Exploring Diasporic Identities in Selected Plays by Contemporary American Minority Playwrights

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Ethnic drama in the United States is still underrepresented, and American minority playwrights are still typically not anthologized or even formally taught. With the exception of a handful of plays, such as David Henry Hwang's *M. Butterfly* and Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun*, many American minority playwrights are still not widely read and their plays are rarely staged by mainstream theaters. Velina Hasu Houston protests that keeping American minority playwrights in the closet denies their plays the opportunity to be re-established in the American canon (137). Commenting on the status of Asian American drama, Houston complains "a body of noteworthy Asian-American drama has been created, but mainstream theatres rarely revisit such plays" (137). Ethnic drama constitutes all the plays written by U.S. minority playwrights. Such ethnic drama functions as a venue for ethnic dramatists' rehearsal and enactment of the racialized subjectivity of their communities and pose a social and political critique and in some cases resistance to mainstream culture. In this context, such ethnic playwrights strive to cross borders to create new worlds to inhabit for both themselves and their characters as well. Each of the American minority playwrights discussed here has utilized a peculiar ethnic rhetoric to empower his or her ethnic communities and to interrogate the nativist American white ideology.

Although the literary discourse on centrism in American drama and theater is still dominating schools and universities in and outside the United States, where only American canonical plays are taught, some ethnic plays from the margins have claimed great success among mainstream audiences, and thus have been canonized. Since it is taken for granted that there are no centers without margins, eradicating the margins would entail destroying the centers as well. Excluding ethnic plays from school syllabuses and textbooks at universities throughout the United States is a form of racial discrimination. Suppressing the voices of American minority playwrights also deprives mainstream audiences from getting a thorough and unbiased understanding of ethnic minorities living in the country. Jon Dominic Rossini argues that American minority dramatists do not want to be considered merely as ethnic tokens, but would rather prefer to be seen as agents of social critique

whose fundamental aim is to empower their ethnic communities (319). Stephen Sumida asserts that the conceptualizing of a multicultural, heterogeneous American literature has to involve the study of marginal authors formerly considered different from the alleged American canonical authors at the center (810). Sumida even asserts that some minority literatures of the United States have been repositioned at the center of literary studies and have even surpassed their marginality and secured a distinguished position in the mainstream culture (804). Gary Okihiro states that in all genres of immigration literature American citizenship is clearly categorized "although situating itself at the core, the mainstream is not the center that embraces and draws the diverse nation together ... it derives its identity and integrity from the representation and thus exclusion of the other" (175). Okihiro, further asserts that it is "the margin [that] has held the nation together with its expansive reach; the margin has tested and ensured the guarantees of citizenship; and the margin has been the true defender of American democracy, equality and liberty" (175).

Any investigation of American minority dramas would certainly reveal the internal but explicit tension between the diverse ethnic cultures from the margins and the dominant mainstream canon. While the former strive to emerge with a voice to be heard, the latter wants to make sure that such an emerging voice remains unheard and that such writers remain at the margins. Márgara Averbach argues that at the center, people mistakenly believe they can eliminate or diminish the margins without any grave consequences (6). In general, reading or watching non-canonical theatres is quite necessary for both U.S minorities and Native Americans to understand each others constructively regardless of the distorted stereotypical images of minority and marginal groups frequently depicted in American mainstream movies and TV series.

However, the American ethnic plays that have been canonized are still rare and their canonization has further marginalized them. Robin Bernstein, sarcastically commenting on the seemingly "fake," literary evaluation of *Raisin in the Sun,* a play by an African American that has been granted the status of a classic, observes that the very process of canonizing a minority play is absurd and paradoxical. Bernstein asserts, "To label an ethnically specific play a masterpiece, then, is to label it exceptional, to separate it from its ethnic tradition" (24). Bernstein seems to stress the fact that canonizing a minority play is even derogatory and discriminatory since this process entails uprooting a play and its playwright from their cultural heritage. Homi Bhabha (1994) asserts that the nativists yearn for "the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite" (86). Bhabha's Lacanian argument on mimicry implies accepting the other on the condition that he or she has to be reformed before being canonized into the mainstream culture.

Ethnic dramatists living in the United States use an empowering rhetoric in their plays to articulate to non-minority audiences the experiences of their U.S minority subjects especially in terms of assimilation, diasporic longing and politicized resistance. The plays discussed here represent significant U.S. ethnic and racial communities. Hispanic and Latino communities in the United States comprise the largest ethnic minorities in the country, while African Americans compose the largest racial minority. Asian Americans, though a fairly recent addition to the country's melting pot, constitute significant ethnic minorities in the United States. All these racial and ethnic minorities strive more than their European counterparts for assimilation in mainstream culture for economic, political and social reasons.

Psychoanalytic traditions of post-colonialist critique offer theories of surveillance and the restrictions this close watch imposes on what is perceived as alien subjects of the United States, particularly in the context of colonialism and postcolonial theory. Alien citizens in the United States, as Mae Ngai points out, are "persons who are American by virtue of birth in the United States, but who are presumed to be foreign by the mainstream of American culture and, at times, by the state" (2). The most influential theory of surveillance is that of Michel Foucault published in *Discipline and Punish* (1977). Foucault's version of "panopticism" stipulates that the subject being photographed is separated from the object and is forced to identify with the gaze of the dominant culture (195-228). Lacan's (1981) depiction of the gaze "I am photo-graphed" is also applicable to the situation of ethnic minorities in the United States where the nativist American's penetrating gaze creates in the person being photographed the imaginary sense of being pictured from a point where the onlooker cannot see himself in creating the subject of his gaze (74). In the same line of argument, Frantz Fanon (1967) acknowledges that a minority being viewed by the dissecting, and amputating white gaze is meant to objectify him or even strip him of his identity. Fanon states:

> And already I am being dissected under white eyes, the only real eyes. I am fixed. Having adjusted their microtomes, they objectively cut away slices of my reality. I am laid bare! (116).

The gaze of the camera, which takes fixed pictures of the objects being photographed, Bhabha (1990) asserts, functions as an enduringly fixed "gaze of the colonizer" (129). However, the watcher's gaze, in this case the colonizer, is not ignored by the colonized subject being pictured, but rather he returns the gaze in an act of mimicry. Bhabha (1990) believes that identity vacillates, and the colonial relation of power is destabilized since the watcher also becomes the watched "it is a process by which the look of surveillance returns as the displacing gaze of the disciplined, where the observer becomes the observed" (129).

