

Latino(a) Research Review

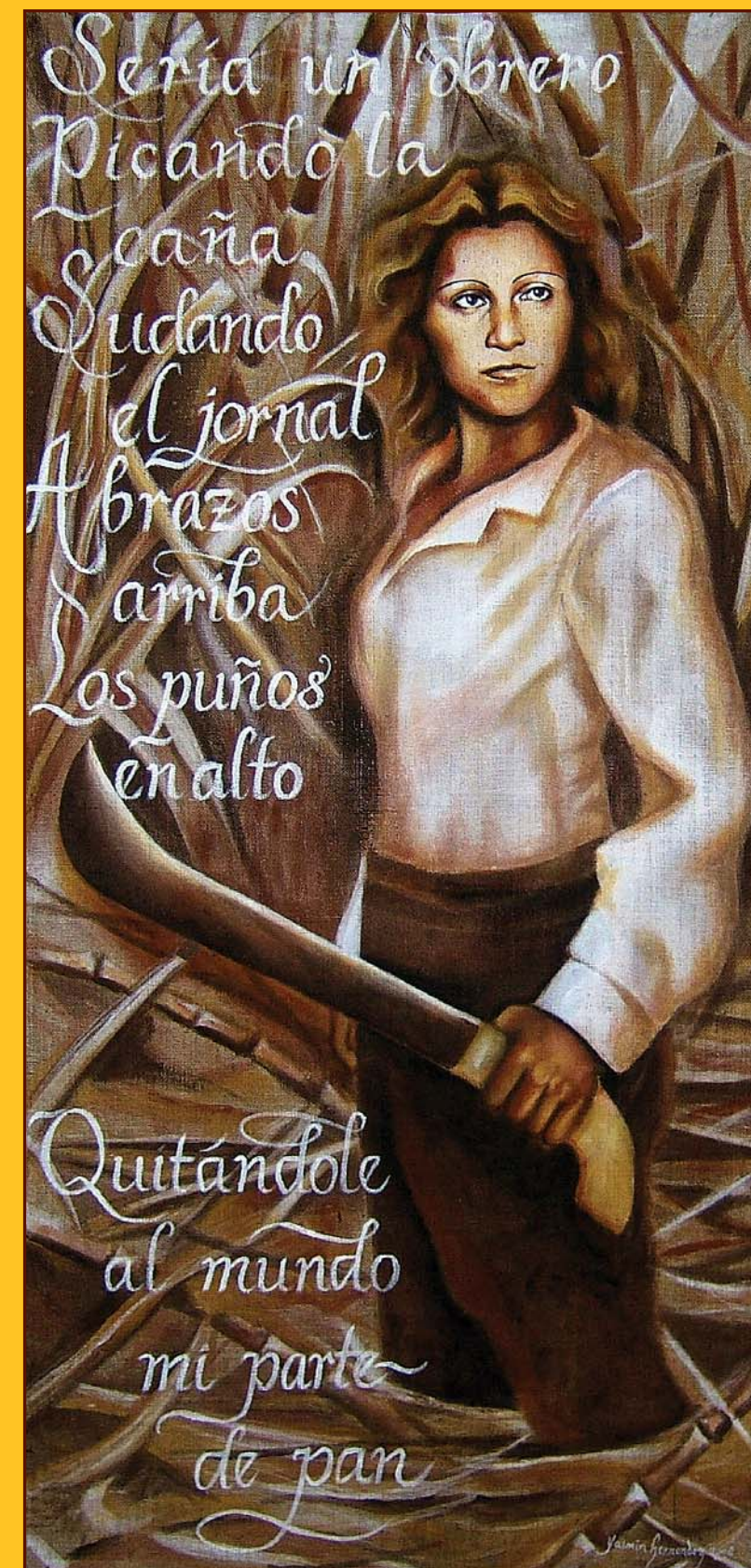
Center for Latino, Latin American, and Caribbean Studies (CELAC)
Social Science 247
University at Albany, SUNY
Albany, NY 12222

Latino(a) Research Review

CELAC CENTER FOR LATINO, LATIN AMERICAN, AND CARIBBEAN STUDIES

Latino(a) Research Review

Vol. 7, No. 3, 2009-2010



Volume 7 Number 3 2009-2010

ISSN 1088385-1



9 771088 385006

\$7.00 USA

COVER ART:

Yasmín Hernández, *Julia de Burgos: Soul Rebel Series*, 2006

Latino(a) Research Review

Volume 7, Number 3, 2009-2010



CELAC

**Center for Latino, Latin American, and Caribbean Studies
University at Albany, SUNY**



The ***Latino(a) Research Review (LRR)*** is a refereed interdisciplinary journal focusing on the experiences of the diverse Latino groups in the United States, and those of the populations of Latin America and the Caribbean regions. The journal publishes scholarly articles, research notes, and book reviews. **LRR** pays particular attention to research on (im)migration issues and the transnational hemispheric processes that link US Latinos(as) with their countries of origin.

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Editor: Edna Acosta-Belén, University at Albany, SUNY

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LRR Subscription Rates: (3 issues/year, including one double issue)

\$20 Individual; \$25 Individual/International; \$35 Institutional

LRR Advertising Rates: \$100 full page: 5" x 7"; \$50 half page.

Send high resolution (at least 300dpi) tif or jpg ad files to the address above.

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LRR wants to acknowledge the support of the New York Latino Research and Resources Network (NYLARNet) at the University at Albany, SUNY for the publication of this issue.

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EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

For several decades now, research on the intersectionalities of gender, race, ethnicity, class, and sexuality has influenced and shaped the scholarship and teaching in most academic disciplines and interdisciplinary fields of study. Both theoretically and methodologically, the "intersectional approach" has been fundamental in enhancing the understanding of power relations and the sources of oppression and persistent inequalities within and among groups. Although this special issue of the *Latino(a) Research Review (LRR)* focuses on women, the intersectionalities and interdisciplinarity that guide the critical analyses of women's conditions and experiences in the various articles selected for this issue, provide fitting examples of the interplay between theory and praxis, and make for intellectually stimulating reading.

In "Crossing Over the Intersections of Nation, Race, and Gender..." Karin Weyland underscores the general reluctance among Latin American, Caribbean, and US Latino(a) populations to embrace blackness as an essential component of their historical, cultural, and social realities. Using the examples of the Dominican Republic and Argentina, Weyland points to the need to reconceptualize national discourses from "a transnational feminist hybrid standpoint" (29) in order to make them more inclusive. Without giving a definitive answer to the question about an emerging Afro-Latino(a) diaspora in the Americas, she argues that a new discourse of hybridity should incorporate women's voices, but also be cognizant of the diasporic realities and lack of representation of Afro-descendant populations. Thus, it can be inferred that there is at least fertile ground for an Afro-Latino(a) diasporic movement to emerge in the hemisphere.

The issue of transnational mobility among immigrant families in today's globalized economy provides the context for Greta A. Gilbertson's analysis of how aging Dominican women in New York City and the Dominican Republic use domestic work and carework as ways of negotiating "family relations across borders" and gaining "certain forms of power through their control of transnational domestic spaces and their identities as mobile caregivers" (53). From data collected from interviews and participant observation with an extended family of Dominican women in New York City and the Dominican Republic, the author illustrates the significant role of aging working class women in bearing the burden of domestic and carework, but, at the same time, increasing their personal autonomy and influence within the family.

EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

Based on ethnographic participatory research with Mexican immigrant and Mexican-origin women in the Midwest, Aidé Acosta investigates these women's quotidian experiences and adaptation process to US society, and shows how they deploy their own individual and collective "funds of knowledge" to mobilize and organize their communities in dealing with specific issues that affect their lives and well-being. The author provides compelling examples of the different ways in which these women engender, negotiate, and ameliorate some of the difficult circumstances they confront as part of the migration process.

Elena Gutiérrez and Liza Fuentes review the particular histories of island Puerto Rican and Mexican-origin women in the United States with forced and coerced sterilization to illustrate the racist and classist discourses used to justify the control of these women's bodies and labor. The authors argue that creating awareness about their particular histories and the official rhetoric behind population control policies (e.g. overpopulation, poverty, economic development), are important steps in forging a movement for reproductive justice, but also in challenging those discourses that still view reproduction among poor women of color as a social problem.

The ways in which Latinas use creative expression to capture their subaltern experiences and struggles underly the critical analysis of women's writing provided by Carmen R. Lugo-Lugo and Marisel Moreno in their respective articles. Lugo-Lugo examines literary essays by leading island Puerto Rican authors (Rosario Ferré, Magali García Ramis, and Ana Lydia Vega), to determine what these texts reveal about the interactions among gender, patriarchy, nationalism, and colonialism. She argues that because of the colonial status of Puerto Rico, for these contemporary feminist writers, the category "woman" is inevitably intertwined with that of being Puerto Rican. On the other hand, Moreno engages in a detailed examination of the ideology of *marianismo*, how it intersects with violence against women, and plays a role in perpetuating it, by analyzing major novels by Puerto Rican writer Alma Ambert and Dominican writer Annecy Báez. Textual analysis of their respective narratives illustrates the different ways in which these two authors expose child abuse and violence against women, and denounce some of the oppressive conditions confronted by women in patriarchal cultures, which are deeply entrenched in the "codes of feminine behavior associated with *marianismo*" (141).

For the artwork on the cover of this special issue, *LRR* wants to thank the talented Puerto Rican artist Yasmín Hernández for giving us permission to use the image of “Jíbara Julia.” A synopsis of the artist and the artwork was written by Solmerina Aponte for this issue. Needless to say, it is by the dedication and creativity of women researchers, writers, and artists from the past and present that future generations of women draw the inspiration and empowerment to confront the challenges posed by persistent gender inequalities and other sources of oppression.

ARTICLES

Crossing Over the Intersections of Nation, Race and Gender: Is There an Emerging Afro-Latino(a) Diaspora in the Americas?

Karin Weyland

Introduction: When the Nation and Other Racial Signifiers are "Crossed Over"

A few decades ago, Dominican historian Frank Moya Pons coined the idea that Dominicans realized they were black once they began migrating to New York City, bringing forth the overdue discussion on the relationship between "race," "borders," and "nation" in the Dominican Republic and its diaspora. Moya Pons's statement brought attention to the white European colonial ideology that has given shape to the politics of culture and race in the Caribbean since the sixteenth century, particularly the racialized "mixing" hierarchies of the Dominican Republic. The idea of "mixing" in this country is derived from a notion of *mestizaje* seen until now as a romanticized version of slavery under which blacks, whites, and indigenous people mixed together and intermarried. This racial system gave birth to the idea of a "mixed" race and a racial democracy, best represented by the saying, "We are all mixed" (*Somos una mezcla*), as if race was not central to Dominican social interactions. In fact, racism is often the basis for day-to-day identification as well as for inclusion and exclusion in the nation, not only from the perspective of Euro-white elitism but also from that of blacks and darker skinned Dominicans who have themselves internalized the "master's world view," and gone beyond the "slippery" character of the variants Harry Hoetink (1967) pointed out for Caribbean race relations. This phenomenon coincides with Stuart Hall's writings (1991, 1993) that the white eye is always outside the frame but sees and positions everything within it, in this case within the ideological "borders" of race and nation.

In his book, *Colouring the Nation*, Howard (2001) explains how racist discourse in the Dominican Republic tends to be "polarized around issues of inferiority or superiority, subordination or domination, or expressed through a false history of naturalness" exemplified by the phrase "We are all mixed." Resembling Hall's assertions about nation

and race, Howard also remarks that “racial prejudice operates between and among all members of society” (7), pointing out to an internalized colonial perspective among blacks and darker-skinned Dominicans. How is this different then when Dominicans leave the national borders that racially defined them? Do they “become black” because they are socially and geographically in a different position and space? Are they discriminated in a different way? Given recent studies on transnational migration,¹ it appears that Latinos(as) do not seem to fit in either racial category and, therefore, find themselves at a crossroads when migrating to the United States, questioning at the same time their own world views regarding racial prejudice and creating in the process a new “transnational social/racial field” with an impact on race, culture, and power back home.²

From an academic point of view, such transformations made it more urgent for social scientists and theorists to revise the dormant power of transnationalism understood here as a social process with the potential for social change brought about by transnational connections. As a result, during the 1980s and 90s several theories on diaspora, displacement, culture, and community identity emerged focusing on the study of the Dominican Republic and its transnational communities (Portes and Guarnizo 1991; Levitt, 2001; Duany 2005; Weyland 2006a). Many of these concepts were also being discussed at a global level as new theories and perspectives emerged focusing on the forces of ideology, identity, and culture. Movements and displacements of migrants and their communities were being approached from very different theoretical paradigms, and migrants, especially women migrants, became social actors in the new social labyrinth. These changes were reflected for example, in the work of Homi Bhabba (1994) who conceived the idea that migrants have a “double vision,” similar to W.E.B. Dubois’ concept of “double consciousness” (1997), and Chicana feminist Gloria Anzaldúa’s (1987) notion of “borderlands” and a new *mestiza* consciousness at the borders of race, culture, and identity. One can also refer to Néstor García Canclini’s (1989) concept of “hybrid cultures” to explain the incomplete modernity of Latin American countries and the need to focus on hybridity instead of pure forms, and Juan Flores’ (2000) concept of “Trans-Latino” aimed at bringing together Latinos(as) in the United States with their Latin American counterparts in order to fight an increasingly capitalist and oppressive world.

At the same time during the 1950s and 60s, discussions of an African diaspora emerged as new social movements became internationalized

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and transnationalized, including more recently the Afro-descendant Latino(a) movement coming out of the 2001 Durban Declaration. The Declaration brought together the efforts of hundreds of community organizations throughout the Americas that for decades had been working at a local level for the advancement of Afro-descendant social and economic conditions. Their coming together in Durban helped them define themselves under one denomination, “Afro-descendant” and to make claims against the state for equal rights when it comes to education, housing, and health care.

A comparative perspective between maroonage culture and contemporary social movements is still to be developed, especially in view of the similarity in mechanisms of resistance and negotiation between African slaves and Afro-descendant communities today, and to do this transnationally may open new lines of research. In an article about the development of contemporary social movements and Afro-Latino diasporas, Agustín Laó-Montes (2007) claims that the histories, cultures, and politics of Afro-Latinidades should be placed in the context of a global African diaspora as a key geopolitical field within the modern colonial capitalist world system in order to historicize and politicize it. Only in this way, we can begin to see Afro-Latinidades as a “project of affinity and liberation founded on a translocal ideology of community-making and a global politics of decolonization” (Laó-Montes 2007, 310). Furthermore, Laó-Montes traces the work of other authors who have also embraced a similar theoretical position. For example, Patterson and Kelley (2000) have tried to inscribe the African diaspora within the context of global race and gender hierarchies and they see it as a process constituted by the cultural practices, everyday resistances, social struggles, and political organization of black people as transnational/translocal subjects. It was not until recently, however, that theorists began to advocate for a more “historicized and politicized sense of diaspora,” one that is fully integrated into day-to-day political activism in attempting to define an Afro-Latino/American hemispheric movement composed of Afro-Latinos(as) in the United States and Afro-descendant Latin Americans (Laó-Montes 2007; Edwards 2001). Laó-Montes referred to “the rise of explicitly black (or Afro) cultural-intellectual currents and social-political movements in Brazil, Cuba, Colombia, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Ecuador, the Dominican Republic, Honduras, Panama, Peru, Puerto Rico, Nicaragua, Uruguay, Venezuela, and Argentina, and their growing relations with US Afro-Latinos” (327). Reinforcing the transnational and, at the same time, the local aspect of the diaspora, Laó-Montes also argues that “Afro-Latinos in the United

States are protagonist actors in these hemispheric networks at the same time that they serve as a bridge in US Black-Latino coalitions” (327). Therefore, we see in these theoretical shifts the effort not only to engage in trans-national thinking and relations between US Latinos(as) and Latin Americans, but also to confront blackness in the Americas, using culture, identity, and transnational connections as the basis for further mobilization and research analysis. While many Afro-Latino/American communities have been doing this for decades, there is nonetheless a general tendency to reject blackness that needs to be recognized, especially in Latin America and its diasporas.

The inability in the Hispanic Caribbean to confront blackness, however paradoxically, presents a new challenge to emerging networks of the Afro-Latino/American diasporic movement. In an interview I conducted in 2004 with the subsecretary of the Museum of Dominican Man, José Guerrero, he stated that “the Dominican Republic is probably the only country in the world where blacks do not want to be called blacks.” Is this different once they migrate to the United States? In a recent study, Ginetta Candelario (2008) uses the common phrase “Black behind the ears,” meaning, where no one can see it—as the underlying theme that guided her analysis of racial diversity in the Dominican Republic and the United States. Her discussion of public spaces, such as museums and beauty parlors, illustrates the day-to-day norms that reinforce a Euro-white image³ tied to the concept of national identity as a social construct, and this seems to be carried over to the Dominican diaspora. In *El retorno de las yolas*, Silvio Torres-Saillant (2004) also points out the resistance towards embracing a diversified plural concept of the “nation” and denounces the complicity of most Dominican intellectuals in having contributed or built a comfortable “raceless” ideological position from “within” the nation. From an ideological subaltern/transnational position, Torres-Saillant writes of the many possibilities migrants have in reconstructing the nation from a new diasporic epistemology, agreeing with other theorists on the dual position migrants are negotiating for themselves, producing more diversified identities and cultures as well as knowledge. While this may be so in academic and other professional circles, average Dominicans and US Latinos(as) continue to label and identify each other based on pure racial forms instead of hybrid ones, contributing in turn to what Aníbal Quijano (2000) has termed the coloniality of power “....affecting 150,000 Afro-descendants in Latin America” (CEPAL 2006), 90% of whom live in poverty.

Following the work of Winant (2001) and Mintz (2004), this article explores the different social contexts and historical moments in which

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race and racial relations have been crucial to the reproduction of racism, race thinking, and race acting among Afro-Latinos(as) in the Americas, calling not only for a thorough study of “the world racial situation that succeeded the abolition of slavery” (Winant 2001, 8), but also a greater sensitivity to “everyday forms of resistance, accommodation, and opposition” (Mintz 1974, 28). Furthermore, it is important to have this particular look on history not only from a transnational perspective but also from a gender perspective, which will be explored further in the next section. The goal is to highlight that new readings of racial and gender “crossovers” show that Afro-Latinas have played an important role in identity-community formation practices and new social movements, and that despite their role, they have been largely excluded from their national histories and contemporary discourses, not being able to break away from fixed identities that reproduce a system of exclusion.⁴ In a way this confirms Moya Pons’s statement regarding century-old ideologies tied to culture and space as well as the “slippery” meaning of race and nation when these borders are crossed.

Absence of Gender Discourses in the Representation of Black Identities and Maroonage Culture

While visiting Cuba during the twenty-seventh Caribbean Festival celebrated in July 2007 in the city of Santiago, several buses took visitors to the Maroon Monument built in the Loma de los Chivos in 1973. The purpose of the visit was for attendees to participate in an Afro-Cuban ritual symbolizing the end of the Festival and the coming together of popular and academic cultures. For one of the founders of the Festival, Joel James, this occasion was a dream come true, and, therefore, his spirit prevailed throughout the event. After climbing a rocky mountain that used to be an old mine in the town of the Virgen de la Caridad del Cobre, a black deity under the *Santería* religion,⁵ my attention was drawn by the exaggerated phallic symbol of the maroon monument, with his mouth wide open screaming out into the Cuban blue sky all the atrocities undergone during slavery, and his head pulled back while holding also in outburst an erected



Maroon Monument, El Cobre, Cuba.

penis. Symbolically, half human-half animal, only his masculine power could redeem the invisibility of this culture of resistance, making black masculinity the imposing force of Afro-Cuban maroonage culture (*cimarronaje cubano*), and raising questions, mainly because of its absence, about the place of gender in maroonage discourses.

Likewise, as one walks through the old streets of the city of Buenos Aires, it is easy to admire the French and Spanish architecture of Argentina's national monuments without ever doubting the masculinity and white ethnicity of its national heroes or thinking twice about the place of women, including black women, in national independence movements. While in the Dominican Republic the statues in front of the Museum of the Dominican Man are more diverse, there is obviously a lack of a



San Martín
Monument,
Buenos Aires,
Argentina.

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Statue of Fray Bartolomé de las Casas.
Museum of the Dominican Man,
Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic.

gender presence and discourse in contemporary public spaces. In all these cases, the official history stands in contrast to an African subaltern history masked by a genderless and “natural” ideology of *mestizaje*.

For maroon communities to have survived seventy to ninety years without being discovered by colonial authorities, the work and social reproduction of women must have been crucial. In fact, historians have already written about the equal position of women and their leading roles in the various mutual aid societies and in black communities, also known as *quilombos*, *manieles*, *palenques*, or *cofradías* that were crucial for the survival of runaway slaves, indigenous people, and free blacks during colonial times. These varied in size and locale. Dominican intellectual Celsa Albert Batista (1990) argues that *cimarronas* or women maroons played a big role in the culture of resistance, and that in the Dominican Republic women constituted at least a third of most *palenques* (72). She also introduces the term “domestic *cimarronaje*” to refer to women’s strategies of resistance in urban spaces applied to “specific actions of slave women that had implications that altered colonial laws and established norms” (75-76, my translation). She particularly describes the work of the “slave merchants,” as they were called by the Crown, who were mostly women whose actions were regulated by colonial laws in order to limit their freedom as they bought and sold products in the market and created a space for themselves where they could negotiate and engage in social relations considered “dangerous” at the time. For example, the Caroligno Black Code stated that only free black men could sell products, and that only slave owners could buy from their slaves the products they produced in order to restrict their free circulation (2003, 76-77). As Albert Batista notes, other laws also prohibited the union between free black women and slave black men because it would contribute to the “insubordination” of the slaves, “mocking and changing legal dispositions” as well as “adopting strategies oriented to convince owners to realize sales and sleep outside their homes” (79; my

translation). Thus, “a process of creativity and negotiation is introduced regarding material culture, contributing to the (gender) history of Afro-American society and the different alternatives this sector of society developed in order for slaves to gain their freedom” (79; my translation). Albert Batista mentions “Nanny” as the main woman force in eighteenth-century maroonage culture of Jamaica, and the only female character with a name in the history of Caribbean maroonage. Interestingly enough, “Nanny” is well-known for her magical powers, diminishing in a way the ordinary roles most African women played in a culture of resistance as “rebels” and “fighters” in search of freedom. Scholarly debates have focused less and less on ordinary African women and their struggles, and instead chosen to focus on the male figure and rural or “wild” spaces of *cimarronaje*, and on the plantation system as a repeating myth. This in turn has contributed to the idea of “the savage” and the “wilderness” when it comes to resisting slavery. A good example of this tendency is the classic ethnographic work, *Biografía de un cimarrón*, which was first published in 1961, depicting the life of the runaway slave Esteban Montejo in Cuba. The group of ethnographers that conducted this study was not interested in the elderly lady who was residing at the same nursing home as Esteban as the main protagonist because she had not lived in the wilderness, and therefore was not a “maroon.” Thus, they focused on Esteban who came to represent the epitome of the masculine maroon figure and who survives by sleeping in caves and eating what can be found in the wilderness. The plantation/mangrove dichotomized image reinforces the idea that slaves, and, particularly, women slaves, are incapable of social interactions and thus, incapable of contributing to society and developing other forms of resistance.

Cuban writer and critic Ana Cairo (2005) refers to the existence of a “mental maroonage” when analyzing Dora Alonso’s novel, *Ponolani* (1966), whose main character was a little girl named Ponolani who had been captured in her village in Africa and sold as a slave named Florentina to labor in the Santa Marta sugar mill in Guantanamo, Cuba. Every night Ponolani would retell the same stories she heard as a child in her tribe in Africa to her children and the elderly people of the sugar mill, crying herself to sleep. Similar to the concept of freedom ingrained in Albert Batista’s “domestic maroonage,” Cairo is able to inscribe a sense of freedom to a female maroonage culture. She refers to this space as a “mental maroonage,” one associated with an internal freedom delimited by a world of dreams that emerge day after day in a life of suffering and misery. Cuban black poet Nancy Morejón had already identified this new gender perspective on maroonage and freedom in

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her poem, “Mujer Negra” (1944, 1979), in which she combines the spirit of maroonage with the independence winds that preceded the Cuban revolution in the late 1950s.

The book *Geographies of Home* by Loida Maritza Pérez (1999) also provides an example of “domestic maroonage,” as a migrant mother of five children finds a mental space as her home that was neither in the land she left behind, nor the one she lived in, but an imaginary space of freedom that could relieve her from the suffering she confronts, caught between her abusive husband and the racial oppression and subordination of what it means to be a Latina migrant in the United States. Another example of female slave culture that represents a locale between Albert Batista’s and Cairo’s idea of “domestic” and “mental” maroonage is the book *Reyita sencillamente* (1997) by Cuban historian Daisy Rubiera Castillo, which narrates the life of her own grandmother, Reyita, daughter of slaves. This book provides elements to construct a “new” gendered and racial imaginary, as Reyitas’ testimony speaks out about the struggle she put up when growing up in Cuba during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, scorned by her own family for being *negrita* and deceived by her own husband into a fake marriage since it turned out she was his second wife. Reyitas’ involvement in the Black Star movement during the 1940s shows her courage and pride for her race, and promise of Africa as her homeland. Looking at the maroonage monument in Cuba and at the shadows of the masculine power the maroon penis elicited, I felt as if Reyitas’ strength and dignity stood with me, despite her absence from the social imaginary depicted in current Afro-Cuban discourses.

Another example of male appropriation of maroonage culture and contemporary racial discourses requires a discussion of the three male statues of Sebastián Lemba, Enriquillo, and Bartolomé de las Casas, located in front of the Museum of the Dominican Man in the island’s capital of Santo Domingo. The first two statues are half naked, invoking perhaps the “savage” aspect of slave resistance, as they are both insurgent leaders from the black and indigenous movement, respectively. Sebastián Lemba is known to have led many slave revolts, and Enriquillo is the Spanish name of a rebel indigenous leader, also known as cacique Guarocuya. In 1520, he led a rebellion against the Spaniards that lasted thirteen years, until he negotiated an agreement with Emperor Carlos V and became Don Enrique. Guarocuya is also the main character in the classic historical novel *Enriquillo* by Manuel de Jesús Galván (1879). This work centers around the killing of several indigenous leaders known as the “Matanza de Jaragua” (Massacre of Jaragua) in 1503,

including Guarocuya's father, when he was only a seven-year-old child. Guarocuya later became the symbol of the popular hero of mixed cultural origins. The myth of Guarocuya as the indigenous hero has circulated throughout the Americas, and the Dominican "nation" is proud to celebrate the heroic indigenous maroon who converted into a Spaniard. Galván also wrote about another hero, Fray Bartolomé de las Casas, immortalized for defending the rights of indigenous people. Las Casas' *A Short Account of the Devastation of the Indies* (1552) is one of the first chronicles to denounce the exploitation of indigenous people and appeal to the humanitarian side of priests. Today, the modern sculptures of these three heroic masculine figures—Sebastián Lemba, Bartolomé de las Casas and Enriquillo—stand up with their fists up in the air, observed by those passing by the Museum and by school children who frequently visit a site that offers a visual representation of an official Euro-white dominant male discourse about how the Dominican nation was built.

This discourse is now inscribed in the national museum of anthropology.⁶ Examples such as these make it quite evident that despite the fact that women have played important roles in maroonage societies, they also have been excluded from official national histories, and this practice of omission has carried over to contemporary Afro-Latin American public discourses, including those emerging among US Latinos(as). Is it then appropriate to refer to an emerging Afro-Latino(a) diaspora in the Americas? To what extent are these national narratives broken when "borders" are crossed?

Similarities Between Afro-Caribbean and Afro-Latin American Cultures and Identities

As it is commonly known, most Latin Americans hold dearest the idea of being "white," mainly of Spanish or French ancestry, and a strong emphasis is placed on racial aesthetics in their day-to-day social interaction and up and down their social and economic ladders. It was also commonly thought that class and social status tend to "whiten" blacks and dark-skinned Latin Americans in general. Nonetheless, among Latin American countries, Argentina and the Dominican Republic take special pride in being white, protecting their borders from "darker" influences (Balaguer 1984; Cirio 2009; Maffia and Lechini 2009). For example, Dominicans pay special attention when it comes to skin tones and hair texture, and therefore being labeled "black" in the United States stands in sharp contradiction to the dominant racist ideology they have inter-

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nalized throughout their history.⁷ During the dictatorship of Rafael Leonidas Trujillo (1930-1961) the internalization of this state ideology was rather strong. The military government's 1937 massacre that killed thousands of Haitians and Haitian-Dominicans living at the borderlands is constantly reenacted in day-to-day social interactions as the denial of blackness (Turits 2002). African influence is considered non-Dominican, and, therefore, subversive to the state, reaffirming the nation as a Hispanic, Catholic, and white entity. This social imaginary still stands in opposition to Haitian nationals, the "racial Others," who are identified as black, "superstitious," and African.⁸ The main intellectual authors of this racist state ideology were Manuel Peña Battle and Joaquín Balaguer, progenitors of *trujillismo*, and policies that throughout the 1950s and 60s deepened racism against Haitians and Dominicans of Haitian descent. Today nationalist public officials speak of a "pacific invasion," fearing massive migrations of Haitians, and ignoring mainly the social and economic contributions of Haitians to the growth and expansion of the sugar industry during the nineteenth century, and to the construction industry during the twentieth and twentieth-first centuries (Silié, Segura and Dore 2002).

A recent study on the Dominican population showed racial prejudice visible in state institutions, the family, the economy, and in civil society in a country where 80% of the population is black or *mestizo* (Servicio Jesuíta a Refugiados y Migrantes, 2004, 2005). In an interview with historian Rubén Silié, he states that "In the Dominican Republic there is not really a denial of a black identity because there was never segregation or persecution of blacks, but there is a lack of identification with our African roots." Dominicans prefer to call themselves "Indians" instead of "blacks," and there are several labels such as "Dark Indian," "Light Indian," "Cinnamon Indian," and "Burnt or Ashen Indian," all euphemisms that replace the word "black" or "*mestizo*," when these two latter words are not used. During Trujillo's regime, the category "Indian" was introduced in people's identification cards. Even today, Dominicans carry their identification cards with the "I" for Indian. Until very recently, the letter "N" (for *negro* or black) was forbidden, and only occasionally someone may be recorded as *negro* without using any other euphemisms.

To date, there is no thorough study of blacks in the history of Argentina and well-to-do families tend to hide any association with a black or indigenous relative in their family tree. Few people know that San Telmo, one of the oldest neighborhoods of the city, was a quarter of



Lezama Park in San Telmo.

slaves who were sold and traded as merchandise in the well-known Lezama Park.

Adhered to a politics of assimilation, even today's Argentineans are concerned about the "native Other," found both in the darker skinned native population or in migrants from Bolivia and Paraguay, who are also seen as "*mestizos*" and "blacks." In his study *El Secreto de Yapeyu* (2001), Hugo Chumbita documents the *mestizo* origin of Argentinean founding father and Latin American independence leader José de San Martín. To the reader's surprise, Chumbita describes San Martín's indigenous mother, Rosa Guarú and his well-to-do *criollo* (Creole) father. Adopted by an upper-class family, San Martín was separated from her mother when the family moved to Spain. Raised in a military family, and having followed a military career himself, San Martín returned to Argentina and fought side by side with his two regiments, one composed of *mestizos* and indigenous *gauchos* that knew how to ride horses, and the other, the infantry, consisting of black soldiers. San Martín's political project of an Incan monarchy never materialized and he was ostracized by his colleagues. He referred to himself as Indian or black on several occasions, but his project was never supported by the landowning bourgeoisie which would never dare to include Afro-descendants or indigenous people in the nation-building process. Thus, San Martín's dream of creating a post-independence socially-mixed democracy, as his soldiers and cavalry also had envisioned, failed to come true.

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During an Afro-Latino gathering that took place in the city of Buenos Aires in 2005 sponsored by the Afro-Latino Initiative (GALCI-Iniciativa Global Afro-Latina), it became clear among the participants that Argentina as a nation shares the myth that blacks were killed during the wars of independence and had long “disappeared.” Another misreading of Afro-Argentinean history is that blacks were assimilated into the white countryman figure of “the gaucho,”⁹ even in provinces such as Buenos Aires where the black population during colonial times was 26% of the total, and in Cordoba where it was 46%.¹⁰ This myth is even more striking when one considers what is common knowledge—that the first tango, entitled “El entrerriano,” was composed by Gabino Ezeiza, a black payador (singer) (Chirino 2005). Anthropologist Dina Picotti (1998) writes about the “invisibility” of blacks and how the cultural contributions of slaves and free blacks have been “assimilated” into national folklore, but still go unnoticed:

In Argentina, stories, poems, sayings, and myths of the slaves are incorporated in the general folklore. There are still caricatures of Blacks, such as in the old carnival dance and music composed by Whites who imitated with laughs the Spanish language of Blacks. In this way, an Afro connotation dominates the popular satire, even though the imitation is no longer associated as such, that is, is misinformed. Afterwards, it becomes part of the written literature, as is the case of the Black poet in the national poem *Martín Fierro*, assimilated into the gaucho even when contributing well-known traditionally African elements such as the call and response known here as “payada.” The African presence and its contributions to our culture and life in general, however, are only mentioned in isolated cases without enough research to appreciate it in the right way, with the honorable exception of some Africanists (127).

In the case of Argentina, an ideology of Latin American Euro-white supremacy hindered the social recognition of blacks, and, at different times, pushed for their assimilation into an urban or rural underclass, depending on the local modern/colonial economies. In 1778, it became lawful for slaves to buy their freedom and many male slaves became *peones* and *vaqueros* (manual laborers who handle horses and other animals in rural sites) in the landowners’ haciendas in Buenos Aires, La Banda Oriental (Uruguay), Santa Fé, Córdoba, and Entre Ríos (Chirino 2005, 11). Women, on the other hand, occupied the positions

of “nannies” or domestic workers, developing other forms of resistance. There is no doubt that part of this constructed “invisibility” was meant to ignore black contributions to music, dance, and other aspects of an otherwise imagined white national culture. As a result, the Argentinean popular dance *tango*, for example, which today is being exported as its national musical rhythm, is associated primarily with a white male singer, Carlos Gardel, and the African origins of the word are forgotten. Picotti also argues that the word “tango” is derived from the word *nago* or *shango*, known in Brazilian and Cuban *Santería* as the African deity of thunder and storm. She explains how in Castilian Spanish the “s” might have been accentuated, becoming *sango* and later on *tango*, given that the “s” sound in Argentinean resembles a Castilian “s” sound, which when pronounced by Nigerian singers is hardly recognized as such due to its sharp sound. She concludes that it is possible that the difference between the “s” and the “t” went unnoticed by Argentines. This explains why Argentines first called African songs *sangos* and later on *tangos*, detaching the origins of the word from its African roots (Picotti 1998, 103-105). Also the word *milonga* which to Argentines means a traditional dance or a neighborhood dance where gossip always reigns, comes from the word *mulunga* which in African means a series of words, gossip, verbal dispute, complain, or heated discussion (Picotti 1998, 105).

