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A Mexican American's Passage: An Autoethnographic Exploration of Identity and Self-Empowerment

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A MEXICAN AMERICAN'S PASSAGE: AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC
EXPLORATION OF IDENTITY AND SELF-EMPOWERMENT

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Dean of the Graduate School

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2018

A MEXICAN AMERICAN'S PASSAGE: AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC
EXPLORATION OF IDENTITY AND SELF-EMPOWERMENT

by

CORINA LERMA, B.A.

THESIS

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Abstract

This thesis presents a critical autoethnography that explores how an understanding of political and cultural events have contributed to my conflicted sense of identity. The purpose of the study was to identify genealogical and historical patterns that manifest in the traumas that have influenced and problematized the construction of my reality and to discover if personal traumas and conflicted senses of identity as a Mexican American in the United States finds any source in the social and political events that took place during the Mexican Repatriation of the 1930s. The autoethnography was conducted both through research of Mexican American history, specifically the Mexican Repatriation of the 1930s, and an exploration into how the politics and rhetorics of the nation combined with the history of my family culminate in shaping my past, present and future. The thesis provides a literature review delineating different perspectives regarding the Mexican Repatriation and offers a positionality in which rhetoric is ontological. My understanding of these theories come from my readings of, primarily, Mikhail Bakhtin, Michel Foucault, and Helen Foster. This ontological position, for example, expands the view of language as more than an instrument, since language/discourse is unique with each use, truths and knowledge are partial, situated, and contingent, and reality is a construct that is only an interpretation where agency is negotiated.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

I grew up thinking the piece of land where one is born dictates one's citizenship; therefore, for all intents and purposes, I am American. I became bilingual at a very young age. My parents made sure I could speak English so I could recite the pledge every morning in school and have the weekend linguistic freedom to watch PBS Kids and Disney. My behaviors and identity centered on the idea that I was an American—even a typical American. Despite my American status, I was placed in bilingual classes at school where I struggled to pronounce English words like my teacher. I did not look like the blonde-haired, fair-skinned girls in my class. Even though I was born and schooled in El Paso, Texas, USA, I felt I had more in common with my cousins in Juarez, Mexico than with my peers and neighbors. It also did not explain why despite trying my best to fit in, the older I grew, the less I had in common with my cousins still living in Juarez. I convinced myself as I became older this was just the way it happens for the children of immigrants.

There is a phrase used in Spanish to describe people like me, *Ni de aqui, ni de alla* (not from here, not from there). I was born in El Paso, Texas, and even at an early age this gave me a sense of security. I never felt persecuted or in danger because my American birth certificate meant I had certain rights, and I could live peacefully in this country. I often heard my parents discuss how distant family members and friends had been deported back to Mexico, but I knew I need not worry; however, my privileged position made it harder to relate to some of my family and friends. It was difficult for me to understand why being deported was such a negative experience. After all, almost every weekend growing up, my mom would make me pack a change of clothes, toothbrush, and five chocolate chip cookies in my backpack and undergo the

hassle of crossing the border bridge to visit family. The border between the U.S. and Mexico nothing more than an arduous hour-long line to go back “home.”

The extended family I visited in Mexico did not seem different from my immediate family in El Paso. They had cars, jobs, problems and loved me. I wondered why they did not do what my parents did and move to the U.S., mostly because then I would have been spared the travel! But, I never objected to the long trips because it was always exciting to play with my cousins. I lived a very isolated life in the U.S., having only two older siblings, so seeing my cousins was the only time I could interact with other children my own age outside of an academic setting. They were extremely social and knew everyone in their neighborhood and often asked the neighborhood children to join our outdoor games. They often made fun of me for being dorky and awkward. It never really bothered me except when they would make fun of me for speaking Spanglish, or when they would want to use me as a pocket translator for English songs or shows, or when they would make me pay for snacks and candies since an American dollar had a larger value than a Mexican peso. Those times they would make me feel different and it was hard not to sense their resentment towards at my American privilege(s).

Fortunately, there was one place where I never felt alone or isolated and that was school. I embraced the opportunity of education in the United States although in many ways it never felt like I had an option. Being a child of immigrants, I had parents who would work all day and sometimes nights. I knew my education was the reason my parents had migrated and I always strived to be a good student. I would enroll myself in extracurricular activities and after-school programs to ensure I had longer days in school. There was not much of a reason for me to go home when my parents were working. When I was home, I did my homework and studied on my own because my parents were not able to help me, as they were unable to speak English. I would

often sign papers in English with their name to enroll in programs or advanced classes. I felt school was a second home for me in many ways. I was so concerned with being a good student that I never questioned information I learned at school. I believed everything I heard, read, and wrote.

The first time I experienced any cognitive dissonance regarding my education was in a U.S. History class in high school. We had been studying the Mexican Revolution and for an essay question, we had to argue whether Pancho Villa had been a hero or hindrance during the Mexican Revolution. Based on what we had learned in that class, I had no option but to write that he had been a hindrance and in many ways an obstruction. Although I had no knowledge of that historical time from a Mexican perspective, something felt incredibly wrong about my response. I felt I had somehow betrayed a part of me, which led me to question my identity. It was the first time I felt a strong sense of academic resistance; those feelings led to understand my childhood feelings of social exclusion and ambiguous identity. On that day, I became most interested in multiple perspective in US-Mexico history. I began learning on my own shortly after my revelation, I learned about the Mexican Repatriation of the 1930s for the first time.

My grandmother was born in Lamar, Colorado, in 1923 (see Appendix A) and, as a result of the events of repatriation, her whole family was deported back to Mexico. Being only seven years old during the depression of the 1930s and unable to provide for herself and not understanding the politics of the time, she was forced to move to a foreign country (see Appendix B). She lived and made a life in Durango, Mexico where she met my grandfather and subsequently my father was born. Growing up, I always assumed my whole family was of Mexican descent and my parents had been the first to migrate to the U.S. It was surprising to

learn about my grandmother's complex intersectionality and a historical event usually ignored by American textbooks.

I began to wonder why the Mexican Repatriation of the 1930s was never a topic discussed in my history classes. This idea sparked my curiosity and after some initial research, I realized repatriation of any nationality is not widely discussed in U.S. history textbooks. In a *USA Today* survey of the nine most commonly used American history textbooks in the U.S., four did not mention the topic, and only one devoted more than half a page to the topic (Hunt, 2006). It became obvious that for most of my lifetime, my identity has been constructed on only one view of history. I desperately began researching information regarding these events, and I felt more aware of the social factors that shaped my identity. All the unease I felt growing up was a result of repressing my Mexican heritage in favor of the dominant American myth. As I learned more about the Mexican point of view, I realized that being American did not mean I had to ignore my history, culture, and heritage.

My identity as a Mexican American and my ideology as a citizen of a border town greatly influenced my research interests in the Mexican Repatriation of the 1930s. The Mexican Repatriation (1929-1936) was the mass deportation of people who were of Mexican descent or had been born in Mexico, but relocated in the U.S. The forced relocation was based on race and ignored the citizenship of an estimated 60%, who were U.S. citizens by birth. My interest centers on the intersectionality of a historical event that greatly influenced my sense of identity and realities with my personal narrative as a granddaughter, a daughter, and as a rhetoric scholar. I realize I do not have to ignore the questions I had and continue to have about my identity, but that I can embrace every difference and uncertainty as I continue the inquiry of my past, present, and future.

Review of Literature

In this review of literature, I explore primary and secondary sources that provide a context for the events that took place during the Mexican Repatriation of the 1930s. Along with these sources, I also read works that centered on the concepts of citizenship, race, illegal aliens, ideology, identity/subjectivity, and power. Because of the ethnically focused nature of the topic, much of the current work takes a Historical and Chicano Studies approach in order to faithfully retell the events and experiences of Mexican nationals and Mexican Americans. They also attempt to make sense of the actions by the U.S. government and Americans to deport people of Mexican descent.

The discourse that came about as a result of the relocation of Mexican nationals and Mexican Americans influenced some of the writers of the literature to include the points of view from economists and sociologists. As a result of the immigration policies implemented to execute the mass deportation, many sources take their perspective from legal and political standpoints. The works I have chosen include primary accounts, documents, and narratives that tell and retell experiences of this historical event. The stories I selected provide a broader context of the time period and to provide summaries of the current scholarship regarding this topic from multiple perspectives.

Historical Chicana Studies Perspective

Francisco E. Balderrama, professor of American History and Chicano Studies, and Raymond Rodriguez, professor emeritus, provide a historical Chicano Studies perspective in their co-authored book, *Decade of Betrayal*, which provides the first comprehensive treatment of the repatriation movement in the United States and Mexico. *Decade of Betrayal* focuses on retelling the experiences of the individuals forced to return to Mexico in what the authors

describe as an “ordeal of betrayal, adjustment, and shame” (p. 3). Their revised edition also addresses the inclusion of the hidden events in American educational curriculum.

The events leading up to a nation-wide repatriation movement of one million Mexicans and their children are described by Balderrama and Rodriguez (2006) with the use of new and original sources such as these, dissertations, monographs, articles to describe the events that led up to the nationwide repatriation movement of one million Mexican nationals and Mexican Americans. The book also draws from archival materials in the United States and Mexico, especially from the Archivo de la Secretaria de Relaciones Exteriores in Mexico City and from the United States Archives in Washington, D.C. At the same time, *Decade of Betrayal* adds a personal dimension by including telegrams, letters, and petitions from individuals and groups. The book includes a range of interview that gives priority to the repatriates.

The authors report that from 1899 to 1928, “at least half a million Mexicans entered the United States legally,” and in 1930 “approximately 1,422,533 Mexican Nationals and Mexican Americans lived in the United States” (p. 9). Mexican emigration became a historically significant mass relocation, but unfortunately, Mexican immigrants were typically only associated with unskilled and backbreaking jobs, and marginal or menial occupations. This perception led to multiple American companies transporting Mexican employees across the border to work for pitiful wages in American plants and facilities in the U.S. These employees were legally in the U.S., however, their employees only regarded as seasonal employees and not permanent residents of the country.

Balderrama and Rodriguez trace the events of repatriation chronologically beginning with the Great Depression and the sense of despair that spread in the United States as a result of the economic down turn. National despair quickly turned to hysteria and soon became a need to find

a scapegoat in the Mexican community. According to Balderrama and Rodriguez, archival materials and oral interviews are at the core of retelling the events of the afflicted and how “Americans, reeling from the economic disorientation of the depression, sought a convenient scapegoat” (p. 1). Balderrama and Rodriguez describe how factors such as social class, culture, language, religion, and ethnicity complicated the integration/socialization/acceptance of Mexican immigrants making their homes in the United States.

Sociolegal Historical Perspective

Mae M. Ngai (2014), professor of history and Lung Family Professor of Asian American Studies at Columbia University, adopts a sociolegal history perspective in her book *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America*. Her book is based on the “contention that law not only reflects society but constitutes it as well, that law normalizes and naturalizes social relations and helps to ‘structure the most routine practices of social life’” (p. 12). Ngai emphasizes that illegal immigrants are a caste group that is categorically excluded from the national community. She adds, “In contemporary political language, they live ‘in the shadows’ and can never embark on the ‘path to citizenship’” (p. xxiii).

This book also follows the “historical origins of the term ‘illegal alien’ in American law and society and the emergence of illegal immigration as the central problem in the U.S. immigration policy in the twentieth century” (p. 3). Ngai argues restrictive immigration policies in the United States after World War I marked a shift in immigration policy practices, in twentieth century American ideas about race, and in practices that effect the citizenship. *Impossible Subjects* analyzes “historical specificities of national and racial identities [that] would offer new ways of thinking about immigration and citizenship” (p. xxi).