The relationship between American canonical and ethnic theaters can also be explained in terms of structuralist and post-structuralist critique of the center and the margins. The decentering of the contemporary American stage has given some space for ethnic theaters from the diverse margins to emerge. In post-structuralist criticism the emerging voices of American minority playwrights resemble the passage from centered to decentred or centerless structures which in turn is similar to the passage from structuralism to post-structuralism (Connor 736). Jacques Derrida describes the relation between the center and the margins in a paradoxical formulation: "The center is at the center of the totality, and yet, since the center does not belong to the totality, the totality has its center elsewhere. The center is not the center" (279). While post-structuralism advocates for absolute centerlessness against the oppressive doctrine of the controlling centre, deconstruction explains marginality out of the very structure of center and margin. However, deconstruction does not affirm the margin against the centre and by no means creates a new center of the margin. Deconstruction not only called for dismantling the logocentrism inherent in the mainstream thought, but also gave marginalized minority writers the academic terrain to express their ethnic identities rhetorically, thus creating a counter discourse to the dominant mainstream discourse. George Lipsitz argues that alienated ethnic writers construct a "counter-memory" which is a mixture of history and myth that overtly rejects the Western dominant binary thinking, and constitutes a potential combination for change (211-232). Helen Tiffin points out that "Post-colonial literatures constitute counter-discursive strategies to the dominant discourse" (96). Applying deconstructive critique to contemporary multicultural American drama, one can conclude that ethnic theaters in the United States, no matter how dramaturgically artistic they might appear, will never be a substitute for canonical American drama either in literary studies or in formal schooling, but still should be recognized as an integral part of American drama. Both canonical and ethnic theatres should be seen as one inseparable entity. Steven Connor contends that the center and the margin should not be viewed as absolute antagonists, but rather two constituents of an indissoluble confederacy (747). Maxine Seller (1983) argues that ethnic theatres fortify the cohesiveness of ethnic communities in America and enhance the process of assimilating minorities into the mainstream culture (6).

In describing borderland theory Bhabha (1990) defines counter narratives of the nation as texts that "continually evoke and erase its totalizing boundaries, both actual and conceptual, disturb those ideological maneuvers through which imagined communities are given essentialist identities" (300). Borderland theory asserts that since culture is not necessarily congruent with national borders, borderland narratives do not assimilate, but constitute a literary space for resistance and struggle (Polster 12-13). As Amy Kaplan has noted "ideological implications of the frontier with its

emphasis on upward mobility, outward expansion have given immigrant narrative texts a space in the nation's literary imagination" (16). This expansion of American literature from exceptionalism to inclusion of minority voices has empowered minority writers to use their own ethnic rhetoric to express their national indigenous identities. Some critics such as Abdul JanMohamed and David Lloyd have called for the recognition of minority discourses in American literature, for such ethnic rhetoric is caused by economic exploitation, political disfranchisement, social manipulation, and mainstream ideological domination (11). Postmodernism, with its notions of the center and the margins, solidified the roots of ethnicity and aboriginal cultures in the United States. Postmodernist critique perceives the center, in this context, the dominant American popular culture, as an entity that no longer holds, thus paving the way for the notion of marginalization to emerge (Cooperman 202). Lee Josephine states that hyphenated theaters have produced clashing plays calling for the inclusion and seclusion of ethnic minorities within the mainstream culture (47).

For nearly most immigrants America is the "Promised Land" where, as Gilbert Muller argues, people of diverse ethnic backgrounds "embrace democratic vistas and transcend national meanings: opportunity, social mobility, self-reliance, the dreams inherent in their new Promised Land" (238). Nevertheless, some American minority playwrights do not portray America as thus; but rather they populate their plays with immigrants puzzled by the dilemma of choosing between fully assimilating into American mainstream culture or preserving their diasporic identity in a multicultural society. As Priscilla Wald remarks, "The narrative of even successful assimilation is plagued with incomplete conversion, discomfort, contradictions and rhetorical disjunction" (243). Even immigrants who assimilate into the new culture unconsciously keep the traditions and customs of their country of origin. As Irene Mata (2007) points out, some immigrants do not assimilate, but prefer to live in ethnic enclaves with their native communities where they can maintain their old world culture (7).

The Chinese American playwright David Henry Hwang's *F.O.B.* (1979) portrays the conflicts between Asian Americans and recent Chinese immigrants to the United States known as F.O.B.s: "Fresh Off the Boat." The abusive title of the play is further explained by Dale, a second-generation Chinese American, who directly tells the audience about the racial and ethnic characteristics of these Asian newcomers to the United States. Though Dale himself is an American Born Chinese, his first remarks about these immigrants in his monologue are insulting and discriminatory reflecting bad stereotypical images of this kind of ethnicity. He calls them "clumsy, ugly, greasy FOB" and "loud, stupid, four-eyed" (7). Dale is an assimilationist who is overwhelmed with a tantalizing desire to be accepted by white American culture. However, to assimilate into the mainstream culture, he

is ready to give up his Chinese identity and cultural heritage. Stuart Hall (1997) criticizes the longing of minorities living in the United States for a self-referential identity that does not permit the position of the Other (42). In the same line of argument Bhabha (1996) notes, "Colonial power produces the colonized as a fixed reality which is at once an 'other' and yet entirely knowable and visible" (93).

Dale seems ignorant of the fact that though it would be nice for any immigrant to be a citizen of the greatest country in the world, loyalty to this American citizenship does not by any means demand rejecting one's cultural roots and heritage. His alienation from both the white American culture and the F.O.B. community seems inevitable. In his first encounter with Steve in the restaurant, Dale insolently ridicules all F.O.B.s accusing them of betraying their parents and China by living as immigrants in the United States. He remarks that the parents of a F.O.B. send him or her to America, but they eventually betray them by not returning to China. Dale contradicts himself when he even indirectly speaks critically of his parents and expresses his resentment of his Chineseness and ethnic connections, "My parents [are] yellow ghosts and they've tried to cage me up with Chineseness when all the time we were in America" (33). Dale asserts his complete assimilation into the American mainstream culture. He even claims that having become an American, he has become entirely human as if people of other cultures and races were subhumans. Dale looks down upon his own race and culture.

> So I've had to work real hard—real hard—to be myself. To not be a Chinese, a yellow slant, a gook. To be just a human being, like everyone else. I have paid my dues. And that's why I'm much better now. I'm making it, you know? I'm making it in America. (33)

Josephine Lee points out that the problem with Dale is that to realize his self actualization, he becomes troubled by his inability to fully liberate himself from his Chineseness (177). One can sense Dale's arrogance in his introductory monologue where he boastfully describes these immigrants of Asian origin as clumsy in appearance and dress, and are embarrassing to an A.B.C., "an American-born Chinese," like him. Dale mockingly rebukes these newly arrived immigrants' attempts at assimilation while still leading a Chinese lifestyle in America. Grace is completely different from her cousin Dale. She is more Chinese than him in maintaining her Chinese identity in every aspect especially when it comes to customs and costume. The differences in their perceptions of their Chinese identities is further widened with the arrival of the newcomer Steve, a college student F.O.B. who lies to everyone by claiming to be the son of a wealthy Shanghai family. While Dale treats Steve with resentment for being a new immigrant by stressing his Americanism, Grace treats him kindly using her traditional Chinese culture, thus winning him to her side. Though Grace resents

Steve at first and has a big row with him in the restaurant, she later becomes fond of him. Trying to Westernize Steve, Dale even suggests changing Steve's appearance and behavior to make him an American fashionable model like John Travolta, an American actor known for masculine charisma and sexual proclivities: "I'm trying to help you ... I'm trying ... to make you like John Travolta" (34).

