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LIMBO: Marie Gonzalez & The Dream Act

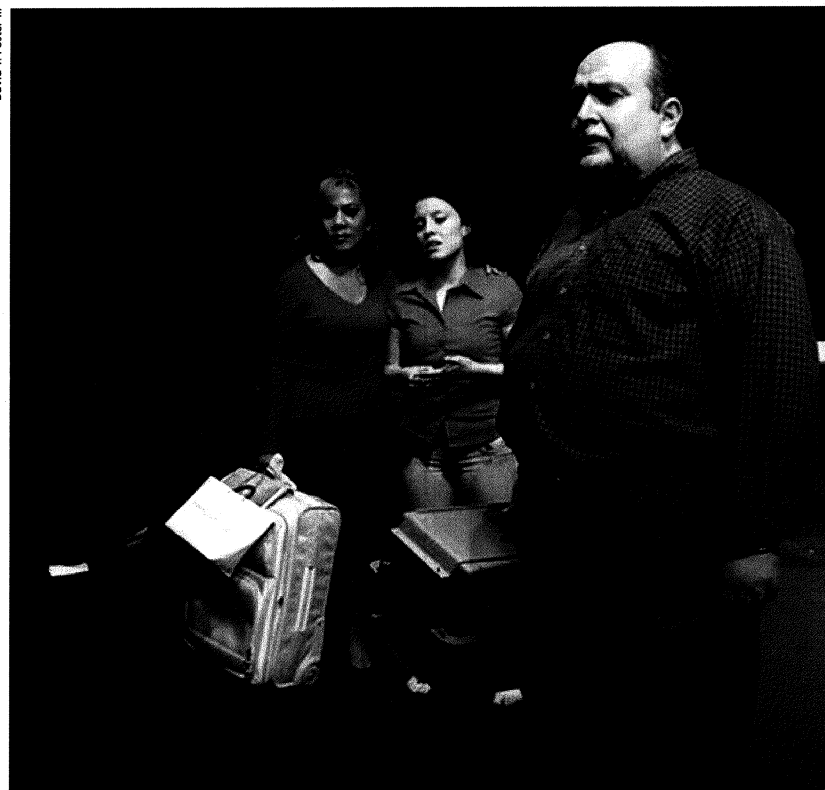
Glenn Hutchinson, Johnson C. Smith University

Playwright Glenn Hutchinson discusses his play *Limbo*, which is based on interviews with Marie Gonzalez, an undocumented college student. Like many other young people in limbo, Marie has made the United States her home; however, because she is undocumented, she is at risk of being deported back to a country she has not known since she was 5 years old. Marie has become an activist for the Dream Act, legislation that would help people in her situation. Following an introduction, Hutchinson has included some excerpts from his play that was performed in Charlotte, NC last year.

Originally from Costa Rica, Marie Gonzalez came to the United States when she was five years old. She grew up in Missouri and her father ran a restaurant and later worked as a courier for the Governor. When a “concerned citizen” contacted immigration about their citizenship status, Marie’s parents were deported. With the help of Sen. Durbin of Illinois, Marie has been given a temporary extension to study at Westminster College. She graduated in December 2008; however, her extension will expire in June of 2009.

Over the past several years, Marie has become a national leader in immigration reform and has testified before Congress promoting the Dream Act (legislation that would help other students in her situation).

David T. Foster III



Mama and Papa prepare to be deported. They say goodbye to their house with their daughter, Marie.

Based on my interviews with Marie, *LIMBO* explores the story of Marie and other students like her who are in limbo. Their parents have brought them here often when they are very young. They go to school here. They make America their home; however, they are not citizens. They are in limbo.

With the help of the Hispanic Cultural Center of Charlotte (HCCC), the Arts & Science Council, and a small independent theater (Carolina Actors Studio Theatre), *LIMBO* became a collaborative effort to tell

Before she is deported, Danielle asks Isabel to take care of her son.

David T. Foster III



Glenn Hutchinson



*Brenda Giraldo
(the actress who
played Marie) and
Marie Gonzalez*

David T. Foster III



The opening dance of Limbo

these stories of undocumented students. The HCCC helped connect the theater to the Latino community by recruiting actors and also helping me interview more students who had similar stories like Marie. We received a grant from the Arts & Science Council to pay the actors and bring Marie to Charlotte and speak with the audience after each show opening weekend.

