

Free in the Land of Freedom? The Experience of Latin American Immigrants in the United States

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"Free in the Land of Freedom?"

**The Experience of Latin American Immigrants in the United
States"**

A Thesis by

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Sociology and Hispanic Studies Departments

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Prologue

My thesis explores the topic of immigration to the United States from Latin America. Because this issue, like most others, can be better understood when examined from various perspectives, I chose to write my thesis through both the Sociology and Hispanic Studies departments. In the sociological section of my paper, I study the immigrant experience through a process of fourteen in-depth interviews with illegal Mexican immigrants who live in Austin, Texas. I explore immigrants' reasons for coming to the United States, their border crossing experiences, and their present life in Austin. In the Hispanic Studies section of my thesis, I analyze three fictional works that tell the stories of immigrants who come to the United States from Mexico, the Dominican Republic, and Guatemala. Although the immigrants in these works of fiction come from different backgrounds and life situations, common themes can be found in their experiences as immigrants. Both sections of my thesis attempt to arrive at an intimate understanding of the personal situations of immigrants to the United States.

Sociological Report

I. Introduction

In 1992, 39.1% of all undocumented immigrants in the United States, or 1,321,000 undocumented immigrants, were from Mexico (Isbister 1996: 76). A study published in 1998 says that 55% of undocumented immigrants are from Mexico (Chavez 1998: 19). Although these figures are dated and were never completely accurate, it remains true today that Mexican immigrants make up the largest single group of both documented and undocumented immigrants. Today's precise number of undocumented Mexican immigrants is difficult to know because there is no conclusive way to count them, but various types of evidence show that Mexicans continue to illegally migrate to the United States in large numbers. This fact has spurred much research and debate in the U.S. about issues including border security, the economy, and bilingual education. There does not seem to be, however, a widespread understanding of the personal experiences of Mexicans who illegally immigrate to the United States. Most American citizens have never pondered the question of how a person from another country, unfamiliar with American culture and language, experiences life as an illegal immigrant in the United States.

My thesis, therefore, is an attempt to shed some light on this topic through a study of Mexicans who have immigrated illegally to the United States. Through a process of eighteen in-depth interviews, I use immigrants' own words and stories to examine various aspects and stages of the immigration process. Rather than focusing on the politics or economics that are debated when examining immigration from a more macro-level perspective, I would like to understand the factors that shape immigrants' personal

experiences in the United States. I am interested in exploring immigrants' reasons for leaving their hometown and choosing the United States as their destination, and I would also like to better understand the crossing process. I hope to examine immigrants' work situations in the U.S. as well as study their daily lives, apart from work. I would like to understand the impressions immigrants have of themselves and of their situation as immigrants.

I selected this topic because it is essential to explore the various effects that immigrating from one culture to another will have on an individual. The immigration of families and individuals from Mexico to the United States is such a widespread occurrence that it demands close attention and inspection. Latinos in fact “have become the second-largest ethnic minority group- and Mexican Americans constitute the largest number of Latinos” (Isbister 1996: 71). Today’s data show that Latinos now make up about 11 percent of the population and that in 2004 there are now more Latinos than there are blacks (Huntington 2004: 34). Their increasing numbers reflect the amount of immigration from Mexico that has occurred over the past century. Immigrants influence United States citizens on an everyday basis, yet there is little thought given to their personal situations. In addition to demanding U.S. attention because of immigrants’ effect on the U.S, this issue is important because of the effect the United States has on immigrants. This thesis attempts to deal with the latter issue. Finally, this phenomenon demands much attention because it indicates the wide range of impacts the United States and globalization have on individuals from Mexico or any other third-world country.

Although numerous studies have been carried out on different aspects of Mexican immigration, many Americans are unaware of the issues in these studies. It is essential to

continue in the search for knowledge about the unique situations of Mexican immigrants. The personal side of the everyday lives of the immigrants frequently goes unnoticed by Americans even though these people often play such large roles in Americans' lives. I would like to expose many different aspects of the immigrant's experience that are not usually noted by United States citizens. I want my project to have an eye-opening effect on those people who have never thought about immigrants' reasons for coming to the United States, people who see immigrants as a source of cheap labor, or people who see immigrants merely as pulling money out of the U.S. economy. I hope that my thesis enables people to understand immigrants from a different, more personal perspective.

I am a good example of a person who lived in the "bubble" of pretense in regards to Mexican immigrants before I set out to research and understand their place in society. My family hires Mexican-descent housekeepers, we have always enjoyed eating Tex-Mex food, and our house is filled with Mexican decorations. This seems to be the type of contact that the white American, especially one living in the Southwest, typically has with the Mexican culture. As I grew up with Mexican housekeepers, most middle to upper class white people in the United States are benefited, directly or indirectly, with the cheap labor provided by the Mexican people. Construction companies, families, and restaurants, especially those in the Southwestern United States, hire Mexicans to work for them at fairly cheap wages. While these immigrants are often paid over the minimum wage, and while their salaries are much higher than they would be in Mexico, the amounts they earn often do not afford them the many necessities that go hand in hand with living in the United States. Also, the immigrants are usually hired in jobs that a

“respectable” white citizen would find very undesirable. In other words, U.S. citizens tend to see Mexicans as a source of cheap labor.

As I frequented Mexican restaurants with my family when I was younger, many U.S. citizens enjoy the cultural aspects that are brought here by Latinos. There are Brazilian restaurants in East Boston and Cuban restaurants in Florida. There are Day of the Dead celebrations in Tucson and Cinco de Mayo fiestas in Austin. Many people decorate their homes and offices with artifacts and pieces of art that they either buy in expensive U.S. stores or in their actual countries of origin. In Texas, the sales of salsa now outnumber the sales of Catsup. A large portion of non-Hispanic U.S. citizens enjoys the culture that comes here from Latin American immigrants.

I began to look more deeply into the lives of Mexican immigrants when I spent a semester on the U.S./Mexican border in the fall of 2002 through the Borderlinks Program. While living on the border in Nogales, Sonora, with a family of three, it became clear to me that the mother I lived with on the Mexican side of the border might someday work as a housecleaner for a U.S citizen. I was interested in learning about the rich histories of people like my family in Nogales. I began to think about my past connections with people from Mexico, and I started to revise some of my earlier assumptions. While living in a community where most people’s hopes were to someday cross the border and make a decent living on the other side, I became interested in the people who had actually crossed the border and set up their lives in the United States. Did they achieve the dream they set out to accomplish, or did they feel just as trapped as they felt in their home countries? Were immigrants accepting of the cultural changes that were imposed on their families, or did they try to resist the American culture and

continue to live with their Mexican traditions? After living on the border, I decided to write my thesis on Mexican immigrants to the United States. Thinking of Mexicans as cheap labor or a source of exotic culture excludes the most basic characteristics of the experience of the immigrant. I hope to explore these more personally central issues throughout my thesis.

I decided to focus my study on immigrants living in Austin, Texas, from Valle Verde*, San Luis Potosi, Mexico. During the summer, I went to a birthday party at a family friend, Carina's*, house, and almost everyone there, probably sixty people, was a migrant from Valle Verde. I was astounded at the huge number of immigrants from this one Mexican pueblo and even more surprised when Carina told me that there were many more immigrants from Valle Verde who had not come to the party. I was fascinated with the idea of such a large migration and wanted to learn more. Had they all come to Austin at about the same time? Were there more of them in other U.S. cities, or had they all come to Austin? Why was Austin their destination? Did they want to stay in Austin forever, or did they plan to return to Mexico some day? Were they here legally? How did they perceive their personal situations as migrants in the United States? My interest in these people and their life journeys lead me to the decision that I would do a study on this group of immigrants.

II. Theoretical Section

The debate about immigration from Mexico has livened up since Bush's recent proposal for a guest-worker program. Immigration has become a central issue for many Americans today, and in this section I hope to present some of the issues and theories in

* I have changed the names of my interviewees' and their town of origin for reasons of confidentiality.

this debate. The subjects I will explore are the various reasons Mexican immigrate to the United States and the assimilation patterns of Mexican immigrants and their children to the American culture.

John Isbister's *The Immigration Debate* points out that many factors cause people to immigrate to the United States. The obvious answer states that they come "to improve their prospects, to get better jobs, to earn more income, to raise their standard of living, and to provide more opportunities for their children" (Isbister 1996: 92). While this may seem apparent, Isbister demonstrates that the reasons are often more complex. Many Mexicans, for example, do not immigrate permanently to the U.S. but instead move back to Mexico when they are older, or move back and forth frequently between the two countries. These temporary immigrants want to work in the United States to earn money they wouldn't be able to earn in Mexico, but they still consider Mexico their home.

Isbister presents Harris and Todaro's "push-pull" model as an explanation for migration. This model takes into account the gap in relative incomes between the two different countries and shows that a large enough gap, especially if it is growing because of changing economies, is enough reason for migration to continue (Isbister 1996: 96, 97). Migrants come to work in an economy that is able to offer them a higher salary than their own economy. They are under the impression that the United States is the "land of opportunity ... where hard work and sacrifice can earn them upward mobility ...the opportunity to *progresar* (make progress) and *mejorar económicamente* (better themselves economically)" (Leo Chavez 1998: 33). This optimistic mentality, suggest many, is why migrants are such steadfast, reliable workers in jobs that citizens might not consider attractive.

Social dislocation can also be a cause of emigration from one's hometown or country. This theory states, "When their community is altered, when the familiar social roles are taken from them, when their place in the world is uncertain, they may want to or may have to move" (Isbister 1996: 99). This social dislocation does not necessarily have to be the result of a failing economy. It can, in fact, be due to economic growth that "leads to the replacement of traditional, customary communities by modern commercial arrangements" (Isbister 1996: 100). This type of social dislocation might be the result of a factory entering a community that has traditionally worked with crafts.

Some argue that immigrants come to the U.S. to take advantage of the social services they are sometimes provided. An article about people who send their children alone to the U.S. to avoid danger in their home country presents a debate between those who favor giving these children rights and those who think these children should not receive any rights. Those who want these undocumented children to have rights believe that, "Special juvenile status or not, parents are going to put kids on a plane to escape danger," while those who oppose these rights say that, "An improved chance to stay here easily for abandoned kids creates a motivation for people to send their kids here, to put them at risk" ("Children Alone and Scared, Fighting Deportation" 03/28/2004). In other words, some people insist that offering benefits to undocumented immigrants will give incentive for others to come. Along these lines, Hanson argues that many Mexicans decide to stay in the U.S. instead of following their original plans to return to Mexico because they "sense the presence of a select and liberal group of Americans in health care, law, education, and government who feel it is their duty to help [them] of all people- the lowly immigrant!" (Hanson 2003: 46). This viewpoint de-emphasizes the

idea that people immigrate to work and stresses the notion that they come to reap benefits.

Massey, Alarcón, Durand, and Gonzalez (1987: 139-147) suggest that Mexican migration needs to be examined in the context of social networks. They believe that social networks are what make Mexican migration grow and thrive. People who live in a community in Mexico that has sent a large percentage of residents to the United States are more likely to become migrants themselves than people who live in a community where few people tend to migrate. Massey et al. talk about four different types of social networks that aid immigrants when coming to the U.S.: kinship, friendship, *paisanaje*, and voluntary organizations. Kinship exists between immediate family members who feel obligated to help out recent migrant. Friendship extends to distant cousins and friends as a way for immigrants to find work and adapt to a different social life.

Paisanaje is the relationship between two people of the same community who meet each other in the U.S. and immediately feel a bond with each other because of their similar backgrounds. Voluntary organizations, such as soccer clubs, help migrants become integrated into their new communities. These networks should be credited for their weight in a Mexican's decision as to whether he or she should immigrate to the U.S. They provide the economic and cultural support that is critical to an immigrant's experience. Massey et al. say that the immigration process is not a singular specific act but rather a dynamic process that essentially recreates itself through social networks.

Assimilation is also a topic widely discussed by researchers, politicians, and special interest groups. Assimilation, also called acculturation, incorporation, and integration, is not easily definable because it can happen along many different levels. As

Peter Skerry states, "Assimilation into American life has never been quick or painless, for any group. In a variety of realms- not just political, but also social, economic, and cultural- Mexican immigrants ... must negotiate the difficult passage from the private to the public sphere" (Skerry 1993: 355). Debates on assimilation revolve around whether or not immigrants assimilate, whether or not immigrants should assimilate, and for those who take for granted that immigrants do assimilate, the different ways in which they assimilate.

Milton Gordon (1964) theorizes that assimilation can be broken down into seven elements that occur in the given order: cultural, structural, marital, identificational, attitude receptional, behavioral receptional, and civic assimilation (Murguia 1975: 13). Murguia describes the three different American Assimilation Models to be the Anglo-conformity model, in which "the immigrants take on the behavior and values of the white Anglo-Saxon Protestant host group;" the melting pot model, in which "all ethnicities contribute in a major way to the development of a new and unique society;" and the cultural pluralism model, in which "the ethnic, racial, and religious groups in the United States do not structurally nor maritally assimilate" (Murguia 1975: 19, 20). These models suggest that it is not an issue whether or not immigrants assimilate but rather how they assimilate.

Chavez (1998) also theorizes on illegal immigrants' various levels of incorporation into society. While he believes that "undocumented immigrants will arrive as outsiders" he is certain that "some will, over time, develop economic, social, linguistic, cultural, and personal ties to the communities in which they live" (Chavez, Leo 1998: 188). Economic incorporation is the most obvious way immigrants are incorporated into

society; once they begin working they have become part of the American economy. Social incorporation happens when “the migrant’s center of gravity shifts from the family ‘back home’ to the family that is now in San Diego” (Chavez, Leo 1998: 176). This process of incorporation is more likely to happen for immigrants when their children are old enough to consider themselves American. Immigrants see themselves as connected to their children’s social life and assimilate socially when their own children marry in the U.S. and start families. Cultural incorporation depends a lot on the English skills that immigrants acquire when coming to the U.S. Their children, therefore, even if immigrants themselves, incorporate themselves to the American culture much more quickly because they are exposed to English as well as American citizens in their schools. Finally, Chavez talks about immigrants’ sense of personal sense of incorporation into society. While some immigrants feel a part of the community, others do not. Some claim to feel part of the community yet at the same time outside of the community, which Chavez cites as proof of the complexity of the issue. Chavez concludes about personal integration:

Experiences such as finding a job, maintaining steady employment, acquiring job responsibility, learning English, forming a family, giving birth to children in the United States, having them attend U.S. schools and acquire American culture, learning to navigate in the larger society, and ultimately, legalizing their immigration status incorporate undocumented immigrants into the new society. (Chavez, Leo 1998: 186)

Chavez’s theory on the different levels of integration suggest that it is important to examine how immigrants assimilate rather than whether or not they assimilate.

Samuel Huntington (2004) on the other hand, believes that there is a likely possibility that Mexican immigrants are not assimilating. He cites Lionel Sosa, a successful Mexican-American businessman who “identifies several Hispanic traits (very different from Anglo-Protestant ones) that ‘hold us Latinos back’: mistrust of people outside the family; lack of initiative, self-reliance, and ambition; little use for education; and acceptance of poverty as a virtue necessary for entrance into heaven” (Huntington 2004: 44). This view suggests that immigrants do not assimilate to American values and behaviors because of traits that are ingrained into their belief system. Huntington uses this information to support his idea that, “The persistent inflow of Hispanic immigrants threatens to divide the United States into two peoples, two cultures, and two languages” (Huntington 2004: 30). Hanson believes that Mexican immigrants have no need to assimilate to mainstream American culture because Mexican culture is becoming "mainstream" itself due to the large numbers of Mexican immigrants. He says that if nothing is done about the influx of Mexicans, the fundamental characteristics of the U.S. will change. He believes, “the transformation of the United States into a country like these would not necessarily be the end of the world; it would, however, be the end of the America we have known for more than three centuries” (“Huntington 2004: 45).

In contrast, Vincent Parrillo (1994) says that immigrants are “all too often blamed for their low socioeconomic standing because of their supposed cultural values. However, it is much more likely that their lack of education and job skills, and a lack of sustained dominant-minority interactions, rather than the minority’s cultural variations, cause them problems in achieving economic security” (Parrillo 1994: 416). He believes that ideas of the Mexicans as being innately lazy and having a present-time orientation

are stereotypes and that Mexican Americans, like most Americans, “want upward mobility, a better life for their children, and community interaction” (Parrillo 1994: 416). Although he does not speak specifically of immigrants, he suggests that immigrants and their descendants do integrate to American cultural values such as working hard and providing for their families. Parrillo does not attribute their lack of economic success to their own resistance or rejection of assimilation but rather to the larger social forces of stereotypes and racism.

Linda Chavez (1991) presents the notion that Mexican immigrants need to assimilate as quickly and thoroughly as possible if they want to be successful in the United States. Mexicans should not attempt to come to the United States without a drive to learn English and assimilate to the ways of Americans. The author points out the many groups of immigrants that have come to the United States throughout history and shows how their labor and hard work have earned them successful places in today’s society. She believes that current Mexican immigrants should follow this lead, including taking a more active role in politics. Chavez believes that policies like Affirmative Action actually take power away from Mexicans instead of giving them a boost in their positions because they “strengthen Hispanic ethnic identity ... and place a premium on disadvantaged status” (Chavez, Linda 1991: 5). She stresses the importance of personal sacrifices the Mexicans should undergo in order to assimilate to mainstream American society and become a politically and economically powerful part of American society.

Matute-Bianchi’s (1991) study on Mexican descendant children’s school performances suggests a counterargument to Chavez’s ideas about assimilation. After a series of interviews with Mexican descendant high school students, Matute-Bianchi

classifies them into five groups according to ethnic identities and behaviors: recent Mexican immigrant, Mexican-oriented, Mexican American, Chicanos, and Cholos. The students who excel the most in school come from the Mexican-oriented group and “maintain a strong identity as Mexicanos although many have lived most of their lives in this country ... They usually cite pride in their Mexican heritage as a primary difference between themselves and the more “*agabachados*” (Americanized) students of Mexican descent in the school (Matute-Bianchi 1991: 217). This study presents the notion that it is better for immigrants to hold onto their cultural identities instead of replacing them with new American identities. If the only American identities to which the immigrants are exposed are those of the Cholos and Chicanos, groups known for misbehaving and bad grades, it is preferable for immigrant children to resist assimilation. Because it is often the case that immigrant children are placed in schools with children already considered “troublemakers,” it is best for them to maintain their Mexican identities.