Similarly, Dominicans have difficulties today recognizing the origins of the festivities and rituals of the Congo of the Holy Spirit in the African deity, Kalunga, the Goddess of the Ocean and Death in the Congo-Angola region (Hernández-Soto 2004). In the video-documentary *Congo Pa’ Tí: Afro-Latino Identity in Dominican Culture*, when asked about the origin of Kalunga, most people interviewed in the main park of the town of Villa Mella, traditionally known as the “Holy Spirit Savannah,” did not know the meaning of the word and only one or two people associated the name with some of the songs played in Congo rituals and other Afro-Dominican festivities. Most people could not associate the name Kalunga with the African deities that were disguised in Catholic saints during colonial/modern times. In this sense, erasing the African roots of popular music and religious deities parallels the common practice during colonial times of erasing the African names and geographical origins of slaves. Adopting the names of their owners most times meant that passing from “slaves” to “blacks” was a social repositioning; it also meant an imposed label of being “invisible” or “excluded” in the hierarchical ladder of colonial/modern times.¹¹ The

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reality of a single Argentinean social imaginary of the “nation” that stood ideologically far from a diversified or hybrid historical discourse, and which, for the most part, ignored African roots and traditions, leads to considering whether the concept of “nation” throughout the Americas was influenced by the same Euro-white male colonial/modern ideology under which blacks have been excluded from nation-state building processes, along with indigenous and women populations. It is impossible to ignore the diasporic nature of contemporary processes that still reproduce an internalized colonial imaginary that began to be propagated in the sixteenth century as part of the European coloniality/modernity project; a project being adopted, even with certain reservations, as more and more Afro-Latinos(as) “crossed over” national borders and imbued culture and identity with subaltern histories and subjectivities. How did these processes differ from nation to nation, and could they be considered today part of one transnational Afro-Latino(a) diasporic movement in the Americas?

Some of these answers may be found analyzing the work of African diaspora intellectuals such as Paul Gilroy (1992) and Stuart Hall (1993), as well as Third World writers such as Edward Said, Néstor García Canclini, Aníbal Quijano, and Homi Bhabha, who have questioned not only the idea of nationalism and the “racialization” of black, indigenous, and women populations, but also the turn most societies have taken towards global capitalism and the racial hierarchy that sustains it. These realities underscore the importance of developing a transnational vision where common strategies of political and intellectual resistance could emerge, unveiling the closely intertwined relationship between ideological positions, scholarly trends, and societal politics, and tracing the impact of the African diaspora in giving rise to the nations of Latin America and the Caribbean as we know them today, with their unique languages, cultures, and identities.¹² Sheila Walker (2001) writes about the foundational culture and spirit of the Americas based on the contributions made by Africans to the New World, in an attempt to reverse the de-valorization commonly attributed to slavery and rewrite history from a different perspective other than the one provided by the colonizer, a perspective that transcends the essentialism of a single European or African identity, and encompasses the new emerging Afro-Latinidades, as she stated in the GALCI forum in Buenos Aires:

The contributions of Africans and their descendants to a Pan-American life are so important and fundamental that there cannot be any honest and precise analysis of the Americas

without their mention. These contributions were part of the agriculture that allowed European immigrants survival as well as the forced migration of Africans. They were part of the economy that allowed societies to develop and expand. They were part of the creation of the languages that followed and allowed for everyone to communicate. They were part of the spiritual nature of things and the way we access and relate to that world. They were part of the foundation of the multiple cultural systems, forms and styles by which African and European immigrants from the Americas organize and express their corresponding identities (Weyland 2006).

Today one can agree that numerous conceptual failings had left Afro-descendants, women, and indigenous people invisible or marginalized in relation to dominant narratives and analytical frameworks, with few historical references or narratives from which to draw cultural, social, and political identifications. The next section will focus on the ways in which cultural and identity affirmation represents a starting point from where Afro-Latinidades simultaneously acknowledge each other and work towards mutual recognition and coalition building. However, the following questions still need to be considered: To what extent can national discourses be reconceptualized?; Are national coalitions enough to build an Afro-Latino(a) movement in the Americas?; Furthermore, has the absence of gender discourses been detrimental to the role of women in contemporary Afro-Latino(a) social movements?

Searching for an Afro-Latino(a) Gender Theory and Praxis

African American intellectual Bahati Kuumba (2001) writes about the lack of gender analysis in African and Afro-American social movements of the 1960s, bringing forth the example of Rosa Parks, the African American seamstress who, on December 1, 1955, refused to relinquish her seat on a city of Montgomery bus to a white man. Her role in the civil rights movement is often forgotten in contrast to other male leaders such as Martin Luther King and Malcom X. Repeatedly, African American women also spoke out against the oppression and subordination they suffered from their male counterparts in the academy and in the arts, denouncing sexism within their own communities, movements, and organizations, such as Alice Walker and Michelle Wright

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have done in their writings (Walker 1985; Wright 2004). The civil rights movement led by women in their own ways had a great impact on Afro-Latinas and Third World women in general (Anzaldúa 1987), as African American women made themselves heard within and beyond US national borders. Working from within a new diasporic episteme which questions not only an Euro-white dominant ideology but also the male bourgeois perspective represented in nationalist discourses, they imbued their voices with self-affirmation and dignity. Anzaldúa's concept of the "new *mestiza*" is the epitome of this new ethnic and racial consciousness from a gender perspective that questions patriarchal and racist notions from within the Mexican and US nations.

In their essay, "Transnational Feminist Cultural Studies," Caren Kaplan and Inderpal Grewal (1999) emphasize the importance of embracing gender in subaltern studies as a crucial category of analysis to understand the "uneven division between men and women, as well as between first and third world constructions of class as inflected by race" (353). Furthermore, they discuss the importance of the study of new social movements such as gay liberation in the United States and Europe, indigenous rights in the Americas, and transnational environmental activism, as well as the new traditions and institutional power that may arise as a result, and as long as the scholarship does not try to absorb and appropriate the terms of a social critique. They write, "these tensions among methodologies and locations of social critique have implications far beyond their academic manifestations since intellectual contestations over culture impact powerfully, though differently, across and between public spheres" (353). While Anzaldúa speaks out about culture and gender as driving forces in decolonization processes from a more personal and individual level, Kaplan and Grewal regard the relationship between theory, culture, and praxis as crucial for larger social transformations.

Laó-Montes recognizes the significance of gender in the analysis of Afro-diasporic selves when he argues that engendering African diaspora discourses entails "important epistemic breaks and political imperatives," since previous authors have not paid enough attention to "women histories and feminist perspectives" (2007, 315). A similar argument about the diversified nature of women's histories and feminisms was made in the 1980s by black feminist writer bell hooks who criticized the lack of diversity and equality in the dominant discourse of white liberal feminism. hooks was neither convinced of the "politics of identity" that followed white liberalism. She proposed to move instead towards knowledge production based on a "politics of difference" (hooks 2000) as a

point of departure for the analysis of women's histories and experiences. In order to illustrate this point, in her book *Feminist Theory* (2000), hooks embraces the idea of "global sisterhood" based on a mass-based feminist movement where the struggle against white oppression is at the same time a struggle against sexism: "when white women attack white supremacy they are simultaneously participating in the struggle to end sexist oppression" (53-54). Similarly to Patterson and Kelly (2000), hooks defines everyday struggle as part of a larger social movement that needs to become mass-based in order for feminist theory and praxis to have an effect on women in general, and particularly on Afro-Latino(a) gender politics and practices. For hooks, as well as many other Latina, black, and Third World feminists, racism needs to be a central feminist issue because "it is so interconnected with sexist oppression" (53). Their answer is to bond on shared strengths and resources as the essence of global sisterhood as opposed to victimization and "common oppression" which were essential components of white feminist liberalism. As hooks notes, "feminist theory would have much to offer if it showed women ways in which racism and sexism are immutably connected rather than pitting one struggle against the other or blatantly dismissing racism" (2000, 53). In this way, black feminism shows a real commitment to an international gendered social movement aimed at ending sexist oppression. Similar to Laó-Montes' (2007) argument about the need to include Afro-Latina identities in contemporary discourses of the African diaspora, bell hooks confronts feminist dominant narratives, provides a new analytical framework, and poses a larger political challenge to the feminist agenda.

Conceiving the African diaspora as a masculine global imaginary and seeing how it is inscribed in public spaces and discourses, it is appropriate to compare this international scenario of "global sisterhood" to the new emerging Afro-Latinidades and the efforts to come together as one Afro-descendant social movement. A point can be made that women have been at the forefront of this emerging social movement at home and abroad, and in their families and communities, reaffirming their African rooted traditions and identities, and gaining at the same time new spaces of negotiation hand in hand with their experience in local/global activism. Women's protagonist role in Afro-Latino(a) struggles, as it will be further argued below, stands in sharp contrast to their absence in official national discourses, as they attempt to change intellectual contestations over culture and, at the same time, reconquer public spaces. It seems that the absence of gender in discourses and narratives has made their struggles more powerful.

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An example to the previous statement is provided by Lucía Molina, the director of La Casa Indo-Afroamericana. For the past twenty years, she has led several local struggles on behalf of youth at risk in the town of Santa Fe, located several hundred miles north of Buenos Aires. Gender, as well as cultural assertion, has been at the forefront of the organization's agenda. Promoting affirmation and cultural rights through theatre and dance, Molina is convinced that this is a way to reenact the history of blacks in Argentina, particularly the role of women in storytelling, as she plays the character of an African Argentinean grandmother, displacing the European and the indigenous to secondary roles. During her opening remarks at the GALCI meeting in Buenos Aires to an audience of over 300 hundred people, she explained how difficult it is to always be seen as a foreigner in your own home: "I'm always asked the question, Where are you from? Even though this is a very simple question, it violates one of our basic human rights, the right to an identity." Molina adds that "by educating ourselves and others, we do not feel ashamed of whom we are, and we hope that the surrounding society begins to see us differently."

Pocha is another Afro-Latina activist. She is the founder and director of Africa Vive (Africa Lives) and carries out her community work in the area of La Matanza and with other predominantly Afro-descendant populations in Argentina, trying to unify Afro-Argentinean families who were displaced from their homes and communities. A story provided by an Afro-descendant family we visited with GALCI organizers in La Matanza describes their displacement: "they brought us here far away from the city. In a way it was good because they gave us cement houses with floors; the ones we left behind were made of zinc and had dirt floors. However, we all ended up in different places. Pocha is now beginning to gather us and this is how we are learning about our African ancestry and our rights." When asked about the three most important community priorities, residents answered that they were most concerned with unemployment, drugs, and school desertion. An analysis of the relationship between racism and poverty today would show that 90% of the Afro-descendant population in Latin America lives in poverty. In fact, two of the major challenges La Casa faces today are poverty and school desertion. La Casa focuses on youth "at risk" because this is a community priority, not letting youth fall "outside of the system," adding to the growing numbers of Afro-descendant youth in jail. La Casa hopes that their struggles will bring people and grassroots organizations together under the realization that identity and power, cultural affirmation, and

action are intertwined, and are part of the same process of resistance. It is also important to recognize that not until recently, culture and identity have become the basis for claims against the state in Latin America and the Caribbean, in part as a result of pressures from international organizations on local governments to begin changing their policies and recognizing the effects of racism and oppression in their cultural, social, and political institutions and practices, as the 2001 Durban Declaration stipulated.

One recurrent theme that also came up at the GALCI meeting, and which, in the case of Argentina, transcends gender, was the challenge facing Afro-descendant community organizations, activists, and other ethnic group representatives in coming together as one and offering a common front at world conferences where decision making was taking place. This has been particularly difficult for Argentina since, besides the country's native black population located mainly north of Buenos Aires, there are other black ethnic groups such as the Cabo-Verdians, Afro-Ecuadorians, and since the 1990s, a community of African citizens mainly from Nigeria. Each community has its own history and trajectory, and due to their various ethnic origins and cultures, coming together as one single Afro-diasporic community has been difficult. At the GALCI meeting this issue was addressed and the long-time collaboration between La Casa, Africa Vive, the Cabo-Verdian community, and the Uruguayan organization Afro-Mundo was acknowledged.

The more recent groups, such as the Africans and the Afro-Ecuadorians, seemed a bit more isolated. The smaller numbers of people in these groups, as well as their focus on economic mobility rather than community organizing, were mostly the causes of their dispersion. On the other hand, the Nigerian community is composed mainly of independent merchants who sell clothes, sneakers, and watches on the streets, making it difficult for community leaders and academics to bringing them together as one group over a single issue or concern. Nonetheless, such united front is necessary when it comes to exercising economic and political rights and negotiating with local governments at home or at international conferences. International agreements and declarations are therefore useful as long as capable social actors from civil society can implement them at a local level without losing their original initiatives and agendas in the process of developing transnational alliances and becoming more integrated into the public spheres and discourses of cultural, economic, and political institutions. In the case of the Afro-descendant populations in the Americas, these efforts would

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strengthen a single diasporic Afro-Latino(a) movement, creating at the same time an “intermediate public space” that provides black women and men visibility in the global-local roundtable of political decision making. In the last few years, due to pressure from international organizations such as the United Nations and worldwide social forums, there have been efforts on the part of governments and other agencies to acknowledge the relationship between colonialism, race, and poverty (Santos 2004), and this is a positive step for Afro-descendant populations and organizations in the Americas. However, more work in this direction needs to be planned and strategically carried out by community leaders, including women leaders and participants.

In the Dominican Republic, on the other hand, while few organizations address the issue of racism due to social and economic marginalization, women’s actions and voices have predominated. The Red of Mujeres Negras (Black Women’s Network) and the Casa por la Identidad de las Mujeres Afro (Organization for the Identity of Afro-Women) were groups that had the most impact at a local level. Their members adhered to the feminist movement, but acted separately, according to their “racial” and other “identities” in pushing for media campaigns and other efforts against racism.¹³ Nonetheless, due to the lack of resources and state support as well as the emigration of some of its members, the network is no longer active. Another group in the Dominican Republic that has been very active in terms of the Afro-descendant struggle is the Dominican/Haitian Women’s Movement (MUDHA-Movimiento de Mujeres Dominico-Haitianas). The organization also has worked hand in hand with the feminist movement, but due to their Haitian status, they also have felt isolated and marginalized, and have run higher risks of getting deported, as Sonia Pierre, the director of MUDHA stated in an interview (Weyland 2008): “This is not a risk Dominican feminists take when they assert their black identities, but we do.” It seems that race, gender and politics do not always go hand in hand. bell hooks’ writings are pertinent to the struggles of Afro-Latinas to end racism before sexism, as gender and race analysis is placed at the forefront of international agendas. Likewise, in the United States issues of gender, race, and poverty remain very much at the heart of debates surrounding the status of Afro-American and Latino(a) communities. Labels such as “underclass” or “truly disadvantaged” can be applied to the status of many Afro-Latinos(as) in Latin America, who are positioned at the lower end of the socioeconomic scale and largely ignored in public debates (Wilson 1987). From all of these examples, it can be stated that racism and socioeconomic oppression have been on the

agenda of Afro-descendant organizations and movements all across the Americas. Despite their absence in official national discourses, this culture of resistance includes women's voices and actions and has always existed parallel to slavery, colonization, and even assimilation. The role of women in today's social movements and local initiatives speaks to their impact on day-to-day struggles and their participation in subaltern identity discourses. From the previous analysis it becomes clear that for an Afro-Latino(a) diasporic movement to emerge in the Americas, many more women's voices need to transcend these local efforts and more gendered perspectives need to find their way into emerging transnational strategies and international coalition building.

Conclusion

Going beyond the idea of Africa, as Stuart Hall (1991, 1993) suggests, as a "symbolic marker" of shared histories of displacement, resistances, and resemblances, this essay has analyzed some of the major differences and commonalities in the Afro-Latino(a) diasporic movement. The discussion underscored the importance of understanding the cultural basis of power that underlies each experience of "identity" and "difference," and of delineating how power relations are embedded in racial and gender hierarchies that are reproduced in national discourses, public spaces, and contemporary community organizing. Throughout the analysis, I have shown the need to pay more attention to discursive hybridity and ethnocultural identity/community formation processes in order to elaborate new paradigms that account for the intersections of race and gender, an endeavor that has not been fully pursued in the Americas (Devés Valdés 2004, 69). In order to fill this theoretical gap, I have proposed several ways in which to look at the experience of the Americas from a transnational feminist hybrid standpoint, which introduces new questions with regards to racism, sexism, and the lack of Afro-descendant cultural and economic representation within the dominant capitalist system discourses, and the theoretical paradigms that have sustained and consolidated them. In light of recent "crossovers" and mass movements—demographic, social, and geographic—new theoretical paradigms are needed that take into consideration critical thought in the academy, as well as commitment to community empowerment and organizing. Today, the Afro-Latino(a) movement finds itself at a crossroads, in search of channels of representation and of institutional actors capable of translating into "policies" the message of individual and collective action. It is important to note that individual and

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institutional social actors, including Afro-Latino(a) youth and women in communities and in the academy, are already asserting their culture through theatre, music, video-documentary, and community activism, all of which contribute to the reversing of stereotypes and to the goal of putting an end to racism. In a black feminist reading of *Moby Dick*, Tony Morrison (2000) reminds us of the ideology of whiteness being this big whale, “permeating every aspect of society” (24), but not being exactly recognized as such, especially by many of the white writers of the time. Both the academy and the community share a responsibility and challenge to deconstruct the big whale that still haunts us and sustains the dichotomized power relationship of whiteness versus blackness, male versus female, Third versus First World; dichotomies and binary oppositions that continue to permeate not only US society but also Latin American and Caribbean cultures and identities. It is important then to deconstruct and unravel racial hierarchies and their well-defined patterns of inclusion and exclusion in order to reach a better understanding of the struggles of women in maroonage culture as well as in contemporary social movements.

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*An earlier version of this paper was presented at the XXXVI American Black Sociologists Association in Montreal, 2006. Most of the data for this essay was collected while conducting research in the Dominican Republic for the film production, *Congo P'a Tí: Afro-Latino Identity in Dominican Culture* sponsored by the Melassa Foundation, and from my participation in local/global conferences regarding the status of US Latinos(as) and Latin Americans of African descent.

Notes

- ¹ For an excellent discussion on race and Dominican identity in the New York City diaspora, see Duany (1996). Also for the racialization of Dominicans in Puerto Rico, see Duany (2006).
- ² Sutton and Chaney (1987) first documented the cultural social fields among Caribbean migrants to New York City. Later on, Basch, Glick Schiller, and Szanton-Blanc (1994) created the terminology “transnational social fields” to refer to political, economic, and social exchanges among Caribbean migrants in New York City and their communities back home.

- ³ For a discussion on racial identity and the politics of hair, see Candelario (2000). Also, for an excellent discussion of this same subject in Puerto Rico, see Godreau (2002).
- ⁴ For the meaning and genealogy of the term “modern/colonial” see Grosfoguel and Rodríguez (2002), Quijano (2000), and Mignolo (2000). The term alludes to the fact that “coloniality” was born in the 16th century as an intrinsic part of the project of modernity.
- ⁵ For a discussion of the image and myth of La Virgen de la Caridad del Cobre, see de la Fuente García (1999).
- ⁶ For a discussion of space and image in the Museum of the Dominican Man, see Candelario (2008).
- ⁷ For an analysis of racial construction in the Dominican Republic, see Howard (2001), Torres-Saillant (1998), and Sagas (2000).
- ⁸ For the study of race and Haitian migrants and their descendants, see Wooding and Moseley-Williams (2004), and for the study of Haitian/Dominican historical and contemporary relations see Wucker (1999).
- ⁹ The word “gaucho” is the local name for “paisano” or “native,” and makes reference to someone who works in the Argentinean pampas (country-side). Gauchos have their distinctive customs and use of the Spanish language. In 1926, Uruguayan intellectual Vicente Rossi wrote about the gaucho poets, criticizing the mythical image of the gaucho in literature, in contrast to the real gaucho who works and lives in harsh conditions in the countryside. He argues that, “We have to insist at all times that the Gaucho was not a romantic but a warrior, no vulgar errant but a silent man ready to face struggle” (my translation, 2001, 254).
- ¹⁰ In his essay, “Los africanos en la región” (2005), José Alberto Chirino (2005) relies on the work of Arcondo (1998) and Furlani (1996) for information on the number of slaves in the Colonial Registry of 1778 in the Province of Córdoba (*Empadronamiento de 1778*) and in the 1799 Census of the same province. According to this data, in 1778, there were 5,569 slaves (12.5% of the total population), and, in 1799, there were 21,230 blacks (6,338 slaves and 14,892 free blacks), 17,340 Spaniards, and 5,482 indigenous people.
- ¹¹ Chirino (2005) describes this process of social repositioning as another way of giving Africans during colonial times the mechanisms for creating a “genealogy of the subaltern” that is filtered into the new socioeconomic and political reality after slavery was abolished, and when Argentina welcomed mass waves of European immigrants.
- ¹² This is not to say that all Caribbean nations gained their independence in the early part of the 19th century. The Spanish-speaking Caribbean, with the exception of Puerto Rico and Cuba, as well as the Southern Cone were indeed part of this earlier independence period. For an account of how Africans participated in the development of the New World and were affected by many of its major events, see Andrews (2004).

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- ¹³ See Ochy Curiel, "Identidades esencialistas o construcción de identidades políticas: El dilema de las feministas" (2004). In this article, the author, a former member of the Red de Mujeres Negras (Black Women's Network), raises the question of how to break away from identities that do not lead to political strategies and continue to exclude and reproduce a system of exclusion and stereotypes, particularly within the feminist Latin American movement. Also, see Mendoza (1997).

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Transnational Mobility, Domestic Arenas, and Carework Among Immigrant Women from the Dominican Republic

Greta A. Gilbertson

Introduction

Immigration and globalization have transformed families in a multitude of ways, dispersing family members across vast areas and reuniting families under new and different circumstances. This article is an attempt to understand and discuss several dimensions of immigrant family life, specifically, how immigrants on an aging continuum negotiate family relations across borders. The context for my exploration is the global and networked nature of family relations characteristic of a transnational era, and the increasing restrictionist policies characteristic of immigrant receiving nations such as the United States. In this paper, I illustrate how aging women negotiate social relations to increase their influence and “create affirmative spaces for their own interests” (Wang, 2007) through domestic labor and carework.

There is a growing literature on transnational family life (Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 1997; Thorne et al. 2003; Priblisky 2004; Chee 2005; Landolt and Da 2005; Parreñas 2001, 2005; Baldassar 2007; Dreby 2010; Foner 2010) that addresses how immigrants are negotiating family life in a global context. Although these studies address a variety of dimensions of immigrant family life, more research is necessary to explore emergent patterns of family life. This study focuses on one of these dimensions: the reconfiguration of family relationships for individuals at a later part of the life cycle. Indeed, this topic is of increasing relevance as immigrant populations age. How do age-related processes unfold in later life when adults have lived in family and community contexts that extend across societies (Thorne et al. 2003)?

Much of the research on transnational family life focuses on the relationship between young immigrants and their parents (Foner 2010; Parreñas 2005) or between spouses (Priblisky 2004). For example, work on intergenerational relations has explored how motherhood is transformed with migration (Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 1997; Parreñas 2001) or the effects of parent absence on children (Parreñas 2001, 2005; Dreby 2010). Another group of studies focuses on caregiving (Alicea

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1997; Mason 2004; Chee 2005; Baldassar 2007; Zontini 2006). This literature concentrates on how families are maintained and reproduced in spite of geographical separation. For example, in a study of Puerto Rican women, Alicea (1997) argues that women's subsistence work, including kin and caring work, contributes significantly to the social construction of transnational families and households. She finds that women are central actors in transnational networks by carrying out work, such as caring for children and the elders both in Puerto Rico and the United States, organizing family gatherings, and connecting US households to those in Puerto Rico.

However, while previous studies have underscored the centrality of women's labor to the construction of transnational families and households, many dimensions of transnational carework are understudied. For example, more work is needed to flesh out under what circumstances women gain power and influence through their transnational domestic labor and carework. As Alicea (1997) emphasizes, women gain certain forms of power from their kin and caring work, while at the same time they are subordinated through the performance of this kind of labor: "The kin and caring work that Puerto Rican women carry out across the transnational field is not equitably distributed and is burdensome, but it is a means of experiencing love, creating a sense of belonging and a sense of family, and can bring women power and recognition" (599).

Maintaining domestic relations across space often requires travel, and this dimension of family life is also overlooked. Also, relatively few studies address how transnational domesticity is influenced by women's identities. Certainly, not all women are able, nor even willing, to invest in social relations across places. This requires both resources as well as a conception of the self that impels such actions, such as, for example, a mobile caregiving identity.

Another overlooked dimension of transnational family life is how domestic relations shift over time, particularly as immigrants age. In transnational contexts, aging may result in the decline of active engagement in multiple households. This occurs as some immigrants find themselves drawn to "home" (Markowitz and Stefansson 2004) and other comforts that they did not find in the receiving community (Byron and Condon 1996). Return may offer concrete benefits such as lower cost housing and a more hospitable climate (Aguilera 2004). As health problems become more prevalent, and as women come to define themselves as "old" or "infirm," they are less likely to carry out domestic labor across households. Moreover, as sending states play a more active

role in retaining linkages with emigrants by enacting dual citizenship or nationality, for example, return may be more feasible and attractive to immigrants at the later stage of the life course. Indeed, as immigrant women age, they will need care, rather than be caregivers.

Also needing further study is the role of the state in regulating migration and influencing the organization of family life. The role of the sending and receiving states is particularly important in understanding return and mobility among the elderly and is an understudied dimension of this topic. Welfare institutions play a powerful role in how aging immigrants forge belonging. State assistance is likely to reconfigure gendered practices of family life, especially caregiving among family members. Moreover, these experiences form an important context in which aging immigrants may choose to draw upon transnational strategies in negotiating return migration. Yet, few studies examine how belonging is conditioned and contextualized by the agencies and regimes linked to welfare, health, and medical care.

Although a literature on transnational families has grown and enhanced our understanding of the nature of immigrant family life, more research is needed which focuses on the factors that shape how women engage with multiple households over the life course. In this paper I discuss the kinds of changes that occur in the organization of domestic relations as women age, the contradictory demands that they seek to reconcile, and the benefits that they derive. An ethnographic approach that looks at the changing dynamics of family life can illuminate many aspects of these themes.

In the pages that follow, I draw upon long-term observation and interviews with over sixty Dominican immigrant residents who are part of an extended family, including members living in the United States and the Dominican Republic. A long-term case study of a single Dominican extended family is well suited to the exploration of transnational domestic arenas and aging for several reasons. First, although Dominicans in the United States are still a relatively young population—the percentage of the Dominican population living in New York City in 2000 over age 65 was 7.2%—Dominican immigrants as a whole have begun to age.

Why look at a single specific case? One reason is that Dominican family life is often elaborated in both the United States and the Dominican Republic. Dominican families have many of transnational characteristics, including a high degree of back and forth movement, family separation, and long distance caring (Guarnizo 1997; Weyland 2004; Sorensen 2005). The transnational orientation of many Dominican

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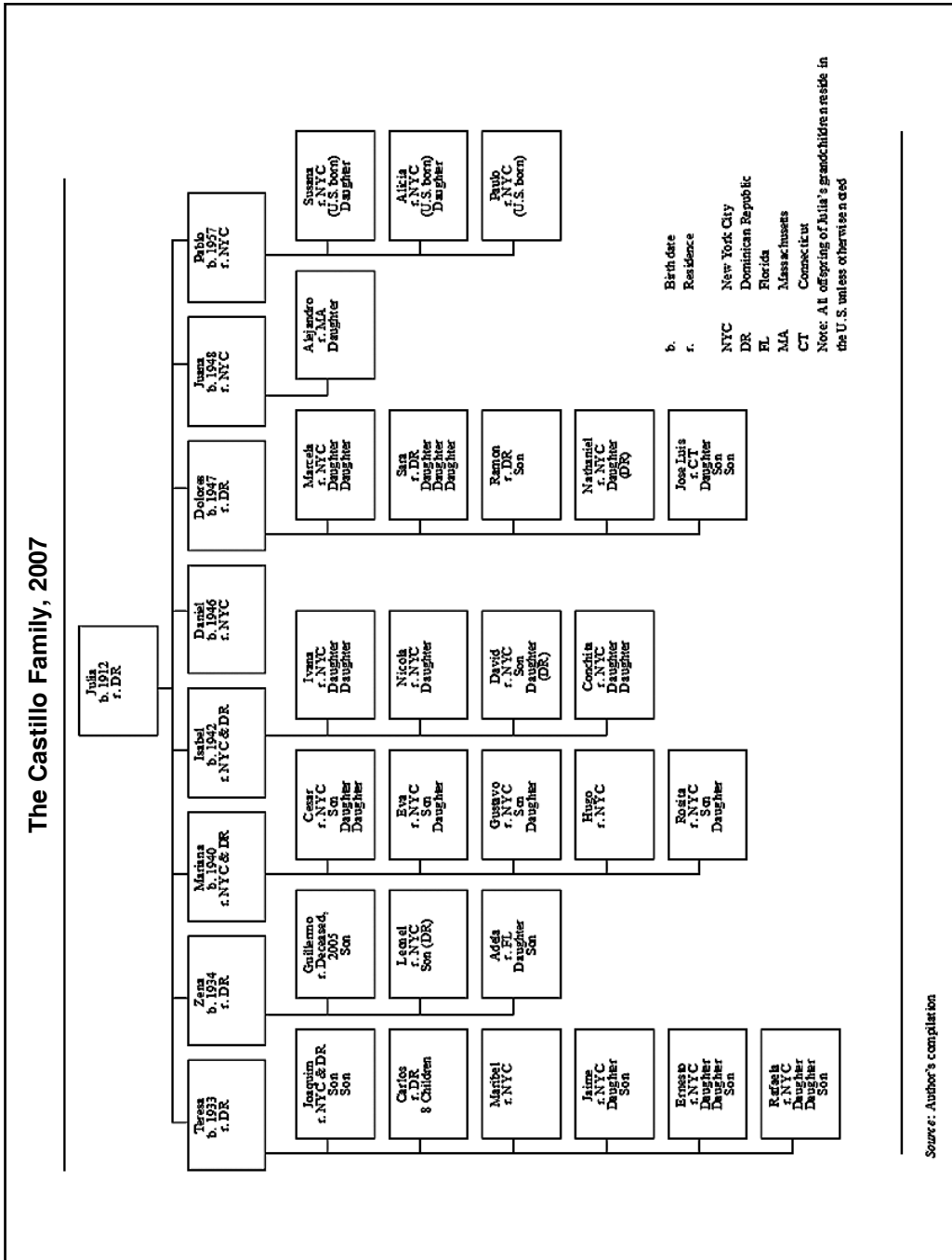
immigrants and the wide range of transnational practices and discourses shaping contemporary Dominican migration have been documented in many studies (Grasmuck and Pessar 1991; Duany 1994; Graham 1997; Guarnizo 1997; Itzigsohn et al. 1999; Levitt 2001). Dominicans remain active in their homelands for a variety of reasons, including a way to recoup status, a means to social mobility, or as part of survival strategies. However, no prior discussion of immigration and family life among Dominicans has addressed how the elderly negotiate return migration and its impact on family life.

Methods

This paper is based on observation and interviews with a group of Dominican immigrants resident in both New York City and the Dominican Republic. The interviews and observations were culled from data I collected for a larger study of an extended family group, the Castillo family, including intensive interviews and participant observation occurring over a period of almost fifteen years (1995-2009). As of 2007, the Castillo family spanned five generations and included ninety-two members, eight of whom resided in the Dominican Republic.¹ Julia's family consists of her eight children, 27 grandchildren, 52 great-grandchildren, and four great-great-grandchildren (see Figure 1). The large size of the Castillo family (five generations) and its concentration in New York City also facilitated observation and interaction with most family members. I make primary reference to the first generation, highlighting the experiences of five women and their families (spouses, children, and grandchildren). I chose these cases because they are illustrative of various dimensions of the situations of aging immigrants and their families.

Most of the first cohort arrived to New York City in the 1970s and the 1980s through family reunification policies. They were 19 to 53 years old when they immigrated and are currently between the ages of 51 and 77. Of the seven siblings, Zena Castillo migrated first in 1969 and procured her legal permanent residency through an arranged marriage. Her brother Domingo migrated after her, received his residency through marriage, and petitioned for his mother. The family chain gained momentum throughout the late 1970s and into the early 1980s as Julia petitioned for four of her five remaining children. One daughter, Teresa, and her husband were petitioned for by her eldest son.

Figure 1



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The Castillos, like other Dominican immigrants in the 1970s and 1980s,² converged on New York City,³ relying on family networks to secure housing and employment. In New York they joined the ranks of the working class, integrating into low-wage, segregated labor markets, mostly in manufacturing. As industrialized employment declined in the city, later arrivals have shifted into low-end jobs in the service sector.

The incorporation of this group follows a model of coresidence with children and grandchildren in the United States, participation in transnational family networks, and the practice of recurrent return migration. Most of the first cohort relied on “patchworking” (Kibria 1993) survival strategies in the United States involving income pooling with children and grandchildren and use of some forms of public assistance. The structure of family life in New York, characterized by coresidence or proximity between parents, adult children, and grandchildren, reflects patterns of family organization and family relations characteristic of the Dominican Republic and was a response to conditions in New York City, including residential segregation,⁴ expensive housing, poor social and educational opportunities, and racism (Levitt 2007; Hernández 2003).

Julia’s daughters engaged in various forms of paid labor activity, both prior to and after migration. However, with the exception of Zena, who worked full time for nineteen years, their paid work was sporadic and was seen, by others and themselves, as an extension of their traditional roles and activities. Thus, material resources from paid labor were less important than the carework women provided, which they traded for social support and security provided by their kin and family.

Although five of the six members of the first cohort have become US citizens, all identify as Dominicans and all see the Dominican Republic as their primary home. Return, even if not realized, can still be understood as part of the aging process, a myth that becomes increasingly important to immigrants as they grow older. For the most part, the older cohort believes that they will have a better quality of life in the Dominican Republic.

Transnational Domestic Spaces

As settlers in immigrant neighborhoods in New York City, the aging Castillos are enmeshed in a transnational social space; their settlement has been structured around regular return. In this section I discuss some of the factors that influenced the ability of Julia’s daughters

(Teresa, Mariana, Isabel, Zena, and Juana) to create and maintain transnational domestic spaces over the life course. The example of Teresa and her sisters provides a detailed look at the complexity of webs of power embedded in family relations.

Domestic and caring labor can extend over a long period of time and shifts over the life course. Teresa has played a crucial role in the care and socialization of many of her six children, eighteen grandchildren, and one great grandchild. A period of more than forty years separates the birth of her eldest grandchild (1965) and the youngest (2007).

Compared with her sisters, Teresa had achieved a more secure class position in the Dominican Republic through marriage and economic activity. Teresa's husband, Pedro, worked out of their home in a *taller* (car repair shop) that was situated on one side of their house. By "helping out" in the home—selling snacks and drinks and livening the social atmosphere for Pedro's many customers and friends—Teresa played an active role in the family's small but successful business. An accomplished seamstress, she also earned money by taking in sewing for pay. In Mao, they were of a prospering class (*los ricos del barrio*) and were well connected into local networks.

Petitioned for by their eldest son, Teresa was in her mid-fifties and her husband in his early sixties when they received their visas to enter the United States in 1986. She explained at one point that she did not feel the need to migrate, given their relatively stable economic position. Indeed, migration was seen as an adventure; another resource that the family could exploit. Teresa and Pedro received their visas, and petitioned their remaining children. They did not distance themselves from Mao as much as they embedded themselves in the United States, maintaining ties with both sets of children: those who migrated and those who stayed behind.

