

# DESDE QUISQUEYA HACIA BORINQUENA: EXPERIENCES AND VISIBILITY OF IMMIGRANT DOMINICAN WOMEN IN PUERTO RICO: VIOLENCE, LUCHA AND HOPE IN THEIR OWN VOICES

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. . . las migraciones no son cosas, ni los inmigrantes son mercancías. Son seres humanos con sus aspiraciones y sus necesidades, sus costumbres y rasgos culturales, sus dificultades actuales y su voluntad de futuro. Por tanto, hay que integrar el fenómeno migratorio, no sólo como variable económica, sino también como realidad humana destinada a modificar la sociedad de acogida, al modificarse a sí misma (Goytisolo y Naïr, 2000: 52-53).<sup>1</sup>

## I. INTRODUCTION

According to the United Nations, (U.N.) more than 1.5 million Dominicans have migrated from the Island of La Española, most living in the United States.<sup>2</sup> This means 17.6% of people born in the Dominican Republic now live outside of the country.<sup>3</sup> The number of Dominican

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1. JUAN GOYTISOLO & SAMI NAHIR, *EL PEAJE DE LA VIDA: INTEGRACIÓN O RECHAZO DE LA EMIGRACIÓN EN ESPAÑA* [THE TOLL OF LIFE: INTEGRATION OR REJECTION OF IMMIGRATION IN SPAIN] 226 (Aguilar ed., 2000) (Spain).

2. UNITED NATIONS POPULATION FUND, DRAFT COUNTRY PROGRAM FOR THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC DP/FPA/DCP/ (2006), available at [www.unfpa.org/webdav/site/global/.../dpfpa-dom-4\\_eng.doc](http://www.unfpa.org/webdav/site/global/.../dpfpa-dom-4_eng.doc) (last visited Nov. 1, 2012).

3. See generally *The Dominican Population in the United States: Growth and Distribution*, MIGRATION POL'Y INST. (2004).

women migrating has increased constantly since the 1970s.<sup>4</sup> Although the main destination of many of the women is the U.S. and Europe, Puerto Rico is a bridge in the way of the “Visa para un sueño.”<sup>5</sup> For many Dominican women, Puerto Rico is a place of opportunity, where Dominican women often find jobs more readily than men.<sup>6</sup> Women expect that the commonality of lifestyle between the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico and the existence of a growing Dominican community will make the adjustment easier.<sup>7</sup>

This begs the questions, who are the Dominican women who migrate? And in what way have their migratory experiences shaped their lives? Although there have been some scholarly studies regarding Dominican women in Puerto Rico,<sup>8</sup> most of the research has focused on the socioeconomic conditions of the women, their participation in the labor force, and their health. In this work, I look more closely at how immigrant survivors of domestic abuse define themselves, their aspirations, and their place in society. Their initial organization around the issue of legal protections from domestic abuse has given them direction towards a realization of their cultural citizenship.<sup>9</sup> The concept of cultural citizenship emphasizes the necessity for respect of the needs of outsiders.<sup>10</sup> It is concerned “with who needs to be visible, to be heard of, to belong.”<sup>11</sup> In

4. *Id.* at 6, 17.

5. A popular merengue song by Dominican composer and performer Juan Luis Guerra that was the inspiration of a documentary about the Dominican migration to Puerto Rico. SONIA FRITZ, *Visa para un sueño [Visa for a dream]* (Isla Films 1990).

6. Sharon Utakis & Nelson Reynoso, *No Tengo Otra Opcion—Ya Me Voy: Stories of Separation told by Dominican Immigrants [I have no choice—I am Leaving: Stories of Separation told by Dominican Immigrants]* 29 ORAL HIST. F. 1 (2009).

7. *Id.* at 26.

8. Luisa Hernandez Angueira, *Across the Mona Strait: Dominican Boat Woman in Puerto Rico*, in DAUGHTERS OF CALIBAN: CARIBBEAN WOMAN IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY 96 (Consuelo López Springfield ed., Ind. Univ. Press 1997); MYRNA HERRERA MORA, MUJERES DOMINICANAS ANTI TRUJILLISTAS Y EXILIADAS EN PUERTO RICO [ANTI-TRUJILLO AND EXILED DOMINICAN WOMEN IN PUERTO RICO] (Isla Negra 2011); Luisa Hernandez Angueira, *La Migración de Mujeres Dominicanas Hacia Puerto Rico [The Dominican Women's Migration to Puerto Rico]*, in LOS DOMINICANOS EN PUERTO RICO: MIGRACIÓN EN LA SEMI PERISFERIA 73 (Huracán 1990); Ramona Hernandez & Nancy Lopez, *Yola and Gender: Dominican Women in Regulated Migration*, in DOMINICAN STUDIES, RESOURCES AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS 59 (CUNY 1997).

9. See generally Anh Hua, *Homing Desire, Cultural Citizenship, and Diasporic Imaginings*, 12 J. INT'L WOMEN STUD. 4, 45 (2011).

10. *Id.*

11. Solen Sanli, *Public Sphere and the Symbolic Power: Woman's Voice as a Case of Cultural Citizenship*, 5 CULTURAL SOC. 281, 283–89 (2011).

the context of Dominican immigrant women, the answer to these questions has largely been construed from the outside.<sup>12</sup>

In this presentation, I engage in a discussion of the experiences of Dominican women in Puerto Rico by using their own voices; voices that narrate the construction and deconstruction of their identities. These women have lived through daunting and often deplorable experiences of violence and disenfranchisement, but have also had wonderful stories and experiences along the way. These women in more ways than one “challenge the dominant discourse regarding women’s submission, intuition, and dependence vis-à-vis men.”<sup>13</sup>

I propose that while these immigrant women have put their lives on the line for their families and themselves, they are by no means passive, and are much more than just victims. The experience of migration for women can be marked by sexual violence and exploitation, while also giving them a sense of leadership and independence.<sup>14</sup> The active voices of the women of the Centro de la Mujer Dominicana play a role in filling the void of information regarding Dominican women’s migratory experiences in Puerto Rico.<sup>15</sup>

## II. METHODOLOGY

I seek to present the voices and experiences of these women with the collaboration of the Centro de la Mujer Dominicana in San Juan (Dominican Women Center). The Centro is the only not-for-profit organization in Puerto Rico created to contribute to the empowerment of Dominican women and their families in Puerto Rico.<sup>16</sup> It is the only such organization created by immigrant women, managed by immigrant women, and serving immigrant women. The Centro is committed to organizing women to actively participate in the elimination of gender inequality and the promotion of social justice.<sup>17</sup> They have initially organized around the

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12. Suzanna Oboler, *Racializing Latinos in the United States: Toward a New Research Paradigm*, in IDENTITIES ON THE MOVE: TRANSNATIONAL PROCESSES IN NORTH AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN BASIN 45 (Univ. of Tex. Press, 1999); See also Jorge Duany, *Racializing Ethnicity in the Spanish Speaking Caribbean: A Comparison of Haitians in the Dominican Republic and Dominicans in Puerto Rico*, in HOW THE UNITED STATES RACIALIZES LATINOS 214 (Paradigm 2011).

13. Hernandez Angueira, *supra* note 8, at 96, 97.

14. *United for a Life without Violence!*, CENTRO DE LA MUJER DOMINICANA [CENTER FOR DOMINICAN WOMEN] (2012), available at <http://cemud.org/english-version.php> (last visited Mar. 23, 2012).

