

RANDALL, RACHEL. *Paid to Care: Domestic Workers in Contemporary Latin American Culture*. University of Texas Press, 2024.

As this book's title suggests, one of its main themes is the issue of payment and compensation for the tasks carried out by domestic workers across Latin America. As the concept of domestic worker is fundamental to Latin American society, it is crucial to the understanding of the development of cities, modernity, and social and economic stratification. Through selected case studies drawn from *testimonios*, films, and social media projects, the book grapples with the complex question of whether care work can be compensated, offering no easy answers.

The first chapter of the book explores the *testimonios* of domestic workers in several Latin American countries, demonstrating how these texts had an impact on sectoral identity and helped bring about social change while also emphasizing the role of the mediation process in shaping their content and interpretation. Randall uses the first chapter to establish the book's essential framework and analytical premises. The chapter examines *testimonios* published from the 1980s onwards (after the end of the dictatorships, as democratic regimes were being established in these countries). Randall's choice of this time period is pragmatic. First, it allows her to focus on the phase of publication and distribution of these texts, which had previously been suppressed by the dictatorial regimes. Second, it coincided with a broader rise of protests and advocacy for improved working conditions and human rights. This created a more favorable environment for the reception of these *testimonios* and their potential impact on society. However, it is important to acknowledge certain limitations in Randall's framing. For one, contrary to what the chronological scope of Randall's study might suggest, the act of writing is not necessarily dependent on a democratic political climate. As Randall herself notes, Carolina Maria de Jesus, for example, after the publication of her first book, a classic *testimonio* titled *Quarto de despejo* (1960), received only a brief period of recognition and continued to write despite the changing socio-political climate and the years of military dictatorship in Brazil. It is also worth considering the perspectives of the domestic workers themselves. To what extent were they concerned with the publication and dissemination of their stories? And how did the specific context of democratization impact their experiences and the content of their *testimonios*? These questions warrant further exploration. By focusing on the publication stage of these *testimonios*, Randall takes on the complex task of carefully peeling away the layers of intervention, mediation, editing, and framing that occurred as part of the preparation of each of these texts for publication. Randall's original and insightful work goes beyond a straightforward reading of the *testimonios*. She conducts a careful and meticulous analysis of every aspect of the published versions, including the

selection of the introduction's author and the cover image, as well as the target audience and the countries of distribution. She also delves into the content of the testimonios and the different emphases that appear in the wording, and even raises the inevitable question of whether the domestic workers were paid for bringing their story to print.

The testimonios that Randall discusses in the first chapter are not presented merely as a body of knowledge or a collection of facts. Rather, they are utilized as a toolbox that enables a glimpse into the experience of domestic workers and their place in Latin American culture and history. Randall highlights the influence of labor unions and the traces of Liberation Theology in their testimonios, which she gleans both from the experiences of the domestic workers, described in the books as undergoing a "process of consciousness-raising" and subjectification, and from the comments of the interviewers and editors who mediate our reading. However, as Randall shows, these domestic workers were not passive receivers of these ideas. The published testimonios also played a key role in the establishment of a sectoral identity for domestic workers and sometimes even served as the foundation that helped prepare society for reforms granting rights to domestic workers.

In chapters two and three, Randall examines fiction and documentary films. Both chapters focus on films that feature a domestic worker as the main protagonist. All were also written about or inspired by the life story of the domestic worker who worked in the filmmakers' home. Randall, who has previously published on the representation of children and youth in Latin American cinema, now turns the spotlight on children who grew up to be filmmakers, examining the emotional debt they feel towards the domestic worker who they describe as their "second mother." While Randall acknowledges the documentaries' greater sensitivity to ethical issues and their more open exploration of moral dilemmas, she ultimately argues that both documentary and fictional films remain constrained by the filmmakers' middle-class perspective. In this sense, the book engages with the famous question "Can the subaltern speak?" and, like Spivak, Randall is not optimistic about the answer. Like the testimonios mentioned in chapter one, the films discussed in these chapters are, on the one hand, the product of a change in consciousness and awareness of the ethics of employing a domestic worker but, on the other hand, the films themselves are also agents of change and have had an impact on social and legal reform (as in the clear example of Alfonso Cuarón's *Roma* which prompted the judicial change in Mexico requiring that domestic workers formally enrol in the social security program).