Teresa's active maintenance of a domestic arena in the sending community helped her to maintain ties with both migrating, returning and non-migrating children, grandchildren, and other family members. Part of this process was managing relationships over distance and maintaining ties with kin and non-kin in the Dominican Republic. Her power base, strongly tied to the relationships with her children, has been challenged by her children's and their families' growing independence. The first set of challenges occurred when her children began to form families and later, when they migrated to the United States. These changes created separations that challenged family unity in a variety of ways. One aspect of this is the dismantling of the family business, an

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arena where Teresa exercised considerable authority. Another aspect was a range of conflicts that ensued as she struggled to maintain authority and influence with her son's spouses or partners. A final aspect is the challenge that migration posed.

Teresa maintained ongoing relationships with her adult children, despite the loosening of ties that resulted from marriage and migration. For example, she had many conflicts with Jaime's wife, who was said to have had an affair in his absence. The transgression not only threatened the reputation of Teresa's son, but the honor her family. And it was all the more humiliating due to the fact that Jaime's wife grew up next door to Teresa and had spent the better part of her adolescence at Teresa's home. In addition, Teresa saw her son's marriage as having helped out his wife and her family, whom she considered as her social inferiors. Through Jaime, his wife and children received their legal permanent residency. This coveted resource had the potential to diminish Teresa's power by freeing Jaime's wife from her surveillance, allowing her to escape the role of daughter-in-law.

Despite these conflicts, Teresa was able to maintain her relationship with Jaime in part due to her transnational resource base. Part of this base are her two places of residence and the social relations that undergird them. Another factor was her mobility; traveling allowed Teresa to move between the two residences. She remained an important part of Jaime's life; his close ties to his mother (and father) and his siblings formed a social world that enveloped him in both the Dominican Republic and the United States. Many forms of interdependence cemented these bonds, despite family conflict, including Jaime's reliance on Teresa's practical forms of assistance.

There is a large spatial component to Teresa's influence. For example, Jaime often stayed in his mother's home, which he considered to be his home as well, when he returned to Mao, and he often ate at his mother's apartment when she was in New York. When another son, Joaquín, suffered a serious injury at his workplace in the Dominican Republic, Teresa mobilized family members in the United States and the Dominican Republic to contribute money to pay for his medical expenses, and she provided hands-on care in Mao. Teresa also played a large part in raising some of her grandchildren.

Since Teresa received her visa in 1986, she has helped many of her children and grandchildren in the United States, where she often spends months at a time. When she is there, Teresa expends a great deal of time providing domestic and caring labor such as childcare and food prepara-

tion. Several of their children have lived with them for varying periods of time in the apartments that they have rented over the years, including their current one.

Family size (i.e. fewer children and single headship) and separation due to migration affect the ability of women to sustain strong domestic arenas, limiting the social and economic resources that women can access (see Rodríguez 1987; Kibria 1993). Isabel and Mariana were both married and had large families; like Teresa, they cultivated strong relationships with their children and grandchildren, providing various forms of domestic labor and carework. Zena, the first of the sisters to migrate when in her late twenties, did not establish the strong domestic arenas that her sisters established. Several factors are relevant including Zena's smaller family size (three children) and the fact that her migration resulted in longer periods of separation from her younger (ages 5 and 8) children. Although Zena petitioned for visas for her three children, her younger son remained in the Dominican Republic for much of his adolescence and young adulthood, under the less than vigilant tutelage of his father. She also petitioned her husband, but he did not receive a visa for eight years; this long period of separation did not help her maintain what was already a difficult relationship with him. Zena became the household head and breadwinner in New York, with the help of her eldest son, who was eighteen when he arrived to the city.

Juana, another of Julia's daughters, was at a greater disadvantage than Zena in her efforts to establish a domestic arena. Juana arrived in the early 1980s, petitioning for visas for her only child, a son, and her husband. Her husband never came to the United States, and they separated shortly thereafter. She later remarried in the United States, but this relationship did not last for more than several years. Moreover, Juana's linkages to the broader family networks were hindered by her transgression of the boundaries of respectable femininity as a result of having several failed relationships.

Internal migration also influenced Juana and Zena's domestic arenas, in effect shrinking them. After marrying, Zena's daughter moved to Florida in her early twenties; Juana's son moved to Boston. This deprived both women of important social and symbolic resources that could help them maintain a stable domestic base in New York, both in the form of ties with their children and the potential ties with grandchildren. With the exception of one of Isabel's daughters, who moved to Connecticut, Mariana's and Isabel's children stayed in close proximity to each other and to their parents, either remaining in their parent's household as adults, or living nearby.

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Other factors contributing to a limited domestic base for Zena were a lack of grandchildren in the United States, strained relationships with another son, and the loss of her eldest son to stomach cancer in 2006. Juana and Zena's smaller family size and their less active involvement with children and grandchildren in the country have truncated their US-based kinship networks and resulted in fewer family resources than their sisters.

State Resources and Domestic Arenas

In addition to relations with family members in the United States and the Dominican Republic, as Julia's daughters have aged, they have become tied to the United States through various benefits and entitlements of the welfare state. Access to subsidized medical care through Medicaid and to medical care in the Dominican Republic shaped the maintenance of transnational domestic arenas. One reason that Isabel returned to the Dominican Republic was to care for her husband, who preferred life in Mao. Mariana's return was oriented around her husband's severe depression and his desire to live in Mao. Health problems just as frequently drew immigrants back to the United States. For example, the chronic health problems of Isabel's husband, who has suffered several serious heart attacks and is diabetic, have become increasingly more severe with age, and have motivated their shuttling between the two countries. Although they utilize some medical services in the Dominican Republic, the cost of health care there has increased and, without insurance, health care services are prohibitively expensive. The threat that Isabel's husband might fall ill again pushes them to return to the United States. Isabel's own medical needs have also increased over time, and her ties with various medical personnel and institutions in New York City require returns to the country.

Housing is a third and essential resource linked with travel and a key source of power for transnational women. Housing and housing aid take on special significance for immigrants in New York City as a result of the high cost and scarcity of housing, and is critical to the incorporation of low-wage workers to the city's labor force.

In 2003, Isabel and her husband were able to procure a subsidized apartment. Although Isabel had used their home in Mao as a kind of getaway, the apartment in New York allows Isabel to extract herself from some of her caregiving obligations without having to leave the city. She also can maintain a greater degree of autonomy and control in her relationships with her children and grandchildren. Having the apartment

also relieves her of some of the work of caring for her husband, whose medical condition is fragile. A home health attendant comes in to provide several hours of care during the day, relieving Isabel of some of the responsibility for taking care of her husband.

Likewise, Teresa and her husband acquired a subsidized apartment in a complex for the elderly in 2004. The apartment, which initially cost about \$300 per month, enables them to maintain their own residence after many years of living either in the apartment of one of their children or, in an earlier period, maintaining an apartment rented at market rate, which proved too expensive. The maintenance of this apartment is another tie to the United States; they are required to keep paperwork current and to attend periodic appointments with the city agency that runs the building. However, this affordable living space is a valuable resource in a city where housing is both expensive and scarce.

When Teresa and Pedro are in the United States, the apartment has been the center of many family gatherings. This allows Teresa to exert more control over family dynamics when she is in the United States. For example, rather than visiting her children at their homes, she prefers receiving them at her apartment. There she is able to cook and entertain visitors. She only reluctantly goes to visit at her daughter's home, insisting that her daughter and her three children visit with her in her smaller apartment. When she is in New York, she rarely attends larger family gatherings.

The apartment has allowed Teresa to maintain her independence; this is often useful in the various power struggles between family members. For example, she refused to visit Jaime at their New York apartment. Yet she often enticed him and her other children and grandchildren, to visit her by cooking on a daily basis and providing an inviting social atmosphere, that is, by having the apartment be a space for family gatherings. By controlling her own space and receiving visitors, Teresa has more power and status than someone who must share space with family members. Although none of her children lived in Teresa's apartment initially, the apartment has become a permanent residence for several of her children, including Jaime, who eventually separated and divorced his wife. These children have a stronger link to Teresa through their occupancy of their apartment. They have returned to Mao more frequently and have been more active participants in caring for their parents as they aged.

In contrast, Zena has been unable to obtain a subsidized apartment. She gave up her apartment in New York City a number of years ago and

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can no longer afford to head a household on her own there, nor does she want to live with her children on a full time basis. Prior to her son's death in 2006, she stayed in his apartment. Having a subsidized apartment in the city would allow her to maintain a more autonomous space, increase her influence by allowing her children and grandchildren access to this space, and facilitate her dual residence. The lack of an independent residence in New York heightens the attractiveness of living in Mao, and Zena now spends longer periods of time there.

The stories of Julia's daughters illustrate several dimensions of how women negotiate transnational domestic spaces over the life course. Later in the life course, all of Julia's children benefitted from their access to, or their husband's access to, some forms of earned entitlements and state resources. These resources, in conjunction with kin ties and community resources in the United States and the Dominican Republic, facilitated the maintenance of transnational residential patterns. Women who had larger kinship networks and more cohesive family relations were best able to wield influence. As women spend longer periods of time in Mao as they age, those who had maintained strong ties to kin in Mao had greater security and power within their families.

Aging, Mobility, and Shifting Identities

While raising young children and later young grandchildren, in the Dominican Republic and the United States, Julia's daughters played a critical role in shaping family life through the performance of domestic labor and the management of households. However, the demands of domestic and caring labor and their co-residence with children and grandchildren become more onerous as women age. Moreover, maintaining ties to both the US and the Dominican Republic becomes more complex over time.

In this section, I discuss the role of travel and how it helps women manage some of the contradictory demands of domestic labor and carework. In addition, I explore how women's maintenance of transnational ties influences their identities. I argue that travel adds a particular layer of power that would not otherwise be available to women of this generation. It allows aging women to better control the nature of their carework and opens up wider social networks in which women expand their subject positions, enabling women to shift away from a caregiving identity. However, travel is a negotiated process and it is both gendered and "aged." As Williams (2007) argues in her study of Indonesian migration,

mobility for women often conflicts with their feminine identities. The dominant femininity constructs aging women in terms of their family roles and responsibilities. Indeed, Julia's daughters embraced dominant constructions of femininity in their roles as mothers, grandmothers, and in performing domestic labor and carework. Yet, they were able to selectively resist some dimensions of these identities through travel. One way that women negotiated the expectations of feminine and caregiving identities was to argue that return was necessary to provide care, for example, for their husbands, their mother, or for other family members.

Another constraining factor is state policies. When Julia's daughters were in their late fifties and early sixties, the US government began to more tightly regulate both immigration and citizenship, including access to welfare programs. A series of legislative reforms, including the 1996 Welfare Act, limited access to select federal welfare programs to US citizens. Among other restrictions, the legislation limited the rights and privileges attached to citizenship and legal permanent residency. This period saw a proliferation of the discourse of immigrants as "welfare abusers." Although Western countries hold out the promise if not the delivery of resources targeted toward the elderly as a deserving social category, within this debate, the immigrant elderly were singled out as taking advantage of certain forms of state welfare such as Supplemental Social Security Income (Bean and Stevens 2003). Elderly immigrants were viewed as undeserving because they are "out of place," particularly if they spend time out of the country.

The uncertain place of aging immigrants also has been influenced by the devaluation of aging immigrants as a category of immigrants (see Ackers and Dwyer 2002, for a discussion of the relationship between aging and the welfare state in the European Union). State regulation of parent/elderly immigration is not only limited to the United States. In other countries, such as Australia, the parents of adult immigrants are restricted from immigration. According to Baldassar (2007), a key assumption behind "parent migration" restrictions is the view held by governments that the elderly are a burden on welfare systems, evident in the restrictionist immigration policy toward "migrant parents."

Responding to the concern over their uncertain status as legal permanent residents, many immigrants, including Julia's daughters (with the exception of Teresa), claimed their place in US society by applying for citizenship. Becoming US citizens, however, did not tie immigrants to this country, but to the contrary, facilitated travel (see Gilbertson and Singer 2003). Sending state initiatives, such as the dual nationality in the

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Dominican Republic, also have contributed to changing sentiments surrounding immigration and settlement. These developments have pushed some older immigrants to reclaim their sense of “home” in the Dominican Republic and reject US-based retirement while at the same time seeking out US citizenship as a form of insurance that guarantees access to social rights.⁵

Within such an uncertain context, women often construct elaborate accounts to justify their travel. For example, the need to provide care and the need to escape some of the burdens of caregiving are both justifications for travel. Domestic labor and caring for children and grandchildren often falls disproportionately on the shoulders of aging women, particularly when they share a residence with children and grandchildren. Over the years I conducted fieldwork, I saw many women take over the care of grandchildren. In most cases, the Castillo women that I observed were able to manage their caregiving in a way that they found tolerable. Indeed, their caregiving affirmed their feminine identities and gave them a sense of usefulness. However, there were many times and spaces where carework became onerous and burdensome for them.

For example, Mariana assumed the childrearing responsibilities of her eldest son’s two children when his wife left him and their children in his care. Mariana also helped shoulder the burden of her daughter’s two children, who moved back to the family household when her husband suddenly passed away. Over the years, Isabel took on much of the responsibility for the domestic labor of the family’s household as well as playing a major role in raising several of her grandchildren. In 1996, three of her four adult children, who were then between the ages of twenty-four and twenty-nine, still resided in the household she headed with her husband in Washington Heights. Isabel felt unfairly burdened with the work of the household and the care of her two granddaughters. She reported that neither her husband nor her children helped her with the household labor, nor with regular contributions to household expenses.

For Isabel, especially, these domestic obligations were difficult to bear. Travel to the Dominican Republic was a way for her to take a break from the stress of city life and domestic problems in New York. She also used travel to reaffirm herself and reconnect with family members living in Mao.

Travel, then, became a way that Isabel and her sisters could claim a space outside of the dominant femininity, which sees aging women in

terms of their family roles and responsibilities. It allowed women to moderate the demands of caring labor they had in the United States. By moving in order to care for family members in one location, women can represent their migration as virtuous and respectable, allowing them to extract themselves from the more onerous obligations associated with grandmothering, and sometimes, caring for husbands.

The difficulty of caring for grandchildren as they grew older pushed women to return to Mao. Aging immigrants frequently find their influence or authority contested by children and grandchildren who are more “American” in their views (Gilbertson 2010). Teresa often finds herself without the authority that she was accustomed to when dealing with family problems. In addition, Teresa and her sisters find, as do all parents and grandparents, that their children and grandchildren (now mostly teenagers or young adults) are less receptive to the kinds of care that they can provide.

The difficult spatial conditions of residing in New York City influence women’s caregiving and contribute to the isolation of the elderly. Many of Julia’s daughters said that they felt confined in small apartments.

All of the factors mentioned above contribute to the appeal of movement and return. Invoking a Dominican identity, Teresa argues that she can no longer remain in New York: “Somos dominicanos; sé que el gobierno nos mantiene, pero me gusta mi casa” (“We’re Dominicans; even though the [US] government supports us; I like my home”). She asserts the moral superiority of small town life over city life. Mills (1998) and Zhang (2001) also examine women’s idealized representation of rural life and how these discourses are a way of denying legitimacy to what women see as undesirable ways of life associated with urban spaces, including women’s independence through paid labor market activities.

The expression of emotions and accounts of stress and depression are important aspects of immigrants’ settlement and mobility narratives (Dyck and McLaren 2004). In describing herself, Teresa embraces an identity as “depresiva” (someone who suffers from depression). This identity is closely intertwined with space; that is, being in New York often triggers symptoms of depression and signals her desire to return home. Rather than simply a psychological disorder, depression can be interpreted as embodied anxiety, link to the difficulties of belonging (Dyck and McLaren 2004).

Women’s domestic space in Mao allowed them to reclaim and reshape their feminine identities. Their domestic labor and carework in the Dominican Republic, including caring for grandchildren, husbands, and

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their mothers, contribute to their caregiving identities. However, this work was usually not as rigorous or isolating as was carework in the United States. Indeed, Zena, Mariana, and Isabel and Julia's homes are adjacent to each other, allowing for a more collective and less spatially enclosed form of caregiving. Carework and domestic labor was less demanding as it could be outsourced more easily, or spread to different individuals (Alicea 1997).

As the aging women spend more time back home, they begin to make small shifts in their identities as caregivers, creating more space for newer ideas of the self. One important shift allows aging women to see themselves as receivers of care, rather than givers of care. Their distance from children and grandchildren, and their increasing use of various health services, allows them to shift away from a caregiving identity.

As women aged, their use of health care in both the United States and in Mao was another important dimension of their experience. The use of US medical services not only gave women greater visibility, but allowed them to develop different subject positions as the recipients of care, rather than givers of care. Women's relationships with doctors and other health related personnel in the Dominican Republic also reinforced their identities as consumers and made visible their status and wealth. Julia's daughters utilized a variety of medical services there, often seeking out private treatment by "good" doctors. Seeing doctors often required that they travel to Santiago, a nearby city, and sometimes to the capital city, Santo Domingo. Such travel allowed women to move outside the confines of their neighborhood and town, which sometimes seemed limiting to them. Medical personnel provide support and care that is valued by immigrants especially as they confront increasing health problems.

To conclude, the first generation of women, while seemingly limited to their traditional roles of wives and mothers (and grandmothers), have been able to exercise significant control over their lives through the control of domestic space and through the access to state and community resources. The nature of their transnational domestic lifestyle adds a new dimension to the power they could wield, allowing women to negotiate relationships with husbands, children, and grandchildren and to reaffirm and reshape their identities. Travel was a way that women could claim a space outside of the culturally dominant femininity, which, for the most part, views aging women in terms of their family roles and responsibilities.

Conclusion

Transnational domestic spaces are embedded in the larger structural contexts of low wage immigration flows within an increasingly restrictionist immigration context. They are essential to the social reproduction of the immigrant labor force in working class communities. The social space connecting New York City and the Dominican Republic provides many symbolic and material resources that undergird complex networks of relationships. The preceding sections made the case that aging Dominican women gain certain forms of power through their control of transnational domestic spaces and their identities as mobile caregivers. These spaces consist of the actual living spaces that men and women occupy as well as the relationships within these spaces. On the other hand, as this study shows, aging women in working class communities in particular, often find themselves shouldering a great deal of domestic and carework. Women sometimes “vote with their feet” as a way to extract themselves from some of the more onerous obligations of carework. Although many engage in carework in their origin communities as well as in the United States, they are better able to manage it on their own terms.

State resources can enhance the influence of aging women. Women are best able to assert control over their circumstances when they have access to a wider array of resources. Aging women use these social mechanisms to seek visibility and autonomy within the webs of relationships with family members and representatives of the state, and in both US and Dominican settings.

These women seemingly conform to dominant concepts of femininity by embracing motherhood and grandmotherhood, but they also seek to establish distance from family members through travel. Mobility between family groups in the United States and the Dominican Republic allows Julia’s daughters to moderate both physical and emotional distance. It also allows them to selectively resist and embrace traditional gendered roles of wife, mother, and grandmother, enabling their shifting subjectivity.

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Notes

- ¹ The family was described in Gilbertson and Singer, 2003. The description of the family has been slightly modified since publication of that essay due to changes in family composition. I use the term generation here to refer to family generations, i.e., Julia's children, grandchildren, great grandchildren, etc.
- ² Most Dominicans who arrived in New York City in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s arrived through family reunification policies. In 2008, the Dominican population in New York City was estimated to be between 570,000 to 580,000.
- ³ Most of the Castillo family members settled in Manhattan communities inhabited by earlier waves of immigrants, including Puerto Ricans and Cubans, and later Dominicans, facilitating the development of ethnic and panethnic identities. The later arriving Castillos, and some of those who arrived earlier, have moved to more affordable, but poorer, multiracial neighborhoods outside of Manhattan, mostly in the Bronx. Others have moved outside of the city and live in Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Florida.
- ⁴ In 1990 and 2000, in the New York Metropolitan area, Dominicans were more segregated from non-Hispanic whites than any other ethnic group.
- ⁵ As originally passed, the Welfare Act rendered legal permanent residents—including those who were participation in the programs at the time the law became effective—ineligible for public assistance benefits. Since the enactment of the Welfare Act, the federal government has restored eligibility for some of the benefits from which immigrants were originally barred, and some states and localities have provided substitute benefits.

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Negotiating and Engendering Labor Migration in the Twenty-First Century: Mexicanas' "Funds of Knowledge" in the Midwest

Aidé Acosta

Introduction

In this study, I focus on the quotidian experiences of immigrant women in east-central Illinois by examining how they negotiate the struggles they confront in the process of migrating to these new arenas. While it is impossible to select one story to represent all immigrant women, there are key experiences that form into a collective history and experience on immigration. I include the stories of two women to point to the intricacies confronted by *Mexicanas* in small-town America, and how they respond to and negotiate the process of immigration. The stories of Irene Zepeda and Lidia Rodríguez mirror the difficulties immigrants confront in labor settings as well as in formal establishments, such as legal, social, and medical institutions. More specifically, they are representative of the strategies women create to alleviate difficult situations. As women who migrate encounter new opportunities and situations, they continuously negotiate such experiences grounded in their own "lived regionalities" (Arredondo 2009). In other words, women's past experiences and knowledge shape the ways in which they live and understand their lives in migrant settings.

In addition to Irene and Lidia's life stories, I include a discussion of the ways in which women utilize their own bodies of knowledge or "funds of knowledge" (Vélez-Ibáñez and Greenberg 1992; González et al. 2005) to mobilize their communities through their active participations. During the summer of 2008, a group of women organized a summer program for children in a local trailer park community that did not qualify for city wide programs. In this context, I will deliberately focus on my own participation with this group of women to speak to the possibilities of creating engaged research that is mindful of the communities' needs and desires, rather than the result of a researcher's own ideas about what is needed. I decided not to focus on the women involved in organizing the summer program as individuals out of respect

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for their own critique of researchers. Given that this community is in close proximity to the University of Illinois, its members strongly felt that they were used as research subjects too often. University researchers, including faculty and undergraduate and graduate students, continue to study this community without having a reciprocal sense of accountability or respect for the community's own desires. In this way, I speak more broadly to the ways in which this core group of women mobilized their own "funds of knowledge" to develop grassroots community organizing. The basic premise underlying the concept of "funds of knowledge" is that "people are competent, they have knowledge, and their life experiences have given them that knowledge" (González et al. 2005, x). The concept is rooted in participatory research that allows one to document this competence and knowledge.

Research Site and Methodology

My ethnographic research in east-central Illinois was primarily conducted in the town of Lorraine from September 2007 through 2008.¹ My methodological approach includes participant observation in several small towns and small-size cities in east-central Illinois, as well as approximately two dozen semi-structured, open ended "life history" interviews. As an engaged bilingual observer, I served as a Spanish translator in various contexts; in homes, schools, social service agencies, for insurance companies, community centers, and specifically in various legal settings (court dates, lawyer offices, and official letters). The critique put forward by immigrant women in the Prairieville trailer park residence (as discussed in the introduction) regarding the relationship between researchers and research participants pushed me methodologically and ethically to carry on my research in a reciprocal and dialogical manner.

At the heart of Amish settlements since the late 1800s, Lorraine is a newly flourishing immigrant enclave for Mexican laborers from the town of Jimenez in northern Mexico. This region has been historically known as the major producer of broomcorn. Although Lorraine currently imports most of its broomcorn material, the broom factory continues to be the town's principal economic source and the primary labor recruiter of Mexican laborers from Jimenez, Mexico, Lorraine's counterpart in broom production. The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) has facilitated the expansion of the broom company as a major international provider of cleaning supplies (brooms, mops, brushes), and consequently as a principal labor recruiter in the area.

While Mexican immigration to the Midwest has been taking place for over a century (Nodín-Valdez 1991; García 1996), it was during the 1980s that Latinas(os) began permanently residing in Midwestern villages and towns (Millard and Chapa 2004; Zúñiga and Hernández-León 2005). This shift is intimately linked with neoliberal economic restructuring (Del Castillo 1996; Duggan 2003; Harvey 2005; and Fitzgerald 2006). In Mexico, the implementation of NAFTA has widened the gaps of inequality and increased emigration. Simultaneously, with neoliberal practices of downsizing and outsourcing, cheap labor became a necessity for US industries. The intensified growth of Mexican labor immigrants in Midwest rural areas is intimately linked with the restructuring of agriculture and food processing, which has caused a widespread reliance on Latina(o) labor (Millard and Chapa 2004). The communities that employ them, however, are often reluctant to meet their needs as human beings, including, decent working conditions, access to medical, legal, and social services in their language, and educational opportunities (Villenas 2001; Vélez-Ibáñez 2004; Millard and Chapa 2004). These inequalities are mirrored in the following two life histories of Irene Zepeda and Lidia Rodríguez.

“Allá barriamos, aquí las venimos a hacer”: Irene Zepeda²
(Over there we swept, here we came to make them)

When asked if they had worked in the broom factory in Jimenez, Nuevo Leon (northern Mexico) given that in Lorraine Irene and Alfredo Zepeda had worked in the broom factory, they responded that they learned how to make brooms *aquí* (here) in Lorraine, whereas, *allá* (over there) in Jimenez they swept with them. Their response speaks broadly to the direct recruitment of laborers in the production of brooms. Many of those employed in the broom factory had in fact worked in Jimenez producing brooms, and were recruited directly to Lorraine because of their skills and experience in this industry.³ Mexican immigrant labor in Lorraine has become structurally embedded in the local economies vis-à-vis the broom industry. The majority of immigrants in Lorraine, however, have migrated as part of a transnational web of social and kin networks. This was the case, for example, with the Zepedas. While both men and women work in the factory producing cleaning supplies, their experiences as laborers are nevertheless gendered. Women are principally relegated to the production line; whereas, men have the opportunities to move up, for example, as *montecargas* (forklifters) and mechanics, and consequently acquiring better wages.

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Irene was born in 1955 in Jimenez. She lived most of her life there, where her two sons and daughter were also raised. Irene married Alfredo Zepeda at an early age. And although Alfredo frequently traveled throughout Mexico, the years they resided in Jimenez, either through his employment in the music industry or when seeking employment in other states, she remained in her hometown working and contributing economically to the household, in addition to her domestic responsibilities. Before migrating to the United States, Irene worked informally through her home selling regional fast food, including tacos and hamburgers.

Alfredo began migrating temporarily to the United States in the 1980s via Texas. In 1988, he was able to legalize his status with the passing of the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA). Soon after, he submitted the paperwork to legalize his family, including his wife and two sons. Their daughter no longer qualified since she was married at the time of the legal proceedings. Irene's paperwork was approved in 1992, and, in 1998, she was granted permanent residency. Upon her residency approval, Irene along with Alfredo and their youngest son, relocated to Texas. Entering through El Paso, they settled in Odessa, Texas. Earlier that year their eldest son, Alfredito, had migrated to Lorraine encouraged by his father. Alfredo recalls that the encouragement surged out of the knowledge that in Lorraine there was an abundance of employment, "*por medio de toda la gente de aquí que es del mismo pueblo*" (through all the people here who are from the same town). While in Odessa, Alfredo found employment in the *taquería* Ta'kontento, which had previously employed him. Irene found employment primarily in the food industry. She worked as a *marinera* (dishwasher)⁴ for Rosa's Café in Odessa, in prep (food preparation) for Burger King, as well as making flour tortillas in a local *tortillería* (tortilla factory). They resided in Odessa, for two years, until relocating to Lorraine in 2000.⁵

While Alfredo and Irene in part moved to Lorraine in search of better employment opportunities, their primary reason was their son, "*pues se estiró un hijo para acá, se vino primero*" (one of our sons made the stretch to here, he came first). Upon arriving to Lorraine the couple found employment in the broom factory. Their son had already been working there. He worked in the factory until 2007 when he moved back to Mexico to work in a broom factory owned by Alfredo's brother. Their youngest son first attended high school when they arrived; shortly after graduating he began working making garage doors in the nearby Amish town.⁶ Irene and Alfredo worked in the broom factory until 2004 when

they opened Tacos El Norte, their small food business. The opening of the business was encouraged by several difficulties they encountered, particularly Irene's injury at work, as well as having been fined for selling tacos from their home.

In 2002, Irene injured her right shoulder from the monotony of production in the broom factory coupled with the intensity of pulling the product's fibers. Shoulder injuries are common among the workers. Irene attributes the injury to the routine, "*se me reventó el tendón, porque era lo repetitivo*" (my tendon ruptured, because work was so repetitive). Irene states that she was always left in the same place, as is common for most workers. Both Irene and Alfredo believe that workers are moved according to the factory supervisor's interests, "*pues ahí te cambian a según la conveniencia del mayordomo*"⁷ (well, there they change your task according to the supervisor's convenience).⁸ Irene had surgery in the nearby city hospital. While the company did pay for the medical costs associated with the injury, she was not granted the sufficient recovery time necessary for her shoulder to fully heal. As a consequence, her shoulder never healed, and, given her reliance on the left shoulder during the recovery period, her left shoulder was also injured. She never had surgery on the second one, mainly because the company did not want to respond to the second injury, but also because of a business opportunity that arose for the Zepedas around the same time. Additionally, Irene was advised in Jimenez that her left shoulder could be healed through a chiropractor; the right one, however, could no longer be healed since she had surgery, "*es que da miedo operarse porque allá en Jiménez me dijeron que si no me hubiera operado a la mejor un quiropráctico podría curarme sin operación; ya operado ya nadie te lo toca*" (it's frightening to have surgery, because over there in Jimenez I was told that if I wouldn't have had surgery maybe a chiropractor could cure me without surgery; once operated, no one touches it).

During the time of the injury, Irene was advised to seek legal counsel for worker's compensation. Through the lawyer's negotiations, she was compensated \$8,000 for her shoulder injury.⁹ She was also provided with a couple of weeks of rehabilitation, and was placed back on the production line upon returning to work. Both Irene and Alfredo believe that she was purposefully placed on the shop floor to do intense work; Alfredo states, "*sabiendo que estaba enferma del brazo y todo como cosa de adrede*" (knowing that she had a shoulder injury and all, and everything was done deliberately). Both felt that there was resentfulness from management and other workers towards Irene. Their integrity and the

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legitimacy of her injury were questioned through accusations of faking the injury as a way to gain monetary compensation from the factory. Upon returning to work, other workers, primarily those related to the supervisor, gave Irene a hard time. Her ability to work and produce fully was questioned and a cause for mockery, "*oyes tu ya no quedaste buena*" (hey, you are no longer good), "*porque quedé el sesenta*" (because my ability was reduced to sixty [percent]). Her inability to generate products at the same rate as other workers, along with the belief that she was only "sixty percent good," was a cause for confrontations.

The supervisor's mother, Estrella, yelled at Irene for not being able to keep up with production, and although Irene stated that she could not do the work she was assigned, Estrella responded by saying "*sí puede*" (yes, you can). Irene recounts the pain of performing the strenuous job and the lack of consideration by management (and those related to the supervisor):

Es que tienes que estar parada entonces tienes que estar agarrando los cepillos y tienes que agarrarlos rápido y encajarlos, entonces ya cuando está la máquina grande, haz de cuenta es así la banda esa. Entonces aquí tienes que ponerla, pero no la pesca tienes que pucharla, entonces yo tenía que pucharla con ésta [izquierda], no con ésta [derecha] porque ésta [izquierda] me dolía bastante. Entonces, este, no es lo mismo, no tienes el mismo movimiento, con una, luego se te va chueco tienes que meter la mano y esto aquí te duele [muñeca] porque estás ahí puchando y puchando.

Y ya no ballaba ni de que amarrarme pues ya andaba de carrera. Y luego le dije "no puedo Estrella, no puedo." Hasta que de repente se paró y puso las manos así en la orilla de donde está el fierro de la banda. Y dijo, "pues si no puedes con el trabajo vete pa' tu casa." Y luego ya me puse a llorar ahí y luego fueron varias "y ya no llores" y "no le bagas caso..."

(It is because you need to be standing and you have to grab the brushes, and you have to grab them fast and insert them, so then when, the machine is big, the band is like this [wide]. So here you have to put it, but it doesn't grab it, so you have to push, so I had to push with this one [left], not with this one [right], because this one [left] hurt quite a lot. Then, it is not the same, you do not have the same movement with one, then it goes twisted and you have to use your hands and this here [wrists] hurts because you are pushing and pushing.

And I didn't know what else to tie on because I was in a hurry. And then I told her, "I can't do it Estrella, I can't." Until she suddenly stopped and placed her hands like this on the edges on the iron band. And she said, "well if you can't do the work, go home." And then I started to cry, and several women workers went over [and said] "don't cry" and "don't pay attention to her...")

Although Estrella did not have the managerial right to send Irene home, she did feel entitled as a direct relative (mother) of the supervisor. The following day, Irene was moved to another band, which was closer to the management office and consequently closer to the company's owner attention. The owner continuously walked by Irene and complained that she was not able to perform at a fast pace. He eventually replaced her at another task that was not as strenuous.

While Irene could partly understand what he stated (in English), it was clear that it was in relation to her performance. Irene felt that she had been placed in this position (making mops), in order to gain his attention; after all, it was customary for "El Pelón" (nickname given to the owner) to fire employees, "*si no le parece va y te corre*" (if he does not like it, he goes and fires you). The possibility and fear of being fired upon the owner's discretion (with or without justifiable reason) serves to discipline workers. Thus, his mere presence creates tensions. For Irene, given her condition, his presence on the floor caused her to be nervous and to work at her assignment despite of the pain caused by her injury, "*Y hombre te pones así (nerviosa) cuando vez al Pelón porque empieza a echar madres dice que 'fuck you' y no sé que el señor; pues uno que no entiende pues nomás se hace, pues sabes que es malo pero no lo entiendes*" (And you get like this [nervous] when you see "El Pelón" because he starts cursing at you; he says 'fuck you' and I don't know what, well one that does not understand, well you just pretend, you know it's bad but you do not understand). The lack of consideration for Irene's injury, as is the case for other workers, prohibited Irene from having a full recuperation, and eventually injuring her other shoulder, which the company did not take responsibility for.

This insensitivity to injuries is also fostered by the local medical facilities in east-central Illinois. When asked if the doctor recommended light duty in her employment, Irene and Alfredo recalled that she was not recommended for light duty and that the doctor was a racist, "*Se portó bien mal conmigo*" (He behaved badly with me). Irene was treated at a clinic in the nearby city. According to Alfredo, the South Asian doctor

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who also spoke Spanish acted in a discriminatory manner. During the first medical visit, Irene was left until the end for consultation. Although they had arrived before the other patients who were seen before Irene, they had to wait. During consultation, Irene brought a translator. While the translator interpreted for Irene and Alfredo when the doctor spoke, the doctor did not need a translator, he responded in English when Irene responded in Spanish. Despite the fact that the doctor understood them and although they had brought an interpreter, he still demanded that they speak English. Additionally, when Alfredo demonstrated to the doctor that he had also burned himself, the doctor responded to them that they should return to their country of origin since they were no longer able to work, "*ya váyanse a su país, ya no pueden trabajar*" (go back to your country now, you can no longer work). His statement reflects the disposability of workers once they are no longer able bodies; their labor is desired, but only when their bodies are healthy and competent (Kearny 1998). This interaction with the doctor contributed to Irene's lack of desire to attend any future medical consultations. Although she worked in pain, she was reluctant to return to the medical facility.

A couple of months after having settled in Lorraine in September 2000, Irene and Alfredo were encouraged to make tacos as they did in Jimenez. Since the *tacos perreros*, as they are known in Jimenez, instantly became a hit, they began selling from their home during the weekends, adding an additional 600 to 800 dollars to their weekly salaries. *Tacos perreros*, as they are regionally known in Jimenez, are made with small tortillas dipped in the meat's grease and served with grilled onions along with the typical toppings of cilantro and salsa. They are served fast and eaten while standing. While the business of selling tacos was quite profitable, they were forced to stop selling them from their home after being fined by the town. Shortly thereafter, the opportunity to open up a business was made available to them. They imagined that since it had been quite profitable selling from the home, opening up the business would be just as lucrative. Upon inaugurating the business, Irene instantly quit the factory job and took care of the business all day. They had decided that Alfredo would continue working to ensure that they both kept their medical insurance, given that they both have diabetes. Alfredo was forced to quit after an inspector informed him that he had to be at the business since he was the licensed food handler. Upon quitting the factory employment, both Irene and Alfredo lost their health benefits, and continue to struggle with the health effects of diabetes.