15. *Id.*

16. Firuzeh Shokooh Valle, *Espacio para Respirar Solidaridad* [Breathing Space for Solidarity], PRIMERA HORA (Oct. 17, 2007), available at <http://www.primerahora.com/espaciopararespirarsolidaridad-119509.html> (last visited Mar. 22, 2012).

17. *Id.*

issues of gender violence and the legal protections for immigrant women available under the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA).<sup>18</sup> The community organization around VAWA has allowed the Centro to forge an active community of immigrant women that are positive actors in their own lives.<sup>19</sup> As Romelinda Grullón, the Center Director, has said: “las cogemos por lo legal y se quedan para todo lo demás.”<sup>20</sup>

Stories as told by immigrant women are the center of this paper, and stories matter. Richard Kearney has stated that human “existence is inherently storied. Life is pregnant with stories.”<sup>21</sup> For him, storytelling allows us to remake the world in light of what is essential to us.<sup>22</sup> It allows us to understand life as is retold.<sup>23</sup> He adds that storytelling has a cathartic power that “alter[s] us by transporting us to other times and places where we can experience things otherwise.”<sup>24</sup> But perhaps more important is the ethical dimension of storytelling. For Kearney, the most basic point to recall is “that stories make possible an ethical sharing of a common world with others.”<sup>25</sup> Legal scholarship in general, and LatCrit scholarship in particular, has recognized the importance of stories in the way we think about teaching and practicing law.<sup>26</sup> The goals of storytellers are also linked to furthering an understanding of the dynamics of oppression based on race, gender, sexual orientation, or other marginalization.<sup>27</sup>

In the course of the research, I engaged in participatory action research. Participatory Action Research or “PAR” is a way of collecting information for organizing that honors, centers, and reflects the experiences

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18. See The Violence Against Women Act, Pub. L. No. 103-322, §§ 40121, 40211, 40241, 108 Stat. 1796 (1994); The Violence Against Women Act of 2000, Pub. L. No. 106-386, 114 Stat. 1464, (2000); The Keeping Children and Families Safe Act of 2003, Pub. L. No. 108-36, 117 Stat. 800-831 (2003); The Protect Act, Pub. L. No. 108-21, 117 Stat. 650 (2003); The Violence Against Women and Department of Justice Reauthorization Act of 2005, Pub. L. No. 109-162, 119 Stat. 2960 (2006).

19. Cannot use *Id* because there are several citations above-needs to be one specific or repeat the whole citation

20. Interview with Romelinda Grullon (stating, “we them for the legal and stay for everything else”).

21. RICHARD KEARNEY, *ON STORIES (THINKING IN ACTION)* 130 (Routledge 2002).

22. *Id.* at 132.

23. *Id.*

24. *Id.* at 137.

25. *Id.* at 150.

26. See generally Berta Hernandez-Truyol et al., *Beyond the First Decade: A Forward-Looking History of LatCrit Theory, Community, and Practice*, 17 *BERKELEY LA RAZA L.J.* 169 (2006); Alfredo Mirande, *Alfredo's Caribbean Adventure: Lat Crit Theory, Narratives, and the Politics of Exclusion*, 26 *CHICANO-LATINO L. REV.* 207, 206 (2006).

27. Jane C. Murphy, *Lawyering for Social Change: The Power of the Narrative in Domestic Violence Law Reform*, 21 *HOFSTRA L. REV.* 1243, 1245 (1993).

of people most directly affected by issues in our communities.<sup>28</sup> More than a method, it is a philosophy and also a way to build and strengthen communities and our understandings of ourselves, each other, and our relationships.<sup>29</sup> PAR is distinguished by three primary facets:

- 1) An interpretative process for conducting research that includes reflection and action;
- 2) Having community members and stakeholders involved with the research process; and
- 3) Using findings to promote positive community change.<sup>30</sup>

It can be a powerful outreach, base building, and organizing tool to help bring people together to build movements for change.<sup>31</sup> Particularly in the context of gender, PAR opens the door for women to research their own lives.<sup>32</sup>

The quotes from women that appear in this work are the result of in-depth interviews that are a part of a larger research project at the Centro. Some women were interviewed by the Centro and their statements were made available to me. All the women interviewed have a history of domestic abuse.<sup>33</sup> I met with them for several hours at the Centro, at family homes, and at parks. I have known some of them for years due to my collaboration with the Centro; others I met for the first time for their interviews. As part of the research, I was allowed to participate in a screening at the Centro of the movie *America* by filmmaker Sonia Fritz. The movie is based on the novel *America's Dream* by Esmeralda Santiago.<sup>34</sup> It is the story of a young Puerto Rican woman from the Island of Vieques that is abused by her husband, but manages to escape to New

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28. Ann Macaulay et al., *Participatory Action Research Maximises Community and Lay Involvement*, 319 BRIT. MED. J. 774, 774 (1999).

29. *Id.*

30. JENNIFER OBINNA ET AL., UNDERSTANDING THE NEEDS OF THE VICTIMS OF SEXUAL ASSAULT IN THE DEAF COMMUNITY 24 (2006), available at <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/grants/212867.pdf> (last visited Mar. 19, 2012); M. O'Neill, P. Woods, & M. Webster, *New Arrivals: Participatory Action Research, Imagined Communities and Social Justice* 32 J. SOC. JUST. 75, 75 (2004).

31. OBINNA, *supra* note 30, at 24.

32. See generally ALICE MACÍNTYRE, PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH 19 (Sage Publications 2008); Caitlin Cahill, *The Personal is Political: Developing New Subjectivities through Participatory Action Research*, 14 GENDER, PLACE & CULTURE 267, 268 (2007).

33. The names of the women have been changed to protect their identities with the exception of Gregoria Grullart, who insisted on revealing her identity. The quotes are in Spanish and translated liberally by the author to English.

34. See generally ESMERALDA SANTIAGO, *AMÉRICA'S DREAM* (Harper Collins Publishers 1996).

York City.<sup>35</sup> The abuse was both physical and emotional, with the main character, America, enduring the abuser's abduction.<sup>36</sup> The abuser remains a constant threat, even tracking her down in New York.<sup>37</sup> However, with the support of relatives and other Latina immigrants, America finds comfort and hope in her new life as a nanny in New York.<sup>38</sup> Fortunately, and unlike most of the cases, the abuser was arrested and America could explore the possibility of living her dream for the first time.<sup>39</sup> The purpose of the screening was to encourage an open discussion amongst the women about experiences and empowering their own hopes and dreams.<sup>40</sup> The evening turned out to be a rollercoaster of emotional and insightful comments, with a lot of humor.<sup>41</sup> Humor was one of the salient characteristics of all the women interviewed.<sup>42</sup>

No one describes it better than Gregoria Grullart, "[l]o que pasa es que yo vivo con la fuente de la juventud, como yo vivo muerta de risa, y no le he dado mente a los fracasos que me han pasado yo vivo feliz."<sup>43</sup> Gregoria is a domestic abuse and cancer survivor.<sup>44</sup> Before leaving the Dominican Republic, she had a biopsy done in her arm that appeared to be negative.<sup>45</sup> She left the hospital without medical authorization as soon as she had been given the result, and got on a yola (small wooden boat) bound for Puerto Rico.<sup>46</sup> She arrived with her brother, her cousin, and her sister-in-law on a yola that had close to 150 people on board.<sup>47</sup> After she arrived to Puerto Rico, she was diagnosed with cancer in her arm.<sup>48</sup> As a result, the arm had to be amputated.<sup>49</sup> Gregoria, however, has no regrets and says that she would do it again.<sup>50</sup> In fact, she is convinced that the cancer would have killed her if she had stayed in the Dominican Republic.<sup>51</sup> Gregoria goes on to say, "[y]o sufrí mucho por lo del brazo, pero después he meditado

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35. *Id.*

36. *Id.*

37. *Id.*

38. *Id.*

39. SANTIAGO, *supra* note 34.

40. *Id.*

41. *Id.*

42. See generally ISABEL ZAKRZEWSKI BROWN, CULTURE AND CUSTOMS OF THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC 44 (Greenwood Press 1999).