The theoretical view from which I understand the issues of migration synthesizes a number of the views elaborated above. The most central and specific reason immigrants from Mexico come to the United States is to work. Although there may be sufficient job opportunities in some areas of Mexico, the positions available do not pay enough money to support a family, especially a family with more than two or three children. Mexican immigrants are usually fairly uneducated because they know that finishing *la preparatoria* (high school) will not open up many more opportunities for them if they cannot afford to go to college. Scholarships are difficult to win, and even a college degree does not guarantee a person in Mexico a secure job.

At the same time, most Mexicans from small towns do not put much thought into whether or not they should finish school or their chances of winning a scholarship. Because no one in their family or neighborhood goes to college, is part of their mindset to quit school at a young age, emphasize on the importance of work, and start a family. When many people from a community have immigrated to the United States, immigration too becomes a cultural trend. If a young woman's neighbors, cousins, uncles, and siblings have come to the United States, it seems reasonable that she will follow in their footsteps. After all, they will be able to help pay her passage in crossing, give her a place to live, and find her a job. Although migrating to the United States is a personal decision made by an individual, it can also be seen as a societal trend that has increased in popularity over the last few decades.

My findings suggest that Valle Verdeans immigrate to the United States in order to find work, earn money, and better support their families. My findings also suggest less personal reasons for immigrating. Immigration to the United States and specifically to Austin, Texas, has become a social norm for Mexicans living in Valle Verde. Because they have relatives and friends already in Austin who are willing to help them financially throughout the immigration process, immigrating illegally seems like a plausible possibility. Also, because such a large percentage of Valle Verdeans have already immigrated, those that remain find it socially acceptable and even expected that they immigrate.

As many of the above theorists suggest, I believe that assimilation cannot be seen from just one perspective. It is difficult to determine how much an immigrant has assimilated to American culture when it is uncertain how “American culture” and

“assimilation” are defined. Usually, though, immigrants who come after high school age do not show signs of linguistic, cultural, or identificational assimilation as much as immigrants who come at a younger age. They consider themselves to be Mexicans, and because they are surrounded by other Mexicans in their homes and workplaces, they do not need to learn English. They might begin to learn about American culture through their children, but they themselves tend to hold on to their Mexican culture. On the other hand, children who attend elementary and high schools usually learn English and some come to consider themselves Americans. Even schools with bilingual programs and large percentages of immigrant students play a major role in assimilating young immigrants and the children of immigrants. Immigrants who come to the U.S. at an older age assimilate economically because they immediately become a part of the work force, but they do not tend to assimilate in other ways.

My findings suggest that immigrant parents from Valle Verde maintain some of their cultural practices, such as celebrating Mexican holidays and cooking Mexican foods, so that their children will understand the culture from which their family comes. At the same time, immigrant parents do not resist the American influences that their children learn in schools and from their friends. Most immigrants have the attitude that if their children are going to be successful in the United States, they will need to know its cultural, social, and linguistic expectations. My findings also suggest that immigrants who have children who are United States citizens are likely to feel a greater sense of comfort and freedom in the U.S. This comfort allows them to leave their houses for recreational purposes and to more fully enjoy their lives in the U.S. On the other hand,

immigrants without legal children often feel restricted to their homes and less a part of American culture.

III. Data and Methods

Eighteen immigrants from Valle Verde were given in-depth interviews in my ethnographic study. I felt that this would be the best feasible way for me to understand their immigration experiences, everyday lives, hopes for the future, and reflections on different topics. When I presented my friend Carina, an undocumented immigrant, with the idea of doing this type of study, she immediately agreed to help me find people from Valle Verde that could talk to me about their experiences as immigrants to the United States. With her help I had very little difficulty finding interviewees and setting up appointments with them. Also, I believe that because Carina set up each of my interviews, often accompanying me to the house of the interviewee, the interviewees trusted me more than they would have had I come without any personal connections. I was able to reach a level of friendship with many of them that gave them reason to be more open and honest with me about many aspects of their lives.

I did the interviews over two different weekends, the weekend before Christmas, and the weekend before spring break. Because of the work schedules of most of the immigrants, I could not conduct interviews throughout the week. Both of these weekends posed somewhat of a problem in finding people who could talk with me; the first weekend, many immigrants had returned to Mexico for the Christmas season, and during the second weekend, a large group of immigrants attended a baptism on the Saturday afternoon. With Carina's help, though, I was able to find enough people to interview. The interviews were not set up in the way that formal interviews are typically planned,

with a time and date designated days or weeks in advance. Instead, Carina made various phone calls on the days of the interviews. In her purse she had a long list of telephone numbers of cousins, aunts, godmothers, and friends, and from that list she chose the names of people she thought would readily give me some of their time. This method of snowball sampling turned out to work well in finding interviewees. Although I felt anxious before the first weekend, wondering if I would arrive in Austin only to find that no one wanted to talk to me, or that they were too busy that particular weekend, I quickly realized that Carina's method worked best for this specific group. As I began to learn through my interviews, most of the immigrants do not work on Saturdays and Sundays, and they spend their free time close to home.

I made it clear to the interviewees that if they did not want to talk to me, I would understand, but none of them denied me an interview. I was able to talk with immigrants living in two different neighborhoods; the first weekend I talked to ten people during eight interviews in four houses in one neighborhood, and the second weekend I talked to eight people during eight interviews in four houses in a different neighborhood. Four of the interviewees were men and fourteen were women. Carina seemed to have more direct connections with women, thus setting me up more interviews with women, and the men I interviewed were usually relatives of these women.

I received varying reactions from the interviewees when I approached them with the idea of my project and my willingness to talk to them. In general, the women were more open to the idea of the interviews. Some talked in a straight-forward manner from the very start, telling me everything that had happened to them in while in the United States, while others were more hesitant to offer me details and opinions. For these more

reluctant women, I tried to describe about my time living on the border and my hopes to give them a voice. I told them that I was personally very interested in their lives, and I explained to them that I thought many politicians talked too much about illegal immigration without ever having spent ample time talking with illegal immigrants. After these explanations, most women seemed to eventually warm up to me and give me an account of their lives as immigrants.

The men, on the other hand, were extremely reticent. One man, a 29-year-old who was living and working without papers in the United States, mumbled one-word answers. When I tried to ask more open-ended questions, which would hopefully bring about more in-depth answers, he spoke more quietly and tapered off at the end of this sentence. Another male, as I decided which question to ask him next, would say to me "Is that it? Finished? Well, what else?" I would smile and say "just a few more, sir!" When his friend walked in the door with a plate of warm enchiladas and placed them on the table in front of us, I said, "You can eat them!" He shook his head 'no' but then stared at the enchiladas for the rest of the interview. I ended up omitting a few of the questions because I could sense his readiness for the interview to end. Another man, Carina's brother, who now legally works in the United States, seemed suspicious of me at first. He eventually began to talk more openly when he started telling me stories about injustices that had happened to him at his workplace.

Serious problems arose in two of the interviews that prevented me from using them in my study. Both occurred during the first weekend while interviewing married couples. During these interviews, I placed the tape recorder in between the husband, the wife, and myself in order to record the voices of the three of us. The tape recorders

hardly picked up our voices because it was not strong enough and because they all spoke to me very quietly. After realizing my mistake, I decided to interview only individuals. I became very conscious of the proximity of the recorder to the interviewee's mouth and always checked to make sure my tape was recording. Because of taking these four people out of my study, I now have fourteen interviews instead of eighteen.

Although some of the immigrants I interviewed are now living legally in the United States, all of them have at one point either arrived here illegally or overstayed a visa, thereby making them illegal here at some time. Most of the people I interviewed, twelve out of the fourteen, are still living and working illegally in the United States. Of the two remaining, one came here illegally in the 1980s and has since become a resident, and the other came here legally in the middle of December with a special permit because her granddaughter, a 2-year-old citizen, had been murdered. She was supposed to return to Mexico a few weeks after our interview, but I recently heard that she has overstayed her permit, now making her illegal in the United States.

IV: Findings

Reasons for Immigrating

When I asked people why they migrated to the United States, they typically answered "*para trabajar* (to work)." As an explanation for why they did not want to work in Mexico, they would often describe their financial situation there as opposed to their financial situation here. A 36-year-old male who has been living and working in the United States for 3 years, said, "I wanted to get to know the United States, and apart from that, well, earn a little bit of money. For these reasons I want to come here. What one earns here will buy a lot in Mexico. There, one has nothing left over from what one

earns." Another woman who has lived illegally in the United States for fifteen years expanded upon this point: "I came because I was trying to get ahead due to the economy of our country because well, life in Mexico is very different. Here there are more opportunities that we don't have there, you know? So, trying to get ahead in order to live." Carina's godmother, who has been in the U.S. for four years, said that she came here "for a very big reason which was that I have many children, and there (in Mexico) where I worked, they gave very little money, and here, well, for me it is a lot better." People's reasons for coming to the United States were generally so that they could work. I learned in one of the final interviews that the main mine in Valle Verde, which had been a source of employment for many male Mexicans, closed down in 1992. Although there had been emigration from Valle Verde before 1992, it appears that the closure of the mine forced many Mexicans to come to the U.S.

Some immigrants wanted to come to the United States in order to make money that would eventually allow them to return to Mexico to live a somewhat better lifestyle. Despite their plans, these migrants often found themselves staying in the U.S. instead of returning to Mexico. For example, a 39-year-old woman who recently became a resident said, "My first plan of coming here was to buy a house in Mexico. Then when I arrived and I worked and I saw the lifestyle and everything, I still wanted to buy the house but I didn't want to return anymore. I just wanted to bring my daughters here and make a life here because it seemed better to me." It became clear over the course of the interviews that many migrants had similar experiences; they originally had no intentions of staying in the United States but they ended up staying for various reasons. Carina's sister said, "No, I didn't think that I wanted to stay. I thought 'I will come, I will work, and I will

return,' but I came, I worked, I met my boyfriend, I got married, and I stayed!
(laughing)."

Other immigrants still plan to return to Mexico after working in the U.S. One woman told me, "There, we are very poor, and there I worked a lot, I always have worked a lot and there I worked a lot and the money didn't last, so because I didn't have a house, I decided to come here, to see if God could make me a house in which to live, and in which my children could live." She has worked in the United States for five years and hopes to have made enough money by three years from now to afford her family a house in Valle Verde. Judging from others' stories of staying in the U.S. despite plans to return, I would guess that this woman will end up staying if her two daughters can somehow make it across the border. In general, when immigrants from Valle Verde end up staying in the United States instead of returning home, it is because they realize that the work situation in Mexico remains the same and because they have children who are U.S. citizens.

Some immigrants give more specific reasons for coming to the U.S. One woman talked about her sick son, saying, "I never thought to come here, but my son, I have only one son, and he got sick, he started getting attacks. So before this, yes, I adjusted for my children to have them in school, to give them food, but now with this of my son, that he got sick, well I always had to bring him to the doctor." Because she could no longer "adjust" with the high medical bills, she decided to immigrate. Also, a woman of 54 years arrived in the U.S. a few weeks before our interview on a special permit because her granddaughter had died. She said, "Our motive in coming was the death of the girl. Because of this, I decided to come. My daughter called and said that we would be able to come, and well, we came to see what happened." Her daughter, a 19-year-old

undocumented worker, left her 2-year-old daughter, a U.S. citizen, in the care of her husband (not the baby's father). According to the grandmother, the child died because she was crying incessantly and the young husband became frustrated and began to hit the child. The grandparents arranged to get a special permit that would allow them to come to the United States in order to be with their daughter in her time of grief. Carolina recently told me, though, that they had overstayed their permit and were now living illegally in the U.S.

Many immigrants also mentioned reuniting with family members as a reason for coming to the United States and specifically for coming to Austin, TX. A 19-year-old immigrant whose mother came to the U.S. without her children decided to join her two years later. She told me:

Me, I was in school but it was going very poorly for us, they lowered our grades a lot, so I decided to leave school and find work. I found work, but as all Mexicans have that illusion of going, and moreover, if you have family members there in the U.S., it's that illusion of "Oh, I want to go there, I want to go to the United States!"

Having family members already living in the U.S. is very influential in a Mexican's decision to immigrate. In addition to wanting to see a family member after time apart, a potential immigrant knows that a family member will usually be able to help them find work. Another girl said "I didn't want to come but all of my family was going to come here, and there's no work in Mexico." Although migrating to work in a new country can seem like a very individual decision for a person to make, a community that sends many migrants to the U.S. can create an atmosphere in which migration seems inevitable. As one girl told me, "There are lots of people from Valle Verde in Austin. Now there are

very few people on the rancho (in Valle Verde).” Migration becomes an obvious step for many Valle Verdeans to take, especially those who are unable to support their families financially, because it is socially expected and accepted by their society.

Crossing the Borderlands

The immigrants I interviewed from Valle Verde spoke more to me about the crossing process than they did anything else. Some of them have crossed the border illegally only once while others have crossed it illegally multiple times. They all spoke of the border crossing process as expensive and difficult. The migrants I spoke with hired coyotes to lead them across the border to a city in Texas. Some of the coyotes were reliable; others crossed the border as “guides” even though it was their first time to cross into the United States. For example, Carina told me of her first time to cross into the U.S., thirteen years ago:

We crossed the river in a tire and after that we spent eight days in the hills walking, without eating, three days without drinking water, and we found where the cows drank, everything dirty. We drank water from there, yes, from there we drank water. And well the coyote, the person who brought us, he didn’t know how to get anywhere. Eight of us were coming with him and he didn’t know; it was his first experience, and he was the guide.

Apart from being inexperienced, some coyotes charged migrants unfairly. Most coyotes received their pay after they brought the migrant to their final destination, but some coyotes convinced migrants to pay them before the journey. This agreement allowed the coyote to receive pay even if he didn’t succeed in crossing the migrants. A mother who has been in the U.S. for four years spoke of this type of experience. She said, “We (my

friend and I) paid a lot of money. Five thousand dollars. Because a woman was going to bring us and we gave her the money first, and that woman didn't bring us. So then we had to look for someone else, and more money. A little difficult for us- we paid it off in a year." As she mentions, migrants typically borrow money from their relatives already living in the U.S. to pay for coyotes and then repay their relatives when they begin working. Prices for a coyote ten to fifteen years ago were around 200 to 500 dollars. According to one of the interviewees, the prices today range from 1400 to 2000 dollars..

After walking through the desert, migrants were either picked up in cars or buses along the highway or placed on trains, and one was even sent to an airport to fly. A woman in her late thirties fell while running away from the Border Patrol and her leg turned purple and bruised. Their coyote then took her group to Laredo, TX where they stayed in a hotel for two days without any food. The coyote finally returned, putting them in a trailer in order to pass the final checking point on the highway. She told me, "We were very lucky because they (the Border Patrol) didn't put dogs to sniff us, or perhaps they did put them in the back of the truck, but not inside. We were able to pass, but it was difficult because of my leg." Another woman, who crossed 15 years ago, was taken to an airport in Harlingen, Texas so that she could fly to Houston. Coming from a small ranch town, she felt confused and scared in the airports. She recalled, "I had no idea what an elevator was, nor a first or second floor! For me, it was like being in a dark room because I didn't know how to move about in the airport; I didn't know which direction to turn nor where to exit."

Many immigrants told me stories of the help they had received during their crossing into the United States. The woman who was confused in the airport luckily

found a Spanish speaking couple offered her a ride to her friend's house. She said, "For me they were like guardian angels in a big country when one knows no one." Carina, after wandering with her group for eight days in the hills, mentioned other immigrants they encountered on their way who helped revive a member of Carina's group who was fainting and showed Carina's group where the highway was. They helped her group find a bus to Houston and instructed them not to pay the coyote any money because he hadn't successfully gotten them across. Once Carina arrived at a bus station in Houston, she and her friend had no money to take a bus to Austin. She recalled a man who helped them out:

Maria and I were seated at the bus central and I said to her 'Maria, what are we going to do? We don't have money to even make a call or anything!' And a man heard me, he was in his seat also, and he took twenty dollars out and he said to me 'Take, here is twenty dollars, I just heard that you are arriving and don't have any money.' And I told him 'Oh no no no thank you!' I still didn't want the money because nobody had ever given me money! And I said 'No, no, give it to her' and he gave it to Maria. He said 'Take this, Señoras, I understand your situation. Buy your tickets, with these twenty dollars you will arrive where you are going. Buy your tickets and go!'

Sympathetic bystanders sometimes eased the many difficulties of border crossings.

In general, though, immigrants spoke of the harsh conditions they faced while crossing into the United States. One woman who has crossed the border various times made observations on the crossing process:

The life of a migrant is very very difficult because sometimes one gets lucky and it's really easy to cross, but sometimes there is no luck and one has to walk for many,

many hours, with hunger and thirst, withstand the cold, withstand the rain, withstand the sun, if there is rain, you withstand rain, if there is sun, you withstand the sun, and so much thirst, so much, and you have to drink water from the cow troughs, also drink the cow's pee pee.

A girl who arrived eight months ago, at a time when crossing the border was more difficult than years past, told me that her coyote lost her group in the hills for six days. The Border Patrol approached them but didn't see or hear them. She was disappointed that they did not catch her because she wanted to be taken back to Mexico; she told me, "I wanted to go back (to Mexico), but no, they didn't see us ... we didn't have water or food anymore; we were dying of hunger, and then I fell. I fainted, and I thought 'Okay, now we should definitely go back because I am dying.'" Migrants often talked about crossing the border with pained looks on their face, demonstrating the horrible memories they kept from that experience. Despite the pain in recalling their crossing experiences, migrants often spoke about them for lengthy amounts of time, describing every detail of the journey.

One story worth noting was told by a 19-year-old girl who came to the U.S. three years ago. After trying to cross through Reynosa and being sent back to Mexico by the Border Patrol, she and a friend decided to try their luck in Matamoros. They found a coyote who crossed them through the principal bridge in Matamoros. When I asked her how, she told me:

We went in a car, as if we were tourists. That's what I understood from what I had heard. They filled a parking lot, from one street to another, with many cars; they put us in really elegant cars and everything, but sooo many people, we were like a hundred

people. They put us in cars right there, but new cars, and then, as I understand it, he bribed the Border Patrol. When we arrived to the bridge, the coyote passed us. He paid the Border Patrol five hundred dollars for each one of us, and the Border Patrol let us pass, he made a signal with his hand that we could pass.

When I asked other migrants if they knew of anything like this, some of them told me that they had heard of coyotes bribing the Border Patrol.

Work

Migrants typically find work upon arriving to the U.S. Except for the grandmother I interviewed, all of the immigrants held steady jobs. Ten of the women worked cleaning houses, one worked cleaning Dell computer facilities, and another worked in construction. Both men worked construction jobs, one installing pipes and the other as a carpenter.