What resonated most in this community effort was how Marie's story connected with many young people in our community. Many audience members commented on how they feel like they are caught in between two places—the place that they call home and the place that tells them it is not home.

Here are some scenes from the play that was produced at CAST Theatre and the University of North Carolina-Charlotte in 2008. In the play, two college film students decide to make a documentary about Marie.



Scene 3: The First Interview

(Westminster College. The beginning of the interview is on film, and then it fades out as the actors onstage recreate the interview. MIGUEL is sitting beside his camera & microphone, and MARIE sits in front of the camera. Nathan holds a boom mike.)

MIGUEL

Gracias por la entrevista.

(Thanks for the interview.)

MARIE

Sure. So, you make a lot of movies?

MIGUEL

Well, not really. We're independent, you know.

MARIE

Yeah?

(Slight pause.)



MIGUEL

And we're finishing up school.

MARIE

Oh.

MIGUEL

Sorry if . . . This is our senior project for film school. Is that cool? We hope that this documentary will get picked up and shown a lot of places.

MARIE

Yeah, sure . . .

MIGUEL

I really admire what you're doing.

MARIE

Thanks.

MIGUEL

I mean, you're standing up, trying to change something.

MARIE

Well, a lot of people can't tell their story.

MIGUEL

But you can?

MARIE

Yeah. They deported my parents, but they let me stay—thanks to Senator Durbin. I have a temporary extension to stay, at least until June 30th. After that? I don't know. I hope that I can finish school.

MIGUEL

Yeah.

MARIE

I have this status—legal to be illegal in the U.S.

(Slight pause.)

So I speak out. I tell my story. I want to change things.

MIGUEL

What's your major?

MARIE

Political Science/International Business.

MIGUEL

Any brothers or sisters?

MARIE

I'm an only child.

MIGUEL

Me too.

MARIE

Oh, so we're both spoiled rotten.

MIGUEL

Yeah . . . Tell us where you're from.

MARIE

Missouri. Jefferson City.

MIGUEL

No, I mean, where were you born?

MARIE

Costa Rica. I was born in Alajuela.

MIGUEL

And you grew up in Missouri?

MARIE

Yes. Since I was five years old.

MIGUEL

So, when did . . . when did all this . . .

MARIE

I was a sophomore in high school when I found out we were, as they say, "undocumented." My parents had filed the paperwork with an abogado . . . a lawyer, and we thought we were OK. But it turns out we weren't. So that's why my parents were sent back to Costa Rica.

MIGUEL

Do you get to talk with them much?

MARIE

When I can. Sometimes on the webcam, when they're at my uncle's—in Costa Rica, he has an internet cafe. The internet is kind of expensive. An expense they can't really afford. I got some calling cards for Christmas. I use it once a week, 10 minutes, 15 minutes.



MIGUEL

How are they?

MARIE

A couple of my sorority sisters have gone down & stayed with them . . .
They're very hopeful.

MIGUEL

What is your first memory?

(PAPA sits at kitchen table. He places a newspaper article
into a large brown binder. MAMA clears the table of dishes.)

MARIE

I haven't been to Costa Rica since I was 5. I don't even know if my
memories are really mine or just things my parents told me that I've
made my own.

I remember images, bits and pieces. My grandfather, my dad's dad,
took me to this park in Costa Rica. Toucan Park.

PAPA

Cahuita Park, mi amor.



MARIE

I remember this one tree, and there were always toucans there. The
bright feathers. Those beaks.

When people ask me about Costa Rica, I don't have much to say. I
don't know much. I know where my parents live, my grandparents.
There are rain forests, gorgeous beaches, but I don't know much else.

What I remember most is leaving and coming here. Five years old.
Getting on the plane. Before that, anything is fair game if it's my
parents' memory or mine.

But what happened to my family—I don't want anyone else to go
through that.

(Lights on PAPA and MAMA fade.)

I haven't seen them in 2 ½ years.

[In this other scene, Marie says goodbye to her parents. After our two
productions, many audience members commented on the different ways
animals and people are treated in America.]

Scene 14: Dogs

(MAMA and PAPA sitting in living room of their empty
house. Sound of a barking dog outside. Their luggage is near
the door, beside a kennel for MARIE's dog, Precious.)

