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Transnational Mothering Arrangements: Moving Beyond Survival Politics

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Abstract

The unequal distribution of domestic labor is one of the predominant reasons that Western working mothers have had to seek domestic care outside their family unit resulting in the commodification of childcare and domestic work. In this new mothering paradigm, a dynamic market of transnational mothers has been created to meet the demands of a new gendered class, in which mothers are all uniquely connected to each other in the raising of their children. In this essay, I examine discourse from literature on immigration and transnational constructions of family, motherhood, and women's localized workplace and historical space in Los Angeles, California. I employ Feminist Third World Theory and Global Systems theory to a "localized" case study in the examination of how working Latina mothers maintain, resist, and challenge their socio-economic position in a transnational globalized work force.

Keywords: transnational mothers, feminization of migration, female poverty, Latina domestic labor, gender, globalization, immigration, underground economy, neoliberal capitalism, California, domestic workers coalition

1. Introduction

To begin, I recognize that as a professional woman I have reaped the benefits of Second Wave Western Feminism and have been afforded tremendous educational and socio-political and economic opportunities-opportunities not available to my maternal ancestors. At the same time, I questioned whether Second Wave Feminism causes/caused me more stress, anxiety, and "anger" than "liberation" and "emancipation," leading to what I believed and believe to be "my" economic enslavement. Patricia Meyer Spacks (1976) points out that this type of anger I feel is "everywhere in women writing about their own condition" (19, p. 30). While I thoroughly embrace my anger as a rhetorical form of social activism likening it to Spack's "rhetorical weapon," I do hope to merge Simone Beauvoir's data and logic to challenge the existing global patriarchal paradigm.

As a self-proclaimed *reluctant* professional laborer, I am interested in the interconnected relationships of global working mothers that have arisen because of the Feminist Movement and the forces of a globalized economy. Women across the globe have joined together to work, create, and write counter-hegemonies to challenge previous patriarchal neoliberal structures. Hester Eisenstein's (2004) *Feminism Seduced*, (11) and Chandra Talpade Mohanty's (2003) *Feminism Without Borders* (15) contend that contemporary women and Third World Feminists (albeit, situated at the different historical contexts and places) share similar ideological concerns. Torry Dickinson and Robert Schaeffer's (2015) *Transformations: Feminist Pathways to Global Change* (9), Carolina Bank Munoz's *Transnational Tortillas* (16), and Barbara Ehrenreich and Arlie Russel Hochschild's (2004) *Global Woman* (10) address "our" common concerns of injustice from diverse racial and ethnic perspectives; yet, they acknowledge the hierarchical gendered positions of power and powerlessness. Some of these

compelling discourses recognize that women from both the Global North and South are pawns in a globalized economy that privileges men over women. Read together, they join a discursive alliance that recognizes the social structures that maintain female poverty and political subordination and presents new insights into how women of the world have worked shoulder to shoulder to bring about positive social good for themselves, their children, and their community.

In this essay, I engage and examine discourse from literature on immigration and transnational constructions of family, motherhood, and women's localized workplace and historical space in Los Angeles, California. I employ Feminist Third World Theory and Global Systems theory to a "localized" case study in the examination of how working Latina mothers maintain, resist, and challenge their socio-economic position in the transnational globalized work force. Foregrounding strategic locations and positioning, I further examine the socio-political and domestic struggle of Latina mothers recognizing their dislocations from their families and native homelands and their enactment of political and social agency based on what Mohanty refers to as "the systematic aspects of social location and experience" (15, p. 162). Synthesizing applied anthropology and Third World Feminist theories, I hope to provide a praxis for understanding the dynamic relationship between professional Los Angeles mothers and Latina working mothers from Mexico and Central America, and the "different" needs, ideologies, and choices that separate them as well as the "common" interests and contradictions that bring them together in what Mohanty describes as a "non-colonizing feminist solidarity across borders" (15, p. 224). The interconnectivity of these relationships suggests the relative permeability of maternal bonds and family borders within the often-impermeable geography of border-states and borderlands. My

research and analysis focuses on both sides of the migration experience by closely examining the daily working relationship in terms of differences and “particularities.” Looking into the ideological gendered context between Los Angeles Westside professional mothers and Latina transnational mothers provides greater understanding of the “commonalities” in the contemporary transnational work force—a work force fueled by ideologies of neoliberal capitalism and hyper-globalization.

