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Not Your Perfect Mexican Migrant: Analyzing the depiction of Migrant Women's Trauma in Chicanx and Mexican Cultural Production

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A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction

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in Hispanic Languages and Literatures

by

Gabriela Patricia Barrios

2024

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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Gabriela Patricia Barrios

Doctor of Philosophy in Hispanic Languages and Literatures

University of California, Los Angeles, 2024

Professor María Teresa de Zubiaurre, Co-Chair

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The topic of migrants from Mexico to the United States has been in the foreground of culture and politics for the past twenty or so years, and public opinion regarding migration has affected policy decisions. This public opinion has largely been influenced by news media as well as popular films, series, and literature. However, not all migrants are represented equally or in equal situations. My dissertation analyzes the representation of Mexican migrant women's trauma in Mexican and Chicanx cultural production in the 20th and 21st centuries. This dissertation looks at Mexican and Chicanx film, literature, and oral history to understand the ways in which the figure of the migrant woman is inserted into narratives of suffering and trauma Using such thinkers as Gloria Anzaldúa, Amanda Ellis, and Cathy Caruth, I link gender, trauma, and border identity to understand the differences between the migrant women characters represented in cultural production and the real-life women whose lives are affected by these portrayals.

Most of the cultural production related to migrant women shows that this group is considered threatening by established institutions in both the U.S. and Mexico because of a pervasive xenophobia, many times codified into law, in both countries. This dissertation builds on theorization around the representation of trauma in cultural production. While Amanda Ellis has written about trauma in Chicanx literature, there has been no in-depth study about the representation of female migrant trauma across the U.S. Mexico border.

This dissertation of Gabriela Patricia Barrios is approved.

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Acknowledgments

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Introduction

The figure of the female migrant is central to better understand the logics of power that define the migratory journey to the U.S. This dissertation looks at the ways in which female migrants turn trauma into survival strategies in literature and film, ending with real-world case studies. The works included in this dissertation span mainly the 21st century and are produced in the United States and Mexico. The analysis follows the dangerous transitions that can occur in a migrant lifespan including adolescence, birthing, and death, as well as the last chapter's look at what it means to survive. The dissertation includes discussions about the following films: *Nosotras las sirvientas* (Zacarías Gómez Urquiza, 1951), *Roma* (Alfonso Cuarón, 2018), *Xiquipi' Guie'dani* (Xavi Sala, 2019), *Spanglish* (James L. Brooks, 2004), *La jaula de oro* (Diego Quemada-Diez, 2013), and *The Three Deaths of Marisela Escobedo* (Carlos Pérez Osorio, 2020). The Mexican television series titled *Mujer, casos de la vida real* (1986-2007) is also included. Along with works on screen, the dissertation also considers the representation of migrant women's trauma and survival in literature, using such texts as: *A True Story Based on Lies* (Jennifer Clement, 2001), *I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter* (Erika L. Sánchez, 2018), *Somewhere Between Bitter and Sweet* (Leakan Zea Kemp, 2021), *Diablo Guardián* (Xavier Velasco, 2003), *The Everything I Have Lost* (Sylvia Aguilar Zéleny, 2019), *Desert Blood* (Alicia Gaspar de Alba, 2004), and *El invencible verano de Liliana* (Cristina Rivera Garza, 2021).

Drawing on the important academic work, this dissertation investigates this representation of migrant women in culture and analyzes what kinds of futures and realities this representation indicates for the public opinion of migrant women's suffering. The importance of analyzing the representation of migrant women's trauma lies in the way that cultural production

affects popular opinion and even public policy[1]. The study of female migrant trauma in Mexico and the U.S. is especially urgent in a time in which U.S. policies only reinforce xenophobic, racist, and classist ideologies. Such policies as California's Proposition 187, which encouraged U.S. citizens to reveal the status of undocumented neighbors and acquaintances, indicate the level of xenophobia with which migrants have been treated.

The way in which individuals experience trauma is different from the representation of that trauma and the violence that causes it. While trauma experience is the actual *lived experience* of an individual who is going through the process of trauma, trauma representation refers to the depictions of trauma that could take the form of a novel, film, art piece, or other form of cultural production that has to do with trauma. Finally, trauma and violence are related but different concepts. Trauma can occur as an individual or group of people process a violent event. The violence that may cause trauma is also often depicted in cultural production that deals with trauma.

When understanding trauma as a communally felt and communally expressed phenomenon, trauma itself can be a bridging process rather than a divisive phenomenon. I focus on trauma rather than suffering to center those who are processing pain, rather than focusing on depictions of suffering that could fall into fetishization due to their focus on the suffering moment rather than the way in which that suffering is processed. The distinction between trauma and suffering for the purposes of this dissertation consists of the duration of each. I use the word "suffering" to talk about the pain in or right after the moment of tragedy, while "trauma" refers to the much longer phenomenon of processing this pain and tragedy. Though the trauma of the

[1] The internationally acclaimed film *Roma* (2018), directed by Alfonso Cuarón, was cited in a court decision that formalized domestic workers' position as workers who can unionize and file anti-discrimination suits against their employers. (Laborde)

migrant female body is my central focus, intergenerational trauma and its expression and cultural production cannot be overlooked due to the ways in which it reveals shifts in ideology among generations.

The 20th and 21st centuries have been fraught with historical moments for migratory studies, specifically relating to U.S.-Mexico border relations. Never has it been clearer that the U.S. and Mexico exist in an interrelated way. Migratory policies, presidential administration, legislative changes in each country affect citizens in the other country, especially those groups who are considered hybrid or in-between—Mexican Americans, Mexican migrants, Chicanas. The common idea of Mexican migrants to the U.S. has been that of a younger man, men being more visible as migrants throughout the 20th century (Kanaiaupuni 1312). This idea is supported by the statistics, with only around 20% of Mexican migrants being women, and only 15% of those 20% emigrating to the United States of America (INEGI). However, the migration of families has increased exponentially in the recent years, with 54% of encounters with U.S. Border Patrol at the U.S.-Mexico border being with families in December of 2023 (Gramlich 1). These families usually include women, and with encounters at the U.S.-Mexico border hitting an all-time high in 2023, the topic of migration remains an urgent issue. In focusing on Mexican women and Chicanas this dissertation highlights the transnational relationship between the U.S. and Mexico that has long affected migrants, even those not from Mexico. Though the current landscape of migration has shifted to a majority of South American, specifically Venezuelan, many migrants to the U.S. are still from Mexico, with 25% of all migrants in 2018 being Mexican (Budiman 1). The representation of their trauma gives a glimpse into the ways in which the hegemonic cultures of the U.S. and Mexico view these women's migration and positionalities.

Within the field of trauma studies, scholarly work has most focused on the Holocaust. These studies provide a foundation for what Western academic institutions understand to be the trauma narrative. Some of these studies include the well-cited work of Cathy Caruth (1996) and Ann Cvetkovich (1992). The more habitually used psychoanalytical work bases itself on the traumatized subject's inability to tell their traumatic story. Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub's 1992 work related to testimony is one of the most ubiquitous and posits that the witness cannot ever fully express their testimony about a traumatic event. The ineffability of the trauma narrative was a popular viewpoint, affecting multiple disciplines. More recent scholarship has challenged this perspective, drawing on regional and Indigenous understandings of the psyche to propose alternative understandings of trauma and its effects.

The field of Chicana/o Studies examines the healing process to further add to trauma studies. Amanda Ellis's 2015 dissertation titled *Detrás de Cada Letra: Trauma and Healing in Chicana/o Literature* connects the field of trauma studies with Chicano literature and traces the legacy of colonialism within this body of cultural production. With this new approach, the concept of the trauma narrative is expanded beyond the European concept born of Holocaust studies and becomes more fluid, encompassing embodied emotions and spiritual expressions as part of the trauma narrative. Ellis's later monograph *Letras y Limpias: Decolonial Medicina and Holistic Healing in Mexican American Literature* (2021) examines healing methods in the wake of colonial trauma and the ways they are represented in Mexican American literature. This contribution to the field opens the possibilities of reading a trauma narrative through Indigenous and Chicanx spiritual practices. This understanding of the trauma narrative allows for a deep Chicanx theorization of trauma studies that leaves stories of suffering legible to the community that has experienced this suffering. In a similar vein, Martha Gonzales's and Lara Medina's text

Voices from the ancestors : Xicanx and Latinx spiritual expressions and healing practices (2019) guide readers through the healing rituals and practices of Indigenous and African communities. The sharing of this knowledge into an academic space continues the effort to bring non-European and non-Institutionalized knowledge of trauma into Chicanx and cultural studies. These works are instrumental in understanding the link between Mexican American identity and trauma studies. However, they do not go into detail about the gendered experience of women migrants. These studies also look exclusively at the U.S.-based Chicano community, a hybrid community, but do not analyze Mexican cultural production or cultural progress alongside it.

The gendered reality of Chicana trauma is less studied than the totalizing understanding of Chicano trauma, which at times ignores the gendered aspect of embodied experience. A more recent work titled *Cicatrixs Poetics, Trauma, and Healing in the Literary Borderlands: Beyond Survival* (2024) by Adrianna M. Santos traces Chicana survival narratives and proposes these as a method for healing. Santos draws on Indigenous healing traditions and ideologies to offer an alternative to European-centered trauma studies. Her text is an important step to firmly establishing a Chicanx trauma studies that represents non-European communities. Another vein of Chicanx studies that this dissertation builds on is the realm of Chicana feminist studies. The final section of this dissertation is especially indebted to the scholarly work of Maylei Blackwell in her foundational text *Chicana power!: contested histories of Feminism in the Chicano movement* (2011). This text uplifts the stories of women that were often overlooked in the story of the broader Chicano movement. Along with the more recent *Chicana movidas : new narratives of activism and feminism in the movement era* (2018), edited by Dionne Espinoza, María Eugenia Cotera, and Maylei Blackwell, *Chicana Power!* challenges the understanding of Chicano history as a story of heroic male figures.

These studies join the robust tradition of Chicana feminism begun by Anna Nieto Gomez (1974), Gloria Anzaldúa (1987), and Cherrié Moraga (1983). These thinkers helped craft the concept of Woman of Color feminism, highlighting the triple marginalization that Chicanas face due to their class, race, and gender. The task they sought to accomplish was one of recognition of Chicanas' role in the fight for civil rights along with a deeper, more nuanced understanding of Chicana sexuality. This exploration of Chicana sexuality also explores the ways in which Chicana suffering and trauma relate to the expression of gender, specifically queerness. Anzaldúa reflects upon the concept of patriarchy and homophobia in the Chicano community and theorizes what she calls a "Nepantla" way of being, or an in-between state that fosters self-expression. Chela Sandoval's (2000) addition to this field fleshes out the concept of third-space feminism, as a way of engaging marginalized consciousnesses. Her "methodology of the oppressed" shows the way the logic of the oppressor functions and the methodology through which this logic might be ruptured. Through Sandoval's contribution, the field of Woman of Color feminism finds a new technique of resistance and transgression.

This dissertation places Chicanx and Mexican cultural production in conversation, necessarily drawing from the two fields of thinking and scholarship. The booming field of Mexican feminism offers a deeper understanding of trauma through its analysis of the tragedy of feminicide in Mexico. While feminicide happens globally, the Mexican incidence of the murder and mutilation of female bodies has long been protested and theorized by Mexican academics. The Ni Una Más movement, which calls for an end to the killings of women in Mexico, has generated scholarship that theorizes the violence that gave birth to this movement as well as the strategies of resistance it offers. Sarah Meagan Upton (2010), Frida Guerreo (2018), and Nina Maria Lozano (2019) offer histories of the movement and point to its collectivity.

Mexican feminist thought theorizes the problematic of femicide quite deeply, while the issues of female migration are far more understudied, both in the general field of migratory studies in the United States as with feminist thinkers in Mexico. However, the subject of migration from Mexico to the United States enjoys a wealth of important studies. Some of the most influential in recent years include the crucial documentation of those migrating on the cargo train colloquially called "La Bestia" that Oscar Martínez provides in his text *Los migrantes que no importan : en el camino con los centroamericanos indocumentados en México* (2010). The journey on La Bestia proves to be particularly dangerous for women, with young girls and women disguising themselves as boys and men to escape notice. This peril is widespread in the undocumented migratory journey. However, the journey has not always looked the same. Previous documentation includes early studies such as Jorge Bustamante's 1997 text, *Cruzar la línea: la migración de México a los Estados Unidos,* one of the more complete descriptions of undocumented as well as documented border crossing in the late 20th century. While studies about migration shed light on the difficult conditions that undocumented migrants and those passing through Mexico face, the specific issue of gender among migrants still goes largely unstudied. Notable exceptions include the 2012 collected volume edited by Esperanza Tuñón Pablos and Martha Luz Rojas Weisner, *Género y Migración,* which catalogues vulnerability and survival strategies of women migrants passing through Mexico from Central America.

Cultural production related to female migrant trauma touches on the fields of trauma studies, affect, *testimonio*, gender studies, queer studies, and critical race theory. Within the field of trauma studies, the concept of a gendered trauma often falls into the trap of stereotype and can easily divide experience based on preconceived notions of gender performance and gender roles. Elizabeth Jelin's writing about women and human rights speaks to the narration of trauma by

women and its difference from that of men. While Jelin addresses the differences in lived experience between men and women during traumatic events, she fails to address genderqueer individuals and often her analysis essentializes the female experience into that which *should* or is *generally* felt. I take the concept of gendered telling of trauma from Jelin's analysis and expand on the diversity and variety within a female retelling of violence through her trauma lens. However, contemporary sociological and psychological studies of female trauma do not distinguish in the way that any gender experiences trauma, rather the violent events and risks that each gender faces is the distinguishing factor[2].

The recent feminization of migration due to the feminization of labor in the 20th and 21st centuries ensures that discussions surrounding brown women's rights and exploitation in Mexico and the U.S. go together with conversations about migration and migratory flow (Desai 17-18). Migration is already a precarious action and the employment to be found, especially for undocumented migrants, in the U.S. and Mexico is largely informal work that tends towards exploitative conditions[3]. The figure of the migrant can be a challenge to the concept of a unified nation but can also be used as a vilified figure that re-enforces an insular idea of nationhood. In *Race and Nation in Modern Latin America,* Thomas C. Holt states, "race is transformed in step with exigencies of nation-making." These type of nation-making racial concepts are specific to whichever nation they are born in. Therefore, as a migrant moves from nation to nation, they may be defined under different racial terms and systems. Though an individual may be considered part of a social or racial elite in their home country, the racial hierarchies of their

[2] Duriesmith, David, "Memory, Trauma, and Gendered Insecurity," *The Routledge Handbook of Gender and Security,* Routledge Press, 2018. Duncan, Whitney L., "Gendered Trauma and Its Effects: Domestic Violence and PTSD in Oaxaca," *Culture and PTSD: Trauma in Global and Historical Perspective,* Ed. Devon Hinton and Byron J. Good, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015.

[3] Chang, Grace, *Disposable Domestics: Immigrant Women Workers in the Global Economy,* Cambridge, MA: South End Press, pp. 105-106, 2000.

country of destination may define them as subaltern[4]. The wide-scale domestic migration of women around Mexico to find work in cities and on the border is mirrored on an international scale as migrants from the Mexican countryside move towards urban centers in the U.S. looking for informal employment.

Strategies of survival on the migrant trail are crucial for female migrants as they face high risk of sexual violence and exploitation (Muzneiks 2016). In fact, female migrants create networks among them to share strategies of survival against immediate threats to their person as they travel through Mexico and/or the United States (Schmidt and Buechler 2017). Thinking of these tactics of survival, female migration is a much more precarious proposition than male migration and depends on the transmission of knowledge among female migrants. I argue that female ethnic identity relies largely on stories of survival and suffering to generate strategies of endurance. In fact, in her collection of female migrant testimonies, Vicki Ruiz states, "Mexicanas created their own worlds of influence predicated on women's networks, on ties of familial and fictive kin" (16). This network-building comes from the concrete experiences of having lived through injustices on the border and in the new workplace. Without a network, survival would be difficult. In the case of female migrants and their expression of a group identity, trauma can be a tool for survival as well as a form of subversion.

The representation of migration in film and literature across the U.S.-Mexico border has historically focused on male migration, with male protagonists as the heroes and villains. This male-centered representation remains prevalent. However, even in the more typical representation of migration, the depiction of women, especially Mexican migrant women, helps

[4] Saldaña Portillo's exploration of race on the border highlights the instability of racial categories but also indicates the ways in which migrants who are racially ambiguous under the U.S. system of racism are used to bolster racially exclusive policies.

understand the ways in which transnational power dynamics and racial dynamics play out within and outside of cultural production. The recent administrations in the United States and Mexico have fore fronted migration as a crisis to be tackled. Under the Trump administration, the United States saw the most sustained and overt focus on the U.S.-Mexico border in presidential history, this attention being negative (Correa-Cabrera 3). The attention to the border is accompanied by the upcoming in-tandem elections in the United States and Mexico, giving rise to the concept of "intermestic" campaign issues, issues that affect both U.S. and Mexican domestic policy (Anduiza Pimentel 2-3).

The violence arising from the so-called War on Drugs proclaimed by Nixon and followed throughout the late 1990s and early 2000s created the conditions for a large migratory era, with individuals fleeing violence in their home states and country. This type of violence was acknowledged to affect Mexican women only after the discovery of dozens of murdered women and girls in 1993. However, the violence against women on the U.S.-Mexico border defined the way in which the politics and necropolitics of violence and narcoviolence are understood in both countries (Wright 709). From the moment of the Mexican Revolution to the more recent moment of migration due to violent events in Mexico, the role of women migrants has been buried under the stories of men who make the migratory journey. However, the presence of Latinas in the United States has long threatened the status quo of white supremacy, with numerous government sterilization efforts as testament to this threat.

Starting the early 20th century, the sterilization of Latinas in the U.S. became institutionalized, to be frowned upon post World War II, only to make its resurgence in force in the 1970s. Such landmark cases as *Madrigal v. Quilligan* and *Andrade v. Los Angeles County* drew attention to the forced and coerced sterilization of Mexican and Mexican American women

at the Los Angeles County-USC Medical center (Espino 724). The racist reasoning behind sterilizing Latinas include classism as well, as eugenic proponents of forced sterilization point to poverty as a reason for Latinas being classified as unfit parents. The eugenicist and genocidal drive to eliminate fertility among Latinas, and migrant women especially, points to the fear of migrant woman by an intrinsically racist system of legislature and justice. Despite high male migratory statistics in the 20th and early part of the 21st centuries, the migration of women, especially those considered women of color, is a move considered to be de facto transgressive. The media depiction of this migratory journey is essential to understanding widespread popular opinion regarding women migrants and gendered migration.

By tracing the dangerous transitions that exist in the migrant reality in the U.S. and Mexico, this dissertation is able to analyze the ways in which migrant women are viewed in cultural production and the ways in which their trauma and suffering is used to characterize them. In the first chapter of my dissertation, "Coming to Terms with Coming of Age: Intergenerational Trauma and Mexican and Chicanx Young Adult Identity Formation," I analyze the ways in which Mexican and Chicanx young female bodies are treated in trauma narratives. The works analyzed in this chapter depict young women and girls who are either migrants or daughters of migrants. The chapter features three Mexican works, *Diablo Guardián* (Xavier Velasco, 2003), *The Everything I Have Lost* (Sylvia Aguilar Zéleny, 2019), and *La jaula de oro* (Diego Quemada-Diez, 2013), as well as three works created by North American authors and directors: *I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter* (Erika Sánchez, 2018), *Somewhere Between Bitter and Sweet* (Leakan Zea Kemp, 2021), and *Spanglish* (James L. Brooks, 2004). I include depictions of daughters of migrants to better understand the role of intergenerational trauma and its depiction in the liberation or objectification of young Mexican and Mexican American girls.

With the help of such concepts as Nepantla, Anzaldúa's in-between space, and the Chicana Bildungsroman, I show the different ways in which Mexican and Chicanx fiction about adolescent migrants creates the foundation for female migrant identity in cultural production.

The second chapter of the dissertation, "Birth and Trauma: Depictions of Indigenous Domestic Workers in Mexican and Chicanx Cultural Production," deals with the societal fear of migrant women's reproductive potential as it analyzes the figure of the domestic worker migrant in Mexican and Chicanx literature and film. The works included in this chapter are the films *Nosotras las sirvientas* (Zacarías Gómez Urquiza, 1951) *Roma* (Alfonso Cuarón, 2018) and *Xiquipi' Guie'dani* (Xavi Salas, 2019) as well as the novel *A True Story Based on Lies* (Jennifer Clement, 2001). This chapter focuses largely on film because of the proliferation of depictions of Mexican Indigenous domestic workers in Hollywood in the 20th and 21st centuries. The popularity of Netflix's film *Roma* caused tangible changes in Mexican law, allowing for protections that domestic workers had not enjoyed before the movie's popularity.

However, the landscape of domestic worker depictions is more complex than this largely publicized victory. In all these works, the concept of a child-bearing Indigenous domestic worker is represented as a threat to upper-class and Mestizo futures. Through the lens of race and class, this chapter analyzes the transgressive force behind the domestic worker figure, understanding the ways in which mobility and fertility come together to make this figure threatening to the racial and class status quo in Mexico and the United States. Studies such as the text by Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo titled *Doméstica: Immigrant Workers Cleaning and Caring in the Shadows of Affluence* (2001) and Eshel Amir's *Futurity: Contemporary Literature and the Quest for the Past* (2013) help make sense of the relationship between Indigenous and Mestizo in these domestic

worker- employer relationships. The two intertwined but antithetical to each other's future survival.

The concept of survival and futurity continues in the third chapter of the dissertation, "What is True in True Crime?: An Analysis of Migrant Women's Trauma in Mexican and Chicanx True Crime Cultural Production and its Alternatives." This chapter analyzes the Mexican and Chicanx interventions in the true crime genre and looks at the ways in which female migrant death is depicted and the subsequent collective trauma of a community is stirred as a result. The works included in this chapter include the texts *Desert Blood* (2004) by Alicia Gaspar de Alba, and *El invencible verano de Liliana* (2021) by Cristina Rivera Garza as well as the works on screen *The Three Deaths of Marisela Escobedo* (Carlos Pérez Osorio, 2020) and the television series *Mujer, casos de la vida real* (1986-2007).

Keeping the balance between U.S.-based works and Mexican-based works, this chapter observes and interrogates the ethics of female representation in true crime. Though often viewed as a tool for justice and in some ways retribution, the true crime genre also exploits its subjects through the depiction of death as entertainment. The specific true crime that features in this chapter on the feminicides in Mexico and on the U.S.-Mexico border. Sifting through the complexities of these atrocities, my analysis connects the female trauma caused by feminicide to the limitations of representation that this largely popular genre offers.

The fourth and final chapter of this dissertation, "*Señora Power*: An Archival Case Study in Transgressive Chicana Joy," traces the possibility of survival and catalogues strategies of resilience in real-life Chicana respondents. This chapter is based on work done for the *Señora Power* project, a public-facing digital humanities endeavor that uses Chicana oral histories and archival knowledge to create a public repository and community podcast for educational and

memory purposes. Begun as a collaboration in the Fall of 2022, *Señora Power* is co-directed by Sonia Del Hierro, Assistant Professor at Southwestern University, Gaby Barrios, PhD Candidate at UCLA, and Sophia Martínez Abbud, PhD Candidate at Rice University.

The *Señora Power* project traces the change in political consciousness and identity formation of Chicanas from 1900-1984 in Houston and Los Angeles. This project highlights the ways in which respected Chicanas gathered resources for their communities despite challenges such as institutional and structural racism, sexism from within and outside of their communities, and ageism. *Señora Power* is a multimedia project, existing in website, podcast, and physical pamphlet formats ensuring that Chicanx community members of varying digital proficiencies have access to their own histories.

This project takes inspiration from the project *Chicana Por Mi Raza,* created by Maria Cotera and Linda García Merchant with the help of funding from the University of Michigan. This chapter features two case studies of Los Angeles Chicanas who fight to gain resources for their communities and for Mexican and Mexican American women on welfare in the 1960s and 1970s. Through the stories of these two women, Lupe Anguiano and Alicia Escalante, I reflect upon the ways in which collective trauma can be understood and survived through every day resource gathering strategies.

Chapter 1

Coming to Terms with Coming of Age: Intergenerational Trauma and Mexican and Chicanx Young Adult Identity Formation

I. Introduction

This chapter considers four novels: *I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter* (2017) by Erika L. Sánchez, *Somewhere Between Bitter and Sweet* (2021) by Laekan Zea Kemp, *The Everything I Have Lost* (2021) by Sylvia Zéleny, and *Diablo guardián* (2003) by Xavier Velasco as well as a film, *Spanglish* (2004) dir. James L. Brooks, and the film *La jaula de oro* (2013) dir. Diego Quemada Díez. These novels and films have as their protagonist migrant girls, their parents, and their love interests. These characters display varying modes of suffering and expressions of trauma. I define trauma as the action of processing a violent event (Atkinson 10). Trauma studies as a field was born around the study of processing the Holocaust and some of its major scholars established trauma as the processing of violence is inherently un-representable (Caruth 1996, Felman 1992). Though trauma studies have long focused on the un-representability of trauma experience, the representation of migrant women's trauma in Mexico and the U.S. is representable both in mainstream cultural production as well as through more grassroots forms of expression.

When speaking of the representation of adolescent female trauma in Mexican and Chicanx migrant stories, the concept of intergenerational trauma is central. The concept of postmemory, originally coined by Marianne Hirsch in her 2012 monograph titled *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture After the Holocaust*, illuminates the mechanism by which memories from previous generations affect the quality of life of later generations. This concept of postmemory is related to the idea of intergenerational trauma,

however, its application is largely in the field of post-Holocaust studies. This chapter references the term "intergenerational trauma" because of this term's ties with Indigenous Studies, a field to which Gender, Chicana/o, and Mexican Studies all owe ideological debts.

In the often-fraught relationships between the young protagonists and their parents, one can see the sociopolitical dynamics between recent migrants, later generations of migrant families, and the latest generation of young Chicanas. This chapter explores the representation of intergenerational trauma of adolescent Chicanas and Mexicanas. The period of adolescence portrayed is essential to understanding the depiction of migrant women's trauma because during this formative period is when women's bodies become sexualized. The cultural production that makes up the point of analysis of this chapter re-imagines societal norms as it narrates a teenage protagonist's experience through inexperienced eyes.

Many works included in this chapter are of the Young Adult literary or filmic genre, but not all. The focus of this analysis is on understanding the process of identity formation and trauma depiction in young adults in Mexican and Chicanx cultural production. Because of this goal, it is essential to include as many representative works that include adolescents as possible. The Young Adult genre is largely a production of the U.S. publishing world, and so does not reflect the totality of Mexican and U.S. works about adolescents. Though the novels included in this chapter can be understood as Young Adult fiction, the films are about adolescents but not exclusively for an adolescent audience. To understand how the representation of adolescent female migrants and female migrants' daughters' functions, it is important to analyze cultural production that speaks to the migrant female experience, some of which is outside of the Young Adult genre.

Through the storytelling conventions of Young Adult literature and film, the authors and filmmakers of these works shape the future of Mexican American migrant identity as they depict the current reality of gendered beliefs about migrant girls and their suffering. The trauma of young girls as depicted in these types of stories is a catalyzing force for identity formation, and presumably the process of identity formation of young readers. In these novels and films, the sexualization of young female bodies is the linchpin upon which the protagonists' identity formation rests. As the young migrant female body is sexualized in these stories, the affected character has the choice to reject this sexualization or assimilate it into her budding identity.

This chapter deals with what has become known as Young Adult Literature and its corresponding film and television counterparts, specifically the novels, film, and series that focus on adolescent Mexican and Mexican American women's bodies. The Young Adult category has been steadily expanding in popularity and budget during the late 20th and 21st centuries. An article in *The Atlantic* from 2019 analyzes the popularity this category has and gathers several quotes from experts, including Tracy van Straaten, the Vice President of Scholastic at the time: "Something people tend to forget is that YA is a category not a genre, and within it is every possible genre; fantasy, sci-fi, contemporary, non-fiction. There is so much richness within the category" (Doll 3) The genre of migrant fiction within Young Adult Literature, Film, and Television is essential for the purposes of understanding the way in which Mexican and Mexican American adolescent girls' trauma is depicted and used in these stories.

The Young Adult title is specific to the United States, while Spanish-speaking cultural institutions call this category "literatura juvenil," encompassing what would be considered Middle Grade literature in the United States. In Mexico, multiple awards exist for "Literatura Infantil y Juvenil," a category which brings together elementary, middle grade, and young adult

literature. However, not many awards are given exclusively for adolescent literature. One such prize is the Premio Nacional de Literatura Para Jóvenes FeNal-Normal, awarded since 2009 to works written for readers 13-18 years of age by authors above the age of 25. Similarly, awards for young adult literature consider many young readers in their awarding process. One prominent organization, the United States Board on Books for Young People (USBBY) has selected award winners since 2006 for their Outstanding International Books List, often choosing texts by authors who do not represent the communities that they write about. E. Sybil Durand et al. note that the selection of award recipients by organizations such as the USBBY is often lacking in terms of author and illustrator diversity.

This lack of diversity is impactful because, as Durand et al note, lists of award books such as the USBBY OIB list are used by school librarians and instructors to choose which texts to introduce to young readers. YA Literature can serve as a didactic tool and often is introduced to young readers through a scholarly institutional structure. For this reason, the process of reaching notoriety for YA Literature is a fraught one, filled with controversy and arguments among adults. Though often underestimated, Young Adult Literature provides high stakes in that it facilitates the process of becoming an adult and forming an identity within a greater society.

The type of literature and cultural production in this chapter is meant for adolescents and adults in their early twenties, and it fits into the category of Young Adult Literature, Film, and Television. The category of Young Adult Literature, specifically, has enjoyed great success in recent years and has been present since the 1970s in United States literary conversations (Blakemore 1). The literary category's subversive potential has always been at the heart of the conversation and controversy around this category of literature. Though this genre is diverse in narrative style, one mainstay of Young Adult Literature is the theme of development of the

protagonist or protagonists throughout the text, and its progression towards adulthood and out of childhood. There is much potential for identity formation in these texts, making it an interesting category of cultural production for analyzing the way in which identity groups form.

The novels and on-screen depictions I include are divided into those that have a salient mother-daughter relationship and those that have a more salient father-daughter relationship. The gendering of parent figures affects the type of behavioral modelling and socialization that the protagonist sees and internalizes. For example, the tension between mothers and protagonists in *I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter* (2017) and *The Everything I Have Lost (*2021) results in reflections on womanhood and sexualization of young female bodies. This tension ultimately resolves into an understanding of the traits and bonds that link the protagonists to their mothers. Similarly, in the film *Spanglish*, the adolescent main character sees her mother's role in the workspace as precarious because of her mother's gender as it is perceived by the rich White employer family.

The father-daughter relationships in *Somewhere Between Bitter and Sweet* (2021) and *Diablo guardián* (2004) bring up the question of respectability politics as the father figure is seen to either step into or fail in the role of head of household. Additionally, the sexualization of young Latinas in these stories is ubiquitous as boyfriends and love interests proliferate: such relationships reveal even more about the gendered aspect of migration and migratory trauma. The film *La jaula de oro* especially reveals these aspects as the parental figures are absent and three young teens must act as adults, negotiating gender and racialization through the geopolitical space of Mexico.

The negotiation of gendered roles goes hand in hand with the construction of respectability for marginalized groups in both Mexico and the United States. While the

construction of respectability is most salient in the father-daughter relationships, it also prevails in the first three works I mention as it defines what a "good" daughter does and does not do. The term "respectability politics" was first coined by Evelyn Higginbotham in 1993 to describe dynamics in the women's movement of the Black Baptist church between the 19th and 20th centuries. Respectability politics refers to the dynamics within marginalized groups in society who attempt to raise their community's social and political status by enforcing dominant values of respectability within their group, thus enacting often racist, classist, and misogynistic norms to survive.

The families in the works included in this chapter mobilize respectability politics to create a better situation for themselves. Often the young female protagonist will push back against these mobilizations of Mestizo or White middle-class values and attempt to define a new identity for herself that shows the reader an alternative mode of being to that which the protagonist's parents espouse. These conversations of respectability, race, class, and gender are culturally specific, but span geo-political borders. The issue of migration, identity, and place are shared by all works in this chapter. Many of the texts I analyze in this chapter straddle the line between "Mexican" and "Chicanx" cultural production. The story of migration specifically among women continues to be underrepresented in 20th and 21st century Mexican literature, though Mexican film has largely addressed the Central American migration experience through Mexico. The story of the young male migrant is present in contemporary Mexican fiction for adolescents; however, the story of the young female migrant remains scarce.

A systematic review and assessment of Mexican bookstores and their websites shows that the section for adolescent literature is populated with translations of Young Adult Fiction published originally in the United States. In the case of *I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter*

(2017) by Erika L. Sánchez and *Somewhere Between Bitter and Sweet* (2021) by Laekan Zea Kemp, the nationality of the authors and the subject matter place them firmly in the category of Chicana literature. *Diablo guardián* (2003) by Xavier Velasco, is a similarly firmly placed novel, its author and publishing house both being Mexican. Though *I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter* was translated into Spanish, the online reviews are largely for U.S.L audiences, being written in English or by U.S. institutions. *The Everything I Have Lost* (2021) by Sylvia Zéleny is a trickier book to categorize. Though Zéleny is a Mexican author, she published the novel in the United States and wrote it in English. However, the subject matter follows the life of a Mexican girl who spends most of the novel in Ciudad Juárez, where she was born, to then migrate to El Paso. Because of the subject matter, author's nationality, and the fact that the novel was originally written in Spanish before the author decided to re-write it in English for publication, I will treat this text as a Mexican border novel.

The categories of nationality and identity affiliation are difficult to pin down in many of the works included in this chapter due to the *fronterizo*, or border quality of migration as a topic. I refer to the now classic concept of *Nepantla,* specifically the concept of an in-between space developed through Gloria Anzladúa's writing in the fourth edition of *Borderlands/La Frontera*. The *Nepantla* concept is particularly relevant when it comes to telling stories of those who are overlooked under a patriarchal, hegemonic system. In Anzaldúa's words,

> It is a limited space, a space where you are not this or that but where you are changing. You haven't got into the new identity yet and haven't left the old identity behind either—you are in a kind of transition. And that is what *Nepantla* stands for. It is very awkward, uncomfortable and frustrating to be in that *Nepantla* because you are in the midst of transformation. (276)

The novels and on-screen depictions I include in this chapter are representations of *Nepantla* identities and moments. Not only is the time of adolescence an awkward and often violent transitional period, but the contemporary moment is also a moment of transition with regards to depiction of migration and gender in the United States and Mexico. Unavoidably, the migration and post-migration narratives that depict teenage girls' struggles are *Nepantla* stories. In this "awkward, uncomfortable, and frustrating" space of ambiguity and transition is where one can find the sociopolitical realities of migrant women.