43. Interview with Gregoria Grullart (Apr. 13–14, 2011) [hereinafter Grullart Interview].

44. *Id.*

45. *Id.*

46. *Id.*

47. *Id.*

48. Grullart Interview, *supra* note 43.

49. *Id.*

50. *Id.*

51. *Id.*

mucho. Yo lavo, yo cocino, yo pelo plátanos, yo trabajo en construcción, yo limpio mi casa y he tenido marido.”<sup>52</sup>

### III. DOMINICAN MIGRATION: FEMININE AND TRANSNATIONAL

Dominican migration processes are analogous to those in the rest of the Caribbean, as they can be seen as part of a regional tradition. Sagás and Molina have characterized Dominican migration in the last fifty years as “a massive migration of diasporic proportions.”<sup>53</sup> Rose Mary Allen has analyzed the work of several sociologists, including Gordon K. Lewis, to expose how institutions across the Caribbean facilitate and perpetuate migration. She also discusses the Caribbean as a border society, where people are “constantly living in search of a better life.”<sup>54</sup>

The migration process from the Dominican Republic is both transnational and increasingly feminine. As the number of male and female migrants has increased, so has the proportion of women (from 47% in 1960 to 49% currently, with differences between countries).<sup>55</sup> However, what really has changed over the past forty years is the fact that an increasing number of women are migrating independently in search of work, rather than traveling with their husbands meeting with their husband’s abroad.<sup>56</sup> It must also be noted that these migrant women are younger than previous migrants.<sup>57</sup>

According to estimates by the U.N. Population Division, by 1990, immigrant women from Latin America and the Caribbean became the first in the developing world to reach parity with male migrants.<sup>58</sup> By 2000, immigrant women constituted 50.1% of total migrations from this region.<sup>59</sup>

52. *Id.* (stating, “I suffered a lot because of the arm, but I have meditated. I clean, I cook, I peel plantains, I work in construction, I clean my house and have had husbands”).

53. ERNESTO SAGAS & SINTIA MOLINA, DOMINICAN MIGRATION TRANSNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES 1 (Univ. Press Fla. 2004).

54. Rose Mary Allen, *Regionalization of Identity in Curacao: Migration and Diaspora*, in CARIBBEAN TRANSNATIONALISM MIGRATION, PLURALIZATION AND SOCIAL COHESION 79 (Lexington Books 2006).

55. See generally ROBERTO BERGALLI, FLUJOS MIGRATORIOS Y SU (DES)CONTROL. PUNTOS DE VISTA PLURIDISCIPLINARIOS [MIGRATION FLOWS AND (UN)CONTROL. MULTI-DISCIPLINARY VIEWS] (Anthropos Barcelona 2006).

56. U.N. INT’L RES. & TRAINING INST. FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN, *Gender Remittances and Development: Feminization of Migration* 1 (2007), available at <http://download-document/615-working-paper-1-feminization-of-migration.html> (last visited Mar. 23, 2012).

57. BERGALLI *supra* note 55.

58. Hania Zlotnik, *The Global Dimension of Female Migration*, 10 MIGRATION POL’Y INST. 1, 1 (Mar. 2003).

59. See *id.*; see also Glenda Labadie-Jackson, *Reflections on Domestic Work and the Feminization of Migration*, 31 CAMPBELL L. REV. 67, 73 (2008).

This pattern of migration is consistent with the migrant growth in the United States.<sup>60</sup> For example, more women than men became Legal Permanent Residents, naturalized United States Citizens, and were adopted in the United States during 2009.<sup>61</sup> Interestingly, the estimates for the unauthorized migrant population in the United States indicate that women accounted for 52% of the 45 and older age group.<sup>62</sup> There is an estimated 1.3 million undocumented children living in the United States.<sup>63</sup> Of those, more than 600,000 are immigrant girls, representing 13% of the total female unauthorized immigrant population in the United States.<sup>64</sup>

This is merely an example of the feminization of migration.<sup>65</sup> Sassen has called this phenomenon the “feminization of survival” because the task of ensuring family and community survival has increasingly fallen on women’s shoulders.<sup>66</sup>

In the context of the Caribbean, this transnational component is also highlighted by the existence of intra-Caribbean migration.<sup>67</sup> As Allen points out, these movements throughout the region have been one of the main survival strategies used by the poorer class in these societies.<sup>68</sup>

More than one million Dominicans have obtained legal permanent residency in the United States in the last twenty years.<sup>69</sup> More than two million Dominicans obtained non-immigrant visas to travel to the United States in the last ten years.<sup>70</sup> But only around 10,000 work-related visas were granted in the same period of time.<sup>71</sup> Of those, nearly 200,000 became U.S. citizens.<sup>72</sup>

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60. DEP’T OF HOMELAND SECURITY, OFF. OF IMMIGR. STAT., 2009 YEARBOOK OF IMMIGRATION STATISTICS 54 (2009) [hereinafter 2009 YEARBOOK].

61. *Id.*

62. DEP’T OF HOMELAND SECURITY, OFF. OF IMMIGR. STAT., ESTIMATES OF THE UNAUTHORIZED IMMIGRANT POPULATION RESIDING IN THE UNITED STATES: JANUARY 2009, at 5 (2010).

63. *Id.*

64. Alexandra Dobrowsky & Evangelina Tatsoglou, *Crossing Boundaries and Making Connections*, in WOMEN, MIGRATION AND CITIZENSHIP 1, 3 (Ashgate 2006).

65. *Id.*

66. Saskia Sassen, *Counter Geographies of Globalization and the Feminization of Survival*, 53 J. INT’L AFF. 503, 506 (2000).

67. Allen, *supra* note 54, at 81.

68. *Id.*

69. 2009 YEARBOOK, *supra* note 60, at 8.

70. *Id.*

71. *Id.*

72. U.S. CENSUS BUREAU, U.S. DEP’T OF COMM., THE HISPANIC POPULATION: 2010, 4 (2011) available at <http://www.census.gov/prod/cen2010/briefs/c2010br-04.pdf> (last visited Mar. 28, 2012) [hereinafter THE HISPANIC POPULATION].