2. Methodology

Historicizing context, acknowledging differences of definition and self-definition, and recognizing past anthropological studies that have objectified third world women as inert victims of globalization are crucial methodological concerns in building transnational social activism beyond borders. Employing a qualitative research methodology, I interviewed 50 Mexican nannies in the West Los Angeles Area of Southern California. The survey was conducted solely in Spanish between 2013 and 2019. The data was then uploaded in *AtlasTi*. The questions focused on four main components:

- Wages and work hours.
- Access to health Care.
- Working arrangements.
- Benefits.

The summary findings are consistent with other studies suggesting that the domestic childcare industry is developed in such a way that increases the potential for inequitable conditions and working relationships that favor the employer to the detriment of the physical, social, and economic conditions of their employees—employees who, by the way, take care of their children.

- 78 percent of workers were paid below the minimum wage.
- 80 percent were paid below \$14 an hour.
- 95 percent of domestic care workers do not receive benefits from their employers.
- 93 percent of Employees do not pay into Social Security.
- 80 percent of domestic care workers do not have health insurance.
- 75 percent of domestic care workers reported working long hours without breaks.
- 90 percent of domestic care workers do not have a written contract.
- 85 percent of domestic care workers are paid in cash.

The extensive nature of Latina childcare work correlates to a rising Southern California “underground economy” where exploitation and mistreatment of women is sadly commonplace. Because most childcare employers pay their help in cash “under the table,” there are no regulations, no labor law regulations that can protect employees from mistreatment, abuse, or unfair wages. Because the workers are deemed socially invisible, so is their social security, government labor law protections, health insurance, and any and all other benefits. In addition to surveying the group of nannies, I also followed one Latina Nanny and her family over the course of 10 years (from 2009 to 2019) in order to truly understand the lived experience of one individual over spatial time.

3. Female pawns North and South

Before I examine the relationship between the relationships between mothers from the Global North and South, it is important to understand the complex causes that initiate the arrangement. What propels working mothers from Los Angeles to hire working mothers from Mexico in the first place? On a personal level, I have struggled with this question. I know that as a professional working mother, I’ve had to subordinate my career to that of my husband’s. It was never a matter of discussion; as I, was/am the maternal link in the domestic chain of care and duties. It is, therefore, not a surprise to find the US 2018 *Bureau of Labor Statistics* corroborate my personal lived experience. Their findings confirm that working mothers spend 15 percent more time doing household chores, childcare and overall household management than their working male counterparts (21). After putting in a full time shift at their “paid employment,” both men and women come home to a second shift of domestic duties. Women, however, spend considerably more time than men performing domestic chores and childcare around the house than men. It is this imbalance of domestic responsibilities and duties that drives mothers to hire additional domestic help.

Table 1: Demographics Working Caregivers in Los Angeles (17)

Domestic work	Men	Women
Household work	20%	49%
Meal Preparation	45.9%	69.5%
Physical Childcare	1.32%	2.87%