PAPA (looking out back window)

¡Callate!



MAMA

Papi . . . Los vecinos.

PAPA

What does it matter? We're leaving anyway.

(Slight pause.)

PAPA

Perro estúpido.

MAMA

Marvin . . .

PAPA

¿Qué? I love dogs. I love Precious, but he doesn't bark like that.

(PAPA looks inside kennel.)

PAPA

Are you still alive, dog? Don't you hear your friends? They're . . .
They're trying to say goodbye.



(More barking from outside.)

PAPA

Sí. Trying to say goodbye.

(Barking continues. PAPA looks out back window.)

PAPA

¡Silencio!

(Slight pause. Barking stops.)

PAPA

Gracias.

MAMA

Sometimes, yo quisiera . . . I wish was one of those dogs.

(Slight pause.)

PAPA

¿Qué?



MAMA

Have you noticed how the Gringos take care of their dogs? ¿Los vecinos? Buy them special food. They buy special little clothes for them. Walk the perros around. They even gift wrap their poop. Consienten their dogs more than their niños.

PAPA (laughing)

Sí.

MAMA

In Costa Rica—do you think dogs live en pura vida? ¿Recuerde los callejeros?

PAPA

Si, mi amor.

(Slight pause.)

MAMA

Papi, ¿Que tú crees? There are illegal people, but are there illegal dogs?

(Slight pause.)



PAPA

No sé.

MAMA

I don't think so. Pues, all of the dogs across the border should come here. They don't know what kind of life they are missing.

PAPA

¡Amnesty para los perros!

MAMA

¡Vivan los perros!

PAPA

¡Los perros!

(Pause. They laugh. Then MAMA begins to cry.)

MAMA

We're leaving. We're going to leave behind my only baby.



PAPA (comforting her)

I know.

MAMA

When will I see her again? Papi? Tell me, when?

PAPA

No sé. But we want her to stay and live her life.

MAMA

Yo sé.

(MARIE enters with small box.)

MARIE

I think this is everything.

MAMA

¿Qué es, mi amor?



MARIE

Some photographs. I want you to have these.

MAMA

Gracias.

(MAMA looks at the pictures.)

MAMA

Ah, mi amor. Your graduation. Que linda.

MARIE

Stop, mom. You're going to make me cry again.

MAMA

And aquí. The . . . ¿Qué?

MARIE

National Honor Society.



MAMA

And here, you playing volleyball. The way you hit that ball—fuerte!
Where did you get that? Not from me. I hated sports.

PAPA

From tu papá problemamente.

MAMA

¿Ay, the athlete, sí?

MARIE

I don't want you to go.

MAMA

Yo sé. But we have to. We will come back.

PAPA

You need to stay and go to college. Tu sueño. Become una abogada and
change the law.



MAMA

Sí. We are so proud of you. Mi vida.

(They hug.)

PAPA

We need to go.

MARIE

Even Precious.

PAPA (going to front window)

You can say goodbye to him at the airport. We have to go. Ay, look at
the people out there.

(MARIE goes to front window.)

MARIE

Díos mío, I didn't think this many people would show up.



MAMA

¿Quiénes son?

MARIE

Friends. And look at that—all of those cameras.

PAPA

Let's go, Marina.

(Pause. They all take a look at the house they are leaving.)

PAPA

Adíos, mi casa.

MAMA

Hasta luego.

(Pause. They leave.)



MARIE

And as we went to the airport, a caravan of 40 cars. Everything had been switched to my name. My dog was in a kennel. Precious. It was the last time to see my dog . . . They let me go to the gate. That's the last time I have seen them . . .

[Marie's story is not unique. The following scene attempts to dramatize the problems and messages about college that affect young people]:

Scene 8: School

MARIE (interview)

I always had that dream. Most of the counselors had met with us—planning for college. I was always very studious. I loved school. There was no question that I was going to college . . . going to law school.

(Actors enter and recreate school classroom.)

TEACHER

Each one of you, take an envelope and count the money inside.

STUDENT #1

Money? We get money?



TEACHER

It's monopoly money. Fake money.

STUDENT #2 (to STUDENT #1)

Stupid!