Both Irene and Alfredo have been working full time at the *taquería*, and while both work in the business, it is Irene who does the cooking primarily while Alfredo attends to the customers. During the first couple of years, the business did well; in the last two years, however, business has been dwindling. This is due largely to the local competition. Another Mexican restaurant opened up soon after they opened the *taquería*. Additionally, several people sell food from their homes, including tamales Nuevo Leon style and *cuajados* (beef stew). These circumstances along with other personal problems, coupled with the country's current economic situation, have caused their business to significantly decrease.

In 2007, when they saw themselves in a critical situation given that one of the walls in their home collapsed, both strategized with alternative ways to raise money. The insurance company denied their claim since the wall had deteriorated due to the age of the house (over a century old) and not due to natural causes. Irene began making tamales in mass amount to raise some money as well as baking a variety of pastries.¹⁰ Given this incident and the need for additional funds, Irene became a hairdresser and began cutting hair on her days off. Every Monday and Tuesday, Irene cuts hair at her house. They used the fundraised money as well as the money from her injury to pay for the reconstruction of the wall. Since then, they have seen themselves in difficult circumstances, and dwindling down economically.

Irene's story of labor migration dealing with an injury and the lack of responsibility shown by her employer, coupled with the hostility she faced in the shop floor, reflects the broader experiences of immigrants in labor settings. Workers are dehumanized and are expected to produce in spite of the injuries that often come with harsh and underpaid labor. Women, in particular, are vulnerable targets of exploitative practices (see Zavella 1987; Melville 1988; Lamphere 1993). The racism she felt dealing with the medical facility is an example of the widely spread racism immigrants face in new arenas where services in the worker's native language are denied and unavailable, and, more generally, with the demand that they speak English. Additionally, the economic hardships subsequent to the partial collapse of their home and the unaccountability by the insurance company are also part and parcel of the lack of adequate advising when purchasing homes. As is common, immigrants are vulnerable targets for banks and realtors who fail to provide detailed information in their native language about the responsibilities and consequences of home ownership. In the following section on the life history of Lidia Ramírez, I expand on the traumatic experiences of immigrants when dealing with the legal system.

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Yet, Irene, as is the case with other immigrant women, cannot be simply conceptualized as a subordinate worker. Her story addresses the resiliency of immigrant women when confronted with the harsh realities of immigration and the effects of neoliberalism—that is the expectation of self care and responsibility (see Duggan 2004; Chang 2000). Women build on their specific “lived regionalities” (Arredondo 2008) to make sense of their new positions and experiences. Moreover, immigrants utilize their own knowledge and experiences to take advantage of the new opportunities created through migration as well as to ameliorate the difficult circumstances confronted.

“Todo es bien diferente porque allá la vida es más alegre”:
Lidia Rodríguez¹¹

Lidia was also born in 1984 in Jimenez. On February 11, 2003, five months before turning nineteen, she migrated to the United States via San Marcos, Texas. Similar to many young women who have migrated to Lorraine as adults, Lidia migrated to join her husband. Memo, her husband, had been residing in Lorraine since the mid-1990s. He migrated directly to Lorraine as part of a broader transnational network of workers in the broom factory. Until the summer of 2007, Memo had been working in the broom factory. He was previously married to a local white woman, whom he divorced, since, according to Lidia, she would not have his children. Memo legalized himself through his marriage and became a US citizen. He began courting Lidia during his summer travels to Jimenez. Eventually, Lidia agreed to relocate to the United States and marry Memo. Upon arriving to Lorraine, Lidia not only joined her husband, but became part of her larger extended family network that had been migrating since the 1980s. Her uncle had been recruited to work in the broom factory. Upon becoming a US citizen in the early 1990s, he legalized his wife and three sons, all of whom worked in the factory. The eldest, established a car shop. In addition to this kin network, Lidia had another two cousins residing in Lorraine and also working in the broom factory.

When Lidia arrived to Lorraine, they lived in a single apartment. She stayed home relegated to domestic responsibilities. Shortly thereafter, she had her first child in 2004, followed by a son a year later, and a third child in 2009. Additionally, Lidia took care of two younger cousins, and was compensated with \$70 to \$100 dollars a week. Although in Lorraine there is a significant Spanish speaking population from the same town of

Jimenez, Lidia initially had a difficult time adjusting, particularly due to language differences, “*pues era muy difícil para mí que acababa de llegar y agarrar el idioma*” (Since I had just arrived it was very difficult for me to grasp the language). She discusses the difficulty with the language finding an apartment that allowed them to access Spanish media, “*y después nos fuimos a otro apartamento, pero en ese apartamento no dejaban poner Dish ni nada, antena. Y mi esposo tuvo que buscar otro apartamento para cambiarnos*” (we left to another apartment, because in that apartment they did not allow us to have Dish [satellite network] or anything, an antenna. My husband had to look for another apartment to relocate).¹² Soon after, they decided to purchase a home. In 2006, Memo and Lidia purchased their two-bedroom home near downtown for \$16,000 dollars with monthly payments of \$260.

With the purchase of their home, Lidia felt her ultimate dreams were being accomplished. Home ownership is at the heart of the American dream, and having attained ownership, the Rodríguezes felt that the American dream had materialized. Memo worked overtime at the broom factory, Monday through Friday from 6:00am to 6:00pm, and Saturdays 6:00 to 11:00am, making approximately \$600 dollars a week. Upon purchasing their home, they also purchased a three-seat SUV. A smaller car was purchased with her babysitting money. For the Rodríguezes, home ownership was a key component of “making it” in US society. The possibility of full home ownership would soon be realized, “*Well I said, here I am going to make my home. The dream that my children would be able to have their own bedroom and all, and I was no longer going to pay rent. I wasn’t going to have to pay anything. One day, I knew it would be mine.*”¹³ Lidia, along with her husband, planned on finishing home payments within two years of the initial purchase by using his income tax return for the mortgage, “*para que en menos años fuera mía*” (so that in fewer years, it would be mine). The promise of ownership, however, and of “making it” was soon shattered, due to legal conflicts the Rodríguez family faced in 2007.

In June of that year, the Rodríguez’s home was raided as part of a larger drug operation that took place in Lorraine. Various governmental agencies, including FBI and Illinois state police along with local police, invaded the home at the brink of dawn arriving in several cars and a helicopter. They entered breaking doors, with guns pointing while the children (ages two and three) slept. Memo, still half asleep was immediately handcuffed and thrown to the floor, and soon after taken outside. Lidia, who initially thought it was ICE that was raiding their house, was also handcuffed and thrown on the floor. Her immediate reaction was

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fear, particularly for her children. *"The only thing I said in English was 'Mis kids is in the bed.' I did not know what I was saying either because I was very scared. The only thing I said was that my kids were, I wanted to tell them that my children were in bed but I could not tell them because I was on the floor. My husband was on the floor as well. And the children were in bed at 4, 4:15 in the morning."*¹⁴ The handcuffs were eventually removed from Lidia, still wearing her pajamas, and she was permitted to change her children's diapers, but was not permitted to dress them. She recalls the painful experience of having her children present as the dog was brought into the home searching for narcotics, *"They saw the dog. And the little girl said, 'Mommy, mommy, look at the puppy, is he hungry?' It's what she told me. And I told her, 'Yes baby the puppy is hungry.' And it was the only thing; it made me extremely sad that my children saw that."*¹⁵ The children would later on develop anxieties around the police, fearing that their mother would be "taken away."

In addition to the dehumanizing procedure, no translator was brought during the search and, consequently, confusion and misunderstandings were created for the family. Moreover, culturally based products known as *bollos*,¹⁶ the equivalent to popsicles, are misunderstood for narcotics given their appearance. *"And he told me, 'Do you know why we are here?' I said, 'I do not speak English.' And he told me, 'Look at what we found in your house.' And they took out two coconut bollos. And he told me, 'What is this?' And at that moment I did not know how to call bollo. 'Coco (coconut)'; ... and he told me, 'What are you saying?', is what he told me in English. And I said, 'bollos de coco' (coconut bollos). And a police [officer] that was behind said, 'Cocaine! Cocaine!'"*¹⁷ At the appearance of the so-called narcotics, Memo and Lidia are interrogated about the alleged "drugs." As an intimidation tactic, Lidia is told by an officer that her husband has just accused her as the owner of the "drugs." She insisted that there were no drugs in the house and that she did not understand, *"I don't know. I don't know. I don't understand."* The *bollos* are taken from the freezer as evidence. She is informed that the children will be taken to the local hospital; meanwhile she will be taken into the county police station for further interrogation about the alleged drugs. Her husband had been taken under arrest shortly after the police forces arrived while Lidia remained in the home for several hours as the search continued. Later in the morning a social worker is brought in. The children are taken to a nearby hospital to be given physical exams, and are later released to Lidia's cousin. While the children are taken by the social worker, Lidia is taken in for further interrogation, *"Y al último me dijeron, 'Sabes que te*

vamos que tener que llevar a la jail.' A la cárcel" (And at the end they told me "you know what we are going to have to take you to the jail." To the jail).

Eventually, a translator was brought to the home and Lidia was further interrogated.¹⁸ Lidia maintained that there were no drugs in her home and her husband had always worked at the broom factory. Before being taken in, she had to wait several hours for a woman officer to be present in order for her to be able to use the restroom, *"it was all men that arrived to my house. There was never a woman until she arrived, that I wanted to go to the restroom. And in those days well I was in my days as well. And well I had to go to the restroom with that shame and that the woman was looking at me."*¹⁹ After several hours of search and with no other evidence other than the *bollos* that were registered as an "unknown substance," Lidia was further interrogated at the County Station. She was held until eleven in the morning when she was informed that she was not arrested and could leave the station. Lidia was never actually told that she was arrested, nor were her rights ever read.

Memo was arrested for allegedly selling drugs to an undercover officer along with possession. The possession charges were soon after dropped since the unknown substance had disappeared. He remained incarcerated for six months until January 2008 when his charges were dismissed by a jury. As soon as Lidia was informed that she was not arrested and thus could leave the station, she sought her kids at the nearby children's hospital. The social worker informed her, however, that she could not take the children until she appeared in court. The children were released to her cousin. Lidia recounts how the children could only be released to her cousin since *"El tiene papeles"* (he has [legal] papers), *"My cousin had to call his wife because they asked them for his social security and residency or citizenship so that they could take the kids."*²⁰ He, along with his wife, took care of the children for ten days. During those ten days, Lidia was only allowed to see her children one hour a day. Meanwhile she was forced to clean up the destroyed house, which was left with broken doors, ceilings, and televisions. In order to regain her children, the house needed to be in livable conditions, *"I had to go to court one time. And the judge told me that I had to have clean...the conditions to get my kids back was that I have my house clean. Because, they left my house a mess. They broke the ceilings since they were made out of dry wall like the ones here, they broke them. The drawers, they broke the girl's little bed. Everything they left, they left everything a mess."*²¹ Additionally, Lidia was required to take a drug test. On July 5, 2007, the children were released to Lidia. During those ten

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days, Lidia did not stay in the home due to traumatic stress related to the search, "*ya tenía miedo de todo*" (and I was afraid of everything). Eventually, she moved back to the house with her children, but was forced to sell the home soon after. The SUV they had recently purchased was repossessed by the bank.

Until June 2007, Lidia had economically depended on her husband Memo, and now found herself having to figure out how to economically survive. Given her legal status at the time, her employment opportunities were restricted. She sold her house before the housing market crash and made a modest profit. The money attained from the sale of the house permitted her to pay her husband's legal expenses as well as hers, and the children's expenses during the six months he was incarcerated, "*I sold it at twenty five [thousand dollars]. But I owed eleven on the house, ten remained. And four thousand for the lawyer and expenses for the kids and all.*"²² Upon selling her home, she resided with another cousin in the local trailer park. Lidia and her two children, along with six more individuals, all resided in the three bedroom mobile home. During this time period, she received assistance through Medicare, food stamps, and \$200 dollars cash once a month. Additionally, she relied on support from her extended kin and social network, including modest cash as well as transportation to visit her husband in county jail, to attend court and lawyer meetings, and transportation to make medical visits for the children. "*Y es la única ayuda que tengo. Y pues mis primos me dan que veinte, que diez*" (And it is the only help I have. And well, my cousins that give me twenty, or ten [dollars]).

Kin, including extended kin through *compadrazgo*, and other social networks are crucial in coping with everyday life circumstances such as the ones Lidia experienced. Although when asked if there was anyone in town whom she relied for assistance, she responded that no one, "*Nadie, yo sola*" (Nobody, I am by myself). Lidia in fact did depend on her extended networks for support. Her response nevertheless reflected general responses in Lorraine when asked if they relied on anyone for help, either during difficult or everyday circumstances. The support Lidia received during this difficult moment as well as other events, such as childbirth, contradicts her belief of being alone. Yet, the sentiment of being alone goes hand in hand with the sense of being uprooted from "home." *Aquí* (here), in the Midwest, migrant women constantly felt loneliness and despair, while imagining *allá* (over there), the nostalgic place of desire, as the place where they had a sense of cohesiveness or belonging.

When asked how life differed in Lorraine from Jimenez, Lidia responded that it was very different,

Es otro tipo de vida. Bailando todos risa y risa. Y aquí como levántate a las cinco de la mañana, vete a trabajar a las seis. Llegas, cuidas los niños, limpias la casa, hacer lonche y al día siguiente haces lo mismo. Para las personas que trabajan. Las que no trabajamos pues estamos en la casa esperando que llegue el marido pa' que te lleve al dólar. Pues que me llevaba al dólar, 'o llévame pa' acá.' Y el fin de semana al Wal-Mart y al mall o a ver qué.

(It is another life style. Dancing, all laughter and laughter. And here you wake up at five in the morning, go to work at six. You arrive, you care for the kids, clean the house, you make lunch and the next day you do the same. For the people that work. Those of us who do not work, well we're at home waiting for the husband so that he will take us to the dollar (store). Well he takes me to the dollar or here and there. And the weekend to Wal-Mart or to the Mall or something).²³

Lidia's sentiment, similar to that of several respondents, speaks to a sense of void as immigrants, whereas *allá* (over there, back home) life is fulfilling and cheerful. *Aquí* (here) life revolves around work and routine. As women who are economically dependent on husbands (or fathers), there is a sense of void and loneliness in large part due to their restricted mobility. Although, like other respondents, Lidia saw herself as permanently residing in Lorraine, particularly because of the opportunities and possibilities available for her children, she nevertheless longed for the life she no longer had, *porque allá la vida es más alegre* (because over *there* life is more cheerful).

The sense of living *allá* is fundamental in diasporic communities that have been dislocated through migration, and subsequently live their lives with nostalgic memories of living elsewhere (Clifford 1994; Manalansan 2003). Moreover, immigrants live their lives across borders, in what Patricia Zavella (2002) conceptualizes as "peripheral vision." In researching the transnational locations of El Bajío and Watsonville, Zavella argues that whether they lived in Mexico and had never migrated, or whether they lived in the United States, after "successful" migrations, "workers imagined their work situations and their family lives in terms of comparison with what was en el otro lado (the other side)—across the US-Mexican border" (2002, 239).²⁴

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Similarly, Flores and Yúdice (1990) argue that Latinos(as) in the United States are placed in a "living border." They also note that, "Latino affirmation is first of all fending off of schizophrenia, of that pathological duality born of contending cultural worlds and, perhaps more significantly, of the conflicting pressures toward both exclusion and forced incorporation" (60). Immigrant women not only live their lives with a "peripheral vision" of a homeland across geopolitical boundaries, but also implement in their quotidian experiences their "lived regionalities" (Arredondo 2008). Their experiences in multiple geographies provide them with lived experiences that inform how they subsist, understand, and act upon their lives in new contexts.

I have selected the life histories of Irene and Lidia to underscore and illustrate the quotidian experiences women face through the process of migration and the strategies they deploy to ameliorate the various inequalities and difficulties they are subjected to as immigrants. In this way, their life stories reveal them as human beings—in opposition to their dehumanized status as immigrants—living with and confronting the effects of globalization and neoliberalism, as well as negotiating in their everyday lives the various effects of immigration. For Irene, she has harnessed her regional gastronomic knowledge from Nuevo Leon to the diasporic context of Lorraine to bring to fruition alternative economic sources. Additionally, after finding herself and her family in an economic predicament, she has applied various informal economic strategies to diminish the acute economic setbacks they confronted. Both Irene and Lidia live their lives in relation to *el otro lado* (Zavella 2002); without the ability to travel back there (*allá*) due to economic limitations or legal restrictions, they nevertheless fondly continue to remember Jimenez.

Through both the lives of Irene and Lidia, I have discussed the individual specificity of their immigrant lives and the strategies they apply to ameliorate difficult circumstances. In spite of the sense of loneliness often expressed by women in east-central Illinois, they in fact manifested cohesiveness in their communities through quotidian practices. The following section provides an ethnographic example of a summer program that was organized by a collective group of immigrant women in a local trailer park community in east-central Illinois. I focus on the ways in which these women deploy their own bodies of knowledge to create programming to benefit their local community.

Women's Funds of Knowledge

On March 28, 2008, a women's collective from the Prairieville trailer park community met to plan out a summer program for underrepresented children who resided in Prairieville and who did not qualify for other summer programming offered by the local city or school district. The principal idea behind creating such a program was the concern for children who are left alone at home while their parents are at work, coupled with the concern that those children are not being productive when left alone watching television. These women, for the most part, did not see themselves as "leaders," in the traditional sense of the word, but, nevertheless, continue to demonstrate a form of leadership fuelled with the desire for mobilizing their communities in seeking better opportunities.

The aforementioned meeting evolved out of three other meetings organized by a Midland local community center that had been working with the African American community. This community center had the goal of developing collaborative participation with the community of Prairieville, which is geographically located in northern Champaign, in what is considered an African American neighborhood. While several African American families reside within the trailer park community, Prairieville has come to be known as the "Latino community" of Champaign. The center had recently made available four computers. The computers provided with internet access were placed in the Prairieville community center, known as *la Escuelita* (the little school) among its Spanish speaking residents. The center was primarily interested in having community members organize themselves to make the computers available to all of the residents, among other collaborate possibilities. During a previous meeting held on March 15, 2008, the facilitator had encouraged the community to develop a "core group" which would become an organizing committee for the Prairieville community and, consequently, the members would be the spokespersons for Prairieville residents. The facilitator emphasized the need for community members to take on leadership roles. While Olivia, one of the community members, did identify herself as a leader, given her recent participation in organizing the *posadas* as well as a *Día del Niño* (Day of the Child), most women participating in this meeting did not perceive themselves as "leaders." All agreed, however, that many organizations come to Prairieville with great ideas, but often those ideas never materialized. As reflected in Olivia's statement, "[everyone] talks too much, and nothing is getting started." Overall, in this meeting there were two

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directions in which residents sought to go, all striving to productively utilize the space of *la Escuelita*. On the one hand, some residents wanted to utilize the space for cultural celebrations, such as birthday parties and baptisms, given that neighbors often complained when parties were celebrated in people's homes. On the other hand, residents wanted to see more programming available for the community. Their primary concern at the time was having resources available while children were on vacation from school. The facilitator, however, failed to act upon the community's desires. While Midland's goal was to develop collaborations with residents, they wanted to organize such collaborations with what they perceived to be the needs of Prairieville.

By the third meeting, the room was full. This time both men and women occupied the space and patiently listened to the various organization representatives offering services. One such entity was an evangelical church, which was soon going to be offering English as a Second Language (ESL) classes in *la Escuelita* followed by bible study. A student organization from the University of Illinois was also there promoting their upcoming event to celebrate *el Día del Niño*. A potential chess instructor was there to announce that he would be interested in providing chess classes, as had been requested by community members; however, money needed to be raised to purchase the chess boards. Once the introduction of services was complete, the facilitator went on to discuss the possible collaborative strategies that the community center could develop along with Prairieville. The residents, who had actively recruited other residents to attend the meeting, again reiterated the need for programming for children along with improving their safety when they were dropped off from the school bus. At this time, frustrated by the unresponsiveness to their ideas, the women decided to continue with a separate meeting to discuss what they wanted for the community. Although I was there as a translator, I suggested to the women that a summer program was possible if that is what they saw as the most immediate necessity.

During the meeting called by the group of women activists, who later named themselves as *la Asociación de Vecinas/os Prairieville* (Prairieville Neighborhood Association), a plan was developed to implement a summer program. During this meeting it was decided that the group would organize a ten week summer program, starting June 9, 2008 until July 31, 2008. It would run Monday through Friday from 8am to 4pm. The age group targeted was 3-12 years old; and children were divided in three age groups: 3-5, 6-9, and 10-12. *La Escuelita* was organized into "three centers" and the three groups of children rotated throughout the

day. The program would function with volunteers. University students would be recruited as volunteers, but the parents themselves would rotate the responsibility of running the program. During this meeting, the group also identified the immediate needs of *la Escuelita* to make it adaptable into a learning center. These included adding a second bathroom,²⁵ replacing the flooring in the main rooms, having central air, a working phone, and first aid kits.

What came out clearly out of these meetings is that this program would be set in motion and that the community residents had the responsibility for the education of their children, and that they were capable of making decisions about what was best for their children. The roles of non-residents were also defined. Marta, a community organizer, and I would serve as liaisons between Prairieville management and the Midland Community Center. Midland would help by making available the resources they already had, and would work with the *Asociación* in developing community programs. Finally, others, such as university professors and students, would also contribute to the program, but it would be the residents who ultimately determined and had control over what they wanted.

It is important to note the upgrades that were made to *la Escuelita* via the *Asociación*. These included adapting an additional restroom, replacing the floor in the two main rooms, and having working central air. These upgrades were necessary to provide decent conditions for a learning environment. Initially, the Prairieville management was not supportive and Marta and I had to meet with the supervisor on more than one occasion; although we asked to speak with the owner, we were never given his direct contact information.²⁶ It was finally agreed both through meetings and Midland's involvement, that these changes would be made by management. However, residents would also donate to cover the costs of materials. Additionally, the Latino Law Student Association provided a donation, to be used towards the costs of upgrading the building.²⁷ While these upgrades should have been available through the trailer park's management given that this is a public space for residents, the upgrades were made possible by the *Asociación's* efforts. Although residents' rent had increased in 2008, they were angered that they did not see any changes on behalf of management, including better lighting in the streets. Thus, the intervention by local residents was crucial towards the development of this public space, and while the upgrades immediately benefitted their current plans of a summer program, these changes would have long lasting effects for future programming.

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In addition to needing money for the upgrades, the *Asociación* needed to raise funds for supplies for the program and chess boards, as well items to provide drinks and lunch for the children. This money was raised by organizing a raffle and a *kermes* (charity fair), as well as for providing drinks and material donations. Food items were also donated by local churches and the food bank. Several items were donated for the first raffle held in May 16, 2008.²⁸ A total of \$305 dollars were raised. The do-nations provided by two of the women, a basket with Avon products with a value of \$80 and a \$50 gift voucher to dine at a local Italian restaurant were provided by their own connections to the workplace and individual sales products. Given the success of the raffle, the *Asociación* enthusiastically developed the idea of a *kermes*, which had initially been proposed to Midland as a possibility for a fundraiser. The *kermes*, which took place in the evening of Friday, June 6, was made possible by the women's contributions and labor. The items which the women made included *chicharrones*, *gelatinas*, fruit cocktail, *flautas*, *tamales*, ice cream, rice pudding, and *horchata*. Soft drinks and ice were provided by Midland, and other items such as *tostadas* and *pozole* were donated by community advocates. A combination of Prairieville residents, university students, and other local Champaign residents supported the event. The small room lined up with tables of food was full of people, as others enjoyed the humid evening in the tables set outside.

The success of this *kermes* was followed by another successful one to raise funds for the summer program. Later in the year, a collective organizing the celebration for Virgen de Guadalupe (Virgin of Guadalupe) held a large *kermes* to fundraise for the festivities. The *kermes*, which is common in larger urban cities such as Chicago and Los Angeles, was not a common cultural practice in east-central Illinois. Thus, in this area the *kermes* has become a grassroots diasporic practice for fundraising activities around community organizing issues, including those of a social and religious nature, similar to the practice in Mexico and, more broadly, Latin America. This celebration has politicized this Midwest community, as members come together building on their own knowledge(s) from their places of origin, making cultural claims in the places in which they now reside.

The hard work of the *Asociación* in organizing meetings, fundraisers, and *la Escuelita* culminated in a successful summer program that ran for a month from 8:00 am to 3:00 pm only the first week. The rest of the program ran from 9:00 am to 1:00 pm, with some hours for chess classes four days a week. Children were rotated throughout the day into

two groups with activities that focused on writing, reading, mathematics, arts, music, and computers. Every morning, a group of approximately a dozen children would start the day with positive reinforcement. In developing the summer curriculum with guidance provided by a university professor in Curriculum and Instruction, it was crucial for the *Asociación* that the children be provided with positive reinforcement, since throughout the year their cultural knowledge was rarely valued in the school setting. Thus, while a primary objective in conceptualizing this program was providing a service for the community, the organizers envisioned a program that would serve as an alternative pedagogical space for immigrant children, who usually were not encouraged in their regular schooling to value their cultural backgrounds and consequently value themselves. In the *Asociación's* vision, this form of alternative education could alleviate the cultural devaluation that immigrant children and children of color in general, were subjected to on a daily basis. The women involved were contributing their own "funds of knowledge" in developing an alternative pedagogical approach for their communities.

The examples of Irene, Lidia, and the *Asociación* are ethnographic representations of the ways in which *Mexicanas* in east-central Illinois are engendering and negotiating the processes of migration at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Influenced through their own lived regionalities, women deploy individual and collective funds of knowledge to ameliorate the difficult circumstances confronted through the process of migration. Gabriela Arredondo (2009) conceptualizes "lived regionalities" as way to consider how women's past experiences and knowledge "shape the lens in which they live and understand their lives." Lived regionalities entail the various geographic and psychic spaces women occupy and how they define their lives. The examples are also representative of the resiliency of immigrant populations, both individually and collectively, and in this way their embodied stories challenge the construction of immigrants as disembodied beings whose labor is wanted and extracted, while they are treated as undesirable beings.

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Notes

- ¹ This article is based on my dissertation research. Following the ethical protocol of the American Anthropological Association, pseudonyms are used and places are changed in order to protect research participants. The cities of Urbana-Champaign are the only places identified by their actual names.
- ² Irene and Alfredo were central participants in the fieldwork for this study. I first met them while doing preliminary research in the summer 2005. I have maintained close contact with them since then. I have often translated for them in formal settings such as banks, insurance companies, mortgage companies, and during meetings with lawyers, as well as translating formal letters. During fieldwork conducted from 2007 to 2008, I talked to them on a regular basis. It was clear to them that I was there doing my research. Don Alfredo often joked with me and my notebook "*mira, mira ya sacó la libreta.*" They often provided my contact information to others that needed help with translation, and also helped me recruit interviewees. Additionally, they often saved the newspaper for me, as well as fliers and shared with me all information relevant to Lorraine and Jimenez.
- ³ Given that Jimenez is Lorraine's geographic counterpart in Mexico and in producing brooms, during the 1960s Mexican workers were directly recruited to relocate in Lorraine. At that time, only men were recruited as laborers. Soon after, they relocated their families.
- ⁴ Irene and Alfredo identified her employment as a dishwasher as being a *marinera*. *Marinera* translates as sailor. The metaphor of the sailor references both the *position* of dishwasher as the lowest in the chain of command as well as the *type* of employment working with water all day. The central stanza of the Mexican popular folk song *La Bamba*—originally from the state of Veracruz and popularized by Ritchie Valens in the 1950s and later by Los Lobos—is "*yo no soy marinero, soy capitán*" (I am not a sailor, I am a captain), indicating the higher status of the captain in relation to the sailor.
- ⁵ They relocated to Lorraine in March 29, 1998 after receiving their tax refund.
- ⁶ Their youngest son had legal problems. Upon turning eighteen years old, he was accused of rape for having sexual relations with a minor. Although the encounter was consensual, he was charged with sexual assault and is registered as a sex offender.
- ⁷ I translated *mayordomo* as supervisor. However, *mayordomo* in the colonial context refers to the primary servant who was in charge of a home or *hacienda*. The usage of *mayordomo* although commonly used for supervisor or manager refers to the place of the immigrant supervisor as the primary servant of the factory (contemporary *hacienda*), in charge of the production line of the factory and of disciplining the subordinate workers.

- ⁸ Their reference to convenience implies the relationships the supervisor has with other employees, and not necessarily doing what is in the best interest of production.
- ⁹ The company wanted to compensate her with \$3,000.
- ¹⁰ I helped the Zepedas by taking several pre-orders on tamales from faculty, staff, and students at the University of Illinois, raising close to \$1,000 through the sale of tamales. Additionally, the student organization *Movimiento Estudiantil Chicana/o de Aztlán* (MECHA) at the University of Illinois organized a fundraiser on campus to sell tamales. They raised approximately \$400. I also sent out the information across campus, and several University faculty, students and staff donated to this effort.
- ¹¹ Translation: Everything is very different because over there life is more cheerful. Lidia was interviewed in December 2008 at *Tacos El Norte*. Prior to the interview, I had first met her at the Douglas County jail. Her husband had been incarcerated since June 2008. She had been permitted to see her husband during the bi-weekly visits. However, due to a conflict leading to a complaint to the county sheriff about “all the Mexicans” in the waiting room, she was denied entrance. I spoke to the Sheriff’s office and asked why there had been a change; he replied that although they had been lenient up to that moment, Lidia needed to present an identification they could read. Lidia had been using her Mexican birth certificate along with a Mexican identification card. These would no longer be accepted. I then asked if the identification provided by the Mexican counsel’s office would be accepted since it was bilingual. He replied affirmatively that as long as it was translated. She did not have a problem on her following visit with her identification from the Mexican counsel’s office.
- ¹² Satellite network such as Dish and Direct TV are the only ways to access Spanish speaking channels.
- ¹³ “Pues yo dije pues aquí voy hacer mi casa. El sueño de que mis hijos tuvieran su propia recámara y todo, ya no iba que tener que pagar renta. Ya no iba que tener que pagar nada. Un día, sabía que iba a ser mía.”
- ¹⁴ Yo lo único que les dije en inglés “*Mis kids is in the bed.*” No sabía ni lo que decía tampoco porque estaba bien asustada. Yo nomás lo único que les dije que mis niños estaban...yo quería decirles que mis niños estaban en la cama pero yo no podía decírselos porque estaba acostada en el suelo. Mi esposo acostado también en el suelo. Y los niños estaban en la cama a las 4, 4:15 de la mañana.
- ¹⁵ Ellos vieron el perro. Y la niña me dijo “mami, mami mira el *puppy* ¿tiene hambre?” Fue lo que me dijo ella. Y yo le dije “sí miña el *puppy* tiene hambre.” Y fue lo único que...me dio mucha tristeza que mis hijos vieran eso.

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- ¹⁶ *Bollos* are homemade types of ice made out of milk and sugar and of various flavors. They are then placed in the freezer. An equivalent throughout Mexico and the US are *bolis*. *Bolis*, however, are made out of sugar and water with various flavors. Both homemade *bolis* and *bollos* are often placed in small bags, tied with a knot and placed in the freezer. In Lorraine, various individuals make *bollos* during the summer to sell. "*Bollo es un bolsita le hechas, hay gente que los hace de leche, les echan leche y les echan coco y azúcar y los pones a congelar. Como un popsicle que le dicen aquí. Nosotros hacemos bollos de sabores.*" (Bollo is in a small bag you put, there is people that make them out of milk, they put milk, and they put coconut and sugar and you freeze them. Like a popsicle as they say here. We do *bollos* of flavors).
- ¹⁷ Y me dijo "tú sabes porque estamos aquí?" Y yo le dije "yo no hablo inglés." Y él me dijo "mira lo que encontramos en tu casa." Y sacaron dos bollos de coco. Y él me dijo "que es esto?" Y yo en ese momento no sabía cómo se llamaba bollo. "coco." Porque no recordaba...Y me dijo "*what you saying?*" Fue lo que me dijo en ingles. Y yo le dije "bollos de coco." Y un policía que estaba atrás del dijo "*Cocaine! Cocaine!*"
- ¹⁸ The translator was of Peruvian descent according to Lidia.
- ¹⁹ Eran puros hombres los que llegaron a mi casa. Nunca había una mujer hasta que llegó que yo quería ir al baño. Yo en esos días pues andaba en mis días también. Y pues tuve que ir al baño y pues con esa pena y que la señora me estaba viendo.
- ²⁰ ...mi primo tuvo que hablarle a su esposa porque les pedían seguro y residencia o ciudadanía para poder que se llevaran a los niños.
- ²¹ Tuve una corte. Y el juez me dijo que tenía que tener limpia... las condiciones para poder que me dieran a los niños era que yo tuviera limpia mi casa. Porque mi casa me la dejaron hecha un asco. Los techos me los rompieron como eran de hielo seco así como los que están aquí, me los rompieron. Este los cajones, la camita de la niña me la quebraron. Todo me hicieron, me hicieron mucho mugrero.
- ²² La vendí en veinte cinco. Pero debía once de la casa, me quedaron diez. Y cuatro mil del abogado y los gastos de los niños y todo.
- ²³ Reference to "el dólar" is the dollar store, where items are sold for one dollar. In Lorraine there is a store called Dollar General; however, not all items are sold at one dollar.
- ²⁴ Patricia Zavella (2002) further argues that "peripheral vision" derives in the periphery, "in the power imbalance between Mexico and United States and the disempowerment of Mexicans in the United States" (239).
- ²⁵ Adding an additional bathroom was crucial, since apparently part of the reason "*la Escuelita*" was no longer available was that one restroom was not sufficient for 30 children. Initially, the group had decided to get volunteers from Prairieville to work on the flooring and having an

additional restroom. When Marta and I proposed to the management this idea, they were not responsive. We added that we would have fundraisers to purchase the necessary materials. The eventual agreement was that the management would make these upgrades, but the association would have to contribute for the materials.

- ²⁶ A critique that Prairieville residents had of the owner was that they had never met him. The previous owner made an effort to introduce himself.
- ²⁷ The Latino Law Student Association did a workshop about “knowing your rights” and also offered a series of seminars at the Champaign public library. Both Marta and I attended the workshop. The Association also expressed interest in providing a workshop for the Latino(a) community. We suggested it be held at Prairieville. The workshop took place on April 2008, and had a significant turnout. During the workshop, a major concern was the issue of racial profiling. It was clear to Prairieville residents that local police often stopped them because they were Latino(a), as was a common practice for African Americans. The Law Student Association made a donation; however, this information was never provided to the residents by the management.
- ²⁸ The flyer for the raffle read: *Rifa para recaudar fondos para el programa de verano* (Raffle to Fundraise for a Summer Program). Other donations included a set of cups and a gift card for Barnes and Noble.