4. Transnational Motherhood

According to Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila (1997) transnational motherhood “occurs when families are spread literally across national borders with parents in one country and the children in another country” (15). Mexican mothers who migrate to Los Angeles to work as caregivers or housekeepers while their children remain in their homeland have created a new transnational motherhood – a fluid structural arrangements of motherhood. These motherhood/child relationships extend beyond borders and exist in many parts of the world; yet, for the purpose of this discussion, the examination is the occurrence between Guerrero, Mexico and Southern California. Because of poverty and the inability to feed their children, many mothers leave their children with relatives and friends while they migrate to the United States to earn money to send back home to their children. According to statistics compiled by Professor Pierette Hondagneu-Sotelo at USC, “25% of housekeepers and 83% of live-in-nannies have children still in their country of origin” (15). According to the Pew Hispanic Center’s statistics on nativity, “women between the ages of 15 to 44 (ages chosen because they cover the typical motherhood years) account for 28.5% of the illegal immigration allows for the effect of transnational motherhood to be extensive” (18). While Pierette Hondagneu-Sotelo identifies the parenting children across countries as “Transnational Motherhood,” I will go a step further to argue that transnational motherhood must include all domestic care relationships of women from the Global South who care and assume the role of domestic caregivers to children of the Global North. Examining the complex socio-economic and political ties of transnational mothers beyond mere identity politics is an important step in subverting and challenging

neoliberal paradigms that benefit only the rich. It is “estimated that 60 million women from poorer countries are recruited into care-work for employment in wealthier nations every year,” adding to the widening gap between the rich and the poor (10). Myriad socio-economic, political, and personal forces are involved in the production and maintenance of transnational motherhood. Barbara Ehrenreich and Arlie Russel Hochschild observe that ambitious middle class First World mothers depend on Third World mothers in a relationship similar to subservient traditional arrangements between the sexes (10). In this arrangement, both women from the Global North and South are pawns in this global game of economic chess. Women from the South are bit players in a patriarchal transnational globalized economy, which has perpetrated the feminization of migration. The commodification of domestic care-giving and maternal love have wreaked havoc on global children resulting in the exploitation of women and mothers across the globe. Ehrenreich and Hochschild are correct in their Western assertion that the “personal is global.”

Interconnectivity brought about by technical advances and the processes of globalization have fueled an unprecedented increase in female migration patterns from “poor countries to rich ones, where they (women) serve as nannies, maids, and sometimes sex workers” (10, p. 3). The contemporary global market has not only impacted gendered relations and family dynamics, but also saddled mothers across the globe with increasing cultural and socio-economic burdens. Western professional women trying to earn a living in the competitive market place have turned over the care of their children and elderly parents to transnational mothers, which many feminist scholars consider to be the brown female underbelly of economic globalization. In this First World/Third world arrangement, millions of women from the South migrate to perform “women’s work of the north—work that affluent women are no longer able or willing to do” (10, p. 3). Ehrenreich and Hochschild observe that Third World women migrants achieve their social agency “only by assuming the cast-off domestic roles of middle and high income women in the First World” (10, p. 3). Comparing the care of Third World nannies to commodity fetishism, Ehrenreich and Hochschild argue that, “the nanny’s love is a thing in itself. It is unique, private–fetishized” (10, p. 26). Evoking images of Imperialism and “the notion of extracting resources from the Third World,” rather than “gold, ivory and rubber,” love has emerged as the new commodity-“the new gold” (10, p. 26). According to this argument, the result of this commodification of Third World female labor, results in Latino children “paying the price” of their absence. The argument is that “migration creates not a white man’s burden, but through a series of invisible links, a dark child’s burden” (10, p. 27). As noted previously, Latina women make up the large percentage of the childcare workforce in Southern California. What is also important to note is that while Latina women make up a greater percentage of the workforce, their wages are lower than their ethnic counterparts. The higher percentage of Latina caregivers also holds true for Los Angeles with Latinas making up 38.6 of caregivers compared to their ethnic counterparts.

Table 2: Demographics Working Caregivers in Los Angeles (17)

Latina	38.6
White	35.1
African American	11.5
Asian/Pacific Islander	14.8

While Latinas make up a higher percentage of the childcare workforce, they earn \$4.14 less than black nannies, \$3.98 less money an hour than white nannies, and \$2.54 than Asian nannies. These findings suggest that race and immigration status interact together to influence employment and salary rates, generating considerable economic disparities for undocumented Latinas.

