

A LINEAGE OF EMBODIED INTERGENERATIONAL TRAUMA: CULTURAL  
PRODUCTIONS FOR MEXICAN-AMERICAN CHILDREN SINCE THE  
GOLDEN AGE OF CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

by

Juan Antonio Flores, Jr., B.A.

A thesis submitted to the Graduate Council of  
Texas State University in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts  
with a Major in Literature  
December 2021

Committee Members:

Sara A. Ramirez, Chair

Teya Rosenberg

Geneva M. Gano

Nithya Sivashankar

**COPYRIGHT**

by

Juan Antonio Flores, Jr.

2021

## **FAIR USE AND AUTHOR'S PERMISSION STATEMENT**

### **Fair Use**

This work is protected by the Copyright Laws of the United States (Public Law 94-553, section 107). Consistent with fair use as defined in the Copyright Laws, brief quotations from this material are allowed with proper acknowledgement. Use of this material for financial gain without the author's express written permission is not allowed.

### **Duplication Permission**

As the copyright holder of this work I, Juan Antonio Flores, Jr., authorize duplication of this work, in whole or in part, for educational or scholarly purposes only.

## **DEDICATION**

For my siblings, Lauren, Yazlynn, and Aiden, the Mexican-American children I had in mind when writing the thesis.

May this work serve for those individuals holding liminal identities. Continue being the bridge between our and “their” world to be crossed.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to thank God and La Virgencita de Guadalupe for giving me such strength to continue writing. Along with their help, I would also like to thank my parents. Dad, your stories and guidance have shaped my understanding of our Mexican culture tremendously. Siempre estoy esperando el momento en que comiences a contarnos historias de cuando eras un niño en México. Mom, your strength and compassion are so noble and I have learned so much from you. Because of the sacrifices you both made, I am here today. I truly cannot thank the both of you enough.

To my younger siblings, Lauren, Yazlynn, and Aiden. You three have inspired me in ways that I will never truly admit. I love each and every one of you. I will stand behind you all forever. I hope that through the endless amount of questions I asked you all regarding identity that it has helped shape you in some way.

To Salomon, one of my best friends since high school. Thank you for listening to all my ideas and rants these past few years. Your friendship means so much to me. I am forever indebted to you.

To Bianca, a terrific friend I have had the pleasure of meeting in San Marcos. You have heard all my crazy ideas and stories this past year and I cannot thank you enough for your friendship.

A huge thank you to my thesis chair, Dr. Sara Ramírez. She introduced me to Chicana feminist theory in the Spring of 2020 and I have learned so much from her. Dr. Ramírez, you have guided me every step of the way through this program as a mentor. I owe everything I know regarding Chicana/o/x studies to you. I have found my calling because of you and your mentorship. Gracias.

Finally, thank you to all the wonderful, courageous women who are a part of my committee.

I owe you all so much. Thank you.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<b>Page</b>
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	
CHAPTER	
I. AN INTRODUCTION TO TRAUMA THEORY REGARDING MEXICAN AMERICAN CHILDREN .....	1
II. UNDERSTANDING TRAUMA FROM THE VERY BEGINNING .....	15
III. BORDER CONSCIOUSNESS AFFECTING A LIMINAL IDENTITY IN “EL RATON VAQUERO,” “A MÉXICO,” AND “MÉXICO, LA ILUSION DEL CONTINENTE” .....	33
IV. THEORIZING THE PERSONAL: THE WOUNDED SOUL AS A SITE OF TRAUMA IN <i>FRIENDS FROM THE OTHER SIDE</i> AND <i>DEAR         PRIMO: A LETTER TO MY COUSIN</i> .....	59
V. EPILOGUE: THE AUTOHISTORIA OF A QUEER CHICANO .....	84
WORKS CITED .....	87

## I. AN INTRODUCTION TO TRAUMA THEORY REGARDING MEXICAN-AMERICAN CHILDREN

The historical experiences of Mexican Americans in the United States have been grounds for developing trauma. Since 1848, the multiple forms of oppression such as racism, inequality, and discrimination that Mexican Americans have experienced have formed a traumatized identity. The term “trauma,” as defined by Cathy Caruth, is a “wound inflicted not upon the body but upon the mind” (3). The wound upon the mind is a breach in the experience of time, self, and the world that is derived from an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events. I chose this definition versus other psychologists’ definition, such as Yvette Flores’s that states,

Traumatized individuals repeatedly relive the event in at least one of these ways: intrusive, distressing recollections (thoughts, images); repeated distressing dreams; flashbacks, hallucinations, or illusions; feeling or acting as if the event were recurring; marked mental distress in reaction to internal or external cues that symbolize or resemble some part of the event or physiological reactions in response to these cues, which may be similar to panic attack, such as rapid heartbeat, sweaty palms, and elevated blood pressure. (63-64)

Flores’s definition of trauma relies upon the traumatic event to relive their trauma, followed by a physiological reaction after. Flores’s definition is descriptive and insightful, not giving as much lenience and liberty as Caruth’s quote. For example: in the first chapter, I argue that the missing experience of death is traumatic, and the mind cannot cope with the possibility of its own death. The migrants that I analyze are traumatized by this missing experience but did not exhibit any of the physiological

reactions mentioned by Flores (panic attack, rapid heartbeat, sweaty palms, and elevated blood pressure). Through an analysis of their body language, readers comprehend how they exhibited their trauma, and Caruth's definition gave much liberty and lenience. It was not confined to one specific reaction or event. These catastrophic events have been endured by people of Mexican descent ever since Mexico ceded much of its territory to the United States in 1848. By analyzing the political, economic, and social prejudices experienced by Mexican Americans ever since 1848, we can begin to understand the trauma—particularly intergenerational trauma—they have endured. Intergenerational trauma “generally refers to the ways in which trauma experienced in one generation affects the health and well-being of descendants of future generations” (Sangalang and Vang 2). In order to fully understand the application of intergenerational trauma theory, we must analyze the experiences of people of Mexican descent, for example, within their particular economic, political, and cultural contexts.

In this thesis, I focus primarily upon the experiences of Mexican-American children and adolescents. Yvette G. Flores, a professor of psychology in Chicana/o Studies, writes, “From a mestizo perspective, a child's emotional and psychological well-being rests on the balance between his or her mind, body, and spirit” (16). Mexican-American children and adolescents must balance their mind, body, and spirit. Their liminal identity is affected by these three factors. The mind of children and adolescents are in constant development, but if their existence as Mexican American is seen as an impediment from their counterparts, it affects them psychologically and emotionally. Flores continues to describe the intrusions of trauma to the spirit and writes,



[Mental] disorders are rooted in violations of the tonal—the spirit. The spiritual self, the aura that surrounds us, is most vulnerable to trauma... Experiencing a frightening or traumatic event can lead to soul loss, a state in which we do not feel fully present or as if we are not really ourselves; we may feel something is missing because the soul has been violated... soul loss can be described as dissociation. (65)

Throughout the thesis, I make references to the soul of Mexican-American children, adolescents, and their ancestors. Not only can a traumatic event lead to the loss of a soul, but the continuous loss of one's soul over generations can begin embodying trauma. Their soul forms the traumatized identity due to the prolonged, intergenerational suffering that these Mexican-American children's family members have experienced. My thesis aims to consider various aspects of Mexican-American children's lives, including their parents' emigration/immigration stories in addition to the youths' encounters with language and racial difference. Children and adolescents are often able to associate themselves with characters, places, and problems in literature on a personal level. These opportunities have not been readily available to Mexican-American youth (Bolling). Speaking from personal experience, I, as a Mexican-American, had little to no interest in literature as a child due to its irrelevance to my existence. Empowering Mexican-American youth through thoughtful cultural productions and using their family as a source of knowledge allows them to connect to their culture and establish their identity.

The Mexican-American authors I discuss in this thesis evidence traumatized identities by narrativizing Mexican and Mexican-American experiences with racism and discrimination through their stories. The narratives of these stories explore the economic,

political, and cultural subordination of Mexican Americans as they express the trauma they endure. This lineage of intergenerational trauma continues to construct itself within cultural productions, trickling down the timeline where these authors use flesh and blood experiences to exhibit this traumatic lineage. I will analyze this lineage of intergenerational trauma among Mexican-American youth and their families, specifically.

The belief about alleged racial and ethnic inferiority are detrimental to Mexican Americans and causes psychological distress. Racial trauma, as defined by Monnica Williams and others, consists of “the mental health symptoms a person experiences as a result of racism or discrimination, which has often been compared to posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD)” (Williams, Peña, and Mier-Chairez 71). Anxiety and depression are the main symptoms that Mexican Americans develop when being racially profiled and discriminated against. The experiences “attack an individuals’ personhood, often leading to responses of shock and dissociation, followed by shame and self-blame” (Williams, Peña, and Mier-Chairez 71). Mexican Americans begin constructing a new identity that suits their non-Mexican counterparts, thus eliminating their ties to their indigenous roots. As generations pass, their identities remain rooted in trauma: afraid that if they acknowledge their Mexican heritage, they will be discriminated against like their ancestors. This traumatized identity shapes Mexican Americans and leaves them in limbo—in an in-between place that many scholars have written about regarding their own issues in searching for their identity (Paredes, Anzaldúa, and Tonatiuh).

I will analyze a variety of Mexican-American cultural productions that include children figures or are made for children and adolescents such as films, songs, and books to explore this lineage of trauma for Mexican-American youth. The lack of representation

of Mexican-American children in children's literature produced during the Golden Age can be tied back to a period known as the Golden Age of children's literature throughout the United States and Britain. The beginning of the Golden Age of children's literature correlates with the end of the U.S.-Mexico War. The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo ended the war in 1848 and ceded fifty-five percent of Mexican territory to the United States, thus making Mexican citizens, who resided in previously Mexican territory, Mexican-American citizens. The last half of the nineteenth and early twentieth century in the United States and Britain gave rise to many canonical and classic children's books that discuss themes such as the loss of childhood innocence, death, coming of age, greed, society's hypocrisy, freedom. While children's books work to impart these themes, they also work hand-in-hand in denying representation. Was there any literature with these Mexican-American children as the intended audience? Why do Mexican-American children not relate to any of the notable works produced throughout the Golden Age? Furthermore, what effect did the lack of representation have on Mexican-American children in general? Was there any popular media that represented Mexican-American children and their lives? I take up these questions through an analysis of the lineage of trauma among Mexican-American children by exploring music, poetry, and children's literature. I will do this in a structure as follows.

### **Chapter Outline**

Chapter One considers the trauma related to the parents of these Mexican-American children. I evaluate the culture and memory of the parents' emigration to the United States and the multiple forms of trauma they experience. I rely upon the film *Siete soles* (2008). *Siete soles*, a film written and directed by a Mexican man named Pedro

Ultras, features the experiences of the emigration that many Mexican parents make for their children. I analyze their experiences with trauma through dialogue, allocated screen time, and camera movements to emphasize the emotions embodied within this horrific journey across the border. Using trauma theory, I argue that by recognizing their parents' hardships and sacrifices, it begins as a necessary starting point in understanding the intergenerational trauma that these Mexican-American children experience. These vivid stories of their Mexican parents' emigration help to craft traumatic lineages. It is at the heart of understanding their trauma that we, as Mexican Americans, can begin to understand our traumatic lineage. This lineage of intergenerational trauma is embodied within Mexican-American children and can be traced back to the creation of Mexican-Americans in the 1840s, a period that coincided with the Golden Age of children's literature.

Each chapter is a reiteration of my own personal story in some shape or form. In this chapter, I discuss the film *Siete soles* and the trauma that migrants endure as they emigrate to the United States. As I wrote this chapter, I could not help but think of the stories my parents would tell me about their own emigration. I remembered feeling sick when they described the heat of the desert and the urge to drink water. I remembered feeling deep fright as they explained how they maneuvered their way through the desert with the other migrants and smugglers to avoid la migra. I hated hearing those types of stories—de el riesgo para ir al EE.UU. (of the risk to go to the United States). I prayed and hoped that they would never have to go through that ever again. I chose to describe the emigration of Mexican migrants because I wanted this chapter to become the basis of the “creation” of Mexican-American children because the creation of these children is not

only denoted by their birthplace—rather their parents—which is why I focus on the emigration first.

Chapter Two relies on Anzaldúa’s mestiza consciousness as a lens to focus on cultural productions for Mexican-American children and adolescents and its relation to intergenerational trauma. Mestiza consciousness “copes by developing a tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguity” (*Borderlands* 101). While this theory primarily centers a feminist consciousness, I acknowledge the border consciousness that Anzaldúa conceptualizes through the new mestiza. Anzaldúa’s conceptualization of a border consciousness overall is useful for understanding the identity struggles that Gabilondo and Paredes present in this chapter. This border consciousness that is in la mestiza “undergoes a struggle of flesh, a struggle of borders, an inner war” (*Borderlands* 100). This inner war is to be torn between ways and embody contradictory identities. I chose to use Anzaldúa’s conceptualization of a border consciousness versus other scholars, such as Jose David Saldivar that states,

First carved out in the midst of U.S. imperialism by the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo (1848) and the Gadsden Purchase (1853), the U.S.-Mexico borderlands have earned a reputation as a “third country,” because the southern border is not simply Anglocentric on one side and Mexican on the other side. Although this “site,” where the Third World implodes into the First, is a strip of land two thousand miles long and no more than twenty miles wide, some believe the U.S.-Mexico border extends all the way to Seattle. To “survive the borderlands”—as a feminist Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) suggests in her border-defying writings—is to become a dangerous “crossroads.” A near-intercultural world unto itself, the U.S.-

Mexican border is dominated by two foreign powers, in Washington, D.C., and Mexico City. The U.S.-Mexico border changes pesos into dollars, humans into undocumented workers, *cholos/as* (Chicano youth culture) into punks, people between cultures into people without culture. (*Borders Matter* 8)

I prefer Anzaldúa's new mythos of being able to integrate the identity of not only an oppressor but also an oppressed identity which provides the ability to navigate the multiple ways of existing. This chapter uses children's music and the poetry of a Texan adolescent written during the Golden Age of children's literature to emphasize the contemporary political and social issues to which Mexican/Mexican American artists respond. Specifically, I analyze Francisco Gabilondo Soler's (who performed as Cri-Cri) notoriously known song, "El ratón vaquero." This song first appeared on the radio station XEW in Mexico City, but Gabilondo did not decide to record it professionally until 1963. I posit that through "El ratón vaquero," Gabilondo teaches us to dismantle the ideas of White supremacy by not showing favoritism towards White people simply because of the color of their skin. Music allows children to interact and develop their thinking through the senses, which stimulates their emotional intelligence. Music spurs their ability to discover the world around them. Thus, on a psychological level, music is a way for children to begin developing their emotions and feelings. By developing their emotional intelligence, they begin knowing themselves and constructing what I argue is a liminal identity. Unfortunately, due to continuous exposure to discrimination and prejudice by their non-Mexican counterparts, Mexican-American children begin perceiving themselves in a negative way. Mexican-American children become disempowered and no longer seek pride in their culture. Mexican-American children no longer seek their

culture to validate their experiences and the construction of their liminal identity becomes convoluted.

Americó Paredes, a Texan adolescent during the end of the Golden Age, explores the issues of constructing one's liminal identity in two poems titled "A México" and "México, la ilusión del continente" (1932-1937). Paredes creates a speaker who is in-between two worlds and describes the personal struggles of holding a liminal identity, while attempting to reflect on the motherland. Because of the hate and discrimination that Mexican-American children experience at such a young age, they assimilate themselves within the culture of the United States and forget the ties to their native roots to avoid being belittled. Paredes, writing from the perspective of a Texas adolescent, describes the love and confusion of being Mexican American. The issues discussed throughout the Golden Age in Gabilondo's children's music and Paredes's adolescent poetry such as race, inequality, discrimination, masculinity, and the search for one's identity, are issues that are still seen throughout contemporary children's literature. The issues pertaining to Mexican Americans about 100 years ago are still occurring today, but contemporary literature is more transparent about racism and exhibits it more frequently than it did in the Golden Age. I relied upon my three siblings as a source of knowledge in questioning whether they have ever been exposed to Mexican-American children or any Mexican-American literature in general. They all responded with no. It is pivotal that decolonization begins at an early stage of children's lives. Unfortunately, decolonization was not available for children throughout the Golden Age, so I began thinking about how the issues throughout that period correlated to issues within contemporary literature. I

began seeing a pattern of recurring issues within the two time periods, thus the creation of chapter three and a continuation of literature targeted at Mexican-American youth.

In this chapter, I focus on children's music and a Texan teenager's poetry throughout a period known as the Golden Age of children's literature. As I wrote this chapter and explored the ways in which a lineage of intergenerational trauma transpired for Mexican-American children, I started recognizing my relationship to media for children (books, songs) and began thinking about my own struggles with my liminal identity. As a child, I admired Mexico. Growing up with stories of my dad's childhood painted a mural of expectations that I had for Mexico. Aside from my dad's stories, I also had expectations of Mexico from the media and school curriculum. The once beautiful mural became torn and alienated, and I no longer knew what to expect. Like the speaker in Paredes's "A México," I knew of the crimes, of the glory, and of the culture. Still, how do I, a Mexican-American child, son to two Mexican migrants, admire my roots from afar? The torn mural is synonymous with my liminal identity. As a child, my mind did not comprehend the idea of loving a culture. As I grew up, I witnessed my dad embrace his love for Mexico effortlessly. The food, music, dance, language, and stories all made him smile. His identity was solidified already. He knew about his homeland and embraced it to the fullest. Me, on the other hand, could not have that personal relationship with Mexico as I wanted. I am Mexican, but I am also American. How am I able to integrate myself efficiently into both cultures? I am both, yet I am none.