Construction of the Mexican American Race

Laura E. Gomez (2018), professor of Law and American Studies at the University of New Mexico, focuses on the history of Mexican Americans and race relations in the United States in her book *Manifest Destinies: The Making of the Mexican American Race*. Gomez's book captures the "complexity as a byproduct of Mexican American's relationships with whites, Indians, and blacks, examining these relationships from 1846 to the turn of the century to reveal the dynamic, non-linear nature of Mexican Americans' off-white status" (p. 3). This book is grounded in history and draws heavily from data in historical documents and from secondary studies or archival materials. Gomez, however, uses an empirical emphasis to tell her story. She focuses on and highlights the sociological concepts of race, race ideology, politics, and colonialism.

The perspective adopted in this book centers on the idea that races are invented categories and racial categories and differences are socially constructed. *Manifest Destinies* describes the larger process of social construction that formulated the concept of race, along with the racial dynamics as they affected Mexican Americans. By focusing on the legal construction of Mexicans as racially "white," along with the social construction of Mexicans as non-white and as inferior, Gomez "explores how these contradictory legal and social definitions coexisted and how the legal definition of Mexicans as white affected other non-white racial groups, eventually helping to entrench white supremacy in the United States" (p. 4). Gomez contributes to the understanding of how conquest and law shaped the ambiguous position of Mexican Americans.

Critique of Contemporary Discourses of Citizenship

Lauren Berlant, Professor of English at the University of Chicago, focuses on the need to revitalize public life and political agency in the United States by offering a critique of

contemporary discourses of American citizenship. She explains what the tradition of the oppressed teaches is that the “‘state of emergency’ in which we live is not the exception but the rule” (p. 175). Moments of what she terms as *hygienic governmentality* are necessary and are used in narratives that characterize a hierarchal and adamant national society. The spread of repatriation efforts by mainstream society aimed at a low level of society is a key example of how “mobilizing the mainstream public sphere to fight the good fight on behalf of normal national culture, while those in power are left relatively immune” functioned during this time period (p. 176).

Multicultural Citizenship

Will Kymlicka (1995), Professor of Philosophy at the University of Ottawa and at Carleton University, offers a political and philosophical approach to expand on the concept of multicultural citizenship by tracing the historical relationship between liberalism and minority rights. This book presents a new conception of the rights and status of minority cultures; he argues that certain “collective rights” of minority cultures are consistent with liberal democratic principles. He also relies on examples from different countries in order to explore institutional embodiment and constitutional protection as well as the politics of multiculturalism. He emphasizes that no single formula can be applied to all groups and that the needs and aspirations of immigrants are very different from those of indigenous people and national minorities. Kymlicka concludes that “many (but not all) of the demands of ethnic and national groups are consistent with liberal principles of individual freedom and social justice” (p. 193).

Multicultural Citizenship highlights issues such as language rights, group representation, religious education, federalism, and secession as central to understanding political policies. According to Kymlicka, “treating people as individuals” is itself just a cover for ethnic and

national injustice (p. 194). He argues that “minority rights are central to the future of the liberal tradition throughout the world” (p. 194). Minority rights should not be regarded as anomalies if liberalism is to have a chance to address the needs and aspirations of ethnic and national minorities.

The Great Depression and Economic Growth

Alexander J. Field (2011, the Michel and May Orradre Professor of Economics in Santa Clara University, provides an economic historical perspective in his book, *A Great Leap Forward: 1930s Depression and U.S. Economic Growth*. Field’s focus on a new growth narrative highlights what went wrong in the Great Depression of the 1930s and what the country did to fix it. He begins his book by making the novel claim that “potential output grew dramatically across the Depression years (1929-1941), and that this advance provided the foundation for the economic and military success of the United States during the Second World War, as well as for what Walt Rostow (1960) called the ‘age of high mass consumption’ that followed” (p. 1). He concludes that behind a backdrop of double-digit unemployment, the 1930s actually saw very high rates of technological and organizational innovation.

Latino American’s Legacy

Ray Suarez (2013), journalist and correspondent for PBS *NewsHour* and CNN, provides chronicles of Latino Americans in his *Latino Americans: The 500-Year Legacy that Shaped a Nation* which highlights the stories of the oppressed as the story of the United States. Suarez explores the lives of Latino Americans over a five-hundred-year span drawing from a series of events: early European settlements, Manifest Destiny, Wild West, Cold War, Great Depression, globalization, Spanish-American War, and the civil rights movement. He argues that Americans have been taught a partial history of their country because the “core narrative, American history,

as he mentions that “the core narrative, the story at the heart of the story, is a grand procession of white guys on white horses, with the ‘others’ –black Americans, women, religious and ethnic minorities—confined to their own separate areas” (p. xii). He emphasizes that the history of Latinos in the United States is everyone’s history, regardless of where your ancestors came from. This book draws heavily on historical sources and narratives or personal histories of people willing to share their experiences of key historical events in the United States.

The different perspectives reflected in the literature review for this inquiry offer a comprehensive understanding of the events of the Mexican Repatriation of the 1930s. The historical approach adopted by the majority of the sources incorporates a variety of narratives, letters, and journals from repatriates to support their ideas and arguments; however, there is a lack of sources focusing on individual voices and narratives as a means to create knowledge to better understand how the larger phenomenon of repatriation has affected the contemporary American descendants of those originally involved in these events. Particularly, descendants’ issues with identity have not been explored.

An autoethnography gives voice to my individual narrative as a Mexican American with multiple subjectivities and roles. This inquiry calls upon my personal experiences and connects my autobiographical story to wider cultural, political, and social meanings associated with the events of the Mexican Repatriation. This inquiry will also provide insights to rhetoric as ontological, as the principles associated with it will be illustrated in the chronicle of my life. Only through this inquiry will I be able to find ways to negotiate different degrees of agency and explore paths of empowerment in everyday social networks. This inquiry draws on narratives as both meaning and knowledge-making and will voice to previously deemed insignificant historical events.

Methodology

The methodology chosen for this inquiry is critical autoethnography as it best illustrates how my life experiences and understanding of political and cultural events have contributed to make me who I am. According to Norman K. Denzin (2014), there are multiple forms of narrative ethnography including: “meta-autoethnography, autoethnography, collaborative autoethnography, co-constructed decolonizing autoethnography...performance ethnography” (Denzin, 2014). Autoethnography, in its simplest form, can be described as the study of the self. It involves “reflexive writing, and performance that engages ‘Conquergood’s triad of triads: (1) the I’s: imagination, inquiry, intervention; (2) the A’s: artistry, analysis, activism; and (3) the C’s: creativity, citizenship, [and] civic struggles for social justice” (Denzin, 2014, p. 25: citing Madison, 2005, p. 171; 2012, p. 189-190; Pennington & Prater, 2014).

Using critical autoethnography will provide a lens to gain insight into how traumas have influenced and problematized my different senses of identity, as autoethnography seeks to systematically analyze personal experiences to gain a deeper understanding of culture, subculture, or life experience. Critical autoethnography challenges canonical ways of doing research by representing the Other as products of political and socially conscious acts. As a method, it combines life history and ethnographic methods. Autoethnography is both the process of evaluating one’s life history and is the product created by the exploration.

My intent in this inquiry is to use my traumas and conflicted senses of identity as a Mexican American in the United States to gain an understanding of the social and political events that took place during the Mexican Repatriation of the 1930s. These inquiries will also allow me to glean insights that will help me better understand how history and events have shaped my identity and thus the person I am today. This autoethnographical approach involves

“reflexively writing the self into and through the ethnographic text; isolating that space where memory, history, performance, and meaning intersect” (Denzin, 2014). In Denzin’s approach to autoethnography, fiction is a narrative made of real or imagined facts and factities (2014). Truth becomes “the present context, refers to statements that are in agreement with facts and factities” and reality consists of “objects, qualities or events to which true ideas are directed” (p. 13). In other words, for Denzin, all writing can be described as fiction or fictional and narratives can be regarded as arrangements of reality.

Although this methodology relies on the use of “epiphanies” or painful experiences, these spaces of discomfort are free spaces in which we “move forward into new spaces, into new identities, new relationships, new, radical forms of scholarship, new epiphanies” (p. 67). This free space creates space for dialogue and questions, “giving a voice to positions previously silenced or ignored” (p. 73). As Bochner (2000) argues, “narratives of the self can be used as ‘a source of empowerment and a form of resistance to counter the domination of canonical discourses” (p. 76). In a similar way, my experiences and traumas resulting from conflicting views of identity will create a space and open a dialogue regarding a historical, political, and cultural event that has been buried and ignored. My narrative can also be regarded as a form of empowerment and resistance to a dominant discourse which has obscured the events and individual narratives of the Mexican Repatriation of the 1930s. To better capture my experiences and life narrative, I will follow the methodology section by describing the disciplinary lens I have developed as a result of my studies in rhetoric.

Disciplinary Lens

My formal education, including a collegiate undergrad and graduate focus on Rhetoric and Writing, have been in the United States. This focus and these experiences have allowed me

to develop a disciplinary lens which adopts the ideas of rhetoric as being ontological in nature. The world and what we know is constructed through discourse, space/place, and materiality (objects and things). Rhetoric, in this sense, is not to be reduced to a tool for communication or skill in the art of persuasion, but is the very means by which we negotiate ourselves in the world. As Brummett (1979) describes, rhetoric “creates realities rather than truths about realities.” Brummett proposes that no reality humans experience exists apart from human values, perceptions, and meanings (“Uncertain Ontologies”). This ontological position, for example, expands the view of language as more than an instrument, since as language/discourse is unique with each use, truths and knowledge are partial, situated, and contingent, and reality is a construct that is only an interpretation where agency is negotiated.

This ontological rhetorical lens makes me interested in analyzing and understanding invisible rhetorical spaces where agency can be negotiated in everyday power relations. The Mexican Repatriation of the 1930s, as well as my ideas regarding identity, have been influenced more by a series of social interactions and experiences than by an oppressive or physical form of power. Therefore, Michel Foucault’s notions of power are helpful when trying to identify invisible, insidious, and omnipresent forms of power. Foucault warns against a negative conception of power that is oppressive, possessed by an individual, or organized pyramidally; these ideas regarding power do not problematize the production of behavior or seek to find spaces for intervention. Foucault argues that people “are as much products of power as they are wielders of it” (Foucault). In this position, power is not only repressive but it is also productive.

Foucault’s ideas on power and the subject also relate to Mikhail Bakhtin’s theories on alterity and dialogism. Bakhtin’s theory adopts the belief that we do not become us without others and who we are is dependent upon others. Foucault focuses on the power relations

involved in our becoming and being subjects, whereas Bakhtin focuses on the ethic of the social relation, alterity, that contributes to make us who we are. The process of alterity is how we construct notions of the self and other. He adds, “The mirror is incapable of capturing all of me. I am both in front of the mirror and not in front of it” (Bakhtin). In his conception of alterity, Bakhtin discusses two types of understanding, shallow and responsive. Shallow understanding is a passive reflection as it merely reflects back to us that which we already know or relate to about ourselves, whereas responsive understanding is “A matter of translating the experience into an altogether different axiological perspective, into new categories of evaluation and formulation” (Bakhtin). Responsive understanding seeks to elicit that which we do not know, so that it effectively broadens our understanding of the human condition. The ideas of alterity are imbricated with the ethical responsibility of subjects to use responsive understanding “as a means to promote empathy and understanding,” as well as using it towards the development of our own becoming using Bakhtin’s term, as we work toward building the architectonic of our lives.