Though this Chinese immigrant community lives in the United States, they still discuss superstitions and myths they brought with them from China. While Steve claims to be "Gwan Gung, the god of warriors, writers, and prostitutes" (11), Grace claims to be Mu Lan, a mythical Chinese woman warrior. By becoming a journalist, Grace, under the obligations of her Chinese culture, becomes obedient to Steve's supposed divine jurisdiction as god of writers and starts having a crush on him as her idol. Though Grace and Steve's discussion about Chinese gods and warriors seems trivial and superstitious, it shows their attachment to their Chinese cultural heritage.

In *F.O.B.* the Chinese immigrants' identities range from the new comer Steve, to the foreign born with ten years' experience Grace, to the second-generation American-born Chinese Dale. With varying degrees all these immigrants seek assimilation into mainstream American culture, and this is clear from the American first names they have chosen for themselves. Dale resents Steve for two reasons. He is his rival in Grace's love and because Steve exhibits all the stereotypic mannerisms of the American Chinese that Dale has tried in vain to suppress. This rivalry between the F.O.B. and the A.B.C. takes different forms. The hot Chinese sauce competition between Dale and Steve not only reflects who will win Grace's heart, but also who will prove to be more connected and devoted to his Chinese cultural heritage. Dale characterizes Steve as the other "FOBs can eat anything, huh? They're specially trained. Helps maintain the characteristic greasy look" (30). The play ends with Grace and Steve reconciling while Dale remains alone still resenting all FOBs.

Hwang's *M. Butterfly* (1988) deconstructed the West's distorted image of the Orient. *M. Butterfly* was even hailed as the most daring ethnic play that has questioned the political, social and cultural identities of the West (Cooperman 201). The play tells the story of a French diplomat who, for twenty years, is tantalized by a love affair with a Chinese male spy disguised as a woman. Engulfed in scenes of espionage and romance, the play intrepidly exposes the Western distorted stereotypical images of Oriental cultures publicized by the myth of Orientalism that stressed supremacy of nations, postcolonialism, hegemony and erotic fantasies. As a postcolonial ideologist Edward Said not only dismantled the centrality of Western thought as being Eurocentric that has marginalized weak cultures and languages, but also opened a new territory for marginal voices belonging to formerly colonized cultures to rhetorically express their ethnic identities. In *Orientalism* (1977) Said argues that the Orient helps "define

Europe or the West as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience" (1). Said states "the geographical space of the Orient was penetrated, worked over, taken hold of. The cumulative effect of decades of so sovereign a Western handling turned the Orient from alien into colonial space" (211). Said's phrase "geographical sense" (*Culture* 78), which is conceptualized through notions of center and margin, applies well to the study of ethnic theatres and minority playwrights in the United States. According to Said (1993), Western societies maintain strict surveillance on minorities to ensure that they remain subordinate citizens:

> Modern western societies ... shape and set limits on the representation of what are considered essentially subordinate beings; thus representation itself has been characterized as keeping the subordinate subordinate and the inferior inferior. (80)

In the same line of argument, Stuart Hall (1996) stresses that "the West is a historical, not a geographical construct" (186). In global modernity, Hall maintains, "the Rest," which refers to all countries not considered Western, seeks the recognition of "the West" (186).

In *M. Butterfly* Hwang makes an allusion to Puccini's opera *Madama Butterfly* to portray the fantasies the West frequently creates about silent Eastern butterflies deserted by their Western devotees. Puccini's opera *Madama Butterfly* was based on an American play *Madame Butterfly* by David Belasco that portrays the love affair between a delicate Oriental and a belligerent Westerner. Song Lilling, the French diplomat's idolized mistress, is supposedly a diva in the Chinese opera *Madama Butterfly* which is watched by foreign attachés. Ignorant of the fact that in a Chinese conventional opera a man plays the part of a woman, Gallimard is enchanted by Song's elegance and beauty taking him to be a seductive Oriental woman. The scene in which Gallimard wears the Chinese attire and commits a ritual suicide, and Song wears a Western suit, but his Asian body is still visible in the Western costume, confirms two facts. First, the roles of the conqueror and the exotic alien have been reversed. Second, Gallimard is the lost "butterfly," not Song. The play asserts that an Asian wearing a Western suit does not, in any way, become a Westerner. Likewise, an Asian American will remain Asian despite becoming an American citizen, and therefore should not Americanize himself at the expense of shedding his Asian identity. Hwang (1999) points out that a common theme in all his plays about Asian American immigrants is the fluidity of identity:

> We are the result of circumstance, the result of things that are not necessarily inherent but instead come out of our interaction with contacts. Many of the plays suggest that if the contact changes, the individual becomes a different person. (231)

In his article "Evolving a Multicultural Tradition" Hwang (1989) observes that words ending with -ism such as "racism, sexism, imperialism" are meant to degrade the other,

"to make the other less than oneself" (18). In the court scene Song defines the Western mentality at a French judge's request: "you expect oriental countries to submit to your guns, and you expect oriental women to be submissive to your men" (83). Song even defies the West's perception of the East as being submissive and weak:

> The West thinks of itself as masculine- big guns, big industry, big money—so the East is feminine-weak, delicate, poor, ... but good at art, and full of inscrutable wisdom-the feminine mystique.... The West believes the East, deep down, wants to be dominated—because a woman can't think for herself. (83)

Toward the end of the play Gallimard refuses to believe that the woman he has loved for twenty years is no more than a spy for the Chinese government during the Vietnam War. Overwhelmed by fantasy and ecstasy, Gallimard remarks, "I'm a man who loved a woman created by a man. Everything else ... simply falls short" (90).To maintain his fantasy, Gallimard asks Song to stop stripping and unmasking, not to reveal her true identity as a male because in his mind he has versioned her as a female: "No, Stop! I don't want to see... You're only in my mind! All this is in my mind!" (87).

Nostalgia for one's country while living in diaspora dominates much of the rhetoric of American minority playwrights. Said (1975) calls such nostalgic feelings that dominate diasporic ethnic groups "transcendental homelessness" (*Beginnings* 312). According to Said, nostalgic feelings are evoked in immigrants living in diasporas as a result of "discovering an absolute incompatibility between the realm of totality and the realm of personal interiority, of subjectivity" (312). Asian American theater, like all ethnic theatres in the United States, is obsessed with portraying feelings of nostalgia accompanied by feelings of melancholia and estrangement in which the characters retreat into nostalgic past deeply rooted in their cultural roots. For such ethnic characters the nostalgic past evoked in the diaspora is merely a feeble shelter in which they take refuge from the harsh realities of their present life. Kim Taehyung argues that in the Asian American literary tradition, the past is either romanticized as heritage and tradition or lamented as unredeemable loss (106).

In the Korean American playwright Julia Cho's *The Architecture of Loss* (2004), a painful immigrant history is recollected nostalgically amidst the immigrants' persistence to cross borders and create new homes in a capitalist society. The play opens in a desert house inhabited by a Korean American family in Tucson on a hot day. An eccentric drunken old man wearing pajamas unexpectedly arrives at Catherine's door and absent-mindedly sits at the table in the house's veranda blankly staring out. When Catherine sees him, she becomes baffled to realize that he is Greg, her missing former husband, who deserted her sixteen years earlier without any sufficient reason. Greg has returned to find out that the family he left

no longer exists. Filled with shock and anger Catherine demands an explanation as to why her husband abandoned her for sixteen years. Deeply lost in thoughts of the past Greg apologizes and starts fishing for a reliable justification for abandoning his wife and two children. Greg confesses to her that being a reformed alcoholic he deserted his family for their benefit to put an end to his excessive drinking that was ruining his marriage life and destroying the happiness of his children.

