

Love or Exploitation
-The Experiences of Maids' Children in the U.S.-

Tomoka Kodama

Faculty of Law,
Keio University
Graduation Thesis, 2024

Table of Contents

Table of Contents.....	2
I. Introduction.....	3
II. Terms and Methods.....	6
III. Literature Review.....	10
IV. Ambivalent Daughters of the American Dream: <i>The Maid's Daughter</i> and <i>Spanglish</i>	13
V. Conclusion.....	16
Works Cited.....	19
Appendix.....	22

I. Introduction

“We are just going to move out. I can’t believe your parents. I am so disappointed after living here for so many years, and in the end, it is just exploitation. I just really feel like I hate your parents for pretending all these years that they loved me and cared about me and pretending they cared about my mother. In the end, they are just interested in her labor. I don’t want to have anything to do with them” (162).¹ In *The Maid’s Daughter: Living Inside and Outside the American Dream* (2011), Mary Romero thus recounts Olivia’s story—the daughter of a Mexican maid employed by a wealthy white American family—who, after living in the employers’ home for fifteen years, calls out the emotional and physical exploitation of her mother. Olivia expressed the frustration she held over the past years she spent with the Smiths when she heard that her mother Carmen fought with the employer Mrs. Smith and was asked to work more for the Smiths or to move out. She is irritated by how the Smiths only saw her mother as a laborer and devastated by Carmen’s belief that they love her. They “love” Olivia even more in reality, as Mrs. Smith seeks to compensate for the failures of her own children while selfishly projecting the image of a successful mother.

Even though employing a maid or nanny for household tasks is common in developed countries, many societies frequently overlook the broader impact of the domestic labor system. The exploitation of domestic labor significantly impacts not only the employees themselves but also their children. Globally, 75.6 million individuals work as domestic laborers, with women comprising 76.2% of this workforce and 17.2% being migrant domestic workers². Women and immigrants often face systemic oppression, and care work is further stigmatized as a low-status

¹ Romero, M. (2011). *The Maid’s Daughter: Living Inside and Outside the American Dream*. New York University Press.

² International Labour Organization. (2024a, January 28). “Who are domestic workers.” <https://www.ilo.org/topics/domestic-workers/who-are-domestic-workers>.

occupation. Domestic workers encounter numerous challenges, including poor working conditions, sexual harassment, and social marginalization.

This paper focuses on the children of women who work as maids and nannies who live in their employers' houses. Hochschild mentions how 30 percent of Filipino children whose parents left children to work overseas were likely to perform poorly in school and express anger, confusion, and apathy and this explains how the parents' environment directly affects the children.³ While there is some news about nannies protesting or suing against their poor working conditions and few books about their lives, even fewer resources focus on their kids' environment and struggles. Here, I will focus on the live-in maid and their children because domestic labor's live-in situations are more invisible to society, and children living with their mother and mother's employer create unique dynamics.

Though my focus in this thesis is Hispanic maids and their children, African American maids also have played an important role in the U.S. Under slavery, African American women were required to provide a wider range of forced labor compared to male slaves including maid labor. White male slavers considered female slaves as masculine roles or surrogate men to exploit them as laborers in the fields. However, they were never treated equally as male slaves in the way they were never chosen as drivers or overseers. Moreover, black women were also exploited as "workers in the domestic household, a breeder, and as an object of white male sexual assault"(22).⁴ Enslaved maids were the victims of both racism and sexism and had to suffer endless torture because they were constantly in the presence of demanding mistresses and masters. Young slave girls were forced to sleep in the same bedroom with a master and a mistress and their resistance only increased the determination of white owners to prove their power. Female slaves were demoralized and dehumanized by sexual assault, not only by the

³ Hochschild, A. R. (2002). "Love and Gold." Ehrenrich and Hochschild, p.20.

⁴ Hooks, Bell.(2015). *Aint I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism*. New York: Routledge.

white owners but also a risk of getting raped by black men who imitated the white male's behavior. In addition, black women were physically assaulted by white women, who allied with white men by racism. Because of the intersectionality of racism and sexism, black women experienced physically and physiologically brutal abuses.⁵

⁵ Hooks, pp.15-49.

II. Terms and Methods

The primary sources for this analysis are two works: *The Maid's Daughter: Living and Outside the American Dream* by sociologist Mary Romero, a story based on an interview, and the film *Spanglish* directed by James L. Brooks, a fictional romantic comedy-drama film. While the book is written from the perspective of the maid's daughter, the film captures multiple perspectives, but I focused on the maid's daughter's perspective. I chose these two pieces because they have a lot of interaction between the children and employers or the mothers compared to other films about maids, that are located in the United States.

Nowadays, both Hispanic and African American maids share some features such as how they are perceived as “exotic”. In “Source twenty-nine” of archives of Black women's artists *We Wanted a Revolution: Black Radical Women, 1965-1985; A Sourcebook*, Simpson describes a conversation between her and a woman working as a maid “Between our silences we knew why this has happened: our skin considered ‘exotic’, targeted for brutal fantasies in cultures that interpret us as orifice to be filled with nightmare”(60.).⁶ Sassen points out that immigrant women may seem desirable sexual partners not only because they are “exotic” but also for the same reason that First World employers believe them to be gifted caregivers because of how they assume that immigrants embody the traditionally feminine qualities of nurturance, docility, and eagerness.⁷ Even if they are in the same country, they are not perceived in the same way white women are, and this reinforces the racial bias in specific labor including domestic labor, sex work, and care labor.

⁶ Woods, S. (2018). “We wanted a revolution: Black Radical Women, 1965–1985: A Sourcebook.” Ed. by Catherine Morris and Rujeko Hockley. *African American Review*, 51(1), 59–61. <https://doi.org/10.1353/afa.2018.0007>.

⁷ Ehrenreich and Hochschild, pp.9-10.

Liberation for women of color also differs from the prominent narrative of feminism created by the middle, and upper-class white women. The Second-Wave Feminist Movement, which took place from the 1960s to 1970s, highlighted that for white women in the U.S., freedom meant something different from that of these immigrant women and that their goal was to be treated equally in the workplace as men.⁸ Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) catalyzed this movement, questioning traditional roles of marriage and motherhood and advocating for social and sexual equality. For women in developed countries, even low-status jobs represent freedom. Pun's interview with *Dagongmei* (a Chinese migrant worker who moved to the cities) who secretly had a dream to travel to Beijing with her small savings illustrates how immigrant workers gained a sort of freedom by making their own money and leaving their hometown where patriarchy dominates.⁹ For Black women, Collins's analysis of how they define and view the terms "womanism" and "black feminism" illustrates different aspects of feminism and their struggles over Black women's solidarity¹⁰. Alice Walker's term "womanism" has been interpreted in multiple ways similar to "black feminism". However, "womanism" focuses more on the racial solidarity for black survival by affiliating with black nationalism and considering themselves "being different from and superior to feminism, a difference allegedly stemming from black and white women's histories with American racism."⁽¹⁰⁾ On the other hand, "black feminism" includes the term "feminism" which associates with whiteness, allows connections to existing women's struggles both domestically and globally that provides a clearer political agenda regarding gender. These two terms highlight black women's fight against sexism cannot be accomplished without considering the racial oppression they receive. This dynamic reveals how perceptions of genderized housework and women's liberation differ across racial and social lines.

⁸ National Women's History Museum. (2020, June 18). "Feminism: The Second Wave." <https://www.womenshistory.org/exhibits/feminism-second-wave>.

⁹ Ngai.

¹⁰ Collins, P. H. (1996). WHAT'S IN A NAME? Womanism, Black Feminism, and Beyond. *The Black Scholar*, 26(1), 9–16.