Immigrant women who arrived recently typically arrange two types of housecleaning work. Some work as live-in housekeepers during the weekdays and go home on the weekends. They usually speak about this arrangement as a happy one. One woman described this type of situation to me:

The *patrones* (bosses) were of Greek origin, but they spoke Spanish, so there wasn't much problem. She (the wife) was a good person and wanted me to stay a long time with them. She looked for a way for me to get a permit to work so that I could travel back to Mexico. In their house I didn't feel weird like I was an employee; I felt like I was in my house. She was one of those people that gives you trust as if you were a part of the family.

Another girl, who works as a live-in housekeeper, told me that the family she lives with “accepts [her] like a daughter.” Carina told me of her first job after arriving in the United States that her aunt helped her find. The wife in the house where she worked “was very kind; she spoke Spanish and she bought me my own food. She would take me to the market and say “We’re going to the market!” and I would get in the car, and she bought me what I wanted, Mexican food.” The women I interviewed were generally very happy with their experiences as live-in housekeepers because they felt comfortable with the families for whom they worked. When a family spoke to them in Spanish, the women felt even more at home. This living arrangement typically ends when the immigrant has her first child and can no longer live away from home.

Other newly arrived women accompany more established relatives and friends to their workplaces to help them clean. The *patrones* of the house pay the original worker, and she in turn gives the newcomer a share of the money. For example, one girl worked “with other girls, cleaning houses. They (the older workers) give me the amount they want.” Similarly, Carina’s sister said that she started working with Carina right after she arrived because Carina “would take me with her.” This working style is a way for new immigrants to “learn the ropes” of cleaning houses in the United States because they are often unfamiliar with the cleaning processes expected in an American house. This arrangement is also important because newly arrived migrants do not have cars or driver’s licenses like many of the older migrants do. Taking a bus to work from the other side of the city greatly increases travel time, so riding to work with a more established immigrant in her car can save time.

Women who work in various houses throughout the week and return to their homes at night are often mothers who have spent more time in the U.S. Carina, for example, began cleaning multiple houses after she had her son. A friend of hers helped her find work in one house and from there she was able to find more work herself. She told me, "I then got my own work. I cleaned well and people really liked my work, and then my employers would ask me 'Do you need another job?' and I would say 'Yes.' I did a good job; that's how I found work." When she first began working from house to house, she was paid twenty dollars for an afternoon of work. One of her current employees pays her seventy dollars for four hours of work. A 19-year-old who has been in the U.S. for three years has already begun to find her own work in different houses. She told me, "I work the whole week except Tuesday, from eight in the morning until four in the afternoon. The families are good with me, just as I am good with them!" Working in multiple houses lets immigrants come home every night to be with their families. This also allows them the flexibility to quit one of their jobs if something goes wrong in a particular house. They are not dependent on just one employer to pay them.

The only negative work experience stories I heard from women immigrants came from times when they had worked for Mexican Americans. These "Chicanas," as the immigrants called them, were demanding and mean. They paid them low wages and were not concerned about them as people. Carina's godmother told me, "I have been lucky because I have worked with American people and they are good, but when I first arrived I worked with a woman from Mexico, the same as where I am from, and no, we did not get along very well." Another woman said she was treated like a "slave, not an employee" by a Mexican American boss, and a younger migrant mused, "Why do the

Mexicans themselves treat us so badly just because they speak English? I don't understand why they treat us like that." A Chicano once told Carina that, "The Mexicans come to take our jobs away, they come to eat the food that belongs to us" and she said "I felt so sad that they would say those words to me, and I told him 'No, sir, we only come to work, and the little or big amount that we have, it is because of our work, because we, the Mexicans, we know how to work!'" The immigrants I interviewed agreed that Chicanos treated them poorly and that it was much preferable to work for "*un americano*."

In general, it is clear that immigrants' job searches are much easier because of the connections they have with family members and friends. Housekeepers ask their employees if they know of other families who need housekeepers and then either take the jobs themselves or offer them to other immigrants. Although I did not talk as extensively about work with male immigrants, the same networking system seems to hold true. Women often told me that their brothers or cousins found work through other relatives. A 29-year-old father told me that he works with cousins and friends, so he most likely found work through them.

Daily Life

Apart from work, the immigrants I interviewed from Valle Verde are involved in a variety of other activities. While some migrants tend to stay in their houses during their free time, others lead active social lives. In general, the immigrants who have been in the U.S. for more than 8 or 10 years and have children who are citizens are more likely to be involved in social activities than those who arrived more recently. One woman who has four children who are citizens described their social lives:

Well we go to the movie theater, we watch television. On the weekends there are a lot of us because my aunt also comes. Well, we know many people, and have plans for the children, *quinceañeras* (traditional 15-year-old birthday parties for girls). Somebody calls us and we go out with them. We try to take advantage of the weekends to be in better contact with people. That's how you do it here, right? You all (Americans) are accustomed to having free time between the weeks, so we are also left to do so. Immigrants focused on the idea that weekdays were for working and weekends were for fun activities. Carina gave me the details of a weekday: "At 5:20 I wake up, at 6:00 I give my children cereal, at 6:30 I drop them off at school and go to work. At 4:00 in the afternoon I pick up my kids from school, at 5:00 or 6:00 I return home and make (my husband) dinner. Night arrives, I wash some clothes, and we go to bed." Weekends, on the other hand, are a time for fun activities for the children. Carina's sister said, "When it's hot we go to the park, and we all have bikes, and the kids ride their bikes. The pool is also close so when it's hot, we go swimming. When it's cold we go to stores, we go out to walk." Immigrants with citizen children experience a stronger sense of comfort taking part in outdoor activities because their children are learning in American schools and have future opportunities in the U.S. It is also possible that because of their numerous years living illegally in the U.S., they have gradually become less fearful of being discovered by the Border Patrol.

Immigrants without legal children in the United States are not as socially active outside their houses. A 19-year-old who arrived 3 years ago, said "I like to listen to music a lot; I like to watch television, see movies on TV ... I don't want to stay here anymore." Her sisters and friends still live in Mexico, and besides taking an English

class a few blocks from her house, she doesn't feel comfortable walking on the streets in the U.S. A 19-year-old who arrived in the U.S. 8 months ago told me, "On weekends I am with my brothers and I clean the house. Sunday I go to mass, and...well I am in the house a lot" (34). Carina's godmother, who lives in Austin with six of her seven children, all of whom are illegally in the U.S., told me that she is usually "here (in the house), cleaning, washing ... We rarely go to parties, my daughters go to dances on the weekends but I leave my house very little." Because she feels that her children might someday be discovered as being in the U.S. illegally, she is scared to leave her house other than to go to the grocery store.

Another man, whose family is still in Mexico, told me that during his free time he watches soccer on the TV at his house. The mother of little girl who just passed away said, "Well I only have free time on the weekends. I stay in my house during the week (when I'm not working) but on the weekends I go out with my brothers, and when I had my little girl ... well, I want to return to Mexico. I came because of my daughter, but probably I won't leave now because she is here now and my brothers are here." Her daughter's citizenship gave her a sense of comfort to leave her house. Now that her daughter has passed away, she leaves her house mostly to go to work. It is typical for immigrants without any legal ties to the U.S. to stay close to home, mostly inside their houses. It appears that immigrants' sense of comfort in participating in social life outside the house depends on the presence of legal children.

Most immigrants, no matter the number of years they have lived in the United States or the status of their children, participate in the less public Valle Verde community in Austin. Carina lives on a "rancho" outside Austin where her husband, an architect, has

built two big houses for fourteen or fifteen members of their extended family. Carina frequently throws parties on different occasions such as birthdays and baptisms. The other immigrants I interviewed, more of Carina's family members and friends, live in two nearby neighborhoods. Their houses are all within a few blocks and the immigrants are frequently in contact with each other. The parties at Carina's and others' houses are times when immigrants from Valle Verde can get together and enjoy each others' company. An immigrant whose children still live in Mexico, who doesn't typically leave her house, told me, "Yes, Carina always has her parties, she invites us. Whenever she invites us we go to her parties." These parties are occasions for family members and friends to see each other, reminisce about Valle Verde, update each other about various members of the community, and talk about their lives. Valle Verde is a tight-knit community in other ways besides planned social functions. Within families, for example, one sister will often take care of another's children so that her sister can work. Although they live in different houses, there is constant contact between family and community members. Also, Carina told me that her nephew was crossing the border the morning that we did our interview. She and many members of the community were hopefully awaiting his arrival, as they did when any community member crossed. This common desire for a community member to make it to Austin seemed to foster a sense of togetherness in the community.

Immigrants with children generally kept some Mexican traditions in their daily lives but integrated American customs into their lives as well. One woman told me, "When they (the children) have birthdays we always try to sing to them '*Las Mañanitas*,' the Mexican version, and yes we almost always cook Mexican food, the *mole*, the rice,

the *picadillo*, the *pozole*, *tamale*, *atole* my kids like that. They like American food and Mexican food.” While they try to hold onto these Mexican traditions, including celebrations of *quinceañeras* and attending church in Spanish, they also celebrate American holidays. One woman explained their Halloween and Thanksgiving holidays: “The kids go to ask for candy and are wearing costumes. This day arrives with the excitement of ‘What costume? Paint my face!’ We also celebrate Thanksgiving with a normal family dinner, we try to eat dinner with relatives.” Carina’s sister stated the importance of trying to keep some Mexican traditions in rearing her children, saying, “We try to keep up the Mexican tradition so that they know something in their heads of their own country. We go to *quinceañeras* and parties with people from Valle Verde. We celebrate Halloween and Day of the Dead.” This celebration of both the Mexican and the American traditions seems to be a common thread among migrants.

Carina, on the other hand, does not want her children to celebrate Halloween. She considers it, “a celebration of the devil, for witches, and no, I don’t like it. I let them celebrate Halloween on two occasions, but now that they are older, if they decide to celebrate, that’s ok.” In other words, although Carina does not approve of the Halloween celebration, she compromises with her children and sometimes lets them celebrate it. Another woman makes an effort to keep old traditions, but her family also celebrates American traditions. She said, “We rarely celebrate Mexican festival days because I always have to work, but we try to eat Mexican food ... We celebrate American holidays, like the day of the turkey that they do here, we also do that. It’s the tradition of here, and well, we are here. The kids celebrate Halloween by asking for candies and they are very happy.” In general, the parents do not try to reject new customs that their kids learn in

school, but at the same time they make a concerted effort to familiarize them with Mexican traditions.

Finding a Balance

When asked what they liked most about the United States, most migrants answered “the economic stability.” Carina told me, “I really like it here because there is work and because there is the opportunity to eat better. It’s the truth- if you work, you buy the kind of food you want.” Another girl also mentioned food: “There is more food, more ways to earn money for food. You have everything. In Mexico there is no money.” One man told me, “What I like most here is that one feels good because one can more easily buy things.” A 19-year-old without children said, “What I like about here is that I earn a lot of money and I buy myself what in Mexico I was never able to buy, like shoes, clothes, I have so many things now and I enjoy them. That’s what I want; I have what I wanted.”

In answering the same question, immigrants with children often included that “one has more opportunity for kids- with doctors. The people are very nice.” Women with young children feel grateful for the benefits they receive from different social services: “There is so much help here for everyone, for example in Mexico- what they give me here for my daughter, I would never get in Mexico.” They often mentioned health care for their children as one of the main benefits to being in the United States. A woman with school-aged children mused, “Kids have more opportunities in school to study and for them it is better, more opportunities than in Mexico.” One man’s statement summarized the greatest reason immigrants were happy to be in the United States: “I can give a better future to my family and to my children.”

When asked what they liked least about the United States, many cited the lack of freedom they felt. One woman said, “What I don’t like a lot here is the law, it’s very strict. Another agreed, saying, “I’m going to tell you one thing that I don’t like there- the laws. That’s the only thing that I don’t like there, the law is so hard. You can’t do anything here! You drive a little bit fast and there’s your ticket, and if you get a mean policeman, he says ‘And your papers?’ Because lots of them do ask if you have papers to be in the U.S.” Immigrants in general do not like the strictly enforced laws in the United States. Immigrants also talked about feeling “*encerrados* (enclosed)” in the United States:

We are freer in Mexico and more enclosed here, because there I can let the kids walk to the store and it’s fine, and here you can’t let them go alone because lots of things can happen ... If I walk in the street I am afraid that the INS will get me. You are here but you don’t have the freedom that you should have- and sometimes you should have freedom because- well I have lived here for more than 12 years, more than 12 years! I should be able to get my papers!

Another girl talked about the fear Mexicans experience of being picked up by the INS:

My life here is not nice because in Mexico I would go to the street and walk with my friends and here I can’t do that. Here I am afraid to go out and walk around. It seems like here all the Mexicans are enclosed because if you think about it, those that live in apartments always go from their work to their apartments, from their apartments to work. They do nothing else. We are enclosed here.

Immigrants talked about this feeling of enclosure whether they had been here for many years or only a few months. Having legal children may influence them to leave their

houses more often, but they still have fears of the INS. Some even mentioned that it would be worse for them to be sent home than for immigrants without children because of the possibility of their children being sent to foster homes in the U.S.

One woman talked about the lack of freedom she felt mentally. She explained the differences between Mexicans and Americans in their attitudes about work:

Well the truth is, a person is here because of the commodities that are here, because life here is easier, because there is a better future. But looking at it well, I think that a person lives better in Mexico, better mentally. Here one lives with the day; one is very stressed because when you don't expect it, the bills, the rent, everything, car insurance, car payments. I think that a person here lives life in such a hurry. One doesn't enjoy life with her children or spouse, with relatives or friends because everything becomes the routine of work, nothing more. I feel like in Mexico one lives better in this sense."

This woman feels trapped not so much physically, inside her house, but rather in the demanding routine of her work. She has been in the United States long enough to understand that even though she is earning more money than she earned in Mexico, she will still never reach the American middle-class standard of living.

For those immigrants who have left family members behind in Mexico, part of their answer to "What do you like least in the U.S.?" included their sadness of not being able to see relatives. A woman who left all of her children in Valle Verde cried as she told me, "I have not returned to Mexico because they say it is more difficult (to return to the United States), so I have not been able to go see my daughters. When I finish earning money for the house, then I will go. If I can return (to the United States), that's good, but if I can't then I will at least have a place to live with my daughters." This woman's

experience is very different from other immigrants' experiences because her children are living far from her, in Mexico. Another woman told me that the hardest part about living in the U.S. is that she misses her mother and father. A 19-year-old girl who came to the United States partly to be with her brothers said that she misses her parents and is ready to go home to be with them. She knows, though, that she would miss her brothers if she left the U.S. For Mexicans with some relatives living in Mexico and others in the United States, there is never one side of the border that offers them the comfort of living with their whole family. Many feel a constant longing to see those family members who are trapped on the other side of the border.

In general, though, immigrants who lived with most of their family members in the U.S. can support the lack of freedom they feel and instead concentrate on the advantages of being in the U.S. They often compare their current situations with their pasts in Valle Verde as a way to focus on everything they have in the U.S. Carina's godmother, speaking of her life in Valle Verde, said, "I worked in a factory. I earned like fifty Mexican pesos a day, which would be like three dollars here, or four. Yes, it was very little." She now lives in a two-bedroom apartment complex with two bathrooms, a kitchen, and a living room. Her children, although not legal, attend schools in the U.S. and are learning English. It is possible that they will be able to attend a public Texas university because illegal immigrants who have spent at least 3 years in Texas high schools are permitted to attend public colleges. The woman whose children are still in Mexico told me about the work she did in Valle Verde:

In Mexico I worked in many things. I worked in the country, planting onions, *chiles*, *jitomates*, going to pick them when they were ready to be picked ... It was very

difficult for me, so I decided to look for housework and so before I came here I worked in a house. At seven in the morning I worked for one woman, and in the afternoon I worked for another woman. Yes, I worked a lot.

She has been working in the U.S. for five years now, sending money back to her children every eight days in order to build a house for their family. She expects that the house will be completed in another three years and she then plans to return. Although she is sad to be away from her children, she considers temporarily working in the U.S. to be her best option.

Carina's sister, who came to the U.S. 12 years ago, told me about her life in Valle Verde: "I studied in middle school in Mexico, and I worked in a snack shop. I think I earned about a dollar a day. Each month I earned one hundred pesos which are like ten dollars, but that was about 10 years ago. I don't know how much that was worth." Whatever it was worth, it was not enough to support a family. She now has four children who are all citizens, and her eldest son is one of the top students in his class. All of her siblings but one are in Austin, and her mother comes to Austin on a tourist visa 6 months out of every year. Carina also talked about her life in Valle Verde, describing their house when she was a child: "I had seen a television before but we didn't have one in my house. We didn't have anything, television, refrigerator, bed; we slept on the floor." She now has four legal children, drives a fairly new SUV, and has become an active member of her local church. Her husband, who became a resident a few years ago, has recently begun to earn more money working for contractor. Carina told me, "[My husband] tells me that I don't need to work any more, but I am accustomed to working, to having my own money, and I like to help my parents because they depend on us, and I also like to

help my kids." Carina is extremely appreciative of everything she and her children have in the United States.

V. Conclusions

Illegal immigration from Valle Verde, San Luis Potosi, Mexico, to Austin, Texas, U.S.A., has become widespread over the past two decades. As Leo Chavez (1993) suggests, immigrants come to the United States in order to better their economic positions. Every immigrant I interviewed mentioned work in their response to why they had decided to come to the U.S. Because immigrants' primary purpose in coming to the United States is to work, they are reliable and dependent workers, grateful for any job they receive, even if the work is difficult or boring. Also, as Massey et al. (1987) suggest, networks play a large role in drawing Mexican immigrants to the U.S. Because the community of Valle Verdeans in Austin consists of so many people, it is somewhat easy for Valle Verdeans in Mexico to follow in their steps and continue the immigration pattern. It is often expected in the Valle Verdean community in Mexico that people will follow their sisters, sons, and cousins to the United States. Immigrants already living in the U.S. are able to help new immigrants pay for coyotes, locate a place to live, and, most importantly, find work.

The actual journey across the border and to Austin is a strenuous, dangerous, and expensive experience. Despite its difficulties, immigrants from Valle Verde will usually attempt the process until they arrive in Austin. Immigrants picked up by the Border Patrol, even after days of thirst and blistered feet, will find another coyote and set out on the journey once again. Talking about their crossing experiences is emotional for many immigrants, both because of the extreme pain they endured and because of the incredible

help they sometimes received from strangers they met along the way or from other members of their crossing group.

