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# Forging Alliances across Fronteras: Transnational Narratives of Female Migration and the Family

Vanessa de Veritch Woodside

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**FORGING ALLIANCES ACROSS *FRONTERAS*:  
TRANSNATIONAL NARRATIVES OF FEMALE MIGRATION  
AND THE FAMILY**

**by**

**VANESSA DE VERITCH WOODSIDE**

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DISSERTATION

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**FORGING ALLIANCES ACROSS *FRONTERAS*: TRANSNATIONAL  
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**ABSTRACT**

This dissertation examines the effects of transnational migration on women with particular attention to the (re-)negotiation of personal and cultural identity resulting from the adoption of novel roles within Chicana narratives of Mexican migration. Chapter One offers a historical background regarding the U.S.-Mexico border, (im)migration, and more specifically, women and migration, as well as an overview of pertinent Chicano migrant literature that serves as an appropriate point of departure for discussion of Chicana re-writings of such texts. This discussion offers border feminism as a framework for analyzing the representation of evolving feminine roles and familial configurations in the context of transnational migration within contemporary cultural production. Chapter Two discusses the novels *Across the Great River* (1989) by Irene Beltrán Hernández and *Trini* (1986) by Estela Portillo Trambley as precursors to post-millennial works addressing issues of immigration and the family. Chapter Three directs

attention to *Across a Hundred Mountains* (2007) by Reyna Grande and *La línea* (2006) by Ann Jaramillo in light of three cinematographic works with common thematics—*La misma luna* (2007), *Sin nombre* (2009), and *Which Way Home* (2009). Chapter Four focuses upon political condemnations of personal tragedies in *The Guardians* (2007) by Ana Castillo, utilizing reflections on “The Cariboo Cafe” (1985) by Helena María Viramontes, and again invoking discussion of aforementioned films to understand these works as paradigmatic narrative and cinematographic calls to action, while also introducing other literary genres—namely testimonials, ethnographies, and juvenile fiction—that similarly call for social change. Finally, Chapter Five discusses transnational families and migration in the context of multiculturalism and cultural coalitions, highlighting the narrative and cinematographic works as instruments to demand social and political activism that transcends borders. The conclusion places the texts within the context of evolving trends in migrant literature to demonstrate how they challenge the nationalist discourse of Mexican narratives of immigration and the masculinist discourse of earlier Chicano migrant texts by focusing upon the re-definition of gender and national identities, and embracing the migrant as a theoretical subject through the restoration of his or her humanity.

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction: Crossing Borders and Transcending Literary Barriers

“My name is Katherine Figueroa and I am ten years old, living in Phoenix, Arizona. Last year [...] both my parents were jailed for three long months after Sheriff Arpaio’s deputies arrested them,” the young girl introduces herself with a voice imbued with a paradoxical mix of confidence and trepidation at a June 2010 congressional ad-hoc hearing on the adverse effects of Arizona’s Senate Bill 1070 on families of migration. Separated from her parents after a workplace raid, she tearfully recalls, “It was very hard for me. Every time when I went to school, I kept thinking that maybe I would see my parents when I got back home,” she said addressing the congressman. “I would also have bad dreams, where the deputies would take my aunt, her family, and me to jail. I’m still afraid of the deputies.” In an emotional plea, Kathy beseeches President Obama and the members of Congress to put an end to the injustice affecting countless young U.S. citizens like her. “Please help us. Children don’t know what to do without their parents. Our parents come here for a better life for their children [...]. Please tell President Obama to stop putting parents in jail. All they want is a better life for their kids” (Ramos “SB1070”).



Donning a t-shirt and a ponytail, twelve-year-old Heidi Ruby Portugal nervously testifies before a July 2010 immigration enforcement hearing, recounting her experiences two years before when her mother had also been arrested and detained by Sheriff Joe Arpaio. “I was only ten years old when I had a sad awakening the day of February 11.

When I woke up, I found out that my mother had been arrested. I thought, ‘Was she in a car wreck? Or what happened?’ But what I couldn’t understand was that she was arrested working.” As the oldest child, “My biggest worries were my two little brothers and sister. What was going to happen to them? And what about my little brother, which was only three months, and my mom was breastfeeding him? I ask myself, ‘Why did I have to suffer so much and I have to take a huge responsibility and take charge?’

Waking up early in the morning, getting my sister ready [...] and, with a great pain in my heart, leave my two little brothers behind. Maybe you are saying, ‘We’ve heard this tons of times before,’ but have you ever thought about [...] the harm that you’re doing to our families and kids that have separated families [...]?” she questions the Congressmen (Ramos “SB1070”).



In January 2011, a Mexican immigrant and single mother of three was arrested during her lunch break after twenty years of working in the United States with a valid social security number. Hoping to arrange for her children to stay in Bend, Oregon, with their undocumented *abuelita* before her own deportation in three months, Liliana Ramos laments, “Es muy triste porque nuestros hijos tienen sentimientos, más cuando son pequeños. Mi niña, la pequeña, sufre mucho. Llora mucho porque ella me dice, ‘Mamá, te vas a ir del país. Me vas a dejar.’ Pero no la puedo llevar [a México] para sufrir.” With deportation imminent, and no family or resources in Mexico to help her, she quietly explains the reason she and other migrants come to the United States: “Queremos una vida mejor” (Ramos).



At last, some women and children impacted by United States immigration policy have been granted a voice to recount their personal experiences and implore politicians to act to preserve the rights of immigrants and U.S.-born citizens alike. Yet, despite the overwhelming attention to issues of immigration in U.S. politics and society in general, these voices are restricted to hearings that are not widely announced to the public nor covered by large news networks. In fact, procuring these testimonies—or evidence that they have even been given in a public forum—has proved difficult for an interested and concerned citizen like myself. In our post-millennial world of globalization and transnational movement of goods and labor, why is it that the location of such testimonies is apparently restricted to publications made available by non-profit groups that advocate immigrant rights and the popular video hosting website, youtube.com? Surely, these few descriptions of the personal impact of immigration legislation and its enforcement represent hundreds of thousands more that have not been heard. Maybe many undocumented migrants and their families choose to remain silent out of fear of the repercussions of revealing their status. Nevertheless, in the midst of acerbic political rhetoric and a veritable media frenzy depicting the influx of immigrants from Mexico and Latin America as derelicts and drains on the United States government and society, perhaps the only hope for positive and effective changes to immigration policy is none other than these simple, authentic words. Yet these are more than words; they are powerful stories that counteract politicians' impassioned, albeit misdirected, attacks on the *indocumentados* whom we, as a society, have come to need.

Whether these compelling stories be testimonies or fictionalized accounts of the trials and injustices endured by migrants, narrative portraits of individuals driven by

desperation to cross the U.S.-Mexico border may indeed be the only means by which the U.S. public will come to view these human beings as exactly that—human. In contrast with the policies and rhetoric that aim to criminalize, demonize, and defile the men, women, and children who undertake the harrowing journey *hacia el norte*, accounts of the personal impact of the global forces of transnational commerce and labor effectively humanize the “illegals” who violate domestic security legislation. Perhaps as an attempt to counteract the marked dearth of news reports of the human element of transnational movement, several authors of non-fiction and fiction alike have recently crafted texts that condemn the broader forces that engender and perpetuate the need for migrant labor and serve as a blaring call for social justice. With brutally honest and unwavering words, these authors document the extreme poverty and lack of opportunities for social or economic mobility that Latin American migrants face in their home communities, and the shocking violence and suffering that they endure once they decide to undertake their arduous trek to the land of opportunity. Along with several recently-released films, these texts further reveal the consequences for women and children of migration through the presentation of stories that offer a somber snapshot of their lives south of the U.S.-Mexico border.

This is of particular import given the current contentious climate of cultural confrontation most explicitly evident in Arizona Governor Jan Brewer’s signing of Senate Bill 1070 in April 2010. This act of legislation, whose constitutionality is still being questioned by the federal government, aims to criminalize presence in the country without appropriate immigration documents through granting police the power to detain anyone suspected of being in the United States illegally, essentially legalizing racial

profiling. Needless to say, the ramifications of the implementation of such a law inevitably extend to the families of U.S.-Mexico immigration, as seen in the testimonies of the children cited above. Even more stringent than Arizona's SB 1070, anti-immigration legislation emerging in Alabama, for example, requires public schools to determine the immigration status of students in kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade, requires police officers to stop anybody suspected of being an undocumented or "illegal" immigrant, criminalizes employing or leasing property to undocumented immigrants, and even goes so far as to make it a crime to give a ride to an individual without documents (CNN; Preston). Thus, House Bill 56, signed into law by Governor Robert Bentley in June 2011, has apparently recruited Alabama police officers, teachers, school administrators, and landlords to work alongside Immigration and Customs Enforcement authorities in the name of deterring and eradicating illegal immigration. With the advent of policies like these in Indiana, South Carolina, Utah, and a number of other states,<sup>1</sup> it is even more imperative that the public have access to stories that impart a humanized characterization of families of migration, and the dangers that they face in hopes that, upon hearing and reading them, public outcry may ultimately reach the necessary levels to effect change on the state and national scale.

These written stories, primarily offered by U.S.-based Chicano/a authors, complement recent sociological, anthropological, and psychological research on the rise of women's migration to the United States and its consequences for the family. In

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<sup>1</sup> Such policies are certainly not new; the reader may recall California's Proposition 187, a 1994 ballot initiative that sought to ban undocumented individuals from public education and health care services.

contrast to the investigations within the social sciences, however, emerging fictional and nonfictional texts present these thematics to a much broader audience in a more palatable way. Furthermore, these literary works serve as cultural artifacts that capture the local impact of global influences in the U.S.-Mexico borderlands in the new millennium, and significantly alter the conceptualization of constructs of cultural and national identity. Joseph Nevins observes the irony in this process of re-envisioning : “[...] [T]he U.S.-Mexico divide is today more part of Americans’ geographical imagination than it has ever been—a curious development in an age of globalization that is supposedly making boundaries redundant” (13). Moreover, Nevins notes a change in American thinking toward U.S.-Mexico immigration coinciding with the implementation of Operation Gatekeeper in the mid-1990s. “This shift,” he argues, “is one that has entailed an evolution of the U.S.-Mexico divide from a border (or a zone of transition) to a boundary (or a line of strict demarcation)” (12-13). Certainly, then, this alteration of perspective will have an impact within Chicano/a scholarship, an area of study in which the straddling of a metaphorical boundary has come to demonstrate and celebrate the richness of a hybrid heritage, and simultaneously, represent the conflict of not belonging entirely to the cultures on either side of the border described by Gloria Anzaldúa in *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1999). Restoring the material dimension of the border, often theorized to capture the complexity of Chicano/a existence and identity (or, more appropriately, identities), Rubén Martínez, Reyna Grande, and Ana Castillo are among the authors who explicitly identify the border zone as a site of injustice and disillusionment through narration of horrific exploitation and suffering as a result of the transgression of the very real demarcation of geo-political boundaries.

In doing so, these authors engage in social activism, wielding the mighty pen to acknowledge and inscribe the existence and experiences of the Latin American immigrant population in the annals of history. Informing their readership of socio-historical circumstances often omitted in “official” history, these writers recuperate the voices of those who are afraid to speak for fear of retribution or deportation. Evidently, the writers and filmmakers whose works constitute the focus of this dissertation are among the first to recognize the need for change borne through *transfrontera* alliances as the only way to protect migrants against death and oppression. Addressing issues not confined by borders develops a transnational solidarity and leads to a revised Chicano/a nationalism of the new millennium, one not based on or bound by geo-political boundaries, but by ethnic affiliation. Indeed, many of the Chicano/a texts published in the past decade offer an “insider’s”<sup>2</sup> view of the phenomenon of transnational migration, documenting the injustices and personal trials of those affected by the flow of “labor” across the U.S.-Mexico border. In making the political more personal, the creators of narrative and cinematographic works that capture the migratory experiences of their characters successfully reveal migration’s effects on women and children, in particular, in a way that contests both the nationalist discourse of Mexican emigrant narratives and the masculinist discourse of early Chicano migrant texts.

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<sup>2</sup> The presentation of such an “insider’s” perspective may, indeed, be problematic, as this suggests an implicit alliance between the typically privileged Chicano/a writer and the Mexican (im)migrant who becomes the texts’ subject without regard to differing experiences of oppression and/or exploitation. On occasion, authors address these issues directly, as does Sonia Nazario in the prologue to *Enrique’s Journey*. One should note that Cuban-born anthropologist Ruth Behar takes up similar issues in *Translated Woman: Crossing the Border with Esperanza’s Story* (1993).

One may comprehend more fully the manner in which Chicana authors, in particular, engage in a re-writing and revisioning of such texts through the application of Sonia Saldívar-Hull's theory of border feminism as a framework for analyzing the representation of evolving feminine roles and familial configurations in the context of transnational migration within contemporary cultural production. In addition to gaining a familiarity with pertinent Chicano migrant literature, it will be beneficial to begin with a historical background regarding the U.S.-Mexico border, immigration, and more specifically, women and migration to understand how post-millennial literature by Chicana writers crosses borders and transcends literary barriers in turning public focus regarding U.S.-Mexico migration inward—within the confines of the home and the family.

### **An Overview of Mexican Migration**

Taken in conjunction, historical and socioeconomic factors on both sides of the border, along with U.S. immigration policies, have contributed to the longstanding tradition of Mexican migration. Both the integration and inter-dependence of the Mexican and U.S. economies have been evident since the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, with a large segment of Mexican citizens serving as a reserve labor force for certain sectors of the U.S. economy.

Even before then, the 1848 signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo that ended the Mexican-American War integrated the inhabitants of communities on both sides of the border when considerable portions of northern Mexico were ceded to the United



States, and Mexico's northern geo-political border moved further southward. Consequently, an estimated 80,000 Mexican and/or Spanish individuals experienced cultural displacement without any actual physical movement when the U.S.-Mexico border essentially crossed them (Rumbaut 94). Patterns of transnational migration among Mexican men, women, and children have fluctuated since that time, depending primarily on the ebb and flow of U.S. labor demand, beginning with the expansion of agriculture, mining, and the railroad in the U.S. Southwest. Such expansion coincided with the exclusion of Chinese and Japanese laborers at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, further heightening demand for Mexican labor (Rumbaut 94). As a result, the demographic and cultural landscape of the borderlands, as well as popular sentiment toward Mexican immigration, have necessarily undergone dramatic shifts throughout the last 160 years. What has remained constant, though, is the underlying desire for social and financial stability as the primary motive for Mexican migration to the United States.

As David R. Maciel and María Herrera-Sobek note in *Culture across Borders: Mexican Immigration & Popular Culture*, "In addition to the pull factors, acute push factors from Mexico have resulted in immigration to the United States being a last hope and a potential safety valve for thousands of Mexican workers" (4), namely the social, political, and economic contexts surrounding the 1910 Revolution, the economic crisis of the 1970s and 1980s, the 1994 implementation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), and most recently, the aftermath of the October 2008 market crash. Joanna Dreby (2010) and Rubén G. Rumbaut (1997) trace the metaphorical swing of the immigration pendulum in response to the social and economic climates of the United States and Mexico. "During the upheaval of the Mexican Revolution [...],

Mexicans moved north along the railroad line to work both in agriculture and in the expanding industrial centers in the United States” (Dreby 7). Rumbaut estimates that approximately 1 million Mexicans, equivalent to one-tenth of Mexico’s population at the time, immigrated during that decade of violence (95). In addition to this so-called “push” factor that motivated Mexicans to leave their *patria*, increased U.S. labor demand during World War I and into the 1920s attracted more migrants to the United States. However, “After the economic crisis of the Great Depression in the 1930s, Mexicans—U.S. citizens and immigrants alike—were rounded up and sent back to Mexico in deportation campaigns” (7), Dreby comments, observing the arbitrariness of governmental operations that deported even American citizens of Mexican descent in response to fears of extraneous drains on the U.S. economy and society. In fact, Rumbaut cites a figure of 400,000 individuals who were repatriated to Mexico in the 1930s (95), during the first major deportation within the United States.

In the decades that followed, the U.S. government established the Bracero Program (1942-64) in the wake of World War II, thereby facilitating the immigration of approximately 5 million Mexican contract laborers to maintain the U.S. agricultural industry (Rumbaut 95). Dreby elaborates, “Between the 1940s and 1960s, leaving their families, Mexican men moved north en masse to work seasonally on bracero contracts. Many Mexican families, and even entire communities, became dependent on their laborers working abroad” (7). Nevertheless, in the tense political context of the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union beginning in the mid-1940s, the U.S. government created the Internal Security Act in 1950, authorizing the deportation and expulsion of “politically dangerous” non-U.S. citizens (Ríos-Soria 21). This

legislation, Olga Ríos-Soria comments, would ultimately serve as a pretext for the 1954 implementation of Operation Wetback, an immense deportation effort that resulted in the expulsion of at least a million undocumented immigrants (21). Despite these and later deportations, remittances from Mexicans working in the United States continued to support communities throughout Mexico as a result of U.S. farmers' employment of so-called "cheap" labor from south of the border in conjunction with the deterioration of the Mexican economy (Ríos-Soria 21).

In *Evolución de la frontera norte*, Romeo R. Flores Caballero examines the symptoms of the unstable Mexican economy from the early 1970s onward, an instability that certainly drove increased immigration to the United States. In particular, he notes the diminishing growth of the gross domestic product from 5.9% in 1974 to 4.1% in 1975 to an astonishing 1.7% in 1976 (153). In combination with the *peso* devaluation in 1976 that made American dollars all the more valuable in Mexico, the number of Mexican migrants increased to approximately 1.7 million by the same year (Flores Caballero 154). The implementation of the *Programa de Industrialización Fronteriza (PIF)* in 1965 further impacted the nature of migration and life in the border region during the 1970s with its propagation of *maquiladoras* and the subsequent closure of many of these factories by 1975, perhaps in part a consequence of inflation of the U.S. dollar during the decade of the '70s<sup>3</sup>. In combination with the devaluation of the *peso*, these factors led to a grave economic crisis in Mexico manifest in the statistic that more than 21% of Mexico's inhabitants relied upon remittances sent from the United States for their

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<sup>3</sup> The rate of inflation of the peso to the dollar ultimately reached an alarming 13.9% in 1980 (Flores Caballero 169; Ríos-Soria 24).

economic well-being in 1976 (Flores Caballero 170; Ríos-Soria 24). Dreby suggests that this trend of transnational dependence has continued since then. “After the Mexican debt crisis of the 1980s,” she observes, “broader sectors of the Mexican society, including urban dwellers and people from the middle class, have come to rely on migration to the United States. Estimates suggest that today one in ten Mexicans lives in the United States, accounting for more than 30 percent of the U.S. foreign-born population” (7). Indeed, recent post-millennial figures released by the Pew Hispanic Center indicate that an estimated 12.7 million Mexicans—authorized and unauthorized—were living and working in the United States in 2008 (2009), even after the implementation of initiatives like Operation Wetback (1954), Operation Gatekeeper (1994), and Operation Return to Sender (2006-2007) to curb immigration through detainment and deportation of undocumented immigrants. Only recently have scholars begun to direct attention to the families of those individuals to comprehend more fully how the global phenomenon of migration and the legislative consequences of fluctuations in such impact the Mexican family.

### **Women and U.S.-Mexico Migration**

Particular immigration policies espoused by the United States not only fostered immigration at large, but did so in a manner that promoted gendered patterns of movement (Segura and Zavella 6). The Bracero Program (1942-1964), for example, afforded an opportunity for men to fulfill economic obligations as breadwinners, “in effect legislatively mandat[ing] Mexican ‘absentee fathers’ who came to work as

contracted agricultural laborers in the United States” (Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 392). Although the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 promoted the reunification of families by allowing the wives and children of *braceros* to join them in the United States, the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) of 1986 proved more advantageous to those migrants who could document their residency and employment (Segura and Zavella 6-7). Along with many migrant agricultural workers and construction day-laborers, migrant women who traditionally worked within an informal or domestic sector were, therefore, largely ineligible for the amnesty offered under this legislation. Massey, Durand, and Malone (2002) report that women constituted approximately 46% of Mexican documented and undocumented migration before IRCA (1980-86), during the transition period immediately after IRCA’s implementation (1987-1992), and after IRCA (1993 and on) (134). However, the percentage of undocumented female migrants relative to Mexican migrants increased during the transition and post-IRCA periods (Massey, Durand, and Malone 134). Thus, regardless of whether they held appropriate documentation to do so, the wives of migrants who had been left behind began to join the migrant stream in larger numbers, gaining increased social mobility and contesting their characterization as passive agents awaiting their spouses’ return.

One would err in supposing that Mexican women only recently began to participate in northward migration. Yolanda Chávez-Leyva describes the manner in which social and political circumstances in Mexico have affected its men and women in divergent ways. Whereas men’s migration in the 1910s accelerated due to a burgeoning economy in the U.S. Southwest, women and girls similarly crossed the border in greater numbers, but did so to flee the violence and destruction left in the wake of the Mexican

Revolution (77). More specifically, “In those years thousands of women and children crossed into the United States, both temporarily and permanently, fleeing rape, abduction, and other forms of gendered violence by entering the United States” (Chávez-Leyva 77). Chávez-Leyva continues, “With few other options available to them, Mexican women and children, understanding the safety afforded them, took advantage of the international boundary to seek sanctuary” (77). The physical act of crossing the border from Mexico into the United States was remarkably simple in those years, and consequently, thousands of children walked across the border without documentation (Chávez-Leyva 79). That would change initially, however, with the passage of the Immigration Act of 1917, which targeted women and children in the name of protecting the U.S. borders. Chávez-Leyva notes, “Women and children became central to this new system of control and exclusion, since both represented threats to the sovereignty and maintenance of the nation-state” (79). Aside from the U.S. government’s concern that the women and children would become “‘public charges’ because of their prevalent poverty and lack of education” (Chávez-Leyva 79), while separated from the male head of household, “Mexican women, as bearers of children and culture, and children, symbolic of the future, were threatening to the U.S. racial hierarchy” (Chávez-Leyva 79). Those government officials would surely be distressed to discover that Mexican women have continued to migrate in high numbers, particularly since 1970.

While initial migratory patterns typically promoted the income-earning travels of the husband while reinforcing women’s roles in the home (Ashbee *et al.* 40), a lack of savings or remittances obligated women to contribute to the household’s economic sustenance. Thus, many Mexican women entered the labor markets of agriculture and

crafts, combining their child-rearing responsibilities with their new economic activities (Hondagneu Sotelo 62-63). With the expansion of their skills, women began to develop identities that reflected increasing independence from their husbands and mechanisms of patriarchal power in general (Hondagneu-Sotelo 66). Nevertheless, “Earning and administering an autonomous income without the added burden of having to tend to their husbands’ daily needs did not automatically translate into a better life for these women” (66), as Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo comments. Rather, “Over time, many of these women developed a sense of indignation toward their husband’s prolonged sojourns, and this anger shaped their own migration motives. Some women believed their husbands were shirking their responsibilities as fathers, and [...] this belief served as an impetus for migration [...]” (67), provoking wives to seek out their husbands north of the border out of a sense of abandonment or suspected infidelity. At this stage, then, it was primarily with the hopes of family reunification that women contributed to a “feminization of migration from Mexico” (Segura and Zavella 7), with undeniable consequences for the labor market, family, and culture.

Denise A. Segura and Patricia Zavella suggest the need to examine these consequences of the gendered shift in transnational migration in their interdisciplinary text, *Women and Migration in the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands: A Reader*. Adhering to Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo’s understanding of “gendered migration,” they recognize that the experiences of separation, conflict, and cooperation (Hondagneu-Sotelo 192) are unique to Mexican migrant women. Furthermore, in contrast to when men migrate in search of economic stability as a sort of rite of passage, “When women do so, they are embarking not only on an immigration journey but on a more radical gender-

transformative odyssey” (Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 393). Such an odyssey entails not only a recasting of traditional gender roles, but also the re-conceptualization of familial structures, particularly in the context of the recent wave of female migration in which the women are those who have left their families behind in order to work abroad and support the family via remittances, separating children from their mothers and/or fathers with significant ramifications.<sup>4</sup>

### **Families Divided by Borders**

“La consecuencia más grande [...] [del] sueño [a]mericano [...] es la desintegración familiar.” (Dreby 201)

“Children crossing tug at your heart.  
Children who die crossing break your heart.”  
(Ferguson, Price, and Parks 150)

Despite the additional dangers that women face in crossing the U.S.-Mexico border without papers (Amnesty International 1998), “Today [...] mothers who migrate without their children are increasingly common, suggesting a major shift in the ways families around the world fulfill individual and household needs” (Dreby 5-6). While recent estimates indicate that 38 percent of Mexican fathers working in the U.S. have children living at home in Mexico, approximately 15 percent of Mexican mothers residing in the U.S. have also left their children behind (Dreby 6). Although familial separation was common in the context of, for example, Chinese, Polish, Italian, and

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<sup>4</sup> Another pattern of migration that is becoming common reflects South American women’s employment as domestic laborers in Europe; discussion of such extends beyond the scope of this project, however.



Jewish immigration a century ago, such a division was primarily a result of men's migration (Foner 2000; Gabaccia 2001; Nakano Glenn 1983). Transnational families, that is, "individual families who are divided by international borders and who maintain significant emotional and economic ties in two countries" (Dreby 5), are thus, in no way, a new phenomenon. These ties extend beyond economic duty or familial relationships to encompass migrants' concepts of their individual and national identity when maintaining strong connections with their country of origin while in the so-called host country. In the post-millennial context, more families are divided by borders as a result of migration from less wealthy or less-developed home countries to more affluent host nations (Dreby 5) by one or both parents. As Dreby describes, "[Migrant mothers and fathers] weigh the economic opportunities available in the United States, as well as the personal benefits they may gain from migration, with the costs of bringing children with them. But mothers and fathers arrive at the decision to leave their children in different ways" (29). Whereas men consider their paternal roles to be fulfilled economically north of the border, "For mothers, the decision to migrate arises out of a combination of economic and family considerations [...]" (Dreby 29). For women, the prospect of "[...] a busy work schedule, the border crossing, and the insecurity of living in the United States without legal documents [...]" (Dreby 29) discourages them from bringing children along *al otro lado*.

Indeed, as a result of financial necessity within a context of global capitalism, increasing numbers of Latin American immigrant women are developing new strategies to reconcile economic demands and maternal responsibilities, either as the primary income earners in the United States, or left behind as the heads of the household as a

result of men's migration. Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo and Ernestine Avila describe the construction of alternative maternal relationships within "I'm Here, but I'm There": The Meanings of Latina Transnational Motherhood." In this type of arrangement, Latin American immigrant women work and reside in the United States, Canada, Europe, or elsewhere while their children remain in their countries of origin in the care of "other mothers" (400), primarily the migrants' own mothers, *comadres*, sisters, aunts, or other female relatives. This type of collectivist approach to mothering is well established in Latin American culture, according to Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila (400). Interestingly, in their contrast of resident immigrant Mexican women and native-born Chicana women, disparate opinions arose with respect to the compatibility of employment and motherhood. Positing differing views regarding the division of social life into public and private spheres as the principal factor that accounts for the discrepancy, Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila point to Mexicanas' collapsing of their economic and domestic lives. Because these women migrated to the United States in order to improve the socio-economic circumstances of their families, they argue, the Mexicana mothers more strongly identify the economic component of motherhood (382). Therefore, they do not express the ambivalence toward working and caring for the children that the Chicanas in their study do.

Mexican women's desperate circumstances and identification of their financial role as parents—to feed, clothe and provide shelter for their children—are often the only motivation necessary to drive them to undertake the perilous journey across the border without their children. Especially in the post-9/11 environment of anxiety regarding border security, there exists no means for parents to migrate with their children legally.

Consequently, they must face grave danger and great expense in order to cross the border. One supposes then, as Douglas Massey, Jorge Durand, and Nolan Malone aver, “Although United States immigration policies are intended to deter Mexicans from working in the United States illegally, they have had the opposite effect. Mexicans continue to come north, and they are not returning home, as they used to” (8), reflecting the recent decline of circular Mexican migration for the first time over the past twenty-five years (Dreby; Leite, Ramons, and Gaspar; Massey, Durand, and Malone). The increased militarization of the border has resulted not only in a more expensive crossing, but also an alarming rise in death rates, which taken together, certainly contribute to migrants’ inclinations to make their stays in the United States more permanent. Wayne Cornelius reports that the average cost to cross the border without documents tripled between 1995 and 2001 during the same time in which deaths among undocumented migrants in Arizona rose by 1,186% (2001; 2004).

The danger and expense of crossing the border with children are even greater; thus, many parents opt to leave their children behind in Mexico or other Latin American countries while they temporarily work in the United States. The temporary separation, however, almost inevitably becomes permanent as a result of increased militarization of the border, which simultaneously discourages migrants already working in the U.S. to risk another crossing and makes the journey for unaccompanied children even more hazardous and costly (Adler; Dreby; Nazario; Thompson). Much like those for adults, “Risks for children at the border include experiencing human rights abuses, getting lost, sustaining injury or death, and being caught by officials. Indeed, border enforcement policies have made the crossing even riskier for minor children, with the number of

children returned to Mexico by border officials skyrocketing over the past few years” (Dreby 28). While Ginger Thompson (2003) reports that 1300 unaccompanied minors were repatriated to Mexico in 2002, the number of detained minors traveling alone increased to 44,000 in 2006 and an estimated 50,000 in 2007 (Hernández-Barajas, “The Vulnerability and Risk of Unaccompanied Mexican Children Crossing the U.S. Border” cited in Dreby). Marizco (2004) documents the U.S. Border Patrol capture of 43,000 children attempting to enter the United States in 2003, 6,000 of whom were unaccompanied (Stephen 200).

