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Persuasion and resistance: how migrant women use life writing

Jacquelynn Kleist Griffiths
University of Iowa

PERSUASION AND RESISTANCE:

HOW MIGRANT WOMEN USE LIFE WRITING

by

Jacquelynn Kleist Griffiths

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Thesis Supervisor: Professor Claire Fox

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The University of Iowa
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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

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PH.D. THESIS

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This is to certify that the Ph.D. thesis of

Jacquelynn Kleist Griffiths

has been approved by the Examining Committee for
the thesis requirement for the Doctor of Philosophy degree
in English at the December 2016 graduation.

Thesis Committee: _____
Claire Fox, Thesis Supervisor

_____
Mary Lou Emery

_____
Bluford Adams

_____
Doris Witt

_____
Ariana Ruiz

To my husband, Scott Griffiths, and my parents, Dean and Pat Kleist,
for their love, support, and encouragement.

ABSTRACT

Migrant women use life writing not only to share pieces of their own lives, but also to write powerful narratives which confront racism, patriarchal oppression, and US imperialism. The four texts I have selected represent skillful negotiation between drastically different languages, cultures, and social systems, evinced both through the experiences the authors represent within the text and through their careful rhetorical and narrative strategies, which are tailored for particular audiences. As these narratives demonstrate, migrant women can use life writing to contest and destabilize dominant narratives of history and race.

In *I've Come a Long Way* (1942), Chinese author Helena Kuo demonstrates the worth, dignity, and superiority of Chinese culture in order to convince US readers to ally with China in their fight against Japan. Kuo's work was intended not only to garner military support for China, but also to create a more positive view of the Chinese people. Rosario Morales and Aurora Levins Morales, a mother and daughter born in New York City and Puerto Rico, respectively, write together in *Getting Home Alive* (1986), layering stories from the mainland United States and the island of Puerto Rico while protesting US imperialism and US military presence on the island. By enacting resistance from a variety of subject positions, the authors are able to share pieces of their life stories while also creating an alternate history of Puerto Rico, one that reveals the violence and imperial domination of the US government. In *When Heaven and Earth Changed Places* (1989), former Vietcong collaborator Le Ly Hayslip tells the story of the Vietnam War from the perspective of a Vietnamese villager, explaining why some Vietnamese resisted US forces. Through her narrative, Hayslip transforms herself from a Vietcong enemy into a reliable narrator for US readers, detailing her own suffering, empathizing with her US readership, and encouraging peace and forgiveness between nations, while still questioning the

ethics of US involvement in the war. By retelling stories from her childhood on the US-Mexico border in *Canícula: Snapshots of a Girlhood en la Frontera* (1995), Mexican author Norma Elia Cantú challenges the impermeability of borders, both between fact and fiction and between nations. By simultaneously retelling and fictionalizing her past, Cantú is able to preserve and reclaim her childhood while creating a subversive counternarrative of border life which contests dominant governmental and patriarchal narratives.

All of these authors use life writing in an innovative way, tailoring their texts to the political and social context in which they were publishing and striving to build a relationship with readers at a particular time in US history. By challenging conventional, governmental, and media representations of events and contesting existing social structures, these authors provide a more comprehensive understanding of US history and society.

PUBLIC ABSTRACT

Comparing four autobiographical narratives written by women from different cultures, nations, and decades who migrated to the United States reveals how migrant women use life writing to combat social injustice. In *I've Come a Long Way* (1942), Chinese author Helena Kuo tries to convince her US audience to join China's fight against Japan in World War II, while also attempting to combat stereotypes and create a more positive view of the Chinese people. Rosario Morales and Aurora Levins Morales, a mother and daughter born in New York City and Puerto Rico, respectively, write together in *Getting Home Alive* (1986), layering stories from the mainland United States and the island of Puerto Rico while protesting US imperialism and US military presence on the island. In *When Heaven and Earth Changed Places* (1989), Vietnamese author Le Ly Hayslip, a former collaborator with the Vietcong, explains why some Vietnamese villagers remained loyal to the Vietcong and questions the ethics of US involvement in Vietnam. Mexican author Norma Elia Cantú depicts her childhood on the border between the United States and Mexico in *Canícula: Snapshots of a Girlhood en la Frontera* (1995). Through her depictions of a border childhood, Cantú plays with the boundaries between fact and fiction, highlighting the constructed nature of both autobiographical narratives and national borders. By reading these four narratives together, we are able to appreciate how migrant women use life writing not only to tell the stories of their lives, but also to combat racism, oppression, and US imperialism.

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Introduction

> "Once I thought to write a history of the immigrants in America. Then I discovered that the immigrants *were* America."
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> Oscar Handlin, *The Uprooted*

> "Memory need not be a passive reflection, a nostalgic longing for things to be as they once were; it can function as a way of knowing and learning from the past."
>
> bell hooks, *Yearning*

Life Writing: An Evolution of the Term

The term "autobiography," as Robert Folkenflik explains, began to be widely used in the late eighteenth century in both England and Germany,[1] and was commonly used to describe self-referential writing produced prior to the Enlightenment.[2] Early autobiographies, which were considered synonymous to the French concept of "les mémoires," were typically written by individuals who were interested either in assessing their own moral and religious purpose in the world or recording their public achievements for posterity.[3] The word "autobiography" at the time of the Enlightenment was considered to encompass all sorts of "self-referential writing," including life-writing,[4] as seventeenth and eighteenth-century authors pursued "self-interest, self-consciousness, and self-knowledge."[5]

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[1] Folkenflik, qtd. *Reading Autobiography* 2.

[2] Dowd and Eckerle 133; For more detailed studies of the history of autobiography, see Michael Mascuch's *Origins of the Individualist Self: Autobiography and Self-Identity in England, 1591-1791* (1996), which traces the origins of narrative autobiography, and Henk Dragstra, Sheila Ottway, and Helen Wilcox's helpful collection of essays on seventeenth-century English autobiography, *Betraying our Selves: Forms of Self-Representation in Early Modern English Texts* (2000).

[3] *Early Modern Autobiography: Theories, Genres, Practices* (2006) offers a collection of essays examining the theory and practice of early modern autobiography.

[4] The term "life writing" had been traditionally utilized by critics and scholars to refer to a subset of autobiography as far back as the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, often in reference to Renaissance-era women's epistolary narratives, prose, poetry, and diaries. For a helpful example of women's epistolary life writing in the eighteenth century, see Sonja Boon's "Recuperative Autobiography and the Politics of Life-Writing," a thorough analysis of Marie-Thérèse Geoffrin de'Estampes's epistolary testament. For more examples of early women's life writing, see Sheila Ottway's chapter "Autobiography" in *A Companion to Early Modern Women's Writing* (2002) and Helen Wilcox's "Private Writing and Public Gender: Autobiographical Texts by Renaissance Englishwomen" in *Gloriana's Face: Women, Public and Private, in the English Renaissance*.

[5] Folkenflik, qtd. *Reading Autobiography* 2.

Beginning in the 1960s, however, postmodern and postcolonial scholars, including Sidonie Smith, Julia Watson, Paul Eakin, Elizabeth Bruss, and Timothy Dow Adams have challenged the application of the term "autobiography" to all forms of self-referential writing, arguing that the category of autobiography privileges the autonomous individual and the unified, non-fictional life story while devaluing other, less conventional forms.[6] These postcolonial and postmodern critics assert that the genre of autobiography is still associated with its history as a mark of "the highest achievement of individuality in western civilization"[7] for privileged white men, excluding people of lower economic status, women, and people of color. Thus, these scholars now prefer to use the term "life writing" instead of "autobiography" to refer to all types of personal narratives in which an individual shares elements of his or her life story. By using this more inclusive term, scholars demonstrate that they have expanded their study of autobiographical representations beyond more traditional, chronological narratives to journals, letters, confession, oral history, daybooks, documentaries, travel writing, *testimonio*, diaries, and poetry, among other forms.[8] As Julia Rak explains in *Negotiated Memory,* this shift from the traditional constraints and expectations of autobiography to the more comprehensive category of life writing opens the genre not only to textual innovation, but also to individuals who have traditionally been marginalized or excluded from publishing.[9] Thus, life writing has gone from being a subset of autobiography to a more inclusive term for writing that represents a life, encompassing not only autobiography, but also numerous other forms of contemporary personal narrative.

[6] Folkenflik, qtd. *Reading Autobiography* 3.
[7] Folkenflik, qtd. *Reading Autobiography* 3.
[8] Adams 460; Eakin 1.
[9] Rak ix.

Some critics feel that the category of autobiography will disappear altogether as it is either re-conceptualized or subsumed under the genre of life writing. As Elizabeth Bruss points out, "Autobiography as we know it is dependent on distinctions between…rhetorical and empirical first-person narrative. But these distinctions are cultural artifacts and might be differently drawn…leading to the obsolescence of autobiography or at least its radical reformulation.[10] Similarly, Sonja Boon asserts that the genre of autobiography could eventually be "re-articulated as life writing"[11] to allow for the inclusion of a wider range of authors and textual forms. In fact, some critics have already adopted a new, expanded use of the term "autobiography"; in *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives* (2010), Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson use the terms "life writing" and "autobiography" interchangeably to refer to texts which represent one's personal experience, including personal ads, video documentaries, films, and even 12-step AA recovery diaries, labeling these texts both "life writing" and "everyday autobiography."[12]

I agree that autobiography exists as one of many textual forms and strategies within the broader category of life writing. Correspondingly, I envision the term "life writing" as an inclusive category that encompasses autobiography (as well as many other types of writing) through which authors are able to represent their lives using a variety of textual and rhetorical strategies. Building on the important criticism about life writing by Smith and Watson, for example, in *Women, Autobiography, Theory,* I want to explore the "intersection of personal and public spheres of meaning" in life writing by women of color.[13] Also extending the important contributions made by Gloria Anzaldùa and Cherríe Moraga and other writers beginning in the

[10] Bruss 8, qtd. Adams 462.
[11] Boon 22.
[12] Smith and Watson 36.
[13] Smith and Watson 26.

1980s, I argue that "theorizing" about subjectivity needs to occur in explorations of women's life experiences while examining historically specific systems of oppression and analyzing how identities and subjectivities are socially constructed in particular places and historical moments.[14] I want to highlight the voices of these five women of color and analyze how they both reflect and respond to oppressive social structures as they re-frame their subjectivity, assert their own textual authority, and transform repression and marginalization into active discourse and calls for justice. Like Anzaldùa, I argue that the women's role as "border subjects,"[15] who navigate in and cross between multiple languages, cultures, and social systems, gives them a unique perspective on both the material realities of oppression and the potential for activism.

I am also building on the work of contemporary life writing critics Caren Kaplan and Marlene Kadar. I expand on Kaplan's discussion of life writing as a form of "outlaw" and "resistance" literature which is often created out of the conflicts between Western imperialism and Western feminism and women of color, who use their writing to resist dominant social systems and to "break many of elite literature's laws."[16] I explore how women migrants of color utilize creative rhetorical and textual strategies in their life writing to "rewrite the social order" and to "propose alternative parameters for the definition and articulation of literary conventions."[17] I also build on Kadar's argument in *Essays on Life Writing: From Genre to Critical Practice* that life writing can serve as "a means of emancipating an overdetermined 'subject'"[18] who has been spoken for, limited, and objectified by dominant cultural and political entities. Finally, I add to the work of Asian American literary critic Sau-ling Cynthia Wong, who

[14] Anzaldùa and Moraga 23.
[15] For a discussion of Anzaldùa's concept of how women of color live in a "third space" between cultures, see my discussion of Anzaldùa in relation to *Getting Home Alive* on pages 93-95 in this dissertation.
[16] Kaplan, "Transnational Feminist Subjects" 209.
[17] Barbara Harlow, qtd. Kaplan 209.
[18] Kadar 12.

explains, in an echo of the Oscar Handlin quote at the beginning of this introduction, that since the United States is a nation primarily comprised of immigrants, "Immigrant autobiography may illuminate the meaning of being American as well as, if not better than, autobiography by the native-born."[19] In this dissertation, I demonstrate that migrant life writing by women of color has extended the parameters of this genre and helped to both redefine contemporary conceptions of life writing and reconceptualize how this genre may be essential in understanding American identity. The texts I have selected demonstrate the way women of color use life writing in unique ways, not only as a means of preserving and sharing their life stories, but also as a medium for advocating social and political change.

Life Writing: Fact or Fiction?

In addition to allowing for the inclusion of multiple perspectives and textual styles, the genre of life writing allows for a more flexible version of "truth" in self-representation than the traditional category of autobiography. As Timothy Dow Adams explains in his introduction to *Life Writing and Light Writing: Autobiography and Photography*, the genre of autobiography was traditionally conceptualized as "nonfiction"; autobiographical texts were considered to be factual documents in which individuals recounted the verifiable facts of their life stories.[20] Correspondingly, historian Jaume Aurell notes that throughout history, individuals' records of their lives have often been viewed as a reliable form of historical documentation, as "a hybrid genre between history and literature."[21] However, modern scholars who work with the genres of autobiography and life writing maintain that authors' representations of their own life stories should not be classified as nonfiction, since writers inevitably enhance, alter, or omit components

[19] Wong 144.
[20] Denzin 9; Eakin 2.
[21] Aurell 434.

of their experiences.[22] In *Fictions in Autobiography,* Paul Eakin explains, "Fictions and the fiction-making process are a central constituent of the truth of any life as it is lived";[23] hence, "the self that is now the center of all autobiographical narrative is necessarily a fictive structure."[24]

Life writing allows authors to play with the notion of "truth" in representation. Unlike autobiographers, who are traditionally expected to provide factual, verifiable details of their lives, life writers may present inconsistent or "shifting" views of themselves or even, as Smith and Watson explain, "perpetuate acts of deliberate deceit to test the reader or hint at the paradoxical 'truth' of experience itself.[25] Thus, the author's relationship to the text in life writing is complicated and avoids autobiography's traditional claims to veracity, thereby highlighting how identities and subjectivities are constructed and fragmented. Life writing, as a more inclusive and flexible genre of self-referential writing, is able to incorporate elements of autobiography without being constrained by its exclusionary practices and the limitations of its association with truth.

A More Inclusive Form of Self-Representation

Scholars have criticized the traditional, white-male-centered Enlightenment model of autobiography for excluding other writers and perspectives. Susan Stanford Friedman emphasizes the "fundamental inapplicability" of traditional "individualistic models of the self" to "women and minorities," explaining that the conventional model of autobiography does not allow for the crucial role and presence of "collective and relational identities" in the works of

[22] Norman K. Denzin, Julia Watson, Sidonie Smith, Leigh Gilmore, Jaume Aurell, and Paul Eakin have all contested the categorization of autobiography as nonfiction. However, Aurell maintains that the historical value of autobiography is not discounted by its lack of factuality; rather, he explains that autobiography should be considered a "valid," albeit "unconventional," form of history ("Autobiography as Unconventional History" 433).
[23] Eakin 5.
[24] Eakin 3.
[25] Smith and Watson 15.

these authors.[26] Similarly, as Gayatri Spivak has pointed out in "Imperialism and Sexual Difference," access to autobiography, for whole groups of people, has historically only been possible through the dominant mediation of an investigator or field worker. She explains that women, people of color, and people from the Global South have frequently functioned as "subjects" who provide "objective evidence" for anthropologists rather than being encouraged to share their own life stories.[27] However, as critics have noted, life writing constitutes a more inclusive arena for presenting and sharing one's life story, opening the genre to a multiplicity of cultural, racial, and national perspectives.

Feminism's second wave in the United States, inspired by the civil rights and Black Power movements and the anti-Vietnam war protests of the 1960s, coincided with women's advancement in professional and academic arenas, paving the way for an abundance of writing by women of color.[28] Between the 1960s and 1980s, there was a boom in writing by women of color and postcolonial authors from both the US mainland and the colonies.[29] As Carole Boyce Davies explains in *Black Women, Writing, and Identity: Migrations of the Subject,* during this time of political and social protest and revolution, there was "a political imperative" to articulate the existence of people of color in relation to white culture, particularly through writing. She explains how, beginning in the 1960s, women of color used their writing to rebel against social inequalities in unprecedented numbers and to enact "radical self-reflexivity," exploring topics

[26] Friedman 34-35.
[27] Spivak 229.
[28] As Amy Ling explains in "A Perspective on Chinamerican Literature," the combination of the Black Nationalist and Feminist movements, together with the "liberal administrators" who were in office in Washington, made the 1960s and 1970s a "favorable atmosphere" for people of color to speak out (77).
[29] As Andrés Torres and José E. Velázquez explain in *The Puerto Rican Movement: Voices from the Diaspora,* in the 1960s and 1970s Puerto Ricans began to engage in radical political activism, challenging police brutality and racial injustice and leading human-rights movements and social justice projects (xii). This movement towards activism was both reflected in and motivated by revolutionary writings of the time, including texts by Malcom X, Marx, Lenin, and Ché Guevara (178).

that had been formerly taboo, including abortion, sex, domestic violence, and childbirth.[30] Accordingly, during the 1970s and 1980s, women writers of color, including Paula Gunn Allen, Alice Walker, Toni Morrison, Cherríe Moraga, and Gloria Anzaldúa, began to receive unprecedented attention in the literary field. Their texts included anthologies written exclusively by women of color, including the most well-known, *This Bridge Called My Back* (1981), co-edited by Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, and *Making Face, Making Soul* (1990), edited by Gloria Anzaldúa. Women literary critics of color also became more prominent, including Norma Alarcón, Barbara Christian, Mary Helen Washington, Barbara Smith, Gloria Hull, and Deborah MacDowell. Texts by women of color were created not only in conjunction with but sometimes in opposition to Anglo-centered feminist literary criticism.[31]

This boom in writing by women of color has been both reflected in the area of life writing and has transformed the literary arena to become more inclusive,[32] facilitating increasing numbers of publications by women and men of color, LGBT writers, and writers from the working class.[33] In *Women's Life Writing and Imagined Communities,* Cynthia Huff explains that, with the entrance of writers from formerly marginalized communities, the genre of life writing has become a "mechanism for making 'visible' formerly 'invisible' subjects,"[34] allowing individuals who were formerly excluded from access to publishing or speaking publicly to share their perspectives.[35] Since the 1960s, the emergence of new voices and perspectives into the arena of life writing has helped the field of literary self-representation to move past "uncritical

[30] Rodriguez 102.
[31] Mankiller 223; For a discussion of how women writers of color used their texts to contest white women's privilege in the 1960s, 70s, and 80s, see Wilma Mankiller's *The Reader's Companion to U.S. Women's History.*
[32] For insight into the various ways in which people of color have made their voices heard through life writing, see Wamuwi Mbao's "Inscribing Whiteness and Staging Belonging in Contemporary Autobiographies and Life-Writing Forms."
[33] Huff 285.
[34] Huff 296.
[35] Hoffman and Culley 10-13.

western notions of autobiography and its historically privileged subject"[36] to allow those who were formerly defined by others to speak for themselves.

Life Writing as an Outlaw Genre

Authors can use life writing not only to document their life stories, but to facilitate cultural survival and address social problems. In "Resisting Autobiography: Out-Law Genres and Transnational Feminist Subjects," Kaplan suggests the existence of hybrid "anti-autobiographical" outlaw genres,[37] which are texts written by an individual to describe his or her life, yet which serve a broader purpose beyond communicating a life story. As Kaplan explains, "Out-law genres renegotiate the relationship between personal identity and the world, between personal and social history. Here, narrative inventions are tied to a struggle for cultural survival rather than purely aesthetic experimentation or individual expression."[38] In my dissertation, I examine four texts in which twentieth-century women migrants to the United States from Latin American and Asian countries use life writing as an outlaw genre, as a tool in the "struggle for cultural survival" rather than just as a means of creating a personal memoir. As Kaplan explains, outlaw genres challenge "the hierarchical structures of patriarchy, capitalism, and colonial discourse."[39]

Accordingly, in the four narratives I examine, the authors call attention to problems in the geopolitical climate at the moments in which they are writing and resist racial discrimination, patriarchal oppression, and US imperialism. They use life writing not only to record and share their life stories, but as an impetus for social change. As Gayle Greene explains, "In a sense, all narrative is concerned with change: there is something in the impulse to narrative that is related

[36] Smith and Watson, qtd. Huff 286.
[37] Kaplan's examples of outlaw genres include "prison memoir, *testimonio,* ethnography, 'biomythography,' cultural autobiography, [and] 'regulative psychobiography.'"
[38] Kaplan 212.
[39] Kaplan 215.

to the impulse to liberation. Narrative re-collects, remembers, repeats…in order for there to be an escape from repetition, in order for there to be change or progress."[40] These women are writing not only to be remembered, but to affect change on their society; they "write to right"[41] the social injustices they perceive in their particular historical moments, highlighting inequalities for their readers and advocating change. As Steven Mailloux clarifies in *The Dialectics of Our America: Genealogy, Cultural Critique, and Literary History,* "A text can be a topic in the cultural conversation, or it can be a participant who is motivated by and has effects on the conversation."[42] The authors of these four texts are active participants in their historical moments, both responding to and attempting to influence geopolitical and social issues at the times in which they were writing.

Criteria for Selection of Texts in this Study

Since women's experiences of migration are uniquely shaped by gender politics,[43] and, as Kadar explains, women have often been excluded from the traditional genre of autobiography,[44] I was particularly interested in texts by women migrants. Additionally, as the genre of life writing has expanded to include the voices of formerly marginalized writers and communities, much recent life writing has been written by Asian and Latina/o migrants to the United States.[45] As I will discuss later in the introduction, Latina/o and Asian migrants, racially categorized as neither "black" nor "white," have been forced to navigate complex political, cultural, and legislative obstacles in the United States, and I wanted to explore how these authors represent

[40] Greene 291.
[41] Jones 36.
[42] Mailloux, qtd. Saldívar 50.
[43] In *Global Woman: Nannies, Maids, and Sex Workers in the New Economy* (2004), Barbara Ehrenreich and Arlie Russell Hochschild offer a detailed look at how gender impacts women's experiences of migration.
[44] As Kadar explains, "the literary history of autobiography has…been a womanless history, whereas life writing offers a feminist canon" (20).
[45] Bergland 459; For an interesting perspective on the construction of ethnicity in Asian American life writing, see Lisa Lowe's *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics* (1996).

themselves to a US audience and respond to the cultural construction of racial and ethnic identities. I decided to focus on first-generation migrants who lived through the migration experience themselves and can attest to the disparate social systems and contrasting conceptions of identity and community in their home and new nations. Since many of the earlier examples of migration life writing are characterized as "immigrant success stories,"[46] I am interested in analyzing texts by twentieth-century women writers of color who contested elements of US society and culture rather than simply expressing admiration and gratitude for the opportunities available in the United States. In order to provide a broader overview of the migration experiences of women of color, I selected narratives by authors from four different nations. I wanted to place these texts in conversation with each other in order to explore how women migrants who were publishing at various historical moments represented themselves and their communities to a US audience. Finally, I was interested in authors who use creative or complex textual or rhetorical strategies to connect with their audiences, share their life stories, and speak out against the social injustices they perceived.

The chapters are arranged in chronological order in order to explore how cultural and political shifts, global events, changing legislation, and evolving social constructions of race and identity have impacted the lives of women migrants of color in the latter part of the twentieth century. Additionally, the structure of the narratives lends itself to this chronology, as the dissertation progresses from a consideration of the least textually experimental text, Helena Kuo's *I've Come a Long Way* (1942), which adheres to a largely chronological narrative format, to the more experimental texts, including Rosario Morales and Aurora Levins Morales's *Getting Home Alive* (1986) and Norma Elia Cantú's *Canícula: Snapshots of a Girlhood en la Frontera*

[46] Daniels, *Coming to America* 13.

(1995), which incorporate less-traditional textual elements including photographs, poetry, and stream-of-consciousness narrative.

In this dissertation, I focus on several main elements of these texts, specifically how these authors enact various forms of persuasion and resistance. I examine the way the authors tailor their narratives to the social and political climates in which they are publishing, attempting to persuade their audiences to move beyond a US-centric view of world events and to adopt a more balanced and just view of other nations and cultures. I explore how each author incorporates her multiple cultural, ethnic, racial, and lingual identities into the text, resisting and undermining racial and ethnic stereotypes and encouraging her audience to embrace a more positive view of the author and her racial and ethnic community. Finally, I examine how each author uses her texts to resist and combat racism, discrimination, social inequalities, and US imperialism, inspiring her audience to join in the fight against social injustice.

Examining texts written by migrants and women of color is imperative in developing a comprehensive understanding of American literature. As Sau-ling Cynthia Wong explains, "Just as immigrants are often seen as less than fully American, immigrant autobiography has been customarily assigned to the peripheries of American autobiographical scholarship."[47] However, these narratives comprise a crucial source of information not only about the women's lives, but also about global relationships, histories of colonization and imperialism, discrimination, and the complex power dynamics between languages and cultures. As women of color and migrants from Latin America and Asia, these authors confront issues their communities have historically struggled with, including racism and social inequalities. Chinese author Helena Kuo, who describes her immigration to the United States in *I've Come a Long Way* (1942), highlights the racism and discrimination she has experienced while living in the United States and Europe. In

[47] Wong 142.

Getting Home Alive (1986), Puerto Rican authors Aurora Levins Morales and Rosario Morales call attention to destructive US imperial presence in Puerto Rico, as well as revealing the negative effects of colonial legacies in other parts of the world. In *When Heaven and Earth Changed Places* (1989), Vietnamese author Le Ly Hayslip explores the colonial legacy of French and US military intervention in Vietnam, explaining how this intervention has led to violence and poverty for the Vietnamese people. Finally, in *Canícula: Snapshots of a Girlhood en la Frontera* (1995), Mexican author Norma Elia Cantú reflects on the racism and atmosphere of militarization she has observed while growing up on the U.S./Mexico border.

As Aníbal Quijano points out, "In spite of the fact that political colonialism has been eliminated, the relationship between European—also called 'Western'—culture, and the others, continues to be one of colonial domination."[48] As members of communities which have been historically oppressed, these women offer a valuable perspective on geopolitical hierarchies and global cultures and relationships. They call attention to social inequalities and injustice that may be otherwise overlooked or concealed by the dominant culture. These women demonstrate how, "as part of the ongoing argument between history and memory, marginalized groups often attempt to maintain at the center of national memory what the dominant group would like to forget."[49] They use life writing to call attention to and speak out against oppressive social systems, using creative, purposeful, and subversive textual strategies and constructing their own radical representations of themselves and their communities. Moreover, through their narratives, these women are able to transcend the status of victims who are merely acted upon by global, imperial forces. I examine how, through their texts, these women contest colonialism and imperialism, discriminatory legislation, and social inequalities, using life writing strategically to

[48] Mignolo 23.
[49] Agnew 201.

connect with their audiences and tell their personal stories of migration. By analyzing the formal aesthetics, reception, and techniques of these innovative examples of life writing, we can appreciate how these authors not only seek to build a relationship with their readers, but also to interact with their current geopolitical situations, responding to and attempting to impact current events.

Life Writing as a Social Proactive

Life writing is an accessible genre for these women since, as Kadar explains, "life writing allows the canonical…to be considered alongside the legitimately marginal."[50] Although women of color and migrants, as marginalized populations, have not traditionally had their work canonized—included in anthologies, taught at universities, or considered part of canonical American Literature[51]—life writing allows migrant[52] women to speak out against repressive social systems and capitalist imperialism and to represent themselves and their communities. Importantly, unlike the framed, contained, and closed thinking associated with more conventional modes of autobiography, this type of writing is open-ended and generative.[53] As an expression of personal experience, life writing gives these five women authors the opportunity to enact freedom and agency through their own representations of political and cultural events, presented through careful use of language and rhetorical strategy. As Sidonie Smith explains in *A Poetics of Women's Autobiography,* the genre of life writing gives a woman "the discursive authority to interpret herself publicly in a patriarchal culture that has written stories of women

[50] Kadar 29.
[51] For traditional surveys of life writing, see Donald J. Winslow's *Life Writing: A Glossary of Terms in Biography, Autobiography, and Related Forms* and Linda S. Coleman's *Public Self, Private Self: Women's Life Writing in England.*
[52] I use the term "migrant" to signify movement across international borders as well as within national borders. Since several of these women, including Cantú, Morales, and Levins Morales, move frequently both across international borders and within a national domain and consider multiple locations "home," the term "migrant" more accurately reflects their circumstances. Also, use of the term "migrant" (instead of immigrant) to represent an individual who relocates across international borders can problematize the myth of one-way migration to the United States and the U.S. rags-to-riches success story (Daniels).
[53] Kadar 22.

for her, thereby fictionalizing and effectively silencing her."[54] Life writing is an act of self-invention or reinvention, a "social proactive which creates meaning rather than merely communicating it."[55] Through life writing, these women authors are able to reclaim discursive authority over their own lives and strategically present themselves to both their home and new communities. For example, former Vietcong member Le Ly Hayslip uses careful rhetoric to present herself not as an enemy of the United States, but rather as a cultural interpreter and guide for the US reader, offering insight into the Vietnamese perspective.

By considering these women's representations of migration as life writing rather than traditional autobiography, we are also able to both account for their inclusion of various media (letters, diaries, songs, myths, photographs) within their text and move past debates about whether their narratives are entirely fact or fiction. As Smith explains, "Belief in the facticity of memory has created the great problem of retrospective autobiography: [the idea] that it creates a consistent self."[56] Autobiography, as a genre, is often assumed to represent a stable, concrete, solidified, and "factual" version of the past. However, as many of my selected authors demonstrate, memories are acts of imagination; they are a "play of seeking, choosing, discarding words and stories that suggest [and] approximate, but never recapture the past.[57] The accuracy of a person's memories does not always equal either "objective" or "subjective" truth; instead, these representations are "best viewed as a continuum that spreads unevenly and in combined forms."[58] Life writing allows for this flexibility.

[54] Smith 45.
[55] Smith 133.
[56] Smith 45.
[57] Smith 45.
[58] Kadar 10.

Migration, Race, & Identity

I am particularly interested in examining the work of first generation migrants[59] because they negotiate between very different gender and identity systems though the immigration experience. These authors are individuals who actually lived through migration, spending much of their childhood or adolescence in one nation, immersed in one language and one set of cultural and social norms, and then moving to another country with a radically different culture, language, and lifestyle. The migrant authors of these four texts represent both "push" and "pull" reasons for migration.[60] Many migrants, including Hayslip and Kuo, fled war and violence in their nations and came to the United States to seek safety, while others, including the parents of both Cantú and Morales, came to the United States seeking better employment opportunities.

As Matthew Pratt Guterl, James Campbell, and Robert G. Lee explain in *Race, Nation, and Empire in American History,* migration represents not only a journey, but the birth of a new identity, grounded in race, religion, gender, and nation, and the tensions within and between these social constructs. The five authors I discuss experienced social and cultural change via geographic movement; literal movement across borders corresponded with a significant cultural

[59] Some of these women, specifically Levins Morales, could also be called the "1.5 generation" since they spent their childhood in one culture and their adulthood in another. Critic Sucheng Chan defines the 1.5 generation as "immigrants who come [to the US] at a young age, who retain their ability to speak, if not always to read and write, the ancestral language," as well as retaining familiarity with their home culture's "values and norms" (Chan xiv). Chan explains how the 1.5 generation often functions as a cultural bridge between the older generations and younger family members who are born in the US: "They often act as cultural brokers, regardless of whether they wish to do so, between their grandparents, parents, aunts, and uncles, on one hand, and the younger, usually American-born members of their families, on the other" (Chan xiv). Chan also explains how authors' awareness of their unique role as cultural mediators can be reflected in their narratives: "As the narrators analyze their own experiences and ever-changing consciousness, they are quite conscious of the in-between spaces they occupy. They mediate not only between the different generations in their families, but between…ways of life and thought as well" (Chan xiv). Pérez Firmat calls the 1.5 generation "translation artists" (4) who mediate between cultures and languages as well as coping with two simultaneous transitions, "the transition from childhood to adulthood" and "the transition from one sociocultural environment to another" (3).

[60] For a detailed discussion of the "push" and "pull" reasons for migration, including the desire for independence, the need to flee war and poverty, the desire to give one's children a better life, and friends and relatives who offer housing and job connections, see Barbara Ehrenreich and Arlie Russell Hochschild's *Global Woman: Nannies, Maids, and Sex Workers in the New Economy*.

shift. Latino scholar Gustavo Pérez Firmat specifies the benefits resulting from familiarity with two cultures, explaining that first generation migrants are able "to circulate within and through both the old and the new cultures….They are capable of availing themselves of the resources—linguistic, artistic, commercial—that both cultures have to offer."[61] Several of the texts I analyze reflect the authors' role of cultural interpreter or mediator, either between different generations of migrants or between their own ethnic community and a mainstream reading public. Additionally, some of the authors address others within their own national or ethnic community, emphasizing the essential nature of community and the preservation of language and culture.

Each of these authors comes from a country or region—China, Mexico, Puerto Rico, and Vietnam—that has a distinct and complicated relationship with the United States. However, there are some similarities in terms of how US legislation and immigration policy has affected migrants from each of these nations. Migrants from many of these nations have been part of a workforce alternately valued and exploited via US immigration policy. Mexicans and Chinese immigrants both played a key role in the nineteenth-century industrialization of the United States, arriving in large numbers to fill the need for labor.[62] Both Mexican and Chinese laborers participated in the mining and railroad industries, often forced to labor in adverse conditions for a fraction of the pay Anglo workers received.[63] The Chinese[64] were formally excluded from

[61] Pérez Firmat 4.
[62] However, the Mexican experience of migration is distinct because, particularly in border areas, former Mexican land became U.S. territory, making some 80,000-100,000 Latinas/os "immigrants" to the United States though they had not migrated (O'Brien 3; Daniels 307-308).
[63] Daniels, *Coming to America* 52.
[64] The Chinese laborers, who were predominantly male, began arriving in the United States in significant numbers beginning with the gold rush of 1849. Chinese immigrants have been historically subject to legislative discrimination, including the Naturalization Act of 1870, which limited naturalization to "white persons and persons of African descent" (Daniels 245), the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 (A. Robert Lee 36), which halted Chinese immigration altogether, the Geary Act of 1892 (Wellborn 57), which extended Chinese exclusion another ten years and placed the burden of proof for legal residency upon each individual Chinese immigrant, and the Immigration Act of 1924 and the Tydings-McDuffie Act of 1934, both of which forbid Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Asian Indian, and Filipino immigration (Palumbo-Liu 33). From 1910-1940, hundreds of (mainly Cantonese) Chinese were

entering the United States and remained ineligible for citizenship from the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882 until 1943. Throughout the twentieth century, employers used Mexican labor contractors to lure Mexicans north with offers of work, often on ranches or farms.[65] However, the US government forcibly deported[66] thousands of Mexican residents, many of them US citizens, in the late 1920s and early 1930s[67] in response to "concerns about competition with native-born workers and alleged overrepresentation among the unemployed ranks and the nation's relief programs."[68] A few years later, the US government instituted the Bracero program in the 1940s, designed to bring Mexican workers to meet the rising demand for agricultural labor. However, because the program guaranteed minimum wage and legal protection to workers, many employers sent their employees back across the border to immigrate again illegally, so that they could be re-employed without qualifying for the program's benefits.[69] Puerto Ricans[70] were also exploited as a source of low-wage labor when the US

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detained in the holding facility on Angel Island, just off the San Francisco coastline (Jid Lee 145). Chinese immigrants remained ineligible for citizenship until 1943 (Daniels, *Asian America* 44).

[65] Historian Hubert Howe Bancroft points out that Mexican laborers were preferred over Chinese or Japanese laborers for U.S. ranches and agricultural jobs, since their employers assumed they would go back home when they were no longer needed (Daniels 309).

[66] This deportation included widespread human rights violations, including "illegally imprisoning immigrants and not permitting returnees to dispose of their property or to collect their wages, separating families, and deporting the infirm" (Sadowski-Smith 33).

[67] Daniels, *Coming to America* 307.

[68] Sadowski-Smith 33.

[69] Henderson 4.

[70] Ever since Spanish colonial rule, the citizens of Puerto Rico have struggled for independence. In 1898, during the Spanish–American War, Puerto Rico was invaded and subsequently became a possession of the United States, which has since retained sovereignty. Immediately after taking control of Puerto Rico, the United States government established military rule, which lasted two years until the Foraker Act of 1900 (sponsored by Senator Joseph B. Foraker) which established a civil government and facilitated commerce between Puerto Rico and the United States, reducing tariffs and integrating Puerto Rico into the U.S. monetary system. This act also allowed Puerto Rico to send one (non-voting) representative to Congress (Monge 40-44). The Foraker Act remained in effect until the passage of the Jones Act of 1917, under which the U.S. government declared all Puerto Ricans U.S. citizens, removing barriers to immigration (Whalen and Vásquez-Hernández 1). Despite this change in citizenship status, Puerto Rico remained an "unincorporated territory" (Whalen and Vásquez-Hernández 13), and was not represented in the electoral college. The late 1940s brought the beginning of a major migration, often referred to as "the Great Migration" (1945-1965) of Puerto Ricans to the continental United States, mainly to New York City (Aranda 16). Out of an island population of 2.2 million people, 470,000 people left the island during the decade of the 1950s

government instituted Operation Bootstrap in 1948.[71] This policy, which attempted to entice US manufacturers to relocate factories to Puerto Rico, resulted in the displacement of workers, the concentration of wealth among U.S. corporations, widespread abandonment of agricultural practices, and migration to cities. However, by the 1960s, after many Puerto Ricans had given up traditional agricultural practices for factory work, these industries began to face growing competition from outside the United States, and severe unemployment became a widespread problem, leading many Puerto Ricans to migrate to the mainland, where they were largely limited to low-paying jobs.[72] Many Vietnamese[73] workers who fled to the United States after the Vietnam War were also limited to menial and even dangerous jobs, often illegally employed in restaurants or garment factories where they had no rights and no recourse if they were mistreated or underpaid.[74] Migrants from each of these groups have been subject to employment barriers, a lack of education and resources, poverty,[75] and relative isolation in their new communities.[76]

In addition to being exploited as a source of cheap labor, migrants have suffered discrimination and racism in the United States, resented not only for the economic competition they represented, but also for the element of "difference" they introduced to US society.[77] The texts I have selected represent roughly a fifty-year period at the end of the twentieth century, a

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alone, representing a 21 percent immigration rate (Acosta-Belén and Santiago 81). While three-fourths of the Great Migration is estimated to have remained on the mainland, one fourth of these migrants returned (Aranda 17).

[71] As Alex Maldonado explains in *Teodoro Moscoso and Puerto Rico's Operation Bootstrap,* this program was designed to facilitate Puerto Rico's transformation from an agricultural to an industrial economy. Exemptions from taxes and import duties, cheap labor, and reduced property rental rates were used as incentives to entice US manufacturers to build factories in Puerto Rico.

[72] As Elizabeth Aranda explains, Operation Bootstrap demonstrated how "U.S. imperialism manifested itself not just politically and economically on the island; it also contributed to a massive displacement of the Puerto Rican population" (16).

[73] Like the Chinese, Vietnamese immigrants were banned under the Immigration Act of 1917, also known as the "Asiatic Barred Zone" act, which "kept out all Asian Immigrants except Japanese and Filipinos" (Daniels, *Coming to America* 278).

[74] Vo 88, 98.

[75] Daniels *Coming to America* 83.

[76] United by a common lingual and cultural background, and possibly by a history of trauma, the Vietnamese community remained relatively separate from mainstream society (Emmons and Reyes 647).

[77] Campbell, Guterl, Lee 103.

period in which national attitudes regarding Asian and Latino/a immigrants fluctuated dramatically. During this period, national sentiment towards Asian immigrants shifted from the anti-Japanese fervor of World War II to the anti-Chinese atmosphere of the Cold War, and then to the more recent "model minority" stereotype of East Asian immigrants.[78] Accordingly, US policy toward immigrants from China and Vietnam changed significantly during the Cold War as the US government first adjusted its laws to account for the potential threat immigrants from Communist countries could pose to national security,[79] and then allowed for more relaxed admission policies by 1980.[80] Attitudes towards Latino/a immigrants also fluctuated, shifting from the comparative tolerance of the Bracero Program to the more strident border policies[81] of the early twenty-first century. Through the decades, many citizens of the United States have remained suspicious of and hostile to immigrants from Asia and Latin America.[82] As scholar Angie Chabram Dernersesian explains, even Latinas/os living in the United States have often

[78] Purkayastha 86.
[79] As Meredith Oyen points out in *The Diplomacy of Migration: Transnational Lives and the Making of U.S-Chinese Relations in the Cold War,* during the Cold War "anticommunism became a precondition to immigration," as well as "an expectation" for migrants who were already living in the United States (101). Between 1949-1959, 650 Chinese nationals were deported from the United States, many of them under suspicion of Communist activity (115). The United States and China did not re-establish formal diplomatic relations until 1979 (Zhao 189).
[80] As Carl J. Bon Tempo explains in *Americans at the Gate: The United States and Refugees During the Cold War*, the 1953 Refugee Relief Act sought to improve the US government's "diplomatic reputation" at the onset of the Cold War, allowing for the admission of 214,000 refugees from European nations. This Act defined a refugee as a person who was threatened by Communism (44). The Immigration Act of 1965 created a more equitable system for entry into the U.S. (Zhao 183), abolishing the national origin quotas of the 1952 McCarran-Walter Act which had previously limited Asian immigration. The Carter and Ford presidential administrations created programs that brought four hundred thousand Vietnamese and other Southeast Asian migrants to the US between 1975 and 1979 (Daniels 345). As Sucheng Chang explains, "Between 1975 and 1997, almost two million people from Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia resettled in Western or non-Communist countries" (171). The flood of immigrants from war-torn countries in the later part of the twentieth century increased hostility towards the Vietnamese in the United States. The 1980 Refugee Act mandated at least 50,000 annual "refugee admissions" to the United States, redefining a refugee as a victim of "persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion," omitting any reference to Communism (Bon Tempo 10).
[81] These include Operation Blockade/Hold the Line in El Paso in 1993 and Operation Gatekeeper in 1994. NAFTA was also passed in 1994, which generated border militarization and anti-immigrant sentiment (Delgadillo 109).
[82] Ong Hing 5.

been conceptualized as perpetually foreign, always assumed to be immigrants though they may be US-born citizens.[83]

In a country defined by Black/White racial imaginaries, both political and social entities have presented Asian and Latina/o migrants as everything from essentially sub-human[84] to almost white, portraying both groups as outsiders whose presence is threatening to the nation. As Amy Kaplan explains in *The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of US Culture*, since domestic metaphors of national identity are contingent upon conceptions of the "foreign" and the "alien," the racial and cultural intermixing associated with migration threatens to make the United States "internally foreign to itself,"[85] thereby jeopardizing the identity of a nation which has always imagined itself as fundamentally white. Since Asian and Latina/o migrants brought foreign languages, customs, and racial difference, they were often viewed as a threat to the "cohesive whiteness" of the United States. Similarly, in *Race, Nation, and Empire in American History*, Robert G. Lee details how the entrance of Asian and Latina/o migrants causes racial anxiety and fear among the white population; he states that their presence creates "terrors about race, class and national identity" as the "borders that give structure and meaning to the world appear to be collapsing."[86] Due in part to the racial anxieties detailed by Kaplan and Lee, throughout the twentieth century Asian and Latina/o migrants have been targets of fear and suspicion, subject to both discriminatory legislation and widespread social stereotypes and prejudice.[87]

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[83] For a more complete explanation of how Latinas/os living in the US are perpetually conceptualized as foreigners, see Chabram Dernersesian's *The Chicana/Chicano Cultural Studies Forum: Critical and Ethnographic Practices.*
[84] Ahmad 55; Riis 92; Allerfeldt 59.
[85] Kaplan 6.
[86] Campbell, Guterl, and Lee 335.
[87] Discriminatory legislation includes: The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, which stipulated that Chinese immigrants remained ineligible for citizenship until 1943 (Daniels 245), the Expatriation Act of 1907, which stated that any American woman who married a foreigner lost her citizenship (281), the 1917 Immigration Act, which mandated that all adult immigrants pass a literacy test and forbid all Asian immigrants except Japanese and Filipinos (278), the 1924 Immigration Act, which made the Japanese ineligible for citizenship (283), the 1942 internment of Japanese and Japanese Americans in concentration camps (303), and the Immigration Reform Act of 1986, which

There have been many social science publications which have examined Asian/Latino relationships, including Eileen O'Brien's *The Racial Middle: Latinos and Asian Americans Living Beyond the Racial Divide*, in which she explores how people of both Asian and Latino descent have been historically "juxtaposed against a 'white' category that is favored and a 'black' category that is not."[88] Similarly, in *Racial Transformations: Latinos and Asians Remaking the United States,* Nicholas DeGenova and Gary Okihiro trace the history of racialization of Latinas/os and Asians, connecting it with the U.S. government's subjugation of Native Americans. Although these studies are valuable, a literary analysis of life writing which compares the experience of Asian and Latino migrants can add a personal perspective and reveal how policy and legislation impact individual lives.

As demonstrated by Michael Omi and Howard Winant in *Racial Formation in the United States from the 1960s to the 1990s,* race functions as a constantly-changing social construction. The four texts I have selected, written at different times and places in the twentieth century, reflect both the socially constructed and historically flexible nature of race. Additionally, as Omi and Winant explain, "our ongoing *interpretation* of our experience in racial terms shapes our relations to the institutions and organizations through which we are embedded in social structure.[89]

Finally, both Asian and Latina/o immigrants, who are not easily categorized as "black" or "white," complicate other racial identities. These groups have functioned as an in-between category, constructed and marginalized differently than the black community but still viewed as

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required employers to verify the eligibility of all employees and instituted prison sentences for employers who hired illegal aliens (392). The 1994 Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act authorized the establishment of a criminal alien center, made it easier and faster to deport criminals, rejected asylum seekers, strengthened the penalties for passport and visa offenses, and provided more money for border control (433).

[88] O'Brien 1.

[89] Omi and Winant 60, emphasis mine.

inferior to whites. Critic Leslie Bow counters the misassumption of Asian American cultural isolation by exploring the presence of Asian Americans in the interactions between blacks and whites. Bow situates Asian Americans as an example of the "interstitial," which postcolonial theorist Homi Bhabha defines as the "passage between fixed identification that opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity."[90] Bow explores how Asian American subjects have been constructed in the space between black "abjection" and white "normative invisibility."[91] These examples of life writing demonstrate how Latinas/os, too, fill this category, not categorized as either black or white, but as existing in a liminal space in between.[92]

Each of these authors comes from a country or region that has a complicated relationship with the US, and these unique histories influence the authors' narrative strategies within the text. By examining narratives taken from the decades between the 1940s and the beginning of the twenty-first century, we are able to see how formal legislation and national sentiment, as well as specific perceptions of particular racial and ethnic groups, influence how these migrant authors purposefully and strategically represent themselves and their communities.

Narrative Strategies and Translation

Although each of these authors has a unique writing style, their texts share an important set of formal aesthetic and socio-historical aspects. I demonstrate how, despite their disparate origins, these authors use similar rhetorical appeals to reach their audience, including portrayals of cultural comparison and cultural conflict, a focus on the specific role of women, and portraying themselves as ideal citizens. Each of these authors also incorporates multiple languages into her text, engaging in translation and code-switching.

[90] Bhabha 4.
[91] Bow 5.
[92] In addition to their marginalization, both of these groups have been used as interchangeable sources of labor throughout the twentieth century (Daniels 309).

Each of these women creatively uses language, specifically translation and code-switching,[93] in her text. In *Lost and Found in Translation*, Martha Cutter defines code-switching as transitioning back and forth between different languages,[94] and notes that it may convey either acquiescence or resistance in relations of power. Each of these authors is preoccupied with a series of translation dilemmas; some involve the direct translation of words or phrases; others involve the translation of ideas. As Cutter explains, "often translation is not an actual lexical practice…but rather a trope—a metaphorical construct utilized to constellate a series of questions about ethnic identities, language practices, and the way tongues from other cultures can (or cannot) be preserved within the linguistic domain of the English language."[95] Accordingly, in these texts, translation—or the refusal to translate—signifies more about power dynamics and the author's expression of identity than about her (in)ability to provide corresponding words or phrases.

For some of these women, the decision not to translate pieces of their text into English signifies their resistance to colonial domination and their desire to privilege their own languages and cultures. I show how Norma Elia Cantú, for example, chooses to integrate Spanish words and phrases into her text, sometimes with and sometimes without an equivalent English translation, in order to privilege the Spanish language and demonstrate the necessity of being bilingual in border culture. Helena Kuo preserves the integrity and superiority of the Chinese language, stating that "translation [of certain passages] into English is so difficult as to be almost impossible"[96] because English is insufficient for the expression of certain Chinese concepts.[97]

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[93] For a detailed discussion of code-switching, see Heller's "The Politics of Code-switching and Language Choice" (Cutter 266).
[94] Cutter 4.
[95] Cutter 5.
[96] Kuo 368.
[97] Kuo 121.

Alternately, Le Ly Hayslip translates Vietnamese cultural texts, including political slogans, children's songs, and legends, into English, enabling the US reader to obtain a more nuanced understanding of Vietnamese culture and establishing her role as a cultural guide for the reader.

As Cutter explains, translation is about more than just finding equivalent words; rather, "translation as a trope often signifies a process of continual negotiation and renegotiation between languages and an ongoing struggle between conflicting and often-clashing cultures and ideologies."[98] These women use translation strategically in their texts to both resist oppression and to preserve and share crucial elements of their identities. Moreover, through their translation and code-switching practices, these authors are able to create multilingual texts which exemplify the experience of border-crossing. In this way, translation becomes not only a signifier of the power struggles between cultures, ethnicities, and languages, but also a way in which these struggles can be altered and revolutionized though the creation of new, multicultural ways of identification and connection.