In *The Architecture of Loss* desertion and abandonment seem to be a painful destructive force in the lives of all the family members who, as a result, are rendered helpless and become estranged from one another. Now Catherine lives with her father, Richard, an alcoholic Korean War veteran, and her daughter Carmie, who works as a tourist guide in the Desert Museum to pay her university tuition fees. Unattainable loss in the play is not restricted to the loss of the child David, who disappeared eight years ago. Loss is deeply seated in Catherine's memories of her white father, and her Korean mother Nora, who lived the life of a recluse inside her Korean church of Jehovah's Witnesses. After the death of her Korean mother, Catherine and her father had several rows over who hurt her more; the husband who mistreated her and frequently beat her or she herself who despised her mother for her frequent meetings with "frumpy women" (17) in the church and finally deserted her. To cope with their loss each family member painfully plucks out from his or her memory any familial attachments and takes refuge into a destructive form of escapade. Greg deserted his family after sexually exploiting his daughter. His atrocious physical act has left Carmie psychologically traumatized and has even made her live with the pretense that such an abusive father does not exist. Nora's living the life of a recluse at home and in the church has excluded her from her family affairs and has therefore estranged her from them. After Nora's death the family disintegrated and Richard's war trauma increases. Catherine lost her childhood house because of Richard's gambling and Carmie starts an illicit love affair with her professor at university. Catherine's life is a true melancholic reflection of her mother's life. To overcome her identity crisis she introjects her dead mother and eventually in her fantasy unconsciously incorporates all her mother's characteristics into her own psyche. In one of the rows with her father over Nora, Richard reproaches Catherine for being ungrateful to her mother and being ashamed of her ethnic identity as half Korean and half American. In turn, Catherine reproaches him for mistreating and abusing her mother. Richard hurls several disparaging ethnic insults at Nora describing her as "some gook fresh off the boat" (23). Therefore, Catherine violently expels him out of the house.

Though missing, David still haunts their life and constitutes a cycle of loss and absence in their lives. The trauma of loss haunts all family members since everyone is guilty of disintegrating the family. David loved his granddad Richard

more than anyone else in the family. Even on the day he disappeared he was last seen following Richard into the daylight, but never came back home. The reasons for his disappearance are still ambiguous and occupy much of the talk of the family. Carmie guesses that the little child could not tolerate seeing a lot of hatred and violence in the house; therefore he left never to return: "isn't it obvious? He left.... Home hurts too much and he left." When Greg suggests that he might have been kidnapped—"He left? He wasn't taken?"—Carmie asserts once again that such a delicate wonderful child could have never been kidnapped, but he must have left for being hurt and seeing the ones whom he loves hurt too: "kidnapped? No, not David. He wanted to leave and then he did. That's why we never found him. He didn't want to be found." Carmie even asserts that his desertion of the family mirrors that of his bohemian wanderer father who just deserted the family for no clear reason. She says, "Like father like son, I guess" (38-39).

In *The Architecture of Loss* victimization is a shared ritual among all the family members who victimize, maltreat, and physically and psychologically hurt one another. The dead Nora and the missing child David seem to hold all he family members in a state of mourning and melancholy. It is clear that every family member is hurt by leaving and being left. Images of loss and destruction are frequently associated with Greg. Carmie speaks of him as a man of the monsoon "rushing out of nowhere like a sudden, drunk party guest" who would bring torrential rain with him upon his return after a long absence (9). Even his return to his house after a long absence seems accidental. While loitering in the streets in the neighborhood after having missed the turnoff to Phoenix, he is seen reading and contemplating the signboard that reads "The Son of Man has no place to lay down" (13). The sign reminds him of his children whom he misses so much and takes him back home.

The absent child constitutes a catalyst for much of the action in the play. Though absent he occupies the center of the play. Catherine and Greg retain many of the memories of the missing child through a game of masking to retrieve the recollection of loss which seems illusionistic. Greg does not even seem to have an identity and considers himself a nullity to his wife, his children, and even to himself. Absent mindedly he asks Catherine to fabricate facts and get involved with him in the illusions of her tormented memories of what has been lost in the past: "What was I? Before? Because I can't remember anymore. What was I, Cath? What did I used to be?" Catherine replies, "What do you want to hear?" Greg tortured by feelings of guilt demands, "say he'll come back" (51). Even though she heard the rumor that Greg could have possibly killed the child, she still believes that her son will return home one day. Tormented by the agony of the loss of the child, Catherine, with tears flooding her eyes, passionately finds solace in her

illusions. She says, "Even now, I still think. Someday, he'll come walking up that dusty road ... and I will be at the sink, washing dishes maybe, yeah, why not" (51).

The missing child, presumably dead, symbolically represents the existential identity crisis for the Korean American family in the United States. Such immigrants mourn the loss of their ethnic identities that have been wiped out in the dominant mainstream culture and express their inability to really cross borders and create a new world in diaspora. They feel stripped of their cultural roots and their life in an isolated desert house also enforces their marginality in such a capitalist multicultural society. Their refusal to acknowledge the death of the missing child reflects the ghostly presence of the past that still haunts them no matter how far they think they have gone from their true identity. The past in the play is not only nostalgically evoked, but also imagined through its tormenting absence.

Many American minority playwrights were universally acclaimed as American playwrights whose works did not remain marginal, but rather became mainstream plays. Philip Kan Gotanda, a Japanese-American playwright, achieved such an honorable status in U.S. literary cycles. Gotanda's transcending his marginality into the canonical mainstream theatre is due to the universality of the themes he writes about and the marvelous dramatic style he uses to convey such themes. Ann-Marie Dunbar (2005) contends that Gotanda's plays bear witness to "his movement away from the limitations of a hyphenated identity- from works which can be read primarily as Asian American to those with more universal themes not restricted by an ethnic tag" (15-16). Dunbar contends that such movement of an ethnic minority playwright from marginality into the mainstream canonical theatre constitutes "an abandonment of ethnicity" rather than a leap toward securing "a more central position" as an American playwright (16). Gotanda's *Day Standing on its Head* (1994) does not address an identity crisis but rather explores the nature of the Asian American identity when it equally engages in the U.S popular culture. Michael Omi states:

> What he's [Gotanda] doing in his plays is to make the Asian-American experience a very American experience. I think that's central to his impact on the mainstream theatergoing audience. His stories are not marginal, exotic tales. What he's telling is essentially an American story. (qtd. in Hong 31)

Employing an abstract expressionist dramaturgical style and tackling universal themes, *Day Standing on its Head* tells the story of an emotionally disturbed middle-aged Japanese-American law professor, Harry Kitamura, who is a victim of his own fantasies, unattainable idealism, repressed sexual desire, and the inability to achieve professional growth. He contemplates his failed marriage, his sexual fantasies around an unknowable woman, his ideological and political differences with his colleagues, his lack of self-expression as a writer, his hyphenated identity,

his gradual detachment from his cultural heritage as an Asian American, and his betrayal of the revolutionary organization he once belonged to. Sam attributes Harry's sense of guilt for shedding his identity and wearing the "frozen mask of middle class propriety while inside you want to rage, scream at the injustices all around" (22) and Nina describes him as a man "locked up deep down inside" (19).

