

The Power of the Voice:
Listening to Mexican and Central American
Immigrant Experiences (1997-2010)

BY

Megan L. Thornton

Submitted to the Department of Spanish and Portuguese
and the Graduate Faculty of the University of Kansas
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy.

Dr. Jill S. Kuhnheim, Chairperson

Dr. Vicky Unruh

Dr. Yajaira Padilla

Dr. Stuart Day

Dr. Ketty Wong

Date Defended: _____

The Dissertation Committee for Megan L. Thornton certifies
that this is the approved version of the following dissertation:

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Abstract

Megan L. Thornton, Ph.D.

Department of Spanish and Portuguese, April 2010

University of Kansas

This dissertation examines representations of immigrant experiences in Mexican and Central American cultural texts at the end of the twentieth and beginning of the twenty-first centuries. By examining immigrant experiences through the lenses of testimonial writing, fictional narrative, documentary film, and popular music, this project offers perspectives from multiple interpretive fields and dialogues with recent scholarship on mobility, transnationalism, and border studies. This multi-genre and cultural studies approach allows me to focus on a diverse group of writers and artists who either tell their own immigrant stories or create experience-based narratives by listening to the subaltern and challenging more canonical systems of representation. All of the texts examined here dialogue with Latin America's testimonial tradition, in that they give testimony, often personal and eye-witness accounts, to explore the many social, cultural, political, and individual facets of migration. Moreover, the narratives discussed here use discursive strategies of orality to emphasize the power of voice and, by showcasing immigrant voices, provide a social space for imagining alternative communities that expose "contact zones" in the Americas.

Each chapter focuses on a different country and genre to show the convergences and divergences between representations of immigrant experiences. I also discuss reader and audience responses to the different texts by examining reviews and criticisms to better understand the impact of these representations. Chapter 1 draws on debates about *testimonio* and introduces the theme of orality by looking at the self-representations of Mexican immigrant

experiences in the United States in Ramón Tianguis Pérez's *Diario de un mojado* (2003), J.M. Servín's *Por amor al dólar* (2006), and Alberto López Fernández's *Los perros de Cook Inlet* (1998). Chapter 2 examines an aesthetic of orality in postwar fictional narratives about Salvadoran immigrant experiences through close readings of Horacio Castellanos Moya's *El asco* (1997), Mario Bencastro's *Odisea del Norte* (1999), and Claudia Hernández's short story "La han despedido de nuevo" from her collection *Olvida uno* (2005). Chapter 3 focuses on the performance of affect and orality in four documentaries about Nicaraguan experiences in Costa Rica, thus presenting different perspectives on the less studied phenomenon of intra-regional migration. Chapter 4 ties together the histories, encounters, and communities discussed in the previous chapters by listening to transnational musical representations of Mexican, Salvadoran, and Nicaraguan immigrant experiences. The influence of the Mexican *corrido* and Latin America's *nueva canción* are considered in my analysis of the music, lyrics, and audiences of a variety of artists, including the Mexican *norteño* ensemble Los Tigres del Norte, the Salvadoran group Tex Bronco, and the Nicaraguan singer-songwriter Flor Urbina. Finally, my conclusion sets the stage for future work on representations of immigrant experiences to better understand the movements and migrations that continue to foster encounters between different cultures throughout the Americas and the world.

For my mom

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Acknowledgements

I have many people to thank for their help with this dissertation. I am especially grateful to my committee chair Jill Kuhnheim, who provided invaluable feedback and support, and also to the other members of my committee, Yajaira Padilla, Vicky Unruh, Stuart Day, and Ketty Wong. Danny Anderson helped shape the early stages of my work on cultural representations of migration. Yajaira Padilla offered insightful information about Central America and invited me to participate on her 2009 LASA panel in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. KU's Center of Latin American Studies funded a trip to Costa Rica and Nicaragua in May 2008, which was instrumental in my research. In Central America, the following people and institutions facilitated my research: Mercedes Ramírez, Patricia Fumero, María Lourdes Cortés, Jürgen Ureña, Martha Clarissa Hernández, Karly Gaitán, Omar García, Jorge Eduardo Arellano, the Centro Costarricense de Producciones Cinematográficas (CCPC), and the University of Costa Rica's Instituto de Investigaciones Sociales. I am also indebted to family and friends for their intellectual and emotional support. I would especially like to thank my parents for funding trips to Mexico and for letting me indulge my cultural curiosities; my sister, for being my friend; Erin Finzer, for letting me talk and always providing helpful advice; Señora Salmeron, who first piqued my interest in Spanish; my friends in Mexico, for teaching me what a classroom cannot; and also Sangeetha, John, Nancy, Scott, Stacy, and the many dear friends in KU's Spanish graduate program.

Introduction

Theorizing Cultural Representations of Immigrant Experiences

In spring 2006 millions of people took to the streets in most major cities in the United States, including Los Angeles, New York, and Chicago, to protest or support immigrant rights in this country. The rallies and demonstrations responded to proposed legislation (HR 4437) that sought to increase penalties for illegal immigration and to prosecute undocumented immigrants, their families, and supporters as felons. Although the legislation failed, it demonstrates the intensity of growing immigration debates in this country. Within these debates, Latin/o American immigrants have been especially targeted by protests and reforms because they constitute the largest immigrant group in the United States and because of illegal crossings at the U.S.-Mexico border, described as one of the most globalized and heavily traveled international borders in the world (Suarez-Orozco, "Right Moves?" 6). Mexicans and Central Americans, in particular, may cross this border in search of the "American Dream" to escape political turmoil and economic hardships in their own countries. However, not all Latin American economic immigrants travel north, for many settle in other countries in the region as evidenced by large numbers of Bolivians in Argentina, Peruvians in Chile, and Nicaraguans in Costa Rica. Like their counterparts in the U.S., these displaced communities have encountered discrimination in their host societies, a situation which has often intensified due to economic crises in the first decade of the twenty-first century. In Costa Rica, for example, Nicaraguan immigrants have been the target of police raids and political ploys, culminating with legislation in 2006 that redefined immigration as a security issue (Sandoval García, "Introducción" xiv-xv). Recent shifts in immigration policies seem to counter the politics of globalization that encourage the free flow of people, products, and ideas, and this situation led me to examine recent cultural

representations of immigrant tensions and experiences to see how Mexicans and Salvadorans in the United States and Nicaraguans in Costa Rica communicate their stories to claim rights and belonging.

This dissertation looks at how cultural workers represent Mexican and Central American immigrant experiences through the lenses of testimonial writing, fictional narrative, documentary film, and popular music. Focusing on representations of migration to the United States and also within Central America goes beyond the often studied U.S.-Mexico border to show similarities and differences with the intra-regional migration of Nicaraguans to Costa Rica. This broadens the scope of my dissertation and offers an innovative perspective on a common issue in diverse parts of the Americas and the world. I use a multi-genre and cultural studies approach that questions power relations via culture and also allows me to focus on a diverse group of cultural workers who either tell their own immigrant stories or create experience-based narratives which give voice to others who may not be heard and who may challenge more canonical experiences. All of the texts examined here dialogue with the testimonial tradition, in that they give testimony, often personal and eye-witness accounts, to explore the many social, cultural, political and, individual facets of migration. By connecting my texts to the *testimonio*, I also connect them to Latin America's cultural tradition and show by illuminating social and literary contexts that the works analyzed here are not isolated examples of solidarity with the transnational Latin American community but rather part of an ongoing tradition. Moreover, the narratives discussed here use discursive strategies of orality to emphasize the power of voice and, by showcasing immigrant voices, provide a social space for imagining alternative communities that expose "contact zones" in the Americas. This dissertation thus crosses national, cultural, social and,

political boundaries to promote cross-cultural and interdisciplinary understanding of immigrant stories. By recognizing identity claims, it also seeks solidarity with immigrants.

In this way, we see how cultural works create a distinct space to show the human experiences of migration by exposing the complex dynamics of this process and its individual and collective characteristics. The texts examined here both represent and construct identities and communities that go beyond the nation to accommodate immigrants' fluctuating experiences, feelings, and loyalties. By making visible immigrant situations and sharing them with audiences, these texts also assert rights and belonging for mobile individuals who do not fit the traditional notion of citizen and who may fall through the cracks of political representation in both home and host societies. These immigrant stories also invite readers, spectators, and listeners to take part in the creative process, for unlike quantitative analyses, ethnographic studies, or political reports, they appeal to the imagination and engage critical thinking. All of the cultural texts examined here are written, produced, or sung in Spanish, thus interpellating a Spanish-speaking audience and establishing further solidarity with the Latin American community. Examining both high and popular cultural forms also brings together diverse audiences with disparate cultural tastes and interests. Because public responses measure the validity and effectiveness of cultural expressions, this dissertation also dialogues with reader responses and audience criticisms to show reactions to the different testimonial works, fictional narratives, documentary films, and popular music. Looking at sales and availability, reading online blogs and literary reviews and also dialoguing with my personal reactions all gauge the impact these texts have on audiences and their potential to promote cultural sensitivity and the building of alternative communities.

Recent studies such as Alicia Schmidt Camacho's *Migrant Imaginaries* (2008), Lisa Lowe's *Immigrant Acts* (1996), and David Maciel and María Herrera-Sobek's edited volume *Culture Across Borders* (1998) speak to the importance of cultural texts as a way for immigrants to define their identities and communities and also claim rights and belonging that are often unavailable in the political sphere. Camacho's notion of "migrant imaginaries" is a play on the social imaginary, which represents a symbolic or imaginative field in which people come to define and understand their social being (5). For Camacho, who specifically looks at Latino cultural politics in the U.S.-Mexico borderlands, cultural forms allow border crossers to negotiate the world around them, for their narratives "imaginatively produce forms of communal life and political organization" (5). She goes on to write that because migrants are often excluded from traditional means of belonging the "migrant imaginaries encoded in song, manifestoes, poetry, novels and testimonials preserve both a repertory of practices for collective action and a social map of the vast terrain covered by border crossers" (12). This study follows in Camacho's lead by uncovering migrant imaginaries produced at the turn of the twenty-first century, however, it goes beyond Camacho's inquiry to look at both Mexican and Central American cultural workers on both sides of the border. It not only examines personal and testimonial accounts of immigrant experiences but also speaks to broader social issues and sheds light on the various ways transnational subjects negotiate their subjectivities, cultural identities, ethnic communities, and power relations.

Like Camacho, Lowe identifies culture as an alternative site to official spaces in which immigrant subjects can question the nation and imagine different narratives, including new forms of subjectivity, collectivity, and public life. She writes, "culture is the material site of struggle in which active links are made between signifying practices and social structures" (22). While

focusing on the struggles of Asian Americans, Lowe's title "immigrant acts" connotes the exclusionary legal acts that have restricted immigrants and imposed contradictions throughout U.S. history (6-8). The title also identifies immigrant agency through acts of labor, resistance, memory, survival, and also cultural works (9). Pertinent to a discussion of aesthetics, the notion of "immigrant acts" also suggests a performance of immigration, for citizens and non-citizens alike enact their designated roles in the nation (33). By looking at such diverse cultural productions as testimony, personal narrative, oral history, literature, and film, Lowe suggests an inter-connectedness between these forms in that they negotiate social struggles and open up new spaces for representation (156-58). Lowe thus validates the different cultural manifestations examined here as evidence of provocative "immigrant acts" that promote alternative ways of defining oneself, asserting rights, and forming communities and, in turn, my project expands her Asian American context to a Latin/o American one.

I draw on Lowe's and Camacho's arguments to illuminate my own "readings" of cultural texts to make more explicit the connections between cultural representations, cultural citizenship, and alternative communities, for the works examined here offer minority groups a space for belonging distinct from traditional citizenry. Because citizenship is defined in terms of one's legal status and political rights, it is felt to be an exclusionary process by those who do not have it. It is also an uneven process tied to looks, speech, and behavior that can exclude those who do not "act the part," thereby often marginalizing citizens with full legal rights. The notion of cultural citizenship can open up the process by recognizing such exclusions, offering agency and empowerment to marginalized individuals. In *Latinos and Citizenship: The Dilemma of Belonging*, Suzanne Oboler sees the participation of Latinos and their demands for rights and justice during the 2006 immigrant protests as a perfect example of reconfiguring the collectivity

and claiming cultural citizenship (11). For Oboler, citizenship is not a set of rules dictated by the state but rather an ongoing process grounded in lived experience and negotiated by all groups and individuals within the community (5). In *Latino Cultural Citizenship*, William V. Flores and Rina Benmayor specifically address the role of cultural works in this process. They define cultural citizenship as social practices, ranging from everyday activities to broad social drama, which establish distinct social spaces for Latinos (immigrants and citizens) in the United States (1, 13). They argue that through music and dance, film and literature, visual and public art Latinos privilege differences and also tear down geopolitical and cultural borders (5). As will be shown, the works discussed here participate in this re-defining and re-imagining of community. They establish literary, filmic, and musical spaces for immigrants, drawing in distinct audiences via high and popular culture to imagine alternative communities.

Because the concept of cultural citizenship allows us to move beyond legal rights, we can reconceptualize Benedict Anderson's notion of the nation-state as an imagined community to imagine a more nuanced alternative community that is more inclusive and available to citizens and non-citizens. This alternative community aligns nicely with Homi Bhabha's interstitial perspective discussed in his influential essay "DissemiNation: Time, Narrative, and the Margins of the Modern Nation." Opposed to a fixed and linear understanding of the nation, Bhabha looks to hybrid and interstitial spaces to narrate the nation, for it is the "disjunctive forms of representation that signify a people, a nation, or a national culture" (292). He goes on to write in *The Location of Culture*, "It is in the emergence of the interstices – the overlap and displacement of domains of difference – that the intersubjective and collective experiences of *nationness*, community interest, or cultural value are negotiated" (2). By going beyond fixed categories of citizen and non-citizen to imagine other kinds of communities, the cultural representations

examined here narrate interstitial moments and negotiate differences. They can thus offer sites of belonging to diverse individuals by engaging readers and listeners of Spanish who may be immigrants themselves or who may be interested in immigrant rights. They may also interpellate individuals with discriminatory attitudes in an attempt to raise awareness or humanize the issue of migration. For example, the documentary *NICA/ragüense*, which will be discussed in detail in chapter three, tries to educate the public about misinformation by interviewing such diverse actors as politicians, citizens on the street, migrant workers, immigration officials, and employers, all of whom express contrasting opinions about Nicaraguan immigrants in Costa Rica. This film perfectly illustrates Mary Louise Pratt's concept of contact zones, or "social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination" (4). That said, all of the works discussed here, be they films, *testimonios*, music, or fiction, represent contact zones in the Americas, highlighting the in-betweenness of immigrant experiences, the importance of negotiation and renegotiation, and uneven power relations. By offering a space for the subaltern to be heard, some of these immigrant texts not only describe contact zone experiences but also participate in communicating across contact zones by imparting cultural knowledge to different readers and audiences, thus allowing them to enter into alternative communities imaginatively.

I focus on Mexican and Central American cultural productions because they offer provocative representations of migration and also engage the socio-political tensions of the moment, allowing for a study of the convergences and divergences of Latin American migrations. Migration to, from, and within Latin America has been a reality for the region since before its initial encounter with Europeans in 1492. Immigrants from Europe helped shape the region during the colonial period and also played a key role in projects of nation building and

modernization during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. After World War II, migratory patterns shifted worldwide, and Latin American countries transitioned from receiving to sending nations, witnessing the displacement of their own populations. During the 1980s and 90s, both internal and external migrations increased throughout the region due to political and economic upheavals as well as globalization. Policy shifts before and after the bombing of the Twin Towers on September 11, 2001 have also brought more attention to the issue, while the 2008 global economic recession has threatened the jobs and salaries of immigrants. Although literary and artistic works have depicted immigrant experiences throughout the region's history, these transformations over the past twenty to thirty years have made the topic of migration one of the primary themes of recent Latin American cultural production, thereby offering a space for immigrant voices to be heard.

Recent changes in migratory patterns call for a new understanding of migration. The term originates from the Latin word "migrare," meaning "to change residence," and social scientists have traditionally defined it as "the more or less permanent movement of people across space" with individuals emigrating out of one setting and becoming immigrants in a new one (M. Suárez-Orozco, "Right Moves?" 9). Post-World War II immigration is often referred to as the "new" immigration because it no longer contributes to traditional projects of nation building, and those involved tend to be non-white, non-European persons who are changing the face of international migratory flows (M. Suárez-Orozco, C. Suárez-Orozco, and Baolian Qin; Jacobson). In the United States, for example, until 1950 almost ninety percent of all immigrants were Europeans or Canadians, whereas today more than half are Latin American and more than a quarter are Asian (M. Suárez-Orozco, "Right Moves?" 13). In addition to demographic shifts, new global and transnational forces permit individuals to move back and forth between home

and host countries like never before, and new technologies and massively-consumed commercial goods make it possible for us to “live” in multiple places at once. This study focuses on literal migrations that physically uproot and displace individuals, however, all of these social and technological changes question the permanency of migration. In the introduction to *Migration and Identity*, editors Rina Benmayor and Andor Skotnes define migration as a long-term process of negotiating identity, difference, and the right to thrive in a host society (8). Rather than focusing on permanent relocation, this dynamic understanding of migration takes a more fluid approach to identity and community and better suits my project. As we will see, the experiences examined here are multiple with individuals like *Por amor al dólar*'s Servín who leaves Mexico to work in the United States temporarily while *Los perros de Cook Inlet*'s López Fernández decides to relocate permanently. Reading about such diverse immigrants as Servín and López Fernández also transports readers and enables them to travel multiple journeys, thus creating simulated border-crossing experiences for the public.

While Mexico and Central America are not indicative of all of Latin America because of the region's diverse linguistic, economic, political, and cultural characteristics, they are representative of many of the tensions in the region due to historical patterns and recent events. Geographical ties, agricultural production, and ongoing civil wars have linked the two areas and perpetuated regional migratory patterns since independence. Since the beginning of the twentieth century, for example, Nicaraguans have traveled to Costa Rica to work on coffee and banana plantations and to escape civil wars, but the 1980s and 1990s registered a marked increase as Nicaraguans fled the Sandinista Revolution and economic devastation. In addition to regional trends, Mexico and Central America are also linked to the United States because of U.S. imperialism, free trade agreements, and connecting borders, making their northern neighbor a

common destination point for emigrants since the 1980s. According to the U.S. Census from 2000, Hispanics, including immigrants and their descendants, are now the largest minority group in the country, with Mexicans accounting for nearly fifty-eight percent and Central Americans constituting the third largest group after Puerto Ricans (M. Suárez Orozco and Páez 1-5). Furthermore, the Migration Policy Institute reports that of the U.S. foreign-born population in 2008 Mexicans and Salvadorans were the two largest Latin American groups (Terrazas). Increased policing and militarization of the U.S.-Mexico border with such policies as Operation Gatekeeper in the 1990s and the 2006 Secure Fence Act have made illegal crossings more difficult and deadly, but the numbers continue to show that both groups have a strong presence in the United States. Furthermore, despite the fact that U.S. unemployment rates for Mexican and Central American immigrants have more than doubled since the onset of the 2008 economic crisis, a mass exodus for Latin America has not occurred, which suggests that immigrants have a complex relationship with their “home” and “host” societies (Fix, et al 3). Thus, examining cultural representations of Mexican and Salvadoran experiences in the United States is a pertinent study of trends in Latin American migration to the north.

Combining the study of northward migration with an analysis of representations of Nicaraguan immigrants in Costa Rica gives this project depth, for it incorporates an example of intra-regional migration and offers a more comprehensive look at Latin American migrations. Analyzing documentary films that explore this migratory flow shows the convergences and divergences between such distinct neighboring countries as the United States and Mexico and Costa Rica and Nicaragua. While there are obvious linguistic and cultural advantages to staying in the region, Nicaraguans still deal with stereotypes and discrimination, much like Latino immigrants in this country. This similarity emphasizes the need for cultural representations to

open alternative spaces of belonging and to offer cultural citizenship to immigrants in Latin America and the United States. By studying authors and artists who live in both areas, my topic bridges Latin American and U.S. Latino/a cultural and literary studies. It also focuses attention on Central America, a region often underrepresented in U.S. academia, and answers Arturo Arias's call in *Taking Their Word* to increase the study of Central American texts. Exploring all of these issues as they are represented in different cultural forms (testimonial works, fictional narrative, documentary film, and popular music) provides a thorough understanding of emerging social paradigms from both perspectives of high and popular culture.

The works discussed here have been published or produced within the past fifteen years and thus dialogue with global shifts and socio-historical changes in migration since the 1980s. They represent the "structures of feeling" that Raymond Williams defines as expressing the tension between official ideology and lived experience in an attempt to go beyond fixed forms and generalities to examine "all the known complexities, the experienced tensions, shifts, and uncertainties" of what is actually being lived, felt, and thought (129-31). In this way, he highlights the affective elements and contradictions of everyday life. Williams argues that this tension reveals a "particular quality of social experience and relationship, [...] which gives the sense of a generation or of a period" (131), which for our purposes is the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. He emphasizes that it is a social experience in process or a "cultural hypothesis" with emergent characteristics (132), which is significant in that its social nature brings different peoples and cultures into contact. Williams also gives the alternative definition of "structures of *experience*" to call attention to the experiencing and engaging of such structures (132). This second definition also validates my use of the term "experience." Analyzing the

structures of feeling, therefore, allows for a more nuanced discussion of the emotional and day-to-day responses to migration as they are actively lived and felt at a given time and place.

More importantly, Williams identifies art and literature as “among the very first indications that such a new structure is forming,” for these forms reveal “cases of this present and affective kind” and “elements of social and material experience” as well as the “specific feelings, specific rhythms” of these elements (133). In other words, the forms and conventions of art and literature may articulate structures of feeling (133), which differ from other expressions in their “articulation of *presence*” (135), meaning their ability to capture in the moment emergent experiences that are lived consciously and unconsciously. Williams’s theory thus supports the understanding of narrative as an interpretation of reality, or a “meta-code,” as Hayden White suggests, by which “transcultural messages about the nature of a shared reality can be transmitted” (1). The testimonial form, in particular, communicates lived experiences, often through eye-witness and personal accounts, thereby manifesting what is being lived, thought, and felt in everyday situations. Testimonialists, readers, and listeners negotiate such emergent structures by thinking about and responding emotionally to cultural and political changes as they pertain to immigrant experiences, for Williams’s use of the term “feelings” refers to “affective elements of consciousness and relationships: not feelings against thought, but thought as felt and feeling as thought” (132). In “Claiming Queer Cultural Citizenship” Horacio Roque Ramírez ties Williams’s structures of feeling to cultural citizenship by suggesting that the making and experiencing of culture as feeling and thought opens a cultural space for marginalized individuals who are not recognized by the nation (182). The cultural expressions of immigrant experience examined here thus depict the structures of feeling as an ongoing process of extending cultural citizenship and imagining alternative communities.

These texts manifest solidarity with immigrants and Spanish speakers in several ways, linking them to a community. The works are in Spanish and thus resist the dominance of English and offer a space of belonging to readers and speakers of Spanish. In Roque Ramírez's analysis of two gay Latino immigrant acts in San Francisco, he suggests that writing and producing immigrant texts in Spanish is a critical intervention that represents "the spatiality of (im)migrant lives in linguistic movement across geopolitics. [...] In this larger sociopolitical context, language is a tool of a resistance to the state's discourses, a form of solidarity for claiming space" ("Claiming" 182-83). Roque Ramírez goes on to write that privileging Spanish also interpellates a specific audience, be it immigrants or Spanish speakers in the United States and those still in their own countries who are connected by transnational ties (183). While the works discussed here speak to and about immigrant communities, they also engage a diverse Spanish-speaking audience, for the testimonial works and fictional narratives in chapters one and two may attract a more high-brow reading public, whereas the documentary films and popular music in chapters three and four may appeal to the popular and working classes through mobile cinemas, internet access, and technological innovations. Because several of the texts, including Mario Bencastro's *Odisea del Norte* and the songs of Los Tigres del Norte, are published or recorded in the United States, these cultural expressions also show the availability of a diverse Spanish-speaking audience on both sides of the border, and thus using Spanish may engage non-immigrants in the U.S. who are interested in immigrant rights and who seek solidarity through affective means. The use of Spanish, therefore, allows thought, feeling, and social justice to intersect through cultural representations of immigrant experiences.

By using discursive strategies that mimic or recall orality, the works discussed here show further solidarity with immigrants, for oral communication is an important mode of

communication for immigrants and a key component of Latin American cultural traditions. Oral modes of storytelling and communicating knowledge have helped preserve the memories and histories of slave communities, indigenous peoples, diasporas, and displaced individuals over the years. In *Hopi Oral Tradition and the Archaeology of Identity*, for example, anthropologist Wesley Bernardini uses Hopi traditional knowledge from the U.S. Southwest, including stories, ceremonies, and songs, to study the prehistoric migratory patterns and identity formations of Native Americans (6). Meredith M. Gadsby takes a different approach in *Sucking Salt* by looking at the notion of salt as a metaphor for hardship and survival in the oral imagination of Caribbean diasporas to examine the ways Caribbean women writers experience and write about movement and migration (2-4). Both of these studies examine oral traditions to uncover immigrant acts of resistance that preserve communal memories and identities. Similarly, oral history projects focus on an individual's personal story or testimony to better understand history. In *Oral History and Public Memories*, Paula Hamilton and Linda Shopes suggest that oral history is a social practice that connects past and present, for individual histories both reflect and shape collective memories (viii-xi). In Hamilton and Shope's edited study, several oral historians, including Roque Ramírez, Gail Lee Dubrow, and Riki Van Boeschoten, look at personal testimonies to better understand migrant cultures and immigrant communities. The interdisciplinary practice of oral history connects life history, narrative biography, cultural interviews, and the giving of testimony in both legal contexts and efforts to achieve social justice (viii). Having gained popularity in the 1960s, oral history projects align nicely with Latin America's testimonial tradition in an effort to uncover unknown stories and to give voice to the unheard.

The Latin American *testimonio* is linked to popular traditions, literary works, and socio-political struggles. While it emerged as a new narrative form along with social struggles in the 1960s, the cultural form can be traced back to early “discovery” texts or *crónicas*, the region’s national essays, and war diaries from the nineteenth century (Beverley, *Testimonio* 31). In *Voices from the fuente viva*, Amy Naus Millay situates the *testimonio* within Latin America’s oral tradition because it inscribes orality onto written discourse (12). The resulting textual hybridity frequently depends upon outside mediation, for a *testimonio* is traditionally mediated by an intellectual, such as an anthropologist or a translator, who records or transcribes an eye witness’ oral account of an important life experience. The narrator tends to be part of a marginalized group and thus relies on the mediator to compile and edit the written text. For example, *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú y así me nació la conciencia* (1985) resulted from the collaborative effort between Menchú and ethnologist Elizabeth Burgos, while Domitila Barrios de Chungara’s *Si me permiten hablar* (1977) was transcribed by sociologist Moema Viezzer. Both of these popular testimonial works emerged from oral history projects and helped link the *testimonio* to socio-political conflicts and solidarity movements. The Central American revolutionary struggles, in particular, created a space for refugees and migrants to tell their stories through the transnational Sanctuary Movement during the 1980s that was supported by the Catholic Church’s Liberation Theology, a movement seeking social justice for marginalized groups in Latin America. Migrants performed their life histories for groups in the U.S. and Canada to create solidarity and promote social change (Westerman 174-75). Speaking engagements were most common, however, *testimonios* were also communicated through songs and embroidered tapestries (176). The written narratives, documentary films, and popular songs

examined here are rooted in this oral testimonial tradition of representing immigrant experiences to give voice to the disenfranchised and to create communal bonds.

Uncovering untold stories based in oral traditions functions as an act of resistance, for orality, in general, undermines hegemonic discourses and power relations that privilege writing and the Western word. Orality works as a provocative mode of representation that enables immigrants to inscribe their experiences onto dominant practices and to recognize Pre-Colombian and alternative systems of knowledge. There are numerous examples in Latin America of oral and visual texts used to communicate and record information before the arrival of Columbus and Western influences. The Incas, for example, used *quipus* or knotted threads woven together to orally communicate messages about the empire's population, crops, and taxes, while the Cunas, who still reside on the San Blas Islands off the coast of Panama, tell stories through embroidered textiles known as *molas*. We can also look at the Aztec pictographs or the Mixtec codices as alternative writing forms, but perhaps the Mayan *Popol Vuh* is the best illustration of a visual literary text. Furthermore, before print capitalism in Spain, the *juglares* orally informed people of current events, a role that music and song continue to fulfill in the Americas today. All of these examples point to a rich history of alternative ways of knowing that continue to influence contemporary cultural workers in Latin America who then push the boundaries of Angel Rama's "Lettered City." Although some of the writers studied here like Servín, López Fernández, and Bencastro may be considered privileged "letrados" or "lettered elite" in the more traditional sense, they attempt to connect to marginalized communities and to speak (write) from in-between spaces and experiences by telling stories about immigrants and using discursive strategies dependent upon orality.

Because such diverse representational systems inform this dissertation, I employ the word “text” in its broadest sense (weaving or textile) to go beyond the limits of the written text. My analysis of cultural texts (written, filmic, and musical) thus engages what Walter Mignolo in *The Darker Side of the Renaissance* identifies as a “pluritopic hermeneutic,” meaning an interactive concept of knowledge that emphasizes “the social and human interests in the act of telling a story as political intervention” and “the existence of alternative politics of location with equal rights to claim the truth” (15). Mignolo’s concept acknowledges the cultural pluralities and alternative literacies that were dominated and erased by the Spanish language and writing culture, which in turn affected Latin America’s (post)colonial reading and writing systems (“Afterword” 308). He describes the implementation of alphabetic writing as a tool for colonization, for the Spanish humanist Antonio de Nebrija argued that the letter could tame the voice and so teaching the indigenous to read and write would facilitate intellectual and territorial control (“Afterword” 294). Recovering the voice is thus essential for equalizing power relations and recognizing the coexistence of alternative cultural spaces. The immigrant acts analyzed in this project are doubly important in that they give voice to immigrants through both form and content.

In *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Chicana writer and activist Gloria Anzaldúa sees writing as a way to overcome silence and to negotiate experience. She deconstructs the writing/speaking dichotomy by describing the written word as a way to speak her mind and to give voice to the images in her head (95). Anzaldúa explains the importance of language to Chicanos who have been stripped of their language due to Spanish/Anglo colonization for 250 years and who culturally straddle the U.S.-Mexico border, thereby living in a floating borderland (79-81). Similar to Bhabha’s interstitial perspective, Anzaldúa defines the borderland as a “vague and undetermined place [...] in a constant state of transition” due to the uneven merging of two

worlds and cultures (25). For Anzaldúa, reclaiming the voice through writing is thus a way to recover one's ethnic and racial identity and to negotiate the borderland experience (81). Writing in Spanish, English, and a combination of the two allows her to inscribe her hybrid tongue and dual identity onto the English language (75-86). Mignolo suggests that Anzaldúa's concept of writing is a subversion of Nebrija's approach to language as a control mechanism (*Darker Side* xii). Anzaldúa also incorporates the Aztec belief that black and red ink, the colors painted on their codices, symbolize writing and wisdom, which for Mignolo equates writing and drawing and thus demonstrates the coexistence of alternative systems of knowledge ("Afterword" 298). Drawing on additional indigenous traditions, Anzaldúa describes the writer as a shaman, for a story has the ability "to transform the storyteller and listener into someone or something else," much like the spiritual and healing powers of the shaman (88). By opening cultural spaces and offering cultural citizenship, the writer as healer, painter, speaker, and mediator transcends the more traditional concept of the lettered or cultural elite. While all of the artists discussed here may be privileged in that they have access to publishing houses, distribution companies, and recording studios, they also engage their respective communities and seek social justice through writing, filming, and singing. As we will see, they represent Anzaldúa's ideas by speaking from and about the borderland and by using oral, visual, and written language to inscribe (their) immigrant experiences onto the socio-political landscape of migration.

Critical studies of orality also connect written and oral discourses, offering another way to link the different cultural texts analyzed in this dissertation. In his study of oral poetry, Paul Zumthor suggests the coexistence of oral and written cultures and argues against equating orality with illiteracy (17). He associates the value of orality with the power of voice describing it as an act of authority, for "voice marks the manner in which we situate ourselves in the world and with

respect to others” (21-22). Because today’s technological innovations orient mass culture toward the oral and visual more than the written, Zumthor sees a return to the oral with the digital age and thus a restoration of the power of voice (18-19). He calls this new orality a “mediatized orality,” focusing on different “mediat” or audiovisual modalities like CDs, MP3 players, television, and film (18). For Zumthor, this mediatized orality constitutes a new collective bond or social experience because the day-to-day sociality of live voice is transformed into a “hypersociality circulating in the networks of telecommunications [and] operating on the disjointed and fragmented elements of traditional, structured groups” (19). This interstitial working of mediatized orality also aligns with the fluctuating borderland experiences and alternative imagined communities that my project seeks to underscore. Zumthor also connects the oral and aural by defining the oral as “any poetic communication where transmission and reception [...] are carried out by voice and hearing” (23). This definition emphasizes the need for listeners to take an active role in reasserting the power of voice and so audience responses and critical reviews are discussed throughout this dissertation to show how reading and listening publics validate cultural texts. Thus, by using discursive strategies of orality to connect to diverse audiences, the texts included here dialogue with a new mediatized orality and therefore represent an emergent structure of feeling or social experience in the making.

Similarly, Walter Ong in his study *Orality and Literacy* distinguishes between primary and secondary orality, the latter being influenced by technology ranging from handwriting, the printing press, and electronic word processing. However, by writing about “the technologizing of the word,” Ong avoids the term “media” because for him it deceptively hides the human interaction and sociality of communication (172). For Ong, secondary orality is similar to primary orality in that both generate a group sense, “for listening to spoken words forms hearers

into a group, a true audience,” but the difference comes with reachability because secondary orality fueled by technology has the ability to generate a global community (134). He also suggests that this group-mindedness is self-conscious, a behavior learned differently for members of a secondary oral culture because through literacy we have learned analytic reflection and the need to be socially sensitive (134). In reference to the way written texts promote interiority and individuality, Ong writes, “Unlike members of a primary oral culture, who are turned outward because they have had little occasion to turn inward, we are turned outward because we have turned inward” (134). Although Zumthor and Ong have different approaches, they arrive at a similar conclusion in their focus on the importance of orality and sociality.

In *Talk Fiction: Literature and the Talk Explosion*, Irene Kacandes draws on Ong’s notion of secondary orality to describe what she sees as “talk fiction” or literary works influenced by the resurgence of oral communication in the twentieth century. She connects talk fiction to the abundance of talk shows on radio and television because both create a sense of participant interaction that is self-conscious (21). To emphasize the dependency of secondary orality on literacy, Kacandes proposes the term “spoken-written age” (8). Furthermore, the phrase “talk fiction” signals the hybridity of orality and textuality, for works of talk fiction “contain features that promote in readers a sense of the interaction we associate with face-to-face conversation (‘talk’) *and* a sense of the contrivance of this interaction (‘fiction’)” (x). With texts that ask readers to do something, feel something, or think something, Kacandes sees writing and reading as a conversation (x-xiii). She limits her study to prose fiction, examining different “modes of talking,” identified as storytelling, testimony, apostrophe, and interactivity, with each subsequent mode demanding more of the reader and requiring more interaction (xiv). I will engage her ideas on testimony.

The first two chapters of this dissertation draw on the above-mentioned studies of orality and textuality, particularly Nauss Millay's ideas about inscribing the oral. Chapter one draws on debates about *testimonio* by looking at the self-representations of Mexican immigrant experiences in the United States, while chapter two examines an aesthetic of orality in postwar fictional narratives about Salvadoran immigrant experiences. In the first chapter, I examine Ramón Tianguis Pérez's *Diario de un mojado* (2003), J.M. Servín's *Por amor al dólar* (2006), and Alberto López Fernández's *Los perros de Cook Inlet* (1998). Although none of the authors rely on outside mediation to tell their stories as immigrant workers in the United States, they both engage and resist elements of testimonial discourse and use discursive strategies of orality to communicate with their reading publics. Drawing on Kacandes's notion of testimonial "talk" as witnessing through which experience is exchanged and readers are called to testify (xv-xvi), I analyze *Diario de un mojado* as a more conventional testimonial work that follows Pérez's migrant route through Texas, California, and Oregon in the early 1980s. While the other two works are more literary, they still manifest testimonial characteristics through their descriptions of Servín's adventures in New York City and parts of New England between 1993 and 2000 and López Fernández's experiences as a migrant worker in the Alaskan fishing industry in 1990. All three texts engage the changes in Mexican migration during the last two decades of the twentieth century, reflecting the socio-political changes and demographic shifts in the United States.

Chapter two shifts our focus to El Salvador and the massive emigration that began in response to violence in the 1980s and has continued despite an end to the Civil War in 1992. I examine Horacio Castellanos Moya's *El asco* (1997), which highlights the difficulties of reverse migration by representing the negative reactions of an immigrant who returns to postwar El Salvador after living in Canada for eighteen years. The other two works, Mario Bencastro's

Odisea del Norte (1999) and Claudia Hernández's short story "La han despedido de nuevo" from her collection *Olvida uno* (2005), represent more common trajectories from El Salvador to the United States. *Odisea del Norte* focuses on the figure of the political refugee by describing Calixto's travels to Washington, D.C. to escape the Salvadoran military, whereas "La han despedido de nuevo" departs from the male world of migrants to represent the experiences of several Salvadoran women in New York City. By creating different voices and inscribing orality, these works of fiction dialogue with the testimonial form to tell stories about Salvadoran immigrants and to question a national postwar identity. Millay defines this process of inscribing the oral with rhetorical strategies like repetition, interjections, ellipses, rhetorical questions, and digressions as a way to create an oral illusion, thereby fictionalizing orality and linguistically manipulating readers (141-42). Her concept of "fictionalizing the oral" will support my analysis in chapter two.

The last two chapters of my dissertation explore representations of the testimonial tradition in documentary films and popular music. Chapter three focuses on how orality contributes to a performance of affect in four documentaries about Nicaraguan immigrant experiences in Costa Rica. Issues of immigrant subjectivity, national identity, and belonging, including the roles of citizens and non-citizens, surface in Jürgen Ureña's *De sol a sol* (2005), Julia Fleming's *NICA/ragüense* (2005), Ishtar Yasin's *La mesa feliz* (2005), and also in *Desde el barro al sur* (2002) produced by María José Álvarez and Martha Clarissa Hernández. All of the films rely on interviews, oral testimonies, and lived experiences to explore the immigration debate, offering personal accounts and an alternative discourse to "official" reports. Following Richard Schechner's definition of performance as "restored behavior" or "twice-behaved behavior" (36), the immigrants interviewed offer a performance of affect, or emotion, by

reenacting their stories for the camera and reconnecting with the feelings and emotions associated with the immigrant experience. This enacting and talking about feelings can in turn draw diverse actors and audiences into new ways of imagining community, citizenship, and belonging. The performance of affect also emphasizes the affective elements of a social experience in process, highlighting Williams's concept of structures of feeling.

The fourth and final chapter ties together the histories, encounters, and communities discussed in the previous chapters by listening to transnational musical representations of Mexican, Salvadoran, and Nicaraguan immigrant experiences. The music I examine also connects the threads of orality, affect, and cultural citizenship that run throughout this dissertation. By looking at the oral strategies of song lyrics, the use of voice, and musical styles, my analysis will focus on the immigrant stories told by singers of *corridos*, or border ballads, and protest songs as part of Latin American traditions of orality and *testimonio*. The music and audiences for such diverse artists as the Mexican *norteño* ensemble Los Tigres del Norte, the Salvadoran group Tex Bronco, and the Nicaraguan singer-songwriter Flor Urbina show how musical *testimonios* about immigrant experiences promote solidarity and community, thus offering an alternative space of belonging to individuals from disparate cultures. This chapter also considers recent studies, particularly those of Josh Kun, that highlight pertinent connections between music and migration and also draws on Zumthor's bridging of the oral and aural by privileging the power of voice.

The immigrant acts examined here show the convergences and divergences of Latin American immigrant experiences. By analyzing both a range of forms and contents, this dissertation shows how different cultural forms communicate the urgency of their messages and in turn how they impact audience responses. As we will see, the cultural texts discussed in the

following chapters question the nation as the sole form of organization and identity by telling stories about borderland experiences and contributing to the formation of alternative transnational communities through stories of solidarity.

