

Neo-Colonial Fingerprints of Women at the Rims of Higher Education

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Introduction

Today's domestic work is as stratified as the names presently assigned it, those evident from this research include babysitter, nanny, childcare provider, childcare giver, au pair, housekeeper, household help, and shadow mother. The women—and occasional man—who work in this field in the U.S. originate from all countries but currently predominantly from the Caribbean and Philippines. Whether they reside legally or illegally in the U.S., until 2010, all New York domestic workers labored without the protection of the law because this work has been regarded as unskilled; hence, those in this field have worked at risk of their health, holistically and naturally, suffering the most abuse emotionally, verbally, and in the worst cases, physically. Consequently, they cannot even begin to identify with the Ivy-league women of Anne-Marie Slaughter's article in July/August 2012 of *The Atlantic*, "Why Women Still Can't Have It All," which provoked an international response. The majority of domestic workers who labor at the bottom of the social stratum, unlike Slaughter, cannot anticipate any respite from their drudgery and abuses. Too many are similar to Valdi, the protagonist of Nandi's¹ 2009 novel, *The True Nanny Diaries: A Novel*. Nandi's work portrays four women—two legal and two illegal—who have tried to escape domestic work because this type of work was not their choice. They, in turn, stand in stark contrast to some women who in real life choose to be professional nannies.

Slaughter's publication makes palatable the pain of separation caused by millions of mothers, internationally, who—regardless of their profession, work, or social stratum—live apart from their children. In regard to the working class and working-class, poor women, their pains that are engendered by the social oppression of globalization and neo-colonial conditions for too long have been met with apathy. Having immigrated to distant lands for better scholastic or economic opportunities, they have been unable to anticipate any timely reunion with their children, an uncertainty that has compounded their painful separation. The plight of immigrant women in domestic work has invariably given rise to a new category of children labeled by new terminologies: "barrel child" and *chivimola*.² In the New York metropolis alone, of the two hundred and twenty thousand domestic workers, eighty percent comes from the Caribbean under varying circumstances. Among these women the term "barrel child" has more currency than its contested *chivimola*, discussed later. Even though Nandi's novel does not focus on the mother-child separation, it stands as a strong argument for dignity and respect for all domestic workers, legal or illegal, because the road to being an illegal American is complex and variegated.

¹ The hard print of the publication includes only the author's first name while the Kindle edition includes both her first and last name. Since I use predominantly the hard print in reference, I defer to the hard print use of author's first name only.

² As will be discussed later, I first learned of both terms in 2007 and conducted an initial research on both with the intention of returning to my findings at a later date. I did find reference to *chivimola* or a variation of it in an internet publication in 2007, which is no longer there. Therefore, I am offering a disclaimer if the term is botched but standing by the position that the concept exists.

Nandi's *The True Nanny Diaries: A Novel*

Despite two factual errors, Nandi's novel speaks richly of the human struggle for equity in labor and even more so of the epochal war against woman's dignity. Much can be made of the errors: the one of inverting Union General William Tecumseh Sherman's name to read "General William Sherman Tecumseh" and the other of citing the year of Trinidad and Tobago's independence as 1961 instead of 1962.³ Intentional or not, both errors speak to the fact that as a human race, the struggle—and the war—is for all humanity to get right the business of human relationships on all levels: macro-, meso-, and micro-, strongly implied in the novel's opening two-sentence paragraph. Macro-cosmically, the narrative indicts a human race who has silenced Mother God,⁴ stolen Her House, and continues to ignore Her existence. Meso-cosmically, the narrative quilts the taut socio-economic tension between race, class, and gender whose social fabric strains to remain intact in a pre-9/11 world. Most poignantly, the protagonist, Valdina "Valdi" West's microcosmic journey from Trinidad to New York implicates the human impulse to pursue one's dream at all cost, even if the goal remains an elusive one—buried merely in hope and faith—for many people, including Valdi. She must overcome metaphorically the derailment of her educational ambition to earn her master's degree at an Ivy league university, overcome cynophobia, and battle all her hallucinatory demons.

The narrative's opening states unequivocally that inhuman behavioral practices are the real threat to the New York socio-economic quilt, one that allows a privileged class of women to depict underprivileged ones not as human but as "snakes" and "monkeys." If, however, they are to be made visible at all, then they are best portrayed as asexual clowns and human caricatures whose job is merely to keep happily entertained the children of civilized women in skilled labor. Apparently based upon a real advertisement for a nanny, a photocopy of which serves as the novel's epigraph, Nandi alters only in the last line "find her" to "pass her on," both phrases accentuating the fact that today's nannies are yesterday's female slaves, and tragically, that some women can be deliberately most unkind to her sisters, as described in *The History of Mary Prince: A West Indian Slave, Related by Herself*, first published in 1831. Nandi's novel is seamed with the abuses of multiple domestic workers, its stories spanning a four-year period set roughly during the late eighties to early nineties. Hence, the reader becomes as indignant as Valdi with the realization that the dehumanization of the less fortunate has remained an historical constant.

Nandi next turns the reader's gaze to Sherman's image that is juxtaposed to the ad, and in so doing is suggesting that Civil War concretized in Sherman's statue has not merely been one of North versus South but also an uncivil, intra-sex, female one. Sherman's statue that dominates Grand Army Plaza as a testament to the North's triumph is the rendezvous of the four nannies whose solidarity is strained by rivalry, secrets, loss of hope, and deep despair. Sherman's statue symbolically represents the meeting place for disclosing one defeat following another, for the life

³ Nandi, *The True Nanny Diaries: A Novel* (New York: Brick for Bread, 2009), 87.

⁴ According to all of the biblical scriptures that the early church fathers rejected in their formation of the biblical canon, Mother-Father/Holy Mother is very much a part of the God-Head.

of a nanny is not a victorious or celebratory one. The nannies war with each other as much as they do with their household employers and find resolution only in all of the women's mutual love for the children, for whom they are all responsible, employer and employee. The unspoken question that hangs over the narrative is: when will all wars cease and Nike, the goddess of peace who shares the pedestal with Sherman, be the triumphant one?

Extracting a protagonist from the farthest region of Caribbean archipelago, one who hails even farther south than the defeated South, Trinidad and Tobago, Nandi uses this geographical fact in a way that bespeaks a war that encompasses a broader geographical and historical North-South one.⁵ Sherman's statue—with its African American woman model⁶ used for the Nike model—like all statues of military heroes, is being used not merely as an attempt to make immortal the glorious feats of northern male warriors. When coupled with the photocopied ad, Nandi is broadening the story of the historical North-South victory and defeat as if to reiterate that the U.S. stands as conqueror of the Western Hemisphere. The Scarlett O'Haras of the South who were helpless without their help have transplanted to the North and flourished among those women who have deemed it appropriate to portray Caribbean women at best as skilled monkeys who left their tree-huts in the West Indies to make a life for themselves among civilized, skilled people. Personally, Caribbean immigrants still trade stories of being patted down by Americans for evidence of their tails and can relate to Nandi's use of the ad as not farfetched. In fact, it implies an uninterrupted historical continuum of a war among women whose solidarity remains with a patriarchal system that validates and reifies racism and sexism. Their myopia fails to consider that legal or illegal, national or international, everyone is human, has the right to labor under fair and just laws, and at worst, not be manipulated or parodied for profit or amusement.

To maintain these arguments that call for a world no longer defined by racism and sexism, Nandi stitches the friendship of four different women of varying characters based upon national origin, age, race, religion, and academic accomplishments. Valdi—the dynamic first-person, subjective narrator—held an honor's degree from the University of the West Indies St. Augustine and was forced to abort Columbia's University Master's degree program because a conservative man considered her scholarship fund granted by his private corporation as excessive and ended its funding. Forced to repay her tuition bill for the unfunded semester, she turned temporarily to babysitting and became trapped in the work. Nandi uses the derailment metaphor in one of the narrative's most dramatic scenes, one that alludes to Amiri Baraka's *Dutchman* in which the Black protagonist, a college student aspiring to be a poet, is killed by his White female

⁵ The U.S., after all, has invaded without provocation Grenada (1983) and Panama (1989).