The novels in this chapter follow teenage female migrants or daughters of migrants. They are not as much about the act of migrating from one place to another, as is often seen in stories about adult migrants, as they are about the presence of the border or of border culture in the lives of young adults and their intergenerational trauma. The concept of "intergenerational trauma" was originally developed through studies of the traumatic effects of the Holocaust. It was originally called transgenerational trauma and was a concept that helped understand mental health outcomes of children of Holocaust survivors. Some scholars who worked on this include Rebecca Coffey in her text, *Unspeakable truths and happy endings: new trauma therapy* (1998). Recent psychological scholarship has also focused on this type of trauma, calling it intergenerational trauma, and noting the risk factors to children of parents' participation in or survival of the Holocaust (Dashorst, Mooren, et al. 24). Amanda Ellis's 2015 dissertation helps to understand the ways in which Indigenous concepts can balance the theoretical framework around trauma studies. The terms "Mexican" and "Chicanx" are multi-racial and multi-ethnic, including but not limited to Indigenous identifying individuals.

II. Mother-Daughter Dynamics

The mother-daughter relationships in the two novels, *I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter* (IANYPMD), *The Everything I Have Lost,* and the movie *Spanglish* contribute to shaping the border identity with which each protagonist struggles. The conflict within these family structures creates a tension with which the young protagonists must contend to find their identity as young border women. The protagonist of *I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter*, Julia Reyes, is in constant conflict with her mother. This intergenerational female relationship is an entry point for the reader to understand different perspectives on gendered identity and the sexualization of young women that exist within the migrant Mexican community. *I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter* examines the relationship between teenage Julia and her mother, Amparo after the death of Julia's sister, Olga. Julia's parents are migrants from Mexico to the U.S., and the family lives in Chicago. Julia and Amparo clash on everything from personal appearance to mental health outlooks. Julia's mother, Amparo, espouses a more traditional perspective in relation to women's bodies. Her fear of men and desire for her daughter to adhere to traditional modesty rules is revealed to be a result of a traumatic assault experience. As Julia grapples with her mother's ideas about sexuality and gendered identity, she must also contend with the unspoken trauma and traumatic incident that marks her mother's conceptualization of the body and their role in U.S. society. This intergenerational trauma is what shapes their relationship for much of the novel even as it also shapes their different understandings of what it means to live on the border between two cultures.

The relationship between the protagonist of *The Everything I Have Lost* and her mother is a parallel to the trauma-shaped mother-daughter pairing of *I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter* in that both mother-daughter pairings are shaped by the mothers' relationships with

masculinity and patriarchy. *The Everything I Have Lost* tells the story of a pre-teen girl, Julia, as she comes of age and her family flees to El Paso to escape the narcoviolence that her father has brought upon the family. Julia's father is involved in the drug world in Ciudad Juárez, and her young life is affected by this, as is evidenced in the diary format of the novel. The trauma caused by a patriarchal concept of the protagonists' female bodies creates an antagonistic relationship with physical displacement or migration. The younger generation, exemplified by the teenage protagonists, attempts to heal from this inherited trauma through their exploration of border and migratory culture. Both young protagonists of these novels are named Julia, so to differentiate the two I refer to the protagonist of *I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter* as Julia R., her full name is Julia Reyes, and the protagonist of *The Everything I Have Lost* as only Julia, as her last name is never given. The last work I will consider in this first trio of cultural products is the movie *Spanglish* (2004), directed by James L. Brooks, starring Paz Vega, Adam Sandler, and Téa Leoni. The young migrant character in this movie is Cristina Moreno, the daughter of Paz Vega's character, Flor Moreno.

The novel *I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter* puts forward the dynamic between Julia and her mother, Amparo, as a tense one. Mother and daughter struggle to understand each other around the obstacle of loss and grief. As the novel continues, the suffering born of this loss reveals the long-term trauma that Amparo has around relationships between men and women. The reader learns slowly about Olga's life through Julia R.'s investigation into her sister's death. Through this process of investigation, Julia also learns about her mother. While Amparo praises Olga as the favorite and perfect daughter, she compares Julia and finds her lacking in obedience, modesty, and social graces. This triangular relationship between Amparo, Julia R., and the

deceased Olga reveals the ways in which traditional gender norms are constructed within the family.

The presence of grief and trauma in the Reyes family disrupts the usual mobilization of familial roles such as Amparo's role as a traditional mother figure who takes care of all domestic issues. Amparo enters a depressive state after Olga's death and her inability to carry out her usual domestic tasks makes clear her integral role in the family's day to day functioning. Her depression leaves Julia without food since Amparo usually cooks for the family. It also triggers a reflection on Julia's future: "This is the only time I wish I would've let my mother teach me how to cook. But I hate the way she hovers over me and criticizes my every move. I'd rather live in the streets than be a submissive Mexican wife who spends all day cooking and cleaning" (Sánchez 13). This early quote in the novel highlights the tension between mother and daughter that coalesces around gender norms. The coming-of-age genre in which *I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter* falls has a narrative structure that allows for the conflict between mother and daughter to be a stand-in for the conflict between old and new outlooks within Chicanx communities. The young protagonist comes of age, finds her identity, and in this resolution, the novel also proposes a way forward among more traditional and newer points of view in the society depicted.

I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter belongs out the formation of a dual identity, both Mexican and American and has been defined by Amy Cummins and Myra Infante-Sheridan as the "Chicana feminist *bildungsroman"* (19). In this type of coming-of-age novel, the protagonist must portray her understanding of a dual identity as Mexican American while developing values of family, community, and collectivity. This categorization helps to place Julia's struggle with her mother's traditional gender values within a broader framework of

Mexican American identity in narrative fiction in which gendered and racial identities are inseparable for the young female protagonists of the Chicana feminist *Bildungsroman* genre. Writing about this novel, Adrianna M. Santos states, "issues like mental health, suicide, and sex, are confronted head-on by amplifying the voices of young women who are coming of age and in many ways, coming apart" (53). This theme of coming apart in this new type of *Bildungsroman* is essential to understanding the ways in which dual identity helps process the intergenerational trauma of displacement. As the young protagonists fall apart, only to reinvent themselves, so too does the traditional family unit.

Julia's assertion that she would "rather live in the streets than be a submissive Mexican wife" shows the distance that the protagonist perceives between herself and her mother. The term "Mexican wife" is used as a negative term, the idea of "Mexican" being tied to oppressive gender dynamics. Julia conflates the concept of being Mexican with the concept of traditionalism, metonymically expressed through "cooking and cleaning." The traditional role of homemaker is painted as oppressive, a "hover[ing]" and "criticiz[ing]" presence. The archetype of Mexican womanhood is essential for Julia R.'s identity-building process, a process marked with the baggage of an older generation. Amparo cannot provide for her family as she passes through the grieving process, and Julia cannot take her place, being in a "Nepantla" or in-between stage of her life. She has not assumed the role of adult woman within her family structure, but the absence of her mother's domesticity makes clear to her that she does not want to assume this position. Grief serves as a disruptive force in the gendered structure of the surviving Reyes family, mother, daughter, and father. This disruption of the family dynamics forces Julia and her mother to have to speak to each other without the intermediary presence of

Julia's deceased sister, or Julia's father, who copes with his grief through silence and absence from the family home.

The *Bildungsroman* aspect of the novel becomes evident in the way that Julia's view of her mother changes throughout, and with this changing mother-daughter relationship comes a changing self-image. The process of transition is also a process of understanding intergenerational trauma. This transition can also be seen in *The Everything I Have Lost* between the protagonist and her mother. Both *The Everything I Have Lost* and *I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter* show that the protagonist's identity is a result of the family structure in which they are raised. An exploration of the mothers' suffering reveals their intentions towards their daughters and this revelation in turn spurs the daughters' identity crisis and an ultimate reckoning with the mothers' traumas.

In the case of *The Everything I Have Lost,* the mother, referred to as "Mamá," has an abusive dynamic with the protagonist's father and a deep-rooted fear of abandonment. The protagonist sees the interactions between her parents and often sides with her father, a usually absent and permissive figure in her life. The origin of Mamá's trauma, the site of violence in her life, is her abandonment by her mother as well as the fear of violence in Ciudad Juárez. The novel links Mamá's trauma to Julia's in direct ways, Julia even stating, "Tere kept saying things, but in the back of my mind I could only think about the word bullshit and, also, about the fact that when Tere talks, it is actually her mom talking. At least that is what Mamá said when I told her about this" (Zéleny 98). Julia references her friend, Tere, passing judgment for echoing her mother, when the novel shows that Julia herself is also parroting Mamá. This frames Julia's comments as a constant battle against creating a catalogue of "her mom talking." This novel also uses a triangular female relationship to model alternative expressions of femininity in the family

structure. Where *I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter* features two younger women and a maternal figure, *The Everything I Have Lost* displays the relationship between Julia, the middle school aged protagonist, her mother, and her aunt, referred to as Tía. In *IANYPMD* Julia Reyes and Olga, her sister, are compared because they are contemporaries. However, in *The Everything I Have Lost* the young protagonist compares her mother and her aunt, seeing more traditionally maternal characteristics in her aunt than in her mother.

The Everything I Have Lost follows Julia and her parents' conflictive relationship as her mother decides to send Julia and her brother across the border to live with their aunt in El Paso. She sends them away to spare them from the violence in their hometown of Ciudad Juárez. *The Everything I Have Lost* takes place mostly in Ciudad Juárez, only 40% of the novel's action taking place in El Paso. The characters speak Spanish to each other, and this is understood within the logic of the novel though the actual words of this book are written in English for a presumably English-speaking audience. Tía, the protagonist's aunt, becomes a second mother to Julia, at times providing an example of care that reveals her mother's shortcomings: "She is like everybody's mother. I remember how many times Mamá would call her because Papá and her had argued and stuff [. . .] Bis once told me that since they were both little and their mother left, Tía was always taking care of Mamá" (Zéleny 157). Julia's aunt takes on a hyper-maternal role as her job as nurse and her position as breadwinner and U.S. Citizen mark her as a caretaker and safehouse of sorts. Here, the role of "everybody's mother" marks Tía as secondary to Mamá's issues. Her identity is subsumed into "always taking care of" family members, specifically the protagonist's mother.

The disruptive quality of grief and trauma interrupts the illusion of functionality that the traditional family structures in *The Everything I Have Lost* and *IANYPMD* strive to maintain. Tía

is the hyper-functional and self-sacrificing maternal figure in *The Everything I Have Lost* while Mamá is an absent figure who is focused on Papá. While the contention between mother and daughter in *IANYPMD* is ultimately resolved and shown to be caused by misunderstandings or emotional growing pains, the difficulties between Julia and Mamá in *The Everything I Have Lost* do not get resolved as neatly. Julia remains in El Paso with her younger brother, her aunt, cousin, and great-grandmother though her mother stays in Ciudad Juárez. Julia's mother stays behind to be with Julia's father who is associated with narcotrafficking activity there and was injured while participating in an illegal enterprise which is never fully explained. The young protagonist conjectures that her mother will always love her father more than she loves her children: "She cares about nothing but Papá. Papá, nothing but Papá" (Zéleny 147).

Julia feels abandoned the same way that Mamá was abandoned. Tía must care for Julia the way that she had to care for Mamá. She was "always taking care of Mamá." The use of the progressive tense here reveals the constant condition of caretaker that Tía assumes under traditional gender norms as the oldest sister and closest female relative available. Julia expresses kinship with Tía as she feels responsible for her younger brother now that their mother is no longer living with them: "It's like she has forgotten that she has two kids. No, it's me who has a kid. My brother is now my kid" (Zéleny 147). The role of mother is played by Tía, who is everyone's mother, and Julia, who is her brother's mother. Through these depictions of motherhood outside of motherhood, the novel shows the ways in which Mamá's trauma of being abandoned by her mother is re-enacted by Mamá herself onto Julia. This cycle seems never ending; however, Julia's life presents an alternative to becoming like her mother through migration.

Migration is the way out that disrupts the cycle of intergenerational trauma in *I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter* and *The Everything I Have Lost.* The act of migrating also marks an end to the protagonists' childhood and makes way for their coming-of-age identity formation. Julia in *The Everything I Have Lost* sees her mother as a failed maternal figure, someone who is constantly in need of care from Tía and who has turned Julia into a mother before her time. She says of Mamá's choice to make her children migrate to El Paso: "At first, I thought that by taking us out of our house and our family and our country, our mother kicked us out of her life. But really, she kicked us out of ourselves. She kicked us out of childhood, the little childhood I still had left" (Zéleny 157). The parallel structure that repeats "kicked us out" draws a path from "her life," Mamá's life, to "the little childhood I still had left." The origins of home for Julia are with her mother, but soon become something more abstract. For her, Mexico symbolizes her childhood. In *IANYPMD* the opposite is true. Towards the end of the novel, Julia R's parents send her to Mexico to stay with her aunts, uncles, cousins, and grandparents. This decision is made after Julia Reyes attempts suicide and is found by her parents. The trip to Mexico is planned as a healing journey for Julia R.. Her childhood is in the United States, with her neighborhood and parents. For Julia R., the migratory journey is temporary as she returns to Chicago at the end of the Summer to continue attending her U.S. high school. However, this temporary migration also brings about the end of her childhood conceptualization of her mother as traditional and irrationally oppressive. During this trip, she learns about her mother's trauma and by speaking with her extended Mexican family, Julia begins to understand the fear that is behind her mother's repressive attitudes. Both Julia from *The Everything I Have Lost* and Julia Reyes from *IANYPMD* come of age with migration as a catalyzing force.

The migratory experience brings the two young protagonists closer to the traumatizing event or events that their mothers had to experience and that gave birth to their relationships with their mothers. In the case of Julia R., her mother's trauma comes from a sexual assault event during her migration journey to the United States. Julia Reyes's aunt tells her about the rape that her mother survived, thus giving Julia a different understanding of her parent. This revelation helps the protagonist to understand her mother's strict attitudes towards sexuality and restrictive attitude towards her daughter, however, it also leaves Julia with a secret to keep, as she does not wish to retraumatize her mother: "I keep picturing her screaming on the ground, Apá with a gun to his head. I don't think I can ever tell her that I know. But how do we live with these secrets locked within us? How do we tie our shoes, brush our hair, drink coffee, wash the dishes and go to sleep, pretending everything is fine? How do we laugh and feel happiness despite the buried things growing inside? How can we do that day after day?" (Sánchez 284). Amparo's trauma has now passed down to her daughter, Julia, not only through the restrictive actions that Julia could never explain, but also through this image that Julia carries with her. The "screaming" and the "gun" are violent images that skirt the reality of the horror that Amparo had to go through, yet it is enough for the reader and the protagonist to feel the terror behind this scene. The "secrets locked within us" include the secret of Amparo's past that Julia now knows, but also the secret of her older sister, Olga's, affair with a married man and subsequent secret pregnancy. Olga died while pregnant, and this loss of life as well as the hidden sexual life of her older sister are part of the intergenerational trauma that Julia must hold inside her as she finds her own in-between identity. Julia R. has a pseudo-flashback, living her mother's pain through her imagination of the event. The young protagonist does not discuss this event with her mother, but her silent holding of this event in her heart and mind.

Julia R. finds a sense of belonging within her family through the confrontation of this violent event that in many ways defined the family relationship before Julia R. and Olga exist. This sense of belonging is not completely positive, however, as it holds with it the terrible responsibility of continuing life as normal with the knowledge of a mother's suffering and violation. The listing of everyday events such as "t[ying] our shoes, brush[ing] our hair, drink[ing] coffee, wash[ing] the dishes, and go[ing] to sleep" provides a baseline of mundanity against which the violent imagery of "a gun" and "buried things" contrast. This juxtaposition makes clear that the violence of the parents' migratory journey lingers indefinitely, intruding on the quotidian life they attempt to create for their children.

Coming of age in this novel means a coming-to-terms with the intergenerational ties, traumas, and responsibilities that exist between mother and daughter. This coming-to-terms as a coming of age is also present in *The Everything I Have Lost,* as Julia reckons with the ways in which Mamá's trauma makes impossible the mother-daughter relationship that Julia would have liked. Mamá becomes an inscrutable figure to her as she pulls away into their old life in Ciudad Juárez while Julia must start a new life in El Paso. Migration is not a panacea for the two young protagonists of *IANYPMD* and *The Everything I Have Lost,* though it does present new possibilities of healing for the daughter generation of these mother-daughter pairings. The violence that threatened the mothers still exists for the daughters, but their coming-to-terms journey allows them to better understand their role in their family structures, communities, and in the society that perpetuates the systemic violence because of which they bear trauma. This complex depiction of intergenerational trauma validates the humanity of the protagonists' mothers while being very concerned with the future possibilities of younger generations and their identities.

While *The Everything I Have Lost* and *IANYPMD* depict violence against women and the pain of migration, they also depict the complexity of migration and its benefits along with the very real tensions in familial female relationships. These relationships have depth and are shown in complex ways, with conflict and all, to connect with a very tangible audience of young girls and women who may identify with these stories: these are stories that consider the perspective of the main characters' real-life counterparts. Erika L. Sánchez says of Julia Reyes: "People ask me if I am Julia, which is a funny question. The answer is no, it is fiction. However, there are a lot of similarities, of course, I put myself into the character. I put myself into a lot of the characters and so Julia is a very strong willed, flawed, snarky, sarcastic girl. And maybe I was, maybe I wasn't at 15" (Chicago Humanities Festival 1:47-2:19).

Sánchez says that she "put[s herself] into the character" and draws parallels between the "strong willed, flawed, snarky, sarcastic" qualities of Julia Reyes. She admits to seeing herself, at least at one time, as an insider within the group of young Chicana women who she is attempting to reach. In the case of Sylvia Zéleny and her novel, she clearly considers a transnational or bilingual audience as she says in the acknowledgements, "This book was first written in Spanish [. . .] When I realized translation was impossible I rewrote it all over again in English" (227). The consideration about the publication language is also a consideration about who will be reading the novel, and the "impossibility" of translation references an intimate knowledge with the cadence and connotation in each language. Though the author began the idea of writing this novel in Spanish, as she states in her afterword, she found that it was a story to be told in English, though it concerns a Mexican girl. In *The Everything I Have Lost* and *I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter* there is a deep consideration of audience that uses insider knowledge

to write a story in which young girls who have been touched by migration can see themselves represented and their struggles discussed.

III. The Trauma of Assimilation

Film also deals with coming-of-age experiences for Mexican/Chicana female adolescents. James Brooks's 2004 film, *Spanglish* leaves out the insider perspective. This film reads more like a U.S. fantasy of female migration narratives than an actual account of the difficulties of migration. This film is about a migrant woman who travels to the U.S. in search of a way to support herself and her daughter after her husband abandons them. The film is told through the perspective of the daughter and the main plot action occurs when the mother, Flor, is hired in a Beverly Hills home in Los Angeles to be a domestic worker, cleaning the Clasky family's house. Flor's daughter and narrator of the film, Cristina finds herself torn between two worlds as the affluent White family welcomes her while making life difficult for her mother. The start and end of the movie establish that the narration is occurring via Cristina's college admission essay linked to her Princeton application. Her narrating voice re-appears a few times throughout the action of the movie. Flor, according to the admissions essay conceit, is the most influential person in Cristina's life. The film begins with Flor and Cristina's abandonment by Cristina's father, continuing with their undocumented migration on foot to the United States and ultimately Flor's employment by the Clasky family.

From the very start of the movie, the depiction of migration is plagued with euphemisms and made palatable for a U.S. audience. Cristina narrates her migration in the following manner: "My mother kept us in Mexico as long as possible to root me in all things Latin. Finally, she sensed our last opportunity for change" (Brooks 00:1:51-00:2:13). This quote is said over a shot

of Flor and Cristina in a small lavender-colored room filled with family photos in color and black and white as well as a wooden cross, a colorful painting of dancing couples, and a bed covered in multi-colored quilts. Cristina, as a little girl, does homework on the bed while Flor sits in front of a wooden vanity counting money from a small box, dressed in a bath robe. This depiction of Flor and Cristina's home in Mexico is crowded with things. When Flor tells Cristina that they are leaving, the external shot of the house shows that they live in a rural area that overlooks hill country and mountains. The terrain looks arid, both the hilliness and arid quality of their surroundings hint at their hometown being in Northern Mexico, an area of Mexico that was very firmly rooted in the U.S. imaginary of Mexican culture in the early 2000s. The reason for Flor and Cristina's migration is implied to be a mix of economic and emotional concerns.

The film characterizes the migrant mother-daughter duo as emotional from the start, the music in the background of these early scenes an orchestral piece highlighting Spanish guitar solos, indicating a generally "Latin" atmosphere, to use the films parlance for Latinx. Besides their emotions, Flor and Cristina's physical appearance is constantly highlighted. Flor decides to switch jobs in order to better keep an eye on Cristina, her daughter, after seeing a boy trying to grope her daughter at a school dance. The film is aware of the sexualization of Latinas but also uses it to build a caricature of the women in the film, not only Flor and Cristina, but Deborah, Flor's White American employer as well. When Flor interviews for a position as domestic worker in Deborah's home, the American woman immediately exclaims: "You're gorgeous!" upon seeing her. Later in the film, Deborah says, "Flor, look at this child. Oh my god, you could make a fortune at surrogate pregnancy" (Brooks 00:48:52). Deborah comments on Cristina's looks in order to objectify and sexualize Flor as well. Flor's body is worth "a fortune at surrogate pregnancy," tying her crassly to the image of the Mexican domestic worker in the United States

being always available to provide for her employer family, usually by caring for the employer family's children. Surrogacy is an extreme end to this thinking.

During this scene Deborah is standing on a balcony of the Clasky family's beach house in Malibu, while Flor and Cristina stay shaded in the living room. This spatial divide forces the camera to turn from one character's face to the other two in order to maintain a tight shot on their expressions throughout this emotionally complicated scene. As the camera turns to capture Cristina and Flor's reaction to Deborah's comment, it shows their confusion. Flor does not understand much Spanish at this moment in the film and Cristina's reaction to Debora's words remind the audience that she is still just a child, even as she must try to translate these words to her mother.

Though this moment is played for laughs in the film, it reveals the reductive logic that the film applies to migrant feminized bodies, both child bodies and adult bodies. The film casts Flor and Cristina as subjects who can never escape a value system that determines their worth through their attractiveness as defined by a Western, European aesthetic system. Flor and Cristina are presented as foils to Deborah and her daughter, Bernice, often referred to as Bernie. While Flor is immediately proclaimed as "gorgeous," her genetic material worthy of "surrogate pregnancy," with little to no shown effort on Flor's part, Deborah is shown to go on punishing runs every morning, taking care about what she eats and even exerting this control over her daughter. Deborah is constantly talking and expecting to be obeyed, while Flor cannot speak within the Clasky household until the last third of the movie, when she decides to learn English to communicate with her employers about Cristina, her daughter. While Cristina and Bernie get along, it is implied that they are learning by watching their mothers fight with each other.

The presence of the young migrant woman, the next generation of migrants, precipitates a battle over identity and loyalty. Deborah takes Cristina out to get highlights in her hair without telling Flor, later she obtains a scholarship for her without telling Cristina's mother, and she buys her clothes as well, fascinated by Cristina's thinness in comparison to Bernie's less thin body. The film's obsession with female bodies and their value is highlighted in an early speech read by the narrator who is meant to be Cristina as an older adolescent:

> There is one particular cultural difference, which I wish to explore academically at Princeton. American women, I believe, actually feel the same as Hispanic women about weight. A desire for the comfort of fullness. And when that desire is suppressed for style and deprivation allowed to rule, dieting, exercising American women, become afraid of everything associated with being curvaceous such as wantonness, lustfulness, sex, food, motherhood. All that is best in life (30:56-31:36).

The film couches Cristina's reflection on weight in academizing language, attempting to give it a more official tone and at the same time to insert it into a U.S. system of knowledge production. This contribution by the narrator reminds the audience that the entire narrative is part of a petition to enter Princeton, a stand-in for U.S. exceptionalism, an institutionalized form of validation.

Though *Spanglish* appears to hold up the Mexican migrant woman and her daughter as paragons of womanhood, this essentialization reduces them to their looks, body parts, and function within a white supremacist heteropatriarchy. The film attempts to discuss Cristina's budding identity towards the end, when Flor resigns from her position in the Clasky household and Cristina cries and yells in front of the employer family, saying that she doesn't want to leave. This all comes to a head as the mother-daughter pair wait for the bus to take them home. The

scene begins with Cristina on one side of the bus stop and Flor on the other, as Flor tries to approach her daughter, Cristina's narrative voice enters to give meaning to the moment: "What did spark our climatic moment was my use of a common American phrase. 'Not right now. I need some space'" (Brooks 2:03:57-2:04:05). During the recitation of the "common American phrase," Cristina's diegetic voice, her voice as a younger version of herself, comes in and contrasts with the older narrator voice that provides the frame for this story.

This scene holds the coming-of-age moment in Cristina's trajectory. She weaponizes an English phrase to keep her mother at length because she sees her mother as an obstacle to her happiness and her belonging within the Anglo U.S. family they just left behind. Flor's longer response to her daughter must be translated for the assumed English-speaking audience by Cristina's narrative voice-over who talks over the Spanish words that Paz Vega, the actress who plays Flor, is saying:

"CRISTINA: In the midst of confrontation, she found clarity.

FLOR: Claro, ahora entiendo lo que está pasando. Hija siento que tengas que lidiar con—

CRISTINA: She expressed regret that she had to ask me to deal with the basic question of my life at such a young age.

FLOR: Sé que todavía eres una niña—

CRISTINA: And then she asked it.

FLOR: ¿Eso es lo que tú quieres para ti misma?

CRISTINA: Is what you want for yourself to become someone very different than me?"

(2:04:19-2:05:08)

The choice that Cristina faces is to either "become someone very different than" her mother, or, as is implied, to try to adhere to her mother's example in life. Flor becomes the metonym for

Latinidad and authenticity in the film, and Cristina's choice is not only about a young girl's desires in that moment, but more broadly about her loyalty to her culture via her mother. The Flor-Cristina-Deborah triangular relationship comes to a head during this moment, even as Deborah is absent from the scene. The "confrontation" that Flor must face in order to find "clarity" is the struggle against her Anglo employer for Cristina's loyalties.

The film attempts to uplift Cristina's ultimate decision to be loyal to her mother and symbolically, to her "Latin" heritage, a word she uses in the migratory scene of the movie. However, the film is clearly made to be palatable to an outsider audience. The trauma of assimilation and the pain of coming to terms or coming of age among this trauma is not fully shown in this movie. Instead of being the underlying conflict, the question of assimilation is merely a tool for resolution. Flor and Cristina are shown as virtuous for having left the Anglo space of the Clasky's household, but the question of Flor's livelihood after her resignation is never addressed. The promise of a bright future is implied in Cristina's narration, the reason for the telling of this story, her application to Princeton. However, in order to be considered of merit, Cristina must make legible her struggle to this institutionalized audience, and more than that, James L. Brooks makes this story entertaining for the English-speaking audience he has in mind. In the climactic scene, Flor does not get to express her teachings to her daughter in her own words, instead Cristina's academized voice must come down as a disembodied translator. Part of this filmic decision is likely due to the fact that Paz Vega, the actress who plays Flor, is Spanish, and the few Spanish-speaking lines she has in the movie that are audible are spoken in a Spanish accent. From the choice of actress to the constant, interrupting translation to the objectification of migrant female bodies, this film is meant less as a liberatory narrative for young Mexican and Mexican American women to take heart in, and more as a white male fantasy of racial otherness

and exoticism. The role of Cristina is both to make palatable the migrant story for U.S. audiences, and to indicate that the young migrant generation will gladly enter into the institutionalized space of higher education, speaking English and translating for an older generation who exists to maintain a certain cultural charm.

Assimilation and its violence is depicted in a much more honest and realistic way in *I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter* and *The Everything I Have Lost* as the two young Julia protagonists struggle to interact with a U.S. environment in an authentic and sincere way. Julia Reyes in *I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter* sees her mother's need for silence in order to secure financial survival for her family: "Dr. Scheinberg arrives right as we're finishing. When he hands us the money, he says, 'Gracias,' and bows with his hands pressed together, and oh my God, he's not even joking. I don't like the way he stares at Amá when he says goodbye. There's something about him that makes me feel as if I'm smeared in awful, warm goo" (Sánchez 103). This quote describes the type of harassment that Amparo, Julia Reyes's mother puts up with in her place of work. Dr. Scheinberg's response to Amparo and Julia R. is to bow "with his hands pressed together" while saying "Gracias," indicating that he doesn't understand Amparo and Julia's cultural background, even though he is an anthropology professor. His "stares" are violent, showing Julia R. the way that her mother is treated at her place of work. This reality contrasts starkly with the experience that Cristina has at the Clasky household, where assimilation and whiteness are seen as glamorous things, only undesirable because they would take her away from Flor, her mother. Adam Sandler's character in *Spanglish* is depicted as the fun-loving father figure whose advances on Flor are more abstract that concrete and whose affection is welcome. In *I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter* the male employer figure is

understood to be a violent character, threatening the protagonist's mother, but someone who must be tolerated nonetheless if the Reyes family is to survive financially.

These difficult considerations are mediated through Julia R's understanding of her mother's experience, much like Flor's experience is mediated through Cristina's narration. However, Julia's narration in *I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter* makes clear the violence necessary to survive and the marks it leaves on her as a young person: "By the time we get on the bus, my back aches, my hands are cracked, and my eyes burn from all the cleaning products [. . .] I've never been this tired in my whole life. Who knew rich people could be so disgusting?" (Sánchez 104). Julia Reyes is physically affected by the relatively short time she spends helping her mother clean houses. In this quote, her body is shown in a fragmentary way, not to sexualize it, but to demonstrate the wear and tear of the kind of work that her migrant mother does in order to allow Julia R. to live and go to college. Julia R.'s "back," "hands," and "eyes" are damaged because of the "cleaning products." This unglamorous portrayal of domestic work contrasts starkly with the vision that Cristina has of Flor's work and employer family.

Finally, the ambiguity of migrant identity are completely dismissed in favor of a violently binary view of this identity in *Spanglish. The Everything I Have Lost* pushes against this by showing Julia's final coming-of-age moment as a coming to terms with the complexity of her own placement geographically and socio-ethnically:

> "Juárez.
>
> El Paso.
>
> Two places that are really one bridge apart. Two places that are one.
>
> I closed my eyes for a second and I saw… I saw everything, my whole life like in a movie. [. . .] The good parts and even the bad parts, because that is all part of the whole

and you can't separate them. Like these cities, you can never separate them, there will always be a bridge" (Zéleny 225).

Juárez stands in for Mexico and for Julia's childhood. El Paso represents her adolescence in the United States. But she acknowledges that the "two places" are "one." This vision of her personal geography is a reflection on the identities she is forced to reckon with. She asserts that "there will always be a bridge."

IV. Gender Dynamics and Control

While the mother-daughter relationship relies on the mother being a model or example for the daughter, the father-daughter intergenerational trauma relationship relies on gender dynamics and control over gender expression and sexuality. *Somewhere Between Bitter and Sweet* (2021) by Laekan Zea Kemp, *Diablo guardián* (2004) by Xavier Velasco, and the film *Jaula de oro* (2013), directed by Diego Quemada Díez demonstrate the role of male-female relationships in the representation of adolescent migrant trauma. *Jaula de oro* depicts three teens' migrant journey as truly divorced from the idea of biological family, highlighting chosen family instead. The added layer of migration is a destabilizing force that allows the traditional heteronormative structure of a nuclear family to be questioned and transgressed while in transit or while in a culture that is not their own.

Somewhere Between Bitter and Sweet (SBBS) and *Diablo guardian* both contrast the female protagonist's relationship with her father and with her romantic relationships. While the first novel, SBBS, focuses on telling the story through the thoughts of Pen and Xander in a very emotional and compassionate way. *Diablo guardián* offers a female protagonist that is cold and promiscuous beyond her young years, Violetta.

Somewhere Between Bitter and Sweet (2021) by Laekan Zea Kemp follows the story of Penelope Prado, called Pen, as she decides on her career after high school. Her passion for cooking leads her to want to follow her father's path and work at his restaurant, an establishment well known in their Latinx neighborhood of Austin, Texas. The tension between Pen and her father, Nacho, initially seems to follow an oppressive gendered dynamic as Nacho expresses a desire to control Pen's future for her own good. Pen must deal with Nacho's trauma of unrealized dreams and economic struggle while also encountering Xander and his trauma. Xander, her love interest, is an undocumented teenager working in Pen's father's restaurant. Pen's identity formation is predicated on her privileged status as a more established Mexican American member of the community in contrast to more recent migrants, like Xander, both of whom live in the same neighborhood.

Kemp's novel draws on values that are central to the traditional Chicanx literary canon such as an emphasis on family and community, but her depiction of a young woman's coming-of-age process disrupts the patriarch-centric plotlines that are featured in such foundational novels as *…y no se lo tragó la tierra* (1971) by Tomás Rivera and *Pocho* (1959) by José Antonio Villareal. These novels depict the nuclear family as revolving around a patriarchal figure and being made up of infantilized or helpless women. Though the effort that Rivera and Villareal were making was to depict a marginalized community from the inside, offering an alternative narrative to racist depictions of Mexicans and Mexican Americans of the time, their strides to remove Chicanos from the margins placed women in the community at a disadvantage. Even the novel *Bless Me Ultima* (1972), in which an older woman of Mexican descent figures prominently, the woman's plotline is secondary to the Chicano protagonist's jouney of self-realization.

The push towards Chicano unity is exclusive of less powerful groups within the community. Feminist writers such as Gloria Anzaldúa, Anna Nieto Gomez, and Cherrie Moraga highlight the injustices of a Chicano movement that did not consider the agency of Chicanas. The text *Chicana movidas,* edited by Maylei Blackwell et al. also makes clear the important contributions to the movement that women made and that went unrecognized. This kind of Chicano identity that is not gender inclusive or feminist can be seen in some canonical works such as …*y no se lo tragó la tierra* by Tomás Rivera. While it was a groundbreaking text and continues to depict injustices that affect the Chicanx community to this day, it is also an example of a multi-perspective novel that still manages to only put forward one image of Chicaneidad. *Somewhere Between Bitter and Sweet* takes the opportunity of the dual-perspective narration, the switch between Pen and Xander's narration in each chapter, to represent the third-generation Chicana point of view while also providing the counterpoint of the undocumented recent migrant.

This young adult novel depicts the struggles characteristic of a Mexican American young woman coming of age in a Latinx community, but it also gives space for the experience of more recent migrants to stand in contrast to some of the comparative privileges that a third-generation Mexican American young person has. While Pen does struggle to find her place and understands the financial limitations of her family, she also has the support of her community who has seen her grow up. Additionally, Pen's status as a U.S. citizen from birth makes her professional goals that much more attainable.

Xander, Pen's love interest and the young man whose perspective is represented in every other chapter of this novel, struggles with his legal status, and is more easily blackmailed by the neighborhood loan shark because of this. Additionally, his attempts to find his biological father

are much more difficult because he has been uprooted from his parents' country and town of origin and must now survive with his grandfather as his only family. While Pen and Xander both live in the same neighborhood and meet in Pen's father's restaurant, their struggles differ greatly. Their traumas, while linked, are of different natures. Pen's relationship with her father gives shape to the understanding she has of herself and her Mexican American identity. Nacho's perceived failures make him wary of his daughter making the same mistakes he has made. Though his intentions are to protect Pen, she experiences his worry as an oppressive force in her life. In contrast, Xander is fatherless, searching for the man who left his mother and moved to the United States. Though his search for a biological father does not always go as planned, Xander's grandfather stands in as a father figure and foil to Nacho. Xander's grandfather is a permissive but supportive figure, wary that something may happen to his grandson due to his undocumented status. I will focus on Pen's relationship with her father, but in order to understand the nuance of recently migrated versus established Mexican-American populations, it is important to also analyze the ways in which intergenerational traumas of migration affect Xander as well as Pen and Xander's relationship.