Bakhtin’s theory of dialogism can be likened to a power relation, as he theorizes the social and political nature of discoursing, itself. Foster writes that a power relation is implied in Bakhtin’s theory of dialogism as the centrifugal forces of dialogism and the centripetal forces of monologism “compete endlessly in dynamic relation,” where the only constant is that there is a fluctuating ratio between them. Power, then, she says, is represented in this fluctuating ratio of contested space in which the subject negotiates agency. It is important to note that although subjects can negotiate agency, not all identities and modes of subjectivity are open to all people at all times. Foucault’s ideas on power also work through a process of inclusion and exclusion restricting the subject’s identification. As described by Chris Weedon, “Identification occurs

when individuals are inserted in specific discourses and they repeatedly perform modes of subjectivity and identity until these are experienced as if they were second nature” (p. 7). In those instances, when this identification does not occur, the individual experiences dis-identification and a rejection of hegemonic discourses or norms. Dis-identification leaves the individual in a state of non-subjectivity and lack of agency (p. 7). Thus, subjectivity in this case can be regarded as a sense of self, but also involves relations of power. At the same time, identity then becomes a relational structure that is understood as a “limited and temporary fixing for the individual of a particular mode of subjectivity as apparently what one is” (p. 19).

My subject positions are a myriad and not limited to teacher and scholar of rhetoric, daughter or Mexican American and citizen of the United States. Therefore, I am always in a state of becoming, always working on the architectonic of my life that Bakhtin describes. I am part of different networks and the identity with which I negotiate the world is always in flux. The framework of rhetoric as ontological holds extreme significance in every aspect of my being and becoming.

Questions of Inquiry

Primary Question of Inquiry

1. How have Mexican and Mexican American historical, political, and cultural events associated with the Mexican Repatriation of the 1930s contributed to my current ideas on identity and how they shape my identity?

Secondary Questions of Inquiry

1. How has my public education in the United States shaped my identity as a Mexican American?

2. How have my beliefs and ideas regarding citizenship and geographical space shaped my identity and made me who I am?
3. How has being a child of immigrants shaped who I am today and ultimately led me to question and shape my identity?
4. How do my understanding of and ideas regarding who I am allow me to find ways of resistance and empowerment?

Chapter Previews

Chapter one will include the prospectus for the thesis providing a brief introduction to the project and the historical event of the Mexican Repatriation of the 1930s. This chapter also explains the research interest, research questions, and methodology for the project. It will also include a literature review with different perspectives regarding the Mexican Repatriation and an introduction to the theoretical framework informed by the theories of, primarily, Mikhail Bakhtin, Michel Foucault, Kendall Phillips, and Helen Foster.

In chapter two, I will discuss and go into detail explaining how the theories of Bakhtin, Foucault, Phillips, and Foster relate to the narratives illustrated throughout the autoethnography. I explain how these theories are connected and how they adopt a view of rhetoric as ontological to explain the main theories of language, subjects, subjectivity, monologism and dialogism, power, spaces of invention agency and identity.

Chapter three will focus on illustrating the recollections and memories I have of my grandmother and her experience as a repatriate. The chapter begins with her early life being born in the United States and her journey back to Mexico after the events of the Mexican Repatriation of the 1930s. It also presents background information about the struggles of during these period

and how she began to form a family in Durango, Mexico. Additional sections in the chapter add to my parents' history and genetic memories.

Chapter four focuses on my education in the United States and early experiences of cognitive dissonance. It illustrates through narrative power relations and the formation of conflicting subject positions through the process of enculturation.

Chapter five focuses on the national narratives and rituals performed at an early age influencing the development of an infantile citizenship. It also makes connections between Foucault's notion of the panopticon and geographical space as a Mexican American performing different subject positions.

Chapter six in this project argues the national narratives, family histories, and personal instances of trauma have led to the construction of multiple subject positions and identities. This chapter shows how different narratives and genetic memories have shaped and influenced the choices I have made to negotiate along the power relations and resist the trauma.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework (Bakhtin, Foucault, Foster, Phillips)

In the following, I describe the theories that I identify to be most strongly illustrated throughout my autoethnography. My understanding of these theories come from my readings of, primarily, Mikhail Bakhtin, Michel Foucault, Helen Foster, and Kendall Phillips. Also, I am strongly influenced by the material in the postmodern course I took with Helen Foster. I will reference and allude to these theories throughout the remainder of this work.

Language and Discourse

In relating the philosophy of language of Mikhail Bakhtin, I rely on Helen Foster's use of his work as she theorizes rhetorical subjectivity, which is language based (Networked Process and Postmodern Course). She writes that Bakhtin's theory of language differs from other theorists of language in significant ways. For example, unlike Ferdinand de Saussure, who theorized words as existing in a closed system where words have meaning relative only to all other words in the system, Bakhtin viewed words as significant when they are strung together (discourse) for a purpose by a person and between and among persons to make meaning. Meaning, then, does not reside in past meaning associated with words, alone, as words take on infinitely new meanings as they are used by people attempting to make words (language, discourse) serve their intentions. This is why Bakhtin maintains that language is both social and political. It is social because we learn and appropriate the language of those around us (for example, our families when we're born) and political because we must struggle in our attempt to make heteroglot language serve our individual intentions.

This social and political aspect of language use, Foster says, can be understood by plotting Bakhtin's theory of dialogism along a continuum, where at one end is monologism and at the other is dialogism. (It's useful to think of this continuum as comprised of all the existing

uses of language.) At and toward the monologic end is the language of authority (for example, parents, religion, institutions) that wants to restrain multiple meanings; at and toward the dialogic end is the language of many meanings. Bakhtin says that monologic discourse is centripetal, as the intention is to restrict and that dialogic discourse is centrifugal as meanings are many. Additionally, words, Bakhtin says, carry all of the intentions of everyone who has ever used them. He calls this heteroglossia; words carry the taste of professions, history, gender, age, class, etc. Last, Bakhtin says that it isn't the monologic and dialogic distinctions that are so important as it is the fluctuating ratio between them.

Foster further discusses the social and political aspects of Bakhtin's theory of dialogism as they relate to rhetoric and writing studies. Particularly, she is interested in what this theory contributes to the concepts of subjectivity and agency, which I will discuss more in a following section. But, agency, along with power, she says, resonates with the fluctuating ratio between monologic and dialogic discourse. Agency is closely related to invention and intentionality, while power circulates through all everyday practices. Power often gets our attention when, for example, we feel repressed or when we experience cognitive dissonance.

The fluctuating ratio of monologism and dialogism therefore correlates to the fluctuating degree of agency we have in different situations. For example, we could be in a room and enjoying a high degree of agency when another person enters and our degree of agency falls. Where we experience lower degrees of power, our fluctuating ratio of agency increases and vice versa.

Also important to Bakhtin's theory of dialogism is alterity. Foster says that Bakhtin's characterization of alterity resonates with a strong ethic. Language come to us from others and each of us is compelled to answer for our place in the world. This, she says, involves the

necessity of co-creation. We co-create meaning in the act of discourse, itself. I say something to you; you respond and it goes back and forth. What I meant and what you meant (can) morphs into something else. There are exceptions to this, though, as we can understand from Bakhtin's concepts of shallow understanding and responsive understanding.

According to Foster, shallow understanding occurs when we discourse with someone and see and understand only in the other that which is like us. It's like looking in a mirror. In this instance, we don't really create anything new because we're closed off to invention and possibility. Responsive understanding occurs when we attempt to see and understand the other's differences from us. This is an ethical and generative act that increases meaning-making and agency, which ultimately changes who we are.

Subjectivity/How We Become Subjects/Power

Here, my understanding is based primarily on Foster, Althusser, Foucault, and Phillips. Subjectivity posits that as we are subjected to various ideologically-saturated discourses (heteroglossia in Bakhtin's theory) and social practices, we effectively assume subject positions associated with these discourses and social practices. For example, motherhood is a powerful subject position because of the strong ideological discourse associated with it (caring, nurturing, sacrificing, etc.), along with the many social practices associated with it (feeding, cleaning, supervising, teaching, disciplining, etc.). We perform subject positions, through discourse and social practices, and, therefore, reproduce these same ideological subject positions. For example, a common subject position that we're subjected to even before birth, assuming our parents know our sex, is the gender norm associated with our biological sex. Parents decorate a nursery with colors, toys, and other objects they associate with a baby's gender. When the baby arrives, parents and other relatives use discourse and enact social practices that are culturally normative.

The baby is enculturated into a gender position. Other early life subject positions include race, ethnicity, class, and nationality.

We are subjected to many subject positions in life. When we enter school, we take on the subjectivity of a student. Our social circles subject us to another and the workplace to another. We have as many subjectivities as the different sorts of relationships we have and as many as the variety of roles we have, e.g., sibling, parent, cousin, friend, spouse, lover, sexual orientation, age, employee, coach, etc.

Another way to think about how we are subjected is through the metaphor that Louis Althusser discusses. We are hailed, he says, and in responding to the hail, we are interpellated to the subject position (Althusser). His example involves a cop pursuing a suspect, who yells out “Stop!” As the pursued subject stops and turns around, they assume the subject position of a suspect. In other words, the pursuer recognizes the person as being a particular kind of subject and the subject recognizes in themselves that they occupy the position. This double recognition is the act of interpellation.

Another useful metaphor is the panoptic architecture of a prison (Bentham, Foucault). Designed so that prisoners can see a centralized guard station with blinds that prohibit them from actually seeing if they are being seen, prisoners adjust their behavior to the norms of the subject position of a docile prisoner. Therefore, according to Foster, the surveillance of the panopticon enacts the same sort of double recognition as involved with interpellation. Effectively, we are surveilled in our subject positions by our cultural others who are, themselves, performing the position and reproducing it. Are we a good student? Are we a good employee and so forth? To the degree that we perform our subject positions, we can experience reward or discipline, as well as everything in between.

Often, we purposefully negotiate the norms of subject positions, while at other times, we purposefully resist or push back against them. Sometimes, we are successful; sometimes, we are not. Often, we achieve or fail by degrees. It really depends on the situation and the degree of agency we are able to exert.

Because we occupy so many subject positions, we can and often do experience internal conflict because the ideologies of the subject positions are not identical. For example, the ideology of an employee is very different from the ideology of a parent. We may engage in a social practice at work that we are telling our children is unethical. If we are exposed to two different nationalities, we will feel conflicted because each is ideologically different and may have different social practices associated with the subject position. This conflict results in a sort of cognitive dissonance.

Power relations constitute our subjectivity and it is important to understand how some discourses, subject positions, and modes of subjectivity have more power than others. The subjectivities into which we are interpellated by the culture, at large, are constituted by power, usually because we are subjected to them from infancy on. However, the subjectivities that we seek are fueled by agency (e.g. grad student, an extra-curricular club, etc.). It could be argued that we seek such subjectivities precisely because power creates the need and or desire for them.

Foucault argues that discourses produce subjects within relations of power to potentially or actually involve resistance. This view of power is both repressive and enabling. For Foucault, power is a relationship that implies resistance. According to Foucault, "The problem is that we have a negative conception of power, which leads us to only call power that which prohibits, while the production of behavior is not problematized at all." This view of power steps away from the belief of power as one thing that can be possessed by one person or one individual who

operates at the top of a pyramid by prohibiting actions or creating negative sanctions. Rather, Foucault argues that power is “amorphous and autonomous and essentially relational” (Foucault as cited in Kelly). Power, therefore, is represented not so much in what people have or attempt to prohibit but is even more so in what people do and in their interactions with one another. It is a power that is so omnipresent that it has become invisible as people negotiate along their various everyday relations. In both discursive and non-discursive relations, then, power relations are ubiquitous.

Although Bakhtin does not address power, per se, Foster maintains that it is implied in his work through his theory of dialogism, as every aspect of life is dialogic: every person is subject to the space they occupy and to the time and history that precede them and in which they currently exist. And, similarly, to dialogism, Foster says, Foucault’s metaphor of a continually operational power mechanism, the panopticon, subjects us to the disciplining of our culture’s observations and normalization, even as we then (re)produce similar observations that contribute to the strength of that normalization.