⁶ According to New York City website, “‘Harriette (“Hettie”) Eugenia Anderson posed for the allegorical figure of peace leading Sherman. An African-American from Georgia, Anderson was described by the artist as ‘certainly the handsomest model I have ever seen of either sex.’ Saint-Gaudens may also have fused the subject's facial features with those of long-time model, muse and mistress, Davida Johnson. The pine branch at the horse's feet represents Sherman's march through Georgia. Disliking statues looking like ‘smoke stacks,’ Saint-Gaudens had the piece gilded with two layers of gold leaf. A frail Saint-Gaudens attended the unveiling on Memorial Day, 1903, eleven years after the monument was first proposed. ‘Saint-Gaudens is one of those artists for whom it is worthwhile to wait,’ the *Saturday Evening Post* explained, however, as the successful piece was widely praised.”
<http://www.nycgovparks.org/parks/M062/highlights/13127>.

foil on a New York City subway.⁷ Valdi, “the scholar and once aspiring writer” has the opportunity to babysit at the literary reception for the newly awarded 1992 Nobel Prize for Literature winner, in an allusion to Derek Walcott, that year’s winner. Even though she does not work on weekends, it is an opportunity to hear the Nobel Laureate in person and she agrees. The reception becomes a fiasco because her successful twin, Delia, was also present. Rather than enjoy the moment, Valdi had to dodge Delia, missed hearing the Nobel Laureate, and ended up being publicly belittled by her boss who mistakenly assumed that Valdi agreed to attend only to hear the choir perform. Chloë could not even conceptualize that Valdi wished to breathe the air of the Nobel Laureate and other writers and not listen to a choir bawling for Jesus.⁸ The insult and its injury redefined for Valdi her hopeless and helpless situation. However, she attempted to assert some sense of authority without autonomy by voicing her right to being treated with human dignity. Consequently, she resigned and the next day while riding the “J” train from Queens to Brooklyn she inadvertently caused Dancermigo’s death. Dancermigo was a mad Mexican passenger who was absorbed into the music of his headphones, dancing and swaying while standing between two cars. Upon disembarking at her stop, she shouted her compliment to Dancermigo that he was a good dancer. Startled, he lost his grip just as the train lurched in its resumption, fell beneath the cars, and was decapitated. Traumatized, but numbed, by what she had just caused and witnessed, she went on to kill.

The context of the killing is her father who resided in Trinidad and her successful, legally U.S. residential twin sister, Delia. Their encounter at the literary reception devastated them both. Delia was aghast that her sister was working as a nanny, of all things, and Valdi was beyond humiliation that her secret identity was exposed ironically at an occasion at which she had dreamed would have been a glorious one. Shame and secrecy shrouded Valdi from her sister, as well as their father who could not boast of Valdi, as he could of Delia who went to America and made something of herself. The twin sisters mirrored success and failure, pride and shame, confidence and uncertainty, but finally the human will to triumph over adversity. Valdi, however, regarded her father as her true enemy, not her twin, and the cause of her deepest fear, cynophobia: the fear of dogs. Her incapability to love dogs originated in her father’s poisoning of Lassie, the old family dog she had grown to love dearly. Her father, by no means a hero, was not even an antithesis of Sherman because he could only boast of his successful daughter, Delia, and not in anything that he himself accomplished. He was responsible for driving the wedge between them by his continued contrasting of their paths. He metaphorically poisoned both sisters against each other and also Valdi’s natural love for dogs. Never mind that his was a euthanizing gesture because the dog was slowly dying from old age, possibly cancer. The untimely killing stated that an inconveniently old dog was the dispensable creature that could be humanely put out of its misery. More provocatively, the story of Lassie’s killing compels the reader to interrogate the validity of all arguments used to justify killings, including Valdi’s own killing of Tennis, the dog

⁷ This paper does not allow for a more detailed analysis of the Baraka’s 1964 play and merely wishes to make the point that some writers rely on the metaphor of derailment to dramatize lost hopes and dreams.

⁸ Nandi, *The True Nanny Diaries: A Novel*, 60.

who brought much comfort to Cole, the child in her charge. In regard to her father, he was the poisonous snake spewing venom laced by Trinidad rum and asphalt.⁹ She, therefore, had to win this war against her father who taught her that killing a dog was justifiable. Once her demons are destroyed, Valdi emerges from all her fogs to see hope in life, not despair. She is triumphant. In morphing dark memories, crushed hopes, destroyed dreams into all the images of diseases and death, Nandi locates the war against humanity as endemic of human nature and perpetually chaotic of human relationships and straining the bonds of friendship. Such is evident in the Valdi-Ava dichotomous one.

Ava, an Indian-Guyanese whose real name was Vasumati Baldeosingh, was ten years her junior and depicted as Valdi's nemesis. Nandi relies upon the historical African-Indian interracial rivalry to tease out another complexity of human relationships. Ava, however, is more than an ambitious Indian who will do whatever it takes to succeed. She is the youngest of the four, most vulnerable, ends up being the most hurt and the one for whom the reader may be inclined to find most sympathetic. She courageously completed her bachelor's degree in Psychology at Medgar Evers College, from which she graduated at the top of her class with Valdi's unacknowledged writing assistance. Even more egregious than the plagiarism in which she indulged, Ava, who analyzed everyone based upon the SIGECAPS formula,¹⁰ failed to recognize that her "family" supported her educational pursuit only because they deemed an educated nanny as more valuable to the family than an uneducated one and not because they intended that she left their employment to become a school psychologist for the Board of Education. When she insisted on her right to autonomy, to live in her future dream house in a gentrified Brooklyn neighborhood—the epitome of success in America—and work in a profession for which she was academically qualified, her ideal plan was thwarted and she was forced to return to Guyana. The narrative implies that even after having lived in the U.S. for seventeen years, earning an honor's bachelor's degree and valedictorian status for having "indelibly sewn herself into the social and cultural fabric of the institution,"¹¹ and possessing a Green Card, Ava could not break free completely from the chains of domestic labor. For her, despite having done all the right things by pulling herself up by her bootstraps, by proving to be the perfect Green Card representative of "responsibility, stick-to-it-ness, passion, optimism, desire, hope, confidence and courage ... and a good attitude," she was a resounding failure.¹² Her failure was even more calamitous and palatable because she had boasted that "nobody could put her out of America."¹³ Her calamity was even more devastating because her good attitude also entailed her stooping to conquer by sleeping with her boss.¹⁴ She willingly did whatever was deemed necessary to succeed. Her fatal mistakes also caricatured all nannies who attempted to forget their place in society. Despite her academic brilliance and ironic of her psychology degree,

⁹ Nandi, *The True Nanny Diaries: A Novel*, 64, 194.

¹⁰ Nandi, *The True Nanny Diaries: A Novel*, 18-19.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 171, 178.

¹² *Ibid.*, 179.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 166.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 168. Nandi alludes to Oliver Goldsmith's eighteenth-century drama, *She Stoops to Conquer or, Mistakes of the Night*.

Ava remained unlearned of the human will to exploit and oppress those considered inferior. She would have benefited from some clear-sightedness of Monica, her aunt-in-law who had no illusions about marrying for her Green Card.

Monica, a Jamaican, was scarred facially back in Jamaica and most likely immigrated to escape the physical abuse. She had her first child at age fourteen, which became the cause of her expulsion from school and not completing her high school education. The narrative initially leads the reader to believe that Monica was in the most viable position of the four friends, having secured a green-card marriage to Ava's Uncle Ram. Even though Nandi skirts the more sordid reality of the many women who become men's sex slave while in green-card marriages, this one is void of romance, similarly to reality, and the woman has no agency. At first, Monica's marital prospects appeared even greener—pun intended—than a nanny's because if she applied herself to earning her high school diploma, Uncle Ram would secure her a job with the Department of Prisons.¹⁵ Through Monica's story, Nandi points out how equally confining "the glass prison" is, which some illegals trade for residential security, because freedom and independence are illusions.¹⁶

Obviously, Nandi is suggesting that marriage for convenience is so fragile that the insecure party—in this case, Uncle Ram, ironically—would resort to devious means to have his way. In this marriage for a Green Card, pregnancy and having a man who is willing to assume full financial responsibility as being head of the home was its own glass prison. Upon becoming pregnant with Uncle Ram's child, he stopped her from working, moved her into his own home, and dictated the terms of their marriage. Once Monica came to that realization, she bitterly contemplated poisoning her "asshole" husband with anti-freeze.¹⁷ No longer basking in the glory of having wittingly finagled the marriage, the inconvenience of the matter is reinforced with the realization that Uncle Ram was the truly calculating one in choosing her over motherless Valdi. A woman with children was more susceptible to dependency, a trump card he later played by sending for her children in Jamaica without consulting her. Monica found herself shackled to a man whose child she was expecting in a marriage that was not supposed "to have sexual perks."¹⁸ In other words, micro- and meso-cosmically, freedom and autonomy are merely illusions; individuals, like institutions and nation-states, are mutually interdependent upon one another, the problems being realized in the manipulative and exploitative tactics to which people resort to imprisoning others, including swindle them out of their hopes and dreams, which becomes the fate of Madam Lucian.

Madam Lucian, whose actual name was Dorothé (M.L.) Alcindore and the oldest of the four women, was so nicknamed because she was a Garifuna, a Black Carib, from St. Lucia. Her alterity is rooted in the history of the European rivalries for possession of the islands that led to the tragic annihilation of innumerable Caribbean natives: Caribs, Aruacs, Garifunas, Tainos, to name those more well known. This most tragic character who has no Carib Leap from which to

¹⁵ Nandi, *The True Nanny Diaries: A Novel*, 24.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 149.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 180, 196.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 23.

plunge and end her misery suffers the metropolitan leap into suicide by overdosing. Her hauntingly sad story begins unfolding at her birth as the second child of fourteen children, thirteen girls and one boy who was the youngest. After the eldest girl escaped by running “off with a *dadder-head* Grenada boy,” it became her responsibility to help support the family by baking and selling bread. She was sold into a marriage at age fifteen “for two sack-a-flour, a bag of rice, a bag of corn meal, and a cotton handbag” to a lecherous man who was forty-nine years old. She endured fifty years of domestic violence, of being raped, beaten then bathed: a cruelty that ended at his death.¹⁹

With a veiled allusion to Dante’s Lucia, Madam Lucian, a staunch Catholic, at first appeared to be the light and inspirational mother of the three younger women. However, her dreams of retiring to live in a house that she thought was being built by her entrepreneurial skills as well as her domestic work turns into a nightmare. Reputed as “the Flatbush bread lady” for selling the finest bread in Brooklyn, every loaf sold paid for every brick for her new house, in her proud “Bread for Brick” plan that heralded her imminent retirement at age seventy-five.²⁰ For approximately ten years, she endured life as a domestic while baking bread to build her dream retirement house. Finally, she could enjoy rest, peace, and comfort. Then, to her overwhelming distraught, she learned that her brother, Boyo, living in St. Lucia, gambled away her investment and failed to build her house.