Chapter 1

Representations of Community and Orality in Recent *Testimonios*

about Undocumented Mexican Immigrants in the United States

The Guatemalan text *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú y así me nació la conciencia*, first published in 1982, brought international attention to the *testimonio* as a contemporary cultural form giving voice to the subaltern in Latin American literature. Though its roots run much deeper in Latin American culture, the *testimonio*'s significance and efficacy have been debated ever since. In his well-known work on the subject *Testimonio: On the Politics of Truth*, John Beverley posits that the *testimonio* emerged as a new narrative form along with social struggles in the 1960s, but that Cuba's well-known cultural center, Casa de las Américas, solidified the form as an important mode of expression in 1970 by deciding to award it an annual literary prize (31).¹ However, Beverley also acknowledges that characteristics of the *testimonio* can be traced back to the early "discovery" texts or crónicas, the region's national essays and war diaries from the nineteenth century as well as oral histories recorded by anthropologists in the first part of the twentieth century (31).² Building on these origins, the narrative form came into its own in the 1980s as part of an emerging identity politics and in conjunction with the Solidarity Movement associated with revolutionary struggles in Central America, as evidenced by Menchú's *testimonio*. With the perceived failure of these Revolutions, critics such as Beverley have questioned whether or not the testimonial moment has passed. In this chapter, I will show how variations on the *testimonio* have emerged as a viable cultural space for the self-representation of undocumented Mexican workers in light of recent immigration debates and policy shifts in the United States. I will focus on *Diario de un mojado* (2003) by Ramón "Tianguis" Pérez, *Por amor al dólar* (2006) by J.M. Servín and *Los perros de Cook Inlet* (1998) by Alberto López

Fernández, all of which engage testimonial discourse in different ways to represent the protagonists' lived experiences as marginalized immigrants in the United States.

Pérez, Servín and López Fernández both employ and resist elements of testimonial discourse as they tell their stories as undocumented workers, thereby giving voice to the subaltern experience of undocumented Mexican immigrants in the United States. I am particularly interested in how they inscribe orality in their texts to represent their experiences and those of others and also to communicate a sense of community. A *testimonio* is rooted in the oral tradition because it is a negotiated text that traditionally is mediated by an outside intellectual, such as an anthropologist or a translator, who records or transcribes an eye witness' oral account of an important life experience, then compiles and edits the written text. The distinguishing characteristic of this personal narration is that the narrator, who is a member of a marginalized group, speaks to the oppression of a collectivity and also highlights an urgent need to communicate (Beverly 30-32; Yudice 17). While the narratives of Pérez, Servín and López Fernández bear witness to oppression and communicate a sense of urgency, they do not rely on outside mediation to tell their stories. All three narrators thus minimize the possibility of outside misrepresentation and lessen the distance between their stories and their interlocutors. However, because of their access to the written word and to publishing houses, the narrators occupy a position of privilege among immigrants, and they must inscribe or fictionalize an oral discourse as part of their written narrations. Also, since the works discussed here are not the writers' only published texts, they have a certain social identity or status as writers that alters their positions as "subalterns" in these texts. At the same time, their status does not change the experiences they endured as marginalized, undocumented workers in the United States during the 1980s and 1990s, but rather, allows them to personally exemplify the recent social history of Mexican

migrations and to represent an immigrant collectivity that has traditionally been silenced in mainstream U.S. channels. Writing in Spanish also shows solidarity with Spanish-speakers, offering a space of belonging and cultural citizenship to individuals who may not have legal rights in this country. Therefore, because Pérez, Servín and López Fernández operate both inside and outside the immigrant community they represent, my readings will attend to moments of textual interference and engage their multiple subjectivities by showing that representation and identity formation are not mutually exclusive, but rather, as complex and fluid processes as are the narrators' changing circumstances.

Much has been written and debated about the testimonial form and its efficacy. By incorporating elements of ethnography, autobiography, journalism and historiography, the cultural form calls into question traditional academic divisions. It also destabilizes representational and literary boundaries by breaking down traditional dichotomies such as the personal and the collective, the representational and non-representational or the literary and non-literary. As the genre has evolved over the years, terms like “testimonial novel” or “testimonial autobiography” have been coined in an attempt to categorize texts that do not fit standardized definitions. Such attempts have led to a politics of labeling that takes away from *testimonio*'s unique ability to function as a hybrid discourse with both ethical and aesthetic functions and to challenge stereotypical representations of the subaltern. Elzbieta Sklodowska identifies testimonial writing as a “palimpsest-like structure” and advocates taking into account its various textual interplays (“Spanish” 92). Similarly, Amy Nauss Millay describes *testimonio* as a “literary modality” with roots in political discourse and social sciences (157). Linda Craft also takes into account the hybridity of testimonial narration, opting to look at the “testimonial function” of a text, or the degree to which it engages testimonial discourse (*Novels*, 22). Because

of the slipperiness of *testimonio*, I will not refer to it here as a genre but rather as a cultural form. I will also privilege the Spanish word *testimonio*, which connotes the act of bearing witness in the legal sense, because of the cultural weight it carries as a literary, political and social mode of expression. *Testimonio* thus resists being categorized and is itself a mobile discourse due to its changing circumstances and interplay between tradition and innovation. In his introduction to *The Real Thing*, George M. Gugelberger declares that the *testimonio*'s "battlefield is the border area between transgression and acceptance" (11). He heralds testimonial writing for sitting at the crossroads of institutional battles and calls for "a strategy of dis-closure, a new vigilance" when reading testimonial narrative (18), especially in light of "migrations unforeseen in the past" that have characterized the new millennium (7). With an understanding of *testimonio* as a hybrid and migrating discourse, it is with a critical eye and ear that I approach the immigrant narratives discussed here as testimonials.

In addition to labeling, *testimonio* raises many issues about representation of the subaltern, such as tensions about the authorial voice, articulations of self and lived experience, and discursive practices. Although a reader may be inclined to trust a personal narration as more authentic and real, a testimonial narration is still a re-creation and a re-presentation of a past experience that is influenced by memory, intention and ideology and also creative or storytelling elements (Skłodowska, "La forma" 379; Beverley xv). All of these issues beg the question that Gayatri Spivak has famously asked in her seminal article "Can the Subaltern Speak?" and, succeeding questions: once she speaks, either for herself or through someone else, is the testimonialist still considered subaltern when she has been heard by listeners or readers who represent hegemonic social forces? While it is true that testimonial works place the margin at the center by representing a community that has not been allowed to speak, the representative who

voices concerns of oppression must step outside the community to do so. In *Proceed with Caution, When Engaged by Minority Writing in the Americas*, Doris Sommer reminds us that “outside” and “inside” are not static positions, and she argues that the testimonialist must become “an ‘outsider’ in order to stay inside” (18). She must form part of the community and also set herself apart from it, a discursive act that Gareth Williams calls an “ambiguous self/collective positioning” (87). For Sommer, this multiple subjectivity represents an act of resistance to avoid being completely absorbed by the metropolis (4), and she counters Spivak’s concern with the more pertinent question of whether or not “we” can listen (20). Sommer posits that readers must learn to hear differential meanings when reading “minority” texts like Latin American *testimonios*, for it is our job to notice silences, interferences and non-compliance in order to respect the boundaries established by testimonial voices (4-10). We must read texts not simply to know or possess the “other,” but rather, to understand what we do not and cannot know (23-25). In her essay “No Secrets” in which she addresses the same issues, Sommer calls for productive alliances that respect cultural distances rather than empathetic identifications that lead to fetishizing the “other” (131). Thus, in Sommer’s and Williams’s views testimonial representation presents a challenge for the reader to respect cultural gaps and to listen intently so that a subaltern speaker has the opportunity to voice concerns and be heard respectfully.

Part of the non-compliance of the testimonial works discussed here is the tension between written and oral discourses. In *Voices from the fuente viva*, Nauss Millay argues that Spanish American writers since colonial times “have sought to mediate between two cultures, one oral and autochthonous, and the other deemed superior in part because of its writing system” (11). For Nauss Millay, by creating a textual effect of orality, writers attempt to negotiate the orality/literacy dichotomy and the violence of writing (12). She goes on to write that the

identification of conflicting realities has served as a means for validating cultural production (12). Because oral culture is associated with community, presentness and “authenticity,” orality is best perceived as a rhetorical strategy to represent disenfranchised peoples (16). Inscribing orality in written texts thus aligns with the *testimonio*’s goal of giving voice to marginalized individuals, and Nauss Millay uses testimonial discourse as a primary example of her argument, thereby connecting the cultural form to Latin America’s oral tradition. By incorporating strategies like repetitions, interjections, colloquial sayings, and ellipses, the *testimonio* as performative storytelling creates a simulacrum of spoken discourse (140-41). Because the works discussed here are self-referential written accounts, Pérez, Servín and López Fernández utilize similar strategies described by Nauss Millay to inscribe orality in their narrations. They also invoke a collectivity, often with the *nosotros* form, and narrate their experiences as they remember them as if talking to their readers. In *Talk Fiction*, Irene Kacandes also identifies the use of fragmentation, flashbacks and achrony as oral strategies to give testimony to traumatic situations (114). For Kacandes, bearing witness is an exchange of experience between the narrator and reader and therefore a collaborative oral exchange (90). These textual exchanges and interplays allow Pérez, Servín and López Fernández to denounce the marginalization and oppression of immigrant workers in the United States and to communicate the urgency of the situation, thereby manifesting a testimonial project. By inscribing oral discourses in their narrations, they also negotiate the tension between their roles as *letrados*, or lettered elite, and as undocumented workers.

Because testimonial writing brings into focus the uneven power relations involved in representation of both self and others, it fits within the idea of the contact zone, as defined in my introduction. While Mary Louise Pratt does not use the word *testimonio* explicitly, she does

employ the term “autoethnography” to describe a similar phenomenon of the contact zone.³ Pratt defines autoethnography as ways in which colonized subjects represent themselves while negotiating the colonizer’s terms of representation (7). As a play on ethnography, a means by which Westerners represent the disenfranchised, she writes that, “autoethnographic texts are those the others construct in response to or in dialogue with those metropolitan representations” (7). They are heterogeneous works through their appropriation of invented or imposed forms and terms and also through their reception by both readers in the metropolis and by literate sectors of the speaker’s own social group (7). While Pratt primarily focuses on autoethnographic texts within the context of Spain’s conquest of Latin America and its aftermath, her terminology illuminates the contemporary *testimonio* that also collaborates with hegemonic literary forms to protest and resist social oppression. Her ideas are particularly pertinent for dealing with the self-representations of undocumented Mexican immigrants in the United States because of their status as disenfranchised individuals who must negotiate uneven power relations and re-envision communities of belonging. Pratt also touches on the crucial issue of how autoethnographic or testimonial discourse implicates the reader in the contact zone. This is a topic I will return to later, however, it is important to note that the *testimonio*’s personal narration interpellates the reader so that he or she feels compelled to take action. It is because of this narrator-reader relationship that the Latin American *testimonio* creates a social space where alternative forms of community can be imagined.

By telling their personal stories and representing an immigrant community, Pérez, Servín and López Fernández address the complexities and tensions of undocumented Mexican immigrant experiences as they are actively lived and felt at the end of the twentieth century in the United States. While each text engages a particular time and place, which will be defined in

my individual analyses, all three testimonial narrations illuminate the emergent socio-political and cultural paradigms of recent migrations. Mexican migration to the United States is by no means a new phenomenon but changes after World War II shifted migratory patterns. Migration between the neighboring countries can be traced back to 1848 when the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo awarded the United States almost half of Mexico's territory, now the Southwest part of the country, and created the two-thousand mile border that both unites and divides them (Massey, Durand and Malone 24). Migratory routes were then solidified in the twentieth century along with the formation of national identities and ideologies (24-25). Railroad construction, the Mexican Revolution and World War I encouraged Mexican immigration during the early part of the century while the Great Depression resulted in massive deportations, slowing border flows until the Bracero Program was established in 1942 (27-36). This U.S. government-regulated program allowed for the temporary recruitment of Mexican farmworkers until 1964. Sociologist Douglas S. Massey suggests that the Bracero Program is the key to understanding current Mexican immigration to the United States because it established transnational migratory networks, which enabled both documented and undocumented migration to continue despite an end to the official program ("The Social Organization" 205-06). In *La voz urgente*, Manuel M. Martín-Rodríguez emphasizes the Bracero Program's stimulating effects on unsanctioned migration, describing it as "el fenómeno [...] más destacado de los años de posguerra" (20). In fact, for many employers, undocumented workers were preferred because they could avoid paying contract fees, taxes and higher wages dictated by the official program (De Genova 66). Consequently, despite restrictions implemented by the United States government, sanctioned Mexican migration transitioned into a self-initiated social process that has continued throughout the years and, in many cases, has turned into permanent settlement.

In addition to the Bracero Program, other changes to U.S. immigration policy have influenced the contemporary flow of Mexicans into the United States. In 1965 the Hart-Cellar Act constituted a major change, outlawing racial quotas and prioritizing family reunification, which benefited immigrants from developing countries, like Latin America and Asia, who had previously been overlooked in favor of European immigrants. Reform laws have also attempted to address a rise in immigration resulting from the emergence of a global economy, changes in labor demands and the mobilization of individuals. The 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) was an attempt to curb the flow of unauthorized migrations with the implementation of employer sanctions and an amnesty program that legalized the status of approximately three million undocumented immigrants in the United States (Sassen 19). With a continued rise in unsanctioned entries, the Immigration Act of 1990 increased the number of authorized immigrants allowed into the country (19). Despite attempts to appease restrictionists, both laws favored sustained migration to satisfy U.S. labor demands, which is reflected in subsequent immigration statistics, and much attention has been placed on Mexico because of the sheer volume of people coming from the South. According to historian David G. Gutiérrez, more people have entered the United States from Mexico than any other nation since 1960, and the U.S. Mexican population grew from 2.3 million to 8.7 million between 1960 and 1980 (xv). Immigrant flows continued to increase during the 1980s and 90s with U.S. Latinos becoming the largest minority group in the country. In 2000 the U.S. Census Bureau reported that Mexicans, including immigrants and their descendents, constitute the largest group of Latinos, accounting for nearly fifty-eight percent of this population (Suárez-Orozco and Páez 5). Thus, Mexicans, like other immigrant or marginalized groups, have often been the scapegoats for economic and social woes in the United States, and a growing Latino community has fueled xenophobic

attitudes. English-only movements that were initiated in many states during the 1980s, California's Proposition 187 in 1994, which attempted to deny education, health care and other public services to undocumented immigrants, and national immigration protests in 2006 have been visible signs of the heated immigration debate in this country.

Economic policies have further intertwined Mexico and the United States and influenced immigration statistics. The rise of neoliberalism in the 1980s and the passage of NAFTA in 1994 solidified economic interdependence between the two neighbors. Citing NAFTA as a prime example, Saskia Sassen argues that U.S. efforts to open its economy and expand its foreign investment have actually mobilized people for migration by creating economic, social and cultural linkages that facilitate migratory processes (14-15). Neoliberal policies thus contradict U.S. attempts to control immigration, for they signal that the border is open to the flow of goods, but not to the flow of people. During the 1990s, for example, the Clinton Administration increased federal policing along the border with aggressive strategies like Operation Gatekeeper while simultaneously promoting a borderless economy (Andreas 1-2). As a result, border crossing has been pushed into more remote and treacherous locations, like the Sonoran desert, leading to more deaths and an increased need for expensive *coyotes*, or immigrant smugglers, and also providing a strong incentive for Mexicans to stay in the United States rather than cross back and forth (4-5). Moreover, the wars against drugs and terrorism have politicized the border even more, and immigration will forever be linked to national security after the events on September 11, 2001. In an attempt to pacify all sides of the immigration debate, it is clear that the United States government has implemented a contradictory policy. In *Beyond Smoke and Mirrors*, Massey, Durand and Malone suggest that "border enforcement represents more of a ritualistic performance than an actual strategy of

deterrence” (103). Situating the border as a political theater makes us all spectators and accomplices in the immigration drama. However, the lives of immigrants have been represented on the national stage without our hearing their voices. Reading experiential stories like *testimonios* is a step in the right direction to raise awareness about immigrant oppression and possibly to build cross-cultural communities.

Diario de un mojado, *Por amor al dólar* and *Los perros de Cook Inlet* engage these historical issues during the 1980s and 90s and represent some of the thoughts and feelings associated with them. They show how lived experiences intersect and often contradict official laws and ideologies, thereby revealing a social experience in process, or emergent structures of feeling, related to the processes of migration. Pérez, for example, follows a more traditional migrant route through Texas, California and Oregon in the early 1980s and represents the changes leading up to the 1986 reform law. One of the consequences of this law was a shift in traditional patterns of migration, so Mexicans began exploring and settling in U.S. states beyond the border region (Massey, Durand, and Malone 126-28). The other two texts represent this change, for Servín describes his adventures in New York City and parts of New England between 1993 and 2000, whereas López Fernández depicts his immigrant experiences in the Alaskan fishing industry in 1990. Each of these *testimonios* exposes the complex dynamics of such migrations and shows the human aspects of the Mexican immigrant experience through the various ways each protagonist negotiates his transnational subjectivity, daily struggles, ethnic conflicts, and power relations. Each testimonialist also accounts for a heterogeneous Mexican and Latino/a immigrant community in the United States by describing their encounters and friendships with other workers along the way. Hence, their testimonial works provide a visible space of solidarity for imagining alternative social communities that provide cultural citizenship

to those who may not have legal rights. In an interview with Paul Thompson, Homi Bhabha states that *testimonios* “display that very peculiar weave of elements of lives lived iteratively, lives lived interstitially, [...]; they challenge us to think beyond what our concepts enable us to do [...] to question nation, to question citizenship, to question community” (“Between Identities” 198-99). The following analysis will illuminate such interstitial elements that expose zones of cultural contact and envision transnational communities in the making.

Because the *testimonio* is a call to action, it intends to stir up certain thoughts and feelings in its readers and to establish communities of solidarity. Contextual information about the works discussed here shows that Pérez, Servín and López Fernández have ties to both Mexico and the United States, personifying the transnational communities that connect these neighboring countries. Pérez is the most accessible of the three writers in the United States because *Diario de un mojado* was first published as an English translation in 1991, as *Diary of an Undocumented Immigrant*, since the heated immigration debates of the time drew attention to its message. The fact that the original manuscript in Spanish was released in 2003 highlights a resurgence of immigration concerns and an available reading public in Spanish.⁴ Both versions were published by Arte Público Press, a cultural house in Houston dedicated to showcasing U.S. Latino authors and making their work available to U.S. audiences since the early 1970s. Excerpts from this testimonial narrative have also been included in recent anthologies like *En otra voz* (2002) and *Crossing into America: The New Literature of Immigration* (2003). *Diario de un mojado*, therefore, is accessible to readers of Spanish and English alike. Information about the author, however, is limited. According to the text’s colophon, Pérez is a native Zapotec Indian of San Pablo Macuiltianguis, a village in the Sierra Juárez region of Oaxaca, but he now lives and works as a photographer in Xalapa, Veracruz. In addition to *Diario de un mojado*, he

is also the author of *Diary of a Guerrilla* (Arte Público Press, 1999), another testimonial work that describes his involvement with the indigenous movement to reclaim his community's ancestral lands in Oaxaca. Pérez's residence in Mexico, his relationship with Arte Público Press, and his *testimonios* thus exemplify the transnational ties that connect Mexico and the United States.

Although J.M. Servín and Alberto López Fernández's works are not as readily accessible in the United States, their testimonial narrations and personal lives also represent the transnational community that intertwines Mexico and its northern neighbor. Servín, for example, garnered more national and international attention as a writer after spending eight years (1993-2001) outside of Mexico, mainly in the United States, and more recently, since his publication of *Por amor al dólar* in 2006. This is not his first novel, however, for he has also published *Cuartos para gente sola* (1999), *Periodismo Charter* (2002), for which he won the Premio Nacional de Testimonio in 2001, and *Al final del vacío* (2007). He has been awarded numerous literary and journalistic honors, and his work has also been featured in recent anthologies, such as *Los mejores cuentos mexicanos* (2001), *¿En qué cabeza cabe?* (2005) and *El gringo a través del espejo* (2006). This latter anthology is of particular interest because it presents an "outside" view of the United States from the perspective of twenty-two different writers, eleven of whom are Mexican, and was compiled by David Lida, a writer from New York who has resided in Mexico City since 1991 (Rodríguez). Servín's contribution is entitled "Dos cuentos del Bronx" and presents another reflection on his experiences in New York. Servín reports in his internet blog that he was born in Mexico City in 1962, is self-taught and currently resides in his hometown where he continues to write and publish nationally. He actively updates this blog site with literary contributions and has also posted writings about his immigrant experiences and

excerpts from *Por amor al dólar*. Thus, Servín has the potential to impact a virtual community via his internet postings and reach a widespread audience who otherwise may not have known about his work. He is truly a product of today's global reality and shows how technology can create border crossers who never leave home.

According to biographical information on the cover of *Los perros de Cook Inlet*, Alberto López Fernández was born in Mexico City in 1967, and since then, has lived in Mexico, Colombia, the Dominican Republic and Alaska. In contrast to Pérez and Servín, López Fernández decided to permanently settle in the United States. He currently lives in New York City where he works as a carpenter and continues to write (Quirarte). *Los perros de Cook Inlet* is his first published novel, but he also has two collections of poetry entitled *Guarda* (1998) and *La otra orilla* (2002), in which he also reflects on his immigrant experiences. Libros del Umbral, which is a small publishing house in Mexico City, has published all three of his works. By publishing in Mexico and writing in Spanish, López Fernández targets a Spanish-speaking, specifically Mexican, readership and is virtually unknown to readers in the United States. Moreover, the colophon of *Los perros de Cook Inlet* indicates that only one thousand copies were printed, which suggests that the novel is not widely available in Mexico either. While López Fernández may be the lesser known of the three writers, his contribution to a "new" immigrant literature is no less significant, for he currently lives the Mexican diaspora and continues to write about his experience. I borrow my understanding of a new immigrant literature from Louis Mendoza and S. Shankar as defined in the introduction to their edited volume *Crossing Into America: The New Literature of Immigration*. Mendoza and Shankar describe this new literature as one emerging from post-1965 immigrations to the United States and characterized by works that are written by those living the immigrant experience themselves

or by members of communities in which the immigrant experience is ongoing and foundational (xviii-xix). They also stress that a new immigrant literature is not linguistically limited to English due to the availability of relevant works in Spanish and other languages (xxv). These defining characteristics, therefore, apply to all three writers and identify their testimonial works as part of this literary phenomenon.

These convergences and divergences demonstrate that López Fernández, Servín and Pérez are all contemporary Mexican writers with a transnational twist. Even though their stories take place and were mostly written in the United States, they do not identify themselves as U.S. Latino or Chicano writers, however, they do exemplify the intersections of Latin American and U.S. Latino/a writers by exploring a subject that affects both sides of the border. Their testimonial works also add to an established tradition of documenting immigrant experiences in the North. In the anthology *En otra voz*, Nicolás Kanellos explains that many of the first accounts of U.S.-Mexico crossings were oral histories recorded in folk songs or other oral expressions of the working class (xxxiv). This oral tradition is evident through an inscribed orality in the works discussed here. In “Undocumented Crossings,” cultural critic Alberto Ledesma cites Daniel Venegas’s *Las aventuras de don Chipote o cuando los pericos mamen* (1928), which relates an undocumented border crossing based on personal experiences, as the first written account of a Mexican immigrant narrative (68-71). Other, and perhaps more well-known, works that deal with the topic include Agustín Yáñez’s *Al filo del agua* (1947), Luis Spota’s *Murieron a mitad del río* (1948) and Carlos Fuentes’s *La región más transparente* (1958). While Spota’s *Murieron a mitad del río* is loosely based on the real-life events of a group of undocumented immigrants, none of these works explicitly gives voice to undocumented workers or describes the experiences of Mexican migration after the Bracero Program like the

works discussed here. *Diario de un mojado*, *Por amor al dólar*, and *Los perros de Cook Inlet* seem to align more with an abundance of fictional and non-fictional works in English and Spanish that have been published since the 1990s about the difficulties of recent Mexican migrations. Examples include *El viaje de los cantores* (1990) by Hugo Salcedo, *Callejón Sucre y otros relatos* (1994) by Rosario Sanmiguel, *Instrucciones para cruzar la frontera* (2002) by Luis Humberto Crosthwaite, *Morir en el intento* (2005) by Jorge Ramos, *Crossing Over* (2001) by Rubén Martínez, and also *The Devil's Highway* (2004) and *Into the Beautiful North* (2009) by Luis Alberto Urrea. Pérez's, Servín's and López Fernández's works are thus part of an established and also growing tradition. However, because their voices are not muffled by outside intermediaries and also because they provide personal information about the undocumented experience through self-referential written accounts, they offer unique and unconventional contributions to our understanding of Mexican immigrant narratives and are thus the focus of this study.

The process of writing provides all three testimonialists the opportunity to describe their adventures and to experience a metamorphosis, for it is through writing that they subvert their status as undocumented workers and empower themselves and other immigrants. As discussed in the introduction, Gloria Anzaldúa describes writing from the Borderlands as a healing act by comparing writers to shamans, or indigenous healers (66-75). She explains that writing is a learning process “that transforms living in the Borderlands from a nightmare into a numinous experience. It is always a path/state to something else” (73). For Pérez, Servín and López Fernández, their Borderland experience becomes an opportunity to bear witness to the injustices and hardships that are actively lived and felt by undocumented Mexican immigrants in the United States. By representing this collective experience, their *testimonios* provide a space of

belonging unavailable through traditional means like legal citizenship. They help redefine citizenship as lived experience and an evolving process of inclusion (Oboler 5). In “Citizens vs. Citizenry: Undocumented Immigrants and Latino Cultural Citizenship,” William V. Flores explains that, with the help of cultural works, the undocumented “are emerging from the shadows as new subjects with their own claims for rights” (277). For Flores, establishing cultural citizenship includes the right to attain membership in society, to define community, and to assert difference (262). Thus, the testimonial works discussed here provide cultural citizenship to an imagined immigrant community by validating social, cultural, and ethnic differences. However, this community is not without limitations. As primarily male voices and actors who are imagining this community, those excluded include women, children and indigenous persons who do not speak Spanish, for their experiences lie beyond the experiential horizons of Pérez, Servín and López Fernández. Nevertheless, there are overlapping issues among different immigrant groups, such as discrimination and economic hardships, and the works discussed here are significant for the views they offer.

By providing an insider perspective, these texts have the potential to influence immigrant and non-immigrant readers, creating an opportunity for healing through understanding and awareness. Although none of them offers an explicit call to action, they implicitly encourage readers to react by raising consciousness about a controversial socio-political topic. John Beverley acknowledges the importance of this narrator-reader relationship by arguing that *testimonio* creates “dialogue, cooperation and coalition” (6), and also allows for personal identification with a popular cause that may or may not align with the reader’s circumstances (37). As previously mentioned, this solidarity or productive alliance, to borrow Doris Sommer’s term, has the potential to create alternative imagined communities that transcend national

identities, cultural differences and socioeconomic hierarchies. For readers, *Diario de un mojado*, *Por amor al dólar* and *Los perros de Cook Inlet* provide an opportunity to re-conceptualize the opposition “we-they” and to acknowledge the dialectical relationship between self and other. Belonging and cross-cultural alliances, therefore, are established through differentiation.

Reader responses to testimonial works determine the efficacy of the form’s social project. In her recent study *Can Literature Promote Justice?*, Kimberly A. Nance tries to establish middle ground for the *testimonio*’s extraliterary function that critics have either celebrated as a utopian dream or mourned as a failed alternative. In order to counter this polarization, Nance describes the *testimonio* as a “space of potential action” and characterizes the testimonial project of solidarity as a “prosaics” rather than a poetics (158). She borrows the term from Gary Saul Morson and Caryl Emerson, defining it as a solidarity based on “considered, contingent, concrete, and undramatic actions in everyday life” (158). In other words, Nance reformulates a response to testimonial writing as a prosaic task of daily activities rather than a huge feat of activism or solidarity. In an attempt to connect life and literature, she contrasts the notions of prosaics and poetics: “Poetics is the realm of the imagination and of multiple possibilities, while prosaics is the realm of concrete choices and of consequences. [...] Prosaics acknowledges the ethical obligation to act even when the information is incomplete and contradictory. [...] it demands ultimately that we face ourselves, our action, and our inaction—not only in the text but in the world” (164-65). Thus, in Nance’s view, testimonial narratives serve as a catalyst for change, a transformation that could range from self-reflection to claiming cultural citizenship to building cross-cultural communities.

Prosaic responses to the immigrant *testimonios* discussed here illustrate the thoughts and feelings of individuals who are living the current immigration debates and who may or may not

be able to relate to the narrators' experiences. For example, several book reviews of *Diario de un mojado*, both the English and Spanish versions, bear witness to the text's potential efficacy. In *School Library Journal*, Sonia Merubia from the University of Texas provides a favorable review and recommends the text for public libraries and bookstores. The Main Library in Glendale, Arizona seems to have followed Merubia's advice, for they included the work in their 1999 bilingual reading and discussion series entitled "The Bridges that Unite Us/Los Puentes que nos unen" (Cone Sexton). Alberto Pulido, an associate professor at Arizona State University and an organizer of the discussion group, explains that their purpose is to create cross-cultural communities: "We live in a border land where we're having to cross these linguistic borders every day [...] We're trying to create these bridges" (Cone Sexton). Julie Ann Vera also offers a positive review in the *San Antonio Express-News* and writes that the text is "an easy read that offers the perspective of those on the outside looking in and what they think of a nation so different from their own." In a follow-up editorial, Blaine Reece reacts negatively to Vera's review, claiming that she glosses over Pérez's "illegal" status by referring to him as an undocumented immigrant. Despite Reece's unenthusiastic response, this exchange is a perfect example of how a prosaic testimonial work can promote dialogue and change. Overall, *Diario de un mojado* has proven effective, allowing readers to discuss and reflect on the human aspects of Mexican immigration to the United States.

While I did not find any Mexican critiques of *Diario de un mojado*, *Por amor al dólar* and *Los perros de Cook Inlet* have been reviewed primarily in Mexico. *Por amor al dólar*, especially, has received much attention. Both *La Jornada* and *Reforma*, Mexico City's two leading newspapers, have printed favorable reviews of Servín's *testimonio* (Martínez Rentería; Garza). In *Nexos: Sociedad, Ciencia, Literatura*, Bernardo Esquinca heralds that the text:

“punza y palpita a cada página, [...]. Es un libro que hacía falta en el panorama literario mexicano actual.” More interesting, perhaps, are readers’ personal reviews posted on Servín’s blog. In 2006, for example, Paris Gaytán writes, “Excelente relato, increíble que esta historia se vive todos los días en repetidas veces fuera de nuestro país, y ahora existe un testimonio escrito que revela las experiencias de una persona que busca una superación personal y que al mismo tiempo analiza, piensa y siente cada uno de los momentos que pasó [...].” In addition to Mexican reviews, *Por amor al dólar* has also caught the attention of U.S. critics. David Lida praises it as “the best Mexican book I’ve read recently,” and C.M. Mayo, a writer who splits her time between Mexico and Washington D.C., responds to Lida’s review on her blog site by asking if anyone is translating the text (Madam Mayo). A translation would make the testimonial work much more available to U.S. readers, for I did not find any published reviews in U.S. periodicals, even though Martínez Rentería notes that Servín has promoted the text in Los Angeles. *Los perros de Cook Inlet*, on the other hand, has received very little attention from critics in the United States. As for Mexico, Quirarte praises the text in his review for *La Jornada*, while Sergio González Rodríguez classifies the work as “narrativa de viaje” in his critique for *Reforma*. He writes, “[L]a novela de Alberto López Fernández, textura de episodios intensos que expresan lo intemporal en el brío de la supervivencia, traduce un territorio de valiosa excentricidad que se ubica entre lo mejor de nuestros nuevos escritores.” Readers can hope that more will be seen and heard from one of Mexico’s more recent writers.

Based on reader responses and my own analyses, these three prosaic testimonial works have enormous potential to create actions that could positively influence the current immigration debates. My analysis engages each author’s testimonial project to show how alternative communities are envisioned in each work. I also show the struggles between representing the

self and others by looking at how each speaker identifies and constructs an immigrant collectivity and how he participates in or resists this same group. I also highlight how the oral elements and textual interplays of each work influence its testimonial message and the creation of community. Through this self/collective positioning, all three testimonial works criticize injustices experienced by immigrant workers and also illuminate the emergent structures of feeling in immigrant communities by engaging historical shifts in the 1980s and 1990s. Part of their critique is directed towards consumer capitalism because the love of money, as Servín's title explains, and the desire to get ahead financially can lure immigrant workers and, perhaps ironically, lead to situations of marginalization and oppression. *Diario de un mojado* functions as a more traditional *testimonio* while *Por amor al dólar* and *Los perros de Cook Inlet* serve as more experimental examples of the form.

In *Diario de un mojado*, Pérez evokes a collectivity from the very start of his text by dedicating it to “mis camaradas: los mojados” (v). He is particularly interested in immigrants from his Zapotec community in Oaxaca, San Pablo Macuilianguis, and continually refers to them as his *paisanos*, or countrymen, in contrast to the other Mexicans and Latinos he meets in the United States. The nostalgic yearnings Pérez feels for his community in the North and the occasional mention of a word in Zapotec reveal his ethnic pride. He also identifies orality as an important part of his community's roots by explaining the origins of Macuilianguis through a story passed down orally throughout the generations with the phrase “los viejos contaban” (5). He also describes his hometown as “un pueblo de emigrantes” (6), and explains that his community's survival has depended on the processes of migration since the Bracero Program began in the 1940s. Despite an official end to the Program in 1964, Pérez acknowledges that an unofficial one has continued over the years, changing the status of migrants from his community

to undocumented workers. As more and more people have emigrated, including his father for a brief period, networks were established, converting Macuilianguis into a socio-economic transnational community. Pérez's own descriptions characterize this community as transnational because the familial, economic, social, and political relations span borders with its migrants involved in both home and host societies.⁵ He characterizes his own migration as part of this tradition: "Como era natural, yo también quería probar mi suerte. Quería ganar dólares, de ser posible los suficientes para mejorar la maquinaria de nuestro pequeño taller" (7). For Pérez, emigrating, whether temporarily or permanently, signifies a way to get ahead and return home with "dólares en los bolsillos" (7). It is this desire for U.S. dollars and the fear of returning home empty handed that drives Pérez to risk getting caught by la Migra, or INS and Border Patrol agents, and to try his luck in the North. Moreover, by characterizing his own journey as part of his community's history, he establishes his authority as a narrator and designates himself as the voice of Macuilianguis.

Pérez's decision to detail his immigrant experiences in the form of a diary creates a personal and informal relationship with the reader. The text is divided into four parts including his journey across the border, his stay in Texas, his adventures in California and Oregon and then ends with his return to Mexico. His descriptions of daily life, work experiences and personal encounters are recorded in seventy-four short entries with a very direct, informal style that reminds the reader of the *testimonio*'s oral qualities. Each chapter also documents a daily impression, much like someone's private diary. However, rather than use the present tense, Pérez offers a retrospective narration in the past tense, utilizing flashbacks, fragmented memories and interjections to give the allusion of orality. His attention to detail, such as recreating conversations and events, also captures the reader's attention and places her in the moment as if

she were listening to Pérez tell the story in person. Using the past tense also allows the narrator to interject nostalgic memories of his community and historiographic information about U.S. immigration, all of which provide important clues about the emerging social and cultural paradigms in the 1980s. While the narrator does not date his entries nor give an exact time frame for his stay in the United States, he does identify temporal markers, such as Reagan's presidency (1981-89), Hurricane Alicia (1983), the 1986 IRCA and certain holidays, that help situate the reader. Because of this information, we know that Pérez enters the United States after Hurricane Alicia hits Houston and that he stays for two or three years, working primarily in Texas and California, until he returns home shortly after the promulgation of the IRCA. Thus, he follows the more traditional path of a migrant worker in the Southwest.

Through a detailed description of his traumatic border-crossing experience, Perez identifies an extended immigrant community beyond Macuiltianguis and also describes underground migrant networks. Although Los Angeles is the most common destination for his *paisanos*, Pérez decides to go to Houston where his friend has been living for several years. He takes the bus from Oaxaca to the border city of Nuevo Laredo where he is greeted by a recruiter for Juan Serna, one of the city's infamous *coyotes*. While Pérez knows that he needs help crossing the border, he is also aware that divulging personal information is risky so he uses a fake name, hides his money in his jacket and refuses to give out his friend's telephone number in Houston (11, 14). With these precautions, Pérez enlists the services of Juan Serna for the price of four thousand pesos plus 450 dollars (10). He waits for several days at a safe house where he meets other border crossers, men, women and children, from all parts of Mexico and even Central America. Some of them have been coming and going for years while others are trying to cross for the first time like Pérez. Although they all face the same risks and must depend on each

other to a certain extent, each immigrant is also looking out for herself or himself, as evidenced by Pérez getting robbed and left with only one hundred dollars for the rest of his trip (29-30). He finally leaves with a group of twenty-five individuals and describes their journey across the Rio Grande and the network of people who hide them along the way. For the final leg of the trip, he rides in the trunk of a car, only to get stopped by the Border Patrol and be deported back to Nuevo Laredo. After contemplating his difficult journey, Perez questions whether or not to cross again: “La posibilidad de volver a casa me daba vueltas en la cabeza, pero también tenía en la cabeza la deuda con mi amigo, además ya estaba en la frontera” (53). In other words, giving up would be worse than another encounter with la Migra.

Pérez’s second attempt to enter the United States is much easier with the help of his friend from Houston. Rather than return to Juan Serna’s house, Pérez agrees to go to Piedras Negras, Coahuila, where a *patero* will help him cross the Río Grande. A *patero* is much cheaper than a *coyote* but only helps Pérez cross the border instead of guaranteeing his arrival in Houston (55). The plan is to cross that night and to meet his friend at a motel on the U.S. side. Besides the nopal thorns that get stuck in his legs and the dangerous highway he crosses, Pérez makes it to the motel without running into the Border Patrol, and he and his friend immediately leave for Houston. While Pérez is successful the second time, he does not idealize the situation and recognizes others who are not so lucky, including the Salvadoran girl in his first group who was raped by a *coyote* in Mexico (45). Accounting for these differences shows the tension between representing his journey and a collective one, for no human experience is the same. It also reveals his sensitivities to the female immigrant experience and the specific dangers they encounter as undocumented border crossers. While the other authors discussed here include women in the immigrant community, Pérez is the only one who explicitly recognizes the gender

gap between male and female workers. Moreover, his detailed descriptions are interrupted by a lack of specificities, like his friend's name or the names of other immigrants waiting to cross the border. An unwillingness to divulge this information reveals the risks of unsanctioned migration and also shows a textual resistance by keeping pertinent information from the reader.

Once in Houston, Pérez realizes that he is a small piece of a larger immigrant community looking for work and quickly becomes disillusioned with life in the United States, attesting to the changing times in the early 1980s. His friend helps him rent an apartment in the Magnolia District, which the narrator compares to the border region. He writes, “El barrio era netamente latino. [...] En algunas zonas no encontré diferencia alguna entre estas casas y las que vi en la frontera” (62). The other Latinos in the streets concern him because he realizes that “el desempleo era alto y los recién llegados como yo, veníamos a agravar el problema” (64). The owner of a taco stand gives Pérez some valuable advice, hinting at the recent changes in Houston: “Me explicó que para encontrar empleo necesitaba conseguir una tarjeta del seguro social, pero como era imposible en esos tiempos conseguirla legalmente, debía conseguir una tarjeta falsa” (64). He also adds that “los buenos tiempos habían quedado atrás,” and that despite unemployment, “los mojados han seguido llegando, en especial los de Centro América” (64). The *taquero*'s comment speaks to the U.S. economic crisis in the early eighties and the upsurge of Central American immigrants due to ongoing civil wars in El Salvador and Guatemala. He also makes a clear distinction between recent arrivals and more established Latino immigrants, like himself, underscoring the heterogeneity of an immigrant community. Pérez takes his advice and pays five dollars for a fake social security card while continuing to look for work. He writes, “Vi con desesperación que no era tan sencillo como lo había imaginado antes de hacer mi viaje a los Estados Unidos. Creí que sólo era cuestión de llegar, trabajar, cobrar dólares y regresar algún

día, como mis paisanos, a mi pueblo manejando un lujoso automóvil o, cuando menos, con algo que mostrara mi esfuerzo” (67). Thus, Pérez realizes that the luck of his *paisanos* was deceiving and that the “American Dream” is more an illusion than a reality.