Early in the play Harry appears as an active member of the Asian American movement who keeps lecturing on campus strikes, multiethnic riots and anti-racial discrimination movements that spread throughout many states in the country in the late sixties and early seventies. His lack of self-expression is made clear when confronted with a question raised by a student:

> Isn't your idea of the Third World Student Movement a bit of a dinosaur given the trend toward anti-Asian violence in African American and Latino communities? ... I think ... the LA uprisings shattered any remnant of your 60s political model and I quite frankly find your lecture ... irrelevant to our discussion here on current political Asian American trends and the legal system. (8)

Dunbar observes that the most dominant Asian American issue addressed in the play is that of the model minority (26). In the Asian American movement of the late sixties, she maintains, "racial self-determination and consciousness put Asian Americans on the socio-political map [of the United States], giving them a social presence and the permission to self-express their identity crisis" (17). The play laments how many fractions of the Asian American movement diverged from their aims and how influential members such as Harry, gradually lost any commitment to the cause on which the movement was founded. His decision to write about one of the seminal strikes of the Asian American movement represents his fear to get involved in such ethno racial strikes, and hence, he suffices to write a critical analysis of the social structures of that time and their relationship to present day legal system and, for him, the strike "wasn't that big" (21). Harry's political rhetoric of the model minority regarding ethno racial causes even conforms to that of the U.S administration and such conformity detaches him not only from his political cause, but rather from his cultural heritage as well. Sam describes the disadvantages of such a conformist political stance:

> They like people like you.... So they accept us for now but at what price? To live like a cowardly mouse....We'll make a little too much money, figure out the game a little too well and then we'll see middle class America's real face. They'll hate us, they'll hunt us down, kill us in the streets. (22-23)

Harry's conformist politics of the model minority sharply contradicts his family life because he suffered from the trauma of divorce. His wife Lillian had accused him

of being a man of "having no feeling" (12). Harry's repressed sexual fantasies find expression in daydreaming with an "enigmatic, erotically tantalizing" woman with "the most beautiful nape" (11). This coquettish woman, Nina, comes to represent for Harry his search for idealistic fuller living. Surprisingly, like his wife, Nina also accuses Harry of coldness. In his fantasies Harry writes a poem in praise of Nina's eroticism and wishes to die in her "mysterious fire" (29). The model minority mask Harry is wearing is exposed by his friend Joe who invites him to go skydiving with him. Harry falls to the ground. Joe wanted to make Harry realize his true identity as an Asian American, but his plan fails: "You didn't break apart.... I figured at least the force of the crash would shatter you, make you see beyond yourself" (27).

At the end of the play Harry wakes up from his daydreaming and hallucinations in which he saw all his past and present friends yelling at him. Such surreal figures represent his accusatory other self who constantly urges him to unmask himself and get rid of his compliance strategy. He murmurs some of Sam's words, reflecting his acceptance of the accusations, and therefore gains some self-awareness: "I told the school officials what we were planning to do.... They like people like me.... Quiet, hard working ... not dangerous ... not sexual" (39). Harry is also deceived in his search for the erotic fullness in a woman. Though he fulfills such a wish when he bites the back of Nina's neck and his arm gets its "muscle back" (41), the fake Japanese blonde Peggy Lee, with whom he dances in dim light and whose "hand moves to stroke" the nape of her neck (42), turns out to be his wife Lillian masquerading beneath the blonde wig. He finds eroticism in his wife only when she camouflaged as a stranger, but once he realizes that she is his wife, her sexual charisma fades away. His inability to distinguish between his wife, Lillian, and the woman of his sexual fantasies, Nina, suggests that Harry is mixing between his true self as an Asian American and his fake identity as a representative of the model minority which he aspires to fulfill. Such confusion between a reverie and reality, the surreal figures that he sees in his daydreaming, the inability to distinguish between his wife and the woman of fuller sexuality, all make the play, as Gotanda himself remarks in "Author's Notes," look like "a German Expressionist film," thus making it impossible to classify the play as an Asian American drama (4). The current dominant trend in multiethnic contemporary American drama, as David Henry Hwang (1998) asserts, is to "explode the very myth of an immutable cultural identity" (viii).

Many American minority playwrights seem gripped by the ethnic dilemma which Fanon (1967) calls "situational neurosis." Fanon states, "In the man of color there is a constant effort to run away from his own individuality, to annihilate his own presence (60). This alienation of the existential self is a severe form of psychological illness that renders many blacks and people of ethnic backgrounds resort to self destructive behavior. Fanon maintains:

> For him there is only one way out, and it leads into the white world. Whence his constant preoccupation with attracting the attention of the white man, his concern with being powerful like the white man, his determined effort to acquire protective qualities ... that is, the proportion of being or having that enters into the composition of an ego. (60).

Pearl Cleage's *Flyin' West* (1995) portrays, from a feminist perspective, the late nineteenth-century Great Migration of African Americans from the South towards the West where they established a free black community on a piece of land in the free state of Kansas. The play, a slave narrative in a dramatic form, recounts the story of courageous, black pioneer women who crossed borders to create a new world for themselves, to escape the racism and slavery of the South. Sophie, Fannie, and Minnie**,** young women with similar circumstances**,** have homesteaded the piece of property in Kansas together and have become like sisters to each other. The women's dilemma starts when Minnie, the youngest sister, returns from New Orleans where she has been living with her husband, Frank, a light-skinned black poet who was born into slavery, but later passed for white for having light black skin and for being the son of a white slave-master. Frank becomes bankrupt after he had been disclaimed and disinherited by his white half-brothers in London. Consequently, he seeks to usurp his wife's share of the homestead. Cleage has inserted such a light-skinned black character in her drama to show how blacks are involved in conflicts even with their own race.

In *Flyin' West* flight or escape from one's hybrid or mongrel identity is the center of this African American drama. Sophie, the central character in the play, tries to spread her political agenda throughout this largely inhabited black community to ensure that it will preserve its black identity in the face of the white man's greed since the whites have become interested in purchasing several pieces of land in the town. During Minnie's birthday, Frank shocks the other women by claiming his wife's share in the land. Having lost all his money in gambling to some white men, Frank decides to sell his wife's share of the land by forcing her to include his name on the deed. Having known that Frank has been physically abusing Minnie and having learned of his greed for her share in the land, the old sage, Miss Leah, and the other sisters become cautious and start to work out a plan to prevent such an intruder from usurping their sister's legal share in the land. What makes matters worse is that they know that Minnie is pregnant and that she does not confess to her sisters that Frank abuses her physically. Their final resort is murdering Frank in a collaborative act.