Introduction to the Texts

The first chapter focuses on Chinese author Helena Kuo's *I've Come a Long Way* (1942), the first full-length autobiography written by a Chinese woman in the United States.[99] In this chapter, I examine how Kuo uses life writing to respond to the geopolitical climate of World War II. She tells her life story with the goals of establishing her own upstanding morals and democratic values and persuading her US audience to side with China against Japan in World War II.

Helena Kuo was born in the former Portuguese colony of Macao, a Chinese territory south of the mainland, to an upper-class family. She attended one of China's best universities

[98] Cutter 6.
[99] Amato 188.

before moving to Europe to escape the 1937 Japanese invasion. Kuo lived briefly in the UK and France before being invited to the United States by Eleanor Roosevelt to lecture on China and the war effort.[100] In her text, Kuo strategically conforms to particular stereotypes while purposefully deviating from others, overtly presenting herself as a subservient Chinese woman while simultaneously serving as an insightful cultural critic.

Kuo emphasizes her own democratic values and her similarities with Westerners in order to win the trust of US readers and to demonstrate that the Chinese share their customs and values. She serves as a cultural translator for her audience, exemplifying her familiarity with Western customs while still catering to her readers' expectations for descriptions of "exotic" Chinese life. Although some critics argue that *I've Come a Long Way* is an example of a text subdued by Western culture and expectations,[101] I assert that, through her overt cultural criticism of the West and her commendation of China, Kuo is able to tactfully address Chinese, European, and US social problems, including poverty and political tensions, while still presenting herself as a spokesperson for the Chinese people.

Kuo's positive depictions of the Chinese people and Chinese culture work to resist predominant historical stereotypes of the Chinese and to demonstrate that they would make valuable friends and allies for the United States. At the same time, she strategically juxtaposes complex evaluations of both the United States and China, offering a careful critique of Western and Chinese society. For example, instead of isolating the blame for poor living conditions in US Chinatowns to Chinese Americans, she hints at US economic inequalities as the root cause. She commends US citizens for their aid to China in the war effort, yet scolds them for supplying Japan with weapons. Kuo's text also criticizes China for particular social problems, including

[100] Amato 188.
[101] Ling 65.

gender discrimination and social inequalities. As critic Jid Lee points out, "she at once condemns and legitimizes her country, constantly finding her two selves in jarring contradictions."[102] The first chapter demonstrates how Helena Kuo serves as an astute cultural critic who uses life writing to artfully blend strategies of persuasion and resistance.

The second chapter focuses on *Getting Home Alive* (1986), which was co-authored by Aurora Levins Morales, who was born in Puerto Rico, and her mother, Rosario Morales, who was born in Harlem to Puerto Rican immigrants. This chapter analyzes how these authors use life writing to destabilize traditional conceptions of race and ethnicity and to contest US imperialism in Puerto Rico. Their text, which includes poetry, essays, and stories, is written in alternating voices, with pieces on various topics and with the authorship indicated by different fonts. Their pieces explore political and social issues, including issues of race, violence, and inner city poverty in the US, unemployment in Puerto Rico, and the overall lack of opportunity for migrants in the US.[103] They also discuss their own personal experiences of migration and lives divided between Puerto Rico and New York. Their lives form layers of travel, departure and return, interrupting the myth of permanent migration and the US immigrant success story. Through their life writing, Morales and Levins Morales provide insight into and criticism of US economic and military control of Puerto Rico and military exercises conducted on the island, including the bombing of Vieques. Additionally, these women call attention to U.S. social problems, including widespread urban violence and poverty, and discuss instances of discrimination. Although Puerto Ricans are United States citizens, the authors clarify that, due to

[102] Jid Lee 74.

their Latina[104] heritage and Puerto Rican cultural background, they are considered outsiders on the mainland. Throughout their text, they explore their liminal role on the margins of US society and of the academy, where they are often compelled to downplay their Latina heritage.

The cross-generational call-and-response nature of this text adds unique textual layers and insight, as the women's relationship with each other mirrors their position of being influenced by and split between two homelands and two cultures. They reveal how the process of writing and the process of becoming writers was collaborative. In the Introduction, Morales explains, "This book began in long budget-breaking telephone calls stretched across the width of this country, in 'listen to what I've just written'; in 'did you hear about this book, this song, this poem, this event?'"[105] Even the process of brainstorming and writing is tied to geography; although the mother and daughter are spread far apart, in the same way as they are separated from their homeland, they influence one another. Just as Latina identities stretch in tension between the island and the mainland, the women's relationship stretches and overcomes geographic and generational lines.

The third chapter focuses on Vietnamese author Phung Thi Le Ly Hayslip's *When Heaven and Earth Changed Places* (1989). In this text Hayslip, a former Vietcong collaborator, gives US readers a new perspective on the war. She shares stories of her childhood in rural Vietnam and describes her years as a teenage assistant to the Vietcong, explaining how they promised her that she could fulfill her patriotic duty and defend her country's independence by fighting the American soldiers. After being raped and tortured by the Vietcong when they labeled her a traitor, she fled to the United States in 1970. In her text, Hayslip describes both her

[104] I use the term Latina/o to describe all people of so-called "Hispanic" descent. In contrast to the term "Chicana/o," which is commonly to describe people of Mexican origin, I use the term Latina/o to include those from the Caribbean.
[105] *Getting Home Alive* 5.

migration experience and her anxiety about returning to Vietnam when she visits her family after sixteen years in the United States.

As a US immigrant writing in the post-Vietnam war era, Hayslip attempts to liberate herself from the shame and stigma surrounding the Vietnam War and to vindicate herself from being labeled an "enemy" of the United States. She explains that the Vietcong threatened to kill the families and destroy the property of those who refused to fight for them. However, she also justifies her reasons for her adolescent alliance with the Vietcong, explaining that she wanted to fight to keep Western invaders out of her village. She depicts herself as a capable and heroic soldier who believed that "from my love of my ancestors and my native soil…I must never retreat."[106] Correspondingly, Hayslip presents a conflicted view of the Vietnamese villagers who sided with the Vietcong. On one hand, she portrays them as naïve and ignorant victims who had been deceived by Vietcong rhetoric; on the other, she presents the Vietnamese as justified in their fight for freedom from Western control and accuses the US of fighting in a war they could not "fully understand."[107] She explains, "For you, it was a simple thing: democracy against communism. For us, that was not our fight at all. How could it be?...For most of us, it was a fight for independence—like the American Revolution."[108] She acknowledges that both US and Vietnamese soldiers were fighting for patriotic ideals, to show loyalty to their nations, and to keep their families safe.

In addition to using life writing to explain and justify the perspective of both the Vietnamese people and the Vietcong fighters, Hayslip, who is writing to a primarily US audience, also performs the role of a sympathetic cultural interpreter. She emphasizes her reliability as a narrator, detailing her strong family values and presenting herself as an ideal

[106] Hayslip ix.
[107] Hayslip xv.
[108] Hayslip xv.

woman, whose mother taught her "humility and the strength of virtue."[109] Hayslip strengthens her narrative credibility by writing with US military veteran Jay Wurts, whose invisible presence in the text serves to corroborate her account. Hayslip emphasizes her familiarity with US culture and presents herself as an immigrant who is grateful for the freedom and opportunities she has enjoyed in the United States.

Thus, in her text, Hayslip performs complicated roles, showing gratitude to the United States government while pointing out its shortcomings and creating distance from her Vietcong comrades while also justifying them. Hayslip uses life writing to transition from being perceived as an enemy to presenting herself as a cultural translator and an ally, someone who can help to alleviate cultural misunderstandings between the people of the United States and the people of Vietnam.

The fourth chapter focuses on *Canícula: Snapshots of a Girlhood en la Frontera* (1995) by Mexican author Norma Elia Cantú. In this chapter, I explore how Cantú uses life writing to highlight her bilingual, bicultural identity and demonstrate the conflicts of border life. Through her creative use of narrative voice and narrative construction, Cantú undermines depictions of Mexican migrants as threatening and calls attention to the corruption of the U.S. government.

Canícula is a collection of photographs and fictionalized memories of Cantú's childhood, spent between Laredo, Texas, and Nuevo Laredo, Mexico. Cantú uses childhood memories, photographs of her family, and fiction to create what she refers to as a "fictional autobioethnography"[110] She explains that many of the characters and situations in her text "originate in real people and events and become fictionalized."[111] Although all of the photographs accompanying the text are of her and her family, she clarifies that the stories do not

[109] Hayslip ix.
[110] Cantú xi.
[111] Cantú xi.

always describe the people and events factually. Correspondingly, several of the photographs in her text exhibit visible differences from the stories they are supposed to depict. Cantú uses these purposeful differences between the stories and photographs to remind the reader that autobiography cannot be entirely factual, and that memory cannot provide a nonfictional representation.

The eighty-five short stories in the text have varied topics: childhood memories of holidays and festive celebrations, accounts of a neighbor's house burning, a friend's rape, a baby's death, school misadventures, childhood forts in the backyard, migrant labor, fathers disappearing to work "up north" in the United States, women's camaraderie in the house and in the kitchen, and stories of coming-of-age struggles, teenage infatuation and embarrassment. The narrator's many siblings, grandparents, parents, neighbors, aunts and uncles, cousins and childhood friends figure prominently in the narrative, sometimes participating in dialogue. While the memories in the text cover disparate topics and time periods, they display particular themes that hold them together, including family, cultural conflict and border issues, and the role of memory. By including scenes of domestic life, holiday celebrations, and family relationships, Cantú strives to build emotional connections with her audience and emphasizes the humanity of migrant families.

Through her creative use of narrative structure and form, and by playing with the relationship between author, narrator, and character, Cantú uses life writing to demonstrate how identities and communities may be fragmented and undermined through border politics. By blending multiple genres and using multiple languages, Cantú allows readers to share in the experience of life on the border.

Conclusion

These four texts are particularly intriguing due to the variety of narrative modes they employ and also to the authors' diverse and strategic uses of life writing. It is important to note that I am articulating a divided, layered subjectivity and mode of address. In accordance with the characteristics of life writing, these narratives are shaped by both authorial presence and narrative voice, as well as by the characters and voices that emerge within the text (through letters, dialogue, narration, oral narrative, etc.). Thus, I am analyzing both the motivations of the real-life women authors and the voices that emerge in the text.

One of the major challenges of writing criticism about life writing is that it both invites and distances itself from notions of representativity. Critic Sau-Ling Cynthia Wong explains that ethnic autobiographers are often expected to provide "a history in microcosm of the community"[112] and are assumed to speak for "their people."[113] However, it is important to be aware that the experiences of these authors do not necessarily represent those of their entire ethnic community. Rather, we must keep in mind the diversity of experience within any group and allow for the unique qualities and self-definition of the individual. Although some of the women within these chapters faced similar social stereotypes and forms of discrimination, as Chandra Mohanty specifies, even "systems of racial, class, and gender domination"[114] do not have identical effects on people from different cultures and backgrounds who live in various places.

Also, according to Wong, ethnic autobiographers are subject to the expectation that they will guide the white reader through an ethnic culture. Although within an ethnic community the writing of autobiography may be valued as a means of preserving memories of culture, language,

[112] Wong 258.
[113] Wong 264.
[114] Mohanty 107.

and lifestyle for future generations, outside of that community, migrant writers are often expected to "satisfy the white reader's appetite for exoticism," serving as "a friendly guide to an exotic culture."[115] It is important to be aware that the writers of ethnic autobiographies may be compelled to emphasize their exoticism in order to facilitate social acceptance; they are "placed in the situation of permanent guests who must earn their keep by adding the spice of variety to American life."[116] Consequently, as the autobiographers become Americanized, "the fascination they hold for the reader would fade."[117] Importantly, some of these authors, particularly Cantú, Morales, and Levins Morales, are also addressing members of their own ethnic or national groups through their texts. In addition to trying to convince Anglo readers of their sincerity, they are attempting to create a community of borderlands or Puerto Rican readers. In these cases the authors face unique challenges: they must engage in a "quest for individual autonomy" without "renouncing a collective identity,"[118] while simultaneously clarifying that they are not speaking for nor representing all members of their communities.

Each of these five women uses life writing in purposeful ways. As Kadar explains, life writing functions as a "socially proactive" genre which creates meaning.[119] By examining the authors' particular textual strategies within the specific historical and social moments in which they were writing, we will be able to understand the meanings these women seek to construct through their texts and appreciate how they portray themselves to particular audiences. They are able to use their knowledge of multiple cultures to "shift subject positions contextually"[120] and

[115] Wong 261.
[116] Wong 265.
[117] Wong 263.
[118] Neuman 218.
[119] Kadar 133.
[120] Sandoval 35.

use life writing strategically to accomplish particular goals both within and through their narratives.

These four texts demonstrate how authors use life writing not only to tell the story of their lives, but also to persuade, connect, vindicate, and preserve. While several studies of life writing exist, few explore the multiple purposes to which it can be used. Moreover, no studies exist which compare these four texts. Although each of these texts was published in a different decade, examining them together reveals valuable parallels in the experience of women of color and of migrants to the United States. These four texts demonstrate how outlaw genres incorporate "the representation and expression of women from different parts of the world"[121] and "challenge Western critical practices to expand their parameters."[122] Examining these women's textual strategies is essential in order to develop a more complex understanding of not only their marginalization and oppression, but also their unique forms of agency. By looking at these texts comparatively, we can more clearly perceive and appreciate how each of these women uses life writing to subvert discrimination, imperialism, and patriarchal oppression.

[121] Kaplan 136.
[122] Kaplan 214.

Chapter One: "Equal to any other free woman in the world"[1]

I've Come a Long Way (1942) by Chinese author Helena Kuo (Kuo Gin-ch'iu)

> "Memory is the construction or reconstruction of what actually happened in the past. Memory is distorted by needs, desires, interest, and fantasies. Subjective and malleable rather than objective and concrete, memory is emotional, conceptual, contextual, constantly undergoing revision, selection, interpretation, distortion, and reconstruction."[2]

> "One morning…it dawned on me that a woman with Chinese character and outward beauty, once she had acquired western glamour and self-confidence, could without doubt attain the highest peak of feminine endeavor. Such a woman might rule the world" (Kuo 102).

In her text, Kuo tactfully introduces both Eastern and Western[3] social problems while still maintaining the image of both an exotic "token spokesperson for China"[4] and an educated and well-traveled woman who was invited by Eleanor Roosevelt to serve as a cultural ambassador, welcomed to the United States to lecture on China and the war effort.[5] Due in part to Japan's military occupation of China, Kuo strove to garner support from US readers for the Chinese people. After being invited by Roosevelt, Kuo's social position meant that she was obligated to openly support the United States in her work. According to critic Amy Ling, patriotic writers like Helena Kuo "felt compelled to make friends for China through the vivid stories of suffering and heroism that they had to tell."[6] However, in addition to trying to foster approval and support

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[1] Kuo 5.
[2] Bertman 27, qtd. Hua 198.
[3] Kuo uses the terms "East(ern)" and "West(ern)" frequently in her narrative. While I stress that it is essential to keep in mind their constructed and subjective nature, as well as their reflection of the unequal power dynamics discussed by Edward Said in *Orientalism*, I will use them in this chapter in accordance with her depiction. It is helpful to refer to Kuo's words, since they reflect her particular understanding of a geopolitical situation in which she conceptualizes the United States, Great Britain, and France, the "Western" economic, cultural, and military powers, as distinct from the "Eastern" nation of China in which she was raised. Throughout her narrative, Kuo repeatedly refers to "Western" and "Eastern" nations, principles, ideals and values, while attempting either to stress their similarities or differentiate between them. Thus, it is useful to incorporate these words in order to better understand her rhetorical strategies and the arguments she is making.
[4] Amato 190.
[5] Amato 188.
[6] Ling 54; Bloom 73; For a more comprehensive discussion of Chinese writers who tried to create support for China among US readers during World War II, see K. Scott Wong's *Americans First: Chinese Americans and the Second World War* (2005).

from her US readership, Kuo also identifies American social problems, though the social climate in the 1940s would have made it extremely difficult for Kuo to openly criticize the United States.

While there were other examples of Chinese migrant life writing already published in the United States at the time of Helena Kuo, many of these texts were written by men, including Lee Chew's *Biography of a Chinaman* (1903), Yung Wing's *My Life in China and America* (1909), Huie Kin's *Reminiscences of an Early Chinese Minister* (1932), and No-Young Park's *Chinaman's Chance: An Autobiography* (1940). Edith and Winnifred Eaton, who had published several texts, some of them autobiographical, by the time Kuo was writing, were of mixed Chinese and British descent.[7] In fact, critics have labeled Helena Kuo's *I've Come a Long Way* (1942) the first full-length American autobiography written by a Chinese immigrant woman.[8] Examples of life writing by Chinese women migrants in the years following Kuo include Mai-mai Sze's *Echo of a Cry* (1945), Buwei Yang Chao's *Autobiography of a Chinese Woman* (1947), and Su-ling Wong and Earl Herbert Cressy's *Daughter of Confucius* (1952). Chinese-American women who were born in the United States also published numerous texts in the years soon after Kuo's publication, including Jade Snow Wong's *Fifth Chinese Daughter* (1950). However, many of the texts published in the years immediately after Kuo either idealize life in the United States as the authors demonstrate that they have "modernized," abandoning the antiquated Chinese traditions of their ancestors,[9] or focus exclusively on the author's personal

[7] Amy Ling calls the Eaton sisters, whose mother was Chinese and whose father was English, and "pioneer" Chinese American writers. Edith, who identified as Chinese, wrote under the pen name Sui Sin Far, and published stories and articles in multiple journals, many of them reflections on the widespread prejudice against Chinese and mixed-race citizens. She published *Mrs. Spring Fragrance,* a collection of her stories, in 1912. Winnifred Eaton, choosing to publish under the Japanese pen name Onoto Watanna, published fifteen books, the majority of which were romances featuring Japanese, English, American, and Eurasian characters. Her most successful book, *A Japanese Nightingale,* was published by American, German, Swedish, and Hungarian presses and was even performed on Broadway (Ling 79).

[8] Amato 188.

[9] As Elaine Kim notes in *Asian American Literature,* works like Jade Snow Wong's which demonstrate "bitterness against Asian cultures and values…were far better tolerated by publishers and a predominantly white readership,

life. Kuo's narrative is unique since she combines details of her life story with criticism of US foreign policy, accounts of the racial discrimination and social inequalities she has observed in the United States, admiration for Chinese culture and traditions, and appeals for US aid in China's fight against Japan.

Kuo's narrative begins in Macao, where she was born Kuo Gin-ch'iu in 1911, the fourth of eight children, two daughters and six sons. Her father was a progressive, educated, and successful contractor and her mother was a traditional Buddhist, a "person of quiet dignified beauty."[10] The beginning of her narrative is filled with stories from her childhood, including how her father went against traditional Chinese practice in educating his daughters. Kuo's childhood was privileged, full of trips to mainland China, Catholic schools, and private language tutors who drilled Kuo and her sister in Portuguese, Cantonese, and English. She left home to attend secondary school in Shanghai at Lingnan University, which she refers to as "one of the most expensive colleges in China…[and] consequently one of the most aristocratic."[11] A gifted student, Kuo was one of only two girls to be accepted into her secondary-school class, and later attended the prestigious University of Shanghai. When the Japanese took possession of China's northern provinces in 1932 and began killing Chinese civilians, Kuo was forced to return back home to Macao.

After returning to Shanghai the following year, Kuo abandoned her studies and began writing for the *China Times* and the *China Evening News,* where she was made editor of a women's section. As the Japanese continued to extend their influence throughout China, Kuo fled to Europe. Once in London, she assisted with a BBC broadcast on the Chinese New Year,

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which has been traditionally more receptive to expressions of self-contempt on the parts of members of racial minority people than to criticism of problems in American society (59).

[10] Kuo 61.

[11] Kuo 55.

which helped her to obtain a position writing a column for the *London Daily Mail*. In addition to living in London, Kuo was able to travel around Europe before her travels were halted by impending war. Desperate to escape wartime conditions in France, Kuo wrote to Eleanor Roosevelt, who invited her to visit the White House in 1939.

In addition to *I've Come a Long Way,* Kuo also published *Peach Path* (1940), a collection of essays inspired by her time on the French coast, *Giants of China* (1944), a book designed to educate young US and European readers on important figures in Chinese history, and *Westward to Chungking* (1944), a fictional account of a patriotic and progressive Chinese family.[12] After the publication of *I've Come a Long Way*, Kuo settled in New York and married artist Dong Kingman, hosting her own program on the *Voice of America*.[13]

Due to the focus on American-born autobiographies in Asian literary scholarship, there is little critical work on Kuo, and most of the 1942 literary reviews of *I've Come a Long Way* label her as exotic and fail to appreciate her deliberate social commentary. In her narrative, Kuo laments writing in a period when "English readers expect the Chinese to say things in a way that is supposed to be unconsciously funny."[14] In both her own journalistic efforts and reviews of her autobiography, Kuo was limited by US and European newspaper editors who recast her serious work into "curious and exotic anecdotes from an 'alien observer.'"[15] For example, a 1942 review by Mary Ross in *Books* states: "You will enjoy this story of a Chinese girl for the charm of strange places" and the "humor" she uses in depictions of Chinese life.[16] Additionally, other early reviewers either overlooked or downplayed Kuo's criticism of Western culture. In an article titled "Background Reading on China," published in a 1943 edition of *The Elementary*

[12] Amato 188.
[13] Amato 188.
[14] Kuo 277.
[15] Kuo 277.
[16] Ross 2.

English Review, author C. O. Arndt ignores the critiques of Western society which abound in Kuo's text and perceives instead problems with China, asserting that the book demonstrates that "the problems which confront the youth of China today are great and varied, but they are not beyond solution for such young people as Helena Kuo."[17]

Modern critics have more accurately perceived varied intentions behind Kuo's text, acknowledging both her criticism of Western culture and her desire to win favor with readers in Europe and the United States. As Jean Amato explains, Kuo's text was part of "a genre of patriotic literature" written by overseas Chinese writers that was "designed to educate and solicit support from Western readers"[18] in China's fight against Japan during World War II. Elaine Kim and Ling agree that these writers served as "ambassadors of goodwill"[19] and "unofficial diplomats,"[20] respectively.[21] Critic Jid Lee sees beyond Kuo's "exoticism" to perceive the multiple intentions of her text, arguing that Kuo was writing a dual narrative. Lee explains that, although Kuo was presenting herself as an "exotic Chinese woman," she "conceals a cultural critic" who skillfully juxtaposes her "conflicting evaluations about both China and America" to reveal the duplicity of Western Orientalism.[22]

I agree with Lee that Kuo is trying to simultaneously appeal to and critique her US and European readers, but I disagree with how both Lee and Ling perceive her voice. Ling contrasts Kuo's "outspoken, confident, at times deliberately provocative stance" in *Peach Path* (1940) with her comparatively muted voice in *I've Come a Long Way*, which she claims was "subdued

[17] Arndt 198.
[18] Amato 189.
[19] Kim 27.
[20] Ling 59.
[21] As Sau-ling Cynthia Wong and Jeffrey Santa Ana point out, the works of these "'ambassador' writers have received scant critical attention" (187).
[22] Jid Lee 190.

by masculine and Western dominance."[23] Similarly, Lee argues that in her writing of *I've Come a Long Way* Kuo was "constrained within the narrative boundaries set by the dominant culture"[24] and that she and the other Asian-American writers of her time "had to restrain themselves from critical comments on America and enlarge upon the flaws of their native cultures to make European-American culture look superior."[25] While I agree that Kuo both admires elements of Western culture within her text and tailors her content and narrative strategies to meet the needs of her audience, I also assert that she openly criticizes Western society and that she clearly presents Chinese culture as equal or superior to Western cultures, from both a historical and moral perspective. In this chapter I will demonstrate that Kuo uses blatant criticism of Western cultures, in addition to praise, in order to portray China as a valuable ally, to persuade US readers to assist China in their war with Japan, and to resist negative stereotypes of the Chinese.

By analyzing the formal aesthetics, reception, and techniques of Kuo's rhetorical address to the reader, we can appreciate how Kuo not only seeks to build a relationship with her readers, but also interacts with the current geopolitical situation, responding to and attempting to impact current events. Her refusal to translate particular ideas into English, her criticism of US and European politics, and the specific examples she provides of racism she has encountered in the US and Europe demonstrate how Kuo uses life writing as a tool to challenge US imperialism, capitalism, Orientalism, and racial discrimination.

In order to gain the trust and respect of her readers and convince them of the morality of the Chinese people and the inherent value of Chinese culture, Kuo had to establish the Chinese, particularly herself, as civilized and culturally advanced. However, this was a difficult task, since Chinese immigrants in the United States had historically been subject to hostility and

[23] Ling 65.
[24] Jid Lee 190.
[25] Jid Lee 79.

discrimination, as demonstrated through both popular culture and legislation. Many in the United States were suspicious of and hostile to Chinese immigrants. Although these immigrants were welcomed for their labor power, they were resented for the economic competition they represented, as well as for the element of "difference" they introduced to US society.[26] Chinese immigrants historically suffered violence in the United States: murdered, brutalized, condemned to segregation, and limited to the dirtiest, most difficult, and most dangerous jobs at the lowest levels of pay. Nineteenth-century union leaders concluded that the presence of the Chinese in the mines and railroads was tolerable only as long as they undertook "labor which Americans would not condescend to perform."[27]

Chinese immigrants were also historically subject to legislative discrimination, including several measures that were still in effect at the time of Kuo's publication. Discriminatory legislation included the Naturalization Act of 1870, which limited naturalization to "white persons and persons of African descent,"[28] the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882,[29] which halted Chinese immigration altogether, the Geary Act of 1892,[30] which extended Chinese exclusion another ten years and placed the burden of proof for legal residency upon each individual Chinese immigrant, and the Immigration Act of 1924[31] and the Tydings-McDuffie Act of 1934,

[26] Campbell, Guterl, Lee 103.
[27] Cole 13.
[28] Daniels, *Coming to America* 245.
[29] This law prohibited the immigration of Chinese laborers for a period of ten years and barred all Chinese immigrants from naturalized citizenship. Historians have often noted that the Chinese Exclusion Act marks a "watershed" in United States history. Not only was it the country's first significant restrictive immigration law; it was also the first to restrict a group of immigrants based on their race and class (A. Robert Lee 36).
[30] The Geary Act of 1892 extended all anti-Chinese legislation which was currently in effect for ten more years. It also placed the burden of proof for rightful residence on the Chinese themselves; if they were found to be in the country illegally, they were either deported immediately or sentenced to a year of hard labor and then deported. All Chinese immigrants living in the country were required to secure certificates of residence in order to avoid arrest and deportation (Wellborn 57).
[31] This Act provided that no alien ineligible to become a citizen could be admitted to the United States as an immigrant. This statute was was intended primarily for Japanese and Chinese aliens. "The Immigration Act of 1924 (The Johnson-Reed Act)."

both of which forbade Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Asian Indian, and Filipino immigration.[32] From 1910-1940, hundreds of (mainly Cantonese) Chinese were detained in the holding facility on Angel Island, just off the San Francisco coastline.[33] In fact, Chinese immigrants remained ineligible for citizenship[34] until 1943, a year after Kuo's book was published.

Challenging Stereotypes of the Chinese

In her text, Kuo carefully employs both persuasive and resistant strategies to combat these stereotypes and negative views of the Chinese.[35] In order to resist predominant historical stereotypes of the Chinese, her text is designed to persuade the US reader that the Chinese are upstanding citizens and desirable allies. Kuo also gives examples of virtue, modesty, and charity from her own life to resist the historical stereotypes of Chinese women as immoral and to persuade her audience that she is a credible narrator.

One way in which Kuo demonstrates her moral integrity is by giving examples of her modesty and admirable conduct with men. When she meets her high school boyfriend, Sun, by chance while visiting Canton, Kuo reveals that she "found he was as much in love with me as ever"[36] and that she also felt attracted to him once again, yet she states that she refrained from engaging in inappropriate behavior with him. She explains, "We were serious people, and the fact that he was married and had made his life kept our mutual passion within bounds. We do not steal each other's spouses for personal reasons, as happens in the West."[37] Kuo emphasizes the morality of the Chinese, specifically their self-control and integrity. She acknowledges the

[32] Palumbo-Liu 33.
[33] Jid Lee 145.
[34] Daniels, *Asian America* 44.
[35] Many of the first Chinese women to come to the United States were working as prostitutes, contributing to the reputation of Chinese women as seductive and sly. As Benson Tong notes in *Unsubmissive Women*, in the nineteenth century, "Chinese prostitutes…were openly sold on the docks, with bidding being carried out in full view of the spectators, who frequently included police officers" (Tong 69). By 1870, more than 60% of the Chinese women in the United States were working as prostitutes (Uchida 163).
[36] Kuo 219.
[37] Kuo 220.

"mutual passion" between herself and Sun, yet affirms that they were "serious" about their commitments: Sun's commitment to his wife and Kuo's commitment to her fiancé, Lien. Kuo clearly distinguishes her own personal ethics and those of her fellow Chinese citizens, who demonstrate loyalty to their partners, from Westerners, who are known to "steal each other's spouses for personal reasons." Kuo resists Western stereotypes of the Chinese woman as a seductress or temptress, as "erotic Suzy Wong" or "the diabolical Dragon Lady,"[38] "seductive and sinister,"[39] which were popular in twentieth-century American popular culture.[40] In addition to resisting negative Western stereotypes of the Chinese and demonstrating her own high ethical standards, Kuo implies that citizens of the West are renowned for their marital infidelity and selfishness. Kuo is not only defending the general virtue of Chinese people (and herself as a Chinese woman in particular), but also implying that the Chinese, unlike Anglo US citizens and Europeans, know right from wrong and are able to demonstrate a greater measure of integrity and self-control.

Similarly, when she takes a weekend trip with her fiancé, Lien, Kuo recounts how she maintains high moral standards and does not engage in premarital sex. While Kuo is studying at the University of Shanghai, Lien stops by for a visit. The couple takes a weekend trip to nearby Soochow (Suzhou) to admire the gardens and stops at an inn to spend the night. Here, again, Kuo presents herself as innocent and able to make good moral decisions. As they arrive at the inn, she realizes the situation she has found herself in: "Only then did I realize that I would be doing a most terrible thing stopping at the same inn with a man. I ate a most unhappy meal, afraid to

[38] Yung 130.
[39] Uchida 163.
[40] For a detailed explanation of how sexual representations of Asian women in 19th and 20th century American literature were used as rationale for legislative discrimination and as a means of cultural differentiation and management, see Sau-ling Wong and Jeffrey Santa Ana's article "Gender and Sexuality in Asian American Literature."

mention my fears."[41] Kuo emphasizes her feminine shyness and morals; rather than looking forward to seduction, she is scared and ashamed of the sexual compliance Lien may expect. She presents herself at odds with the assumption that all "Oriental women" were prone to engage in "criminal and demoralizing acts."[42] Importantly, Kuo reveals that both she and Lien adhered to high moral standards. She explains, "Being both descendants of good conservative ancestors and followers of Confucian teachings, we retired peacefully to bed without bothering each other."[43] Kuo specifically resists the stereotype of the corrupt, immoral Chinese seductress and presents herself as an innocent student who conducted herself with integrity even when caught in a potentially compromising situation with a man.[44] Moreover, she ascribes her ability to resist temptation and preserve her innocence to her Chinese culture, heritage, and tradition; their "good conservative ancestors" and "Confucian teachings" are what lead Kuo and Lien to behave admirably.

In addition to refuting negative stereotypes of the Chinese, Kuo demonstrates a thorough understanding of predominant middle-class US cultural values at the time she was publishing and shows that she fulfills them. *I've Come a Long Way* is a prime example of how "Auto-ethnographic texts are always written (and performed) with an 'other' in mind" and how "the eye of the 'other' directs the eye of the writer."[45] Kuo's text is tailored for a middle-class, Anglo US or European reader, both referencing and critiquing cultural norms this type of reader would have recognized. Because she is familiar with multiple cultural and linguistic registers, Kuo employs her cultural knowledge to write to a particular audience, demonstrating that she that she

[41] Kuo 115.
[42] Mohanty 25, qtd. Uchida 164.
[43] Kuo 115.
[44] Macao, in particular, was known for the opium trade, gambling, and prostitution (Van Dyke 134).
[45] Elbaz 1987 14, qtd. Denzin 7.

is familiar with Western culture and able to fulfill the expectations of US and European readers.[46]

Kuo presents herself as split between cultures and able to navigate in multiple cultural contexts.[47] As Ling explains in *Between Worlds: Women Writers of Chinese Ancestry,* Kuo is aware of "the precariousness of the balancing act that was her life as a Chinese in the United States."[48] To show US readers that she understands them and their needs, Kuo attempts to establish herself as familiar with Western custom and makes multiple references to US cultural phenomena. For example, Kuo often uses the phrasing "Dad and Mother"[49] and employs terms of reference US readers could relate to. She contrasts her own small-town background with that of her cosmopolitan Lingnan University classmate Ah Wei; Kuo remarks that Ah Wei was "as different from me as a New York girl would be from a farm girl in the Middle West."[50] She also compares people from her own district and her boyfriend Lien's district to "Yankees and Southerners,"[51] explaining that they historically did not see eye-to-eye. Similarly, in the 1942 article she wrote for New York *Vogue*, Kuo again evinces her knowledge of US middle-class culture and values, referencing "Old MacDonald,"[52] "American Okies,"[53] and home as the "woman's domain."[54] She also tries to establish common ground with her US and European readers by explaining that the Chinese people share similar values. She explains, "China has a heart, and that heart is made up of the little people, the *you's* and *me's*, the big and little business

[46] In the *Vogue* article, Kuo points out that many Chinese men and women have advanced degrees and have studied at British and American universities. She asserts, "China has a large percentage of middle-class people just as has America and France; only we have many more of them" (83).
[47] One of the most vivid examples of this is when Kuo explains, "I live now in a happy if sometimes puzzling state of divided mind; the old Chinese mind and the new mind of the West" (Kuo 4).
[48] Ling 106.
[49] Kuo 46.
[50] Kuo 60.
[51] Kuo 162.
[52] *Vogue* 83.
[53] *Vogue* 83.
[54] *Vogue* 105.

folk who, until the war came, sent their children to high school and college, paid their taxes, and went riding in autos or rickshas on worship-and-bow day, which means Sunday to you."[55] Kuo's explanation of Chinese customs is reminiscent of a political speech, referencing the hard-working, tax-paying, educated citizens of China, who take Sunday drives, just as American families did in the 1940s. Although her reference to the Chinese interpretation of Sunday as "worship-and-bow day" acknowledges the existence of significant cultural differences, Kuo brushes them aside; by adding that this "means Sunday to you," she excuses historical, cultural, and religious disparities as simply alternate phrasing. Kuo presents Chinese people, including her own family, as cultured and civilized.

In addition to portraying herself and her family as virtuous and familiar with US and European customs, Kuo attempts to help her readers relate to and respect the Chinese by elucidating the civility of all Chinese people. She expounds on the merits of the Chinese, revealing them to be companionable, industrious, hardworking, and generous.[56] She notes that the Cantonese are very clean.[57] When she visits the Chinese Embassy in London, Kuo explains, "It was indeed a thrill to see the familiar flag of China outside that impressive-looking yellow building, and inside there was that warm companionable atmosphere that you find everywhere the Chinese live abroad. It was sweet music to hear Chinese spoken again, to meet happy smiling people with customs the same as my own."[58] She describes a Chinese atmosphere not as threatening,[59] but rather welcoming and pleasant. Kuo also describes how Chinese families help each other; for example, her fiancé Lien's education was paid for "by an industrious brother in Chicago," a gesture which she describes as "an illustration of the family cooperation of the

[55] *Vogue* 83.
[56] Kuo 257.
[57] Kuo 51.
[58] Kuo 259.
[59] Riis 92.

Chinese."[60] In contrast to negative historical stereotypes, as well as disparaging contemporary social depictions such as Josef von Sternberg's *Shanghai Express* (1932), which depicted "a China all gambling den, opium, and vice,"[61] Kuo deliberately presents herself and other Chinese as adhering to the highest moral standards. By demonstrating that she and other Chinese people possess the moral and character traits valued by US readers in the 1940s, Kuo provides evidence that they would make valuable allies.

In addition to resisting negative stereotypes of the Chinese people and emphasizing their moral and cultural adherence to US values, Kuo declares that the Chinese are no longer inferior to citizens of the United States or Europe. The most popular novel depicting life in China at the time Kuo was publishing was Pearl Buck's *The Good Earth* (1931), which won a Pulitzer Prize and sold millions of copies.[62] *The Good Earth* tells the story of a Chinese peasant family and depicts their daily struggles against adverse weather conditions and poverty. Many US citizens who had lived through the Great Depression could relate to these struggles, which contributed to the book's popularity. However, although Buck's novel provides a largely empathetic depiction of the Chinese, it also centers on uneducated main characters and their rural lifestyle, acknowledging the existence of morally questionable Chinese cultural practices such as opium smoking, the taking of concubines, and female infanticide.

Kuo was publishing in an environment in which Buck's depiction affected the US reader's prevailing view of China, and she strives to resist and counter this perception by demonstrating that China has attained levels of sophistication and education equal, or even superior to, Western nations. Kuo explains that in China, "Illiteracy is being swept away at an incredible speed, and the young men and women of the reborn China are stepping out into the

[60] Kuo 187.
[61] A. Robert Lee 144.
[62] Spurling 9.

future hand in hand, virtually equal, and socially balanced in a spirit that may never be reached by any other country."[63] In her praise of the Chinese "spirit," education, social balance, and equality, Kuo is resisting both current negative stereotypical perceptions and a century of violent discrimination against Chinese immigrants in the United States. Moreover, she declares that the spirit of the educated, socially-informed Chinese young people "may never be reached by any other country;"[64] in this sense, China is superior.

Additionally, Kuo specifically explains the virtue of her feminine perspective and emphasizes what Chinese women have in common with women of other nationalities. She states, "I have to remember always, I tell myself, that I am seeing life as a woman. How strange it is that so many people of other nations believe Chinese women are different from their own. We have been described as inscrutable, exotic, and even sinister. My viewpoint is that women all over the world are the same basically."[65] With this statement, Kuo reassures her readers that Chinese women are the same as US and European women, sharing the same female perspective and moral standards. Kuo establishes her own morality and emphasizes the similarities between Chinese women and women from other nations. She continues by not only advocating the equality of Chinese women, but also pointing out how, in some ways, they are even more socially advanced and liberated than their Western counterparts: "And never let it be forgotten that, through the revolution, Dr. Sun Yat-sen gave us that freedom [to vote] years before women's suffrage and other liberating movements swept the more enlightened nations of the world."[66] Kuo first establishes Chinese women's equality with Western women in attaining suffrage and then goes a step further, pointing out that Chinese women received the right to vote

[63] Kuo 5.
[64] Kuo 5.
[65] Kuo 4.
[66] Kuo 5.

years before women in the United States. Kuo explains that Chinese women now possess freedoms "equal to that of any other free woman in the world"[67] and emphasizes that they received those freedoms earlier. Kuo is demonstrating that she, along with other Chinese people, understands the ideals and goals of democracy and that the Chinese would make valuable allies for the United States. Additionally, by pointing out the advanced qualities of Chinese society, she is contesting the US and European stereotype of the Chinese as backwards, uneducated, and mired in foot-binding and oppressive patriarchy.[68]

While Kuo welcomes a military alliance and friendly diplomatic relations with the United States, she resists the idea that China is in any way inferior to the United States. In contrast to Ling, who claims that Kuo's voice was "subdued by masculine and Western dominance,"[69] and Lee, who argues that Kuo was "constrained within the narrative boundaries set by the dominant culture"[70] and that she and the other Asian-American writers of her time "had to restrain themselves from critical comments on America,"[71] I assert that Kuo openly criticizes Western society as both a means of persuasion and resistance. By criticizing Western cultures, Kuo can resist negative stereotypes of the Chinese and persuade her readers of the Chinese people's respectability and desirability as allies.

One strategy Kuo uses to establish China's superiority over the U.S. and to resist stereotypes and discrimination against the Chinese is by explaining the discrimination she has experienced while living and working in Western countries, thereby demonstrating the incivility of Western people. She explains how, during her time working for the *Daily Mail* in London, she

[67] Kuo 5.
[68] Amato 189.
[69] Ling 65.
[70] Jid Lee 190.
[71] Jid Lee 79.

was looked down upon by editors who wanted her to write in the way they thought a Chinese person should. She laments:

> I wanted to see England as the English did, to share their pleasures and their life. But the *Daily Mail* wanted me to write as a Chinese girl. English readers expect the Chinese to say things in a way that supposed to be unconsciously funny, but all the time I was trying to write like an English person. The sub-editors took liberties with my copy when I tried to be serious, so I gave it up and wrote what they expected.[72]

Kuo explains the discrimination she has faced in trying to be taken seriously as a journalist. With this anecdote, Kuo specifies her desire to share a Western viewpoint and emulate Western writers, to "share" in their way of doing things, establishing her position as a desirable ally. However, she explains that she was limited by the Western stereotypes of Chinese people, which tainted the expectations of her editors and readers. Expected to be "unconsciously funny," she is unable to present a "serious" perspective, and sadly gives up and limits herself to the stereotype.

A similar situation occurs when Kuo is asked to write about English women at a dog show. The editor of the *Daily Mail*, Mr. Beccles, tells her "You're going to do an article every day, and we'll give it a byline as if you were writing to your Father. You'll start your article, 'Honorable and Beloved Parent.' You do write that way, don't you? If you don't—well, that's how the British Public think you do."[73] Mr. Beccles stereotypes Kuo and all Chinese, assuming that they use antiquated and quaint language in addressing their parents, then expects her to fulfill that stereotype. In *Asian American Literature: An Introduction to the Writings and Their Social Context*, Elaine Kim explains that the pre-World War II era was characterized by the "vast numerical superiority of books by Anglo-Americans about Asians to those written by Asian Americans themselves, whose own expressions found much less acceptance in a milieu where publishers, critics, and readers were better attuned to morbid or comical stereotypes [of Asians]

[72] Kuo 277.
[73] Kuo 272.

created by Anglo-American writers."[74] Although Kim does not discuss Kuo specifically, the expectations of Kuo's editor at *The Daily Mail* and her US and British readers would have been shaped by expectations corresponding to these "morbid or comical stereotypes" of Asians. Kuo presents these stereotypes of the Chinese as a limiting factor. She implies that her perspective would be honest and insightful if she was allowed to speak her mind and express herself freely without being constrained by Western stereotypes of how a Chinese person is supposed to behave and communicate. By describing these situations, Kuo implies that the Chinese are not limited by their lack of sophistication, education, or civility, but rather by Westerners, who impose limitations and stereotypes upon them.

Kuo further demonstrates the incivility she has experienced in Western countries by explaining how the other *Daily Mail* reporters become jealous of her work. A friend overhears some of Kuo's colleagues in a bar complaining about the amount of space Kuo is allotted in the paper. Her friend tells her, "Some one [sic] said, 'Well, what's coming over the old paper? We've got a Chink reporter now.' 'Yes,' grumbled another, 'and we can't get a line in edgeways!' 'Don't worry,' said some one else, 'they've never lasted—just a stunt. Something will happen.'"[75] Kuo follows this account of her coworkers' racism and prejudice with an account of how someone snatched one of her weekly articles from the editor's basket before it could be published and how it was never found. She concludes that "some one had taken it to make more space."[76] Kuo explains that she decided to leave the paper voluntarily, writing a farewell article and explaining "I had enjoyed the sunshine of that fame provided by writing daily for two million people."[77] Rather than retaliating against her colleagues, Kuo focuses on

[74] Kim 21-22.
[75] Kuo 286.
[76] Kuo 286.
[77] Kuo 287.

how much she has enjoyed writing for the paper. Kuo pairs an anecdote that demonstrates her own integrity, courtesy, and kindness with an account of the selfishness and dishonesty of her Western colleagues.

In addition to resisting negative stereotypes of the Chinese and implicating the West as the cause of the limitations and stereotypes imposed on Chinese immigrants, Kuo also blames the West for the deplorable conditions of Chinatowns and Chinese immigrants. Kuo explains the discrimination the Chinese are still suffering in England:

> The lot of the Chinese in England is not a happy one. They are still the victims of prejudice and suspicion, mainly because sensation-mongers delight to exploit the sinister aspect of a Chinese colony. I turn cold sometimes when I walk along the main street of a prosperous city and on my ear falls the pleas of some ignorant barker inviting tourists to visit 'Chinatown.'[78]

In this quote, Kuo refers to popular depictions of Chinatown in Western culture in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, which were overwhelmingly negative.[79] Chinatown was portrayed as "sensuous," "potentially addictive," and dangerous, a place of fakery and multi-sensory stimulation.[80] In several US and European cities, including London and San Francisco, tour offices offered "slumming tours" to Chinatown, in which tourists could watch Chinese performances, eat chop suey, and peer into dimly lit opium dens.[81] Although these tours were most popular in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, they continued until the

[78] Kuo 254.
[79] Jacob Riis, for example, portrays the Chinese community as stealthy, secretive, and hostile towards whites. He explains, "The very doorways of [Chinese] offices and shops are fenced off by queer, forbidding partitions suggestive of a continual state of siege. The stranger who enters through the crooked approach is received with sudden silence, a sullen stare, and an angry 'Vat you vant?' that breathes annoyance and distrust" (92). Riis depicts Chinatown's doors—and people—as crooked, and as indisposed to good relations with whites. His use of dialect is both condescending and condemning, indicating that the Chinese are incapable of and uninterested in true assimilation. In another scene, Riis exoticizes Chinese immigrants and Chinatown, depicting it as full of vice and corruption. He describes an "open cellarway…through which comes the pungent odor of burning opium and the clink of copper coins on the table" (92). Two key vices associated with the Chinese, gambling and smoking opium, are shown. The moral lowness and depravity of the den corresponds with its physical location, away from the light and below street level.
[80] Haenni 157.
[81] Haenni 96.

1940s.[82] However, Kuo resists the notion of inherent Chinese poverty, laziness, or desecration; instead, she portrays the impoverished and unsavory conditions in Chinatown as a consequence of segregation and discrimination by whites.

For example, Kuo depicts the Chinese immigrants living in London's Chinatown in the 1930s as deserving of empathy instead of scorn, as victims of a prejudiced society and limited opportunities for income and integration:

> A slum area of mean streets, with dirty, sleepy Chinese people sitting on doorsteps, with sluts of white women running small stores, drunken sailors rolling up the narrow streets, and everywhere an atmosphere of dissipation and the rankest poverty. The younger Chinese residents themselves in many cases had not been to China but were the descendants of Chinese sailors who had been stranded far from home and had never earned sufficient money to go back…. the men had lost all the good characteristics of the Chinese, suffering as they did from poverty caused by lack of opportunity to obtain gainful employment. How tragic to be so far from home, in a strange unsympathetic country, with no hope of ever sailing back to sleep with their ancestors. Suppose that were to be my fate.[83]

In this passage, Kuo implicates white, Western society in both causing and benefitting from the poverty and segregation of the Chinese. She points out the immorality of the white "slut" shop owners and lewd sailors who surround the Chinese, contributing to "an atmosphere of dissipation and rankest poverty." Kuo also points out how widespread discrimination against the Chinese has made it impossible for them to get well-paying jobs, which has led to their poverty and disgrace, which white society then profits from by making Chinatown into a spectacle.[84] The Chinese people Kuo portrays are not evil, but rather "dirty" and "sleepy," scrounging for food and earning money in any way possible, unable to keep themselves clean and well-groomed, suffering from poverty due to a lack of employment. Kuo maintains that the Chinese inherently

[82] Bowen and Young 124.
[83] Kuo 255.
[84] As Yong Chen explains, "For many white tourists, Chinatown satisfied not only their curiosity about the unfamiliar but also their need to rediscover their superiority. For them Chinatown stood as a site of comparison: one between progress and stagnation, between vices and morality, between dirtiness and hygiene, and between paganism and Christianity (98-99).

possess "good characteristics," which have been lost because of poverty. Moreover, she points out that many of the younger Chinese, the descendants of sailors, "had been stranded far from home," and were unable to earn enough money to go back. By comparing herself to these men and women, she is implicitly asking the reader to sympathize with their "tragic" plight, far from home and ill-treated by Western society. San Francisco's Chinatown was similarly isolated from mainstream society, and Kuo remarks, "Two visits to San Francisco's Chinatown were a revelation of how a people can live within a nation and still preserve their own customs and characteristics."[85] She labels it "one of the wonders and tragedies of China away from China."[86] Instead of blaming the Chinese for their poverty and isolation, Kuo implicates Western society, which has discriminated against them and made it impossible for them to integrate and prosper.

In addition to resisting negative Western stereotypes of the Chinese and implicating Western society in contributing to the poverty and suffering of Chinese immigrants, Kuo demonstrates how China as a nation has suffered due to European colonialism and the negligence of Western powers. One of the influences which shapes Kuo's perspective throughout the text is the colonial influence she grew up with in the Portuguese colony of Macao. Kuo's childhood and education in Macao[87] gave her early exposure to multiple cultures. Kuo and her sister attended Catholic schools run by Portuguese nuns, took frequent trips with their family to mainland China, and had a private language tutor who drilled them in Portuguese, Cantonese, and English. Thus, Kuo was exposed to European and Christian educational institutions and cultures in addition to mainland Chinese culture, resulting in her formation as an intercultural subject before

[85] Kuo 90.
[86] Kuo 361.
[87] Macao, first colonized by the Portuguese in the mid-16th century, was the first European settlement near China, controlled by Portugal for nearly 450 years until 1999. Macao became a Special Administrative Region of China on Dec 20th, 1999. Although Macao remained under Portuguese control throughout Kuo's childhood, the region is adjacent to mainland China, and thus is heavily influenced by both Portuguese and Chinese cultures and languages (Hao and Wang 1; Dolin 35-36).

ever leaving Macao. In addition to emphasizing her experience with both Chinese and European cultures, Kuo reacts against European colonial presence.