Unaccompanied Mexican children attempted the journey northward even at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, though in much smaller numbers. Chávez-Leyva describes a 1907 act that specified “children unaccompanied by their parents” as one target of exclusion from the U.S. (79-80), and further notes the manner in which, “Efforts to demarcate the [border] line geographically were followed by attempts to demarcate the line socially and culturally. The migration of children threatened these intentions, making Mexican children lightning rods of controversy” (72). Although the current repatriation of mind-blowing numbers of Mexican minors points to the U.S. government’s continued vigilance of this population’s movement (perhaps because of the social and cultural threat they presumably still pose to the fabric of American life), the exposure of these children’s stories of migration via national media undermines the government’s efforts to criminalize them. Upon learning more about the plight of the youngest victims of migration, the general American public develops an awareness of how “[...] Mexicans’ experiences of family separation reveal the ways that recent changes in U.S. immigration policy can have an immediate impact on family life” (Dreby

216). Rather than insist upon the fortification of our southern border and the criminalization of undocumented immigrants, the informed public may come to realize that Mexican migrants—adults and children alike—come to the U.S. in hopes of reunification with their parents, an inevitable consequence of global forces of economics and political power driving immigration.

Indeed, for the thousands of individuals who cross the border, immigration is not just political, but obviously personal, and carries ramifications that extend beyond economic laws of supply and demand. “In Mexico, migration is increasingly seen as the cause of the problems afflicting Mexican youth. Migration is a necessary evil. The toll it takes is meted out on the family and, above all else, on the children. Families divided by borders, popular sentiment suggests, essentially fall apart” (Dreby 202). Struggling to understand a parent’s decisions to put a seemingly insurmountable barrier between parents and children as a sacrificial act rather than one of abandonment, children who are left behind harbor strong feelings of resentment and disappointment (Dreby 4; Nazario). Even in the seemingly ideal realization of family reunification upon overcoming the physical divide keeping families apart, emotional connections among reunited parents and children tend to be tenuous at best.

The notion that maternal support in the form of economic stability may warrant familial separation is even more complex within a cultural context that “emphasizes a strong allegiance to an idealized form of motherhood and a patriarchal ideology that frowns on working wives and mothers [...]” (Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 371-72). Alternatively, perhaps the sacrificial spatial and temporal separation is concordant with “the image of *la madre* as self-sacrificing and holy” (Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 375),

the very image against which Chicanas and Mexicanas often compare themselves (Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 375-76). Regardless, “[...] [T]ransnational mothers and their families are blazing new terrain, spanning national borders, and improvising strategies for mothering. It is a brave odyssey,” Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila declare, “but one with deep costs” (389). As we shall see, the creation of a transnational family is but one familial configuration that results from migration to the United States, and more and more representations of such are rather suddenly emerging within narratives written by U.S.-born writers, namely those of Mexican descent. The depictions of these variations and their effects on the female characters within the texts explicitly demonstrate the sacrifices resulting from the journey northward, impacting both men and women. Not only do the individual crossings entail certain costs, particularly to the women and children left behind, but they also inevitably necessitate a reconstruction of migrants’ social and cultural identities, particularly since transnational migrants “negotiate gender in their families in new ways [...] in a binational context” (Dreby 7).<sup>5</sup>

Understanding the manner in which Mexican migrant women adapt to their evolving socio-cultural context—developing new social identities and constructing innovative definitions of *la familia*—is one component of recent Chicana/o Studies research on the local economic and cultural effects of globalization and migration (Segura and Zavella 16). However, as David R. Maciel and María Herrera-Sobek suggest in *Culture Across Borders*, the cultural and artistic manifestations resulting from, or inspired by, immigration merit additional scholarly attention (88). Patricia R. Pessar and

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<sup>5</sup> On the topic of evolving gender roles and responsibilities in binational families, the interested reader is encouraged to refer to D’Aubeterre (2000, 2002), González-López (2005), Hirsch (2003), Smith (2006), and Stephen (2007).

Sarah J. Mahler concurs, explaining, “Work on transnational migration and gender has much to gain by examining those genres of cultural production that contribute to the ways in which gender is represented, consumed and practiced transnationally.” (834) They elaborate, “Moreover, [...] such engagement with cultural matters marks a departure from the standard transnational migration scholarship that focuses solely on migrant social relations and institutions” (Pessar and Mahler 834). This dissertation aims to do just that, namely to contribute to a burgeoning body of inquiry regarding transnational migration, gender, and the family within literature and film emerging in the U.S.-Mexico borderlands.

Fictional narratives of migration by Chicana authors, in particular, shed light on the emergence of transborder families and the re-definition of motherhood within a transnational framework, both of which have already been the subject of sociological inquiry (Hondageu-Sotelo and Avila; Ojeda de la Peña; Segura). Furthermore, the various texts dramatize or narrativize the complex negotiation of cultural or national identity that women in the borderlands, particularly those affected by U.S.-Mexico migration, must undertake.

### **New Conceptions of Identity in the Borderlands**

Although undocumented Mexican migrants undoubtedly experience physical obstacles when “crossing over” to the other side of the border, much ink has been spilled by critics like Héctor Calderón who have suggested a fluidity or continuity between the nations and cultures of Mexico and the United States, positing a “Greater Mexico.” This

allows for a facile understanding of an affiliation with all things Mexican in the Chicano/a imaginary, through an emphasis on the permeability of cultural borders and the positive aspects of the liminal middle land of *nepantla* that Pat Mora and Gloria Anzaldúa have described. In this metaphorical space, the borderlands come to represent a hybrid zone with the potential for overcoming oppressive powers and institutions through the very essence of its fluidity (Price 98). Furthermore, it offers an identifiable—though rarely site-specific—space with which Chicanos/as may define themselves (Fox 119). As Claire F. Fox describes, the U.S.-Mexico border “[...] is invoked as a marker of hybrid or liminal subjectivities, such as those that would be experienced by persons who negotiate among multiple cultural, linguistic, racial, or sexual systems throughout their lives. When the border *is* spatialized in these theories, that space is almost always universal” (119). I would add that this universality applies only to the more theoretical construct of the borderlands in the imaginary of U.S. Latinos/as, and particularly, Chicanos/as in academia. Certainly, within this geo-political space surrounding the border between the United States and Mexico, individuals often experience simultaneous processes of cultural, national, geographic and linguistic exclusion and identification (Segura and Zavella 4). As Segura and Zavella explain, the “subjective transnationalism” experienced by migrants reflects an identification with more than one location geographically (in this case, both the United States and Mexico) since the globalized contact zones of the borderlands deterritorialize the construction of identity. On the other hand, the same subjective transnationalism becomes responsible for a feeling of exclusion from both cultures and nations (Segura and Zavella 3). This experience echoes that which is expressed in Chicano/a artistic production, a theme of which is often the notion



of being *ni de aquí ni de allá*, neither from here nor there. The migrant population, much like Chicana/o individuals who are more established within U.S. communities, must negotiate a hybrid cultural identity, and in the case of the borderlands, will do so in the “interstitial spaces between the dominant national and cultural systems” on either side of the border (Segura and Zavella 3).

Further compounding the sentiment of a cultural “dis-belonging” is an identity crisis of place (Price 83), or better yet, of a lack thereof. Uprooted and displaced from their home country, transnational migrants necessarily undertake the daunting and perhaps impossible task of defining their national “membership.” In our globalized world, in which “collective attachments to place have eroded” (Price 83), the notion of the nation-state may now be on its way to becoming obsolete. Patricia L. Price eloquently captures this development:

As modernity has progressed we have become uprooted, and the nation-state to which we might cling as a sheltering claim to place (or, alternatively, from which we have always been alienated; or, alternatively, which is now sorely outmoded) is no longer (or never was) able to provide a stable moorage in the midst of such a sea [of] change. (83)

How, then, do individuals have a sense of identity and self without a connection to place? In this context, I suspect that instances of transnationalism may still result, in part, in a double alienation—from the dominant cultures of both the country of origin and the host country.

One might argue that marginalized groups, particularly those that reside in the interstices between dominant cultures (to borrow Homi Bhabha’s terminology), may find

a sense of belonging within the artistic production of hybrid cultural expression. Hence, literary expression may provide an opportunity for identity affirmation, especially within the context of migration and globalization (Segura and Zavella 8-9), and the emergence of a deterritorialized identity. In affirming this marginalized identity, Rafael Pérez-Torres identifies what he terms “sites of oppositional cultural consciousness” (817) precisely within the cultural production that emerges from “interstices [that] find a correlative in the national border as a site that needs to be bridged, as a site where the struggle between inclusion and exclusion has most clearly manifested itself in military, economic, and political ways” (817). The artistic works of Chicano/a authors have addressed such struggles within the Chicano/a experience since the Chicano Movement in the late 1960s, and now extend this to capture similar challenges of defining and constructing new transnational identities within the context of immigration.

How, then, might we position the case of the Chicana writers who have written fictionalized accounts of Mexican migration? Doubly oppressed as Chicana women, these authors are contributing to a body of fiction that transcends borders and develops alliances with Mexican border-crossers, as Gloria Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands/La Frontera* encourages. In fostering transnational connections, the writers whose works will be discussed within the next chapters of this dissertation embrace the border feminism described by Sonia Saldívar-Hull.

Adopting a shift of focus from “[...] filiation to affiliation, from ties to men and women of [one’s] own blood to political ties with peoples across national borders who enter the United States in search of political [and, more recently, economic] liberation” (*Feminism* 145), border feminism does not necessarily develop only in the physical space

immediately surrounding U.S. borders. However, it is certainly an appropriate and particularly useful framework in understanding, as Monika Kaup contends, how—and perhaps why—Chicana authors re-write canonical migrant texts based in the U.S.-Mexico borderlands, “[...] address[ing] immigration not to consolidate blood ties of filiation or to recover the organic Mexican origins of their present Chicana selves, but to make a transition from filiation to affiliation” (291). This type of association not only promotes transnational solidarity, but deconstructs the binary of the country of origin and the host country, a deconstruction that Irene Mata argues is an integral component of the revised reading of the immigrant narrative within a global system.

What does one make of the fact that the primary creators of contemporary Latin American immigrant narrative seem to be U.S.-based authors who, by definition, have not personally experienced the migratory journey? In addressing the ways that new socioeconomic demands and mobility oblige Latin American (and specifically Mexican) women to create new roles, identities, and constructions of motherhood and the family, Chicana writers “[...] forge bonds of choice between Mexican Americans and contemporary migrants whose national descent differs from their own, yet whose marginal position within the U.S. borderlands makes them *quasi-natural* political allies” (Kaup 291, emphasis added). Chicana authors thus address issues of marginality that transcend borders, re-defining traditional gender roles and allocating more agency to characters within a broader theoretical context of feminism. By challenging the traditional concepts of Mexican gender and familial roles, these writers continue the literary tradition in which, “[...] Chicanas have refigured *la familia* at the intersection of race and gender” (Kaup 212). In the chapters that follow, I will examine the textual

representation of migration's effects on the dynamics of gender relationships and identity construction with particular attention to physical migration, and discuss how the representation of such effects in recently published narratives thus alter the canon of Chicano/a literature. Like literary scholar Juanita Heredia, who describes textual critiques of institutions of power in divergent Latin American diasporic texts, I similarly argue that the narratives in the present investigation vehemently condemn mechanisms that perpetrate injustice and violence. However, my specific focus will be on the manifestation of the effects of these mechanisms on the women and children of Mexican and Central American migration.

### **The Chicana Take on (Im)migrant Narrative**

In a revisionist historiography of sorts, Chicana authors have reclaimed the voices and experiences of Chicana and *mexicana* women alike through their counternarratives that subvert hegemonic conceptualizations of the (im)migrant experience and also the form and themes of more traditional Chicano and Mexican narratives of male migration. In contrast to the initial emphasis on individual men's journeys northward, recent Chicana narratives of Mexican migration to the United States have more profoundly presented the consequent challenges facing women, embodying a literary shift that reflects a parallel change in gender dynamics in the migrant stream. Although Daniel Venegas, Tomás Rivera, and Miguel Méndez include women within their novels, *Las aventuras de don Chipote o, cuando los pericos mamen* (1928), *...y no se lo tragó la tierra* (1971) and *Peregrinos de Aztlán* (1974), respectively, the narratives that are the

focus of this dissertation underline the feminine experience of transnational migration in more depth by positioning the women as protagonists, rather than secondary characters. A precursor to Chicano literature, *Las aventuras de don Chipote o, cuando los pericos mamen* offers a glimpse of the Mexican immigrant experience during the 1920s in picaresque fashion. Following the trials and tribulations of the titular character, an uneducated migrant from a rural area in Mexico, the narrative demonstrates that the suffering—of injustice, abuse and exploitation in addition to hunger and poverty—that accompanies migration embodies the futility of sacrifices within an environment that inherently lacks equality. Like the other immigrants who, “lured by the luster of the dollar, abandoned their own land to come to suffer even greater hardship” (43), Don Chipote suffers one injustice, disappointment, or humiliation after another from the start of his trip north. Venegas focuses on his protagonist’s particular experiences with minimal development of the impact of his migration on the family he has left behind. Like the work of Venegas, *Peregrinos de Aztlán* decries the suffering of Mexican migrants, with a primary focus on that which is endured by various men who have gone *al otro lado*. Although *Peregrinos de Aztlán* offers the reader a collective voice of immigration(s) through its polyphonic narrative, the novel does not do justice to women’s experiences. Published in the 1970s, when the feminine experience still took second stage to the socio-political matters of import to the Chicano Movement’s men, the novel serves as a call to action, giving a voice to an assorted cast of characters who break the silence imposed on them by the hegemony upon revealing their experiences of injustice and their humble, painful and silenced existence. Nevertheless, the narrative presents generally negative and naturalistic portrayals of women.

Focusing upon a handful of other examples of immigrant narrative written by Chicano men and women writers in “Engendering Immigration in Chicano/a Fiction: Patriarchal Foundational Narratives and Women’s Search for Self-Knowledge,” María Herrera-Sobek describes the manner in which texts written by male versus female writers exemplify divergent approaches to presenting experiences of transnational movement. She notes that novels like José Antonio Villareal’s *Pocho*, Ernesto Galarza’s *Barrio Boy* and Edmundo Villaseñor’s *Rain of Gold*, typically narrate the immigration of the first generation of a family’s border-crossers and the settlement of subsequent generations, often taking the Mexican Revolution as the beginning of the text. These foundational novels written by men generally follow the structure of the heroic journey described by Joseph Campbell in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. Alternatively, Chicana representations of immigration—like in Graciela Limón’s *The Memories of Ana Calderón*, Estela Portillo Trambley’s *Trini*, Sandra Cisneros’s “Woman Hollering Creek,” and Norma E. Cantu’s *Canícula*—tend to begin in times and spaces other than the 1910 Mexican Revolution, portray circular rather than linear migrations, and emphasize the diversity of individualized (im)migrant experiences in a feminine quest for self-discovery or knowledge. I would add that many Chicana writers engage in resistance to patriarchy and combat both social and cultural mechanisms that keep women “in their place” in their more profound presentation of the physical and emotional toll on women as a result of the search for the elusive American Dream.

This dream of a new and better life is what compels an astounding number of Mexican men and women to undertake the harrowing journey across the U.S.-Mexico border. With the aid of texts like those discussed within this analysis, readers may begin

to comprehend the magnitude of the sacrifices that each has made in doing so. On the one hand, narratives of (im)migration with a descriptive approach that presents more humanized characters establish an empathetic relationship between readers and characters. Simultaneously, though, a closer look at the dangers of migration and its destructive consequences for the family fosters a generally negative perspective regarding transnational migration, although this view of the desperate individuals that undertake the journey is not. In particular, the suffering inflicted upon women as a result of migratory movements within the narrative works discussed raises questions as to whether the quest for economic stability is worth enduring the inherent challenges, especially upon consideration of the how the separation that many migrants envision as temporary ends up destroying their families.

In their works analyzed here, Chicana authors call attention to the dangers of border crossing and migration's effects on the family left behind, thereby humanizing the characters while simultaneously reinstating a more tangible or material essence to the "*herida abierta* where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds" (Anzaldúa 25). In contrast to the more abstract conception of the border "as a marker of hybrid or liminal subjectivities" (Fox 119), potentially present "[...] in any metropolis—wherever poor, displaced, ethnic, immigrant, or sexual minority populations collide with the 'hegemonic' population [...]" (Fox 119), these narrative depictions of the Borderlands as a violent and tragic zone serve as a call to action. As Alfred Arteaga notes, "[...] the border can be symbol and rendered poetic, but it is always a site of real world politics. It is not simply a metaphor" (8). By shattering the metaphorical representation of the border and exposing the authentic effects of real-world politics—ironically, through fiction—the

works I will discuss reveal in very raw terms the injustices perpetrated against migrants (and, indirectly, their loved ones), and promote cultural solidarity among U.S.-born Chicana/o individuals and Mexican migrants, despite an often ambivalent relationship between the two cultural groups.

Whereas some critics point to the conflicted relationship between the Mexican American community and the newly-arrived Mexican immigrants (Kaup 111; Vila 4-5), others like Gloria Anzaldúa emphasize that *mexicanidad* is racial or ethnic, rather than national. She explains, “*Nosotros los Chicanos* straddle the borderlands [...]. Deep in our hearts we believe that being Mexican has nothing to do with which country one lives in. Being Mexican is a state of soul—not one of mind, not one of citizenship. Neither eagle nor serpent, but both. And like the ocean, neither animal respects borders” (84). Honoring the Mexican “tradition of migration, a tradition of long walks” (33), she comments, “Today we are witnessing *la migración de los pueblos mexicanos*, the return odyssey to the historical/mythological Aztlán. This time, the traffic is from south to north” (33). In her writings, Anzaldúa encourages the development of transnational solidarity with those northbound migrants. Like Anzaldúa, the Chicana authors examined here foster a sense of international community or cohesion through their fictionalized accounts of Mexican migration.

In a border poem that succinctly captures the questions that arise within the novels analyzed in this investigation, Gloria Anzaldúa provides the perspective of a Mexican crossing the border in “sobre piedras con lagartijos,” documenting some of the difficulties with the journey across the border and establishing the severe life in Mexico as a motive for migration. “Maldito fue el día / que me atreví a cruzar” (Anzaldúa 143),



declares the poetic voice, which explains, “Nada más quiero hacer unos cuantos centavos / y regresar a mi tierra” (Anzaldúa 143). He continues, wondering about his wife, whom, “Ayá la dejé con los seis chiquíos. / Tuve que dejarlos, / dejar ese pinche pedazo de tierra” (Anzaldúa 143). This notion of the economic urgency of relocating to the United States and the strong desire to return to one’s *patria* appears within the texts we will analyze later. “Pronto volveré a mi tierra / a recoger mi señora y mis hijos” (Anzaldúa 144), the migrant explains. However, it is likely that the day he returns will arrive sooner than he had expected when he finds it necessary to hide from the Migra and he takes refuge in a cave: “Cuando oímos el ruido / de la camioneta / corrimos por todos rumbos” (Anzaldúa 144). Just as it seems he is no longer in danger, the poetic voice notes:

Mira como los lagartijos se alejan  
 aventando piedritas por todos lados  
 Oye, ¿Qué es ese ruido  
 que arrebató a mi corazón, que me para el aliento y  
 seca más mi boca?  
 ¿De quién son esas botas  
 lujísimas que andan  
 hacia mi cara? (Anzaldúa 144-45)

One may suppose that the boots belong to none other than a member of the Border Patrol, that is, *la Migra*, reflecting another element that arises time and time again in border crossing narratives. Anzaldúa thus presents a humanization of the Mexican immigrant within dehumanizing conditions that parallels those that one finds within the novels of

Ana Castillo, Ann Jaramillo, Reyna Grande, and the other authors whose works I analyze in the coming chapters.

Further contributing to the humanization of migrants within their narratives, a fundamental element within Chicana (im)migrant literature is its attention to the domestic sphere and the family. In particular, Monika Kaup describes the unique treatment of such in Chicana narratives of migration in *Rewriting North American Borders in Chicano and Chicana Narrative*:

[...] Chicana feminism addresses a new problematic, absent in male-authored Chicano nation-based narratives, and partially explored in migrant narratives: *familia*, domesticity. Whereas nationalism is about the homeland, and while the temporal process of migration elaborates the transformations of ethnicity between ‘Mexicanness’ and ‘Americanness,’ the feminist project begins at home [...]. (13)

Particularly in the texts discussed within this dissertation, one must also consider the transformation of home and domestic relationships as a result of migration, and, more specifically, of female migration. As we have seen from sociological research and the analysis of fictional works written by Chicanas, “The ties of transnational motherhood suggest simultaneously the relative permeability of borders, as witnessed by the maintenance of family ties and new meanings of motherhood, and the impermeability of nation-state borders” (Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 410). To accommodate their socio-economic and geographical circumstances, transnational mothers, in particular, must create new familial structures that may or may not adhere to the images and icons of motherhood in the Chicano/a or Mexicano/a cultural ethos.

In the context of migration, women necessarily adopt these new roles and identities despite the fact that these may contradict cultural ideals or symbology. Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo and Ernestine Avila observe, “[Latino/a] [c]ultural symbols that model maternal femininity, such as the Virgen de Guadalupe, and negative femininity, such as La Llorona and La Malinche, serve to control Mexican and Chicana women’s conduct by prescribing idealized visions of motherhood” (391). Nevertheless, various critics have examined the revision and subversion of such symbols within Chicana literature with particular attention to the archetypal figure of La Llorona (Payant; Rebolledo; Sandoval). In light of the present study, one may posit this figure not only as a threat to the migrant children (as in *Across a Hundred Mountains* and *La línea*), but also as a collective female victim of oppression (in “The Cariboo Café”) and, in the context of transnational mother-daughter relationships, as the spirit of those mothers who must leave their children behind with the hopes of providing them with better opportunities (*Trini* and *The Guardians*).

In addition to the feminist project of revising restrictive cultural archetypes, Chicana authors recuperate their foremothers’ past. As Pat Mora explains, “Assisting in the retrieval of our cultural past and that of those around us is a quiet form of rebellion” (46). Recovering lost or silenced tales of past and present migration—albeit in fictional renderings—is, therefore, a means to contest hegemonic narratives. These tales often present a crisis, and consequent re-definition, of identity that is grounded in the negotiation of hybrid cultures. Rather than focusing upon “the conflicts between ‘remaining Mexican’ and ‘becoming American’” (Kaup 12) as in earlier migrant literature, “[...] Chicana and Chicano narratives of immigration concentrate their

attention on the redefinition of identity, on the constant adjustments that Mexicans who are now living in the United States need to negotiate their new cultural surroundings” (Ledesma 88). As a result of migration, even those characters—particularly the women—who do not migrate themselves exemplify Mary Pat Brady’s “subjectivity-in-process” (52), reflecting their dynamic, rather than fixed or static, identities. In their narratives, largely what Tey Diana Rebolledo would call “tales of growth, independence, and change” (*Chronicles* 233), the Chicana authors analyzed here successfully capture the evolution of women’s roles and identities within newly-imagined familial and cultural contexts as a result of migration. In doing so, these writers not only capture the socio-cultural phenomenon of transnational movement, but also offer texts that challenge the nationalist discourse of Mexican narratives of immigration and the masculinist discourse of earlier Chicano migrant texts.

The chapters that follow are dedicated to the analysis of the effects of transnational migration on women with particular attention to the (re-)negotiation of personal and cultural identity resulting from the adoption of new roles within Chicana narratives of Mexican migration. More specifically, Chapter Two discusses the novels *Across the Great River* (1989) by Irene Beltrán Hernández and *Trini* (1986) by Estela Portillo Trambley as precursors to 21<sup>st</sup>-century works addressing issues of immigration and the family. These works demonstrate cultural resistance and a defiance of the social and cultural mechanisms that limit women’s subjectivity by recuperating the experiences and evolving identities of Mexican women impacted by transnational migration. Beltrán Hernández’s *Across the Great River* captures the emotional and physical journey of its young protagonist, a daughter of migration who must contend with the new

responsibilities thrust upon her after her father's disappearance and her mother's incapacitation when the family crosses the border together. We find the first textual appearance of the transnational Mexican mother in *Trini*, which introduces the thematics of a border-crossing mother's sacrifices and the emotional toll that her separation from her children entails. Portillo Trambley's novel not only inscribes the experiences of a *mestiza* Mexican woman within migrant literary discourse, but also subverts the traditional form of the *Bildungsroman* and the content of cultural myth through the presentation of a mother figure who embodies the integrative qualities of the Aztec goddess Coatlicue.<sup>6</sup> The publication of these early Chicana works contributes to the development of a counter-discourse through narrativizing the cultural heritage and migratory experience of Mexican women. Thus, these are among the first narratives that demonstrate the fight against a triple oppression due to race, class, and gender via the interrogation of patriarchal ideals and the traditions of Chicano culture. Furthermore, the texts' exposure of social injustices perpetrated against migrants establishes them as antecedents to later condemnations of such, and therefore exemplifies fiction that transcends borders and develops alliances with Mexican border crossers.

Chapter Three extends the discussion of fictional works that embrace border feminism to encompass various 21<sup>st</sup>-century Chicano/a narratives of the effects of transnational migration on women and children of Mexican families, creating empathy for the plight of the migrant and his or her family, and exposing the danger and violence

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<sup>6</sup> A seemingly contradictory figure, Coatlicue embodies the notion of dualities as the Aztec earth goddess of both birth (creation) and death (destruction). Gloria Anzladúa describes the relevance of Coatlicue to contemporary Chicano/a identity in "La herencia de Coatlicue/The Coatlicue State" in *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*.

that mechanisms of socioeconomic and political power engender in the borderlands. The realistic portrayal of the physical, socioeconomic, and psychological struggles of the children of migration in *Across a Hundred Mountains* (2007) and *Dancing with Butterflies* (2009) by Reyna Grande, *La línea* (2006) by Ann Jaramillo, and *Into the Beautiful North* (2009) by Luis Alberto Urrea illustrates the characters' personal and cultural identity negotiation as well as the changing gender dynamics in Mexican families and culture as a result of transnational migration. Along with the cinematographic works *La misma luna* (2007) and *Which Way Home* (2009), these texts expose international migration as a political *and* personal process, and effectively demand social justice that extends beyond borders through humanized portrayals of the inherent dangers of individuals' quests for financial stability and family reunification.

The manner in which the narration of personal tragedies and trauma serves as a springboard for political condemnations of structural mechanisms that simultaneously sustain the need for migration while condoning violence in the borderlands is the primary focus of Chapter Four. Exemplifying paradigmatic narrative and cinematographic calls to action, *The Guardians* (2007) by Ana Castillo, the aforementioned films, and various works of non-fiction (including *La Migra me hizo los mandados* (2002) by Alicia Alarcón, *The Death of Josseline: Immigration Stories from the Arizona-Mexico Borderlands* (2010) by Margaret Regan, *Enrique's Journey: The Story of a Boy's Dangerous Odyssey to Reunite with his Mother* (2006) by Sonia Nazario, and *Crossing Over: A Mexican Family on the Migrant Trail* (2001) by Rubén Martínez) disrupt the notion of an exclusively abstract borderland. In documenting the violence, injustice, and suffering of migrants and their families in a more material and tangible sense, these

works function as instruments that foment transnational solidarity through informing their audiences about the political and economic forces driving international immigration *and* through restoring humanity to otherwise dehumanized individuals. Extending the thematic call for justice established much earlier by Helena María Viramontes in “The Cariboo Cafe” (1985), Castillo’s *The Guardians* is complemented by the proliferation of testimonials, ethnographies, and juvenile literature that addresses similar themes, and thereby establishes new voices and approaches that contribute to a better understanding of the impact of transnational migration via literary production.

Finally, the concluding chapter provides a forum to discuss narratives of female border crossing and the family within the context of evolving trends in migrant and Chicano/a literature to highlight their effectiveness as tools for social change. Embracing the migrant as a theoretical subject through the restoration of his or her humanity, these texts emphasize the interplay of the personal and political, incorporating a contemporary addition to an already complex Chicano/a conceptualization of identity and experience, and exemplify the current broader collaboration among people of all ethnicities in the fight for human rights. Moving beyond an alliance based on alienation as a result of race, class, ethnicity, or gender, writers and advocates alike are re-directing and extending the demand for social justice once focused primarily on Chicanos/as during the Chicano Movement. It is no secret that both the U.S. and Mexican governments have responded to current increased transnational migration with varied legislative maneuvers to slow it down. Such shifts in immigration policies reflect the changing circumstances and undeniably impact the families of Mexican migrants. Not only do we now see responses to this in cultural production, primarily that written by U.S.-based Chicano/a authors, but

also in nationwide protests and advocacy efforts to humanize the dehumanized, give a voice to the silenced, and develop a consciousness of race, class, and gender that extends beyond borders through recording more realistic versions of pan-Hispanic injustices.