One of the obstacles to Pen's identity-building process is her father's role in the community and his insistence that his daughter does not follow his footsteps. This tension between father and daughter exemplifies the growth-producing tension that is characteristic of many *Bildungsroman* narratives. Pen and her father fight and misunderstand each other, but ultimately, they act to ensure their family's survival and bring together their community. Similarly, Xander finds family in his grandfather and Pen, in a narrative move that signals hope and joyous survival. The representation of Pen and Xander's suffering and trauma is only one part of a multi-layered story about hope and Chicanx joy despite hardship.

Nacho, Pen's father, is a small business owner, belying the image of migrant communities as solely being populated by workers who answer to Anglo bosses. The model of a small business owner as the savior of their community has been widely critiqued during the Chicano movement, but also revindicated through post-Chicano Movement scholarship, such as Cynthia Orozco's *No Mexicans, Women, or Dogs Allowed: The Rise of the Mexican American Civil Rights Movement* (2009). In *Somewhere Between Bitter and Sweet,* the role of the activist business owner coalesces in Nacho Prado, the female protagonist's father. His restaurant employs undocumented people in the neighborhood and provides other community members with a fixed salary and a respite from debt. Much of the tension in the novel comes from Pen's relationship with her father who refuses to let her take over the family business, though Pen's dream is to become a chef. Nacho is depicted as the head of the family, affecting even Pen's self-image: "'Of course I've thought it through. Dad's always said that I'm the smart one, the responsible one. But then last week he suddenly decides to give Angel the manager's position just because I'm the one in school'" (Kemp 19). Here, Pen speaks to her friend, Chloe, about her decision to tell her parents that she has been lying to them. She has never attended the community college that her parents think she goes to every day. Instead, she works toward her dream of taking over her father's restaurant. Pen's comment to her friend shows a tendency to define herself through her father's perception. This conversation happens early in the novel, creating an image of Pen for the reader through her father's assessment of her. Pen is "smart" and "responsible" under this characterization, but she is also put in constant comparison with her brother, Angel.

The conflict between Pen and her father creates fertile ground for the coming-of-age narrative arc that then marks the trajectory of the novel. Nacho, Pen's father, has a trauma related

to the restaurant, never fulfilling his own dreams (what are his own dreams?) because of financial and community pressures to keep the restaurant going. Additionally, his relationship with the neighborhood loan shark, El Martillo, creates a dangerous and violent undertone to running his business. Because of El Martillo's interest in keeping the members of the neighborhood in debt, Nacho's practice of employing anyone in need is directly opposed to the loan shark's goals. Nacho's role as the savior of the largely Mexican and Mexican American community to which he belongs makes him a role-model figure for Pen even as it is a burden to her. The process of coming-of-age in this novel happens based on tension between the older generation and a younger generation in which the younger generation often identifies themselves in opposition to their parents.

Pen's journey ends after her father's restaurant is burned down by the nefarious loan shark, El Martillo. Her final reflections on her trajectory make clear that she believes in the saving power of her father's restaurant and the potential of her own food truck: "We're not standing in the ashes of our father's dream. We're standing in the ashes of the dreams of this neighborhood, every single person who's eaten my father's food leaving behind this invisible hope—that's all that's left" (Kemp 330). The "ashes" are not only literal but also point to the end of her father's vision. Throughout the novel, Pen's father refuses to let her take over the restaurant because he does not want her to take on his debts. However, Pen sees his "dreams" as the center of their community. The "invisible hope" of the neighborhood coalesces around the food that Nacho made and that now Pen wants to continue making. Her victory in starting a food truck is not wholly her own, since her boyfriend, Xander, is the one who buys the truck and fixes it along with some other members of the community. The resolution for Pen in *Somewhere Between Bitter and Sweet* breaks the mold of the Young Adult Chicana *bildungsroman* in a way

because it models a relationship with a love interest that melds with the affection that the protagonist has for her community and family. While family is always essential in these novels, the addition of a reliable romantic partner is rare.

V. Male-Female Formative Relationships in *Diablo Guardián* and *The Everything I Have Lost*

The Mexican young adult novel, *Diablo guardián* (2004) by Xavier Velasco represents a quite different portrait of a migrant young woman. The protagonist, Violetta, migrates from Mexico to the United States and goes through hardship. However, the emphasis of this narrative is on the audacity or outrageousness of this character's actions rather than the everyday suffering that a young migrant girl undergoes alone. In *Diablo guardián* the protagonist, whose given name is Rosalba Rosas Valdivia, rebels against her parents whose bourgeoisie aspirations she denounces as hypocritical. She takes a nickname that her father pronounces sinful: Violetta. The novel follows her escape from her family home and her migration to the United States in a dual-perspective narration that jumps between Violetta's story and the tale of Pig, a sometimes friend, sometimes enemy whose literary aspirations lead him to have a difficult relationship with those around him. Violetta tells her story through a recording left to Pig for him to write as an account of her adventures. Her story begins when she steals a bag of cash from her parents, who had in turn, embezzled that money from charity and church groups. She escapes her hateful family only to be alone and lost in the United States.

A running thread throughout the novel is the hypocrisy and pervasiveness of Catholic morality which so prominently featured in Violetta's parents' idea of bourgeoisie morals and aesthetics. This Catholic framework is highlighted in the title, *Diablo guardián,* which is a play on the concept of a guardian angel. Velasco attempts to subvert the weaponization of Catholic

morality through an inversion of this morality, however, the narrative's treatment of the female body and its uneven representation of Violetta and Pig's voices falls back into Catholic tradition and morals. In attempting to subvert the bourgeois ideology, Velasco makes it the center of the novel with Violetta's young body and supposedly destroyed innocence as the battlefield. Her coming-of-age narrative does not catalogue the identity formation of a young girl, rather it narrates the formation of a novel at the expense of a young woman's body. Violetta's relationship to men and her familial trauma frame her migration story, making her a part of a man's story no matter where her body moves.

This novel can be juxtaposed with *The Everything I Have Lost,* in which the main character also has a conflict with her family and manifests crushes on boys and even older men. While Julia from *The Everything I Have Lost* is inexperienced and dwells on her vulnerability and new emotions, Violetta from *Diablo guardián* is presented as a femme fatale, experienced even when young, constantly a sexual object, constantly desired under the male gaze. Violetta's relationship with male characters around her is telling of the way in which her body is sexualized as it moves through different spaces. The narrative turns Violetta's narration back on herself, making her voice an agent of the male gaze in the ways she describes herself and other women in her life. Though the focus of this chapter's analysis is on the novel, *Diablo guardián,* it is important to mention the 2018 Amazon Prime series by that same name. Both works of cultural production feature the sexualization of the young migrant female body for the purposes of creating a glamorized depiction of migration and the United States.

Through the comparison of Violetta's self-descriptions and Pig's descriptions of Violetta, *Diablo guardián's* concept of young womanhood becomes clear. In *Diablo guardián* the figure of the young migrant woman is sexualized for the author's benefit. Violetta's act of self-

recording has been read as a subversion of the novelization of her life by Pig (Cabello 93). However, the ultimate inscription of her body into a larger narrative critiquing the hypocrisy of the Mexican petit bourgeoisie requires that Violetta become the consummate rebel. Instead of providing a moral to a story, her sex work is seen as the quintessential transgressive action, not of Violetta the girl, but of Violetta as object to the various male subjects with whom she comes into contact.

Velasco uses the framework of Catholic confession to introduce Violetta as a first-person narrator who understands her actions within a logic of sinfulness inherited from a traditional but hypocritical religious framework: "No lo puedo creer. La última vez que hice esto tenía un sacerdote enfrente. Y tenía una maleta llenísima de dólares, lista para salvarme del Infierno. ¿Sabes, Diablo Guardián?" (11). These first lines of the novel are addressed from Violetta to Pig, establishing her story as a sort of testimonial or confessional to him, the misunderstood author. Her initial statement frames her entire story with the tone of incredulity or unbelievability. She says "no lo puedo creer," indicating that she cannot believe that she would engage in this confessional storytelling again, the last confession she gave being the one that began her journey away from home. This "no lo puedo creer" is implicit in the reader's experience as Violetta tells of romantic exploits, a solo migration journey, and tales of sex work.

The "sacerdote enfrente" who listens to her confession is her friend who would be the author of her story. However, the "sacerdote" or priest confessor can also be the reader. The reader witnesses Violetta's confessional and is "enfrente" in the position of a confessor. Diegetically, she is speaking to Pig, however, the epithet of Diablo Guardián could be mistaken as a direct address to the reader in the early stages of the novel, before the dynamic between Violetta and Pig is revealed. The reader can be understood as a confessor or a voyeur, the two

nearly indistinguishable in the novel's logic. In fact, this voyeur-confessor figure becomes an impetus or excuse for Violetta's transgressions: "Además una nunca le confiesa al padre los pecados que piensa cometer. *Me acuso, padre, de que el año que entra voy a matar a un hijo de puta.* O sea, ve a matarlo y vienes ¿ajá?" (83). The gaze of the priest, or "padre," is constantly in the consciousness of the sinner, in Violetta's conception of the confession dynamic. The act of narration, after the fact of the crime, is almost as important as the act itself. Violetta confesses to the readers and finishes the cycle of "ve a matarlo y vienes." The protagonist has a relationship with Pig, the diegetic author, but also with the readers, performing a rupture of innocence repeatedly. This performance of penance and sin lend a quality of pornographic voyeurism to the novel, especially as Violetta, a teenager, chronicles her career as a sex worker in detail.

The narration of sex work is also a story of the ways in which Violetta's body becomes inscribed into a capitalistic scheme of buying and selling, of value commensurate with the whims and opinions of the male gaze. As she switches from boyfriend to boyfriend, Violetta learns what appeals to each one, moving through the United States and its economic system thanks to the re-invention of her identity. The way she understands herself has more to do with the commodification of her body than with her understanding of the world around her. While the Chicana Bildungsroman model proves accurate in the case of *Somewhere Between Bitter and Sweet, Diablo guardián* takes a route more akin to the piquaresque novel. While *Diablo guardián* certainly follows the conventions of a Bildungsroman, its satirical and transgressive nature draw in important aspects of the piquaresque. The novel has been lauded as a breakthrough in female representation both at the time of its publication, winning the VI Alfaguara Prize for Best Novel (VI Premio Alfaguara de Novela), as well as in more recent scholarship analyzing gender roles in the Mexican Bildungsroman of the twentieth century

(Gallegos de Dios 2). Though Violetta is an outspoken and transgressive character who has her own desires and thoughts, her purpose seems to be part protagonist and part subject of the male gaze.

At the beginning of the novel, Violetta is fifteen and her transition into sex work is depicted as a descent into hedonism, a detailed sexualization of a young female body. The male gaze is present even in this literary medium. Added to the image of Violetta as a constantly desiring and desirable sexual object, is the racist depiction of Mexican womanhood. Violetta's desire to escape to the United States, her apparent disdain for Mexico, is gendered as she says: "Yo misma era mexicanísima, que por supuesto no es igual que ser coatlicue. No es que yo tenga nada contra las coatlicues, pero tampoco tengo que admirarlas. Ni parecerme a ellas, qué horror" (325). This momento has been read as a desire to engage in a globalized world, a true hybridity made evident by Violetta's Spanglish and Mexican American references throughout the novel (Estrada 490). Looking closely at the term "coatlicue" that Violetta so frequently uses in a derogatory manner, 27 times throughout the novel, one can see that the aversion she has is not necessarily to being Mexican. She states that she is "mexicanísima," this superlative a separate reality to being "coatlicue." The term coatlicue is joined by others such as "tlahuica," "naca," and "hijas de la chingada." These terms range from offensive to merely being of Nahua origin. Coatlicue is the name of the Aztec earth goddess, usually depicted as covered in snakes, a reference to her name which literally means snake skirt or serpent skirt. Tlahuica is a language currently spoken in Mexico and can also refer to a people who were at war with and ultimately subjugated by the Aztec in before first contact with Europeans.

These terms do not originally carry negative meanings, except through a process of racist meaning-making. Similarly, the word "naca" probably has Indigenous origins, though its history

is the subject of much controversy. Carlos Monsiváis in his collection of essays titled *Días de Guardar* asserts that the word "naco" (masculine form of naca) is most likely a shortened version of the word totonaco, the name of an Indigenous peoples from Veracruz, Mexico. Though there have been efforts to re-appropriate the word "naco," it ultimately maintains its derogatory and racist connotation, linking Indigeneity with tackiness and adding a classist aspect as well (Cruz 4). Finally, "hija de la chingada" is a sexist term that references the history of Malintzin, more commonly known as La Malinche, who has become synonymous with betrayal and sexual promiscuity.

The topic of Malintzin as a maligned figure has been explored both in canonical Mexican thought as in foundational Chicanx writings. In Violetta, her embodiment of La Malinche as a transgressive figure enables her to be seen as both liberatory as well as burdened by a misogynistic trauma narrative that bolsters both Chicano and Mexican nationalism. Miguel Caballero gives a liberatory reading of Violetta as Malinche: "una Malinche consciente que al relatar sus vivencias crea ficción pero una ficción que le vale para atreverse a ser" (194). Caballero also points out that Violetta is a Malinche because of her hybridity, going back and forth from Mexico to the U.S. and denouncing her Mexicanness when most convenient to her. However, she is an unabashed Malinche, a postmodern Malinche who lives her life like a videogame (Caballero 188). The role of Violetta as a sex worker, Malinche, or traitor to her own culture is telling of the way in which the male gaze infiltrates the portrayal of a young woman in transit. Violetta is a fictional character, but the disdain of young women and migrants is very real.

Violetta's relationship to the male characters on whom she relies in one way, or another exemplifies a patriarchal push to gaze upon a constantly sexualized and at the same time

innocent female body. This portrayal of a young woman's coming of age contrasts starkly to the Bildungsroman narrative represented in *The Everything I Have Lost,* the other Mexican novel included in this chapter. The protagonist, Julia, is twelve and thirteen during the events of the novel, while Violetta starts off *Diablo guardián* at the age of fifteen. However, the representation of these two young girls is diametrically opposite. While Julia displays doubts appropriate to her age, expressing curiosity about romantic relationships and developing crushes that come and go, Violetta immediately labels herself a "piruja" and spends the first part of her narrative detailing her transactional sexual relationship with the gardener's twelve-year-old son.

While Violetta's sexual escapades can be read as a challenge to middle class morality, the focus on her body, her rejection of most female relationships, and her young age all create a characterization of Violetta that emphasizes her role within a patriarchal system. She must always be attached to a man to move through the world and across borders: "No es que no me quedara claro que los gringos ya andan saltando camas desde los catorce años, pero es que lo miraba y decía: *Necesito que esté muerto por mi*" (Velasco 128). Violetta's possibilities of remaining in the United States and moving across its various spaces, both geographical and sociocultural, depend on Eric, the "gringo" who becomes her first paramour in the U.S. and helps her get from Texas to New York. Eric is subsumed into the category of "los gringos" who bed-hop from the tender age of fourteen. This characterization of Americans as sexually promiscuous helps set up a contrast between this sexually experienced group and Violetta, who at this moment in the story is still a virgin. She is nervous to sleep with Eric for the first time, an attitude which marks Violetta as inexperienced and her impending sexual interaction as momentous. However, this nervousness is then undercut by the transactional reasoning behind her desire to sleep with

Eric. She wants him to be obsessed with her, "muerto por mi." Violetta achieves agency through sexual manipulation, creating the appearance of liberation.

Violetta, the protagonist of *Diablo guardián,* and Pen, the protagonist of *Somewhere Between Bitter and Sweet,* both undergo a level of sexualization and sexual awakening as they begin to understand their positions vis a vis the men in their lives. While Pen's relationship to Xander is one that recognizes both of their agencies and personhoods, the relationship between Violetta and her multiple sexual partners is purely transactional. Some emotions are attached to each relationship, but even those are called into question as Violetta reveals herself to be an unreliable narrator. The vital difference between Pen and Violetta is that Pen's position in the United States and her community is secure, her citizenship never called into question and her family ultimately supportive of her goals. Violetta is a character whose independence is forced upon her in true *Bildungsroman* fashion. Part of the *Bildungsroman* convention is that the young protagonist be made to fend for themselves, either through the death of their parents or through their expulsion from their childhood home. Violetta's parents' increasingly harsher edicts form her into a cynical narrator whose view of herself is at times self-deprecating and self-aggrandizing. Pen, on the other hand, learns to trust her community as she initiates a relationship with Xander. In both of these novels, the vulnerability of the young female body is touched upon but not directly addressed. While Violetta moves through the U.S. and Mexico, represented at times as a vulnerable body, the threat of sexual abuse is never realized.

VI. Male-Female Migrant Relationships in Film

La jaula de oro (2013) directed by Diego Quemada-Diez offers a view of the journey across Mexico, showing three young teenagers' migratory journey in a way that focuses on hardship while still showing moments of joy and youthfulness. This film is one of the few

Mexican films that portrays an adolescent female migrant and her personal relationships. Though not exclusively for adolescents, it is ideal for understanding the representation of adolescent migrant girls on screen. Sara, the female protagonist, must re-define herself and her relation to boys and men to migrate. In *La jaula de oro,* there is no centralized family structure like there is in *Somewhere Between Bitter and Sweet* and *Diablo guardián.* The children who migrate all begin their journeys in Guatemala, but they seem untethered to a place, country, community, or family, instead they only have each other and the dynamics they create on the road. As Anelise R. Corseuil states in her analysis of *La jaula de oro,* "the only space granted to the migrant is his/her own body" (39). While this statement may prove true towards the beginning of the film, it is belied by the end as Sara is kidnapped by men presumed to be involved in narcotrafficking activities.

The three main characters are Sara, Juan, and Chauk, all around fifteen or sixteen years old. Throughout the film, Juan and Chauk vie for Sara's attention and affection. This competition takes on a racialized subtext as Juan, a Spanish-speaking white-presenting boy, insults Chauk, calling him "indio" because of his lack of Spanish and different habits. Though Chauk exclusively speaks a Mayan language, the other two main characters find ways to communicate. The dearth of dialogue in the move has been read as a sort of "void" that allows for the story of the three teen's friendships to come to the foreground (Curry 62). Most analyses focus on Juan and his transformation through the migratory journey because he is the only teen who survives the entire journey to the United States. He is seen as the protagonist by virtue of his survival; however, I see this as a commentary on the chance that differently raced and gendered bodies have of surviving the migratory journey to the United States. While the only white-presenting, male character reaches the goal of migration, the darker-skinned girl and the Maya-speaking

Indigenous boy get left behind. The film's portrayal of Sara and Chauk defines gender and race on this migratory journey, and Sara's relationship with Juan and Chauk transforms her character in the film.

By looking at Sara's first and last scenes in the movie one can see the trajectory of her character in the narrative. When she is first introduced in the film, she is shown with longer hair, and clothes that are in colors traditionally associated with the feminine. She walks into a bathroom stall with "damas" written on the door, carrying a plastic bag in which it is later revealed there is a change of clothes and a packet of pills. Sara cuts her hair, wraps her breasts in a length of cloth, and dons loose clothing traditionally associated with masculine people. Finally, she pops a pill out of a packet of birth control pills and takes it, a tactic to stop her period as well as pregnancy [00:01:27-00:03:44]. She is preparing for the migration journey in which women are routinely raped and even killed. Sara's steely-faced preparations call to mind such scenes as the one that befalls Julia Reyes's mother, Amparo, in *I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter* by Erika L. Sánchez. Though Sara's parents are never shown, the passed-down knowledge of rape and death is present in Sara's actions. Someone must have taught her about the dangers present on the path of migration for a female-presenting person. This first scene reveals the difference between Juan and Sara's realities as they face migration. While Juan must only pack and find hiding places for his money, Sara must hide her body and assume the identity of "Osvaldo," a boy.

The comparisons and relationships between Sara and her two migratory companions, Juan and Chauk, are telling of the ways in which the migratory journey deconstructs the traditional female role, not always in a liberatory fashion. At the start of the film, the three travelling companions do not include Chauk, instead Juan and Sara are joined by their friend

Samuel. They get deported during their first attempt at crossing, and Samuel chooses to stay behind, however, Chauk follows Juan and Sara, his place in the group ultimately secured by Sara's advocacy in the face of Juan's racism toward Chauk. The austerity of the film is often remarked upon in its filmic analysis and Silvia Mejía interprets it as a revolutionary aesthetic devised to let the audience focus on the usually ignored and marginalized subjects of globalization (88). The film's lack of background music and small amounts of dialogue cause the audience to rely mostly on the visual representation of action to understand the emotions that each scene attempts to evoke. While these may be revolutionary aesthetics, made to highlight the hostility in which the three young protagonists must survive, they also serve to highlight their relationships to each other, as Richard Curry points out in his analysis of the film. Curry interprets these relationships as friendships, which they are, however I also see them as pedagogical relationships, as Sara's connection to Juan and Chauk ensures that all three characters engage fully in the Bildungsroman genre throughout the movie.

The migratory journey strips Sara of a female body for most of the trip, but heightens her sexuality within the interior world of her relationships with Juan and Chauk, providing leverage over the two boys as they fight to win her affection. Sara must masquerade as Osvaldo for the journey, and at first Chauk also believes that she is a boy. He grows close to her even when he thinks she is male because she treats him kindly, making sure he has a place in her small group of sojourners. From the start of the film, it is established that Juan is romantically interested in Sara and that Chauk is a threat to this relationship. During the first migratory attempt, Sara gives Chauk some of her food and Samuel comments to Juan, "Mirá ahí va con tú amigo. Yo creo que le gusta, fíjate. Ya te la bajó, mano" [00:18:46-00:18:49]. Samuel's comment is meant in part in jest, but he assigns Sara to Juan as something or someone who can be "stolen" by Chauk. This

dynamic between Juan and Chauk with Sara in between continues and re-inserts the young girl's traditional gender role into the narrative, even as she tries to erase these femme traits. Though these inexperienced exchanges among Sara, Juan, and Chauk sometimes provide a more normal and amusing break from the very high stakes journey they are on, they also re-affirm the danger that Sara is in, a very different danger than Chauk or Juan.

The very last scene in which Sara appears concretizes the gendered danger that the migrant journey signifies. The moment in which Sara's gender is revealed is the moment in which she is removed from the narrative. She cannot exist as female and migrant in this story. As the three teenagers near the U.S.-Mexico border, the Bestia, or train on whose roof they ride, is stopped suddenly. All the migrants who ride the Bestia are forced to line up next to the train tracks by a group of men with guns who search each migrant for valuables. They also pull aside the women, loading them into the back of a cargo truck. As they near the three protagonists, Sara pulls down her cap, attempting to hide her face. At first the men pass Sara by, but they return to her, singling her out. One of them shoves her baseball cap off saying, "Ésta es hembrita." They expose her in front of the other migrants and men with guns, laughing, grabbing at her, and yelling sexual innuendos, and finally loading her screaming and crying onto the truck as Juan and Chauk attempt to fight the armed men and get her back [00:56:00-00:57:41]. This moment of assault ultimately serves narratively as a point of growth and development for Juan, the only survivor of the journey. However, it signifies the end of Sara's role as character. The first scene she is in attempts to erase her body, transforming it so she may survive displacement, while Sara's last scene proves the need for this transformation.

The *Bildungsroman* genre here helps to make sense of Sara's role in the film and also ties this character to other young female characters whose relationships with the men around them

affect their identity formation, such as Pen Prado from *Somewhere Between Bitter and Sweet* and Violetta from *Diablo guardián.* Sara's trajectory through the film is largely shown to be marked by suffering, running, escaping, and hiding. The first and last scenes in which she appears are filmed with increasingly shaky camera techniques, relying on tight shots of the three teenagers' faces to convey the panic and distress they are feeling as Sara is taken. *La jaula de oro* does not lend itself to interiority, unlike the film *Spanglish,* there is no first-person narration to give a moral value to each scene. As Sara screams for Chauk and Juan to save her, the camera shifts to the two boys lying unconscious on the dirt ground, beaten by the men who abduct Sara. As he forces the girl into a waiting SUV, one of the armed men says, "súbete con los verdaderos machos," tying the violence of toxic masculinity directly to the physical violence being done to Sara.

VII. Conclusion

The relationship of young migrant women to their own bodies is mediated through their relationships with the men around them in the two novels and film of this last section. Their nepantla identity, the in-between identity that they acquire, translates to the way in which they are viewed and sexualized or defined by the male characters around them. In Pen Prado's case, Nacho and her brother Angel set out expectations and provide a goal for her to reach while her relationship with Xander contextualizes Pen's station in life as not quite a migrant. Pen is affected by her family's migration story but does not live the same struggle of belonging and daily livelihood that Xander must overcome. However, Xander's romantic regard makes Pen reconsider herself under the lens of sexuality and physicality. Pen is not a migrant, but neither is she established within U.S. society. She exists between the establishment and the margins, providing some link to establishment for Xander, whose undocumented status provides no

protection. *Somewhere Between Bitter and Sweet* embodies the Chicana *Bildungsroman* model by uplifting the value of community, having this community be the catalyst for the Chicana protagonist's self-realization journey.

Conversely, Violetta's nepantla identity is made clear through her separation from her family. She defines herself as is necessary to move through the male-dominated world. *Diablo guardián* presents an image of a teenage girl who is not really a girl but a grownup woman avant la lettre, her inexperience replaced quickly by a desire to manipulate the men around her to get what she wants. She is neither femme fatale nor girlishly innocent, rather she switches between both male fantasies as the novel sees fit. Violetta narrates her life on an audio recording for Pig to transcribe into a written narrative, however, this happens within the wider written narrative of *Diablo guardián.* She exists somewhere between audio and text. Violetta is truly a nepantla character, not because she finds a third space of liberation to exist within, rather she is written in this manner to constantly be satisfying the impossible patriarchal sexual fantasies of a young woman's body. Her migratory journey only reifies her insertion within a patriarchal capitalist society.

Finally, Sara's trajectory in *La jaula de oro* shows the ways in which the young female body in transit is forced into a nepantla or in-between identity to survive. While *Diablo guardián* presents a sexualized and adventurous image of migration, *La jaula de oro* follows a model closer to Italian neorealist film. The movie is fictional, but many background characters are real migrants and the story is based on the testimony of about 300 migrants who are credited in the film credits (Mejía 87). Sara is not allowed to fully live her *Bildungrsoman* by a migratory infrastructure that destroys girls and women. To provide a coming of age for Juan, the survivor character, Sara must be removed forcefully. This story parallels many traditional stories of

migration, even echoing the story that Julia Reyes's mother tells her in *I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter.* In order for the few to survive, the women sacrifice their bodies and identities. Sara sacrifices her future as her fall from nepantla, from the in-between space of not male and not female makes her vulnerable.

The works in this chapter offer a varied understanding of the Bildungsroman genre as applied to migrant girls. Novels such as *I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter, Somwhere Between Bitter and Sweet,* and *The Everything I Have Lost* show an age-appropriate understanding of sexuality and relationships, demonstrating the friction that can happen through intergenerational trauma and cultural differences thanks to a migrant background. The insertion into a U.S. frame of reference is in and of itself a trauma-inducing event as certain frames of reference are misunderstood, or as the physical journey from Mexico to the U.S. proves to be physically violent. The female protagonists of these three novels form their identities around this knowledge of insecurity or ambiguity. In *La jaula de oro'*s case, Sara's future is cut short or re-defined thanks to the impossibility of a woman's body being safely in motion. Her ambiguity saved her until she was forced to inhabit a patriarchal concept of womanhood, proving that for some young migrant bodies, maturity is a threat. This threat is idealized or fashioned into a patriarchal fantasy in the movie *Spanglish* and the novel *Diablo guardián.* The United States is metonymic with male relationships and a male presence is synonymous with freedom for the protagonists of these films. While the young narrator of *Spanglish* is able to make her way without attaching herself to a man, she must embrace the hegemony of institution as she re-packages her trauma and her mother's trauma for a college admissions committee. The figure of young Latinas and their relation to migration is used as a battleground for societal values and

hegemonic conventions. These coming-of-age stories are cultural spaces in which the insertion of a future generation within the status quo is decided.

Chapter 2

Birth and Trauma: Depictions of Indigenous Domestic Workers in Mexican and Chicanx Cultural Production

When Third World women are asked to speak representing our racial or ethnic group, we are expected to move, charm or entertain, but not to educate in ways that are threatening to our audiences

– Mitsuye Yamada "Invisibility is an Unnatural Disaster: Reflections of an Asian American Woman"

I. Introduction

The tensions between social classes is never more present than in an affluent home that employs a domestic worker. In this paper, I analyze film and literature that depicts the lives of migrant female domestic workers in order to understand how their trauma works in conjunction with class and race dynamics to form an image of these workers in a Mexican cultural context. In the three films and the novel that I include, the lens through which the audience/reader understands the domestic worker characters is one of sexualized labor. Through the sexualization of the migrant domestic worker's body, her threat to the established status quo becomes apparent. I analyze the link between the reproductive possibilities of migrant domestic workers and the prospects of the affluent class that employs these domestic workers.

In Mexican and Chicanx cultural production, domestic workers are often migrants, whether these women cross national borders or merely state borders, their *otherness* is key in explaining the ways they move and are moved. The depiction of domestic workers' suffering in Mexican and Chicanx cultural production occurs mainly around the topic of reproduction and/or fertility. This depiction of suffering and trauma reveals the ways in which images, and

sometimes stereotypes, of domestic workers are normalized and produced through film and literature. Though cultural production about domestic workers may not capture their lived experience in its entirety, it does show an image of domestic workers that is widely consumed and naturalized by a general audience. The novel and three films I analyze depict the suffering of their domestic worker characters and through analyzing this depiction of the suffering domestic worker, I hope to break down the image of a suffering domestic worker into the cultural stigmas and expectations that contribute to that same image.

Yamada's reflection on "Third World" women is relevant in understanding the role of migrant domestic workers as depicted in cultural production because of the ways in which these domestic workers' roles are seen as threatening both in and out of film and literature. The migrant domestic worker is forever threatening the futurity of a White or mestizo employer class while also being central to this futurity. In the context of this chapter, I use the concept of futurity to indicate the possibility of survival for a given social group in the long-term, especially having to do with racial and class dynamics of oppression. Though this term has been used as a framing for utopian imaginings as well as discussions about the potential future of the literary field, I use the term to discuss the potential future life of a certain racial and socio-economic class (Eshel 5). In the case of the novel and films I analyze, the two main groups represented are the affluent mestizo employers and the indigenous migrant female domestic workers. In understanding these dynamics, the representation of domestic workers' pain is key, as it depicts the ways in which domestic workers deal with the system of inequality in which they work.

In the novel *A True Story Based on Lies* (2003) by Jennifer Clement, and the films: *Roma* (2018) directed by Alfonso Cuarón, *Xiquipi' Guie'dani* (2018) directed by Xavi Sala, and *Nosotras las sirvientas* (1951) directed by Zacarías Gómez Urquiza, the depiction of domestic

workers' trauma is intrinsically tied to the racial and class categorizations. Suffering, pain, and trauma are all concepts that play a central role in my analysis at the affective level of these works of cultural production. However, while pain may be a passing experience, both physical and emotional, suffering is the drawn-out expression of pain, while trauma is a broader psychological phenomenon that presents with specific symptoms in an individual that has lived a violent or shocking event. In the case of the domestic workers depicted in the texts and films I analyze, pain, suffering, and trauma exist because of the systematic violence they experience due to unfair work conditions and an inherently racist and colonial framework of employment.

While all three concepts are linked, I am interested in teasing out the role of trauma because of its ability to isolate and its equally potent ability to gather people together. The field of trauma studies has historically posited that trauma is an individual phenomenon that interrupts the communication of a person's experience of pain[5]. For the purposes of this paper, I define trauma as the action of processing past suffering (Atkinson 5). Because the traumatized individual has lived through an event that they cannot contextualize within their life experience, the traumatic period is one in which they attempt to process what has happened through various mental and emotional coping mechanisms. This view is the psychoanalytic perspective on trauma in individuals, however, I am interested in the more recent studies that examine non-Western and non-European populations. These studies state that non-Western populations deal with trauma through collective and community processes of experience-sharing. In contrast to the individual who processes a traumatic event individually, or even a community who all experience trauma but cannot communicate this to each other, certain non-Western groups such

[5] Scholars such as Cathy Caruth, Shoshona Felman and Dori Laub are much-cited in the field of trauma studies and some of their notable texts such as *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (1996) and *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History*, respectively, put forth the concept that trauma experience is never fully expressible because of the incomprehensibility of trauma memory.

as communities in Southeast Asia and some South American indigenous groups, deal with trauma in a community-based manner (Visser 126). Though I use the word "trauma," I acknowledge that this is a term born of a Western psychoanalytic tradition and does not encompass all the terms and expressions for that phenomenon.

In the works of cultural production that I analyze, the domestic worker characters' trauma sometimes is lived individually, but is seen to have intergenerational effects, making the concept of communally expressed trauma particularly relevant. In what ways does the depiction of domestic workers' suffering influence the position in society that these domestic workers appear to have in cultural production? Does domestic workers' trauma affect the way class and race are conceived of in these works of cultural production?

I focus on the migrant domestic worker because of the layers of othering that migration implies but also because of the prevalence of migrants in the domestic worker field. This position implies a triple othering: due to the worker's ethnic background, due to her social class, and due to her gender. The role of race is paramount in Latin American domestic workers' experience, especially in regards with their place within a domestic space and in relation to a female employer (Carrillo 173). I expand my analysis to include both Mexican and Chicanx cultural production because of the ways that racial and class boundaries work transnationally to *other* migrant domestic workers both in their place of origin as well as in their destination. I am interested in the racial dynamics that exist in Mexico regarding women of indigenous descent who migrate for jobs, especially as depicted by Chicanx authors and Mexican authors. The incidence of violence towards female migrants is exponentially higher than that which male migrants experience (Muzneiks 2016). This violence occurs not only on the journey, be it to another country or to the city for work, but also in the workplace. Because of this precarious

position, the expression of migrant domestic workers' trauma represents a subversive move towards centering that which is usually made invisible: the emotions of working-class migrant women. These emotions are especially threatening because they are both a challenge and a central part of domestic workers' jobs within an affluent and othering space, their employers' homes.

The film *Roma* is told mostly from the point of view of the young domestic worker, Cleo. The novel, *A True Story Based on Lies,* uses both a third person narrator as well as a first-person child narrator. The film, *Xiquipi' Guie'dani,* focuses mainly on the title character, Guie'dani, a thirteen-year-old girl, and her view of the other characters of the film. And finally, the film *Nosotras las sirvientas* homes in on the main character, Claudia, despite its collective title. The first step in understanding the framing of domestic workers in the face of an affluent audience is to understand the methods of narration that each author or director chooses.

Roma's focus on the political situation in Mexico in 1971 allows the film to dig into the context of the protagonist's oppression that could lead to a precarious life. The film follows the story of a young indigenous domestic worker named Cleo who becomes pregnant while working for an affluent mestizo family in Mexico City. This happens in a year during which a student protest was violently quelled, killing many young people and injuring many more, an event which has been called "Matanza del jueves de Corpus." The protest is shown in the context of Cleo's personal life and her own concerns. In 2019, a year in which multiple marches against government repression and feminicides are either ignored or repressed by police intervention, *Roma's* narration of the past reflects on the present as well.

