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The Ends of Education: Chicanx Self-writing and the Institution of Higher Education

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The Ends of Education: Chicanx Self-writing and the Institution of Higher Education

DISSERTATION

submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in English

by

Christopher Joseph Varela

Dissertation Committee:
Professor Rodrigo Lazo, Chair
Professor Emeritus Alejandro Morales
Professor Jonathan Alexander

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DEDICATION

For my family, given and found

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Latinx Literature

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

The Ends of Education: Chicanx Self-writing and the Institution of Higher Education

by

Christopher Joseph Varela

Doctor of Philosophy in English

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Professor Rodrigo Lazo, Chair

This dissertation examines literary representations of Chicanx experiences of higher education in autobiographical writing to excavate new insight into the past, present, and future of education for diverse students. Throughout the US, we continue to struggle to achieve equitable access to education across racial/ethnic, and though many universities and colleges make strides toward inclusivity and diversity, these institutions often fall short of meeting the needs of a diverse student population. As a first-generation Chicano student and teacher, troubled by these concerns in and around the classroom, I recognized similar preoccupations in various forms of self-writing—including autobiography, memoir, essay, poetry, and short narrative—of many Mexican American and/or Chicano/a/x writers. From Richard Rodriguez, Ruben Navarrette, and Sergio Troncoso to Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherríe Moraga, to Ana Castillo and Sandra Cisneros, to, more recently, Reyna Grande and Rigoberto Gonzalez, education haunts their written lives—sometimes in the subject matter and sometimes in the formal qualities of their work. It is as if

they cannot help but simultaneously account for their educational privilege while giving testimony to the racial trauma of education.

Studying the self-representational writing of these highly educated authors, I argue that Chicanx self-writing is a particular site for the manifestation of the burden of representation—the pressure to perform as othered racial/ethnic subjects. These works, published from the late 1970s to the late 2010s and giving accounts of experiences as early as the mid-1960s, are indicative of the shifts in education for students from underserved communities in the late 20th century that we continue to see: mainly increased but uneven and precarious inclusion. Self-writing—operating less as a genre and more as a rhetorical mode in its unique constellations between writer, historical context, "truth," and reader—becomes a critical space that calls for the interrogation of one's own exceptionality. Each of these authors, to varying degrees, at times embraces and at others resists their exceptional status as all of them, on some level, express an understanding of how the rhetoric of exceptionalism can often function to justify the continuity and continuation of inequity. This project reveals that within these authors' accounts of and reflections on higher education lie a basis for both a sustained critique of the shortcomings of the university for Latino/a/x people as well as the potential for reimagining what higher education can be and do.

INTRODUCTION

For whom is higher education, and to what purpose? These questions have been at the heart of the institution of higher learning in the United States from its historical precursor in the colonial era's secular colleges—the foundation for the Ivy Leagues—to today's vast dispersion of almost seven thousand accredited post-secondary schools. It is no secret that throughout the US we continue to struggle to achieve equitable access to education across racial/ethnic lines. And although some colleges and universities have made strides toward inclusivity and diversity, contentions around issues like affirmative action and expanding access to im/immigrant populations show that the conflict over who "belongs' in academia and how to best serve students rages on. For example, while the University of California, Irvine, has achieved designation as a "Minority Serving Institute" in the last half-decade, California public universities have yet to recover from the effect of 1996's Proposition 209. Even the historic Bakke decision of 1978 that deemed soft forms of affirmative action nationally constitutional did so largely by reasoning that diversity added value to the experience of an educated white class rather than arguing for higher education as a democratic right or necessity. When the inclusion of people from marginalized racial and/or ethnic communities is based on tolerance per their usefulness or the ease of their incorporation, such inclusion seems precarious indeed: the persistent threat of the "end" always feels near. It is no wonder that many scholars of color might form a complicated relationship with higher education as they try to find a place in a system that simultaneously heralds and rejects them.

While these are not exclusively Chicanx matters, one can trace the thread of these concerns throughout the autobiographical work of many Chicano/a/x writers as they tend to

engage with ideas of higher education through form, content, and/or both. This is no coincidence, as higher education offers the potential opportunity to gain access to social and material tools of cultural production that are vital for reaching the book market. What is striking, though, is how a preoccupation with education haunts the life writing of so many Chicano/a/x or Mexican American identifying authors. From Richard Rodriguez, Ruben Navarrette, and Sergio Troncoso to Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherríe Moraga to Ana Castillo and Sandra Cisneros to, more recently, Reyna Grande and Rigoberto Gonzalez, writing about their own lives seems to compel them to account for their educational privilege while also giving testimony to the racial trauma of educational institutions. On success and education, Richard Rodriguez, for example, writes, "[W]hat I am about to say to you has taken me more than twenty years to admit: *A primary reason for my success in the classroom was that I couldn't forget that schooling was changing me and separating me from the life I enjoyed before becoming a student*" (Rodriguez 47). Rodriguez interprets his experience to claim as a universal truth that education changes the essence of oneself. This is not a new phenomenon—we commonly see this theme in literature, from bildungsroman to autobiography. And yet, further excavation of Chicano/a accounts of higher education, including Rodriguez's, reveals that these changes can have distinct effects on non-white students, often in ways that intersect with other issues of class, gender, and sexuality.

Compounding on Latino/a/x author's accounts of education is the ever-present "burden of representation," a term I adapt from Kobena Mercer to convey the pressure of expectations on one who is labeled with the status of ethnic/racial/cultural other to speak to/for the interests of

their social group.[1] These expectations can be leveled from both within and without said social group, calling upon the rhetor to represent one's otherness "appropriately," so to speak. Autobiographical writing or self-writing is especially fraught in this regard because the writer is forced to reckon with oneself as an othered subject under the lens of what autobiography scholar Leigh Gilmore observes as a rhetorical relationship between the author, testimonial contexts, the reader, and perceptions of "truth." According to Gilmore, "[A]s a genre, autobiography is characterized less by a set of formal elements than by a rhetorical setting in which a person places herself or himself within testimonial contexts … in order to achieve as proximate a relation as possible to what constitutes truth in that discourse" (3).[2] I take this assessment a step further by using the term "self-writing" to treat autobiographical writing—which includes an array of textual forms, including but not limited to autobiography, memoir, essay, poetry, and short story—as a rhetorical mode than as a formal genre altogether. Chicanx self-writing, then, becomes a particular site for the manifestation of the burden of representation for the educated ethno-racial subject as this rhetorical space calls for the interrogation of one's own exceptionality.

In the primary texts that this study examines, we find that each author variously embraces and/or rejects their exceptional status as highly educated Latino/a figures at different moments and to different degrees. In turn, as the works of these writers provide critical insight into the shifts in higher education for students from underserved communities—mainly increased but uneven and precarious inclusion—they too establish grounds for understanding how the ideology

[1] Kobena Mercer, in "Black Art and the Burden of Representation" (1990), is specifically addressing the complex relationship between black art and representation. By drawing from Mercer, I am not suggesting that all experiences or processes of oppression and exclusion are interchangeable or comparable across sociohistorical, cultural, and or/racial contexts. Rather, my goal is specificity over portability—there may be parallels, similarities, and intersections between contexts, but this does not equate to universality.
[2] *The Limits of Autobiography: Trauma and Testimony* (2001).

and rhetoric of exceptionalism can often function to justify the continuation of inequity. I focus the scope of this project on Chicanx writers rather than Latinx writers more generally because of the way in which the intellectual and academic history of Chicano Studies—its formation and continuous interrogations and reformations of concepts of education—interweaves and sometimes collides with a variety of Chicanx self-writing. As well, I focus on primary works published from late 1970s to 2010's as the writing covers author experiences starting from the mid 1960s and are indicative of the shifts in education in the late 20th century that we continue to see, including the rise of discourses of diversity and Latino/a excellence, the implementation of "Hispanic serving institutions," and the growth of creative writing programs as mediators of cultural production.

As the work of both John Alba Cutler and Michael Soldatenko illustrates, the relationship between Chicano/a studies programs and the institutes that house them has been no easy union.[3] From the inception of Chicano/a and Mexican American programs on college campuses there has always been a tense negotiation of what it means to represent an oppressed culture while also accessing certain modes of privilege from within a dominant culture. It is not as if Chicano/a students en masse *simply* and *uncritically* embraced their minority status and role in higher education. The perennial question—for which Audre Lorde has perhaps given us the answer—arises: can the master's tools dismantle the master's house?

Alba Cutler's work is influential to this project also for its model of reading that analyzes literature as cultural representation while simultaneously considering the means of cultural production. Relatedly, Mark McGurl's *The Program Era* has been useful for both its critical analysis of the key role of creative writing programs in particular and higher education in general

[3] Cutler, *Ends of Assimilation: The formation of Chicano Literature* (2015); Soldatenko, *Chicano Studies: The Genesis of a Discipline* (2009).

in the shaping of 20th-century American literature and its methodology that stresses the material contexts of the academy. To an extent, my project will take up practical aspects of these writers' academic careers: all the authors in this study have bachelor's degrees, and almost all have graduate degrees and/or have held appointments as instructors in a variety of programs, from literature to creative writing programs to cultural studies and Chicano/a/Latino/a studies programs. The point of such methods in this project is not to logically square away these writings' role as superstructural but rather to contextualize the material conditions often attested to in the writing itself as well as to historicize the cultural shifts around these texts. I believe that the methodological framework necessary to investigate the complex relationships between Chicanx self-writing and higher education must consider the resulting writings as both products of the university *and* cultural representations.[4]

By representation, I do not suggest that individual authors can represent a whole community in toto or that identity affiliations can fully account for the intellectual output of individual authors. Rather, I read cultural representation as a political act by which authors claim stakes to positions of alterity—whether it is to resist and/or reinforce hegemonic ideologies. By emphasizing the sociohistorical contexts of writing as a product of its material conditions, I aim to move beyond an account of what we might call the polemics of representation—identity-based politics that suggest that simply having representation of oppressed cultures and peoples in cultural, political, and material gatekeeping positions is enough to counter social inequity and

[4] I have found that strictly materialist accounts tend to ignore completely the agency and potential for agency of already marginalized authors and work. One can see an example of this methodological drama played out in Alba Cutler's response to Mark McGurl's reading of Sandra Cisnero's *The House on Mango Street*, which I cover briefly in Chapter 2.

injustice.[5] The authors this project focuses on have differing takes on representation—some are more explicit about this than others—but, as González notes, the choice of Latino/a authors to write of their lives as subjects through the public rhetorical space of self-writing is inherently political.[6]

The project's title, *The Ends of Education*, is in reference to Cutler's Ends of Assimilation, which itself references Derrida's Ends of Man and Krishan Kumar's The Ends of Utopia. It is meant to signal a certain pessimism over the precarity of access to higher education for students of color, but it is also meant to pose questions that offer new potentiality in the reading of Latinx literature: what does education do? what have we done with it? what *can* we do with it? Each instance of self-representation in this study provides, almost inevitably, an account of education as a transitional space that is, to some extent, both destructive as well as positively transformational personally and/or socially. Far from unequivocal endorsements of higher education as a panacea for social inequality and injustice or outright rejections of education as a colonized endeavor, Latinx writing tends to enact and reenact a tenuous positioning toward higher education. What I reveal in texts of self-representation by these Chicano/a/x authors are accounts of education that allow for both a critique of the university apparatus as well as an argument for why access to such institutions is still vital to Latino/a cultures as each author, through a literary rendering of their educational experience, provides insight into unique visions/definitions of what higher education has been, is, and/or could be for Latinx folk.

Chapter 1, "Scholarship Boys: from Ivy League Students to Professional Writers," addresses Richard Rodriguez's early work, *Hunger of Memory* (1981), to establish a historically

[5] I borrow here from Nicole Fleetwood who uses the term "polemics of black visibility" to indicate not just the 80s and 90s multicultural turn, but also so called identity politics and the relationship between the multiculturalism and a politics of representation.
[6] "Memory Lessons, Memory Lesions," *Red-Inked Retablos* (2013).

contextual entry point into the discussion as he attends college in the mid-sixties through early/mid-seventies—the era of the first generation of affirmative action. The chapter juxtaposes *Hunger* with Ruben Navarrette's *A Darker Shade of Crimson* (1993) and Sergio Troncoso's writings in *Crossing Borders* (2011) and "Passing Ambition" from *We Wear the Mask* (2017) to examine when, where, and how these three elite educated authors—who share similar career trajectories as scholars to public, professional writers/authors—coincide and diverge in their critiques of education. I find that each author presents unique engagements with the discourse around Latinx higher education in terms of both content—what he has to say about Latinx higher education—and rhetorical contexts—how he says it—to arrive at different conclusions about the purpose, implementation, and responsibilities of education.

Chapter 2, "This Bridge Called Our Education," explores the self-writing of Chicana feminists Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherríe Moraga, starting with their contribution to the seminal collective text *This Bridge Called My Back* (1981) and continuing through their later work: Moraga in *Loving in the War Years* (1983), *A Xicana Codex of Changing Consciousness* (2011), and *Native Country of the Heart* (2019); and Anzaldúa in *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1987), in contributions to *Making Face, Making Soul/Haciendo Caras* (1990) and *This Bridge We Call Home* (2002), and in her posthumously published *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo Oscuro* (2015). For Anzaldúa and Moraga, the burden of representation presents as an ethical imperative of responsibility to oppressed peoples, not just one's own. They meet this call with a coalitional impulse, launching *Bridge* as an intervention into not just Chicano/a and feminist discourse but also higher education. They build on and develop new strands of critical thought that take into account class, race, gender, and sexuality as interrelation modes of subject identification and

experience, something akin to what Kimberlé Crenshaw, through critical race and legal theory, will later name intersectionality.[7]

Specifically, this chapter reexamines Anzaldúa and Moraga's theoretical foundations in the Bridge project as a starting point for insight into their continued interventions into the patriarchal/masculinist empiricism and rationality of dominant academic modes of thought. I argue that while both thinkers utilize various forms of writing for resistance making and community building throughout their careers, self-representation is one of their primary modes—for Anzaldúa, *the* primary mode—for such work. One benefit to self-writing is that it is not exclusive to or exclusionary as a form or genre: Anzaldúa's work in *Bridge* alone illustrates how one might forge hybrid forms of self-representation as she draws from forms of poetry, essay, speech, letter, interview, and autobiographic essay. Of these, the autobiographical essay is of particular interest because Anzaldúa, Moraga, and other Chicana feminists following soon after—like Ana Castillo and Sandra Cisneros—will further develop this form throughout their careers.

Chapter 3, "An Art of One's Own," argues that the self-writings of Sandra Cisneros and Ana Castillo become the sites of each author's renegotiation of their associations with the university through what I call self-making—the process by which an author creates their own sense of self on the page. More than simply reflecting on one's origins, self-making utilizes the unique rhetorical space of self-writing—the implicit relationship between "truth," context, and the writer—to construct themselves on the page. Castillo—in her collection of "critical essays" *Massacre of the Dreamers: Essays on Xicanisma* (1994) and her recent memoir, *Black Dove: Mamá, Mi'jo, and Me* (2016)—and Cisneros, in her collection of short memoiristic essays and

[7] Coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw in "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex" (1989)

speeches, *A House of My Own: Stories from My Life* (2015)—found the construction of their writerly personas in the figure of the self-invented artist amidst educational institutions that continue to fall short of meeting the needs of diverse students. While both authors, to different degrees, mark their own exceptionalism as artists, they still insist on stressing the importance of addressing socioeconomic inequity through art. These political commitments find the artist in opposition to the hierarchical, career-driven, and often male-centered aspects of academia. In turn, their reflections on their struggles within academic settings further elucidate how Chicanx and Latinx students face an educational system that is often alienating.

Chapter 4, "Exceptional Subjects," turns attention to the popular memoirs of Rigoberto González—*Butterfly Boy: Memories of a Chicano Mariposa* (2006)—and Reyna Grande—*The Distance Between Us: A Memoir* (2012) and *A Dream Called Home: A Memoir* (2018). While most of the writers I discuss are not immigrants, this chapter brings the intersection of immigration and education to the forefront. Both immigrant-identifying authors start publishing their self-writing after MFA programs and do so in the style of what we might loosely call "popular memoir"—long-form narrative prose written to a wide rather than particularly academic audience—during what many scholars and critics have identified as the "memoir boom" at the start of the new millennium.[8] While I also draw from González's *Red-Inked Retablos* (2013), a collection of essays and speeches, I focus mainly on *Butterfly*, *Distance*, and *Dream* to investigate what the shift toward popular memoir might mean for representations of

[8] Julie Rak describes this as "a period roughly spanning the first decade of the twenty-first century, when the production and public visibility of American and British memoirs by celebrities and by relatively unknown people sharply increased" (3).For a detailed account see *Manufacturing Memoir for the Popular Market* (2013). See also chapter 5, "In the Wake of the Memoir Boom" in Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson. *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives* (2010) and G. Thomas Couser's *Memoir: An Introduction* (2019).

Latinx higher education, especially regarding immigration.[9] I find that both authors grapple with themes of assimilation and guilt as each expresses aspirations for upward mobility through education while also feeling a sense of responsibility for those who are left behind. González and Grande, like other writers in this study, experience higher education as simultaneously liberating and oppressing—an opening of possibility that is also a rupture. For González, as a gay man, this freedom pivots around sexuality while for Grande it is tied to her sense of self as an immigrant seeking the (US)American dream. I argue that, while these works are important as representations of immigrant experiences in pop Chicano/a memoir, the exceptionality of their narratives complicates reading them as representative of a normative immigrant experience.

[9] This project has not been exhaustive in its coverage of Chicano/a/x autobiographical writing, and there certainly are examples of the novelistic prose memoir–Oscar Zeta Acosta's *Autobiography of a Brown Buffalo* (1972) and *Revolt of the Cockroach People* are notable if peculiar examples, but the end of the first decade of the 2000s sees an explosion of examples: Jimmy Santiago Baca's *A Place to Stand* (2007), Rosalina Rosay's *Journey of Hope: Memoirs of a Mexican Girl* (2007), John Rechy's *About My Life and the Kept Woman: A Memoir* (2009), Domingo Martinez's *The Boy Kings of Texas: A Memoir* (2012), Myriam Gurba's *Mean* (2017), Obed Silva's *The Death of My Father the Pope* (2017), and Marcelo Hernandez Castillo's *Children of the Land: A Memoir* (2020), to name a few. There are, of course, unique qualities to each of these examples—for instance, Baca's memoir also falls under the category of "prison memoir" and Silva's under "gang memoir"—but a general shift is impossible to ignore. If we zoom out to look at Latinx works in general, the evidence of the trend toward popular memoir expands exponentially.

CHAPTER 1: Scholarship Boys: From Ivy League Students to Professional Writers

The self-writing of writers Richard Rodriguez, Ruben Navarrette, and Sergio Troncoso should be of relevance to scholars of autobiography interested in narratives of Latinx experience in elite institutions of higher education. On the surface, their trajectories appear astonishingly parallel: All were "star" students, earning scholarships to prestigious universities—Rodriguez at Stanford, Navarrette and Troncoso at Harvard—for their undergraduate studies. All continue their studies into graduate school—Rodriguez at Columbia and Berkeley, Navarrette at UCLA, and Troncoso at Yale. And all have strong adverse reactions to their educational experiences that lead them to renounce the academy and their projected career path to become successful professional writers. But what is most significant is where and how each author's critique of education diverges, both in terms of content—what he has to say about Latinx higher education—and rhetorical contexts—how he says it. Each author seems compelled to address their education and the exceptional quality of their elite education. In this chapter, I argue that the need to account for their rarified status is a unique version of the burden of representation: the expectations on one who is labeled with the status as ethnic/racial/cultural other to speak to the interests of their social group. For Rodriguez especially, the resistance to the perceived burden shows itself in an outright rejection of representational discourse. Of course, escaping such expectations is not as simple as making the statement: "I do not represent *X*," especially if one continues to engage primarily with issues of whatever group or community or imagined community one claims not to represent. Though none of the authors use the terms "privilege" and/or "responsibility" explicitly, this study takes up these two terms as a lens to explore each

author's unique relationship with, positioning around, and posturing toward ideas of privilege—in regard to their education and higher education more generally—and responsibility—who or what is responsible for the success or failure of Latinx students. This exploration seeks to better understand educational privilege—how is it instituted and how is it wielded—as well as advance conversation around responsibility, raising the questions: to whom or what should writers, authors, and critics, be responsible? And what are the limits to such responsibility?

Rodriguez's 1982 *Hunger of Memory: The Education of Richard Rodriguez*—critically acclaimed yet infamous to many Chicanx critics/scholars—opens: "I have taken Caliban's advice. I have stolen their books. I will have some run of this isle" (1). Ruben Navarrette, in his own memoir of education, *A Darker Shade of Crimson: Odyssey of a Harvard Chicano*, sets the stage for a scene of a contentious reading of this opening just over a decade later in a visit to a Chicano Studies class at Yale:

> My girlfriend's course syllabus told me that the professor was about to lead a discussion on a piece of Mexican-American literature. As the instructor cleared her throat, the students around the table reached into their backpacks and pulled out their copies of a familiar paperback book. I recognized the book as being the same one that lay scribbled and worn on my bookshelf back in Cambridge, Richard Rodriguez's controversial classic *Hunger of Memory*. (208)

The description builds to reveal the book at hand, allowing the author to revel in his familiarity with this classroom setting. His Ivy League education has prepared him for nothing if not the classroom arena—Navarrette may be a transplant from Harvard to Yale at this moment, but the trappings remain the same: the syllabus as an itinerary—perhaps an order the nameless teacher is set to carry out—; the professor's throat clearing as passive signaling of authority; the classroom

bustle. Each familiar beat compounds on the next to present the author's most crucial point of ownership: that of the text. The scribble and wear of Navarrette's copy signify more than academic engagement—the author's intimate wrestling with the text has changed his life, intellectual and otherwise. At this point in Navarrette's narrative, he has met and established a relationship with Rodriguez and begun an experiment of sorts—uprooting his student life in Cambridge and moving home to San Joaquin Valley—on a mission to disprove one of *Hunger*'s key tenets: that education inevitably alienates one from his family and tradition.

In reference to Rodriguez's tenet itself, Navarrette notes to the reader, "Although I had not fully conceded to his theory that an elite education requires a loss of intimacy, my arduous experiment at home had at least taught me to respect his point" (208). Navarrette's mastery of the space and material—the rhetorical situation of the classroom and the content of the book—endows him not just with confidence but with a particular expectation that he projects onto his Yale girlfriend: "Sensing a combative mood in the room and well-aware of my stubborn loyalty to friends, my girlfriend squirmed in her seat in nervous anticipation of the storm brewing" (209). The projection of combativeness serves two purposes here: to ratchet the sense of growing tension in Navarrette's strained romantic relationship and to partially decenter Navarrette from the locus of dissent: when the fighting begins, it will not be his fault if he must defend his friend. Now, this scene of contention will most likely feel familiar to scholars who have studied/discussed Hunger in the classroom, and Navarrette wants the reader to know that he knows this. He also needs to extricate himself from the reader's expectations for his reading of *Hunger*. He then tries to refocus the attention of expectation onto his girlfriend as she "senses ' the "mood." Even though Navarrette elsewhere extols his girlfriend's intelligence, even claiming

she is more intelligent than himself, here we receive no indication of her intellectual engagement with the material at hand, only the author's interpretation of her feeling.[1]

This decentering of the author from the inception of conflict also allows him to retriangulate his connection/disposition with Rodriguez and the discourse around the text. As a friend to Rodriguez, Navarrette's loyalty has shifted somewhat away from Chicano hardliners and the RAZA/MEChA devout. This newfound shift in loyalties, paired with what he believes is his new experiential understanding of the Latino/Chicano educational experience, establishes Navarrette's defensive readiness—he *knows* that Rodriguez will be attacked just as well as he *knows* his girlfriend knows he will defend him. It is not just a defense, though, but a sort of tactical defense, one poised to spring into offense, which is why the decentering of the combative energy does not fully work—the whole setup of the scene revolves around the author's preconceptions and expectations of the room. He estimates that the other Latinos and the Asian-American student in the room will be Rodriguez's most vehement attackers "because these are the ones who hear his message most clearly…the ones with lingering insecurities about having come to the Ivy League only by the grace of affirmative action…the ones for whom the image cast in Rodriguez's literary mirror is most disconcerting" (209). It is conspicuous that Navarrette fixates on the expected reaction of the non-white students and not the professor. Considering the power dynamics of the classroom scene, one might expect Navarrette's performance of mastery to be directed at a more obvious figure of authority—the instructor—rather than his peers. Yet his rhetorical strategy makes sense here as a way of simultaneously identifying his group affiliation and distancing himself from the same group. Even Navarrette's speculation about these student's "insecurities" does not make clear if he himself assumes that they must be

[1] One might notice that he never uses the girlfriend's name, which also creates a weird subject/object dynamic, but this might be coincidental as he never names anyone in his memoir except for public figures.

affirmative action beneficiaries or if he is merely referring to one's insecurity of feeling that other people must assume one is only in the elite classroom because of affirmative action, a feeling he has personally dealt with previously. A generous reading would suppose the latter, but we must note that at this very moment he is also assuming that these other non-white students are either too ignorant or inexperienced to have accurately read Rodriguez's memoir. Navarrette is thus their peer, but also not their peer—he has elevated himself through the knowledge of experience. Narratively, both this careful triangulation of his position between himself, his peers, and the other students as well as Navarrette's initial projection of expectation onto his girlfriend work as a sleight of hand.

In the interaction that follows, conflict does come, but not in the manner that Navarrette expects—instead of his loyalty and experience clashing with the baggage of other Ivy league minorities, he comes face to face with what he interprets as the white professor's good old-fashioned racist reading of *Hunger*'s opening line. The instructor asks the students why Rodriguez references Shakespeare: "Why not say, 'I have taken *Marquez's* advice…' or *Paz's* advice?" (209). The question receives no response, so this line of questioning continues…and continues to receive no response until the professor cannot contain herself: Navarrette writes, "Then, finally, the professor blurted out the idea around which she had been nibbling for several minutes. 'Could it be, 'she asked, 'that the author is trying to be…*white?*'" (209). It is a "should have seen this coming" moment, but the reader's and, ostensibly, Navarrette's attention had been on the expected student reactions. Navarrette is understandably outraged, but what stands out is how he codes the teacher's mastery, or lack thereof, and compares it with his own mastery and experience. The "professor" fumbles through the lecture, unable to yield any productive discussion from her students because she is too preoccupied with her own simplistic, hackneyed

thesis. “Nibbling” brings to mind pseudo-intellectual babble around cheese and cracker trays, while “blurted” implies a lack of self-control, especially in contrast to how Navarrette depicts his response. The disciplined student *raises his hand*. Sure, this is the polite thing to do, but Navarrette takes great care to highlight this action, saying he “raised [his] hand and asked for permission to speak” (210). He continues:

> Once permission was granted, I explained to the startled professor that I took exception to her suggestion that Rodriguez "wanted to be white” … I told her, I was offended by her implication that a more authentic Mexican-American author would have alluded to Paz or Marquez instead of Shakespeare, as if the world's great literature was somehow segregated. I asserted that, as another Mexican-American who had read Shakespeare, I neither "wanted to be white" or felt less authentically Mexican … Finally, I told the professor that it was a sad state of affairs when a well-educated Latino intellectual and writer like Rodriguez could not mention Shakespeare without incurring hostile criticism that he wanted to be something that he was not. (210)

Navarrette’s account of the interaction feels rehearsed, like the fantasy of an argument: he is able to embody outrage while remaining immaculately poised in the moment. His argument seems like one built on passion, out of his own deeply felt experience, but his actual paraphrasing of his reaction feels calm, measured, and deliberate. That is not to say that Navarrette’s response is not, in a sense, cutting—he utilizes/weaponizes his lived experience as a scholar/intellectual *and* a Mexican American while indicting Ivory Tower elitism.

Navarrette continues by indirectly attacking the instructor’s white privilege with a question: “If you think that an intellectual like Rodriguez-by a scholarly quoting of Shakespeare-wants to be white, then does that mean that in your mind, the more legitimate image of an

authentic Mexican is some dark-skinned, Spanish-speaking farmworker who doesn't read Shakespeare?" (210). At this point, the professor can only double down on her possibly racist thesis or defer to Navarrette's racial knowledge/experience. She does the latter: "Embarrassed, the professor granted me the point and conceded the dangers of using intelligence as an indicator of ethnic authenticity" (211). The embarrassment accompanying the concession compounds the effect of the professor's ineffectualness. In the realm of academia, the interaction can be read as a battle. The diplomatic description of Navarrette's speech is further contrasted by his insertion of the imagined inner thoughts/reactions of his girlfriend at the beginning of his response "*Oh shit! Here he goes. Please let him leave behind enough of her to grade my final…*" (209) and in the middle of it "*Damn, right for the jugular!*" (210). Altogether, the representation of the argument is less of a description of a dialogue and more of a play-by-play account, reinforcing the idea that Navarrette not only won the battle but did so while keeping his cool—playing and mastering the game. He has a moment of success at apparently conquering elite privilege by wagering his institutional and experiential knowledge against the prejudices of institutional whiteness. But where battles are waged, there is also always loss. Navarrette completely fails to address the gendered power dynamics of the original setting and of how he has framed the scene.

The author's treatment of gender could take a full study as his conscious effort to take up a pro-woman position—by acknowledging the kind of specific prejudices and challenges women tend to face at elite institutes—is consistently undermined by the formal treatment of women and his rhetorical positioning in his representation of sexual relationships and intellectual engagement. In this classroom scene specifically, his girlfriend and his girlfriend's teacher become objects of a sort of naturalized misogyny. I have previously alluded to how the reader only receives a rendering of his imaginary account of his girlfriend's feelings in this scene: while

Navarrette is able to feel, think, and act, she has no agency but only the hint of feelings. Likewise, the presentation of the woman professor's feeble inadequacy serves not so much to critique racist ideology but to bolster Navarrette's fantasy of power. Both figures work as disempowered foils, feminized by negative tropes of femininity, to Navarrette's subject self as a figure of empowerment—the girlfriend is emotion without intellect, and the professor is powerless against rationality. What is represented is not just an account of racist tendency in the elite classroom but also a seemingly inadvertent account of a failed intersection of race and gender, one indicative of the larger failures of Chicanismo and feminism to account for each other, an issue explored at length in the "Third World" feminism of Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherrie Moraga.

Not only is Navarrette's rhetorical illusion of conquer undercut by the need to subjugate feminine capacity but also by the lack of scope in his account of Rodriguez's opening reference itself. It is not immediately significant that Navarrette eschews any sort of academic reading in favor of his experiential, even speculative account of the scene around the reading: the text never purports itself as scholarship; it is first and foremost a memoir, a personal account of his Harvard years. Yet Navarrette *does* engage with Rodriguez's ideas from a certain intellectual purview throughout *Darker* in other places in an engagement of the conceptual implications of *Hunger*. Yes, the undertones of racism in the professor's interpretation need dealing with, but Navarrette misses the opportunity to explore a much more interesting discourse around Rodriguez's relationship with Caliban.

Raymund Paredes, for example, describes a revisionist strand of thinking around Caliban most present in thinkers/writers—such as Frantz Fanon and Roberto Fernández Retamar—who hail "from countries with long histories of colonization" for whom "Caliban's life symbolizes the

history of the oppressed peoples everywhere, but not wholly in negative terms" (290).[2] In Paredes's assessment, while "Rodriguez seems to be aligning himself with the revisionist interpreters of Caliban," he is actually "drawn to Caliban largely for the latter's utility as a symbol of ethnic exoticism and sheer physical ugliness" (291). Rodriguez's Calibanic project has less to do with defiance and resistance than it does with assimilation: "Rodriguez's Caliban metamorphoses into a proper scholarship boy, eager to learn from his master and to become such a man as Prospero himself might countenance" (292). Paredes's account coincides with José Saldívar's account of the "School of Caliban," which he describes as "a group of writers, scholars, and professors of literature who are engaged under a common political influence, a group whose different (imagined) national communities and symbologies are linked by their derivation from a common and explosive reading of Shakespeare's play The Tempest" (297).[3] In trying to connect the "literal and figurative centrality of Caliban" in thinkers like George Lamming, from Barbados; Aimé Césaire, from Martinique; and Roberto Fernández Retamar, from Cuba, "to a line of Chicano/a and African-American writers not usually seen as instances of Calibanic inheritance: Ernesto Galarza, Richard Rodriguez, Cherríe Moraga, and Houston Baker, Jr.," Saldívar finds Rodriguez to be the major outlier (298). Unsurprisingly he declares that "Rodriguez is not a Calibanic protagonist" in the School of Caliban sense, but that "rather he has become"—and he quotes cultural anthropologist Renato Rosaldo here—"an icon of collaboration with the English-only movement and the conservative right wing" (308)[4]. Saldívar's conflation with Caliban and Rodriguez himself notwithstanding, the point remains that *Hunger of Memory*

[2] Paredes, "Autobiography and Ethnic Politics: Richard Rodriguez's Hunger of Memory."
[3] Saldivar, "The School of Caliban: Pan-American Autobiography."
[4] Saldívar is quoting from Rosaldo's review, "Others of Invention," in the Village Voice of *The Invention of Ethnicity*, a collection of essays on "ethnic" American literature edited by Werner Sollors, which contains a contribution from Rodriguez, "An American Author." I include this quote and reference point as a small nod to the layers of accumulated contempt found for Rodriguez in some intellectual quarters.

then roots Caliban in conventionality, serving to de-tooth the possibly cannibalistic creature. For both Saldívar and Paredes, Rodriguez's use of Caliban is a gross misappropriation that not only misses out on any revolutionary import but also undermines a genealogy of Afro/Latinidad post/anticolonial thought.

While I do not entirely disagree with these assertions, reading Rodriguez's Caliban only at face value as purely opportunistic/commercialistic appropriation leaves us at a dead end. And what then of Navarrette's defense? I pose Caliban here as a site for something akin to what Marissa K. Lopez terms "racial immanence" or a site for the reading of race as "something real and material that nevertheless eludes language" (9).[5] That is not to undercut the agency that revisionist Calibanists have derived from the figure but to give some perspective to the Caliban we are looking at: a figure based on colonialist orientalization of the "aboriginal" reinterpreted by post-colonial thinkers. There is no authentic point of origin for Caliban—the figure is always already worked through, being worked through culture—both in the event of signaling dark otherness, in the reading/interpretation of the racial figure, and in the relationship between the signaling and the reading. Rodriguez's invocation of this figure is an attempt at resisting the burden of representation, which he adds to by exaggerating the absurdity of such a representation as he describes himself:

> Dark-skinned. To be seen at a Belgravia dinner party. Or in New York. Exotic in a tuxedo. My face is drawn to severe Indian features which would pass notice on the page of a National Geographic, but at a cocktail party in Bel Air somebody wonders: 'Have

[5] For example, in *Racial Immanence* (2019), Lopez presents an illustrative object/thing for such a reading in Santa Anna's severed/prosthetic leg—its historical and cultural history that resists the leg being "read representationally." Applying a praxis of racial immanence, Lopez asks us "to see the limb as an unknowable illusion, a shade of human form that cannot be grasped, the circulation of which knits other objects together in ever-shifting patterns of the real" (9).

you ever thought of doing any high-fashion modeling? Take this card. '(In Beverly Hills will this monster make a man.) (1)

Inscribed by racial features of color and countenance, but at odds with the orientalization of such inscription, Rodriguez gives a glib account of the commodified otherness of his skin and face that is at once over-the-top and also believably on point with "stuff white people say" straight-faced to people of color. Caliban serves as an appropriate avatar for Rodriguez here because there is no representation to be had; instead, Rodriguez describes a scene of the performance of representation—what it means "to be seen" as the dark-skinned, cultured beast figure—while the act of description itself is a performance, a dramatization of an author representing otherness.

Similarly, John Alba Cutler notes how "Rodriguez actually satirizes his own education, characterizing himself as a "scholarship boy" in *Hunger*'s second essay who, in his youth, put more importance on being accepted by his academic mentors than on critically engaging with intellectual thought: "Poking fun at himself, Rodriguez nevertheless identifies how the symbolic capital of the university hails him through the authoritative word of the college professor and the unabashed terms of the canon" (91).[6] While the quasi-Calibanic opening perhaps does not achieve full-on satire, it does approach a similar sort of ironic distance in its glibness, its audacity, and its rhetorical winking. Rodriguez has not "stolen their books," he has checked them out of the library. Even more audaciously to his critics, he is merely playing with the idea of Caliban. Rodriguez's toying with both the figures of Caliban and the scholarship boy allows him to address expectations that deal with race and experience as subject matter but from an ironic distance. This distancing goes hand-in-hand with Cutler's argument that "[i]n *Hunger* the disinterestedness of the artist-intellectual combines linguistic and symbolic capital; Rodriguez's

[6] Alba Cutler, *Ends of Assimilation* (2015).

voice derives authority from its linguistic faculty, constantly on display, and from its performance of an education so thorough that it can afford to leave behind the trappings of mere acquisitiveness" (92). Rodriguez's "linguistic faculty" has been noted by just about every scholar or critic that writes about Rodriguez—from the high praise of his admirers to the back-handed compliments of most ardent detractors. Calls for a critical reevaluation of *Hunger*, which are often accompanied by calls to let it into "the canon," are largely rooted in the aesthetic qualities of Rodriguez's language and either take pains to disregard his ideological arguments or to chide Chicano/a scholars for excluding the author on ideological grounds.[7] What arguments over *Hunger*'s inclusion in "the canon" miss—besides the fact that by the 1990s and early 2000s its canonical status seemed all but secure[8]—is what the memoir as a product of Latinx educational experience has to say about the complex negotiations, burdens, and expectations of such an education. What insight can it give us into the privilege and responsibility of elite higher education? Such an account can also encompass its art while not ignoring the material conditions of its production and the stakes of Rodriguez's claims. Rodriguez's skillfully collusionist Caliban, for example, shows that the stakes are not the same for Rodriguez as they are for other Latinos/as that might benefit from bilingual education policies and affirmative action or be harmed from arguments against these policies, such as his own. And this is, in part, Rodriguez's point.

[7] For example, scholars Lawrence Hogue, in his article "An Unresolved Modern Experience," (1992), and Paul Guajardo, in his book *Chicano Controversy* (2002), both claim that Chicano/a scholars have hypocritically stymied diversity in Chicano/a literature by attacking Rodriguez on the grounds of his politics.

[8] As early as 1990, Ramón Saldívar writes, perhaps a bit exaggeratedly, that "selections from [*Hunger*] are now anthologized in practically all new college freshman composition course readers in this country" (*Chicano Narrative: The Dialectics of Difference*, 155). This is not to say that inclusion on composition syllabi equate to canonization, but when one considers this along with the amount of discussion, even if it was mostly negative, around *Hunger* by Chicano/a scholars, its safe to say that the book was not unaccounted for in the college classroom. Even if Rodriguez, particularly his work in *Hunger* did fast become the "whipping boy" of Chicano/a scholars as Guajardo claims, it was certainly marked as a significant work to be read time and again.

Regarding Navarrette, I am not putting forth that he *should* have engaged with Saldívar or other literary and/or academic accounts of Rodriguez and/or Caliban in the pages of his memoir, but rather that his positioning of the scene causes him to miss some obvious points that a more nuanced response to the professor's assertion of Rodriguez's white aspirations. On one hand, if Rodriguez had been identifying as white, he would not have chosen Caliban as his avatar, and, on the other, his triangulation of race through Shakespeare *is* signaling his cultural capital, his education through both his knowledge of material and skill at incorporating said knowledge artfully. Perhaps one reason for Navarrette's blind spot is that Rodriquez's maneuvers are too close to his own: Navarrette's performance of mastery works as well to marshal the cultural capital of his elite education. Furthermore, much like Rodriguez dramatizes racial representation, Navarrette dramatizes a racial reading of Rodriguez's performance. The "racist" professor then is really just an actor in Navarrette's scene that performs the function of white liberal racism, allowing him to not only retriangulate his own loyalties but that of the audience toward Rodriguez—the reader is tasked with confronting the more pressing issue of overt racism alongside Navarrette and Rodriguez rather than pick apart Rodriguez's own tricky, complex, controversial engagement with race. This strategy of dramatization aligns with how Navarrette himself often treats Rodriguez's in general: rather than offering intellectualized critique, Navarrette focuses on alignments of loyalty and experience.

For instance, his initial reaction to the book is much aligned with the type of reaction he comes to expect from other students of color in the classroom scene as he feels the need not to just disagree with Rodriguez but also the urge:

> … to repudiate the individual as well. I held trial in my own conscience. The charge: an unspeakable sin. A public sin. Rodriguez had exploited his God-given gift as a

> writer of beautiful words by being publicly contemptuous of his parents, his past, his culture, and his people. The evidence: He had … not only professed intellectual alienation from his parents which I considered disrespectful and ungrateful, he had also openly questioned the legitimacy of … bilingual education and affirmative action, each … considered sacred to Mexican-Americans concerned with educational progress. It took me only minutes to pass judgment: Guilty. He had not shared cake. He had turned against his own. (144)

In this short space, Navarrette manages to sum up the key points of contempt of the Chicano/a "establishment" toward the book as well as the deeply personal levels from which this contempt stems. Still, Navarrette's account of his early indictment of *Memory* lays the path for his realignment of loyalties in the characterization of his vehement reaction. For one, the overburdened rhetoric hints that the naïve reading of a younger Navarrette will not endure his future experience and mastery of racial knowledge. Secondly, the author continues to paint his tortured reaction to Rodriguez as both alluring and disturbing by describing his own handwritten annotations to the book—notes that cannot help but grudgingly concede many of Rodriguez's observations—as "schizophrenic scribbles" (145). It is as if Navarrette would like the reader to pause and ask, "what sort of mad, tragic R/romance has been set in motion here?"

Navarrette proceeds to distance his initial view of *Hunger* in his observation that Rodriguez's harshest critics were Latinos/as of the first generation of those who had benefited from affirmative action, whom Navarrette refers to as "affirmative action babies," borrowing the term from Stephen L. Carter.[9] He subsequently spins this term into a metaphorical construct in

[9] Carter reappropriates the often-pejorative term in his memoir, *Reflections of an Affirmative Action Baby* (1991), as part of his project of reclaiming the original intent of affirmative action by exploring both its benefits and perceived negative side effects while critiquing the then current state of affirmative action policy.

which affirmative action is the "mother," Rodriguez is the "bastard son" son, and he is a baby—a fellow affirmative action baby from a subsequent generation—learning his place in the family between dutiful versus "disrespectful" siblings. The way the metaphor infantilizes Latinx academics echoes one of the longstanding critiques of affirmative action that claims that it diminishes the esteem of students of color. Race and education scholar Jamillah Moore calls this the "myth of stigmatization" or the belief "that affirmative action admits minority students who cannot compete at the same level as whites, marking those students inferior" (91).[10] Certainly, simply because it a false belief does not mean that the insecurity that many students feel as a result is not real—both Navarrette and Rodriguez wrestle with this kind of insecurity. Yet, the next logical step in recognizing such suffering is not simply to ban affirmative action as a means of protection as many anti-affirmative action advocates do.[11] Navarrette may stop short of condemning action on the grounds of stigma, but his infantilization shares a similar range of operational logic that would argue that people of color need protection from their own aspirations.

Furthermore, posing himself, Rodriguez, and his Latinx critics as siblings—actors in a dysfunctional family —also serves to characterize negative personal reactions to Rodriguez's work as petty bickering, establishing Navarrette's engagement with the work as one of loyalties

[10] Moore, *Race and College Admissions: A Case for Affirmative Action* (2005).

[11] Examples range from the concern in Justice William Brennan's opinion that "preferential programs may only reinforce common stereotypes holding that certain groups are unable to achieve success without special protection based on a factor having no relationship to individual worth" (*Regents of the University of California V. Bakke*, 360) to the anti-affirmative action rhetoric of Roger Clegg, President and General Counsel of right-wing think tank the Center for Equal Opportunity. An example of the insidious rhetoric of Clegg's arguments reads as follows: "You will stigmatize the so-called beneficiaries of the preferences—both in the eyes of others and their own eyes. You will diminish the accomplishments of those blacks and Hispanics who did not need special treatment. Where preferences are used, people—classmates, future employers—will assume that a person in the preferred group who was admitted was less qualified then other people who were admitted. And, of course, that is a fair assumption. The whole purpose of the preferences is, after all, to admit those who would otherwise have been rejected as less qualified. It assumes some groups cannot succeed if held to the same standards of others" ("Racial and Ethnic Preferences in Higher Education," 35).

and alignments. Navarrette's account of his reaction to *Hunger* in this section is also telling because his assertion of Rodriguez's talent as a "God-given gift"—not something learned or connected with acquired skill—obscures the role of social capital and the effects of education. My point is not that we should condemn either author for utilizing their privileges, but to point out that each writer draws on their social capital for authority, making claims of mastery, while perhaps overlooking the extent to which their thinking and writing are tied to institutionalized elitism. And on one level, who can blame them? –they *really* want to believe that their merits are their own, their intellect seeded through education at an early age from some spark of innate aptitude. Still, one cannot completely overlook the kind of leveling work that Navarrette's rhetorical strategy deploys: how it serves to dismiss the sociopolitical issues at hand in the first place. The debate around the politics of *Hunger* becomes less about affirmative action or bilingual education itself and more about respect and loyalty.