Working in the United States is usually seen as a positive experience for the immigrants in my study because the salaries they receive are so much higher than what they earned in Mexico. Women tend to work cleaning houses and men tend to work in manual labor jobs. Immigrants from Valle Verde often feel comfortable and cared for in their workplace, especially if their employers know some Spanish and treat them kindly. They all agree, though, that it is better to work for an American that is not of Mexican descent because Mexican-Americans or Chicanos tend to treat them harshly and pay them poorly.

Apart from work, immigrants' weekly activities depend on whether or not they have children, whether their children are legal, and how long they have been in the U.S. It appears that illegal immigrants who have legal children in the United States feel a stronger sense of freedom within the greater society than illegal immigrants without legal children. Immigrants with legal children are typically more willing to venture outside of their homes to partake in activities such as watching movies in the theaters, taking bike rides to the park, and going swimming. Because immigrants with legal children know that their children have a guaranteed future in the U.S., a weight seems to be lifted off their shoulders. They know that even though they might never themselves be able to legally live and work in the U.S., their children will never be deported to Mexico. Their children receive health care, a public education, and even the chance of a college scholarship. Even though these parents have worries that immigrants without legal children do not have, for example that they will be deported and their children will have

to be sent to foster care in the U.S., these parents are more likely to feel comfortable in American society. This comfort may be due to the hope that their children will be able to make them citizens when they turn 18-years-old, or perhaps to the familiarity the parents begin to feel within the school system and the neighborhood parks. The security illegal immigrants feel in the public sphere of society seems to depend on the presence of legal children. Leo Chavez (1998) indicates similar findings when he states that immigrants begin to assimilate socially once their children are old enough to consider themselves American. My data suggest that immigrants feel more comfortable outside of their homes when they have legal children, even if the children are not yet old enough to consider themselves American.

Valle Verde immigrants who have been in the U.S. for a shorter amount of time, usually those who are single and without legal children, do not feel the same connection to the U.S. They do not leave the vicinities of their homes very often, except to work, and many want to return home to be with other family members. Although most immigrants, no matter what their children's legal situation, talk about the lack of freedom they feel in the United States, immigrants without legal children tend to focus on lacking freedom because of feeling enclosed in their houses. Immigrants with legal children felt a lack of freedom due to the strict laws of the U.S. Valle Verde immigrants without legal children feel forced to be in the U.S. in order to earn money, and they hope that their stay United States will be temporary. They do not have a guaranteed future legal connection to the U.S. like immigrants with legal children do. It seems likely that immigrants in this situation who get married in the U.S. and have a child will change their minds about wanting to go back to Mexico.

Immigrants from Valle Verde are generally appreciative of their economic situations in the United States. Those with children feel grateful for the social services they receive and especially thankful for their children's educations. On the other hand, many immigrants live under the constant fear that they will be found by the border patrol. They talk about the lack of freedom they feel in the United States due to their status of illegality but also because of the harsh laws and the amount of hours they work each day. However, immigrants usually see their lives in the United States in comparison to the lives they had in Valle Verde. They work long hours in the U.S., but they would also be working long hours in Mexico and making less money. One man told me, "What I like the least about being here is that I would prefer to be in my own country." Because their own country does not offer them a living wage and affordable health care, their only reasonable option is to immigrate to the United States.

Huntington's (2004) suggestion that immigrants do not assimilate is challenged by my data. Although most of the immigrants I interviewed can speak little to no English, they are very open to learning about American traditions and cultures. Immigrants with school children are especially willing to understanding American culture because their children begin to learn American traditions and English, and they (the children) begin to identify themselves as Americans. Although immigrants may not approve of every new American custom their children learn, and although they might try to keep some Mexican traditions in their families, they tend to believe that it is good for their children to become a part of American culture. They see this assimilation as a necessary and positive experience that will probably happen regardless of how they raise their children. Although first-generation immigrants may not assimilate as much as their

children do, they do not pose the threat of dividing American society that Huntington suggests.

Also, Huntington quotes Lionel Sosa's idea that Latinos do not succeed in the U.S. because of their "mistrust of people outside the family; lack of initiative, self-reliance, and ambition; little use for education; and acceptance of poverty as a virtue necessary for entrance into heaven" (Huntington 2004: 44). My data shows the very opposite of what this quote implies. Mexican immigrants from Valle Verde demonstrate a great amount of initiative and ambition in their crossing experiences and in their search for work. Although they may rely on family or community members to help them find jobs or to find a place to live in the U.S., immigrants come to the U.S. with much motivation to find success through hard work. If they were as accepting of poverty as is suggested in the above quote, they would not have migrated in the first place. Also, although many of the migrants from Valle Verde have not finished school themselves, they place great value on their children's education. They might not have valued their own education in Mexico but it cannot be assumed that this was due to their disdain for education or learning. More likely it was because they knew in Mexico that finishing *preparatoria* would not bring them a better job, and that the time they studied in school could be better spent making money.

Although my study on immigrants from Valle Verde may suggest certain experiences and mindsets of immigrants from different countries and from different parts of Mexico, it is important to recognize that my findings cannot necessarily be generalized to other immigrant groups. Migrants from Valle Verde are unique in that they come from a town in central Mexico that has sent a large percentage of its population to the United

States. Their crossing experiences are very different from migrants who enter the United States through the Arizona desert or on an airplane. The culture of Valle Verde, San Luis Potosi is different from cultures in other regions of Mexico due to various factors such as climate, indigenous groups, and ancient traditions. Also, most immigrants from Valle Verde now live in the same neighborhood in Austin, Texas, which is unique from other migrants from different parts of Mexico who disperse to various United States cities.

Finally, my study suggests that there is still much to be learned about the Mexican immigration experience. Does my data hold true for Mexican immigrants who come from different parts of Mexico? What similarities can be found between the experiences of immigrants from Valle Verde and the experiences of immigrants from around the world? Because there has been little research done on the different levels of freedom illegal immigrants feel in the United States, it would be beneficial to create a study that focused on that specific issue. Exploring questions such as how immigrants' perceptions of freedom change when they have children in the United States is essential in order to better understand the experience of illegal immigrants.

My study also has implications for immigration policies. When I asked immigrants about Bush's proposed immigration policy, they all agreed that immigrants with families would not participate in a guest-worker program because their stay in the U.S. would be limited to three years, forcing them to eventually return to Mexico even though their children are U.S. citizens. Immigrants from Valle Verde emigrate from Mexico in order to leave impoverished conditions and to create an economically more secure life in the United States. A guest-worker program needs to include a path that eventually leads to citizenship because if it does not, there will be participation only of

the immigrants without legal children. A guest-worker program also needs to assure that immigrants will be able to travel back and forth between Mexico and the United States. Because Mexican immigrants make up such a large part of the unskilled work force in the United States, the U.S. in turn needs to offer more English courses to help immigrants in their assimilation process. Maybe someday Mexican citizens will find enough secure job opportunities within their own country, but it is unlikely that this will happen anytime in the near future. It must be accepted, therefore, that immigration to the United States will continue in the years to come. Immigration must be more researched, better understood, and more fully addressed.

Parte II: Estudios Hispánicos

Introducción

La migración a los Estados Unidos es un tema fascinante en diferentes campos de estudio y ha causado una gran discusión entre políticos, economistas, y sociólogos. Pero también es un tema tratado por escritores de literatura y cine. En esta sección de mi tesis analizo tres obras que tienen que ver con la migración de la gente de America Latina a los Estados Unidos. Los libros que examino son *Esperanza's Box of Saints*, escrito por María Amparo Escandón y *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents*, escrito por Julia Álvarez. La película que analizo es *El Norte*, escrita y dirigida por Gregory Nava.

Cada una de estas obras trata de migrantes que vienen de países diferentes con situaciones distintas. *Esperanza's Box of Saints* trata de una mujer mexicana que sale de su pueblo en busca de su hija que había muerto. Su migración a los Estados Unidos y después su retorno a México crea un proceso de descubrimiento de ella misma. *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* es la historia de cuatro hermanas de la clase alta de la República Dominicana que migran como niñas a los Estados Unidos debido a la violencia política en su país. A pesar de vivir su adolescencia y su madurez en los Estados Unidos, nunca llegan a sentir una completa comodidad en ninguno de los dos países. *El Norte* relata la vida de dos hermanos guatemaltecos que emigran de su pueblo por la extrema violencia que sucede en su país. Al principio encuentran una aparente forma de vida mejor, pero las situaciones van cambiando y terminan con la dura realidad de que no pueden vivir en ninguno de los países. Aunque las obras presentan distintas circunstancias, todas sugieren una exploración de las causas y efectos de la migración.

Esperanza's Box of Saints

En su libro *Esperanza's Box of Saints*, Escandón demuestra la experiencia de la migración como un proceso de reflexión y descubrimiento. Aunque para Esperanza esta experiencia está influenciada por raíces místicas, el milagro del descubrimiento del ser no surge de lo sobrenatural. Sin saberlo, busca una manera positiva de entenderse dentro de un mundo en que lo más horrible puede ocurrir en cualquier momento. Esperanza se encuentra y se comprende por circunstancias de la vida tangible y por la gente que conoce dentro de este mundo material. Escandón presenta una visión del mundo en que la vida común es la fuente de milagros y situaciones increíbles.

Las apariciones de San Judas Tadeo a Esperanza parecen venir del más allá. Cuando su hija Blanca muere durante una operación dental, Esperanza reza al santo, diciendo, "The night of the funeral I prayed to San Judas Tadeo, our saint for desperate cases. You know how miraculous he is" (14). Su fe la lleva a rezar a un santo después de la muerte de su hija. Como una respuesta a su oración, San Judas "appear[s] before [her], on [her] oven window ... [She] hadn't cleaned the oven in months. And now [she] realize[s] it hasn't been procrastination. A heavenly reason was causing [her] untidiness. San Judas Tadeo needed the grime to appear to [her]" (14, 15). Lo que había considerado como una forma de descuido ahora se convierte en algo sagrado y divino. Su entendimiento de sus propias acciones cambia drásticamente cuando ve la aparición del santo y cuando viaja al norte para encontrar a Blanca en un prostíbulo, lleva una caja llena de las figuras de varios santos.

Busca otra aparición de su santo, pero no encuentra ni aparición ni Blanca en los prostíbulos. Cuando llega a un apartamento en Los Angeles, Esperanza implora a su

santo, "This is not a whorehouse, if that's what's been stopping you ... an oven is an oven ... grease stains are grease stains" (178). Pero el resultado: "No saint, anywhere" (179). Esperanza entiende que un santo no querría aparecer dentro de un prostíbulo, pero no concibe por qué el santo no se presentaría dentro de un apartamento respetable. De todas maneras, cree que San Judas tiene sus razones divinas por no aparecer cuando está en Los Angeles. Para ella, los santos son su conexión entre lo que es divino y lo que es mortal. Intermedian la vida y la muerte, y por eso pueden ayudarla a encontrar a su hija perdida porque la permiten saber detalles sobre su hija que no se encuentran en el mundo humano.

Lo que Esperanza no ve con tanta claridad sobre la relación que tiene con sus santos es la habilidad de las figuras sagradas de motivarla a tomar las acciones que ella misma tiene ganas de hacer. Emplea las figuras santas para incorporar la voluntad humana que ella misma desconoce. Por ejemplo, reza a San Judas Tadeo antes de su primera aparición. El hecho de rezar a este santo, conocido por su ayuda en casos desesperados, le revela que Esperanza todavía no ha aceptado la muerte de su hija Blanca. En vez de rezar a un santo que ayuda con la muerte o con una vida que ya pasó, decide rezar a un santo que le ofrece una posibilidad de hallar a su hija. Desesperada delante de la pérdida de su única hija, Esperanza oye a San Judas Tadeo decir que su hija no está muerta. A base de esa declaración, asume que el doctor "must have abducted her. There's no other explanation ...It's easy for a doctor to ... sell her to a brothel... That's why San Judas Tadeo has sent me to look for her" (55).

Así Esperanza encuentra en sus santos una forma de justificar sus viajes a prostíbulos en el norte. Tiene tantas ganas de negar la muerte de su hija que cuando ve la

aparición de San Judas Tadeo, empieza a crear una historia complicada sobre el paradero de su hija. Escandón hace evidente que Esperanza no quiere saber los detalles de la muerte de su hija, haciendo ver que Esperanza no quiere más investigación sobre la muerte de su hija cuando el Padre Salvador dice, "I offered to find out the truth at the hospital, but she was certain he had kidnapped the girl" (55). Cuando Esperanza ha imaginado que su hija puede estar viva en un prostíbulo, ya no quiere pensar en la probabilidad de que ella esté muerta. Encuentra otra justificación en sus santos cuando está decidiendo cruzar a los Estados Unidos para buscar a Blanca. Decide "to go to Los Angeles and look for Blanca there ...San Judas Tadeo was not contacting her in Tijuana. Maybe in Los Angeles he'd decide to show up" (155). Sus santos le dan la justificación para las acciones que toma para hallar a Blanca pero a la vez le ofrecen la oportunidad de liberarse de todo lo pesado que ha tenido en su vida antes.

En el norte encuentra a nuevas personas que son muy diferentes de la gente descomunal que ha conocido durante su vida. Por ejemplo, se encuentra con Paloma, una niña pobre que también viaja hasta Tijuana. Empieza a sentir una conexión con la joven cuando están sentadas juntas en el camión y Paloma se duerme sobre el regazo de Esperanza. Nota que "the more [she] looked at Paloma, the more she looked like Blanca... Esperanza felt an uncontrollable happiness as she experienced the growing warmth of Paloma's head on her thighs" (90). Pero cuando Paloma le roba todo su dinero, la llama "a despicable little thief" y se siente deprimida por lo que sucedió (95).

Paloma representa muchos aspectos de la experiencia de Esperanza. Primeramente, le hace pensar en su hija Blanca. Esperanza tiene la ilusión de encontrarle a Blanca como era, una niña inocente con un espíritu feliz, y a la vez su peor pesadilla es

encontrar a su hija violada y destruida. La contradicción que encuentra en Paloma la recuerda que sus esperanzas pueden ser demasiados idealistas. Paloma también representa la llegada a una frontera repleta de dualidades. Como Paloma tiene dos lados distintos, uno de niña tímida y otro de adulta ladrona, la frontera es el lugar donde se conocen la sociedad norteamericana y la mexicana. Esta liga entre los países y las culturas es muy inestable. Paloma tiene una función significativa en el viaje de Esperanza porque abre sus ojos a la sociedad que va a encontrar y la prepara para lo que le va a suceder. Esperanza tendrá que aprender a reconciliar su pasado con su presente y saber cómo vivir con las dualidades que existen en su vida.

Los santos que lleva Esperanza a todas partes le dan un sentido de comodidad, y así aprende a vivir tranquilamente dentro del peligro que encuentra. Se siente incómoda en el prostíbulo, the Pink Palace, pero reza a varios santos cuando llega allí para sentirse mejor. Dice, "Oh San Gerardo Mayela, patron of housewives, you've always been there for me ... And my dear San Pafnucio, you're the expert at finding lost, stolen and misplaced things" (113). Después de rezar, empieza con su rito de quitar las imágenes de los santos de su caja y ordenarlas en una mesa: "She then pulled out a candle and a framed image of San Judas Tadeo. Then one of San Pafnucio, kneeling on a field with a human skull before him. She lit the candle in a ritual she knew so well she could perform even when distracted with other thoughts" (114). Este proceso la hace sentir cómoda en un lugar extranjero a pesar de ser un prostíbulo. Aún cuando trabaja en Los Angeles, en una casa de placer donde hombres invisibles la observan detrás de un vidrio, arregla sus santos dentro de su cuarto. Su jefe sabe que los clientes "all wanna see her stupid altar" (222), y la curiosidad de ellos por sus santos demuestra la fascinación que tienen por una

mujer "exótica." Pero para Esperanza sus santos representan todo lo contrario de lo que es exótico; encuentra una comodidad por las figuras de sus santos. Ella se siente bien en la presencia de ellos, y la fama que le llevan le da una forma de seguridad en guardar su trabajo.

Esperanza empieza a sentirse mejor cuando se cree acompañada por sus santos en el norte. Lo que le parece extraño empieza a parecer más familiar. Antes de ir a Los Angeles, busca un mapa de California para conocerlo mejor. Ve las ciudades de "San Francisco, San Luis Obispo, San Clemente, Santa Barbara" y cree que sus "saints are waiting for [her] in California" (155). Los nombres de las ciudades la hacen saber que sus santos van a poder cuidarla en el extranjero. Un día en Los Angeles, entre el ruido de la calle y la polución de la ciudad, encuentra a la Virgen de Guadalupe pintada en un mural al lado de un edificio. La Virgin "stare[s] back at Esperanza, and a smell of roses suddenly emanated from the wall" (188). De repente, se siente tranquila en la presencia de María. También, cuando entra en los Estados Unidos con Scott, ve a un hombre negro vendiendo drogas y piensa que podría ser "San Martín de Porres, the black saint she loved so much" (165). Al encontrar a santos en todas partes, lo más peligroso y ajeno se convierte en algo familiar y comprensible.

Como Escandón demuestra que lo que parece más místico tiene sus raíces en la gente y sus acciones, la seguridad en que vive Esperanza durante su viaje se puede explicar por sus propios esfuerzos. Con la motivación de sus santos, vive dentro de una protección que le parece divina pero que actualmente manifiesta sus propias habilidades y deseos. Aunque viaja por ciudades peligrosas, Tijuana y Los Angeles, se cree protegida por fuerzas que parecen ser una mezcla de lo sobrenatural y lo corriente. Escandón

presenta una manera paradójica de entender la buena fortuna que encuentra Esperanza en su viaje al norte. A pesar de la presupuesta influencia constante de lo sobrenatural, la protagonista está protegida por sus propias acciones. Su creencia y dependencia en lo sobrenatural le proporciona los recursos para sobrevivir en un ambiente peligroso y difícil. Por ejemplo, cuando llega para trabajar en un prostíbulo en Tijuana, el jefe Cacomixtle le dice, "If I had a fruit stand, I'd have to test my watermelon for ripeness before I sold it, don't you think?" (101). Este pachuco representa lo peor que existe en el viaje de Esperanza, con su "wet tongue" que quiera probarla. Ella de repente "jump[s] on him with all her strength, making him fall. He hit[s] his head against the edge of the night table ...He quietly drag[s] himself out of the room" (102). Escandón hace claro que Esperanza acude a sus esfuerzos personales para protegerse en una situación peligrosa.

Cuando la heroína va para prostituirse en el Pink Palace, tampoco está violada y ni siquiera llega a tener relaciones sexuales con ningún hombre. Un cliente americano, Scott, juez de Los Angeles, es su única pareja. En vez de tener relaciones con ella, "He lies in bed by [her] side. [They] are always naked ...' 'You haven't had sex with him?' [pregunta el sacerdote] 'No, I sing him lullabies from when Blanca was a baby... He snuggles with me under the sheets and falls asleep'" (123). Dentro del mundo de prostitutas y hombres violentos, vive protegida y tranquila por su habilidad natural de calmar a la gente.