I specifically focused on Hispanic maids who immigrated to the U.S. because this represents the current global trend of people immigrating from the third world to the first world for better opportunities. According to the UCLA Labor Center, in 2018, three-quarters of domestic workers were Latinx, Asian American/ Pacific Islander, or Black women.¹¹ Sassen highlights that the globalization of women's work is driven by changes in women's employment and lifestyles in Western countries, combined with the U.S. government's failure to adapt to these shifts.¹² Between 1970 and 1990, employment rates and working hours for women increased substantially, especially in managerial and professional roles, where women's working hours rose faster than men's. In addition, the proportion of women in paid work who have children below eighteen has also increased. However, Ehrenreich and Hochschild point out the lack of the U.S. government's public child care or not ensuring paid family and medical leave. For instance, state tax revolts in the 1980s also reduced the number of hours public libraries were open and school after-school programs. When women in developed countries joined professional workplaces public support didn't compensate for the changes, the immigrants took place to pay for the position of caring for the house in developed countries women used to care. This was mutually beneficial for women in developed countries who wanted cheap alternative labor to do their housework and workers from developing countries who sought better labor opportunities.

Analyzing stories from books and films helps unravel the maid's children's oppression because the stories reflect society even though some fiction stories could be criticized for exaggerating reality and reproducing stereotypes hidden in society. For instance, in the film *Cama Adentro*, Beba's reluctance to fire her maid, Dora, despite financial hardship and begging for money from her ex-husband, reflects both emotional attachment and a desire to

¹¹ UCLA labor center. (n.d.). "Profile of domestic workers in California." <https://www.labor.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Profile-of-Domestic-Workers-in-California.pdf>.

¹² Ehrenreich and Hochschild, pp. 4, 8, and 9.

maintain her social image.¹³ This reflects the societal image of maids as not only someone who provide housework, but who offer emotional support and tools to prove their wealth, and social status or benefits. Even in real-life advertisements, household staffing companies promote how bilingual workers will help the employer's children be introduced to new cultures and languages.¹⁴

I first analyzed the book and film to synthesize these narratives, identifying key themes and issues presented in each work. Then I categorized these issues based on commonalities, ultimately identifying four major themes. This paper provides examples from the book and film to illustrate these themes, emphasizing the voices and experiences of the children to honor their individuality and dignity. While my primary focus is on these two works, I also reference broader works on domestic labor, including stories from countries outside of the U.S. In the final section, I discuss my findings on the challenges faced by these children, reflecting on their invisibility in societal discourse and identifying areas where further analysis is needed.

¹³ Gaggero, J. (Director). (2004). *Came adentro* [Film]. Aqua Films.

¹⁴ Strickland, B. (2024, June 25). Benefits of bilingual nannies. <https://householdstaffing.com/benefits-of-bilingual-nannies/>.

III. Literature Review

The Maid's Daughter: Living Inside and Outside the American Dream was published in 2011 and written by sociologist Mary Romero. Romeo has interviewed Olivia's life experience as the daughter of Carmen, a Mexcian single mother who worked for the Smiths as a maid (Figure 1). In this book, Romeo intends to closely examine the worker's family by framing domestic and care work from the maid's children's perspective. Olivia's struggle with her identity and belonging, and contradictions in mainstream notions of social mobility and meritocracy are central issues Romeo illustrates in Olivia's life story. Romeo emphasizes the significance of Olivia's story by raising the question "If the maid is caring for the employer's children, who are caring for the maid's children? (20)"

The book received mostly positive views from the readers and offered new perspectives on a topic that is uncommonly discussed. Some people sympathized with Olivia's identity struggles or the contradiction of meritocracy, commenting on the review, "As an Arab woman who once lived briefly in the States for school, I could relate to Olivia's feelings of isolation and disorientation in *The Maid's Daughter*. Though our circumstances were quite different, I connected with her frustration as a young immigrant woman trying to find her place in a new culture."¹⁵ Scholars have also evaluated her 20 years of interview turning into valuable work as a micro-sociological research Mike Davis phrased it as "A unique, autobiographical collaboration between two brilliant women, *The Maids Daughter* relentlessly interrogates every

¹⁵ "The Maid's Daughter: Living Inside and Outside the Amer...", *Goodreads*, www.goodreads.com/book/show/11534999-the-maid-s-daughter. Accessed 28 Jan. 2025.

facet of privilege and subalternity to achieve a psychological complexity and irony worthy of a great novel.”¹⁶

Overall, *The Maid's Daughter* offers micro aspects of oppression and struggles Olivia experiences as a maid's daughter, a low social hierarchy immigrant living with a White upper-class employer's family. Romeo's long-term interview and observation are attentively portrayed throughout the book.

The film *Spanglish* is narrated from the perspective of Latina maid Flor Moreno (Figure 2). The film's narrative takes the form of an essay written by Flor's daughter, Cristina, for her Princeton admission application. In the essay, Cristina reflects on Flor as her most influential person, however, their relationship is complicated because of the dynamics among the employer's family. The director Brooks had done tons of research on Hispanic women to develop the character by sitting at my home, gathering women, seeing women with their children, having the kids translate, and more. He tried to balance the comedy and tragic side of maids by aiming to reflect real life because he thinks if comedy reflects real life, it is more reassuring that they will get through. If the world in the movies was better than actual life and everything had a happy ending, he thinks the audience would feel the distance from the film.¹⁷

Spanglish was also positively viewed by many audiences because of how it is character-driven and how each character was well performed.¹⁸ There were a few disappointments in the ending how which was simple or vague, including “I had grown to care significantly about these characters and I wanted to know more about their resolution. I also can't deny, however, that I've thought about the film much more since I left the theater because I

¹⁶ Davis, Mike, “*The Maid's Daughter*.” De Gruyter, , 1 Sept. 2011, www.degruyter.com/document/doi/10.18574/nyu/9780814777251.001.0001/html?lang=en.

¹⁷ B., Brian. “Director James L. Brooks Talks *Spanglish*.” *MovieWeb*, 16 Dec. 2004, movieweb.com/director-james-l-brooks-talks-spanglish/.

¹⁸ “User Reviews: *Spanglish*.” *IMDb*, www.imdb.com/title/tt0371246/reviews/?ref_=tt_uruv_sm. Accessed 28 Jan. 2025.

find myself constantly wondering how they ended up”.¹⁹ Although this ending seems to be part of Brooks's intention, he believes there are no happy endings in this story, and being truthful and real is a pact with the audience for this film.²⁰

Even though the film is categorized as a comedy and contains humor in the characters and the plot, *Spanglish* is significant because it provokes some social issues that the audience can relate to or that could be thought-provoking. It offers a perspective of living as a foreigner without knowing the language and the cultural clash between Hispanics and Americans.

How the characters became maids represents the global trend, yet how these two stories provide children's perspective also gives more value. Carmen transitioned to domestic work from the garment industry in El Paso for better pay and because housecleaning required less specialized skills, her experience represents the global trend.²¹ Flor immigrated after her husband left her and chose to become a maid for a better-paying job that also allowed her to spend more time with her daughter Cristina.

Hochschild explains that while the movement of care workers from the Global South to the North is not new, the current scope and speed of migration are remarkable.²² This is due to the increase in the gap between the global rich, where multinational corporations gather and keep developing, and the global poor. Hochschild points out that the middle class in the Third World now earns less than the poor in the First World, for example, the earnings of a Filipino nanny who works in Washington, D.C. are equivalent to what a small-town doctor earns in the Philippines.²³ More scenes reflect the society throughout the book and the film that reveal the children's situation and oppression in the maid's family.

¹⁹ Propes, Richard. *The Independent Critic* - “*Spanglish*” Review, theindependentcritic.com/spanglish. Accessed 28 Jan. 2025.

