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Representations of Influences in the Identities of Young Migrant Girls of the Borderlands and  
their Relationship to Gender, Childhood, and Motherhood

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By  
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May 2020

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## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this project to my family. Your dedication and sacrifice have facilitated my journey to where I am today. My words will never be enough to describe my gratitude. Thank you for making sure I never forgot my roots.

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis seeks to analyze the representations of border-related trauma in contemporary written works. The introductory chapter seeks to set the foundation for this thesis using Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1985) as a means of thinking about the border in terms of womanhood and identity. In Chapter I, I draw from Chicana feminist theory and criticism to read closely Reyna Grande's 2012 *The Distance Between Us, a Memoir*. In Chapter II, I turn to Valeria Luiselli's 2019 fictional piece, *Lost Children Archive*, as well as her 2017 essay, *Tell Me How It Ends: An Essay in 40 Questions*. By reading across diverse genres, this thesis argues that Chicana writers construct works in which representations of the border's detrimental effects are shown through narrative and pivot centrally around motherhood. Each writer points to the ways the border specifically complicates the relationship between Chicana identity and traditional notions of motherhood and childhood development.

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## INTRODUCTION

Gloria Anzaldúa is known for her groundbreaking contributions to Chicana feminist theory, queer theory, and theories of identity. Her critiques of traditional institutions, such as the Catholic church, and the undeniable gender disparity present in Mexican American culture are the basis for many of her anthologies and works, including her 1987 *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. Anzaldúa deploys the use of *mestizaje*, a term commonly used in discussions about race. She broadens the conceptual reach of the term in order to apply it to Chicana identity by illustrating the way in which Chicanas are liminal: neither one nor the other, but a combination of the two existing outside of social norms. She emphasizes an awareness and acceptance of ambiguous identities through her development of a paradigm called new mestiza consciousness, a lens through which generations of Chicana feminists critique the world around them and the traditions that their culture is steeped in. The new perspective provided by mestiza consciousness grants Chicanas the tools to analyze and revise a developing literary canon in order to pull away from macho-dominated storytelling.

The theory of the borderlands is a topic of study that has found a distinct foothold in Chicana studies throughout the twentieth century. Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* registers the idea of the border as not only a physical boundary, but also a spiritual and emotional boundary that affects women and brings them in touch with their own identity. Anzaldúa theorizes the borderlands as a conceptual space between countries "where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds" (Anzaldúa 25). The complex relationship that each Chicana experiences between her own identity and her culture create within her a crossroads in which she must become the bridge between two nations in order to acknowledge each side of herself.



Using her own experiences living near the U.S.-Mexico border, Anzaldúa paints a picture of the borderlands as a space of shifting identity, in which one must straddle the region similarly to the way in which Chicanas must straddle their own identity: “To survive the Borderlands // you must live *sin fronteras* // be a crossroads” (Anzaldúa 217). Chicanas feel the pull of both sides of her culture but are accepted by neither. Her identity is tied to multiple nations; she must become the bridge where two cultures can interact and inform her identity.

Anzaldúa also reiterates the idea of the border as a physical, man-made boundary which in turn causes the formation of a borderland culture. She makes sure to separate these terms in the first chapter of *Borderlands*: “A border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge. A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary” (25). While the border is depicted as unmoving, the borderlands seem to be capable of change and fluctuation. The inherent movement brings attention to the struggle emerging from the region. The shifting characteristics of the borderlands exemplify the turmoil of the Chicana’s inner struggle between cultures. There is chaos present in both of these images; the borderlands are a product of the enforcement of a border. The “emotional residue” (Anzaldúa 25) that Anzaldúa claims is found at the border between Mexico and the United States and becomes the foundation for the internal border struggle within the Chicana. By virtue of internalizing the conflict of the borderlands within herself, the Chicana is inevitably affected by the border.

I argue that the unnatural essence of the U.S./Mexico border combats the indigenous part of the Chicana, the part of her tied to the natural landscape marred by the “dividing line.” The internal war that ensues within the Chicana ultimately shapes her response to childhood, motherhood, and gender. I argue that this response comes through in the narrative and revision of

myth that female authors employ in the genre of contemporary Chicana literature. Through narrative, the Chicana is able to express her anxieties and make sense of border trauma.

Anzaldúa illustrates the importance of the Chicana's indigenous identity by saying "The worst kind of betrayal lies in making us believe that the Indian woman in us is the betrayer" (44). While Anzaldúa is signaling Mexican culture as the perpetrator of this crime, she implies that the blame can also be placed with the unnatural energy that the border imposes upon the surrounding borderlands and its people. The borderlands are both a place affected by a boundary as well as an emotional state within the Chicana. Therefore, the border causes extensive damage within her that mirrors the struggle presented in the physical borderlands. In the Chicana specifically, the effects are seen in her relationship to her childhood, the possibility of motherhood, and in relation to her own gender identity.

The harm perpetrated by the border upon Chicanas is an example of border trauma. The use of the term trauma refers to the traumatic effect that border crossings and proximity to the border can have on women of all ages. Anzaldúa makes the distinct observation that "pain makes us acutely anxious to avoid more of it, so we hone that radar. It's a kind of survival tactic that people, caught between the worlds, unknowingly cultivate" (61). This is a very specific image of surviving with pain. Anzaldúa depicts a coping mechanism that is cultivated and grown despite internal struggle. It is a distinct thread through which Chicanas can be tied together given that they all must deal with their respective traumas.

In *Borderlands*, Anzaldúa notes the birth date of the border as "February 2, 1848 with the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo" (29). This treaty brought an official end to the Mexican-American war. According to Anzaldúa, "the U.S. incited Mexico to war" (29). The revision of U.S. history that Anzaldúa takes up proclaims the existence of a culture of violence

within U.S. foreign policy that has been present for over a century. The border fence marked the presence of a political boundary and stranded thousands of Mexican citizens on the wrong side of the fence, “annexed by conquest along with the land” (29). The equation of human beings to land was the first step towards the dehumanization of Mexican immigrants.

The Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo was meant to establish a code of conduct for the division of land along the border as well as give a sense of stability to U.S.-Mexico relations. In her article, “On the Complexities of Race: The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo and *Dred Scott v. Sandford*,” Guadalupe Luna explains that the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo was how “the United States contractually promised to protect the property interests of those remaining within the annexed territories” (698) after the Mexican-American war. However, the document’s grand promises were never fulfilled: “The treaty was never honored and restitution, to this day, has never been made” (Anzaldúa 29). Once Mexico ceded the land to the United States, Mexicans living above the newly minted Rio Grande border were robbed of lands they had owned for years. According to Luna, “In failing to protect Chicanas/os, the United States breached its obligations under federal and international law” (701). It sets a legal precedent stating that Mexicans would not be protected by American law.

Article X of the Treaty of Guadalupe, which was removed by the United States, assured the protection of land claims already present before the treaty was ratified.<sup>1</sup> The removal of Article X, as well as the ignored Protocol of Queretaro,<sup>2</sup> favored the United States by advancing

<sup>1</sup> Kim David Chanbonpin, *How the Border Crossed Us: Filling the Gap between Plume v. Seward and the Dispossession of Mexican Landowners in California after 1848*, 52 Clev. St. L. Rev. 297 (2005) available at <https://engagedscholarship.csuohio.edu/clevstlrev/vol52/iss1/20>

<sup>2</sup> “The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo.” *The Center for Land Grant Studies - Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo*, [www.southwestbooks.org/treaty.htm](http://www.southwestbooks.org/treaty.htm).

their agenda of transferring Mexican-owned lands over to American settlers. Despite promising that the rights of Mexicans, now considered American nationals, would be protected, they were ignored. The fallout forced them into decades of economic and legal oppression. According to Sonia Hernandez, “Many *Tejanos* had been disposed of their lands by Anglos after Texas gained its independence, and if Article X was ratified, many *Tejanos* could reclaim their land grants” (103). The removal of lands owned by Mexican families for generations caused a shift in their economic circumstances. Families found themselves in a country that was no longer home with their land taken from them by Anglo settlers.

A period of economic decline followed for Mexicans caught on the wrong side of the border. The illegal removal of their lands forced Mexicans into sharecropping and other jobs, facilitating the exploitation of Mexican workers. Dire economic circumstances led to the rise of the maquiladora system. Anzaldúa discusses Mexico’s economic dependency on the United States through her explanation of the maquiladoras:

Currently, Mexico and her eighty million citizens are almost completely dependent on the U.S. market. The Mexican government and wealthy growers are in partnership with such American conglomerates as American motors, IT&T and DuPont which own factories called *maquiladoras*. One-fourth of all Mexicans works at *maquiladoras*; most are young women. Next to oil, *maquiladoras* are Mexico’s second greatest source of U.S. dollars. (Anzaldúa 32)

The effects of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo and the subsequent theft of Mexican lands led Mexico to build an economy completely dependent on the United States. Anzaldúa characterizes Mexico as a female; there is an emphasis on the effect of the maquiladoras on young women. The emphasis on the gender of the workers is significant in this section; it shows that while there

is a legal and economic instability in the relationship between U.S. and Mexico, the tension is also affected by gendered dynamics of power in both.

The economic exploitation of Mexican workers continues to be significant in Anzaldúa's *Borderlands* when she coins illegal immigrants as “economic refugees” (33). The use of the legal term “refugees” implies a search for asylum and legal protection. However, Mexicans caught in the annexed territories were not protected by U.S. law. Rather, they were ignored and later exploited by it. The effects of the border on politics paves the way for legal discourse taken up by Valeria Luiselli's works, discussed in chapter two.

There is a connection forged between the emphasis on gender and the effects on childhood in Anzaldúa's writing as well. She makes the association between the maquiladora system and children by explaining “while the women are in the *maquiladoras*, the children are left on their own. Many roam the street, become part of *cholo* gangs” (Anzaldúa 32). Anzaldúa emphasizes the role that women play in childhood development, implying again that economic exploitation is a gendered subject. There is an implication of the importance of female caretakers in the development of children impacted by “border trauma.” The economic disparities in Mexico affect the traditional idea of family life, putting children in danger of falling into gang activity. Anzaldúa equates the economic influences of the United States in Mexico with violence that preys on families and endangers the positive influence of motherhood.

While every border brings its own set of difficulties and distinct effects, my research is focused specifically on the U.S./Mexico border. This is the specific border that Anzaldúa targets in the first chapter of *Borderlands*. It is also the border present in Reyna Grande's 2012 *The Distance Between Us: A Memoir*. Valeria Luiselli's book *Tell Me How It Ends: An Essay in 40 Questions* as well as her most recent 2019 novel *Lost Children Archive*, which is a continuation

of the narrative begun in her essay, given that each of these works take up the discourse of the U.S./Mexico border as well. Each of these authors deal with the border in specific ways, but they are tied together by their use of female narrators and their representations of border trials. Each work also shows a distinct representation of motherhood and the different ways in which motherhood can present itself.

The first chapter of this thesis will discuss Reyna Grande's memoir, *The Distance Between Us*. The memoir recounts Grande's own childhood in Mexico after her parents immigrate to the United States, her border crossing years later, and her development into adulthood while living in Los Angeles. Reyna's relationship to motherhood is hindered by her sense of abandonment, given that Juana, abandons her children. While the memoir does not show Grande herself as a mother, it does show the effects of each maternal figure that Grande has throughout her life. I argue that Reyna's maternal influences had a lasting effect on the formation of her own identity. Since motherhood has great value in Chicana culture, the border's effect on Reyna's maternal bonds was an affront to her Chicana identity.

The distinct narrative of motherhood has been controlled by men since colonial times. The story of *La Malinche* was widely spread by men as a way of demonizing a maternal figure into someone who should be vilified. *La Virgen de Guadalupe* was desexed by the Catholic church and turned into an example, ruled by misogyny and patriarchal oppression. *La Llorona* was broken down from her goddess form, Yemaya, into a symbol for hysteria. Each of these narratives center mothers who are used by men to engender a set of guidelines detailing what women should and should not be. Chicanas seek to deconstruct said guidelines by revising these myths and instead imagining women who do not allow men to control them. Hence, their literary contributions comprise an effort to empower women as mothers and as daughters.

The second chapter of this thesis will focus on Valeria Luiselli's 2019 novel *Lost Children Archive* as its main focus to analyze the way Luiselli experiments with narrative as a way of blurring the line between fiction and reality. Luiselli's novel as well as her essay, *Tell Me How It Ends: An Essay in 40 Questions*, also incorporates labels and categorization as a way of explaining the legal discourses that come up in conversations about the border and those who choose to cross it. This is a more distanced approach than Reyna Grande's memoir. While Grande narrates her own personal childhood through the genre of memoir, which in itself constructs a sense of intimacy, Luiselli chooses to use nameless fictional characters as a tool that shapes border discourse.