Foucault’s work has been criticized for not providing an explicit agenda for resistance, but this does not mean that he precludes the possibility. Foster, for example, believes that spaces for resistance exist but that we must exercise a sort of critical diligence to recognize them and marshal the agency of invention to create them. Such acts always carry with them, risk.

Kendall Phillips goes further, as he argues that discussing Foucault only in terms of power and resistance limits our understanding of his theories. This perspective, he says, sets up power and resistance as oppositional terms or as a binary and focuses on the act of resistance as the only potential site of transformation. In the following section, I will explore Phillips’ ideas regarding Foucault’s work and potential transformation.

Agency/Transformation

Foucault's notions of power indicate that the power relations dictating position and form are also the power relations that provide agency for resistance and reformulation or transformation. Agency can be defined as the subject's ability to act and this ability occurs when power shifts from its status as a condition of agency to the subject's own agency. Foucault, according to Phillips, presents a decentered potential agency that can lead to new possibilities for exploration in discourse and a broader dispersal of agency. Different subject positions afford different degrees of agency and afford different risks for potential disruption or change.

Spaces of Invention

My understanding of spaces of invention and the rhetorical maneuver is influenced by the work of Kendall Phillips (2002) in his articles, "Spaces of Invention: Dissension, Freedom, and Thought in Foucault" and "Rhetorical Maneuvers: Subjectivity, Power, and Resistance." Again, power and resistance should not be regarded as oppositional terms because doing so focuses on the act of resistance as the only possible place of transformation, ignoring experience and the emergence of potential spaces for invention. Spaces or gaps are not only where resistance emerges but also where resistances are created (Phillips, 2002). These spaces of invention are possible spaces where new actions can be imagined or enacted. Phillips (2002) maps the process by which these spaces emerge through "spaces of dissension," "spaces of freedom," and "spaces of thought."

Spaces of Dissension

Phillips (2002) characterizes spaces of dissension as places of incoherence and contingency of discourse. Places of incoherence can also be described as spaces of instability or contradiction (cognitive dissonance). Discourse creates the illusion of authority and absoluteness

or continuity hiding the existence of incoherence and contingency. However, contradictions exist in discourse when “normal” discourse encounters incompatibility. Contradictions are inherent in discourse as a result of multiplicity, overlap, and incompatibility. Spaces of dissension are momentary spaces marked by irregularity, abnormality, and unintelligibility, where discourse escapes the illusion of continuity (Phillips, 2002). Spaces of dissension can also be described as spaces of cognitive dissonance and as points of possibility.

Spaces of incoherence and cognitive dissonance resonate with Bakhtin’s theory of dialogism. According to Bakhtin’s theory of dialogism, monologic discourse resonates with ideas of “authority, absoluteness, and continuity,” whereas dialogic discourse resonates with “contingency, situatedness, and partiality.” Therefore, Foster argues, the fluctuating ratio of monologism and dialogism correlates to the fluctuating degree of agency we have in different situations. Where we experience a lower degree of the exertion of power on us, our fluctuating ratio of agency increases and vice versa.

Spaces of Freedom

Phillips emphasizes that we ought not view Foucault’s notion of power as enabling and limiting, and similarly, he argues, we should not think of notions like domination and freedom as separate or opposed, but as unified concepts. Phillips adds that if there was no possibility for resistance, there would be no power relations because they would simply reduce us to blind obedience and to being automatons. Power relations, therefore, involve a degree of power and resistance, where points of friction occur when there is a sense of limit for both power and resistance. These moments of friction are regarded as the beginning or possibility. Phillips refers to this point of possibility as a point of *stasis*, in which the relations of power and the forces of resistance are at rest or are temporarily suspended. This precise point, Phillips says, is a space of

“concrete freedom,” since there is no clear path. Therefore, this space of freedom is dependent on a space of dissension or contradiction. Both spaces hint at a possible space for transformation, as the subject becomes aware of the friction between resistance and power (Phillips, 2002).

Spaces of Thought

The last aspect of spaces of dissension is that of thought, in which the subject is able to reconstitute subjectivity by stepping back and turning it into a problem to be probed and questioned (inquiry). In other words, reflection allows for freedom between the present moment and the possible. Phillips adds, “Thought is possible at these extreme points where one experiences displacement from one’s self and one’s actions” (2002, p.338). Once the subject arrives at a point in which it has become impossible to keep living as one had, a space is opened for inventing subjectivity.

Dissension, then, is not a new discourse but an inventional pause; freedom is not a reversal of power relations but a reflective/inventional moment; and thought is not a new subjectivity but a reflection of one’s self and one’s actions before a potential inventional moment of potential transformation. As Phillips posits, “‘Real’ transformation occurs only after the emergence of thought—the moment of disorientation in which the subject is displaced from itself—and the reflection on the present as a problem” (2002, p.339).

Rhetorical Maneuver

Another process in which the subject can potentially gain agency, Phillips contends, is through the rhetorical maneuver, a mechanism in which the purposes of agency escape the purposes of power. The rhetorical maneuver is a “calculated action determined by the multiplicity of possible subjectivities, and can be defined as the articulation of an inappropriate alternate form of subjectivity within an already defined subject position” (Phillips, 2006, p.321).

In other words, the subject calls upon a different subject form to cause disruption and disunity and achieve its desired intent or achieve a higher degree of agency. The movement from one subject position to another in the rhetorical maneuver indicates there is potential agency in the space between the subject position and the subject form. Even if a subject position is established in relations of power, the subject may choose to risk performing a different and inappropriate form of subjectivity. Agency is then formulated not only in terms of power and resistance, but also in terms of risks entailed by invoking it (Phillips, 2006). The rhetorical maneuver shows the subject's potential to draw from resources of memory, agency, artistry, and invention.

Chapter 3: Child of Immigrants (and identity)

Abuelita Concha and Repatriation

It can be said my life story begins with my grandmother, Concepcion Velis. She is the oldest ancestor I have a clear memory of since my mother's parents died when I was very young and, as a result of two embolisms, my father's dad is only a memory of a bedridden and nonverbal old man. Abuelita Concha was never the warmest or kindest of grandmothers but, for better or for worse, she was my only grandmotherly figure growing up. She was born in 1923 in Lamar, Prowers, Colorado, although, I had always mistakenly thought she had been born in Mexico (Appendix A).

Growing up, my father always told me things he remembered about her and he would always become emotional. She did not have an easy life. She was born into a family of musicians. According to my father, his uncles were always dressed in suits and were never without a musical instrument in their hands. My grandmother's father, Secundino Velis, made the decision to immigrate to the United States despite being undocumented because he was struggling in Mexico to provide for his growing family. They had family in Colorado, who extended an offer of assistance. Secundino and his sons were able to make a sustainable living playing gigs around the city. They were not rich, but they were able to provide for their family and achieve a comfortable lifestyle. Unlike most people during those times, they were not forced to resort to picking crops or to doing domestic work. By the time my grandmother was born in 1923, the family had been in the United States for over a decade. My grandmother, being born in Colorado, was legally an American, but at the age of seven, the events of the Mexican Repatriation forced her entire family back to Mexico.

The Repatriation of the 1930s that resulted in the deportation of over a million Mexicans and Mexican Americans during the Great Depression is a largely forgotten chapter of American history (Suarez, 2013). The causes for it were complex but the depression provided the tipping point (Field, 2011). Many businesses decided to stop giving jobs to Mexicans and Mexican Americans as a result of the hysteria of the depression and the subsequent fear that Mexicans would take the jobs of more deserving Americans. Mexican nationals and Mexican Americans faced various other types of discrimination, as well. Segregation was practiced as, in many cases, restaurants refused to serve Mexicans and Mexican Americans or offer them services. Children were told that they could only speak English in school (Balderrama & Rodriguez, 2006). My grandmother's palms were slapped with a ruler if she tried to speak in Spanish. Then, census data collection practices were changed in the 1930s, when the U.S. Census instructed Census officials to list any people born in the U.S. to Mexican parents as Mexican (Appendix B), even though in previous censuses (and later in the 1940's census), enumerators had been instructed to list Mexican Americans as white (Hendricks and Patterson, 2002).

The word repatriation carries connotations that it is a voluntary movement, where people decide to return to their country of nationality, but the very public raids by the government during the Hoover administration complicate the concept of voluntary (Balderrama & Rodriguez, 2006). The prejudice and hysteria resulted in many raids in public spaces. The most famous raid in Los Angeles was called the Placita Raid, in which a part of the downtown was cornered off and deportations began without distinguishing between those people without papers and those that were American citizens (Balderrama and Rodriguez, 2006).

The family recognized the futility of fighting the hegemony and decided to go back to Mexico of their own volition instead of waiting for the law to deport them. Therefore, a lack of

accurate records exists as to how many people actually returned to Mexico during this time, as many others did the same as my family. Contrary to many Americans' perceptions of oppressive governmental policies bearing the greatest responsibility for repatriation and the raids associated with it, power, relative to the raids, was not contained in the form of a single entity such as the United States government oppressing Mexicans and Mexican Americans and physically forcing them to move out of the U.S., using the Army or National Guard. It is always easier to blame a single person or entity for the horrible events in history. For example, people think of the Holocaust and automatically think of Hitler as the villain. But, it is more complicated than that.

This form of power was more complex. Power was not a thing but a relation and, as mentioned, it was not localized in the government and State but was instead dispersed and exercised throughout the social body of the culture. Power operated at the most micro levels of social relations and became distributed and omnipresent. This power was not only repressive but also productive, strategic, and war-like (Foucault). Mexican nationals and Mexican Americans during these times were under the illusion that they had the freedom to choose or decide for themselves to go back to Mexico, but in reality, that was their only option.

Therefore, my great-grandfather, like many others, was forced by circumstances to return to Mexico and once again rely on family for financial and emotional support when he brought his wife and children to San Jose de la Parrilla, Durango, Mexico, to once again rebuild their life. My grandmother struggled to adapt and get used to living in a new country. After years of struggling to speak English, she was now encouraged to forget the tongue of those who had uprooted her people: "You are Mexican and don't you forget it." Perhaps because she was only seven years old, she adapted quickly to her life in Mexico. Others were not as lucky.

I have always believed my grandmother was never resentful of the repatriation because she met my grandfather in Durango and fell in love. At only eighteen years of age, she met my grandfather, Marcos Lerma, who was six years older and, according to my mother, a very handsome man with the friendliest of personalities. I still remember the first time I heard the story of how they met from my father, because we laughed for about an hour and I still laugh when I think about it. To my shock and amazement, my grandfather enjoyed writing. My father remembers his father hunched over his desk, scribbling page after page of his latest work during his free time. Sometimes he would also write the plays for church during *Las Posadas*, or the Inns, which are the religious festivals celebrated in Mexico and some parts of the U.S. between December 16 and 24. The festivities commemorate the journey of Joseph and Mary to Bethlehem in search of safe refuge for the birth of the baby Jesus. My father told me, “Your grandmother was so pretty she was chosen to play Mary in the play. Your grandfather wrote the play and he was also acting as...” I quickly screamed and interrupted with, “As Joseph!” My father threw his head backwards with laughter and wiped tears from his eyes as he said, “No. He was the devil.” “Are you serious?!” I yelled and joined him in the laughter. Up until this day, that is still my favorite story of a couple meeting. Unfortunately, the audience of the play were not the only ones who perceived my grandfather as devilish.

My grandparents decided they would get married shortly after meeting during *Las Posadas*, but her family refused to accept my grandfather under any circumstances. They refused to accept him because he was from a very low socioeconomic class and had worked in the 1940s as a seasonal worker (bracero) in the U.S., and braceros were looked upon as sell-outs. The Bracero Program was a series of laws and diplomatic agreements, initiated on August 4, 1942, when the United States signed the Mexican Farm Labor Agreement with Mexico.

The agreement guaranteed decent living conditions and a minimum wage of 30 cents an hour to Mexican contract laborers, who were imported into the U.S. as a temporary measure to labor shortages during the early phases of World War II. The program was terminated in 1964.