While searching for work, Pérez gives testimony to productive alliances that try to aid the immigrant community. He frequents various places that offer help to unemployed immigrants, such as the daily radio program “Yo necesito trabajo,” and the famous corner in front of the Charro Club and La Misión (73-75). He learns quickly that he must abide by their rules in order to receive help. For example, he is turned down at one church for calling himself a “mojado” instead of using the politically correct term “trabajador indocumentado” (88-89). He also takes refuge for several weeks at a church that offers free room and board to immigrants in exchange for their testimonies. Although Pérez does not use the term Sanctuary Movement, his description aligns with the church-based program during the eighties that offered shelter for undocumented immigrants, primarily Central American refugees, to protect them from U.S. authorities and civil wars back home. The Sanctuary Movement also advocated the use of oral *testimonios* to educate the U.S. public and create solidarity. When Pérez notifies his landlord don Anselmo that he will be staying at the church because he can no longer pay for rent, he forms another alliance. Don Anselmo, a Mexican immigrant who achieved U.S. residency through the Bracero Program, takes interest in Pérez and offers him a job at his fruit and vegetable store. While he is grateful for the job, he realizes that he cannot count on it forever because he was employed “por razones humanitarias y no porque realmente necesitara un ayudante” (109). After working for don Anselmo for one month, Pérez decides to leave Houston to look for work in San Antonio. He explains that, “Houston significaba para mí una ciudad sin esperanza. Le había perdido la fe”

(109). Considering he received help from churches, the religious overtones in this quotation ironically communicate his frustration with life in the United States.

Pérez's frustrations continue in San Antonio where he experiences marginalization and endures discriminatory practices. He finds work at a print shop where his coworkers, who are mostly Latino, baptize him with the nickname of Indio Gerónimo because of his indigenous features. Pérez responds with a dry sense of humor: "Había veces que al verme llegar, alguno comenzaba a danzar y gritar a la manera que ellos veían por la tele que lo hacían los indios. Mi única respuesta era que yo sí era indio zapoteca del estado de Oaxaca, y les describía con exageración [mi pueblo]" (157). His exaggerations allow for a hidden subversive agenda to emerge from the text by revealing the ignorance of his coworkers and the ethnic stereotypes among Latinos. His indigeneity also complicates the notion of an immigrant community, for as a Zapotec Indian from Oaxaca, a marginal state in southern Mexico, he may be considered both an insider and an outsider to the Mexican immigrant community, thereby creating a double marginalization in the United States. His peripheral status becomes even more apparent when Pérez begins working at a carpentry shop in order to learn new skills to take back to his father's shop in Oaxaca. He realizes the stark economic differences between his community and the United States after seeing his father's outdated machinery hanging from the ceiling as mere decoration in the U.S. shop: "Me miré a mi mismo preguntándome si yo también parecía anticuado tal como la garlopa. [...] Salí de la oficina sintiéndome empequeñecido. No era que aquel tipo de maquinaria no la hubiera en México, pero tenían un precio de importación y eso, nosotros no lo teníamos" (168). Turning his observation into self-reflection shows an awareness of his own difference and status as "other" in the United States and Mexico.

Throughout his *testimonio*, Pérez shifts between positioning himself within an extended immigrant community and the Macuiltianguis transnational community. This tension reveals an evolving subjectivity that depends on his needs at the time. In Los Angeles, for example, Pérez positions himself as an integral part of the Macuiltianguis network. He lives in a small house with his uncle, who has worked in the United States for fifteen years, and three other *paisanos* who help Pérez find a job at a nearby car wash. He explains that about four hundred *paisanos* live in California and maintain constant communication with each other and with Macuiltianguis: “[P]ues casi todos sabíamos donde vivía y trabajaba cada cual. De esa manera, no había nada que pasara en el pueblo que no lo llegáramos a saber” (206). The immigrant community also uses the organization OPAM, Organización Pro-Ayuda a Macuiltianguis, to help its hometown in Oaxaca. Along with providing financial support, OPAM has been able to help relieve taxes, send a movie projector and sponsor the town’s patron saint celebration. Those living in the United States also support each other, as evidenced when Pérez, his uncle and their housemate Antonio pool their money to pay the coyote when their other two roommates are deported to Tijuana one afternoon. His uncle also encourages Pérez to study English because learning the language signifies advancement: “Pues, si quieres progresar en los Estados Unidos —me dijo— tienes que aprender a hablar inglés, de lo contrario, tendrás que resignarte con trabajitos como el de lavatrastes, como muchos de nuestros paisanos” (194). Pérez follows his uncle’s advice and enrolls in classes but becomes frustrated because he never has the opportunity to practice. Despite his frustrations, the classes pay off when he gets promoted at the car wash and earns the respect of his friend Miguel when he gets lucky with a “güerota” (255), or big blonde girl. Pérez recognizes that being able to speak English is not only an important survival skill but also a status symbol among his *paisanos* and other Latino immigrants.

Pérez's self/collective positioning requires distinguishing himself from others, which he accomplishes by establishing identity markers. He easily identifies the markers for undocumented immigrants because they mirror his own situation. He writes, "Nos reconocíamos inmediatamente, tan fácil como si en la frente cada uno tuviera un letrero que dijera 'Mojado'. Quizás era porque la mayoría proveníamos del campo y teníamos un estilo de andar [...] En algunos más que en otros había podido notar una ligera actitud reservada como el que no estaba en su propio terreno" (112-13). In addition to these characteristics, Pérez usually accounts for differences among immigrants by noting their nationality. When describing non-immigrants, however, he relies on skin color. Aside from his random encounters with *anglos* or *blancos*, he primarily focuses on *morenos*, meaning Latin American or U.S. Latino/a, and looks for one whenever he needs help. When applying for a job at the print shop, Pérez depends on a "morena" because "el color de su piel me decía que hablaba español o cuando menos debía comprenderlo" (123). Associating skin color with language usually serves him well, but he also comments on the need to understand Spanglish, which he refers to as "el lenguaje méxicoamericano" (86).

Pérez seems to use the terms Mexican American and Chicano interchangeably to refer to U.S. Latinos, lumping them into a homogenous group with roots in Mexico. While an overwhelming majority of U.S. Latinos do have ties to Mexico, his assumptions are problematic and stereotypical. Pérez also expects a comradery that often does not exist, as illustrated by his encounter with a policeman, whom Pérez identifies as Chicano, after getting into a minor car accident. The cop's discriminatory remarks encourage the other driver to press charges, to which Pérez responds:

Me pregunté la razón por la cual el chicano se empeñaba en perjudicarme de alguna manera. No esperaba que me favoreciera por el solo hecho de ser ambos de una misma descendencia, pero al reconocer yo mi culpa, sí esperaba que fuera justo, pero [...] él estaba tratando de empeorar mi caso. Ya había conocido a varios chicanos a quienes jugando a palabras les había hecho recordar que sus raíces estaban en México, pero muy pocos lo consideraban de aquella manera.

[...] al expresar sus sentimientos decían: “*I am an American citizen*”. (269)

Thus, Pérez’s experiences with others, primarily U.S. Latinos, display the social, economic and ethnic differences that can separate recent immigrants from established citizens or residents. By bringing awareness to these differences, his *testimonio* can promote understanding and facilitate cross-cultural alliances that recognize unevenness.

Because of his nostalgia for Macuiltianguis and his perception that life in the United States is “completamente rutinaria” (291), Pérez decides to return to Mexico shortly after the ratification of the IRCA in 1986. When work at the car wash dies down, he follows the harvest to northern California and Oregon but then returns to Los Angeles where he works in a Chinese restaurant for several months. While working at the restaurant, he hears of the new immigration law, whose objective is to legalize, according to a strict set of guidelines, undocumented immigrants who had entered the United States before 1982. Pérez comments on reactions to the law: “Entre mis paisanos había escepticismo; la mayoría prefería esperar los acontecimientos. No existía la creencia de que la ley se llevara a cabo efectivamente” (286). Religious groups and employers also expressed concerns, and complaints of corruption and abuse surfaced (287-88). To represent the intensity of these debates, Pérez takes a lighthearted approach by incorporating a satirical U.S. citizenship exam that he finds in a local newspaper. Instead of the traditional

questions about history and government, the reporter proposes questions about eating at McDonald's or watching television (288-89), to which Pérez responds, "Cuando leí el cuestionario, el problema de llegar a ser ciudadano era cuestión de risa" (290). Including this anecdote is a satiric response to an outdated measure for judging U.S. citizenship since many citizens would not be able to answer the real questions and pass the exam. It also pokes fun at an insurmountable hurdle for many undocumented immigrants providing comic relief to a serious situation. Thus, Pérez's *testimonio* provides an outlet by offering cultural citizenship through a visible space of solidarity.

Despite his humorous approach, Pérez evaluates his situation in the United States due to a general uneasiness about the changing immigration policies. He wants to remain true to his original plan, that of "ganar dólares que cambiaría en pesos cuando me fuera de regreso" (291). He also recognizes his own limitations in this country: "Aquí en los Estados Unidos era verdad que había comodidades y lujos, pero no eran para la gente como el lavatrastes y el *bus boy* que ganaban el salario mínimo. [...] En caso de que hubiera seguido aprendiendo inglés, no me hubiera podido integrar al modo de vida norteamericano por la diferencia de costumbres" (291). Consequently, Pérez makes the journey back to Mexico with tools, clothes and money, worried about the famous *mordida* or bribe he might have to pay Mexican officials (293). Much as he characterizes his journey to the United States as part of his community's tradition, he considers the *mordida* part of Mexico's immigrant history. Pérez writes:

Esa es la manera en que México funciona, siempre ha sido igual. [...] Todo aquel que venía de regreso tenía que entregar un soborno y la única diferencia era que unos tenían que pagar más que otros. [...] Las inconveniencias de la vida del mojado no terminaban hasta que uno llegaba a casa otra vez. (296)

His concluding remarks suggest that the trip home is just as stressful as crossing the border and living in the United States without permission. His return to Mexico also demystifies the fallacy that immigrants want to steal jobs from citizens and stay in the United States permanently.

In contrast to Pérez, J.M. Servín does not describe in detail his return to or departure from Mexico, for his is a different type of undocumented experience. He does not endure a traumatic border-crossing experience like Pérez because he travels to the United States by plane. In *Por amor al dólar*, Servín explains that he and his sister Norma both have valid visas: “Llegué al Bronx un cuatro de Julio sin gran cosa que perder, [...]. Mi hermana había llegado tres años antes, más o menos por las mismas fechas. Ambos emigramos en avión, con visa de turistas” (15). While his goal was not to vacation as a tourist, a visa secures his entrance into the United States where he can then blend in with “el incesante flujo de inmigrantes indocumentados” (15). Because Servín ends up living in the country for several years and working without proper documentation, the authorities still consider him to be an unauthorized immigrant, specifically a “visa overstay,” or someone who overstays the traditionally allotted six-month visit afforded by a tourist visa. Political scientist Peter Andreas argues that so much emphasis has been placed on unauthorized border crossers that visa overstays are easily overlooked even though they account for forty to fifty percent of “illegal” immigration (7). Aware of his undocumented status, Servín feels much more secure once he gets a fake green card, for like Pérez he must manipulate the system in order to survive in the United States. However, because Servín is able to get a tourist visa and pay for a plane ticket, he represents a more privileged immigrant than Pérez. He also has better access to these services by living in Mexico City, the nation’s hub, whereas Pérez is much more marginalized in Oaxaca. Thus, Servín’s *testimonio* gives visibility to a different category of undocumented immigrants and attests to the varying strategies of unauthorized

crossings as laws tighten and the border becomes more enforced during the 1990s, making it difficult to travel back and forth between the two countries. Although visa overstays may have a slight advantage upon entering the country, they still end up living as unauthorized immigrant workers in the United States with fears of deportation.

Because of his status, Servín identifies his immigrant experiences as part of a larger community. He identifies himself as an undocumented immigrant from the very start of the text and recognizes those who have endured a similar situation in his *Advertencia*. He explains that:

Por amor al dólar recoge algunas de mis impresiones durante casi una década (1993-2000) como trabajador indocumentado, principalmente en Estados Unidos. Lo escribí por una necesidad vital de adentrarme en otras realidades donde [...] personas de todo el mundo que en la *aventura* buscan, casi siempre, mejorar sus condiciones de vida. (9, emphasis added)

Servín recognizes that his immigrant experience is part of a collective reality, and he represents this collectivity by incorporating stories of other immigrants, including that of his father who spent several years working in Texas and to whom the text is dedicated: “A él y a quienes me apoyaron en el periplo, dedico este relato” (10). However, his use of the word “aventura” once again highlights his privileged position within an immigrant collectivity because his own search for adventure and life experience overshadow his need to work for survival. His possible departure for Europe at the end of his stay in the United States also signals a continuation of his life adventure and a different socio-economic status than most undocumented immigrants. Although his positionality sets him apart from others, Servín strives to connect to a collectivity by presenting a human perspective of the immigration phenomenon with his *testimonio*. He emphasizes this goal in an interview with Adriana Cortés Koloffon: “Para mí es muy importante

remarcar que somos seres humanos y que poseemos los mismos sentimientos y que dependiendo de las circunstancias estamos en un crisol donde desplegamos lo que más nos conviene en un momento dado.” His testimonial narration demonstrates that this human perspective includes a range of emotions and reactions, often contradictory, to the undocumented experience.

The text’s formal characteristics help communicate such complex reactions, for Servín’s tone and style are very different from Pérez’s more direct approach to writing. While Pérez narrates a more traditional *testimonio*, Servín plays on the cultural form’s malleability utilizing textual interplays and experimental methods. He characterizes *Por amor al dólar* as an “especie de testamento” (9) that incorporates journalistic, documentary and literary techniques. The text is divided into two main sections that present a retrospective narration in sixteen chapters. The first section, *Arde el Bronx*, describes his adventures in New York City and the Bronx, his job as a nanny in Greenwich, Connecticut and his brief trip to Ireland, while the second part, *Gatsby de gasolinera*, focuses on his work at a private golf club and a local gas station in Greenwich. These two sections are framed by the Advertencia and an Epilogue. While the organization is somewhat chronological, his memories jump back and forth as if he were telling the story as he remembers it, thereby producing an oral effect. However, there is tension between an inscribed orality and the written word with literary references like *Gatsby* and the incorporation of epigraphs, both of which distance Servín from the more conventional testimonial voice by situating him as a member of the lettered community. An epigraph from Nelson Algren, a twentieth-century U.S. writer who focused on hard-knock characters, prefaces the entire text and reads, “I was only tryin’ to make an honest dollar in a crooked sort of way” (7). Much like the tone of this epigraph, Servín’s narration tends to be sarcastic and self-degrading interspersed with serious moments. In general, he is a much more pessimistic narrator than Pérez and highly

critical of the United States. Furthermore, while detailing his immigrant experiences, Servín makes philosophic observations about life and includes documentary evidence of his adventures in the United States, such as check stubs, business cards, and pictures of people and places. This artistic collage has multiple effects, for it fragments the written text and distracts the reader but also personalizes and validates his experiences. Following Kacandes's ideas about *testimonio*, this fragmentation contributes to an oral effect in the text. Servín's use of textual interplays, however, sometimes overshadows his attempt to create a representative voice. His struggle between self-representation and representing an immigrant community, therefore, requires more attention from the reader to discern the text's testimonial message.

Servín first observes an immigrant community upon arriving in the South Bronx and coming face-to-face with the illusory "American Dream." While many immigrants leave home to escape poor living conditions, they might find themselves in similar situations in the United States. Servín, for example, comments on the violent sounds and scenes in the South Bronx and compares the area to his neighborhood in Mexico City: "El ordinario ritmo de vida es un *déjà vu* de mi adolescencia. La gente aquí vive con los mismos resentimientos y temores de quienes fueron mis vecinos durante quince años en [...] la ciudad de México. Gente pobre y muy pobre entre hampones y viciosos reincidentes. Todos esos barrios se parecen" (42). The realization that he has not escaped the past or poverty is disconcerting, yet his observation connects the immigrant community to the disenfranchised in Mexico and around the world. Servín also describes the different immigrant groups, mainly Puerto Ricans, Dominicans and Mexicans, that he encounters in the South Bronx. In comparison to Pérez, he experiences a different immigrant population with distinct social and ethnic hierarchies, especially considering that Puerto Ricans are U.S. citizens. He notes that the "jerarquías migratorias" are apparent from "las banderas

nacionales [que] ondeaban en ventanas” and from their different ways of speaking (27).

Recognizing the differences within this population, including his own uniqueness, and also acknowledging their shared immigrant experience is a common theme throughout Servín’s text.

For Servín, this common experience is evident through the work immigrants perform to support the “American way of life,” and he encounters an immigrant community traveling to and from work. In one of his first experiences riding the subway in New York City he notices that the passengers are “casi todos hispanos rumbo a sus trabajos. Un botín para la ‘migra’” (32). In a similar situation he comments on the Amtrak passengers that travel to the city’s suburban areas for work. He writes, “[...] el Amtrak transportaba cientos de cocineros, meseros, sirvientas, nanas y albañiles,” all “sirvientas que emigraron de países empujados de por vida al Banco Mundial” (103). He goes on to describe the atmosphere on the train:

Nuestros rostros reflejaban de dónde veníamos, a dónde íbamos y lo que pensábamos de una vida como la nuestra. Silenciosos, nadie hacía conversación con los demás a menos que estuviera perdido. Algunos dormitaban, otros perdían sus miradas en el vacío y aquellos con menos tiempo en el país, iban agobiados por la preocupación de descifrar los cavernosos mensajes de los altoparlantes anunciando la próxima estación o la ruta del tren. (104)

Servín’s use of the *nosotros* form evokes a collectivity in which he positions himself, and his description notes a somewhat tense atmosphere that highlights the routine and mundane existence of undocumented workers. While Servín usually describes this collectivity as Latino, he also incorporates non-Latinos into “la república mundial de jornaleros sin papeles” (50), such as the “hindú cincuentón” he befriends while working at the gas station (182-83). Thus, because he envisions a more global collectivity and does not identify himself as part of a specific

community like Pérez's Macuilianguis, Servín's *testimonio* is more fragmented and less representative of a specific group.

Like Pérez, however, Servín gives testimony to situations of oppression and marginalization by describing his various jobs and encounters with other immigrant workers. At Servín's first job in the city, he earns six dollars per hour at an Italian restaurant. He forms part of "la gente de la cocina," primarily Latinos, while the "staff gringo" takes care of the customers (66). He complains about the lack of comradery between the two groups by commenting, "todos a lo suyo sin importarles lo que hicieran los otros" (84), and compares his job to a similar situation in Mexico: "Recordé que en México trabajando como carnicero de restaurante caro, los meseros repartían algo de sus ganancias entre los de la cocina y el encargado. Aquí pura madre. Ya era suficiente con que nos dirigieran la palabra" (84). This flashback not only highlights his complaint about the other workers but also serves as an example of inscribed orality in the text.

Servín endures similar ethnic hierarchies at his other jobs. He and one of his coworkers at Mobile, for example, have a disagreement with a client who refuses to pay for his gasoline, so they call the police (213). Servín notes that, while listening to their allegations, the cop "interrumpía para recordarnos que no éramos *Americans* y con ello insinuaba nuestra condición de braceros" (214-15). Although in the end the client is forced to pay, Servín and his coworker feel "castigados por la justicia de un pueblo obstinado en disimular sus castas" (215). The protagonist becomes acutely aware of this underlying racism and his different status while working as a nanny. He writes, "Estaba convertido en un criado con uniforme de lujo gracias a los regalos de una familia con mucho dinero. [...] Para comer filetes y ganarme unos dólares tenía que trabajar para quienes no tenían otro mérito que ser benévolos a cambio de no cargar sobre sus espaldas culpas y una soledad" (93). This quotation highlights Servín's frustration as

an undocumented worker and underscores the sociocultural and economic displacement that he, and immigrants in general, experience as the “other.” His different jobs show that, even though the situation may change, undocumented workers are treated as second-class citizens and suffer a loss of agency in the United States.

Polarizing differences between unauthorized immigrants and citizens carry over to hierarchies among immigrant workers. Conflicts may arise between recent arrivals and more established immigrants, between those who are “legal” and those who are not or between different ethnic groups. For example, when Servín signs on for extra work to earn more money at the restaurant, several of the Latino kitchen workers wait around to give him a warning. The head cook advises him not to be so eager: “Se ve que no tienes mucho tiempo en esto. Al principio así es uno: ganoso, queriendo quedar bien. Lo malo es que perjudicas a los demás” (85). The realization that his gain is another person’s loss highlights a lack of solidarity among immigrant workers. Recreating the dialogue between Servín and the other workers also fictionalizes an oral discourse.

While others may perceive him as a threat, Servín also distinguishes himself from other *braceros*, his most common word for immigrant workers. He describes them as “casi siempre desconfiados y hostiles” and then readily admits, “tenían razón en desconfiar de mí” (80). He reasons, “Siempre solo, me emborrachaba entre semana y nunca hablaba de planes para traer a mi familia a Estados Unidos” (80). In addition to not worrying about a family left behind, he does not nostalgically pine for Mexico nor can he relate to the desire to legalize one’s status. He even asks the other workers, “¿Por qué siguen aquí?” (83), to which they respond, “[d]ólares, comodidades y servicios de eficacia” (83). Servín comments on this addiction to dollars at several moments in the narration and recognizes his own “amor al dólar” (188) as time

progresses. He writes, “El dinero me amarraba a la rutina, volviéndome como los demás, pero peor, porque siempre estaba dispuesto a darles la espalda en cuanto querían hacerme cómplice de su condena” (135). Thus, the protagonist is only willing to identify with other braceros up to a certain point. His feelings of difference, perhaps superiority, represent a testimonial non-compliance, for he recognizes that he is an “outsider” and an “insider” of the very group he is trying to represent. Framing his resistance as part of the unevenness of the entire community, however, softens his contradictory reactions to this same group.

Servín tries to counter this lack of solidarity by reaching out to immigrants and other marginalized individuals through his narration. While his interest in reading and writing may separate him from other immigrant workers, writing his *testimonio* forces him to deal with the very reality he wants to escape. It also provides a social space to make the immigrant community visible. After getting fired from his nanny job and moving back to the South Bronx, Servín explicitly mentions writing about his experiences in the United States: “Estaba decidido a probar suerte enviando crónicas a revistas y periódicos mexicanos. Escribir me ayudaba a reunir tiempo para mí. Intentaba organizar parte de lo que había vivido hasta entonces en Estados Unidos” (117). He recalls feeling lost upon arriving in New York City and enrolling in English classes to facilitate his adaptation. He first enrolls in “un curso de inglés vespertino en una escuela pública [...] llena de indocumentados y egresados de preparatoria con bajo rendimiento académico,” but quickly switches to “las clases de literatura” (117-18). His love of reading, therefore, facilitates his skills in English and allows him to practice writing. The teacher responds to one paper in particular by commenting that he is a “*borderliner*, refiriéndose a [sus] resultados en clase” (187). Her comment has a profound impact on the protagonist, reminding him that he is part of an extended immigrant community. He writes, “Me gustó el adjetivo.

Significaba mucho. Mexicano. Todos los días hordas de todas partes del mundo venían por su pedazo de sueño. Muchas lo conseguían con un empleo como el mío. A otras ‘la migra’ las despertaba antes de tiempo, [...]. *Yo era uno más*” (187, emphasis added). Writing about his U.S. experiences thus forces Servín to look beyond himself and to identify with a larger immigrant collectivity.

In addition to representing the experiences of people he meets, Servín also dedicates two chapters to the deaths of two marginalized individuals who are unknown to him. In Chapter four, he describes the death of Leo, a homeless man who is killed in a drive-by shooting, and in chapter six, he details the murder of Monika Beerle, a 24-year-old immigrant from Switzerland.⁶ He gives a journalistic account of both murders and utilizes the style of Mexico’s *nota roja* to explain Monika’s murder. Her death, in particular, comments on the alluring affects of the “American Dream” because she arrived in the United States “aspirante a bailarina clásica” but ended up working at a topless bar where she met her future killer (69-70). Perhaps, including her story serves as a warning to the potential dangers of immigrating to the United States. Servín’s pessimistic and cynical tone in general and his sarcastic reference to the “American Dream” as a “pesadilla” (50) also support the argument that he wants to communicate the harsh reality of living in the United States as an undocumented immigrant. Interestingly, he aligns himself with a non-Latino immigrant to emphasize this point and to make it a global issue. The attention he gives to Leo’s death broadens his scope even more and suggests that he wants to denaturalize violent hierarchies and speak for marginalized individuals in general, for he doubts that Leo’s murder “alcanzara lugar en alguna esquina del *New York Post*” (44). He also refers to Leo as “el homeless” and describes his death as a “*drive by shooting*” (44), thus inserting English words and colloquial sayings into the text to emphasize an inscribed orality. As shown with both of these

examples, *Por amor al dólar* can offer solidarity and advice to immigrants, and it may also serve as a voice for those, like Leo, who slip through the cracks of mainstream U.S. society.

Servín ultimately decides to leave the United States because of his dissatisfaction and disillusion with living as an undocumented worker in this country. He wants to save as much money as possible and ends up working two jobs: one at the Stanwich, an exclusive golf club in Greenwich, and another at the Mobil gas station. He works “dieciocho horas repartidas entre el Stanwich y la Mobil” (140), earning “ciento cincuenta dólares diarios” (138), and even shares an apartment with his sister to save on rent money. While Servín takes advantage of opportunities in the United States, he is disappointed with his contributions to the U.S. economy, which he refers to as “un mercado de delirios” (60). Despite his frustrations, he does not close the door on New York completely and writes, “Pienso volver a Nueva York algún día. El FBI anda a la caza de peces más gordos” (217). After making light of his undocumented status, Servín leaves the reader with these final words: “Viajar es una oportunidad de desprenderme de mí mismo y de recuerdos. Un vuelo charter me esperaba en unas cuantas horas” (228). Although earlier in the text he hints at returning to Europe, the open ending leaves the reader guessing where his flight is headed and wondering about his next adventure. Consequently, he incorporates one final moment of textual resistance, leaving the reader in the dark.

While both Pérez and Servín opt for temporary stays in the United States, the protagonist of *Los perros de Cook Inlet* decides to stay permanently. This last work has an open ending like *Por amor al dólar*, but instead of traveling to an unknown European destination, the protagonist of *Los perros de Cook Inlet* leaves Alaska and travels back to the contiguous United States in the fourth and final chapter. The previous chapters are structured according to the various places he visits, where he encounters a multitude of bohemian and international characters as well as harsh

geographical conditions. Chapter one focuses on his journey to Alaska and his work on the fishing boat, whereas chapters two and three describe his experiences while living in Anchorage and Elmendorf, Alaska. While the first two chapters portray the transitory environment of his migrant experience, the narrator begins to describe people and places in more detail in the third chapter. This noticeable change suggests that he has become more comfortable with his surroundings, both culturally and linguistically. For example, there is a pause in the narration when he goes on a camping trip with his friend Matt and describes the details of this adventure. It is one of the rare occasions in the text when the narrator is not concerned with work or money, and it becomes a moment of reflection for both the protagonist and the reader. The narrator, thus, emphasizes a process of experience as the text progresses through a linear, retrospective narration that shifts to a simultaneous narration in the fourth chapter, which allows him to reflect on his migrant adventure as he is leaving Alaska and also adds an oral effect by narrating in the present.

Mexican literary critic Vicente Quirarte confirms that *Los perros de Cook Inlet* is autobiographical having interviewed the author about the text and his experiences in Alaska.⁷ However, unlike the other two works already discussed, López Fernández never explicitly identifies himself as the protagonist of the text nor does he preface the work with an explicative note defining it as a *testimonio*. Furthermore, the protagonist's name is never revealed, be it López Fernández or otherwise, thereby protecting his anonymity. Moments of textual resistance such as these highlight the speaker's non-compliance, even though the representation of his experiences and his references to an immigrant community suggest a testimonial project. In an attempt to respect this resistance, I will refer to the testimonial voice as the narrator rather than López Fernández.

Los perros de Cook Inlet also incorporates textual interplays that emphasize the tension between an inscribed orality and the written word. For one, the language shifts from providing direct descriptions of the protagonist's immigrant journey and recreating dialogues to a poetic style that pauses the narrative action and often inserts an oral rhyme. López Fernández initiates the text with two epigraphs, with one from a knife engraving and the other from an Eskimo song. These unconventional epigraphs thus highlight an inscribed orality in the written word. Like Servín, López Fernández also includes literary references that reflect his reading experience and confirm his position in the lettered community. They range from Miguel Cervantes's famous *Don Quijote* and the Spanish philosopher José Ortega y Gasset to the U.S. poets Walt Whitman and Allen Ginsberg. While these references may distance López Fernández from an immigrant community and show his status as an "outsider," they may be an attempt to connect with the reader, by establishing that he too is a reader. Referencing individuals who write in Spanish and English may also represent a bridge between two cultures. Along with these literary references, however, López Fernández also mentions examples of popular culture, specifically musical performers like the Grateful Dead and Jethro Tull. Combining examples of written and oral cultures, therefore, forces the reader to take note of such textual tensions. This narrative technique also provides the reader with a shifting perspective of the immigrant experience, positioning her between two worlds, much like the protagonist finds himself in a hybrid space in the United States.

In *Los perros de Cook Inlet*, the autodiegetic narrator tells his story as an undocumented Mexican worker in the Alaskan fishing industry during nine months in 1990. This retrospective narration describes working on the fishing boats and in the canneries and provides an insider's view of the migrant experience in Alaska. Because Alaska is one of the most remote and

peripheral parts of the United States, the narrator's experience registers the shifting migratory patterns of Latin American workers after 1986, who become part of the fishing industry's global community with migrant workers from all over the world. The narrator connects his status as an undocumented worker to a larger immigrant collectivity by describing his jobs, coworkers and friends as well as the general tensions in the fishing industry at the end of the millennium. While grappling with immigrant stereotypes imposed by dominant socio-political discourses, he negotiates his subjectivity and relationships with others and also explores his identity as a writer. The narrator is conscious of the writing process in the last chapter and reflects on the difficulties of telling his story and remaining true to his experiences:

Voy terminando de escribir mi viaje [...]. Lucho por recordar para que no sean hoy las ausencias, poder hablar de aquello, como crear un personaje al que vas llevando, toma soltura, crece a su albedrío. Pero de pronto dejas de pensar en él, las cosas te suceden a ti, él vive a merced de tu recuerdo y no hay recuerdo, ya no cabes en ti. (114)

By using the trope of the double, the narrator highlights the problem of self-representation. This struggle also alludes to the difficulties of representing a collectivity, and, at times, the two may be contradictory, as shown with *Por amor al dólar*.

Similar to the other two testimonialists discussed, the narrator of *Los perros de Cook Inlet* conveys his status as an undocumented immigrant from the first page of the text. He writes:

Llegué a Dutch Harbor una de las ínfimas tardes del invierno del noventa [...]. No pensé ni siquiera en gastarme los ochenta dólares que costaba el hotel; llevaba conmigo una tienda de compañía que había pasado la prueba en la Baja, donde

estuve esperando a un tipo que venía de Los Ángeles con mi tarjeta verde y mi seguro social. (9)

His possession of falsified work documents and his arrival from Baja California, Mexico to work for six months on the fishing boat *Pacific Producer* confirm his position as a migrant worker.

The narrator also hints at his economic limitations and later emphasizes his material motivations for traveling to Alaska. He comments, “No tengo muy claro si un hombre puede llegar a ser feliz, pero sí que puede hacerse rico. Eso lo tenía muy claro, me iba a buscar el oro al lugar del oro, aunque para mí estuviera éste en los pescados y no en la criba de la arena” (9). Because of his undocumented status, the narrator maintains a safe distance from others and also manifests insecurities about his English-language skills. In Elmendorf, the protagonist meets and befriends Louis, a local who works on the fishing boats. When he learns about the death of Louis’s wife and daughter in a car accident, the narrator wants to console him but is stopped by his linguistic and cultural insecurities: “Yo quería dar ese gran paso y acercarme a Louis en su pena [...]. Quería irresponsablemente preguntar, como si fuera posible que un pinche güey que ni siquiera habla tu idioma, [...], pudiera realmente escucharte” (63). This example illustrates a negotiation within the contact zone, for there is a conflicting cultural distance between the narrator’s experiences as an undocumented Spanish-speaking migrant worker in the fishing industry and Louis’s reality as an English-speaking team leader on the fishing boats. His use of *tú*, or the informal you, creates an oral effect as if the reader were listening to their conversation, which establishes a familiarity with the reader and draws him or her into the contact zone.

As an undocumented worker, the narrator is hesitant to divulge personal information regarding his identity and immigrant status because he is extremely vulnerable to the perceptions and actions of others. Remaining anonymous is a security measure and an act of resistance, so

he never reveals information about the past or his family and friends in Mexico. His personal contacts in Alaska and the reader are kept on a need-to-know basis. During his stay in Elmendorf, the narrator and his friend Sergio, also a Mexican immigrant, befriend two brothers who want to help them better adjust to life in Alaska. However, they are reluctant to accept help: “El hermano quería informarse para ver cómo ayudarnos, si es que éramos ilegales o algo por el estilo, pues decía que era muy raro que anduviéramos por allí de hacía tan poco y ya fuéramos, como insistíamos nosotros, amparados. Entre el idioma que se escapa, [...], nos quedábamos inconclusos” (77). Their false claim to amnesty highlights a fear of deportation and an unwillingness to reveal the reality about their situation in the United States, for exposing the truth to their new friends would threaten their opportunity to earn a living and remain in Alaska. Towards the end of the text, the narrator suggests that concealing personal information, including his name, has been intentional. He writes, “No tengo nombre, lo digo si me lo preguntan pero no lo pienso” (115). The enigma of the narrator’s identity creates silences in the narration that speak volumes about immigrant experiences in the United States. His anonymity evokes an immigrant collectivity by hinting at the unknown identities of immigrants who have been silenced and dehumanized within mainstream media and socio-political discourses. His resistance to individual representation thus creates visibility and catches the reader’s attention by highlighting invisibility.

The narrator’s interactions with and descriptions of other workers in the fishing industry represent a diverse and growing Latino population in Alaska that reflects the general trends of post-World War II migration. For one, the narrator recognizes a shift in traditional migratory patterns and emphasizes a strong presence of other Latin American immigrants on the boat: “Quienes llegaron eran en su mayoría latinos, con cinco o siete años yendo de California a

Chicago, de la pizca del durazno a la limpieza de oficinas en los suburbios [...]. Ahora en el barco se trabajaba más duro, se sabía quiénes eran los otros y se hablaba en español” (32). Their common language and immigrant experience make it easy for them to form a community, and the narrator plays an active role in this collectivity. While on the fishing boat, he befriends a small group of Latinos, mainly from Mexico, and, on the mainland, he plays with “La Raza, un equipo de puro latino en la liga de soccer de Anchorage” (69). Despite participating in the community, the narrator communicates inner feelings of isolation and solitude and also recognizes tensions among the other workers. After a fight among several of his friends, he expresses a constant need to protect himself: “El trabajo de labrar cada relación y cuidarte la espalda sin que lo noten, cuidados y cuidados y alegrías del mar” (35). This quotation is a good example of the poetic language with an oral rhyme that López Fernández often uses to describe his experiences.

The protagonist decides to leave the boat and lives a somewhat nomadic existence, traveling to Anchorage and then Elmendorf, finding odd jobs along the way and often sleeping at a friend’s house. Even at the end of the text, he is on the move on a bus headed east through Montana. The narrator’s constant movement and feeling of isolation reveal an emergent paradigm within the context of contemporary society, for globalization has led to fragmented societies because of increased movement and displacement of individuals in search of better opportunities. The narrator comments on this fragmented reality: “[...] el abrazo de los hombres es una idea y cada día, frente a la realidad de nuestros movimientos y nuestras facturas, abandonamos lo que podría unirnos” (45). Ironically, his use of the first-person plural speaks of a collectivity, albeit a fragmented one, and he seems to characterize societies in general as

migratory. Thus, he positions himself both inside and outside of a global immigrant community while emphasizing the disjunctures and dislocations of society.

Similar to Pérez and Servín, López Fernández describes how Latino workers in the fishing industry negotiate discrimination and established hierarchies within labor practices. Ethnicity and citizenship are the two main characteristics by which the narrator identifies social biases. For example, he emphasizes that “los muchachos americanos [...] con sus papeles buenos” have more opportunities than undocumented workers (32). He also takes into account education and experience: “Nunca fui cortador; había indios pies negros y filipinos que venían de la planta central en Seattle, educados, precisos y rápidos” (75). As the most recent arrivals with the least experience, Latinos seem to occupy the lowest paying jobs, making them more susceptible to discrimination. The narrator is faced with such biases when working at the cannery in Elmendorf. While his boss is Native American and goes by “Chief,” his name becomes an ironic play on words after the narrator describes the poster hanging in his office: “There is only one Chief here, the rest are Indians” (81). The narrator proceeds to give the details of his conversation with “Chief” when he is hired at the cannery: “Me dijo bato y me contrató. Y me dijo espalda mojada y se reía y él sabía que no había broma alguna, pero reía, reía de saber que cada cosa tiene su lugar y que darle su lugar a cada cosa es saber que todas caben” (81). The fact that his boss laughs about these inappropriate comments, despite his own minority status within mainstream U.S. culture, illustrates his own participation in discriminatory practices and abuse of asymmetrical power relations. He maintains power by devaluing and exploiting the workers, part of which includes sixteen-hour work days spent separating six different types of salmon, one of which the narrator calls “los perros” (75). This comment helps explain the title of the text because Cook Inlet forms part of the Gulf of Alaska that turns into a

port near Anchorage. However, the narrator also compares the fish to the workers at the cannery. He writes, “No era tan fácil separarlos, trabajábamos seis tipos de salmón y tres de ellos comparten características muy semejantes. [...] Más fáciles de distinguir éramos los trabajadores” (75-76). Because of this comparison, the title takes on a double meaning in which “perros” also refers to the workers who were forced to work like “dogs.” Thus, the title of López Fernández’s *testimonio* evokes a collectivity of minority workers, including Latino immigrants, bound together by difficult working conditions and situations of oppression.

Because the narrator is aware of biased labor practices, he uses humor to diffuse discriminatory attitudes and undercut stereotypical perceptions. While hanging out at a local bar with his friend Louis, the protagonist creatively subverts the stereotype of Mexican immigrants by convincing the locals that he is actually from Russia. His donning of a Russian identity is understandable considering the influx of Russians within the fishing industry, but it is also a provocative choice keeping in mind leftover attitudes from the Cold War. Despite possible tensions, however, the narrator’s newfound Russianness enables him to garner the locals’ trust and expose their misconceptions about Mexicans:

Yo me hacía pasar por un ruso, por lo que los alaskaños estaban exultantes. Brindaban conmigo en la gran alianza y yo saludaba a la democracia y a la libertad de un pueblo tan generoso. Me contaron un par de estúpidos chistes sobre mexicanos y celebraron mi aprobación. “Realmente esos mexicanos son una plaga insaciable, ustedes los rusos se parecen más a nosotros, hablamos el mismo idioma porque ustedes llegan con agradecimiento, no forman comunidades periféricas y comen cosas como las que nosotros comemos”. (64)

While the protagonist performs his role as a Russian, he proudly sings karaoke to “Cielito lindo,” a song about Mexican nationalism, and proceeds to order a round of tequila for everyone in the group (64). In an attempt to assure the reader, the narrator states, “Pero no hubo problema, ellos entendían que en Rusia enseñaron en las escuelas ‘Cielito lindo’” (65). This humorous scene pokes fun at the locals and shows their ignorance while making a poignant commentary on the stereotypical images of Mexican immigrants during the nineties. They are seen as the outsiders because they are different from the locals, and, more importantly, comparing them to a plague reveals the extreme fear of being overtaken and wiped out by Mexicans. One also notes the inscribed orality in this passage, for López Fernández uses a popular song and recreates dialogue to communicate his message. The biting humor of this scene delivers a clear message about dominant socio-cultural perceptions of Mexican immigrants in the United States.