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Population Control by Sterilization: The Cases of Puerto Rican and Mexican-Origin Women in the United States

Elena R. Gutiérrez and Liza Fuentes

The mainstream story of the women's health and rights movement during the twentieth century in the United States focuses heavily on abortion rights and equality in the workplace, primarily for white women. However, at the same time the US government was denying women the right to a safe, legal, and funded abortion, the forced and coerced sterilization of Mexican-origin, Puerto Rican, Black, Native American, and mentally disabled women was being funded, directly and indirectly, with US government dollars (Espino 1996; López 1997; López 1998; Lawrence 2000; Rodríguez-Trías 1976; Brown and Moskowitz 1997; Gutiérrez 2003, 2008). The particular stories of Latinas' struggles for reproductive justice have only emerged from scholars and activists who have forcefully resisted their historical, social, and political marginalization (Gutiérrez 2004; López 1997; López 1998; Rodríguez-Trías 1976). Unlike the problems of abortion and contraception, coercive and forced sterilization of Latinas and other women in the United States and its colonies was not about whether the procedure was legal, accessible, or affordable because, technically, it was and still is. Rather, the sordid history of sterilization in the United States and Puerto Rico lies in its literal employment as a tool of oppression that helped to make Latinas and their communities conform to the state's political and economic goals of maintaining race and class power differentials.

In this essay we discuss the use of sterilization in just two Latino communities, Puerto Rican women in Puerto Rico and New York and Mexican-origin women in Los Angeles. First, the case of Puerto Rican women, based on a review of social science literature, is presented followed by Gutiérrez's primary historical research about the case of Mexican-origin women. The histories of how sterilization was used among Mexican-origin women and Puerto Rican women are very different in their historical context, nature, and trajectory. And yet, the

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underlying explanations for why these stories transpired—racist and classist concerns that certain women’s reproduction threatened institutions of power such as medicine and government—were similar.

Today, the main publicly funded reproductive health programs in the United States and Puerto Rico focus on providing women resources to limit their fertility; for example, while providers that receive Title X grants must offer at least basic infertility services to patients, the grant does not provide for prenatal care, childbirth, or even abortion care (Department of Health and Human Services 2001). But there is serious trouble with promoting fertility limitation as a public health and social goal in and of itself. Through telling and accounting for Latina histories of oppression and resistance, it becomes clear why. The process of achieving reproductive justice necessarily means challenging how power is distributed among and within communities and institutions. Therefore, that a reproductive service or technology is made accessible and affordable is not nearly sufficient for reproductive justice. In fact, the oppressive utilization of sterilization among Latinas and other women of color lies in *how* and *why* it is made accessible, affordable, and legal. Thus, the lessons we can take from how sterilization has been utilized in Latino communities has important implications for reproductive justice more broadly today.

Sterilization and Puerto Rican Women

Almost as soon as Puerto Rico became a US colony in 1898, the alarming declaration that the island was overpopulated emerged and was used throughout the twentieth century by US mainland and Puerto Rican scholars, advocates, and government officials to explain Puerto Rico’s high prevalence of poverty and related morbidity and mortality (Ramírez de Arellano and Seipp 1983). US policy in the twentieth century promoted the reorganization of the island’s economy, social structures, and norms, and introduced “modern” health care and health research as an opportunity to bring Puerto Ricans out of this poverty and into modernity (Briggs 2003; López 1998). The overpopulation argument was fundamental in justifying American imperialist prescriptions against Puerto Rico. It is in the context of this particular socio-historical moment of the early twentieth century, in a US colony dominated by a mercantilist political economy, that an overpopulation discourse targeted at women emerged, and which resulted in a large proportion of Puerto Rican women being or choosing to be sterilized. By 1965, over 34% of mothers aged 20–49 in Puerto Rico were sterilized. This percentage was

nearly double that of 1954 (16%) and five times as high as the rate of tubal ligation in 1947 (7%) (Presser 1969). By 1980, Puerto Rico had the highest rate of female sterilization in the world.

The first decades of US colonialism in Puerto Rico saw the medicalization of women's reproduction, which López (1998) notes had been previously managed through community norms and practices regarding family planning. Dozens of health clinics focusing on maternal and reproductive health appeared in Puerto Rico, purporting to bring modern maternal health and family planning services to the island (López 1998; Ramírez de Arellano and Seipp 1983). In a country where an overwhelming majority of Puerto Ricans lived in rural areas, and more than 80% of women gave birth at home, installing maternal health clinics as child planning and birthing authorities represented a fundamental shift in how women in Puerto Rico had traditionally dealt with pregnancy prevention, childbirth, and healthcare (Ramírez de Arellano and Seipp 1983). Considering that funding for such clinics was intermittent and that in the 1930s no safe, effective, and convenient contraceptive technologies were available to women, especially compared to traditional family planning methods, what these clinics achieved in the way of reproductive health was very little.

What this "commodification of family planning" (López 1998, 243) probably did achieve, however, was access to clinical trial subjects for population activists, researchers, and physicians who implemented a "wild west" standard of medical research on the island. Puerto Rican women, who often times were patients of family planning clinics, were used to test birth control pills and the Depo Provera contraceptive shot, in addition to contraceptive foam and the intrauterine device, in unethical and sometimes dangerous clinical trials, often without their knowledge or consent.

Similarly, informed consent procedures for sterilization were often just as absent as they were from medical experiments. In one hospital, informed consent consisted of a form stating that the patient was "well-advised of the medical reasons justifying the sterilization and of the psychological consequences thereof," where the "medical reasons" were not listed. Many other institutions did not have any notion of informed consent in place at all (Ramírez de Arellano and Seipp 1983, 137).

Like traditional means of family planning, Puerto Rican economic and labor systems were interrupted for the benefit of the US economy. "Operation Bootstrap" was a 1948 economic development program that drew numerous US industries to the island with the promise of

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cheap labor, tax exemptions, and free trade between Puerto Rico and the United States. Ironically, this program of economic colonization resulted in high unemployment on the island, increased migration, and exacerbated poverty among the impoverished farmers it was purported to help. The resulting joblessness and poverty was largely interpreted at the time as a symptom of “overpopulation.”

Another consequence of colonialist political and economic reform in Puerto Rico was both more opportunities and need for women to work outside their home. Many of these job opportunities were in factories, and women who wanted to work in them felt overt pressure to ensure their employers that pregnancy would not interfere with their job. In the 1930s three sugar plantations had on-site birth control clinics that were run by the Maternal and Child Health Association, and some factories refused to hire women unless they had undergone sterilization (Ramírez de Arellano and Seipp 1983; Denis 2006).

The political and economic context in which Puerto Rican women got sterilized was one in which the colonialist system worked to disenfranchise Puerto Ricans economically, politically, and socially. But considering the family planning alternatives available in Puerto Rico during the twentieth century (illegal abortion, childbirth, and awkward, ineffective birth control) and the disruption of “communal systems of birth control beliefs,” (López 1998, 241) sterilization may have offered the best option for some women who wanted to control their fertility (Ramírez de Arellano and Seipp 1983; López 1998).

What does this mean for those who want to know whether to characterize Puerto Rican women’s sterilization as either “forced” or a “choice”? López (2008) offers an answer in her research on Puerto Rican women in New York City who had undergone sterilization in the US. She articulates that sterilization is often a choice of “agency within constraints” (154), which is to say, a choice that is made in the context of few or no alternatives. According to López, while individual women made the choice to undergo sterilization, in the face of poor alternatives, it was not necessarily a choice that could *not* have been made. This analysis can be applied to women in Puerto Rico as well, where coercion, a lack of proper informed consent, the lack of birth spacing or pregnancy prevention methods, a political economy that created poverty and joblessness, and a state interest in promoting population control colluded to make sterilization a choice made under constrained circumstances. In the words of López (1998), a woman’s sterilization can be “a source of resistance and empowerment,” but “is simultaneously an expression of

her oppression by a state motivated by considerations of economics and politics” (12) .

“Manifestly, on an agricultural island already overcrowded, such a fantastically rapid increase cannot be maintained even for a few years without the help of emigration” (Combs and Davis 1951, 364). This quote, taken from a 1951 scientific journal article, exemplifies the logic used throughout the first half of the twentieth century to explain and remedy poverty and underdevelopment in Puerto Rico. The article cites overpopulation as the primary justification for its study on fertility patterns, but like other overpopulation arguments, fails to ever define overpopulation or by what parameters it is measured. Mentioned as early as 1899, the rhetoric of overpopulation would be employed to justify social and economic remedies prescribed against Puerto Rico, specifically “Operation Bootstrap,” emigration, and fertility reduction for at least another 65 years. The overpopulation rhetoric distracted from exploitative policies that successfully reorganized Puerto Rico’s economy to benefit the United States companies that invested there, with little concern for the employment and well-being of Puerto Rican farmers and laborers.

The use of this rhetoric as a scapegoat for researchers and public officials to avoid public policies that provide labor rights, healthcare, and community empowerment has serious consequences for how women are functionally and rhetorically integrated into a society that is at once modernizing (producing new social and economic opportunity) and being colonized (constraining opportunity and subjugating autonomy). First, the provision of adequate quality housing, safe working conditions, living wages, and competent public education can be cast from the government’s responsibility because they are ignored or explained away by the singular problem of having too many people that need them. Secondly, overpopulation discourse places the responsibility for economic and social failures of the country squarely on women’s shoulders, or more appropriately, in their wombs. The constant and broad reification of “overpopulation” creates an opening for arguments that falsely challenge women’s right to reproductive self-determination. The legalizing of birth control and subsequent wide availability of sterilization in Puerto Rico, undoubtedly changed women’s lives profoundly, permanently, and in many cases, for the better. However, the proliferation of overpopulation rhetoric was key in supporting this change, with adverse social, health and economic consequences for many Puerto Ricans.

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Sterilization Abuse of Mexican-Origin Women

During the 1960s and 1970s a wave of coercive sterilization swept across the country to permanently terminate the childbearing of thousands of low income women and women of color in the United States. As many scholars have shown, during this period policy makers, the federal government, and medical practitioners simultaneously became increasingly concerned with the reproduction of poor minority women, and took efforts to control their fertility. Although Native American and African American women were also subject to sterilization abuse, Latinas in New York, California, and many other states were also subject to the permanent termination of their childbearing by coercive, permanent sterilization (Gutiérrez 2008; Schoen 2005; Roberts 1997; Silliman et al. 2004). This groundswell of abuse occurred within a rapidly changing context of governmental and medical practice in relation to forced sterilization, and the lack of informed consent protocols.

In 1970 the American College of Obstetrics and Gynecology relaxed the requirements for sterilization. The following year, governmental funding assisted in the popularization of sterilization, with Medicaid paying for 90% of the procedure. With these new developments in medical regulations and federal funding, female surgical sterilization became more readily available to all women in the United States by 1971. Although sterilization quickly rose to the most popular form of contraception, federally funded sterilization was primarily utilized by poor women of color. It is estimated that through government funding 100,000-150,000 sterilizations of poor women of color were practiced during the early years that the procedure was available (case of *Relf v. Weinberger* 1974).

Women of Mexican origin¹ were among those who experienced coercive sterilization abuse during the 1960s and 1970s. Elena R. Gutiérrez (1999, 2004, 2008) has previously demonstrated that in concert with the racial and class discrimination that characterized sterilization abuse at this time, nativist impulses also led to the targeting of women of color for sterilization abuse across the nation. Concerns about overpopulation, recently increasing Mexican immigration, rising welfare roles, and the alleged costs of delivering the children of undocumented immigrant women in US hospitals influenced the identification of Mexican-origin women, who were believed to have many children, as a group needing to be sterilized in the Southwest.

The case of coercive sterilization of Mexican-origin women at the University of California-Los Angeles County Medical Center's

Women's Hospital (LACMC) illustrates that a more complex understanding of how these abuses occurred necessitates looking beyond explanations based in racism and classism, which are typically identified as the main factors influencing nonconsensual sterilization (Gutiérrez 2008). Although these same factors undeniably played a part in the sterilization of Mexican-origin women, the discourse of overpopulation and nativism that was similarly popular in the discourse of Puerto Rican women's sterilization was also instrumental in the abuses that occurred at LACMC. While Mexican-origin women were forcibly sterilized in other hospitals across the state, a lawsuit was eventually filed on behalf of the patients who were coercively sterilized at LACMC (Kistler 1975).

In this particular circumstance, it was pregnant women who were already admitted to the hospital to have an emergency caesarean section delivery who were encouraged or forced by medical personnel to have the postpartum sterilization surgery. Thus, as historian Virginia Espino notes, most patients were literally sterilized as they gave birth (1996). Under such circumstances, some of the women were never asked if they wanted to be sterilized, or were never told that they had been sterilized during the delivery of their children.

The many cases of coercive sterilization at LACMC were finally exposed in 1973 due to the efforts of Dr. Bernard Rosenfeld, who was an intern at the hospital during the period when the abuses occurred (Rosenfeld et al. 1973). When his complaints to the chief of the hospital, Dr. Edward Quilligan, about the coercions he had witnessed received no response, Rosenfeld approached the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) who had legislated the case of *Relf v. Wineberger*. Because the SPLC had successfully fought the case that established the new protocol for informed consent for female sterilization, Rosenfeld believed that the center could be the one to represent the women he observed being sterilized against their will. Instead of taking the case, lawyers at the SPLC advised Rosenfeld to document the abuses that he had witnessed and find a legal entity in California that would be willing to take the case to trial. Upon accomplishing these tasks, Rosenfeld and Antonia Hernández, an attorney from the Los Angeles Center for Law and Justice who was willing to take on the case, had compiled much more evidence on over a hundred women who had been sterilized without their knowledge or consent. Once the coercive sterilization of Mexican-origin women at LACMC was exposed, a lawsuit, *Madrigal v. Quilligan*, was launched and brought to trial in 1978.

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The lawsuit revealed that many of the nonconsensual sterilizations that occurred at the hospital could be attributed to the absence of any consent form for the surgery and a lack of communication between the doctors and their patients regarding the sterilization. Language differences between the mostly Spanish-speaking patients and English-speaking hospital staff undeniably influenced the abuses that occurred.

Among the incidents of abuse that Rosenfeld documented were women who were lied to outright by their doctors or nurses. While women were in the last, most painful stages of labor, and often sedated, they were approached and asked if they would undergo surgical sterilization. Some women were wrongly told that they had a life threatening medical condition and that they might die if they were not sterilized, or that their husband had consented to the sterilization on their behalf. Several women also reported being hit or mishandled by doctors (Gutiérrez 2004, 2008).

In other instances doctors or nurses refused to administer pain medication unless the patient agreed to undergo sterilization surgery. Many women were misled when hospital personnel told them that their tubes would be temporarily “tied,” not permanently cut. Only because they believed that their tubes could be untied later and their child-bearing resumed did some women agree to the sterilization procedure. Many others who refused the procedure were not even told that they had been permanently sterilized and would never be able to have any more children. These women only found out during later visits to the gynecologist that they had been sterilized, or when contacted to participate in the trial of *Madrigal v. Quilligan* (Gutiérrez 2004, 2008).

Some doctors predicated their efforts to control the reproduction of their patients based upon racial stereotypes. Many made assumptions that women of a certain phenotype or who spoke Spanish must be illegal immigrants or on welfare. These ideas are clear in one nurse’s recollection that many of her colleagues at the hospital believed that:

[Mexican-origin women] weren’t really ‘American’ and [they] had come from Mexico pregnant on the bus just so that they could have their baby born a US citizen so they can’t be deported themselves. It was frequently expressed that the poor bred like rabbits and ate up money on welfare, that the women were promiscuous and just having babies because they couldn’t control their sexual desires or were too stupid to use birth control.... The prevailing attitude was that one or two children were enough for any mother and that any mother

who had four or more was an undisciplined and ignorant burden upon the country.²

The impact of these purported attitudes were significant, as several patients agreed to sterilization because their doctor threatened that they would be deported if they did not agree to sterilization.

Although the trial of *Madrigal v. Quilligan* was not decided in favor of the plaintiffs, in the end, organizing on behalf of those sterilized at LACMC resulted in some notable gains. As a result of the trial a pamphlet was designed to fully explain the sterilization to all those considering the procedure. The new regulations mandated from the California State Department of Health were designed to ensure that a patient choosing sterilization would be supplied with sufficient information to make a decision under “legally effective informed consent.”³ The guidelines required that surgical sterilization candidates be formally advised that federal benefits, such as welfare, would be available to them whether they underwent sterilization or not. They also required that all patients be thoroughly informed about the procedure, its risks and permanence, and that sterilization candidates had to receive counseling on the range of birth control alternatives available. New federal guidelines established a 72-hour waiting period following consent, and placed a ban on sterilization of girls under the age of eighteen.⁴ Both the informational pamphlet and the newly regulated consent form were designed at a sixth grade reading level in the patients’ native language. Understanding the crucial role of Latinas in establishing the standards for informed consent is important as their efforts impacted all women who benefited from increased protection from possible abuse. Not merely victims of coercion, Latinas played a significant and often overlooked role of expanding and deepening the sterilization regulations to help ensure the rights of women of color, particularly those who do not speak English.

In comparing the sterilization of Puerto Rican and Mexican-origin women, in both cases the United States government plays a clear and significant role in establishing a context within which abuses could occur. The federal government established policies in both cases that encouraged the sterilization of low-income Latina women and provided funding that would ensure that the sterilization procedure was accessible.

Moreover, discourses of overpopulation and poverty contextualized concern about women who were believed to be incapable of using birth control and making their own reproductive decisions. Indeed, there are some differences in the two case studies we have presented; while an

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aspect of the sterilization of Puerto Rican women was to encourage women to participate in the labor market, Mexican-origin women were viewed as a drain on the public dole. However, in both cases women are regarded only in relation to the US economy and racial fabric rather than in relation to a concern about their health and ability and right to to make reproductive decisions. Although the role of the US government is much clearer in the sterilization of women in Puerto Rico, in the case of Mexican-origin women the impact of racialized concerns are more visible. Regardless, discourses about overpopulation were woven through the ideologies justifying both Mexican-origin and Puerto Rican women's sterilization. Both groups were undeniably cast as irresponsible breeders who were not welcome into the more general American populous and thus subject to population control.

Contemporary Sterilization

Although coercive sterilization may be considered by most as a past occurrence, we argue that the legacies of this history continues to impact the reproductive health, rights, and justice of Latinas in the United States as well as those in Latin America. Moreover, in the present context of nativism and immigrant bashing, it is unlikely that instances of coercive sterilization are not taking place. Alternatively, focus groups and interview research currently being conducted by Liza Fuentes in 2010 suggests that some women in low-resource settings in the United States, specifically Mexican-origin women in rural Texas border counties, may be denied sterilization services if they cannot pay cash or make payments ahead of time. This also is accounted for by a denial of reproductive autonomy based on race and class, where Latinas may be forced to use family planning methods they do not prefer (or no method) because their immigration or job status makes them ineligible for either public or private health insurance. Moreover, we are well aware that some women must have abortions or be sterilized because they cannot afford to have more children even if they would like to. According to López's study of Puerto Rican women in New York City who had undergone sterilization surgery, 80% of the women in this study claimed that their economic circumstances had a direct or indirect effect on their decision to get sterilized (1997). Forty-four percent felt that if their economic conditions had been better, they would not have undergone surgery (247). One respondent clearly explains: "If I had the necessary money to raise more children, I would not have been sterilized. When you can't afford it, you just can't afford it" (247). These

contextual factors demonstrate just why sterilization must be considered an issue of reproductive justice. If all women had all of the resources necessary to have and raise a healthy child who has unlimited options in life, many might opt to have more children rather than be sterilized.

Additionally, it is difficult to ascertain whether or not hospitals are currently complying with the regulations that were established to ensure that coercive sterilization does not occur again. In an ongoing study, the National Latina Institute for Reproductive Health joined Dr. Elena R. Gutiérrez to learn more about the current state of sterilization federal guidelines in US hospitals in an effort to determine best practices in informed consent protocols for female sterilization (Sterilization Policy Project; SPP).

The SPP is a follow-up study to research conducted during the 1970s that examined hospital sterilization policies and procedures, and, more specifically, their compliance with federal guidelines. The subjects of the study are 246 federally funded teaching hospitals in the United States with approved residency programs in obstetrics and gynecology. Although too few surveys of these sites have been completed to make any generalizations, some valuable observations can be made about the current small sample regarding informed consent procedures, the influence of Medicaid regulations on hospital policies and internal procedural compliance monitoring, including possible correlations between patient and health insurance status, and the risk of coerced sterilizations. Notably, for hospitals with at least 40% of total patients with private insurance, the communication that government benefits will not be affected by the decision whether or not to undergo surgical sterilization is missing from consent protocols. If a patient does not have access to public insurance programs, due to income requirements or legal immigration status for example, this dependence on Medicaid remittances to guide clinical practice does not ensure the reproductive freedoms of all patients.

The current regulations were wrought from the legal battles fought against systemic sterilization abuses among poor women of color and immigrant communities in the United States. The data showed that in this sample the regulations are enforced for those who receive public health insurance benefits, but that population is perpetually decreasing as social welfare programs are cut or greatly reduced across the board. As the ranks of the uninsured grow steadily, so does a population without advocacy. This is a population particularly at risk for coerced or forced sterilization.

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As the preliminary data from the SSP suggest, while it is possible that overt sterilization abuse is no longer an outright practice, certain structural factors exist that limit options for many women. At the very least, the low response rate from the hospitals surveyed demonstrates the difficulty in knowing whether or not they are abiding by the federal regulations. Since only public hospitals were surveyed, the informed consent forms requested should be readily available.

Beyond the case of sterilization in hospitals, low-income women of color continue to face discrimination in medical practice as well as being stereotyped by some providers when receiving treatment. A national study by the Institute of Medicine (2002) reported that racial minorities and non-English speakers face “unequal treatment” in the nation’s hospitals. Even after controlling for access to insurance, access to health services, health status, socioeconomic status, and other variables, ethnic disparities in health care remain (Institute of Medicine 2002). Many Latinos(as) report receiving lower quality care (Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality 2006) and experience worse health outcomes compared to their white counterparts (Wong 2005). Research also has demonstrated that women of color continue to be discouraged to have children by their healthcare providers. Downing, LaVeist, and Bullock (2007) found that low income women of color are more likely to report being encouraged to limit their childbearing by their healthcare provider than their middle class white counterparts. Latinas in particular had greater odds of reporting that their provider discouraged them from having more children while they were pregnant than others. Such findings suggest that some Latinas continue to experience their reproductive lives in a social context where their childbearing is not supported.

The last decade has seen the development of a robust body of research elucidating health inequities, particularly in reproductive health, as one of the most pressing issues to address in public health and social justice advocacy (Ríos and Hooton 2005; Adler and Rehkopf 2007; Anachebe 2003; Mechanic 2002; Subramanian and Kawachi 2006). As reproductive justice activists, health and feminist researchers, and program planners consider solutions, the cases of women in Puerto Rico and Mexican-origin women in Los Angeles are uniquely informative. There is nothing inherent about fertility limitation that serves an economic or social good. As articulated by the International Conference on Population and Development, it is women’s empowerment through access to the range of reproductive health rights and services that will aid social and economic development (United Nations Population Fund

1994). Recognizing women's agency in negotiating reproductive health choices and other health issues is essential to public health advocacy and practice, but we must also consider the context in which this negotiation takes place. Only when such efforts are made will Latinas move forward toward true reproductive justice.

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Notes

¹ We use the terms women of Mexican origin and Mexican-origin women to include those women who are Mexican immigrants and those who have been born in the United States to parents of Mexican descent.

² Karen Benker Statement, 5.

³ For legal aspects of the debate over the regulation, see: *Relf et al. v. Weinberger et al.* and *National Welfare Rights Organization v. Weinberger et al.* Civ. A. Nos. 73-1557, 74-243 372 F. Supp 1196, March 15, 1994; *Relf et al. v. Mathews et al.* and *National Welfare Rights Organization v. Mathews et al.* Civ. A. Nos. 1557-3, 74-243 403 F. Supp 1235, October 22, 1975; and *Relf et al. v. Weinberger et al.* and *National Rights Organization v. Weinberger et al.*, Sept. 13, 1977. For an excellent and thorough analysis of the debate as it shaped in the public arena, see Rosalind Pollack Petchesky, "Reproduction, Ethics, and Public Policy: The Federal Sterilization Regulations," *The Hastings Center Report* 9, 5 (October 1977), 29-42.

⁴ Despite the promulgation of these guidelines by HEW, however, a 1975 study found "gross noncompliance" with the regulations. Elissa Krauss, *Hospital Survey on Sterilization Policies* (New York: American Civil Liberties Union, 1975).

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Writers of the Colony: Feminism via Puerto Ricanness in the Literature of Contemporary Women Authors on the Island

Carmen R. Lugo-Lugo

For if there is a commonality of spirit in these stories, it lies in their creation of a space in which the socially prescribed “woman’s place” is questioned, problematized, and often, subverted.... And “a woman’s place,” as defined by the patriarchal order there, despite its strong resemblance to its mainland counterpart, fits into its own set of codes—cultural, linguistic, literary. These define “woman” in a peculiarly Puerto Rican way.

—Diana Vélez, *Reclaiming Medusa* (iii)

In tune with the agitated exploration featuring our people, women narrators of today are observers and participants, and judges and defendants within the complex, disturbing processes full of intense adventure and surprises that make up Puerto Rican history and culture.¹

—María Solá, *Aquí cuentan las mujeres* (54-55)

Contextualizing the Colony

Puerto Rico’s political and economic positioning as a colony of the United States (under its official name, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico) is undoubtedly a key factor in molding the realities faced by Puerto Rican women, which include a few paradoxes. The most outstanding of those paradoxes has to do with the way in which the colony has simultaneously situated women in analogous positions to women in both First and Third World countries. For instance, after the island underwent industrialization (the bulk of the process took place roughly from the 1940s to the 1970s), women had to endure the “double shift,” a situation women in First World countries have been describing for decades now. On the other hand, and because of stereotypical notions about women held by those dictating the global division of labor, Puerto

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Rican women were the chosen workforce for industries moving to the island, as have been women from other Third World countries.² These stereotypical notions guarantee that women are paid less than men and usually less than what they need to make any fundamental changes to their living/material conditions. In a related paradox, even though companies have used a Third World approach to divide labor by gender in Puerto Rico, most US federal stipulations involving labor practices apply to the island, including minimum wage laws. Thus, even though structurally, the workforce operates as that of any Third World country, Puerto Rican women (and men) are paid at the very least, as much as the lowest paid workers in the United States. To complete this paradox, Puerto Rican women have been sold an ideology that tells them that because of the island's relationship to the United States, they are in a different position (a better one, that is) from women in other Third World countries, including those of Latin America and the Caribbean. Thus, for the most part, even though they are "living it," they do not see themselves reflected in the predicament they associate with Third World countries. Puerto Rican women also have to contend with other consequences of the colonial status. One tangible consequence is that of political disempowerment. For instance, because the island is a US territory, it is not recognized as a legal political entity by most international organizations. This means that Puerto Rican women do not have a legal forum where they can seek social and structural changes beyond those provided by the Commonwealth government, the very institution that created their political and economic predicament in the first place.

This latter reality puts them in a different position from that of oppressed women in the United States and other industrialized countries, and from that of women in most Third World countries who can (at least, in principle) access resources from different international organizations (e.g., the United Nations), given that their countries are recognized political entities. To complicate the picture of political disempowerment, because the island is not a state of the American union, Puerto Rican women (and men) have no voting representation in the very body that governs them (the US Congress) and are not allowed to vote in presidential elections for the man who can send them, their husbands, and/or sons and daughters to war. Thus, the struggle of Puerto Ricans as members of a colonial territory is complicated by the fact that the idea(l)s of human rights, freedom, and liberty, which although tied to material conditions, are also tied to unresolved issues of national sovereignty, colonization, and self-determination. However,

even though Puerto Rican women are in a precarious predicament vis-à-vis politics and the economy, they have been active challengers of their unequal status, always resisting the structures that contribute to their subordination.

In this essay, I will focus the discussion on samples of literature written at the end of the twentieth century by women as a feminist form of active resistance, an active resistance that explains and in many cases challenges the predicament of women in the colony. I propose that the literature of women writers in Puerto Rico must be studied as a whole. When analyzed together, patterns of thought and ideological alternatives are clearly outlined. This is not to suggest that Puerto Rican women writers have a unified voice. Quite the contrary. There is a plurality of ideas and messages in the writings of these women. I am also not suggesting that the three authors whose works have been chosen for this analysis are the only exponents of Puerto Rican literature by women. However, the selected writers—Rosario Ferré, Magaly García Ramis and Ana Lydia Vega—were, in a clear way, representative of women writers during the time period in question. The excerpts discussed below (and the works of women writers in general) are important in that they connect the literary world to social processes, and to the ideas/ideologies and expectations of a particular cultural context and historical moment. To better guide the discussion of the selected works as feminist works, I have identified a specific umbrella topic: the notion of Puerto Ricanness, which gets intertwined with issues of nationalism and the political and economic status of the island (including images of Third Worldness). Before discussing women writers and their literature, some background on the women's movement in Puerto Rico and women's living conditions at the end of the twentieth century is needed, for it was within this context that the literature of women writers emerged.

Feminism as Resistance: Women in the Commonwealth

The women's movement on the island, though certainly and to an extent influenced by the women's movement in the US mainland, had a different trajectory altogether (Azize-Vargas 1986). The most important distinction is that of race and race relations, which were pivotal in second and third wave articulations of feminism in the United States (Moraga and Anzaldúa 1983; Collins 1990). Feminists in Puerto Rico had a different situation (and, perhaps to an extent, a trickier one). That

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is to say, in spite of its colonial status and the presence of racism, Puerto Rico's racial history and the ideologies informing race relations on the island have taken a remarkably different course. For instance, after slavery, Puerto Rico did not have Jim Crow laws, or anything along the lines of the "separate but equal" doctrine. As a result, schools, public facilities, or neighborhoods have never been legally segregated on racial grounds. But the clincher of race relations on the island has been the resolve of academia and the government in manufacturing an ideology that creates the illusion of a "Puerto Rican being" who is unfailingly the net product of a mixture of Spanish, Indian, and African: "the mystery of the racial trinity," as I call it. This pervasive ideology has influenced the works of eminent scholars on the island, including José Luis González, who in his seminal essay "Puerto Rico: El país de cuatro pisos" (translated into English as Puerto Rico: The Four-Storeyed Country) theorizes about the different cultural and racial layers that have created Puerto Rican society throughout the centuries. Following the ideology of the racial trinity, González (1993) begins the discussion in his essay by telling the readers that "[i]t is by now a commonplace to assert that this culture has three historical roots: the Taíno Indian, the African, and the Spanish" (8).

As Arlene Dávila argues in her book *Sponsored Identities: Cultural Politics in Puerto Rico* (1997), that the ideology of the "common origin" has had a lasting effect on Puerto Rican cultural nationalism, which has stood in clear opposition to Americanness for over a century now. Dávila states:

The official discourse about what could rightfully represent Puerto Rican culture reproduced patterns of nationalist ideologies similar to those found in many other contexts... [I]mages of national identity became centered around a traditional agrarian past with its customs and folklore; and a romanticized and harmonious integration of the indigenous Taíno, Spanish, and African components of society...was set in opposition to the American invader (4-5).

The suggested racial trinity further argues that because of this mixture of races and cultures Puerto Rico does not have a "racial problem," masking racial issues on the island behind the illusion of sameness and equality (based on equal origin), and precluding any fundamental discussion of race relations among Puerto Ricans. In other words, if Puerto Ricans are all the same, then, by definition, there are no (racial) differences among them and, thus no need to talk about race and racism.

Needless to say, racial issues in general and racism in particular are in effect present on the island, though they do take a different path from those in the United States. For instance, light-skinned Puerto Ricans do not burn crosses in front of the houses of dark-skinned Puerto Ricans. Nor do they drag dark-skinned men to their deaths behind pick up trucks. Racism in Puerto Rico is a little more subtle (though not necessarily more simple). Puerto Ricans have never elected a dark-skinned governor. In fact, many politicians on the island are light-skinned, light-eyed, and can literally trace their lineage back to Europe. But most importantly, there is a tangible connection between poverty and color among both Puerto Ricans living on the island and Puerto Ricans living on the mainland, namely, dark-skinned Puerto Ricans are overrepresented among the lower classes.

Puerto Rican preoccupations have historically bypassed issues of race and focused on issues of nationhood, nationalism, and political status, instead. That includes feminism on the island. It is then within this context, and not within the context of the *Brown v. Board of Education* legal precedent, that feminism in Puerto Rico was articulated in the twentieth century and carried into the new millennium. The feminist movement in Puerto Rico was born out of political contradictions, economic dependence, and an overall lack of self-determination.³ As Magaly Pineda states in her prologue to *Documentos del feminismo en Puerto Rico: Facsimiles de la historia (Volumen 1: 1970-1979)* (2001), at times during the beginning of this wave Puerto Rican feminists felt that they had ties to two separate worlds: to First World feminism as articulated by US and European feminists (with whom they felt an “un-apologetic empathy”), and to that of Latin America, which as she describes it, was being ripped apart by military dictatorships and violence (xiii). She further states: “As women from the Caribbean, we were the expression of an undeveloped thought, which we did not have the strength to transform into a bridge-proposal between these two seemingly irreconcilable worlds” (xiii).⁴

One important characteristic of the second wave of feminism in Puerto Rico described by Pineda (2001) is its high degree of sophistication, when comparing it to other parts of the Caribbean and Latin America. As she explains it: “many of the things that took place in Puerto Rico [regarding the feminist movement] during the 1970s were not a reality in the rest of our region until well into the 80s” (xiv).⁵ Pineda connects this sophistication to Puerto Rico’s colonial relationship with the United States, which, for better or for worse, allowed for a flow of

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ideas between the mainland and the island. The author is also quick to point out that regardless of Puerto Ricans' early sophistication involving feminism, feminism as a political ideology and as a social movement was very isolated on the island, for as mentioned earlier in this essay, Puerto Rican feminists did not have access to the financing provided by international organizations. As she explains it: "many [feminists] in Latin America got to travel around the region because they received funding for activities involving the exchange of ideas. Puerto Rican feminists were left out of this circle, for it was not easy for them to participate in the different conferences and events without economic funding" (xvi). In the rest of Latin America external funding was the backbone upon which the feminist movement was built, since it subsidized things such as a staff, paperwork, magazines, and even the physical location of the particular organization (Pineda 2001). Again, because of Puerto Rico's relationship to the United States, Puerto Rican women were denied access to these resources.

Living Conditions: Women of the Commonwealth

Once the process of industrialization began, women entered the workforce en masse, feminizing the Puerto Rican proletariat substantially.⁶ For instance, between 1969 and 1993, the participation rate of working women increased from 23% to 34.1%.⁷ This process remained steady until well into the 1990s. As in other industrializing countries, women stepped into the public sphere to perform similar tasks to the ones they performed at home. An added component to this situation was the way in which the strict international division of labor guaranteed that the working conditions endured by and the wages paid to these women did not reflect their hard work. In fact, consistent with capitalist's practices in many parts of the (Third) world, women's wages in Puerto Rico did not match their human capital.⁸ In addition, many of those jobs were performed under mediocre and unhealthy working conditions.

Women also found themselves being the workforce of a mode of production that gave them few returns (in terms of pay, benefits, and ability to accumulate assets, etc.), while at the same time changed their society into one that quickly became driven by US consumerist standards. Feminist concerns during this time grew out of and were shaped by the uncertainties created by these kind of contradictions. Within this full-fledged absentee capitalism, however, women were left with no other feasible option than to participate in it. But, even though they

worked outside the home more than ever before, and even though their working conditions and wages were far better than they were before the island's industrialization, women still constitute one of the poorest groups in Puerto Rico.