My grandmother's family made their disdain for their new son-in-law blatant when at their wedding reception, her entire family, including her father Secundino, refused to eat at their dinner. This story, as opposed to how they met, always made my father sad. Her family did not believe her new husband was good enough for her. He was poor, uneducated and, unlike my U.S. born grandmother, entirely without prospects for social or economic mobility. Despite the family's objections, however, the happy couple married and soon had little mouths to feed.

My Father, el *Músico*

My father, Andres Lerma, was born in 1952 in La Parrilla, Durango, Mexico, where he lived for only a year, but he still gets upset if someone dares to say he was born somewhere other than Juarez, Chihuahua. When I would ask my father anything about Durango, he would immediately answer with, "I planted the trees at the Chamizal (National Park along the United States-Mexico international border commemorating the peaceful settlement of the Chamizal boundary dispute) in Juarez; you think I'm going to say I'm from Durango?" That would immediately cease all discussion regarding where he was born, and I found changing the subject to my grandmother's story wise.

My grandparents had moved to Juarez when my father was only a year old to be closer to El Paso, where my grandmother could work on getting her paperwork fixed and then claim her U.S. citizenship. They hoped that if she were able to claim U.S. citizenship, she would be able to work in El Paso and earn higher wages. Once Grandmother Concepcion Velis was able to claim her U.S. citizenship, life began to improve for the family. She worked for many years cleaning

houses around the Shelmont neighborhood in El Paso close to downtown (in the same neighborhood I now live in). She would clean houses and sometimes cook for the families and she was able to make more money since she was paid in U.S. dollars and they were still living in Juarez.

My father remembers waiting for his mother at the streetcar station in Juarez so he could walk her home after a long day of working in El Paso. He was eleven or twelve and took great pride in fulfilling his duty for his mother. My father would wait for her late at night as she arrived in the streetcar that came from El Paso. He remembers as they would excitedly go grocery shopping after she arrived and he would help with the grocery bags back home. He also remembers the period when my grandmother began working at El Paso Laundry, pressing pants and other garments, because that was truly when things improved in his family. They were no longer limited to the bare necessities but were able to afford even a few luxuries. His eyes tear up sometimes when he remembers a time he saw his mother get off the street car with a big gift in her hands. Despite their difficult living conditions with six children, she had bought my dad his first guitar, an electric guitar with a dark brown wood finish.

At the age of fifteen, my father left school and pursued a career as a musician. He had a natural affinity for the guitar and bass and, at the age of only thirteen, was already performing in local clubs and bars to help my grandmother financially. One night as my father was performing, he met my mother, his future wife, while she was chaperoning her sister because her parents would not allow the girls out alone. It was love at first sight.

The Story of Repatriation Repeats

Both of my parents were working in Juarez, my father as a musician and my mother as a receptionist, when my older sister, Elsa, was born in 1976. Five years later, when my mother

became pregnant with my brother, my father decided to attempt the paperwork that would give citizenship to his family for new opportunities. My parents had to borrow money from their family and friends and work extra shifts to pay for the paperwork, fees and process of becoming U.S. residents. Although it was a difficult and tedious process, they believed the effort would pay off once they were able to live and work in the U.S. They were finally able to receive their residency status in 1981.

Since all their hard earned money had been used to pay for the fees and paperwork to become U.S. residents, they were not in a position to rent a place in El Paso. They decided to travel to California and live with my mother's sister, Hortencia, for a few months while they worked and saved money to return and live in El Paso. Although my father was hesitant, my mother convinced him they should travel to Los Angeles, California, reminding him that my brother would be born a U.S. citizen. After receiving ill-treatment from my aunt and her sons, my mother was unable to wait for the birth of my brother, despite it being only a few weeks away. She frantically collected her belongings and bought two bus tickets back to Juarez, Mexico. Having given all his money to my mother and sister to travel back to Mexico and reluctant to return to my aunt's house, my father was forced to stay, where he remained homeless for a week in Los Angeles, California. He went to work for a whole week, stayed in parks to sleep, and at the end of the week, collected his last paycheck, asked for my sister's transfer papers from school, picked up the Christmas toys they had on layaway for my sister, and bought a bus ticket back to Juarez, where he would be reunited with his family.

Upon their arrival, back to their "home," they discovered that all of their belongings had been stored in a small room in my grandmother's backyard. Their house, which had been borrowed by my mother's younger sister during the nine months they were away, was still being

used by her family and they had no intention of leaving it. Tired and defeated after their experiences in California, my parents decided to avoid further conflict with family and lived with my grandmother until they could stand on their own feet once again.

My brother was born in El Paso, making him a U.S. citizen and ensuring his future, as my mother had hoped. His birth in the U.S. followed a pattern familiar among Mexican families, where older children are generally born in Mexico or near the border and younger siblings are born in the U.S. (Bladerrama and Rodriguez, 2006, p. 29). This pattern can also be seen in my grandmother's family records (Appendix A).

Trauma and Genetic “Memories”

The idea that we inherit the legacy of our ancestors is nothing new. When I think back to the trauma and family history I ignored for the majority of my lifetime, I cannot help but wonder if their legacy is one of displacement and instability. I found myself terrified that I might be fated to repeat the patterns of my family's past in my life. As Pam Weintraub (2018) describes, “Survivors of history can't just get over it. They are trapped by the centrifugal force of centuries, and their arcs are still spiraling out.” The trauma and impact beginning with the Mexican Repatriation of the 1930s can be defined as “cumulative emotional and psychological wounding over the lifespan and across generations, emanating from massive group trauma” (Heart as cited in Weintraub, 2018). The events of repatriation were never acknowledged, so both Mexican and American cultures continue to propagate trauma unconsciously (Weintraub).

Since I discovered my grandma had been part of the repatriation events, I have always assumed that due to her young age, the events had had little to no effect on her. I thought she had no negative feelings, since she never talked about them and because she had met my grandfather, created a life of her own, and raised a family in Mexico. However, I never considered that the

traumas she suffered were ignored instead of faced and understood and healed. To a much smaller scale, my father and my family experienced similar trauma when they migrated to the U.S. the first time and, due to discrimination and hardship, were forced to return to Juarez, to a familiar place.

Recent studies by psychologists, scientifically trained in epigenetics, have begun to analyze the impact of history's traumas on subsequent generations. According to epigenetics, "The study of inheritable changes in gene expression not directly coded in our DNA—our life experiences may be passed on to our children and our children's children. Studies on survivors of traumatic events have suggested that exposure to stress may indeed have lasting effects on subsequent generations" (Hunka, 2016). Studies have been conducted with Native American children forced to leave their families and attend boarding schools; African Americans who are descendants of survivors of the attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki; people whose parents survived atrocities in Rwanda; people whose parents survived the collapse of the Twin Towers in New York; and the most infamous of traumatic situations, the children of World War II Holocaust survivors. Children of Holocaust survivors suffered a "higher risk of anxiety, depression and post-traumatic stress disorder than their generational peers" (Hunka, 2016). Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is a common and debilitating mental disorder that occurs after a traumatic event. Symptoms include re-experiencing the traumatic event, avoiding event-related stimuli, and fight-or-flight response or hyperarousal. My grandmother's lack of response when discussing the topic of the Mexican Repatriation and similar events could have been a direct result of her young age, but it could have also been the need to avoid any event-related stimuli. Research regarding "genetic memories" that explores the significance of survivors' children's emotional parallels is ongoing and necessary; I am convinced that the events and

traumatic experiences of my ancestors, compounded with my traumas of poverty, discrimination and instability, continue to impact and shape my reality.

Chapter 4: Education (and identity)

A New Beginning

By the time I was born in 1991, my parents were living in an apartment near the central area of El Paso. Although they had established themselves and were able to offer my siblings and me comfortable living conditions, they did so by sacrificing most of their time working long hours in physically-taxing jobs. Therefore, school was a safe haven for me in many ways.

I remember the frantic mornings being woken up by my mother as she was leaving for work at the Prewash Company, where she pressed jeans. I would open one of my eyes as she kissed my forehead and reminded me not to be late for school. When I had opened both eyes, I would check to see if my dad had returned from his shift working as the night supervisor and laundryman at the National Garment Company. He was in charge of getting me ready for school and dropping me off. I would get dressed with whatever my mom had laid on top of the bed and my dad would lovingly, but a little roughly, brush my hair into one of the only two styles he knew: ponytail or loose with a hair band. He would make me chocolate milk with chunks of banana that was so sugary, I still credit him with my wide-eyed eagerness and ability to stay awake and thus be successful in school. He would walk the two blocks with me to school and, often falling asleep against a fence or wall, wait for me to recite the pledge at the flagpole and then go to class before he shuffled home. I remember sometimes I would feel jealous that he was able to go back home and sleep a few hours before he had to go back to his next shift.

I was always eager to learn in school and had a genuine curiosity for most topics. The main problem I had was that I was shy and unassertive, even quiet. Being less vocal was never an indication of not understanding or struggle, but it was a reflection of lack of confidence and a strong fear of being the center of attention and feeling judged. Several things caused me to feel

afraid, despite not having a strong reason for it. I felt terrified that I might say the wrong answer, or worse, say the wrong answer in mispronounced English! I feared being called an overachiever or a teacher's pet and tried to avoid any attention, positive or negative, from my peers and instructors.

Early Education: The Establishment of the Hierarchy

At six years old, I experienced one of the most traumatic experiences I had faced in my life at that point. My parents had an almost violent argument with my neighbor and our family was forced to leave what had been my home for six years. I had to move to a new school, Beall Elementary, which was almost at the heart of downtown El Paso. The red bricks of the school building reminded me more of a fire station than a school, but I was willing to try. However, I soon realized nothing had prepared me for that first transition year.

Mrs. Tovar became my first grade teacher and she was an imposing six-foot-tall woman with a strong floral perfume scent that still causes my heart to sink when I catch a random whiff. She had pale skin, green eyes, and witch-black hair. On the first day of class, she was standing impatiently waiting outside in front of a line of students, repeatedly checking her watch. As soon as the bell sounded, she walked out in strides so long that almost every child was left behind as she flew into classroom. I sat down but she quickly motioned me to stand up and walk to the front of the classroom. She introduced me as the "new one," threw my name at my classmates and pointed to a seat. As I was sitting down, I noticed a little boy with a freckled face and blonde hair at a round table sniffing and with a red face. I was not sure but I could almost swear he was crying.

That first day was uneventful, but with the passing of each day, more tasks were piled on me and the pressure to catch up became overwhelming. It was not long before I realized that

Jorge, the sniffing blonde from my first day, had every reason to cry. My family would come to call him Jorge el Chillon (Jorge the Crybaby) because he cried every morning when his grandmother dropped him off to take his place in Mrs. Tovar's line before class. It was not long before I found myself crying every day, too. It was not uncommon for Mrs. Tovar to yell at her students and lose her temper easily, which only made matters worse.

In an effort to encourage me, my mom visited me during lunch and brought me a Gansito (a Mexican chocolate cupcake with strawberry filling). I looked forward to lunch when I could be somewhat comforted by her presence and a snack, but shortly after, Mrs. Tovar noticed my mom visiting me. She asked my mom to stop doing it and allow me to adapt to the new environment on my own. My mom felt she had no other option and agreed to stop visiting me. The power the teacher had over my mother only increased my anxiety. The more nervous I became, the more mistakes I made on assignments or in pronouncing English words, which only angered Mrs. Tovar even more. She would yell at me—making me even more nervous and I would make even more mistakes. Mrs. Jordan, Mrs. Tovar's assistant and complete opposite, became my savior and hero during that year. She was around 63 years old and she was extremely sweet and quiet. She would frantically help me before Mrs. Tovar found out that I had glued something wrong or had colored the wrong area of the drawing. Mrs. Jordan noticed when I would shake with fear and nervousness, too, and constantly asked me if I was okay.

