

The Dialectics of Transculturation in Chicano/a Literature

Von der Philosophisch-Historischen Fakultät der
Universität Stuttgart

zur Erlangung der Würde eines Doktors der Philosophie
(Dr. Phil.)

genehmigte Abhandlung

Vorgelegt von

Marie-Florence Baur

aus Stuttgart

Hauptberichter: Prof. Dr. Walter Göbel

Mitberichter: Prof. Dr. Renate Brosch

Tag der mündlichen Prüfung: 19.07.2012

Institut für Literaturwissenschaft der Universität Stuttgart

2013

Contents

1) Introduction	1
2) Approaches to Chicano Literature	12
2.1) A Short Outline of the Socio-Cultural and Political Situation of Mexicans in the US from 1846 until Today	12
2.2) Chicano Literature and Postcolonial Discourse	21
2.3) Chicano Literature as Ethnic Literature	26
2.4) The Cultural Function of Ethnic Literature	29
2.5) The Practice of Stereotyping and Cultural Effacement	32
2.6) The Theory of Transculturation	37
3) A Clash of Cultures: <i>George Washington Gomez</i>	46
3.1) Introduction	46
3.1.1) The Corrido As Form of Resistance: A Short Introduction	48
3.1.2) Jonesville-on-the-Grande: Establishing a Contact Zone	52
3.2) Form as Manifestation of Transculturation	53
3.3) From Rebellion to Compromise	62
3.4) Life in the Contact Zone: Erecting Borders	71
3.5) Transculturation as Process of Cultural Effacement	75
3.6) Mexico vs. America: The Lure of the American Dream	85

4) Richard Vasquez' <i>Chicano: The Struggle to Find a Collective Identity</i>	87
4.1) Introduction	87
4.2) The American Dream as Cause for Transculturation	90
4.3) Tradition vs. Assimilation: A Conflict of Generations	94
4.4) Transgressing Cultural Borders: The Beginning of Assimilation	101
4.5) Machismo vs. Emancipation: The Fight for a New Female Role	106
4.6) An Attempt at a Cultural Mediation	109
5) Richard Rodriguez' <i>Hunger of Memory: Education as an Instrument for Assimilation</i>	115
5.1) Introduction	116
5.2) Private vs. Public Voice: The Role of Language in Identity Formation	119
5.3) Public Life as Cause for Alienation	123
5.4) Brown Skin and the Impossibility of Assimilation	129
5.5) Assimilation and Cultural Effacement: The Loss of Home	132
5.6) Affirmative Action and Bilingual Education as "Ethnic Markers"	135

6) Luis J. Rodriguez: <i>Always Running-Gang Days in L.A.- Gangs and the Formation of a Collective Identity</i>	140
6.1) Introduction	142
6.2) Lost in Systems: The Impossibility of Crossing Borders	144
6.3) Homelessness and a Lack of Role Models: Gangs as Family Replacement	151
6.4) A New Home: The Gang as Foundation for a New Identity	155
6.5) The Chicano Movement: Finding a New Chicano Self	161
7) Helena Maria Viramontes: <i>Under the Feet of Jesus- The Struggle for a Collective Identity</i>	165
7.1) Introduction	167
7.2) Transculturation as Manifestation of Power	170
7.3) Crossing Cultural Borders: A Battle for Survival	176
7.4) Finding a Home During the Process of Transculturation	181
7.5) Feminism as Element of Transculturation	185
8) Conclusion	196
Bibliography	
Appendix	

1) Introduction

“On April 10th, 2006 half a million illegal immigrants marched through the streets of Washington D.C., Seattle and New York demanding US citizenship. A large number of the protesters were Latinos who uttered their wish in English and presented the pledge of allegiance raising their American flags. Spectators could have perceived this event as a fourth of July celebration due to the national attachment with the US, which was shown on that day. The protesters were low paid workers, who slowed down a wide range of industries depending on low paid labor across the nation. Rallying on this day in April also meant a critical loss of wages for them. In spite of that, they showed up in numbers of 500,000 at a time to make people aware of their cause. The Mexican "illegals" demonstrating were so interesting because they seemed as if they were as much in the midst of an internal as well as an external struggle. One could see it and hear it as they momentarily looked proud, then uneasy, then excited.

It was as if, in those moments of joining a demonstration, they were coalescing as a collective, navigating their way into "becoming" something other than what they had been. They turned from illegals to citizens, from Mexicans to Americans. But they were also fighting to retain something else that they did not want to leave behind.”¹

The protest marches in various big cities in the US in those days reflect the clear desire on the Mexican side to become Americans. The reasons for this change of citizenship and, with it, of identity are economic forces. Having a job, even if at low pay, and having the ability to achieve upward mobility, are the main reasons for making themselves heard. Actions such as openly waving American flags, speaking English and Spanish, presenting the pledge of allegiance and having the confidence to stand up for their cause in a country where they are

¹ For diverse coverage of this event see Avila, Oscar, Olivo, Antonio, *A Show of Strength: Thousands March to Loop for Immigrants' Rights* in: Chicago Tribune, March 2006, Page, Clarence, *The Foreign Flag Rule* in: The Baltimore Sun, April 2006 and Prengaman, Peter, *Protesters Work to Change Image* in: Associated Press, Long Beach, April 2006

residing illegally are significant for a desired and determined transition from one culture to the other and for finding a place of belonging in a seemingly borderless world.

These illegal immigrants showed an eagerness and willingness to become American although this could result in a partial or complete loss of their native culture. This mind-set describes a steady and loyal commitment to one nation and its culture and provides an alternative approach to dealing with a global world and constant transitions between different cultures. These forces seem to create a longing for a home, for a place of belonging and a culture one can identify with and be rooted in. The nation as a “controlled and bounded territory with a more or less unified core culture”² leads Chicanos to think of themselves as United States citizens accepting the “old logic of identity” perceived as stable and protective space against the intrusion of capitalism by many Chicanos/as.

This struggle, which often results in cultural effacement and evokes assimilation and/or resistance, is reflected in the cultural productions by Chicanos/as. In my work I will show that binary oppositions between Americans and Chicanos, stereotyping, assimilation and resistance towards different nations and cultures as well as in-betweenness and hybridity influence the formation of identities. These concepts have always been and still are present everywhere in US society and presented in Chicano/a literary productions starting in the early 1900s until today.

In my work I will analyze and interpret literary texts by Chicano/a writers ranging from 1940 until 1995 in order to show that the situations, sentiments and alignments described above have remained stable even while global forces are changing national and cultural alignments all over the world. In an ever-changing world, first generation lower class and working class immigrants as well as

² See Hall, Stuart, “Old and New Identities, Old and New Ethnicities”, in: *Culture, Globalization, and the World System: Contemporary Conditions for the Representation of Identity*, ed. Anthony King (Minneapolis, 1997), p. 41.68

Americans of Mexican descent in later generations are seeking a stable national and cultural identity in order to survive or to improve their social status. Additionally, the (re)surgence of ethnic nationalisms can be detected especially among lower and working class Chicanos, resulting in the eruption of gangs and national clubs and open discrimination of Americans in their own country.³

The grappling and struggling for identity and the resulting sentiments towards a dominant culture are part of a process called transculturation. The term, coined by Fernando Ortiz in his revolutionary work *Cuban Counterpoint* describes the clashes and negotiations of different cultures encountering one another. Ortiz divides this cultural coming-to-terms with one another into five different phases, explaining clearly which transformations and changes happen during the process of forming a national and cultural identity. His work has been a key factor in developing contemporary models by which to understand the dynamics of culture in terms of adjustment, incorporation, acquiescence and resistance.

Mary Louise Pratt, for example, incorporates Ortiz's model of cultural transformation. In her 1992 study on travel writing, she discusses how ethnographers have used the term to describe how subordinated and marginal groups select and invent from materials transmitted to them by a dominant or metropolitan culture. Pratt notes that transculturation takes place in what she has famously termed "contact zones". These are "social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination - like colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out across the globe today." (Pratt, 1992: 519) Her view of transculturation depends entirely on the relation between cultures that occupy different positions of power. Both Ortiz and Pratt focus on the

³ One example for open anti-American sentiment is a soccer game between Mexico and the US at the Los Angeles memorial Colloseum in L.A., where "the American players quickly found out...that playing in Los Angeles is not a home game for the United States national team." After the game the US players "were pelted with debris and cups of water, beet or worse. It was an ugly sight..."

struggle between different cultures and their works have been widely discussed. Ortiz describes transculturation as a process of assimilation eventually resulting in integration, whereas Pratt defines this process as a selection from the other culture in order to form an individual identity and in order to integrate into the other culture.

Therefore, Pratt's understanding of transculturation is a development from Ortiz' model of seemingly binary oppositions, in which the inferior assimilates and finds his identity throughout a process of assimilation and adaptation and reaches a feeling of comfort. At first sight, Ortiz describes the process of transculturation as assimilation and adaptation to the dominant culture. However, even this process is characterized by a frequent identity reconstruction, as the inferior adapts to the new culture in phases, as described in his theory. Additionally, when taking a closer look at the text this theory emanates from, the oppositional cultures allow for the formation of identities in-between and beyond cultural and national concepts. It is this process of transgressing cultural borders and a consequential negotiation and frequent reconstruction of national and cultural identities with a variety of different outcomes, that is narrated in many texts by Chicano/a authors.

So far, specific critical analyses of the process of transculturation as described by Ortiz and Pratt in Chicano/a texts and the eventual struggle for a national and cultural identity resulting in different formations of identity due to this process are few. Some studies provide insights into the practices of transculturation along the U.S.-Mexican border, presenting transculturation as a useful concept to describe reoccurring shifts between nations and cultures. However, a thorough analysis of Chicano/a texts which present and discuss the transcultural process as a concept of cultural clash, assimilation and resistance and its consequences for individual and collective identity formation and national attachments, still needs to be provided in American and Chicano/a Studies. This project is therefore supposed to contribute to research activities that focus on the process of transculturation and its representation in literary productions by Chicanos/as in the U.S. The topic of transgressing borders has been widely discussed in Chicano/a

Studies already looking at transnational and post-national concepts in order to analyze the engagements of Chicanos with nations and nationalisms. Identity in these studies is understood as in flux, a constant shift between national and cultural alliances or as dwelling between two national and cultural concepts.⁴ Transculturation in some recent studies has been seen as a possible theoretical concept in order to explain the shifting of alliances with different national and cultural concepts in the U.S. It is perceived, as proposed by Pratt, as a description of “how subordinated or marginal groups select and invent from materials transmitted to them by a dominant or metropolitan culture.” This selection process leads to shifting and constantly changing involvements with different national and cultural imaginaries.

However, transnational engagements describe the goal of never-ending transitions of national and cultural borders contrary to national discourses, and post-national engagements refer to the utopian desire of transcending the socio-cultural formation of a nation. In many texts by Chicano/a writers assimilation, adaptation and the loss of culture, and on the other hand resistance and nationalism and the formation of a seemingly stable national and cultural alliance with either one or the other nation/culture are formulated as consequences of the transcultural process. In times of reoccurring economic crises and instable or corrupt political systems affecting the whole globe in a borderless world, Chicanos/as as well as other ethnic minorities in the US are looking for national stability and set and defined cultural codes and values, as they experience the affiliation with one nation and one set of cultural codes as safe and (re)assuring. David G. Gutierrez wrote in his essay *Migration, Emergent Ethnicity, and the Third Space* (2000) that “if current economic trends continue, it seems more likely that a great many

⁴ for further information on recent studies discussing transnational and postnational identity formation see Pease, Donald, „National Narratives, Postnational Narration“ in: *Modern Fiction Studies*, 1997, Pizarz-Ramirez, Gabriele, MexAmerica: *Genealogien und Analysen postnationaler Diskurse in der kulturellen Produktion von Chicana/os* (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2005) Heide, Markus, *Grenzüberschreibungen: Chicano Erzählliteratur und die Inszenierung von Kulturkontakt* (Heidelberg: Winter, 2004) and Priewe, Marc, *Writing Transit* (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2007)

ethnic Mexicans will continue to define themselves in ways to militate against their cultural assimilation and their political socialization as Americans.”⁵ At the same time, many will seek safety and upward mobility by adapting to US national and cultural concepts. Again, others will try to find their place between both cultures and/or construct an imaginary place of belonging, which is not part of either culture/nation.

The illegal immigrants protesting in L.A. and demanding US citizenship are a living example for the desire to belong to one nation and one culture, while being torn at the same time. They also show a shift in national allegiance from Mexican to American. When in 1994 thousands of Latinos, most of them illegal aliens and of Mexican descent, took to the streets of L.A. to protest against proposition 187, they carried Spanish language protest signs and expressed their views in Spanish. Many of them carried Mexican flags and took part in singing the American national anthem in a mariachi style. In both protest marches Chicanos showed a clear and stable attachment to one nation and its socio-cultural formation. A remark needs to be made here that this desire is mainly uttered by working class Chicanos/as and not necessarily by the intellectual elite living in a jet-set mode and using the possibility of transgressing borders between different nations and naturally developing a portable identity.

In all texts analyzed in this work, the attempt to achieve upward mobility and developing an individual and/or collective identity from a marginal position is narrated. The concept of transculturation helps to show the process of shifting national and cultural alliances from one culture to the other in order to achieve these two goals. The focus in this work is on literary texts which describe the struggles experienced mainly by working class Chicanos, who go through the different phases of the transcultural process as defined by Ortiz. Even though Ortiz’ theory was discarded by some critics, I will show that this theory describes the development and changes in identity formation, cultural

⁵ For further details on the discussion of national allegiances of Chicanos see Gutierrez, David, *Migration, Emergent Ethnicity, and the Third Space. The Shifting Politics of Nationalism in Greater Mexico*, journalofamericanhistory.org.

belonging and national attachments throughout the process of transculturation as presented in Chicano/a literary productions.

Reading the selected texts by Chicano/a authors, I will discuss the relation between transculturation, the effacement and enhancement as well as the division and negotiation of national and cultural affiliations and narration. With regard to the presentation of the transcultural process in the chosen texts, we need to analyze firstly, which forces initiate the cultural struggle and how it evolves, how the process of transculturation affects the formation of identity and influences the question of belonging. If culture is effaced during the process of transculturation how are Chicanos/as coping with this loss? Secondly, does the process of transculturation evoke resistance to the dominant nation and its culture and if so how is this resistance expressed in the texts? Thirdly, which consequences does the attachment to more than one national and cultural concept entail? Finally, the narrative strategies employed in Chicano/a literary productions to articulate this cultural clash and struggle for identity need to be looked at.

In order to answer these questions, the social, political and historical contexts from which these Chicano/a literary productions come forward need to be provided. Therefore, the first chapter provides a summary of US-Mexican history, starting at the beginnings of the 20th century and covering the different periods, which are taken up in the texts presented. I will also refer to the social conditions of Chicanos in the US and provide an insight into the political changes in the US due to the steadily rising (illegal) immigration of Mexicans.

The second chapter describes a possible theoretical framework for analyzing narrative representations of transculturation in Chicano/a novels. My studies are guided by methodologies from Chicano/a Studies and Cultural Studies. Furthermore, my readings of the representational texts follow two main concepts. The first is the concept of transculturation, furthering the understanding of shifting allegiances between different nations and the adaptation to different cultural codes. This is the main concept I focus on in my studies as it describes

situations, such as forced clashes or voluntary migration, showing that a wide range of cultural encounters can be covered by this theory. The concept of transculturation also allows for many different concepts of identity formations such as assimilation, adaptation, displacement and homelessness, in-betweenness, resistance, rebellion and nationalism. As identity is produced from a situation of otherness in which the self is challenged constantly by the situation in which others have positioned it, transculturation describes the constant exchange with others as well as the retreat to a seemingly fixed position, which also contains some heterogeneity, as no identity is completely stable. These different approaches towards forming an identity are omnipresent in today's world and are included in Ortiz' theory of transculturation.

Due to the representation of more than one social, cultural and national concept the second useful concept is that of diaspora as diasporic discourses on the one hand enhance notions of national resistance and rebellion, which are presented in ethnic literature. On the other hand, diaspora preconditions the production of ethnic literatures in order to counterbalance the missing of one's homeland and to find a place of belonging.

Taking into account these conceptual and theoretical considerations, the third part of this study analyzes and compares textual representations of the dynamics of transculturation in contemporary Chicano/a novels. Various literary texts are analyzed and interpreted with the questions formulated above in mind. In order to show that the representation of the different phases of Ortiz' concept of transculturation and also Pratt's development of his theory have remained a reoccurring theme in literary texts by Chicano authors, the times of production of the novels discussed in this study range from as early as 1940 until 1995. All texts provide a different historical and political setting for the struggle to form an individual and/or collective identity and describe different phases of the process as well as different struggles for and formations of identity.

The first chapter of part three of the study centers on a representation of

the first encounter between Mexicans and Americans in the early twentieth century. The first novel to be discussed in this chapter is *George Washington Gómez* by Americo Paredes. The text describes life on the border, the presence of white, English-speaking authorities, the vulnerability of Mexican-American families and the resistance to the American intruders. These factors contribute to the protagonist's formation of a cultural identity and his allegiance with American nationalism. The assimilation of the protagonist at the end of the story, along with his contempt for Mexicans who don't blend into American mainstream society, precisely describe the first phase of Ortiz' concept of transculturation.

Chapters two and three in the third part of this text center on the periods of compromise and adjustment. The struggles and difficulties associated with this process are articulated in two texts by Richard Rodriguez and Richard Vasquez. The family saga *Chicano* by Richard Vasquez focuses on a change of approach to the dominant culture and a shift in loyalty to the new fatherland. Over the generations development from a decisive rejection over forced assimilation to desired acceptance in the US is described. However, the gradual Americanization of the family over time is not rewarded by American society, and many characters are left homeless and uprooted. In this novel, the social criticism of US society is strong and denies a successful transculturation in the US.

In *Hunger of Memory* Richard Rodriguez narrates how education facilitates the blending into US society and presents a clear national and cultural affiliation with the US, while attacking the concepts of bilingual education and Affirmative Action. Central to his texts in *Hunger of Memory* is the attempt to define exact borders between the US and Mexico and the cultures practiced within these borders. Presenting stereotypical views and a colonized mindset, he demands adaptation to US culture and identification with national narratives of the US.

In the last two chapters of part three two texts are analyzed which present the period of comfort during the process of transculturation. *Always Running: Gang Days in L.A* by Luis Rodriguez moves the

definition of national borders into neighborhoods in L.A. where gangs and the police wage war on each other, in order to gain or defend territories and cultural codes. Rodriguez narrates conflicts with institutions of a dominant, white society which has refused to accept Mexicans socially, politically, and economically. Articulating strong resistance against the dominant American society, this autobiography presents the last phase in Ortiz' model of transculturation. The phase of integration in *Always Running: Gang Days in L.A.* is not realized as the existing oppositions and stereotypes presented in the text inhibit a successful transculturation.

Under the Feet of Jesus by Helena Maria Viramontes depicts the economic exploitation and deprivation of Mexican migrant workers while paving the way to a collective identity. The text also narrates the way towards a new role for women and the adjustment to the dominant culture fueled by the dreams of upward mobility. Transculturation in this novel is a way towards the formation of a new female identity and also towards a collective identity of Chicanos. In this text Mexicans feed into a pool of cheap labor which is necessary for the US to maintain a stable economy. The effects of the global economy on people living on the margins of US society are presented, starting with a steadily growing resistance among the migrant workers and culminating in a rebellion. The rebellion is targeted at American consumer society as well as Mexican machismo. A female leader figure is born, raising the question whether homelessness and displacement can lead to liberation of the self.

The aim of the concluding chapter is to provide an outlook on the possible development of the national and cultural affiliations of recent and long-term Mexican immigrants and Chicanos in the US. Taking into account many different groups with ties to Mexico I will show that the concepts and theories presented in this work are relevant to understand the changes in national and cultural engagements of Chicanos today. I will also explain why the importance of national allegiance to working class Chicanos and recent and long-term immigrants of Mexican descent could grow again in the future.

The texts in this study are exemplary for the struggles between two nations and two cultures, much like the march similarities of illegal immigrants in major cities in 2006.

2) Approaches to Chicano Literature

2.1) A Short Outline of the Socio-Cultural and Political Situation of Mexicans in the US from 1846 until Today

In order to understand the process of transculturation between the Mexican and the American people, one needs to become familiar with the historical background leading to the increasing immigration of Mexicans to the US. I will give a short outline of Mexican-American history and their changing socio-cultural and political situation in the US in this chapter, aiming to provide an explanation for the necessity and desire of transculturation today.

In 1836 when Texas and Mexico fought in the Texas-Mexico War, the tensions between Mexico and Texas had reached a climax. It was this war for Texan freedom which changed the relations between Texas and Mexico from allies to enemies. Suddenly, the subjugation of Mexicans was no moral or constitutional issue any more. This change in attitude combined with the strife for land in the name of Manifest Destiny, resulted in the US-Mexico War in 1846. Mexicans were seen as inferior and after the war they were strangers in their formerly own country. This colonization of the Mexican people started the process of transculturation, which is still a big issue today as Mexicans keep immigrating to the US.

During the Mexican Revolution many Mexicans immigrated to the US because they saw the chance to find jobs and improve their lives. Americans saw the increasing immigration as a necessary evil, as they needed cheap labor to further the progress of this modern nation.⁶ However, the border region, where most of the workers settled, turned into a contact zone where both cultures fought and struggled in order to maintain their cultural purity. Soon, the US Senate held hearings concerning a restriction of immigration and had to face the problem of needing cheap labor but trying to keep the cultural categories pure. The

⁶ See Acuna, Rodolfo, *Occupied America: A History of Chicanos* (New York: Harper & Ro., 1972) for further information on this topic

general atmosphere in the US was marked by vulgar racist hostility on the one hand and national neglect on the other. As a consequence of the mass immigration during and after WWI, Americans tried to push Mexicans to the margins of society and keep them there. They segregated Mexicans and Americans in schools and started a process of Americanization.⁷ In school, Mexican children were indoctrinated by their teachers who taught them the American way of life and degraded Mexican culture.

These Mexican American children were supposed to be assimilated into American culture in order to maintain pure Americanness. However, the children as well as their parents had to struggle with the values of the new culture and racism. School not only segregated and indoctrinated the children; it also helped keep the Mexican-American children on the margins of society as it pushed youths out of school at an early age in order to secure the advantages of cheap labor. Teachers functioned as agents of Americanization and taught the virtues of capitalism and the theory that Mexican culture was a backward culture. At the same time Mexicans were labeled as a menace to public health, of low mentality and inherently criminal, and the US Bureau of Immigration conducted intense deportation hunts for aliens.⁸

In the 1930s this radical suppression turned into an attempt to promote Mexicans and give them the opportunity to adjust to the American way of life. The YMCA played an important role in educating Mexican-American children and teaching them American virtues. The YMCA did not treat Mexican-Americans as inferior and mentally incapable “peons”, yet tried to teach them how to deal with the new culture. Ernesto Galarza, who was the first Mexican to form a student

⁷ An in-depth coverage of this topic see in Carter, Thomas P., *Mexican Americans in School: A History of Educational Neglect* (<http://eric.ed.gov>, 1970) and Steven H. Wilson, “Brown over “Other White”: Mexican Americans' Legal Arguments and Litigation Strategy in School Desegregation Lawsuits”, *Law and History Review*, 21.1, (Spring 2003)

⁸ See John Chavez, *The Lost Land: A Chicano Image of the Southwest*, (New Mexico: New Mexico UP, 1984)

organization, thought highly of the YMCA and therefore, it attracted many Mexicans. At this point in time many Mexicans could be called Mexican-Americans as they were born in the US and caught between cultures. They started to forget their mother tongue, as the official language in school was English and they adapted elements of the American culture as they were surrounded by it. Transculturation allowed them to learn English and to adjust to the American culture, but at the same time they became alienated from their family and their roots. The effacement of Mexican culture in the process of transculturation began at this time and soon after Villareal wrote his first novel *Pocho*, describing the struggle between two cultures due to the transgressing of cultural borders.

During WWII Mexican-Americans had a great opportunity to blend with American society as many of them enlisted and died on the battlefields in Europe. However, the attitude towards Mexican-American did not change in spite of their efforts. At the same time members of the Mexican American Movement, which was founded in 1942, had created equal working opportunities for Mexicans in war related industries. Job discrimination against Mexican-Americans continued, though. It seemed that Mexican-Americans had no opportunity to blend in. Families and their relatives were attacked, racism was promoted and publicly supported in newspapers; segregation, social inequality, and discrimination continued. It is remarkable that at this time Mexican Americans were not necessarily blaming the white Americans for this treatment, but their fellow Mexican -American citizens and among them especially one group, the *Pachucos*. After WWII many new economic opportunities opened up for Mexican-Americans and recent immigrants from Mexico, improving the integration of the formerly mentioned groups into American society. During the war, many Mexican Americans fought in US armed forces or worked in defense industries, driving forward the integration into the imagined American national community.⁹

⁹ for more detailed information on this topic see Cohen, Lizabeth, *Making a new Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago 1919-1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1991) 361-366, Garcia, Mario T., *Mexican American: Leadership, Ideology, and Identity 1930-1960*,

Due to the initiative of Mexican American community organizations pushing for the realization of civil right agendas after the war, significant numbers of Mexican Americans had a realistic opportunity to take part in the economic and political America. However, it is important to keep in mind that not all Mexican Americans could participate in this upward movement. For many Mexican Americans and immigrants from Mexico living in the barrios and ghettos at the margins of the city and of society, this trend went by rather unnoticed, as they remained unaffected by the inclusion into American society in the postwar years. Although the Second World War was a chance for Mexican-Americans to meet people of other ethnic and cultural backgrounds, the problem of segregation maintained. Americans criticized the fact that Mexican-Americans did not encourage education and assimilation but preserved their Mexican culture, as this cultural backwardness would make integration difficult. However, US society regarded Mexicans as a problem, not as an asset to their society, and refused to let them take part in the American way of life. Assimilation was wanted but made impossible at the same time.¹⁰

In the 1960s and 1970s the Chicanos spoke up against discrimination and oppression and demanded equal rights and a better education. When the student movement was active around the globe in the late 1960s, mass walkouts were initiated by high school students in Denver and East Los Angeles in 1968. In the 1970s, the Chicano Moratorium developed as a movement of Chicano anti-war activists, who organized opposition against the Vietnam War. The organization was led by activists from local colleges and by members of the Brown berets, a group, which developed during the high school student movement and organized walkouts, like the East L.A. Walkouts in 1968. The best known

New Haven, 1989) 145-174 and Ruiz, Vicky, *From out of the Shadows: Mexican Women in Twentieth Century America* (New York: Oxford UP, 1998) 94-98.

¹⁰ See Garcia, Mario T., *Mexican American: Leadership, Ideology, and Identity 1930-1960*, New Haven, 1989), McLemore, Dale and Romo, Ricardo, "The Origins and Development of the Mexican American people" *The Mexican American Experience: An Interdisciplinary Anthology*, ed Rodolfo de la Garza et al (Austin: U of Texas P, 1985) 3-32

historical fact of the Moratorium was the death of Rubén Salazar, who frequently reported civil rights violations and police brutality. The Chicano movement also showed great strength at the college level. The organization MEChA started to promote Chicano unity and empowerment through education and political action.¹¹ Luis Rodriguez takes up these events in his autobiography *Always Running: Gang Days in L.A.* Not only were the 60s and 70s a time of hope and change for the Chicanos. These times also stand for an incipient gang culture¹² and a rise in violence and organized crime in the Chicano communities. Rodriguez narrates how he was caught in this gang culture but found help and a future in the Chicano Movement. He vividly describes the change from gang member to active reformer and social critic, who finds his place between the Mexican and the American culture by forming a Chicano identity.

Since the 1970s the number of inhabitants of Mexican descent has nearly tripled with most of the immigrants residing in the states on the border to Mexico and in major cities in the Southwest such as Los Angeles. The population of East Los Angeles, for example, is over 90% Latino/a including 50% non-US citizens. As the border region is becoming increasingly “Mexicanized” or “Latinized”, evocations of Mexican national identification and pride can be witnessed as well as strong engagements of Chicanos with the US. Additionally, Americans counter this Mexicanization of the border region by expressing nationalistic sentiments themselves. In the following years Mexico became the largest source of immigration and cheap labor to the US, causing major changes in the cultural reconfiguration of the Southwest of the United States. The flow of illegal immigrants who crossed the border along with the legal permanent immigrants raised dramatic issues

¹¹ See Acuna, Rodolfo, *Occupied America: A History of Chicanos* (New York: Harper & Ro., 1972) and Moore, J. W., and Cuéllar, A.B. (1970). *Mexican Americans.: Ethnic groups in American life series*, (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1970)

¹² On evolution of gangs see Moore, Joan W., *Homeboys: Gangs, Drugs, and Prison in the Barrios of Los Angeles* (Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1978) and Vigil, James D. “Cholos and Gangs: Culture Change and Street Youth in Los Angeles”, *Gangs in America: Diffusion, Diversity and Public Policy*, ed. Ronald Huff (Beverly Hills,: Sage, 1990)

with regard to Mexican immigration and residence in the US as a whole. As the flow of immigration to the US increased and also migration between Mexico and the US became more frequent, different socio-cultural matrices could be witnessed in which individuals and collective formed identities. Living in an alternative space in-between the nations, constantly transgressing national and cultural borders or staying on one side and developing strong affiliations with one nation and one culture were all possible identity schemes.¹³

However, even though immigration increased immensely, naturalization rates among Mexican immigrants were and for a long time remained among the lowest. An expansion of a Mexican socio-cultural infrastructure in barrios in the Southwest enabled working-class Mexican-Americans to live in a society within American society. Spanish movie theatres, neighborhood cantinas, Spanish language advertisements and Mexican *telenovelas* provided a retreat from US society and kept both cultures apart, as the need to adopt parts of the dominant culture was not given. As the stream of legal and illegal immigrants deepened due to chronic unemployment, the collapse of the oil market, deeply rooted political corruption and the eruption of Narcoterrorism in Mexico and a seemingly insatiable demand of low-skilled and cheap labor in the US, many Mexicans moved north. Cheap transportation, developments in electronic communications and a more global financial system offered the possibility to easily transfer funds across national borders. This intensified immigration as well as migration and contributed to drastic and dramatic demographic and socio-cultural reconstructions along the border in the Southwest of the US.

The steady expansion of the *maquiladoras* has drawn massive numbers of Mexicans into the frontier zone, who eventually tried and still try to cross the border as the possibility of finding work in the US is ever-

¹³ See Gutierrez, David G, "Ethnic Mexicans and the Transformation of American Social Space: Reflections on Recent History, *Crossings: Mexican Immigration in Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, ed. Marcelo M. Suarez-Orozco. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1998

present. The consistently rising number of legal and illegal immigrant working-class Mexican-Americans always could and still can practice their own culture in a territorial and cultural space between Mexico and the US.

Today Chicanos are the biggest minority in the US and make up a large percentage of the population. Many Mexicans cross the border to the US illegally and remain in that status for the rest of their lives. The demonstration in major cities in the US described in the introduction shows the attempt to legalize their status as many Mexicans enter the US illegally but feel like Americans after living in America for a while. The majority of them work in low paid and dead end jobs, due to the fact that they do not receive a good education, usually because they live in poor areas where the community cannot afford good schooling. Due to stereotyping, many Chicanos are believed to work in blue-collar jobs, as most immigrants from Mexico come from the lower classes, from rural areas and from families, which have been employed in lower skilled jobs for generations and still find themselves in that position. Thus, many new Mexican immigrants are not skilled or educated to obtain white collar professions. Recently, some professionals from Mexico have migrated but they still need to adapt to the American culture and learn the English language. This has created tensions between the Chicano community and other ethnic minorities in the US, as the availability of cheap Mexican labor displaces members of other ethnic minority groups such as African Americans.

Illegal immigration provides America with an endless pool of cheap labor, which worries and deprives other ethnic minorities and also uneducated whites and keeps Chicanos in a cycle of low paid jobs as workers can always be replaced. Often, they cannot speak English, stay in their Mexican communities and work in the same backbreaking job for their whole life. They form a secluded community, which is not a part of American mainstream society but makes sure that Americans can rely on cheap food and clothing. Helena Maria Viramontes describes this vicious cycle of deprivation and the sheer endless supply with poor uneducated workers from Mexico in her novel *Under the Feet of Jesus*

taking up this current topic and criticizing Chicanos as well as Americans who make this exploitation and deprivation of other minorities possible. Illegal immigration and its consequences is an issue widely discussed in the US today. TV stations show programs, which show police, border control or nationalist American hunting down Mexicans, who have entered the US illegally or bring more Mexicans over the border. The problems caused by illegal immigration lead to legal Mexicans and Americans alike supporting an immigration policy which would enable illegal Mexicans to get an American citizenship if they "pass background checks, pay fines and have jobs, learn English."¹⁴

A major focus of Chicanos in the US today is politics. Trying to gain influence in American society, their main goals are increasing the number of Chicano candidates, achieving the appointment of more Chicanos in government, and persuading non-Chicano candidates to commit themselves to the needs of the Mexican American community and conducting broad-scale voter registration and community organization drives.¹⁵

Although more Chicanos belong to the middle class nowadays and hold white collar jobs, they still face negative stereotypes which have long circulated in media and popular culture. Due to these prejudices, they suffer from discrimination and have to endure anti-Mexican sentiments. In 2006, Time magazine reported that the number of hate groups in the United States have increased by 33 percent since 2000, primarily due to anti-illegal immigrant and anti-Mexican sentiment and have almost doubled in California since 2003.¹⁶ Essays written by nationalists such as Samuel P. Huntington, who fear for the American culture and the English language, fuel these sentiments. Huntington argues that the

¹⁴ For further details on the views on immigration bill see Pew Research Center's report, *Mixed Views on Immigration Bill: Democratic Leaders Face Growing Disapproval, Criticism on Iraq*, June 2007

¹⁵ See Villarreal, Roberto E., and Norma G. Hernandez. *Latinos and Political Coalitions: Political Empowerment for the 1990s* (Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1991)

¹⁶ Ressler, Jeffrey, "How Immigration is Rousing the Zealots," *Time Magazine* (May 2006)

extreme number of immigrants, the proximity of Mexican American neighborhoods to one another and to their homeland, linguistic homogeneity in Spanish, and other characteristics of immigrants from Mexico will weaken and eventually erase the dominance of English as a nationally unifying language. The country's dominant cultural values, he explains, will also vanish, and ethnic allegiances will be promoted rather than the identification with American national and cultural values. He states that Mexicans live segregated from American society and avoid contact with Americans and the American culture.¹⁷ The barrios, as the neighborhoods with a high number of Latin-American and mainly Mexican immigrants are called, are a safe haven for Spanish-speaking immigrants who are not yet fully adjusted to the US culture and have not yet learned the English language well enough to survive in mainstream America. In the barrio, they can communicate in Spanish, get schooling, find a job, and ask for support without the pressure to speak English. It is a place where Latino culture provides a source of comfort to a recent immigrant, as it offers a place to work and live. The inequality experienced by Mexican Americans is represented in the fact that by living in barrios, they have fewer opportunities to receive a good education or find good jobs. As these neighborhoods are also not in the focus of the police and governments, these problems tend to continue and manifest themselves.¹⁸ Theories by American nationalists often do not see the barrios as a consequence of the discrimination and exclusion from American society. They fail to understand that these secluded communities provide its members with reassurance and the opportunity to enter American society once they have been able to learn all the skills and acquire the necessary cultural knowledge to adapt to American society.