The above statement is clearly illustrated by statistical data. In the 1990s, only 1 out of 3 women over 16 years old was economically active.⁹ Of those who were economically active, close to 28% were actually unemployed. Furthermore, 43% of the unemployed women were heads of household. Connecting the statistics on employment with the ones on divorce, in 2000 there were 26,151 marriages on the island and 13,706 divorces, showing a divorce rate of 52% (this rate had gone up to 56% by 2001).¹⁰ In that same year, close to 75% of the households headed by a single woman were below the poverty line. Wages are also an important component in this discussion. For instance, in 1993, of those working full time, women made 78 cents for every dollar men made.¹¹ This went down to 75 cents for every dollar men made by the year 2000 (Ferré, 2000a). Relatedly, during the 1990s, 52% of employed women had an annual wage lower than \$3,000. Considering that Puerto Rico has an incredibly low per capita income, the statistics on women and work are very telling of their still worse position within the economic structure: women and women with children (that is to say, heads of households) are at the very bottom of that structure.

Literature as Resistance: Women Writers in the Commonwealth

In the 1970s, as feminism gained momentum in Puerto Rico and as Puerto Rican women were learning to deal with their realities, women writers began publishing their oftentimes controversial works. Not by coincidence, of course, for the literature of women writers was directly engaging with those realities. By publishing their works, Puerto Rican women writers consciously inscribed their own insights into their literature, while making a space for themselves in the male-dominated literary world. I would argue that literature, in its role of reproducer of culture and society, plays a germane role in documenting society's ideologies at a given time or, to use Rosario Ferre's (2000b) words, as "a way of creating and recreating the world" (161). But there is more to literature than just being able to (re)produce/(re)create ideas and ideologies. In an interview with Marie Panico (1987), for instance, writer Ana Lydia Vega argues that: "[t]he objective of literature is not [...] to

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give solutions, but to make people reflect on issues, while entertaining them" (44).¹² Being able to reflect on issues is indeed important, though equally important is being able to identify the issues in the first place, because as literary critic María Solá (1990) argues: "[a]ny narrative reflects the society in which it was created [but] even more valuable, it reveals what is hidden or disguised" (21).¹³

Puerto Rican women writers constantly reveal in their works the hidden connections between feminism and Puerto Ricanness. In an interview with Carmen Dolores Hernández (2000), Vega explains the role of the writer in Puerto Rico in the following way:

In Puerto Rico you also have to be a sort of ambassador, always, of a country with no international representation. When abroad, you have to speak for the island, explain the language problem, the immigration problem, explain Puerto Rico's particular political situation. Literature and art in Puerto Rico have to take the place of embassies and consulates (55).

Vega's statement indicates that she sees literature as a form of national expression, but also, and perhaps more importantly, as a form of political representation. She makes a similar point when Marie J. Panico (1987) asked her what she thought was the reason for the academic attention that her work has garnered. In her words:

I think my books came out at the right moment. Feminism and Caribbean-ism were ripe ideas. Then, in spite of myself, I became a spokesperson, a token because I represented a series of things at a given time and this called attention to myself. Maybe too much attention. On the other hand, this also affected the way in which my works were read, simplifying and polarizing [them] (43).

The writer's most insightful comments, however, were in response to Hernández and López Springfield's interview question (1994) as to how feminism affected her way of writing. She replied:

A lot. First of all, I believe that everything we are affects our writing. My being Puerto Rican shows up in my writing. If I'm black, it will be in my writing. If I am a woman, it will be there too. All that we are is in our writing; and it frames the perspective from which we write, whether one is aware of it or not. It doesn't have to be something conscious. I believe that the experiences that I have had as a woman since my infancy,

my experiences with repression, this constant negotiation with a male-dominated world, leaves an imprint on one's self. One does not have to know feminist theories to be a feminist in practice, to arrive at some positions that frame what one chooses to write about. I think that my "feminism" is more practical than theoretical. It is more a response to decisions I have made in my life than to theoretical readings in feminism. While in the university, I read feminist theories; but my feminism grew out of decisions and positions that are lived experiences (816-817).

Writer Rosario Ferré also had her (strong) take on feminism when Magdalena García Pinto (1991) asked her whether she considered herself a feminist and what she thought about feminism:

The victories that have been won can no longer be reversed. I think feminism is the most important revolution in the twentieth century. Many people don't agree with me. But no social progress will be achieved in any part of the world if it's not through the medium of feminism (95).

And she added: "We women are the ones who have to take issue with women's problems. I don't think any system or political party will do it for us" (95). Linking women's struggles to her writing was not at all difficult for her:

Things were changing [when I started writing]; feminist issues were becoming more and more important. I was lucky. I probably took the last train that went out for my generation of women. I always look at myself like that (85).

Solá (1990) notes that Ferré's writing shows the conflicts between women, men, and institutions, which according to her, "determine life and its dialectic integrity" (30).¹⁴ She adds that Ferré's stories are "unequivocally sided with human rights, justice, and the rights of the subordinated, not just women's rights" (30).¹⁵

I would argue that, the works included in this essay are indeed political in a fundamental feminist way, insofar as they provide "us" (the readers) with ideologies, expectations, and norms conducive to social change, within the context of colonial Puerto Rico at the end of the twentieth century. Literature puts in writing the possibility for social change by presenting new scenarios or new interpretations to old scenarios, for instance. The three authors have a way of presenting the readers with a myriad of possibilities for change. Once those possibilities

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are made tangible (and ideas embedded in a story may do just that), they penetrate the collective psyche (in this case the collective psyche of Puerto Ricans), influencing their consciousness.

In referring to the works of women writers in Puerto Rico, it is important to keep in mind that they reflect the status of the island and the effects such status has on them as writers and as women. In fact, these women are writing from overlapping subordinate positions, as women and as colonial subjects, where they experience a double dose of silencing and double invisibility. Moreover, it is also important to talk about the economic positioning of the island globally, the repercussions of such positioning for women on the island, and the ways in which contemporary women writers document this positioning in their works. Solá (1990) argues that many contemporary Puerto Rican women writers “are able to identify themselves with other marginalized groups” (53). That may actually be one of the most identifying and identifiable characteristics of contemporary writers in Puerto Rico. Writer Magali García Ramis (1987) notes that this new generation of writers showed its solidarity to international causes, while simultaneously showcasing their own cause, molding the lessons learned from other struggles to their needs, and to their image. It was the events that inspired this solidarity that, she argues, prompted them to write:

The relationship with the most advanced empire in the world brought us a brotherhood with the minorities in North America; we identified with Eldridge Cleaver and, in imitation of the Black militants, we began to raise our left fist because we were leftists in our estimation, while the leftists of the rest of the world raised their right fist, the one of the battle....We were able to see ourselves from many different perspectives: to feel a brotherhood with a progressive Chile, to cry for Allende and Neruda, to hope again after knowing Benedetti, to cry for the liberation of our five nationalists, to fight to have the navy removed from Vieques, and to feel desperate anguish [sic] over the death of Pinochet. Upon seeing ourselves reflected in a thousand neighboring villages from the Caribbean and Central America to the world of the Andes and from all of America, our differences were no longer, as we played one last time before growing up, Rayuela, with Cortázar, and once and for all, we sat down to write (113).

As a writer, Ana Lydia Vega also appeals to international solidarity when she develops the idea of Caribbean-ism in her book of short

stories *Encancaranublado y otros cuentos de naufragio* (1983), which she dedicates to “the future Caribbean Confederation.” Vega’s hope for solidarity and political collaboration among Caribbean countries is also present in several of her literary essays.

The most important contribution of contemporary women writers in Puerto Rico is that they created characters that are icons of what García Ramis (1987) dubs the “collective lifestyle” of the nation. The writings of these women do reflect their subject positions in the social, cultural, and political landscape of the island, always in relation to other culturally, politically, and socially-defined subjects. As a result, the feminism found in their writings is born out of negotiations and (sometimes clashes) between their own subject positions and the island’s history and culture. As Solá (1990) discusses in her book, women writers are not only chronicling Puerto Rican history and culture as mere observers; they are also full participants in the history and the culture they are documenting, occupying different social locations within them. And, as mentioned earlier, they can also be seen as agents of social change, insofar as they are propellers of ideological changes. In order to illustrate this connection, five short pieces (literary essays) by the three authors will be used.

Feminism via Nationalism: The Case of Puerto Rican Women Writers

The feminism in the writings of Puerto Rican women does not operate in a vacuum of idea(l)s. Instead, it is heavily connected to other struggles. For instance, García-Ramis’ essay “Sólo para hombres en la Semana de la Mujer” (“Only for Men on Women’s Week”; 1991), can be construed as an open challenge to both patriarchy and coloniality. In an attempt to hold men accountable for atrocities such as lynchings, war, and violence against women, and in order to make sense of that which has none, García-Ramis discusses the irrationality of patriarchy and colonialism, and the violence these forms of domination engender and perpetuate, sometimes in the name of progress. She invokes a kind of feminism that is fully aware of the connections between women’s struggles and anti-colonialist struggles, and those between women’s struggles and struggles for peace. She also articulates a feminism that feeds from global fights for social justice. García-Ramis is seeking to understand the male perspective and she does it on a day that is designated for changing the material conditions of women around the world and in Puerto Rico (the essay was first published in March 8, 1985, International Women’s Day):

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Tell us, how does it feel to be men like that, because we, the other half of humanity, the women, were also initiated from time immemorial into the world of adulthood, also at night, also during the full moon (an asteroid more ours than yours), also conscious of our sexuality; all these so we could know the secrets of the crops, of the seasons, of life. We did not have to prove with external and forced pain that we were strong, we proved it by giving birth to you and feeding you until you could take care of yourselves; we did not inherit the need to inflict pain on other women of the village with humiliation and rites of blood, for blood flows easy for us women; we did not have to learn to hurt people, and when we had, by necessity, to become soldiers alongside our men, alongside the Indians, the Algerians, or the Vietnamese in the wars for independence, or alongside our Latin American brothers in their fight for freedom, we did not have to beat our *compañeras*, but you did, because you are men, and that is why we want to know now why, what do you feel, how does it feel, tell us, you who know! (1991, 58-59).

Essentialism aside, the author's plea can be seen as a request to men in general. That is, the specific things she addresses here may be characterized as "universal," in the sense that they have taken place at different points in history and across different cultures. But it is the "we" in the construction that makes García Ramis' plea relevant, for she is positioning Puerto Rican women within this global predicament. She is also taking the experiences of different oppressed groups and made them her own. Also, her calling Latin American men "brothers" is not a mere rhetorical tool, for she is positioning herself as a Latin American woman. García Ramis' feminism, then, becomes a feminism that transcends the borders of the island of Puerto Rico by positioning the island (and thus its inhabitants) within a global context.

The construction and development of a Puerto Rican "essence" (that includes culture, genealogy, identity and sense of being and belonging), a Puerto Ricanness, has been a fundamental way of Puerto Ricans making sense of themselves and their history. Even though this notion is present and very much articulated in a vast part of their literature, it is important to note that Puerto Rican women writers do not "take for granted" any specific construction of the category Puerto Rican. Instead, the idea of a Puerto Rican is contested, (re)constructed, and questioned in many of the readings. That is to say, the authors focus

their energies on (re)defining Puerto Ricanness in a variety of ways, in clear opposition to strict notions that articulate Puerto Rican(ness) as a static concept, or as the result of one universal consciousness or history. In fact, usually moving beyond identity politics (i.e., “I am Puerto Rican because...”), the authors articulate and represent Puerto Ricanness in ways that contest the existing mythologies by providing new ways of looking at Puerto Ricanness. For instance, Rosario Ferré’s essay, “El oro de Colón” (Columbus’ Gold; 2000c), touches on the question of Puerto Ricanness when she discusses the 500-year celebration of Christopher Columbus’ first voyage to the so-called New World. In her essay, Ferré reflects on the celebration, which took place in San Juan over ten years ago, and concludes that:

The Puerto Rican of today is not concerned with the “where do we come from” as much as s/he is with the “where are we headed” [...]. The Puerto Rican of today is very much aware that s/he should give Caesar what’s Caesar’s, and God, what’s God’s; and that s/he will have to do the same with Columbus’ gold (81).¹⁶

In this case, Ferré introduces a notion of Puerto Ricanness that does not particularly care about its past but instead focuses on its future, a future that is the direct result of coloniality and must deal with women’s issues.

Ana Lydia Vega contests assumptions about Puerto Ricanness in a number of her literary essays as well. One example is provided in “Vegetal fiero y tierno” (Fierce and Tender Vegetable; 1991a), where she constructs Puerto Ricanness as a specific dialectic in which her extended (Puerto Rican) family defines boundaries for their identity by “othering” that which they do not see as Puerto Rican. Vega unravels this dialectic while talking about her own experience as a vegetarian on the island. Faced with her extended family members’ skepticism of vegetarianism and vegetarians, she has to listen, with patient martyrdom, to comments such as “that is so American, just like feminism,” at family gatherings.

Those “innocent” comments are but a way of differentiating themselves as meat-eating (and therefore *bona fide*) Puerto Ricans from the non-meat eater (and therefore dubious) one (i.e., the author). Vega (1991a), of course, is not oblivious to the insinuation. Indeed, she is fully aware that her family is telling her in a not too subtle way that she is slacking in her Puerto Ricanness big time, for she is vegetarian and she also identifies as a feminist. Moreover, she is being more like the

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colonizer (that is, an American) than she is being Puerto Rican, a charge a little too hard to swallow for a woman who also repudiates Puerto Rico's subordinate position vis-à-vis the United States.

Vega (1991a) takes the discussion about the "Puerto Rican other" further when she states, "[j]ust imagine the psychological mega-trauma of a Jewish, black, homosexual, pro-independence, communist, feminist, Puerto Rican, woman, who is also a vegetarian" (270). This quote captures the magnitude of being the "other," an "other," in this case, who challenges the taken-for-granted notions of a "real" Puerto Rican as mainly male, Catholic, white, heterosexual, pro-capitalist, meat-eater, and pro-US. Thus, when "othernesses"—such as being a non-Catholic, non-heterosexual, non-capitalist, non-light-skinned, non-meat eater, etc.—accompany the category "Puerto Rican woman," things get much more complicated, for the "otherness" of the subject becomes stronger with each added category. She taunts the reader by saying "that is not my case, but you can't deny that 5 out of 8 is not a bad average," playfully leaving the reader to choose which five categories of "otherness" apply to her.

Vega's essay is written in a humorous tone, and the humor of that passage is not lost. In fact the reader has come to expect humor in her work. As Solá (1990) notes: "in [Vega's] literary universe, everybody and everything is a laughing matter.... But the mockery comes from a kindred spirit, and not in a cynical or pedantic manner" (7). Humor notwithstanding, the seriousness of Vega's statement is uncovered in the opening of the statement: "Just imagine." The fact that she has to ask the reader to "just imagine" the scenario, speaks of how inconceivable (though not necessarily unlikely) is such a mix of multiple "otherness" or "un-Puerto Ricanness." The "just imagine" can also be interpreted as an invitation for active (political) engagement. By imagining something, that is to say, by picturing it in our minds, we make it come to existence, we make it a possibility: in this case, a possibility upon which we need to reflect.

For these women writers, though, Puerto Ricanness is not only articulated as a mere issue of definitions (or undefinition). In fact, the category "Puerto Rican" also gets situated (and thus construed) in relation to other categories. One example is Ana Lydia Vega's essay "Para pelarte mejor" (To Better Bad Mouth You),¹⁷ in which she reminisces about her days as a graduate student in France. Vega tells us how being homesick was a bonding experience for her and many of her Latin American classmates, who would get together in somebody's apartment

to “smack talk” about France, a representative of the First World. Calling those meetings “Third World revenges,” she writes:

Through the rhythm of nostalgic, unifying songs, one was able to forget about the one thousand fucked up things in our respective and far away countries. Everything in them turned beautiful, perfect, irreproachable. Even the bad guys lost their wickedness in the distance. The colonial shit, the disunion, the dictatorship, the misery, nothing was able to stop our rabid sentimentality (279).

The fact that Vega includes herself as an active participant of the unified Third World revenge, speaks clearly of how she looks at Puerto Rico’s political positioning: she sees the island as part of Latin America, yes, but more importantly, she sees it as part of a racially-mixed Third World Latin America, where she includes Colombia, Guatemala, Mexico, Venezuela, the Dominican Republic, and Brazil. Thus, the Puerto Ricanness Vega (1991b) articulated in this particular essay, is very much connected to the Third World experience: a connection that she makes by way of her own body and subject position as an “exile” in France. It is a Puerto Ricanness that understands coloniality (“the colonial shit”), but that also understands about lack of solidarity (“the disunion”), about dictatorship, and about misery. It is also a Puerto Ricanness that in spite of knowing about coloniality, disunion, dictatorship, and misery is able to love the homeland, to feel a transnational connection and to feel a healthy nostalgia.

In her writings, Vega shows her mastery in articulating Puerto Ricanness in a variety of ways. For instance, in her clever piece “Gimnasia para una noche en vela” (Gymnastics for a Sleepless Night; 1991c), the author describes her fears as a writer who espouses pro-independence ideas in Puerto Rico during the mid 1980s, an especially politically repressive time on the island (courtesy of the FBI) for those who thought Puerto Rico could/should be an independent country. Back then, the FBI was systematically raiding the houses of those who favored independence for the island, in an eternal quest for “subversive material.” Even being in possession of the Puerto Rican flag was seen as being in possession of subversive material. When she wrote her essay in 1985, Vega explains, the FBI was particularly interested in subversive literature (making her a bit paranoid, and hence her acute case of insomnia). Similar to being in possession of the flag, being in possession of subversive literature meant having any piece of writing exalting the island (its beauty, its capabilities, and its right to be free)

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and/or condemning its relationship with the metropolis. Vega (1991c) uses phrases such as “underdeveloped little country” to refer to Puerto Rico (again connecting the island with the Third World), and the “pro-independence ghetto” to refer to the symbolically segregated and isolated space (more mental and psychological than physical, perhaps) of those who harbor pro-independence idea(l)s. Holding on to her humor, the author manages to communicate the horror of living under constant surveillance from the metropolis and the consistent threat of having her home invaded and violated by the federal government. All of this because of her political ideas, in a place with a constitution that gives her the right to hold those ideas. Vega also manages to articulate her Puerto Ricanness in this essay, not as a result of who she believes she is (identity politics), but as a result of what she thinks should be the political status of the island. She is presenting her Puerto Ricanness in direct opposition to the US government, as a tool to openly critique the island’s political status (i.e., that of an “underdeveloped little country”).

Concluding Remarks

As stated earlier, the essays analyzed in this text are just examples of the kind of literature that Puerto Rican women were writing at the end of the twentieth century. The authors articulate a feminism that is in turn embedded within their articulations of Puerto Ricannes. They make a convincing case for the inextricable connections between the predicament of women in Puerto Rico as subjects of a patriarchal system and as subjects of an imperialist power. Women authors are also fully aware of the need to avoid parochial arguments in their writings, by actively connecting the plight of Puerto Ricans in general and Puerto Rican women in particular, to international struggles for liberation and social justice. In the end, the literature produced by these women serves as a bridge between local struggles (in Puerto Rico) and international struggles (in the Third World). It also serves as a bridge between political ideologies on the island and political praxis. And, of course, they provide a bridge between women’s literature and women’s struggles in Puerto Rico.

The works of women writers also illustrate the importance of literature in the development of social and political action in the colonial Commonwealth of Puerto Rico. Literature offers a lens with which to look at social processes and social dynamics. More broadly, these stories

can also be understood as political outlets, as Ana Lydia Vega's description of Puerto Rican literature as consulates and embassies illustrates. In an island (and a political entity) where contradictions reign, the written word turns into possibilities, into promising paths for the readers to follow. Thus, literature in Puerto Rico goes beyond its function as art: in addition to being an individualistic expression of creativity, literature on the island must be seen also as a text (a testimony) within a context (a history) full of political and economic nuances. Moreover, the literature of these women must be seen as an extension, a part, an examination, and more importantly, a contestation of colonial structures and a colonial society within a particular historical moment, where text and context become one, inseparable from each other. In a country that has been kept out of the international political light, but that still suffers the effects of the international economic processes, literature is an outlet for and a way of documenting that predicament. More than ever before, contemporary Puerto Rican women writers are using that outlet to discuss the intricate connections between patriarchy, colonialism, and women, by showing that literature is a great exponent of feminism in Puerto Rico, and by extension the Caribbean.

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Notes

- ¹ My translation.
- ² Different scholars have documented that textile, pharmaceutical, and computer industries relocating to Third World countries have historically employed women because they see them as more docile, malleable, and controllable.
- ³ Feminist scholars (Azize-Vargas 1986; Jiménez-Muñoz 1997) have identified an earlier "wave" of feminism in Puerto Rico at the beginning of the twentieth century, which was mostly concerned with the suffrage, in the case of middle and upper class women, and working conditions, in the case of working class women.
- ⁴ My translation.
- ⁵ My translation.
- ⁶ For instance, of the 446,000 jobs created from 1955 to 1998, over 59 percent went to women. Information taken from Fernández et.al, 1998, 126.

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- ⁷ The statistics presented in this section were compiled from the following reports: *Mujer en Puerto Rico, Su Situación Actual* (1994), and *Plan de Acción Para la Igualdad, el Desarrollo y la Paz de las Mujeres en Puerto Rico* (1995) prepared by the Comité Nacional de Puerto Rico ante Beijing (National Committee of Puerto Rico Before Beijing), except where noted.
- ⁸ It is important to note that in spite of US federal minimum wage and labor laws on the island, Puerto Rican working class women's wages (the majority of women on the island) are, for the most part, still well below subsistence standards.
- ⁹ Information taken from the report by the Comité Nacional de Puerto Rico ante Beijing at Mar de Plata Argentina, 1994. The same report stated that 17% of the men on the island were also unemployed. Even though both figures are high, the higher numbers of unemployed men reflect the changes in the mode of production, from agriculture-based where men were the workers of choice, to industrial-based, where women's labor is sought more aggressively. For governmental statistics, unemployment refers to people who are not working at the time, but are looking for work. This way of conceptualizing unemployment leaves out people who are not working and not looking for work. Economically active refers to people who are either employed or unemployed and collecting unemployment benefits, and who are looking for work.
- ¹⁰ Taken from the US National Center for Health Statistics (2003).
- ¹¹ Even though 78 cents for every dollar may seem actually a high ratio (compared to other countries at the time), it should be taken into consideration that Puerto Rican men, on the average, made below subsistence level incomes. Thus, this means that women's net pay was even lower than the already low income of men.
- ¹² My translation.
- ¹³ My translation.
- ¹⁴ My translation.
- ¹⁵ My translation.
- ¹⁶ My translation. Thanks to Marta M. Maldonado for her much-appreciated help with the translation.
- ¹⁷ The translation for this particular title is a little tricky. "Pelarte" from the verb "to peel" literally means "to peel you" or "to peel your layers," which is a slang word for "gossiping about you." Since there is no literal equivalent in English, I will translate the title of the essay as "To Better Bad Mouth You."

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The Tyranny of Silence: *Marianismo* as Violence in the Works of Alba Ambert and Annecy Báez

Marisel Moreno

On January 11, 2006, the brutal murder of seven-year-old Nixzmary Brown shocked not only the Puerto Rican community of Brooklyn, New York, but the entire nation as well. The story behind the girl's homicide resembles the plot of a horror movie: "the second-grader had been bound to a chair, tortured, sexually molested and starved for weeks before being killed by a savage blow to the head" (Dillon 2006, 1). Her "battered body was found in her Brooklyn 'house of horrors,' more precisely in what the family called the 'dirty room,' what Goldman (2006, 1) described as a "rodent-infested room where she had been tied up and left with only a litter box as a toilet." Nixzmary's tale illustrates the violence, understood as an "action that causes physical or emotional harm and is geared toward destruction or punishment," to which thousands of US Latino children are exposed at the hands of parents and relatives (Ramírez 1999, 73). Although child abuse—be it physical, sexual, and/or psychological—is also present in the Puerto Rican and Dominican communities in the United States, it has remained a taboo subject both at the social and literary levels. The intensity of the silence that surrounds this problem is precisely what makes Alba Ambert's *A Perfect Silence* (1995) and Annecy Báez's *My Daughter's Eyes and Other Stories* (2007) stand out from the rich body of US Latina Caribbean literature published during the last two decades.

This essay examines how Ambert's and Báez's narratives illustrate the intersection between violence and *marianismo*, the 'other' side of *machismo*, in order to demonstrate that *marianismo* has played an instrumental role in the perpetuation of violence in patriarchal cultures.¹ As María Pérez y González puts it, "[traditionally], a Puerto Rican woman's identity is rooted in the function she plays in the family—housekeeping, childbearing, and child rearing. She is socialized to adhere to the cultural concept known as *marianismo*, which emphasizes the virtues attributed to La Virgen María (the Virgin Mary): obedience, submission, meekness and humility" (2000, 19). The emphasis on motherhood, central to *marianismo*, is based on the assumption that women are "naturally"

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loving, caring, and protective of children. Yet, as this study will prove, women often participate, either actively or passively, in multiple forms of child abuse.

My methodology will consist of close readings and textual analysis, in order to illustrate these claims. The theoretical framework that guides my analysis can be best described as multidisciplinary, as I draw on feminist and gender theory, history, and studies on the psychology of trauma to demonstrate how these narratives denounce some of the links between *marianismo* and violence against women.

I also examine how by embedding violence against children in the contexts of the home culture and the diaspora, Ambert's and Báez's narratives speak to the legacy of violence that has defined US-Puerto Rico colonial relations and the post-Trujillo years, respectively. Breaking the silence that surrounds the issue of child abuse thus represents a pivotal step in the fight against a system that tends to ignore the plight of the defenseless. For this reason, it is important to recognize how Ambert and Báez are forging new paths in US-Puerto Rican, Dominican-American, and Latina-Caribbean letters alike.

The comparative approach of my study shares with other Latina feminists what Edna Acosta-Belén and Christine Bose consider "the difficult task of building bridges of understanding and solidarity among ethnoracial groups at national and international levels" (2000, 1117). Alba Ambert's *A Perfect Silence* and Annecy Báez's *My Daughter's Eyes* lend themselves to the type of comparative and interdisciplinary analysis that is advancing Latina Caribbean studies by proposing alternative models to examine these literatures. In this case, the points of contact between these works are as significant as their discontinuities, as this essay seeks to demonstrate. Besides the fact that Ambert's text is a novel and Báez's represents a collection of stories (which reads like a novel), both works follow the paradigm of the *bildungsroman*, where the protagonists' passage from childhood to adulthood parallels their transformation from victims to agents within the contexts of Puerto Rican and Dominican patriarchal cultures.

Blanca and Ynoemia (Mia) in Ambert's and Báez's narratives respectively, represent what Mary Jane Suero-Elliott calls "transmigratory subjectivity" in referring to "Puerto Rican transmigration and the psychosocial identity that develops from it" (2008, 332). The constant back and forth movement or *vaivén* (Duany 2002, 2) of Puerto Ricans between the home and the diaspora is a direct result of the historical colonial ties of the island to the United States. The island's official

status as an “unincorporated territory” of the United States has created an unbalanced relationship that has granted Puerto Ricans US citizenship since the Jones Act was approved by Congress in 1917, but has restricted their rights and perpetuated discrimination toward them as “second-class” citizens. Specific economic and sociopolitical forces have also contributed to the phenomenon of transmigration, as it happened during the implementation of Operation Bootstrap in the late 1940s and 1950s, under Governor Luis Muñoz Marín’s administration. This development program was designed to modernize Puerto Rico and attract US investments to the island by offering tax incentives and cheap labor. The failure of this program is now measured in part by the wave of migratory displacement it unleashed, first from rural to urban areas, and subsequently from the island to the continental United States. As one of the largest migrations in history, commonly referred to as the Great Migration, this event decidedly transformed the way in which Puerto Ricans viewed migration, biculturalism, and cultural and national identity. As a result, “more and more Puerto Ricans are remapping the borders of their identity by moving frequently between their nation of origin and the diaspora throughout their life” (Duany 2002, 33).²

On the other hand, grounded on the experience of transmigration—“the process of crossing over diverse social and cultural boundaries, and tying together the values of local, national, and global traditions” (Sagás and Molina 2004, 1)—the concept of a “transmigratory identity” is also applicable to the case of Dominicans, who according to Sagás and Molina are “Without a doubt, [...] one of the most transnational people in Latin America” (10).³ While the rate of transmigration is very high among Puerto Ricans and Dominicans, the historical circumstances that have led Dominicans to migrate to the United States are quite distinct from their Caribbean counterparts. While there has been a Dominican presence in US society that dates back to the nineteenth century (Torres-Saillant 2000, 257), the bulk of this migration started in the 1960s. The first migratory wave, which began in the aftermath of Trujillo’s assassination in 1961 and peaked after the US invasion in 1965, is considered to have been politically driven (Sagás and Molina 2004, 12). A later wave in the 1970s and 1980s differed in that it was mainly propelled by economic stagnation, extreme poverty, and high rates of unemployment. As Sagás and Molina have explained, the massive displacement of Dominicans to the United States has been characterized by strong social, economic, and political links between those on the island and the diaspora.

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Blanca and Mia, the main characters in *A Perfect Silence* and in *My Daughter's Eyes*, share the experience of transmigration as they move back and forth between their homelands and the diaspora, specifically the Bronx. Not only do Blanca and Mia confront the reality of discrimination, racism, and the myriad social ills associated with the “mean streets” of the ghetto, but in both cases the reader also gains insight into the phenomenon of return migration, where the characters struggle again to adapt to their new environment—be it Puerto Rico or the Dominican Republic—after living in the United States. For instance, Mia’s struggle to fit into her new school environment is evident in the following passage:

Most of the wealthy Dominican girls are all very light-skinned. They look like American girls. Some of them are snotty. They do not like us Dominican girls who were raised in New York, particularly the Bronx, so I don’t hang out with them. Mostly, they try to be decent, but behind our backs they think we are low class. They call us names like ‘Gringas Sucias’ but not to our faces [...]. It’s strange to wait so long to come to your own country and then feel like you don’t belong (101).

The difficulties associated with the experience of “return migration” among Dominicans, a phenomenon studied by Patricia Pessar in *A Visa for a Dream* (1995), are often the result of the discrimination that migrants endure when they return to their homelands (86). The feeling of not belonging is also common among Puerto Rican returnees, who face discrimination on the island for similar reasons. According to Marvette Pérez, Nuyoricans are rejected “because of their physical and metaphorical proximity to the United States,” and are seen as “dangerous, hybrid, and contaminated beings, and in danger of, upon returning to Puerto Rico, contaminating Puerto Ricans” (quoted in Duany 2002, 29). The notion of the contaminated migrant is evident in the insult “gringas sucias” to which Mia and her Bronx friends are subjected at school in the Dominican Republic. While the term “gringa” points to transculturation and the social distance that exists between migrants and islanders, the word “sucia,” associated with female promiscuity, underscores sentiments of moral superiority among traditional island circles that view US culture as a corruptive influence over Dominican women.

In addition to the connections addressed above, *A Perfect Silence* and *Daughter's Eyes* are most importantly linked by their fierce denunciation of sexual abuse and violence against children, specifically toward girls.

These taboo subjects are also connected to the themes of loss, memory, and healing, which become intertwined in both narratives. Ambert's and Báez's incursions into these silenced issues renders their texts examples of what sociologist Ramona Hernández has called "manifestations of resistance."⁴ In both cases, their narratives defy the ideology of patriarchal domination at the center of traditional Puerto Rican and Dominican cultures. This is not only achieved by denouncing social ills typically associated with patriarchy and *machismo*, but also through the demythification of the home as a "safe space" for women and children, whether they struggle to survive in the diaspora or in the home country. In this sense, their narratives move beyond the prevalent dichotomy between Island/United States and purity/corruption that those spaces have come to embody by demonstrating that violence and oppression are equally present at home and abroad.

The dual critical stance mentioned above represents a new direction in Latina Caribbean letters, where the glorification of the homeland and tales of upward mobility in the diaspora have prevailed at the expense of more serious issues that affect the daily lives of Latinas and their families. *A Perfect Silence*, the second novel by London-based Puerto Rican author Alba Ambert, is considered to be "the first Puerto Rican novel dealing with child abuse" (Hernández 1997, 59). Its focus on violence makes it a dark semi-autobiographical narrative that traces the life of Blanca, an orphan who "falls through the cracks of the system," so to speak, and is repeatedly abused at the hands of her paternal grandmother, Paquita, and other caregivers. The novel fluctuates back-and-forth between the present, where we observe Blanca institutionalized due to severe mental illness, and the past, which traces Blanca's childhood story to provide a backdrop to her present condition. The alternation between past and present in the text mimics the therapeutic process that Blanca undergoes at the asylum, where conversations with her psychiatrist and other patients trigger memories of her traumatic past, an indispensable step in her healing process, as she admits: "I dig constantly within, to peel my layers of pain. My pain and my past are one" (225). Besides temporal shifts in the narration, the action also moves back-and-forth between Puerto Rico and the United States, the two spaces where Blanca's life transpires. Although the end of the novel suggests that Blanca manages to transform herself from victim to agent, most of the narrative emphasizes how her sense of powerlessness and isolation in the face of violence—physical, sexual, and psychological—eventually leads to self-violence. Yet, while not a particularly uplifting story, Blanca's tale of abuse, healing, and survival, can be a source of empowerment for

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those who have endured violence and the tyranny of silence that often accompanies it.

This portion of my study analyzes the role of violence in Ambert's *A Perfect Silence* from different perspectives. I first examine how the novel's representation of violence against children, as a form of social protest, represents a new direction in contemporary US Puerto Rican women's literature. Second, I look at how the novel challenges traditional constructions of Puerto Rican womanhood cemented on *marianismo*. I argue that by positing a female character as an abuser, the novel dismantles the stereotype of the maternal figure and shows how women are frequently key agents in the perpetuation of *machismo*. And finally, I draw on contemporary studies on the psychology of trauma in order to show that the novel, as written text, is symbolic of the transformation of traumatic memory into what Susan Brison (1999) calls "narrative memory," a process that evokes a shift from victim to agent.

Contemporary narratives by US Puerto Rican women tend to follow the model of the personal "success story." These texts paradoxically reinforce the myth of the American dream, despite the fact that the majority of Puerto Ricans in the United States struggle to overcome the obstacles associated with the condition of internal colonialism. According to critic Lisa Sánchez González, contemporary narratives differ from those of pioneer authors such as Luisa Capetillo, Pura Belpré, and Nicholasa Mohr, given that "these mainstreamed Latina feminist texts narrate personal experiences of the feminine condition to the near total exclusion of a collective predicament that entails growing problems with racism, poverty, reproductive rights, education, and colonial maldevelopment" (2001,140).

Because *A Perfect Silence* is not framed around the formulaic "success story," nor is it unconcerned with the social ills affecting Puerto Rican communities on the island and the mainland, the novel represents an exception to this contemporary trend. Although Blanca is relatively successful eventually—she studies at Harvard and becomes a teacher of bilingual education at a Boston high school—it is obvious that the memories of her past traumas continue to affect her in the present. Her release from the hospital at the end of the novel, which would be typically seen as a sign of health and progress, is mitigated by the fact that she partially fakes her recovery in order to be released. Freedom from the hospital does not translate into freedom from her past; she still carries with her the wounds that more than once have led her to attempt suicide. While the end of the novel offers a glimpse of hope when she

opens that “outside door, the final door, the door that will open all doors,” the guarded reader is left to wonder how Blanca, and her daughter Taína, will fare in the end (234).