The main lesson I learned from my first grade experience was to be quiet and remain in anonymity if I wanted to avoid being embarrassed or stay out of trouble. I had internalized the hierarchy established in my public education and developed a student subject position as one who avoided trouble and talking unless absolutely necessary. The restrictive and repressive classroom made me adopt a subjectivity in which emotional responses had no place and had to

be eliminated if I wanted to become a successful student (Hooks, 1994). At the same time, it was the first encounter I had with coercion. Mrs. Tovar had made me understand that she had power and authority over me, as she used force and intimidation to get all of her students, including me, to fear her and the consequences of not adhering to her every expectation. I continued with this mentality of being emotionless and doing exactly as teachers wanted as I advanced to the second grade.

English Language takes Priority

My second grade teacher was Mrs. Kuntz and she was no taller than five feet with curly blonde hair and a chubby figure. Mrs. Kuntz's friendly and funny personality made it very easy for me to adapt and feel less guilty about my experiences in first grade. As I had dreamed covertly during first grade, but never dared to hope, in second grade I quickly became a star student, which earned me the right to sit in the special seat reserved for the star boy and girl student with the highest grades every six weeks. In retrospect, it was probably not the best seat, because it was the older individual wood seat, but no hard seat could take away my thrill at having a special box under my seat for my notebooks and pencil box, or any other treasures I chose to store there.

Halfway through the school year, Mrs. Kuntz informed us that she would begin scheduling the visits she would make to our homes and about the need to fill out the orange form she would send with us that afternoon. I obediently gave the English and Spanish form to my mom, who looked instantly shocked. She asked me if I knew any more information and I shook my head and shrugged my shoulders. My mom informed me that Mrs. Kuntz would visit everyone's home and discuss our progress, as well as take notes on our home environment. I was seven years old and my favorite teacher, so far, was going to visit my house. This year could not

get any better. I was excited and thrilled, especially because I was sure my mom would only hear good things regarding my work and behavior in school. The two weeks prior to the long awaited visit passed quickly and it was finally the day.

I got home from school, quickly placed my backpack in its proper place, and sat in the living room anxiously awaiting the visit. My mom joined me, having missed work so that she could clean the house and meet with Mrs. Kuntz. Mrs. Kuntz arrived promptly at the scheduled 4:00 p.m. appointment, and I greeted her with a big smile as I opened the door to my home. My mother greeted her and offered her something to drink. She accepted water and I rushed to get it and still not miss any part of the conversation. As predicted, Mrs. Kuntz mainly spoke to my mom about my being quiet and well-behaved, as well as my completing every assignment and having high grades. As they discussed my progress, I became somewhat distracted with *Clifford*, which was playing on the television in the background with no volume. Mrs. Kuntz must have noticed because she asked, “What kind of shows or cartoons does Corina watch?” My mom proudly replied, “She loves all the cartoon on PBS like *Clifford* and *Barney* and *Zaboomafoo*.” Mrs. Kuntz smiled and said, “That is great! Make sure she continues to only watch English television shows and cartoons and speaks English at home.” Her admonition to my mother made me feel like my parents’ language was somehow detrimental to my education. Her hegemonic discourse, made more insidious by her innocuous presentation, convinced me that it was in my best interest to stop speaking Spanish. As opposed to Mrs. Tovar in the first grade, Mrs. Kuntz was not intimidating or forceful, but, nevertheless, she had used her authority as an instructor to persuade me that my language was inferior and to influence me to feel shame for speaking in my first language. Although I now realize that being bilingual or multilingual is an advantage in any society, at that age, I began to wonder if I would ever be able to hide the fact that I spoke

Spanish and I worried about how much I needed to continue working on removing all trace of an accent when I spoke English.

Similarly, during the Repatriation of the 1930s and more specifically in El Paso, schoolteachers blamed the family for maintaining what they characterized as ignorance among Mexican students. Even though Spanish served as a bond that kept families together through a common identity, heritage, and history, students attending American schools were told that speaking English was key to being successful and that speaking Spanish was a sign of inferiority. Language, in this case, was used not as a means to adapt but as a weapon of conquest and domination (Balderrama and Rodriguez, 2006). Henry Giroux adds, “Students have memories, families, religions, feelings, languages and cultures that give them a distinctive voice. We can critically engage that experience and we can move beyond it. But we can’t deny it” (Hooks, 1994, 88). Mrs. Kuntz’s perhaps well-intentioned advice hurt me because as I moved on in my education, I developed a positionality where I resented my family’s attachment to their language and feared that they would somehow hold me back. Gloria Anzaldua captures this pain when she says in *Borderlands/La Frontera*, “So if you want to really hurt me, talk badly about my language” (Hooks, 1994, p.168).

The rest of my academic career, I continued to write and speak using only standard English and even avoided any instance of Spanglish at home or school. My ability to repress “all longing to speak in tongues other than standard English without seeing this repression as political was an indication of the way we act unconsciously, in complicity with a culture of domination” (Hooks, 1994, p. 173). Mexican American children experienced linguistic violence during times of repatriation, which became a legacy, as English became a marker of education and success and Spanish a language of the inferior and unwanted.

The Anti-Hero, Villa

The first time I experienced truly palpable cognitive dissonance regarding my education was in a U.S. History class in high school. Mr. Johnson was a six-foot-tall man from Minnesota with long hair and a beard. His classroom was a portable that was removed from the brick-and-mortar walls of the school property, which gave him an unsupervised license to turn his classroom into a dry Texan bar; it was impossible to see the wall or floor of that small portable. He had so many flags, old posters, banners, and drawings as wallpaper that it made it difficult for me to concentrate. He was a very imposing teacher and his class consisted of his walking between the rows of desks and yelling “Madam!” and pointing at the person, whose turn it was to answer his complex questions. His questions came from the readings he had assigned, but if for some reason I had not read the night before, which happened all too often, his style of teaching was terrifying. My calm and quiet demeanor would constantly clash with his boisterous personality. I loathed being called upon and feared being asked questions; I did all I could to avoid attention during his high-volume, over-the-top intensity class.

Throughout the semester, I struggled during that class, but I also assumed that I would be more prepared for the final History IB test. Unlike other history classes, the tests did not consist of multiple choice tests that required memorizing dates or specific details. The tests in class, just like the final, consisted of essay questions on topics we had explored in class. Finally, after a long year in Mr. Johnson’s class, which had traumatized me to the point that I heard “Madam!” in my sleep, it was time to take the test. We were required to go to a different location away from our school to take it. We had to arrive at 8:00 a.m. in a room next to a church on the west side of town. I arrived twenty minutes early because I was terrified that if I were late, I would not be

allowed to take the test, thus destroying my chance to earn the prestigious International Baccalaureate Diploma.

I walked over to my desk, which was carefully labeled, and noticed I had two number two pencils next to my name. After taking role, the IB Coordinator, Mrs. Gonzalez, handed out the booklets with the test, which she had guarded like a national treasure for two months. I received the booklet and after she set the timer, we all frantically looked through the three essay questions in order to plan how they would be answered. I was excited to see there was a question regarding the Mexican Revolution. The question read: “In a well-supported essay argue if Pancho Villa was a hero or anti-hero to the Mexican Revolution of 1910.” I quickly began making notes from what I could remember, although in the beginning I immediately thought of him as a hero. However, when I looked down at my list, I had three main points for anti-hero and none for hero. I was confused and tried to think harder and remember the lectures and readings to see if I could remember anything that would allow me to write for Pancho Villa as a hero. I kept coming up blank. All IB tests are timed and I knew if I continued debating what to write about, I would lose valuable time.

I picked up my pencil and looked at my list and opened with arguing that Pancho Villa’s pursuit by the U.S. Army had created long-term negative repercussions. It established an anti-American sentiment in Mexico and allowed Venustiano Carranza, a wealthy landowner, to mobilize popular anger against Villa, thus further strengthening his political position. I felt as if I had no option but to write that he had been a hindrance and in many ways an obstruction in the Mexican Revolution. Although I had no knowledge of that historical time from a Mexican perspective, something felt incredibly wrong about my response. I felt I had somehow betrayed a part of me. I remembered conversations in my family, especially my dad mentioning good deeds

that Villa had done for the Mexican people. The poor considered him a hero, much like Robin Hood. He had gained the love and respect of people because he took the land from the wealthy and gave to those in need. It was the first time I felt a strong sense of resistance to my teachers, the books we had read and the views we had studied. My epiphany shined a light on my previous feelings of personal dissonance and confusion about my identity.

Throughout my life, up to that moment, I had unconsciously worked on mechanisms to live a completely segmented life between my home and school. I had been raised and informally enculturated by my family's stories about my grandparents in Mexico; I had learned the value of hard work and that one must respect their elders and people in authority. I had learned that Mexican women are expected to be respectful, subservient, and quiet. My opinions on any issue were limited to quiet musing, no matter how much knowledge or lack of understanding I had. Unconsciously and through deliberate observation, I had absorbed cultural traditions and expectations, such as eating menudo on Sundays and retaining my Spanish language, but I had also come to know when to speak it and when to keep it hidden. In the same unconscious way, I understood that for the Mexican people, Pancho Villa was a hero. I had seen statues of him even in our neighbor city of Juarez. We had taken family vacations to Parral, where he was killed, to watch parades celebrating his life and we explored the museum built in his memory. People in Mexico dress like him and celebrate his life as someone who resisted the power of the wealthy and fought for the poor people in Mexico, even taking on the tyrannous United States Army.

Therefore, one of the strongest aspects of enculturation for me was in the form of public education in the U.S. Through observation, I had come to understand that to be taken seriously, academically, I had to speak English at school. I had encountered formal enculturation in history classes as well. History books and teachers' lectures taught that the U.S. won battles and wars in

the name of protecting the American people and preserving their freedoms. In Mr. Johnson's class, I read that Pancho Villa's 1910 Mexican Revolution had brought nothing but pillaging and destruction to the Mexican people. Mr. Johnson's hegemonic discourse convinced the class that this version of history was true and since our grades depended on it, we adopted the view that Pancho Villa was a villain and not the celebrated hero of the Mexican people.

It was in that moment while I burned through valuable minutes in a high-stakes IB History test, pondering whether I could argue Villa's case for hero or anti-hero, that I was forced to confront the imbrication of what had been separate subject positions and enculturations. This one question had captured my ambiguous subjectivity as a daughter to Mexican parents and my subjectivity as an American pursuing an education in the United States. I had unconsciously believed Pancho Villa to be a hero and regarded him as such, seeing it in rituals in the Mexican culture. Because of these rituals, I had unconsciously believed Pancho Villa to be a hero; however, consciously, I had learned and internalized a narrative that portrayed Villa as an anti-hero who caused destruction, because he believed he was above the law and that his pride had actually caused a delay in the Mexican Revolution and created a setback for the general populous. In that moment, I had to choose a language attached to a subjectivity and a performance. I chose to adopt and perpetuate the ideas and beliefs I had learned as an American student, but, in reality, I had no other option. I would not have been able to write a viable opposing argument.

Foucault's notion of power describes how the people who determine our choices have tremendous power because they legitimize the viable responses. Foucault's writing describes the appearance of statements and their relations with other statements both within and between discursive formations. However, he also aims to provide a critique of the constraints and

exclusionary mechanisms at work in the production and legitimization of discourse (Howarth, 2002). Mr. Johnson's unilateral representation of history in his lectures led me to only have one option when writing the essay about Pancho Villa. The option I had was to perpetuate the idea that Pancho Villa was an anti-hero and with these ideas legitimize the American perspective on this chapter of history.