European colonialism constitutes a constant presence underlying Kuo's text, one against which she is constantly pushing back. As Walter Mignolo explains in *Globalization and the Decolonial Option*, "Mainstream knowledge, rooted in European colonial understandings of the world, is structured along vertical, hierarchical lines. That is, certain groups of people and certain ways of acting and thinking are deemed to be superior to others."[88] Although in postcolonial studies the context for Orientalism is often understood to be Europe, here Kuo's opposition to Orientalist stereotypes informs her rhetorical position when addressing US readers. Kuo clearly perceives an Orientalist[89] tendency among the inhabitants of the United States and European nations to assume cultural superiority over "Eastern" nations. Consequently, as we see in the multiple examples above, she goes to great lengths to advocate the equality—and, at times, the superiority—of China over Europe and the US in terms of culture, democratic values, etiquette, and integrity, along with many other moral values. As Mignolo explains, "the relationship between the European—also called 'Western'—culture, and the others, continues to be one of colonial domination."[90] Kuo clearly senses this continuing US/European domination over world politics, and over the affairs of China in particular, and reacts strongly against it, blaming Western nations for profiting from their dealings with China while refusing to get involved to defend China against the Japanese.

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[88] Mignolo 18.
[89] Edward Said discusses the unequal power dynamics between "Eastern" and "Western" nations in *Orientalism* (1978). Said's main argument is for the East as a Western construction. He asserts that the Orient was not only constructed by the West, (specifically Britain, France, and the United States), but "submitted" (6) to being culturally, linguistically, historically, and socially inferior to the West. He explains how the designation of the "Orient" and the field of Orientalism function as a sign of Western domination rather than an authentic "representation" (6) of "Oriental" countries and peoples.
[90] Mignolo 23.

While traveling in Europe, Kuo visits the League of Nations building, which she refers to as the "scene of that dramatic meeting when Sir John Simon and his associates sold China to Japan."[91] Simon[92] served as British Foreign Secretary during the Japanese occupation of Manchuria and was known for a speech he gave in December of 1932 in which he failed to condemn Japanese actions. Moreover, the Japanese emissary congratulated him for presenting Japan's case against China at Geneva in 1931.[93] Understandably, Kuo views Simon's actions as a betrayal of China. Gazing at the League of Nations building, she continues, "Unhappy building—monument of political dishonesty and self-interest, stepping-stone to appeasement that was leading inevitably to disaster! The mind of man had created a good idea, but England and France had ruined it, by failing to understand that there was more in the conduct of life than international finance."[94] Kuo both alludes to the Western selfishness and greed which she feels has led to China's suffering, and points out that, by appeasing Japan and Germany, the Western powers had made a crucial mistake. Kuo laments how the Western powers sold China "down the river"[95] by refusing to help China defend herself against Japanese invasion. She emphasizes the folly of their actions and implies that some of China's suffering could have been avoided if figures like Simon were willing to stand up to Japan.

With this statement, Kuo is referring to the general policy of Western isolationism after World War I, as well as a number of ineffective negotiations with Japan and the refusal of Western powers to lend military support for China or to issue economic sanctions against Japan. As Nicholas Wapshott explains in *The Sphinx: Franklin Roosevelt, the Isolationists, and the*

[91] Kuo 291.
[92] Sir John Simon was a British politician who held senior Cabinet posts, including Home Secretary, Foreign Secretary, and Chancellor of the Exchequer, between the first and second world wars, serving under five British prime ministers (Wapshott 378).
[93] Reed 62.
[94] Kuo 292.
[95] Kuo 233.

Road to World War II, after the 1931 Japanese invasion of Manchuria,[96] the United States and the European powers declared that they would not recognize the Japanese claim to Manchuria, yet did not take military action. Europe was still suffering from the losses of World War I, and many citizens felt they did not have the resources to become involved in another war. Kuo mentions a conversation she had with a young Frenchman while traveling in Paris. He explains, "War might be a salvation [from the ravages of Hitler] but France is not capable of fighting. We fought our last war in 1918, and it was a ghastly mistake…."[97]

The United States shared European countries' reluctance to become involved in another war. Wapshott explains that after the heavy losses incurred in World War I, "no one was in a mood for embarking on another war, starting with Hoover, who told his cabinet that as the Japanese actions 'do not imperil the freedom of the American people…we shall not go along on…any of the sanctions economic or military for those are the roads to war.'"[98] Similarly, the *Philadelphia Record* reported, "The American people do not give a hoot in a rain barrel who controls North China."[99] Despite continuing aggression towards China, due to the Great Depression and the significant losses suffered during World War I, most U.S. citizens were unwilling to become involved in a distant war on behalf of people they had never met. Instead of issuing economic sanctions against Japan or providing military aid to China, the United States first participated in several ineffective negotiations with Japan and then issued the Stimson

[96] "On September 18, 1931, an explosion destroyed a section of railway track near the city of Mukden. The Japanese, who owned the railway, blamed Chinese nationalists for the incident and used the opportunity to retaliate and invade Manchuria. However, others speculated that the bomb may have been planted by mid-level officers in the Japanese army to provide a pretext for the subsequent military action. Within a few short months, the Japanese army had overrun the region, having encountered next to no resistance from an untrained Chinese army, and it went about consolidating its control on the resource-rich area. The Japanese declared the area to be the new autonomous state of Manchukuo, though the new nation was in fact under the control of the local Japanese army" ("The Mukden Incident of 1931 and the Stimson Doctrine").
[97] Kuo 295.
[98] Wapshott 8.
[99] Wapshott 8.

Doctrine, a United States policy of non-recognition of international territorial changes between China and Japan, in early 1932.[100] However, the strategy of non-aggression and isolationism proved incredibly ineffective in the face of continuing Japanese invasion; after its successful occupation of Manchuria, Japan attacked Shanghai in 1932.[101] It was not until the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in December of 1941, nearly ten years later, that the United States decided to become involved.

Kuo believes that Western nations had the power to stop the Japanese invasion and yet chose not to, unwilling to risk their own economies and resources. Particularly because the Portuguese colony she grew up in was a place which "was used by Westerners as a major entrance to China and served as a major linkage between China and the outside world,"[102] a place in which Western colonial powers profited greatly by trading with China, she is angry that European powers refused to step in and defend China from Japan. Kuo reacts strongly against what she sees as European "self-interest" and the prioritizing of "finance"[103] over human lives and international justice.

In addition to resisting negative Western stereotypes of the Chinese and implicating Western society in contributing to the poverty and suffering of Chinese immigrants, Kuo demonstrates how China as a nation has suffered due to the negligence of Western powers. By pointing out the incivility of Western nations, Kuo attempts to persuade her readers of the civility and morality of the Chinese and present them as valuable allies who are eager to understand Western culture, while also resisting notions of Western superiority by emphasizing how the Chinese have suffered due to the discrimination and misdeeds of Europe and the United States.

[100] "American Isolationism in the 1930s."
[101] "The Mukden Incident of 1931 and the Stimson Doctrine."
[102] Hao and Wang 1.
[103] Kuo 292.

Life Writing Strategies: The Created Subject vs. The Authorial Subject

While considering Kuo's multiple rhetorical strategies and purposes in this text, it is crucial to acknowledge the instability of self in life writing, to distinguish between Kuo's role as the narrator of her text and the real life person of Helena Kuo who lived through many of the events depicted in the book. As Arthur Bochner explains, "The truths of stories can never be stable truths. Memory is active, dynamic, and ever changing….The past is always open to revision and so too are our stories of the past and what they mean now."[104] Bochner points out that truth is subjective; Kuo's outlook is shaped by her own memory, which inevitably adds to and omits, alters and embellishes events. Kuo is writing in retrospect, so any retrieval of an entirely accurate version of past events is impossible. Even if Kuo had wanted to recall an entirely "pure" and unadulterated version of her past, she would be unable to, since, as Bochner states, "memory is ever-changing" and stories of the past are altered and influenced by "what they mean now." Additionally, Kuo's presentation of her life story is shaped by the particular goals and purposes she is trying to achieve through her text, including her desire to present herself and other Chinese citizens as civilized and respectable in accordance with US standards, her disapproval of certain aspects of US and European cultures and politics, her desire for Western nations to ally with China in their fight against Japan, and, most likely, the influence of the White House and the Roosevelts' national policies.

Kuo's textual structure itself functions as persuasion and resistance. The chronological format of her narrative appeals to the Western reader, while her strategic use of humor both holds readers' interest and provides a pointed criticism of Western culture. Additionally, Kuo's claims to be unable to do justice to the beauty of Chinese through English translation reveal her resistance to Western assumptions of superiority. Through strategic translation strategies and

[104] Bochner 161.

both subtle and overt statements, Kuo argues for China's superiority over the US at the same time as she requests US aid.

Like the content of *I've Come a Long Way,* Kuo's writing style itself was designed to appease the US reader, yet subtly enact cultural criticism at the same time, resisting Western assumptions of superiority. Her book is written in a chronological style, telling her life story in order from her birth until her present moment of writing and publication. The easy-to-follow narrative flow of *I've Come a Long Way* enables Western readers to easily follow the progression of Kuo's life, emphasizing the "long way" she has come geographically, culturally, linguistically, and socially to be able to share China's plight with them. As Ling observes, Kuo's autobiography is "written in a straightforward and unpretentious manner. Her English is fluent and at times even colloquial, at other times highly metaphoric."[105] As Jid Lee explains, Kuo's chronological narrative is "clear and easy to follow" and functions as "a safe instrument for a cultural informant to use."[106]

Kuo's command of the English language was sufficient for her to write her book independently, without a native-English-speaking co-author. Her impressive bilingual skills help Western readers to understand her points and to trust her as an informed and educated source of information. Kuo's textual structure makes the book's style and content accessible to Western readers, while her command of the English language allows her to achieve one of the life-long goals she establishes in her text: "to print something worth reading—something that would make China better known to the world."[107]

One way in which Kuo both holds Western readers' attention and entertains them and yet resists notions of Western superiority is through humor. Kuo is frequently self-deprecating and

[105] Ling 77-78.
[106] Jid Lee 67.
[107] Kuo 343.

uses humor to hold the readers' interest, providing amusing anecdotes and making jokes, demonstrating her mastery of the English language and her familiarity with Western culture. For example, she describes herself as a "silly rebellious child" and a "little pop-eyed barbarian"[108] who still manages to get accepted to Lingnan University, one of the best schools in the nation. Although Kuo invokes the term "barbarian," a term historically used to denote the animal-like characteristics of Chinese immigrants,[109] she immediately undermines the truth of this stereotype by detailing her diligence in school and her eagerness to learn, recalling, "I used to stay reading in the dormitory till half-past ten, when we were supposed to put out the lights. I read so much that I nearly ruined my eyes; they are still weak. I did not mind. I was so hungry to learn."[110] In this scene, Kuo's insatiable desire for knowledge is the opposite of barbaric ignorance.

Another example of how Kuo uses humor to defuse and undermine Western stereotypes occurs when she describes her steamer voyage from Hong Kong to Shanghai, where she is to begin classes at the University of Shanghai. While on the steamer, Kuo is staying in an upper-class cabin where the passengers are expected to attend fancy dinners. At her first dinner, Kuo commits several social faux pas. She has never eaten a Western style meal before nor used silverware, and the experience is bewildering. Her more worldly older brother, Chao-wen, tries to give her advice and to model proper dining etiquette, but his efforts are lost on his seventeen year old sister. Kuo describes her experience in an entertaining manner for the Western reader:

> There were so many things to eat with. Water glasses, wine glasses, two or three knives, forks, big spoons and little spoons and plates….I wanted to eat a piece of very attractive looking white bread and I did not know which belonged to me, that on the right or the left….One thing I remembered. Brother had said that on no account was I to put the knife in my mouth. This seemed ridiculously illogical, for the meat balanced so nicely on the knife….The coffee served by the French waiter was hot and bitter. I wanted to spit out the first mouthful, but Brother spotted me and gave me the sign that such a thing was out

[108] Kuo 56.
[109] Riis 92.
[110] Kuo 58.

> of the question….I noticed that the others were stirring their coffee with silver spoons, and I had a bright idea. I ate mine like soup…Back in the cabin I decided the Europeans must be very stupid people to make eating so complicated.[111]

In this anecdote, Kuo de-familiarizes the Western dining experience. Since she was extremely well traveled, educated, and well-connected by the time she wrote *I've Come a Long Way*, here she is selecting humorous examples of her own former naiveté and demonstrating that she had much to learn. She highlights how the abundance of cutlery and glassware could be overwhelming for a newcomer and insinuates that Western customs are no more logical than those of any other culture; after all, the "meat balanced so nicely on the knife." In the end, she uses her spoon to eat her coffee "like soup," a concept which would be entertaining to the Western reader yet also appear as a practical option. Kuo expresses her desire to acclimate to Western culture, describing the white bread as "very attractive looking," but she also points out that Western customs can be perceived as "ridiculously illogical" and "complicated." Although much of her description of her first foreign meal on the steamer from Hong Kong to Shanghai is humorous, her description is also tinged with criticism for Western practices. A few lines later, Kuo begins to critique Western culture and practice more openly, detailing the discomfort she experiences in the midst of exotic practices: "The meal was a painful experience. The thought of using a knife and fork seemed worse than barbarous. Knives were used for killing animals and people, and it seemed exceedingly impolite to use them at table. I knew the Chinese had used knives and forks thousands of years ago, but had given them up in the interest of being civilized."[112] Kuo invokes a developmentalist argument, explaining that the Chinese had given up the "uncivilized" practice of eating with knives thousands of years ago and implying how far they have surpassed the West in terms of civility and etiquette. Thus, she resists stereotypical

[111] Kuo 76.
[112] Kuo 75.

Western conceptions of the incivility and barbarity[113] of the Chinese and emphasizes that what is perceived as "right" and "normal" by a particular culture is all a matter of perspective. By portraying Western customs as unfamiliar, illogical, or even "barbarous," Kuo invites US readers to reconsider the apparent normalization and propriety of their own customs and resists negative characterizations of the Chinese. Kuo's strategic use of humor both holds readers' interest and provides a pointed criticism of Western culture.

Cultural Anecdotes as Critique of Western Culture

In addition to using humor, Kuo also includes interesting cultural anecdotes to satisfy the Western reader's desire for the novelty of Chinese culture.[114] As Elaine Kim explains, the preferences of editors and the reading public during the years surrounding World War II evinced a new receptivity to the Chinese, but they were also conditioned by expectations rooted in historical stereotypes. New interest in the lives of Chinese people was still shaped by an element of curiosity about exotic customs, people, and food.[115]

Importantly, Kuo pairs her anecdotes with explanations of the reasons behind these rich cultural traditions, thereby persuading her Western audience of their value while simultaneously critiquing Western culture. One example is her explanation of how Chinese housewives air out household items, allowing them to sit in the fresh air and sunshine, during annual spring cleaning. She explains:

> Today I still do not have the same viewpoint as the Anglo-Saxon or American woman. People laugh at me when I open my suitcases and carry them out in the sunshine to air my clothes. Why do I do that? Because I think it is good for them. For centuries in China housewives celebrated the coming of spring by turning out their homes and putting the furniture outside to air. Scholars are supposed to do likewise with their books and papers…never in a thousand years can I understand the complex of many of my western woman friends who, immediately as the sun comes out, rush to change into a bathing

[113] Ahmad 61.
[114] Wong 157.
[115] Kim 66.

> costume and roast themselves pink. Why? The answer is the same as that to why I put my clothes in the sun, I suppose.[116]

Again, Kuo both resists negative Western stereotypes of the Chinese as "savage"[117] and persuades her audience that Western customs can be viewed as equally strange. She mentions the discrimination and humiliation she experiences when adhering to her Chinese customs in the West, admitting "people laugh at me."[118] She then provides justification for her own practice—adhering to Chinese tradition—and then compares her own seemingly illogical behavior with Western women who sunbathe, which, Kuo points out, makes no more sense than airing one's clothes. By de-familiarizing Western social norms, Kuo justifies her Chinese traditions in the face of discrimination. Kuo also demonstrates that her Chinese perspective and practices are equally valid to those of the West. Additionally, Kuo demonstrates her own superior manners by not mocking or laughing at her "western women friends" for their behavior as many Westerners laugh at her.

Kuo provides a similar example in an article she wrote for a 1942 copy of *Vogue.* The article title, "People and Ideas: The China You Don't Know," immediately undermines US readers' assumptions of their own cultural superiority. Kuo explains:

> Whenever I read a book by American novelists who enjoy a mass circulation in exploiting the illiteracy and economic misery of the Chinese I want to scream. I remind myself, however, that people often have strange conceptions of other people at first sight. I once showed some Chinese friends a much-treasured copy of *Vogue* in Shanghai. One of them contemplated the lovely unsmiling models for a considerable time. Then she said, 'Are Western people all that hungry? They look as if they haven't had anything to eat or any pleasure for weeks.' (83)

Though she acknowledges that the models are "lovely," Kuo also criticizes Western culture. She explains how her Chinese friend, potentially suffering under the torture of the Japanese

[116] Kuo 278.
[117] Riis 100.
[118] Kuo 278.

occupation in Shanghai, marvels that Western models look gaunt and unhappy. Kuo emphasizes the irony that the beautiful New York models, living in the world's richest country, appear devoid of both food and pleasure, while Chinese people are truly starving and suffering at the hands of the Japanese. Kuo responds to the way Westerners often "exploit" the "illiteracy and economic misery" of the Chinese by both demonstrating how a Chinese person might find Western customs strange and implicitly criticizing affluent Westerners for affecting starvation and misery—and representing both of these afflictions as beautiful.

In the above examples, Kuo emphasizes her own civility and the incivility of Westerners. While Kuo satisfies Western readers' curiosity about China, she also criticizes the West for being uncivilized, hypocritical, and prejudiced.

Translation as a Form of Resistance

Kuo also uses translation in her writing as a strategy to both resist notions of Western superiority and persuade her audience of the dignity, beauty, and value of the Chinese culture. By refusing or claiming to be "unable" to translate quotes from classical Chinese scholars into English, Kuo demonstrates that the English language is unable to express the sophisticated thoughts and beauty possessed by the Chinese language. Importantly, Kuo seems to have no trouble translating the quotes from Chinese philosophers, which precede eleven of her chapters. No one else is credited for the translation of these quotes; presumably Kuo, as a fluent speaker of both Chinese and English, translated them herself. There are several other examples of Kuo's successful translation of Chinese throughout the text. For example, Kuo translates her father's name, Chi-tang, as "Plant the Wild Plum Tree," and explains that it signifies "a symbol of true brotherly friendship."[119] She also translates documents throughout the text, including the first

[119] Kuo 15.

piece of Chinese calligraphy she copied as a child, a short letter credited to Confucius,[120] a section from the Chinese classic *The Romance of the Western Chamber*,[121] a poem written by an unnamed "Chinese poet [who lived] centuries before,"[122] and a poem from a Chinese "Book of Poetry of the Eighth Century B.C."[123] which details the good treatment of sons and the poor treatment of daughters in Chinese culture.

Curiously, Kuo expresses difficulty in translating other sections of traditional Chinese literature into English, stating that important elements would be lost. For example, she explains the difficulty of translating the *San Tse Ching* (*The Book of Three Words*). She states, "I have found the Chinese original [*San Tse Ching*] very difficult to translate into English with the certainty of giving true value to the manner of expression."[124] In her discussion of the *San Tse Ching*, Kuo specifies that English is inadequate to do justice to the true "value" of the Chinese words. Kuo expresses similar difficulty in translating the poem her high school boyfriend Sun gave her before she left China. She recalls, "When I left China he gave me a poem he had written in scholarly and poetic prose, so stately and so impressive that translation into English is so difficult as to be almost impossible."[125] Kuo observes that this Chinese poem is too "stately" and too "impressive" to be accurately translated into English, thereby inferring the superiority of both the Chinese language and Chinese ideas. Although Martha Cutter explains in *Lost & Found in Translation: Contemporary Ethnic American Writing and the Politics of Language Diversity*, authors or characters who "refuse to translate are often avoiding the intercultural and interlingual demands that translation entails,"[126] I assert that Kuo's refusal to translate signifies her resistance

[120] Kuo 35.
[121] Kuo 74.
[122] Kuo 94.
[123] Kuo 130.
[124] Kuo 37.
[125] Kuo 368-9.
[126] Cutter 26.

against Western assumptions of cultural superiority. Kuo implies that the English language is not capable of expressing the "scholarly and poetic prose" that Sun composed, nor the "true value" of the *San Tse Ching.* In both of these examples, she implies that the Chinese language is not only a different linguistic outlet, but also a better and more nuanced venue for certain types of expression.

A third example arises as Kuo and her fiancé Lien stand at a pagoda overlooking West Lake in Hangchow (Hangzhou), when she recalls a poem written by Yo Fi, "the famous loyal and filial general of the Sun Dynasty."[127] She transcribes the poem, but prefaces it with regret regarding the inadequacies of translation: "It is a pity that this marvelous piece of dramatic expression can not [sic] survive translation, for it is a pure gem of its kind."[128] Kuo also refuses to translate poems written by the venerable Chinese poet Na Lan,[129] stating, "Now I must struggle against the temptation to translate them for you. It requires the Chinese outlook to appreciate the fragile sentiment of Na Lan. I would not dare to presume to match my English to his grace, which to me exceeded Shelley or Keats."[130] Kuo explains that to translate the verses of Na Lan would be to do them injustice. Here, again, she is placing the merit of Chinese culture above Western both by refusing to translate and by stating that Na Lan is superior to some of the greatest Western poets, Shelley and Keats. Although Kuo claims that it is a deficiency in her own language skills which prevents her from succumbing to her urge to translate Na Lan's poetry, she also states that the reader must possess a "Chinese outlook" in order to appreciate Na Lan's sentiments, which clearly her Western readers would not possess. Kuo feels that something important would be lost if she were to translate the verses of Na Lan into English, not only

[127] Kuo 110.
[128] Kuo 111.
[129] Na Lan, or Nalan Xingde (1655-1685) was a renowned Manchu lyrical poet (Ruchang 27).
[130] Kuo 121.

because of her limited English, but because Western readers could not be expected to fully appreciate Na Lan, and his "grace" would be wasted on them.

Importantly, Kuo is willing to share the details of her childhood, her adolescence, and her young adulthood, but remains unwilling to translate particular sections of Chinese poetry. I assert that both of these actions are equally purposeful. By refusing to translate the poetry, Kuo is resisting claims to Western cultural and linguistic superiority. Her refusal to translate implies that there are sophisticated Chinese views on culture and life that Western readers and even renowned Western poets (Shelley and Keats) would be unable to grasp. The United States, in addition to historically presenting itself as superior to China, has also developed a reputation for being "aggressively monolingual,"[131] and thus perhaps Kuo either feels her readers would be unable and unwilling to appreciate the "fragile sentiments" of ancient Chinese poets or else that they, from their vantage point of supposed cultural superiority, do not deserve to read them. Kuo not only insists on the superiority of Chinese language, culture, scholarship, and perspective, but also insists on maintaining elements of Chinese culture reserved for the exclusive enjoyment of the Chinese.

Kuo's refusal to translate Chinese poetry constitutes a seemingly low-stakes refusal that wouldn't offend the Roosevelts, yet reinforces a divide between examples of Chinese "high culture" poetry, which she portrays as untranslatable, and the story of her life, which she clearly feels is translatable and communicable to a US and European audience. By refusing to translate the poetry Kuo implies that the Chinese culture and language remain distinct from, and, in some cases, superior to, Anglo culture. Through both her refusal to translate certain aspects of Chinese culture and her willingness to share other aspects, Kuo attempts to persuade her Western readers

[131] Cutter 217.

to ally with China, to acknowledge their own cultural shortcomings, and to question notions of their own assumed cultural and racial superiority.

Kuo and the White House

One of the influences affecting Kuo the author may have been her relationship with Eleanor Roosevelt. Kuo was personally invited to the United States by Eleanor Roosevelt in 1939. Since immigrants to the United States from Asian countries were completely excluded under the Immigration Act of 1924,[132] this personal invitation facilitated her otherwise impossible immigration. As noted in a 1943 *Washington Post* article, in addition to being allowed to immigrate to the United States as a result of Eleanor Roosevelt's invitation, Kuo was also invited to visit the White House on two separate occasions.[133] Although I was unable to access the personal correspondence between Kuo and Roosevelt, we can assume that, as the sponsors of her immigration, the Roosevelt administration held a significant degree of influence over Kuo, her text, and her activities and lectures in the United States.

At the time of Kuo's publication, the Roosevelt administration would have been wholly supportive of Kuo's effort to challenge historically negative stereotypes of the Chinese, since they needed the support of the American people in the US alliance with China against Japan. They needed her to make the Chinese attractive to mainstream readers. When the Chinese-Japanese fighting began in the early 1930s, many Americans were not interested in getting involved. However, as the fighting continued into the late 1930s, support for Chiang Kai-shek (leader of the Chinese nationalist army) began to grow, particularly among Chinese Americans. From 1937-1945, Chinese Americans raised $56 million to support China.[134] As Roger Daniels explains, the "heroic Chinese resistance to Japanese aggression, the increasing coverage of Asia

[132] Daniels, *Asian America* 152.
[133] *The Washington Post* 29 July 1943, pg. 15.
[134] Daniels, *Asian America* 188.

in the American press, and the growing tensions between Japan and the United States, especially after the bombing of the United States gunboat *Panay* by Japanese planes in Chinese waters in December 1937, all contributed to a new Chinese image in the eyes of many Americans."[135] After the bombing of Pearl Harbor, many Americans began to view the Chinese as their allies and as partners in the fight for democracy. As Ling explains, after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, "Americans made an about-face in their opinions of China and Japan. The favored position enjoyed by the Japanese and the hostility shown the Chinese in the nineteenth-century were totally reversed, and now the Chinese became America's long-suffering ally while the Japanese were seen as the hated enemy."[136] Franklin Roosevelt praised Chiang Kai-shek for being a symbol of the fight for democracy and the partnership between China and the United States. In 1942 Roosevelt sent a public message to Chiang that stated: "All the world knows how well you have carried on that fight which is the fight of all mankind."[137]

Kuo's text would have helped the American public to view the Chinese as fellow human beings and allies.[138] As Ling explains, after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, "the Chinese, once regarded as subhuman, were now fellow sufferers from Japanese aggression."[139] Importantly, Kuo emphasizes the nonviolent nature of the Chinese in contrast to the brutality of the Japanese. She specifies that when the Japanese troops invaded Peiping (Beijing), the Chinese

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[135] Daniels, *Asian America* 188.
[136] Ling 56.
[137] Daniels, *Asian America* 189.
[138] Accordingly, for the first time in Chinese American history, nearly one hundred years after notable Chinese immigration began in 1849 with the California Gold Rush, the highly skewed sex ratio was beginning to even out. In the 1940s the most numerous Chinese population demographic was composed of people under five years of age, and men now outnumbered women by roughly two to one (Daniels, *Asian America* 191). This was a much more balanced figure compared to the Chinese demographic in 1890, when national census data demonstrated that Chinese males outnumbered females by more than twenty to one (Daniels, *Coming to America* 241). Additionally, by the 1940s, the children of the 1910s and 1920s were beginning to move out of Chinatowns and find housing and jobs in mainstream society (Daniels, *Asian America* 191).
[139] Ling 56.

did not resort to violence or sabotage, but were peaceful.[140] Kuo's flattering description of the Chinese—in contrast to the brutality of the Japanese—emphasizes their humanity and value as allies to the West.

In addition to needing Kuo to create support for China, the Roosevelts would have also needed Kuo to villianize the Japanese. Accordingly, another of Kuo's main goals in her text is to convince her US readers that Japan is cruel and villainous, a shared enemy. While Jid Lee argues that "in no place in her autobiography indeed does [Kuo] reveal vengeful emotions against the Japanese,"[141] I assert that, in order to persuade her readers that they should join the fight against the Japanese, Kuo details the suffering caused by the Japanese invasion of China, describing the violent atrocities the Japanese committed and the way the Chinese people, including herself, suffered.

After winning a war against China in 1895, Japan won Taiwan, Korea, and the Liaotung peninsula from Chinese control. In 1915, Japan forced China to agree to the "Twenty-One Demands," a list of conditions granting Japan extensive sovereignty in China, including the right to install Japanese officials in Chinese government and police forces, exclusive trade rights, and territorial sovereignty.[142] In 1931, Japan seized southern Manchuria, and by 1939 the Japanese controlled all of Manchuria, half of Inner Mongolia, Beijing, and many of the major seaports, including Nanjing and Shanghai, as well as the valley of the Yellow River and the Yangtze River. The Japanese were notorious for their extreme brutality,[143] including the torture and rape of Chinese civilians.[144]

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[140] Kuo 200.
[141] Jid Lee 68.
[142] Gunther 106, qtd. Ling 58.
[143] As Iris Chang explains in *The Rape of Nanking*, the Japanese imperial government endorsed policies that would wipe out everyone in certain regions in China. One of the deadliest was the 'Three-all' policy ('Loot all, kill all, burn all') in northern China (215). In fact, the rape of Nanking was only one incident in "a long saga of Japanese

The first Japanese invasion occurs while Kuo is a college student living on the University of Shanghai campus. Suddenly, the students are told to evacuate as Japanese troops flood the city. Kuo recalls her terror at this realization, "The Japanese were coming. They had already raped and mutilated many Chinese women. We would not be spared….We bundled our few things together and fled…We heard the noise of bombs overhead and the crash of explosions in the distance."[145] Kuo also details the horrible conditions resulting from subsequent Japanese invasions, including her evacuation from the city of Chinkiang, outside of Nanking (now Nanjing). In the summer of 1937, the Japanese troops were nearing the city, invading Shanghai and the coastal towns, and the Chinese government was evacuating Chinkiang. Kuo describes how "the town emptied of women. Soon we were living in a deserted city. There was no soap, very little food, the shops were closing and the windows were rattling from the vibrations of bombs exploded in Nanking….already the roads were filling with troops and refugees. In the distance the smoke of burning villages was rising to the sky and the explosions of field guns were rattling the windows."[146] Kuo describes how fear increased as basic necessities became scarce. She flees on a riverboat to Hankow, one of three cities that forms modern-day Wuhan. While on the boat, the conditions are terrible, and Kuo becomes ill. She gazes down at the "inferno of misery" of desperate Chinese people packed onto the boat fleeing the Japanese:

> No slave ship of the dark ages ever carried such a sad burden. From below rose the most indescribable smell: it assaulted the nostrils vilely—the smell of closely packed humanity, of sweat, urine, decay, and death, the awful stench of improvised latrines, the conglomeration of dirty bodies and fright-galled perspiration. And these were my people, some of the four hundred and fifty millions of Chinese beginning a new Calvary because

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barbarism during nine years of war," including "a campaign of slaughter that started in Shanghai, moved through Nanking, and proceeded inland" (215). Chang estimates the final death count at nearly four million people, and points out that "millions more perished from starvation and disease caused in large part by Japanese looting, bombing, and medical experimentation." She adds that, if those deaths are added to the final count, then the Japanese killed more than 19 million Chinese people in its war against China (216).

[144] Ling 58.

[145] Kuo 148.

[146] Kuo 227.

> the politicians in Europe had decided to sell China down the river. Judge us if you like and say that it was our fault, that better arrangements should have been made, that as a nation we were asleep, but the horror was there, the first sad march of a heroic people away from the invader. Here was the result of half-hearted appeasement, and here was the prelude to the most forceful tactics of modern war, assault on the morale of the civilian population.[147]

During her days of illness on the riverboat to Hankow, Kuo witnesses almost indescribable suffering, which she attributes directly not only to the Japanese invasion, but also to Western indifference, to "the politicians in Europe" who failed to take a stand against Japan and defend China. Kuo makes a direct ethical appeal to readers, describing the pitiable condition of the Chinese people fleeing on the boat and then inviting readers to "judge us if you like," to blame China for failing to fight effectively against the Japanese invaders. However, in the subsequent sentence, she again attributes the "horror" of Japanese violence and invasion and the inhuman conditions on the boat not to the shortcomings of the Chinese military, but to the "half-hearted appeasement" of Japan by Western politicians, which has led to "the most forceful tactics of modern war" and "assault" on the civilian population. In Hankow, Kuo describes equally horrific conditions: "Fuel was short and food getting scarcer and scarcer…the Japanese were raping women, and Hankow was due to be bombed at any moment."[148] Kuo details the brutality of the Japanese and ascribes part of the blame for the Chinese people's suffering to Western nations and their ineffective dealings with Japan. Kuo is not entirely supportive of US governmental policy, and criticizes the US and Europe for not stepping in sooner to help China. She implies that if Western nations had taken a stronger stand against Japan from the beginning, and not conceded to "half-hearted appeasement,"[149] they could have spared the Chinese people their suffering.

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[147] Kuo 233.
[148] Kuo 236.
[149] Kuo 233.

Conclusion

Although Kuo criticizes the United States and Europe for not getting involved with Japan, Kuo's text also assists the Roosevelts in creating a "common purpose" between China and the United States. She challenges negative stereotypes of the Chinese and encourages Americans to view them as allies, while villianizing the Japanese and helping to portray them as the enemies of democracy. Kuo's text aligns with the Roosevelt administration's goal of making the Chinese attractive to mainstream readers.

Kuo's demonstrations of loyalty to the United States government continue even after the conclusion of World War II. In a 1951 broadcast for the *Voice of America* feature on "America's Chinese," she explains that only "one percent" of the Chinese American community is "pro-Communist."[150] Rather, Kuo insists that most Chinese Americans remain "loyal to America" and hopefully await the overthrow of Mao's regime. She clarifies that, whereas the goal of many refugees before 1949 had been to return home to their families, in the wake of the Communist takeover of China, "This dream has vanished, and there is now great sadness and homesickness among the people of China," who fear that "they may never see their own country again." Kuo concludes the broadcast by reminding listeners that "American Chinese have appreciated the freedom and opportunity they have found in the United States."[151] Despite her fears that overseas Chinese would never be allowed to return to their homeland, Kuo eventually returns to China on an "artists' tour" with her husband, Dong Kingman and twenty-three of his students in 1978. In her account of the trip, published by the *New York Times*, Kuo explains that their group comprised some of the first international visitors allowed to enter the country.

[150] Wu 410; Helena Kuo, "America's Chinese," Voice of America Chinese Unit Feature transcript, Feb. 11, 1951.
[151] Wu 402.

Le Ly Hayslip's *When Heaven and Earth Changed Places*, which I analyze in Chapter Three, also depicts an Asian homecoming, but under very different circumstances. Kuo's experience of return, which coincided with the purposes of the US government in rebuilding a diplomatic relationship with China, contrasts dramatically with Hayslip's return trip to Vietnam. In 1985, when Hayslip was planning a return trip to see her family, whom she had not seen since her departure in 1970, the United States government had cut off diplomatic relations and trade with Vietnam.[152] The US Embassy warned Vietnamese nationals who wanted to return to Vietnam to reconnect with family members that it would be unable to aid them if they were captured or detained. When Hayslip applied to the Vietnamese mission of the United Nations for a visa, "she was granted the visa but was told by U.S. authorities that they could be of no help if she was detained."[153] Although Hayslip still chose to return to Vietnam for a visit, she did so at considerable risk.[154] Hayslip's inability to return to her home country easily is reflected in the focus and purpose of her text; while Kuo focuses on building an alliance between the US and China, Hayslip urges US readers to forgive their former Vietnamese "enemies" and asks the US government to lift trade embargos on Vietnam, endeavoring to heal the relationship between the two nations.

Like Le Ly Hayslip, Rosario Morales and Aurora Levins Morales, and Norma Elia Cantú, Kuo demonstrates how immigrants use life writing to establish a connection with their audience and to persuade the reader to adopt or appreciate a particular viewpoint. Through various forms

[152] The United States did not restore diplomatic ties with Vietnam until 1995 (Karnow 26).
[153] Granberry A3.
[154] Although they frequently encountered hostility in the United States, for refugees like Hayslip, return to Vietnam was even more risky. Vietnamese who returned to visit their home country risked torture or death not only at the hands of the Vietnamese government, but by their fellow immigrants, or "Viet Kieu," upon their return to the United States, since returning to Vietnam was often viewed as an act of treachery. In fact, after a local newspaper published a story about her planned trip, Hayslip "was forced to unplug the phone to avoid the angry calls and death threats of [both] Viet Kieu and veterans" (Fielding 74). Similarly, a 1988 *LA Times* article described how two migrants were "sentenced to death" (Reyes R3) by fellow immigrants in Orange County upon their return from a visit to Vietnam, during which they were suspected of helping the Communist government.

of persuasion and resistance, as well as by utilizing particular textual strategies, Kuo crafts an effective piece of life writing which was designed to demonstrate the worth, dignity, and even superiority of Chinese culture and to convince Western readers to ally with China in their fight against Japan.

As I assert in the following three chapters, it is essential to examine life-writing texts, including Helena Kuo's *I've Come a Long Way*, in a transnational frame. Kuo tailors her narrative to the political atmosphere of World War II, and she strategically endeavors to emphasize the strong moral values and positive attributes of the Chinese, traits which would have encouraged the United States government to permit wider immigration from China to the United States, as well as persuading them to allow Chinese Americans to attain citizenship rights. Her sympathetic portrayal of the Chinese as hardworking, patriotic, and respectable individuals with strong family values would have made them more appealing to the US government as residents and citizens. Correspondingly, her detailed, first-hand accounts of how the Chinese were suffering under the control of the Japanese invaders would have inspired US politicians to allow the Chinese to take refuge in the United States. Kuo's work was intended not only to garner military support for China in their fight against Japan, but also to create a more positive view of the Chinese people among both politicians and the reading public in the United States.

Soon after Kuo's publication, the US was ready to admit their error in excluding the Chinese and was ready to make them eligible for naturalization on the same terms as immigrants from other nations. By 1943, the Chinese Exclusion Act had been repealed. Roosevelt, who supported the repeal, regarded it as "important in the cause of winning the war and of

establishing a secure peace" and explained that the US owed it to the Chinese to foster faith in her allies. He stated:

> We owe it to the Chinese to strengthen that faith. One step in this direction is to wipe from the statute books those anachronisms in our laws which forbid the immigration of Chinese people into this country and which bar Chinese residents from American citizenship. Nations, like individuals, make mistakes. We must be big enough to acknowledge our mistakes of the past and correct them….An unfortunate barrier between allies has been removed. The war effort in the Far East can now be carried on with a greater vigor and a larger understanding of our common purpose.[155]

Roosevelt acknowledges the "common purpose" of China and the US in preserving democracy and speaks to US dedication in the "war effort in the Far East." In this climate of repentance and reconciliation towards the Chinese, Kuo's criticism of Western nations was perhaps easier to accept. Kuo's book was published in 1942; by 1943, some of the goals Kuo was writing for, including increased legislative acceptance of the Chinese and China's military alliance with the US, had been achieved.

Kuo's text demonstrates how the individual life narrative can intersect with the geopolitical context of international relations. Through her narrative, Kuo exemplifies Sidonie Smith's statement that in life writing "autobiographical practices become occasions for restaging subjectivity, and autobiographical strategies become occasions for the staging of resistance."[156] In her text, Kuo is able to "restage" herself and the Chinese people, resisting stereotypical representations of the Chinese and discriminatory foreign policy and presenting the Chinese as like-minded US allies with compatible morals and values. Examining and analyzing Kuo's narrative reveals the irony that she was welcomed to the United States by the Roosevelts as an "exception" to US immigration policy, given her straightforward criticism of US foreign policy and cultural flaws.

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[155] Rosenman, *FDR Public Papers* (1943): 429-430, qtd Daniels *Asian America* 196-197.
[156] Smith 156-157.

By using pieces of her life story not only to portray the Chinese people as sympathetic, but also to criticize aspects of US politics and society, Kuo demonstrates how "Migrants use their intellectual, social, and political resources to construct identities that transcend physical and social boundaries,"[157] making them active agents in constructing their own reality and history. Through her overt cultural criticisms of the West and her commendation of China, Kuo serves as an astute cultural critic who resists Orientalist assumptions of Western superiority and demonstrates how life writing can interact with—and, perhaps, impact—international politics and transnational relationships.

[157] Agnew 5.

Chapter Two: "I am a child of the Americas"[1]

Getting Home Alive (1986) by Puerto Rican authors
Rosario Morales and Aurora Levins Morales

> "For years after we left Puerto Rico for the last time, I would wake from a dream of something unbearably precious melting away from my memory as I struggled desperately to hold on, or at least to remember that I had forgotten. I am an immigrant, and I forget to feel what it means to have left. What it means to have arrived" (Levins Morales 22).

In *Getting Home Alive* (1986), Aurora Levins Morales and Rosario Morales provide a cross-generational perspective on Puerto Rican migrant identity. Aurora Levins Morales was born in Puerto Rico, and her mother, Rosario Morales, was born in New York City, the daughter of two working-class Puerto Rican migrants. Aurora's father (Rosario's husband, Dick) was of Ukrainian Jewish heritage. Their text, which integrates multiple genres, including poetry, essays, journal entries, letters, stories, and photographs, is written in alternating voices, with Spanish, Yiddish, and English interspersed throughout and with authorship indicated by different fonts. Their pieces explore political and social issues, including themes of race, violence, and poverty in the US, unemployment in Puerto Rico, and U.S. imperialism, as well as depicting their own personal experiences of migration and lives divided between Puerto Rico and New York. Their lives form layers of travel, departure and return, interrupting the myth of permanent migration, assimilation, and the US immigrant success story. The multi-generational call-and-response nature of the narrative adds unique textual layers and insight.

Both women explore topics of race and identity, explaining how their participation in academia necessitates a performance of both whiteness and upper-class identity, which conflicts with their identity as women of color. Morales clarifies, "I'm a Third World, born working-class woman,"[2] and several of the women's pieces explore their roots as working class and their

[1] Levins Morales, *Getting Home Alive* 50.
[2] Morales, *Getting Home Alive* 68.

mixed-race heritage. In "Child of the Americas" Levins Morales explains, "I am a child of the Americas, a light-skinned mestiza of the Caribbean, a child of many diaspora, born into this continent at a crossroads."[3] In this poem and throughout the book, both women explore how their various identities intersect with the body and with language. In consecutive sentences, Levins Morales explains, "I am a U.S. Puerto Rican Jew…I speak English with passion: it's the tongue of my consciousness," "I am Caribeña, island grown. Spanish is in my flesh," and "I am of Latinoamerica, rooted in the history of my continent. I speak from that body."[4] Morales and Levins Morales utilize their multiple subject positions and cultural identifications to confront and resist systems of oppression, using life writing to speak out not only against US imperialism on the island of Puerto Rico, but also against racism, violence, and poverty in multiple national and cultural contexts.

While critics of *Getting Home Alive* frequently acknowledge the multiple perspectives, languages, and cultural influences brought together in this text,[5] they often disagree regarding how the authors define their ethnic and racial identities. For example, Margarita Rivera asserts that "the book incorporates two women's voices in the effort for self-definition *within* ethnic cultural boundaries."[6] Alternately, Lourdes Rojas states that Morales and Levins Morales are "proposing a culturally syncretic identity that aims at obliterating the lines of separation among all immigrants."[7] Monika Wadman argues that the multicultural individual as represented in this text exists outside of all cultural identifications, remaining "an individual, and not a member of a

[3] Levins Morales, *Getting Home Alive* 50.
[4] Levins Morales, *Getting Home Alive* 50.
[5] Edna Acosta-Belén and Carlos E. Santiago assert that *Getting Home Alive* "introduced a radical feminist perspective into Puerto Rican literary expression…[and] captured the experiences of two Puerto Rican women from different generations" (194). Accordingly, Jacqueline Stefanko reads *Getting Home Alive* as a "hybrid text" which crosses "borders of language and culture" (50). A. Robert Lee calls *Getting Home Alive* "an exploration in verse and prose of island-maintained cultural legacy in its eclecticism of site, ethnicity, language, and gender" (248).
[6] Rivera 63, emphasis mine.
[7] Rojas 175.

community."[8] While I agree with Wadman that Morales and Levins Morales are attempting to move beyond "binary, oppositional thinking and rhetoric,"[9] I disagree with her claim that the multicultural individual presented in this text remains "someone without an identity,"[10] isolated from all communities. Conversely, I assert that Morales and Levins Morales situate themselves as members of multiple ethnic and racial communities, acknowledging racial, ethnic, and cultural boundaries while neither erasing nor being constrained by them. I will explore how the authors use their identification with multiple communities and their ability to speak multiple languages as an opportunity for resistance against racism, discrimination, and U.S. imperialism.

Critics have also tended to overlook the specific sociohistorical, political situation of Puerto Rico in the twentieth century and the particular transnational context into which Morales and Levins Morales were publishing, and instead consider the women's voices and concerns as synonymous to those of other people groups or other activist movements. For example, Gabriella de Beer notes that the women identify strongly with both Latin and Jewish culture, yet concludes, "What emerges from these poems and short essays is that *different are basically the same* [sic]. They share the same dreams, feelings, and aspirations. Immigrants, especially those considered minorities, face similar problems in a society that harbors deep-seated prejudices."[11] Here, de Beer makes a sweeping statement, asserting that the experiences and sentiments of Morales and Levins Morales are shared by all people of color and by all immigrants. John Mutter aligns the authors with a different set of views, stating that Morales and Levins Morales, with "their radical and feminist views…echo the rhetoric of the '60's."[12] Both of these critics fail to consider how the women's particular racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds, as well as the

[8] Wadman 230.
[9] Wadman 224.
[10] Wadman 230.
[11] de Beer 77 (emphasis mine).
[12] Mutter 57.

specific political and sociohistorical context of Puerto Rico and its unique history of immigration, have shaped and influenced this text. In addition to equating *Getting Home Alive* with activist movements of an entirely different time and place, these critics have overlooked the specificity of Morales's and Levins Morales's ethnic and racial identities and neglected to appreciate how their particular place in history has shaped the entirety of this text.

In this chapter, I will argue that *Getting Home Alive* must be understood in a specific transnational context. The political, social, and economic factors influencing the complex U.S.-Puerto Rico relationship, which also affect Latinas/os on the mainland, form a crucial backdrop for this text. As literary critic Marta Sánchez explains, "Puerto Rican identity is simultaneously inside and outside the borders of the Caribbean and the U.S. mainland: both up here and down there, yet also in transit."[13] As Morales and Levins Morales illustrate, Puerto Rican identity extends beyond the geographic boundaries of the island, and is both connected to and distinct from other cultural, political, and social identities. I will demonstrate how, because of the unique sociohistorical, ethnic, and political positioning of both Puerto Rico and Puerto Rican immigrants, *Getting Home Alive* must be viewed in a transnational context in order to be understood and appreciated. Placing this narrative into a transnational context allows for a more comprehensive understanding of Puerto Rican identity, community, and culture, as well as highlighting the violence of US imperial domination in Puerto Rico.

As Sidonie Smith asserts in *Subjectivity, Identity, and the Body: Women's Autobiographical Practices in the Twentieth Century*, established social structures of difference and discrimination are able to be contested, challenged, and changed by the same people who are experiencing discrimination. She explains, "Cultural scripts of difference remain vulnerable to contradictions from within and contesting social dialects from without that fracture their

[13] Sánchez 119.

coherence and dispute their privileges."[14] Smith points out that autobiography and life writing are means by which members of marginalized populations are able to "talk back"[15] to those imposing discriminatory social structures. As Puerto Rican Latinas living on the US mainland, Morales and Levins Morales are speaking from a socially marginalized subject position, and are thereby able to "talk back" to those in privileged positions, not only creating awareness of social inequalities, but also resisting white privilege, racism, discrimination, violence, poverty, and U.S. imperialism and calling for change. I will explore how Morales's and Levins Morales's intersectional identities[16] make them uniquely able to contest social inequalities and racial and ethnic stereotypes. These women are of both Jewish and Latina heritage, as well as being Spanish-speaking individuals who embrace their Puerto Rican cultural traditions and have attained academic standing on the mainland United States. Their membership in multiple ethnic and racial communities not only shapes their own life experiences, but also helps them to confront systems of social oppression more effectively.

In this chapter, I will explore how, like Kuo, Hayslip, and Cantú, Morales and Levins Morales seek to create an alternate narrative or history, one counter to the "official histories" provided by U.S. government publications and history books, as well as calling attention to U.S. social problems, including widespread violence, poverty, racism, and discrimination. I will examine how Morales and Levins Morales use life writing strategically to resist racism, capitalism and imperialism and establish their rights as women of color.

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[14] Smith 21.
[15] Smith 20.
[16] As Aída Hurtado and Karina Cervantez explain in *The Handbook of U.S. Latino Psychology,* the theoretical framework of intersectionality is based around an analysis of how "intersecting social categories," including gender, race, class, sexuality, ethnicity, and physical ableness, facilitate an understanding of the social and economic conditions of women of color (184). These authors define their study of intersectionality as an exploration of how "memberships in oppressed groups intersect in significant ways that affect women's experiences of oppression" (184).

Puerto Rican Writers in the United States

Latinas, including Puerto Rican women, began to enter the academy and be published in greater numbers in the late 1970s, 1980s and 1990s. The most well-known text by women of color from this time period, *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (1981), was a feminist anthology edited by Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa and included work by Morales and Levins Morales. This anthology brought together publications by women of color from multiple ethnic and racial backgrounds, making it an important milestone for the entrance of women of color into the academy. Other well-known Latina publications from this time period include Mexican American author Ana Castillo's *Otro Canto* (1977) and *The Invitation* (1979),[17] Mexican/Native American writer Lorna Dee Cervantes's *Emplumada* (1981), and Dominican American writer Julia Alvarez's *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents* (1991). The Latina writers from this movement often broached multiple topics, selectively identifying with aspects of both the Civil Rights movement and the second-wave feminist movement, while also criticizing the patriarchal biases of the Civil Rights movement and the racist and classist aspects of Anglo-American feminism.