Prior to Boyo’s betrayal, her younger sister, Elmina, provided her temporary residence when she first arrived from St. Lucia and secured her work as a live-in babysitter; however, Elmina was a treacherous swindler. Elmina established a bank account in her own name into which she was supposed to deposit Madam Lucian’s earnings but in fact stole every penny.²¹ Madam Lucian, the mother who fed the people with her bread, was betrayed by her own siblings, had labored in vain, and Valdi could do little else but console her with the psalm-reggae spiritual reminder that it was impossible to try to “sing the Lord’s song in a strange land”²² when one’s dreams contorted into hallucinations and nightmares.²³ What other song of consolation could one offer in the face of such a crushing hope? The song resonates of all their losses and foreshadows the dirge it would become of Madam Lucian’s suicide. In fact, Valdi’s hallucinatory image of Madam Lucian before she overdoses on her medication is not of sunshine and promise typically associated with Madam Lucian but of “a big black cauldron, giggling with she no-teeth self” who has taken “to walking the road without her *mouth plates*.”²⁴ This old mother has become a menacing ghost, a witch who joins others in Valdi’s hallucinations of the ghosts of all their unraveled dreams flattened to dust and ashes.²⁵ Interestingly, this image of Madam Lucian is

¹⁹ Nandi, *The True Nanny Diaries: A Novel*, 144.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 141.

²¹ Nandi, *The True Nanny Diaries: A Novel*, 146-47.

²² Alludes to Psalm 137.4 and the Jamaican singing group, the Melodians’ song, “By the Rivers of Babylon” (from the soundtrack of *The Harder They Come*).

²³ Nandi, *The True Nanny Diaries: A Novel*, 149.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 164.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 25-26, 201-02.

directly linked to Valdi's twin sister, Delia, who is the true ghost of the story and is reminiscent of one aspect of Anne McClintock's work.

McClintock's portrayal of the historical continuum of women as maids in "The Ghost in the Looking Glass" shows a nineteenth-century cartoon of a "a lady admiring her image in a full-length mirror and catching in the glass a startled glimpse of a haggard and dying woman slumped in the shadows behind her," a cartoon based upon the reality of a young seamstress who collapsed and died from a twenty-six and a half-hour work-day without rest.²⁶ She continues, "The mirror frames a female hydra, a Siamese twin fully expressive of the contradictory and fatal reciprocity of the identity of working class and upper-class women" whose leisure, pleasure, and class status "prestige depended on the deadly labor of the female working class."²⁷ In Nandi's novel, not only are Valdi and Delia the twin hydra but so are all the cursing, despairing, hurting characters who died or were destroyed in despair. The first one was Pilar, the first worker killed accidentally by a U.S. postal truck because she dared to compete with her employer, Chloë, by purchasing a pair of boots that was similar to hers. Ava never realized her cherished ambition to work in a profession for which she was academically qualified as well as purchase her own home in a gentrified Brooklyn neighborhood. Madam Lucian's suffered multiple betrayals at the hands of her younger siblings. Cole and his dog, Tennis, were equally vulnerable victims in the myriad tragedies of human invention. So many wars still being fought and lost unfold in this narrative that becomes a poignant plea for humans to find new, creative ways to protect each other from unnecessary pain and suffering.

Despite being a well-crafted narrative, the novel is problematic regarding neo-colonial and post-colonial discourses. Nandi, in fictionalizing modern Trinidadians, as she describes them in relation to British colonialism, harks back to colonial attitudes as if Trinbagonians (conflation of Trinidadians and Tobagonians) have remained in that arrested state of consciousness.²⁸ The problem of interfacing reality with fiction surfaces during Valdi's interview with Lisa Beckham, a British housewife and non-practicing anthropologist who promised to treat Valdi as a person deserving of dignity and respect. Valdi flashbaked to a poignant childhood memory when she and Delia were eight years old and along with the entire country awaited one of the Queen's visits. Extraordinarily talented Valdi, in contrast to the ordinary Delia and other classmates, was chosen to recite "Hail Britannia." Most likely, this event occurred in 1956, and Valdi matured during the fifties and sixties before emigration to the U.S. in 1970 upon completing her UWI degree program. This timeline puts Trinidad and Tobago in the throes of the Black Power Movement in 1970—an unrest that began in 1969 and continued into 1974, depending upon the historical markers being used when the two national revolutionary movements—the National Joint Action Committee (commonly called NJAC²⁹) and the National United Freedom Fighters (commonly called NUFF)—revolted for the end of British, American, and Canadian rule and presence in the country.

²⁶ Ibid., 97.

²⁷ Nandi, *The True Nanny Diaries: A Novel*, 96-97.

²⁸ Ibid., 87-90.

²⁹ The website, <http://njactt.org/>, features much information on the organization's more recent activities.

Both NJAC and NUFF called for a new educational paradigm that eventually resulted in the replacement of the General Certificate of Education (GCE) by the Caribbean Examination Council (CXC). These were dynamic years that awakened and energized Trinbagonians, irrespective of race and class. For instance, emerging from the movements are the two brilliant Jones sisters, Beverly and Jennifer who won the Common Entrance Examination—a gateway test to secondary schools that both sisters passed for Bishop Anstey High School (the highest ranking high school for girls). The younger sister, seventeen-year old Beverly, became the youngest martyr of NJAC and NUFF by being killed with the guerillas in September, 1972. The 2011 release of award-winning *'70: Remembering a Revolution* captures excellently and makes Trinbagonians proud of the history as well as the documentary of NJAC's activities. Coupled with NUFF, both student-led movements re-engendered the consciousness of university and high school students, respectively, and the afro and dashiki with their related calls of "Back to Africa" and "Black is beautiful" bombarded the streets. Furthermore, Dr. Eric Williams's "buy local" 1962 independence call was revived in a renewed rejection of American consumerism and Trinbagonians' mailing barrels of American goodies. Instead, Trinbagonians were requesting that their migrant relatives send back U.S. dollars instead. The U.S. dollar used to purchase local goods was the better stimulus for national economy. Certainly, there were—and still are—some Trinbagonians who remained unduly influenced by foreign things. However, many Trinbagonians remained inoculated from such influences and had no desire for things foreign, foreigners, or the desire to emigrate. Many regard the earth as a "ketch-hell" place and prefer to catch hell in a warm country ruled by "we people" rather than a cold one ruled by "de w'ite man." Thus, for Nandi to imply that Trinbagonians remains enthralled by all things foreign goes beyond slighting this part of the country's history. She almost erases it.

The other problematic aspect of the work is the idea of one's *sun*-fried brain and *sun*-blackened skin are indicative of one's social failure is such a colonial and neo-colonial argument that its very implication threatens to make invalid her overall argument for immigration. The global migration of all peoples throughout the world is not only shaped by world geography but world economy. Developing countries remain in deep debt to financial institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. Kamau Brathwaite's bodies of poetry make the most compelling arguments for Europe to stop under-developing the African continent in ongoing neo-colonial ventures masquerading as help for the poor, equatorial black skins who cannot think for themselves. Hence, it is quite disappointing to see the argument being revived in this novel, albeit within the context of people's success and/or failure depending upon not only their definition of success/failure but any extenuating factor that may bring either to the fore. According to the narrative, Valdi is a failure because despite her hard work, she—and the other nannies—cannot overcome the multiple social barriers that are immovable, the major one being the lack of sufficient economic opportunities of developing countries that cause immigration and strips the women of womanhood beyond being domesticated creatures. One cannot help but notice the vicarious references to their sexuality and femininity.

Valdi is herself void of any sexual relationships. In fact, the only poignant encounter is in relation to her dead, childhood dog, Lassie, who during one of her hallucinations morphs into a giant “about seven feet tall and it wore a gray trench coat that was open to display a naked, hairy, dog body and its erect purple manhood” that attempts to rape her but she eludes him and turns on “the light switch to make him disappear.”³⁰ Her own job with Chloë has been replaced temporarily by Aleksandra, “a very blonde blonde” with “milky skin and sky blue eyes” and walked like she could glide into and out of television hair commercials.³¹ Valdi accurately predicts that once Alex’s sexual favors with Chloë’s husband begin that asexual Valdi would have her old job back. However, not even she foresaw that Chloë would divorce her husband for his indiscretion within the walls of their home, which were witnessed firsthand by the child, Cole—another victim of the non-idealistic domestic milieu. As previously mentioned, Ava is no saint herself and one can not but wonder when her work degenerated into prostitution in exchange for her college tuition, Green Card, car, and exposure to Broadway shows.³² Monica is resolved to being the wife of a man for whom she has no respect and wishes dead. These nannies live in a world without love, except for their love for the children in their charge, because their adult emotional relationships are portrayed as non-threatening to masculinity. They are all domesticated women—the lines between wife, mistress, prostitute often blurred—with no control of their lives. The worst of them is Valdi, a woman whose academic goals were derailed by a conservative-company-master-pimp of neo-colonialism who estranged an emigrant in the big city and left her without any hope of returning home with dignity. She is very angry and has no modicum of control until she goes to war with her father vicariously through her war with Tennis, Cole’s dog, and kills it. Only then she regains her sanity for having defeated her father, the one who was the true satan of her life.