¹⁷ For his whole argumentation see Huntington, Samuel P. in “Dead Souls. The Denationalization of the American Elite,” *The National Interest* (2004) and Huntington, Samuel P.; “Who We Are: The Challenges to America’s National Identity” (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2005)

¹⁸ Martin, Michael E., *Residential Segregation Patterns of Latinos in the United States, 1990-2000*. (New York: Routledge, 2007)

In contrast to the negative stereotypes, the children and grandchildren of Latino immigrants have started to close the educational and income gaps with white Americans. Immigrant Latino men make about half of what native whites do, the third generation of US-born Latinos makes almost identical wages when compared to Americans in the same jobs.¹⁹

Overall, many Chicanos are firmly rooted in US culture but still maintain the connection to their Mexican cultural heritage. However, discrimination, exploitation and negative stereotyping are still problems many Chicanos in the US are faced with. The literary productions chosen in this text all have a strong historical and socio-political background, which they place their characters in. In all texts history and socio-political issues influence the character's formation of identity and their feeling of belonging.

2.2) Chicano Literature and Postcolonial Discourse

According to Ortiz, two different people have to meet and clash in order for transcultural processes to emerge and continue. Ortiz expects a transition between two cultures when a society is conquered or when migration takes place. For Chicanos and immigrants of Mexican descent in the US both situations have occurred and continue to influence their identity formation during the process of transculturation. The steady crossing of the border from Mexico to the US describes one of the situations necessary to evoke transculturation. While this situation is very present in the minds of readers, it also needs to be stressed that the South West of the US used to be Mexican territory and was colonized by US forces in the wake of Manifest Destiny. A third factor, which makes the situation of Chicanos and Mexican immigrants similar to the Cuban situation described by Ortiz, is that the US itself is a postcolonial country. In his theory Ortiz seeks to establish a term, which more adequately explains the cultural encounter between two groups with

¹⁹ See Barrera, Mario, *Race and Class in the Southwest: A Theory of Racial Inequality* (London: Notre Dame P, 1979) and Bean, Frank D and Tienda, Marta, *The Hispanic Population of the United States* (New York.: Russel Sage,1987)

different national and cultural backgrounds than the term acculturation, which was popular among North Americans at the time. He coined the term transculturation to oppose the one-way imposition of the dominant culture.

Transculturation can thus be understood as the complex process of adjustment and re-creation - cultural, literary, linguistic, and personal - that allows for new, vital and viable configurations to arise out of the clash of cultures and the violence of colonial and neo-colonial appropriations. (Spitta 1995:2)²⁰

The dynamics between different cultures in a postcolonial country and the explanation of deviation from their original cultures are the core of Ortiz' theory of transculturation.

The US, itself a postcolonial country, colonized parts of Mexico and turned some of the Mexican people into a colonized minority in their own country. However, the US once was itself a country in a postcolonial situation²¹ and the question has to be asked how a country, which is itself in a stage of being "affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day" (Ashcroft, 1998: 2) can colonize other nations simultaneously. Peter Hulme stated once that "a

²⁰ For an in depth analysis of transculturation in narrative see Spitta, Silvia, *Between Waters: Narratives of Transculturation in Latin America*, (Texas A&M: UP, 1995)

²¹ Regarding the question whether the US is still in a postcolonial state see Bill Ashcroft (1998), who still sees the US as a post-colonial country and sees the US as the first post-colonial country, which has produced a national literature. In *The Empire writes back* he states that "The first post-colonial society to develop a national literature was the USA... In many ways the American experience and its attempts to produce a new kind of literature can be seen to be the model for all alter post-colonial writing" (Ashcroft et al. 1989:16) and Klor de Alva (1995) who argues that all American nation states have been colonized by Europeans but gained their independence much easier than the English and French colonies in Africa in the 20th century. Additionally, America still culturally and ethnically identifies with Europe. He sees the Native Americans as the only people in the US which is still colonized whereas the rest of the US lives in a post-colonial state. Also see Heide, Markus, *Grenzüberschreibungen: Chicano Erzählliteratur und die Inszenierung von Kulturkontakt* (Heidelberg: Winter, 2004) on this topic

country can be postcolonial and colonizing at the same time”²², and thus considered the special status of the US as both colonizer and formerly colonized. His understanding of the country’s ambivalent position makes it possible to look at the US as a nation which is familiar with the struggles against dominant forces and which as a nation uses its powerful position to subjugate other people. Since the 1990s, “postcolonial” has replaced the term “internal colonialism” used in Chicano literary discourse up to that point.²³ As the definition of the Chicanos as a people who suffered from internal colonization didn’t take into consideration spatial and temporal changes, the term postcolonial seemed to describe the situation of the Chicanos in the United States more adequately. The term post-colonialism does not only refer to a historical period, but also provides the reader with a decentered perspective of the once familiar. It seeks to reverse commonly known and accepted views and to reposition the focus in order to redraw functional relations between the dominant and the subjugated. Klor de Alva argues, though, that American minorities are different from post-colonial people in the Third World:

My argument is that in strategically assuming a postcolonial “essence”, as many indeed have done, subaltern Latin American *mestizos*, US Latinos, African Americans and others similarly situated have created common identities that have been used to advocate collectively for common needs. But these strategic identities, however useful they may be among some of the West’s subalterns, should not be confused with the ones non-Western postcolonial subjects must develop if they are to

²² For further explanation see Hulme, Peter, *Colonial Encounter: Europe and the Native Caribbean 1492-1797* (London: MacMillan, 1986)

²³ See Acuna, Rodolfo, *Occupied America: The Chicano’s Struggle Toward Liberation* (San Francisco: UP, 1972). Acuna claimed that the Chicanos lived in internal colonies and saw them as a colonized people within the US. See also Barrera, Mario, *Race and Class in the Southwest: A Theory of Racial Inequality* (London: UP of Notre Dame Press, 1979) who links the Chicano people with the peoples in the third world saying “the manner in which the original Chicanos came about links Chicano history firmly with the history of other Third World people who have been subjected to the colonial experience in one or another of its forms.” (218)

overcome the very different legacies of their tragic colonial pasts (de Alva: 1995, 246)²⁴

Chicano literature is placed in a postcolonial discourse; however, as Chicano writers try to change their position of writing from the margin to writing from the center. Chicano writers try to raise awareness of the problems Chicanos still face in the US. But they also try to create new forms of literature combining writing styles and techniques from US literature and the Mexican oral tradition of storytelling. Additionally, they attempt to revise established notions of their people and present it as constantly moving between two cultures. Of course, this ceaseless transition between cultures raises issues such as the formation of an individual or a collective identity. Being in constant change and movement, the Chicano people has trouble finding a collective identity. This also leads to problems in finding one's individual place of belonging.

In his 1990 essay "Cultural identity and Diaspora" Stuart Hall criticizes the fact that cultural identity has been looked at and formed with regard to a shared heritage and a common tradition, which was achieved in the past and might not be accessible under the present circumstances as history progresses and a people progress with it. Therefore, he states, identities cannot be looked upon as something stable and fixed, but rather as a construct undergoing constant change and reformation. He argues that

Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories, but, like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being grounded in mere recovery of the past, which is waiting to be found, and which when found, will secure our sense of self into eternity, identities are the

²⁴ See Klor de Alva, Jorge, "The Postcolonization of the (Latin) American Experience: A Reconsideration of Colonialism, Postcolonialism and Mestizaje." *After Colonialism: Imperial Histories and Postcolonial Displacements*. Ed. Gyan Prakash. (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1995)

names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past.” (Hall, 1993: 394)²⁵

Therefore, he comes to the conclusion that there are new and old identities. The new discourses of identity are formed in a globalized world and deny binary oppositions within a people. He states that

The notion that identity [...] could be told as two histories, one over here, and one over there, never having spoken to one another, never having anything to do with the other [...] is simply not tenable any longer in an increasingly globalized world. (Hall, 1991:48)²⁶

He illustrates his point by metaphorically calling himself the “sugar at the bottom of the English cup of tea.” Likewise, the Chicanos are part of American society, although many of them have their place at the bottom of society. The example quoted in the introduction of this paper makes this fact very clear. Mexican-Americans consider themselves as a part of the American culture and they are willing to take part in it. They make themselves heard and have therefore left the marginal position they were thought to have in this society and try to place themselves at the center of society. In this globalized world they have to find out where they belong and how to belong. This also requires a decision how much of their own culture they are ready to sacrifice for being able to belong to one of the most powerful nations. Coming to terms with these questions is part of the process of transculturation and also the reason why the Chicano people and its literature can be placed in a postcolonial discourse. Throughout this process of meeting another dominant culture positions are reviewed, identities are reformed, and new notions of the

²⁵ See Hall, Stuart, “Cultural Identity and Diaspora.” *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory.*, ed. Laura Chrisman. (New York, London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993)

²⁶ See Hall, Stuart, “Old and New Identities, Old and New Ethnicities.” *Culture, Globalization, and the World System: Contemporary Conditions for the Representation of Identity*, Ed. Anthony King (London: MacMillan, 1991) 41-68

commonly known are created. Literature is a way of coping with this process of transculturation and the consequences resulting thereof, but it is also a place where identities are written and rewritten, and where imaginary communities are created.

2.3) Chicano Literature as Ethnic Literature

In order to understand the fiction of Chicano literature is its relationship to questions of ethnicity, which are generally linked to questions of identity formation. One of the most productive concepts of postcolonial identity is that of “imagined homelands,” as Salman Rushdie called it,²⁷ constructing a sense of cultural belonging and determining new identities.

Essential to ethnicity is the building of nations as they provide the foundation of ethnicity. Benedict Anderson argues in *Imagined Communities* that, in the eighteenth and nineteenth century people relied on imaginary communities to form a sense of belonging and collective identity. He states that reverberated communities depended on literacy and national (ethnic) literatures.²⁸ These communities relied on texts and on words. Being ethnic is defined by Sollors as “belonging and being perceived by others as belonging to an ethnic group”²⁹, and therefore he categorizes ethnic groups as groups that are different from the dominant culture. Applied to literature this means that literature which is different from the dominant canon in a country can be classified as ethnic. Ethnicity is based on a mutual history and ethnic literature emerges from a shared historical context. Therefore, ethnic literature reveals cultural

²⁷ For further information on his notion of imagined homeland see Rushdie, Salman, *Imaginary homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-1991* (London: Granata, 1991)

²⁸ For further information on this topic see Weber, Max, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft: Grundriss der verstehenden Soziologie* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1956) who defines ethnicity as “subjektiver Glaube an eine Abstammungsgemeinschaft” and Sollors, Werner, “Ethnicity” in *Critical Terms for Literary Study* (Chicago: UP, 1993)

²⁹ See Sollors, Werner, *Beyond Ethnicity-Consent and Descent in American Culture* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1986)

differences between the ethnic group and the dominant group in society. Sollors and Boewelhower argue that ethnic literature needs to be classified (as such) within a social and cultural context, meaning that signs only become ethnic within a context.

Sollors criticizes the one-group-approach by claiming that this approach does not take into consideration the connections and transgressions between ethnic and other texts. He states

The widespread acceptance of the one-group-approach has not led to unhistorical accounts held together by static notions of rather abstract and homogeneously conceived ethnic groups, but has also weakened the comparative and critical skills of increasingly timid interpreters who sometimes choose to speak with the authority of ethnic insiders rather than that of readers of texts (Sollors, 1986,:256)

However, it is not cultural difference itself, which creates ethnicity but the “specificity of power relations at a given historical moment and in a particular place that triggers off a strategy of pseudo-historical explanations that camouflage the inventive act itself.” The subjugation of a people creates a historical moment, which can be used by the oppressed group as shared memory in order to create an imaginary community.

In the case of the Chicanos this shared historical moment is the defeat in 1848, which turned a part of the Mexican soil into US territory. This moment in history united a people and created the imaginary community of Chicanos that would have never existed had the US not invaded Mexico and annexed part of it. Until today it is noticeable that many Mexicans who live in the Southwest have continued to live their own Chicano way of life, floating between the binary poles of Mexican and American. Mexican traditions are interwoven with mainstream culture and create a third new culture that is based on transition and mediation. This imaginary community constructs groups and is thus the basis for

establishing categories of belonging in a discourse. Ethnic literature based on these constructs takes up the culture and traditions of these groups and creates new texts, which renegotiate the place of the ethnic group in mainstream society. As Sollors puts it “it makes little sense to define ethnicity as such, since it refers not to a thing in itself but to a relationship; ethnicity is typically based in contrast.”³⁰

He argues further

Ethnicity is a pervasive theme in all American literature, whether in the shape of ethnicity as ancestry or of ethnicity as diversity...And the very forms of American literature are also partly shaped by the forces of ethnicity, from the first emergence of Americanized genres to the highest achievements of the American Renaissance, from the opposition of romance and novel to the rise of modernism. (Sollors, 1980:649)³¹

Therefore, it is not ethnicity (as such) which distinguishes ethnic literature from non-ethnic literature, especially in an American context. As America is a country of immigrants and as this population has been shaping American history and society, ethnic literature can only be defined as such within an American cultural context. Bowelhower takes up Sollors view and concludes “There could be no such thing as ethnic literature outside of the structuring context (American political and cultural boundaries) in which it is created, which means that being American and being ethnic American are part of a single cultural framework.” (Bowelhower, 1987: 9ff.)

It is the collective belief in an imagined community within American society that makes Chicano literature different from American literature. The narration of historical events such as subjugation, exclusion and

³⁰ For further explanation see Sollors, Werner “Ethnicity” in *Critical Terms for Literary Study* (Chicago: UP, 1993). For Saldivar's criticism on Sollors understanding of ethnic literature see Saldivar, Ramon, *Chicano Narrative-The Dialectics of Difference* (Wisconsin: Madison UP, 1990)

³¹ See Boewelhower, William. *Through a Glass Darkly: Ethnic Semiosis in American Literature* (New York: Oxford UP, 1987)

oppression experienced by a minority and told from the point of view of a minority, makes ethnicity visible. The history of the Chicanos in the US is different from other minority groups as the “early Chicanos were a colonized people [and] most of them today have immigrant roots.”³² Therefore, they cannot be compared to the European immigrants to the US, as they do not share this history of colonization.

The use of Spanish in Chicano literature, the criticism of American mainstream culture or the narrations of Mexican traditions create the contrast between American literature and Chicano literature as ethnic minority literature. Chicano literature questions the erection of barriers, the drawing of borderlines and constantly redefines itself and the imagined community it represents. It is undergoing perpetual change and never ceases to redefine the cultural identity of this ethnic group. Chicano literature can be seen as ethnic literature, as it tries to question the marginal position of Chicanos in American society. Additionally, it negotiates the formation of a cultural identity and presents the struggles while transgressing between two cultures. Based on the experiences of Chicanos in the US this literature debates the differences between two cultures in an American cultural context and represents the point of view of an imaginary community in opposition to the mainstream culture in the US.

2.4) The Cultural Function of Ethnic Literature

Ethnic texts voice the social, cultural and political viewpoints of the people at the margins of society. Their cultural function for marginalized groups in a society and for the society as a whole is to be further discussed in this chapter.

³² See Takaki, Ronald, *A Different Mirror: A History of Multicultural America* (Boston:Back Bay Books, 1993)

Boelhower states that “ethnic discourse is a discourse of foundations”³³ and defines ethnic discourse as a discourse opposed to the process of globalization and the inevitable up-rootedness resulting from living in a world where nations are interconnected and affiliation with one nation is less and less possible or wanted. Ethnic literature tries to re-root cultural identities and establish a place of belonging. These texts not only provide entertainment or instruction but also offer political reasons which are connected to agendas “well beyond aesthetic understanding.”³⁴ Donald E. Hall says in his essay on subjectivity that

Identity became thoroughly politicized in the nineteenth and twentieth century and part of our continuing struggle to understand the different ways in which identities are socially valued, interrogated, and replicated is through the process of reading, studying, and critically engaging with a wide variety of cultural texts. Indeed, as literary and cultural critics have aggressively expanded what they mean by the term text, the textuality of the self as a system of representation has, itself, become a singularly important arena of investigation and speculation. Thus, in exploring subjectivity, we are in effect exploring the self as text, as a topic for critical analysis, both in and beyond its relationship to the traditional texts of literature and culture.³⁵ (Hall, 2004:5)

Therefore, ethnic texts serve as a space where the self can be written, a place where identity can be formed, changed, discussed and questioned. The works discussed in this paper have, at their center, the struggle to form and renegotiate individual and collective identities. In narrative psychology the opinion has been expressed that narrative and identity are constantly feeding into and mutually constituting each other. The belief that texts and narratives do not only describe the state of identity

³³ See Boewelhower, William. *Through a Glass Darkly: Ethnic Semiosis in American Literature* (New York: Oxford UP, 1987)

³⁴ See Boewelhower, William. *Through a Glass Darkly: Ethnic Semiosis in American Literature* (New York: Oxford UP, 1987)

³⁵ For further information see Hall, Donald E. *Subjectivity* (New York: Routledge, 2004)

but are also fundamental to the construction of identity is based on the idea that text and identity are so closely intertwined. Bruner states that “we organize our experience and our memory of human happenings mainly in the form of narrative.”³⁶ Trying to connect the events in order to give them meaning, we create relationships and use narration to “give order and direction to events that otherwise might be perceived as random or isolated.”³⁷ The reason why narration is an effective way of self-creation lies in its temporalization. As a chain of events provides an explanation for changes, the storyteller can establish his identity due to the logical progress of the story itself. The events narrated in a story contribute to the narrator’s creation of self and give reasons why an identity is constructed in a particular way. It allows constant changes, a perpetual questioning of one’s own identity and criticism directed at the social and cultural surroundings of the narrator or the characters in a story. Brockmeier states that

Interweaving past and present with the threads of a life history creates a self-narrative, whether fictional or not, which can give meaning to our experiences which form the basis for a formation of identity. How we order and make sense of our experiences is heavily influenced by culture. Therefore, culture plays a main role in our construction of identity and builds the foundation for a narrative, where a text describes the process of identity formation or even helps create an identity.³⁸ (Brockmeier, 2001:11-32)

When reading Chicano texts we find many elements in the texts which represent Mexicanness, for example the frequent use of Spanish. These patterns make the text ethnic on the one hand, as they create difference, but they also explain how Chicano identities are formed and which problems are encountered by the Chicano people when struggling between the American and the Mexican culture. Transculturation is a

³⁶ See Bruner, Jerome S., “Life as Narrative,” *Social Research* 54, 1 (1987)

³⁷ See Bruner, Jerome S., “Life as Narrative,” *Social Research* 54, 1 (1987) 11-32

³⁸ For further information see Brockmeier, Jens, “Identity,” *Encyclopedia of Life Writing. Autobiographical and Biographical Forms Vol 1* (London/Chicago, 2001)

process of finding an individual as well as a collective identity as the transition between two cultures requires a negotiation and reformation of one's identity. Narratives are a way to articulate or enact the process of finding an individual identity including the emotional consequences. They tell about up-rootedness and homelessness in order to help with the re-rooting of cultural identities and the establishing of a place of belonging.

The cultural function of ethnic texts is to create an imaginative community as Sollors calls it and provide for a place of belonging and a collective cultural identity, which serves as a foundation for the creation of an individual identity.

2.5) The Practice of Stereotyping and Cultural Effacement

Apart from serving as places of identity formation, ethnic literature also often presents the practice of stereotyping. As every culture fears the unknown, stereotypes are established in order to define the other and exclude it. This way of controlling other cultures is used in ethnic discourse to show the difficulties of becoming part of another culture. The boundaries, which are created by stereotyping, are enormous and enhance the struggles to transgress the borders between two cultures.³⁹

Sander Gilman states in his essay "The Deep Structures of Stereotypes" that "everyone creates stereotypes. We cannot function without them. They buffer us against our most urgent fears by extending them, making it possible for us to act as though their source were beyond our control."⁴⁰

³⁹ This chapter contains excerpts from Grupp, Marie-Florence, „The American Dream in Cuban-American Literature“ (2007) , which have partially been revised for this thesis

⁴⁰ See Gilman, Sander, "The Deep Structures of Stereotypes ," *Difference and Pathology* (London: Cornell, 1985)

Kristeva argues that stable cultures try to keep their categories pure.⁴¹ This means that categories are clearly labeled and that everyone, who is part of that society fits into one of these categories. This phenomenon marks a culture of unique meaning and identity and leads to the conclusion that everything that is out of order, such as people not belonging to a certain group or people refusing to belong to a certain group, throws society out of balance. Kristeva shows what happens to the members of a society, who break these unwritten rules. She provides a possible explanation when saying that what one does with matter out of place, is to sweep it up, throw it out, restore the place to order, bring back the normal state of affairs. The retreat of many cultures towards closure against foreigners, intruders, aliens and others is part of the same process of purification.⁴²

However, this seems to be a one-sided theory. In every society, immigrants experience different living conditions depending on their ability to manage the cultural differences. Many immigrants coming to the US encounter the living conditions they imagined and are content and happy with their status in society. Of course, many of them speak adequate English, which is one of the keys to becoming a part of US society. Pursuing Kristeva's argument even further, though, the result becomes evident, that every culture provides for so-called symbolic boundaries that ban people who don't fit in from society. Babcock takes up this statement and concludes that "marking difference leads us, symbolically, to close ranks, shore up culture and to stigmatize and expel anything which is defined as impure, abnormal. However, it also makes difference powerful, strangely attractive precisely because it is forbidden, taboo, threatening to cultural order."⁴³ This means that the banishing of "rule-breakers" usually has a symbolic reason.

After establishing the reasons why stereotyping exists and how it is motivated, the questions need to be raised what exactly stereotyping is and how it is a representational practice that leads to the legitimization

⁴¹ See Kristeva, Julia, *Powers of Horror* (New York: Columbia UP, 1982) 211 ff.

⁴² Kristeva, Julia, *Powers of Horror* (New York: Columbia UP, 1982) 211 ff

⁴³ Babcock, Barbara, *The Reversible World* (New York: UP, 1978) 32

of banning certain parts of society. A first definition of “stereotyping” could be, “the reduction of people to a few, simple essential characteristics, which are represented as fixed by society.”⁴⁴

To come to a clearer definition, the questions of what a stereotype is and how it works, have to be answered more thoroughly. In order to answer the first of the two questions, an essay by Richard Dyer might help⁴⁵. He defines three characteristics essential to stereotyping. First, instead of allowing a minimal development of the characteristics mentioned above, stereotyping reduces and simplifies traits of a person. These traits are fixed in people’s heads and endure, as they usually don’t undergo any change. Additionally, these traits are seen as natural, and not as acquired. This leads to the assumption that these traits are essential. So the first characteristics of stereotyping are that stereotyping reduces, naturalizes, essentializes and fixes difference.⁴⁶

Secondly, stereotyping fixes boundaries as symbols for exclusion. As stated above, abnormal behavior or looks are reasons to expel certain people from the heart of society and mark them as outsiders. Looking at the various groups in a society, one needs to understand, that those who live by the rules fit into a group and those, who don’t live by the rules cannot acquire membership in a group. Stereotyping stands for the application of rules to exclude people that don’t fit. These people are also called stereotypes. This means that stereotypes cannot overtly reinterpret their identity in order to fit in society. They are turned into rigid characters and have to accept the symbolic boundaries that society establishes. Society marks stereotypes and at the same time takes every chance from them to change their position in society. They themselves can reinterpret their identity, but society will not allow them to live

⁴⁴ Hall, Stuart, *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* (London: The Open University, 1997) 257

⁴⁵ See Dyer, Richard, “The Role of Stereotypes,” *Media Studies: A Reader*, ed. Paul Marris and Sue Thornham, (Edinburgh University Press, 1999) and Dyer, Richard “Stereotyping,” *Gays and Film*, ed. Richard Dyer (London: British Film Institute, 1977)

⁴⁶ Hall, Stuart, *Representation : Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* (London: The Open University, 1997) 258

outside their assigned stereotype. Therefore, the second characteristic of stereotyping is its practice of exclusion and the establishment of symbolically fixed boundaries that make it possible to exclude everything that doesn't belong.

The two characteristics just mentioned lead to the conclusion that stereotyping is a means to maintain and stabilize symbolic and social order. Stabilization and maintenance of social and symbolic order requires power. Stereotyping provides this power as it expels people from society if certain requirements of that society aren't met. It is ordinarily directed against inferior parts of society, especially if those parts have different cultural norms, a different language or show traits that cannot be controlled. The binary opposition "Us/Them" requires one group to rule and suppresses the other.

This means that stereotyping provides for hegemony. If one part of society achieves the goal to be marked as "normal" to belong to one of the groups that were established by the rules of society, it eventually turns society into a functioning body that lives according to these rules. This leads to the result that stereotypes are excluded from society by society and hegemony is set up. This hegemony, however, is not necessarily a "violent hierarchy", as Derrida puts it.⁴⁷ It is rather a power, as explained above, that classifies, marks, symbolizes and represents. Power doesn't have to be understood as physical power, but as the power to represent people or things in ways that allow for the establishment of symbolic boundaries, that split society into "Us" and "Them". Edward Said concludes that "in any society not totalitarian, then, certain cultural forms predominate over others; the form of this cultural leadership is [...] identified as hegemony."⁴⁸ Since this predomination is achieved by dividing society into types and stereotypes, stereotyping is clearly a major element of setting up symbolic boundaries and exercising symbolic violence.

⁴⁷ See Derrida, Jacques, *Positions* (Chicago: UP, 1972) 41

⁴⁸ Said, Edward, *Orientalism* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1978) 7

However, the practice of stereotyping also allows foreigners to construct a self that society cannot see and control. Since the main part of society is set up with a fixed image in its head, the person stereotyped is always able to contain a part of his or her self that cannot be seen and controlled by others.⁴⁹ That helps to preserve a part of the self and self-control in a society that sets up boundaries. Additionally, language can also be a means to maintain control. As Mikhail Bakhtin argues “The word in language is half someone else’s.”⁵⁰ He means that meaning in a dialogue can only be established if there is a difference between the speakers. He states that “everything we say and mean is modified by the interaction and interplay with another person.”⁵¹ According to this theory, the other is essential to create meaning, meaning cannot be fixed and the domination of meaning by one group becomes impossible. This means that the identity of immigrants cannot be labeled by any other national culture. In a society with fixed rules and boundaries, differences in meaning are not necessarily an advantage, though, because an adaptation to the nation’s culture will be difficult; and adaptation is desirable out of reasons already explored above.

It needs to be mentioned that immigrants set up symbolic boundaries as well. As the functioning of society also applies to immigrants who live in a particular society, they also tend to follow the established rules that work for any kind of society; the rules of typing and stereotyping. Symbolic boundaries against the other from their point of view are set up, too, and intensify cultural misunderstandings. Immigrants in a society as well as society itself are able to set up symbolic boundaries because both speak their own language and have their own rules. One could summarize that stereotyping happens to minority and majority and therefore makes it difficult to solve cultural conflicts. Fear of the unknown other is a major reason for the practice of typing and stereotyping.

Having explained the practice of stereotyping, the question needs to be

⁴⁹ See Bhabha, homi, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994) 54 ff.

⁵⁰ See Bakhtin, Mikhail, *The Dialogic Imagination* (Austin: U of Texas P, 1981) 293

⁵¹ Bakhtin, Mikhail, *The Dialogic Imagination* (Austin: U of Texas P, 1981) 293

asked what role the practice of stereotyping plays in the process of transculturation and whether it is mainly responsible for the effacement of indigenous cultures when emigrating to foreign countries. When two cultures meet for the first time and clash, binary oppositions are created, based on the perception of the other as different and not fitting the norms. This erection of binary poles makes it difficult for both sides to come closer together. In the following, it is the side of the suppressed who try to make changes in their lifestyle in order to survive. Their process of adaptation is the beginning of a mutual approach as the other side recognizes the changes and is willing to admit the suppressed to their cultural circle. However, the label other might not disappear for many more generations. The act of stereotyping creates binary oppositions at first but is also responsible for the fusing of cultures as the situation of living in poverty and deprivation due to the categorization into “Us/Them” is not desired. Chicano literature often tries to create a new culture, a culture of transition between one culture and the other. Presenting Mexicans and Americans in dialogue, many others manage to break down the stereotypical view of the other and to create a new cultural identity. One can see this attempt in some texts analyzed in this paper; the textual themes used range from social criticism over a juxtaposition of cultural elements to a praise of assimilation. The effacement of culture, the re-rooting of identity and the search for a new place of belonging due to the transgressions of cultural boundaries can be detected in many texts. Stereotyping is the start of a transcultural process which leads to manifold identity issues and formations described in Chicano literature.

2.6) The Theory of Transculturation

In his work *Cuban Counterpoint* (1940) Fernando Ortiz coins the term transculturation as a means to describe situations of cultural interventions and the effect that such interactions have on all the cultural systems involved. The term was originally created to explore the dynamics between Cuban and other cultures, but theorists have also used the term to study a wide range of artistic, cultural and social manifestations throughout Latin America and the world.

Recently, the term has been used as a generic term in order to examine issues relating to the cultural economy between peripheries and centers in general.

The frequent use of the term lies in the notion of challenging the assumption that cultures develop teleologically and unidirectionally. Transculturalism can be understood as a multidirectional and endless interactive process between various cultural systems which oppose and defy unidirectional and hierarchical structures determined by the principles of origin that are associated with claims for cultural authority. The term suggests a mutual interaction between cultures and it can be used to examine the complex dynamic forces implicit in the interaction between different cultures and the continual definition of cultural contexts it brings about.⁵² Ortiz describes humans as bearers and as victims of cultural exchange. Therefore, he sees Cubanness as transitory, provisional, and always changing. So, transculturation is filled with political content as it is concerned with the practices of a people, their histories and experiences. Consequently, transculturation is a flexible method of analysis capable of dealing with the multiple and complex set of socio-cultural practices in Cuba, Latin America and the world.

Ortiz defines five phases during the process of transculturation: hostility, accommodation, adaptation, self-affirmation and integration. The first phase is one of attack. The colonizer attacks a seemingly inferior group in order to take away their possessions and their land. The reaction by the oppressed to this injustice is rebellion, if possible. Finally, the inferior group is conquered. This first clash of cultures is followed by the second phase, the phase of compromise. During this stage of transculturation the dominant group exploits the defeated that defend themselves with shrewdness and make clever adjustments based on their mistrust of the superior group. The two races start to mix and the dominant group begins to relent because of their mixed offspring,⁵³

⁵² See Spitta, Silvia, *Between Two Waters: Narratives of Transculturation in Latin America* (Texas A&M: UP, 1995) 4

⁵³ While for legal purposes, Mexican Americans were counted as White, most Mexican Americans were not considered "white," did not enjoy "white" status or privileges, and

38

while the inferior group continues to readjust itself to the new life and to develop a love for the new fatherland. However, there is constant mistrust toward the other side as the ruler wants this system to last indefinitely whereas the oppressed wait for a moment to fight back and overthrow the ruler. The phase of accommodation is then followed by the phase of adaptation, later self-assertion and in the end ideally by the phase of integration.

The term transculturation is a neologism as Ortiz wanted to undermine the term acculturation which implies homogenization.⁵⁴ He thought that it disguised the true dynamics which are at work in colonial situations. He states:

I am of the opinion that the word transculturation better expresses the different phases of the process of transition from one culture to another because this does not consist merely in acquiring another culture, which is what the English word acculturation really implies, but the process also necessarily involves the loss or uprooting of the previous culture which could be defined as a deculturation. In addition it carries the idea of the consequent creation of new cultural phenomena which could be called neoculturation. (Ortiz: 1947, 102-3)

However, acculturation is an essential and central part to Ortiz' theory. Looking at phases two and three it is evident that acculturation or even assimilation is the key to survival in the presence of the dominant group.

were in fact typically subjected to systematic discrimination and racial segregation in everyday life. In times and places where Mexicans were allotted white status, they were permitted to intermarry with what today are termed "non-Hispanic whites", though social customs typically only approved of such marriages if the Mexican partner was not of any discernable indigenous heritage. For further information on the "white" status of Mexicans in the US see Sheridan, Clare, *Another White Race: "Mexican Americans and the Paradox of Whiteness in Jury Selection* in: *Law and History Review*, Spring 2003

⁵⁴ See Spitta, Silvia, *Between Two Waters: Narratives of Transculturation in Latin America* (Texas A&M: UP, 1995) 4

The process of transculturation cannot work without assimilation at a certain point during the relationship between dominant and subjugated group. Ortiz himself thought it necessary for the suppressed group to adapt to and to imitate the dominant group and to deny their color during the phases of accommodation and adaptation. Therefore, Ortiz' model seems to propose a cultural "whitening" of the subjugated group and turns his theory into a homogenizing model which claims to include diverse cultural elements.

This claim is a contradiction to the spontaneity and dynamics which he saw at work in this model. In the end, this model calls for the formation of a new culture carried out spontaneously and dynamically by all diverse cultures in the nation but seems to reduce it to an intellectual project for a minority who promote assimilation to the culture of the dominant group rather than a transculturation. However, when reading Ortiz' text where he explains the theory by the social and economic dynamics which result from the production of tobacco and sugar in Cuba, a space beyond assimilation becomes visible and the criticism of cultural "whitening" needs to be rejected. Throughout the text of *Cuban Counterpoint* the contrasts of sugar and tobacco are presented as a set of oppositions, for example tradition/modernity, masculine/feminine, national independence/foreign intervention, generates middle classes/polarizes classes.

However, tobacco in the text is linked to the native (indigenous plant), to the European (cultivated by white holders) and to the uniquely Cuban (as transcultural product). Therefore, the theory describes binary positions which result in assimilation or resistance as well as the in-between two cultures and the creation of a new, hybrid culture. As stated above, this flexibility in describing possible identity formations makes this theory a useful model to explain the formations of national and cultural identities when two cultures encounter each other via conquering or immigration.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ For more details on the metaphorical constructs in the text describing alignments that destabilize notions of fixed polarity see Malinowski, Bronislaw in *Cuban Counterpoint* (Alfred A. Knopf: 1947), introduction

Ortiz created the term transculturation to describe the dynamics at work in Cuba at the time. Cuba and the Antilles, more generally, are a special phenomenon in Latin America as their indigenous population was wiped out in the early years of the conquest. Cuba and the Antille's population now consist mainly of immigrants. According to Spitta this is a significant difference from most other countries in the world as Ortiz' model of transculturation can only be situated in such a context. However, Ortiz claimed that his theory could explain any encounter between two cultures.