In *The Puerto Rican Movement: Voices from the Diaspora*, Andrés Torres explains the revival of Puerto Rican political movements in the 1960s and 70s, including movements for Puerto Rican independence and protests against the US occupation of Vieques.[18] This revival of activism was reflected in the literature in the following decades, as women of color began to publicly speak out against discrimination and injustice, advocating for gender and racial equality both on the island of Puerto Rico and on the US mainland. In *Family Matters: Puerto Rican*

[17] Norma Alarcón explains Castillo as a revolutionary "social protest poet" who "portrayed the burdens of the urban poor" and explored feminist politics in the 1970s, at a time when "Chicanas and other women of color had a difficult time when…they insisted that feminist politics…[also] applied to them" (x).
[18] Torres 3.

Women Authors on the Island and the Mainland, Marisel C. Moreno explains how Latinas in the 1970s and 1980s began to use writing as a tool for social justice and activism, a means of reconstructing the world through language. In the early 1970s, Puerto Rican novelist and short-story writer Nicholasa Mohr began publishing autobiographical stories and poems, many of them describing her experiences of discrimination and racism against Puerto Ricans as a young girl growing up in New York City, including *Nilda* (1973) and *El Bronx Remembered* (1975). By the mid-1990s several Puerto Rican women authors had published life writing texts, including Judith Ortiz Cofer's *Silent Dancing: A Partial Remembrance of a Puerto Rican Childhood* (1990), Sandra Maria Esteves's autobiographical poetry, including *Yerba Buena* (1981), *Tropical Rain: A Bilingual Downpour* (1984), and *Bluestown Mockingbird Mambo* (1990), Esmerelda Santiago's *When I Was Puerto Rican* (1993), and Luz Maria Umpierre-Herrera's *Una puertorriqueña en Penna* (1979).[19] All of these works discuss issues facing Puerto Rican migrants, including racism, discrimination, social and economic inequalities, and the struggle for identity.[20] Critic Carmen Rivera describes how Puerto Rican women authors "challenge traditional literary discourses, from both Puerto Rico and the United States, to author/ize their own voices."[21]

These women were able to contest stereotypes and combat social injustice to record and share their experience of both the island of Puerto Rico and the US mainland. As Nicholasa Mohr explains of the 1980s generation of women writers, including Morales and Levins Morales, they are ready to move beyond reflecting on the island of Puerto Rico and create a new body of literature on the mainland: "We are no longer an island people….This new world, which

[19] Hernández 235-238.
[20] Rivera xviii.
[21] Rivera xviii.

we are still creating, is the source of our strength and the cradle of our future."[22] While Morales and Levins Morales share the other authors' commitment to creating a new body of literature and addressing social injustice, their cross-generational call-and-response format and their blend of textual styles make their text unique.

Biographical Information

The daughter of Puerto Rican immigrants, Rosario Morales (1930-2011) was raised in New York City. As she explained in an interview with Kelly Anderson for Smith College's *Voices of Feminism Oral History Project*, Morales's great-grandparents on her father's side were upper-class Puerto Ricans, founders of the town of Naranjito, "large landowners" who owned stores and an "estate." She also described her ancestors on her mother's side of the family, the Moures, as a "prominent family" in Puerto Rico. However, Morales emphasized that her ancestors were "downwardly mobile," and explained that her own parents were working class and often struggled to buy food.[23]

Morales was born and grew up in the Bronx, at a time when "the Puerto Rican population [there] was really quite small."[24] She explains how her father moved to New York a few years ahead of her mother, and then her mother immigrated to New York in 1929, the year before Morales was born, which Morales described as "a terrible year to try and get a job in New York City."[25] Her father, who had trained as a teacher, struggled to find work, eventually obtaining a position as a janitor,[26] and the family suffered from poverty and hunger. The family's situation gradually improved as she grew older and her father was able to find steady work. Morales

[22] Mohr "Puerto Ricans in New York" 160, qtd. Rivera xix.
[23] Anderson 1.
[24] Anderson 1.
[25] Anderson 2.
[26] According to Virginia E. Sánchez-Korrol, Puerto Rican immigrants to the mainland often faced inadequate schooling, lack of job training, and discrimination, which relegated the majority of Puerto Rican employees to poorly paid, low-status positions (214).

visited Puerto Rico periodically with her parents and younger sister throughout her childhood. She states, "Certainly as an adolescent, my consciousness of myself was as a child of immigrants."[27]

In 1949, Morales joined the Communist Party and in 1950 married well-known ecologist and geneticist Richard (Dick) Levins, the son of Ukrainian Jewish immigrants. A year later, when Morales was twenty-one, the couple moved to Puerto Rico, where Dick taught at the university and they became active in the Puerto Rican Communist Party. The couple purchased a small farm in the mountains. Aurora Levins Morales (1954-) and Ricardo (1956-) were both born in Puerto Rico. Shortly after, the family relocated to New York so that Dick could pursue graduate study at Columbia. In 1961, the family returned to Puerto Rico and the couple's third child, Alejandro (1965-) was born. In 1967, Dick was denied tenure at the University of Puerto Rico because of his political activities, so the couple returned to the United States, where Morales started graduate school at the University of Chicago. Levins Morales was thirteen.[28] Both Morales and Levins Morales became active in the women's movement in the late 1960s and were also involved with the Chicago Women's Liberation Union. Both women have been published in numerous periodicals and collections. Most notably, in 1981, both Morales and Levins Morales were published in *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, the first anthology of Latina writers published in the United States. In addition to *Getting Home Alive,* Levins Morales has continued to publish other texts, including *Remedios* (1998) and *Medicine Stories: History, Culture and the Politics of Integrity* (1998). A mixture of testimony, historical account, and storytelling, these books examine women's experiences of oppression in

[27] Anderson 4.
[28] "Rosario Morales Papers," Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College.

the Americas and in colonized indigenous and African cultures.[29] Morales died in Cambridge, Massachusetts in 2011.[30] Levins Morales currently divides her time between Oakland and Minneapolis and continues to write.[31]

A State or a Nation? Puerto Rico's Complex Political Status

Ever since Spanish colonial rule, the citizens of Puerto Rico have struggled for independence. In 1898, during the Spanish–American War, Puerto Rico was invaded and subsequently became a possession of the United States, [32] which has since retained sovereignty.[33] Puerto Rico continues to struggle to define its political status.[34] Much ambiguity still exists about Puerto Rico's liminal status as a colony, even within the academy. In fact, some scholars refer to Puerto Rico as a separate country; for example, in *The Age of Migration: International Population Movements in the Modern World* (2014), the authors explain that, as of 2011, there were "more than 2.4 million US citizens abroad. Top destination countries for U.S. citizens are

[29] Acosta-Belén and Santiago 195.
[30] "Rosario Morales Papers," Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College.
[31] "Aurora Levins Morales Biography" University of Minnesota.
[32] Immediately after taking control of Puerto Rico, the United States government established military rule, which lasted two years until the Foraker Act of 1900 (sponsored by Senator Joseph B. Foraker), which established a civil government and facilitated commerce between Puerto Rico and the United States, reducing tariffs and integrating Puerto Rico into the U.S. monetary system. This act also allowed Puerto Rico to send one (non-voting) representative to Congress (Monge 40-44). The Foraker Act remained in effect until the passage of the Jones Act of 1917, under which the U.S. government declared all Puerto Ricans U.S. citizens, removing barriers to immigration (Whalen and Vásquez-Hernández 1). Despite this change in citizenship status, Puerto Rico remained an "unincorporated territory" (Whalen and Vásquez-Hernández 13), and was not represented in the electoral college. Political economist Pedro Cabán views the bestowment of citizenship as a conciliatory gesture towards Puerto Ricans who were dissatisfied with their liminal status and who were pushing for independence. He states, "The grant of U.S. citizenship was proposed as a gambit to abate Puerto Rican dissatisfaction with the colonial regime, quiet political agitation for independence, and serve to permanently bind the country to the United States" (Qtd. Whalen and Vásquez-Hernández 13-14). As a result of their new citizenship status, Puerto Ricans were now eligible for the draft; during World War I, 17,855 Puerto Ricans were inducted into segregated military units (Dietz 97).
[33] Even though Puerto Rico was granted the status of a free political entity in 1952, acquiring the right to draft its own Constitution, it remains an unincorporated organized territory of the United States under congressional supervision, and its ambiguous status continues to spark political debates (Aranda 17).
[34] In recent years, island residents have promoted statehood for Puerto Rico, mobilizing around a plebiscite (Whalen and Vásquez-Hernández 228). On July 23, 1967, the first plebiscite on the political status of Puerto Rico was held. Voters overwhelmingly affirmed continuation of Commonwealth status (60%), with only 39% voting for statehood (Ayala and Bernabe 224). Other plebiscites have been held to determine the political status of Puerto Rico in 1993 and in 1998 (Ayala and Bernabe 295, 299). Both times, although by smaller margins, the status quo has been upheld.

Mexico, Canada, and Puerto Rico."[35] The authors' use of the terms "abroad" and "destination countries" make it clear that even to some scholars, despite its legal protectorate status, Puerto Rico can reasonably be considered a separate nation. Although the inhabitants of Puerto Rico are technically United States citizens, their movements back and forth between the island and the mainland still involve a drastic transition between disparate cultures, histories, and languages. As Brad Epps explains, "Technically, the Jones Act of 1917 granted Puerto Ricans US citizenship, but that does not mean that they do not experience their movement from the island to the mainland and back as a mode of immigration."[36]

From 1920 to 1940, Puerto Rican immigration to the United States gradually increased and the Puerto Rican population in the United States grew slowly from 12,000 to almost 70,000,[37] in part due to economic difficulties related to the Great Depression on the island[38] and two major hurricanes, San Felipe in 1928 and San Ciprián in 1932, which destroyed much of the coffee and sugar production.[39] Morales recalls that one of the reasons her parents left their small town of Naranjito and immigrated to New York City in the late 1920s was the failing economy, explaining, "It was a small community, but it was also a very bad time for everybody. The Depression that hit the metropolis hit Puerto Rico long before. It was hard to get employment."[40] The late 1940s brought the beginning of a major migration, often referred to as "the Great

[35] Castles, Haas, and Miller 135.
[36] Epps 8.
[37] Whalen and Vásquez-Hernández 13.
[38] Aranda 15.
[39] Dietz 137.
[40] Anderson 4.

Migration" (1945-1965)[41] of Puerto Ricans to the continental United States, mainly to New York City.[42]

There continues to be much crossover between the mainland United States and the island of Puerto Rico, as recent decades have seen migration rates equal or surpass the rates of the Great Migration.[43] The political, economic, and sociocultural links between the island and the U.S. main have created, as Elizabeth Aranda explains in *Emotional Bridges to Puerto Rico,* "a nation of commuters who navigate though the landscapes of global capitalism by way of migration."[44] Importantly, many people return to Puerto Rico after moving to the United States or continue to travel back and forth.[45] In their book *Coming Home? Refugees, Migrants, and Those Who Stayed Behind,* Lynellyn D. Long and Ellen Oxfeld combat the myth of one-way migration to the United States. Contrary to widespread perceptions that people want to remain in their new countries, particularly in wealthy Western nations, they demonstrate that many refugees and migrants want to return to their place of birth.[46] Correspondingly, rates of return migration from the mainland to the island of Puerto Rico are high; U.S. census data reveals that, of all Puerto Ricans living on the island in 2000, 6.1 percent were born in the United States.[47]

Features of the Text

Getting Home Alive features multiple genres, including poetry, essays, journal entries, letters, and stories, as well as several black and white family photographs, multiple languages,

[41] Aranda 16.
[42] Out of an island population of 2.2 million people, 470,000 people left the island during the decade of the 1950s alone, representing a 21 percent immigration rate (Acosta-Belén and Santiago 81). While three-fourths of the Great Migration is estimated to have remained on the mainland, one fourth of these migrants returned (Aranda 17).
[43] In the 1990s, almost 8 percent of island Puerto Ricans moved to the mainland. In 2004, almost half of all Puerto Ricans lived in the mainland United States: about 3.87 million, compared to 3.9 million Puerto Ricans who lived on the island (Aranda 2).
[44] Aranda 2.
[45] Puerto Ricans currently constitute the second largest Latino community in America, approximately 3.5 million, eleven percent of Latinas/os in the nation. Much of that population is concentrated in New York City (Lee 198).
[46] Long and Oxfeld point out that, of the 30 million people admitted to the United States between 1900 and 1980, approximately 10 million returned to their country of origin (Stalker 2001,114, qtd. Long and Oxfeld, 2).
[47] Aranda 2.

including English, Spanish, and Yiddish, and multiple voices, weaving selections by Morales and Levins Morales into a cross-generational call-and-response. Overall, the book is structured as a collage —a combination of visual images with texts written in different literary genres—thereby reflecting the narrators' complex identities. As Ayelet Tabak notes in her review of *Getting Home Alive*, "The text itself is an immigrant, a traveler through many forms, defying traditional expectations of literary identity, genre, and authorship."[48] This sense of the text as a traveler through many forms is reflected by multiple aspects of *Getting Home Alive*, including the book's cover art, font, textual framing, and photographs.

The cover shows a quilted depiction of a landscape interspersed with three multi-colored houses, each of them shaded by quilted palm fronds reminiscent of a Puerto Rican landscape. The background is composed of quilted material in three horizontal stripes: the top stripe in gold, the middle stripe in bright blue, and the lowest stripe in black, creating the impression of a golden sky, a deep blue ocean, and a dark black piece of earth forming a backdrop behind the houses. The quilted houses and trees are made up of a variety of fabric pieces in various prints and textures, perhaps representing the complex histories, ancestries, and identities of the two authors as well as the myriad of issues they discuss in the text. The quilted texture of the cover art also pays tribute to women's cultural traditions and domestic labor, which the authors praise in their closing poem, explaining that the labor of women "gave us life, kept us going [and] brought us to where we are."[49] Additionally, the collage of colors and textures woven between the houses on the cover suggest a map, alluding to the journeys both women have made between their various homes in Puerto Rico and in the United States. Finally, the quilted houses on the cover are also representative of the title, *Getting Home Alive,* which points toward the goal of

[48] Tabak 15.
[49] *Getting Home Alive* 213.

escaping or overcoming perilous circumstances, of surviving a long and arduous journey in order to return—perhaps not unscathed but in one piece, alive—to one's home. The quilted collage on the cover honors traditional women's domestic arts, as well as serving as a metaphor for Morales's and Levins Morales's intersectional, multicultural identifications.

The text is divided into eight sections, all of which, with the exception of "Flowering in the Dust of the Road" (written completely by Rosario Morales), contain pieces by both mother and daughter. In the Editor's Note, Morales and Levins Morales explain that instead of noting the author's name at the beginning of each selection, they use two different fonts to indicate authorship: "Signature" for Levins Morales and "Clearface" for Morales.[50] However, several critics and reviewers, including Annette Peláez and de Beer, point out that the two typefaces do not contrast enough for the reader to easily be able to determine the author of each section. In her review of *Getting Home Alive,* de Beer remarks, "This reader found the typefaces very similar and had to consult the table of contents to see which one of the authors had written each piece. The reading would have been smoother had the writer of each selection been identified in the text."[51] Similarly, Peláez notes, "Though two typefaces are used to 'distinguish their work visually,' the typefaces did not contrast enough and often, at first glance, left me wondering who was speaking."[52] In contrast to these critics' insinuation that an unintentional similarity in font styles contributed to a lack of textual clarity, I suggest that Morales and Levins Morales purposefully used similar typefaces to blend their work into a multi-generational, transnational perspective. Because the two font styles are so similar, readers are free to be drawn into the women's unique, yet often complimentary perspectives on the issues facing Puerto Rican women in the twentieth century. By blending their perspectives, the authors demonstrate how the stories

[50] *Getting Home Alive* "Table of Contents."
[51] de Beer 77.
[52] Peláez 131.

they tell and the concerns they raise affect multiple generations and tie together numerous women's voices and issues.

This sense of returning home in one piece is reflected by the poems the authors use to begin and end their text. *Getting Home Alive* is framed with poetry, beginning with the poem "Borderlands" by Gloria Anzaldúa and closing with a poem titled "Ending Poem," written by Morales and Levins Morales. The book opens with a feeling of destruction and separation, as expressed in the opening poem by Gloria Anzaldúa, which reads:

To live in the Borderlands means
the mill with the razor sharp teeth
wants to shred off your olive-red skin
crush out the kernel, your heart
pound you pinch you roll you out
smelling like white bread but dead

To live in the Borderlands means
you are at home, a stranger wherever you are
the border disputes have been settled
the volley of shots have shattered the truce
you are wounded, lost in action
fighting back, a survivor.

To survive the Borderlands means
you must live *sin fronteras*
be a crossroads

In "Borderlands," Anzaldúa creates a feeling of danger, of a militaristic, imperialist, white-supremacist environment that wants to destroy people of color, dismembering their bodies and crushing their spirits, exiling and excluding them, preventing them from finding a place of refuge or a home. People of color are perpetually "wounded" and kept at "a crossroads." Importantly, however, these people are "fighting back," survivors of imperialist violence. They do not give in, but instead continue to fight for their dignity, humanity, and right to belong. Anzaldúa's poem lends a sense of destruction, homelessness, and fragmentation to the opening

of the book, which contrasts dramatically with the sense of peace and wholeness the authors arrive at in "Ending Poem."

The last poem weaves together lines by both authors from previous selections, this time utilizing italicized and non-italicized versions of the same font, so that the women's voices are indistinguishable. This direct interplay, or conversation, between the voices of Morales and Levins Morales, whose selections have remained separate throughout the previous text, creates a feeling of merging, of coming together, and of unity, as the two authors from different generations take pride in their various identities, declaring "I am Puerto Rican. I am U.S. American. / *I am New York Manhattan and the Bronx. /* A mountain-born, country-bred, homegrown jíbara child / *up from the shtetl, a California Puerto Rican Jew...*"[53] The women catalogue their various identities, blending references to both "I" and "we": "*I am an immigrant /* and the daughter and granddaughter of immigrants. / *We didn't know our forbears'* [sic] *names with a certainty. /* They aren't written anywhere."[54] After listing what they are not: "I am not African," "I am not Taína," "I am not European," they women conclude with what they are: "I am a child of many mothers," "We are new," "*And we are whole*."[55] In this sense, the text itself constitutes a journey from fragmentation to wholeness, from wandering and searching for identity to "getting home alive," arriving at a sense of completion and integrity. Moreover, by declaring "We are new," the women signify that through their blended identities they are able to create a new identity. They are acknowledging their identification with diverse communities, yet simultaneously maintaining their sense of wholeness.

Through the journey of their text, Morales and Levins Morales make their way from Anzaldúa's description of living as "a stranger wherever you are" to knowing, stating, and taking

[53] *Getting Home Alive* 212.
[54] *Getting Home Alive* 212.
[55] *Getting Home Alive* 213.

pride in their history, their roots, and their identity. In "Ending Poem," Morales and Levins Morales acknowledge that they were "born at a crossroads,"[56] in accordance with Anzaldúa's representation. As Stacy E. Schultz explains in "Latina Identity: Reconciling Ritual, Culture, and Belonging," in Afro-Caribbean literatures a crossroads often constitutes a liminal space, symbolizing the threshold between the physical and the spiritual, the body and the mind. Similarly, although Morales and Levins Morales could be thought to exist in a liminal space because of their multiple, blended cultural and ethnic identifications, they fight past this sense of fragmentation to arrive at a conclusion of physiological and psychological wholeness, stating, "*History made us. /* We will not eat ourselves up inside anymore. / *And we are whole*."[57]

By including poetry written by Chicana activist Gloria Anzaldúa, Morales and Levins Morales connect with borderlands scholarship, which, like their own text, draws on a "history of United States conquest" [58] in which political divisions and national borders do not correspond with the cultural, social, and racial realities of existence. Like Anzaldúa, Morales and Levins Morales live in a "third space"[59] between cultures, a space characterized by multiple cultural influences and multiple languages. Also, like Anzaldúa, Morales and Levins Morales celebrate their unique and multifaceted identities and demonstrate how by "embracing ambiguity and holding contradictory perceptions without conflict,"[60] they are able to use their position as both insiders and outsiders from mainstream US culture to provide a valuable perspective on social systems of oppression.

[56] *Getting Home Alive* 213.
[57] *Getting Home Alive* 213.
[58] Hurtado (2003b, 18), qtd. Hurtado and Cervantez 182.
[59] Lugones (2003), qtd. Hurtado and Cervantez 182.
[60] Hurtado and Cervantez 182.

Located in the center of the text[61] are six black-and-white family photographs of the authors in their childhood as well as of their Puerto Rican and Jewish relatives from the island and the mainland. These photographs are captioned and arranged as if in a family album. These photos function as a complement to the textual dialogue, as well as a visualization of the problematic blend of fiction with truth in the memoir.

On the first page, there is an informal photograph of Levins Morales's elderly Jewish great-grandparents, taken in 1965 on a boardwalk along Brighton Beach in Brooklyn. The caption notes that her great-grandfather, Abraham Sakhnin, immigrated from the Ukraine to the United States in 1904, and his wife Leah followed two years later with their daughter Ruth (Dick's mother). The picture below shows fourteen-year-old Ruth, formally attired in a black dress and posed in a photographer's studio in 1918. The caption notes that her last name was changed from "Sakhnin" to "Sackman" by immigration officials on Ellis Island when she arrived from the Ukraine with her mother. The opposite page features three smaller, informal photographs of Levins Morales as a young child. In the top photo she reads on a bed in Maricao, Puerto Rico, with her mother; in the middle photo she poses at home on her second birthday in 1956. The third photo shows Dick Levins teaching a young Levins Morales how to write. The toddler is seated in a chair, legs crossed, holding a pencil, while her father leans over her, guiding her hand. The last page of photos features a formal family portrait of Morales, age twelve, with her parents and younger sister.

These photographs of the authors and their families lend a sense of legitimacy to the women's stories, while at the same time further complicating the relationship between author,

[61] *Getting Home Alive* 106-108.

narrator, and character.[62] Because the photographs depict Morales and Levins Morales, and because photographs are typically associated with factual representations,[63] the reader is prone to take these photographs at face value, as affirmations of the veracity of all that is represented in the text. As Timothy Dow Adams explains in *Light Writing and Life Writing-Photography in Autobiography,* "Apparently no amount of appealing to logic about the obvious distortions of photographs can quite sway viewers from the popular idea that there is something especially authentic or accurate about a photographic likeness."[64] However, these photographs also create a sense of the authors' identity which is at odds with the lives they reveal in their stories, thereby calling attention to the constructed nature of autobiography and the limited representation permitted by photographs. The formal family photograph of Morales with her parents and sister, for example, which appears composed, all family members dressed nicely with shiny black shoes, the girls in well-pressed dresses, her father wearing a tie, belies the realities of poverty, hunger, and domestic abuse that the women reveal in both the text and interviews. Morales describes her father, Manuel, as "autocratic and jealous, a controlling male…abusive…enough so that it frightened us. It was scary."[65] Similarly, in "Immigrants," Levins Morales recalls Manuel's "violent possessiveness and jealousy."[66] The family in the picture looks cohesive and peaceful, but Morales explains how she and her sister repeatedly begged her parents to divorce. This discrepancy between the stories told and the alternate narrative represented by the photographs demonstrates Adams's argument that while "photography may stimulate, inspire, or seem to document autobiography," it may also "confound verbal narrative….Because both media

[62] For a comparison between the use of photographs in this text and in Cantú's *Canícula*, see page 192 in this dissertation.
[63] See Adams's discussion of the evidentiary value of photographs (5-7).
[64] Adams 4.
[65] Anderson 6-7.
[66] *Getting Home Alive* 23.

are located on the border between fact and fiction, they often undercut just as easily as they reinforce each other."[67] While the portrait, at first glance, appears to provide an accurate representation of Morales's family, its validity is undermined by the narrative. Similarly, the childhood pictures of Levins Morales, which feature a well-cared for toddler with her beaming parents, contradict the text, which reveals her mother's loneliness and despair, her exhaustion and frustration at dealing with a toddler,[68] and her agony over her numerous miscarriages.[69] In "Of Course She Read," Morales reveals how her daughter was "born hungry, born small, crying for food, feeding continuously, so that I never slept. I cried with tiredness and shook the cradle with despair. I won't feed you, I cried. I won't, I won't. But I did."[70] Yet in the picture, Morales lounges on the bed with her daughter, smiling broadly, holding out a picture book for her daughter to see.

In addition to providing an additional (and sometimes contradictory) representation of the women's family for the reader, the pictures emphasize the constructed nature of the text, which is highlighted in "I Never Told My Children Stories" as Morales reflects on "how much of my truth was embroidered." She continues, "No, not embroidered exactly—just remembered in special ways….I began thinking of people's truths as the stories they tell about themselves…You know, these stories are like stage directions in a play, telling you how to do the character."[71] Here, Morales discusses how memory is inevitably constructed, and how, when people share stories about their lives and families, pieces are inevitably omitted, added, and changed. She explains how, like selecting particular photographs to supplement a text, the process of selecting particular memories constitutes a process of creation and fictionalization.

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[67] Adams xxi.
[68] *Getting Home Alive* "Of Course She Read" 110.
[69] *Getting Home Alive* "Birth" 100.
[70] *Getting Home Alive* 110.
[71] *Getting Home Alive* 167.

Experiences of Migration

Like the other three texts discussed in this dissertation, *Getting Home Alive* explores narratives of migration and return migration, including the stories of generations of migrants and dispelling illusions of migration as a one-way phenomenon. In "Immigrants," Levins Morales describes the challenge of spending most of her childhood in Puerto Rico, and then being suddenly uprooted and taken to Chicago at the age of thirteen. She details her longing for Puerto Rico after her family's departure: "For years after we left Puerto Rico for the last time, I would wake from a dream of something unbearably precious melting away from my memory as I struggled desperately to hold on, or at least to remember that I had forgotten. I am an immigrant, and I forget to feel what it means to have left. What it means to have arrived."[72] Levins Morales longs for aspects of the Puerto Rican life she left behind and is afraid to forget nuances of her life there. In leaving Puerto Rico, Levins Morales has lost the site of her childhood and the natural beauty of the island. She fears that the "unbearably precious" experiences of her childhood home will fade away, or even worse, that she will forget that her childhood home ever existed, that she will "forget to feel what it means to have left" and "what it means to have arrived." Although her experiences of immigration were traumatic, she does not want to lose them and their essential role in the formation of her identity. Levins Morales presents memory as an active site of "struggle," in which she must try desperately to remember that she had once experienced another home, another culture, and another way of being. Although she acknowledges that she may not be able to retain all the details of her childhood, she expresses her desperation "at least to remember that I had forgotten," that there was once a life in Puerto Rico to forget.

Levins Morales describes how the gloomy atmosphere of Chicago adds to her sense of loss. She contrasts the lush, green landscape of Puerto Rico with the bleak and dirty urban

[72] *Getting Home Alive* 22.

atmosphere of the city, observing her surroundings in Chicago and stating: "The brown brick buildings simmered in the smelly summer, clenched tight all winter against the cold and the sooty sky…huddled against a lake full of dying fish whose corpses floated against the slime-covered rocks of the south shore."[73] Her metaphors of Chicago are full of constriction, conflict, and fear: the buildings are "clenched" and "huddled;" even the fish float "against" the rocks. Chicago in Levins Morales's description is filthy, caustic and overwhelming to the senses. The climate is either too cold or too hot, the air and water are dirty, and the wildlife is dying. Additionally, she explains how danger lurked around every corner: "Nowhere to walk that was safe. Killers and rapists everywhere. Police sirens. Ugly, angry looks. Bristling hostility."[74] Levins Morales characterizes the people in Chicago as vicious, anxious to hurt or kill. The whole environment is polluted, confining and perilous, hostile to life. Alternately, in Puerto Rico, she recalls, "there was space."[75] She describes the natural wonder around her family's farm: "the flamboyan tree, the pine woods, the rainforest hillsides covered with alegría, the wild joyweed that in English is called impatiens."[76] While Chicago's poisonous urban atmosphere, violent and polluted, chokes its inhabitants, Puerto Rico's clean and fertile climate is conducive to life. Importantly, her descriptions of the Puerto Rican flora include "alegría," a synonym for "happiness" in Spanish, and "wild joyweed," both names that emphasize the delight and pleasure fostered by Puerto Rico's natural beauty. In "Immigrants" Levins Morales demonstrates the sense of loss, the dangers, and the nostalgia for home experienced by immigrants.

Levins Morales expands beyond her own experience of migration to incorporate numerous instances of migration and return migration among her ancestors. For example, she

[73] *Getting Home Alive* 22.
[74] *Getting Home Alive* 22.
[75] *Getting Home Alive* 22.
[76] *Getting Home Alive* 22.

explains how her father, Dick Levins, was the first child in his family to be US-born; his mother Ruth came over on a boat from Russia. Similarly her Puerto Rican maternal grandmother, Aurora (referred to as Lola), immigrated to New York in 1929. Consequently her mother, a first-generation US resident, "grew up an immigrant child among immigrants. She went to school speaking not a word of English"[77] when she started kindergarten in the Bronx, spent her childhood in New York, and as an adult moved back to Puerto Rico, where Levins Morales was born. Levins Morales spent most of her childhood in Puerto Rico, and then moved to Chicago with her family when she was thirteen.

Consequently, Levins Morales identifies herself as "the immigrant child of returned immigrants who repeated the journey [back to the US from Puerto Rico] in the second generation."[78] She explains:

> Born on the island with first-hand love and the stories of my parents' Old Country—New York; and behind those, the secondhand stories [set in Puerto Rico] of my mother's father, of the hill town of his long-ago childhood, told through my mother's [New York] barrio childhood. Layer upon layer of travel and leaving behind, an overlay of landscapes, so that I dream of all the beloved and hated places, and endlessly of trains and paths and roads and ships docking and leaving port and a multitude of borders and officials waiting for my little piece of paper. (26)

Here, Levins Morales places herself into a multi-generational cycle of migration, explaining how her grandparents and parents have immigrated from place to place. She herself was "born on the island," and her parents' "Old Country," a term usually used to refer to the European home countries of eighteenth and nineteenth-century immigrants to the United States,[79] is New York. Rather than limiting herself to a discussion of her own migration experience, Levins Morales perceives a legacy of migration within her family, generations of "travel and leaving behind," forming an inherited memory of arrival and departure, of border crossings and

[77] *Getting Home Alive* 24.
[78] *Getting Home Alive* 26.
[79] Daniels, *Coming to America* 170; 194; 203.

nostalgia. She concludes, "My children will be born in California. It's not strange anymore, in this part of the world, in this time, to be born a thousand miles from the birthplace of your mother."[80] This continuous flow of Levins Morales's family between countries coincides with Takeyuki Tsuda's assertion that "Migration is not merely a unipolar one-way process of immigration, settlement, and assimilation confined to the receiving nation-state."[81] Rather, as Levins Morales demonstrates, migration is multi-directional and complex; families often immigrate between several countries and sometimes relocate between the same two countries several times. By placing Levins Morales's description of her family's immigration experiences into a transnational context, we can more fully understand and appreciate how her family's history mirrors the cycles of immigration that have affected Puerto Rico.[82]

In fact, during the period between 1955 and 1960, one-third of those living on the island of Puerto Rico had some experience of the U.S. mainland, indicating the ubiquity of return migration to the island. Levins Morales's family reflects this pattern of return migration. Her maternal grandparents left Puerto Rico for the mainland so that her grandfather could find work and support his family, yet her parents returned to Puerto Rico to raise their own children. Then, when she was a teenager, her family moved to the mainland once again. As Levins Morales explains, immigration involves "layer upon layer of travel and leaving behind,"[83] clarifying that immigrations may be numerous and repeated and that every instance of migration involves losing important elements of one's home, family, and identity.

At the same time, Morales and Levins Morales clarify that the sense of loss they experienced upon immigrating to the United States is paralleled by the sense of loss experienced

[80] *Getting Home Alive* 27.
[81] Tsuda 8.
[82] For a detailed explanation of the "first" and "second" wave of Puerto Rican writers, see Lara-Bonilla 356-357.
[83] *Getting Home Alive* 26.

by Puerto Ricans leaving the mainland to return to Puerto Rico. For example, when Morales's mother, Aurora (Lola) and her husband, Manuel, retire to Puerto Rico after many years in New York, Lola misses the freedom of the mainland. Levins Morales states that her grandmother longed for New York "or some other U.S. city where a woman can go out and about on her own…out of the stifling air of that house, that community, that family."[84] Just as the authors experienced a sense of loss when they left Puerto Rican culture for the mainland, Lola lamented the loss of aspects of her former life and identity when she immigrated back to Puerto Rico.

Similarly, Morales reflects on the loss she experienced when she moved back to Puerto Rico as an adult after spending her childhood on the mainland. In "Hace Tiempo" she explains her feelings of loneliness and suffocation in the Puerto Rican rainy season, as she longs for all she has left in New York. She laments, "It's too soon for rain. Lord, if it starts raining this early in the day, I'll die asphyxiated. That's what it feels like, the shutters closed to keep out the water. Dark all day, darker if the lights fail, the small glow of a candle in the gloom of these brown wooden walls-at two in the afternoon…I daydream fireplaces…hot tubs followed by big towels and freshly ironed sheets, and even underwear creased from the iron. All things warm and dry.[85] Morales feels suffocated by both the Puerto Rican weather and the lack of amenities she associates with life in New York, such as a reliable power supply and hot tubs, both luxuries common to the mainland United States but more rare in Puerto Rico. She feels as if the brown walls, the darkness and water, and the unfamiliarity are closing in around her, blocking out the light. Morales contrasts this bleak reality with the Puerto Rico she imagined when she and her

[84] *Getting Home Alive* 23.
[85] *Getting Home Alive* 28.

husband made the decision to move: "a kind of paradise, all palm trees, banana plants, sun, and warm breezes."[86]

In addition to missing the amenities and conveniences she had become accustomed to while living in the United States, Morales felt like an outsider in her Puerto Rican village. In her interview with Anderson, she explains, "One of the things I was really clearly aware of while I was in Puerto Rico is I was a New Yorker. I didn't speak Spanish well, and in fact I had missing from my vocabulary crucial words. I remember going into a drug store and not being able to say "comb" and having to gesture because I didn't know the word in Spanish. So, you know, that kind of awkwardness really marked me….from everybody as someone who was slightly foreign, even though I was Puerto Rican."[87] Even though she is ethnically and racially Puerto Rican, Morales remembers feeling separate from the community of women there since she spent her childhood in New York. She describes her distance from the Puerto Rican women who were raised in Puerto Rico: "I definitely didn't grow up [in Puerto Rico.]…we didn't quite understand each other."[88] Although she and her husband chose to move to Puerto Rico to raise their children, Morales feels disconnected from the people there, struggling to perfect her Spanish and fit in with her neighbors. She misses the comforts and familiarity of New York. Along with depicting cycles of migration, Morales and Levins Morales explore the accompanying sense of loss. The authors demonstrate how, as immigrants leave their home countries and cultures, they also leave behind familiar environmental landscapes, people, places, and cultural and social norms.

Creating an Alternate History from Multiple Subject Positions

Although Monica Wadman argues that the authors' multiple cultural identifications in this text function as "a masked desire for totality, permanently bound up with the awareness of

[86] *Getting Home Alive* 29.
[87] Anderson 37.
[88] Anderson 38.

inescapable fragmentation and a sense of loss,"[89] I assert that their identification with multiple cultures, races, nationalities, and ethnicities serves not as a measure of unfulfilled longing, but rather as a crucial site of resistance. Like Kuo, Hayslip, and Cantú, Morales and Levins Morales seek to create an alternate history, one that contrasts "official" U.S. government histories. They utilize their identification with multiple subject positions, including immigrants, Puerto Ricans, women of color, and Jews, to be heard.

In *Subjectivity, Identity, and the Body: Women's Autobiographical Practices in the Twentieth Century,* Sidonie Smith asserts that "hegemonic discourses can…be tested through and displaced by nonhegemonic discourses, or what might be called unofficial knowledges."[90] As people of color, women, members of the LGBTQ community, and others who are excluded from the dominant culture speak, they are able to produce dissenting narratives. Morales and Levins Morales claim multiple histories and ethnic identities, which facilitates their resistance to established social systems.[91] Critic Lee Quinby notes that a subject's multiplicity of speaking positions increases "the possibility of resistance"[92] and asserts that "heteronomous subjects," those possessing various identities and belonging to multiple social constructs, are uniquely able to "participate actively as 'agents'"[93] and rebel against those constructs. Accordingly, although Morales and Levins Morales are academics, they are also members of several historically disadvantaged populations: women, Latinas, Jews, and immigrants, among others.

For example, Morales and Levins Morales use their identification with Jews[94] to resist established social systems, equating persecution of the Jews with U.S. imperialism and white

[89] Wadman 230.
[90] Smith 21.
[91] See my discussion of the authors' intersectional identities on page 6.
[92] Quinby, qtd. Smith 21.
[93] Smith 22.
[94] Levins Morales, whose father, Dick Levins, is of Ukranian-Jewish heritage, identifies as Jewish. Although Morales is not ethnically Jewish, she spent much of her childhood in a Jewish neighborhood, married a Jew, and has

privilege. Morales compares the violence of US imperialism, particularly the violence directed at people of color, to the violence Jewish people faced during the Holocaust. Her poem "Refugee" reads, "Get out before the bombs hit your house!/Get out before the soldiers come to rape and kill!"[95] Although this violence occurs in an unnamed country and is perpetrated by an unnamed government, Morales subsequently equates this violence with US imperialism. The poem continues, "Listen, little girl./The good guys don't strafe./They don't bomb civilians./They don't kill women and children./American democracy defends you against those things/Defends you against the evil men who do things like that."[96] Here, Morales highlights the irony that a government that claims to be the "defender of the free world"[97] participates in violence against its own people, perhaps referring to the U.S. bombing of two Puerto Rican towns during the Nationalist Party rebellion in 1950.[98] By pairing a scene of civilian refugees being bombed with a satirical defense of the US government and military, Morales indicates that the US government is not to be trusted.

In the last section of the poem, the speaker imagines that "all my relatives were herded into a department store, all except me. I rode in the jeep with the stormtrooper with the blond hair and I pretended to be white and blond and Aryan and 'O.K.'"[99] Morales equates the violence of the Nazis with US imperialism and white privilege. In this scene, the Jewish refugee who

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identified with Jews since her childhood, recalling how others bullied her and even threw rocks at her for spending time with Jewish friends and classmates. In her interview with Kelly Anderson, she states, "I was stoned as a Jew, not as a Puerto Rican" (Anderson 20).

[95] *Getting Home Alive* 18.

[96] *Getting Home Alive* 18.

[97] Briggs 2.

[98] As Nelson A. Denis describes in *War Against All Puerto Ricans: Revolution and Terror in America's Colony* (2015), in 1950, after more than fifty years of US military occupation of the island and colonial rule, the Nationalist Party of Puerto Rico led a violent rebellion against the US government, burning down government buildings, including post offices and police stations, and even sending men to assassinate President Truman. Rebels also engaged in gun battles with law enforcement officials in eight Puerto Rican towns. The US government responded by deploying thousands of troops and bombed two Puerto Rican towns, marking the first time the US government had bombed its own citizens.

[99] *Getting Home Alive* 21.

pretends to be white is allowed to be free, yet is forced to deny or suppress crucial aspects of herself. Similarly, migrants to the United States are often forced to suppress or deny crucial aspects of their identity. Here, Morales calls attention to the loss, sorrow, and sacrifice that comes with a migrant or person of color taking the side of the oppressor and abandoning one's people and culture. As the stormtrooper in her dream washes the chain-link fence around the department store where the Jews have been imprisoned, the speaker explains, "water streamed out of my eyes but nothing could wash me clean."[100] Morales highlights the guilt migrants suffer when racism and discrimination compel them to erase their accent and distance themselves from their native culture and language. Morales and Levins Morales use their identification with the Jews to create an alternate history and resist U.S. imperial violence.

Often the authors adopt multiple narrative positions within a single text. For example, in the poem "Getting Out Alive" Morales writes, "I wear a yellow star behind my heart / above my liver / I still hear Guernica burning / Yesterday I walked the dusty miles to a hungry reservation. / Today I staggered from Shatila bleeding. / I have changed my name / my religion / my family / my language / I have run away from the persecution that is all around me."[101] In consecutive lines, the narrative voice shifts from a World War II era Jewish perspective to a speaker who lived through the Spanish Civil War,[102] and then from a potentially Native American speaker to a survivor of the Sabra and Shatila massacre in Lebanon.[103] Here, borders between nations, ethnicities, and even decades are blurred as the narrative presence moves from one perspective to

[100] *Getting Home Alive* 21.
[101] *Getting Home Alive* 21.
[102] The bombing of Guernica was a Franco-sponsored German air force attack on the unarmed civilian town of Guernica, located in the Basque region of northern Spain. The attack, which was carried out on April 26, 1937, is considered one of the first air raids on a defenseless civilian population by a modern air force (Paul Preston, *The Destruction of Guernica).*
[103] The Sabra and Shatila massacre involved the killing of anywhere between 460-3500 civilians, mostly Palestinians and Lebanese Shiites, by the Kataeb militia, a right wing party allied with the Israeli Defense Forces, on September 18, 1982 (*Sabra and Shatila*, Bayan Nuwayhed al-Hout).

another. This combination of perspectives creates a sense of identification between migrants who have fled military and government-sponsored violence in multiple countries, connecting their sense of fear and loss, the violence they have suffered, and their desperation to find safety. The shifting narrative identity compels readers not only to discern the identity of the various narrative voices, but also to empathize with multiple perspectives, challenging them to break down constructed boundaries between genres and speakers and to allow for dialogue between multiple subject positions. Additionally, the fragmentation of the narrative voice parallels the loss of identity each of these migrants has experienced, while emphasizing their diverse and yet shared history of violence. By connecting these particular narrative positions, Morales associates imperial domination, militaristic violence, and racial and ethnic discrimination and hate in various national and cultural contexts.

The multiple narrative voices in the text also serve as a reflection of varied and diverse parts of Morales and Levins Morales's ethnic, racial, lingual, and cultural identities, allowing readers to appreciate how the various elements of their identity blend into the "wholeness" of a single self or a single text. As Stefanko explains, the technique of adopting multiple narrative positions is characteristic of Latin American migrant women writers, who often "question and reject the assumption that a unitary, synthesizing narrator is capable of telling the stories they have to disclose, instead opting for a narrative stance that includes multiple voicings."[104] Speaking from multiple narrative positions allows Morales and Levins Morales to further transgress and break down established boundaries between aspects of their own identity, including race and class, as well as between textual elements, including genre and narrative voice, allowing for instability and fluctuation in both dimensions. Furthermore, by avoiding the dominance of a single narrator, the authors avoid allowing readers' perceptions to be controlled

[104] Stefanko 51.

and limited by a single voice, and instead demonstrate the importance of including multiple perspectives. The multiple narrative positions in this text mirror the migrant's mobility and temporality, multiple facets of consciousness, and constantly shifting and transforming sense of self, which often parallels physical movement from place to place.[105]

The unique blend of genres in *Getting Home Alive* enhances the sense of transgression and fluctuation facilitated by the presence of multiple narrative voices. Featuring poetry, essays, journal entries, letters, and stories, this text exemplifies contradictions and tensions at the level of genre mixing. Even the visual presentation of the texts, with a mix of poetry in verse and traditional prose paragraphs, as well as less traditional pieces, including "The Other Heritage," which features a stream-of-consciousness narrative with no punctuation, suggests a mixture of fluidity and fusion, with an amalgamation of various forms. Like the quilt featured on the cover of the text, the variety of genres exemplifies the concept of hybridity within the text, demonstrating how diverse elements of identity can be joined to create a meaningful whole.[106] Additionally, identifying with multiple cultures, races, nationalities, and ethnicities, as well as including multiple narrative voices and genres, allows Morales and Levins Morales to connect with a diverse community of readers, enabling readers from various backgrounds to relate to their text.

In addition to including multiple narrative voices, the women share authorship of the text. As Denzin explains, by writing a "duo-ethnography," writers are able to "create a shared performance space potentially farmed around acts of activism and resistance…sharing identities,

[105] For further insight, see Carol Boyce-Davies's *Black Women: Writing and Identity: Migrations of the Subject*, as well my discussion of how physical movement from place to place generates changing conceptions of subjectivity and identity in *Getting Home Alive* and *Canícula* in the Conclusion to this dissertation on pages 225-226.
[106] Stefanko 53.

co-producing a critical consciousness, [and] imagining new politics of possibility."[107] *Getting Home Alive* constitutes a space where Morales and Levins Morales share thoughts and ideas with each other in a multi-voiced text that invites and compels readers to enter the dialogue. By speaking from multiple narrative perspectives, the authors are able to express anti-imperialist and environmentalist views more clearly, as well as creating new ways of expressing migrant identity and conceptualizing community.

Speaking Out Against U.S. Imperialism

Puerto Rico has remained under US control since 1898, when it was invaded and conquered by the United States during the Spanish-American War.[108] As a U.S. territory, Puerto Rico is subject to U.S. federal laws, including the draft. However, Puerto Ricans are not allowed to vote in presidential elections, and have no senators or representatives. Although they are permitted to elect a resident commissioner who sits with Congress, this commissioner has no vote.[109] As Laura Briggs asserts in *Reproducing Empire: Race, Sex, Science, & U.S. Imperialism in Puerto Rico*, in addition to being "a proof text for the benevolent mission of the United States overseas,"[110] Puerto Rico has often been "the site of profound denial and silence,"[111] particularly in regards to U.S. imperialism and expansionist tendencies and U.S. military testing, which exists alongside a prominent public narrative in which the United States functions as "a major anti-imperialist force in the world, the nation that insists upon the integrity of national boundaries and that is the protector of victimized populations."[112] Morales and Levins Morales subvert the narrative of the United States as benevolent and point out how U.S. interference has damaged the Puerto Rican economy, culture, and lifestyle.

[107] Denzin 27.
[108] Whalen and Vásquez-Hernández 13; Dietz 97.
[109] Daniels 321.
[110] Briggs 2.
[111] Briggs 2.
[112] Briggs 2.

The women speak to the violence perpetrated because of the greed of imperialist nations. In "Concept of Pollution," Morales speaks out against the current situation in the U.S. and European academy, where developing countries are treated as resources to be exploited, and where their populations are viewed as inferior subjects to be examined. She presents a global history of expansion and imperialism, "A soundless litany of death by exploration, of death by pacification, of death by manifest destiny, of death by pioneering and frontiering and private enterprising, of death by hard-working, god-fearing, farming and gold-rushing, of death by capitalist expansion in the sixteenth, seventeenth, eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries.[113] Here, Morales speaks to the damage colonialism and imperialism has inflicted on less-developed nations, as both their populations and their resources are destroyed and exploited. One example of U.S. interference and exploitation in Puerto Rico was Operation Bootstrap.[114] Supposedly designed to bolster the Puerto Rican economy,[115] Operation Bootstrap actually expanded North American economic influence over the island,[116] contributed to the widespread abandonment of traditional agriculture, and led to the need for the importation of food. While purportedly designed to benefit Puerto Ricans, it actually benefitted U.S. corporations, which

[113] *Getting Home Alive* 64.
[114] As Alex Maldonado explains in *Teodoro Moscoso and Puerto Rico's Operation Bootstrap,* in 1948 the US government instituted Operation Bootstrap, which was designed to facilitate Puerto Rico's transformation from an agricultural to an industrial economy. Exemptions from taxes and import duties, cheap labor, and reduced property rental rates were used as incentives to entice US manufacturers to build factories in Puerto Rico. As Puerto Ricans became a preferred source of low-wage labor, this U.S. policy resulted in the displacement of workers, the concentration of wealth among U.S. corporations, and widespread abandonment of agricultural practices and migration to cities. As Elizabeth Aranda explains, Operation Bootstrap demonstrated how "U.S. imperialism manifested itself not just politically and economically on the island; it also contributed to a massive displacement of the Puerto Rican population" (Aranda 16). However, by the 1960s, after many Puerto Ricans had given up traditional agricultural practices for factory work, these industries began to face growing competition from outside the United States, and severe unemployment became a widespread problem. Moreover, the decrease in agriculture on the island meant that Puerto Rico was forced to import most of its food. Meanwhile, Puerto Rican workers who had immigrated to the mainland faced comparable challenges; throughout the 1970s and 1980s, manufacturing and blue-collar jobs gradually disappeared as U.S. corporations relocated to areas with cheaper labor. Although opportunities for white-collar and skilled occupations continued to grow, Puerto Ricans often faced discrimination and lacked the education and skills to apply for these positions (Sánchez-Korrol 215).
[115] Sánchez-Korrol 214.
[116] Briggs 112.

enjoyed lucrative tax exemptions and benefits and an abundance of cheap labor, both for their factories on the island and on the mainland, as growing unemployment led to increased migration to mainland cities.[117] Operation Bootstrap is only one of many examples Morales refers to of the "death by capitalist expansion" and "private enterprising." U.S. corporate development and economic control of Puerto Rico led to the "death" of Puerto Rican culture, tradition, and agricultural self-sufficiency, as well as separating families and displacing a large segment of the population.