Blanca’s depiction in the novel does not glorify the Puerto Rican woman’s experience in the diaspora. In fact, the representation of Puerto Rican women—especially those who have been victims of violence—is highly negative at times. Depicting the main character as the ultimate victim of patriarchy paradoxically serves to raise awareness about the taboo of child abuse and its long-term effects on those who endure it. The mere act of talking about such a silenced topic can have an empowering effect, such as Ambert recalls in an interview with Carmen Dolores Hernández:

The reading unleashed something. Women started talking about child abuse, about how they had been abused as children and nobody wanted to talk about it. They were saying that finally there was a novel in Spanish, written by a Latina, that addressed this important issue because Puerto Ricans and other Latinos did not want to acknowledge that this problem existed. There was a Chicana lawyer there who talked about seeing instances of child abuse among Latinos all the time. We are all denying that child abuse happens among us. We want to believe that Puerto Ricans are perfect parents and never abuse their children. That’s not true; child abuse happens in every society (1997, 60).

As suggested above, the audience’s reaction reveals the extent of the taboo surrounding the issue of child abuse in Puerto Rican and other US Latino cultures, where traditional views of the family reflect the values of patriarchal ideology.

One of the novel’s most salient accomplishments is the way in which it “breaks the silence,” so to speak, by shattering the traditional image of the Puerto Rican woman cemented on *marianismo* through the character of Paquita, Blanca’s grandmother. The attributes associated with *marianismo* also have been transferred to, and are often more accentuated in, the figure of the grandmother, who plays a central role in US Latina literature (Ortega 1989,12). Due to the role of *marianismo* and “the cultural myths we project upon mothers and women in general—that mothers are child protectors and have unconditional love for the child and that women are often the victims of abuse but are not perpetrators of it,” it is often difficult for US Latino and Latin American cultures to accept that women are capable of abusing children (Duncan 2004, 21).

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Ambert's *A Perfect Silence* dismantles this myth through the character of Paquita, who takes the role of Blanca's surrogate mother. Having lost her mother at the age of two, Blanca spends most of her childhood and teenage years under her grandmother's custody. Living with Paquita proves to be a lifelong traumatic experience for Blanca, given that she subjects her to years of relentless psychological, physical, and even sexual violence. For instance, Paquita humiliates Blanca by constantly reminding her that she's an orphan and by making her feel like a "piece of furniture" (222). And yet, despite not ever showing any affection toward Blanca, she forces her to call her "Mami" (45). Paquita also beats her regularly, and sometimes so severely, that at least once Blanca ends up in the hospital (99). When Blanca reaches her teenage years, Paquita engages in acts of sexual abuse through the performance of frequent vaginal inspections in order to "insure that she was not running around with any man" (152). This need to control and safeguard Blanca's virginity mirrors dominant ideas of female sexuality in patriarchal cultures.

Paquita's portrayal goes beyond the simple defiance of *marianismo* in order to posit her as the embodiment of patriarchal authority. Much of her behavior aligns her with the realm of the masculine as both aggressiveness and violence are closely linked to machismo and the construction of Puerto Rican masculinity (Ramírez 1999, 71). In emphasizing the role that women can play as perpetrators of violence against children, *A Perfect Silence* thus undermines the stereotype of women as victims of patriarchal domination and exposes their complicity in the perpetuation of this ideology. Women are not only victims within this system, they can also be victimizers; children, however, are the real victims.

It can be argued that the relationship that develops between Paquita and Blanca parallels the dynamics at play between the typical abusive man and the victimized woman. For instance, as Nancy Kaser-Boyd points out, a characteristic of abusive men is their "strong need for control," which ultimately drives them to make all decisions for their family, including decisions about their partner's bodies (2004, 45). They also tend to be highly egocentric, they do not accept responsibility for their actions, cannot control their emotions, and do not usually show empathy toward others (2004, 45-47). The abuser's intense need for control is partly the result of his paranoia, which "is based on his history of abandonment by his parental objects during his childhood" (Celani 1994, 159). For this reason, Celani explains, he does "everything in his power to insure that he will not be abandoned again. He uses the independent style, which relies on action, activity, and vigilance, to combat

his vulnerability. His paranoia is designed to protect him from the humiliation and potential ego collapse that will occur if his partner leaves him" (159).

Paquita's frequent displays of egocentrism and her obsessive need to control those around her are some of the traits that she shares with the archetypal abusive man, as the following passage illustrates:

Paquita had an insatiable need to destroy. She was unable to accept the distinctive features of others, least of all in her own family. The blood they shared was an indissoluble bond that made them one, like a tribe or a web. She not only required their physical presence in her life, she demanded their minds and souls. Paquita pronounced herself the force ruling this unity and was willing to destroy whoever threatened her rule (50).

For the most part, Paquita uses violence and manipulation in order to exert control over those around her. She often fakes illness or assumes the role of "martyr" when violence is not an option. Such is the case when she manipulates Blanca into moving back to Puerto Rico with her after the brutal beating that sends Blanca to the hospital and Paquita into self-imposed exile to Puerto Rico (121).

Blanca, on the other hand, displays qualities associated with the so-called battered woman syndrome, which is characterized by the formation of a bond between abuser and victim (Kaser-Boyd 2004, 47). As the narrator explains, the "years of beatings had achieved the irreversible mental bondage that would not allow [her] to break away" (122). Even when an elder Paquita no longer has the physical strength to overpower Blanca, she still feels dominated by her grandmother:

The girl became the center of the old woman's center. So it was that Paquita controlled every second of her granddaughter's life and made the girl her reason to be and to exist. It was the girl who would sacrifice her youth to Paquita, who would love her, obey her, and never ever leave her (123).

Although as a child Blanca is completely dependent on her abusive grandmother, her inability to leave Paquita once she is older parallels the incapacity of abused women to leave their oppressors. For Blanca, this pattern becomes more pronounced once she establishes relationships with men as an adult. Often misunderstood as a "masochistic" impulse (Kaser-Boyd 2004, 47), this type of behavior is often the result of a psychological phenomenon called "repetition compulsion," "the human

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pattern of unconsciously choosing marital partners, friends, or lovers who reject the individual in the very same manner that he [or she] was rejected in childhood" (Celani 1994, 143).

The repetition of this pattern illustrates Paquita's success in socializing Blanca to be submissive through the use of violence. She often resorted to beatings in order to "train" the little girl, a "time-consuming enterprise," as she put it (71). Yet, it pays off, because "Slowly she fashioned her empire, locking in her subjects" (67). Blanca's absolute submissiveness at the hands of her grandmother thus evokes and denounces violence against women and children under systems of patriarchal domination, but perhaps more importantly, it challenges the positive value ascribed to submissiveness by *marianismo* by unveiling it as a key instrument of oppression.

In fact, *A Perfect Silence* demonstrates how patriarchal mechanisms of socialization engender and perpetuate violence and oppression. For instance, following her grandmother's escape to Puerto Rico after she beats Blanca, her father places her under the custody of Rafael, one of his co-workers. Rafael beats, starves, molests, and ultimately rapes Blanca while she lives with him and his family in the Bronx (119). The first time Rafael abuses her is indicative of the level to which Blanca has internalized her submission: "Blanca suspected that nothing nice could emerge from his request, but her years of unquestioned obedience to adults had indoctrinated her well" (109). Blanca's isolation is emphasized by the psychological violence to which she is subjected at the hands of Rafael, his wife, and children. Cruelly mistreated by all of them, Blanca's dehumanization culminates in her rape as she is reduced to a sexual object.

Her internalized submission also emerges years later when she is raped by her driving instructor in Puerto Rico. After he sexually assaults Blanca, he becomes obsessed with her and forces her into an abusive relationship from which she cannot escape (168). Afraid of the "beatings he threatened to inflict," Blanca becomes paralyzed just like she used to in the past when her grandmother threatened to hurt her (168). The helplessness Blanca feels corresponds to a "learned pattern" among abused women that usually puts them at risk for subsequent victimization, according to Duncan (2004, 22). The narrator's assertion that "[Blanca] had grown accustomed to punishment" and that in fact, "she expected it as her inescapable fate" (169), perhaps explains why Blanca stays in a relationship with a man who rapes her (167), forces her to have an abortion (175), and abuses her throughout the course of several years.

Life with him proves to be a “repetition of patterns,” where Blanca “escapes her grandmother’s subjugation only to fall into the snare of an equally oppressive tyrant” (135).

The inhumane treatment and suffering that the character of Blanca experiences both in Puerto Rico and the US challenges glorified images of the diaspora and the island—as land of opportunity and paradise respectively—that are prevalent in US Puerto Rican literature. On the one hand, Blanca’s abuse while living in the Bronx with Paquita and Rafael represents an aspect of the diaspora that has remained silenced in US Puerto Rican literature despite the negative impact that it has on individuals, their families, and communities. The prevalence and neglect of the reality of violence against children and women among immigrant communities speaks to the subordinate position that Puerto Ricans, despite being US citizens, occupy in dominant society. Blanca’s abuse, which spans several years, is not only a result of *machismo* but also of the level of disenfranchisement that Puerto Ricans experience in the mainland as a colonized people. The abuse Blanca faces while living in Puerto Rico, also speaks to the lack of support that victims of violence encounter within a culture that privileges masculine domination and dismisses violence within the home as a “private matter.”⁵

Although Blanca eventually manages to escape from both her grandmother and her abusive husband, memories of the violence she endured at their hands will impact the rest of her life. Besides suffering from physical, psychological, and sexual violence, Blanca also becomes a victim of self-violence, which manifests itself through bouts of depression, self-hatred (153), self-mutilation (160), and repeated suicide attempts (160). These typical expressions of childhood abuse represent “reenactments of the trauma experience” or “expression[s] of emotional pain” (Duncan 2004, 10). By focusing on Blanca’s last suicide attempt and her eventual institutionalization, the novel bridges the gap between Blanca’s past and present while illustrating the cyclical nature of violence.

While Blanca’s victimization has been emphasized throughout most of the novel, the end hints at her newfound sense of agency. Earning a graduate degree from Harvard, securing a job as a bilingual education teacher in a Boston high school, and raising her daughter as a single mother, are all “manifestations of resistance” against a system that stacked all the odds against her. Most importantly, however, is the effect of empowerment that the reader can derive from reading her story. The crucial role that giving voice to trauma plays in the healing process should not be undermined. As Brison explains, “Narrative memory is

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not passively endured; rather, it is an act on the part of the narrator, a speech act that defuses traumatic memory, giving shape and a temporal order to the events recalled, establishing more control over their recalling, and helping the survivor remake a self" (1999, 40). *A Perfect Silence*, as written text, thus represents a form of therapeutic art that can be transformative not only to the author but to readers as well. Writing the novel, Ambert intimates, was "a way of getting many stories out," particularly her own story and those of women she has known (Hernández 59). Voicing those experiences, as also done in the writings of Dominican-American Annecy Báez, thus serves to transform many traumatic memories into narrative memories by giving a voice to the truly voiceless, the real disenfranchised—in this case, abused children—through a speech act that resonates beyond ethnic, racial, and gender boundaries.

The significance of Annecy Báez's *My Daughter's Eyes and Other Stories* is notable amid the recent flourishing of second-generation Dominican women authors publishing in English with highly reputable US publishing houses. Báez has joined the ranks of authors such as Loida Maritza Pérez (*Geographies of Home*, 2000), Angie Cruz (*Soledad*, 2002 and *Let It Rain Coffee*, 2006), Nelly Rosario (*Song of the Water Saints*, 2003), and Ana Maurine Lara (*Erzulie's Skirt*, 2006), some of the most recent voices to join the repertoire of Dominican-American letters. Báez's innovative and socially-conscious approach to issues of domestic violence, sexual abuse, and female sexuality is evidenced by the fact that her book was published by Curbstone, a press that "focuses on publishing creative writers whose work promotes human rights and intercultural understanding," and where it received the Miguel Mármol prize in 2007, given annually for a first book of fiction in English by a Latino writer.

In *My Daughter's Eyes*, the candid and matter-of-fact portrayal of different types of violence against women and children—achieved in many instances through the first person perspective of a child—is meant to shock the reader and therefore create awareness about the immediate and long-term effects of violence. As I will demonstrate, most instances of violence in the text are linked either to expressions of an emerging female sexuality during adolescence, or to acts that are construed as defiant of traditional views of Dominican femininity cemented on *marianismo*.

One of the first instances of verbal violence takes place in the story "The Red Shoes," where almost fifteen-year-old Zuleika, Mia's cousin,

is shopping for shoes in the Bronx with her mother Tati. When Zuleika decides to try a pair of red high heels against Tati's wishes, she pays for it by enduring one of "her mother's unforgiving public displays, her sudden outbursts of verbal abuse" (21). Their argument over the red shoes escalates to the point that Tati threatens to slap her, but Zuleika backs down because "she did not want to get smacked in front of all of these people" (24). The mother-daughter power struggle that ensues centers on the oppositional value that each of them ascribes to the shoes. While Zuleika dreams of how beautiful and "stunning" they would make her look, Tati believes that they're "certainly not appropriate for a young decent Dominican girl" (18). According to Tati, the shoes are too high and she could "hurt [her] ovaries" (23). Even worse, they are so red and sexy that "Only whores wear those shoes" (22). In trying to convince Zuleika not to even try them, she posits a series of catastrophic "what if" scenarios: "Zuki, if I let you wear those shoes, it'll be the end. I can just imagine it. Soon you'll be in bed with some nasty Dominican man all over you...and then the next thing we know you're pregnant at fifteen. I'm not raising a grandchild...no way" (23). In other words, the shoes are dangerous because they would lead to premarital sex in a culture where women are expected to remain virgins until marriage (Pérez y González 2000, 19). Flaunting red high heels would be construed as a sign of "overt female sexuality, [which] has been posited as problematic, as being sinful, to be feared and something which needs to be controlled" (Craske 2003, 203).

Tati's reaction to the red shoes is partly explained as a product of her realization that Zuleika, who would be turning fifteen in a few weeks, was no longer a child: "Zuleika was a *Señorita* in her own right, but with her upcoming birthday came a certain feeling of loss and solitude as if one chapter of Tati's life had ended and a new one was beginning" (18). Tati's obsessiveness about Zuleika's sexuality sharply contrasts to her own active sexuality. Throughout the story, Tati is assailed by erotic images of her 'sexual escapades' with Julio, her young lover, which provoke in her intense feelings of guilt:

But, it was wrong. It was wrong to make love to Julio on the anniversary of her husband's death. It had been ten years now, but still, she should have shown respect for the dead. However, on that anniversary night, wearing her red lingerie with her matching heels, Tati clung to Julio like a vine [...]. Such vanity and selfishness, she thought, such disrespect for the dead (21).

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Ironically, Tati's need to suppress Zuleika's budding sexuality by forcing her to conform to the image of a "decent Dominican girl" is undermined by Tati's sense of shame and guilt over her own sexuality. The pleasure or sexual enjoyment that she associates with Julio also adds to her guilt because dominant views on female subjectivity dictate that, "decent women should not enjoy sex" (Craske 2003, 203). For this reason, the violence that Tati exerts against her daughter represents an act of self-admonition that channels patriarchy's oppression against all women as sexual beings.

A much worse type of violence, specifically the sexual abuse of children, is the central concern in the story titled "The Pinocchio, 1967." Similar to "The Red Shoes," this story is narrated in the third person and focuses on female characters that are related to Mia, the main character. The story traces the process of how Rosa and Mimi, six and five years old respectively, fall victim to a child molester living under their roof. According to the narrator, Rosa and Mimi went to live in the Bronx with their grandmother, *la Guela*, after their parents died in a car accident in the Dominican Republic (27). To support herself, the grandmother rented a room in her house to Luis Felipe, *el Doctor*, who had just arrived from the island and had come to her "through a respected source" (27). The fact that he was a husband, father, and a doctor, earns him the respect of his community and allows him to abuse Rosa and Mimi for years without raising suspicions.

The scene in which *el Doctor* tries to gain the girls' trust before engaging in sexual acts with them is disturbing not only because of the events in themselves, but also because of his use of religious symbols to perpetrate those acts. When Luis Felipe goes into the girls' bedroom for the first time—while the grandmother is cooking in the kitchen—he refers to Rosa as "[his] dark Virgin" and to Mimi as "[his] light-skinned Virgin." While referring to them as "his Virgins" to him represents his acknowledgement of their sexual and mental purity, and thus emphasizes the power differentials between adult/child and man/woman dichotomies, the girls innocently take this comparison as a compliment.

The parallel between the children and the Virgin is further underscored when he hands each of them a statue of the Virgin Mary: "OK," he said and took out a small dark Virgin figurine he'd bought in the local Botánica for Rosa and then revealed a light-skinned Virgin one for Mimi" (28). The intricate symbolism of this scene is very apparent; in a culture where girls are socialized to imitate the attributes of silence,

meekness, obedience, and submission associated with the Virgin Mary, calling them and presenting them with a figurine of the Virgin allows him to achieve his goals. Aware of the power and respect that the Virgin evokes in Latin American cultures, *el Doctor* convinces them to cooperate with him by framing the sexual act as a request from the Virgin: “But first, the Virgins want you to play a game with me [...]. The Virgins love the silence of little girls [...]. The Virgins will be mad at you if you tell, and something bad might happen you know” (28). Luis Felipe’s manipulation of this religious icon thus allows him to convince Rosa and Mimi to play “Pinocchio” with him by touching his “nose,” “which every man has [...], but in a different place,” and making it grow like Pinocchio’s (29). Through manipulation of religious iconography and a children’s fairy tale, *el Doctor* achieves what many around him consider impossible.

This story’s portrayal of a child molester and the ease with which he manages to victimize two preschool sisters also represents an indictment of society in general as it turns a blind eye, and thus becomes complicit, to child sexual abuse. The most telling example is the reaction of the grandmother when Rosa and Mimi “told her about their special game with Luis Felipe” (31), ‘Pinocchio.’ “*Eso es un cuento*,” the grandmother said, to which Rosa replied “No, Pinocchio is down there [...] and pointed between her grandmother’s thighs,” while Mimi added that “a man’s Pinocchio grows and grows” (31). At this moment, instead of listening and opening her eyes to the abuse that her granddaughters had been unknowingly subjected to, the grandmother dismisses their *cuento* as a lie: “‘*Miren, carajo, la Guela* said angrily, ‘*Eso no se dice! Mentirosas,*’ and she scolded them for telling lies about Luis Felipe, a respectable young doctor who had a wife and children waiting for him in Santo Domingo” (31). Immediately, she proceeded to take away the Virgins, “because children who lied shouldn’t have them” (31). The painful experience of being scolded and ignored by their grandmother is the reason why Rosa and Mimi “promised that from that moment on everything they did with Luis Felipe would remain a secret” (31). In other words, it is the lack of support they receive from their grandmother, the only maternal figure in their lives, that triggers the perpetuation of this cycle of violence. The story shows that by privileging men and disregarding the feelings and experiences of children, Latino and Latin American patriarchal cultures implicitly and explicitly condone this abuse.⁶ Yet, more importantly, this narrative denounces the complicit role that women play in the perpetuation of machismo and the oppression of women and children.

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In addition to verbal and sexual abuse, physical violence also plays a central role in this collection of stories. “To Tell the Truth” is a tale about betrayal and violence, where Mia is severely hurt by her father when she tries to cover for her cousin Eva, with whom she has been sneaking out of their Bronx school in order for Eva to have sex with her boyfriend. While Mia does not engage in intercourse, Eva’s deceiving reputation as “*muy buena*” and “too frightened of adults, of God’s wrath, to ever lie,” allows her to accuse Mia of engaging in sexual acts (42). Mia’s father believes Eva and decides to submit Mia to a violent punishment. First he throws her in the middle of the room, then he slaps her, and eventually,

He took the belt from his pants and belted the floor four times, then five, and then one strong whip to her leg. Mia felt the whip like salt on an open wound, and she jumped at the blow, but on the next whip, the tip of the belt struck Mia in the eye, making her jump and scream, ‘Papi, no, no,’ as she covered her bleeding eye (44).

As if the brutality of his actions were not enough, he reminds her that now she is “as good as nothing” because she is no longer a virgin (45). The treatment of his daughter, and the encouragement he receives from Tío Quinto (Eva’s father), reflect the patriarchal notion that an unmarried woman’s worth is solely a function of her virginity. The men therefore believe that since “women are weak [...] a lesson is needed, and one they won’t forget” (43).

The scene of Mia’s beating thus serves that purpose. It is a spectacle that seeks to reinstate the authority of the father over his daughter’s body at the same time that it is meant to teach a lesson to all the women in the family, particularly those who are willing to defy the traditional role of the Dominican woman. The public setting of Mia’s punishment—almost the entire extended family is present—can be said to serve a triple function: it intensifies Mia’s shame, asserts her father’s authority, and reaffirms the subordinate position of women within the family. This last point is emphasized several times by the narrator who explains that “Her family watched [her beating] quietly, silently” and that “The women watched, afraid to defy her father. It was his daughter, and she was his property” (45). Their reluctance to interfere, including Mia’s surrogate mother (her father married her mother’s sister after she died), is telling of the “internalized submission” of some women living under extreme patriarchal conditions. The failure of female adults to stop the violence represents a poignant criticism of women, who in

choosing to remain silent witnesses, are complicit in the abuse and allow the cycle of violence to continue affecting generation after generation.

The events that transpire mark a pivotal moment in Mia's life because the physical and emotional pain that she suffers makes her feel broken inside. Her hopelessness is evident in the story that follows, "The Awakening," where Mia confesses: "Sometimes, I wake up and I have no light in my heart, no hope. I feel a deep sadness as if someone died. It is an awful feeling that doesn't go away. I open my eyes, and I wonder about living" (49). The physical violence, the emotional abuse, and the humiliation she endures as a result of Eva's betrayal, push her into a state of despondence characterized by silence. Mia's inability to speak becomes a reflection of the deep layers of hurt that also makes her see her body covered in bruises. No one around her, however, can see her bruises except her aunt Aura, a spiritist who "believes that people could have bruises on their body; it's just that normal eyes can't see them because the bruises are invisible" (50). According to Aura, loss and words can cause invisible bruises inside the heart, "where bruises hide, causing a tangle of sadness" (50). Because Aura believes that "If left alone and misunderstood, this sadness can be like [a] shadow [one] takes everywhere," she takes on the role of Mia's spiritual guide and helps pave her road to recovery.

As mentioned above, an important aspect of *My Daughter's Eyes* is that it traces the main character's transformation from victim to agent. The focal point of this process takes place in "The Awakening," where her relationship with Aura awakens both her interest in the spiritual world and in writing, two key sources of healing for her. While her journal/notebook had been a present from her father to facilitate communication with her family, Aura had called it "La Libreta de los Espíritus" after she blessed it because in it Mia recorded not only her own thoughts, but also what the spirits would tell her when she used her Ouija board. Her newfound sense of spirituality allows her to search deep inside her, to confront memories she wants to forget because as Aura puts it, "they are there to teach you something" (65). Her most important lesson occurs during a guided meditation with Aura in which Mia imagines that she speaks to a turtle in the underworld:

Aura says you can do a lot with memories—you can bury them in your body, you can bury them in your mind and forget them, you can nurture them with understanding, or put them away by forgiving them. "Memories can be put to rest by giving them away, by giving them a voice," the turtle says and

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then I am not sure if Aura is the turtle or the turtle is Aura, but their voices are the same (66).

The turtle's message to Mia, telling her to be strong and to find her own voice, is rendered even more powerful by the fact that it is inscribed within a larger narrative of Taíno mythology that Aura shares with her. Mia's meeting with Caguama, the female turtle that is the "mother of humans," marks a turning point in her journey that is evinced by her forgiveness and growing rapprochement between her and her father.

Mia's meeting with Caguama not only provides her with a lifelong source of inner strength, but it also serves to foreshadow her return to the land of her ancestors. When her family returns to the Dominican Republic in 1972, Mia is forced to confront both old and new obstacles as a result of the island's political climate. While her relationship with her father seems to be on the mend, he continues to assert his authority, perhaps more strictly than ever, because he "wanted her to live an idyllic youth, believing the world was good" (81). In trying to protect Mia from the reality that lurked outside their walls, he submits her to a life of confinement where she becomes a prisoner in her own home. This heightened sense of protectiveness and control on the part of her father thus serves to illustrate the conflation between patriarchy and state, specifically under the rule of Joaquín Balaguer.⁷ The fear and violence that up to this point *My Daughter's Eyes* has associated with *machismo*, are now parallel to the fear and violence exerted by the state, as the following passage illustrates:

Her father never spoke about his job, but she knew that he worked for Joaquin Balaguer, the President, but she didn't know what he did. All of the men in the family worked for the government. She knew that there were things you could not do or say and that her father seemed more worried now then (sic) when they were in the United States. People were dying or disappearing, men were fighting for causes, reporters were killed for speaking their thoughts, young adults in the university rioted against the government, and youth were easily deported to Russia for their beliefs. Questions were not allowed in her family, and her life was to be a continuous stream of denial (81).

Because state violence and oppression has been typically associated with the metanarrative of the *trujillato* in Dominican letters, Báez's focus on the Balaguer regime and its ties to the diaspora reflects a significant contribution to this body of literature.⁸ The code of silence hinted at

above, while often seen as a legacy of the *trujillato*, is shown here to extend well beyond the thirty-one years that Trujillo was in power. The ongoing repression that links the past with the present—Trujillo with Balaguer—is expressed by Doña Beatriz, an old woman whose husband disappeared during the dictatorship. According to Mia, “she tells [them] stories about the past when you couldn’t say a word in this country without dying,” confessing that “nothing has changed” (102).

My Daughter’s Eyes reflects on how the political climate influences Mia’s personal life, that is, how the private and the political become intertwined. One way in which this becomes evident is through her father’s opposition to her *amores* or romantic relationship with Miguel Angel, whose father was a member of the Dominican Revolutionary Party (DRP) and thus belonged to the opposite political camp.⁹ While her father “suspected every boy of being a communist, a sexual perpetrator or a drug addict,” an attitude that reflects his need to protect and control his daughter, his attitude toward Miguel Angel exposes the profound political tensions between the DRP and Balaguer’s Partido Reformista: “‘*Esa familia es rara*,’ he said, that the family was weird and he went on, ‘*dizque rosa cruces, comunista, vagabundo*’ he added and went on to discredit the family and their political beliefs” (83). Her father’s negative perception of the opposite camp underscores the divisions that plagued Dominican society for decades. And yet, while his intolerance of political enemies reflects that of the government, Mia’s opinion of her father as “a caring man who consistently cared for the poor and instilled in her a deep commitment to serving others,” but who “had a terrible fear of communism” serves to humanize the side he represents by illustrating the complexity and ambiguity created by political and other types of labels.

Another way in which this work reveals the connection between the private and the political lies in the symbolism attached to Mia’s journal. While she is in the Dominican Republic, she writes in a journal that says “Gobierno Dominicano” that her father gave her so that she could “document [her] history” (101). In her journal, she not only writes about her life, but she also likes to “cut out poetry and literary pieces” from the pro-government newspaper *Listín Diario* to paste in it (80). Her father has forbidden her, however, to “cut anything related to death or political events,” a gesture that not only exposes the code of silence that governs daily existence among Dominicans at that time, but which also hints at how the system inhibits women’s political agency (80). One telling instance occurs when Mia tries to cut out a story about the

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assassination of Francisco Alberto Camaño, the leader of the 1965 revolution, in order to “create a collage of stories about this time” (102). When he realizes what she is doing, he takes the scissors and paper away and warns her “This can get you in a lot of trouble” (102). This act of censorship might be the result of his good intentions, his desire to protect his daughter during those “dangerous times,” but it also reflects the dynamics behind the gendering of politics as Mia’s interest in documenting Dominican history is curtailed by her father, who symbolically stands for Balaguer’s Neo-Trujilloist government.

Because Mia’s father implicitly associates death with politics, he actively discourages her from learning about the world around her, and especially about current political affairs in the Dominican Republic. Instead, as she intimates, “he brings me notebooks from his job at the Palace, notebooks that say ‘*Gobierno Dominicano*,’ hard, huge notebooks that are supposed to be for documenting Dominican history, but Papi brings them to me to document mine” (118). The symbolism behind the notebook acquires several dimensions: first, it points to the silences or blank pages of Dominican history, those chapters that have yet to be written because certain governments discouraged the truth; second, it signals the conflation between the private and the political given that the notebooks, property of the Palace, are being used to record Mia’s personal history; and third, it privileges the feminine voice and her version of the past by substituting it for the records of historical facts usually documented by men (108).

Filling out the pages of her “*Gobierno Dominicano*” notebook with intimate journal entries, therefore can be seen as an act of agency in that it ironically condenses national history into personal history. In documenting her story, she is also narrating chapters of the Dominican past that are typically silenced by official histories. Mia’s understanding that “a woman should write her own history,” a notion that is paradoxically encouraged by her father, will transform into a source of empowerment for her. For instance, when her abusive boyfriend Estanly confronts her about her writing and tells her that men are the ones who are supposed to document her history, she finally realizes that she needs to leave him because “he was a vampire, draining women from their source, their power” (109). The power she derives from her writing and the lessons she has learned is also what allows her later on to leave Pito, the father of her daughter Gabriela, because she was “happier without him” (145). Years later, Gabriela and Mia will find her *Libreta de los espíritus* and her *Gobierno Dominicano* journals while cleaning her attic.

As Mia reads over her entries, she realizes “how patterns repeat themselves, how if we look back, we can determine what errors we might make based on errors of the past” (173). Her close relationship to her daughter, however, underscores the fact that she has learned from her past mistakes, has been capable of forgiving those who hurt her the most, and has understood the importance of being strong and finding her own voice.

In sum, *A Perfect Silence* and *My Daughter's Eyes* are two narratives that mark a shift in US Latina Caribbean literature. Driven by the intersection between feminist and human rights concerns, these works delve into the taboo subject of child abuse and the multiple types of violence to which they are victims, whether it is verbal, psychological, physical, or sexual. Ambert's and Báez's respective incursions into this controversial issue not only seek to denounce this prevalent practice, but perhaps more importantly, they expose the role that *marianismo* and women in general play in the perpetuation of violence. The idealized stereotype of Latin American women as nurturing and maternal, an image propounded by *marianismo*, is subverted in *A Perfect Silence* in order to shatter the widespread perception that women do not inflict violence upon children. In fact, the character of Paquita displays so many traits associated with *machismo* that she becomes the embodiment of patriarchal authority. The myth that women are “naturally” maternal is responsible for allowing violence to continue, such as Blanca's story illustrates. In addition, the novel questions submissiveness as an idealized trait within *marianismo* that is also central to the cycle of violence. Blanca is reared to be submissive, as Puerto Rican women “should be,” yet it is precisely this quality what impedes her to fight against her aggressors. *My Daughter's Eyes* also focuses on the role that *marianismo* plays in the perpetuation of violence in Dominican patriarchal culture. Although most of the violence against children in this text is perpetrated by men, women are exposed as accomplices in the cycle of abuse and as key figures in the predominance of *machismo* given their role in transmitting patriarchal values from generation to generation. Codes of feminine behavior associated with *marianismo* are also unveiled as oppressive to girls and young women, who are condemned and chastised by society for engaging in overt displays of female sexuality. One significant difference between this and Ambert's text is that in Báez's narrative a sense of hopefulness and resistance to oppression is prevalent throughout. Mia's transformation from victim to agent is evinced more than once in the stories, and her journey to healing is

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directly linked to writing. In the end, while Ambert's novel might reveal a bleaker picture of child abuse and its repercussions on the individual, both Ambert's and Báez's works emphasize the power of words, written or spoken, to combat violence by breaking the silence that perpetuates it.

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Notes

- ¹ *Machismo*, according to Nikki Craske, "endorses aggressive behaviour including heavy drinking and violent behaviour when protecting 'honour,' stresses fecundity, and assumes a male breadwinning role" (2003, 215).
- ² In his book-length study *The Puerto Rican Nation on the Move: Identities on the Island and in the United States* (2002), anthropologist Jorge Duany offers a convincing analysis of the modes in which Puerto Rican identity is being continually reshaped and influenced by transmigration and how it is perceived at home and in the diaspora.
- ³ For an interdisciplinary approach to the phenomenon of Dominican transmigration, see *Dominican Migration: Transnational Perspectives*, edited by Ernesto Sagás and Sintia Molina (2004).
- ⁴ This term has been coined by sociologist Ramona Hernández to refer to those strategies implemented by Dominicans in their struggle to overcome repression and subordination. See "Dominicans in the United States: From the Almost Anonymous Few to the Recognized Many." Hispanic Caribbean Lecture Series, University of Notre Dame, South Bend, Indiana, 15 Apr. 2009.
- ⁵ María Jesús Pola Z. supports this position when she states: "Durante mucho tiempo, el reducto familiar fue intocable y protegido por la creencia de una privacidad que había que mantener a toda costa, invisibilizó grandes crímenes contra las mujeres, las/os niñas/os y las/os envejecientes" (2005, 125).
- ⁶ In the Hispanic Caribbean, the common saying "las mujeres/niños hablan cuando las gallinas mean" (roughly translated as "women/children speak when the hens urinate"), conveys the social expectation that women and children are to remain silent and not speak their minds in a culture where only men are allowed this privilege.
- ⁷ Joaquín Balaguer occupied various posts in Dominican government as Trujillo's protégé. He was president from 1960-62, 1966-78, and 1986-96. His second term is commonly known as "The Twelve Years," and was characterized by its "Neo-Trujilloism." According to historian

Frank Moya Pons, "The Dominican Republic suffered for several years under the terror imposed by Balaguer's military and paramilitary forces. These groups systematically and randomly repressed the opposition parties at random (sic) without regard to whether they were leftists or not" (1995, 391).

- ⁸ Sagás and Molina have stated that "The twelve-year administration of Balaguer certainly induced the migration of thousands of Dominicans abroad. Political repression and economic woes were its two main catalysts or 'push' factors" (2001, 13).
- ⁹ The Partido Revolucionario Dominicano (PRD; Dominican Revolutionary Party), founded in Cuba in 1939, came into the local political scene in the aftermath of Trujillo's death and was directed by Juan Bosch, the writer and intellectual who won the first free elections in 1962 but was overthrown in less than a year and forced into exile in Puerto Rico (Moya Pons 1995, 383).

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COVER ART WORK

Yasmín Hernández: “Soul Rebel” for Boricua Art

Solmerina Aponte

*Channeling various global traditions in creativity and resistance,
I invoke art to reclaim histories that have been suppressed.*

Yasmín Hernández, “Artist’s Statement”

New York’s Puerto Rican artists/activists’ long history of denouncing the injustices perpetrated against Latinas(os) in US society found a perfect showground in the works of visual and installation artist Yasmín Hernández. A prolific painter and educator in New York City, Hernández is an untiring supporter of the struggles of the disempowered. Her paintings offer cultural and political signifiers with which she conveys the struggles of the Puerto Rican people for cultural recognition, equality, and national liberation. With a style that is reminiscent of both Puerto Rico’s 1950’s social realist art and New York’s 1970s Boricua art, she recreates images of the island’s historical revolutionary figures that display a fusion of political commentary with feminist and social issues. A prime example of this is her 2006 “Soul Rebels” series of paintings. One of these is a rendering of Puerto Rico’s most recognized Nationalist and feminist poet, Julia de Burgos (1914-1953). Every nuance and detail within the painting “Jíbara Julia” deplores injustices from sexism and classism, to poverty and oppression. The literary luminary’s image is a symbol of the revolutionary fighter for Puerto Rican independence and, simultaneously, for the women’s liberation struggle.