Though the three films and novel I discuss are by no means exhaustive of the genre related to domestic workers in Mexican and Chicanx cultural production in the 20th and 21st

centuries, these four works are the ones that deal most directly with the suffering of female and all deal with either a birthing scene or the constant allusion to giving birth. This preoccupation with fertility and the figure of the migrant domestic worker is particularly important when considering the ways in which suffering, and trauma determine the racialization of these domestic workers in cultural production. The supposed danger in their race, class, and closeness with affluent families is tied to their ability to bear a child. This reproductive ability threatens the white-supremacist logic of racial purity that many of the employers in these films and novel rely on in order to maintain a social hierarchy. I begin by analyzing the lasting implications of the film *Nosotras las Sirvientas,* linking it to *Xiquipi' Guie'dani's* refusal to create conciliatory employer-employee relationships. Then I analyze *Roma* and *A True Story Based on Lies* in order to speak to indigenous versus mestizo futurity and the role that the display of suffering plays in the futurity of each group.

The ideology surrounding domestic workers is built upon the assumption of their invisibility. They are semi-visible in that their labor is a crucial part of creating a domestic space away from the public domain and is even the basis for the sort of cult of domesticity that exists in Mexican upper-class circles as well as the affluent American lifestyle (Hondagneu-Sotelo 3). Historically, in Latin America, domestic workers' material conditions and even the state of their bodies is defined by the will of their employers (Cumes 573). The following pieces of cultural production imagine the experiences of domestic workers, focusing on their ambiguous role within the affluent household.

II. Nosotras las sirvientas (1951)

The film *Nosotras las sirvientas* (1951) engages with the fear of replacement and the dynamic of surrogacy featured in all four works of cultural production analyzed in this chapter.

The expected role of a female domestic worker balances precariously between a helpful presence in the household to a temporary substitute for the female employer of the house. Following the strictures of binary gender norms, the female employer, or woman of the house, is expected to oversee all the work within the domestic realm, however, the domestic worker is expected to take on the work that this affluent woman is unable or unwilling to do herself. This precarious position of paid substitute is outlined in the 1959 handbook for domestic workers and employers titled *Your Maid from Mexico: A Home Training Course for Maids in English and Spanish.* Written by three Texas society women, by Gladys Hawkins, Jean Soper, and Jane Pike Henry this book shows the racist and classist applications of oppressive gender roles that are inherent in the type of employment structure that is also depicted in *Nosotras las sirvientas* (1951) and the novel *A True Story Based on Lies.* The handbook states: "You can be like the salt in our daily food; we can do without it, but the food has no flavor. You can become a loyal helper or a second mother to our children, loved and respected by our families and friends. By taking our place in the home and doing many of our jobs, you can give us free hours to do the things we enjoy—playing golf, sewing, playing the piano, attending club meetings, or working at a job we like" (2). The domestic worker is also supposed to fill the role of "a second mother to our children" and even take "our place in the home." Domestic workers must anticipate all needs, act as a substitute in the gendered role of housewife, but still must not overstep their bounds. In this description the Anglo female employers are still the heroines of the story, they are now able to step out into society and may even enjoy "working at a job [they] like."

The film follows a young woman, Claudia Claro, who arrives from a rural town to Mexico City in order to work in an affluent household. It is implied that she is from an Indigenous community due to her style of dress and some linguistic markers that are pointed out

by other characters in the film. Claudia, the protagonist, quickly falls in love with the son of her employer, Felipe. She vies with Felipe's fiancée, Teresa, for his affection, ultimately winning out in what is framed to be a competition between the two women. The love triangle featuring the three main characters allows for a direct comparison between Claudia, the domestic worker character, and her employer's fiancée. The threat of replacement by a domestic worker is never clearer than in this movie. *Nostras las sirvientas* depicts the relationship between Claudia and her employer's son as the best-case outcome, and rather than dwelling on the impossibility of a relationship between the two due to class difference, the film depicts Claudia as a simple but authentically Mexican paragon of womanhood.

Nosotras las sirvientas (1951) fits the cinematic romantic comedy genre as it molds the role of a domestic worker into the fantasy of the pliant love interest. This film was released just after what has come to be known as the Golden Age of Mexican cinema. This period, spanning roughly from 1941 until 1945, saw Mexican film mirror and many times depend on Hollywood. The "star system" that at that moment was the basis of the Hollywood film industry was also becoming the driving force of Mexican cinema. This system relied on the recognizable faces of certain movie stars to sell tickets to movies. Though released after the Golden Age of Mexican cinema, this star system was still popular in the moment that *Nosotras las sirvientas* was released. Under this format, the plots of movies could be somewhat formulaic, following a format that would leave audiences satisfied and would highlight the ticket-selling actors of the moment. In this way, Mexican cinema saw a huge boom of film production. In 1951, the year of *Nosotras las sirvientas,* 101 films were produced (García Riera 194). This formulaic model is very clear with *Nosotras las sirvientas* as the plot of the film follows conventions of the romantic comedy genre: a clear attraction between the two main characters, both played by prized stars of

the “star system,” a complication to their romance, and finally the concluding marriage proposal that brings the two characters together. This formula gives the experience of domestic work an idyllic glow as Claudia, portrayed by Alma Rosa Aguirre, represents the innocent girl who is in many ways saved by the male love interest. Though this role of untried girl and paternalistic love interest repeats throughout the Golden Age of Mexican cinema (*Flor Silvestre, Allá en el rancho grande*), here it acquires another level of helplessness and precarity in that this girl is employed by the love interest.

This paternalistic relationship repeats even in the case of *Roma,* which depicts mostly female interaction between the employer class and their employees. In the case of *Nosotras las sirivientas,* the lighthearted and formulaic style pioneered in the Golden Age of Mexican cinema allows for a semi-subversive depiction of inter-class relationships. Because the film is interspersed with musical and dance numbers, usually by working class characters, the narrative depicted in the movie seems to belong to the world of fantasy rather than presenting a real-life threat to the status quo. At the start of the film, Claudia, the protagonist steps off of the bus and into Mexico City. This scene is paralleled by one of the first scenes in *Xiquipi’ Guie’dani* in which Guie’dani and her mother finally arrive to the affluent house in which they will work.

In *Nosotras las sirvientas* Claudia, a young girl with braids, shawl, and long skirt, a wardrobe choice that sets up a connection to her rural and possibly Indigenous background, steps into the urban setting with a suitcase in hand. She looks around optimistically and her unfamiliarity with urban surroundings causes the plot to move forward and leads to the first instance of humor as she lands in the police station for obstructing traffic. She is uncertain in crossing the street, and her inexperience with the urban scene causes a near tragic accident as a car almost runs her over. The passenger of this car is Felipe, the future love interest and initial

antagonist. From this first moment, the class dynamics between the two are clear as Claudia questions why Felipe is involved in the dispute if he wasn't driving the car that almost ran her over and Felipe answered that he was the passenger, and that the car is his. Claudia also asserts that, "Yo vine a México porque quiero ser señora y eso sólo se aprende viviendo con señores."[6] This aspiration to be a "señora" is repeated in alternation throughout the film as an excuse, a revindication, and a defense of Claudia's character.

The contrast between "señora," understood to be an upper class lady, and "campesina," a title that indicates a person of rural origin and possibly of working-class background, is also a theme presented early on. In the police station, Felipe offers Claudia employment at his family home in exchange for her acquiescence in relation to the earlier traffic altercation. After this beginning scene, Claudia is left in Felipe's living room alone to await further instructions. At the same time Felipe's father and sister are being notified that he will be introducing his fiancée to them that day. Felipe's father goes down to the living room to find Claudia and assumes that she is his son's fiancée. He is pleased to see that her appearance points to a rural background saying, "Eres como siempre quería que fueras. Una campesina. Una auténtica mujer de México. Cómo esa."[7] Here, the man points to a portrait just over the living room mantle that depicts a dark-haired woman with braids, very similar in appearance to Claudia. The portrait shows Felipe's mother, who is revealed to have also been named Claudia. The parallels between Felipe's deceased mother and the female protagonist of the film give

In the first scene, Claudia's face is the focus of the shot with the lighting always displaying her pale skin and dark hair. This coloring stands out with the black-and-white filming,

[6] I came to Mexico because I want to be a fine lady and you can only learn that by living with gentlemen and ladies. (Own translation)

[7] You are as I always wanted you to be. A country girl. A true woman of Mexico. Like that one. (Own translation)

ensuring that the focus remains on Alma Rosa Aguirre, the star of the movie. This is the only piece of cultural production that I analyze that does not have a birthing scene. However, one of the crucial turning points of the movie illustrates the gender and class dynamics that underlie the birthing scenes of the other pieces as well, the moment in which Claudia's true feelings for Felipe are revealed.

This scene sets up the competitive dynamic between Claudia and her love rival, Teresa. Teresa is Felipe's fiancée and the daughter of an affluent family. Throughout the movie she is depicted as a spoiled young woman who is content to use others, saying to her lover and Felipe's secretary: "Yo necesito casarme con Felipe pero tú me gustas. Nada tiene que ver una cosa con la otra." This comment, made in the latter half of the movie but before the revelatory scene I mention above, establishes Teresa as a foil to Claudia. While Teresa does not see the connection between marriage and emotion, Claudia spends her days dancing and weeping while she cleans Felipe's house. Her musical numbers mostly focus on her forbidden love for the son of the household. Though the budding relationship between Felipe and Claudia is forbidden under usual tropes because of class difference and the aforementioned betrothal between Felipe and Teresa, Felipe's father, Don Ernesto, approves of Claudia from the start. In one of the first scenes he mistakes Claudia for Felipe's fiancée, who he has not yet met, saying that she is "una campesina, una auténtica mujer de México." The film sets up a dichotomy between Teresa, the unfeeling rich woman, and Claudia, the country girl full of emotion who also "authentically" represents Mexico.

This dichotomy reframes the idea of the threatening and sexualized domestic worker. The fraught scene in which Claudia is forced to reveal her feelings for Felipe underlines the difference between Teresa and Claudia, but also presents the two as clear alternatives one for the

other. In this scene, Teresa accuses Claudia of having stolen Felipe's sister's diamond earrings, planting them among Claudia's belongings for the affluent family to find during the accusatory scene. Claudia protests and is forced to open the cabinet that holds her belongings. She refuses at first but is encouraged by her friend and fellow domestic worker to acquiesce or else risk appearing guilty. When Claudia opens the cabinet, she reveals a picture of Felipe that she has hung on the door of the armoire. This scene highlights her profile next to Felipe's photograph, the two boasting similar coloring, their faces almost looking at each other. During this scene, the camera focuses in with a series of tight shots on the facial expressions of all characters involved, specifically lingering on Claudia's pained expression as she sheds a tear. Though this moment seemingly pits the two women against each other, the underlying question at stake is which of the two will end up with Felipe and therefore enter into the affluent family. The conclusion of the film shows Felipe proclaiming his love and proposing marriage to Claudia on the street in front of his home.

This public display along with Don Ernesto's early and frequent endorsement of Claudia as a potential romantic interest for his son show a prioritization of working-class characters that is not present in the three other narratives presented here. This endorsement reflects the "back to the land" ideology that permeated the Golden Age of Mexican cinema. This perspective was part of the *noble topics* trend that had its highest popularity during the period of the 1950s in Mexican cinema (García Riera 207). This trend promoted such topics as the long-suffering but strong country boy or girl and the general prioritization of the hard worker over the heir. These were seen as "national interest" subjects, as they were called by the Banco Nacional Cinematográfico (National Cinematographic Archive). Though the topic of class and a connection to the land were seen as Nation-building and positive, the concept of race or Indigeneity goes unquestioned.

Claudia's dress and at times her way of speaking are the only aspects that allude towards an Indigenous background. This vagueness shows that racial ambiguity was supposedly prioritized, with José Vasconcelos's ideology of the *raza cósmica* prevailing even to the 1950s, but in practice, all actors are equally pale, their speech very similar one to the other. The threat of class warfare is nullified through the marriage of Claudia and Felipe, thanks to Felipe's choice of spouse. Though their marriage is shown to be born of overwhelming emotion and bucking the status quo, it also preserves mestizo futurity through its placating nature. All characters are shown to be better off in the end, but the actual day to day life of Felipe and Claudia is left to the imagination of the public. Their life together and even the children they might have cannot appear on screen within the lighthearted strictures of the romantic comedy genre. While Claudia's emotions are acceptable, they are only acceptable in order to move the plot along. Her tears and suffering show her to be genuine and worthy of Felipe within the logic of the movie. Other than to lament the obstacles to her and Felipe's relationship, she is not shown to be upset or emotional. Rather she sings while she cleans, and her anger is used as the butt of jokes.

This careful depiction of Claudia's emotions allows her character to be read by the audience as exceptional and a sympathetic character, rather than opportunistic or grasping. However, in limiting Claudia's emotions to these acceptable affects, the film furthers the objectification of her character, truly turning her into a tool for the employer class. Sianne Ngai's *Ugly Feelings* explores the ways in which "ugly feelings" or affects like envy, irritation, and paranoia usually go un-examined or attributed to the oppressed class. However, they also allow for an expression of agency or rebellion in the face of the social norm. Claudia is not allowed this possibility while Guie'dani in *Xiquipi' Guie'dani* does use her emotions to express her discontent.

III. Xiquipi' Guie'dani (2018)

Xiquipi' Guie'dani (2018) is a film directed, written, and produced by Xavi Sala. It depicts the life of a teenage Zapotec girl who moves with her mother to Mexico City, where her mother finds employment as a domestic worker. This film speaks to the ways in which trauma is subsumed differently by two generations, one represented by the teenaged protagonist, Guie'dani, and the other represented by her mother. While *Xiquipi' Guie'dani* gives the audience scenes of discrimination and sexism with which to condemn a system of servitude and racism, *Nosotras las sirvientas* romanticizes this system even as it enacts the most dangerous outcome that exists as a threat in almost all of the employer-employee relationships depicted in the novel and three films included in this chapter. Domestic workers' sexuality in these two films is a threat to the established status quo because of the ways in which it disrupts a patriarchal hierarchy of control and even threatens an implied and class-linked notion of racial purity. Understanding the tricky collectivity of a direct female employer-employee relationship, the following analysis turns to the wider dynamics that give shape and definition to the fears that exist on both sides of the employer-employee divide. In *Xi'quipi Guie'dani* (2018) the characterization of power dynamics between indigenous domestic workers and the depiction of various groups' traumas are predicated on the idea of the position of power itself as a corrupting force, rather than any qualities depicted as racially based qualities.

Xiquipi' Guie'dani follows the life of a 13-year-old girl named Guie'dani as she moves to Mexico City with her mother so that her mother can work as a live-in domestic worker in an affluent household. While *Nosotras las sirvientas* and *Roma* depict indigenous female domestic workers that travel to work in an affluent household in Mexico City *Xiquipi' Guie'dani* is much more critical of the class system than *Roma,* and especially more than *Nosotras las sirvientas.*

The dynamics of sexual object and mother are inherent in every piece of cultural production included in my analysis. However, *Xiquipi' Guie'dani* depicts these in the most horrifying light as its focus becomes the daughter of a domestic worker rather than the worker herself. The audience sees the class system through the eyes of a liminal character: Guie'dani is a young adolescent, not quite child and not quite teen, she has no formal role in the household, and she has been raised speaking both Zapotec and Spanish. In such a formative time, the identities that others impose onto Guie'dani's adolescence all fall short.

The birth scene in *Xiquipi' Guie'dani* focuses on both Guie'dani's facial expression as well as her mother, Lidia's, reaction to the emergent situation. In this birth scene, the mestiza female employer, Valentina, goes into labor on the spiral staircase of her home. This sequence is one of the last in the film and begins with Lidia and Guie'dani's departure from the house as Lidia is fired from her position because of Guie'dani's defiance. As they are being ushered onto the street, Valentina goes into labor and the only way for the birth to go smoothly is to use Lidia's experience with the births in her hometown. In the beginning of the birthing scene, the camera follows the action just above Lidia's right shoulder as she quickly walks up the stairs to Valentina who is gasping and bent over, wearing an oversized nightgown. The slightly shaky camera and lack of soundtrack emphasize a feeling of urgency and panic as Valentina's cries and gasps are almost louder than Lidia's reassurance. Lidia says, "No se preocupe, en mi pueblo he guiado a muchas mujeres.[8]" From the context, the viewer understands that Lidia means that she has guided many women in the process of giving birth, however, her quick comment leaves room for the interpretation of general life guidance. In this moment, Valentina is like the "muchas mujeres" that have also benefitted from Lidia's knowledge. The camera closes in on

[8] Don't worry, in my town I've guided many women.

Lidia and Valentina's faces. Lidia is facing three-quarters away from the camera, her profile visible and her posture straight, while Valentina bends forward with her hair partially in her face, her eyes are closed as she gasps. Against the white walls and staircase of the house, Valentina and her light coloring blend in while Lidia stands out. In this moment of life or death Lidia is the one who is visible and in charge while Valentina is at a loss to deliver her child or save her own life.

The moments of life-giving that are represented by childbirth and even the question of motherhood are the moments in which the threatening power of indigenous domestic workers becomes clear. During Valentina's labor, her ability to bring her child into the world is lacking. Lidia, who Valentina just fired, is must participate in this labor, *doing* the labor for her, in order for the mestiza child to survive. In a scene that narratively mirrors Cleo's birth scene in *Roma* (2018), the differences between the two are stark. While Cleo gives birth alone and scared, Valentina is surrounded by many people during her birthing scene. Valentina's husband calls the ambulance in the background, her teenage children look on with scared faces, and Lidia guides her through her birth while Guie'dani stands watching with an unmoving expression. The scene ends abruptly as the camera focuses on Guie'dani's face and the next shot cuts off Valentina's scream. The scene after this tense display begins with a fixed shot of Guie'dani calmly eating rice and eggs in the kitchen amidst a silent household.

In these scenes of birthing, what is at stake is the dynamic between employer and employee, between indigenous futurity and mestizo futurity. Cleo's child is stillborn, and the camera focuses on her face as she grieves, the moment of life-giving turns into a moment of death. Here, Cleo is alone with her grief but must earn her living taking care of mestizo children, one of whom she saves from drowning in in one of the last scenes of *Roma*. Guie'dani is

unmoved by Valentina's struggle, the parallel and consecutive shots of Valentina's teenaged children and Guie'dani show the contrast between the fright on the mestizos' faces and the indifference on Guie'dani's. *Roma* shows the pain that Cleo undergoes, the parallel scene in which she saves one of her employer's children shows the trauma she must live with. *Xiquipi' Guie'dani* resists the voyeurism inherent in the display of indigenous pain. This film depicts indigenous resilience, revealing the ways in which mestizo futurity relies on indigenous presence. Here, the viewer sees glimpses of fear, pain, and shame as Guie'dani moves through the affluent home of her mother's employers. In the most physically violent moment of the movie, David, the male employer, attacks Guie'dani after he comes home from a trip to find her and the girl from a few houses down dancing among trash and food in the empty house. In this moment, Guie'dani and her friend/love interest scream and hold each-others' hand but Guie'dani ultimately fights back, taking out a hidden knife with which she threatens David.

The presence of this weapon in Guie'dani's hands signifies a constant state of vigilance that is so different from the employer family's children. An earlier conversation between Guie'dani and Claudia, her friend/love interest, presents the reason for this kind of vigilance. Claudia asks Guie'dani if David has ever touched her inappropriately and when Guie'dani answers in the negative, Claudia admits that her mother's male employer has touched her before. In these small moments of defense and vulnerability, the viewer has access to information regarding these girls' and women's precarious position in the household without being a voyeuristic witness to their helplessness. Cleo's pain and disappointment are readily accessible to the viewer with the close shots and emotive acting that characterizes the film *Roma.* In fact, Cleo's grief is the central focus of the film, as is Leonora's constant bereavement at raising while not raising her own child. *Xiquipi' Guie'dani* keeps the audience away from the details of

indigenous women's grief. Their pain is present, and the fear of future mistreatment is evident, yet any displays of trauma exist as defiance. The fear that the mestizos have of the indigenous women in this latter work is the evidence of a cycle of oppression and resistance whose inner workings are expressed in the daily labor of an indigenous domestic worker.

Guie'dani's refusal to react in the moment of Valentina's crisis is also a refusal to participate in the drama of mestizo futurity. The violence she lived at David's hands and the violence implied in Claudia's confession to Guie'dani show their marks in Guie'dani's indifference to Valentina's pain. She witnesses the birth of another member of the ruling class but does not participate other than to fetch the hot water that her mother asks her for. Again, the hand of the indigenous domestic worker reaches out to save the employer's child, their futurity. However, Guie'dani's indifference presents a radical alternative to her mother and Cleo's strategies of survival. Even Leonora, who mothers her child in secret, actively participates in the future-making of the affluent class by donating her child to her employer family. While Cleo, Lidia, and Leonora all act in ways necessary to survive, they also are caught up in the system of oppression that ensures the health and future of the affluent class at the expense of their own lives and futures. Guie'dani's indifference is the act of a 13-year-old girl who refuses to obey, but it is also a choice to deny any responsibility of care or emotional labor. Ultimately, the injustices of domestic work lie in the exhaustive amount of labor that each domestic worker is expected to do. Emotional labor is just as important to the job as is their physical labor. While her mother must find ways for both her and Guie'dani to survive, Guie'dani's role as the daughter of a domestic worker places her in the position to refuse that future.

IV. *Roma* and *A True Story Based on Lies*

In *Roma,* directed by Alfonso Cuarón (2018), and *A True Story Based on Lies,* written by Jennifer Clements (2001), gender-specific moments of conflict bring together the issues surrounding class and gender that define the female employer-employee relationship present in both of these works. The temporal marking in many texts and films about domestic workers is linked to gender and the ways in which gender marks experience. Because many temporal markers rely on births, marriages, and violent events, the link to migrants' gendered experience is inextricable. In cultural production about domestic workers in Mexican and Chicanx cultural production, these important events mark the moments of change in each protagonist and are treated as monuments, large historical events, though they occur in lives that usually go unseen.

Though the text and film featured in the analysis of this section are retrospective and do rely on historical markers to set their narratives in a past relative to the time they are written and filmed, the quotidian aspects of the domestic worker protagonists' lives make the stories transhistorical. This section analyzes the ways in which the roles of female migrant domestic workers exist in tension between vital member of a household and destructive force within the same household. The trans-historicity of their stories is due to the prioritization of every-day moments of female experience rather than an analysis centered on nationally recognized historical events. This attention to everyday manifestations of emotion also allows for a broader analysis of trauma experience and the ways in which Cleo and Leonora's trauma plays a role in their gendering and racialization, especially as they push back against expectations of emotional labor and care.

I look at the film *Roma* to see the ways in which it repeats stories and emotions of marginalized individuals, creating a sort of network among workers with similar experiences.

Before entering into an analysis of *Roma,* it is important to understand the language available for depicting domestic workers in non-fiction settings. These types of texts represent the viewpoints that the two works I analyze attempt to interrupt through the minute depiction of domestic workers' lives and emotions. *Roma* and *A True Story Based on Lies* focus on the violence inherent in being a female domestic worker and attempt to enter the perspective of these women during and after the traumatic events in their stories.

The historically accurate *misce-en-scene* of the film as well as its black and white format creates a timeline in which the central character of the film lives out personal experiences that are not unique to the time period depicted. However, by placing Cleo, the protagonist's, story in a specific moment of conflict in Mexican history, the film emplaces her struggles within the wider concept of History. Emma Pérez proposes that history can be understood in a cyclical manner that allows for silenced voices and stories to come forward in her text *Decolonial Imaginary: Writing Chicanas into History.* Pérez employs this tactic in order to bring forth the presence of Chicanas in History, especially for cultural and educational purposes. She states, "I am more concerned with taking the 'his' out of the 'story,' the story that often becomes the universalist narrative in which women's experience is negated" (xiv). The intersection between collective and personal history is blurred in *Roma,* and rather than show that the protagonist is part of a historical moment, the historical moment is depicted as being part of Cleo's history, a story of a pregnant young woman that repeats throughout time.

The protagonist of *Roma,* Cleo, is a young indigenous domestic worker who has migrated from her town to Mexico City in order to find a job. The film follows Cleo as she works in an affluent home for a *mestizo* family. The main conflict of the movie occurs as she becomes pregnant and the father of her child refuses to acknowledge their existence. The family that Cleo

works for undergoes turmoil as well due to the father's absence and later departure. The mother of the family agrees to keep Cleo on and support her as she has her child. Alfonso Cuarón, the Mexican director of the film, has confirmed that the film is a semi-autobiographical work that focuses on a character meant to depict the domestic worker who helped raise him in the 1970s in Mexico City. The film relies on long shots that tend towards tight framing, giving more time and visual detail to facial expressions and textures of objects depicted. The black and white format allows texture to take a more primary role in the shots than if a more diverse color palette were represented. The opening frames of the movie show a fixed shot of a black and gray tiled floor which becomes filled with waves of soapy water after a few minutes. Wide frames that show a location in its entirety are commonly used as establishing shots. The first frame of a movie sets the tone for the aesthetics and focus of the film. This shot shows early on an attention to quotidian detail that allows the protagonist's reality as a domestic worker to shine through as a struggle worthy of being recorded.

The film's opening sequence plays with the transhistorical nature of Cleo's story as it depicts a reality that still exists in Mexico City, complete with all the everyday sounds that accompany the experience of domestic work. The first few shots focus on a tiled floor and for the first minute or so there is no sound. As a soapy wave of water enters the shot, the sound of sweeping and lapping water become gradually clearer. When the water stills, it reflects the small figure of an airplane overhead and allows the audience to locate itself in a patio of sorts. Though the small rumble of the plane can be heard, the main sounds are still the swishing of a hard-bristled broom against the tiles. Cuarón begins the movie with the most minute details, pausing to give center-stage to the daily actions of the protagonist's life. Though Cleo is not present until halfway through the opening sequence, her labor is what starts and impulses the plot of the

movie. Though the passing of the plane locates the audience in the 20th or 21st centuries, the tiled floor and patio are fixtures of most middle-class to upper-class Mexican homes. As the shot widens and the camera follows Cleo around the patio, it becomes clear to a Mexican audience that the house is in Mexico City and belongs to an affluent family. From the art-deco iron bars on the front gate to the Spanish tiles lining the patio, the house is typical of single-family housing built in the early 20th century for aristocrats whose houses changed hands following the Mexican Revolution and whose "stone balconies, art nouveau wrought-iron grilles, and art deco wooden frames" remain even now, particularly preserved through the 1970s (Blanco 203). As these features come into view, Cleo and the other domestic worker in the house speak to each other in Mixteco, an indigenous language prevalent in the Central and Southern part of the country. This scene-setting establishes place, the Roma neighborhood in Mexico City for which the film is named, but it is not until Cleo exits the house that the time period becomes evident thanks to the presence of older cars on the street. Though the scene of a domestic worker sweeping a patio could occur in any moment of Mexican history, the street scene brings the audience to a certain moment in time.

These opening frames convey information about place and culture to all audiences, but they convey a further layer of class placement and identity to an audience familiar with Mexican culture and social dynamics. In a move that persists throughout the film, the protagonist's socioeconomic status takes center stage as it is an indelible part of her emotional experience. The fact that the main character speaks an indigenous language freely in an upper-class space is an already transgressive depiction of *presence* for a character whose role in the house is to create the *misce-en-scene* and not inhabit it. This *presence* through transgression continues in one of the most crucial scenes of the movie as Cleo is rushed to the hospital to give birth. This scene comes

right after the sequence that shows the 1971 protest in Mexico City. The killing depicted in *Roma* is known as the "Matanza del jueves de Corpus" and was a governmental suppression of student manifestations in support of a democratic electoral process. At the time of the protest there had only been one party in power from the 1921 post-revolutionary period. This party, the ironically named Revolutionary Institutional Party (PRI), remained in power until the 2000 elections. The scenes that precede Cleo going into labor show her and the mother of her employer shopping for a crib in a large furniture store. Just as they are looking around, shouts and gunshots begin to sound and young people run in begging for a hiding place as they are followed by young men with batons and guns intent on killing them. In this moment, Cleo sees the father of her child, Fermín, who is part of the paramilitary force coopted by the government to brutally put down the protests.

Here, the intersection between a country's history and a woman's history is the fulcrum upon which the narrative rests. As Cleo goes into labor, she and the elderly woman from her employer's family rush to the hospital. The establishing shot of the hospital sequence shows fully occupied benches and a multitude of women while Cleo's gasps of pain take the forefront in the sound mix. As the orderlies take Cleo away, the elderly woman employer cries as a hospital worker asks her questions: "What is the patient's last name? What is her date of birth? How far along is she?" to which the woman can only answer "I don't know." The only question she answers is "What is your relationship to the patient?" to which she responds "Soy su patrona" (I am her boss). In this moment of anxiety and pain, the country's turmoil takes on a secondary role to the pain that Cleo is undergoing. Her only support system is her employer, her family remains in a town far away and her employer only knows that Cleo works for her.

Cleo's labor and the process of her *going into* labor are unified. Her history takes precedence even as it is emplaced within the historical moment of the protests of 1971. Because she depends on her employer family for funds and resources, even in the moment of giving birth, she must rely on a "patrona" that only knows her through her marginalized labor. While the labor she does around the house is the defining characteristic that links her to her employer, the act of *going into* labor during a historical event makes present Cleo's body as a discrete entity with its own agency. Even the flustered "patrona" must acquiesce to the demands of Cleo's body and is forced to live through a moment in which she is not in charge. Though much of Cleo's experience has to do with the forces around her, the transhistorical act of giving birth gives her a moment of agency in a space and time in which her life is considered insignificant to a traditional depiction of HisStory.

While the moment of giving birth during a large historical event prizes the individual narrative above that of the state or nation, the tie and reliance on Cleo's employer family remains strong and important for Cleo's survival. When her female employer, Sofía, discovers Cleo's pregnancy, her response is one of sadness but overall empathy. The mestiza woman encourages Cleo to stay and promises to help fund her motherhood. Within the narrative of *Roma*, this acceptance stops the female employer from becoming the villain of the story. In fact, Sofía's husband soon takes a similar role of villain as he abandons his family and goes to be with his girlfriend. Through this narrative move, *Roma* creates sympathy for the female employer and likens Cleo to Sofía in a parallel narrative structure of two women who are left behind and disappointed by the fathers of their children. While Cuarón stays away from completely flattening the two characters' class situations, the narrative parallels between Cleo and Sofía are presented as two women whose strength is demonstrated due to similar difficult moments.

The pain inherent in giving birth is the central part of this labor scene and the colonial violence of Cleo's societal position is evident in the "patrona" versus "criada" dichotomy that is set in the scene just before the audience sees Cleo giving birth. The result of this scene is tragedy as Cleo's child is still born. The film's narrative turns upon this moment, Cleo's difficult decision and the precarity of deciding to have a child as a domestic worker in an affluent household are all turned into brave but futile efforts as the birthing scene results in death. Though Cleo's grief is evident during this scene, her trauma is manifested visibly only once, in one of the most famous stills of the film: the beach scene towards the end of the movie. After Sofía, the mestiza employer, discovers that her husband will not be returning to their marriage, she takes the children and Cleo to a beachside town in order to break the news to the children. Before they return home, the family and Cleo visit the beach. While Sofía goes to the car to pack things up, Cleo stays with three of the four children, Sofía cautioning the children not to enter the ocean because Cleo doesn't swim. The children promise to stay at the edge of the water and Cleo takes the youngest boy, Pepe, to a chair to dry off. Throughout the movie, the child tells Cleo of another life he led "cuando era grande[9]" of which he dreams. Just as Cleo turns to check on the two children at the edge of the water, Pepe says, "¿Sabías que cuando yo era más grande fui marinero? Sí pero un día me ahogué en una tormenta. Y las olas eran muy grandes[10]" This narration that is shrugged off as childish nonsense serves both as a foreshadowing of the near-drowning that is to happen in the next scene and also serves to remind the viewer of the transhistorical nature of life.

[9] When I was old

[10] Did you know that when I was older I was a sailor? Yes, but one day I drowned in a storm. And the waves were very big.

As Cleo runs into unrelenting waves shouting “Pepe” and “Sofi,” the names of the two children in the water, the sounds of the surf grow louder, competing with her shouts. Soon, her head is barely visible above the flat ocean horizon and there is a moment of uncertainty as none of the three characters surface. Finally, Cleo is able to grab the youngest child, Sofi, and pull her, along with her brother, to safety. The scene in which Cleo sobs with the children and Sofía crouched around her, hugging each other, is one of the shots most used in the publicity for the film. The image references Renaissance forms with its triangular composition. The eldest child of the family and Sofía, the mother, lean towards each other, creating a point over Cleo’s head. Her body is a darker shadow between the backlit figures that kneel against a gray scale sunset. While the two sons cling to Cleo’s back and Sofía reaches towards Cleo’s face, the young woman covers her face, her head tilted down as she cries. This is a moment of triumph and relief for the mestizo family as Cleo’s self-sacrificing actions save the life of the youngest child, named after her mother, Sofía. The parallels and ruptures in this scene contain the nuances of violence and affection that characterize the domestic worker position in this film. While Sofía, Cleo’s employer, reaches out in gratitude, Cleo physically shields herself from the whole family. Perhaps she cries from relief or perhaps she cries for her own child who she was not able to pull out of herself alive.

In the end, Cleo’s hand, the hand of the Indigenous outsider, is the hand that saves mestizo futurity at the expense of her own wellbeing. Because of this sacrifice and her central role in the survival of the family, her employers perform affection towards Cleo. This manifestation of a loving violence houses Cleo’s trauma, turning it into an ambiguous outpouring of emotion. Here, the trans-historicity of her story, the trans-historicity of death, surges forward

like the waves that threatened Cleo only moments before. While Cleo survives against all odds, she remains within the system of inequality that coopts even her emotional expression.

The relationship of female employer and female domestic worker holds the layers of complexity similar to those that surface in the relationship of outsider author to marginalized protagonists. The relationship of privilege to marginalization can slip into a dynamic of spokesperson to the voiceless. In the case of Cuarón and Clements the way in which they establish this tricky employer-employee relationship is telling of the ways in which the domestic worker's role has the potential to either reify or unravel established social roles. While the relationship between Cleo and her employer, Sofía, is benevolent in that Sofía accepts Cleo's pregnancy and does not kick her out of her employ, the relationship between Leonora and Mrs. O'Conner in *A True Story Based on Lies* follows a much more traditional understanding of employer and employee in domestic worker situations. In this novel Leonora, an Indigenous woman, is hired as a teenager into the household of an affluent *mestizo* couple. She is taught to serve families like the O'Conner family during the time she spends being educated in a convent near her hometown, an Indigenous community in a rural area. From the first moment of employment, Leonora's "virtue" is tied to her sexuality and she is warned to keep herself chaste.