In "I'm On Nature's Side," Morales speaks to the violence governments use to control disadvantaged populations, comparing these populations to "pests" in the garden of empire: "We know we're pests for wanting to live our lives in peace and plenty. We're pests for not fitting into the grand plan of cornering markets and conquering peoples, increasing profitability and productivity, of sheltering taxes and fixing prices. And we've got to be made to fit in, we've got to be controlled."[118] Morales points out that people of color just want to live their lives in "peace" and thereby are at odds with capitalist governments and profit-driven corporate executives who are concerned only with their own success, even if it involves harming people or the environment. She continues, "To control them, gardeners and agricultural schools, farmers and multinationals spray poisons, distribute infected blankets, unleash predators and armies, demolish nesting sites and villages and neighborhoods. And we die. Many of us die."[119] Here, Morales includes herself, as a woman of color, as one of the "pests" whom imperialistic governments seek to control. She details the violence the government often uses to repress populations in developing countries, colonies, and exploited lands, including Puerto Rico. However, she continues, "But not all [of us die.] Some of us survive. Our survivors are stronger

[117] Sánchez-Korrol 213.
[118] *Getting Home Alive* 68.
[119] *Getting Home Alive* 68.

in some ways, more wily, more versatile. We protect ourselves. We fight back….until one day we will devastate their crops, bankrupt their agribusiness, destroy their armies, topple their governments. We will survive!"[120] With this triumphant statement, Morales demonstrates that people in oppressed populations will not give up, but will continue fighting back against capitalist oppression and attempts to profit through exploitation. "I'm On Nature's Side" not only highlights the destruction propagated by governments and corporations, but also illustrates and affirms the strength of citizens of developing countries and their capacity to unite and resist oppression.

The women also speak specifically about the damage U.S. imperialism has caused in Puerto Rico, describing the military bombings of Vieques, a small Puerto Rican island off the eastern coast. Although the island has beautiful beaches and valuable coral reefs, the United States Navy occupied Vieques from World War II through 2003, using it as a weapons testing ground, including tests for nuclear weapons.[121] For decades, constant military operations have threatened the safety of local fishermen and discouraged the development of agriculture and tourism,[122] undermining the peace and safety of residents.[123] In 1999, one of the Navy's bombing exercises killed a civilian. After his death, protestors staged the largest march[124] in Puerto Rican history, insisting that the Navy withdraw from Vieques. Many of the protestors were arrested and spent time in Federal detention centers.[125] Even after Bill Clinton and George W. Bush facilitated the closing of the U.S. military bases on Vieques, military debris remains, and approximately one

[120] *Getting Home Alive* 68-69.
[121] Briggs 10.
[122] Jimenez De Wagenheim 10.
[123] Pico 7.
[124] Many Puerto Ricans on the U.S. mainland also supported the "Peace for Vieques" movement (Pico 309).
[125] Pico 309.

third of the island is still off limits to residents.[126] Like Vieques, neighboring Puerto Rican island Culebra has also been used by the Navy for target practice.[127]

In "For Angel, For Vieques," Levins Morales refers to the case of Angel Rodríguez Cristóbal, a pro-independence activist who protested the military presence on Vieques. After being arrested for his involvement in the protests, he was sentenced to six months in a federal prison on the U.S. mainland. On November 11, 1979, two months into his six-month sentence, he was found dead in his prison cell. Although prison officials declared the death a suicide, his family requested an independent autopsy, which revealed that he had been beaten to death.[128] Levins Morales connects Angel's death with his refusal to submit to military control of the island: "Angel's face, bruised and beaten in that cell. The flies settling on the blood, and no hand brushing them off. You should have stayed where you belonged."[129] Here, Levins Morales undermines the image of the US government as "the protector of victimized populations"[130] and reveals the violence they will resort to in order to punish those who threaten their authority. Accordingly, she contrasts the incredible beauty of Vieques with the military violence it has experienced and connects these bombings to acts of violent U.S. imperialism in other nations:

> Look again. This is the landscape of war: the whitest beach, the greenest hill, earth pitted and scarred into a family likeness: the familiar, pock-marked face of Viet Nam, showing up here in our family—little sister, Isla Nena. Ships, jets, tanks, trucks, bombs and bombs and bombs. The noise cracks the walls of the houses. Even the sea dawn of the Caribbean is shell-blasted. This is an island the U.S. Navy wanted for target practice.[131]

Here, Levins Morales compares the island of Vieques to a person, using its nickname, "Isla Nena" (Little Girl Island). She contrasts images of island beauty and serenity, of pure white sand

[126] Pico 309.
[127] De Wagenheim 10.
[128] McCaffrey 90.
[129] *Getting Home Alive* 73.
[130] Briggs 2.
[131] *Getting Home Alive* 72.

and lush green jungle, with earth destroyed, "scarred," and "shell-blasted." The homes are cracked; the island is polluted, corrupted, and damaged. Levins Morales emphasizes how the serenity and tranquility of the island is shattered by bomb blasts, and compares the destruction of the island's environment and the violence committed against its residents to US military action in Vietnam. She describes how island residents whose ancestors have worked the land and fished on the sea for generations are now forbidden from entering a third of the island, blocked by signs which read "PRIVATE PROPERTY" and "NO TRESSPASSING," and deciphers the meaning behind these signs, which she interprets as "WE OWN THE SEA. WE OWN YOUR LIVES. THE DIFFERENCE IS, WE NEED THE SEA. For target practice."[132] This is the only place in the book where all capital letters are used, emphasizing the desperate situation and utter destruction the U.S. government is imposing on Vieques.[133]

In addition to depicting US colonial exploitation abroad, the women describe their lives on the US mainland as similarly subject to imperialistic oppression. In "Hace Tiempo," which translates loosely as "some time ago," Morales explains the feelings of fear she and her husband Dick shared while living as Communists in the United States in the 1950s. She recalls "the fear that we had no future, that Dick could be hauled off to jail any day for refusing to fight [in the Korean War], that either of us might be arrested and jailed or concentration-camped for being communist."[134] Resisting conceptions of the US as a "haven of freedom" or a benevolent presence in the world, Morales portrays the United States as a place where people lack freedom to express their views and to support alternate forms of government.

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[132] *Getting Home Alive* 73.
[133] In *Military Power and Popular Protest: The U.S. Navy in Vieques, Puerto Rico,* Katherine McCaffrey explains how cancer rates on the island have soared since the military occupation, leading residents to suspect a connection between the toxic materials used in the bombs, which contaminate the air, land, and water, and the sickness spreading among the residents of the island, many of whom subsist on fish from the island's waters (97).
[134] *Getting Home Alive* 29.

Even the photographs in *Getting Home Alive* provide examples of the women speaking back against and resisting U.S. imperial dominance. One example occurs in the photograph of Levins Morales on her second birthday. She is seated in the foreground of the photograph on a child-size chair, wearing a ruffled blouse and a pinafore decorated with hearts. On the wall behind her hangs a striped flag and a portrait. The caption next to the photo explains that the portrait is of Lenin and that it is the Puerto Rican flag hanging on the wall in the background, noting that "the flag was made in the 1940s…and displayed at a time when doing so could lead to arrest."[135] Here, a transnational context is important in identifying the significance of this flag. On June 10, 1948, Jesús T. Piñero, the island's first Puerto Rican governor, appointed by President Truman, signed the infamous "Ley de la Mordaza" (Gag Law). Law 53, as it was officially known, made it illegal to display the Puerto Rican flag, sing a patriotic song, talk about independence or to fight for the liberation of the island. It resembled the anti-communist Smith Law[136] passed in the United States.[137] Under the Gag Law, from 1948 through the mid-1950s it was a felony to display the Puerto Rican flag; the only flag permitted to be flown on the island was the flag of the United States. By including a photograph of Levins Morales in front of a forbidden symbol of Puerto Rican autonomy, the authors contest the position of Puerto Rico as "a political showcase for the prosperity and democracy promised by close alliance with the United States."[138]

In addition to resisting U.S. expansionism and imperialism on a national scale, the women speak specifically about the marginalization and discrimination they have experienced as

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[135] *Getting Home Alive* 107.
[136] The Smith Act, formally the Alien Registration Act of 1940, was a U.S. federal law passed in 1940 that made it a criminal offense to advocate the violent overthrow of the government or to organize or be a member of any group or society devoted to such advocacy. After World War II this statute was made the basis of a series of prosecutions against leaders of the Communist Party and the Socialist Workers Party (Schrecker 97-98).
[137] Ayala and Bernabe 160, 167; Acosta-Belén and Santiago 67.
[138] Briggs 2.

Latina women living on the mainland United States. As Latinos, Puerto Ricans were considered perpetual outsiders from mainstream U.S. society, regardless of their citizenship status, and viewed as "irreducibly 'foreign,' essentially 'un-American,' potentially 'enemies within,' and thereby denied even the most fundamental civil or human rights."[139] The problems of discrimination and racism that Puerto Rican immigrants to the US mainland faced were compounded by their poverty. According to US census data from 1987, at the time Morales and Levins Morales were writing, Puerto Ricans families were receiving the lowest median family income among all "Hispanic groups" in the United States and only half the median family income of US residents categorized as "not Hispanic."[140] Morales and Levins Morales reveal how, as residents of the mainland United States, Puerto Ricans were not only subject to poverty and racial discrimination, but also pressured to forfeit elements of their identity, including their use of the Spanish language and their cultural connections to Puerto Rico.

In "Immigrants," Levins Morales describes how her mother, compelled by mainland US teachers and school administrators, gave up her native language, Spanish, and "learned accentless English in record time, the sweet cadence of her mother's open-voweled words ironed out of her vocabulary, the edges flattened down, made crisp, the curls and flourishes removed."[141] Here, Levins Morales emphasizes that in the course of learning English, her mother is forced to sacrifice important components of her identity—her native language, important elements of her culture, and a crucial connection to her family and her past. Like Anzaldúa's statement that living in the borderlands means that "the mill with the razor sharp teeth / wants to shred off your olive-red skin / crush out the kernel, your heart / pound you pinch you roll you out

[139] De Genova and Ramos-Zayas 217.
[140] Daniels 323.
[141] *Getting Home Alive* 24.

/ smelling like white bread but dead,"[142] the mainland schools Morales attended force her to adopt "accentless English," to assimilate to mainstream culture, and to distance herself from her Puerto Rican ethnicity and heritage. Morales recalls, "I cried when I heard my voice on tape for the first time. My voice showed no signs of El Barrio, of the South Bronx. I had erased them."[143] Morales cries when she remembers all that she was forced to give up in order to integrate into the U.S. school system and realizes that by distancing herself from Spanish and gradually erasing her accent, she has lost a crucial part of herself.

Both Anzaldúa and Levins Morales equate the loss of native language and culture with force; Anzaldúa implies that white mainstream US culture and imperialist forces want to "shred," "crush," and "pound you pinch you roll you out" until you are "dead," while Levins Morales associates her mother's loss of language with a flattening, pressing, or squeezing, a loss of character and valuable aspects of her identity. Levins Morales compares her mother's loss of language to how she herself was forced to suppress her longing and enthusiasm for her birthplace, Puerto Rico, when she arrived in Chicago: "Learning fast not to talk about it, learning excruciatingly slowly how to dress, how to act, what to say, where to hide. The exuberance, the country-born freshness going quietly stale. Made flat. Made palatable. Made unthreatening. Not different, really. Merely 'exotic.'"[144] Due to the atmosphere of racism and discrimination, Levins Morales is compelled to fit in with her white classmates and to behave as they do, expected to discard her own cultural heritage and personal preferences and adopt theirs. Again, assimilation is equated with loss; she has to suppress her desire to share her memories and experiences, to mask certain elements of her identity, and to allow parts of herself to be flattened and

[142] *Getting Home Alive* 14.
[143] *Getting Home Alive* 19.
[144] *Getting Home Alive* 25.

diminished. By being perceived as "exotic," allowing her differences from her classmates to be perceived as superficial rather than inherent, she makes herself less threatening.

As Morales and Levins Morales acclimate to life in the United States, there is a profound sense of loss—loss of home, language, family, identity, cultural paradigms, and social norms. In their descriptions of their experiences in the United States, both women contest the conception of the US as a benevolent presence and call attention to the racism and discrimination they experienced and the way they were forced to erase or conceal crucial elements of their identity, including culture and language, in order to be accepted.

As Latinas/os, Puerto Ricans threatened the historically white identity of the United States, as outward expansion of the U.S. empire threatened to incorporate the foreign and dismantle the domestic sphere of the nation. As Amy Kaplan asserts in *The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of U.S. Culture*, "If the fantasy of American imperialism aspires to a borderless world where it finds its own reflection everywhere, then the fruition of this dream shatters the coherence of national identity, as the boundaries that distinguish it from the outside world promise to collapse."[145] Much of the racism and discrimination directed towards Puerto Ricans may have been in response to their being seen as a threat to the historically "white" identity of the United States when Spanish-speaking Latinos on a Caribbean island were granted U.S. citizenship. As Suzanne Bost explains in "Transgressing Borders: Puerto Rican and Latina *Mestizaje,*" despite their U.S. citizenship, Puerto Ricans "still lie on the margins of the United States, separated by distance, language, racial difference, and their different civil rights and duties."[146] Although Puerto Ricans are legally U.S. citizens, they are, as Morales and Levins Morales reveal, frequently discriminated against. As women of color, Morales and Levins

[145] Amy Kaplan 16.
[146] Bost 189.

Morales call attention to racism both in society and in the academy and fight for their voices to be heard.

Resisting Fragmentation of the Body

These women not only speak back against negative stereotypes of Puerto Ricans, but also contest being classified into narrow racial categories. Rather, as Morales and Levins Morales declare in "Ending Poem,"[147] they are creating something "new" forged from multiple racial and ethnic identifications. In "The Other Heritage," Levins Morales acknowledges "I am not African," yet she asserts "Africa is in me."[148] Here, Levins Morales is not claiming her cultural ethnicity as African, but is explaining that her African heritage is part of her identity. In "Child of Americas," she explains that the African element of herself is helping to redefine what it means to be American. She claims to have "no home" in Europe or Africa. Instead, she states, "I am a child of the Americas…I am a U.S. Puerto Rican Jew, a product of the ghettos of New York…I am Caribeña, island grown…I am of Latinoamerica, rooted in the history of my continent."[149] As Bost explains, Levins Morales does not claim a particular identity beyond "American," and this "American" includes the multiple races and nationalities of people who have immigrated to the Western hemisphere. Levins Morales is (accurately) using the term "America" to refer to North America, Central America, South America, and the Caribbean, rather than simply to refer to North America, as it is often used. Although her identity has various components, she does not see it as fragmented. She states, "I was born at the crossroads and I am whole."[150] Importantly, Levins Morales refuses to either privilege or erase any of the racial or ethnic components of her identity. In "Puertoricanness," Levins Morales exclaims that

[147] *Getting Home Alive* 213.
[148] *Getting Home Alive* 50.
[149] *Getting Home Alive* 50.
[150] *Getting Home Alive* 50.

she could not, "in the endless bartering of a woman with two countries, bring herself to trade one-half of her heart for the other."[151] Instead, she affirms her implicit wholeness. As the authors clarify in "Ending Poem," although they identify with multiple races, nationalities, and ethnicities, they are not fragmented, but whole.[152]

In her poem "Old Countries," Levins Morales explains the plethora of ethnicities and nationalities which have come to constitute "American," including the residents of Chicago, who are made up of "Northern Black Irish Polish Russian Hillbilly Puerto Rican Ojibwe."[153] Her lack of punctuation between these terms reinforces the notion that true "Americanness" is a blend; the different ethnic and racial heritages merge and become inseparable in the American identity. By including "Black" and "Ojibwe," Levins Morales undermines the distinctions between free and enslaved, between indigenous and immigrant, and between native and diasporic. Levins Morales clarifies that the United States is made up of people from multiple races and ethnicities; all are equally and legitimately "American." By including racially white heritages, including Russian, Polish, and Irish, she also emphasizes to white readers that they possess foreign, ethnic heritage as well. However, by including these white heritages in a list with "Ojibwe" and "Black," Levins Morales challenges and destabilizes European privilege, and reminds the reader that she, as a mix of races and ethnicities, is representative of many Americans who share a blend of ethnic and racial heritages.

However, both women also explain that it is only by masking their experiences and multiple identities as women of color that they are able to achieve professional success. As Rosario explains in "Concepts of Pollution," the academy expects them to distance themselves from concerns important to people of color. She states, "we write and publish and get promoted,

[151] *Getting Home Alive* 85.
[152] *Getting Home Alive* 213.
[153] *Getting Home Alive* 91.

give or receive prizes and grants, and we never mention pain or sorrow or anger or death."[154] She describes how the higher education system masks and denies the humanity of oppressed people groups. She explains how even the study of rape, violence, slavery, and the European exploitation of native peoples is grouped neatly under the label of "anthropology" and how academics are expected to maintain professional, emotional distance. She explains how she was expected to "be a scholar, to be an anthropologist. Not there to be a person, a woman. Not there to care that I was Puerto Rican, a child of Taino Indians, of Spaniards, of African slaves. Not there to question, to argue. Not there to identify. Not there to cry. Certainly not there to cry."[155] In pursuing academic success, Morales is expected to distance herself from her ethnic and racial identity, to look at human suffering as merely a topic for study, and to refuse to identify with the people of color she is studying who are dehumanized and exploited.

Yet, although they are viewed as outsiders in certain contexts because they are Puerto Rican Latinas, in other contexts, because Morales and Levins Morales are also U.S. citizens and academics, they are included as desirable and legitimate members of the United States population. As Laura Briggs explains, Puerto Ricans have long been subject to widespread racial discrimination and stereotyping in accordance with several discriminatory classifications, including "a culture of poverty," "the exotic, tropical prostitute (seductive but brimming with disease)," and "the impoverished, over-large family (produced by ignorance and brainwashing by the Catholic church)."[156] Both Morales and Levins Morales undermine stereotypical images of the Puerto Rican as a dark-skinned, uneducated peasant accustomed to farm labor on a coffee

[154] *Getting Home Alive* 65.
[155] *Getting Home Alive* 64.
[156] Briggs 4.

plantation.[157] Although both women spent years in a Puerto Rican mountainside hut on a former coffee plantation, they hold graduate degrees and speak multiple languages.

Levins Morales acknowledges her privilege in "Class Poem," yet promises to use her privilege to aid others and to fight against oppressive social structures. She explains, "I will not suffocate. / I will not hold back. / Yes, I had books and food and shelter and medicine / and I intend to survive."[158] Levins Morales is determined to use the resources, tools, and training she grew up with to help others. In her Introduction, Levins Morales explains the important life lessons she learned from her mother when she was young: "The first rule I remember learning was never to harm or deface a book. The second was never to cross a picket line."[159] With this statement, Levins Morales connects education with social empowerment; she is able to read and educate herself, and she has been taught to defend the rights of the working class. As Juanita Heredia explains in her discussion of this text, "because these Latina writers are situated in a special position as 'insiders' and 'outsiders,' both at home and abroad, they have been capable of experiencing firsthand and through memory moments of inclusion and exclusion in both Latin American and U.S. contexts, thereby gaining a special perspective on the politics of gender and race in transnational fashion."[160] Although the authors portray women of color as endangered, subject to racism, violence, ignorance, and discrimination, they also establish the importance of sharing their experiences and using their resources to combat oppression.

Translation and Interplay Between Languages

Like the other three authors discussed in this dissertation, Morales and Levins Morales demonstrate the interplay between multiple languages. The authors incorporate English, Spanish,

[157] Pico 274.
[158] *Getting Home Alive* 47.
[159] *Getting Home Alive* 7.
[160] Heredia 132.

and Yiddish into their text to demonstrate the blending of multiple cultures, providing a multi-cultural experience for the reader and expressing a crucial part of their identity. Their incorporation of multiple languages also demonstrates how language can either separate migrants from or connect them to their new environment, while also helping them to maintain ties to their ancestors, families, and homeland.

Morales incorporates Spanish to demonstrate how she remained an outsider in the rural mountain village where she and Dick moved in 1951. She is alone in the house all day, pregnant with Aurora, and Dick spends his days at the university. A neighbor girl knocks on the door and she responds in faltering Spanish "Si? Que quieres?" and then thinks "I sound so brusque. I don't know what to say, how to sound polite in Spanish. I recover a phrase. 'En que le puedo ayudar?'" She then second-guesses her more courteous rephrasing, thinking "Lord, now I sound formal, as if I were at a reception or something."[161] Here, Morales's lack of familiarity with various registers in Spanish adds to her sense of being an outsider in the community. She is unable to come up with an appropriate response to the young girl who has come to her door, bringing eggs in exchange for herbs from Morales's garden which can be used to help her sick mother. Although she is living in Puerto Rico, in the land her parents grew up in, Morales uses examples of her struggles with language to demonstrate how she remains an outsider in her Puerto Rican community. Morales follows her description of her own halting Spanish with the little girl's response, a flood of abbreviated and chopped off words that flow together: "Mami mandó esto' huevo' que la' gallina' e'tan poniendo y pide perdon pol no venir ella mi'ma que no se siente bien pue' tiene un frio en el e'tomago y que si puedo bu'cal yerba buena en la finca que hay un pedazo detra' de la casa"[162] The Spanish is not translated, forcing the non-Spanish

[161] *Getting Home Alive* 30.
[162] *Getting Home Alive* 30.

speaking reader to glean bits of information from Morales's subsequent train of thought, which is recorded in English. Moreover, although a Spanish speaker can make out the meaning of the words, some of them are abbreviated, "e'tan" instead of "estan," and "e'tomago" instead of "estomago," for example, helping even a Spanish-speaking reader to empathize with Morales's struggles in understanding colloquial Puerto Rican pronunciation. Morales thinks, "Yerba buena. Some sort of herb to cure something like a cold in the stomach? I think so. God knows what's really wrong with her."[163] Here, Morales not only reveals her lack of familiarity with the local names for ailments and for plants ("yerba buena," a colloquial Spanish term for mint, translates literally as "the good herb"), but also demonstrates her lack of faith in the locals' ability to diagnose and treat illness. Although Morales is ethnically Puerto Rican and grew up surrounded by her family's stories of Puerto Rico, in this scene she is divided from her female neighbors, separated not only by language, but also by cultural expectations: by judgments of how illness should be diagnosed and treated and by her unfamiliarity with Puerto Rican social norms, including knowledge of which herbs are used for which purposes and the exchange of goods between neighbors.

In "Kitchens," Levins Morales uses Spanish to demonstrate the blending of Puerto Rican and mainland American cultures in her own kitchen in California. As she cooks black beans and rice, she imagines the generations of women who have fed their families through this domestic ritual for hundreds of years.

> It's the dance of the cocinera: to step outside
> fetch the bucket of water, turn.
> all muscular grace and striving,
> pour the water, light dancing in the pot,
> and set the pail down on the blackened wood.
> The blue flame glitters in its dark corner,
> and coffee steams in the small white pan.

[163] *Getting Home Alive* 30.

Gnarled fingers, modando ajo,
picando cebolla, cortando pan,
colando café,
stirring the rice with a big long spoon
filling ten bellies
out of one soot-black pot.[164]

Here, no translation is provided; instead, the use of Spanish helps the image of the Puerto Rican cocinera, or cook, to come alive. Her cooking is presented not as domestic drudgery, but as an art form, as she turns with "muscular grace" and the light and flames "dance" and "glitter." Her tasks: peeling garlic, chopping onions, cutting bread, and filtering coffee, are listed in Spanish, adding cultural integrity to the women's actions and emphasizing their significance in Puerto Rican society. The use of Spanish and English in this poem demonstrates Levins Morales's admiration for and connection to both Puerto Rican and mainland US cultures, and provides a vivid example of her bi-cultural legacy.[165]

In "Getting Out Alive," Morales integrates Spanish in her description of the Puerto Rican section of the Bronx she grew up in, which she refers to as "El Barrio," highlighting the beauty of Puerto Rican culture and demonstrating that migration does not necessarily equal assimilation. She describes "low houses teeming with people, the streets full of women walking arm in arm, of families standing in front of the candy store, girls playing double dutch or bouncing a ball beneath their swinging legs, boys and girls running in and out of the fire hydrant's barreling waters."[166] Her description invokes the senses as she describes "the smell of ripe plátano frying."[167] She directly addresses readers, asking, "Do you see it? Smell it?" and commanding "Listen! / The streets full of life and sound, singing shouting greeting," before launching into a

[164] *Getting Home Alive* 38.
[165] For a detailed discussion of how Morales and Levins Morales choose to alternately embrace and reject particular US mainland and Puerto Rican cultural practices and norms, as well as an insightful discussion of femininity and the concept of home in the text, see Fatima Mujcinovic's "Hybrid Latina Identities: Critical Positioning In-Between Two Cultures."
[166] *Getting Home Alive* 19.
[167] *Getting Home Alive* 20.

sequence of Spanish phrases one might overhear in a Puerto Rican barrio: "¿Que tal? ¿Y como estás, chica?" "¡Tita! ¡Ven acá enseguida! ¡Te estoy llamando hace media hora!" "¡Fea, fea, tu eres fea!...." With these phrases ("What's up? And how are you, girl?" "Auntie! Come here immediately! I've been calling you for a half an hour!" "Ugly, ugly, you are ugly!") and others following, Morales draws the reader into the sights, sounds, and smells of the Puerto Rican barrio. By integrating Spanish into the text, she allows the reader to experience "the high rapid fire of Puerto Rican speech with the softness of dropped syllables and consonants, round and soft and familiar. The laughing: high loud laughter out of wide open mouths."[168] Here, Morales helps readers to appreciate and become familiar with El Barrio, presenting it not as threatening, but as friendly, with children playing, good-humored laughter, and women walking "arm-in-arm."[169] By blending multiple languages in their text, Morales and Levins Morales are able to enact an integral part of their own multicultural, multilingual identity and allow readers to share in this experience. They help readers to discern the value of speaking multiple languages and demonstrate the valuable connections to one's community and ancestry that language provides.

Women's Empowerment

Although Morales and Levins Morales expose oppression and violence against women, they also explore possibilities for female solidarity and resistance against patriarchal oppression. Jamil Khader argues that the women in this text "remain alienated and estranged not only from their metropolitan homes, as a result of colonization and racism, but also from their originary Caribbean homes as a result of nationalist ideologies, patriarchal oppression, poverty, and other personal traumatic experiences."[170] However, I argue that *Getting Home Alive* reveals not only multiple sites of oppression for women, but also opportunities for transformation, resistance, and

[168] *Getting Home Alive* 19.
[169] *Getting Home Alive* 19.
[170] Khader 63.

liberation. Despite the trauma they have suffered and their repeated migrations, I assert that women in this text forge a sense of home through relationships with other women and through domestic rituals that link them to generations of women who have performed the same rituals for centuries. Rather than remaining "alienated and estranged," these women are thriving in a self-made environment of creativity and personal growth.

In "Kitchens," Levins Morales describes finding connection to generations of women while cooking in her kitchen in California. Although her kitchen is modernized, full of "bottled spring water and yogurt in plastic pints," as she lifts the lid on a simmering pot of black beans and rice, she marvels:

> My kitchen fills with the hands of women who came before me, washing rice, washing beans, picking through them so deftly…Standing here, I see the smooth red and brown and white and speckled beans sliding through their fingers into bowls of water…From the corner of my eye, I see the knife blade flashing, reducing mounds of onions, garlic, cilantro, and green peppers into sofrito to be fired up and stored, and best of all is the pound and circular grind of the pilón: *pound, pound, thump, grind, pound, pound, thump grind.*"[171]

The sound effects and detailed explanation of the way Puerto Rican women would traditionally cook black beans, rice, and sofrito make it come alive for the reader. Although Levins Morales is thousands of miles from her Puerto Rican childhood home, through the process of cooking traditional Puerto Rican black beans and rice, she becomes connected to generations of Puerto Rican women and is able to forge a new sense of home in California. Cooking traditional Puerto Rican dishes provides Levins Morales with a tangible connection to the women who came before her, and helps her to situate herself in a legacy of domestic ritual, culinary skill, and of providing for self and family. She continues, "It's a magic, a power, a ritual of love and work that rises up in my kitchen, thousands of miles from those women in cotton dresses who twenty years ago taught the rules of its observance to me, the apprentice, the novice,

[171] *Getting Home Alive* 37.

the girl-child: 'Don't go out without wrapping your head, child; you've been roasting coffee, y te va' a pa'mar'" [and] 'This much coffee in the colador, girl, or you'll be serving brown water."[172] These neighborhood women and older female relatives not only taught Levins Morales how to make a proper cup of coffee, but passed down a legacy of cuisine, of domestic labor, and of cultural tradition. The author's use of Spanish helps the women's voices to resonate through generations, through Levins Morales's California kitchen, recalling and preserving memories of their domestic expertise.

In Morales's "Dinner Party," the speaker describes a presumably upper-class, white dinner party at which women of color are cooking the food, and explains, "I didn't go [into the dining room.] My folks didn't either, not my womenfolks. They don't go to things like that, weren't invited, wouldn't know what to say or do, how to eat. Besides, the food is boring."[173] Instead, the women of color choose to remain in the kitchen, where "the air is rich with smells and sounds."[174] While the dinner in the dining room is "boring," the dinner the women hold in the kitchen is full of color and conversation, as each woman "wears her colors for feasting: red, orange, green, turquoise, blue, yellow, gold."[175] These women have created everything they are using to eat; they've woven the tablecloth, carved and painted the plates, shelled, chopped, cleaned, and cooked the food. While women of color have historically been stereotyped as being confined to servant roles in a "culture of poverty,"[176] in this poem they are skilled artists, rich in culture and creating life and sustenance. Importantly, food in this poem, as in "Kitchens," serves as a crucial means of the transmission of culture across generations. The speaker states that the women honor their female ancestors "because they have kept it all going, all the civilizations

[172] *Getting Home Alive* 38.
[173] *Getting Home Alive* 51.
[174] *Getting Home Alive* 51.
[175] *Getting Home Alive* 51.
[176] Briggs 4.

erected on their backs, all the dinner parties given with their labor. And they gave us life, kept us going, brought us to where we are."[177] This poem demonstrates Suzanne Bost's assertion that the kitchen serves as "a traditionally feminine space—the 'womb' of a feminine culture based on story-telling, female control, and domesticity."[178] The women in this poem are empowered, resisting classification as servants while showcasing their creativity and honoring their ancestors. While cooking and celebrating their traditional food, these women build solidarity, share their culture, and express their identity.

One of the best examples of female strength and solidarity in the text stems from the unique relationship and co-authorship of Morales and Levins Morales. In the Introduction, Morales explains the collaborative writing process: "This book began in long budget-breaking telephone calls stretched across the width of this country, in 'listen to what I've just written'; in 'did you hear about this book, this song, this poem, this event?'"[179] The women's individual contributions weave together into a unique, multi-generational, call-and-response format that allows the reader to appreciate how their perspectives both diverge and overlap, as well as learning from two Puerto Rican women who grew up in different places and at distinct historical moments. Morales describes how the strength of their mother-daughter relationship transcends both the miles between them and their occasional arguments and conflicts. They write collaboratively "through the good times and the bad, the fights and the making up, the long sullen silences and the happy chatter cluttering the phone line strung between us like a 3000 mile umbilical cord from navel to navel, mine to hers, hers to mine, each of us mother and daughter by turns, feeding each other the substance of our dreams."[180] Despite the geographic distance

[177] *Getting Home Alive* 51-52.
[178] Bost 200-201.
[179] *Getting Home Alive* 5.
[180] *Getting Home Alive* 5.

between them and their differences, these women remain connected. Morales and Levins Morales's relationship with each other mirrors their position of being influenced by and split between multiple homelands and cultures. Even the process of brainstorming and writing is tied to geography; just as migrant identity often stretches in tension between multiple homes and communities, the women's relationship stretches and overcomes geographic and generational lines.[181]

Levins Morales explains how their collaborative work results in both mutual education and empowerment: "We are teachers to each other…we love the power of our own and each other's lives…we are able to see beyond the mother-daughter knot to where the bond is."[182] Here, Levins Morales defines the "bond" between she and her mother as more than a genetic, physiological connection. She describes it as constituting something deeper: a connection between women of color and a connection between those fighting against dominant social ideologies. She explains how, at a feminist meeting, "We fight like hell for each other in the face of ageism and adultism because we are a little too young and old respectively."[183] Levins Morales describes their collaboration and defense of one another as "joining forces," a combining of effort and ability, a utilization of this growing reservoir of inner "power"[184] they are discovering. Although Morales and Levins Morales reveal instances of oppression and violence against women in this text, they also explore possibilities for women's creativity, resistance, and power. *Getting Home Alive* both advocates and demonstrates solidarity between women across generations.

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[181] For a discussion of the distinction between the collaboration of Morales and Levins Morales and that of Le Ly Hayslip and Jay Wurts, see page 173 in this dissertation.
[182] *Getting Home Alive* 8.
[183] *Getting Home Alive* 8.
[184] *Getting Home Alive* 8.

Conclusion

Getting Home Alive integrates multiple diasporas and experiences of migration, disrupting classically American stories of progress and upward mobility, and constituting instead a narrative of constant, non-linear, back and forth movement.[185] Although Morales and Levins Morales explore diverse facets of their ethnic, racial, cultural, and lingual identities, they simultaneously forge a new wholeness, a new definition of "home" as a space between cultures and social systems, a space in which they are free to embrace all aspects of themselves without conflict. As Martha Cutter explains, "there is a trope of translation specific to ethnic American literature that crosses boundaries of diverse ethnic identities and therefore may be considered 'transethnic.' In this trope a new mode of voice, language, or subjectivity may be formulated that meshes—but also exceeds—prior subjectivities or languages.[186] By creating a new identity, one that supersedes racial and ethnic classifications, Morales and Levins Morales reveal these divisions as social constructions. Moreover, they are able to forge a sense of wholeness—not in spite of, but because of—their multiple and diverse identifications. Getting home "alive" in this text signifies creating a new space in which everyone is free to be whole, to shed the fragmentation society imposes through arbitrary labels and divisions and to embrace and celebrate the varied cultural, lingual, and racial aspects of their identities.

Morales and Levins Morales use their unique perspective to destabilize dominant, institutionalized conventions of nationhood and citizenship. This text, in which hybridity becomes a platform for resistance and transformation, aptly demonstrates Anzaldúa's declaration that "to survive the borderlands" means one must live "sin fronteras." By enacting resistance from a variety of subject positions, the authors are able to share pieces of their life stories while

[185] Wadman 227.
[186] Cutter 3.

also creating an alternate history of Puerto Rico, one that reveals the violence and imperial domination of the US government. Morales and Levins Morales not only encourage the dismantling of arbitrary boundaries between aspects of one's own identity, but also the eradication of US imperial rule over Puerto Rico. By revealing and resisting social systems of oppression, including racism, white privilege, and imperialism, Morales and Levins Morales introduce possibilities for revolution, transformation, and renewal.

Chapter Three: "To take this tragedy and apply it to peaceful ends"[1]

When Heaven and Earth Changed Places (1989) by Vietnamese author Le Ly Hayslip

> "Vietnam in the American consciousness is a confluence of images of conflict; where Vietnamese appear they are backdrop to displays of US heroism" (Helena Grice, 941).

> For my first twelve years of life, I was a peasant girl in Ky La, now called Xa Hoa Qui, a small village near Danang in Central Vietnam. My father taught me to love god, my family, our traditions, and the people we could not see: our ancestors. He taught me that to sacrifice one's self for freedom—like our ancient kings who fought bravely against invaders; or in the manner of our women warriors, including Miss Trung Nhi Trung Trac[2] who drowned herself rather than give in to foreign conquerors—was a very high honor. From my love of my ancestors and my native soil, he said, I must never retreat. From my mother I learned humility and the strength of virtue. I learned it was no disgrace to work like an animal on our farm, provided I did not complain. 'Would you be less than our ox,' she asked, 'who works to feed us without grumbling?' She also taught me, when I began to notice village boys, that there is no love beyond faithful love, and that in my love for my future husband, my ancestors, and my native soil, I must always remain steadfast. For my next three years of life, I loved, labored, and fought steadfastly for the Viet Cong against American and South Vietnamese soldiers.
> (*When Heaven and Earth Changed Places* ix).

In her narrative, *When Heaven and Earth Changed Places* (1989), Vietnamese author Phung Thi Le Ly Hayslip provides an account of the war from the perspective of a Vietcong sympathizer.[3] In the second epigraph, she justifies her involvement with the Vietcong, explaining how her decision to ally with the Vietcong was tied to her love of "god," "family," "traditions," and "ancestors." In contrast to the first epigraph, in which Helena Grice explains how the Vietnamese appear in the American consciousness only as a "backdrop to displays of US heroism," Hayslip presents her position as a Vietcong sympathizer as an equally "heroic" defense of her native country, comparing herself to "ancient kings who fought bravely against

[1] Granberry 1.
[2] According to *A History of Chinese Civilization* by Jaques Gernet, Tru'ng Thac and Tru'ng Nhi were sisters who led a rebellion against the Han Dynasty invasion of Vietnam in 40 AD (126). Legend holds that they held off the Han forces for three years, and committed suicide in 43 AD when their land was captured.
[3] Although Hayslip aided the Vietcong, including spying on enemy soldiers and alerting her division of enemy troop movements, it is important to note that she was an adolescent civilian who sympathized with and helped the Vietcong, rather than an active soldier and fighter for the National Liberation Front. Hayslip's involvement with the Vietcong may be contrasted with that of Truong Nhu Tang, a founding member of the Vietcong who later became the Vietcong's Minister of Justice. Tang is the author of *Vietcong Memoir: An Inside Account of the Vietnam War and its Aftermath* (1986).

invaders" and "women warriors" who chose death over submission to "foreign conquerors." Hayslip interrupts the US conception of Vietnam as dominated by "images of conflict" by emphasizing the Vietnamese people's family values, including hard work, "humility and the strength of virtue," and "faithful love." Through her narrative, Hayslip offsets US depictions of the Vietcong and Vietnamese as faceless enemies[4] by offering testimony from the perspective of a Vietnamese villager and presenting her alliance with the Vietcong as a fulfillment of family and patriotic values.

Hayslip's text demonstrates her determination to provide an alternate perspective on the war.[5] At the time in which Hayslip was writing, Vietnam largely remained in the American popular consciousness as "a confluence of images of conflict and destruction."[6] The Vietnamese themselves were frequently absent from US depictions of the Vietnam War, and, where they appeared at all, they merely constituted a "backdrop to displays of US military heroism and sacrifice: as cowering peasants in the rice fields, passive victims, prostitutes, traitors conniving with the enemy, cruel torturers, effeminate cowards, or the nameless mass of Viet Cong guerrillas lurking in the jungle."[7] By offering a Vietnamese perspective on the war, both from the viewpoint of an innocent child living in a war-torn country and the viewpoint of a teenage sympathizer forcibly recruited by the Vietcong, Hayslip is able to contest and challenge dominant US-based narratives. She details the Vietcong's motivation and perspective, the perspective of her own local community, and aspects of everyday life, culture, family dynamics, Vietcong rhetoric, and national history which will help the US reader to consider the perspective

[4] Grace 944.
[5] In her second book, *Child of War, Woman of Peace,* Hayslip explains her motivation for writing *When Heaven and Earth Changed Places*: "All the other books about Vietnam have been written by generals or soldiers or politicians or scholars—nobody has told Americans what the war was like for ordinary people, villagers and farmers. That will be my job" (283).
[6] Grace 944.
[7] Grace 944.

of the Vietcong sympathizers. Hayslip brings the Vietnamese people to the forefront, depicting them as individuals with complex situations and struggles, rather than as a homogenous backdrop for US heroics. She also uses explanations of her family's fear, ignorance, and pervasive Vietcong propaganda to explain why she allied with the Vietcong.

In telling her life story, Hayslip resists victimization, demonstrating her ingenuity, strength, and ability to survive. At the same time, she details the suffering of the Vietnamese people and describes the horrors inflicted on the Vietnamese people by the US-backed South Vietnamese military. Hayslip's narrative can be considered an example of testimonial literature; she serves as a first-hand witness to the atrocities of war and adds to her credibility by writing with US military veteran Jay Wurts. By helping US readers to realize their responsibility for the Vietnam War and the country's resulting poverty and crisis, Hayslip combats racism and hostility while compelling her readers to offer financial aid. Accordingly, at the end of the book Hayslip encourages readers to donate to her humanitarian organizations, the East Meets West Foundation[8] and the Global Village Foundation,[9] which are devoted to building medical clinics, helping local Vietnamese artisans to import and sell their products in the United States, and assisting the Vietnamese people financially as they recover from the war.[10]

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[8] Hayslip founded the East Meets West Foundation in 1987, declaring that its mission is to "heal the wounds of war" in Vietnam. This organization facilitated the building of several clinics in rural Vietnam to provide health care "for the homeless and rural poor" (367). The clinics are staffed by volunteer health professionals, including physicians and dentists, and run with the help of US charitable and religious organizations. Hayslip notes that her foundation is "making a special effort" to recruit Vietnam veterans, including former military nurses and medical professionals, to volunteer in these clinics.

[9] Hayslip explains the mission of the Global Village Foundation as "to promote the culture, arts, and vocational development of Vietnamese villagers while preserving their local traditions and national heritage" (372). She explains that this organization has been able to establish the Traditional Cultural Center in Ky La, where elderly Vietnamese receive wages for training young people in traditional arts and crafts. She explains that these craft products are then imported to the U.S., where they are sold to provide "much needed income for local workers," while also helping to "break the cycle of poverty, illiteracy, and hopelessness" (372) that is part of the legacy of the war. She provides information about both organizations, including an address where potential donors can send their donations, in the Afterword.

[10] The East Meets West Foundation was renamed "Thrive Networks" in 2014, and has received multiple US government grants and a grant from the Gates foundation. The organization is currently providing health and

Like the other narratives examined in this dissertation, Hayslip's text demonstrates how immigrants use life writing to contest dominant, "official" US histories and narratives and connect with their audience. Hayslip, like Kuo, Morales, Levins Morales, and Cantú, uses life writing in a purposeful way to tell her story, enacting rhetorical strategies of persuasion and cultural comparison. In this chapter, I will examine the way Hayslip uses life writing to vindicate herself from being viewed by the US public as a Vietcong enemy, to win her audience's trust, and to counter racism and hostility towards the Vietnamese. By humanizing the Vietnamese villagers and making them relatable to a US audience, Hayslip is able to both critique United States involvement in the Vietnam War and foster peace between the two nations.

Hayslip provides a largely chronological narrative of her childhood as the youngest of six children, describing her peasant family's hard work in the fields, the French occupation, how her family's home and rice paddies are repeatedly destroyed by fighting, how she is forcibly recruited by the Vietcong at age twelve, her advance through the ranks, and how at fifteen she becomes a public Vietcong hero after warning her platoon of an invasion. Fellow villagers and Vietcong fighters write songs in her honor, making her a target for the U.S.-backed South Vietnamese ARVN (Army of the Republic of Vietnam)[11] soldiers. She is arrested and tortured by Republican soldiers and then raped by Vietcong soldiers upon her release (when they assumed she had offered her captors information in order to avoid being killed). She flees to Saigon and secures a job as a housekeeper for a wealthy Vietnamese couple; eventually, she begins an affair with her boss, Anh, and conceives her first child, Jimmy. When his wife discovers their affair and her pregnancy, she kicks Hayslip out of the house. Hayslip recalls how she then moves in

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humanitarian services in nine countries in Asia and Africa. Details about the organization's projects and history can be found at http://thrivenetworks.org/about-us/history/.

[11] To reflect Hayslip's language in *When Heaven and Earth Changed Places,* I will refer to the South Vietnamese ARVN soldiers as Republicans (xiii).

with her older sister, Lan, who works as a hospitality girl at a local bar, serving drinks to US soldiers. After several brief, desperate, and disastrous relationships with some of these soldiers, many of which were driven by her desire to secure connections to escape the dangers of war and bring her infant son to the United States, Hayslip begins a relationship with Ed, a much older US military contractor, with whom she has her second son, Tommy. He eventually brings her to the United States in 1970 at the age of twenty. However, their nearly forty-year age difference makes life together difficult, and the couple soon divorces. Hayslip then marries Dennis Hayslip, with whom she has her third son, Alan. Dennis Hayslip harbors deep suspicions towards the Vietnamese, and the couple fight often and eventually separate. After their divorce, Hayslip concentrates on raising her three sons and becoming economically independent, managing several rental properties and eventually opening her own restaurant, thereby achieving relative prosperity. In 1986, she decides to return to Vietnam to visit her family and see the state of her country. Her narrative alternates between telling the story of her adolescence, when she was fighting for the Vietcong in her village, and telling the story of her journey back to Vietnam to visit her family as an adult. Although Hayslip includes many episodes from her life, including her relationships and interactions with US soldiers, her attempts to survive working as a vendor and a housekeeper, and details of her family relationships with her parents and siblings, for the purposes of this chapter I will focus on particular elements of her narrative, including her accounts of her experiences working with the Vietcong.

Ky La, the village now called Xa Hoa Qui where Hayslip spent her childhood, is located just outside the coastal city of Danang, where, in 1965, some of the first US military battalions came ashore.[12] North Vietnamese forces had been engaged against Saigon government forces

[12] Karnow 27.

there for months before the US soldiers arrived.[13] The US military built an airfield in Danang, and the CIA and Navy Seals established camps nearby which were designed to train South Vietnamese US allies.[14] However, the location was not secure, and an estimated 6000 Vietcong soldiers operated in the vicinity. Danang remained a site of conflict and violence throughout the war,[15] as Hayslip testifies in her narrative.

Hayslip's narrative is filled with loss and longing for home. Throughout the text, Hayslip loses multiple family members to the conflict. Since her older sister Ba is fighting against the Vietcong, whom her own family generally supports, Hayslip's parents disown Ba, who is forced to then marry a Republican policeman for protection. Hayslip's oldest brother, Bon Nghe, leaves to join Ho Chi Minh in the North, and her second brother, Sau Ban, is killed in war. Her father despairs and commits suicide by swallowing acid. Her relationship with her mother is damaged when she is raped, and she temporarily loses all hope of marrying or having children, feeling that she is now contaminated and not worthy of a husband or her family's respect. Hayslip also loses crucial connections to her community and her own identity when she escapes war-torn Vietnam and immigrates to the United States with Ed. Partly because the country is still plagued by war, and partly because her family feels that she is committing an act of betrayal by leaving, communication is difficult, and her connections to her family, her village, and her nation are temporarily severed.[16]

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[13] Karnow 346-347.
[14] Karnow 378-380.
[15] Karnow 431.
[16] It is important to note that Hayslip escaped from Vietnam in 1970 in the midst of the war, making her account distinct from those of the refugees who fled Vietnam, largely in boats, after 1975.[16] Additionally, she escaped under the protection of her first husband, Ed Munro, a US citizen. Although Hayslip, like many of the refugees who later fled Vietnam, came from a peasant farming background, she was able to leave Vietnam before the implementation of the Communist re-education camps and did not experience the suffering of the post-1975 refugees, making her experience distinct.

Critics[17] tend to agree that one of Hayslip's primary goals was to present a positive image of the Vietnamese and create empathy for them. Maureen Fielding states, "Hayslip's work has three goals: to give voice to the Vietnamese who suffered, help Americans to identify with and have compassion for them, and ultimately nourish her readers."[18] As Leslie Bow explains, Hayslip "promises a glimpse into what remained opaque and incomprehensible to both a television viewing audience and the soldier in the field—the heart of 'our enemy.'"[19] I agree with Fielding and Bow that Hayslip intended her text to help US readers to see the Vietnamese as individuals and to encourage readers to alleviate the suffering of the Vietnamese people caused by the war.

However, some critics felt that Hayslip's focus on the personal negated the validity of her account of the war. For example, in a 1989 review, Lynne Bundesen criticizes Hayslip for a lack of historical context and specificity; she states that "the endless wars and invasions become merely the backdrop of [Hayslip's] personal life."[20] Similarly, other reviewers criticized Hayslip for prioritizing her personal story while glossing over enduring social and racial inequalities. In his article "Just Memory: War and the Ethics of Remembrance," literary scholar and Pulitzer Prize-winning novelist Viet Thanh Nguyen calls Hayslip's book "a wonderful memoir of her war-scarred life in Vietnam and America…unflinching about addressing the cruelties committed

[17] In 1989, when Le Ly Hayslip first published *When Heaven and Earth Changed Places,* Asian American authors were rapidly gaining popularity. As Edward Iwata explains in a 1989 article, "For the first time, a growing number of Asian American writers are gaining a wide mainstream audience. They're earning dazzling commercial success and high marks from tough critics and scholars. A new *literari* is taking shape" (2). Although the field of Asian American literature was growing, inspired by authors including Amy Tan and Maxine Hong Kingston (Iwata 1), Hayslip's texts received comparatively little critical attention. As Rebecca Stephens explains, "Hayslip's writing has been virtually ignored by the academy of literary critics. Unlike other contemporary US-based women immigrant writers, such as Bharati Mukherjee and Jamaica Kincaid, whose works have prompted a large number of critical examinations, Hayslip's autobiographies have been reviewed almost exclusively in popular magazines, such as *People Weekly* (Stephens 661). Although several periodical sources published reviews of Hayslip's work, there are comparatively few critical articles focused primarily on her texts.
[18] Fielding 88.
[19] Bow 115.
[20] Bundesen 14.

by both Americans and Vietnamese" yet notes that "part of the popularity of the book came from her forgiving Americans for any guilty feelings they might have, which her readers may have mistaken as forgiveness from a representative of all the Vietnamese people.[21] Nguyen continues, "In her case, an Asian American literary text fulfilled a double function: to tell the story of a devastated people, but also to reconcile the pains of the past between victims and victimizers. This reconciliation becomes problematic and premature when the historical conditions that produced such pain have not themselves been resolved, including American global domination and the inequitable place of minorities within the US."[22] I agree with Nguyen that Hayslip's main goal in her text is to foster peace and reconciliation, but I contend that she does not obscure or ignore enduring social problems, including racism and disparities in the United States. Rather, I assert that part of Hayslip's mission is to make these problems visible by means of her personal account, and to encourage readers to acknowledge their own prejudice and racism and seek to address and correct it.