The problem with this blind spot is that it does not allow the writers, especially Rodriguez, a full grasp of how the stakes differ for them than for other possible recipients or beneficiaries of policies like affirmative action. And this is despite the fact that Rodriguez knows he has gained privileged access that others do not have. Whether or not it is the responsibility of a writer, in general, to critique in literature the modes of their own cultural production is debatable, and to claim that Rodriguez and Navarrette have a responsibility to do so simply because they are Latino writers would mean falling into the trap of the burden of representation. These two writers, though, make it their responsibility because they are making claims regarding access to social and cultural capital that they themselves benefited from and are actively drawing from those benefits to make said claims. Neither writer is directly arguing for more restricted access to higher education for Latinx students—they actually explicitly argue for the need for

more access—but such arguments around institutional access can become part of the very problem that they are trying to address without institutional critique. Specifically, Rodriguez's case backfires because he is unable to reckon with the fact that while his speech about debates around affirmative action and bilingual education may be a game, a performance to him, the issue itself has a real material impact. His speech has the power to hurt the same people he purports to want to help.

Rodriguez attempts to dodge this responsibility by claiming that he is *only* talking about his own experience with elite education as a "scholarship boy" and not making universal statements, but his arguments and positioning around his arguments in the introduction and the three essays most directly addressing his education—"Aria," Achievement of Desire," and "Profession"— beg otherwise. It is no coincidence that scholars that seek to disregard Rodriguez's arguments and elevate the artistic merit of *Memory* make much use of his declaration that:

> Mistaken, the gullible reader will—in sympathy or in anger—take it that I intend to model my life as the typical Hispanic-American life. But I write of one life only. My own. If my story is true, I trust it will resonate with significance for other lives. Finally, my history deserves public notice as no more than this: a parable for the life of its reader. Here is the life of a middle-class man (6).[12]

Rodriguez sets a trap for critics: it is one's own gullibility that would lead one to read Memory representationally. According to this logic, it would be a misreading to claim that Rodriguez is

[12] Both Hogue and Guajardo unsurprisingly take this route. More recently, transnational scholar Durán Isabel what she calls the sanctimonious "extremist criticism" of Rodriguez's Chicano critics, calling for a refocus back to the aesthetic (92). See "Latino Autobiography, the Aesthetic, and Political Criticism: The Case of Hunger of Memory." To be fair, she claims that her application of aestheticism takes into account the politics of the aesthetic through historical specificity, but she also does not apply the same historical specificity—the larger fraught history of Chicano literary studies—in her analysis of the criticism.

trying to use his life as a model for stances of policy regarding Latinx people. Rodriguez belies this logic himself in the introduction when he highlights his interest in such topics. Addressing the sentiment of his editor, he states:

> But the New York editor is on the phone and he can't understand: "Why do you spend so much time on abstract issues? Nobody's going to remember affirmative action in another twenty-five years. The strength of this manuscript is in the narrative. You should write your book in stories—not as a series of essays. Let's have more Grandma." (5)

The truth is that Rodriguez is not satisfied with merely "resonating" with the lives of others; he has a keen eye for the appeal of political discourse that his narrative of education engages in. Superficially, one can read Rodriguez's presentation of this editorial interaction as a display that he is resisting the market, the expectation of what he would call "ethnic" literature, and is not interested in cultural representation.[13] If Rodriguez wants to be free of cultural representation, then why is he writing about affirmative action? Bilingual education? I am not suggesting that one's race and/or ethnicity necessitates that one engages in conversations of race/ethnicity. Rodriguez's subject matter is *his* choice. Maybe this is an over-simplification: no one *merely* writes what they want to write. The writing of one's life compels one to make sense of story, and for Rodriguez that includes the issues around these programs. And yet moments like this: his flirting with the idea of grandmas versus politics, the juxtaposition of stories versus essays, narrative versus polemics make bare his *rhetorical* choices. He rejects representation while at the

[13] I do not follow the claims of some critics that seem to imply that Rodriguez has no culture. Paredes, for example claims that "Rodriguez presents a childhood bereft of culture," that he has either fabricated or forgotten his childhood culture (285). I understand how a critic responding to what they interpret as cultural attacks might respond in this manner, but such accusations tend to make essentialist assumptions of culture and overstep the bounds of speculation.

same time claiming authority over Latinx political issues by merit of his experience as a Latino in higher education—his experience is his claim to expertise. Perhaps Rodriguez's defensive posturing and rhetorical positioning offer clues to why so many Latinx critics have such an instinctual adverse reaction to his position on these matters—the kind of reaction that Navarrette describes himself. Sure, Rodriguez's arguments in *Hunger* would nonetheless have garnered and would continue to garner backlash, but there is an additional insult to injury in how Rodriguez frames his positions that draws such passionate ire. An unfortunate consequence of this defensive posturing—the author's attempt at disallowing critique of his critique—is that there is little subsequent space to build conversation around some of the valid experiential insight that Rodriguez brings to bear, such as the complex entrapments of representation this study has begun to address and the trauma of education it will later address.

To be clear, this project is not one of recuperation—Rodriguez and his work look to be doing fine on their own. Though I aim to take Rodriguez's ideas and claims seriously as part of the longer range of Latino/a thought, I believe that Rodriguez fundamentally misidentifies the agency and power dynamics of and between the actors in his account of the state of higher education. Relatedly, we must address Rodriguez's ideas on bilingual education. Even though they have less to do directly with the purview of this project as they are framed in terms of primary education, his constructions of the private and public in *Aria* lays the foundation to his understanding of education in general. Cutler has previously addressed how assimilationist ideology forms the basis of Rodriguez's use of private and public:

> "For Rodriguez, the boundary between Mexican and American (private and public) is fixed and stable, if not impermeable. There is no question of where the private ends and the public begins, and there is no suggestion that the nature of the public could

ever change. To assimilate is to cross a line, and once that line is crossed, there is no going back. (Cutler 90).

Assimilationism relies on the assumption of a monocultural US public devoid of ethnicity—the "melting pot" as the goal both nationally and per individual. According to Rodriguez, education is a sort of border crossing, and, in line with assimilationist thought, it is a one-way crossing.[14] Of course, the problem with assimilationism, one out of many, is in the misunderstanding of the US project as a deracialized space—the idea that there is such a thing as cultural neutrality. In turn, race is obscured by economic liberalism in which racial issues are simply matters of cultural choice. It is unsurprising, then, that Richard Rodriguez diverts the issue of the use of Spanish in the classroom to a discussion of the universal cultural role of education, stating that "[it] is not possible for a child—any child—ever to use his family's language in school. Not to understand this is to misunderstand the public uses of schooling and to trivialize the nature of intimate life—a family's 'language'" (10). Race becomes a non-issue because everyone must assimilate to "make it." Here, Rodriguez casts *himself* as an ally of culture and *bilingualists* as the denigrators of family culture as he proposes to keep Spanish private, within the home, to protect it—the public is seemingly naturally gendered as masculine and the private feminine.

Cutler as well points out how Rodriguez's rendering of the "public individual" fits with Wendy Brown's assessment of the liberal ideal of the individual, the "self-interested" masculine subject (88).[15] Per Brown:

[14] This is a counter example of sorts to Kirsten Silva Gruesz's framing the term of "errancy" in Antonio José de Irisarri's work, in treating migration/immigration as a concept of fluidity, indeterminacy, to counter the often teleological immigration narrative that has seemingly become normative to migration/immigration discourse, from both pro- and anti-immigration ("The Errant Latino: Irisarri, Central Americanness, and Migration's Intention," 21-23, 36, 47). I point this out not as an endorsement of Rodriguez's notion of assimilationist border crossing, but to point out his formulation as an example of the kind of normalized discourse that Gruesz is working against in her rich assessment of Irisarri and formulations of Latinidad in the nineteenth century.

[15] Brown, *States of Injury: Power and Freedom in Late Modernity* (1995).

> The self-interested individual is premised upon a selfless one…draws the material and sustenance of its "self" from the selflessness of another. As the "individual" is made possible through the family it claims both to represent and support, as labor in civil society is made possible through the invisible labor of the household, so the self-interested subject of liberalism both requires and disavows its relationship to the selfless subject of the household, typically gendered female. (162)

It is not the case that Rodriguez disregards the role of the familial, but that he believes it has a proper place in societal construction, much like the genderist traditional construction of the roles of man and woman. There are many fields of study that we could use to examine this one aspect of *Hunger*, but what I want to point out here is how the author needs the private, feminine to propel his public subjecthood. This is similar to how Navarrette must secure his victory in the classroom scene through the erasure of feminine subjecthood. In this instance, Rodriguez masks the stakes of this kind of sacrifice, which is ideological, as personal pain—played out in the fantasy of ethnic loss/trauma—and with a performance of concern for the other—oddly, through the trope of masculinist protection.

Rodriguez's supposed concern for culture is revealed to be a ruse though as it takes a backseat to his larger concerns:

> Supporters of bilingual education today imply that students like me miss a great deal by not being taught in their family's language. What they seem not to recognize is that, as a socially disadvantaged child, I considered Spanish to be a private language. What I needed to learn in school was that I had the right—and the obligation—to speak the public language of los gringos. (7-18)

At first glance, it might appear that his primary concern is the best interest of the children, a "concern" I think most people could support even if they disagree with the means. That Rodriguez couches access to English as not only a "right" but an "obligation" though, reveals another—perhaps more deeply seated—concern for a monolingual, monocultural public space: a space that is by design white and elitist. Rodriguez claims that the problem for him is that even his Spanish is not proper—he calls it a "ghetto Spanish" of "the barrio" (14). So, while other middle-class or upper-middle-class students could learn Spanish as a second language in addition to the public language of English, he believes that, for himself, "bilingualism could not have been so quickly achieved" and that he "did not believe…he…could speak a single public language" (18). Now there are at least two problems with Rodriguez's reasoning here—the first one logical misstep and the second an ethical lack:

1) If it is not possible for "any child" to ever use their family's language in school, then all children would be learning a public language and all would be assimilating, but that is simply not the case. By his own account "upper-middle class" children already speak a public language, which I suppose then is something like "upper-middle-class English," or as Cutler—building on the work of John Guillory—states, "the new professional middlebrow, the likes of "universal language" to which composition curricula aspires (106).[16] That Rodriguez refers to it as the language of "los gringos" signals this proposed culturally neutral space as already raced as white even if the use of Spanish may be meant to signal the author's outsider status. Such a labeling

[16] Guillory, in *Cultural Capital* (1993), agrees, to a degree, with Pierre Machery and Etienne Balibar's assessment in "Literature as an Ideological Form" that "composition" is a "belated attempt to install grammatical norms in college students" through the pursuit of "good" writing, but adds that grammaticality has never been composition's sole end: composition has "posited grammaticality as the means to emancipatory political ends which are not finally different from the posited political ends of literary education" (79). He continues: "In taking over the social functions [of literary education] of producing a distinction between basic and a more elite language, composition takes on as well the ideological identity of that socioelect, its pretention to universality, its status as the medium of political discourse" (79). It is in this regard that Alba Cutler demonstrates how Rodriguez becomes a preeminent choice for samples of "ethnic" writing in composition curriculum.

might seem to see, to name "whiteness" along the lines of Richard Dyer's call to "dislodge [whiteness] from the position of power" that comes with the assumption of whiteness as the non-raced "human norm," that to be white is to be "just human" (1-2).[17] Neither does Rodriguez's use of Spanish serve any other than a passing resemblance to something like Gloria Anzaldúa's practice of "code switching." The "los gringos" of Rodriguez's offers no such critique or claim to agency, serves no purpose but to give a slight ring of alterity.

2) Rodriguez is taking his own experience or perception of experience—in another section he admits he "wrongly imagined English was intrinsically a public language and Spanish an intrinsically private one" (18)—to make prescriptions based on speculations for all whom would be affected by bilingual education. It is one thing to say, *this is my experience and, based on that experience, I do not think that under this new program I would have prospered as well as I did*. It is another to condemn a program entirely based on said singular experience. The ethical issue is not that the author places value in his own qualitative insight from his subjective point of view, nor is it the narrativization of a political argument into art—art and readings of art can hold a multitude of values: cultural, societal, aesthetic, etc. The ethical issue lies in Rodriguez's prescriptivism that has no consideration or, more accurately, has only a nascent sense of consideration of the possible consequence of its implications. Rodriguez apologists might counter that to make such ethical demands of the author is outside the purview of literary criticism: that the issue is simply one of mere political alignments. I hold that to forgo such conversations is to wash our hands of social responsibility—should we leave critical knowledge formation *only* in the hands of political and social scientists altogether so that we can focus solely on something like the art of language, as if art, language itself was not always political? At

[17] Dyer, *White* (1997).

the very least, it should be clear how Rodriguez once again contradicts his claim that he is exercising his subject position as non-representational. What is more, Rodriguez even goes out of his way to include a condemnation of the use of black English in the classroom, stating that the problem is that it is "inappropriate" because of "what lower-class speakers make of it" (34). He never addresses what exactly *it* is that these speakers make of it. He continues, "Just as Spanish would have been a dangerous language for me to have used at the start of my education, so black English would be a dangerous language to use in the schooling of teenagers for whom it reinforces feelings of public separateness" (34). This statement recalls and builds on the author's previous characterization of the type of "ghetto" Spanish he speaks as a child—a characterization that goes beyond the mere distinction of formal versus informal Spanish. For Rodriguez, there appears to be a dichotomy of white middle-class English and anything else, and the use of anything else in an educational setting equals danger. The compounding impact of loaded words—"ghetto," "inappropriate," and "dangerous"—also relates to the author's concerns about the "right" and "obligation" of speaking white middle-class English. In essence, (US) American education gives the privilege of speaking the "public" language, which is de facto white and middle-class. In return, the educated have the responsibility to speak this language and, presumably, to safeguard it from the threat of the barrio and ghetto. It is no wonder that Rodriguez identifies with Nixon in 2002's *Brown*, another collection of autobiographical essays.

Rodrigue's account *does* resist painting a simply triumphant account of his progress, though, acknowledging the pain and loss, at least on a personal level, of what such privilege and responsibility entail even as he disavows a need for bilingual education:

> My awkward childhood does not prove the necessity of bilingual education. My story discloses instead an essential myth of childhood—inevitable pain. If I rehearse here

> the changes in my private life after my Americanization, it is finally to emphasize the public gain. The loss implies the gain … Once I learned public language, it would never again be easy for me to hear intimate family voices. More and more of my day was spent hearing words. But that may only be a way of saying that the day I raised my hand in class and spoke loudly to an entire roomful of faces, my childhood started to end. (27).

Essentially, Rodriguez claims that—despite some loss—he did not *need* bilingual education, and thus no one else should. Our writer must be careful here, for although he has spent much space in the essay and throughout *Hunger* disclosing the trauma of his education, he needs to code this trauma as mere "awkwardness." If, at this crucial point in the narrative, the reader were to construe his pain as trauma, then they might see a necessity in programs like bilingual education, for trauma indicates something greater than the personal. For Rodriguez, this might lead to a sentimentality that would prevent the fulfillment of education's duty to Spanish-speaking students: "Fortunately, my teachers were unsentimental about their responsibility. What they understood was that I needed to speak a public language" (18). What irony that Rodriguez opposes sentimentality here when so much of his arguments are anchored by his own sentimentality over his education. So, the reader must empathize with his loss, but resist sentimentalizing it lest they lose sight of the goal of growing young Latino/a students into middle-class (US) Americans. Still, even here it is ambiguous just how universal this process of border crossing is: what does it mean for Rodriguez's story to "disclose inevitable pain" as "an essential myth of childhood"? Does he mean that his pain was singular, so not inevitable, or does he mean that pain is a myth in the sense that myths hold an essence of truth?

To understand myth in Rodriguez's construction of childhood and education we must turn to his personal identification, in the essay Achievement of Desire," with one of British sociologist Richard Hoggart's typographies of students:

> Scholarship boy: good student, troubled son. The child is 'moderately endowed, ' intellectually mediocre, Hoggart supposes—though it may be more pertinent to note the special qualities of temperament in the child. High-strung child. Brooding. Sensitive. Haunted by the knowledge that one chooses to become a student. (Education is not an inevitable or natural step in growing up.) Here is a child who cannot forget that his academic success distances him from a life he loved, even from his own memory of himself". (50-51).

Especially troubling is the statement that education is a "choice": considering Rodriguez's previous claim that the public use of schooling is to socialize students, allowing them to access public voice, it would follow that education is *not* a choice. One must assume then that Rodriguez, through Hoggart, is talking about a specific type of education, an elite education or higher education, the type of education he himself chooses. If this is the case, the label of scholarship boy applies to his formal education in toto—from childhood to graduate school. This would also suggest then that the characteristics of the scholarship boy spring from something in his nature that he has to outgrow, something that marks him as exceptional. It is no coincidence that Richard Rodriguez finds Hoggart in the stacks of the British Museum while seeking scholarship that would help him understand his experience. By attempting to tie his experience to a sociological framework in the pages of Hunger, he also seeks to legitimize this experience, further translating it into an intellectually legible project. Ultimately, it is education itself that founds the conditions for the production of the project in the first place, as Rodriguez states: "If,

because of my schooling, I had grown culturally separated from my parents, my education finally had given me ways of speaking and caring about that fact" (77-78). Echoing his conclusion on bilingual education, the author basks in the rewards of education: the ability to access public language to understand and speak about the trauma and guilt from the loss of his "private language" outweighs any trauma or guilt itself. This is not to say that he does not acknowledge the pain, but that, for Rodriguez, the ends justify the pain.

Perhaps what we can relate to regarding Latinx educational experience at large is how Rodriguez's pain is an example of a kind of trauma Latinx students, particularly "successful" students, often suffer in their encounters with institutes of education. More generally, there seems to be some truth in the myth that to grow through education entails trauma, even if Rodriguez does not believe this should be a consideration in educational programming. At its core, though, Rodriguez's narrative is indicative that not all students suffer trauma in the same way or even to the same degree. The upper-middle class peers of Rodriguez do not ostensibly suffer in the same way that he does, and Rodriguez, in turn, does not suffer in the same way as others who are coming in from positions of even less privilege and who might not attain

Rodriguez's level of educational "success."[18] Many will agree that Rodriguez's definition of assimilationist success is problematic to say the least, but I would pose that it is, to an extent, his own business if he wants to be satisfied with, or okay with trying to be satisfied, with this kind of "success." It truly becomes problematic though, when he employs this model as *the* model of success that policies of education should employ. What then becomes of everyone who is not like Rodriguez? What if they do not "choose" education or, more accurately, do not have access to education? Rodriguez's construction of public and private language—read public and private culture—would relegate them to somewhere outside the public. Norma Alarcón notes how Rodriguez, in *Hunger*, marks the "the disposed (im)migrant laborer or Indian" not through her "presence," but through "her absence from the public sphere, as citizen-subject, that continues to drive the nation-making process" (151).[19] Alarcón continues by posing that Rodriguez's answer to Spivak's question "Can the Subaltern Speak?" would be a resounding "no because [the subaltern] lacks a public persona" and concludes: "thus in Rodriguez's writing trajectory, difference is aesthetic and private, identity is political and public and must be subordinated to

[18] Table 1.1: Distribution of educational attainment for Latinx people over the age of 25 compared to white, non-Latinx people as of 2014 (Data compiled from the US Census Bureau by Blanca Rincón, et at, in "A State of Neglect: Latino Educational Attainment, 66).

	US Total	Latino	White, Non-Latino	Mexican	Puerto Rican	Cuban	Central American	South American
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Less than high school diploma	13.1	34.7	11.2	40.1	22.6	20.1	44.1	15.0
High school graduate	27.7	27.2	28.0	27.3	29.7	29.6	25.0	25.1
Some college or associate's degree	29.2	32.3	29.4	22.2	30.0	25.0	18.9	28.0
Bachelor's degree	18.7	9.9	19.5	7.6	11.6	15.9	8.4	20.5
Graduate or professional degree	11.4	4.5	11.8	2.9	6.1	9.3	3.5	11.4

[19] Alarcón, "Tropology of Hunger: The 'Miseducation' of Richard Rodríguez."

prevailing hegemonic views of the public sphere" (151). Without diminishing the specific implications of Alarcón's analysis for indigenous subjectivity, I add that for Rodriguez it is anyone who does not wield white middle-class English that is somehow, in some way outside the sphere of the public, lacking agency. While power imbalances *do* lead to inequitable access to forms of agency, Rodriguez's formulation of public and private as well as his prescriptions for success leave no possibility for agency altogether for anyone who does not speak the "language of los gringos," or los gringos educados to be more specific. As an example, *Hunger* shows that we must be careful when discussing Latinx education and success—whether in policy, academics, critique, or literature itself—that we do not prescribe a monolithic model of success and that in our advocacy for equitable access to models of success, we must always take race as well as class into account.

Rodriguez's disavowal of race may be a product of his own trauma, but it nevertheless leads him to further misidentify agents of power in his assessment of affirmative action in the essay "Profession," which begins with his somewhat glib account of his initial experience with affirmative action:

> In the late 1960s nonwhite Americans clamored for access to higher education, and I became a principal beneficiary of the academy's response, its programs of affirmative action. My presence was noted each fall by the campus press office in its proud tally of Hispanic-American students enrolled; my progress was followed by HEW statisticians. One of the lucky ones. Rewarded. Advanced for belonging to a racial group 'under-represented 'in American institutional life. When I sought admission to graduate schools, when I applied for fellowships and summer study grants, when I needed a teaching assistantship, my Spanish surname or the dark mark in the space indicating my

> race—'check one'—nearly always got me whatever I asked for. When the time came for me to look for a college teaching job (the end of my years as a scholarship boy), potential employers came looking for me—a minority student. (153)

The "clamoring" immediately codes non-white activists, perhaps all non-white Americans, as the masses at the gates while he himself seems initially satisfied with his entrance into the gates, seemingly at the demand of the masses. The rub is that Rodriguez does not see himself as one of these masses. For him, "minority student" itself is a "juxtaposition of terms" as he continues: "For me there is no way to say it with grace. I say it rather with irony sharpened by self-pity. I say it with anger. It is a term that should never have been foisted on me. One I was wrong to accept" (153). His anger and his dilemma come from his guilt from "[k]nowing" he "was not really more socially disadvantaged than the white graduate students in my classes" and that he "was not disadvantaged like many of the new nonwhite students who were entering college, lacking good early schooling" (157). To Rodriguez's credit, he knows that his hailing by affirmative action is both a choice—his marking of the race box—and not a choice—his Spanish surname, which would seem to indicate the way race is foisted upon one regardless. The thing Rodriguez seems to miss is that race has been and will be at work regardless of affirmative action. Even in Rodriguez's case, there are markers like his name, hometown, school, etc. that would mark him in regard to race and be taken into account on applications—either consciously, subconsciously, or both. And that is before one considers the advantages. Can Rodriguez really be sure his privilege of a good early education and his seemingly natural abilities would have ensured a college admission on their own? Perhaps it is not just guilt that drives Rodriguez's anger: for him, it is affirmative action rather than systemic racism that has marked him racially. Still, there seems to be an assumption that without historical intervention, Rodriguez would have

still achieved a decent level of success. Is his case that he wants to believe in a colorblind society because such a society would allow him to reach his full potential on his own merits alone, without qualification? Or is all his bluster over affirmative action a lament for Rodriguez's vision of a colorblind nation that could have been?

Rodriguez continues his account of affirmative action by tying it more directly to the civil rights movement:

> The movement that began so nobly in the South, in the North came to parody social reform. Those least disadvantaged were helped first, advanced because many others of their race were more disadvantaged. The strategy of affirmative action, finally, did not take seriously the educational dilemma of disadvantaged students. They need good early schooling! Activists pushed to get more nonwhite students into colleges. Meritocratic standards were dismissed as exclusionary. But activists should have asked why so many minority students could not meet those standards; why so many more would never be in a position to apply. The revolutionary demand would have called for a reform of primary and secondary schools. To improve the education of disadvantaged students requires social changes which educational institutions alone cannot make, of course. Parents of such students need jobs and good housing; the students themselves need to grow up with three meals a day, in safe neighborhoods. But disadvantaged students also require good teachers. Good teachers—not fancy electronic gadgets—to teach them to read and to write. Teachers who are not overwhelmed; teachers with sufficient time to devote to individual students; to inspire. (162-163)

Rodriguez makes some astute points here—higher education is not isolated from the matrix of students' lower school education nor from the rest of their lived socioeconomic experience. Still,

there are core problems with his account: 1) he assumes that college admissions were ever based on merit alone, and 2) he presents this argument as if no one else had ever thought of it, as if activists were not fighting for these types of systemic and institutional reform in the first place, as if everyone on the left and people of color came together and simply decided that they were only going to ask for affirmative action. He continues:

> …In the late sixties, civil rights activists might have harnessed the great idealism that the southern movement inspired in Americans. They might have called on teachers, might have demanded some kind of national literacy campaign for children of the poor—white and nonwhite—at the earliest levels of learning.
>
> But the opportunity passed. The guardians of institutional America in Washington were able to ignore the need for fundamental social changes. College and university administrators could proudly claim that their institutions had yielded, were open to minority groups. (There was proof in a handful of numbers computed each fall.) So less thought had to be given to the procession of teenagers who leave ghetto high schools disadvantaged, badly taught, unable to find decent jobs. (163)

Rodriguez's vision is laudable, but his understanding of the "civil rights movement" is too reductionist to even begin to give an account of what it could or could not accomplish and/or what it should or should not have aspired to. More importantly, by putting the responsibility of educational equity on the shortcomings of the civil rights moment, Rodriguez relegates the possibility of social change to the impossible past—change becomes not even a matter of deferment, but of lost opportunity with no recourse in the present.

What Rodriguez does give insight to besides his own sentiments around affirmative action is an on-the-ground account of some of the shortcomings of its implementation, especially

but not limited to its early stages, even if his account lacks pedagogical nuance or the benefit of later understanding of non-traditional modes of learning and knowing:

> Academia accepted its so-called minority students. And after the pool of 'desirable 'minority students was depleted, more 'provisional 'students were admitted. But the academy was prepared to do little more for such students. (Getting admitted to college was for many nonwhite students the easiest obstacle to overcome.) The conspiracy of kindness became a conspiracy of uncaring. Cruelly, callously, admissions committees agreed to overlook serious academic deficiency. I knew students in college then barely able to read, students unable to grasp the function of a sentence. I knew nonwhite graduate students who were bewildered by the requirement to compose a term paper and who each day were humiliated when they couldn't compete with other students in seminars. There were contrived tutoring programs. But many years of inferior schooling could not be corrected with a crowded hour or two of instruction each week. Not surprisingly, among those students with very poor academic preparation, few completed their courses of study. Many dropped out, most blaming themselves for their failure. One fall, six nonwhite students I knew suffered severe mental collapse. None of the professors who had welcomed them to graduate school were around when it came time to take them to the infirmary or to the airport. And the university officials who so diligently took note of those students in their self-serving totals of entering minority students finally took no note of them when they left. (166)

In short, according to Rodriguez, in his observation during his time at Columbia and Berkeley, there were a number of ill-prepared students of color entering higher education programs—presumably to meet quotas. It is no secret that many institutes in the beginning days of

affirmative action were ill-equipped to ensure the success of these students. Even today, universities have trouble meeting the needs of the diverse populations of students that it strives to represent in their annual reports.[20] Rodriguez's assessment brings to light the resentment such shortcomings can produce, sometimes forming into partially misplaced ressentiment like the author's. But whereas many supporters of affirmative action—of its various types—and, more largely, advocates of non-traditional students—whether it be due to their material and/or social access related to class, race, gender, age, sexuality or any or all of the above—would call for more institutional support, Rodriguez's position is that these students do not belong in the first place. Or, more precisely, Rodriguez thinks that there are *some* students from these backgrounds that do belong, himself included, but that they do not and should not need any help in particular, whether it be special consideration in the application and admittance stage or once they are on campus. This supposes: 1) that, once again, meritorious students will be admitted without regard to race whatsoever—that race is not already a factor outside of affirmative action; 2) that established merit-based standards do indeed tell us who has the academic skills to succeed—the rest is a factor solely of the student effort; and 3) that the academic skills needed to succeed in a particular higher education program are acquired before beginning said academic program—

[20] Examples of the issues that early quota era initiatives suffered from abound. Columbia's first considerably sized undergraduate cohort of black students in 1969 only 25 out of 48 received bachelor's degrees (Hartocollis, "50 Years of Affirmative Action: What Went Right, and What It Got Wrong"). Stanford's early years of affirmative action in the late 1960's and early 1970's documented similar growing pains (Cohn, "Who Gets In?"). More recently, Richard Sander and Stuart Taylor argue in 2012's *Mismatch: How Affirmative Action Hurts Students It's Intended to Help, and Why Universities Won't Admit It* that "underrepresented minority groups," who are by and large assumed to have been admitted because of affirmative action have suffered through the decades since Bakke because they are "mismatched" at higher level schools than they are qualified to attend. While Sander and Taylor received much popular attention, much research since has shown that while their empirical data do illustrate some of the continuing hardships of students of color, it strains to support their premise on further scrutiny. For example, in *Race on Campus: Debunking Myths with Data* (2018), Julie Park notes that the empirical data and previous research that *Mismatch* and its proponents cite already hold counter proof to the theory's claims. For example, the data shows that underrepresented minority students statistically do better at higher tiered schools with better resources (131-134). The empirical data could more accurately said then to show evidence that the University still continues to struggle to meet the needs of diversity.

evidently Rodriguez believes that his good primary schooling was enough to save him from his linguistic "ghetto."

Although Rodriguez frames his disappointment in terms of concern for these students, one suspects that it is the perceived breakdown of meritocracy that he laments. He longs for the earlier days of classical liberal education when one could rely on a singular "standard"—in terms of curriculum and type of student. Never mind that this curriculum and student body were almost exclusively white, Anglo-Saxon, and male-centric; not representative of the world we live in; and certainly not representative of Rodriguez's vision of an equitable colorblind society. Rodriguez simply wants to study his Shakespearean peace and quiet without the clamor of discontent. The irony, of course, is that he chose not to take that road: he could be teaching and writing books about Shakespeare at Yale today. Even if we were to take Rodriguez's concern for his fellow students at face value, he provides no middle ground in the conversation around affirmative action. For instance, he never mentions the difference between quotas—the use of fixed numbers or percentages that was struck down by the Supreme Court in the 1978 Bakke decision—and preferences—the use of race, in underrepresented categories, as a "plus factor" to be regarded amongst the other values under consideration in admissions that was precariously ruled constitutional in the same decision.[21] Jamilah Moore categorizes affirmative action—which can be used to describe a wide array of practices since Lyndon B. Johnson's executive order 11246 called for its use in 1965 without explicit direction—into five different types: quotas, self-studies, preferences, outreach and counseling, and anti-discrimination, which would include de-segregation (79-81). Granted, as readers now, we have had fifty-five years since Johnson's proclamation, half a century of education programming and attacks on programming playing out

[21] See Ancheta, Angelo. "Bakke, Antidiscrimination Jurisprudence, and the Trajectory of Affirmative Action Law."

in the courts, to consider the scope and nuance of affirmative action. In contrast, Rodriguez experienced the first wave of such programming, publishing his first essay on the subject in 1974.[22] Sill, *Hunger* joins the affirmative action debate seventeen years post-Johnson and four years post-Bakke, so one would hope that, at the very least, Rodriguez would acknowledge that by the early 1980s what is commonly referred to as "affirmative action" has indeed changed.[23]

It is in light of Rodriguez's concerns—explicitly his concern for underprivileged peoples and implicitly his concern for the institute of classical liberal education—as well as his lack of historical acuity regarding affirmative action that his recollection of the moment of his renunciation of scholarship becomes especially conspicuous. At this point in his career, his last year of study, Rodriguez has received many jobs offers, including from Yale, before he has even finished his dissertation while many of his peers seem to be struggling on the academic job market. He recalls a small but momentous encounter in his lecturer office at Berkeley with one such peer, a white Jewish man who accuses Rodriguez of receiving unfair racial benefits. Rodriguez concedes to the perception that he is an affirmative action beneficiary, and his knee-jerk reaction is to defend the need for such benefits. His peer replies, "Nothing you say, though, really changes the fact that affirmative action is unfair. You can see that, can't you? There isn't

[22] On a federal level, the Supreme Court currently continues to support "plus factor" consideration, under certain conditions, but journalist Hua Hsu notes that there has been much movement at the state level to abolition affirmative action in admissions altogether ("The Rise and Fall of Affirmative Action"). The first of which, California's Proposition 209 of 1996, perversely also called the California Civil Rights Initiative, amended the state constitution to prohibit state institutions from considering of race, ethnicity, or gender in hiring or admission. Since then, many other states have followed suit, with similar propositions passed in Washington, Michigan, Nebraska, and Arizona, an executive order issued in Florida, and legislature passed in New Hampshire (Hsu). Moore documents specifically how admission numbers of underrepresented racial groups declined dramatically in California and Washington after the first year their propositions (22-28, 37-39).

[23] Beyond *Hunger*, Rodriguez is well known for speaking against affirmative action, he even discloses that in the book. Even as late as 1998 at the President's Forum on Race, he was reported as saying to the then President Clinton "that he quit academia in protest of affirmative action, which he said caused him to be treated like the token 'brown man'" (Shogren, "Clinton Calls for New Approach to Affirmative Action," 14). He also "urged that the right way to approach the problem is to 'start at the bottom of the social ladder' and that we should "make sure America had a system of education that saved children in first grade, because we are losing them" (14).

any way for me to compete with you. Once there were quotas to keep my parents out of schools like Yale. Now there are quotas to get you in. And the effect on me is the same as it was for them" (184).[24] Rodriguez's internal response, resembling something like a cross between Wilkie Collins and Rousseau, reads:

> At the edge of hearing, I listened to every word he spoke. But behind my eyes my mind reared—spooked and turning—then broke toward a reckless idea: Leave the university. Leave. Immediately the idea sprang again in my bowels and began to climb. Rent money. I pictured myself having to borrow. Get a job as a waiter somewhere? I had come to depend on the intellectual companionship of students—bright students—to relieve the scholar's loneliness. I remembered the British Museum, a year in the silence. I wanted to teach; I wanted to read; I wanted this life. But I had to protest. How? Disqualify myself from the profession as long as affirmative action continued? Romantic exile? But I had to. Yes. I found the horizon again. It was calm. (184)

This moment of haunting is guilt masquerading as an ethical imperative. Where is the life changing, profound indignation for students or potential students that were not about to graduate from a doctorate program at a "public Ivy" school? Those that would or will never come close to accessing the privilege of Rodriguez and his peer. It is not even as if the other student in this conversation did not have an offer, but that it was his only offer and to a "lesser" public state school whose location would cause his new family—wife and child—some initial hardship. Sure,

[24] The similar comparison was made by Ed Blum, alleged mastermind of Fisher v. University of Texas (2013) and Students for Fair Admissions v. Harvard (2014). We find the following in the filed legal complaint of the latter, the biggest profile current case against affirmative action in education, which has so far been ruled in favor of Harvard twice : "Harvard is using racial classifications to engage in the same brand of invidious discrimination against Asian Americans that it formerly used to limit the number of Jewish students in its student body (*Students for Fair Admissions v. Harvard* 4). Hua Hsu reports on an interview with Blum, "He giggled as he described its opening brief, which cites the quotas of the twenties and thirties which kept Jewish students out of Harvard" (np).

Rodriguez previously expresses disappointment for what he considers the failed potential of the civil rights movement, but here he has a moment of full-on conversion.

Ramón Saldívar claims that *Hunger* attempts to meet the demands of the Western autobiographical tradition rendered by the likes of Augustine, Rousseau, and Dante with its underlying conversion narrative, even if it is a secular conversion. Raymund Paredes likewise refers to Rodriguez's educational experience as one of secular conversion but analyzes it through Werner Sollors's model of "ethnic autobiography" that displays a narrative in which the author/subject "moves from 'shallow assimilationist to reborn ethnic'" (282). To the shock of no one, *Hunger's* conversion narrative comes up short for both Saldívar and Paredes, but I am more interested in one aspect of Rodriguez's narrative that both scholars appear to miss: they assign the process of conversion simply to the author's movement from ethnicized subject to educated middle-class subject.[25] I submit that Rodriguez's conversion narrative is more complex: yes, the author takes the reader through his conversion from an English as a second language student in childhood to a scholarship boy in adolescence and early adulthood, but there is a second conversion from naïve scholarship boy to wizened public intellectual in his rejection of academia and affirmative action, emblemized by his scene of epiphany.[26] That the crux of this moment is the guilt that Rodriguez feels for the perceived injustice toward his white, middle-class—or at least middle-class aspiring—academic peer merely emphasizes to whom/what he feels a sense of responsibility. It is not English language learner students nor undereducated students from working or lower-class socioeconomic situations. In any case, Saldívar and Paredes would most

[25] By Saldívar's account, Rodriguez fails at self-representation when compared to Augustine and Rousseau in three regards: "historical self-explanation," "philosophical self-analysis," and "poetic expression" (160-161). For Paredes, *Hunger* in its steadfastness to assimilation presents a retrograde or even fraudulent version of "ethnic autobiography (282-285). I am less interested in rehashing the validity of these claims—to do so would be to retread over tired debates about authenticity and ethnicity—than in addressing the focal point of conversion.

[26] In this sense, Rodriguez's twisty conversion narrative at second glance holds more company with Rousseau's conversion from Calvinism to Catholicism and back again, all the while defying both religious communities.

likely agree that Rodriguez's treatment of conversion themes, simple or complex, ultimately works to reify assimilationist ideology that disregards situational cultural and racial concerns for the façade of universal democratic rhetoric.

What Rodriguez does not know or acknowledge is that the second conversion is only partly successful: he writes to the reader as a successful middle-class writer—in the sense that if the reader is reading his work it will have been successful—but still writes—in his style, references, and form—as a scholarship boy. Cutler addresses how Rodriguez's use of reference and style show an engagement with these aspects of writing as markers of symbolic capital rather than as means for critical modes of discourse: his references are primarily to show ownership of knowledge and his "disinterested" style is meant to show that he knows what the presentation is of knowledge is supposed to look like (91-92). If we consider his dedication to the essay form along these lines, we find something similar. In the interaction between writer and publisher, again, for example, it is the mere fact that he is writing in essay form rather than story or narrative form *as well as* the content—topical political subjects—that Rodriguez marks as setting his intellectual work apart from other perceived "ethnic" writers. Furthermore, Rodriguez's rhetorical method of argument seems to be predicated on the belief that essay writing is primarily argumentative in nature—it is a method of writing invested in something like the art of polemics.

That is not to say that one cannot write a nuanced argument or make sincere qualifications or employ dialectic methodology without coming across as a blowhard, but that Rodriguez leans into the tendency in essay writing for authoritative positioning—the feeling that for one's argument to be substantive, it must declare itself the one correct point of view above all others. As a consequence, Rodriguez can say he speaks for himself, but he needs the reader to believe his experience is universal because his experience is his primary—if not only—evidence

to support his arguments. It is also through the universal that progressive liberal ideology seeks to understand and ultimately reconcile human experience. The manner in which Rodriguez identifies with the essay form also belies his proposed class politics: although he identifies economic class as the major problem with education, not race, he banks on his acquired class privilege to make critiques that are possibly harmful to folk without the same privilege. One could say that he utilizes the cultural capital of his university education as a shield, and I think his Chicano/a critics might be more understanding if he stopped there, but Rodriguez, in turn, weaponizes his privilege as he takes his place as a public intellectual, even as he claims to care about the Latino/a population.

The drive for authoritative positioning is not as present in Navarrette's writing, but he does acknowledge that he has a tendency toward combative argument that has been fostered, in large part, by his academic training. These moments of recognition are small, but spread throughout the book, such as in his description of the fights with his father: "My tone was horribly disrespectful. At times, instinct took over. Harvard had taught me to wound with words" (191). Another such moment is found in Navarrette's reflection on his public confrontation with Cesar Chavez after Navarrette accuses him of having lost sight of the needs of the farm workers the UFW is supposed to represent. Navarrette recalls, "In his defensive ravings and accusations, I had not seen a saint. Only a scared little man, determined to have the last word with someone who had been taught, in the Harvard way, never to grant it" (228). The author does not simply attribute his verbal attack to his formal education though: "I had done exactly what Harvard and my family had taught me to do, to speak for those who were not in a position to speak for themselves" (228). On one level, Navarrette seems satisfied with his self-righteousness. On another, he seems to recognize that such a rhetorical strategy is a zero-sum game as he describes

his and Chavez's verbal altercation: "A childish tenacity seized us both, and neither one of us was ready to back down" (227). The earlier classroom scene as well presents a training in academic combat: in Navarrette's compulsion to win at all cost, his perceived tension between the students in the class, and in the dramatization of his victory over the professor. I may be over-dramatizing here—to wit, neither Chavez nor Navarrette's father have elite academic training, and they are just as spiteful in these accounts as Navarrette. Their belligerence must have other sociohistorical roots—Chavez for example, spent two years in the Navy in his early twenties and cut his teeth on the often harsh picket line and protest rallies of the farm labor movement in his mid-twenties.[27] Still, the work of Rodriguez, Navarrette, and, as we will soon see, Sergio Troncoso all connect aggressive argumentation with elite academia in unique ways.

Regarding Navarrette's treatment of Rodriguez, I have already described the way in which he generally positions loyalty/allegiance and experience over direct engagement with Rodriguez's ideas, but this is not *exactly* true of the subject of affirmative action. Or, to be clear, Navarrette does take a stance on the subject that both agrees and diverges from Rodriguez, though Navarrette does not frame this divergence as a disagreement. Navarrette criticizes, "I have seen the most timid forms of affirmative action do little more than perpetuate the status quo by benefiting only those who need special consideration the least," but makes clear that the difference between his critique "and that of most of its critics is that, while they attack the preferential treatment of minority college applicants because they believe it goes too far toward addressing the racial inequality that still exists in our society, [he has] attacked it because

[27] I do not seek to make assertions about Chavez's warrant to any specific form of expression—social movements utilize whatever tools they find accessible—but it is known that Chavez did not always play nice, and not just with those leveraging more power and authority, but with undocumented im/migrant laborers as well. Certainly, Chavez's accusation that Navarrette is "a grower plant" sent "to embarrass him," which Navarrette reads as paranoia, is not completely devoid of merit considering the scrutiny, federal and civilian, that the public leader was often under (227).

[he]…believe[s] that it does not nearly go *far enough* toward meeting that end" (251). It is unclear if Navarrette includes Rodriguez with "most of its critics" because while Rodriguez could be said to denounce all forms of affirmative action, he does mention and expresses a desire to see changes in social inequities. Despite this ambiguity, there is a clear difference in how Navarrette assigns responsibility for racial injustice and addresses educational privilege that we can trace by examining how his struggle with affirmative action differs from Rodriguez's. The most obvious distinction is the generational gap between authors, which has already been noted. Another is that Navarrette is deeply involved with RAZA, the type of organization that Rodriguez seems not just to shun but fear during his academic years. And even though Navarrette's relationship with RAZA shifts during his undergraduate years—from a key member, proponent, and organizer to a despised outsider, his experience of solidarity and then break with other Latinx students is formative for good and ill.

Central to this experience is Navarrette's and his peers' dealing with the fallout, personal and public, from the trial of their comrade Jose Razo, editorialized as the "Harvard Homeboy," after he confessed to a spree of robberies in Orange County while home on summer break. Navarrette dedicates a whole chapter to this incident, and it is during this time that the author first discovers Rodriguez, reading his editorial on Razo. Noticeably, Navarrette does not name Rodriguez here in the narrative—he saves that for his second encounter when he finds *Hunger* on a co-op bookshelf. Navarrette simply notes one editorial, out of many, about the case that seemed to have merit saying that the author attributed Razo's "tragic fate" to the student's resistance to making the "concession" of giving up his culture for the sake of elite education: "Razo had tried to have his cultural cake and eat it too" (140).