## Chapter Two

### Blazing Literary Trails: Early Portraits of the Mexican Migrant Woman's Experience

Coinciding with the 1980s “boom” of Chicana literature (Lomelí; Lomelí, Márquez, and Herrera-Sobek), the publication of Estela Portillo Trambley's *Trini* (1986) and Irene Beltrán Hernández's *Across the Great River* (1989) challenged the predominantly masculine renderings of the Chicano experience available at that time, thus contributing to the development of a body of literature to reflect the diversity of the Chicano *and* Chicana experiences(s). These texts, then, are among those that exemplify the emergence of the “Contemporary Chicana Generation” (Lomelí, Márquez, and Herrera-Sobek 288) that extends the trend beginning in the 1970s of “utilizing technique to unveil a cross-sectional disclosure of multi-faceted experiences covering gender, class, psychological and social determinants” (Lomelí 102). Pointing to the works of more widely-read Chicana authors like Cherríe Moraga, Sandra Cisneros, Helena María Viramontes, Denise Chávez, Margarita Cota-Cárdenas, Pat Mora, and Gloria Anzaldúa, Lomelí notes the development of style, innovative blurring of genres, and thematic within Chicano/a literature during the 1980s:

Their writings delve into affairs beyond mere identity, which can be understood as an issue to settle in historical terms; more so, their motivation seems to be grounded on examining the inner-self, the person vis-à-vis intrahistorical matters, such as maturation, the passage of time, family upbringing, cultural institutions, peer pressure, a sense of otherness, sexuality, social conditioning and expectations. The central

question is to relate experiences from an optic—mainly female—that has been ignored, subdued or silent. (104)

In adding to and contesting the narratives reflecting the masculinist and nationalist ideologies of the early Chicano Movement, texts by Chicana authors endowed the until-then “virtually invisible” Chicana women (Eysturoy 60) with a resonant voice. Equipped with this voice, these authors successfully declare a progression from being objects of subjection to empowered agents of subjectivity (Eysturoy 42) through capturing the feminine agency exercised by the characters in their texts, a phenomenon described by Angie Chabram Dernerseian in “And, Yes... The Earth Did Part on the Splitting of Chicana/o Subjectivity” (1993).

By inscribing women within the history of Mexican immigration, the early fictional accounts of transnational migration by Beltrán Hernández and Portillo Trambley assert a feminine voice that demands to recuperate women’s roles and experiences, despite their overwhelming absence in male-centered migrant literary discourses. As such, *Across the Great River* and *Trini* function as precursors to works published in the new millennium, humanizing the characters and generally relocating their stories from “individual oblivion to collective memory” (Chabram Dernerseian 37). While these novels do not convey the greater degree of political consciousness of the structural violence that border crossing entails found in later texts, they present the empowered and evolving identities of women in newly-imagined familial and cultural contexts.

In the aforementioned article, Chabram Dernerseian examines Chicano/a visual and literary expression created during the 1970s and early 1980s, and discusses the manner in which Chicanas overcame their displacement from Chicano cultural

production. In the face of the Movement's nationalist claims to a seemingly universal experience, Chicana artists began to subvert their subordinate positioning through an interrogation of the identities that their *compañeros* had established for them. Re-appropriating their voices to articulate their unique experiences as Chicana women, they implicated Chicano men as additional "agent[s] of oppression" (51), and embraced their own subjectivity—in all of its variations.<sup>7</sup> These women, according to Chabram Dernessesian, thereby "[...] altered the subject position of Chicanas in cultural productions, taking them from subjection to subjectivity, from entrapment to liberation, and from distortion and/or censure to self-awareness and definition" (42). Although Chabram Dernessesian's article appeared before the publication of the works analyzed herein, *Across the Great River* and *Trini* continue the trend in which Chicano/a subjectivity "[...] has parted—this second time self-consciously along gender lines that deconstruct sexism from within the arena of Chicana/o cultural production itself" (39). In narrating the journeys of female migrants, Beltrán-Hernández and Portillo Trambley establish a literary space for protagonists who embody cultural resistance, and combat the patriarchal and cultural mechanisms that traditionally keep a woman—particularly a

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<sup>7</sup> It should be noted that the idea of a Chicana feminist literary "counterattack" of sorts on Chicano *compadres* during the 1980s is not maintained by all critics. For example, Lomelí, Márquez, and Herrera-Sobek focus on a more general description of Chicana narrative interests during this time including the following: "the examination of women as 'theoretical subjects'; [...] the cultivation of a wide assortment of literary forms; [...] 'experiential inwardness'; [...] the portrayal of social elements from a 'herstorical' approach; [...] the presentation of texts from a genderized political and cultural perspective; [...] the objective to either challenge, defy, or break traditional boundaries or borders of any kind (including textual and sexual); and [...] the desire [...] to exercise some kind of inspirational influence among subsequent generations" (291). For more on women as 'theoretical subjects,' please refer to Norma Alarcón's writings.

*mexicana* or Chicana—“in her place.” The migratory journeys are thus less about the trip from one geographic location to the next than the inherent development and reformulations of identity when the protagonists confront an alternate culture and have new responsibilities and roles thrust upon them accordingly.<sup>8</sup>

***Across the Great River (1989): The Evolution and Regression of a Young Migrant***

In Irene Beltrán Hernández’s novel, *Across the Great River*, the young narrator linearly chronicles her family’s migratory experience from a Mexican border town to Eagle Pass, Texas. From the first scene of the text, it is clear that the decision to uproot the family lies entirely in the hands of Papa. “‘Kata,’ Mama says to the daughter, “‘I wish we weren’t going anywhere, but ...’” (5), she abruptly interrupts herself. Her rational objections to the journey are met with anger: “‘Silence! I will hear no more!’ [Papa] commands as he walks on even faster” (6). Upon regaining composure, Kata’s father gently comforts his fearful wife, “‘Do not fear, my love. All is ready and a new life across the border awaits us [...]. Come, we do this for the children’s sake’” (8), he reminds her. Not much later into the narration, however, Mama becomes seriously injured and Papa disappears when the family attempts to cross the Río Grande illegally. Glossing over the details of the physical dangers of crossing the border, the novel instead

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<sup>8</sup> Another important contribution to Chicana literature emerging in the 1980s is “The Cariboo Café” (1985) by Helena María Viramontes. Heightening the reader’s awareness of social injustice in Central America and the ramifications for dislocated migrants, this text is analyzed at length in Chapter Four, as its themes and narrative structure fall more in line with the discussion of textual condemnations of politics based upon personal tragedies than the negotiation of gender and cultural identity resulting from migration.

focuses upon the challenges that Mama, Kata, and baby Pablito face thereafter while enduring the geographic and cultural displacement upon which Papa has insisted. Having left the only home the family has known, Mama must put her worries regarding her missing husband aside and, once she heals, seek economic stability as the sole breadwinner of the family.

Fortuitously, the *coyotes* with whom the family has traveled seek the aid of Doña Anita, a local *curandera*, to heal the narrator's mother once they have arrived in the United States. As Mama recovers, this resourceful and caring character becomes the physical and emotional caretaker of the family. As the primary caregiver, Doña Anita modifies the familial structure and provides an alternative model of motherhood for the narrator. Once Mama has fully recuperated, she must seek employment away from Doña Anita's *ranchito* as the new head of her family. Initially, Kata's mother entrusts the narrator to Doña Anita's care, and mother and daughter must endure temporary separations. Kata, however, will later join her mother in the city to care for her baby brother while Mama works. Fortunately, Doña Anita takes advantage of her mysterious gift, akin to clairvoyance, to arrive in town in order to protect Kata and her family from the physical threat posed by the *coyote*, who has seen gold in the family's possession and knows them to be unprotected—by a man, that is. Despite her efforts, Doña Anita is unable to prevent the implicitly sexual attack on Mama that leaves her “limp as a doll” (63). As the narrative voice describes, “The front of Mama's blouse is ripped apart, as is her skirt. Her legs are bruised with deep patches of purple and red running along the inside. Deep welts along her arms lead to a bruise the size of my fist upon her cheek. Blood trickles from her mouth and onto her neck” (63). This example of physical

victimization as a consequence of crossing the border also carries additional implications for the familial structure.

Once again, Mama finds herself incapacitated; not only is she unable to work due to her hospitalization, she is also incapable of caring for her children. Kata, a young girl who had asked to bring a doll along for the journey across the river, must mature quickly, and consequently the relationship she shares with her mother evolves throughout the novel. “Don’t worry about a thing, Mama. I’m right here and I will take care of you [...]” (117), the narrator reassures her mother. Somewhat surprised, Mama responds, “You sound sure of yourself, my little Kata. How you’ve grown since we left the village. You’re not a little girl anymore” (117). As a result of the circumstances surrounding the frustrated family migration, the narrator must take on new responsibilities that translate into a great deal of individual growth and maturity. In a certain sense, Kata views her new identity in opposition to Mama’s, declaring, “Sometimes I wish [Mama] would grow up and behave like a strong woman, instead of like a little girl who is lost in the woods” (133). Evidently, Mama’s identity has not evolved much after the tragic disappearance of her husband despite having to work outside the home. The new roles forced upon Kata, however, contribute to her maturity and re-definition of her identity, and she “[...] becomes the border-trope of a mutating identity” (162), suggests Sophia Emmanouilidou.

Typical of the *Bildungsroman*, the narration of Kata’s (mis)adventures captures her personal growth as she seemingly progresses toward the attainment of knowledge and the fulfillment of her identity. As a border subject, her experiences further convey the necessarily metamorphosing identity imposed upon her as a result of displacement. In

the article, "Border-Crossings and the Subject in Abeyance in Irene Beltran Hernandez's *Across the Great River*," Emmanouilidou goes so far as to claim that Kata exemplifies a case of "non-identity" (165) before a symbolic birth and/or baptism while crossing the Río Grande into the United States. The critic elaborates, "While waiting on one side of the border, Kata is in an identity-limbo, not knowing where she is going and why she is abandoning her homeland. In Mexico, Kata was a cultural embryo, which was kept well-protected from the outside world. The Mexican home was the womb, but now she experiences a symbolic birth" (165). "Baptized" (165) in the river, Kata will presumably adopt the hybridity of the border-crosser's identity, an identity that will be revised as she negotiates multiple cultures. Nevertheless, despite her presence in a cultural contact zone, I would argue that the negotiation of Kata's new identity has little or nothing to do with cultural or national affiliations. Rather than acting upon a conscientious decision to retain her cultural heritage while in the United States, the young girl remains in a cultural comfort zone of her family's own making, largely unaware of her cultural and psychological displacement.

Despite the journey from one nation to another, the narrator comments, "Sometimes I forget that I'm no longer in Mexico" (58). Once she is in "the land of good opportunity" (13), her experiences in the small American town are not much different from those of her native *pueblito*. Indeed, Doña Anita must explain to her, "You see, the people here are mostly Mexicans, but they are born on this side of the river and that makes them Mexican-Americans. You were born on the other side of the river and that makes you a native Mexican [...]" (58). She continues, "Language has nothing to do with it. There is a government that runs Mexico and there is a different

government that runs the United States’” (58). Perhaps as a result of her youth and naiveté, Kata does not appear to suffer the psychological and emotional turmoil that typically results from the migrant’s geographic dislocation either. She is in the care of a loving individual who protects her from physical dangers while also teaching her about her way of life as a *curandera*. While Emmanouidilou claims that Doña Anita and Kata “[...] represent the hybridity of marginal cultured identities” (167) through their use of Spanish and the manner in which “they mediate a culture distinct from the one professed by the (white) Center” (167), I suggest that, at the very least, Kata’s identity retains its inherent *mexicanidad*.

Although the border is often offered as a trope to reflect the inevitable encounter and potential conflict with the cultural Other(s) and the subsequent negotiation of a hybrid borderlands culture, the young Mexican protagonist of *Across the Great River* further embraces her cultural heritage once she has re-located to the United States. The young girl resorts to her prior experiences in her homeland to interpret and better understand the activities and behaviors she observes in her new location. Constantly drawing comparisons between life in the American town and her Mexican *pueblito*, Kata defines and affirms her own identity through always positioning herself relative to the cultural Other. She ponders the identities and lives of the individuals whom she encounters in her new urban environment, though from afar. “Often we sit on the steps and watch people pass. I study them silently,” she explains. “Is he a farmer? Or does he work in a laundry? How many children does she have? It’s a game I play with myself because I never speak to these people” (50). She wonders about their existences, but isolates herself within her new social context. Furthermore, the protagonist maintains a



link to her homeland as she matures through her protection of physical “tokens of cultural inheritance” (Emmanouilidou 165).

Describing these artifacts in more conflictive terms, Emmanouilidou specifically identifies the doll and pouch that Kata carries with her as “the items of a cultural smuggling” (166). The protagonist herself voices the significance of the latter, commenting, “My hand reaches to the pouch on my waist as if it were the only thing left from my previous life” (88). Retaining these items that originated in Mexico enables Kata to maintain a connection, albeit tenuous, to her *patria*. According to Emmanouilidou, the protagonist consequently embodies an attitude of cultural resistance since these mementos from home symbolize her refusal to totally integrate within American society. Furthermore, Emmanouilidou purports that Kata takes advantage of her cultural awareness to manipulate cultural discourse effectively in order to align herself with the American “us” versus the immigrant “them” while responding to the police sergeant’s questions following the violent attack on her mother. She cites, ““That man probably crossed the border illegally. Perhaps he’s a wetback who doesn’t have papers or identification. We get men like that here all the time’” (80). Unfortunately for her case, though, Emmanouilidou erroneously attributes these comments to the protagonist when, in fact, the sergeant is the one who makes these declarations. Nevertheless, the argument that Kata fails to integrate wholly within American society still holds. Rather than exemplifying effective cultural maneuvering, however, I contend that Kata’s behavior simply stems from the fear that her undocumented status will be discovered by the Anglo authorities, and I suspect that the portrayal of her attachment to

personal items like her doll may be rooted in childhood nostalgia more than cultural resistance *per se*.

Since Doña Anita has explained to her that she entered the country illegally and the ramifications of such, Kata largely remains silent during the questioning, “[her] heart rac[ing] at the sound of the word ‘papers’” (80). Out of fear, she merely expresses her opinion about the attacker’s fate, responding, “‘Well, he deserved to die because he hurt Mama and Anita’” (80). Although she omits the entire truth of her origins by explaining to the sergeant, “‘We just came from Anita’s ranchito’” (79), rather than delving into details about her family’s illegal border crossing that preceded the stay with Doña Anita, this in and of itself does not constitute an act of subversion.

Perhaps the true subversive nature of the protagonist’s behavior lies in the apparent obliteration of traditional cultural norms with respect to gender and generational responsibilities while she is in the United States. Due to the circumstances surrounding her family’s frustrated attempt at migration, Kata embarks upon a journey that reflects what Mary Pat Brady would term “subjectivity-in-process” (52), reflecting her dynamic, rather than fixed or static, identity within newly-imagined familial and cultural contexts. The emergence of such subjectivity as a process of individual growth and maturity is typical fodder for the narrative genre of the *Bildungsroman*. In what superficially appears to be a rather traditional coming-of-age novel, Kata shapes her identity while overcoming a series of trials, particularly with the help of Doña Anita. As we will later see in our discussion of *Trini*, Elizabeth Coonrod Martínez and Annie Eysturoy astutely note the manner in which the heroine’s quest subverts the traditional *Bildungsroman* form, which narrates the coming-of-age of a male protagonist. As opposed to the

“happy” ending of social or cultural integration typical of the male *Bildungsroman*, they argue that the heroine’s journey satisfactorily results in some form of rebellion, particularly against patriarchal norms (Coonrod Martínez 364; Eysturoy 58). Although Kata adapts to her circumstances by adopting roles that conflict with typical generational and gender norms implicit within Mexican culture, her actions do not constitute such a rebellion. Rather, her circular physical journey mirrors the simultaneous return to innocence and her comfortable re-integration within the patriarchal expectations of Mexican society. While one may question, then, whether *Across the Great River* can, indeed, be considered a feminine version of the *Bildungsroman* as described by Coonrod Martínez and Eysturoy, I would suggest that Beltrán Hernández offers her readers yet another permutation of the typical *Bildungsroman*, further capturing the complexity of feminine transnationalism decades before sociological scholars and literary critics turned their attention to the unique experiences of Mexican women impacted by migration.

As previously mentioned, Kata’s journey northward begins in the company of her beloved doll, Anna. At the moment of departure, the second of the aforementioned “tokens of cultural inheritance” (Emmanouilidou 165), the pouch holding what the reader later learns to be a gold nugget, is in her mother’s possession. Coinciding with Mama’s initial injuries sustained during the river-crossing and the consequent responsibilities that Kata adopts, the protagonist discovers the pouch, and takes it upon herself to protect it, despite her ignorance as to its contents. Soon thereafter, when Kata moves from Doña Anita’s *ranchito* to the city, her doll goes missing. Not coincidentally, it is at this point in the narration that she simultaneously parts with her childhood.

Despite the apparent process of maturing, Kata's personal transformation comes to a screeching halt once Mama recuperates from her second round of injuries and is ready to join her family at Doña Anita's ranch. Although Kata has behaved as an independent young girl, even when she is in the care of an American nurse and doctor in the city's orphanage during her mother's recovery period, she exhibits an emotional regression as soon as she returns to Doña Anita, apparently aware that she no longer bears the burden of familial responsibility. Content to be free of the pouch and its implications of duty, Kata explains, "Anyway, I'm glad that I do not have to wear that old thing any longer. It scratches me'" (124). In a more emotional outburst, her stolid countenance breaks, and Kata wails, "I really want to go home. I've even lost my Anna and I don't now [*sic*] where' [...]" (123). At that moment, Doña Anita returns her doll, and as the protagonist describes, "I scream as I reach her and I crush her to my chest, then hold her at a distance to examine her dress, which is wrinkled but not torn. 'Anna, you're home, too'" (123). Whereas Kata's mother had previously complimented this young woman on her maturity, circumstances have changed, and she now states, "Ah, Kata. What a child you are" (121). In response to this assertion, Kata complains, "Yesterday you called me all grown up. Today I am a child again. I think you older people are the ones that are all mixed up!" (121). Perhaps this complaint is right on target for capturing Kata's personal evolution of emotional maturity and subsequent regression throughout the novel. As the novel nears its resolution and Mama and her children return to Mexico, even the border guard identifies Kata's juvenile attachment to her doll. "It's all right, little girl. You don't have to part with your doll. Just run along with the señora'" (132),

he assures her, in no way sensing the tremendous responsibility and maelstrom of emotions she has endured while north of the border.

As a result of her youth, or more likely, the limited duration of her stay in the U.S. before returning to Mexico and the similar demographic make-up of both towns, Kata expresses a feeling of discomfort within, but not a confrontational exclusion from, American culture. Prior to the return to her family's homeland, Kata remarks, "I will miss the Doctor as I miss the gift of quietness that Anita's place offers. But for me, our little village in Mexico will always be home, no matter where I go or whom I meet" (120). She will re-integrate within Mexican society and culture as a young girl with this knowledge that she has attained during her experiences north of the border. Her mother echoes this sentiment, explaining to Doña Anita, "'It's just that we are so unfamiliar with the American ways and customs. In Mexico, our village life was so simple and happier'" (123). They eagerly anticipate their return to this comfortable and familiar lifestyle as they embark upon their journey southward.

The homeward trek begins in the urban American environment, passes through Doña Anita's ranch, and concludes in rural Mexico, where the family reunites with Papa, lost during his attempt to cross the river with the family and later incarcerated in a Mexican jail for unexplained reasons. Unbeknownst to Papa, thanks to Doña Anita's previous healing of his daughter, "The Commandante [*sic*] did not ask questions, but simply ordered my release and drove me out here himself" (134), Papa explains. In addition to the image of a simple and happy Mexican life that Mama describes, the family's reunification lends itself to an interpretation of a return to an idyllic existence. Such images are reminiscent of the renderings of the Chicano homeland of Aztlán as a

beacon of social justice and happiness. Not coincidentally, this village is also the origin of the shining gold nugget that ultimately results in the family's redemption.

Representative of the value of their homeland, the gold protected in the pouch serves as the family's only means of survival after risking and losing nearly all during its migration. Further emphasizing the plenitude that Mexico offers—as opposed to the violence and limited opportunities to the north—Papa is amused by the abundance of gold and the implications of such for his family once he recognizes its true worth. He tells Doña Anita, “But, señora. There are many more of those stones in that boulder. All I need to do is pick them!” (135), thereby assuring his family's well-being. Perhaps the re-characterization of a presumably barren rural Mexican area whose limited opportunities initially forced Kata's family northward as a natural supplier of immense material and cultural riches suggests a relocation of Aztlán to the south of the U.S.-Mexico border, according to Emmanouilidou.

The concept of Aztlán and its connotations of liberation and recuperation served as part of the nationalist agenda of the Chicano Movement in the late 1960s. Aside from developing a mythic symbology to affirm Chicano nationalism, discourse utilizing Aztlán contributed to solidarity within the Chicano community. Furthermore, the proclamation of the Chicano homeland of Aztlán resisted the dominant ideology by recuperating Chicanos' erased past and re-imposing their history, a history that had been strategically erased by hegemonic forces. Upon proclaiming the recuperation of their lost land, Chicanos similarly reclaimed their culture, identity, and voice. Since the late 1960s and early 1970s, the representation of Aztlán in the discursive space has evolved to reflect changing circumstances, yet always retains the notion of the importance of cultural

memory. In the case of *Across the Great River*, Emmanouilidou suggests a relocation of Aztlán to Mexico, rather than in the American Southwest, which functions to shatter further the illusions of the American Dream. Regardless of whether one interprets Mexico's plentitude—in this case exemplified by the *pueblo*'s ample gold nuggets—or cultural comfort as a metaphorical Aztlán, there remains no doubt that the novel portrays the migratory experience in a negative light. Interestingly, this novel—written by a Chicana—essentially glorifies Mexican culture while condemning the pain of migration.

Although cultural conflict between the Mexican and Anglo populations is less evident in this novel than in, say, Daniel Venegas's much earlier *Las aventuras de Don Chipote o cuando los pericos mamen* (1928), the migrant experience of disillusionment is one and the same. After consideration of the family's suffering as a result of its dislocation, Doña Anita chastises and admonishes Papa. "Señor [...] you should stop all that foolish dreaming and provide for your family. They have been through much pain and heart-ache, which will take many years to forget'" (134), she remarks after witnessing this heartache first-hand. His delusions of a better life north of the border result in the entire family's migration, which separates the family and ultimately empowers the female characters to varying degrees. Not only does Papa demand that the family oblige when he dreams of riches in the United States, he fails to support and care for his family once he disappears for what seems to be a matter of months. In one sense, the narrative voice vilifies Papa, though to a lesser degree than other principal male characters in the novel. In particular, the narrator characterizes the tattooed coyote as an evil perpetrator of violence against women and as a greedy manipulator of the victims of the socioeconomic phenomenon of transnational migration. In the end, though, justice is

served as this villain dies at the hands of a vengeful mob after his attack on Mama becomes public; beyond this, Papa apparently sees the errors of his ways. In the next novel analyzed herein, the resolution does not involve a restored harmonious relationship among genders nor the same degree of social justice. Rather, *Trini* (1986) explores the more extensively elaborated identity development of the titular character during her physical and spiritual journey and emphasizes the multiple oppressive socioeconomic conditions faced by women of color.

### ***Trini* (1986): One Mother's Journey**

Since its publication, Estela Portillo Trambley's *Trini* has received far more critical attention than the work of Irene Beltrán Hernández. Despite inscribing a *mestiza* migrant woman's experience within the body of migrant literature, the reception of this novel has not always been particularly laudatory among Chicana critics. Nevertheless, it may certainly be considered an antecedent to the later condemnations of the social injustices perpetrated against migrant populations. As such, *Trini* is rather revolutionary in its subversion of form, its documentation of the protagonist's experiences of independence and sexuality, and its characterization of genders. Furthermore, the novel introduces the thematics of a transnational mother's sacrifices for her family and its implications for the other family members, a recurring theme in the more recently published works analyzed within the next chapters.

Narrating the protagonist's multiple journeys beginning as a child in the Bachotigori valley of Mexico and ultimately ending with her migration to Valverde,



Texas, nearly three decades later, *Trini* exemplifies what Annie O. Eysturoy terms a “Chicana [q]uest [m]yth” (57). Essentially following the template of journey of the hero as outlined by Joseph Campbell, the text captures the protagonist’s development during her mythic journey in a narrative form that parallels the typical *Bildungsroman*. However, as Eysturoy notes, “*Trini* illustrates how the happy denouement of the traditional male *Bildungsroman* carries quite different consequences when it comes to the female quest for self. Being a Chicana *Bildungsroman* it reveals, furthermore, the additional hardships social and cultural circumstances present in the protagonist’s *Bildungs* process” (58). Indeed, after Trini’s mother dies and her family must migrate as a result of the closure of the mine that employed her father, he develops an illness, and the teen-aged protagonist must assist the family financially as the oldest child. Early on during her travels, Trini is kidnapped and raped, and her childhood Tarahumara friend and mentor, Sabochi, avenges the wrongdoing against her before returning to his tribe, of which he will later become the head. After Trini’s baby dies, she moves to the urban environment of Chihuahua in search of employment, and there she reunites with her future husband, Tonio. Again pregnant, Trini now endures the comings-and-goings of her wayward husband and lives with a female friend and her children in an apartment in the city in order to continue to support her family once Tonio has left her indefinitely. Eventually Tonio returns and relocates Trini and their daughter to the border city of Juárez before he departs once again to seek the economic stability that only work across the U.S.-Mexico border provides. After his departure, which is essentially equivalent to physical and emotional abandonment since his return trips are so sporadic, Trini must seek the means to survive financially, much like the mother in *Across the Great River*.

She determines that the sole means to escape the poverty resulting from her socio-economic dependency on Tonio is to cross the border before the birth of her second child to provide her family with the chance of pursuing the American Dream. Only in Texas is she able to acquire her own land, where she finally plants seeds she has carried with her from her homeland, and provide for her children.

While this brief synopsis may characterize the titular character as exemplary of the figure of the self-sacrificing and victimized yet strong woman who independently searches for a better life for her family, the fictional biography of this *mestiza* woman and mother also reveals the manner in which she creates her own subjectivity and power, often by defying the societal norms for a woman's behavior. One such strategy is to embrace and act upon her sexuality outside of her monogamous relationship, thereby resisting the patriarchal traditions imposed upon her. Elizabeth Coonrod Martínez has commented at length upon this topic, describing the manner in which sexual initiative corresponds to subjectivity ("Crossing" 132). Already mother to one of Tonio's children, Trini decides to pursue Sabochi, temporarily leaving the city and her daughter to return to the mountains in search of some sort of personal and sexual fulfillment or gratification. In a sense, Trini returns to her indigenous roots in seeking out the company of her long-time companion from her childhood and the erstwhile defender of her honor. Sabochi is married with children and yet he and Trini remain in the cabin in the area where he finds food for his tribe away from his village until the snow melts and he returns home. This is the first and only extended sexual encounter between the friends who, until this point, had shared a relationship more akin to that of a father or mentor and daughter. As a result of their tryst, Trini becomes pregnant, and after some consideration, decides she must

migrate north of the border so that her child with Sabochi is born an American citizen. Only with the opportunities that accompany U.S. citizenship does Trini have any hopes of providing for her family, particularly since her husband's whereabouts are unknown.

Perhaps her reliance on the citizenship of this love-child for her personal and familial betterment is what prompts Cherríe Moraga to view this novel with such a critical eye. In a harsh review of the text, Moraga comments, "*Trini* sends us whirling backwards where the Mexican woman's suffering and sexuality is only justified through the male fruit of her labor. In short, *Trini* romanticizes heterosexuality with the indigenous serving as no more than a motif, adding *sabor* to the story" (162). What is more, Moraga observes, "*Trini* does depict a brown woman confronting the very real hardships in the life of *una indocumentada* (such as rape, single motherhood, poverty, etc.) but the events of her life are shaped and understood through male-imposed definitions" (157). Consequently, Moraga declares that the so-called subject of the novel is, paradoxically, nothing but an object—the product of a romanticized objectification of a Mexican and indigenous woman. Moraga's characterization of Trini as an object *sans* subjectivity, however, lacks substantial textual evidence. Not only does this protagonist exhibit the ability to find a degree of control within a patriarchal system that inherently renders her dependent upon her husband financially and otherwise, she does so even after suffering a lifetime of displacements and challenges.

One of the more obvious displays of Trini's control is that of her own sexuality, the manipulation of which is typically restricted to males. In *Trini*, as in the other stories and novels Coonrod Martínez discusses within "Crossing Gender Borders: Sexual Relations and Chicana Artistic Identity," "[...] the Chicana characters have had to claim

a sexuality or sexual gratification traditionally denied them and considered whorish, lacking in dignity and self-control, while remaining true to their heritage and continuing to establish a Chicana identity. Thus, they rewrite the roles of gender within their culture” (132-33). Furthermore, Trini does so within a broader social context whose demand for women’s submission and dependency on men essentially negates any attempts to establish an independent feminine identity. As Eysturoy describes, “Trini encounters a world defined by patriarchal prerogatives inimical to female independence, a fundamental discrepancy between social demands and her own search for selfhood [...]” (79). And yet, Trini manages to discover her authentic self, escaping the “process of entrapment that is assured by two tiers of oppression—the economic and the psychological dependency on the oppressor” (Eysturoy 82), once she recognizes and then rejects this dependency. The protagonist takes the initial step toward a more independent and fulfilling life, conceiving of the possibilities for her future. Despite her sorrow in saying goodbye to her lover, the narrative voice asserts, “I have to be much more myself, more than just a woman in love” (171). Trini returns to Morentín to her daughter and a number of demanding letters from Tonio, letters claiming that he has changed his womanizing ways, and begging to see his daughter and marry Trini. Nevertheless, “[Trini] was somehow encapsuled in a fierce pride. It’s all up to me, my life, without Sabochi, without Tonio. Just Linda and me” (174). After all, Trini objects to his written requests, declaring instead, “There’s more to life than a man!” (175). Despite her initial resentment and anger, she opens the most recent letter to find a money order to meet him at the bus station in Juárez, and imagines the security of a home and family, particularly now that there would be two children. Ironically, in what seems to be a heightened

dependency on her husband, Trini develops a greater degree of independence, particularly once Tonio departs again soon thereafter—this time for California as a *bracero*. Now in Juárez, Trini's mere proximity to the border affords her additional opportunities for securing a better future for herself and her family.