For this text I read Chicano literature with the aim to point out that the cultural development of one people according to Ortiz' model of transculturation can also be detected in the narrations and autobiographies which have been written by Chicano authors. The cultural and social development of Chicanos/as in Chicano/a literature corresponds with the cultural development in Ortiz' model of transculturation. From the first wave of immigration up to today the formation of the Chicano people has gone through a phase of hostility when they first entered the US after the Mexican-American war and adapted to the American culture until they finally reached a phase of self-assertion during the Chicano Movement. The phase of integration was also initiated by an intellectual minority and is still in process as the Chicanos are still perceived as a threat by parts of the American society.⁵⁶ The refusal and fear of the other is strong on both sides and is the reason for the failed integration up to now.

The concept of transculturation is taken on and further developed by Mary Louise Pratt. Whereas Ortiz describes the process by which a conquered people select whatever aspect of the dominant culture they will accept she proposes in her essay "The Arts of the Contact Zone"

⁵⁶ Samuel P. Huntington reveals his fear of Chicanos as a threat for American society in the article "The Hispanic Challenge" in *Foreign Policy* (Spring 2004)

that transculturation does not only take place in the social places where disparate cultures cross each other: this model can be extended to everyday situations such as the classroom or the playground. She recounts the interactions between different groups of people and defines the contact zone as

Social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination...like colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out across the globe today.
(Pratt, 1992: 4)

In her text, Pratt manages to incorporate the ideas of the contact zone and transculturation and thus shows the dynamics of interaction between different social groups. She is able to explain both concepts in detail as she can draw on examples from her everyday life. In the following, I will elaborate on the different concepts introduced in her work.

Her employment of the contact zone depicts the varieties and diversity in the interaction of human beings. Contact zones are places in a society where different groups interact in various ways. The places of interaction can be everyday places such as a shopping mall or a classroom. All places have in common that there is often an asymmetrical relation of power, meaning that one group dominates the other. The kind of arguments between the respective groups can take place on a cultural, national, educational or linguistic level. As an example of this process she tells the story of Guaman Poma, an indigenous Andean who adopted Christianity and took on a position as a Spanish colonial administrator. This story reveals that during the event of one country conquering another contact zone was formed where two cultures clashed and interacted. This example shows that she understands contact between cultures as an essential part for the process of cultural subject formation. She sees cultural contact as a chance for adaptation, transformation and exchange.

Pratt states

Contact zone is an attempt to invoke the spatial and temporal co-presence of subjects previously separated by geographical and historical disjuncture, and whose trajectories now intersect. By using the term contact I foreground the interactive, improvisational dimensions of colonial encounters so easily ignored or suppressed by diffusionist accounts of conquest and domination. A contact perspective emphasizes how subjects are constituted in and by their relations to each other. (Pratt, 1992:7)

Her example of conquest creating contact zones can be applied to the history of the Native population of the American South West as we will see later.

In her essay, Mary Louise Pratt also defines the term transculturation with reference to Fernando Ortiz' understanding of the term.

Ethnographers have used this term to describe how subordinated groups select and invent from materials transmitted by a dominant or metropolitan culture. While subjugated people cannot readily control what emanates from the dominant culture, they do determine to varying extents what they absorb into their own, and what they use it for. Transculturation is a phenomenon of the contact zone. (Pratt, 1992, 6)

Her idea of this process is very similar to that of Ortiz. However, she puts the selection from dominant cultures in a more modern context. The example she uses in her essay to explain this process is taken from everyday life in Florida. She describes how the Cubans in Miami have kept their own heritage but have adapted and thus improved their living conditions. Therefore, transculturation describes the interactions between two different cultures, in which one culture preserves its own heritage while simultaneously adapting to selected ways of life in order to benefit from them.

Ortiz and Pratt describe transculturation as a cultural interaction between two different cultures which takes place in a contact zone. However, for Pratt transculturation is a dual process describing the encounter of different cultures in so-called contact zones where one culture influences the other. In these contact zones the subordinate groups select aspects of the dominant culture in order to improve their lives in the dominant society at first and later to create a new culture in this society. She has therefore employed Ortiz' understanding of the term but added a spatial dimension to it. Pratt also developed Ortiz' theory by locating these contact zones in- and outside of the everyday public spaces. For her, the process of transculturation is not limited to colonies as she discusses the effects on and in the metropolis. Thus she "makes transculturation a concept central to discussions of cosmopolitan culture and globalization."⁵⁷

Comparing Ortiz' and Pratt's employment of the concept of transculturation a major difference can be detected. Ortiz understands transculturation as a cultural struggle which ends in the integration of the suppressed into the dominant society. Pratt, however, sees transculturation as a struggle between two cultures which ends in hybridization and the formation of a new culture. Whereas Ortiz' clearly defines five phases on the way to a new identity Pratt does not look at the various stages in identity formation. She describes the exchange of cultures as a struggle but involves both sides in this struggle. Ortiz, however, describes the process of transculturation as a development from clash over assimilation to integration. Although he considers the possibility of hybridization in *Cuban Counterpoint*, he describes assimilation as one core phase while transgressing cultural borders. Therefore, he stresses the fact that the integration of colonized subjects is not an equal cultural exchange ending in a new culture, but to a large extent an adaptation of the dominant culture in order to integrate.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ For a definition of the term transculturation see Hawley, John Charles, *Encyclopaedia of Postcolonial Studies*, (Connecticut: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2001) 437

⁵⁸ See Ortiz, Fernando, *Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco and Sugar* (Durham: Duke UP, 1995), introduction

Ortiz and Pratt both fail to discuss the emotional nature of transculturation. Transculturation is also a personal struggle by which individuals choose which aspects from the dominant culture they will accept. Often this decision is not made voluntarily but due to essential needs. Even if the selection process takes place willingly, people have to give up some aspects of their own culture and cope with that loss.

In the next chapters I will show how the process of transculturation is presented in novels written by Chicanos. All novels deal with different aspects of transculturation. *George Washington Gomez* by Americo Paredes depicts the first clash of two cultures in a contact zone and describes the ensuing emotional struggles. The novel *Chicano* by Richard Vasquez is a family saga which describes phases one to four of Ortiz' model of transculturation and shows the many aspects of a life in transgression as well as the economic forces which influence the formation of a cultural and national identity

3) A Clash of Cultures: *George Washington Gomez*

3.1) Introduction

In the novel *George Washington Gomez* the main character is born into the conflict between Seditonists and Texas Rangers carrying the burden to become a leader of his people. Throughout the novel his attempts to live up to this prediction are narrated and the influence of his peoples' hope is shown as well as the dominance of the Anglo-Texan forces on his formation of identity in the midst of a transcultural process. Significantly, the last part of the novel is called "A leader of his people", evaluating whether the prediction from the first chapter has come true. Therefore, the first and the last part of the novel function as a frame for the other three chapters. The three chapters in the middle of the novel narrate Gualinto's upbringing, coming of age, socialization and finally his education during the financial crisis in the 1930s.

Gualinto is born into a time and space of conflict. The aftermath of the Mexican-American war is clearly a stage of transculturation, as the physical war is over and both peoples have to find a way to live peacefully with each other. Gualinto's identity formation and his search for a place of belonging are the main focus of the story. In the first part of the novel his identity and fate are determined by his parents, followed by a struggle between the inferior and the dominant cultures and nations until he comes back to Jonesville with a seemingly fixed and stable identity in the last chapter. Therefore, the three mid-chapters describe how he finds his national and cultural identity between two cultures. However, Gualinto's development is only one major theme in the novel. The second important storyline is the life of Feliciano, Gualinto's uncle, who takes care of the family after Gualinto's father dies. His time as seditonist during the rebellion is described in the first chapter and followed by an account of his activities after Gumersindo's death. The reader is informed of his job as waiter at a *rinche* bar, his first grocery shop, and his retreat to his own farm during *la chilla*.⁵⁹

⁵⁹ "La Chilla" is the phrase characters in the novel use to comment on the slight value the Anglo authorities place on Mexican lives. Paredes translates it to squeal in English, 46

Both major characters in the novel undergo the process of transculturation in a contact zone and (re)form their identities in different and opposite ways. The imaginary village Jonesville-on-the-Grande serves as the contact zone, where Feliciano and Gualinto fight and negotiate with the dominant culture of the *rinches* in order to find, defend, transform or lose parts of their identity.⁶⁰ Feliciano is torn between the two cultures and shows ambivalence towards his superiors; on the one hand, he respects some of them and envies their power. On the other hand he scorns how they oppress him. His search for a balance between envy and respect vs. scorn and disdain form his own personal struggle during the process of transculturation.

Gualinto, however, is born into a conflict situation, struggling to find his place between the hopes of his people and the power displayed by the Texas Rangers. His naive position as a child and youth is expressed in the wish to join the seditionists and kill the *rinche*, showing clear nationalist tendencies at an early age. During the three chapters in the middle of the novel he is drawn much more to the Mexican culture and opposes the Anglo-Americans and their dominant culture. It is surprising how his story turns out at the end of the novel, as at first Gualinto seems to be drawn much more to the Mexican culture and ready to become a leader of his people. Throughout the novel he has fantasies in corrido fashion in which he fights the Anglo-Americans gaining land back that had been stolen from the Mexicans. However, he is the character in the novel that abandons almost his entire Mexican cultural heritage and becomes a spy for the dominant nation in order to keep illegal Mexican immigrants away from the US.

which means outcry. Using words like “la chilla” or “the squeal” reveals the disastrous effects the Depression had on Mexicans in the area and on the relations between Anglo-Texans and Mexican-Texans.

⁶⁰ See Heide, Markus, *Grenzüberschreibungen: Chicano Erzählliteratur und die Inszenierung von Kulturkontakt*, (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2004)

3.1.1) The Corrido As Form of Resistance: A Short Introduction

In the novel George Washington Gomez characteristics of the corrido, a ballad narrating the fight of simple Mexican-American men against Anglo-American forces can be detected. According to Americo Paredes the corrido came into existence at the end of the 1850s and “sing the feats of the first Mexican-American rebels against the North American government.” (Paredes, 1979:13)

The corrido exists as a song and in written form with a set rhythm and rhyme pattern. The corrido is a ballad of eight-syllable, four-line stanzas sung to a simple tune in fast waltz time. The corrido is a song for men and usually not sung by women, also due to the topics covered in the songs which often relate to war experiences. During the Mexican Revolution (1910-1930), for example, these songs were often heard in campaigns. However, they were also sung on the migrant workers' journeys to the fields. Today, they can still be listened to on the radio although some critics have pronounced the corrido to be dead. A new form of the corrido, which has emerged over the last ten years, is the narcocorrido, the theme being drug trafficking on the border.

In its literary form the corrido is said to be a direct descendent of the romance, a Spanish ballad form that developed in the Middle Ages. Brought to the New World by Spanish conquistadors, it became a traditional form of storytelling. The corrido employs a four-line stanza form with an abcd rhyme pattern. Usually, the corrido narrates a story that affects everyone in the country or the region such as wars, natural disasters, rebellion and hero's deeds.⁶¹

⁶¹ See Dan W. Dickey, "Tejano Troubadours," *Texas Observer*, July 16, 1976. Dan W. Dickey, *The Kennedy Corridos: A Study of the Ballads of a Mexican American Hero* (Center for Mexican-American Studies, University of Texas at Austin, 1978) for a detailed coverage of the corrido in Texas, see Vicente T. Mendoza, *El corrido mexicano* (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1954) for a general description

A special type of corrido is the border corrido. It came into existence during the Mexican-American War, which was ended with the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848. The corrido in its form as a derivation from the romance began to disappear in the South-Western States such as California due to the rising immigration of Anglo-American settlers. However, when the first Mexicans emigrated from Mexico, they reestablished the corrido with a focus on narrations about the border and the Mexican-American war as well as the Mexican Revolution. In Texas, the setting of Paredes' novels, the border corrido has a longer history than in other states due to the conflicts between Mexico and the US. This started in 1836 and ended with the surrender at Santa Anna in 1848, resulting in the colonization of the lower Rio Grande area by white *empresarios*. As Mexicans along the border were subjugated and disowned, more conflicts erupted between Mexicans and Anglo-Americans. Thus, these events provided further material for border corridos that were also sung as a form of resistance against the oppressors and their culture.⁶² Paredes states that the borderers' "slow, dogged struggle against economic enslavement and the loss of their own identity was the most important factor in the development of a distinct local balladry."⁶³

At the height of the cultural conflicts between Mexican-Americans and Anglo-Americans between 1890 and 1910, the border corrido was a widely spread form of resistance against the Anglos by narrating history according to their Mexican heritage. Paredes narrates the life of the most famous corrido hero Gregorio Cortez⁶⁴ in his novel *With a Pistol in his*

⁶²See Mendoza, Vicente T., *Lírica narrativa de México: El Corrido* (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas, 1964). Américo Paredes, *A Texas-Mexican Cancionero: Folksongs of the Lower Border* (Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1976).

⁶³ See Paredes, Américo *Ballads of the Lower Border* (M.A. thesis, University of Texas, 1953).

⁶⁴ According to Dan W. Dickey the ballads portray Gregorio Cortez as a peaceful Mexican living in South Texas at the turn of the century despite his notoriety among South Texas Anglos. When Cortez's brother is shot, allegedly for no good reason, Cortez is pursued over South Texas by as many as 300 *rinches*, or Texas Rangers. Following the pattern, the corridos picture Cortez goaded into action, fighting against "outsiders"

*Hand*⁶⁵ and also incorporates elements from the corrido in his novel *George Washington Gomez*. Whereas he includes ballads in the former novel⁶⁶, he assigns typical corrido hero characteristics to the figures in the latter novel. George as well as most other men in his family reminds the reader of a corrido hero by trying to resist to Anglo-American culture and fighting the Texas Rangers.

In the beginning of the 20th century the conflicts along the border ceased to be a major concern and people living in this area began to transgress cultural borders. This process of transculturation was facilitated by improved means of communications and the opportunity to travel more easily and faster. The corrido could be seen on both sides of the border in those times, as the corrido in Mexico was upheld during the Mexican Revolution and on the other side of the border the increased demand of cheap labor caused many Mexicans to immigrate to the US or migrate back and forth between the countries. As the developing agribusiness in Texas was pulling an increasing number of former Texas-Mexican peasants into migrant farm work, the corridos told the life of these migrant workers. Placed at the margin and at the bottom of society, Mexican farm workers composed hundreds of corridos and sang about bad working conditions, deprivation, poverty and the hopelessness of the Texas-Mexican migrant agricultural worker.

After WWII, corridos mainly dealt with smuggling or shootings. The commercialized corrido experienced another revival after the assassination of Kennedy in 1964, which continued well into the 70s. This was due to the Chicano Movement, when the corrido narrated the lives and legends of the Chicano leaders and ideals of economic justice, equal education opportunities and cultural pride.⁶⁷ From the 1970s and

for his own and the people's independence.

⁶⁵ Paredes, Americo, *With His Pistol in His Hand: A Border Ballad and Its Hero* (Austin: U of Texas P, 1958).

⁶⁶ See Paredes, Americo, *El Corrido de Gregorio Cortez: A Ballad of Border Conflict* (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Texas, 1956)

⁶⁷ See Simmons, Merle, *The Mexican Corrido as a Source of an Interpretive Study of Modern Mexico, 1870–1950* (Bloomington: U of Indiana P, 1957).

into the twenty-first century the biggest factor in corridos in Texas, across the southwestern United States and in northern Mexico was the rise of the genre of narcocorridos. These corridos describe the profits and crimes of drug dealers and smugglers, a trend which is now more popular than ever.⁶⁸

Paredes, the preeminent scholar of the corrido of the lower Rio Grande border area, employs strategies of the border corrido in his novel *George Washington Gomez*. Most male characters in the novel try to live up to the corrido tradition but fail miserably except for George's uncle Lupe, who remains a passionate guerilla fighter. In this novel, Paredes seems to establish the form of an anti-corrido in order to correspond to Gumersindo's wish to unite the Mexican-Americans and Anglo-Americans, forget the history of bloody conflicts and approach one another. The fact that George, who will be completely assimilated in the end, kills Lupe conveys the message that in this novel the Anglo-American culture and dominance cannot be fought. Paredes, as I will show later, created a heterogeneous text mixing elements of the bildungsroman and the corrido as well as mixing English and Spanish. However, the American elements seem to rule over the Spanish elements as the novel is written in English and only interlaced with Spanish; the narration according to the genre of the bildungsroman is finished with the assimilation and rise of George whereas the tradition of the corrido is not fulfilled. The failure to fulfill the typical role of a corrido hero by resisting to the dominant Anglo-American forces makes the text an anti-corrido, which I will also explain in a later section in the text in more detail.

⁶⁸Wald, Elijah, *Narcocorrido: A Journey into the Music of Drugs, Guns and Guerillas* (New York: Rayo / Harper Collins, 2001).

3.1.2) Jonesville-on-the-Grande: Establishing a Contact Zone

The little village Jonesville-on-the-Grande and the region of South-Texas function as transcultural setting, as a contact zone for Anglo-Texans and Mexico-Texans and their respective cultures. The narrator tells the reader in various excursions in the novel that the contact zone in the text was created by US expansion and the treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo in 1848 as one result of the Mexican-American war. In the beginning of the second part of the story he reports

Early in the eighteenth century, before there was a United States and when Philadelphia was a little colonial town, Morelos was founded on the south bank of the river [...] Then came the *comanches* and the *yanquis*. And so it came to pass that one day in 1846 an army of the United States was encamped on the north bank of the river which different Hispanic explorers had given different names: Río de las Palmas, Río Grande del Norte, Río Bravo. The army was preparing to push southward toward the heart of Mexico. (Paredes, 1990:35)

The narrator describes the conquest of Mexico as an eventual and normal act that is not surprising or in any way brutal and oppressive. The phrase “It came to pass” is used in children’s stories or fairy tales and adds harmlessness and quietude to the colonization as if the narrator himself believed that this conquering was a manifest destiny and should not be opposed. His tone during this introduction to the shaping of US territory is reminiscent of a general writing a log. Even later in the text when he describes the process of modernizing the American West and the population by white Anglo settlers as dire consequences of the lost battle, he does so in a serious but in no way empathetic manner:

[...] Mexicans were pushed out of cattle raising into hard manual labor. It was then also that Jonesville-on-the-Grande came to have a Mexican section of town [...] (Paredes, 1990:36)

These negative consequences of the Mexican-American war turn the setting into one of conflict and opposition, but also leave room for possible solutions. The population of the South West is directly linked by the Americans to a marginalization and exploitation of Mexicans. In the new social, cultural and political order their place is at the bottom of society and they become menial laborers for America's benefit. However, assimilation could also improve their living conditions and pave the way to a successful life in this new socio-political order.

According to Pratt's model, a village like Jonesville-on-the-Grande on the border in the South West serves as a place for contact, transformation and cultural exchange. Here, the first phase of cultural clash during the process of transculturation is located and crucially changes the social order and the lives of the Mexican population. A mixture of cultures due to transculturation can be expected as well as resistance and assimilation to the conquerors' culture and the new national boundaries. The narrator in the novel proposes different outcomes for the characters undergoing this change of power relations and shows the effects of such changes on the formation of identity for the various characters.

3.2) Form as Manifestation of Transculturation

The eventual mixture of Mexican and American culture as a result of the invasion of Mexico can also be seen in the form of the novel. The novel *George Washington Gomez* can be aligned with various narrative forms and shows aspects of different genres. Paredes was clearly influenced by American realism and the corrido. His novel can be read as a bildungsroman or as social protest novel.⁶⁹ Roland Barthes says in *The*

⁶⁹ The corrido is a Mexican American ballad which celebrates the resistance of simple Mexican American men against the oppression of Anglo-Americans. The bildungsroman, however, is the paradigmatic form for representing the processes through which European and US subjects accommodate themselves to their position in society. Paredes uses the two culturally different narratives in order to structure the text and form the protagonist's identity as hybrid. On the corrido's paradigmatic status see

Death of the Author that a text composed by an author is “a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centers of cultures [...] a multidimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash“⁷⁰. I will discuss these cultural varieties of form which express the intersection of different cultures in detail and show that the text itself is a documentation of transculturation.

Jose David Saldivar called George Washington Gomez a “historical bildungsroman.”⁷¹ History is omnipresent in the novel and plays an important role in the characters’ developments as it is the main reason for the unchangeable fate of the Mexican community. While the novel presents an ever-present historical background, the reader also learns about Gualinto’s life from birth to adulthood, with a focus on his education and his social integration.

However, the story is not always linear. At some points the narration is interrupted by a detailed account of history, by newspaper articles or corridos. It seems as if Paredes tried to make the reader aware of the situation of the Mexican people and to create an authentic picture of the important events in their history. When the narrator tells the reader about the disastrous effects the Mexican-American war had on the Mexican population, he clearly criticizes the Anglo-Americans and makes the voice of his people heard. In the fourth chapter Paredes uses a

Ramon Saldivar, *Chicano Narrative: The Dialectics of Difference* (Madison: Wisconsin UP, 1990), 32; on the bildungsroman as a narrative as social accommodation see Franco Moretti, *The Way of the World: The Bildungsroman in European Culture* (New York: Verso, 2000)

⁷⁰ see Barthes, Roland, “Death of an Author”, *Image, Music, Text* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977)

⁷¹ Jose David Saldivar also suggested reading GWG in a tradition of „frontier modernism“. Both terms convey the modernism of Paredes’s text as a historical bildungsroman combines the history of Mexicans in the US and the accommodation of a Mexican character in social reality simultaneously. Reading GWG in tradition of frontier modernism also implies a hybrid text as the corrido, which is the traditional frontier narrative becomes modern by intersecting it with elements from the bildungsroman. For further information on this subject see Saldivar, Jose, *Border Matters: Remapping American Cultural Studies* (California: UP, 1997), 210

newspaper article and long, disconnected dialogues to demonstrate how difficult the situation for his people is during the economic crisis. The various impacts of the Depression on the Mexicans in Texas are narrated in short subchapters which begin with the words “*La Chilla*”.

The dialogue by speakers, which are not familiar to the reader, are a unique occurrence in the text and create confusion and a desperate hectic tone, stressing the fact that the Great Depression affected everyone in the Delta and polarized society even further:

“It’s nice of you to give me a chance at the job, with so many people looking for work.”

“My boy, I prefer Latin Americans, always. More dependable, more conscientious, harder workers...”

“And the - the wages?”

“Three dollars a week...”

“I’m a friend of Johnny Mize’s. You hired him last week at eight dollars.”

“You know you can’t expect to make as much as Johnny Mize. His standard of living is higher than yours. He needs more money to live on. You can do with less.”

“But, Mr. Peeble, why should I do with less?”

“Everybody knows that a Mexican family can live on two dollars a week...”

Here, the discrimination of Mexicans is stressed. The scene also alludes to the conflict, which is created by hiring Mexicans at cheaper wages instead of Anglos. A further polarization of society due to the Depression is to be expected. Anti-Mexican sentiments grow indeed and are displayed in various events during *la chilla*. The reader is informed about countless incidents of violence, which are seemingly randomly placed in the course of the narration without any relevance for the plot of the story.

In chapter four the narrator prepares the reader for the change in style by explaining

For some time, the newspapers have been talking of strange things happening in the North. Men were blowing out their brains in Chicago. In New York City they were jumping out of tall buildings and smearing themselves all over the pavement below [...] but in Texas [...] things seemed to be normal [...] and in due time Depression came.” (Paredes, 1990:195)

The narrator mentions the newspaper articles, which will appear later in the text, reporting the effects of the Depression on people in the North of the US. Having described how the Depression affected men in the North, he creates suspense on how the Depression would affect the people, especially the Mexicans in Texas. One of the consequences of the Depression is the enhanced pursuit of immigration violations. The reader can witness this effect of *la chilla* by following the news:

Juvenito Grajales, 42, was sentenced to three years at the FTI today on a charge of habitual violence of American immigration laws. The FTI, still another alphabetical term, is the Farm Type Institution. There is one at La Tuna built especially to take care of habitual violators of the immigration laws. (Paredes, 1990, 198)

The newspaper article further describes the reasons for Grajales' incarceration and supposed mistreatment by arresting officers. The tone of the article is neutral and objective, making this event appear a regular occurrence in the Delta. The explanation for the increased deportation and imprisonment of immigration violators is also given by the narrator in the following short passage by saying that “all competes for the fluffy, desperately light handful in the long, long rows. Whole families turn out [...] so they can pick enough with their combined efforts to eat that day.” (Paredes, 1990: 198) The competition for work is thus provided as reason for the hunt after illegally and legally residing Mexicans as they take the needed work away from the Anglos.

Unassigned direct speech, newspaper articles, poems and songs are used as ways of expressing the situation for the Mexicans during the financial turbulences. The ruptures of the text provide the reader with a better understanding of the endurences and hardships of the Mexican people under Anglo domination. Therefore, these elements could be seen as influences of the social protest novel of the time. Breaking the linearity of a typical *bildungsroman* with these aspects, Paredes creates a hybrid form of narration.⁷²

The transcultural aspects in the form of the novel can be detected in Paredes' use of the corrido on the one hand and American realism on the other. One can see that George Washington Gomez is aligned with literary realism in the novel's first chapter. The precise description of the local surroundings on "a morning late in June" and the detailed account of the two Texas rangers appearing on the scene provide the reader with a complete picture of the setting and the characters. He narrates:

It was a morning late in June. The flat, salty *llano* spread as far as the eye could see ahead and to the right. To the left it was bordered by the chaparral, which encroached upon the flats in an irregular, wavering line. (Paredes: 1990, 9)

The encroaching chaparral can be read as a metaphor for the steady conquest of the Mexican land by the Americans. The border is described as irregular and wavering, meaning that Mexican resistance is not solid and is likely to be overcome. The reader is also aware of the fact that an irregular borderline will be turned into a regular one by cutting down the bushes which mark this irregular border. In this scene the landscape is presented as idyllic and as friendly towards the Mexicans as the chaparral represents a place of retreat for them. In the chaparral the Americans cannot see the Mexicans so they can hide from suppression

⁷² See Heide, Markus, *Grenzüberschreibungen: Chicano Erzählliteratur und die Inszenierung von Kulturkontakt* (Heidelberg: Winter, 2004) for further information on this topic

and the continuing conquest of their land. Additionally, they are not affected by industrialization and the destruction of their land, but have a space in the midst of these bushes allowing them to live life in the traditional sense without persecution by American forces.

The importance of this safe haven becomes even clearer when realizing the consequences of its disappearance:

The chaparral had been the Mexicotexan's guarantee of freedom. While it existed, it served as a refuge to the ranchero fleeing from an alien law. The chaparral and the flats have made cattle-raising possible; and even the small farmers - their little parcels of land tucked deep in the brush - has been comparatively independent. But the American had begun to develop the land. He had it cleared and made it into cotton fields, into citrus orchards and towns. And it was the Mexicotexans brown arms which felled the trees. He wielded the machetes against the smaller brush and strained his back pulling tree stumps out of the ground. For this he got enough to eat for the day and the promise of more of the same tomorrow (Paredes, 1990, 42)

In this scene the metaphor is slightly changed as the chaparral does not stand for a place of retreat any more, but for the constant loss of Mexican culture and land and the progress of industrialization and, if taking this thought further, for globalization. The eroding of the bushes and the installation of the railroads symbolizes the beginning of industrialization for this area foreshadowing the role of the Mexicans as laborers during this process. The creation of plantations also metaphorically seals the fate of the Mexicans as fruit or cotton pickers placing them at the bottom of the new social order in this now American land. The disappearance of the chaparral finally eliminates the last piece of land, where Mexicans could undermine the suppression by the Americans stressing American dominance. The cultural and social dominance, driven by Manifest Destiny, seems to be rightfully in place

and the Mexicans are presented as powerless against this god-given power and fate.

The new owners of this piece of land are introduced to the reader in the beginning of the novel:

Along the edge of the chaparral wound the road, and down the road four Texas Rangers were riding. Their horses' hooves stirred the flour-fine dust, and it rose and covered their beards, penetrated down their shirt collars despite the blue bandanas around their necks, lay in a thin film on their rifle-stocks and the big handles of their revolvers. One was a middle-aged man with a John Brown beard; two were sour-looking hardcases in their thirties; the fourth was a boy in his teens, with more dust than beard upon his face. (Paredes, 1990:9)

The narrator paints a panoramic scene and comes to a close-up of the Texas Rangers indicating at the same time that they are the source of problems, which are about to erupt. Seeing them "down the road" indicates the future dominance of the Texas rangers in this formerly Mexican land. He contrasts the beautiful landscape of what used to be Mexico with the violence of the rangers, symbolized by their weapons.

The Texas Rangers are described as a group of uncultivated, impulsive villains and ridiculed at the same time. Calling them "sour-looking hardcases" questions their power and authority, blending in well with the fact that the youngest of them has not grown a beard yet. However, this slight ridicule is contrasted by the weapons and the blue bandanas. The description reminds the reader of Wild West cowboys who tyrannized whole cities and presents the rangers as violent and primitive. The John-Brown beard emphasizes the fact that these Texas Rangers are cold blooded killers enacting the words of John Brown himself: "These men all talk. What we need is action-action."⁷³ It is clear they will not

⁷³ Rhodes, James Ford, *History of the United States from the Compromise of 1850*,

try to transgress cultural borders in order to get to know the other side, but that they will raid and kill everyone who looks different from themselves. By describing this scene in realist fashion, the reader is made aware from the very beginning that the Anglos disturb the peace in the region.

Paredes also uses the tradition of the border corrido as a contrast in his novel. The border corrido is a kind of ballad that emerged along the Texas-Mexico border during the nineteenth century. Its theme is the border conflict between various fighting groups and the hero is the man violently fighting for his rights. The corrido creates a macho image of the Mexican man which is also taken up by Paredes in this novel.⁷⁴ However, the novel could be read as an anti-corrido as well⁷⁵, as Feliciano learns to live in the Anglo world and benefits from it. Even though he maintains his Mexican identity and refuses to assimilate, he lives against the corrido tradition by apparent acculturation. Gualinto also tries to live like the corrido heroes but needs to learn that corridos are a part of his fantasy never to become reality.

He learns to hate the *rinches* and the gringos early in his childhood and is haunted by the recurring dream “to reconquer all the territory west of the Mississippi River and recover Florida as well.” However, very late in the novel he decides to join the US army and to assimilate. So he does not follow the corrido tradition but actively turns against it by adopting

(Harvard: Harper & Brothers, 1892) 385.

⁷⁴ The border corrido describes a Mexican hero who fights against the oppression by US forces. Paredes, however, uses the corrido element to emasculate his characters. Gumersindo as well as Feliciano do not raise Gualinto in the Mexican tradition, which contradicts the corrido tradition, as Gualinto should have continued to pass on the Mexican culture. However, both men consciously refuse to teach him US-Mexican history as well as the Mexican customs and traditions. In this sense, they obey their oppressors and do not act according to the corrido tradition. For further information on the reception of GWG as anti-corrido see Sorensen in *American Literature*, vol.80, 2008.

⁷⁵ See Sorensen, Self, “The Anti-Corrido of George Washington Gomez,” *American Literature*, vol.80 (2008)

the culture of the dominant group. The corrido remains part of his fantasy and needs to yield to the reality of assimilation as only opportunity to become a part of US culture. Therefore, *George Washington Gomez* could be read as a criticism of the corrido and a turn towards American culture. Nevertheless, Paredes employs elements from the corrido in his novel and thus includes a part of Mexican culture in the text.

The novel *George Washington Gomez* is heterogeneous as it includes elements from the bildungsroman, the historical novel and the social protest novel. This heterogeneity turns the novel itself into a contact zone, a written contact zone, where Mexican elements of storytelling meet the American conventions of narration. Paredes presents a hybrid text, which is the result of selecting from two different cultures and their way of telling stories. He forms a new narration with these various elements, which is already hinted at in the subtitle of the novel “A Mexico-Texan Novel.”

This attempt to form a new Mexican-American tradition of narration can also be derived from his use of the two different languages. The novel is written in English, the language of the oppressor, foreshadowing Gualinto’s assimilation. The predominant use of the English language and the rare use of Spanish in the text could be seen as a form of subliminal competition, like the competition between Rangers and Seditonists, between Mexican community and dominant culture, between Gualinto and George Washington. The Spanish as well as the corrido fantasies remain private and obscure in the novel, whereas the English and the assimilation, and in Feliciano’s case resistance, to the dominant culture are public.

However, the adoption of the dominant English language, juxtaposed with Spanish language elements, could also be seen as the most obvious sign of transculturation in the form of the novel. Paredes brings in Spanish words and sentences or introduces the reader to Spanglish terms, which underline the point of trying to create a new form of narrative. Paredes interweaves the language of the dominant group with

the language of his people to create a text that encompasses both cultures.

Paredes, who grew up in the border region of Brownsville, Texas, had the transcultural experience of living between two cultures. It could be said that this Mexican-American novel is the result of the author's process of transculturation. Therefore, he is able to aesthetically present a possible consequence of this process in his writing by including American and Mexican elements in his text and forming a new kind of narrative.

3.3) From Rebellion to Compromise

The title of the story *George Washington Gomez* already hints at central topics of the novel. The name expresses conflict, hybridity, and transculturation and is a symbol for important historical events and cultural contacts between Mexico and the United States. However, the contact with America is not only a literary discourse but also an aesthetic topic due to the name's symbolic function.

The name also represents a clash of two cultures, as one part of the name is borrowed from a famous American and the other part is Mexican. Like in *Cuban Counterpoint*, where tobacco represents the indigenous and native and sugar represents the imperial, the name George Washington Gomez represents on the one hand the dominating Americanness and on the other hand a native, traditional Mexicanness. These tensions and the process of coping with these tensions and conflicts are narrated in the novel. The process of transculturation, the clash of cultures and the following creation of a new culture and a new place of belonging are already visible in the three words of the novel's title.

However, this clash of differences in the tension between the first name and the last prepare the reader not only for a cultural fight and struggle but also create the possibility of a culturally hybrid space⁷⁶, a place where two cultures mingle and form a new culture with which identification is possible. Both protagonists, Gualinto and Feliciano, are affected by the humiliating and violent behavior of the Americans but each of them reacts differently to these forces. In this part of the chapter I will focus on Feliciano, who experiences the beginnings of war, discrimination and institutional racism, but is forced to transgress cultural borders for the benefit of his nephew Gualinto. He is torn between resistance and reconciliation as he experiences suppression as well as assistance from the Americans. Like every character in the novel he finds his identity in the cultural and political struggle at the end of the text.

In the beginning of the novel the Mexicans have been largely dispossessed and the dominant forces have been concentrated in the paramilitary forces of the Texas Rangers, called *rinches*. Institutional Racism and segregation have been established and the reader is less aware of the cultural problems between Anglo-Texans and Mexico-Texans as the stage of rebellion is over and US nationalism has successfully domesticated the border. The imperialist violence, with which the Anglo-Texans came to possess the land, is not mentioned except in the stories Feliciano tells Gualinto later in the novel.