²⁰ B., Brian.

²¹ Romero, p.8.

²² Hochschild, A. R. (2002). Love and Gold.” Ehrenrich and Hochschild, pp.16-18.

²³ Hochschild. (2002) p.18.

IV. Ambivalent Daughters of the American Dream

The Maid's Daughter

Carmen naming her daughter Olivia because she thought her employer's daughter's name was pretty symbolizes how much Olivia's life was trapped in her mother's work. Olivia's childhood is directly affected by her mother's work and the live-in situation started when she was three years old. The fact that Carmen worked up until a week after Olivia's birth highlights the absence of labor protections like maternity leave and reflects the fear and pressure of losing her job. Single immigrant mothers, usually lacking their family support because their family remains in their home countries have no choice but to work, which traps them in poor working conditions as was observed in this story.

The issue with poor labor conditions for maids is obvious in some scenes and these also directly affect the maid's children's lives and mother-daughter relationships. First, the room in the Smiths two lived lacked privacy. Time spent in their room was the only completely private time with her mother, but they were interrupted because the maid's quarter was located next to the kitchen, and the Smiths' children always opened the fridge, disrupting their sleep. Olivia and Carmen's privacy was not as secure as the Smiths were, the employer-employee hierarchy was beyond the work, and they were treated in a dehumanized way. Throughout the story, Olivia refers to the Smiths as Mr. and Mrs. while the Smiths including their four children refer to Carmen by their first name, which also implies a lack of respect for the maids.

Second, Olivia had to be conscious of the days of the week so that she could head to the house Carmen is after school, and get to the right carpool every day. Moreover, Olivia was required to stay in designated areas, interact with the employer's children, and avoid touching certain items and these small rules changed based on the houses Carmen was working. Carmen

discouraged Olivia from discussing her Mexican heritage with the employers, fearing they would look down on their culture. These are abnormal considerations a young girl is required to make every day.

This is due to the low payment that made Carmen work in several households to maintain their life. Data reveals that domestic workers are less likely than workers overall to be employed full-time, year-round, and even when domestic workers are employed full-time, their annual wages are less than half those of the typical worker.²⁴ More specifically, domestic workers earn only 56% of the monthly wages of other employees and are more likely to work either extremely long or short hours.²⁵

Olivia remembers that when she was really little and unaware of their economic and social circumstances, she felt upset about Carmen's inability to spend time with her, especially compared to the Smiths' parenting style. While Mrs. Smith was fully engaged with her children, Olivia felt Carmen cared with little quantity or quality time. Olivia often tried to force Carmen to go to the movies together but she was unsatisfied because Carmen always fell asleep due to exhaustion from work. It can be observed that negative aspects of maid's labor also impact their children's lives and emotions in many ways. Carmen deeply acknowledges how her job limited her involvement with her child as well and had a feeling of guilt for a long time. Romeo mentions interviewing Carmen only once because it was too painful for Carmen to talk about her regrets about how she was not able to spend enough time with her daughter.

Third, the Smiths decide to pay Olivia's tuition for prep school instead of paying wages to Carmen, drastically changing the whole dynamics in the Smiths and the mother-daughter relationship. This arrangement was initially to avoid paying taxes, but in reality, the changes in payment happened due to informal employment and this is also a common nature of maids'

²⁴ Mitchell.

²⁵ International Labour Organization. (2024a, January 28). "Who are domestic workers."

labor. In the U.S., 81 percent of the maids are hired by informal employment and not only do they lack legal labor protection, but 22% of undocumented immigrant maids and housekeeping cleaners also work while not having legal citizenship as well.²⁶ Carmen is one of them, a maid who lacks legal protections and has to face low wages, poor working conditions, and dehumanizing treatment by employers. Moreover, informal employment impacted Carmen and Olivia more deeply because it blurred the boundary between work and private, which decommercialized Smith's relationship with Carmen and strengthened their ability to make decisions about Olivia's education, which also relinquished a degree of parental authority over Olivia for Carmen.

In the very beginning, Olivia didn't necessarily dislike Mrs. Smith intervening in her education. Mrs. Smith took Olivia along with her children at the beginning of the school year to get school clothes. Mrs. Smith partially took the role of Olivia's mother by providing her with attention and time that Carmen could not. For example, it was always Mrs. Smith who picked up Olivia from school and asked about her school life. Not only Carmen didn't have time but because Carmen didn't complete school, it was difficult for Carmen to help with her school issues. So on her first teacher-parent conference, both Carmen and Mrs. Smith attend.

From Carmen's perspective, Mrs. Smith's involvement in Olivia's education was a constant fear of losing her daughter. It escalates when Carmen is hospitalized over the summer for a uterine tumor. Ten-year-old Olivia stays in LA when she usually returns to Mexico for summer, attends summer school, and begins spending more time with the Smiths while her mother is in the hospital. Mrs. Smith even attends Olivia's performance for the acting class, and Olivia gets out of the maid's quarter and moves to a room with the family members where one of Smith's

²⁶ Svajlenka, N. (2023, August 21). "Protecting undocumented workers on the pandemic's Front Lines." <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/protecting-undocumented-workers-pandemics-front-lines-2/>.

children used to live. Carmen refuses Olivia to move out of the quarter but is convinced by Mrs. Smith, that she felt like Olivia got closer to the Smiths while she was in the hospital.

Although Olivia built a closer relationship with Mrs. Smith, it's unlikely she ever saw her as a maternal figure nor formed an emotional bond, rather she begins to feel Mrs. Smith has been interfering with her life too much. The Smiths made Olivia take Spanish courses against her desire to learn French and the fact that she already knows Spanish. Moreover, once Olivia became older and started to consider her college, the Smiths wanted Olivia to be their symbol of success, because all four of their children either failed and dropped out of school, got addicted to drugs, or got pregnant in their teens. Olivia remembers a dinner party with the Smiths' clients as a nightmare of how they talked to their clients in front of Olivia about how she should go to top universities on the East Coast and date white boys because the Smiths had a racial stereotype of Mexican Americans as low achievers, dropouts, and drug users. She felt micro-managed and manipulated by those who maintained racial and cultural superiority and who embraced deep-seated stereotypes against Mexicans. In other words, she was frustrated at how her white surrogate parents treated Olivia's Chicana identity as "a teenage phase" (133.) rather than an essential part of her.

The blurred boundary between Olivia and Carmen's life and Smiths over the years originally due to the informal contract ends when Olivia moves out. She also hopes to create a space where Carmen can separate work from home and gain autonomy. However, the mother-daughter relationship got complicated enough throughout the weird dynamics among the employer's family that Carmen egregiously misinterpreted this decision as rejection, thinking Olivia was ashamed of being the maid's daughter. Over time, Olivia recognizes the exploitative nature of the Smiths' treatment of her mother and confronts them, ultimately severing her ties with the family. Olivia told Jane (Carmen's daughter) when she begged Carmen to stay, "We are just going to move out. I can't believe your parents. I am so disappointed after living here for so

many years, and in the end, it is just exploitation. I just really feel like I hate your parents for pretending all these years that they loved me and cared about me and pretending they cared about my mother. In the end, they are just interested in her labor. I don't want to have anything to do with them" (162.).

Carmen eventually loves the new place and starts to spend time there, inviting friends, but she also stays connected with the Smiths. On the other hand, Olivia didn't have contact with the Smiths once she got into college. She figured out that she was considered an adopted child in the Smiths at Mr. Smith's funeral when her name was carved on a tombstone with his other four children. It is complicated for Olivia because she always wanted her mother to be recognized as a valued member of the Smiths, but she sits in the corner during the funeral while Olivia sits with the other children, and Carmen's name is only described as "family's friend" (209.) in the tombstone.