Navarrette is dissatisfied with the numerous editorials, gossip, and general conversation that would speculate on, seeking to rationalize or explain, Razo's case, but he does add, half-cheekily:

> My own suspicion is that, at the end of his sophomore year, Razo was not nearly as afraid of confronting the American penal system as he was of explaining to his proud parents that he was unhappy at Harvard and wanted to leave. I empathized. Had I not been unable to bring myself to tell my parents of the trials of my freshman year? (122)

This further resonates with his comment on the institutional lack of support and/or support systems for students of color *or* even recourse to seek such support: "My generation was left to muddle through the murky waters of what came next: What of the quality of life for minority students once admitted? To even raise the question was to sin against progress, to seem ungrateful for experiences that had been denied our parents" (123). Navarrette contrasts the tumult he and his RAZA peers feel with the university's complete disavowal of the whole affair—their statement boiling down to the citation that "…the Razo case was an 'isolated incident' and that there were also, among Harvard's Latino students, many more success stories than otherwise" (128). He continues to reflect on and critique the official reaction a few pages later:

> The old saying suggests that victory has a thousand fathers, but defeat is an orphan. The phrase was likely coined by a Harvard man. Success was something for which Harvard had no trouble claiming credit. Good publicity meant large checks from wealthy alumni. On the other hand, failure was someone else's responsibility. (130)

The responsibility, or at least the sense of responsibility, for Razo's situation seems to fall on Navarrette, his Raza peers, and the other Chicano students at Harvard as they organize their

biannual conference that year “as an introspection into the uniqueness of our experience as Chicano students at predominantly white, Ivy League colleges” (134). Reflecting on the keynote speech for the event, in which the speaker is relating how the students must feel about Razo to the sense of helplessness one feels when a loved one is injured or in danger, Navarrette writes, “I was thinking of Joe Razo and of what may have been, for Harvard Chicanos, our greatest collective failure. What could we do? We could have held him. We could have told him that he would be all right” (135). Navarrette internalizes this sense of responsibility so much so that when he encounters Rodriguez’s “theories” on sacrificing private culture for public privilege a second time in *Hunger*, he makes it his personal mission to prove this theory wrong. His aforementioned experiment consists of taking a year leave of absence from Harvard to reacquaint himself with his culture by living back at home in San Joaquin Valley and studying Chicano Studies at California State University Fresno. Upon declaring his plan to the senior writer, ex-scholar Rodriguez, he is wished well but given warning that “[i]t may not be as easy as you think to 'go home again’…You may not like what you find” (152). As to be expected, Navarrette finds more disillusion than resolution, finding himself out of place and simultaneously missing his Harvard privilege while acknowledging it as such. Still, Navarrette never resorts to condemning preference based affirmative action, but rather becomes more attuned to the inequalities of education as a whole: a lack of support and access for students of color, both with and without affirmative action.

In addition to the impact of Joe Razo’s incident, Navarrette’s sympathetic outlook stems from a keen awareness of generational traumas of education, citing career tracking in primary school, exemplified by his mother's experience of a segregated career day:

> One bus, loaded with white students, toured the downtown businesses including the banks, post office, and shops. The other bus, loaded with Mexican-American students, appropriately toured the packing houses and local canneries. Apparently not worried 'about overstatement, the school officials had consciously taken different groups of students to different employment sites because they assumed that they were destined for different career paths. (10)

The locus of this blatant act of prejudice—a school-sponsored career day—underscores the relationship between education and access to career options: it is not only that Navarrette's parents were not given equitable access to academic knowledge, but that institutional sites function to circulate or, as this example illustrates, direct the circulation of social capital. Navarrette notes that despite a lack of educational support, his mother did enroll in college and find work in a bank and "various government agencies" (10). Likewise, his father, who ranked third from the bottom in his high school graduating class, finds work as a police officer, working his way ultimately to police sergeant while attending night classes at Fresno State and earning his Bachelor's degree after ten hard years (35, 51, 161). Navarrette's grandparents 'educational access is even more limited, his mother's parents having been subject to formal segregated schooling (36). Even considering his father's college schooling, Navarrette comes to realize the breadth of the disparity between academic experiences of local-serving state schools and community colleges and that of elite institutes during his year as a visiting student to his father's alma matter. This disparity in both the rigor of material and in the amount of hardship that many non-traditional, working-class students face is epitomized in a scene where Navarrette is congratulated on a perfect score on an exam that he did not really study for while a classmate fairs differently: "The woman with the construction worker husband and the sick child and no

health insurance could only manage a high 'C 'on the same exam. She will have to try harder, the professor tells her. But just how hard should one be expected to try? I hide my blue book in my binder. This is all a joke, I tell myself. A sick, twisted, unfunny joke" (172).

Navarrette's enrollment in a Ph. D program in Education at UCLA after his graduation from Harvard stems from Navarrette's indignation at this generational trauma and continuing inequity as well as his self-interest and practical considerations. He first decides to go to graduate school when he realizes that, when paired with his "association with Harvard, elite credentials like a Ph.D. bring with them a certain amount of legitimacy that can give "access to…the sort of power needed to affect the social change that [he had] begun to envision [him]self, one day, creating" (152). After his rejection from several elite law schools, including Harvard, Navarrette settles on the UCLA program as something that will subsequently help his law school applications, which could then lead to a law career where he could "use [his] planned legal training as a tool for educational reform" (243-254). Navarrette builds up the grandiosity of his plans to buttress his post-Harvard, wide-eyed expectations to demonstrate how he buys into the hype of his own excellence. These expectations, the buying into privilege, then juxtapose his soon to come renunciation of academia. While *Darker*'s narrative trajectory mirrors *Hunger*'s in many ways, what sets Navarrette apart from Rodriguez throughout is how he follows his concerns with due diligence: in his root-searching year-long experiment and in his pursuit of graduate studies as a means to a career from which he can effect changes in education, even if his ambition is also a matter of self-interest.[28] Navarrette's responses to educational inequity, while impassioned, resist reactionary posturing toward specific policies en masse and instead

[28] In this sense, in Navarrette's ambition for power, the investment into one's own self-importance in regard to social movements is reminiscent of Oscar Zeta Acosta's self-reported involvement as lawyer activist in El Movimiento in the pages of his autobiographical novels *The Autobiography of a Brown Buffalo* (1972) and the *Revolt of the Cockroach People* (1973).

focus on the current popular pedagogies of ability-grouping—placing students of "similar" ability within groups in the classroom—and tracking—placing students of "similar" ability in the same classroom, though we must note that he conflates the two practices in his discussion and focuses primarily on tracking.

The author sows the seeds of discontent with these pedagogical practices early in his narrative with a brief, but direct proclamation: "The American educational system's first and most thorough lesson…one of division" dividing "Remedial students. Honors students. Gifted students. Better students" (20). In the last chapter, "Reconciliation," Navarrette expands on this subject, linking the practice to his own childhood experience:

> Memory takes me back to Madison Elementary School, an inconspicuous assortment of gray buildings in my brown and white hometown. The place where, during recess, I first played with my Mexican-American friends. The place where, in the classroom, I was first set apart from them. Set apart by teachers. Not demons, but teachers-well-intentioned men and women searching for more efficient ways of teaching roomfuls of students of different aptitude. Teachers convinced that, for any number of reasons, they could not teach [255] us all. Teachers making private concessions, content to educate at least some with a blind eye toward the rest. (255-256)

Navarrette concludes:

> And so, truth be known, I am not a victim of the injustice of intraracial differentiation. I am actually its beneficiary. I have benefited from the very sort of educational inequity that I went to graduate school with the hope of eliminating. I was allowed to excel in the American educational system by virtue of the same form of ability-grouping that had undermined the educational progress of so many other

> Mexican-American students like me. This realization comes to me only now, as a doctoral student lost on the final leg of my educational trek. (261)

Like Rodriguez, Navarrette voices concern for those left behind and guilt that his success is, in part, predicated on others' lack of access to privilege. Also like Rodriguez, Navarrette stages a dramatic scene of abdication, but Navarrette's framing of his scene allows the reader to keep focus on those who would suffer the most from a faulty program rather than obscuring racial issues by drawing from a concept like "reverse discrimination."[29] Navarrette expresses, "Overwhelmed with guilt, I would eventually find relief only in the complete surrendering of ambition and with the dramatic, and what some might consider self-destructive, renunciation of academic privilege" (255). Beyond the page, we know Navarrette continues to build a successful career as a columnist and public speaker, and the inception of this success is written into the writer's account of his early essay writing.[30] Yet, *Darker* differs from *Hunger* in that Navarrette's account does not constantly perform the need to be read as success—the sort of writing oneself into success that Rodriguez seems fixated on. Yes, Navarrette does display some performance of mastery, but what *Darker* lacks in this sense allows the force of the narrative to bear on the idea of failure rather than success. Even if that failure ultimately leads to his success as a writer, Navarrette's story on the page can still be read as the failure of his intervention into a system of inequity.

Finally, what sets Navarrette and Rodriguez apart is not only how they assess failures of elite Latinx education, but also how each one focuses on success versus failure in the first place.

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[29] Rodriguez does not use this term and is weary of the Bakke case itself because even though he publicly supports Bakke's position, he feels it fell short by drawing focus solely on "the rights of white middle-class students," leaving no one to wonder "if it had ever been possible to make higher education accessible to the genuinely socially disadvantaged" (178). Despite this weariness, the scene of second conversion is exactly about discrimination against white folks, even if the comment on Jewish history tries to confuse the situation.

[30] According to Navarrette's online bio, he "is the most widely read Latino columnist in the country, and the 16th most popular columnist in America according to Media Matters" (rubennavarrette.com/about/).

Looking to Sergio Troncoso here, another Harvard alumnus turned professional author, will provide further insight into this focal point in regard to ideas of responsibility and privilege. Troncoso also offers an account of the traumas of elite higher education on the pages of his personal essays and a speech in the collection *Crossing Borders* and in an essay published in *We Wear the Mask*, "Passing Ambition." Though *Crossing* is not as dedicated to educational experience as *Hunger* or *Darker*, the author is similarly compelled to account for his educational privilege as a core element in his personal narrative. The essay, "Latinos Find an America on the Border of Acceptance," does not address education directly, but Troncoso's note on the representation of failure and success will help foreground the author's relationship to this discussion:

> For this reason, I have often called for Latinos, particularly Chicanos, to define themselves, and not to let others, even the well-intentioned media, define who we are. That's why I have written stories about growing up on the Mexican-American border of El Paso, Texas. Stories about people who work and try to make a life and sometimes fail and sometimes succeed. The quotidian reality of hard work and small successes and failures is the reality we mostly live in, but too often it is the reality ignored by the American media. (78)

Here is a call to meet the burden of representation head-on—to self-define Latino/a and Chicano/a image. Such a call should be heeded with caution, for the danger of succumbing to the trap of universalized representation/misrepresentation—the idea that the privileged few can stand in for the whole—is ever-present. The saving grace of Troncoso's statement is its emphasis on both failure *and* success, big *and* small. In the right context, such a treatment might offer an alternative to the binary idea of "making it" or not, the assimilationist idea that one either

succeeds or fails completely at living an "American" life. Even anti-assimilationist writers and critics are liable to get caught up in these binaries in resisting assimilation or in disassimilation—the thought that one can escape to one's "roots" away from hegemonic culture. Roots are always entangled in hegemony as there is no zero-degree of ethnicity.

To be clear, addressing failure and success is not a panacea for ethical representational discourse—Rodriguez himself could be said to address both concepts in *Hunger*, but applying the lens of failure and success can elucidate ideological impulses.[31] For example, if we consider Rodriguez's concerns about the failure and success, we see that he blames not only a lack of broader access to education but also the students and their supporters themselves for the failures in education that he witnesses. As well, his ultimate concern is for success: his success and that of other high performing students of color like him. Even if he pays lip service to a redistribution of educational capital, his underlining concern is for the ongoing legitimacy of liberal education as well as the perception of legitimacy of privilege for those who do succeed in higher education. Navarrette, on the other hand, seems truly compelled by the failure he witnesses, both on a personal level—Joe Razo—and on a larger social level—the persistent inequity of ability-grouping and tracking pedagogy. Even his disavowal of higher education comes from a different sort of guilt than Rodriguez's—guilt from the feeling of responsibility to the non-privileged rather than the privileged.

Troncoso too has a moment of disavowal, but his is one that comes from pride rather than guilt. His intention as a Harvard student and then as a Yale graduate student is to go into politics

[31] While Troncoso's call for addressing success and failure is primarily meant to address fiction—he himself seems to follow his own advice in his fiction work—it is interesting to apply it to Navarrette and Rodriguez specifically and autobiographic writing in general.

or political science, but his experience as a student intern in Washington DC provides disillusionment followed by clarity:

> I had become a "real" gov jock at the end of that summer of 1981, the only kind of "real Harvard student" I felt I could achieve, by passing as that kind of student when I had no idea what that meant…I had learned that ambition could be my worst enemy. When I got what I wanted—what I imagined I wanted—I saw how meaningless politics and this political world were. Why had I fought to be a real gov jock at Harvard? That's the question I couldn't stop thinking about as I returned to school. I carried that question with me as I delved deeper into history and philosophy in my coursework. When I started writing stories about the border to give voice to characters from my home, when I melded those stories with philosophical and psychological questions I had refined in school, then I found meaning in my work, literary work…I wasn't passing as anything anymore. ("Passing ambition" 187-188)

The feeling of unbelonging, which echoes Rodriguez's and Navarrette's, is only punctuated by his experience on Capitol Hill. In his essay "Literature and Migration," he speaks of his East Coast Ivy League education as a whole: "In the beginning, the mantle of the outsider was thrust upon me by new surroundings. But later, I adopted the outsider status to communicate the good I saw in the Mexican-American community of El Paso to places like Harvard and Yale, Boston and New York (6). The difference in Troncoso's reaction is that he finds a role from which he can try to leverage his educational privilege in service of the less privileged, in terms of elite education. Instead of wholly rejecting—or at least claiming to reject his educational privilege—he embraces the aspect of his education that he feels can serve both art and culture: "I felt I finally was who I wanted to be by doing the work of creative observation that is storytelling, that

is philosophy in literature, that is being a voice for outsiders who had no voice" (Passing Ambition 188). Now here we should practice some skepticism. Is it even possible to retain one's "outsider" point of view from an insider place of power? Is it overreaching to claim to speak for those who have "no voice" when your privilege sets you apart from those same voices? Is Troncoso, in Navarrette's paraphrasing of Rodriguez's take on Razo, trying to have his "cultural cake and eat it too"? The first question Troncoso wrestles with himself as he looks back at his career, especially at his time spent as a board member for the Hudson Valley Writer's Center: "But was I really an outsider anymore? What kind of insider-outsider was I, after six years on the board of directors? More importantly what standards should I uphold, as an insider-outsider, to maintain my center of gravity in the literary world?" (122) His conclusion is a non-conclusion—there *is* no definitive answer. Perhaps the most important thing about this question is that it is being asked and continues be asked by those trying to give a voice to outsiders and by those reading such work. Rodriguez and, to a lesser extent, Navarrette would have us believe that they inhabit this outsider category by merit of rejecting academia, as if in doing so they are also renouncing their privilege gained from years of academic training/knowledge/experience. Contrastingly, Troncoso offers a model of scholar/writer/educator, that maintains his claim to the privilege of an elite higher education while also keeping a sharp critical eye on that education—he is both insider and outsider.

An example of Troncoso's critique is his rejection of the kind of authoritative posturing and lingual domination that Navarrette wrestles with and Rodriguez aspires to:

> I also noticed that many of the practitioners of academic fancy language, as I'll call it, were individuals who treated people poorly. Their education and facility with argument and power encouraged lying, deception and manipulation. The nature of truth,

> the pursuit of abstraction in universities, was a passive aggressive violence. Eliminate your opponent, not by killing him, but by warping arguments to win at any cost, by murdering his mind. The nature of truth was hate. (7-8)

Troncoso's comment echoes Navarrette's description of the cutthroat winner-take-all competitiveness of elite academic discourse, but instead of needing to master it, Troncoso denounces the obsession to win as detrimental to something like the human spirit. For Troncoso this lingual violence goes hand in hand with the intellectual tendency to abstract, a process he believes is inherent to writing:

> When you view human beings as abstractions, then it is easy to abuse those abstractions without guilt. Judging a person as a category is the root of racism; it is the root of cruelty. Moreover, writing about the world of people is an exercise in abstraction, and explains my deep ambivalence about being a writer. Too often my writer friends lose themselves in their world of words. (8)[32]

One might note that by writing of the "world" Troncoso could be referring to fiction writing, as he is primarily known for his fiction and tends to refer to fiction when he discusses writing, but he does not delineate between the two here. In any case, it is interesting to think about this author's notes on abstraction here in relation to Rodriguez's attraction to abstraction as a rhetorical move to signify importance. Perhaps for Troncoso, writing in the context of fiction—as a sort of premeditated experience in abstraction—allows him a sliver of space to write about subjects while mediating the violence or possible violence of abstraction. To pursue this further, we would need to look deeply into the author's fiction writing—something outside the scope of this project. I propose though that such a study would yield further insight into the author's

[32] Of note, Troncoso also has an argumentative streak that he acknowledges but does not give much to tie it to his education.

unique attunement to his own privilege and sense of responsibility for his representation of culture. Besides a critical stance toward academic tendencies that help keep their negative aspects in check, Troncoso's sense of responsibility toward/for his culture, particularly the vulnerable aspects and people of his culture, as well garner some good faith when pondering the second question: should he even be trying to speak for those without voices? The writer's sense of responsibility—present throughout his previously mentioned thoughts—is paramount in his essay "Why Should Latinos Write their Own Stories?":

> I believe our community has developed that confidence to step forward and start taking responsibility for the many images that are projected in the name of Ysleta and El Paso. And I said confidence, not arrogance. This confidence means we know we can tell our own stories now, and it also means we accept the burden of this responsibility. It means we keep an open mind. It means we accept the many varied voices of our people. I am simply one of those voices, and I know that. (199-200)

Troncoso approaches something like the burden of representation, but instead of a burden in the sense of something to be suffered or overcome, the responsibility becomes an issue of cultural pride.

Troncoso's "voice" for "outsiders with no voice" expands into a call for others to join in. He is not content to claim mastery of his one experience to represent the other. This sentiment is paralleled by the author's work off the page: organizing and teaching writing workshops and mentoring other Latinx authors, such as Rigoberto Gonzalez, whom he mentions in *Crossing*. That is not to say Rodriguez and Navarrette do not engage in similar activities: Rodriguez is known for his openness to interact with and even mentor younger writers, and all three writers are known for their speaking engagements through which they share their knowledge, insight,

and points of view. That is also not to say that this partially extratextual information is necessary for a reading of these authors' works. It *is* to say that Troncoso's concern for cultural voices/community voices on the page means his claim that he is one voice out of the many resonates differently than Rodriguez's similar claim, one the latter repeatedly undermines. More importantly, Troncoso and Navarrette offer a contrasting conceptualization of responsibility for one's education and toward the education of others to Rodriguez's account of historical and personal foreclosure. Both authors write of the active pursuit of personal and professional investment in the advancement of others, even if Navarrette ultimately gives up his quest, while Rodriguez, in his account, seems compliant—if not content—with serving as an ambassador of Latino excellence. This concept of responsibility, tied to the burden of representation for Navarrette and Troncoso, is explored in more depth in the "Third World," women of color feminist activist-oriented writing of Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherríe Moraga, which is also, unsurprisingly, more tenacious in its systemic critique of academia than that of these three relatively privileged male writers.

CHAPTER 2: This Bridge Called Our Education: Chicana Feminism, Intersectionality, and the University

Forewords, prefaces, and/or introductions can often contain a sort of story of the project they announce, but Gloria Anzaldúa's retelling of the genesis of *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* in the 2001 foreword of the 21st-anniversary edition of the seminal anthology is especially significant in its illustration of the capacity of the author's autobiographical impulse.[1] In this brief account, Anzaldúa weaves in many threads of thought that she has also woven throughout her career—themes of coalition, allyship, alienation, education, consciousness-making—to craft not just the story of *Bridge*'s creation, but a story of her own creation as an intellectual/artist/activist. It is from this originating space, where the personal is political, that Anzaldúa and Cherríe Moraga are able to launch *Bridge* as an intervention into not just Chicano/a and feminist discourse, but also higher education through a critical lens that takes into account class, race, gender, and sexuality as interrelation modes of subject identification and experience, something akin to what Kimberlé Crenshaw, from critical race and legal theory, will later name intersectionality.[2] In particular, this chapter reexamines Anzaldúa and Moraga's theoretical foundations in the Bridge project as a starting point for insight into their continued interventions into the patriarchal/masculinist empiricism and

[1] I would not go as far as to label the foreword as "autohistoria" or "autohistoria-teoría," which are Anzaldúa's oft-used terms to describe her modes of autobiographical writing. Her most concise definition is in her notes on her essay "now let us shift…the path of conocimiento …inner work, public acts" from *This Bridge We Call Home*: *Radical Visions for Transformation* (2002): "Autohistoria is a term I use to describe the genre of writing about one's personal and collective history using fictive elements, a sort of fictionalized autobiography or memoir; an autohistoria-teoría is a personal essay that theorizes (578). See Keating's gloss of the terms as well in *The Gloria Anzaldúa Reader* (2009, 319). I align moments like the one in this foreword alongside instances of the author's telling of self in places like interviews that tell and retell her story. My point is to illustrate that even in Anzaldúa's most straightforward, literal accounts of the self, much complex thought is at play.

[2] Coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw in "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex" (1989).

rationality of dominant academic modes of thought throughout their careers as writers, teachers, activists in thought and praxis. I argue that while both thinkers utilize various modes of writing for resistance making and community building throughout their careers, self-representation is one of their primary modes—for Anzaldúa *the* primary mode—for such work.[3] One benefit to self-writing is that it is not exclusive to or exclusionary as a form or genre: Anzaldúa's work in *Bridge* alone illustrates how one might forge hybrid forms of self-representation as she draws from forms of poetry, essay, speech, letter, interview, and autobiographic essay. Of these, the autobiographic essay is of particular interest because Anzaldúa, Moraga, and other Chicana feminists following soon after—like Ana Castillo and Sandra Cisneros—will further develop this form throughout their careers.

Anzaldúa begins describing the early germinations of *Bridge* in 2001 foreword:

> The seed for this book came to me in the mid-seventies in a graduate English class taught by a "white" male professor at the University of Texas at Austin. As a Chicana, I felt invisible, alienated from the gringo university and dissatisfied with both el movimiento Chicano and the feminist movement. Like many of the contributors to *Bridge* I rebelled, using writing to work through my frustrations and make sense of my experiences. I wrote an essay, with the pretentious title "Growing Up Xicana," in an autobiographical politically engaged voice rather than in the dispassionate, disembodied language of academic discourse pushed on graduate students. Much to my surprise this white man championed my writing. (262)

[3] Both Anzaldúa and Moraga use poetry, essay, speeches, and short narrative as well as hybrid combinations of these forms. For Anzaldúa there is also "autohistoria-teoría" and children's stories, and for Moraga there is also theater and popular autobiography.

In her "alienated" feeling from the university commons we find resonance with themes from many of the texts in this study, certainly with the hunger, loneliness, and outsider-hood found in our previously discussed work of Rodriguez, Navarrette, and Troncoso. Unlike the experiences of these male authors, in which alienation and tokenization seem to pivot around conspicuous visibility, Anzaldúa's is paired with invisibility. I present this as emblematic of the all too familiar occurrence that even when tokenized at the proverbial "seat at the table" women of color are often expected to take up less leg and elbow room, given less attention than men and white women. This is not an oppression measuring contest though, not a calculation and comparison of the amount of oppression experienced by women of color versus men of color nor by white women versus men of color.[4] I call attention to this difference to point out the multiplicity of subject positions—indivisible, but not additive—at work/play in Anzaldúa's relational representation of cultural identity: she comes to describe her alienation from Chicano/a spaces in her womanhood and queerhood as well as alienation from feminist spaces in her colorhood/brownhood. Also evident in this recounting is her resistance to essentialist notions of race—a resistance that gains momentum throughout her career—in the depiction of her instructor: the rhetorical effect of her use of scare quotes around the first instance of "white" and her surprise at the instructor's support fuse to illustrate allyship in difference.

Anzaldúa continues to chronicle this period of time in her first PhD program at UT Austin, and describes how, upon finding a dearth of "material that reflected [her] students' experiences" when teaching a course on "La Mujer Chicana," she "vowed to one day put Chicanas' and other women's voices between the covers of a book" (262).[5] The lack of

[4] Such comparison would miss the point that gendered, classed, and raced experience is always relational.
[5] While details of this period are spread throughout Anzaldúa's work, the perhaps most detailed published accounts of this era are found in her interviews, particularly by Linda Smuckler from 1982 in *Interviews/Entrevista*s (2000) and by Hector Torres from 1990 in *Conversations with Contemporary Chicana and Chicano Writers* (2007).

representation—a form of invisibility—spurs Anzaldúa to make not to just a decision but a "vow" and not just in regard to her authorial capacity but in to her anticipated rise in cultural capital, specifically, access to the social capital of the academy and/or artist networks: it is not enough for her to write about *her* Chicana experience or even to present only Chicana voices. Anzaldúa describes:

> At around that time a white gay male friend invited me to guest lecture his class. The idea of el mundo zurdo—the vision of a blood/spirit connection/alliance in which the colored, queer, poor, female, and physically challenged struggle together and form an international feminism—came to me in his class. (262) [6]

Note the details that Anzaldúa gives and does not give—she tells no specifics of the class or students but does let us know that her friend who offers the invitation—a small but nonetheless meaningful honor for an early scholar—is white and gay.[7] One might infer that the class has something to do with race and/or feminism or sexuality or that the students were diverse, but what seems to be more important to this moment in *Bridge*'s origin story is the idea of a shared space between friends and colleagues with different cultural backgrounds and lived experience in which they can work toward a shared advocacy for women. "El Mundo Zurdo," or "The Left-Handed World" as she sometimes calls it, begins as a philosophy to guide the sharing of these potential spaces—the classroom, the pages "between the covers of a book," and the world at large. El Mundo Zurdo becomes a central idea that the author will continue to develop throughout her life, shifting from a nascent desire for utopic coalition in this early work to her concept of "conocimiento," her onto-epistemological theory of/for a spiritually and

[6] Anzaldúa usually capitalizes "El Mundo Zurdo" as a proper noun, but here she does not. I take this as the author signaling its state of early iteration in this scene—a sort of vision one comes to understand more clearly in time and experience.
[7] This friend is most likely Randy Conner.

experientially guided state/practice of radically relational "knowing," in her final works. That is not to say that Anzaldúa loses interest in coalition building, but that it is more prominent in the context of the *Bridge* project and her other project anthologies.[8]

Appropriately, Anzaldúa's telling of *Bridge*'s beginnings hinges on the coalitional impulse as she continues to focus on obstacle and allyship:

> Two years later in San Francisco while attending a workshop by Merlin Stone, a working class, spirituality-practicing, goddess-loving "white" woman, I experienced subtle and blatant forms of racism and classism from the white participants. With Merlin's encouragement I decided to compile a book of US Third World women's voices and, before leaving the workshop, composed a call for papers. Months later I asked Cherríe Moraga to join me in editing the book. I was seriously ill part of the time and without her the project would not have been completed. (262-263)

Anzaldúa omits that, within those two years, she leaves the Ph.D. program to pursue a full-time writing career in California—San Diego, then San Francisco—and lives by stringing together part-time while working tirelessly on her writing projects. I interpret this omission not as the author downplaying her rejection of academia at the time—though that may be part of it—but as a rhetorical choice to build on what you might call a momentum of inclusive positivity. Another "white" ally, Stone, supports Anzaldúa even if she is not portrayed as directly defying the racist, classist workshop participants. This use of "white" hints beyond binary constructions of race as white/non-white while at the same time it invokes said binary. Anzaldúa also presents Moraga as becoming involved at the last moment of the project's inception instead of as a co-originator, as some accounts seem to suggest. This positioning stands in contrast to Anzaldúa and Moraga's

[8] *Making Face, Making Soul / Haciendo Caras: Creative and Critical Perspectives by Feminists of Color* (1990) and *This Bridge We Call Home* (2002), co-edited with AnaLouise Keating.

jointly penned original 1981 introduction that focuses squarely on the struggles and oppositional stance of women of color. Stone is mentioned, but not by race, there is no "white" college professor nor guest lecturing for a white gay male friend, and there is more emphasis on the duo's collaborative effort.[9] It is not that Anzaldúa ignores women of color in the new introduction, but that white allyship features more prominently. Part of this difference could be attributed to the different lengths or the difference in the authorship of the accounts. Still, this contrast aligns with Anzaldúa's explicitly non-separatist disposition after the first edition: her 2002 follow-up, *This Bridge We Called Home,* even includes writing by men and white women.[10] It would be inaccurate to label *Bridge* or the range of theories, narratives, and art it contains as separatist—a large part of the Third World women's movement was their problem with white feminism's gender separatism at the time because it did not account for the cultural experiences of women of color. Yet, there is a definite tension present between Anzaldúa's desire to bring together a community of women of color activists and the impulse toward radical inclusivity often present in her work after the first edition.[11] Like the accounts of *Bridge*'s origins, it is not so much the story that, but the framing and context.

This account gives a glimpse of how, as José Esteban Muñoz claims in his conceptualization of a "brown commons":

[9] On pages xliii-xliv of the Fourth Edition.
[10] This decision is ultimately what leads Moraga to decline participation in *This Bridge We Call Home*. Moraga discusses this decision in "The Salt That Cures," her chapter devoted to Anzaldúa's work and their friendship, falling-out, and reconciliation in *A Xicana Codex of Changing Consciousness: Writings 200-2010* (2011). For Moraga, it was not a matter of separatism, but a pragmatic decision about what she felt was the best strategy for the continuing women of color feminists in light of the cultural work needed to be done—in essence, Moraga felt like there was still too long of a distance to cross *that* bridge yet.
[11] Even as early as in her Foreword to the second edition in 1983, Anzaldúa states, "We have come to realize that we are not alone in our struggles nor separate nor autonomous but that we—white black straight queer female male—are connected and interdependent" (253-254). As well, in her 1982 interview with Smuckler, the author expresses a desire to start a more inclusive radical feminist press and name it El Mundo Zurdo Press (63).

> [B]rown thought flows through the channels of what Stefano Harney and Fred Moten call the undercommons of the academy. While official curriculums and itineraries for learning are vulnerable to those who would drive them underground, brown practices of thought will—as they have always done—thrive in the realms of the intramural, the unofficial, and the fugitive. (4)[12]

While Anzaldúa may find some university support during the making of *Bridge*, in the form of a lecturer position at San Francisco State, and even comes to her vision while in the space of the university classroom, these moments are exceptions. The project itself is fugitive in its adamance to build coalition and modes of knowledge/knowing outside of, not sanctioned by the University, even if the project always already finds itself in relation to the University. And while *Bridge* will be taken up in college classrooms, its potential, its vision is more aligned with the "brown commons," as Muñoz states:

> The brown commons is not about the production of the individual but instead about a movement, a flow, and an impulse to move beyond the singular subjectivity and the individualized subjectivities. It is about the swerve of matter, organic and otherwise, about the moment of contact, and the encounter and all that it can generate. Brownness is about contact and is nothing like continuousness. Brownness is a being with, being alongside. The story I am telling about a sense of brown is not about the formation of atomized brown subjects. It is instead about the task, the endeavor, not of enacting a

[12] Muñoz, *The Sense of Brown* (2020). Moten and Stefano describe the student in the undercommons, at toil in the shadow of the educational institution, in difference of the hemming and hawing over the institutes function that takes place "upstairs"—whether to restore or reform it: "But for the subversive intellectual, all of this goes on upstairs, in polite company, among the rational men. After all, the subversive intellectual came under false pretenses, with bad documents, out of love. Her labor is as necessary as it is unwelcome. The university needs what she bears but cannot bear what she brings. And on top of all that, she disappears. She disappears into the underground, the downlow lowdown maroon community of the university, into the undercommons of enlightenment, where the work gets done, where the work gets subverted, where the revolution is still black, still strong." (26) The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning & Black Study (2013).

> brown commons but rather of knowing a brownness that is our commonality. Furthermore, the brownness that we share is not knowable in advance. It is not reducible to one object or a thing, so the commons of brownness is not identifiable as any particular thing we have in common. (2)

In this context, Anzaldúa's focus on "white" is not contradictory to the mission of the project, but an opening up of possibility for shared relational commonalities. It is out of this potential for interaction and support that Anzaldúa and Moraga stage their coalitional, intersectional intervention with other women of color writers.

Of course, by the time of *Bridge's* formation in the late 1970s, black studies, women's studies, and Chicano studies have already been at work in and around the University, and their embattled histories illustrate that tension and contention between identity-focused political communities on campus and dominant modes of academic thought are nothing new. Michael Soldatenko's work tracks the competing prevalent modes of discourse present in Chicano and Mexican American studies programs since their inception in the late sixties to find that they shift and ossify into what he calls the "empirical" school of thought in the late seventies and eighties—a trend still largely evident today in the dominance of social science-oriented programs and departments.[13] Soldatenko labels the primary contender, the runner-up to empirical thinking as the "perspectivist" mode, explaining that scholars in this camp: "centered their work on formulating a Chicano standpoint that grew out of Chicano(a) experiences in the United States. Critical of social-science research and questioning academic work, these thinkers sought to establish an oppositional epistemology rooted in the process of Chicano(a) identity formation" (8). Even though empiricists and perspectivist camps reflect dispositions of social sciences and

[13] Soldatenko, *Chicano Studies: The Genesis of a Discipline* (2009)

humanities, respectively, Soldatenko resists simplifying the conflict to simple disciplinary discrepancies—his labels instead work to encapsulate more nebulous styles of thought and scholarship that gravitate around specific tendencies. As well, at first glance, Anzaldúa and Moraga and company might seem to align with the perspectivists with their refusal of empiricism and focus on experience, but the crucial difference, according to Soldatenko, is that the Chicana writings in *Bridge* "complicated Chicano(a) endeavors to describe the Mexican American experience through any particular paradigm or assumptions that methodologies and their methods were a neutral technology" (166). In short, Anzaldúa, Moraga, and other contributors engaging in Chicana thought—including Norma Alarcón and Naomi Littlebear Morales[14]—were not only skeptical of but also resistant to the privileging of institutional knowledge making, including the institutionalized methodologies of Chicano studies. Perspectivists, while "critical of the political hope that empirics had for organization building," were, along with empiricists, "uncritical, as well as unaware of the limitations of institutions" (Soldatenko 84). This is not to say that Anzaldúa and Moraga do not have methodologies, and I believe Soldatenko would agree, but rather that the overarching methodology of *Bridge* is to draw together the many methodologies of the project in a search for alternative modes of critical engagement that are not exclusionary, that are not limited to institutional knowledge, and that engage with institutional knowledge with critical skepticism. In other words, Bridge works as a platform not for a single or even just a few authoritative modes of thinking and knowledge building, but for modeling a space for further collective, coalitional exploration.

[14] We could also widen the scope to writers writing about the larger Latina experience as well and include Mirtha Quintanales (Cubana), Rosario Morales (Puertorriqueña), Arora Levins Morales (Puertorriqueña and Jewish), Judit Moschkovich (Latin and Jewish) who identify as and talk about their experience as Latin and/or Latina. Max Valerio (going by Anita at the time of contributing to *Bridge*) talks elsewhere about having an estranged Latino father, but focuses on his experience as a Native American in the anthology.

Chicano Studies and Anzaldúa and Moraga, in the Bridge project and their following writing careers, ask the question—for which Audre Lorde has perhaps famously given us the answer in speech, which is printed in the very pages of *Bridge* itself—: "can the master's tools dismantle the master's house?" But unlike Chicano studies, which historically wrestled with problems of higher education but has by and large sought legitimacy through educational institutionalization, the work in the *Bridge* project does not seem immediately worried over the legibility of the *Bridge* project within the institutional framework of academia. To be clear, I do not argue that Anzaldúa and Moraga have not accounted for the University in their intention for the project, but that they are not concerned with tailoring it for academia. There are at least two elements at work in this regard that we can glean from the original introduction. First, there is the editors' apparent confidence in the text's inherent value to the classroom as they "envision the book being used as a *required* text in most women's studies courses … [not] just "special" courses on Third World Women or Racism, but also courses dealing with sexual politics, feminist thought, women's spirituality, etc…" and "want to see this book on the shelf of, and used in the classroom by, every ethnic studies teacher in this country, male and female alike" (xlvi).

Second, the project's mission is to reach beyond the University. While *Bridge* and Anzaldúa's subsequent early work of *Borderlands,* or at least sections of these works, *do* become a mainstay in college syllabi—especially for cultural studies classes and composition classes—the intention for the hybrid collection of poetry, essays, theory, and self-writing was also for it to serve other women of color activists as a manifesto of sorts for the burgeoning Third World feminist movement. As Anzaldúa and Moraga declare, "We see the book as a revolutionary tool falling into the hands of people of all colors. Just as we have been radicalized in the process of

compiling this book, we hope it will radicalize others into action" (xlvi). For the project to be a "revolutionary tool" necessitates circulation not just in the classroom, but outside of it as well, as Anzaldúa and Moraga continue:

> Off campus, we expect the book to function as a consciousness-raiser for white women meeting together or working alone on the issues of racism. And, we want to see our colored sisters using this book as an educator and agitator around issues specific to our oppression as women.
>
> We want the book in libraries, bookstores, at conferences. And union meetings in every major city and hole-in-the-wall in this country. And, of course, we hope to eventually see this book translated and leave this country, making tangible the link between Third World women in the US and throughout the world. (xlvi)

In short, the book is the textual manifestation of revolutionary yearning, its creation an act of world-building intended to continue through the future.

As well, Toni Cade Bambara, in the forward to the first edition, illustrates how the movement was in many ways founded at the crossroads of academia and activism, particularly art-related activism. Speaking on the need for feminists of color to "know each other better and teach each other…" to "get the work done," Bambara states:

> *This Bridge* can get us there. Can coax us into the habit of listening to each other and learning each other's ways of seeing and being. Of hearing each other as we heard each other in Pat Lee's *Freshtones*, as we heard each other in Pat Jones and Faye Chiang, et al.'s *Ordinary Women*, as we heard each other in Fran Beale's Third World Women's Alliance newspaper.[15] As we heard each other over the years in snatched time moments

[15] *Triple Jeopardy*

> in hallways and conference corridors, caucusing between sets. As we heard each other in those split-second interfacings of yours and mine and hers student union meetings" (xxxi).

Artistic, academic, and political activist spaces are entwined: the interactions, engagements, and inspirations between participants in each sphere carry over, accreting intellectual and political momentum over time and space. In her appeal for recognition of the potential for the project, Bambara acknowledges the zones of activity around the university as one of the matrices of sites for women of color to hear and learn from each other. As Bambara continues, she widens the scope of her examples of resistance and coalition building to include the international work of the Interreligious Foundation for Community Organizing, interracial cooperation between women of color in the "French and Indian War" and Seminole Wars, and indigenous, perhaps preconquest, work of women's councils. Bambara's panning-out of space and time anchors the project within the larger scope, the spatial aspect of which reflects Anzaldúa and Moraga's world-level ambitions, but, in addition to looking forward in time, she also looks to history to link the project to the long genealogy of women of color activism.

This genealogy seeks to unsettle the status quo for both left oriented race focused movements and the feminist movement as Moraga describes in her Preface to the first edition, titled "La Jornada":

> A book by radical women of color. The Left needs it, with its shaky and shabby record of commitment to women, period. Oh, yes, it can claim its attention to "color" issues, embodied in the male. Sexism is acceptable to the white Left publishing house, particularly if spouted through the mouth of a Black man.

> The feminist movement needs the book, too. But for different reasons. Do I dare speak of the boredom setting in among the white sector of the feminist movement? What was once a cutting edge, growing dull in the too easy solution to our problems of hunger of soul and stomach. The lesbian separatist utopia? No thank you, sisters. I can't prepare myself a revolutionary packet that makes no sense when I leave the white suburbs of Watertown, Massachusetts and take the T-line to Black Roxbury bracket. (xxxv)

In many ways, *Bridge* is not only an attempt to open conversations between feminism, people of color movements, and academia, but also serves as documentation of the liminality of the crossroads of such spaces. This is especially significant considering that Anzaldúa and Moraga stay in academia, even if their paths differ: Moraga spends 20 years as an Artist in Residence at Stanford and since 2017 has been a full professor at UC Santa Barbara in the English department, and Anzaldúa will take on various teaching and artist in residence appointments throughout her life and even enrolls in a second doctoral program at UC Santa Cruz in 1988, continuing as a student until her passing in 2004.[16]

One of Anzaldúa's pieces in *Bridge,* "Speaking in Tongues, an open letter addressed to "mujeres de color, companions in writing," gives a more directly autobiographical account of this liminal creative space with a specific turn toward her queer experience (163). The first line reads, "I sit here, naked in the sun, typewriter against my knee trying to visualize you" (163). The image of the typewriter—a machine, a tool of creative production—in contact against the knee of the writer's naked body—a site of knowledge not recognized as such by academia nor certain activist circles—suggests a concern for materiality. Here the writer is not only trying to

[16] Anzaldúa sets out to rewrite and revise her dissertation in earnest in 2003, but will pass a year later at the age of 61—the writing is posthumously published as in 2015 as *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo Oscuro*.

write her own life into consciousness—citing her naked corporeal form— but also trying to write into consciousness a coalition of "companions," which Anzaldúa proceeds to project:

> Black woman huddles over a desk on the fifth floor of some New York tenement. Sitting on a porch in south Texas, a Chicana fanning away mosquitos and the hot air, trying to arouse the smoldering embers of writing. Indian woman walking to school or work lamenting the lack of time to weave writing into your life. Asian American, lesbian, single mother, tugged in all directions by children, lover or ex-husband, and the writing. (163)

Anzaldúa's imagining of bodies of various shades, in various locations and situation, from various races, perhaps nationalities, creates a psychic, spiritual web of intentionality, a proposed shared imaginary community for voices that would have at one time hoped to have a place in the democratic dream of diversity that the post segregation and civil rights movement era seemed to promise. Anzaldúa's new community poses a space where the voices of women of all colors, history, and experiences would be heard.

By the late 70s and early 80s, Anzaldúa and other Third World feminist writers had realized that the inclusion of these voices—which might bring forth the equitable treatment for women in the intersection of marginalized racial, gender and sexual identities—was not only late on the horizon, but, for many, had not been part of the deal in the first place. Seeing the voices of women of color similarly dismissed by activists in race movements and white feminists alike, Anzaldúa declares:

> Unlikely to be friends of people in high literary places, the beginning woman of color is invisible both in the white male mainstream world and in the white women's feminist world, though in the latter this is gradually changing. The *lesbian* of color is not only

> invisible, she doesn't even exist. Our speech, too, is inaudible. We speak in tongues like the outcast and the insane. (163)

Muted by men on the racial front on issues of gender and sexuality and by white women on the gender front on race leaves one path for recourse: create a new community, opening space on the page for these voices. *Bridge* contends against the erasure of queer women of color by providing a material platform where this new community can manifest.

But once such space is rendered, how does one make legible previously rejected knowledge? Anzaldúa writes:

> It is not easy writing this letter. It began as a poem, a long poem. I tried to turn it into an essay but the result was wooden, cold. I have not yet unlearned the esoteric bullshit and pseudo-intellectualizing that school brainwashed into my writing.
>
> How to begin again. How to approximate the intimacy and immediacy I want. What form? A letter, of course. (163)

Whereas learned "instinct" might gravitate the writer toward form, style, and thought in which one has been trained—the academic essay, a "legitimate" discourse imbued with social capital—Anzaldúa pulls away from such writing. Yet Anzaldúa knows that it is not as if one can be free of the sway of such training. The instillment of cultural capital becomes "brainwashing," another colonization. By imagining her address—part essay, part personal narrative—in letter form and imagining her comadre's bodies on the page, Anzaldúa employs the feminist maxim that "the personal is political" in her search for legibility for the "inaudible" voice. Relatedly, Cherríe Moraga will later specifically note in *Loving in the War Years* that "[t]his feminist tenet, *the personal is political*, has provided me the permission to use my own life as evidence of what I

believe to be true about *us* and *them*. Us and them: that binary that binds us in ever-shifting shapes of body and thought" (iv).

As simple as it is to point out, even the language she uses here to describe academic writing—"esoteric bullshit" and "pseudo intellectualizing"—goes far in calling out the empire's new clothes, so to speak. For instance, I remember reading this selection for the first time during my second year as an undergrad student as part of a Xeroxed reader on Chicano Studies and being shocked at Anzaldúa's tenaz, shocked that one could critique the university using the university's "tools" while using such informal, some might consider vulgar, language. Reading this same selection with my own students in the years since, I have witnessed many similar reactions. Anzaldúa's acts of defiance and expressions of anger, backed by her cogent critique throughout the piece, can be liberating for students of color struggling, yearning to find their own place in the rarefied halls of academia.