I struggled with exploring my culture as a Mexican and U.S. American and felt as if I was not enough for either. I was considered equal or even superior to Mexican citizens, and as a Mexican to White U.S. Americans, I was inferior to them. As a child, I



spent much time researching, reading, and analyzing my homeland, and I still felt that I was not enough for either. The struggles regarding my identity started as a child. I was never aware that children's literature existed for Mexican-American children; I grew up reading books by White authors where most if not all characters were White. They never discussed the issues I had regarding my culture. Where were the stories of La Llorona? El Cucuy? La Lechuza? The Mexico-United States border? Stories of the Mexican food I ate? The festivities? There were not any available for me to read, so I dismissed my own culture for a while for that very reason. This issue is still occurring today. It is important for me to note that while writing this thesis, I continuously asked my siblings, who attend public schools in my hometown Bryan, Texas, various questions regarding identity and literature due to their age (16, 14, and 11). I asked if they ever read any books pertaining to Mexican-American children or anything related to Mexican-Americans at all. Their answers remained the same: no. It is pivotal that decolonization begins at an early stage of children's lives. That is all I can hope for.

Chapter Three focuses on contemporary children's literature for Mexican-American children through autohistoria-teoría. My engagement with Anzaldúa's theorization of autohistoria-teoría is also useful for an analysis of texts that focus on identity construction. Autohistoria-teoría interconnects identity, language, and trauma in a way that theorizes the authors' personal story. Autohistoria-teoría is also a way for writers to blend cultural and personal stories through history, memoir, storytelling, myths, and other ways for them to theorize the personal (Keating 319). In this chapter, I explore children's picture books written by Mexican-American authors Gloria Anzaldúa and Duncan Tonatiuh. By using Anzaldúa's theory as a basis for my argument in this

chapter, I argue that these two Mexican-American authors' stories are intertwined and woven together to create cultural and personal biographies through children's picture books. Anzaldúa's children's book *Friends from the Other Side/Amigos del otro lado* describes the story of a Mexican-American girl named Prietita and a Mexican boy named Joaquín. These two children tackle internalized racism, discrimination, and issues regarding identity. Tonatiuh's children's book *Dear Primo: A Letter to My Cousin* describes the story of two primos: Carlitos, a Mexican child living in Mexico, and Charlie, a Mexican-American child living in the United States. These two primos describe their lifestyles and everyday tasks to each other. Tonatiuh affirms the similarities for bicultural Mexican-American people who believe that the cultures of Mexican and Mexican Americans are completely different. Instead of focusing on the differences between the two cultures, Tonatiuh explores the similarities and demonstrates the unity between the two cultures and primos. As autohistorias, *Amigos* and *Dear Primo* encourage both the author and reader who identifies with the characters to face these traumas. Readers who see themselves in these texts must also contend with the ways in which their identity as Mexican or Mexican American in the United States has been shaped by these politics.

In this chapter, I explore contemporary children's literature through Anzaldúa's theory of autohistoria-teoría and how Anzaldúa and Tonatiuh explore their own torn souls through the children's picture books. It was not until I took an undergraduate children's literature class that I was introduced to Mexican-American children's literature. Thank you to Dr. Graeme Wend-Walker for introducing me to such literature that spurred an interest in pursuing Chicana/o/x studies. The first book I read in that class was *Pancho*

*Rabbit and the Coyote* by Duncan Tonatiuh. From the title, I did not know what to expect. I thought it would be like any other children's book, but as soon as I read the first page at the age of 19, I was hooked. This book told the story of a rabbit traveling to El Norte (the United States) accompanied by the Coyote (a smuggler) in search of the rabbit's father. The language and illustrations exemplified the emigration of Mexican migrants for children well.

*Amigos* was the second Mexican-American children's book that I read as a scholar that validated my experiences—specifically my feelings—within children's literature. Throughout *Amigos*, I was able to travel to other realms of consciousness. The nonphysical world where I traveled through space and time to relive the stories of my mamá growing up like Joaquin as an undocumented child in my hometown Bryan, Texas; the stories of her internal struggles with racism and discrimination, her deportation, her relationship with La Virgen de Guadalupe, and many others. I chose *Amigos* because I could see my mom's struggle embodied within Joaquín, but I could also see her fierceness and drive to help others within Prietita.

*Amigos* illuminates my mom's torn soul; *Dear Primo* helps me see mine. This past May, I finally got the pleasure of meeting my primos in Mexico for the first time. Just like Tonatiuh discusses throughout *Dear Primo*, we all shared more in common than we both believed. We affirmed commonalities between our two cultures. The only difference I did notice was the usage of Spanish. I speak Chicano Spanish while they speak regional Spanish from San Pedro de las Anonas, San Luis Potosi, Mexico. I met my dad's side of the family while I was in Mexico. It made me so happy to finally be able to meet them, but it also made me upset. My dad has not seen nor spoken to his family in

over 20 years. As I spoke to my aunts, uncles, and cousins about my dad, I could see their faces filled with such content. They were happy to hear of all the wonderful things their brother/uncle has done for himself in the United States. At times like that, I wish my undocumented dad was granted the opportunity to visit his family.

My epilogue is a reflection of my own personal experiences with the topics in the previous chapters. My own autohistoria will follow the organization of the thesis. I offer my story as a child to immigrants, my relationship to media for children (books, songs) regarding the recognition of my liminal identity, and my own soul represented through contemporary children's literature. Through the exploration of each chapter, I will further explain my own struggles with my liminal identity, language, racism, la migra, and trauma.

I anticipate that this thesis can contribute to scholarship regarding Mexican-American children and their lineage of intergenerational trauma. I also hope that this serves as a starting point in understanding the trauma that is embodied within the souls of Mexican-American children and further continues theorizing the personal.

## II. UNDERSTANDING TRAUMA FROM THE VERY BEGINNING

*A la memoria de todos los inmigrantes, [In memory of all immigrants]  
que en la lucha por alcanzar el sueño de [who in the fight to reach the Dream of]  
una vida mejor, han dejado en el camino [a better life, they have left]  
su propia vida [behind their own].*

- *Siete soles* (2008)

Media generally has convinced immigrants that the United States is a land of equal opportunity, where one's hard work and diligence can result in personal success and fulfillment. We recognize this narrative as the American Dream. The term "American Dream" was coined in the 1930s by James Truslow Adams,<sup>1</sup> who used it to describe "that dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for every man, with opportunity for each according to his ability and achievement ... and be recognized by others for what they are, regardless of the fortuitous circumstances of birth or position" (404-405). Adams's definition proclaims that everyone in America, regardless of their birth or position, should be able to live out this particular dream for a better life. While the American Dream has its own meaning for each individual immigrant, in this chapter, I focus solely on Mexican immigrants and the traumatic experiences they undergo on their journeys to cross the Mexico-United States border in pursuit of the ever elusive American Dream. I rely upon *Siete soles* (2008), a film targeted to adults that exemplifies the traumatic events that Mexican migrants undergo by highlighting the embodiment of their traumatic experiences through dialogue, allocated screen time, and camera

---

<sup>1</sup> Adams was a popular historian in the 1920s and 1930s who published an interpretive history of America titled *The Epic of America*, after the publisher rejected his proposed title—*The American Dream* (Schweingruber 2018)

movements. I analyze these cinematic elements to argue that each traumatic experience heightens the migrants' sense of what is to come, their eventual hopelessness, and impending demise in the United States.

El Sueño Americano (The American Dream) for Mexican immigrants focuses on their well-being and prospects for a better future either in the United States or upon returning home to Mexico with their tangible wealth (Clark 2003). Their elusive search for improvements is at the heart of their vision to attain their dreams. Unfortunately, not everything is what it seems. The American Dream remains a pervasive idea only if one chooses to believe it. The attainability of this Dream is contingent on one's gender, race, ethnicity, and nationality. These factors help shape a different reality for each person. Immigrants and their families generally buy into the U.S. American narrative of becoming successful and making a better life for themselves and their families. They must make the physical venture across the Mexico-United States border and reach their destination safely before they can face the reality of their dream. This reality includes the exploitation of workers, racism, classism, and many other factors that transform their dream of success. Racism against Mexicans and non-White people in the United States is an ongoing issue, for example. Due to the racism they experience once they successfully arrive at their U.S. destination, these Mexican migrants' perception of the Dream itself become shattered and destabilized.

### **Traumatizing Obstacles in *Siete soles***

Trauma exhibited through film is unique in forming the traumatized identity of characters onscreen. The characters' trauma is derived from an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the responses to these events often appear

through hallucinations and other invasive phenomena. Unlike academic articles and books, film affords the audience the unique ability to watch, listen to, and process as traumatic events unfold onscreen. *Siete soles* exemplifies the traumatic events that Mexican migrants experience, traveling across the Arizona desert on their way to the United States to fulfill the American Dream. This film is testimony to the tragedies that these migrants experience on their way for a chance at a better life. Many Mexican-American children learn through stories about their parents' treacherous journey across the Mexico-United States border. Recognizing their parents' hardships and sacrifices is a necessary starting point to understanding the intergenerational trauma these Mexican-American children experience.

The film begins in Nogales, Sonora, Mexico, with the characters of Ramona, Miguel, and their two children. Miguel moves to Chicago, Illinois, United States, to provide for his family in Mexico and finally saves up enough money to pay a coyote (a smuggler) to cross them over the Mexico-United States border. Two coyotes pick up Ramona and her two children to transport them to a house where other Mexican migrants will accompany them on their way to El Norte. There is a total of fifteen people in the group: two coyotes named El Negro and El Gavilan, two children, a baby, and the rest are adults. While some of these migrants are traveling to El Norte to reunite with family, the other members of the group are moving to better their life for themselves and their families in Mexico. The shot then cuts to a scene of El Negro explaining the rules of the desert and their traumatic voyage into the United States begins. The rules consist of “[teniendo] cuidado donde pisan. En el desierto hay muchas víboras y animals venenosas. Habrán bien los ojos [being careful where you step. In the desert there are many

poisonous snakes and animals. Be aware of your surroundings].” On the surface, the rules are supposed to warn the migrants of the natural dangers of the desert. However, the true danger of the desert is El Negro, who poses a more frightening and deadlier danger than the poisonous snakes and animals. What was supposed to be a one-day trip across the border turns into several days. Plans change and alternate all the time—especially when crossing the border due to avoiding la migra (U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement). The group is not prepared for the trip and is told to extend their supplies as much as possible.

As the film depicts, the desert is a horrific climate to travel across. Migrants see only the desert, dry, filled with sunlight, dry heat, cacti, and weary bushes when traveling across the Mexico-United States border. Throughout the film, the camera cuts to long shots of the desert and the sun. The sun blazing, emitting fiery beams across the desert, is affected by the film’s modification of contrast and color. In various scenes throughout the film, the sunlight leads to an overexposure of the shot, illustrating the intensity of heat in the desert. After a close-up of the sunlight occurs, the camera pans back to a shot of the migrants hiding themselves in the dried-up trees to avoid direct contact with the sun. We view the migrants’ experiences of the intense heat through instantaneous cuts of medium close ups; we see various times throughout the film sweat rolling down their faces, dried lips, their red cheeks, and thin layers of clothing that might provide coolness but not protection. The climate is not their only fear, however. Aside from dehydration and hunger, many of these migrants experience their own particular trauma throughout the journey.



The film's cinematography and dialogue demonstrate that the journey includes other traumatic hardships and obstacles. Sickness, violence, injury, and death all become compounded within the traumatic experience that the journey entails. For example, an older man named Don Rafael twists his ankle and is not able to walk. Two unnamed male migrants carry him for a while until Don Rafael is not able to not endure the pain from his ankle any longer. Don Rafael screams in agony and continuously repeats, "No puedo [I can't]." El Negro appears in front of the two migrants who are helping Don Rafael and says, "Lo siento pero temenos que seguir. Si el Don no puede pos ni modo, se tendrá que quedar [I am sorry, but we have to continue on. If Don Rafael cannot go on any longer, then he will just have to stay]." One of the unnamed migrants is furious due to their promise of crossing everyone across the border, so he confronts El Negro:

No seas ojete güey. Ustedes se comprometieron a cruzarnos al otro lado y de esto nos tienen que sacar. ¿Por eso les pagamos buena feria, no? No podemos dejar aquí al Don [Rafael] abandonado en el desierto para que se muera como un perro. ¡Órale, cabrón! ¡Contestá! ¿Nos vas a sacar de esto o no? [Do not be an asshole, man. You promised to cross us to the other side and you have to get us out of this. That is why we paid you a good sum of money, no? We cannot leave Mr. Rafael here lying in the desert to die like a dog. Hurry, bastard! Answer! Are you going to get us out of this or not?]

The other migrants are in complete disbelief. Their eyes widen, they put their heads down, and stare at the floor. The shot then depicts a medium close-up of El Negro as he stabs the unnamed migrant. The sound amplifies the other migrants' gasps as one of the migrants hugging her husband turns away from what she just witnessed.

While there is no dialogue to demonstrate their fear, the mise-en-scène and the cinematography elements emphasize the fear that El Negro invokes. The migrants indicate their fear through their body language and facial expressions. For example, the camera cuts to an extreme close-up of one of the unnamed male migrants. The migrant is trembling, his eyes are wide open, and his eyebrows are raised, suggesting that he is fearful of El Negro. The other migrants huddle together, facing away from the unnamed migrant whom El Negro stabbed, and the viewer gathers that they are fearful that they might endure the same fate. The migrants' dilemma becomes more apparent when one of the migrants tells her husband, "Ay viejo, no podemos dejar estos pobres viejos aquí [Oh, husband, we cannot leave these poor men here]," to which her husband replies, "No, vámonos. No nos vayan a dar una golpe a nosotros también [No, let's go. They might beat us up, too]." As these two migrants are speaking, there is a long shot of Don Rafael and the unnamed migrant on the floor. The shot then cuts to a medium close up of Don Rafael watching the husband and wife leaving with the group. His eyes squinting, his face red, and his teeth clenched all suggest the disbelief and pain in his eyes as the fellow migrants leave him to die. The other migrants continue their journey across the desert following El Negro, fearing that they, too, might meet their own end.

This traumatic death of an elder and another migrant leave the others completely overwhelmed, for they are survivors and witnesses of their deaths. Trauma studies scholar Cathy Caruth writes,

[T]he shock of the mind's relation to the threat of death is thus not the direct experience of the threat, but precisely the missing of this experience, the fact that, not being experienced in time, it has not yet been fully known. And it is this lack of direct

experience that, paradoxically, becomes the basis of the repetition of the nightmare. (62)

In line with Caruth, I posit that the surviving migrants have been traumatized by the thought of their own deaths. El Negro threatens the group many times by saying, “A ver si así aprenden a respetar. Y que no se les olvide aquí el que da las órdenes soy yo, no cualquier pendejo. Así es la ley del desierto: el que puede camina y el que no se chinga [Let’s see if that way (by force), they learn how to be respectful. And do not forget that I am the one who gives orders, not any dumbass. That is the law of the desert: He who can, walks. He who cannot is screwed].” Don Rafael and the unnamed character meet their ends; they are both left alone, injured, and dehydrated in the desert. A scene quickly cuts to a shot of Don Rafael and the unnamed migrants’ deceased lifeless bodies in the desert. While the other characters do not directly see the men’s deaths, they, without a doubt, know of the injured men’s fates. Everyone else in the group is afraid, shocked, and hesitant during the rest of their journey across the desert. Caruth argues that the mind is not able to cope with the possibility of its own death, so survival is paired with the impossibility of living (62). Each surviving migrant’s mind is conflicted. Their options are to endure whatever El Negro puts them through or die.

The constant feeling of not knowing whether they will reach their destination dead or alive is the basis of their collective trauma. Caruth emphasizes that “the act of survival, as the experience of trauma, is the repeated confrontation with the necessity and impossibility of grasping the threat to one’s own life” (62). The migrants are survivors at this point of the film, but, as Caruth argues, “the act of survival” is the traumatic experience. The surviving group of migrants’ witnessing of Don Rafael’s and the

unnamed migrant's deaths is not the trauma necessarily; it is the missed experience of death for themselves that traumatizes them. Their minds comprehend the death of the two migrants, but they are not able to comprehend their own survival. The trauma is centered not on the migrants' deaths but their escape from the experience of their own death. The impossibility of the mind comprehending its own death is the root of this kind of trauma. Because their arduous journey towards the United States is not over, and their lives could end at any moment, they repeatedly experience trauma as they confront the ever-present threat of death.