Once the buses with her husband and the other departing *braceros* disappear, Trini recognizes, "It was time for her to journey again, to search, to find, to plan" (182). She would have to leave her daughter once more to risk the journey across the U.S.-Mexico border as an undocumented immigrant in order to provide for her family. The emotional toll of her border crossing eclipses the physical risks, as Trini copes with the notion of separation from her daughter. Due to her lack of options, she feels compelled to leave her child in the care of Elia. Consequently, "An old guilt rose. She had to leave Linda, her older child, once more to work in El Paso. When you're poor, she thought, all is given up, even your children. I mustn't be bitter. Someday..." (182), she continues and then the incomplete thought trails off, suggesting her dream that someday she will have the socioeconomic means to reunite the family. After all, "It's the thing to do—leave our children for the daily bread God does not put into our mouths" (182), Elia adds to comfort Trini, whose primary desire is to save money to purchase land where she may establish her family's home. Her guilt stemming from the imminent separation is tempered by this dream. "This time, Linda, she promised, this time will be the last time I shall leave you behind. I will find land, and there we'll stay. The dream stifled her guilt" (206), and enabled her to focus on the future, rather than on the dangers and suffering ahead.

Although, unlike the narrator's mother in *Across the Great River*, Trini does not fall victim to physical violence during her crossings nor afterward, the narrative voice suggests the protagonist's preoccupation with her unborn baby's health as a result of the physical demands of her perilous journey. Moreover, as an undocumented immigrant and a woman, Trini must heed the warnings of her *coyote*, La Chaparra, and El Topo, who identify the existence of "[s]ome of the girls sitting around that look like us [that] [...] work for la migra" (185), and also explain that "'Julio with the pink hands is a pimp'" (185). Well aware of the dangers that she may encounter on the other side of the border, Trini would soon find live-in domestic work "in a strange world" (187). Despite the major changes, "Pale and puzzled, she adapted awkwardly to the automatic order of her new world" (188), tending to household chores and caring for "[t]he gringa's children" (188). Yet she endures loneliness, and "[...] thought of Linda too often" (188). As a transnational mother, Trini suffers the pain and guilt of being away from her child, particularly as she provides care for other racially and economically-privileged children. She understands, however, that this separation and her later return across the border for the birth of her second child (after la patrona notices Trini's expanding belly and coerces her to cross back into Mexico) will ultimately allow her to fulfill her dreams of a unified and economically stable and landed family.

Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo and Ernestine Avila provide an insightful sociological discussion of the phenomenon of the migrant mother leaving her child(ren) behind to care for Anglo children in the United States, particularly within the sections "Who Is Taking Care of the Nanny's Children?" (400-03) and "Bonding with the Employers' Kids and Critiques of 'Americana' Mothers" (406-09) in their article, "'I'm Here, but I'm There':

The Meanings of Latina Transnational Motherhood.” In the type of arrangement discussed, Latina immigrant women work and reside in the United States while their children remain in their countries of origin in the care of “other mothers” (400), primarily the migrants’ own mothers, sisters, *comadres*, or other female relatives. This type of collectivist approach to mothering is well established in Latin American culture, according to Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila (400). In their comparison of resident immigrant Mexican women and native-born Chicana women, however, disparate opinions arise with respect to the compatibility of employment and motherhood. Positing differing views regarding the division of social life into public and private spheres as the principal factor that accounts for the discrepancy, Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila point to Mexicanas’ collapsing of economic and domestic lives. Because these women migrated to the United States in order to improve the socioeconomic circumstances of their families, they argue, the Mexicana mothers more strongly identify the economic component of motherhood (382). Therefore, they do not express the ambivalence toward working and caring for the children that the Chicanas in their study do. One may identify the emphasis that Trini places on this economic element of motherhood in her justification for migrating northward on her own.

One may question how this notion of maternal support in the form of economic stability comes to warrant the familial separation, particularly in a culture that “emphasizes a strong allegiance to an idealized form of motherhood and a patriarchal ideology that frowns on working wives and mothers [...]” (Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 371-72). And yet, perhaps the sacrificial spatial separation is concordant with “the image of *la madre* as self-sacrificing and holy” (375), the very image against which Chicanas

and Mexicanas often compare themselves (375-76). In his innovative article, “Coatlícue on the Loose: Encompassing the Dualities in Anzaldúa, Portillo Trambley, and Cisneros,” Michael Harden examines the series of maternal figures to which Trini is exposed throughout her life, and concludes, “Estela Portillo Trambley, in *Trini*, provides us a type of Coatlicue: a new mother, one of unification, conglomeration, and accommodation, a mother who has space enough to encompass the duality and fragmentation which the culture propagates in its archetypes” (83). Her maternal identity, therefore, is an integration of the many facets and images of motherhood she has encountered.

These diverse images reflect a synthesis of sorts of both Christian and indigenous iconography. The most obvious employment of Christian symbology is the presence of the figure of *la Virgen*, the vision of whom miraculously leads Trini north across the border (again) to a church, where she gives birth to her son, near the end of the novel. The protagonist had previously juxtaposed her own identity with that of her Tía Pancha, an “austere virgin of thirty-three” (33). As opposed to the pious aunt, who brings to mind a Christ-like or virginal character and attempts to pass her values and practices on to her niece, Trini later declares to Tonio, “I am Tonantzín” (75).<sup>9</sup> Trini later encounters an example of the opposite side of the spectrum in her friend and roommate, Licha. Exemplifying the more seductive and liberated of the virgin/whore dichotomy, Licha projects her confidence as a desirable and desired woman. In addition to her own mother,

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<sup>9</sup> Tonantzín (or Tonantzin) is the Aztec mother goddess. Some historians and critics argue that, in an example of cultural syncretism, the Spaniards adapted her image in the formation of the Catholic Virgin of Guadalupe in an effort to convert the Aztec people to Christianity during the Conquest more effectively.



who dies prematurely during childbirth in front of a thirteen-year-old Trini, Harden also notes the significance of Trini's interactions with Perla, a mysterious and witch-like figure whom Harden associates with the figure of the *femme fatale* and Aztec mythology (93). With the appearance of "[...] the Aztec women of Guadalajara that Trini had seen in magazines" (192), Trini perceives Perla as "[a] high priestess from an Indian village unspoiled by white men" (200), despite becoming a prostitute after migrating to the city of Juárez (200). In Perla's presence, "[Trini] felt twelve again" (193), at the age of twenty-one. Harden comments, therefore, that the emotional regression to an age preceding her mother's death implies that Perla replaces Matilda as a mother to Trini.

Perhaps most innovative, though, is Harden's identification of Trini's male lover Sabochi as an indigenous maternal figure for the protagonist. "As mother, [Sabochi] has provided the native and natural identities for Trini which will serve to balance the mestiza and urban which she already has or will acquire later" (91), Harden asserts. The interpretation of Sabochi's cross-gendered identity merits further attention, and will be discussed later. Of utmost importance for the present discussion is the integration of this indigenous element in Trini's identity, and the association of the protagonist with a revised and contemporary version of the Aztec earth goddess that simultaneously represents creation and destruction. Indeed, Harden comments, "[Trini], as a modern Coatlicue, like the demythified/remythified la Malinche, offers the elements for a new model, a model without the negative consequences of binary identification. Coatlicue provides the spaces in which to create selves, to integrate dualities, to exist as independent women, and to exist as independent human beings" (96). This is the very fusion of dualities and identities that Gloria Anzaldúa embraces in "*La herencia de*

*Coatlicue/The Coatlicue State*” (63-73). Like Coatlicue, the Chicana *mestiza* is an amalgam of contradictions that defy binary categorization. Anzaldúa explains, “*Coatlicue da luz a todo y a todo devora. Ella es el monstruo que se tragó a todos los seres vivientes y los Astros, es el monstruo que se traga al sol cada tarde y le da luz cada mañana*” (46). As such, Anzaldúa continues, “Simultaneously, depending on the person, [Coatlicue] represents: duality in life, a synthesis of duality, and a third perspective—something more than mere duality or a synthesis of duality” (46). As a half-Tarahumara transnational mother, Trini exemplifies such a synthesis through her experiences as a *mestiza* woman in an Anglo environment, necessarily adapting her rural background to various urban settings in Mexico and the United States, and confronting her complex identification as child, lover, wife, and mother. Furthermore, she embodies the seeming contradiction of the mother that leaves her child(ren)—the very means by which she becomes “mother”—behind in order to provide for them. What is more, Trini not only defies the cultural norms of that which is expected of mothers by doing so, but combats patriarchal ideals by independently pursuing economic stability instead of leaving her family’s well-being in the hands of her unreliable husband.

Considered in this light, one may posit that the imagining of Trini as a modern Coatlicue is one means by which, “Narratively, a transformation takes place at the level of cultural iconography” (Pérez-Torres 78). Maria Antònia Oliver-Rotger notes the significance of such a transformation within the texts of various Chicana authors, who “[...] evoke rebellious female figures who go beyond the limits of ‘female decorum’ and the national imaginary in spite of socio-cultural pressures” (377), by relating their characters to female archetypes like Medea, la Llorona, la Malinche, or, I would suggest,

Coatlicue. Moreover, in re-writing the tales of such figures, Chicana authors re-appropriate their voice to contest the hegemonic envisioning of these women and their role(s) within History. Consequently, in reconstructing history from a feminine perspective, Chicana writers subvert the traditional conceptualization of myths and legends. Particularly in *Trini*, the protagonist as a modern Coatlicue integrates a multitude of elements that constitute her identity (or identities?) and the control that she manages to exercise in her life ultimately serves to interrogate traditional notions of gender.

Beyond merely questioning customary ideas regarding gender-based roles and responsibilities, the novel as a whole offers a strong critique of the figure of the Mexican man. One identifies such criticism embedded in the work's portrayal of physical and sexual violence against women, the societal norms condoning such, and the more specific negative characterization of Tonio. Nonetheless, in developing the male characters more profoundly than in other texts, *Trini* stands apart from others that may criticize Mexican standards of masculinity through two-dimensional characters. Critic Aishih Wehbe Herrera asserts that the novel, "[...] reels off cultural traditions that coalesce in Chicanos' identity (Mexican, indigenous, and American) and, above all, it shows positive masculine characters that foster women's self-development rather than arresting it, playing a positive role in the protagonist's life, and offering alternative models of manhood to traditionally patriarchal images" (136-37). The critic views Tonio's counterpart, Sabochi, as such an alternative model of masculinity.

As opposed to the hedonistic and womanizing *macho* Tonio, Sabochi represents Trini's spiritual link to her heritage, and as such, demonstrates the positive characteristics

that Wehbe Herrera observes. Whereas Tonio exclaims early on in the novel that, for a good time, “I need girls, music, beer!” (29), Sabochi exemplifies a sensitive man with a wise soul, according to Wehbe Herrera. As a Tarahumara Indian, his perspective regarding mankind’s relationship with nature helps to ground Trini within her culture and to position herself more comfortably within the universe at large. Positing Sabochi as Tonio’s antithesis, however, is certainly a stretch. Although he may encourage Trini’s connection to her geographical and cultural heritage, he—like Tonio—is guilty of extra-marital affairs without much indication of remorse for his actions. Consequently, I fail to see the basis for the positive characterization of his “alternative” masculinity when such is exemplified by essentially the same behaviors exhibited by Tonio. Further, the notion that Sabochi truly advances Trini’s process of identity formation is questionable at best, except in that his departure (like Tonio’s) essentially robs Trini of an opportunity to be entirely dependent on him, and, by default, forces her into taking action toward becoming an independent woman.

Thus, after bidding farewell to Sabochi after their extended encounter in the mountains, Trini takes matters into her own hands on multiple occasions, seeking a better life for herself and her children, and fulfilling her role of preserving the family unit. For, “It was up to her to find a way of bringing her family together” (220). She challenges the expectation that she remain a poor and relatively powerless *mestiza* Mexican woman in Mexico, a country with limited opportunities for her socioeconomic mobility, and takes the reins of her own destiny by migrating to the United States not just once, but twice. After Trini settles into life as a domestic employee in the United States, her employer notices her ever-expanding belly during her pregnancy with Sabochi’s son, and ushers

Trini back across the border to Mexico. Knowing that giving birth to her son in the United States will allow her dreams for him to come to fruition, the protagonist endures the arduous trek back to the United States once her labor pains begin. ““Why not [...]?” she asks, continuing her reverie, ““My baby born an American citizen. I will work, buy land, and when Tonio comes back, he will be so proud of me”” (203). Despite her independence and drive to better her circumstances, it seems that her motivation still ultimately lies in pleasing Tonio.

When he finally returns after what seems to be a number of years, Tonio initially appears to applaud Trini’s “self-actualization as a Mexican immigrant woman” (Ledesma 86), and the establishment of their family’s home in Valverde, Texas, rather than being indignant and envious of her independent success when he has been unable to provide for his family. After his return from California, “The good fortune of land, of Trini’s sufficiency, had kindled like a fire in his eyes. ‘Querida, you did all this yourself?’” (238), he asks repeatedly in awe and with gratitude. “Then one day he stopped. And then there was no more Tonio to spread her long hair on the pillow with soft fingers, to spin soft tones full of plans and desires” (238). His love affairs begin anew and, perhaps as a means to exact revenge, Trini reveals to her youngest child, Rico, the true identity of his father, “Sabochi, [...] the ahua of Cusihuiriachí” (245). Coonrod Martínez identifies this revelation as but one example of the control that Trini does indeed exercise: “The husband she has is a louse, and the man she loved passionately cannot be hers, but her life is one that, despite the hardships of poverty, pain, and struggle, she makes her own, whether striving to own her own land, initiate sex with Sabochi, or, in the end, reveal to

her son that his father is not Tonio. The woman protagonist is always in control of her heart and soul, and her path” (“Crossing” 136-37).

In spite of the comings-and-goings of her wayward husband, this path has led Trini and her children to remain in their new home in the United States, reflecting “the characteristic embracing of settlement in the U.S. and the corresponding reluctance to dream of a return to Mexico” (275-76), which Monika Kaup identifies in Chicana narratives of individual migration by women. As opposed to *Across the Great River*’s juvenile protagonist, who cannot easily differentiate between the two sides of the border, Trini has a greater awareness of the cultural conflict present within the Borderlands, yet chooses to establish her new home in a foreign land that is less than welcoming to its neighbors to the south. El Topo, in particular, explains to her the manner in which U.S. residents typically view all Mexican immigrants—documented and undocumented—as homogeneous, identifying the linguistic labels that distinguish between “us” and “them.” “We’re all the same,” he tells Trini. “They call us taco, spic, greaser, mojado; we’re nothing to them [...]. They think we’re mules” (184). Trini herself distinguishes between the experiences of her family and those of the Anglo world, which, “[...] crowded in—television, houses sprouting to the edge of her property, the children’s chatter in English, a war in a place called Korea, books, magazines with the American rich splashed in bright colors on every page. The dream was for the gringos, not for Mexicans. All these things were intrusions, confusions in her life. Her old, tried beliefs and customs had fallen into insensibility” (237-38). As a Mexican woman raising a bicultural family in the United States, Trini endures alienation and isolation on various fronts. Not only does she contend with the daily trials of being a Mexican immigrant in a

foreign country and culture, she fails to find total comfort and solidarity within the intimate confines of her familial circle. Hence, Trini must negotiate a new cultural identity, one that re-shapes her now culturally-irrelevant beliefs and customs so that they are more compatible with the American context in which she and her children find themselves at the end of the novel.

While still retaining some elements of her *mexicanidad*, the protagonist certainly transcends customary notions of gender roles and identity, and both this work and *Across the Great River*, demonstrate the manner in which immigration affords Mexican migrant women an opportunity to re-define and revolutionize typical gender norms, thereby acquiring more personal agency and combating patriarchal ideas. More specifically, Alberto Ledesma comments, “These narratives do not primarily explore questions of class, ethnic identity, racism, or nationalism, but rather the social mechanics of gender stratification as they pertain to the experience of Mexican immigrants who come to the United States. As such, these narratives offer invaluable portraits of the kinds of realities that Mexican immigrant women and men face in their struggle to survive in the United States” (87). Moreover, within this context of gender stratification, the reader comes to recognize these examples of Chicana narrative as individual stories of personal and cultural identity transformation, particularly in the manner in which the protagonists evolve as a result, or in defiance, of the socioeconomic circumstances imposed upon them. As previously mentioned, this evolution parallels that of the male character in a typical *Bildungsroman*, but with significant divergences from the masculine paradigm.

Above all else, the coming-of-age tale of a female protagonist typically offers a degree of critique for the mechanisms of a patriarchal social structure, particularly

noticeable within the texts' conclusion. As Coonrod Martínez explains, “La diferencia entre el *bildungsroman* masculino y el femenino es que mientras el niño madura y se integra a su sociedad como hombre decidido, la niña hecha mujer termina no integrándose a su sociedad, sino alejándose, o teniendo que cometer actos de rebelión. Sólo con esa rebelión puede la mujer inculcarse a su sociedad, y [é]ste es el ejemplo de Trini” (“La historia” 364). As opposed to the juvenile protagonist of *Across the Great River*, who ultimately integrates back into Mexican patriarchal culture comfortably, Trini’s independence as a migrant woman who provides for her family in the United States is certainly exemplary of social rebellion and subversion of the traditional *Bildungsroman*. As such, the novel fits well within the body of feminist Chicana literature that contests masculine renderings of identity formation and extends the portrayal of female characters to capture the diversity and complexity of the female experience. Furthermore, the novel itself paints a portrait of an indocumented Mexican immigrant woman whose story—like those of countless others—has been omitted from History, even within the extant body of migrant literature. This inscription of an individual’s cultural heritage and migratory experience essentially extends to the collectivity she represents, which is a principal reason that the publication of these early texts, *Across the Great River* and *Trini*, is so significant.

### **Chicana Collectivity, Counter-Discourse, and Cultural Resistance**

During the 1980s, the decade in which Beltrán Hernández and Portillo Trambley published the novels discussed herein, the representations of Chicana women and their



experience(s) began to flourish to encompass the previously-disregarded variation within the collectivity. In articulating unique experiences as Chicana women through their characters, and in the case of these novels—*Mexicana* protagonists—these authors contributed to the resonant voices that were crying out to be heard. After all, “Because theirs was a subjugated or subordinated discourse, excluded from both mainstream and minority discourse, [early Chicana writers] were trying to ‘inscribe’ themselves in a collective and historical process that had discounted and silenced them” (Rebolledo 97). In doing so, though, Rebolledo notes the difficulty that they have faced in balancing individual versus collective representation and the consequent integration of the two. “It seems to me that with every individual representation, with every individual voice, we see the collective that formed it, the collective that shaped it and whose roots permeate its very heart. Thus one woman can sing, but she is always conscious of her echoes, the reverberations that play off the multiple voices. As they have nurtured and named themselves individually, so they have inscribed themselves into the collectivity” (Rebolledo 208). Collectively, they present works of cultural resistance that interrogate both patriarchal ideas and the traditions of Chicano culture. Consequently, these writers combat a triple oppression composed of race, class, and gender, while offering a counter-discourse that challenges masculine depictions and omissions of the representation of women within earlier migrant literature.

Beltrán Hernández and Portillo Trambley themselves seem to be engaged in a manipulation of discourse that results in an implicit alliance with Mexican women. This stands in stark contrast to the texts of earlier *nuevomexicana* writers; Cleofas Jaramillo, Nina Otero Warren and Fabiola Cabeza de Baca immediately come to mind as early

Hispana writers in New Mexico who explicitly identified themselves as “Spanish,” and not “Mexican.” Despite evoking a fantasy heritage of harmony among the Anglo, Indian, and Hispano/Mexicano populations of the Southwest, these writers distance themselves from the Mexican newcomers, instead inscribing the history and traditions of their Spanish-descended Hispano ancestry. This is not to diminish their contribution to literary history. Indeed, their subversion of official history resulting from the depiction of their heritage’s survival in the face of the threat of Americanization, and the inscription of women within History carries over to the novels by Beltrán Hernández and Portillo Trambley. In particular, *Across the Great River* and *Trini* recuperate the voices of women affected by migration and the consequent evolution of their roles and identity while drawing attention to mechanisms of structural violence against women.

The authors of these texts thus exemplify resistance through authorship, shedding light on that which has been erased by writers of official discourse and transmitting experiences of Mexican migrant women. Daniuska González González elaborates upon the manner in which such fiction has the capacity to fill in the gaps within History, describing, “El discurrir de la ‘historia en cursivas’ (por su ficcionalidad), registra también la recuperación de ciertos vacíos en la memoria oficial. Los senderos que se desvían del camino establecido como verdad, articulan varios puntos de vista, y al no edificarse la historia desde la óptica hegemónica, permite completar los paréntesis de ausencias que han provocado esos anales académicos” (109). In the case of *Across the Great River* and *Trini*, these divergent textual paths not only complement the hegemonic or dominant vision of cultural memory, but also contribute to the body of fiction that transcends borders and develops alliances with Mexican border-crossers, thereby

embracing Sonia Saldívar-Hull's border feminism discussed in detail in my introductory chapter. Moreover, these two texts demonstrate the "gendered migration" that Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo suggests, reflecting the uniqueness of women's experiences of migration, and in so doing, extending the body of migrant literature.

This feminine perspective of the migratory experience is but one novel facet of the Chicana experience that writers began to narrate in the 1980s. As Chabram Dernessesian notes, "Chicana cultural producers of the 1970s and early 1980s crossed the seemingly impenetrable borders of Chicano subjectivity. They transformed the language of self-representation, visualized new ethnic configurations and subject positions, and paved the way for contemporary Chicanas to explore other dimensions of the Chicana experience" (52). Although Beltrán Hernández and Portillo Trambley did not themselves experience a physical border crossing to pursue the American Dream, they recognize their cultural ties to Mexico and the experiences of their ancestors and *compatriotas*, regardless of geo-political boundaries. In particular, *Trini* is perhaps the first Chicana novel that narratively introduces the figure of a transnational mother, a figure whose presence has become more common in recent years. Not only do the individual crossings entail certain costs, particularly to the women and children left behind and/or experiencing transnational motherhood, but they also inevitably necessitate a reconstruction of migrants' social and cultural identities. Nonetheless, some critics maintain that these early Chicana novels delve into such sacrifices on a superficial level. Twenty years later, Reyna Grande and Ann Jaramillo offer a much more profound look at the gendered social, economic, physical and emotional consequences of migration and

familial separation in their novels, *Across a Hundred Mountains* and *La línea*, to which we will now turn our attention.

### Chapter Three

#### Left Behind and Moving Forward (and Northward)<sup>10</sup>

Amid what some critics have labeled the “third major wave of global migration” (Dreby 4), the 21<sup>st</sup>-century public is certainly attuned to the presence and obvious repercussions of international immigration. A maelstrom of emotional rhetoric presently swirls around the debate of migrants’ legal statuses and rights in light of newly proposed legislation, and we have witnessed a veritable explosion of journalistic writing and documentaries that reveal previously untold stories of the actors at the center of the political debates. In the face of the current legal climate regarding immigration, along with statistics indicating that approximately 20% of children in American urban areas are immigrants themselves or children of immigrant parents, mostly of Asian or Hispanic origin (Artico 2), borderlands historians are beginning to take note of the more personal impact of the largely political and socioeconomic phenomenon of global movement, namely its effects on the family. As Yolanda Chávez Leyva notes, “Writing children into history transforms the way we look at the U.S.-Mexico border as well as Mexican American history. At the most basic level, it allows us to understand the day-to-day lives of the majority of the Mexican population on the border. But centering children’s experiences and representations does more” (72), she declares, elaborating, “It also

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<sup>10</sup> It is important to note that the concept of “moving forward” in this case is not a reflection of social progress on the national level, as in, for example, the dichotomy of an archaic or “backwards” Mexico versus the modern and progressive United States. Rather, this idea is meant to capture the psychological healing and measures taken to improve personal socioeconomic conditions on the part of the women and children left behind by migrants.

enables us to realize more clearly the obstacles faced by the Mexican community and the strategies employed by adults and children to assert agency. Writing children into border history provides a glimpse into the creation of the contemporary border” (72). U.S.-based authors of fiction have similarly moved children of Mexican migration to center stage, as it were, in recently produced border narratives and films, capturing the subjectivity and voice of those seemingly forgotten individuals who endure profound socioeconomic, physical, and emotional consequences as a result of transnational migration. Like the directors of *La misma luna* and *Which Way Home*, Reyna Grande and Ann Jaramillo humanize the figure of the migrant and expose the broader, but nonetheless personal, impact of migration in their novels, *Across a Hundred Mountains*, *Dancing with Butterflies: A Novel*, and *La línea*, to a greater degree than, for example, Luis Alberto Urrea does in *Into the Beautiful North*.

Beyond emphasizing the dangers of the physical migration itself, the authors reveal the influence of migration on the family. In narrating the familial effects of the journey northward—be it successful or not—these texts fit within the Chicana feminism that Monika Kaup describes in *Rewriting North American Borders in Chicano and Chicana Narrative*, focusing on that which transpires within the home largely as a result of migration, rather than emphasizing the conditions of the migratory journey and the experience of cultural confrontation, alienation and/or assimilation in the host country. In this sense, Grande and Jaramillo—along with other authors of the new millennium that write within this theoretical framework—stress the domestic space and the effects of migration on the families who remain behind, shedding light on the economic and social suffering that may arise as a result of migration. As with the Latina authors whom

Juanita Heredia describes as “[...] not only imparting gender matters or a woman’s perspective on official history, but also popular culture” (4), these writers “present *alternative* histories to contest the hegemonic power of official history in their transnational narratives, because traditionally, their perspectives and voices have been omitted” (4). As such, their cultural production serves as a counter-hegemonic discourse that simultaneously condemns the violent and unjust structural mechanisms involved in transnational migration, reveals the necessarily evolving identity of the women and children left behind, and serves as a blatant call to social justice through the depiction of the sundry consequences of piecemeal migration.

Despite the dream that a family member’s “crossing over” will provide wealth and stability, Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo describes the concerns that women expressed in her sociological research in *Gendered Transitions: Mexican Experiences of Immigration*. “Women feared that their husbands’ migration would signal not a search for a better means of supporting the family but an escape from supporting the family. Their husbands’ migration promised an uncertain future for themselves and for the children who would remain behind” (59). Indeed, the female characters of Reyna Grande’s *Across a Hundred Mountains* must deal with uncertainty on various levels after the departure and disappearance of the protagonist’s father. One of the more obvious of these effects is the physical separation of family, and the implications of such, as a common component of the migratory experience.

### **Crossing Mountains and Deserts in Search of Answers**

“In a few days I will leave for El Otro Lado” (27), Juana’s father explains to the 12-year-old protagonist and narrator of *Across a Hundred Mountains*. “That’s the only way I can ever hope to make enough money to build a house for my family” (28). Thus begins Apá’s search for economic stability, a search that ultimately leads to the detriment of his family on various levels. Aside from the overarching financial insecurity after losing contact with the family’s primary breadwinner, Juana and her mother must contend with the emotional turmoil of wondering whether they have been abandoned. Like the women, “[...] sitting by the door, embroidering servilletas while waiting outside for the mailman, waiting for the letter from El Otro Lado that rarely, sometimes never, came” (36-37), they have no choice but to wait. And yet, they differentiate themselves from “the forgotten women, the abandoned women” (37), telling themselves that they have not been forgotten nor abandoned. The protagonist comments on the deleterious effects of the uncertainty surrounding her father’s disappearance: “For nineteen years I have not known what happened to my father. You have no idea what it’s like to live like that—not to know” (3). When she returns home to give her mother her father’s remains seventeen years after she had left in search of answers, she believes that knowing the truth will permit her mother to rest in peace, particularly after Amá has endured tremendous suffering due to her socioeconomic circumstances.

Primarily because of her inability to pay the family’s debtors after her husband’s departure and disappearance, Juana’s mother experiences a loss of innocence resulting in her perdition. Don Elías, the funeral home owner, is well aware that Juana’s father has



left the *pueblito* and takes advantage of his absence and the family's financial obligations to him, demanding that Juana's mother sexually satisfy him time and time again to collect on the outstanding debts physically. Ashamed, the protagonist's mother tells her, "Don't touch me, Juana [...]. I'm not clean" (74), lamenting her acts. When Don Elías and his barren wife take her baby (though it turns out he is her husband's legitimate son, conceived before Miguel had departed in search of work), Juana's mother turns to alcohol to escape her depressing reality. As a result, she becomes the town drunk, "[...] down at the cemetery, calling out to her children as if she were La Llorona" (96), and behaving hysterically in public, namely outside of the family home of Don Elías.

Her mother's grief and despair at having lost a second child—approximately two years after her daughter accidentally drowned while in Juana's care—send her over the edge, with the help of her excessive alcohol consumption. Consequently, the traditional mother-daughter relationship inverts, and Juana, at a mere twelve years of age, must adopt a maternal role to care for her deranged mother, much like the young protagonist of Irene Beltrán Hernández's *Across the Great River* (1989). Don José, the night watchman, finds Juana to explain, "Your mother needs your help, child [...]. She's at the foot of your sister's grave, ranting and raving like a loca. I tried to calm her down, but she lashed at me with a broken tequila bottle. You must come and see if you can talk some sense into her" (96). Illustrating this inversion of roles, Juana attempts to persuade her mother to return home, declaring, "Amá, we need to go home. You need to get out of the rain. You may catch a chill" (96). After Don Elías, in cooperation with his wife, robs Amá of her newborn son, she attacks him, and is consequently sent to jail, leaving Juana to fend for herself financially. The separation legally imposed upon mother and

daughter may be a blessing in disguise, however, as even seventeen years later, Juana's imprisoned mother remains delusional: "My husband is in El Otro Lado,' she whispered [to herself]. 'Soon he will come back. He told me so. Soon we will be together.' She turned back to the screen and said, 'Verdad, Miguel? You'll be coming back to be with me. Verdad? Soon you will come back to me'" (233). While her mother remains confined to her prison cell, Juana possesses the freedom to migrate in order to procure economic stability and, more importantly, to go in search of answers regarding her father's disappearance.