The threat of Leonora's sexuality is ever present and the threat of her supplanting Mrs. O'Conner manifests in the narrative climax of the novel when Mrs. O'Conner learns from her husband that Leonora is pregnant with his child: "Tell me what tricks did you use? [. . .] I know that you servants use all kinds of Indian magic. What did you do? Did you put your menstrual blood in his coffee? Did you put your hair and skin in his food? Did you put your nail parings in our bed? What trick did you use?" (73). This invective folds into it the ever-present danger inherent in othered domestic workers. In both *Roma* and *A True Story Based on Lies* Cleo and

Leonora are Indigenous women from a far-away place that is not described nor shown in any detail. The presence of women from rural states in Mexico City is considered normal in the 20th and 21st centuries, especially as subsistence farming and even farming on agricultural land grants becomes overshadowed by competition from larger corporations. The need to find employment outside of largely agricultural communities becomes more marked as this shift occurs and more young women like Cleo and Leonora are sent by their families to find jobs in the city. The presence of Leonora in the O'Conner's household is not only framed as foreign because of Leonora's socioeconomic status but also because of her indigeneity which is conflated with a discriminatory view of rural life as an ignorant way of life.

Mrs. O'Conner's accusations towards Leonora are based on this racist view of Indigenous women as being backward and constantly working against their employers. Mrs. O'Conner shifts the blame onto Leonora and her supposed "tricks," because her "Indian magic" is in and of itself such an amorphous concept that there could be no proof for or against this understanding of Leonora's guilt. The only evidence that could support Mrs. O'Conner's claims is the position that Leonora holds in the home. The employer gives as examples of Leonora's guilt actions that bring her into close contact with Mr. O'Conner's body. "Put[ting] [her] menstrual blood in his coffee," "put[ting] [her] hair and skin in his food," and "put[ting] [her] nail parings in [their] bed" all imply the invasion of Leonora's self into her employers' bodies or personal space. Food and coffee are threats because Leonora's job is to prepare them, the bed is also suddenly threatening because Leonora makes it. The domestic worker's proximity is both her role and also the threat that lies beneath.

This dynamic in *Roma* is softened as Cleo seems to happily and willingly make beds, pick the children up from their school, and feed them their meals. However, the constant non-

belonging inherent in the domestic worker dynamic is manifested both linguistically and physically in the film as Cleo and her co-worker speak in Mixteca, a practice that is called to the audience's attention towards the beginning of the film as one of Cleo's charges yells at her: "¿Qué dicen? ¿Qué dicen? ¡Ya no hablen así!"[11] This barrier between Cleo and her employer family signals agency in difference. While she and her co-worker discuss her romantic prospects, the child they care for is unaware and cannot report back, on accident or on purpose, to the adults in his family. Cleo is always physically and emotionally close to the family as she makes their everyday lives possible and cares for the children, but she retains the option of secret communication. In *A True Story Based on Lies* communication is the cornerstone of Leonora's agency. The "lie" upon which the "true story" is based is the secret of Aura's birth. Aura is the child that Leonora has as a result of her employer's sexual assault of her. Aura is adopted into the employer family under threats to Leonora to put her in jail should she attempt to leave with her daughter.

In the process of keeping and uncovering secrets, the reader sees the flow of power through the household. Leonora is the first to know of her pregnancy and, in a moment that echoes Cleo's discovery of her pregnancy, immediately believes her place within the household forfeit: "Two months later Leonora was positive that she was pregnant and knew this meant that she would have to leave" (59). In the moment that Cleo is about to disclose her pregnancy to Sofía, Sofía asks her to call down the children. As the camera follows Cleo through the open living area, the voices of Sofía and her elderly mother can be heard as the mother says: "Tranquila hija, todo va a salir bien."[12] This calming phrase is paired with the image of Cleo

[11] "What are you saying? What are you saying? Stop speaking like that!" (Own translation)

[12] "Be calm, daughter, everything will be okay" (Own translation)

wringing her hands as she does what she is told to do. Just before this sequence, Cleo prepares Sofía's tea in the kitchen, a space surrounded by tiled walls whose small window overlooks the patio and servants' quarters. Just as Cleo lifts the tray with the tea, her co-worker says "Tú llévalo, manita. No te preocupes, todo va a estar bien."[13] The parallels in these two consecutive sequences link the anxieties of Cleo and Sofía together through their nervous attitudes and the support they find in a friend and a mother, respectively. However, the moment in which both of these anxieties come into contact indicates the hierarchy within the household. Cleo approaches Sofía after the kitchen scene to deliver her tea and tell her that she would like to speak with her about something. Sofía tells Cleo that first she needs to speak to her children about something and delay's Cleo's news until after this is done.

Here, Sofía asks Cleo to sit in the living room with the family as she informs the children that their father will not be joining them for Christmas or New Years. Cleo sits perched on the arm of an armchair while the small figure of one of the children takes up the seat of the chair. Her slanted body language continues as she sits next to Sofía to tell her about her own issue. Cleo is close but always set apart. She asks her employer while crying, "¿Me va a correr?" and Sofía responds, "¿Correr? Claro que no, no seas tonta"[14] while grasping Cleo's forearm with both hands. This affective response, the body language, and framing all stand in marked contrast to the scene in which Leonora and Mrs. O'Conner face off in Mrs. O'Conner's bedroom. While Sofía and Cleo both sit in the corner of the same couch, Cleo sits at the very edge of the cushion

[13] "You take this, little sister. Don't worry, everything will be okay" (Own translation). Here I have written the quote in Spanish though it is spoken in Mixteca because I do not have the proficiency in Mixteca to transcribe what the actress says and no transcriptions of this part of the script can be found online. I emphasize that both English and Spanish are colonial languages that have long been imposed upon unwilling subjects. My choice to write the main quote in Spanish (from the subtitles that come with the film) is one based on the subalternity of Spanish-speaking populations in relation to English-speaking populations in the U.S. at the time of writing this paper (2020).

[14] Cleo: "Are you going to fire me?" Sofía: "Fire you? Of course not, don't be dumb"

while Sofía sits deeply into the sofa, her torso leaning forward into Cleo's personal space. Cleo leans away slightly, only her face turned toward her employer. The scene in which Mrs. O'Conner confronts Leonora begins by describing their positions: "In the bedroom Mrs. O'Conner closed the door behind them and sat on the bed. She told Leonora that she knew everything [. . .] Leonora's hands moved frantically as if she were knitting. She stepped back and answered Mrs. O'Conner's thoughts with her own" (69-70). The physical positions in the case of Leonora and Mrs. O'Conner more directly depict their emotional situation at the moment of confrontation.

These two scenes show two opposite possibilities for the relationship between employer and employee. Through the narrative techniques in both, the audience can read the way that power and hierarchies play out independently of what is said. While the response that Sofía has to Cleo's announcement is positive, as she refuses to fire her for being pregnant and offers her support according to what Cleo would like to do, this response does not erase the power dynamic between them that causes Cleo to lean back and appear ready to flee as she speaks to Sofía about her problem. This power dynamic is more evident in the conversation between Leonora and Mrs. O'Conner partially because of the circumstances that led to Leonora's pregnancy. While the father of Cleo's baby is the cousin of her co-worker's boyfriend, the father of Leonora's baby is Mrs. O'Conner's husband, also the person who tells Mrs. O'Conner about Leonora's pregnancy. Mr. O'Conner takes Leonora's choice in forcing her to engage in a sexual relationship with him and even takes her right to tell her own story. However, Leonora's agency comes behind the "closed door" that Mrs. O'Conner tries to employ as a way to consolidate and wield her power against Leonora. While Mrs. O'Conner sits on the bed, Leonora remains standing, a position which can be read as waiting on her employer but could also be read as looking down on her

employer. Even the reason for this confrontation puts Leonora at an advantage. Mrs. O'Conner states that "she knew everything," which is only partially true, as she was informed of a set of events by her husband who, besides Leonora, is the only one who witnessed the events that led to this moment.

In these moments of revelation, Cleo and Leonora must navigate the power dynamics between themselves and their employers, at all times aware of the precarity of their position. In the act of disclosure, Cleo exercises her agency. However, in the answering reaction of acceptance, Sofía reveals her power over Cleo's situation. Cuarón depicts a benevolent employer who connects with her employee on the level of female experience but who at the same time is inherently separated from her employee because of the nuances of this same experience. Clements depicts a similar moment between employer and employee but paints a picture of impossibility. Mrs. O'Conner and Leonora might be united in having had relations with the same man and both being the mother of the same child, however, in the moment of confrontation their distinct power over each other shifts back and forth. Mrs. O'Conner threatens to fire Leonora and Leonora resolves to run away with her child. These actions represent the boundaries of power that are accessible to both women within the male-led household. Ultimately Mr. O'Conner refuses to fire Leonora and tells her that she cannot leave with her child or he will throw her in jail. The bridges of female experience in both instances are so starkly dividing *because* they are so strangely similar. Cleo and Sofía have been left by men to deal with their maternity alone while Mrs. O'Conner and Leonora have been pitted against each other by the same man and live vastly different forms of violence because of this dynamic.

From invader to "second mother," the role of the domestic worker is constantly shifting in the eyes of employers. However, these shifts in opinion are necessary for the relationship of

domestic workers and employers to exist. Cleo and Leonora are close to their employer families, their emotional labor is woven into the fabrics of familial relations. In Leonora's case, her daughter becomes the daughter of the employer family. In this sense, the boundaries that an employment relationship pre-supposes are unstable and based solely on the power that employers are able to exert in moments of dissention. Even if that power is never exerted in any sort of punishing manner, it does not cease to exist.

V. Conclusion

The three films and the text I analyze reveal the objectification of domestic workers' bodies in terms of their labor as well as the care-work they do. *Roma,* the most commercially distributed piece of cultural production of the four included, allows for there to be affection between employer class and employee class. However, the realities of domestic works and the trickiness of the emotional labor it entails are apparent even throughout the narrative of affection between employer and employee. At the affective level, Cleo's trauma provides a constant barrier between her employers and herself. In the way that she carries the trauma of losing her child, the audience sees the inherent inequality and injustice in the way she must live both inside and outside of a family structure, never laying claim to her own family. Similarly, Leonora's chance at motherhood is coopted for the good of the affluent employer family she lives with. She can never live through her daughter's life along with her, rather she must live slightly apart, a friend and companion but never a mother. Inherent in this relationship is the theft of a future, not only for Leonora but also for Leonora's daughter, Aura, who is the result of abuse on the part of Leonora's male employer.

The indigenous migrant body becomes a conquerable object within the household of her employers. In *Nosotras las sirvientas,* that conquering effort occurs even in the storytelling of the

film. The domestic worker protagonist cannot speak out against any social strictures because she is already caught up inside them. She seemingly achieves the ultimate goal of marriage to the employer's son, all the while "earning" this prize through her long-suffering genuine character. The understanding is that Claudia, the protagonist of *Nosotras las sirvientas,* joins the employer class through marriage. However, Guie'dani, in *Xiquipi' Guie'dani,* embodies the impossibility of this future. She refuses all superficial "goodness," her affect one of rebelliousness and anger. For Guie'dani, even indifference is weaponized. Guie'dani's indifference to the employer woman's pain is, under this light, the ultimate threat. Though the employer family has power over her mother's livelihood, Guie'dani's indifference to her employer's distress, so different from her mothers', opens the door to a new generation of indigenous women who may refuse to aid in mestizo futurity.

Chapter 3

True Trauma: The mobilization and weaponization of Mexican women's trauma in feminicide-focused true crime film and literature

I. Introduction

The true crime filmic and literary genre transforms stories of femicide into zombie stories, turning murdered women into re-animated corpses whose agency is subsumed by the author of each true crime story and using respectability politics and fear to stigmatize female migration and mobility. Through the use of archetypes, melodramatic story arcs, and gender stereotyping, true crime stories of femicides on screen and on the page express and dialogue with national identity and fear of female movement across borders. The film, *The Three Deaths of Marisela Escobedo* (2020), directed by Carlos Pérez Osorio, the Mexican television series, *Mujer, casos de la vida real* (1985-2007) co-produced by Sylvia Pinal, the novel *Desert Blood* (2005), written by Alicia Gaspar de Alba, and the documentary text *El invencible verano de Liliana* (2022) by Cristina Rivera Garza are examples of trauma stories about feminicide and migratory identity that belong to the true crime genre in its literary and screen manifestations.

These cultural products engage with the most salient views regarding femicide of their historical moments. The two episodes relevant to this analysis, "Al Cruzar la frontera" (2004) and "Guerrillera" (2005), were widely consumed serialized content that re-creates and re-affirms attitudes regarding feminicide and female migration of the early 21st century. The novel, *Desert Blood,* also makes its debut in 2005, reflecting a new understanding of the murders of women along the U.S.-Mexico border. Its bestselling status in a time in which queer Chicana literature

was not common marks it as an important text in understanding cultural attitudes towards migration and feminicide of the time. The documentary text, *El invencible verano de Liliana,* and the documentary Netflix film *The Three Deaths of Marisela Escobedo* are much more recent, entering the public sphere in 2022 and 2020, respectively. While *The Three Deaths of Marisela Escobedo* gained notice and acclaim as a featured documentary on a major streaming service, *El invencible verano de Liliana* gained international notice with its 2023 translation to English, marketed as a true crime story. These latter two stories reflect a more recent attention to the physical abuse and murder of women, especially in a post-pandemic lockdown world.

These four types of storytelling have the intention of advocacy, however, their treatment of the figure of women as victims provides varying degrees of access to these women's humanity. In the stories about murdered people, the trope of the zombie is often present, if only as a latent concept. In the television series, novel, documentary film, and documentary text that form the center of this analysis, the figure of the zombie is useful to understand the ways in which the deceased body of women is used as a threat, object, or as a vehicle through which that woman can speak. The figure of the zombie originates among Hatian slaves who practiced voodoo, the zombie was an individual raised from the dead by a witch doctor who would keep this individual as a spiritual and/or physical slave (Lauro ix). In Western culture, especially a Hollywood re-invention of the zombie, this figure can be either an infection vector or a mindless body to be controlled. These characteristics have made the zombie a convenient figure upon which to project societal anxieties (Harris 65). Often interpreted as a critique on capitalism, the contemporary zombie story is nonetheless never divorced from race and class realities. In her text *Zombies, Migrants and Queers* Camilla Fojas writes that zombies can signify injustices that will not die, and the need to survive above all else (62). It is the marriage of zombie-like

persistence and objectification that appears in true crime narratives of deceased Mexican and Mexican American women.

The vulnerability of migration only increases when the migratory journey is undertaken by women and/or non-male individuals. The motive for migration through Mexico to the U.S. is often escape, and of those migrants whose goal is to escape the violent situations in their home countries or home states, 20-30% are women (Varela Huerta 156). The journey of migration itself represents a risk to female-presenting migrants, with 60-80% of migrant women and girls travelling through Mexico to the U.S. reportedly being raped at some stage in their travel (UN Women). The danger to women reflects the marginality and impunity with which transnational justice systems treats them. The tragedy of feminicide is intrinsically tied to migration in that it creates the need for migration for women escaping violence.

The representation of feminicides in Mexico has been a fascination of U.S. media and a preoccupation of Mexican cultural production since these murders began. The coverage in the U.S. tends towards morbid: a fascination for the bodies of dead young women pervades the film and novel production, especially in the early 2000s. Films such as the 2007 Hollywood production *Bordertown*, directed by Gregory Nava, with such actors as Jennifer López, Antonio Banderas, and Martin Sheen or the 2006 film *The Virgin of Juárez* with Minnie Driver as the protagonist and Kevin James Dobson directing focus on sensationalizing the murders of Mexican women, taking the narrative out of the affected community's control and placing it in the realm of entertainment and fantasy. The television series, *Mujer, casos de la vida real* (1985-2007) and *Desert Blood* (2005) follow some of these conventions of sensationalizing female death, and their attention to the gore and suffering of Mexican women points to a preoccupation with

educating the largest amount of people on a phenomenon that at the end of the 20th century seemed new.

The injustice of feminicide is a long-lasting phenomenon that spans the globe. However, the amount and mode of these murders in Mexico during the 1990s caught the eye of international journalists, novelists, and filmmakers alike. From 1990-1994, there were 7,705 deaths by homicide of women recorded by the Mexican National Institute for Statistics and Geography (INEGI) (Ramírez Rodríguez 5). Tragically, this high number, has only become even more exorbitant in the last 30 to 35 years. In 2021, the incidence of violence toward women older than 15 years of age had risen from affecting 66% of Mexican women to affecting 70% of Mexican women (INEGI Violencia contra las mujeres). Though the overall trajectory of feminicides increased, the number dropped from the 1,000-2,000 deaths a year range to 827 in 2023 (Redacción AN/AG 1). This may be a step forward, signifying a drop in the murder of women in Mexico and along the U.S.-Mexico border, however, the numbers reported do not always reflect the true on-the-ground events. The Mexican legal system places sanctions on and provides resources to combat the aftereffects of violence toward women and girls, however, its active prevention is left to the wayside—the responsibility of preventing feminicide is placed on women rather than the state (Pérez Duarte y Noroña 368). The United States is not absolved of the kind of impunity that fuels the rise of feminicides. In 2023, the U.S. ranks 34th in the world for number of feminicides, and accounts for 70% of feminicides in comparable countries, most likely because of the accessibility of firearms (Hamlin 1).

Bolstering these numbers is a narrative of complacency and normalcy—the problem of feminicide is constantly projected onto Latin American countries in U.S. popular culture, especially Mexico. While feminicide remains a real and present threat in Mexico, it is not absent

in the U.S.. The transnational relationship that police and military forces across the U.S.-Mexico border have, affects the ways in which feminicides, especially those involving migrant women, are prosecuted. The narrative surrounding women as victims is particularly central in policy outcomes and telling with regards to a lingering patriarchal approach to gendered violence. David Johnson, in his monograph titled *Violence and Naming: On Mexico and the Promise of Literature,* describes the pitfalls of being defined as a victim within a legal system: "to be counted as (only) a victim – is to be identified in such a way that one is no longer who or what one was: no longer part of a community, no longer a citizen, no longer a person with rights and his or her own story (*historia, cuento)*" (2). The figure of the victim is central in the construction of a true crime narrative, focusing on this victim as a focus on which the amorphous desire for justice can coalesce. A person's "community" and "rights" are replaced by speculation, objectification, and the projections of a wider audience who lays claim to the "victim's" motivations and desires through the vehicle of the true crime story. A 2022 Pew Research Center study found that the genre most consumed in podcasts in the U.S. is true crime, and that the population most likely to listen to these podcasts are those with less formal education (Nasser and St. Aubin 1). In the introduction to their collected volume titled *Critiquing Violent Crime in the Media,* Maria Mellins and Sarah Moore state that "there is a new porosity to media accounts, a tendency for stories that emerge in one format or medium to move to others, and even be produced with that in mind (something that Media Studies researchers call 'transmediality)" (8).

The shifting of stories from one medium to another is what makes the study of true crime literature and film so vital. The ambiguity between storytelling and fact reporting is the lifeblood of this genre. The construction of victimhood, justice, and crime in these stories reflects and shapes popular opinion regarding those who are deemed victims and those who are perpetrators.

When the true crime narratives focus on migrant Mexican or Mexican American women, the humanity of this group is called into question. The true crime genre creates a murder narrative that interpolates the audience, eliciting an emotional response and establishing a complex relationship with the criminal figure (Murley 7-8). This genre has a largely female-identifying audience whose interest in this type of crime story comes from the need to be prepared or protected from a similar tragedy befalling them. At least this is one of the more popular theories that has been put forth to explain the massive popularity of true crime podcasts, series, and video streaming channels (Horeck 4). The prevalence of women in true crime extends beyond the demographics of this genre's audience and is reflected in the subjects and authors of these true crime narratives.

The television series *Mujer casos de la vida real* (1986-2007), the novel *Desert Blood* (2005), the documentary film *The Three Deaths of Marisela Escobedo* (2020), and the documentary text *El invencible verano de Liliana* (2022) are all works that touch on the uncertainty of Mexican and Mexican American women migrating and moving while facing the reality or possibility of feminicide. These works fall into the true crime genre, defining victimhood and crime in ways that objectify the female survivors and deceased at different levels of severity. The chronology of these works is important to understanding the ways in which the current event status of feminicide affects the cultural outlook on feminicide as a phenomenon.

II. Mujer, casos de la vida real

The earliest work included, *Mujer, casos de la videa real*, claims to apply a journalistic perspective that prioritizes truth as it dramatizes stories of supposed real-life criminal cases. This television show ran from 1986 until 2007, a total of 21 years during which its host and co-producer Sylvia Pinal framed stories of crimes as actors re-created them on screen. Originally

created to help survivors of the 1985 Mexico City earthquake find family members, this series quickly became a show designed to warn viewers away from certain behaviors or certain areas of Mexico (Gamero 2). The representation of crime in these episodes is highly dramatized and creates a portrait of criminality that relies on a pre-established status quo of societal fears, such as fear of sexual promiscuity. Cultural analysts point out that *Mujer, casos…* turns its attention towards abuse against women in order to educate a wider audience, promoting an activist message against intimate partner violence (Cabral 30). Not many academics have written about this series, instead much of the commentary on this series is present online. Many online reviews take the form of lists that enumerate the most shocking episodes of the series, highlighting a propensity for showing women in difficult and violent situations (Peralta 1). Despite this problematic nature, this series has received high acclaim from contemporaneous audiences and from writers who take a retrospective look at the show as well (Redacción 1). Some of the more controversial, and thus the most discussed, episodes include "Guerrillera" and "Al cruzar la frontera," both of which deal with feminicide, kidnapping, and sexual assault. Because of their acclaim and their focus on violence against women, these episodes form the center of this chapter's analysis of *Mujer casos de la vida real.* These two episodes contain the threat of feminicide, and "Guerrillera" contains an instance of feminicide.

The depiction of violence against migrant women in these two *Mujer, casos de la vida real* episodes demonstrate the ways in which archetypes become oppressive vehicles for respectability politics. The ways in which the two female migrant protagonists of these episodes are portrayed zombify them through a policed sense of female identity and sexuality. Throughout the episodes, the threat of feminicide hangs above the protagonists' heads, creating a driving force for the melodrama in both episodes. The long-running show's episodes follow the same

format each time: Sylvia Pinal appears in a domestic setting, addressing the camera, and highlighting a real-life tragedy or disappearance, asking the audience's participation in resolving some of these disappearances. Then, a related supposedly true story is represented by professional actors in a telenovela-like format. At the end of each episode, Pinal returns, asking the audience to call the number on the screen if they know anything about the disappearance or crime that was acted out in the episode. Most of this series has to do with violence, murder, and kidnapping, often using female or child characters as innocent figures who heighten the narrative stakes in each episode. Melodramatic tropes are present in both the true crime genre and the telenovela genre, providing a driving thrust to the narrative. *Mujer casos de la vida real* originally focuses on crimes and disappearances in Mexico City, however, the show branched out through its 21 years to depict transnational stories. This shift in episode topics tracks the growing frequency of migration and geopolitical unrest that began to affect Mexico from the 1990s onward. The episodes titled "Al Cruzar la Frontera" (2002) and "Guerrillera" (2002) exemplify the gendered and melodramatic outlook that *Mujer casos de la vida real* brings to this topic.

"Al cruzar la frontera" follows the story of a Mexican woman who immigrates to New Mexico where she meets a migrant Honduran man while working in a Mexican restaurant. The two make a life together and have children, but one day the man must return to his hometown due to his mother's death. His wife begs him not to leave, but he says he will only go for a while When he returns to his apartment a few months later, his wife and children are gone, nowhere to be found. The landlady tells the man that she cannot help him with his family's whereabouts. His old boss is sympathetic but cannot help him either. The episode ends with the man's oath to go to any extreme necessary to find his wife and children again. Like all other *Mujer, casos de la vida*

real episodes, this one begins with a claim to truth, framing this melodramatic story as a real event. Sylvia Pinal steps into frame at the end of the episode to request that any audience members who know the whereabouts of the woman in the story call the station with information.

The "Al cruzar la frontera" episode creates an air of mystery around the process of migration, establishing it as a precarious situation, not because of the laws surrounding it but because of the interpersonal relationships that may arise. For each story, the person who submits it is a different character within it. For this episode, Pinal starts it off saying, "Y ahora vamos a ver el caso que nos manda Teresita" [00:17]. In the next scene, the establishing shot of the episode, an older man is introducing a woman to another man by saying, "Hola Rigoberto. Mira, ella es Teresita y va a trabajar con nosotros aquí en la cocina" [00:27-00:31]. This transition from Pinal's introduction into the dramatic action of the episode ties the real-life viewer of *Mujer, casos de la vida real,* Teresita, to the dramatized story about to be shown. The format of the series follows the conventions of American melodrama that many others of this series adhere to: a focus on women and family structures, a diminishing of the male character (Mercer and Shingler 6). The melodramatic is deeply inscribed in Latin American filmic and television culture in the form of telenovelas, of which *Mujer, casos de la vida real* is a sort. The intrinsic relationship that melodrama and telenovelas have with patriarchy remains intact in the dramatic representations of trauma that *Mujer, casos…* lays out for a Mexican audience.

The relationship to melodrama that *Mujer, casos de la vida real* establishes through its cinematography as well as its narrative representation of gender and family, relies on the construction of patriarchy and traditional Christian concepts of morality. Juana Suárez analyzes the Latin American traditional melodrama as is manifested in the telenovela genre commenting, "A pesar de las variaciones de periodo a periodo, la representación de las mujeres ha oscilado

generalmente entre la santidad, el martirio y el autosacrificio" (116). The three possible archetypes of Saint, Martyr or Self-Sacrifice are all present in the creation of the migrant woman in crisis in *Mujer, casos…* and is a result of the ways in which the true crime genre locates femininity within victimhood. The victimhood here follows the pattern of isolation that David Johnson points out, the victim is no longer a part of their community, no longer an agent in their own story. In the case of *Mujer, casos…,* the two episodes I take as case studies show the women as characterized by their relationships to male characters. Though their roles are central to the narrative, in the way of melodrama, they are defined through their roles within a family. Though their family is important to create meaning for their roles, Teresita and Almudena, the two protagonists of "Al cruzar la frontera" and "Guerrillera" remain apart, their roles as victims isolating them from a possible collective grieving process.

Teresita fits into the role of Saint and mother at once. She shows grief, feelings of displacement at being a migrant in a new country, however her union with her husband and subsequent motherhood are shown to be a balm to this. The episode shows Rigoberto and Teresita quickly entering a romantic relationship and having children. When their boss questions them about how fast they are proceeding together, Rigoberto claims, "No, no es eso patrón. Lo que pasa es que ya no somos jovencitos" [09:13-09:18]. During this line read, Teresita covers her face and looks down, smiling and biting her lip as if embarrassed. She promises to continue working after having her child, a promise which proves to be false as the next scene shows her at home with two children and pregnant. This image of Teresita as devoted wife to Rigoberto is the emotional crux of the episode which helps create the affective tension that climaxes when Rigoberto returns from his trip to Honduras to find her gone with the children. The threat of

feminicide returns here, as Teresita is separated from her husband and is without her community. The dangers of female migration return, her status as mother makes her doubly pitiable.

The figure of Teresita becomes zombified as she is forced to disappear while her husband is away, she begins to show signs of distress along with a desire to assimilate with which her husband disagrees. This distress and assimilation attempt indicate a force greater than herself—the force of displacement:

"RIGOBERTO- ¿Y si es niño?

TERESITA- Hm, ¡Richard!

R- ¿Richard? ¿Y porque Richard?

T- Porque Richard es…aristocrático. Suena elegante." [11:02-11:40].

Though her husband, Rigoberto, suggests his own name for his unborn child, Teresita expresses a staunch preference for the Anglo-sounding name that she argues is "aristocratic." The push to assimilate is a contentious issue between the two and is shown as a routine issue in this episode when it comes to migrant realities. As Teresita and Rigoberto become separated and are affected by forces outside their control, migration is depicted as a precarious situation whose benefits will soon be outweighed by the loss of identity and the loss of family. In the case of the stereotyped Teresita, this loss of family is also a loss of identity. She becomes *victim* and loses the title of wife and mother. The logic of the series places her as a lost individual. Though she is not dead, she is displaced, her agency removed by the greater forces of migration and the threat of feminicidio.

During this historical moment, the term of "femnicidio" was not legally recognized as different from homicide in Mexico and had very little visibility in the U.S. news mainstream. However, the academic world began publishing at a high output about the tragic phenomenon,

calling it a problem due to "social inequality" and maquiladoras (Brugger 6), tying it to working class women or obreras (Schmidt Camacho 24), and trying to define the concept as a sexist hate crime (Gutiérrez Castañeda). The period of time during which Teresita and Almudena migrate and during which these stories are shown on mainstream Mexican television are moments during which the question of female deaths at a mass scale was still in question officially, but present in the public consciousness. The true crime conventions that help tell these stories in *Mujer, casos de la vida real,* make meaning of a fearful moment of uncertainty. Through the application of melodrama and the creation of virtuous female characters who persevere, *Mujer, casos…* indicates that there may be a logic or cause-and-effect to the threatened violence.

True crime relies on these conventions of melodrama to create an image of a sympathetic female character, dialoguing with patriarchal gender norms to elicit an emotional response from the audience. Teresita's opposite is Almudena, the protagonist of another migration episode titled "Guerrillera" or "Female Guerilla Fighter." This dramatization tells the story of Almudena, a Colombian young woman who migrates to Mexico escaping an abusive stepfather and violent guerilla situation in her hometown. Almudena is presented as a sympathetic character, the opposite of her twin sister who dies halfway through the episode. This sister, Manuela, is a fighter in the local guerilla, hiding from the authorities and espousing ideals of gender equality and retribution for male abusers. Though the series' point of view does not seem to disagree with these viewpoints, Manuela dies young for her ideals, a punishment of a sort or consequence that warns other young women away from her path. Both "Al cruzar la frontera," the story of Teresita and Rigoberto, as well as "Guerillera," the story of Almudena, have hopeful endings. "Al cruzar la frontera" gives hope to the audience that Teresita will find her husband through audience participation. "Guerillera" is a cautionary tale as Almudena migrates to Mexico and becomes a

sex worker out of necessity. From her sexually abusive stepfather in Colombia to the type of forced sex work Almudena takes on in Mexico, Almudena is shown as being at the mercy of cruel men. During her time as a sex worker, Almudena meets a Mexican woman who befriends her. Once she tells her friend about her life in Colombia, this Mexican woman offers her a way out by suggesting that Almudena marry her homosexual brother to obtain Mexican nationality and the options for financial independence that this would bring.

The women in *Mujer, casos de la vida real* toe the line between transgressive and normative, their embodiment of female archetypes necessary for the audience to find their plight sympathetic. While the series' claim to truth transforms the stories from mere imaginings into cautionary tales, this claim to truth also adds to the morbid entertainment of the true crime genre, while the melodramatic elements of the series allow it to remain within the realm of respectability. Drawing from Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham's 1993 concept of respectability politics, one can understand the moves towards societal acceptance that *Mujer, casos…* makes even as it displays criminal acts and implies sexual realities that are often censored and censured in mainstream media. In "Guerrillera" Almudena is raped by her stepfather, the beginning of this assault is shown in the episode, with a tight shot on the faces of Almudena and her assaulter. The young woman screams while her elderly mother weakly protests from her sickbed in the corner of the one-room house. Over these sounds is a track of ominous music that is repeated throughout the episode as an emotional cue to the audience regarding the dangerous actions on screen.

This scene is extremely violent and can be very triggering to certain populations who may be survivors of a similar assault. Its casual inclusion in this episode is not to be taken lightly. In present-day mainstream serializations, streaming networks and producers are careful

to display content warnings at the beginning of potentially triggering episodes, they include hotline numbers at times to help survivors who may be struggling with mental health issues. However, even these productions often use scenes of assault to add shock value to their series. *Mujer, casos…* displays a similar tactic using a liberal spread of violent scenes, usually with the female body as the recipient of this violence. In "Guerrillera," the audience is both witness and voyeur as Almudena is assaulted.

While Almudena is seen as a pitiable character whose experience with sexual abuse and later sex work removes her from the role of mother, Saint, or Self-Sacrifice. She takes the role of martyr and, to a greater extent, moralizing example for the audience. The story does not end with a plea for the audience to intervene in the story, rather Sylvia Pinal explains that Almudena should not let anyone exploit her: "Almudena no debe permitir se explotada por nadie. Los derechos internacionales de la mujer la protegen. Puede buscar asesoría y asilo en nuestro país de acuerdo a las leyes mexicanas" [21:45-21:58]. Pinal enters as the voice of authority and moral reason, her words frame the narrative within a logic of respectability. The scenes of Almudena's story include violence, trafficking, and sexual acts, but with the presence of Pinal's narrative intervention, the audience can be told how to make sense of these difficult topics. Her story is put forth as an amalgamation of other stories, a cautionary tale. *Mujer, casos de la vida real* makes moral judgments on the perpetrators in this story, espousing a type of woman-centered message by showing the liberating camaraderie between Almudena and her Mexican friend. However, Pinal's final message has a sense of blame as she says that Almudena must not "allow herself to be exploited." This is one example of the individualist approach that *Mujer, casos de la vida real* takes, an approach common to traditional true crime narratives. The idea that it is Almudena's responsibility to combat the exploitative forces she faces shifts blame away from a

system of patriarchal abuse and injustice that undocumented migrant women fact to this day. Similarly, Teresita's story of loss places an emphasis on audience participation, rather than civic engagement.

The intention behind *Mujer, casos de la vida real* remained one of outreach and advocacy, as even in 2006, Sylvia Pinal announced the establishment of Fundación Mujer, Casos de la vida real. This would be a foundation that would provide resources and services to women in need (Flores 4). The connection to real world consequences is not only a gimmick of this series, but a hallmark of the true crime visual and literary genres. The representation of violence in *Mujer, casos de la vida real* often turns the camera away from the act of violence, implying it instead of directly showing the assault. The avoidance of showing the violence directly is done in consideration to survivors of similar violent attacks. The fact of showing abuse and violence does not in and of itself constitute advocacy work, however, the true crime genre often creates confusion in its audience because it establishes a call-and-response pattern. It calls for action in the viewers or readers by posing an unexplained or unsolved crisis that is presented in such a specific or individualized manner as to appear manageable to the general public. For example, Teresita's case is not merely a story about a separated family, it is a call to arms to a concerned audience. Pinal is the narrative voice, moral authority, and bridge to the public all in one. This function is very clear in the case of this series, however, in the case of true crime literature, the moralizing or narrative voice is sublimated more artfully within the action of the stories told.

III. *Desert Blood*

Desert Blood by Alicia Gaspar de Alba (2005) displays violence against women on the U.S.-Mexico border in the early 2000s, highlighting their victimhood in the face of the novel protagonist's heroics. The bodies of young murdered or abducted women are zombified, made to

resemble re-animated creatures, in order to shock and appeal to an international audience. *Desert Blood* follows many conventions of the noir detective novel including the presence of a jaded investigating character, a femme fatale, and a damsel in distress. Gaspar de Alba turns this convention on its head by substituting the traditionally male protagonist with a lesbian young woman, Ivon Villa, as the main character. *Desert Blood* tells the story of a doctoral student, Ivon, who returns to her hometown of El Paso to adopt a newborn whose biological mother is a teenage worker at one of the maquilas, or factories, on the Ciudad Juárez side of the border. This young girl is murdered and so Ivon is alerted to the tragedy of femicides on the U.S.-Mexico border. She begins to investigate, and her investigation gains a more personal motivation when her teenage sister is taken by one of the groups of men who is murdering young women. Ultimately, Ivon solves the mystery of the femicides and rescues her sister in an action-packed scene involving U.S. federal and local law-enforcement agents.