### **The Treatment of Women in the Desert**

The trip is longer than expected, and many of the migrants do not have enough supplies for the journey. In this section, I analyze the treatment of migrant women—specifically a character named Jimena—and the other migrants' body language as trauma responses. It is imperative to note how these migrants exhibit their fear of both death and El Negro through body language, which demonstrates embodied trauma. A woman named Jimena travels across the desert with her newborn son. Frustrated by the heat, dehydration, and lack of supplies, Jimena sees a helicopter and begins signaling for help. El Negro pins her down, puts a gun to her head, and tells the rest of the migrants to stay quiet and hidden. If any of them fail to comply, they will be shot. The shot then pans to the remaining group members, all weary, sweaty, and red from the heat, traveling across the desert, and Jimena begins to cry. Her son has nothing to eat, so she asks El Negro to spare a bit of water to feed him. El Negro tells Jimena that everything comes at a price. Jimena responds, “No importa. Mi marido le va a pagar lo que sea cuando llegemos pero por favor deme poquita agua para mi bebé [It does not matter. My husband will pay

you whatever you want, but please just give me some water for my son].” El Negro begins to touch her face, and Jimena pulls away, telling him to leave her alone. El Negro says, “Que no querías agua para tu pinché chamaco? Pues el precio lo tienes que pagar tu no tu esposo [I thought you wanted water for your damned son. *You* have to pay the price, not your husband].” El Negro pulls Jimena away with the gun to her head and sexually assaults her in exchange for the water.

Immigration scholar Olivia Marrujo explains that sexual assault has become a fact of life for many migrant women (31). Marrujo’s research estimates that “[B]etween 80 and 90 percent of migrant women have suffered sexual violence, [and] rape has become so prevalent that, in the words of one regional director of the UN development fund, some women consider it ‘the price you pay for crossing the border’” (31). Like many migrant women, Jimena is sexually assaulted by El Negro as the “price to pay” for the water for her newborn son. Sexual violence towards migrant women affects them physically, emotionally, and psychically (Marrujo 33). This sexual violence, as described by Marrujo, “refers to an act that is physical or psychological in nature—a sexual assault as well as a threat of sexual assault, for example—aimed at the sexuality of a woman migrant, at attacking her physical, emotional, and psychic integrity” (33). By attacking their physical, emotional, and psychic integrity, women are vulnerable to short and long-term psychological consequences. Distress can occur immediately after the attack in various ways: the survivor may feel anxiety, fear, confusion, shock, and withdrawal. Jimena exemplifies fear, anxiety, and withdrawal after her assault. Jimena is fearful of the smugglers, anxious about the remaining journey across the desert, and withdraws herself from the rest of the group after undergoing another traumatic experience.

The woman who grabbed Jimena's baby weeps behind a cactus, feeding the baby and listening to Jimena's screams. It is important to note that Ramona, the other migrant woman in the group, is not completely aware of what is occurring; she is gravely ill as a result of her diabetes and is lying down, comforting her kids. The fear becomes evident through the body language and facial expressions of the unnamed migrant woman comforting the baby. The camera cuts to a medium long shot of the migrant woman, weeping and secluding herself beneath the cactus seeking comfort in the baby. By nourishing and protecting Jimena's baby, this provides the only self-governing that is readily available to the unnamed migrant. She, along with the other migrants, have no personal autonomy within the group. The woman is trembling anxiously, her arms twitching while she feeds the baby. She is sweating and her eyes are closed, taking in dirt and tears, suggesting that aside from being dehydrated, she is afraid. The camera cuts to various shots of the other migrants sharing water, and while there is no dialogue to depict their fear, their faces, all sweaty and red, tremble beneath dried up trees, still traumatized by the idea of their impending demise and the power that El Negro possesses. They are not able to express themselves through dialogue. They are traumatized by the missing experience of death and El Negro, and instead of expressing themselves through words, they exhibit their trauma through body language.

The shot cuts to the scene of the migrants continuing their journey through the desert and suddenly Jimena begins to scream. Jimena's baby is not breathing and passes away due to lack of food and dehydration. The camera cuts to a long shot of Jimena screaming, crying, and comforting her deceased baby. Jimena runs to El Negro and says, "Malditos! Ustedes tienen la culpa! Por su culpa se murió mi bebé porque ustedes nos

engañaron. Mal nacidos! Animales! Perros! [Damn you all! It is all your fault. Because of you, my baby died because you lied to us. Bastards! Animals! Dogs!].” These migrants were lied to. What was supposed to be a one-day journey turned into several days, and they were not prepared to endure this trip that long. The minimal amount of food and water as well as the climate of the desert contributed to the death of Jimena’s baby. Jimena begins to spiral out of control and the other migrants comfort her to try and ease her pain. Jimena undergoes the trauma of sexual violence as well as the traumatic experience of losing her newborn son.

Harriet Lefley and colleagues explore the psychological consequences of sexual trauma regarding understudied communities and conclude that Latina rape survivors experienced more psychological distress compared to non-Latinas (Lefley et al. 627). Psychological distress is caused by the assault itself and other harmful life experiences experienced by the survivor. For Mexicanas crossing the border, the entire journey affects their psychological health one way or another; the climate of the desert, sexual violence, and the thought of death are the major contributions of trauma to many migrant women crossing the border. Unfortunately, when in the desert following a smuggler, these women have little to no personal control regarding what happens to them, and as traumatized migrants, “[M]any traumatized people are involved in ongoing traumatic situations, in which they seem to have little or no personal control over what happens to them” (Van Der Kolk et al. 420). The migrant women are fearful of El Negro and have no control over his actions. All they can do is hope and pray that that they make it out of the desert alive.

## **El Negro as Death and Trouble**

El Negro is the main human antagonist in the film who provokes trauma. Because of him, Don Rafael and the unnamed migrant die and Jimena undergoes sexual assault. The fear that El Negro invokes is undoubtedly traumatizing and is a common quality that all smugglers possess, but this fear and trauma are characteristics tied with his name. El Negro's literal translation is "The Black man," but, more accurately, Spanish speakers use this nickname to describe a dark-skinned man—no matter if he is considered racially "Black." As a group that still upholds discriminatory ideals introduced through European colonization, Mexican culture continues to be racist against Black people through the erasure of Afro-mexicanos as well as the perpetuation of harmful stereotypes about Black people. Colorism is also another issue that is prevalent amongst Mexicans and Mexican Americans, hence the nicknames, "Negro/a," "Prieto/a," "Moreno/a." These nicknames are given to people with darker skin and as shown in *Siete soles*, actors with darker skin tones are cast as villains and thus perpetuate the idea that Black people are bad, evil, and cruel. El Negro is a dark-skinned Mexican coyote smuggling the Mexican migrants across the border with the help of El Gavilan. He ridicules, abuses, assaults, and even kills the migrants into fearing him. This underscores the phrase of "bad is black" as a phrase that assumes unethical acts are being committed by people with darker skin tones (Alter et al. 1653).

The film extends this racist stereotype by suggesting a connection between El Negro and death, trouble, and destruction. El Negro causes trouble that traumatizes the migrants and often leads to death. Every migrant in the group is traumatized except El Negro. He is the leader of the group and contributes to the trauma experienced by the



migrants—depicting how the migrants are traumatized due to the missing experience of death, but in a sense, El Negro is death for them. The fear that El Negro invokes, along with the power that he possesses, represents his character as the embodiment of death. Because of him, many of the migrants have been killed, abused, and assaulted, thus aiding him as a salient of death itself. El Negro establishes dominance over the group and this establishment of power traumatizes some of the migrants.

### **The Destabilization of the Migrant's American Dream**

Towards the end of the film, the migrants are seen resting to try and gain some strength to continue their journey. The camera cuts to Ramona praying with a rosary in her hands. While there is no dialogue to indicate what Ramona is praying about, viewers can assume she is praying for a successful journey across the border. As Ramona's health depletes throughout the journey, she is unable to provide the protection that her two children need. The future that Ramona told Amanda and Chico about is no longer attainable. In the film, Ramona discusses why she wants to go to the United States with her mamá and says, "Por fin vamos estar todos juntos... Ya esperaba seis años desde Miguel se fue para el Norte. Para que quiere que espere más? Aquí no hoy nada para hacer. Miren cómo vivimos. No tenemos nada... No es justo que crezcan sin su padre [At least we will all be together... I had already waited six years since Miguel left to the United States. Why do you want me to wait any longer to leave? There is nothing to do here. Look at how we live. We have nothing... It's not right that (Amanda and Chico) grow up without their father]." Ramona's American Dream consists of better living conditions, reuniting their family, and an overall better life for herself and her children. In

order to attain her dream for herself and her family, Ramona must survive the journey across the desert.

Early in the film, viewers learn that Ramona is diabetic. Ramona needs to take a pill daily that helps control her diabetes, but unfortunately, she leaves her prescription back home. As the days pass by, Ramona becomes very weak and ill and is unable to endure the journey. El Negro carries Ramona for quite some time until El Gavilan disarms him and makes him leave her alone in the desert with her two children, Amanda and Chicho. They watch as their mother dies and take in her last words. The shot cuts to a medium close up of Ramona, dried lips, dirt covering her red face, the sound effects mimicking the sound of her breathing, and her final words are, “Perdoname, perdoname, perdoname [Forgive me, forgive me, forgive me].” Ramona repeatedly asks for forgiveness from Amanda and Chico before dying. Ramona promises them a better life in the United States where they would be reunited with their father. Ramona’s American Dream is no longer attainable due to her death, along with her promise of making it safely to Chicago, Illinois. Amanda and Chico must now travel across the desert alone, hoping that by some miracle, they make it out alive. The sound mimicking her breathing ends and Ramona dies with her children holding her hands. They take in their mother’s final words and are thus left alone, stranded in the desert.

Amanda and Chico decide to continue on with their journey to El Norte by themselves. Chico, approximately eight years old, is later bitten by a scorpion and dies. Amanda, approximately six years old, now has no one accompanying her in the desert and mourns the loss of both her mother and brother. She loses those closest to her, and “[f]or young children, the family is usually a very effective source of protection against

traumatization, and most children are amazingly resilient as long as they have caregivers who are emotionally and physically available” (Van Der Kolk et al. 432). The family bond needed to protect against traumatization is destroyed. Amanda is left traumatized by the death of not only Ramona and Chico, but of the other horrible atrocities she witnessed within the group. Sexual assault, death, and abandonment all contribute to her trauma. Further, “since the interpersonal aspects of [trauma] such as mistrust, betrayal, dependency, love, and hate, tend to be replayed [throughout their journey],” Amanda’s life will forever be altered by these traumatic experiences (Van Der Kolk et al. 420). Like Amanda in *Siete soles*, children who cross the border are also at high risk of experiencing trauma. Children are keen in noticing any shift in behavior of their family members and tend to ask questions regarding it. Much like in the film, as it progresses, Ramona attempts to hide her declining health from Amanda and Chico by saying “Estoy bien chiquitos. No se preocupen. [I’m fine, little ones. Don’t worry.]” They continuously ask their mamá, “Mami, estas bien? Que tienes? [Mom, are you okay? What’s wrong?].” Not only can the viewers notice the difference in Ramona as the film progresses, but so can Amanda and Chico. They notice the difference in her physical appearance and emotions and continuously question her health. While Amanda and Chico are right to worry about their mother, Amanda is the sole survivor out of the three and must accustom herself to a new life. Later in the film, El Negro goes back to the desert to try and save Ramona, Amanda, and Chico, but only finds Amanda. El Negro rescues Amanda and takes her to Chicago, Illinois, to reunite with her papá. While the dreams her mamá envisioned for her are not attainable, Amanda is free to construct her own.

The voyage for the remaining four migrants and the two coyotes finally comes to an end. As promised, they are picked up by a car in the night and are taken to a safehouse somewhere in Phoenix, Arizona. El Negro escapes from the safehouse and calls the police notifying them of the other migrants hiding in the safehouse. The scene cuts to a long shot of all the migrants inside the house crying. They are being deported back to Mexico. The hard, treacherous, and traumatic journey that these migrants went through was all for nothing. They lose their hope. Their dreams are no longer attainable now that they have been captured. Their traumatic experiences will forever shape them for the rest of their lives. This film documents the dangerous journey that migrants take when crossing the border. Migrants continue to face these issues and traumatic experiences every single day.

### **The Construction of Traumatized Identities Emerge**

Mexican parents and children cross the border every day to make a better life for themselves. In order to better their life, they must make the arduous journey into the desert, endure the trauma, and try to forget about these obstacles once they arrive at their destination in the United States. However, the symptomology of trauma and its associated symptoms such as anxiety and depression regarding behavior and identity aid in the construction of Mexicana/o/xs' new identity in the United States. Their new identity is partly founded on the constraints of the psychological and social effects of trauma. This identity follows them throughout their entire life. Further, as these migrants adjust to their new life in the United States, they continue to be exposed to the risk of trauma due to feeling threatened and powerless due to racial-ethnic discrimination (Perreira and Ornelas

4). This increases the risk of poor physical and emotional outcomes thus traumatizing them, again.

Because they oftentimes travel across the border with their parents, children must also adjust to their new lives in the United States. Once they settle into their destination, migrant children are vulnerable to the victimization of other children their age for numerous reasons: the main one being the difference in language (Toppelberg and Collins 2010). Children are very blunt and judgmental due to their cognitive immaturity, so their English-speaking counterparts might look at them differently and begin asking questions as to why they only speak Spanish instead of English (Bialystok 3-4). This leads to the migrant children feeling “different” than everyone else and can lead to mental health problems (Perreira and Ornelas 5). This, along with their already traumatized identity from their childhood and crossing the border, can add additional hardships and increase the likelihood of experiencing trauma.

It is important to recognize that migrants indeed share their stories of these traumatic experiences with family, friends, and acquaintances. It is pertinent that many migrants share the same traumatic stories of being assaulted, violence, and death. As they construct their own version of the American Dream and then birth families, Mexicanos share their life experiences with their children. “Cuando yo era niña/o, [When I was a girl/boy],” is the start to many Mexican parents’ stories when discussing their life in Mexico, and oftentimes discuss their journey across the border. These vivid stories help to craft traumatic lineages. It is at the heart of understanding their trauma that we, as Mexican Americans, can begin to understand our traumatic lineage. All the hardships that our parents experienced on their journey to the United States shape and affect us as

Mexican Americans. As we hear their stories, we become aware of such atrocities that occurred throughout their lifetime. The retelling of these traumatic stories is what shapes our identity. Their experiences throughout their life before and after arriving in the United States is traumatic, thus creating intergenerational trauma. This lineage of intergenerational trauma is embodied within Mexican-American children and can be traced back to the creation of Mexican-Americans in the 1840s, a period that coincided with the Golden Age of children's literature.

### III. BORDER CONSCIOUSNESS AFFECTING A LIMINAL IDENTITY IN “EL RATON VAQUERO,” “A MÉXICO,” AND “MÉXICO, LA ILUSIÓN DE CONTINENTE”

The last half of the nineteenth and early twentieth century is referred to as the Golden Age of children’s literature, a formative period in children’s literature in the United States and Britain. This period gave rise to many canonical and classic children’s books such as *Alice in Wonderland*, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, *Treasure Island*, *A Little Princess*, *Peter Pan*, and many other notable works. The authors of these classic children’s books “moved away from older, extremely didactic styles [of] writing [and] instead [focused on] immersive, fantastic, and entertaining narratives” (Echterling 112). Children’s books throughout the Golden Age covered themes that included the loss of childhood innocence, death, coming of age, greed, family, society’s hypocrisy, and freedom. While children’s books work to impart these themes, they also work hand-in-hand in denying representation for children of color. Marilyn Joshua poses two important questions in regard to representation: “If children of color never or rarely see themselves in literature, will they feel devalued? If Euro-American children see themselves in literature without seeing children of color, will they develop negative attitudes about others who are not the same ethnicity and do not outwardly look like them?” (125-126). The majority of works produced throughout the Golden Age had only White children as the main characters. However, these White children’s experiences did not represent all children’s realities in the United States during this time period.

In this chapter, I respond to Joshua’s questions about the value of representation. However, because children’s books during the Golden Age did not focus on issues

pertinent to Mexican-American children, I focus on works produced by Francisco Gabilondo Soler (Mexican) and Americo Paredes (Mexican-American), who discuss Mexican-American children's experiences through song and poetry, respectively, during the Golden Age. An analysis of these narrativized children's experiences reveals the ways in which a border identity develops and a lineage of intergenerational trauma transpires, as the authors' cultural productions intertwine and weave together the daily traumas such children endure.

### **The Intolerance of Mexican-American Culture throughout the Golden Age**

Racial discrimination has become an integral part of the Mexican Americans' experiences in the United States. The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo ended the U.S.-Mexico War in 1848 and ceded fifty-five percent of Mexican territory to the United States, thus making Mexican citizens, who resided in previously Mexican territory, Mexican-American citizens. Aside from the difference in culture, these new Mexican-American citizens encountered difficulty in assimilating into the English language spoken by White Anglos (MacDonald). Mexican-American citizens were granted "the right to their property, language, and culture" by the Treaty, but these guarantees were soon decimated by state agencies. Victoria-María MacDonald, a historian specializing in education regarding Latinos, explains the power of these agencies and their effects on Mexican-American children's education:

Politically, socially, and economically the status of elite Californios, Tejanos, and Hispanos eroded during this period, affecting the ability of former Mexican citizens to shape and maintain a culturally and linguistically compatible form of public schooling for their children. (MacDonald)



The development of “Mexican schools” emerged in the 1880s due to “racial discrimination, ideological differences, and political tensions based on conflicts of heterogenous values and differential power relations” experienced by Mexican Americans from their counterparts (Gonzalez 11-20). Texas began segregating all public schools, while Arizona and New Mexico allowed local districts to segregate elementary schools (MacDonald). Due to segregation, policies that excluded Mexican culture, community, and language were put into place. The promotion of Anglo heritage over Mexican heritage was evident throughout the United States, and this further cemented an intolerance for non-Anglo cultures.