In *Bridge*, Anzaldúa critiques not just higher education, but monolingual, Anglo-oriented education as a whole:

> Because white eyes do not want to know us, they do not bother to learn our language, the language which reflects us, our culture, our spirit. The schools we attended or didn't attend did not give us the skills for writing- nor the confidence that we were correct in using our class and ethnic languages … And Spanish was not taught in grade school. And Spanish was not required in High School. And though now I write my poems in Spanish as well as English I feel the rip-off of my native tongue. (163-164)

For Anzaldúa and Moraga, as for many Latinx writers, the college experience does not simply begin at the university; it is bound up with many education/miseducational experiences guiding a trajectory toward higher education. While one could make such claims about students of higher

education in general, for students from underprivileged communities that trajectory is much more precarious and often fraught with racial/gender/class trauma. Even Anzaldúa's choice to major in English is made in defiance: "I, for one, became adept at, and majored in English to spite, to show up, the arrogant racist teachers who thought all Chicano children were dumb and dirty" (164). "English" doubles here, referring to not just a language, but a formal subject/field of study. On one level, there is resistance to the blatantly nationalist discourse of the English-only movement, which is but one in a long line of attacks of lingual violence in the US with its history of invasion and "conquering" of indigenous languages by European languages. Recently, there have not only been instances of legislation and policy of language erasure, like the decreased access to interpreters for migrant/immigrant prisoners, but also the day-to-day exchanges amongst the public, incidences of verbal and or physical assaults over speaking Spanish in public.[17]

On another level, we must reckon with the ideological implementation of English at each level of education so that by the time one gets to college, "English" appears as just another subject like math, science, and social studies, which, while certainly colonized as well, do not carry the same significance as English as a subject.[18] Think, for instance, about the general public trying to understand what an English student or even a professor does on the college level or consider the skirmishes between English/composition/literature/Comparative Literature/ Creative Writing/cultural studies departments across the US to figure out who/what "belongs"

[17] For example, on February 15, 2020 a mother and daughter were attacked for speaking Spanish in East Boston. (Levenson, *New York Times*) This incident made it to the local and national news because charges were filed, but I have witnessed a number of incidents recorded on social media in which Latinx people are harassed and/or threatened by white folk for speaking Spanish. In some cases, the virtual community of POC and allied folk have been able to find the offender's real world information, filing complaints with employers, sometimes leading to consequence.

[18] Yes, there are other languages as subjects in the US, but they function differently form the implementation of English.

where in the last four or five decades. Figures like Richard Rodriguez as well as people I have studied next to and under through the years may lament the shifting of curriculum shifting away from so-called classics of literature without pausing to question if literature and/or language studies in the US throughout its history was fit or intentioned to meet the needs of a diverse democracy. The answer is probably not, for when diversity is thought of at all, it is often included as a mere value added: we see this from the Bakke decision to today's excellence in diversity programs to academic departments retaining a "token" person of color to their faculty to address "ethnic" content within a discipline. For Anzaldúa, even though mastery of English—as a language and as a subject—is an act of defiance, it is also a cage with no easy emancipation. Even incorporating Spanish into her writing—she specifically mentions poetry here—makes her "feel the rip off of [her] native tongue" (164). The "rip off" could refer to not only the theft of Anzaldúa's relationship with Spanish as a natural speaker and, in the greater scheme, a relationship with American indigenous language/s but also the sense that her return to Spanish is, in some small but significant way, an appropriation of language from those who remain lingually unindoctrinated by academic American English. If one considers Anzaldúa's focus on the corporeal, there is also a visceral connotative resonance in the rip-off. The vivid imagery of the organ severed jaggedly from a mouth will continue to resonate in her poeticizing, theorizing, and politicizing of borders and the vulva as open wounds in her later work.[19]

Anzaldúa, having had poetics linger in the air throughout the piece thus far, now turns to an excerpt from Moraga's poem "It's the Poverty," which will be published two years later in Moraga's next collection, *Loving in the War Years*:

I *lack imagination* you say

[19] *Borderlands/La Frontera* () and the poem "La vulva es una herida abierta/The Vulva is an Open Wound," respectively. The latter can be found in The Anzaldúa Reader (198-202).

No. I lack language.

The language to clarify

my resistance to the literate.

Words are a war to me.

They threaten my family.

To gain the word

to describe the loss

I risk losing everything.

I may create a monster

the word's length and body

swelling up colorful and thrilling

looming over my *mother*, characterized.

Her voice in the distance

unintelligible illiterate.

These are the monster's words. (164)

The double-bind of the poem, in part, plays into a binary model of language acquisition in which the mastery of one language negates the other. I say "in part" because the danger is not just the possible loss of ancestral or familial language, but the allure of the social power of educated language—that one might come to believe that understanding lies *solely* in the domain of academic thought or that experience becomes real *only* through intellectualizing. I read these lines not as anti-intellectualism but as an expression of self-warning, a reminder that words not only build but have the power to destroy. What if the same rules and definitions by which we

come to better understand social injustice—to right it—are the same rules and definitions that authorize and enable continued injustice? If the mother is deemed "unintelligible" and "illiterate," we must ask by whom and to what purpose.

Anzaldúa and Moraga's response to these threats is the project itself—the insistence on the validity of their own voices by sharing and theorizing their own experiences as women of color. Anzaldúa ponders the possible price of simply acquiescing to becoming a rip-off, "playing it safe," so as to be recognized as a "professional" or "literary writer" as she states: "…perhaps if we go to the university. Perhaps if we become male-women or as middle-class as we can. Perhaps if we give up loving women, we will be worthy of having something to say worth saying. They convince us that we must cultivate art for art's sake" (165). In this hypothetical, middle-class aspiration, education, heteronormativity, and misogyny are all entwined, putting pressure on the woman writer to not act up—to be respected as a woman writer, one must not only write for men, but also still serve men as a woman. To what she understands as the current professional situation for women writers, Anzaldúa protests: "The Third World woman revolts: *We revoke, we erase your white male imprint* (165).

Yet, Anzaldúa knows it is not as straightforward as that, as she bounces back and forth between speaking of limits on women writers and speaking of revolutionary possibility: "I can write this and yet I realize that many of us women of color who have strung degrees, credentials and published books around our necks like pearls that we hang onto for dear life are in danger of contributing to the invisibility of our sister-writers. 'La Vendida,' the sell-out" (165). The "degrees," "credentials," and "published books" symbolize the cultural capital one might accrue, in exceptional examples, over years, decades, or even a lifetime of work and study within, around, in relation to institutes of higher learning and associated publishing networks. The

conundrum that Anzaldúa hints at is that this cultural capital gives access to tools that can enable one to work toward addressing systemic oppression and inequality in one's community, but to achieve such levels of "success," it seems as if one must make concessions that compromise said work in the first place. The simile comparing professional credentials to pearls on a necklace suggests an amalgamation of material and cultural wealth in objects that may feel important as one desperately tries to attain and retain them but may ultimately be just trinkets, dressings to the actual work taking place or that could take place. It is not simply the danger of being lured by wealth and/or privilege—as most scholar writers can attest to the point that this is seldom the actual case—it is more the case that women of color are in a constant struggle to be seen, heard, respected.

"La Vendida" in this instant is not an accusation of racial or ethnic inauthenticity—Anzaldúa herself does not endorse these familiar arguments and will come to write about "La Vendida" in *Borderlands* and elsewhere in terms of the reappropriation of the figure/s of "La Malinche" and "La Llorona." What Anzaldúa *is* troubled about is:

> *The danger of selling out one's own ideologies*. For the Third World woman, who has, at best, one foot in the feminist literary world, the temptation is great to adopt the current feeling-fads and theory fads, the latest half truths in political thought, the half-digested new age psychological axioms that are preached by the white feminist establishment. (165, emphasis in original)

Out of context, this statement could be read as reactionary to academic and activist feminism, but, in the context of the author's theory, political thought, and spiritual—sometimes with a touch of Jung—work in her writing, it should be clear that she is attacking a specific sort of uncritical following of these fields of thought. It is the "preaching" and acceptance of dogmatic

thought that concerns Anzaldúa. She continues to clarify another problem with white feminism: "Its followers are notorious for 'adopting' women of color as their 'cause' while still expecting us to adapt to their expectations and their language" (165). In addition to a tendency toward uncritical engagement, it is that unique women of color experiences, worldview, culture, and interests are disregarded in the transaction of tokenism that leads Anzaldúa to declare: "*We cannot allow ourselves to be tokenized. We must make our own writing and that of Third World women the first priority"* (166). While Anzaldúa can be said to give the women of color community or movement "priority" over the individual, a regard for the personal is ever present, especially as she examines the impetus for and the nature of writing.

Describing "the act of writing" itself as "the act of making soul" and "the quest for…the center of self," "the dark, the feminine" that has been "other[ed]," Anzaldúa poses the rhetorical question: "Didn't we start writing to reconcile this other within us?" (167). From this assumed starting point, Anzaldúa expounds:

> Forever after we have been in search of that self, that "other" and each other. And we return, in widening spirals and never to the same childhood place where it happened, first in our families, with our mothers, with our fathers. The writing is a tool for piercing that mystery but it also shields us, gives a margin of distance, helps us survive. And those that don't survive? The waste of ourselves: so much meat thrown at the feet of madness or fate or the state. (167)

Anzaldúa narrows the scope not quite to the individual, but to the self and the individual in relation to others/"the other." Interestingly, the author identifies the family as the originating scene of othering, rather than educational or writing-related spaces. This conceptualization establishes the family as the center for a yearning for "return" that writing and education

ironically allow one to explore while simultaneously creating more "distance." The themes of yearning for return and the distance that education creates echo those of Rodriguez's *Hunger*; the difference is that Rodriguez, through assimilationism, seems to want to resolve the tension that these matters create, even if he is ultimately unsuccessful and/or it is not his true underlying goal. Anzaldúa, on the other hand, is more interested in the insights into relationality that this tension might reveal. It is this interest that leads to Anzaldúa's development of her methodology of writing and knowledge making.

What follows is an early iteration of this philosophy/theory of the writing and knowledge-making process:

> It's not on paper that you create but in your innards, in the gut and out of living tissue—*organic writing* I call it. A poem works for me *not* when it say what I want it to say and *not* when it evokes what I want it to. It works when the subject I started out with metamorphoses alchemically into a different one, one that has been discovered, or uncovered, by the poem. It works when it surprises me, when it says something I have repressed or pretended not to know. The meaning and worth of my writing is measured by how much I put myself on the line and how much nakedness I achieve. (170)

In Anzaldúa's later work, she will develop her related theories of the Coatlicue state and the nepantla state, which are not exclusive to the writing process but nonetheless essential to it. At the core of Anzaldúa's concepts of writing are the processes of unbecoming and re/synthesis. The writer uses poetry as an example here in *Bridge*—aligning with her description of her first, frustrated attempts at writing the piece— and in her later work focuses on her essayistic self-writing, but what remains throughout is an emphasis on writing and thinking through experiential history as a methodology and part of a praxis of scholarship and activism that acknowledges both

the material and the spiritual, almost metaphysical, aspects of being. As with her reference to poetry, Anzaldúa's use of "nakedness" recalls her symbolic use of the body in the opening. In some of the final lines of the piece, Anzaldúa builds on her use of bodily imagery to juxtapose the University:

> There is no need for words to fester in our minds. They germinate in the open mouth of the barefoot child in the midst of restive crowds. They wither in ivory towers and in college classrooms.
>
> Throw away abstraction and the academic learning, the rules, the map and compass. Feel your way without blinders. To touch more people, the personal realities and the social must be evoked—not through rhetoric but through blood and pus and sweat. (171)

There is almost a perverse lingering on the organic in opposition to the machines of higher education. There is fecundity in the peopled-ness of the working class against the university's waste of young minds in the "ivory towers" through non-use or misuse. Instead of an outright rejection of intellectualism, Anzaldúa's critique is part of a strategy for creating a methodology of responsibility/cultural ethics/accountability—it is a necessary disruption to the status quo of what gets passed along as critical thinking. Again, I use the term methodology loosely here, for Anzaldúa's intention is to provide a working model of activism that is not prescriptive, so that other women of color writers have room to draw from their own experience to build not just knowledge, but also methods of knowledge building that have long been unrecognized. That means first finding/making spaces where such voices are recognized as valid.

Moraga and Anzaldúa model *Bridge* as such a space—a forum where woman of color writers can use their voices to enable one another rather than to compete for institutional

positioning. For example, we can examine how their personal essays “La Güera” and “La Prieta,” respectively, complement one another to critique colorism. Both terms are American-Spanish slang used to denote skin color: güera/o meaning a light-skinned or white person and prieta meaning dark-skinned or mestizo person. Both words can have derogatory connotations, but their meaning may dramatically shift depending on who is using the term for whom: for many communities, especially Spanish-speaking communities, nicknaming customs within the family and close family friends can include derogatory or borderline derogatory terms. Take, for example, Gordo/a, Gordito/a, Flaco/a, etc.[20] Still for many, these nicknames as terms of endearment do not erase negative connotations, but rather complicate them.

In “La Güera,” Moraga begins by establishing the disparity between her and her mother's formal education: “I am the very well-educated daughter of a woman who, by the standards in this country, would be considered largely illiterate” (22). Moraga uses careful wording in the description of her mother's “illiteracy” to implicitly critique “standards” of “literacy” as the notion of proficiency in an assumed common stable of knowledge. This critique continues as she proceeds to root the source for her own feminist and racial literacy in her mother's ability to communicate a history of struggle and inequity:

> I remember all of my mother's stories, probably much better than she realizes. She is a fine storyteller, recalling every event of her life with vividness of the present, noting each detail right down to the cut and color of her dress. I remember stories of her being pulled out of school at the ages of five, seven, nine, and eleven to work in the fields, along with her brothers and sisters … At fourteen, she was the main support of the family. (22)

[20] Of course, you can find this element of nicknaming in other cultures to different degrees, and nicknames in Spanish speaking communities do not all contain this element, but it is a common occurrence in Latino/a communities, nonetheless.

Working various tedious manufacturing jobs through her fifty's while Moraga was enrolled in college prep school, the mother's experience sets the backdrop from which Moraga will eventually contrast her own relatively privileged trajectory in higher education. After prep school, Moraga attends a small Los Angeles Catholic private women's college and graduate school at San Francisco State University. Moraga's re/collecting of her mother's storytelling works to establish familial genealogical experience as a site for new knowledge as her mother's lifetime of experience with educational inequity will become one of the key loci of the author's budding awareness of social injustice.

While this shared generational experience may prime Moraga, her consciousness in her youth is yet to fully awaken as she shares:

> I was educated, and wore it with a keen sense of pride and satisfaction, my head propped up with the knowledge, from my mother, that my life would be easier than hers. I was educated; but more than this, I was "la güera:" fair-skinned. Born with the features of my Chicana mother, but the skin of my Anglo father, I had it made. (23)

Whiteness and "education" become entwined. "No one" needed to tell her "that being light was something valued in [her]my family," it was implicit in the fact that Moraga was not brought up to speak Spanish, her mother's native language, and in the way her mother would distance the family from other even more economically poor Mexicans. Moraga shares that her mother derogatorily calls them "braceros" and "wetbacks" even though her mother's family shared the same history and, to an extent, a similar present (23). Moraga further explains, "It was through my mother's desire to protect her children from poverty and illiteracy that we became 'anglicized;' the more effectively we could pass in the white world, the better guaranteed our future" (23). Despite her mother's aspirational assimilationism, her mother's experience and

sharing of experience through storytelling lay the foundation of Moraga's resistance to assimilationist ideology.

Still, Moraga claims that her discontent remained hidden "as long as [she] feigned being the happy, upwardly mobile heterosexual" (23). It is precisely through the intersection of race, class, gender, and sexuality that Moraga's social consciousness awakens—sexuality being the last piece of the puzzle:

> When I finally lifted the lid to my lesbianism, a profound connection with mv mother reawakened in me. It wasn't until I acknowledged and confronted my own lesbianism in the flesh, that my heartfelt identification with and empathy for my mother's oppression—due to being poor, uneducated, and Chicana— was realized. My lesbianism is the avenue through which I have learned the most about silence and oppression, and it continues to be the most tactile reminder to me that we are not free human beings. (23)

Of course, it is not as if simply being lesbian or even coming out as lesbian provided some magical or mystical insight: it is living with a closeted sexuality in which her "bones… ached with the knowledge" of her forbidden sexual longing that disrupts the young Moraga's complacency with the injustice of the world around her. Moraga continues:

> "When we are not physically starving, we have the luxury to realize psychic and emotional starvation. It is from this starvation that other starvations can be recognized—if one is willing to take the risk of making the connection—if one is willing to be responsible to the result of the connection. For me, the connection is an inevitable one. (24).

We should not mistake Moraga's discussion of "starvation" here as a metaphor: it is real pain that enables her to recognize various forms of cultural and material oppression. The kind of

"psychic and emotional" pain that Moraga describes strips one of their well-being and is often not recognized until others see the material devastation it leaves behind. Moraga shares a similar outlook a decade later in her essay, "Queer Aztlan":

> My real politicization began, not through the Chicano Movement, but through the bold recognition of my lesbianism. Coming to terms with that fact meant the radical restructuring of everything I thought I held sacred. It meant acting on my woman-centered desire and against anything that stood in its way, including my Church, my family, and my "country." It meant acting in spite of the fact that I had learned from my Mexican culture and the dominant culture that my womanhood was, if not despised, certainly deficient and hardly worth the loving of another woman in bed. But act I did, because not acting would have meant my death by despair. (146)[21]

While in the earlier text Moraga uses the word "empathy" to describe her "identification" with her mother and her own pain, it cannot be read in terms of the general racial or humanistic empathy that inclusive liberalism asks of the public. A general kind of empathy tends to promote the simple opening up of access to better tiers of socioeconomic status, a kinder, more inclusive capitalism, if you will, while never questioning the structural institution of inequality. For Moraga, the sense of the issue starts with feeling, but never escapes materiality: here comparison of emotional starvation links to physical starvation because both can quite literally kill you, even if the biology and physical immediacy of the starvations may work differently. In other words, the emotional connection is a beginning and not an end—it leads to Moraga's continued lifelong questioning from the intersections that connect and the differences that divide her and her mother along the lines of race, class, and sexuality.

[21] *The Last Generation: Prose and Poetry* (1993)

We can look to Moraga's work after *Bridge* for further insight into her engagement with the hunger of desire as a mode of knowledge-making as she explores both familial and non-familial sites of desire. For example, in the chapter "What Kind of Lover Have You Made Me Mother?" in *Loving in the War Years*, the author explores, by way of her family, the feeling of queer desire silenced. Moraga remembers the moment when her mother reveals the knowledge of her father's gay sexual orientation:

> I bite my tongue down hard, holding it. I must not say too much. I must not know too much. But I am so excited, thinking of the possibility of my father awakened to the touch. Imagining my father feeling something deep and profound and alive. (5)

Although it is not completely clear if Moraga is out to her mother at this time—she likely is, it *is* clear that Moraga feels that there is a definite limit to what she can share with her mother about her queerhood. The friction between this limit and the deep connection Moraga feels to her father in his closeted queerness and to her mother in the vulnerability of the moment creates a tension reinforced by the signaling of the author's own desire: the biting of her tongue, her rush of excitement. As Moraga's mother finishes the telling of this secret, the author describes:

> The room falls silent then as if the walls, themselves, begged for a moment to swallow back the secret that had just leaked out. And it takes every muscle in me not to leave my chair, not to climb through the silence, not to clamber toward here, not to touch her the way I know she wants to be touched. (5)

One could explore the queering of the Oedipus or Electra complex here, but such a reading would misalign with the sense of the positive potentiality of intimacy Moraga's scene inhabits—one may recall the kitchen scene in Audre Lorde's *Zami*. Moraga's scene of desire is more about coming into knowledge rather than unknowing and/or blindness, more about affirming what is

alive in interfamilial desire than in what is marked by death. There may be ever present threat of death in the tension of silence and restraint, but rather than replace the father, Moraga yearns to be a surrogate lover for her father to her mother. Moraga describes her childhood and relationship with her mother in more detail in her most recent memoir, 2019's *Native Country of the Heart: A Geography of Desire*:

> I had only one romance—the love of an intractable Elvira, and this is what would shape my lesbianism and this is what would mark my road as a Mexican and this is what would require me to remember before and beyond my mother. I am a woman who knew myself daughter and son at once—a protector and provider for women and children. I have learned to confront police and rapists and silent enemies from within and have lived to tell of it. (5)

This site of overlapping of queer desire and familial history becomes a place from which to build her own system of knowledge from which she can relate to others, a relational intimacy to resist oppression rather than mere "empathy."

I resist applying the term epistemology here because while it could seem like Moraga is calling for something like an epistemology of queer resistance, the kind of knowledge/education that Moraga is elaborating is rooted in emotional experience both personal and shared, the kind of empathy that makes it both more specific than queerness writ large and more portable to modes of resistance in general. Thus, the possibilities of knowing that queerhood opens for Moraga are not necessarily universal nor primary to all other sites of knowing. Moraga writes in "La Güera":

> In this country, lesbianism is a poverty - as is being brown, as is being a woman, as is being just plain poor. The danger lies in ranking the oppressions. The danger lies in

> failing to acknowledge the. specificity of the oppression. The danger lies in attempting to deal with oppression purely from a theoretical base. Without an emotional, heartfelt grappling with the source of our own oppression, without naming the enemy within ourselves aid outside of us, no authentic, non-hierarchical connection among oppressed groups can take place. (24)

Though Moraga's political journey of political consciousness begins with her lesbianism, it continues by acknowledging both her privilege as well as her oppression within Chicano/a community. Her conceptualization does not give queerness universal precedence but rather posits that, for her and others, queerness becomes, can become, a site of experiential knowledge not able to be gleaned through the classroom: theoretical accounts of living can only go so far in producing relational intimacy. Moraga calls for others to take critical accounting of their own experience of systemic oppressions: not just in how they have been injured but also in how they have benefited from them, as oppression and privilege go hand in hand. In the 2003 essay, "Weapons of the Weak," Moraga claims that "[m]aybe one of the greatest damages white feminism did to women was to convince us of our own victimization without at the same time requiring us to acknowledge our complicity in oppression and the ways in which we, ourselves, oppress" (59).[22] *Bridge* becomes the place then that Moraga's yearning for a kind of feminism would employ critique while embracing ethical responsibility for the "other," for such critique *and* care—similarly to Anzaldúa's vision of coalition—holds the potential for a relational solidarity of oppressed peoples. As Moraga writes in "Güera":

> What prompted me in the first place to work on an anthology by radical women of color was a deep sense that I had a valuable insight to contribute, by virtue of my birthright and

[22] As published in *Xicana Codex* (2011)

> background. And yet, I don't really understand first-hand what it feels like being shitted on for being brown. I understand much more about the joys of it—being Chicana and having family are synonymous for me. What I know about loving, singing, crying, telling stories, speaking with my heart and hands, even having a sense of my own soul comes from the love of my mother, aunts, cousins..." (25)

For Moraga this critique enables her realization that race is more than a binary issue and that she enjoys a certain privilege in regard to colorism as a light-skinned Chicana amongst other women of color.

Colorism also operates within racial communities, and, along with racism, operates in relation to class. Moraga continues:

> I have had to confront the fact that much of what I value about being Chicana, about my family, has been subverted by anglo culture and my own cooperation with it. This realization did not occur to me overnight. For example, it wasn't until long after my graduation from the private college I'd attended in Los Angeles, that l realized the major reason for my total alienation from and fear of my classmates was rooted in class and culture." (25)[23]

She writes of how this blindness continued into her undergrad career: "… I knew nothing about "privilege" then. White was right. Period. I could pass. If I got educated enough, there would never be any telling" (26). Ultimately, it is Moraga's inability to assimilate into heterosexist culture that pushes her to question passing and assimilation in all its forms because if she were not to acknowledge and confront her own privilege, she would remain complicit in the suffering

[23] In *Native Country of the Heart* (2019), Moraga characterizes here alma mater, the Immaculate Heart College in Los Angeles as deceptively "radical", its "good Catholic name had conveniently disguised to [her] my family its subversive intent (71).

of others. Lesbian desire, as Moraga will further illustrate in *Loving* and later works, presents an impasse to her normative existence. In turn, *Bridge* and Third World feminism become the place for her intersectional exploration and learning where Moraga, for example, can write on privilege and oppression: "These are not settled issues… one voice is not enough nor two, although this is where dialogue begins. It is essential that radical feminists confront their fear of and resistance to each other, because without this, there will be no bread on the table" (29). Again, the hunger, potential starvation, is present in the symbolism of "bread on the table": in this instance, it would be the failure to find solidarity that would allow cycles of starvation to continue.

"La Güera" and "La Prieta" do not merely contrast and/or complement each other in regard to the theme of skin tone: they work relationally to reinforce the argument for the need for cultural critique from within and without communities of affiliation—both blood and chosen. Anzaldúa opens "La Prieta" with the scene of her birth: her fair-skinned grandmother on her mother's side—part Spanish, part German—inspecting her newborn skin, "looking for the dark blotch, the sign of indio, or worse, of mulatto blood" (198). She continues to describe the discovery of her dark skin: "Too bad mihijita was morena, *muy prieta*, so dark and different from her own fair-skinned children. But she loved mihijita anyway. What I lacked in whiteness, I had in smartness. But it was too bad I was dark like an Indian" (198). As with Moraga's familial experience, there is seemingly inherent colorism that each author feels is necessary to confront despite the guilt or pain or trauma that doing so might entail. For Anzaldúa, addressing colorism unravels a thread of critiques that are loaded with precarity. In this regard, she shares, "I was terrified because in this writing I must be hard on people of color who are the oppressed victims. I am still afraid because I will have to call us on a lot of shit like our own racism, our fear of women and sexuality" (198). Anzaldúa's "smartness" is not the only factor that mitigates the

family's reaction to her dark skin—her mother implies that she could always be darker when warning her against going out into the sun: "If you get any darker, they'll mistake you for an Indian. And don't get dirt on your clothes. You don't want people to say you're a dirty Mexican" (198). Even as her family would at times work side by side with migrant laborers in the fields, or perhaps because of this, there was an imperative to distance the family from the "Mexican" and "Indian." The irony of this is reflected in the writer's comment that "[i]t never dawned on her that, though sixth-generation American, we were still Mexican and that all Mexicans are part Indian" (198). This statement does not intend to belittle the plight of migrants/immigrants in the US or the devastation of indigenous peoples and cultures in the Americas, but simply goes to point out that white US America often tends to see Chicano/as or Mexican Americans and Mexican and Latin American migrants/immigrants as one and the same.

Anzaldúa's early budding biological sex characteristics—she begins to have uterine discharge at three months old and begins growing breasts at the age of seven—compound on her feelings of otherness and censure by her mother:

> At seven I had budding breasts. My mother would wrap them in light cotton girdles so the kids at school would not think them strange beside their own flat brown mole nipples. My mother would pin onto my panties a folded piece of rag. "Keep your legs shut, Prieta." This, the deep dark secret between us, her punishment for having fucked before the wedding ceremony, my punishment for being born. (199)

Though different from Moraga's account of sexual awareness, sexuality is still in play as the mother's sexual knowledge transposes onto Anzaldúa's own. The "transgression" of premarital sex metamorphosizes onto the daughter's child body through the mother's "guilt at having born a child who was marked 'con la sena'" (199). Anzaldúa reflects, "In her eyes and in the eyes of

others I saw myself reflected as ‘strange,’ ‘abnormal,’ ‘QUEER.’ I saw no other reflection. Helpless to change that image, I retreated into books and solitude and kept away from others” (199). This othering or, in a sense, queering of the young Anzaldúa comes largely from without, but partly from within in the form of her self-isolation: again, a retreat, recourse to intellect. I mention the author’s self-isolation not to suggest any blame on the part of the victim, but to note the agency, although measured, she takes in reaction to her treatment as well as the agency claimed by the fact of her account—that, by sharing her experiences, she is naming her otherness and queerness. One might even say that through the pages of *Bridge*, Anzaldúa makes witness to her own birth, taking agency over her own origin. In this way, the non-normative, as in Moraga’s writing, becomes foundational to the knowledge needed to critique oneself and one’s surrounding.

As Anzaldúa grows into puberty, her sexual health issues intensify as her “[f]ull flowing periods accompanied cramps, tonsillitis and 105° fevers” (200). Each trip to the doctor receives the same diagnosis as the author remembers the doctors’ words: “‘It's all in your head,’ they would say. ‘When you get older and get married and have children the pain will stop.’ A monotonous litany from the men in white all through my teens” (200). Medical knowledge, unable to reckon with unbound womanhood, turns to hetero-sexist gatekeeping. Unable to read the queerness in Anzaldúa’s body, medical professionals can only attempt to reinscribe it into a heteronormative social context. With her father's death, which also occurs as she enters puberty, Anzaldúa’s adolescent illusions of patriarchal protectivity are shattered, and her maternal relationship further intensifies: “My father dead, my mother and I turned to each other. Hadn’t we grown together? We were like sisters - she was 16 when she gave birth to me” (200). Life is no fairy tale, or as Anzaldúa presents in the excerpt from her poem “Letting Go”:

Nobody's going to save you.

No one's going to cut you down cut the thorns around you.

No one's going to storm

the castle walls nor

kiss awake your birth,

climb down your hair,

nor mount you

onto the white steed. (200)[24]

The illusion of benevolent patriarchy laid bare, Anzaldúa becomes more self-reliant while also hoping for more support from her mother. But despite the closeness of Anzaldúa's relationship to her mother and despite the hard labor she contributes in the fields on weekends and every summer, she is not afforded the same respect or public display of affection as her brothers. Anzaldúa describes, "Though she loved me she would only show it covertly—in the tone of her voice, in a look. Not so with my brothers—there it was visible for all the world to see. They were male and surrogate husbands, legitimate receivers of her power. Her allegiance was and is to her male children, not to the female" (200-201). Here, Anzaldúa's denied affection echoes the themes of the withheld desire for intimacy and surrogacy in Moraga's "La Güera." Anzaldúa further writes, "I resented the fact that it was OK for my brothers to touch and kiss and flirt with her, but not for my sister and me. Resenting the fact that physical intimacy between women was taboo, dirty" (201). Even though Anzaldúa's desire is not explicitly queer in this telling, it is the fear of queerness, on the part of her mother and the world around her, that prevents the maternal attention she seeks.

[24] The poem can be found in its entirety in *Borderlands* (2012) (186-188).

Even in light of the circumstances, or perhaps because of them, Anzaldúa forges an ambiguous gender identity, which her mother is ambivalent toward:

> Yet she could not discount me. "Machona—india ladina" (masculine— wild Indian), she would call me because I did not act like a nice little Chicanita is supposed to act: later, in the same breath she would praise and blame me, often for the same thing—being a tomboy and wearing boots, being unafraid of snakes or knives, showing my contempt for women's roles, leaving home to go to college, not settling down and getting married, being a politica, siding with the Farmworkers. (201)

Once again, Anzaldúa's stubborn defiance, as in her pursual of English as a subject of study, manifests in her choices that will shape the course of her life. In this case, her rebellion primarily pivots around gender, but race is still present in her mother's chastising her as una "india ladina." Although the author does not go into depth regarding indigeneity at this moment in her writing, this detail recalls her censure of her mother and grandmother's anti-indigenous sentiment at the beginning of the piece. Indeed, if Anzaldúa were to go into depth on the subject here, she would most likely speak to reclaiming a sense of one's indigeneity through the mestiza history of Chicano/a people. As well, Anzaldúa's following claim that her Mother takes secret pride in her "waywardness," perhaps works as well to reorient her mother's position toward indigeneity, even if for her mother the reclamation works on an unconscious level. Despite her mother's shame of her ties with indigenous ancestry—a shame unfortunately reflective of certain strands of classism and racism in some circles of Mexican and Mexican American culture—the mother's secret pride illustrates a potential of redress, even if across generations.

Anzaldúa, in the following section of the piece, the appropriately named "Verguenza (Shame)," seems to know that shame is not a simple matter. Anzaldúa recalls:

> "…being afraid that my friends would see my momma, would know that she was loud—her voice penetrated every comer. Always when we came into a room everyone looked up … I was afraid she would blurt out some secret, would criticize me in public. She always embarrassed me by telling everyone that I liked to lie in bed reading and wouldn't help her with the housework. (201)

The internalized shame of otherness—the otherness made public—entwines with the poverty Anzaldúa's family experiences. She states, "It was not very romantic for my sister and me to wear the dresses and panties my mother made us out of flour sacks because she couldn't afford store-bought ones like the other mothers" (201-202). While "romantic" denotes here a general idealization of a way of life or living, it is a curious choice here to refer—in a negative form—to Anzaldúa's childhood undergarments and dresses: it cannot help but also connote a sense of sexualization upon the adolescent body if one considers the statement in tension with Anzaldúa's premature womanhood. The meanings together produce an illustration of the adolescent learning to cope with the always-present possibility of having to deal with sexualization. These acts of sexing, identification of sexuality, and scenes of poverty accrete to further develop Anzaldúa's portrayal of the feeling of otherness or other than normalness. Anzaldúa reflects with critical understanding in adulthood: "It was not my mother's fault that we were poor and yet so much of my pain and shame has been with our both betraying each other. But my mother has always been there for me in spite of our differences and emotional gulfs. She has never stopped fighting; she is a survivor" (202). I say critical understanding rather than wisdom because such understanding is not given—in Anzaldúa's words:

> Over the years, the confines of farm and ranch life began to chafe. The traditional role of la mujer was a saddle I did not want to wear…Slowly I unbowed my head, refused my

> estate and began to challenge the way things were. But it's taken over thirty years to unlearn the belief instilled in me that white is better than brown—something that some people of color *never* will unlearn. And it is only now that the hatred of myself, which I spent the greater part of my adolescence cultivating, is turning to love (202).

The author's rejection of shame comes not from mere experience of age, but from a socially conscious, active working through of her trauma over time.

Anzaldúa's growing pains, literal and metaphorical, continue into adulthood, and her sexual health issues progress, leading to a severe collapse and a hysterectomy at age 37. Anzaldúa writes, "Last March my fibroids conspired with an intestinal tract infection and spawned watermelons in my uterus" (203). The colorful, almost playful quality of the physical description of the issue—characterized as a conspiracy between ailments "spawning watermelons," pairs with the idiosyncrasy of the choice of fruit, a popular crop for Texas ranchers and farmers, to create a poetic backdrop of her ordeal. The levity of the sentence turns toward darker poetry in the next line/sentence: "The doctor played with his knife. La Chingada ripped open, raped with the white man's wand" (203). By staging the medical procedure as "rape," Anzaldúa reinforces her distrust of medical professionals, and by referring to herself as "La Chingada," another common name for La Malinche, she further indicts the institution of Western medicine as another tool of modern colonization. While the "rape" itself is metaphorical, the physical trauma is real. Or to put it another way, Anzaldúa's physical trauma is personal but resonates with the political context of American colonial history as she implicitly questions the possibility of consent. Nowhere does Anzaldúa imply that surgery is non-consensual, or even unnecessary, so by allegorizing her experience with La Malinche's legend, she casts a shadow of doubt over the idea that there can be a consensual action taken upon the

bodies of our indigenous ancestors and, subsequently, those of indigenous and mestiza decedents today.[25] For instance, where was the consent given for Anzaldúa and her family's exposure to pesticides in the fields throughout her adolescence that could very well have been a factor in her many bodily issues throughout her life that ultimately cut it undoubtedly too short.

There is no easy answer to this grim line of questioning, for an easy answer would either cede agency of indigenous bodies or absolve colonizer of culpability for injury. Perhaps this is why Anzaldúa turns to the spiritual and metaphysical here—first by claiming spiritual solidarity with La Malinche, and then by referring to the "white" man's tool as a wand, which is euphemistic for sure, but more importantly signals an other reality, creating a similar effect as something akin, maybe a cousin to magical realism. She continues:

> My soul in one comer of the hospital ceiling, getting thinner and thinner telling me to clean up my shit, to release the fears and garbage from the past that are hanging me up. So I take La Muerte's scythe and cut away my arrogance and pride, the emotional depressions I indulge in, the head trips I do on myself and other people. With her scythe I cut the umbilical cord shackling me to the past and to friends and attitudes that drag me down. Strip away—all the way to the bone. Make myself utterly vulnerable. (203)

Anzaldúa takes agency of her near-death experience, which does not erase or compensate for the trauma but does work as a moment of unmaking and renewal. Part of this unmaking is taking account and reckoning with one's own toxic beliefs and actions, one's own culpability in systemic oppression, much like Moraga speaks to in "La Güera."

[25] This also echoes and is echoed by long history of accounts of indigenous and black women being sterilized involuntarily in the Americas, the latest instance being reports coming from detention centers in the Southwest United States.

That is not to say that Anzaldúa's illness or trauma is her own fault, but that in the trauma she experiences, she is able to come to new insights. What Anzaldúa strives for here is not victim blaming, guilt, or even healing per se: it is a means toward the vulnerability, the openness necessary to build a bridge politics. If we tie this reckoning to Anzaldúa's racial logic, we can relate it to her later statement in "La Prieta":

> "I see Third World peoples and women not as oppressors but as accomplices to oppression by our unwittingly passing on to our children and our friends the oppressor's ideologies. I cannot discount the role I play as accomplice, that we all play as accomplices, for we are not screaming loud enough in protest" (207).

Anzaldúa's being dark-skinned does not absolve her from her role in perpetuating cycles of trauma and oppression. There is no simple victim, oppressor binary. The responsibility/accountability that Anzaldúa and Moraga take on is not necessarily in direct response to their academic training. It is more accurate to say that their sense of responsibility stems from a social or political consciousness that entwines with their academic knowledge without allowing academic orthodoxy or discourse to become all-determining for the project at hand. In this way, Anzaldúa and Moraga's work can be read as related to the burden of representation, but not in the same manner as say Rodriguez's *Hunger* and Navarrette's *Darker*. Rodriguez and Navarrette, for example, never seem able to come to terms with this burden because of the writers' preoccupation with disproving any implication of token status in their elite educations, even while they complain of being tokenized.

What Anzaldúa *does* feel is the pressure of representative allegiance. For example, she describes her feelings around being a mediator between identity-oriented communities:

> I am a wind-swayed bridge, a crossroads inhabited by whirlwinds. Gloria, the facilitator, Gloria the mediator, straddling the walls between abysses. "Your allegiance is to La Raza, the Chicano movement," say the members of my race. "Your allegiance is to the Third World," say my Black and Asian friends. "Your allegiance is to your gender, to women," say the feminists. Then there's my allegiance to the Gay movement, to the socialist revolution, to the New Age, to magic and the occult. And there's my affinity to literature, to the world of the artist. What am I? A third world lesbian feminist with Marxist and mystic leanings. They would chop me up into little fragments and tag each piece with a label. (205)

What enables resistance to these "labels" that "split" is that she does not get trapped by the fears of her own tokenism, for it is the "sharing of the pie" that "almost poisoned" her—as she refers to her experience of being tokenized—that informs her determination to inhabit bridge politics, the liminal space of intersectional feminist thought and action (208). It is not as if one can simply not be tokenized, but instead of running from it or merely giving in to it, Anzaldúa takes it as another factor of oppression but not with any more importance than others. With this, Anzaldúa is able to divest from personal interest and privilege making claims of allegiance, as she declares, "I stand behind whatever threatens our oppression. I stand behind whatever breaks us out of our bonds, short of killing and maiming. I stand with whatever and whoever breaks us out of our limited views and awakens our atrophied potentials" (208). Ultimately, it is not the indignation over her personal treatment or feelings of alienation or tokenism related to her experience of education that drives Anzaldúa's critique of the institute of education. Personal experiences may have opened her critical eye, but the passion to stand in opposition to oppression, no matter the source, is what carries on the critique.

The university, as an arbiter of discourse, with its history of colonialist and imperialist endeavors—whether in its reification of white male superiority, subsumption in the name of assimilation or neoliberal diversity, and/or its collusion with powers of the state—makes a prime target for critiques of power and oppression for thinkers and activist like Anzaldúa who believe:

> The rational, the patriarchal, and the heterosexual have held sway and legal tender for too long. Third World women, lesbians, feminists, and feminist-oriented men of all colors are banding and bonding together to right that balance. Only together can we be a force. I see us as a network of kindred spirits, a kind of family. (209)

The problem one comes back to is this: how does one stand against oppression while simultaneously speaking from the privileged position of the same institutes that work for oppression? For Anzaldúa's way through this dilemma, we find a clue in her wording: she stands "behind" and "with" "whatever" and "whoever" works to end oppression. Another way to say this is that social change is not always just about what one stands against, but what/who one stands for/with.

The *Bridge* project itself is an example of these ideas of relational coalition, but it is important to remember how Anzaldúa's *Bridge* work does not end on the page. In *Borderlands*, in the section "Fear of Going Home: Homophobia," Anzaldúa discusses an incident in which she serves as a mediator between queer students and staff and straight, gay-panicking students and staff during her short time as an instructor at the Vermont College of Norwich. She begins the section by addressing her lesbianism as a rebellion:

> For the lesbian of color, the ultimate rebellion she can make against her native culture is through her sexual behavior. She goes against two moral prohibitions: sexuality and homosexuality. Being lesbian and raised Catholic, indoctrinated as straight, I *made the*

> *choice to be queer* (for some it is genetically inherent). It's an interesting path, one that continually slips in and out of the white, the Catholic, the Mexican, the indigenous, the instincts. In and out of my head. It makes for *loquería*, the crazies. It is a path of knowledge-one of knowing (and of learning) the history of oppression of our *raza*. It is a way of balancing, of mitigating duality. (41)[26]

Anzaldúa's attention to in-betweenness, between knowing and unknowing as a process is familiar. With her focus on "knowing" and "learning," it is no coincidence that Anzaldúa takes the reader to the site of the college campus as a backdrop for learning how to navigate queerhood and one's heterosexist upbringing. The wordplay of the subtitle stems from an accidental usage that Anzaldúa explains:

> In a New England college where I taught, the presence of a few lesbians threw the more conservative heterosexual students and faculty into a panic. The two lesbian students and we two lesbian instructors met with them to discuss their fears. One of the students said, "I thought homophobia meant fear of going home after a residency." (41)

The author makes no explicit connection between this event and the idea of bridges/bridging, yet this scene clearly shows an example of what one might call "bridge-work" or bridge politics in action—Anzaldúa and fellow lesbians serving as mediators to these conservative, straight students and mediating ignorance from heterosexism culture toward the "homosexual" world.

The homophonic play on words strikes a note of lightness that would seem to represent the sort of innocuous ignorance, the naivete of the straight students that ring dissonantly with the gravity, the reality of homophobia, a social poison from which hateful acts of violence both

[26] Brief note on the controversy of Anzaldúa's "choice."

physical and psychical stem. The irony is that the students' ignorance lights a spark of unintended insight as Anzaldúa reflects:

> And I thought, how apt. Fear of going home. And of not being taken in. We're afraid of being abandoned by the mother, the culture, la Raza, for being unacceptable, faulty, damaged. Most of us unconsciously believe that if we reveal this unacceptable aspect of the self our mother/culture/race will totally reject us. To avoid rejection, some of us conform to the values of the culture, push the unacceptable parts into the shadows. Which leaves only one fear-that we will be found out and that the Shadow-Beast will break out of its cage. (41)

The misunderstanding of the terminology creates a sort of displacement of the fear aspect of the concept, the object of the phobia. For the straight students, the fear is returning home to their families after having the experience of higher education and living more independently, a signaling of the larger discourse of education and higher learning: the idea that you "can't go home again" because education so fundamentally changes you. Of course, the fear the lesbian students and faculty intend to quell is the fear of "homosexuality" or the non-heterosexual or the "other," the presumably unknown to the straight students. The ambiguity of the target of fear makes manifest the weirdness of the word itself—from the Latin roots, "homo" as a prefix and "phobia" as a suffix, one would expect the term to mean the "fear of the same," especially in relation to the term "homosexual" defined as "same-sex" sexuality. If we ignore the common prefix usage of "homo," we could perhaps interpret "homophobia" as fear of man/men, a rare but actual archaic usage. Thus, we must understand "homo" as a shortening of, a displacement of "homosexual," which has long been used outside of the queer community variously to inscribe same-sex attraction within the understanding of western medical institutions and sometimes as an

outright slur. Written into the word homophobia then, it would seem, is the fear of "homosexuality" itself, otherwise, we might say homosexualphobia or homosexphobia or something more along those lines. But "homophobia" as we understand it is not an *actual* phobia but a social prejudice against queer folk. That is not to say that feelings of fear and anxiety are not involved but that they function similarly—but not identically—as in other prejudices, like racism. In short, we are left with the always already chingado—*fucked*— terminology of homophobia. Finally, if we look at the fear that Anzaldúa describes for herself and other queer students, it is the fear of homophobia at home—not the general fear of students of returning to their familial past after tasting autonomy but something like a fear of homophobia or homophobia-phobia.