Usually, society only notices the surface-level impacts of a maid's job's crucial aspects, but these issues such as irregular working hours, and informal contracts go beyond the risks of poverty and exploitation. Lacking time and attention to their children not only hurts the children but also creates guilt in the mother and the third person interfering mother-daughter relationship requires the daughter to understand the atmosphere of a situation from a younger age. It is difficult for the maids and their daughters to resist the employer's interference in education and others because they can't risk losing their jobs and also it is a fact that they have more social capital that could be beneficial for the daughters' opportunities.

Another important theme in this book is the development of Olivia's identity. Living in a white, upper-class house knowing that she would always be "the other" but also not being able to fully blend in with the other Mexicans because of her "white" environment growing up.

During her childhood, Olivia observes stark contrasts between the monolingual, female-dominated culture of Mexico and the male-dominated, upper-class white community of Liberty Place, a gated neighborhood. She never felt a sense of belonging, trailing her mother to different households each weekday but remaining an outsider as a working-class, Spanish-speaking, Mexican child. Olivia felt that the employers tried to “change” her, teaching her English without making any effort to learn Spanish themselves. Furthermore, Olivia internalizes her status as an outsider when Carmen warns her to “learn from everybody else’s mistakes” (66.), which underscores that Olivia wouldn’t have the privilege of a second chance like the Smith children.

As a child, Olivia connects with her Mexican identity during summers in Mexico, visiting Carmen’s family and her godparents in San Fernando. These visits romanticize Mexican life for her, and she dreams of returning, imagining Mexico as a utopia where she truly belongs. In these communities, Olivia is happy to see her mother interact with her sisters enjoying herself instead of constantly cleaning or picking up trash. She also notices that family and everyday labor, while female-dominated, are divided not by race or ethnicity but by gender and age. Olivia’s Spanish-speaking ability is valued and rewarded in these places and she gains the sense of “being normal,” blending with other Mexicans. She sleeps on the floor alongside her godparents’ children, feeling like part of a family member. She thought Mexico was much simpler and less complicated than Liberty Place, where everything revolved around college social status, leaving her feeling rushed and burdened with commitments.

As she grows older, however, Olivia realizes she cannot fully integrate into her idealized Mexican community. Carmen is highly respected among relatives, but when Olivia visits on her own, her dress, speech, and mannerisms mark her as different. Relatives mocked her American accent, restricted her from wearing shorts she often wore in LA, and viewed her as a spoiled brat—contrasting the employers’ perception of her as a model child. Olivia also struggles to

connect with her godparents' children due to the stark differences in their school lives. In San Fernando, schools are overcrowded and underfunded, and poverty is prevalent, with many children turning to drugs.

Struggling to find her identity, Olivia decides to quit prep school, one of the best educational opportunities in her area with all-white children. She notices that living with the Smiths allowed her to pass as white and gain social capital, including access to elite clothing and educational experiences. However, she realizes the limits of racial passing when she is excluded from the Smiths' social network, such as not being invited to join the cotillion, which requires economic or familial lineage to truly belong.

Olivia realizes that continuing at prep school requires her to conceal her working-class background and Mexican culture, distancing her from her mother and causing emotional harm. Against the Smiths' hope for Olivia to become the ideal white, elite that their children failed to be, Olivia transfers to a private school that offers college-prep education. There, she found other students of color and no longer had to choose between maintaining her culture and pursuing a good education. She chose to be more Mexican than blending into the Smiths' environment, which also had a limitation because she can never fully be part of the family.

Olivia seeks to embrace her identity as the maid's daughter without feeling inferior because of her race, ethnicity, or class. Therefore, she actively interacts with other Latinos as part of her resistance to the Smiths, yet she remains different from her Latino peers. One time, she has to invite her Latino school friends to the Smiths for a Christmas party, mainly because Mrs. Smith wanted to observe her friendship and the Latino community as a "social experiment." Without Carmen present, Olivia couldn't fully display her working-class background, as the Smiths' luxurious home and security guards masked it. At UCLA, she joined MEChA (Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán) and became keenly aware of her cultural capital. She possesses

not only the linguistic skills to converse in middle-class English with administrators but also the confidence to navigate interactions with all levels of academic hierarchy—an advantage many of her peers, primarily first-generation Mexican American students, do not share. She does not fit the essentialist definition of Chicana identity and living in an all-white, upper-class neighborhood questioned her “authenticity” as a Chicana. She felt denial of her background because she didn’t want to be in Liberty Place but it felt like being betrayed by her friends when they didn’t consider her as the same Chicana. Also, the boys from the frat who went to the same elementary school as her did not understand why she protested with the other Latinos because they thought she was on “their side.”

Ultimately, Olivia transforms her frustratingly dual identity, a dilemma, into a source of strength. Mrs. Smith never notices Olivia’s struggle to resist assimilating into the white, upper class and maintain her Mexican identity, while Mrs. Smith hopes to use her bilingual and bicultural experiences to become a bridge between upper-class whites and the Latinos in LA. However, Olivia starts to work in the Mexican-American Legal Defense and Educational Fund (MALDEF) after college and settles in El Paso to find her new community where she will not get any influences from the Smiths. She uses her verbal skills as a source of power to level the playing field in a political area while accepting the fact that she has internalized some elite cultures, manners, and ways of thinking from the Smiths that will never go away from her. When she explains to Mrs. Smith what she wants, she says, “I did always know that I can do anything that I want, and as a result, I can choose not to be what you want me to be. I don’t have to do any one particular thing, and I am not limited to anything. But whatever it is, I will do it because I want to do it(192.)”. Olivia struggles to find her belonging and identity, but finally, she can accept both sides.

Since most maids in the U.S. are immigrants these identity struggles between the maids’ children’s mothers and employer’s backgrounds are assumed to be a common struggle. Lacking

enough attention from their mothers and also lacking a sense of belonging in their childhood is a brutal experience for children that could affect their behaviors and education. However, these issues that align with emotions are difficult to observe from the outside of the house. It is complicated because the presence of Mrs. Smith harmed Olivia's dignity and her relationship with Carmen, but Mrs. Smith also helped Olivia in many ways how she gained social capital from lower class backgrounds which allowed her to mobilize her social status.

Another important issue is the gap in social mobility between the daughter and the mother. While Olivia achieves social mobility with the Smiths' support—albeit under unfortunate circumstances—Carmen neither gains similar social mobility nor acquires the social capital needed to transcend her class division. Olivia and Carmen's status separation is apparent when Olivia is having dinner with the Smiths. When she tries to do all the dishes before her mother comes back, she is told by Mrs. Smith to leave the dishes for Carmen. Mrs. Smith passed Olivia as their family but her mother was always a maid for them. In that scene, she stands up and says that she is a maid's daughter and she wants to spend more time with her mother.

Furthermore, Carmen's lack of retirement funds forced her to rely on Olivia financially after quitting her job, a dependence that ensured she would never escape her class constraints. She was aware that she couldn't achieve her social mobility without assimilation and the Smiths' capital, but she constantly tried to resist the unconditional assimilation into the white upper class. She intentionally makes friends with Black and Chicana servants, and cleaners to treat them with dignity and respect by hugging them, engaging in chitchat, calling them by their names, and acknowledging them as equals rather than as individuals of low status. She also pushed back against white beauty standards by intentionally gaining weight. However, she refused to engage in behaviors like drug use, as the Smith children did, recognizing that it would only reinforce negative stereotypes about Mexicans and marijuana.