Mexican-American children were forced to learn English, and due to the erasure of Mexican heritage from the curriculum, there were no children’s books that validated their experiences as Mexican-American children (MacDonald). Such segregation in schools coincided with the Golden Age of children’s literature in the United States and Britain. During this significantly developmental period in their lives, White children were able to read and enjoy these books, and Spanish-language-only Mexican-American children were not because the books were written in English. The dominant literature throughout this time period in the United States was not written by Mexican or Mexican-American authors and was not representative of the language-minority children in the United States. Children’s literature published throughout the Golden Age did not accurately depict Mexican-American children’s lives as the stories’ themes—including childhood innocence, coming of age, and greed—were not representative issues in the lives of most Mexican-American children.

Children's literature is a method by which children learn what is happening in the world, in their community, and in their own families (Crippen). Children are able to associate themselves with characters, places, and problems in literature on a personal level. By being able to relate to the literature, these children also gain the opportunity to become familiar with reading and learning. These opportunities of representation within literature are not extended to Mexican-American children. Being able to acknowledge one's own culture and history through literature allows one to value oneself, which is vital for children. Children's literature is a crucial resource in being able to cultivate a child's progress from basic literacy to a level of critical and cultural literacy necessary for effective adult life (Hollindale 18). However, racial discrimination and language prejudice prevented Mexican-American children from accessing the type of literature that allowed them to understand their position in the world. Perhaps because they did not have access to such children's literature, it is likely that Mexican-American children of the Golden Age learned about their family's hardships and obstacles within the United States through only daily observations as they became accustomed to their non-Mexican counterparts' customs and traditions. Unlike their Anglo counterparts, Mexican-American children could not rely on children's literature to help them make sense of their world. In this way, the lack of representation in children's literature may have contributed to their loss of identity.

While there is a lack of representation of Mexican-American children in children's literature during the Golden Age, there were indeed artists who produced works for Mexican-American youth during this time. In the later part of the Golden Age, artists such as Francisco Gabilondo Soler (also known as Cri-Cri) and Américo Paredes

produced work that responded to Mexican-American social and political issues, including Mexican-Americans' sense of liminality, which allowed an audience of Mexican/Mexican-American children and adolescents to connect to their communities, traditions, and experiences from Mexican/Mexican-American perspectives.

### **“A Struggle of Flesh, A Struggle of Borders, An Inner War” Within Mestiza**

#### **Consciousness**

Gloria Anzaldúa, a popular Chicana feminist, describes the type of consciousness that a person who is trapped in between cultures develops. She refers to this person as a “new mestiza” in *Borderlands/La Frontera*. She writes,

The new *mestiza* copes by developing a tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguity. She learns to be an Indian in Mexican culture, to be Mexican from an Anglo point of view. She learns to juggle cultures. She has a plural personality, she operates in a pluralistic mode—nothing is thrust out, the good the bad and the ugly, nothing rejected, nothing abandoned. Not only does she sustain contradictions, she turns the ambivalence into something else. (101)

It is pivotal in understanding that mestiza consciousness is “una conciencia de mujer [a consciousness of women]. It is a consciousness of the Borderlands” (99). Mestiza consciousness is a feminist of color consciousness, and Gabilondo’s and Paredes’s texts are not feminist. However, Anzaldúa’s conceptualization of a border consciousness overall is useful for understanding the identity struggles that Gabilondo and Paredes present. The border consciousness that is in la mestiza “undergoes a struggle of flesh, a struggle of borders, an inner war” (100). This inner war is to be torn between ways and embody contradictory identities. The new mythos of being able to integrate the identity of

not only an oppressor but also an oppressed identity provides the ability to navigate the multiple ways of existing. Mestiza consciousness creates new paradigms that break down the "subject-object duality" that "show[s] in the flesh and through the images in [their] work how duality is transcended" (Anzaldúa 102).

### **Who Is the Vermin?: Cri-Cri's Cowboy Mouse in "El Ratón Vaquero"**

Francisco Gabilondo Soler was born in 1907 in Oribaza, Veracruz, Mexico. When Gabilondo was about twenty-five years old, he began performing as a professional musician. Gabilondo's music around this time focused on humorous subjects that he constructed from his imagination. Gabilondo, so fond of the music he was producing, decided to enter the radio field during the Golden Age of Mexican Radio, which took place towards the end of the Golden Age of children's literature. The Golden Age of Radio began in the early 1920s and lasted through the 1950s. Families gathered around their radio at home to listen to their favorite programs. With the increase in his popularity due to the radio, Gabilondo composed children's music based on imaginative stories by Jules Verne and Hans Christian Andersen in addition to Aesop's Fables to perform live on the radio station.

Gabilondo, known by his stage name, Cri-Cri, sang many songs that validated the experiences to which Mexican-American children could relate. With the increase of popularity as Cri-Cri, Walt Disney himself wanted to purchase the rights to Cri-Cri's music and stories to share with the United States. Gabilondo denied their request due to his belief that the stories of Cri-Cri were only meant for Mexican children and people (Ford 190). Gabilondo later allowed a collaboration with Disney and that inspired Jiminy Cricket and *The Three Little Pigs*. Because of this collaboration, Cri-Cri's songs were

being heard not only in Mexico but in the United States, too. Mexican parents who migrated to the United States throughout this time were now able to share music from their homeland with their own children. In this section, I will argue that at least one of Cri-Cri's songs becomes especially significant for Mexican migrants and Mexican Americans living in between Mexican and U.S. American cultures. Cri-Cri's notoriously known song "El Ratón Vaquero" illustrates the sociopolitical issues that Mexican and Mexican-American families experience vis-à-vis White Americans such as race, inequality, and discrimination, along with their portrayal of masculinity.

"El ratón vaquero" is about a presumably White American cowboy mouse trapped in a Mexican jail. While Gabilondo does not explicitly name the anonymous speaker, scholars believe that the speaker is either Cri-Cri himself or a Mexican (Potapowicz 4). The speaker of Mexican descent likely comes from a lineage of racial inequality, discrimination, and trauma, especially during this time period. Gabilondo sings, "En la ratonera ha caído un ratón [There fell into a trap a mouse]." This lyric offers an image of Mexicans catching a mouse. At this point, Gabilondo has not provided details about the physical characteristics about the mouse, but we know that mice are considered pests or vermin. The next line describes the mouse: "Con sus dos pistolas y su traje de cowboy [with his two pistols and his cowboy outfit]." The description of two pistols suggests a stereotypical, hypermasculine image of someone who should be threatening, but the mouse is not. Gabilondo purposefully indicates that the mouse wears "su traje de cowboy" in order to underscore that his clothes are just an outfit, or a false front. The mouse is not a cowboy; his "traje" is a façade that hides who he truly is, which Gabilondo explains in the next lyric.

The singer surmises, “Ha de ser gringuito porque siempre habla inglés [He must be a little White American because he always speaks English].” This line is significant in that Gabilondo racializes the mouse. Mexican and Mexican-American listeners will no doubt understand the singer’s logic that correlates the English language with White Americans, especially as language is a source of connection with other Spanish speakers as well as disconnection with English-only speakers. As these lyrics unfold, we recognize that we now have a White American cowboy mouse caught in a trap for vermin. It is important to note that during this time period, White Texas Rangers were known to “catch” Mexicans to lynch them (Munoz Martinez). Within this context, Gabilondo offers an inverted image of Mexicans catching a White figure and thus inverts the power relations between White people and Mexicans. The dominant White culture of the time (and even today) characterizes Mexicans as vermin and pests, so the singer-songwriter reverses the stereotype, situating a White American as the pest in this song. In many Anglo cartoons, the mice were Mexican, but to negate those harmful portrayals, Gabilondo created this mixture of Speedy González and John Wayne as the White Cowboy Mouse. This negative portrayal of Mexicans through Speedy Gonzalez, for example, in mainstream U.S. media is harmful to Mexican-American children, who see figures who “look” like them and speak their home language portrayed as vermin, the unwanted, unwelcomed pests who must be exterminated.

Moreover, the phrases “su traje de cowboy” and “Ha de ser gringuito” link together to establish the semblance of a small (read: insignificant) and deceitful White man. That is, Gabilondo inverts the stereotype of Mexicans as “conniving” and White people as “honest” through these lines. As if these images were not enough for the

caricature, Gabilondo ends the first verse, singing, “A más de ser güerito y tener grandes los pies [In addition to being White and having big feet].” Gabilondo creates a caricature of White people, as big feet on small bodies can be attributed to clumsy and goofy clowns. The song suggests that the Cowboy Mouse wants to appear as threatening and hypermasculine, but the singer sees through him as a small and insignificant figure playing dress up. This inversion of the racist caricature enables the Mexican and Mexican-American child listener to recognize the absurdity of such images.

The mouse is infuriated because he is trapped and sings in English, “What the heck is this house for a manly Cowboy Mouse?” Gabilondo’s manipulation of language persistently ridicules the mouse. The characterization of the mouse’s speech suggests that the mouse is foul-mouthed as he uses “heck” in the context of a children’s song. Aside from being disrespectful and vulgar, the White-American mouse questions his new space and assumes that the jail is a house because—as a White American—he is used to being treated with dignity and respect, but it is the complete opposite. The house is a circus tent and the silly mouse is the main act. The mere fact that the mouse has to remind his captors that he is “manly” illustrates that his masculinity is all a show as suggested by his choice of clothes. The song, however, undermines his masculinity and makes him a fool.

In the next line, the mouse exclaims, “Hello, you! Let me out! And don’t catch me like a trout.” When referring to someone, usually a polite and respectful person will say, “Hello, sir/ma’am,” but the mouse says, “Hello, you” as if he is speaking to a servant instead of his captor. The mouse does not ask to be let go; he demands his freedom and thus displays his sense of superiority. He believes that because he is a White mouse dressed as a cowboy with blue eyes—the typical features of a White man—that he should

be let go. The White mouse sees himself as the superior race to Mexican captors and demands that they abide to his demands. Izabela Potapowicz writes, “Ese tipo de extranjero - más rico o más poderoso que el personaje local - aparece sin embargo limitado en su verdadera superioridad (física o moral) en relación con su contraparte Mexicana [This type of foreigner—richer or more powerful than the local characters—nevertheless appear limited in their true superiority (physical or moral) in relation to his Mexican counterpart]” (4). The White mouse has no power over the speaker keeping him in his cell. His physical appearance gives off the impression of a powerful White American cowboy, but it is just a pretense to obscure a powerless White figure who is a prisoner to Mexicans. Due to the belief that White people are superior to other races, it is to no surprise that the White mouse demands that his captors adhere to his command and release him.

The last two lines of this verse indicate, “con que sí, ya se ve que no estás a gusto ahí / Y aunque hables inglés, no te dejaré salir [Oh yes, it is clear that you are not happy there, and regardless of whether you speak English, I will not let you out].” The Mexican speaker in the song sees that the mouse is not comfortable, but the singer does not care. He especially does not care that the mouse speaks English. Because the mouse speaks English and demonstrates all physical features of a White man, he believes that he is superior to everyone around him and that they should subject themselves to him. The mouse demands to be “let out” and to not be “caught like a trout,” due to his alleged superiority. His whiteness situates him as not-pest. The phrase, “And don’t catch me like a trout,” is peculiar, and we must consider how a trout is caught. Trout are often caught using a fishing lure. This lure is a small minnow-type plug used to bait the trout.



Gabilondo does not provide the details surrounding the mouse's capture, so listeners are left wondering what enticed the mouse to fall under their control. Further, a mouse is vermin while a trout is not, further suggesting that the mouse has no idea he is a pest and cannot possibly fathom being White and a pest simultaneously.

In general, Mexican Americans view White people as the superior race due to decades of White supremacy instilled through mistreatment, discrimination, and violence, and Gabilondo's music works against that harmful ideology. Gabilondo/Cri-Cri educates children of Mexican descent through the lyrics of this song to understand that a person should not be showed favoritism because of the color of their skin, the language they speak, nor for their nationality. Gabilondo aims to dismantle the ideas of White supremacy and illustrates to children that violent confrontation is not necessary though the White mouse "[tira] dos balazos," or fires two shots. The shots do not evoke any sort of fear for the singer, and this prompts Mexican listeners to not think of themselves as any less than White Americans. Cri-Cri educates Mexican children through this music that enables them to think through much of the discrimination and trauma that Mexican Americans endure.

Border consciousness becomes evident in Gabilondo's "El Raton Vaquero." The song's narrator, who captures the mouse, is an oppressor, but he also belongs to an oppressed group. Through an inversion of power relations in "El Raton Vaquero," the oppressed is now the oppressor. The mouse—who insists on his superiority through his words—reminds the narrator that the narrator is indeed part of an oppressed group. In this way, Gabilondo offers Mexicans and/or Mexican Americans a way to think about their straddling of two cultures as oppressors (Spanish) and oppressed (Indigenous/Mexican).

## **A Mexican State of Mind: Soul in Paredes's Poetry**

A prominent figure in Mexican-American Studies named Américo Paredes was born in 1915 in Brownsville, Texas. Having lived his youth in a border town, Paredes became fascinated and intrigued with music in both English and Spanish, and later began writing poetry, playing guitar, and singing. As a folklorist, Paredes wrote poems discussing his experience in a border town as a Mexican American to convey the crossroads between cultural histories. As a musician, Paredes focused on the musical form of the corrido. The performances of corridos cultivated his ingenuity as a child and later became the main subject of his research as a scholar. Like Gabilondo, Paredes lived and documented part of his life throughout the time period that correlated with the Golden Age of children's literature. While Gabilondo articulated his messages about contemporary social and political issues through children's music, Paredes voiced his concerns through poetry as a Texas adolescent. Unlike Gabilondo, however, Paredes addresses issues of racism, discrimination, and inequality more directly through his descriptive poetry.

In 1937, Paredes published his first book, *Cantos de adolescencia: Songs of Youth (1932-1937)*, a volume of poetry that focuses on the cultural intersection of being both a Mexican and a U.S. American and documents five years of his life during his adolescence (at 17 years old) into adulthood (at 21 years old). The collection explores numerous themes: culture conflict, race and gender relations, and hybridity. Paredes illustrates the hybridity of being both Mexican and a U.S. American and living liminally in two worlds. In their introduction for *Cantos*, scholars and translators B.V. Olguín and Omar Vásquez Barbosa assert,

Even though Paredes knew *what* he wanted to write about at this formative period in his life—the turbulent history of the lower Rio Grande/Río Bravo borderlands and its people’s defiant and resilient longevity—he was not completely sure of which language and style to use and, moreover, what it all meant. (xxv)

Much of Paredes’s language is “innovative hybrid poetics and provocative counterhegemonic posture [that] revolve[s] around the conflicted spatial ontology of the border-lands Mexico-Texan” (Olguin and Barbosa xxv). Paredes’s poems create a lyrical narrative to convey the crossroads between cultural histories. In this section, I will analyze two poems, “A México” and “México, la ilusión del continente,” that are part of the first section of *Cantos*.<sup>2</sup> The speakers discuss their feelings of being alienated from both Mexico and U.S. American cultures. Anzaldúa describes the issues of a liminal identity in *Borderlands* and writes,

This voluntary (yet forced) alienation makes for psychological conflict, a kind of dual identity—we don’t identify with the Anglo-American cultural values and we don’t totally identify with the Mexican cultural values. We are synergy of two cultures with various degrees of Mexicanness or Angloness. (85)

---

<sup>2</sup> The bulk of Paredes’s book is broken into seven sections: “The Patriotic Lyric,” “Music,” “Nature,” “The Comedy of Love,” “The Tragedy of Love,” “In Memory,” and “The Rebellious Voice.” The prologue discusses Paredes’s transition stage from adolescent to adult. This section pays homage to “los años ciegos y desequilibrados de metamórfosis [the blind and unbalanced years of metamorphosis]” where “la primera pasión y la primera flama del amor patrio [the first flame of patriotic love]” developed (3). “Music” details the imagery of Mexico—its physical and spiritual characteristics—speaking to Paredes and traces the lineage of some Mexican Americans back to Spaniards and Africans. The other five sections describe Paredes’s exploration of the borderlands through love, prayer, pride, memory, and rebellion in this slumbering world.

The speakers of these two poems address what Anzaldúa identifies as a dual identity. I argue that these poems represent Paredes's continued search for a mode of expression for Mexican Americans and his depiction of Mexican Americans as liminal subjects.