Dominicans accounted for 3% of the total Hispanic population in the United States.<sup>73</sup> This population grew by 85%, increasing from 765,000 in 2000 to 1.4 million in 2010.<sup>74</sup> The largest immigrant group in Puerto Rico was also Dominican; the population increased by 21% or 12,000 people since the 2000 census.<sup>75</sup> Dominicans make up 2% of all Hispanics on the island.<sup>76</sup> There are an estimated nineteen million immigrant women in the United States.<sup>77</sup> Dominican women account for 2% of all immigrant women in the United States.<sup>78</sup> Dominican women outnumber Dominican immigrant men by almost 20%.<sup>79</sup> This trend of female migration to Puerto Rico has been consistent for the last twenty years.<sup>80</sup> There is no definitive census regarding the precise number of immigrant women in Puerto Rico.<sup>81</sup> However, we know that more Dominican women emigrate legally as a result of family based petitions, and that more men are intercepted at sea by the U.S. Coast Guard.<sup>82</sup>

Esa yola, esa yola era bien grande. Era tremenda yola con dos motores de 150 cada uno, con mucha gasolina, comoda, salami de todo y con bolsitas de agua muchas bolsitas de aqui. Era como de 150 personas. Era como una casa de alta. [. . .] Nos tardamos veinticuatro horas en llegar porque nos perdimos en el mar, porque el tipo no sabía supuestamente la ruta.<sup>83</sup>

Fourteen years ago, Gracia had not planned to take a yola to go to Puerto Rico, but her brother had.<sup>84</sup> He had been working for some time with smugglers before deciding that he should leave the country.<sup>85</sup> Before it was time for him to depart though, he changed his mind and decided that Gracia should go first because her life was too difficult.<sup>86</sup> He still wanted to

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73. *Id.* at 3.

74. *Id.* at 11.

75. *Id.*

76. *Id.*

77. See U.S. CENSUS BUREAU, U.S. DEP'T OF COMM., AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY (2008) [hereinafter AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY].

78. *Id.*

79. *Id.*

80. Hernandez Angueira, *supra* note 8, at 96.

81. AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY, *supra* note 77.

82. THE HISPANIC POPULATION, *supra* note 72.

83. Interview with Gracia (Apr. 12, 2011) (stating, "[t]hat yola was very big. It was a huge yola with two 150 motors, it was comfortable, it had food, salami, bags of water . . . many bags of water. We stayed at sea 24 hours because we got lost at sea, the guy did not know the way.") [hereinafter Gracia Interview].

84. *Id.*

85. *Id.*

86. *Id.*

help the chief smuggler, since there were hundreds of people in line to go to Puerto Rico.<sup>87</sup> However, when the time came to leave, she became scared and tried to stay behind.<sup>88</sup> Unfortunately, she had the only compass.<sup>89</sup> The yola came back to get la mujer de la brújula.<sup>90</sup> She refused to get in, but since she had the compass, they dragged her into the yola against her will.<sup>91</sup> She in turn grabbed her brother and her journey to Puerto Rico began.<sup>92</sup> She was amused by the fact that they needed her and that without her they were lost.<sup>93</sup> She looks at that anecdote as a metaphor for her life.<sup>94</sup> She feels lucky, in spite of it all, and she is convinced that she has made a difference in her own life, in the lives of her children that she had to leave behind, and even in her abuser's life.<sup>95</sup> She now sees herself as la mujer de la brújula (the woman with the compass).<sup>96</sup>

The Caribbean Sea is a continuum of diffuse borders that we all filter through towards the dream of a better life. Haitians go to the Dominican Republic, Dominicans to Puerto Rico and Puerto Ricans to New York. This exchange is constructed inside the multicultural context created by migration flows and transnational relations. Relations that have existed in one way or another for some time are now more evident and more complex.

Michael Peter Smith defines these transnational relations as:

A marker of the crisscrossing transnational circuits of communication and cross-cutting local and trans-local practices that come together in particular places and particular times and enter into the contested politics of place-making, the social construction of power differentials and the making of individual, group, national and transnational identities and their corresponding fields of difference.<sup>97</sup>

Discussing Appadurai, Glover has also argued the following: "these powerful forces have unfettered the popular imagination, generating new social and cultural possibilities that radically transcend the horizons

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87. *Id.*

88. Gracia Interview, *supra* note 83.

89. *Id.*

90. *Id.* (stating, "[t]he boat came back to get the woman with the compass").

91. *Id.*

92. *Id.*

93. Gracia Interview, *supra* note 83.

94. *Id.*

95. *Id.*

96. *Id.*

97. MICHAEL PETER SMITH, *TRANSNATIONAL URBANISM LOCATING GLOBALIZATION* 3, 5 (Blackwell Publishers 2001).

previously in place by their countries or communities of origin.”<sup>98</sup> Not all of these developments are emancipatory, but they’re ever-changing nature means that their emancipatory and democratic possibilities cannot be discarded.<sup>99</sup>

All the women interviewed have almost daily communications with their children and the rest of the immediate family that they left behind.<sup>100</sup> Even from another nation, they manage to be present and take care of their family.<sup>101</sup> As Gregoria puts it:

Yo los llamo y los llamo casi todos los días, pero la verdad eso es algo como que uno no encuentra que se los tiene como uno quiere. Por ejemplo cuando yo llamo, ya son las nueve de la noche y todavía andan en la calle , eso me deprime porque yo se que lo hacen porque yo no estoy allí.<sup>102</sup>

Interestingly, according to Professor Araujo Dawson, the transnational practices of Dominicans facilitate their connection to their home country and cultural practices in a way that serves to shield them from the stress and mental health consequences that discrimination often has in Latinas.<sup>103</sup> She adds that “these cultural connections may inherently help them cope with discrimination.”<sup>104</sup> She specifically found in her study that the closer that women were to their culture and had lower acculturation levels in the United States, the more protected they were from the negative impact that discriminatory experiences have on Dominican women.<sup>105</sup>

The women interviewed also supervise the way their remittances are used.<sup>106</sup> The remittances are usually the most important source of income for their children and immediate family.<sup>107</sup> The women need to know that their family is taken care of. Cuando le mandaba dinero a mis hijos se lo

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98. See David Glover, *Preface* to SILVIA PILAR CASTRO & MARIA ISABEL BORRERO, *CULTURAL MIGRATIONS AND GENDERED SUBJECTS: COLONIAL AND POSTCOLONIAL REPRESENTATIONS OF THE FEMALE BODY* (2011).

99. *Id.*

100. Grullart Interview, *supra* note 43.

101. *Id.*

102. *Id.* (stating, “I call them and I call them almost every day, but the truth is that is something that one never finds that they are how they should. For example when I call and they are in the street at nine in the night that depresses me because I know that happens because I am not there”).

103. Beverly Araújo Dawson, *Discrimination, Stress, and Acculturation Among Dominican Immigrant Women*, 31 HISP. J. BEHAV. SCI. 96, 105 (2009).

104. *Id.* at 106.

105. *Id.* at 105.