⁷⁶ In *Cuban Counterpoint*, Ortiz situates the transcultural process within the social and economic dynamics that arise out of the production of sugar and tobacco. Tobacco is the indigenous, dark crop representing tradition whereas sugar is the imported white product which stands for foreignness. These two counterpoints create the tension which characterizes Cuban culture. The name George Washington Gomez also creates a tension between the traditional Mexican, Gomes and the American George Washington. The tension and between the names is supposed to create a new culture made out of elements from the Mexican as well as from the American culture and end the tension between the oppressor and oppressed. See Spitta (Texas A&M: UP, 1995), 4

Therefore, a criticism of the imperialist Mexico-Texan US subject is foreclosed, as the events are simply not narrated, except for a brief account of Gumersindo's death in the first chapter. Gualinto is born into the final stage of these struggles and the title of the first part, "The Seditious", tells the reader that he is born into the time when guerilla bands fought in a last major uprising of "the corrido century". The novel varies between accounts of Gualinto's early childhood and stories about the confrontation between Texas Rangers and Gumersindo, Feliciano, and Lupe. Every one of those three men takes a crucial position in the rebellious struggle, the world of the corrido and in the consequential attitude toward the dominant American force. Feliciano supports the seditionists because he wants social justice but his active part is short. Gumersindo is an outsider, a *fuereno*, who comes to the border because he seeks stability. Lupe is the only one of the three who fights actively against the Texas Rangers.

These triangular positions on the subject of rebellion against a colonizer show already that the monolithic conception of a Mexican-American identity is fragmented. The tension between the two peoples is created through these three very different positions toward the oppressor. It also creates expectations for a new culture, which could arise from the fragmented and torn Mexican-American identity formation. The tension between different peoples which Ortiz describes in *Cuban Counterpoint* is mirrored in the disunity of the Mexican people as well as in the unequal balance of power between Mexicans and Americans. These tensions will lead to the formation of a new culture, which will always be in flux due to the perpetual process of transculturation. In *George Washington Gomez*, however, this new culture is not yet realized as the text describes the first and second phase of the transcultural process that results in resistance interpreted as opportunity because the characters are presented with the chance to mediate between both cultures in spite of the tenuous relationship.

The novel begins with various encounters between a band of Rangers, Lupe and Gumersindo. One particular episode makes Lupe appear in a quasi-heroic light as four rangers don't exercise one-sided violence

against him and an unarmed driver, but let him pass unharmed, while recounting his previous misdeeds and showing their respect for him. He plays an active part in the confrontation with the Rangers, whereas Gumersindo stands by silently while the doctor vouches for him to be a good Mexican. Lupe and Gumersindo represent two opposite sides in this conflict. Feliciano, however, lives between these poles. When he is first introduced in the text, he criticizes Gumersindo's assimilationist attitude.

The reader becomes aware of this widening ideological gap between the two men when they have to choose a name for the newborn child. In this scene, which I will analyze in detail in a later chapter, Gumersindo reveals his sympathy for the Anglo-Texans, whereas Feliciano voices his hatred towards the oppressors. Feliciano's anti-Texan attitude later leads him to join the guerilla bands because he feels if he were "out there with Lupe, shooting them the way they shot us", he wouldn't feel so distant from the conflicts waged in his country. He is convinced that fighting against the Texan invaders is a noble and necessary deed. Filled with the desire for revenge he embarks on the mission to fight the Texas Rangers with his brother's guerilla band. His obvious rejection of Americanism and the alignment with the guerilla bands place Feliciano within the corrido tradition. Feliciano seems to be the hero, who fights the oppressive intruders and tries to keep the American values from spreading. He seemingly refuses to select even the smallest part of American culture while reforming his identity in the contact zone but rather erects barriers between his Mexican culture and the gringo culture.

When he joins Lupe's band, however, he understands that the guerilla warfare is not constituted of noble heroes but rather cold-blooded murderers. In a very brutal scene, when Lupe reminds a fifteen-year old boy of how his parents were burned alive by the Rangers, Feliciano recognizes that this kind of warfare is not worth his support. His last conversation with Lupe during this incident characterizes both men and their attitude towards the Anglos:

Revenge is good, Lupe said mildly. "Remigio [...] will get at least one. And after that, what if he dies? His soul will be at peace."

"Don't talk to me like a preacher, said Feliciano in a tense whisper. "You're a beast, a beast with fangs and claws. All you want is blood - Remigio's, mine, everybody's!"

Lupe leaned carelessly against the mesquite and looked down at Feliciano. "And you," he said, "are a hypocrite [...] There was dirty work to be done, so you needed a bandit like me. For your lands and your liberty and your pure ideals. So you could all be presidents maybe, or ministers, or something. (Paredes, 1990: 26)

The two brothers could not be more different. Lupe is presented as a terrorist, who finds joy in killing Anglos and has found his destiny in doing so. The conquest of Mexico by the Anglos and the countless killings of Mexicans who, according to Lupe, were "butchered like sheep," (Paredes, 1990, 26) seems to have evoked an endless desire for revenge in him. Comparing them to sheep he regards the Mexicans as innocent and vulnerable and assigns the role of the wolf to the Americans who brutally take lives. The killing of Anglos seems to give Lupe's life meaning and reassures him that he is needed in order to give the Mexican people a future and get back their lands. In contrast to his brother Feliciano Lupe understands that war is necessary to change the situation for Mexicans in this country. Feliciano on the other hand does not want to see this fact. He regards his brother's killings as beastly and not necessary. From the beginning he is torn between the hatred he feels for the Anglos and his cowardice to actually fight against them. This tension within him will allow him to live between the two cultures later in his life.

Not much later in the novel, however, Feliciano is forced to change his anti-American sentiments. When Rangers mortally wound Gumersindo, he demands of Feliciano to break the chain of telling corridos about Anglo oppression. Gumersindo doesn't want to continue the hatred between the two opposing sides but rather aims at a reconciliation,

which should be started by his newborn son, who is supposed to be a great man among the gringos.

Feliciano's acquiescence requires his disrupting of the anti-colonial *bildung* and passing on of traditional corridos. Therefore, instead of following the path of violent resistance, he emulates Gumersindo and allies himself with the dominating and powerful Anglos in order to further his own interests, to send Gualinto to college and provide for his sister's family. The event of Gumersindo's death is a crucial turning point in the story. Having been a rather instable character in the beginning of the novel, he now changes to one of the most stable male characters. In opposition to Gumersindo, who is torn between the two cultures and favoring the American side due to the naïve belief that favorable changes might happen for the Mexican population if the Mexicans adapted. Feliciano clearly defends his Mexican heritage and refuses to assimilate. Even though he becomes part of the political machine in Jonesville-on-the-Grande he never denies his Mexicanness. Feliciano seems to learn how to function in the community's economic and political system while maintaining his Mexican sense of self and may be aligned with the corrido tradition.

His transition from violence to alliance occurs when the family moves to Jonesville on the Grande, where Rangers may not enter the city but the institutions of segregation are firmly in place. This new form of domination requires a new form of resistance but when Feliciano enters Jonesville, his relationship towards Anglo-Texan formations of power is altered. As he is an attractive target for the rangers due to his brother's crimes against Americans, he aligns with the powerful Anglo-Texans in the city. Judge Robert Norris, the leader of the blue party, helps him and the family to escape a critical situation with Rangers. The neo-imperial order on the border is consolidated due to Judge Norris' ambition to change the social order in Jonesville.

Feliciano's initiation into Anglo society results in a change of power formation in the little village. Due to Judge Norris' help, Feliciano quickly becomes one of the leaders in Jonesville who enforce the newly

established social and political rules. His development is not commented on by the narrator. It is narrated in a rather neutral fashion.

Elections were coming soon, and the judge was worried about the chances of the Blues.

Feliciano was outfitted with a buggy drawn by a fine-looking sorrel gelding. His job was to visit every house in the Second and Third Wards and talk the men into letting the Blues buy their poll taxes [...] He was an earnest and fluent speaker. Taller than most Mexicans, he cut a good figure in his boots, cowboy hat and full mustache, which he had grown again [...] Once the canvassing for voters was over [...] it was Feliciano's job, with Juan Rubio's help [...] to arrange for and supervise these feasts. Sheriff Emilio Apodaca named him a special deputy at this time [...] (Paredes: 1990, 46-47)

Feliciano's success in the little village is told as an eventual sequence of events. The narrator conveys the message that once cultural borders are crossed economic success and social acceptance are unavoidable. However, Feliciano's success is also caused by selling out to white interests in order to survive in the little village. Further, it is remarkable that the narrator points out that he is taller than most Mexicans, looks good in his cowboy appearance and can speak fluently. It seems that a part of the transgressing cultural borders is acquiring a special look that makes Feliciano stand out from the mass of Mexicans and adds some whiteness to his appearance. Due to the changes in appearance it seems logical that Feliciano progresses quickly.

However, any emotion of joy or happiness is withheld from the reader. The narrator does not praise his social advancement or regret his turning away from the heroism of the border corrido. Instead, the narration presents the inadequacies and attractions for identity formation offered by each tradition. The narration becomes a hybrid genre borrowing from and criticizing both cultures simultaneously. Feliciano develops a seemingly hybrid identity but the reader has to eventually witness his

relapse into his Mexicanness and notice strong nationalist tendencies. This development from guerilla fighter to supporter of the dominant forces to Mexican nationalist blurs the demarcation between oppressor and hero and between neo-imperial order and anti-colonial resistance.

This blurring is also manifested in his change in identity. The internal struggles while changing from being a nationalist Mexico-Texan to an Anglo-Texan supporter are not narrated in the story. His change from corrido hero to ally happens eventually and voluntarily but it is clear that he only aligns with the Americans because of monetary benefits and his brother-in-law's pledge. At the very end of the story when Gualinto returns to the village and Feliciano finds out that he works for the border control his obvious disappointment in his nephew's occupation reveals his nationalist tendencies and ends his struggle for identity. Feliciano's transcultural experiment comes to an end at this very moment as he cannot hide his contempt for the Anglo-Texan oppressors or for his nephew. His changes in alignment and his transgression of cultural borders describe a circular development that is finished at the end of the novel when he falls back on the Mexican culture.

Two scenes in the text illustrate Feliciano's shift in alignment. When Gualinto develops tendencies of nationalism and strongly embraces the corrido, Feliciano tries to repress his nephew's urges unenthusiastically and uncomfortably:

But you shouldn't think of such things, much less talk about them," his uncle said softly. "It will only get you in bad. They are too many and too strong. You might as well try to stop a river with your fingers." He stopped and swallowed hard. "Other men have tried it ...many others have tried and they have all failed. All they did was make the gringos hate us more and treat us worse, and it's better to live in peace and forget the past." He finished his last words in a hurry and wiped his brow at the effort the declaration had cost him. (Paredes, 1990:300)

Explaining to Gualinto to not follow his instincts and kill as many of the *rinches* as he can is a big effort for Feliciano. It seems like his explanation to Gualinto has a physical impact on him as he needs to swallow hard and starts sweating. He denies his actual belief and adopts Gumersindo's point of view keeping the promise he gave his brother. Additionally, he announces that history between the two peoples is too big a hindrance as to approach each other. Feliciano seems to advise Gualinto to not try and bring the two nations and cultures together as it is a burden no one can carry. However, he cannot accept the adaptation to the American value and belief system. He feels sympathy towards some Anglos but his overall attitude towards the American people doesn't change. This becomes evident in the last chapter when Gualinto comes to visit the village after three years and Feliciano learns that he is a spy for the US army. He tells Gualinto:

You can turn me in if you want to, if it helps you to keep you in the good graces of your masters...Does your country include the Mexicans living in it? I'll tell you this is the time when I wish I believed in another life, in a life after death. (Paredes, 1990:302)

Feliciano accuses Gualinto of betraying his home country Mexico. He also makes clear that he never saw the US as a part of Mexico and never accepted the domination of the Anglos. It is remarkable that he assumes that Gualinto will turn the other Mexicans in to his master. Using the term master in this context implies a postcolonial setting and turns Gualinto into a *pochó*, a traitor as he is obviously assimilated and views his people with the same neglect as the oppressors.

Feliciano is deeply disappointed by the assimilation of Gualinto and the reader becomes aware of the fact that his loyalty to Mexico has never changed. His transcultural process was only temporary as it suited certain needs which Feliciano didn't define but his brother-in-law Gumersindo did. He selected from the American culture what he needed in order to survive, provide for his family and send Gualinto to college.

Therefore, transculturation in this case is no voluntary choice of elements from another culture. It is presented as just another form of oppression as the elements of culture which are adopted are not accepted but used to survive. So, Paredes uses the concept of transculturation as an attempt to create a new form of narration on the one hand, but on the other hand he seems to strongly criticize it as it helps oppressing people instead of furthering a cultural exchange. The process of transculturation is not only difficult for Feliciano, but also for many more characters in the novel as Paredes describes how barriers are built in the contact zone, which are almost impossible to overcome.

The creation of stereotypes and the incessant fight and preservation of power seem to inhibit a successful transcultural process.

3.4) Life in the Contact Zone: Erecting Borders

“Everyone creates stereotypes. We cannot function without them”.⁷⁷ Sander Gilman describes a phenomenon which is omnipresent in all societies and which is also present in the little community in Jonesville-on-the-Grande. Fear of the unknown is the driving factor when others are discriminated, excluded, humiliated and oppressed. This fear exists on the side of the oppressor as well as on the side of the oppressed. During the cultural clash in the contact zone both cultures express their fear of the unknown and unfamiliar other culture. Barriers are built in order to control the other. In Jonesville-on-the-Grande stereotyping is a means for both cultures to maintain and protect their cultural heritage. Transcultural exchange is inhibited by the practices of categorizing the other and makes it difficult for the oppressed to transgress borders in order to survive economically.

The institution in this little village in Texas, which is responsible for keeping borders intact and for securing an imbalance of power, is the

⁷⁷ See Gilman, Sander, “The Deep Structures of Stereotypes.” *Difference and Pathology* (London: Cornell, 1985)

Texas Rangers. The presentation of the Texas Rangers in the novel illustrates how stereotypes are created and maintained in order to secure superiority. In the very beginning of the novel the narrator comments on the Rangers' appearance that "one might have taken them for cutthroats. And one might not have been wrong." (Paredes, 1990:9)

This comment immediately destroys any positive connotations and makes the reader aware of the fact, that the biased narrator regards the rangers as unjust, violent troublemakers. His point of view is presented in a very neutral way as he uses the impersonal "one" and the forms of possibility "might" and "could". The narrator seems to be careful with judgments and seems to be reluctant to form an opinion of the rangers merely from their outer appearance. His considerate manner of coming to an opinion about the rangers is in stark contrast to the ranger's view of the Mexicans.

It seems as if the rangers are only able to categorize people by their outer appearance. One scene in the novel serves as a good example for their narrow-mindedness. Spotting El Negro and Lupe on their way to the village one of the rangers observes that El Negro is "a nigger...a nigger-greaser". The Negroid features are noticed first as well as the possible Mexican appearance. By using derogatory names to describe the features, the ranger clearly associates inferiority with people of African and Mexican descent. He also reveals his biased attitude towards people with a different color of skin and a different cultural background by naming them in this demeaning manner. Additionally, the ranger obviously regards them as cultural minority in his country as he speaks about them contemptuously and uses degrading names which American culture has usually assigned to Africans and Mexicans in the US. The feeling of superiority and power is only based on the fact that El Negro's physical appearance is different from theirs and automatically associated with inferiority.

During an incident that happens only a bit later in the novel Gumersindo is also judged by his looks. Drawing their rifles at the sound of an automobile, the rangers have to acknowledge that there is a Mexican

sitting in a model Ford T, which everyone knows belongs to the doctor. However, Gumersindo, who is white like Gualinto, cannot be recognized as Mexican at first glance. When one of the rangers detects that Gumersindo “doesn’t speak much English” he concludes that he is Mexican. Instantly, the doctor tries to defend Gumersindo:

He’s a good Mexican“, Doc said, “I can vouch for him.”
“He’s ok if you say so, Doc,” Mac Dougal answered. “But it’s getting kinda hard these days to tell the good ones from the bad ones. Can’t take any chance these days. But he’s all right if you say so. (Paredes, 1990:12)

Apart from the looks the ability to speak English is also a criterion which can be used to distinguish Anglos from Mexicans. It is interesting that the rangers willingly trust the doctor’s opinion with regard to his Mexican companion but would kill any Mexican themselves if they were in doubt about his goodness. How they determine whether someone is good or bad speaks for the arbitrariness of their definitions as they can only judge people by their outer appearance. Basing their judgments on this factor leaves little room for valid judgments and explains why their view of the Mexicans is so biased.

The narrator once more ridicules the rangers by presenting them as an uneducated, narrow-minded group who cannot form a true understanding of their enemy as they are unable to transgress cultural borders in order to get to know the Mexicans. He conveys the message that better knowledge about the Mexicans and their culture would facilitate the discovery of potentially dangerous Mexicans. People with physical features other than their own are marked as inferior on the one hand but as dangerous on the other. The derogatory names for the members of the other cultures and the fear of the “bad ones” reflect a fear of the unknown. Downgrading the others and killing them conquer this fear. These examples also show very clearly that a cultural exchange between these two groups is very difficult if not impossible. The narrator also tells the reader that a meeting of the opposite sides is inhibited due to stereotyping out of fear.

As already mentioned, this fear of the unknown and the resistance against it are not only characteristic for the rangers. Gualinto also internalizes some negative beliefs about the Mexican-Americans in the community and in general. This can be seen when he calls his father an “ignorant Mexican” (Paredes, 1990:285). When he falls in love with Alicia he is afraid to show her the small house he lives in and goes out of his way to avoid her seeing it. When he comes back to the village after three years, his sentiments towards Mexicans become most evident. He thinks of his sisters children that they “looked like Indians” (Paredes, 1990:285), and were in fact very dark. He, like his father, is light skinned and could be taken for a white. Gualinto is clearly ashamed of his nephews’ dark complexion and acts like the rangers who judge people by their outer appearance. However, it is not only the skin color that bothers Gualinto about Mexicans

Mexicans will always be Mexicans. A few of them, like some of those would-be politicians, could make something of themselves if they would just do like I did. Get out of this filthy Delta, as far away as they can, and get rid of their Mexican Greaser attitudes. (Paredes, 1990:300)

It is obvious that Gualinto, after being away from the village for three years and after a long process of socialization, is indoctrinated by the American point of view and has internalized their stereotypical attitudes. His opinion of Mexicans stands in direct contrast to the dream of his father to unite Mexicans and Americans. Whereas the man with the dream of a better future for the Mexicans dies, his son, who was supposed to be a leader of his people and mediate between the two peoples, has gone over to the other side and aligns himself against the Mexicans.

This twist seems ironic at first but it tells the reader that transculturation in this novel is not a process which is able to improve the future for Mexicans. Feliciano preserves his Mexican Self throughout the whole

text and only adopts certain American ways of life in order to provide for his family and Gualinto rejects his Mexican heritage completely in order to get ahead in American society. Both characters build barriers, which make the realization of Gumersindo's dream of two cultures intersecting and merging impossible. It rather seems that the majority of characters believe in binary oppositions and an asymmetry of power relations.

Therefore, Gumersindo's dream must be seen as utopian, which he wants his son to realize. Gualinto, on the other hand, has to experience, that his father's idea is but a dream and that life in the contact zone does not plan social improvements for Mexicans. He understands the game of power and rather sides with the oppressors than live as a poor Mexican with no chance of a better future. Therefore, Gualinto incorporates the stereotypical views of the oppressor and acts alike towards his own people.

The reader can see that the contact zone is a place of barriers and clashes where one group dominates and enjoys privileges and the other group has to adapt or live in deprivation. At the end of the novel the reader is aware of the fact that transculturation has just started and that it is still a long way to an integration of the Mexicans in Texas.

3.5) Transculturation as Process of Cultural Effacement

As stereotyping makes the process of transgressing cultural borders and selecting from both cultures a difficult mission, one character in the novel shows that assimilation is the only way out of the Delta and the key to mainstream America. However, assimilation as part of the process of transculturation often means a complete loss of cultural heritage. Paredes shows in his novel that the process of transculturation can lead to the effacement of culture which is usually caused by a complete assimilation to the dominant culture.

Gualinto is the character in the novel that during a surprising twist in the story turns out to have fully adapted to American culture. This outcome is not expected as he shows more affection to his Mexican heritage throughout the first four chapters of the novel and seems to hate Americans, especially the *rinches*. His tiring fight against the *rinches*, however, comes to an abrupt end when he joins the American army. His development from anti-American to *pocho* is driven by a confusing struggle and insecurity of his own self. The ground stone for his never-ending struggle for a national and cultural identity is laid when Gualinto is born.

The naming of the newly born is a crucial scene in the novel as all characters that heavily influence his formation of identity are introduced. The naming of the child once more expresses his father's dream of a new nation as he gives him the name of a "gringo" and a Spanish last name. Gumersindo projects his hopes for a consolidation with the Americans and the formation of a new understanding onto his new-born son, which leads the narrator to comment on Gualinto's fate.

Born a foreigner in his native land, he was fated to a life controlled by others. At that very moment his life was being shaped, people were already running his affairs, but he did not know it. Nobody considered whether he, a Mexican, had wanted to be born in Texas, or whether he had wanted to be born at all. (Paredes, 1990:15)

The narrator presents Gualinto, as he will be named by his grandmother, as someone who will have to carry a lifelong burden as his fate is controlled by others who define his function in the fight between Anglos and Mexicans a few minutes after his birth. It seems terrible that his parents didn't consider whether they should subject their Mexican son to the fate of living in Texas. The narrator conveys the message that life in Texas for a Mexican is something that needs to be carefully weighed as not everybody might be able to cope with being a minority in their own country. Being born a Mexican in Texas is apparently equivalent to making the crucial decision of being born at all. The importance of this

decision was obviously not understood by his parents, according to the narrator.

The narrator stresses the fact that his parents have a major influence on his fate as they were the ones who brought him into this world, knowing about the conflict situation in which their child would have to live. His father's vision is the key to his fate and later development. When the baby is born and the family argues about what to name him, Gumersindo presents his future plans for his only son:

A Gringo name he shall have!" Gumersindo cried in sudden inspiration. "Is he not as fair as any of them? Feliciano, what great men have the gringos had?"

"They are all great,, growled Feliciano, "Great thieves, great liars, great sons-of-bitches. Show me one of them who isn't money-mad and one of their women who is not a harlot."...After a while Gumersindo said, "About the name. I was thinking of a great North American, he who was a general and fought the soldiers of the king...I remember," said Gumersindo. "Wachinton. Jorge Wachinton. (Paredes, 1990:16)

Maybe unintentionally, he immediately hybridizes the name by giving it a Spanish sound. At the same time he crosses cultural borders and selects a part of the American culture for his family. By adding the last name Gomez mixes the two cultures and serves as the first example of transculturation in the novel. It seems as if this mixing of cultures by selecting parts of one culture and embedding them into another culture is the aim of the characters in the text and the central message.

The father is obviously ready to break with family traditions and with cultural opposition. He stresses that point a little later in the story when he walks with Feliciano.

They walked in silence for a while, then Gumersindo said, "After all, it's their country."

“Their country!” Feliciano half shouted” Their country! There you are. Their filthy lies are all over you already. I was born here. My father was born here and so was my grandfather and his father before theirs.” he dropped his voice. “but it won’t be theirs much longer, I can tell you. We’ll get it back, all of it.”
“No, no, no!” This is all wrong! You can’t do it, you can’t. What did I come here from Mexico for? Because I thought that here I could find work and peace. Why do we have to hate each other? It’s a sin, I tell you. (Paredes, 1990:20/21)

Feliciano’s hate towards the Anglos is obvious in this scene and this is his last adversarial statement towards Anglos for a while, as soon after Gumersindo is shot and makes him promise to raise Gualinto without hate. It is remarkable that Gumersindo is seeking work and peace in a country which was formerly Mexican and which they have entered as immigrants. He is obviously not aware of the historical burden that lies upon the Anglo-Mexican relations. This ignorance of historical events and their consequences also explains why he expects his son to unite the two people. His outburst “why do we have to hate each other?” stresses his naïve and childish attitude which forces his son to assimilate in the end as he cannot deal with the historical role assigned to him as leader of his people.

The grandmother is also opposed to the name given to the baby. At once she turns the American name into a Native American name by saying “Gualinto...what a funny name” ridiculing the grand name of a great American. Paired with this name is a big burden on Gualinto’s shoulders due to his mother’s wish that he should become a leader of his people.

I would like my son...” she began. She faltered and reddened. “I would like him to have a great man’s name because he is going to grow up to be a great man who will help his people. (Paredes, 1990:16)

His mother reddens when uttering this wish as if it were inappropriate to help the Mexicans in their situation. She seems to be embarrassed when stating this hope, which turns her hope into a silly demand without reason. This impression is enhanced when Gumersindo automatically assumes that this name has to be a gringo name. So, Gualinto incorporates both his parents' visions of his life.

The reader can foresee the conflict in his life as his mother clearly wants him to help the Mexicans to a better future in the former parts of their country whereas his father wants him to be a "great man among the gringos." Taking into account the stereotypical characters in the novel the reader can only assume that neither of these plans is going to be realized. In order to accomplish his mother's idea he should have a different name and in order to fulfill his father's wish he should be American.

The papaya plant in the garden symbolizes the conflict which lies ahead of him. The narrator describes the papaya plant on the day of the birth:

The papaya plant stood incrustated in a coat of shimmering transparency. Tomorrow, when the ice melted, it would be a brown corpse burned paradoxically by the cold. But tomorrow, well tomorrow is tomorrow. (Paredes, 1990:14)

The plant shimmers in ice but will be burned by it in the end and symbolizes George's identity formation. George Washington Gomez carries the name of a great American which will become a burden in his later life as he is not able to fight for his own people like the well-known general, and he will never be a great American because he is Mexican. The name surrounds him like the ice surrounds the plant and will in the end kill his Mexican self. The Mexican part of his identity will, too, be a brown corpse as George will try to live up to the mighty American name by assimilating. Thus, he fails to meet the expectations of his people by refusing to become their leader.

At this point all bridges between him and the Mexican people are burnt down and like the burnt papaya plant his Mexicanness dies. Like the plant dies overnight, George changes his identity formation suddenly, seemingly overnight. None of his relatives or friends expect this surprising change. His father and his uncle force the belief onto him that Americans are friends, not foes and do not think about tomorrow when George would start to believe the good stories about the Americans learning at the same time that his own people have lied to him. This short-sightedness contributes to his sudden change from resistant Mexican to assimilated American.

The change from Mexican to American happens suddenly but George struggles between the Mexican and the American culture for a long time before he makes a final decision of where to belong. In the course of the story this conflict is displayed while he is coming-of-age between the two cultures. During his childhood he develops a hateful attitude towards the Anglos which continues until his radical change into an American. When Filomeno is lying defenseless on the ground dying Gualinto witnesses two Anglo sheriffs murdering his Mexican friend. When bystanders call the police they do not investigate who is responsible for Filomeno's death. It is at this moment that Gualinto learns to hate the gringos. After this incident with the police he plays Mexican and *rinche* in the garden of his parents' house wishing he could one day become a fighter for the revolutionary army and kill all the Anglos.

However, he also makes good experiences with Anglos. Two of his teachers, Mrs. Huff and Mrs. Barton, like him, encourage him in school and further his talents. Mrs. Huff is the first teacher to identify intellectual potential in Gualinto. She nurtures him and so rescues him from the traumatizing experiences he had to make with Mrs. Cornelia, a Chicana teacher, who humiliates him in front of the whole school. In high school, Mrs. Barton is Gualinto's ally. When the seniors plan a small party at a restaurant and the Mexicans are refused entry to the restaurant, Mrs. Barton tries everything to change the situation. He witnesses that there are Anglos in the community who try to help the

Mexicans but he cannot see any change due to their support.

It is at the end of chapter four that he begins to have dreams about reconquering all of Mexico. These dreams pursue him for a long time and he feels this desire like a burden on his shoulders. When his uncle tells him the story about his father's death and the promise he made, Gualinto finally refuses to adapt to American culture. He ignores his father's plan for him to go to college and starts working at a friend's grocery shop while going to school.

During this time the country experiences an economic crisis and the Mexicans are the first ones to suffer. When an Anglo impregnates his sister, aggression is set free in Gualinto, which makes him fight with a boy his age, Chuco, because he makes jokes about his sister and family. In this scene Gualinto lives the corrido tradition as the hero who defends his family against the malevolence of others. Following this incident he accidentally kills his uncle Lupe as he is afraid of the revenge from Chuco or his family and takes Lupe for an enemy. Gualinto's murder of Lupe sets an end to his attempts of living out his Mexicanness.

Deeply shocked by his deed he seems incapable of leading the defense of his people against the Anglos. He knows that it is his heroic fight in the sense of the corrido tradition which provoked this situation. At this point he makes the decision to go to college and continues the way his father had planned for him. It seems as though he is weighed down by the importance of history and kept from developing into a heroic figure because his actions fail to alter the course of history. Historical determinism apparently stands in the way of his fate to help his people and preserve the Mexican heritage against the whites. The result of this terrible incident becomes evident in the fifth chapter.

When Gualinto returns to the village, he has not only changed his name back to George M. Gomez, the middle initial probably standing for his mother's name Maria, but also his attitude towards the Mexican people and his culture. The chapter opens with George's reoccurring dream of Mexican-American border fights:

There is a barrage of mortar fire from behind the hill, and out of the woods come wave after wave of rancheros, superbly mounted and carrying sabers and revolvers. They are followed by ranks of Mexican soldiers in simple brown uniforms but carrying revolver rifles and hand grenades. He already knows what is to follow. Carnage. Houston is easily captured. Santa Anna is joyous at what he thinks is his deliverance. But this joy does not last long. He is immediately hanged...Texas and the Southwest will remain forever Mexican. (Paredes, 1990:281)

The narrator gives a hint to the reader that he is now part of the other, the dominant side. In his dreams he sees himself as an American on the one hand as he is hung by Mexicans and as a traitor as well because the dream causes him discomfort. "The same mother-loving dream. The third time this past week." He remembers how these dreams used to ease his anger at the riches and realizes that now they cause a feeling of "emptiness, of futility." He says that "somehow he was not comfortable with the way things ended." The reader is also told that these dreams have come back at night since he started his career as a spy for the US army and married an American woman. It seems as if his people do not want him to forget how they suffered under Anglo rule. The reader also understands that he failed to complete the task he was set to, namely helping his people. Instead he joins the US army and works as a spy for the border control.

His first stop in the village is a political meeting where he is the guest of honor. This meeting is the dramatic climax in the novel which crushes first the expectations of his parents and then the ones of his friends. Everyone in the village assumed that George Washington Gomez would become the leader of his people. However, at the meeting Gualinto is asked to help with one of the candidate's campaign and his refusal and the following answer to this pledge is disappointing for everyone present:

You won't be able to get many Mexicans to vote for you. Oh, they'll come and eat your *carne asada* and drink your beer. And they'll yell themselves hoarse shouting *vivas* for Miguel Osuna. But in the end it will be those on the city payroll, they and their relatives. They're the ones with their poll taxes paid, one hundred percent. Their hearts will be with you, but their bellies won't, they'll vote for Willie O'Brien. (Paredes, 1990:293)

Great hopelessness and despair can be heard in this speech. As disrespectful as Gualinto speaks about his own people, he seems to do so painfully. He assumes that Mexicans do not stand up for their ideals and vote for the candidate who tries to defend their Mexicanness. They would rather vote for the American who promises a full stomach. George seems to speak of himself and might see himself mirrored in these Mexicans. The only reason why he chose this career and got married to an American lies in the loss of his belief in change. He says that Mexicans could get ahead if "they changed their Mexican greaser attitudes" (Paredes, 1990: 300) and praises his own development. He got rid of his Mexican values, customs, traditions and the Spanish language. Therefore, he lives a comfortable life, is well situated and does not have to fear the future. Like his fellow Mexicans he chose comfort over ideals.

Knowing that he has betrayed his people, he is haunted by his decision to refuse his Mexicanness. Although he underwent an arduous socialization process, grew to become a military man and lawyer, he still cannot rest and find peace. His dreams keep hunting and tormenting him, but he has experienced life as traditional Mexican in the valley and knows that exchanges of culture or friendly sentiments are impossible. So, he chooses to give up his own culture instead, to efface it in favor of the dominant culture and in favor of himself and his family.

However, Gualinto's identity formation is psychologically complex and he mirrors the hybridity of the text in his self. He holds two selves within the same body but cannot resolve the conflict between the two. Feliciano and the other Mexicans in Jonesville cannot see this conflict

within Gualinto and see him as traitor. But the narrator describes this inner tension to the reader:

It would be years before he fully realized there was not one single Gualinto Gomez. That in fact there were many Gualinto Gomezes, each of them double like the images reflected on the glass surface of the show window. The eternal conflict between two clashing forces within him produced a divided personality, made up of tight little cells independent and almost entirely ignorant of each other, spread out all over his consciousness, mixed with one another like squares on a checkerboard. (Paredes, 1990: 147)

The narrator presents George Washington Gomez with a shattered and yet transcultural identity. His fragmented subjectivity is presented in a string of complex images which form a transcultural self. He combines the two cultures but cannot form a new and whole identity out of these selected parts. This fragmented cultural identity, however, has a very practical political and economic use:

The Mexicotexan has a convenient dual personality. When he is called upon to do his duty for his country he is an American. When benefits are passed around he is Mexican and always last in line. And he has nobody to help him because he cannot help himself [...] Spanish speaking people in the Southwest are divided into two categories: poor Mexicans and rich Spaniards. (Paredes, 1990: 195/196)

Although his identity is divided and confused by the two culturally different components, Gualinto seems to be able to use this fragmented identity to his advantage. He has effaced most of his Mexican identity and added American elements in order to be successful in life. He has understood that only adapting to the dominant culture guarantees a prosperous life. His Mexican Self is lived out in his war fantasies which torment him at night and from which he cannot escape. Gualinto seems completely assimilated but actually carries two cultural mindsets in his

psyche. This inner struggle will keep him in flux between the cultures and help him benefit from both cultures. Gualinto can use the tensions to his advantage but also suffers from the refusal/effacement of the Mexican culture.

3.6) Mexico vs. America: The Lure of the American Dream

Americo Paredes wants to create a new form of narration where Mexico and America meet and mix. This is also incorporated in his presentation of the two countries. He shows the difficulties Mexicans face during the process of transculturation by presenting the US as a country of empty promises. The American Dream which almost all Mexicans in the novel try to live is one of the mechanisms used to keep the Mexican people oppressed. The maxims of assimilation and hard work can only be reached by a few, a fact which is also observed by Gualinto at the end of the novel.