The narrator’s peripheral surroundings in Alaska and his experiences with nature serve as an allegory for the multiple forces that contribute to his marginalization. As his relationship with nature transforms, his uneasiness about being an unauthorized immigrant also changes, which is reinforced by place. For example, he starts out on the boat, a metaphor for liminality, then transfers to mainland Alaska and eventually the continental United States as he progressively adapts to his new reality. While on the boat, the narrator describes his own feelings of helplessness compared to the power of the sea when a storm prevents him and the others from working and earning money. He is especially taken by the sea’s patience: “[...] la paciencia del mar, que es la mayor de todas y que se transmite a quienes en él habitan” (30). The narrator’s vulnerability to nature is further exposed when he falls trying to climb a mountain. He defeats his fears when he repeats this adventure at the end of the text and climbs to the top. He writes, “Mi estancia en Alaska iba concluyendo y sería una derrota no llegar hasta arriba, costara el

absurdo que costara” (106). Reaching the top of the mountain can be interpreted literally and metaphorically, for the mountain could also represent his experience as an undocumented migrant worker. Either way, the narrator clearly gains more confidence as he spends time in Alaska and even consults a lawyer about legalizing his status.

His goals to survive and gain material wealth are overtaken by his personal motivations to take control of his own destiny and forge a new path. As a result, the narrator decides to leave Alaska and explore his options in the continental United States. The simple task of buying his own bus ticket communicates his openness to change, and his concluding thoughts while traveling through Montana express this attitude: “Es arriesgado confiarle a un chofer nuestro destino, oh captain, lo mejor es comprar un boleto en la terminal y subirse al camión indicado” (118). The use of the phrase “oh captain” in English recalls Walt Whitman’s famous poem “Oh Captain! My Captain!,” which was written in honor of Abraham Lincoln after his untimely death (“Groundbreaking”). The association of Lincoln with the Civil War makes a powerful connection between the rights of slaves and those of immigrants. The poem also refers to the end of an adventure and a fight, much like the narrator’s journey in Alaska is coming to a close. Furthermore, a reference to Walt Whitman emphasizes the narrator’s privileged position as a *letrado*, but the poem’s orality reinforced by the exclamation points in the title once again highlights the tension between the two.

By leaving the reader with an open ending while traveling through Montana, the narrator indicates a number of possibilities for his future. He never states a desire or need to return to Mexico, which suggests that he has decided to reside in the United States. He likens his stay in Alaska to a spiral “que se trenza de nuevo y se cierra al abrirse” (109). Hence, he is closing the chapter on Alaska but opening a new one to the future. Upon returning to the continental United

States, or the “mundo sujeto a la rotación de los polos” (114), his life begins again after a nine-month parenthesis. The narrator’s optimism at the end (or beginning) of his immigrant journey emphasizes that *Los perros de Cook Inlet* has a different focus and reflection than *Por amor al dólar* and *Diario de un mojado*. López Fernández keeps his eye on the “American Dream” and seems much more interested in establishing himself in the United States. Thus, his *testimonio* may connect with and extend cultural citizenship to a different group of immigrant Latinos than the other two works, by validating the experiences of undocumented workers who decide to stay in the United States. While all three works touch on similar aspects of the immigrant experience, they reach out to different groups by focusing on different issues. Pérez is more interested in ethnicity among immigrant workers because of his ties to Macuiltianguis whereas Servín is more interested in the exploitation of immigrants as victims of a capitalist society. López Fernández departs from both by focusing more on issues of class and adaptation. All three show that self, other and community are floating concepts constituted at different sites of culture, place and power.

As testimonial narrations, *Diario de un mojado*, *Por amor al dólar* and *Los perros de Cook Inlet* contradict hegemonic narrations of the nation by offering personal accounts of the undocumented immigrant experience in the United States. By offering an insider perspective, they align with a recent boom in memoirs, autobiographies and other personal narratives about migration, which provide an alternative angle to the “official” story depicted in media reports, political debates and historiographical accounts. Each *testimonio* also connects the personal to the collective by imagining a community and showing that issues of belonging cut across national, class, and racial/ethnic lines. Although classifying these texts as prosaic *testimonios* helps ground some of the issues surrounding this illusive narrative form, they do have

limitations. They privilege the male immigrant experience without representing the unique difficulties of female immigrants or immigrant children, and, even as published works, they have a limited audience in readers of Spanish. Even so, Pérez, Servín and López Fernández should not be overlooked as valuable voices shedding light on the immigrant experience shared by many undocumented Mexican and Latino workers in the United States.

Notes

¹ Kimberly A. Nance also traces the beginning of Latin America's *testimonio* to the 1960s in her pivotal study *Can Literature Promote Justice? Trauma Narrative and Social Action in Latin American testimonio*. She specifically cites Esteban Montejo and Miguel Barnet's *Biografía de un cimarrón* (1966) as the cultural form's most referenced foundational text, while extending the honor of the first testimonial text to a lesser known work, *Quarto de despejo* (1960), from Brazilian writer Carolina María de Jesus (1-2). For a thorough listing of Latin American testimonial narratives from the 1960s, 70s, 80s and 90s, see Nance's annotated chronology (167-78).

² Nance also lists the antecedents of the contemporary *testimonio* in her chronology. In addition to those mentioned by Beverley, she cites abolitionist testimony and testimony from the Holocaust as sibling genres to Latin America's testimonial narrative (167-68).

³ John Beverley makes the same connection between the *testimonio* and Pratt's use of autoethnography (xiii).

⁴ According to Renee M. Brooks from the *Houston Chronicle*, the text evolved from a two-part story published in *Texas Monthly* in May and June of 1984.

⁵ For a more detailed definition of transnational migration, see *Towards a Transnational Perspective on Migration*, edited by Nina Glick Schiller, Linda Basch and Cristina Blanc-Szanton. I did not find a specific study dealing with the transnationality of San Pablo Macuilianguis, however, social scientists Wayne Cornelius, David Fitzgerald, Jorge Hernández-Díaz and Scott Borger look at the transnational ties between San Diego and the Oaxacan community San Miguel Tlacotepec in their recent study *Migration from the Mexican Mixteca*.

⁶ While I was unable to confirm Leo's death, Monika Beerle's murder was a real event that occurred in New York City in August, 1989 (Dunning).

⁷ Quirarte focuses on the protagonist's stay in Alaska as an adventure rather than a migrant experience: "[...] que su aventura vital sea lo más importante y sobre la marcha asistamos a un aprendizaje donde la realidad esperada es lo más sorprendente" ("ser *Alguien más*"). As a result, my analysis of the novel as an immigrant narrative offers an important reading of this relatively unknown and recent work.

Chapter 2

An Aesthetic of Orality in Postwar Narratives

about Salvadoran Immigrant Experiences

While the testimonial form has dominated much late twentieth-century Central American literature and provided a space for the recent self-representation of Mexican immigrant experiences, since the 1990s Central America has also experienced a boom in fictional narrative. This increase is due to the end of civil wars in El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Guatemala and the perceived failure of leftist political agendas and social utopian projects. During the revolutionary years of the 1970s and 80s, testimonial writing, as the privileged form of expression in Central America, was linked to grassroots movements, offering an alternative to the “official” story and giving voice to the subaltern.¹ Literary critic Beatriz Cortez explains that fiction suffered in comparison because it was considered propaganda for “un proyecto de alienación cultural [...] la ficción fue vista con frecuencia como un instrumento para evadir la urgencia de la realidad centroamericana” (“Estética”).² The postwar period, however, has allowed writers to explore how literature and politics may be connected in ways beyond the testimonial and to reevaluate the role of fictional narrative. Although “new” literary projects continue to examine important social issues, such as violence, urban life, immigration and national identity, the release from “truth telling” or “witnessing” allows authors to imagine the nation and its citizens in creative ways. For Cortez, postwar literature, like testimonial writing, still offers a critical perspective, but it has exchanged idealism for cynicism, a style she identifies as “an aesthetic of cynicism” (“Estética”).³ This chapter will explore this postwar disenchantment in a particular context: El Salvador and see how it pertains to the immigrant situations represented in Horacio Castellanos Moya’s *El asco: Thomas Bernhard en San Salvador* (1997), Mario Bencastro’s *Odisea del Norte*

(1999), and Claudia Hernández's "La han despedido de nuevo" from her collection *Olvida uno* (2005). By creating different voices and fictionalizing orality, these three texts dialogue with the testimonial form to tell stories about Salvadoran immigrants and, through their fictional representations of immigrant experiences, they also question national identity and criticize the postwar reality, thereby re-imagining the Salvadoran transnational community.

Focusing on *El asco*, *Odisea del Norte*, and "La han despedido de nuevo" broadens the argument presented in chapter one. It allows us to examine the convergences and divergences between testimonial writing and fictional narrative, while combining Mexico and Central America also distinguishes this project from other studies that only look at the representation of Mexican migration. Arturo Arias has called attention to the marginalization of Central American literature within Spanish and Latin American Studies Departments in the United States, which he sees as an element in the general invisibility of Central Americans in the United States (*Taking* 184-200). Because Central Americans in the U.S. are often mistakenly identified as Mexican or erased by the categories of "Hispanic" and "Latino," Arias proposes the term "Central American-Americans" to better identify their presence and influence in the North. Thus this chapter heeds Arias's advice by broadening our focus on migration to include fictional narratives of Central Americans. Since it is impossible to cover all of the countries in the region, my analysis will use El Salvador as an exemplary case and focus on representations of these immigrants who constitute the largest Central American group in both the United States and Canada.⁴

The three narratives considered here depict a wide range of Salvadoran experiences. *El asco* highlights the difficulties of reverse migration by representing the negative reactions of an immigrant who returns to postwar El Salvador after living in Canada for eighteen years. Arias describes the novel as the most representative text of Central American postwar disillusion (23),

and I agree that the novel's biting criticism and pessimism capture an extreme disenchantment with Salvadoran society that is represented to a lesser degree in the other texts discussed here. In contrast to *El asco*, *Odisea del Norte*, and "La han despedido de nuevo" represent the more commonly seen trajectory, from El Salvador to the United States. *Odisea del Norte* focuses on the figure of the political refugee by weaving together the story of Calixto, who travels to Washington, D.C. to escape the Salvadoran military, with stories of other immigrants. "La han despedido de nuevo" departs from the male world of migrants to represent the experiences of several Salvadoran women in New York City who come into contact with women from all over the world. As we will see, these narratives allow readers to re-imagine postwar scenarios through the creative lens of fiction.

In his essay *Recuento de incertidumbres*, Castellanos Moya defends the role of fiction in El Salvador by suggesting that fictional narrative is just as important as revolutionary action when thinking critically about the nation. He writes:

La ficción como ejercicio de libertad, como práctica de invención, asusta a quienes quieren controlarlo, a aquellos para quienes la imaginación debe "ajustarse a las necesidades de la revolución" [...] la ficción es una rica fuente de conocimiento y proyección nacional, y que —como sostiene Mario Vargas Llosa— "la literatura no describe a los países: los inventa." (67)

Here Castellanos Moya emphasizes the creative power of the imagination in its ability to engage writers and readers. Whereas testimonial writing's connection to truth brings ethical issues to the forefront, fiction may showcase the art of storytelling by using aesthetic elements to invite readers to imagine or fantasize about unknown situations. Fiction can also call attention to important social issues, which is the case with *El asco*, *Odisea del Norte*, and "La han despedido

de nuevo,” however, these works invite readers to investigate the complexities of language and the constructed nature of the text more than the testimonial-based works in chapter one. The former include more elements from traditional novels, such as stream of consciousness narration and psychological development of characters, and they also establish critical distance from the topic of migration, allowing for techniques like parody to present larger, philosophical questions about meaning that *testimonio* tends to side step. Furthermore, the texts in chapter one use dedications, forwards and photographs to underscore the lived experiences of the author-narrators, while the works analyzed here do the opposite, highlighting their invented quality. Bencastro, for example, precedes his novel with this statement, “Esta es una obra de creación literaria en que ciertos acontecimientos, combinados con situaciones y personajes de la invención del autor, se narran en forma ficticia” (*Odisea*). He highlights the words “creation” and “invention” from the outset.

The creative use of language is an important characteristic of the fictional works considered here, for they emphasize the intricacies of communication and perspective by using different voices and contrasting ways of representing orality. Rafael Lara-Martinez suggests that reflecting on the use of language is critical for El Salvador’s postwar literary project and its commitment to telling stories (“Cultura”). Similarly, Castellanos Moya cites the renovation of language as one of the key challenges for reinventing fiction in El Salvador (*Recuento* 68). In an interview in 2002, the writer explained that in several of his novels, such as *El asco* and *La diabla en el espejo* (2000), he uses an extreme verbosity with long, subordinated sentences to represent the uniqueness of Salvadoran language and its spoken form (Tenorio 937). In *El asco*, in particular, this spoken language is represented as a conversation between the narrator and the protagonist, and the use of the informal “vos” implicates the reader in this same conversation. In

a similar fashion, Hernández's "La han despedido de nuevo" also reads like a conversation. However, the story switches back and forth between first-, second- and third-person perspectives, incorporating a multitude of voices with few textual markers to signal a new voice, so they seem to run together, as if the reader were listening to a group of women chatting about their daily lives.

In *Odisea del Norte*, Bencastro incorporates different voices through a collage of oral testimonies, newspaper interviews, personal letters and informal conversations. In this way he juxtaposes multiple perspectives of the Salvadoran war and postwar realities, creating a dialogue between the distinct voices, which the personal account of a *testimonio* cannot do. Bencastro also utilizes theatrical techniques to highlight the different voices, thereby incorporating performative elements into the text. Furthermore, a third-person narrator is inserted into the fragmented novel at different moments, allowing for more psychological development than in testimonial works because the reader enters into the mind of Calixto and is privy to the way he thinks. In an interview with Barbara Mujica, Bencastro comments on his use of language. He states:

In the novel I also confront the problem of language and stylistic elaboration, and the game of words to express something in a way that is different but that will sound natural, clear and direct, so that the language will not come between the reader and the story but rather will be the element that unites them. ("Mario" 25)

Bencastro's description of writing as a "game of words" applies to the way all three writers call attention to language by using different narrative techniques that highlight their aesthetic creation of orality and the interplay between the spoken and written word.

While playing with language shapes El Salvador's postwar literary project, these authors' representations of orality grow out of past literary traditions. As previously mentioned, it is linked to the testimonial tradition since the *testimonio*, as we saw in chapter one, is usually an oral account recorded and transcribed by an outside intellectual who then compiles and edits the written text. During El Salvador's Civil War, immigrants often told their stories to help garner support for solidarity movements that worked to end the violence in Central America, thereby linking the migratory phenomenon to oral testimonies. As discussed in chapter one, in her 2005 study *Voices from the fuente viva*, Amy Naus Millay connects the testimonial form to an oral genealogy of works from the colonial period like El Inca Garcilaso's *Comentarios Reales* and Felipe Guamán Poma de Ayala's hybrid text. Naus Millay is particularly interested in how all these forms negotiate two cultures, one oral and autochthonous, and the other characterized as superior for its writing system (11). One could extend her timeline by going back to the folktales and indigenous creation myths like the *Popol Vuh*, which recognize the pre-Hispanic oral tradition as an important part of cultural storytelling in the region. These examples show that the incorporation of the spoken word into written texts, which we will see in this chapter, represents the heterogeneity of Salvadoran culture and also displays continuities between past and present literary traditions.

Walter Ong looks at the evolution of orality and the privileging of the written word in Western cultures by emphasizing how writing, print capitalism and technology have impacted our understanding and processing of discourse. Following Plato's arguments, Ong suggests that the written word is artificial while orality is more natural and accessible (81). Ong is particularly interested in the role of memory and an understanding of time, for he argues that human experience is verbally processed as "embedded in the flow of time" rather than a linear storyline

(137-44). He uses the example of the epic poet who begins a story in *medias res* and skillfully weaves together his or her narrative. The three texts discussed here also utilize this strategy of oral narrative, plunging the reader into the middle of the story and requiring her to piece together the narrative.

Nauss Millay takes Ong's theory one step further, criticizing what she sees as his dualistic and dichotomized perception of the spoken and written word. She argues for a more fluid approach in order to understand interactions between the two as heterogeneous cultural expressions (17-18). Because orality is associated with "authentic" discourse, communal identity, and autochthonous culture, Nauss Millay suggests that inscribing the oral in written texts may be an attempt to subvert Western ideologies reinforced by writing culture rather than "a faithful expression of the *essence* of oral culture" (16-19).⁵ Incorporating rhetorical strategies like repetition, interjections, ellipses, rhetorical questions, and digressions may create an oral illusion, thereby fictionalizing orality and linguistically manipulating readers (141-42). Nauss Millay identifies writers who inscribe the oral as cross-cultural mediators because they negotiate different linguistic and cultural systems and also attempt to give voice to disenfranchised individuals, for "otherness, thematized as a return to the oral, is conveyed [...] through the fictionalization of oral discourse" (24). Her discussion of the idea of transculturation, (that is the simultaneous loss, absorption, and creation of cultural practices as cultures encounter one another), is particularly pertinent for this study because it is a phenomenon of the contact zone (Nauss Millay 14-15; Pratt 6). Thus, by fictionalizing orality to represent Salvadoran experiences, Castellanos Moya, Bencastro, and Hernández operate as cross-cultural mediators in their contact zones, displaying the tensions and negotiations of immigrant subjects who find themselves in-between two cultures. Their works create an aesthetic of orality and a space of

solidarity that offers cultural citizenship to marginalized individuals who may not have access to legal means of belonging.

The topic of migration has become an important part of the cultural conversation in El Salvador due to a massive exodus of the country's population during the 1980s. It is estimated that three million Central Americans, or fifteen percent of the region's total population, left their countries of origin between 1980 and 1989 because of violence and poverty (Robinson 206). El Salvador, in particular, has been one of the countries with the highest out-migrations, for an estimated twenty-five percent of the population left during the civil war between 1979 and 1992 (Gammage). The United States and Canada were popular destinations and, according to statistics in 2007 from the Migration Information Source, approximately 1.2 million Salvadorans now live in the United States and 39,000 are in Canada (Gammage). They currently make up the largest group of Central American immigrants in both countries (Davy; García, "Canada"). Although statistics skyrocketed during the eighties, migration has always been a part of the country's history, since with the expansion of coffee production after independence and then modernization and industrialization after World War II, immigrants traveled from rural to urban locations or to neighboring Honduras in search of work and economic opportunities (Hamilton and Stoltz Chinchilla 19-30). However, when relations between the adjacent countries became tense in 1969, approximately 200,000 Salvadorans were forced to leave Honduras (28). Since the seventies, then, Salvadorans have pushed further north into Guatemala, Mexico and the United States (28-29). Most of those who fled El Salvador during the eighties were looking for political refuge or economic opportunities due to fighting between the Salvadoran military, including U.S.-backed death squads, and leftist oppositional groups, such as the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front or FMLN. Between 1979 and 1992, the years of extreme violence and

repression, approximately 70,000 people were killed (Booth, Wade and Walker 108). During these same years, the economy worsened due to the fall of coffee prices and the exodus of capital, thereby leaving Salvadorans with few options (99-108). Immigration became an escape valve.

When the Peace Accords were signed in 1992, the Salvadoran government enacted a program of reform and reconstruction, including open elections. A neoliberal model of free-market economic policies was also adopted during the postwar years, including a shift to the U.S. dollar in 2001 and the approval of the Free Trade Agreement with the United States in 2006 (Booth, Wade and Walker 108-13; Martínez). These changes, however, have done little to improve conditions in El Salvador, for the economy has continued to struggle, relying on remittances from abroad, and the same political party, the anticommunist group ARENA, has maintained control of presidential elections since the war.⁶ The destruction caused by Hurricane Mitch in 1998 and two major earthquakes in 2001 have devastated the country's economic resources even more, and military violence from the civil war has transitioned into gang wars and civil unruliness, threatening the general population (Booth, Wade, and Walker 113). These conditions have also contributed to continuing emigration. While statistics have declined somewhat, figures from 2002 report that an estimated 25,000 people per year have continued to leave El Salvador since the conflict ended in 1992 (Gammage). This small Central American nation is now the second country in the hemisphere, after Mexico, with the highest amount of remittances sent from abroad (Gammage). Moreover, amnesty was awarded in 1993 to the government and military officials involved in the civil war, and so nobody has been held responsible for the many tragic deaths or for the sacrifices of separated families. By calling

attention to these traumas, narrative has become an important space of resistance, resilience and renegotiation.

Cultural critic Ana Patricia Rodríguez emphasizes the need for more cultural projects to honor those who died or left during the conflict. She criticizes the Salvadoran government's reform program, arguing that the implementation of a few institutional projects meant to represent a "culture of peace" does not recognize the enormous sacrifices made by the people nor do they encourage Salvadorans to deal with the social traumas of the past. Rodríguez is particularly critical of *El hermano lejano*, the monument in San Salvador designed to honor the country's emigrant population, because it focuses on remittances and material concerns rather than moral and ethical values ("Mozote"). In the same vein as Rodríguez, who emphasizes the importance of memory as the road to recovery, the cultural works discussed here memorialize El Salvador's violent past, postwar situation and diasporic population. *El asco*, *Odisea del Norte*, and "La han despedido de nuevo" help to flesh out the country's problems, including immigration, violence, and corruption, thereby encouraging a dialogue about these social traumas and contributing to a space of reconciliation.

These texts may reach people in different ways and attract diverse reading publics because each one represents a specific aspect of migration, such as the return trip in *El asco*, the political refugee in *Odisea del Norte* and the female experience in "La han despedido de nuevo." Because the contextual information is familiar, these narratives may especially appeal to Salvadoran readers who have either immigrated themselves or know somebody who has left El Salvador. These narratives may also speak to immigrants in general who can relate to the script of leaving (or returning) home and adapting to a new place. In this, they form a kind of "interpretive community," Stanley Fish's term for a reading group who share common social

structures and experiences (524). Responding, in part, to Fish, Wolfgang Iser suggests that the unfamiliar is just as important as the familiar when reading, citing the imagination as a powerful interpretive tool that enables readers to understand “foreign” situations. In “The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach,” Iser explains how readers use their imaginations to fill in textual gaps and to better understand a literary work (285-86). He writes,

The manner in which the reader experiences the text will reflect his own disposition, and in this respect the literary text acts as a kind of mirror; but at the same time, the reality which this process helps to create is one that will be *different* from his own [...]; indeed, it is only by leaving behind the familiar world of his own experience that the reader can truly participate in the adventure the literary text offers him. (286-87)

Because reading is a dynamic process that involves the author, text and reader, leaving behind the familiar requires readers to take an active roll in creating meaning by altering their expectations and participating in textual “realities” (289-91). The more one reads, the more she becomes involved in a text and learns new information that requires a change in expectations. By playing with literary techniques and rhetorical strategies, the work may also defamiliarize certain elements, creating tension in the text (293-94). An unreliable narrator, for example, may create doubt about a familiar social context, or, as we will see with “La han despedido de nuevo,” incorporating multiple voices without differentiating between them makes us question who is speaking. Through these processes, the reader becomes entangled in the work and learns “to open himself up to the workings of the text, and so leave behind his own preconceptions” (296). This entanglement changes readers, for it offers teachable moments, allowing us to see

different perspectives and discover the unknown (296-99). It also peaks readers' interest and keeps boredom at bay.

Following Iser's line of thinking, fictional narrative can transcend cultural boundaries by representing a different way of seeing "reality." The texts discussed here, for example, stimulate re-imaginings of postwar El Salvador and allow readers who are both familiar and unfamiliar with the situation to learn something new. Those whose first language is not Spanish are challenged by linguistic complexities and must take risks to comprehend the text and to create meaning. The works also invite readers to leave behind their preconceived notions about migration and El Salvador, involving them in the creation process and opening them up to new perspectives. When thinking about the difficult and emotional processes of migration, suspending assumptions and beliefs may allow a reader to better understand the complexities of this social reality. Perhaps the extreme disenchantment of *El asco* best illustrates this point because the protagonist does not speak nostalgically about the country he left behind but rather openly criticizes El Salvador and its people, making public what can be sometimes scandalous comments. Although the text has been criticized for being anti-Salvadoran, Castellanos Moya suggested in an interview in 2001 that the narrative originated with the Salvadoran people. He said, "Digamos que era una síntesis de todas las críticas al país, que había escuchado, y más, porque a veces el personaje hace comentarios con los que no estoy de acuerdo" (de la Fuente). By making public private comments about El Salvador, *El asco* represents open resistance to the postwar situation.⁷ In doing so, the text places readers in a vulnerable position, inviting them to suspend their expectations and to take a narrative journey.

Bridging the familiar and unfamiliar allows readers from all walks of life to engage the stories analyzed here and to critically reflect upon El Salvador's postwar transnational

community. Immigrants and non-immigrants, Salvadorans and non-Salvadorans can participate in an alternative, perhaps global, interpretive community when reading *El asco*, *Odisea del Norte*, and “La han despedido de nuevo” because Castellanos Moya, Bencastro, and Hernández cross frontiers to engage different reading publics. According to the colophon of *El asco*, Castellanos Moya was born in Honduras in 1957 but grew up in El Salvador, and so the topic of immigration is a personal one. He lived in exile during the war, residing mainly in Mexico City, and after publishing *El asco* in 1997, he left El Salvador once again due to death threats he received for the text’s biting criticism. Although the novel is now part of the curriculum at the Universidad Centroamérica in San Salvador, critics still protest its content (Cardenas). Consequently, Castellanos Moya currently lives in exile in the United States but continues to write about El Salvador and the effects of the war. He has published eight novels, numerous short stories as well as poetry and essays. His works have been translated into several different languages, winning him recognition both inside and outside of El Salvador. *Senselessness*, the English translation of his most recent novel *Insensatez* (2004), was included on NPR’s list of Best Foreign Fiction in 2008, securing his position as a well-known international writer (Crispin). A fragment of *El asco* was also translated into English under the title *Revulsion* and published in the anthology *Words Without Borders* (2007), which presents the world through the eyes of diverse writers.

Painter-turned-writer Mario Bencastro shares similarities with Castellanos Moya, for he also resides in the United States and has several works published in English. He was born in 1949 in El Salvador but has resided in Washington, D.C. for more than twenty years (Craft, “Mario”). In addition to *Odisea del Norte*, his other major works include *Disparo en la catedral* (1990), a novel about the Salvadoran conflict that resulted in Archbishop Romero’s

assassination, *Árbol de la vida: historias de la guerra* (1993), a collection of short stories about the civil war, and also *Viaje a la tierra del abuelo* (2004), his most recent novel about a 17-year-old who gets deported back to El Salvador after living in the United States for ten years. Except for this latter work, the rest have been translated into English. While *Odisea del Norte* was first written in Spanish, the English translation, *Odyssey to the North*, was published by Arte Público Press in 1998, one year before the Spanish version, thereby making the novel available to readers of English and Spanish. A fragment of the text is also included in Nicolás Kanellos's anthology *En otra voz*, identifying it as "literatura de inmigración" (293-95). Moreover, it is important to note that *Odisea del Norte* was the first text written specifically about Salvadoran immigration to the United States from the perspective of an immigrant himself (Hood 567-68; Mujica, "Review" 62; Lara-Martínez, "Mario" 22). Despite the novel's context, Bencastro has described it as a general guide for those immigrating to the United States, which explains the popularity of the text's English translation in India (Hood 575).⁸ Thus Bencastro's stated intent is to tell stories so that all types of readers can better understand the immigration phenomenon.

In contrast to Castellanos Moya and Bencastro, works by Claudia Hernández are not well known in El Salvador or in the international community. Born in 1975, Hernández is part of a younger generation of writers who grew up during the civil war, a theme apparent in her writing. She has been considered an up-and-coming writer after being awarded the Juan Rulfo prize for best short story in 1998 (Salamanca). In 2007 Hernández was the only Salvadoran included on the list of the most important writers in Latin America under the age of thirty-nine (Salamanca). In response to this important recognition, literary critic Carlos Cañas Dinarte expressed a need to distribute her work and to study it more (Tamacas). Her publications include four collections of short stories entitled *Otras ciudades* (2001), *Mediodía de frontera* (2002), *Olvida uno* (2005),

and *De fronteras* (2007). Her work is also showcased in several anthologies of Central American short stories, including José Mejía's *Los centroamericanos* (2002) and Werner Mackenbach's *Cicatrices* (2004). Several of the short stories in *Olvida uno*, such as "La han despedido de nuevo" and "Déjà vu tal vez," represent immigrant experiences, underscoring the importance of the topic for Salvadorans still living in El Salvador for they are all connected through a transnational community. Moreover, by addressing the female immigrant experience, Hernández provides a pivotal contrast to the male experiences that have been discussed up to this point. In her article "Setting *La diabla* free," Yajaira Padilla looks at the representation of women as part of a larger critique of the Salvadoran nation because of their active participation in the revolutionary struggle and their subsequent relegation to more traditional roles during the postwar transition. As we will see with "La han despedido de nuevo," Hernández seems to counter traditional gender dichotomies by constructing a world where immigrant women meet the challenges of everyday life with little or no help from men. Consequently, her story crosses gender boundaries to attract an interpretive community of women and men.

By engaging the social, economic, and political shifts during the war and postwar years, all three texts represent Raymond Williams's structures of feeling as they are lived and felt on a daily basis in the Salvadoran community. The cynicism and criticism expressed in each work reveals an uncertainty about the country's future. However, it also underscores a deep level of commitment to the nation because disillusion implies a prior feeling of hope and optimism. After two earthquakes hit El Salvador in 2001, Bencastro visited his native land and described the situation as "dark" but later affirmed that El Salvador is a "country of survivors," citing a spirit of endurance as an essential part of Salvadoran identity (Hood 574). Because of this underlying optimism, Castellanos Moya, Bencastro, and Hernández use the art of storytelling to

denounce the current situation of El Salvador and its citizens. The following analysis will first consider *El asco* and then *Odisea del Norte* because both texts seem to engage testimonial writing the most, whereas Hernández's short story is most distant from this well-known literary form, indicating a more experimental and postmodern direction for contemporary Salvadoran fiction.⁹

In *El asco* orality is central to the story of Edgardo Vega and postwar El Salvador. The protagonist's narration of his migration to Montreal and his feelings of disgust upon returning to San Salvador for his mother's wake is represented as a spoken dialogue that is heard and recorded by the narrator. To the reader, however, this is a monologue because she never "hears" the voice of the narrator, only occasional references to Moya, the interpellated narrator.¹⁰ The first few lines of the novel make this strategy clear: "Suerte que viniste, Moya, tenía mis dudas que vinieras, porque este lugar no le gusta a mucha gente en esta ciudad, [...] por eso no estaba seguro si vos ibas a venir, me dijo Vega (11). The interjection of "Moya" and the added commas create an illusion of orality and a simulacrum of a spoken monologue. The use of rhetorical questions also contributes to an oral aesthetic: "Yo no entiendo qué hacés vos aquí, Moya, ésa es una de las cosas que te quería preguntar" (21). Vega's monologue continues throughout the whole novel without paragraph divisions and few breaks between sentences, creating a sense of verbal spontaneity that reads as a stream of consciousness directed toward the narrator. The reader learns that Vega has invited Moya for drinks after spending fifteen days in San Salvador in order to "contar [sus] impresiones, las ideas horribles que [ha] tenido estando aquí" (13). Moya is an old friend from school and the only person the protagonist trusts with his story. Their relationship parallels that of a testimonialist and his narrator/editor, however, Vega is not a

subaltern and his cynical attitude parodies *testimonio*'s perceived project of idealism and optimism.

Because the narrator's name is Moya, the same as the author, the text also plays with the notion of authorial control and inscribes Barthes's "reality effect," for the name may mislead readers to believe the story as authentic and real. The "Advertencia" at the beginning of the novel adds another layer to this perceived manipulation. It reads:

Edgardo Vega, el personaje central de este relato, existe: reside en Montreal bajo un nombre distinto –un nombre sajón que tampoco es Thomas Bernhard. Me comunicó sus opiniones seguramente con mayor énfasis y descarno del que contienen en este texto. Quise suavizar aquellos puntos de vista que hubieran escandalizado a ciertos lectores. (9)

With this preface, the narrator admits to changing certain remarks by Vega and thus makes explicit his control as the editor of the text. His comment about "softening" Vega's words is ironic considering the biting criticism and strong disillusion represented in the text. He also emphasizes that Vega is a "real" person, raising questions about his identity, for his name is not Vega or Thomas Bernhard as suggested by the title. The reference to Bernhard, a twentieth-century Austrian writer, is particularly provocative because the text seems to be a parody of his style of writing. Bernhard tended to represent solitary characters who explained their views to a silent listener who then reported the monologue second hand, much like the style of *El asco* (Cousineau 54-55). Chilean writer Roberto Bolaño calls attention to this stylistic parody in a review of the novel because in his view it adds a sarcastic level to the text's profound criticism. "It is a novel that will make you die laughing," he writes (295). All of these strategies: simulated orality, parody, and doubt, call attention to the act of representation and lead the reader

to question the boundaries between truth/fiction. Castellanos Moya confronts the reader with the same question facing Central American writers in the postwar years: what is the difference between testimonial and fictional narrative? By blurring and parodying elements associated with the authenticity of testimonial discourse, *El asco* offers a subversion of the *testimonio* through the lens of fiction. The text plays with familiar themes and styles to show the critical value of fiction when reflecting on the nation.

In addition to formal elements, the novel's subversion of testimonial discourse is also evident through the characterization of Vega and his critique of the nation, for he does not represent the typical Salvadoran immigrant who fled the war during the 1980s but rather parodies this situation. Vega was not looking for political asylum or better economic conditions; he simply left El Salvador before the war erupted because of his extreme dissatisfaction with the country. He explains his reasoning to Moya, "[M]e parecía la cosa más cruel e inhumana que habiendo tantos lugares en el planeta a mí me haya tocado nacer en este sitio, [...] el peor de todos, en el más estúpido, en el más criminal, [...] me fui porque nunca acepté la broma macabra del destino que me hizo nacer en estas tierras" (17). Vega does not express nostalgia for the country he left behind, but rather rejects national symbols, such as Pilsner beer, pupusas and soccer and seems to be asking the question: why would anybody return to postwar El Salvador? He had no desire to come back but has done so on this occasion to collect his inheritance and because he now has a Canadian passport that guarantees his return entrance. Vega describes this document as "lo más valioso que tengo en la vida [...] mi vida descansa en el hecho de que soy un ciudadano canadiense" (115).

His citizenship change is crucial to his characterization because, for Vega, being Salvadoran is a disgrace that he equates with violence, killing, and military power, all of which

cause him to feel “asco,” or repulsion (22). In Vega’s eyes, it is a grotesque nation (25) that was horrible before the war and is now “vomitiva” (22). They have only traded one type of violence for another: “Qué gusto el de la gente de este país de vivir aterrorizada, Moya, qué gusto más mórbido vivir bajo el terror, qué gusto más pervertido pasar del terror de la guerra al terror de la delincuencia” (108). It seems that nothing can escape Vega’s rage, for he criticizes the country’s social problems, military and political leaders, including the leftist politicians, and also the educational and medical systems. For a man who has dedicated his life to studying cultures, Vega feels disgust toward a country that, in his opinion, has been brainwashed by television programs and ignorant politicians. He is also disillusioned by the lack of interest in literature and the arts, and sums up his visit to San Salvador in one phrase: “la degradación del gusto” (84). Moreover, he describes Salvadorans as “una raza podrida” with animal-like qualities (21), and his references to women are particularly stereotypical and misogynistic. Thus, for Vega, El Salvador does not have any redeeming qualities. Changing nationalities and names was his ticket to freedom and validation, and perhaps the ultimate revenge on the country he left behind. His discourse goes in circles returning to the same topics and repeating his criticisms, which also adds to the text’s fictionalization of orality.

Because of his negative feelings toward El Salvador, Vega sets himself apart from Salvadorans living both inside and outside of the country, considering his attitude and actions superior. His class identity is a distinguishing factor, for he is well educated and comes from a wealthy background, both of which helped secure him a position as an art history professor at McGill University in Montreal (51, 57). While his Canadian citizenship indicates that he arrived in Canada with proper immigration documents, it is important to note that Canada has less stringent rules than the United States, offering citizenship to anybody who has been in the

country legally for at least three years.¹¹ Getting to Canada, however, does require more money, extended transportation and better contacts since it is further away from El Salvador and thus unattainable for many undocumented immigrants who may be traveling on foot. This suggests that Canada offers Vega an elitist status, whereas settling in the United States would align him with working-class Salvadorans and signify a step down economically.

Vega's attitude becomes clear during his initial trip south when he is horrified and dismayed by other Salvadoran immigrants who board his plane in Washington, D.C. and begin to share their experiences as "jardineros" and "empleadas domésticas" in the United States (86). He cannot relate to their work situations or to their excitement about returning home. Upon arriving in San Salvador, he is even more surprised by the "masas furibundas [...] procedentes de Los Ángeles, de San Francisco, de Houston y quién sabe de qué otras ciudades [...] que se arremolinaba en la sala de migración en un agobiante caos" (90). Vega also expresses shock and disappointment by the glorification of Salvadoran immigrants as families receive with "codicia," or greed, the gifts their loved ones bring from the United States (92). For him, the ultimate disillusion is the *Monumento al hermano lejano* because of its tribute to Salvadoran immigrants and their contributions to the national economy, which in 2006 equaled more than \$3 billion in remittances (Rodríguez, "Mozote"). Vega explains to Moya, "[El Monumento] es la obra cumbre de la degradación del gusto: un gigantesco mingitorio construido en agradecimiento a los sombrerudos y las regordetas que vienen de Estados Unidos cargados de cajas repletas de los chunches más inusitados" (95). Thus, for Vega, emigration, particularly that of working-class individuals, is part of the larger social problem that plagues El Salvador, thereby contributing to the country's repulsion.

Vega's critical stance on El Salvador and its immigrant population calls into question the identity of the postwar nation. He poignantly underscores that the nation's citizens are no longer contained within national borders and represents, albeit cynically, an important group of individuals whose economic remittances are keeping El Salvador afloat, thereby re-mapping the national community. Because he specifically criticizes Salvadoran immigrants in the United States, Vega implicitly comments on the nation's perceived class identity as a country of uneducated and uncultured, working-class individuals. For Vega, exporting this population and identity is humiliating and detrimental to El Salvador. His dismay at their return "home" also speaks to the Americanization of El Salvador, for they are importing U.S. culture and further contributing to the country's postwar degradation. He even compares San Salvador to Los Angeles:

San Salvador es una versión grotesca, enana y estúpida de Los Ángeles, poblada por gente estúpida que sólo quiere parecerse a los estúpidos que pueblan Los Ángeles, una ciudad que te demuestra la hipocresía congénita de esta raza, la hipocresía que los lleva a desear en lo más íntimo de su alma convertirse en gringos. (46)

Vega's disapproval of imitating the "gringos" adds an ironic twist to his discourse, for the United States is partially responsible for the country's current situation after fueling their civil war, training members of the military, and using Central America as a frontline defense against the Cold War. Thus the United States is part of the problem, which also helps to explain Vega's decision to settle in Canada.¹²

Even though many immigrants may feel disillusion upon returning "home" since things are never how one remembers them, Vega's disenchantment runs much deeper than the average

disappointment and cuts to the core of Salvadoran identity and values. The novel's parody of the *testimonio* and the typical Salvadoran immigrant shows the benefit of using fiction to critically reflect on El Salvador's postwar reality, for an invented character can reveal different aspects of the situation and perhaps be more scandalous with techniques like parody than a testimonialist narrating his personal story. While Vega's extreme cynicism predicts doom and gloom for the nation, an alternative reading might see underlying concern in his disaffection because it is difficult to express so much rage about an issue that does not matter. The problem, however, is that *El asco* does not offer productive alternatives for El Salvador, leaving the reader with a feeling of uncertainty about the future of the Salvadoran community.

Whereas *El asco* overwhelmingly communicates feelings of disgust and disillusion, *Odisea del Norte* represents the trauma, fear and uncertainty of the immigrant experience. Unlike Edgardo Vega, Calixto personifies the typical Salvadoran immigrant who flees El Salvador due to the war, looking for safety in the United States. Although he recognizes the problems in his home country, he communicates nostalgia for what he has left behind and insecurity about living in a new place.¹³ Due to the issues addressed, Bencastro's novel is thematically the most similar to the testimonial works discussed in chapter one. Much like these *testimonios*, *Odisea del Norte* focuses on the hardships encountered by Calixto and his immigrant friends, including discrimination, problems finding work, overcrowded housing and language barriers. The text does not idealize their situation in the United States but rather warns potential immigrants of the hazards associated with the American Dream. In fact, Calixto questions whether his situation is better here than in El Salvador because "la miseria estaba en todas partes" (6).