A "mexicano de este lado" in "A México": "A México," or "To Mexico," is the first poem written by Paredes in a section of *Cantos*, which is titled, "The Patriotic Lyric." The poem's title indicates the speaker's addressee, Mexico. The speaker begins the first stanza by saying, "Yo te canté desde muy niño [I sang to you since very young]" (1). The speaker's usage of the first-person singular creates a one-sided conversation. The speaker has sung to a personified Mexico since he was a child but does not explicitly say what he sings. The next line reads, "amor por tu suelo muy joven senti [love for your land I felt as a child]" (2). The love for his land further accentuates that the "you" the speaker speaks of is a personified site. The speaker has sung to and continuously repeats that he has had this love for this land "desde muy niño [since I was a boy]" (1). The last two lines read, "mi primera poesía en nuestra lengua / fué, patria, para ti [my first poetry in our tongue / was for you, my homeland]" (3-4). "A México" is the first poem in *Cantos*, but the speaker is referring to other poetry written previously before the publication of *Cantos*. While the poem does not suggest any evidence for this claim, it is safe to assume that the speaker is referring to this poem as his first poem written in his tongue. This "lengua" that the speaker speaks of is the mother tongue of his homeland. Because the poem is originally written in Spanish, the Spanish is the "lengua" that the speaker refers to. The speaker's urge to connect with his motherland is influenced by his love. The speaker said that he has felt love for his homeland since a child and later in the poem, we learn that his love is from "tierra extraña [foreign lands]" (14). This love from the foreign

lands is the only way that the speaker is able to connect with his motherland, specifically through language as exemplified in the first stanza.

In the second stanza, the speaker begins analyzing the history of his homeland and says, “Yo te he visto por las páginas de historia / caída y angustiada – ¡no vencida! [I have seen you through pages of history / fallen and anguished—though not defeated!]” (5-6). While knowledge is accessible anywhere you seek it, the speaker suggests that he has viewed the history of his homeland through “páginas de historia,” or pages of history, which indicates that he has accessed this information via the written word. The written word is vital in understanding how people, place, and things are represented. The words that writers use hold much authority regarding the topic that they are discussing. For example, the speaker describes viewing Mexico as “caída y angustiada [fallen and anguished]” in pages of history, thus describing the language used in those pages as informative, yet this written information still holds hope (6). The language surrounding Mexico and its history was powerful enough to entice the speaker, who is now able to write of his experiences growing up regarding his homeland. The speaker learns the culture and history of his homeland through writing, but he also describes how Mexico has “fallen,” yet has “not [been] defeated” (6). The description of Mexico as “caída y angustiada [fallen and anguished]” suggests that a battle or war contributed to the country being fallen and anguished, but above all, the speaker’s homeland has not been defeated (6). Researching and learning about one’s homeland to begin establishing one’s identity can be rewarding, but for the speaker, it is both rewarding and harming. To describe Mexico as “caída y angustiada [fallen and anguished]” and reflecting on the “crimen y la gloria [crime and glory]” of its history is fruitful (6-7). Still, the harmful

realization of what your homeland has undergone can be very hard and for the speaker, any pain caused to Mexico is pain caused to him.

In the next few lines of this second stanza, the speaker evokes images of war, revolutions, battles, and even the corruption of politicians as some of the many tragic events that have occurred to Mexico. The speaker ends this stanza by describing Mexico's wounds: "Has pasado por el crimen y la gloria: / heroica, sacrosanta y fratricida [You have endured crimes and glory: / heroic, sacred, and fratricidal]" (7-8). Note Paredes's use of a colon to emphasize this list of words used to describe the "crimes and glory" that Mexico has experienced (7). The "crime and glory" is described as "heroic, sacred, and fratricidal" (7-8). Mexico is heroic and sacred, but Paredes does not explain how. Paredes leaves it to the readers to pick what parts of its history can be described as heroic and sacred, but out of the three words, fratricidal stands out. "Heroic" and "sacred" correlate with the glory the speaker mentions, while the crimes he discusses correspond with the word "fratricidal" (7-8). Therefore, some of the crimes Paredes writes about in this poem are due to internal divisions within the country, which led to the demise of his fellow Mexican brothers and sisters.

The third stanza begins with descriptive imagery of what has occurred in Mexico: "Te baña con tu sangre el insurrecto, / te vende el estadista por dinero [The insurgent bathes you in your own blood, / the politician sells you for money]" (9-10). A rebel bathes Mexico in their own blood. The imagery of bathing in one's blood and "Te baña con tu sangre [It bathes you in your blood]," further stresses the death of Mexican citizens in their own country (9). This ties back to the analysis of the word fratricidal and further supports my claim that some of these crimes Paredes writes about are due to

internal divisions within Mexico and has caused a bloodshed. The bloodshed is caused by politicians and their greed for money. “Te vende el estadista por dinero [The politician sells you for money]” describes the corruption of politicians, but the speaker does not say exactly what they are selling in return for money (10). They are either selling access to the government, or the rebels are using the politicians’ influence to their advantage. The last two lines of this stanza read, “Conozco bien, mi patria, tus defectos / y porque los conozco, yo te quiero [I know well your flaws, my homeland, / and because I know them, I love you]” (11-12). Earlier in the poem, the speaker states that he has seen Mexico through “páginas de historia [pages of history],” and in line 11, he knows the flaws of Mexico well (5). Due to learning Mexico’s history through pages, they are well-versed in its issues and history, both harmful and glorious. Nonetheless, regardless of the flaws within Mexico, the speaker still loves Mexico.

The last stanza acknowledges the nation’s flaws and the speaker no longer discusses its history. Instead, the speaker discusses his personal sentiment with Mexico: “Cuando sé que das un paso hacia delante / mi corazón en tierra extraña se engrandece; [When I know that you take a step forward / my heart grows in foreign lands;]” (13-14). The speaker learns of Mexico’s progress from afar and his heart grows in foreign lands, likely the United States. The last two lines of this stanza read, “y si tus hijos te hieren por la espalda, / como si a él le hirieran... se estremece [and if your children stab you in the back, / as if they hurt him... he trembles]” (15-16). The children that the speaker refers to are people of Mexican descent. If these children stab Mexico in the back, his heart will be hurt. Paredes switches to a third person narrative when saying “el [him],” leading the reader to question who is *him*. *Him* can be depicted as whoever the reader believes

correlates to the issues Paredes writes about in this poem. One can either put themselves in *his* shoes or find an individual that loves Mexico as much as the speaker does.

The speaker admires and loves Mexico from afar even though he is not Mexico's "hijo." Anzaldúa explores the relationship of being Mexican on both sides of the border in *Borderlands* and writes,

We distinguish between mexicanos del otro lado and mexicanos de este lado.

Deep in our hearts we believe that being Mexican has nothing to do with which country one lives in. Being Mexican is a state of soul—not one of mind, not one of citizenship. (84)

The speaker in this poem is a "mexicano de este lado" (Anzaldúa 84) due to him being in "tierra extraña" (Paredes 14). In this way, Paredes constructs the speaker's sense of liminality. The speaker is from neither here nor there. The speaker is constructing a basis of identity that is solidifying itself throughout the poem. Being Mexican, as Anzaldúa explains, is a state of soul. The speaker is not in Mexico, nor is he solely Mexican—he is Mexican American—and because of that, he is Mexican through his soul.

*The Amalgamation of Race Within the Soul in "México, la ilusión del continente"*: In "México, la ilusión del continente," Paredes further explores Mexican American's liminal identity. In the first stanza, the speaker begins describing their alienation from Mexico: "En tierra ajena me arrojó la vida / al sacarme del limbo de la Nada [Life has thrown me onto foreign land / to pull me from the limbo of Nothingness]" (1-2). This is a first-person narrative in which life has thrown the speaker onto foreign lands. The speaker does not explicitly define where these foreign lands are, but the next sentence states that they are being pulled from the limbo of nothingness. Limbo is an in-



between space, while nothingness is self-explanatory—emptiness, absence of life or existence. In between nothingness is nothing, but it is critical to depict between the two because nothing should not be confused with nonexistence. Nothing is the absence of an object in a specific place or time, while nothingness is a realm of nonexistence. We, as observers, conceptualize nothing within nothingness because we cannot observe a physical object or being in that realm, but that only holds true to *us*, again, as observers. Paredes capitalizes the N in “Nada,” or N in “Nothingness” emphasizing that this location, Nothingness, is a proper, specific place. Nothingness is a domain or dimension of nonexistence, so for the speaker, the foreign lands they reside in are Nothingness and they are being pulled from it.

The last two lines of this stanza continue to describe the speaker’s feelings of alienation: “¿Ajena digo? ¡Tierra enajenada! / que ha tiempo fuera de mi patria herida [Foreign I say? Land made foreign! / That it has been time away from my wounded homeland]” (3-4). The speaker questions if he is truly a stranger to their country. The speaker feels alienated as he is pulled from the limbo of nothingness. Nothingness is a realm of nonexistence and Paredes’s continued use of words such as “ajena” and “enajenada” further accentuates that the speaker feels isolated and is being pulled from nothingness. Their homeland, which I assert is Mexico due to the title of this poem, is hurting. While the speaker does not give an explanation as to why Mexico is hurting, it is important to note that the speaker is estranged and unknowing of everything that is occurring in his homeland due to being pulled from the limbo of nothingness.

The second stanza begins with a reflection of the speaker’s adolescence into adulthood: “Yo paso mis veinte años desgraciados / confuso en lo sajón y lo latino [I pass

my tragic twenty year youth / confused about (things) Anglo and Latino]” (5-6). The speaker is now an adult and explains that his twenty-year youth is tragic due to the confusion about things Latino and things Anglo. The “things” the speaker mentions are not defined in the second line, which leaves a window of opportunity for the reader to make their own interpretations. The last two lines of the stanza read, “mas, pronunciando el español divino / y con los ojos en el Sur calvados [still, pronouncing the divine Spanish / and with eyes fixed firmly South]” (7-8). The “things” the speaker discusses are followed by a line describing the divine language of Spanish. Cultural context helps us recognize the “things” of Anglos that the speaker questions include the English language, coinciding with the Anglo settlers’ identity. Regardless of being confused by Anglo and Latino things, the speaker still speaks Spanish, which he describes as divine. Spanish is divine in regard to English due to it being the oppressor’s language of the speaker’s people. The speaker speaks Spanish and has his eyes fixed firmly South. Knowing that this poem is about Mexico, it is known that the foreign lands that the speaker speaks of are the United States. Mexico is South of the United States, so due to this connection, the limbo of nothingness discussed in the first stanza can be depicted as the border between the Mexico and the United States. The speaker is stuck in between Mexico and the United States witnessing all the harm being done to their beloved Mexico.

The third stanza discusses the doubt that the speaker has had of his own race: “Viendo la huella que sangrienta traza / mi pueblo, que se arroja hacia el arcano [Looking at the bloody footprints that are left traced / my people, who rush towards the arcane,]” (9-10). The image of bloody footprints suggests an abundant amount of blood, which, in turn, indicates death. The speaker is discussing a war or internal conflict that led to death.

The speaker does not describe how the bloody footprints come to be but follows this line with describing their people who rush towards an arcane. The speaker's people rush towards something mysterious. The last two lines of the stanza read, "me ha llamado sin serlo mexicano / pues he dudado de mi propia raza [without being I have called myself Mexican / but I have doubted my own race]" (11-12). The speaker has called themselves Mexican but has doubted their raza. The term raza was used by Mexican philosopher José Vasconcelos in his essay "La raza cósmica [The cosmic race]" written in 1925. In this essay, Vasconcelos argues that there is a fifth race in America consisting of a cluster of all races in the world: Amerindians, Europeans, Africans, and Asians. This fifth race is to be the most sublime, hence the name, "La raza cósmica [The cosmic race]." Vasconcelos posits that this "raza cósmica [cosmic race]" will transcend the people of the Old World. The speaker calls himself Mexican even as he admits to not truly being Mexican (11-12). There are two ways to look at this line. The speaker does not consider himself a Mexican because he was not born or is not living in Mexico. This self-naming and affinity for Mexico ties in with Anzaldúa's argument that being Mexican is a state of soul. We might also consider how the speaker is not able to call themselves Mexican because they are an amalgamation of the four races in the world.

The fourth stanza begins with the speaker engulfed in confusion: "Perdido entre la duda y las querellas / he oído tu palabra palpitante [Lost in doubt and disdain / I have heard your palpitating word]" (13-14). The speaker is lost, confused, and feels unworthy. These emotions could be tied to doubting his own race and feeling unworthy to call himself a Mexican due to the previous stanza. Nonetheless, "your" palpitating word still engulfs. "Word" refers to the language and dialect of the "español divino [divine

Spanish]” discussed earlier in the second stanza. By the palpitating words, the rapid, strong, irregular dialect of Spanish is what the speaker is referring to when saying “your.” The next two lines states, “y del Infierno, como el mismo Dante / ¡he salido otra vez a las estrellas! [and from Hell, like Dante himself, / to the stars I have come out again!]” (15-16). The speaker compares himself to Dante in Dante Alighieri’s *The Divine Comedy*. Dante travels through Hell in Inferno, purifies his soul in Purgatory, and emerges to finally reach heaven in Paradise. In comparison to Dante, the speaker emerges from Hell “like Dante himself” and “I have come out to the stars again,” signifying the emergence of reaching the stars, or heaven, like Dante (15-16). The comparison of the speaker to Dante is significant in terms of the metamorphosis he has undergone. The beginning stage was being “lost in doubt and disdain” (13). The intermediate stage was by “hearing your palpitating words” and the final stage followed the “coming out to the stars again” (14, 16).

The fifth stanza describes the narrator soaring free to the stars like an eagle, while the sixth stanza poses the speaker as a heroic cactus that “crece entre las peñas del desierto [grows between desert bolder crevices]” (24). The seventh stanza begins by discussing the speaker’s search for guidance, inspiration, and direction. The first two lines read, “Mi alma que en tinieblas fué indecisa / espera una palabra que la aliente; [My soul once unsure in shadows / awaits for a word to inspire it;]” (25-26). The speaker’s soul was once unsure, but as the poem progresses, the speaker’s soul constructs itself as being Mexican. The speaker has spent “time away from his wounded homeland” and because of that, “he is confused about (things) Anglo and Latino” (4, 6). The speaker also reflected on their race, which at one point, “[dudo] de [su] propia raza,” but finally, like

Dante himself, the speaker “[volo] a las estrellas” (12, 20). While the soul has begun constructing itself in the shadows, it continuously yearns for a word to for inspiration. The speaker does not indicate a word or expression that will initiate the soul to leave behind the shadow. The last two lines of this stanza read, “quiere ser... ¡siquiera una serpiente / que hiera al presuntuoso que la pisa! [I want to be... at least a serpent / that wounds the arrogant who tramples!]” (27-28). The speaker wishes to be a serpent. Attributes of a serpent include flexibility, cold blooded, limbless, and possibly venomous. The speaker’s choice of being a snake is due to their aptitude to harm the “arrogant who tramples” (28). Those arrogant enough to trample over Mexico will be dealt with by the speaker, a serpent who slithers across looking for their prey. Once this word that the speaker is looking for is said, he will transform himself into a snake to harm those who presumptuous enough to trample Mexico.

The last stanza of this poem describes the speaker’s muse: “Será mi luz, la estrella que me guía [It will be my light, my guiding starshine,]” (29). A star will be guiding the speaker towards the light. The speaker does not describe where the star will guide him in this line, but in the next line, it states, “el águila, el nopal y la serpiente: [the eagle, the cactus and the serpent:]” (30). The eagle, cactus, and serpent are icons part of the flag of Mexico. Therefore, Mexico will be the speaker’s guiding star. The second line ends with a colon, giving emphasis to the final two lines of this poem: “¡México! ¡La ilusión del continente! / México! ¡La ilusión del alma mía! [Mexico! The illusion of the continent! / Mexico! The illusion of this soul of mine!]” (31-32). Mexico, la ilusión del continente. The “continent” is a social construct, geographically speaking. Abraham Fetin, a cultural

and biological anthropologist, describes the multiple social constructs of the human population and writes,

All the social constructs that interplay with human population genomic studies (race, ancestry, ethnicity, geography, and culture) are offspring of or tie back to a single social construct: the sense of personhood. Whether human population geneticists realize it or not, when they define populations, they are also delineating people within those populations. Population geneticists devise their populations out of the multiple closely related social constructs that all interplay with each other.

The delineation of these populations delineate culture. The word “continent” is more than just a physical definition. Continent carries on the culture of its population and that is what the speaker references. Mexicans are not just confined to Mexico, that is an illusion.

Mexicans are everywhere. Our roots stretch far more than the North American continent. The last line states that Mexico is also an illusion of the speaker’s soul. This can be tied back to the argument Anzaldúa makes about “being Mexican is a state of soul—not one of mind, not one of citizenship” (84). The speaker of the poem is in the United States and not Mexico. Although the speaker claims to be Mexican, it is an illusion of their soul. They embody all parts of Mexico, but being Mexican is a state of soul, not of the mind. Like the speakers in “A México” and “México, la ilusión del continente,” Mexican Americans living in the United States may similarly doubt their connection to ancestral lands due to harmful portrayals of Mexicans by their anti-Mexican counterparts. The liminal identity becomes torn for some time, but deep inside of all Mexican Americans, they “[carry] in their spirits, bodies, and hearts the trauma of

conquest and domination. [Mexican-Americans] also kept in their souls and psyches the connection to the ancestors of their past” (Flores 16).