All in all, the narrative is engaging of four women who struggle against overwhelming odds and have only hope to sustain them. It is tragic that one dies without her hope being realized and another returns home with the sense of being a failure despite her accomplishment. A modicum of hope, however, remains for one who will find an intolerable marriage to be tolerable because of the children. Lastly, the subjective narrator will find clarity and hope in life itself. The life of a nanny is not a fairy tale, Nandi makes convincingly clear because the novel becomes pivotal in the passing of New York’s Domestic Workers Bill of Rights in 2010, having garnered the support of State Senator Kevin Parker (D-NY), 21st Senate District, Brooklyn who wrote its Foreword. One cannot deny that the novel holds a distinguished place among the works of all the writers whose works have depicted the lives of domestic workers and the effects on their children, all of which have contributed to the passing of this historical bill, including the works of sociologists, whose analyses follow.

³⁰ Nandi, *The True Nanny Diaries: A Novel* (Kindle Edition), 2239.

³¹ Nandi, *The True Nanny Diaries: A Novel*, 82-83.

³² *Ibid.*, 82.

The “Barrel Child” and *Chiwimola* of Immigration

Though Nandi’s novel does not engage the plight of the children who are disaffected due to their mothers’ living abroad, the works of sociologists and my own research inform on the challenges that these children face. One major challenge is overcoming the pain of separation toward defining their path to success. One source of pain is the labels that have been appropriated to them: “barrel child” and *chiwimola*.

“Barrel children” was coined during the 1990s and introduced into academic discourse by Jamaican sociologist Claudette Crawford-Brown, its definition being “children waiting to rejoin parents, who receive material gifts in barrels from parents who reside in the metropolitan capitals, but receive little emotional nurturing from these parents.”³³ During the 2000s, it was adopted by some Caribbean mothers who found it particularly informative of one effect of globalization. A barrel child is one whose parent is living abroad and mails home in cardboard barrels, especially at Christmas- and Easter-time, non-perishable foods, clothing, and toys. While the barrels’ contents were supposed to be regarded as tokens of love, they have been received with ambivalence by both the children and the larger community. A body of literature attests how for some children the barrels became painful reminders of absentee-parents while for others the barrels represented social mobility. Foreign clothing or toys were statements that these children were better off than those who did not have a mother, father, or relative living abroad who could send them “things” that advertised more effectively than television commercials American consumerism. Nothing can be more convincing than the tangible evidence that possessions effected happiness and laughter. While one may concede that the postcolonial impetus has been eclipsed by globalization, the behavior realized in immigration that produces “barrel children” speak to the perpetual struggle for social equity, the re-articulation of meaningful human values, and a pedagogy that reifies contentment over excessive acquisition of the material.

The term “barrel child” momentarily is receiving visibility, thanks to the efforts of Trinbagonian Christine Yvette Lewis of Union Theological Seminary’s Poverty Scholars. Lewis is an educated, published poet, activist, and nanny, and remarkable in many ways. First, she is poor by choice because such is her understanding of being Christ-like in a world whose global super class and billionaires are existing in a state of disequilibrium as they spiral at a frenetic speed that is propelled by greed and excess. She is on a one-woman crusade to rid the world of poverty and the conditions that continue historically to percolate the violence and abuse of women and children. Her apartment is not only full of items for barrel children but of whatever that is leftover for the poor and homeless of the New York metropolis. To get a glimpse of her passion, her poetry performance at the 2010 PEN World Voices Festival of International Literature’s can be found on YouTube. She also is completely un-retreating as she goes head-to-head with Stephen Colbert on *The Colbert Report* shortly after the Domestic Workers United won its historical fight for New York’s passing of the law that now protects the rights of all

³³ Claudette Crawford-Brown, *Who Will Save Our Children?: The Plight of the Jamaican Child in the 1990s* (Kingston, Jamaica: Canoe Press University of the West Indies, 1999), 53-56.

domestic workers. Most emphatically, she counters Colbert's satire that domestics are unskilled workers with her most appreciable fighting words: "I don't know who first called it unskilled, but my God, if I should find this person..."³⁴ Her "bring it on" moment won a rousing applause from Colbert's audience and dramatized the courage of a Caribbean woman who is intrepid and confident that she will win the war, eventually. Nike will prevail. Meanwhile, the sociological condition that reproduces poverty and barrel children must be confronted.

Pamela K. Marshall's novel, *Barrel Child* (2011), presents the perspectives of Jamaican barrel children who become trapped in the cycle of parents with children living back home who then become young adults who procreate barrel children. The narrative dramatizes how at times it is excruciatingly painful for a mother to be separated from her child, yet how that mother (and father, too) is helpless to break the cycle of emigration for a better quality of life that results in separation. Marshall's novel, however, falls short of calling into question any of the issues of globalization that have forced female protagonist, Sara, and male protagonist, Will, to fall blindly into their cycle parent-child separation. Instead, the reader is invited to appreciate that this young couple who immigrated to New York to reunite with their parents and attempted to pursue their college education. However, their path to social success was fraught with the common distractions typical of today's college generation: partying, dressing well, missing classes, facing fears of unplanned pregnancy, and being forced into a premature marriage. The narrative reads like a concerted effort for its characters to appear as normal American young people whose only major differences are urban acculturation and having fallen into the cycle of reproducing barrel children, inadvertently. Marshall can be applauded on two levels, though. She presents a fairly accurate portrait of today's average college youth who are more preoccupied with bling-bling rather than delving into the historical, sociological, and political evolution of the focus on material acquisitions. More compellingly, the narrative argues persuasively that higher education has lost its intrinsic value inherent in the pursuit of academic learning and instead exists in service of a world that is defined by wealth and its accumulation. Contrapuntally, the novel can be characterized as urban fiction with a Caribbean flare that, nonetheless, has missed the opportunity to engage the humanistic consciousness of the Caribbean. Caribbean history has, after all, produced such historical icons as the eighteenth-century woman Jamaican rebel leader Ni, also called Nanny, Haitian eighteenth-century revolutionary leader Toussaint L'Ouverture, twentieth-century leaders Marcus Garvey (Jamaican) and Kwame Toure (formerly Stokely Carmichael of Trinidad), and Jamaica's own current prime minister, Portia Simpson Miller, who was first served in 2006-2007. In other words, the narrative lacks a social or historical context of a western plantation system that engendered the barrel child social phenomenon. Nevertheless, one can appreciate Marshall's narration of a sociological phenomenon that occupies a rim of society.

The other sociological phenomenon emerging from immigration is the *chiwimola* in relation to *mowichilbah*. Both terms are formed from the first letter/s of the phrases, "**children with mothers living abroad**" and "**mothers with children living back home**." I first learned of

³⁴ Christine Yvette Lewis, *The Colbert Report: Episode #07015* (26 Jan. 2011).

these terms being used in 2007 by some educated Caribbean mothers who could not identify with or embrace the term “barrel child/ren,” finding the concept as constraining as the neo-colonial conditions that keep recycling the conditions of economic dependency of people of developing countries. Unintentionally, the idea of a barrel child assumed some negative undertones in its implication that the far-reaching arms of colonialism continued to dictate how Caribbean parents saw themselves as in a state of perpetual disconnectedness from their children; furthermore, the term reiterated that immigrant parents could not escape a state of victimhood and colonization. Thus, the barrel became the symbolic representation of colonial victimization and colonization. In Nandi’s novel, a mere passing reference is made to the barrel in relation to entrepreneurial, immigrant women who came to the U.S. to complete a “six-month hustle to fill a barrel and go back South.”³⁵ For immigrants who traveled with options, the barrel represented an opportunity and not continued exploitation. Nonetheless, the mothers who objected to the idea that their children were barrel ones preferred the terms *chiwimola* and *mowichilbah* and credited their invention to Asian immigrant mothers. A neo-colonial position calls for a contestation of the usefulness of all these terms that speak to the ongoing effects on globalization on families and how mothers have sought to define themselves and their children.

Furthermore, these terms speak of the will to be creative and not destroyed by colonialism’s crushing wheels of oppression and poverty, along with the right to create language that suits their own identity, having identified with Audre Lorde’s “The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House,” Paule Marshall’s novels, and other notable Black women writers, decades after these Caribbean women scholars were in vogue. Theirs was a tenacity to continue to confront and challenge the hierarchization of labor, which remains very much in vogue. These educated mothers were further concerned that the term “barrel child/ren” would merely homogenize and make invisible the complexities of mothers living abroad and away from their children, as does any label, for that matter. Arguably, these two terms are inclusive of all immigrant mothers who are separated from their children and used remittances, along with purchased items, to maintain an overseas connection with their children. Nonetheless, the term “barrel child” cannot be dismissed for the neo-colonial conditions that continue to allow for the exploitation of woman’s labor, the historical feminization of poverty, and the genderization of global labor.