TEACHER

I want you to count the money. Each one of you has a different amount.

STUDENT #1

I got more than you.

STUDENT #2

It's fake, stupid. ¿Cual es la diferencia?

TEACHER

Please! OK. Now I want you to put the money back in the envelope.
Put it back in the envelope . . . There you go. OK. How much money
do you have?



STUDENT #1

\$1000

STUDENT #4

Oh . . . he is the man!

STUDENT #2

\$400

STUDENT #3

\$300

STUDENT #4

\$20

STUDENT #5

\$1



TEACHER

Now read what's written on your envelope.

STUDENT #5

HS DO.

TEACHER

That stands for high school drop out. Next.

STUDENT #4

HS G.

TEACHER

High school graduate.

STUDENT #3

CG.

TEACHER

What do you think that stands for?

(Pause.)



TEACHER

College graduate.

STUDENT #4

Oh, I get it . . . Mine is GD.

TEACHER

Graduate degree.

STUDENT #5

What's PD?

TEACHER

Professional degree. Like a doctor.

STUDENT #1

Wow. Well, this sure was a fun game.

TEACHER

Do you know what the point of this activity was?

STUDENT #2

You forgot to do your lesson plan for today?

TEACHER

The point of this lesson, young lady, is to show you the power of education. If you drop out of high school, this is how much you are going to make.

STUDENT #4

That's not true. My cousin, Lorenzo, makes a lot of money. He just bought a new car.

STUDENT #3

Oh, sí, that new red Mustang. ¿No?

STUDENT #4

Qué padre.

STUDENT #3

Chevre.

TEACHER

That may be true. But what about college? What about his future? That money is only temporary.

STUDENT #3

What isn't temporary, Miss Smith?

TEACHER

What?

STUDENT #2

And Lorenzo can't go to college. He's illegal.

STUDENT #3

¡Cállate, estúpido!

STUDENT #2

Es la verdad. ¿Sí o no?



TEACHER

That's enough! Sit down, please.

STUDENT #3

¡Estupido!

TEACHER

What I want you to think about is...What is your dream? What do you want to do when you leave this place? Do you want to work the same job for years and years making just enough to get by? Or do you want to pursue something more? Danielle, what is your dream?

DANIELLE

You don't think I have dreams? . . . Sueños. And what is the dream for mi niño, Samuel? Money?

(Slight pause.)



DANIELLE

sueños. díos mío . . .

as soon as they see me,
as soon as they hear my voice,
they ask, where are you from?

i say here & then that look:
"you aren't from here" they say
con sus ojos, their eyebrows.

as if home is una fortaleza &
i've invaded theirs,
for veinte años, still
a stranger? or maybe
they think a spaceship has landed &
they're talking to an alien.

yes, yo soy de aquí,
i am from here
at least for now,
the same as you.

home is right now.
mañana—we'll see.

that espacio, that space
between your eyes & mine,
the place where
we might listen
or might not.



[This is the closing monologue of Marie]:

Scene 26: Voice

MARIE

I can't make any long-term plans.
A ton of my girlfriends are getting married . . .
I can't promise anything past June 30.
That's my last and final day to be in the U.S.

(Slight pause.)

you know, sometimes when i'm reading my
history textbook, i hear the
voice of sean connery.
i'm not sure why.
it works for the war stuff,
but i have to get him out of my
head for women's suffrage—
he doesn't sound believable.

my roommate says that she hears
the voice of her professor,
which works out, because
she has this ridiculous crush on him &
so she reads it every night before she
goes to sleep.

my other roommate tells me she doesn't
hear a thing when she reads.
well, of course, she would have
to actually open a book to really know.



i have a whole cocktail party up there,
people going back and forth, never stopping &

sometimes it's that movie announcer guy,
sometimes it's papá, mamá,
sometimes it's some voice that i've
never heard before.

but what worries me is
that i'll lose my voice.

because when i listen
for my voice—

even when i speak—
is that me?

each day,
changing.

mi voz . . .

(Slight pause.)

limbo.

What will we as educators and citizens do in response to the many
students who are in limbo? Marie's story is one of many for us to
consider. If you would like to see the complete interview of Marie
following our performance, type in Marie Gonzalez and Limbo on
youtube OR visit <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pGDZjdYqA-8>.