Finalmente, se ve la protección mística bajo la cual vive Esperanza cuando encuentra un teléfono público para llamar al Padre Salvador. Dos salvadoreños tienen planes de cobrarle demasiado dinero, engañándola, pero cuando uno se da cuenta de que Esperanza está hablando con un sacerdote, decide no cobrarla más. Su compañero le dice

"Are you out of your mind?" pero le contesta el otro, "Hey, man, I wasn't going to interrupt the conversation" (183). El hecho de quedar pacífica y honesta en ciertas situaciones da a Esperanza la habilidad de sobrevivir dentro de los peligros que encuentra. Escandón le da al lector la opción de ver su seguridad como el resultado de sus cualidades personales o la influencia de sus santos.

En Esperanza, Escandón presenta al lector a un personaje angélico que niega su propias cualidades benditas. Cuando primero ve la imagen de San Judas Tadeo, "[she looks] at the glass at an angle so as not to confuse the reflection of [her] face with his image" (14, 15). La confusión entre la cara del santo y su propia cara es lógica porque Esperanza es angélica. En la primera escena del libro, Esperanza habla sobre San Judas, diciendo, "Why is he so good to me? I guess that's why he's a saint and I'm not. It takes a good-hearted kind of person to become a saint" (14). Su modestia no la deja ver que su vida de criar a su hija con su amiga Soledad, siempre viviendo con fe y esperanza, ha sido una vida ejemplar. Cuando era niña, su mamá le dijo que "sometimes saints and virgins perform miracles without us knowing" (132). Esperanza, una santa en su propia vida, realiza milagros sin saberlo. Su negación constante de ser santa, o como una santa, demuestra al lector que Esperanza tiene que ser una fuente de milagros en la tierra precisamente porque no se cree santa. Cuando dice que "God can really do it all single-handedly, but He's the boss, He can afford to have as many assistants as He wants," el lector se ve que Esperanza es una de estos santos (133). La autora lo aclara cuando describe la vida que creó Esperanza para Blanca cuando murió su esposo. En vez de transmitir la tristeza que siente por la muerte de Luis, decide mostrarle a Blanca una vida de felicidad y belleza. Esperanza y Soledad dedican su vida a Blanca, "making her a

Jarocho costume," y "writing notes to put in Blanca's lunch bag. *When the juice of this mango drips down your arm, think of how much I love you*" (33, 34). A pesar de la vida extraordinaria que ha dado a su hija, persiste con modestia que ella misma no es ni santa ni fuente de milagros.

Esta historia positiva que trata el proceso de migración a los Estados Unidos demuestra el proceso de descubrimiento del ser que sucede cuando una persona determinada y fuerte encuentra nuevas situaciones, retos, y gente después de una pérdida que al principio parece imposible de superar. Con sus santos como una fuente de motivación, esperanza, y tranquilidad, Esperanza aprende a crecer a ser una mujer confidente y independiente. A la vez, no pierde los rasgos de honradez y modestia que siempre la han definido. En el prostíbulo en Tijuana "Flaca clipped away, [and] Esperanza felt weightless for the first time in thirteen years. She hadn't cut her hair since Luis was killed in homage to him ... Now she looked in the mirror and she didn't see a widow anymore" (136). El peso que ha sentido desde la muerte de su esposo de repente se va cuando Esperanza tiene que salir para investigar la muerte de Blanca. La caída de su pelo representa la pérdida del cargo que empezó a sentir cuando murió su esposo.

La transición a su nueva persona, confidente y segura, se ve cuando conoce al Angel Justiciero. Ella dice que, "The only thing she was certain of was that she would never have walked up to El Angel Justiciero that night at the arena if she hadn't met those other men first" (252). Por los retos que ha enfrentado, y por sus nuevos rasgos autosuficientes, Esperanza tiene bastante seguridad para conocer al hombre angélico que ha admirado desde la primera vez que lo vio. Su ser transformado la deja enamorarse de él y finalmente llegar a vivir como su esposa en los Estados Unidos. Su unión con Angel

Justiciero simboliza su habilidad de aceptar su propio ser y vida. El Angel Justiciero no la enseña cómo entenderse mejor sino que la ayuda a expresar las muchas revelaciones personales que ha tenido durante su viaje.

Esperanza llega a la cumbre de la transformación de su identidad cuando se da cuenta del significado de la aparición de San Judas Tadeo. Después de enamorarse del Angel Justiciero, empieza a hablar con San Judas Tadeo. Le dice "Yes, Blanca is not dead. I understand that. But where is she? Are you only going to appear before me in my oven at home?" (231). De repente, un "blinding light [falls] on her face ...She hear[s] the faint sound of ... 'Hallelujah! Hallelujah!' Esperanza realize[s] that what she ha[s] just said ha[s] actually been a message from her saint. 'In my oven at home,' she repeat[s]"(231). Aunque su santo la ayuda a entender el mensaje sobre su hija, Esperanza es la que capta, para sí misma, el significado de la muerte de su hija. Fue necesario descubrirse y desarrollarse antes de poder entender el estado de Blanca. Cuando llega a Tlacotalpan, le dice a Padre Salvador, "Father, do you understand? I finally know what San Judas Tadeo meant. Blanca is not dead. Blanca is not alive. She is in that little space in between ... If only I had let my saint finish his sentence, after 'Blanca is not dead' " (245). Antes de viajar, de encontrar desafíos culturales, miedo, y lo desconocido, y de verter el peso de la muerte de su esposo, no estaba lista para saber que Blanca iba a existir no más que en el plano espiritual. Después de encontrar la paz interior, Esperanza logra aceptar el hecho de que la presencia espiritual de Blanca siempre va a estar cerca.

Escandón sugiere que la migración al norte, símbolo mexicano de lo mejor y de la posesión de gran abundancia, puede conducir a una exploración del ser humano. La gente que migra, presentada con una distinta realidad, tiene que verse en otra manera que

antes. A la vez Escandón presenta una crítica sutil de la migración, mostrando que Esperanza llega a la cumbre de su realización cuando regresa a su pueblo en México. Básicamente lo que hace la peregrinación es manifestar lo que uno siempre llevaba dentro. Cada persona ya tiene en su interior todo lo necesario para encontrarse profundamente. Es importante poder verse en una manera nueva pero no es esencial viajar hasta otra parte físicamente lejos para lograr hacerlo.

How the García Girls Lost Their Accents

En *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents*, Julia Álvarez demuestra la situación problemática de la mujer migrante. La historia se enfoca en cuatro hermanas de la República Dominicana que vienen de jóvenes para vivir en los Estados Unidos. La novela presenta varias intrincaciones y complicaciones que surgen como resultado de dejar atrás el país maternal y enfrentar las circunstancias del nuevo país. Álvarez muestra la historia de una familia que viene a vivir en los Estados Unidos para encontrar la seguridad y paz que no había en su país. Aunque las hermanas encuentran una tranquilidad política y eventualmente económica en los Estados Unidos, nunca dejan de sentir las fronteras que las dividen socialmente y espiritualmente de su país adoptivo durante toda la vida. Además, sus viajes a la República Dominicana les hacen sentir que ya no caben bien allí por haber llegado a ser tan americanas. El único área en que hallan una paz interna es en las relaciones fuertes entre sí. Su unidad les da a las hermanas un espacio en que comunican la historia personal que comparten.

Chucha, la criada hatiana que trabaja por la familia García cuando vive en la República Dominicana, sugiere la tesis principal del libro: las hermanas siempre van a

encontrar dificultades debido al contraste entre sus memorias y la actualidad que viven, pero lograrán superar los obstáculos por sus caracteres fuertes y determinadas. Alvarez la presenta después de las dos primeras partes y antes de la tercera. Aparece en el capítulo en que la familia huye de la República Dominicana y de la dictadura de Trujillo. Así, actúa como la conexión de las hermanas entre su vida en la República Dominicana y su vida en los Estados Unidos. Esta aparición efímera tiene mucho significado en el libro porque le hace que el lector reflexione sobre el contenido de lo que ha leído, la vida adulta de las hermanas, y unirlo con lo que va a leer, los relatos sobre sus juventudes. Su localización central en la novela sugiere su personaje como el foco principal. Chucha vino a trabajar por la familia de la Torre cuando Trujillo declaró que iba a matar a toda la gente de Haití. Cuando la familia Garcia de la Torre sale para vivir en los Estados Unidos, les dice a las hermanas “When I was a girl, I left my country too and never went back. Never saw father or mother or sisters or brothers” (221). Chucha también tuvo la experiencia de dejar atrás su cultura y siente una gran preocupación por el bienestar de la familia.

Es evidente que Álvarez distingue Chucha de otros personajes en el libro porque le da una voz en primera persona. Después de haber leído capítulos enfocados en las historias de las hermanas Garcia, el lector nota el cambio drástico de la voz de Chucha. En medio de la conversación, acción y ruido de la familia García, Chucha habla de la profundidad de una soledad silenciosa. En vez de narrar un cuento lleno de emoción y pasión, como cuentan las hermanas, habla tranquilamente sobre "the silence [that] remains" (222). Dice “They are gone, left in cars that came for them, driven by pale Americans in white uniforms ...the color of zombies, a nation of zombies. I worry about

them, the girls, Doña Laura, moving among men the color of the living dead” (221).

Chucha se queda en la casa sola, pensando en reposo sobre la familia.

Chucha “looks into their futures and sees the house decaying and the girls struggling” (Barak, 161). Pero su predicción no es puramente negativa. Presiente que “they will be haunted by what they do and don’t remember. But they have spirit in them. They will invent what they need to survive” (223). La predicción de Chucha viene a ser la verdad; Álvarez demuestra las fronteras de las culturas que afrontan las hermanas como migrantes pero a la vez demuestra sus tácticas para sobrevivir. Siempre sienten los efectos negativos de estar parte de dos culturas por las fronteras creadas por los idiomas y la gente. El idioma, una representación vocal de la cultura, siempre queda intangible. Tampoco logran definir bien su cultura porque no saben en dónde caer entre los deseos de sus parientes y las influencias americanas. Estas fronteras se les hacen imposible la tranquilidad en una sociedad u otra. No se sienten dominicanas por tanta influencia de los Estados Unidos; no se sienten americanas por su pasado y sus raíces en la República Dominicana.

A pesar de los obstáculos de las dos culturas, las chicas hallan maneras de superar las complejidades que enfrentan cada día; encuentran una solidaridad entre sí mismas que las ayuda a sobrevivir entre las dos culturas. Existe una cultura propia entre sí que les proporciona un espacio tranquilo y relajado. Las cuatro han tenido una experiencia similar en migrar, entonces entre ellas hay una comunidad comprensiva. Aunque no discuten la situación de ser mujer migrante en sí, sus discusiones sobre sus historias personales les crean una distancia de los problemas que afrontan en su vida. Las

hermanas se analizan y analizan a la gente con que viven, y de sus pláticas surge la fuerza para seguir explorando la vida.

La estructura del libro es una parte esencial de la análisis porque sugiere una examinación del pasado para entender bien el presente. Como Chucha propone, el pasado de las chicas tiene un gran efecto en su presente. Empezando en el año 1989, la narración progresa hacia el pasado. Hay tres secciones del libro y cada una representa una época diferente en la vida de las hermanas. La primera sección ocurre entre 1989 y 1972, la segunda entre 1970 y 1960, y la tercera entre 1960 y 1956. Cada capítulo cuenta una historia de una de las cuatro hermanas. Con pocas excepciones, las dos primeras secciones del libro tienen una narradora de tercera persona. Aunque a cada chica le toca narrar su propio cuento, Yolanda es la narradora principal. El libro empieza con su llegada a la República Dominicana en el año 1989, y la mayoría de los cuentos que siguen tienen que ver con ella. Su presencia se siente en toda la obra; es escritora de poesía y también de los cuentos de sus hermanas.

Por otra mano, los capítulos en la tercera sección y algunos otros, están escritas en primera persona. Así, el lector logra ponerse en la posiciones de las hermanas y entenderlas mejor porque, después de haber leído relatos contados en tercera persona desde el punto de vista de Yolanda, siente un interés en examinarlas desde otra perspectiva. Julie Barak propone una teoría sobre los capítulos contados en primera persona en el libro:

All these first-person stories are memories, recounted by each of the girls in the present about their pasts on the island ... Everyone wants to be in control of her own version of her history, and these first person narratives

in the last section become, in effect, a defense offered by each girl in her own words, an explanation of who they have become in the present, of why they ‘turned out’ the way they have. (Barak, 161)

Por ejemplo, dos relatos de Yolanda que tienen que ver con su vida romántica están colocados juntos. El primer capítulo, “Joe,” está escrito en tercera persona y el capítulo que sigue, “The Rudy Elmherst Story,” está escrito en primera persona. Yolanda encuentra la misma dificultad en estas dos relaciones, la incapacidad de conectar con su pareja, pero el segundo relato explica las razones porque siempre fracasa. El capítulo “Joe” empieza con una escena en que Yolanda está hablando con un doctor. Le dice “In the beginning, Doc, I loved John” (69). Siguen sus memorias de su relación con John, demostrando las dificultades que caracterizaban la relación. Aunque el lector aprende detalles de la relación de Yolanda con John, no encuentra una explicación profunda de las acciones de Yolanda. Los dos están en la cama una noche cuando John intenta tener relaciones con ella. Yolanda dice “I’m sweating... Don’t” (76). John continua en sus intentos de convencerla y ella se enoja, gritándole, “Shit! Fuck!” (77). Su ira y frustración con John están evidentes, pero el lector todavía no entiende bien las raíces de su comportamiento.

El capítulo que sigue, contado desde la punta de vista de Yolanda, le da una explicación al lector de las razones por las fallas en sus relaciones. Cuando empieza su relación con Rudy, el lector nota su persistencia de tener relaciones sexuales con ella. En las noches de los fines de semana cuando Yolanda quiere dormir, Rudy siempre quiere quedarse con ella. Rudy “wouldn’t move from his place at the foot of my bed next to my desk where I sat writing... He would just look at me with those bedroom eyes, and stand,

as if he wasn't going out the door but coming...coming in from the cold outside for a night of lovemaking with his lady-lay" (94). Yolanda explica que en su universidad hay "people with a lot more experience than I had" y que si ella fuera como los otros "I too would be having sex and smoking dope" (95). Dice que "I saw what a cold, lonely life awaited me in this country. I would never find someone with the right mix of Catholicism and agnosticism, Hispanic and American styles" (99).

El acceso a la interioridad de Yolanda que tiene el lector en este capítulo le abre acceso a su dificultad de ubicarse bien en una relación. Notando los pensamientos de Yolanda en este capítulo, el lector puede analizar mejor las razones que causaron el fracaso de su relación con John y sus otras relaciones. Parece que Rudy le trataba como un objeto y lo único que quería de ella fueron relaciones sexuales. Por sus relaciones pasadas, Yolanda se siente que John también desea demasiado el aspecto sexual de ella. De esta manera, los capítulos escritos en primera persona señalan las razones subyacentes por las acciones dentro la novela. Sin darse cuenta, Yolanda se relaciona con hombres americanos que tienen algo en común con el hombre estereotípico dominicano, el que sólo quiere sexo de la mujer, y que le tratara como la mujer dominicana que es, pero no es.

Como los capítulos escritos en primera persona profundizan las acciones de los capítulos en tercera persona, los capítulos sobre las juventudes de las hermanas presentan más información sobre sus experiencias como adultas. El libro está escrita en un orden invertido para enfatizar la noción de que el pasado prescribe el presente. Por ejemplo, al principio de la novela, se describe a Sofía cuando ya es adulta:

Sofía was the one without the degrees ...she had dropped out of college, in love ... on her vacation she went to Columbia because her current boyfriend was going ... They broke up. She met a tourist on the street, some guy from Germany, just like that. The woman had not been without a boyfriend for more than a few days of her adult life. (29)

Este capítulo presenta el dilema de Sofía de no poder sentirse segura como mujer independiente y soltera. Su dependencia en el hombre le da el sentido de seguridad que le falta como individuo. El grado de sus incertidumbres personales se demuestra con su necesidad constante de estar en una relación con un hombre.

El capítulo “A Regular Revolution” cuenta la adolescencia de Sofía y clarifica las razones por los conflictos que experimenta en su vida adulta. La mamá de Sofía la obliga a vivir en la República Dominicana durante un verano para no perder su conexión con el país. Sofía empieza a salir con un primo, Manuel, que respresenta el varón típico machista de la alta sociedad dominicana. Las hermanas pueden ver que “loveable Manuel is quite a tyrant, a mini Papi and Mami rolled into one. Fifi can’t wear pants in public. Fifi can’t talk to another man” (120). Sofía, la hermana más joven, que supuestamente tiene más experiencia con la cultura americana y las relaciones americanas, ha caído en una relación típica de una mujer dominicana. Las hermanas le advierten, “Don’t let him push you around. You’re a free spirit” pero “within the hour, Fifi is on the phone with Manuelito, pleading for his forgiveness” (121). En su relación con Manuel, Sofía demuestra su inhabilidad de escoger una cultura sobre la otra. Todavía cree en las ideas feministas exaltadas por sus hermanas, pero a la vez se siente cómoda en una relación machista. Su confusión en su relación con Manuel indica su

confusión sobre su identidad personal. Siente una ambigüedad interna, el resultado de las influencias de las dos culturas. Esta perplejidad de no saber en cuál sociedad cabe se manifiesta en su relación con Manuel y en sus relaciones con otros hombres en su vida adulta. Los sucesos de “A Regular Revolution” presentan los orígenes de su confusión porque demuestran la lucha interior que ha experimentado desde joven.

Chucha menciona que las hermanas siempre tendrán dificultades en su nueva situación, y una de estas problemas es que nunca dejan de sentir la influencia de su español. Aunque las hermanas saben hablar los idiomas de sus dos países, se pierden entre el español y el inglés. Las complejidades de no tener control sobre ninguno de los dos idiomas hace que las hermanas nunca se sientan completamente cómodas en una situación en que alguien está hablando. Como ha observado Ricardo Castells, “the sisters repeatedly find themselves at odds with their bicultural surroundings, experiencing a form of alienation that is often symbolized by either silence or by an absolute failure to communicate with the other characters” (Castells, 34). Para las hermanas, encontrar un lenguaje común con otra persona es un reto casi imposible de cumplir.