The critical response to this novel has largely been positive, with critics regarding the novel as "intricate and historicized" (Mata 17) and "ethically complicated" (Pérez 91). However, the depiction of violence in the novel comes under scrutiny for its gratuitousness, even in more positive reviews (Butcher 412). This depiction of violence against female bodies and Ivon's role in examining them is what is of interest in this analysis. Through Irene's first-person narration, the reader encounters the dichotomy of El Paso and Ciudad Juárez viewing it through a critical lens. Though fictionalized, this novel draws from contemporaneous news articles and journalistic work that reported on the feminicides in Ciudad Juárez at the time. The life and subjectivity of Irene and her family is invented, but many of the murders mentioned in the novel are based on fact. This connection between fiction and real-world crime places the novel in the realm of true crime writing. Gaspar de Alba's book uses exaggeration and techniques from pulp fiction to

draw the attention of a broader audience. The hyperbole in *Desert Blood* has been read as a call to attention regarding the murders of women on the U.S.-Mexico border, with the characteristics of thriller and action novels serving to create an unmistakable image of violence, implicating the average U.S.-based reader (Donohue 555). This aesthetic of exaggeration can be seen clearly in crucial narrative moments, such as the protagonist's first encounters with the gruesome nature of the feminicides: "Ivon couldn't move. She was standing less than five feet away from the body of the girl who was going to be the mother of her child. Her head was turned sideways, facing Ivon, the eyes a milky red, the mouth wide open. The body was marbled green and yellow, the skin loose, the hands curled inward, toes pointed. Dark rope burns on her neck" (Gaspar de Alba Loc 874). This disturbing scene details the autopsy of Cecilia, the teenage factory worker who was going to be the biological mother of Ivon's soon-to-be adopted child.

The narration pulls from the dramatic techniques of pulp fiction while keeping the violent injustice of feminicide front and center, using the mutilation of the female body as the fulcrum on which the mechanisms of guilt and pathos rest. Gaspar de Alba's use of color in this passage creates a gruesome image, with "milky red," "marbled green," "yellow," and "dark rope burns" bringing to mind bruising and illness in the body. The "marbled green," "loose skin," and "hands curled inward," suggest an undead or zombie quality that underscores the horror that Ivon and the reader feel. The narrative makes moves toward humanizing Cecilia, even in death, calling her a "girl" rather than a corpse or a body. However, the main characterizing feature that sets Cecilia apart is that she would have been the "mother of [Ivon's] child." The sentence that establishes Ivon's placement in relation to the autopsy table makes use of pathos as well as horror tropes to bring the reader into an affective realm of empathy or sympathy for Cecilia, and more than Cecilia, for Ivon.

Gaspar de Alba's effort to write a pulp fiction-like novel that appeals to a broader audience comes with narrative choices that speak to an international audience, specifically a U.S. one, in their style and meaning. The Mexican characters in this novel, and most importantly, Cecilia, exist insofar as they are related to Ivon. The young maquiladora worker is not mentioned further in the novel except to lament her passing and provide some motivation for Ivon's later research and investigation into the murders. Ivon stands "less than five feet away" from Cecilia's body, but the intention is for U.S. readers to put themselves in this proximate position. Gaspar de Alba's intention of forcing a privileged international reader to understand the issue of feminicide may not completely hit its mark as the "zombification," so to speak, of Cecilia's character reders her an object of pity or salaciousness. In the vein of true crime, advocacy soon turns to crime tourism. The deaths of real women who migrate from other parts of Mexico during the 1990s and early 2000s to work in the maquiladora factories become local color or morbid detail for novels like *Desert Blood* that treat the hard-boiled detective figure as an avenging hero, switching all attention from the brutal efficiency of a flawed justice system to the flashy machinations of a made-up villain, like the antagonist of Gaspar de Alba's novel—J.W..

The character of J.W. is highly symbolic in many ways, standing in for U.S. military interference along the U.S.-Mexico border, but within the linear narrative that this kind of action novel dictates, J.W. is akin to a mustache-twirling villain of melodrama. He appears at first on the flight that Ivon takes from Los Angeles to El Paso: "'Bet you fifty cents I can guess what you do for a living,' he said. She ignored him. He was just some racist white man on the make. 'You're a model, right? Or in the movie business.' What was it about straight guys who liked to pick up on butch women?" (Loc 120)

This first glimpse of the novel's antagonist serves as expository prose that fleshes out Ivon as a character as well. J.W. is presented as a "racist white man" who butts into Ivon's space and privacy aggressively. The "fifty cents" that he bets her come back in a gruesome manner towards the end of the novel when his modus operandi as a killer is revealed, violating the bodies of women with rolls of coins. In this first moment, his focus is on Ivon's appearance and body, calling her a "model." This part of the dialogue reveals to the reader that Ivon may be conventionally attractive, and it also confirms that she considers herself part of the "butch women" category. Without fully describing her body, the interaction between these two characters creates a gendered dynamic that centers Ivon and sets the tone for later interactions between J.W. and the protagonist. J.W.'s symbolism as part of the more violent sides of U.S. intervention in Mexican politics is part of the characterization that Gaspar de Alba uses to create an abrasive villain.

Though the hyperbole may be meant to force readers to face the violence on the border, it can also be read at face value as an element in a simple action story that prizes flashy American characters over minoritized Mexican women. Ivon's real interest in the problems of feminicides in Ciudad Juárez starts when her teenage sister is kidnapped in retaliation for Ivon's investigations into the murders of maquiladora workers. This disappearance gives a narrative reason for Ivon to involve herself more closely with criminal investigations, putting the protagonist in the role of grieving family member. The novel attempts a subversion of gender norms, placing Ivon as an avenging hero and the rational head of her family. However, this reversal of traditional gender roles continues to play into the traditional gender binary: "They were arguing in the living room, and Ivon had the eerie sensation that she was still that runaway teenager and her uncle was there to defend her against her mom's hormonal wrath. Her father

never meddled in her mother's affairs" (Loc. 2200). Ivon listens to her uncle and her mother fight about family matters and is reminded of her adolescence. In this moment, the protagonist is characterized as a rebellious figure, someone who had been a "runaway teenager," even as her mother is painted as an irrational figure. Her mother's anger is reduced to a "hormonal wrath" thanks to health issues she was suffering. While Ivon's mother is depicted as a shouting, emotional individual who rails against her daughter, the protagonist's uncle is "there to defend her." He represents reason and understanding.

Ivon's loyalties lie with her male family members rather than her mother, with whom she is in constant disagreement. Her mother even likens Ivon to her father, a loaded comparison. Even though she displays a difficult relationship with her deceased father, Ivon is still clearly identified as a masculinized character within the logics of her family and the novel: "'But you look just like your dad in that shirt.' She sniffled, wiping at the corners of her shiny green eyes with a lace-edged hankie she took from her apron. [. . .] 'But he wouldn't have liked it, would he, Ma?' Ivon couldn't resist goading her. 'Or did you forget that Dad was always getting on my case about the clothes I wore and how I looked more like a *joto* than a girl'" (Loc. 1046). This scene takes place close to the scene in which Ivon meets J.W., both moments of dialogue with another character who comments on Ivon's appearance and gendered existence in the world. Her mother's "lace-edged hankie" and "apron" place her in a domestic setting. Her tears at seeing her daughter resemble her late husband contrast with Ivon's "goading," an emotionally closed response to her mother's tears. Aditionally, the dialogue brings up the difficulty of homophobic rejection by the family. Ivon's clothes and gender expression are tied to her sexuality as she remembers that her father called her a "*joto,*" a homophobic slur referring to gay men.

The gender politics of the novel take center stage as Ivon's romantic and familial relationships are the driving force of the novel, with the rising female death count as a backdrop. The interpersonal relationships at the heart of the novel's actions may be mere set dressing meant to draw the average reader in to a plot about minoritized groups, however, the centrality of these highly specific and individual dynamics takes precedence as Ivon embarks on the search for her sister. The crucial connection between Ivon and her homophobic parents resurfaces in one way or another throughout the novel, especially as Ivon takes on characteristics attributed to her father and other male characters of the story. This connection hearkens back to Gloria Anzaldúa's foundational text of *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987) which outlines one of the first theorizations of Chicana queerness that was largely read and consumed by the academic world. Anzaldúa's text conceptualizes homophobia as "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" (42). Alicia Gaspar de Alba's novel and her protagonist Ivon echo this fear of going home. The main motivations behind Ivon's actions stem from this fear of not being taken in and feeling of being "abandoned by the mother." Ivon first tries to find justice for Cecilia, the girl that would have made Ivon a parent. Her further involvement in investigation comes because of Irene, Ivon's young sister.

The reader's contact with feminicide is tinged with Ivon's familial relationships and her struggle with gender identity. On one level, this is a narrative strategy to create exposition for the reader by offering entrance into the novel's world through the inexperienced eyes of an outsider learning about the main problem of the story just as the reader is learning. In another light, this strategy is the same as true crime cultural production, including literature, film and podcast media. One of the more frequently consumed forms of true crime in the United States is podcasts

about unsolved crimes. The foundational true crime podcast, *Serial,* inspired much of the contemporary push towards crowdsourcing detective work—such a staple of true crime. Produced and created by Sarah Koenig and Julie Snyder, *Serial* follows the legal case of Adnan Syed, a man accused of murdering his high-school girlfriend, Hae Min Lee in 1999. Because of this podcast, Adnan Syed's case was reopened, and his life-long prison sentence was reversed in 2022, 23 years after Adnan was convicted (Blair 2). *Serial* empowered a wide audience to interact with the ongoing case in real time, seemingly validating the para-social relationships that fans and listeners developed with the subjects of these true crime productions and their hosts when the verdict that they fought for became a reality. These relationships are one-sided connections that audience members and listeners develop with artists, podcast hosts, and even the subject of the show—Adnan Syed. In the case of *Desert Blood,* this drive towards amateur sleuthing is enshrined within the narrative of the novel, creating a bridge from reader to subject but also flattening the overwhelming matter of feminicides along the border to a single solvable crime.

IV. The Three Deaths of Marisela Escobedo

A documentary film produced and streamed on Netflix, *The Three Deaths of Marisela Escobedo,* looks at the story of Marisela Escobedo and her struggle to find justice for her missing daughter, assumed dead. As Marisela takes the initiative to investigate the crime in the face of official impunity, she becomes more of a target of organized crime bosses. The film initiates with the specter of Marisela's death as most of her story is told through interviews with her children, siblings, and friends. As the film ends, Marisela's death becomes a reality with surveillance camera footage capturing her murder, spliced into the Netflix film. The documentary is listed under the true crime category on the streaming platform where it is housed.

This film's deductive structure brings audience members into the search for the culprit of Marisela's murder and her daughter's disappearance.

The characterization of motherhood in *The Three Deaths of Marisela Escobedo* provides the structure for characterizing femininity in this documentary. Through Marisela and Rubí the film constructs an image of victimhood using the depiction of motherhood and daughterhood. Notably, neither woman is alive to contribute actively to the film's creation. The most vocal members of the Escobedo family are Marisela's oldest son and second oldest son. Both men as well as Marisela's sister and her oldest daughter, the other two contributing family members in the film, have clearly suffered a grievous loss. Their participation in the documentary seems to be due to a desire to raise awareness for the injustice that occurred through their family members' murders and the consequent impunity for their murderers. The question of intentionality of the participants in this documentary or of the creators of the film is not one that is of interest in this chapter, rather the focus of this analysis is on the built-in exploitation in the growing true crime genre and its effects on a Mexican and Mexican American cultural production.

The Three Deaths of Marisela Escobedo is largely evaluated as the story of a grieving mother, instrumentalized by government and transnational cultural forces to put forth an official story regarding feminicide. Marisela is seen as a subaltern subject whose campaign against feminicide has been coopted for public relations reasons (Buoso Gavín 69). This very recent documentary has few academic articles written about it, however, the online reviews call the documentary a "chilling true story" (Henry 1). The titular character, Marisela Escobedo, is a figure with which the audience can identify as she embodies the role of consummate mother. The documentary purports to be about Marisela and tangentially about her daughter, Rubí. Marisela's

maternity is what gives the true crime documentary its main thrust, creating a martyr and avenger out of the main character. The film opens on a shot of Marisela speaking solemnly:

> "Buenas tardes. Mi nombre es Marisela Escobedo Ortiz. Madre de Rubí Marisol Fraire Escobedo. Y le he perdido el miedo a todo. Le he perdido el miedo a la muerte, que es lo peor que me podría suceder. He enfrentado a las autoridades. He enfrentado al Gobernador. He enfrentado a quien se me ha puesto enfrente. Y quiero que mi hija, dondequiera que esté, que sepa que la amo y que no voy a dejar de luchar hasta que se le haga justicia" (00:00-00:41).

During this tight shot that focuses on Marisela's head and the top of her shoulders, she looks into the camera, only glancing away every now and then to think of her word choice. The stark white background offers no distraction from her short monologue, and her white wire-rimmed glasses frame a direct gaze.

The purpose of this shot is to introduce the main subject of the documentary as a fighting woman, someone who is beyond fear, and somehow beyond death as well. This depiction of Marisela in this documentary is held up as a counterpoint to traditional representations of submissive Mexican mothers in film (Paz-Mackay and González Hurtado 15). Ultimately, Marisela fights the system that creates impunity for her daughter at the cost of her own life. The true crime industry thrives on women's deaths and Marisela's is no different. The fact that she is an avenging mother only helps to create further *pathos,* thus making the story more appealing. The documentary does not shy away from showing Marisela's anger in full force, even including a clip of her screaming in a courthouse at the verdict of not guilty that her daughter's presumed murderer receives. She proves her opening claim that states "me he enfrentado a quien se me ha puesto enfrente." Here, the identity of "madre de Rubí" is conflated with fearlessness. After

assuring the audience that she is not afraid even of death, she names her enemies, mainly "el Gobernador" and "las autoridades." Marisela is an anti-institutional figure from her inception as a character in this narrative.

The Three Deaths of Marisela Escobedo presents motherhood as a transgressional force, showing the kind of extra-official accountability that mothers such as Marisela provide. By presenting Marisela as an alternative to the institution of criminal justice, the documentary underscores the cycle of impunity that comes with a corrupt institutional structure. This story reached the international press as just one more tale about the violence in Ciudad Juárez, its revival in this 2020 true crime Netflix documentary brought up this same subject in reviews written about the film. A *Vice* review characterizes Escobedo's struggle in the following way: "She had set up camp in one of Mexico's most dangerous cities – a place where people won't leave their homes at night—to protest day and night against corruption and impunity in her daughter's murder case" (Jiménez 1). Though this article mainly draws attention to Marisela's courage and tenacity in pursuing her daughter's murderer, its first characterization of her fight implies that Marisela's murder was inevitable due to the city in which she "set up camp."

The depiction of Ciudad Juárez as a place of "protest," "corruption," and "impunity" may align with the depiction of this city by documentaries such as *The Three Deaths of Marisela Escobedo,* however, it also casts an implicit aspersion on the type of person who would stay, and even "camp in one of Mexico's most dangerous cities." This view of Marisela and those like her can be harmful in that it objectifies their efforts, flattening them into futile efforts or curiosities to be consumed by an international audience. A similar phenomenon occurs within the genre of true crime as it is patterned after journalistic storytelling practices. Added to the pre-disposition

to depict women as the authors of their own demise is the tendency to construct Mexico as a lawless and crumbling nation.

The press coverage of this documentary echoes the international media's view of Mexico and the common characterization of the U.S.-Mexico border as an "herida abierta" or open wound. This is at times a useful metaphor to understand the ways in which Mexican and Mexican American individuals experience the oppression of two governments and cultures. Examples of generative uses of the "open wound" depiction include the writings of Gloria Anzaldúa, Cherrié Moraga, and Norma Alarcón, to name only a few Chicana scholars. However, the idea of the open wound is also a burden that the U.S.-Border must contend with to be taken seriously. This characterization originates from the 19th century conflict between the U.S. and Mexican governments for control of what is now the U.S. Southwest (Cerbino and Macaroff 170). The open wound previously referred to a forced schism of a community that was split by a political border and has become a description of the violence that has been attributed by international media to border communities and organized crime on the U.S. Mexico border.

Narcoviolence is often used as the catch-all problem that explains any violence or disruption in Mexico or on the U.S.-Mexico border. While organized crime impacts many marginalized communities in both Mexico and the United States, it is not a spontaneous occurrence. U.S. military interference and demand for drugs coming from North America have spurred on the success of narcotrafficking in Latin America generally, and Mexico specifically. This nuance is usually left out of American journalistic depictions of violence in Mexico. True crime narratives echo this binary depiction of narcoviolence and feminicide in Mexico, two types of violence that have been linked time and time again in scholarship that investigates the cause of the widespread mass killings of women in Mexico. Narcoviolence may be a piece of the machine

of feminicide that grinds women down, producing around 500 murders of women in the last year (Barragán 1), but the engine of this behemoth is a patriarchal logic of control. The foundational scholarly text *Making a Killing: Feminicide, Free Trade, and La Frontera* (2010) edited by Alicia Gaspar de Alba and Georgina Guzmán analyzes the role of multi-national corporations and the consequences of free trade on the murder of low-income racialized women on the U.S.-Mexico border. Gaspar de Alba's contribution to the edited volume traces the role of the maquiladoras in abusing and disposing of young women and girls who worked in those factories from around 2000-2010. She also points to the abundance of theories regarding the cause or driving force behind the feminicides, including but not limited to serial killers, satanic cults, and one Egyptian chemist (67).

More recent journalistic investigations show the culprit of feminicide to be a toxic combination of institutional incompetence, corruption, and institutionalized patriarchy. Lydiette Carrión, a Mexican investigative journalist, writes that the core of this mass murder is the way in which boys and young men are raised to understand their worth. According to her examination of the disappearances and remains found in the Río de Remedios outside of Mexico City titled *La Fosa de Agua,* these young men's indoctrination into the patriarchy paired with the under-resourced and corrupt system of criminal justice creates the perfect conditions for impunity (156). *The Three Deaths of Marisela Escobedo* implicates members of the Zetas narco-organization in the murders of Marisela and Rubí Escobedo, but the real battle that Marisela fought was not only against organized crime, but against a criminal justice system that would not take her or her daughter seriously [00:58:00].

The documentary shows Rubí as a member of society who has been tossed away by the institutions of law enforcement. Marisela's efforts to gain justice for her daughter, Rubí, is an

effort to reinsert her in the institutional logic and find a way out of the oppressive status quo. *The Three Deaths of Marisela Escobedo* leans on eschatological aesthetics to elicit an emotional response from viewers that plays along the line between sympathy and disgust. Juan Manuel, Marisela's oldest son, describes the field in which they search for Rubí's remains: "Este es un terreno donde va la gente y avienta huesos, grasa de animal, de vaca, de marranos. Lo que es el desperdicio, lo que sobra, pues" [17:06-17:15]. This description is played as a voice over while the camera pans over what seems like a landfill. The phrase "va la gente y avienta huesos" is ambiguous in the context of a murder story. It is at first unclear if the "huesos" that are disposed of are animal or human. As Juan Manuel continues, he names "vaca" and "marranos" as animals whose waste products are deposited in this field. The possibility of Rubí's remains being included among animal waste lumps her in with "lo que sobre, pues," what is left over, what is thrown away. The focus on "grasa de animal" and bodily remains engages with the sensationalism that comes with the dark side of true crime.

This sensationalism exalts Marisela's quest to find her daughter's remains even as it objectifies her and her daughter. The documentary is built on the expression of "ugly feelings," a name coined by Sianne Ngai in her eponymous text *Ugly Feelings* (2005). These kinds of "ugly feelings" are emotions such as anger, envy, irritation, paranoia: in general, negative emotions that arise from blocked action. Ngai reads the effects of racism and colonialism in film and literature and understands these feelings as markers of resistance when expressed by colonialized or marginalized subjects. In the case of Marisela, her anger is uplifted by the documentary and used as a device to characterize her as a hero. Anger against injustice is her fuel as she perseveres despite all the obstacles in the law enforcement system, her sister even saying, "Nada más el deseo de que se hiciera justicia era lo que la mantenía de pie" [38:47-38:41]. This

comment is offered to explain Marisela's mindset after the trial during which Sergio, Rubí's assumed killer, confesses but is ruled not guilty.

This interview with family members is followed by a scene in which Marisela is standing outside of the courtroom crying and screaming. She says, "¡Qué me importan sus audiencias! ¿Por qué?" [39:18-39:29]. During this scene of extreme emotion, Marisela collapses onto a bench outside of the courthouse and is helped up by four women, one of them being her best friend, another interviewee of the documentary. As these women help her walk forward, she sobs, her body bent almost in half and her face the foremost figure in the shot as the camera follows her slow progress forward. The camera captures the various concerned faces of the women around her and Marisela's pained expression as she cries out. This representation of extreme suffering is briefly interrupted by Juan, Marisela's son, and his physical threatening of courthouse personnel. He launches forward and must be dragged away by three to four bailiffs in official uniform. This provides a visual echo to Marisela's sobbing exit from the courthouse. Though both are expressions of suffering, anger, and disbelief, Marisela's is couched in female community and family. While her son starts a physical fight, Marisela's grief helps her express her anger and address the systems of oppression that keep her daughter from receiving justice. The display of her "ugly feelings" sets Marisela apart from the traditional ideal of a docile mother or woman, but it does not stray outside of the norm with which the general viewer would be familiar.

V. El invencible verano de Liliana

While the documentary text *El invencible verano de Liliana* (2022) by Cristina Rivera Garza focuses on one murder case and its unsolved mysteries, the way in which it creates an affective connection with its readership differs from the pulp fiction tactics of *Desert Blood. El*

invencible verano de Liliana emphasizes the ways in which Liliana's individual story connects to the systemic issue of sexism and patriarchy. *El invencible verano de Liliana* tells the true story of the author's sister, Liliana Rivera Garza, who was murdered while completing her architecture degree in Mexico City in the early 1990s. Cristina Rivera Garza uses her sister's belongings, notebooks, documents, drafted letters, and photographs to piece together her life away from home and before her death. The author also uses oral testimonies of Liliana's friends and loved ones who could help understand her life and whereabouts before her passing. The process of creating this text-testimony is as intrinsic to the act of justice as the content of the text itself. In the words of the author in her text *Escrituras geológicas*:

"Así tomaron forma los huesos y las uñas, las puntas del cabello. Esa sonrisa. Para lograrlo fue necesario transcribir y cotejar, enviar de regreso a testigos y volver a corregir, estructurar de nuevo y, entre todo, rescribir. Al final, ya después de negociaciones y acuerdos varios, los testimonios parecen, de hecho, 'originales.' [. . .] En otras palabras: el que parezcan originales no quiere decir que no constituyan, mejor, esa prueba mediada del presente" (183). Here, Rivera Garza refers to the ways in which she sifted through the information that she had regarding Liliana's life. The "originales" she mentions are a reference to a concept by Svetlana Alexievich, a Belarusian journalist who gathered oral histories from women who were involved in the World War II war effort to create a different image of this war. Alexievich states that the originals, or "originales," are these original recordings of the women about whom she writes.

This reliance on "originales" finds praise in cultural critics who see the documentary text as a type of feminist archive (Ritondale 73). Critics also read this archival impulse that Rivera Garza makes manifest in *El invencible verano de Liliana* as a fight against the impunity that makes feminicide so frequent (Tomasena 154). This fight against erasure is made more salient

because the perpetrator of the feminicide in *El invencible verano de Liliana* is paid very little attention (Ortega Villela 113). The author uses documentation as a strategy of resistance. Cristina Rivera Garza references the witness statements, documents, and personal belongings related to her sister as her originals. She adds on that creating this "documentary text," *El invencible verano de Liliana,* is a collective effort between the artefacts left behind by Liliana, the testimonies of friends and family, and the author's intervention to create a narrative. Rivera Garza sees her task as author as an effort to revive her sister, in a way, giving her "huesos," "uñas," "cabello," and "sonrisa." The author creates an image of her murdered sister so that her absence may be felt by the reader, and so that the full weight of feminicide can be read into the text. She explains her approach to the topic further stating, "La imaginación, quiero argumentar, no es un atributo de la ficción, sino el rasgo intrínseco a toda práctica de escritura, es más: a toda práctica de lectura" (185). Imagination is key to all writing and reading, according to Cristina Rivera Garza. In a very crucial way, it is also the center of all true crime and is important to understanding its popularity.

El invencible verano de Liliana connects the individual issue of Liliana's murder to the large-scale tragedy of feminicides in Mexico using current event cases and statistics interspersed throughout the text. The text is largely narrated by an authorial first-person voice who is understood to be Cristina Rivera Garza. She includes scenes from her own life as anchors for the reader to understand the present-day consequences of crimes like the one perpetrated on Liliana. In the search for justice and information about her sister, the author embeds cases for which there is still no justice and which are more recent: "Es fácil amar una ciudad donde todo pasa al mismo tiempo. Donde todo tiempo es tiempo real [. . .] En México se cometen diez feminicidios cada día y, aunque con el paso de los años estas noticias se han ido normalizando, la violación de una

adolescente, perpetrada por miembros de la policía local dentro de las mismas patrullas oficiales, desató la indignación de nueva cuenta" (10). Here, Rivera Garza plays with temporality, claiming that Mexico City is somehow outside of the normal rules of time—a place where everything happens at once. Every moment is "real time." This statement ties the narrator's emotional state to the city, a type of urban memory that evokes memory in the survivors of a traumatic event. The narrative voice in *El invencible verano* is one such survivor and the view of the city through her eyes creates simultaneity. This simultaneity is crucial for the kind of justice Rivera Garza seeks on behalf of her sister, because it more easily brings to the surface past injustices, making them present once more.

Mexico City is "easy to love" in Rivera Garza's description, and at the same time it is the site of violence that she investigates. Her use of statistics reminds the reader of the overarching issue within which Liliana's murder fits. She writes that ten feminicides are committed every day. This startling number is followed by a lament that this fact has become "normalized" among the people who must live in this reality. In 2019, one of the first protests against feminicide and rape in Mexico in the 21st century took place, titled #NoMeCuidanMeViolan. In this large-scale demonstration, protesters took to the street, painting the titular slogan onto public property and monuments. These protests were condemned in the press and public opinion for damaging government property (Cardona and Arteaga 2). At the same time, they were being echoed across Latin America and praised internationally as the only expression of affect possible when facing the reality of feminicide (Salas Ungar 2). This outrage is echoed in parts of Cristina Rivera Garza's text, her narrative deviating from the traditional true crime text in that she includes her own memories and emphasizes the aspect of her own role in the fight for justice. Additionally, many traditional true crime narratives emphasize the role of detective, looking for clues and

attempting to verify the identity of a culprit. In the case of Liliana's murder, the culprit is very clear. Rivera Garza's purpose in writing this text is to bear witness to the impunity and to re-create an image of her sister that cannot be ignored.

The role of true crime genre conventions in the case of *El invencible verano de Liliana* is to afford the story visibility and legibility to a wider audience. The text was translated into English in 2023 and, according to The New York Times: "The publication comes at a watershed moment for women's rights in Mexico" (Russell 1). The translation of this text into English brought with it a categorization into U.S. literary genres, such as true crime writing. In 2023, the book was being sold side by side with murder-thriller type non-fiction books and other more pulp fiction-like texts in large chain stores such as Barnes and Noble. Though Rivera Garza diverges from more traditional and sensationalist representations of true crime, her inscription in this genre transnationally gives her a wider platform on which to demand justice.

The question of temporality is essential to understanding the intentions and effectiveness of true crime cultural production. Rivera Garza harnesses the urgency that is habitual in the true crime genre and uses it to create an affective link between the reader and her sister's situation: "Somos ellas en el pasado, y somos ellas en el futuro, y somos otras a la vez. Somos otras y somos las mismas de siempre. Mujeres en busca de justicia. Mujeres exhaustas, y juntas. Hartas ya, pero con la paciencia que sólo marcan los siglos. Ya para siempre enrabiadas" (11). This quote appears in the same section of the text as the previous one, establishing the wider stakes of the book. Here, she counts herself in the same group as the reader and the women who protest and survive in Mexico. The word "somos" does the work of creating connection and stakes. She includes markers of time such as "pasado," "future," "siempre" and "siglos." Other true crime works, such as *Desert Blood* or *Mujer, casos de la vida real* present a dangerous situation that

creates urgency and immediacy by its largeness and overwhelming nature. In *Desert Blood*, Ivon discovers just how far the issue of feminicide reaches, and the reader feels the largeness of the issue alongside the protagonist. *Mujer, casos de la vida real,* presented a new tragedy, crime or warning every week.

Rivera Garza joins in on the tradition of calling attention to a tragic and structural issue through an individual story, however, through her use of varying temporal markers and collective language, she bypasses the possibility of apathy that may overtake a reader just learning about this very large issue, and instead calls this reader to action. She acknowledges that "mujeres" can be exhausted but still together, still fighting in a collective across time. This type of rallying language provides a motivating tone that is absent or at least less optimistic in most true crime stories. While true crime often calls in readers to embody the amateur sleuth, it does not usually provide a concrete path to change systemic issues. *El invencible verano de Liliana* not only lays out the stakes—the tragic loss of women—but also outlines the failures in the infrastructure that allows for these types of tragedies to happen, and grounds them in somatic and geographic memory.

Rivera Garza's own body and presence are another character in the text that is almost as important as Liliana, offering a clear marker of the narrative perspective represented in this text. The overt presence of the author/narrator is crucial for the intentionality and ethics of this documentary text because it does away with the illusion of journalistic objectivity, or a transparent and neutral narrator that many other true crime narratives employ. *Mujer, casos de la vida real* and *The Three Deaths of Marisela Escobedo* place the focus on the people involved in the crimes or tragedies they portray, moving the focus away from the directorial gaze or the writers of the scripts. *Desert Blood* offers a protagonist through whose eyes the reader makes

sense of the world of El Paso and Ciudad Juárez in the early 21st century. *El invencible verano de Liliana* is as much about Liliana's murder as it is about the reality of absence and grief. This reality is in constant conversation with bodily realities of living and dying: "Es mentira que el tiempo pasa. El tiempo se atora. Hay un cuerpo inerte aquí, atrancado entre los goznes y pernos del tiempo, que suspende el ritmo y la secuencia. No hemos crecido. Nunca creceremos. Nuestras arrugas son artificiales, indicios apenas de las vidas que pudimos haber vivido pero que se fueron a otro lugar. Las canas, las caries, los huesos frágiles, las articulaciones entumidas: meras poses que ocultan la repetición, la redundancia, el estribillo" (34). The concept of shifting or irregular temporality returns here as Rivera Garza expresses her grief and the ways in which she imagines it tying her to her sister's body. Time is stuck for her and the "cuerpo" is inert. The author lists bodily functions that indicate life and growth, such as "crecer," "arrugas," "canas," "caries," "huesos," and "articulaciones." The anatomy of grief is such that it creates a desire to be as unchanging and inert as the deceased loved one. Here, the narrative voice says that she has stopped growing and changing, there is no real growth without her sister who will never be wrinkled with age or have another cavity.

The expression of grief is habitual in the true crime genre and is usually the main avenue of creating connection between the narrative and the audience. *El invencible verano de Liliana* offers grief as a language with which to express that which cannot be forgotten or assimilated into memory. The author is not literally unchanging, she has grown and changed normally, however, the expression of grief and the use of imagination offers a possibility of leading the reader into a difficult interiority. By demonstrating the very tangible difference between life and death through an expression of affect rather than through a graphic description of murder and corpses, Rivera Garza focuses on the effect of feminicide on survivors. This is a turn away from

the traditional true crime genre conventions which do not shy away from descriptions of gore and death.

Time is the unifying element that creates tension in mainstream true crime films and literature, and Rivera Garza's resistance to linear time also represents a resistance to the official narrative regarding her sister's feminicide and others'. When writing about Liliana's belongings, the author states that: "Lo que hay en esa acumulación cariñosa de papeles y sobres es tiempo, mucho tiempo, tiempo físico y tiempo emocional. El tiempo de las muchachas en flor" (57). The documents that Liliana leaves behind are like a portal for Rivera Garza into her sister's life. The "papeles y sobres" signify a timeline of Liliana's life and emotions. She makes a distinction between "tiempo," "tiempo físico," and "tiempo emocional," valuing all three and noting their presence in the artifacts of Liliana's life. The physical time, or linear time, is there in the dates of letters and journal entries. However, there is also an affective timeline that is revealed through the emotions of friendship, crushes, loyalties, and betrayals. These particularities are revealed throughout the text as well, contributing to the image of a well-loved young woman whose many friends appreciated her friendship and mourned her loss. This depiction of a young woman whose life was radiant before it was cut short, falls into the convention of true crime. A construction of an idealized tragic protagonist is essential to the affective connection that true crime narrations form between the story and the readers.

Liliana's character is in many ways a function of the narrator's grief. As Rivera Garza says in her reflection regarding *El invencible Verano de Liliana*, the writing and reading of any text requires a good amount of imagination. As Rivera Garza tells the story of her trauma, imagination is a loophole through which she can approach her sister's murder, a subject which brings so much pain and seems untellable. Liliana is depicted in a kind and loving light, but also

as a figment of Rivera Garza's grief: "Vivir en duelo es esto: nunca estar sola. Invisible pero patente de muchas formas, la presencia de los muertos nos acompaña en los minúsculos intersticios de los días. Por sobre el hombro, a un lado de la voz, en el eco de cada paso" (99). The reality of living in grief is what is represented in this text. The narrator is "never alone", and the presence of Liliana is everywhere. Rivera Garza says that Liliana is with her, but "invisible," and this invisibility is addressed throughout this text as she reconstructs her sister's life. Her corporality, the "hombre," "voz," and "paso" behind which the memory of Liliana hides, provides an anchor for the affect that Rivera Garza must traverse to tell the story of her trauma.

VI. Comparative Discussion

True crime as a genre is prone to sensationalized prose and insensitive portrayals of survivors and the deceased. The intention of many creators and authors within this genre is to draw attention to an overlooked injustice or to call on a wider community to aid in the resolution of an ambiguous and tragic case. The impulse behind these works is one of finding community and creating a network of concerned, like-minded people. However, in practice the methods of disseminating this information often detach the humanity from a story, leaving only a puzzle or a morbid piece of entertainment. Such dissemination methods include social media, podcast platforms, Hollywood studios, and even certain publishing houses. In the case of Marisela Escobedo, her story cannot be told through her own words anymore. Though snippets of interviews with her are included in the documentary *The Three Lives of Marisela Escobedo,* most of her narrative is pieced together by the filmmakers, and supplemented by family members who may all have different perspective on their relative. The aspect of community creation is largely absent in mass distribution like the type of distribution that Netflix gives its content.