### **The Continuous Struggle of Being In-Between Two Cultures**

The embodied trauma within the construction of identity in Paredes’ “A México” and “México, la ilusión del continente” is embodied within our flesh as Mexican Americans. That is to say, trauma and issues regarding identity is intergenerational. The amalgamation of language, culture, and politics from Mexico and the United States creates an identity that is both captive and free. We are being held captive from our indigenous roots all due to hatred and bigotry from anti-Indigenous people and systems. We are considered “free” due to the first amendment in the U.S. constitution, but due to racist xenophobes in the United States, the right to be vocal and exhibit our culture is portrayed negatively. Therefore, we are never truly free. We are only allowed to be free amongst other people of our culture, but even then, our own culture harms our identity. Anzaldúa writes, “Yet the struggle of identities continues, the struggle of borders is our reality still. One day the inner struggle will cease and a true integration [will] take place” (85). As Anzaldúa proclaims, we are a synergy of two cultures. Our inner struggles regarding our identity continues to be a problem. While I hope that true integration will indeed take place soon, the reality is that perhaps it will not occur in our lifetime. The issues discussed during the Golden Age in Gabilondo’s children’s music and Paredes’s adolescent poetry such as race, inequality, discrimination, masculinity, and the search for one’s identity, are issues that are still seen throughout contemporary children’s literature. The issues pertaining to Mexican Americans about 100 years ago are still occurring

today, but contemporary literature is more transparent about racism and exhibits it more frequently than it did in the Golden Age.



**IV. THEORIZING THE PERSONAL: THE WOUNDED SOUL AS A SITE OF  
TRAUMA IN FRIENDS FROM THE OTHER SIDE AND DEAR PRIMO: A  
LETTER TO MY COUSIN**

*‘¡Miren al mojadito, miren al mojadito!’ gritó su primo Teté.*

*‘Hey, mojado, ¿por qué no te vas pa’l otro lado  
de donde viniste?’ dijo otro muchacho.<sup>3</sup>*

*- Amigos del otro lado, Gloria Anzaldúa*

The issues that were prevalent for Mexican Americans throughout the Golden Age are issues that now appear in contemporary children’s literature. Like Gabilondo and Paredes highlighted, issues of racism and discrimination affected their psyches and soul, thus convoluting their liminal identity. Since 1848 and the end of the Golden Age in the 1940s, Mexican Americans have lived in the “in-between.” The feeling of alienation for Mexican Americans comes from their struggles of trying to be accepted by two cultures simultaneously. In *Black Widow’s Wardrobe*, Lucha Corpi compares a Mexican American to an abandoned child: “We [Mexican Americans] are like the abandoned children of divorced cultures. We are forever longing to be loved by an absent neglectful parent—Mexico—and also to be truly accepted by the other parent—the United States” (147-148). Embracing our Mexican heritage is seen as an impediment to other U.S. Americans, as it suggests to them that we are not willing to choose one “side” and assimilate. Yet, in trying to please our non-Mexican counterparts, we neglect Mexico. We neglect our mother culture due to centuries of racism and discrimination that ultimately

---

<sup>3</sup> Translation: ‘Look at the *mojadito*, look at the wetback!’ called out her cousin Teté. ‘Hey, man, why don’t you go back where you belong? We don’t want any more *mojados* here,’ said another boy.

lead to psychological distress. In this chapter, I explore children's picture books by Gloria Anzaldua and Duncan Tonatiuh, who illuminate the ways in which Mexican Americans' souls are split into fragments due to their collective experiences with trauma. Using Anzaldúa's theory of autohistoria-teoría as the basis for my argument, I posit that these authors explore their own torn souls through children's picture books.

Anzaldúa is one of the most widely read Chicanas today. Anzaldúa, a self-described "Chicana dyke-feminist, tejana patlache, poet, writer, and cultural theorist," describes her relationship of being in-between cultures in the borderlands through a mixture of history and personal narrative exhibited throughout her work. AnaLouise Keating defines Anzaldúa's theory of autohistoria-teoría in *The Gloria Anzaldúa Reader* and writes,

[Autohistoria-teoría is a] theory developed by Anzaldúa to describe a relational form of autobiographical writing that includes both life story and self-reflection on this storytelling process. Writers of autohistoria-teoría blend their cultural and personal biographies with memoir, history, storytelling, myth, and/or other forms of theorizing. By so doing, they create interwoven individual and collective identities... Through this lens, Anzaldúa and other autohistoria-teoristas expose the limitations in the existing paradigms and create new stories of healing, self-growth, cultural critique, and individual/collective transformation. (319)

People are able to travel to other realms of consciousness—the physical and nonphysical world—and connect with their spirits and ancestors. While the nonphysical world is impalpable, our expressions, feelings, and thoughts in that realm affect us in the physical

world. Kakali Bhattacharya, a qualitative research methodologist, describes her relationship with autohistoria-teoría and how it has shaped her writing:

What has attracted me to use autohistoria-teoría is that I can exceed the realms of this world, and bring in the world I have always known—a world of contemplation, mindfulness, and journeying into other realms... [Anzaldúa] shares being inspired by her muse, naguala, from another realm... she maps her wounds, trauma, and lived experiences through deep excavation. (199)

The wounds surrounding Mexican Americans are the racism and discrimination they have experienced ever since 1848. Those wounds—the trauma surrounding their soul—are intergenerational. Our soul is torn and split by not only our struggles, but by the struggles of our ancestors, and we imprint these narratives in our consciousness (Bhattacharya and Keating 345-346). The stories of the Mexican American authors I explore are intertwined and woven together to create cultural and personal biographies. Autohistoria-teoría interconnects identity, language, and trauma to theorize the personal, and by theorizing the personal, new stories of healing, self-growth, and transformation take place. We, as Mexican Americans, “[become] conscious of the fragmentations of [our] soul, for carrying individual and collective pain, and countering this by putting forward an agenda for healing, building capacity, generating critical insights, and modeling possibilities” (Bhattacharya 200).

Anzaldúa theorizes the personal through her bilingual children’s book, *Friends From the Other Side / Amigos del otro lado*, illustrated by Consuelo Méndez. In this way, she shapes the children’s book as an autohistoria. Autohistoria-teoría is a way for writers to blend cultural and personal stories through history, memoir, storytelling, myth, and

other ways for them to theorize the personal (Keating 319). *Amigos* offers Mexican-American children representation as well as a way to understand their sociopolitical conditions. Autohistoria-teoría brings together conceptualizations of identity, language, and trauma to theorize one's personal story. I am able to connect with my family lineage by exerting my mamá into this story. Anzaldúa relies upon flesh and blood experiences of Mexican Americans to illustrate their stories within literature. That is, the characters, issues, internal and external conflicts, all intertwine together into the experiences that resonate with Mexican-American children. In *Amigos*, we are introduced to a character named Prietita whose issues and struggles are particularly Mexican American conflicts. Prietita's biggest issue is coming to terms with another child named Joaquín who looks exactly like her yet is very different. Prietita is keen in noticing the differences early on such as language, clothing, and birthplace. While attempting to bridge the differences between them, Prietita is also conflicted with protecting Joaquín from bullies calling him a mojado [wetback]. She either could have bullied Joaquín like the other children or helped him. This is the biggest struggle for Mexican American children. To continue belittling other children for being "different," or to befriend them. We are more similar than different and that is what Anzaldúa demonstrates throughout *Amigos*.

### **The Convergence of Two Amigos in *Friends From the Other Side***

*Friends From the Other Side / Amigos del otro lado* is a bilingual children's picture book written by Gloria Anzaldúa and illustrated by Consuelo Méndez. This book was published in 1993 and is written in both English and Spanish. Anzaldúa begins the book by giving readers background information of what she witnessed growing up in South Texas near the Rio Grande river, which was viewing firsthand many women and

children crossing the Mexico-United States border to have a better life in the United States. Anzaldúa then begins telling the story of Prietita and Joaquín. In the illustration, Prietita is sitting on a branch of a thick mesquite tree, while Joaquín is pictured in front of the gate to her house trying to sell Prietita's family firewood. Prietita notices differences between her and Joaquin and asks, "Did you come from the other side? You know, from Mexico?" [4]. Aside from the difference in birthplace, Prietita questions his clothing: "Prietita wondered why he wore a long sleeve shirt when it was so hot that most boys went shirtless" [4]. Because of European colonization of the Americas and the African slave trade that took place throughout the continent, Mexicans' skin tones vary. Joaquín's skin is a tannish-brown color. Darker skinned Mexicans face internalized racism by other Mexicans and often get the nickname of negro/a, prieto/a, and moreno/a.<sup>4</sup> Anzaldúa discusses her relationship with colorism in "La Prieta," and writes, "Don't go out in the sun,' my mother would tell me when I wanted to play outside. 'If you get any darker, they'll mistake you for an Indian. And don't get dirt on your clothes. You don't want people to say you're a dirty Mexican'" (220). Joaquín is covered from head to toe—the only parts of him exposed to the sun are his face and hands—and he is the epitome of what Anzaldúa's mother did not want her to be: brown. Prietita's name translated to English is dark-skinned girl. Prietita also exhibits a tanned-brown skin color like Joaquín. Anzaldúa deliberately names this character Prietita as a way to reclaim the color. Anzaldúa identifies herself with this name as a way to signal her mestizo identity:

---

<sup>4</sup> Negro/a, prieto/a, and moreno/a is a nickname typically used for darker skinned Mexicans. The usage of these nicknames are not offensive.

Mexican American and Indian. Anzaldúa articulates herself as Prietita in *Interviews/Entrevistas* and writes,

In my own autobiographical writing sometimes the things are so painful to write about that I have to dislocate myself from myself. So I'll say, "This is happening to Prietita," and I'll use the third person. Once I get over the trauma of experiencing this thing I'm writing about and putting it in words, the pain is lessened so then I can say, "This was me. Yes, this happened to me." (223)

Prietita is Anzaldúa and this is a way for her to reclaim her own story (Millán 204).

Another difference that Prietita distinguishes between her and Joaquín is the usage of Spanish. Joaquín speaks a different type of Spanish than Prietita. Because Prietita is a Mexican American, her Spanish, as described by Anzaldúa in *Borderlands*, is a mixture of two languages, English and Spanish. Anzaldúa explains that Mexican Americans create their own language, "a language which they can connect their identity to, one capable of communicating the realities and values true to themselves—a language with terms that are neither español ni inglés, but both" (55). Anzaldúa then explains the eight languages,<sup>5</sup> we, as Mexican Americans, speak. Joaquín, being Mexican, speaks regional Spanish from his state in Mexico. His and Prietita's Spanish is different, but Prietita does not know that their Spanish is different due to the regional differences. Joaquín replies to Prietita's question regarding his home country, and Prietita begins examining him a bit more. In the illustration, Prietita crosses her arms and stares at

---

<sup>5</sup> In "How to Tame a Wild Tongue" in Anzaldúa's *Borderlands*, the eight languages Mexican-Americans speak are Standard English, working class and slang English, standard Spanish, standard Mexican Spanish, North Mexican Spanish dialect, Chicano Spanish (regional variations from Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and California), Tex-Mex, and Pachuco (caló).

Joaquín. Joaquín evidences embarrassment; his head faces down with his eyes staring at the animals on the ground, and his right hand clenches his left arm to avoid showing Prietita the boils on his arm [3]. Prietita considers taking Joaquín to a healer, but he sprints away from her with his head down.

Later that day, Prietita hears some neighborhood kids yelling. As she approaches the gate, she hears her cousin and another boy belittling Joaquín: “‘Look at the mojado,<sup>6</sup> look at the wetback!’ called out her cousin Teté. ‘Hey, man, why don’t you go back where you belong? We don’t want any more mojosados here,’ says another boy” [8]. Prietita, startled by the internalized oppression and discrimination as depicted in the illustration, is torn between choosing her old or new friends. Prietita’s “body [goes stiff]. She had known Teté and his friends all her life. Sometimes she even liked Teté, but now she was angry at him” [8]. The illustration surrounding this dialogue exhibits the three neighborhood kids pointing at Joaquín, while Joaquín, puzzled, is in front of a fence that has “U.S. Border” written on it. The children are pointing at Joaquín and the border, emphasizing that he should go back to Mexico. The most invigorating aspect of this illustration is that one of the neighborhood kids is wearing a shirt that says, “Pocho” [7]. Pocho, as I explain in chapter two, is slang for Mexican Americans who are neither Mexican nor American, who are in-between Mexican and American culture. Their identities remain convoluted, traumatized, and heavily influenced by their non-Mexican counterparts. These children are afraid that if they acknowledge their Mexican heritage,

---

<sup>6</sup> Mojado/wetback is a derogatory word used to describe illegal immigrants who have crossed a body of water to get from one shore of a country to another—crossing the Rio Grande river in the Mexico-United States border. As Anzaldúa puts it, “Many of them got wet while crossing the river, so some people on this side who didn’t like them called them “wetbacks” or “mojosados” (1).

they will be discriminated against like their ancestors. They choose to disregard their heritage and assimilate themselves into the White American culture, illustrating their hatred for Mexican migrants, as described through the dialogue and illustration. Prietita chooses Joaquín over her old friends and shields him from the neighborhood kids who attempt to throw rocks at him. In this illustration, one of the neighborhood kids wears a shirt that says, “Bully.” That is exactly what these neighborhood kids are—bullies.

Prietita and Joaquín reflect on what happened with the neighborhood kids, and she assures him that they will not bother him again. Prietita then walks Joaquín home where she meets Joaquín’s mamá. The illustration depicts a “tumbled shack with one wall missing” [14] with a sign that says, “La espada rota no se rinde nunca” [13]. This phrase translated to English means, “The broken sword never surrenders.” The broken sword can be depicted as Joaquín and his mamá due to “[having] to cross the river because the situation on the other side was very bad. [His mama] couldn’t find work and Joaquín was in rags” [16]. This analogy to a broken sword can depict their broken lives. Their lives are broken due to disconnection. Because Joaquín and his mamá have barely emigrated to the United States, they feel disconnected from the world around them. Joaquín is experiencing racism and discrimination from children, adding on to his disconnection from having a “normal” life like the children around him. Joaquín and his mamá migrated to the United States, endured the traumatic journey, left their homeland and family behind, and had to start a new life. Instead of continuing to struggle in Mexico, Joaquín and his mama decided that it was best for them to migrate to the United States. Like the families depicted in *Siete soles*, their American Dream is to live a better life. The “pride in their faces,” as said by Prietita, tells it all [13]. They have not surrendered themselves



to poverty. Instead, Joaquín and his mamá ventured across the border to better their life, thus exemplifying that the broken sword never surrenders.

The next few days go well for Prietita and Joaquín. They play, eat lunch together, and Prietita takes Joaquín to get his sores healed by the curandera in their neighborhood. As they are playing *lotería*, a woman begins screaming, “The Border Patrol’s coming! La migra!” Prietita and Joaquín run to find his mother, then run to the curandera’s house because “the herb woman will know what to do,” says Prietita [20]. As they run to the shack, “Prietita [takes Joaquín’s] hand and [feels] it tremble,” reminding readers of the fear that these border patrol agents instill undocumented migrants [21]. These Border Patrol agents (now known as U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents) have the ability of capturing them and sending them back to their country, forcing them to leave all that they have acquired and accomplished here in the United States. Prietita holds Joaquín’s trembling hand followed by his mother right behind him. The landscape shows a rundown shack on the left and houses on the right. No one is in sight except the animals [22].

They all manage to make it inside the curandera’s home safely and she hides them behind her bed. The illustration shows Joaquín and his mamá hiding behind the curandera’s bed, followed by a look inside the curandera’s room. On the walls, there are pictures of La Virgen de Guadalupe, San Jose El Santo, La Virgen de San Juan de los Lagos, and El Santo Niño. As in Joaquín’s mamá’s home, these religious figures serve as evidence of the inhabitant’s Catholic faith. A curandera is a healer that administers remedies for mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual illnesses. While some healers rely on herbs, others rely on religious figures pertinent to the Catholic faith. Their Catholic

faith, prayers, and holy water are used alongside their indigenous religious elements. Curanderismo syncretizes indigenous spirituality and Catholicism. From the illustration, this curandera draws upon the Catholic faith to help those who seek healing.

Prietita and the curandera watch la migra drive up the street. The van door opens and out comes “the Chicano migra” [25]. He asks, ““Does anyone know of any illegals living in this area?”” [25]. A woman begins pointing at the gringo (White) side of town and says, ““Yes, I saw some over there”” [25]. The migra laughs and continues down the street, not detaining anyone. This depiction of the border agents is especially telling in that it positions the characters as U.S. citizens whose families have been on U.S. land for many generations. For Mexicans and Mexican Americans who are undocumented or whose parents or loved ones are undocumented, the term itself, la migra, evokes similar feelings as the term La Llorona, the ghost of the Weeping Woman who—after drowning her own children—is said to wander waterfronts in search of children to claim as her own.<sup>7</sup> Like the story of La Llorona, which is used to instill fear in children, the term “La migra” is used to frighten undocumented immigrants. Alfredo Del Real, a journalist for *LAist*, describes his relationship in a personal essay regarding La Migra and says, “These are the things I heard in my neighborhood and on the streets as I played. ‘Watch out for *La Migra*, they’re going to get you.’ Even though I was born here, I was afraid. The fear was always there.” The fear that la migra invokes is traumatizing for many migrants. Caruth emphasizes that “the act of survival, as the experience of trauma, is the repeated confrontation with the necessity and impossibility of grasping the threat to one’s own

---

<sup>7</sup> La Llorona, or The Weeping Woman, is folklore that refers to a ghost roaming waterfront areas in search of her children that she drowned.

life” (62). Migrants that emigrated to the United States’ sole purpose is to have a better life and survive. The migrants attempt to survive from the endless amount of racism, discrimination, prejudice, and many other things, but a huge part of that survival is to not be caught by ICE. The migrants are survivors of the trauma they endured of crossing the border, but now “the act of survival” here in the United States must occur, too. The migrants know of the threat ICE is to their life. The trauma is centered not on the fear itself but their survival to avoid ICE and not leave everything they have built in the United States behind.