Yolanda por ejemplo encuentra problemas de comunicarse también en su relación con Rudy. Después de prestarle su lápiz a Rudy en su clase en la universidad, Rudy viene a su dormitorio para devolvérselo. Cuando le pide que salga con él, Yolanda dice “I didn’t trust this guy, I didn’t know how to read him. I had nothing in my vocabulary of human behavior to explain him” (92). Al primer momento de hablar con Rudy, Yolanda se da cuenta de que los dos existen en planos distintos. Yolanda le ayuda a escribir poesía para su clase de inglés:

We spent most of the weekend together, writing it, actually me writing down lines and crossing them off when they didn't scan or rhyme, and Rudy coming up with the ideas. It was the first pornographic poem I'd ever co-written; of course I didn't know it was pornographic until Rudy explained to me all the word plays and double meanings. "The coming of the spring upon the boughs," was the last line. (93)

Yolanda y Rudy están viendo el mismo poema pero lo entiende en maneras completamente diferentes. No es que Yolanda no entienda el significado literal de las palabras, sino que no entiende el doble sentido que tienen las palabras en inglés.

Después de salir un tiempo, Rudy empieza a apresionar a Yolanda que tenga relaciones con él. Le dice que quiere "screw and fuck and ball and get laid," pero sus palabras le dan asco y miedo a Yolanda (101). Cuando Yolanda le pide que no le hable así, Rudy le dice "What do you mean, don't say it that way? A spade's a spade. This isn't a goddamn poetry class" (96). Aunque Yolanda ha vivido en los Estados Unidos desde hace muchos años, no se ha acostumbrado al idioma vulgar de la gente ni a la forma cruda en que vive. Todavía siente que su cuerpo debe ser respetado, y no halla nada de reverencia en las palabras de Rudy. Siempre ha observado la relación entre sus papás y entre otras parejas en la isla, y todavía encuentra seguridad bajo la idea idealista de que los hombres buenos solamente hablan a sus parejas con palabras dulces. Yolanda entiende, tal vez sin estar conciente de ello, que las palabras de Rudy reflejan su indiferencia e insinceridad hacia ella. Cuando su relación ha acabado, Yolanda piensa "I saw what a cold, lonely life awaited me in this country. I would never find someone who would understand my peculiar mix of Catholicism and agnosticism, Hispanic and

American styles” (99). Yolanda teme que nunca va a encontrar a nadie que la entienda. Pero ella misma no se entiende porque no sabe cómo relacionar sus dos culturas. Si ella misma no sabe entenderse, ¿cómo podría otra persona entenderla? Yolanda busca su propia identidad en sus relaciones con otros pero no logra definirse.

Yolanda también tiene muchos mal entendidos en su comunicación con su esposo John. Cuando él le dice a Yolanda “Do you love me Joe?” ella sabe que “he [wants] words back. Nothing else [will] do” (70). Para John, la seguridad en su relación con Yolanda existe en las palabras fijas y las ideas que uno puede articular. Yolanda halla una lista que hizo John de los aspectos buenos y malos que encuentra en ella. Yolanda le dice “What the hell you have to make a list of the pros and cons of marrying me for?” (74). Los dos saben hablar inglés, pero parece que hablan idiomas diferentes. Yolanda es poeta y sus palabras representan sentimientos, emociones, y deseos. Las palabras de John representan exactamente lo que quiere decir; no hay espacio para ambivalencias ni comunicaciones malas. Cuando John llega a la casa para darle rosas a Yolanda, ella trata de hablar con él:

Thank you love ...John, can you understand me? He [shakes] his head no... She [holds] him steady with both hands as if she [is] trying to nail him down into her world... ‘Babble babble.’ His lips [are] slow motion on each syllable. He is saying *I love you*, she though! ‘Babble,’ she mimicked him. ‘Babble babble babble babble.’ Maybe that meant, *I love you too*, in whatever tongue he was speaking...Maybe now they could start over, in silence. (78)

Los dos no saben alcanzarse por medio sus palabras, y Yolanda se siente más segura con el lenguaje del silencio.

Carla también siente una lucha con los idiomas. Cuando empieza la escuela en el grado sexto, los chicos siempre hacen bromas de ella por su estilo de vestirse y de hablar. La imitan, gritando “Eh-stop ... plees eh-stop” (153). Carla se siente confundida y asustada, no sólo por los chicos groseros sino también por su propio cuerpo que ha empezado a desarrollar. Siente que “the girl she had been back at home in Spanish was being shed...In her place was a hairy, breast-budding grown up no one would ever love” (153). No sabe explicar lo que está pensando sobre su cuerpo porque, además de sentir la incomodidad típica que les pasa a los adolescentes durante la pubertad, no sabe qué palabras usar. Se siente como si su cuerpo la fuera traicionando. Este cambio corporal es una representación física de la inaccesibilidad del pasado. Carla y sus hermanas vivían una existencia inocente y protegida hasta su llegada a los Estados Unidos. Carla se siente preocupada porque su cuerpo está cambiando físicamente, y nunca podrá regresar a la chica ingenua que era en la República Dominicana. Aun si vuelve para visitar a sus parientes, no será la misma chica porque su cuerpo se ha transformado.

El lector también ve su lucha con los idiomas cuando un hombre le muestra sus genitales a Carla. Caminando a la escuela, un hombre en un carro le pide que se acerque. Ella ve su pene y camina directamente a su casa. Las policías le fuerzan a explicarles lo que había visto. Carla siente mucha timidez de hablar y un policía demanda “Can’t she talk?” (161). Ella empieza a contar lo que había visto, pero en cuanto llega a la parte sobre los genitales, “Carla thought hard for what could be the name of a man’s genitals. They had come to this country before she had reached puberty in Spanish ...Now, she

was learning English in a Catholic classroom, where no nun had ever mentioned the words she was needing” (163). El miedo y la confusión de Carla se amplifican con su inhabilidad de encontrar las palabras. El único lugar en que puede encontrar un espacio seguro existe en su cabeza. Cuando se han ido los policías, Carla “would close her eyes and wish them gone...she would pray, beginning with the names of her own sisters ... the seemingly endless list of familiar names would coax her back to sleep with a feeling of safety, of a world still peopled by those who loved her” (165). Ya no existe un mundo que siente seguro para ella; tiene que imaginarlo para sentir contenta. Como sus hermanas, Carla está perdida entre las palabras del inglés y las españolas y siente una seguridad en el silencio.

Aparte de luchas entre los dos idiomas, las hermanas encuentran dificultades para ser parte de cualquier sociedad debido a la presión de los demás. Sus familiares quieren rechazar muchos aspectos culturales de los Estados Unidos, pero a la vez, la cultura de los Estados Unidos exige que las hermanas se olviden de su cultura original. Atrapadas entre estas dos presiones, no saben a qué lado tirar. Entre todos los parientes, el papá siente más pasión sobre cómo deben actuar en los Estados Unidos. Tiene muchas ideas fijas sobre cómo deben pensar y actuar sus hijas dentro la sociedad americana.

Por ejemplo, Yolanda es premiada con el honor de hablar a toda la escuela el Día de los Maestros, y tiene que escribir un discurso. Cuando empieza a escribir, está confundida de lo que debe decir; “night after night, she [sits] at her desk, hoping to polish off some quick, noncomittal little speech. But she [can’t] get anything down” (141). Buscando inspiración, lee un poema de Walt Whitman que dice “I celebrate myself and sing myself ...He most honors my style who learns under it to destroy the teacher” (142).

Las palabras le dan una pasión muy fuerte y poderoso a Yolanda, y empieza a escribir su discurso con mucha pasión. A su mamá le encanta la presentación, y la mamá y su hija deciden presentarla al papá.

La reacción del padre es intensivamente negativa. Empieza a gritarles:

What ees wrrrong with her eh-speech? ... I will tell you what is wrong. It show no gratitude. It is boastful ...Now Carlos was truly furious ...Soon he would be surrounded by a houseful of independent American women...He snatched the speech out of Yolanda's hands, held it before the girl's wide eyes, a vengeful, mad look in his own, and then once, twice, three, four, countless times, he tore the speech into shreds. (146)

Carlos ve que sus hijas están creciendo con una mentalidad muy americana, una mentalidad que valora al individuo y no respeta a las figuras de autoridad.

Yolanda escribe otro discurso, “two brief pages of stale compliments and the polite commonplaces on teachers” (148). Este tipo de cumplimento demuestra el respeto para los maestros de Yolanda que se considera tan importante en la República Dominicana. Su papá cree que una presentación llena de respeto para los maestros tiene mucho más valor que una presentación que parece amenazar su importancia. Ella siente una gran presión de su papá de mantener su cultura original, pero a la vez está descubriéndose dentro de la cultura americana.

Las hermanas también sienten un mandato de la cultura americana de acostumbrarse a sus normas sociales y sus morales. Sus papás les mandan a una escuela preparatoria para chicas de la sociedad alta de los Estados Unidos. Su mamá quiere que las hijas “meet and mix with the ‘right kind’ of American,” y esta escuela les presenta la

oportunidad de conocer y asimilar la cultura americana (108). Aunque no caben precisamente entre los grupos de chicas en su escuela, empiezan a aprender las normas sociales en la escuela de internos. Las hermanas “learn to forge Mami’s signature and [go] just everywhere, to dance weekends and football weekends and snow sculpture weekends. [They can] kiss and not get pregnant. [They can] smoke and no great aunt [will] smell us and croak. [The begin] to develop a taste for the American teenager good life, and soon, Island [is] old hat, man” (108). Ya empiezan a criticar la República Dominicana por su conservatismo de ideas sobre cómo deben ser los adolescentes. Cuando están en la escuela, se sienten más ajustadas a su vida en los Estados Unidos; sus ojos están abiertos a la libertad de la cultura americana.

La resistencia de sus familiares puesta al lado de las influencias fuertes de la cultura americana les hace imposible encontrar un equilibrio entre sus dos culturas. Cuando Sandi va con su familia a cenar en un restaurante caro en los Estados Unidos, parece de repente que las hermanas hayan encontrado un equilibrio feliz entre sus dos culturas. La familia Fanning, una pareja que ayudó a Carlos a salir de la República Dominicana, quiere llevarlos a comer en “a special Spanish restaurant that was written up in a magazine” (169). En el restaurante, los adultos empiezan a hablar y Sandi juega con unos paquetes de azúcar en la mesa. Contemplando la mesa, se da cuenta de que “they could have eaten anywhere ... and yet they had come to a Spanish place for dinner ...Spanish was something other people paid to be around” (179). Sandi recuerda a la mujer que vive en su apartamento que siempre se queja del ruido molestante del español. Ahora Sandi se siente afirmada; la vecina está equivocada sobre el español porque, como Sandi puede ver en el restaurante, su cultura y su lengua son muy respetadas dentro la

comunidad americana. Cuando unas mujeres vienen al restaurante a bailar flamenco, Sandi está muy impresionada. Su “heart [soars]. This wild and beautiful dance came from people like her, Spanish people, who danced the strange, diquieting joy that sometimes made Sandi squeeze Fifi’s hand hard until she cried” (185). Se siente completamente cómoda y feliz en el restaurante americano viendo a los bailadores españoles. La interacción entre las dos culturas es una de respeto y entendimiento. La cultura americana cede a la española porque la aprecia; a la vez, los papás de Sandi están disfrutando una noche en una restaurante en los Estados Unidos.

De repente las esperanzas atentas de Sandi se esfuman cuando Mrs. Fanning, ahora muy borracha, se junta con los danzantes a bailar. Sandi ve “two figures [hurl] by. It [is] Mrs. Fanning with Dr. Fanning giving chase! She scramble[s] up onto the platform, clapping her hands over her head ... The diners roar their approval. All but Sandi. Mrs. Fanning ha[s] broken the spell of the wild and beautiful dancers” (186). Mrs. Fanning parece representar lo pero de la cultura americana. No tiene modestia; no sabe valorar otras culturas ni tampoco quiere hacerlo. Quiere atención en sí misma, y cuando se junta con el grupo de danzantes, lleva con ella todo su espíritu americano, arruinando la presentación.

Cuando Mrs. Fanning compra muñecas para las hermanas, Sandi la ve con sus “blurry alcoholic eyes and ironic smile” (190). Su mamá le dice que le agradezca el regalo, y Sandi “[hops] her dancer right up to the American lady and [gives] her a bow ...Sandi [does] not stop. She [pushes] her doll closer, so that Mrs. Fanning [apes] a surprised, cross-eyed look” (191). Su muñeca le besa a Mrs. Fanning en la mejilla. Por su estado de borrachera, Mrs. Fanning no comprende este acto de rebelión y desafío.

Además, su falta de conciencia no la deja ver su comportamiento como algo típico de un americano. Sandi sabe que nunca quiere ser como Mrs. Fanning; puede ver dentro de ella y no le gusta su interior. Aunque debe ser una mujer cultivada, refinada, y amable, Sandi ve que está confundida y aburrida con su vida. Sandi se sentía emocionada cuando vio a los danzantes en el restaurante y existía bien con sus dos culturas. Mrs. Fanning le quita las esperanzas porque le presenta a Sandi la realidad de la cultura americana y le demuestra que las dos culturas no existen bien juntas.

El resultado de esta inhabilidad de resolver las dos culturas es que las hermanas no saben definirse.

Perhaps the most revealing part of the many difficulties brought about by linguistic and cultural conflict is found in "Antojos," the first chapter of *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents*, but chronologically the conclusion of the family story. (Castells, 35)

Yolanda llega a la República Dominicana para visitar a su familia después de no haberla visto por cinco años. Antes de llegar a la puerta, "Yolanda sees herself as they will, shabby in her black cotton skirt and jersey top, sandals on her feet, her wild black hair held back with a hairband. Like a missionary, her cousins will say, like one of those Peace Corps girls who have let themselves go so as to do dubious good in the world" (3). Yolanda ya no piensa como las primas con quienes siempre vivía antes de salir para los Estados Unidos. Ahora tiene una forma de vida y una mentalidad muy diferente de ellas.

Ellas le dicen "Miss America" cuando entra en la casa, y cuando empieza a hablarles, olvida unas palabras de español. Cuando Yolanda dice que quiere ir al campo para coger guavas, su familia le dice que una mujer de familia buena no sale sola para

coger fruta. Yolanda está atrapada entre dos culturas y formas de pensar y le gustaría olvidarlas para hacer lo que quiera, pero no sabe cómo escoger entre de las dos. Su familia le presenta un pastel, diciéndole que haga un deseo mientras sopla. Piensa “there is so much she wants, it is hard to single out one wish ...She and her sisters have led so many turbulent lives- so many husbands, homes, jobs, wrong turns among them. But look at her cousins, women with households and authority in their voices. Let this turn out to be my home” (11). Yolanda ve la seguridad que tienen todas sus primas y desea encontrar lo mismo en su propia vida. Sus primas tienen una seguridad en el hecho de que siempre han sabido cómo deben vivir su vida. Yolanda no tiene una guía cultural que seguir para ayudarla a escoger la forma en que debe vivir.

Manejando al campo, prende la radio y es “all static- like the sound of the crunching metal of a car ...the faint blurry voice on the airwaves of her own, trapped inside a wreck, calling for help. In English or in Spanish?” (13). Se siente muy sola entre los dos idiomas porque parece que nadie la puede oír. Necesita a alguien para guiarla pero no hay nadie que la entienda ni que quiera gastar el tiempo para entenderla. Yolanda llega a un pueblo donde hay una cantina con un cartel viejo. Hay una foto de una mujer, “a creamy, blond woman luxuriates under a refreshing shower, her head thrown back in seeming ecstasy, her mouth opened in a wordless cry” (15). Mientras viendo el cartel “an old woman emerges from a shack behind the cantina, buttoning up a torn housedress” (15). El contraste entre las dos mujeres aquí es muy evidente; la mujer americana, rubia y limpia, y la mujer dominicana, pobre y con ropa vieja. Yolanda existe entre esas dos mujeres, pero no se identifica con ninguna. Siendo una mujer de familia muy prestigiosa en la República Dominicana y también mujer de los Estados Unidos,

Yolanda cae en un lugar ni representado ni identificable. Quiere entender las dos, o tal vez sentir las seguridades de sus culturas, pero su experiencia como migrante no le ha dado esta opción.

Después de una aventura en coger guayabas con unos niños, Yolanda sale del pueblo en su carro:

In the glow of the headlights, Yolanda makes out the figure of the old woman in the black square of her doorway, waving goodbye. And above the picnic table on a near post, the Palmolive woman's skin gleams a rich white; her head is still thrown back, her mouth still opened as if she is calling someone over a great distance. (23)

Álvarez repite el contraste entre las dos mujeres. Mientras la mujer dominicana está en la sombra casi invisible, la mujer americana brilla. Parece que está pidiendo un deseo como Yolanda, pero está silenciada dentro del cartel. La voz de Yolanda también está perdida entre las culturas. Las dos quedan en un silencio por falta de habilidad de expresarse.

A pesar de las dificultades que afrontan las chicas por las culturas distintas, la predicción de Chucha se cumple. Las hermanas “have spirit in them. They invent what they need to survive” (223). Una manera de sobrevivir en su sociedad es contar cuentos. Cuando Yolanda es muy joven, su mamá le regala un libro sobre una chica capturada por un sultán. El sultán quiere asesinar a la chica, pero justo antes de matarla, le pregunta si quiere “hear one more of Scheherazade's wonderful stories before [she] die[s]” (232). Scheherazade empieza su cuento pero no llega al fin, y el sultán le deja vivir hasta el próximo día. Su cuento dura toda su vida, nunca llegando a un fin, y así el sultán nunca quiere asesinarla. De la misma manera, Yolanda ha podido sobrevivir a pesar de los

desafíos en su vida. Cada capítulo del libro es un cuento nuevo que cuenta para superar las dificultades de su posición bicultural. Como Scheherazade está cautivado en la progresión de su propio cuento, Yolanda quiere explorar su pasado, en la forma de cuentos, para continuar su existencia. La vida de Scheherazade depende de la continuación de su cuento cada noche, y Yolanda depende de su habilidad de escribir relatos sobre su vida y la vida de sus hermanas.

La acción de contar cuentos le permite a Yolanda distanciarse de su propia vida. El acto de contar algo personal es una manera de ver la vida desde un ángulo distinto. Es más fácil aguantar los desafíos de la vida cuando uno habla a gente que entienda la situación y la historia. Para Yolanda, esta gente comprensiva consiste es sus hermanas. Cuando las cuatro vienen a la casa de Sofía para la Navidad, empiezan a discutir la pelea entre ella y su papá que tiene que ver con su esposo. Empiezan a reír sobre la forma tradicional de pensar que tiene su papá. Sofía dice “Nothing like a story to take the sting out of things” (65). Esta idea principal corre dentro todo el libro. Cuando están juntas las cuatro hermanas, se crea un ambiente informal y comprensiva. Cada una es distinta en su forma de pensar y de vivir, pero todas tienen la misma historia de migración.