The novel's opening scene emphasizes his tenuous status in the United States, as readers watch an immigrant window washer fall to his death. Calixto witnesses the tragedy of his co-

worker but is afraid to identify the man for fear of his own undocumented situation: “Temían que le culparan a él la muerte y terminar en la cárcel, si es que no lo deportaban por indocumentado. ‘Entonces,’ pensaba, ‘¿quién va a mantener a mi familia?’” (2). The fear that Calixto expresses translates into isolation and enclosure, for he leaves this tragic scene to walk among the animal cages at the zoo (3). The metaphor of enclosure is repeated throughout the novel as Calixto describes his small apartment where he lives with twenty other immigrants (4), his experience crossing the border crammed into a van with some fifteen people (121), and his time spent in solitary confinement after getting into a fight while awaiting deportation (167). All of these experiences emphasize the hardships in the United States, cautioning potential immigrant readers to think seriously about their impending journey because there are no guarantees in the “land of opportunities.”

Although *Odisea del Norte* represents similar immigrant themes as the works in chapter one, the narrative technique used to explore these topics is different, for Bencastro presents a fragmented text that follows several different storylines. Calixto’s story is central to the novel, which jumps between his experiences in Washington, D.C. and his journey from El Salvador to the United States. Even though the reader already knows he successfully crosses the border, the difficulties of his odyssey keep her interested in finding out how he makes it. Bencastro keeps the reader guessing until the very last chapter when Calixto is released from the immigration detention center in El Paso and finally arrives in the U.S. capitol. Meanwhile, readers have already learned of the hardships he endured during his first year in Washington, D.C. In addition to Calixto’s experience, we follow the deportation hearing of a Salvadoran woman named Teresa and the epistolary exchange between two lovers who are separated due to the conflict in El Salvador. Newspaper articles offering contextual information about Salvadoran immigrants in

the United States are also intermixed with these different storylines, thereby lending credibility and authority to the fictional narrations.

The technique of fragmentation allows Bencastro to incorporate different voices associated with the immigrant experience, and the reader then hears these voices through different narrative strategies that mimic oral discourse. Calixto's experiences in Washington, for example, are depicted through conversations with other immigrant workers in the hotel kitchen where they all work. It is difficult to discern who is speaking, but questions directed toward Calixto emphasize his role. During these conversations, the immigrant workers mainly discuss cultural differences between their home countries and the United States, such as holiday celebrations and relationships with women. In one chat, Calixto is surprised by a group of prostitutes he encounters:

Lo que quiero decir es que en mi pueblo, por feas o bonitas que sean las mujeres, cuesta bastante trabajo conquistarlas. En cambio aquí, en la calle 14, las mujeres lo conquistan a uno.

Es por dinero, Calixto. Sólo por dinero. (47)

Similar to the way this discussion shows Calixto's naivety about prostitutes, most of them tend to underscore the difficult process of leaving home and adapting to a new place. These conversations also incorporate italicized information in parenthesis, much like stage directions for a play. The following lines introduce the first conversation and similar directions precede each kitchen interaction: “(*Cocina del restaurante de un hotel. Calixto, Caremacho y Juancho platican mientras lavan platos*)” (8). Even the descriptions of Calixto's departure from El Salvador and his journey to the United States include a substantial amount of dialogue, eclipsing the fact that a third-person narrator is at work behind the scenes. These rhetorical strategies

create an illusion of orality that makes the reader feel as if she is watching and listening to the interactions between Calixto and his family and friends. The text takes on a performative quality that highlights the constructed and creative nature of the novel.

The performance aspect becomes explicit with Teresa's deportation hearing, for Bencastro has written these episodes like a script for a play. The characters include Teresa, the judge, a translator and lawyers. The first oral exchange between Teresa and the judge explains the reasoning for the trial:

JUEZ. Bien. Esta es una audiencia de deportación. La ley establece que usted puede ser deportada porque entró en este país sin inspección, sin documentos legales; y yo voy a determinar si usted debe o no ser deportada. En esta audiencia usted tiene el derecho de...

TERESA. ¿Qué quiere decir "sin inspección"?

JUEZ. ¿Sin qué?

TERESA. Inspección.

JUEZ. A usted se le acusa de haber pasado a escondidas la frontera. ¿Tenía visa para entrar en los Estados Unidos?

TERESA. No.

[...]

JUEZ. De eso exactamente se le acusa, de entrar sin permiso, y de eso se trata esta audiencia. (41)

While this scene highlights the illegality of undocumented migration, the theatrical format invites the reader to picture the scene, placing her in a front row seat for the trial. Perhaps she may feel and hear the conversation and the expressed confusion more than if she were just

reading words on a page. Thinking about the deportation hearing as a performance also emphasizes that each individual has a role to play within the immigration drama, including our role as spectators, and that Teresa is simply another deportee for the judge rather than a human being with a story. Communication problems between Teresa and the judge highlight his disinterest and lack of compassion, encouraging readers to listen attentively, for we learn that Teresa is seeking political asylum because she feared for her life in El Salvador due to her husband's involvement with the guerrilla fighters. The judge cannot understand why her husband's situation would inadvertently affect her and ultimately denies her request for asylum, ignoring that her husband was trained by the U.S. military. Teresa's story concludes with a newspaper fragment from El Salvador's *La Tribuna*, informing readers that she was found dead shortly after being deported. The final line of the article reinforces her need for political asylum in the United States, "Se cree que fue asesinada por represalias políticas" (191). Because Bencastro is also a playwright, it is not surprising that he uses this dramatic art form to humanize Teresa's situation and bring to life the pitfalls of the U.S. immigration system. By re-creating dialogues, her story is heard like an oral testimony, and the connection to *testimonio* is reinforced when Teresa mentions that "el señor de la iglesia" is helping her fill out the paperwork to request asylum (58). It becomes clear that she is involved with the Sanctuary Movement established to help victims of the Central American civil wars and to promote justice in the region. Thus, the novel's oral aesthetic and transparency of metadiscursive strategies enhance the ethical concerns of the text.

Teresa's and Calixto's situations represent the plight of the Central American refugee. The United States's 1980 Refugee Act defined a refugee as someone "who flees her or his country of origin for fear of persecution—because of racial, religious, or political opinions;

nationality; or group affiliations—and is forced to reside elsewhere for fear of further persecution” (Rodríguez 407). While seemingly straightforward, the definition is problematic. Teresa’s situation shows that persecution is difficult to prove, and in “Refugees of the South” Ana Patricia Rodríguez notes that the definition excludes those who leave for economic and social instabilities, which can also threaten lives (408). For these reasons, most Central Americans were denied political asylum in the United States during the 1980s (388).

Although Calixto is not seeking political asylum, he too leaves El Salvador out of fear for his life because he has been erroneously identified as an “enemigo del gobierno” (10). Emigrating seems like the best option to protect his wife Lina and their kids, for Calixto can send money home to support them and at the same time shield them from the military. However, like Teresa, Calixto learns that safety is not guaranteed in the United States, and several moments in the text underscore his insecure situation in both countries. One of the more critical instances occurs when he is hiding from government officials in El Salvador but cannot fall asleep because he hears “balazos apagados en la lejanía o el eco de explosiones dispersas. Ruidos de una noche típica de la ciudad en que reinaban las sombras, de las que nadie escapaba cuando le llegaba el turno de ser devorado por ellas” (21). This frightful scene makes clear Calixto’s decision to begin the dangerous journey from El Salvador to the North, traveling by bus and on foot with the help of a *coyote*. Due to the unnecessary police shooting of a fellow immigrant, Calixto finds himself in a similar war zone in the United States when riots break out between police and residents in a Salvadoran neighborhood in Washington, a struggle based on an historical event that occurred in 1991. One of the residents compares the situation to the war she left behind by stating, “‘Como si estuviéramos en El Salvador,’ afirmó un vecino. ‘Esta situación semeja un enfrentamiento de los que se ven muy a menudo allá’” (96). Her statement and the experiences

of Calixto and Teresa highlight the dangers in both countries and also communicate that the United States does not provide equal protection or equal rights for everyone residing within its borders.¹⁴ Because so many Salvadorans have had to endure similar situations or make the same choices as Calixto and Teresa, *Odisea del Norte* represents El Salvador's postwar disillusion, humanizing the same individuals that Vega criticizes in *El asco*. In comparison to the texts analyzed in chapter one, Bencastro's novel also broadens the perspective of economic migrations from Mexico to include that of the Central American refugee.

While the ideal reader of *Odisea del Norte* is perhaps a Salvadoran or a Central American, the representation of the immigrant experience serves as valuable information for anyone contemplating an undocumented crossing into the United States. The text is also inclusive of immigrants from all over, for Calixto comes into contact with people from other parts of Latin America as well as Afghanistan, India, and Germany. His close friends include Salvadorans, Chileans, Colombians, and Cubans, a group Rodríguez would consider a "Latino contact zone" ("Refugees" 406). While she does not specifically look at *Odisea del Norte*, Rodríguez draws on Pratt's notion of contact zones to describe social spaces where marginal subjects, in this case various Latin/o populations, come into contact to forge social and cultural alliances (406, 412). These alliances are particularly important for Central American immigrants whose identities are often dissolved into the categories of Mexican or Hispanic in the United States. By representing Teresa's experience, Bencastro also includes the female refugee as part of this Latino contact zone. Taking all of these different pieces into account, *Odisea del Norte* provides readers with a globalized vision of El Salvador's postwar reality, thereby crossing borders to engage a diverse reading public.

While Bencastro recognizes the female immigrant experience in *Odisea del Norte*, Hernández makes it the central theme of her short story “La han despedido de nuevo.” The story focuses on the experiences of Lourdes, a young Salvadoran woman who recently joined her aunt and cousin in New York City. Much like Juan in *Por amor al dólar*, Lourdes traveled to the United States by plane with a tourist visa but does not have permission to stay and work. Moreover, she speaks very little English, and so her aunt and cousin help her to find work and adjust to her new surroundings, offering suggestions along the way. Lourdes also receives advice from other female immigrants, such as the Dominican at the beauty salon and her Romanian friend-turned-lover from the diner. A few contextual comments in passing inform readers that Lourdes and her family are Salvadoran; for example, we know that Lourdes studied “un par de semestres en una universidad en El Salvador” (33). Lourdes’s experience also attests to the fact that sending youth to live with relatives in the United States is a common strategy either to protect them from violence in El Salvador or to help the family economically (Hamilton and Stoltz Chinchilla 46-47). Otherwise, comments in the text are more general with less focus on the national situation. Even though readers know that the Dominican is referring to El Salvador when she convinces Lourdes to stay in the United States, her comments could apply to anyone’s unfortunate situation. She says, “Quédate niña. ¿Qué vas a hacer en tu país? Tu prima dice que se vive muy mal allá. Quédate. Todo mundo se queda. Aprovecha que te ha tocado fácil, no has tenido que pasar la frontera a pie” (41). While we learn about Lourdes’s situation, the text also represents the generational differences among women, the difficulties of romantic relationships, and the importance of immigrant networks. The absence of male voices further underscores the focus on women. All of these elements emphasize the gendered experience of migration, ranging from the type of work described to the dangers of sexual exploitation.

Making female experiences the center of the story also highlights the conflictive situation of Salvadoran women who fought alongside men during the revolution but were then relegated to more traditional roles after the war. In *After the Revolution*, social scientist Ilja A. Luciak explains that El Salvador's postwar project of reconciliation did not take into account the needs of women. She writes, "Women were allowed a 'counter-traditional role' as long as it was in the interests of the struggle. After the war, when their new identities threatened traditional gender relations, an attempt was made to [...] disempower them" (47).¹⁵ While Luciak does not look specifically at migration, leaving El Salvador may offer women a renewed sense of agency during the postwar period. It is important to note, however, that migration became a survival strategy before the war with more women than men crossing into the United States prior to the 1980s (Hamilton and Stoltz Chinchilla 45-46). Employment opportunities are still a major determining factor since the labor force participation of Salvadoran immigrants continues to be higher than it is for women in El Salvador (75). Although job prospects and earning possibilities are a plus, women like Lourdes are still vulnerable to demanding employers, low wages and immigration authorities, for they must negotiate the double marginalization of being women and immigrants in the United States. For this very reason, out of fear of la Migra, Lourdes's cousin recommends that she work an early morning shift at a nearby diner. She tells Lourdes, "Te conviene: Migración jamás llega a los diners y menos a esa hora. No tendrás que angustiarte como te tocaría si entrás a la fábrica que mi mamá propone" (34). The help and contacts that her cousin offers are fundamental to Lourdes's success, for in their study *Seeking Community in a Global City* Hamilton and Stoltz Chinchilla emphasize the significant role of immigrant networks that enable women to find better jobs and assert more control over their own lives (76,

94). Thus, Hernández's story represents the complex immigrant experiences of Salvadoran women by bringing to light issues of inequality, marginalization and exploitation.

The conversational style of the story forces the reader to listen attentively for subtle changes in voices as if she is listening to gossip about daily occurrences. The first few lines of the text highlight the disorienting changes between voices. They read:

Su voz en mi contestadora me ruega que no le devuelva la llamada hoy: no estará en casa a la hora de siempre. Probablemente me llame mañana. O el miércoles. Suena feliz. Debió haber estado sonriendo. Lo estaba. Lo supuse. ¿Me reí? No, pero se te ahogaban las palabras como cuando estás alegre. (29)

The syntax and punctuation and also the rhetorical question, “¿Me reí?,” help engender an illusion of orality that create a conversation-like flow. The narration continues with brief sentences and very few paragraph breaks, adding to the flow of the text and speeding up the reading process. An abundance of disembodied voices, however, points to a lack of character development and few textual markers to indicate who is speaking or when somebody new enters the conversation. These discursive strategies can be somewhat disorienting and confusing for the reader, forcing her to feel displaced from the text much like an immigrant is displaced from her homeland. As the story progresses, one assumes that Lourdes is the voice on the answering machine, but her name does not actually appear in print until four pages later. While the conversational style adds an oral quality to “La han despedido de nuevo,” the story does not borrow other elements from testimonial writing like *El asco* and *Odisea del Norte*. Hernández, who is the most contemporary writer of the three, makes a more definitive break from *testimonio*, which has perhaps been made possible because writers like Castellanos Moya and Bencastro started to make the transition sooner.

The main topics of conversation include work, men, and the importance of learning English. Advice about men, in particular, abounds, and the general consensus is not to trust them. Lourdes's cousin advises her to be cautious with men from the diner, especially the Mexicans: "Acá no es como allá, nadie te va a decir nada, excepto mi mamá, por supuesto, que desconfía de todos los hombres que viven en este país, especialmente si son mexicanos. No le gustan. A mí tampoco. Te recomiendo que no les hagas caso si se te acercan" (34-35). This comment attests to the tensions between Salvadorans and Mexicans, dispelling the notion of a unified immigrant community. The Dominican esthetician also offers relationship advice. She tells Lourdes, "Si vas a meterte con uno que no sea hispano, decídetelo por un gringo. Y trata de casarte con él: es la mejor manera de obtener los papeles rápido. Eso le digo yo" (41). While her comment suggests that U.S. citizens can provide security, she encourages Lourdes to keep the relationship on her own terms, "Una vez que hayas aprendido y puedas trabajar en algo bueno, mi vida, lo mandas pa'l carajo" (40). The Dominican speaks from experience for her own husband will not let her advance her career at a salon in the city. She states, "Es una lástima porque se gana buen dinero: las clientas allá pagan sin renegar y te dejan buena propina. Pero mi marido quiere que cuide a la niña, ya tú sabes cómo son los dominicanos" (38-39). It is clear that the main advice for Lourdes is to "mejorar su situación" and not to let anyone stand in her way (63). In addition to nationality, a man's economic status is essential, for the good ones are "los que ganan bien y mandan dinero a sus países. Debe aprovechar si alguno la invita porque los hombres responsables no abundan en la ciudad. No importa que tengan esposa en su país. No afecta: están lejos" (62). Although this latter comment may seem anti-feminist, it highlights the complex situation of transnational families and gives Lourdes the power to make the best decisions for herself.

Lourdes must assert agency to control her own life, and her romantic relationships and work situations prove this. At first, she avoids men completely to have a brief fling with her coworker Michelle but then becomes involved with “el lobo de piedra” (57), el Señor Orestes and finally Robert the Irish policeman, all within a couple of months. Her “promiscuity” underscores the right to construct her sexuality as she desires. She also asserts control over her body when she gets pregnant and decides to abort the baby. She drinks a mixture called “ajenjo” to “librarse de la criatura que acababa de permitir en su cuerpo” (75). Taking control of her reproductive rights sends a strong message about female agency and also critiques traditional gender roles and the criminalization of abortion in El Salvador. Much like her relationships, Lourdes takes charge of her work situations. The following quotation brings the two situations together when Lourdes tires of one of her boyfriends. She asserts, “No sé cómo quitármelo de encima. Me tiene harta, al igual que el trabajo. Odio el diner. Acabo de renunciar” (50). After quitting the diner, Lourdes holds a variety of jobs, including working as a waitress, house cleaner, sales assistant and home health nurse. She changes employment often, always looking for a better opportunity, for fear of becoming like her aunt who “trabajó diez años en la misma casa” until she legalized her status and now does home health with only Spanish-speakers to avoid learning English (32, 47-48). Their relationship represents a generation gap, for Lourdes is much more mobile and willing to take chances.

Lourdes’s independence, however, seems stunted at the end of the story because the “ajenjo” does not terminate her pregnancy. Having the child is problematic because the baby’s father is the controlling Señor Orestes who forces her to live in isolation and cater to his every whim. An unidentified “yo” tries to help Lourdes with little success. This disembodied voice ends the story by saying:

Pensaba traérmela a casa conmigo y guardarla acá hasta que él y la ciudad entera se olvidaran de ella, pero, cuando llegamos a la orilla del Hudson, entendí que no podría conseguir por mis medios sacarla de esas calles ni quitarle del alma la idea absurda de dar a luz un hijo que es su mismo padre, entonces la entregué a los animales que libran a las mujeres de la noche perpetua de la ciudad y las llevan de regreso a casa. (77)

While the ending is not clear, it seems to suggest that Lourdes becomes a prostitute, losing control over her body and becoming vulnerable to future pregnancies and more violence. Thus the conclusion of “La han despedido de nuevo” robs Lourdes of the agency she has seemingly asserted throughout the story. Perhaps the role reversal is intended to be the ultimate critique of the oppression of women in El Salvador, for much like the revolutionaries who lost power after the war, Lourdes loses control of her life in the United States. Even immigration does not allow her to escape the cyclical abuse of power.

The cynicism represented in “La han despedido de nuevo,” *El asco*, and *Odisea del Norte* shows the difficulties and disillusion of El Salvador’s postwar transition, specifically the deceptions experienced by immigrants. Through the art of storytelling, the characters in each work open a provocative dialogue about the feelings and experiences that are lived by Salvadorans, thereby offering a communal space of memory and recovery for the sacrifices made during and after the civil war. Whether their narratives evoke disgust, fear, or confusion, all of these emotions are a pivotal point of entry into El Salvador’s structures of feeling and an important key for unlocking the country’s traumatic past. The affective or emotional responses to texts, which will be discussed in detail in chapter three, can also bridge alternative interpretive communities that open up social sites of solidarity and belonging while also recognizing

diversity. Thus, through their creative works, Castellanos Moya, Bencastro, and Hernández show the productive ways fictional discourse can reflect upon the nation and engage readers' imaginations to better understand the world around them. Moreover, fictionalizing orality in the contact zone allows these writers to negotiate the distinct cultural legacies of El Salvador and the in-between situation of postwar immigrants.

Notes

¹ In *Literature and Politics in the Central American Revolutions*, John Beverley and Marc Zimmerman offer a detailed discussion of the relationship between literature and politics in Central America by addressing the importance of testimonial narrative and poetry during the revolutionary years. The well-known writers from El Salvador during this period include Roque Dalton, Claribel Alegría, and Manlio Argueta. In *Novels of Testimony and Resistance from Central America*, Linda Craft also looks at the role of testimonial writing in the region with chapters focusing on Alegría and Argueta.

² In an essay in 1966, the same year he accepted the Casa de las Américas award for his testimonial work *Biografía de un cimarrón*, Miguel Barnet announced the death of fiction and an end to elitist tendencies in Spanish American literature with the advent of the *testimonio*, which he defined as a new narrative based on the experiences and sensibilities of disenfranchised individuals (Millay 121-22).

³ In his article “Entre política, historia y ficción,” Werner Mackenbach also describes a shift in cultural and aesthetic paradigms in Central America at the end of the 20th century and beginning of the new millennium. Rafael Lara Martínez investigates the characteristics of this new literary project as it pertains specifically to El Salvador, identifying “el desencanto” as the primary characteristic (“Cultura”). In his recent study *Taking Their Word: Literature and the Signs of Central America*, Arturo Arías also notes a disenchanted tone in recent narrative and writes, “a certain past intoxication with revolutionary utopias has given way to a heavy hangover” (22).

⁴ In addition to Salvadoran writers, other Central American authors have addressed the topic of migration in recent works of fiction. Key Guatemalan texts include *Ningún lugar*

sagrado (1998) by Rodrigo Rey Rosa and *Las murallas* (1998) by Adolfo Méndez Vides. The Honduran writer Roberto Quesada broaches the subject in his novels *Big Banana* (2000) and *Nunca entres por Miami* (2002). Recent works in English, such as *The Long Night of White Chickens* (1992) and *The Ordinary Seaman* (1997) by Guatemalan Francisco Goldman, and *The Tattooed Soldier* (1998) by Guatemalan-American Hector Tobar, have also been instrumental in bringing attention to the presence of Central Americans in the United States.

⁵ While Millay's use of "authentic" refers to an autochthonous discourse unaffected by Western cultures, the term is problematic because all discourse is mediated. Any representation of oral discourse is interrupted by our knowledge of writing culture and therefore a fictionalization of orality.

⁶ Mauricio Funes of the FMLN was recently elected president of El Salvador on March 15, 2009. This historic victory ends ARENA's 20-year reign over the country and offers hope for Salvadorans. While Funes's success remains to be seen, his campaign, backed by the general population and social organizations, has promised changes in government institutions and also improvements to social justice (Martínez).

⁷ Making the private public exemplifies James C. Scott's explanation of the public and hidden transcripts in *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*. Scott defines the hidden transcript as offstage interactions that are kept hidden from those in power whereas the public transcript describes open interactions between subordinates and their superiors (2-4). The frontier between private and public transcripts is always in flux and thus essential to understanding everyday forms of resistance and cultural patterns of domination and subordination (4, 14).

⁸ According to the 2000 U.S. Census, India is the third largest immigrant group in the United States, numbering over one million (Grieco).

⁹ While she does not look specifically at the texts addressed here, Beatriz Cortez also recognizes postmodern characteristics, such as the construction of subjectivity, the will of the individual and the fragmentation of identities, in postwar Central American fiction (“Estética”).

¹⁰ Yajaira Padilla has pointed out that other Central American writers, including the Salvadoran Jacinta Escudos and the Guatemalan Rodrigo Rey Rosa, employ this same narrative technique (“Setting” 144).

¹¹ The official website for Citizenship and Immigration in Canada (www.cic.gc.ca) outlines the details for obtaining citizenship. In addition to the three-year requirement, an applicant must be at least eighteen years old and hold permanent residency status, which is only obtainable for those who have authorization to live and work in Canada or for those who have been granted refugee status. Undocumented individuals are not eligible for citizenship. For more information regarding immigration policies in Canada, María Cristina García’s 2006 study *Seeking Refuge* provides a comparative analysis of the U.S., Canadian and Mexican responses to Central American migration.

¹² In contrast to the United States, Canada took a more hands-off approach to the Central American civil wars. Instead of getting directly involved in what they considered to be domestic issues, Canada offered support through the United Nations, NGOs, and refugee policies (García, *Seeking* 124-40).

¹³ In “Mario Bencastro’s Diaspora: Salvadorans and Transnational Identity,” Linda J. Craft offers a discussion of the construction of home and identity in *Odisea del Norte* and Bencastro’s other works.

¹⁴ In “Refugees of the South,” Rodríguez argues a similar point by looking at several texts in which the Central American refugee “appears as a palimpsest—a trace of the violence of

the New World Order, challenging the public relations narratives of the global economy and revealing the United States not as the home of equal protection but the guarantor of unequal distribution in all its entailments” (390).

¹⁵ Although the mobilization of women to fight with the FMLN countered traditional gender roles in El Salvador, Luciak also notes that women’s rights were not part of the group’s platform, and thus women combatants often faced discrimination and exploitation within the guerrilla movement (3-16, 29-31).

Chapter 3

A Performance of Affect through Oral Testimonies:

Filmic Representations of Nicaraguan Immigrants in Costa Rica

Since 2001, César Meléndez has performed his one-man show *El Nica* for audiences in Costa Rica, Nicaragua and other parts of the world. The show has been a box-office success at prestigious theaters and festivals, and has also debuted at schools, churches, and private homes in an effort to expose all levels of society to *El Nica*'s message about social prejudices and issues of belonging (Agüero; Rodríguez). In this popular monologue, Meléndez dons the identity of a Nicaraguan immigrant, José Mejía Espinoza, who endures economic, social, and emotional hardships while living and working in San José.¹ While the protagonist deals with his personal conflicts, he also embodies the tense relations between Costa Rica and Nicaragua, for “nica,” meaning someone from Nicaragua, has taken on a derogatory connotation in Costa Rica. In *Threatening Others*, Carlos Sandoval García, Costa Rica's leading researcher on immigration, writes that *nica* denotes “an arena of social struggle over the power of representing the ‘other.’ It illustrates how a word is inhabited by past and present voices under asymmetrical power relations” (144). As is the case with marginalized groups in other countries, the Nicaraguan “other” is being blamed for Costa Rica's socio-economic problems at the turn of the millennium. While tensions between the two countries are not new, pressures have mounted since the early nineties with increased migrations, economic crises, and political problems in both countries. By dealing with such controversial issues, *El Nica* has achieved mythic status in the eyes of the public. A fan in Managua, for example, lauds the impact of “esta magistral obra [...] un éxito sin precedentes en la historia teatral costarricense” (Díaz Dávila). Nicaragua's foremost cultural historian Jorge Eduardo Arellano also praises the performance, describing it as “espléndida” for

the range of emotions displayed on stage (“El Nica”). Even the *Lonely Planet Guidebook* lists *El Nica* as a “must see” when visiting the region (85). Thus, *El Nica* represents local and global pressures and reportedly resonates with the feelings and emotions of its Costa Rican and Nicaraguan spectators.

Issues of immigrant subjectivity, national identity, and belonging evident in the popular monologue have also been addressed in early twenty-first-century films from Costa Rica and Nicaragua. In May 2008, Costa Rican director Jürgen Ureña, whose cinematographic short *De sol a sol* (2005) documents a day in the life of a Nicaraguan couple working in San José, described *El Nica* as a precursor to a flurry of cultural activity dealing with the representation of immigrant workers in response to discriminatory attitudes and socio-political events (Personal Interview). As this chapter will demonstrate, both documentary films and full-length feature films represent the Nicaraguan experience in Costa Rica, perhaps better than written narratives or literary texts, because film’s public nature and re-presentability appeal to audiences influenced by Hollywood and the consumption of mass media. While narrative can describe feelings and appeal to readers’ imaginations, films bring spectators face-to-face with actors’ emotions and experiences. Film can also counter stereotypical images of immigrants in news reports and on television. In documentary films in particular, the performance of affect, or emotion, enables the imagining of alternative models of community as a response to the negative reception Nicaraguan immigrants have received in Costa Rica at the turn of the twenty-first century. The documentary’s distinctive features, showcasing oral testimonies and lived experiences, make it a particularly apt genre both for enacting and talking about feelings, which can in turn draw diverse actors and audiences into new ways of imagining community, citizenship, and belonging. This chapter also continues my discussion of Central American migrations in chapter two,

however, it focuses on an intra-regional migratory pattern, allowing for a comparison and contrast of migrations to the north. As we will see, despite a shared language and similar customs, Nicaraguan immigrants still encounter discriminatory practices in Costa Rica and must learn to negotiate their new “home.”

A variety of early twenty-first century documentary films examine the Nicaraguan immigrant experience in Costa Rica. In addition to Ureña’s *De sol a sol*, Julia Fleming’s *NICA/ragüense* (2005) focuses on social prejudices and xenophobic attitudes in Costa Rica, while Ishtar Yasin’s *La mesa feliz* (2005) films a group of Nicaraguans discussing the ins and outs of their immigrant experiences on a San José rooftop. All three were released in 2005, which marks an important year for both communities with the widely publicized death of Natividad Canda Mairena, a “nica” who was mauled to death by a couple of Rottweilers in front of policemen and bystanders in San José (Sandoval García, “Introducción” xiii). Prior to this watershed event, Nicaraguan directors María José Álvarez and Martha Clarissa Hernández filmed *Desde el barro al sur* (2002), in which they expose different aspects of the immigration debate by interviewing workers and employers in Costa Rica as well as families left behind in Nicaragua. Costa Rican director Maureen Jiménez adds another perspective by focusing on the female immigrant experience in *Más allá de las fronteras* (1998), while Guiselle Bustos Mora traces the bicultural relationship between two adolescents living in San José in her documentary short *Objeciones a una novia nica* (2000).²

In contrast to these documentaries, two feature-length films approach the immigration drama through a fictional lens. *El camino* (2007), also directed by Ishtar Yasin, is a road movie that follows the path of a brother and sister in search of their mother who left Nicaragua seven years prior to find work in Costa Rica, while *El rey del cha cha cha* (2007), co-directed by Isabel

Martínez and Vicente Ferraz, depicts the life of a Sandinista fighter who now lives in Costa Rica and dedicates his life to teaching the cha-cha-cha (Cortés, “La luz” 157-58).³ Because state resources are tight and film budgets rely on private funding, feature-length films are rarely produced, so the fact that Costa Rica’s first two productions of the twenty-first century explore Nicaraguan migration reveals its importance in the eyes of the public. Although *El rey del cha cha* has yet to be released to the general public, *El camino*, after garnering success at international film festivals, opened to audiences in Costa Rica in August 2008 to mixed reviews. Mercedes Ramírez Áviles, the former director of Costa Rica’s Film Institute, writes, “Unos lo encuentran espantosa y otros maravillosa. Una líder nicaragüense me dijo que la comunidad nicaragüense estaba indignada por la imagen del migrante que transmite la película” (E-mail). Thus, *El camino* provokes different affective responses, leading to discussion and debate about migration.⁴

All of the films discussed here highlight social scripts of national belonging and exclusion and, within such paradigms, the constructed roles of citizens and non-citizens. I am particularly interested in the documentaries because they rely on oral interviews and testimonies to explore the immigration debate, offering personal accounts and an alternative discourse to “official” reports much like the written testimonies discussed in chapter one. Furthermore, the documentary genre occupies a privileged position within the New Latin American Cinema Movement and within the filmic histories of Costa Rica and Nicaragua. Although documentaries may be seen as mimetic representations, their audiovisual content, mode of representation, and stylized production, including the roles of the “actors,” can be characterized as a performance that actively engages the public. For example, immigrants who tell their personal stories, albeit real and truthful, are still reenacting their lives for the camera. They relive the memories of their

experiences in order to narrate them and also reconnect with the feelings and emotions associated with the immigrant experience. This act of retelling aligns with Richard Schechner's definition of performance as "restored behavior" or "twice-behaved behavior" (36). The actors' performance of affect also elicits an affective response from the audience by stirring up certain thoughts, feelings, and emotions about the controversial issue. Thus, in this chapter I will focus on the performance and negotiation of affect in *La mesa feliz*, *De sol a sol*, *NICA/ragüense*, and *Desde el barro al sur* because of their affective power to raise awareness about a provocative social issue and to promote the imagining of alternative communities that acknowledge differences and offer cultural citizenship. I will analyze how all four documentaries engage and represent the affective structures of the immigrant experience by talking about and making visible the roles of Nicaraguan workers in Costa Rica.

The notion of affect provides a pivotal point of entry into the immigrant experience because emotions serve to negotiate one's surroundings and relationships. While emotions are often described as internal processes, they are also social constructions based on societal norms (Ehn and Löfgren 114). Such norms correspond to majoritarian scripts of accepted behavior, including the "right" look, dress, speech, and feelings, as dictated by formal institutions, dominant social groups, and cultural paradigms (115). Immigrant workers tend to be cast as "illegal" outsiders and non-citizens who alter such normative social matrices. Costa Rica is no exception, for the "nica" is associated with dark skin, poverty, inferior Spanish, and political turmoil, whereas the exceptional "tico," or Costa Rican, is defined by its nation's uniqueness within Central America and, therefore, linked to an idyllic past, a predominantly "white" population that speaks the "purest" Spanish, an affluent middle class, and a stable democracy (Sandoval García, *Threatening* xiii-xvi, 62). Thus, speaking out in documentaries gives agency

to Nicaraguan immigrants and allows them to dismantle constructed notions of being a “nica” by claiming rights and belonging. Their performance in front of the camera provides an opportunity to make visible their own subjectivities and positionalities, for performance can also be understood as a process of negotiating one’s social identity. In “Latino Performance and Identity,” David Román defines performance as both a public and private enterprise and as a “cultural practice fundamental to cultural formations of individual subjectivity and social negotiations of communal identity” (152). He also states that performance can help preserve a cultural identity threatened by immigration and provide a public space “to negotiate and rehearse shifting social mores and internal conflicts” (153). In order to deal with such changes and conflicts, therefore, emotions become an important coping mechanism and survival strategy.

Similarly, José Esteban Muñoz, drawing on Sartre’s *Sketch for a Theory of Emotions*, defines emotions as “the active negotiations of people within their social and historical matrix” (“Feeling Brown,” 71). He further explains that emotions are a “performed manifestation of consciousness” and that this performance enables us to cope with life’s highs and lows and also negotiate “different cultural logics of normativity” (71-72). Muñoz’s understanding of emotion contributes to his “minoritarian theory of affect,” which can facilitate an understanding of how minority subjects, like immigrants, affectively map their own identity and position in relation to majoritarian scripts (72). As for immigrants, they either conform to societal norms through processes like assimilation or develop performative strategies of survival, which Muñoz labels “disidentifications,” that enable them to negotiate the explicit and implicit matrices of normative citizenship (*Disidentifications* 4). Although Muñoz mainly focuses on the Latino/a experience in the United States, his argument sheds light on the positions of immigrants in Costa Rica where normative citizenship is defined in opposition to the Nicaraguan “other,” who is considered

racially inferior, less intelligent, and inherently violent. The documentaries discussed here show how Nicaraguans living in Costa Rica use affect to negotiate the perceived identities and misrepresentations of immigrants. While many of the interviewees show feelings of anger, loss, disillusion and fear about their experiences, some of them also express gratitude, hope and optimism. The ability to communicate multiple and often conflicting feelings about their immigrant status facilitates the process of “disidentification” and, consequently, the ability to cope with a situation in constant flux.

The personal, public, and political all collide within these documentaries because when recorded on film personal stories become part of a public archive in response to a politicized debate on immigration. Documentary films capture the emergent thoughts and feelings of those who are living a pivotal moment in Costa Rica marked by increased immigration and overt xenophobia. Raymond Williams emphasizes the affective elements of social experiences in process with his “structures of feeling” theory. In order to explain his use of the word feeling, Williams writes,

The term is difficult, but ‘feeling’ is chosen to emphasize a distinction from more formal concepts of ‘world-view’ or ‘ideology’. [...] We are talking about characteristic elements of impulse, restraint, and tone; specifically affective elements of consciousness and relationships: not feeling against thought, but thoughts as felt and feeling as thought: practical consciousness of a present kind, in a living and interrelating continuity. (132)

Much like Sartre’s understanding of emotion as an extension of consciousness, Williams seems to characterize feeling as free-flowing consciousness, or a visceral response to an unfolding reality. However, his use of “structure” suggests a connectedness between such responses,

giving them a social quality or a “sense of a generation” (131). Thus, for Williams, structures of feeling pertain to a certain time and place, which, for my purpose here, is the experience of Nicaraguan immigrants in Costa Rica within the past ten years.

In her pivotal study *An Archive of Feelings*, Ann Cvetkovich builds on Williams’s theory to discuss the importance of trauma in the public sphere. She prefers the term “structures of affect” to describe the feelings and emotions of a cultural experience in process (11), while her study is organized as an “archive of feelings,” or an exploration of the content, production, and reception of cultural texts that are affectively encoded (7). For Cvetkovich, this archive is both material and immaterial and located within formal institutions, intimate spaces, and cultural genres (244). She looks at a variety of texts but stresses the importance of documentaries because of their visual power to display affect. She writes, “The particular ways in which new documentaries create affective archives are instructive for the ongoing project of creating testimonials, memorial spaces, and rituals that can acknowledge traumatic pasts as a way of constructing new visions for the future” (14). By connecting documentaries to ritual, Cvetkovich implicitly brings up the notion of performance, for ritual is one of the examples of restored behavior offered by Schechner (35). Because restored behavior conjures up conscious and unconscious memories to recall the past, communicating emotion is an important part of reconnecting to the past. Furthermore, as Cvetkovich suggests, a focus on memory emphasizes the affective experience of history (37), which is often left out of the official story. Thus, investigating the affective experiences of Nicaraguan immigrants in Costa Rica, as represented in recent documentaries, allows us to listen to an often silenced point of view.

Because the process of migration is marked by historical and everyday traumas of race, sex, class, and gender inequalities, the category of trauma can broaden our understanding of the

affective experience of migration. Cvetkovich links migration to the trauma of displacement and to the “traumatic histories of domination and exploitation that form the story of transnational capitalism” (118-19). For Cvetkovich, the exploitation of immigrant workers is part of a broad system of social violence, a system that has been naturalized in order to manage affect. In her study *Mixed Feelings*, Cvetkovich argues that the construction of affect has political and ideological dimensions as well as progressive potential, for the expression of affect has the power to both dominate and resist domination. That is, affect, appearing naturalized, can be used to control individuals through sensationalist tactics, or it can make social structures visible by denaturalizing and deconstructing them. In this vein we can say that a national affect has been established in Costa Rica dictating how “real” Costa Ricans should feel about immigrant “invaders,” while cultural workers, including the documentarians discussed here, are working to expose this affective agenda by promoting feelings of acceptance and understanding toward immigrants.

By offering sensationalist accounts of immigrant activities and by couching their reports in negative terms and criminal metaphors, the Costa Rican media has reinforced nationalistic discourses of belonging and promoted feelings of anger, fear, and distrust in the public sphere. Newspaper, radio, and television reports have thus outlined some possible affective scripts for dealing with “nicas.” During the 1990s, Sandoval García argues that news outlets used negative labels for “nicas” while offering very little analysis or deconstruction of such perceptions and provided scant coverage of human rights violations, thereby robbing Nicaraguans of their own representative voice (*Threatening* 33-35). In “Feeling Brown” Muñoz also recognizes the power of the media to stereotype marginalized groups in general and considers the media a “chief disseminator of ‘official’ national affect” (69). According to Muñoz and Sandoval García,

audiovisual media, in particular, can convert disenfranchised communities into suspicious spectacles by focusing the majoritarian gaze on their “faults.” Conditioning this gaze to elicit a negative affective response is part of the media’s representational performance. This is certainly true in Costa Rica, where the “official” national affect tends to represent the “nica” as an ill-tempered, dangerous criminal who is emotionally excessive while the “tico” is generally portrayed as peaceful and affectively reserved. Thus, the documentaries discussed here offer a counter-image and a counter-discourse to the more traditional media representations of Nicaraguan immigrants in Costa Rica. *La mesa feliz*, *De sol a sol*, *NICA/ragiense*, and *Desde el barro al sur* all provide alternative performances of affect and give Nicaraguans the opportunity to control the Costa Rican gaze by deconstructing hegemonic social scripts.

The progressive potential of these films to bridge alternative communities depends on their visibility and accessibility to immigrants and non-immigrants alike. Because legal and political forms of citizenship are often unattainable for immigrants, defining citizenship in terms of affect can lead to a sense of acceptance and belonging without forcing individuals to give up their native culture. Cvetkovich argues for “affective forms of citizenship” (*Archive 11*), which I interpret to mean alternative communities in which individuals are bound by the performance of common feelings. Affective communities are a creative step away from defining citizenship in terms of nationality or one’s legal status, especially since formal citizenship, as Carlos Sandoval García points out, does not guarantee automatic acceptance when individuals are often judged by more visible markers like skin color or accents (“Are we”). Sandoval’s comment suggests that citizenship is a performance, rather than a legal formality, that depends on one’s negotiation of hegemonic social scripts. In *Nomadic Identities: The Performance of Citizenship*, May Joseph comes to a similar conclusion: “This ephemeral place of imagined and available rights [meaning

citizenship] is a performed as well as rhetorically produced avenue of personhood, whereby peoples invent themselves in relation to, and in tension with, existing constructs of participatory politics” (19). For Joseph, “the expressive stagings of citizenship” can unite individuals who share past histories, similar loyalties, and future possibilities (11), while Sandoval García advocates constructing “communities in difference” based on values of equality, solidarity and respect (“Are we”). Thus, based on the performative notion of citizenship, communities bound together by a shared representation of affect draw strength from differences in nationality, ethnicity, gender, class and sexuality.