Figure 1: Wage Earnings (17)

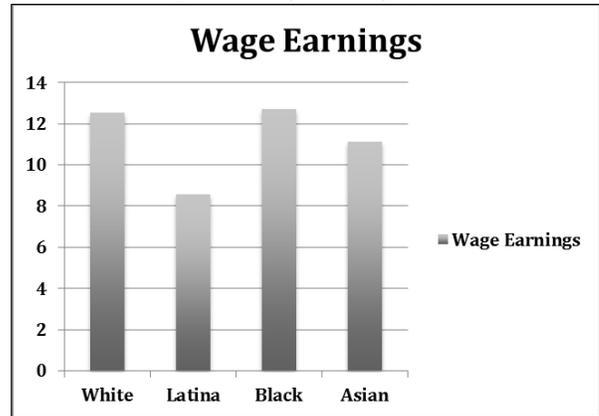


Table 3: National Domestic Workers Survey.

Citizenship	
US Citizen	\$12.51
US-Born	\$12.56
Foreign-Born	\$12.25
Documented Immigrant	\$10.00
Undocumented Immigrant	\$9.86

In *Female Well-Being*, Bilson, Mancini and Fleur-Lobban (2005) substantiate Ehrenreich and Hochschild’s findings that mothers who migrate “do so at great personal cost, leaving their families to other, even poorer care-givers as they leave to serve the wealthy in other countries” (4, p. 397). The children left behind in the home countries are left in the care of relatives left behind. Using hyperbolic language to make their point, Bilson and Fleur-Lobban argue that Western Women have “abdicated their role of homemaker” and Third World mothers must now fill in the gap of neglect by doing “women’s work for them, and by so doing create a “care drain” in their own countries” (4, p. 397). In this global chain of childcare, 82 percent of nannies based in Los Angeles have left their own children behind (21). Attached to the transnational mother/caregiver are social and cultural prescriptions of ideals of motherhood. In “I’m Here, but I’m There: The Meanings of Latina Transnational Motherhood,” Hondaneu-Sotelo and Avila (1997) observe that, “this ideal is disseminated through cultural institutions of industrialization and urbanization as well as from rural preindustrial peasant arrangements that allow for women to work while tending to their children” (14, p. 551). Cultural symbols also diffuse through social structures and influence hegemonic construction

of maternal femininity and veneration of motherhood. One such cultural symbol is the Virgin Mary and its transnational prescription of idealized constructions of motherhood, which has had profound influence on motherhood norms in both the First and Third World family units. Idealized constructs, however, are not immune from the globalized market and do not necessarily determine women's behavior. Women North and South must work and earn money to survive. And on this brave odyssey of Southern migration there are indeed negative repercussions for the children left behind in their native homeland.

5. Another Perspective

Ehrenreich and Hochschild concede in *Global Woman* that some aspects of their analysis of transnational mothering are based on generalizations and oversimplification; nonetheless, they posit that earlier phases of imperialism exacted resources from the South, but in today's market the extraction and exploitation "is something harder to measure and quantify, something that can look very much like love" (10 p.4). In further hyperbolic observations of the First/Third world relationship, Ehrenreich and Hochschild argue that "it is as if the wealthy parts of the world **are** running short on precious emotional and sexual resources and have had to turn to poorer regions for fresh supplies" (10. p. 5). Chavez, Hubbell, Mishra, and Valdez (1997) observe through their research of undocumented domestic workers in Orange County that the contributions of immigrants to the economy has had a positive impact across social sectors (6). Other feminist theorists argue that transnational motherhood has been likened to a historical pattern of servitude and contract labor, which encourages the maximization of profit and productivity. The arrangement is referred to as a coercive legacy because it does not acknowledge family rights and protections. While some Western scholars might argue that migrant women from the Global South realize their success by shouldering the cast off domestic roles of middle class and affluent women of the Global North, my research and observations confirm Chandra Talpade Mohanty's argument that this conclusion robs women from both locations of their respective socio-political agency. My global observations and localized research affirms Mohanty's assertion that these fluid transnational mothering relationships are much more complicated and multi-faceted. A newly interconnected workforce of women has emerged. Global Women have joined together in a new hegemonic interdependent arrangement in which the success of the North/South dyad of Los Angeles Working mothers and Central American mother caregivers are mutually dependent upon each other, creating new constructions of motherhood and socio-economic and cultural existence. Gargi Bhattacharya contends that these newly created "hybrid identities lie in the region between overlapping, intermingled social categories and heterogeneous social spaces, what some feminists describe as 'borderlands'" (3, p. 2). Numerous studies show that as American women entered the workforce, their male counterparts did little to contribute to domestic responsibilities. This unequal distribution of domestic labor is one of the predominant reasons that Western working mothers have had to seek domestic care outside their family unit resulting in the commodification of childcare and domestic work. In this new mothering paradigm, a dynamic market of transnational mothers

