

Housemaids onscreen

The way Latin American films represent maids has dramatically changed over the past ten years. From not having any proper appearances, maids became important characters, if not the main one, in numerous films. The Festival do Rio is presenting two examples of this new trend, Chilean Sebastian Silva's *La Nana* (*The Maid*) and Peruvian Josue Mendez's *Dioses* (*Gods*).

La Nana focuses on a maid who has been working for the same family almost all her life. In a way, Raquel feels part of the family; she considers herself as a child who tries to be like the mom. Sebastian Silva not only represents the maid as a person who imitates the people in the family, but depicts how the family considers Raquel as no more than the person who makes their beds and cleans their rooms. Nobody cares about her life or her real family. In a way Raquel even acknowledges the situation, by stopping calling her mother and even forgetting her relatives. Her existence is reduced to the status of a maid and her life beyond the walls of the house does not exist. This all changes though when a new maid comes into the house who makes Raquel realise that she can have a life on her own. Raquel begins to try new things that for her were "outside the line". She calls her mother again, and starts running at nights.

The Peruvian film *Dioses* goes even further; here maids are portrayed as ghosts, walking around the house and not talking to their bosses. If they really have to, they address their employers with their eyes fixed towards the floor. As if the bosses were, as the title says, gods. The only moment when the maids speak freely is when gathered in the kitchen. Only then can they speak their native language, and look into the eyes of the people they are talking to. Before the movie is over Josue Mendez also shows us the world from the perspective of one of the rich characters. For Diego, entering his maid's neighbourhood is a completely new experience; he doesn't know how to act there. To be honest this part of the film is one of the worst because the director makes it too clichéd.

Hidden for years, maids are gradually becoming a visible - and central - character of new Latin American cinema. Both *La Nana* and *Dioses* show the maid as a character who is only present to complete a task; nobody cares about what is under the surface of things. If *La Nana*'s family makes Raquel believe she is part of them, in *Dioses* the bosses don't even care about the maids' feelings, considering them as slaves. Maids are so much used to being treated the way they are, that they think this is the only, and best, way. As their bosses believe the only reason for which maids are present in the world is cleaning the house, maids start to believe this is true, and eventually adopt their bosses' points of view on themselves.

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