Aside from necessarily maturing in order to care for her hysterical mother, Juana later ages beyond her years when she further loses her innocence during her attempts to cross the border in search of her father. Still a child, she experiences the physical deprivations and delirium that are part and parcel of the journey northward. "The mountains weren't getting any closer. Or was it just her imagination?" (102), she wonders before La Llorona appears before her in an apparent hallucination (104). Once Doña Martina, a family friend and *curandera*, finds and revives her, Juana arrives at the sobering conclusion that "Apá was not on the other side of these mountains. And in order to find him, she would have to cross not just these mountains, but perhaps a hundred more" (106). During her journey across those other hundred mountains, she witnesses evidence of the physical danger of migration, presented both by elements of nature and, as seen in *Across the Great River*, that which is presented by the *coyotes* who guide migrants across the border. In order to obtain information regarding her father's whereabouts, Juana eventually resorts to working as a prostitute, catering to the wants and demands of these *coyotes*. She reflects upon the parallels between her situation and

that of her mother: “Juana thought about Amá, about the things she had done with Don Elías, the things people used to say about her, the sin that weighed so heavily on her mother’s back. Her mother had done what needed to be done. Juana would have to do the same” (179). These sacrifices would be worth it to her, as they enable her to resolve the mystery of her father’s disappearance, and move forward with her life despite her fear of crossing the border. “She, too, was afraid of dying while attempting to cross the border. That was one of the many things she and Adelina had learned from all the coyotes they’d slept with. One never knew if they’d live to see El Otro Lado” (205). Perhaps because of the horror of the multitude of possible dangers that border crossing involves, being caught and deported by the Border Patrol appears to be the least of Juana’s worries.

Capturing the manner in which the officials of *la Migra* can destroy the hopes and dreams of immigrants just as they finally arrive in the United States, the narrator of *Across a Hundred Mountains* exclaims, “El Otro Lado! Juana breathed a sigh of relief [...]. She was almost there” (216). Nevertheless, “When she finally got to the other side, it was the bright light she had to adjust to [...]. When she opened her eyes, Roberto, Pancho, and the coyote were sitting on the ground, staring at her. Three gringos dressed in green uniforms stood before them” (219). Although one generally associates the Border Patrol with unfruitful attempts to cross the border like this one, Grande establishes the presence of its agents as welcome, and even desirable, assistance in another moment in the text. When the protagonist searches for her father’s tomb along the border, the old man with whom she travels tells her she should hide when *la Migra* comes; however, she views the Border Patrol’s presence as positive, perhaps because she has already adopted a

new pseudo-legal American identity by using her deceased friend's U.S. birth certificate after Adelina's possessive boyfriend kills her in a violent rage. Now Adelina, "[She] turned around and saw a white vehicle approaching. La migra was here. But they were nineteen years too late to save her father" (4), suggesting that its presence would have been able to save him during his attempt to cross the border decades before. This is a sentiment that Grande echoes in her later novel, *Dancing with Butterflies*.

Adopting a surrogate identity as Adelina Vásquez, Juana crosses the border relatively easily to begin her life anew—a life that offers social mobility through educational and professional advancement. Although the narrative glosses over Juana/Adelina's experiences north of the border, it is evident that she has undergone a transformation when she returns home to Mexico at the age of thirty-one. Initially surprised to be addressed as Juana by Doña Martina's granddaughter, the protagonist concurs, "You should call me Juana. That's who I am" (226). Nevertheless, Sandra disagrees. "I think you're wrong [...]. You aren't Juana anymore. You're now a successful woman who has done what needed to be done. You should keep your new name—Adelina'" (227), because the use of Adelina's citizenship documents permitted Juana "to cross the border, go to college, and get a job" (227), thereby establishing an identity and existence far removed from those that she knew as a girl in her *pueblito*. Further exemplifying this change, she no longer wields embroidery needles with the comfort that she had years before. "Sandra was trying to teach Adelina how to make different stitches with the needle. Adelina pricked her thumb and put it inside her mouth. It had been too many years since she'd embroidered" (235), the narrative voice explains. Crossing the border to a world of education and professional experiences has shaped

Juana/Adelina's identity in such a way that her previous gender roles and identity become obsolete. Much like Mary Pat Brady notes, the concept of borders "[...] implicitly [suggests] that a person can be formed in one temporality but when he or she crosses a border that person transmogrifies, as it were, into someone either more or less advanced, more or less modern, more or less sophisticated" (50). In this case, the circumstances that compel Juana's migrations result in such a transmogrification, and a presumed identification or alliance with her surroundings north of the border. This *Bildungsroman* accordingly narrates the dual journeys (Juana's trip northward and then southward return as Adelina) that demonstrate how she overcomes the suffering that ensues from her father's migration, and transcends traditional gender constraints as she independently migrates and successfully establishes a new identity and life across the line.

### **In Search of a Unified Family**

“If for Ms. Freud, ‘*The mother’s job is to be there to be left,*’ for the children left behind, *The mother’s job is to return, so that she can be there to be left.*” Ceres J. Artico (140)

The young protagonists of Ann Jaramillo's *La línea* similarly undergo a transformation of identity during the journey across and beyond the U.S.-Mexico border; nevertheless, their experience with migration is different from that of the protagonist of *Across a Hundred Mountains* since they exemplify the case of children left behind by *both* parents. Miguel, one of the protagonists, expresses his awareness and expectations of his personal growth and change, reflecting as an adult, “I thought I'd find the real

Miguel, the one I thought I couldn't be in Mexico, once I crossed *la línea*. I didn't understand that there are thousands of *líneas* to cross in a life. Sometimes you see the border and you walk right across, eyes wide open. You know you will change. You know everything will be different" (124). Indeed, separated from their parents and later escaping their poverty to join them in the United States, Miguel and Elena discover that everything is quite different. In the process of their migration, they leave behind their grandmother and turn to the construction of an alternative transnational family to support them throughout their journey, enabling them to overcome the physical dangers that arise. Although this *Bildungsroman* utilizes an adolescent male's voice in narrating one obstacle after another presenting itself during the trek across the border, Jaramillo places at least as much emphasis on thirteen-year-old Elena's transformation and growth as she transcends prescribed gender norms and comes into her own as a result of the journey.

From the first pages of the novel, the reader understands that Miguel and Elena have grown accustomed to separation from their parents, who have been in the United States for many years. "In almost seven years, we'd seen Mamá just once, a little over three years ago, for three days. She'd slipped home for her sister's, Tía Consuelo's, funeral, using up all the saved money to pay a *coyote* to get her back across *la línea*" (5), Miguel explains. When their father writes to Miguel that it is time for him, at fourteen years of age, to join him across *la línea*, his younger sister feels tremendous disappointment that she will not accompany him on his journey and, therefore, have an opportunity to be with her parents once again. After all, as a member of this transnational family, "Elena had to grow up without a mother, so she hoarded what she could of Mamá, her letters. The words were like little drops of water to a person dying of thirst—

enough to give hope; not enough to make a difference” (5). Even the children recognize that this familial separation is a sacrifice for the greater good, though, much like in *Trini*. Remaining in their Mexican town with their grandmother, where “[t]hings were tight, really tight” (19), Miguel explains, “If Papá and Mamá didn’t send a little money every month, we would starve” (6). In fact, he adds, “Even if I wanted to, I couldn’t help here anymore” (6), describing the lack of opportunities for social and economic mobility in the *pueblito*. Accordingly, he will head north to contribute to the well-being of his family.

His departure serves as yet another disruption to the familial configuration, which had already undergone modifications to accommodate his parents’ employment in the United States. “[Abuelita had] been my mother. I’d been her son. There was no sense pretending we’d see each other again. She was old. I wouldn’t return for many years. I might not return at all” (33), Miguel comments. Socioeconomic circumstances simply dictate that he must abandon his home, grandmother, and sister, following in the footsteps of the many men who had already embarked upon the journey northward. Like many Mexican *pueblos*, “San Jacinto had been emptied of young men. A few left because they wanted to. Most left because they had to. There was no work, nothing worth doing, just odd jobs here and there that paid a few *pesos*, not enough to feed a family” (12). However, the compulsion to leave is not restricted to the young men of the town. ““Who’d want to stay anymore?”” (12), Elena asks. ““Even the girls are leaving now, if they can. Just last month Jesusita left, with that new boyfriend of hers”” (12), she continues. Indignant that her brother would leave her behind in San Jacinto, Elena decides that she, too, will cross the border. “I know how to get north, and I’m going to

do it'" (43), she declares, despite the gender norms that imply a daughter's (or in this case, granddaughter's) responsibility to tend to the home and care for her elders.

When Elena successfully joins Miguel, he reacts with surprise and anger, part of which is due to her transgression of these gender roles. "How could you make everyone worry? What about Abuelita? How could you leave her alone? You were supposed to stay and take care of her!' [Miguel] said angrily. '¿No tienes vergüenza?'" (51).

Nevertheless, he comes to terms with her presence, which ultimately saves his dream of migration from bandits since the resourceful girl had hidden a portion of her money in the lining of her purse (58). Also recognizing the importance of their familial tie, Miguel projects, "Whatever we did, we had to do it as brother and sister. We'd been through too much to separate now" (59). They would need help, though, to reach their destination.

As luck would have it, Miguel and Elena befriend an older Salvadoran gentleman and experienced migrant, who becomes a member of their makeshift family while en route to the United States. Javi's wisdom proves to be extremely helpful, particularly in warding off the dangers that Elena, as a young woman, will inevitably face. Despite leafing through the *Guía de Seguridad en el Desierto* (87), which outlines the hazards of migration and techniques for turning themselves in to the Border Patrol authorities or for returning to civilization if they become lost, the implicitly gendered risks do not seem to cross young Elena's mind. "You should disguise yourself. The less you look like a girl, the better. There are train gangs. They rob, steal, eat people up [...]. And they rape many women'" (65), Javi explains, informing her of the unique dangers she may encounter during her journey. As an additional precautionary measure, he quietly instructs Miguel, "Write '*Tengo SIDA*' in big letters across her chest [...]. The threat of



AIDS might stop some men’” (66). This threat of rape and violence becomes more tangible during their journey once “[a] gang dragged three young girls off the train, screaming and begging to be let go. They disappeared into the bushes on the far side of the water tower” (73). Visibly shaken by what she has witnessed, “Elena shrank down to the ground, pulled her cap down tight over her head, and hugged her knees” (73).

Perhaps those three girls have endured the same suffering as “[...] the Martinez sisters, ten-year-old Juana and twelve-year-old Julietta, sent for by their parents, sent across the desert with a *coyote*, and never heard from again. No one speculated on the fate of the girls. No one wanted to say how they might have died or, even worse, how they might still live” (28). Traumatic exposure to such violence and danger as impressionable pre-adolescents during their migration is the price they pay in the attempt to reunite their transnational family.

Even before beginning their journeys to the United States, the characters hear the stories narrating the horrendous possibilities of what may happen en route to the other side. While some stories are pure exaggeration, the true stories have the same capacity to frighten their listeners, perhaps even more so. “[...] [M]ostly, they told these stories to avoid telling the ones that were one hundred percent true, the ones that we *had* to believe” (28), Miguel reflects before embarking upon his trip. “Maybe I didn’t believe everything Señor Gonzalez said, but the basic idea of kidnapping someone and then selling his organs seemed like it could happen” (26). Perhaps their first-hand experience with the death of a mother and child reaffirms their desire to join their parents.

Stumbling upon a victim of migration, Miguel notes, “She lay on her side, curled up. Her long black hair fanned out from her head. The skin on her face had blistered and

puckered up. I couldn't tell how old she might be. Cradled in her arms was a small child, its face toward her breast" (113). Cradling her child, this woman paid the ultimate sacrifice in hopes of crossing the desert for a better life, and her image would continue to haunt Miguel and Elena.

Attempting to rest, Miguel describes, "But I lay awake, listening to the wind. It was a thousand voices competing to be heard. Hundreds moaned in despair, hundreds in sadness. It was the people lost in this place, calling me to join them. It was the mother and child we left, now arisen and walking with the others" (115). He recalls Doña Maria's warning that, "In that place of desolation [...] a ghost now walks at night. They say it is *La Llorona* [...]. She'll attempt to lure you away from your path. Cover your ears so you don't hear her wailing. Don't make the mistake many have made, of following her" (26). Accordingly, he concludes, "It was *La Llorona* out to bewitch me, just as Doña Maria had warned. If I listened and followed, I'd be lost forever" (115). Ironically, this archetypal figure normally associated with water is now a threat even to migrants crossing kilometers of desert, nowhere near any river or stream. One may suggest, however, that this image of a dead mother and child may also serve as a reminder to the protagonists that their separation from their parents has not been for naught. Rather than risk the well-being of their children, Miguel and Elena's parents had opted for transnational separation.

A witness to robbery, sexual violence, and death during her migratory journey to reunite with her mother, Elena faces unspeakable traumatic images and experiences that inevitably force her to mature quickly, much like Kata of *Across the Great River* and Juana of *Across a Hundred Mountains*. "Fairy tales are for little girls,' she screamed

above the roar of the train” (69-70), indicating that she has observed and experienced too much to be the girl that she once was. “I don’t believe in *el hada madrina* anymore. I hate this stupid train!” (70), she exclaims, expressing her hatred toward “the *mata gente*,” which “[...] was full of boys and girls, just kids [...] looking for our *padres* and *madres*” (71). Illustrating that they are but one example of countless children who migrate across the border, Miguel comments, “There must be trainload after trainload of *niños*, all of them headed north, searching for their families” (71). After such an arduous journey, the luckiest of these children will join their parents in pursuit of the American Dream.

With the expectations of a better life of wealth and stability, it comes as no surprise that some of these migrants, like Elena, experience disillusionment after spending time in the United States. After enduring so many physical and emotional trials to arrive across the line, “She says that *el Norte* never measured up to what she imagined it would be” (122), explains Miguel. In the novel’s epilogue, Miguel and Elena share a phone call ten years after their departure from Mexico. Looking at a recent snapshot, Miguel describes, “There’s Elena, the one who claimed she wanted to go north more than anyone, right back there on Abuelita’s *rancho* in San Jacinto. Elena returned as soon as Papá let her, right after she finished high school. Even Mamá wasn’t enough to keep her in California” (122). Despite her education and experiences north of the border, Elena decides to leave her family, electing instead to return to her life of tradition, living on her grandmother’s ranch with her husband and son, and growing organic foods to sell to Mexico City restaurants. One presumes from her return to San Jacinto that she does not

embrace a new American identity, like Juana/Adelina does. However, the reader must project whether (and how) her migratory journeys affect her existence upon her return.

The dangers and disappointment that Elena experiences largely mirrors that which is evident in Sonia Nazario's *Enrique's Journey*, which we will see in the next chapter, and within extant sociological and psychological research regarding the emotional consequences of transnational motherhood and piecemeal migration patterns in which first the father migrates, followed by the mother, and ultimately by some or all of the children. Among the unique challenges for the children of these transnational families, those that do manage to reunite with their parents must adapt to a new language, culture, and social and educational systems, while simultaneously coping with feelings of loss surrounding their separation from their "surrogate parent" (Artico; Glasgow and Gouse-Sheese). Much like Miguel and Elena miss their *abuelita* terribly but dare not speak of this so as to protect their parents' feelings, "Separated children [...] feel unable to openly talk to their parents about their sadness over the loss of the surrogate caretaker and their ambivalence about coming to the U.S." (Artico 4). Perhaps more overwhelming, though, is the experience of reconnecting with unfamiliar relatives, and perhaps meeting a new stepparent or siblings (Artico; Glasgow and Gouse-Sheese). Such is the case in *La línea*, in which the narrator voices his consternation regarding "the twin sisters we'd never seen, three-year-old Maria and Liliana" (11). Before reuniting with his family he questions, "How was it possible to have sisters I'd never even seen?" (11). Many years later, he explains his ambivalent feelings toward them: "I've grown to love my little sisters, the *hermanas* I'd never known or held until I came north [...]. But I feel a familiar twinge of envy. Maria and Liliana have advantages they don't appreciate or understand" (122).

One such advantage is their mastery of English alongside Spanish, but, “What is more, ‘Papá and Mamá never left my sisters’ sides, not even for a day. Maria and Liliana never had to wonder when, or if, they would see their parents again. And the twins are citizens. They can go to Mexico and come back whenever they want. For them, there is no *línea*” (122). This envy and resentment also surfaces within Reyna Grande’s *Dancing with Butterflies: A Novel*, which conveys one of the four adult narrators’ recollections of her experience of family reunification north of the border.

Within the complex novel that weaves the stories of four women connected by their love for Mexican folkloric dance, the story of Soledad, an undocumented immigrant and costume designer for the dance company around which the novel ultimately revolves, emerges. Having successfully migrated north at the age of twenty by borrowing an American’s birth certificate, she finds herself again in Mexico when she returns to see her dying grandmother. Her forced stay in her *pueblito* and the experience of crossing the border illegally a second time provoke reflection upon her experiences with her previous migration, reunification with her mother and a stepfather and sister she had never met, and the continued pursuit of the American Dream. As in *La línea*, Soledad’s mother migrated north in order to provide for her family once Soledad’s grandfather and father, experienced migrants who evidently fell victim to foul play during their latest attempt to cross the border, were found dead in the desert. The narrative voice elaborates, “When they died, Ma had to come to the U.S. to make money because we sometimes didn’t have anything to eat. She left me and my brother, Lorenzo, with Abuelita Licha. She met Tomás a year later and she fell in love with him and they had Stephanie. After many years, Ma said to me to come help with Stephanie and the swap meet” (48). Despite the

opportunities that her relocation affords her, Soledad details her difficulty with coping with her separation from her grandmother. “She and I, we were always together. It was so hard to leave her behind when I came here to be with Ma. After so many years of Ma being gone I’d started to see my Abuelita as my mother. Sometimes, I asked myself why I even came” (102-03). She repeats the sentiment, adding, “When I first came to the U.S., it was very hard for me. I missed my grandmother very much. I missed sitting outside our little shack, embroidering napkins with colored threads. Abuelita showed me how to make all kinds of stitches” (102). Soledad maintains her connection with her grandmother, albeit from afar, through her work as a seamstress. After all, her *abuelita* had been a seamstress for El Ballet Folklórico de México when she was young and, once she married and moved to Michoacán, “[...] she tried to make a living by sewing school uniforms, quinceañeras or wedding dresses, but she loved making dance costumes, like me” (102). Her grandmother’s legacy lives on through Soledad’s work and, in more personal terms, affords her a bit of consolation in their separation, particularly given the difficulty with which she adapts to her new family.

Just as Miguel and Elena meet their siblings only upon arriving in the United States, Soledad meets her half-sister Stephanie, for whom she acts as caretaker. As such, Soledad must put her educational and professional dreams on hold. Expressing her resentment at these circumstances, she recalls:

But I came here and Ma didn’t want me to go to school to learn English. Because I was twenty, she said I was too old to learn anything, anyway. She wanted me to work and baby-sit Stephanie. Working at the swap meet didn’t make me feel good. I wanted to work with my hands and

make beautiful things. I missed the colored threads, the sound the scissors make as they cut the fabric, the feel of cloth against my fingertips. The click-clack of the sewing machine. (103)

Only once her younger sister is in middle school does she have the opportunity to pursue her own goals, first obtaining a certificate in fashion design, and later taking English courses in hopes of qualifying for a green card, obtaining a high school diploma and college degree in fashion design, and ultimately operating a successful U.S.-based business. Although she is now able to concentrate on her own professional pursuits, Soledad's anger and resentment toward Stephanie remain. These emotions mirror the anger and envy that Miguel of *La línea* expresses regarding his twin sisters' childhood experiences in the United States. Soledad comments, "Sometimes I feel so angry at the way Ma spoils Stephanie. Angry and jealous. Ma left me when I was thirteen years old, and for seven years I was without a mother. Stephanie's had a mother for all of her seventeen years of life. She doesn't know what it's like to have been left behind by the person you love most" (50). Grande and Jaramillo successfully capture the sense of abandonment experienced by children of transnational migration that has also been documented within socio-psychological studies and some of the nonfictional texts discussed in the coming chapter.

In *Latino Families Broken by Immigration: The Adolescents' Perceptions*, Ceres J. Artico examines the manner in which Latino adolescents and young adults communicate their experiences and memories of prolonged separations from transnational parents during childhood with particular attention to how these are integrated within the development of an internal working model of self and others. More

specifically, the author posits that the comprehension of their parents' decision to leave the country stems from a primary conflict between interpreting the parental action as abandonment versus sacrifice (6). While the majority of Central American mothers who left their children behind to procure domestic work in the United States consider their departure a sacrificial act (Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila), many of the individuals in Ceres' study indicate that fulfillment of material needs was insufficient compensation for the parents' incapacity to fulfill their emotional needs (99). Although they may recognize their parents' migration as a sacrifice for the greater good of the family on a theoretical level, the sense of abandonment often remains. As Artico observes, "[...] [E]ven with the most benign set of external circumstances, many of these children could not help but feel unloved and rejected at times. Such a duality of emotions and cognition seemed to be part of a larger, overarching theme of duality that permeated this project [...]" (132-33). Among these dualities, she cites "separation versus reunification; sacrifice versus abandonment; the felt-obligation of loyalty to caretakers versus the expected sense of loyalty towards parents[;] the desire to remain in the country of origin versus the need to join the parents in the U.S.; feeling rejected versus feeling special ... the list seems to go on forever" (133). These themes are manifest within the narrative works that we have addressed thus far, which, like the film *La misma luna* (2007), tackle issues of immigration, abandonment, and the quest for family reunification.

Directed by Patricia Riggen, *La misma luna* deftly illustrates the emotional repercussions of transnational motherhood for both mother and son during just one harrowing week. The opening scenes juxtapose the morning routines of Rosario, who awakens startled from an apparently recurring nightmare that replays her crossing of the



river, and nine-year-old Carlitos as he begins his day in a Mexican *pueblito* caring for his ailing grandmother. If the photos in both households and the shiny, light-up sneakers that Carlos dons are not enough to suggest to the audience that this is a transnational family, the content of the weekly phone call between mother and son on Sunday morning is. Echoing the participants' comments in the Artico study, when Rosario asks Carlitos if he needs anything in hopes of providing for him materially, his simple and powerful response after four years of separation is, "Tú." Although he knows that he should appreciate the gifts and better standard of living that the separation from his mother provides, he does not wholly comprehend that her love for him can be exemplified in the very separation that contributes to his sense of abandonment and rejection. Just two days after his last phone call with his mother, Carlitos' *abuelita* dies in her sleep, and fearing that he will end up in the hands of ill-intentioned relatives, he sets out on his journey to find his mother in Los Angeles with the money that he has saved and the P.O. Box return address from an envelope that she has sent despite the fact that the local *coyote*, and female family friend, has made it clear that she had promised his mother and grandmother that she would never help him cross over because of the inherent perils of the trip.

In spite of a number of dangerous encounters during his journey, the protagonist's resourcefulness—and perhaps his naiveté—land him in Tucson, Arizona, just two days later. There, he experiences exploitative conditions in the *pisca* of tomatoes and I.N.S. raids while his mother simultaneously suffers from exploitation when an employer fires her and refuses to pay, reminding her that calling the police would be for naught given her illegal status. All the while, Rosario wrestles with her own guilt about what is best

for her son, contemplating returning to Mexico to be with him and also entertaining a marriage proposal from an acquaintance in order to bring Carlitos to the United States legally. On Saturday night, soon after backing out of the wedding ceremony, Rosario receives the call that incites the worst of any mother's fears, particularly within a transnational context. *La coyota* informs her that Carlitos went missing after Rosario's mother passed away days before, and consequently, Rosario makes the rash decision to return to Mexico immediately, assuming that Carlitos will certainly face deportation and return to Mexico rather than find her in the huge metropolis of Los Angeles without so much as her physical address. After much deliberation, though, she recalls how she describes the area surrounding the pay phone from which she calls her son on a weekly basis and on a leap of faith she goes there at the regular time. Miraculously, with the help of a fellow migrant whom he befriends in Arizona, Carlitos finally finds the same corner in East L.A. that is home to a Domino's Pizza, a laundromat, a party goods store, and a mural after an extended, albeit humorous, search through what one may imagine are countless similar strip malls in the area.

The film abruptly ends as the stoplight keeping mother and son a mere street-width apart changes to green, so the audience is left to rejoice in their reunification without much consideration to the challenges of adapting to a newly unified family unit, as seen in *La línea* and *Dancing with Butterflies*. Nevertheless, *La misma luna* succeeds in revealing the personal impact of the global phenomenon of transnational migration, and with its attractive cast members, does so in a way that effectively humanizes the figure of the migrant and develops the audience's empathy for his or her plight. Furthermore, the film subtly critiques U.S. immigration policy, namely in the radio

broadcast that Rosario and her friend hear while on a city bus discussing California Governor Schwarzenegger's hypocritical decision to veto a bill allowing undocumented immigrants to drive legally in the state when he, himself, has migrated a much farther distance from his home country. Although one certainly identifies the emotional struggles with which both mother and child contend in this film, the touching and heartfelt story of one family's experiences with migration creates a much less dramatic impact on the viewer than the Oscar-nominated documentary *Which Way Home* (2009), which reminds the audience that the experience of border crossing begins thousands of miles south of the *Río Grande* for many migrants.

Filmmaker Rebecca Cammisa provides a glimpse of diverse personal stories of immigration of unaccompanied Central American migrant children who brave the illegal journey on freight trains like "*la Bestia*," presumably the basis for "*la mata gente*" of Ann Jaramillo's *La línea*. Following the disconcerting journeys of children including nine-year old Hondurans Olga and Freddy, ten-year-old José from El Salvador, and fourteen-year old Kevin from Honduras, the film exposes the abysmal economic situations essentially forcing these children to seek better opportunities north of the border. Aside from the economic factors that push unaccompanied minors to head north, *Which Way Home* reveals the variety of motivations children may have in risking their lives to cross the border. In addition to the hopes of reunification with family members who are already in the United States, there exists for some the hope of finding an American family that will come to love and adopt them. Alternatively, other children decide to take on an adult role as the breadwinner to provide for their family members back home.

Regardless of the individual reason for leaving home, or whether the family supports each child's decision to do so, the mixture of hope, despair, fear, and anticipation remain ever present. Juxtaposed with scenes of the utter danger that such a trek involves—many of which are similar to narrated scenes within Grande and Jaramillo's novels—the cinematography allows for further humanization of these children of migration. Despite the fact that these migrant children are mature beyond their years, scenes like that depicting two young friends playing on the swings at a playground while awaiting the arrival of yet another train north effectively expose the children's fragility and vulnerability. The fact that the documentary captures true stories lends an even more heartbreaking element to the issue of immigration and its effects on the families left behind. In light of the representation of migrants' journeys to a new life in films like *La misma luna* and *Which Way Home* (as well as others including *De Nadie* (2006) and *Sin nombre* (2009)), Chávez Leyva's comments regarding the proper categorization of young migrants becomes even more significant. "When writing about Mexican children, the category of 'child' often remains clouded by familial needs and survival" (74), she asserts. Historically, "Children frequently lived, worked, and existed in an adult world in which they were in fact, if not by legal definition, adults" (Chávez Leyva 74-75). Indeed, embarking upon such a harrowing journey in an attempt at family reunification or as the means to a better life is no juvenile matter. For child and adult alike, though, the pursuit of the elusive American Dream may be enough to outweigh the risks of crossing the border.

Discussing this very matter with Soledad in *Dancing with Butterflies*, her brother Lorenzo explains, "Listen, Sol. When I was in the river and I thought I was going to die,

I suddenly realized one thing: By being in México at least I know that I can give a little food to my children, even if I have to steal it from the fields. But I'm no good to them dead, do you understand?" (270). While Soledad certainly must understand the risks involved as she prepares to make yet another attempt to cross the border illegally to resume the American life she had previously begun to establish, she cannot help but consider the many opportunities that will only be at her disposal in the United States. "But [America's] where my life is now,' I hear myself say. And then I know this is true" (191), Soledad reflects. "I think about my sewing machine at home and my notebook with all my drawings of pretty dresses. I think about my booth at the swap meet, about Alegría and the costumes I didn't finish mending. And I think about my English class. I even miss my Food4Less shopping cart. I think about the dress shop I want to own one day" (191). From the mundane comforts and idiosyncratic elements of her adopted home to the overarching dreams of personal and professional success, a life north of the U.S.-Mexico border proves to be worth not just one attempt at crossing the line, but several, for Soledad.

As opposed to earlier patterns of circular migration, in which Mexican migrants sought seasonal positions in the United States and returned home to Mexico regularly, the contemporary militarization of the border, more stringent immigration policies, and the laundry list of other obstacles to a successful migratory journey essentially promote permanent or long-term settlement north of the border. Soledad notes the difference between the ease with which her grandfather and father's generations of migrants were able to cross back and forth relatively freely and her own experience. Furthermore, she recognizes the impact of such on her *pueblo* in Michoacán, much like the protagonists of

*La línea*. “Where are the men?” [she] ask[s] Malena. It is so strange to me to see women sitting alone with their children [...]. There were always families here, fathers playing with their children, husbands walking hand in hand with their wives [...]. This isn’t how I remember my town” (162-63). Her friend responds, “They’re gone, Sol. The men are all in the U.S.” (163). Once they leave, it seems, they remain so as not to jeopardize their lives or their capacity to provide for their families. As our discussion of recently released novels and films suggests, the women and children may not be far behind their steps on the migrant trail.