had(s) been created to meet the demands of this new gendered class, in which we are all uniquely connected to each other in the raising of our children.

I am one of millions of American women forced to join the work force in order to help offset the cost of the education of five daughters. Intersecting social hierarchies, hybrid identities, and my situated knowledge and experience influences my analytical perspective and socio-political "standpoint." I have employed undocumented transnational Latina mothers to care for my children and so I am intimately familiar with the complicated, heartfelt dynamism of this relationship. Journalist Christa Wichterich (2000) comments, "So long as women earn more from housecleaning and child-minding overseas than from teaching in their homeland, they will tend to set off and leave their own country and children behind" (22, p.4). While this is true, I argue that as long as capitalism and our globalized patriarchal corporate paradigm forces women into the work force, working mothers will need domestic help with family and home care in order to maintain familial unity and cohesion. Put simply, mothers both North and South are pawns of capitalism. Women have entered the work force both "because they have been *asked* to do so and because they *need* to do so to maintain household income levels" (9, p. 13). Further, many feminists scholars observe that "the entry of women into the paid labor force may not substantially improve the economic conditions or social status of women around the world" (9, p.25). In fact, as a result of globalization, women are working harder than ever before "both in settings where they work for wages and in settings—in the home, on the streets, and in the field—where they generate nonwage income for households" (9, p.13). Privileging one mother population over another and making hasty generalizations that Northern mothers abuse Southern mothers in order to reap the benefits of capitalism is not only a biased oversimplification, but ignores the multi-faced complexity of these transnational motherhood alliances. These social North/South relations and "spaces are less discrete and homogenous and less constructed by either/or binaries, and are relatively more homogenous" (9, p. 2).

Hondaneu-Sotelo and Avila refer to the migration of Latina mothers as "fluid entities," which became semiautonomous spheres in their own right, "transcending national borders" (14, p. 544). Indeed, domestic care demand for Latina immigrant women, especially in affluent areas of Southern California has encouraged migration patterns from areas of Mexico and Central America where opportunities for employment are scant or simply do not exist. While Third World feminists may consider this as a free market neoliberal ideology, hunger is not a socially constructed theory; hunger and thirst transcend theory. It is important to note that every day throughout the world, 40,000 children die from hunger and hunger related diseases. To label survival by pedantic theories and hyperbolic abstractions ignores the reality of millions of women and children who die daily from hunger and thirst.

6. Mother Warrior Theory: Moving Beyond Survival Politics

Latina women who leave families in their homeland in search of employment in Southern California are not only active in the process of personal survival, they are also on a journey of affirmatively engaging in and building hybrid constructions of

motherhood. The contemporary processes of globalization and interconnectedness have created the formation of a diasporic community of transnational mothers. Latina caregivers have learned to revolutionize work conditions, which enables them to simultaneously take care of their children while earning a living. Migrating to the U.S. to engage in “invisible employment” as a transnational mother provides for immediate vital income and the furtherance of domestic security. Through active socio-political agency, Latina mothers are involved in transnational political nongovernment organizations and other hometown associations, including local Catholic parishes, Parent-Teacher Associations, and Latino neighborhood counsels. These activities and organizations afford Latina caregivers access to services other wise not available through public sponsored services.