His father utters the wish to be reconciled with the Americans as he is convinced that the US is the only country where he could obtain a good job and live decently. This idea is responsible for Gualinto's upbringing and for Feliciano's accomplishment of getting a taste of the American Dream. In the beginning of the novel, Feliciano is helped by a powerful American, Judge Norris, who saves his and his family's lives and offers him a job and a place to live. In the course of the novel, he opens up his own grocery shop with the money he has been able to save and becomes a respected member of the community. He owes his high status in the community to the fact that he never denies his Mexicanness and still manages to live the American Dream.

The American Dream in his case is the dream of being well-off while never having to deny his culture. At the end of the novel, however, he loses his shop during *la chilla* and retreats to his farm to sell vegetables. His financial rise and fall throughout the novel makes clear that reaching the American Dream is only possible with the help of Americans. If Feliciano hadn't met Judge Norris, his life and that of his family's

would have taken a different turn. His failure to assimilate also plays an important role in his economic downturn.

Gualinto, who is completely assimilated at the end of the story, shows that even a bad economy cannot hurt anyone who has instilled American ideals. Feliciano and many of the other Mexican characters in the novel never rise in society because of their Mexican culture. They live together in their own community speaking Spanish, singing corridos and hating the Americans who have stolen their land and their freedom. Gumersindo's idea to try and become friends with the Americans is impossible for them. Even Feliciano is only pretending to get along with the oppressors but reveals at the end of the novel that he always regarded Texas as land of the Mexican people.

In opposition to Feliciano others in the community succeed in living the American Dream. It is noticeable, however, that the few Mexicans who achieve their goals all have fair skin. The color of skin seems to be an important aspect with regard to achieving the American Dream. At the end of the novel Gualinto stresses this fact by thinking to himself that his brother-in-law is indeed very dark. He knows that the proper outer appearance is a vital factor in succeeding in America, which might be one of the reasons why he doesn't see the Mexican people go far in this country. Gumersindo's idea that everyone could take part in the American culture and achieve the same life had to fail partly because of Feliciano's attachment to his Mexican heritage but also because Americans don't want the Mexicans to become a part of their culture. Becoming a part of the American culture in this novel always means to efface at least a part of one's own inherited culture.

In the end, it seems as if a Chicano/a emergence from the novel is impossible as none of the characters develops a Chicano/a Self; but they either assimilate or refuse to adapt to American culture. However, the lines between the two opposing cultures are often blurred and Gualinto as well as Feliciano cross the borders between the two cultures multiple times. This text can be seen as the exploration of a hybrid genre and also as the call for a Chicano/a culture.

4) Richard Vasquez' *Chicano*: The Struggle of Finding a Collective Identity

4.1) Introduction

The novel *Chicano* by Richard Vasquez is a family saga and covers between sixty and seventy years, starting around 1900. The plot of the novel is closely connected with the destiny and history of the Sandoval family, which emigrates from Mexico to the US and goes through a long and painful stage of struggle in the process of transculturation. Vasquez describes the life of the various family members and focuses on their cultural up-rootedness. He also has the characters express their feelings of being torn between tradition and assimilation. At the same time he presents the differences between the Anglo and the Chicano way of life, tries to describe the reasons for the impossibility of crossing the borders between these two opposed cultures and attempts "to give the American reading public its first candid portrait of the Mexican-American."

He also tells the reader the actual aim of the novel by having one of the characters in the novel, sociology professor William Rowland, formulate in one of his classes that "we want to know what in the cultural barrier is so insurmountable to the individual and why." Many critics see Vasquez' novel as a sociological document about a minority group which was written for an American group of readers in order to present to them how one part of their society had developed over the years.⁷⁸ He narrates the different stages of cultural struggle which all characters in the novel have to undergo, beginning with being up-rooted from one's own culture over the identity confusion due to living between two

⁷⁸ Chicano literary critics unanimously rejected the novel due to the fact that the Chicano who appears in the title never manages to form an identity. For criticism see Ralph F. Grajeda, Jose Antonio Villareal and Richard Vasquez: *The Novelist Against Himself in The Identification and Analysis of Chicano Literature*, Lomeli/Urioste, *Chicano Perspectives in Literature* (Albuquerque, Pajartie Publications: 1976) and *Chicano Literature 1965-1975* by Carlota Cardenas de Dwyer who calls the novel "so permeated with capitulation and self-flagellation that it climactically signals the close of the Mexican American epoch and ordeal" (de Dwyer, 1976:125)

opposing cultures to the creation of a new culture which is composed of various elements of the formerly conflicting cultures. Therefore, the novel begins around 1900 with the Mexican Revolution, deals with the era of depression and ends in the sixties, a time of emancipation for the Chicanos. However, it is not only the long period of time that is covered in the novel which gives a detailed picture of the sociological development of the Chicanos. The presented spatial dimension takes in the Sandoval's way from a small Mexican village in the South to a barrio in the US in the North.

The novel itself is divided into two parts. The first part narrates the emigration from Mexico and focuses on the attempt to build a new life in the US. The narration begins with an account of a train wreck in Mexico during which Hector Sandoval is hurt and forced to settle in a small village close to the rail. There, he marries Lita and has three children with her. One of them is Neftali, who is later recruited by the *federales* and makes the family flee to the US due to deserting the troops. In California, the family lives in a ghetto next to the plant where Neftali and Hector work as orange pickers and their daughters, Jilda and Hortensia have jobs as maids. Over the years poverty and hunger are overcome due to the backbreaking work of the male family members and the prostitution of their daughters.

During this period of struggle in their new home country Vasquez turns the reader's attention towards the importance of family ties as at this point in the novel the disruption of the family begins. The tensions in the family are rooted in the different attitudes towards American culture and continue until the end of the novel when Mariana's naive belief in Anglo-Chicano friendship sets an abrupt end to the romantic vision of tearing down cultural barriers. The narrator describes how Hector dies because of drinking, how his wife Lita goes back to Mexico and how Neftali's family falls apart due to a generation conflict. Neftali's children openly rebel against his traditional Mexican life and move to Los Angeles where they try to assimilate and achieve a higher social status.

The second part centers on the youngest generation of the family and their relationships with the Anglos. In this part of the novel the narrator tries to answer why the barriers between the two people cannot be overcome and provides the reader with drastic pictures. On the one hand, the third person narrator describes Sammy's way from school dropout to becoming a drug dealer to get the attention his parents couldn't provide during their daily run for money. On the other hand he describes how David and Mariana are both determined to tear down the barriers between Mexican and American culture by entering a relationship against the will of their parents. The narrator questions the future of this relationship from the beginning and confirms this assumption in a tragic way. It seems as if all relationships between Anglos and Chicanos are meant to fail.

Additionally, Vasquez shows the reader how various family members break with old traditions and become alienated from themselves and their culture during the process of transculturation. He also addresses the question why all attempts of assimilation must fail, how materialism is the main reason for giving up one's culture and ending up on the peripheries of the two opposing cultures, and how the abolition of machismo results in a confusion of gender roles.

As mentioned in the beginning, Vasquez tries to describe the social development of the Chicano people and the difficulties American society imposes on it. Trying to encompass the social injustice that happens to the Chicanos requires the presentation of an immense socio-historical background along with the events in the story as the American public is the intended reader.⁷⁹ In the following, I will discuss how Vasquez structured the narration and which narrative techniques he used in order to link the enormous amount of events and characters presented in the story.

⁷⁹ Martinez/Lomeli state in *Chicano Literature. A Reference Guide* (Westpoint: Greenwood Press: 1985) that "Anglo-American critics have praised it more than the Chicano critics have." (p.411) This acceptance by the Anglo public is also mirrored through the novel's publication by Harper Collins.

4.2) The American Dream as Cause for Transculturation

In his novel *Chicano* Vasquez introduces the reader to a large number of characters and narrates many different events which are all linked with one another. He employs different narrative techniques in order to create a logical thread of narration. The main story line starts with Hector Sandoval, covers the development of his son Neftali and Angie and Pete and ends with Sammy and Mariana. All of these family members get married and thus increase the number of characters in the novel. As the number of characters grows, the differences in development increase as well. It seems as if their spatial movement and their cultural alienation happen simultaneously. The further they move north the more they are willing to give up their culture and assimilate.

Whereas Hector refuses to assimilate and celebrates the traditional machismo up to his death, Neftali adopts parts of the American culture in order to make a living. His children and his grandchildren who are willing to sacrifice their cultural heritage to belong and thus benefit monetarily continue this adaptation to American culture. However, the social conditions they encounter in American society prevent them from rising in society. Nevertheless, they efface their tradition and culture and end up in a cultural wasteland as their economic well-being is closely associated with their emotional downturn. Vasquez shows the reader that economic success is only possible at the expense of one's traditions and culture and stresses the fact that during the process of transculturation it is decided whether the preservation of cultural and national rootedness is more important than the survival in a materialistic society.

Transgressing the borders between the two cultures is vital for the Chicanos in order to survive in America and in Vasquez' novel they willingly neglect their Mexican heritage and assimilate. In the end they are neither a part of the Chicano nor the American culture as they are caught between both cultures and cannot manage to form their identity in-between. On the one hand, they lose contact to their roots and cannot identify with their heritage anymore and on the other hand, they cannot

become a part of American society because they are not American. They live in confusion, alienation and cultural disorientation.

Apart from constructing the parallel of emotional downturn and economic upturn Vasquez also narrates certain events in the novel from different perspectives to provide the reader with a broader view of how the events came to happen. Vasquez enables the reader to see the story from two perspectives and thus makes it possible for the reader to understand why some barriers cannot be overcome during the process of transculturation. An example of this technique is the meeting in the white neighborhood where the Sandovals moved after having reached financial stability. The narrator describes the meeting of the white residents in the neighborhood to discuss the possibilities of removing the Sandovals from their neighborhood:

Mrs. Newman waved her hand as though to quiet an uneasy flock. "Now wait a minute. What we - Bill and me - called you here for is to make sure everybody knows just what they are like, and then we can decide on a proper course of action. Within any laws."

Another man spoke up. "Frankly, I was aware of it when the Sandovals moved in. Saw them in their old trucks. But I figured, in all fairness, we should give them a chance to prove themselves one way or another before we draw any conclusions."

Mrs. Newman carried on "Well, there's nothing wrong with living next to them. That is if you don't mind seeing people run around the yard in the raw. Or go to the john on the front lawn, or even in the street in front of God and everybody." (Vasquez, 1970: 232)

This meeting shows the cultural clash very clearly. The Sandovals live according to their cultural values and beliefs. To the Americans in the neighborhood this lifestyle is uncultivated and even offensive. While most of the neighbors agree that the Sandovals should move back to their barrio where they belong, one of the neighbors is willing to give

them a chance.

However, he is convinced quickly when the other neighbors tell him about the Sandovals' lifestyle. Group dynamics are at work here, which in the end form a resistance and an opposition towards the Sandoval family. The narrator shows that cultural open-mindedness and tolerance are not wanted by most of the white residents and fear and discomfort with the unknown culture prevails. Any attempt to speak for the Sandovals will fail as the group has developed a mutual opinion and strong dynamic driven by fear and hate and not allowing for a change of opinion.

The discussion about whether the Sandovals should be removed from the neighborhood carries on and is almost at an end when all of a sudden the Sandovals ring the doorbell. The narrator is quick to tell us why the Sandovals show up at a meeting they weren't invited to by displaying the following conversation by the Sandovals:

Looks like they are having a neighborhood get-together or something over there," Pete remarked [...] "Yeah," Minnie replied, "I've already seen three couples from this side of the street and one from the other go in there."

"Maybe we should go over and get acquainted, introduce ourselves."

"...but...I think around here you should be invited before you drop in."

"Naw, neighbors are just like neighbors everywhere. If we wait to be invited we'd never see any of our friends [...]"

"Okay, Pete. Wait'll I put on something a little nicer [...]"
(Vasquez, 1970: 239)

In comparison to their white neighbors the Sandovals judge the situation completely differently. Trying to make a good impression and using the chance to get to know their neighbors they approach the meeting with great anticipation. Their naturally friendly and warm approach is based on their cultural background which makes hospitality and friendliness

towards strangers a priority. Both sides approach the respective other side trapped in their culturally fixed patterns and fail to make contact with the other. The Anglos reject the Sandovals out of fear but on purpose and the Sandovals fail to understand the Anglos' fear and rejection. By showing how both sides approach the meeting the narrator can show why the white neighbors feel threatened by the Mexicans and why the Sandoval family is disappointed by the behavior of their neighbors which is a clear signal to them that they are not wanted in this area. The narrator describes the attempt of transculturation from both angles and clearly states why it is impossible to overcome barriers. In this case the cultural differences are obvious, lead to stereotyping and rejection of the "other".

In order to show the contrast between the Anglo and the Mexican-American population and to criticize the social conditions Chicanos have to live in Vasquez uses the technique of juxtaposition. He juxtaposes places from the Anglo world with those of the Chicano world. When the Sandovals move to Los Angeles, for example, Julie walks through the Anglo quarter Olmo before entering the Chicano barrio. The contrasts are immense:

The city of Olmo lies spread in the midst of a vast, flat farm land, technically part of a valley system [...] The nicely paved streets proceed farther to be lined by the establishments of those who have to do with land division, wholesale produce, livestock, fertilizers, and pest control. The men who work here wear light cotton suits and broad brimmed straw hats. They greet heartily and slap the backs of men who drive up in expensive pickup trucks wearing spotless coveralls and denim shirts, to pressed khaki trousers with shirts to match. Then the paved roads stop abruptly at the beginning of the barrio. The barrio is on the edge of town...Occasionally a smooth-worn brick or cobblestone sidewalk graced the sides of the unpaved streets, politely by-passing a huge dead tree stump or an ancient olive tree which refused to die [...] There were few cars to be encountered in the area. The crooked walls and irregular tiles on

the roofs of buildings vouched for authenticity, put there in a vanished era by people who no longer existed. (Vasquez, 1970: 109 ff)

This juxtaposition displays the enormous differences between the two neighborhoods. The narrator describes the transition from the white neighborhood to the barrio as abrupt and thus marks a barrier between the two areas. Well paved streets, big cars and smiling people opposed to accidentally trodden paths, damaged houses and a ghostly atmosphere are stark oppositions which create the impression of barriers and divisions which cannot be overcome and which no one wants to overcome. As the two spaces are so unequally developed and populated, a mental barrier is created as well, which makes an exchange between both cultural spaces very unlikely. The reader is presented with a black and white picture that stifles all expectations of cultural transgression and flux.

4.3) Tradition vs. Assimilation: A Conflict of Generations

However, this cultural division and opposition becomes less over the years as the Sandovals learn how to cross borders and adapt values and beliefs from Anglo society. Vasquez discusses various attitudes towards adaptation to the other culture in this text and shows the different outcomes.

In every generation the characters' approach to the new culture is different. While the first two generations try to preserve their Mexican heritage from complete Americanization, the next two generations try to become a part of Anglo society by assimilating completely in spite of suffering from the effacement of culture. Especially the third and fourth generations show the consequences of the struggles for a collective identity while attempting to improve their status in society. All characters in the novel try to become a part of American society and fail or resign. Hopelessness and despair are the main emotions conveyed in the text. This nihilistic atmosphere is created in the first chapter and held up until the very end of the novel.

In the beginning of the story the reader is informed about a train wreck which happened due to the construction of the railroad which will link the North and the South of the United States. The train wreck itself is responsible for the Sandoval family's change of life.. It is clear from the beginning that America is connected with bad luck and tragedy, as forecast by the train wreck which the Americans are blamed for. The dependence on America is foreshadowed and the strong connection between social reality and the fate of the individual is hinted at in this scene.

It was a mistake, making this railway here. If the Yaquis don't get us, the *bandidos* will. No law, no city for two hundred kilometers, no nothing. I think I quit and go to the *Estados Unidos*," he said.

"Don't kid me," said an engineer, "They don't let Mexicans drive locomotives in the United States. And besides, they have *bandidos* there, too." (Vasquez, 1970:6)

In this scene the impossibility of achieving a better life in the US is already foreshadowed. In the dialogue the US is not presented as the home of the American Dream offering countless opportunities to newcomers. Rather, it is described as a place where Mexicans are confronted with crime like in Mexico and additionally, belong to an underclass, as they cannot work in the jobs, which they were trained for. It seems that Mexicans themselves cannot change the place for Mexicans in US society as it depends on the mercy of US society. Saying "They don't let you..." clearly emphasizes the fact that there is an undeniably close interdependence between the generosity of Americans and the ability for Mexicans to improve their social status.

Vasquez chose the train wreck as key scene to be the first event in the novel and so started interweaving social reality and individual fate and commenced the story of the cultural and social struggle of the Sandoval family. Starting with the scene of the train wreck, the Sandoval family struggles and depends on the help of American society to reconstruct

their family.

However, Vasquez shows the reader in this first scene that the Sandoval family cannot rely on the American society as he clearly opposes the poor, humble and peaceful Mexican and the destructive, violent and forceful American. This opposition and negative connotation of the United States is continued when the first Sandovals, Hector and Lita, are forced to move to the US.

When they immigrate to the US hoping for a better life they are continually disappointed. Their disappointment begins when they take in the nature in California:

He had expected California to be a green country, soft pastures and farmlands, but so far he could only make out rugged, rocky hills, barren except for brush, cactus, and an occasional group of stunted trees [...] the shrill, cold air knifed through Hector's clothing to the flesh [...] Hector remembered back to another train ride, in another time and another place. That day of the train wreck, the heat had been sweltering. Which was better, he mused, the heat or this cold? With a convulsive shudder he decided that heat was better. (Vasquez, 1970: 33)

The narrator describes the life-threatening surroundings the Sandovals will have to live in, a country without vegetation and thus without possibility of survival. The cold seems to be deadly as it cuts through Hector's flesh and so threatens his existence. His decision that he prefers the heat to the cold already forecasts that the Sandovals will have difficulties adapting to the way of life in this foreign country. This natural environment in California foreshadows the behavior of American society towards immigrants, as they are associated with coldness, hostility, rejection and indifference. This description of nature is also a leitmotiv in the first part of the novel giving an insight into the characters' inner struggle with the different culture and environment.

The rain, for example, is a symbol of the coldness the immigrants are exposed to.

A cold, steady drizzle began to fall [...] It was still cold and drizzling [...] The sound of the rain grew smaller and smaller and finally disappeared and as they stood looking about there was no sound at all, even the steady drizzle was silent. (Vasquez, 1970: 34)

The disappointment about the inhospitable nature later turns into a disappointment about life in general. The silence and emptiness create a space where no communication takes place even between the family members. This lack of communication is a sign of the difficulties of finding a place between the foreign culture and the inherited culture. The Sandovals don't have the ability to communicate with Americans or Mexicans as they do not speak English and do not understand the mentality of the Mexicans, who have lived in the US for a longer period of time. This inability to communicate leaves every character up-rooted and struggling for an identity and a place of belonging.

Lita and Hector are the first generation arriving in the United States and they show the strongest tendencies of mistrust and opposition towards the foreign culture. Lita goes back to Mexico after Hector has died and Hector himself cannot adapt to the American culture throughout his whole life in California. They are the first generation failing to become a part of American society. Although they are economically successful they are not accepted in society and voluntarily move back to the barrio. There, they emphasize the Mexican way of life and refuse to adopt to any part of the American culture. The patriarchal family structure is stressed and sex and alcohol become the most important elements of Hector's life. The women of the family do not openly rebel against this kind of behavior as tradition keeps them in their place. However, Hector's daughters Jilda and Hortensia undermine his power and start working as prostitutes and learn to speak good English.

When Neftali, Hector's only son, accidentally finds out that his sisters earn their money by offering themselves to white men the sisters explain to him what experiences they had with the American culture and how these experiences influenced their decision to earn their living as prostitutes:

Sí, I've been screwing here for two years and I'm not one damn bit sorry about it.

You don't know what the hell this country's about [...] it's hard enough to be a Mexican in this country without being honest. You either have to be a maid and screw the patron, or marry an orange picker and live in a shack in the *barrio bajo* [...] (Vasquez, 1970: 56)

Jilda and Hortensia are the first ones in the family to understand the relation between assimilation and economic success. After being sexually abused and degraded by their American bosses the behavior of the sisters is symptomatic for the behavior of most characters in the novel. Americans show them their place in society and they take it and adapt to the American way of life. It is remarkable that the girls lose their Mexican accent when speaking English: "The girls spoke English without much of an accent." As opposed to their parents they try to survive in America and assimilate; additionally, they show that many compromises are necessary in order to adapt to the American culture.

The transgression of borders and the mixing of two opposing elements is embodied as they sell their brown bodies to members of the dominant white group. However, despite their efforts to learn English and attempts to adapt, their place is at the bottom of society and this condition is not going to change throughout the novel. The fact that they become prostitutes rather than live in poverty and patriarchal structures also shows the dilemma of being placed between two cultures. The dominant group suppresses them and forces them to accept derogatory treatment due to the fact that their family does not allow them to adapt to essential parts of the other culture, which forces them to live in poverty. In the

end they choose a life at the bottom of Anglo society instead of a life in poverty in the barrio. The refusal by their family to learn English and get in touch with the dominant group is fatal for the next generation, as they need to restart their rise in society from the very bottom again instead of continuing upward.

The first phase of transculturation in this text is a clash of cultures which results in a retreat to the familiar and well-known. The second generation, however, welcomes the opportunity to get to know parts of the unknown culture and therefore has to struggle to find their place between the two ways of life. The struggle in this phase of transculturation is especially visible with Neftali, who is the only character in the novel questioning the emigration from Mexico. He calls immigration to the US a “giant trap” which Mexicans step into and looks for ways to avoid that. Like his sisters he adapts to the American culture but understands that Mexican-Americans have to know their place. Neftali is able to adapt in certain ways but refuses to assimilate completely. This is the reason why he is one of the few characters who is not destroyed or corrupted by Anglo cultural values.

He is ready to work hard and live among Americans although he dreams of a place in the US where the Mexicans have their own piece of land and where they can live their own life. However, his dream is not fulfilled. Neftali cannot keep up with American progress and is condemned to a life as orange packer. He is the last one of the characters that cannot speak nor read English and suffers from the limited possibilities due to his refusal to learn the foreign language. He is a stable character and does not undergo any changes throughout the novel. Neftali embodies the Mexican machismo, clings to the Mexican traditions and so furthers his family’s disintegration. When the other members of his family start to turn away from him and his idealized Mexican way of life, he begins to glorify his Mexican past and dreams about a Mexico, which never existed. He has a dream, which he develops very early in the novel and clings to until he dies expressing his longing for his perfect Mexico.

[...] in his mind he had a secret fantasy of a cream-skinned young girl, virginal beyond belief, who wanted, as he did, nothing more than to start a close-knit family, and watch babies grow, and he wanted to never look at any other woman. She would be from a small village, eager for the steady home life, wherein he could cultivate the outside relationships he desired, where he could have good family friends over every night, and have guitar music and enough to eat for all, and live where his children would never know the stinging poverty he had grown up with or the lashing temptations that had torn his family apart here in the *barrio bajo*. (Vasquez, 1970: 61)

In this scene, Neftali creates his own utopia where he retreats when he is overwhelmed by the feeling of alienation and not belonging. He idealizes Mexico in order to be able to survive the coldness he experiences in the US. The traditional values such as family, friends, machismo, and music are still in place and respected. This never-ending dream shows that Neftali cannot cope with his position in Anglo society. Neftali is the only character in the story that doesn't change at all and is therefore forced to witness the steady change around without being able to stop it. His inability to adapt brings about financial problems and a disintegration of the whole family. His children turn away from him and try to approach the American culture. They understand that their father never managed to transgress cultural borders and had his pride hinder him from leading a successful life. In the end, Neftali dies dissatisfied and lonely. The author continues to convey the message that economic success and cultural adaptation are strongly interwoven and every attempt to preserve the cultural heritage has to end in a life in poverty and loneliness.

4.4) Transgressing Cultural Borders: The Beginning of Assimilation

In opposition to their parents, Neftali's children and their families try to embrace American culture and dedicate their lives to transgressing the cultural borders and assimilating to the American mainstream. Angelina and Jose and Minnie and Pete experience a life between two different cultures and the emotional difficulty of denying the Mexican culture completely in order to fit in with mainstream America.

The third generation is the generation of change, which can be seen in their way of naming themselves. When the Sandovals move to Los Angeles Angelina revolts against her parents and meets Julio. Within an instant she turns into Angie and Julio into Julie. Minerva turns into Minnie when she marries Pedro, who is now known as Pete. This third generation is interested in the American culture; they don't share their parents' views about preserving the Mexican culture in the US but try to find their space between the two ways of life they experience. However, neither of the two families can really break the barriers between the two different cultures. The closer they approach Anglo-American society the bigger their defeat, the harder they work the bigger the disappointment and the exploitation. The nihilistic background atmosphere is maintained, and although it seems that the families in the third generation have progressed in the understanding of what is necessary to overcome the barriers erected between Americans and Mexicans, they are not successful. The struggle to become a part of American culture in the third generation conveys that the Sandovals are stuck in the desperate attempt to improve their social status. Both families, however, are disappointed by assimilation.

Julio and Angie Sandoval are both rebels. Angie rebels against her family's traditions and Julio rebels against everyone who tries to force him to adopt cultural values of any kind, though he doesn't see a benefit. From the beginning they are the more promising couple in the fight for a decent life in American society. The reader is ready to believe that they

might make their way over and around barriers because they don't accept oppression. Julie, however, is very materialistic and only takes advantage of friends and family. He is the only character in the novel that does not make good friends, but sells his potential friends to *la migra* or leaves them when they seem to become a burden. His attitude towards other people is degrading, cold and arrogant, but he is economically successful and seems to be the one who has understood that a Mexican can survive in the US by adapting to American stereotypes. It is claimed in the text that Julio's materialism is a clearly American cultural stereotype as well as his opportunism and hypocrisy.

Adopting these cultural elements from the dominant culture he manages to improve his social status and move into a white neighborhood. However, as Julie is a macho in the corrido tradition, he doesn't change his behavior when the family moves into the white neighborhood. He invites his friends over to drink and play cards; he throws parties and celebrates his machismo. Although he is determined to be economically successful and become a part of American society, he refuses to give up his status as patriarch, which makes a movement from the margin to the center of US society impossible. Julie is a character who transgresses the symbolic limits between the cultures constantly because he wants to live comfortably. His goal forces him to victimize others, which he does willingly.

Julie experiences failure only when he embraces one of the two cultures completely. Moving into a white area and presenting a Mexican lifestyle to the community makes him experience the first failure in his life as the family has to move back to the barrio. Afterwards, when he takes opportunities that the Anglo society offers him, it causes him to become more and more alienated from his Native Mexican culture, leading to his arrest. Julie fails like every other Mexican character in the novel, although he makes an effort to create a new identity made up of various elements of the two cultures. He seems to be assured about his own self and never questions his place of belonging. Even when the family has to leave the white neighborhood he quickly adapts to life in the barrio again and is pleased to live there as well.

This readiness to change makes him able to choose elements from both cultures and find his own. However, the Mexican or the American part of society does not acknowledge this process of transculturation that he displays perfectly. Vasquez makes clear once more that there is no possibility to combine both cultures and feel at home in-between as the two opposite cultures grind everyone in the middle.

Angelina is also a character that fights against the traditional Mexican way of life. She refuses to take her traditional place as a woman and dedicate her life to children and cooking. Julie is fascinated by her drive for liberty at first, but when he marries her she needs to give in to Julie's machismo. However, she is determined to raise her children the American way and not to favor the boy over the girl, which leads to a neglect of her son Sammy, who starts a career as a drug dealer. Angelina accepts her traditional role as a woman silently which leads to her destruction in the end. Angelina disappears behind her husband throughout the story and is not able to provide support for either of her two children. After Julie's first beatings she develops the courage to call the police but is frightened of her courage at the same time. This event paradoxically ends her drive for freedom and self-determination and makes her resume her place as traditional Mexican wife.

Angelina's attempt to cross cultures is promising at first but she, like all other characters in the novel, is held back by the fear of losing the familiar and having to redefine her role. Her traditional female role inhibits her when she tries to transgress cultural borders as she is caught in this role and cannot escape. The only attempt to break free from this assigned role is to raise her children in a misunderstood American way which leads to the death of her daughter and the emotional destruction of her son. From her position it is impossible to gain access to the other culture in a way to understand which elements of this culture are necessary for her and her children. Vasquez shows that resistance to one culture is not necessarily equal to assimilation to the other culture. Resistance needs to lead to a crossing of cultures in order to replace the negative elements of one's own culture with elements from the other

culture. Angelina, though, is able to revolt against her Mexican role as a woman but she does not know how to live like an American woman. This lack of knowledge is responsible for her resumption of the role of a traditional Mexican wife.

In contrast to Angelina and Julie, the development of Pete and Minnie shows that the third generation of Chicanos can make it in American society. However, their success is purely materialistic and neither of them manages to become a part of the American culture and be accepted as Americans. Pete, who starts out as a construction worker, becomes an entrepreneur in a middle-class company, and Minnie stays at home with the children, embodying the perfect Mexican wife. The fact that Minnie fulfills the traditional role of a Mexican woman demonstrates that the apparent assimilation is only a façade. Pete, who tries very much to speak “good *gringo* English” even picks up some slang, which he practices constantly when with his Mexican friends, and is torn between the Anglo and the Mexican world.

On the one hand he strives for material success, learns the language and raises his children the American way, but on the other he pushes his wife into her traditional female role. He even shows some traits of racism when he says “Look where you’re going, you Goddam dumb Oakie son-of-a-bitch.” (Vasquez: 1970, 182), The process of transculturation helps Pete and Minnie to survive and provide a decent life for their children. However, their situation doesn’t differ from the one of their fathers and forefathers, as the main reason for assimilation is the will to survive and achieve a better living standard than in Mexico. Like Julie and Angelina, they have understood this essential connection between neglecting their Mexican cultural heritage and the possibility of improving their social status. Once this goal is achieved Pete and Minnie start neglecting their children, as they feel settled and assured in US society.

Sammy, their son, who has a lot of problems in the Anglo school system, cannot get his parents’ attention when he tries to talk to them

about his problems. His parents only stress the need of receiving good grades and not to “make any more trouble.” Sammy finds consolation in fairy tales as a child and later deals drugs to experience a feeling of appreciation. He realizes that he can get far without a good education. After selling marihuana for the first time he thinks to himself “Twenty bucks. He smiled at himself. Not bad for a dumb Chicano who can hardly read.” (Vasquez, 1970: 259).

His first experiences at school traumatize him and he does not make any effort to be successful in school, although this is what his parents present to him as the key to Anglo society. One scene shows Sammy’s resignation very clearly:

Are you Samuel Sandoval?”

“Yeah.”

“You’re required to be here four hours every week. In the event you refuse to attend this class, the authorities will be notified and you’ll be put in a corrective school. You understand that, don’t you?”

“Yeah.” (Vasquez, 1970: 257)

Sammy’s monosyllabic answers create the impression that he has resigned and is frustrated with the school system. He seems to be physically present in the classroom, but shows that he has already given up on his schooling as a way to a better future. Additionally, the teacher talks to Sammy as if he was a child and displays his power over the obviously hopeless “Mexican case”. The classroom serves as a contact zone in this scene, as the dominance of the teacher and Sammy’s unwillingness to accept this dominance unravel at full force.

The threat to be put in a corrective school does not affect Sammy as he will later drop out of school and end up in jail before he can finish High School. Due to his parents’ decision not to prefer their son to their daughter, they create mental problems for their son. Therefore, Anglo society is not solely blamed as the behavior of Sammy’s parents is obviously a factor in his bad development. Their neglect of Sammy is a

result of not understanding the other culture properly. Transgressing the border between the two cultures and adopting parts of Anglo culture does not further the understanding of the culture. Their assimilation is rather an automatic reaction to the oppression of the dominant culture, but does not lead to an understanding of and between cultures. Therefore, transculturation can be seen as a necessary step towards material well-being but not as a step towards reconciliation between the two opposing cultures. Their daughter Mariana is the one who benefits from her parents' equal upbringing. She is the character in the novel that understands to connect the two different cultures and feels at home in the Anglo world.

4.5) Machismo vs. Emancipation: The Fight for a New Female Role

One core theme in the novel is the opposition of two very distinct elements of either culture, namely the Mexican machismo and the American independence of women. The cultural element of emancipation cannot be integrated into the life of the Chicano women in the novel. The patriarchal status of men is never questioned in the text so transculturation does not mean a life of independence and self-determination for the women

Many women in this novel try to break out of the hierarchical family structure which patriarchy imposes on them. Angelina, Minnie, and Mariana are the three women who fight most for their independence. However, their aim can never be reached as machismo is a part of Mexican culture which is omnipresent and apparently cannot be changed. However, when Angelina and Julie meet there is a small glimpse of hope that Angelina could be the first woman to alter the family structures but her efforts are commented on as follows:

Julie had refused to give up completely several of his family friends, and refused to give up any of his drinking, and Angie

was naïve - or perhaps Americanized - enough to believe that, by God, if she could work and earn equally as well as (indeed, better than) Julie, she should enjoy equal rights so far as wanting to know where he spent his evenings and their money. (Vasquez, 1970:135)

The possibility that Angie could break free from the traditional role as wife and mother is questioned immediately by calling her naïve and by assigning to her the role of the American who believes in change and justice. Using modals of possibility Vasquez limits the likelihood of equality of the two genders. As if to destroy the hope for emancipation entirely, the narrator describes shortly after how Julie shows off among his friends with how much control he has over his wife:

“When a man says jump to his wife,” he often told his friends, ‘she should say ‘how high?’ and when he says ‘three feet’ she should say ‘how many times?’ and he should say ‘Never mind that, just keep jumping till I say quit!’ ” This, of course, was a variation of an American maxim he’d once heard from a boss of his. He had simply adapted it from its original employer-employee premise to a husband-wife analogy. (Vasquez, 1970: 136)

Julie shows that this treatment of Angie is an outlet for him as he has to experience the same humiliation at work every day. He takes his anger home with him and takes it out on his wife. Vasquez tries to show that one of the reasons why machismo survives generations and cannot be stopped is partly due to the fact that the Anglos behave towards Chicanos in exactly the same degrading way as they perform at home. The humiliation and disdain they have to encounter in America put them in an inferior position and take away their independence. The necessity of regaining their power leads to the ever-present system of patriarchy. All women who try to break out of this cycle experience failure or death but the man’s role as described in one of Mariana’s children books is not changed throughout the novel:

About all he does is sit around and pose, breed, of course, and occasionally fight for a female. He's really something to look at, but he doesn't take any responsibility. He makes a lot of noise, but the females raise the cubs, organize the hunting and do all the killing. The females keep on the alert for danger. (Vasquez, 1970: 314)

The narrator describes the roles in the animal world and in this way emphasizes the tradition of the male and female roles. Comparing the roles of Mexican men to that of lions makes clear that this long tradition has been beneficial as the lions are the most powerful animals. The message conveyed is that everyone profits from this tradition and therefore, there is no need to change it. In fact, it could be dangerous for the whole population if traditions were changed. The apparent necessity to maintain this old tradition makes it almost impossible for any woman to assimilate and live a life of her own. No woman in this novel has the opportunity to gain full independence and if she strives for it she is forcefully called back to her duties as a good Mexican wife.