Chapter 5: Citizenship/Geographical Space (and identity)

The Success of Inactivity

Although my initial elementary adventures were negative, by the time I was ten years old, I felt completely comfortable in school. I felt I had adapted to be a successful student and the routine each year in school felt easier and easier to follow. It was my last year in Beall Elementary and my fifth grade teacher was Mrs. Peralta. Like every year since I started school, we lined up outside and walked in a straight line into the classroom every morning. After a few minutes, I would stand up and ritualistically place my right hand over the left side of my chest. We remained standing for the national anthem and then recited the national pledge of allegiance and the pledge to the Texas flag.

Even today, years later, I can recite any of these and yet I still have no clear idea of what they mean or in what context they were written. I never questioned these practices. I knew that at the time that it was important for me to consider myself an American. Unfortunately, after years of public school indoctrination, these rituals were what I most associated with as being American. These practices can be thought of as what Lauren Berlant (1997) terms a patriotic performance, in which a tourist is “playing at being American.” Though these practices become an important aspect of constructing a political and a national subjectivity, they ultimately lead to the infantile citizen. Tocqueville writes, in *Democracy in America*, that “while citizens should be encouraged to love the nations the way they do their families and their fathers, democracies can also produce a special form of tyranny that makes citizens like children, infantilized, passive, and over dependent on the ‘immense and tutelary power’ of the state” (Berlant, 1997, p. 27).

Mrs. Peralta, although the sweetest lady in color-coordinated suits and with a stylish cane, had unorthodox teaching methods. She often began the day with dictation quizzes in

English and Spanish. As usual, I always tried my best, without any question whatsoever, but soon it became obvious that I would not be the only one who tried their best. After she dictated a small passage, she picked up our papers and graded them. If we earned a perfect score, she called us up to her desk and folded a dollar bill into a ring, which was then handed to us. Most of my peers proudly wore the rings on their fingers all day, but the times I earned one, I simply took it and placed it in my backpack, because I did not want to call attention to myself. Those small exercises, however, further enforced my ideas about becoming an American. I associated getting an education and being successful in school with money. Mrs. Peralta's well intentioned teaching practices shaped our reality and definition of success.

One morning as I was stuffing pancakes in my mouth while reviewing my vocabulary list, I saw my dad completely frozen in front of the television screen with a look of horror on his face. His terror frightened me and I jumped onto the couch cushion next to him. There were two large buildings in the middle of the screen and one was engulfed in a cloud of gray smoke. I could read the caption at the bottom of the images, "U.S. Under Attack," but I could not understand. Perhaps it was due to my young age, but I witnessed one of the most tragic moments in U.S. history and I only thought about going to school. The events of September 11, 2001, went unnoticed throughout the day. Mrs. Peralta did not mention anything related to the events and we had dictation that day, but I did not receive a perfect score, which made me feel disappointed.

After I left school, my parents described what had happened, but, unfortunately, my age and my limited experiences at being an American, singing the national anthem and reciting the pledge of allegiance, also limited my understanding. Years later, whenever I thought back to those events and my lack of reaction or response, it produced in me a sense of guilt. If I was truly an American, I thought, how had I not been able to understand or respond to what had happened?

Perhaps as Berlant says, “contact with the monumental nation can turn a citizen’s infantilizing rage, anger, and crazy-making feeling of betrayal into a calm, stabilized, mature or adult subjectivity ready to ‘let the past go’ and, with amnesiac confidence, face the prospects of the present” (1997, p.33). During the early years in elementary, I pursued education and becoming Americanized with that amnesiac confidence; however, as the years passed, the sense of betrayal to my Mexican heritage and the cognitive dissonance it produced became harder to ignore.

The Assumed Pregnancy

Five years after the infamous collapse of the Twin Towers, on a Friday night around 8:00 p.m., I began to feel sick. I was watching television to distract me from the fact that I was sick and home alone. My parents had gone to eat dinner at my sister’s house and I had not felt like eating since that morning. As pain throbbed more viciously through my internal organs, I realized that staying home had been a bad idea. I began to rub my sweaty palms together and tried to ignore the feeling of everything spinning around me. I crawled from the living room to my bedroom and laid down, facing up to avoid falling and in an attempt to make the spinning stop. Unfortunately, the symptoms only worsened, making me more nervous or perhaps the nervousness made the symptoms worse, and my parents were not back home. As I stared at the pearl white ceiling of my room, I felt a rush of saliva puddle under my tongue. Having no experience with this symptom before, I failed to recognize that my body was getting ready to vomit. After a few seconds, I jumped out of my bed and ran to the restroom, which was luckily only about five feet away from my room. I fell to my knees in the middle of the restroom and was barely able to fling half of my body over the bathtub as I hurled my breakfast from that morning. I took a deep breath afterwards and felt a sense of relief. My mom always told me I would begin to feel better after I was able to vomit what had made my body sick. I rinsed my

mouth and slowly walked back to my room thinking the nightmare was over. Fifteen minutes later I was back in the same position and the vomiting spell continued for almost an hour. I was sweating profusely and tried to call my sister's house to beg my mother to come back home because I was scared. When she arrived home, she found me on the floor of the restroom crying, holding the right side of my stomach. I felt a sharp pain under the right side of my rib as if someone had stabbed me with a hunting knife and had forgotten to take it out. Despite my phobia of anything medically related and the fact that it was after midnight, my parents rushed me to Thomason Hospital.

I sat in a cold plastic chair holding my side tightly as my mother filled out papers to admit me to the hospital. I was called to a window by an unfriendly nurse who asked me my name, age, and insurance information. I had to respond with a "no" to most questions, since I did not have any type of medical insurance. My parents could not afford it and I was only fifteen years old. I was sent back to wait in the freezing lobby and my anxiety of being in hospitals only grew with each passing minute. By the time I was admitted and called to a room, I was shaking with fear and consumed in agonizing pain. I laid down in an impeccably white bed and a male nurse walked in to take my vitals. He said my blood pressure was high but it was normal since I was experiencing pain and he left. I waited and waited and waited and finally a doctor walked into the room with a very confident and cheerful tone. She began to ask me questions about my symptoms and my pain but quickly noticed my nervousness. Her attention quickly shifted from my pain to investigating what was making me so nervous. She coldly looked at me and asked, "Why are you so nervous? Are you hiding something?" I bit my tongue to stop the tears I already felt pouring out of my eyes and answered, "I don't like hospitals." "Huh. What do you want to be when you grow up?" she continued to ask. "Um...I'm not sure" I told her. She asked me one

more time if there was anything I wanted to talk about and after I shook my head and wiped the tears, she left.

I waited for over an hour and did not receive any relief despite being curled up in the fetal position in excruciating pain. A female nurse finally walked in with a cart and orders to perform an ultrasound using a vaginal speculum. Fortunately, my mom was with me and when she saw the instruments and perceived their purposes, she questioned the nurse. My mom informed the nurse of my symptoms and why we had come to the hospital in the first place. She was also very clear when she told the nurse she would not allow that invasive test to take place when no other tests had been done. The nurse's face reflected her concern for following orders and an opposing concern about what my mother might do; she left the room and in a few moments, the doctor returned and said, "We have to make sure you are not pregnant." I quickly told her I was not pregnant, but I had a feeling she did not believe me. The whole ordeal had made me so tired and frustrated that I begged my mom to allow me to go home with my pain, which at this point had become slightly more manageable. We asked the doctor for the release papers and she once again told me with a stern face that if I left, they would not be responsible if my condition worsened. I ignored everything she said and we signed the forms. I left the hospital at around 4:00 a.m., worse than when I had arrived: in pain and humiliated. After a few hours of rest, my parents took me to Dr. Tavarez in Juarez, where medical care is much more affordable. After a quick, but thorough examination and listening closely to me as I described the symptoms and how they developed, Dr. Tavarez explained to me that I had all the symptoms associated with gallbladder stones.

The more I thought about the previous night, the angrier I felt. I had spent a whole night in the emergency room in pain, and I had not received a single pain medication. Instead, I was

grilled about my future life plans and accused of lying about my symptoms while I was in mind-numbing pain. After further analyzing the situation and pondering why that had happened, I realized the doctor had stereotyped me. Thomason Hospital is located in the central area of El Paso and is close to the U.S.-Mexico border, so the doctor had interpreted my nervousness as being associated with a probable teenage pregnancy. Although I had recognized at the moment the doctor voiced her stereotypical presumption of pregnancy that something was wrong in the situation, I did not negotiate or resist the power relation. I simply exited the subject position I held as a discriminated teenager, who looked Mexican and therefore must be pregnant, by asking for the release papers and leaving the hospital as soon as possible.

Homeland, *La Patria*

Fast forward five more years to two days before my twenty-first birthday, and I was pacing back and forth in the middle of my ten-by-ten-foot dorm room. The wood floors complained with frustration as I pounded my feet. Suddenly, I heard the long awaited ring from my cellphone. My mom, who has never been the most secretive person ever, had innocently ruined a birthday surprise my older sister had for my birthday. No matter; even though mom had let my sister's surprise slip, I could pretend that I knew nothing and then everyone would be happy. I answered calmly and normally to avoid any suspicion that would reveal my recently gained information. I answered, "Hey, Elsa. How are you guys?" She said, "Hi, we're good. How are you? Excited about your birthday?" I smiled and said, "Yes, but I'm sad I won't be able to spend it at home." It was my first semester at UT Austin and the semester had just started. My sister, knowing I was feeling depressed about not being home for my birthday, planned to give me a great surprise gift. She said, "I know you can't come home for your birthday but you should look forward to the end of the summer semester although you can't come home then either." I

laughed and said, “No, I am going home then for two weeks before Fall.” She giggled and snorted, “No, you won’t be coming home. Well maybe just for a bit because we’re going to...Mexico!” “Really?” I asked as she kept talking and giving me the details of a trip she had planned for us to go to Mexico City. I had never visited Mexico City, but the idea of it was thrilling for me. A part of me felt like I would discover something about me or about my family by going to the homeland. Up until then, all my travels had been to different parts of the United States. The semester flew by and before I knew it, I was in the airplane going back home. I got home and greeted everyone quickly and ran to my room to begin the unpacking and repacking for the trip.

We arrived to the Juarez airport a few hours before the flight, because I still needed to get some paperwork to be able to travel to Mexico with an American passport. I was completely unaware of this paperwork and the idea that I would not be allowed to simply visit Mexico based on being Mexican seemed bizarre and unreal. I signed the forms in a small window at the airport and handed them my passport. The short woman on the other side of the window looked back at me and a part of me almost felt embarrassed. Her glare from behind the window as she quickly typed my information in a clunky computer spiked my anxiety and made me feel like an impostor. To make matters worse, she asked me a few questions using her best attempt at speaking English but still with a thick accent and awkward phrasing. I am not sure if the airport had a policy for employees to speak English, but I could tell it made her very unhappy and bitter to do so. It is difficult to know if she hated speaking English, in general, or if she hated speaking English to me. A part of me felt that with every jagged word that came out of her mouth, she told me I was not truly an American and did not deserve to be spoken to in English. The process was simple and only took about twenty minutes but for me, it was one of the most uncomfortable

twenty minutes of my life. Twenty minutes was enough to make me feel like an imposter and make me question my own subject position as an American-born citizen. I tried to brush it off and focus on the delicious real Mexican food I would be trying in about two hours.

As soon as we arrived, I could tell we were not in El Paso anymore. It was difficult to focus on one thing. There were so many people and cars and houses and smells and buildings and colors. It was overwhelming, to say the least, but beautiful in its own way. I was still very excited as we moved quickly towards the taxi that was picking us up and taking us to our hotel, the Krystal Grand. The hotel lobby took my breath away. The floors were a pink and black marble and the clear elevators and furniture were decorated with gold metal. I inferred by the name and the people checking in, including pilots, that the hotel was for American tourists. As expected, the rooms were beautiful and my sister informed me that we had a special pass to the ninth floor of the hotel, which was a special restaurant and buffet we could visit for breakfast, lunch, and dinner every day if we were not eating somewhere else.