In Hondaneu-Sotelo and Avila’s research of the relationship of Third and First world mothering arrangements, they examine how “immigrant domestic work transformed meanings of motherhood to accommodate spatial and temporal relations” (14, p. 546). Because I am specifically interested in incorporating applied anthropology, theoretical research, and social activism, I have conducted my own current research on this dynamic North/South relationship and child rearing practices, as well as strategies for social political agency.

7. Violent Endings and New Beginnings: Marisol Hernandez Case Study

Marisol, a 38 year-old working mother of two children, migrated from Guerrero, Mexico in 1996 at 23 years of age. (To protect these women, names have been changed.) As a young single mother, she left Guerrero and her two-year old toddler in the care of her mother to escape poverty and find employment. Escaping this troubled social landscape, Marisol hoped to create a better way of life for herself and her daughter than the one she left behind. She also claims to have left an abusive relationship with her boyfriend, Hector five years her senior. In fact, according to recent statistics between one-fourth and one-third of the population of Guerrero, approximately 950,000 *Guereñenses* actually lives in the United States. According to recent Guerrero migration pattern statistics, “73.9% of the municipalities with an indigenous population are unable to provide employment options for their residents especially for the Nahuatl and Mixteco people” (7). Because of Marisol’s struggle to survive, and because migrants like her, have no “alternative, but to leave the state and *buscar empleo* (look for work),” Marisol paid a Coyote \$200 American dollars to get to a McDonalds in San Ysidro, California where her *prima* (cousin) greeted her and picked her up and drove her to a one bedroom studio apartment on Figueroa and Pico in downtown Los Angeles—a household already brimming with eight other extended family members. Marisol was lucky to reach her destination as every day 50-60 *Guereñenses* attempt to cross the border into the United States, usually with a lot more difficulty. Because her *Coyote* was a cousin of her cousin’s boyfriend, she was not charged the standard rate of \$1,500 for taking a person across the border, which in itself causes great financial burden for migrants.

During our conversation at a West Los Angeles community park where at the time she cared for two twin eight year-old boys, Marisol commented that although she works long hours and her

husband whom she married several years ago “doesn’t have many work hours,” she is happy that she left her homeland. She said her children are the reason she is in America and they are both now enrolled in two premiere nationally recognized public schools. Marisol says that her migration was really not a choice at the time. She believes that she was forced to leave her homeland because it had turned into a combat zone in the SEDENA (National Department of Defense) war against drug trafficking. One-sixth of active soldiers assigned to combat drug trafficking in Mexico are stationed in Guerrero, which has had profound effects on young women forcing many like Marisol to escape and find a better life free of rape, poverty, crime, and sexual harassment. In addition to the *tráfico de drogas* (drug traffic), drought conditions made it difficult to grow crops and provide water security for her family. Guerrero produces 60% of the total poppy production in Mexico. According to The Tlachinollan Mountain Center for Human Rights, “communities are driven to the cultivation of opiates by economic necessity, as the prices of other crops (coffee, corn, hibiscus, beans...) have dropped greatly” (8). She narrates how she became “cada vez más alarmado por la falta de suministros de agua adecuados” (increasingly alarmed about the lack of adequate water supplies.) She says that as the rainfall diminished, her family crops withered, which forced the sale of her animals. She also noted that the land and forest cover was disappearing year by year with burning of pastures and the felling of trees to plant illicit crops. My own independent research reveals that there are multiple interacting causes between migration and environmental changes. “Illegal timber extraction, drugs, unemployed youth, arms,” and “the collapse of civil governance,” generate “multi-causal, low-intensity violence” (8). Faced with these conflicting socio-political environmental forces, Marisol chose to migrate to Los Angeles to survive and create a better way of life for her and her daughter.