Interestingly, Trinbagonian journalist George Alleyne makes a call in his 2006 article for remittances rather than barrels, which is not new, as previously mentioned. One can further take issue with Alleyne for writing stereotypically negative of Trinbagonian expatriates by implying that everyone who emigrated was poor and struggling. To the contrary, the process was costly and in fact had evolved to a status symbol representative of those who were doing well enough, educated enough to be admitted into an Ivy league university, in stellar health, had a spotless criminal record, and could own a Green Card served residential or commodity status. Some people who were granted legal residency kept flexible their option of living either in the U.S. or at home. Some “beat the system” by living in the U.S. for six months then return home for the

³⁵ Nandi, *The True Nanny Diaries: A Novel*, 85.

other six, a flexibility that though problematic could not be circumvented. Undoubtedly, one granted initial permanent residency had to be able to afford the plane fare, a portion of the sponsoring fee if being sponsored, produce a bank statement with the evidence of having sufficient money to sustain her wellbeing for at least six months, and swear never to become a ward of the State in which she would reside. Expatriates, then, tended to be from the middle class and were mobile enough to escape declining economic conditions that threatened to lower their standard of living, as anthropologist Mary Beth Mills delineates in her work. In other words, one had to be well-off enough to submit one's application and unlikely to become a domestic worker. If they did, as Mills points out, because of their educational level they would have negotiated for and earned more as temporary au pairs,³⁶ limned in Jamaica Kincaid's *Lucy* (1990). Additionally, "women's informal entrepreneurial and artisanal labor has itself been identified as a promising field for international economic development," such endeavors being fortified by the micro-credit movement.³⁷ The Philippines has gone one step further to organize officially its transmigratory workers as overseas contract workers whose remittances help raise the standard of living of families back home.³⁸ Therefore, to relegate all immigrants to struggling, lower-class people is a mischaracterization of them.

Even though the Caribbean does not have in place an operation similar to the Phillipines, its migratory mothers have paid a high toll for living apart from their children. My own field research entails the story of a Barbadian *chiwimola* and *mowichilbah* that merits the attention of any sociologist, psychologist, and medical doctor. O'Livia suffered from seizures for over forty years and writes in her journal of their harrowing effects that include accidentally falling onto the subway tracks of a New York City station and surviving narrowly, the most devastating part being the periods of blackness that are lost and can never be regained. She was not born an epileptic but became one as a result of a fall incurred on the day she was chasing after her mother on the day of her mother's departure. Fortunately for her, and unlike the seizure incident of the Black girl whom Michelle Cliff describes in "If I Could Write This in Fire, I Would Write This in Fire," O'Livia was protected and surrounded by people who understood and embraced her and her condition, her chief protector and guardian being her grandmother who was also responsible for O'Livia's older sister. O'Livia's story further entails a protective grandmother who keeps secret the seizures so her emigrant daughter would be free from this worry while building a new life in New York. When mother and daughter were reunited years later, the mother had to deal with the painful realization that her departure had such an unintended consequence.

³⁶ Mary Beth Mills, "Gender and Inequality in the Global Labor Force" *Annual Review of Anthropology* 32 (2003): 41-62.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 47.

³⁸ Lisa Law and Kathy Nadeau, "Globalization, Migration and Class Struggles: NGO Mobilization for Filipino Domestic Workers" (DSU database), 55.

The Ongoing Effects of Immigration

When anything is amiss with her children, the mother's haunting question is, "Where did I go wrong?" Such question resonates of the strict upbringing of some Caribbean daughters as depicted in Jamaica Kincaid's chapter "Girl" in *At the Bottom of the River* (1992). That story ends with the poignant cry of despair, "[Y]ou mean to say that after all you are really going to be the kind of woman who the baker won't let near the bread"?³⁹ In this chapter that stands alone as its own story, the mother is instilling in her daughter the rules of behavior intended to break some stereotypes of the Black woman's colonial inheritance—maid, launderer, cook, gardener, housekeeper-mistress, and whore—to become the person who manages herself and her societal affairs well. The chapter's structure is one long question with an occasional semi-colonic punctuation and can be read as questioning of the dominant narrative tradition. First, it reminds the world shaped by masculinity and controlled by the master's language that word-bread-life originated in the mother-child relationship, with the mother being the child's first teacher. Second, the chapter rewrites the narrative genre on multiple levels. Both mother and daughter are the contrapuntual protagonists who have inherited this colonial legacy of social rules which if violated would result in their de facto disinheritance. Neither would have access to the bread that is owned by the baker. Third, it ends with two questions that invite further interrogation of the master's discourse. Who has said Black women exist merely to be the world's washerwomen, maids, helps, cooks, domestics, sex objects and suffer their menial, social status as good Christian souls? "In the Night," the story that immediately follows "Girl," proceeds to overturn the patriarchal order that embraces the jablesse-lesbian-girl as central to the feminine consciousness and dreams. Judith Ortiz Cofer's poem "La Bruja" in *Terms of Survival* identifies woman as "la bruja" who has such power that when she "spits / in the path / of her enemy, / the earth will / open at his feet / like a hungry mouth".⁴⁰ La jablesse or la bruja, Black and Minority women writers have centralized some previously marginalized images of woman—socially and spiritually. However, whether in reality or fiction, violence against women is still a critical issue.

Edwidge Danticat's *Breath, Eyes, Memory* (1994) depicts the terror and brutality that the *Tonton Macoutes* have inflicted on all Haitians with women catching an unequally larger portion of the violence. Julia Alvarez in her (1994) novel *In the Time of the Butterflies* portrays the horrors of dictatorship that demands teenage girls for lovers or young mothers who have resisted such dictatorship being imprisoned and killed. Jamaica Kincaid states this so well in *Lucy* when the protagonist observes how Lewis, her employee-lawyer mistreats his imminently-estranged wife, Mariah:

I wanted to say this to her: "Your situation is an everyday thing. Men behave in this way all the time. The ones who do not behave in this way are the exceptions to the rule." ... Everybody knew that men have no morals, that they do not know how to behave, that they do not know how to treat other people. It was why they had to invent such things—they need a guide. When they are not sure what to do,

³⁹ Jamaica Kincaid, *At the Bottom of the River* (New York: Plume, 1992), 5.

⁴⁰ Judith Ortiz Cofer, *Terms of Survival* (Houston: Arte Público Press, 1995), 25.

they consult this guide. If the guide gives them advice they don't like, they change the guide.⁴¹

It is because men—and women, too—have been so abusive, oppressive, exploitative, and evil in their treatment of nannies and maids that Christine and the other New York activists worked so diligently to ensure the passing of the Bill to protect all domestics, irrespective of the race or ethnicity. As jubilantly reported at its website, the announcement reads:

After six years of organizing by domestic workers together with unions, employers, clergy and community organizations, the New York State Legislature passed the Domestic Workers Bill of Rights (A1470B/S2311E) on July 1, 2010. Domestic workers are finally recognized as real workers under the law!!

The fight was not easy. Angelica Hernandez, a member of Domestic Workers United, traveled to Albany twenty-six times during the course of the campaign; each trip to Albany is a 12-14 hour day. In addition to Domestic Workers United, members of all of the New York Domestic Workers Justice Coalition groups – Adhikaar for Human Rights, Unity Housecleaners, Damayan Migrant Workers Association, Haitian Women for Haitian Refugees, Andolan Organizing South Asian Workers – rallied, marched, attended meetings and mobilized during the six year-long effort. The commitment and leadership of domestic workers inspired thousands to join the campaign.⁴²

The lawyer who helped draft the Bill, Trinbagonian Arlene M. Roberts, in writing about the situation provides some major factors that helped the Bill's successful passing:

... [I]n New York state more than 200,000 women (Caribbean, Latina and African) work as nannies, companions and housekeepers. Long hours, meagre wages and to a certain extent drudgery, can be said to typify their existence. It is not unusual for domestic workers to log ten to sixteen hours of work per day, and to do so without the benefit of overtime pay, severance pay, health insurance, disability or even regular vacation. The few protections afforded domestic workers are generally not enforced. Employers, cognizant of this fact, often use it to their advantage.⁴³

In support of the Bill, Senator Parker in the Foreword of Nandi's novel titles his endorsement, "The 'True' Nanny Experience," and goes one step further in an argument that takes subconsciously the patriarchal position. He maintains:

Although the labor of approximately 1.5 million nannies, maids, and housekeepers is still central to the ongoing prosperity of this nation, they remain

⁴¹ Jamaica Kincaid, *Lucy* (New York: Farrar Strauss Giroux, 1990), 141-42.

⁴² *NY Bill of Rights*, <http://www.domesticworkers.org/ny-bill-of-rights>.