106. Gracia Interview, *supra* note 83.

107. *Id.*

mandaba a mi mama, pero después se lo mandaba al papa. Pero le ponía una nota y llamaba de una vez al más grande y le decía: papi te mande tanto, para ti y para tu hermano.<sup>108</sup>

The women interviewed send money back to their family on a regular basis.<sup>109</sup> For many, this is the center of their existence.<sup>110</sup> Dina, the eldest interviewed, is one such woman.<sup>111</sup> An extraordinary person, she came to Puerto Rico eight years ago.<sup>112</sup> Dina migrated after she married a Puerto Rican man that she had met in the Dominican Republic.<sup>113</sup> She has a daughter from a rape when she was fifteen years old.<sup>114</sup> In Puerto Rico, she stayed married for two years until she could no longer tolerate the abuse.<sup>115</sup> Now she is a domestic worker and makes a very good living.<sup>116</sup> She has more job offers than she can take and has been working with the same families for the last five years.<sup>117</sup> She sends back home close to half of her income. "Tengo que cuidar a la viejita y a mi hija y a mis nietos, si yo no le mando, quién les va a mandar."<sup>118</sup> She has built a large home for her mother and daughter, and she pays for their medical bills and schooling.<sup>119</sup> She is one of the lucky ones as she is a Legal Permanent Resident, enabling her to travel back home once a year for Christmas.<sup>120</sup>

According to the Financial Affairs Commissioner of Puerto Rico, the remittances from Puerto Rico to the Dominican Republic in 2010 reached an all time high of \$156.6 million.<sup>121</sup> This represents twenty-eight percent of all remittances sent out from Puerto Rico.<sup>122</sup> The average transfer

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108. *Id.* (stating, "when I used to send money first I will send it to my mother, latter when I sent it to the father I would call my son and tell him: papi I sent you this much for you and your brother").

109. Interview with Dina (Apr. 14, 2010) (note that 'Dina' is not the true name of the interviewee. Her name has been changed to Dina to protect her identity)[hereinafter Dina Interview].

110. *Id.*

111. *Id.*

112. *Id.*

113. *Id.*

114. Dina Interview, *supra* note 109.

115. *Id.*

116. *Id.*

117. *Id.*

118. *Id.* (stating, "I have to take care of my old mother, and my daughter and my grand-daughter. If I do not do it, who will?").

119. Dina Interview, *supra* note 109.

120. *Id.*

121. OFICINA DEL COMISIONADO DE INSTITUCIONES FINANCIERAS DE PUERTO RICO [PUERTO RICO'S OFFICE OF FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS COMMISSION], TRANSFERENCIAS POR DESTINO PARA EL AÑO TERMINADO, [DESTINATION TRANSFERS FOR THE YEAR ENDING DEC. 31, 2010] (P.R. 2011).

122. *Id.*

amount was \$154.02, meaning that over one-million transactions took place in a single year.<sup>123</sup>

Remittances from Puerto Rico represent nine percent of all remittances received in the Dominican Republic.<sup>124</sup> Dominican women send more remittances than men, both in absolute and relative terms.<sup>125</sup> Although women account for 52.5 percent of immigrant migrants to the United States, they are responsible for fifty-eight percent of the remittances sent from that country.<sup>126</sup> They also send more money directly to women in the Dominican Republic.<sup>127</sup> A project report by the Inter-American Development Bank Multilateral Investment Fund estimated that both senders and receivers of remittances are generally people with a low level of education, and that over 60% are women heads of household.<sup>128</sup>

Given that the average income of women is lower than that earned by men across all migration destinations, the high percentage remitted constitute a high level of personal sacrifice by women.<sup>129</sup> In order to send a larger percentage of their income, women often cut back their own expenses for health, education, nutrition, and leisure time.<sup>130</sup> Professor Wayland argues that this transnational experience has proved to be fruitful and empowering for women: “as their status increase so does the remittances that help pay for children’s tuition, basic living, medical expenses, and many times help to create additional job opportunities for those that stay behind.”<sup>131</sup>

Scholars have deemed remittances one of the strongest transnational links between sending and receiving communities. As Duany points out, remittances can be considered a classic form of transnationalism from below.<sup>132</sup> He goes on to stress that “such massive transfers of resources are

123. Jorge Duany, *To Send or not to Send*, in *CONTINENTAL DIVIDES: INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION IN THE AMERICAS* 205, 207 (Sage 2010).

124. *Id.* at 205, 207; U.N. INT’L RES. & TRAINING INST. FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN, *Women Gender and Development: The Case of Women Migrants from Vicente Noble, Dominican Republic* 131(2006) [hereinafter *Women Gender and Development*].

125. MIF-IFAD PARTNERSHIP FACILITY FOR RURAL PRIVATE SECTOR DEV., *REMITTANCES AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC* 2 (Jan. 2005).

126. *Id.*

127. *Id.*

128. *Id.*

129. *Id.*

130. *Women Gender and Development*, *supra* note 124, at 29.

131. Karin Weyland, *Dominican Women con un Pie Aquí y otro Alla* [Dominican Women with One Foot Here and the Other There], in *DOMINICAN MIGRATION TRANSNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES* 165 (Univ. Press Fla. 2004).

132. Duany, *supra* note 123, at 206

embedded in far flung webs of solidarity and reciprocity among relatives and friends that cross national borders.”<sup>133</sup>

Some of the women had experiences in transnational relationships, even before migrating.<sup>134</sup> Dina, for example, met her husband when he visited the Dominican Republic with a friend.<sup>135</sup> They then maintained a long distance relationship over the phone.<sup>136</sup> Many of the women interviewed pointed out that the need to keep in contact with their families has made media and technology a part of their daily lives in a way they had not anticipated. Most of them watch Dominican television, read Dominican newspapers, listen to Dominican radio stations, and vote in Dominican elections.

In this day and age, the possibilities of “media” are almost endless. Texting, sexting, Facebook, dating cites, TV dating, and sex tourism websites are all utilized by immigrants. Dominican women have also penetrated the domain of diverse media outlets as a means of preserving existing familiar relationships, and as a means of creating new ones.<sup>137</sup> Anthropologist Dennis Brennan noted that for many Dominican women, maintaining transnational ties with their “foreign” men is often a daily task.<sup>138</sup> She adds that for some women “dropping by the Codetel office to see if they have received faxes is a daily ritual.”<sup>139</sup>

Other women seek to meet their future boyfriends and husbands on Internet dating sites.<sup>140</sup> They maintain long distance relationships through email, texting, and sexting.<sup>141</sup> For example, Veras met her husband when a friend texted her phone number to a music video channel to make some new friends.<sup>142</sup> Her friend was already talking to a man when another phone call was received, and the friend asked Veras to answer it.<sup>143</sup> Veras did so and spoke with the man for over an hour.<sup>144</sup> They liked each other,

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133. *Id.*

134. Dina Interview, *supra* note 109.

135. *Id.*

136. *Id.*

137. DENISE BRENNAN, WHAT’S LOVE GOT TO DO WITH IT? TRANSNATIONAL DESIRES AND SEX TOURISM IN THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC 21 (Duke Univ. Press 2004).

138. *Id.*

139. *Id.*

140. STEVEN GREGORY, THE DEVIL BEHIND THE MIRROR: GLOBALIZATION AND POLITICS IN THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC 136–141 (Univ. of Cali. Press 2007).

141. Interview with Veras (date unknown) (note ‘Veras’ is not the true name of the interviewee. The name has been changed to protect her identity)[hereinafter Veras Interview].