The motif of female flight in *Flyin' West* permeates the entire play through bird flight imagery and feminist discourse replete with symbolism. In the household, Fannie, like a peace maker, mediates the peace discourse between the bossy Sophie

and the independent Miss Leah, whose behavior indicates that she is living in the house against her will. Minnie's image as the harmless caged dove ceases to exist with the murder of her husband and this becomes clear when she approaches the corpse of her husband and fiercely snatches the deed from his pocket. With the death of Frank and the birth of her healthy baby girl, Minnie frees herself of the shackles of that marriage and flies to freedom to join her sisters. Sophie's support of the cause of the westward migration of blacks shows her dedication to the flying west movement and makes her "free as a bird" (38). However, it is Miss Leah not Sophie, who is more associated with flying west more than the other female characters in the play. Narrating how she had arrived in the free state of Kansas, Miss Leah states, "I started walkin' west. If I'd had wings, I'd a set out flyin' west" (74). Miss Leah's frequent allusions to slave narratives, the spiritual African folklore and poetry serves as a constant reminder for the African-Americans of their cultural heritage that looms in the United States even after centuries of living in this new land. Miss Leah travels west leaving behind her five freeborn sons and her slave husband. Though she lost her family in the South, she established a bigger family in the West; the entire free black community in the West, a place, as she puts it, "big enough for all my sons and all my ghost grandbabies to roam around" (74). The final scene of *Flyin' West* evokes the legendary African folklore. Sophie "extends her arms and slowly turns around to encompass her land" (86). In fact, for many ideologists the melting pot theory, as Nancy Cho remarks, is no longer accepted as the leading theory pertaining to understanding ethnic minorities in the United States (5). In an interview, the African-American playwright August Wilson harshly criticizes the "melting pot" theory of ethnicity: "Blacks don't melt in a pot ... because we're very visible minority.... We have a culture" (173). Wilson proudly declared, "I am an African, and I can participate in this society as an African" (173).

Silvia González is regarded as the most prominent Hispanic playwright who has devoted much of her works to portraying the ethnic dilemmas of Mexican immigrants living in the U.S. (Sengupta 5). Gonzalez (2004) explicitly states, "I am somewhat Chicanacentric, or Latinacentric. I see through the eyes of a Latina ... I strive to depict the Latino accurately." In *The Migrant Farmworker's Son* (1994) González dramatizes the clash between Hispanic ethnic identity and mainstream American popular culture in the form of a familial conflict between a conventional Mexican father and his young Americanized teenage son. Roger Ellis in his introduction to *The Migrant Farmworker's Son* states:

> Perhaps the most poignant area of concern for U.S. playwrights dealing with multicultural subjects today is that of the family: the 'culture shock' that happens

> when a family's traditional ethnic culture and values collide and seek to merge with mainstream American society. (47)

In *The Migrant Farmworker's Son* a Mexican couple, Mom and Dad, work a piece of land in rural Arizona. Mom stresses her closeness to her native land by stating that where she, her family, and all the Mexican community live "was once Mexican soil" (57). Dad perceives the English language that both his wife and son speak as a linguistic invader in his Mexican house. His son's inability to speak Spanish and the way he perceives his native language as inferior make Dad afraid of losing his son and his native identity. Criticizing his son for not speaking his native language, Dad reproachfully addresses his son Henry. He complains:

> You used to speak Spanish when you were a child. Why did she [the mother] have it in her head that you would do better in life with only English? Now look at you. You don't understand the things I say. This is a conspiracy to take you away from me and the mother country. (54)

Dad urges Henry to learn his native language: "You should learn Spanish, it's good for you. If you forget the language, you'll be lost. You'll never know yourself or your history" (65). He also tries, to no avail, to discourage his wife from learning English: "It's a waste of time for a woman to learn" (54). Seller argues that the contemporary American lingo and street idiomatic expressions slipped into various ethnic theatres, reflecting the rapid changing speech of immigrants, especially new arrivals, who were eager to be Americanized (7). Mom begs her husband to learn the language so that they can better understand their son who speaks only English and does not speak Spanish, their native language. But Dad believes that if they all speak English and stop using Spanish, they will not remain Mexicans anymore. Dad even considers his wife's work as a threat to his social stability and patriarchal system. He keeps reminding his wife that a woman's work is dishonorable in Mexico where men would criticize him for letting her work: "If we lived in Mexico, they would shame me for letting her work. A real man doesn't allow that" (53). Dad tells Mom that she should not wear pants or work the fields, and when he senses that his patriarchal authority is being challenged he says to her [you should not] "talk like that to me" (53).

Dad even believes that children of ethnic minorities living in the United States are spoiled and have been uprooted from their cultural heritage. He does not like Henry's classmates and hates to listen to the noisy rap music he enjoys. Dad constantly demands respect from his son and frequently beats him when he senses the least disobedience. Henry feels sorry for not tolerating his father's old Mexican values that he cannot adopt so easily. As Ellis observes, "In the process

of acculturation many children find themselves restricted, threatened and even embarrassed by the ethnic values and customs of their parents and older family members" (47). Henry frankly informs his father that he will never question his authority as a father even if he keeps beating him because he lives in his house: "I got used to all the beatings.... Keep hitting me, Dad, if it makes you feel better. After all, this is your house. I am a snake in the grass for not understanding you" (88). Henry does not show the least respect to his father. Even he ignores him when he speaks to him by wearing headphones to listen to the rap music. Dad's autocratic domestic behavior and violence even unintentionally caused the death of his beloved daughter. He intended to punish her for the slightest disobedience. The innocent girl drowned while trying to wash the dress he insulted her for dirtying. With the death of Girl, Dad is doomed to live his entire life in guilt and shame. Her ghost haunts him wherever he goes as a constant reminder of his domestic violence and his inability to cope with the fact that his children have been naturally Americanized because they live in America.

González employs the ghost of Oliverio, a farmer long dead, as a dramatic technique to serve as a mediator between Dad's world of traditional Mexican culture and mainstream American culture which his Americanized son Henry has assimilated into. Gonzalez states, "Latinas/os find themselves torn between the demands of another society—frequently one which they may only dimly remember—and the compelling, seductive cultural attractions of contemporary America" (qtd. in Woods 47). The ghost instills in Henry the desire and motivation to live in the two worlds. He serves as a constant reminder of Mexico and its traditional values, though he still has an understanding of the culture of the new world. Unlike his father, Oliverio listens attentively to Henry, tolerates his dilemma, sympathizes with him at times but criticizes him at others for not understanding his father. Acting like a father figure and a spiritual Mexican sage, Oliverio serves to bridge the generation gap between Henry and Dad. Oliverio lectures Henry on the importance of living close to the land while stressing the need to get accustomed to living in the modern multicultural society in the United States. Oliverio, who speaks both English and Spanish, advises Henry to go to college to learn Spanish so that he can communicate with his parents in their native language. He tells Henry that language, whether it is Spanish or English, should not stand as a barrier between him and his father as long as they love each other. Oliverio says that familial love is the language of the heart: "It's not what the words mean. It's how the language makes you feel" (84). He also urges Henry to work hard to build a future for himself: "Look, my boy, someday you'll find that money doesn't make you happy. It's the work" (84). Oliverio's advice makes Henry

tolerate his father's dilemma, and with the death of his daughter, Dad has come to learn that he must tolerate his son's ethnic dilemma instead of inflicting more pain on him by not understanding his new life style. To reconcile with his son, Dad offers to pay for Henry's tuition at college, but Henry, to prove that he respects his father, refuses to take the money and tells him that he will work as a farmer in the fields to pay for his education from the money he earns. However, to show his respect and gratitude to his father for such an offer, Henry speaks to him in Spanish, and Dad, in response, tells him that he has started to like his rap music.