### **In Search of a Revolution**

Just as migration has changed the face of the *pueblitos* described in *Across a Hundred Mountains*, *La línea*, and *Dancing with Butterflies*, the town of Tres Camarones, Mexico, in Luis Alberto Urrea’s *Into the Beautiful North* has similarly undergone major demographic changes with the advent and escalation of transnational migration. On a quest altogether different than that narrated in a more traditional *Bildungsroman*, the novel’s nineteen-year-old protagonist, Nayeli, joins forces with three of her *compañeros* to restore the hope of their community’s perpetuation and progress through a migratory journey to the United States. “We can repopulate our town. We can save Mexico. It begins with us! It’s the new revolution!” (56), she exclaims, inspired by the film *The Magnificent Seven*. “Isn’t it time we got our men back in our own country?” (56). In the wake of migration, her village remains stagnant and antiquated; the narrative voice describes, “The modern era had somehow passed Tres Camarones by, but this new storm

had found a way to siphon its men away, out of their beds and into the next century, into a land far away” (4). Observing the impossibility of naming even one pregnant woman in a town filled with “nobody [...] but women, old men, and little children” (32), Nayeli and her friends thus decide to pursue the mission “to protect and repopulate their villages” (168). Moreover, such a journey holds the promise of fulfilling the more personal dream of family reunification.

Beyond the broader social and revolutionary purpose of her trek northward, Nayeli—like the children in the works previously discussed—is on a more personal quest to bring her father, who had gone to the United States three years before, back home to the family in Mexico. “Sometimes, she dreamed of going to the United States—‘Los Yunaites,’ as the people of the town called them—to find her father, who had left and never come back. He traded his family for a job, and then he stopped writing or sending money” (8-9). Like Juana of *Across a Hundred Mountains*, Nayeli seeks answers and, above all else, hopes to restore the family’s unity for her mother’s sake. She and her “gang” (168) manage to cross the border with the help of some eccentric characters whom they befriend in Tijuana, and as she nears her destination of Kankakee, Illinois, she reflects upon her personal motivation for the extended trek across the United States. “The trip, the Border Patrol, the dump...it had all been worth it. Just to take her father home. Just to see her mother’s face” (322). When she ultimately tracks down her father, however, it becomes clear that he has left his life in Mexico behind and has embraced an American life, complete with a blonde American wife and toddler. Consequently, one may draw parallels between this daughter’s search for her father and that of Juana in *Across a Hundred Mountains*. In this text, though, her father becomes

dead to her in a different, and perhaps even more painful, sense. The narrative voice does not belabor the point regarding the emotional consequences of familial separation resulting from transnational migration in this novel, however. Rather, Urrea incorporates this plot line as but one element of a text that balances humor with a deeper criticism of broader social and economic forces driving transnational migration and the typically overlooked impact of such on the affected communities on both sides of the border. The author himself explains his motivations for creating such a novel:

Three things moved me to write the book: First, I was sick of immigration/border writing. It started to feel like it was all the same, making all the same points, by all the same writers. Second was my fascination with small-town life in both Mexico and the United States and the huge cultural changes going on in both places that I never see documented. And, finally, although it is a painful book in many ways, I wanted to write something that made me laugh out loud every day. (5)

Indeed, the heightened level of humor within this text creates an atmosphere in which the severity of criticism toward international policies and circumstances is abated and becomes more palatable to the reader.

The narrative voice, for example, utilizes humor and irony to critique illegal migration to Mexico from countries to the south, echoing the very arguments that American anti-immigration proponents maintain regarding the consequences of the influx of Mexican migrants to the U.S. Aunt Irma complains, “‘These illegals come to Mexico expecting a free ride! Don’t tell me you didn’t have Salvadorans and Hondurans in your school, getting the best education in the world! They take our jobs, too.’ She muttered



on in her own steamy cloud of indignation” (36). Later in the text, however, the narrator counters this type of anti-immigrant discourse, explaining that Mexican migrants in the United States simply “[...] were there for food, to send money home. These invaders, so infamous on American talk radio, were hopeless and frantic with starving compulsion” (168). As a result, the typical groups of migrants find themselves at the mercy of coyotes and other exploitative agents. The narrator continues, “So they would make whatever desperate deals their guides suggested, or they would borrow money or dig hidden rolls of cash from their own orifices and gamble their last stores to try again. And the agents of despair were there for them, offering an immediate return” (168), in the event that the first attempts at crossing proved to be unfruitful. Furthermore, the narrator comically attacks the ridiculous nature of the fictional policy that dictates that Border Patrol agents be “[...] sent out to arrest wets who were *leaving* the United States for Mexico. Hey, if you can’t catch ‘em coming in anymore, bust ‘em when they’re doing you a favor and trying to get back out” (159), the narrative voice reasons. In this context of overarching critiques of capitalism, agricultural commerce and immigration policies, criticism toward the structural violence and risks inherent in border crossing is minimal in comparison to the explicit and graphic condemnations of such in the texts by Grande and Jaramillo.

Nevertheless, Urrea does address the particular dangers for females who undertake border crossings, enumerating the various risk factors that prevent Mexican families from supporting their daughters’ decisions to head northward. “No one was willing to let her girl go into the maw of the appalling border. A long journey far from home, predatory men and Mexican police, bandits, injuries, car wrecks, kidnapping, slavers, pimps, drug pushers, illness, jails, *Tijuana!* The word alone speaking volumes

about every border fear they held within them” (59). The list goes on: “Coyotes and smugglers. Border Patrol and Minutemen. Rapists, addicts, dogs, robots, demons, ghosts, serial killers, racists, army men, trucks, spotlights. *¡Por Dios!* they cried, these were just girls!” (59). Though the narrative voice makes mention of the multitude of potential dangers, the novel itself does not incorporate scenes to depict such threats graphically, and as a result, does not humanize its female characters to the degree that one finds within *Across a Hundred Mountains*, *La línea*, *Dancing with Butterflies*, or the films *La misma luna* and *Which Way Home*. Moreover, rather than developing the dangers and the characters’ disillusionment with the United States more profoundly, *Into the Beautiful North* instead relies on the fact that Nayeli’s crew’s efforts at their own brand of revolution—recruiting Mexican warriors to return to their homeland to protect the Sinaloan village of Tres Camarones from the threat of bandits—yield a surprising seventy Mexican migrants for an interview in hopes of a reason and the means to return to Mexico (313). Interestingly, the underlying tone of this novel, like *La línea*, suggests a preference for a simpler, happier—albeit less lucrative—life in Mexico as opposed to the life of danger, exploitation and disenchantment in the more cosmopolitan United States. Notably, this is a sentiment that is also evident in early migrant literature such as *Las aventuras de don Chipote* by Daniel Venegas.

This, and the trend seen in all of the works analyzed herein that suggests the simplified dichotomy of a modern United States versus an archaic Mexico, contrast with Mary Pat Brady’s assertion that, “[...] Chicana border crossing narratives typically refuse a temporal economy in which Mexico is equated with a static, ancient order and the

United States emerges as a vibrant, pulsing arena for change and transformation” (52).<sup>11</sup> In all of these works, the principal characters undergo a substantial personal identity shift during their journeys, perhaps reflecting how, “[...] by narrativizing the moment of ‘crossing,’ Chicana writers invoke a spatiohistorical conception of subjectivity-in-process” (Brady 52). Michelle Habell-Pallán identifies the utility of such a conceptualization of identities as fluid in the understanding of cultural identity as similarly “dynamic and subject to historical, geographical, and political change” (72). How, then, can one comprehend the experience of the children of migration who mature beyond their years, first in adapting to changing familial configurations once parents leave the home and in later facing the harrowing journey northward in search of answers and/or family reunification? As young and impressionable individuals, these children not only contend with the task of establishing their own identities as all children and adolescents do, but face the added challenge of establishing a cultural identity within a muddled context of transnational relations on both sides of the border.

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<sup>11</sup> In contrast to Mary Pat Brady’s notion that Chicana narratives of border crossing contest the dichotomy of Mexico as embodying the past and a lack of salvation or progress while the U.S. represents the present/future and progress, many of the works analyzed here seem to exemplify this duality. Rather than being a critique of our neighbors to the south, the development of such a dichotomy in the text may be the simple result of the authors’ basis of knowledge regarding contemporary Mexico on the memories and recollections of life in Mexico shared by their parents, grandparents, and other relatives. One may read more about this idea in Richard Rodriguez’s *Days of Obligation: An Argument with My Mexican Father* (1992).

### **A Textual Revolution: Narratives of Transnational Migration's *Hijas Perdidas***

Undoubtedly, migration's effects are far-reaching, and extend beyond mere physical movement to encompass migrants' political and cultural affiliations. As the social scientist Aristide Zolberg observes:

“[...] [I]nternational migration is an inherently political process, and the relevant policies encompass not only the regulation of outward and inward movement across state borders—including of persons who are not, or declare that they are not, migrants—but also rules governing the acquisition, maintenance, loss, or voluntary relinquishment of ‘membership’ in all its aspects—political, social, economic, and cultural.

(11)

Nonetheless, one must recognize that this “inherently political process” is simultaneously “an inherently *personal* process” (Dreby 3, emphasis added). This is particularly evident within narratives of the domestic sphere, in which evolving familial configurations profoundly affect the lives of the families—and particularly children—of transnational migration. One may conceive of the concurrent narration of events within both the private or familial space and the overarching global context as akin to revealing the nature in which two concentric circles containing distinct experiences and circumstances within each individual circle nonetheless impact one another. Chicana literature's emphasis on the private and personal, therefore, allows for consideration of how more intimate experiences relate to broader social and cultural contexts. Maria Antònia Oliver-Rotger explains, “Thus, the apparent concern of this literature with ‘local,’ ‘private,’

‘intimate’ spaces is in fact a speculative reflection upon the relationship between the local and the global, the private and the public, masculinity and femininity, the personal and the political, the individual and the collective” (17). Recently published Chicana/o narratives of the effects of transnational migration on the women and children of Mexican families, therefore, tell compelling tales that create empathy for the plight of the migrant and his or her family while also exposing the tremendous danger and violence that mechanisms of socioeconomic and political power engender in the borderlands.

Furthermore, the realistic portrayal of the migrants’ struggles serves to illustrate the manner in which gender dynamics change within the family and Mexican culture as a whole as a result of migration (Ledesma). As we have seen, the young female protagonists of *Across a Hundred Mountains*, *La línea*, *Dancing with Butterflies: A Novel*, and to a lesser extent *Into the Beautiful North* transcend traditional cultural and gender-based norms that dictate that a woman’s sphere of influence shall be restricted to the home. In penning these texts, the authors not only direct attention to the evolving gender dynamics within families affected by transnational migration, but, more importantly, direct attention to the atrocities that these young women and other migrants face on their quests for a better life. Literary critic Juanita Heredia applauds Latina writers (namely Denise Chávez, Sandra Cisneros, Marta Moreno Vega, Angie Cruz, and Marie Arana) for their depictions of women’s experiences and contributions on a personal and public level. She asserts, “In particular, these Latina writers have [...] proven to be at times more conscientious than their male counterparts in representing an active role of women in history, in their communities, and at home.” (133). Further, “In the generations of the transnational characters in their narratives, the women writers bring

to the forefront questions of gender, genealogy, and feminism to seek social justice across national borders” (Heredia 133).

Directed toward an English-speaking American audience, the texts by Grande and Jaramillo utilize simple language to tell the complex and gripping stories of but a few protagonists who have come to represent the countless other Mexican women and children whose stories have not yet been inscribed within literary or official history. In breaking the silence regarding the profound and traumatic effects of transnational migration on those who have been “left behind,” these authors stir their readers to awaken from the comforts of their middle-class lives in the industrialized United States to recognize, ironically through fiction, the horrifying truths of the experiences of many of their *hermanas* to the south. Combining feminism and a consciousness of race and class, these Chicana texts embrace Sonia Saldívar-Hull’s vision of a border feminism based upon transnational solidarity to promote discursive and broader social resistance. For, Saldívar-Hull asserts, “As literary and cultural workers voice secrets that need to be told, we engage in resistance strategies as we report and analyze the struggles and their complexities” (172). Grande and Jaramillo accordingly spark a revolution of their own, putting pen to paper to expose their readership to the injustices faced by migrants and their families, emphasizing the tribulations of vulnerable children, to encourage readers to resist complacency with current circumstances in the borderlands, and to incite them to take action in the name of social justice.

## Chapter Four

### The Personal *Is* Political: Narrative Condemnations of Individual Tragedies of Transnational Migration

It is no wonder that artifacts of cultural production should effectively capture the socio-political climate within which they emerge. Although readers and critics may examine the elements of a text for the sheer sake of their artistic merit, applauding art for art's sake within a historical vacuum, scholars more commonly recognize the value of viewing narrative as a lens through which society in a given socio-historical moment may be better understood. As such, contemporary fiction not only conveys the pressing issues of the day, but does so in a manner that is accessible to a broader audience. As the general public of the United States turns its attention to issues of immigration in the name of post-9/11 domestic security, Chicano/a and Latino/a authors of fiction and non-fiction alike have further embraced their roles as facilitators and mediators, offering in their works another forum to promote the consideration of the circumstances surrounding the controversies of immigration policy and justice for undocumented migrants. In facilitating this opening of the discussion regarding migration, these writers mediate between cultures, communicating to an English-speaking—and presumably Anglo—readership that which is often omitted within political rhetoric and the media. Writers of fictionalized accounts of migration, as well as those who approach the topic from a quasi-objective journalistic perspective, inform their readers of overarching political and economic forces that perpetuate transnational migration and, more importantly, restore humanity to the otherwise dehumanized individuals by giving the characters of their

works a voice. This expression of more intimate and personal experiences with the phenomenon of immigration and border crossing shatters the illusion of a merely theoretical borderland and necessarily reminds readers and critics alike of the more tangible and material dimension of the border. Beyond this, the articulation of the personal tragedies and trauma steeped in suffering and injustice serves as an effective point of departure for the expression of political condemnations of the structural mechanisms that sustain the need for migration and simultaneously condone violence.

In proffering scathing condemnations of the personal impact of the global phenomenon of immigration, the authors whose texts are analyzed within this chapter utilize their works as instruments to foment transnational solidarity. In particular, Ana Castillo's *The Guardians* (2007) extends the thematic call for social justice across borders evident in Helena María Viramontes' short story, "The Cariboo Café" (1985), published over two decades beforehand. Although the effects of migration on family in the United States and Mexico and, of course, on the migrants themselves surface in these fictional works as well as in various examples of non-fiction—namely *La Migra me hizo los mandados* (2002) by Alicia Alarcón, *The Death of Josseline: Immigration Stories from the Arizona-Mexico Borderlands* (2010) by Margaret Regan, *Enrique's Journey: The Story of a Boy's Dangerous Odyssey to Reunite with his Mother* (2006) by Sonia Nazario, and *Crossing Over: A Mexican Family on the Migrant Trail* (2001) by Rubén Martínez—, Castillo's novel is by far the most compelling and effective at communicating the preponderantly negative consequences of migration in the U.S.-Mexico borderlands. Alternatively, the more journalistic accounts present an ambivalent perspective regarding transnational migration, touching upon the potential horrors of



migration while both justifying such as an inherent element of global movement, and describing these as a means to an end that may potentially offer opportunities for a better life in terms of economic stability and, for women, independence and an evolving gender identity within the family and the Mexican culture at large.

Accounts of migration addressing such thematics have not only emerged in U.S.-based fiction, testimonials, and ethnographies in recent years, but also in a growing body of juvenile literature. Exposing new generations to the contemporary realities of migration and its impact on youth, children's books convey heavy political issues like undocumented immigration and deportation in a manner that allows young readers to identify with characters who, for example, encounter feelings of alienation by fellow children or experience separation from their parents in the name of domestic security. Despite the disparity in style and approach to the expression of the impact of border crossing on migrants and their families, the proliferation of diverse literary genres geared toward readers of various ages and ethnicities contributes to the development and recognition of new voices that enter into the polemic debates about migration. That authors based in the U.S. are the creators behind these migrant voices makes one question whether the extension of their own notions and/or experiences of oppression and injustice to a transnational or pan-Latino context is entirely appropriate. I would argue that addressing such issues that are not confined by borders engenders a revised Chicano/a nationalism of the new millennium, one that is not based on or bound by geo-political boundaries, but ethnic affiliation.

## The Individual Price of Globalization and Immigration

Ana Castillo's *The Guardians* is a powerful didactic work that offers a new spin on the migrant narrative, focusing upon the psychological repercussions of the migratory journey for family members left behind on either side of the U.S.-Mexico border. In particular, the text revolves largely around the female protagonist, Regina, who lives in the United States, rather than emphasizing the physical and emotional trials of her brother, Rafa, a Mexican migrant who has crossed the border various times, and whose most recent apparently unsuccessful attempts at border crossing form the crux of the text despite not being narrated at any point in the novel.<sup>12</sup> In the wake of Rafa's vanishing during his most recent effort to cross the line, Regina adopts a maternal role to care for his son, Gabo, and, much like Juana of Reyna Grande's *Across a Hundred Mountains*, takes on the investigative challenge of resolving the mystery of his disappearance. Nevertheless, Castillo successfully presents the multitude of dangers that border crossing entails, thereby exposing the perils of migration and condemning the global forces that foster Mexican movement northward.

As in the case of other texts we have seen thus far, the quest for economic stability is the primary factor that motivates Rafa to cross the border. Projecting strong feelings of nationalist loyalty, he had come and gone frequently to maintain a sense of his

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<sup>12</sup> Although Castillo's epistolary novel, *The Mixquiahuala Letters* (1986), also utilizes the trope of a journey, this work remains beyond the scope of the present discussion since this earlier novel's focus is the fictional narrative of the protagonist's return or migration to Mexico. We may consider the protagonist of this novel, then, to be what Tey Diana Rebolledo labels "the Negotiating Border Subject [...] who resides in a place of contradiction" ("Questioning Nepantla" 233), experiencing the bicultural discomfort that the poetic voice of Pat Mora's "Legal Alien" (52) articulates.

Mexican *patria*, reflecting the earlier patterns of circular transnational migration evident prior to the implementation of heightened border surveillance and the enforcement of more stringent U.S. immigration policies beginning in the 1990s. “How many times had mi tía Regina begged my father not to return to México, to take his chances and stay, Santo querido?” (85), asks Gabo, Regina’s nephew. “But México had a pull on my papá. It was his country. ‘No soy un gringo,’ he’d say. He came up to el Norte only for the sake of supporting his familia” (85). Despite their devotion to Mexico, the characters that migrate north cannot resist the temptation of the rumors of wealth and the American Dream. Unfortunately, this dream turns out to be elusive in many cases; in fact, “La búsqueda de un sueño americano puede ser tu peor pesadilla” (115), succinctly states the warning sign on the wall of a humanitarian office that Regina visits in Juárez as she continues the search for her missing brother. The quest for the American Dream may indeed turn out to be a nightmare both for the migrant and for the family members left behind.

Underlining this discrepancy between migrants’ dreams and their reality, Regina ponders her nephew’s comprehension of the situation. “He is a boy trying to figure things out. Even if you are a hundred, how do you make sense of your parents being killed or disappearing trying to make their way to the Land of Gold? Muchos dólares en Los Estados. That’s what people hear in their villages” (97). Gabo and Regina themselves have endured the physical trials of crossing the border in addition to the disappearance of Gabo’s mother. Now, they must overcome the anxiety of yet another missing relative. Regina, in particular, is well aware of both the obvious and the less-discussed risks, and reflects upon the possible challenges her brother has encountered:

The Mexican government now even puts out a survival handbook.<sup>13</sup> It advises migrants how to cross, with tips on avoiding apprehension by U.S. authorities [...]. When you try to come over with no papers and vanish, there won't be any dogs or search parties called out. You travel at your own risk. You are at the mercy of everything known to mankind and nature. There is the harsh weather and land, the river and desert. The night is and is not your friend. It provides coolness and darkness to allow you to move. But you can get lost, you can freeze, you can get robbed or kidnapped, you can drown in el río. You can fall into a ravine, get bitten by a snake, a tarantula, a bat or something else. The brutal sun comes with day and anything can happen to you that happens at night but you can also dehydrate, burn, be more easily detected by patrols and thieves. Bandits could kill you as easily as rob you of not just your life's savings but that of your whole familia. Even of your village, in cases where communities have decided that getting one person out will help them all. If you are a pollo smuggled with others in an enclosed truck you could die of suffocation. (117)

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<sup>13</sup> Indeed, Mexico's Ministry of Foreign Relations began to distribute a 36-page pamphlet that serves as an official guide for those planning to cross the U.S.-Mexico border illegally in May 2005. While offering advice for a safe arrival in the United States and informing migrants of their rights, the guide largely discourages unauthorized immigration through drawing attention to the inherent risks that such entails. Nevertheless, the publication and distribution of the *Guía del migrante mexicano* has drawn a tremendous deal of criticism from anti-immigration individuals and organizations in the United States. One may access this illustrated guide at [http://www.cfif.org/htdocs/legislative\\_issues/federal\\_issues/hot\\_issues\\_in\\_congress/immigration/mexican-booklet.pdf](http://www.cfif.org/htdocs/legislative_issues/federal_issues/hot_issues_in_congress/immigration/mexican-booklet.pdf).

As in other works that I have discussed in previous chapters, nature *and* mankind threaten the migrant during his or her journey northward. Even more treacherous than the perils related to climate, threatening terrain, or wild animals are the actions (or lack of action) on the part of the cast of human characters in the borderlands.

The dangers presented by “humanity” are not limited to bandits or official checkpoints on behalf of the Mexican or American governments. The *coyote*, whose duty is to ensure that migrants successfully cross the border, may take advantage of the circumstances and may very well present another danger that makes other inconveniences seem mundane. “Embarrassment is nothing when you’re at the mercy of not just ‘your’ coyote but all coyotes, all traffickers prowling out there for the victims of poverty and laws against nature” (118), Regina states, echoing the danger posed by smugglers that is also manifest in texts like Irene Beltrán Hernández’s *Across the Great River* and Reyna Grande’s *Across a Hundred Mountains*. Further identifying this threat, the narrator declares:

The problem is the coyotes and narcos own the desert now. You look out there, you see thorny cactus, tumbleweed, and sand soil forever and you think, No, there’s nothing out there. But you know what? They’re out there—los mero-mero cabrones. The drug traffickers and body traffickers. Which are worse? I can’t say. (4)

As the plot of *The Guardians* develops, it is evident that migrants are at the mercy of the coyotes not only during the act of crossing the border, but also after arriving in the United States as well. Furthermore, “Whatever happens to men, in my opinion, is worse for

women” (117), Regina avers, reiterating the sentiment expressed in Ann Jaramillo’s *Línea*.

In her work *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Gloria Anzaldúa similarly identifies the unique risks that migrant women face on both sides of the border. She observes, “The Mexican woman is especially at risk. Often the *coyote* [...] doesn’t feed her for days or let her go to the bathroom. Often he rapes her or sells her into prostitution” (34). What is more, “She cannot call on county or state health or economic resources because she doesn’t know English and she fears deportation. American employers are quick to take advantage of her helplessness” (34). Yet, “She can’t go home. She’s sold her house, her furniture, borrowed from friends in order to pay the *coyote* [...]” (34). This is the case of the “fortunate” woman who has made it across the line. When Rafa and his wife, Ximena, attempted to cross the border previously, their coyotes insisted upon their separation. “The coyotes said no, the women had to go in another truck. Three days later the bodies of four women were found out there in that heat by the Border Patrol. All four had been mutilated for their organs. One of them was Ximena” (4). The fact that Gabo’s mother had died like this provokes further anxiety for the adolescent in the face of his father’s recent disappearance.

Much like Reyna Grande’s narrative portrayal of the emotional angst experienced by the family left behind as a result of migration in *Across a Hundred Mountains, The Guardians* depicts the effects of this uncertainty. As Regina explains, “We’ve been waiting a week, me and Gabo—for his dad to come back. He’s been back and forth across that desert, dodging the Border Patrol so many times, you’d think he wouldn’t even need a coyote no more” (4). However, awareness of Rafa’s potential fate

emotionally impacts his son. “It isn’t as if Gabo himself hasn’t noticed. I heard him crying into his pillow one night. He probably envisions his father being killed by a coyote and left in the desert like what happened to his mother” (12), the narrator supposes. Facing such trauma necessarily forces Gabo to age prematurely. Recognizing this, Regina explains, “It made me long for the child who said his prayers out loud every night. The last time I had seen him do that was before his papá had gone missing. All his innocence was oozing out of him a little every day and there was nothing I could do to stop it” (50). In fact, Gabo, a spiritual and pious adolescent, “made a pact with the Devil” (81), resorting to a powerful gang’s help to acquire knowledge regarding his missing father’s whereabouts. As an indirect consequence of his relationship with the members of los Palominos, Gabo is murdered before obtaining any information.

Illustrating the personal tragedies of one family’s story of migration affords an opportunity to critique the broader forces that, in conjunction, perpetuate Mexican migration to the United States. More so than the other writers within this study, Castillo incorporates polemic commentaries within her work, strongly criticizing national border and immigration policies, and identifying drug-trafficking as a vice propagated north of the border that has concrete effects south of the border. Referring to investigations for one character’s fictional book titled *The Dirty Wars of Latin America: Building Drug Empires* (32), Miguel asks, “Now, the sixty-four-thousand-dollar question, or in this case, billion dollar question, is: How long can the United States contain what its vices and counterproductive prohibitions have wrought?” (151). Miguel’s narrative voice offers an alternative to current labor and immigration policies, indirectly casting the blame for

economic problems on the outsourcing of jobs rather than on the influx of Mexican immigrants:

If the country made it easier for professional immigrants to come in, the competition would possibly drive professional salaries *down*. Thereby equalizing the distribution of wealth. Anyway, it's not about people sneaking in but jobs being snuck out. NAFTA, CAFTA, the new treaty with the Pacific rim, all the maquilas along the U.S.-Mexican border and Southeast Asia—companies went there and keep going there to take advantage of the cheap labor to be found abroad. (125)

Further elaborating upon questions of globalization and relations between the two sides of the border, Regina poses a series of rhetorical questions: “What if there had been no war and what if no money could be made on killing undocumented people for their organs? What if this country accepted outright that it needed the cheap labor from the south and opened up the border? And people didn't like drugs so that trying to sell them would be pointless?” (29), recognizing the elaborate mechanism that ultimately holds the responsibility for the structural violence against migrants attempting to create a better life for themselves across the border.

Not only does her critique encompass immigration policies, but also those agencies that require that migrants, in particular, comply with such legislation. In Castillo's novel, *el Abuelo Milton* describes the unjust treatment of Mexicans on both sides of the border, beginning with the 1924 establishment of the Border Patrol. “That's when Mexicans got to be fugitives on our own land. Whether you lived on this side or that side, all Mexicans got harassed” (72), regardless of citizenship status. With its



advanced technology and constant vigilance in the name of domestic security, *la Migra* is but one obstacle to the Mexican migrants attempting to enter the United States to support their families. As all of the analyzed texts suggest, however, the Border Patrol is not the only threat to security and well-being in the Borderlands. El Abuelo Milton affirms, “The borderlands have become like the Bermuda Triangle. Sooner or later everyone knows someone who’s dropped outta sight” (132), someone like Rafa, “only one among hundreds every year disappearing or finally turning up dead because of heat and dehydration in the desert or foul play at the hands of coyotes” (148), individuals who take advantage of structural issues. By exposing the series of tragedies endured by Rafa’s family, the narrative voice of *The Guardians* encourages the reader to consider more profoundly the elements that contribute to the seemingly inevitable violence and risks inherent in the migratory journey. Change borne through *transfrontera* alliances forged among parties north and south of the border may be the only hope to protect migrants against death and/or oppression in the face of a lack of structural change.

Decades beforehand, Helena María Viramontes had suggested the need for such trans-border efforts for social justice for immigrants (authorized or otherwise) in “The Cariboo Café,” first published in 1985. This short story illustrates the manner in which a Chicana writer in the United States may effectively wield her pen as a social activist who informs her readership of socio-historical circumstances often elided in “official” history, and who demands that we, as informed and socially-aware readers, take action.

Accordingly, it is beneficial to consider Viramontes’ contribution to the body of Chicano/a literature regarding transnational migration to comprehend more fully how

Castillo's *The Guardians* extends this notion of writing as social activism in the context of more recent cultural production.

### **Transnational Migrants Seeking Refuge**

In her polyphonic short story from the collection *The Moths and Other Stories*, Helena María Viramontes presents the ramifications of migration on women and children, weaving narrative voices to expose the alienation, displacement, and oppression of undocumented immigrants in the United States. Like Castillo's novel, "The Cariboo Cafe" does not narrate the migratory journey itself; rather, the story opens with the description of a migrant family's arrival to the unnamed city that is their destination. "They arrived in the secrecy of night, as displaced people often do, stopping over for a week, a month, eventually staying a lifetime. The plan was simple. Mother would work too until they saved enough to move into a finer future where the toilet was one's own and the children needn't be frightened" (61), the narrative voice explains, establishing the familial motivation for migration as being primarily financial. In contrast to the accounts of children of transnational families who are left behind, Sonya and Macky have accompanied their parents on the trip north. However, socioeconomic circumstances require that they remain unsupervised while their parents work. This situation eventually results in the formation of a transnational "family" by a Salvadoran washer woman, whose own haunting tale of oppression and migration constitutes an integral element of the text.