In early twenty-first century in Costa Rica, the social scripts of inclusion and exclusion have been exaggerated and tested due to political, economic, and sociocultural changes. Increased migration, political tensions, and neoliberal economic policies have called into question Costa Rica’s national identity and future. The myth of Costa Rica’s exceptionalism within Central America has been based primarily on its peaceful and democratic past, the abolition of its army in 1949, and a considerable investment in such social services as health care, education, and the environment. Costa Rica also remained relatively stable during the 1970s and 1980s, despite civil wars and political unrest throughout the region, and even helped negotiate the Central American Peace Accord. Political scientists John Booth, Christine Wade and Thomas Walker argue that Costa Rica more or less lived up to its mythic status until the 1990s when political and economic changes began to affect Costa Rica’s general population (53-68). Transitioning to a neoliberal economy, for example, has led to a decrease in social services, compromising the government’s investment in its people, which in turn has led to decreased approval of the political system (62-64). Immigrants have also been blamed for stealing local jobs and abusing public services. Despite Costa Rica’s reputation as a friendly refuge for

immigrants, as exemplified by the 1992 and 1994 amnesties offered to undocumented “foreigners” and the 1999 amnesty extended to Central American refugees (Sandoval García, *Threatening* 147), lawmakers responded to public anxieties about immigration in 2006 by redefining it as a security issue, allowing them to tighten migratory controls and give more power to the authorities (Sandoval García, “Introducción” xiv-xv). This policy has intensified the racialization and criminalization of immigrant groups, with “nicas” bearing the brunt of the criticism.

While migratory patterns between Nicaragua and Costa Rica were established in the early twentieth century, Nicaraguan migration has increased substantially since the 1980s. Costa Rica’s National Census from 2000 registered almost 300,000 foreign-born residents in the country with Nicaraguans comprising the largest group at 76.4% (Castro Valverde 26). This same statistic has jumped considerably since 1984 when Nicaraguans totaled 51.6% of Costa Rica’s immigrant population (28). While Nicaraguans also travel north, making the United States their second most popular destination point, the rising numbers of Nicaraguans in Costa Rica is understandable considering the neighbors’ geographical proximity, common language, and cultural similarities. According to historian Patricia Alvarenga Venutolo, the increase of migratory flows has been characterized by Nicaraguans fleeing the Sandinista Revolution and the obligatory military service in the eighties while the nineties initiated an economic migration due to rising unemployment rates and poverty levels (“Los migrantes”). Ongoing political tensions and economic problems in Nicaragua as well as the devastating effects of Hurricane Mitch in 1998 have also contributed to rising statistics since the eighties. Because Nicaragua is one of the poorest countries in Latin America, looking for work in Costa Rica is a viable alternative for both documented and undocumented immigrants.

The representation of immigrants in *La mesa feliz*, *De sol a sol*, *NICA/ragüense*, and *Desde el barro al sur* exposes the affective structures at play in Costa Rica and Nicaragua in the new millennium. By drawing on a traditional documentary style with interviews and testimonies, the films are rooted in the tradition of the New Latin American Cinema Movement which, since the 1950s, has privileged social documentaries, that is “documentaries with a human subject and a descriptive or transformative concern,” to better represent Latin America’s social reality (Burton, “Toward” 3). Influenced by Italian neo-realism and Paulo Freire’s pedagogy of the oppressed, this documentary style can best be classified as critical realism because it calls upon the filmmaker to deconstruct idealized images of the nation and also requires an active spectator to critically reflect upon the world around her (Chanan 37-39). Thus, with the social documentary, film becomes a tool for giving voice to marginalized groups, educating the masses, and working toward social justice.

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, themes ranging from historical memories to ecology movements to global migrations represent a continued commitment to social concerns. While Central American migrations to the United States have also been documented, the flow of Nicaraguans to Costa Rica has been the priority for filmmakers in both countries during the late 1990s and early 2000s.⁵ *NICA/ragüense* and *Desde el barro al sur* utilize a more traditional documentary style that at times could even be classified as *verité* style with the use of a hand-held camera to capture comments and experiences in the moment, whereas *La mesa feliz* extends the documentary mode by weaving oral testimonies with performative elements, such as music, poetry, dancing and singing. *De sol a sol* is also more experimental through its combination of fiction and documentary, for the couple portrayed is actually living the immigrant experience in

Costa Rica, however, the film's script is based on the short story "La aventura de un matrimonio" by the Cuban-born Italian writer Italo Calvino. The following analysis will explore the affective performances of immigrants as they relive their experiences for the camera and express their hopes and anxieties about living and working in Costa Rica. Their expressive stagings of belonging claim rights for immigrants and also invite spectators to imagine alternative forms of community. Because the films have either aired on public television, played at cultural centers or debuted in national theaters, they have attracted a diverse public and thus critical reviews and spectator comments will also be addressed to show the impact and transformative nature of the documentaries.

Ishtar Yasin's *La mesa feliz* (2005) debuted in San José on November 4, 2005 at the Centro Cultural de España with opening words from the director: "Bienvenidos a *La mesa feliz*, sobre todo hoy que debemos dar voz a quienes no son escuchados" (Venegas, "Pinoleros").⁶ With this call to action, the film represents a group of approximately fifteen Nicaraguans who gather atop a roof in San José to discuss their immigrant situations. Through laughter, tears, shouting and celebration, they explore their contradictory emotions with lively debates about life in both countries. The opening scene creates curious expectations, for the documentary begins with a poem by the Chilean writer Pablo Neruda that calls the world to eat, drink and sing at the "happy table." While written as the Prologue for Neruda and Miguel Ángel Asturias's *Comiendo en Hungría* in 1969, these verses speak of a humanitarian desire for the world to come together in peace, a desire still very pertinent in the twenty-first century: "Sobre la mesa del mundo, con todo el mundo a la mesa, volarán las palomas." These inviting words eloquently summarize the documentary's purpose of bringing together two divided communities.

After Neruda's poem scrolls down the screen, the camera transports the audience to a San José rooftop where children are engaged in games and a man begins playing his saxophone. This scene is interrupted by a girl who watches everything through a red piece of glass and whose red-tinted perspective becomes the camera lens from time to time. All of this occurs in the first four minutes of the documentary without any dialogue, serving as a meta-theatrical stage-setting device because immediately after the opening scene, the camera pans to the busy street below then returns to the rooftop where people begin arriving, setting up the table, and gathering around it. As the guests begin sharing their stories, the significance of the rooftop setting becomes clear: it offers protection and escape from their daily lives found in the busy, possibly traumatic, streets below. In his review of the film, William Venegas similarly describes the rooftop setting as a refuge, for within this comfortable space individuals can express their feelings and emotions without worrying about retribution or accusations ("Pinoleros"). The occasional glances through the red-tinted glass suggest a change of perspective or a different gaze that reminds us of the camera's function. In a similar contrast, audience members are shifted from an "official" hegemonic gaze that negatively stereotypes Nicaraguans to one dictated by immigrants themselves through affective performances. The roof, therefore, also represents a performative space where the guests sing, dance and "act" for the camera. These celebratory moments help ease the tension by interrupting the serious debates and emotional testimonies of the immigrants. The songs also represent a ritualistic reenactment of their cultural heritage, for they are mainly popular songs by Luis Enrique and Carlos Mejía Godoy, Nicaragua's most famous folk singers, and nationalistic songs, such as "Nicaragua, Nicaragüita," which express love and nostalgia for their home country. The guests' facial expressions of longing and remembering make clear that the music transports them "home," if only for a

moment. While the visual elements are important, the oral elements of talking, debating and singing solidify their performances of affect.

The range of emotions displayed in the documentary enables the guests at the “happy table” to negotiate their traumatic immigrant experiences. There is no narrator or voice in off that guides the public’s perception, only a live radio program that describes the different migratory waves since the 1970s and serves to introduce individual testimonies. One man, for example, describes his journey to Costa Rica through the mountains with a group of eighteen compatriots. They decided to desert the counter-Revolutionary forces sponsored by the United States but also feared capture by the Sandinistas for being traitors. In a similar situation, a younger man tearfully explains that he came to Costa Rica in the 1980s because his father wanted to protect him from obligatory military service in Nicaragua. Women also share their immigrant experiences; one in particular expresses relief for fleeing an abusive husband, but then communicates disillusion with the pressure of earning enough money to survive in Costa Rica and admits to having considered prostitution. Another woman, who identifies herself as Maura, tells the traumatic story of crossing the San Juan River with her two children. With tears in her eyes, she explains that both of her children almost drowned. In general, the guests explain why they emigrated and discuss the difficulties of their physical and emotional journeys. Most are not identified by name, except at the very end when a list of participants runs with the final credits. This anonymity emphasizes the group dynamic of the gathering, for their togetherness is just as important as their individual efforts. It also emphasizes for the audience that the guests are part of a larger immigrant community beyond the camera lens.

As part of the group dynamic, the interviewees debate their current situations in Costa Rica and the problems in Nicaragua, alluding to the different push-pull migration factors in each

country. They heatedly discuss the Somoza regime, the Sandinista government, and the presidency of Violeta Barrios de Chamorro in the 1990s. While some blame the different governments, others blame the U.S. economic embargo during the 1980s, but all agree that Nicaragua still does not offer the security and prosperity that its citizens deserve. They express conflictive feelings about their host country by recognizing that Costa Rica has provided them with financial, medical, and educational opportunities, but they have also faced social prejudices and discrimination. They specifically mention the negative representation of “nicas” by the media and the assumption that all Nicaraguans are criminals. After listening to various complaints, one guest politely reminds the others, “No debemos de morder la mano que nos está dando de comer.” These contradictory responses show the different experiences related to the immigration process, thereby providing audience members with a more realistic and humanistic perspective than the stereotypical images found in newspapers or on television news programs. By enacting their stories for the camera, the guests perform outside Costa Rica’s normative social scripts and open a space for progressive dialogue. This exchange can help resolve feelings of anger and resentment by joining people through the common desires of stability and security. Furthermore, as the guests conclude with a celebratory dance, the documentary leaves its spectators with a hopeful impression that, despite differences of opinion, we can still eat, drink and sing together at the “happy table.”

The emotional charge and transformative message of *La mesa feliz* earned it a spot on the Spanish Agency of Cooperation and Development’s film program “Migraciones, mirando al sur” with participating centers in Central America, Mexico, and Miami. According to the project’s Miami website, the goal is to establish a dialog and encourage critical thinking about the Central

American migratory processes and their cultural repercussions. An anonymous blogger in El Salvador contributes to the discussion by describing his impressions of the documentary:

El derecho a ser, a mejorar, a dar nuevos frutos en tierras extrañas, a no ser encasillados, son argumentados mediante las diversas participaciones de los protagonistas, quienes [...] son individuos que comparten no sólo con nuestros hermanos lejanos, sino con nosotros mismos, los anhelos y aspiraciones que constantemente nos empujan a continuar con el esfuerzo cotidiano. (“La mesa”)

La mesa feliz also traveled to film festivals in Spain, Ecuador, and Cuba (Yasin, “La mesa”), and reached the general public in Costa Rica via the public television show *Lunes de Cinemateca* (Fernández). The film’s positive reception in different parts of the world shows global concern for a provocative social issue and the possibility of bridging alternative communities.

In contrast to *La mesa feliz*, Jürgen Ureña’s *De sol a sol* (2005), which he produced and directed in collaboration with his film students at the Universidad Veritas in San José, uses very little dialogue to perform affect.⁷ The film’s silence strategically draws spectators in to understand how immigrants live in the shadows of the nation. In May 2008, Ureña explained that he and his students experimented with different techniques, such as eliminating dialogue, while adapting Italo Calvino’s “La aventura de un matrimonio” to a Costa Rican reality (Personal Interview). This short story describes a husband and wife who work different shifts and only see each other in passing, and *De sol a sol* adds the immigrant context by documenting the lived experiences of a pair of Nicaraguans with opposite work schedules in San José. Alfredo works the night shift as a security guard while Verónica works the day shift as a domestic employee, and they barely have enough time to share breakfast and dinner together.⁸ However, Ureña admitted that he and his students were not originally interested in the topic of

migration: “El proceso de adaptación nos llevó naturalmente a esta población; honestamente no era el objetivo inicial. Al pensar en este contexto y al desarrollar la historia [...] nos dimos cuenta de que ésta era la población, digamos, que era más representativa de este [...] fenómeno” (Personal Interview). The national focus on migration in 2005 also contributed to the film’s theme and to its success, for it received the award for best short fictional film in 2005 at Costa Rica’s annual film festival *Muestra de Cine y Video* and also garnered the *Premio Áncora* or top audiovisual award in 2006 from Costa Rica’s national newspaper *La nación* (Venegas, “Hace”; Díaz). Both of these awards honor Ureña’s skills as a director and his poetic portrayal of a provocative issue.⁹

Ureña’s experimentation with *De sol a sol* blurs the lines between documentary and fiction because the lived experiences of Verónica and Alfredo are infused with metaphorical and creative elements. The lack of dialogue, in particular, is an important technique for communicating the film’s subject matter, for at no point do the “actors” explain their migratory status or even identify themselves as Nicaraguans. This information is simply implied based on the Costa Rican context and the type of work the couple performs. Not hearing their voices on screen also represents the Nicaraguan immigrants who are ignored and not heard on the national stage, underscoring their physical presence both in the documentary and in Costa Rica. The couple does share a brief conversation at home in the morning, but audience members only see their mouths moving as the camera lens widens to distort the image. Thus, because there is no dialogue or narrator who describes their daily routine or personal interactions, spectators must draw their own conclusions and read the film based on its powerful images.

The absence of speech also represents the solitude of the work performed by Alfredo and Verónica, for neither one of them has conversations or interacts with other individuals while at

work. For example, spectators watch Verónica come and go from her employer's house, which is an elegant yet solitary home on a vacant street outside of the bustling city. While the audience watches her prepare the family meals, clear away their dishes, wash their laundry and clean their house, her employers never appear on camera. Much like the effect of not hearing conversations, the family's absence heightens their presence, creating a big-brother effect. Similarly, Alfredo silently walks the dark halls of the office building he patrols, eats alone, watches the security cameras and stares at the city lights through the office windows. He even rides a vacant bus to and from work. The final image of the film emphasizes Alfredo's loneliness and longing as he reaches over to Verónica's empty side of the bed while trying to fall asleep. In May 2008, Ureña spoke about the solitary world created in *De sol a sol*. He stated, "A mí me parecía que la historia de los nicaragüenses en el país y que los trabajos que realmente realizaban tenían que ver [...] con esa soledad, con esa ausencia de sonidos, con esa ausencia de diálogos." Thus, the actors' silence and solitude contribute to the film's performance of affect and to its representation of the immigrant experience.

Although the audience does not hear Alfredo and Verónica's voices, *De sol a sol* does introduce oral elements. Their morning actions are interrupted by a radio announcer who gives the local time and daily news, which includes a report or an announcement about labor in Costa Rica. The announcer also introduces the classical song "Avemaría," which the public hears while Alfredo prepares *gallo pinto*, a traditional breakfast of rice and beans, before Verónica leaves for work. This song plays at the beginning and at the end as the couple completes a 24-hour period, thereby framing the film. Described by the radio announcer as a morning prayer of thanks, the "Avemaría" seems to take on a double meaning because the couple's brief exchange in the morning, about as long as the song, is bitter sweet for they must say goodbye again. The

song also has a melancholy tone that undermines its message of thanks. During the eighteen-minute short, audience members also hear brief excerpts from popular music that represent the couple's lives: "Yo me voy... tú te vas" and "¿Por qué te fuiste?," focus on the theme of solitude and separation. The song "De sol a sol" is heard twice and also gives the film its title, emphasizing the couple's 24-hour routine during which one of them is always working. The song also speaks of a loving relationship and thus communicates the difficulties of separation. The music that accompanies the images of Verónica and Alfredo therefore verbally constructs the feelings of longing, nostalgia, and loneliness that audience members perceive from the couple's gestures and facial expressions. Music becomes a tool for interpreting the unsaid. The music may also move the public in a way that visual images cannot by stirring up similar emotions or reminding them of similar affective experiences, for even if a spectator is not an immigrant, she has most likely experienced separation from or loss of a loved one. The soundtrack to *De sol a sol* is thus a provocative part of the film's performance and serves to enact a larger alternative community through affect.

The film's creative approach has made it attractive to diverse audiences both nationally and internationally. Like *La mesa feliz*, *De sol a sol* aired on the public television program *Lunes de Cinemateca* in Costa Rica and also toured the various Cultural Centers of Spain in Central America and Mexico during summer 2008 as part of the series "Migraciones, mirando al sur." *De sol a sol* also played at Costa Rica's Film Institute as part of the forum, "Migración bajo el lente," which offers free screenings of pertinent films in order to generate discussion and raise awareness about migration (Ureña, "Un poco más"). *De sol a sol* also premiered in Nicaragua at the II Festival de Cine y Video Centroamericano in 2007. In addition to receiving attention within the film industry, *De sol a sol* also debuted at the international visual arts show "Estrecho

dudoso” in San José in 2006. Videoart critic Jorge Albán Dobles applauds Ureña for forcing the spectator to slow down in an over-stimulated world by producing a film with no dialogue. On his internet blog, he writes, “Ir más despacio y frenar la asimilación de elementos y dinámicas, permite al [espectador] una inmersión más consciente y propiciadora de pensamiento crítico, estimulando nuevas formas de pensar y percibir las cosas” (“Desaceleraciones”). I would add that slowing down also allows audience members to get in touch with their emotions and to reflect on how the film makes them feel. Because the film is available on Youtube (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sNst-hR9wOI>) and portrays a global issue without the need for subtitles, *De sol a sol* has the potential to affectively reach spectators around the world at the click of a mouse.

In contrast to *La mesa feliz* and *De sol a sol*, Julia Fleming’s *NICA/ragüense* (2005) employs a more traditional documentary style that represents a performance of affect through interviews and oral testimonies. With the help of Carlos Solís, a Nicaraguan journalist living in Costa Rica, and a Fulbright Grant, Julia Fleming produced and directed *NICA/ragüense* between January 2004 and May 2005 (Fleming 357). Fleming, a U.S. citizen, explains her desire to “mostrar las experiencias de las personas inmigrantes nicaragüense en Costa Rica” after spending three months there in 2001 (357). By combining interviews, personal testimonies, clips from the media and cultural performances, Fleming and Solís focus on the changing times in Costa Rica and the xenophobic attitudes that have led to discriminatory policies. The two primary events that frame the documentary and allow for diverse stories to emerge include a police raid on January 30, 2004 and a violent conflict between the police and protesters on May 31, 2004, both of which occurred in La Carpio, a predominantly Nicaraguan community on the outskirts of San José that has been characterized as violent, poor and illegal. Based on these two

incidents, the film shows various sides of the immigration debate by including comments from government officials, employers, immigrants and also family members left behind in Nicaragua, while privileging a discourse on tolerance that criticizes discriminatory attitudes in Costa Rica.

The opening scenes of the documentary juxtapose negative comments from Costa Ricans on the street with a Nicaraguan demonstration of cultural pride in response to the 2004 events. The “ticos” are asked to give their general impressions of Nicaraguans, and one woman responds, “Han violado, han asesinado, han hecho muchas cosas malas.” Her response, and the other comments as well, represent the strong feelings against “nicas” in Costa Rica. In contrast, a group of Nicaraguans have gathered to support one another and to showcase their heritage, an exemplary expressive staging of belonging in San José’s central plaza. The rally begins with the patriotic sounds of marimba music as the group walks in procession to the plaza, all of which serve as a performance of ritual. Ardilla Solís, one of the organizers of the demonstration and the director of the Centro de Derechos Sociales de la Persona Migrante, initiates the rally by stating, “Esta es una demostración del orgullo de ser nicaragüense. [...] Además, es una manera de ofrecer nuestra amistad [...] a este pueblo generoso costarricense.” After her remarks, audience members watch a Nicaraguan folklore dance and listen to popular music. By making their voices heard and their culture visible, this demonstration is a public performance of belonging for Nicaraguans in Costa Rica and an assertion of cultural citizenship. The juxtaposition of the Costa Ricans’ negative comments with the Nicaraguans’ peaceful demonstration makes clear from the very beginning the film’s critical stance, thereby constructing a performative discourse that criticizes the Costa Rican community.

Even the culturally sensitive “ticos” who are interviewed, such as the popular singers Manuel Monestel and Dionisio Cabal, are critical of their fellow citizens by citing ignorance as

the main reason for a rise in xenophobia. A taxi driver who argues that “el ciudadano nicaragüense es por naturaleza muy violento” corroborates the misrepresentation and misinterpretation of Nicaraguan immigrants. As the documentary continues, the discourse does soften but the initial impression has already been felt by audience members. For example, Ronald Chavarría, the owner of a coffee farm in San Rafael de Heredia, expresses his deepest gratitude to the migrant workers from Nicaragua who make it possible to collect the annual coffee harvest because, according to him, “Ya no hay mano de obra tica.” While his words are heartfelt, audience members watch in the background as workers perform hard labor, aware that many are undocumented and that they receive very little wages. One of the workers, an undocumented woman who is there with her husband, son and brother-in-law, describes their situation as migrant workers. She says, “La esperanza de nosotros es ganar esta platita para medio levantarlo. No, no es cantidad lo que llevamos nosotros porque no se gana cantidad. [...] Queremos venir sólo por tres o cuatro meses. [...] Vamos, volvemos, así estamos.” With a smile on her face, she never stops working while she talks. Immediately after spectators observe this scene on the coffee plantation, the camera returns to the streets of San José where average “ticos” state that Nicaraguan immigrants do not make positive contributions to the economy, thus reinforcing the exploitation of migrant workers. Through the editing process, Fleming and Solís highlight these conflictive comments and feelings to encourage spectators to reflect on the disparities and to stir up their own feelings about the situation.

Making evident the construction of national identity further represents misunderstandings about the two communities. The visual images of different interviewees deconstruct the longstanding myth of Costa Rican whiteness, for the Costa Ricans interviewed, especially those in the opening scenes, do not appear physically different from the Nicaraguans who appear on

camera. Apart from the comments made by each group or identifying labels added by the filmmakers, it would be impossible to visually distinguish one nationality from the other. Recognizing this sameness through difference performs an alternate community through affect, for it deconstructs the social scripts of national affect that teach us to feel and think a certain way. Karla, a young Nicaraguan who came to Costa Rica to join her mother at the age of two, underscores the ability to construct one's national identity by hiding her "Nicaraguaness" because the kids at school would make fun of her. She states, "A mí no me gusta reconocer que yo soy nicaragüense. [...] Para mí, para mí, yo soy de acá." By acting Costa Rican, she adopts a performative strategy of survival, as described by Muñoz, to negotiate the majoritarian scripts of normative citizenship. Language tends to be another marker of difference between "ticos" and "nicas," and Karla alludes to this in her testimony. She tells the story of a girl who is scolded by the social studies teacher for using the expression "eh, pues" because it identifies her as Nicaraguan. As Karla relives this experience for the camera, her facial expression changes and she laughingly tries to pronounce the phrase with a Nicaraguan accent, as if she herself must don this different identity. Karla's testimony is a provocative moment that forces spectators to pause and take notice of their own feelings and perhaps their own identity performances. Therefore, the implicit and explicit examples of identity construction in the film serve to both deconstruct and reconstruct the social scripts that divide these two communities while emphasizing the powerful human desire of belonging and acceptance.

NICA/ragüense also demonstrates the performative aspect of newspaper stories and television reports that negatively publicized the two violent conflicts in La Carpio in 2004. The January incident was a police raid that rounded up individuals to check their immigration status, resulting in over 600 detainees and 21 deportations, while the May conflict erupted over land

grants and urbanization laws but escalated due to leftover tensions from the earlier raid (Fleming 364-65). After audience members observe the peaceful demonstration and cultural show organized by Nicaraguans, anti-immigrant headlines from newspapers flash upon the screen, providing close-up shots of words like “antinica,” “policial,” and “detenidos,” while anxiety-provoking music plays in the background. The documentary also shows excerpts from different live news reports that constantly repeat “La Carpio,” emphasizing the effect that such repetition has on everyday listeners, for La Carpio has become synonymous with danger. A comment from one Costa Rican woman shows how effective the media campaign has been. When asked about La Carpio, she states, “Es terrible. [...] Yo ni la conozco. [...] Allí viven todos los nicaragüenses.” To denaturalize this negative perception, Fleming and Solís interview different people who live in La Carpio and who were affected by the 2004 events to represent their side of the story and to put a human face on this public tragedy. They talk with people who were illegally detained and with family members of those who were deported, all of whom describe human rights violations and breeches of their safety and security. As Ann Cvetkovich suggests in another context, allowing these individuals to tell their stories can help counteract sensationalist media reports and incorporate the affective experience of history. It also encourages spectators to feel for those wrongfully violated and to imagine alternative communities that respect differences.

As different individuals tell their stories, spectators observe scenes from La Carpio and Los Anonos, another neighborhood on the outskirts of San José. The film shows families living in simple conditions, kids playing in the streets and people going about their daily lives, in contrast to the media reports and general perceptions of constant violence and horrible conditions. These images are accompanied by popular Nicaraguan folk songs which give the

film a nostalgic and sentimental tone. Flor Urbina, for example, a Nicaraguan singer who lives in Costa Rica and who will be discussed in chapter four, is heard in the background singing about displacement and finding new roots in the song “Agua dulce y pinol” and about identity politics in “Centroamericano.” The documentary also shows a clip of a live performance by the famous Nicaraguan protest singer Luis Enrique Mejía Godoy. Mejía’s role in the Sandinista Revolution and as a symbol of Nicaraguan culture situates the issue of migration as part of an ongoing struggle for social equality and cultural survival. Thus, much like the role of music in *De sol a sol* and *La mesa feliz*, here it helps communicate the innermost feelings of longing and unsettledness and contributes to the film’s performance of affect.

The detailed testimony of Karla’s mother Mariluz is the focal point of the film’s performance of affect. She conveys conflicting emotions of joy for the life she has built in Costa Rica and regret for the family she left behind in Nicaragua. She is especially proud of the mango tree that she planted five years ago, for it symbolically represents her own struggles to establish roots in Costa Rica: “Nosotros sembramos ese palo cuando construimos aquí la casa. Ya tiene como cinco años y ya va a dar fruto este año. Sembrado de uno, verdad. Plantado por las manos de uno, verdad.” The smile on her face while talking about the mango tree turns to sadness as she remembers her family members in Nicaragua, for Mariluz left behind her oldest daughter Jocelyn to be raised by her mother. In order to communicate with her daughter and mother in Estelí, Nicaragua, Mariluz wants to send a video-letter via the documentary, however, she is overcome with emotions and sits in total silence in front of the camera. Director Julia Fleming comments on the affective power of Mariluz’s testimony in her article about producing *NICA/ragüense*. She writes, “Su silencio habló más poderosamente que ninguna palabra en el documental. Su silencio y sus lágrimas me dieron claridad. [...] En ese momento de silencio, me

di cuenta que para comprender la complejidad de la inmigración nicaragüense a Costa Rica, tenía que sentarme y escuchar con quietud” (370). When Mariluz does finally muster a few words, the public listens attently: “Yo sólo quiero que mi hija sepa que la amo mucho, aún cuando ella no está aquí conmigo. Espero que entienda que tuve que irme. No tenía opción.” The follow-up comments from Mariluz’s mother are also very telling, for the filmmakers travel to Estelí to capture her feelings about her daughter’s absence. As spectators see the poor conditions in which Mariluz’s mother, oldest daughter and family live, the film adopts a nostalgic tone with the song “Nicaragua, Nicaragüita” playing in the background. The comments from Mariluz’s mother suggest that she does not agree with her daughter’s decision to leave home. She says, “Aquí como pobre que esté, como pobre voy a morir y no tengo esperanza de ir allá, pues prefiero morir como pobre [...] en mi lugar.” The different feelings and emotions enacted in *NICA/ragüense* thus capture the complexity of migration and the difficulties of transnational families. It also shows that the decision to leave one’s country is a very personal one with mixed results. By representing these conflicting reactions, the film performs an alternative community through affect and encourages the public to do the same.

Reviews of *NICA/ragüense* reflect its transformative and didactic merits. In addition to winning the award for best documentary at the 2005 *Muestra de Cine y Video*, it has also been used as an educational tool for workshops on xenophobia in Costa Rica (Fleming 362). The documentary aired on television programs in both Costa Rica and Nicaragua, allowing audiences in both countries to view the film. In a brief article for *La nación*, Darío Chinchilla Ugalde writes that, after viewing *NICA/ragüense* on Costa Rica’s weekly television program *Lunes de Cinemateca*, he became more aware of the stereotypical representations of Nicaraguans in the media and commends the documentary for bringing this criticism to the forefront. The

documentary has also premiered at festivals in Latin America, the United States and Europe, including the Festival Internacional de Nuevo Cine Latinoamericano in Cuba and the San Diego Latino Film Festival, both in 2006. In May 2008 Martha Clarissa Hernández, the director of *Desde el barro al sur*, praised Fleming and Solís's documentary, describing it as “muy lindo trabajo” (Personal Interview). Thus, it is clear that *NICA/ragüense*'s performance of affect through oral interviews and testimonies has impacted diverse audiences both nationally and internationally.

In comparison to the other films discussed here, *Desde el barro al sur* (2002) directed by María José Álvarez and Martha Clarissa Hernández imagines an alternative community through affect by primarily focusing on the immigrant experiences of women.¹⁰ Like *NICA/ragüense*, it represents a variety of feelings and reactions about migration, interviewing workers and employers in Costa Rica and also families in Nicaragua. However, *Desde el barro al sur* presents a more balanced perspective of the positive and negative aspects of migration, for it explores the individual motivations of each interviewee and takes a critical look at both countries without laying blame. In May 2008 Hernández was very clear about the film's purpose by stating, “Muy, muy, muy, muy a propósito no queríamos hacer algo que fuera victimizante ni culpabilizante” (Personal Interview). With this goal in mind, *Desde el barro al sur* uses music, contrasting images, and personal testimonies to represent the complexities of the immigrant experience and to imagine alternative affective communities.

Desde el barro al sur is also the film that has been the most widely publicized and distributed, receiving substantial attention in both countries. This is due in large part to distribution through the *cine móvil*, or the New Latin American Cinema Movement's mobile cinema, for Hernández and Álvarez have organized free screenings in theaters, communities,

schools, universities, and cultural centers in urban and rural areas throughout Nicaragua and Costa Rica. It also aired on public television in Nicaragua. Furthermore, when the documentary premiered in Nicaraguan cinemas in 2002, it filled theaters for three weeks, which, according to Hernández, “es una cosa extraordinaria” (Personal Interview). She later commented: “Yo siento que en Nicaragua esa película puso en agenda el tema. A partir de allí, digamos, se comienza a hablar sistemáticamente del asunto” (Personal Interview).

The film had a similar impact in Costa Rica. It debuted at the National Film Institute’s 2002 *Muestra de Cine y Video* and then toured the country for about two weeks (Cortés, *Luz* 103; Hernández; Parra). Costa Rica’s former Minister of Labor, Ovidio Pacheco, took a special interest in the film by organizing a private screening for his cabinet members, the media, and Nicaragua’s ambassador to spark a discussion among decision-makers involved with labor relations (Hernández). Alberto Cortés, a Nicaraguan political theorist living in Costa Rica, was pleasantly surprised by Pacheco’s reaction:

Resulta esperanzador el impacto que tuvo esta película a nivel gubernamental costarricense, sobre todo la actitud del ministro de Trabajo. [...] Desde la visión de este ministro, el objetivo de ordenar los flujos migratorios es contribuir a que la migración deje de ser una aventura peligrosa para los inmigrantes. [...] El ministro insistió en el videoforo que la fuerza de trabajo nicaragüense, [...], ha sido “una bendición para la economía costarricense.” (Cortés, *La pantalla* 450-51)

Film critic María Lourdes Cortés also had high praise for the film. In *La pantalla rota*, she writes, “*Desde el barro al sur* es el tipo de trabajo que demuestra que hacer cine, [...], es una manera de contribuir en la transformación de la sociedad en algo más justo” (452). With

continued screenings and favorable reactions like these, *Desde el barro al sur* has enormous potential to connect immigrant and non-immigrant viewers by way of their affective experiences and responses, thereby promoting cross-cultural communities.

During 57 minutes of video, several symbolic elements intensify the film's affective performance of community. The title itself is a metaphor that plays with the different cultural meanings of *barro*, mud, and *sur*, south. As a mix of dirt and water, *barro* is a biblical reference to the origins of humanity and also refers to El Occidente, a poor region in northern Nicaragua that has traditionally worked with *barro* to make decorative pots (Hernández). In contrast, *el sur* represents economic opportunities in Costa Rica, Nicaragua's southern neighbor. Thus, Nicaraguans travel "desde el barro al sur" in search of a "better" life. In addition to the title's connotation, the film's opening scene sets up the public's viewing experience with a dusty and rustic shot of El Occidente. Through the dust, viewers observe an old bus, a herd of cattle, and a man on horseback, all of which communicate hard work and a difficult way of life, urging audience members to better understand the extreme conditions in which many Nicaraguans live. These conditions also contextualize the stories of several women from El Occidente who have been affected by migration and whose experiences help tie the different parts of the film together. In addition, the accompanying music solidifies the differences between the two countries. When transported to Nicaragua, the public listens to a more rustic melody of a guitar and harmonica that nostalgically represents rural living and a simple yet difficult life. Scenes of San José, however, emphasize the plasticity and busyness of the city with a faster techno-influenced, synthesized music that plays while the camera roams the city streets focusing on tall buildings, shopping malls, street performers, and commercial billboards. One sign, in particular, reads, "Haga sus sueños realidad," which ironically communicates the hopes of immigrants as

they travel south. By contrasting these images, Álvarez and Hernández strategically highlight two very different modernities in Nicaragua and Costa Rica and how immigrants must continually negotiate these two extremes.

One family who lives in El Occidente, the Ramírez family, discusses the economic advantages and emotional heartbreak of their immigrant experiences. Two of their daughters, Rosalba and Alma, traveled to Costa Rica in search of work. While Rosalba returned home and is filmed in Nicaragua, Alma continues to work as a domestic employee for a family in San Rafael de Escazú, a wealthy community near San José. Rosalba enacts her story for the camera as she remembers her experience with tears in her eyes: “Al recordar siento que me estoy viviendo lo que sufrí estando allá por primera vez. Me tocó sufrir mucho porque iba sola, [...], o sea pasé muchas dificultades, y [es] así como yo sé que muchas muchachas que se van sufren” (*Desde*). Because Rosalba is now back in Nicaragua with her family, the audience listens to her testimony and that of her mother Doña Alma. Doña Alma used to make pots from *barro* and sell them to help support her family, but tough economic times have deeply affected their livelihood. She expresses guilt for relying on her daughters to take care of the family. Like many immigrant families, one member stays behind to take care of the house and smaller children while others travel to find work and support the family with remittances. Although the Ramírez family seems unique because women have migrated instead of men, filmmaker Álvarez explains that this situation is common in Nicaragua. In an interview with Nicaragua’s *La Prensa*, she says, “Nos llamó la atención el rol que las mujeres están jugando. Gran parte de las amas de casa de la Nicaragua desempleada, toman las riendas en Costa Rica” (Ruiz Baldelomar). Thus, the Ramírez family offers spectators an informative glimpse of what immigrant families experience in Nicaragua by depending on the younger Alma who lives and works in Costa Rica.

At first Alma does not enact much emotion for the camera and appears to be well adapted to her new life in Escazú. She is twenty years old in the film but has been working for the Guzmán family for five years, cooking, cleaning, and taking care of the youngest son Manrique who has Downs Syndrome. Her employers are also interviewed and graciously express gratitude for all that Alma does, dispelling the notion that “nicas” steal jobs and take advantage of Costa Ricans. Martha Clarissa Hernández commented that incorporating the Guzmán family was a strategic part of the film: “Se rompió la jerarquía de patrón y empleada porque los tres salen como personajes” (Personal Interview). While this may be true, they continue to perform roles for the camera, for the Guzmán family plays the role of the “good” Costa Ricans who are appreciative and respectful of their domestic help, and Alma, who seems more stoic and quiet with her employers, enacts the role of the quiet and faithful domestic worker. What remains hidden is the fact that Alma does an enormous amount of work for very little money and only has Sundays free. This segment of the film is a clear example of what James Scott in *Domination and the Arts of Resistance* refers to as public and private transcripts, meaning the audience is only presented with what is said in public but is not privy to what the Guzmán family thinks and feels behind the scenes. Spectators do, however, get a glimpse of Alma’s more private feelings as she shares more personal information when she is alone with the camera. She selflessly explains, for example, how her salary helps back in Nicaragua:

La verdad en Nicaragua estudiar es un lujo y un lujo que los pobres a veces no se pueden dar, y entonces en ese tiempo estábamos tan mal que yo dije bueno que aprendan a leer mis hermanitos los chiquitos. [...] Todo este tiempo les he estado pagando el colegio a ellos. Me gustaría que tengan más oportunidades. (*Desde*)

Alma speaks of her own desire to take classes and search for better opportunities in the future but regrets that her schedule does not allow it. When Alma has the opportunity to watch the video of her family going about their daily lives in Nicaragua, it is at this moment when she enacts her homesickness, a performance of affect that represents her citizenship. She becomes visibly emotional and expresses her loneliness with the words, “Me hacen mucha falta” (*Desde*). Alma’s negotiation of affect leads to a disidentification that emphasizes her feelings of displacement and lack of belonging.

In addition to the Ramírez family, *Desde el barro al sur* represents the immigrant experiences of other women who have settled in Costa Rica. Pregnancy and domestic violence are two topics that surface. According to Costa Rican law, undocumented women who have a baby in the country can legalize their status and obtain residency, and thus pregnancy may be a strategic tool for many newcomers. Traveling south to flee abusive husbands is another option for Nicaraguan women. Beverly Pacheco, for example, immigrated in 1990 to escape a situation of domestic violence, claiming “mejor protección para la mujer y los niños en Costa Rica.” Like Alma, Beverly’s situation represents two opposing sides to the issue because, at the time of filming, she had not seen or spoken with her children in Nicaragua for nine years. Immigrating provided her with economic and marital independence but also forced her to make a difficult decision about her children. Beverly lives in La Carpio, a neighborhood primarily inhabited by Nicaraguans on the outskirts of San José, and self-identifies herself as “negra,” for she comes from the Caribbean side of Nicaragua and is thus possibly a Miskito Indian. She speaks strongly, criticizing both governments for being corrupt, and complains about the “nicas” who get involved with gangs and the “ticos” who are racist. She expresses disappointment and anger about racist attitudes by communicating that she has been overlooked for several different jobs

because of her skin color. Beverley's performance of affect, therefore, brings to light issues of xenophobia, racism, and violence against women as they pertain to the issue of migration. Her testimony also leaves a lasting impression on audience members, for she is mentioned in different reviews of the film (Penha; Cortés, *La pantalla* 449). During the question-and-answer session after the film's premiere in Costa Rica, she also received several questions about her children in Nicaragua (Hernández). According to Hernández, because of the emotional impact of making the documentary, Beverley clandestinely crossed into Nicaragua to look for her children and was able to travel back to Costa Rica with her daughter (Personal interview). *Desde el barro al sur* thus provided a cathartic experience for Beverley that transformed her life and encouraged audience members to imagine alternative communities.