Rossini identifies all contemporary Chicana/o and Latino theatres as "Drama of consciousness" (31), since they strive to instill a consciousness of cultural legacy in ethnic minorities rather than accept to dissolve their identities in diaspora. Rossini even classifies Chicana/o and Latino drama as theatre of the oppressed in the manner of Paolo Freire, for such drama depicts the hard living conditions of both legal and undocumented members of Latino communities living in the United States (32). Rossini argues that all ethnic theaters of consciousness in the United States constitute a border-crossing for all American minority dramatists, a deconstructed lineage, legal and aesthetic framing devices, and mad realism that have produced theaters that are actively involved in the U.S social life (319). As Fanon (1963) remarks, without obtaining cultural identity "there will be serious psycho-affective injuries and the result will be individuals without an anchor, without a horizon, colorless, stateless, rootless" (218). Racial discrimination propels ethnic minorities to develop a kind of resistance to mainstream culture and its colonizing power, or what Edward Said (1993) calls "the great movement of decolonization," a nationalist movement whose ultimate aim is to assert their "national identities, self determination, and national independence" (*Culture* xii).

Milcha Sánchez-Scott's *Latina* (1980) demonstrates why women choose to cross borders and the problems they face while trying to create new homes in the New World. From the very beginning of her journey of border crossing Elsa, the New Girl, faces countless troubles. She pays a bribe to a corrupt policeman to cross the border. Her possessions are stolen. Then, a man threatens her with a pocket knife and attempts to rape her, but she manages to escape. As her fellow immigrant Lola explains, "The policeman on the road wants his mordida. What the police don't get, the bandits take. Better for them if it's a woman. Then they try to get paid in other ways or sometimes they just kill the people" (107). The play implies that although Elsa manages to cross the borders and escape the rape attempt, many undocumented women workers are not that lucky. Overcome by panic after the horrors of the rape and kidnapping she experienced, Elsa becomes as ferocious as a stray animal kept in captivity ready to strike and bite anyone she

meets. She bites Sarita, a girl she meets in the street, for mentioning the word immigration. Sarita complains, "She bit me ... I don't believe it. Eugenia, did you see that? She bit me like some kind of animal" (90).

Sánchez-Scott's rhetoric in *Latina* is furious and full of anger at the dehumanization and exploitation of Latina immigrant women laborers in the United States. The central character in *Latina*, Sarita, is a Chicana who works as a receptionist at the Los Angeles Domestic Agency that caters to a white population of middle-class housewives. The poor Latina maids working for the agency have much in common for they all experience humiliation in the houses of their employers. The first client, Mrs. Levine, complains to the agency that all baby sitters leave her after one week since they cannot stand her naughty children and, therefore, she "always needs a replacement, the girls just leave her" (123). Despite the children's naughtiness, Alma decides to accept a job no one has been able to tolerate because she urgently needs the employment after she has been dismissed from her job by Mrs. Homes. Early in the play Mrs. Homes is seen in the agency for selecting a maid and sees Alma in a row of Latina women immigrants. She loftily addresses the agency's staff, "I am returning Alma" (108). The way she points at Alma is both offending and dehumanizing since she treats her as a commodity to be bought from the market rather than treating her as a human. Sarita ridicules Mrs. Homes' attitude by sarcastically imitating her: "I am returning Alma. What does she think this is, the May Company?" (109). Mrs. Homes becomes even more offensive when she arrogantly insults Alma and all Latina women workers for their improper breeding and recklessness at home. Her derogatory attitude dehumanizes the maids since she considers the worth of her china to be more valuable than a human:

> It has become obvious that Alma has never been around beautiful things. She has no respect for my blue and white Chinese porcelain, or any of our antiques.... Where do you people get these girls? (109)

When Mrs. Homes inquires about Alma's references, Sarita, furiously responds while looking at Alma's file, "according to Alma's references, she is very clean, takes a great deal of pride in her work" (109). In this context, even Sarita unconsciously uses an abusive jargon like that of Mrs. Homes. This encourages Mrs. Homes to be more arrogant and abusive: "she is very clean. I wouldn't allow a dirty girl in my home, but she just doesn't understand antiques and fine things" (109). When Sarita sarcastically informs Mrs. Homes that she cannot find a Latina woman with such refined breeding for such a low wage, Mrs. Homes arrogantly replies that she is ready to double the wage if they give her such a domestic worker: "Oh, I'll be more than happy to go higher for a proper person" (109). Mrs. Homes

unintentionally uses a racist and abusive rhetoric that is in itself dehumanizing and is meant to exploit what she considers a racially inferior set of people. Mrs. Homes not only abuses Latina women, but also blacks and oriental women: "What about a black lady. Or better still, an Oriental? How much would an Oriental run me?" (109-110).

Unlike Mrs. Homes and Mrs. Levine, Mrs. Harris is a working woman with a mediocre salary. She cannot afford to hire a domestic laborer, but she has been advised to come to the agency since she has been told that they have cheap undocumented maids: "really can't afford anybody, but Silvia [her friend] said most of your women were ... you know, illegal" (131). Although Mrs. Harris is not from the upper class, she also insists on employing a child care laborer for a low wage, but still demands a clean and slim baby sitter. Her jargon is also racial and stigmatizes some Mexican women with gold teeth as being vulgar, ugly, and greasy: "I just want somebody young, clean, bright. I mean, I don't want one of those fat ones with the gold teeth. I always see those kind at the bus stop" (131). When Mrs. Harris is told by the agency staff that Elsa Maria, the New Girl, would be her employee, she complains that new immigrants are not good since they do not know what their employers seek in a domestic laborer: "New girl? From Peru? She didn't just get here, did she? Because Silvia said they're not any good when they first come here" (131-132). Mrs. Harris even favors to change Elsa's name: "I'll just call you Elsie" (134). By Anglicizing Elsa's name, Mrs. Harris not only wants to wipe out Elsa's ethnic identity, but also wants to make her conform to American lifestyle.