Mariana and Angelina seem to be the women who could change this tradition and emancipate. However, neither one of them can fulfill the expectations. They lack the strength to fully embrace the unknown, to take a step towards the other culture, which would grant them the freedoms they have been dreaming of. Living in the barrio where machismo is omnipresent makes striving for freedom a difficult task. American society would allow them to emancipate and live a life without obedience. A far more difficult step is to become part of that society which accepts them as women but not as Chicanas.

The reader understands that Chicanas experience oppression from two sides, namely the Mexican and the American side. No matter which side they choose they will always be humiliated and suppressed. Transculturation is a way for them to form their own culture otherwise they would have to decide whether to live in oppression at home or assimilate completely and be looked down upon for being a Chicana. As

Gloria Anzalua proposes in *Borderlands/La Frontera*, they will have to find their own space, a new space where they can be independent and free.

4.6) An Attempt at a Cultural Mediation

The second part of the novel is devoted to the love story of Mariana Sandoval and David Stiver, which starts out in a promising way but ends in a catastrophe, destroying all hope for a cultural mediation.

They provide a last hope for the reader that the two opposing cultures can still come together and that a woman can live independently and free from male domination. Stiver is described as a weak character who tries to avoid difficulties and trouble. He is the only American in the text that is a main character and he is always referred to by his last name as if to stress that he is a stranger in the Chicano community. Calling him by his last name shows that he is part of the other culture and creates the impression that he lacks emotions and empathy. He starts a relationship with Mariana, but he never manages to become accustomed to the Chicano culture and perceives Mariana as something exotic which is not part of his world as it is too different.

Vasquez clearly opposes Mariana's patriarchal family to the matriarchal American family of David Stiver. However, both fathers share the belief that they have done the best for their children. Contrary to their beliefs, David studies sociology to rebel against his father, his sister divorces her husband, Mariana starts a relationship with a member of the domineering class, and Sammy deals with drugs and ended up in jail before he can finish High School. Although Vasquez caricatures the American family by portraying their male members as weak and indecisive, he also seems to convey the message that both families have a lot in common as neither of the families can raise their children in a way they benefit from. In both families there is a rebel and a hopeless child.

In the beginning of the second part of the novel this pessimistic atmosphere is not yet conveyed. It appears as though the two cultures finally will find a way to approach each other and find consolation, peace and a common basis of understanding. Mariana is the only member of the Sandoval family who manages to build a bridge between the two cultures. She is intelligent, beautiful and smart and tries to understand the different perspectives and backgrounds. Mariana is the character that develops most in the novel and therefore falls deepest. She is presented as a very independent woman in the beginning, who makes the decision to start a relationship with Stiver. Her effort to bring the two cultures together can be seen in the fact that she reads English magazines to her grandfather and tries to explain the Chicano culture to Stiver.

However, when she finds out that she is pregnant her character changes. When deciding to behave in such a way that Stiver wouldn't have any difficulties, she falls back into old traditions, accepts the pregnancy and refuses vehemently to have an abortion. She would rather raise the child in her family, although the American legal system grants her certain rights. The fact that she gives in to having an abortion after discussing the matter with Stiver surprises the reader but emphasizes the Mexican traditional female role of obeying the male will. Once more, Vasquez rules out the possibility of change and puts an end to the hope of future generations to make a difference in the relationship between Anglo and Chicano. The emphasis of his nihilistic attitude reaches a climax when Marina and the baby die due to the abortion. At the end of the novel Stiver has proven to be the villain US society is expected to bring forth and exemplifies the violence and brutality of US society against its immigrants. His character develops towards this violent rejection of Chicanos throughout the second half of the novel.

Stiver enters the novel as the character that might bring about this change in relations. His aim is to find out why there are so many Chicano school dropouts and he chooses Sammy as his object of study. He has to come in contact with the Chicano world and culture and tries to understand how their way of life is connected to the high number of

dropouts. The reader can see that it is an effort for Stiver to actually approach Chicano culture and accept it as equal to the American culture. When the police attack some of the Chicanos at a party in the barrio and arrest them Stiver shows his lack of knowledge with regard to the relationship between Americans and Chicanos:

“What’s going to happen? To those two they took?”

“They’ll go to jail. Be tried for resisting arrest, being drunk, and maybe a half dozen other things.”

“But the man, the butcher. He did nothing. That officer bumped him deliberately and then pretended to fall down.”

Mariana smiled bitterly at him. “You want to really be the white liberal? Then go to the court and tell that to the judge. It won’t do any good, but you’ll be getting a real lesson in sociology.”

[...]

Mariana, I’m going to do something about this, what I saw tonight.” She was silent, serious. “Don’t you believe me?” (Vasquez, 1970: 339 ff)

Mariana’s bitterness and resignation as opposed to Stiver’s idealism and naiveté emphasizes the fact that Stiver has never been in contact with Chicanos or any other minority before. At this party he experiences inequality in power relations for the first time. At first Stiver seems willing to get to know the other culture and to try to make a difference as he goes to the police station telling them how unfairly the police treated the Chicanos. However, when he is out on the street with the Chicanos during the night of the party he sees Officer Raul as “the buffer between the Anglo police and his people.” The narrator shows that Stiver’s open-mindedness is not what it seems but a daring project he could always stop when he pleases:

Like the villain in a movie who arrives at a point where a façade of conscience and morality no longer serves his villainy, he could now tear off the mask that said he ever cared about anything but the social safety and security, the loss of which he so flippantly had flirted with as a liberal. He saw that his

challenging his family by going with her, becoming involved with her, was really like a boy seeing how far he dared swim from the shore, knowing or at least believing all the while he was never too far out to make it back to safety. (Vasquez, 1970: 402)

This comment shows how frightened and naïve Stiver actually is when he has to deal with that other, unknown cultural world. He is said to act like a child when trying to get to know Chicano culture, which turns his attempt into a foolish act of daring. He fears for his safety as if he were swimming in the uncontrollable sea. By comparing the Chicano barrio and the sea, the narrator gives the impression of the Chicano neighborhood as an area that cannot be controlled and poses a threat to society even though it looks calm on the surface. It is this implied danger which cannot be seen at first glance and which needs to be avoided. This lack of control and the inability to understand the other side is exactly what makes him and the other Americans in the text so afraid and describes the reason for the exclusion of Chicanos from American society.

In the end, when he fears that Sammy might tell people about the abortion, he can rely on the safe shores of his own culture and has Sammy arrested before he has a chance to tell the truth about how and why the abortion happened. Vasquez shows that transgressing the barriers between two cultures is impossible for the dominant side. The feeling of a loss of safety and security, the lack of control, the necessity of having to come in contact with the unknown is frightening. Brief contact or a superficial attempt to approach is possible and maybe even seen as necessary to be able to understand at least the essentials of the other culture, but a close contact or meaningful conversation cannot happen.

When Stiver turns Sammy in to the police and has Mariana killed in the end, Stiver does not feel sorry but is happy that he can continue his life without the burden of the Chicanos. When he attends Mariana's funeral he makes a superficial attempt to seem sorry but he only cares about

whether he will make it to his graduation in time. He sees the justification of Mariana's death in the fact that "you've got to suffer for what you are." The last bit of hope that the two cultures could still approach each other and a following generation could manage to finally become a part of the American society is literally butchered when the doctor shows David the remains of his and Mariana's child:

"I thought you'd like to see proof you are getting your \$ 300 worth," the doctor said, and David found himself staring into the pan at the butchered fetus. (Vasquez, 1970: 392)

Vasquez takes the death of the unborn that should have continued and maybe finished the travel from South to North as a means to tell the reader that a Chicano cannot survive in the Anglo world. He fiercely criticizes Anglo society by letting Stiver get away with his horrible deed as he stresses the fact that this is how the Anglo society works. This society does not care about the inferior, it does not try to help, and it does not try to understand the needs and problems of parts of their society. Their refusal to accept the Chicano as part of their society has to lead to the death of Mariana and her baby, as the baby would just experience the same fate as all of the Chicanos. Vasquez seems to put an end to a long suffering that has lasted over generations and has now come to a halt. He presents the story of the Sandoval family as an experience which needs to fail due to the coldness and indifference of the Anglos.

Mariana's weakness in assenting to an abortion could be seen as criticism of the Chicanos and their traditions. Although "her giving in to the abortion was not an action which fit with her development as a character", it seems to be mainly caused by her belief that bringing one more Chicano into US society who according to Vasquez needs to experience failure, would be a mistake. Mariana must have realized herself that a new Chicano would have to live a life in otherness. The nihilistic atmosphere Vasquez creates from the beginning of the novel onwards finds an end in Mariana's and the baby's death. Americans and Chicanos cannot live together unless the Chicanos carry the burden of

being treated as inferiors.

Vasquez ends this novel very drastically and bitterly, but he seems to have the desire to wake up American society. His call for unity, a mutual understanding and a breaking with traditions and stereotypical role assignments cannot be overheard.

5) Richard Rodriguez' *Hunger of Memory*: Education as an Instrument for Assimilation

In his text *Hunger of Memory* Rodriguez attacks the concepts of Affirmative Action and Bilingual Education and has created big controversies among Chicano critics. Receiving the title "coconut" as someone who is brown on the outside but white on the inside he pursues his views on the two concepts in his autobiography and presents himself as an assimilationist who sees it as the duty of Chicanos in the US to rapidly transgress from one culture to the other and reject their Mexican heritage.

According to a statement in one of his later interviews Rodriguez thinks that "assimilation just happens"⁸⁰ and therefore sees the need to oppose programs, which in his view make assimilation more difficult. In order to understand the analysis of Rodriguez' argumentation in the last chapter of this part I will give a short introduction to the concepts of Affirmative Action and Bilingual Education in the US.

Affirmative Action is a series of federal programs seeking to prevent discrimination of minorities and women in universities and in the workplace. Trying to protect these groups against prejudices, which make it difficult for them to obtain a job or the opportunity to study at a university in the US, Affirmative Action was initiated in 1964 with the passage of the Civil Rights Act. Between 1971 and 1989 several Supreme Court rulings established a series of precedents limiting some aspects of Affirmative Action. A famous example for these precedents is the 1978 decision in *Bakke v. Regents of the University of California*, permitting programs in which race was only one factor among others which decided upon the possibility to study at a certain university.

⁸⁰ London, Scott, "A View from the Melting Pot: An Interview with Richard Rodriguez," *The Sun* (1997)

Rodriguez in *Hunger of Memory* unexpectedly took the side of the opponents and caused a nationwide controversy among Chicanos and left activists but received praise from white Americans. As I will show in a later chapter, Rodriguez is of the opinion that Affirmative Action is actually counterproductive for the students it seeks to help, as it labels them as ethnic and less deserving.

Bilingual Education has the goal to help children of new immigrants who do not speak English yet by teaching them subjects in their Native language while gradually introducing them to the new language. The first Bilingual Education Act was passed in 1968 and renewed in 1974. Due to the immense costs of the program, especially for Spanish speaking students as the largest immigrant group, concerns began to arise. The topic was and still is hotly debated on national TV and in newspapers as the opponents see the melting pot function threatened and along with it the culture of the United States. They argue that English is the language to receive a job in the US and are afraid that bilingual education furthers the existence of cultural enclaves where another language than English is spoken as the main language, leading to a disunity of the country.

Rodriguez also takes the side of the opponents with regard to this topic as he believes that English skills are necessary in the US to be socially and economically successful. Although Rodriguez has had to experience alienation from his family and culture he still upholds the belief that learning English through education is indispensable to gain access to US society. I will show in the following how Rodriguez explains his opposition to the programs by describing the benefits he received by getting a good education and mastering the English language and how he defends his rejection of his Mexican cultural heritage.

5.1) Introduction

Richard Rodriguez' autobiography *Hunger of Memory: The Education of Richard Rodriguez* is one of the most controversial texts written by a member of the Mexican American community. Discussing significant

political and social issues he narrates his coming of age and his change from “private” Mexican speaking Spanish to “public” American speaking English. Becoming part of American public society is the proclaimed aim of Rodriguez, who at times could barely admit that he was “of Mexican ancestry.”⁸¹ Published in 1982, the book earned heated criticism from the Chicano community but became “the voice of Hispanic America”⁸² for white Americans at the same time. They believed the book to be “a key to understanding the Mexican-American and debates related to bilingual education and affirmative action.”⁸³

The Chicano community, however, heavily criticized the essays in this book; additionally, they also did not approve of the remarkable praise Rodriguez’ work received by the mainstream media, for example by *New York Times Book Review*, *Time* or *Newsweek*. The concerns of Chicano critics are based on “his failure to engage the reality of the Mexican experience in America.”⁸⁴ Rodriguez regards himself as middle-class American denying his Mexican heritage, which he saw as hindrance on his way into American society. His childhood and adolescence do not represent the typical Mexican experience in the US but according to Rodriguez, everyone can achieve such public success when not clinging to a Mexican past but assimilating.

The text of *Hunger of Memory* contains a prologue and six chapters that narrate “the education of Richard Rodriguez.” These six chapters are loosely connected and chronologically arranged, describing the childhood and coming-of-age of a Mexican in the United States. In the

⁸¹ See Paravisini-Gebert, Lizabeth, “Richard Rodriguez’ *Hunger of Memory* and the rejection of Private Self,” *US Latino Literatures: A Critical Guide for Students & Teachers*, ed. Harold Augenbaum and Margarite Fernandez Olmos (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2000) 81-92

⁸² Saldivar, Ramon, „Ideologies of the Self: Chicano Autobiography”, in: *Diacritics* 15, no3 (1985), 26

⁸³ Rivera, Tomas, “Richard Rodriguez’ *Hunger of Memory* as Humanistic Antitheses”, in: *Melus* 11, no.4 (Winter 1984), 5

⁸⁴ See Decker, Jeffrey Louis, „Mr. Secrets: Richard Rodriguez Flees the House of Memory“, in: *Transition* 61 (1993), 124-133

first essay “Aria” the intimate space of the Spanish speaking Rodriguez household is replaced by Rodriguez’ dedication to learning the English language and becoming a member of public society. At a very young age he develops the desire and determination to become part of mainstream America. Education is revealed as the key to public society and in the second chapter “The Achievement of Desire” a never ceasing pursuit of education and love for academia is stressed. In the third essay “Credo” Rodriguez speaks about his Catholic faith and his identity changing from *catolico* to Catholic.

In this chapter Rodriguez sets up a basis for confession weaving through the entire text, giving it a confessional and almost apologetic tone as if he asked for absolution for his “public” identity. In “Complexion” Rodriguez addresses the issue of brown skin, presenting it as the most powerful barrier to assimilation. He openly confesses his shame of his color of skin labeling it as a physical marker of ethnicity, which he cannot escape through education. “Profession”, the fifth essay in Rodriguez’ collection, focuses on affirmative action and bilingual education, narrating Rodriguez’ refusal to accept a teaching position at Yale which he could get through affirmative action, but he believed that the acceptance of this position would marginalize him as member of an ethnic minority and categorize him as undeserving. In chapter six “Mr. Secrets” he discusses his on-going alienation from his parents and siblings due to his education and assimilation, offering him the opportunity to rise from working class to middle class.

These six loosely connected essays are written from a central position and not from the margin, as Rodriguez does not consider himself to be part of a particular ethnic experience. Many critics describe *Hunger for Memory* as an ethnic autobiography. In contrast to their perception, Rodriguez is trying to avoid the ethnic labeling of his work, as he believes that the acquisition of the English language and the rejection of Spanish as well as his education make him American. He actually tries to make the ethnic markers such as the Spanish language or belonging to the working class, disappear and seeks to destroy every connection to his Mexican heritage. Rodriguez lives the belief that “an authentic

ethnic identity cannot survive [...] either in a public education or the acquisition of a public self.”⁸⁵

Rodriguez collection of autobiographical essays is the attempt of a middle class American and former Mexican immigrant, to receive absolution for his sin of assimilating and forming a public identity at the expense of his private Mexican identity.⁸⁶

5.2) Private vs. Public Voice: The Role of Language in Identity Formation

The first chapter in Richard Rodriguez’ autobiography *Hunger for Memory* is called “Aria”, indicating the topic of language and sound which is discussed in this chapter. In this first chapter Rodriguez describes his school days and his development from a Spanish Native Speaker with little knowledge of the English language to one of the top students in his class. Being placed between binary oppositions as a child, such as Mexican vs. American, Spanish vs. English, Catholic vs. Protestant he perceives the world as an accumulation of polarities.

These perceived sets of binary oppositions cause the desire in Richard to assimilate and step out of his position between the two rigidly defined poles. He does not develop the ability to view his position as one in flux, with multiple and diverse opportunities of identity formation but is overwhelmed by the oppositions. Perceiving the world around him “based on a selectively posited grid of categories that allow him to explain differences between American culture and Mexican culture on the basis of dichotomies”⁸⁷, he makes the decision to assimilate and

⁸⁵ Shuter, Bill, „The Confessions of Richard Rodriguez”, in: *Cross Currents* 45, no. 1 (Spring 1995), 95

⁸⁶ See Alarcón, Norma, “Topology of Hunger: The Miseducation of Richard Rodriguez,” *The Ethnic Canon: Histories, Institutions, and Interventions*. Ed David Palumbo-Liu (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1995) 140-152.

⁸⁷ Sanchez, Rosaura, „Calculated Musings: Richard Rodriguez’ Metaphysics of Difference”, in: *The Ethnic Canon: Histories, Institutions, and Interventions*, ed. David Palumbo-Liu (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1995), 160 and Alèman, Jesse, “Chicano

become a member of the public at a very early age.⁸⁸

Therefore, he lacks a precise understanding what it means to fully engage with only one culture and to reject the other. Rodriguez' misapprehension of his need to position himself within this polarized world is most clearly shown in his decision to embrace an American identity in public and move his Mexican heritage to private spheres such as his parents' home. His experiences in school are the driving forces behind his reduction of the Spanish language and effacement of the Mexican heritage.

Rodriguez begins the chapter with the narration of his first day at a Catholic Elementary school. Being "able to understand some fifty stray English words" he commemorates the beginning of his success in the academic and public world. As the family only speaks Spanish at home, Richard and his siblings do not receive the opportunity to practice their English outside of school and quickly become the outcasts in their classes. When one day the nuns visit Richard's parents and ask them to speak English with their children, as their academic skills suffer from their inability to speak the language they change the family's life forever.

From that day onwards the family struggles to communicate in English, using the few words and phrases they have learnt, but breaks apart due to the two languages and cultures that are now known in the family. Richard understands at this point that being in command of the English language enables him to speak up in class and to excel in academia. He becomes an excellent student who spends more time reading at home than playing outside. Richard's goal is to read and learn everything his

Novelistic Discourse: Dialogizing the Corrido Critical Paradigm," *MELUS* 23, no.1, (spring 1998). 49-64

⁸⁸ see Paravisini-Gebert, Lizabeth, "Richard Rodriguez' Hunger of Memory and the rejection of Private Self," *US Latino Literatures: A Critical Guide for Students & Teachers*, ed. Harold Augenbaum and Margarite Fernandez Olmos (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2000) 81-92

teachers deem necessary and he becomes an imitator, a memorizer, who depends on his teachers rather than his parents to receive guidance in life.

Before entering the American education system Richard perceives Spanish as the language of love, of private life:

A word like *Si* would become, in several notes, able to convey added measures of feeling. Tongues explored the edges of words, especially the fat vowels. And we happily sounded that military drum roll, the twirling roar of the Spanish r. Family language: my family's sounds. (Rodriguez, 1982: 18)

His perception of the Spanish language shows that Rodriguez only focuses on the sounds of Spanish. He seems to value the music of the Spanish language as he compares the “r” to the sound of a military drum roll but does not perceive Spanish as a language with grammar and syntax. Spanish is music to him which is why he called this chapter aria, but he does not regard Spanish as a language which conveys meaning.

He says that Spanish is “pure sound” which devaluates the language to a childish way of communication and fails to acknowledge its richness and literatures. Even if these sounds represent home and family he does not assign the same value to Spanish as he does to English. This becomes clearer by comparing two passages from the first chapter:

Pocho, she said. But then it made no difference. Our relationship continued. Language was never its source [...] The words she spoke were almost irrelevant to the fact - the sounds she made. Content. The mystery remained intimate utterance. (Rodriguez, 1982:38)

His grandmother calling him a *pocho* does not have any effect on Richard, as the words do not convey meaning to him. The letters are sounds that evoke feelings in Richard; feelings, which are not linked to the actual meaning of the word. *Pocho* means traitor and is normally

understood as insult and associated with negative feelings. Richard associates it with the feeling of being content in this scene. The reduction of Spanish to mere sounds, which cause intimate feelings, is an example of Richard's attempt to privatize the language and the feelings connected to it. Mastering this effacement of Spanish from his life he can finally succeed in the public spheres:

The great change in my life was not linguistic but social. If, after becoming a successful student, I no longer heard intimate voices as often as I had earlier; it was not because I spoke English rather than Spanish. It was because I used public language for most of the day. I moved easily at last, in a crowded city of words. (Rodriguez, 1982:32)

This passage shows that English is the language teaching him words and structures; it is the language that assigns meaning, which educates him and opens the door to the public. Once more, he shows his narrow and polarized perception of culture and language. Regarding Spanish as a private language, which lacks "the intelligence and ability to communicate beyond the sensibilities of the personal interactions of personal family life"⁸⁹, he glorifies and internalizes the English language in order to form a public self and simultaneously improve his position in society. In command of the English language he is able to obtain jobs, discuss politics and benefit from the advantages American society offers. Rodriguez could never have achieved such an education and success by only speaking Spanish.

The English language is a tool for Rodriguez to enter the public world. Throughout the text he makes frequent allusions to Caliban from William Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, who uses the language of Prospero as a means to transgress his own limitations. Rodriguez seems to take Caliban as a role model as he, too, uses the English language as a tool to

⁸⁹ Rivera, Tomas, Richard Rodriguez' *Hunger of Memory* as Humanistic Antithesis, in: *Melus 11*, no.4 (Winter 1984), 8

enter American public society and develop a culture even if this culture is narrowly defined as “American” from a Mexican perspective.⁹⁰ In his autobiography Rodriguez alludes to masterpieces of English literature displaying a profound understanding of the dominant culture and the ability to play with the language of this dominant culture. Praising Rodriguez as “exceptional stylist” means praising his education, his successful assimilation but also his rejection of Mexicanness and the reduction of Spanish to sounds.

5.3) Public Life as Cause for Alienation

According to Rosaura Sanchez, Rodriguez states in *Hunger of Memory* that he “prefers consenting to the myth of a common American identity traceable to New England and the Puritans.”⁹¹ According to this ideology there is one elementary and unique form of Americanness as a transcendental truth, which apparently leads Rodriguez to conclude that in order to become American, Mexican heritage and history needs to be rejected and sacrificed.⁹² Seeking cultural purity he denies a multicultural America granting immigrants access to a public life and suggests that only the complete effacement of Mexican ancestry offers the opportunity to take part in American public life. The access to a public life also guarantees a higher social status due to the fact that immigrants can obtain better jobs and build up an American social network in middle class neighborhoods.

Improvement of social status is important to Rodriguez, as it distinguishes him from the Mexican-American working class and rewards him for his choice to assimilate. With social status he does not

⁹⁰ On Caliban as role model see Alarcón, Norma, “Tropology of Hunger: The Miseducation of Richard Rodriguez,” *The Ethnic Canon: Histories*

⁹¹ Sanchez, Rosaura, „Calculated Musings: Richard Rodriguez’ Metaphysics of Difference”, in: *The Ethnic Canon: Histories, Institutions, and Interventions*, ed. David Palumbo-Liu (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1995), 160 rephrasing Jehlin, Myra “Introduction: Beyond Transcendence”, in: *Ideology and Classic American Literature*, ed. Sacvan Bercovitch and Myra Jehlin (Cambridge: UP, 1986), 14

⁹² Sanchez, 160

only associate wealth but also a good reputation and many friends and benefactors. Thus, learning English changes Rodriguez' life and his social status and environment immensely.

When the family moves to the US, Rodriguez describes the family's social position as such:

I grew up in a house where the only guests were my relations...Our house stood apart. A gaudy yellow in a row of white bungalows. We were the people with the noisy dog. The people who raised pigeons and chickens. We were the foreigners on the block [...] no one in the family knew the names of the old couple who lived next door; until I was eleven years old I did not know the names of the kids who lived across the street. (Rodriguez, 1982: 11)

The family keeps to themselves and does not make contact with anyone else but their relatives and their neighbors. Americans do not speak to them because the Rodriguez family is obviously culturally different and only meets with their kind of people. Rodriguez mentions here that the house stood apart, that the family was noticed as it was different and displayed their different cultural background and lifestyle openly. One of the cultural contact zones in the text is the middle class neighborhood, where the Rodriguez family is singled out as different, and has to transgress cultural borders in order to come into contact with the Americans.

Richard seems to be very aware of the fact that his family is not like every other family on the street. And it seems to bother him even at such a young age. In these first lines the reader can already witness the embarrassment he is filled with when speaking about the Mexican heritage of his family. This feeling of shame connected with his Mexican background will intensify the more he comes in contact with the Anglo world.

When Richard and his siblings start going to school and realize that not speaking English inhibits them in academia and in their social lives, they decide to acquire this necessary skill to survive in the United States. Soon Rodriguez informs the reader about his progress in learning the English language and his social progress:

Making more and more friends outside my house, I began to distinguish intimate voices through speaking English [...] After such moments of intimacy outside my house, I began to trust hearing intimacy conveyed through my family's English [...] Intimacy thus continued at home; intimacy was not stilled by English. (Rodriguez, 1982: 31)

This observation seems to be very important for Rodriguez as this means that he does not have to give up his intimacy at home for the intimacy he experiences outside. For a short moment in his life he can actually experience intimacy outside and at home as English becomes the language of intimacy inside and outside of home. Suddenly, he can be intimate with Americans; they even become his friends and end his status as outsider. At this point in the text he actually seems to have two places of intimacy and to be able to live in a world with two cultures. His families' Mexicanness and the friends' Americanness can be merged as both speak the same language: English. The neighborhood as contact zone has brought forth a cultural exchange between the cultures that enables Richard for a short time to enjoy the American public space as well as the family's private space.

In one passage in the text the hyphenating of the two cultures is tried out by Rodriguez:

In those years I was exposed to the sliding-glass-door-informality of middle-class California family life. Ringing the door bell of a friend's house; I would hear someone inside yell out, "Come on in, Richie, door's not locked." (Rodriguez, 1982: 194)

The hyphenated word formations are rare for the text but illustrate Richard's short phase of trying to bridge gaps between the two opposing cultures. The sliding-door of his neighbors stands in stark contrast to the screen door at his parent's house which symbolizes isolation whereas this door connects. Rodriguez seems to convey the image that in the middle-class household the doors are open, transition between different spheres is easier than in his family's Mexican household. The sliding doors symbolize access to American society, whereas access to the Mexican culture is difficult.

Rodriguez displays a continuous, uniform space for a moment in this text where the transgressing of borders is possible and welcomed by American society, whereas his Mexican family seems to isolate itself from mainstream America⁹³. Therefore, Rodriguez does not have the possibility to gain access to both cultures, as his parents do not grant him access to American culture. Rodriguez seems to be forced by his parents to have to decide on one culture which forces him to fall back on binary oppositions. The hyphenated word formations cited above are rather unusual for the text and stand in contrast to the usually short, clipped phrases which form a discrete, isolated unit in the text. These sentence fragments symbolize Richard's position in a polarized world. He is isolated and has no connection to his Mexican ancestry or the American public life.

Thinking in dichotomies makes the mixing of both cultures impossible for Richard. Except from the scene cited above he clearly divides places which could be seen as contact zones, such as school and library, into public zones as opposed to home as a private zone. When the different cultures from these distinctly separate zones come together Richard cannot disguise his shame for being Mexican.

The shame he develops is also due to his improving English skills. The better his English becomes, the less is he able to communicate in

⁹³ See Alarcón, Norma, "Tropology of Hunger: The Miseducation of Richard Rodriguez," *The Ethnic Canon: Histories*

Spanish. As he is trying to perfect his English he is embarrassed by the performance of his parents. Rodriguez begins the process of alienation from his parents and later from his whole family at a very early age. Improving his English, succeeding in academia and making American friends, he understands that he is becoming alienated from his family but appears to do so willingly. He confesses to the reader:

At last, seven years old, I came to believe what has been technically true since my birth: I was an American citizen. But the special feeling of closeness at home was diminished by then. We remained a loving family but one greatly changed. The family's quiet was partly due to the fact that, as we children learned more and more English, we shared fewer and fewer words with our parents. (Rodriguez, 1982: 22 ff)

This feeling of being an American citizen is accompanied by speechlessness between Richard and his parents and an alienation from the rest of his family. At the age of seven he expresses joy about feeling American, about having made a choice in a polarized world. He has achieved isolation from his family and the Mexican community and gained access to the American public world. The fallacy of having to decide between both cultures will make him a lonely, homeless man. Richard has to acknowledge that he loses the connection to his parents who still speak Spanish better than English and try to maintain their Mexican cultural heritage. He narrates how the sounds disappear from the once so lively house and that the communication between parents and children ceases.

Rodriguez recounts these changes in the family in a rather observant manner and without any emotions as if he expected this development at the age of seven and regarded it as necessary and unavoidable. Language separates the family and worries his parents who cannot solve the conflict, as they lack the English to speak with their children and have not taught their children enough Spanish to communicate sufficiently. Both parents react differently to the new quiet in the house and change their behavior in each case.

Rodriguez describes his mother as “restless” when she notices the difference in the house and calls his father “reconciled to the new quiet”. Both parents lose their authority over their children, as they cannot function as role models any more, as being unable to keep up with their children’s progress in learning the foreign language. Additionally, they see the necessity to excuse their children to their relatives, as the children’s Spanish gradually disappears. The relatives often call Richard “*Pocho*”. Rodriguez, however, is proud of his efforts to assimilate and does not see the need to feel guilty. He says:

Embarrassed, my parents would regularly need to explain their children’s ability to speak flowing Spanish during those years [...] Most of those people who called me a *pocho* could have spoken English with me. But they would not. They seemed to think that Spanish was the only language they could use, that Spanish alone permitted close association. (Such persons are vulnerable always to the ghetto merchant and the politician who have learned the value of speaking their clients’ family language to gain immediate trust) [...]. But once I spoke English with ease, I came to feel guilty. (Rodriguez, 1982: 29)

It seems that once Richard, simply sheds the Mexican part of his identity once he can speak English well. However, he mentions also that he feels guilty for speaking English really well.

It is in this passage of the text that Rodriguez mentions the reason for writing this autobiography for the first time. This autobiography is a confession, an attempt to explain why he decided to assimilate and become Americanized. Guilt and the feeling of having committed a sin to his family and his community make him confess in written form and ask for absolution.

5.4) Brown Skin and the Impossibility of Assimilation

Rodriguez discusses the problems of assimilation in *Hunger of Memory* by narrating the uneasiness his brown skin causes in public. Despite all efforts to assimilate he is and remains the one in his family with the darkest skin tone. Summing up his concerns with his skin tone Rodriguez writes on the very first page of the prologue to his six essays:

Thirty years later I write this book as a middle-class American man. Assimilated. Dark-skinned. To be seen at a Belgravia dinner party. Or in New York. Exotic in a tuxedo. My face is drawn to severe Indian features which would pass notice in the page of a National Geographic, but at a cocktail party in Bel Air somebody wonders: Have you ever thought of doing any high-fashion modeling? Take this card. (Rodriguez, 1982: 1)

He expresses his disappointment in the fact that he has mastered assimilation and moved up from the lower social stratum to the middle class, but is still perceived as exotic due to his color of skin. His ethnic background, which he tried to erase for many years receiving an excellent education and adapting to American cultural values, is still revealed by his brown skin. Rodriguez seems to regret that he is the one in the family with the darkest skin and views it as a symbol of oppression and inferiority:

I am the only one in the family whose face is severely cut to the line of ancient Indian ancestors. My face is mournfully long, in the classical Indian manner; my profile suggests one of those beak-nosed Mayan sculptures - the eagle-like face upturned, open-mouthed, against the deserted, primitive sky.” (Rodriguez, 1982:115)

He associates his Indian features with primitiveness and sadness as the facial features suggest mourning, revealing shame rather than pride in his outer appearance. Throughout the text this hate for his body, the symbol for his Mexicanness, causes an alienation from his body and his

ancestry, even though he tries to convince himself that he could not blame his natural tan for being unemployed:

I wasn't afraid that I would become a menial laborer because of my skin. Nor did my complexion make me feel especially vulnerable to racial abuse (I didn't really consider my dark skin to be a racial characteristic. I would have been only too happy to look as Mexican as my light-skinned older brother) Simply, I judged myself ugly. And, since the women in my family have been the ones who discussed it in such worried tones, I felt that my dark skin made me unattractive to women." (Rodriguez, 1982: 134)

However, he sees as ethnic marker and contradiction to his otherwise perfect assimilation.

Rodriguez learns early in his life that the color of skin is a decisive factor in public spheres. The awareness of his color of skin is implemented by his mother and his aunt, who ensure that Richard does not go into the sun for long or takes on jobs which keep him outside during the summer. Although this awareness of skin color was created so early, he still had the opportunity to change this view when coming of age. Growing up as an American of Mexican descent in the US in the sixties and seventies, he witnesses the Chicano Movement and the general resistance against racial discrimination.

However, Rodriguez fails to understand the pressure with which conformity is forced upon immigrants in the US and does not analyze the importance of a cultural community. One reason for his lack of analysis and understanding might be the fact that from a very early age onward he associates dark skin with poverty. He grows up in a home where his mother pities "*los negros pobres*"⁹⁴ meaning the Mexican-

⁹⁴ In *Hunger of Memory* „los negros pobres," are Mexican immigrants in the United States who have very dark skin and therefore, cannot speak the "public" language that Rodriguez has learned. Rodriguez meets "los probres" when he works on a construction site for the summer. After spending a summer with them, he feels haunted by their

Americans who work in the field or on a construction site. They are always exposed to the sun and therefore have very dark skin. These kinds of Mexicans seem to work in dead-end, low class jobs, mostly menial labor and his mother encourages him to get a good education and stay out of the sun, as she does not want her son to have a back breaking job which makes him grow old as fast as his father:

My sisters, we were all still just teenagers. And since mi papa was dead, my brother had to be the head of family. He had to support us, to find work. But what skills did he have! Twenty years old. *Pobre*. He was tall like your grandfather. And strong. He did construction work. Construction! The gringos kept him digging all day long, doing the dirtiest jobs. And they would pay him next to nothing. Sometimes they promised him one salary and paid him less when he finished. But what could he do? Report them? We weren't citizens then. He didn't even know English. And he was dark. What chances could he have? (Rodriguez, 1982: 127)

Although Rodriguez does not see skin color as a racial characteristic, he would rather be as light-skinned as his brother. When he takes on a job as a construction worker one summer to identify with *los pobres* he realizes that the darker his skin gets, the bigger the differences appear. Rodriguez' self is rooted in his education, his knowledge and his mastering of the English language so as to escape his physicality, which makes him similar to *los pobres*. He says of himself that through his education he has acquired a different "attitude of mind" (Rodriguez, 1982: 138) which forms his self and distinguishes him from the Mexican workers. In white America his skin color will always label him as ethnically different.