The novel begins with the realistic point of view of an adult, Ma. Luiselli introduces her scholarly pursuits as well as her difficult home life as a way of establishing an adult reality that is removed from the children's day-to-day lives. There is an inherent privilege in being a middle-class working family. The work projects that each adult pursues shows their point of view as well as informs the way Ma speaks to the reader. There is a formal tone to her analysis of her own emotions as well as the documentation of the moments she is living in both before and during the road trip. There is sophisticated syntax and use of language at play; she uses complex sentences and metaphors to explain her thought process. There is a general sense of adulthood that permeates her narration. It is marked by experience and time that the novel's children in do not possess. The second half of the book shifts into the perspective of Ma's young children, specifically the Boy. Through the voice of a child narrator, Luiselli is able to blur the line between fiction and reality. By using this narrative technique, Luiselli brings the story of the lost children into the forefront of the novel. It motivates an important discussion about privilege and

the rights of children. It is a depiction of the borderlands within a narrative space; Luiselli shows representations of children affected by the border.

Chicana identity is built off of the idea of being both Mexican and American by feeling the pull from both sides of the border. The changes between genres in the works by Grande and Luiselli introduce the use of literature as a mechanism to show the duality of Chicana and mestiza identity. Anzaldúa uses code-switching in *Borderlands* as a mechanism for explaining the Chicana's use of language. It is a literary tool that mirrors the Chicana's shifting identity as she grapples between two parts of herself. Anzaldúa shows this in the switches from English to Spanish in *Borderlands/La Frontera*: "*Un lenguaje que corresponde a un modo de vivir*. Chicano Spanish is not incorrect, it is a living language" (77). The idea of code-switching can also apply to the shift between genres, from Reyna Grande's memoir, an American form, and Valeria Luiselli's fictional novel that blurs the line between fiction and reality. It is a way of bridging both languages and literary forms as a way of creating a space for Chicanas to tell their stories. The code-switching between genres becomes a coping mechanism through which Chicanas can attempt to process their experiences in a space usually commandeered by white male authors. The use of the memoir and a fictional novel that is fluid between reality and magic is a way for Chicana authors to take back "territory" in a literary way. It creates a forum for them to operate in the same spaces as white authors as well as illustrates the extent of their own border trauma.

The analysis of both of the works presented in this thesis serves as a basis for the study of the depiction of border trauma of young migrant girls in a literary structure. By qualifying the use of narrative as a way of coping with trauma, I will analyze representations of young women affected by the border and analyze how the political and economic influence of the United States



affects each generation of Chicanas. Centuries later, the effects of U.S. imposition must be understood in order to recognize how exclusionary power is made manifest in literary spaces that are not always receptive to people of color.

## CHAPTER 1: THE IMPORTANCE OF MATERNAL FIGURES IN SHAPING CHICANA IDENTITY IN REYNA GRANDE'S *THE DISTANCE BETWEEN US*

Reyna Grande is a contemporary writer born in Iguala, Guerrero, Mexico. She became an undocumented immigrant after crossing the border at nine years old. Her 2012 memoir, *The Distance Between Us*, is a narrative depicting her life both before and after crossing the U.S.-Mexico border. The memoir constructs a representation of the adverse effects of the border on family dynamics, including its capacity to break families and shape early childhood experiences. The memoir shows the way a child is conditioned to live in fear due to the border's effects on her fragile family. Grande's work is one of many in a movement of "counter-narratives from the perspective of undocumented immigrants themselves" (Rohrleitner 37).

Grande uses the memoir to express her unique relationship to citizenship. The intimacy of the memoir allows Grande to present her own story while still producing a nuanced work that represents the traditions of Chicana literature. According to Marion Rohrleitner,

Chicana memoirists are painfully aware of and deeply familiar with historical and current practices of (mis)representation of Mexican immigrants in the United States, and consciously engage with such misrepresentations in their own work by adopting literary forms recognizable to their opponents (44).

By working in a literary form developed by Europeans, and later adopted by Americans, Grande makes a unique intervention. Take for instance Henry David Thoreau's *Walden*. Like Thoreau, Grande has taken the same authority to tell her own story so that it may not be forgotten by history. However, Thoreau's work is considered canonical in many American literature classes

while Reyna Grande's work is deemed relevant only to the Chicana community. Despite her citizenship, Grande is still left out of the historical record for being a woman of color as opposed to a white male philosopher. Grande is not secluded in a forest; she has intricate connections to her hometown of Iguala. These relationships inform her identity, propelling her work and growth forward, giving the memoir special significance in Grande's portrayal of her developing identity.

Reyna, along with her siblings Magloria and Carlos, are left in the care of their abusive paternal grandmother, Abuela Evila, when their mother, Juana, migrates to the United States to join their father in 1980. Their father, Natalio, left Mexico two years prior in 1978. Despite telling the children she would be back before long, their mother leaves them with their abusive grandmother for two and a half years. When Juana returns, Reyna's image of the ideal family reunion evaporates with the news that her father has left her mother for another woman. She returns a changed woman, abandoning the children with their maternal grandmother. Their father returns in 1985 and takes the children back with him to Los Angeles. After crossing the border, they face the struggles of being undocumented children within a shaky family structure who live with the constant fear of abandonment.

An important idea posed by the Chicana feminist movement that emerged as part of Anzaldúa's thought was "new mestiza consciousness." This idea, developed by Anzaldúa in *Borderlands/ La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987), gave Chicanas the tools to critique the literature presented to them as well as the world around each of them. In her pivotal text, Anzaldúa writes "From this racial, ideological, cultural and biological cross-pollination, an 'alien' consciousness is presently in the making—a new *mestiza* consciousness, *una conciencia de mujer*. It is a consciousness of the borderlands" (99). Anzaldúa's reclaiming of the term alien, a label used by media outlets, politicians, and everyday Americans, is a powerful way of

reclaiming an immigrant identity. Using the word “alien” implies the presence of an other; it is a way of creating a divide by treating the people of the borderlands as an unknown entity. It also serves as a tool to single out and dehumanize an entire group of people based on citizenship status.

Anzaldúa creates a theoretical and creative space to which women can turn in order to survive the divisive nature of the borderlands. It provided a way for Chicanas to revise theories and knowledge developed by the Chicano Movement of the late 1960s and 1970s. Chicano writers such as Rodolfo Corky Gonzales, the author of *Yo Soy Joaquin*, created a cultural movement focused on the attainment of basic civil rights. However, the Chicano Movement was gendered and specifically geared towards men. Chicana writers strive to create a space in which women are empowered by joining a movement geared towards their civil rights. Surrounded by a literary canon made up of male-dominated stories, Chicana feminists began to revise both reality and myth as a way to theorize the complexity of Chicana identity. This complexity comes from an internal war between being neither Mexican nor American, but a transformed identity existing in both categories. The conflict also grapples with the ideas of gender and sexuality as women are traditionally kept in controlled environments that see sex as taboo and womanhood asymmetrically.

The revision of myth caused by the enlightenment brought about by the new mestiza consciousness shines through in Reyna Grande’s memoir. Other pivotal Chicana texts, such as Ana Castillo’s 1993 novel *So Far from God* and Sandra Cisneros’ 1996 essay “Guadalupe the Sex Goddess,” spur critical thinking by revising myth as well. Anzaldúa’s revision of the maternal figures of the Chicana Movement in *Borderlands* serve as a lens through which to analyze the mother figures in Grande’s memoir. The connection between mother and daughter

shape young Reyna's identity. As the memoir continues, Reyna begins to doubt her own place in the world. Her broken family serves as an example of border trauma, the effects of which follow her into adulthood. Reyna has several maternal figures that Grande introduces throughout the memoir. Each of these mothers serves a function in Reyna's life: the birth mother, the stepmother, the nurturing older sister and the encouraging professor who encompasses a path of healing and acceptance.

The shifting maternal figures in Grande's narrative provide a way to read the emotional damage she must come to terms with as an adult. The memoir of a single girl is a microcosm of a bigger conversation concerning the representations of border trauma in contemporary literature. Ultimately, the border is the driving force behind the issues that Reyna faces throughout her childhood. The influence of the border and what lies beyond its limits effectively breaks Reyna's family into pieces. Each sibling develops their own mechanism for dealing with the trauma of their childhood though here I wish to focus primarily on the representation of young girls.

The facet of the border being discussed transcends its status as a physical man-made boundary on a map. The border itself shapes Chicana identity and its tendency to fluctuate and change. Alicia Muñoz and Ariana E. Vigil describe the border as "a prominently contested site not just of nationality and migration but also of history, memory, and identity: a heterotopia of fluctuating meaning and status that imparts scars, both physical and psychic, upon individuals and families" ("A Journey to/through Family" 2019). It is a geographic marker that affects family life by causing separation and division between parents and children. It is a major influence on the reality children face during their development. It is a marker of socioeconomic status as well as emotional strain due to the buildup of tensions between countries it divides on

either side. In Reyna's story, the effects of the border are represented through the cycle of maternal figures that affect her life during her formative years.

The U.S. is portrayed as an ultimate source of power in this narrative. Rather than focus on the taking of children at the border, like many sensational news pieces have done recently,<sup>3</sup> Grande's book begins with the declaration that the U.S. takes parents away from their families. Put another way, Grande's memoir reverses the paradigmatic ways we think about the lives of immigrant children in borderland narratives. Throughout the memoir, Reyna Grande refers to the United States as *El Otro Lado* (The Other Side). The name holds an implication of something other, unnatural and unknown, across what is perceived to be an impenetrable border. The name depicts the U.S. as an enormous entity, placed upon a pedestal that is unreachable to the masses clinging to its feet. Luiselli's *Tell Me How It Ends* (2017), discussed in the next chapter, is an essay whose form takes the shape of an immigration questionnaire and is the format through which children are examined by immigration and governmental officials. Current news media shows the U.S. as an international power that takes children and locks them up.

On the other hand, Grande's memoir depicts the U.S. as "a power that takes away parents, not children" (Grande 3). In her early childhood, Reyna hears how everyone in her town of Iguala in Guerrero, Mexico described the United States as *El Otro Lado*. Guerrero is located deep in Mexico and is closer to the border Mexico shares with Guatemala than the U.S. border. The distance sheds light on the border's violent geographical reach as it pulls parents from deep within Mexico's territorial body. The reverence felt towards the United States is exacerbated by

<sup>3</sup> Billingsley, Lloyd. "DACA Declared Dead as Border Anarchy Intensifies." *Frontpagemag*, 3 Apr. 2018, [archives.frontpagemag.com/fpm/daca-declared-dead-border-anarchy-intensifies-lloyd-billingsley/](https://archives.frontpagemag.com/fpm/daca-declared-dead-border-anarchy-intensifies-lloyd-billingsley/).

the distance between Guerrero and the United States. This abstraction of the American presence becomes larger than God. Grande writes “What I knew was that prayers didn’t work, because if they did, El Otro Lado wouldn’t be taking my mother away too” (Grande 4). Reyna sees *El Otro Lado* as an all-powerful presence to pray to that has the capacity to stymie her desires. However, there is a loss of faith associated with Reyna’s ties to the north. As a child longing for her parents, she feels insignificant and powerless.

The abstract idea of *El Otro Lado* becomes a way of deifying the unreachable country to the north. In Reyna’s own words, “there was a reverence in their voice, as if they were talking about something holy, like God” (Reyna 37). Religion is a significant part of Mexican culture and family life. Comparing the United States to God emphasizes the impact of its presence. While God can be merciful, he is often unforgiving. The U.S. treats migrants in the same way, choosing who is deserving of opportunity and who is not. Religion is tied to the border again when Reyna attempts her own crossing with her father and siblings, Carlos and Mago. While undertaking the traumatic journey, Grande recalls “the church pilgrimages we had taken with Abuelita Chinta a couple of times. *If I once made it through nine days of walking, surely I could make it now, couldn’t I?*” (Grande 156). By comparing her border crossing to a spiritual journey, or religious pilgrimage Grande shows that her “perception of the other side of the border is influenced by a prevailing discourse of veneration” (Muñoz, Vigil 231). Throughout her childhood, Reyna has looked to the U.S. as a place where magic and mystery are abundant. After all, her parents disappeared into this land and emerged as completely different people. Grande likens the border crossing to a journey fueled by faith and belief in a higher power. It becomes a journey that should fulfill Reyna’s emotional and spiritual needs in some way, but disillusionment leaves her feeling empty as the journey cannot heal her sense of abandonment.