As a Mexican-American child born to two undocumented immigrants, I was afraid of La Migra, too. They have the ability to ruin your life and take those most dear to you. La Migra took my own mother from me when I was younger, so every time I hear the phrase “La migra,” fear begins to flow all throughout my body. Del Real continues to explain his relationship with La Migra and exclaims,

Still, I will be very careful if someone knocks on my door. Immigrant rights activists and attorneys are instructing families not to open their doors if ICE [U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, or la migra] comes to visit. This is what fear perpetuates. Will the fear ever go away? At some point, we have to answer the door.

To answer Del Real’s question, no, the fear will never go away. Continuous xenophobia and anti-immigrant attitudes will never end. The reality is that we live in anti-immigrant times here in the United States. The continuous usage of the imperative, “Come the right way, it is not that hard” emphasizes the speakers’ privilege. Due to their privilege, they will never realize how long the process takes to become a citizen. This process can take

up to twenty or more years for many undocumented immigrants. Violations of human rights, separation of families, and mistreatment of undocumented immigrants are some of many tactics that La Migra uses to instill fear in undocumented immigrants. Anzaldúa addresses a complicated issue in a relevant way for Mexican-American children to understand, but does not demonstrate it effectively for undocumented children and/or children of undocumented families.

After La Migra leaves their neighborhood, the curandera, Prietita, Joaquín, and his mom drink peppermint tea to recover from their fright. The tea that they drink is a significant demonstration of what the curandera is able to do: heal their fright and get them back to normal. They are all sitting at a table with various herbs are hung up on the wall [27-28]. The curandera heals people not only with religion, but by relying upon nature's herbs. The story ends with the curandera telling Prietita that she is going to show her how to become a healer just like her because ““It's time for [her] to learn. [She] is ready now”” [29]. The illustration shows Prietita, Joaquín, and his mamá in a beautiful field, picking herbs. Throughout the book, however, Prietita already functions as a curandera in various ways; she becomes friends with Joaquín, takes him to get his boils healed, saves him from Teté and the other two bullies, and leads Joaquín and his mamá away from La Migra. While she does not cure Joaquín using any physical remedies, her friendship heals Joaquín mentally, physically, and emotionally. At the beginning of the book, Joaquín is very shy and afraid of the other children, but Prietita protects and shields him from all those who could cause him harm. His shift as a character is noted and it is because of Prietita. This shift is demonstrated through the illustrations. At the beginning of the book, Joaquín is seen with his head faced down, eyes staring at the ground, and his

right hand clenching his left arm to avoid showing Prietita the boils on his arm. As the story progresses, Joaquín's body language changes. He no longer secludes himself, nor does he hide from Prietita. His eyes now focus on Prietita, his head tilts up to make eye-contact with her, and his boils have been healed by la curandera. Joaquín, overall, is happier than he was in the beginning with the help of Prietita's friendship.

### **The Assimilation to U.S. American Culture and the Internalized Hatred It Entails**

In the previous chapter, I explained how Gabilondo and Paredes demonstrate Anglo or non-Mexican discrimination against and hatred for Mexicans. In *Amigos*, this discrimination and hatred for Mexicans comes from Mexican Americans. We must recognize that Mexican Americans constructed their collective identity in response to their non-Mexican, Anglo counterparts. That is, in an effort to assimilate into Anglo-American culture, they internalized the racism and hatred of their cultural roots. This translates to Mexican Americans exemplifying their hatred for undocumented Mexican immigrants. Their identities become Anglicized and as generations pass by, they lose the unique elements that tie them to their culture and heritage. Assimilated Mexican Americans no longer seek pride in their culture, and in an attempt to gain approval from White Americans, they disempower people who remind them of their cultural roots.

Much like the Mexican-American border agent in *Amigos*, assimilated Mexican Americans disempower undocumented Mexicans and force them back to their country. Mexicanos would look down upon the border agent due to his assistance in deporting his community. David Cortez, an opinion contributor for *USA Today*, questions why Mexican Americans work for agencies that deport their communities:

How do [Mexican Americans] do this to their own people, I asked. Is it self-hatred? A denial of ethnic identity? Or do they think that being party to the state's exclusionary machinery cements, in a way, their own individual claims to belonging as Americans—to whiteness?

Cortez suggests that Mexican Americans work for these agencies out of economic self-interest. Border patrol agents had no chance but to “push aside feelings of empathy if [they] hoped to pay [their] own bills.” Brittny Mejia, a staff writer for *The Los Angeles Times*, interviews a border patrol agent named Antonio. Antonio urges his friends to join the Border Patrol, but they say they cannot work for an organization that arrests their own people. Antonio's response to his friends is, “I'm protecting my people. My people are here.” While Antonio's grandparents and other relatives are from Mexico, he emphasizes that his people are those in the United States and not elsewhere. Antonio's disregards his family's homeland and internalizes xenophobia. How can Antonio, a Mexican-American man, disregard undocumented immigrants from Mexico when some of his family, his ancestors, and his lineage derive from Mexico? Border Patrol agents should recognize the inherent power that they possess against undocumented immigrants and the fear that they invoke. How much money is their humanity worth?

*Amigos* demonstrates that it is not only Mexican-American migra agents who internalize such hatred for Mexicans; Mexican-American children also display this internalization. The dominant feeling and attitude of most Mexican Americans living in-between is that they submerge themselves into thinking that they do not belong to Mexico, nor the United States. The feeling of alienation from both sides of the border creates psychic tension, an emotional strain brought on by inner conflict or anxiety.

Mexican Americans experience this psychic tension due to the construction of their liminal identity. In *Amigos*, Teté and the other two bullies are a prime example of this liminal identity. They are Mexican-American children face-to-face with a Mexican child. Instead of acknowledging the similarities between them, they point out the differences and begin to belittle him. Joaquín reminds Teté and the bullies of their Mexican ancestors as children, and they are conflicted internally on how to acknowledge him. Due to their cognitive immaturity, they view Joaquín as an outsider when Joaquín is an embodiment of their culture and ancestors. Because of their cruel mistreatment towards Joaquín, he begins to feel “different” than Teté and the others, leading to emotional distress. This feeling, along with the trauma that Joaquín and his mamá likely endured when crossing the border, adds additional hardship and compounds with their previous trauma.

Mexican-American children understand the division of liminal identities, but due to White supremacy, the Anglicized part of their identity prevails, and they belittle other Mexican children to align themselves with Whiteness. Teté and the other two bullies belittle Joaquín for being different than them. The only difference between them is their nationality. The illustrations do not explicitly show Teté and the other two children’s faces, but from what readers are able to see, they, as well as Joaquín, share similar features. They both have tannish-brown color and dark-colored hair. There are no physical characteristics that differentiate them from each other, so why does Teté still bully Joaquín?

Adults, including many parents, are main facilitators for internalized racism and oppression. Many Mexicans are notoriously known for being racists towards other people of color. Mexican parents, many of whom have already endured the trauma of their

migration here to the United States, also experience racial trauma and discrimination once they have begun assimilating themselves into the culture of the United States. Racism is a traumatic experience that many people of color experience every day of their lives. They are often denied resources due to their race and stereotyped as “dirty Mexicans,” criminals, and other negative identifiers; these statements and accusations cause psychological distress. They doubt their own race (as the speaker in Paredes’s “A México, la ilusión del continente” and question whether their culture and heritage are something of which to be proud. The parents of these children may no longer seek their culture for truth and validity, as they now view it as only a hindrance to their success in the United States. Their identities become Anglicized, and they construct their lives to avoid their culture entirely. This harmful ideology is then passed on to their Mexican-American kids, whom they want to protect from experiencing racism and discrimination firsthand. In turn, these children, like Tete, act on this internalized racism and harm others. Unlike the children in *Friends* that exhibit internalized racism, this next section showcases the many similarities that children of Mexican descent have in common—regardless of their physical environment—and how Mexican and U.S. culture are more similar than different.

### **How Different Are We Really? Two Primos’ Similar Lifestyles in *Dear Primo***

*Dear Primo: A Letter to My Cousin* is a children’s picture book written by Duncan Tonatiuh. This book was published in 2010 and tells the story of two cousins, Charlie and Carlitos. Charlie lives in the United States, while Carlitos lives in Mexico. They write letters to each other discussing their daily lives. While their lives may seem different, they have more in common than they believe. Through this story, Tonatiuh



introduces children to the idea that community and family extends itself way beyond neighborhoods and school.

The book begins with an illustration of Charlie in a modernized room surrounded by toys jumping up and down because he has received a letter from his cousin, Carlitos [1]. Charlie opens the letter and begins reading. Carlitos writes, “Dear Primo Charlie, how are you? Do you wonder like me what life is like far away?” (2). Carlitos is curious as to how life is in the United States and describes his home to his primo. Carlitos lives on a farm surrounded by mountains and trees. His family has donkeys, chickens, and a rooster that wakes them up every morning. They also grow their own corn. The illustrations show their brick house, his dad shoveling into the ground, and Carlitos feeding the chickens [2-3]. It is important to note that the story shifts between Charlie and Carlitos and the continuation of their letters. The story shifts to the beginning of Charlie’s letter and he describes the city life to his primo. Charlie writes, “I live in a city. From my window, I can see a bridge and cars zooming by. I can see skyscrapers, too” [4]. The illustration depicts Charlie sitting down at a desk, next to a goldfish staring out the window at the tall buildings, bridges, and lights lighting up the night sky [5]. The first part of their letters describes their home and what surrounds it. While Charlie can see skyscrapers tall enough to touch the clouds, Carlitos is able to see mountains and trees. They both teach each other about their lifestyles in their respective countries.

Through these illustrations and descriptions, Tonatiuh emphasizes that the difference between them is only regional, as the pictures depict the landscape and environment. Carlitos lives on a farm surrounded by animals, and mountains, and grows maíz, while Charlie lives in an apartment surrounded by skyscrapers and cars zooming on

the street. The physical differences are evident, but how different are they really? They both serve the same purpose: house Charlie and Carlitos, have beautiful scenery, and have pets. While the animals serve their own purpose in the ranch, they are still pets that need to be taken care of. As for Charlie, he has a pet goldfish, as depicted in the illustration [4]. Their homes are physically different, but still perform the same functions.

Tonatiuh then describes similarities between the two primos. Carlitos rides his bicycle to school and continuously passes cacti and gets chased by dogs, while Charlie rides the subway. At recess, Carlitos plays soccer with his friends, while Charlie plays basketball. While these two sports have socialization differences, they still use a ball to play. Their methods of transportation are different, but they are both still on their way to learn. In the illustration, Tonatiuh has dotted lines emphasizing the movement of the soccer ball and basketball. These dotted lines further accentuate the sameness between the two sports. Carlitos “kick[s] it with [his] foot, and if [he] scores, [he] yells... gol,” while Charlie “dribbles the ball, [a friend passes it to him], he jumps [then] shoots” [8-9]. While the mechanics of the games are different, they have one goal in common: receiving points by either kicking or shooting the ball in the net with their respective teammates. Tonatiuh then shifts the story into describing their favorite foods. Carlitos’s favorite meal is quesadillas, and Charlie’s is pizza. Once they are finished with their food and homework, they enjoy playing games outside with their friends. Carlitos plays trompo (spinning top) and canicas (marbles), while Charlie plays with a papalote (kite). To cool off on hot afternoons, Carlitos jumps in a small río (river) right by his house, and Charlie “likes getting splashed by the fire hydrant when the firefighters open it up and close off the block” [17].

Charlie and Carlitos do completely different things, but *how* different are they really? They both get to school, play games with their friends, and eat food. While, yes, the difference is the activity itself due to regional differences, but they perform the same duties. Tonatiuh's main focus in this book is to demonstrate to Mexican-American people how similar the lives are of a Mexican and Mexican-American child. What is believed to be a completely opposed lifestyle is negated throughout *Dear Primos* and demonstrates how two children in completely different physical environments partake in the same daily activities. Tonatiuh's usage of the first person singular, *I*, emphasizes the interpersonal connection that the two primos have. Carlitos's continuous explanation of his daily activities in Mexico not only allows Charlie to learn of his primo's lifestyle, the readers—Mexican-American children—can begin comprehending that the action of their lives is very similar despite being in different environments. One primo socializes in the same manner that the other primo does. Tonatiuh's illustrations depict the lifestyles and landscapes of Mexico versus the United States, and while they are not similar, the environments still function the same. The environments may look different, but both primos perform the same everyday tasks. They both utilize their environments to play, celebrate festivities, shop, and rely upon it for shelter. Tonatiuh reemphasizes the idea that while their lives may seem different, they have more in common than they believe. Instead of pinpointing the subtle differences, Tonatiuh highlights the unity between the two cultures of these two primos.

The two primos describe their respective trips to the mercado (market). Carlitos's mercado is "an open-air market in the town nearby. [They] sell maíz and tunas, a prickly fruit that [they] grow. [They] also buy food and other things [they] need" [18]. The

accompanying illustration depicts Carlitos, his dad, and other vendors selling the items they brought. On placemats, these vendors display corn, fruit, chiles, and baskets. Open-air markets are very common in Mexico and in the United States. To Mexicans in the United States, these markets are often called “tianguis” or “pulgas.” Charlie’s mercado consists of “[bringing] a list—milk, toothpaste, soap—and [Charlie] checks off the items as [they] put them in [their] cart” [19]. The illustration demonstrates that Charlie’s version of the mercado is a basic supermarket here in the United States. There are products on shelves, pushcarts being used, and cashiers ready to charge customers for their items. While being physically different, the markets serve the same purpose.

Tonatiuh then describes fiestas that occur throughout the city. Carlitos experiences the “fiestas that last two or three days. At night there are cohetes [fireworks] that light up the sky and mariachis that play and play,” while Charlie watches “people in costumes and uniforms march down the street” [20-21]. Mariachi is a genre of regional Mexican music that has evolved since the eighteenth century. Marching bands consists of a group of people playing their instruments while marching. These two groups of musicians have instruments as well as uniforms that define them. For mariachi bands, their uniform is a three-piece charro/a outfit or suit that includes custom embroidered ties, belts, and buttons. For marching bands, their uniforms consist of a jacket, cape, bibbers, socks, and a hat. The illustration depicts the difference in outfit for the two groups and allows readers to differentiate between the two. While the music is evidently different, these two groups of musicians play music depending on the region they are in. Carlitos listens to a variety of genres through the mariachis regional to Mexico, and the same can be said about marching bands—they adapt to the music from other genres tailored

towards the culture of the United States. They both enjoy watching and listening to the musical group and the music they perform. This suggests that, again, while the physical differences are evident between the two bands, they still perform the same duties.

Tonatiuh emphasizes that the only difference between them is their region and continues to attest the commonalities between their two cultures.

Carlitos teaches Charlie about Mexican street performers such as charros—horsemen—who do tricks with their hats and lariats; Charlie introduces Carlitos to break-dancers on the street of the city. Then, Carlitos describes two traditions in Mexico, Día de los Muertos and his favorite, Posadas. Charlie goes on to describe traditions in the United States such as Thanksgiving, and his favorite, Halloween. A Posada is a religious celebration that represents the pilgrimage that Mary and Joseph endured before the birth of Jesus. This celebration includes a piñata filled with fruits and candy, which is Carlitos’s favorite part of the Posada. During Halloween, candy is given to children typically dressed in costumes. The two traditions have very different origins, but the children still enjoy themselves and eat sweets. Another similarity between the two is that those celebrating usually decorate for the event. Halloween is filled with decorations that tend to be scary and include witches, ghosts, monsters, etc. Posadas tend to have a nativity scene with central figures such as Mary and Joseph being part of it, followed by shepherds, stable animals, and the most important figure, baby Jesus. While Tonatiuh does not share the end of their letters, the story ends with Carlitos and Charlie having the same idea: “My primo should come visit me!” [28-29]. Tonatiuh exemplifies to children that although these two primos live in two different countries, they have more in common than they think. Carlitos shares his Mexican culture and heritage with Charlie. Charlie,

still developing his liminal identity, is learning of the life his cousin lives in Mexico.

Unlike the children on the U.S. side of the Texas-Mexico border in Anzaldúa's *Amigos*, Charlie attempts to understand his Mexican counterpart, which are necessary for Charlie's development as a person living between and connected to cultures.