The fact that he thinks his dark skin makes him ugly and unattractive again stresses his inferiority complex. The feeling of inferiority due to his appearance is deeply rooted within Rodriguez and stays with him as

image, as they had always been figures of both fear and desire for him.

he still feels out of place even after becoming an educated man. His skin color seems to be the reason why Rodriguez opposes Bilingual Education and Affirmative Action, why he stresses the importance of assimilation and Americanization. If his skin were lighter he might value his cultural background and try to be a part of the Mexican and the American community, as his ethnically defined experience is not revealed.

5.5) Assimilation and Cultural Effacement: The Loss of Home

During the process of assimilation Rodriguez weakens the ties with his family and the Mexican-American community as a whole. At a very early point in his life Rodriguez decides to become Americanized and to forget his Mexican cultural background. He begins this process by growing farther and farther apart from his family. Once he learns to speak better English than his parents he feels ashamed in public as they speak with an audible accent and make grammatical mistakes. He also devalues the Spanish language and the Mexican culture in his essays. In contrast to their own son Rodriguez' parents know who they are and who the "*gringos*" are. They always call Americans that way, stressing the unequal power relation and the fact that they haven't forgotten history.

They have a clearly defined picture of American society and their place in it. Rodriguez' parents know their cultural background and represent a singular culture, as they have preserved their cultural roots even when living in the US. Therefore, they also understand who the *gringos* are, whereas Rodriguez cannot understand this preservation of Mexican culture due to his blind imitation of the American language and way of life. Not knowing US culture and cutting the ties to his Mexican cultural background, Rodriguez ends up alone and does not belong to any community.

He can only attempt to be American. His essays and texts are well received by the North American public as he shares their view, but he only receives the applause because of his devaluation of the Mexican culture in the US. He does not show any understanding for the history of Mexico, as he values his culture and his language differently if he had a profound knowledge of Mexican history. His fierce attempts to dispose of his Mexican roots enhance the likelihood of pride in his Americanized self and prohibit any feeling of regret.

The title of this collection of essays is *Hunger of Memory*, which conveys a certain longing for the moments of his childhood, when he still communicated with his family and the intimacy in the family was intact. Many Mexican-Americans in the US long for a community, like Rodriguez' parents and relatives. He is the only one in the family who rejects being a part of the Mexican community and is yearning for the memories forced out of his mind. Breaking off all ties to his community leaves him lonely, monolingual, monocultural and with a confused identity as he knows that he cannot be a white American but has forgotten his Mexicanness due to denial. He believes that it is more important to live in one of the two cultures he has experienced but forgets that one can live in both communities and gain an individual identity. This identity which is made up by two singular cultures and achieved by transgressing cultural borders and selecting cultural elements, which seem important and achievable, is truly individual.

Rodriguez calls himself Caliban in the chapter "Mr. Secrets". Caliban is a role model for Rodriguez from Shakespeare's play *The Tempest*, as he is controlled by others and driven by materialism. Rodriguez seems to convey the message that in the end he only imitated the dominant culture because he saw the opportunity to get a good job and accumulate wealth. The world of the well-off is a public sphere Richard admires throughout the whole text:

With my mother's eyes I'd see my hostess's manicured nails and judge them to be marks of her leisure. Later, when my schoolmate's father would bid me goodnight, I would feel his

soft fingers and palm when we shook hands. And turning to leave, I'd see my dark self, lit by chandelier light, in the hallway mirror. (Rodriguez, 1982: 132)

Seemingly in spite of having dark skin Rodriguez embraces status symbols and manners of the higher class but feels inferior in the world of white wealth at the same time. The stark contrast between his appreciation of the symbols of wealth and his own reflection in the mirror suggests that he cannot reach this lifestyle due to his color of skin and offers an explanation for the rooting of Rodriguez' identity in the "acquisition of language and knowledge"⁹⁵. His dark skin becomes exotic in the world of the rich and the educated and is not necessarily perceived as belonging to the Mexican population, which he perceives as underclass. Being able to share the wealth with Americans due to good English skills and his excellent education Rodriguez again shows similarities to Shakespeare's Caliban.

However, the reference to Caliban reveals more about the way he perceives himself. The first similarity could be seen in the fact, that Rodriguez refers to himself as brown, as Caliban was referred to by Prospero, who calls him "thou earth" (Shakespeare, 1975, 314) Throughout the play Caliban is associated with darkness. Rodriguez also frequently mentions his dark skin color. Caliban's dark skin color stands in stark contrast to Miranda's association with light and purity⁹⁶; in the same way, Rodriguez stands opposed to white Americans. Additionally, Rodriguez is torn between his indigenous culture and the American culture. Many critics say Caliban was a victim of colonization and therefore, like Rodriguez, "torn between their indigenous culture and the culture superimposed on it by their conquerors."⁹⁷

⁹⁵ See Marquez, Antonio C., „Richard Rodriguez's Hunger of Memory and the Poetics of Experience“ in: *Arizona Quarterly* 40, no.2 (Summer 1984), 135

⁹⁶ See Hall, Kim F., *Things of Darkness: Economies of Race and Gender in Early Modern England*, (Cornell UP: 1995), 142 ff

⁹⁷ Vaughan, Mason and Vaughan, Alden T, *Shakespeare's Caliban: A Cultural History*, (Cambridge UP: 1993), 145

However, Rodriguez turns into a puppet in the hands of American society. He assimilates and throws away his Mexican culture in order to be part of not only American society but of American middle class society. Caliban, on the other hand, does not assimilate but tries to trick his masters and gain control by raping Miranda and populating the island with little Calibans. Vaughan and Vaughan point out, that "a work of art, once completed, may communicate meanings, which were outside the conscious intentions of the artist."⁹⁸ Therefore, it is likely, that Rodriguez saw similarities to Caliban only in the slightly similar behavior but not in his overall position towards the dominant force.

5.6) Affirmative Action and Bilingual Education as “Ethnic Markers”

Hunger of Memory was published in 1982, a time when Affirmative Action was contested throughout the United States. Unexpectedly, Rodriguez sides with those, who state that Affirmative Action psychologically harms those it claims to help as it labels a group of students with a migrant background who never managed to assimilate. However, Affirmative Action helped Rodriguez to get a scholarship and study at a well-known university. He sums up the importance of education for his public individuality by saying “It is education that has altered my life. Carried me far.” (Rodriguez, 1982:4)

Receiving a good education forced him to speak English, forced him to forget his Spanish, taught him American culture and introduced him to American literature. Rodriguez values these experiences as they allowed him to form a public identity and take part in American mainstream culture. However, his education seems to have been limited to mastering the English language. Understanding contexts or the ability to solve complex problems seems to have been neglected in the education of

⁹⁸ Vaughan, Mason and Vaughan, Alden T, *Shakespeare's Caliban: A Cultural History*, (Cambridge UP: 1993), 169

Richard Rodriguez:

For although I was a very good student, I was also a very bad student. I was a “scholarship boy”, a certain kind of scholarship boy. Always successful, I was always unconfident. Exhilarated by my progress. Sad. I became the prized student - anxious and eager to learn. Too eager - too anxious - an imitative and unoriginal pupil. (Rodriguez, 1982: 46)

Rodriguez confesses in this passage that it was a lot of effort for him to become such a successful student. Yet, he only manages to become an imitator and cannot grasp the meaning of concepts. In accordance with Ortiz’ model of transculturation Rodriguez views complete imitation as the key to success. Thus, Rodriguez displays a colonized mindset which is also expressed in his unquestioned admiration of his teachers.

Tomas Rivera writes in his essay “Richard Rodriguez’ Hunger of Memory as Humanistic Antithesis” that it surprises him “that as an educated humanist in 1982 he would still have that type of complex, colonized mind.”⁹⁹ However, it is exactly this colonized mind which makes him an academic success and which allows him to develop a public identity. Being unable to develop a deep understanding of theories and concepts due to his eagerness and his drive to learn and assimilate made him neglect the contents of his studies. Rodriguez’ academic career appears to be hollow, his academic achievements a facade that is kept up by his good English and the bonus of having succeeded as Mexican immigrant in American society. The apparent inability to understand literary, historical and cultural contexts also implies that he might not be able to value the culture he has assimilated

⁹⁹ See Tomas Rivera „Richard Rodriguez’ Hunger of Memory as Humanistic Antithesis” in *Melus*, vol. 11, No.4, Winter 1984, pp.5-13. His essays is one of the first written criticisms of Rodriguez’ autobiography. Most other criticism before was not written down. See also Herms, Dieter, *Literatur der Chicanos* (Frankfurt: Vervuert, 1990)

into as he does not and cannot question and analyze its underlying concepts. Yet, he glorifies his academic career and his development from immigrant to American.

Hunger of Memory is a chronicle of development and as such narrates the rise from working class immigrant to middle class American. Although this development is an essential part of his autobiography, Rodriguez' autobiography rejects affirmative action and therewith the very essence of his academic success. This denial of an ethnically influenced experience leads to a discussion of affirmative action and bilingual education as "ethnic markers" in the chapter "Profession".

Rodriguez regards affirmative action as a hindrance for Americans of Mexican descent as they label candidates as less deserving due to the fact that they are favored by universities because of their ethnic background. He also claims that affirmative action as well as bilingual education helps to create a class of people who are not and will not assimilate into the mainstream of American society:

Today I hear that bilingual educators say that children lose a degree of individuality by becoming assimilated into public society...But the bilingualists simply scorn the value and necessity of assimilation. They do not seem to realize that there are two ways a person is individualized. So, they do not realize that while one suffers a diminished sense of private individuality by becoming assimilated into public society, such assimilation makes possible the achievement of public individuality. (Rodriguez, 1982: 26)

Rodriguez clearly views the achievement of a public individuality as much more desirable than the achievement of a private individuality and sees the public individuality as replacement for the private. According to him bilingual education deprives a person of the value of a public self which is necessary to enjoy the "social and political advantages"

(Rodriguez, 1982:27) in America. His view with regard to affirmative action is similar. Seeing affirmative action not as a helpful concept for the less fortunate, he regards it as a prevention of assimilation. In his opinion such programs intensify the hostility towards minorities as the members of these minorities are not a part of the public.

However, he also manages to uncover some deficits common to affirmative action:

Remarkably, affirmative action passed as a program of the Left. In fact its supporters ignored the most fundamental assumptions of the classical Left by disregarding the importance of class and by assuming that the disadvantages of the lower class would necessarily be ameliorated by the creation of an elite society. (Rodriguez, 1982: 151)

Here, Rodriguez criticizes the creation of an educated elitist class of Chicanos as the creation of an elite would not help the majority of Chicanos belonging to the lower class; on the contrary, this makes education even more exclusive, as it is only accessible for a few. Class is an important factor when it comes to education and if Affirmative Action does not take into account where a student comes from, an important factor is neglected. However, Rodriguez fails to notice that class is often directly linked to ethnicity. Even though he rejects this view, it is true for many Chicanos.

Hunger of Memory is a text which has created and is still creating much controversy among Chicanos and gaining praise among white Americans due to extreme opinions on programs such as affirmative action and bilingual education. Rodriguez also builds up a world of binary oppositions where an individual has to choose one culture and one language in order to belong. Rodriguez himself transgresses cultural borders from the Mexican to the American culture making it a journey with no return. Although he closes the gap between private and public life through writing and making his private life public, his autobiography remains a confession, an apology to his family and the

Chicano community as he reveals the pain at the loss of his Mexican heritage. In the year 1982 Rodriguez published a text which describes the third phase in Ortiz' model of transculturation and provides an insight on the dynamics and struggles which are at play in this phase. According to Spitta, assimilation is a part of the process of transculturation resulting in the loss of cultural ancestry and heritage. Rodriguez' autobiography is the attempt to invent a private life in order to bridge the gap between his assimilated public self and the suppressed and lost private self.

6) Luis J. Rodriguez: *Always Running-Gang Days in L.A.* - Gangs and the Formation of a Collective Identity

In the preface to his autobiography¹⁰⁰ *Always Running - Gang Days in L.A.* Luis Rodriguez states that

The crazy life in my youth, although devastating, was only the beginning of stages of what I believe is now a consistent and growing genocidal level of destruction predicated on the premise there are marginalized youth with no jobs or future, and therefore expendable. (Rodriguez, 1993:7)

In these lines preceding the novel he discusses the reason for the still growing gang problem in the US and especially in Los Angeles, a city which gave birth to the infamous 18th street gang as well as the Crips and the Bloods.¹⁰¹ He sees the hopelessness of young people who do not receive the opportunity to participate in US American mainstream culture as a major problem as it causes the feeling of being expendable. By foreseeing the rise of gang culture and gang activity in L.A. to a genocidal level he points out the life threatening circumstances which exist in the neighborhoods in East L.A. and the arbitrariness of death. As the gangs are at war with each other defending their “turfs” they kill members of other gangs and often members of their families aimlessly.¹⁰²

According to Rodriguez the exclusion from US culture and the segregation of L.A. into affluent sections of the city and the ghettos or barrios force young people in poor neighborhoods into the arms of

¹⁰⁰ I regard *Always Running: Gang Days in L.A.* as autobiography as Rodriguez states in the introduction „this work is not fiction, yet there are people I don’t want hurt by having their names and stories made public.“ (Rodriguez, 1993:11)

¹⁰¹ See Rodriguez, Luis, *Always Running: Gang Days in L.A.* (Connecticut: Curbstone Press, 1993) 4

¹⁰² See Davis, Mike, *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles*, (London: Verso, 1990) 1

gangs. Los Angeles is a divided city which pursues the marginalization of the homeless, the poor and immigrants, forcefully stifling all hope for social integration.

Mike Davis writes in *City of Quartz*

The carefully manicured lawns of Los Angeles' Westside sprouts forests of ominous little signs warning: Armed Response! Even richer neighborhoods in the canyons and hillsides isolate themselves behind walls guarded by guantoting private police and state-of-the-art electronic surveillance. (Davis, 1991:1)¹⁰³

In his text he describes the segregation which also Rodriguez sees as the core problem of Los Angeles provoking rising gang activity. Davis explains how Los Angeles draws clear boundaries between the middle-class and rich neighborhoods in L.A. and the poor and the immigrants. The fact that in more affluent parts of Los Angeles inhabitants threaten intruders with armed response and a private police force shows the immense fear of the people from "the other side".

The neo-military syntax of contemporary architecture insinuates violence and conjures imaginary dangers [...] although architectural critics are usually oblivious to how the built environment contributes to segregation, pariah groups-whether poor Latino families, young black men, or elderly homeless white females-read the meaning immediately. (Davis, 1991:2)

The segregation of immigrant and poor people from the well-off parts of the city and the places for tourists leads to a division of the city which is preserved by the semiotics of so-called "defensible spaces". Installing a two class system and responding violently to intruders, aggression is stirred among those, who are stuck in low income and gang

¹⁰³ See Davis, Mike, *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles*, (London: Verso, 1990) 3

neighborhoods. Almost all neighborhoods east of the river in L.A. are gang territory. Rodriguez tries to show with his novel *Always Running* that this segregation and marginalization of the other has far-reaching effects on the youth living in these areas, which turn to gang life to have a perspective in life. Drug selling becomes a means for survival and is the capitalism of the barrios. Controlling their markets which are usually defined by geographical borders within the city they have built up their own profit-oriented trade with the global world. *Always Running-Gang Days in L.A.* is a text which interlinks marginalization and rebellion in the form of gang culture.

6.1) Introduction

Luis J. Rodriguez writes about the meaningless life of urban youth in his novel and explains the circumstances which lead to gang life. Written for his son, he describes the social exclusion of young Chicanos in Los Angeles and the search for an identity which cannot be rooted in the US American culture or the Mexican culture due to rejection.

The attempt to cross the border between the American and the Mexican culture is not undertaken by Rodriguez until the very end of the text. The attempt to merge both cultures and choose elements from both cultures seems to be inhibited by the American system, especially the school system and the police. The author focuses on these two pillars of the American society in order to show that transgressing cultural borders is difficult, as Mexican Americans are initially demoted and labeled as hopeless cases.

Rodriguez beautifully expands on the fear of the unknown which he can see in his teachers. The brutal treatment of Mexican Americans by the police emphasizes this fear but also underlines the abuse of power and seems to negate the very humanity of a racialized minority. In his novel he also takes a look at the American education system which contributes to the feeling of not being “wanted”, points out police brutality, describes his daily fight against the protectors of white America and

focuses on the question of identity and rootedness. Rodriguez takes the reader on a journey through his childhood and his teenage years, narrating the many discriminating incidents of his coming-of-age until he becomes a member of a Chicano gang, Las Lomas.

His initiation into the gang is one of the turning points in the story and simultaneously the climax of a disappointing and confusing search for identity up to that point in his life. Having become a member of Las Lomas, his life turns into a constant downward spiral until a social worker finally saves him by helping him discover his talents and reform his identity. Rodriguez' narration is marked by the endless violent encounters with whites, his family, the police and later the members of the other gangs. His autobiography reads like a police report at times and the reader is definitely taken by surprise at the end of the narration when Luis J. Rodriguez decides to leave gang life behind and start a career as a writer. Rodriguez gives very detailed descriptions of the events which influenced his life and thus highlights the difficulties of becoming a part of American society.

The novel presents only stereotypes and leaves little room for change. The Chicano Movement is the event in the narration which provides for a feeling of community among the Chicanos and encourages Luis to leave the gang and start a new life. After experiencing the undermining of ethnic identity and empowerment, he finally comes across people who share his feelings openly and are determined to fight against discrimination and exploitation. At this point in his life he does not need the gang any more to be able to belong. The Chicano Movement provides a new spiritual and cultural home for him and makes him understand that he in fact is Chicano, caught between two cultures but ready to form a new one.

In the following chapters I will analyze Rodriguez' proposed explanations for his inability to cross the border into American culture. His novel exemplifies the situation of a minor part of the Chicanos in the US today. However, it also describes one of the current issues especially in the South West US and covers a hotly debated topic.

Rodriguez shows in his text that the phase of integration is still in process and that the borders erected by American society continue to deprive Chicanos from upward mobility. Confronted with poverty, little or no chance to achieve an education and surrounded by bad influences, many young Chicanos rely on gangs in hope of a better life and in hope of taking revenge on white America.

6.2) Lost in Systems: The Impossibility of Crossing Borders

Luis Rodriguez is nine years old when his father decides that the family would benefit from living in the US and crosses the border between these two culturally opposed countries. Having arrived in the US, Luis does not feel welcome and realizes that life in the US is very different from life in Mexico and that American society has erected many barriers for Mexicans which are difficult to overcome. The feeling of inferiority sets in when the Rodriguez family enters Los Angeles for the first time:

Los Angeles loomed low and large, a city of odd construction, a good place to get lost in...We ended up in Watts, a community primarily of black people except for La Colonia, often called The Quarter-the Mexican section and the oldest part of Watts [...] Watts fed into one of the largest industrial concentrations in the country, pulling from an almost endless sea of cheap labor [...] For decades, L.A. was notorious for restrictive covenants-where some areas were off limits to undesirables [...] Our first exposure in America stays with me like a foul odor. It seemed a strange world, most spiteful to us, spitting and stepping on us, coughing us up, us immigrants, as if we were phlegm stuck in the collective throat of the country. My father was mostly out of work. (Rodriguez: 1993, 19)

When coming to the US Luis feels exposed as he cannot capture the strange world he has entered. From the very beginning he feels the hostility which results in being coughed up like phlegm. Rodriguez uses

strong words to describe the treatment of Chicanos by American society. “Spitting and stepping on us” conveys the picture of Chicanos as small, unworthy insects which crawl on the floor trying to survive. The association with cockroaches is an immediate one and explains the intense reaction of society. It seems as though Los Angeles were a city so big and obscure that it swallows the immigrants who cannot find their way out as it is such an “odd construction” that they become disoriented.

The image of Watts feeding cheap workers to the industries vividly describes the exploitation and endless supply with cheap labor. He perceives this feeling of resistance and spite towards the immigrants as a collective feeling and establishes a binary opposition between Chicanos and Americans from the start. The cause for these feelings can be located in the opportunity to exploit Chicanos and the non-existing resistance out of the necessity to survive.

In these few lines in the beginning of his autobiography Rodriguez sums up the circle of need, exploitation and disdain. He establishes the fact that Mexican immigrants are not wanted in the US from the very beginning of his autobiography and takes this as the start of a narration in which America is represented by individuals who work for various systems in the US which apparently never allow upward mobility for Mexican immigrants. Therefore, the practice of stereotyping starts rather early in the story and Americans and Mexican immigrants are depicted as two opposed forces, which will have to fight against each other. He conveys the message that there can only be one winner in this war of cultures.

In the beginning of his autobiography he recounts the unfairness, discrimination and intolerance towards Mexican immigrants, which presents them as victims of American society and establishes the picture of a violent and unfair America. Rodriguez starts his narration of a violent and ignorant American society with this example:

Once my mother got the children and we walked to Will Rogers Park. There were people everywhere. Mama looked around for a

place we could rest. She spotted an empty spot on a park bench. But as soon as she sat down an American woman, with three kids of her own, came by.

“Hey, get out of there. That’s our seat.”

My mother understood but didn’t know how to answer back in English. So she tried in Spanish. “Look spic, you don’t belong here! Understand? This is not your country!” Mama quietly got our things and walked away, but I knew frustration and anger bristled within her because she was unable to talk, and when she did, no one would listen. (Rodriguez: 1993, 19)

In this scene Rodriguez portrays the disdainful behavior Americans show towards Mexican, and stresses the opposition between Chicanos and Americans. In this everyday situation the park is the contact zone where the Mexican and the American culture clash. The fact that curse words towards Chicanos can be uttered in public enhances the obviously unanimous anti-Mexican sentiments which exist in the US. In order to underline the binary oppositions which are built up by Americans in this text Rodriguez provides the example of an American forcing a Mexican out of her seat which serves as a reminder of the Mexican-American War when America conquered Mexican land.

Due to the inability to speak English, Rodriguez’ mother leaves the park and gives in to the dominant American. The unequal power relations in the cultural struggle between Chicanos and Americans are thus established and the inability to speak English is described as the first major hindrance on the way to becoming a part of American society.

The language barrier is also the first one the Rodriguez family encounters in the US. Except for the father no one in the family speaks English when they get to America. Rodriguez learns his English in “imaginative worlds - in books, TV shows.” (Rodriguez: 1993, 14)

However, he does not start to learn this foreign language before he goes to school which results in a humiliating and disastrous school experience. The school is the first official institution, which represents the power and oppression of white America and the many restrictions to

children who cannot speak English. He describes these restrictions as “Don’t speak Spanish, don’t be Mexican - you don’t belong” (Rodriguez: 1993, 20) and therefore feels his Mexican identity attacked. Rodriguez sees the necessity of an identity reformation in order to be able to belong to American society. Additionally, US society shows him constantly that he cannot survive nor become a part of US life if he maintains his Mexican values and the Spanish language, which up to that point constituted a large part of his identity. The desire and necessity to belong to American society vanishes, though, when he understands that he is not wanted in the US.

He experiences exclusion for the first time when he starts Elementary School:

First day of school: I was six years old, never having gone to kindergarten because mama needed me then to take care of La Pata and Cuca so she could work [...] I was taken to a teacher who didn’t know what to do with me. She complained about not having any room, about kids who didn’t even speak the language. Although I didn’t speak English, I understood a large part of what she was saying. I knew I wasn’t wanted [...] it got so every morning I would put my lunch and coat away, and walk to my corner where I stayed the whole day long. In those days there was no way to integrate the non-English speaking children. So they just made it a crime to speak anything but English [...] Teachers complained that maybe the children were saying bad things about them. (Rodriguez: 1993, 26)

At school the cultural opposition and misunderstandings as well as stereotyping and the fear of the unknown are carried out in the classroom which is also a contact zone. Rodriguez points out that the children of Mexican immigrants are discriminated against and cast out because the teachers don’t know Spanish and are afraid of this new culture. The fear of the unknown leads to exclusion, not integration and gives children the feeling of being alienated from the beginning. Rodriguez points out that the opposition between the teachers and the

Mexican children is a problem of cultural misunderstandings. The misunderstanding starts with the fact that he did not go to kindergarten, as it is more important in Mexican families to stay home and take care of the siblings. The concept of going to kindergarten in order to prepare for school is not known to his parents, and therefore Luis misses out on the opportunity to learn English properly and on the preparation for Elementary School.

His teachers in Elementary School, on the other hand, do not know how to handle children without any knowledge of English, as the integration of children with Spanish as first language had never been an issue and therefore had not been dealt with. The main problem in school is the English language, which marginalizes Mexican children. The language barriers are so high that children cannot overcome them without the help of others. The parents, however, cannot provide that help as they don't speak the language themselves and the teachers do not dare assist as they fear this unknown and different cultural element.

The result of this cultural clash at school is that the teachers forbid Spanish and try to instill American cultural values which lead to Luis' perception of being criminal because he is Mexican. Rodriguez, along with other Mexican children, is pushed to the margins of society when entering a classroom for the first time and feels fear and shame at first which later turn into hate and resistance towards American society.

Rodriguez does not only experience the exclusion of Mexicans at school, but also in the strict division of his neighborhood into cultural territories. In fact, all of Los Angeles is divided into rich or well-off whites and poor Mexicans or black ghettos. The white areas are "forbidden territories for the people of Watts." (Rodriguez: 1993, 24) This concept of territorial separation is not known to Luis and his brother Rano when they decide to go grocery shopping in South Gate, an Anglo neighborhood.

On their way home they are put into their place when they encounter teenagers, who live in the Anglo neighborhood:

“What do we got here?” one of the boys said. “Spics to order - maybe with some beans?” he pushed me to the ground, the groceries splattered onto the asphalt. Then somebody held me and picked me up and held me while others seized my brother, tossed his groceries out, and pounded on him [...] My brother and I then picked ourselves up, saw the teenagers take off, still laughing, still talking about those stupid greasers who dared to cross over to South Gate. (Rodriguez: 1993, 5)

Hence, the attempt to cross borders and get to know what is on the other side of the barrier ends in a violent and brutal rejection of the Mexican culture which is expressed in the comment about their eating culture. In this scene the American teenagers seem to perceive the situation as a joke, stressing their knowledge of their status in society. However, Rodriguez also conveys a certain ignorance on the American side who think in stereotypes by automatically associating beans with Mexican culture. Additionally, the white Americans in this scene outnumber the two Mexican boys, which present the white teenagers as cowards. This one incident is only one of the many humiliating situations for Luis and his family in the text and adds to the creation of a black and white picture with regard to the power relation between Anglos and Mexicans. The rejection, suppression and exclusion, along with being caged-in in their barrio and cut off from the rest of society, has to lead to a volcano of boiling hate and anger which will erupt eventually.

Another institution Rodriguez holds responsible for the bad relationship between Anglos and Mexicans are the police. The police are presented as a suppressive force that act in the name of American society and are responsible for Luis' first experience with violent death. In a scene at the beginning of the text Luis and his friend Tino are playing basketball on a court in the neighborhood after hours. In the middle of the game a police car comes by and summons the boys to the fence of the court.

Tino's first reaction when he sees the car is “Let's get out of here.” (Rodriguez, 1993:37) Both boys run away with the police chasing them. The police are responsible for Tino's death that night and present

themselves as killers rather than savers. Luis learns that the police are on the side of white America and will also hunt him for being Mexican. He describes the reason for his hate towards the police in the following scene when the police chase him and Tino:

The deputies weren't far behind, their guns drawn. Tino looked below. A deputy spied the boy and called out: "get down here...you greaser." Tino straightened up and disappeared. I heard a flood of footsteps on the roof -then a crash. Soon an awful calm covered us. (Rodriguez: 1993, 37)

A seemingly loathing hate of the police is conveyed by this hunting of a child with drawn guns and by calling him derogatory names which have a racist tendency. Rodriguez creates the impression of hunter and prey stressing the fact that Mexicans are chased regardless of their age and whether they have committed a serious crime or not - merely because of the fact that they are Mexicans, which is underlined by the fact that the police call Tino a greaser. Due to his Mexicanness and his place at the margins of society Rodriguez is constantly hunted and the more he affiliates with the gang looking for the approval American society cannot give him the more he feels chased:

It never stopped this running. We were constant prey, and the hunters soon became big blurs: the police, the gangs, the junkies, the dudes on Garvey Boulevard who took our money, all smudges into one. (Rodriguez: 1993, 36)

Luis feels like prey and sees the police as hunters, which is an analogy to the animal world. He lives in a jungle without rules, where the fittest survive. Rodriguez is always on the run and seems to be surrounded by enemies. This never ending run deprives him of the opportunity to find his self and creates a feeling that he cannot root himself any place in society and form a stable identity. His identity is always in flux as he is running from one place to the next and dealing with many different groups in society.

The inhumanity described in this autobiography, which is exercised by teachers, police and white people is shocking and appalling. However, the immigrants quickly learn how to respond in exactly the same way. They organize in gangs and go out to hunt the police or members of other gangs. Applying the rules learned by the dominant culture they form a resistance against their suppressors.

This resistance in form of joining gangs provides Rodriguez with the feeling of having found a place he belongs. American mainstream society, the schools and the police all show the migrated Mexican boy that he is not welcome in their culture and that he does not belong in America. His parents cannot provide for a place of belonging either as they are also struggling to become a part of American society. Luis has no role model among the members of his family or in American society which can help him find roots. Therefore, he embraces the gang culture in the hope of forming a stable identity and finding his self.

6.3) Homelessness and a Lack of Role Models: Gangs as Family Replacement

Luis experiences a feeling of homelessness, uprootedness and confusion, which is due to missing structures in his life. These structures should be provided to him by his parents and also by society. However, both institutions cannot support him in his search for identity or his struggle between two cultures.

Luis does not mention his parents often in this account of his life, which hints at the fact that his parents did not play a big role in his life. After migrating to the US every member of the family has to cope with the situation of being re-placed. Therefore, the parents cannot provide for a stable retreat, which would have been important for Luis to be able to adapt to American culture and find his place of belonging. As both parents are unable to break through the barriers between Anglos and Mexicans they find themselves in many humiliating situations, which the children witness. As they are also confronted with this hostile world,

the children know which battles their parents fight every day but they also see their lack of success. Understanding that their parents cannot win the cultural battle the children do not regard their parents as authority figures but as failures. One factor that adds to the separation of the family is the disunity of the parents when they come to the US.

Rodriguez' mother and father have a different view of life in the US. Whereas his father sees life in America as a chance for improvement, his mother misses Mexico and regards the US as foreign territory to which she cannot get access. Luis describes his parents' opposite characters and how their differences shaped him:

An emotionally charged, border woman, full of fire, full of pain, full of giving love. He was a stoic, unfeeling, unmoved intellectual who did as he pleased as much as she did all she could to please him. This dichotomous couple, this sun and moon, this *curandera* and biologist, dreamer and realist, fire woman and water man, molded me; these two sides created a life-long conflict in me. (Rodriguez: 1993, 16)

His mother's resistance to white America, her longing to go back to Mexico, her unwillingness to adapt to the American culture and her preservation of the Mexican culture seem to influence Luis as well as his father's attempt to assimilate; his striving to live the American Dream and his love for the United States. However, both parents fail in their function as identity formers. As their views are so different they initiate a conflict within Luis which he cannot solve. So, Luis is caught between his parents as well as between two cultures. Every institution he comes in contact with - his family, school or the police - traps him in between the two poles of Mexico and America.

However, he also learns from the parents' failures how to survive in America. With regard to employment opportunities in the US he unwillingly comes to understand that the US does not offer many good employment opportunities for immigrants even if they are well educated. Rodriguez narrates his father's attempts to improve the

families' life by doing honest work and focuses on his almost constant unemployment. It seems that honesty is directly linked to being out of work and that employment means humiliation and degradation. In one scene Rodriguez describes his feelings when he detects his father's profession.

When he is already deeply involved in gang life and lives in the garage of the family's house his father decides to take him to the school where he works as laboratory assistant. Luis is deeply disappointed when he learns that his father actually values the opportunity of obtaining a low paid job:

Dad cleaned the cages of snakes, tarantulas, lizards, and other animals used in the labs. He swept floors and wiped study tables; dusted and mopped the museum area [...] Dad felt proud of his job - but he was only a janitor. I don't know why this affected me. There's nothing wrong with being a janitor - and one as prestigious as my dad. But for years, I had this running fantasy of my scientist father in a laboratory carrying out vital experiments - the imagination of a paltry kid who wanted so much to break away from the constraints of a society which expected my father to be a janitor or a laborer - when I wanted a father who transformed the world [...] My dad looked like a lowly peasant, a man with a hat in his hand - apologetic. At home he was king, *el jefeito*, the word. But here my father turned into somebody's push-around. Dad should have been equal with anyone, but with such bad English [...] (Rodriguez: 1993, 136)

The feeling of shame and embarrassment overcomes Rodriguez when he understands that his father is proud of working for people who he sees as suppressors. Presenting his father as lowly peasant whose desire it is to please his master, he alludes to the situation of Mexican peasants shortly after the Mexican American war pleading to keep their land. Rodriguez imagines his father to be a strong character that can change the situation for Mexicans in the US and serve as example for others.

However, his father used to work as a High School teacher in Mexico and is now stuck in a low class job which destroys Rodriguez' picture of his father as a hero and authority figure. Rodriguez perceives his father's position as symbolic for the status of all Mexicans in American society. He thinks that American society expects Mexicans to work in low end jobs and welcome hard work with no future.

Again, Rodriguez presents stereotypes in this case aimed at the employment situation of Mexicans. It seems that he looks for an excuse for his father's failure and finds it when he makes his father's bad English responsible for his inability to find better employment. Rodriguez learns from experiences like these that honesty and obedience to the rules of American society do not pay off. Witnessing the humiliation of his parents, he understands that they cannot break through to the other side - because of their lack of English. However, he does not understand why his parents don't stand up to white America but bow in order to get by.

It seems as if Luis realizes at a very early age that assimilation and enduring discrimination is not the way to success. This realization drawn from the behavior of his parents and the fact that his parents are constantly fighting with each other slowly pushes him into the gang Las Lomas. He is apparently searching for a home and a family, which does not obey the rules of white America but makes their own. Additionally, his brother shows him as well that violence is a way to success and is not necessarily punished. When they are kids Rano always beats Luis and does not experience any repercussions from his parents. He teaches Luis that violence is essential for gaining control. Therefore, all members in his family except for his sisters pave the way into gang life.