The journey north is mainly associated with the arduous trek immigrants must make through the desert to get to the border. In keeping with the religious connections made throughout Grande's memoir, the dangerous "pilgrimage" Reyna takes through the desert is similar to the forty days that Jesus spends in the desert according to the Bible. The desert is an unforgiving landscape, characterized by the Bible as a place haunted by the temptations of the Devil and divine punishment. In Grande's memoir, the desert is marked by Reyna's first open encounter with death outside of her own family. While having been exposed to her cousin's corpse before leaving her hometown of Iguala, Reyna has never been close to a dead stranger and the reality of the danger surrounding her will haunt her nightmares for years to come. These scenes complicate the idea of the distance between Reyna and her mother by showing it in the violent reality of murder. It also prevents the reader from making the easy conclusion that Juana abandons Reyna because she wanted to. In her own way, Juana is protecting her daughter from the dangers of the borderlands. She is being a mother in the best way she knows how: by leaving and providing for them in U.S. dollars from afar. Throughout Grande's memoir, *El Otro Lado* is a symbol of opportunity, material wealth, and distance. Reyna's hometown of Iguala is known for the people who leave to go to the U.S. for job opportunities. The main motivation for leaving is being able to provide a better life for those waiting back at home in Mexico. The economic reality shows that Reyna's mother left for monetary reasons and chose to leave her children behind as a way to preserve their innocence while attempting to improve their economic reality. Reyna's encounter with death in the borderlands is an example of an event that Juana perhaps hoped to prevent but ultimately could not.

Grande characterizes the U.S. as a way of measuring the distance between Reyna and her parents. When Reyna and her siblings receive a package sent by their parents from the U.S., they



are disappointed to find that “the shoes they sent were a size too small, and so were the dresses” (Grande 56). In their parents’ minds, the children have not grown while they have been away. However, Reyna feels the time pass with painful clarity as if “time stood still and over there I hadn’t yet turned six” (Grande 56). Her parents have begun to fulfill what they had set out to do; they have begun to provide for their children in ways they hadn’t been able to afford while being in Mexico. However, the clothes serve as evidence of the time lost for their family and as the border’s capacity to rearrange their relationship to chronological time. Parents are meant to know their child better than anyone. A fact as easy as clothing and shoe size would come easily to any parent that regularly spent time with their child and bought them clothes as they outgrew the last pair. Reyna sees the clothes as proof that her parents have forgotten about her. Their lack of knowledge about their children is painful to each of them.

*El Otro Lado* is also tied to Reyna’s father throughout the memoir. Grande hopes for any semblance of a family and sees the border crossing as a way to achieve “an emotional reconciliation with a parent she has long yearned but also spurs confrontations with physical and emotional abuse” (Muñoz, Vigil 232). After her mother returns to the U.S. as evidence of a failed marriage, Reyna and her sister Mago turn to the U.S. and their father as their only way of having a family. Despite the fact that her father has spurned her mother, Reyna still holds out hope that “the Man Behind the Glass,” as she calls his photograph, will come rescue her from Iguala and restore some order to her life. She venerates the picture of her father in the same way that some people south of the border speak of the U.S. making the linkages between nationalism and male power clear. Her attachment towards the only paternal figure in her life is seen through the lens of border trauma.

Reyna Grande's memoir puts a distinct emphasis on the idea of motherhood and the various forms in which maternity can be portrayed. The relationship between mother and daughter is seen as sacred. It is a continuation of a cycle of inheritance that stems from the Virgin Mother Mary. In Mexican culture, the virgin is portrayed as La Virgen de Guadalupe, a significant maternal symbol for Chicanas. The patriarchal nature of traditional Mexican households makes the idea of maternity even more prevalent. Chicanas are not given much of a choice in what they can do with their own lives. Anzaldúa illustrates this by saying "For a woman of my culture there used to be only three directions she could turn: to the Church as a nun, to the streets as a prostitute, or to the home as a mother" (39). The virgin-whore dichotomy is emphasized by the idea that motherhood is one of a few very limited choices for a woman and is not simply born through a woman's desires for sexual autonomy, nor simply through a desire to nurture a child. This dichotomy is the very categorization that Grande revises in her novel through the various versions of "mother figures" that she has throughout her childhood that help to elaborate our conceptions of maternal figures.

Before discussing the maternal figures present in Grande's memoir, it is important to discuss maternal figures in terms of Anzaldúa's *Borderlands*. According to Anzaldúa, the Chicanos have three mothers: "*Guadalupe*, the virgin mother who has not abandoned us, *la Chingada (Malinche)*, the raped mother whom we have abandoned, and *la Llorona*, the mother who seeks her lost children and is a combination of the other two" (53). In reality, these mother figures have been twisted into symbols that fit within the patriarchal system and are characterized by a relationship to loss. La Virgen de Guadalupe is a dramatization of motherhood as a path to purity and sanctity. The ultimate symbol of feminine passivity, la Virgen de Guadalupe is a figure void of any kind of sexual energy. By being the mother who still remains a

virgin, she is seen as untouched and clean. Cristina Herrera discusses the downfall of the virgin mother oxymoron in *Contemporary Chicana Literature: (Re)Writing the Maternal Script* (2014): “[A mother’s] nonvirgin female body is tied to sex, and because sex is bad, the mother is disparaged; she is thus simultaneously elevated and denigrated” (Herrera 46). She is expected to be a good woman and form a family, but a good woman must also be resistant to sexual energy. It is a situation she can never win, a system she can never satisfy. By virtue of the patriarchal system, mothers are both uplifted and degraded. Herrera discusses how “the role of mother is often the sole source of power granted a woman in society or culture” (18). The one decision women are allowed to make without facing social repercussions, however, is severely controlled by men. Regardless of whether or not they choose to have children, women are judged and treated as subjects who must be controlled lest they be corrupted by sexual urges.

Anzaldúa characterizes La Virgen as “the single most potent religious, political and cultural image of the Chicano/*mexicano*” (Anzaldúa 52). The virgin-whore dichotomy Anzaldúa discusses in *Borderlands* is pushed forward by the Catholic church. In the eyes of the patriarchy, the virgin mother is an ideal that all women should strive to attain. La Virgen portrays a mother who is larger than life, willing to sacrifice anything for her children, the Mexican people. She is the mother that never abandons. The fight to achieve the virgin’s level of perfection will never end; it is a pedestal that women will never be able to reach. Yet, the virgin’s example provides a reason for men to shun women who stop trying to attain “virgin” status. It is a distraction for women; keeping a group of people occupied in a struggle they will never overcome keeps them docile and under control.

La Chingada’s story has roots in the history of the Chicana people. Malinche, a woman of Aztec descent who is also called “*Malinali Tenepat* or *Malintzin*” (Anzaldúa 44), is known for

her interactions with conquistador Hernan Cortes, serving him as an interpreter. Chicana feminist reinterpretations of this figure point to the ways skewed historical accounts have portrayed her as a traitor to her people for becoming Cortes' mistress. She is thought to be the mother of the *mestizo*, a mix of the true Aztec origin of Mexico and Cortes' European birthright. Anzaldúa's description of la Chingada as "the raped mother whom we have abandoned" (*Borderlands* 52) seeks to revise the narrative of female sexual promiscuity as evil and unnatural. Instead of seeing Malinche's rape, men sought to control her image by implying that a lack of control over her own sexual urges led her to sell out her people to colonizers. When a woman gets in touch with her sexuality, she becomes dangerous, someone who needs to be contained. A term for abuse, *chingada* is used to describe any woman who has been "fucked"; any woman who has begun to deepen her own understanding of the natural essence between her legs becomes *la hija de la Chingada*. Traditional prejudice against sex further emphasizes the virgin-whore dichotomy. If you are not working towards the ideal of la Virgen de Guadalupe, then you are la hija de la Chingada. The term chingada is a profane epithet used by people of Mexican origin. It is a label given to women who are described as "the fucked one" or as a "whore [or] prostitute" (Anzaldúa 44). By describing Malinche as "abandoned," Anzaldúa opens our eyes to the way patriarchal structures within Mexican society have changed the idea of female sexuality and have leveraged sexual desire and sexuality into a weapon that has been put to use against Chicanas.

The third mother, La Llorona, comes into play in many Chicana texts that seek to use and revise myth in order to make their own points about Chicana feminism and female autonomy. There are various versions of the legend of La Llorona with shifting characters and events. The main idea revolves around a woman who is consumed by grief after being abandoned by her husband. Her grief is so blinding that she murders her own children, drowning them in a river.

The traditional version of the legend claims that her ghost roams near bodies of water, all in white, wailing for her lost children. She is seen as a symbol of hysteria. The root of the word “hysteria” is the Greek *hystera*, meaning of the womb. Disturbances caused by the uterus were thought to cause extreme emotions in women, who were labeled as hysteric and have continued to bear the weight of this label ever since. Anzaldúa revamps the idea of womanhood through her observations about the uterus itself: “The female, by virtue of creating entities of flesh and blood in her stomach (she bleeds every month but does not die), by virtue of being in tune with nature’s cycles, is feared” (39). Anzaldúa depicts a woman allied with nature, powerful in her own right. On the other hand, the legend of La Llorona is intended to be placating; it demonizes a woman’s grief by turning her into a murderous monster with no control. In *There Was A Woman: La Llorona from Folktale to Popular Culture* (2008), Domino Perez describes how the portrayal of la Llorona as “a bad mother, while excusing or ignoring the behavior of the man” (23) dangerously reaffirms the notion of women as threats unless they are controlled. Chicana feminists have rewritten la Llorona into “a sign of resistance in a society which glorified the warrior” (Anzaldúa 55).

In *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Anzaldúa shows connections between the physical border and la Llorona’s image before being perverted by the patriarchy. She writes “The sea cannot be fenced, *el mar* does not stop at borders. To show the white man what she thought of his arrogance, *Yemaya* blew that wire fence down” (25). The comparison of the U.S.-Mexico border to the ocean creates an environment of movement and chaos. It is a perpetuation of the image posed by Anzaldúa when she distinguishes the border from the borderlands. It is an environment made up of resistance; the waves beating against the shore mimic the resistance of Chicana feminists against the patriarchal system of control imposed upon them. The inclusion of the

goddess Yemaya emphasizes the idea of woman as worthy of adoration without the traditional prerequisites. Yemaya is a divine being known as an orisha who belongs to the religious practice of Santeria. For these reasons, Alex Espinoza among other Mexican American writers, shows the connection between Santeria, curanderismo and Chicana cultural practices in his novel, *Still Water Saints*. He describes how la curandera, Perla, has learned about various spirits including “Yemaya, the daughter of the seas, whose colors are sky blue and white” (Espinoza 82). Ysamur Flores describes Yemaya as “the mother of the most important orishas. She rules over motherhood as a value, and the sea with all its abundance and ceaseless motion is her physical representation” (51). Her connection to “ceaseless motion” presents Yemaya as a spiritual embodiment of the borderlands, at odds with Grande’s *El Otro Lado*. Yemaya’s role as a mother connects Anzaldúa’s theorization of the border to the triad of maternal figures introduced as the mothers of the Chicanas. From Espinoza’s descriptions of a woman dressed in white to the connection to bodies of water, Yemaya embodies the goddess version of la Llorona and Mexican American writers wrestle with Yemaya’s representation across genres.

When comparing la Virgen de Guadalupe and la Llorona, a goddess uplifted into an impossible standard and a goddess perverted in order to further the impact of the good/bad mother dichotomy, the main difference is control. La Virgen is an image that can easily be manipulated by the patriarchy; her passivity encompasses what the perfect woman should be like in order to live in a male-dominated environment. La Llorona (Yemaya) is a woman who does not trouble herself with being passive. With the ocean as her guiding symbol, she is the image of resistance. In order to be able to control her, the perversion of her form into la Llorona was necessary. Anzaldúa writes “The male dominated Azteca-Mexica culture drove the powerful female deities by giving them monstrous attributes” (49). The image of Yemaya was twisted

into a spirit to be afraid of rather than a female deity to admire. According to the standards of the patriarchy and the Catholic church, a woman only deserves to keep her goddess-like state if she refrains from engaging in the intricate process of getting to know her own sexuality. The man is never reprimanded for his adultery in the versions of the myth in which he is unfaithful. The woman receives the eternal punishment of damnation and a reputation used as a cautionary tale of the dangers of leaving home.

At the beginning of Grande's memoir, she recalls her grandmother using the tale of la Llorona as a warning: "She would say that if we didn't behave, la Llorona would take us far away where we would never see our parents again" (3). Reyna's childhood, as well as her narrative, is marked by the presence of la Llorona as a figure symbolizing the terrifying reality of family separation. Cristina Herrera explains the use of the legend as a way to "teach their daughters the rules created by the patriarchy" (58). The image of the weeping woman is used as a tool of cultural oppression towards young girls.