The language used throughout *Dear Primo* is a mixture of English and Spanish and evidences Charlie's liminal identity. While much of the text is in English, Tonatiuh uses Spanish to highlight certain words. The dialogue pertaining to Carlitos's letter is where the usage of Spanish appears. Words such as maíz, bicicleta, quesadillas, trompos, papalote, río, tunas, cohetes, and a variety of other words are used. The use of the Spanish words in Carlitos's letter may serve as a means for Charlie to learn Spanish. The audience for this mostly English-language book includes children like Charlie, who are children of Mexican descent. The use of Spanish introduces or helps maintain such children's bilingual language development. Carlitos, a Mexican child, describes certain animals, places, and activities in his native tongue. Tonatiuh helps the reader understand the word by using illustrations. Charlie, a Mexican-American child, describes the city, activities, and traditions in English. Tonatiuh suggests that Carlitos is bilingual.

It is less clear whether Charlie is also bilingual because no part of Charlie's letter is in Spanish. Charlie could potentially be one of the many Mexican-American children who understand a language but do not speak it. It would not be uncommon for Charlie to understand Carlitos's Spanish words in Spanish without being able to speak the language. Mexican-American children's ability and aptitude to learn and speak Spanish is often imbedded within language trauma. Language trauma "severely impact[s] a person's linguistic repertoire: on his or her inclination to learn languages, to use, retain, or

abandon a particular language, or to take refuge in silence" (Busch and McNamara 327). Mexican immigrant parents are afraid that if they teach their children Spanish, the children could be heard speaking it out in public and be racially discriminated against for communicating in their culture's mother tongue. This language trauma contributes to the loss of identity for Mexican and Mexican-American children in the United States.

Much like Anzaldúa, Tonatiuh embeds his personal history into this children's story. Tonatiuh was born to a Mexican mother and an American father in Mexico City and grew up in San Miguel de Allende. When he turned sixteen, he moved to Williamstown, Massachusetts. Ever since that moment, he began to experience that in-between culture and also began to construct his liminal identity. Growing up, Tonatiuh witnessed both sides of the culture and realized the similarities and differences he had with other children: "When I first moved [to Brooklyn], I was struck by the kids because they looked like me and my friends growing up in Mexico. The big difference was that the kids in Sunset Park spoke perfect 'television' English." Tonatiuh does not mention the usage of language any further in his author's note, but one can assume that Tonatiuh's position is represented by Carlitos and Charlie stands in for the kids who spoke perfect "television" English. Tonatiuh conveys the following sentiment his author's note to the readers:

I am both Mexican and American (literally; I have two passports), and what I've discovered is that despite the apparent differences between these two countries—the buildings, the food, the day-to-day routines, physical appearances, the politics—at the end of the day, we are more similar than different. People are people.

Through *Primos*, Tonatiuh affirms commonalities for bicultural Mexican-American people who believe their two cultures are completely opposed. Instead of focusing on stark differences between the two cultures, Tonatiuh explores unity and expression of the Mexican and United States culture through two primos.

### **Bandaging Our Wounds Through Writing**

Both Anzaldúa and Tonatiuh personalize their stories, present their liminal identities that are often products of trauma, and thus theorize the personal. These stories reveal intergenerational traumas that are the result of sociopolitical events (e.g., the institutionalization of national borders, border crossing, and English-only dictates). As autohistorias, *Amigos* and *Dear Primo* encourage both the author and reader who identifies with the characters to face these traumas. Readers who see themselves in these texts must also contend with the ways in which their identity as Mexican or Mexican American in the United States has been shaped by these politics. We, Mexican Americans, are in between two worlds. Our soul is torn and split by not only our struggles, but by the struggles of our ancestors, and we imprint these narratives in our consciousness (Bhattacharya and Keating 200). The wounds of not only Anzaldúa and Tonatiuh, but of the characters, have been bandaged over generations, but still manage to open and bleed out; never fully recovering. Anzaldúa explains the border as an open wound in *Borderlands* and writes, “The U.S.-Mexican border es una herida abierta [open wound] where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds. And before a scab forms it hemorrhages again, the lifeblood of two worlds merging to form a third country—a border culture” (3). Anzaldúa and Tonatiuh, the Third World mestizos, bleed out their struggles, pain, and exhaustion in what used to be their home before it was colonized and



became the United States. Now, they are looked down upon by colonizers who resent them for existing. They attempt to bandage their wounds through their writing, but the bandages become undone, hemorrhaging again, never fully healing. Due to the continuous amounts of racism, discrimination, and hatred towards us, it is possible to not see us heal from our trauma in our generation. The harmful truth is that systemic racism is deeply imbedded within American society and in order to change the United States for the better, they have to acknowledge the history of racism and its existence today. Our stories of identity, language, and trauma interconnect with those of other Mexican Americans. Our narratives unite us by the trauma that we endure. Our issues are intergenerational.

## V. EPILOGUE: THE AUTOHISTORIA OF A QUEER CHICANO

The importance of Anzaldúa's theory, autohistoria-teoría, is that we, as researchers, can incorporate traditionally non-academic elements such as spirituality and myths into our scholarly writing. Being able to blend cultural and personal biographies into our writing empowers me in ways that I cannot fully explain. As I wrote each individual chapter, I traveled to other realms of consciousness—the physical and nonphysical world—and connected with our spirits and ancestors. They guided me much throughout my writing, just like these spirits guided my parents. When I began reading Chicana/o/xs' work, I noticed that a lot of the concerns they had regarding trauma and identity were issues that I was concerned about, too.

The most integral part of autohistoria-teoría, to me, is how “autohistoria-teorístas expose the limitations in the existing paradigms and create new stories of healing, self-growth, cultural critique, and individual/collective transformation” (Keating 319). These new stories of healing and self-growth have not taken place in my life as I would have wanted. The collective trauma from my childhood as well as my torn soul have not been healed. Everyone heals differently in their own way, but I do not think that is possible for me. Trauma truly is intergenerational for Mexican-American children. While I am not a child anymore, I am the son to two undocumented Mexican migrants and have been able to reflect on my parents' trauma as my own as I wrote this thesis.

Every single day and night, I pray to La Virgencita de Guadalupe to protect them from any harm. I pray that they return home safely to my siblings. The four of us need them.

My parents have done so many wonderful things for me, but they also have traumatized me. Ever since I could remember, I always enjoyed playing with primas. Anyone looking for me would always find me with my primas (female cousins)—not my primos (male cousins). Even in school, at recess, you would see us playing together. This “tendency” led my parents and classmates to assume my sexuality. “Are you gay?” just about everyone asked. Virgencita, people asked me that so many times as I was growing up. At the time, I did not even know what being gay meant. I always wondered why everyone around me was so obsessed with my sexuality more than I was. Hell, I still do. My mom had a gay best friend, who highly influenced her negative perceptions of gay men. She did not want me to be like him, so she belittled me in her own way. I could not do or say anything feminine. It was worse with my dad. My dad, dominated by the ideals of machismo, could not have a gay son. That is strictly impossible for him. The few degrading things he told me as a child still run around my head now and then. Now that I am an adult and have embraced my queerness, I still wonder how they feel about it. They say that they love me and accept me just the way I am, but do they really? They always dreamed of me going to college, becoming a doctor, finding a wife, having kids, and living the *perfect* life. I cannot give them what they wanted. Sometimes I feel like I have failed them for being queer. Even now as a grown adult, I still feel ashamed for being queer. Homophobia and internalized homophobia work through my body. I have doubted myself so much because of them. They say that children need both their mother and father, but how do I love someone who silences part of my personality? How do I love someone who causes the pain in my heart? How do I love someone who urges me to change my ways, when I do not understand my own ways? My parents are the pain in my

tears, the fear in my body, and the voice in my head telling me they love me. They have created, shaped, and molded me into a million broken pieces.

Writing this thesis has helped me realize all the broken parts of my soul. I wish I could rely upon my family to heal my soul, but I think I must find a way to heal it on my own. Reading many of these Chicana feminist theorists' works has inspired me in many ways. They understand me in ways my family never will. I find myself at home when reading books that allow me to become myself. I find my kin in these writers. I have learned so much from them, but I am striving to expand my knowledge even further. In my quest to healing my soul, I hope to apply and get accepted into to a PhD program in Chicana/o/x studies. I yearn to know as much as I can about my culture. Along with exploring my culture, I would also like to explore my identity through queer studies. Maybe this soul searching will be good for me. I know and hope it will.

Anzaldúa writes, "Nudge a Mexican and she or he will break out with a story"  
(*Borderlands* 65).

This is mine.

## WORKS CITED

- Adams, James Truslow. *The Epic of America*, Little Brown, 1931.
- Alter, Adam, et al. "The 'Bad Is Black' Effect: Why People Believe Evildoers Have Darker Skin Than Do-Gooders." *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, vol. 42, no. 12, 2016, pp. 1653-1665.
- Anzaldúa, Gloria. *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. 3rd ed., Aunt Lute, 2007. Print.
- , and Consuelo Mendez. *Friends from the Other Side: Amigos del otro lado*. Children's Book Press, 1993.
- . "Doing Gigs: Speaking, Writing, and Change. An Interview with Debbie Blake and Carmen Abrego." *Interviews/Entrevistas*, edited by AnaLouise Keating, Routledge, pp. 211-234.
- . "La Prieta." *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, edited by Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press, 1983, pp. 198-209.
- . *The Gloria Anzaldúa Reader*. Edited by AnaLouise Keating. Duke University Press, 2009.
- Bhattacharya, Kakali. "Autohistoria-teoría: Merging Self, Culture, Community, Spirit, and Theory." *Journal of Autoethnography*, vol. 1, no. 2, 2020, pp. 198-202.
- , and AnaLouise Keating. "Expanding Beyond Public and Private Realities: Evoking Anzaldúan Autohistoria-Teoría in Two Voices." *Qualitative Inquiry*, vol. 24, no. 5, 2018, pp. 345-354.

- Bialystok, Ellen. *Bilingualism in Development: Language, Literacy, and Cognition*, Cambridge University Press, 2009, pp. 3-4.
- Bolling, Valerie. “Why Children Need to See Themselves in Books.” *International Literacy Association*, 14 Nov. 2021, <https://www.literacyworldwide.org/blog/literacy-now/2021/03/10/why-children-need-to-see-themselves-in-books>
- Bonham, Venice L., et al. “Race and Ethnicity in the Genome Era: The Complexity of the Constructs.” *American Psychologist*, vol. 60, no. 1, 2005, pp. 12-14.
- Busch, Brigitta, and Tim McNamara. “Language and Trauma: An Introduction.” *Applied Linguistics*, vol. 41, no. 3, 2020, pp. 323-333.
- Caruth, Cathy. *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History*, John Hopkins University Press, 1996.
- Clark, William A. *Immigrants and the American Dream: Remaking the Middle Class*. Guilford, 2003.
- Corpi, Lucha. *Black Widow’s Wardrobe*. Arte Publico Press, 2000.
- Cortez, David. “I Asked Latinos Why They Joined Immigration Law Enforcement. Now I’m Urging Them to Leave.” *USA Today*, 3 July 2019, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/opinion/voices/2019/07/03/latino-border-patrol-ice-agents-immigration-column/1619511001/>
- Cri-Cri. “El Ratón Vaquero.” *Las 100 Clásicas de Cri-Cri, Vol. 1*, BMG Entertainment Mexico, 2001, *Apple Music*, <https://music.apple.com/us/album/las-100-cl%C3%A1sicas-de-cri-cri-vol-1/322132440>.

- Crippen, Martha. "The Value of Children's Literature." *Oneota Reading Journal*, 14 Sept. 2021, <https://www.luther.edu/oneota-reading-journal/archive/2012/the-value-of-childrens-literature/>
- Del Real, Alfredo. "Fear of La Migra Has Always Been Around for LA's Latinos." *LAist*, 28 June 2019, <https://laist.com/news/la-migra-and-a-legacy-of-fear-in-la>
- Echterling, Clare. "Postcolonial Ecocriticism, Classic Children's Literature, and the Imperial-Environmental Imagination in 'The Chronicles of Narnia'" *The Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association*, vol. 49, no. 1, 2016, pp. 93-117.
- Fetin, Abraham. "Race, Continents, and Populations: The Illusion of the 21st Century." *Abraham Fetin*, 10 Oct. 2021, <https://abra2014.medium.com/race-continents-and-populations-the-illusion-of-the-21st-century-17c75469bcfa>
- Flores, Yvette. *Chicana and Chicano Mental Health: Alma, Mente y Corazón*. University of Arizona Press, 2013.
- Ford, Eileen Mary. *Children of the Mexican Miracle: Childhood and Modernity in Mexico City, 1940-1968*. PhD Dissertation. University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Champaign, Illinois, 2008.
- Gonzalez, Gilbert G. "Background to Segregation." *Chicano Education in the Era of Segregation*. Balc Institute Press, 1991, pp. 11-20.
- Hollindale, Peter. *Ideology & the Children's Book*. Thimble Press, 1991.
- Joshua, Marilyn. "Inside Picture Books: Where Are the Children of Color?" *Educational Horizons*, vol. 80, no. 3, 2002, pp. 125-32.

- Lefley, Harriet, et al. "Cultural Beliefs About Rape and Victims' Response in Three Ethnic Groups." *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, vol. 63, no. 4, pp. 623-632.
- MacDonald, Victoria-María. "Demanding their Rights: The Latino Struggle for Educational Access and Equity." *National Park Service*, 21 Sept. 2021, <https://nps.gov/articles/latinothemeeeducation.htm>.
- . "Americanization and Resistance: Contested Terrain on the Southwest Frontier, 1848-1912." *Latino Education in the United States: A Narrated History from 1513-2000*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2004, pp. 55-92.
- . MacDonald, Victoria-María. "Segregation and New Arrivals, 1898-1960." *Latino Education in the United States: A Narrated History from 1513-2000*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2004, pp. 117-182.
- Mejia, Brittany. "Many Latinos Answer Call of the Border Patrol in the Age of Trump." *Los Angeles Times*, 28 Sept. 2021, <https://www.latimes.com/local/lanow/la-me-ln-citizens-academy-20180323-htmlstory.html>
- Millán, Isabel. "Contested Children's Literature: Que(e)ries into Chicana and Central American Autofantasías." *Signs*, vol. 41, no. 1, The University of Chicago Press, 2015, pp. 199-224
- Muñoz Martinez, Monica. *The Injustice Never Leaves You: Anti-Mexican Violence in Texas*. Harvard University Press, 2018.
- Paredes, Américo. *Cantos de adolescencia: Songs of Youth (1932-1937)*. Arte Publico Press, 1937.



- Paredes, Américo. *Cantos de adolescencia: Songs of Youth (1932-1937)*. Translated by B.V. Olguín and Omar Vásquez Barbosa, Arte Publico Press, 2007.
- Perreira, Krista, and India Ornelas. "Painful Passages: Traumatic Experiences and Post-Traumatic Stress Among Immigrant Latino Adolescents and their Primary Caregivers." *The International Migration Review*, vol. 47, no. 4, 2013, pp. 1-25.
- Potapowicz, Izabela. "Del 'ratón vaquero' y otras extranjeros: las representaciones del otro dominante en la cultura popular mexicana." *Revista Chilena de Antropología Visual*, vol. 14, 2009, pp. 175-189.
- Rangel, Elisa. "A Legacy for Mexican Children." *Decolonizing The Music Room*, 16 Sept. 2021, <https://decolonizingthemusicroom.com/songs-%26-stories/f/a-legacy-for-mexican-children>.
- Ruiz Marrujo, Olivia. "Women, Migration, and Sexual Violence: Lessons from Mexico's Borders." *Human Rights Along the U.S.-Mexico Border: Gendered Violence and Insecurity*, edited by Kathleen Staudt, Tony Payan, and Z. Anthony Kruszewski, University of Arizona Press, 2009, pp. 31-47.
- Saldívar, Jose David. *Borders Matter: Remapping American Cultural Studies*. University of California Press, 1997.
- Sangalang, Cindy, and Cindy Vang. "Intergenerational Trauma in Refugee Families: A Systematic Review." *Journal of Immigrant and Minority Health*, vol. 19, no. 3, 2017, pp. 745-54.

Schweingruber, David. "American Nightmares; or, Why Sociologists Hate the American Dream." *American Nightmares: Social Problems in an Anxious World*, by Joel Best, 1<sup>st</sup> ed., University of California Press, Oakland, California, 2018, pp. 34-66. *JSTOR*.

*Siete Soles*. Directed by Pedro Ulteras, Venevision, 2008.

Tonatiuh, Duncan. *Dear Primo: A Letter to My Cousin*. Abrams Books for Young Readers, 2010.

Toppelberg, Claudio, and Brian Collins. "Language, Culture, and Adaptation in Immigrant Children." *Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Clinics of North America*, vol. 19, no. 4, 2010, pp. 696-717.

Van der Kolk, Bessel, et al. "A General Approach to Treatment of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder." *Traumatic Stress: The Effects of Overwhelming Experience on Mind, Body, and Society*, The Guilford Press, pp. 417-40.

Vasconcelos, José. *La raza cósmica*. Madrid, 1925.

Williams, Monnica, et al. "Tools for Assessing Racism-Related Stress and Trauma Among Latinos." *Toolkit for Counseling Spanish-Speaking Clients: Enhancing Behavioral Health Sciences*, edited by Lorraine Benuto, Springer International Publishing, 2017, pp. 71-96