As Randall shows, these films portray the microcosm of class, race, and gender relations within Latin American homes, but at the same time reflect the

complexities of national identity in the region. In comparing the domestic and national spaces, Randall raises important questions about the oppression and exploitation that occur within the employer's home, while stretching beyond the domestic space to the national scale and engages with the concept of "mestizaje" and the historical roots of oppression which are embedded in the very idea of nation-building in Latin America. Randall links that emotional connection—the filmmakers' sense of debt toward their domestic workers to the broader sense of debt and the emotions felt towards the peoples who were exploited and absorbed into the "melting pot" that underlies the formation of Latin American nations. The questions Randall poses about space and marginality are framed within the home or the family territory, and precisely because of the parallel Randall draws between the private home and the national home, further research could expand the discussion on questions of space, the origin of those domestic workers, and internal migration. Examining the concept of space may prove useful not only in the context of national identity or the construction of collective definitions, but also for discussing the identity of domestic workers themselves, as can be seen in the writing of other women who have dealt with the dimension of migration and examined how spatial changes have influenced their identity (Ruth Behar and Gloria Anzaldúa for instance).

Randall's emphasis on the films' emotional dimension helps strengthen her central claim: that it is precisely the emotional connection between employers and domestic workers that allows for exploitation. This is where I locate the book's main contribution. Those bonds of affection, a sense of "debt," and the custom of giving gifts to the domestic worker in return for her care of the children and of the home she is employed in, cannot be quantified or broken down. Randall opens eyes and shows that those feelings and gifts blur the line between an employed worker/"trabajadora" (and payment she deserves for the tasks she carries out) and feelings of familiarity, affection, and closeness. These emotional ties, based on a colonial heritage, not only do not benefit the workers but, as Randall's strong argument points out, are the fundamental factor that enables their exploitation.

The closing chapter of the book deals with social media-based activism. Randall chooses two projects, both created by female activists. One of them is the Brazilian rapper Preta-Rara's Facebook page, "Eu empregada doméstica" (I domestic worker), through which the page's readers also began to share their experiences of domestic work after her own confessional post about having been a domestic worker. The other one is the Peruvian artist Daniela Ortiz's exhibition *97 empleadas domésticas* (97 domestic workers) which published 97 photos collected from ordinary family life with a "transparent" worker in the background. Both projects managed to highlight the transparency of these

domestic workers, raise awareness about their exploitation, and criticize their representation in the media.

Similarly to the published testimonios that made domestic workers' experiences accessible to a wide audience, Facebook offers the public a platform to see and read about these experiences, sometimes even without having obtained the approval of the domestic workers. Randall raises the same questions about mediation and intervention that she explored in earlier chapters. For instance, in her art, Ortiz strongly criticized the workers' invisibility in family photos, yet, as Randall mentions, she did not collaborate fully with them or seek permission to publish and frame the images. Even the collaborative community-based project by the Brazilian Preta-Rara often relies on the second- or third-hand accounts of children, grandchildren, etc., sharing the experiences of domestic workers without their authorization. While Randall acknowledges the artists' commitment to social change, she also points to criticisms. Preta-Rara's decision to change the project title from "empregada doméstica" (domestic employee) to "trabalhadora doméstica" (domestic worker) aimed to strengthen the call for workers' rights. However, she faced public criticism on Facebook for her involvement in union politics and for potentially promoting herself at the expense of the domestic workers' rights movement. Despite these criticisms of the social media activism methods explored in this chapter, these initiatives have garnered significant exposure, significantly aided the fight for domestic workers' rights, and fostered solidarity with their cause.

Randall's book engages with previous research on marginality, class, and gender in Latin America and makes a significant contribution to the discussion of domestic workers' rights, especially in light of her examination of rights that are not even spoken about by labor unions (such as: who has free time? what kind of family is a domestic worker supposed to have?). The book also makes a methodological contribution to the different forms of oral documentation (written, filmed, or virtual) and allows an enlightening discussion on the process of publication of others' life stories (as in the striking example the question "¿puede existir un buen patrón?" in Ana Gutiérrez's *Se necesita muchacha* and the implicit interpretation of an interviewee who described her employer, the patron, as good). Randall allows us to look at both sides of the coin and examines, on the one hand, the intervention on domestic workers and the way their life stories are framed and told or filmed, and, on the other hand, the waves of influence of each publication of a life story in a film, testimonial book, or post on social networks.

Randall opens the introduction to her book with a description of a Black Brazilian domestic worker with a white child sitting on her lap. This image had been misinterpreted by the English-speaking world as evidence of racial equality

and integration. Likewise, the class stratification and the cultural practices that stem from the colonial legacy can be misinterpreted by outsiders who view it from their perspective, that of a society built on a capitalist economic model. In this sense, a significant contribution of this book lies in its having been written in English, making it accessible to the world outside of Latin America. Having this study in English is also a way to raise awareness of other patterns of racial, class, ethnic, and, of course, gender-based oppression.

Together with the important social critique the book raises, it sows hopeful seeds for a better future where domestic workers will no longer be subaltern and will be able to speak. To pave the way for this, a follow-up study could take a critical look not only at the publication of a domestic worker's life story as an agent of change in a society, but also at the domestic worker herself as an agent of change.

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