The final scenes of the documentary record different reactions along the border from those who were recently deported or are waiting to cross. The border area appears to be a no man's land, for there is not much security and immigrants seem to cross easily. One man, in particular, is in good spirits about his pending journey and laughingly enacts his testimony. He expresses joy about working in Costa Rica and says he would go to Vietnam or China if the pay were better: "Lo que uno necesita es espíritu de superación porque hay dos tipos de gente en la vida, hay gente pobre y pobre gente" (*Desde*). In his mind, immigrating to Costa Rica signifies taking control and not being a victim, even if this means leaving his wife and child in Nicaragua. However, one man who was recently deported tells a different story, enacting the stereotype of the exploited immigrant worker. He represents the risk of crossing illegally, for his employer called the authorities to avoid paying for the month's work he had done. The Ramírez Centeno family from northern Nicaragua was also deported and waiting to try again the next day. After

the mother explains that they have sold everything to make the difficult journey, her son enacts a heartfelt description, or performance of affect, of the “nica-tica” relationship. He states:

Parece que la ley no permite que un nica se entre mientras los ticos a Nicaragua entran cuando a ellos les parezca. Parece que no todos fuéramos centroamericanos. Todos somos centroamericanos, todos somos hispanos, todos tenemos que tener el mismo sentido de unión en el corazón. (*Desde*)

This statement is a call for cultural citizenship and alternative communities in the face of national rules and regulations that restrict individual mobility. The film’s closing words make a similar plea for working together: “La migración [...] debe interpretarse no como un problema, sino, como un asunto de necesidad mutua” (*Desde*). By offering this final message in written form, audience members are asked to read and reflect upon their own feelings about the film and about the reality facing Nicaragua and Costa Rica in the twenty-first century.

Thus, through the local context of Nicaraguan immigrants in Costa Rica, the four films discussed here, *Desde el barro al sur*, *NICA/ragüense*, *De sol a sol*, and *La mesa feliz*, offer unique viewing options for national and international audiences that promote awareness about a global trend of increasing migrations and internationalisms. Because of public and often free screenings and also popular consumption of movies, these social documentaries are perhaps more accessible and attractive to the general public than testimonial writings and fictional narratives. They also represent a variety of immigrant experiences, those of women, men and children who both leave home and are left at home. Furthermore, by offering audiences visual, musical, and oral representations of these experiences, the films discussed here communicate affect in a way that a written text cannot and encourage spectators to negotiate their own feelings about immigrant tensions in Costa Rica, Nicaragua, or wherever they consider home to be. If

audience members can grapple with and discuss their reactions to the films, then perhaps they can better understand the human complexities of migration and reach a new level of consciousness that promotes alternative communities and affective notions of belonging. They can learn to appreciate differences in nationality, ethnicity, gender, class, and sexuality and, therefore, perform a global citizenship through common feelings of affect.

Notes

¹ The fictional protagonist of *El Nica* is partially based on Meléndez's lived experiences as an immigrant and is apparently infused with his own feelings and emotions about the immigrant situation in Costa Rica. The monologue also brings to life the essay "Yo también soy nica" originally published in 1997 in *La nación* by Rodrigo Soto González, who then collaborated with Meléndez to create a script for *El Nica*. Meléndez, however, has garnered most of the attention for transforming the script into a two-hour performance, during which the protagonist holds a one-sided conversation with the crucifix hanging on the wall of his humble apartment. In May 2008 despite repeated attempts to contact Meléndez, I was unable to interview him about *El Nica*. I did not have the opportunity to see the show either because he no longer offers regular performances.

² I am grateful to Costa Rica's Centro de Cine and Mercedes Ramírez, the director in May 2008, for providing me with information about the directors and documentaries discussed here as well as digital copies of available films.

³ Neither *El camino* nor *El rey del cha cha cha* had been released to the general public in May 2008 so I was unable to watch them or purchase a digital copy during my trip to Costa Rica.

⁴ In addition to the films discussed here, I experienced other cultural events that explored the topic of migration during my trip to the region in May 2008. Costa Rica's Museo Nacional and Museo de Arte Costarricense had exhibits intended to sensitize the public, and in Managua I attended the play *El cruce*. While the play focused more on Nicaraguan migrations to the United States, the performance I attended was designed to initiate a general dialogue about emigration. It was a special showing for nearby schools, sponsored by Nicaragua's Civil Society Network for Migrations, whose representatives led a discussion following the live performance. In Managua,

I also listened to a live broadcast of *Enlace familiar*, a joint radio program sponsored by Nicaragua's Radio La Primerísima and Costa Rica's Radio Cucú, in which people in both countries can phone in messages for their long-distance relatives. I am thankful to Omar García who invited me to the broadcast on May 30, 2008, which was Mother's Day in Nicaragua.

⁵ Directors Julio Molina and Daniel Ross take a unique look at Nicaraguan migration to the United States with their documentary *Querido Camilo* (2007). The film is based on the true story of Camilo Mejía, a Nicaraguan immigrant living in the North who became the first U.S. soldier to desert the army in protest of the war in Iraq. Other recent documentaries dealing with Central American migration in general to the United States include *Homeland* (2001) from Daniel Flores D'Ascensio, Luis Argueta's *Por cobrar* (2002), Tin Dirdamal's *De nadie* (2005), Uli Stelzner's *Asalto al sueño* (2006), and Juan Manuel Sepúlveda's *La frontera infinita* (2007).

⁶ With a Chilean mother and an Iraqi father who both lived in exile, Yasin was born in Moscow in 1968 and moved to Costa Rica at the age of five (Sanchez; WIDE). She has worked in theater, screenwriting and directing and also started her own production company, Producciones Astarté, in 1998. In addition to *La mesa feliz*, Yasin has written, directed and produced the short film *Florencia de los ríos hondos y los tiburones grandes* (1999), *Te recuerdo como eras* (2004), a short film dedicated to Pablo Neruda, and her first feature film *El camino* (2007).

⁷ The School of Film and Television at Universidad Veritas opened in 2003 due to a growing interest in the audiovisual medium in Costa Rica and Central America. Since then, it has produced an important group of young filmmakers who have helped reinvigorate the local cinema (Cortés, *Luz* 254-71).

⁸ In the final credits, the actor's name appears as José Alfredo Guidos, however, the script for *De sol a sol* refers to him as Alfredo, which is the name I have used throughout my analysis.

⁹ Originally from the San José area, Ureña has worked in film and television in Costa Rica and Spain since the age of twenty (Venegas, "Hace"). In addition to *De sol a sol*, he has also directed *Costa Rica es pura vida* (2004) and *Espejismos* (2006), both of which won awards at Costa Rica's Muestra de Cine y Video in their respective years (Cortés, *Luz* 112-19). He also works for the art foundation Teorética, writes for *La nación*, and teaches courses on film (Personal Interview).

¹⁰ Álvarez and Hernández have been working together on film projects since the Sandinista Revolution when Hernández left Honduras and immigrated to Nicaragua. In the early 1990s, they formed their own production company Luna Films and since then have produced a number of films, including *Lady Marshall* (1991), *No todos los sueños han sido soñados* (1994), *Blanco Organdí* (1998), and *Desde el barro al sur* (2002). The majority of their work focuses on the experiences of women.

Chapter 4

Listening to the Aural Borderlands: Musical Representations of Mexican, Salvadoran, and Nicaraguan Immigrant Experiences

Music connects people, perhaps more than other cultural forms, to their emotions, identities, values, likes, and dislikes because most can relate to the experience of being moved by a catchy tune or committing one to memory. Music can affect people physically, mentally, spiritually, and sensually, conjuring up past experiences, present ideas, and future possibilities. Furthermore, listening to music is both an individual and a collective experience, for it builds communities and is influenced by socio-cultural practices, and yet a song may take on new meaning with each listener and listening. The characters and protagonists of works previously discussed, for example, are listeners of musical tales through which they connect to others and to their own experiences. In *Diario de un mojado*, discussed in chapter one, border crossers listen to well-known migrant *corridos* or border ballads by Los Tigres del Norte (44), while Servín in *Por amor al dólar*, also discussed in chapter one, gets transported back to his youth in Mexico City listening to rock music in Connecticut (94-96). In *Odisea del Norte*, commented in chapter two, a Salvadoran tries to understand his Mexican counterparts through *ranchera* or country songs (51), whereas music of all sorts connects the different scenes and performances of the documentaries in chapter three. All of these examples compose the migrant soundtrack that this chapter seeks to underscore. It records the musical exchanges, connections, and (dis)harmonies that migrants sing and listen to as they cross geographical and geopolitical frontiers. This chapter is thus primarily concerned with the popular musical expressions of working-class immigrants who straddle the fences of the Americas.

Music offers the perfect cultural form to conclude this project because it crosses into the terrain of popular culture, giving voice to and providing an outlet for the people. Like *testimonio*, fiction, and film, as discussed in the previous chapters, music is often a narrative form, as we will see with the Mexican *corrido*, which tells the stories and adventures of individuals and their communities through song. However, compared to these cultural forms, music is more accessible because people do not need to understand the lyrics to feel the rhythm and connect to the beat, thereby promoting cross-cultural connections. Because of its oral transmission, music is also more readily available than books or film and can link literate, non-literate, or semi-literate individuals to a community. In *Postnational Musical Identities*, Corona and Madrid suggest that music is perhaps the most apt genre to represent migrant cultures because it is the “perennial undocumented immigrant; it has always moved beyond borders without the required paperwork” (5). As of late, sounds and songs have become increasingly more mobile due to technological innovations such as MP3 players, cellphones, and internet sites like iTunes. In *Musical Migrations*, Aparicio and Jáquez comment on the privileged role of popular music “as one of the most visibly transnational cultural productions in the Americas” (2).¹ Similarly, sociologist Simon Frith describes music as “the cultural form best able to cross borders – sounds carry across fences and walls and oceans, across classes, races and nations – and to define places; [...] we are only where the music takes us” (125).

In this chapter, I will explore the music, lyrics, and listeners of people who traverse frontiers to represent Mexican, Salvadoran, and Nicaraguan immigrant experiences, thereby linking the histories, encounters, and communities represented in the previous chapters. The music I examine here also ties together the threads of orality, affect, and cultural citizenship that run throughout this dissertation. By looking at the aural/oral elements of musical texts and the

strategies that songwriters and performers employ, including influential lyrics, the use of voice, and musical styles, my analysis will focus on the immigrant stories told by singers of *corridos* and protest songs as part of Latin American traditions of orality and *testimonio*. The singers considered here engage the *testimonio* tradition, for their songs offer oral, often personal and eye-witness accounts of immigrant experiences and adventures, thus creating musical *testimonios*. In *Voices from the fuente viva*, Nauss Millay recognizes music as part of the region's oral production by describing singers, musicians and storytellers as "human archives of collective lore; they store information and perpetuate tradition" (11). Many of the strategies of oral narrative described by Nauss Millay, such as repetitions, colloquial sayings, spoken dialogue, and allusions to myth, also structure songs. These oral elements thus constitute music's strategies for promoting a sense of community and for communicating site-specific experiences among immigrant communities, thereby encouraging solidarity among listeners.

This chapter focuses on the oral *testimonios* produced by Mexican regional music and Nicaragua's *volcanto* songs. I will examine the music, lyrics, and audiences of diverse artists who orally represent the immigrant testimonies of Mexicans and Salvadorans in the United States and of Nicaraguans in Costa Rica. "Mexican Regional" is a catch-all term for *norteño*, *banda*, *mariachi*, and other traditional styles from Mexico and, according to the Recording Industry Association of America, it is the top-selling Latin genre in the United States, accounting for sixty percent of sales (Ragland 189). *Norteño* music with the *corrido* at its core has been the most popular genre within this musical conglomerate, and Los Tigres del Norte has been its biggest promoter (16, 179-89). While the sounds of Mexican Regional are traditional, pulling from the polkas and waltzes of northern Mexico and the rural or *ranchera* style, they have also been influenced by U.S. music like rap and hip-hop (Kun, "A Good Beat" 1, 28). These regional

sounds appeal to the working-class immigrant populations from Mexico but have also influenced border crossers from Central America, and Salvadoran groups like Tex Bronco have adopted the *norteño* style to represent the experiences of their *paisanos* abroad. Mexican styles have also influenced the music of Nicaragua, however, the Latin American New Song (*Nueva canción*), a cultural movement pulling from traditions in Spain and the Americas that developed in the sixties as the voice of the oppressed, has especially taken root among Nicaraguans (Kattau 253). This socially and politically committed music flourished in Nicaragua in the eighties under the name *volcanto* as part of the Sandinista's cultural renaissance with artists like Carlos Mejía Godoy (264), and continues to influence contemporary artists, such as Flor Urbina and Ramón Mejía. Their music ranges from the folk sounds of acoustic guitar to technologically enhanced rock ballads. Thus both styles, Mexican Regional and Nicaragua's *volcanto*, are hybrid and transnational forms, for they manifest local and regional traditions but grow within a transnational frame.

Recent studies have highlighted the important connection between music and migration, including music's ability to move and the musical expressions of immigrants. In "The Aural Border" Josh Kun highlights the sounds of the U.S.-Mexico border, suggesting that songs can make audible the experiences, histories and politics of the border (2). The nation's official construction of the border(s), he argues, also produces multiple unofficial ones that create spaces for "narrativity, experience and storytelling, the border articulated through the daily performances, rituals, and acts of people who live within its physical and psychic bounds" (4). The aural border, that is the border narrated through music and sound, forms part of this multiplicity. It highlights audio-formations of social and cultural identities and also provides alternative sites for interaction and communication (2, 9). It also brings together sound and

space, artists and listeners, and performance and consumption. Thinking about the aural border in terms of Arjun Appadurai's global cultural flows, Kun coins the term "audioscapes," or "musically determined and financially enabled landscapes populated by indeterminate cultural forms, mobile communities, and shifting identities" (14). Rather than soundscapes, audioscapes privilege the ear and what is heard. Kun's definition also emphasizes the fluidity of sound and the ease by which music crosses all types of boundaries, catering to hybrid cultures and identities. Music therefore can connect dispersed populations and diasporic communities, offering a link to home.

By privileging the ear and what is heard, the aural border underscores the importance of orality to migrant cultures. Music offers mobile individuals who may rely on word-of-mouth communication an oral/aural outlet for telling their stories and hearing the experiences of others. In his study on oral poetry, which includes song, Paul Zumthor defines the oral as "any poetic communication where transmission and reception [...] are carried by voice and hearing" (23). He thus brings together the oral and aural by focusing on the power of voice. For Zumthor, every oral communication depends on voice which, in turn, establishes an act of authority because "voice marks the manner in which we situate ourselves in the world and with respect to others" (21-22). Zumthor also explains that a new "mediatized" orality has restored power to voice because it benefits from the influential status of technology (18). He uses the term "mediat" instead of mass media to focus on audiovisual technology like radio and television that involves hearing and audiovisual senses (18-19). Similarly, Eero Tarasti suggests in *Signs of Music* that today's digital age, which is inherently mobile and borderless, can be considered a new oral age because people are more oriented to the world by spoken language and visual markers than by written texts (163). The use of cellphones, MP3 players, and iTunes are

examples of this new mediatized orality through which music can be listened to, recorded, and transported. Kun focuses on the power of the cellphone for working-class immigrant families because many of them do not own a home computer and are thus not typical consumers in the electronic age (“Mexican Bands” 24). He reports that while the majority of digital sales in the Anglo market take place online an estimated eight-five percent of digital Mexican music is bought via cellphones (24). As a population on the move, cellphones keep transnational families and communities connected, appeal to young and old listeners, and easily transition into mobile jukeboxes (24). Today’s oral age, therefore, makes it easier than ever to hear the aural border.

Because the border in this chapter moves between the United States, Mexico, and Central America, the aural border is mobile, an idea that allows me to conceptualize beyond the geopolitical space of the U.S.-Mexico border. Gloria Anzaldúa identifies a borderland as a “vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition” (3). Similarly, in *The Floating Borderlands*, an anthology of U.S. Hispanic Literature, Lauro Flores emphasizes the “floating” or undefined nature of a borderland while adding a utopian dimension that encapsulates dreams and possibilities in this undetermined place (5). Both of these definitions highlight the affective nature of the borderland, united by emotion, be it painful or hopeful, and songs (music and lyrics) can express these emotions and elicit affective responses better than other cultural forms because music has a way of getting under our skin. A simple melody or musical phrase can remind us of a fond childhood memory, a lost love, or a traumatic situation. The aural borderland is thus part of our affective attachments, individual identities, and collective memories.

Kun also recognizes the affective dimensions of music in his 2005 study *Audiotopia*, a concept he defines as “sonic spaces of effective utopian longings” (23). Drawing on Foucault’s

idea of heterotopias, or unreal spaces of possible utopias, Kun argues that music brings into contact incompatible sites, offering listeners and musicians “new maps for re-imagining the present social world” (22-23). Moreover, the feelings inspired by music can lead to utopian dreams of who we want to be and how we want the world to be (17). Protest songs are a perfect example of musical longings for a more just world. As will be discussed, Woody Guthrie’s “This Land is Your Land” imagines a more inclusive United States where people from all backgrounds can live together, while the music of Cuban Silvio Rodríguez has become a “soundtrack” for cultural revolutions in Latin America. Their songs are powerful audiotopias that project, from their viewpoint, a united dream in which race, class, gender, and nationality do not matter. As Kun writes, music provides access to other worlds, creating a tool for social change and for community-building (*Audiotopia* 4). By functioning as a possible utopia, music is more than sound to our ears, it is also “a space that we can enter into, encounter, move around in, inhabit, be safe in, learn from” (2). With this understanding, audiotopias are also “contact zones” because they are musical spaces of difference where individuals from disparate places and cultures can coexist (23). Thus, music invites us to negotiate our own identities and those of others, trying on different versions of ourselves as we sing in other languages or hear tunes from disparate musical spheres and enter into alternate cultural spaces.

All of these concepts: audiotopias, audioscapes, and aural borderlands—show how music can create imagined communities. Benedict Anderson briefly describes music’s ability to connect individuals, basing his argument on the singing of national anthems because they “provide occasions for unisonality [...]. If we are aware that others are singing these songs precisely when and as we are, we have no idea who they may be, or even where, out of earshot, they are singing. Nothing connects us all but imagined sound” (145). In thinking beyond the

nation, I propose that music associated with a particular style or region, like *norteño* music from northern Mexico or Nicaragua's *volcanto* music can also produce a sense of belonging and cultural identity, especially for dispersed populations. Performers like Los Tigres del Norte, El Gringo and Tex Bronco, which can be classified as Mexican regional acts, have promoted a sense of community in the United States, Mexico, and Central America through their immigrant *corridos*, whereas such diverse singer-songwriters as Flor Urbina and Ramón Mejía have drawn on the *volcanto* tradition to connect listeners in Nicaragua and Costa Rica. The oral/aural elements of these musical *testimonios* promote a sense of solidarity and community.

Orality is an essential part of music's ability to create alternative communities, for according to Walter Ong, orality generates a group consciousness by creating a listening public and, with today's globalization, this group of listeners tends to be transnational (*Orality* 134). Zumthor also suggests that mediatized orality erases distance and constitutes a new collective bond because "the sociality that in day-to-day existence enriches 'live' voice is changed into a hypersociality circulating in the networks of telecommunications" (19). Thus, much like Anderson's theory about national anthems, popular songs based in oral traditions that represent immigrant experiences can create a transnational imagined community for citizens living inside and outside of their countries of origin. These songs can also attract non-immigrant performers and listeners as part of the community, such as the singer-songwriter Shawn Kiehne known as El Gringo, who produces an imagined sound that crosses borders and facilitates change. Although musical styles are often defined along lines of class, race, ethnicity, and nationality, audiences can fluctuate. In "Music and Identity" Frith argues that listeners are not restricted by social circumstances but rather one's musical identity and pleasure can be freely chosen (122). Much like Kun's notion of audiotopia, Frith sees music as a way to idealize oneself and the world free

from pre-determined socio-cultural scripts, for it “gives us a real experience of what the ideal could be” (123). The visceral experience of music therefore contributes to a group consciousness, and the hybrid sounds of popular music invite listeners from all backgrounds, representing the cultural mixes so prevalent in today’s globalized world.

The popular oral traditions of regional Mexican music and Nicaraguan *volcanto* songs are complex sites where identities are negotiated and communities are bridged. The music travels with migrant populations as part of their collective memories and cultural identities, offering a link to home and a space for belonging in new lands. Immigrant songs are thus powerful audiotopias that register cultural flows between and within nations by juxtaposing differences. Because immigrants are often silenced within official discourses, popular music also plays an important discursive role for the Mexican, Salvadoran, and Nicaraguan transnational communities through which they can voice concerns about and manifest resistance to their host societies. These musical styles also register the structures of feeling of the immigrant experience in the United States and Costa Rica by revealing a social history in the making and identities emerging from daily situations. As George Lipsitz writes, “Popular culture does not just reflect reality, it helps constitute it” (*Dangerous* 137).² These musical styles thus influence and are influenced by borderland experiences, thereby remapping and reconfiguring immigrant cartographies and communities. The following analysis will listen for such aural borderlands and oral testimonies by being attentive to voice, lyrics, styles, and audiences as they pertain to Mexican Regional and the Nicaraguan *volcanto*.

The oral/aural elements of the sounds and songs of the *norteño* ensemble Los Tigres del Norte offer a perfect example of how music can bring immigrants and non-immigrants together to imagine alternative communities. Originally from the northwestern state of Sinaloa, Mexico,

the group arrived in the United States without documents in 1968, and their personal status as unauthorized workers allowed them to connect with immigrant and working-class fans on both sides of the border. Since arriving in the United States, group members Jorge Hernández, lead vocalist and accordionist, brothers Hernán, Eduardo, and Luis and their cousin Oscar Lara have enjoyed enormous success with some 55 recorded albums that add up to more than 30 million dollars in sales (Mangual 38). They have won six Grammy and Latin Grammy awards, including one for their 2007 album *Detalles y emociones*. Furthermore, the title track from their 2009 album *La Granja* hit number one in September 2009, the first *corrido* to reach number one on Mexican Regional charts since 2002 (also a Los Tigres *corrido*—“La reina del sur”). In addition to chart-topping sales and numerous awards, Los Tigres have influenced new and diverse musical performers, among the many are El Gringo, a self-proclaimed “white” guy who learned Spanish listening to the group on a Texas ranch and now has his own album recorded in Spanish, and also Julieta Venegas, an alternative rocker from Tijuana who sings on the group’s 2001 rock tribute album *El más grande homenaje a los Tigres del Norte*. Having performed in such diverse places as Spain, El Salvador, Mexico, and the United States, Los Tigres have reached local, regional, and international success, thus crossing musical, cultural, and geographical borders.³

As the most popular vocal group on Mexican Regional charts, Los Tigres stay connected to their Mexican roots with a *norteño* sound and style. The *norteño* sound depends on a “pinched, shrill, nasal style” backed by the accordion, and other instruments include a *bajo sexto* guitar, an electric bass, and drums (Chew Sánchez 35-36; Ragland 1). Los Tigres have slightly modernized their sound with new technologies and contemporary styles, thereby taking advantage of today’s mediatized orality to re-energize a traditional style that connects them to

the Mexican community and specifically to the border region. Their songs describe the feelings and experiences of the *pueblo*, which has earned them the nickname “Los Ídolos del Pueblo” because the average person can identify with their music and history. For this same reason, their listening public tends to be the working class on both sides of the border.⁴ By often portraying violent, sexist, and misogynistic themes, however, it is important to note that *norteño* music tends to exclude the experiences of women. Thus, similar to the testimonial works about Mexican immigrants discussed in chapter one, Los Tigres’s songs tend to privilege the male migrant experience.

While Los Tigres helped *norteño* music achieve widespread popularity in the 1980s and 1990s, regional Mexican music has had a long history of influence in the United States and of representing immigrant experiences. In her study *Northward Bound: The Mexican Immigrant Experience in Ballad and Song*, María Herrera-Sobek finds the theme of migration in songs as early as 1848 to express the feelings of displaced individuals from the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo that rewarded the northern half of Mexican territory to the United States (xi). Herrera-Sobek traces the musical history of migration and notes that the topic became more popular in the 1970s and 80s (xii), which parallels an increase in the movement of Mexicans, especially undocumented individuals after the end of the Bracero Program in 1964. Songs focus on a variety of themes related to the immigrant experience, such as strategies for crossing the border, racial and ethnic tensions, politics, love, and assimilation (xii). Moreover, Herrera-Sobek identifies the roots of Mexican music with an immigrant theme in the oral tradition, specifically that of oral poetry (xix). This tradition of orality dates back to pre-Colombian culture before influence from the Western world.

Steeped in this oral tradition, the Mexican *corrido* has been the primary voice for migrants over the years. It has been traced to the Spanish *romance*, a classic poetic song form dating back to the 1500s, and has also been described as a “popular musico-poetic form that has served the *pueblo* [common people] as a means of oral expression since the formation of Mexico” (Ragland 7; Fernández 116). The states of Jalisco, Michoacán, Guanajuato, and the border region—the places that send the majority of immigrants to the United States—have contributed more than others to the folklorization and popularization of the *corrido*, which suggests a strong connection between this musical form and migration (Fernández 117). In comparison to other popular songs, *corridos* are characterized by their narrative content, for they narrate historic or popular events, often in the epic form, from the perspective of a witness or a well-informed individual (115). For our purposes, the *corrido* might be considered the musical form of the *testimonio*. In telling stories about immigrant experiences, *corridos* often represent border crossers as heroic outlaws who confront authority, racism, and poverty much like Pancho Villa and other Revolutionary fighters who have been portrayed in *corridos* since the late nineteenth century (Ragland 10). Mythical allusions to such heroes function as rhetorical strategies of orality and also appeal to rural and working-class communities on both sides of the border. In *Corridos in Migrant Memory*, Martha Chew Sánchez emphasizes the popular song’s appeal to these communities: “Since *corridos* are created, listened to, and performed by rural and urban working classes, they are normally seen as in opposition to the cultural expressions of the dominant culture” (31). All of these elements contribute to a group consciousness and a sense of community for immigrants working in the United States.

Pulling from this rich history, Mexican regional music has been booming in the United States since the 1980s and 1990s due to socio-historical developments. The economic crisis in

Mexico, NAFTA's disruption of local practices, and the need for workers in the United States, resulted in an influx of border crossers who brought a renewed sense of cultural identity to the North, establishing popular music as the voice of immigrants, particularly that of undocumented workers. Music became a response mechanism to discriminatory practices, unjust working conditions, and legislative reforms like California's Proposition 187 in 1994. In a study of *banda* music, George Lipsitz argues that listening to traditional music from Mexico, wearing rural cowboy fashion, and gathering at dance halls shows resistance to assimilation, for immigrants "proudly flaunt rather than hide their foreign origins, seeking solidarity in numbers and catharsis in aggressive festivity" ("Home" 201-03). This is a perfect example of cementing a collectivity from an oral/aural gathering. Whether listening to live acts or recorded songs, the music produces a space for alternative communal bonding, offering cultural citizenship to listeners who have endured similar experiences of racism or discrimination for their immigrant status or Mexican background.

Transnational solidarity also resulted from the 1992 death of *banda* singer Chalino Sánchez, an undocumented immigrant from rural Mexico who became famous writing and singing *narcocorridos*, or ballads about drug traffickers. According to journalist Sam Quinones, Sánchez modernized the *corrido* about border bandits and folk heroes, making it available to the masses (12). Quinones argues that Sánchez's death made him a legendary hero, initiating a "Mexican-roots renaissance" in Los Angeles and the United States that made it "cool" for younger generations to listen to their parents' music from Mexico (12, 24).⁵ The rising popularity of Mexican Regional therefore has helped create an intergenerational solidarity among the working-class immigrant population in the United States, including the young and the old as well as recent arrivals and more established immigrants.

In his 2006 New York Times article “A Good Beat, And You Can Protest to It,” Kun describes Mexican Regional as an aural CNN for the immigrant community, providing “a platform for building community while broadcasting the hardships of border crossings, deportations and manual labor” (28). By participating in political and cultural movements, it offers a soundtrack for recent immigrant protests and responds to immigrant legislation, such as the defeated 2005 legislation (HR 4437) that sought to punish undocumented immigrants, their families, and supporters as hardened criminals (1, 28). While songs used to be produced in Mexico, they now come from the United States and only gain popularity in Latin America after becoming successful in the North (28). The sounds of Mexican Regional are thus more about life north of the border than south of it.⁶

Los Tigres del Norte have contributed to this transnational and intergenerational solidarity, for they are constantly re-releasing hit songs, breathing new life into them and making them accessible and available to newer generations. Re-releasing popular songs also contributes to an oral tradition that keeps songs current and present. While this marketing strategy creates an intertextual dialogue with Los Tigres’s own musical repertoire, many of their songs also use intertextuality to connect the listening public to Mexico’s larger oral tradition. “El mojado acaudalado,” a popular *corrido* that spent sixteen weeks on Billboard’s Regional Mexican chart in 1997, is a perfect example of this oral technique. Written by Teodoro Bello, “El mojado acaudalado” tells the story of a migrant worker who has earned enough money in the United States to comfortably spend his final years in Mexico. The song opens with what sounds like the homegrown acoustics of a child singing the chorus in his bedroom, which highlights the song’s performance as the voice of the *pueblo* because anybody can sing it. The introduction is then

followed by an accordion interlude and an ay-yay-yay yelp, important oral strategies that identify the *corrido* as a *norteño* hit. The chorus, sung in a nasal tone, also closes the song:

Me está esperando México lindo
 por eso mismo me voy a ir.
 Soy el mojado acaudalado
 pero en mi tierra quiero morir.

While the voice expresses nostalgia for Mexico and the desire to return home to die, the protagonist has also grown attached to the United States. After naming the places he has worked, California, Texas, and Oregon, the voice sings, “De los Estados Unidos / yo no me voy a olvidar.” Although many undocumented immigrants may not have the option of returning home to die, “El mojado acaudalado” represents listeners’ audiotopic longings to fulfill this desire. The use of the phrase “México lindo” in the chorus also plays on listeners’ nostalgia, for it calls into memory the popular mariachi song “México lindo y querido,” which also speaks of dying away from Mexico. In Los Tigres’ reinvented version, however, the immigrant gets a happy ending by returning home. This dialogue thus emphasizes an oral tradition, activating the collective memory of the Mexican transnational community.

The use of the word *mojado* in the title and throughout the song also deserves attention because its English translation “wetback” negatively refers to unauthorized Mexicans who enter the United States by swimming across the Río Grande. Despite its negative connotations, Los Tigres appropriated it with their first immigrant *corrido* “Vivan los mojos” in 1976 and have continued to use the term over the years. In *Corridos in Migrant Memory*, Martha Chew Sánchez explains that *mojado* “becomes a source of ethnic pride that defines migrants as social, cultural, and economic actors, as people who cross the Rio Bravo and whose hard work makes a

significant contribution to the U.S. economy” (42). I would add that Los Tigres’s appropriation of the term also interpellates undocumented immigrants, which translates into a direct acknowledgement of the experiences of a large part of their listening public, thereby creating an alternative space for communal belonging unavailable through traditional citizenship and political means.

The Grammy-winning 2004 album *Pacto de sangre* emphasizes the group’s social and political commitments to undocumented immigrants and to oppressed workers in general. “El santo de los mojados,” for example, speaks to the dangers of crossing the border since the United States government initiated Operation Gatekeeper in the 1990s, a policy that beefed up security measures at popular checkpoints pushing unauthorized immigrants to rely on smugglers and to traverse remote areas. “El santo de los mojados” represents these policy changes and increased dangers through shifts in its music and lyrics, which may indicate a reformulation of the structures of feeling in the twenty-first century. The song uses an oral prayer format in that it interpellates a higher power and also speaks directly to Saint Peter, “el santo patrón de todos los mojados,” with the personal pronoun you. The voice also sings as a collective “we,” making the prayer communal by asking for protection for all undocumented immigrants trying to get to the United States. The first four verses reveal this request as well as the prayer format:

En el nombre del padre y del hijo
 Señor San Pedro a ti me dirijo
 Y a nombre del espíritu santo
 Nos des la protección de tu manto.

The voice describes the difficulties of crossing the border, requesting help “para que ya ni el frío ni el calor / dejen más muertos” and also safekeeping from “los asaltantes, contrabandistas y

otros maleantes.” The *corrido* also depicts a difficult situation at home, for immigrants are willing to risk everything because their “hijos se mueren de hambre.” A country of origin is not specified in the song, but rather the collective voice refers to an inclusive immigrant community from the Latin/o American borderlands. This general critique becomes explicit with the following request: “no dejes que regrese al infierno / que a mi país convierte el gobierno,” a verse that could refer to many countries in Latin America. To remedy this situation, Saint Peter’s protection guarantees a safe arrival to the United States and also “legalización al indocumentado.” In contrast to the nostalgic vision of Mexico represented in “El mojado acaudalado,” “El santo de los mojados” is more critical of home and only sees a future north of the border. Evoking a Catholic saint and using the rhetoric of prayer highlights this critique by drawing on Latin America’s religious roots and Liberation Theology, the Church’s movement that supports justice for the oppressed and also uses oral testimonies to advocate international solidarity. Unlike the faster *corridos* that invite dancing, the music also supports the rhythm of prayer with a slower waltz rhythm that emphasizes the words and accordion interludes. These stylistic adjustments, thus, indicate the changing times for border crossers and communicate a time- and site-specific experience among immigrant communities.

Los Tigres’s 2007 album *Detalles y emociones* includes one of the group’s most politically charged songs to date: “El muro” is a provocative political comment on the 2006 Secure Fence Act, a law later repealed that intended to construct a 15-foot, high-tech fence along the border to further divide the U.S. from Mexico and to deter unlawful immigration. This controversial *corrido* written by Cristina Rubalcava plays with language and voices to highlight orality and to evoke an aural response. The song mixes spoken and sung verses framed by a child’s perspective, for it opens with a group of children playing along the fence and ends with a

child's spoken words, "Yo no quiero muro." While the children's voices and the accordion music give the song a playful sound, "El muro" has a serious message about the dangers of borders and barriers, advocating an open-door policy. The opening lines even address former President Bush, asking him to build bridges instead of tearing communities apart: "Oiga señor presidente / Mejor construya un puente." The use of the formal command "oiga" functions as an oral summons to hear and listen to the people. The singing voice also lists failed initiatives in countries like Iraq, Israel and Palestine, and asks all heads of state to open their ears and minds. The final stanzas also promote a community mindset, and the use of the indirect command form highlights the sense of an oral conversation, asking the listening public to tear down walls and borders so that we can better understand different perspectives:

Que quiten todos los muros

Que se abran las fronteras

Que podamos conocernos

Y cambiar nuestras ideas.

This powerful audiotopia sings of a better world without wars, borders or prejudice and even inserts spoken verses in other languages, like Arabic, German, and French, to emphasize an international mindset. Much like the album title *Detalles y emociones*, the details of the song appeal to the affective experiences of listeners, asking them to imagine a unified community beyond the U.S.-Mexico border.

With so many influential *corridos*, Los Tigres del Norte help perpetuate Mexico's oral tradition by engendering new performances and recordings of Mexican sounds. They are considered by popular artists as diverse as Shawn Kiehne, Julieta Venegas, and Lila Downs as the founding fathers of U.S.-based Mexican regional music. Kiehne, for example, is a self-

proclaimed “white” guy from the U.S. Southwest who was exposed to Los Tigres’s songs while working on a Texas ranch (Kun, “Born” 20). In his autobiographical “El corrido del Gringo,” he recognizes Los Tigres as his “maestros en el español” and also expresses solidarity with immigrants by advocating for undocumented workers. With an accordion accompaniment and *norteño* rhythm, Kiehne sings in clear Spanish:

A mis amigos mojados

[...]

sigan soñando y luchando

que este país necesita

de su esfuerzo y su trabajo.

Kiehne released “El corrido del Gringo” on his 2007 debut album *Algo sucedió* as El Gringo, a nickname that refers to his U.S. citizenship and skin color (Kun, “Born” 20). Emphasizing his “outside” status is a risky move because Mexican Regional music has not traditionally embraced “foreigners.” However, it seems to have paid off in this case, for Kiehne has appeared on Univision’s successful talk show “Don Francisco Presenta” and also won the Spanish-language network’s version of American Idol in 2005 (“El Gigante de Mañana” contest). Kiehne is making a name for himself as the “real deal: a gringo who not only chooses to sing in Spanish, but is also willing to fight for the other side” (Kun, “Born” 20). Although Kiehne’s lyrics and musical style are directed more toward undocumented Mexican workers, he also hopes to appeal to mainstream U.S. culture as the next Ricky Martin crossover star while maintaining a traditional Mexican sound (20). His overall impact remains to be seen, but one thing is for sure: El Gringo is making sonic waves in the U.S.-based Mexican music industry and helping to bridge the gap between immigrant and non-immigrant communities.

In addition to following in the oral footsteps of Los Tigres, Kiehne's success is due in large part to today's mediatized orality because positive customer reviews and top-selling ringtones on iTunes help advertise his musical identity and popularity. Most of the fan reviews comment on his crossover status. Azteca74 writes, "Solo quiero pedir que apollemos a mi compa porque solo con aceptar nuestra música nos acepta a nosotros la RAZA y además sus canciones son muy buenas." While this comment suggests that Kiehne's music is important, being a visible representation of solidarity and acceptance in the United States is perhaps more significant to immigrant groups. Denise Centro, a fan who identifies herself as "American," follows up with a bilingual comment, showing that Kiehne's music appeals to politically active groups like RAZA and also to non-immigrants. She writes, "Es bonito ver un americano que se adapta tanto a lo mexicano. Soy americana y siempre quería ver algo así. El corrido del Gringo es great!" His music is also popular with different age groups, supporting an intergenerational solidarity among Latinos, for an anonymous fan comments in English that she bought the CD for her parents but likes it for herself. Along with writing positive reviews, fans are also downloading Kiehne's songs to their cellphones. "El corrido del Gringo" and "Algo sucedió" are his most popular mobile ringtones, which puts Kiehne in line with Mexican Regional's latest trend of using cellphone technology to appeal to listeners on the move.

Like Kiehne, Mexican singer Julieta Venegas has recognized the influential importance of Los Tigres by singing "Jaula de oro" on the group's 2001 rock tribute album. "La jaula de oro" is one of the group's most recognized *corridos* because it portrays immigration as a social process and represents the generation gap between a father and his sons, issues that are just as relevant today as when Enrique Franco wrote the lyrics in 1984.⁷ After a traditional accordion opening, "La jaula de oro" offers musical testimony of an undocumented immigrant who has

been living in the United States for ten years with his family but still feels insecure about his new surroundings. The voice sings in a nasal tone, “asi no salgo a la calle / pues tengo miedo que me hallen / y me pueden deportar.” His fear of deportation leads him to question the money he has earned and to compare the U.S. to a prison, making it a “jaula de oro.” His imprisonment takes on a double meaning because he also feels isolated from his sons who speak a different cultural and linguistic language than him. While the father feels nostalgia toward Mexico, his sons, who left very young, do not remember it. A spoken dialogue in the middle of the *corrido* reveals this generation gap:

Escúchame m’ijo ¿te gustaría que
regresáramos a México?

What are you talking about, Dad?

No way, I don’t want to go back to Mexico.

The spoken form of these verses and the use of colloquial language like “m’ijo” emphasize the song’s orality. They stand out to the listener, causing her to take notice of the different voices and the tension expressed. This orality is altered when Venegas reinterprets “Jaula de oro” as an alternative rock song. While maintaining the traditional accordion sound, Venegas records a faster version with different voice inflection and less *norteño* nasality. The lyrics of the song do not change, but the listener’s aural experience is completely different. Venegas’s re-recording and re-performing of the song thus allows for an oral reconstitution or reconstruction with slight changes to the musical format.⁸

Although Venegas has a much different musical style that tends to be classified as Latin pop or alternative rock, she draws on the oral traditions of northern Mexico by incorporating accordion melodies and regional sounds into her songs.⁹ By evoking the notion of travel with

titles like “Me voy,” “A dónde sea,” and “Andar conmigo,” Venegas’s lyrics may also resonate with immigrants and mobile communities. Born in California but raised in Tijuana, Venegas’s roots also represent a border hybridity that may appeal to immigrant listeners. As George Lipsitz reminds us, the politics of music is less in the lyrics than in its performance, meaning the “social world and social relations that it has helped create” (“Home” 201). The audience attracted to Venegas’s hybrid music and their response to it are thus part of the performance. Not having seen Venegas or any of the artists discussed here live in concert limits my analysis of performance to musical styles, recorded albums, song lyrics, and online videos, which, in the case of Venegas, suggest that her music interpellates a global Spanish-speaking audience that includes undocumented workers. Her song “Sin documentos” on her 2006 album *Limón y sal* makes a direct connection to “illegal” immigrants, however, the appeal to freely roam is couched in poetic lyrics that describe the wishes of separated lovers instead of a border-crossing experience:

Déjame atravesar el viento sin documentos
 que lo haré por el tiempo que tuvimos
 [...]

 porque buscando tu sonrisa
 estaría toda mi vida.