El invencible verano de Liliana answers the question of how to create community after tragedy in an interesting but not completely successful way. The text relies on oral histories and interviews with Liliana's friends, now 30 years older than they were when Liliana was murdered. Through this act of gathering witnesses, Cristina Rivera Garza creates a ceremony of remembrance as she writes her sister's story. In the final parts of the text, Rivera Garza includes transcriptions of her interviews with her parents: "No, no puedo decirte qué sentí cuando regresamos de viaje y nos enteramos que la habíamos perdido ya. Que estaba enterrada. No puedo decírmelo ni siquiera a mí. No me preguntes eso" (254). Antonio Rivera Peña, Liliana and Cristina's father, finds the end of language when he is asked about his emotions upon learning of his daughter's death. The passage conveys grief effectively as he says "la habíamos perdido ya." The past progressive conjugation of Antonio's lament with the finality of the "ya" or "already" at the end of his answer highlight the helplessness and pain of being informed of a past loss. The simplicity of Antonio's language as he responds speaks to an inability to dissemble about his continued grief. His various denials, "no puedo decirte," "no puedo decírmelo," and "no me preguntes eso," speak volumes in their negation. Trauma is traditionally understood as an interior phenomenon whose symptoms may be visible to others but whose inner workings can scarcely be explained. In including these negations, the inability to tell the story of his own emotions regarding Antonio's grief, Cristina Rivera Garza uses this inability to narrate as its own contribution to the narrative she constructs.

Often, Mexican true crime writing, and journalism draws criticism for its sensationalism, however, Rivera Garza's documentary text rejects much of this sensationalism. *Desert Blood,* another true crime text published earlier, attempts to harness this sensationalism to draw the attention of a true crime audience. Mark Seltzer in his text *True Crime: Observations on*

Violence and Modernity (2007), says of the veracity of true crime that it "maps that vague and shifting region between real and fictional reality where mass belief resides" (11). This mass belief is what the shock factor of *Desert Blood* chases, and in this regard this novel by Alicia Gaspar de Alba is a consummate true crime text. It takes from the "real," news reports on murdered women in Ciudad Juárez, to create a "fictional reality" that engages with the existing "mass belief" regarding the atmosphere and day-to-day life in Mexico.

Desert Blood engages contemporaneous anxieties about NAFTA and the growth of a globalized business landscape as well. In the edited volume, *Globalization and the State in Contemporary Crime Fiction: A World of Crime* (2023), Persephone Braham states: "Juárez in particular has provoked a startling number of journalistic and literary interpretations, which have converged most recently around the theme of transnational capitalism" (125). Though Braham states that the preoccupation with transnational capitalism is "recent," this anxiety begins with earlier cultural production, such as *Desert Blood* and the sensationalist Hollywood films that were released around the same time, the early 2000s. In following the mass belief, an author such as Alicia Gaspar de Alba raises awareness of an issue such as feminicide on the U.S.-Mexico border. Reactions to feminicide in the mass media at the time included such polarizing events as the 2010 Rodarte Maquiladora Fashion show during which U.S. models paraded around a catwalk in ripped and bloodied clothing, meant to emulate the rags in which murdered women's bodies are discovered. This type of clumsy engagement finds a slight echo in the ways in which *Desert Blood* forces a U.S. audience's eyes towards foreign gore for the sake of awareness.

The critiques of Mexican true crime, specifically, find fault in its similarity to journalistic coverage of gruesome events, worrying that the fictional texts that deal with such issues only serve to glorify the perpetrators of these crimes (Braham 119). *El invencible verano de Liliana*

focuses on such an individualized story that it evades the sensationalist tone, when Rivera Garza references the systematic murder of women in Mexico, it is always with an awareness that the fault is with a system of patriarchal impunity rather than a storybook villain. Here, we see the divergence between Rivera Garza's interpretation of true crime and Gaspar de Alba's version. The two texts are published almost 20 years apart, and this distance affects the preoccupation and aesthetics of the books. While NAFTA is present as the underlying villain in Alicia Gaspar de Alba's 2005 novel, a more amorphous and yet banal antagonist appears in Cristina Rivera Garza's documentary text—a justice system made of incompetence and misogyny.

Both texts create a bridge between individual injustices and a systemic issue, creating case studies out of the main action of their texts. While *Desert Blood* is a fictional action thriller with news stories sprinkled throughout, *El invencible verano de Liliana* is a documentary text whose narrative is drawn directly from the life and testimony of a young person's life. These are trauma texts that function in opposite ways. The wound that is expressed is very different, though the overarching injustice of feminicide is the same. While *Desert Blood* narrates the loss of a sister through fictional means, the action-thriller genre conventions demand that the characters be flattened to fit the archetypes of the action hero, the victim/damsel in distress, and the femme fatale. In the case of Alicia Gaspar de Alba's novel, Ivon is the action hero, her drive to discover the culprit of the murders provoking her to attack in flashy ways. Meanwhile, Ivon's sister, Irene, is the damsel in distress—a young girl whose inexperience lands her in a dangerous situation with the very culprits that Ivon is already tracking.

The depictions of Ivon and Irene during the main moments of crisis reveal the dependency that this type of pulp fiction genre has on a traditional construction of gender. Ivon's revelations further the case and she is increasingly more willing to risk her safety to follow these

leads and save her sister: “Just like the maquilas themselves have been shoved down Mexico’s throat . . .” added Ximena. “. . . because of NAFTA,” Ivon finished the sentence. “Brilliant,” said Rubí, green eyes glittering. “I’ll have to follow up on that, but right now, I have to get back to my interview. Walter needs me over there. Con permiso.” (Loc 4215). The connection to transnational capitalism is overtly spelled out and Ivon takes the role of ace detective, giving meaning to atrocity for the sake of the storyline and the international readership of *Desert Blood.* Here, Mexico is likened to the murdered women and girls in Ciudad Juárez. The novel invents a criminal ring of men who insert U.S. coins down the throats of their female captives before these women are murdered on film. The “maquilas” and the U.S. coins are parallel symbols, one standing in for the other in the story of *Desert Blood* to drive home the point regarding NAFTA’s culpability regarding the deaths of girls and women in Mexico.

The narrative places an awe-struck character, Ximena, in this scene to pronounce Ivon as “brilliant.” Irene, Ivon’s sister, represents an incentive for Ivon, the action hero, to involve herself in the disappearances of women on the U.S.-Mexico border. As the third-person limited narration of the novel follows Irene’s perspective, the reader is exposed to the gory, morbid violence against women’s bodies. This violence is part of the action narrative, creating pathos through Irene’s exposure to it, but also mirroring the sensationalism of flashy news headlines pronouncing the violence in Ciudad Juárez to be the worst in history. Irene cowers as she waits for her sister to save her:

“‘Where’s the bitch? I want to see the bitch now! Show me the bitch!’ She’s terrified that they’re coming for her and feels her bowels contract. ‘Here she comes. Here comes the lucky penny.’ A girl is crying hysterically. ‘A mí no, por favor, a mí no. Tengo hijos.’ ‘¡Dracula! Action!’ She hears wild demonic laughter that makes the girl do a staccato of screams.” (Loc

4478). This passage conveys the brutality possible in the disappearances of women at the time. However, the punctuation in the dialogue and the melodramatic quality of the dialogue itself removes the text from the realm of realism. This exaggerated representation of violence is akin to the telenovela-like aesthetic that *Mujer, casos de la vida real* takes on. In this scene, Irene is bound and gagged while naked in an enclosed cell, listening to the rape and murder of other women. This scenario necessitates dialogue to be legible to the reader whose understanding of the narrative action comes from the information that Irene can intake, which in this case is auditory. The use of abundant profanity, three consecutive instances of the word "bitch," along with the exclamation points make clear to the reader the antagonism of this character, the contrast between the English of the villain's dialogue and the Spanish of the victim's dialogue indicate that the perpetrator is a U.S. citizen. The visceral response that Irene feels, "her bowels contract[ing]," at hearing the menacing words of her abductor give an affective cue to the reader, transmitting the embodied experience of fear.

Desert Blood and *Mujer, casos de la vida real* employ melodrama to convey an affective truth to an audience outside of the communities affected by the violence depicted. In the case of "Guerrillera" and "Al cruzar la frontera," migrant women are depicted as vulnerable characters whose strength can only be found through the collective. Built into the structure of the *Mujer, casos* episodes is a call to action of any audience members willing or able to help in the situation described. Though Alicia Gaspar de Alba does not write her novel, *Desert Blood,* in a similarly interactive way, the choice to publish in the mystery-thriller genre indicates a desire to be widely read, even by individuals who may not usually read about Mexican factory workers or women living on the U.S.-Mexico border. In *Desert Blood,* the young women who migrate to the U.S.-Mexico border seeking work are also depicted as vulnerable to attack, however, the type of

literary genre in which this novel is published demands a clear hero, not a collective call to action. By acquiescing to the conventions of the mystery-thriller genre, Gaspar de Alba simplifies the message of collectivity that she puts forth in the earlier parts of her novel. Ivon is the clear hero, she enters into a physical altercation with the clear villain of the story and stops his attacks on migrant border women with the help of law enforcement. This "good guys" versus "bad guys" structure simplifies the situation enough to enter into the "mass beliefs" that true crime often addresses, but it leaves the question of dead migrant women and their ongoing issues hanging.

The documentary text, *El invencible verano de Liliana,* and the documentary Netflix film, *The Three Deaths of Marisela Escobedo,* both focus on one specific instance of feminicide and its consequences on family members. While *El invencible verano de Liliana* unfolds in a fragmented way, nonlinear and multi-perspectival, *The Three Deaths of Marisela Escobedo* follows a more linear narrative structured to create suspense and shock in the viewer. These aesthetic choices determine the target audience of each cultural product, but also the ways in which community can be created around said cultural product. *El invencible verano de Liliana* draws from a network of family members and friends to testify to Liliana's life and personality, similarly to *The Three Deaths of Marisela Escobedo,* which includes direct interviews with children and siblings of the deceased Marisela Escobedo. Friends of Liliana's say such things as: "Cómo no voy a recordarla si fue la primera persona que me dirigió la palabra el primer día que estuve en la universidad. Ella estaba ahí cuando llegué al salón: su pelo largo y lacio, su sonrisa franca, y esos brazos y piernas tan largas. Era tan alta. Y muy femenina a pesar de que no usaba una gota de maquillaje" (Rivera Garza 114). The communal memory of this deceased young woman is revitalized through the interviews that Cristina Rivera Garza conducts about her sister.

This friend, Laura Rosales, says "cómo no voy a recordarla," the phrase asserting that Liliana's memory is not easily forgotten, that her presence in Laura's remembrance is a given. She describes Liliana positively with "pelo largo y lacio, sonrisa franca" and "muy femenina." These gendered descriptors along with the earlier description of Liliana's friendliness créate an image of a smiling and well-liked woman who fit into others' ideals. While Liliana is not a migrant in the way that Cecilia from *Desert Blood,* Azucena from "Sueño Ameriano," or Teresa from "Al cruzar la frontera" are, she is a young girl who relocates from her small town surrounded by her family to a large city where her only network is made up of peers and recent friends.

The true crime genre convention of describing the deceased becomes a community-building activity in *El invencible verano de Liliana,* while in *The Three Deaths of Marisela Escobedo* this element of the story separates one group of people from another. *El invencible verano de Liliana* is an exercise in remembering and re-creating, and most of all of harnessing the living to get justice for the deceased:

"Busco justicia para mi hermana. *El violador eres tú*. A veces toma treinta años decir en voz alta, decirlo en voz alta ante un empleado del sistema de justicia, que uno busca justicia" (Rivera Garza 28).

Rivera Garza clearly states the purpose of her investigation and the purpose of re-creating her sister through memories, testimonies, and interviews: she's looking for "justicia" for her sister. The verse of a now-famous feminist protest chant follows her announcement of intention. "El violador eres tú" invokes the plethora of demonstrations that filled the streets of major cities worldwide in 2018. This phrase comes from a song written by the Chilean artist collective, Las Tesis, who respond in these verses to the injustice of growing feminicides, entering the global #metoo movement that spoke out against abusers and sexual assailants. This song, titled "Un

Violador en tu Camino," places the responsibility for feminicides at the feet of the patriarchy, more specifically the State, army, and police. Through the invocation of a collectively sung protest song, Rivera Garza calls on a communal experience of resistance and pain. Here, the trauma of losing a female loved one to murder, the fear of violence and assault, are experiences that a reader within this community can activate to empathize with the author of *El invencible verano de Liliana.* The vocalization of wanting justice, the facing up to an "empleado del sistema de justicia" is shorthand for understanding and utilizing personal trauma to communicate demands.

The Three Deaths of Marisela Escobedo uses a more sensationalist aesthetic to re-create an image of Marisela Escobedo and her daughter, Rubí, the splicing of news footage with video filters and the use of background music creating an ambiance habitual in horror films. The film's intended audience is global, and its tactics of representation skew towards entertainment television tactics. Though the documentary film does not follow melodrama conventions as *Mujer, casos de la vida real* does, it creates a narrative of tragedy and horror around the death of Rubí Escobedo and later, her mother, Marisela who attracts attention by seeking justice for her daughter. Marisela's son says, "Se murió en la raya" [1:15:25], referring to the U.S.-Mexico border. Marisela is killed in front of city hall in Ciudad Juárez protesting and witnessing to her daughter's murder. "La raya" refers to a colloquial word for the line that the border makes, but it can also be understood as a way to say "the battlefront."

Marisela dies on the border and going into battle for her daughter. Her story affects the whole community, especially after her murder:

“Llega como a los límites la indignación social y empieza a haber manifestaciones muy importantes de la gente, y se empieza a partir de ese día a rodear el Palacio del Gobierno con velas” [1:12:06-1:13:57].

The disembodied voice of the lawyer working with Marisela’s case speaks over footage of marches and protests in 2010, after Marisela’s death. As the voice mentions “indignación social” Marisela’s son leans out of a moving car window at night yelling “¡Mi madre! ¡Marisela Escobedo!” His face is creased in rage as he screams, protesters walk around him, streaming up a main street of Ciudad Juárez. The “indignación social” that the lawyer mentions is part of the communal grieving and outrage that the true crime genre relies on to generate interest. In Marisela’s case, she becomes a public figure, known by all of Ciudad Juárez for her public battle to imprison her daughter’s husband, her murderer. Juárez’s placement on the U.S.-Mexico border creates the conditions necessary for transnational news coverage to garner U.S. attention for Marisela and Rubí’s cases. The “manifestaciones” and the “gente” are from two communities—the community of Ciudad Juárez residents, as well as community members who live across the border.

The Three Deaths of Marisela Escobedo follows Mexican true crime convention in that it converges with journalism, picking out the participation of organized crime and focusing on the news coverage around these perpetrators:

“Tiene el teléfono apagado tres días y dos días prendido. Tres días no hay llamadas en el teléfono y dos días prendido. Y es como—es como trabajan los Zetas. Cuando vemos ese patrón, luego entendemos que—que sí. Pues que sí anda con los Zetas” [58:00-59:35].

Marisela’s son explains the kind of investigation that the family undertook after his sister’s death, in some ways culminating in the discovery of the culprit’s ties to narcotrafficking. Sergio

Rafael Barraza is Rubí's husband when he murders her and disposes of her body. Marisela always suspects him of physical abuse towards her daughter, and the rest of Rubí's siblings confirm that they had been suspicious of him for a while. The connection with the Zetas, one of the major drug syndicates in Northern Mexico, creates a narrative that ties in organized crime, official corruption, and the general lack of follow up that the penal system offered after Rubí's death.

Public affect is a crucial part of the tactics of dissemination in this documentary. The interviews with Marisela's family members are always done in a dim room, with a small amount of light trickling in from a single window. The framing includes tight shots on the interviewee's face, capturing every expression and emotion. There are at least two camera angles in all interviews, one head-on and one from a three-quarters angle to one side, creating a candid-like image. As Marisela's son explains their revelations regarding Sergio's involvement with the Zeta syndicate, he stutters and pauses, especially when coming to conclusions regarding the trafficking ring. His verbal tics betray uneasiness, "es como—es como trabajan los Zetas" and "entendemos que—que sí." Multiple participants of the documentary highlight their willingness to continue searching for justice, no matter the cost. Marisela and her son being the foremost crusaders in this cause. However, the public nature of these declarations about the Zeta crime organization guarantees another layer of danger. Marisela's murder was at the hands of a young man involved with the Zetas, sent to silence her accusations regarding Sergio, a part of this crime syndicate. Most of the Escobedo family flees Ciudad Juárez, some in favor of El Paso, to find refuge from the assaults and danger that the Zetas represent.

Chapter 4

Señora Power: An Archival Case Study in Chicana Survival Strategies

I. Introduction

The *Señora Power* digital humanities project collects the accounts of señoras, or prominent Chicana and Mexican women, living in Los Angeles and Houston whose stories have been crucial to understanding the development of their communities. These stories include moments of suffering and are often undergirded by a history of communal trauma. The women's control over their own stories gives insight into the strategies of Chicana resilience and survival that are available and that prevail over the narratives of suffering more widely marketed in Hollywood, streaming services, and international publishing houses.

The *Señora Power* project is a public digital humanities endeavor begun in the Fall of 2022 by three scholars, then graduate students. Currently the team is made up of one Assistant Professor and two PhD Candidates, including myself. The goal of the project is to record and archive the stories of resource gathering and survival of respected Chicana and Mexican women in the Mexican American communities of Los Angeles and Houston. Along with archival documents and artefacts, the stories of these women are told through interviews conducted by the three researchers on the *Señora Power* team with the women in question and/or their family members. This project draws inspiration from the oral history project titled *Chicana Por mi Raza* as well as the efforts and theory behind *Chicana Movidas* (2018) edited by María Cotera, Maylei Blackwell, and Dionne Espinoza.

Señora Power is a multimedia endeavor, existing in website, podcast, and physical pamphlet formats ensuring that Chicanx community members of varying digital proficiencies have access to their own histories. We are interested in creating a tool for the Chicanx

community that can be used in an educational way, inside and outside the classroom. For this reason, we will be working in conjunction with education professionals in Los Angeles and Houston to develop K-12 curricula based on the *Señora Power* content to be offered with open access on the *Señora Power* website. The intention with the project is to serve the community in as many ways as possible.

In the past, this project has received funding from Rice University and the U.S. Latino Digital Humanities Project housed under Arte Público Press. Major works in the field, like *Chicana Por Mi Raza* and *Latina History Project*, have begun to digitally document Chicana contributions towards sociopolitical change and justice. However, what has remained missing is the level of community outreach that the *Señora Power* project is committed to accomplishing through digital as well as on-the-ground content. The specific goals of the podcast are the following: 1. To collect stories of women whose contributions to their communities have gone unnoticed, 2. To identify and make available the survival strategies that Chicanas used to gain resources for themselves and their communities, 3. To normalize Chicana stories as part of Chicano history.

Current impact is measured qualitatively based on feedback and communication with community services, members, and institutions. We have received enthusiastic support and interest from the Chicanx community members from local institutions, like CA LULAC and LULAC Council 60, Our Lady of Guadalupe, Immaculate Heart of Mary, La Plaza de Cultura y Artes, and the Petra Maria Ruiz Guillen Foundation. Their stories—and those of the women highlighted in our recordings and website—are essential to understanding Chicana history. We cannot understate the explicit personal and emotional investments of our audience in celebrating and highlighting “Las Chicanas.”

Building on written scholarship like *Chicana Movidas* and *Chicana Power*, our project intervenes in a still understudied topic of Chicana contributions to Chicane history, especially Chicanas outside of the Chicano Movement of the 1960s and 70s. The connection between Houston and Los Angeles Mexican American communities is strong, but also infrequently discussed in academic and digital humanities circles. Archival collectivity is crucial to telling a trauma narrative in such a way that avoids exploitative methods and genre conventions. Through the collaborative curation of archival materials, the story of suffering turns to an expression of transgressive joy. The archives are a liminal space in which past traumas are made present, and in which subaltern subjects can have an opportunity to speak. These spaces are not only limited to collections of written work - understanding archives through Diana Taylor's theoretical framework, put forth in her text *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (2003), that which remains as physical object is not always the extent of a community's accumulated history or knowledge. The oral history of a community can be as important or even more revelatory than the physical repositories of objects, documents, and other tactile materials.

The work of gathering señora stories, honoring the accomplishments of older Chicanas, and bringing the gendered labor of women out into the community is part of a centuries-long struggle for visibility. Chicana history holds a very recent place in academia with such important figures as Gloria Anzaldúa, Cherrié Moraga, Dolores Huerta, and Norma Alarcón still remaining prominent in the Chicane cultural imaginary. However, the general public and the Chicane community still understands the concept of Chicano History to include a male-centeric Chicano Movement of the 1960s and 1970s, upholding heroic characters such as César Chavez. In an effort to challenge this patriarchal perspective, *Señora Power* traces the change in political

consciousness and identity formation of Chicanas from 1900-1984 in Houston and Los Angeles, while highlighting the ways in which respected Chicanas gathered resources for their communities despite challenges such as institutional and structural racism, sexism from within and outside of their communities, and ageism.

The use of the term "Señora" in "Señora Power" references the respondents' respected status in their communities. Traditionally, the honorific of "señora" is given to women who are married. However, the colloquial connotation of the word "señora" links this honorific to age, only using "señora" when speaking to a woman one knows is married or is older. During a conference, our team received the feedback that an audience member's mother had cautioned her to never use the term "señora" seeing as it would imply old age and possibly offend the woman who was being addressed. At its root, this title commands respect and shows seniority. Though its technical definition equates it to the English honorific "Mrs.," it can mean much more than a woman's marriage status. The *Señora Power* project seeks to harness the respect and social status that this title implies, showing the ways in which women who are referred to as "señora" can accomplish feats that go beyond what has historically been expected of older women in the Chicanx community.

For a story that contains multiple narratives across cities and time, nuance and accessibility was best obtained via a podcast series. Digital storytelling, such as podcasts, originated as a "democratization of culture: to empower and giv[e] voice to individuals and groups traditionally silenced, marginalized, or ignored by mainstream media" (Clarke and Adam, 159). The medium of a podcast allows us to make accessible and, most importantly, narrate the different but connected struggles of women of Mexican descent. Through the digitalization of these histories, the fight against "dispossession" can continue. Drawing on Karen Roybal's text

titled *Archives of Dispossession* (2017), the concept of dispossession becomes a salient threat to groups of individuals left out of the legal system and general institutions throughout the 19th and 20th centuries. Such a group is Mexican and Mexican-American women:

"While material property remains important to the women's history and serves as the foundation of their cultural production, in the twentieth century, women of Spanish/Mexican descent are subjected a new form of dispossession—the appropriation of their cultural heritage" (Roybal 11). Roybal's understanding of cultural appropriation goes beyond racist caricaturizing. The concept of archival dispossession encompasses the erasure that many marginalized groups, but specifically Mexican and Mexican American women undergo through the layers of curation of institutional archives.

The erasure of archives, while not signifying an immediate erasure of all history, opens the possibility of Sadiya Hartman's concept of "critical fabulation" (128). In her text *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route* (2008), Hartman traces her genealogy in the face of the violent erasure of slavery. "Critical fabulation" tells a story of nothing, revising history to suit the narrative of an oppressing institution. The act of archival erasure is an extension of state and racial violence in that it attempts to delegitimize the real struggles that racialized bodies undergo to survive, especially in the United States and Mexico. This tactic of archival erasure is common throughout the Americas, especially in the wake of such traumatic events as forced disappearances and political killings (Islekel 60). So many intersecting minoritized communities experience this historical erasure by which one's presence is made a myth or a statistical abnormality. The story of Mexican and Mexican American women in the 20th century has been one of these erased archival histories. Whether it be because much of Mexican American women's knowledge has been passed down through oral tradition or because

their material history has been deemed unworthy of preserving, the documentation of Mexican American women's lives remains scarce in comparison with their male counterparts, and even scarcer when placed against Anglo men's history.

Señora Power serves as a conduit and repository for the community history of Mexican American women to make its way to the younger generations of Mexican American people and beyond. Through interviews, archival work, and an interactive podcast practice, this project offers an alternative to the institutional mediation of larger archives that may not be as accessible to the communities involved. *Señora Power* is an innovative project that brings together the community and the stories of their elders to solidify knowledge of survival strategies. Through the digital, online intervention, *Señora Power* highlights Mexican and Mexican American women's contributions to their communities in Los Angeles and Houston in a way that is open to the public online and in select community centers. This chapter analyzes *Señora Power*'s approach through three case studies and señora profiles, focusing on the possibilities of self-representation that a digital humanities project like this offers for future digital storytelling.

The four women included in this chapter are Guadalupe "Lupe" Anguiano, Alicia Escalante, and Mamie García. These señora profiles feature themes of migration, communal trauma, and feminist political identity making through the lens of Chicana and Mexicana joy. Lupe Anguiano's story provides an example of surviving the religious institution. Alicia Escalante embodies the image of the activist, whose survival tactics are carried out at the level of the community, and Mamie Garcia represents the complexities of surviving the police state.

II. *Señora Power:* A reflection on podcasting for the community

The decision to create a podcast came from the impulse to share the stories of resilience and survival that the Señora Power team saw in the archive as we researched for a more

traditional academic project. We are currently finishing production on the first Season of the *Señora Power* podcast. Each episode is really made up of three mini-episodes: two señora profiles that focus on biographical information and the specifics of each señora's survival strategy, and one mini-episode that includes conversations between the three *Señora Power* teammates and other relevant respondents putting the two profiled señoras into conversation. The first season features a total of ten señoras—five from Los Angeles, and five from Houston. Each episode arc pairs one Los Angeles señora with one Houston señora, teasing out the connections of Chicaneidad between both cities and Mexican American immigrant cultures.

The choice for a podcast format is due to the desire to create inter-generational conversations on a wider scale. While podcasting is a recent medium, radio is not, it has been useful to understand the podcast as an online radio show—this framing is accessible to many generations of community members. The response to the idea of a podcast has been widely positive, with one community contact even expressing their joy at the idea of finally finding community, finally hearing the stories of a Chicano community that they never felt a part of as a Texan Mexican individual raised in the 1950s. This community member's perceived isolation may be in part a result of a lack of access to community history. The podcast medium allows for a multi-generational approach that eschews the need for an institutional mediator.

As one digital humanities expert, Douglas A. Boyd, frames it, "Digitization and the Internet offer great promise for releasing the traditional analog access constraints on oral history and for raising the expectations of researchers" (86). Some analog constraints that community members could run into include limited availability of time to enter the institutional archives, a lack of ability to enter the same archives due to a lack of institutional affiliation, and the poor dissemination of that archive's contents. Many institutional repositories do not advertise their

contents, assuming that researchers will find the relevant documents and materials through their searches due to a specific type of educational background and preparation. However, community members without this educational background are not often welcomed or trained in archival work. This dynamic is changing through efforts such as the U.S. Latino Digital Humanities Recovery Project that has, among other initiatives, community archive days designed to help community members build and maintain their own repositories.

The experience of the archive is unique when one understands the archival material as belonging to and being part of a living community and tradition. Even Diana Taylor's text, *The Archive and the Repertoire,* understands the archive to be an endeavor of understanding the past. The archive has even been read as a melancholic space, or a space of mourning (Boulter 7). Many Chicana's have been erased from institutional archives, and those who remain and are represented there may not exist in that institutional space in their entirety. Archives such as Alicia Escalante's collection in the UC Santa Barbara Special Collections library can be quietly stored behind a pay wall, inaccessible to community members whose history is tied up in those very documents and material history.

The podcast gathers oral histories and interviews of featured señoras from the Houston and Los Angeles Chicana communities as well as historical information about these señoras. Some of the women we profile have been interviewed and studied before, their stories disseminated in academic circles, or very local spaces. However, many of the women of *Señora Power* have stories that exist within their families and in the archives. The *Señora Power* goal is to find stories of Chicana resilience and make them accessible to a wider Chicana/o audience. When in the archives learning more about these women, many images of protests, events, and parties featured women labelled "unidentified," essentially strangers to the archive. Our goal is

to identify these women, to provide a history of Chicanas that includes the everyday woman, mother, activist, worker, and person. The type of trauma that resides in traditional archives is not only due to the stories of tragedy and disaster that are often stored there, but also in the untold stories of theft and hoarding that remain the legacy of some repositories. By telling the stories of Chicanas who have been only recently or not at all recognized by history, the podcast project attempts to highlight the survival and resiliency of Chicana señoras.

III. Lupe Anguiano: Institutional stories

The women that *Señora Power* highlights are respected and known within their communities, a positive notoriety some of them have utilized to create a platform with which to tell their own stories as a strategy of survival for themselves and their communities. One such señora is Lupe Anguiano, a former Catholic nun who left her order to pursue activist work among the Chicanx community and beyond. Señora Anguiano's story touches on the classic prejudice that Mexican migrants in the early 20th century faced as they settled and found work in the Southwestern United States. Anguiano is a second-generation Mexican American and her experience is colored by her witnessing her parents' struggle with discrimination and poverty due to displacement. Anguiano's story is present in the world, and her work has been publicized by politicians and writers alike. After her exit from the religious life, Señora Anguiano began a non-profit organization that aided and gave training to mothers on welfare so that they could find employment and become financially independent. Though she began this organization in San Antonio, Texas, it spread to include chapters across the United States. The information about her life included in this chapter comes mainly from the Lupe Anguiano Papers that reside in the UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center. Information about Anguiano's earlier life and her

opinions regarding her activism are pulled from the oral history done by Virginia Espino in 2011 and stored with the resources from the Center for Oral History Research at UCLA.

The child of a Huichol man and a Spaniard woman, Anguiano was born in 1929 in Denver, Colorado. While her parents had previously operated a dry goods store in Mexico, they were forced to flee to the United States after the Mexican Revolutionary government seized their lands. As a young child, Lupe would accompany her mother and siblings to do farm work in California during the Summer, staying with cousins and returning to Colorado after the farm working season was over (Wright 15).

Anguiano's decision to join the religious sisters of Our Lady of Victory was borne of a need to reach out to the marginalized. She writes in a 1959 op ed of a convent magazine titled the *Missionary Catechist*, "A missionary's great privilege is to bring the Good News of the Gospel to the poor, to help them rise up and face the world with dignity. Yes, a missionary was what I wished to be" (10). Anguiano's decision can also be understood as a desire to effect change within an established institution - the institution of the Catholic Church is greatly enmeshed in the Mexican and Mexican American community, historically, and shapes predominant worldviews in these communities. As Robert Treviño puts it in his foundational text, *The Church in the Barrio: Mexican American Ethno-Catholicism in Houston,* "Moreover, their Catholicism was so thoroughly enmeshed in their lives that it was more than a set of religious beliefs and practices; indeed, it defined them [. . .] In short, Mexican ethno-Catholicism was a way of life, a 'lived religion'" (43). This analysis differentiates between "a set of religious beliefs" and "a way of life." Treviño claims that Mexican communities, specifically Houston-based Mexican communities, understand the world through the lens of Catholicism. His term "Ethno-

Catholicism" refers to the "lived religion" or regionally based Catholic practices that are most saliently expressed in the home.

The importance of Catholicism and the influence over life outlooks in the Mexican community is reflected in Anguiano's story. The Catholic Church encouraged assimilation throughout its history of interaction with the Latine population in the United States (Stevens-Arroyo 66). This adoption of values promoted by the dominant Catholic institution fits within the idea that "acquisition of the human, social, and cultural capital of the dominant group facilitates social mobility and integration" (Ruiz et al. 33). The adoption of Catholic values was a survival strategy for many, and the Church was a venue to assimilation for many Mexican and Mexican American families in the United States, especially in the 20th century. Lupe Anguiano had a desire to belong to the community that the Church represented: "You know, a religious life is quite a commitment, because the first year you're a postulant and it's sort of like an exploratory, to see if you like it and to see if the order likes you, if you fit, and of course I wanted to fit. I really wanted to" (Anguiano 1:22:00).

Lupe went to the Missionary Sisters' convent in Victory Hall, Huntington, Indiana in 1948 to begin her journey as an aspirant. Anguiano entered the order of Our Lady of Victory in 1949 at age twenty. After the process of entering as a "postulant," she went on to take her first-year novitiate vows in 1950, her second-year vows in 1951, and her first vows August 5, 1952. During this process she took the name Sister Mary Consuelo and began to understand her role as advocate for migrants: "I was always an advocate, even when I was in my first year. In summer, I had an opportunity to either continue my college education or to go and work in the summer with the migrants, and I always chose to go and work with the migrants, all the time" (Anguiano 1:33:20). This conviction links her work with the Church institution with a desire to change

conditions for migrants, such as her parents. Anguiano identified as a migrant herself, though she was born in Colorado.

While the Church had at first represented the promise of action and affecting change, for Anguiano it soon becoming a hindrance to this desire to affect change. A particular point of contention between herself and her superiors came in Anguiano's use of the social capital and resources that she received as a missionary nun to reach out to the populations she wished to help. One such example of this is detailed below:

"I can't remember what they picked in Imlay City, but they wanted to celebrate the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe, and the parishioners used to say, 'Oh, the migrants. They're migrants.' And they always sat in the back of the church. One day I came to Mass and I was kind of late, and the church was full, and the usher said, 'Oh, sister.' My name was Sister Mary Consuelo [of Our Lady of Victory Missionary Sisters]. 'Sorry, but there's no room.' I said, 'Well, there's room there with the migrants. I'll just sit there.' 'Oh, no, you don't want to sit there.' I looked at him and I said, 'Of course I'm going to sit there. I used to be a migrant.' He became very surprised, and I went to sit there. The next day, I went to visit the pastor and I told him about that, and I said, 'Father, did you know that I'm a Mexican and I used to work in the field of agriculture?' And his face just turned red, green, whatever. Because I was very popular in the parish. And I said, 'And to top it off, you celebrated a regular Mass instead of the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe. Do you know that the migrants had to celebrate the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe in the migrant camp? And they should have celebrated it here in church.' He apologized and everything" (Anguiano 1:30:50-1:31:14).

Her role as a missionary sister, a representative of the Catholic institution, removed Anguiano from the realm of "migrant," for the parishioners that she served. In the Imlay City,

Michigan church that she references in this quote, the segregation of parishioners by race and ethnic background was alive and well in the 1950s. Anguiano states that "they always sat at the back of the church," "they" referring to the migrant farm workers in the community. The segregation of the Catholic Church has largely been studied through the lens of White Supremacy's oppression of Black Catholics in the U.S. South (Williams 2022, Newman 2018, Komline 2017). These studies make evident the institutionalized racism from which religious institutions are not exempt. National precedent-setting cases such as *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) codified social segregation in the United States into law and gave states the right to decide which of its residents were considered White and which were non-White for segregation purposes (Nájera 6-7). This ruling was most directly targeted at Black citizens but affected the treatment of Mexicans and Mexican Americans as well. In the case of religious institutions, the separation between Anglo White churchgoers and those considered "non-White" was more socially enforced than formally. However, the segregation in churches across the country has historically been supported by the Church institution. In Lupe Anguiano's case, her declaration of solidarity with the migrant population in Imlay City is enough to open the possibility of providing greater resources and dedicating time to such culturally important religious festivals as the feast day of Our Lady of Guadalupe.

Anguiano's exclamation of "I'm a Mexican" is not only a defiant gesture, but it is a moment of resource gathering on behalf of her community. This stance reflects her ongoing relationship with established institutions. Towards the beginning of her career, she fights discrimination towards and unfair treatment of Mexican migrants, identifying herself as one of them even as she claims the privilege and power of such a ubiquitous institution as the Catholic Church. Anguiano became a spokesperson that had the respect and power of an institutional

insider. She states that she is very "popular in the parish," a fact that protects her and provides leverage in the face of the pastor's shock and indignation. Though she succeeds in bringing the Our Lady of Guadalupe celebration "here in the church" the following year, this move represents a mixed victory. Anguiano uplifts the migrant community, identifying them as parishioners in need of service. The usher's response to Anguiano's assertion of her identity together with the pastor's shock indicate that Anguiano had passed as White and privileged until that moment. Her stance advocating and identifying with the migrant worker community in her parish made this position precarious.