Sitting under a tree in Los Angeles, California on a windy Tuesday, Fall afternoon, both of us exhausted from working long hours (she as a nanny to three small children and I as an educator of 170 students and mother of five children, we discuss the many obstacles and triumphs on her motherhood journey of survival.

I ask her about her work journey. After her arrival to Los Angeles, she immediately got a job working for \$125 a week as a live in maid and nanny for an architect in West Los Angeles. She not only cared for three young children all under the age of five, but she cooked and cleaned the house. She worked in this location for two years. Over the course of several years, Marisol switched jobs five times, each time for more income and fewer hours, eventually working seven-hour shifts so at night she could attend school to learn English at Santa Monica College. Each week, she sent half of her income home to her mother and daughter in Guerrero. During the first few years in America, she got pregnant by a Guatemalan man. She delivered a baby boy named Miguel and continued to work until she gave birth and then immediately resumed her job as a nanny leaving her baby with her cousin until he was old enough to go into a day care for low-income families in Venice, California. A few years later, in 2001, Marisol married a gardener named Enrique, secured a temporary green card and a valid drivers license. In 2002, Marisol paid a coyote to have her sister bring her daughter Naria

to California. She also bought a Honda Accord and a home adjacent to the 10 Freeway in West Los Angeles. Her current employer, Dr. Calhoun pays her \$2,900 a month including Kaiser health insurance for a five-day 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. workweek. (This is not her real name as Dr. Calhoun was worried about the legal repercussions in the initial hiring of an undocumented worker. She also cancelled our interview citing “professional” reasons.) Dr. Calhoun also paid for and initiated Marisol’s green card status. She does not perceive her employer Dr. Clara Calhoun to subordinate and oppress her. In fact, she uses her doctor’s address so that she can send her children to the same schools that her doctor’s children attend in an affluent neighborhood of Los Angeles. Although I spoke with other nannies who have also benefited from equitable working relationships, I have found this to be an unusual pattern among many of these North/South mother work relationships in this geographic location. When Marisol’s children are finished with school, they walk to Dr. Calhoun’s house to do homework until Marisol is done for the day. “Madres juntos,” Marisol says. (We are mothers together.) Marisol is NOT a victim of this North/South motherhood working relationship. She is not a victim like Mamacita from Cisneros oppressive *House on Mango Street*. Her actions demonstrate a strong, independent woman willing to do what it takes to improve her socio-economic and political standing in Los Angeles. “Yo trabajo y lucho por mi hijos para tener una vida mejor que yo,” Marisol said. (She works hard and fights for her children so they can have a better life than her.) “Mas que una criada,” (More than a maid), she sighs aware of the gendered disadvantages faced by Latina girls who are often trapped in cultural and legal frameworks. Marisol’s personal concerns about gendered disadvantages are widespread throughout Central and Latin America. In August 2011, 150 experts from 20 Latin American countries participated in the UNICEF gathering in Mexico City and pledged to work for gender equality from childhood. The conference entitled, Our Girls: The Right to Equity from Infancy, called for an agenda and platform toward clear identification of the gender constructs that consider girls subordinate beings only useful for domestic work. In order to subvert this patriarchal paradigm, UNICEF representatives urgently advocated for “investing in girls” and preparing them for equal participation in all segments of society. While Marisol and her daughter are absorbing the hegemonic and “traditional popular conception of the world,” it is important to recognize that they are strategically engaged in Gramsci’s “war of positioning” (13). Marisol is actively involved in the Parent Teacher Association in an elementary school where her son is enrolled. She was the mother representative of the Latino Student Union at Naria’s high school and a member of AVID, a program for underrepresented students to close the achievement gap by preparing students for college readiness and success in a global market. Naria Hernandez is a member of the 382,000 undocumented students who attend an LAUSD school and was part of the 65,000 undocumented students who graduate yearly from an LAUSD high school. Naria and Marisol volunteered with other Latino Student Unions throughout California and mobilized a campaign to send letters to former Governor Jerry Brown to support the Dream Act. Marisol tells me she was ecstatic that Governor Brown signed the second half of the two-part California Dream Act on Saturday, October 8, 2011, which