Once Olivia got into college and figured out her identity, she started to stand for her mother to advocate for her rights, urging Carmen to quit her job as a maid. Once she noticed that the Smiths attempted to decommercialize their relationship with Olivia by treating her as their own when they “voluntarily” purchased school clothes and paid for her meals when she was invited to the country club instead of paying Carmen a salary. Olivia confronted her mother, saying, “Mother, school costs this amount. Why are we supposed to feel indebted to them, because you could be making all that much more money if they weren’t paying for my school!? I think you should break this deal and tell them no, you don’t want them to pay for my education anymore, and have them pay you a salary. We can afford to pay for my education. Don’t think that they’re doing us this great thing. (127.)”.

However, Olivia was unaware of many aspects of Carmen’s life. She was shocked when she knew that her mother was raped by Olivia’s biological father because she had no idea and didn’t have any image of her mother being a victim of rape. There are a considerable number of people who immigrated to the US to escape from domestic violence, sexual abuse, or human trafficking as Carmen did. The U.S. government offers a U visa which intends to encourage victims of these crimes to help authorities go after these crimes and the number of people applying for this visa has increased in 2018 by roughly 6 times more compared to 2009.²⁷ Anonyms interview who experienced rape by her father who was pressured not to report the rape otherwise her mother got abused by him, mentioned that even though traveling alone in Mexico is not a safe option either, she decided to leave the country to feel secure, and how she felt safe even though she knew nothing about life in the U.S. or knew anyone there. She mentions how the Mexico government never helped her or other girls and women.²⁸ They are also exposed to a higher risk

²⁷ Vaughan, Jessica M. “Visas for Victims: A Look at the U Visa Program.” *CIS.Org*, 30 Mar. 2020, cis.org/Report/Visas-Victims-Look-U-Visa-Program#:~:text=The%20number%20of%20people%20filing,10%20years%20is%2082%20percent.

²⁸ “I Came to the U.S. Fleeing Horrific Abuse in My Home Country. Jeff Sessions Wants to Send People like Me Back: ACLU.” *American Civil Liberties Union*, 27 Feb. 2023, www.aclu.org/news/immigrants-rights/i-came-us-fleeing-horrific-abuse-my-home-country.

of sexual assault and kidnapping near the border where criminal groups dominate the land take advantage of their situation and ask for money.²⁹ Immigrants who successfully moved to the US also have a higher risk of getting raped especially if they are undocumented because the perpetrator expects that they won't report the crime to avoid getting deported.³⁰ Carmen's experience is a common case for immigrants and their vulnerable situation tends to lead to a higher risk of more abuses.

This revelation deepened Olivia's understanding of her mother's resilience and sacrifices. She also came to recognize how Carmen's job had defined her identity for over two decades and how deeply she was respected within the community of maids. Although work was a big part of Carmen's life, the fact that she was turning in her 50s and had a heart attack three times, Olivia stood up for Mrs. Jimenez because she expected Carmen to work a lot just because she paid for her. "My mother needs control of her life. She needs to be able to say no. But you are not letting her say no. You think that just giving her a raise and paying more money is going to do it. My mother is fifty-five years old. She doesn't have to deal with this anymore. She loves your kids, and she is with them because she loves them. There is no price you can pay to substitute for that. There is never going to be enough. You don't know how lucky you are to have somebody who loves your children, cares about them, and is interested in their well-being. There is no amount for you to pay for all the time that you can go off on vacation and know that your kids are safe and that your kids are being taken care of. It has nothing to do with how much you pay her" (158.). At this time, Olivia was able to view her mother's work condition objectively from outside of the workplace. Ultimately, Carmen decided to leave her job and move to El Paso, where Olivia lived with her Latino husband and son. This change allowed their mother-daughter

²⁹ Reuters. "More Migrants Are Victims of Rape, Sexual Violence at Mexico Border." *NBCNews.Com*, NBCUniversal News Group, 29 Sept. 2023, www.nbcnews.com/news/latino/migrants-are-raped-mexico-border-await-entry-us-rcna118161.

³⁰ MCASA. "Sexual Violence and Immigrant Survivors." mcasa.org/newsletters/article/sexual-violence-and-immigrant-survivors. Accessed 30 Jan. 2025.

relationship to grow beyond the confines of the Smiths' influence. They needed distance from that environment to better understand and build a new mother-daughter relationship.

Spanglish

“Is what you want for yourself to become someone very different from me?” (Brooks 02:04:46). In the final scene, Flor decides to leave the Claskys and asks her daughter Cristina this question, which highlights the tension of the mother-daughter relationship and the identity dilemma of living at the employer’s house. It was observed that not only did the maid and her daughter’s relationship get complicated, but also the employer’s family felt the impact of having the “others” living in their home.

Initially, hiring a maid was Deborah’s arbitrary decision and her husband John seems surprised and confused about her decision to hire a maid who doesn’t understand English at all. The Clasky family except John was there at the interview, but without even agreeing or having a specific contract, Deborah loves her from first sight how she is beautiful, and immediately decides to hire her. This explains how housework is expected to be a woman’s job not only from the men’s perspective but also how women internalize the generalized expectations resulting in women themselves desire to have pretty and comforting women to take care of their children.

Since the beginning of the story, Flor has always been prioritizing to protect her daughter Cristina. For the first six years in LA, Flor worked in laundry service and some other job, earning \$450 a week and they never left the Hispanic community because she wanted to keep their Mexican identity. Flor’s decision to change jobs arose after she saw a boy approach Cristina and realized she needed to quit her night shift to better protect her daughter. Flor didn’t speak a single word of English and worked for “foreigner” because she was paid \$650 per week and there were no other job options for her to earn enough while being with Cristina as much as she could.

In *Spanglish* as well, the maid's daughter receives a drastic impact from the nature of the maid's work of not having a formal contract. When Flor gets hired, she agrees to Deborah's oral request of working six days a week, seven to eight, and doing all the housekeeping and driving the kids. However, the lack of specificity in Flor's duties and blurred work requests suddenly becomes evident on her first day, when Deborah asks her to be accompanied for her shopping—a task not typically associated with a maid's responsibilities. The biggest impact on Cristina emerges when Deborah expects Flor to live with the Claskys at the beach house they had rented for the summer. Deborah takes it for granted for Flor to live in so she naturally assigns one room for Flor, but she refuses because she cannot leave Cristina alone. Deborah persuades Flor by framing her request as a personal favor which reveals the blurred relationship: "I'm sorry, my friend, but this is what I need." (Brooks 0:46:49) which ends up with Flor bringing Cristina to the Claskys. Deborah's behavior shows the unequal power balance between the maid and the employer. Even though Deborah calls Flor her friend, she views a maid just as a tool by not assuming that Flor also has her own life and family but can do whatever for Deborah because she is getting paid.

The summer in the beach house created complicated dynamics between the Claskys, Cristina, and Flor. Cristina is loved by Deborah from the first moment they meet, as Deborah adores Cristina's beauty, humility, and obedience. As Deborah and Cristina get closer through the summer, Flor's fear of losing her daughter increases and Deborah's daughter Bernie also gets offended by her mother's favorite "stranger's" child.

Shortly after they meet, Deborah takes Cristina to a flea market without informing Flor. Cristina gets to see new things she has never seen in her life before, and on her way back she keeps appreciating Deborah and respecting her for how much she knew about so many things and Deborah seems satisfied and loves her more. This moment highlights how the Claskys broadened Cristina's worldview, while also underscoring the cultural and class divide between

the two families. Cristina seems to internalize the difference in the culture and the privilege Deborah had that her mother didn't have in other moments as well. Cristina knew since she was little that Flor tried so hard to suppress her sadness and negative emotions in front of her daughter; however, Deborah was always the one who expressed her emotions the most, by screaming, crying, and laughing.