142. *Id.*

143. *Id.*

144. *Id.*

and began speaking on the phone and texting more than five times per day before they finally met.<sup>145</sup>

It would be interesting to evaluate how prevalent the use of technologies and social media is among immigrant women in Puerto Rico and in the United States. Interesting research performed in Ireland found that social media usage enables a background awareness of friends and acquaintances that supports bonding capital and transnational communities in ways not previously reported.<sup>146</sup>

#### IV. THE SHAPING AND RESHAPING OF IDENTITIES

Dominican immigrant women travel slowly across physical and discursive borders. Identities are constructed, deconstructed, and reconstructed in a discursive and experiential continuum. The migratory experience serves as a vessel for crossing boundaries that allows them new experiences of transgression and empowerment. For example, in the case of undocumented immigrant women, the “undocumented” label is an identity imposed on them from outside.<sup>147</sup> Their bodies are the crime; their mere presence is a transgression.<sup>148</sup> As pointed out by Castro and Romero, “women’s bodies have always been, and are still today, the sites of sin and transgression, discrimination and control, exploitation and commoditization.”<sup>149</sup>

For all the women interviewed, the journey from the Dominican Republic to Puerto Rico is a starting point for the “otra” that they are, the other woman they have become.<sup>150</sup> As Gregoria points out:

Me siento preparada, . . . Que antes yo era una mujer sumisa, yo era una mujer que duré tres años con el papá de mis hijos. Que si ese plato estaba mal ahí, pues se quitaba porque el hombre habló. Ahora no, te molesta? pues quítalo, mira tengo las pantalones sucios: lávalos. Hoy? No, yo me siento cansada. Yo voy a lavar cuando yo quiera. Si los quieres limpios, pues lávalos. Yo no hacía eso antes.<sup>151</sup>

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145. *Id.*

146. Lee Komito, *Social Media and Migration: Virtual Community 2.0*, 62 J. AM. SOC’Y INFO. SCI. TECH. 1075, 1075 (2011).

147. Silvia Pilar Castro Borrego & Maria Isabel Romero Ruiz, *Repossessing Our Bodies and Ourselves*, in CULTURAL MIGRATIONS AND GENDERED SUBJECTS: COLONIAL AND POSTCOLONIAL REPRESENTATIONS OF THE FEMALE BODY 1, 9 (Cambridge Scholars 2011).

148. *Id.*

149. *Id.*

150. Grullart Interview, *supra* note 43.

151. *Id.*, stating:

However immigrant women coming to Puerto Rico have to face the construction of the Dominican in Puerto Rican society.<sup>152</sup> They often find a xenophobic environment rooted in racism and nationalism.<sup>153</sup> The experiences of discrimination have been associated with low levels of self-esteem in immigrant Dominican women.<sup>154</sup> In Puerto Rico, the usual construction of the public discourse about immigrant women is similar to that of other countries that are marked by migration.<sup>155</sup> Maneri, while addressing the racialization of immigrants in Italy, has noted that the discursive representation of immigrants often “molds the grammatical form that designates their acts.”<sup>156</sup> They are often active subjects of negative and problematic actions (they disembark, they prostitute, they participate in drug trafficking, they are passive recipients of governmental and community based actions).<sup>157</sup>

The term ‘racialization’ may appear to be an inaccurate representation of the relationship between Puerto Ricans and Dominicans because it is a homogenizing construction on identity based on citizenship and not on ethnicity.<sup>158</sup> However, I agree with Duany that in principle that any group can be racialized. That is to say that their identity is construed from the outside by assigning intellectual, emotional, and behavioral characteristics based on group membership.<sup>159</sup> Dominicans in Puerto Rico are often discriminated because they are perceived as black, filthy, vulgar, criminals that are invading the country.<sup>160</sup> Popular jokes, radio and television shows,

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I feel prepared. Before I was submissive, I stayed 3 years with the father of my children. If the plate was out of place, it had to be moved because the man said so. Now, if it bothers you, move it. Hey my pants are dirty, clean them! Today? No, I am tired, if you want clean them yourself. I would not do that before.

152. *De Paz Lisk v. Aponte Roque*, 124 P.R. Dec. 472 (holding, national origin discrimination in Puerto Rico involving a Dominican woman that was not allowed to become a teacher in the Puerto Rico public school system because she was a Legal Permanent Resident and not a citizen of the United States. The Puerto Rico Supreme Court ruled that practice unconstitutional).

153. *Id.*

154. Beverly Araújo Dawson & Sandra Panshanadeswaran, *How Discrimination and Stress Affects Self-Esteem Among Dominican Immigrant Women: An Exploratory Study*, 26 SOC. WORK PUB. HEALTH 60, 60 (2010).

155. *See infra* note 170.

156. Marcello Maneri, *Media Discourses on Immigration Control Practices and the Language We Live, in* RACIAL CRIMINALIZATION OF MIGRANTS IN THE 21ST CENTURY 77, 78 (Ashgate 2011).

157. *Id.*

158. *See infra* notes 170–76.

159. Suzanna Oboler, *Racializing Latinos in the United States: Toward a New Research Paradigm, in* IDENTITIES ON THE MOVE TRANSNATIONAL PROCESSES IN NORTH AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN BASIN 45, 46 (Univ. of Tex. Press 1999).

160. Duany, *supra* note 123, at 214.



and other media often ridicule Dominican accents and customs.<sup>161</sup> Brennan also states that the Internet plays an important role in “producing and disseminating stereotypes based on race and sexual prowess” of Dominican women.<sup>162</sup> Dominican women are associated with sexual availability and widely advertised on the Internet.<sup>163</sup> Gracia recalls her first encounter with a Puerto Rican man after arriving on the yola:

Ese día cuando llegamos nos sacaron del sitio donde estábamos y nos pusieron en otro, y había un Señor que quería quedarse conmigo, que quería que yo me quedara con él tu sabe, que el decía yo te hago los papeles quédate conmigo, que las dominicanas son mejores, que lo hacen mejor. Y yo le decía  
noooooooo . . . .<sup>164</sup>

As Romelinda Grullón points out, in Puerto Rico, there is also a particular construction of Dominican women.<sup>165</sup> They are perceived as immoral prostitutes and thieves.<sup>166</sup> They are accused of taking away men from Puerto Rican woman and only marrying for papers.<sup>167</sup> Grullón jokes that “in a way it seems that men are seen as a scarce resource.”<sup>168</sup> She adds, however, that Dominican women are also perceived to be resilient and hard working.<sup>169</sup> This construction of the Dominican finds echo in the experiences of many of the women interviewed.<sup>170</sup>

La señora me decía: “yo no te quiero aquí que mi marido es un hombre enamorado, es medio fresco, tu eres un peligro aquí en mi casa.” Yo estaba loca por ver al marido ese, ja y cuando llegó yo le dije: “Mire doña, ese hombre está para usted, esa porquería, usted me dice que tenga cuidado con eso. Yo aquí no

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161. *Id.* at 219.

162. BRENNAN, *supra* note 137 at 199.

163. *Id.* at 198–201. STEVEN GREGORY, *THE DEVIL BEHIND THE MIRROR GLOBALIZATION AND POLITICS IN THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC* 33, 62, 136–141 (Univ. of Cali. Press 2007).

164. Gracia Interview, *supra* note 83, stating:

That day they took us up from the place where we were staying and they took us to another place. There was a man who wanted to keep me that said ‘I will give you papers if you stay with me’. He said that Dominican women to it the best. And I said ‘nooooo’ . . .

[hereinafter Grullón Interview].

165. Interview with Romelinda Grullón, Dir., Centro de la Mujer Dominicana [Center for Dominican Women], (Dec. 17, 2010) [hereinafter Grullon Interview].