Although the border is not specifically mentioned, the accordion accompaniment places the audience in the U.S.-Mexico borderland. The song takes on meaning as people listen to it, with the potential to conjure up affective responses from individuals, possibly immigrants, who are separated from their loved ones. The border is therefore part of the aural experience and interpretation rather than the actual lyrics. Thus, Venegas’s hybrid songs offer a unique sound

from the aural borderlands by performing borderland experiences without limiting them to a physical border.

Compared to the previous performers discussed, Mexican-American singer Lila Downs has the most eclectic sound with regional Mexican characteristics. However, she clearly uses intertextuality to draw on Mexican and U.S. oral traditions, and also uses her vocal range to create a unique aural experience for the listener. With a U.S. father and an indigenous mother from Oaxaca's *mixteca* region, Downs has spent her life in-between both countries and now lives in New York where she records musical manifestations of her multicultural identity. She has created her own space to mix and experiment with a variety of musical styles and genres, including indigenous sounds, traditional *ranchera* songs, jazz, hip hop, and classical music. Downs compares her songs to the weavings of the indigenous Trique women in Oaxaca. She explains that these indigenous women voice their own cultural and political views through weavings, and she tries to do the same by creating her own language through music (Montesinos). Downs's vocal range and use of volume are key components of this musical language, for they lend power and authority to her voice and highlight her musical orality. In addition, linguistic maneuvers are an important part of her sound because Downs sings in Spanish, English, and several indigenous languages, often mixing them together to create bilingual fusions. Because of her linguistic and vocal abilities and her double citizenship in Mexico and the United States, Downs has a privileged role in both countries that permits her to cross musical, geographical, and cultural frontiers, appealing to a diverse listening public. Her 2009 live tour, for example, has concert dates in such diverse places as Chicago, Santa Fe, Mexico City, and Oaxaca. Moreover, Downs achieved international fame when she participated

on the *Frida* soundtrack, a movie about Mexican artist Frida Kahlo, which earned her a performance at the Oscars in 2003.

Because of her eclectic sounds and audiences, Downs is a little more difficult to classify as a regional Mexican artist. Kun argues that Downs does not qualify as a regional Mexican act, even though she may want to, because she draws more of an NPR-type audience (“Of Angels and Migrants”). Billboard and iTunes, however, do list many of her songs as Mexican Regional, especially her interpretations of well-known *ranchera* songs like “La tequilera” and “El bracero fracasado.” Songs like these are definitely an attempt to appeal to audiences familiar with Mexico’s oral tradition, and customer comments on iTunes indicate positive reviews. In September 2008, for example, Juan Pablo writes, “Lila sigue dándonos a todos lo mejor de su arte [...]. En ambos idiomas canta la realidad de la comunidad latina in los EE.UU. y de inmigrantes en general.” Album covers like *La cantina* (2006) and *Ojo de culebra/Shake Away* (2008) that show Downs in folkloric dress with braided hair are another performative effort to entice Mexican or Latino/a listeners by emphasizing her indigenous heritage. Downs may also attract English speakers with remakes of popular songs like Woody Guthrie’s “This Land is Your Land” or the romantic ballad “Perhaps, Perhaps, Perhaps.” Moreover, the music industry has classified Downs’s style as “world music,” a label used to denote non-Western music, primarily from developing countries, as representative of local cultures (Pacini Hernández 19). Even though the label is an effective marketing strategy, world music’s promotion of local sounds is problematic since it commodifies folklore and has become a global distribution phenomenon. Because Downs is seen as a willing participant in world music’s essentialization of Mexican culture, some may consider her a sellout and not representative of working-class listeners. However, it is still important to recognize the Mexican sounds in her music and her solidarity

with immigrant workers. Downs is not a working-class immigrant herself but rather a middle-class music professional who represents the “people” and their experiences as she sees them.

The topic of migration is significant for Downs because of her multiethnic background and transnational experiences. Her immigrant songs interpellate a variety of individuals, including immigrants, migrant workers, border communities, and U.S. citizens interested in the topic. She also represents indigenous voices and the experiences of women and children in songs like “La niña” and “Sale sobrando,” thereby recognizing a heterogeneous immigrant community. Downs sings about indigenous immigrants on her first album *La sandunga* (1997) with the *corrido* “Ofrenda,” which according to the CD, was written by her and inspired by all the Mixtec border crossers who die in the United States.¹⁰ Much like the immigrant *corridos* sung by Los Tigres, the voice of “Ofrenda” expresses the desire to return to Mexico to die or at least be buried there. The singing voice also references an oral tradition that informs the community with the phrase “dicen los viejos.” Downs strays, however, from traditional *norteño* music to give the *corrido* an original sound with her strong vocals and guitar and saxophone accompaniments.

Downs’s third album *Border/La línea* (2001) is dedicated to Mexican immigrants and includes a variety of songs with migration and border themes, most of which were written by Downs and her partner Paul Cohen. The album’s musical namesake “La línea” addresses the asymmetrical relations between the two countries by describing the border as a wound, much like Anzaldúa does. By contrasting Downs’s deep voice with the light and classical sound of a harp, the song’s orality also plays with contradictions and asymmetry to emphasize its message. The voice portrays the Mexican side with disdain, contrasting the postmodern and globalized Mexico with its more traditional image: “Ahí en esa orilla del mundo no duerme la maquiladora

/ de un desperdicio en la tierra / el hijo del sol nació.” The singing voice criticizes the materialism and industrialization produced by NAFTA, while promoting the simplicity of the “espíritu de la tierra, espíritu del mar” and by evoking such indigenous images as “la curandera” and “la flor de maíz.” These aural and thematic oppositions therefore underscore the differences between traditional and contemporary Mexico. Because a bass tone is often associated with wisdom (Zumthor 5), Downs’s deep vocals give authority to the singing voice and help privilege Mexico’s indigenous past.

The song “Sale sobrando” also uses orality to emphasize its message and connects to an oral tradition via intertextuality. The lyrics adopt a sarcastic tone mixing Spanish and English to criticize Mexico and the United States for injustices and violations of human rights. The opening verses, for example, compare the reception of Spanish conquistadors to the migration of undocumented workers:

Los hombres barbados vinieron por barco
y todos dijeron mi Dios ha llegado
ahora pa’l norte se van los mojados
pero no les dicen, welcome hermanos.

The voice then jumps to describe the persecution of indigenous groups in Chiapas, switching its criticism to Mexico. The chorus also emphasizes injustices in Mexico: “El indio, el negro, el mestizo, el güerito / todos manifiestan al México lindo / pero, ¿dónde fue la justicia y la pena?” The use of a rhetorical question is an effective oral strategy that encourages listeners to think, while the spoken lyrics “sung” to a jazzy rap beat also create a distinct aural experience. Similar to Los Tigres in “El mojado acaudalado,” Downs recycles an intertextual reference to the popular song “México lindo y querido,” mixing it with another reference to the traditional

mariachi song “Cielito lindo.” Downs’s song incorporates a famous verse from the second song that all Mexicans would recognize: “Ay yay ay yay, canta y no llores porque cantando / se alegra México lindo, los corazones.” The original lyrics read “cielito lindo” instead of “México lindo,” and so Downs combines the two songs to make a stronger connection to Mexico’s popular oral tradition. The incorporation of mariachi sounds makes this connection explicit. However, the combination is ironic because the exodus and killing of Mexico’s citizens as described in “Sale sobrando” is anything but cute (*lindo*).

Downs mediatized remake of Guthrie’s “This Land is Your Land” showcases her ability to cross borders, for in this song she dialogues with an oral tradition in the United States. Her song “Medley” is a compilation of “This Land is Your Land,” “Pastures of Plenty,” another one of Guthrie’s songs, and Downs’s original contribution “Land.” The titles give important clues because all three songs describe the hard work of migrant laborers on U.S. soil. Downs’s use of Guthrie is not accidental since he was an important musician and social activist who represented through his music the marginalized and oppressed workers in the United States during the first half of the twentieth century. Both of the songs discussed here offer personal testimony of these difficulties, showing that the situation of migrant workers has not changed much over the years. “This Land is Your Land” in particular engages an oral tradition in the U.S. because its chorus is very well known, and the lyrics construct a collectivity that interpellates all “Americans” who deserve the same rights and opportunities. The singing voice in “Land,” however, criticizes these same “Americans,” problematizing this collectivity and questioning U.S. values. She speaks from the perspective of immigrant workers, blaming U.S. citizens for ignoring marginalized individuals in society:

Say you don’t need me

but you know what you got.

Say you're American but what does it mean?

[...]

Did you ever look around to see who you forgot?

Once again addressing the audience through rhetorical questions and the use of “you” are efficient oral strategies that criticize listeners directly and ask them to think about their role in the United States. The compilation of these three songs in the form of a musical pastiche is also productive because it attracts listeners who might recognize Guthrie’s lyrics and then hits them with the strong message of “Land.” While “Pastures of Plenty” is sung acappella and “This Land is Your Land” has a sweet melody, “Land” stands out as more of a rap with a strong, spoken voice accompanied by a drum beat and jazz and hip hop sounds. Thus, Downs compiles a unique audiotopia, or utopian protest song, that recycles popular oral hits through transculturation to express the current reality of the contact zone in the United States.

While Downs recorded most of her immigrant songs on *Border/La línea*, she continues to recycle the topic with new releases. Her most recent album *Ojo de culebra/Shake Away* (2008) includes the blues song “Minimum Wage,” which describes in English the difficulties of the border crossing experience that people are willing to suffer in order to earn minimum wage. This song is another example of how Downs’s unique sounds and socially committed lyrics may appeal to a variety of listeners in English and Spanish. Her rendition of the traditional *ranchera corrido* “El bracero fracasado” further illustrates this point, for it includes a brief clarinet interlude of “America the Beautiful,” another ironic use of musical dialogue since the latter song idealizes life in the United States and ignores the treatment of undocumented workers. Downs’s

music, therefore, functions on various levels by dialoguing with oral traditions, interpellating different audiences, and representing diverse experiences.

Mexican music has migrated both north and south, influencing the Mexican singers previously discussed as well as Central American groups. The *corrido* tradition and *ranchera* style, in particular, have made inroads south of Mexico, gaining popularity in El Salvador. In “Crónica de fronteras,” for example, Roxana Martel and Amparo Marroquín document the influence and history of the *corrido* in El Salvador. Like Mexico, this popular oral tradition has become intertwined with the country’s migrating population, narrating stories of the working class. As Chris Strachwitz reminds us in his documentary *Chulas fronteras*, “Las canciones son la poesía de la gente trabajadora, los obreros, los camioneros, los ganaderos, y los corridos son sus diarios” (Martel and Marroquín 2). Although *corridos* gained popularity in El Salvador in the 1990s due to their rising success in Mexico and the United States, this musical narrative form was also used during the revolutionary years to provide testimony of combatants and clandestine operations (3-5). Groups such as Los Torogoces de Morazán and Los Norteños de Cabañas recorded songs for the secret guerrilla radio *Radio Venceremos* to keep people informed of important revolutionaries and battles.¹¹ The lead singer of Los Torogoces, Benito Chicas, explains that they were more than just a musical group for they also saw themselves as a combat unit (“Sebastián”). The music written and produced during the 1970s and 80s in El Salvador can also be linked to the socially committed music in line with Latin America’s New Song Movement, which will be discussed in detail with Nicaragua. Music, therefore, was an important form of oral resistance during El Salvador’s Civil War, and this tradition continues today with the production and consumption of migrant *corridos*.

After the revolutionary years of the 1970s and 80s, popular songs in the North traveled home with migrants who returned to El Salvador for a visit, facilitating the circulation of traditional Mexican *corridos* and *norteño* sounds. Salvadorans also began listening to *corridos* on mainstream radio, and Martel and Marroquín report that in 2003 approximately eighteen radio stations in El Salvador were playing *corridos* on a regular basis (4). They have been especially popular in the interior and rural regions of the country, for the first concert ever held in Chalatenango, a region in northern El Salvador heavily impacted by the Revolution and by migration, was given by Los Tigres del Norte in 2005 (Martel and Marroquín 4). The Mexican group's *corridos* about Central Americans, such as "Tres veces mojado" and "El centroamericano," have become a type of (trans)national anthem for Salvadoran migrants and their families (4-5).¹² Recognizing Central Americans is also an important marketing strategy for Los Tigres because of the former's increased presence and influence in the United States since the eighties and their commonalities with many Mexican listeners, such as working-class roots and border crossing experiences. Martel and Marroquín also describe *corridos* as "symbolic remittances" in El Salvador, "que sirven para mantener unidos los lazos de la familia y para 'configurar' ese espacio transnacional" (5). Journalist Rosarlín Hernández goes one step further by arguing that migrants have established new roots and created a new form of *salvadoreñidad*, or Salvadoran identity, based on their music, clothes, Mexican accent, and the *corrido* (2). While little has been written about music and migration in El Salvador, both of these studies highlight the impact of Mexican music and the importance of the *corrido* as a way of connecting transnational communities through an oral tradition and for representing the experiences lived by Salvadorans on a daily basis.

La Fórmula Norteña and Grupo Tex Bronco are the most popular national groups who have adopted *norteño* sounds and styles. Tex Bronco, in particular, is the group most listened to in El Salvador and the United States, with a large fan base in San Miguel, La Unión, and Chalatenango (Hernández 3). The group formed in the late 1990s under the direction of lead vocalist Mario Erazo who was attracted to the storytelling and testimonial lyrics of the *corrido* (3). On their albums *Reconoce que te quiero* (2004) and *Cañonazos norteños* (2006), they sing original songs and also offer covers of hits by Los Tigres del Norte and the Mexican group Bronco. The group's original songs represent immigrant experiences; for example, "Camino hacia Honduras" tells the story of Javier Rivera, a migrant on his way to Honduras. The *cumbia* rhythm "Esa novia mía" also acknowledges Salvadorans abroad by opening the song with a spoken prelude: "Saludos a toda la raza salvadoreña en los EE.UU. de Tex Bronco de El Salvador." By interpellating the Salvadoran immigrant community, this discourse highlights an oral format. Even if a song's lyrics do not explicitly recognize immigrants or describe the border-crossing experience, the group's performance as a *norteño* act represents a migrant culture that has infiltrated El Salvador and makes an important connection to its listening public. Like Los Tigres del Norte and other *norteño* groups, the predominant sound of Tex Bronco's music is the accordion and the singer's nasal tone; however, in general their recordings sound less polished. Even so, Tex Bronco shows how musicians can adapt and transform outside influences to represent local experiences. Mexican regional sounds are "transcultured" to appeal to Salvadoran listeners which has also altered their (trans)national culture.¹³

Nicaragua has also been influenced by Mexican music and the *corrido*, but the socially committed music of Latin America's New Song Movement has figured more prominently in the country's oral tradition. The New Song became popular in Latin America in the 1960s along

with revolutionary movements and struggles for social equality. It has strong ties to the Southern Cone, for Chile's Violeta Parra and Argentina's Héctor Roberto Chavero (Atahualpa Yupanqui) were important precursors during the first half of the twentieth century (Arriaza). Argentina's Mercedes Sosa and Chile's Víctor Jara, who was killed during Pinochet's coup in 1973, are today emblematic of the New Song Movement, along with Cuba's Silvio Rodríguez who is perhaps the most famous singer-songwriter from Latin America. Protest music from the 1960s and 70s was not a commercial venture but rather an attempt to communicate social and political messages to the people. In "Un vistazo a la trova y su historia" Alejandro Arriaza describes the ideological function of the music. He writes, "temas difíciles, nada para distraer o pasar el rato, todo para cuestionar, para enfrentar, para obligar a la reflexión" ("Un vistazo"). Arriaza also situates socially committed music in the oral tradition of the *juglares* or *trovadores* from Medieval Spain, whose job was to orally inform and describe current events before print capitalism and the advent of newspapers. Thus, the desire to inform and give testimony bridges Latin America's Spanish roots, protest music and the *corrido*, for music continues to be an important (trans)national cultural form to deliver information and communicate ideologically charged messages. Music can still serve as the people's daily newspaper.

In Central America, socially committed music developed along with political unrest beginning in the 1960s. References to New Song usually pertain to Nicaragua and El Salvador, however, protest music emerged throughout the isthmus (Scruggs, "Socially Conscious 44). While the terms "protest music," "testimonial music," "New Song," and "trova music" are used interchangeably throughout Latin America, a label specific to Central America is "volcanto," a combination of *volcán* and *canto* inspired by the line of volcanoes running along the region's western side (43-44). The term was coined after the 1979 Sandinista triumph in Nicaragua and,

although the term was meant to encompass Central American protest music, it became a specific reference for popular music in Nicaragua during the 1980s (44). Because music played a prominent role in mobilizing people against the Somoza dictatorship, the Sandinistas heavily supported the cultivation of popular music and national cultural expressions. The group's namesake, Augusto César Sandino, also used music to transmit nationalist messages to the popular classes during the 1920s and 30s, adapting the Mexican *corrido* which was already popular in northern Nicaragua (44-45). Due to Sandino's legacy as a national hero, music in opposition to Somoza referenced Sandino to connect to the people (45). In the forties, Camilo Zapata reacted against Mexican influences and developed the *son nica*, a uniquely Nicaraguan sound from the *marimba de arco* tradition, consisting of a marimba, a guitar, and a smaller four-stringed *guitarrilla* (46). A combination of *son nica* compositions and lyrics that incorporated vernacular Nicaraguan Spanish became an important musical tradition and marker of popular identity (46). Carlos Mejía Godoy, the singer-songwriter most associated with the Sandinistas, was able to combine all three of these elements, Mexican *norteño* styles, *son nica* characteristics, and colloquial language, to become the most influential composer of socially committed music in Nicaragua (48-62).¹⁴ As a middle-class music professional, Mejía has been able to connect to the working-class and represent their experiences from his perspective. Much like Los Tigres have influenced Mexican music, Mejía's musical style and commitment to his audience continues to inspire an oral tradition and influence younger generations of Nicaraguan musicians, such as Flor Urbina and Ramón Mejía.

After cultural projects lost state support with the ousting of the Sandinistas in 1990, Nicaraguan music has had to reinvent itself, and immigration is one area that has opened up a cultural space for musical expression and for performers like Flor Urbina and Ramón Mejía.¹⁵

Much like Mexican and Salvadoran immigrants carry music to and from the United States, Nicaraguans in Costa Rica take comfort in familiar songs and musical sounds that remind them of home. As discussed in chapter three, because of increased migration since the 1980s and economic and social problems in Costa Rica, tensions between the two groups have developed, with Nicaraguans often taking the blame for Costa Rica's troubles. With a tradition of socially committed music in Nicaragua, songs about migration provide an established space of resistance and an outlet for voicing concerns about racism and discrimination. Ishtar Yasin's *La mesa feliz*, also discussed in chapter three, shows the power of music, for in the film Nicaraguan immigrants gather around a San José rooftop to share their experiences and to sing popular songs. Despite arguments about the Sandinistas, their country, and their new homeland, they are able to find common ground through music and singing. Urbina, the singer-songwriter featured in the film, is a Nicaraguan living in Costa Rica who has created a niche for herself performing socially committed music about her homeland and the immigrant experience. Although she arrived in Costa Rica at a young age, Urbina grew up listening to Nicaraguan legends, especially the Mejía Godoy brothers, who have influenced her style and commitment to her roots. She has recorded two albums, *Flor de Sacuanjoche*, comprised of original folkloric songs, and *Boleros*, a collection of well-known traditional ballads like Agustín Lara's "Solamente una vez."¹⁶

On *Flor de Sacuanjoche*, songs such as "Agua dulce y pinol," "Renica sos," and "La Tencha" use orality to encourage Nicaraguans to embrace their cultural heritage and to resist discriminatory attitudes. "La Tencha," for example, tells the story of a Nicaraguan woman who has lived away from her homeland for many years but is still proud of her nationality, referencing cultural icons like Rubén Darío and the Mejía Godoy brothers. The voice sings: "Soy nica por donde quiera lo digo sin pena, apuro o espanto / Con la frente muy en alto no le

niego a nadie Pinolera soy.” The words “nica” and “pinolera” function as colloquial and familiar nicknames for Nicaraguans. “Pinolera,” in particular, refers to a toasted corn drink called *pinol* associated with the Nicaraguan *campesinos* or *pinoleros* and so the voice of the song specifically identifies with the working class. The song’s music also appeals to Nicaraguan roots, for listeners will identify the sounds of the accordion and the marimba. “Renica sos” has a more assertive message for immigrants who try to hide their Nicaraguaness and, with a video on YouTube, it is dedicated to those who have forgotten their origins. The song functions as an oral/aural reminder of important cultural traditions that Nicaraguans should celebrate and be proud of, such as the *palo de mayo* dance, their way of speaking, praying to the Virgin on December 7, and specialty foods. The song “Nacatamal” follows in the same tradition of remembering by reciting a family recipe for Nicaraguan tamales. Because of stereotypes and tensions that have heightened at the beginning of the new millennium, triggering the immigrant community’s cultural memory helps to fight the shame and stigma associated with being Nicaraguan in Costa Rica. These songs help resist backlash and offer a space of acceptance. As Zumthor explains, a network of perceptions, customs, and ideas maintain an immigrant group’s oral traditions, which, in turn, acknowledge the past and give validity to the present (201). By incorporating traditional sounds and social messages, these songs also show how Urbina aligns her music and lyrics with Nicaragua’s *volcanto* movement.

While Ramón Mejía uses socially committed lyrics, his sound tends to be characterized as rock rather than folkloric. His music is a perfect example of how contemporary musicians are creating hybrid styles, for he mixes *volcanto* lyrics with rock and hip-hop fusions. As the nephew of Carlos Mejía Godoy, Ramón has social and musical advantages because his name will always be associated with the *volcanto* tradition in Nicaragua, which may give him the freedom

to experiment and to push the limits a bit more than Urbina. In addition to his family name, his stage name, Perrozompopo, also connects him to Nicaraguan listeners because it signifies the transparent lizard considered a national symbol in Nicaragua. Mejía's first album *Romper el silencio* (2005) combines musical influences ranging from rap and blues to flamenco and rock with the guitar as his signature sound. The title's social implications of breaking the silence about political corruption and foreign dominance in Nicaragua give way to protest songs like "Quiere a tu país," "Nos quieren dejar sin pinol," and the title track "Romper el silencio," which became the theme song for encouraging young adults to vote in the 2006 elections.

Perrozompopo's second album *Quiero que sepas* (2007), a collaboration with Costa Rican musicians that was produced by the Central American label Papaya Music, also showcases songs with socially committed lyrics by addressing the topics of migration, violence, and the marginalization of women.¹⁷ The singer-songwriter even shows solidarity with Mexico by writing and recording "Las hijas del sol" about the femicides in Ciudad Juárez.

The album's title track "Quiero que sepas" and the song "Ríos de gente" represent the issue of migration. The former is a lighter rock ballad with piano accompaniment that highlights Mejía's voice. The lyrics describe the harsh reality of Nicaraguans leaving for Costa Rica, while the music crescendos to emphasize the repeated line of the chorus: "Cruza fronteras de norte a sur." "Ríos de gente" is a bit more ambiguous, for the title could refer to the San Juan River between Nicaragua and Costa Rica or the Río Grande between Mexico and the United States or other rivers that function as national gateways. In general, the lyrics are more universal as the voice identifies himself as "un inmigrante del mundo mundial, indocumentado un ser espacial." The song thus recognizes that migration is a global phenomenon, however, Perrozompopo's collaboration with Costa Rican musicians on this album places special emphasis on the tico-nica

connection. “Ríos de Gente” also emphasizes the sacrifices of women who have left their children behind to find work in other places, and the music video, available on YouTube, shows Nicaraguan families holding pictures of absent mothers. The video’s artistic performance and emotional impact earned it the award for best video at the 2008 Muestra de Cine y Vídeo Costarricense. With this second album, therefore, Perrozompopo has won recognition in both Nicaragua and Costa Rica.

Two of the musicians who collaborated with Perrozompopo on *Quiero que sepas* are members of the popular Costa Rican rock group Malpais. On their 2006 live album, Malpais also recorded a song about migration entitled “Contramarea.” Translated as “Against the Tide,” the title evokes the notion of crossing water but it also connotes the act of going against societal norms. Both understandings are appropriate, for the lyrics tell the story of a pair of star-crossed lovers, a Costa Rican girl and a Nicaraguan Border Patrol agent, who are divided by the San Juan River and social tensions between the two countries. The song references the master narrative of Romeo and Juliet to connect to the audience:

Ella era un “clis de sol,” y él guardafronteras.

Hijos del río San Juan, Romeo y Julieta

En un silencio del viento, acorralado,

Zarpó el amor en un bote, contramarea.

The use of Romeo and Juliet also functions as an oral referent, for the play has been performed on stage and adapted to film, music and opera, transforming the couple’s story into a popular myth. Millay lists the allusion to myths as a characteristic of oral narrative (141). Because Romeo and Juliet are from warring families, Shakespeare’s tragic romance also brings to light social hostilities, which translate into racial and economic tensions in Malpais’s song. The

phrase “*clis de sol*” taken from the word eclipse indicates that the Costa Rican girl is fair-skinned and probably upper class, whereas the Nicaraguan’s job as a Border Patrol Agent suggests that he is working class. Like Shakespeare’s play, the couple’s story ends in tragedy with their untimely deaths in a capsized boat. The song’s sweet melody accompanied by classical instruments like piano, flute, and violin give the music a sad and nostalgic tone, appealing to listeners’ emotions. Moreover, the song’s affective impact and representation of a pertinent social issue brought Malpais huge success, for “*Contramarea*” won Song of the Year at Costa Rica’s 2008 music awards (ACAM).

The decision of both rock groups, Perrozompopo and Malpais, to record songs about the impact of migration shows the significance and relevance of the issue for these neighboring countries. It also demonstrates that the topic appeals to the different ages and interests of listeners, for it has migrated from Urbina’s more traditional folk songs to the ears of young, and perhaps more mainstream, rock fans. Music thus has helped raise awareness about immigrant experiences and controversies by representing the structures of feeling, or the emergent social paradigms in Costa Rica that have brought immigrant tensions to the forefront. Because rock music has traditionally been associated with resistance and defiance, it is not surprising that it stands next to the *corrido* and *volcanto* music as a vehicle for giving testimony about social problems and giving marginalized groups a voice. Much like these other musical forms, the songs of Perrozompopo and Malpais also engage the aural borderlands by singing about borderland experiences and by initiating joint musical efforts that incorporate both countries. Jaime López, the 1970s rock icon from Mexico, has even described *rock en español* as a song of the borderlands (*un canto fronterizo*) because it “transculturates” a musical style from the United States and makes it relevant to Spanish-speaking audiences (Durán and Barrios 34). The music

itself has traversed frontiers and so representing people who cross borders seems appropriate, for both contribute to transnational cultural flows. Thus, by listening to the mobile audioscapes of Perrozompopo and Malpais, we can hear new communities being formed and new zones of contact being created.

All of the diverse artists and groups discussed in this chapter, including Los Tigres del Norte, Shawn Kiehne, Julieta Venegas, Lila Downs, Tex Bronco, and the tico-nica performers, show how people on the move have constructed hybrid sounds and cultures. Because of music's accessibility and mobility, it plays a predominant role in the politics of belonging, for immigrants can use traditional sounds to celebrate their roots and also take advantage of syncretic compilations to bring their homes together. Music can thus authenticate and validate immigrants' in-between experiences of the Latin/o borderlands by producing and performing glocal sounds. Zumthor summarizes the importance of oral production to immigrant cultures by writing that new traditions form and transform oral relics on the move with immigrants (199). These traditions both acknowledge the past and give validity to the present (201). A song's dialogue with an oral tradition and its affective impact can also attract diverse audiences and produce sonic utopian spaces, or audiotopias, that enable listeners to imagine united communities where different expressions of citizenship, race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality come together.

Notes

¹ Aparicio and Jáquez argue that Latin/o popular music has become more visible since the eighties because of growing Latin/o communities and their cultural influence in the United States (1). The commodification of music in the global market has also made Latin/o sounds more accessible (1-2). By using the term “musical migrations,” the editors highlight the processes of dislocation, transformation, and negotiation that describe musical forms, productions, and performances as they traverse national and cultural boundaries and adapt to different historical periods (3).

² In his 2007 study *Footsteps in the Dark: The Hidden Histories of Popular Music*, Lipsitz describes in detail how popular music records social history. He looks at the dialogic nature of culture and writes, “Popular music is not history, but it can be read historically, dialogically, and symptomatically to produce valuable evidence about change over time. Popular music can mark the present as history, helping us understand where we have been and where we are going” (xi-xii). Ramón Saldívar also uses the theories of Raymond Williams to analyze popular culture. He suggests that, “In vernacular forms such as popular music, the experience of migrant labor can be conveyed as lived experience in an aesthetic mode” (220).

³ Los Tigres’s official website (www.universalmusica.com/lostigresdelnorte.com) offers detailed information about the group’s past and present endeavors.

⁴ Ragland distinguishes between the musical styles of *norteño* and *tejano* or Tex-Mex, also associated with the border region and popularized by singers like Linda Ronstadt and Selena. Although both genres use similar instruments, they tend to attract different crowds, for *norteño* is associated with unassimilated and undocumented migrants, whereas *tejano* is connected to more assimilated groups with Mexican roots, such as Mexican Americans and

Chicanos. *Tejaño* is more regional with its primary roots in Texas, but *norteño* is more transnational with a larger audience on both sides of the border (1-4; 12-13).

⁵ I mention Sánchez's death because of its importance for the U.S. Latino community, however, I will not be analyzing his songs, for this study focuses on immigrant *corridos* rather than *narcocorridos*. Much scholarly attention has been given to the latter song form because of its controversial nature, and Elijah Wald's *Narcocorrido: A Journey into the Music of Drugs, Guns, and Guerrillas* offers a good overview. Helena Simonett's 2001 study *Banda: Mexican Musical Life across Borders* charts the rise of *banda* music in Los Angeles in the 1990s, with a focus on *narco* culture in the latter part of the book.

⁶ In "Home is Where the Hatred is," Lipsitz makes a similar argument about *banda* music. He writes that listening and dancing to *banda* music "[does] not address life in Mexico as much as [...] what it means to be Mexican in the United States" (203).

⁷ Ragland notes that Franco's songs were often based on his own experiences, for he came to the United States without papers but was able to legalize his status under the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act (176-9). Among the many lyrics Franco wrote for Los Tigres del Norte, "Jaula de Oro" was the most successful, inspiring the production of a Mexican movie with the same name in 1987 (177).

⁸ I owe this idea to ethnomusicologist Peter Jeffery who explains the oral reconstruction of Gregorian chants with each new performance (13-14).

⁹ Venegas erupted on the music scene in 1997 with her debut album *Aquí* and, after releasing four successful albums, her most recent is an MTV Unplugged recorded in Mexico City for which she won the 2008 Latin Grammy for Best Alternative Album. Before launching her solo career in the late nineties, Venegas sang with the Tijuana punk band Chantaje, which

later became known as the city's most political rock group Tijuana No! (Kun, "New Tijuana Moods"). Venegas has also been loosely associated with the Nor-tec collective, characterized as local, organic expressions of Tijuana that challenge dominant, often foreign, perspectives of the city's culture as lawless, uprooted, and transient. One local artist describes Nor-tec "as a strategic tool of self-representation, as a way to re-write the identities of *tijuanenses* and present them to the world" (Madrid 271).

¹⁰ In an interview with Columba Vértiz in 2001, Downs commented that she came face to face with the migration phenomenon when a man from San Juan Mixtepec, a ghostly town in Oaxaca where ninety percent of residents go North to work, asked her to translate his son's death certificate from the United States. Because of this experience, Downs decided to call attention to the difficulties of Mixtec migration for those who leave and for those who stay behind.

¹¹ In *Radio Rebel: The Story of El Salvador's Radio Venceremos*, José Ignacio López Vigil offers an insider's account of the history and importance of the clandestine radio. The story of Los Torogoces de Morazán is described in Iván González's *Las guitarras del fuego de ayer*.

¹² "Tres veces mojado" was Los Tigres's first migrant corrido about Central America from their 1992 album *De película* and re-released in 2006 on *La banda del carro rojo*. The lyrics describe a Salvadoran's odyssey across Guatemala, Mexico, and the United States, making him "tres veces mojado."

¹³ Since Mario Erazo's untimely death in 2006, Tex Bronco has undergone changes, with Mario's son Jacobo now managing the group. As a homage to their founder, the group recorded "El Corrido de Mario Erazo," which is available in video format on YouTube. While they continue to play at festivals and rodeos, Mario's death seems to have reduced the group's

visibility. When conducting preliminary research in fall 2007, the group had an impressive website that boomingly announced their name once it downloaded. It also had updated information about their albums and concert dates. This site is no longer available, which suggests a decrease in funds and perhaps popularity. Tex Bronco currently has a much less impressive site at the following address: <http://texbronco.iespana.es/texbronco/main.htm>.

¹⁴ The Mejía Godoy family is very well known in Nicaragua for its musical talent, and Carlos's younger brother Luis Enrique is also a famous singer-songwriter of socially committed music, although he did not reach the same level of success as his brother. The family has a restaurant in Managua called La Casa de Los Mejía Godoy where fans can purchase most of their albums in the gift store and listen to popular music on the live stage. This is one example of how the family continues to foster musical talent and traditions in Nicaragua.

¹⁵ In "Music, Memory, and the Politics of Erasure in Nicaragua," ethnomusicologist T.M. Scruggs offers a detailed analysis of the Nicaraguan music industry's difficulties in the 1990s and its reinvention in the twenty-first century.

¹⁶ I was unable to purchase Urbina's CDs during my trip to Costa Rica in May 2008, but all of her songs are available on her website (www.florurbina.co.nr). The website also lists 2004 as the release date for both albums. Urbina has been in the public eye since the late 1980s as a dancer, singer, actress, and radio and television announcer and is recognized as a performer in both Nicaragua and Costa Rica.

¹⁷ According to their website (<http://papayamusic.com>), Papaya Music was launched in 2003 as a showcase of Central American musical talent. It is based in San José, Costa Rica but available throughout the region. When traveling to Costa Rica and Nicaragua in May 2008, a

collection of Papaya CDs, including Mejía's *Quiero que sepas*, was marketed and sold in airport shops and also available in the capital cities at cafes, bookstores, and department stores.

Conclusion

Situating *lo latinoamericano* in the Twenty-First Century

The cultural texts examined in the previous chapters illuminate the migrant imaginaries at the end of the twentieth and beginning of the twenty-first centuries for Mexican and Salvadoran immigrants in the United States and for Nicaraguans in Costa Rica. The testimonial works, fictional narratives, documentary films, and popular songs discussed here offer opportunities to listen to those who may not be heard and also provide a social space of belonging to those who may not be eligible for traditional citizenry. By connecting these texts to the testimonial and oral traditions of Latin America, this dissertation project also shows how they dialogue with established traditions to communicate the urgency of immigrant situations and to draw in diverse actors and audiences to imagine alternative communities of solidarity. While these immigrant stories invite a disparate public to take part in the creative process, they specifically interpellate a Spanish-speaking, often immigrant audience, thereby claiming further solidarity with a transnational Latin American community. This dissertation thus crosses national, cultural, social, and political borders to promote cross-cultural and interdisciplinary understandings of immigrant experiences and to expose “contact zones” in the Americas.

In *Latinoamericanos buscando lugar en este siglo*, Néstor García Canclini writes that, “América Latina no está completa en América Latina. Su imagen le llega de espejos diseminados en el archipiélago de las migraciones” (19). This quotation sums up the importance of listening to immigrant voices and paying attention to representations of immigrant experiences to better understand Latin America’s role in the twenty-first century. García Canclini advocates using cultural practices to situate *lo latinoamericano* within a globalized world, which this dissertation accomplishes by examining the national, international, and intra-regional

connections established by cultural works dealing with issues of mobility, transnationality, and uneven power relations. The texts discussed here also expose emergent structures of feeling as Latin America grapples with its position in the new millennium. Feelings of disillusion about the American Dream, El Salvador's postwar situation, and Costa Rica's current reality surface as immigrants describe their experiences. A sense of belonging also seems to have shifted as individuals negotiate their places within fluctuating communities and also deal with national, transnational, and global concerns. These issues seem to comprise the "archive of feelings," to recall Cvetkovich's term, that represents the emergent thoughts, feelings, and emotions of Latin American immigrants in the first decade of the twenty-first century.

By looking at Mexico and Central America and also high and popular cultural forms, my analysis offers provocative examples of Latin American cultural production since the mid-1990s. This dissertation is also an important contribution to the field of cultural studies. My research on films that document Nicaraguans in Costa Rica, including original interviews with filmmakers Martha Clarissa Hernández and Jürgen Ureña in May 2008, is of particular interest because this issue has received little attention in U.S. academia. Furthermore, connecting all of these issues via discursive strategies of orality offers a unique theoretical angle that engages studies dealing with the importance of oral and visual markers in the digital age. It also places the texts discussed here within the wider context of the Latin American *testimonio*. By examining recent cultural representations of Mexican and Central American immigrant experiences, this dissertation is thus produced within and also a product of glocal processes.

Although this study takes important steps toward recognizing immigrant voices, valid questions still remain. Due to debate and criticism of the *testimonio*'s efficacy and to difficulties of adequately representing the subaltern, it is important to continue to question whether or not

immigrant voices are being heard and whether or not the public is listening. Investigating public responses must be an ongoing process to discern whether or not the texts discussed here or other works dealing with immigrant experiences are reaching a wide-spread audience. It is imperative that other immigrants have access to these texts, especially when taking into account the notion of cultural citizenship. The mobile cinema used to promote *Desde el barro al sur* is a good example of taking the film's message to the masses, and the *corridos* of Los Tigres del Norte and the protest songs of Flor Urbina also reach listeners through digital technologies. However, are immigrants reading works like Pérez's *Diario de un mojado*, Servín's *Por amor al dólar* or Hernández's "La han despedido de nuevo"? If not, then, how can we make them more accessible and available? It is questions like these that should continue to inform future projects on cultural representations of immigrant experiences.

Future research also needs to address the countries and experiences not covered in this dissertation. More work needs to be done on cultural representations of Guatemalan or Honduran immigrant experiences to better compare and contrast Central American migrations with those of Mexico. Perhaps *Las murallas* (1998) by Adolfo Méndez Vides (Guatemala) or *Ningún lugar sagrado* (1998) by Rodrigo Rey Rosa (Guatemala) or *Nunca entres por Miami* (2002) by Roberto Quesada (Honduras) would be good texts with which to start. Furthermore, the works discussed here primarily focus on male migrants and thus looking at representations of female immigrant experiences and those of children will further illuminate the human complexities of migration and broaden our understanding of the process. Because of rising numbers of femicides along the U.S.-Mexico border and gang violence along the Mexico-Guatemala border, perhaps examining cultural representations of human trafficking or gender violence will show how violence and migration are intertwined. Cary Fukunaga's 2009 feature

film *Sin nombre*, for example, offers a unique glimpse through the eyes of a young Honduran girl into the situation of Central American migrants who must negotiate border patrol agents from Mexico and gang members of the Mara Salvatrucha along Mexico's southern border in order to reach the United States. This film combines many of the elements previously discussed that need further attention: Honduran migration, violence against women, and the immigrant experiences of a young female.

Stories of violence and tragedy along the U.S.-Mexico border also continue to influence cultural workers. Mexican playwrights, especially, seem to be fed by this reality, for an abundance of recent plays address the social imaginary of the border region and immigrant crossings. Hugo Salcedo's *El viaje de los cantores* (1990), for example, creatively represents the tragic events of a group of Mexicans trying to enter the United States illegally who become trapped in a railroad car with all but one suffocating to death. Hugo Alfredo Hinojosa's *Desiertos* (2007) also focuses on the human cost of migration, exposing difficulties in the Sonoran desert that straddles the United States and Mexico and also highlighting emotional deserts of those who are left behind. By focusing on the reported femicides in Ciudad Juárez, Sabina Berman and Víctor Hugo Rascón Banda have taken a different approach to the border region. In Berman's *Backyard/El traspatio* (2009), now a motion picture, she examines the complexities of multinational corporations, corrupt law officials, and the troubled U.S.-Mexico relationship that have prohibited the proper investigation of the violence against women in Juárez. Rascón Banda in *Hotel Juárez* (2008) also examines the femicides from the perspective of a woman searching for her missing sister in the violent border town.

As these works demonstrate, a further investigation of cultural representations of immigrant experiences is necessary. We must continue to listen to immigrant voices and

recognize their experiences and perspectives to better understand the changing world around us. Furthermore, expanding the issues addressed in this dissertation will draw in additional actors and audiences to imagine alternative communities of solidarity.

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