

BOOK REVIEW

Domestic Disturbances: Reimagining Narratives of Gender, Labor, and Immigration

Rosana Blanco Cano

Domestic Disturbances: Reimagining Narratives of Gender, Labor, and Immigration. By Irene Mata. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2014. Pp. 236. \$55.00 (Hardcover).

In Domestic Disturbances

Irene Mata examines a genealogy of traditional and leading-edge Latina/o narratives of gender, labor, and immigration. Her interdisciplinary approach, engaging a variety of genres and artistic formats including theatre, cinema, literature, art, and photography, results in a rich and multilayered analysis. The careful mapping and analysis make explicit the intersection of gender, ethnicity, migratory status, and education level, among other factors, in the constitution of Latina identities in US society today.

Mata's introduction establishes a critical tone of analysis, from which she centers the Latina immigrant experience. The introduction also provides a solid historical background contextualizing traditional narrations of immigration that have produced a narrow definition of "America," a definition primarily based on Euro-centric values that position individuals of color on the margins, unable to fulfill the requirements of the ideal citizen in the US nation.

The subsequent four chapters are organized thematically. Mata cleverly creates a dialogue between the themes, further expanding the discussion. Chapter 1, "Dream a Little American Dream," examines traditional narratives of

immigration in the US, looking at particular Latino/a cultural representations that have perpetuated dominant discourses around immigration. This chapter serves as a foundational departure to better understand the more contemporary and critical interventions examined in the last three chapters of the book.

Chapter 2, “Cleaning Up After the National Family, and What a Mess They Make,” presents a detailed examination of the Latina stereotype in US hegemonic narratives of immigration with a focus on the domestic worker. As Mata argues throughout this chapter, this figure has been overexploited through numerous cultural artifacts, occupying a strategic position that, while fulfilling her (labor/sexual) obedient role within the “American” domestic sphere, is naturalized as a harmless presence. While rendered ineffectual in popular discourse, domestic labor, Mata demonstrates, remains an essential commodity in the US. This chapter is particularly valuable because it makes explicit the contradictory, yet exclusionary, romantic-exploitative discourse mobilized against Latina bodies. Here Mata engages mainstream films such as *Spanglish* and contrasts such hegemonic narratives with counter-hegemonic cultural productions that create a “new genealogy of resistance,” such as Lucha Corpi’s *Cactus Blood* (63). Thus Mata is able to explore and map how domestic workers are subject to power relations and violence in their labor environments, and by extension, within national domestic spheres.

The shift to a global economy with its buttressing of exploitative labor practices emerges as the dominant theme of chapter three. Here Mata’s analysis of laboring spaces “growing within an interconnected system of global cities” (94) astutely exposes and maps how the political, economic, and social dynamics of the global city, still require invisible and exploited bodies to clean up after the powerful, while disregarding the wellbeing of the people who work in the hospitality industry. Here she also complicates the notion of Latina (im)

migration by examining cultural productions that center the ambiguous experience of the Puerto Rican diaspora, considered US citizens on paper, yet placed outside of American hegemonic discourses of citizenship.

Domestic Disturbances concludes with a challenge to readers: expect more of your superheroes. The chapter problematizes traditional US superheroes and their place in the popular US imagination. Tracing the traditional narratives of nation that US hegemonic superheroes represent, Mata then identifies several Latina cultural productions that contest notions of the heroic as White. This is a powerful visual analysis of contemporary works that create alternate narratives of the superhero within nation. This chapter is particularly valuable and will have a strong appeal to undergraduates because of its focus on cutting-edge works such as Dulce Pinzón's photographic series, *Superheroes*, making visible the transnational labor market that is crucial both for the US and Latin American economies. With their careful attention to the global economy and to the power of art and cultural production to do the work of justice, the concluding chapters will be of special interest to those who study global economies and justice movements. The extensive bibliography will be also invaluable for any student or scholar of Latina/o, Latin American, or ethnic studies.

Rigorously written, yet accessible, *Domestic Disturbances* will prove to be a critical resource for a wide variety of classes that address Latina/o experiences, history, and cultures; this includes not only interdisciplinary fields such as gender studies and labor studies but also traditional disciplines such as sociology and literature. With its careful historical grounding and strong connections between the local and the global, it is sure to become a foundational text in the area of popular culture in Latina/o, and Latin American studies.