Whereas the adolescent character in Castillo's *The Guardians* contends with his own fears that primarily involve his parents' deaths during separate border crossings rather than the implications of his undocumented status in the United States, there remains no doubt that Sonya and Macky have internalized a profound fear of deportation instilled in them by their parents' rules. "Rule one: never talk to strangers [...]. Rule two: the police [...] was La Migra in disguise and thus should always be avoided. Rule three: keep your key with you at all times—the four walls of the apartment were the only protection against the streets until Popi returned home" (61). Only within the refuge of their apartment would the children be safe from the threat posed by the police, the "men in black who get kids and send them to Tijuana, says Popi" (63). He further warns, "Whenever you see them, run, because they hate you [...]" (63), emphasizing the danger of facing officials' hatred toward immigrants like them, in addition to the threat of deportation. Consequently, when Sonya loses the key to their home, she becomes "a living example of the anguish of displacement and the stress of homelessness" (Castillo and Tabuenca Córdoba 149), seeking refuge at a local seedy diner. Ironically, the children's terror of the police inadvertently results in their kidnapping by a Central American woman, whose own circumstances have forced her across the border to flee guerrilla activity.

Presumably displaced by violence and war in her home country and the disappearance (or murder) of her son, this nameless woman endures the alienation common to the immigrant experience. "Right off I know she's illegal, which explains why she looks like a weirdo" (66), declares the cafe owner. Equating her appearance with malevolent intentions, he comments, "Already I know that she's bad news because

she looks street to me. Round face, burnt toast color, black hair that hangs like straight ropes. Weirdo [...]” (65-66). In this case, his intuition may be accurate since he later sees “[...] this news bulletin ‘bout two missing kids. I recognize the mugs right away. Short Order and his doggie sister” (66), he identifies Sonya and Macky. Suddenly, the image of the woman’s face loses clarity, and he postpones a call to the police to report his sighting. Fragmented like the café owner’s memory of the woman’s face, the narrative fills in some of the textual gaps, forcing the reader to deduce the woman’s rationale for abducting the children. Deranged from the grief of losing her son, Geraldo, she endures the guilt of having prioritized work over familial obligations. “When my son wanted to hold my hand, I held soap instead. When he wanted to play, my feet were in pools of water” (70), she laments. Perhaps she believes the young boy to be her missing child, or she may be seeking her own sort of refuge in the construction of this makeshift transnational family of individuals who must withstand oppression as undocumented immigrants.

The underlying common alienation experienced as “Others” unites this improvised family, exemplifying the manner in which, “[...] borders become bonds among peoples, rather than the articulation of national difference and the basis for exclusion enforced by the collaboration of the United States and Salvadoran regimes” (Harlow 152). As Barbara Harlow notes, the onus falls on women like the Salvadoran refugee of “The Cariboo Café” to reformulate personal and political identities beyond gender and race, a task she accomplishes in this case by re-configuring the traditional structure of family (152). While the displaced children seek refuge from a world of shadows in the labyrinthine city beyond their apartment doors, the washer woman

searches for sanctuary from her physical displacement and psychological torment. By integrating parallel stories of suffering as a component of migration, “[...] Viramontes commits herself to a transnational solidarity with other working-class people who like all nonindigenous tribes are immigrants to the United States” (Saldívar-Hull “Feminism on the Border” 217), reflecting a combination of feminism and consciousness of race and class. Representing all other female victims of hegemonic agents, this “modern-day *llorona*” (Saldívar-Hull “Feminism” 219) joins “[t]he women [that] come up from the depths of sorrow to search for their children” (Viramontes 68). The narrative voice specifically refers to the Mesoamerican archetypal figure of La Llorona, establishing another transnational connection to unite the histories and experiences of the North American Borderlands and Central America (Saldívar-Hull *Feminism* 105). “It is the night of La Llorona,” the narrative voice in Viramontes’ text asserts, “I hear the wailing of the women and know it to be my own” (68-69). Following Saldívar-Hull’s suggestion that this story exemplifies Chicana political discourse intended to fortify alliances across borders, one may extend this commentary to encompass the cries and laments of all Latina women subjected to suffering. Hence, the Chicana author (or reader) comes to identify with the oppression of fellow Latinas, and perhaps feels compelled to counteract the injustices in a transnational effort. “The Cariboo Cafe” drives the reader to empathize with individuals like the washer woman, who, “As refugees in a homeland that does not want them, [...] find a welcome hand holding out only suffering, pain, and ignoble death” (Anzaldúa 34). This call to action heightens the reader’s awareness of the structural violence perpetrated against migrants—particularly, women and children—regardless of specific geo-political borders.

Published in the 1980s, in the midst of El Salvador's lengthy civil war, Viramontes' short story operates much like Ana Castillo's subsequent biting social critique of the overarching forces that perpetuate the violence of border crossing through the narration of the domestic and more personal effects of migration. Viramontes exposes the volatile socio-political context of 1980s El Salvador through depicting the devastating emotional impact of war on the nameless Salvadoran washerwoman in her text, and consequently, her work educates her readership about issues beyond the national border and documents the experience of but one Central American refugee whose voice is ordinarily silenced or simply ignored.<sup>14</sup> Notably, Demetria Martínez also places the plot of her well-known novel *MotherTongue* (1994)<sup>15</sup> within the context of the twelve-year civil war in El Salvador, explicitly drawing attention to the U.S. government's support of the state-sanctioned violence against civilians in the preface to the text. As the protagonist comes to understand the terror experienced by her lover, a refugee from El Salvador, and the broader injustices in El Salvador, she identifies the capacity of writing to serve as testimony. The power of the characters' documentation of social and political injustice extends to that which is presented by Chicana authors like Martínez, Viramontes, and Castillo. In recording more authentic versions of the realities of pan-

Hispanic injustices, albeit within fictional works, these writers develop a consciousness

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<sup>14</sup> Whether the depiction of this character is flattering or sympathetic is an entirely different matter. One may argue, however, that the trauma she has experienced in her home country and as a result of fleeing from the violence somehow justifies her actions within the short story.

<sup>15</sup> I will not delve into an analysis of Martínez's novel in the present discussion because it does not directly address issues of (im)migration. However, it is imperative to recognize its presentation of trans-border issues of social justice through innovative narrative techniques.

of race, class, and gender that extends beyond typical divisions or borders and thereby grant a voice to migrants who typically live “at the periphery of North American society” (Saldívar-Hull “Feminism” 218).

Perhaps the development of Chicano/a literary works that address issues facing a broader and more diverse population of Latino/a immigrants in the United States is a natural outgrowth of the earlier Chicano Movement’s fight for cultural and political equity and justice. Critic Tim Libretti suggests that authors like Viramontes (as well as Rolando Hinojosa, Graciela Limón, and Cherríe Moraga) have developed “[...] narratives of political consciousness and struggle that do not discard the Chicano nationalist politics of self-determination and decolonization but rather reassert the urgency and necessity of those politics by elaborating and resituating those politics in both an international context and in the context of a diversifying Latino/a culture and identity in the United States” (137). Dealing with international politics more “cosmopolitically” (Libretti 147), post-*movimiento* Chicano/a literature simultaneously challenges imperialism and exploitation on a transnational scale while demanding the interrogation of such within the confines of our nation’s boundaries. Indeed, what appears to be an alliance through alienation developed by Helena María Viramontes, Demetria Martínez, and, more recently, Ana Castillo does not detract from the consideration of the socio-political circumstances facing contemporary Chicanos/as. Rather, their novels re-direct and extend the demand for social justice once focused more exclusively on their fellow Chicanos/as to encompass that which their Hispanic *compadres* similarly deserve. In her acknowledgments at the end of *The Guardians*,

Castillo explicitly recognizes the overlooked, subaltern individuals of the world with whom the author, as a Chicana, presumably empathizes. Castillo writes:

Finally, the forgotten underclass throughout the world, whose lives, services, and labor are taken far too much for granted, are remembered. May one day the leaders who govern over humanity earnestly seek ways to even the playing field for everyone to live with dignity. (212)

This hope echoes the Chicano Movement's desire for equity, justice, and recognition of Chicanos/as' contributions to society as a whole, but places it within the more contemporary context of globalization and the consequent transnational movement of goods and people. Furthermore, Castillo's wish for dignity may be fulfilled, in part, by authors like herself who grant migrants a voice within narrative history, thereby re-humanizing the image of an often demeaned and demonized figure of the undocumented border crosser.

### **Making the Invisible Visible: Non-fiction Exposés of Transnational Migration**

Chicano/a and Latino/a writers of non-fiction have similarly offered migrants an opportunity to reclaim their own voices in journalistic testimonies that decry the mechanisms of globalization and transnational migration that necessarily maintain hierarchical power structures between individuals of the first and third worlds, and condone, if not encourage, the perpetuation of systems of violence directed against undocumented immigrants. As opposed to the fictional accounts previously discussed, however, the authors of *La Migra me hizo los mandados* (2002), *The Death of Josseline:*



*Immigration Stories from the Arizona-Mexico Borderlands* (2010), *Enrique's Journey: The Story of a Boy's Dangerous Odyssey to Reunite with his Mother* (2006), and *Crossing Over: A Mexican Family on the Migrant Trail* (2001) do not present an overwhelmingly negative perspective regarding the personal consequences of international immigration. On the contrary, these texts address transnational migration from a stance of ambivalence. While they certainly capture some of the horrific tragedies faced by particular families and communities affected by migration—delving into global issues by first examining the impact within a cultural and political microcosm—the accounts ultimately justify the risks taken by migrants whose only hope is pursuing a better life north of the U.S.-Mexico border. Although most of the journalistic texts I will examine unequivocally cast blame on the U.S. government and its border policies for the ever-increasing number of deaths of migrants, the reader is left with the understanding that confronting the risks of violence and/or death is the only means to procure opportunities for economic stability and, for women, the additional benefit of independence and a shifting gender identity within their families and their culture at large.

Whereas the other quasi-objective nonfictional texts I will discuss in this chapter and the previously-analyzed fictional works, *The Guardians* and “The Cariboo Cafe,” do not delve into the graphic reality of corporeal harm during the trek northward, the physical risks that migration poses to Latin American immigrants do take center stage within journalist Alicia Alarcón’s *La Migra me hizo los mandados*. This collection of testimonies presents the presumably autobiographic immigration stories of Alarcón’s Radio Única audience in Southern California. Although the vignettes expose the

tremendous violence involved during the journey across the border, the radio listeners who contributed their stories have come *and* stayed in the United States, suggesting that the horrors they faced while crossing the border without documents may have been worth it for the individual women who headed north in search of a better life without a spouse to meet them on the other side, and for those men and women who found themselves pushed out of their home countries because of the economy or violence.

Just as the potential for income has lured the characters of the other novels we have discussed across the border, one contributor to the collection, Teresa, recognizes that the only possibility to pay for higher education and help the family financially is to join her mother in the United States. As she describes in “Unos nachos para llevar”:

El dinero que mandaba mi mamá desde Los Angeles alcanzaba cada vez menos para sostenerme en la escuela. Menos pensar en entrar a la universidad. La solución era reunirme con ella, estudiar inglés y trabajar. Así le podríamos ayudar a mi abuelo a salir de sus deudas. (33)

Following in the footsteps of her mother, who had left the family behind in order to support them, Teresa heads north. Seemingly more concerned with the distance from her spouse than the issue of money, another woman, Fabiola, explains that she opted to accompany her husband across the border, particularly since, “Yo no sería como ellas, una esposa sometida a la espera” (87). Thus begins their honeymoon in the borderlands, an experience that is *nothing* like what television and her hometown’s equivalents of *Don Chipote*’s Pitacio—the returned migrant—have suggested. Perhaps it is wise that Fabiola undertake this journey, if nothing else, to keep tabs on her new husband. For, as another migrant, Iginia describes, she and her husband married and had three children. “Éramos

felices hasta que un día se le metió la loquera de viajar a los Estados Unidos. Hice lo imposible para sacarle esa idea de la cabeza. Todo fue inútil. Me dejó sola con mis hijos” (118-19). Aside from the loneliness and heartbreak of separation, “Al principio me mandaba dinero pero de repente no supe más de él” (119). Consequently, she began to work to care for her children, and once grown, they crossed the border themselves and found him married to another woman. She explains further that her children “pidieron que me fuera con ellos a Estados Unidos. Al principio me negué. Pero el amor por ellos fue más grande que mis miedos y mis angustias” (119). With reason, she harbored many fears, for the journey presents a multitude of risks, but she did ultimately opt to embark on the trip north to join her children. While the Border Patrol certainly functions as one obstacle to migrants, a bigger threat rests in the physical demands of the journey and the very real possibility of violence and, in the case of women, rape.

As opposed to the passing mention of rape in the fictional texts we have encountered thus far, several testimonies within Alarcón’s text explicitly depict scenes of sexual violence toward women. Interestingly enough, though, these are largely the stories of men, not women. In “Vi cómo la violaban,” for example, Henry describes the rape of sisters with whom he travels:

La más grande, desnuda, de espaldas sobre la cama, con los ojos abiertos, gemía quedo. La sábana entre las piernas estaba llena de sangre. Sentía que las sienes me iban a explotar. Unos ojos me miraban suplicantes. Pedían auxilio. Era la más chica, la del círculo de luna oscura en el pómulo derecho. Estaba en el suelo como si estuviera gateando, con su ropa totalmente rasgada, estaba la niña de Colombia. Uno de los

mexicanos la sujetaba por los cabellos con el pene adentro de su boca mientras que el otro la sujetaba por la cintura violándola por detrás. Al verme, se levantaron furiosos [...]. (55)

Henry feels powerless to stop the assault since the same Mexican *coyotes* hold his future in their hands. Even though Henry does nothing to assist the sisters, the *coyotes* later treat him more severely, angry that he has interrupted and simply witnessed their sexual predation. Similarly, José Luis describes “el infierno” (133) once he and the other migrants have crossed the border. He incorrectly assumed that dangers were behind them, particularly after one woman from their party was swept to her death while attempting to cross the river. In the room at the Motel 6, three of the *coyotes* convened, and, “Mientras uno me vigilaba, los otros violaban a las muchachas. Eso lo hicieron varias veces. Pensé en la muchacha de Nicaragua. Tal vez fue mejor que se la llevara el río” (133). José Luis notes the effects on the poor girls yet, like Henry, does nothing to stop the violence. “Cuando salimos, las muchachas parecían haber envejecido diez años. Caminaban lento, las piernas apretadas, la cabeza agachada. La mirada no era la misma” (133). Somehow, drowning pales in comparison to suffering the violence and indignity of rape, and these vignettes, in particular, illustrate that both are very real risks that border crossing poses to women. The graphic nature of the scenes forces readers to recognize this, and the narrative voice thereby establishes a certain degree of empathy for the victims without means to rectify or prevent the situation.

In capturing sometimes horrific autobiographical experiences in this collection of testimonies, Alarcón stirs the reader to action, or at the very least, to awareness. Written in Spanish, one may presume that the intent is to warn fellow migrants of the potential

suffering and danger that await them. Alternatively, the original publication in Spanish may have been geared toward Spanish-speaking or bilingual (i.e., Chicano/a, Latino/a, Hispano/a) individuals living in the U.S., in hopes that the blunt descriptions of contemporary migrant realities will ultimately lead to progress toward social change. The subsequent publication of this collection in English certainly allowed for a broader readership to gain exposure to a sampling of circumstances pushing men and women to cross the border and the perils they encounter during the journey. While the *testimonios* do not specifically reflect a migrant's metamorphosis of personal, national or cultural identity, nor the changing gender dynamic within the family and community as a result of migration, the stylistically austere and jarring articulation of actual trials and tragedies endured compel the reader to consider the personal impact of migration.

The prologue of Margaret Regan's *The Death of Josseline: Immigration Stories from the Arizona-Mexico Borderlands* similarly evokes a reaction of empathy, shock, and anger on the reader's part, largely owing to the heart-wrenching depiction of fourteen-year-old Josseline's demise on the migrant trail. "A little girl with a big name—Josseline Jamileth Hernández Quinteros—she was five feet tall and a hundred pounds. At fourteen, young as she was, she had an important responsibility: it was her job to bring her little brother, age ten, safely to their mother in Los Angeles" (xi), Regan, a regular contributor to *Tucson Weekly*, describes. She elaborates upon the obstacles that Josseline and the other migrants from El Salvador had already faced on their journey to Arizona:

The group had crossed from El Salvador into Guatemala, then traveled two thousand miles from the southern tip of Mexico to the north. The trip had been arduous. They'd skimped on food, slept in buses or, when they

were lucky, in *casas de huéspedes*, the cheap flophouses that cater to poor travelers. In Mexico, the migrants feared the *federales*, the national police, and now, in the United States, they were trying to evade the Border Patrol, the dreaded *migra*. (xii)

Finally north of the border, Josseline suffers from blistered feet and the biting cold before she begins to vomit uncontrollably and becomes too weak to stand. In light of her state, “The coyote had a decision to make, and this is the one he made: he would leave the young girl behind, alone in the desert. He told her not to worry” (xiii). Accordingly, the other migrants pull her wailing brother away, and continue onward, abandoning the adolescent whose “[...] clothes betrayed her girly tastes” (xiii). Emphasizing Josseline’s youth, Regan describes her choice of clothing for her trek to a new life, where she hoped and expected to be reunited with her mother in Los Angeles:

One jacket was lined in pink. Her sneakers were a wild bright green, a totally cool pair of shoes that were turning out to be not even close to adequate for the difficult path she was walking. A little white beaded bracelet circled her wrist. Best of all were her sweats, a pair of “butt pants” with the word HOLLYWOOD emblazoned on the rear. Josseline planned to have them on when she arrived in the land of movie stars.  
(xiii)

When Dan Millis, a volunteer with the humanitarian group No More Deaths, spotted bright green shoes while leaving supplies in the desert for migrants, he did not initially think of Josseline or death, Regan recounts. Then, however, he saw her body. “The little pearl bracelet was on her wrist” (xvii), and once the sheriff’s deputies arrived, they turned

her over to discover that this was, indeed, the missing girl. The conclusive evidence? “On the back of the pants was a single word: HOLLYWOOD” (xvii).

Painting this image of youthful clothing on a juvenile victim of transnational migration is an extremely effective means of describing the impact of U.S. border policy in humanized terms. In providing her audience with a more tangible illustration of the human toll of unauthorized immigration, Regan converts statistics into the individual lives of people whose stories are typically not told, and many of whom have perished in hopes of pursuing a better life in the United States. Nevertheless, she largely utilizes this tactic to grab the attention of the reader before moving on to discuss a large quantity of data and research that she has compiled regarding the militarization of the U.S.-Mexico border and the environmental impact of migration on the region. One may gather, then, that the primary purpose of this text is not so much to grant migrants a voice *per se* as to challenge U.S. policies like the Hold the Line project in Texas (1993), Operation Gatekeeper (1994), Operation Safeguard (1998), and Operation Return to Sender (2006-2007), which have essentially forced migrants to cross into the country through more dangerous terrain, rather than achieving the desired goal of deterring migrants from attempting illegal entry. Although the tone of the text is certainly critical of the governmental response to undocumented immigration, the author fails to offer any solutions to the complex issues that impact so many lives, nor does she explore the personal motivations of migrants that serve as an impetus for undertaking so many risks in hopes of procuring a minimum-wage job north of the border.

In contrast, Sonia Nazario provides a powerful journalistic account that deals with the personal impact of, as well as the underlying forces behind, transnational migration in

*Enrique's Journey: The Story of a Boy's Dangerous Odyssey to Reunite with his Mother* (2006). A projects reporter for the *Los Angeles Times*, Nazario extends her Pulitzer-Prize winning newspaper series into this nonfictional text, which narrates the astounding danger and hardship that young Enrique faces as he attempts a journey alone from Tegucigalpa, Honduras, to the United States in 2000, where he hopes to reunite with the mother whom he last saw eleven years earlier, when he was just five years old. Just one example of the estimated 48,000 immigrant children who seek reunification with parents north of the border annually (Nazario 5), Enrique becomes a poster child for transnational migration for Nazario's readers, who necessarily come to identify with his fear, faith, and will while accompanying him on his harrowing journey northward. Based upon interviews with a number of individuals and agencies and the author's own journey to retrace Enrique's steps, the text effectively returns a level of humanity to migrants like Enrique and echoes many themes and images one finds in Ann Jaramillo's *La línea* and the documentary *Which Way Home*, directed by Rebecca Cammisa. Furthermore, the work's prologue illustrates that transnational migration and motherhood hit quite close to home for the author, whose passing conversation with her housekeeper ultimately compels her to explore a mother's motivation for leaving her children behind—often for years—and the effects of such a decision on the family as a whole. These families are not an abstract conceptualization to facilitate the discussion of more theoretical issues of migration, as in the case of Regan's *The Death of Josseline*; rather, this housekeeper, María del Carmen Ferrez, is an authentic human being with whom the author interacts regularly, and yet for years, has harbored a secret about the four children whom she left behind in Guatemala twelve years ago to provide for them as a single mother. A year



after the conversation, Carmen's son, Minor, decided to undertake the journey through Guatemala and Mexico, and miraculously, surprised his mother at her doorstep. After discussing the migratory experience with Minor, Nazario decided to investigate the phenomenon further. She explains her motivation in narrating the tale of one migrant child, "Perhaps by looking at one immigrant—his strengths, his courage, his flaws—his humanity might help illuminate what too often has been a black-and-white discussion" (xiv) regarding illegal immigration. And so began her search for a typical adolescent Central American boy who had traveled on the trains, ultimately crossing the U.S.-Mexico border, in search of his mother.

In following Enrique's journey, the author crossed thirteen Mexican states and traveled over 1,600 miles, half of which was traversed atop trains. These trains, Carmen's son had previously explained, present the biggest danger to migrants. "He'd told me about the gangsters who rule the train tops, the bandits along the tracks, the Mexican police who patrol the train stations and rape and rob, about the dangers of losing a leg getting onto and off of moving trains" (xv), Nazario comments, echoing the observations within *Which Way Home*, discussed in the previous chapter. Corroborating this observation, a priest at a migrant shelter in Chiapas whom Nazario interviews asserts, "Arrayed against them is *la migra*, along with crooked police, street gangsters, and bandits. They wage [...] *la guerra sin nombre*, the war with no name" (68). Yet, the young migrants are determined to face all of these dangers in the blind faith and hope that they will find their mothers. For, "In their absence, these mothers become larger than life. Although in the United States the women struggle to pay rent and eat, in the imaginations of their children back home they become deliverance itself, the answer to

every problem. Finding them becomes the quest for the Holy Grail” (7), Nazario explains. Accordingly, the children put aside whatever feelings of abandonment or resentment they have experienced in their mothers’ absence to undertake the perilous journey northward to provide further financial support for their extended family, or simply for the purposes of reunification. In many cases, Nazario observes, a child or adolescent’s decision to head north is not approved of by the parents in the United States or the caretakers in the home country.

This is the case for the author’s housekeeper who, “left for the United States out of love. She hoped she could provide her children an escape from their grinding poverty, a chance to attend school beyond the sixth grade” (x), and she acknowledges the sacrifices that ensued. Nevertheless, she describes her resistance to bringing her children to the United States above and beyond her inability to save enough money for a smuggler to bring them. “Besides,” Nazario writes, “she refuses to subject her children to the dangerous journey. During her own 1985 trek north, Nazario’s housekeeper, Carmen, was robbed by her smuggler, who left her without food for three days. Her daughters, she fears, will get raped along the way” (xi). This fear is not without basis, as, “A 1997 University of Houston study of U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service detainees in Texas shows that nearly one in six says she was sexually assaulted” (98). Similarly, Enrique’s mother, Lourdes, “[...] does consider hiring a smuggler to bring the children but fears the danger. The coyotes, as they are called, are often alcoholics or drug addicts. Usually, a chain of smugglers is used to make the trip. Children are passed from one stranger to another. Sometimes the smugglers abandon their charges” (21). Likely capturing the sentiment of most transnational mothers, Lourdes questions, “Do I want to

have them with me so badly,' she asks herself of her children,' that I'm willing to risk their losing their lives?'" (23). Moreover, both Carmen and Lourdes express their concern at bringing children into their "poor, drug- and crime-infested" (xi) neighborhoods. It is clear, then, that these transnational mothers always bear in mind the well-being of their children, even if that means imposing an almost insurmountable distance between them for years and even decades at a time, disappointing hopes for family reunification, and ultimately hindering any chances of knowing one another intimately.

Enrique, for example, had fantasized about his mother's return for the holidays year after year. "Christmas arrives, and he waits by the door. She does not come. Every year, she promises. Each year, he is disappointed. Confusion finally grows into anger" (Nazario 19), and in his case drug addiction and outright rebellion against his caretakers in Honduras. At 16, he decides to take matters into his own hands, leaving his home with \$57, his Lourdes's phone number written on a scrap of paper and in the waistband of his pants, a t-shirt, cap, gloves, toothbrush, and toothpaste, to face "*la guerra sin nombre*" (68). On his eighth attempt, Enrique ultimately finds her. Do they live happily ever after? Not exactly. As Nazario describes:

Children like Enrique dream of finding their mothers and living happily ever after. For weeks, perhaps months, these children and their mothers cling to romanticized notions of how they should feel toward each other. Then reality intrudes. The children show resentment because they were left behind. They remember broken promises to return [...]. Some are surprised to discover entire new families in the United States [...].

Jealousies grow. [...]. The mothers, for their part, demand respect for their sacrifice: leaving their children for the children's sake [...]. They think their children are ungrateful and bristle at the independence they show—the same independence that helped the children survive their journeys north. In time, mothers and children discover they hardly know each other. (191)

Much like in Ann Jaramillo's *La línea* and Reyna Grande's *Dancing with Butterflies*, strong feelings of abandonment and resentment re-surface after the treacherous journey for family reunification.

By revealing the experiences and emotional turmoil of actual individuals impacted by transnational migration, Nazario effectively paints a human portrait of this global phenomenon that is often discussed with objectivity, indifference, and little to no compassion for those parents whose desperation drives them to leave their children to seek undocumented entry to the United States, and for those unaccompanied minors who likewise find themselves motivated to embark on the extremely dangerous trek across various borders. In describing the multitude of dangers, she undoubtedly portrays the effects of transnational migration in a negative light; nonetheless, she is compassionate toward the individuals whose socioeconomic circumstances led them to undertake this journey. One may suggest that the underlying tone of hope and redemption in her text mitigates the negativity of circumstances that provoke migration and sustain the violence inherent in the movement of people across borders, and helps her readership to appreciate and acknowledge these migrants' contribution to our society. "The single mothers who

are coming to this country, and the children who follow them, are changing the face of immigration to the United States,” Nazario declares. Moreover:

Each year, the number of women and children who immigrate to the United States grows. They become our neighbors, children in our schools, workers in our homes. As they become a greater part of the fabric of the United States, their troubles and triumphs will be a part of this country’s future. For Americans overall, this book should shed some light on this part of our society. (xxv)

Indeed, *Enrique’s Journey* tugs at the readers’ heart-strings and encourages them to consider the issue of migration on a more human level, though without much of an emphasis on the transformation of gender, national, or cultural identity.

These types of changes are more explicit in Rubén Martínez’s *Crossing Over: A Mexican Family on the Migrant Trail* (2001), which successfully humanizes Mexican families affected by transnational migration, with particular attention to both the women who are left behind, and those who decide to cross the border with their spouses. An ambivalent perspective regarding migration surfaces in this work, whose journalistic approach is based upon the author’s interviews and time with a community of Purépecha Indians in Cherán, Mexico, in the aftermath of a tragic accident that took the lives of three brothers from Cherán and five other undocumented immigrants. Despite the physical risks and the emotional consequences of family separation, “[...] the migrants continue to cross, because ideals of paradise die hard, especially for Mexicans, who for several decades have regarded the Rio Grande as a river of life more than of death [...]. They continue to cross despite the tragedies and despite Operation Gatekeeper because

the odds remain in their favor” (7), Martínez comments. For them, “The future lies in America, the past in Mexico” (9), and particularly appealing to the women of Cherán, this future holds the promise of changing gender roles and identities. Martínez reveals that the women of Cherán view migration as not only an opportunity for increased revenue, but a means to escape stifling and suffocating conditions in their *pueblito*. For many women, this is worth whatever risks crossing the border may entail.

In sharp contrast to their lives in the conservative indigenous community, “In the ‘liberal’ north, women don’t have to wear rebozos, [and] no one cares much if you shack up with your lover without getting married first [...]. In the north, Mexican women can drive cars, and their husbands might even help wash the dishes and tend to the children” (45). Consequently, even Rosa, the sister who is grieving the loss of three of her brothers, considers what the future holds in store for her should she stay in Cherán when her husband heads north:

Here: Stay at home, mend clothes, stitch doilies that won’t sell at market. Fill the tins in the yard each day with sudsy water. Mind a store that has no customers. Wait for calls and money orders from Wense, wait for rumors of his drunken carousing or infidelities up in St. Louis. Watch her daughter, Yeni, grow up, attend a few years of elementary school and get knocked up by a local boy who will surely run away to the north himself. Perhaps one day Yeni will sit at the Singer like Rosa does now, thinking about making a break for the north. (149)

In contrast to this existence, the tangible benefits of life in the United States, which she had experienced before, may outweigh the guilt of leaving her mother and the fear of losing her life to cross the border:

There: [...] Up there, they have an apartment of their own, with hot and cold running water, an indoor bathroom, a sofa, an electric stove. Wense acts differently up there; he even helps with the dishes. She can probably convince him to teach her to drive the white Buick he recently bought [...]. It is impossible to imagine mobility in Cherán. But when Rosa thinks of St. Louis, all kinds of visions come to her: cosmetology school, college for Yeni, and someday a house of their own. Where her mother will live. Where the widows and Rosa's nieces and nephews will live.