Anzaldúa's ironic use of "fear of going home"/homophobia subsequently universalizes the experience—all students face fear— but limits that universalization through the specificity of fear that many queer students face. More precisely, Anzaldúa is implicating the homophobic aspect of Latino/a culture, specifically Mexican American culture, as the nexus of her fear of going home. That is not to say homophobia is endemic to Latinidad, but that for Anzaldúa it has been part of her experience as a Chicana. If she were to reject ivory tower culture, the distant intellectualism of Western-learned discourse, then to where can she return if rejected by her home culture because of her queerhood? For Anzaldúa, the path from fear leads inward:

> Some of us take another route. We try to make ourselves conscious of the Shadow-Beast, stare at the sexual lust and lust for power and destruction we see on its face, discern among its features the undershadow that the reigning order of heterosexual males project on our Beast. Yet still others of us take it another step: we try to waken the Shadow-Beast inside us. Not many jump at the chance to confront the Shadow-Beast in the mirror

> without flinching at her lidless serpent eyes, her cold clammy moist hand dragging us underground, fangs barred and hissing. How does one put feathers on this particular serpent? But a few of us have been lucky—on the face of the Shadow-Beast we have seen not lust but tenderness; on its face we have uncovered the lie. (41).

Anzaldúa does not explicate any sort of outcome from the mediation; more important is that she uses the scene to explore her inner prejudice, what some call the "colonized self." The bestial represents the "other," the unknown, the beyond society—queerness, but also the colonialist view of the indigenous. Anzaldúa's imagery calls upon, in an attempt at recuperation, Mesoamerican iconography to dislodge the association of beast with the negative, phobic implications—the question of putting "feathers" on the "serpent" invoking Quetzalcoatl, "Feathered Serpent" but also, more specifically, the story of Coatlicue's, "Serpent Skirt's," impregnation by a ball of feathers. According to the mythology, Coatlicue is beheaded and dismembered by her existing children, led by Coyolxauhqui, to prevent the birth of the war god, Huitzilopochtli, who nonetheless emerges at the moment of the beheading. Anzaldúa associates Coatlicue throughout *Borderlands* and her later writing with the figures of Malinali Tenepat/La Malinche/La Chingada, La Llorona, and La Virgen de Guadalupe—different versions of the tortured mother figure, some worshipped, some vilified as a curse, but all embodying an element of womanhood that escapes comprehension. The act of feathering then—which on the surface may seem like an act of taming—is a reclamation of the "other" by forging an identification with the other within oneself.

This is not a safe hybridity, as Anzaldúa states, "Alienated from her mother culture, 'alien' in the dominant culture, the woman of color does not feel safe within the inner life of her Self. Petrified, she can't respond, her face caught between *las intersticios*, the spaces between the

different worlds she inhabits" (42). This in-between space, traumatic though it may be is also a site of resistance. Anzaldúa writes:

> My Chicana identity is grounded in the Indian woman's history of resistance. The Aztec female rites of mourning were rites of defiance protesting the cultural changes which disrupted the equality and balance between female and male, and protesting their demotion to a lesser status, their denigration. Like la Llorona, the Indian woman's only means of protest was wailing. 43

Resonating with Bambara's genealogical claims to the long history of women's resistance movements, Anzaldúa's testimony of identification seeks to reclaim the agency of the indigenous aspects of her Chicana being from a white-washed history. The significance here to ideas of education is that Anzaldúa's engagement with indigeneity is predicated on the lens of Chicano/a thought, which filters through the academy in the discipline of Chicano/a studies. Of course, it is not *only* through the relationship between Mexican Americans and the University that this understanding functions, but even the term, the identification as "Chicano/a/x" is historically underwritten by students and activists in proximation with the US institute of higher education. Even while Anzaldúa rejects many aspects of Academia at this time in her career, the hybridity of her systems and processes of knowing and knowledge-making indicate some acknowledgment of this fact, and, besides, Anzaldúa *needs* this space to create something new, not a return home but a going forward. In this sense, she declares:

> So, don't give me your tenets and your laws. Don't give me your lukewarm gods. What I want is an accounting with all three cultures-white, Mexican, Indian. I want the freedom to carve and chisel my own face, to staunch the bleeding with ashes, to fashion my own gods out of my entrails. And if going home is denied me then I will have to stand and

> claim my space, making a new culture-una cultura mestiza-with my own lumber, my own bricks and mortar and my own feminist architecture. (44)

What emerges from Anzaldúa and Moraga's early writings in the Third World feminist movement is the declaration of a praxis that we see each writer pursue in related, but unique trajectories throughout the rest of their careers. And while both authors will continue to engage in activist and academic discourse, their relationship with the latter will remain contentious—to different extents—as each woman searches for, troubles through the means of creating alternative sites of knowledge to ivory-towered, always already colonized modes of "knowing."

Anzaldúa and Moraga both continue to critique academic writing later in their careers while also drawing from academic forms, in different degrees. Anzaldúa's last book-length monograph, *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo Oscuro* (2015), published posthumously, is especially entrenched in a more traditional academic essay form and style. One can look to the fact that the text was meant to serve as her dissertation for her second enrollment in a Ph.D. program at the University of California, Santa Cruz from 1989-2004 as an explanation for this shift, but this change represents more than just a difference in rhetorical purpose. In the twelve years from leaving her first Ph.D. program at UT Austin to beginning the second program, Anzaldúa has been writing professionally, giving talks, and teaching writing in and out of the University setting and there have been cultural interventions into scholarship, not to mention from the *Bridge* project itself. In a posthumously published essay, "The New Mestiza Nation," written while at UC Santa Cruz, Anzaldúa compares her experiences:

> I felt very isolated and marginalized. I left after completing all of my course work when a couple of advisors told me that we were living in "America" and there was no such thing as Chicano literature. In the early and mid 1970's feminist studies and…theory were not

> yet legitimate topics of study or research. I was not allowed to apply a multicultural approach to feminist theory, Chicano literature, and Spanish literature…Now I am all but dissertation in my second venture in graduate school…still dissatisfied with the methods of literary study. Like other graduate students of color, I've tried to de-construct the orals and dissertation criteria. Because of my privilege as a published author and a person who gets paid for her words as a speaker, professors listen to me. Whether they hear what I say is another matter. (208)[27]

By the era of *Light in the Dark* there has been some improvement in academia at large, but also Anzaldúa's social capital has grown, giving her more clearance for non-traditional academic exploration in her graduate career.

Still, 1) Anzaldúa acknowledges her exceptional position and 2) even her privileged standing is not enough for her to have the range of academic freedom that she calls for:

> For mestizas such as myself, the areas of study that professors want us to concentrate on do not appeal. We want new books, new areas of inquiry, and new methodologies. We want to study non-English and non-Euro-American literatures. We want more work by women of color on the reading lists. We are bookworms gnawing holes in the canon; we are termites undermining the canonical curriculum's foundations.
>
> We struggle to make room for ourselves, to change the academy so that it does not invalidate, stamp out, or crush our connections to the communities we come from. For working-class and colored people this means breaking down the barred windows that have kept us out of the universities. (208)

[27] Published in *The Gloria Anzaldúa Reader* (2009). Keating notes that the essay was based on a college talk given in 1992 and revised from 1995 to 2001. Anzaldúa gives a similar account in here essay, "now let us shift…the path of conocimiento…inner work, public acts," published in both Bridge We Call Home (2002) and Light in the Dark (2015).

For Anzaldúa, it is not just about being granted permission to pursue her own individual intellectual interests but about creating change in the institutional spaces themselves. AnaLouise Keating's introduction to *Light* gives further insight into the published author's decision to enroll at Santa Cruz, quoting Anzaldúa from an unpublished 1989 interview: "Being back in school gives me access to more books, the latest theories and fellowship, while getting credit for it. I need this kind of environment to get a handle on my life. After *Borderlands* I was very much in demand in terms of attending a class or a reading.… Being too much out in the world was not balanced by my time at home" (16). One might be tempted to write off these paratextual practical concerns, but Anzaldúa's leveraging of her access to scholarship for time and support to think and write is representative of a larger matter: the uneven labor and wage relationship between the university and writer/artist/activist means that the thought produced in such an environment, in Moraga's words, "must occur within the conceptual framework and economic constraints of the patrón-university—e.g., tenure tracking, corporate-funded grants and fellowships, publishing requirements, etc." (173).[28]

In an essay on border art, for example, Anzaldúa notes:

> El arte de la frontera is community—and academically—based. Many Chicana / o artists have master's degrees and doctorates and hold precarious teaching positions on the fringes of universities. They are overworked, overlooked, passed over for tenure, and denied the support they deserve. To make, exhibit, and sell their artwork, and to survive, los artistas have had to band together collectively. (62)[29]

[28] "Out of Our Revolutionary Minds: Toward a Pedagogy of Revolt," published in the second edition of *Loving in the War Years* (2000).

[29] The essay, "Border Arte: Nepantla, el Lugar de la Frontera," was first published in *La Frontera/The Border: Art about the Mexico/United States Border Experience* (1993), and that version can be found in *The Gloria Anzaldúa Reader* (2009). I quote from the most recent published version in *Light in The Dark* (2015).

Anzaldúa's comment—which engages a critical eye toward the relationship of art and higher education but stops short of extended criticism—is indicative of the difference between her and Moraga's critique of the university and its modes of thinking in their mid to late careers, from at least the 1990s on. Anzaldúa tends to see the issue of education and race/gender/sexuality/class struggle as work in progress, whereas Moraga is determined to keep questioning the very nature of the so-called progress we have seen.

In outtakes from Anzaldúa's early 2000s essay, "Geographies of the Self: Reimagining Identity," she discusses the state of ethnic studies since its birth around three decades prior and its role in opposing oppression:

> Along with Native American studies, the various Raza studies are being forced to submit to academia's dominant-culture elitist leaders, rules, rewards, and punishments. We now more than ever recognize that the purpose of education is not only to fight against oppression but to heal the wounds that oppression inflicts and to cultivate individual and collective growth—laying the foundation for justice and balance. (Oppression is an extreme state of imbalance.) 180

Anzaldúa recognizes the possible limits of education but, then, in line with her *Bridge* politics, appeals to cooperation as opposed to antagonism to continue to make progress, to realize the commitment of "La Raza studies." Keating notes that it is unclear if Anzaldúa meant to incorporate and/or rework these notes into an essay—Anzaldúa saw her work as always in revision, even sometimes after publication. The version that is understood to be the most current draft at the time of her passing, likewise, evaluates Chicano/a studies, but concentrates on the tension she witnesses in "[t]he dialogue between the old male vanguard and Chicanas / Latinas feministas who challenge it" as the conversation "has become polarized on many campuses"

(76). In the author's estimation, "Hombres y mujeres fear the other for similar reasons: being thought less of, ignored, disliked, displaced, not allowed space", and—because of this fear—forget the commitments of Chicano/a studies and—by extension—their commitments to each other" (76). "Women (and cultural others)" are once again "demonized as malinches" by the old guard, but also, according to Anzaldúa, now "Chicanas silence indigenous women, and indigenous women lambast Chicanas for appropriating Indian identity" (76). In sum, she assesses: "For people of color and other outsiders, the academy is a wounding field. Our cuerpos are riddled with emotional scars. Heridas fragment and disrupt the self, disturb who and what we are" (76). Anzaldúa pleas that "[t]o bridge the fissures among us, to connect with each other, to move beyond us/them binaries (men and women, queer and straight, able and disabled), we must dismantle the identity markers that promote divisions" (77). Throughout the essay, material inequity and structural inequality hover ominously overhead as the true enemy of the people, but Anzaldúa is still so concerned with confronting "the ignorance, fear, hate (los desconocimientos) that diminish us" within oneself and between possible allies as the true "enemy" that the institutions that enforce, carry-on, and reproduce these "desconocimientos" are never directly addressed (93).

In contrast, as early as 1993, Moraga—upon making similar observations about the discord in Chicano studies and the movimiento at large—reports, "Everything I read these days tells me that the Chicano Movement is dead (148).[30] Later in the decade she follows up on this observation in the essay, "Out of Our Revolutionary Minds":

> I don't believe the movement of young scholars on our university campuses is setting the stage for radical action. (On our more cynical days, my artist friends and I describe that

[30] From "Queer Aztlan" as published in *The Last Generation* (1993).

> "movement" as no more than shuttling from office to office and conference to conference.) I believe the best of our young academics are struggling to get their Ph.D's with their original tongue, cultural beliefs and basic humanity intact. (180)

For Moraga, it is not the attitudes of singular students, but ideological white-washing that denigrates the validity of non-white, queer, and/or working-class cultural experiences. In the author's words:

> One does not pass through the university system unchanged. It is the intellectual factory of Corporate America, whose intention is to educate us to be law-abiding consumer-citizens. More insidiously, the university functions to separate us from the people of our origins, which in effect neutralizes whatever potential impact our education might have on them. The university allows a benign liberalism, even a healthy degree of radical transgressive thought, as long as it remains just that: *thought* translated into the conceptual language of the dominant class to be consumed by academics of the dominant class, and as such rendered useless to the rest of us. (173)

Though Moraga uses the word "unchanged," her argument is not so much that the student of color should remain altogether unchanged as it is that the change that is foisted onto their thinking devalues the communities, the lives they come from—which is contrary to radical goals at the origination of the El Movimiento and stunts the potential for systemic change. A statement from a 2009 essay by Moraga—written to remind "people committed to social justice" to not sacrifice all "radical action" in the name of "reform" in the Obama era—rewords this idea: "A culturally equitable program of study for people of color has yet to be achieved, because equity as defined by the university means *integration* into the dominant culture, without altering the culture of Euro-American dominance within or outside the University" (169). Now, a little over a

decade later, six years since the Obama administration, Moraga's words resonate ever truer. The capitulations of reform-oriented Democrats in the Obama era—exacerbated by the loss of the House majority during the first midterm election and the added loss of the Senate majority in the second midterm—should have been cause for widespread action by "people committed to social justice." For many it was not: not until the rise of Trump did the mirage of a post-racial US clear from the eyes of moderate liberals. For those wanting an equitable society in the US, today is a crucial moment—even as we might hail voting Trump out of office a victory, the public and political reaction to COVID-19 by many US Americans—many of whom are still Trump loyalists—has made blatantly clear just how little care for the "other" there is on the right. We must also realize that the "rise" of Trump and the normalization of white nationalism in mainstream conservatism is not actually signaling something new in US ideology, but rather is the congealing of what was already there in reaction to the Obama era.

For those of us in academia—teaching, learning, writing—it is not the time to back down, to take comfort in our posts: it is the time to continue the fight. But what does that look like for academics of color as we continue to contend with a landscape that still looks much like what Moraga describes in "Out of Our Revolutionary Minds":

> The majority of Raza isn't teaching at or attending elite universities. The majority of Raza wrought its education from the same extended community where it eats and sleeps. Today, within a capital-based culture, state and community colleges remain a kind of factory in the accumulation of units toward a degree that should ostensibly provide the graduate, should s/he survive the college system, with some economic buffer in the world. Few students have the privilege (time, space and economic support) to really "study;" that is, pursue the life of the mind, however briefly. (181)

Even as some universities continue to build support for students of color and there have been some strides, such as the elimination of standardized testing in the University of California system, that speak to progress toward equity, higher education continues to struggle to improve enrollment and success rates for students. To be clear, Moraga is not criticizing community college from a classist point of view: there is a difference between denigrating such schools as "less than" because they have less "prestige" and pointing out that the socioeconomic history and current practices of the US public education system have worked to create and maintain a higher education market segregated by class and race. In such a system, it is no surprise then that—as Moraga further elaborates—:

> Community and state college faculty are overworked and underpaid, with impossible class loads and overloaded classes without teaching assistants. The embattled condition of teaching at such institutions discourages many of us from teaching the very communities to which we are dedicated. *If you teach full time at City College* my writer's self reminds me, *that's* all *you do.* (181)

Of those, including herself, that find themselves at "elite universities" Moraga writes that—despite all indications otherwise—"[s]till, we tell ourselves (queers, feminists, colored folk) that we are here at Stanford, at Yale, at Dartmouth, at Duke, at Cal, to engage in radical re-visions of history in the effort to construct a radical agenda for the future, *once we get* their *theory down*" (178).

Correspondingly, in regard to writing and higher education, Moraga writes in 2005 that "[i]n the end, we disavow what we know. We come to the training ground of writers empty of knowledge. We spend a lifetime trying to imitate what we never knew. This keeps us very busy

and unoriginal. We do not transgress" (81-82).[31] In other words, we are kept busy using the "master's tools" to upkeep the master's house to survive, so that we cannot even attempt to dismantle the house itself. In the same essay, Moraga asserts, "I am a writer. I have the education and privilege to write, to publish, to teach, but how often have my peers and I stopped ourselves along the way and reassessed what we really know and how we came to know it?" (84). As Moraga and Anzaldúa made the charge to assess one's privilege in *Bridge*, so too does Moraga do so here—the difference is the author's station as an established writer and teacher over two decades later. Here, Moraga wonders, without answer, what would happen if all of us that work for/through/with the institute of higher education "recognized the small and profound ways we have been complicit in our own oblivion" through the government-sponsored "erasure of self-defining indigenous cultures across the planet"? (84). Moraga does not indulge in this inquiry, but let us take a moment here to do so. What would it affect? Would we all quit, refuse to wield the pen underwritten by and in turn underwriting US imperialism, the continuing wars— oh, but we do not really use the word war anymore—against people of color, against the "other" within the borders of Amerikkka and across the globe? I think not. The university would continue nonetheless and then where would it be then? Where would we all go? Besides, we cannot all be Richard Rodriguez. But are these only justifications for continued complicity? Justifications, yes, but only so, I would like to hope not.

Despite the steadfast harshness in Moraga's criticism in her later career, she still sees a glimmer of hope for some kind of revolution. Acknowledging that her pessimism toward academia and the university might be "misconstrued" and "interpreted as a kind of anti-intellectualism," she insists on the contrary. She attributes the pessimism in her writing as an

[31] "Indígena as Scribe: The (W)rite to Remember," from *Xicana Codex* (2011).

attempt to "expose the Academic Emperor in all his nakedness, even at the risk of the generalization which belies the exception and the exceptional" (186). Moraga is not referring to "exceptional" in the way that "excellence in diversity" programming rhetorizes the term as she clarifies: "There *are* exceptional students and exceptional faculty. There are remarkable moments where 'critical consciousness'…is awakened, where the most visionary and dangerous of faculty inspire thoughts that directly affect the bodies sitting in front of them. The bodies chink. They stand up. They are not afraid of freedom. They act" (186). She carries the strand of the potentiality for these "exceptions" to her own teaching later in *A Xicana Codex*:

> I urge my students que se aprovechen el momento of their college years; to look beyond conventional career-oriented concerns toward something deeper, toward the discomfort and wonder of real conciencia, which comes, as the educator Paulo Freire understood, through a self-determined, self-defined education. I never let my students forget that their elite education wants them to do otherwise, to look away from the pueblo-self as the source of knowing. Through the practice of creative writing, I have found students uncovering glimpses of knowledges heretofore obscured and untouched. As path stones to critical thinking, the works become grounded in the historical as much as the intuitive and can inspire an engaged social consciousness. (86)[32]

By elaborating on her own pedagogical practice, Moraga gives examples of how one may put theory into practice in the classroom. Likewise, Anzaldúa presents a scene between herself and a student in her 1990 introduction to *Making Face/Making Soul*:

> A Chicana graduate student talked to me about not knowing how to argue against the professors who were trying to shove their methods and theories down her throat. "I don't

[32] From the 2005 essay, "Indígena as Scribe."

> have the language, the vocabulary," she said, sobbing. Like many mujeres-of-color in graduate school, she felt oppressed and violated by the rhetoric of dominant ideology, a rhetoric disguised as good "scholarship" by teachers who are unaware of its race, class and gender "blank spots." It is a rhetoric that presents its conjectures as universal truths while concealing its patriarchal privilege and posture. It is a rhetoric riddled with ideologies of Racism which hush our voices so that we cannot articulate our victimization. (xxiii)

For Anzaldúa this scene illustrates the continued struggle of students of color—a chain unbroken between her experience and her students'—but also the continuing need for interventions in education through materials, cultural knowledge, and teaching. If we relate this scene to Anzaldúa's return to grad school and eventual engagement with more stylistically academic language, then we may see her later style not as acquiescence to academia but as a step toward further intervention. In Keating's notes on *Light in the Dark*, she quotes a line of text from Anzaldúa's unpublished notes regarding her enrollment at UC Santa Cruz: "I've resisted academic language but then felt that there was a language I'd turn away from and that I should return to grad. school and learn that language" (209).[33] Perhaps Anzaldúa's shift toward the academic can be read as another act of stubborn defiance, an issue of agency-making.

In an extended exploration of "conocimiento" in *Light in the Dark*, Anzaldúa proclaims that "[k]nowledge is relative, and reality is a composition" that you construct through awareness and action, and that "[f]ormal education enhances some aspects of awareness and gives access to certain kinds of knowledges" (43-44).[34] The process of what she names "decolonizing reality"

[33] "This document, last saved August 27, 1999, is on Anzaldúa's hard drive in a subfolder titled 'SIC.'" (Keating, 209)

[34] In chapter two, "Flights of the imagination: Rereading/Rewriting Realities."

then "consists of unlearning consensual 'reality'" on the path to a new state of learning and being—and I would add teaching (44). In a later chapter, Anzaldúa reiterates how this process works:

> Before rewriting the disintegrating, often destructive "stories" of self constructed by psychology, sociology, anthropology, biology, and religion, you must first recognize their faulty pronouncements, pronouncements, scrutinize the fruit they've borne, and then ritually disengage from them. Reflexive awareness and other aspects of conocimiento, if practiced daily, overrule external instructions transmitted by your ethnic and dominant cultures…(138-139)[35]

By turning toward academia, Anzaldúa is attempting to not just use the "master's tools," but to break down and reconstruct the tools themselves, guiding students to do the same. The goal of this process is to make and put into action "new narratives to intervene in the cultures' existing dehumanizing stories" (139).

From both Anzaldúa's and Moraga's work—in *Bridge* and beyond—there is still much to learn about writing, learning, and teaching, but what I want to close with here is the message that we should continue to come together to create interventions into accepted ways of knowing in and around the classroom: the theoretical implications of the *Bridge* project mean little if we do not put them into praxis ourselves as thinkers and educators. Although such practice has specific resonance within Chicano/a studies and thinking, it applies to not just Chicano/a studies but across disciplines. Anzaldúa addresses what she calls "Raza studies" in the outakes from "Geographies of Selves," published by Keating in *Light*:

[35] In chapter six, "now let us shift…conocimiento…inner work, public acts." Also published previously as an essay in *This Bridge We Call Home* (2002).

> We must continue to address the crises of Raza and Raza studies. We must explore unexamined connections of the Raza legacies we rely upon. Today we must engage discussions of how Raza feminisms, through various generations, contribute to trans-categorical conversations and collaborations and inform the needs of nuestros pueblos. To transform curriculum and education we must practice what This Bridge Called My Back calls theory in the flesh, which sees practice as a form of theorizing and theorizing as a form of practice. Today we must bridge the chasm between campus political activity and grassroots activism, women and men, us and others (of whatever race or culture they may be). Through our scholarship and creative expression we must be willing to translate across (mis)perceived differences instead of highlighting our separate worlds, be willing to facilitate rather than obstruct dialogue and collaboration. Today we are poised on the brink of our own flowering. We need to increase our capacity for awareness, vision, presence, and compassion and integrate reflective and contemplative practices into daily professional routines. For this, our moment in history, we need to clarify collective and personal identities and visions. (180)

I reiterate here and now to Chicano/a/x folks and Latino/a/x folk studying, teaching, writing in academia: we must do more than usher the select few students of color through the halls of the university, we must see and help them see beyond the walls of academia so that we can find a way to tear down the walls themselves. For fellow Chicanos and Latinos—those identifying as men—we must let go of male ego and take on *Bridge* work as well. Some of us are already doing so, especially queer-identifying men, but we can do more. Together, we cannot be content to witness and talk about *Bridge'*s and women of color feminism's rippling effects in Latino/a literature and education; we must make an effect ourselves.

CHAPTER 3: An Art of One's Own: Sandra Cisneros's and Ana Castillo's Acts of Self-Making

Ana Castillo's and Sandra Cisneros's life stories provide an intriguing comparison: both women were born in Chicago a year apart, both were raised there for at least a part of their childhoods, and both are American Book Award-winning novelists. But while Cisneros trained in poetry at the famed Iowa Writers' Workshop MFA program, Castillo has written about skepticism of poetry workshops. In the 1995 introduction to her loosely semi-autobiographical first poetry collection, My *Father Was a Toltec* (1988), she writes the following:

> As for the writing of poetry, having no models that spoke to my experience and in my languages, I decided that I would never ever take—and never ever have taken—a workshop or a writing class at any time anywhere. I was afraid that I would be told that I had no right to poetry (as I had been told about painting and drawing), and that I didn't write English or Spanish well enough to write. So, while I was indeed intent on being a good poet, I had to carve out for myself the definition of "good." (Loc 185)

The kind of criticism Castillo describes and the kind of self-invention rhetoric she engages in are familiar thematic territories, if not exactly unique, to the self-narratives of Chicanx writers. Despite not having formal creative writing training, Castillo *is* highly educated: she holds a BA in art from Northeastern Illinois University, a MA in Latin American Studies from the University of Chicago, and a Ph.D. in American Studies from the University of Bremen, Germany. Despite her work at Iowa, Cisneros writes of similar alienation and self-invention:

> I went home that night and realized my education had been a lie—had made presumptions about what was "normal," what was American, what was of value. I wanted

to quit school right then and there, but didn't. Instead, I got mad, and anger when it's used to act, when used nonviolently, has power. I asked myself what I could write about that my classmates couldn't. I didn't know what I wanted exactly, but I did have enough sense to know what I didn't. I didn't want to sound like my classmates; I didn't want to keep imitating the writers I'd been reading. Their voices were right for them but not for me.

Instead, I searched for the ugliest subjects I could find, the most unpoetic, slang, monologues where waitresses or kids talked their own lives. I was trying as best I could to write the kind of book I'd never seen in a library or in a school, the kind of book not even my professors could write. Each week I ingested the class readings, and then went off and did the opposite. It was a quiet revolution, a reaction taken to extremes maybe, but it was out of this negative experience that I found something positive: my own voice.

(127-128)[1]

Even though Castillo opts out of and Cisneros resists formal academic training in poetry writing, their lives and work remain entwined with the university. Although both authors pose their origins as acts of self-determination, their self-narratives illustrate higher education as both a source of intellectual experience and income, especially in their early careers as aspiring professional writers. While Anzaldúa and Moraga also engage the idea of the university as a subsidizer of creative work in their own self-representation of their writer-personas, the two elder writers seem steadfastly aware that their work, their status as writers, and their readership are inextricably tied to Academia. Anzaldúa and Moraga present themselves not just as writers but

[1] *A House of My Own* (2015)

also as teachers and activists whose art and work are anchored to spaces in and around higher education even as they are critical of its institutions.

In contrast, Castillo and Cisneros disavow the role of higher education in their creation as artists despite drawing support from colleges and universities in the form of teaching gigs, artist residencies, speaking/reading events, and other appointments. Even Castillo, who does at times take up the call of activist scholar, makes a clear distinction between artistic expression and scholarship or critical writing.[2] For both authors, self-writing becomes the site for renegotiating their associations with the university through what I call self-making—the process by which an author creates their own sense of self on the page. More than simply reflecting on one's origins, self-making utilizes the unique rhetorical space of self-writing—the implicit relationship between "truth," context, and the writer—to construct themselves on the page. Castillo—in her collection of "critical essays" *Massacre of the Dreamers: Essays on Xicanisma* (1994) and her recent memoir, *Black Dove: Mamá, Mi ʾjo, and Me* (2016)—and Cisneros, in her collection of short memoiristic essays and speeches, *A House of My Own: Stories from My Life* (2015)—root the construction of their writerly personas in the figure of the self-invented artist amidst educational institutions that remain oblivious to their needs. While one could read such individualistic practices of self-making as examples of exceptionalist discourse, I read them in Castillo's and Cisneros's self-writing less as celebrations of exceptionalism and more as strategies of surviving academic and literary spaces that simultaneous herald diversity while remaining largely inaccessible to diverse peoples.[3] Unsatisfied with the inequitable access that

[2] Cisneros clearly views her founding and work with the Macondo Writers Workshop and the Alfredo Cisneros del Moral grant as activism, but I pose this as a kind of literary or writerly activism that is separate than what I describe here as the work of the activist scholar.

[3] Regarding Cisneros, I am referring specifically to her self-representation on the page as oppositional to the university: the author certainly does celebrate her own exceptionalism in many other ways throughout her self-accounts in print and speech.

they witness, both authors insist on emphasizing political commitments that often demand a separation from the hierarchical, career-driven (and male-centered) aspects of academia. In turn, their reflections on their struggles within academic settings further elucidate how Chicanx and Latinx students face an educational system that is not always welcoming.

Cisneros describes *A House of My Own*, a collection of short writings and lectures, as a project of gathering self-stories to understand her life:

> …I'm gathering up my stray lambs that have wandered out of sight and am herding them under one roof, not so much for the reader's sake, but my own. Where are you, my little loves, and where have you gone? Who wrote these and why? I have a need to know, so that I can understand my life.
>
> These stories from my life span from 1984 to 2014. Most were written for specific audiences, a university or high school lecture, a journal, an anthology, often at someone's request. In the beginning, I didn't have a lot of confidence to speak as myself. I used the scrim of poetry and fiction. The truth told slant, as Emily Dickinson instructed. To speak as me required learning to come out from behind the screen. (4)

Cisneros's assertion of these short self-writings as "stories" blurs the border between fiction and creative non-fiction. Even if poetry and fiction are a "scrim," a screen for Cisneros to set aside as she tells these stories of herself, the aura of the theater remains: the page itself remains as a membrane between performer and audience, between the experience and the telling of the experience. And what of her personification of the writings as her "stray lambs"? The moment brings the writer and their work together: the former a semi-maternal figure—suggesting metaphors of writing as procreation, which Cisneros often uses in the book—and the latter the quiet animal other—a creature needing continuous tending. On one level, it is a playful

metaphor common to the rhetorical language of writing-hood, but Cisneros only starts here, continuing by cultivating strangeness through her line of questioning. The creatures, the writings themselves, are not only products of the writer but also products of that which is other than the writer: the spatial and temporal distance between the writer *now* and the writer *then* others the writer from herself, further complicating the notion of continuity between a life, the telling of a life, and the reading of a life. And if the project is for the author's sake rather than the reader's, why the public presentation? Because these complications are part of the performance: as an *artist*, Cisneros is not just delivering recollections but also curating them into self-stories in what we might call a "theater of the self," borrowing from Adrianna Cavarero's reading of Gertrude Stein's *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*.[4] On a practical level, Cisneros's noting of spatial and temporal contexts—thirty years of instances of writing in settings like university or high school classrooms, journals, or anthologies—gives a clue to how educational/educated spaces might intersect with an author's professional life. Even so, Cisneros identifies not her formal education but Dickinson's "instruction" as the frame of reference for truth-telling in her fiction work.[5]

The play between fiction and non-fiction is nothing new for Cisneros. Before the publication of *A House of My Own*, critics—like Mark McGurl and John Alba Cutler, for instance—often cited her tenth-anniversary introduction to *Mango Street* to read that early novel autobiographically. Cisneros is playfully ambiguous, writing:

[4] In *Relating Narratives* (2000), Cavarero writes "…the text functions as a sort of theater of the self in which Gertrude stages her exhibitive impulse and her desire for narration. Alice, who watches and recounts, more than simply being a literary artifice, is here *the necessary other*" (82).
[5] See Geoffrey Sanborn's "Keeping Her Distance: Cisneros, Dickinson, and the Politics of Private Enjoyment" for an in-depth treatment of how "Cisneros revises Dickinson's relatively elitist conception of privacy…by insisting on its contingency and by opening it to nonelite practices of identification" (1336).

> I'm thirty-eight now, far from that time and place, but the questions from readers remain: "Are these stories true?" "Are you Esperanza?"
>
> When I started The House on Mango Street, I thought I was writing a memoir. By the time I finished, my memoir was no longer memoir, no longer autobiographical, and had evolved into a collective story peopled with several lives, from my past and present, placed in one fictional time and neighborhood—Mango Street. (125)[6]

Unlike Dickinson, Cisneros is the living stage manager between the text and her audience. Even the cute title, "*The House on Mango Street*'s Tenth Birthday," signals the author's role as a mother or caretaker. One can imagine Cisneros welcoming birthday guests into the figurative home space of her writing, mediating between guests and child, perhaps answering lingering questions on behalf of the child: Where were you born? Do you remember when…? In the case of readers like McGurl and Cutler, those questions are posed as if Mango Street were indeed directly autobiographical. For McGurl, *Mango Street* is an example of how the creative writing program, as a mediator between ideals of cultural pluralism and singular creativity, functions as an ironic proving ground for the realization of commodification—both internal and external—of the ethnic subject. As McGurl states, "Cisneros's long journey to success in [the literary] field began when she learned to convert her disabling sense of otherness into a valuable, because relatively scarce, form of cultural capital" (337). In other words, Cisneros's experience at Iowa was "negatively enabling" as she was able to take her class and ethnicity—which paradoxically alienates her from middle-class and high cultured spaces while becoming her source of value in those same spaces—and utilize it the context of the shared space of the literary field as "made concrete in the university classroom" (337). To be clear, McGurl's reading does not *absolutely*

[6] This piece is later featured in *A House of My Own* as well.

rely on *Mango Street* as self-writing. Still, it does lean heavily on the assumption that Cisneros believes herself to be telling her self-narrative at face value, and, as a result, it misses how the author is already complicating notions of truth-telling and representation in her work.

Looking to John Alba Cutler's disagreements with this reading in *The Ends of Assimilation* will help us sort out some of these problems. In short, Cutler argues that McGurl's reading of Cisneros flattens her story into one of assimilation—albeit assimilation in which social difference is recognized, validated, and commodified in the process—and locates his reading of *Mango Street* around the poetics of the book. Cutler writes:

> McGurl goes on to insist that, despite Cisneros's criticisms, her work bears the indelible stamp of the Writers 'Workshop and cites as evidence "how Cisneros's first-person form echoes the pedagogical procedures of the classroom. These vignettes are the length of the typical creative writing workshop exercise and are very much akin to the short story form which is…the privileged genre of the creative writing program." In other words, no matter what Cisneros writes, she has acculturated to the norms of the workshop at the level of form.
>
> But Cisneros was enrolled at Iowa as a poet, not a fiction writer, and *Mango Street*'s short chapters resemble lyric poems in their length and densely aural aesthetics much more than short stories. This is not mere detail—if Cisneros's institutional training is important, then so is the precise nature of that training. Reading Cisneros's autobiographical account with the lyric in mind, Cisneros's style cannot be characterized as simple submission to the fiction workshop's imperative to "Find Your Voice." Moreover, McGurl equates Cisneros's class and racial alienation with that of the "post-romantic artist," as if all forms of alienation were fungible. But there is good reason to

> insist on the specificity of Cisneros's alienation as differing from the majority of her classmates. From this perspective, it is telling that Cisneros describes finding a "voice," but she calls attention to objects of representation more than aspects of voice: drunk husbands, third-floor flats, and so on. Her voice is constituted as much by content as by form. (131-132)[7]

Cutler's objections here focus on McGurl's faulty assessment of form and on how the argument itself works as an erasure of both Cisneros's alienation and agency: note especially his framing of how McGurl "insist[s] … despite Cisneros's criticism." Part of what we do at times as literary and cultural critics is "insist despite" whatever claims of intention or meaning an author might make. In other words, we take license, we disregard consent. In Cutler's assessment of McGurl's estimation of Cisneros, there is a sense of injury having been done to the writer. Indeed, despite McGurl's concession that, regarding alienation, we do not "need assume they were all equally justified in this emotion, or felt it as intensely as she did," the claim that Cisneros can simply not fathom the nature of her own feelings *is* condescending, not only to her but also to the history of written accounts of race and class alienation (135). It is vital to remember and assert that Cisneros is not *just* a "product" of her formal education. And yet, McGurl is not entirely off-base: *Mango Street* and Cisneros, the "writer," are in no small way products of college and writing programs. As well, even Cutler's rebuttal, while drawing upon formal specificity between fiction and poetry, overlooks the peculiarity of Mango Street as a memoir "evolved" into fiction. In these respects, I do not wish to rehash *Mango Street* itself as autobiographical, and instead, hoping to afford Cisneros more agency even in critique, I choose to focus on her

[7] Cutler is quoting McGurl p339.

writing about the writing experience and how it relates to school—both in her education but also in her professional life.

In the piece "Hydra House," written in 2014, Cisneros reveals more shades of complexity to Mango Street's "truths":

> The night I began the book in Iowa, I wrote the first chapter, "The House on Mango Street," "Meme Ortiz," and a vignette that fell by the wayside.
>
> When I was working as a high school teacher in Chicago, I wrote "Darius & the Clouds," "Chanclas," "Minerva Writes Poems," "Geraldo No Last Name," and "The Monkey Garden."
>
> "The Family of Little Feet" was born during the year I was a counselor at Loyola University, my alma mater, after a comment a student made about my own small feet. "Alicia Who Sees Mice" and "What Sally Said" were also based on something spoken by one of my counselees. During this same time in my life I shared "The First Job" with the Chicago writer James McManus. Jim took my work seriously and reminded me to do the same, and this was just what I needed to hear at that time of wobbling faith in my own creative powers. (28)

She may have started writing Mango Street in Iowa, but the stories, the characters not only find origins in her life before her MFA program but in her experiences after. While some of these origins involve the classroom, the roles of high school teacher and college counselor do not hold the same level of "prestige" as that of MFA student or future artist—as Cutler reminds us, we should be attentive to the particularities. The way that Cisneros's life experience that inspires *Mango Street* follows her to Iowa and continues to follow her from Iowa—all the while growing with new experiences that continue to inspire—simultaneously betray the singularity of the

university writing program experience while also illustrating the life-changing context of the university. In McGurl's case, he is so fixated on finding the smoking gun in the writing program experience as deterministic to the development of the artist/writer that the influence of the space of and around the university writ large is nearly forgotten. Elsewhere though, he is attuned to the larger cultural force of the university in general: what he calls, borrowing from Langdon Hammer, "the culture of the school" (30).[8] For students and writers from working-class backgrounds like Cisneros and Castillo, the professionalism that is part of the culture of the school is tied to paths of middle-class employment as a safety net for the aspiring educated artist.

Cisneros's work as a high school teacher and college counselor speaks to necessity—throughout *House of My Own* she often comments on her non-writing work during this period of her life as a means to the end of writing. But it also speaks to a commitment to education: there are plenty of other ways to earn a living. Narrating a photo of herself from this era in the titular "A House of My Own," originally written for *Mango Street*'s 25th anniversary, Cisneros writes:

> The young woman in the photograph gets up in the morning to go to the job that pays the rent on her Paulina Street apartment. She teaches at a school in Pilsen, her mother's old neighborhood on Chicago's South Side, a Mexican neighborhood where the rent is cheap and too many families live crowded together. Landlords and the city take no responsibility for the rats, trash that isn't collected often enough, porches that collapse, apartments without fire escapes, until a tragedy happens and several people die. Then they hold investigations for a little while, but the problems go on until the next death, the next investigation, the next bout of forgetting.

[8] In "Plath's Lives," Langdon Hammer traces Plath's student-hood and career to argue that the poet "conceived of the female professional as a kind of student, and vice versa. Plath's identifications with high and mass culture production (her self-images as a poet and a commercial writer) were *both* formed in the culture of the school" (66).

> The young woman works with students who have dropped out of high school but have decided to try again for their diplomas. She learns from her students that they have more difficult lives than her storyteller's imagination can invent. Her life has been comfortable and privileged compared to theirs. She never had to worry about feeding her babies before she went to class. She never had a father or boyfriend who beat her at night and left her bruised in the morning. She didn't have to plan an alternative route to avoid gangs in the school hallway. Her parents didn't plead with her to drop out of school so she could help them earn money. (277-279)

The contexts of education and material inequity are entwined in Cisneros's telling. The artist lives amongst but apart from the community she serves, and she is careful to bear witness to how her experience differs from others that she observes. The "comfort" and "privilege" that Cisneros acknowledges for herself is important because it illustrates a practice of conscientious writing that attenuates readers to the difference and complexity of inequity and oppression.

Cisneros follows with a line of questioning:

> How can art make a difference in the world? This was never asked at Iowa. Should she be teaching these students to write poetry when they need to know how to defend themselves from someone beating them up? Can a memoir by Malcolm X or a novel by García Márquez save them from the daily blows? And what about those who have such learning problems they can't even manage a book by Dr. Seuss, but can weave a spoken story so wondrous, she wants to take notes? Should she give up writing and study something useful like medicine? How can she teach her students to take control of their own destiny? She loves these students. What should she be doing to save their lives? (278)

The writer's questioning of art also questions her privilege, which she has accumulated on top of her relatively "comfortable" upbringing. Anyone who cares about social justice *and* believes in the structural, material quality of injustice will have asked themselves at some point: what am *I* doing to make a change? Is it enough? Those of us who work within, alongside, and around institutes of structural power will ask such questions while knowing, on some level, that we are complicit, to some capacity, with the same systems of oppression we seek to deconstruct. Cisneros may only be hinting here at such a conundrum, and I perhaps read too deeply my own reflection in her words, but surely her ruminations speak to a more troubled, nuanced understanding of her position than McGurl gives credit. At the very least, Cisneros's matured writing complicates what has often been read as the wide-eyed optimism of *Mango Street*'s ending—the narrator's promise to return to her community—as her autobiographical account of the book's creation reveals the fraught terms of such an endeavor.

Cisneros continues to chronicle her practical service work as she continues the narrative around the woman in the photo while also closing the rhetorical distance between past and present by shifting into the first person:

> The young woman's teaching job leads to the next, and now she finds herself a counselor/recruiter at her alma mater, Loyola University…I have health benefits. I don't bring work home anymore. My workday ends at 5 p.m. Now I have evenings free to do my own work. I feel like a real writer.
>
> At the university I work for a program that no longer exists, the Educational Opportunity Program, that assists "disadvantaged" students. It's in keeping with my philosophy, and I can still help the students from my previous job. But when my most

brilliant student is accepted, enrolls, and then drops out in her first semester, I collapse on my desk from grief, from exhaustion, and feel like dropping out myself.

I write about my students because I don't know what else to do with their stories. Writing them down allows me to sleep. (279)

The author's re/imagining of her younger self's inner turmoil suggests not just the struggle against social injustice but also between artistic ambition and the desire for selfless service to one's political commitments, especially as one experiences more class mobility. It is in this sense that we should re/read Cisneros's much-discussed statement in the tenth-anniversary introduction that:

Mango Street is based on the speech of the Chicago streets where I grew up. It's an anti-academic voice—a child's voice, a girl's voice, a poor girl's voice, a spoken voice, the voice of an American Mexican. It's in this rebellious realm of anti-poetics that I tried to create a poetic text, with the most unofficial language I could find. I did it neither ingenuously nor naturally. It was as deliberate to me as if I were tossing a Molotov. (127)

The "anti-academic" voice that the writer cultivates for Esperanza is not simply a middle finger to her MFA program; it is a cultivation of poetics as politic, the artist trying to find her way through art to speak to her political passion. It is an attempt at an act of sabotage. In retrospect of *Mango Street*'s success, we too easily overlook how the "Molotov" could have razed the young woman writer's career. That the book becomes reading material for a variety of classrooms, from grade school to college, from composition to literature to various cultural studies, is not some kind of proof of Cisneros's complicity, from *Mango Street*'s inception, with the university's agenda for a new type of deferential assimilation. I accept the author's portrayal

of her younger self's act as one of bravery. Ten years after the writing, twenty-five, soon to be forty years later, decades of Cisneros's cooperation with the scholastic and book market's celebration of the book as revelatory, it is arguable that the narrative of *Mango Street* as radical disruption does not hold up. Indeed, "Molotov" does not hold as an accurate metaphor.

Still, there is power in the assertion of the book project as inspiration for marginalized voices. Cisneros courts this narrative of the book as well, enmeshing it with both the continued retelling of the work's creation and her service as a teacher:

> At one time or another, we've all been made to feel the other. When I teach writing, I tell the story of the moment of discovering and naming my otherness. It's not enough to simply sense it; it has to be named, and then written about from there. Once I could name it, I wasn't ashamed or silent. I could speak up and celebrate my otherness as a woman, a working-class person, an American of Mexican descent. (127)

In this instantiation of the story of the story, the act of teaching surfaces as possible means for advancing the art of writing as reparative, but teaching for Cisneros is overshadowed by the imagined potential of her art itself to represent and inspire those who have been othered by/in society. Through the repeated telling of its origins, the narrative of *Mango Street* itself grows from its own pages into the pages of Cisneros's later self-writing to merge with both the story of its own creation and the emergence of Cisneros as a writer/artist. For Cisneros, the telling of her experience working in service to the community is significant because it allows her to continue her testimony of social inequity even as she aspires for a different lifestyle than she feels the community can offer. Cisneros's account of her failure as a teacher and counselor and success as a writer implies that what leads her away from directly serving the community is not a lack of

care, but that she is more suited for the latter. Cisneros's professed care for the other contrasts with the lack of care she perceives coming from the MFA program:

> In grad school, I'd never been trained to think of poems or stories as something that could change anyone's life but the writer's…Even while I was teaching in the Chicano community, the two halves of my life were at odds with each other—the half that wanted to roll up my sleeves and do something for the community, and the half that wanted to retreat to my kitchen and write. I still believed my writing couldn't save anyone's life but my own. (129-130)

The dichotomy between artistic ambition and selfless service transforms from a dilemma of class guilt to a problem of training and belief. This lack of knowledge and belief, that making art can be service, is bridged by Cisneros's discovery of the history of Chicano/a and Latino/a letters and later by the readership of her own work.