⁴³ Arlene M. Roberts, "The Nanny Diaries: A Caribbean Version" (*Huffington Post*, 3 Aug. 2009), par. 2.

among the most marginalized in the United States. This situation persists, despite the centrality of their contribution to the most important element of their employers' lives: caring for their families, children and homes. Because the ongoing oppression of domestic workers has largely been created from federal law, I am making the call for a National Domestic Workers' Bill of Rights, to raise the living standards of all domestic workers in America.⁴⁴

Parker's call, though sounding well-intentioned, is merely a ripple in the ocean of women's historic calls for fairness. Time will inform on the effects of the Bill. Nonetheless, inspired by New York's success, California activists are working diligently for a similar law that protects its domestics who come primarily from the Asian countries.

To further understand this historic moment, activists for social justice must engage the macroscopic narrative of biblical discourse that would compel calls for action that surpass Himani Bannerji's call in *Thinking Through* (1995). In this work, Bannerji writes, "Decontexting 'patriarchy' or gender from history and social organization—which is structured by both cooperative and antagonistic social relations—obscures the real ways in which power works."⁴⁵ Her argument is that patriarchy and power are so deeply entrenched in their assumed positions of a natural hierarchical order that people continue to cooperate blindly and in complicity with this order. I am taking Bannerji's call one step further to aver that since patriarchy and religion are so intricately intertwined that scholars much engage the biblical macro-narrative of lost, rejected, and forgotten books that are inclusive of Holy-Mother, her daughters, and the actual names of various women who have shaped world affairs throughout the ages. We cannot ignore that patriarchy's tenuous position was constructed on the sands of omissions, revisions, redactions, and other alterations of the original macro-biblical text but remains strong only in ignorance of this text. One finds in it a wonderful panoply of stories that provides a richer canvas of the human struggle to understand the Alpha and Omega of all things. Its macroscopic narrative, however, fails to delineate the evolution of servants and handmaids who are first introduced in their relations to Abram/Abraham and his servant, Eliezer of Damascus; Sarai/Sarah and her handmaid, Hagar of Egypt; and, Sarah's grand-daughters-in-law, Leah and Rachel, and their maids, Zilpah and Bilhah, respectively.

It is already generally known that religious literature has been made sacrosanctly *uber*-patriarchal and *uber*-heterosexual of social relations and organizations, and regardless of the language and culture through which their related ideologies have been filtered throughout the ages, they all perpetuate the same lie: women, the effeminate, and children were created to be ruled and dominated by not just men but the alpha ones into whom the Holy Son has been fashioned as the Alpha of all alphas. In contradiction, religious zealots fail to acknowledge that this Alpha was both majestic Lion *and* sacrificial Lamb, yet the world thinks no less of him (or Her?).

⁴⁴ Nandi, *The True Nanny Diaries: A Novel*, "Foreword," par. 5.

⁴⁵ Himani Bannerji, *Thinking Through: Essays on Feminism, Marxism, and Anti-Racism* (Toronto: Women's Press, 1995), 69.

The Social Narratives of Domestic Workers

To return to the argument of this paper, the role of nannies, au pairs, domestics, caregivers, and other women and women who labor in this industry, today is unique of our time. One sees in Tasha Blaine’s work the image of nannies who feel like victims of mothers who fail to appreciate that nannies are “taking care of [their] most prized possessions,”⁴⁶ a problematic observation that relegates children to things to be valued, devalued, treasured, or discarded at someone’s will. Children are human beings who are to be guided and steered along the right paths to adulthood. An absent mother or caring adult places that neglected child at various risks, even if the working mother has no choice but to be absent from her child. In the case of Blaine’s Claudia Williams, she was an estranged wife and mother who became a nanny to support her daughter, Tanisha, as well as a son who was living with relatives back home in Dominica. Claudia’s Brooklyn apartment was burglarized repeatedly during her absence but she was helpless to prevent its recurrence.⁴⁷ Employed by the Halls, she sometimes felt trapped in her well-paying job that often was so boring that she fought the feeling of going mad because she had stifled her dream of earning her bachelor’s degree and the respect such afforded.⁴⁸ She finally decided to stop allowing “life—a pregnancy, a broken heart, money she needed to earn and send back home—get in the way of her dreams” and began taking math classes toward earning her GED.⁴⁹ She was determined to change her status after she confronted the reality that others assumed her only dream was to be a nanny. Her story ends with the rude, harsh thud reminiscent of the musical *Les Misérables*’s Fantine’s heartbreaking rendition of “I Have a Dream”: “But the tigers come at night / With their voices soft as thunder / As they tear your hopes apart / And they turn your dreams to shame.”⁵⁰

Immigrant Claudia is juxtaposed with American-born Vivian McCormick (employed by the Pritchards) who, having already earned her bachelor’s degree in mathematics, chose to be a professional nanny, was a member of the board of the International Nanny Association, and was determined that all nannies be educated American citizens who were trained and working under professional conditions, to the benefit of all of society. She fought to be recognized as America’s top nanny, for regulation, and for the public to be educated on the importance of quality childcare.⁵¹ She continues to fight for the United States Office of Exchange Coordination and Designation to revamp the agency’s au pair program from a quasi-cultural exchange one into one that hired au pairs who were experienced and committed to caregiving.⁵²

Kimberley Falls is the third featured nanny in Blaine’s panoply. A twice-divorced,

⁴⁶ Tasha Blaine, *Just Like Family: Inside the Lives of Nannies, the Parents They Work For, and the Children they Love* (Boston and New York: Mariner Books of Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2009), 14-15.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 302.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 39.

⁴⁹ Blaine, *Just Like Family: Inside the Lives of Nannies, the Parents They Work For, and the Children they Love*, 43, 60.

⁵⁰ Alain Boublil and Claude Michel Schönberg, *Les Misérables, 10th Anniversary Concert at London’s Albert Hall, 2008*.

⁵¹ Blaine, *Just Like Family: Inside the Lives of Nannies, the Parents They Work For, and the Children they Love*, 67.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 293.

childless woman who was, nonetheless, maternal to the core, Kim was the ideal nanny for the Porters.⁵³ Professional and expert at her job, she was also of a calm demeanor and utter unselfish in her dealings with her employers. She was fortunate to have worked in homes where her respect was never diminished and she was able to delineate the social order of the household staff of her latest home: first nanny, then the housekeeper or maid, then gardener.⁵⁴ However, once she began to work for the Porters, she found for the first time that she was disrespected and “micromanaged” professionally and personally by Brian, an insecure, paranoid, and overbearing man.⁵⁵ She finally had the courage to quit after he called her a “fucking bitch” for giving his tacit consent to a harmless joke that she and his male personal assistant, Paul, made. No amount of resulting bribery—her own apartment, a new car, fabulous and extravagant bouquets, spa certificates, and other incentives—could persuade to rescind her resignation. When Blaine followed up with her a few years later and inquired as to how she dealt with being a nanny without the hope of promotion or social mobility, she simply responded, “Some women just aspire to be a mother and that was always my aspiration. . . . My aspiration wasn’t to have any titles or have the world know what I was doing.”⁵⁶ Granted, society has the right to protect the rights of women like Kim, not abuse or exploit them.

Gail Collins’s *When Everything Changed: The Amazing Journey of American Women from 1960 to the Present* (2009) reads like it was written of a parallel universe, especially the last three chapters that deal with the present. Using the fictitious Claire Huxtable as the backdrop of Hillary Clinton, Sarah Palin, and Michelle Obama, Collins glaringly omits the help that these “superwomen” had—and still do. She includes Michelle’s despairing realization that shocked her into admitting that women cannot have it all, do it all, or should do it all, unlike Barack who apparently has never once paused to give thought to the fact that he can continue building his political career with little to no interruptions because he will have it all: a beautiful wife, beautiful and endearing daughters, and America’s best services that are afforded its presidents.⁵⁷ It is now public knowledge that Michelle has the constant presence of her mother in the White House to assist her with Sasha and Malia. Grandma Robinson is, however, no shadow mother who must disappear at the end of the day, as sociologist Cameron Lynne Macdonald recounts.

Macdonald’s *Shadow Mothers: Nannies, Au Pairs, and the Micropolitics of Mothering* (2010) details the role of global capitalism that has formed global cities and “produced both a wealthy class of knowledge-workers, who need and can afford domestic help, and a labor pool of predominantly immigrant women to fill those needs at low wages,”⁵⁸ defined as “intensive

⁵³ Ibid., 103.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 106.

⁵⁵ Blaine, *Just Like Family: Inside the Lives of Nannies, the Parents They Work For, and the Children they Love*, 220.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 318.

⁵⁷ Gail Collins, *When Everything Changed: The Amazing Journey of American Women from 1960 to the Present* (New York, Boston, and London: Little Brown and Company, 2009), 386-87.

⁵⁸ Cameron Lynne Macdonald, *Shadow Mothers: Nannies, Au Pairs, and the Micropolitics of Mothering* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2010), 7.

mothering.”⁵⁹ Intensive mothering is recognized as “child-centered, expert-guided, emotionally absorbing, labor intensive, and financially expensive.”⁶⁰ Macdonald informs that Latinas in Los Angeles and women from the Caribbean in New York have met this need.⁶¹ Offering a comprehensive discussion on the difference in perception and value of productive and reproductive labor that has traditionally divided labor into masculine and feminine, respectively, she further explains how what is regarded as women’s work has been relegated to “natural” or “invisible” or “spiritual,” none of which as deserving of equitable value as men’s labor hierarchized as physically demanding and intrinsically highly valuable to all of society. The shadow concept of domestic work performed by women has come to be expected to be performed by intelligent and professional nannies, loving caregivers, and empathetic childcare providers who have evolved from the omniscient, omnipresent mammy figure established by the indomitable, assertive, and humorous Hattie McDaniel of *Gone with the Wind* (1939).