The next day, I woke up early and excited for the day ahead. I did not even look at the clock, but I opened the curtain in my room from side to side to a great view of the enormity and vibrancy of the city of Mexico. Even though it felt like it could not be even past 7:00 a.m., all the people and cars on the streets already looked as if they were late for something. I really enjoyed people-watching for a few minutes and then ran ecstatically to the shower and got ready.

As soon as I was ready, I glanced over the desk in the room and saw the red card to the ninth floor. I texted my sister that I would be going to get breakfast and that I would meet her there when she was done getting ready. She always took an unnecessarily long time getting ready, anyway. I took the clear elevator to the ninth floor and the doors opened to a luxurious looking restaurant with red carpet and small white perfectly squared tables for four people. At

the end of the space, with windows all around, was a long rectangular table with a chocolate fountain in the middle and silver trays with food that looked like they had just been staged for a magazine; they smelled like a slice of heaven. I walked across the long room towards a table close to the windows and close to the food, when I heard a distracting laugh coming from a table on the side. At a table were seated two older ladies with an impeccable and colorful style, who were speaking English. A part of me was happy to hear English; I had a strange feeling of familiarity and yearning for my home. As I walked past them, they looked over at me and as I was about to greet them in English, they said, “Buenos días! Como te llamas?” with an American accent. I disappointedly smiled back at them and replied in Spanish, “Buenos días. Corina.” I kept walking towards a table only a few feet away from them and I felt unhappy. The fact that they had not even hesitated to speak to me in Spanish and only saw me as a great opportunity for them to practice their Spanish made me feel like an outcast. How did they know I would speak Spanish? How come they did not recognize me as American? I sat lost in thought, staring out the windows waiting for my sister, when I realized the room was so empty that I could still overhear parts of the women’s conversation in English. I heard as one said to the other one, “She’s lovely. They’re all so friendly and I love their natural tan.” There I was, listening to them talk about me and unsure how to react to their ostensibly kind comments.

I felt I had been discriminated against, but I was not sure if I should. Should I be upset that they assumed I was Mexican and did not recognize me as American? I got frustrated with the overwhelming and contradicting questions in my head. I stood up and decided to go back to my room to wait for my sister. As I walked past the American women, they smiled at me and I said, “Have a nice morning.” Their faces reflected shock and puzzlement, but I kept walking back to my room.

El Paso, Texas, is a border town and growing up, I never realized how my inhabiting this unique geographical space influenced and shaped my reality. It has become more evident that this is an important factor to consider, as this space and the materiality of a bridge has served in many ways to have a panoptic effect. Living in a city divided with the structure of a bridge makes it more of a reality to have to choose between this very physically present binary. The bridge was always there, not as a uniting symbol but as a constant reminder of division. It pushed me to work towards adopting and performing the subject position of a child of immigrants, who did not feel fully American but who also needed the legitimacy of an American subject position.

For the doctor at Thomason hospital, the bridge and border also served to clearly delineate the behavior of a child of immigrants and reduce her viable options to offer me treatment. I clearly had to fit the Mexican stereotype of being a pregnant teenager. For the woman in the airport, the border also seemed to have the same function of division. Her ill-treatment towards me was because she knew I had decided to adopt and reinforce an American identity. It is almost as if the bridge serves as a surveillance mechanism, ensuring that you perpetuate the behaviors and values of the American side of the bridge and if you do not, the incongruity will make you feel a deep sense of impostor syndrome. I expected this same division to be present when I travelled to Mexico City and to be easily recognized as an American, but the geographical space was different and the power relations and context had changed.

I thought when I travelled to Mexico that if I maintained and performed the subject position of an Americanized student, I would instantly be recognized as an American. The encounter I had with the American women in the hotel showed me that there was a radical difference between how I saw myself and how others defined me. I had ignored how my body is central to identity—both the chosen identities and the imposed identities. Bodies are competing

regimes or constant sites of struggle as we seek to define (e.g. skin color, gender, phenotype) ourselves. Hegemonic discourses and everyday racism attribute fixed sets of meaning to non-white bodies (Weedon). In this case, power limited the possibilities I had for identity and meaning of the visual (body) was not at my disposal but overdetermined by a history of representation.

Chapter 6: Identity (resistance and self-empowerment)

I am now finishing my thesis project and getting ready to complete a Master's Degree in Rhetoric and Writing Studies at the University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP). I am a writing tutor at El Paso Community College and a teaching assistant at UTEP. I understand that I am the granddaughter of Concepcion Lerma, a Mexican American and repatriate of the 1930s, who married Marcos Lerma, a Mexican national, who worked in the United States in the bracero program during the 1940s. I am American born and raised in El Paso, Texas, and daughter to Mexican parents, Andres and Elsa Lerma. I understand that all of these aspects of myself define some of the subject positions and subjectivities I use on a daily basis to negotiate the world around me. These details shape my reality and problematize the concept of identity. Identity and reality are in flux, fragmented, and always in the state of becoming.

The arduous process of writing this thesis and undergoing this experience of reflection has created a space or an intentional pause where I was able to analyze how these experiences of dissension, contradiction, and cognitive dissonance are points of possibility. This experience has changed me and will prevent me from being the same as before or having the same relationship with certain things, thus creating a space for change and intervention. I no longer feel the need to define myself with one identity or feel the need to choose between my Mexican heritage and my life at home and my American citizenship and my education in the United States. I am comprised of the amalgam—and more. Rather than an identity, I would argue I have identities that I negotiate on a daily basis through power relations and networks of subjectivity and positions.

Reflecting on my family's history and, for the first time, realizing the repeating patterns, I wonder how much of that repetition is a result of genetic memory. I wonder if, as I write this paper, I am resisting those aspects of instability, stress, and not belonging that were an

inheritance from my ancestors. I believe it was those aspects that haunted me and that made me find a haven in school. School provided me with stability, identity, and a sense of belonging that I so desperately and unconsciously sought. An education in rhetoric granted me a space of invention and a pause to understand my own intervention. All of these past experiences of friction as I encountered power in the form of authority or with the overlap and conflicting subject positions were moments of possibility and potential agency. Most of those times, I silenced that sense of tension as I encountered power, but as I move forward and recognize similar feelings, I will not stand idly by. Education has allowed me to better recognize these moments and perhaps this is the reason I am resisting the repeating patterns of my family. At the moment, I am the person with the highest level of education from my family and perhaps this contradiction to the familiar pattern has allowed me to reach a higher level of agency and continue resisting as I negotiate power relations.

Although Foucault's notions of power focus on an idea of power as being dispersed and omnipresent, as opposed to a physical or coercive form of power, I believe both forms of power had a strong impact on shaping my reality and limiting my agency when I was younger. I still believe the coercive tactics of intimidation and fearmongering employed by my teacher in the first grade in many ways conditioned me to more easily accept and adopt hegemonic discourses. The contrast of both, which I had early in my life, led me to believe that adhering to hegemonic discourse was in my best interest because it lessened that state of fear and instability I was desperately trying to avoid in school.

As I move forward, as a future PhD student and eventual professor, I understand the need for progressive curricula and methods of pedagogy. It is imperative for instructors to understand that students do not walk into their classrooms as blank slates but, instead, have rich histories and

genetic memories that are of value and that shape their experience. When I fought to maintain a clear divide between the culture of my home and the expectations of school, I experienced multiple layers of trauma. In reality, students are hurt by trying to maintain these self-constructed divisions. Their realities become subject to limited views of history and ideas that encourage parts of their culture to be hidden—none of which have any place in the classroom. I perpetuated those ideas for many years only to discover those ideas limited my understanding and my own potential for self-empowerment.

On May 10, 2018, I accompanied my father to visit my grandparents at our Lady of Mount Carmel Cemetery (the only Catholic cemetery in the El Paso area). May 10th is a very important holiday for most people of Mexican heritage, as it marks *Día de las Madres* (Mother's Day). I had only been to my grandparent's grave once when my grandmother passed away, but this visit was completely different. Although I did not have a very close relationship with my grandmother, as I looked for her grave among the rows of last names, I had a sudden excitement to find her. I ignored the intense heat and sweat dripping from my forehead and finally found her. My grandfather and grandmother are buried in the same space with a large marble plaque in the center, with each of their birth and death years and my last name all in caps in the middle, "LERMA." I stared at their names, the years, and my last name for over ten minutes. For the first time, staring at those names made me feel emotional and somehow connected to them. I reflected back to my thesis and all their stories and I had a sudden urge to utter, "thank you."

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Appendix

Appendix A: U.S. Census Records, 1930

11/15/2017

Person Details for Concebsion Velis in household of Secundino Velis, "United States Census, 1930" — FamilySearch.org

Concebsion Velis

United States Census, 1930

Name	Concebsion Velis
Event Type	Census
Event Date	1930
Event Place	Lamar, Prowers, Colorado, United States
Gender	Female
Age	7
Marital Status	Single
Race	Mexican
Race (Original)	Mexican
Relationship to Head of Household	Daughter
Relationship to Head of Household (Original)	Daughter
Birth Year (Estimated)	1923
Birthplace	Colorado
Father's Birthplace	Mexico
Mother's Birthplace	Mexico
Sheet Letter	A
Sheet Number	3

United States Census, 1930

District	ED 3
Sheet	
Number and Letter	3A
Household ID	53
Line Number	38
Affiliate Name	The U.S. National Archives and Records Administration (NARA)
Affiliate Publication Number	T626
Affiliate Film Number	248
GS Film Number	2339983
Digital Folder Number	004950311
Image Number	00860

Household	Role	Sex	Age	Birthplace
Secundino Velis	Head	M	56	Mexico
Francisca Velis	Wife	F	46	Mexico
Florencio Velis	Son	M	28	Mexico
Marino Velis	Son	M	25	Mexico
Paulo Velis	Son	M	21	Mexico
Gregorio Velis	Son	M	10	Colorado
Concebsion Velis	Daughter	F	7	Colorado
Iuses Velis	Daughter-in-law	F	23	Mexico
Rosa Velis	Granddaughter	F	4	Colorado

Citing this Record

"United States Census, 1930," database with images, *FamilySearch*

(<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:X74V-M1X> : accessed 16 November 2017), Concebsion Velis in household of Secundino Velis, Lamar, Prowers, Colorado, United States; citing enumeration district (ED) ED 3, sheet 3A, line 38, family 53, NARA microfilm publication T626 (Washington D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 2002), roll 248; FHL microfilm 2,339,983.

Vita

Corina Lerma graduated with honors and an International Baccalaureate diploma from Coronado High School, then from El Paso Community College's Honors Program with an Associate of Arts in General Studies and an Associate of Arts in Journalism. In 2014, Corina earned a Bachelor of Arts in Rhetoric and Writing from the University of Texas at Austin. She is completing her Masters in Rhetoric and Writing Studies from the University of Texas at El Paso where she will graduate with a 4.0 and with a Technical and Professional Writing Online Certificate as well as a Teaching Online Academy Certificate.

During her academic career, Corina has been awarded the Ronald McDonald House of Charities Scholarship and the Allien and Paul C. Davidson Scholarship for the University of Texas at El Paso by the UTEP Graduate School.

Spanning the educator spectrum, Corina Lerma has served as a note-taker/scribe for the El Paso Community College Center for Disabilities. She tutored students one on one to help with writing assignments or other work as necessary. Corina started working as a writing tutor for the El Paso Community College and continues to assist students and people of the community. While balancing her Masters' courses and El Paso Community College position, Corina spent a year working at the University of Texas at El Paso's Writing Lab to support UTEP students in their writing across disciplines. For the past academic year, Corina has been a teaching assistant at the University of Texas at El Paso where she has taught first year composition students the basics of rhetoric and writing to prepare them for the demands of their majors.

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This thesis was typed by Corina Lerma.