Returning to "A House of My Own," we see one way in which Cisneros fills this gap of knowledge as she imagines a conversation with her friend and scholar Norma Alarcón:

> At Iowa we never talked about serving others with our writing. It was all about serving ourselves. But there were no other examples to follow until you introduced me to Mexican writers, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, Elena Poniatowska, Elena Garro, Rosario Castellanos…
>
> Until you brought us all together as U.S. Latina writers—Cherríe Moraga, Gloria Anzaldúa, Marjorie Agosín, Carla Trujillo, Diana Solís, Sandra María Esteves, Diane Gómez, Salima Rivera, Margarita López, Beatriz Badikian, Carmen Ábrego, Denise Chávez, Helena María Viramontes—until then, Normita, we had no idea that what we were doing was extraordinary. (285)

The list of writers—Mexicanas in the first cluster and mostly US Latinas, with an emphasis on Chicanas, in the second—represents an archive of North American Latina writing historically excluded from US higher education. Alarcón—author/scholar/teacher—serves as curator and ambassador of this archive, guiding Cisneros, the figure of the picture, into her understanding of writer-hood. The second cluster of examples illustrates the life of this archive: it is Alarcón's uniting of the writers themselves and not only their work—ranging widely from academic scholarship to fiction, poetry, plays, creative non-fiction, etc.—that Cisneros celebrates. These revelations in Cisneros's writing life are by no means removed from the university but rather circulate in the space of Chicana and Latina academic interventions. By declaring her bond to this archive, Cisneros is forging her metaphoric way back to *Mango Street* as if reaching back into the last pages and leaving a trail for Esperanza. The discovery of this cultural knowledge is not the only one Cisneros cites as foundational for her understanding of the social potential for her writing.

In the tenth-anniversary intro, we find the author mending the space between her service and her art:

> In the ten years since Mango Street was first published those two halves of my life have met and merged. I believe this because I've witnessed families buying my book for themselves and for family members, families for whom spending money on a book can be a sacrifice. They bring a mother, father, sibling, cousin along to my readings, or I'm introduced to someone who says their son or daughter read my book in a class and brought it home for them. And there are the letters from readers of all ages and colors who write to say I've written their story. The raggedy state of my books that some readers and educators hand me to sign is the best compliment of all. (129-130)

So, while audiences may not be reading *Mango Street* and taking to the literal streets or university halls, Molotov in hand, they may be inspired to pursue education because they may not feel altogether shut out of literary space or the space of the classroom. This may seem like a small advancement compared to revolution. Still, perhaps, we can look at such success as tiny Trojan horses by which non-dominant cultures can be trafficked past gatekeepers rather than define it as an example of simple subsumption of the "minority" voice by the educated class. After all, despite the appearance of Cisneros's voice in the novel—through Esperanza—as diminutive and naïve, it has often been declared as a threat to the status quo.[9]

Cisneros gives some indication of what a new intellectual space might look like in the cross-cultural roster of writers throughout "A House of My Own" that includes not just Mexicanas and US Latinas but also Ermilo Abreu Gómez, Elena Poniatowska, Gwendolyn Brooks, Joy Harjo, Yasunari Kawabata, Gabriel García Márquez, Heinrich Böll, Grace Paley, Jorge Luis Borges, Hans Christian Andersen, Ovid, Malcolm X, Isabel Allende, and, most pertinent to the title of the piece and the collection, Virginia Woolf. Altogether, Cisneros's vast array of references creates a connection between these authors that is neither wholly genealogical nor directly associative but works to develop constellations of referents that revolve around ideas of what it means to be a writer: the writer as activist, the writer as a voice for underrepresented voices, and the writer as the artist. One such constellation is distinct in illustrating her past self's want of knowledge:

[9] There have been many instances where *Mango Street* has been banned or there has been an attempt to ban it, earning it a place on the American Library Association's watchlist of frequently challenged "books with diverse content" as of 2016. While this alone does not make the novel subversive, there is something to be said about such a classically diminutive voice, more so even if you have ever listened to Cisneros's reading from the work aloud, being seen as a threat.

> Where she gets these ideas about living like a writer, she has no clue. She hasn't read Virginia Woolf yet. She doesn't know about Rosario Castellanos or Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz. Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherríe Moraga are cutting their own paths through the world somewhere, but she doesn't know about them. She doesn't know anything. She's making things up as she goes. (274)

In these moments, the photo, a crystalized instance in time, becomes the scrim, its image not fully developed but not entirely blank, onto which the author projects her found cultural knowledge that she has gained from 1) her own experience as a writer; 2) an appreciation of the literary, artistic, and political practices and legacies of these writers; and 3) a sense of connectedness via the curation of community by people like Alarcón. Woolf's presence on this shortlist of otherwise Latina/Mexicana feministas—or in the case of Inés de la Cruz, proto-feminista—emphasizes an air of what one might call the "writerly" figure in Cisneros's idealization of the life of the woman writer. Cisneros's question, in this case, is not so much about the responsibilities of writing but about the possibility of existing as a writer and a woman.

Even as she makes her way through the different versions of her progress narrative, Cisneros's accounts of her early career remain haunted by a sense of self-doubt. In "Hydra House," for example, Cisneros also talks about what she simply did not know about the life she wanted:

> I wanted my life to change. After grad school I taught high school, then worked as a college recruiter and counselor. I organized community arts events. I gave away my time to everyone except my writing. I wanted to be a writer, but I had no idea how to go about this except to travel…I knew so little about how women writers lived, and nothing about working-class writers, even though I'd been to a writers 'workshop. I wasn't sure

> how to go about this business of becoming a writer, but I knew what I didn't want. I didn't want to live in New York or teach at a university—the former because I hated big cities (as a poor person), the latter because universities intimidated me (as a poor person). I wanted to live like a writer, and I imagined writers did this with a typewriter and a house by the sea. (11-12)

Cisneros's class insecurities, practical needs for writing, and concern for the writerly aesthetic—not to be confused with the aesthetics of writing—all coalesce to form her romantic image of what a writer's life looks like: again, Cisneros's invention as a writer, both of her own making and her community's, goes beyond her experience in Iowa. The alienation that Cisneros describes does not simply end when she "finds her voice" but continues to encompass her sense of self as a writer, an educator, and, perhaps, even a person. To emphasize this point, I turn to two of Cisneros's autobiographical lectures, also published in *House of My Own.* In a 1995 keynote address for the national conference for the Women's Caucus for the Arts, "I Can Live Sola and I Love to Work," Cisneros also claims that she taught high school because she "was too afraid to apply for a teaching job at an institution of higher learning" despite having an MFA because it might confirm that she "didn't belong in the world of letters,…wasn't smart enough, good enough" (134). This version of Mango Street's creation story, though condensed, provides supplementary detail to her relationship with teaching and the university during this time in her life, confirming that her feelings of alienation from the college classroom reach well beyond her tenure as a student. From Cisneros's writing and interviews, the rejection she felt in Iowa and her subsequent rejection of specific ideas and models of writing and what it means to be a writer is already clear. Here, we see in addition how that rejection follows her, manifesting into preemptive insecurity over her potential worth as a college-level instructor. It is, after all, not just

a passion for service, but also practical necessity that leads to Cisneros's work as a high school teacher, community organizer, and college counselor/recruiter during this time of her career.

Cisneros eventually *does* find herself lecturing in the college classroom out of desperation during a disparaging period of uncertainty, after the publication of *Mango Street* and around the time *Wicked Ways* is in the process of being published. In a speech given in 2005, "A Tango for Astor," Cisneros describes 1988 as the year of her "near death" and "resurrection." She details her state of mind as she drives to see Astor Piazolla, her musical hero, perform:

> I'd lost my purpose for living. I know it sounds overly dramatic, but that's the truth. I was tired of the nuisance of staying alive. I couldn't understand why I was put on the planet if I couldn't seem to do anything that would earn me my keep. I was weepy and nervous and skittish as a cat. In Texas I'd been without a job for almost a year. A friend teaching at Cal State, Chico, was taking a temporary leave, and he had recommended me for his position. (86)

The dynamic tension between the excitement of meeting one of her heroes and the admittedly melodramatic presentation of the younger Cisneros's self-image creates the atmosphere for the writer to deliver a personable account of herself as a struggling artist—by passion—and educator—by necessity. This lecture also provides insight into how and why Cisneros continues to identify as a "working class writer" in this era even though she also sees herself as apart from her local working-class community in other tellings. She continues:

> The last thing I wanted was to teach at a university. I'd never felt at home there. The truth was I didn't feel smart enough as a student, let alone as a professor. Yet here was a job at a university being offered to me. I was so broke, I was forced to overlook my terror and take it.

> I borrowed money from my family for the umpteenth time, dragged my thrift-store furniture in a trailer, and soon discovered what I had feared all along: I was a failure. The lethargy of my freshman composition students compared to the adults I'd taught at community centers convinced me I was no good, I was worthless, I was a dud. At least, that was the way I saw it then.
>
> And if I wasn't any good at teaching…and if I was thirty-three years old and still borrowing to get by…and so what if I'd written a book that earned me hardly enough to cover a few months' rent…and I hated being in academia, feeling like I had to know everything when I hardly knew anything…and what if I was discovered for being the fraud I was…and if I had to borrow money from my family one more time, well…I'd lost my will to go on. (86-87)

Of course, Cisneros, "the writer," reemerges from these challenging times, but let us linger for a moment on Cisneros's ambivalence. There is the impression that Cisneros's class self-identification is centered around practice more than access: although a bachelor's degree from Loyola and a master's degree from the University of Iowa may have furnished her with access to means for class mobility, she perceives herself as an outsider to the university as an institution even after she has been awarded her first NEA grant in 1982, an American Book Award from the Before Columbus Foundation for *Mango Street*, and the Frank Dobie Paisano Fellowship in 1985.

Further complicating the author's account of her disposition toward the university are the preconceptions of work and teaching in the university that reverberate throughout Cisneros's accounts. While the author seems to have reconciled her need for service to the community and her desire as an artist, her employment as a college instructor does not quite fit the equation.

Cisneros cites the time and energy demands of teaching and other full-time employment as, understandably, the reason for the incompatibility between such work and her creation of art, but considering the way the author romanticizes the writerly life, one suspects that the cultural status of the teacher versus the artist plays no small role as well. Now, Cisneros is not belittling the teaching "profession" or saying that teaching is beneath her but rather implying that the fact that she financially needs this type of work is a symbol that she has not "made it" as a writer yet. The author's humility weighted expressions of her sense of unbelongingness as an instructor also aid in counterbalancing the notion that her pedal-stooling of the figure of the artist should cast shadows of denigration over that of the teacher. While Cisneros's accounts of this era of her life may portray such employment as an obstruction to her advancement as a writer, the construction of herself as a working-class writer simultaneously relies, in part, on her status as a struggling laborer during her early years. It is not surprising that Cisneros, in the Astor speech, forgoes mentioning the awards and accolades that she has won since Iowa and instead focuses on her continued struggles: this allows the writer to make the most of the rhetorical effect of the anecdote, which sees her, the main character, swing from down-and-out to on track for success.

Markedly, considering these omissions, the thing that delivers Cisneros from despair, besides the event of meeting her musical hero, is continued institutional support in the form of her second NEA grant. After she establishes the loss of her "will to go on," she proclaims, "But a national writing award arrived in the nick and reminded me why I was put on the planet…" (87). While the grant is not academically based, the prize economy and higher education cultural institutions operate from related spheres of elevated symbolic capital. There is, no doubt, a difference in the kind of symbolic capital: the writer's grant symbolizes artistic merit while academic and professional achievements generally do not. Cisneros's choice of prizes and

awards to showcase and omit is telling. Yet, Cisneros is careful not to diminish the teaching profession or scholarship even as she rejects certain models and ideas of education—the author knows that to do so would risk alienating a large demographic of her readership. As well, the space that Cisneros carves between the university and the self-making of her writerly origins allows her to acknowledge the importance of the rise of other Chicana/Latina artists/academics like Anzaldúa and Moraga—an act that is not only political but also a matter of good marketing. Cisneros's account of her relationship with education helps to bridge some of the conceptual gaps between the story of the rise of MFA program literature and the illustration of the kind of practical relationship between artistic/professional life that has developed for Chicana writers like Anzaldúa, Moraga, Castillo, and herself.

Like Cisneros, Castillo remarks that she finds herself in a teaching position by "happenstance" and because of practical need. In *Black Dove*, Castillo notes that during her first marriage, which lasted a few years in her early career and from which she mothered a son, she taught part-time so that she would still have time to write (266). After her separation, she struggles to support herself and her son, working multiple part-time jobs, which include "teaching creative writing residencies" that "caused a lot of moving" (144). Castillo, though a celebrated writer/artist in her own right, depends even more extensively on university work well into her writing career.[10] Notably, unlike Cisneros—a veritable open book throughout her career—Castillo is more reluctant to bring her personal experiences into her representation of social/educational/literary relations: the revelations in *Black Dove* are shared thirty-two years after her first major publication and 22 years after her first book of nonfiction, *Massacre of the Dreamers*. In Castillo's work, we find a direct connection to the work of Anzaldúa and Moraga:

[10] Castillo is still active in the university with workshops, guest lecturing, and residencies.

while working on 1988's *My Father Was a Toltec*, she also co-edits and contributes new material to a Spanish language edition of *This Bridge Called My Back*, *Esta Puente, Mi Espalda*, which is released the same year.[11] In *Dreamers*, one might expect a continuation of the legacy of the *Bridge* project or writing akin to the autobiographical elements of *Borderlands* or *Loving in the War Years*—two works that while distinct share a kinship in the content, impetus, and sense of hybridity. Castillo's essay collection *does* have commonalities to these previous works, but, if Anzaldúa's and Moraga's early work feel like sister pieces, *Dreamers* feels like a distant cousin.[12] There is a fundamental difference in both the depth of Castillo's personal observations and her critique.[13] In regard to the role of personal observation in relation to claims based on other forms of support, such as data from research, Castillo writes in the introduction:

> Women in the United States who are politically self-described as Chicana, mestiza in terms of race, Latina or Hispanic in regard to their Spanish-speaking heritage, and who number in the tens of millions in the United States, cannot be summarized nor neatly categorized. I have applied my ideas as broadly as possible, ever mindful that at the same time they are my own reflections. Because the critical essay format demands it, where possible I have attempted to corroborate some of my ideas with data from a variety of resources, from U.S. Census Bureau reports to ethnographic studies. (1).

[11] *Esta Puenta, Mi Espalda* also cuts many pieces of writing from the original and, as a result, doesn't have the same kind of coalitional impact.

[12] Throughout *Dreamers* are critiques of colonialism, US imperialism, and globalization; concerns with Latina/Chicana issues of gender, race, sexuality and class within Latino/Chicano culture and the US as a whole; and claims for a recovery of indigeneity.

[13] Castillo is inclined toward broad claims that she, at time, supports with unsound information. The most egregious of which is perhaps in her account of the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional that she adds in the book's 2014 edition. She emphatically reinforces the myth that the EZLN was from inception dedicated to unarmed "peaceful" protest, which is convenient for supporting her longstanding critique of what she sees as Leftist politics' disregard of women's lives in hailing for revolution (233). Castillo sees women as caught in the crossfire, or, worse, as pawns, of any kind of political movement she might deem militant, as "[i]n [her] opinion, women do not want to take up arms against soldier, police, or anybody" (106).

Castillo's methodology is not completely alien from other writings of this study: Moraga, for example, makes a similar assertion in the introduction of *A Xicana Codex of Changing Consciousness* (2011). As well, most writers make claims to some degree of generality: like Richard Rodriguez's appeal to the universality of experience in *Hunger of Memory* (1982). Of course, in each author's case, a balancing act must occur between making an appeal from the uniqueness of one's experience and the breadth of humanity to which one's experience may apply. This is especially true in the case of the critical essay, for while it is not necessarily rooted in personal experience, many writers, like Anzaldúa and Moraga, choose to emphasize their lived experience as members of groups that have been historically denigrated. Speaking one's truth, as they say, can be a means for the writer to claim authority on subjects personal to them *and* to claim space for representative groups in the public space of writing. For feminist writers and activists, there is also significance in legitimizing the personal as political as a means of rejecting gendered dichotomies of the private and public spheres. Castillo seems to root her "ideas" in personal observation, acknowledging that they are her "own reflections," but ironically, what makes *Dreamers* unique as a Latinx/Chicanx feminist book of essays from the mid-nineties—revised in 2014—is that the author largely refrains from exploring the subjects of her essays through the lens of her own lived experience.[14] In other words, while Castillo's voicing is personal, she resists extended excavation of her private life in the collection.

The book's origin may give some clue to its voicing. In *Black Dove*, Castillo compares its reception to that of her 2007 novel, *The Guardians*, which centers around immigration issues:

> "Similarly, *Massacre of the Dreamers*, my book of critical essays on Xicanisma, which was published by a university press and for which I received a doctorate and, later,

[14] I still regard *Dreamers* as self-writing because of Castillo's persistence in relating her arguments to her own lived understanding even if she lacks detail.

> an honorary doctorate, provoked hostility. Getting it published had been difficult. I think it was because I wrote from the gut. For a long time, women of color in this country from modest backgrounds weren't supposed to be seen or heard. They were only meant to keep the assembly lines running without complaint, like my beautiful indigenous mamá did. (222-223)

Dreamers may come from a place of personal passion, but it is directly rooted in the sphere of educated practice as an academic text. The difference with *Bridge* is that it has academic ties but is rooted in the para-academic activist/artist sphere. Then there is the intent—the broadness that Castillo is trying to cover. As a result, much of the tension that we find in Anzaldúa and Moraga's work—particularly in their rejections of the institution of higher education as highly educated subjects—is not as immediately evident.

The essay "The 1986 Watsonville Women's Strike: A Case of Mexicana/Chicana Activism," which works as the second chapter of the book, is one of the sections that focus on Castillo's thoughts on inequitable educational access across class and ethnicity. Castillo provides context for the interview that serves as the source material for the essay:

> My interest in Watsonville was first catalyzed with a visit there in 1987 when I cofacilitated a twelve-hour-long writing workshop one Saturday. The workshop was sponsored by the local city college and the participants received credit. It was organized by a Chicana who worked at the college and also participated. All the women who attended, about a dozen, among them many activists, were Chicanas, with the exception of one Native American woman—married to a Mexican and part of the Chicano community of Watsonville. (42)

Curiously, Castillo's use of first-person voice to insert herself into the scene on the page is more prominent here than in most of the essays in the collection, but this framing is more of a function of the ethnographic point of view than a tool of critical self-reflection. Castillo employs a reportative tone that one might find in an administrative report or application document: it is descriptive and engaged without being *too* engaged. The speaker is an active observer, but an outside observer, nonetheless. The resulting style is not artfully disinterested like Rodriguez's nor passionately personal like Anzaldúa or Moraga's but professionally academic. The possible benefit of Castillo's ethnographic positioning, the first-person voice working as an interlocutor between the reader and the respondents, is that it could enable her to speak on higher education from a different vantage point than if she were to just speak of her own experience.

Castillo presents the essay as an account of the interview as an event, told through her observations and interpretations that she emphasizes with excerpts from the original interview translated into English. Interestingly, a fuller version of the untranslated question-and-answer session is published in *Esta Puente, Mi Espalda* as one of the new additions to the project with no editorializing except a brief introductory paragraph. In *Dreamers*, Castillo's discussion of the interview further contextualizes the Watsonville labor strike in terms of trends in US labor exploitation of Latinos and Latinas. [15] The author's additional analysis attempts to illustrate "how labor activism among women catalyzed conscientización by showing how the economic inequities that pervaded their working lives were specifically related to race and gender" (41).

Although Castillo utilizes aspects of academic ethnography and seems to want to draw empirical conclusions, she relies heavily on general observation and insight, which creates a

[15] In the 2014 edition, Castillo rounds out the international scope of these issues with updates on the implementation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and im/migration "reform" since the mid-90's.

dissonance between methodology and form. This dissonance reflects the conflict between the empirical and intuitive imperatives that Castillo outlines later in the book:

> Throughout Western history two schools of thought have rivaled each other to help society make meaning: the rational and the intuitive. The first relies on the premise that an individual can be detached from his subject and can make empirical conclusions based on measures, qualification, and linear deductions. The subject is objectified and the investigator maintains the position of being detached. Intuitive thought (the realm of the poet) is associated with mysticism and is devalued by Western culture…Intuition in scientific and academic research is often referred to as a "hunch" but is only convincing when qualified by external measurements. (220)

This outlook echoes Anzaldúa and Moraga, and we see accounts of this general intellectual history in recent academic projects that examine the history of Chicano/a studies and the university, like that of Michael Soldatenko and John Alba Cutler. For Castillo, precisely, the conflict over what is considered legitimate modes of knowledge-making is more of an issue between artistic and scientific knowledge: the former is disparaged while the latter is prized in institutionalized western thought. Consequently, there appears to be compartmentalization in Castillo's thinking between work that employs anthropological/ethnographic tools and work of creative nonfiction. Perhaps the reason that Castillo does not mention or notice a conflict of interest between her critique and use of institutionalized knowledge is that the Watsonville essay is framed as an academic exercise—even if only loosely anthropological—rather than as art. Still, Castillo seems to prize intuitional insight, whether hers or the interviewees', over any methodological rigor despite the almost clinical opening paragraphs and the overdetermined nature of her claims.

Regarding the women in the workshop, Castillo vaguely informs that "their education ranged from junior college to postgraduate work" (42). In the interview itself, only four of the women from the group, Cruz Gómez, Gabriela Gutiérrez, Shirley Muñoz-Flores, and María Pérez, speak: the other women are present but serve more as a supporting chorus. The subject of education weaves in and out of the original interview—as the women share some of their experiences and observations—and Castillo's essay—as she builds her claims. Castillo presents the outlook of Shirley Muñoz-Perez, one of the interviewees:

> In this society you have to have at least four distinct things before you can obtain an education: You have to be oriented within your family that tells you that education is good. Second, you have to have freedom: freedom from child care, other such responsibilities, mobility. . .. Another thing you must have are the abilities—your parents must help you through that system. It isn't an easy system to enter [financially]. The other thing that you must be is comfortable in that environment. (46)

To this astute commentary, Castillo adds her own summary of the women's experiences with education:

> Moreover, education for the most part and for the large majority of these respondents had not been seen by their families as a necessity toward the improvement of the family as a whole. It presents an odd juxtaposition for the activista. (On the one hand, working for the benefit of a larger community is not always approved of; on the other hand, it is okay for her to work tirelessly for the benefit of her nuclear and even, extended family.) (46-47)

Castillo notes that this is "unfortunate" because women too have been wage earners—the implicit line of reasoning is that better education leads to better wages to better support the

family. What is confusing about Castillo's statements is that in the original interview, there does not seem to be enough evidence to make such a summary statement of the women's families' outlooks on education. We know the following: Muñoz-Flores, at one point, states that she has had to demand support from her husband to receive it; Gómez implies that she left her husband and is estranged from her parents because of her education and/or her activism; and three of the four speaking respondents indicate that their families' material circumstances were obstacles to earning college degrees, but none, besides Gómez, explicitly state that their family was not supportive.[16]

Castillo also leaves out small, but potentially crucial details from Muñoz-Flores's statement. First, the interviewee is responding to Castillo's question: "¿Estudiar en la universidad era algo que se esperaba de ti?" (214) [*Was studying at university something that was expected of you?*][17]. Second, her response begins:

> No. Yo tuve que escogerlo para mí misma. Yo creo que mis padres veían la educación como un valor y la querían para mí, pero eso no es suficiente. En esta sociedad tienes que tener por lo menos cinco distintas cosas antes de que puedas obtener una educación…" (214).[18]
>
> *[No. I had to choose it for myself. I believe that my parents saw education as a value and wanted it for me, but that is not enough. In this society you have to have at least five distinct things before you can obtain an education…]*

[16] The experience of the remaining named correspondent, Gabriela Gutiérrez, is not represented here as it is the least documented because she was unable to finish the interview.
[17] All bracketed translations are my own.
[18] The discrepancy between "cinco distintas cosas" as quoted in *Esta Puente* and the "four distinct things" that Castillo quotes in translation in *Dreamers* seems to be a simple editorial choice, for, even in untranslated version, Muñoz-Flores only articulates a list of four items.

It is odd, to say the least, that Castillo appends her own assumptions—that the women's families were prevalently indifferent toward education—to Muñoz-Flores's words when the activist has indicated that her parents did, in fact, care about her education just a moment before in the original interview. If Castillo is not talking about the four women directly, she could be referring to the general sense she had of the Watsonville women activists present as a group, but, again, she is not specific. In effect, it feels as if Castillo is ventriloquizing her own preconceptions and judgments about Latino/a family culture onto these women's accounts. Perhaps this is an unfair reading. Maybe what Castillo means when she states that the families did not see education as a "necessity" for the betterment of the family is not that they were indifferent, but that the families did not elevate education to the same level of importance as life and death needs, like food, shelter, water, etc. Then, this observation would seem inherently true, as the women suggest that educational attainment for them was a personal endeavor rather than one of primary importance to their families. In other words, the Watsonville families relegated education to a lower order of importance because of the practical necessities of survival like so many other working-class families. In this case, the phenomenon that Castillo witnesses is not one of cultural value so much as the effects of material inequity, an assessment of which could provide valuable insight to address the needs of underserved people, perhaps especially those in proximity to the place and time of her study. As is, though, the structure of her claims draws her argument unsettlingly close to theories of "cultural poverty," which could lead to the conclusion that if socioeconomically disadvantaged families only prioritized education more highly, then education would become more attainable.[19]

[19] Karin Alejandra Rosemblatt provides a brief but well supported history and critique of the "cultural poverty"—its origination with Oscar Lewis and subsequent widespread use in the US— in "Other Americas: Transnationalism, Scholarship, and the Culture of Poverty in Mexico and the United States."

Instead of exploring and/or presenting the specificities of Watsonville women, Castillo is more concerned with reconstituting their viewpoints to present their account as 1) proof that Chicano/a families do not support education and 2) as a Freirean model for social change. For example, Castillo reinterprets Muñoz-Flores's list of essentials for education attainment a second time, stating that schooling is not easy for "the impoverished women of color" because:

> First and foremost she must feel that she is educatable—that she can learn, that she may be a valuable contributor to society as a result. In other words, that she is worthy of such a luxury as formal schooling. If [she] does not receive encouragement…from home, but…[from] an outside influence—a scholarship or a mentor within the institution—she must also contend with the other obstacles. If she is already a mother, who will care for her children while she goes to class and when she needs to study? If she must work to support her family, where does she find the time for all the responsibilities? (47-48)

By systematizing Muñoz-Flores's observations, which themselves resist being broken down neatly into cultural versus material elements, into a two-tier process of feeling worthy and overcoming material obstacles, Castillo emphasizes feeling and cultural outlook as starting points for educational change. The other side to this feeling of worth is the feeling of inequity, the adverse effects of discrimination. Castillo, in seeming agreement with the respondents, applies the term "conscientización" to the process by which one comes to understand these feelings and take positive action.[20] According to Castillo, this understanding of process becomes point zero for the dialogue between Castillo and the Watsonville women:

[20] Castillo primarily draws from Paolo Freire, but cites Anzaldúa as well.

> At the start of our discussion, it was first established that a woman without conscientización nevertheless perceived certain societal discrimination directed at *her*. With conscientización, she began a deliberate process of questioning this discrimination, but she might not yet know how to grapple with its effects. With deliberate orientation toward conscientización—which might come by way of higher education or the unusual experience of some social/political catalyst (such as the Watsonville Strike, … the Chicano movement of the 1970s, or through a personal deliberate effort to seek help from other women), she might find she had no other recourse but to finally take radical action. (43)

Castillo's focus on modeling flattens the nuance of the women's perspectives expressed in the interview. For instance, while Castillo uses "discrimination" generally in her description of conscientización, she is generally preoccupied with gender discrimination in her essay. She omits the complex observations and analysis of the multifaceted nature of discrimination that the interviewees make throughout the conversation. When "discrimination," by name, comes up in the interview, Cruz Gomez is responding to the question of why im/migrant Mexican families often change drastically within one generation, stating: "Es una discriminación que a veces no se entiende claramente o no se ve, pero se siente. Casi la mayoría te puede decir, en algún tiempo cuando tu llegas a tener comunicación con ellos, que sienten esa discriminación." (210) [*It is a discrimination that sometimes is not clearly understood or is not seen, but is felt. Almost all can tell you, at some point when you come to have communication with them, that they feel that discrimination*]. For Gomez, this sense of all-permeating discrimination leads to self-doubt, the belief that "Bueno, tengo que cambiar, yo no soy bastante bueno" [*"Well, I have to change, I'm not good enough"*], which they pass on to their children (210). Their children, in turn, carry that

belief to school, where they—feeling the burden of discrimination as well but also seeing more closely that others have material wealth—begin to equate self-worth with material possessions in a sort of "discriminación internalizada" [*internalized discrimination*] (210).

Gabriela Gutiérrez then complicates Gomez's statement, adding: "Pero eso ya existe…en México, tambíen" [*But that already exists…in Mexico, too*] (210). According to Gutiérrez, Mexican folk "se desvive por" [go out of their way for] any foreigner coming to Mexico because of internalized discrimination (210). Gutiérrez offers her observations as a counselor and bilingual teacher as a counter example: "[N]iños…los que han estado con maestras mexicanas la mayor parte del tiempo y los que han sido tratados bien y que han tenido un programa de educación bilingüe bien implementado…tienen la autoestimación de lo que son y sus modelos…" [*Children…who have been with Mexican teachers most of the time and those who have been treated well and who have had a well-implemented bilingual education program…have the self-esteem of who they are and their role models*] (211). What Castillo misses by omission is Gomez's sense of the pervasive quality of discrimination—how it might connect to (US)American obsessions with meritocracy and consumer materialism—and Gutiérrez's insistence on problematizing the dichotomy of (US)American/Mexican experience—an intellectual move that could yield analysis of the intricate entrenchment of US branded capitalism across the border. In any case, this exchange is but one example of the many instances where the Watsonville women resist facile discourse as they try to get at the insidious quality of class and racial oppression—that oppression is malleable to fit the specific environmental sociocultural history shapes current conditions.

Ultimately, the essay tells us less about the lived experiences and beliefs of the Watsonville women and more about Castillo's own personal observations on Latina experiences

with higher education and activism more generally, which she summarizes in her essay on the incongruities and failures of Marxism and Catholicism in el Movimiento. In "Saintly Mother and Soldier's Whore: the Leftist/Catholic Paradigm," Castillo chronicles:

> While cultural pride remained, the Latino movement's leftist collective zeal was subdued. Throughout the Reagan era…it was no small feat for us to remain steadfastly dedicated to our own work, and it was during that decade that a visible Chicana feminist consciousness emerged…Oftentimes, we had our own families to support. Academic pursuits may have required finding government grants, loans, or scholarships. By and large, we did not identify with the white woman's movement and…We continued to experience social and religious constraints in our roles as daughters, lovers, and mothers. In addition, women sometimes had to live with alcoholism, drugs, and physical and mental abuse: there were no resources and no recourse but to manage however we might. Strength was garnered from our conscientización and motivated us onward. (100)

Castillo's reflection, given in the first-person plural, echoes the Bridge project's previous expression of the fraught nature of spaces of activism, academia, and art—individually and in relation to one another—for women of color. The narratives of the Watsonville women may very well fit into Castillo's broad depiction of this era of Chicana feminism, but Castillo's account of their ideas does not provide the specificity of their experiences or ideas that would allow the reader to assess if this is so. Instead, Castillo merely provides another summary of her own intuitive account of this era of activism, which feels especially strange as Castillo's self-intuitive sense does not match her tendency toward empirically leaning description in the essay. Further complicating these pecadillos, Castillo rewrites the experiential intuition of the interviewed women to match her intuition. It is disappointing that Castillo does not accord more faith in the

intuitions of the women, which would allow for a richer account and intersectional investigation of that moment in labor, gender, and racial history that might give us a richer portrait than Castillo's depiction of the Watsonville activist's story as a formula for how one goes from oppression to conscientización to resistance.

That is not to say that this is *all* that Castillo's essay is doing, but her ethnographic academic voice, especially in establishing the parameters for the essay, leans in the direction of tidiness with the sense that these ideas can be easily represented in an essay. For example, we have Castillo's statement:

> …the awareness achieved by the organizing success of the strike of 1986—a pragmatic learning process in itself—caused some of the women to understand how all of these issues interrelated and how they, as mexicanas, were not given consideration by U.S. society. (50)

This depiction of clean and clear progress toward social consciousness fails to reflect the particularities of the women's voices in the interview, not to mention the larger group of women not even present at the meeting. Castillo, in the same neat fashion, summarizes:

> The principal lessons the Watsonville women strikers learned was that there was no separation between their private and their public worlds, from their wage-earning world and their world of kitchens and bedrooms, from their pregnancies and their priests, from the education they never had and from the education their children might never receive. 55-56

I find it remarkable that Castillo can delineate a "principal lesson" of "the Watsonville women strikers" from the material of the short, semi-casual interview with only a few participants when the participants themselves make no such overarching claims. Castillo may not be wholly

incorrect, but the material she is drawing from does not match the scope of the specific conclusions that she is making about these women's particular experiences. Part of the issue may be the pull of the ethnographic lens toward tangible findings—that the ethnographer may feel the need for definitive interpretation and conclusion for their writings to be taken seriously.

In this sense, perhaps Castillo's rhetorical performance is one of overcompensation for writing in an academic space that she feels is antagonistic to her subject.[21] "Overcompensation" may sound patronizing because it tends to imply that the actor is inherently lacking and attempting to make up for said lacking, but that does not need to be the case. There simply needs to be the chance for one to be perceived as lacking, the author then acting to counter this perception. In Castillo's case, for example, she shows critical acumen elsewhere in dealing with subjects of race and class and has cross-disciplinary academic training from her graduate studies. In the last essay of the collection, "Resurrection of the Dreamers," for example, Castillo's understanding of academic legibility and legitimacy for Latina/o scholars sheds light on the context of her semi-academic work in *Dreamers*:

> The National Association of Chicano and Chicana Studies (NACCS) has been in existence for more than forty years…However, Chicano Studies remains a field largely unrecognized by universities throughout the United States, as is evident by the cutting of the few ethnic studies programs. Unlike other scholarly associations whose members clearly participate solely out of professional interest, membership, which includes many students, is largely comprised of Chicanas and Chicanos. In these gatherings, participants

[21] This is akin to other acts of possible overcompensation we have seen in this such as Rodriguez's rhetorical performance and that same author and Navarrette's witnessing of acts that they perceive as overcompensation in some their Latino/a peers.

> are engaged as much in the polemic of self-identification as an intellectual dialogue on the discipline. (224)

NACCS, while not the singular major Chicano Studies organization, is large, old, and well known enough for Castillo to make observations that suggest trends in Chicano/a studies on a larger scale. The struggle for recognition and the precarious standing of Chicano/a Studies as a discipline is, of course, observed by every other scholar studying the past and present of the field.

Castillo continues to expand her brief overview by shifting focus to Latina scholars/activists:

> By entering academia, one may argue, women can participate in social change. This has been the philosophy of the scholars and students who participate in MALCS (Mujeres Activas en Letras y Cambio Social)…founded in 1981 [and] dedicated to Latinas in academia. Its annual summer meeting serves to further educate and connect people in academia in need of affirmation and scholarly exchange. MALCS has grown from a mostly nationalist Chicana constituency based in California to a feminist membership, which holds its annual institute throughout the United States. (224)

Again, the relationship between the desire for social change and the efficacy of action for social change by means of institutions is complicated: it is not simply a given that working through education effects change, but, in Castillo's words, "one can argue" for it to be so. Castillo is also perceptive to the identity politics of such organizations, holding the affirmational aspects of cultural identification in positive regard. Castillo's thoughts on NACCS s suggest that identity politics is both part of what holds the organization together as well as what holds it back. To Castillo, MALCS can harness cultural identity more positively because "[i]ts willingness to

allow for self-evaluation (an inherent quality of Xicanisma) has helped it to endure and expand" (224). If Castillo's vision of Xicana/Chicana consciousness inherently holds some inoculation against nationalism and various forms of essentialist toxicity, it is indebted to Third World women's movement and indigenista and indigenous associating political movements.

Even so, whatever power this inoculation holds, it may not be enough to thwart the machinations of academia, as Castillo is aware of the possibility that the efficacy of academic activism may be, after all, a (useful) fiction for academics of color aspiring to "make a difference." For one thing, there is the experience of grad school itself:

> By the time a Xicanista earns her doctorate, she is well versed in Western philosophy and letters, having succeeded in a rigorous program under mostly white tutelage in an androcentric context. She may be jaded by the competition as well as by the experience of being courted for being Chicana, and then often "dropped" for being Chicana by administrators and faculty. (224)

Here are familiar themes of institutional motive—that the academy's function is to reify Western thought—and tokenism—the failure/harm of lip-service-diversity politics. For another, there is the professional world of Academia:

> Any ambitious Chicana who joins the institution and is in a position in which she may determine the acceptance of another Chicana knows full well that she too, may end up applying a divisive strategy of her own. It comes with the territory. And while this new territory is conquered, the territory of indigenista philosophy (which does not see the world in hierarchical terms of power) once compromised, is forsaken. (224)

For Castillo, these systems of competition and rejection can drive the otherwise inoculated Chicana to betray what the author herself believes to be inherent Xicanista values. According to

Castillo, it is all too easy for the aspiring Latina scholar to buy into the idea of meritocracy after years of hard work, and "even if she has convinced herself that she will beat [the university] at its own game," she must still play by its rules (224).

As for the scholarship itself, Castillo writes:

> Sometimes such studies serve to change policy. Sometimes they persuade people in power to do something. But in day-to-day terms the motivation for this kind of work may be career based. I am certain that many a woman has asked herself about the probable ineffectiveness of her "feminism" within hierarchical academia. (224)

What is interesting about Castillo's observations on competition between Latino/a students and scholars and what some might call "selling out" is how it compares to other accounts of competition featured in writings covered in previous chapters. In the cases of male authors Rodriguez, Troncoso, and Navarrette, much of what they explicitly say about competition is in terms of that between white and non-white students. The theme of competition *is* vividly present in Rodriguez and Navarrette in the subtext of their work, but they give less regard to the economy of institutional resources. Navarrette, for example, discusses the stress of intellectual competition overall and between Latino/a students, but, for him, the jockeying of the students becomes a matter of elitist institutional culture rather than material circumstance. Troncoso is less concerned with competition and focused on the message that one should share one's intellectual and professional resources with others as one gains privilege. Similarly, Anzaldúa and Moraga champion collectivity, especially in their early work—this is at the core of their *Bridge* project. Anzaldúa goes on to comment on infighting within women of color activist/scholar groups in her later work and encourages an *almost* post-racial strategy for working together.

Castillo's observations on Latina academia, both on the student and career level, in this essay come closest to Moraga's mezcla of pessimism and hopefulness, for her critique is not precisely a repudiation or total disparaging of the role one can play from within academia. It is instead a warning against complacency in academia. Castillo writes:

> In order to be a viable alternative to stratified society, Xicanisma cannot be elitist. It is not a woman-identified ideology mirroring patriarchy, a grab for material power when white people or men are not looking. It is not free from the consequences of its actions. (224)

Even though Castillo once again draws from the supposed inherent qualities of Xicanisma, she refrains from making claims to or calls for ethnic authenticity: "selling out" is not an issue of not "staying true" to one's culture so much as it is an issue of social responsibility for Latino/a/x scholars. The premise that the shared desire for Xicanisma is for an equitable society—one free of supremacy and oppression—sets Xicana ideology apart from both some strains of old-school Chicano nationalism and some of white feminism. For Castillo, Xicanisma is not just a path forward for Chicanas or Latinas but a means to achieve the goals of the Chicano/a studies movement that have remained unmet since its inception. Despite the sliver of hope that such politics might offer, Castillo also refrains from sugar coating the contemporary landscape of Latinx education, stating:

> It's an arduous climb to be sure. Most of the schools we attend in heavily Mexican populated areas from preschool to college are vastly deficient in supplies and staff. Curriculum that is relevant to our reality by teachers who are also from our communities still is largely absent in the educational system throughout the United States at all levels, in both public and private institutions. And if there are not enough qualified

> educators to fill the occasional slots allotted for a person of color it is because the educational process is often hostile to his or her needs. (224-225)

At each point in her critique of institutional education, Castillo accounts for the material aspects of educational access and support rather than lamenting the supposed cultural shortcomings of Latino/a families. Castillo may still be painting in broad strokes here, but the picture feels more honest than the Watsonville essay because the writer's insights are less obfuscated by a need for semi-empirical validation.

Decades later, in 2016's deeply personal collection *Black Dove*, we find Castillo revisiting the subject of Latino/a higher education. The collection marks a shift in genre to personal essays that follow a chronological life narrative akin to the popular memoir form, which allows Castillo to engage with higher education on a personal register. For Castillo, the memoir helps her realize the message she began in *Dreamers* regarding education and the attendant fluctuation between hope/optimism and critical pessimism. In the introduction, the author recounts:

> In public schools, I grew up without a single Latino instructor with whom to identify; indeed, I had none in college. The Latino student organization I participated in demanded a Chicano instructor and we finally prevailed in my last year, welcoming a young ABD sociologist not much older than those of us he'd teach. And yes, having that changed my life. What I heard in his class left me astounded and affirmed. (2-3)

This excerpt echoes what Castillo has previously written of education—that Latinos/as suffer from a lack of exposure to and support for higher education, that there are Latino/a students and teachers actively trying to change this, and that exposure can make a profound difference on a personal level.

She also returns to the question about a lack of Latina/Chicana academic support at home. Castillo expresses her desire for her mother, in particular, to understand her growth as a thinker and artist. In "Peel Me a Girl," she writes of remembering that her parents gifted her an easel for Christmas in her late teens, indicating that at least *some* care was given to her early steps as an artist, but continues: "… I don't know that any of my writing, which I started as a child, ever interested her. Designing and sewing appealed to me, and she helped at home but offered no support with regards to the classes I sent myself to at the Art Institute of Chicago" (83). It is not that her mother was against her endeavors, but that she held different interests; as Castillo states, "She had another daughter in whom, I think, Mamá invested her own lost dreams, and who was much more like her" (83). Nevertheless, the result is a lack of support which Castillo makes up for with self-determination.

Even in moments when Castillo's narrative does, like Cisneros, readily rehearse the trope of the self-made artist/intellectual, it would be a mistake to label it as mere exceptionalist glorification. I read Castillo's acts of self-creation as an exploration of provisional adaptations that one must often make to navigate culturally oppressive spaces. For instance, in this same chapter, Castillo echoes *Toltec*'s 1995 introduction but gives a more detailed impression of her early college years at the City Colleges of Chicago:

> When I'm asked about training as a writer, I've always said I never took a class, and I never have. I just started writing and it got out of control. At eighteen I left office work and, without support from anyone to do so, I signed up for community college downtown…I probably would have continued as a file clerk if it hadn't been that the boss suddenly hired a white girl, the daughter of an associate. He didn't need two clerks, so he let me go. English 101 was a degree requirement…[and] the class was taught not by a

> professor but by a newspaperman who ran it like a journalism course. He assigned essays written to elicit a particular emotion. The professor journalist often held court with a semicircle of young, white, male aspiring writers around him. (69)

Castillo's distinction between writing as an art form and as a perfunctory exercise in proficiency is not so subtly implied, and it is critical for understanding the author's perception of the relationship between her writing and academic training and between her fiction and nonfiction work. By "training," Castillo undoubtedly means formal education in the arts of literary writing, such as a writers' workshop or an MFA program: the community college freshman composition course does not count as training, as neither does subsequent college-level writing. The further designation of the instructor as a "newspaperman" connotes almost a disdain for the "professional" writer as the label, in this instance, works in relief of the absence of the "artist" writer in the classroom. I say almost because the condescension does not work entirely on its own but in conjunction with Castillo's articulations of racial and social displacement: her description of her replacement in the office and the writer-bro clique's presumably exclusionary proximity to the would-be professor. In other words, much like Cisneros, her sense of uniqueness is born out of alienation.