Winning the Trust of a US Audience

Hayslip uses life writing to win her audience's trust and to counter racism and hostility towards the Vietnamese, vindicating herself from blame for fighting with the Vietcong and establishing herself as a respectable narrator and knowledgeable guide for the Western reader. By humanizing the Vietnamese and making them relatable to a US audience, Hayslip fosters empathy and encourages her readers to give money to help the Vietnamese who are in poverty. However, she simultaneously presents herself as a patriotic Vietnamese woman who critiques Western interference in Vietnam.

[21] Nguyen 147-148.
[22] Nguyen 148.

Hayslip portrays herself positively and highlights her admirable characteristics. In the selection quoted at the beginning of this chapter, Hayslip describes the virtues she learned from her parents, explaining, "My father taught me to love god, my family, our traditions, and the people we could not see: our ancestors. He taught me that to sacrifice one's self for freedom…was a very high honor."[23] Hayslip demonstrates that she has been taught to value her family, God, and her nation—values US readers could relate to—since she was a child. She continues, "From my mother I learned humility and the strength of virtue…that there is no love beyond faithful love, and that in my love for my future husband, my ancestors, and my native soil, I must always remain steadfast."[24] By recalling the wisdom and valuable lessons she learned from her parents, Hayslip evinces their influence on her life.

Moreover, Hayslip specifies that she learned "virtue," "faithful love," and how to behave properly towards both the village boys and her future husband from her mother. Hayslip demonstrates that by fighting for the Vietcong she is following and fulfilling her mother's wishes and the conceptions of female propriety she has been taught, rather than negating them.[25] By emphasizing the "virtue," morality, and family values of Vietnamese women, including marital faithfulness and appropriate behavior towards suitors, Hayslip demonstrates that Vietnamese conceptions of ideal womanhood correspond with Western conceptions of femininity. Hayslip's emphasis on her own and her mother's virtue counters pervasive negative stereotypes of Asian femininity and women of color.[26]

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[23] *When Heaven and Earth Changed Places* ix.
[24] *When Heaven and Earth Changed Places* ix.
[25] In *Gender and Warfare in the 20th Century,* Angela K. Smith explains of women who have engaged in conflict, "For women it is different. To participate in war, on many levels, they need to break traditional codes of femininity. Even as victims and casualties they trespass into a male arena" (24). Hayslip clarifies that her loyalty and service to the Vietcong fulfilled, rather than contradicted, the way her mother taught her that an honorable Vietnamese woman was supposed to behave.
[26] Hayslip re-conceptualizes traditional representations of war as the domain of men, refocusing the story of the Vietnam War away from male combatants' experiences and narratives, while still emphasizing the respectable

Hayslip explains that it was her dedication to protecting her family, preserving her freedom, and defending the land of her ancestors that drove her to spend three years fighting for the Vietcong. By attempting to "sacrifice one's self for freedom," and defend her family's small farm and village from "foreign conquerors," Hayslip shows that she is not enacting hatred towards Westerners, but rather pursuing a "very high honor." She compares herself to Tru'ng Thac and Tru'ng Nhi, national heroes who fought against invading Chinese forces. At the same time, she is demonstrating "humility," working "steadfastly" like the family's ox to protect and provide for her family members. By specifying that she "loved, labored and fought steadfastly," Hayslip clarifies that in fighting she was demonstrating persistence, dedication, and bravery, refusing to give up, fulfilling her parents' wishes, and attempting to do something honorable.[27]

Throughout the text, Hayslip demonstrates her strength and her ability to overcome adversity. Her ability to survive and succeed, despite living through horrific violence and rape, evinces her strong character. In the Epilogue, she states, "Most of you who read this book have not lived my kind of life. By the grace of destiny or luck or god, you do not know how hard it is to survive; although now you have some idea. Do not feel sorry for me—I made it; I am ok."[28] Hayslip reminds readers of both their own privilege and the hardships she has suffered. Yet she clarifies that she is not asking for their pity, but for their understanding and respect. She also reminds readers that her purpose in writing this book is not to obtain personal glory, but rather to

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femininity of Vietnamese women. As Walter Mignolo explains, "It is part of their history that only white bourgeois women have consistently counted as women so described in the West. Females excluded from that description were not just their subordinates....They were understood as animals in the deep sense of 'without gender,' sexually marked as female, but without the characteristics of femininity" (Mignolo 384). Hayslip, as a woman of color, inserts herself in the genre of life writing, which was traditionally dominated by white women at the time Hayslip was publishing.

[27] In *Race and Resistance,* Nguyen explains how Hayslip's portrayal of herself as an honorable Vietnamese woman was also aimed at other overseas Vietnamese who might see her as a "traitor" who is only writing for "self-promotion" (108). Thus, he explains that Hayslip specifically emphasizes her "spiritual virtue in the face of overwhelming circumstances," making her akin to "the emblematic heroine of classic Vietnamese literature" (108).

[28] *When Heaven and Earth Changed Places* 366.

inspire compassion and aid for those in Vietnam who are still suffering. She continues, "Right now, though, there are millions of other poor people around the world—girls, boys, men, and women—who live their lives the way I did in order to survive….I ask only that you open your heart and mind to them, as you have opened it to me by reading this book…."[29] Hayslip attempts to use her own story of strength and survival to inspire compassion for those who continue to suffer from the atrocities of war. Despite surviving years of war, violence and torture at the hands of both the Republican soldiers and the Vietcong, domestic abuse, and the death of family members, Hayslip demonstrates that she has become financially and socially successful—a mother of three sons, owner of a small business, and a conscientious person with strong morals, a sense of patriotism, and compassion. In *Child of War, Woman of Peace,* she states that, after thirteen years in the United States, she has constructed "a full and successful life—economic security, fine sons, and lots of friends."[30]

US Literature on Vietnam

Most of the foundational US literature on Vietnam and the Vietnam War is US-centric, focusing almost exclusively on the experiences of US citizens in Vietnam and the way the war impacted US culture, politics, and society. The perspective of Vietnamese people is rarely included in these texts. For example, in *The Vietnam Reader: The Definitive Collection of American Fiction and Non-Fiction on the War* (1998), editor Stewart O'Nan brings together narrative texts, oral histories, and memoirs by US writers, songs by Bruce Springsteen and Creedence Clearwater Revival, and movies including *Platoon, Full Metal Jacket,* and *Apocalypse Now*. O'Nan explains that his text is intended to bring readers "closer to the war"[31] and to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the war's physical and psychological

[29] *When Heaven and Earth Changed Places* 366.
[30] *Child of War, Woman of Peace* 229.
[31] O'Nan 2.

consequences on US soldiers and civilians, as well as on both political and popular culture. Spanning the years immediately preceding and following the war, his text includes pieces by military and ex-military writers, as well as by historians, filmmakers, and songwriters. O'Nan does not include any texts by Vietnamese writers, though he acknowledges that texts written by Vietnamese comprise a "number of insightful and important works."[32] Several of the texts in O'Nan's anthology explore who is qualified to "play the American hero"[33] in literature on the Vietnam War, as well as the ethics of US involvement. Similarly, H. Bruce Franklin's *The Vietnam War in American Stories, Songs, and Poems* (1996) and *Vietnam and Other American Fantasies* (2000) explore the significance of the Vietnam War in US society and from the perspective of US writers. However, Franklin provides a more critical look at the US perspective. In both books Franklin explores how US popular representations of the Vietnam War in films, songs, stories, and political speeches have frequently demonized the Vietnamese and portrayed US soldiers alternately as victims and heroes.

Alternately, some US literature on Vietnam includes the perspective of Vietnamese writers. Wayne Karlin, a US writer and editor, is the author of several novels and first-person narratives documenting his experiences in the Vietnam War. *The Other Side of Heaven: Postwar Fiction by Vietnamese and American Writers* (1995), a collection of short stories Karlin co-edited with Le Minh Khue and Truong Lu, pairs selections by American writers, including Tim O'Brien and Bobbie Ann Mason, with (largely) translated selections from Vietnamese writers. Many of the writers from both nations are veterans of the Vietnam War, and Karlin remarks that this collection demonstrates how people who would have tried to kill each other if they had met decades earlier can work together to find unity and healing. The Vietnamese writers' selections

[32] O'Nan 3.
[33] O'Nan 3.

explore life in Vietnam after the war, describing family members left behind, refugees escaping by boat, and Communist re-education camps.

Much of the "traditional" US literature on Vietnam has been written by men. For example, in O'Nan's collection, only three out of the forty narrative texts are written by women. Accordingly, when former Army nurse Lynda Van Devanter approached a publisher about publishing *Home Before Morning,* her account of her service in Vietnam during the war, he responded, "What could a woman possibly have to say about war, especially the Vietnam War?"[34] This conception of war, particularly the war in Vietnam, as a male-centered phenomenon reveals how women's accounts of war are often ignored or discounted. Critic Jean Bethke Elshtain explains how men, who are conceived as being at the center of war, have long been viewed as "the great war-story tellers" who are "authorized to narrate" accounts of battle, while women are generally viewed as "exterior from war"[35] and thus their accounts do not comprise authorized or desirable sources of information. The absence of women's narratives from accounts of war produces, as Gilbert and Gubar explain, a "classic case of dissonance between official, male-centered history and unofficial history."[36] Critics Kathy J. Phillips, Paul Williams, and Susan Jeffords observe that cultural representations of the Vietnam War in the US center around constructing a narrative of masculine dominance.[37] They observe that even white women's accounts of the Vietnam War have received little critical attention, and the experiences and stories of Vietnamese women who lived through the war have remained largely ignored.[38]

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[34] Van Devanter and Furey xxi.
[35] Elshtain 213.
[36] Gilbert and Gubar 262.
[37] Jeffords asserts that the process of masculinization, via the Vietnam War, results in femininity being expelled, villianized, and posited as a contaminating influence, while Phillips explores masculine anxiety in times of conflict.
[38] As critic Carol Acton explains, the most well-known Vietnam stories, including Philip Caputo's *Rumor of War* and Tim O'Brien's *Going after Cacciato, The Things They Carried,* and *If I Die in a Combat Zone,* are "combat stories in the tradition of male combatant writing." If women are present at all, she explains, they function as either marginal, supporting characters or as "representatives of another world from which the men are isolated." Acton

As critic Carol Acton explains, despite a few texts, including Mark Baker's *Nam* (1981) and Bernard Edelman's *Letters Home from Vietnam* (2002), which include selections by women, Vietnam War narratives still focus on men's accounts, while women's experiences of war remain largely "unspoken."[39] Importantly, several of the few existing women's accounts of the Vietnam war are written by US army nurses, including Van Devanter in *Home Before Morning* (1983) and Winnie Smith in *(American) Daughter Gone to War* (1994).[40] Although several Vietnamese women published accounts of the war, many of these were written in Vietnamese and published by Vietnamese-language publishers.[41]

Vietnamese American Life Writing

Hayslip was not the first Vietnamese author to publish or to be widely read in the United States; in fact, Vietnamese authors had been publishing in the US since 1962.[42] In 1962 Nguyen Thi Tuyet Mai published a personal essay, "Electioneering Vietnamese Style," and in 1965 Tran Van Dinh published the novel *No Passenger on the River,* both of which were designed to educate US readers about the corruption of Ngo Dinh Diem's regime, which the US was currently supporting in Vietnam. Michele Janette, the author of *My Viet,* an anthology of Vietnamese writing from 1962-2011, [43] explains that although these two authors were publishing

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observes that direct contact with women in most accounts of Vietnam is limited to men's "brief interludes of R and R where women fulfill entertainment roles" (107).

[39] Karen Gottschang Turner and Phan Thanh Hao's *Even the Women Must Fight* (1999) explores the impact of the war on women who fought for North Vietnam.

[40] Barbara Sonnborm's documentary *Regret to Inform* (1999) is the account of a US woman who goes to visit Vietnam after her husband, a US solider, is killed during the war. She visits Que Sanh, the site where he was killed, and interviews war widows from both sides of the fight-US and Vietnamese, discovering that "their lingering grief and anger is balanced by an astounding resilience and desire to let the past be the past" (Holden E16:1).

[41] Pelaud 22; One exception is *Last Night I Dreamed of Peace,* the war diary of Dang Thuy Tram, a 27 year old Vietnamese woman who worked as a doctor for the north Vietnamese and was killed while trying to defend her patients, which was originally published in Vietnam before being translated by Andrew Pham and published in the United States in 2007.

[42] Janette xvi.

[43] Janette divides Vietnamese American literature into two categories: paradigmatic narratives, which she labels "Tales of Witness," intended to "tell America what happened" during the war, and "Tales of Imagination,"

as Vietnamese in the United States rather than as Vietnamese-Americans, their texts foreground important characteristics of Vietnamese American writings for the next thirty years, including a focus on memoir, criticism of the Vietnamese government, and the desire to change the view of US readers regarding the Vietnam War.[44] As Janette explains, early Vietnamese writers often wrote "to explain Vietnam and educate the American reader" because "they felt American audiences needed to hear their stories."[45]

These initial texts were followed by narratives written by the "first wave" of Vietnamese immigrants, which Janette distinguishes as those arriving in the US in the late 1970s, most of whom had ties to the South Vietnamese government as well as "economic means" and "personal connections" with people in power that helped to facilitate their escape. These texts include former South Vietnamese Prime Minister Nguyen Cao Ky's reflections on the appeal of his political adversary Ho Chi Minh[46] and ARVN General Tran Van Don's memoir of his participation in the coup against Ngo Dinh Diem.[47] Although Hayslip also arrived in the US in the 1970s, she was from a peasant family without important political connections or substantial economic resources, making her experience distinct from the authors of these "first wave" narratives.

In the late 1970s and 1980s, both Vietnamese and Vietnamese-American authors attempted to promote healing and reconciliation between the United States and Vietnam.[48] This shift is reflected by Nguyen Van Vu's *At Home in America* (1979), a fervent expression of

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comparatively creative texts which experiment with unconventional textual and narrative styles and move beyond the topic of war (xix).
[44] Janette xvii.
[45] Janette xvii.
[46] *Twenty Years and Twenty Days* (1976) by Nguyen Cao Ky.
[47] *Our Endless War: Inside Vietnam* (1978) by Tran Van Don.
[48] Janette xvii.

gratitude to the United States.[49] Similarly, in Tran Thi Nga's *Shallow Graves* (1986), a description of refugee life in the US, subtle critique is blended with an expression of appreciation.[50] Hayslip's gratitude for the economic opportunities available in the United States, her happiness at being able to raise her boys in California, and her desire for reconciliation between the US and Vietnam correspond with this trend.

As Huping Ling and Allan Austin explain in *Asian American History and Culture*, Vietnamese writing from the late 1970s and 1980s also tends to focus on the authors' experience of trying to come to terms with the violence and destruction of the war, featuring themes of battle, devastation, and post-traumatic stress. Along with Hayslip's text, other examples of Vietnamese life writing adhering to this trend include Nguyen Ngoc Ngan's *The Will of Heaven: A Story of One Vietnamese and the End of His World* (1982), Doan Van Toai's *The Vietnamese Gulag* (1986), and Tran Tri Vu's *Lost Years: My 1,632 Days in Vietnamese Reeducation Camps* (1988).

In the 1980s, life writing by Vietnamese women began to appear. Many of these women, like Hayslip, detailed their experience of escaping war along with their experiences of trying to adapt to life in the United States.[51] As William Cloonan observes in *The Writing of War,* women writers often choose to focus on the consequences of war, emphasizing the destruction of home and family, rather than depicting graphic scenes of battle. Former Vietcong sympathizer Hayslip does both, depicting not only the way the conflict damages her family's livelihood and well-being, but also including scenes of fighting and violence. Along with Hayslip, Anna-Kim Lan McCauley, the author of *Miles from Home* (1984), Nguyen Thi Thu-Lam, the author of *Fallen*

[49] *At Home in America* (1979) by Nguyen Van Vu with Bob Pittman.
[50] *Shallow Graves* (1986) was recorded orally by Tran Thi Nga and transformed into verse by Wendy Wilder Larsen, perhaps accounting for the mix of gratitude and criticism expressed towards the United States (Huang and Nelson 10).
[51] Mai Holter's *While I Am Here* (1993) and Nguyen Van Vu's *At Home in America* (1979) are examples.

Leaves (1989), and Nguyen Thi Tuyet Mai, the author of *The Rubber Tree* (1994), all published memoirs. Like Hayslip, all of the Vietnamese women writers helped to correct the imbalance in male-centered texts involving the war, though Hayslip's narrative is unique because of her participation in the war itself as a collaborator and assistant to the Vietcong. Additionally, Hayslip's narrative, along with the narratives of Duong Van Mai Elliot[52] and Andrew Pham,[53] details her journey back to Vietnam in addition to describing her first-hand experiences of the war.

In the 1990s, Vietnamese narratives shifted from recounting the horrors of war and describing the transition to life in the United States to exploring the challenges and hardships of reunification.[54] For example, Jade Ngoc Quang Huynh's narrative focuses on the "re-education" labor camps,[55] while Kien Nguyen explores the rejection and ostracism experienced by mixed-race children of US fathers and Vietnamese mothers. [56] Some of Andrew Lam's writing centers around the rejection experienced by Vietnamese refugees when the nations they escaped to were already overburdened and unable to offer sufficient aid.[57]

Vietnamese literature within the last two decades has diversified, moving beyond narratives which promote forgiveness and healing between the US and Vietnam to include narratives which challenge US-centric viewpoints of Vietnam and offer new insight into international, political, and cultural relationships.[58] Until the 1990s, Vietnamese American literature consisted almost entirely of memoirs, but more recent authors have expanded,

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[52] *The Sacred Willow* (1999) by Duong Van Mai Elliott.
[53] In *Catfish and Mandala* (1999), Andrew Pham considers his own relationship to global power dynamics and structures of oppression, acknowledging the privilege he experiences as a US immigrant when he returns to Vietnam as an adult.
[54] Janette xxi.
[55] *South Wind Changing* (1994) by Jade Ngoc Quang Huynh.
[56] *The Unwanted* (2001) by Kien Nguyen.
[57] "The Stories They Carried" (2005) by Andrew Lam.
[58] Janette xviii.

complicated, and challenged this genre.[59] Correspondingly, recent texts written by the 1.5 generation[60] and the US-born children of Vietnamese migrants tend to be more experimental in form and content, branching beyond memoir and journalism to include drama, poetry, and fiction.[61] Janette notes that while many first-wave migrants decided to tell their stories in spite of language barriers (and often, like Hayslip, with the aid of a native English speaker),[62] many 1.5 and second generation migrants speak English fluently and can tell their stories independently.[63]

With the development of new voices in Vietnamese American literature, more Vietnamese authors are able to share their perspective with a mainstream audience. Most recently, Viet Thanh Nguyen's book *The Sympathizer* won the 2016 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction with an account of a Vietnamese fighter who migrates to the United States and works as a spy. Writing 30 years after Hayslip in *Nothing Ever Dies: Vietnam and the Memory of War* (2016), Nguyen[64] continues Hayslip's discussion of how the Vietnam War is depicted and remembered in the United States. He explains, "All wars are fought twice, the first time on the battlefield and the second time in memory"[65] and centers his book around a discussion of the "ethics of remembering." While Nguyen echoes the complications Hayslip portrays, explaining how communists and anticommunists did not divide neatly into north-south geographic divisions, he

[59] Ling and Austin 45.
[60] For a discussion of the unique role and perspective of the 1.5 generation, see page 16 in the Introduction to this dissertation.
[61] For a detailed explanation of these works, including Huynh Quang Nhuong's children's books *Beyond the East Wind* and *The Little Weaver of Thai Yen Village,* politicized and experimental poetry by Truong Tran, Barbara Tran, Linh Dinh, Mong Lan, and Kim-An Lieberman, and Lan Cao's novel *Monkey Bridge*, which explores conflict between a Vietnamese migrant mother and her teenager, see Janette's *My Viet* pages xxiii-xxv.
[62] Examples include *At Home in America* (1979) by Nguyen Van Vu with Bob Pittman, *A Vietcong Memoir* (1985) by Truong Nhu Tang with David Chanoff and Doan Van Toai, *Shallow Graves* (1986) by Tran Thi Nga and Wendy Wilder Larsen, and *In the Jaws of History* (1987) by Bui Diem with David Chanoff.
[63] Janette xxii.
[64] Nguyen responds to Hayslip specifically in the fourth chapter of *Race and Resistance,* "Le Ly Hayslip and the Emblematic Victim," in which he asserts that Hayslip's body in her narrative exists in "two dimensions," one rendered "powerless" by movements of "nations, armies, and capital," ultimately becoming "an object of others' politics" and the other empowered through her own voice and experiences, through which she demonstrates her own "integral importance to these movements" (108).
[65] Nguyen vii.

expands her discussion of participants in the war to include Laotians, Cambodians, and South Koreans. Rather than, like Hayslip, prioritizing continued reconciliation between the US and Vietnam, Nguyen explores the way US-centric representations of the war, including video games, movies, and books, have distorted reality. Nguyen urges readers not to be content with US-centric representations of the war which perpetuate unequal power dynamics; instead, he urges readers to acknowledge the inhumanity and violence perpetrated by all sides during the war, since, as he explains, "it is so easy to forget our inhumanity or to displace it onto other humans." Recently, other accounts of the Vietnam War from the perspective of Vietnamese citizens have been published, including Andrew Pham's *The Eaves of Heaven: A Life in Three Wars* (2008),[66] *The Girl in the Picture,* Kim Phuc's biography as told to Denise Chong (1999),[67] and Duong Van Mai Elliot's *The Sacred Willow: Four Generations in the Life of a Vietnamese Family* (1999).[68] As critic Helena Grice explains, these examples of life writing by Vietnamese who are documenting the Vietnam War from their perspective serve to correct the "one-dimensional Anglo-American representation of the war"[69] and create "a counternarrative of Vietnam" [70] and a "new kind of American literature."[71] Other contemporary Vietnamese authors,

[66] In this text, Pham tells the story of his formerly wealthy father, Thong Van Pham, who must live with the physical consequences of the French occupation, the Japanese invasion, and the Vietnam War. Through the story of his father, Pham explores how the Vietnamese are able to overcome violent memories of war to forge new beginnings.
[67] At nine years old, Kim Phuc was photographed as she fled, naked and screaming through the streets after being severely burned with napalm which a South Vietnamese pilot had dropped on a group of villagers. Associated Press photographer Nick Ut won a Pulitzer Prize for his photo of Phuc, which became known as an icon of the inhumanity of war and helped to create widespread opposition to the Vietnam War in the United States. *The Girl in the Picture* is her life story as told to Denise Chong.
[68] Elliot's unique combination of memoir and narrative represents the experiences of four generations of her family, beginning with her great-grandfather, and documenting her family's experiences of the Vietnam War. She describes her sister's attempts to flee through the jungle, memories of hiding with her family and watching her childhood village burned, and her nephew trying desperately to escape by grabbing onto a departing US helicopter. She depicts both her nation's destruction and the challenges of creating a new life as a migrant to the US. Other useful collections include Sucheng Chan's *The Vietnamese American 1.5 Generation: Stories of War, Revolution, Flight, and New Beginnings (2006)* and *Memory is Another Country (2009),* a collection of essays by members of the Vietnamese diaspora.
[69] Grice 942.
[70] Grice 941.

including Lac Su,[72] have used memoir to explore modern representations and conceptions of the Vietnamese, moving beyond discussions of the war to examine current issues of racism, discrimination, economic inequality, and generational difference among Vietnamese American families.

Life Writing as an Act of Self-Invention

As I observed in the chapter about Helena Kuo, it is important to distinguish between Hayslip the author, who crafts the text, and Hayslip the character, who lives out the events as they are depicted in the narrative. As in any example of life writing, there is tension between the authorial presence and the subject who is living in the world of the narrative. There is always a gap between the author, who speaks, and the self-as-character who is spoken about. As Leslie Bow so aptly explains, "the fact that these entities are often presumed to be identical testifies to the strength of realism as a genre and the illusion of unmediated access to the subject of first-person narrative."[73] Hayslip the character as we see her in the narrative is living through the events as they happen, reacting and making decisions without the benefit of a broader perspective. Hayslip the author, however, has the advantage of time and distance; she is able to reflect on and reconstruct past events. Moreover, since she has already lived through these events, she has been changed by them and learned from them. Thus, Hayslip is both empowered and disempowered by her narrative distance; although she may no longer be able to recount experiences as "accurately" after many years, she is empowered by the opportunity to selectively

[71] Grice explains how many of the Vietnamese narratives adopt a much broader time frame than many US veterans' accounts of Vietnam, detailing the first Indochina War, the French occupation, and the struggle between communism and nationalism, US involvement, and life after the fall of Saigon in 1975, instead of only a few months of battle scenes (949).
[72] *I Love Yous Are for White People* (2009).
[73] Bow 187.

present and narrate those experiences. In his book *Race and Resistance,* Nguyen explains how Hayslip's "voice" establishes its authority "from a claim to an essential truth of experience."[74]

The author of a life writing text is both creating and shaping a supposedly factual life story, though truth in life writing and autobiography is impossible in the conventional sense. Life writing can never consist of unmediated truth; as authors select and present events from their lives, they inevitably alter them. Sonia Ryang devotes attention to deconstructing the notion of autobiography as "a coherent, authoritarian, and truthful account of one's life"[75] and instead proposes that it is "a genre full of promiscuous interpenetrations of mixed textualities and realities."[76] She explains, "The act of remembering, revisiting the past, and re-understanding it involves interpretation, reenactment, reevaluation, and reregistration of certain facts and events, while forgetting or omitting others, rending one's recollection largely subjective, and, empirically speaking, unreliable. Yet this should not mean such a recollection is fake, since when one relives the past, the reliving itself is a meaningful performance through which one can be related to events."[77] Hayslip, although purporting to tell her (factual) life story, is creating fiction. By selecting which events to recount and shaping them according to her particular interpretation, she is interpreting, adjusting, and shaping what actually occurred through her telling, and thereby fictionalizing. However, these events remain true in the sense that Hayslip presents them as being a record of her life.

Hayslip demonstrates Marlene Kadar's definition of life writing as "an act of self-invention or reinvention" and as a "human 'poetics' of autobiography" in which "the autobiographer is seen as discovering meaningful pattern in the flux of past experience in order

[74] Nguyen 108.
[75] Ryang xiv.
[76] Ryang xiv.
[77] Ryang xxix.

to arrive at an understanding of [her]self as unique and unified."[78] Hayslip presents her text as a memoir, documenting her "story of growing up during the French and American wars and then coming back to Vietnam as a mature woman to see what had happened to my family, my country, and to try and make sense of my life."[79] Although part of her purpose is vindicating herself as a Vietcong sympathizer, she does not explicitly present her text as a vindication of the Vietnamese people, nor as a justification of her own involvement with the Vietcong, but rather as an account of a personal journey, as "the story of my return to Vietnam in 1986…in search of my past and the meaning of my life."[80] In her text, Hayslip is crafting, presenting, and re-inventing her life story in a meaningful way, with the purpose of showing her own journey towards finding peace and forgiveness. Despite suffering the loss of her home and family members to the war, she is able to forgive all who were fighting against her, and she encourages her readers to do the same. In a 1988 interview, Hayslip explains, "Tragedy has stalked me my whole life. I hope to take this tragedy and apply it to peaceful ends, merely by telling my story. If I cannot do that, if I go to my grave without releasing this tragedy so that others may learn, well, then, I have failed in my task. I cannot bear that burden."[81] Hayslip clarifies her sense of purpose in writing her text as a means to both free herself from the burden of enduring resentment and hostility and to educate others and help them attain the same level of peace.

Hayslip's narrative adds a valuable perspective to the existing literature on Vietnam; she is able to provide a unique representation of the Vietnamese as individuals, rather than as a backdrop to American heroics.[82] As Hayslip explains in her second book, *Child of War, Woman*

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[78] Kadar 214.
[79] *When Heaven and Earth Changed Places,* 369.
[80] *When Heaven and Earth Changed Places* 369.
[81] Granberry 1.
[82] This view of the Vietnamese as a mass of faceless enemies and merely a backdrop for American heroics reflects Walter Mignolo's explanation of the centrality of the West: "The emergence of the idea of the 'West' or of 'Europe', is an admission of identity—that is, of relations with other cultural experiences, of differences with other

of Peace (1993), many US citizens saw the Vietnamese as "faceless Orientals fleeing burning villages, tied up as prisoners, or as rag dolls in a roadside trench."[83] By offering her own memories and recollections of family life in Vietnam both before and during the war, Hayslip offers a story that contrasts and supplements the numerous published stories of U.S. Vietnam veterans. Many books by Vietnam veterans portrayed all Vietnamese as cruel and inhuman. Texts like Leland Gardner's 1966 book *Vietnam Underside* encouraged a racist and hostile view towards the Vietnamese,[84] claiming that "in all the world, no people can equal their talent for vice and depravity"[85] and "No place is better equipped to leave its scar on the American soldier than is Vietnam."[86] As literary critic Judy Helfand explains, "Movie images had given me an idea of the destruction: Le Ly offers an understanding of what it means to be a Vietnamese person who lived in the village we see being blown to pieces."[87] By adding the perspective of an adolescent girl who is living in a war-torn Vietnamese village when she is recruited by the Vietcong, Hayslip is able to contest, challenge, and augment existing narratives on Vietnam.

Literary critic Helena Grace explains that any effort to "rework the image" of the Vietnam War provided for the American public by US military veterans is an attempt "to forge a new history," one which "simultaneously memorializes but [also] moves on from the images that dominate the representation of Vietnam in both mind and media; it acts as a corrective…to the overwhelming 'U.S.-centric conceptualization of Vietnam.'"[88] Through her depictions of herself, a teenage assistant for the Vietcong, her family members, and the other Vietnamese villagers as

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cultures…the other cultures are different in the sense that they are unequal, in fact inferior, by nature. They only can be 'objects' of knowledge or/and of domination practices. From that perspective, the relation between European culture and the other cultures was established and has been maintained, as a relation between 'subject' and 'objects" (28).

[83] *Child of War, Woman of Peace* 27.
[84] Fielding 57.
[85] Gardner 9.
[86] Gardner 151.
[87] Helfand 22.
[88] Helfand, quoting Truong 522.

individuals rather than as faceless victims, Hayslip creates empathy for the Vietnamese and attempts to counter the rampant hostility and racism Vietnamese immigrants were facing in the United States at the time she was writing.

Alleviating Cultural Misunderstandings

Hayslip establishes her own understanding of US culture and presents herself as a trustworthy guide for her audience. She explores misunderstandings between the US and Vietnam, attempting to provide clarity for US readers. In several places throughout the text, Hayslip overtly positions herself as a mediator and translator between the Vietnamese and her US readers, promising, "I will try to tell you…why almost everyone in the country you tried to help resented, feared, and misunderstood you."[89] She also addresses United States GIs directly, asking them to "look into the heart of one you once called enemy,"[90] asking them how they could possibly expect to free a people by "fighting a battle so different from your own."[91] She acknowledges the US veterans' good intentions, explaining, "the least you did—the least any of us did—was our duty. For that we must be proud."[92] In these quotes, Hayslip acknowledges that many of the US soldiers were trying to do something honorable in Vietnam, trying to serve their country, defend their own families, and aid the Vietnamese people. She also notes that they were resented, feared, and misunderstood by the same people they were (in some cases) trying to help. Hayslip presents the Vietnam War not as evidence of animosity between the two countries or cultures, but rather as a conflict where both sides had good intentions. She positions herself as an expert on the Vietnamese perspective, as someone who is able to help bridge the gap in understanding between the cultures.

[89] Helfand xiv.
[90] Helfand xiv.
[91] Helfand xv.
[92] *When Heaven and Earth Changed Places* xv.

Hayslip acknowledges the difficulties faced by US soldiers and demonstrates that she understands their position. She explains, "Where the Republicans came into the village overburdened with American equipment designed for a different war, the Viet Cong made do with what they had and seldom wasted their best ammunition—the goodwill of the people."[93] Here, she acknowledges that the US soldiers had better equipment, yet explains why the Vietcong were victorious—they had the local people on their side, providing them with food and shelter. She also sympathizes with the US cause and acknowledges the ignorance and prejudice of the Vietnamese. She gives examples of the pervasive Vietcong propaganda and explains, "Of course, the Viet Cong cadre men, like the [U.S.-backed] Republicans, had no desire (or ability, most of them) to paint a fairer picture. For them, there could be no larger reason for Americans fighting the war than imperialist aggression. Because we peasants knew nothing about the United States, we could not stop to think how absurd it would be for so large and wealthy a nation to covet our poor little country for its rice fields, swamps, and pagodas."[94] Hayslip praises the superior economy and infrastructure of the United States and explains how the villagers' prejudice towards the US soldiers was partly due to ignorance. She points out that the United States was not interested in obtaining control over Vietnamese land, implying that they had more admirable motives than "imperialist aggression."

In addition to serving as a mediator, Hayslip also serves as guide to an "exotic" culture,[95] since her explanations of Vietnamese culture help Western readers move beyond viewing the Vietnamese as a faceless enemy. She describes holiday celebrations, religious customs, gender roles, culinary traditions, and family rituals. In her first chapter she gives a detailed description of the cycles of farm life, recalling how she helped her mother plant and tend to the rice:

[93] *When Heaven and Earth Changed Places* xiii.
[94] Granberry xii.
[95] Wong 14.

> Transplanting the rice stalks from their 'nursery' to the field was primarily women's work. Although we labored as fast as we could, this chore involved bending over for hours in knee-deep, muddy water. No matter how practiced we were, the constant search for a foothold in the sucking mud made the tedious work exhausting. Still, there was no other way to transplant the seedlings properly; and that sensual contact between our hands and feet, the baby rice, and the wet, receptive earth, is one of the things that preserved and heightened our connection with the land.[96]

Hayslip provides a vivid depiction of Vietnamese village life, describing the physical sensations of planting and tending to the rice, preparing daily meals, and appreciating the earth and the natural beauty of her village. As Renny Christopher explains, in addition to traversing different cultures, Hayslip must also write across class boundaries; since she is narrating the story of a peasant family for a primarily middle-class readership, she must attempt to make herself and her family sympathetic characters, "familiar rather than exotic, understandable rather than inscrutable."[97] Hayslip achieves this by focusing largely on family relationships and referencing cultural values that may be shared by her US readers.

In addition to describing Vietnamese customs and family life, Hayslip references US cultural phenomena, demonstrating her familiarity with various traditions in the United States. At the same time, she attempts to build trust and establish camaraderie with Western readers by using "us" and "we" and including herself in this category. For example, in the Afterword, Hayslip explains how all parts of life are interconnected, and attempts to show how this viewpoint is not limited to an Eastern mentality. She explains, "Even in the West, when *we* bury a loved one, *we* say, 'ashes to ashes and dust to dust,' reminding *ourselves* that all life is a circle."[98] By demonstrating her knowledge of important religious and social customs for burial in the United States—including the words commonly spoken in English—Hayslip shows US

[96] *When Heaven and Earth Changed Places* 6.
[97] Christopher 71-72.
[98] *When Heaven and Earth Changed Places* 368, emphasis mine.

readers that she understands their culture. Moreover, she uses her knowledge of multiple cultures to demonstrate that the Eastern and Western viewpoints are not so different.

Hayslip even presents her own patriotic duty to the Vietcong as something the US reader can relate to, comparing it to the patriots' motivation during the American Revolution. She references well-known US ideals and values as she defines what she, and many of the other Vietcong members, believed they were fighting for: "*Freedom* meant a Vietnam free of colonial domination. *Independence* meant one Vietnamese people—not two countries, North and South—determining its own destiny. *Happiness* meant plenty of food and an end to the war—the ability, we assumed, to live our lives in accordance with our ancient ways."[99] Hayslip associates the Vietnamese desire for sovereignty with the American Revolutionary ideals of self-government, self-determination, and a desire for independent leadership, which her US readers will likely be able to relate to.

Hayslip also furthers her role as mediator by praising aspects of life in the United States, thereby potentially creating common ground with the US reader. She expresses confidence in the superiority of the United States capitalist system over Vietnamese Communism and acknowledges the desirability of living in a comparatively affluent US society. She compares the prosperous life of US residents with the hardships suffered by people living in Vietnam, stating, "How much would that [Vietnamese] old man and his teenage assistant give to trade places with me even for a day…to enjoy a taste of life in America?"[100] Hayslip praises US culture and acknowledges the success she has experienced while living in the United States. She declares her loyalty to her adopted country clearly, stating in the Epilogue, "Today, I am very honored to live in the United States and proud to be a U.S. citizen. I do my best to honor the American flag,

[99] *When Heaven and Earth Changed Places* xii.
[100] *When Heaven and Earth Changed Places* 100.

which I have seen not only raised in battle against me but flying proudly over the schools where my wonderful boys have learned to be Americans."[101] Here, Hayslip attempts to both assuage the hostilities and distrust of those who continue to view her as "the enemy" and to build camaraderie with her US readers by expressing her gratitude towards the United States government and her pride that her sons have US citizenship. However, she also reminds readers that her pride and gratitude towards the American flag required an act of forgiveness on her part, since that same flag was once "raised in battle" against her and her people. Here, Hayslip demonstrates her own act of forgiveness and the joy it has brought to her life, urging readers to forgive their former enemies, the Vietcong, and "break the chain of vengeance forever."[102]

By positioning herself as an insider, as a US citizen who has spent nearly two decades in the United States and understands important US customs and traditions, Hayslip undermines the concept of a homogenous Caucasian US national identity, which was perpetually separate from the body of immigrants.[103] Throughout her text, Hayslip constructs herself as both an insider and an outsider from both the United States and Vietnam in a national context; she writes that "All my life I had been *caught in the middle*—between the South and North, Americans and Vietnamese, greed and compassion, capitalism and communism, not quite peace and almost war."[104] By locating herself perpetually in the middle of nations and cultures, Hayslip positions herself as a mediator, guide, and sympathetic interpreter of Vietnamese culture for US readers while also acknowledging their good intentions.

[101] *When Heaven and Earth Changed Places* 365-366.
[102] *When Heaven and Earth Changed Places* 366.
[103] Stephens 661.
[104] *Child of War, Woman of Peace* 329.

No Longer Faceless Enemies

The climate in which Hayslip was publishing, California in the late 1980s, was marked by racism and hostility towards new immigrants.[105] In *Child of War, Woman of Peace,* Hayslip recalls the "many Americans" she met after immigrating to the United States (in 1970) who "were so fed up with the war that they hated anyone who reminded them of it."[106] Tensions from the war still ran high and many US residents remained unwilling to integrate people of Vietnamese descent into their communities.[107] Many US citizens, particularly veterans, remained hostile towards Vietnamese immigrants, particularly those like Hayslip who had fought for the Vietcong. As critic Maureen Fielding explains, "Despite the antiwar movement's political victory in ending America's military engagement with Viet Nam, many Americans remained deeply racist and located the source of American soldiers' moral and mental breakdown in Viet Nam."[108] Despite the controversy over US involvement in the war, many US citizens continued to view Vietnamese as the enemy and were reluctant to welcome them to the United States.

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[105] The high numbers of immigrants from war-torn countries in the later part of the twentieth century only served to increase hostility towards the Vietnamese in the United States. As Sucheng Chang explains, "between 1975 and 1997, almost two million people from Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia resettled in Western or non-Communist countries" (171). Between the 1980 and 1990 national censuses there was a 99% increase in Asian Americans living in the United States (Ling 2). Newspaper articles from 1987, at the time in which Hayslip was attempting to publish her book, note the dramatic growth both in the Vietnamese population and the Vietnamese press (LaGanga 1). A change in legislation, the Immigration Act of 1965, made this increase in immigration possible by creating a more equitable system for entry into the U.S., abolishing the national origin quotas which had previously limited Asian immigration (Daniels). As the U.S. revised the policy of restrictions on Asian immigration it championed itself as the "defender of the free world" (Daniels) despite the hostility and obstacles faced by immigrants.

[106] *Child of War, Woman of Peace* 23.

[107] Vietnamese immigrants to the United States, many of them refugees, struggled with cultural conflict and the divide between their Vietnamese language, traditions, and social norms and life in the United States. Newspaper articles published near Hayslip's home in California, during the years she was writing and publishing her book, 1987-1989, show a climate rife with cultural conflict; Vietnamese and other Asian immigrants were frequently met with violence, hostility, and discrimination (Robertson March 9, Robertson May 18, "Anti-Racism Phone Line." *LA Sentinel.* Sept 8, 1988. A2). Articles from the *LA Times* detail Vietnamese immigrants' struggles in communication, finding work, receiving education, and succeeding in a foreign culture and community (Katz SG1, O'Connor A16, Robertson March 9, Emmons and Reyes, 647). Vietnamese teenagers, seeking acceptance and belonging in their new environment, often became involved with gang violence, sometimes directed at other Vietnamese (Hicks A1, Emmons and Reyes, 647, Efron 891). Many Vietnamese also remained relatively isolated in their new communities. United by a common lingual and cultural background, and possibly by a history of trauma, the Vietnamese community remained relatively separate from mainstream society (Emmons and Reyes 647).

[108] Fielding 155.

Accordingly, Hayslip's text was not always well-received by the general public; in fact, some US veterans were outraged that their local newspaper would publish interviews with Hayslip, book reviews of *When Heaven and Earth Changed Places,* or excerpts from her text. In his 1989 letter to the *LA Times,* one vet stated, "As a two-tour veteran of the Vietnam War, I was very upset with our magazine's decision… It seems quite ironic to me that in our country, freedom of speech and freedom of the press also exist for those who fought against and killed those who fought for those very rights. You owe every Vietnam vet an apology."[109] Another man responded with, "I wish [Hayslip] would drift back to Vietnam….this woman was our enemy, and her presence here makes a mockery of the 58,000 names on The Wall in Washington, as well as of every veteran of the war."[110] In addition to receiving negative responses in print, Hayslip experienced negative feedback in person. In her second book, Hayslip describes the violent responses she received after publishing *When Heaven and Earth Changed Places*, including multiple death threats and a vet who made a scene outside her restaurant, yelling that "we should go back [to Vietnam] and nuke every damn Communist!"[111]

By revealing the motivation and personal stories of particular Vietnamese citizens, Hayslip makes the Vietnamese sympathetic, no longer faceless and threatening enemies, but instead human beings with families. She recalls the widespread misery that characterized life in Vietnam: "Everywhere we went we saw funerals and burials, crying and screaming. Nothing you could call peace, no enjoyment of life, no sense of youth, no sense of freedom, nothing but darkness, never knowing who was enemy or who was friend."[112] Hayslip portrays life in Vietnam as devoid of all happiness and prosperity; she describes how the Vietnamese people

[109] "Letters" 387.
[110] "Letters" 387.
[111] *Child of War, Woman of Peace 2*28.
[112] Granberry 3.

were overwhelmed by death and suffering. Hayslip attempts to diffuse the hate US readers may feel towards Vietnamese villagers who fought for the Vietcong and tries to replace it with sympathy, portraying the Vietnamese people as ignorant victims: "We were pawns of war, used by all sides, repeatedly and maliciously. I look back and don't see how or why children have to endure that kind of suffering, that nervous, scary suffering. A life of no enjoyment. A hell."[113] Hayslip portrays Vietnamese villagers as living in an atmosphere of perpetual fear and pain, under constant threat of death and unable to build stable relationships or care for their families. She points out that many Vietnamese children had no childhood, and, along with the adults, were "used by all sides" as soldiers. Hayslip acknowledges that the US soldiers and the US government may have had honorable intentions in their involvement in Vietnam, intending to spread democracy, yet she explains that the Vietnamese people could not understand or appreciate democracy. She explains, "Because our only exposure to politics had been through the French colonial government (and before that, the rule of Vietnamese kings), we had no concept of democracy. For us, 'Western culture' meant bars, brothels, black markets, and *xa hoi van minh*—bewildering machines—most of them destructive."[114] Hayslip clarifies that for many Vietnamese people, Western culture and US presence in Vietnam was equated with immorality and violence instead of freedom. Hayslip's use of Vietnamese to describe the US-made tanks that had invaded her childhood village highlights how foreign and frightening US technology and weapons appeared to the villagers, and the degree to which they were confused and intimidated. She continues, "We couldn't imagine that life in the capitalist world was anything other than a frantic, alien terror."[115] By presenting the Vietnamese villagers who were conscripted to fight for the Vietcong as confused and scared, Hayslip counters prevalent

[113] Granberry 1.
[114] *When Heaven and Earth Changed Places* xiii.
[115] *When Heaven and Earth Changed Places* xii.

depictions of them as depraved and vicious and instead fosters sympathy for their extensive suffering.

Hayslip's justification of the Vietnamese villagers' fear and subsequent hostility to the US military demonstrates the subjective nature of both patriotism and political loyalties. As the daughter of a poor farming family whose land and safety was threatened not only by US presence in Vietnam, but also by the Vietcong if she refused to ally with them, it was in Hayslip's best interests to join the Vietcong. She explains how Vietcong ideology was persuasive within the context of Vietnamese culture; however, her involvement with them was also largely motivated by self-preservation.

Hayslip also presents herself and the other Vietnamese as having no control over the war, which she depicts as a terrible, uncontrollable, and autonomous force. She recalls, "And so the war began and became an insatiable dragon that roared around Ky La. By the time I turned thirteen, that dragon had swallowed me up."[116] Hayslip depicts her recruitment by the Vietcong as a consequence of her village being swallowed up by the dragon of war, implying that her work for them was involuntary and destructive to her and to everyone around her. She emphasizes that her work with the Vietcong was "never by choice"[117] since she and her family were threatened with torture or death if they refused. Hayslip also explains how the Vietcong manipulated the Vietnamese people so that they would learn to hate the US invaders and trust "Uncle Ho," the Vietcong leader. She details how the Vietcong often referred to North Vietnamese leader Ho Chi Minh as "Uncle Ho," making him, as an older male relative, deserving of loyalty. The Vietcong presented him as part of the villagers' family, as a leader who understood their needs and wanted to help them preserve their way of life and protect their families. She recalls a popular line of

[116] *When Heaven and Earth Changed Places* xiv.
[117] Granberry 3.

Vietcong propaganda: "Uncle Ho had urged the poor to take up arms so that everyone might be guaranteed a little land on which to cultivate some rice."[118] She explains, "We peasants assumed everything we heard was true,"[119] and details how the "indoctrination sessions" played on the uneducated people's "worst fears."[120] She also explains how she was only presented one side of information to believe: "Everything I knew about the war I learned as a teenaged girl from North Vietnamese cadre leaders in the swamps outside Ky La. During those midnight meetings, we peasants assumed everything we heard was true because what the Viet Cong said matched, in one way or another, the beliefs we already had."[121] Hayslip vindicates herself from her work for the Vietcong by explaining not only that she and her family were conscripted under threat of death, but also that they didn't know any better. She explains how the Vietcong played on existing Vietnamese cultural traditions and teachings, such as the loyalty to family, calling Ho Chi Minh "Uncle Ho" to inspire loyalty.

Hayslip also establishes herself as a patriotic Vietnamese woman, stating in the Foreword that as an adolescent, assisting the Vietcong was a way to honor her "ancestors, father and mother, brothers and sisters, nieces and nephews."[122] She locates the origin of her involvement with the Vietcong not as anger or opposition to the United States or to democracy, but as loyalty to her family, her country, her ancestors, and her people. Thus, her loyalties may become understandable, or even admirable, to her US readers rather than appalling. She explains, "Everything we knew commanded us to fight. Our ancestors called us to war. Our myths and legends called us to war. Our parents' teachings called us to war. Uncle Ho's cadre called us to war. Even President Diem had called us to fight for the very thing we now believed he was

[118] *When Heaven and Earth Changed Places xiv.*
[119] *When Heaven and Earth Changed Places* x.
[120] *When Heaven and Earth Changed Places* x.
[121] *When Heaven and Earth Changed Places* x.
[122] *When Heaven and Earth Changed Places* v.

betraying—an independent Vietnam."[123] By explaining that the Vietcong rhetoric resonated with the Vietnamese villagers' core beliefs, including their desire to defend their land and their heritage, Hayslip prepares the reader to view her loyalties to the Vietcong as patriotic duty and family loyalty rather than vindictive efforts towards the United States. Moreover, by demonstrating that she was only attempting to do what was best for her family and her country, Hayslip is proving her trustworthiness as a daughter and citizen.

Hayslip also fosters sympathy for the Vietnamese by describing the terrible conditions she finds during her return visit in 1986.[124] When she returns, although the war has officially been over for years, she finds a different sort of "war still going on,"[125] with Vietnamese people fighting for scraps of food and desperately selling their last belongings on the black market in order to survive. Relationships between family members and neighbors have been torn apart, and she recalls how "crushing paranoia infected every person, including every member of my family—and eventually myself."[126] The consequences of the war include tens of thousands of "hardworking people of moral strength…[who have been] reduced to poverty."[127] Hayslip explains that the overwhelming poverty of Vietnam has inspired her to greater efforts for peace

[123] *When Heaven and Earth Changed Places* xiv.
[124] Conditions in Vietnam remained dire. The country was war-torn and economically struggling, the citizens impoverished and traumatized by violence. The Vietnamese government remained hostile to the United States, and economic relations had not been re-established, due in part to continued Vietnamese presence in Cambodia and the Vietnamese government's refusal to return the remains of US veterans or aid in locating soldiers missing in action (Russell Z21). Williams, publishing in 1987, describes the hardships of life in Vietnam: "There is still little reason for joy. Life in Hanoi is as hard as ever. There is just enough food, not nearly enough jobs, and decay stalks the streets" (Williams 4). He continues, "The surface signs of economic and social liberalization cannot mask the poverty, the strongest impression of the city. Vietnam is one of the poorest countries in the world. Per capita income is estimated at less than $250" (Ibid). In the city, "clustered around coffee shops or squatting against a wall are the jobless." "The official currency rate, 80 dong to the dollar, has become laughable in the face of a black market rate of more than 700 to the dollar" (Ibid). Moreover, desperate refugees were still attempting to flee the country, suffering starvation and resorting to cannibalism ("Vietnam Refugees Tell of Deaths at Sea; Cannibalism" 2).
[125] *Child of War, Woman of Peace* 243.
[126] *Child of War, Woman of Peace* 243.
[127] *Child of War, Woman of Peace* 243.

and reconciliation between the two countries and the establishment of organizations designed to aid the Vietnamese.