Donald Bogle, in writing about McDaniel who came to be known as “Hi-Hat Hattie,” reports that when criticized for perpetuating the Mammy stereotype in all of her twenty or so films, McDaniel retorted, “Why should I complain about making seven thousand dollars a week playing a maid? If I didn’t, I’d be making seven dollars a week actually being one!”⁶² McDaniel went on to become the first Black actor to win an Academy Award as Best Supporting Actress for her role in *Gone with the Wind*. Nevertheless, playing the part of a maid and actually being a maid are incomparable. While Bogle does not present any details on McDaniels’s private life, undoubtedly she could have afforded her own maid or two with earnings that even by today’s standards are impressive. Mammies and domestic helpers have held precarious social positions in the homes of their employers, and not all of them have worked with children. However, if any of them was a mother, she was responsible for the well-being of her own children and, consequently, must have become quite adept at compartmentalizing her emotions. Such is depicted in the stories told by Blaine, Macdonald, and Tamara Mose Brown, also a sociologist.

Workers functioning in the capacity of shadow mothers had to know how to engage in “detached attachment.”⁶³ This complexity also defines intensive mothering. As Macdonald informs on detached attachment, its three rules are:

[T]he first is a mandate to love the children in one’s care and to form a stable bond with them, just as a parent would. The second is a requirement that the caregiver simultaneously love the child *and* maintain some emotional distance so that she can prepare them both for their eventual separation. The third is a demand that the childcare provider not usurp the mother’s position as primary caregiver, regardless of how much time she might spend with the children or the strength of the bond between them.⁶⁴

⁵⁹ Ibid., 22-23.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 22.

⁶¹ Ibid., 45.

⁶² Donald Bogle, *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, & Bucks: An Interpretive History of Black in American Films* (New York: The Continuum Publishing Company, 1989), 82.

⁶³ Macdonald, *Shadow Mothers: Nannies, Au Pairs, and the Micropolitics of Mothering*, 114-18.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 114.

Difficulties arise in the difference in employers' perceptions of the roles of these workers in the employers' homes, which varied and were not controlled by any law. Workers in New York from the Caribbean commanded weekly salaries that ranged from \$800 to \$2,400; those from Latin America ranged from \$320 to \$1,600 per week; those from Europe, Africa, and China ranged from \$400 to \$2,000; and, those from the US ranged from \$750 to \$1,920.⁶⁵ Macdonald explains that the "logic of competitive mothering" causes upper-middle class mothers to regard working-class nannies as dispensable and disposable cogs in their children's lives rather than as playing an integral role in their child's growth and development. In veiled language these writers inform on the various levels of abuses that the workers experience in their employers' homes throughout the country that led to the gratifying success of the Domestic Workers Union, an international coalition of women who fought and won New York State's passing of Bill to protect domestic workers irrespective of the country of origin. Bolster by New York's success, California's domestic workers' activists are diligently at work to see a similar bill passed there toward ending parenting as one of our most class-segregated practices.⁶⁶

Whether from the Caribbean, Latin America, Mexico, Sri Lanka, and the Philippines, the pain of separation by choice caused by immigration to the US, Canada, Britain, and Europe is just as compelling and deserving of examination and discussion toward charting how life can be made better for mothers and women affected and disaffected by the matrices of global parenting and cultural globalization. To state unequivocally, the effects on all mothers and their children are in some ways immeasurable, from the psycho-social to the long-term socio-economic. From 1939 to 2011, mammies and domestic helpers are still perceived as the most exploited members of our society, a reality that both Brown and Macdonald explore in their respective works. Macdonald writes of Kimberley whose male employer simply refused to regard her as a professional who did not need to be told her job then dissolved into tears (not feminine?) when she confronted him and demanded to be treated as a human being *and* a professional. Brown's work offers the invaluable, in-depth view of Caribbean domestics, having herself entered into their "ghettoized" world to engage her interviewees on a first-hand basis on their work.⁶⁷ She reports that they warmed to and trusted her only after she had first established that she was a Caribbean and then a researcher who would give voice and visibility to their plight. And, it is not that domestics are reticent to speak about their condition, they are wary and wearied of yet another person feigning interest but not genuinely committed to effecting change for many of these women did not dream of becoming trapped in this "ghettoized" occupation that excluded them from other opportunities for social mobility.⁶⁸

Arguably, women in this industry have not merely been marginalized but rendered invisible in this global age but not lacking awareness or the will to express their consciousness.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 216-17.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 203.

⁶⁷ Macdonald, *Shadow Mothers: Nannies, Au Pairs, and the Micropolitics of Mothering*, 14, 182 (fn 21).

⁶⁸ Ibid., 182 (fn 21).

Certainly, they have found offensive being called “the girl” or “the maid.”⁶⁹ Additionally, their responsibilities very often caused the line between child provider and housekeeper to be blurred, sometimes deliberately so, as in the story of Texan nanny Kimberley Falls narrated in Blaine’s *Just Like Family: Inside the Lives of Nannies, the Parents They Work For, and the Children They Love*. Nonetheless, for as long as they remained invisible and silent and have operated under multiple occupational titles of their choice, as Brown discusses, their cooperation with and participation in Brown’s own labor attested to their subconscious awareness of domestic work as it shaped an axiological principle of mothering. Hence, they surrendered to the multiplicity of titles: maid, servant, nanny, babysitter, sitter, childcare worker, childcare provider, and nanny.⁷⁰ However, Ai-jen Poo, director of New York’s Domestic Workers United points out to Brown that some titles are generally not useful in the struggle to reclaim identity and human dignity that everyone deserves, the two most negative being “help” and “maid.” Much more appealing is “worker” or “housekeeper” that implies professionalism and demanding of respect.⁷¹

Consequently, it is quite appropriate to speculate on the supposed positive attention that the novel and movie *The Help* (2011) have generated. It is within this historical context, for it is hard to separate Octavia Spencer’s 2012 win of the Academy Award for Best Supporting Actress from that of Hattie McDaniel’s 1940 one, that we may simply be allowing for yet another co-optation in plain sight of women’s labor that will remain in its place in capitalism’s revolving wheel. Further, how does the winning of these two Oscars make any difference to the actual women who labor in this industry? Are women in higher education supposed to feel good only about Spencer’s accomplishment while ignoring that the true winner of the day is the Hollywood industry that glamorizes, romanticizes, and capitalizes in some absurdly and offensive ways the human struggle for dignity and respect? Will Spencer’s win mean that the next male employer who wants to speak inappropriately to or unclad suggestively in front of his female employee pause before doing so? In other words, will exposure of the deeply rooted sexism and racism accelerate toward the eventual obliteration of racial, gender, class inequities for the entire human race, not just the domestics?

One can agree that the war against parents originally began for mothers who were compelled to abandon their own children and homes to take care of someone else’s children and homes. Writing about a version of the war against parents in their 1998 book, Sylvia Ann Hewlett and Cornel West subsume in a broad sweep that this war against parental eminency for domesticity has effected “the fracturing of families, the hollowing-out of community.”⁷² Hewlett and West met in 1992 as potential members of the Domestic Strategy Group, having been invited by Senator Bill Bradley and William Bennett to the Aspen Institute in Colorado for a panel discussion on the causes of U.S.’s social ills. However, the discussion disintegrated and the group dissolved into disarray based upon the deeply conflicting ideologies of the panel members,

⁶⁹ Brown, *Raising Brooklyn: Nannies, Childcare, and Caribbeans Creating Community*, 14.

⁷⁰ Brown, *Raising Brooklyn: Nannies, Childcare, and Caribbeans Creating Community*, 15-16.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁷² Sylvia Ann Hewlett and Cornel West, *The War against Parents: What We Can Do for America’s Beleaguered Moms and Dads* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1998), p. xiii.

except for the two of them whose shared interest in the future of America's parents resulted in their collaborated efforts. As useful as their research is to the panoply of multiple family structures of an élite middle class (if one may dare categorize the middle class as élite), the glaring absence is the family headed by or inclusive of the domestic worker of the working class and/or working-class poor. Twenty years later, we are now beginning to scratch the surface of this family dynamic toward examining the far-reaching effects of these households. Who are these children? What is their academic performance in elementary, middle, high schools and at the college level? Are their psychological problems different from children raised in the privileged environments of their parents' employers? Are they more or less prone to crime? Twenty years is almost a generation, and when we measure the productivity of the nation as a whole, should we be taking into account who are the productive versus non-productive members of society?