Anguiano was moved multiple times in her early career because of the attachments she was seen to have formed with parishioners, especially the teenagers she taught. This constant forced displacement under the watch of her supervisors began to create some tension between Anguiano and the structure of her religious order. During her time as a nun, she wrote op ed articles under her birth name rather than her religious name, separating these opinions from her religious persona due to the backlash she received from superiors who accused her of becoming "worldy" (Folder 9, Box 2). In one such article, Lupe writes, speaking about discrimination towards Mexican Americans in East LA, "'We cripple a people and then complain because they limp.' This thought keeps coming to my mind every time I read or hear such accusations." She was specifically addressing the racist belief that Mexican Americans were "lazy." Her interaction with the Catholic Church is a point of entry to understand the ways in which she employed assimilation as a survival strategy, but also as a resource-gathering strategy. Anguiano writes these words, identifying the racist and classist societal structure surrounding Mexican and Mexican American individuals as the reason for their marginalization. Her efforts to hide her

writing show that she understands these thoughts to be transgressive within the Catholic institution to which she belonged.

The tension between transgression and institutional affiliation is at the crux of most of Lupe Anguiano's advocacy work. Her desire to advocate for minoritized individuals, such as the Mexican and Mexican American communities in California, was often at odds with the capacity for change that large institutions such as the Catholic Church and local government were able to provide. Towards the end of her time as a religious sister, she was moved to East Los Angeles where she worked with young people who were in gangs or at risk of entering a gang. During this time, Anguiano began fighting for education policy reform within the Catholic Church to include Mexican and Mexican American children in standard schooling. In addition, she also campaigned for open housing despite Los Angeles's Cardinal, her superior, explicitly forbidding Catholic involvement in this political effort, according to the draft of her biography that resides in the Lupe Anguiano Collection ("Early Years as an Activist").

Anguiano saw her involvement in Catholicism and the attainment of institutional power as a strategy for helping her community. She speaks about her outlook on missionary work: "So the academia was for the white, but the mental retardation program was really focused on—and there were some Latinos and some blacks who knew enough English, who really did not get trapped on that, but the larger population, over 50, 70 percent, 75 percent of Latinos and black students were [unclear]. So this friction existed. During that time when I was in the Youth Training Employment Project as a counselor, I took classes at Cal State L.A. dealing with juvenile delinquency and sociology, because you will recall I was a missionary sister and I dealt more in evangelizing and doing missionary work dealing with people, enabling them to survive

in their community and developing leadership skills, the "observe, judge, and act" (Anguiano 00:10:30).

During the period of the 1950s until the 1970s, the federal government passed a slew of legislature purporting to address issues experienced by children with disabilities, including but not limited to the Handicapped Children's Early Education Assistance Act (IDEA). These legislative changes affected children outside of the target population of disabled individuals. Mexican, Mexican American, and Black children were affected by these changes because they were often slotted into courses designated for students with learning disabilities, though the Mexican, Mexican American or Black children may not have had these types of disabilities. The rationale given for this type of mis categorization was that the English-speaking instructors could not teach the Spanish-speaking students, therefore the students could not learn and needed to be placed into special education courses. This placement limited students' career and higher educational possibilities.

In light of this discriminatory practice, Anguiano joined political movements to change the educational landscape, especially for Mexican American youth in East Los Angeles. She studied to better affect change, but also displays her beliefs regarding the transformative power of religion. Her assertion regarding her role as a missionary sister makes clear her contribution as viewed by Anguiano: "because you will recall I was a missionary sister and I dealt more in evangelizing and doing missionary work dealing with people, enabling them to survive in their community." The evangelizing and missionary work is the type of survival strategy that she offers her community. The words "evangelizing" and "missionary work" are charged with colonial connotations, and Anguiano's hands-on work does not escape from this coloniality. However, her drive to change conditions for working-class Chicanas was fundamentally at odds

with the colonial logics of the Church. Her exit from this institution shows this incompatibility, as she chose her community's welfare over the Church structure.

The impulse to guide individuals through the various institutional structures that stood in their way continued as Anguiano established the organization that brought her to national recognition. The National Women's Employment and Education (NWEE), first known as the National Women's Program Department Inc. was an organization that began in San Antonio in 1973, where Anguiano lived after leaving the order of Our Lady of Victory Missionary Sisters. The NWEE's mission was to help single female heads of households to find employment to support their families. Speaking of the decision to found the organization, she says, "I was angry at the way in which the system traps young, healthy, and intelligent women; makes them dependent on welfare; destroys their pride and their willingness to work; and keeps them living always under the poverty level" ("Getting Off Welfare"). The organization truly grew to significant levels thanks to a $7,500 grant in 1983 from the Wonder Woman Foundation. Much of the rhetoric around this organization targeted single mothers who depended on government welfare programs. At the time of NWEE's true expansion, the U.S. welfare system was in the process of retrenchment by Ronald Reagan's administration (Moffitt 733). Anguiano's efforts received a significant amount of support from the Reagan administration, specifically Barbara Bush, then Vice President Bush's wife. Their correspondence reveals a willingness on Anguiano's side to shore up any gaps in the nation's welfare system: "NWEE in 1983 and for the next five years has decided to move the Model into a national position, so that we might be able to demonstrate specific changes needed in our nations [sic.] A.F.D.C. Welfare policy. Target States are New York, Philadelphia, and California" (Letter to Barbara Bush Feb. 22, 1983). A.F.D.C refers to the Aid to Families with Dependent Children program, formerly known as the

Aid to Dependent Children (ADC) program. This government project was targeted to low-income families and required one biological parent to be absent for a family to be eligible. Originally, this program was ideated to help women whose husbands had become disabled or who had become widows. Inherent in the origins of the program is the understanding that women would not work and would be mothers.

Anguiano's program was, in one aspect, revolutionary because of its drive to aid single mothers in accessing and benefiting from the workforce. Her outlook, as she states in her February 1983 letter to Barbara Bush, is one of deep reform to the welfare system, specifically targeting the A.F.D.C. program which affected single mothers most. She states that her targets are New York, California, and Philadelphia, expanding from the organization's Texas origins and returning to her own California background. Later that year, Anguiano received a letter from Vice President Bush himself, expressing his pleasure at learning that she would be appointed "a Member of the President's Advisory Council on Private Sector Initiatives" (Letter from George H.W. Bush to Lupe Anguiano, 1983). Anguiano's rise to influence in the White House exemplifies her institutionalized survival strategy. In her answer to Vice President Bush's congratulatory note, she names part of her organization, the Women's Employment and Education Model Program (WEEMP) as "a viable alternative" to the "ADFC Welfare system." (Letter from Lupe Anguiano to George H.W. Bush, 1983) This exchange marks Anguiano as a hopeful member of the highest decision-making institution in the U.S.. She is a part of the State, but external to it, as her presence on the council for "Private Sector Initiatives" indicates. NWEE focused on giving women the opportunity to gain independence, at the same time shoring up the significant gaps left by the retrenchment and insufficiency of an outdated welfare system.

Anguiano's original goal remained the same throughout her career, her motivation for missionary work carried her through into the non-profit sector, making her story one of institutionalized advocacy. Señora Anguiano's survival strategy is one that involves institutional participation. She positioned herself in a way that would allow for a re-direction of resources to community members with which she may have felt an affinity. The tightrope between institutional acquiescence and transgression is a fine one and Anguiano's efforts walk this line. Her emphasis on humanizing the women who were "trapped" in the inefficient system of welfare is one that shows the ways in which her resource gathering efforts were targeted at the survival of her community. This push towards survival combats the suffering of discrimination and loss that many of Anguiano's community experienced. Though the reliance on institutional structures created the conditions for uplifting the female migrant communities from which Anguiano came, it also aligns the efforts of this señora within a system that rejects the very women that she helped.

IV. Alicia Escalante: Activist Survival

Alicia Escalante's battles for resources took place in part roughly around the time that Lupe Anguiano was teaching the teenagers of East Los Angeles—the 1960s and 1970s. Escalante, originally from El Chamizal, Texas, fled to California as a young child to escape her abusive father and reunite with her mother who had moved to California after being denied custodial rights to her children (Bermudez 124). Through witnessing her parents' situation and her mother's inability to retain custody of Alicia and her siblings, Escalante became aware of the injustices that single mothers, especially single mothers of color in the U.S., faced. The fruits of this young consciousness-awakening was the founding of the East Los Angeles Welfare Rights Organization (ELAWRO) in 1967. Escalante helped found and run this organization to advocate

for low-income single Chicana mothers, even involving herself in border organization along the U.S.-Mexico border in California. ELAWRO was later known as the Chicana Welfare Rights Organization (CWRO), a focus that actively centered Chicanas during a time in which the Chicano Movement was only interested in men's stories, treating the male experience as universal (Bermudez 126).

The history of the CWRO is also a history of Escalante's organizing efforts and a testament to the ways in which Escalante used an ethics of revolution and transgression in order to mobilize Institutional structures such as the State and the Legislature to gain opportunities for L.A. Chicana communities. The original organization from which ELAWRO and CWRO were born was named La Causa De Los Pobres—a group that organized around 1966 to combat Medi-Cal cutbacks. Escalante writes in the typed history of La Causa de los Pobres that she crafted: "Previously Welfare Mothers were advising one another concerning rights and privileges, and decided to become an organized body for the purpose of educating each other on welfare rights to the fullest extent, and presenting the welfare issue to the public at large" ("History of La Cause de los Pobres").

The resources that this group of Chicanas sought were "rights and privileges" regarding the raising of their children and the wellbeing of their families. Escalante and other "Welfare Mothers" created what might be called a mutual aid group in present day parlance. They established their own "organized body" because of the lack of institutional aid that was the reality for single mothers, especially single mothers of color, at the time. Escalante's story presents a model of resource gathering outside of established institutions, offering a contrast to Anguiano's strategies of resource gathering and survival. Alicia Escalante's story is by no means lost to time, and her life and goals are thoughtfully outlined in Dr. Rosie Bermudez's chapter

titled “La Causa de los Pobres: Alicia Escalante’s Lived Experiences of Poverty and the Struggle for Economic Justice” within the collected volume *Chicana movidas* (2018). Her story is also featured in the *Chicana Por Mi Raza* archival repository and her oral history resides with the National Museum of African American History and Culture. The *Señora Power* project goal is to contribute to the consciousness raising efforts that these projects and organizations are already successfully achieving, but also to analyze the ways in which various señora survival and resource-gathering strategies work within the Chicana community.

The March 1972 State Social Welfare Board Position Statement exemplifies the type of rhetoric that Escalante and her community battled. Its main subject was “Illegitimacy,” a generalizing term that was meant to include births from teenage motherhood as well as pregnancies occurring outside of marriage. This position statement recommendations include defining a mother as “morally depraved” after having a third child born out of “wedlock,” requiring a child’s biological father to be found and produced by the child’s 6 months, giving any funding to the child’s grandparents, and stopping any aid when the mother reaches majority. In all the recommendations and cases, the mother is de-prioritized. The State defines single mothers, especially teen mothers, as inherently flawed or immoral unless they are widows. Escalante’s battle against the unfairness of the welfare system was effectively a battle against the disposability of single mothers, especially Chicana single mothers. She engages with respectability politics in a complex manner, feeling the oppression of respectability and at the same time mobilizing it when necessary.

Escalante did not completely eschew institutional support throughout her life and career, but was often at odds with the Institution, specifically welfare regulations and welfare officers in Los Angeles. Her driving force was based in the Chicana identity in which she was able to find

solidarity and support. In a draft of a speech she wrote for a meeting around the early 1970s, she states, “Now back to Nationalizing, I was here in the youth conference- in July, we made the decision then to Nationalize, it was announced in a press conference, and seven States volunteered to be affiliate immediately with E.L.A.W.R.O. Resolutions were made and we’re here in the beginning of it now” (Escalante 5). Here she speaks about nationalizing ELAWRO and turning towards the goal of reaching out to all Chicanas who might need aid in facing the complex U.S. welfare system. Escalante’s goal to nationalize ELAWRO and the ways in which she addresses the general Chicano audience hint at the goals she had to unite her community in fighting for welfare rights—an issue long understood to be a woman’s problem, only affecting mother and children.

The topic of Chicano rights at the time pushed towards a generalizing stance that labelled solidarity the priority, not recognizing that this type of surface solidarity did not meet all needs. Escalante’s writings reveal her attention to class strife within the Chicano community as well: “My own people discriminate against the recipient on welfare, the Anglo establishment very shrewdly brainwashed them that way, to separate the working from class Chicano, from the non working one, they’ve seperated [sic] the poor from the more fortunate, they’re seperated [sic] the educated from the non educated & so on. We can not afford to let that happen any longer, we are all one Raza, one familia, whether we come from the suburbs, or the barrio. The untogether Mejicano, that won’t accept this, is because he is afraid to face the truth, to face reality, he feels safer in an Anglo society, for this [sic] ones I say, I hope you come home someday, if you don’t, I wish you Buena Suerte, you’re going to need it! If this sounds like Racism, you draw your own conclusions, I accept Anglos (pause) in the background, if they stay in their place!” (“My own people discriminate”)

In this undated, handwritten note, Escalante identifies prejudices between the "Anglos" and "Chicanos" as well as between "the working class Chicano" and the "non-working one." The intersectionality of identity inherent in the migrant community surfaces here. Though the audience Escalante addresses is "Chicano," this can include men, women, as well as middle- and working-class individuals. Even those unemployed individuals in the community are identified in Escalante's writings. The hybridity of migrant identity also plays a role in Escalante's categorizations. The identity of Chicano is prevalent, but the label of "Mejicano" also exists within this text, indicating a differentiation between the politically conscious and the perhaps more recent migrant who Escalante views as less politically conscious. This "Mejicano" archetype is painted as a sort of traitor, preferring "Anglo society" to the "barrio" that is labeled as "home."

The distinction between Chicano and "Mejicano" may indicate a distrust of more recent migrants, but Escalante's commitment to ensuring rights for all Mexican American community members remains strong as she advocates for Spanish translations to all welfare activism documents and speaks out against discriminating based on citizenship. The ultimate enemy that Escalante puts forth is the "Establishment." In a letter to Monseigneur Barry responding to his denial of the ELAWRO proposal Escalante states:

"In your letter you named the organization an agency.. It is not an agency, it is a volunteer organization, staffed by courageous volunteers, that do <u>not</u> live off the blood and tears of people as you do.

You sir, are the Agency, you are the Establishment.

All of a sudden the Churches are interested in the humane development of people. One Hundred years <u>too</u> late. You may be able to buy off some people, but you can never undo all the

harm the Churches have done, in ignoring the problems the poverty, the discrimination, the racism, the hunger and needs of the poor!" (2).

Escalante's encounter with the Catholic Church differs greatly from Anguiano's experience. While Anguiano worked within the religious institution for many years, Escalante found herself rejected by this same institution. She alludes to the colonialism of the Catholic Church saying that the Church's concern is "one hundred years too late." This letter also highlights the collectivity of ELAWRO, the "courageous volunteers" are the community members for whom Escalante advocates. She uses Msgr. Barry's rhetoric against him, using the language of "agency" as a pejorative, signaling his privilege as part of the "Establishment" or Institution that oppresses the community. The distinction Escalante makes between "volunteer organization" and "agency" shows a distrust in formalized institutions and a belief in the grassroots nature of ELAWRO. Though ELAWRO becomes recognized and scaled up in formal ways, it is never as officially recognized as Lupe Anguiano's NWEE.

Escalante's anti-institutional sentiments offer an alternative form of resource gathering to the type that Lupe Anguiano exemplifies. Though both women sought to change legislation and worked for Chicana recognition, one believed in Institutional aid while the other begrudgingly mobilized Institutional contacts. Escalante's involvement with a Chicano protest at St. Basil's Cathedral in 1969 created a tense relationship between herself and church officials. She was among the 20 indicted by the archdiocese of Los Angeles, and one of the activists that spent the most time imprisoned for the alleged charge of destroying Church property. A Spanish language article in the Católicos Por la Raza newsletter states: "Los Catolicos por la Raza exigieron primero se les abrieran las puertas; la contestacion fue negativa. Despues algunos penetraron por una puerta lateral del vestibulo y al tratar de abrir las puertas centrales fueron recividos [sic.] con

liquidos lacrimógenos y a golpes" (31). This protest at St. Basil's Cathedral was prompted by the unmet demands for Church resources to be allocated to the Mexican American/Chicano community. Alicia Escalante along with many protesters found violence in the Cathedral, being beaten and tear gassed by undercover police dressed as church ushers. The instrumentalization of the police force by the Church displays a merging of violent institutional power that Escalante spends most of her activist career fighting against. This encounter and subsequent imprisonment stands in stark contrast to the encounter that Anguiano has with a church usher in Imlay, Michigan only 15 years earlier.

Anguiano's ability to advocate for the Mexican migrant community in Imlay is due to her then status as Church insider, while Escalante's need to organize from outside of institutional borders signals her status as a multiply minoritized individual. Though she was not accepted within institutions, Escalante was able to create her own "volunteer organization," as she calls it. Anguiano eventually became a Church outsider but remained an institutional favorite through her political involvement and the support she received from the Bush family. These two señoras provide examples of intra-institutional and extra-institutional advocacy, telling their stories and gaining resources for their migrant communities by instrumentalizing the gendered roles they were permitted to occupy. These two case studies provide an idea of the survival strategies that the señoras featured in the *Señora Power* project use to uplift their communities. Their life accomplishments are a testament to the ways in which Chicana survival and joy can be forged through community organizing and the implementation of that intangible force we call señora power.

V. Mamie García: Surviving the Police State

Mamie García's legacy of survival strategies is tied to the legacy of police violence in the Houston Mexican neighborhood of Magnolia Park. Surrounding the shipping channel and the beginning of the freight railroads, Magnolia Park is one of Houston's oldest Latinx neighborhoods. Mexican migrants arrived around 1911, with numbers steadily climbing as Mexican nationals fled the Mexican Revolution in the early 20th century. Many men of this refugee population found work on the railroads and the shipyards, settling in the Magnolia Park neighborhood because of the proximity to their work and the lower cost of living (Houston Gov). The demographics of this neighborhood remained the same through the 20th century, and the area was largely Mexican by 1978, the year of the Moody Park riots.

The Moody Park riots occurred one year after the homicide of Joe Campos Torres, a Mexican American man, at the hands of the Houston Police Department (HPD). The officers involved were fined one dollar and sentenced to one year of probation (KTRK 1). This murder incited unrest in the Magnolia Park community, where the homicide occurred and where Joe Campos Torres had lived. A year later, during the Cinco de Mayo celebration in Moody Park, the community protested, beating police officers and reporters and setting police cars on fire. The unrest lasted a few days, with the residents of Magnolia Park refusing to let HPD enter their neighborhood in any capacity. The information regarding Mamie García that is included in this chapter stems largely from the interview that the *Señora Power* team conducted with García and her daughter, CJ García in December of 2023.

In the wake of the murder of Joe Campos Torres and the ensuing resistance, Mamie Garcia became the liaison to the Chief of Police. Her decision to speak with representatives of the Houston Police Department was a difficult one, brought on by a drive to ensure that her

community was not cut off from vital resources. However, this decision is also highly controversial. García's conversation with HPD officials evolved into the development of the police liaison program. This liaison program ensured that a representative chosen by the community would have a place in the local police department to oversee and report all police decisions to the community. This way, the Magnolia Park residents would have a say in the decisions made about the policing of their neighborhood. García became the first liaison, and this program was later instated in police departments across the country. Regarding this decision, García states that she was advocating for this during a time in which HPD held to a "storefront policing" model, one in which the officers at each station were truly embedded in the community.

The faith that García places on the ability of police forces to protect her community is not necessarily substantiated by the statistics regarding police brutality in communities of color. She says, "I have grandsons, I can't imagine what Mrs. Torres felt. It was the biggest rally I've ever seen. It was packed and media was bombarding me. 'Who else did you call?' I said the Justice Department, that's the way I did it." She says this in reference to a rally that she held to honor the families of the deceased in the wake of the Moody Park riots. García's survival strategy relies on the power of institutions, she places a great deal of trust in "the Justice Department" and the Houston Police Department.

Houston Mayor Sylvester Turner asked García to be part of a panel about revitalizing the police. In addition to the highly visible storefronts, Mamie advocated for the increase in Hispanic police officers to ameliorate the language barrier between officers and community, as well as acknowledge some of the racial bias officers exhibited, such as lack of sympathy for racialized victims of a crime. Mamie and a couple of other officers, including Rico Garcia, founded the

"Chicano Squad" to recruit more Mexican American officers. Mamie proposed a position called the "community liaison," a middleperson between HPD and the community, which began in magnolia and was implemented in police departments across the country. Mamie didn't give away this recognition—she also implemented a system of trading cards featuring different HPD officers. Like other trading cards, these would include facts, statistics, and community service performed by each officer. She insists that they needed to "earn" their place in the community.

García's desire to aid her community guides her to take actions that some may call counterproductive. She sought a truce between HPD and the Mexican community of Magnolia Park through the incorporation of local police officers into the community. The history of Mexican and Mexican American populations with law enforcement in the United States is also a history of white supremacy's control over the Latinx population in the U.S.. Starting with the Texas Rangers, the dynamic between Mexican descent communities and law enforcement was set. After the Mexican American War of 1846-1848, Mexican-descent populations gained a reputation for criminality, born of war propaganda and the pseudo-science of eugenics at the time (Oropeza 161). This racist characterization of Mexican populations as criminals survived through the 20th century and even to today, most notably being touted in the 2016 presidential elections by the Trump campaign.

The role of police has increasingly become entangled with social welfare and urban governance, creating an overreliance on policing by state and local governments (Gordon 11). Though the idea of minority (Black, Latinx, or Asian) representation in the police force has been put forth as a possible strategy for creating more effective police departments, this has been proven to have little to no impact on clearing cases effectively (Jurek 238). The path to less police violence is a reinvestment of funds and effort into social services, according to a 2020

Human Rights Watch report ("A Roadmap" 2). This perspective is shared by Mamie García and her daughter, CJ García. They agree with the presence of more social workers and mental health specialists along with police. However, Mamie argues that building relationships with local police departments is hard but necessary, "Take the people with you, take the media with you." [1:19:10]. She recounts the types of "crime summits" that she would help organize with "teachers," "professors," "police," and other community members in the 1970s and 1980s in Magnolia Park, Houston. Her recollections paint a positive image of collaboration with local police departments, but they also emphasize the role of the community as enforcers of accountability. The position that Mamie proposed and created is titled "community liaison," and this is work she took very seriously. Her faith in the process of bringing community members together to advise on policing was in many ways unprecedented, especially in the Mexican neighborhood of Magnolia Park, which had long been discounted as a neighborhood of criminals.

Mamie García continues to work in her community, running the Sociedad Mutualista Obrera Mexicana (SMOM) of Houston along with her daughter, CJ García. These two women have raised funds to restore the SMOM building after Hurricane Harvey destroyed the roof in 2017. With the remodeled facilities, the García women hope to offer an after-school program for middle and high school children of the area, an event space for community members, a cafeteria program for seniors, and low-rent individual office space with office facilities for any community member that needs a workspace. These kinds of endeavors are possible because of the community-ingrained process that Mamie García began to employ after the tragedy of Joe Campos Torres's murder. When asked what advice she can give present-day Latinos who are disillusioned with the police, she recommended knocking on neighbors' doors and organizing the

community to do something about it. Though this advice is broad, it combats institutional violence with the survival strategy of community action. Mamie García's answer to systemic oppression is a reliance on a community support system.

VI. Conclusion

The three señoras included in this chapter enact strategies of survival that include the negotiation of institutional hierarchies to better serve marginalized community members, the rejection and confrontation of government agencies to ensure better welfare rights, and the gathering of community members to combat police violence. Though none of these strategies are without their flaws or ideological pitfalls, they demonstrate a radical resilience that can be built upon by future generations.

The goal of the *Señora Power* project is to honor the survival of previous generations and offer the language and information for future generations to learn from them. Currently, the *Señora Power* website and podcast are under production, to be completed in Fall of 2024. During the past year, we have interviewed four respondents and explored personal and public archives of 6 more women. After publishing the first season of the *Señora Power* podcast along with related lesson plans and educational material, we plan to start on a second season that will put two new U.S. cities in conversation. Candidates for the second season include Denver, Colorado, Albuquerque, New Mexico, and Chicago, Illinois. While maintaining existing community contacts, the *Señora Power* team has begun exploring contacts in these other cities.

Conclusion

Rethinking Female Migrant Trauma

I. Overarching Themes

The scope of this dissertation addresses the various representations of migrant and Mexican American women's trauma in Mexican and Chicanx contemporary literature and film, with a final focus on the possibilities of survival that real-life Chicanas and Mexican American women offer to future generations. The impulse to study Chicana and Mexican American trauma as depicted in culture was born of an unsettled feeling at seeing women's suffering again and again on the page, the big screen and the small one. The gendered lens through which this dissertation looks is necessary for understanding the broader marginalization and power dynamics of migration. Though women's stories are not the only ones that make up the reality of Mexican migration, they have been often overlooked or grouped into a generalizing experience. The following questions guided me to what the dissertation is today: Is migrant suffering the only form of depiction of migration in cultural production? What are the complexities of female migrant identity and what do they have to do with class and race? Why is female death so prevalently displayed in works that are meant to entertain? Who is telling the story of female migration from and through Mexico? What is the mainstream way to tell stories of migration? Is there a different way to tell stories of migration?

This dissertation started with an investigation of young adult and adolescent migrant identity and the effects of intergenerational trauma. Examining the novels *I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter* (2017) by Erika L. Sánchez, *Somewhere Between Bitter and Sweet* (2021) by Laekan Zea Kemp, *The Everything I Have Lost* (2021) by Sylvia Zéleny, and *Diablo guardián* (2003) by Xavier Velasco as well as a film, *Spanglish* (2004) dir. James L. Brooks, and the film

La jaula de oro (2013) dir. Diego Quemada Díez, the first chapter of this dissertation covers the breadth of female migrant identity in the adolescent years and across the U.S.-Mexico border. The depiction of the young female migrant body relies on sexualization just as much as it relies on the depiction of family relationships. The mother daughter relationship in which the mother figure is a migrant, creates a narrative dynamic in which mother and daughter are foils for each other—each exposing generational differences and affinities in the other through their familial dynamic. This dynamic also reveals the inner workings of inter-generational trauma, demonstrating a lingering migrant experience that exists within a generation that did not undertake the migrant journey themselves, such as in *I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter* (2018), *The Everything I Have Lost* (2021), and *Spanglish* (2004). These three novels present mother daughter relationships fraught with tension, but ultimately influential in the daughter's second-generation migrant identity.

Part of this identity includes the sexualization of the migrant female body and its traumatic outcomes. Through the imagining of a future generation, authors also posit a way out of the trauma of migration and into an honoring of the migrant journey. While the mother daughter relationships show the development of the migrant identity through two generations of women, the father-daughter migrant relationship reveals differences in these gendered experiences. *Somewhere Between Bitter and Sweet* (2021) presents a tense dynamic full of intergenerational trauma in which the female protagonist defines herself in contrast with her father, seeking to gain his approval but always butting up against the limits of gendered experience. The film *La jaula de oro* (2013) and the novel *Diablo guardián* (2003) give insights into realities of adolescent migrant girls living without parental figures. The developing sense of self and the young girls' sexuality is pushed to the fore as they are objectified and must use this

objectification as currency to survive. Overall, the first chapter of the dissertation shows the centrality of sexuality for adolescent migrant and migrants' daughters' identity development.

The dissertation moves forward, addressing the topic of Indigenous migrant domestic workers in Mexico and the threat that they represent to mestizo futurity. The figure of the Indigenous domestic worker appears in the novel *A True Story Based on Lies* (2003) by Jennifer Clement, and the films: *Roma* (2018) directed by Alfonso Cuarón, *Xiquipi' Guie'dani* (2018) directed by Xavi Sala, and *Nosotras las sirvientas* (1951) directed by Zacarías Gómez Urquiza. These works form the basis of the second chapter's analysis, revealing the centrality of reproduction in the cultural depiction of Indigenous domestic workers. In every film and the novel included in this chapter, the female Indigenous domestic worker protagonists threaten the racialized and hierarchized systems within mestizo households through their ability to have children. The films and novel range from showing happy complacency with this objectification (*Nosotras las sirvientas*) to ambivalence (*Roma),* to active defiance (*Xiquipi' Guie'dani* and *A True Story Based on Lies*).

In most of these works, there is a birthing scene or the allusion to birthing, this scene is often full of suffering. The suffering is not completely due to the pain of going into labor but is added to by the threat of a mestizo, middle to upper class employer interfering in the protagonist domestic worker or child's life. Trauma surrounding sexualization of the protagonist's body returns and affects the decisions that each domestic worker makes with regards to their romantic entanglements and their children. The double meaning of "labor" becomes central to the analysis of these four works. While the female Indigenous migrant protagonists of these works go *into labor* and are afraid of going *into labor,* their manual labor is what creates the occasion for the threat that they present to the mestizo affluent class. Cleo, the protagonist of *Roma,* appears as a

sympathetic character to the mestizo affluent class, with her female employer keeping her as an employee even after discovering her pregnancy. However, the ways in which Cleo is isolated in her suffering and grief related to her miscarried pregnancy shows the class and race divide that exists regardless of any kindly gestures from an employer. The realities that the four works analyzed in this chapter present point to an impossibility of both employer and employee class thriving within the racialized hierarchical system of domestic employment as it is presented in this selection of Mexican and Chicanx cultural production.

The next chapter of the dissertation examines the depiction of feminicides in Mexico and on the U.S.-Mexico border, taking the film, *The Three Deaths of Marisela Escobedo* (2020), directed by Carlos Pérez Osorio, the Mexican television series, *Mujer, casos de la vida real* (1985-2007) co-produced by Sylvia Pinal, the novel *Desert Blood* (2005), written by Alicia Gaspar de Alba, and the documentary text *El invencible verano de Liliana* (2022) by Cristina Rivera Garza as the basis of its analysis. These works all fall into the true crime genre, a form of storytelling that focuses on death, especially the untimely death of women. The combination of the true crime genre and the depiction of feminicides reveals societal prejudices against women who are survivors of assault as well as the women who are murdered under the violent patriarchal transnational system that makes impunity possible. Many of these works create an image of murdered women as pseudo-zombies (*The Three Deaths of Marisela Escobedo, Desert Blood,* and *Mujer, casos de la vida real*). This zombification is aided and normalized by the true crime genre conventions that focus on the glorification of female death. In contrast, *El invencible verano de Liliana* presents an image of a deceased woman that evokes her living self through community intervention into the author's trauma. This communal response to embodied suffering, the calling forth of the loved one, also offers an alternative to the objectifying image

that is created of murdered women by a patriarchal criminal justice system in Mexico and the U.S..

The final chapter of the dissertation outlines real-life migrant Mexican and Mexican American women's stories of survival. The chapter is born of the work done for the *Señora Power* digital humanities project, still under production. The team is made up of myself, another PhD Candidate at Rice University, and an Assistant Professor at Southwestern University. Our work consists of interviewing older Chicana and Mexican American women in Los Angeles and Houston to identify and catalogue their survival strategies and the resource gathering efforts that have benefitted their communities. The chapter features a reflection on the podcast that will be published online and that is a part of the *Señora Power* project as well as three case studies of three women's stories and survival strategies. While these women's views on institutional power and oppression rarely reflect contemporary understandings of systemic violence and institutional oppression, their survival strategies are valuable for understanding the trajectory of Mexican American and Chicanx history in the United States, especially focusing on the role of women in a community that has historically erased women's accomplishments.

This dissertation builds on existing trauma and migration research but focuses on the experience of both Mexican and Mexican American women. This ambitious breadth of analysis has not been meaningfully discussed in the field of cultural studies. The research in this dissertation provides a different way of understanding trauma among these populations and explores examples of film and literature that takes a more holistic view of migrant women's trauma. Additionally, the inclusion of the *Señora Power* project links the cultural analysis of trauma representation with real-life strategies of survival, a technique meant to offer an alternative to a more traditional approach that focuses solely on the suffering of migrant women.

While analyzing the representation of this trauma and suffering is vital, the scholarship regarding survival strategies in the wake of trauma remains mostly in the psychological field of study rather than in cultural studies.

The project began with an impulse to understand the reason for such pervasive representation of migrant women's suffering. By following a life trajectory, from identity formation to the depiction of migrant and border women's death as represented in true crime feminicide stories, the goal of the study was to show the creative ways in which seemingly untellable trauma can be told. However, through the trajectory of the project, the lack of representation of migrant women in the telling of their own stories became clear. Though migrant women appear throughout Mexican and Chicanx literature and film, they rarely tell their own stories. Throughout the dissertation, Erika L. Sánchez in her novel *I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter* (2018), Sylvia Aguilar Zéleny in *The Everything I Have Lost* (2021), and Cristina Rivera Garza in *El invencible verano de Liliana* (2022) are the closest to the subjects of their stories, having either been eyewitnesses to the action or drawing from their own experiences. This lack of representation of migrant women storytellers often leads to a glorification of migrant women's pain, or a flattening of their portrayal. Such incomplete narrations allow for the study of societal stereotypes and misconceptions of migrant women. The specific ways in which Chicanx and Mexican literature and film limit the depiction of migrant women's trauma, such as through the sexualization of young migrant bodies, the obsession with Indigenous migrant reproduction, and the zombification of murdered women, point to the ways in which structural sexism and racism take on concrete shape.

This dissertation does not cover 20th and 21st century Mexican and Chicanx literature and film in its entirety, nor does it aim to do so. There are many avenues for future study in the

silences that are left after this project. However, this dissertation offers the beginning of a path to understanding female migrant trauma and survival together in the same sentence.

II. Future Directions

The conclusion of this dissertation opens multiple avenues for future research. One such avenue is the way in which Mexican and Chicanx queerness, trauma, and migration intersect. Though increasingly fruitful, the field of queer migrant literature and film has historically been marginalized or suppressed. However, films such as *Mosquita y Mari* (2012) directed by Aurora Guerrero and *I Carry You With Me* (2020) directed by Heidi Ewing are examples of films that represent cis-gendered queer migrant and Mexican American protagonists. Still very necessary in the field of queer migrant studies is the representation and cultural studies of trans migrant stories. The topic of queer migration is so rich with complexities that it provides material for a dissertation-length project of its own. This work is especially pressing in the wake of the 2018 migrant caravan made up of exclusively LGBT-identifying individuals (Romo 1). The clear divide that is formed among migrants due to sexuality and the perception of this sexuality remains an urgent field of study, especially as queer migrant trauma surfaces in an intersectional manner due to this divide.

Additionally, the field of trauma studies has rapidly changed during this dissertation's creation. A direction of further study after this project may focus on resilience, considering suffering and healing instead of the more Western concept of trauma. This perspective is considered in the future directions of the *Señora Power* project whose upcoming goals include studying and publicizing survival strategies to a specific Chicanx community. Trauma as it has been traditionally conceived is not wholly outdated and provides useful frameworks, however the advent of an increasingly important online presence creates the need for further study related

to a digital presence and the expression of trauma. This online study may offer more avenues for female migrant self-expression and provides an interesting new direction for such cultural studies research.

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