made undocumented immigrant students in California eligible for state-funded financial aid for college. (California now joins Texas and New Mexico in its public policy to allow illegal immigrants to receive financial aid from state-funded colleges.) Unfortunately upon taking office, President Trump moved to rescind the Dream Act. In November 2019, The U.S. Supreme Court began hearing arguments in a controversial set of cases that threatens the legal status of some 700,000 young immigrants (Dreamers) who were brought to the U.S. illegally as children.

Although Marisol believes she receives a fair wage and labor protections, the majority of her peers do not and so she joined the California Domestic Workers Coalition to advocate for labor protections. In 2013, AB241 was passed on the condition that it would sunset after three years. The coalition won a second victory in 2016 when Governor Jerry Brown signed AB241 into permanent state law. The campaign for dignified working conditions is a continuous process of overseeing and educating workers and employees about compliance with domestic labor laws. In 2018 and 2019, the California Domestic Workers Coalition lobbied to create an Education and Outreach Program and in 2019, Governor Newsom signed the California State Budget, funding the establishment of the program. (Unfortunately, as noted earlier, these protections are almost impossible to put into action when the individual is illegal and undocumented.)

Marisol and many Latinas like her have refused to be molded to the needs of the economic base, and its “continuous development of the economic apparatus of production” (13). Marisol is politically aware and has invested her “organic intelligence” in the conscious raising of the masses. As a Latina caregiver, from within her particular “space” and “location,” she continues to challenge social structures anchored in gender, race, and class. She represents the counter-hegemony of ideology of an intellectual who developed from within the subordinated class. Her grassroots activities are revolutionary and subversive challenging the authority of the ruling elite and raising the consciousness of the masses. Marisol’s story offers an important historical testimony and critique of totalizing theories and social change. Her story founded on courage and survival politics evidences a subversive chipping away of what Mohanty refers to as “ethnocentric centers of self/other definitions” (15, p. 119).

Marisol has come along way from the disruptive landscape of Guerrero, Mexico. While a racially gendered employment ceiling may trap her, she has resisted this paradigm through her own social agency and networks. Certainly, her daughter Naria who graduated from California State Northridge has shattered this gendered racial ceiling. While the Calhoun/Hernandez motherhood arrangement does not exist in most North/South motherhood relations, the fact that it does exist is the beginning of a transnational working relationship that addresses not only inequalities of gender but also inequalities of race, class, and citizenship status.

8. Conclusion

In this essay, I examined how women from both the Global North and South are connected in a complicated arrangement that casts women from the Global South as essential, yet invisible contributors to a global economy. I argued that Latina

domestic nannies are critical to the Southern California economy as they enable Los Angeles professional workers to work outside the home and pick up the slack of husbands who do not equally share in domestic chores and responsibilities. Moreover, Latina nannies provide the intangible commodity of love and care, meeting the socio-emotional and physical needs of the children under their care. The contributions of documented and undocumented Latina nannies make the contributions of Los Angeles working mothers possible. Latina caregivers help raise and nurture the next generation of the working middle and upper middle class. Despite the significant contributions to the social cohesion of family life, Latina nannies more often than not work in substandard conditions without equitable wages and labor protections. While Latina nannies often suffer abusive and exploitive working conditions, they are not passive victims of globalization. Strong and brave, Latinas effectively sustain a powerful degree of social agency working diligently to improve their lives and the lives of their children. In a time in America when political polarization and inequality run hand in hand, this case study hopes to encourage improved working conditions for Latina caregivers and more research on the positive contributions of Latina caregivers in California.

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