Castillo further details her time in the course, comparing the positive and negative receptions of two writing assignments that she presented to the class. Of the first, she describes:

> …I wrote about a kid from my neighborhood named Ricky. Ricky walked with a gimp. He came from a big family. Something was off about him. He wasn't in school and he wandered about the neighborhood all the time. Sometimes, despite the fact that I wouldn't speak to him, he'd walk alongside me having a one-sided conversation. He was small for his age and always disheveled. One time he got locked up at county jail. The

next day he was found hanging by a sheet in his cell. I read the essay and, as I'd hoped, the class was moved by the story of this neglected young man who took his own life. (69)

The depiction of the outcast youth from the quintessential old neighborhood—you could easily picture him in Cisneros's *Mango Street*—serves as a canny example of the simple "human interest" piece: the kind manufactured to elicit knee-jerk sympathy often while offering little critical substance. The brisk, descriptive packing and phrasing of the summary of this bit of reportage tracks with Castillo's portrayal of the journalistic inclinations of the course/instructor. These moves are made so craftily that the reader must take pause at the notion that these sorts of writing experiences had no relevance to the author's development as a writer. Castillo's claim of self-tutelage in this section is a claim of/to cultural capital—she is identifying herself as from an outsider class while declaring her ability. This is a rhetorical wink: she never belonged to the college classroom, but still knows the tricks of writing—whatever the community college composition teacher knew—and, more importantly, *good* writing—which said teacher, in her estimation, probably did not. She makes claim to the "writerly," but on her terms. Castillo is quite aware that the early college experience, not to mention her doctoral training, *was* a sort of training. Learning to write in various forms, both artistic and/or functional, is not a matter of discrete units of instructional input and applicational output. Neither is form a matter of singular categorical classification: Castillo's body of work shows this much.

Castillo spends more time setting the scene for the presentation of the second assignment, giving the reader a glimpse into her day-to-day school life:

> Community college was set up like my high school in that a bell rang to let you know it was time for class and the second bell said class must begin. The professor gave us orders that upon the second bell the door was closed, and if you showed up after that

> you were not welcome. The day it was my turn to read my second essay aloud I reached the classroom to see that the door was closed. My heart pounding, I opened it anyway…
>
> It was probably awkward for him to have me flout his military-style rules—or embarrassing, as it should have been, considering this wasn't a graduate seminar at Princeton in 1958 but an inner-city community college, with drug deals going on openly in the lobby between indisputably shady noncollegiate characters and it was a wonder I made it up to class at all. Keeping out a quiet girl who was turning in all her assignments because she arrived a minute late once might be excessive, even for a smug instructor. He put it to the class who, of course, thought it was okay for me to attend. (69)

In this section of the book, not only does Castillo's stated lack of support for entering college align with her outlook on the Chicana college experience in *Dreamers*, but the characterization of the school itself in *Black Dove* correlates with the "less than" status of community colleges she previously delineates as the kinds of institutes to which Chicano/a students most commonly have access. The picture that Castillo sketches of her community college is that of an extension of the archetypal underfunded, underserved urban high school of the 80's/90's—the future targets of dubious DARE's "just say no" programs—rather than prestigious halls of ivory towers. Castillo does not linger in this gaze of impoverishment—as one might imagine her original Ricky story might—but employs a sober eye that is also sensitive to her feeling in the moment. The illustration is neither a cry for sympathy for her meager beginnings nor wonder at her achievement despite such a start. It seems more like a statement: *this* was the state of things; *this* is what I felt. Castillo's cartooning of the instructor *and* mid-century—read white, male—Ivy League in relation to one another also suggests that she is not looking to academic elitism to transform education.

One might notice that gender, which has thus far simmered through Castillo's account of community college, starts to bring to a boil as she brings focus to her "girl"-ness. In this instance, Castillo's gender seems to work in her favor as her peers find mercy for this suitably feminine figure—the mousy girl whose only sin is tardiness—in comparison to the figure of the lion-ish male authority—even as it crouches itself in the shadow of faux democratic posturing. This classroom compassion does not follow to the subject of Castillo's second essay, "Teresa, a beautiful, insane lady who wandered [the] neighborhood…throwing herself at men, all wobbling flesh in a too-small bikini" (70). Castillo recalls the instructor's response at seeing the class's negative reaction:

> "Ah!" the professor said with a certain satisfaction after my less-than-triumphant performance. "So! She [meaning me] disappointed you!" It wasn't a workshop. There was no way for us to discuss how a sexual woman gets labeled a tramp and, therefore, not worthy of empathy. (70)

The narrativization of the receptions becomes a minor case study for the limits of facile compassion. What is fascinating about Castillo's craft here is how she succinctly laces emotional oscillations through the few paragraphs leading up to the reading and the fallout from the performance: there is the threat of masculine gendered space of the classroom, the positive reception of the first piece, the rising panic of opening the closed doors, the momentary respite in the vote in Castillo's favor, and ultimately the letdown of the second reception. From here, Castillo leans into her own sense of physicality at the time:

> Since fifteen when I bloomed I was holding at 36-24-36. Just like my eclectic taste in music, my fashion sense, too, fluctuated. When I wasn't in pseudo-hippie garb at school, I dressed up. Like a very early Selena, the long hair went up in curls, and hot

pants and vinyl go-go boots came on. With only a part-time job as a salesgirl, I joined a couple of student organizations. (71)

Even though Castillo's description of herself differs in degree from her description of the woman in her essay, her portrayal of the physical aspects of her body and how she exhibits them at the time provides a parallel construction from which the author delves further into her own traumatic experience of sexual assault. While this kind of trauma is beyond the almost typical racial and/or gendered classroom trauma I have covered in this study thus far, sexual assault is a disgustingly common experience for women-identifying students, especially women of color and queer-identifying students.

Castillo narrates the attack:

> One day running up the stairs in the hallway between those obnoxious bell rings that left halls and stairwells immediately vacant, he and I collided. Not much was said. He must've tried at first to kiss me. I don't remember anything about those minutes except we struggled in the stairwell and I ended up on the floor beneath him while he groped and tugged at my clothes. While I fought him off he whispered in Spanish in my ear, "A man will pursue a woman a lifetime until he gets her. He'll have her one way or the other." I don't know how it is that I seem to remember he was thirty-six, twice my age. Of course, I did not report the incident. I got away and that was enough. Even if he had succeeded in raping me, it was a time, similar to today, when such crimes were rarely convicted and in the process, the victim was put through further humiliation. (71)

Castillo does not expressly draw a comparison between herself and the subject of her essay, but the proximity between her presentation of Teresa's characteristics, the essay's reception, her own characteristics, and her assault work together as an indictment of misogyny: from "casual"

misogyny that would refuse compassion for another person if she is a certain "type" of woman to more egregious victim blaming to outright rape and physical harm. Castillo's depiction of the assault, furthermore, highlights the nature of sex crime: it has nothing to do with the target's behavior nor to do with passion or "attraction" and everything to do with domination and control, especially masculine control. Castillo's reasoning for not reporting the assault as well speaks to the fact that the exertion of power does not end with the direct and physical: by connecting this past event, her past, to the contemporary moment, she is disputing the myth of safe spaces because the classroom and the halls around it are in some aspect always already gendered.

And, if there is no safe space even within the generally "progressive" US college campus, then what of writerly spaces? It is understandable then that a woman of color writer would especially feel the need to claim some of that space for her own. Castillo's bid for legitimacy as an artist in *Black Dove* is founded on the idea of something like the "poet's soul"—it is a bid for the inherent nature of the writer similar to Cisneros's and Rodriguez's: there is always an innate aptitude and/or passion for language being molded or enhanced through the lived context of the writers' lives. For Castillo, this essence encompasses both the artistic and the political together. In the short closing section of the book, "Coda," she declares: "I am not a political scientist or a historian, but a poet. Poets are notorious for our grave opinions on the matters of all things. My poet's ideals have led me to run an online zine, La Tolteca, whose motto is promoting the advancement of a world without borders or censorship" (277). The idea of the poet intrinsically connotes the figure of a person with a facility with language, but Castillo implies that political idealism is also essential. We can find this definition of "the poet" threaded throughout Castillo's narrative of her artistic development. Returning to the author's account of community college in "Peel Me a Girl," we read:

> In my first year at the community college, I took only prerequisites. I hadn't committed to a major, whether to become a sociologist and save the world one social ill at a time, or become a painter. All the while, I was writing as I had all my life. Free-form poetry with small i pronouns was popular then as social protest. It was a good outlet for my youthful rage. I admired Amiri Baraka and Nikki Giovanni, whom I'd discovered. Like its art stores, the city's bookstores—new and used—always had a lure for me. College courses were interesting, even if rudimentary, and I enjoyed learning about anything from the Gregorian chants in Humanities 101 to nutrition in Biology 101.
>
> The real reading, however, came on my own. On the bus, I devoured Hermann Hesse, Kurt Vonnegut, Kafka, and, soon, Toni Morrison and Gabriel García Márquez. My nose was pinned to The Last Temptation of Christ in the loud school cafeteria while drug transactions took place, student activists plotted, and newly arrived Americans negotiated with English. (82)

Castillo presents this academic time as crossroads of sorts between pursuing a practical or artistic application of political practice. Undergirding these explorations is still a sense of natural aptitude: Castillo's practice of writing, in some form or other, is almost a given, *and,* like many learned autobiographers, she is predisposed toward the pursuit of knowledge in general, even if the instruction at the time is "rudimentary" to her sensibility. The black poet activists Baraka and Giovanni foreground Castillo's cataloging, which like Cisneros's, is not just a list of influences, but a shorthand journaling of the writer's process of coming into her own understanding of artistic value. This is a process facilitated by the educational space, but it is distinctly the author's self-guided journey of literary experience, especially amidst her school environment, which Castillo again describes as distinctly rough.

Later, in the titular chapter of *Black Dove*, Castillo continues the chronicle of her developing career, sharing that she "made the choice to pursue poetry and, later, prose" when she "was in college studying art" and that "[w]riting and literature became [her] life[,]…[her] own form of activism" (264). Despite her newfound conviction for writing, her experience in art classes leads her to assess:

> Any idea of actually "studying" writing felt like potentially murky ground at best and dangerous at worse…As a brown female—timid, too—I almost always felt overlooked or ignored outright. It was also a time when an ethnic slur by a teacher was acceptable and, if he were tenured, it was futile to complain. In art classes, male instructors were surrounded by male aspiring artists. White girls caught their eyes, too, even if their work did not. (264)

At the core of Castillo's negativity toward creative writing in the classroom are the alienation she felt and the racism and sexism she witnessed as an art student. Intriguingly, Castillo's convictions about the art-making classroom do not seem to hold the same weight for her as they might for the scholarship-focused classroom: in her accounts, she does not exempt wider academia from charges of inequity but is still able to tolerate working through multiple programs as a student then an instructor earning a bachelor, a masters, and a doctorate—indeed, no small feat. Castillo's career path may not hold profound mystery for many fellow artists and/or scholars, for, as she writes:

> I started teaching by happenstance in ethnic studies. By the eighties many of the Latino writers were also making their living through teaching while promoting a literature that had blossomed or, perhaps a better word, erupted out of cultural pride and political commitment.

> The road ahead as a writer was likely to be paved with sheer force of will. There were black activists and writer stars, but US Latinos and Latinas were not being published in the mainstream. A few men—Piri Thomas in the sixties and, at the other extreme of thought and consciousness much later, the essayist Richard Rodriguez—became prominent. But Latinas were not yet considered. (264)

Even though her "choice" is presumably made around the time of her attendance at Northeastern Illinois University in the early to mid-70s, Castillo's commentary here seems to extend to both the breadth of her higher education experience, but also to the general experience of aspiring women of color artists and the state of US Latino/a writers into the eighties. It also serves as another example of the growing trend of literature and the university's entwinement that includes and exceeds the MFA meta-narrative.

Upon first reading *Black Dove*, it would be easy to interpret Castillo's representations of career and education as the boasting of a now accomplished author: *I am a writer because that is who I am, not because I was trained, but because I am a writer at my core. Yet, I can also play the academic.* While there is undoubtedly some boasting at play—especially when Castillo writes of her community college composition class—the heart of the matter is the author's relationship with herself as a "poet," the personal depth in the connection between one's art and politics. Perhaps, therein lies an explanation for Castillo's refusing formal training as a writer even as she pursues training as a professional scholar. It is one thing to have your scholarship demeaned or simply neglected or snubbed for being too personal, too racial, or too political in fields where traditionalist values still often win out over work that seeks social reckoning

through scholarship.[22] For Castillo as an artist, it is possibly another thing to have one's art suffer this familiar injury: Cisneros's story is proof in point. But Castillo still suffers her own alienation, nonetheless.

Is it necessary for the university's continuing symbolic and cultural capital that it remains a trial of hardship for most students? Cisneros and Castillo react to the culture of the school, which is both oppressive and liberating, by employing strategies of survival, from the practical—such as taking on temporary teaching gigs—to the idealistic—such as Cisneros defiance, using her anger to find the "ugliest subjects," and Castillo attempting to keep her artistic writing out of the academic space. When representing their experience in memoiristic writing, each artist rhetorically positions herself as an artist rather than the product of professional education and claims a process of self-making, which too is an act of survival. And while both artists made good from their experience, it does not erase the pain—for them nor other students who do not manage to "make good" in similar situations.

[22] By "traditionalist values," I mean according to the field. This could vary, for example, from literary scholarship that sees "literary" value solely through western aesthetics to sociological scholarship that values only empirical methodology, discrediting qualitative methodologies that seek to disrupt the global imperialism.

CHAPTER 4: Exceptional Subjects: Self-Narratives of Im/migrant Success in the Popular Memoirs of Rigoberto González and Reyna Grande

G. Thomas Couser, writing of what many have called the "memoir boom" of the mid-2000s and the rise of the "nobody memoir"—memoirs of previously unknown people, observes that "[a]s the memoir becomes progressively democratized, professionalized, and novelized, it has great appeal to those studying to become, or starting out as, creative writers. Whereas prose writers' first books used to be autobiographical novels, now they may be novelistic autobiographies" (150).[1] While neither Rigoberto González nor Reyna Grande were nobodies at the time of writing their first book-length autobiographies—*Butterfly Boy: Memories of a Chicano Mariposa* (2006) and *The Distance Between Us: A Memoir* (2012), respectively—both immigrant identifying authors are fairly early in their careers to tell their life-stories: each in their mid-thirties with a few respected but not best-selling books to their name.[2] Both publish their self-writing after MFA programs and do so in the style of what we might loosely call "popular memoir," long-form narrative prose written to a wide rather than particularly academic audience. This is a notable shift in style from the various forms of self-writing that this study has evaluated from the 20th century: essay, poetry, vignette, etc. Navarrete's *Darker Shade of Crimson* may be the closest in form but registers as more journalistic than novelistic in style. Even the work of authors in the 21st century by established elder-writers, Moraga, Castillo, and Cisneros, do not neatly fit this category even if Moraga and Castillo's work does so more than their previous

[1] *Memoir, An Introduction* (2012)

[2] When González publishes Butterfly Boy, he has published one poetry collection, *So Often the Pitcher Goes to Water Until It Breaks* (1999); one novel, *Crossing Vines* (2003); and two children's books, *Soledad Sigh-Sighs/Soledad Suspiros* (2003) and *Antonio's Card/La Tarjeta de Antonio* (2005). When Grande publishes *Distance*, she has published two novels: *Across a Hundred Mountains* (2007) and *Dancing with Butterflies* (2009).

autobiographical writing. I propose that González's first autobiography and Grande's two memoirs—2018's *A Dream Called Home: A Memoir* serves as a direct sequel to *Distance*—will give insight into what the shift toward popular memoir might mean for representations of Latinx higher education, especially regarding immigration.[3] While migration/immigration has been an aspect of Latinx literature at the periphery of this project thus far, this chapter will bring the intersection of immigration and education to the forefront.

Even though González and Grande both identify as first-generation immigrant writers and reflect common characteristics of what sociologist Rubén Rumbaut labels as the "1.5 generation" of immigration, their experiences of immigration vary significantly as González is US-born but raised in Mexico till the age of 10 while Grande is Mexican born and immigrates at the age of 10.[4] In addition, both authors are first-generation college-goers whose families are a significant site of conflict regarding education. In some cases, the family is an obstacle to acquiring an education; in others, it is a source of alienation. Largely as a result of this conflict, both also grapple with themes of assimilation and guilt as each expresses aspirations for upward mobility through education while feeling a sense of responsibility for those left behind. González and Grande, like other writers in this study, experience higher education as simultaneously

[3] For González, I will also draw from some of his many other works of self-writing, but I focus on *Butterfly Boy* because it is most focused on his educational experience and its narrative form is most inclined towards popular memoir: *Autobiography of My Hungers (2013)* is a collection of poetry, prose poetry, and vignettes, *Red-Ink Retablos (2013)* is a collection of personal essays, academic essays, speeches, and hybrid poem-essays that includes autobiographical accounts throughout much of the material, *What Drowns the Flowers in Your Mouth: A Memoir of Brotherhood (2018)* is a collection of prose scenes and episodes that highlight his bond with his brother in adulthood, and *Abuela in Shadow, Abuela in Light: A Memoir* (2022), though also long-form narrative prose, does not cover much in terms of education.

[4] Rumbaut coins the term "1.5 generation" to categorize children born outside of but brought to and raised in the raised in the US in their adolescence as "a distinctive cohort in that many ways they are marginal to both the old and the new worlds and are fully part of neither of them" (61). See "The Agony of Exile: A Study of the Migration and Adaptation of Indochinese Refugee Adults and Children." In many ways both Grande and González would fit such a sociological description although the latter would technically be considered 2nd generation. Neither would fit Nicolás Kanellos's requirements for writing "immigrant literature": which he defines as writing by first generation authors who immigrated as adults and write primarily in their native tongue. See *Hispanic Immigrant Literature* (2011).

liberating and oppressing—an opening of possibility that is also a rupture. For González, as a gay man, this freedom pivots around sexuality; for Grande, it is tied to her sense of self as an immigrant seeking the (US)American dream. I argue that, while these works are important as representations of immigrant experiences in pop Chicano/a memoir, the exceptionality of their narratives complicates reading them as representative of a normative immigrant experience.

In the introduction of *Red-Inked Retablos*, González discusses how he shifts to writing about his own life: he does not stop writing poetry and fiction, but self-writing becomes a significant component of his oeuvre. González notes that it was just after finishing his second MFA—his first is in poetry and the second in fiction—in his "mid-twenties in the mid-1990s when [he] began writing personal essays":

> Creative nonfiction was just beginning to surface as a popular third genre (and the category was as blurred then as it is now, encompassing everything from cultural criticism to memoir). Though I had never been enrolled in a creative nonfiction workshop, I gravitated toward this form that invited me to write about those subjects I was struggling with—my family, my sexuality, my past. (xxi)

González's observation gives insight into the general state of creative non-fiction and his view of self-writing as a process of public self-exploration. For González, this "third genre" of writing, I call it a "mode," becomes the grounds from which he develops what he calls a "mariposa memory" that gives not only "important testimony about coming out and reconfiguring identity in relation to masculinity, culture, and religion" but also "about highlighting values such as education, shaping a sex-positive discourse, and exercising agency through a public voice" (xxii). Mariposa memory "is about making the queer experience a Chicano experience, and a Chicano experience a queer one. It is the affirmation of an intelligent, articulate, confident,

politicized, and proud self" (xxii). By reclaiming the term "mariposa" from its historically pejorative use as Spanish slang for an effeminate gay man, González asserts the validity of queer Chicano identities. The memories that González works through and shares in *Butterfly Boy* represent merely the beginning of this autobiographical work; they are—as he subtitles its first section—"Starting Points, Smarting Points." In many ways, the memoir is about coming to recognize cycles—personal, familial, and, to an extent, social; wrestling with one's place within these cycles; and, even if ever so slightly, adjusting one's positionally toward them. While there is some resolution—perhaps the foundation for what will later become the "affirmation" to which the writer later refers, the book is not exactly a celebratory account of Chicano queerness and/or the social uplift of higher education.

Narratively, González centers the present tense of the memoir around his trip to visit his maternal grandparent's home in Zacapu, Mexico, during summer vacation from the University of California, Riverside, in 1990, but reminisces throughout this account over past scenes of his life as a budding thinker and dreamer in a family to whom hard labor and pragmatism are paramount. While the subject of González's college education permeates the book, there are few explicit references to his day-to-day college life. The moments of detail that the author provides run hand-in-hand with his accounts of his on-again-off-again abusive relationship, which itself is a major subject of the memoir. González describes the scene of the morning after he has broken up with his lover for the penultimate time, the morning he is leaving Riverside:

> We've done all the insulting and humiliating the night before. I accused him of cheating on me and he called me jealous and possessive. Both are true… And somewhere between the slap on the face and the spitting of words we wedged in our soft tongues and the cooing. I cling to the memory of his hairy body grating against my smooth skin, but

> the image suddenly gets swallowed up by the one in which he grabs my hair to make sure I look at him when he swears at me in Spanish. In Spanish our voices are much more violent because the hatred comes from the gut, not from the schools of our adopted second language. (6)

The lines between warm affection and violent attention blur: there is a precarity to any sense of safety in the reminiscence as moments careen from tender to abusive. The notion that "both are true" is not only attributable to the lovers' accusations, but to the sense that a relationship, a person, or even simple matter, can simultaneously hold contradictory impulses or qualities.

González continues by turning to a slightly forensic assessment of the physical remains of the scene:

> I find more clues to the night before: a cleared mantel with a pile of photographed faces to one side of the fireplace; my lover's belt with its buckle looking wide-mouthed in exhaustion; the hastily torn condom packet and the dented tube of K-Y with its cap two inches away like a broken tooth; one of my textbooks with its covers spread apart against the wall. Its ruffled pages make it look like pigeon roadkill. I can't remember if that last object was his act of rage or mine. (6-7)

Evidence of passion, rage, and lust litter the apartment. The textbook, symbolizing González's academic aspirations, may seem, in the first instance, to be a victim of collateral damage, like "roadkill," but, by the end of the passage, González has made clear that it was a targeted act of destruction. The importance of the question—was it the lover or González himself?—is not about who did what but about the ambiguity itself that remains. Maybe it was part of his lover's abuse—an attack on something that González values. Or maybe González's frustration with his lover spilled into frustration with college. That the latter is a possibility, that González may rage

into the night against his schooling, suggests that one can simultaneously value institutional education and be exasperated by it. The textbook's proximity to signs of sexual activity—the condom wrapper and lubrication—connect González's pursuit of education with the possibility of an openly queer life: as a student living on his own in Riverside, he has space open to him that is not while living under his family's roof. His sexuality, closeted from his family until middle age, finds expression in these scenes but not in a celebratory sense of sexual awakening. In previous chapters, I have noted how queer Chicana writers like Anzaldúa, Moraga, and Castillo engage in a sense of the carnal material body, but with González there is more in common with Samuel Delany's adult film theaters or John Rechy's imagery of cum-covered streets, itself hinting at an X-rated Whitmanesque fantasy.[5] González seems to revel in his queer identity while also associating it with a sense of danger and pain.

Though the distance, emotional and physical, from his family enables his open expression of queer identity, it does not follow that the author aligns himself with his academic peers through queer identity. Instead, he draws on his identification to set himself apart, contrasting the bright morning day with the idea that:

> …none of these college kids heading on foot toward the university can even guess the secrets I keep. This makes me want to scream at them. And then a thought strikes me. This morning, with a backpack over my own shoulder, I blend in. I'm one of them. So I continue my trek home as if there is nothing out of place in my head. (8)

It would be easy to slip into psychoanalysis of González's imagined sense of interpolation or non-interpolation as a "college kid," but the vital aspect of this scene is that he conveys the sense of both. His school education consists of the same curriculum as the other "college kids,"

[5] See Samuel Delany's *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue* (1999) and John Rechy's *The Sexual Outlaw: A Documentary* (1977).

evidenced in the destroyed textbook in the previous scene, but his "secret" knowledge harkens to a conceptualization of education that includes a more profound experiential knowing. In González's rendering, there is a similarity to Chicana feminist constructions of education: experience seems a vital aspect of knowledge-making. Unlike those constructions, in González's narrative world, access to this knowledge-making is closed off: it is only the author and, to a minimal degree, a few others who get to share in these secret knowings. For example, the older lover's shared Spanish language serves as a connection to González's familial past—which is itself marked by both abuse and longing. In turn, his sexuality and education—as a first-generation college student—are the prominent factors in his alienation from his family.

González gives glimpses at a liminal space, a borderlands, where only he resides, but the closed-off nature of González's knowledge-making forces him into a mode of passing as one thing or another:

> *How quickly I slip from one world to another*, I think on the bus as it circles around the station en route to Highway 10. In Riverside I'm a college sophomore majoring in the humanities and no one knows I'm involved with an older man who makes love to me as fiercely as he angers me. In Indio I'm the son and grandson of farmworkers who have never once hugged me, but whom I miss terribly, especially when I need to run away from the man who tells me that he loves me, he loves me, he loves me. (9)

To the outside world within his narrative, González must be either a "normie" undergrad, a queer masochistic lover, an abuse victim, or a Mexican son and grandson, and, in turn, González seems untethered from any definitive identity. This is not necessarily a problem, but it leads to a disconnection from aspects of his family and intellectual life that González seems to value. It is only in González's later self-writing that he recoups some of these lost connections: to school

life and a life of learning in his reflections as a teacher and leader in his speeches and essays and to his familial ties, highlighted in but not limited to his memoir of brotherhood.[6]

Even though González's account of his life in Riverside is depicted as tumultuous, it is told with a sense of blasé coolness; it is only when he arrives to join his father in "Indio, California, POP. 36,793"—as the author makes sure to note—that he expresses true trepidation:

> …as my cab pulls into the Fred Young Farm Labor Camp off Van Buren Avenue, my mind switches completely to Spanish and the stress begins to build inside me. This is my grandparents' apartment, but my father stays here through the grape harvest. He spends the rest of the year with his new family in Mexicali, just south of the California border. My younger brother, Alex, who dropped out of high school, is now living that same cycle: México, United States, México, United States, work and rest, work and rest. (12)

It is as the switch is made to Spanish only, son only, that González registers a burden, but of what exactly: a lack of life options? His own expectations for himself to break this cycle? A sense of guilt? A broken familial connection?

These are all crucial aspects of his work, but for the immediate scene at hand, I connect González's sketch of the cycle of migration and labor to his description of his feelings as he settles in for the evening amongst his grandparents while waiting for his brother and father. González details small intimacies—like his observation of his grandfather's grooming habits, his grandfather gently offering a haircut and serving him a plate of food without asking, a small "ceremony of homecoming"—that might counter his previous depiction of the coldness of a family that "never once hugged." The details effectively establish the writer's strong, even if

[6] See *What Drowns the Flowers in Your Mouth: A Memoir of Brotherhood (2018)*.

troubled, bond with his family but also serve to add to the sense of entrapment in the scene as González writes:

> I have slipped inside the daily routine of the farmworkers and it makes me feel I'm in the way. I don't belong here anymore. The familiar claustrophobia begins to take hold of me; I used to suffer from it for years before I finally got out. The crowded walls are no help. For as long as I can remember my grandmother has been nailing every piece of gaudy memorabilia into the concrete, from family photographs to meat market calendars to the cheap Mother's Day presents my brother and I have given her over the years. (13)

Significantly, González's first mention of the labor camp, which will be the primary setting for his later flashbacks to his middle and high school years, marks the beginning of a cycle of the build-up of a strong emotional reaction—it is not only the family, but González's relationship with hard labor that drives, triggers a response. This response is personal, but it is also a reaction to a historical geopolitical situation—the US exploitation of migrant and immigrant labor and inequitable access to socioeconomic resources for migrant/immigrant populations. Labor camps, like the one his grandparents live in, and the cycle of migrant labor that González sees in his father and brother's lives are emblematic of particular larger cycles of migration and labor of Latin American, especially Mexican, workers in the US throughout the 20th century. Later in the memoir, the author will add further detail:

> I was born into a culture of work. Since the age of the Bracero Program in the 1940s, the state of Michoacán has been the number one exporter of Mexican farm labor to the United States. It is not out of the ordinary to witness entire communities of farmworkers migrate back and forth between the two countries—an echo of the region's

famous monarch butterflies who do the same for survival, their spectacular flights across the continent retraced generations later through genetic memory. (55)

González is observing a model of migrant labor at a time when US policy is poised to change drastically: the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 will set the stage for the militarization of the US-Mexico border with the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996 that will then intensify post-9/11 and continues today. In this previous era, migratory labor patterns back and forth across the border were much more common, whereas, in recent years, there has been a trend toward one-way immigration. As González notes, his family "had been moving north and south for four generations" (55). In contrast, Grande's experience—about half a decade later—illustrates a contextual shift: already, there is an increase in the dangers and trauma many immigrant people face. By the time of an account like that of Marcelo Hernandez Castillo's in *Children of the Land*—which mostly takes place in the mid-1990s to the mid-2010s—the criminalization of immigration has become a pervasive force.

González, on the other hand, does not have to worry about his—nor his brother's—documentation status: his natural-born citizenship and the historical era leads his account of an immigrant experience to focus more on sociocultural aspects of migration/immigration. González's preoccupation around migration then, as we see in this episode, is that he may become trapped in a cycle of movement and labor that, to him, goes nowhere. With his lover, he darkly romanticizes Spanish as a closed circuit of meaning, a dead-end of sorts, that holds power nonetheless because of its cultural and historical roots. He can relish his personal connection with the language in the context of his secret love life as a college student in Riverside, but when the frame of reference shifts to his family history—or rather what is history to him but is the

present for his family—Spanish is not a choice anymore. It becomes a marker of the life that González has fought to leave behind through education. Even though he feels "in the way" and does not "belong" there anymore, the real danger is that perhaps he does fit in too well, too naturally to his family's lifecycles—the migrant life. The tension builds until it erupts in a verbal fight between González and his father over his father's neglect of the author's prized photo of his mother. As González storms out of the house into the desert, he hears his other family members comment on the disturbance with a question: "'Already?' they ask, because this is also a part of the homecoming ceremony, though the fighting with my father has never happened so quickly" (15).

González reveals that this process—the building of stress, the push and pull of the desire for and rejection of familial intimacy, the eruption of anger—is too part of a cycle of his own migration as a "butterfly boy" or "mariposa." The author may have broken out of the cycle of hard labor through higher education, but he still does not "belong" anywhere, and his proximity to what he struggled to escape is too close for comfort. As González flees on foot into the hot desert, he realizes there is nowhere to run and feels like a "fool," "a child in a tantrum," and acknowledges to himself, and thus to the reader, that he has fled one place just to flee another. González has vowed to quit his abusive lover, but he will ultimately return one last time before breaking free for good. In this moment, he wonders if this sort of "behavior" drove his lover to abuse him, to which he quickly interjects:

> I shake that thought out of my head. I need to stop thinking like that. And then I keep thinking like that. My lover hits me, though my father has never dared to. My grandfather was the one who used to lay his hands on me, on all of us. Why don't I feel that level of rage for him? Why am I so cruel to everyone else? (15-16)

With this inner dialog, González reveals his familial abuse to the reader for the first time, establishing continuity to the author's life relationships even as he tries on new personas and identities: there are cycles of trauma that he has yet to escape. A slight resolve follows as the tension wanes from the episode when González hears a song in the distance that reminds him of picking grapes with his family. He ruminates:

> I was never good at it, my hands so small and clumsy. I have my mother's hands. I heard she was never good at picking either. One of my hands can disappear inside my lover's fist. I want to press my hands to my ears. How I hate that song with its jovial accordion and a singer whose falsetto tears down the distance between the work fields I never wanted to come back to and me. (16)

At this point in the memoir, it may not be clear that González's mother, who passed when the author was 12, is a source of his strength. In this instance, his seeing his mother in himself provides a connection in a moment of estrangement from the world and people around him.

The beauty of this passage and the book itself is in how González brings strands of his memory into affective range of each other without forcing causal relationships or turning to sentimentality to drum up a sense of healing. The physical presence of the desert, the auditory sensation, the remembrance of and identification with the mother, the out-of-place relationship to physical labor, the force of the lover, the yearning to flee all alchemize to create the picture of an unrestful state of rootedness as González rises from the ground. But before this state reaches equilibrium, a fit of "déjà vu" hits: "I'm in the fields, beneath the grapevines. To reach the low bunches, I have to get down and sink into the hot soil. Even with the thick denim the heat comes through and my joints become as numb as my head" (16). González's feelings are marked by the materiality of the description of the work and the desert: these fits represent not just his struggle

to break from his past cycles of relationships, but of hard labor. He continues: “How I wished for the days to be old enough to go away and never have to suffer pain like this. As I walk into the living room again I know I haven't ventured very far because I'm back. And I keep going back” (16). The pain connects both past and present in a cycle within the temporal loop of the memoir—it reminds him of the wish that was made in the past for the future, which is ostensively the present time of writing, which looks meanwhile to the past. Of course, this loop of déjà vu inherently hints at a future—one in which González has left this cycle, and even though the author “knows” that he has not “ventured very far,” there is the sense that *this* is okay. It seems enough to have ventured a little and returned different, but not so different as to signal some sort of revelatory personal epoch.

From this point on, most of the present-tense focus of the memoir is on González’s strained interactions with his father as he continues to chronicle their trip by bus from Indio through Mexicali onward to Zacapu. González illustrates the same estranged aloofness toward the strangers on the bus and the general public that he does toward his college peers in Riverside, but his father’s affect toward the strangers is congenial and warm, which proves continuously irksome. González describes a moment when, after his father has been carrying on for a time with other passengers, they note his brooding presence:

> And then a little later, “Oh, that's my son. He goes to college in the United States. He studies letters.”
>
> I imagine the people nodding politely, perhaps picturing me hunched over an old book and a magnifying glass, an amplified Cyclops eye scrutinizing the varying lengths of the *ls*, the dissimilar bubble-mouths of the *os*.

> Letters. What had I learned about letters? That they were the building blocks of words that went unspoken, of words that were hurtful, of words that became worthless. (24)

Through the filter of the idiom "to study letters," González's imagining of people trying to imagine what it is he actually does serves to illustrate: 1) a disconnection between his father and his day-to-day life—the generic response does not say anything about the son's intellectual interests or investments. 2) the disconnection between the strangers and his academic pursuits—in a way, the secrets of his academic life here mirror the secrets of his love life in the college setting. 3) the disconnection between Gonzales and his own work—there is an ambivalence toward the significance of language while at the same time a recognition of the complexity of language.

González ponders the significance of the simple arrangement of letters in the words "Apá" and "Mami," noting, "Apá, I have called my father since I was a child. My mother was Mami. I lost both. One to death, one to fear. I have forgiven only one" (24). González will eventually make clear that his paternal resentment stems mainly from the fact that his father left him and his brother to be raised with their paternal grandparents after his mother's death despite his grandfather's abuse. González turns again to the remembrance of his mother:

> …I have not forgotten my mother, or our relationship through letters. Just before she became too ill to continue, my mother had been making a concerted effort to master two skills: driving and speaking English. The driving classes were the most difficult because my father was the designated instructor. My father had no patience for such things…(24)

In González's recollection of his mother's studies, it is not simply the fact that she was trying to "better" herself, as some might describe it, or necessarily a shared interest in language that initially sparks his connection to her; it is her tenacity. González shares that he was embarrassed at first for his mother as he watched her and the other adult learners sing children's songs in English, especially because she "had the worst singing voice in the class" as "[s]he fumbled her way through the lyrics in her telltale choppy accent" (26). This embarrassment turns to tenderness and respect as González continues: "But this didn't stop her and I admired that eventually" (26). It is also through this experience that González "discovered" that his mother "was only functionally literate" and that neither her nor his father had "completed third grade in México" (27). In a later section in the book, when he is detailing his own learning of English at the age of 10, he again mentions his mother's ESL learning as an element of what brings them closer together:

> I eventually came to think of myself as my mother's companion. In the absence of my father and brother, indeed the masculine element of the household, my mother and I got along fine. We exchanged fotonovelas…because she understood my love of reading and my interest in keeping myself literate in Spanish. I enjoyed keeping her company in her ESL classes. And though she could barely write, I loved her signature, a lower case script from beginning to end, and with so many as—Avelina Alcalá—the name was pure music. (98)

It is not the English language, but his mother's appreciation for learning that bonds the two. The diminutive qualities of their hands, which contributes to their ineffectiveness in field labor, correlate with their investments in learning. For González, education is a means of finding new

avenues of agency in which gender expectations less bind him to perform masculinity while subduing femininity.

The bond between González and his mother contrasts with his estrangement from his father. For example, when his “father tries to drum up a conversation,” this leads to an awkward exchange:

> “So when do you finish your career there in college?” he asks.
>
> I take a deep breath. “That depends,” I say.
>
> “On what?” he asks.
>
> “Well, many things,” I say, not sure about what I'm going to tell him. I had just completed my sophomore year and had declared a vague major in the humanities with an emphasis in creative writing, but friends kept telling me that didn't lead to any kind of job, except maybe teaching. (29-30)

The awkwardness is doubled here again by both the sense that González seems to imagine that his father has no idea what he does in college and that González himself is unsure of his academic path. This altogether threatens to trigger a defensive response—signaled in the need to “take a deep breath.” González continues his response:

> “Well, it depends on whether I want to be an elementary school teacher, a high school teacher, or a university teacher,” I finally say because it sounds thought-out.
>
> “And which do you want to be?” he asks.
>
> “I'm not sure yet,” I say, honestly this time. “At this point I just need to complete my degree. By then I'll know.”
>
> “That's good, you,” he says, and then withdraws into silence. He feigns interest as unconvincingly as I fake politeness. (30)

The result is a cordial yet unsatisfying interaction as González chooses to give the most practical response, as it is what he thinks the father will understand, and the father stops short of pressing for a deeper response.

The scene is a reflection of the separation that many first-generation college students report between their familial understanding of higher education and what they come to know of the ins-and-outs of the college experience: as the student is assimilated into the "culture of the school," often ambivalently, the student's ability to share experiences with family falters, creating a sense of alienation from the family. In González's case, he falls back on the practical aspect of education—career and labor attainment—to communicate with his father. There is a hint too that González's frustration in the exchange is frustration with himself for there needing to be a practical aspect to his higher education, which is reminiscent of frustrations present in the self-writing of other artists, like Cisneros and Castillo, who often simply want the affordance to engage in intellectual, creative endeavors without encumberment. The tragedy of this missed connection between father and son is not that the distance between is necessarily too great; it is that there is too much class-based baggage and, of course, family trauma on González's part to begin to bridge generational experience at this point in the author's self-narrative. González must interpret his father's interest as "fake" as his own "politeness" because he must guard himself from creating potentially unattainable expectations but also because of the preconception that his family could only be interested in the practical, utility value of education.

González provides more insight into his family's disposition toward education as he chronicles his education experience from the age of 10, when his family moves back and he begins to learn English, through high school, where he is tracked into college prep courses and nicknamed "Schoolboy" by his Latino/a peers in "el campo," most of whom eventually drop out

to help their families with manual labor. Early in this era, González expresses a fascination with his school speech therapist, a kindly Texan woman named Dolly's enthusiastic demonstration of "the infinite number of single syllable nouns and verbs in the English language, a linguistic characteristic that [his] native Spanish didn't have" (78). He continues, "Under Dolly's tutelage, my fear of English began to dissipate. However, the aversion to the language and school was still strong at home" (78). González further explains that his homes in both the US and México lacked books—save "the TV Guide and the Bible"—because all of the adults in his household—his grandparents, parents, aunts, and uncles were "functionally literate," "none of them had completed an elementary education if they had attended school at all" (78). Interestingly, when he first discloses his mother's educational status, he recalls shock at finding that she was "only functionally literate." This slight difference contrasts the relationship between literacy and labor in the context of his relationship with his mother—with whom he associates—and of his relationship with the rest of his family—from whom he feels disconnected. Knowledge of his mother's limited literacy is revealed as a discovery while his extended family's limited literacy is described as merely a fact of life. Of the two books in the house, González notes, "[B]eing the non-practicing Catholics that we were, we consulted the TV Guide more frequently" (78). The Bible is merely there because it was gifted from a Baptist church that the family attends once a month for the free buffet. The "aversion to the language" continues its cycle into his generation and seems founded on senses of cultural intimidation and practicality:

> Since we were Spanish speakers, schoolbooks with their foreign grammar and diction intimidated and excluded us. We wanted nothing to do with them and we kept them away from the safety of our homes. Our bliss was the television and talking over each other at meals in the late afternoons. With time, my older cousins began dropping

> out of high school to enter the work force; the younger ones began skipping classes, hiding out in the desert brush across the grassy playgrounds. I was learning to enjoy school and had no desire to sneak out in search of more engaging extracurricular activities. (78)

Much remains unstated in this account of his generational peers' personal experiences with English and education: What kind of interactions and assistance did they have in school? Did they have an intervention, perhaps from some lone Dolly figure, and did they reject it? Were there seeds of potential for learning that went uncultivated because of a lack of support and/or the practical needs of labor? In the context of *Butterfly Boy* alone, even though we do not know the specific circumstances that lead the cousins to resist and drop out of school to work, González implies that the "aversion" to "the" language is part of the more extensive socioeconomic history of labor and migration that he sketches here and there throughout the memoir. This history, in no small way, includes inequitable access to education for working-poor laborers of migrant status across generations. González hints at two factors of this circumstance: a lack of institutional support in school systems and financial necessity that leads to labor taking precedence over educational aspiration.

González expands on his cousins' education in the personal essay "The Truman Capote Aria" in *Red-Inked Retablos*.[7] The essay itself works to compliment the high-school section of *Butterfly Boy*, adding to the author's literary coming of age by focusing on his discovery of the work of Truman Capote and detailing his obsession with TV in more detail—Capote filling the gap between the literary and popular with queer flair. González writes about seeing himself in the character Holly Golightly:

[7] The title is undoubtedly a reference to Rodriguez as queer Chicano forebearer.

> "I could relate to Holly. My cousins, after my aunt took them back to México, became resentful of me because I was reinventing myself in the United States. When we visited them in Mexicali, across the border, they called me gringo and humiliated me in front of their friends about how I loved gringo television and the gringo language" (10).

In his attempt at understanding his cousin's ire, González loosely concludes that their derision must come from jealousy, stating, "Certainly my cousins shouldn't blame me because they dropped out of school. That was their choice. I was going to have an education. I had made my mind about it and knew that the way to succeed was by not being like my Mexican cousins. So I sought my future elsewhere" (11). González may be right about his cousins' behavior coming from feelings of envy of his access to upward mobility, but he misses the opportunity to further examine the sociocultural and/or economic factors in the equation. Instead, he proceeds to consciously differentiate himself from his cousins through his choice of language and education.

González recalls watching an old Mexican movie on TV with his brother around this age and his brother's comment about a Mexican shoeshine boy who is working the square: "That's what we would've been doing now if we had never left Michoacán" (11). González writes of his internal response:

> I thought about my cousins, one apprenticed to a mechanic, another to an electrician. My fate was school nine months of the year and the grape fields in the remaining three. Yet I knew I was simply biding my time. In five more years I would be an adult and I already knew I would leave this world behind because it didn't fulfill me. I imagined Holly Golightly coming to the same conclusion because her dreams were much bigger than the space she was born into, and how she began to collect her new identity, word by word, until the time came for her to exist in another language. (11)

Writing of one's past often entails the when, how, and why one leaves versions of their past selves behind. González's cousins, here and elsewhere in his writing, operate as visions of possible past-selves that González has left behind. "Possible" because they serve as others that shadow González's adolescent "schoolboy" persona that he details in *Butterfly Boy*; González is already predestined to emerge as the Chicano mariposa.

Similarly, Grande's memoirs establish its writer's exceptionality—the difference is the degree to which they rely on a celebratory progress narrative that fits neatly within the realm of popular memoir. Grande is often preoccupied with the kind of "what ifs" that González sees in the Mexican boy on TV and, by extension, his cousins. In *Distance,* Grande chronicles her life in two parts, writing in straightforward prose narrative form: Book One covers from her adolescent years living in poverty in Iguala, Mexico, to her border crossing via coyote at the age of ten, and Book Two tracks her "new life" in the US up to her graduations from Pasadena City College, ending with her leaving her family in LA to attend the University of California, Santa Cruz in 1994. *A Dream Called Home: A Memoir* (2018) acts as a direct sequel, picking up where the first memoir left off and continuing through her graduation from UCSC, her professional life as a public-school teacher, and her experience as a PEN Center's Emerging Voices fellow, which leads to the publication of Grande's first novel, *Across a Hundred Mountains* (2006). Grande's memoirs detail how, for most of their childhood, Grande and her siblings, Mago and Carlos, pine for their absent parents while being raised for periods by their paternal grandmother, Abuela Evila—whose name proves appropriate for the abusive treatment she gives—and by their kind but even more destitute maternal grandmother, Abuela Chinta. When Grande is two, her father migrates to the US with dreams of earning enough money to bring back to build his dream house and becomes "the man behind the glass" in the framed photo that the children admire. Her

mother leaves to join him when Grande is four and her father realizes "that dollars weren't as easy to make as the stories people told made it seem" in "El Otro Lado" (6). When Grande is six, her mother returns with her US-born baby sister, Betty, when the father leaves her for another woman, but never truly returns emotionally, flitting in and out of her children's lives. In 1985, when Grande is ten, her father brings the Mexican-born siblings to live with him and his new wife Mila in LA, hiring a coyote to guide them through the desert. Even as Grande presents immigration as the best opportunity for her life, she also shows the trauma of this event: they are forced to leave Betty behind because the mother withholds her US birth certificate, and the crossing itself takes three dangerous attempts. Grande's account of childhood gives testimony to the hardship of extreme rural poverty and the emotional costs of family separation that migrant and immigrant families often experience.[8] This testimony is then put to service ideologically in the structure of the memoir as a progress narrative told in two parts, the author constantly looking back—whether in speculation of what her life could have been or in describing the relief her successes in the US delivers—to a Mexican childhood that haunts a (US)American present and future.