166. *Id.*

167. *Id.*

168. *Id.*

169. *Id.*

170. Grullón Interview, *supra* note 165.

vine a buscar marido ajeno." Después nos vimos solas, porque el fulano se le fue y ella me ayudaba a mi y yo la ayudaba a ella. Y así pasamos todo ese tiempo y todavía, esa señora me busca.<sup>171</sup>

It is consistent that for all the women interviewed, regardless of all the social and legal labels imposed on them by their host society, their national identity as Dominicans remains their anchoring identity.<sup>172</sup> For all of them, surviving abuse is one of the defining characteristics of the women they have become.<sup>173</sup> It has given them a sense of empowerment.<sup>174</sup>

The migratory experience has also given them a sense of being in control of their own lives—of independence and of knowledge.<sup>175</sup> Gracia often remembers that when she lived back home in the Dominican Republic, she was her mother's only daughter and favorite child.<sup>176</sup> Now she sees herself as a different woman.<sup>177</sup> She jokes:

Mira cuando yo llegué yo no sabía nada de nada, porque en mi casa mi mama no me dejaba hacer nada. Yo no sabía freir in huevo, ni hacer arroz. Cuando me casé mi esposo no podía creer que yo no sabía cocinar, decía que no podía creer que se hubiera casado con la única mujer dominicana que no cocinaba. Ahora, ahora yo puedo hacer lo que sea, arreglar, un trimer, soldar un hierro, arreglar gomas, si es hechar cemento, pues también, lo que sea, si es cortar patios también lo hago. Estoy ready.<sup>178</sup>

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171. Gracia Interview, *supra* note 83, stating:

The woman told me: 'I do not want you here, my husband is a loverboy, he is a player. You are a danger in my home.' I was dying to see the famous husband. Ha and when I saw him I told her: [h]ey Miss, that man is all yours. That trash and I do not come here to take anyone's husband. Later we lived together, because he left, I would help her and she would help me. We were like that for a long time and she still cares for me.

172. See Jose Itzigsohn & Carlos Dore Cabral, *Competing Identities? Race, Ethnicity and Panethnicity Among Dominicans in the United States*, 15 SOC. FOR. 225, 225 (2000).

173. *Id.* at 241.

174. *Id.*

175. Gracia Interview, *supra* note 83.

176. *Id.*

177. *Id.*

178. Grullart Interview, *supra* note 43, stating:

Look when I arrived I did not know a thing, in my home my mother would not let me do anything. I could not fry an egg. My husband could not believe that he had married the only Dominican woman that could not cook. Now, now I can do everything, fix a trimmer, weld iron, fix tires, mix cement whatever, gardening I can do too. I am ready.

Gregoria is perhaps the most visible of the immigrant domestic violence survivors in Puerto Rico.<sup>179</sup> She has made it hers and everyone's business, that her story be told.<sup>180</sup> In our interview she looks back at herself and says:

Yo ya no me dejo joder la vida. El trabajo dónde yo entro lo primero que yo digo en la entrevista: Cómo estás? Bien gracias y me dicen esto es así , y así y yo digo OK Ahora me toca a mí. Si algún día yo faltó, no me hable entre la gente que no somos muchachos y dependiendo como usted me trate, pues bregamos. No acepto que nadie me humille.

She continues:

Soy una mujer feliz y alegre, divertida. Dónde yo me meto, el que no quepa que se salga que llegue yo. Sabes única, me siento, única. No me he deprimido por eso. Me siento preparada para seguir la vida. Me siento una mujer luchadora, qué te digo, dramática en todo.<sup>181</sup>

There is also much nostalgia for the families left behind.<sup>182</sup> This nostalgia is coupled with the desire of "doing something that will allow them to bring their family to Puerto Rico."<sup>183</sup> When Gracia left, her children were so small that they did not remember her.<sup>184</sup> When she was finally able to return to the Dominican Republic after ten years, they went to pick her up at the airport but they walked past each other without recognizing her.<sup>185</sup> At first, she did not recognize them either.<sup>186</sup> Still, she

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179. Firuzeh Shokoo Valle, *Del Dolor Sacó la Fuerza* [Of the Pain Taken by Force], PRIMERA HORA, (Oct. 16, 2007).

180. Grullart Interview, *supra* note 43.

181. *Id.*, stating:

I don't let anyone fuck with me anymore. The job that I get, this is the first thing I say: How are you? Well, thank you and then they tell me how things are . Then I say ok , now is my turn, do not yell at me in front of people because we are not kids, we will get along depending on how you treat me. I do not let anyone humiliate me. I am happy and full of joy. Where I arrive if you do not like me, you can leave. Unique, I feel unique. I am not depressive. I am prepared, I feel like a warrior woman, what can I say, always dramatic.

182. Gracia Interview, *supra* note 83.

183. *Id.*

184. *Id.*

185. *Id.*

186. *Id.*

thinks about opening a business that will allow her to bring them to Puerto Rico; perhaps a restaurant now that she cooks well.<sup>187</sup>

The complex identities that these women describe find little or no representation in the public discourse regarding Dominican women in Puerto Rico.

## V. ON VISIBILITY

In general, the women interviewed feel invisible, not taken into account. Further, they reject the few spaces of portrayal. In Puerto Rico, Dominican women exist on the periphery. It is unlikely that anyone can conduct his or her existence in Puerto Rico without having to interact with a Dominican woman. Dominican women are the primary caretakers of Puerto Ricans, and have also traveled silently into other professions.<sup>188</sup> Yet they are dramatically underrepresented in the media.<sup>189</sup> Media serves as a global culture machine.<sup>190</sup> It is responsible for the dissemination of discourse on what a woman is, and what she should be.<sup>191</sup> Silence is invisibility in that histories have not routinely included women as publicly visible political subjects.<sup>192</sup>

The mass media plays a determining role in the creation of public opinion. Professor Nash has stated that in the context of immigrant women:

The news, information, opinions expressed and the cultural representations projected, both in the audiovisual and written media, constitute a decisive universe of discourses that create values, attitudes and judgments with respect to our social, cultural and political environment.<sup>193</sup>

Nash analyzed the representation of immigrant women in Spanish media, and concluded that the media engagement with the issue of female immigration does not reflect its real weight in society.<sup>194</sup> She asserts that “the media discourse generates a field of meanings based on the silence that makes immigrants invisible, creating a current of public opinion that minimizes their presence and recognition.”<sup>195</sup>

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187. Gracia Interview, *supra* note 83.

188. Hernandez Angueira, *supra* note 8, at 96; Weyland, *supra* note 131, at 165.

189. *Id.*

190. *See infra* note 211.

191. *Id.*

192. *Id.*

193. Mary Nash, *Rethinking Media Representations of Immigrant Women*, in *QUADERNS DE LA MEDITERRANIA* 57 (2006).

194. *Id.* at 58.