The relationship between the goddess and the grieving spirit are an example of the effects of the patriarchy on female mythical figures and icons, and they point us to how discourses animate the oppression of women. A goddess likened to the ocean, an uncontrollable force of nature, is reduced to a temptress whose actions culminated in the destruction of life and family values. And yet, men can't control women who know their own power. By transforming a goddess into a flawed woman, men ensure that they are in control of women, despite female divine ancestry. However, Anzaldúa's likeness of the border to a goddess marked by her relationship to the undying restlessness of the waves creates a feminist spirituality with foundations in the borderlands. The waves continue to crash in the same way that Chicana

feminists continue to resist the traditional values imposed upon them and revise the prevailing representations of womanhood that circulate.

According to Anzaldúa, “males make the rules and laws; women transmit them” (38). Reyna’s abuela fills in the role of the surrogate mother transmitting the culture to the young daughters of the family through her retelling of the myth of La Llorona. Anzaldúa goes on to explain how “the culture expects women to show greater acceptance of, and commitment to, the value system than men” (39). According to the patriarchal system that is emphasized in the myth of la Llorona, women must be controlled by men in order to keep from falling into despair. The idea that a woman must be kept bound by the ties of tradition is firmly established in the first page of Grande’s book. The resistance against male dominance and control is central to Chicana identity. The introduction of the socialization young Reyna experiences as a child at the hands of her grandmother shows the beginning of the shifting halves of her identity beginning to make an impact in her life.

Grande ties the idea of control and oppression to the United States later on in the prologue: “Neither of my grandmothers told us that there is something more powerful than la Llorona—a power that takes away parents, not children. It is called the United States” (3). By linking her childhood memories of la Llorona to the effects the United States (and by default the geopolitical presence of the border) has on her life, Grande opens the idea of control over women onto a global spectrum. She unveils a connection between nation and its ability to control female autonomy. The application of nation to gender shows the focused idea of the effect of the border on a girl’s childhood to the broader discussion about how maternal relationships are implicated in oppression in Chicana culture. The myth of la Llorona is a prevalent symbol in Chicana



literature; her role as a maternal figure as well as the implications of abandonment complicate and revise depictions of the murderous mother.

The distinction between each of the three mothers is significant to Chicana feminism due to the importance of the mother figure in Chicana literary practice. Anzaldúa explains “the true identity of all three has been subverted—*Guadalupe* to make us docile and enduring, *la Chingada* to make us ashamed of our Indian side, and *la Llorona* to make us long suffering people” (53). Motherhood is shaped by a system of categorization used to classify women into easily controllable positions. The separation caused by the border catalyzes the perversion of the idea of motherhood and distorts the unique connection between mother and daughter. The relationship between mother and daughter shapes both individuals and their identities. Discussing these fluctuating connections in terms of the border helps inform the developing identities of young girls and their relationships to themselves, their mothers, and the borderlands.

My point is that the trinity of mothers used in Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands* provides a significant lens to analyze the various maternal figures that appear in Reyna Grande’s memoir. The first mother figure introduced in the text is Juana, Reyna’s birth mother. Juana is a representation of La Llorona, shown by her reactions to men and her own children. At the beginning of the book, Juana is getting ready to cross to El Otro Lado to join her husband, Reyna’s father. Grande writes how Reyna resents her mother’s decision, saying “It made me angry to hear her say those words: *My husband needs me*. As if my father were not a grown man. As if her children didn’t need her as well” (7). From a young age, Reyna shows her own form of resistance towards the patriarchal structure enforcing the idea of the man being granted power, primacy and centrality above all. Despite being young, Reyna sees her father as an adult and directs her anger towards him. He is responsible for endangering her connection to her mother.

Juana's journey to the United States is a source of significant trauma for the three children she leaves behind. It is the beginning of major change in their family structure since Juana enacts the role of La Llorona.

One of the prevalent images throughout Reyna's separation from her mother in the early part of the memoir is the connection between mother and daughter through the umbilical cord. It is a carnal defiance of the separation of the border as well as a symbol of motherhood and family ties. After being called an orphan and losing her temper, Reyna lets her older sister, Mago, take her into the old shack in which she was born:

Mago pointed to a spot on the dirt floor and reminded me that my umbilical cord was buried there. *That way, Mami told the midwife, no matter where life takes her, she won't ever forget where she came from.* But then Mago touched my bellybutton and added something to the story my mother had never told me. She said that my umbilical cord was like a ribbon that connected me to Mami. She said, "It doesn't matter that there's a distance between us now. That cord is there forever." (Grande 21)

The umbilical cord is a distinct symbol of the relationship between mother and daughter. In "El entierro del ombligo," (the burial of the belly button), David E. León Romero writes "Qué doloroso debe ser abandonar la tierra donde está enterrado nuestro ombligo" (2019). Translated, it means "how painful it must be to abandon the place where our bellybutton is buried." The most obvious function of the umbilical cord is its primacy as an organic tie between living beings. It is a symbol of life and vitality. The ritual of burying it in the floor of an individual's birthplace creates a living tie between the individual and their homeland aside from the connection between mother and child.

The mother affects the child's identity throughout their childhood and development. Herrera discusses how the mother-daughter relationship is characterized by two individuals who "seek their own space, seek autonomy yet also attachment to each other" (Herrera 13). Mothers see themselves in their young daughters while daughters seek validation and approval from mothers. Each person's reality is subjective and tainted by different experiences affected by time and place. However, the natural bond of mother and daughter ties them together. The umbilical cord is a tangible, physical rendering of this bond. It is a tie to Reyna's identity from her birth that stretches into adulthood after immigrating to the United States. In the introduction to his book, *Border Matters: Remapping American Cultural Studies* (1997), José David Saldívar theorizes the border as a place of transformation. He describes how "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" (Saldívar 8). Reyna's crossing changes the function of the umbilical cord from a link to her mother into a connection to her homeland. It is an acknowledgment of indigenous ties to the land, a form of ownership that can't be taken by colonial structures.

The umbilical cord presented in Grande's narrative also shows her changing relationship to her homeland as well as her socioeconomic reality. In this early memory, Grande uses the image of Reyna's umbilical cord as a way to reach across the border to her mother. It is a way for her to stay connected. The shack is her childhood home and she views it with the tinted lens of sentimentality. Her ties to Iguala cause her to view Mexico through the eyes of a child seeing "the velvety mountains around us, the clear blue sky, the beautiful jacaranda trees covered in purple flowers..." (Grande 64). Despite the reality of Iguala's "crumbling adobe houses, the shacks made of sticks, the children with worm-pregnant bellies..." (Grande 64), Reyna still sees

an image of Mexico filled with natural beauty as opposed to an adult's perspective of a poverty-stricken land. The child-like innocence she uses to see her homeland as a natural marvel is connected to the fact that her umbilical cord is literally buried in the earth. She feels tied to Mexico and to nature through this bond. The illusion of beauty shatters when Reyna comes back as an adult later on in the memoir. This physical tie to her homeland is cut as she realizes that "even though my umbilical cord was buried in Iguala, I was no longer considered Mexican enough" (Grande 281). Her time in El Otro Lado and her transformation as a result of traversing the border shapes her identity in ways that those she encounters while visiting Iguala do not understand. She is neither Mexican nor American, stuck in an identity limbo that leaves her feeling at a loss.

In terms of the umbilical cord, Anzaldúa takes up the significance of mother/daughter relationships to the constricting power of domesticity. She writes "there's an ancient Indian tradition of burying the umbilical cord of an infant girl under the house so she will never stray from it and her domestic role" (Anzaldúa 58). The relationship depicted creates a complication between the childhood notion of being tied to your home and the confinement of Chicana women to subservient, domestic roles. The image of a life-sustaining physical tie forged of blood is perverted into a symbol of confinement. Throughout her childhood, Reyna resists the patriarchal institution in small ways. When she starts school and realizes that her grandmother doesn't send her and her siblings food for lunch, she eats a mango off of the floor despite being told that "when food falls to the ground, the devil, who lives right below us, kisses it and taints it with evil" (Grande 53). Despite being conditioned by tales that her culture transmits, Reyna rebels by eating the mango anyway. As she continues to grow and develop, her rebellious spirit begins to

take form. Reyna commits the ultimate act of resistance by leaving home, returning later on in life, and recognizing the reality of the conditions she lived in.

In Juana's absence, Reyna and her siblings are left under the care of their paternal grandmother, Abuela Evila. While her grandmother is seen as a figure of authority, Reyna does not associate any feelings of maternal connection to her. However, she witnesses the way her grandmother dotes on her cousin, Elida. This experience lets Reyna observe a makeshift mother-daughter relationship from an outsider's point of view. Her position in her grandmother's household mirrors her position as an outsider standing at the edge of the borderlands. Anzaldúa qualifies the pain felt by an outsider as trauma in *Borderlands*: "Those who are pushed out of the tribe for being different are likely to become more sensitized (when not brutalized into insensitivity)" (60). Those who are pushed out, such as Mexicans pushed out of their rightful land or migrants pushed out of the United States, develop different senses due to the trauma they endure. Grande depicts exact instances in which Reyna felt herself on the outside looking in. She is pushed out of the makeshift tribe formed in her grandmother's home. The pain of the distance between herself and a potential mother figure causes the development of a new sensitivity, which later morphs into her identity as a Chicana. Reyna's stay with her grandmother is directly caused by her parents' departure. However, Abuela Evila's cruelty is not caused by the border, but the old woman's prejudice against her daughter-in-law due to her traditional distrust of women outside her family.

After Reyna endures the hardships of living in the care of her abusive paternal grandmother, Juana's return to Mexico is another blow to her ideal image of a family. Broken by her husband's infidelity, Juana comes back a changed woman: "The woman standing there wasn't the same woman who had left" (Grande 76). In terms of Anzaldúa's maternal figures,

Juana begins transforming into a microcosm of la Llorona. She is broken down by the grief of losing Reyna's father to another woman. Despite uprooting her entire life to serve him in El Otro Lado, she was still replaced. The feeling of not being good enough twists Juana's identity into a new form. She no longer feels the ties to motherhood that she exhibited in the beginning of the memoir. The children begin to feel the shift as well. Grande describes how inheriting her father's features began to feel like a curse to her: "I wanted to grab the Man Behind the Glass and toss him onto the railroad tracks so the train would shatter him. So that Mami wouldn't look at him, and look at me, and then think we were one and the same" (Grande 91). Juana's grief at Natalio's betrayal effectively kills her maternal instincts, bringing an end to the mother inside of her. Juana becomes a representation of the figure of la Llorona; her heartbreak becomes a murder weapon, killing her ties to her children.

As the children grow accustomed to having Juana in their lives again, their mother decides to leave with yet another man. Juana's decision mirrors la Llorona slaying her children. In the same way la Llorona chooses to let her husband's betrayal outweigh the value of the lives of her children, Juana decides that forgetting one man and gaining another is more important than being a stable presence in her children's lives. She rids herself of the one true reminder of her husband like la Llorona did when she drowned her children. Juana becomes a lost soul in the world; without her husband, she becomes restless and searches for herself anywhere other than the family she tore apart. In "Chicana Memoir and the DREAMer Generation: Reyna Grande's *The Distance Between Us* as Neo-colonial Critique and Feminist Testimonio," Marion Christina Rohrleitner describes Juana as "a woman who defines her own value via her male partners' desire for her" (49). The image of a woman deeply affected by men is emphasized through Grande's observation that her father "had returned to us a different version of my mother, one

who was bitter, heartbroken, and weighed down by the knowledge that she had four children to support and was on her own” (Grande 78). *La Llorona* was alone with her children as well; versions of the legend depict a husband and father who was unfaithful or slowly faded into the background. She dealt with the emotional turmoil she was experiencing on her own. Both women felt like failures; they had failed to keep their family together. The misogynistic ideals of the patriarchy made these women feel that it was their fault that their husbands had failed them.

Reyna and her siblings are deeply affected by their mother’s second departure. After her first departure, the children cling on to the hope that their mother is here to stay. The news that she is planning on leaving them for another man is heartbreaking. As the youngest, Reyna still clings to the ideal of her mom. Her connection to her mother becomes even more tenuous after she leaves. Grande describes, “When Mami left, she didn’t even have the courage to tell us...At seven years old, I found myself running to catch up to my mother and beg her not to leave me for the second time in my life” (Grande 93). The connotation of the word “beg” implies the extent of Reyna’s hopelessness. Begging breaks down a person’s dignity. To a child, that may not mean much, but as they transition to adulthood, the child will remember how being in that position made them feel. No child should ever have to beg their mother to stay in their lives. The traumatic absence of a goodbye from her mother at the tender age of seven years old marks Reyna’s development as it progresses into adulthood.