Both Cristina and Deborah seem to be very happy after the shopping but the one who remained at the house seems not to be. Flor was especially expressing her anger towards the two but it is assumed that it mostly comes from the fear of her daughter getting attached to the employer. Deborah was providing something Flor could not do to Cristina which is both time and money. In addition to that, because Cristina does not understand English and cannot figure out what they are talking and she feels left behind even in the house.

Bernie also seems to be uncomfortable when Cristina and her mother come back. Before Cristina joined the house, Bernie already knew that she had failed her mother's expectations. There was a scene where Deborah bought a shirt for Bernie but she intentionally bought a size smaller than her actual size because Deborah wanted Bernie to be skinnier. And because she was two years older than Cristina, Bernie was mature enough to not comment on anything, but her mother treating someone they barely knew made her insecure. This moment brings Bernie and Flor closer because Flor secretly sews the new clothes Deborah bought so that Bernie can fit in, and learns a few words to tell Bernie to try them on. Bernie's sad facial expression disappears once she realizes that she can wear the shirt, and she goes to hug Flor when she realizes that Flor adjusted the button for her. However, later when Cristina accidentally discovers this incident by being a translator in the fight between Flor and John, she feels offended and less prioritized by her mother because they had a rule not to talk about the work in the house but it was ruined because all the sudden Flor started to ask Cristina how to say something in English that was all to make Bernie happy.

This explains how Flor's existence and impact were beyond housework, as they should be, but how she also offers a role of emotional labor to the family. Emotional labor occurs in the public sphere where social and economic interactions are exchanged for wages but during these interactions with customers or co-workers, individuals are required to display and express specific emotions that align with organizational goals.³¹ Throughout the story, Flor controls her emotions and the way she behaves for the family such as showing love and care for Bernie being the alternative to her actual mother or quietly leaving the room when she detects the tension or fighting between Deborah and John so that they can have their private time.

On the other hand, Cristina was also struggling to adjust to a new environment. No matter how Deborah interacts in a welcoming behavior, she understands that she is just an employee's daughter. So she sits one seat away from the rest of the children when they gather and the father John suggests the children play a game picking up sea glasses assuming that she is not included. However, John allows Cristina to go with the kids without Flor's permission and because Cristina never had a chance to receive an allowance, it makes her crazy to collect sea glasses, and she ends up collecting \$640. However, Flor quickly intervenes, demanding Cristina return the money to John. Cristina's disappointment reveals the growing awareness of her family's low-income status and its contrast with the Claskys' wealth, as long as how she cannot fully be treated as "part of the family". The fact that she had to be present as a translator when Flor and John argue about money and intervening in each other's child made her situation more complicated. Cristina feels guilty because she doesn't mean to get John into trouble because of her action but it sounds like Cristina was bellowing at him when she translated Flor's anger. It hurts Cristina's feelings when she has to yell back at her mother when John says something that puts her in a difficult situation and realizes how the dynamic works. Cristina has to be a good girl for Flor so her work goes smoothly; she also needs to be extra careful to be friendly with the

³¹ Klimczuk, A. (2017). "Work, Domestic Work, Emotional Labor." *The Wiley-Blackwell Encyclopedia of Social Theory*, 1–4. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118430873.est0409>.

Claskys but not too friendly, even though the Claskys are the ones wanting her to be part of the family.

Similar to *The Maid's Daughter*, the mother-daughter relationship becomes more complicated once Deborah becomes overly involved in Cristina's education, pushing her to attend the same private school as one of her daughters. Deborah takes Cristina to visit the school and secures a scholarship without any malice but genuinely she loves Cristina and wants to have a better opportunity because she is a hard worker. However, an employer intervening in an employee's child's education is simply overstepping and it can be assumed that Flor was worried about Deborah stealing her role as a mother. One of the reasons that make Flor hesitate to let Cristina go to private school is explained to John: "Either she will be odd. Or she will make herself the same as them" (Brooks 01:23:03). Flor wishes for Christina to retain her Mexican identity, and Flor knew that most of her Mexican identity will disappear if she went to the private school surrounded by white kids. She is also afraid to see her daughter suffering because she is the only Mexican and might not blend in at school.

It is painful to see Flor's concerns that originate from her wishing Cristina's best and happiness not reflect in the same way from Cristina's perspective. From her view, Flor was blocking Cristina's educational opportunity and Deborah was more supportive. Cristina was praying right next to Flor saying please change my mom's mind, without knowing Flor's situation financially, and also emotionally being scared of her daughter being more detached. Cristina's detachment from Flor is obvious on the first day of school after her internal struggle and decides to let Cristina go to the private school. As the bus arrived, Cristina turned to thank Deborah, saying, "Thank you so much for this opportunity and everything." (Brooks 01:25:33) . Despite Flor's attempts to make eye contact, Cristina only looked at Deborah. After boarding, she turned back like she remembered something and waved at Deborah but didn't say a single word. While the bus was leaving, Deborah kept saying how great this was, but Flor immediately

left with anger. In the movie, it is not clear who paid the tuition for Cristina, but Cristina can't go without Flor's hard work. Although Cristina was young enough not to be aware of her mother's struggle Flor felt like she was abandoned by her daughter because of her wealthy employer. The fact that Deborah prepared a new backpack with full school supplies and a necklace made it more clear how it seemed like Deborah was more excited about Cristina's education.

Cristina seems to enjoy her school life a lot making many new friends, and often doing homework together late into the night, however also in school, it can be assumed that she struggled with her identity. All of her friends are White, and they seem to be very close but the only difference is that the place she invites them to is not her actual home, and she never lets her friends meet her mother, Flor. By the time school started the live-in situation was resolved because the summer was over and they were no longer at the beach house, Cristina spent a lot of time at the Claskys. Even though she loves her mother, she seems to have internalized the feeling of shame about her mother's low social status because the school she went to was a private school with all the wealthy White students. Living in two different worlds, Cristina was trapped in a double-bind identity and it can be assumed that she had no one to share her identity issues with which made her in a more difficult situation.

At the end of this film, when Flor suddenly quits her job, it shocks everyone but Cristina is the one who gets most upset and emotional. While her immediate reason is her growing feelings for John, her decision also seems motivated by a desire to reset her relationship with Cristina and distance her from the Claskys. However, for Cristina, it is a bolt from the blue and devastating. Flor comes to pick up Cristina when she is hanging out with the Clasky kids at the pool in the backyard. Cristina begs to stay longer, but Flor firmly states, "You must say goodbye" (Brooks 01:58:07) and "I don't work anymore" (Brooks 01:58:12). As the children tearfully say their goodbyes, Cristina cries, "That's not fair" (Brooks 01:58:21). Later, while walking away, Cristina narrates, "Shortly after we left, my mother told me another decision she had reached. I

would no longer go to the private school” (Brooks 02:02:34). This leads to an explosive confrontation, with Cristina publicly shouting, “I will never forgive you”(Brooks 02:03:08). Flor has tears in her eyes, but doesn’t say anything. Flor then finally opens up about the personal conflict that she has been dealing with ever since Cristina stepped into the “American world” by asking a fundamental question: “Is what you want for yourself to become someone very different than me?”(Brooks 02:04:46). Asking this question to her young daughter symbolizes and explains all the struggles and conflicts she faces between Cristina and the Claskys. Flor is afraid of Cristina going somewhere far away leaving her original identity and becoming like the Claskys, that is like the White Americans she cannot even fully communicate.

While the film leaves it ambiguous whether Cristina is admitted to Princeton, her essay—the film's narrative—stands out to the admissions officers. If we assume she succeeds, her story aligns with the “American Dream,” portraying the journey of an immigrant achieving upward mobility through education and gaining access to an Ivy League institution. However, this success comes at a painful cost. While Cristina’s path may seem like a dream narrative, it is crucial to recognize that her mother, Flor, remains in the same social hierarchy.