Through her narrative, Hayslip attempts to create empathy for the Vietnamese people. Hayslip brings the Vietnamese to the forefront, depicting them as individuals with complex struggles, rather than as faceless victims or enemies. As Jones explains, "The purpose of autoethnography…is not only to tell personal stories. It intends to expand the understanding of social realities through the lens of the researcher's personal experiences."[128] By telling her story, Hayslip endeavors to change fear and suspicion directed towards the Vietnamese to acceptance and understanding.

The "American War"

As critics have pointed out,[129] Hayslip often privileges her own story of survival, self-realization, and immigration over the story of the war. However, in her text, Hayslip must reconcile her roles as both witness to the violence and destruction of the Vietnam War, much of which was due to US involvement, and as a successful and grateful immigrant who is telling her story of attaining financial success after relocating to the United States. Leslie Bow asserts that Hayslip's text represents "the individual overcoming adversity to settle in a place of refuge," stating, "Le Ly is the prototypical immigrant heroine, fleeing her country to seek sanctuary and a second beginning in a new land. She not only survives but, as indicated by her 'painted fingernails, and hygienist-cleaned teeth and four-bedroom home in California,'[130] finds financial success."[131] Although Bow argues that Hayslip's text both encapsulates and affirms "mythic

[128] Jones, Adams, and Ellis 108.
[129] Bundesen 14; Thanh Nguyen 148.
[130] Hayslip 193.
[131] Bow 129.

American values of opportunity, freedom, and class mobility,"[132] I argue that Hayslip's text diverges from the account of a "prototypical immigrant heroine" seeking prosperity in the United States. Although Hayslip acknowledges her financial success in the US, I assert that her text focuses on describing the situation in Vietnam. Moreover, rather than simply praising the United States as a land of opportunity, in accordance with the stereotypical immigrant narrative,[133] I assert that Hayslip also places blame for the war on the United States.

Along with many Vietnamese, Hayslip refers to the war as the "American war,"[134] implying that responsibility for the war rests with the United States.[135] She gives multiple examples of family members, neighbors, and friends who were killed by the US soldiers and South Vietnamese. She recalls her sorrow when the US bombing of Man Quang killed her favorite aunt Thu, who was preparing lunch in her kitchen when a bomb fell in her front yard, sending "hot shrapnel" through her body and the body of one of her young grandchildren, resulting in both of their deaths.[136] Hayslip also describes how the presence of the US military resulted in the deaths of many of her siblings and cousins during the war. She also explains that "in Vietnam, both sides had powerful helpers: many captains and navigators who thought they know better than anyone the course my people should set."[137] In her use of the phrase "my people," Hayslip creates distance between the Vietnamese people and the US military officials who interfered in Vietnamese affairs, inferring that these "captains and navigators" thought they knew best, but ended up contributing to massive destruction and death. Throughout her narrative, Hayslip details the violence and devastation brought about by the US military presence in

[132] Bow 129.
[133] Daniels 5.
[134] *When Heaven and Earth Changed Places* x.
[135] For many Vietnamese, the war has always been "The American War." For a more thorough explanation of both how the Vietnamese viewed US military involvement in Vietnam and the horrific realities of war for Vietnamese civilians, see Nick Turse's *Kill Anything That Moves: The Real American War in Vietnam* (2013).
[136] *When Heaven and Earth Changed Places* 14.
[137] *When Heaven and Earth Changed Places* 369.

Vietnam. She presents the Vietnamese as justified in their fight for freedom from Western control and accuses the US of fighting in a war that did not represent the interests of the Vietnamese people.

Hayslip also criticizes the destruction the American War in Vietnam caused not only to families and relationships, but also to the environment. She contrasts the beauty of the natural landscape she remembers from her childhood with how it appeared after being bombed by the US and South Vietnamese forces. "In 1965, when I left, the village was filled with beautiful fruit trees. Coconut trees, palm trees….When I returned, it was barren—the Americans had made it a kind of bloody parking lot. I don't see how men can take something so beautiful and make it so ugly. You can see how this touches me. It's one thing to take a life to protect yourself. It's quite another to ravage the beauty of nature."[138] Here, Hayslip acknowledges that some of the US soldiers' fighting and destruction may have been justified, particularly if they were defending themselves. However, she also points out how they destroyed the Vietnamese landscape, ruining the beauty of the countryside and in the process destroying the livelihood of many farmers and villagers. Moreover, she places blame for this destruction on the "Americans" specifically, rather than on the South Vietnamese or Vietcong soldiers.

Hayslip also equates US involvement in Vietnam with Vietnam's history of oppression under foreign powers. She recalls, "Our parents told us of the misery they had suffered from the invading Japanese ('small death,' our neighbors called them) in World War II, and from the French, who returned in 1946. These soldiers destroyed our crops, killed our livestock, burned our homes, raped our women, and tortured or put to death anyone who opposed them—as well as many who did not."[139] Much of Hayslip's childhood, as well as that of her parents, was spent

[138] Granberry 1.
[139] *When Heaven and Earth Changed Places* xiv.

under violent foreign occupation. She recalls white soldiers wandering through her village, killing and raping her neighbors and destroying their family home on several occasions.[140]

Moreover, because the American War came soon after the Vietnamese war with France (1946-1954), the Vietnamese people were already suspicious of Western attempts to control their land. She explains, "First, we were taught that Vietnam was *con rong chau tien*—a sovereign nation which had been held in thrall by Western imperialists for over a century. That all nations had a right to determine their own destiny also seemed beyond dispute, since we farmers subsisted by our own hands and felt we owed nothing to anyone but god and our ancestors for the right to live life as we saw fit."[141] She connects the villagers' confidence in Vietnam's right to self-rule with their cultural heritage and their social experience as farmers. Hayslip explains that the Vietnamese saw US soldiers not as their saviors or protectors, but as "Western imperialists" who were oppressing their nation, which had a right to its own self-government. Hayslip recalls how "the cadres told us that the division of Vietnam into North and South in 1954 was nothing more than a ploy by the defeated French and their Western allies, mainly the United States, to preserve what influence they could in our country."[142] Hayslip portrays US presence in Vietnam as a desperate attempt to maintain control over Vietnamese land and resources. In her discussion of Vietnam's desire for independence, Hayslip uses Vietnamese words, emphasizing the separate identity, language, and culture of the Vietnamese and thereby inferring their right to self-government rather than control by the West.

She explains how the Vietcong incorporated these concerns into their propaganda and campaigns to gain the support of the people: "'*Chia doi dat nuoc?*' the Viet Cong asked, 'Why should outsiders divide the land and tell some people to go north and others south? If Vietnam

[140] *When Heaven and Earth Changed Places* 3.
[141] *When Heaven and Earth Changed Places* x.
[142] *When Heaven and Earth Changed Places* x.

were truly for the Vietnamese, wouldn't we choose for ourselves what kind of government our people wanted? A nation cannot have *two* governments,' they said, 'anymore (sic) than a family can have two fathers.'"[143] Hayslip connects the Vietnamese people's desire for a unified country to their desire for a unified nuclear family and solid, unified patriarchal heritage. She explains how the US occupation violated the Vietnamese desire for national sovereignty and blames them for the destruction of Vietnamese land and the deaths of Vietnamese people.

In addition to criticizing US involvement in the war, Hayslip also critiques elements of US foreign policy. For example, when she explains how her new non-profit organization, The Global Village Foundation, would allow Vietnamese artisans to sell local handicrafts for a fair wage to distributors in the United States, she laments the obstacle of the "high tariffs levied by U.S. Customs,"[144] which will make it difficult for the village artisans to make a living. Hayslip also blames the indifference of the United States government and their desire to enact "vengeance" on Vietnam for the current starvation of Vietnamese families. She explains, "Between six and seven million Vietnamese men, women, and children are dying slowly of starvation, malnutrition, and disease because food and other necessities cannot be produced or imported in sufficient quantities from Western countries, some of which, like the United States, continue a wartime embargo. The cycle of vengeance persists."[145] Hayslip details the suffering of Vietnamese families at the time of her book's publication, which corresponds with the suffering she witnessed when she returned to visit her family in Vietnam three years earlier. She blames much of this suffering and starvation on the US government, which has enacted a trade embargo on Vietnamese goods. She considers this embargo an act of "vengeance" against the Vietnamese

[143] *When Heaven and Earth Changed Places* x.
[144] *When Heaven and Earth Changed Places* 372.
[145] *When Heaven and Earth Changed Places* 366.

and encourages the US government to show forgiveness, to lift the trade embargo in order to alleviate the starvation and suffering of the Vietnamese people.

Co-author Jay Wurts

Hayslip's text is written with Jay Wurts, who is listed on the cover and the title page and whom Hayslip acknowledges briefly as the co-author "who helped my memories walk and live and breathe again,"[146] but the text does not include any other information about his life, how he met Hayslip, or their writing process together. Wurts and his opinions, life experience, and input are not discussed nor identified at any point in the book, making it easy for the reader to forget that Wurts was involved as a fellow writer and editor who helped to shape the book's content and structure. However, as opposed to the female strength and solidarity demonstrated in the collaboration between Morales and Levins Morales, there is a distinct power differential in the collaboration between Hayslip and Wurts. Whereas the women are united not only by blood, but also but the common purposes of fighting social injustice, specifically activism for women's and Puerto Rican rights, and both authors are able to contribute individually and share control of the text, Wurts and Hayslip come from drastically different backgrounds, and Wurts, as the editor, exerts a degree of control and may have a different agenda than Hayslip in the compilation and publication of her work.

It is important to remember that Hayslip and Wurts came from completely different backgrounds. Hayslip grew up in a war-torn village in the jungles of Vietnam, trying to navigate French, Vietcong, and U.S.-backed South Vietnamese Republican occupations. By the age of sixteen, she had been tortured, imprisoned, captured, and raped, and experienced the deaths of several close family members. Wurts grew up in the United States, "in a post-industrial culture,

[146] *When Heaven and Earth Changed Places,* Foreword.

divided by public debate about the war, trying to sort through his military options."[147] Although Wurts served as an Air Guard pilot during the Vietnam War, he never saw combat in Vietnam.[148] Critic Joseph Trimmer observes, "If Hayslip entered the collaboration unaware of the conventions of Western narrative, Wurts entered the collaboration unaware of the culture that had shaped the consciousness of this woman from Ky La."[149] It is important to remember the "blind spots" that both of these authors might have possessed; Hayslip would have been unaware of the conflicts facing a US military veteran, and Wurts could not possibly comprehend the hardships and tragedies Hayslip had endured.

The Nuances and Dangers of Testimonial Literature

Due to the collaboration between Hayslip and Wurts, *When Heaven and Earth Changed Places* could be considered testimonial literature. As Maier and Dulfano explain, testimonial literature emerged "as an adjunct to armed liberation struggle in Latin America and elsewhere in the Third World" in the 1960s.[150] After beginning in Cuba, the form was utilized in Central America and continued to develop and be used in conjunction with the dictatorships and military violence in South America in the 1970s.[151] Importantly, the power dynamics between the author and editor of testimonial literature are usually asymmetrical: the narrator of a testimonial text "belongs to an oppressed, excluded, and/or marginal group and speaks/writes as a member of that group,"[152] while the editor, often a member of a more privileged class, is expected to professionalize the form and verify the facts. Accordingly, Hayslip, a woman of color from a

[147] Trimmer 34.
[148] Joseph Trimmer notes that Wurts elected to fly transport missions rather than engage in active combat. His only stint in Vietnam was comprised of twelve hours on a Vietnamese airstrip.
[149] Trimmer 34.
[150] Maier and Dulfano 3.
[151] Maier and Dulfano 3.
[152] Maier and Dulfano 5.

developing country who had survived war and trauma, engaged the help of a white, male, US editor to write and market her story for a US audience.

Awareness of Wurts's presence and influence in the text highlights both the constructed nature of life writing as a genre and the rhetorical nature of this particular text. As a former Vietcong sympathizer, Hayslip is writing from an "enemy" perspective; thus, it is useful for her to employ a co-author who represents a perspective US readers would have been more likely to relate to and trust, that of a US military veteran. As Leslie Bow notes, "Hayslip's narrative would not have received attention had it not been perceived as factual, especially in a genre such as Vietnam War narrative, where authority is so clearly aligned with a first-person experience of the war."[153] As co-author and co-editor, the audience could assume that Wurts is able to verify facts about the war and that the authors' two perspectives might balance, resulting in a more accurate and well-rounded narrative. Readers who might be unlikely to trust the perspective of a former Vietcong sympathizer might be more likely to trust the story if a US veteran was verifying the facts and editing the content.

Although Wurts's input and contributions are never acknowledged within the narrative, he played an important role in writing, shaping, and creating the text. Wurts admitted:

> A great percentage of the book was imaginative writing. I was not there. I didn't know these people. But I hoped my imagination, guided by empathy, would help me recreate Le Ly's life…But when I got it wrong, even if the writing was wonderful, Le didn't say, 'Wow! If it didn't happen like this, it should have.' She taught me very quickly that there were limits to imaginative writing unassisted by facts. When my imagination took a left turn, she protested…."[154]

Here, Wurts acknowledges the crucial role he played in writing this text, admitting that he did not experience the events Hayslip was writing about, and thus had to resort to "imaginative writing" in his composition of the text. However, he maintains that the text

[153] Bow 187.
[154] Trimmer 35.

provides an accurate representation of Hayslip's life, noting that when he altered events to fit his own imagination, Hayslip was quick to correct him. In his interview with Joseph Trimmer, Jay Wurts also expresses his frustration with Hayslip's lack of form, and explains that he had to substantially reformat her text in order to make it comprehensible to a general audience: "It was simply three hundred pages of oral testimony. There was no story. Just fragments….So I wound up cutting and pasting her manuscript, looking for a way to integrate her story."[155] Here, the extent of Wurts's involvement is evident. He admits that he not only shaped what Hayslip wrote, but that he also determined much of how it was presented. It is evident that Wurts perceives Hayslip's original, oral life story as shapeless, and feels that it is up to him, as a literate US editor, to give it form.

However, it is important to remember that although Wurts controlled much of what was included and excluded from the text and shaped its presentation, his involvement does not irrevocably obscure Hayslip's life story or her message. As Anne Goldman explains in *Take My Word: Autobiographical Innovations of Ethnic American Working Women*, "Editorial agenda [in testimonial literature] can mask but not obliterate the imperatives of the speakers; if we attend more closely to the discursive patterns in specific women's narratives, we can begin to pick up the necessarily oblique theorizing about race and gender politics—as well as about many other issues—that is encoded in them."[156] By paying close attention to the content of Hayslip's story, as well as the way in which she tells it, including the rhetorical strategies she uses and the purposes she is trying to achieve through these strategies, we can discern her goals and her intent. While it is crucial to recognize Wurts's role in creating this text, his presence as a co-author does not completely negate the validity of Hayslip's voice. Goldman clarifies,

[155] Trimmer 34.
[156] Goldman 68.

"Recognizing power differences (between author and editor) is not the same as either wishing them away or apologizing for them, but instead means outlining what is sometimes made to appear invisible."[157] By remaining mindful of Wurts's presence, we can develop a more accurate and nuanced understanding of this text and the complex process of its creation. In *Women, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader,* Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson explain that testimonial literature can serve as a form of "resistance literature." Correspondingly, in her narrative, Hayslip is using the help of a US veteran to express her dismay with the actions of the United States government, criticizing their involvement in Vietnam and scolding them for the "cycle of vengeance"[158] they are perpetuating through their poverty-inducing trade embargos on the Vietnamese.

At the same time, there are also dangers inherent in testimonial literature, as collaboration between individuals from different backgrounds and levels of privilege is fraught with potential for exploitation. By collaborating with a white male who served in the US military, Hayslip, while still promoting her own views and telling her life story, is also giving evidence of her own "conversion" to a US mindset while at the same time making her story and perspective more "acceptable" to a mainstream US audience. In contrast with the dialogic collaboration of Morales and Levins Morales, as Goldman points out, "collaborative compilations" between individuals of different races, ethnicities, and socioeconomic backgrounds "may…provide one means of managing ethnicity."[159] By making Hayslip relatable to a white, potentially anti-Communist audience, Wurts is managing, shaping, and constructing her image and marketing her text in a way that both authors hope will be palatable. Hayslip's repeated offers of forgiveness to the US

[157] Goldman 69.
[158] *When Heaven and Earth Changed Places* 366.
[159] Goldman 71.

reader for their involvement in Vietnam[160] remake the image of a cunning, threatening, faceless Vietcong sympathizer into a woman who is far more approachable and even grateful to the United States.[161] Her affirmation of the benefits of capitalist society and her pride in her US citizenship may serve to set readers at ease, thereby increasing the sales of her book and facilitating readers' donations to her NGO.

Conclusion: From Hostility to Reconciliation

Hayslip focuses on the pursuit of peace and encourages readers to move past hostilities and work towards reconciliation. In the Afterword to the second edition, perhaps in response to readers who wonder how they can possibly forgive those Vietnamese soldiers who injured or killed their family members, Hayslip encourages, "Don't worry too much about forgiving your enemies—at least right now. It is enough to forgive yourself. A person worthy of such compassion will likely do no more harm in the world, and very likely do much good."[162] Here, again, Hayslip reminds her reader that the US soldiers have also done wrong, and are also in need of forgiveness. However, by bestowing forgiveness, she encourages readers to do the same.

Hayslip positions her text as a fulfillment of her father's last wish when he tells her: "Bay Ly, you were born to be a wife and mother, not a killer. That is your duty…Go back to your little son. Raise him the best way you can. That is the battle you were born to fight. That is the victory you must win."[163] Thus, as Leslie Bow explains, "Hayslip posits her Americanization not as oppositional to her Vietnamese duty but paradoxically as its fulfillment."[164] By telling the story of her own suffering and the Vietnamese people, relating to and empathizing with her US

[160] Thanh Nguyen 147-148.
[161] Hayslip's most ardent declaration of patriotism was quoted on page 17 of this chapter: "Today, I am very honored to live in the United States and proud to be a U.S. citizen. I do my best to honor the American flag, which I have seen not only raised in battle against me but flying proudly over the schools where my wonderful boys have learned to be Americans" (*When Heaven and Earth Changed Places* 355-356).
[162] *When Heaven and Earth Changed Places* 371.
[163] *When Heaven and Earth Changed Places* 201.
[164] Bow 124.

readership, and encouraging peace and forgiveness, Hayslip transforms herself from a Vietcong enemy into someone US readers can relate to. Ultimately, Hayslip endeavors not only to achieve acceptance and vindication, but also to promote peace and goodwill between the United States and Vietnam.

Hayslip's text serves as both a testimony to the atrocities of the Vietnam War and an immigrant success story. Through her narrative, she is able to reposition the story of the Vietnam War away from an exclusive focus on U.S. heroics, Vietnamese victims, and male combatants, and introduce the perspective of a female Vietnamese villager who fought for the Vietcong. As stated in the beginning of this chapter, Nguyen criticizes Hayslip for positioning herself as "a representative of all the Vietnamese people" and creating a "problematic and premature" reconciliation, "forgiving Americans for any guilty feelings they might have" [165] despite continued US imperialism and racism.[166] However, as we have seen in this chapter, Hayslip does not obscure or ignore enduring social problems, including racism and disparities in the United States. Rather, she both criticizes US involvement in Vietnam and acknowledges the good intentions of US citizens. Hayslip is not representing Vietnam in an official political or ambassadorial sense; rather, she is representing the perspective of an migrant who makes global problems visible through her personal account, and who encourages readers to stop the "cycle of vengeance,"[167] overcome their own hostilities and prejudices, and aid the residents of Vietnam.

[165] Thanh Nguyen 147-148.
[166] Thanh Nguyen 148.
[167] *When Heaven and Earth Changed Places* 366.

Chapter Four: "That safe space, between two countries"[1]

Canícula: Snapshots of a Girlhood en la Frontera (1995) by Mexican author Norma Elia Cantú[2]

> "Memory is our means of connecting past and present and constructing a self and versions of experience we can live with" (Gayle Greene, 293).[3]

> In 1985, back in that safe space, between two countries, the woman Nena and her mother bring out the boxes, untie the white-turned-yellow shoelaces, and begin going through the memories. The smell of the past trapped along with the memories. For days, for weeks, for months, they hold the photographs reverently, and the stories come to them. Sometimes the sisters—Dahlia, Esperanza, Azalia, Margarita, Xóchitl—join them and then leave, taking their memories of things, the younger ones not remembering stories, only images, brief descriptions of how they wore a favorite dress; they grieve for a long-past missed birthday, remember a sisterly fight over a long-forgotten childish thing. The father too, curious, interrupts, contributes stories. They continue, the mother filling in gaps for the daughter, of before, of the times before and during that she has forgotten or changed in her mind—the family, the neighbors, celebrations, events. Some they both experienced yet remember differently; they argue amiably, each sticking to her version of what happened. The woman Nena begins to shape her story, drawing it out as carefully as when she ripped a seam for her mother, slowly and patiently so the cloth could be resewn without trace of the original seam. The stories of her girlhood in that land in-between, la frontera, are shared; her story and the stories of the people who lived that life with her is one. But who'll hear it? (*Canícula* 2).

Canícula is a collection of stories of Norma Cantú's 1950s childhood, which was spent between Laredo, Texas, and Nuevo Laredo, Mexico. In her text, Cantú blends personal memories, authentic photographs of her own family, and fiction to create what she labels a "fictional autobioethnography."[4] Cantú's narrative mirrors the structure of a collage, comprised of eighty-five short stories and twenty-three images, including photographs and documents. The stories range in length from a paragraph to a few pages long, and each of them describes a photograph, although many of these photographs are not included. There are twenty-one

[1] *Canícula* 2.
[2] Cantú is a poet, writer, teacher, and school administrator who spent much of her early life between Laredo, Texas and Nuevo Laredo, Mexico. She earned her BA and MA in English from Texas A&M University, and a Ph.D. from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, earning a Fulbright Fellowship to Spain. In addition to writing *Canícula,* she has published numerous short stories and articles and served as co-editor for four books focusing on Chicana traditions and border culture. She currently teaches English at the University of Texas at San Antonio and serves as editor for the Rio Grande/Rio Bravo Culture and Traditions book series at Texas A&M University Press (Mermann-Jozwiak and Sullivan, 115-116; University of Texas-San Antonio).
[3] Quoted Delgadillo 79.
[4] *Canícula* xi.

photographs all together, many of them creased, lined, or marked with handwritten captions, as well as two official documents, a U.S. immigration card and a Mexican residency card, which also have photographs.

Although critic Timothy Dow Adams claims that "it's hard to see how [Cantú's] book is significantly different from almost any other autobiography in terms of its fictionalizing,"[5] I assert what makes it different is that Cantú calls attention to its fictionalization. As Linda Andersen explains in *Autobiography (The New Critical Idiom)*, in a traditional autobiography "the author becomes the guarantor of the…meaning or truth of the text."[6] However, in this text, Cantú does not maintain a pretense of adhering to the truth, but rather points out that many of the characters and situations in her text "originate in real people and events and become fictionalized."[7] For example, Norma Cantú herself never appears in the text; instead, she represents herself as a fictional character, Azucena, who functions as both the protagonist and narrator. In addition, although all of the photographs are of Cantú and her family, the stories accompanying them do not always describe the people and events factually; she clarifies that "what may appear to be autobiographical is not always so."[8] She admits, "This is not a narrative strung out" chronologically; "it does not adhere to conventions of plot development."[9] Instead, she explains, it is "a collage of stories gleaned from photographs randomly picked, not from a photo album chronologically arranged, but haphazardly pulled from a box of photos where time is blurred."[10] In her essay "The Writing of *Canícula:* Breaking Boundaries, Finding Forms," Cantú reveals her thoughts regarding the text's structure and organization: "I was…bent on not

[5] Adams 19.
[6] Anderson 2.
[7] *Canícula* xi.
[8] *Canícula* xi.
[9] *Canícula* xii.
[10] *Canícula* xii.

writing a purely autobiographical book…Chronological order had to go; after all, we don't think in clean, clear chronological order; life doesn't happen in neat little packages. I wanted a narrative that, like my memory, worked in a recursive and overlapping fashion."[11] In contrast to many traditional autobiographical texts, which claim to represent truth,[12] Cantú calls attention to the fictionalization of her childhood memoirs.

Photography, as a medium, is often assumed to be factual and is frequently associated with official documents, such as passports and drivers' licenses, used as evidence in police investigations and court cases, and is viewed as synonymous with objective, reliable representation of people, circumstances, and events. As John Tagg points out in his book, *The Burden of Representation*, the camera is used as "an instrument of evidence."[13] Similarly, according to Roland Barthes's explanation of the evidentiary role of photography in *Camera Lucida,* "What the photograph asserts is the overwhelming truth that 'the thing has been there,'" even if it represents "a reality one can no longer touch."[14] Thus, as Barthes and Tagg explain, photographs both constitute evidence of the subject's existence, allowing the viewer to interpret the image from a cultural, historical, or political standpoint, and create an emotional, psychological connection between "the *necessarily* real thing which has been placed before the lens"[15] and the viewer. Cantú uses this binary strategically to pursue what Barthes refers to as the punctum,[16] the direct, emotional connection between the viewer and the photograph. The photographs of family members and domestic scenes she includes in her text—grandchildren

[11] Cantú, *Chicana Feminisms* 102.
[12] Anderson 2.
[13] Tagg 1.
[14] Barthes 87.
[15] Barthes 87.
[16] Barthes differentiates between the two main ways in which a photograph is interpreted by the viewer: the studium, which involves the viewer's political, cultural, and linguistic interpretation of the photo, and the punctum, which signifies the emotional connection between the viewer and the photo.

crowded around their grandmother, a smiling baby, a laughing toddler in front of a birthday cake—encourage the reader to relate to and empathize with the people portrayed in the pictures.

Importantly, Cantú explains that the photographs are used creatively in her text; they are paired with fictional narratives and do not provide exact representations of her stories. Although the photos she includes depict treasured family memories, they do not always correlate with historical events nor with the accompanying narratives, demonstrating Tagg's statement that "*every* photograph is the result of specific and…significant distortions which render its relation to any prior reality deeply problematic."[17] Though photography as a medium is often perceived as documenting fact, Cantú's narrative allows for freedom in both representation and interpretation of the scenes depicted in the photos. Thus, Cantú uses the photographs in her text creatively, with fictional components added and pieces missing, undermining the notion of photography as evidence and highlighting instead the emotional connection her readers can make with the photographs.

Like the other three texts I have examined, Cantú explores themes of migration and return migration and creatively and strategically utilizes rhetoric, including the unique structure of her text, and, in this case, the varied mediums of photographs and official documents, to connect with her audience. Like the authors of the other three texts, she also plays with the complex relationship between author, narrator, and character and explores the unique roles and importance of women. In this chapter, I will examine how Norma Cantú blends photographs with text and fact with fiction to call into question notions of autobiographical authenticity and to mirror her conflicting identities and the disjointed experience of living on the border. I will demonstrate that Cantú uses the complex relationship between text and photographs to highlight

[17] Tagg 2.

the blended, fragmented lives and multicultural identities of people who live on the US-Mexico border.

Chicana Life Writing

Although Chicano life writing texts, including *Pocho* (1959) by José Antonio Villarreal, were published in prior to the 1960s, as Maria Henríquez Betancor explains in "Hispanic American Life Writing," prior to the 1960s, the genre of "Chicana/o literature" did not exist.[18] However, as mentioned in previous chapters, the social activist movements of the 1960s opened the literary arena for writers of color, and Chicano/a writers began to publish.[19] Chicano literary works in the 1960s and 1970s stressed communal identity and solidarity over individuality, emphasizing the community's rural and working class roots.[20]

Chicano/a life writing in the 1980s and 1990s began to reflect the authors' individuality as they explored personal struggles for acceptance, identity, and connection to their Mexican heritage, while also exploring topics of racism and discrimination towards Latinos. Early examples of Chicano life writing include Ernesto Galarza's *Barrio Boy* (1971), Oscar Zeta Acosta's *Autobiography of a Brown Buffalo* (1973), and Richard Rodriguez's *Hunger of Memory* (1981), although it was not until the 1980s when Chicana women authors became known for their life writing.[21] Three of the best known examples of Chicana life writing from the 1980s are Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherríe Moraga's *This Bridge Called My Back* (1983), Cherríe Moraga's

[18] Although the genre of "Chicana/o literature" did not officially exist until the 1960s, a tremendous amount of writing by Chicanas/os existed in Spanish and English in diaries, newspapers, and other print venues. A considerable amount of scholarship is now being produced about Chicana/o literature that existed pre-1960. For a discussion of some of this early literature, and how Chicana/o writing reflects conceptions of space, belonging, and nationalism, see Marissa K. Lopez's *Chicano Nations: The Hemispheric Origins of Mexican American Literature.*

[19] For a helpful discussion of how Chicana women participated in and obtained leadership through the political and social movements of the 1960s, see "Chicanas and Mexican American Women" in Wilma Mankiller's *The Reader's Companion to U.S. Women's History.*

[20] *Encyclopedia of Life Writing: Autobiographical and Biographical Forms,* 428-429. Ed. Margaretta Jolly.

[21] Betancor 429.

Loving in the War Years (1983), Sandra Cisneros's *The House on Mango Street* (1984), and Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1987).

Well-known works of Chicana life writing from the 1990s, when *Canícula* was published, include Mary Helen Ponce's *Hoyt Street* (1990), Tiffany Ana López's *Growing Up Chicana/o* (1993) Mary Guerrero Milligan's *Daughters of the Fifth Sun* (1995), and Elva Treviño Hart's *Barefoot Heart: Stories of a Migrant Child* (1999).[22] As David William Foster explains in *Mexican Literature: A History,* Chicano texts in the 1980s and 1990s explore themes of both belonging to and separation from mainstream US society while also reflecting "the struggle against a subordinated integration."[23] While the aforementioned authors, like Cantú, address issues of identity, race, and the importance of preserving their cultural heritage, Cantú's blend of prose and photographs and her emphasis on the fictionalization of her narrative makes her text unique.

Textual Representation of the Border

Cantú's book opens with a hand-drawn map featuring locations important to her narrative, although the border itself is not highlighted. At first glance, the map appears to show a single, cohesive Southwestern region of land, dotted with city names, some in Spanish and others in English. Unlike the actual border fence, which is in many places militaristic and highly visible, the border on Cantú's map is subtle and hard to find, a small, innocuous line among a tangle of rivers and the boundaries of Mexican states. Cantú's depiction of the areas surrounding Laredo, Texas, and Nuevo Laredo, Mexico, downplays the existence of a division between the nations, the communities, and the people groups, seemingly portraying them as a single territory and community. Cantú's portrayal emphasizes the strong regional "Tejano/a" culture and identity

[22] For a detailed discussion of these works and some of the themes and cultural topics they explore, see Chapter Three of Scott Baugh's *Mediating Chicana/o Culture: Multicultural American Vernacular.*
[23] Foster 387.

which has characterized this region for hundreds of years, both before and after the annexation of the Republic of Texas into the United States in 1845.[24] Cantú's depiction of the border area also corresponds with Claudia Sadowski-Smith's claim that, according to many twentieth-century border texts, "the Mexico-U.S. border constitutes an entirely arbitrary divide that has separated *one* people since the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo."[25] By making the border itself discreet and not easily visible, Cantú demonstrates how the people living on both sides of the national divide are part of a united community. Accordingly, throughout Cantú's text, the border functions as an arbitrary divide; protagonist Azucena's family lives, works, shops, travels, and attends religious celebrations and family events regularly on both sides of the border.[26]

Beginning in her introduction, Cantú reinforces the idea of a singular, united Latino population on both sides of the border. She explains that *Canícula* is the second book in a three-book series, with the first book, *Papeles de mujer*, written entirely in Spanish and made up of "correspondence and documents that will tell the story of a family in the geographical space between Monterrey, Mexico and San Antonio, Texas, from 1880-1950,"[27] and concluding with the third book in the series, *Cabañuela*, which "continues the story to the end of the twentieth century."[28] Although the other two books in the trilogy remain unpublished,[29] by introducing the two other texts, Cantú situates *Canícula* within a longer and more in-depth history of the border, and *Canícula*'s characters within generations of families who negotiated border politics and identities.

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[24] For a detailed explanation of Tejano identity, see Timothy M. Matovina's *Tejano Religion and Ethnicity.*
[25] Sadowski-Smith 28.
[26] Renowned Mexican-American author and activist Américo Paredes also explores his formative experiences on the south Texas/Mexico border, detailing the influence of both Anglo and Mexican cultures on his childhood. For an in-depth discussion of Paredes's work, see José Limón's *Américo Paredes: Culture and Critique* (2012).
[27] *Canícula* xi.
[28] *Canícula* xi.
[29] In a 2009 interview, Cantú explains that she has already finished writing *Cabeñuela,* but that she is unable to find a publisher (Mermann-Jozwiak and Sullivan 124).

Despite Cantú's assertions that "these stories are my family's,"[30] we cannot easily assume that Norma Cantú herself is the book's narrator. Although the introduction is signed "Norma Elia Cantú," the Prologue depicts a woman called Nena, and the (visibly doctored) signatures on both official documents included in the text read "Azucena Cantú," the full version of the nickname "Nena." In fact, the author's first name, "Norma," is never mentioned within the text. Rather, the first-person narrator is referred to only as "Nena," a common nickname for the oldest female child in a family[31] (similar to the Spanish word for girl, "niña") as well as a nickname for females named Azucena (Spanish for "Lily"), which corresponds with the signatures on the documents.

To further complicate matters, Azucena, the book's narrator and a fictional representation of Cantú, uses both first and third person. "Nena of Three," accompanied by a photo of a young Cantú, is narrated in third person: "The three-year-old girl looks off camera, probably at her father...."[32] However, in many other stories, including "Dahlia One," "Esperanza," "Azalia," and "Communions," the narrator uses "I." For example, in "Communions," which is accompanied by a photo of a young Cantú in a First Communion dress, the text reads, "I smile looking off camera, kneeling and holding the candle, the rosary…."[33] Similarly, in "Body Hair," a story accompanied by a picture of an adolescent Cantú, the text reads "An awkward teen, shy and reticent, I face the camera…."[34] Since many of these narratives are paired with photographs of a girl who is clearly Norma Cantú, the narrator's alternating use of first and third person reminds us that Cantú is both fictionalized character and author, and that she is the one constructing these memories, adding or deleting, supplementing and creating, shifting, obscuring and changing

[30] *Canícula* xi.
[31] Adams 62.
[32] *Canícula* 53.
[33] *Canícula* 57.
[34] *Canícula* 60.

actual events until they "become fictionalized."[35] Similarly, Azucena functions as both the first-person narrator and a character within the text. As Kathryn Quinn-Sánchez explains, "By complicating what initially appears as autobiography, Cantú-as-author clearly emphasizes her authority over what is represented in and by the text."[36] Moreover, the uncertainties in the text spur the reader to actively participate in construction and interpretation of the text, questioning both the reliability of the narrator and the motivation of the author. As Theresa Delgadillo clarifies, juxtaposing photographs and narratives which have obvious discrepancies "destabilizes a purely ethnographic reading" of Cantú's text and "metafictionally invites varied reader interpretations."[37]

Like her other strategies for subverting notions of authenticity, representing her fictionalized childhood self as Azucena allows Cantú to demonstrate how identities and communities may be fragmented and undermined through border politics. Individuals who live "en la frontera" are expected to survive and thrive in an environment marked by multiple languages, governments, social systems, and cultural norms. By playing with the conventions of autobiography and highlighting her own textual performance, Cantú is able both to call into question the notion of "authentic" or "fixed" identities and to demonstrate how those living on the border must become adept at transforming themselves to fit a variety of cultural and linguistic demands. Additionally, depicting herself as a fictional character allows Cantú a higher degree of narrative agency in which she is not tied to her family's memories or historical documentation of events; instead, she is free to play with the notions of "truth" and "factuality" in historical representation and memory. By creating a narrator who resembles her childhood self rather than "factually" represents her, Cantú creates a level of distance between herself and the

[35] *Canícula* xi.
[36] Quinn-Sánchez 122.
[37] Delgadillo 96.

text. This distance allows for a layer of protection from still-living relatives who disagree with how Cantú represents their family. Accordingly, Cantú reveals in *Chicana Feminisms* that her harshest critics are her sisters, who "read *Canícula* and say 'That's not how it happened.'"[38] As Jacques Derrida states, "There is no writing which does not devise some means of protection, to protect against itself, against the writing by which the 'subject' is himself threatened as he lets himself be written: as he exposes himself."[39] Cantú's fictionalization of her childhood self not only allows her to play with notions of border politics and authenticity, but also provides a layer of protection from critics.

The book's Prologue features an adult woman named Nena (presumably a grown-up version of the same Azucena who is portrayed as a child in the rest of the book's fictionalized memories) shown in three scenes—first, reading about Roland Barthes's death over coffee at a café in Madrid in 1980, then, the same year, looking at her Spanish lover's family photographs in his apartment, and finally, in 1985, back in her childhood home on the US-Mexico border, sorting through her own family's photographs with her parents and sisters in the scene quoted at the beginning of this chapter. Throughout the Prologue, Nena contemplates how photographs are used to make people and places known; by sharing his old family photographs with her, her Spanish lover "has offered his life"[40] to her. She laments that in Spain, far from her childhood home, "she has no photographs to offer, to share her life through. Her photographs, silent witnesses of her life, her history, lie an ocean away, across the United States, across Texas, at the borderland where Mexico meets Texas."[41] With no photographs to enable him to imagine her life and understand her childhood, her home, her culture, and her life remain a mystery to him.

[38] "The Writing of *Canícula*" 104.
[39] Derrida *Writing and Difference* 224, qtd. Adams 15.
[40] *Canícula* 1.
[41] *Canícula* 2.

Without visual references to show him her life, she is from "an unknown land he cannot fathom, a land as far from Spain as the unknown."[42] Nena considers photographs a way of bridging a cultural gap, a way of preserving history and sharing important pieces of her life; without them, her life story remains incomprehensible. Here, in the first pages of the text, Cantú uses Azucena to show how photographs can be invaluable in sharing, preserving, and piecing together life stories, memories and experiences, simultaneously demonstrating the value of photographs in her own text.

The Prologue also introduces the rest of Nena's family, who will feature as characters throughout the text. In the third scene (quoted on the first page of this chapter), the family participates in constructing a collaborative history. As Nena and her mother sort through the boxes of photographs, her sisters, Dahlia, Esperanza, Azalia, Margarita, and Xótichl, contribute to the stories. Their father, too, is "curious, interrupts, contributes stories."[43] Some of the memories are lost to the younger children and even to Nena, but their mother remembers, "filling in gaps for the daughter, of before, of times before and during that she has forgotten, or changed in her mind."[44] The mother and daughter experienced the events from different perspectives, yet each woman's version seems accurate to her. "Some [events] they both experienced yet remember differently; they argue amiably, each sticking to her version of what happened."[45] This scene mirrors the full text of *Canícula*; like Azucena's family stories, which may have been forgotten, misremembered, or "changed," with each family member recalling the same event differently, Cantú has shaped, altered, and fictionalized her memories of childhood and family life. By showing how family members can hold different interpretations of the same event, Cantú

[42] *Canícula* 1.
[43] *Canícula* 2.
[44] *Canícula* 2.
[45] *Canícula* 2.

reveals that truth is subjective, and there is no one correct way of remembering things. The prologue ends as the woman Nena begins to "shape her story, drawing it out as carefully as when she ripped a seam for her mother, slowly and patiently so the cloth could be resewn without a trace of the original seam."[46] Like Cantú's text, Azucena's (Nena's) stories are constructed, "shaped," rather than simply retold. Importantly, the cloth in this metaphor is resewn "without a trace of the original seam";[47] likewise, in Cantú's text the memories and stories of the past are not simply being retold, they are being re-created.

This scene, which was included in the epigraph, exhibits valuable parallels to the mother/daughter dynamic in *Getting Home Alive*. Like Nena, her mother, and her sisters, Rosario Morales and her daughter, Aurora Levins Morales, write collaboratively, with each woman contributing her memories, observations, and opinions to the text. Both of these texts demonstrate the importance of collaborative, communal, women-centered stories, which will be further emphasized by Cantú's discussion of her mother's best friends, the "comadres," later in this chapter.

While the photographs themselves can lend an air of authenticity to her narrative, Cantú clarifies in the introduction to *Canícula*, "although it may appear that these stories are my family's, they are not precisely, and yet they are. But then again, as Pat Mora claims, life en la frontera is raw truth, and stories of such life, fictitious as they may be, are even truer than true."[48] Though the photographs belong to Cantú's family, they do not always depict the people or events she describes. Cantú states that "the story emerges from photographs, photographs through which, as Roland Barthes claimed, the dead return; the stories mirror how we live life in our memories, with our past and our present juxtaposed and bleeding, seeping back and forth, one to

[46] *Canícula* 2.
[47] *Canícula* 2.
[48] *Canícula* xi.

the other in a recursive dance."[49] Although the occurrences in the book may not have happened exactly as she describes them, she explains that through this "dance" between past and present, fact and fiction, they effectively mirror the fragmentation and cultural blending of life on the border. She herself may not have lived through all of these experiences, but they still provide an authentic depiction of a 1950s border childhood.

Accordingly, there are noticeable difference between the text and photographs throughout Cantú's narrative, which demonstrate Cantú's claim that "photography is truth, yet it is unreliable."[50] Like the family photographs in *Getting Home Alive*, which do not correspond with the narrative, the photographs in Cantú's text do not match up with the written text, sometimes exhibiting clear contradictions. As Timothy Dow Adams explains in *Light Writing and Life Writing-Photography in Autobiography,* "because photographs are in a sense physical traces of actual objects, they somehow seem more referential than words."[51] Although the photographs in *Canícula and Getting Home Alive* seem to represent truth, providing objective, factual documentation of a moment in time, the discrepancies between the images provided in the text and the authors' accounts highlight the both the subjective nature of truth and the constructed nature of history and memory.

Interestingly, at first glance Cantú seems to be using her stories to describe the adjacent photographs, yet the stories and photographs exhibit intentional differences. For example, she includes a photograph of a Mexican national ID card which clearly lists the bearer's age as sixteen, whereas the subsequent story focuses around the acquisition of a Mexican ID card picture by a girl who describes herself as "a shy skinny twelve year old."[52] In the story "Dahlia

[49] *Canícula* xii.
[50] Cantú, *Chicana Feminisms* 101.
[51] Adams xv.
[52] *Canícula* 22.

Two," the narrator describes a birthday cake with three candles lit, while the cake in the picture has four candles.[53] Likewise, while the story "Cowgirl" is prefaced by a picture of children lined up in the schoolyard, the narrator describes herself and her classmates as posing "in front of the blackboard with the alphabet running across the top."[54] Other stories describe the people in the photographs as smiling[55] when they are not. In "Bueli," the narrator describes her grandmother in the photograph as surrounded by four children, "Tino, Dahlia, Esperanza, and me";[56] the photograph shows an elderly woman surrounded by three children rather than four. Most notably, the photograph accompanying the piece "Tino" is not the one described in the corresponding paragraph. The photo shows four children lined up outside, near a fence, bushes and fields in the background, while the text describes a birthday party scene: "Everyone else is crowded around me; the piñata in the shape of a birthday cake sways in the wind above our heads."[57] In this case, the only similarity between the photo and the text is the narrator's brother Tino, making his finger in the shape of a gun and pointing it at the camera.

Other memories, including "Crossings,"[58] have no photo to match the description; a few, including "Chalo,"[59] do not allude to a photo at all. "Last Piñata" describes a scene the narrator holds in her mind, though she admits "I've lost the photo, I don't even know where it is, in one of my Mother's other boxes, or in one of Espy's albums, perhaps. It remains crisp and clear in my mind."[60] The narrator's description of this photo as a tangible item emphasizes the authenticity of the people and memories depicted in the text, while its absence from the text

[53] *Canícula* 105.
[54] *Canícula* 33.
[55] *Canícula* 53.
[56] *Canícula* 24.
[57] *Canícula* 14.
[58] *Canícula* 5.
[59] *Canícula* 79.
[60] *Canícula* 55.

highlights the narrative's status as constructed and fictionalized. Some of the images in the text have been visibly doctored; both the official signature on Cantú's citizenship card[61] and the name on her U.S immigration papers[62] have been covered over with new, pasted-on signatures which read "Azucena Cantú" rather than "Norma Cantú." By offering a fictionalization of her childhood, told in glimpses, with pictures that may or may not be depicting the scenes that are being described, Cantú calls readers' attention to the constructed nature of identity, narrative, and memory. Purposeful differences between the stories and photographs remind the reader that the narrative is not entirely autobiographical, and that memory cannot provide a "nonfictional" representation. The discrepancies compel the careful reader to pay attention, to assist in the construction of the text, and to become involved in the interpretation of the photographs.

Another way in which Cantú compels readers to become involved in the text is through interpretation of sensory details. Though all the pictures are in black and white, Cantú includes vivid descriptions of color. There is no way for the reader to tell whether the colors the narrator describes are real or imagined; regardless, her descriptions of color and other sensory details bring the photographs to life and draw the reader into the scenes she is describing. Since the colors are not pictured, and the reader cannot hear the sounds or smell the scents she describes, the reader is required to do mental labor to immerse him or herself in the scene. For example, in "Rocking Horse," a story accompanied by a black and white photograph of a young Cantú riding a rocking horse outside, the narrator describes:

> I ride the rocking horse Buelito's built from discarded wood planks painted the color of the red coyoles—red as memories. My feet sandaled in brown huaraches from Nuevo Laredo with tiny green nopales and the tinier red pears, tunas, painted on the delicate leather. A white ribbon holds flimsy black curls away from my face…Mami has made

[61] *Canícula* 22.
[62] *Canícula* 21.

> my sundress, blue like the sky, and embroidered tiny pink rosebuds in the handmade smocking.[63]

Here, Azucena the narrator catalogues the colors in the scene, bringing it to life for the reader. Because the pictures are black and white, the reader is compelled to impart color into the photographs, to become involved in interpretation and in reconstructing a past time. Importantly, since we cannot see the colors, we must trust the narrator that they are accurate. Thus, through detailed descriptions of sensory details, the narrator both makes the scene come alive for the reader and reinforces a sense of the photograph's authenticity. In addition to describing color, throughout her text Cantú integrates a myriad of additional sensory descriptions, all compelling the reader to become actively involved in interpretation. The narrator describes "A tingly tasting orange soft drink"[64] her family used to bring on picnics, how her father would come home from a long day of work at the smelter "smelling of metal and sweat,"[65] how she'd hang out the window of the car "feeling the breeze whip my hair against my face,"[66] kneel in church and pray the rosary with "the smell of incense so strong I want to faint,"[67] and how "the smell of orange blossoms [was] intoxicating"[68] at an outdoor celebration for her cousin's quincenañera. All of Azucena's vivid sensory descriptions bring scenes alive for readers and allow them to become involved in active interpretation. Cantú explains her motivation behind excluding information from her text: "I didn't go back and 'fill in' what was missing in this piece….I chose instead to let the gaps remain wide open for readers to fill in themselves."[69] Cantú's fictionalized use of

[63] *Canícula* 6.
[64] *Canícula* 91.
[65] *Canícula* 91.
[66] *Canícula* 91.
[67] *Canícula* 4.
[68] *Canícula* 11.
[69] Cantú, *Chicana Feminisms* 102.

photographs throughout the text allows the reader to become actively involved in interpretation of the photographs and to join her in the reconstruction of memories.

Like the other three texts I discuss in this dissertation, issues of migration and return migration are central in Cantú's text, associated with both the loss of the familiar and the promise of new opportunities. The selection "Crossings," for example, describes Azucena and her parents crossing from Mexico into the U.S. in 1948. She was only a year old, and the memory remains ambiguous: "Bueli and Mami and Papi crossed the bridge on foot from one Laredo [Nuevo Laredo, in Mexico] to the other; they took turns carrying me, or maybe only pushing my blue stroller."[70] Although Azucena is not exactly sure how she got from one side to the other, this particular memory provides a crucial link between her own migration from Mexico to the United States in 1948 and her maternal grandparents' earlier return migration from the United States to Mexico in 1935, during the Great Depression.