After being abandoned by their mother, Reyna and her siblings find their lives being uprooted again by the return of their father. As if his return is not enough, he brings in tow his new wife. Reyna must now deal with the rocky introduction of a new maternal figure in her life. For all intents and purposes, Mila becomes a figure of authority to Reyna. However, her resentment keeps her from becoming a true mother. From the first moment she meets her, Reyna

labels her as “the woman who had broken up my family” (Grande 144). However, her childhood self begins to compare Mila to her own mother and is surprised at the fact that she wishes her own mother was more like Mila. In Reyna’s mind, she is “betraying my mother. I told myself I should hate that woman, not admire her clothes or makeup or pretty skin” (Grande 144). Mila begins to fill the stereotype of the “evil” stepmother. While she does not treat the children with cruelty in the same way that Abuela Evila had done in Mexico, Mila does make her feelings clear to the children. She resents them for not being her actual children and feels the strain of having the fruit of her husband’s first marriage present in her life. Looking back on her childhood, Grande recalls how “she wasn’t an evil stepmother, not like in the fairy tales I loved to listen to. But she also wasn’t the mother I so desperately wanted to have” (Grande 184). In the midst of their father’s continued abuse, Reyna and her siblings found the slightest solace in Mila’s kindness. However, Reyna can’t shake the knowledge of Mila’s pain and indifference towards them.

Mila’s connection to Anzaldúa’s maternal trinity comes from her connection to her womanhood as opposed to her relationship with Reyna. It is uncommon to see a woman who has taken it upon herself to break out of her traditional role as a mother and family woman in order to follow her own path. By leaving her previous husband, Mila undermines the system of patriarchy which has kept her in a set role since becoming married. Leaving one man for another implies an awareness of her own sexual drive; it is a rebellion against the institution of the church as well as tradition. She is a strong likeness of la Malinche, the woman who was scorned for “sleeping” with Cortes and essentially giving birth to the mestizo. She shuns the traditional notion of being a loyal wife in the same way that la Malinche supposedly turned her back on her loyalty to her people by getting into bed with colonizers. In the same way, Mila is scorned by her



family only because of the ways in which a man defines her. By breaking out of this stereotype, she embraces freedom. Mila is different from traditional Mexican women due to spending most of her life in the United States. The freedom she was allowed in the U.S. changes the way she acts as a woman. While in Mexico, Mila shows her dislike of Abuela Evila's sexist comments, telling her, "It's different for women in the U.S....Over there, women aren't treated like servants" (Grande 149). Mila's unique stance shows her character and immediately puts her in the category of "bad women" that every Chicana woman has been warned not to be. This distinction sets her apart from the rest of the women that Reyna has dealt with thus far. However, she falls back into the role of submissive wife to Reyna's father despite his abuse. Grande recounts being "disappointed in Mila for dropping the charges and staying. I thought she was a different kind of woman" (Grande 305). The narrative being spun here is of a woman in chains. Despite learning more about herself and growing enough to leave, she falls back into the same traditional role.

However, Mila is different from Juana in every way. From the first moment that Reyna meets her, Mila shows herself as Juana's true opposite. Reyna's first reaction is to compare Mila to Juana and to wish "that the woman before me didn't look younger than my mother, even though she was five years older" (Grande 144). Every positive thing about Mila has its negative counterpart in Juana. The one quality that puts these women on a level playing field is their motherhood. Each woman has multiple children, and each is blamed by their respective families for abandoning their responsibilities as mothers. However, aside from each family's perception, Grande relates how Mila never truly abandoned her children despite choosing to leave her family in order to follow her heart. While Juana chooses to leave her children in order to make sense of her own life, Mila "never gave up on her kids....just because she had lost them that day didn't

mean she had given up the fight. And she never did” (Grande 183). Mila’s character is connected to Anzaldúa’s idea of “the raped mother whom we have abandoned” (Anzaldúa 52). Mila has never truly left her children; she is still actively trying to reconcile and be a part of their life. However, her children abandon her and choose to denounce her in the same way people denounce Malinche as *La Chingada*.

Another maternal figure that is given recognition in Grande’s narrative is her older sister, Mago. Throughout the memoir, Mago serves as the most consistent form of authority that Reyna has during her formative years. Throughout Reyna’s childhood, she calls Mago her “little mother” and defers to her as the head of their family. Despite feeling abandoned, Reyna looked up to Mago because she “was there when my father and mother were not” (Grande 16). Throughout the entirety of the memoir, Mago becomes a constant symbol of kindness stemming from love rather than obligation like Mila. Mago steps up for her siblings to protect them when the adults in their lives refuse to do so. When Reyna gets stung by a scorpion while living with Abuela Evila, Mago pleads for her aunt to take her to the hospital (Grande 63). She does the same for Betty years later when Abuelita Chinta accidentally drops boiling water on the young girl’s face (Grande 115). She is the biggest advocate when Reyna needs someone in her corner.

One of the defining moments of Reyna and Mago’s relationship is their father’s decision to take the oldest siblings with him to the U.S., leaving Reyna behind. Mago did not allow this to happen; she fought against her father’s wishes strongly, saying ““I won’t go with you if you don’t take Reyna”” (Grande 149). Despite knowing their father’s refusal means that she might have to stay in Mexico as well, Mago does something that Reyna’s mother had not been capable of: her “maternal instincts won over her need to save herself” (Grande 149). Mago is able to push for her sister’s future by taking her out of Mexico and giving her the chance to be with her own

family. While both Juana and Natalio chose to leave their young daughter behind, Mago is not willing to leave Reyna behind, establishing Reyna's importance to both Mago and their family structure. Taking her to the United States is Mago's way of fulfilling "Reyna's emotional and physical needs" (Muñoz, Vigil 229). After being abandoned countless times by both her parents, Reyna needs the validation given to her by her older sister. This moment marks Mago as Reyna's true maternal influence and the person whom she depends on for validation and affection.

As a child, Mago has pride in her roots and the city she was born in. She tells her siblings "that we should be proud to have been born in Iguala..." (Grande 49). However, the border has its effect on Mago as well. After migrating to the U.S., Reyna begins to notice her sister choosing to assimilate. The crossing is transforming her into an assimilated version of herself. By reinventing herself into Maggie, Mago begins to shed the influences of her home in Iguala for the more likable nuances of *El Otro Lado*. Mago is similar to many people who leave Mexico in search for a better life; she "rejects any actual or theoretical return to Mexico" (Muñoz, Vigil 235). This is one of the main differences between Mago and Reyna's development in the United States. Mago shows her rejection for Mexico and an assimilation into her new American way of life of assimilation. On the other hand, Reyna misses the freedom and childhood safety of her hometown of Iguala (Grande 174). She holds onto her country in a different way than her sister does.

As Mago continues to get older, Reyna notices the changes in her sister which mark the beginning of her assimilation. She realizes the many ways in which Mago rejects her Mexican heritage in order to fully embrace "the American Dream." In Anzaldúa's pre-draft notes, written before she began writing *Borderlands*, which are held in a collection at the Benson Latin American Collection in Austin, TX, she writes "Unlike my more unfortunate paisanos, I acquired

the self-knowledge to figure out what was going on. Others not as lucky begin to resemble the projection.<sup>4</sup> However, Mago also rejects the abuse of her father and stands up to him by leaving home (Grande 287). While Mago's departure deeply hurts Reyna, this decisive action gives Reyna the strength she needs to leave her abusive household and attend college. Mago, through her influence and maternal affection, is one of the only positive role models that Reyna has during her formative years.

The final maternal figure introduced into Reyna's life is found in her mentor Diana Savas. She becomes the strongest maternal, if not biological, bond that Reyna has with another woman. It is a professional form of validation and a form of chosen family rather than a family bond. After meeting her in a college class, Reyna feels drawn to Dr. Savas due to the validation that the professor gives her as a writer. She is also the first to introduce Reyna to literature that connects her to her identity as Latina. Reyna no longer feels the need to read books about twin sisters who had sun-kissed blond hair, a golden tan..." because of the escape they offer into "a world I wished to belong to" (Grande 241). Instead of wanting to disappear into the picture-perfect American life, Reyna finds solace in "characters with the same color skin as mine. With the same heartaches and dreams" (Grande 300). Diana is the first woman in Reyna's life to truly accept her unrestricted by the bonds of blood and family.

Diana Savas also gives Reyna the first stable home she has known since her parents immigrated to the U.S., devoid of abuse and disillusionment. Grande recalls how "it was a rare feeling to be out in the living room and not be afraid that someone would yell at me, beat me, or put me down" (Grande 305). The trauma of living in various abusive households throughout her childhood took a toll on Reyna's development and her self-esteem as both a person and a writer.

<sup>4</sup> Gloria Evangelina Anzaldúa Papers, Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas Libraries, The University of Texas at Austin.

Under Diana's guidance, she begins to grow and develop emotionally and mentally. Diana becomes a path to healing for Reyna; she is the embodiment of La Virgen de Guadalupe, a benevolent and kind woman who is a symbol of forgiveness. While the patriarchy turned her image into one of passivity, Grande depicts her as an accomplished scholar, childless save for her students, who finally accepts Reyna for who she is. In Anzaldúa's personal notes on *Borderlands*, she describes the idea of "crossing the gender gap: wanting a career that is traditionally reserved for men.<sup>5</sup>" Diana Savas is a representation of La Virgen de Guadalupe who is empowered by her decision to make a difference and pursue academia. The feeling of empowerment is passed onto Reyna, evidenced by Grande's use of the traditional American form of the memoir to tell her own narrative. Grande makes the decision to tread into male-dominated spaces.

The traumatic experience of abandonment that Reyna Grande narrates in *The Distance Between Us* opens a larger conversation about the role of maternal figures in individuals impacted by the borderlands. How does the presence of a maternal connection inform the developing identity of Chicana immigrants? While the absence of maternal affection can be the difference between success, such as Reyna's, and survival, such as the rest of her siblings, the introduction of key individuals can begin to address the damage done by the absence of a true family structure. Anzaldúa's trilogy of mothers serves as a framework for understanding the way women relate to other women in order to develop an intelligent discourse about the larger dynamics of border-related trauma.

<sup>5</sup> Gloria Evangelina Anzaldúa Papers, Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas Libraries, The University of Texas at Austin.

## CHAPTER 2: EXPERIMENTATION WITH BORDERLAND NARRATIVES IN VALERIA LUISELLI'S *LOST CHILDREN ARCHIVE*

Valeria Luiselli's *Lost Children Archive* (2019) showcases representations of the effects of the border on a privileged American family. By using an academic road trip as a narrative structure, Luiselli creates a fragile image of a fracturing family and the inherent violence of having your story told for you. The narrator is a mother who finds herself in a unique family. Ma is a working woman in New York who meets Pa while they are working on a project together. Through the connection of their work, they marry and build a family. Both parents have academic pursuits, albeit with different aesthetic preferences: Ma prefers the narrative-driven aspect of sound documentation and Pa records what catches his attention and looks down upon Ma's journalistic tendencies. Each has a child from a previous relationship; Ma is the girl's birth mother while Pa is the boy's birth father. In the novel, Ma refers to them as "Boy" and "Girl." Together, they have created their own blended family, which looks ostensibly traditional from the outside. Luiselli describes their family structure through "the rules of their private grammar," which led to the decision of adopting "the much simpler possessive adjective our to refer to them two. They became: our children" (*Lost Children Archive* 6). The simple, yet decisive relay of information leaves no room for questions; it serves to unite them as a unique family living and sharing experiences together.

After establishing the inner workings of their family for the reader, Luiselli chooses a different approach to consider their fragile family: "New families, like young nations after violent wars of independence or social revolutions, perhaps need to anchor their beginnings in a symbolic moment" (*Lost Children Archive* 12). The anchoring moment for their family is moving into their first family dwelling, the first place they collectively call home. The novel

begins in a place of comfort and sentimentality; the road trip away from their anchoring point as a family alludes to the threads that are beginning to unravel in Ma's consciousness in terms of her relationship to Pa.

*Lost Children Archive* as well as Luiselli's 2017 non-fiction book *Tell Me How It Ends: An Essay in 40 Questions* are linked thematically, in terms of their concerns with contemporary border politics, as well as through story. *Tell Me How It Ends* is Luiselli's account of her time working in the New York Immigration Court system. Using an intake questionnaire as the structure for the book, Luiselli delves into the plight of undocumented, unaccompanied minors who travel to the U.S. in search of asylum. In order to subvert the strict structure of the questionnaire, Luiselli utilizes narrative as a way to provide nuance and complication in the undocumented children's stories. Essentially, *Lost Children Archive* is the fictional continuation of the factual narrative laid out in the essay format of *Tell Me How It Ends*.