Las hermanas encuentran su propio idioma entre ellas mismas. En el capítulo entitulado “A Regular Revolution,” Álvarez usa la forma de “nosotros” para contar el cuento de sus actos de rebeldía. La primera persona plural le avisa al lector que el capítulo va a presentar las características más fuertes de las hermanas como grupo. Antes de salir para la República Dominicana para quedar el verano, las hermanas juegan con los nombres de sus parientes. Dicen “We played with their names, translating them into literal English so that they sounded ridiculous. Tía Concha became Aunt Conchshell, and

Tía Asunción, Aunt Ascension; Tío Mundo was Uncle World; Paloma, our model cousin, turned into Pigeon” (111). Este capítulo presenta la noción de que las hermanas, en este momento, se sienten más americanas que dominicanas. Bromeando de sus parientes crea solidaridad entre ellas que viene de su americanismo. Cuando su mamá halla marijuana en su cuarto, las hermanas hablan de cómo la encontró. La imaginan hablando con el Tío Pedro, un siquiatra que sugiere que “we [las hermanas] were all addicts, fallen women with married lovers and illegitimate babies on the way” (114). Las hermanas forman una conversación que tiene que ver con la cultura americana, señalando que ahora se sienten más americanas que dominicanas.

Cuando Sofía empieza a salir con Manuel, las hermanas demuestran aún más fuerte la tendencia de pensar con una mentalidad americana . Todavía contado en la forma de primera persona plural, pero ahora en el presente, Álvarez presenta una base para reconocer que la novela viene de una perspectiva americana. Las hermanas se sienten muy lejos de la forma de pensar de la gente dominicana por haber crecido como adolescentes en los Estados Unidos. Sofía, que se siente la más americana que todas sus hermanas por haber migrado en una edad muy joven, busca su lado dominicana en un relación con Manuel. Por ejemplo, cuando las hermanas llegan a verla “Fifi ... is a jangle of bangles and a cascade of beauty parlor curls... She has darkened her lashes with black mascara” (117). Esta apariencia es muy diferente que su estilo más natural que siempre lucía Estados Unidos.

Aunque Sofía trata de parecer que se siente cómoda en su relación, las hermanas pueden ver que no es así porque Manuel es machista. Manuel rechaza la idea de llevar un condón y de darle libertad personal a la mujer. La relación de Sofía con Manuel

demuestra la confusión que se siente Sofía en no poder definirse como dominicana. Las hermanas, que todavía siguen usando la forma de nosotros, representan las voces de todas, incluso la voz de Sofía. Si fuera otra hermana en una relación machista, Sofía formaría parte del grupo de las hermanas. Todas se juntan y “the revolution is on. We have one week left to win the fight for our Fifi’s heart and mind” (122). Lo interesante es que el corazón y la mente de Sofía ya están con sus hermanas. No están en su relación con Manuel porque no se siente enamorada de él ni tampoco lo considera como alguien muy cautivando; Sofía está con Manuel porque quiere escaparse de la cultura americana.

En “A Regular Revolution” las hermanas demuestran que ahora son más americanas que dominicanas. De todas maneras, todavía tienen una habilidad de entender la cultura dominicana. Cuando quieren que Sofía ya no salga con Manuel, crean un plan que depende en su conocimiento de la cultura dominicana. Salen con todos sus primos y le piden a su primo Mundín que les lleve a casa porque así dejarán solos Sofía y Manuel. Lucinda, su hermana, “works a version of her Kotex custom office trick” (127). Saben que Mundín no querrá discutir nada sobre este tema, y que hará lo que su hermana le pida. También, las hermanas saben que Mundín querrá protegerle a Manuel porque “loyalty is what keeps the macho system going” (127). Cuando la mamá se entera de que su hija está sola con Manuel, decide que Sofía tiene que regresar a los Estados Unidos. Aunque las hermanas no tienen las formas de pensar de la gente dominicana, usan su conocimiento de cómo es. Sofía regresa para ser parte del grupo de sus hermanas, y las cuatro salen de su familia en la isla que ahora les parece demasiado conservadora y tradicional.

En *How the García Girls Lost their Accents* Álvarez emplea una estructura narrativa pluralista para demostrar varios aspectos de la experiencia bicultural. Chucha predice que las hermanas encontrarán dificultades pero que sus espíritus les van a ayudar a sobrevivir. Las dificultades vienen de la cultura, y se presentan en las formas del idioma y de las relaciones con los parientes. Las hermanas tienen problemas en definirse bien, pero encuentran maneras para soportar sus conflictos culturales. En contar sus cuentos, son una audiencia comprensiva entre sí. Aunque siempre se sienten que no caben bien dentro de la sociedad americana, el libro está escrito desde una perspectiva americana. Por haber crecido en el contexto norteamericano, todas ya piensan con la mentalidad americana y consideran la mentalidad dominicana como anticuada.

El Norte

El Norte, una película dirigida por Gregory Nava en 1984, trata de dos hermanos indígenas que emigran de su pueblo en Guatemala hasta Los Angeles. Nava presenta las causas materiales, el proceso físicamente duro, y los efectos económicos de la migración, y a la vez demuestra las grandes esperanzas, los conflictos interiores, y la desesperación espiritual que experimentan los hermanos, Enrique y Rosa. Dentro de toda la película crea un contraste notable entre la perspectiva de los hermanos y la de la gente que vive en los Estados Unidos. En una manera sutil, Nava demuestra que la riqueza de los Estados Unidos es la causa por la situación insoportable de los migrantes.

Uno de estos contrastes más destacables es el significado que las dos sociedades dan a la comunidad versus la importancia que guardan para el individuo. La sociedad guatemalteca de donde vienen Rosa y Enrique pone mucho énfasis en las

relaciones familiares. Una de las primeras escenas en la película presenta su familia "laughing and listening to Tía Josefita chatter in her shrill, high voice" (Nava 1979: 10). La familia parece muy unida y fuerte, aún cuando viene el novio de Rosa a visitarla en su ventana. Tía Josefita dice "Novios, how sweet!" y todos continúan con la plática (12). Cuando el papá, Arturo, va a luchar para la tierra que pertenece a la comunidad, no le permite a Enrique que le acompañe. Le exige "Go home...tell your Mamá not to be afraid. I'll be home soon" (15). Aunque Arturo no queda con la familia, quiere que su hijo esté allí con ellos para asegurarles que todo va a estar bien. El apoyo de la familia también se ve cuando Rosa le pide a su tía Josefita que le dé dinero para ir al norte. La tía ha ahorrado su dinero desde hace muchos años para viajar al norte, pero se da cuenta de que "I'll never go. I'm too old now ...Go to the north for me" (33, 34). Este sacrificio profundo demuestra el grado de apoyo familiar que existe en las familias guatemaltecas.

El contraste entre esta mentalidad que apoya a la familia y la mentalidad que enfatiza la importancia del individuo se ve cuando los hermanos empiezan su migración a los Estados Unidos. En el camión hasta los Estados Unidos, un día caliente, se encuentran con un hombre que rehúsa dejar abierta la ventana del autobús en que viajan. A pesar de que todos están sudando, el hombre grita, "I can't stand drafts ... you should have more respect!" (46). Enrique "looks at him like he's crazy" porque no entiende cómo podría ser tan grosero con su hermana (46). Viniendo de una sociedad en que los miembros de la misma comunidad indígena demuestran respeto para todos, los hermanos están confundidos sobre el hombre y se enojan por su egoísmo. Esta actitud se presenta otra vez cuando un hombre en Tijuana les dice que puede ser su coyote para ayudarlos a cruzar al norte. Bajando del camión, varios coyotes empiezan a gritarles y bromear de

ellos. Otro coyote llega a salvarlos, diciéndoles a los coyotes, "If you're all so brilliant, I wonder what you're doing here in Tijuana, barefoot?" (51). Enrique y Rosa, acostumbrados al ambiente de confianza que había entre su familia y su comunidad, de repente sienten un compañerismo con él. Los hermanos se sonríen con felicidad, pensando que han encontrado a alguien que les pueda cruzar. Cuando el coyote intenta "bring a large rock down on Enrique's head," los dos están completamente sorprendidos por el cambio drástico (58). Aunque Enrique y Rosa vienen de una situación peligrosa en su propia comunidad por los soldados violentos, su tendencia es confiar en la gente que parece amable a primera vista. Esta actitud, contrastada con el comportamiento de las personas que conocen en el norte de México, demuestra el cambio significativo entre los valores de la sociedad indígena guatemalteca y la sociedad del norte de México.

Nava usa imágenes visuales para demostrar las características de los dos lados de la frontera. Muestra una serie de imágenes de casas pobres en Tijuana, contrastándolas con las casas bonitas de los Estados Unidos. Esta serie sugiere que la frontera del lado mexicano es donde se manifiestan las tensiones creadas por las injusticias que sufre la gente pobre del sur. Indica que la riqueza del norte tiene mucho que ver con la condición de pobreza en el sur, como si no pudiera existir el uno sin el otro. También las luces del sur y del norte se pueden comparar por los efectos visuales de la película. Cuando Enrique y Rosa salen de su pueblo en Guatemala, giran para una última mirada. Todo se ve un color natural de verde oscuro, y el pueblo está callado. Por otra parte, Rosa y Enrique ven una luz fuerte de la Migración cuando salen del túnel, llegando a los Estados Unidos. Segundos después, ven la ciudad estadounidense llena de luces brillantes. A Enrique y Rosa les encanta el brillo de las luces, pero es aparente la ironía de esta llegada

feliz. Están buscando una vida mejor, pero solamente van a encontrar lo artificial y lo material en los Estados Unidos. Nunca regresarán a la naturaleza de su pueblo.

Llegando a Los Angeles se presenta aún mas fuerte la idea de que el individuo es más importante que la familia y la comunidad. Cuando Rosa y su amiga Nacha encuentran trabajo limpiando una casa de una familia de dinero, Rosa está "utterly fascinated" en ver la casa; "this is beyond her wildest expectation" (97). La grandeza de la casa exige una comparación con la casa de Rosa y Enrique en Guatemala. Su hogar era lleno de familiares, sentados en la mesa, hablando, mientras esta casa, "vast and operatically decorated," es enorme, vacía, y sin familia. Otro día trabajando en la casa, Rosa oye a la hija de la familia en su carro pitando. Parece "impatient [and] she honks again" (106). Su hermano corre al carro y los dos se van. Los dos parecen molestos con ellos mismos y la hermana no tiene paciencia para su hermano. Esta pareja de hermanos se puede comparar con Rosa y Enrique, que venían juntos en su viaje para darse seguridad y apoyo. Cuando Rosa convenció a Enrique que debiera acompañarlo al norte, le dijo, "If we live, then we live together, and if we die, then we die together" (37). Enrique le contesta, "You are right, Rosita. We have to stay together" (37). Su unión como hermanos, visto al lado de la relación de los hermanos ricos, se ve fuerte y unida.

El egoísmo del individuo se presenta otra vez cuando Carlos, un chicano que trabaja en el restaurante con Enrique, renuncia a éste a la migra. Otro trabajador mexicano le explica a Enrique "The migra doesn't just show up-- someone has to call. He's been pissed off ever since you got promoted" (131). Carlos, que habla inglés perfectamente y tiene más tiempo trabajando en el restaurante que Enrique, tiene celos por no estar adelantando como los trabajadores ilegales. Sin pensar en el otro, decide

sacar a Enrique y llamar a la migra. Como Jorge explica, "That's the way it is here. You've got to think about yourself or you don't survive. You do whatever you have to do-- to get ahead" (132). Nava sugiere aquí que la sociedad americana corrumpe a los que tienen mucho tiempo viviendo allí, incluso a los mexicanos. Finalmente, se ve la falta de importancia del otro y el énfasis en el individuo cuando Alice, una jefe de una fábrica en Chicago, quiere que Enrique venga a trabajar por ella como el "foreman." Cuando Enrique menciona "I'd have to talk to Rosa, and--", Alice dice "We can't allow any families. It just gets too complicated" (113). Alice, pensando solamente en su fábrica y el dinero que puede ganar, considera a otros miembros de la familia como distracciones innecesarias. Cuando dice que "He's bright. And very self-assured" no está viendo a Enrique como persona sino como alguien que le puede beneficiar su negocio (114). La diferencia entre las actitudes y las moralejas sobre el respeto para el otro versus la importancia de uno mismo se nota mucho entre los guatemaltecos y los personajes del norte.

Nava también presenta la ingenuidad que tienen los hermanos cuando viven en Guatemala. Se ve la inocencia de los hermanos desde el principio de la película cuando todas sus pláticas tienen que ver con las lujurias del norte. La Tía Josefita dice "You know what I heard about the north-- everyone there, even the poor people, they all have toilets that flush. You can really pee in style up there! ... In the north *everyone* has a car" (11). Enrique está de acuerdo, y dice "there is a lot of money up there. Some of my friends have relatives there .. they told me" (11). La familia de Rosa y Enrique siempre ha vivido bajo esta actitud que parece ignorante al espectador americano. Todas sus conversaciones giran sobre el tema del norte y los tesoros que uno encuentra allá.

Basando sus conocimientos en cuentos que han oído, revistas que han visto, y la televisión, Rosa y Enrique asumen cómo van a ser varios aspectos de los Estados Unidos. Lo que más les interesan son las cosas materiales que nunca han podido tener, como cocinas blancas y luces eléctricas. No saben que deben sospechar de los grandes rumores que han oído toda la vida ni tampoco que deben cuestionar el valor que tales rumores dan a las cosas materiales.

La inocencia de los hermanos se presenta otra vez cuando llegan a México. Sin un buen entendimiento de las ciudades en México, les dicen a un mexicano que maneja una camioneta que van para Oaxaca. El hombre empieza a reírse de ellos, diciéndoles "Well you're three hundred kilometers in the wrong direction! You're Chapines (Guatemaltecos) aren't you?" (43). Su manera de hablar, seguro y fuerte con palabras vulgares, parece muy distinto de cómo hablan Enrique y Rosa. En su deseo para ir al norte, ellos tienen tal vez más determinación que tiene este hombre, pero hablan más despacio con mucho cuidado en escoger sus palabras. Llegando a la frontera, la inocencia de los hermanos otra vez está contrastada con la vulgaridad de los mexicanos. Saliendo del camión en Tijuana, todos los coyotes los ven como inocentes e intentan hablar con ellos. Les gritan, "El norte --12,000 pesos!" y "Come on pollitos-- I can get you there, to the other side!" (49). Los hermanos parecen asombrados por tanta agitación y por la ciudad ruidosa. Cuando un hombre que parece más tranquilo llega y les dice, "Come with me, let's get away from these idiots," de repente se sienten mejor con él. Como su título "coyote" y el apodo para los migrantes, "pollos" sugieren, Enrique y Rosa se ponen en una posición de ser víctimas inocentes.

Cuando llegan a Los Angeles, su ingenuidad se ve claramente en sus trabajos. Enrique, en su posición como camarero en un restaurante, "moves through the room as if in a dream. He stares at the fantastic vision: every table is full now ... Enrique blinks in astonishment" (89). Trabaja con una manera muy entusiástica y feliz que parece infantil al espectador. Cuando empieza a aprender inglés, una chica le pide más café. Dándose cuenta de que ha entendido su petición, le contesta "Yes, of course!" Ella le agradece pero "she turns her back to her companion without waiting for a reply from Enrique" (105). La indiferencia de la chica, visto al lado de la gran emoción de Enrique, demuestra su idealismo inocente. En vez de reconocer la pasividad que los clientes tienen por él, queda con un optimismo extremo.

Rosa también demuestra una ingenuidad en su trabajo limpiando la casa de Helen. No entiende cómo usar las máquinas de lavar y secar, y entonces decide lavar todo a mano como lo lavaba en Guatemala. Cuando Helen llega a la casa, buscando la respuesta de por qué no había usado la lavadora, Rosa pregunta "Well-- what difference does it make how I do it as long as the clothes get washed?" La confusión de Rosa frente las tecnologías modernas y la solución que encuentra demuestran su inocencia en un país que no la deja existir. Helen parece saber todo lo importante, mientras Rosa apenas está aprendiendo cómo lavar ropa a máquina.

A la vez, Nava propone la idea de que Helen es ingenua a su vez. Cuando Helen empieza a explicar sobre la lavadora, dice "It's really very simple. You just flip this to "on" -and then you have eight seconds to put in your program-- or else it will go to the default setting - just use 'perm press' that works for almost everything" (98). Aunque Rosa demuestra una confusión visible en oír la explicación, Helen implica su falta de

consciencia sobre el mundo que existe afuera de su propia casa, barrio, y ella misma, porque no registra la respuesta de sus ayudantes a todas sus explicaciones. Si tuviera una visión más completa sobre la historia y la cultura de Rosa y Nacha, sabría que nunca habían usado una máquina para lavar ropa. Helen también demuestra su inocencia para lo que existe afuera de su propia cultura cuando exige a Nacha, "Oh, please, Nacha --call me Helen" (99). La cultura guatemalteca no aprobaría que una criada llamara a su jefa de nombre, y esta insistencia hace que Rosa y Nacha se sientan raras. El personaje de Helen representa al norteamericano de clase alta que no sabe ver más allá de lo que siempre ha visto. No tiene malas intenciones ni quiere negar la cultura de ellas, pero no busca la manera de entender algo diferente porque ya se siente satisfecha con su perspectiva del mundo. En introducir a este personaje, Nava propone una explicación de la inocencia. Sugiere que la inocencia es una característica de la gente que no sabe porque no tiene la manera de saber; la estupidez, por otra parte, viene de la gente que no sabe porque no quiere saber.

Enrique y Rosa están enfrentados con varios retos cuando entran en una sociedad que da un gran valor al ser individual y que generalmente no reconoce que existen otras realidades afuera de la suya. Rosa está forzada a ver la dureza del norte cuando después de que viene la migra a su trabajo en una fábrica, Nacha le explica, "You don't think that gringos wanna live with Mexicans, do you?" (93) Rosa de repente cambia su estilo para conformarse y para agradecer al americano. Va a Sears con Nacha y llega a su apartamento en la noche con nueva ropa y maquillaje. Enrique le dice "What-- what happened to you? ... I didn't know what happened to you ...I've been crazy with worry!" (94, 95). Rosa, en vez de haber considerado las preocupaciones de su hermano, se había

ido a la tienda con su nueva amiga. A pesar de su promesa de apoyarse como hermanos en el norte, Rosa y Enrique empiezan a seguir sus propios deseos personales. Enrique, por ejemplo, decide ir a un bar con su amigo Jorge después de decirle "I'd like to, but-- I have to go home ... I have to go somewhere with my sister" (116). Aunque no siente que deba ir, finalmente está "seduced by [Jorge's] macho attitude" (116). Le pasa lo mismo cuando Monty le explica que Alice podría darle la ocasión de recibir sus papeles. Antes había dicho que no podía dejar a su hermana sola en Los Angeles, pero después de perder su trabajo en el restaurante, le parece mejor la opción. Cuando Alice le pregunta "You have some family don't you? Wasn't that the problem?" Enrique le contesta con mucha determinación "No. Is no problem. My sister --she has a job. She will be all right here" (137).