Flor originally hoped to stay in Mexico but moved to Los Angeles, where she could preserve her Hispanic identity and pass it on to Cristina. Instead, she sacrifices her time and energy, paying \$86 per month to learn English and memorize words while working tirelessly as a housekeeper. Meanwhile, the Claskys make little effort to understand Flor’s culture, mispronouncing her name and making ignorant remarks about her faith. In contrast, Cristina’s assimilation into American culture, her perfect English accent, her private school experience, and her summer with the privileged Clasky family grant her social capital but also dilute her Hispanic identity.

This cultural divide becomes evident in the final scene when Flor and Cristina argue—Flor shouts in Spanish, while Cristina yells in English. Flor’s deepest fear comes true: Cristina, having experienced the privileges of the “other world,” chooses a different path, embracing an American identity that distances her from her mother. In the end, while Cristina’s social status rises, Flor—who made the greatest sacrifices—remains exactly where she started, left behind after her daughter’s success and their complicated ties with the Clasky family are severed.

Conclusion

These films heighten the contrasts between employer and employee through their narratives: In particular, Olivia's story portrays a more nuanced, long-term evolution of relationships influenced by life events. As these two films suggest, children of maids grow up in an environment that heightens their awareness of class and racial disparities, often learning to adapt by suppressing parts of their identity to assimilate or "pass" in certain spaces. While Olivia and Cristina achieve social mobility by leveraging their mothers' employers' environments as resources, living in their employers' homes introduces tensions between the daughters and their mothers. As Olivia maintains some distance from her employer, her mother worries about their relationship and fears Olivia would drift away from her cultural identity. Both Olivia's and Cristina's mothers devote themselves to labor to support their children, but as young children, Olivia and Cristina often fail to grasp the social and economic realities of their situations. They compare their mothers unfavorably to their employers, feeling lonely and neglected while witnessing the employers' children receive abundant attention. The presence of the maid's daughter impacts the employer's daughter's relationship with their mother as well. Bernie has often been compared to Cristina in academics and looks, which left an inferiority complex and created a gap between Bernie and Deborah.

However, I want to end the thesis by questioning whether these films exactly reflect the reality of society or not. The two stories I mainly analyzed only cover a limited subject, a successful Latina girl, while there are diverse gender, racial, and ethnical diversity to be focused on. Both children in these two stories exemplify success, but the destinies of maids' children vary widely, including some who fail to meet their mothers' expectations. The Obama Administration implemented Deferred Action for Childhood Arrival (DACA) protecting young undocumented immigrants from deportation and providing work permission to applicants who

qualify for certain requirements including age, academics, and criminal background. While DACA provides multiple benefits such as creating an economic foundation, promoting political engagements, and increasing educational opportunity, student Dreamers who are undocumented immigrants who have qualified for DACA still have limitations to blending into mainstream society.³² For example, DACA recipients are not eligible for federal financial aid which distances them from enrolling in higher education or required to balance working and studying, or because DACA doesn't grant full lawful status some may not be able to complete their education.³³ The government's support had limitations in supporting the children without full legal status and many failed to succeed in the U.S, unlike Olivia and Cristina.

The nature of domestic labor is invisible compared to other works for immigrants and their children are usually even more invisible to society. Ehrenreich and Hochschild argue that racism contributes to the "discounting" of racialized labor, and the indoor nature of maids' work limits their visibility in society. Unlike taxi drivers or other public-facing workers, maids rarely have opportunities to be exposed to society other than interacting with their employers gathering in large numbers, or making their struggles known.³⁴ They also mention that the Western cultural ideals of individualism militate against acknowledging help or human interdependency. Maids are not even status-rich but how they remain in the background because career women nowadays earn their status by "doing it all" by producing full-time careers thriving children and keeping the house clean and tight. This invisibility not only makes it difficult for society to recognize the struggles of domestic workers but also hinders the maids themselves from organizing and advocating for better conditions.

³² BOUNDLESS. *Challenges and Opportunities Facing DACA Recipients*, 30 Sept. 2024, www.boundless.com/research/challenges-and-opportunities-facing-daca-recipients/.

³³ Porter, Natalie. *Barriers to Higher Education DACA Recipients Face in the United States*, Ballard Brief, 2 Jan. 2025, ballardbrief.byu.edu/issue-briefs/barriers-to-higher-education-daca-recipients-face-in-the-united-state.

³⁴ Ehrenreich and Hochschild, pp.3-4.

The Trump administration will add fuel to the fire leaving them even more unrecognizable and suffering situation. Within less than a week after his new administration, there have been more than 21 actions from the president that drove immigrants into a corner. His executive order seeking “mass deportations” suspended the entry of all undocumented migrants to the US, allowed expanding Immigration and Customs Enforcement's (ICE) ability to arrest and detain unlawful migrants on US soil, increased Army troops at the southern US border, canceled existing migrants’ appointments and more.³⁵ Undocumented immigrants now face an increased risk of deportation, which significantly hinders their ability to maintain employment or pursue educational opportunities.

Under the accelerating immigration policy and a lack of support from the government, grassroots organizations are one of the few lifelines for supporting vulnerable undocumented immigrant children. NYSYLC was the first undocumented youth-led organization in New York, they seek to support undocumented youth’s barriers to work legally or inequality in education.³⁶ They also value a sense of community because undocumented students often hesitate to open their status or be the target of xenophobia and experience isolation. Organizing “Coming Out of the Shadows” rallies as spaces for undocumented youth to share their stories and UNDOCU students to meet up such as game nights, college-specific meet-ups, and writing classes offers not only physical support but emotional space for undocumented students.

The brutal situation currently surrounding immigrants and their children needs to be seen and noticed more by society. Along with understanding structural oppression, I believe that exposing individuals to the micro perspective of immigrant children through non-fiction or fiction stories will be a helpful way to be involved in issues surrounding them. I hope my thesis will be the

³⁵ Yousif, Nadine. “Six Big Immigration Changes under Trump - and Their Impact so Far.” *BBC News*, BBC, 27 Jan. 2025, www.bbc.com/news/articles/clyn2p8x2eyo.

³⁶ New York State Youth Leadership Council. *NYSYLC*, www.nysylc.org/. Accessed 28 Jan. 2025.

beginning of understanding the handful of complicated environments of children of immigrant
maid's mothers.

Works Cited

- B., Brian. "Director James L. Brooks Talks Spanglish." *MovieWeb*, 16 Dec. 2004, movieweb.com/director-james-l-brooks-talks-Spanglish/.
- Banerjee, A., Wolfe, J., Moore, K. K., & deCourcy, K. (2022, November 22). "Domestic Workers Chartbook 2022: A comprehensive look at the demographics, wages, benefits, and poverty rates of the professionals who care for our family members and clean our homes." Economic Policy Institute. <https://www.epi.org/publication/domestic-workers-chartbook-2022/>.
- BOUNDLESS. *Challenges and Opportunities Facing DACA Recipients*, 30 Sept. 2024, www.boundless.com/research/challenges-and-opportunities-facing-daca-recipients/.
- Brooks, J.L.(Director). (2004). *Spanglish* [Film]. Sony Pictures Entertainment Inc.
- Collins, P. H. (1996). WHAT'S IN A NAME? Womanism, Black Feminism, and Beyond. *The Black Scholar*, 26(1), 9–16.
- Ehrenreich, B., & Hochschild, A. R. (Eds.). (2003). *Global Woman: Nannies, Maids, and Sex Workers in the New Economy*. Granta Books.
- Friedan, Betty. *The Feminine Mystique*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2013.
- Gaggero, J.(Director). (2004). *Came Adentro* [Film]. Aqua Films.
- Gleeson, J. (2021, September 7). "Judith Butler: 'We need to rethink the category of woman.'"
"The Guardian."
<https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2021/sep/07/judith-butler-interview-gender>.
- Goodreads. "The Maid's Daughter: Living Inside and Outside the Amer...", Goodreads, www.goodreads.com/book/show/11534999-the-maid-s-daughter. Accessed 28 Jan. 2025.
- Hochschild, A. R. (2002). *Love and Gold. Global Woman: Nannies. Maids. And Sex Workers in the New Economy*. Metropolitan Books/Henry Holt and Company.
- Hooks, Bell. (2015). *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism*. New York: Routledge.
- Household Staffing International. (2024a, March 20). Nanny vs. maid: What's the difference?
<https://www.householdstaffinginternational.com/blog/nanny-vs-maid-whats-the-difference/>.