In both books, specific lines and events coincide. For example, in *Tell Me How It Ends*, Luiselli and her husband are stopped by police asking them for documentation. *Lost Children Archive* features the same exchange, down to the same wording: "So you came all the way out here for *the inspiration*. And because we won't contradict anyone who carries a badge and a gun, we just say: Yes sir!" (*Lost Children Archive* 130, *Tell Me How It Ends* 24). These exchanges both happen in southern United States; as the proximity to the border increases, so does the prejudice against people of color. It is not uncommon for police officers to stop people of color despite there being little reason for doing so. The authority of law enforcement near the southern border is tinged with racial tension. The distinct connection between the two pieces shows the duality of Luiselli's work; both the fictional and the factual have a place in the narrative of migrant children. It also serves as confirmation that each piece has its own place as a form of

resistance and activism. Despite not being publicly confrontational when faced with authority, the author makes sure to structure the events and information we receive so that the reader understands that this is an academic form of social protest.

Valeria Luiselli is a Mexican author living and working in the United States. While she is not considered a Chicana author, her works touch on themes of the borderlands and creates discussions concerning migrant children, specifically in recent work. However, her upbringing does introduce a question of ethics. She writes about this concern in *Lost Children Archive*: “And why would I even think that I can or should make art with someone else’s suffering?” (79). It is a powerful thing to assume narrative authority over another human being’s experience. The media takes it upon itself to tell people’s stories for them. Luiselli touches on this in both *Lost Children Archive* and her essay, *Tell Me How It Ends*. In the novel, Ma grapples with the ramifications of producing a sound project “composed, fundamentally, of a series of testimonies or oral histories that register their own voices telling their stories” (*Lost Children Archive* 96). The project is deeply intimate and ambitious; by giving voice to the unspoken stories of detained children, Ma is attempting to ensure that there is documentation of the existing situation. Her main reservations in undertaking a project of such magnitude revolves around the way the media would twist the children’s stories “because the more attention a potentially controversial issue receives in the media, the more susceptible it is to become politicized” (*Lost Children Archive* 79). Throughout the novel, Luiselli repurposes different labels that the media uses to describe the children at the border and avoid the media’s influence.

In order to distance the children from the rest of the American public, the media writes with the intention of implying “These children are utterly foreign to us...They come from a barbaric reality” (*Lost Children Archive* 50). While there is no deceit in reporting the violent



lives the children flee from, the media weaponizes the children's backstories in an attempt to distance and dehumanize their stories. By demonizing the children in the media, reporters ensure that their audience can rest easy knowing that their children are not in that position; it doesn't affect them directly. Luiselli challenges this directly by placing Ma's own children in that scenario: "I wonder if they would survive in the hands of coyotes, and what would happen to them if they had to cross the desert on their own. Were they to find themselves alone, would our own children survive?" (*Lost Children Archive* 117). Luiselli uses the privileged children in her novel as a way to force the general public to pay attention. By appropriating someone's trauma, Luiselli seeks to show the unfairness and bias present in the United States. While people may care what happens to a child from a family living in New York, no one is worried about unaccompanied children at the border who seem to have vanished into thin air.

In keeping with the theme of privilege, Luiselli acknowledges the inherent privilege of telling someone's story for them. As discussed before, the narrator in *Lost Children Archive* grapples with the ethics of using that privilege. It worries Ma that her journalistic work will be taken as much as the media coverage nowadays is: in one ear and out the other. She gives voice to these anxieties in many instances. In a particularly painful rumination, Ma shows the extent of her grief by saying "no one decides to not go into work and start a hunger strike after listening to the radio in the morning" (*Lost Children Archive* 96). The media is a major influence in the novel due to its prevalent role in political and social conversations. Ma views the media as an entity that will twist the perspective of a project like hers, leading to political influences on the subject of migrant children that will slowly shift the tragedy of the migrant children into "a bargaining chip that parties use frivolously in order to move their own agendas forward" (*Lost Children Archive* 79). Despite being a journalist herself, Ma is afraid of creating a tool that could

be wielded by politicians against the children she seeks to represent in her sound project. Both Luiselli and her narrator are at once a part of the media and separated from it by an ethical standard they choose to adhere to.

Aside from the concerns of the media's appropriation of the lost children's stories, Ma questions whether or not she has the right to create this project. Her project would not be a simple documentation of children; her work is usually narrative-driven, meaning she would influence the narrative of this project with her own point of view as an artist. Luiselli shows Ma's inner struggle by saying "Although a valuable archive of the lost children would need to be composed, fundamentally, of a series of testimonies or oral histories that register their own voices telling their stories, it doesn't seem right to turn those children, their lives, into material for media consumption" (*Lost Children Archive* 96). Despite the novel being a work of fiction, in this moment, the line between fiction and fact is blurred. Luiselli brings up a question of ethics that applies both her narrator's work as well as work done by real authors and researchers. Luiselli seems to struggle with this question in her own writing and projects the very real worries of a writer trying to document a situation she is not inherently a part of. She doesn't know the extent of the trauma and anxiety imposed upon these children by the border and their time in immigration detention facilities. While Luiselli is Mexican by birth, her father is a Mexican ambassador. She was born into a life of privilege unlike children born into poverty and violence in her country. Therefore, it isn't necessarily her experience to write about. This is a small thread in a continuing conversation about author's and subject's rights in the publishing industry.

In terms of the state of ethical standards of storytelling in today's society, a particular author has catalyzed important conversations about narrative authority and who is "authorized" to tell certain types of stories. Jeannine Cummins recently released *American Dirt*, a fictional

story that follows a Mexican mother and her son as they cross the U.S.-Mexico border (Alter 2020). The book was chosen for the Oprah book club as well as given lengthy media coverage. However, there were many, including Luiselli, who believed the book was a commercialization of a traumatic experience. Reyna Grande, author of *The Distance Between Us: A Memoir*, signed off on the book. She was greatly criticized for describing *American Dirt* as “a powerful, moving, and unforgettable read.”<sup>6</sup> She participated in Oprah’s apology tour with two other Latina co-panelists as well as Jeanine Cummins herself.<sup>7</sup> Randy Boyagoda, a novelist and professor of English at the University of Toronto, wrote: “The asymmetry of Cummins’s identity (she’s white and not an immigrant) and story (a Mexican woman’s flight to the United States with her son) has led to charges of racial and cultural appropriation and publishing-industry whitewashing” (Boyagoda 2020). There are many Chicano/a authors who have created works of art and struggled to gain recognition in a publishing industry that pointedly ignores them. However, when a white woman of European descent, such as Jeanine Cummins, chooses to write this story, she is listened to and marketed widely to large audiences. In a talk given to Dorinne Kondo’s class in February 1991, Gloria Anzaldúa spoke on this subject, saying “White publishers, the ones in power, publish the white people...the writer of color get(s) rejected and the white rip-off writer gets published and gets rich off of marginalized people.”<sup>8</sup> The goal is not to censor people of other backgrounds from writing Latinx stories; this particular book opened a wider

<sup>6</sup> “Advanced Praise.” *Jeanine Cummins*, 2019, [www.jeaninecummins.com/american-dirt/](http://www.jeaninecummins.com/american-dirt/).

<sup>7</sup> Hernandez, Daniel. “Analysis: The ‘American Dirt’ Apology Tour Goes Streaming with Emotional Oprah Special.” *Los Angeles Times*, Los Angeles Times, 7 Mar. 2020, [www.latimes.com/entertainment-arts/books/story/2020-03-07/american-dirt-apology-tour-oprah](http://www.latimes.com/entertainment-arts/books/story/2020-03-07/american-dirt-apology-tour-oprah).

<sup>8</sup> Gloria Evangelina Anzaldúa Papers, Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas Libraries, The University of Texas at Austin.

conversation of who is ethically allowed to tell certain stories in a publishing industry that could do with changes in its framework. It is important to recognize the validity of these statements and the power that a narrative can have on any single person.

Aside from the acceptance of the privilege that Luiselli has, *Lost Children Archive* also touches on the idea of privilege in your home life that allows you to turn a blind eye to things happening in other people's everyday reality. Luiselli describes how Ma notices that "the lost children's stories are troubling our own children. We decide to stop listening to the news..." (*Lost Children Archive* 75). In another instance, Ma reacts in the same protective way towards her children. In order to "distract her from all this, I look for a playlist and press Shuffle. Immediately, like a current sweeping over us, everything is shuffled back into a more lighthearted reality, or at least a more manageable unreality." (*Lost Children Archive* 48). Luiselli showcases the privilege of this family through the way in which their mother protects the children. The harsh reality is the children at the border seem to have lost that first line of defense.

While showing examples of privilege in both work and family life, Luiselli has also shown the necessity for Ma's project in *Lost Children Archive*. Luiselli writes "sometimes a little light can make you aware of the dark, unknown space that surrounds it, of the enormous ignorance that envelops everything we think we know" (*Lost Children Archive* 60). Through this description, we see the true intentions of the narrator and the ignorance she perceives in the world around her. Through her work, Ma hopes to shed light on the plight of the lost children and expel the dark in order to make the public aware of their ignorance. By forcing people to come to terms with the issues they have been ignoring, Luiselli implies that this will help catalyze change and gives the project a significant purpose aside from academic pursuits.

Both of Luiselli's books emphasize the importance of narrative and storytelling by characterizing them in different ways. In *Lost Children Archive*, Luiselli ties the idea of childhood to storytelling by beginning the novel with a confirmation that "the children will ask, because ask is what children do. And we'll need to tell them a beginning, a middle, and an end. We'll need to give them an answer, tell them a proper story" (5). By placing storytelling and narrative in the realm of parental responsibility, Luiselli takes the task away from the children. She allows them to do "what children do" and enjoy the joyful curiosity of childhood. The parents are given the authority of being storytellers. However, in *Tell Me How It Ends*, Luiselli paints a different picture. As she sits in front of migrant children, interviewing them with the guidance of a questionnaire, Luiselli comes to the realization that "the children's stories are always shuffled, stuttered, always shattered beyond the repair of a narrative order. The problem with trying to tell their story is that it has no beginning, no middle, and no end" (*Tell Me How It Ends* 7). The children that she finds herself interviewing in New York have been robbed of the freedom of being a child. Instead, they have been unfairly promoted into a position of authority in their own lives. They carry the burden and responsibility of telling their own stories to an audience that isn't always receptive.

Luiselli's wording also puts herself into the position of storyteller. Regarding the ethics of telling someone's story, Luiselli has to conform to legal standards of narrative experience. In her essay, she is only relating her experience as someone observing from the outside. Her position as an interpreter in an immigration courthouse puts her at the mercy of the bureaucratic structure of law. The questionnaire she uses for each interview is an unyielding mold for each of the stories she hears. It is a seemingly "unbiased" and formulaic approach to narrative storytelling. Her authority over the children's stories is limited; the children are "a reel of

footage” while she is merely “an obsolete apparatus used to channel that footage” (*Tell Me How It Ends* 11). Through this analogy, she makes it clear to the reader that she is aware of the place she occupies in these children’s lives and the narrative control she exerts over their lives. She operates as a projection, a narrative tool that manipulates each story into coherence. However, Luiselli keeps this privilege checked and maintains a form of ethical behavior when it comes to telling another person’s story. She recognizes her own position as an outsider to the narrative being told to her and documents the experiences the best way she can. Her self-awareness motivates her wish to document the lost children and their experience.

The idea of documentation is essential to *Lost Children Archive*. Both Ma and Pa work in the realm of sound; they create projects based on various forms of presenting and documenting sound. However, Ma argues that her work is primarily “journalism-based and narrative-driven” while her husband’s work consists of “walking around listening to the cityscape as if waiting for a rare bird to fly past” (*Lost Children Archive* 99). Between the two of them, they create a binary that seems to suit their different methods of work while creating a space in which both can co-exist peacefully: “We’d say that I was a documentarist and he was a documentarian, which meant I was more like a chemist and he was more like a librarian” (*Lost Children Archive* 99). While the differences in their methods create distance between the narrator and her husband, the explanation of the binary they define together helps to establish Luiselli’s narrator as a mirror to Luiselli herself in *Tell Me How It Ends*. As discussed earlier, in the essay, Luiselli serves as the “documentarist” for the intake interviews that she is conducting. Each question she asks the children supplies details for the narrative that she must put together. For her children, she is truly a “chemist” (*Lost Children Archive* 99), taking raw materials and creating a coherent form.

The importance of sound in the narrative of the lost children relies on both the presence and absence of sound as a confirmation of existence. It serves as a form of documentation that Luiselli can utilize. The narrator in *Lost Children Archive* explains how scholar Steven Feld “understood birds as echoes or “gone reverberations”-- as absence turned into a presence; and, at the same time, as a presence that made an absence audible” (*Lost Children Archive* 98). She later relates how the documentation of these birds brought “into existence an entire layer of the world, previously ignored” (99). The scholarly use of sound documentation equates silence with absence, similar to the philosophical argument that someone or something does not exist unless you see it and acknowledge it. By giving voice to the “lost children,” the narrator would essentially be proving the existence of the children as well as force others to acknowledge the undeniable sounds of people in need. The sound project would create further proof of the cruelty at the border. By using the framework of an acoustemologist’s academic research, Luiselli helps the reader understand the importance of sound in this novel. The conclusion adds to the bigger theme of documentation. By documenting these children in methods that can’t be ignored, Luiselli calls into question the “undocumented” status of human beings. Can a human being be undocumented if there is academic proof of the documentation of their suffering? The idea of documentation influences the use of labels that Luiselli later employs in the novel.