Hernández redresses the bard’s role, bestowing her with the stance and attitude of a powerful warrior and a “dignified revolutionary.”¹ Her rendering of the poet is not that of feminine or delicate figure, but rather a visual interpretation of how Julia de Burgos portrayed herself in her verses. Displaying “jíbaro” or fieldworker’s attire, the poet appears strong and defiant, wielding a machete that is both the peasant’s main tool for making a daily living and the weapon of a freedom fighter. The burlap on which the image is captured is a nostalgic reminder of an almost extinct island peasant class; the poet is engulfed by decaying sugar cane, a remembrance of the poverty that engulfed Puerto Rico as

APONTE/YASMÍN HERNÁNDEZ: "SOUL REBEL" FOR BORICUA ART

a neglected colony of the United States, during a period also characterized by intense political repression against Nationalists. While the art piece praises the fortitude of the laborer, it also denounces the decline of Puerto Rico's agricultural economy with the advent of US-controlled industrialization, a process that also provoked a mass exodus of Puerto Rican workers to the United States.

The imposing image of Julia de Burgos embodies female empowerment. By including the poet's verses, "Today I want to be a man/I'd be a laborer/Cutting cane/Sweating the wage/Arms up/Fists high/Taking from the world/My piece of bread," from the poem "Pentacromia" (Pentachrome),² Hernández offers the viewer the image of a *free* woman who can be any man's equal, free of the social female trappings of make-up, perfect hair, or confining clothes, ready to take on the world. De Burgos' image exhibits a large, strong mannish hand, wielding a machete. She is dressed in masculine attire, donning a wild mane of hair, almost indistinguishable from the tangle of sugar canes behind her, while her clear eyes are locked into a steady, self-assured gaze contemplating the horizon, as if peering into the future of Puerto Rico and its women, fearless and determined.

Notes

¹ See www.yasminhernandez.com

² Verses translated by the artist. See www.yasminhernandez.com/JibaraJulia.html

Puerto Rican painter and installation artist, Yasmín Hernández, was born in 1975 in Brooklyn, NY. She received a Bachelors of Fine Arts degree from Cornell University. Numerous exhibitions of her work have been held throughout the United States and Puerto Rico.

BOOK REVIEW

Norma Valle-Ferrer, *Luisa Capetillo, Pioneer Puerto Rican Feminist*. Translated by Gloria Waldman-Schwartz.
Nuestra Voz Series, Volume 4. New York: Peter Lang, 2006.

Feminism and Labor Activism in Turn-of-the-Century Puerto Rico

Joan Wylie Hall

Notorious in her lifetime for wearing pants in public and defending free love, Luisa Capetillo (1879-1922) has been the subject of Norma Valle-Ferrer's scholarly attention since the 1970s, when she interviewed some of Capetillo's family members and fellow workers. As a professor at the Escuela de Comunicación, Universidad de Puerto Rico, and a journalist in both radio and print media, Valle-Ferrer has lectured widely on Capetillo for more than three decades. The Spanish-language edition of her groundbreaking biography, published in 1990 by Editorial Cultural of Río Piedras, became a textbook in many Puerto Rican schools and attracted historians' interest in Capetillo as a long neglected labor organizer and anarchist. In her prologue to this second edition, Valle-Ferrer remarks that several Women's Studies library collections were named for Capetillo after 1990, and the activist's portrait was hung in Puerto Rico's Capitol in 2004.

While the original title, *Luisa Capetillo, historia de una mujer proscrita*, acknowledged Capetillo's fame as a scandalous woman, the phrase "pioneer Puerto Rican feminist" better suits Valle-Ferrer's focus throughout this slim but substantial book. As the biographer says, Capetillo "revolutionized the role of women in Puerto Rican society and became a paradigm for the new woman" (6). Challenging the patriarchal institutions of church and state, she made a priority of union organizing, and her progressive outlook extended to women's education and to "responsible and voluntary love among competent and free adults, not sexual licentiousness" (46). A vegetarian and advocate of physical exercise, Capetillo called for reforms in "dress, health and diet" (53). Although she was never arrested for her masculine attire in Puerto Rico, Mexico, or the United States, she was charged with creating a

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public scandal in Cuba. A Havana newspaper quoted Capetillo's defense of her "perfect civil right" to wear pants "just like men do" (52). According to one reporter, Capetillo told the judge that she always wore pants, "and lifting her dress slightly, showed a pair of loose white pants that almost reached her ankles." Capetillo was acquitted.

Valle-Ferrer stresses that the episode "should not be interpreted as a superficial event in Capetillo's life" (52). For this ardent anarchist, wearing male apparel "represented her defiance of traditional institutions, moral standards and bourgeois ethics." Moreover, says the biographer, "Her arrest was calculated and typical of many anarchist actions designed to shock conventional society, to take advantage of the impact of publicity, and create forums to further advance her goals." One of the book's appendices reprints several excerpts from Capetillo's 1909 play, *Influencias de las ideas modernas* (*The Influence of Modern Ideas*), including the passage: "In spite of all this honesty, I have not been understood. On the contrary, I have been defamed and misinterpreted" (76). Both Valle-Ferrer and her translator, Gloria Waldman-Schwartz of City University of New York, were determined to render a faithful interpretation of Capetillo's life. Waldman-Schwartz directed a group of seven women from "Translating Feminist Texts," a graduate course she taught as a visiting professor in Puerto Rico. Class member Eunice Rodríguez-Ferguson recalls that "The dynamic of the project mirrored the ideas underscored in the text; there we were, working as a true sisterhood of collaborators towards a common goal" (xvii).

Valle-Ferrer places Capetillo in nineteenth and early twentieth-century social, political, and cultural contexts. Her French-born mother and her Spanish-born father "had been ideologically influenced in Europe in the aftermath of the French revolution" (20). Noting that Capetillo lived during the golden age of anarchism, the biographer relates her unusual reconciliation of anarchism and spiritism to "the preachings and practices of Tolstoy, whose books she avidly read" (25). Capetillo also took an unconventional approach to female suffrage, arguing that not only literate women, but all women, should be free to vote. Valle-Ferrer remarks that "The era in which Luisa Capetillo lived represents the turning point in the historical development of women in Puerto Rico. In her written works and in her militant activity as a labor organizer, she espoused the most advanced principles of the nineteenth century and the most radical principles of the twentieth century" (61). *Luisa Capetillo, Pioneer Puerto Rican Feminist* shows a new readership that Capetillo did not simply espouse these principles; she acted upon them

very publicly. A mother of three, a journalist, a reader for Puerto Rican tobacco workers, and a boarding house operator in New York, Capetillo was also “the first woman to successfully challenge prevailing prejudices against women by becoming an important labor leader and advocate for women and the poor” (62).

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BOOK REVIEW

Yolanda Prieto, *The Cubans of Union City: Immigrants and Exiles in a New Jersey Community*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2009.

The Cubans of New Jersey: White Ethnics, Racialized Minorities, Immigrants, or Exiles?

Ted A. Henken

In 1995 and 1996 I lived in Mobile, Alabama, where I had gotten a year-long job with Catholic Social Services resettling Cuban refugees coming in from the now infamous Guantanamo Bay US Naval Base. They had been in limbo there for most of the previous year after having been interdicted at sea attempting to reach the US coast on homemade rafts. It was at this job in the Deep South that I first discovered the existence of New Jersey's Cuban community. Instead of remaining in the quite foreign locale of Mobile, my clients would routinely take their first resettlement check and buy a one way Greyhound ticket for Miami, where they thought they would be more comfortable among fellow Cubans. One day, however, a client approached me demanding that I help him relocate not to South Florida but to a place he knew only as "Gües Nujor Nuyesi."

At first, neither he nor I knew whether he was saying the name of a state, city, town, or simply a general location—as he was repeating the sounds he associated with the place where his cousins lived—en La Yuma (the United States). As our exchange took place BG (that is before Google), we had to sound out his enunciation over and over again until we settled on "West New York New Jersey." Still unaware that there was indeed a town in New Jersey named "West New York" or that a Cuban community even existed in the New York metro area, I was befuddled. Finally, I skeptically approached the Greyhound ticket counter wondering to myself if my client had any idea of what he was talking about and asked, "Do you have a bus that goes to some place called West New York? Maybe it's near New Jersey." The agent laughed at my confusion and said, "We sell tickets to Union City, New Jersey. That's where you

want to send this guy. Lots of Latins there. It's adjacent to West New York and just across the Hudson river from Manhattan."

Given its tight focus on the understudied community of Cuban immigrants and exiles in Union City, New Jersey (arriving both well before and well after the Cuban revolution), as well as its original thematic chapters on community associations, women's work, and the role of the Catholic church in Cuban immigrant adaptation, *The Cubans of Union City* is a valuable work of scholarship that should be read widely by immigration scholars and students for what it can teach us about immigrant groups that do not conform to an easy label or category (immigrant vs. exile, working class vs. professional, white vs. black, men vs. women). As I see it, the work makes a number of significant contributions to our understanding of international migration in general and the Cuban case in particular.

First and most obviously, the work makes public the important, yet understudied story of the Cuban immigrant enclave of Union City, New Jersey. This is important given the fact that most if not all previous studies of Cuban immigration have focused on and generalized from the experience of immigrants and exile in South Florida. Given that the author makes clear that the Union City enclave is demographically unique and has been far less dominant regionally than their émigré brethren in South Florida, the study is all the more important.

Second, the work is important because it traces the history of this enclave over the course of half a century and is done by a scholar who has been a member of the community and a participant in many of its activities. This background is especially strong and evident in the excellent chapters on women and work, the Catholic Church, and exile/political organizations. Far from being a snapshot of the community, it is clear that the book benefits from an ongoing research agenda extending back in time more than 20 years (laid on top of years of residence in the study area).

Third, the work engages some of the most enduring and important issues that all immigrant/ethnic studies have dealt with in the history of immigration scholarship and the study of race and ethnic relations. These include immigrant assimilation, integration, and dispersion; the impact of host country reception on immigrant success; the effect of racial and ethnic identities and organizations on immigrant success; ethnic and exile politics; as well as the relatively understudied areas of gender and work and the role of religion in immigrant incorporation.

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WHITE ETHNICS, RACIALIZED MINORITIES, IMMIGRANTS, OR EXILES?**

The book's strongest chapters are those that deal with gender (Chapter 4, "Women Leave Home for the Factory: Gender, Work, and Family"), religion (Chapter 5, "Saint Augustine Parish and Cuban Adaptation: Religion and Reconciliation"), and Cuban exile politics (Chapter 6, "Exile, Ethnic Identity, and Political Culture"). While some previous work has been done on Cuban women and work in Florida and California (Fernández-Kelly and García 1990), this new study extends that previous work by looking more intently at a single community over a longer period of time. Moreover, many of the findings in that previous study about "Cuban women accepting patriarchal norms at home" and viewing their "garment-industry jobs as a transitory experience aimed at recovering or attaining middle-class status" (71) are reconfirmed in this study.

To my knowledge little research has been done on the important role of the Catholic Church as a key actor and assimilator in the Cuban exile experience. I know that this is a growing area of immigration research and am glad to see it referenced in this book. The author's research into how the Union City Cuban Catholic community evolved over time, especially politically and demographically, is quite fascinating. I was especially struck at how the Church attempted to play a mediator and pro-reconciliation role during the historic episode of Pope John Paul II's controversial visit to Cuba in 1998 and was impressed with Prieto's discussion of the history of the criticisms from the exile community toward Cuba's Catholic hierarchy and the changes in community thinking about relations with the island brought about by the Pope's visit there twelve years ago. At the same time, I would have liked to see a bit more data and description on the impact of the fact that many of the newest generation of Cuban immigrants are either non-religious or practice Afro-Cuban religions and that these two factors may be a factor in the lowered importance of the Church today in the lives of New Jersey's Cubans.

While there is a lot of other work available on Cuban-American political culture, little of it is focused on the Union City area despite the fact that the area has had an oversized importance—especially in terms of some of the activities of the more violent anti-Castro groups. However, while this chapter was strong and detailed, I was left wanting more information on the relation between ethnicity (Cubanness) and race/racial diversity among Cubans. There is some mention of this in the book's final chapter, but I had thought that Union City was special in part because it has traditionally had a much higher proportion of

Afro-Cubans than Miami. Still, in the book's final chapter, "Union City Cubans and Community Change: Some Theoretical Considerations," the author does directly address a number of larger issues including integration vs. assimilation and race and ethnicity, showing how the Cuban community of Union City has been especially unique from either the white ethnic norm or the typical Caribbean/Latino pattern of immigrant adaptation.

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BOOK REVIEW

Michael Peter Smith and Matt Bakker, *Citizenship Across Borders: The Political Transnationalism of El Migrante*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2008.

México y los Estados Unidos: “De un pájaro las dos alas”

José E. Cruz

Seven years in the making, *Citizenship Across Borders*, is a theoretically dense, jargon-ridden, but provocative, intellectually ambitious, methodologically rigorous, and rewarding exercise in transnational ethnography. The book successfully tackles a number of serious questions about the consequences of fluid borders for political obligation, political participation, and community development.

In eight chapters, the authors situate their research within the literature on nationalism, postnationalism, and transnationalism; determine the place of Mexican migrants in the discursive practices of the neoliberal Mexican state, locate the coordinates of community development politics, showing its translocal and global positionings; and describe the transnational politics of Mexican migrants in Mexico as well as US localities. They show how instead of making migrants less politically accountable to their countries of origin, or less capable of cementing political ties with the receiving society, fluid borders allow for extensive and active political engagement by Mexican migrants both in Mexico and the United States. Rather than being politically unmoored in the United States and doubly loyal to Mexico, Mexican transnational political actors are active in US society and loyal to both countries. Their dual allegiance may be conditional and contingent, but it is no less real for being so. More importantly, the fact that the social and political capital accumulated in one country is transferrable to the other makes the duality of transnational citizenship an asset rather than a liability.

While this book provides sufficient empirical evidence to support its benign assessment of political participation across borders, it also reveals three key limitations of the transnational political practices it documents. First, the political engagement of migrants back home has contributed to

the democratization of local politics but it has done little to improve the political status of marginal groups such as women and the poor. Second, while certain “American” features of the identity of migrant political actors contribute to their ability to win political office in Mexico, those features are of limited value once they are embedded in the political culture of Mexican institutions, surrounded by political actors that are unlikely to welcome their “American” style of politics. Third, it is one thing to promote development in the United States and another to do so in Mexico where the political economy context may be rural, neoliberal, and constrained by NAFTA. In this context, the productive investments that could stem the flow of poor migrants across the Mexico-US border are harder to initiate and institutionalize.

Smith and Bakker find that while the state has played a key role in promoting and shaping transnational political behavior, the migrants themselves have also assumed active roles in this process to advance their interests. Even though I wonder why it is still necessary to debunk structural readings of power that render citizens incapable of exercising autonomous political action, I still must note that the authors provide ample demonstration of the ability of their subjects to talk back to, and act back at, power. In this way, they challenge the idea that structural arrangements are timelessly enduring iron cages. Their demonstration highlights the role that political action plays in enabling transnational citizenship, whether action is individual, social, or institutional. We may think that unchanging political borders would keep political action encircled within the formal jurisdictions of nation-states. Alternatively, we may think that fluid socioeconomic boundaries would make political transnationalism automatic. In effect, political transnationalism is neither impossible nor automatic. Instead, it does happen but it must be *sponsored*, which means that only political agents—citizens, the state, or both—can make it happen. Granted, the agents in Smith and Bakker’s analysis are only a handful of elites, but these are not ordinary elites; some embody the archetypal rags to riches story and all are embedded in dense institutional and community networks within the civil and political society.

I found the one reference to Puerto Rico in the book interesting. Decrying the phenomenon of migration, one informant shudders at the prospect posed by the continuous drain of Mexican human capital. “[T]he time will come,” he says, “when we’re like Puerto Rico. Damn! [Laughs] A commonwealth of the United States!” (95). Earth to informant: the time has already come! Mexico is not Puerto Rico, but

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when it comes to migration and transnational politics, it certainly looks a lot like the island. When I read the following sentence in Chapter 1 of the book: “Rather than being *doubly loyal* to their nation of origin, the politically engaged migrants we have studied express a kind of dual allegiance to both countries that is conditional and contingent” (13), I wrote this note on the page margin: “just like Puerto Ricans for over 50 years now.” The authors may think they have uncovered a brand new phenomenon but they have not. The case of Puerto Rican transnational politics is quite old and it shares most of the features described by Smith and Bakker, except that it has taken place in the context of a colonial relationship; that may be the reason why it did not appear on Smith and Bakker’s radar screen.

In the concluding chapter, the authors cite Clifford Geertz saying that the way to understand social relations is by looking at “the most local of local detail and the most global of global structure in such a way as to bring them into simultaneous view” (184). If the citation sought legitimation for their methodological approach, it was unnecessary; if it was intended to specify their methodological compass, it was appropriate. Even though Geertz’s prescription is ultimately impossible to fulfill, Smith and Bakker’s treatment of the relationship between local and global conditions and their analysis of the interrelationship between the historical, political-economic, cultural, and institutional context of their ethnography is masterful. This book is a significant contribution to the contemporary debate over national identity and political obligation, and it also illuminates and enriches discussions about transnationalism, citizenship, and community development.

With undergraduate students increasingly being less and less capable of processing material above the level of a graphic novel, I would be hard pressed to use this book in anything other than a graduate seminar on globalization and politics. This may be more a reflection of my own teaching experience than a general prescription. Perhaps in an honors undergraduate course it would work. As far as scholars of transnationalism, globalization, and community politics is concerned, *Citizenship Across Borders* is obligatory reading.

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BOOK REVIEW

Lawrence La Fountain-Stokes, *Queer Ricans: Cultures and Sexualities in the Diaspora*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009.

PRQS 101: Introduction to Puerto Rican Queer Studies

Enrique Morales-Díaz

As part of the *Cultural Studies of the Americas* series, Lawrence La Fountain-Stokes' *Queer Ricans* adds to the growing scholarship on homosexuality in the Puerto Rican diaspora. Better yet, it adds another voice and perspective to what he calls "Puerto Rican queer studies" (xiv). Other works that focus on US Puerto Rican experiences have traditionally overlooked, for whatever reason, the importance of the queer contributions to life in this country. La Fountain-Stokes' study centers on the ways that Puerto Rican cultural producers examine their experiences in the United States as both Puerto Ricans and queers. Of particular interest is his analysis of a number of literary genres and performances as a way to illustrate the vast and growing contributions made by homosexuals to the experiences of the DiaspoRican communities.

La Fountain-Stokes analyzes the work of writers, performers, and artists in the United States who are also located beyond the New York City borders, but by the last chapter comes back full circle to focus on the possibilities of continued community building in Nuyorico. The author examines the cultural productions of representative members of the various communities—"Puerto Rican, Nuyorican, Chicago Rican, Philly Rican, CaliRican, and DiaspoRican" (x). More importantly, the works he analyzes are based on the artists' lived experiences with discrimination that have led them to produce works that call for resistance to : imposed heteronormative identities and behaviors. In fact, it can be argued that contemporary US Puerto Rican queer writers, artists, and performers have opted to face the pressures imposed by the mainstream they are a part of, including mainstream Puerto Rican society on the island and in the diaspora, in order to re-appropriate a sense of who they are devoid of any labeling other than the one they choose. As La Fountain-Stokes writes, "...the homophobic views [of]

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the diasporic Puerto Rican community (...) does not differ much from island views, as well as to generalized homophobia in mainstream American society” (66).

It is important to note that when references are made to LGBTQ individuals, particularly on the island, much of what is said is based on criticism about supposed choices and behaviors. Puerto Rican homosexual deviation from the norm places a stigma on these individuals. But as La Fountain-Stokes writes, these criticisms and stigmas tend to be a form of hypocrisy as “...there can be no *macho* if there is no *loca* or *maricón*” (1). However, such stigmas have led to a vast number of Queer migrations, or “sexiles,” to the United States.

Queer Ricans is organized into five chapters. Structured as a historical and chronological study of queer Puerto Rican migrations, the author focuses on the genesis of relocation for a vast number of people who have moved to the United States or who were born in this country, whose lives have been shaped by their ethno-sexual identity and the prevailing social and cultural prejudices against their sexualities. For example, in the first chapter (The Persecution of Difference) the author focuses on an analysis of Luis Rafael Sánchez’s “¡Jum!” as an example of some of the conditions queer Puerto Ricans confront on the island. Although the author states at the end of the chapter that by beginning his analysis with this particular story there is a risk of drawing generalizations about Puerto Rican culture’s intolerance of homosexuality, it provides a compelling example, since the protagonist’s attempt to leave his neighborhood is a reflection of the period and of the persistent discrimination against “deviant” sexual behavior.

The next chapter (Autobiographical Writing and Shifting Migrant Experience) focuses primarily on the analysis of Manuel Ramos Otero’s life and works. In this chapter La Fountain-Stokes begins by stating that, “For some gay men, Puerto Rico is (or has been, at specific historical moments) a space of impossibility, frustration, and fear, a situation that has led to migration, especially to New York” (19). This statement sets the stage for an in-depth examination of Ramos Otero’s literary trajectory in the United States by dividing the chapter into stages, each focusing on the ways his literary oeuvre developed and evolved based on his exilic and “sexilic” experiences. He writes, “By reading Ramos Otero’s production in chronological sequence, as a temporal progression (...) we are able to see a distinct development and change in perceptions and relationship to Puerto Rico and the United States” (62-63).

In the third chapter (Women's Bodies, Lesbians Passions), La Fountain-Stokes focuses on an analysis of Luz María Umpierre's poetry almost as a parallel to the previous chapter on Ramos Otero. He includes a series of facts about each artist as a way to demonstrate the significant connections experienced by both gay and lesbian Puerto Ricans that migrate to the United States. Moreover, although gay Puerto Ricans are often overlooked in scholarship about the various diasporic communities, studying the migratory experiences of a Puerto Rican lesbian woman or the contributions of lesbian Puerto Ricans to those communities seems to be largely invisible. As the author writes in the introduction to this chapter, "At times lesbian women have found Puerto Rico to be a place of intolerance or of limited opportunities and have migrated elsewhere as a form of liberation and escape" (64). He focuses this important analysis of Umpierre's work on three specific stages "of migratory/lesbian experience," "...the shock of migration is initially felt and articulated through issues of language prestige (...) culture shock (...) and an acute awareness of class difference and the differential treatment that results from elitist, anti-working-class prejudice..." (71). In *Queer Ricans* the author does a thorough analysis of Umpierre's trajectory until the moment in which she declares her lesbianism within the confines of the heteronormative and patriarchal societies she "belongs" to.

La Fountain-Stokes does a great job interweaving the various chapters and making important connections between the writers and artists whose work he analyzes. For example, in the fourth chapter (Visual Happenings, Queer Imaginings), the author switches his focus primarily to visual representations of the queer Puerto Rican diasporic experiences and analyzes the works of Frances Negrón-Muntaner, Rose Troche, and Erika López. All three artists "work in the visual medium" (93); nonetheless, each of them focuses on different experiences based on their relationship with and time in the United States. He closely ties Negrón-Muntaner's and Umpierre's experiences as "first-generation, adult migrants who maintain(ed) very strong ties to their place of birth, but who also simultaneously develop(ed) new allegiances and attachments to their new homes" (94). However, as second-generation migrants, Troche's and López's work will emphasize more connections to the United States because they were born and raised in this country. Their ties to Puerto Rico, particularly in terms of political activism, differ from those manifested in the works of Ramos Otero, Umpierre, or Negrón-Muntaner. In order to show these differences and underscore

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the importance of all of their visual work that captures the many experiences of queer Puerto Rican women, LaFountain-Stokes provides an in-depth analysis of Negrón-Muntaner's groundbreaking film *Brincando el charco: Portrait of a Puerto Rican* (1994), Troche's film *Go Fish* (1994), and López's work as a "writer, cartoonist and performance artist" (123). La Fountain-Stokes adds that her work "is characterized by her innovative approach to gender and sexuality (defending bisexuality, for example), her engagement with third-wave feminism, and her reassessment of ethnic and racial identities in the United States" (123).

Lastly, in the fifth chapter (Nuyorico and the Utopias of the Everyday), the author continues his focus on visual mediums, specifically the performance artists Arthur Avilés and Elizabeth Marrero. He provides a thorough, insightful, and enlightening analysis of some of the works performed by these two artists, specifically *Arturella* and *Maeva de Oz*. These performances, among others, are a "radical departure from traditional modern dance, an elite form performed for select groups, and becomes a popular theatrical or performance modality, whose aspirations are to critically present and reflect on the reality of Nuyoricans and New York-Ricans, and gay and lesbian ones specifically" (168).

Another important point of this last chapter is that it is not a conclusion to La Fountain-Stokes' analysis of artistic representations of queer Puerto Rican migrant experiences. Instead, this last chapter is open-ended in delineating the course of giving creative expression to the experiences of queer Puerto Rican migrants—whether they are first, second, or third generation—by characterizing it as an ongoing process. It is implied that up and coming writers and visual/performance artists have a lot more to say about their lives in the United States. This is made obvious by the author when he discusses the idea of a Nuyorico, which he describes as "a space of liberation, tolerance, and social justice.... A concept, in other words, that still has room and a pressing need for political growth, but that offers a vision of possibility (...) a space of cultural contention, of community building, and of friendships..." (132-133).

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BOOK REVIEW

Isabelle Vagnoux, *Los hispanos en Estados Unidos*. Traducción de Josefina Anaya. México, Editorial Jus, 2009.

¿Qué saben de los latinos?

Efraín Barradas

Por décadas la editorial de las universidades de Francia, conocida por sus siglas en francés, PUF, ha publicado una serie de gran popularidad y utilidad llamada “Que sais-je?” (¿Qué sé?). La serie la componen breves textos de temas variadísimos—de los albigenses a Zola, de la microeconomía a lo macrobiótico—que intentan servir de introducción sencilla pero erudita a un campo. Por ello el subtítulo de la colección es “Le savoir vite”, el saber rápido. Nos enfrentamos, pues, a una proto-Wikipidea, confiable y en papel. Pero, a pesar de la brevedad de sus textos, algunos de ellos se han convertido en piezas imprescindibles para cualquier estudioso que se interese por los temas estudiados.

En el 2000 apareció en esta importante serie un libro de Isabelle Vagnoux titulado *Les hispaniques aux Etat Unis* y una traducción del mismo apareció recientemente en México. Por casualidad ésta cayó en mis manos y la compré de inmediato llevado por el interés de ver qué saben sobre los latinos los intelectuales franceses. Mi objetivo estaba anclado en dos premisas: primera, que el libro era representativo de una visión europea o, al menos, francesa de la realidad que trataba de estudiar, lo que es una presuposición; segunda, que hay intelectuales europeos que han contribuido al estudio de esa realidad, lo que es un hecho comprobable. Los nombres de Wolfgang Binder, de Antonia Domínguez Miguela, de Rita de Maeseneer y de Aitor Ibarrola, entre muchos otros, son prueba de ese interés, al menos para el campo de las letras. Intrigado, pues, por esa pregunta que enmarca toda la colección —¿Qué sé?—me acerqué a este libro para ver qué saben los franceses sobre los latinos en los Estados Unidos.

Como todos los libros de esta serie, el de Vagnoux tiene un marcado objetivo didáctico. Por ello va de un amplio marco histórico del pasado más distante (capítulo 1), a la historia más reciente de los latinos (capítulo 2), a la presentación del estado actual de éstos y su producción cultural (capítulo 3) a la presentación de los problemas centrales a los

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que se enfrentan (capítulo 4). El libro termina con una bibliografía que no sólo declara cuáles fueron las fuentes que empleó la autora en la elaboración de su libro sino que debe servir de guía a los lectores interesados en saber más sobre el tema. En términos generales, la estructura del libro demuestra la finalidad didáctica de la colección. Pero, por desgracia, ese formato tan claro y accesible no está sustentado siempre por datos que lo apoyen y lo validen. Pero el problema central del libro, más allá de esos datos erróneos, es el desbalance de la información que se nos presenta. El texto ofrece una imagen un tanto distorsionada de los latinos en los Estados Unidos. Pero vale la pena acercarse a éste con mayor atención porque, aun por esa imagen algo errada y deforme, podemos entender cómo ve esta investigadora francesa a los latinos y el por qué de su visión. Recordemos que el libro tiene como finalidad orientar a sus compatriotas y, al así hacerlo, crear una visión francesa del tema. Al menos, eso es lo que la aparición de éste en tan prestigiosa colección presupone para muchos lectores, al menos para mí.

Como ya he apuntado, el principal problema de este libro es que Vagnoux, politóloga que se ha interesado en otros textos suyos en las relaciones entre los Estados Unidos y México, carga la mano hacia la problemática de los chicanos y, al hacerlo, no ofrece un balance en su visión de los latinos. Hay que reconocer que el concepto mismo de lo latino o de la latinidad—la autora favorece el término hispano—es nuevo y que, en verdad, no define una realidad social y cultural que se haya delimitado de manera estable y concreta. Estamos creando ese término y la realidad que define según los estudiamos. Aunque Vagnoux es consciente de ello, por momentos parece olvidar esta peculiar situación. Hay que recordar que hasta hay quien que ha postulado que el concepto de latino es el producto de estrategias de mercadotecnia y no una realidad histórica concreta. Es por ello que en el momento se nos hace tan difícil estudiar este amplio concepto y, por ello mismo, es mucho más fácil estudiar a los grupos que lo componen. Este, por ejemplo, es el acercamiento de Juan González en su historia de los latinos, *Harvest of Empire* (2000), libro que apareció el mismo año que el de Vagnoux y que no queda superado por éste.

Vagnoux intenta crear una imagen de los latinos acercándose a los tres principales grupos que lo componen: chicanos, cubanos y puertorriqueños. Es evidente que el primero de estos tiene una larga tradición cultural y una fuerte presencia histórica en el territorio que hoy llamamos los Estados Unidos. La autora las estudia con detenimiento,

pero la atención especial que les dedica a los chicanos parece que la lleva a no considerar justamente a los cubanos y puertorriqueños que también contribuyen a la historia de los latinos. Por ejemplo, aunque de paso menciona a Bernardo Vega y a Jesús Colón, la importante presencia de los tabaqueros cubanos y boricuas en la costa este de los Estados Unidos desde principios del siglo XIX no forma parte integral de esa historia de los latinos que propone en su libro. Por ello, José Martí y Arturo Schomburg, por ejemplo, no aparecen en sus páginas. Una investigación más detallada de fuentes secundarias que han explorado el tema de forma sistemática le hubiera servido a la autora para matizar mejor la historia de los latinos que nos ofrece. Por ejemplo, Vagnoux ignora textos fundamentales para el pleno conocimiento de la historia de los latinos, como los de Virginia Sánchez Korrol y Louis A. Pérez, Jr. Quizás esa falla sea producto de la dificultad de estudiar el tema desde Francia. ¿Será igualmente de difícil estudiar la realidad de los latinos desde otros países europeos? Muchas otras preguntas paralelas suscita este libro de manera indirecta: ¿No podremos emplear las herramientas que hemos desarrollado para estudiar a los latinos en el estudio de los emigrantes en muchos de esos países? ¿Podremos llamar latinos a los latinoamericanos en Europa, especialmente los que viven en España? Parte del valor de este libro son preguntas como éstas que, sin así proponérselo la autora, su lectura nos provoca.

Además que por el desbalance, este libro queda deformado por errores que muy probablemente son el resultado del interés de la autora por ofrecer un cuadro amplio de la cultura y la historia de los latinos sin consultar la bibliografía secundaria necesaria. Por ejemplo, por su interés en apuntar una imagen religiosa paralela entre los puertorriqueños a la Virgen de Guadalupe entre los chicanos y la Virgen de la Caridad del Cobre entre los cubanos, menciona a la Virgen de la Providencia, figura que no cumple para los boricuas la misma función que las otras para esos dos grupos. Peor aún, la breve sección del libro dedicada a la cultura está llena de serios vacíos. Por ejemplo, en un breve párrafo sobre las artes visuales sólo menciona el impacto de los muralistas mexicanos en los artistas chicanos, pero no ofrece un solo nombre que sirva para demostrar los logros y la importancia de esta expresión cultural entre los latinos. Más grave aun es que nunca se hace referencia a la salsa, posiblemente la contribución más importante de los latinos en el campo de la música. A veces las imágenes que se ofrece de la realidad cultural puede ser ofensiva, como lo es tildar de “pagana” a la santería. Los ejemplos de fallas y errores son múltiples y, muy probablemente, sean

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en la mayoría de los casos resultado de la brevedad del libro y, sobre todo, de la dificultad de investigar el tema desde Europa.

Pero recordemos que fue enterarnos del carácter de esa tarea—la investigación de los latinos desde Francia—lo que me llevó en primer lugar a la lectura del libro de Vagnoux. Si éste es representativo del estado de los estudios del campo desde ese país, podemos decir que allá como acá, en los Estados Unidos, nos enfrentamos al mismo problema: cómo crear un todo homogéneo, coherente y balanceado cuando nos enfrentamos a una realidad que vamos descubriendo y vamos inventado poco a poco y a partir de solo partes de la misma. No podemos dejar de pensar que lo que estudiamos está en pleno proceso de formación, que no tenemos todas las piezas para crear esa totalidad que llamamos la historia de los latinos y que, por ello mismo, nuestros prejuicios y preferencias se reflejan marcadamente en la imagen que vamos componiendo de eso que llamamos los latinos. No cabe duda que es más fácil estudiar el tema desde los Estados Unidos mismos. Pero, curiosa y paradójicamente, tanto el investigador de acá como la investigadora de allá se enfrentan a un mismo y grave problema: crear la misma realidad que se estudia. Por ello mismo y a pesar de sus fallas, el libro de Isabelle Vagnoux es una contribución al campo. No cabe duda que los lentes franceses distorsionan la visión de los latinos, pero también la enriquecen.

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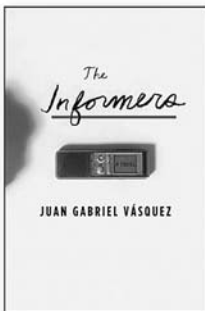
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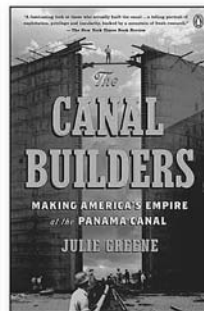
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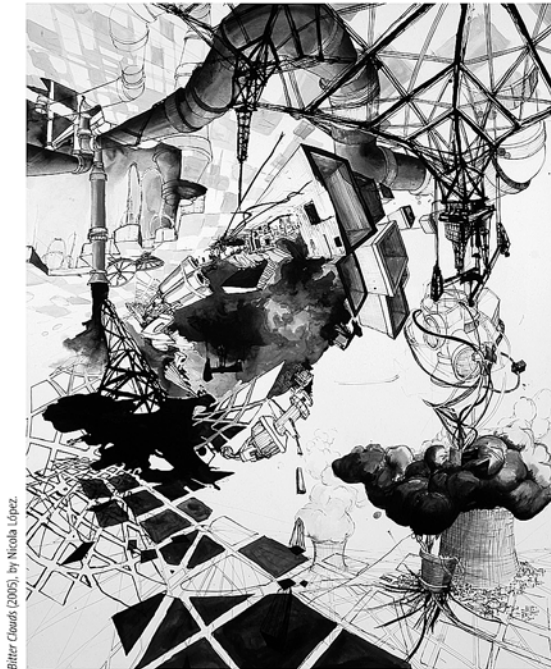
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