In her maternal grandparents' case, return migration meant "losing everything"[71] they had accumulated during their time in the United States, including "a black Ford pickup truck and all their belongings—to corrupt customs officials at the border."[72] The theft of their material possessions reflects their loss of U.S. residency and sense of belonging in their former community. They were not alone in their loss, since "most deportees left with nothing but the clothes on their back—sent in packed trains to the border on the way to Mexico, even those who were U.S. citizens."[73] As Sadowski-Smith notes in *Border Fictions,* the involuntary migration of Azucena's maternal grandparents "refers to Mexican (American) repatriation during the late 1920s and early 1930s in response to concerns about competition with native-born workers and

[70] *Canícula* 5.
[71] *Canícula* 5.
[72] *Canícula* 5.
[73] *Canícula* 5.

alleged overrepresentation among the unemployed ranks and the nation's relief programs…These deportations resulted in widespread violations of civil and human rights."[74] These violations included the denial of citizenship rights via the deportation of Azucena's grandfather, who had been born in the United States. Other violations included "illegally imprisoning immigrants and not permitting returnees to dispose of their property or to collect their wages, separating families, and deporting the infirm."[75] By depicting her grandparents' return to Mexico as an involuntary experience of trauma and loss, Cantú provides a contrast to typical models of reverse migration, which normally include either failure in one's new environment, leading to a desire to return to the security of one's native territory, or the achievement of a measure of success, and subsequent return to enjoy and share the profits.[76] Since her grandparents have been forced from their home in San Antonio and are not returning to Mexico by choice, their return is shrouded in loss and sorrow rather than triumph and success. "But there was nothing to be done except cry and go on,"[77] Azucena explains. She also notes that for her grandparents, who moved back to the United States in 1948, returning to the land that had rejected and evicted them did not feel like coming home any more: "In 1948 crossing meant coming home, but not quite."[78] As Mary Pat Brady notes, in these circumstances, "the family cannot afford to believe in a stable concept of home or nation; to feel that they 'belong' is to

[74] Sadowski-Smith 33.
[75] McKay, qtd. Sadowski-Smith 33.
[76] Reyes explains four theories behind the reasons for return migration. The first is the disappointment theory, in which immigrants who have "failed" (12) to attain a particular level of success in their new location return to their country of origin. In the circular migration theory, migrants remain flexible, traveling wherever there are employment opportunities including returning to their home country for work. According to the target income theory, migrants may return to their home country once they have experienced a particular level of economic success and accumulated savings. According to the social network theory, in which migrants rely on one another for financial, social, and economic support in their new location, they might return if networks have not yet been sufficiently developed (15).
[77] *Canícula* 5.
[78] *Canícula* 5.

heighten their own vulnerability."[79] For this family, neither Mexico nor the U.S. is home. By including the example of involuntary return migration to Mexico, Cantú undermines predominant national conceptions of the United States as an ideal home space and also demonstrates the sometimes repeated and often unpredictable nature of migration. The border in this context demonstrates the family's exile "on either side of the line."[80]

Another of Cantú's selections which focuses specifically on migration and reverse migration is "Mamagrande." Her father's parents, whom she refers to as "Mamagrande" and "Papagrande," live in Anáhuac, Mexico. In the short story "Mamagrande," narrator Azucena recalls listening to Mamagrande's stories of crossing the river "en wayin," which causes her to imagine a covered wagon like in the movies.[81] Here, Azucena includes her childhood perception of Mamagrande's story at the time it was told as well as her adult recollection of the telling. She explains how her grandmother had first left "her girlhood house in the town near Monterrey where her ancestors settled newly come from Spain," to move north to the United States, fleeing the Mexican Revolution, and then later, with her husband and children, moved back across the border to Mexico so her husband could avoid the WWI draft. Azucena recounts Mamagrande's description of the journey: "Papagrande herding the goats, the younger children packed into the wagon, the older ones on horseback, crossing the river to Mexico once again."[82] The narrator describes, though does not include, a photograph showing Mamagrande during the journey: "The tired woman almost lost among the children. The work, endless."[83] Throughout the trip, Mamagrande is forced to endure the mental and physical demands of caring for a large family; when the family settles, they are in a remote area far from civilization. Nevertheless, she tries to

[79] Brady 183.
[80] Brady 183.
[81] *Canícula* 17.
[82] *Canícula* 17.
[83] *Canícula* 17.

raise her family according to high moral standards, teaching them proper etiquette. Although she copes with the challenges of housework, "from cooking daily meals…to keeping the linens whiter than white, fighting the dust and the grime of life on a ranch of a town," she feels that "the keeping up of appearances, of dignity, of what is right" could be "even more tiring."[84] Azucena's grandmother has lost much through these multiple journeys across national borders; the trip itself is exhausting and her family is now spread far apart. Because of her repeated migrations back and forth across the border, Mamagrande is now separated from relatives, living and dead.[85] Her parents are buried in Monterrey; "her children [are] buried in Nuevo Laredo, in Dolores, in Anáhuac.[86]

Some of the migrations depicted in *Canícula* are life-changing; entire families are moved across the border and lose their homes, their possessions, their communities, their families, and their sense of belonging and identity. Both sets of grandparents have experienced these types of losses through migration. Azucena's maternal grandmother, Bueli, and her daughters remember losing not only material possessions—the black Ford pickup truck and all their possessions—but also their sense of dignity and belonging in the United States, and even their rights of citizenship. Despite the fact that her husband Maurilio had been born in Texas and was a U.S. citizen, Bueli and Maurilio, together with their two young daughters, were forced out of the country and compelled to abandon all of their possessions. Azucena's aunt, Tía Nicha, remembers seeing another little girl, weeks later, "wearing her dress—a mint green dress she'd hemmed herself with pastel blue thread, a memorable dress so unlike the ugly, drab, navy-blue uniforms of

[84] *Canícula* 17.
[85] For a detailed discussion of how U.S. policies and legislation have influenced the presence of the Mexican diaspora in the United States in the 20th century, see Alexandra Délano's *Mexico and its Diaspora in the United States: Policies of Emigration since 1848* (2011).
[86] *Canícula* 17.

Sacred Heart Elementary School."[87] The loss of Tía Nicha's dress, a colorful and hopeful symbol of prosperity and individualism, and its replacement with an "ugly, drab" Mexican Catholic school uniform reflects the family's loss of not only material possessions, but also their sense of belonging and security in the United States. Azucena's grandparents are singled out by the United States government as people of Mexican descent, stripped of their possessions by government officials, exiled from their homes, and forced across the border. Her paternal grandparents, too, are compelled to return to Mexico to avoid the World War I draft, leaving a life of relative material comfort to settle in a dusty, desolate ranch town. As men of Mexican descent "who don't speak English"[88] are sent to the front lines to die in World War I, Mamagrande and her husband feel they have no choice but to flee. Her grandmother, particularly, laments leaving a comfortable life to settle in a house "not quite fit for her." She is saddened by memories of the life she left behind, and her "aquamarine eyes behind gold-framed eyeglasses fill with tears"[89] as she recounts her stories of migration for Azucena.

Although these are select examples of monumental, life-altering border crossings, for Azucena and others like her living on the border, border crossing is part of everyday life. Azucena has close family on both sides of the border, and, when her parents move back across to the United States, her father does not want to go too far north, since they do not want to be "too far away from family."[90] Azucena describes the ease and familiarity of crossing the border during the days of her childhood, reinforcing Sadowski-Smith's definition of the border as "an entirely arbitrary divide." [91] In "On the Bridge" she tells the story of days spent shopping on the other side of the Mexican border in Nuevo Laredo, exploring the market, eating watermelon and

[87] *Canícula* 5.
[88] *Canícula* 16.
[89] *Canícula* 17.
[90] *Canícula* 29.
[91] Sadowski-Smith 28.

pineapple, drinking juice squeezed by local vendors. For Azucena, the border crossing is not traumatic or shocking, but simply part of life. Since she and her parents and siblings speak Spanish fluently and have family, including grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins in Mexico, Azucena depicts one family, one community, spread across the border, rather than focusing on the divisions caused by national demarcation. Mexico is part of her heritage, her family, and her identity, and living on the US side of the border does not negate that.

Azucena presents herself and her siblings as well acclimated to border rituals, including customs requirements and the exchange of money. The children "carefully count out the money, figuring out the exchange pesos to dollars."[92] When Azucena waits in line for a public restroom, she must pay the elderly attendant for toilet paper. She explains, "I hand her a veinte, a Mexican coin brown and fat. Ritualized exchange."[93] When Azucena and her brother buy avocados at the Mexican market, the vendor carefully cuts them in half and removes the pits, "satisfying U.S. Department of Agriculture requirements" so they can "legally cross them to the United States."[94] In this scene, a part of everyday life, shopping for food, has been altered by government regulations, marked by the agricultural restrictions established to protect U.S. avocado farmers. Azucena and Tino can visit the other sections of their community and family in Mexico, speaking Spanish and successfully navigating the Mexican neighborhoods and markets, but in crossing back to the United States they are imposed upon by the government, forced to leave a part of their purchases, and themselves, behind. In much the same way, as Mary Pat Brady notes, the merchant's slicing of the *aguacates*, "which he carefully cuts in half . . . and closes them again, like fine carved wood boxes,"[95] alludes to the children's own sense of fractured identity[96]

[92] *Canícula* 8.
[93] *Canícula* 8.
[94] *Canícula* 8.
[95] *Canícula* 8.

caused by the division of national boundaries. However, when compared to her grandparents, who have comparatively traumatic memories of border-crossing, the border in Azucena's world functions as an integral part of everyday life. The older generation experiences the border as pain, loss, and trauma, as they mourn the division of a once-unified region, while for the children the existence of the border and border-crossing protocols are naturalized and routine.

However, although Azucena herself feels comfortable with the change of culture, language, and social norms synonymous with entering Mexico, the experience of crossing the border still involves loss. In crossing back to the United States, the children must leave behind some of their "Mexicanidad;" they may no longer use pesos, and they are expected to speak English and to comply with U.S. law. In their own frequent border crossings, the children are exchanging more than just currency; they are also exchanging languages, social norms, and identities, exchanging acceptance as "brown" and Spanish-speaking for the need to comply with Anglo social norms. In crossing the border, Azucena is compelled to suppress part of her identity, and navigating the cultures on both sides remains fraught with underlying governmental tension.

Azucena describes others in her community who have experienced a similar sense of split identity and cultural tension, of the fragmentation which comes with belonging to both sides of the border. In "Los Pulido" Azucena describes Comadre Fina, who has sixteen children, eight born in Mexico and eight in the United States, and has moved back and forth across the border with her family several times, which is a common occurrence within the text.[97] The physical appearance of the sixteen children in the story mirrors their split identities and their life on both

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[96] Brady 183.

[97] Accordingly, Reyes describes "an immigrant population that continuously moves between Mexico and the United States," and describes a bus depot in Houston, Texas "that is frequented by Mexican immigrants who commute between Mexico and the United States on a daily, weekly, or other temporary basis" (10).

sides of the border. The Mexican children tease them, calling them "borrados" (the erased) because of their light skin and hazel eyes. When they move back across the border into the United States, other Mexican migrant kids already living in the neighborhood pick on them, calling them "mojados"[98] because they have just moved from Mexico. Mexican children in Mexico view these kids as too white to fit in; Mexican migrant children in the United States tease them for being new immigrants, unfamiliar with US customs. Like Azucena, these children must attempt to navigate life and social interactions on both sides of the border.

Although migration across the border is common, children on both sides still see the newcomers as intruders, as outsiders inferior to those who are more established, who more clearly "belong." Tensions between more established tejanos and mexicanos and newcomers were common, though based more on class than on race. As Daniel Arreola explains in *Tejano South Texas,* in a society based around the division between "a landowning class" and "a laborer class,"[99] "ethnic divisions became secondary to those of class."[100] Thus, "upward mobility for Mexican Americans was more a matter of shedding [lower] class status than ethnic identity."[101] As *Canícula* demonstrates, in South Texas, the light skin and hazel eyes of comadre Fina's children do not represent the same social advantage they might in other parts of the United States. This story shows how the typical mapping of US race, class, and citizenship do not necessarily apply in the borderlands. Here, Cantú demonstrates that although the border is an accepted part of everyday life, it still produces tensions among migrants and those who remain behind, as all seek to establish themselves as belonging to a particular community. Although Azucena does not view the experience of crossing the border as traumatic, she, too, experiences

[98] *Canícula* 18.
[99] Arreola 66.
[100] Arreola 158.
[101] Arreola 194.

the fragmentation that results from living in two cultures. Cantú enables readers to experience elements of navigating in multiple cultures by including two languages in her text.

In addition to blending fact and fiction, text and photograph, Cantú carefully blends English and Spanish, using a process known as "code-switching";[102] although the majority of her writing is in English, she frequently inserts Spanish words and phrases. This literary technique enables the reader to empathize with Azucena's experience of living between two languages and cultures on the border, and of being expected to communicate in both English and Spanish. The non-Spanish speaking reader will be forced to look up words in a Spanish dictionary, or to guess at the words' meanings purely based on context, thereby experiencing the confusion and challenges faced by a person who is expected to operate bilingually on the border. In this way, translation and transition between two languages function as a sort of migration, in which the narrator (and the reader) move back and forth between one set of vocabulary, one frame of reference, and another. As Martha Cutter explains in *Lost and Found in Translation*:

> An effective translator can creatively mesh languages and worldviews so that the spiritual, cultural, and social values of the original or parent culture are not lost as the translator moves into a new culture and language. For these writers, translation entails moving the ideas and values of one culture to a new context, but it also involves transplanting, transmigrating these ideas—making a new location for them in the new world and the new language they must inhabit.[103]

Through her book, Cantú is able to communicate effectively in two languages, not only transmitting words and concepts, but also facilitating a cultural experience, allowing non-Latino or non-Spanish-speaking readers to be pulled out of the familiar and asked to operate and immerse themselves in a new language and culture.

Cantú incorporates select Spanish words into nearly every short story. In Azucena's description of her family's frequent journeys across the border to Nuevo Laredo, she recalls,

[102] Cutter 4.
[103] Cutter 3.

"We make the rounds at the mercado, go to the butcher's and buy red juicy meat and have it ground by Raúl who winks as he puts in a pilón…."[104] Here, the reader is able to guess from context what the words mean, or skim over them without losing the meaning of the sentence entirely. This type of rapid code-switching enables the reader to practice the translation and inference skills needed to survive in border life. However, in particular stories Cantú goes beyond including single words and short phrases and includes lines of Spanish text without translation. For example, in Azucena's description of her preschool days in "Rocking Horse," she includes the nursery rhymes she learned without translation. She describes "Sra. Piña's escuelita where I learn to count and sing and declamar poems for Mother's Day: 'Si vieras mamita, que lindas flores / amarillas y azules / de mil colores / aquí las veo abiertas / acá en botón / pero todas alegran mi corazón…."[105] According to Azucena, this is the way she learned these rhymes, in Spanish, so it is more accurate to include them this way.[106] The Spanish-speaking reader is able to appreciate the different rhythm and cadence of Spanish, perhaps imagining the young children reciting the rhyming Spanish verses, while the non-Spanish speaking reader is forced to either skim past the Spanish rhymes or rely on a dictionary to painstakingly translate, recreating an experience many migrants who crossed the US-Mexico border would have shared: being unable to read or understand text in a language they do not speak and then decoding it. Being faced with Spanish in the text gives the reader experience with the cultural conflicts and blending that Azucena describes.

A similar example exists in the story "La Escuelita" when Azucena describes the preschool she ran for neighborhood children the summer before she entered seventh grade to

[104] *Canícula* 7.
[105] *Canícula* 7.
[106] Like other parts of the text, this poem emphasizes the importance of communal bonds and family relationships between women, as young Azucena calls her mother "mamita," an affectionate term for mother.

make extra spending money. She "taught five and six-year-olds and a couple of mature four-year-olds, all about school—in English and Spanish, nursery rhymes, alphabets, numbers, and games…."[107] Here, the narrator includes nursery rhymes in both English and Spanish, alternating between "Here we go round the mulberry bush" and "Naranja dulce, limón partido, dame un abrazo que yo te pido."[108] This inclusion of rhymes in both languages not only records exactly what the children were learning and conveys the dual language skills they will need as citizens of the border, but also immerses the reader into the bilingual atmosphere of the escuelita, demanding from them a working knowledge of both Spanish and English if they are to understand and appreciate the rhymes.

Cantú reflects on the translation process and how she herself learned to read in Spanish by reading Spanish newspapers with her maternal grandmother, Celia Becerra Ramon, who she refers to as Bueli. "While Bueli ironed or cleaned beans or engaged in some other household task, I sounded out letters and made sense or, more often, read and did not make sense. I read to her words I did not comprehend and that she sometimes explained and other times just glossed over with some vague remark."[109] Here, Cantú reflects on her own process of learning to read, of being confronted with difficult, unfamiliar words and being forced to sound out, reflect on, and struggle with language. By including Spanish in her own text, Cantú is providing readers with a similar experience. Similarly, Azucena explains how English was unfamiliar to her father, who spent several months working in Gary, Indiana: "Papi didn't last up there in that cold, harsh place, where everything was the color of cement and grey and sad, where he could only speak with Mami's family and co-workers. Everywhere the English sounds, like the sounds of an unfamiliar engine that he couldn't decipher, frustrated him. Claims he never thought of anything

[107] *Canícula* 93.
[108] *Canícula* 93.
[109] Cantú, *Chicana Feminisms* 98.

except coming home."[110] By describing her father's struggles and unfamiliarity with English, Azucena defamiliarizes it for readers and encourages them to imagine what life would be like in a foreign country where they couldn't speak or understand the language. Cantú's inclusion of Spanish in the text allows readers to put themselves in the place of Azucena's father as they struggle with language and to empathize with the struggles of border citizens and non-English speaking migrants.

Cantú's code-switching between English and Spanish allows readers to be immersed in the multi-cultural world between the US and Mexico which she herself inhabited, making the text, while not factual, still "truer than true"[111] in its representation of a childhood spent on the border. Cantú describes her own childhood as filled with both Mexican and Anglo influences, such as food, music, and mass media. In *Chicana Feminisms,* Cantú recalls her favorite songs as a child: "Sad Movies Make Me Cry," "Angelito," and "la cama de piedra…songs I heard on the radio from Nuevo Laredo and San Antonio" and her favorite foods as a child: "shrimp cocktail, lemon meringue pie, as well as the foods I was learning to cook, *calabacita con pollo, migas*…."[112] Like Azucena, Cantú was able to navigate multiple cultures and languages. Accordingly, in its representation of a childhood spent on the border, *Canícula* combines cultural references familiar to an Anglo audience, including "Ed Sullivan"[113] and "Mr. Sandman,"[114] with familiar icons in Latino culture, including the Mexican flag[115] and Our Lady of Guadalupe.[116] Cantú grew up in a world of cultural blending and cultural conflict, and including language and cultural references from both segments of the border community makes her text an authentic

[110] *Canícula* 28-29.
[111] *Canícula* xi.
[112] Cantú, *Chicana Feminisms* 99.
[113] *Canícula* 22.
[114] *Canícula* 29.
[115] *Canícula* 38.
[116] *Canícula* 29.

representation of a border childhood. Additionally, including text in both English and Spanish compels readers to become involved in the translation process and to experience the blending of multiple cultures.

In addition to preserving her own childhood memories, representing childhood on the border, and immersing the reader in the bilingual culture and translation of the border, Cantú's inclusion of Spanish validates it as a language worthy of academic study. As Roger Daniels explains in *Coming to America: A History of Immigration*, many schools in states along the U.S.-Mexico border discouraged or forbid the use of Spanish, even at recess.[117] In border states, a population of less-educated and less-affluent Mexican Americans and migrants, combined with "proximity to the border, a continuing migration from Mexico, and a [Mexican] population highly concentrated into urban enclaves" helped to create a "nativist 'English only' movement."[118] Accordingly, Daniels explains that "many Mexican American students have been made to feel that they, their language, and their culture are not welcome in schools."[119] This expectation of English only and US culture at school is passed on to Azucena's home life, in which she and her siblings are eventually discouraged from speaking Spanish.[120] By incorporating Spanish into *Canícula*, Cantú validates it as a language worthy of academic study. She gives Spanish a privileged position in her text and privileges the bilingual reader over the monolingual, demonstrating the value of being able to navigate multiple cultures and languages.

Like the four authors discussed in the previous chapters, Cantú faced racial discrimination. *Canícula* was published in 1995, after at least a decade of US effort to intensify border militarization, including two major initiatives: Operation Blockade/Hold the Line in El

[117] Daniels 318.
[118] Daniels 318.
[119] Daniels 318.
[120] *Canícula* 88.

Paso in 1993 and Operation Gatekeeper in 1994.[121] NAFTA was also passed in 1994, which generated border militarization and anti-immigrant sentiment. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, "anti-immigrant sentiment was on the rise, as were media coverage of violence at the border and demands for stricter border controls."[122] In 1996, Congress passed expansive laws to control illegal immigration, imposing mandatory detention and deportation for even minor violations.[123] In this context, the border functions strictly as a military, governmental, official line, notwithstanding the people and communities who exist on both sides. Alternately, in Cantú's narrative, instead of the militarized demarcation of the border, she presents "la frontera," a community that stretches over both sides of the border, home to people with mixed Mexican and U.S. heritage, allowing for a mixture of Spanish and English. By privileging personal stories of friends and family, love and loss, traditional medicine, Catholic heritage, celebrations, funerals, and stories of childhood and adolescence, Cantú provides a counternarrative to much of the dialogue surrounding the border, which focuses around governmental regulations, immigration law, and crime. Instead of focusing on legislation or illegal activity, she focuses on the domestic aspects of home and everyday life.

In her text, the borderlands, "la frontera," is a home and a community rather than the militarized zone depicted through legislation. Thus, as Delgadillo explains, Azucena's narrative "intervenes against the construction of hegemonic collective memory that would erase the frontera in favor of the border."[124] By interrupting dominant narratives of imperialistic power and militarization with memories of a bi-cultural childhood, Cantú supplements (or supplants)

[121] Nevins, *Operation Gatekeeper* 15, qtd. Delgadillo 109.
[122] Delgadillo 109.
[123] Critics argued that such legislation violated civil liberties and human rights; correspondingly, in 2001, the Supreme Court ruled that many facets of the 1996 statutes were unconstitutional (see Michael Welch's *Detained: Immigration Laws and the Expanding INS Jail Complex).*
[124] Delgadillo 109.

governmental narratives with personal memories. Moreover, because her memories are openly fictionalized, she conveys that all memories, including dominant narratives, are not to be taken at face value, but must be interrogated, explored, tested, doubted, and scrutinized. As Anh Hua explains in *Diaspora, Memory, and Identity: A Search for Home*, "The past—or history—becomes a site to struggle over individual and collective memories and memorialization. Memory is an important term of analysis for diaspora and feminist theorizing precisely because it is closely tied to historical and political struggles."[125] Cantú both adds to and subverts hegemonic presentations of the border as a no-man's-land and a contested, intransigent national boundary.

Cantú also uses careful rhetoric to undermine predominant representations of Mexican immigrants as dangerous to the social and economic stability of the United States and to encourage empathy and portray them in a positive light. When Cantú published her text in 1995, hostility towards Mexican immigrants was prevalent, including negative representations in popular media and legislation. According to *Model Immigrants and Undesirable Aliens*, between 1995 and 1996, President Bill Clinton passed three laws: the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act,[126] the Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act, and the Personal Responsibility Act. These laws, which modified immigrants' legal rights, were designed to foster an image of which types of immigrants were "desirable" to society and which would be hardworking, evincing personal responsibility and contributing to the national economy. Throughout the 1990s, politicians linked immigration to complex issues, including "poverty, welfare reform, so-called family values, measures designed to combat terrorism, and

[125] Agnew 197.

[126] The Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996 was designed to improve border control by imposing criminal penalties for smuggling of people and goods across the border and for forging immigration documents. The Act also heightened enforcement of visa regulations and employment eligibility, and mandated tightened regulations for the disbursement of government aid (Cornell University Law School).

the spiraling costs of social welfare programs."[127] In *Brown Tide Rising,* linguist Otto Santa Ana examined popular US media and legislative representations of immigrants from Latin America between 1992 and 1998. He found that Latin American immigrants were "commonly equated with dangerous waters (tide, flood, wave, etc.), described as animal-like, as invaders, as a disease, or as a threat to America's national identity. Even articles that explicitly condemned racism…tended to employ the same types of metaphors."[128] Cantú uses careful rhetoric to contest these predominantly negative representations of Mexican immigrants at the time she was writing and publishing.

Like the authors of the other three texts we have examined, Cantú purposefully represents herself (via her fictionalized childhood self, Azucena) as a legitimate citizen as well as a hard-working, respectful and conscientious daughter and student, and her Mexican-American border community as respectable citizens who help one another, work hard, and care for their families. After Zacate Creek floods, destroying buildings and washing away entire households, Azucena's family helps their neighbors rebuild. The whole community, "the Salinases, Mendozas, Treviños, Bacas, Valdezes, and Sánchezes," care for each other and assist one another in reconstructing their homes and yards, sharing plant clippings from their gardens.[129] By purposefully listing families with Mexican last names, Azucena demonstrates the respectability and trustworthiness of the Latino families living and working in the US community of Laredo, emphasizing their value as citizens. Nena also describes her family as maintaining high moral standards. Her grandmother never tires in her commitment to "what is right" [130]; her grandfather forbids his children from seeking revenge against anyone, even when one of his sons is shot in a

[127] Gerken 153.
[128] Gerken 153.
[129] *Canícula* 10.
[130] *Canícula* 17.

neighborhood brawl.[131] Many of the eighty-five short stories depict strong family relationships: Azucena's grandmothers help to raise their grandchildren; her parents work hard and take the family on Sunday drives; her siblings care for each other.

Cantú also uses emotional appeals to connect with her readers and emphasize the humanity of migrants, recounting the hardships and grief Azucena's family has suffered. Although Mexican immigrants and many residents of the border community Cantú depicts are socially marginalized as members of a culture "which is not the dominant culture,"[132] by detailing emotional moments, human struggle, and family memories, Cantú strives to create empathy among her readers. One of most touching moments in the text occurs when Azucena describes how her father prays desperately to a portrait of the Virgin Mary on the wall when her younger brother Tino is stricken with a serious childhood illness. She then contrasts her family's joy at his miraculous recovery with their mourning at his death ten years later, the day his body is brought home from Vietnam, where he has been killed fighting for the US military. Azucena recounts how her father sobs in the backyard, hitting his head against the mesquite tree and keening "like a wounded animal." He cries to the same image of the Virgin Mary, "in his pain, tears running down his face, [telling it] 'For this, you spared my son.'" She recalls, "He'll take the image down from its place on the wall, cannot bear to see it, to be reminded. On the wall, a rectangle of nothing…."[133] Here, the reader cannot help but empathize with the devastating pain Azucena's father has suffered with the loss of his son. Cantú was publishing in a context in which governmental and popular discourses frequently dehumanized Mexican migrants.[134] However, in this scene, the Mexican migrant family has sacrificed the life of their son for the US

[131] *Canícula* 16.
[132] Quinn-Sanchez 120.
[133] *Canícula* 14-15.
[134] Lopez 81.

government, undermining popular representations of Mexican migrants as a "subversive force" or a "threat"[135] to the community and nation and instead demonstrating the contributions and sacrifices of migrant families.

Cantú also uses sensory details to help readers empathize with migrants. Azucena describes picking cotton in a farm field on a hot August day at nine years old, enabling the reader to imagine the back-breaking discomfort. She describes, "Sun so bright it hurts my eyes, barely look at it and I see bright red spots. Sweat runs in rivulets along my back….Strange insects…find their way to exposed ankles, arms, necks, and suck life-blood, leaving welts, ronchas—red and itchy—and even pus-filled ampulas that burst and burn with the sun."[136] Nena's detailed description of the physical pain she endures all day as a young child helps readers to put themselves in the place of migrant families and imagine their suffering. In a context of post-9/11 "alarmist" media coverage regarding migrants crossing the border from Mexico,[137] Cantú's text provides a counternarrative, depicting Mexican migrants as upstanding and respectable people who love their families and contribute to their communities, while also helping readers to empathize with their suffering.

Additionally, Cantú provides a counternarrative from a Mexican migrant's perspective as she points out the injustices and corruption in U.S. government. Whereas Mexican migrants are often treated as "an undesirable drain on society,"[138] Cantú describes her family as upstanding and hardworking. Moreover, in contrast to prevalent media and legislative depictions of Mexican

[135] Lopez 82-83.
[136] *Canícula* 3.
[137] Lopez 83; For a detailed discussion of how immigration has been reframed as a "national security" issue since the September 11th attacks, and how public perceptions and media portrayals of Mexican migrants have been overwhelmingly negative, see Lopez's "Humanity vs. Illegality: Post-9/11 Print Media Discourse on Mexican Immigration."
[138] Rosas 157.

migrants taking advantage of the US government,[139] she depicts U.S. government officials as repressing and taking advantage of the Mexican residents in impoverished Texas neighborhoods, stealing tax money and using it for their personal gain:

> I don't understand…Our money lines their pockets, paves private roads on their ranches, while our streets remain unpaved, run like rivers after every rain, while our public library remains as small as someone's private library; while the dropout rate remains between 50 and 80 percent; while judges, mayors, sheriffs, high and low powerful ones abuse, rape, embarrass, harass, taunt, demean women. I see the pain, the hopelessness, the survival strategies of the poor.[140]

Cantú not only contests the reputation of Mexican migrants as a threat to or a drain on US society, but also calls attention to the corruption of US government officials. She presents US politicians as stealing from and abusing the impoverished residents of their communities, depriving them of access to safe roads and quality education, and physically harming and threatening them. In these communities, it is not the Mexican immigrants who pose a threat, but rather US government officials who abuse their positions of power.

As a Mexican migrant to the United States and as a woman, Cantú is writing from a disadvantaged position and providing a narrative which is at odds with dominant narratives. Yet she feels it is important to speak out, to contest official narratives which represent the border as an impermeable line and Mexican migrants as both a threat to and a drain on U.S. society. As Juanita Heredia explains in *Transnational Latina Narratives in the Twenty-First Century,* "It is important to note the role of each Latina author as a historical commentator…These women writers are…imparting gender matters or a woman's perspective on official history….At the same time, the writers represent *alternative* histories to contest the hegemonic power of official history in their transnational narratives, because traditionally, their perspectives and voices have

[139] Lopez 82.
[140] *Canícula* 30-31.

been omitted."[141] By emphasizing the family values, humanity, and integrity of migrant families in *Canícula*, Cantú provides a counternarrative to official governmental rhetoric that portrays Mexican immigrants as a threat to national security and advocates a militarized border.

Finally, like the other three texts we have examined, Cantú explores the valuable roles of women in her community and highlights the significance of women's lives. Cantú's text centers around women: her mother, grandmothers, sisters, neighbors, her mother's friends, women in her community, and her own growing-up experiences as a female. These female voices provide insight into family, culture, local history, religion, medicine, gender dynamics, child-rearing practices, community relationships, and everyday life on the border. Women form a community both with and separate from men. Azucena observes her mother's relationship with her best friends and learns important lessons about marriage and raising children in "Comadres." She is inspired by neighbor women who host celebrations and closely watches her female relatives' interaction with other women in their community.

Much of Azucena's narrative describes memories from her childhood, which was spent at home with her mother and in the company of siblings, grandmothers, and neighbor women with their children. Many of the stories focus on women's lives and the domestic realm, describing women's religious practices, family life, marital relationships, child-rearing, the birth process, and observing traditional holidays and celebrations. She also details the camaraderie between women en la frontera, on both sides of the border. For example, in the story "Comadres," Azucena details the close relationship between her mother and her two closest female friends: "The three comadres sharing worries, joys: each morning after the dishes are done, the clothes hung on the line, the beans cooking. Sharing chismes, dreams, gossip, advising each other."[142]

[141] Heredia 4.
[142] *Canícula* 35.

The women share joys and sorrows, trade tips for dealing with husbands, children, and personal and cultural conflicts. The women's loyalty to one another outweighs their loyalty to social institutions, including the church and their husbands. In advising each other in matters including birth control and divorce, they prioritize one another's needs above social norms and rules. One woman tells another, "I don't think it matters whether you're married by the church or not, after all, it's not that you didn't want to; you couldn't because compadre Leo was already married by the church, he was divorced. But, you're legally married, so I don't think it matters, you can have your baby baptized, but our compadre will ask Father Jones, just to be sure."[143] Here, although the women acknowledge that the wishes of the church must be taken into consideration, and that husbands must serve as the communicators between women and the priest, they trust each other to make educated decisions. In other situations, they even violate or defy social prescriptions; when one woman presumably admits contemplating having an abortion, another reassures her, "No, comadre, you already have five boys, what if the next is a boy, too. You're doing the right thing. If your compadre weren't so religious I would have done the same thing…Good thing you found a doctor who would do it, too."[144] With this statement, the comadres defy the prescriptions of the church, their husbands, and society and opt to advise what they feel is best for one another. The women can see that their friend is stressed by the demands of five young boys and do not wish another upon her. They are able to see beyond what society and the church dictate and look out for one another's best interests. Their friendship lasts through generations as they share every aspect of life with one another:

> And every morning, platicando, and every evening playing lotería, laughing, chatting, leaning on each other for decisions, for support. Las comadres attend to each other's needs. Early on, it's their own kids running and playing all around, after it's grandchildren who sit on a lap, or need a runny nose wiped, or sleep secure in

[143] *Canícula* 35.
[144] *Canícula* 36.

> grandmotherly arms, when they gather to chat in the morning sun. In death and in birth, there for each other, feeding the kids, doing laundry, sweeping linoleum floors and sunbaked backyards, sometimes pain forming bonds stronger than blood makes them more sisters to each other than to their own sisters, Thelma, Nicha, Tita. Vecinas. Comadres. Above all, women sharing life, tending to each other. Supporting each other. Teaching each other to mother, to survive, to understand, to live."[145]

In a life filled with hardship and (often unacknowledged) domestic labor, these women provide a crucial support system for each other, forming, as Azucena emphasizes, "bonds stronger than blood." Importantly, in addition to caring for husbands, children, and grandchildren, these women "attend to each other's needs," helping each other to make decisions, giving guidance and advice, and sharing the joys and sorrows of life. In a world largely dominated by men and patriarchal institutions, these women are "teaching each other" life skills, mothering, and survival strategies, reclaiming the right to pass down and share knowledge.

Cantú explains that she purposefully included many strong women in her text:

> The feminist in me consciously included the strong women—the mothers, grandmothers, aunts, *comadres.* But it was not a difficult task, for they were there in my life and in my childhood. I wanted to tell the stories of women who survived, who struggled, who worked as schoolteachers, who sold Avon and Stanley products door to door, as well as the mothers who went to work in the fields alongside the men. The women who peopled my childhood belonged to various social classes and survived in the world through different means, but all of them influenced me."[146]

Although women's perspectives are often ignored or diminished by dominant social narratives, *Canícula* privileges women's voices and their stories. Importantly, many of these women's stories of family life and domestic labor would not otherwise be valued or preserved. As Delgadillo points out, Cantú is doing the important work of "transforming formerly invisible women on the border into flesh and blood"[147] through her text and the value she places on women's everyday lives. Both the process of remembering girlhood and the remembrances

[145] *Canícula* 36.
[146] Cantú, *Chicana Feminisms* 105.
[147] Delgadillo 97.

themselves are marked by Azucena's desire to retrace her female lineage, to recuperate the community of women who loved, nurtured, and educated her. Azucena's narrative forces readers to acknowledge women who are typically rendered invisible by virtue of their race, gender, and place in the domestic sphere despite their "multiple roles as farm workers, midwives, mothers, wives, caretakers, cooks, curanderas, [and] beauticians."[148]

In this text, Cantú plays with and subverts the distinctions between truth and fiction, between Spanish and English, and between author, first-person narrator, and character. Accordingly, the documents and photographs she includes both undermine and reinforce the sense of authenticity within the text. She explains, "My book is about memory, and photos are one way of 'freezing' memories just like words are one way of 'freezing' thoughts—and yet both are tenuous and fleeting….I work with the ideas of memory and writing—but all in a cultural context of the border which itself is fleeting and fluid."[149] Cantú demonstrates that truth cannot be separated from fiction, and that life on the border blurs the distinctions between languages and cultures.

Just as she calls into question negative representations of immigrants and the militarized boundary between the U.S. and Mexico, Cantú also questions the constructed nature of the divisions between genres. She asks, "How can someone who writes in all these genres—literary criticism, folklore, ethnography, and fiction—separate them into neat little boxes labeled and set aside? Maybe it can be done, but I can't do it. Others can write criticism devoid of ethnographic insight, I can't. Others may write novels without cultural trappings, I can't; others may write ethnography without lyrical linguistic expression, I can't."[150] By using multiple languages, genres, and forms of visual representation, Cantú demonstrates scholar bell hooks's claim that

[148] Delgadillo 110.
[149] Adams 66.
[150] Cantú, *Chicana Feminisms* 105.

the purpose of remembrance "is not simply to document but to construct the new, 'to move us into a different mode of articulation.'"[151] By retelling stories from her childhood in a different way, Cantú gives herself the freedom to remember events happening differently, to "create spaces where one is able to redeem and reclaim the past… to transform present reality."[152] By retelling her past in a new way, Cantú is able to both preserve and reclaim her childhood, simultaneously creating a subversive counternarrative which contests dominant governmental and patriarchal narratives.

[151] hooks *Yearning* 147, qtd. Agnew 204.
[152] hooks *Yearning* 147, qtd. Agnew 204.

Conclusion

> "In this world-system of asymmetrical participation in cultural and industrial production, the activities of writing and reading cannot remain neutral."[1]
>
> Caren Kaplan, "Resisting Autobiography"

As examples of life writing by Asian and Latina migrants, these narratives comprise an important element of American literature that is often overlooked. As the Oscar Handlin quote at the beginning of this dissertation states, immigrants "are" America; immigrants and their descendants comprise a majority of the US population, and yet texts by female migrants of color have not traditionally been taught in the academy or included in the canon of US literature. By expanding our definitions both of life writing and of US literature, we can create space for voices which have traditionally been excluded, and which offer a valuable and unique perspective on history and society.

These four texts enable us to discover and appreciate how life writing has been used by women migrants of color at particular times in history not only to share their life stories, but also to fight back against oppression. As Caren Kaplan explains, life writing "allows for 'writing technologies' that can work *for* and *with* women,"[2] providing a venue through which women from different cultures and different parts of the world can express themselves. As these four texts demonstrate, migrant women writers have enacted multiple types of creative life writing interventions, including humor, pointed social criticism, collage, co-authorship, dialogical authorship, deliberate fictionalizing, word-image, and dissonance. Their particular purposes and strategies demonstrate their commitment to connecting with particular audiences at specific moments in history and promoting social reform.

[1] Kaplan 215.
[2] Kaplan 215.

These four narratives are not only personal, autobiographical records of these women's lives, but they also do important work in resisting discrimination, oppression, patriarchy, and imperialism. These texts comprise active calls for change, as well as for a shift in which texts and authors are valued, for which narratives are privileged or disregarded. Although these narratives are written by women of diverse racial and cultural backgrounds at disparate moments in history, they reflect a shared goal: the wish to be heard and to bring about social change. Through their narratives, Kuo, Morales, Levins Morales, Hayslip, and Cantú are creating space in US literature for writers of color, women, and migrants.

The authors' gender lends a charged, paradoxical dimension to these texts. As women, these authors, like 1.5 generation migrants,[3] often play the role of translators, brokers, and intermediaries in intercultural interactions. Shamita Das Dasgupta has pointed out how women migrants are often expected to serve as the "preservers" and "transmitters" of their culture in their new country.[4] Gender has a direct impact on the migration experience; women migrants can be empowered as moral leaders[5] and preservers of culture, expected to serve as cultural transmitters or diplomats, diminished to objects of exchange, or suspected as potential traitors. The five authors I have selected alternately embrace and resist these roles, which have been scripted for them by literary genres and by immigration politics. As Helena Kuo preserves and shares elements of Chinese culture, she also advocates its superiority over US and European cultures. Thus Kuo serves not only as a US government-sponsored diplomat who attempts to persuade her US audience to support China in its fight against Japan, but also as an advocate for the Chinese people both in China and abroad, confronting racism and discrimination and

[3] Chan xiv.
[4] Das Dasgupta 7; She also specifies that women migrants are often "believed to be the family repository of reputation and status in the community" (159).
[5] Das Dasgupta 159.

establishing their value and worth as human beings. Rosario Morales and Aurora Levins Morales celebrate particular elements of both US and Puerto Rican culture and society, while also contesting continued US imperialism and military presence on the island of Puerto Rico. As migrants who have moved back and forth between the island and the mainland several times, Morales and Levins Morales serve both as cultural intermediaries and cultural critics, highlighting incidents of violence, poverty, racial discrimination, and systemic injustice while calling for change. They also contest the compartmentalizing of various racial groups, finding wholeness in multiple cultural, racial, ethnic, and lingual identifications. Le Ly Hayslip attempts to move past the status of potential traitor to establish herself as a cultural intermediary and diplomat, justifying the actions of the Vietnamese villagers and the Vietcong and asking US readers for compassion and financial assistance on behalf of her fellow Vietnamese. With the strategic credibility of co-author Jay Wurts, Hayslip establishes herself as a cultural translator who not only explains the motivation of the Vietcong, but also calls into question the ethics of US involvement in the war. Norma Elia Cantú serves as both a cultural translator and a preserver of twentieth-century U.S./Mexico border culture, using photographs and family stories to record her childhood. However, by emphasizing that some of her stories and photographs have been altered and fictionalized, highlighting her own textual performance, Cantú also takes on the role of a cultural critic, demonstrating how identities and communities have been fragmented and undermined through border politics and discriminatory US legislation.

Through their narratives and their adoption or rejection of particular roles, these authors both exert agency and make themselves vulnerable. As Stacy Holman Jones, Carolyn Ellis, and Tony Adams explain in their discussion of life writing, the choice to make oneself vulnerable is often "made with the hope that audiences will engage with and respond to the author's work in

constructive, meaningful—even vulnerable—ways." They add, "The idea of reciprocity also suggests that audiences approach and act on the work they read with a sense of responsibility—they are not passive receivers of a text or performance but are, instead, positioned as active participants expected to act in and on the unfolding story."[6] By sharing their experiences, their histories, and their unique stories of migration, these authors attempt to motivate their audiences to take action—to confront social inequalities and discrimination, patriarchal, capitalist, and imperialist injustices, and to demonstrate compassion and empathy not only towards migrants, but also towards people of other races, other nationalities, languages, and cultures.

From Hayslip's straightforward request for financial donations to support The East Meets West Foundation and The Global Village Foundation to Cantú's negative portrayals of the militarization of the US/Mexico border, each of these authors utilizes diverse forms of persuasion and resistance within her text. Although Kuo's solicitation of US military support for China in their fight against Japan is overt, her criticism of US culture is comparatively subtle, since she needs to win the support of US readers and maintain the sponsorship of the Roosevelts, who facilitated her immigration to the United States by making a personal exception to the Chinese Exclusion Act. Accordingly, much of the content of Kuo's narrative, including her accounts of her childhood and her school experiences, is designed to persuade her audience of the inherent value of Chinese culture and the good character of the Chinese people, demonstrating that they would make good allies.

Throughout their text, Morales and Levins Morales openly resist stereotypes and narrow ethnic and racial categorizations, preferring to construct a new, inclusive identity that incorporates various elements of their culture and heritage. They also resist US imperialism and US military presence in Puerto Rico, calling for an end to the United States government's

[6] Jones, Adams, and Ellis 25.

violence towards people of color and exploitation of its colonies. Their text is designed to persuade their audience to overcome prejudice and to eliminate social injustice. Morales's and Levins Morales's criticism of the US government is much more explicit than Kuo's, perhaps because, as Puerto Ricans, while residing in the US they have access to juridical forms of US citizenship, and they are living in the comparatively liberal decades after the 1960s civil rights movements.

Hayslip also uses life writing to encourage her audience to overcome racial prejudice, urging her readers to move past lingering hostilities from the Vietnam War and to move towards forgiveness and reconciliation. She resists US cultural and media portrayals of the Vietnamese as "faceless enemies" by providing a personal, emotional account of the war from a Vietnamese perspective, bringing to life a cast of characters—relatives, friends, and fellow villagers—who suffered from US military violence during the war. Through these portrayals, Hayslip both resists negative depictions of the Vietnamese and attempts to persuade her audience to view them as fellow members of humanity who are suffering and need help. Like Kuo, she uses the story of her childhood to demonstrate the virtue and solid character of her people. Hayslip concludes her narrative with a direct request for financial aid from her readers, which she will use to build clinics and schools and start a variety of social programs in Vietnam.

Although Cantú, like Morales and Levins Morales, resists US imperialism and military presence, specifically the militarization of the US-Mexico border, her criticism of the US government is much less blatant. Rather, Cantú uses photographs and memories from her childhood to express the destructive effects of discriminatory legislation, social inequalities and prejudice, and the US militarization of the border on local families and citizens, who her readers may be able to easily relate to. Like Kuo and Hayslip, Cantú uses her life story to portray the

Mexican-American community as hard-working and trustworthy. Importantly, Cantú emphasis on the fictionalization of her childhood memories both makes them relatable to a larger group of readers, some of whom may be able to see elements of their own childhoods reflected in her text, and calls attention to the constructed nature of identity, implying that the conceptions of race and citizenship, belonging and exclusion constantly need to be challenged, questioned, and analyzed. Through their various forms of persuasion and resistance, some forthright and direct, others more subtle and interwoven into narrative, each of these authors uses life writing strategically to achieve a similar goal: to combat injustice, racism and US imperialism.

Through their migration and the discrepancies between life in their native and new countries, these women have acquired a wealth of experience, which they share through their narratives. Vijay Agnew notes that migrants benefit from "a double perspective: they acknowledge an earlier existence elsewhere and have a critical relationship with the cultural politics of their present home—all embedded within the experience of displacement."[7] These five authors are comparativist by nature, able to juxtapose the politics, social systems, and realities of living in their former and new countries. By giving readers insight into multiple cultures and societies, these authors help to confront and destabilize dominant, institutionalized conceptions of race, ethnicity, nationhood and citizenship.

As Carole Boyce Davies explains, movement and migration are perpetually entwined with "re-membering and re-connection" since writers who experience repeated migrations live not only in their place of departure or their destination, but in "that in-between space that is neither here nor there."[8] Due to their continued movement between disparate locations, sets of social norms, languages, and cultural structures, for these authors, as Boyce Davies clarifies, "the

[7] Agnew 195.
[8] Boyce-Davies 1.

re-negotiating of identities is fundamental to migration."[9] The writing of Morales and Levins Morales and Cantú, in particular, can be read as a series of boundary crossings rather than as texts which are tied to a fixed geographic location or a single racial, ethnic, or national identification. By constructing their subjectivity as existing in multiple cultures, nations, and locations, Morales, Levins Morales, and Cantú are able to break down national, cultural, and textual borders. Through their multiple migrations, they enact a unique form of agency and construct a new, multi-faceted identity, reflected in the experimental nature of their texts, which blend multiple languages and textual styles. Perhaps because these authors, unlike Kuo and Hayslip, who were unable to move back and forth freely between the US and their home countries due to war and discriminatory legislation, were able to migrate relatively freely and repeatedly, their texts demonstrate more narrative experimentation and do not conform to traditional chronological narrative. Through their geographic movement, their skillful navigation between various languages and cultures, and their incorporation of various textual styles, including photographs, poetry, dialogue, song, rhyme, and stream-of-consciousness narrative, Cantú, Morales, and Levins Morales refuse to be subjugated, contained, or limited to one place and culture, instead demonstrating their ability to survive and succeed in multiple locations and cultural contexts. Through their border crossings, these authors are not only redefining but reclaiming their identity.

As Sonia Ryang explains in her discussion of migrant women of color, "The stories they tell about themselves, the languages they learn and forget, and the selves they construct broadly espouse multiple national boundaries and disrupt cultural borders which might otherwise be secure and firmly drawn, especially in the eyes of the main, non-diasporic population."[10]

[9] Boyce-Davies 2.
[10] Ryang 21.

Through their life stories, these five authors challenge readers to overcome their own hostilities and prejudices, encourage communities to connect and to value their cultural history, and urge nations to demonstrate empathy and forgiveness, demonstrating how life writing can be used to impact both personal and international relationships. Ultimately, these narratives are both disruptive and transformative, serving as a platform for both resistance and renewal.

There is still much work to be done in the area of migrant life writing. My interest has been in examining these four narratives as innovative examples of life writing in US literature, but these texts could conceivably be considered part of Chinese, Puerto Rican, Vietnamese, and Mexican literatures as well, and it would also be worthwhile to analyze them in the context of Asian and Latin American literary studies. We might also consider how US migrant women from other cultures, nations, and time periods productively use formal innovations in the genre of life writing to achieve political, social, and cultural goals. Similarly, we could also consider other life writing texts in a transnational context in order to more fully appreciate how life writing can be used to both interact with and impact international politics and transnational relationships. Finally, we might also examine the experiences of migrants who are migrating within and between nations other than the United States, and consider the voices of men as well as women. Just as these five authors provide valuable perspective by integrating, comparing, and contrasting elements of their sender and receiver cultures, we can gain insight by comparing life writing by authors from diverse national and cultural traditions.

Looking at a diverse selection of migrant life writing will enable us to answer important questions: How do migrants use their knowledge of multiple languages and cultures to transform the genre of life writing? How do migrant authors of life writing use language strategically and blend various styles of writing—poetry, essays, fiction, nonfiction, family legend, history—into

purposeful representations of their lives and their migration experiences? How does the way migrants represent themselves through their life writing compare with how they are depicted by dominant media, cultural, and government representations? What must they do to be heard? How does looking at multiple examples of migrant life writing comparatively enhance our understanding of the strategies migrants use not only to survive, but also to represent themselves, their communities, and their experiences to a broader audience?

By recognizing the value of texts by authors from commonly marginalized communities, we can reshape the way readers and the academy view concepts of citizenship, belonging, and nationhood. As Maria Lugones and Elizabeth Spelman explain in "Have We Got a Theory for You: Feminist Theory, Cultural Imperialism, and the Demand for 'The Woman's Voice,'" "Having the opportunity to talk about one's life, to give an account of it, to interpret it, is integral to leading that life rather than being led through it….We can't separate lives from the accounts given of them; that articulation of our experience is part of our experience."[11] Examining migration narratives is important work; we are legitimizing equally valid—albeit often ignored or silenced—aspects of our national identity, community, and history. In paying close attention to the voices of female migrants, we are rewriting a new US literary history, calling into question long-standing assumptions about who is qualified to speak and to be remembered.

[11] Lugones and Spelman 574.

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