The importance of silence and sound create a connection between Luiselli’s work and Anzaldúa’s notion of violence in silence. Luiselli’s focus on sound as the primary medium in Ma’s research project echoes the importance of being given a voice that Anzaldúa addresses in *How to Tame a Wild Tongue*, a section of *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987). Anzaldúa discusses the Chicana’s need to have a voice in order to resist the traditionally enforced idea that “well-bred girls don’t answer back” (Anzaldúa 76). Silence and tradition are

equated in this text; they are considered partners and enforcers of the linguistic oppression of Chicanas. Silence in Luiselli's work shows an absence of existence that allows ignorance to continue without any sort of correction. Anzaldúa urges Chicanas to resist the tradition of silence that is ingrained in young girls and to speak out as a form of resistance. The creation of sound through the reclaiming of voice and identity plays into the sound documentary that Luiselli's narrator seeks to create. By recording sound related to young migrant girls, Ma seeks to restore the power of existence to the children at the border. She wants to reconnect them to an identity and a sense of purpose in order to resist the ever-growing influence of the United States, modeled after the patriarchy that Anzaldúa fights against in *Borderlands*. The connection grants a new sense of significance to female narratives; it is a form of resistance in which the authors and characters fight to reclaim their voices in an effort to avoid becoming one of the lost.

The literary works being discussed in this chapter differ greatly from Reyna Grande's memoir (discussed in my previous chapter). The main difference is centered upon the narrator and their voice. Grande's memoir was reminiscent of a bildungsroman; it was mainly focused on representations of the effects of a childhood marred by the effect of the U.S.-Mexico border that carried into an adult life. Grande's memoir is a painful and intimate retelling of the defining influences of her childhood: the distance she felt from both of her parents, the traumatic experience of crossing the border and the shifting maternal figures in her life. Luiselli takes a more distant approach as a way of remaining respectful in her storytelling while still establishing representations of border trauma.

While Grande's narrator struggles to find her identity within the confines of her position as a daughter, Luiselli's narrator is a maternal figure who feels that the ideation of family has not fully fledged into what she thought it would be. Her resentment of her husband transfers down to



the boy who is not her child by blood. While grocery shopping with the entire family, she sees a future in which she is only shopping for herself and the girl: “I remember imagining, for the first time since we had moved in together, how it would be to shop for just the girl and me, in a future where our family was no longer a family of four” (*Lost Children Archive* 62). Despite regretting the thought as soon as she’d had it, Ma finally voices the future she sees for herself. While breaking her family apart will hurt her, Ma is slowly coming to the conclusion that she is no longer happy in the situation she currently finds herself. However, she still imagines herself as a nurturing mother to the girl, her biological daughter. The reader receives a very fragmented account of how Ma came to feel this way.

Ma’s maternal nature comes through in Luiselli’s novel when she describes her children and the way she perceives them. She paints a very raw, unsentimental image of each child, describing both their good moments and their bad. The novel opens with a description of their children as they embark on their trip, “mouths open to the sun...foreheads pearly with sweat, cheeks red and streaked white with dry spit” (*Lost Children Archive* 5). Ma isn’t blind to the humanity of both of her children; she doesn’t turn to sentimental descriptions of the beauty and youth. She describes them as she sees them. However, her maternal side emerges as she comments on the fact that she continues to check on them as they lay in the backseat, despite the obvious fact that there is nowhere they could’ve gone. Her motherly instincts keep her looking back towards the children as they sleep to make sure everything is as it should be.

While Luiselli does describe the two children throughout the novel, there is a specific moment in which she reveals her hidden feelings towards the boy specifically. When the boy throws a tantrum, calling her “predictable and self-involved,” Ma describes how she “grow(s) distant, circumspect, and maybe even unbiologically cold” (*Lost Children* 64). The use of the

word “unbiologically” demonstrates Ma’s awareness of the blood bond that she and the girl share, but which the boy does not. Despite adopting the boy and seemingly treating him as her own, Ma has not forgotten that he is not truly her child. The distance she feels could be attributed to the ties of blood in family and the bond between a mother and a daughter more specifically. Her acknowledgement of her physical and emotional reaction to the child’s behavior shows her internal conflict. She wishes for a future in which she does not have to deal with the tantrums of a boy who is not truly hers. While her wishes don’t affect her effectiveness as a mother, it does help the reader understand Ma’s emotional progress from a happily married woman to one who feels trapped in the family she had a part in building.

One of Ma’s main functions as the leading maternal figure in Luiselli’s novel is giving structure to the children’s broken stories. Ma sees herself as “a voice that serves as a scaffolding to his world” which is defined by her “vantage point as mother” (*Lost Children Archive* 160). This is similar to the role that Luiselli plays in the New York immigration court system in *Tell Me How It Ends*. She must also provide the structural component of the narratives that she hears from children that are not her own. Since many of the children come unaccompanied, Luiselli must act as the adult power in their lives and help them formulate their stories in the same way Ma does when the girl asks her to draw four squares that will help her put together her story (*Lost Children Archive* 61). The connection between the women who give a narrative structure to the young words of children helps blur the line between fiction and reality that Luiselli is playing with. Luiselli’s essay differs in that she is given a strict structure to follow by the U.S. government: the credible fear questionnaire. However, her use of the questionnaire to tell the stories she learns in the courthouse adds a level of compassion that is not usually allowed in the rigid bureaucratic structure of law.

There is a definitive shift in the form of storytelling that comes from a mother versus the narratives dictated by daughters. Cristina Herrera quotes Elizabeth Brown-Guillory on the relationship between mother and daughter in *Contemporary Chicana Literature: (Re)Writing the Maternal Script*: “...when a mother looks at her daughter, she sees herself. She is constantly reminded of her mistakes, yearnings, dreams, successes, and failures. When the daughter looks at her mother, she often sees herself and rejects her mother’s values as inappropriate to her reality” (13). There is an attachment present between mother and daughter defined by blood and aspiration, but there is also a desire to be an individual unmarked by the boundaries of familial bonds. There is a distinct binary between separation and connection; either individual yearns for one of the two at any given time. Anzaldúa discusses a similar sentiment in *Borderlands*: “The individual exists first as kin -- as sister, as father, as *padrino* -- and last as self” (40). The traditional sentiment of the importance of blood and family above all is echoed in the narrative experience of mother-daughter stories.

There is both a pointed use and distinct lack of certain labels throughout the novel that provide structure to the narrative. To create an archive, Ma must record and organize information in order to present it in a full-fledged academic project. The labels in the novel serve as a categorization system. While adopting some of the labels as her own, Luiselli also rejects certain labels and pushes against the constraints that they create. One of the labels that Luiselli chooses to ignore is names. The mother and father are both unnamed as are their children. Despite this important mark, each person is characterized through their distinct voice and personality. The reader can clearly distinguish between the narrative style of the mother and the ingenuity of the children’s narration, which appears later in the novel. The only character that is explicitly named in the beginning of the novel is Manuela, the woman whose daughters are being held in

immigration detention after crossing the border on their own. This makes her memorable in a narrative where names are not given any importance. It brings her experiences into focus and marks her as Luiselli's first representation of border trauma by emphasizing the importance of mother-daughter relationships in narratives about the U.S.-Mexico border.

As we continue to get information about Manuela and her daughters, Luiselli establishes the phone numbers on Manuela's children's dresses as a label of their own. The only thing the people who find them will know will be a phone number; their survival depends on this one thing (*Lost Children Archive* 17-18). It is their one tether back to their family, to Manuela, and it is stitched onto their clothing like a tag. The girls' inability to remember a simple phone number is a sign of their youth and innocence. It is telling of the nature of the children that end up detained at the border. It is children like these who disappear without a trace, as Manuela relates to Ma once the girls never land in Mexico after being deported. The experience of Manuela's girls closely mirrors Reyna's crossing in Grande's memoir. In both works, there is an emphasis on the mother/daughter dynamics. In Luiselli's novel, the father is not present. Manuela's girls are on their own, traversing through dangerous terrain and malicious coyotes in order to make it back to their mother. Through Reyna's memoir, we are given an intimate retelling of events that are particular to one person's experience. In *Tell Me How It Ends*, Luiselli gets firsthand accounts from the children she interviews. However, in Luiselli's novel, the reader is removed from the stories of the migrant children as well as from the various narrators. There is a narrative distance between the children at the border and the characters narrating the story that is not present in Grande's memoir nor Luiselli's essay.

The use of names jumps out in Luiselli's novel after a complete lack of names when Ma joins a group of people in grieving those who have disappeared in ICE custody. Ma recalls how

“as each person in the line called out the name of a missing relative, the rest of us repeated the name out loud. We pronounced each one clear and loud...” (*Lost Children Archive* 116). Luiselli is reinforcing the importance of names as a means of expressing grief and anger. The group is asked, “who are we missing?” (*Lost Children Archive* 116). It is a collective call for grief, a shattering of the silence that has caused the disappeared to fall out of existence completely. The group’s shouts addressed to the missing is an active fight against their absence. It is a form of remembrance that forces others to pay attention to the noise and know the missing.

In comparison to Grande’s deeply personal and descriptive memoir, Luiselli’s novel seems to pull away from the intimacy of names in order to take up the idea that general labels apply to all of us. Despite our labels, each person has their own unique set of characteristics and values. Ma’s narrative style differs greatly from her children’s voice, which make up our main point of view in the second half of the novel. Even within a distinct narrator, the descriptions and dialogue are different from each other in key ways. However, Luiselli uses the idea of nameless children resonates with the reality of detained children at the border. None of these children are named by the media and politicians. It dehumanizes them in the face of the might of the United States. However, like the boy and girl, each detained child is distinguishable through distinct personalities, habits, and life experiences. By reducing every character within the story by robbing them of their label in the world, Luiselli has used her writing as an equalizer. Every child is now nameless, but it does not rob them of their right to have a distinct narrative.

Instead of names, the novel gives migrant children the label of “lost.” Luiselli writes “...the refugees became known to us as ‘the lost children.’ And in a way, I guess, they are lost children. They are children who have lost the right to a childhood” (*Lost Children Archive* 75). The idea of the loss of childhood is connected to the responsibility of narrative that was

discussed earlier in the chapter. By nature of crossing the border, the way in which children's narratives are handled has changed. In Chapter 1, I discussed Anzaldúa's description of the borderlands as a place of transformation. Those who cross the border are forever changed as evidenced in Grande's memoir by Natalio, Juana and Reyna herself. Luiselli depicts the border in the same light by showing the changing narratives that come up as the family heads further south. She writes "We look hard into our past and future: a departure, a change, long life, short life, hard circumstances beyond, here you will head south, here you will encounter doubt and uncertainty, a crossroads ahead" (*Lost Children Archive* 125). The perception of the children's narrative changes as the family continues traveling south. The labels continue to get more demeaning.

Another label that is given agency in Luiselli's novel is the term "refugee." The girl asks Ma a simple question: what is a refugee? After a thoughtful internal dialogue, Ma comes to the conclusion that "a child refugee is someone who waits" (*Lost Children Archive* 48). However, this is not the explanation she gives her young daughter. Instead, she says "a refugee is someone who has to find a new home" before distracting her and the rest of the family by playing music (Luiselli 48). This moment in the car between mother and daughter highlights both the mother's awareness of the situation of the children at the border as well as the privilege the family wields in order to make their own reality easier to live in. The idea of a child in a continuous state of waiting conjures the image of someone suspended in limbo, at the mercy of time. It conjures a passive image rather than a symbol of resistance.