195. *Id.*

Dominican women, in relation to media in Puerto Rico, are largely absent in media discourse, and Dominican women are seen as products to be commoditized. Mass media, be it television, magazines, the internet or other medians, provide models in which women compare themselves.<sup>196</sup>

That is not to say that there is no representation of Dominican women whatsoever in the media. There have been representations of Dominican women in the media; however, there has been almost no representation by Dominican women aside from athletes and entertainers.<sup>197</sup> The most notable representation is that of a feisty and uneducated domestic worker named Altagracia in a comedy show during the 1980s.<sup>198</sup>

This lack of visibility is also noticeable in print media. Although it has seen its relevancy challenged by the immediacy of social networking, it is still an important discursive force.<sup>199</sup> Print is still perceived as the more serious, reliable, and unbiased source of information.<sup>200</sup> Involvement in certain social and political issues has been positively linked to the perceived importance of newspaper coverage of a story.<sup>201</sup> Puerto Rico has four daily newspapers.<sup>202</sup> All of them have some form of online version.<sup>203</sup> One of the newspapers, *Primera Hora*, routinely carries information about the Dominican Republic, and even has a designated page for that purpose.<sup>204</sup> So it would be expected that coverage of issues relevant to immigrant Dominican women would be a staple.<sup>205</sup> However, the opposite has been true. During the last two years, there has been almost no content related to immigrant Dominican women, despite the publication of approximately 2,000 stories relating to Dominican politics, sports, and entertainment.<sup>206</sup>

Only a handful of stories featured Dominican women in contexts not related to politics in the Dominican Republic, sports, music or

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196. INDIA BROWN, *MEDIA REPRESENTATION OF YOUNG WOMEN IN THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC* 13 (2010).

197. *Id.*

198. Eva-María Suárez Büdenbender, *Comparing Dominican Linguistic (In)security in the Dominican Republic and in the Diaspora*, in Claudia Borgonovo et al eds. *SELECTED PROCEEDINGS OF THE 12TH HISPANIC LINGUISTICS SYMPOSIUM*, 148-159 (2010) (quoting AIDA DE LA ROSA LA IDENTIDAD CULTURAL DE LA MUJER DOMINICANA DE CLASE TRABAJADORA EN PUERTO RICO: SU ARTICULACIÓN EN LA COMEDIA TELEVISIVA (University of Puerto Rico MA Thesis (2002)).

199. Blake D. Morant, *Democracy, Choice, and the Importance of Voice in Contemporary Media*, 53 DEPAUL L. REV. 943, 965 (2003-2004).

200. *Id.*

201. Bruce E. Pinkleton & Erica Weintraub, *Individual Motivations, Perceived Media Importance, and Political Disaffection*, 18 POL. COMM. 321, 330 (2001).

202. *Id.* at 321.

203. *Id.*

204. *Id.*

205. *Id.*

206. Centro de la Mujer Dominicana, *supra* note 14.

performance.<sup>207</sup> The other stories that featured Dominican women involved Sobeida Félix, the femme fatale of the Puerto Rico-Dominican Republic drug trade, and former Ms. Dominican Republic, Amelia Vega, who recently became the spokesperson for the Puerto Rico Tourism Company.<sup>208</sup> Other stories dealt with immigrant women arrested for prostitution and child neglect or immigrant women that were the victims of crime.<sup>209</sup>

The only news generated by Dominican women is produced by the Centro de la Mujer Dominicana.<sup>210</sup> The Centro has featured stories regarding how women overcome violence, the services offered by the Centro, the activities that the women organize, and their requests for changes in public policies.<sup>211</sup>

Organized immigrant women, through the Centro, are filling an uncontested space and gaining visibility.<sup>212</sup> The Centro, the only organization created by immigrant women and managed by immigrant women, generates a sense of ownership and trust among the women that allows them to fully participate.<sup>213</sup> They are taking an empty, discursive space and filling it with their own discourse.<sup>214</sup> The discourse against domestic violence and the availability of legal remedies under the Violence Against Women Act has allowed Dominican women to agglutinate and claim this space.<sup>215</sup> It should be no surprise that the availability of legal protection for survivors of violence has the effect of galvanizing immigrant women into a cohesive block.

Through their assertive visibility, these women have managed to not only occupy physical and discursive space, but to redefine these spaces as well. By making their voices and their bodies visible, they expose their humanity, including their hopes, their opinions, their dreams, and their lives. Their presence creates questions that demand answers.

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207. *Id.*

208. *Id.*

209. *Id.*

210. *Id.*

211. Centro de la Mujer Dominicana, *supra* note 14.

212. *Id.*

213. *Id.*

214. See Shani M. King, *Race, Identity, and Professional Responsibility: Why Legal Services Organizations Need African*, 18 CORNELL J.L. & PUB. POL'Y 1, 3 (2008).

215. Violence Against Women Act, *supra* note 18.

## VI. CONCLUSION

Transnationalism can open the door to the establishment of a new cosmopolitanism and a new perspective on citizenship and participation.<sup>216</sup> The migratory process has opened doors that enable immigrant women access to the public sphere. This is crucial because, historically, for women to improve their cultural citizenship, they have had to enter the public sphere. The Dominican immigrant women interviewed feel that the migratory experience has allowed them to be the managers of their own lives in a way that might not have been possible back home.

These women have overcome terrible experiences with domestic abuse and left their country and their families. Yet they have organized themselves and are navigating the spaces toward their visibility and recognition. This recognition of themselves is on their own terms with their own sets of stories.

These stories have to become part of the narrative of migration. Borrowing from Margaret Montoya, “[t]he narratives that focus on the experiences of the outsider empower both the story teller and the story listener by virtue of its opposition to the traditional forms of discourse.”<sup>217</sup> As Badiu has masterfully stated, when these stories are aired, “they publicly declare the existence and valence of what had previously been without valence, thereby deciding that those who are here belong here and enjoining people to drop the expression ‘illegal immigrant.’”<sup>218</sup>

From the LatCrit point-of-view it can be said that the sharing narrative of these immigrant women allows us to reinterpret and reposition contemporary discourses regarding immigration in a way that embraced the perspective of the “other” and empowers all communities.<sup>219</sup> Ruitenberg reminds us that we all bear the marks of the places where we have lived, no matter how long or short we have lived there. She further reminds us that “human beings do not grow actual roots on which they depend for their physical, intellectual or ethical nourishment. Instead, nomads who have learned the ethical gestures of hospitality and openness to a community to come will bring nourishment to any place they land.”<sup>220</sup>

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216. Alexandra Dobrowsky & Evangelina Tatsoglou, *Crossing Boundaries and Making Connections*, in *WOMEN, MIGRATION AND CITIZENSHIP 1* (Ashgate, 2006).

217. Margaret Montoya, *Máscaras, Trenzas y Greñas [Masks, Braids and Hair]: Unmasking the Self While Embracing Latina Stories and Legal Discourse*, in *CRITICAL RACE THEORY 522* (Temple Univ. Press 2000).

218. ALAIN BADIOU & SLAVOJ ZIZEK, *PHILOSOPHY IN THE PRESENT 37* (Polity 2009).

219. Berta Esperanza Hernandez-Truyol, *Latina Multidimensionality and LatCrit Possibilities: Culture, Gender and Sex*, 53 *MIAMI L. REV.* 811, 813 (1999).

220. Claudia Ruitenberg, *Deconstructing the Experience of the Local: Toward a Racial Pedagogy of Place*, in *PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION 212*, 219 (2005).

As Derrida alluded to in *On Cosmopolitanism*,<sup>221</sup> I also imagine these spaces of contested migrations as giving rise to a place for reflection and for a new order of law and a democracy to be put to the test.

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221. See generally JACQUES DERRIDA, *ON COSMOPOLITANISM AND FORGIVENESS* (Routledge 2001).