While there are many moments in Book Two that look back to the past, there is only one that directly projects to the author's later transition into US American life. When Grande's mother's well-to-do employer, Don Oscar, hosts a party for her sister's sixth-grade graduation. Grande describes, "We were very shy around Don Oscar's kids; even though they were our age, they belonged to a different class than us. They had beautiful clothes, they went to private schools, they spoke formal Spanish, and once in a while they giggled at the way we talked"

[8]For an in-depth sociological account of family separation immigration see Leslie Abrego's *Sacrificing Families: Navigating Laws, Labor, and Love Across Borders* (2014). Abrego specifically focuses on Salvadoran families, but findings are insightful to im/migrant families in the US at large.

(133). Interrupting this scene, Grande writes, “I didn’t know that thirteen years later, I would return to Iguala during my junior year of college, and I would be invited by Don Oscar to celebrate Christmas with his family. I would find myself wearing clothes as nice as theirs… not gawking at their two-story brick house because by then I would have set foot in similar houses in the United States” (133). In this Cinderella-esque scene, Grande’s class position shifts, not just regarding material signifiers like her clothing, but in her cultural capital as “Oscar Jr. and his sisters shove lyrics of their favorite American songs at” her for translation and she shares about her college courses (133). Grande is quite aware of the threat of the clock striking midnight though as she concludes this interlude: “I would return to the U.S. more determined than ever, because even though I had drunk Bailey’s with them, dined and sang English songs with them, my cousin Lupita, Tía Güera’s daughter, was working for them as a maid. And I knew then, as I do now, that could also have been my fate” (133). Grande’s upward potential, like González's, needs a figure of comparison to invert like a film negative. Grande’s dire tone may be a bit overdramatic—is it a curse to work as a maid?—but her concern is rooted in the fear of legal persecution during her especially precarious early years in the US without documentation. What is more, Grande’s father often preys on these fears to incentivize good behavior and studiousness. Grande briefly illustrates the first one of these many abusive “pep” talks as soon as they are across the border in the US:

> Papi said we had broken the law by coming to the United States, but back then I didn’t understand much about laws. All I could think of was why there would be a law that would prevent children from being with their father. That was the only reason I’d come to this country, after all.

"And you three better do well in your classes, because if you don't, I won't wait for la migra to deport you. I'll send you back to Mexico myself!"

"We won't disappoint you, Papi," my sister, my brother, and I promised while nodding our heads. (165-166)

A critique of the oft-unjust nature of US immigration law and policy—that much of the history of its practices run counter to the so-called American Dream—is tucked in with Grande's portrayal of her young confusion. The law makes no sense, but the child has no frame of reference except the father's reaction to and internalization of the social trauma: anti-immigration policy and rhetoric in the United States. There is a friction in the paradox between anti-immigrant beliefs and American ideals—like equality and exceptionalism embodied in "the American Dream"—that creates a schizophrenic state of harm in the US. While it is true that even a cursory critique of the US history of colonialism and slavery reveals these ideals to be mythic in origin, the rub is that when put to use uncritically, they perpetuate social injustice. Socioeconomic inequity, for example, becomes a simple matter of personal drive and perseverance—the kind of bootstraps fallacy that Grande often seems to wrestle with.

The father's rhetoric seems to "work" on Grande in that she becomes hyper-focused on fulfilling her promise: several times throughout the second half of the memoir, Grande repeats that she feels a need, a desire to "make papi proud." One extended example comes just after her account of her first day of school in the US:

I felt as if I owed him something, as if there was a debt that needed to be repaid. The way I could pay it back was to make him proud of my accomplishments, because they would be his accomplishments, too. Even now, there are times when I think back on that moment when I begged my father to bring me to this country, and the knowledge that

> he could have said no still haunts me. What would my life had been like then? I know the answer all too well. (173)

Grande's understanding of educational attainment and, eventually, writerly aspirations is interlaced not only with the idea of social mobility but also citizenship, ideas that the author has seeded in small yet significant ways in the first half of the memoir. In one passage from Book One, for example, Grande gives insight into her mother's point of view when she returns to Iguala after being left for another woman, stating that "[t]he irony was that in her worst nightmares she had pictured my father leaving her for a golden-haired, blue-eyed gringa. But the woman who stole her husband was a paisana, a Mexican from the state of Zacatecas" (84-85). The author further speculates:

> What was it about her he liked? My mother had wondered. Was it that she was educated and was a nursing assistant, unlike my mother, who was only allowed a sixth-grade education? Or was it the fact that this woman was a naturalized U.S. citizen and could speak English, unlike my mother…Did my father see that woman and her American privileges as a way to a bigger future, a future that my mother, with her limitations, couldn't give him? (84-85)

The passage also seeds Grande's own "upward mobility," the idea of rising beyond one's potential "limitations" through claiming "privileges" through language but also through the judicial system. Mila, the future stepmother, will not ever fully be Grande's ally but will represent potential privilege for Grande in her first years in the US: Grande's father and Mila marry soon after bringing the children over as a strategy for legalizing the family's status.

It is also Mila who gives Grande moral support as she starts school in the US—it seems that in Mexico she was a good student and enjoyed learning but has a rough start when the

teacher hits and berates her for writing her name with her left hand, forcing her to unaturally use her right throughout her early schooling. Initially, Grande has been excited about starting school in the US—eager "to meet [her] teacher, make friends, get [her] own books"—but as the school year approaches, fear begins to set in (169). Grande shares the comfort her soon-to-be stepmother gives her:

> "Mila said that teachers here don't hit their students like they do in Mexico. And best of all, she said that my teacher would not yell at me for being left-handed. "That stuff your grandmother told you about the devil is pure nonsense." When she said that, I started liking my stepmother, and I stopped being so afraid of going to school. I hoped that one day I would be like her, fluently bilingual and a U.S. citizen. (169)

Grande's juxtaposition of her past educational experience in Mexico with the expectations of what her (US)American experience will entail invokes the trope that pits the United States as a land of social progress compared to what could be conceived as a less developed country.[9] The trauma of Grande's past, here represented in the grandmother's superstitions or religiosity and the teacher's abusive behavior, is, in a sense, reclaimed by the author as testimony to her progress or, at least, the promise of "progress," both individual and public. Grande herself does not use the label of "developing country" to describe Mexico, but there are many moments like

[9] In popular discourse in the US, terms like "developing country" and "Third World country" have historically been used derogatorily and often with impunity as they have been official terms used by researchers and political institutions. While "Third World" has fallen out of use because of its sociocultural implications and because of limits of the oversimplistic three categorization system, the label of "developing country" is still widely used. Metrics used by organizations like the United Nations and the World Bank, not to mention national government agencies themselves can be highly useful for understanding aspects of global socioeconomic contexts past and present, but so often occurs is that certain terms become shorthand for reinforcing cultural jingoism. If we look at some of metrics themselves, we see a complex picture. For example, today the UN ranks Mexico is a country with a "developing economy" with a per capita Gross National Index in the "upper-middle-income" bracket and classifies it in the "high" human development category by its Human Development Index score. See the UN's "World Economic Situation and Prospects report" and "Human Development Reports."

this throughout her memoirs that align too easily with this dichotomous rhetoric of US exceptionalism.

The irony is that today Mexico could be said to be ahead of the United States on the issue of corporal punishment of children as they have federally banned corporal punishment in the school as of 2016. I do not take issue with Grande's representation of her experience—she is not a "traitor" or a "sell-out," as she will fear later, for favoring the opportunities of her "new" life in the US. What I wish to problematize is the potential force of tropes valorizing the US as the idealized destination at the cost of denigrating Latinized nations of origin within the context of self-representation, popular memoir in particular. Grande's account, for example, might seem to simply tell the situation "like it is" even as popular memoir is increasingly read by mass audiences for information on social issues and to form policy opinions. But the ideological weight of Grande's constructions at times swings freely without much critical perspective—in part due to the trappings of pop memoir as opposed to other modes of self-writing—threatening to overtake the artistry of the work with trite ideological recitation. That is not to say that Grande is taking an assimilationist stance or simply reinforcing pro-(US) American ideology: she does provide the audience with evidence and observations that complicate these notions.

The father's "motivational" tactics are presented ambivalently: she does not denounce them nor elevate them as a model for im/migrant families. On the one hand, Grande's success seems to be a case in point of its effects, but, on the other, the author's portrayal of her father's positive influence is tempered by the presentation of his growing alcoholism and abusiveness, as Grande describes:

> "When my father beat me, and in his drunken stupor called me a pendeja and an hija de la chingada, I held on to the vision of the future he had given me during his sober

moments. I thought about that vision when the blows came, because the father who beat me, the one who preferred to stay home and drink rather than to attend my band concerts or parent-teacher conferences, wasn't the same father who told me that one day I would be somebody in this country. That much I knew. (250-251)

Grande's characterization of her father's disparate behavior as a Jekyll and Hyde split might call to mind common depictions of alcoholism, but, more significantly, it reads as a survival strategy of rationalization for her younger self, as a means for understanding both the faults in a father figure that she previously idolized from a distance and a life in the US that does not quite match the idealized vision of "El Otro Lado." The criticism that bubbles up around her father's faults are clues that they are not necessarily personal failings, but reactions to a dysfunctional immigration system and ideology. In another of the many instances that Grande illustrates her father's pontification, she describes:

Sometimes Papi would sit down and talk and talk as if he were trying to make up for the eight years he was gone from our lives. But his talks were always about the future, and they always went like this:

" Here in this country, if you aren't educated, you won't go very far.

"School is the key to the future.

"Without an education, you're nothing. So you kids have to study hard. You hear me? Do you hear me?"(227)

The father's talks are always already marked by the schism between the past and future—the present is fractured because of the family's separation, an outcome of larger socioeconomic conditions that drive migration and immigration. His assertion of the importance of education fits a progress narrative, but the obsessive quality of his reiterations and the fervor of his drive

expose a logical inversion of the (US)American dream: it is not the idea that the children can be "anything" or "anybody" they want with hard work, but that without hard work they will be "nothing." This negative iteration is exemplified in the rhetoric of immigration politics and (US)Americanism and meritocracy. Even well-meaning pro-immigration advocates often rely heavily on arguments based on the benefit of migrant labor—both physical and, more recently, intellectual—to the USA at large or, more precisely, the population eligible to vote. This tactic, part of the western argumentative strategy of the "cost-benefit analysis," is understandable, perhaps even necessary to battle anti-immigration sentiment and policy implementation on a practical level amongst the general public. Yet, the conceptual risk is that it essentializes people as their function, their use-value to US society. Furthermore, as neoliberalism cashes in on the promises of liberalism and our day-to-day lives function more and more through market logic, it would only make sense that those falling outside this logic would be deemed as non-existent. More than ever in US society, it is evident that inherent to the notion of meritocracy is the idea that "merit" is not just rewarded, an arguable notion itself, but also that not having "merit" is punishable, even criminal.

There are hints that Grande might push back against this ideology. For one, there is the self-evident harshness in Grande's portrayals of her father's teaching. For another, there are moments where she exposes his hypocrisy. The father often remarks that his ex-wife should be "ashamed" for being on welfare, working a "dead-end job," and "getting paid under the table" without receiving benefits, stating, "That's not the way to live, not here in this country" (228). Grande adds her commentary: "He didn't mention that he, himself, wasn't getting much out of his job because he was using a social security card he'd bought at MacArthur Park for a hundred bucks" (228). In these instances, Grande gestures toward the larger struggles of undocumented

immigration, but her attention always returns to her investment in the exceptionalism of her own rags to college student to book author story. In a later chapter, Grande sounds considerably like her father when she assesses her mother's living situation after everyone in the family has attained legal residency in the US:

> Even though we had suggested she learn English and find herself a better job, my mother insisted on living the way she had lived in Mexico or the way she had lived when she was still undocumented. She refused to learn English and how to drive a car. She refused to look for a job that could offer her benefits—such as medical insurance and a pension plan, and where she could finally get off welfare. (274)

For Grande, the indictment becomes valid once the mother, having gained documentation, "refuse[s]" to pursue upward mobility and live an "American" life.

Grande's portrayal of American exceptionalism and meritocracy inevitably grows more complicated as she depicts how her experiences often fall short of expectations for her "new" life. For example, in an episode during Grande's first years in school in the US, she conveys her excitement for and disappointment with a school writing competition, a small, but possibly monumental event, as she expresses with her younger self's inner dialogue: "*I will finally get my chance to make Papi proud!*" (215). Mr. López, the teacher's assistant assigned to help the table of ESL students in the corner of an English-only speaking classroom, instructs his table to write their stories in Spanish as they know the language better, which would presumably allow them to express themselves better. Still, Grande is at a loss of where to begin as this is the first time she has been asked to write a story of her own. Turning to the books in the classroom that she has access to at the time proves unhelpful, as Grande recalls:

> "I'd always liked to read in Mexico, but here in this country, books for kids my age were very difficult for me to read because of my limited English. The books Mr. López gave me were those for kindergarteners—books with big letters and lots of pictures. I loved looking at the pictures, but the stories weren't very interesting. *See Spot Run!*" (215-216).

To contrast the simplicity of those kindergarten readers, Grande writes, "I missed the literature books I left behind in Mexico, the ones I was given at school. I loved the stories in those books" (216). The writer goes on to give a very brief general description of a few folk stories from her Spanish readers, but even more striking is the literary vision she has for her entry for the contest:

> As I wrote, I told about how I couldn't wait to be born and the midwife barely had enough time to catch me before I hit the dirt floor. "It's a girl," the midwife said as she put me into Mami's arms…I wrote about how Mami had turned to face the fire so the heat of the flames could warm me. As the midwife cut the umbilical cord, Mami pointed to a spot on the dirt floor and told the midwife to bury it there. I wrote how even though I was now living far away from Mami and my country, I hadn't forgotten where I came from. (216)

Grande's creation story is descriptive, full of symbolism, foreshadowing her professional journey into autobiographical writing in adulthood. Grande is crestfallen when she witnesses the head teacher, Mrs. Anderson, who speaks little Spanish, merely glance at her piece before putting it in the rejection pile. Likewise, none of the other Spanish-written entries are considered. Mr. López responds to the disappointment at the table and gives them a short pep talk: "There is no reason for any of you not to get ahead in life. You will learn English one day. You will find your way. Remember, it doesn't matter where you come from. You're now living in the land of

opportunity, where anything is possible" (218). Mr. Lopez's pallid empathy fails to address the fundamental problem of the situation: the lead teacher does not have the faculty to judge the work of the Spanish-speaking students and has betrayed the student's good faith that they have a fair chance in the competition. Grande's construction of the scene conveys a clear sense of betrayal, that the contest has been a setup, but she leaves ample room for further interpretation of what it means to the larger discourse around immigration. On the one hand, Grande presents an example of false meritocracy: the teacher's "evaluation" has nothing to do with the quality of Grande's work, which is presented to the reader in retrospect as the youth's literary masterpiece. On the other, Grande's answer to the injustice seems to be that, knowing the systems of education and merit to be unjust, one must work harder to prove themselves. The production of her success narrative itself becomes proof in point that hard work does pay off even if its rewards come with complications.

In a later chapter, Grande is poised for a comeback story as she, now equipped with English language skills that will make legible her storytelling passion to the (US)American classroom, enters and wins a junior high short-story competition. When Grande wins first place—the prize, tickets to tour the Queen Mary—she goes home with pride, eager to share the news with her father. His reaction is the opposite of what one might expect from a parent so seemingly devoted to learning, as Grande exhibits, "As soon as he opened the door, I ran to him and told him about getting first place in a competition. I showed him the prize and my short story. Papi glanced at the tickets. "What the hell is the Queen Mary?" (244). The matter is a misunderstanding on two levels. First, there is the prize itself: Grande, too, is understandably initially confused by "tickets for a cruise ship that didn't go on cruises," but she is able to recognize the prize as a token, a symbolic gesture for her accomplishment. Second, there is the

father's inability to register the significance of the accomplishment to Grande as a young, aspiring learner. To the father, there is no functional purpose to the prize, thus no significance in winning the contest. There are many other moments when Grande finds the limits to her father's commitment to education and, by extension, the limits of how she is able to connect to him through the values of education many times in her writing, but most significant is his refusal to let her attend the University of California, Irvine. When they first receive their green cards in 1990, just in time for Mago's high school graduation, the father's hopes are still high for his children. Grande illustrates a picture-perfect portrait of family optimism: "We had become legal residents of the United States! Finally we could let go of our fear of being deported and look to the future with hope. Papi said, "I've done my part. The rest is up to you." And the three of us clutched our green cards in our hands, imagining the possibilities" (251). Grande's father becomes disillusioned after giving Mago and Carlos financial support for college just to watch them drop out and pursue full-time jobs. Taking these choices as the failure of his children as a whole, he scolds the three of them together: "I don't know why I even brought you kids to this country, just so you could throw it all away. It was an opportunity of a lifetime, do you realize that?…Do you know how many people would die to be in your shoes? To have the opportunities you have here?" (273). So, by the time Grande receives her acceptance letter to UCI in 1993, he refuses to fill out and sign the necessary paperwork, much to her heartbreak. Grande persists in her educational quest, having already internalized the idea that higher education is *the* means for success and happiness, and enrolls herself in an English course at Pasadena City College a year later. With the professional and intellectual mentorship of her English instructor, Diana Savas, she finds her path to writing despite continued familial hardship and earns her associate's degree.

Much of *A Dream Called Home* then is concerned with how Grande's aspirations continue to take her farther from her family. Opening with her drive from Los Angeles to Santa Cruz, Grande writes:

> Every minute that went by, another mile separated me from my family. We drove north on I-5, and I felt divided in half, like this highway I was on—one side going north, the other going south. Half of me wanted to turn back, to stay in Los Angeles and fight for my family—my father, my mother, my sisters and brothers—stay by their side even though our relationship was in ruins. (3)

Grande carries on the theme of separation from *Distance*: she even invokes north and south in recollecting the journey up the freeway. But, unlike the border that splits the north and the south between Mexico and "El Otro Lado," the freeway is divided between opposite flowing lanes of traffic, suggesting that the potential for Grande's mobility is a given—she's "made it this far"—and that the dilemma now is choice:

> The other half of me faced north with excitement, optimistic despite my fears. I was…leaving to pursue the wild dream of becoming the first in my family to earn a university degree. The key to the American Dream will soon be mine, I told myself. This was no small feat for a former undocumented immigrant from Mexico. I felt proud to have made it this far. (3)

In the second memoir, while Grande continues to build her progress narrative of achieving the (US) American dream, she also complicates a facile interpretation of what it means to achieve one's dreams. In her attempts to help others—Betty, her extended family, and Arturo, a short-lived love interest—gain access to a broader range of life choices, Grande begins to recognize that it is more than choice that determines educational attainment and socioeconomic status.

When Grande learns that her mother has sent Betty back to Abuela Chinta in Iguala because of her rebelliousness, she takes the responsibility upon herself to go to Mexico to check in on her during her winter break. Grande enables this trip by applying for and winning a grant based on the invention that she is working on a writing project based on her hometown. Upon first arriving, Grande takes note of her grandmother's continued poverty, remembering, "When I lived here…there were times when we would have nothing to eat except tortillas sprinkled with salt." She continues by reflection, "As a university student, I was struggling to get by, and I wasn't in a position yet to help support my grandmother. But I made a promise to myself that one day, when I was making the kind of dollars that would come from my college degree, I would take care of her, just like she had once taken care of me" (51). For Grande, Education is still tied to family, but now it is beginning to connect also to the greater good of her extended family rather than her father's pride. The moment of connection continues:

> "How's it going in El Otro Lado?" my grandmother asked, licking her own fingers. "Your mom tells me you are at a university now."
>
> I nodded and excitedly told my grandmother about Santa Cruz, about the redwood trees, the deer, the bay, the boardwalk, the way the air smelled—a mixture of leaves, soil, salty ocean breeze, and esperanza. What I wouldn't give to be able to take her there! (51)

Grande imagines herself walking through campus with her "tiny grandmother" and moves to "hold her hands, as if by magic [she] could transport" the two there together.

Grande's wistful dreaming is checked by the present materiality of her grandmother's person:

> Abuelita Chinta smiled and had a faraway look in her eyes, as if she were trying hard to imagine this magical city. When you live in a place like Iguala, it's hard to

> believe that the world can look any different. My guilt brought me back to reality, and I could feel the calluses in her wrinkled hands, see the layer of dust on her feet, feel the heat radiating from her tin metal roof. Why did I get to enjoy such a beautiful place, but not my grandmother who from a young age had had to work to feed her family? My grandmother never went to school, lived only three hours from Acapulco and yet had never seen the ocean with her own eyes. (52)

The sentimental portrait of Abuela Chinta at this moment works to specify the guilt that Grande feels—it's not exactly that she pities her grandmother, but that her own class mobility allows her to realize the injustice of social inequity—that her grandmother did not get a "choice." Grande's understanding of and motivation for education at this point continues to expand beyond the need for her father's approval or a feeling of responsibility to his past sacrifice to a sense of responsibility to those who did not have her same opportunities.

Later that night, after Grande reunites with her sister gone astray, they share thoughts about their family's past as they lay in bed waiting for sleep—about which she writes, '"I'm sorry, Betty,"' I said. And I meant I was sorry about everything, how immigration and separation had taken a toll on all of us, how even though our parents had emigrated from this very city to go to the U.S. to build us a house, they ended up destroying our home" (56). Despite Grande's repeated celebrations of her own mobility, her own progress narrative, there are instances where the toll of immigration can simply not be dismissed. Betty becomes the point of fixation for Grande's need to make good, which at times veers close to becoming a savior complex:

> I wanted to help my sister as much as I wanted to help the people who lived here, but I didn't know how. I was ready to return to Santa Cruz, the place I longed for more and more. The poverty in Iguala was a burden I was tired of carrying. The guilt, the

> helplessness, the anger that bubbled up at seeing my family living in these circumstances became too much, and I was desperate to leave…I wanted to go back to UCSC and bury my head in my literature books and read about exotic lands that had nothing to do with my family's reality. I wanted to read about someone else's struggles and misery. Not my own. Not my people's. But how could I forget? By forgetting Iguala, I would be abandoning those I left behind. (58)

For Grande, like González, literature offers both a potential for future "escape," in terms of upward mobility, but also an immediate escape of the mind—an intellectual joy. Part of Grande's guilt lies in the simple fact that she has found some personal resolution to this residual pain and trauma—that she could yearn for escape instead of facing her family's material circumstances directly. Guilt, pain, and trauma are all entwined—guilt and trauma cause pain, but part of Grande's guilt is knowing that some aspect of her "progress" involves overcoming this trauma and pain, which is progress foreclosed to many of her loved ones. Grande's remembrance and reflection on her familial guilt echo Cisneros's famous promise of return at the end of *Mango Street*, but at this point in the narrative, Grande, the character, is not ready to make promises herself.

Grande's resolution in the meantime is to bring her sister to Santa Cruz to live with her because, as she states," Betty needed a home as much as I did … I could be the mother that Betty needed, and I wouldn't be so lonely anymore if I had her with me" (72). In this decision, Grande creates a potential salve for the familial guilt and social alienation she feels. Grande pays for Betty's plane ticket with part of her school tuition money and "smuggles" her into her dorm room without permission, commenting, "I was afraid of getting kicked off campus for having my

little sister with me, but it was a risk I was willing to take" (73-74). In Betty, Grande also sees a new opportunity to share her aspirations with family once again, writing:

> She needed Santa Cruz as much as I did, and she willingly followed me north to live in the place I told her could help her heal, allow her to dream, and be the kind of home we'd always wanted to have. "One day," I said to her, "we can both be college graduates, accomplished career women capable of taking care of our own needs and fulfilling our own desires." (73-74)

The sisters live in newfound tranquility for a few months, but, by the end of the semester, Betty has started cutting class again and Grande's fear of campus reprimand comes true as she is given the ultimatum of leaving student housing or having her sister vacate. Grande moves them off campus as Betty resolves to try harder, but when her sister continues to ditch school to be with her new boyfriend repeatedly, they have a falling out. Grande comes to a realization:

> For the first time, I understood that what I wanted for her—to do well in school, to go to college one day—wasn't what she wanted for herself. I could not give my dreams to her. She would have to find her own. She would have to find the ganas, the fierce desire that my father often said would drive us to become the people we knew we could be. (87)

This realization sets the stage for Grande's future interrogation of her internalized beliefs around education and success as she grapples with recognizing that her sister does not share her vision. As Grande's desire to save her sister finds its limit in both her need for self-preservation and Betty's own will, the author decides to send her sister back to Los Angles to be with their mother. Grande proceeds to turn Betty out of the apartment when she refuses, and she moves in

with her boyfriend, becoming pregnant a few months later at the age of sixteen. Grande comments on her feelings at the time:

> I felt lonely in Santa Cruz, just like I had when I first moved here, and I couldn't even take refuge in the campus as I once had. The redwoods had lost their power to heal me. They no longer smelled of hope, but failure. I began to doubt myself, wondering if there was a point anymore to what I was doing" (89).

Adding to Grande's sense of frustration is the fact that Mago and her sister-in-law are both pregnant as well, a condition she refers to as "a pregnancy epidemic…in [her] family" (89). Grande clarifies, "I saw all those babies as obstacles to higher education because if my older siblings had dropped out of college—even when they were single and childless—pursuing higher education while supporting a family would prove a challenge too difficult to overcome" (89). That Grande takes this failure in her quest to save her sister and, by extension, her family personally is further evident in her questioning her own presence on campus: "What am I doing here? I wondered. I would go to my classes, half listen to what was said, and ask myself that question again and again" (90). Grande's internal conflict appears to come from her staunch belief that education is the end-all-be-all means to success for herself and her family: she cannot comprehend the complexity of the matter—that there are myriad other factors to someone's educational attainment besides ganas and a basic opportunity or that higher education might not be the best path for someone else or that "success" itself can mean different things. Furthermore, if the originating goal for her family's immigration is to build a home and if her aspirations—that she thinks the rest of her family should share—draw her further and further from her family, then it only makes sense that Grande might lose her sense of purpose. Just as Grande's familial preoccupations threaten to disrupt her own academic progress, institutional support continues to

buoy her endeavors: her winning of three recent grants "made [her] feel confident and excited about the creative work [she] was doing and [her] progress as an artist" (93). Grande writes, "Once again, I had turned to my creativity to help me deal with my pain and sorrow, and it carried me through the difficult months during my trials with Betty, but especially after we had our falling out" (93). Ultimately, Grande's relationship with Betty provides a more nuanced understanding of success, but only after the author can recoup some of her own anguish with art.

When Grande and Betty next speak, the author teeters between wanting to show support and her inner urge to cast judgment: "My eyes went straight to her big belly, and I realized that her life wouldn't be carefree for long. I didn't want to judge, yet all I could think of was that my sister had turned seventeen two months before and would be a mother in ten weeks" (107-108). Contrary to Grande's fears, Betty is doing well—in school and her homelife—and even looks forward to being a mother. Grande tracks her internal response: "I could tell in her voice that she really meant it. That was the first time it ever occurred to me that something positive had come from this situation" (108). This instance marks the beginning of a long process by which Grande slowly acknowledges Betty's own agency and that there might not be a singular definition of or model for success. Grande concedes: "I wasn't happy that she was pregnant at this age, but at the same time I could see the effect this little human being growing in her womb was having on her. She seemed confident and mature" (108).

When the baby is born, Grande still cannot bring herself to exactly congratulate her sister because "[s]omehow, along the way, [she] had grown to believe that being a teenage mother was the worst thing one could be, especially for Latina girls, who already had too many obstacles to overcome because of race, gender, and class inequality" (110). Grande further reflects: "Whether I wanted to admit it or not, I cared too much about not being a statistic" (110). The author walks

a fine line between an awareness of structural social inequity—a care for how it effects another—and judgment that comes from internalized prejudices and attitudes that help fuel the engines of inequity. Grande utilizes her younger sister's disposition to pregnancy and life, in general, to find her balance, remarking that in contrast to her own fixations, "Betty…didn't give a damn what society thought of her" (110). In Grande's portrayal, it is Betty that takes the lead in their reconciliation. As if able to intuit her older sister's feelings of doubt and residual guilt, she consoles Grande: "Reyna, I have nothing to forgive you for, and you have nothing to regret. I know what you were trying to do for me, and I thank you. But I'm not going to regret anything either, especially my baby" (110). In these moments, Betty becomes the teacher, widening Grande's worldview. Grande ends the chapter with a kind of epilogue to her drama with Betty:

> Two years later, at Betty's high school graduation, I would realize that she was right—there was nothing to regret for either of us…I had been afraid that she would drop out of school again, but instead, Omar and her baby had grounded her. Santa Cruz belonged to Betty in a way it didn't belong to me. Her child had been born here. She had her own family now. Once she had been a leaf in the wind; now she had roots and had landed in a place where she would flourish and be happy. (110-112)

In this carefully crafted resolution, Grande is finally able to show respect for a different version of accomplishment and contentment than her own by showing that Betty is able to find happiness on different terms.

Grande's respect does not carry into the account of another "failed" project, her relationship with Arturo, a Mexican farmworker living in Watsonville. Grande describes Watsonville as "the town half an hour from Santa Cruz with a large Mexican population. It was an agricultural town, known mostly for its strawberries" and notes that she "had passed through

there on [her] way to UCSC and performed there once with Los Mejicas" (120). Even as Grande describes Watsonville generically, it becomes an emblem of the manual laboring Latino/a and/or immigrant in contrast to the college aspiring student who expresses their cultural ties to Latinad in University sanctioned activity. The contrast between Grande's experience and her description of Arturo's lived environment is even more striking. Whereas she romanticizes the natural splendor of Santa Cruz, even if she criticizes the social and metropolitan aspects of the city, her characterization of his home reads thus:

> Arturo's house was in the middle of lettuce fields, and the only way to get there was by a bumpy dirt road. Dirt and lettuce as far as the eye could see. He shared the place with several men, including his two cousins. It was a dilapidated house, as filthy inside as it was on the outside. His landlord took no pride in it, and the house had deteriorated to the point where only desperate immigrant men would live in it. (122)

Grande illustrates what is often reported as common conditions for immigrant field laborers in sociological research and journalistic accounts that feature first-hand accounts of and/or from the laborers themselves. Such accounts show that what middle-class US Americans perceive as subpar living conditions are not *only* a result of inequitable wages and/or landowners/landlords taking advantage of a vulnerable population—though this is a large part of it—but also of practical strategies employed by laborers themselves. Many laborers may not be seeking permanent residence and choose to live as inexpensively as possible while working in the US so that they can maximize what they send to supplement their household's income in Mexico. This, of course, does not justify what can become inhumane living conditions, but these issues are more complex than Grande's brand of representation can show. Her description is meant to shock to the reader into a concern for the wellbeing of immigrant people, but this sort of shock

can be weaponized to institute anti-immigration policies as these concerns become the pretext for punitive and/or criminalizing policy and/or action. For instance, occupation limits and regulations can be imposed that punish the workers themselves. In California, we see this in zoning ordinances around multiple family designated properties as well as rental codes and in crackdowns around modern "colonias." Grande might generally express good intentions for her portrayals of immigrant lives, but her reliance on a model of immigration that prizes exceptionalism finds her trafficking in ideology that is dangerous to immigrant discourse.

For Grande, the problem does not seem to be the quality of life in general that she witnesses and deems as subpar, but that seeing Arturo, someone she deems as fit for more, in such an environment creates an inner contradiction. Grande writes:

> I couldn't wrap my head around seeing him in this place. In my mind, I saw him walking down the aisles of the McHenry Library on campus, checking out some books for his research paper. I wanted that for him so badly that, not long after I met him, I gave him a tour of the university so that I could see him there for real, not just in my fantasies. (122)

As if taking a car for a test drive or trying on an outfit in a dressing room mirror, Grande whisks Arturo away to the environment that she has made her own so that she can behold her vision for him. To be fair, one can imagine Grande wishing that, once in her space, he might be self-inspired —that her act might transform into an act of mentorship. Grande finds disappointment instead, relating: "Arturo wasn't comfortable in Santa Cruz. The campus intimidated him. He clung to [her] as we walked hand in hand from building to building. Though he towered over [her] and many of the other students on campus, he seemed small" (122). Barely into the "tour," Arturo tells Grande, "Ya vámanos" [*lets go already*], and they "returned to Watsonville, back to

the fields and the bar he loved, where [they] drank Coronas and listened to the jukebox play rancheras—the melancholy music from Jalisco, the place he longed for" (122). Grande is able to relate to this longing in her description of how Vicente Fernández plays on the jukebox as Arturo tells her "about his home, his family, everything and everyone he had left behind" (122).

In the next scene, Grande shares an exchange between her and her sister that is telling of both of their prejudices:

> "Maybe I can marry him and get him his papers," I told Mago one day. "I could teach him English. He could go to school, get a better job."
>
> "Ay Nena, why are you always trying to rescue people? Focus on your dreams. Olvida ese lechugero [*forget that lettuce picker*]. Don't let him distract you from your goals." (123)

Clearly, Arturo has become a sort of project for Grande, much like her sister Betty, and—as with that previous project—her instinct is to take on a rescuer's role without much consideration of what the other's actual goals are. With Betty, at least there is some collaboration, but, in Arturo's case, the would-be beneficiary does not seem to be aware that he even "needs" saving. As well, that Grande would approach the "problem" of Arturo's documentation with spousal sponsorship makes sense in the context of her familial experience, but buys into a popular misconception of the ease of the process.[10] Grande continues:

> Lettuce picker? I wanted to say. How dare you call him that? I wanted to do for him what I wished someone had done for our father when he had slept in that abandoned

[10] Research shows that popular portrayals are often misguided and misguiding to the general public, giving a skewed portrayal of immigration. While spousal sponsorship is one of the major paths toward citizenship, it is often a daunting process depending on the situation—for example, the material factors and the luck of bureaucratic process. See sociologist Laura Enriquez's recently published *Of Love and Papers: How Immigration Policy Affects Love and Romance* (2020) for more coverage on this topic as well as its relationship with the criminalization of immigration.

car and had been far from home. Mago hadn't seen where Arturo lived. She hadn't seen him so tired and drained from the field work that for a minute in that club, despite the dim lights, he hadn't looked twenty-two, but fifty. If she met him, maybe she would feel differently.

"You can't save him," Mago said, reading into my silence. "You can't wish him into being something he is not, like you do our father." (123)

There is the justified outraged at her sister's label of "lechugero," Spanish slang hurled as an insult, but there is a sense then that despite Mago's crudeness and insensitivity, she is providing Grande and the narrative with a necessary "hard truth." The construction of the scene gives the implication that Mago's assessment of Grande's intentions for Arturo and the possible risk to her own aspirations in carrying out these intentions are correct. Grande's recollection of her internal reaction signals anger, but she does not actually confront her sister. As well, Grande's indignation comes from Mago calling her boyfriend a "lechugero," not necessarily from the troubling use of the term as an insult, doubly so in how it essentializes one as their labor — refusing to recognize them as a person—and in its denigration of field labor as "less than." Grande's sentiment then—that if Mago could only see Arturo personally, then she would see his worth—reveals the ingrained exceptionalist discourse of the memoir itself. The truth in her sister's logic provides a screen for the dark side of Grande's aspirations—that for exceptionality to matter, there must be a majority of the unexceptional.

In the following scene between Grande and Arturo, she suggests he enroll in the adult English night classes offered in Watsonville—to which he responds with a smile and by shaking his head saying, "I know I look like a gringo, but I'm not. And I'll never be one. Mexico is my home. One day, I will go back" (123). Grande argues that English access will provide better job

and life opportunities, asking, "Don't you want to be able to communicate with Americans in their own language?" (123). Arturo counters by holding her "tight with fierce ownership," saying, "I have you for that." Grande writes that in this instance she recalls her father's dependence on her stepmother throughout their time together: she previously documents this in *Distance* but here adds the new information that "[e]ven when he was dying of cancer…Mila was the bridge between him and his doctors" and comments that "his life had literally depended on her" (124). In Grande's evaluation, this overreliance is "because he was afraid to interact with the outside world and overcome his fear of speaking English and navigating the choppy waters of American culture" (124). Grande continues:

> Arturo was using his nostalgia for Mexico as a barrier between him and American culture, the same thing my own parents had done, the same thing I had done on occasion. I had spent too many years mourning for what I lost, wandering the borderlands trying to find my way, pretending, adapting, and reinventing myself, trying not to buckle under the strain of assimilation and the pressure to hold on to my roots. I had spent too many years torn between wishing to forget and needing to remember, between wanting to fit in and resisting being a sell-out, between dreaming of the future and longing for what used to be but was no longer. (124)

Grande's perturbation at Arturo's expectation of her is fair—the work of cultural translator can be a burden and, significantly, is related to the emotional labor that is often overburdened on women. And yet Grande is also casting a value judgment on Arturo for feeling content to merely get by linguistically until he can return home to Mexico as if there is something inherently wrong with being a Mexican national without aspirations for US citizenship and inclusion. It is one thing to say you and a potential partner have different, incompatible life goals, but it is another to

refuse their goals as diminished. In trying to "help," Grande acknowledges that social mobility is not simply an issue of willing oneself into financial security, that one needs support, but she cannot fathom how, once support is offered, one would not naturally wish to move "up" in class.

In a scene years later, Grande, returning focus to helping family, illustrates that she has found some balance in her sense of rescue. While Grande is waiting to hear back about her application to the Emerging Voices fellowship, Abuela Chinta, still living in Iguala, is bitten by a scorpion and becomes deathly ill. Grande rushes to see her, but arrives just hours after her grandmother has already passed. At the funeral, Grande's young cousin, fascinated by her aunt from America, asks, "¿Vives en Disneyland?" (228). Grande takes the question as a prompt, writing:

> I smiled at her, not sure how to answer her question. I didn't live in Disneyland, but I did live in a magical place. I was reminded once again of the privilege of living in the U.S. Though it wasn't perfect, it was a place that allowed me to thrive. It was a place of opportunity, abundance, possibility, and dreams. Living there allowed me to have what I could never have had in Mexico—a college education, a well-paying job, my own house, my writing. (228)

Even as Grande appears to double down on the (US) American dream, there is a note of critical elaboration—even if the review is positive, there certainly is qualification. Grande continues her reflection:

> I wondered what life had in store for this sweet little girl. How could I teach little Diana to dream of a bright future here in Iguala where nightmares abounded? What could I do for my transnational family to support and encourage them across the borders and mountains between us?

Once again, Grande feels the pull of responsibility but seems to realize that she does not necessarily have the answer for her family's needs. To an extent, Grande recognizes the (US)American dream as *hers* rather than *the* dream to be imposed upon everyone everywhere, for while Grande does continue to draw on it abstractly by posing it as a place of magic, privilege, opportunity, etc., she is also taking the time to consider *how* to help them. The "support and encouragement" are what is posited as moving "across the borders," which is different from a directive *to* cross *the* border. In other words, we could reframe the questions that Grande poses to herself: *How do I share my particular privilege to inspire my family to have their own dreams and goals and help support them achieve said goals*? Grande paints an earnest scene at the cemetery, promising her grandmother in her grave:

> …I would do what I hadn't done while she was alive. I would look out for the family she was leaving behind, especially her grandchildren.
>
> "This time, I promise I won't forget," I said. "Rest in peace, my beloved Abuelita." (228-230)

Grande ends the scene by narrating, "Years later, when I would send my cousin Lupe to college, Diana to beauty school, and their brother Rolando to university, I would fulfill my promise" (230). For once, Grande's metric of success does not depend on citizenship directly, but, in the larger framework of the author's self-narrative, it is still her own socioeconomic mobility that allows her to "fulfill [her] promise."

Despite some moments of nuance, ultimately, Grande resorts to an aspirational model of immigration that prizes education, citizenship, and class mobility. None of these aspirations are inherently problematic, but taken together uncritically as the exemplar of success in narratives around im/migration can be counterproductive in addressing social inequity and injustice of these

communities at large. Grande herself clearly acknowledges social inequity and takes on a sense of personal responsibility for addressing it in her role as a successful writer. The help she gives her family, in addition to being part of her familial duty, is one aspect of this, but what about the larger public?

Toward the end of her undergraduate career, Grande relates that she could not find her childhood immigration experience in published work, leading her to often ask herself, "if I am not in literature, does that mean I don't exist?" (126). Taking the advice of a mentor to heart that "sometimes you have to write the book that you want to read," Grande comes to the conclusion that "[she] would have to write [her] way into existence" (128). From her experience, Grande extrapolates a greater problem of representation of childhood immigration, which, in turn, allows the author to present her success as a form of social advocacy. In the last pages of the memoir, Grande describes a book signing after a book reading event for *Across a Hundred Mountains*:

> When I finished, the students applauded, and I was escorted to the table to sign books…Some students, especially the handful of Latinos in attendance, thanked me. One young woman said, "Thank you for writing your story. You've inspired me to keep fighting for my dreams."
>
> It was then that I knew my struggle had been worth it. (318)

This scene, echoing Cisneros's account of her own readership, suggests that representation holds the power for transformative social change. For these authors, addressing social inequity is a matter of both reaching the masses and inspiring the aspirations of other Latinos/as. Scenes like Grande's book signing and Cisneros account of watching families by her book illustrate this as a cycle of sentiment in which the future author sees his/herself in writing, creates his/herself in writing, and then witnesses their readers see themselves in their writing. Such sentiment is quite

limited: the focus is the author's self-satisfaction with little accounting for the material conditions necessary for the potential dreamers to channel into this cycle. Education would implicitly be the key, but when ideas of education are tied to the logic of exceptionalism, we must ask, who is benefiting and who is being left out?

Cisneros, Troncoso, and González take representation a step further through what we might call literary or writerly activism that aims to help other writers through material support and mentorship.[11] Grande's accounts of her experience as a mentee lay a foundation for her to speak on her role as a mentor, perhaps discussing her work with the Macondo Writer's Workshop, if she continues to publish her self-writing. González, for his part, presents mentorship along with community building as part of "a framework of responsibility to all [those] inhabiting the Chicano/Latino literary landscape" as "a strategy for survival if we are to move ahead in the new millennium as champions of our own cause" (114).[12] González's impression of responsibility also relates to his particular take on representation, as he writes in "Memory Lessons, Memory Lesions":

> …Latino memoir is conscious of politics, of either embracing or rejecting activism—though both are political stances—and whether we like it or not the act of writing and the act of remembering is a political gesture; whether or not we call it political activism, we are performing it. This call to action, this call to the pen, is not about representation—as in representing ones' ethnicity, community, or culture, though some will see it that way and either swell with pride or shrink with fear, or something in

[11] Once again, Rodriguez proves a curious outlier in this regard: he is widely known as a prolific and generous mentor, but would balk at the idea of tying this to representational politics.
[12] From "To the Writer, to the Activist, to the Citizen," a speech made at the National Latino Writers Conference in 2003 as printed in *Red Inked Retablos*.

> between. This call to the pen is about responsibility, perhaps even obligation: if you have the privilege of literacy, of voice, of creative power—use it! (47)

González seems to be acknowledging the burden or representation—specifically regarding memoir—while simultaneously trying to sidestep the limits of representational discourse. While González's note that "some will see it that way" is vague, it suggests that there might not be a sidestepping—readers and/or writers will inevitably interpret self-representational writing as representational of a people to some degree.

In their self-representation as exceptional subjects—attaining liberation and upward mobility through higher education, talent, and persistence—González and Grande maintain a care for other Latinos/as, especially those affected by immigration, that continue to lack access to educational and economic resources. There is a difference though between reading their popular memoirs representationally as paradigmatic models for immigrant success and understanding them as examples of a specific type of immigrant success narrative. Yes, these narratives can give insight into experiences of higher education of Latino/a/x students and/or artists and inspiration to their Latinx readers—who likely already have more access to resources than a large proportion of Latinx folk—but this is only a start, not an endgame for social justice and equity.

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