Ironically, in our failure to give all due credit and adequate salaries to domestic workers, we continue to fail to affirm what is generally known among women and their female assistance: that a great or successful woman is already supported by a devoted, caring woman.⁷³ Susan Cheever in writing about the nanny dilemma in 2002, calls attention to the fact at that time "there [were] almost 400,000 children under thirteen in New York City whose parents both work, and fewer than 100,000 places for them in after-school and day-care programs."⁷⁴ It was this problem that gave rise to the burgeoning need for nannies, a void into which many Caribbean women stepped to fill. Similarly to the 1960s' immigration wave, caused by the Immigration and Naturalization of 1965, New York allowed for a new wave of sponsorship that promised from all developing countries, as well as Ireland, Scotland, and some European countries to enter with the promise of sponsorship that led to the Green Card. Cheever narrates her interview with Dominique, a woman from Trinidad whom Cheever thought had little or nothing to complain of in her work as a nanny. She was gently awakened to the truth that Dominique lived in a Brooklyn studio apartment that was sparsely furnished and its rent was \$504 a month, which she could barely afford. During the winter months, she awoke before sunrise and was on the subway to Manhattan to arrive at her employment at or before eight o'clock. She snacked on oranges and Snapple throughout the day and hoped that upon returning home she could fix herself a proper dinner. If not, she settled for a fast-food meal. During the weekends, regardless of the season, she was expected to be on call and felt that she had no life she could call her own.

Dominique, as do the other writers examined here, further described the precariousness of being a nanny without job stability. Jobs dwindled as children grew older. Salaries were docked by some employers if a nanny were late arriving, regardless of the reason: delayed trains, bad weather, or illnesses. However, some employers were not always professional in their own arrival at the end of the day so that the nanny could leave to go home and take care of her own family and other business. No employer compensated the nanny for returning home late at the

⁷³ Barbara Ehrenreich and Arlie Russell Hochschild, *Global Woman: Nannies, Maids, and Sex Workers in the New Economy* (New York: Holt Paperbacks, 2002), 31.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 32.

end of the day. Travel and cell phone expenses were not factored into the salaries. Sick days were docked from salaries. However, the worst of all experiences were those whose employers somehow forgot when payday arrived and had to make their employees wait, sometimes through the weekend, for their pay. These insensitive employers were apathetic to the hardship this caused a nanny and her family. Joy M. Zarembka, on the other hand, presents the even more dire plights of a Bolivian and then a West African nanny. Bolivian Marie Jose Perez had her passport immediately confiscated upon her arrival in Washington, D.C. in 1997 and was forced “to work days more than twelve hours long, for less than one dollar per hour. She was not allowed to leave the house without her employer,” a human rights lawyer for the Organization of American States, and after being raped by one of his friends was denied hospital or medical care because she was too expensive.⁷⁵ West African Gnizako, a fifty-two year-old woman who was recruited “by a wealthy relative who worked for the World Bank” and upon arriving in Maryland was subjected to such servitude, physical violence, and verbal abuse that her story reads like one of Caribbean writer, Barbara Bush’s accounts of Caribbean slave women.⁷⁶ Both women were hampered by their lack of fluency in English. Zarembka continues that women like Perez and Gnizako become trapped in “modern-day slavery, trafficking, and migrant domestic abuse” due to “the illegal manipulations and deception of hopeful migrants” who choose to immigrate in order to ameliorate their situations. Instead, they exchanged hardship for hell. Barbara Ehrenreich and Arlie Russell Hochschild’s work additionally map the continuing, unabated trend of global migration that crisscrosses the five major continents and the geographical islands in their vicinities, even though their focus that applies to this analysis of domestic workers is on illegal immigrants and the implication that illegal nannies comprise “thousands of immigrant women looking for jobs that require no training, no degrees, and, often, no papers.”⁷⁷

Conclusion

The billowing interest in domestic workers is well deserving of the women who toil in this labor pool. This interest may lead one to believe that globalization’s strategic silence on this aspect of women’s labor is being penetrated. After all, societies are being forced to confront the reality of national governments’ inability to regulate their economies, which are international in their modes of production and reproduction.⁷⁸ Should such be the case, then an increasing number of activists can be as bold as Christine Yvette Lewis, previously mentioned, in raising an even louder clarion call for the end of domestic labor that reproduces poverty. Lawyer Hope Lewis, in reporting at the American Society of International Law in 1999 used an unfamiliar term with which to identify Caribbean female migrants: “lionheart gals” who “are agents of their own survival,” having taken full responsibility for theirs and their families’ economic wellbeing in the face of welfare reform laws, as well as denial of their human rights to medical care and the threat

⁷⁵ Ehrenreich and Rothchild, *Global Woman: Nannies, Maids, and Sex Workers in the New Economy*, 142-43.

⁷⁶ Ehrenreich and Rothchild, *Global Woman: Nannies, Maids, and Sex Workers in the New Economy*, 143.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 32, 276-80.

⁷⁸ Janine Brodie, “Shifting the Boundaries: Gender and the Politics of Restructuring.” *The Strategic Silence: Gender and Economic Policy* (London: Zed Books, 1994), 48.

of disability and social security benefits.⁷⁹ Today, the picture is still grim for women occupying the lower tiers of the economic ladder.

Present-day women must continue to organize and call more urgently for change especially for single Black women whose wealth in 2010 was reported by the US Federal Reserve Board as averaging five dollars. In contrast, the average wealth for single White women was forty-two thousand, six hundred dollars,⁸⁰ a bitter pill for Black women to swallow. Economist Janine Brodie offers some polemics toward ensuring that no woman is fighting on the boundaries of deindustrialization and globalization in the restructuring of economic discourse. Her theories are relevant to all in higher education only if the restructuring will allow all Black academics to help build a stronger base for wealth for Black women. No one should work for twenty-six hours nonstop then drop dead from sheer exhaustion, regardless of their occupation. In Jamaica Kincaid's *Lucy* (1990) and Edwidge Danticat's *Breath, Eyes, Memory* (1994), the female protagonists immigrate to try to escape the pain of being female that invariably lies beyond any scope of escapism because to be female resides in the eternal consciousness in shared relationships established with the mother-daughter, father-daughter, mother-son, father-son, and in all of the links of parenting and family, including grand-parenting and surrogacy. In reality, women immigrate with the hope that their decision will prove fruitful. Similarly to Slaughter and in contrast to Hugo's Fantine, Nandi's Madam Lucian, and all the women who die without their dreams and hopes being realized, women labor and toil and hope such is not in vain. The best should not be realized only in implementing just and fair laws that would provide some measure of protection from abusive household employers. Americans can give serious consideration to having open borders that remove the "illegal" status for people who are willing to work, period. Women in higher education can lead the charge in helping the creation and establishment of affordable higher education opportunities, including those at the community college level.

Enough evidence exists that the human race has always adapted to change when old systems have outlived their usefulness. The human race is now on the cusp of inventing new systems. Tavis Smiley and Cornel West in *The Rich and the Rest of Us: A Poverty Manifesto* (2012) urgently call for Americans "from coast to coast to flood city, state, and federal government officials with a petition for the first official act of the next President on January 21, 2013, to be the announcement of a White House Conference on the Eradication of Poverty in America."⁸¹ Smiley, in addressing an audience of over one thousand, seven hundred faculty, staff, students, and the public who packed Delaware State University's Memorial Hall Gymnasium on the night of September 13, 2012 to hear him and West speak on poverty in

⁷⁹ Hope Lewis, "'Culturing' Survival: Afro-Caribbean Migrant Culture and the Human Rights of Women under Globalization." *American Society of International Law: Proceedings of the 93rd Annual Meeting: On Violence, Money, Power and Culture: Reviewing the Internationalist Legacy* (24-27 Mar. 1999), 374.

⁸⁰ "Study: Average Wealth of Single Black Women is Five Dollars," <http://www.truthout.org/study-average-wealth-single-black-women-five-dollars57596>; Tim Grant, "Study Finds Median Wealth for Single Black Women at \$5," *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, 9 Mar. 2010.

⁸¹ Tavis Smiley and Cornel West, *The Rich and the Rest of Us* (Carlsbad, California, New York City, London, Sydney, Johannesburg, Vancouver, Hong Kong, New Delhi: Hay House, Inc., 2012), 200.

America, stated that American democracy “is in crisis when the people of democracy have no hope,” in the face of the statistic that “four hundred Americans own wealth the equivalent to the bottom one hundred fifty million Americans.”⁸² The audience gasped in disbelief at the enormity of such an economic divide. Since his metaphor for change was the tail-wind that pushes the aircraft and makes the flight faster, the hope is that the audience’s gasp will convert into a strong wind in the back of the next U.S. President who will effect fast change toward restoring hope. West, who followed Smiley and preached more than spoke, appealed to the audience’s (and Americans’) better selves realized in their love of learning, love of knowledge, love of wisdom, love of social justice, and love for humanity to fuel change for a better economic future.⁸³ In concurrence, all conscientious Americans can work in solidarity to make the Smiley and West appeal become a reality and also fortify all change-agents toward the creation of new economic systems that serve all humanity better than the historic ones.

⁸² Tavis Smiley, “The Poverty Tour 2.0: A Call to Conscience” (speech at Delaware State University in Dover, Delaware on 13 September 2013). Smiley, the first to speak, announced that Delaware State University was the only academic institution included on their eighteen-city tour.

⁸³ Cornel West, “The Poverty Tour 2.0: A Call to Conscience” (speech at Delaware State University in Dover, Delaware on 13 September 2013).

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