- Household Staffing International. (2024b, December 16). Is there a difference between a Maid and a housekeeper?
<https://www.householdstaffinginternational.com/blog/is-there-a-difference-between-a-maid-and-a-housekeeper/#:~:text=Maids%20are%20often%20employed%20by,and%20overseeing%20other%20household%20staff.>
- “I Came to the U.S. Fleeing Horrific Abuse in My Home Country. Jeff Sessions Wants to Send People Like Me Back.: ACLU.” *American Civil Liberties Union*, 27 Feb. 2023,
www.aclu.org/news/immigrants-rights/i-came-us-fleeing-horrific-abuse-my-home-country.
- International Labour Organization. (2024c, January 28). “Who are domestic workers.”
<https://www.ilo.org/topics/domestic-workers/who-are-domestic-workers.>
- International Labour Organization. (2024d, August 14). New Rights for Domestic Workers in Thailand.
<https://www.ilo.org/resource/article/new-rights-domestic-workers-thailand.>
- Jackson, S. (1992). Towards a historical sociology of housework. *Womens Studies International Forum*, 15, 153-172.
- Klimczuk, A. (2017). Work, domestic work, and emotional labor. *The Wiley-Blackwell Encyclopedia of Social Theory*, 1–4.
<https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118430873.est0409.>
- Mainardi, P. (1970). *The politics of housework*.
- MCASA. “Sexual Violence and Immigrant Survivors.”
mcasa.org/newsletters/article/sexual-violence-and-immigrant-survivors. Accessed 30 Jan. 2025.
- Mitchell, S. M. (2024, March). Domestic Workers in the United States.
<https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/WB/DomesticWorkersFactSheet.pdf.>
- National Women’s History Museum. (2020, June 18). Feminism: The second wave.
<https://www.womenshistory.org/exhibits/feminism-second-wave.>
- New York State Youth Leadership Council. *NYSYLC*, www.nysylc.org/. Accessed 28 Jan. 2025.
- Ngai, P. (2005). *Made in China: Women factory workers in a global workplace*. Duke University Press.
- Porter, Natalie. *Barriers to Higher Education DACA Recipients Face in the United States*, Ballard Brief, 2 Jan. 2025,
ballardbrief.byu.edu/issue-briefs/barriers-to-higher-education-daca-recipients-face-in-the-united-state.

- Prado Anayansi.(Director). (200). *Maid in America* [Film]. CBS Entertainment Production
- Propes, Richard. *The Independent Critic* - “Spanglish” Review, theindependentcritic.com/spanglish. Accessed 28 Jan. 2025.
- Reuters. “More Migrants Are Victims of Rape, Sexual Violence at Mexico Border.” *NBCNews.Com*, NBCUniversal News Group, 29 Sept. 2023, [www.nbcnews.com/news/latino/migrants-are-raped-mexico-border-await-entry-u](https://www.nbcnews.com/news/latino/migrants-are-raped-mexico-border-await-entry-us-rcna118161)
s-rcna118161.
- Romero, M. (2011). *The Maid’s Daughter: Living inside and outside the American dream*. New York University Press.
- Sassen, S. (2002). Global Cities and Survival Circuits. *Global Woman: Nannies. Maids. And Sex Workers in the New Economy*/Metropolitan Books/Henry Holt and Company.
- Strickland, B. (2024, June 25). Benefits of bilingual nannies. <https://householdstaffing.com/benefits-of-bilingual-nannies/>
- Svajlenka, N. (2023, August 21). Protecting undocumented workers on the pandemic’s Front Lines. <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/protecting-undocumented-workers-pandemics-front-lines-2/>
- UCLA Labor Center. (n.d.). Profile of domestic workers in California. [https://www.labor.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Profile-of-Domestic-Wor](https://www.labor.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Profile-of-Domestic-Workers-in-California.pdf)
kers-in-California.pdf.
- Vaughan, Jessica M. “Visas for Victims: A Look at the U Visa Program.” *CIS.Org*, 30 Mar. 2020, cis.org/Report/Visas-Victims-Look-U-Visa-Program#:~:text=The%20number%20of%20people%20filing,10%20years%20is%2082%20percent.
- Woods, S. (2018). We Wanted a Revolution: Black Radical Women, 1965–1985: A sourcebook ed. by Catherine Morris and Rujeko Hockley. *African American Review*, 51(1), 59–61. <https://doi.org/10.1353/afa.2018.0007>.
- Yousif, Nadine. “Six Big Immigration Changes under Trump - and Their Impact so Far.” *BBC News*, BBC, 27 Jan. 2025, www.bbc.com/news/articles/clyn2p8x2eyo.

Appendix

Figure1:Characters relationship in “The Maid’s Daughter”(created by author)

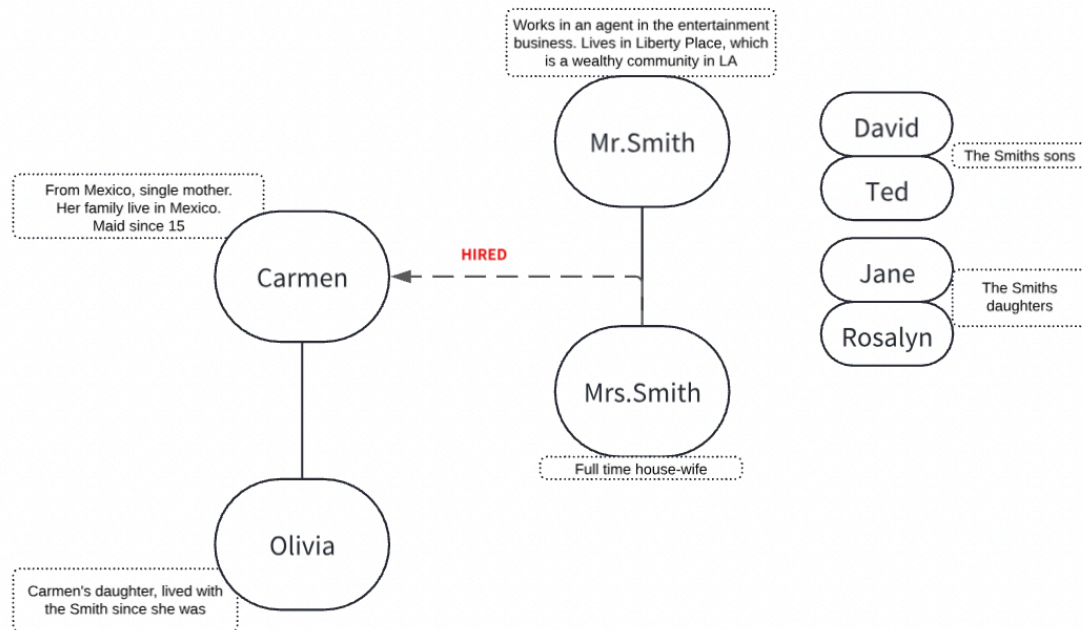


Figure2:Characters relationship in “Spanglish” (created by author)