Having seen the women of her own race exploited all over the country instills in Sarita an obligation to show solidarity with all the maids of the agency. When Lola, without prior notice, quits service at Mrs. Camden's home because she has been constantly insulted, Sarita must quiet and satisfy Mrs. Camden the way she interacts all the other employers. However, Mrs. Camden's abusive behavior and arrogance infuriate Sarita. The moment Mrs. Camden steps into the domestic agency, she reveals her racial arrogance: "Well, I see my maid is here, Sara" (137). She dehumanizes Lola by calling her a maid rather than by her name, thus objectifying her as her own possession. Lola objects to being referred to as a commodity, and asserts her true identity as a Latina girl: "I am not your maid" (137). Lola's defiance makes Mrs. Camden more abusive towards her and all the maids of the agency. She constantly refers to all Latina immigrant workers as "you people," an offensive label that objectifies, dehumanizes, and nullifies what she perceives an inferior race of a different color: "You people think you are so downtrodden.... Most of you know nothing about running a modern house" (138). Mrs. Camden has a very bad image of all Latina maids, thus she describes them as reckless, untidy, domestic maids who always destroy her appliances because they lack wit and responsibility: "The repair

bills I've had to pay for all the appliances you people have broken would support your families in Mexico. Most of you can't even take a simple phone message ... any sense of responsibility" (138). Mrs. Camden, like most American housewives, mistakenly assumes that all Latino domestic maids are from Mexico. Unlike the submissive Alma, who did not complain while her employer, Mrs. Homes, is insulting her, Lola is stubborn and does not remain a passive recipient of Mrs. Camden's racist assault. Lola's rebelliousness, which seems quite unpopular among Latina maids, makes her an outlaw in the eyes of Mrs. Camden, who is enraged because Lola quit without giving her any prior notice: "That maid (*pointing to Lola)* with no previous warning, quit. It is customary to give two weeks notice. She didn't even call" (138). Lola responds to Mrs. Camden's humiliating remarks by stressing her humanity: "You look at me like I'm a machine. So I act like machine. Machine don't give notice" (138). Enraged, Lola aggressively criticizes Mrs. Camden and her entire family for mistreating her as a human being and stripping her of her name, and ethnic identity:

> Each day you make me more nobody, more dead. You put me in nice white uniform so I won't offend your good taste. You take away my name, my country. You don't want a person, you want a machine. My name is Lola. I am from Guatemala. (138)

Mrs. Camden is a hypocrite because she participates in trafficking illegal immigrants into the United States. To her, Lola becomes legal when she only performs her duties as a maid, however, when she defies her orders she becomes illegal: "She is an illegal. She is an alien" (139). Having seen her fellow Latina domestic worker racially abused and reduced to an invisible human in the American household, Sarita feels conscience-stricken for participating in dehumanizing the people of her own race. She starts to see herself as guilty as Mr. Felix, the manager of the domestic agency, for selling the Latina maids out to humiliation and degradation without any regard for the bad conditions they might work in. In retaliation to her racist assault on Lola, Sarita refuses to recruit any Latina maid for Mrs. Camden's household. She knows that Latina maids are scarce and without such domestic labor, Mrs. Camden has to handle her household work by herself. This decision infuriates Mrs. Camden who, in response, threatens to sue Sarita and the domestic agency in court: "You'll hear from my lawyers. You, whatever you are, and your illegal aliens" (139). Mrs. Camden's expression "whatever you are" indicates that though she sensed Sarita might be a documented immigrant, she does not recognize her as an American citizen. Sarita even accuses Mrs. Camden of being stingy and hypocrite because she only relies on cheap, undocumented maids since she cannot afford to pay the higher wages of a documented maid: "You hypocrite! You talk 'legal,' you hired her because you didn't want to pay the salary a legal person gets" (139). In fact, the reason Mrs. Camden recruits illegal immigrants is that they are not only cheaper

than documented maids, but they can also be easily deported for the slightest signs of disobedience: "if I wanted to, I could call immigration so fast" (139). But Sarita knows that Mrs. Camden cannot do this since in doing so she would also be faced with the charges of trafficking illegal immigrants, an act for which she would be sent to prison and would tarnish her reputation among women of the upper class because she relied on cheap domestic labor. To defend herself against charges of employing cheap labor, Mrs. Camden uses a harsher rhetoric. She claims that the taxes she pays to the government can pay for all immigrants who are labeled as welfare recipients" "Why should I? My taxes support your people's welfare" (139).

Mr. Felíx, in his capacity as the manager of the domestic agency, pacifies Mrs. Camden. Even Mr. Felíx unconsciously uses an abusive rhetoric to placate Mrs. Camden. He describes the Latina maids he recruits as a commodity to be home delivered and he promises her to send her a fresh maid: "Do not worry, Mrs. Camden, I will take care of this matter myself. I will personally deliver to your home a fresh maid.... It's been a pleasure serving you" (140). Though Sarita's efforts to protect her fellow Latina maids from being exploited by the American white community are undermined by her manager, she has succeeded in raising the maids' consciousness of their rights as humans. Having seen that Sarita has tried to protect the maids from any kind of exploitation, Lola embraces her and demands a promise that she will always stand up for the maids and not sell them out as commodities: "Sarita, I only wanted you to stand up for us, not to kill the woman" (140). The play does not end happily for the migra raids the agency and deports all the undocumented maids out of the country. Mr. Felíx pacifies the sad Margarita for parting with her fellow maids just to ensure that she will continue working for his agency. He comforts her by telling her that all the deported maids will come back again to the agency once they get enough money to cover their travel expenses to cross the borders:

> Don't worry honey. They can't touch you.... I didn't break the law. I didn't bring them up here.... Honey, you got a green card.... They'll all be back. They just put them on the bus and drop them on the other side. When they get the money, they'll be back. (140)

The play ends with Sarita sitting on the bus bench, while the stage directions describe the arrival of a new Latina girl. The journey is cyclically repeated. Despite the fact that the play's ending is bleak, the play suggests that the migra will never succeed in preventing undocumented immigrants from illegally entering the country since the people who help them cross the border remain invisible to the immigration authorities and Latino communities of the domestic labor will hopefully raise a better defying stance to improve their work conditions. Irene Mata observes that deportation entails the movement of the immigrant worker

might be southward, but there is always the possibility of a new journey to the North, implying the continuous cycle of im/migration (21). While some narratives, Mata maintains, depict immigrants as domestic workers submissive to the racial abuses of their employers in the elated hope of achieving assimilation and success, most of the contemporary immigrant narratives do not offer a definite solution to the dilemmas and difficulties such immigrant workers experience in the space of labor (20). Byung-Eon Jung points out that ethnic minorities in theatre are "internally colonized" (1-2). Jung maintains that "the colonizing power destroys the indigenous culture, controls the assumed inferior, and employs skin color as a means of differentiation for discrimination" (3).

Marginalized American playwrights use a precautious and defensive rhetoric to protect their ethnic communities from being erased by a dominant mainstream center. The relationship between the center and peripheries has always been marked by dominance of the former. Being the weaker, the cruder and the least civilized, marginal peripheries use different strategies in defiance of the center that range from imitation with the hope of assimilation and acculturation, to submissiveness out of fear of deportation, and in many cases aggressiveness to destroy or at least shake the borders of the center. Getting rid of ethnocentric views and assimilating ethnic minorities into the fabric of the American multiethnic society not only help strengthen American society, but also decreases the hidden tensions between the people of the United States. Ashis Sengupta rightly argues that the choice for people with ethnic backgrounds is not between maintaining their own identity or having it wholly reinvented to suit mainstream taste, but maintaining a balance between the two identities in a heterogeneous society (12). It is worth mentioning that studying America's marginalized ethnicities on stage as depicted by marginal playwrights is not only objective, but also helps readers and audiences from the margins and the center explore the reactions of marginalized groups to how they have been suppressed, veiled or even erased by the dominant center. For audiences in the center such ethnic theatrical performances give them a fair depiction of how minorities see themselves in relation to the mainstream culture. Such ethnic theaters also offer mainstream audiences new perspectives of minorities, perspectives that are completely different from those staged in canonical theaters.

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