The term "refugee" is also used various times in *Tell Me How It Ends*. Luiselli describes the main room in the New York immigration court as "a small refugee camp occupied temporarily by local organizations and the children they screen tirelessly, every day" (*Tell Me*

*How It Ends* 38). There is a cruel irony in comparing an immigration courtroom to a refugee camp. While one is seemingly against the child refugees, the other is meant to support. It also brings attention to the legal significance of having “refugee” status as opposed to being labeled an “illegal alien.” Being labeled a refugee has the heaviness of legality; it promises the government’s consideration in being allowed to stay. It also evokes the image of an individual in need of shelter and help. However, the term “illegal alien” enforces the idea of something other, something that is not human. Labeling a human being as an “illegal alien” both criminalizes and “dehumanizes undocumented immigrants regardless of their national and ethnic backgrounds by equating legal status with membership in the human race” (Rohrleitner 38). There is an added significance to the meaning of citizenship other than legality. By demonizing an entire group of people, those who have privilege do not feel badly when they turn a blind eye to their tragic stories. There is no sense of intimacy or personal narrative. It is a general label meant to block the reminder that these people are human just like any American citizen. The use of deportation and removal provide another label that Luiselli seeks to uncover through her novel. She describes removal as “a euphemism for ‘deportation’...removal is to deportation what sex is to rape. When an ‘illegal’ immigrant is deported nowadays, he or she is, in written history, ‘removed’” (*Lost Children Archive* 133). By equating forced removal with sexual assault, Luiselli emphasizes the cruel violence that each of the acts inflicts upon a human being. It is a violation of human rights.

Due to the various labels and words with double meaning, Luiselli uses Anzaldúa’s method of code-switching, a form that shows language shifts, in order to shift between reality and fiction in the text. Luiselli uses a part of Chicana/mestiza identity in order to take a story somewhat removed from the day-to-day struggles of children at the border and turn it into a

mechanism through which she can bring her characters closer to the situation. Through the Boy and Girl's escape from their parents and their subsequent ride on the train, Luiselli is able to create a space in which the world of Ma's fictional book, titled "Elegies for Lost Children," becomes a reality viewed through the innocent eyes of the children.

The children's journey on the train marks the moment when what is real and what is imagined in Luiselli's novel begins to blur together. There is a code-switching that happens with the point of view shift: from adult to child as well as from reality to the wildness of imagination. As the children leave the protection and relative safety of their parents, the change in narrative is very distinct. While Ma seems to speak in an introspective manner and analyze her own life, the Boy speaks to his sister and recounts their narrative in that way. Children can be considered unreliable narrators due to their innocence and lack of understanding about the world around them. The children's reality begins to shift as the world the Boy is showing the reader begins to mirror the narrative woven in Ma's book, "The Elegies of the Lost Children." He reads the book as he and the Girl embark on this journey alone. The eighth elegy of the book explains how "aboard the trains, in the early mornings, the boys were allowed to relieve their bladders only once" (*Lost Children Archive* 269). In the next section of the Boy's narration, he recounts "I realized I also had to pee. I used to pee only in toilets, but I had learned to do it in the open, just like the lost boys did..." (*Lost Children Archive* 269). The Boy and Girl become like mirror images of the lost children, outside the world of the fictional book. There is a reenactment of the actions of the lost children, like an echo of their past lives. This idea of echoes connects back to Ma's wish to create an archive documenting the lost children. The echoes are an affirmation of existence.



While on the train, reality and fiction truly blend together for the children. After telling the Girl stories about the children as they continue to walk, the Boy recalls seeing “four round faces were looking right at us from the other side of the open door of the old train car, so real I didn’t believe they were real” (*Lost Children Archive* 330). The world of the book is now merged with their own reality. The fragmented narrative of this section is marked by a distinct lack of periods. Only commas show separation between thoughts and sentences. There are also no paragraph breaks, creating a visual tunnel for the reader in which both stories become condensed on the page, leaving no room for blank space. This causes the Boy’s experience to read as stream of consciousness and puts into question the clarity of the storytelling. Are they really seeing the lost children? Or have they been affected by the miles of walking and lack of water and food? The argument could be made for both; the code-switching between reality and fiction have created a mutation that contains both. It is a form of storytelling similar to the Chicana’s own liminal experience: not one or the other, but both living continuously in one living format.

The Boy echoes this particular sentiment in his own search for identity after they have been rescued. He is making a recording for his sister and explains that he doesn’t know how to decide between being “a documentarian or a documentarist? And then I thought maybe I could be both? I kept on thinking about that, about how to be both” (*Lost Children Archive* 348-349). While he is not a migrant child, he is a symbolic mirror image of the children lost in the desert. However, his privilege ensures his rescue and reunion with his parents. The lost children do not get that luxury. However, his journey affects him and brings him to question his own identity, similar to young migrant children.

Valeria Luiselli uses fiction as a way of telling the story of migrant children from a limited point of view. The space she creates within her novel, in which fiction and reality morph into one, brings the story of migrant children to the forefront of the narrative. Luiselli's essay, *Tell Me How It Ends*, also grapples with the constructs of reality and fiction in terms of legal jargon and the space for narrative within law. The fluid middle ground between reality and fiction resembles both the physical embodiment of the borderlands (a space in between) and the shifting aspects of Chicana identity as they grow and merge.

The family seen in Luiselli's novel can be tied to Reyna Grande's recollection of her own fragmented family structure in her memoir. While each family has a distinctly different relationship with the border (in terms of legality and which side they find themselves on at the beginning of their respective narratives), there is still separation as the distance between the narrator and the border begins to close. Reyna Grande's family was torn apart by the border during her childhood years. The separation was abrupt and had lasting effects on her development. The family depicted in Luiselli's family goes through a gradual fragmentation that begins before they leave their home in New York and culminates in the separation narrated by the Boy after they have reached their destination in the southern United States. Overall, the border, as well as the surrounding borderlands, become a symbol of fragmentation where reality and fiction melt into one another and families find themselves unraveling at the seams.

## CONCLUSION

Gloria Anzaldúa's contributions to the field of border theory have opened the door for Chicanas to further understand their own identities as well as the factors that may influence their own development. Young girls who cross the U.S.-Mexico border are affected in many areas of life. This thesis focused on the representations of the border's detrimental effects. Reading across generic divides, I have noted the distinct ways the border is discursively imagined as a force that creates a shift in Chicana identity, affecting the Chicana's response to motherhood and childhood experience. Through the analysis of works by Reyna Grande and Valeria Luiselli, I have analyzed these representations of the effects of the border on the child characters in each work.

The definition of the border used in my analysis stems from Anzaldúa's differentiation between the border and the borderlands. She writes "A border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge. A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary" (Anzaldúa 25). The "unnatural boundary" catalyzes the formation of the borderlands; this "undetermined place" shapes young migrant girls' identities. The unnatural quality of the border fights against the essence of the Chicana: her connection to the natural world and the land due to her indigenous heritage. The negative effects of the struggle between natural and unnatural come across in three key parts of Chicana identity: motherhood, childhood, and gender. They become a form of border trauma that Chicanas endure due to proximity to the border as well as crossing the borderlands.

Reyna Grande's memoir, *The Distance Between Us*, shows a firsthand account of a childhood crossing. Through the use of an acquired method of storytelling (the memoir), Grande shows the effects of the border crossing on various aspects of her life, including her childhood experiences growing up and her feelings of inadequacy whilst living in the US. The collapse of

her family caused her psychic and physical pain; the abuse she endured from her paternal grandmother as well as her father had great influence on her formative years. The border trauma and eventual healing that Reyna goes through is distinctively marked by the maternal figures she encounters in each stage of her life and animate the emotional force of her memoir.

The maternal figures show the distinct connection between motherhood and border trauma. Each of the mothers shows a connection to Chicana culture through their similarities to La Virgen de Guadalupe, La Malinche and La Llorona. Juana, the first maternal figure, shows Reyna the pain of separation and being left behind. Mago, her older sister, is a persisting mother figure. She never leaves Reyna and later becomes a living example of assimilation to her younger sister. Reyna's mentor, Diana Savas becomes the adult who nurtures and drives forward Reyna's emotional and professional growth. Ultimately, she paves the way for Reyna's healing. The analysis of motherhood shows the importance of maternal figures in understanding and overcoming border trauma. Diana helped Reyna cope with the effects of her border trauma, a feat that none of the other maternal figures were able to accomplish. By thinking through the mythical figures that Anzaldúa lays out in her treatise, I showed how pronounced the effects of these figures are in shaping contemporary Chicana memoir and constructing Chicana experience.

The main focus of the first chapter was to tie together the border and its effects to motherhood and the connection between mother and daughter. I argued that the effects of the border could be seen in motherhood through literature. In her article, "Yo Soy La Malinche: Chicana Writers and the Poetics of Ethnonationalism," Mary Pratt writes "In the ensuing years, Chicana writers often invoked the figure of La Malinche as a vital, resonant site through which to respond to androcentric ethno-nationalism and to claim a gendered oppositional identity and history" (861). Echoing the assertions of Mary Pratt, Chicanas use their narratives to engage,

revise, and respond to mythical iconic female figures. Reyna Grande is no different; however, I argue that Grande uses memoir to imagine the ways motherhood and, in consequence, childhood is shaped by border trauma. I also contend that Grande's memoir points to the ways the border specifically troubles formations of gender identity and complicates traditional notions of motherhood because border trauma specifically destabilizes Chicana's relationships to motherhood and maternity.

In Valeria Luiselli's work, her essay *Tell Me How It Ends: An Essay in 40 Questions* and her novel *Lost Children Archive*, the boundary between reality and fiction is blurred. Luiselli uses this literary mechanism as a tool for storytelling; it gives a framework from which to examine the stories of the lost children. The children's situation at the border is one which is both reported in real time and fictionalized in stories and novels. The point of view of the family in the novel is limited; they are separated from the children at the border by privilege. The story told in the novel differs greatly from Grande's firsthand experience with the border. It places the border in the context of legal structure and storytelling. Through these extensive generic frameworks, the story is seen in a more removed format than Grande's memoir. However, it operates in a similar way to Grande's work; Luiselli adopts an American form (American road trip novel) in order to tell a story that may have been ignored in another format.

Luiselli's essay and novel begin to intertwine and share certain narrative points, such as being stopped by cops on their road trip in the southern states of the US. This is resonant with the use of Anzaldúa's distinct code-switching, a method of switching between languages in *Borderlands/La Frontera*. In Luiselli's work, she manages to use code-switching in terms of genre, putting her reader in the mindset that Chicanas occupy at all times. While Chicanas must

be and understand both sides of herself, the reader must also occupy and find understanding in both a place of fiction and reality.

The main argument of chapter two revolves around the privilege and importance of storytelling as well as Luiselli's use of code-switching to show the effects of the border on the family. The recent backlash revolving around Jeanine Cummins' *American Dirt* displays the prejudice that is still happening towards the stories of people of color. Luiselli takes narrative distance in order to tell a story that is not uniquely hers, but which she feels deserves attention from readers. She has an inherent privilege in her choice to tell this story; being published is a privilege in itself. While many ignore the situation at the border, authors force them to pay attention through literature.

Luiselli's story shows the effects of the border on privileged families as well. Despite the existing problems within the family, their journey closer to the border exacerbates these differences and ultimately ends with the breakdown of their family structure. It is similar to Reyna Grande's narrative in her memoir. While in Guerrero, thousands of miles away from the border, Reyna begins to feel the cracks within her family. As she reaches and crosses the border, her life and identity are forever changed, tying her to the borderlands.

In an effort to represent the border's effects on the Chicana, Luiselli uses code-switching to create a literary form of the duality that marks the Chicana's identity. At the end of *Lost Children Archive*, reality and fiction morph into one continuous format. The novel becomes a literary representation of the Chicana by becoming not one or the other but both forms at once. The proximity to the border of Echo Canyon, where the kids are heading when they break apart from their parents, shows a connection between the border and this shift in reality. The appearance of the lost children on the train are another distinct link. It is evidence that the border

has a profound impact on the experience of children; their psyche is affected by the events they experience in the borderlands.

The works constructed by both of these authors shows imagined representations that further qualify the presence of the border's damaging effects on the responses of young migrant girls to certain aspects of their identities. The border affects their perception of maternity and childhood as well as how they relate to them in the future. This study has explored imagined representations of both personal migrant experience as well as fiction pertaining to those who see the situation at the border.

Further research could be done that delves into the complexities of the harms of the border from other vantage points. While this thesis discussed the importance of gender empowerment and the effects of patriarchy, more studies can be developed over how the border affects sexuality in terms of gender oppression. Anzaldúa touches on queer identity in *Borderlands* and explains how that affected her identity growing up. This could be connected to border trauma through deeper research on the complexities of sexuality and identity. Research could also be done on border trauma as it relates to trauma literary theory and criticism. The field of trauma studies is vast and beyond the scope of this project. However, it would bring a deeper understanding to the effects of border trauma that goes further than the imagined representations constructed by Chicana writers.

The borderlands are place of fluctuation, marred by the effects of a boundary line imposed by war and years of racial oppression. As the Chicana internalizes the struggle of the borderlands, the border begins to damage the Chicana internally, shifting her identity. This trauma comes across in their relationship to motherhood and their own often tumultuous childhood. Literature is used to bring those stories to light in a white-dominated publishing

industry. There is a constant struggle present for Chicanas. Their stories have become a form of literary protest, pushing back on decades of trauma.



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