La evidencia más fuerte que presenta la pérdida de la unidad entre los hermanos pasa cuando Rosa se pone enferma en el hospital. Nacha encuentra a Enrique para decirle que vaya al hospital para estar con su hermana, pero Enrique le dice que tiene que ir para Chicago. Nacha le grita, "Rosa may be dying Enrique. But you are already dead" (140). En este momento, Enrique parece haberse hundido en el individualismo extremo de los Estados Unidos. En una sociedad que valora al individuo y que rechaza las ideas de comunidad, Rosa y Enrique empiezan a caer en el individualismo que exige la sociedad norteamericana, forzándolos a salir de su supuesta inocencia para vivir otra realidad.

A pesar de estas influencias, Enrique y Rosa encuentran la manera de quedarse conectados y actuar con un apoyo mutuo. Cuando Rosa ve que a Enrique no le agrada su maquillaje y nueva ropa, y Enrique la llama payaso, "she [paints] two bright red spots on

her cheeks with her new lipstick. Now she really does look like a clown" (96). A pesar de las dificultades culturales, Rosa halla la forma de guardar un sentido de humor entre los dos. Enrique tiene que decidir al final de la película si debe ir con Rosa que está enferma en el hospital, o si debe ir al aeropuerto con Alice para empezar su nuevo trabajo y recibir sus papeles. Eventualmente, decide quedarse con su hermana, escogiendo su tradición cultural sobre la realidad de los Estados Unidos que exige que un migrante sea egotista si quiere tener éxito económico.

Lo que no encuentran es la manera de mantener las mentalidades que tenían. Están forzados a ver la realidad dura de los Estados Unidos, una realidad que no existe para los americanos sino para los migrantes pobres que no tienen recursos. Cuando Rosa está en el hospital con tifus, transmitida por ratones que la mordieron mientras pasaba por un túnel cruzando la frontera, dice, "In our own country, there's no life for us. They want to kill us --there's no place for us there. In Mexico there is only poverty -- there's no place for us there. And here in 'el norte' we can't be legal, we can't be accepted. There's no place for us here, either" (144). En este momento, Rosa entrega la inocencia que tenía en sus esperanzas y ve la dura realidad de su situación. Se da cuenta del significado de las mujeres vestidas en negro en su pueblo que sollozaban su nombre cuando estaba saliendo de su pueblo. Encarnaban la muerte inminente de Rosa que le iba a pasar en Guatemala. Rosa trató de escapar su destino cuando salió de su pueblo pero la muerte la siguió hasta los Estados Unidos.

Cuando muere su hermana en el hospital, Enrique regresa al apartamento con mucha tristeza. La muerte de su hermana le ha dejado sin esperanza en un futuro mejor, y decide continuar trabajando en algo monótono y pesado en vez de regresar a su pueblo

en Guatemala, donde ya no vive su familia. Entre un grupo de mexicanos pidiendo trabajo con sus manos en el aire gritando, "Pick me -- I have strong arms!" Enrique considera a los hombres a su lado (146). De repente, tira su brazo al aire para juntarse con todos en la lucha para encontrar una manera de llegar al dinero. Nava presenta la imagen de todos los trabajadores sudando bajo el mismo sol que brillaba en Guatemala. Mientras se oye el tambor de Guatemala, Enrique se acuerda de la cabeza colgada de su papá, matado por los militares, y se da cuenta de lo mismo que dijo Rosa: no puede regresar a su país pero tampoco tiene un lugar respetable en los Estados Unidos.

En su película *El Norte*, Nava demuestra la condición desesperante del migrante pobre. La mentalidad del migrante que enfatiza la importancia del otro, especialmente lo material del otro, le pone en una posición de inocencia cuando llega a los Estados Unidos. Según *El Norte*, nunca llegará a encontrar un lugar satisfactorio porque la sociedad americana no tiene una habilidad ni un deseo de entender las tradiciones y culturas diferentes de las suyas. Además, la riqueza de los Estados Unidos, exactamente lo que Enrique y Rosa siempre deseaban, es lo que más les encierra en una vida insoportable. Nava sugiere que la supuesta sabiduría de la gente educada es en sí muy limitada. Mientras tal vez no tiene malas intenciones, no sabe ni quiere salir de la mentalidad que siempre ha poseído. Los migrantes, al contrario, son los que terminan con la sabiduría que presumen tener los americanos; Rosa y Enrique terminan la película con un conocimiento profundo de su situación personal. De todas maneras, este conocimiento no les da la habilidad de salir de su circunstancia porque viven en una situación de pobreza que no les ofrece las oportunidades para salir adelante.

Conclusión

Esperanza's Box of Saints, How the García Girls Lost Their Accents y *El Norte* presentan varias historias de migración. Cada personaje viene a los Estados Unidos por sus propias razones, pero todos enfrentan el reto de entender su situación y encontrarse personalmente entre el nuevo país y su país de origen. Este reto es la fuerza que siempre les da la motivación para seguir adelante.

Esperanza no se encuentra en los Estados Unidos sino cuando regresa a su pueblo mexicano. Descubre que aunque su hija no está viva, tampoco está muerta, y aprende a sentir la existencia de su hija en su vida diaria. Esperanza siente libre para regresar a los Estados Unidos con el Ángel Justiciero porque ya ha encontrado la manera de conocerse mejor y de quedar conectada con la presencia de su hija. Halla una paz interior porque su migración le ha ayudado a verse profundamente.

Yolanda y sus hermanas también buscan sus identidades entre los dos países. No logran sentirse cómodas en ninguno de los países porque las fuertes influencias de la otra cultura siempre les prohíben definirse bien. Por tanto tiempo en los Estados Unidos empiezan a identificar más con sus seres americanos, pero todavía tienen problemas en relacionar con la gente americana. El único espacio que les da bastante comodidad para empezar a entenderse existe entre ellas mismas. En contar cuentos y hablar sobre su pasado común, las hermanas hallan la forma de ver su vida de otra perspectiva más comprensiva.

Similarmente Enrique y Rosa encuentran una solidaridad entre ellos mismos, pero por su situación dura nunca llegan a tener la comodidad que hallan las hermanas García. De todas maneras, se encuentran dentro del proceso de la migración. Dándose un apoyo

mútuo para sobrepasar los retos de estar en un nuevo país, aprenden que su relación como hermanos es el espacio más fuerte y seguro que existe por ellos. A pesar de entender el gran valor de su relación, están forzados a darse cuenta de que no tienen una libertad para estar en ninguno de los dos países. Encuentran que no existe un lugar para ellos en ninguno de las sociedades, sino que deben de valorar la relación que tienen y las memorias de su familia.

La migración a otro país exige una examinación del ser humano. *Esperanza's Box of Saints*, *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents*, y *El Norte* presentan personajes que intentan entenderse durante el proceso de esta migración. Las consecuencias de la migración marcan las historias de su vida. Todos los personajes intentan guardar las conexiones que tienen con sus familiares para soportar las dificultades de la migración. Según la situación personal de cada uno, pueden encontrar un espacio seguro para sentirse cómodos con gente familiar. Así pueden entender mejor su propio estado y hallar la manera de examinarse a ellos mismos.

Epilogue

This thesis examines immigration from the perspectives of sociology and fictional works. Both fields allow a profound understanding of the experience of immigrants from Latin America who immigrate to the United States. Although there are obvious and expected differences between the accounts of immigration told by fictional works and a sociological study based on in-depth interviews, both parts of my thesis suggest similar characteristics of the immigrant experience.

There is an inherent difference between fictional works and sociology in that fictional works attempt to create a compelling account of a certain subject while sociology tries to analyze the intricacies of daily life. Because of this distinction, authors of fiction tend to base their stories around exciting circumstances that may or may not be realistic. The immigration in *El Norte* and *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents* is spurred by extreme violence in the home countries of the protagonists. The immigration in *Esperanza's Box of Saints* is driven by a mother's search for her dead daughter. Because an author or director is concerned with creating a gripping story for an audience, he or she focuses less on mundane, everyday occurrences and more on the plot. In my sociological study, on the other hand, I try to emphasize the ordinary daily lives of immigrants to better understand their situations. While I do present the fascinating border crossing accounts of many immigrants, I focus more on analyzing everyday decisions, actions, and self-perceptions. Fictional works show the plights of individuals, perhaps hinting at the notion that their struggle extends beyond just the protagonists, while sociology examines individuals' circumstances as a method to generalize about the greater society and draw overarching conclusions.

Although these perspectives have their differences, both parts of my thesis emphasize the notion that immigrants establish personal connections in order to reach a level of personal comfort in their new surroundings. In the sociological section, it is clear that immigrants support each other financially and emotionally throughout the immigration process. In their everyday lives, immigrants are usually in contact because of the proximity of their houses and because they often work together. They celebrate special occasions together and take care of each other's children. Another important personal connection that plays a large role in a Valle Verdean immigrant's experience is that which they have with their children. If their children are legal citizens, immigrants feel more secure establishing themselves in the United States. Those immigrants without legal children may turn to their cousins, siblings, and other relatives for a sense of comfort in the United States, but they are not able to reach the same feeling of personal freedom as reached by those with legal children.

In the Hispanic Studies section of my thesis, personal connections are also emphasized as a way to find one's place in an unfamiliar society. In *Esperanza's Box of Saints*, Esperanza maintains connections with friends from home through letters and telephone calls, while at the same time creating new relationships with people she meets in the United States. The people connected to Esperanza are her link to her past and her future and therefore help her find an emotionally and spiritually secure present. In *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents*, the sisters are unable to find a sense of belonging in either the United States or the Dominican Republic, but their common experiences create a comfortable space among themselves. In the movie *El Norte*, Rosa and Enrique support each other through their dedication to staying united as brother and sister. Although they

are tempted to enter the individualistic mindset of the Americans, they ultimately realize that the only true place they have in the world is with each other.

As both sections of my thesis suggest, immigrants hold onto and create personal connections in their lives as mechanisms to survive physically, emotionally, and spiritually in their new environment. Personal relations can remind immigrants that there exist other people who share a common past, as well as help immigrants create a viable and realistic future under new circumstances. The everyday lives of immigrants are enhanced by the strong personal relations they establish and maintain with supportive friends and relatives.

Interview Guide

Initial Questions:

What is your name?

How old are you?

What city do you live in?

How long have you lived in this city? In the United States?

From what city and country did you come?

Are you married? Does your husband live here?

Do you have children? How old are your children? Were your children born in the United States or in your country of origin?

Immigration Process:

Why did you come to live in the United States?

Did you get a visa to come here? What kind of visa? What kind of papers?

How long did it take you to get papers to come here?

If you have family members living in the U.S., did they help you to get your visa?

If you did not come to the U.S. with papers, how did you cross the border to get here?

First Impressions:

Where did you live when you arrived to the United States?

What were your first impressions of people in the U.S.?

Explain some aspects of life in the United States that you had not expected before you arrived here.

When you first came to live here, what did you most note about the people here (their way of life, actions, the way they think)?

Work and Salary:

What type of work did you get when you came here? How did you find this work?

Are you still doing the same work? If not, what do you currently do for work?

What does your husband do for work?

Do you like your work?

How does your work here compare to the work you had in your country of origin?

Do you work with other Spanish-speaking people?

Do you have friends in your work?

What is your relationship like with your boss? (do you know your boss?, is he/she nice?)

Do you earn a large enough salary to afford all of your children's necessities?

Does your work have any benefits (retirement plan, medical insurance, etc.)?

How many hours do you work each week?

Do you have enough money to support your family?

What are certain things you lack that you consider essential?

Are you better off financially, taking into account the differing values of money in both countries, than you were in your country of origin?

Do you have enough money to send some home to family members in need?

Do your children have access to the same resources that their friends have?

Physical Well Being:

Have you ever experienced health problems while living in the United States?

If so, were you able to access medical care and see a doctor?

Are there people in your family who are in need of any type of medical care that they have been unable to receive because they do not have health insurance?

If you have not yet experienced health problems, do you see your future access to medical services as perhaps being denied?

Children:

Are your children in school in the U.S.?

Do your children like living in the United States?

How would you describe your relationship with your children?

Do you know about your children's circle of friends?

Does your child inform you of his or her social plans?

Do you and your child usually get along well?"

Free time and household roles:

How often do you have free time for yourself?

What do you do during your free time?

If you have small children, do you play a larger role in taking care of them than your husband does?

Would you like for your husband to play a larger role in duties around the house (washing clothes, taking care of babies, cleaning, cooking)?

Do you and your family ever attend social events with friends?

Do you attend church services any day of the week?

Language:

Do your children have friends who speak English, or do they mostly hang out with other children who speak Spanish?

Do you and your husband have friends who were born in the United States who do not speak Spanish?

Do you feel more comfortable interacting with people who speak Spanish?

Do you live in a neighborhood that has many immigrants who speak Spanish?

Holidays:

Do you celebrate Halloween or Day of the Dead (if Mexican)?

Do you celebrate the same holidays you used to celebrate when you lived in your country of origin?

How do you celebrate the same holiday differently (for example, have any of your Christmas traditions changed)?

Do you celebrate Thanksgiving?

Interaction with country of origin:

Have you ever returned to your country of origin?

How often do you talk/e-mail/ write letters to people in your country of origin?

Do you keep up with the newspapers of your region and/or country?

Wrap-Up questions:

What do you like most about being in the United States?

What do you like least about being in the U.S?

Do you feel as if you have learned anything about yourself through the immigration proces, and if so, can you explain?

Guía de la Entrevista

Preguntas Iniciales:

Cómo se llama Usted?

Cuántos años tiene?

Cuánto tiempo tiene Usted de vivir en Austin? En los EEUU?

De qué ciudad vino?

Está Usted casad(oa)? Vive aquí su esposo (a)?

Tiene hijos? Cuántos años tienen los hijos? Los hijos nacieron aquí o nacieron en México?

Proceso de Inmigración:

Por qué vino Usted a vivir en los EEUU?

Sacó una visa para venir aquí? Qué tipo de visa? Qué tipo de papeles?

Cuánto tiempo duró el proceso de sacar papeles para venir aquí?

Si Usted tiene familiares que viven en los EEUU, le ayudaron en pagar la visa?

Si no vino a los EEUU con papeles, cómo cruzó la línea para venir aquí?

Primeras Impresiones:

Dónde vivió cuando llegó a los Estados Unidos?

Cuáles fueron sus impresiones primeras de la gente de los Estados Unidos?

Explique algunos aspectos de vivir en los Estados Unidos que no había esperado antes de venir aquí.

Cuando primera vino Usted aquí, qué se notó sobre la gente de aquí (su forma de vivir, actuar, pensar)?

Trabajo y Salario:

Qué tipo de trabajo consiguió Usted después de venir aquí? Cómo lo consiguió?

Sigue Usted en el mismo trabajo? Si no, en qué trabaja ahora?

En qué area trabaja su esposo?

A Usted le gusta su trabajo?

Cómo compara su trabajo aquí a su trabajo en su país de origen?

Trabaja Usted con gente que habla español?

Tiene Usted amigos en su trabajo?

Cómo es su relación con su jefe de trabajo? (él/ella le conoce?, es amable?)

Gana Usted un salario bastante para darles a sus hijos sus necesidades?

Su trabajo tiene algunos tipos de beneficios (plan de jubilar, seguro médico, etc.)?
 Cuántas horas trabaja Ud. Cada semana?
 Tiene bastante dinero para su familia aquí en los Estados Unidos?
 Se siente que ahora vive mejor que vivía cuando estaba viviendo en México, hablando de dinero?
 Sus niños tienen más o menos el mismo acceso a juegos y ropa que tienen sus amigos?

Bienestar física:

Ha tenido problemas físicos (enfermedades) mientras viviendo en los Estados Unidos?
 Si sí, podría explicar si fue a ver un doctor y cómo fue?
 Hay gente en su familia que necesite un doctor que no hayan podido recibir porque no tienen seguro médico?
 Cree Usted que en el futuro va a encontrar problemas en hallar un doctor?

Niños:

Sus niños están en escuelas en los EEUU?
 A ellos les gusta vivir aquí? Explique.
 Cómo es su relación con los niños?
 Conoce los amigos de sus niños?
 Sus hijos le dicen sus planes sociales?
 Usted y sus niños pelean mucho o se van bien juntos?
 Usted trata de guardar tradiciones mexicanas con sus niños, explique por favor.
 Los niños han visitado México?

Tiempo Libre:

Tiene Usted mucho tiempo libre para estar con amigos, parientes, para disfrutar?
 Qué hace durante su tiempo libre?
 Cuida Usted más a los niños que su esposo (a), o su esposo (a) cuida más, o es lo mismo?
 A Usted le gustaría que su esposo (a) hiciera más en la casa (lavar ropa, cuidar niños, cocinar)?
 Usted y su familia van a eventos sociales (como fiestas, quinceañeras)?
 Va Usted a servicios de la iglesia con frecuencia?
 Cómo ha cambiado la relación con su esposo (a) después de venir a los Estados Unidos?

Language:

Sus niños tienen amigos que hablan inglés o usualmente sus amigos hablan español?
 Usted y su pareja tienen amigos que son de los Estados Unidos y hablan inglés?
 Se siente más cómodo con gente que habla español?
 En su barrio, hay mucha gente que habla español?

Días festivos:

Celebra Halloween o Día de los Muertos, o los dos?
 Celebra los mismos días de fiestas que celebraba cuando estaba viviendo en México?
 Cómo celebra Navidad en la misma manera, o en una diferente manera- han cambiado las tradiciones?
 Celebra día de Gracias?

Interacción con México:

Ha regresado a México?

De qué frecuencia hablas/escribe a gente de su país?

Lee los periódicos de San Luis Potosí o de México?

Manda dinero a parientes en México?

Preguntas finales:

Qué le gusta más de estar en los EEUU?

Qué le gusta menos de estar en los EEUU?

Se siente que ha aprendido algo sobre sí mismo dentro del proceso de migración y explíque por favor.

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