(149)

Thus, she makes her decision; Rosa will venture north to work and live in a culture that espouses radically different conceptualizations of gender roles. As Maria Antònia Oliver-Rotger notes, this very culture is one that offers additional protection to women, making private affairs like domestic violence issues in the public sphere (*Battlegrounds* 194-95). María Enríquez, another Purépecha migrant in America, explains, "Back home, the man will hit you, and what can you do?" she says, [...] speaking not in a whisper but in the loud, sometimes shrill voice of a Purépecha matron. "But here, they'll go to jail. Maybe that's why they think they're not free up here, ha!" (244). Apparently, the migrant men's freedom disappeared with the arrival of their spouses north of the border.

These devoted women headed north, largely as a result of machismo, according to the narrator. "The old migrant tradition in small towns like Cherán permitted only the

men to become adventurer-providers, journeying north alone to tame the frontier” (181). Nevertheless, the separations were difficult for the women, who had to contend with loneliness, rumors about their husband’s infidelity with Mexican or, even worse, *gringa* women, or even the absolute disappearance of the ones they loved (as we have seen in Reyna Grande’s *Across a Hundred Mountains*). To remedy the situation, wives face three options: “accept the man’s philandering away from home and wait patiently for money and the occasional visit” (181); “create their own *casas chicas*, but [...] to do so would risk one’s being labeled a whore by the elders, men and women alike (181); or most effectively, demand to join their husbands in the States. Reminiscent of the scene of Don Chipote and Doña Chipota’s reunion in Daniel Venegas’s *Las aventuras de Don Chipote, o cuando los pericos mamen*, Martínez observes, “These days there were new tales being told among the Cheranes, stories from women who said they’d traveled north to surprise their husbands with their mistresses and how the whores were sent packing and the men suffered the wrath of betrayed Purépechas” (181). Therefore, these women decided to take matters into their own hands, marching across the border to restore the family unit. They, like Rosa, must undertake a grueling journey to cross the border, suffering physically and potentially falling prey to *coyotes*. Describing the manner in which these strong and determined women embark upon their journeys northward, *Crossing Over* shatters the myth of the abnegated and submissive Mexican wife.

Nowhere is this image more completely obliterated than in Martínez’s presentation of La Licuadora, the female *coyote* whose family business is human smuggling. The narrator describes her as she leads her *pollos*: “She makes her way through the bustle like a Mafia don. A short, tough Indian woman with the trademark



blue-black rebozo of the Purépecha Indians. Age has begun to crease her face, but her hair is dark black still and she's got the don't-fuck-with-me-look of our adolescent Wild One. She is followed by about fifteen dirt-poor Indians, all of them carrying small vinyl bags" (27). The narrator draws the reader's attention to the paradox that, "Purépecha women are sometimes used in Mexican tourist publicity as an example of exotic beauty—quiet, docile beauty. But in Cherán, women often think of themselves as macho, tough as nails" (99). These tough women, like Rosa, will not stand to be passive victims of male oppression, and rather, choose migration as a means of liberation from what they describe as a suffocating community, and they may be shown the way by La Licuadora herself. Although migrant Mexican women may overcome the mechanisms of machismo to a certain extent to gain greater independence and contribute to the family's finances, they must still suffer separation from family members whom they have left behind, and of course, the physical risks of back-and-forth migration will continue to present a challenge. Hence, the reader does not identify a clearly defined perspective regarding migration, perhaps indicative of the balanced exposition of this subject in a nonfictional text.

The overall tone of ambivalence within Martínez's text lies in the notion of migration as a necessary evil, one which presents risk and challenges, but ultimately provides for opportunity and movement toward economic improvement for residents of the Purépecha highlands. Indeed, as Maria Antònia Oliver-Rotger comments, Martínez emphasizes "the essential modernity of migrancy in the context of the global economy" ("Ethnographies" 187), which essentially implies a divide between the old, traditional Mexico and a new, vibrant one that is being transformed through migrant labor and its

effects on the home community through remittances and the physical return of migrants. She continues, “*Crossing Over* firmly, and at times also romantically, describes the Indian migrants as the prophets of the future of Mexico and the most active agents of cosmopolitanism in the country” (191). Furthermore, the text’s revelation of the hybrid citizenship and cultural identities of migration from Cherán to the United States entails an exploration of “[...] how ‘multilocal diaspora cultures’ such as the Purépecha destabilize nation-state discourses where the nation is sovereign and finite” (191). As such, she argues, “Mexican migrants are doing to Mexico what Chicanos did to the United States: wearing out the image of a homogenous national culture” (197).

In an era in which the United States, as a nation, embraces multiculturalism, the definition of a national culture of identity *per se* is complex indeed. The connection between Mexican migrants and Chicanos based upon their cultural hybridity within a context of intra- and transnational diaspora is one that merits attention, particularly as we consider the apparent explosion of works of fiction and non-fiction alike by Chicano/a authors dealing with Mexican and Latin American migration to the United States. A brief overview of recently published children’s books offers a unique and interesting glimpse at the perception of such cultural links within yet another literary genre that has turned its attention to transnational migration and the family.

### **Teaching Cultural Coalitions and Social Change to the Next Generation**

Several Chicano and Chicana authors have penned juvenile literature in recent decades, reflecting authentic experiences of young Chicano/a readers to inculcate a pride

in their heritage and help to preserve their culture in a world characterized by globalization, and a tendency toward cultural homogeneity that such implies. These storybooks are also critical in fomenting a respect for the values and perspectives of different cultures among young readers, and therefore are appropriate and important for children of all cultures. Interestingly, a current trend within children's literature, primarily that written by Chicano/a and Latino/a authors, similarly includes the emergence of stories that address the personal impact of migration, likely in response to the statistics that over 100,000 parents of children who were U.S. citizens were deported between 1997 and 2007 (Falcone A12).

In the early 1990s, Gloria Anzaldúa published the bilingual children's book, *Friends from the Other Side / Amigos del otro lado* (1993), "the story of Prietita, a brave young Mexican American girl, and her new friend Joaquín, a Mexican boy from the other side of the river" (1), who crossed the border with his mother so that she could find work. Anzaldúa captures the tension between Chicanos and Mexican migrants as neighborhood children, mostly Mexican American, yell slurs: "Hey, man, why don't you go back where you belong? We don't want any more *mojados* here" (8). The young protagonist opts to become Joaquín's friend and ally, defending him from the taunting and also helping him to escape *la Migra* during its patrols of the street by bringing him and his mother to the wise *curandera*'s house to hide. Further highlighting this cultural tension on a national scale, the narrator describes, "From behind the curtains, Prietita and the herb woman watched the Border Patrol van cruise slowly up the street. It stopped in front of every house. While the white patrolman stayed in the van, the Chicano *migra* got out and asked, 'Does anyone know of any illegals living in this area?'" (25). While

Anzaldúa's text deals with the alienation and persecution experienced by migrants, later bilingual children's stories directly address transnational parenting and the separation of families as a result of immigration.

In Robin B. Cano's *Lucita Comes Home to Oaxaca / Lucita regresa a Oaxaca* (1998), the protagonist returns to her birthplace in Oaxaca with her grandmother for a two-month vacation. Despite her initial sadness because of the temporary separation from her parents, working in the U.S., Lucita ultimately reconnects with her Zapotec roots during her summer vacation, realizing, "My home is in the North [...] but it's in Oaxaca, too" (13). Soon thereafter, her parents arrive to visit the extended family and bring Lucita back to the U.S.; the ending is certainly a happy one. The conclusion of *From North to South / Del norte al sur* (2010) by René Colato Laínez is not as unambiguously celebratory. Inspired to write this children's book by one of his elementary school students, upset after her father's deportation to Tijuana, Colato Laínez depicts the experience and trauma of family separation, especially for the U.S.-born citizens whose undocumented parent(s) had been deported. Opening with José's excitement at his upcoming visit to his Mamá in Tijuana at el Centro Madre Assunta, a shelter for immigrant woman and children, he later explains, "Two weeks ago, Mamá didn't come home from work. That night, when she called us, we all cried together. She had been working at the factory when some men asked for her immigration papers. But Mamá was born in Mexico and didn't have those papers. The men put Mamá and other workers in a van. In a few hours, Mamá was in Tijuana, Mexico" (7). Since his father is a permanent resident, the family hopes that the lawyer will successfully arrange her papers, though there is no telling when that might happen. Despite the ability to visit his

mother, José's sadness does not dissipate, as the separation has taken its toll. However, once he meets and plants a garden at the shelter with unaccompanied children who had attempted to cross the border to reunite with their parents, he takes comfort in knowing that other children are going through similar experiences and emotions as a result of transnational migration. In narrating the story of a young boy whose mother has been deported, while also including the detained children left behind with dreams of family reunification, *From North to South / Del norte al sur* (2010) allows young readers in a similar situation to identify themselves within the text and, in focusing on the impact of migration on parents and children, restores the humanity of migrants for a broad audience, regardless of cultural or ethnic affiliation.

Much like the border crossing narratives analyzed throughout this broader study, emerging juvenile literature that incorporates issues of immigration serves as a counter-discourse to the political rhetoric and explosion of images in the popular culture and the media that anthropologist Leo Chávez describes in *The Latino Threat: Constructing Immigrants, Citizens, and the Nation* (2008) and *Covering Immigration: Popular Images and the Politics of the Nation* (2001) as manipulating public opinion so that immigration is considered a threat to citizens' liberties. Like the fictional, testimonial, and ethnographic texts geared toward an adult audience, these children's books bring the focus back to the family, and invoke consideration of what it means to be Chicano/a or Latino/a in the United States, notions of cultural diversity within and beyond borders, and the importance of forging *transfrontera* alliances for social justice.

## **The Chicano/a Textual Call for Social Justice beyond Borders**

Contemplation of Oliver-Rotger's parallel between the erosion of cultural homogeneity on the part of Mexican migrants and Chicanos in their respective nations brings to mind a perhaps more pertinent question regarding the impact of the intersections of the two marginalized groups. As Lomelí, Márquez, and Herrera-Sobek note in "Trends and Themes in Chicana/o Writings in Postmodern Times," Mexican immigration is not a new phenomenon, nor is its thematic treatment in Chicano/a cultural production (302). However, there seems to have been a proliferation of Chicano/a novels that focus primarily on Mexican immigration since the 1990s, most of which narrate the journey to the U.S. and then focus on conflicts of integration and assimilation, or incorporate immigrants as secondary characters (Lomelí, Márquez, and Herrera-Sobek 303-04). "As long as Mexican workers continue to migrate legally or illegally to the United States," Lomelí, Márquez, and Herrera-Sobek assert, "some Chicano literary production will continue to focus on this important phenomenon, and we will continue to read about the adventures, the sorrows, the heroism, the deaths, and triumphs of Mexican immigrants" (305). One may suppose that including these themes contributes to the portrayal of the complexity and diversity of contemporary Chicano/a experiences in our transnational world. Moreover, the proliferation of new voices, approaches, and genres that address immigration and the family enhances the body of Chicano/a and Latino/a cultural production.

Particularly since 2000, though, U.S.-based Chicano/a and Latino/a authors have shifted their focus to documenting the atrocities of contemporary migrants' lives in

fictional and nonfictional works, adopting roles as cultural mediators to inform readers and effect social change. Delineating the difference between Hispanic immigrant literature and “native” literature written by Chicano/a or Latino/a U.S. citizens, Nicolás Kanellos refers to Latinos’ entitlement to constitutional civil rights as one reason U.S.-based authors may more openly protest social injustice in their writing: “This empowers authors to use texts in the battle to reform society and force it to live up to the principles of equality and protection under the law which are codified in the national charter” (25). Hence, these writers expose the violence, exploitation, suffering and injustice endured by migrants and their families, cultivating transnational alliances in the fight for human rights while also invoking the more typical themes of “native” (i.e., Latino) writing that Kanellos identifies: identity crises, community, and the interplay of race, class, and gender (23). Ana Castillo, in particular, lambasts U.S. immigration policy and the dominant culture’s complacency with the marginal position of migrants through candid and forceful comments and the restoration of characters’ humanity in *The Guardians*. Regardless of the works’ style and projected sentiment concerning migration, it remains clear that the texts discussed in this chapter exemplify the manner in which the personal *is* political (and vice versa), particularly for the women and children of transnational migration, and reiterate the need for *transfrontera* solidarity in the name of social justice.

## Chapter Five

### Conclusion

“Where the transmission of ‘national’ traditions was once the major theme of world literature, perhaps we can now suggest that transnational histories of migrants, the colonized, or political refugees—these border and frontier conditions—may be the terrains of world literature” (Bhabha 146)

As Homi Bhabha notes, the current trend in world literature seems to be a focus on the transnational, rather than distinctly national, experiences of the inhabitants of specific regions throughout the world, reflecting the interconnectedness of communities globally and the resulting complex negotiation of geopolitical, ethnic, gender, and socioeconomic identities by those individuals who transcend boundaries. It should come as no surprise that so-called ethnic literatures published in the United States have similarly embraced these transnational histories as a contemporary addition to the discussion of the intricacies of an existence on, near, or crossing concrete and metaphorical borders. In the previous chapters, I have demonstrated how 21<sup>st</sup>-century Chicana narratives of border crossing convey the physical, socioeconomic, and psychological effects of transnational migration and separation on women and children, imparting a humanized characterization of families of migration, the multitude of dangers and exploitation they face both in their communities of origin and in the United States, and the personal processes of transformation that they undergo as a result. Chicano/a and Latino/a writers that capture the personal effects of migration not only alter the canon of Chicano/a, Latino/a, and (im)migrant literatures through a focus on women and the



family, but offer to their audiences texts that function as effective didactic tools and instruments for social justice.

While authors of border crossing narratives may describe the changes in migrants' physical appearances, these are often emblematic of the deeper psychological ones. As transnational beings, they undertake the process of "becoming like and unlike U.S. citizens, becoming part of a citizenry that does not feel a responsibility to them, becoming part of a nation that both desires and detests them" (Pérez-Torres 823). This results in a complicated process of negotiating cultural and national identity on two planes. First, each displaced migrant must locate himself or herself geographically, psychologically and socially on an individual plane. Second, the impact of an (im)migrant presence in U.S. communities—and, conversely, the absence in communities of origin—has become more glaringly obvious on a broader community plane in recent decades. As U.S. residents come to identify migrants as part of the fabric of our daily lives and communities, and adopt or adapt migrants' cultural traditions, border-crossing individuals inevitably shape the identity and meaning of being a U.S. citizen. This may be what Pérez-Torres intends to convey in declaring, "[...] already the aliens serve us, already the aliens move among us. Indeed, already, always, we are the aliens. The aliens are us" (823).

Pérez-Torres cleverly extends the metaphor of the "alien" and human smuggler to describe the manner in which the individuals who expose the experiences of border-crossers and, more broadly "the Other," through narrative or other means assume a role as cultural traffickers of sorts. "Those involved in the articulation of minority discourses of all kinds act like *coyotes*, smuggling across national, disciplinary, and methodological

boundaries (for a price) agents who already challenge the significance of those boundaries” (Pérez-Torres 823). One might envision that the authors I have discussed smuggle the truths about social injustices and violence perpetrated against migrants, as well as factors motivating their transgression of borders, into the dominant literary discourse that has historically omitted or erased the personal stories of the impact of Mexican and Central American migration. In breaking the silence regarding the profound and traumatic effects on the women and children who have been left behind and often set out on their own migratory journeys, these authors create texts that are, in essence, the equivalent of literary contraband. Addressing a wide English-speaking—and likely Anglo or bicultural Hispano/a—audience based in the U.S., they (not so) surreptitiously import these stories and condemnations of the forces driving and sustaining international migration within their works of fiction or ethnography as though they were dangerous or disruptive contraband. Chicano/a authors who combine feminism and a consciousness of race and class in their works about migration, embracing Sonia Saldívar-Hull’s vision of a border feminism based upon transnational solidarity to promote social resistance, also interrogate notions of what should be included within the canon of Chicano/a literary discourse. Though written by Chicanos/as and Latinos/as, many of the works within this investigation focus on the impact of social injustice on, and identity negotiation of, protagonists who are *not* Chicanos, although in most cases, there is usually at least one secondary Chicano/a character that maintains some type of relationship with the Mexican or Central American migrant who constitutes the focus of the text.

Addressing issues not confined by borders leads to a revised Chicano/a nationalism, or perhaps “inter-nationalism,” of the new millennium, based on ethnic affiliation rather than geo-political boundaries. These works appear to be a natural outgrowth of the fight for social justice, equity, and recognition of Chicanos’ contributions to society during the height of the Chicano Movement in the late 1960s, but within the more contemporary context of globalization and the consequent transnational movement of goods and people. On the one hand, one must commend these writers for addressing issues of social justice that transcend borders. After all, the works I have discussed exemplify the notion of “a politically and ethically committed text” (Oliver-Rotger “Ethnographies” 200) that demonstrates not only the marginality that migrants face, but also the U.S. government’s complicity with a system that essentially demands the use of cheap labor from south of the border, whether it be legal or not, to support U.S. industries and commerce. Until the overarching mechanisms driving northward migration disappear, or undergo some type of major overhaul, migrants will continue to be exploited, devalued, and dehumanized. Telling the stories of these individuals, then, offers a means by which the authors may confront and address this dehumanization, indirectly proffering a voice to those who have been silenced.

Nevertheless, while we should applaud the intentions of these authors, we must be wary of the risk of comparing disparate histories of dislocation, exploitation, marginality, and/or “otherness,” as Oliver-Rotger cautions (“Ethnographies 181-82). This is particularly the case when comparing the situations in the first versus third worlds, in which socio-cultural and economic circumstances may be quite incongruent, as in the case of Chicano/a and Latino/a writers in the United States and the Mexican or Central

American migrants about whom they write. Furthermore, this brings to mind the question of whether it is, indeed, possible to give a legitimate or “authentic” voice to those individuals who cross the U.S.-Mexico border in a northward direction. One must only reflect on the focus of postcolonial and subaltern studies and the discussion of their application to Latin America to recall the hot debates regarding the inherent danger in taking up the pen on another culture’s behalf.

This is not to diminish, however, the importance of the roles of social activist and cultural mediator adopted by these authors and filmmakers in recent years, particularly in the post-9/11 xenophobic climate and post-2008 economic crisis in which the United States finds itself. Beyond salvaging individual stories from narrative and historical oblivion, they provide a plethora of information regarding the forces that drive and sustain international immigration, and provoke their audience to engage in thoughtful consideration of the personal, economic, socio-cultural, and political consequences of contemporary global movement. In practical terms, though, can one conceive of the extension of Aztlán, the metaphorical Chicano homeland, to groups with similar albeit very different histories and experiences? The authors and filmmakers discussed here have described their responsibility as social activists, but are there noticeable implications on a community level? Have we witnessed any sort of mobilization within the community beyond the texts?

Recently, a great deal of support of undocumented immigrants’ right to a driver’s license on the part of more “established” Chicanos/as, Latinos/as, or Hispanos/as who are U.S. citizens or legal residents has emerged in New Mexico, one of only three states that do not currently require individuals to prove legal immigration status in order to obtain a

driver's license (along with Utah and Washington). Republican Governor Susana Martinez, elected in November 2010 and herself a granddaughter of immigrants, is attempting to change New Mexican legislation to require proof of immigration status for driver's licenses; consequently community members of varied ethnicities and nationalities are coming together in the spirit of collaboration. Sociologist Patricia Zavella similarly notes the high levels of participation of citizens of diverse racial backgrounds in the 2006 demonstrations and marches protesting pending immigration legislation in California (x). However, there remains quite a bit of division, ambivalence or even hostility among groups based on nationality or ethnicity so that the authors I study, like the musical group Los Tigres del Norte and singer Lila Downs whom Zavella describes, "are not calling for a politics of *unity*, with assumptions that all Mexicans [and Central Americans] have common concerns, but a politics of *solidarity* premised on acknowledging differences [...]—whether based on ethnicity, location, generation, or gender" (223, emphasis added). Rather than claim a revised Chicano/a nationalism or inter-nationalism, then, perhaps a more appropriate term to describe the intention behind U.S.-based textual and cinematic productions dealing with border crossings is a post-millennial Chicano/a *solidaridad*. To an extent, the borders of Aztlán seem to be opening to embrace the issues, struggles, and triumphs of other alienated or marginalized groups from Mexico and Central America.

This is not to suggest that migrants must turn to their U.S. counterparts for solidarity or assistance. In addition to highly developed networks of support on the migrant trail and in their communities in the United States, an activism of sorts has also emerged south of the border. While there does not appear to be as much attention to the

plight of migrants nor the dangers of their journeys in recent texts published in Mexico and Central America as in contemporary U.S. cultural production, there are examples of these themes in an interesting intersection of art and community in Alejandro Santiago Ramírez's project, "2,501 Migrants." Upon returning to his home community in Oaxaca, Mexico, he was shocked to discover that 2,500 individuals, over half of the population, had left for more urban parts of Mexico or the U.S. as a result of poverty and unemployment. His plan was to re-populate Teococuilco with 2,500 ceramic figures to represent those who had left, as well as one more to represent him and his return. These sculptures will be moved as a group to somewhere in the desert between Mexico and the U.S. to represent the path of the typical Oaxacan migrant (Pech Casanova). One might question whether migrants would be deterred from continuing northward were they to encounter this army of ceramic sculptures in the desert. Similarly, the texts I have discussed throughout this study are not effective as deterrents to migration since one would presume that the target audience is not the migrant population in their countries of origin. In *solidaridad* with these migrants, though, the authors effectively inform their U.S. readers, raising consciousness about immigration policy, and potentially motivating them to take action.

Moreover, the heightened awareness of experiences and issues affecting migrants allows for their inscription within history vis-à-vis the construction of a "dialogic history" (Zavella 223). Zavella asserts, "[These artists] turn the individual deaths, beatings, deportations, alienation, exploitation, or tensions of the Mexican diaspora into cultural memory" (223). Not only do the performance artists she describes denounce oppression and offer dreams of social justice and change, they "provide a vision of the nation that is

inclusive and respects other languages, complex racial mixtures, and collaborations, and also embraces migrants from Latin America; they value an America sin fronteras where crossing legal boundaries does not set up social barriers” (224). Much of the same can be said of the Chicano authors included in this dissertation.

As discussed in the second chapter, Irene Beltrán Hernández and Estela Portillo Trambley were among the first Chicana writers to develop overt alliances with border crossers in their texts, portraying the experiences of female Mexican migrants in *Across the Great River* (1989) and *Trini* (1986) respectively. Not only do these novels address the impact of immigration on the family, namely familial separation and the transformation of relationships and responsibilities within families, they demonstrate the triple oppression—due to race, class, and gender—with which the female protagonists contend. In addition to recuperating the experiences and identity (re-)negotiation of Mexican women impacted by transnational migration, these novels expose the exploitation and violence from which migrants suffer, embodying border feminism in the transcendence of geo-political borders and development of alliances with Mexican migrants and their families.

The families—namely the children—of migration and their tremendous physical, socioeconomic, and psychological struggles are at the forefront of Reyna Grande’s *Across a Hundred Mountains* (2007) and *Dancing with Butterflies* (2009), and Ann Jaramillo’s *La línea* (2006), as I discussed in Chapter Three. In depicting the often tragic consequences of familial separation and transnational motherhood, these novels, like the films *La misma luna* (2007) and *Which Way Home* (2009), humanize the figure of the migrant, creating empathy for the plight of the women who cross borders and children

left behind and effectively demanding social justice that extends beyond physical borders. The authors and filmmakers capture their audience's attention, drawing them into compelling and entertaining plots about individual quests for financial stability and family reunification, and simultaneously reveal the changing gender dynamics in Mexican families and culture as a result of transnational migration, and the danger and violence to which children of migration, in particular, are exposed as a result of the complex interplay of mechanisms of socioeconomic and political power in the borderlands.

Though these thematics are presented rather overtly in the texts, the reader does not detect a militant, belligerent, or inflammatory tone, likely because the critiques are embedded within engaging and provocative stories about fictional individuals. Chapter Four similarly describes texts in which transnational migration as a personal *and* political process is manifest, and demonstrates how fictional and nonfictional narratives of personal tragedies or traumas function as a point of departure for the expression of political condemnations of the mechanisms that drive and sustain migration and seemingly condone violence in the borderlands. In contrast with the novels mentioned above, Ana Castillo's *The Guardians* (2007) more bluntly addresses the relationship between political and economic forces and the phenomenon of migration. In the course of the narration of the protagonist's search for answers about her brother's disappearance, Castillo invokes incendiary imagery and discourse about the U.S. demand for drugs, the black market for human organs, human trafficking, gang violence, and the corrupt and unjust Border Patrol. Castillo's text, then, falls more in line with works of non-fiction like Alicia Alarcón's *La Migra me hizo los mandados* (2002), Margaret Regan's *The*



*Death of Josseline: Immigration Stories from the Arizona-Mexico Borderlands* (2010), Sonia Nazario's *Enrique's Journey: The Story of a Boy's Dangerous Odyssey to Reunite with his Mother* (2006), and Rubén Martínez's *Crossing Over: A Mexican Family on the Migrant Trail* (2001), all of which shatter the notion of a merely theoretical border in documenting the violence, injustice, exploitation, and suffering endured by migrants and their families. As such, these texts function as instruments that cultivate transnational solidarity by shocking their audience with information about the factors originating north of the border that stimulate and perpetuate international migration while also restoring humanity to the otherwise dehumanized individuals impacted by such factors. Authors introduce these themes in a less graphic, though still compelling, manner in recent juvenile literature, reminding readers of all ages that migrants and their families simply hope and search for a better life north of the border, sacrificing much to do so.

This restoration of humanity in 21<sup>st</sup>-century Chicana narratives of border crossings derives largely from the texts' emphasis on the effects of the journey northward within the domestic or familial sphere. This focus on *la familia* sets them apart from most migrant narratives written by male Mexican and Chicano authors, which tend to narrate the masculine migrant experience during the physical journey and/or issues of assimilation versus alienation upon establishing lives north of the border. That which is patently missing in these male-authored fictional texts is a depiction of the female migratory experience and the impact of the individual's peregrination on the families and communities left behind. Chicana re-writings of migration not only incorporate the experience of the female border crosser and the resulting negotiation of personal, gender, ethnic and national identities, but also the vast consequences of migration on the women

and children left behind and emerging patterns of parental arrangements like transnational motherhood. As such, they exemplify not only the Chicana feminism described by Monika Kaup but also the border feminism that Sonia Saldívar-Hull has articulated.

Indeed, contemporary Chicana writers continue to develop themes that extend beyond issues of ethnic identity based on historical circumstances of *mestizaje*. Beginning with the works of Beltrán Hernández and Portillo Trambley in the 1980s, the transformative process of the female characters resulting from the clash between inherited cultural and gender norms and the personal transformation borne of transnational migration is manifest. Chicana authors publishing at the turn of the new millennium, like Reyna Grande and Ana Castillo, place the personal stories of their female protagonists within the 21<sup>st</sup>-century context of globalization and immigration, successfully revealing the interplay of the personal and the political to capture more effectively a contemporary addition to the complexity of the Chicano/a conceptualization of identity and experience, still through a feminine lens.

The recent focus on the impact of transnational migration on women and the family in contemporary Chicana narrative contributes to the diversity of Chicano/a experiences captured in literature and motivates readers of any ethnicity to seek a more comprehensive understanding of immigration and consider taking action to improve the lot of migrants and their families. Whereas earlier Chicana literature offered readers characters with whom to readily identify, thereby validating their own experiences and existences, the overarching lack of Chicana protagonists in the texts analyzed here is a bit curious, but reflects an awareness of the local and global communities in which the

authors live and write. Much like Chicana writers began to embrace the Chicana woman as “theoretical subject” in the 1980s (Alarcón 1991), contemporary Chicano/a and Latino/a writers alike have shifted the focus to the migrant, namely the female or juvenile migrant, as the theoretical subject of the new millennium through detailed depictions of their experiences and an emphasis on their qualities as human beings in a variety of literary genres—be they fiction, testimonials, ethnographies, or even children’s books. The authors arrive at this humanization of the migrant largely via the textual revelation of the personal impact of transnational migration, echoing the notions of “experiential inwardness” that Lomelí, Márquez, and Herrera-Sobek (2000) identify in writings of the Chicana Generation in the mid-1980s.

Rather than contribute to the notion of a migrant presence as an invasion or infiltration, then, all of these literary texts compel readers to contemplate more profoundly the abstract notion of undocumented or illegal immigration to consider the personal and human price of migration for hundreds of thousands of Mexican and Central American migrants and their families. As such, they complement historical, anthropological, and sociological research addressing similar themes. You might envision, then, a scene of a fierce desert sandstorm somewhere near the U.S.-Mexico border, with winds whipping and howling. Through the haze of dust and sand in the air, you can barely make out blurred figures. As the figures approach, their human form takes shape. As they continue to draw near to you, their faces come into focus, and even before hearing their voices, you recognize the suffering, desperation, faith, and hope in their expressions as they block the harsh assault of the tiny and relentless grains of sand against their faces. You now realize that the once unidentifiable shapes in the distance

are individuals—human beings—fighting against elements of nature, economics, politics, and oppression in their search for a better life north of the border. In much the same way, Chicana narratives of border crossing bring images of women and children of transnational migration into focus, promoting a shift from public consciousness, or awareness, of immigration to public conscience or conscientiousness.

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