The gangs provide family structures and live following set rules, which provide what Luis is longing for. Apart from that, the gang resists the police, the schools and American society. In the gang Luis finds people who share his views and present a solution to his problems, which is to fight and take out rage on mutually selected enemies. The gang activities are the outlet Luis has been looking for all his life. He finally finds a

way of taking revenge on the Americans who have oppressed him for so long.

6.4) A New Home: The Gang as Foundation for a New Identity

Due to the lack of role models, Rodriguez looks for a community where he can belong and form a stable identity. He believes to find the support and comfort he is searching for in gangs, which soon take over the streets in his neighborhood. Luis first joins The Animal Tribe and later Las Lomas. He feels the need for “protection” as the barrio is over swept with gangs and clubs, which slowly “metamorphosed into something unpredictable, more encompassing. Something more deadly.” (Rodriguez, 1993: 43)

Rodriguez seems to see the threat that is spread by the gangs as well as the dynamics in these formations that are uncontrollable. However, he ignores the danger and destruction he might be exposed to when joining a gang. Simultaneous to his failure in school he becomes more and more involved with gang life. Apparently, Rodriguez’ lack of success and exclusion at school leads to a bigger attraction to gang life. Rodriguez indirectly blames the schools and later the police to be responsible for the eruption and the popularity of gangs in Mexican neighborhoods. When Thee Mystics, a gang from the barrio, first attack his school, Rodriguez is pulled into gang life: “But Thee mystics had done their damage. They had left their mark on the school - and on me.” (Rodriguez: 1993, 42)

This attack changes Rodriguez’ life. Captured by the power the gang seems to possess and the damage they can do to the school, he decides to dedicate his life to the fight against authorities. The fact that he regards himself as damaged by the performance of Thee Mystics reveals that Rodriguez is aware of the danger he exposes himself to and also of the downturn his life might experience. Soon after this attack, at the age of 12, he joins The Animal Tribe and neglects school. Rodriguez

describes also how the climate at his Junior High School facilitated the beginning of gang life. The feeling of superiority to authorities who are overstrained by the violence at the school along with a violent, drug-ridden surrounding seem to be the driving factors for gang affiliation:

This is what I remember of junior high: Cholas who walked up the stairs in their tight skirts, revealing everything, and looked down at us, smiling at their power. Bloody Kotexes on the hallway floor, Gang graffiti on every available space of wall. Fires which flared from restroom trash bins. Fights every day after school on the alley off Jackson Avenue. Dudes who sold and took drugs, mostly downers and yesca, but sometimes heroin which a couple of dudes shot up in the boys' room while their homeys kept a lookout [...] We drove teachers nuts at Garvey. A number of them were sent home with nervous breakdowns. We went through three teachers and five substitutes in my home room my first year at the school. (Rodriguez: 1993, 45ff)

During his time in Junior High School Luis is introduced to a new kind of society; a society within the American society where suddenly the tables are turned. The white teachers are the suppressed, the school is powerless against the violence coming from within the Mexican-American community, and the police are an enemy to be fought. Luis discovers that he can survive much better in this society of fist rule rather than in the society where Mexicans are thunderous with no way out.

The description of the Junior High School itself sounds like an accumulation of bad influences. Seducing underage girls, fighting during the breaks and drug dealing express the hopelessness, indifference and aggression of the Mexican students. It seems that learning and studying play a minor role at best and violent incidents structure the day. Rodriguez uses very colloquial language once he starts narrating his time in the gangs and creates an authentic atmosphere that provides a good impression of his everyday life. This use of language

conveys the indifference, which dominates his life as the words seem carelessly written down and not carefully chosen.

During his time in Junior High School Rodriguez distances himself from his parents and his brother, who has turned into the success story of the barrio. His parents still don't know English very well but all their children speak it and never talk to them in Spanish, which leads to a lack of communication. As he cannot talk to his parents about the damage, which is caused by the gangs, he turns to drugs in order to forget the violence and the meaningless in his life. Turning to drugs with the aim to flee from his life reveals that he is desperate and has resigned, as neither his parents nor society can stop his fall, which is taking him deeper and deeper into gang culture.

Trying to stop the destruction in his life and to get out of the circle of violence and drugs he tries to commit suicide at the age of fifteen. At that point in his life, he uses drugs on a regular basis and is heavily involved in gang life. Rodriguez at one point utters the wish to wash away his face, this "face of weariness, of who-cares, of blood-shot eyes." His description would fit men who have had to endure many hardships in life but he is in fact talking about a fifteen-year-old teenager. The effects of violence and drugs take its toll and stress Luis' despair instead of easing it. The drugs and the violence seem to ease his pain of feeling uprooted and torn apart but they only provide illusion for a while.

Whereas Rodriguez' time in Junior High School is an endless juxtaposition of violent beatings, drug experiences and desperate attempts to get out of this cycle, his time in High School starts out more promising. When going on to High School there is a small glimpse of hope that Rodriguez will come to terms with the fact that he is constantly caught between two opposing worlds, Mexico and America, gang and society.

Entering Mark Keppel High School , he is once more made aware of the separation of society into Anglo and Mexican which finally leads to his dropping out of High School and full dedication to the gang.

He tries to justify this decision by describing Mark Keppel High School as a school with

Two principal languages. Two skin tones and two cultures. It revolved around class differences. The white and Asian kids were from professional, two-car households with watered lawns and trimmed trees. The laboring class, the sons and daughters of service workers, janitors and factory hands, lived in and around the Hills (or a section of Monterey Park called "Poor Side.") (Rodriguez: 1993, 83)

The two opposed cultures are separated by the school which leads to a class system. The people who come from the Mexican neighborhoods are put in industrial arts classes whereas the Anglos are selected for the college preparatory classes. The only time the two cultures get in contact with each other is the yearly tradition of fighting each other physically. The school does not help the Mexicans to integrate nor does it help the whites to get to know the Mexican kids. The binary oppositions are being maintained. At Mark Keppel High School Luis realizes that

It was harder to defy this expectation than just accept it and fall into the trappings. It was a jacket I could try to take off, but they kept putting it back on. The first hint of trouble and the preconceptions proved to be true. So why not be proud? Why not be an outlaw? Why not make it on our own?" (Rodriguez: 1993, 84)

When Luis is finally expelled from school he remarks, "This was fine with me. I hated school and I loved fighting." (Rodriguez: 1993, 100)

Rodriguez now openly blames American society - "them" - for his failures and his gang life. The clear message that American society wants him to be a violent criminal is spiteful and a justification for his actions. It seems like he is looking for excuses for staying in the gang and not changing his life. His attempts to try and find a place in this society are ended with this statement and shortly after this realization he

joins Las Lomas and spends most of his time taking drugs and battling the police and rival gangs.

After blaming American society for the eruption of gang violence he goes on to explain why gangs are attractive for hopeless teenagers like him:

I had certain yearnings at the time, which a lot of us had, to acquire authority in the face of police, joblessness and powerlessness. Las Lomas was our path to that, but I was frustrated because I felt the violence was eating us alive. (Rodriguez: 1993, 113)

According to this statement Rodriguez joins the gangs because he wants to fight the American system of injustice. His gang life is a way for him to change America and to gain power against this impenetrable society. It is a battle for empowerment described by Ortiz in his first phase of transculturation. However, Luis understands that Las Lomas aren't the solution to these problems and also distances himself from the violence. When he is seventeen he starts to hang out with community workers from the barrio as he feels that he must learn more about the world and his society, meaning the Mexican-American community. One of the social workers especially catches his attention:

Chente impressed me as someone I could learn from. He was calm, but also street enough to go among all those crazy guys and know how to handle himself. He didn't need to act bad to operate. He could be strong, intelligent, and in control. He was the kind of dude who could get the best from the system [...] without being a snitch or giving in. I wanted to be able to do this, too. (Rodriguez: 1993, 113)

This passage clearly shows that Luis was looking for a role model his whole life, for someone who he can look up to. Neither his parents nor his older brother were able to give him any advice for life. But Chente, who is twelve years older, shows Luis how to live and how to obtain

what he desires. He also shows him how to live in America and how to be successful without having to endure humiliation and discrimination, which is very important for Luis.

Although it can be foreseen that Luis will turn his back on gang life once he meets with Chente, the resistance to US society remains. Rodriguez wants to benefit from the system on the one hand but he does not want to change his identity or assimilate. This contradiction of taking part in US society but not being ready to make the necessary changes leads to his Chicano identity. The hate towards Anglo society goes deep, and Rodriguez seems to not be able to cross the border to the other culture.

In the following two years, Luis has to watch his sister Gloria get involved in a girl gang as she idealizes him and thinks he is free and independent. He takes part in numerous violent robberies, beatings and killings. However, the reader can finally feel a certain distance towards the violence enacted. He doesn't take part in rapes; he doesn't like killing for stealing and after a long process of thought seems to choose Chente as his role model.

Chente impersonates Luis' hero. He keeps visiting him and slowly understands that he has to fulfill certain duties in order to make it in the US. After choosing the gang life to have an outlet for his anger and to get back at white America, Chente slowly but steadily leads him onto the right track. Chente's support, along with the Chicano Movement, which gave more power to the Chicanos, turned Luis life around a second time. He finds another way to fight for his cause of empowering the Chicano people and simultaneously finds a place of belonging: the world of the Chicanos; a world which is Mexican and American. In the last chapter of this part I will focus on how Luis Rodriguez finds his new Chicano Self and helps others to find it as well.

6.5) The Chicano Movement: Finding a New Chicano Self

In the 1970s Rodriguez finally finds a mentor who shows him a way out of gang life. Chente is the person in Rodriguez' life who opens up the world of art to him and helps him understand how he can use art and literature to express his own feelings. Understanding and using the art of writing to speak up against those who suppress him and his people during the Chicano Movement creates a new understanding of self in Rodriguez. He seems to know where he belongs and is able stand up for himself and his fellow Chicanos as he now knows who and what he is fighting for. It is also remarkable that he is ready to not use violence anymore as the universal answer to all problems but thinks of peaceful ways to make his dissatisfaction heard and seen. Rodriguez has come to understand that he is a Chicano who needs to fight for the rights of his people.

This knowledge leads to leaving the gang, to becoming a member of various Chicano student organizations and to obtaining a contract with a publisher. His fight against suppression, discrimination and injustice continues, but in a non-violent way as he has found roots and can argue from a stable position. The grappling and fighting in Los Angeles persists as the Chicanos now have a common cause and can fight as a unity. Considering himself a Chicano and having found others who share his belief provides Rodriguez with the self-confidence to tear down barriers and start a dialogue. He also tries to keep younger children away from a gang life by working on the streets.

His attempts to improve the situation in the barrio also include his protest against violence in his own gang. While the other gang members are trying to make a plan of how to take revenge for the deaths of two of their friends, Rodriguez has the courage to outline the sinister future which lies ahead of them if another war with the other gang is started:

We can't pretend a war with Sangra won't mean others won't die," I responded, knowing I couldn't back off. "That our brothers and sisters, or even our moms, won't get hurt [...] You

all know I'll take on anybody [...] They were my homeboys too. But think about it. They were killed by a speeding car, both of them shot right through the heart. Nobody yelled out nothing. Who's trained to do this? Not Sangra. I say the cops did this. I say they want us to go after Sangra when we are so close coming together [...] we have to think about who's our real enemy. The dudes in Sangra are just like us, man. (Rodriguez: 1993, 208)

Here, Rodriguez points out that Chicanos should have a sense of unity and collectivity as the powerful suppressors will turn them against each other and destroy their people. It is obvious that Luis has understood the war of power and that he would like his people to unite and fight for their rights. Assuming that the police killed their friends shows once more that Luis has not ceased to think of white America as opposition. The barriers between the cultures are still erected and Rodriguez is still caught in a polarized world. However, poverty, suppression, discrimination, violence and drug abuse have made his friends enemies of their own people.

Having seen how the cycle of deprivation works against the Chicanos, Rodriguez becomes a street worker in order to keep the children away from the gang. Yet, his attempts seem to be vain when he describes how the Mexican Mafia takes over the neighborhood during the Chicano Movement and recruits all gang members from Las Lomas and Sangra. In the wake of this heavy influence police violence increases and community centers are closed and Rodriguez sees his neighborhood change to the worse:

The scourge of PCP - "angel dust" - had begun to grip almost every facet of barrio life. Whole neighborhoods became ghost towns as increasing numbers of young people were hooked into this overpowering narcotic, easily manufactured in back-room laboratories and distributed widely and cheaply [...] But the most critical blow came with the close of the Bienvenidos Community Center [...] the John Fabela Youth Center, the

dropout school and day care, all closed their doors - leaving Las Lomas with what it had once before: nothing. (Rodriguez: 1993, 240ff.)

Rodriguez describes the disastrous effects the closing of social institutions has on his neighborhood. Portraying the barrio as a ghost town conveys the image of empty streets and hopeless and desperate people who have lost the will to live. Simultaneously, the area seems to be segregated from other areas, a town of its own with no future. Rodriguez sees a connection between the increasing number of drug users and the closing of the community centers as he perceives these institutions to be a place of retreat for young Chicanos who cannot find support at home. His conclusion that his former gang has once again lost everything that could save them from the vicious cycle of gang culture foreshadows a hopeless future as the reader expects the members of Las Lomas to join the Mexican Mafia as they have no other place of belonging due to the closing of the community centers.

In his autobiography Rodriguez points out the cycle between economic necessity and gang activity. It is striking that young people try to earn a living by selling drugs and are eventually sucked into the bigger gang where a way back into normal life is almost impossible. Rodriguez also describes how the gangs replace society for the poor and homeless as they provide rules and regulations and regard their members as part of this society. One could say that the gangs offer a life, which the American society should provide.

Gangs provide homes for their family, a decent income and are part of a social network, which takes care of its members as long as they prove loyal. They function as a society within society and, as stated by Rodriguez, US social and educational systems are to blame for the attractiveness of gangs, as they do not provide better options for Mexicans.

According to Luis Rodriguez' autobiography, American society excludes Chicanos and does not allow them to improve their social

status as the basic cultural elements, such as language, values and a cultural code of conduct are not transferred.

Thus, many Mexican-Americans are kept at the margins of society. Gangs seem to offer help in such a hopeless situation and therefore have no difficulties in recruiting young children. However, the gap between the two opposing cultures is steadily widened. Integration, which was the determined goal when Ortiz' developed his theory of transculturation, still seems far away.

Rodriguez proclaims a battle "against police terror, labor issues, the rights of the undocumented, for tenant rights and decent education" at the end of his autobiography. However, having found his place between the two opposing cultures, he fights peacefully and condemns the wars of the gangs against the police which entail so many negative effects and just drive the two cultures further apart. He shows that transculturation could happen through dialogue and does not have to be carried out with weapons.

7) Helena Maria Viramontes: *Under the Feet of Jesus*- The Struggle for a Collective Identity

We have fed you all for a thousand years-
For that was our doom, you know,
From the days when you chained us in your fields
To the strike a week ago.
You have taken our lives, and our babies and our wives,
And we're told it's your legal share,
But if blood be the price of your lawful wealth,
Good God! We have brought it fair!¹⁰⁴

This poem from 1908 by an unknown Proletarian can be found on the homepage of [farmworkers.org](http://www.farmworkers.org) describing the hardships and deprivations of farm workers in the United States. Enduring suppression and exploitation in a globalized world, which pushes them to the margins of society they are the most invisible labor group in the US and throughout the world. Helena Maria Viramontes depicts the difficult situation of migrant farm workers in her novel *Under the Feet of Jesus*. In the novel she not only makes the readers aware of the farm workers hardships but also contrasts the American consumer society to the migrant farm workers. In order to provide a background for the core theme in Viramontes' novel, I will give a short overview of the major issues and facts of migrant workers in the US.

Due to globalization a fundamental restructuring of the agricultural business has taken place, which is oriented towards meeting the demands of multinational corporations and passes on the pressure, leading to low wages and bad working conditions.¹⁰⁵ As agricultural work is mostly seasonal work, farm workers and their families do not have job security, which leads to child labor. Often the women and

¹⁰⁴ Written by an unknown Proletarian, 1908, source:
<http://www.farmworkers.org/strugeal.html>

¹⁰⁵ Guthman, Julie (2004). *Agrarian Dreams: The Paradox of Organic Farming in California*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

children in a family work on the fields like then male members of the family. This situation deprives children of a decent education¹⁰⁶ and supports the cycle of poverty and deprivation. Women often have to endure sexual harassment and/or abuse, work during pregnancy and have to experience wage discrimination.

Children are not only deprived of educational opportunities but also of the opportunity to learn English, which is necessary in the US. Stuck in the circle of migrant farm work they are kept at the margins of society, lacking the opportunities to become a part of US society. Often migrant workers follow the crops to secure regular work as described in *Under the Feet of Jesus*. However, this kind of traveling is expensive and the families cannot be assured that the money spent on traveling is made up at the next job.

Undocumented farm workers have the biggest challenges to face as they often need to endure abuse or isolation and they are paid the lowest wages. However, many farm workers live below the poverty line and sometimes do not earn enough money to feed their families. Often, families live in shacks on the fields that are usually unsanitary and overcrowded. One major problem which is also describes in the novel are health issues. Agricultural workers are often exposed to pesticides and heavy machines and thus physically harmed. The problem of pesticide spraying is a serious one and recognized as such.

Viramontes takes up this issue and narrates the fate of Alejo, who dies from a pesticide spraying. She does not only show the helpless exposure of the migrant workers to the globalized forces but also raises an awareness for the health of migrant workers on plantations. However, many of the farm workers in the US are undocumented and 95% of the farm workers do not have a health insurance¹⁰⁷, which makes the fight for better working conditions and health insurance for the families very

¹⁰⁶ Only 50.7 % of migrant worker teenagers have a high school degree according to <http://www.migrant.net>

¹⁰⁷ Harrison, Jill, „Abandoned bodies and spaces of sacrifice: Pesticide drift activism and the contestation of neoliberal environmental politics in California". *Geoforum* (2008)

difficult.¹⁰⁸

The life of migrant workers, of whom 77% are from Mexico¹⁰⁹, is exposed to insecurity. Therefore, religion and faith play a major role in the families' lives. In *Under the Feet of Jesus* religion as symbolized by the mother's altar, which provides some protection. The statue of Jesus guards the proof of Estrella's citizenship and Alejo sees God as responsible for his life and death when he asks him why he has to die from the pesticide spraying. The dangers of the migrant life are faced with the help of faith and religion.

In the following I will analyze how Viramontes depicts the hard life of the migrant worker and how the text represents transculturation. I will also explain how Mexican females have to struggle as women and as Chicanas due to the transgression of cultural borders. Last but not least I will discuss how the world economy can profit from transculturation as means to produce an underclass in order to maintain and stabilize global economy.

7.1) Introduction

Helena Viramontes' *Under the Feet of Jesus* narrates the life of a thirteen year old Mexican girl who leads a life as poor migrant worker in California and tries to break free of traditional female gender roles. Estrella is the main character in the novel that along with the other characters in her patchwork family has to endure the harsh life of a migrant worker. She and her family seem to have accepted their place at the bottom of American society as cheap labor securing American opulence. They are aware of the fact that due to their work American society can rely on cheap goods but appear to have accepted their place in society.

¹⁰⁸ See Guthman, Julie, *Agrarian Dreams: The Paradox of Organic Farming in California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004)

¹⁰⁹ See <http://www.migrant.net>

However, as the narration progresses a certain resistance towards Americans can be witnessed and towards the end of the novel the call for a collective Chicano community grows stronger. This rising criticism is due to the clash of the marginalized culture of the migrant workers and US mainstream culture. Consuming the goods they produce under the hot California sun Estrella understands that because they work at the bottom rungs of California's agribusiness they are (culturally) invisible and the reality of their labor and existence is disguised. This realization leads to a steadily rising resistance against US mass consumer society in Estrella, who perceives the strenuous work under life-threatening conditions every day. Seeing the (immediate) future of her people in danger she steps out of her marginalized role as a Mexican female and sets out to summon her people and give them a voice.

Viramontes uses highly metaphorical language to present the back-breaking life under the sun of California in order to mediate the hard and difficult conditions which migrant families have to cope with. Using multiple points of view to tell the same events a few times also offers the reader the possibility to conceive a complex picture of the life of migrant workers.

From the beginning of the story it is clear that the formation of a new female as well as a collective identity is one of the main themes of the novel. In Viramontes' text it is necessary for the main character, Estrella, to form her cultural identity in order to unite the rest of the Mexican-American community and create a collective identity to secure its future existence. Life in America is desired and seen as a chance to rise from the lowest social stratum of society. Estrella and the other Chicanos/as come to realize, that improving their social status in US society is long and burdensome.

Being Mexican and female, the way from the margins to the center of society is a big challenge for Estrella, who is instructed early by her mother to keep the proof of her American citizenship "under the feet of Jesus." In spite of having American citizenship, the right to live in the US is not perceived as a given but is under constant attack by *la migra*,

who label illegal immigrants by their color of skin. Discrimination due to stereotypes contradicts the text of the second section of the Declaration of Independence that bestows everyone with “certain unalienable Rights [...] among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.”¹¹⁰

Estrella and her fellow Chicanos have to understand that race, class, gender and the politics of production are closely interlinked, and that the liberty and pursuit of happiness, which they associated with the United States, is not true for them as they are invisible and replaceable. The migrant workers have a fixed place in American society, which contributes to a cycle of survival; cheap Mexican labor ensures a seemingly endless supply with cheap food and American farmers can raise their profits by hiring cheap workers. Cheap labor is needed to make the globalized economy of the country work and Chicanos /as are a calculated factor in the country’s production of food and goods.

The thread of hope that Viramontes weaves through her novel is illusory, as it stands in stark contrast to her depiction of the migrant workers’ lives. Estrella’s vita shows clearly that society has given her the place at the end of the social stratum because of her ethnicity and gender. Even though she manages to win the fight against female stereotypes and is ready to summon her people and lead them, she will not be able to change the vicious circle of the global economy, which assigns a specific role to most Mexican immigrants.

Transculturation means exploitation and sacrifice as the backbreaking labor is seemingly the only way out of poverty. Estrella speaks English and fights for her freedom as a female. These two elements are the only ones Estrella manages to learn and take from the other culture; this shows how limited the contact to the other culture is and how slim the chances are to integrate. Although the Chicanos in the novel contribute considerably to the well-being of American society, they are kept at the

¹¹⁰ See quote by Thomas Jefferson in Wills, Gary, *Inventing America*. (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 213

margins and in the vicious cycle of deprivation. The result of transculturation is a complete dependency on their American masters and a never-ending cycle of hard work and poverty. The belief in the fact that hard work can change a life is clung to throughout the novel as the concept of the American Dream is an element of American culture, which the migrant workers have taken over. Contrary to the never-ending belief in the American Dream, it is this dream of a better life, which keeps the Chicanos in their place and ensures the American standard of life and a stable economy.

This novel was also chosen to discuss the aspects of comfort and integration according to Ortiz' model. Like in *Always Running*, integration is not realized. The Chicanos in the text know their physical place that is on the fields and they know their social function that is to feed into a pool of cheap labor and provide American society with food. However, they are physically and socially excluded from white America. American society counts on their productivity and their belief in the American Dream, which actually makes them a stable part of society. The Chicanos/as in this novel believe that they are a part of American society as they fulfill their duties towards American society but the Americans see them as a faceless mass of people, exchangeable and replaceable by any other minority in the US. Transculturation in Viramontes' novel is a tool to maintain the power structures and keep the Chicanos spatially and culturally at the margins of society.

7.2) Transculturation as Manifestation of Power

In spite of the difficult working conditions, the belief in American society and its benefits are unbroken throughout the novel. The concept of the American Dream is ever present and motivates the characters to go out into the fields every day. The attempt to live the American Dream despite the exploitation and hardships the Chicanos endure shows a strong determination to cross cultural borders and adapt elements of American culture. Estrella and Alejo are the two characters in the novel who trust in the fact that one has to work hard to survive and get ahead in life.

In the beginning of the novel Estrella's and Alejo's lives are connected through narrative techniques. At the same time the theme of exploitation and deprivation is introduced. The novel starts out with Estrella wondering "Had they been heading for the barn all along?" (Viramontes: 1996, 3) To answer this question the events previous to this question are told in a series of flashbacks by a third person omniscient narrator who takes on the various viewpoints of the characters interchangeably in order to show the reader different perspectives of the same events or situations.¹¹¹

The changes between the different scenes remind us of a camera sweeping from one scene to the next. From the beginning of the novel the fates and lives of Estrella's family and Alejo are interwoven as the narration starts with a scene in the families' station wagon and then shifts to Alejo and his cousin, who are sitting in a tree stealing fruit. A bit later Estrella and her siblings go into the barn to scare some birds, which is witnessed by Alejo and his cousin as well. A space in the text indicates the change of scene:

It happened so quickly. The swallows and owls shrieking in a burst of furious flight, feathers snowing down, the girls screaming.

- Cats fighting. Alejo whispered between the toes of his concord tennis shoes, through the branches and down to Gumecindo. (Viramontes, 1995:10)

This narrative technique informs the reader about the different perspectives which are gained from the situation depending on the location of the characters. The reader is led into the theme of exploitation and poverty from the beginning as the old, dilapidated barn constitutes the families' new home; additionally, Alejo and his cousin

¹¹¹ See Nieto Garcia, Michael, Ethnic, Feminist, Universal?: Helena Viramontes's Under the Feet of Jesus. *Phenomena: Journal of Language and Literature Vol 7 No3*, (Feb 2004) 125-133.

have to steal in order to survive in spite of the fact that both of them are working. The cycle of miseducation, hard work in the fields, poverty and marginalization is summed up in the first few pages of the novel and unfolds in detail throughout the rest of the text.

The reader is also made aware of the fact that Estrella cannot receive the education she would need in order to improve herself and her family's life. Her few school days are described as a waste of time and as a way to exclude Estrella from the rest of the class and in the wider sense of US society:

Estrella hated when things were kept from her. The teachers in the schools did the same, never giving the information she wanted. Estrella would ask over and over, so what's this, and point to the diagonal lines written in chalk on the blackboard with a dirty fingernail [...] but some of the teachers were more concerned about the dirt under her finger nails. They inspected her head for lice, parting her long hair with ice cream sticks. They scrubbed her fingers with a toothbrush until they were so sore she couldn't hold a pencil properly. They said good luck to her when the *pisca* was over, reserving the desks in the back for the next batch of migrant children. (Viramontes: 1996, 24/25)

Estrella is eager to learn and at this point in the novel cannot understand yet why the teachers do not make the same information available to her that they grant to the other children in the class. It is apparently understood by the teachers that the Mexican children have to be kept at the bottom of society and thus they do not teach them any knowledge but focus on their cleanliness in order to stress their belonging to the underclass.

In this scene the teachers regard it as a waste of time to provide the migrant children with useful information as they are not expected to finish school and obtain a better job. They know that their work in the fields does not allow them to receive a proper education and do not try to change an unchangeable situation. The fate of the Mexican students

manifests and leaves little hope. Estrella does not see the teachers' treatment as demeaning but rather annoying until she understands that "words could become as excruciating as rusted nails piercing the heels of her bare feet." (Viramontes: 1996, 25)

It is interesting that in both quotes from above the stress of observance is on physical features rather than emotional or mental ones. Throughout the novel physical proximity as opposed to an emotional absence and isolation can be witnessed. Viramontes repetitively uses images involving several body parts, such as toothless or deformed mouths representing speechlessness and therefore powerlessness or backs which are usually bowed representing suppression and inferiority. In contrast, the emotions of the characters are not expressed openly but rather by inner monologues, which creates a distance to the reader: therefore, the characters seem to be emotionally isolated. The stress is really on the physical features and the bodily functions which are important for the characters, as they ensure survival.

When looking at the treatment Estrella experiences at school it shows that her teachers only pay attention to the cleanliness of her body and not to the capability of her brain. Thus, the position of migrant workers in society has been firmly established. The statement that the places in the back of the class will be kept free for the next wave of migrant workers' children indicates that the teachers see the Mexican children as physical workers rather than students.

Perfecto is the character in the novel that makes Estrella realize that education is important. When he shows his tools to her, she understands that it is "essential...to know these things. That was when she began to read." (Viramontes: 1996, 26) From the beginning Estrella is portrayed as a girl who tries to invest in herself and is not satisfied with being kept at the margins. She is expected to break out of her life as migrant worker due to her persistent attempts to obtain an education. Although the teachers at school withhold necessary knowledge from her and she has to work in the fields in the summer, Estrella unfailingly makes efforts to gain knowledge. It is said that she reads everything she can. However,

many books are not available to her, which narrows down her choice of literature:

The only book she had ever owned was a catechism chapbook that her godmother had given her. Estrella had read and reread the chapbook “I believe in God and the Holy Spirit came in the form of tongues of fire to show His love, and in a great wind to show the power of His grace” [...] Maxine’s book was light and Estrella flipped through the first page open. The pictures add bubbles with words. Words like the kind in the newspapers thrown in trash cans at filling stations, or oatmeal instructions, or billboard signs that Estrella read over and over: Clorox makes linens more than white [...] It makes them sanitary, too! (Viramontes: 1996, 31)

Remarkably, Estrella reads about the two factors that are most important in her life: faith and economic goods. Although she cannot make sense of the words she is reading as she was never taught how to read a bible and as she will never have the money to buy Clorox or oatmeal, she devours the words themselves. She lacks understanding for the cultural context of what she is reading but she is proud of her newly gained skills.

Achieving a better understanding of the world that surrounds her is her motivation to read and later to learn how to use Perfecto’s tools. It is obvious that she cannot deal with her situation of being powerless and being kept at the margins. She is not willing to accept her fate as a migrant worker; therefore, she asks questions.

Estrella is also the only character in the novel, which understands that comprehension of cultural contexts is vital in order to survive and in order to be able to raise one’s voice. Her views and actions present a stark contrast with the images of the speechless mouths Viramontes uses as imagery to symbolize the powerlessness of the migrant workers. The imagery of the mouths is used for the first time when Alejo and his cousin see the boy in the barn

Alejo moved to comfort the boy but the boy stepped back, his mouth a lopsided O as he held out his bleeding elbow gingerly. It seemed to Alejo that he was crying, though all he heard were the wind-tossed trees. Even the hole of his own shirt hung like a speechless mouth on his belly. (Viramontes: 1996, 22)

The Chicanos in this novel cannot speak. They are speechless and thus powerless as they cannot utter their desire for change. The boy in this scene is unable to cry for help. He can only show what he needs. The inability to speak is omnipresent in the novel. Women are worried that their babies could be born without a mouth, migrant workers have toothless mouths and mouths cannot produce speech. It is remarkable that there is hardly any dialogue in the novel but a lot of inner monologues. Viramontes supports the imagery of the physical non-existence of mouths or teeth with the absence of dialogue to stress the powerlessness of the characters and to show the emotional isolation of the characters. Estrella does not accept her speechlessness and tries to revolt against it. She understands migrant workers' status in society and is ready to revolt.

Her realization that "people just use you until you're all used up, then rip you into pieces when they're finished using you" (Viramontes, 1995: 75) stands in clear contrast to Alejo's dreams of going to university or to her mother's fear keeping their proof of citizenship safely in a statue of Jesus. The fact that every migrant worker is replaceable shocks Estrella and helps her to gain perspective on her own life. She understands that although she is a US citizen, she will always be a migrant worker and will be thrown away once she is used up. She has to realize that migrant workers will be defeated in the cultural battle, as they cannot overcome the barriers between themselves and American society.

Although they are able to take some elements from American culture such as the belief in hard work, the longing for success and the English language, they are far too distant from society to apply this knowledge in a beneficiary way.

In Viramontes' text the transcultural process raises the awareness that the world economy has assigned a fixed place to the Mexican migrant workers in order to function. American society has created a class in its society that is responsible for the well-being of white America and simultaneously for their own continuous deprivation. Estrella understands that migrant workers are replaceable factors in the global economy, which actually makes it superfluous to form a stable identity, to think of a place of belonging. The stability in identity lies in the unsteadiness, in the constant change of place, language and fate. The battle of transculturation is never-ending and a steady factor in the calculation of the economic forces in the world as it never ceases to fill the endless pool of cheap labor.

7.3) Crossing Cultural Borders: A Battle for Survival

Survival in the contact zone is one of the central themes in Viramontes' novel *Under the Feet of Jesus*. The process of transculturation forces Mexicans to work in back breaking jobs such as fruit pickers. The economic battle in which the dominant side needs the cheap labor and needs to keep the immigrants in their inferior position and the other side sees the jobs in the fields as an opportunity to rise in society is the central theme in Viramontes' novel.

Therefore, the importance of work and a good economy is discussed from the beginning of the text until the end. When Estrella looks up at the sky where the clouds are "ready to burst like cotton plants". By this image the reader is made aware of the fact that Estrella and her family are focused on and depend on work. Comparing the beautiful sky to the back-breaking work they are about to start reminds the reader of how violent the landscape is to Chicana migrant workers. The violence of the landscape is omnipresent in the novel and starts on the very first pages by describing the valley and the fields. What to the reader sounds very idyllic and peaceful such as

Sunlight weaved in and out of the clouds. Wisps of wind ruffled the orange and avocado and peach trees which rolled and tumbled as far back as the etched horizon of the mountain range. (Viramontes: 1995, 3)

a means of work for the Chicana migrant workers. The fruit needs to be picked from the trees, the sunlight makes the work on the fields unbearable, the etched and endless horizons symbolize hopelessness, and the mountains imprison the workers in this mocking beauty. The hardships of work, which is necessary for the survival of the whole family are described in the beginning of the story:

The silence and the barn and the clouds meant things. It was always a question of work, and work depended on the harvest, car running, their health, the condition of the road, how long the money held out, and the weather, which meant they could depend on nothing. (Viramontes: 1996, 4)

This scene shows that the fate of Estrella and her family is very uncertain as their survival in the US depends on many factors, which they cannot influence, such as the weather. Their life is like a game which they could lose any day. Taking their economic situation into consideration it is also clear that the formation of a stable identity is impossible if the only certain factor in life is unsteadiness.

However, it seems as if the characters have constructed their self in view of this steady element in their lives. The fact that their economic well-being depends on something as uncertain and incalculable as the harvest explains this attitude towards American society and towards their own selves. Estrella is a very optimistic and positive character, which accepts her situation and tries to make the best of it. She does not dream of a better life but she also does not see herself as someone who operates at the bottom of society. Once she understands that American society is

just using people until they are not needed any more and then leaves them behind she is sincerely shocked. After this realization she decides to take the fate of her people into her own hands and her character changes.

Alejo's near death experience is the necessary stimulus that Estrella needs in order to take the fate of the Mexican migrant workers into her own hands and fight for them. Viramontes starts this scene with an imagery of a death symbol

Alejo hadn't guessed that the biplane was so close until its gray shadow crossed over him like a crucifix, and he ducked into the leaves. The biplane circled, banking steeply over the trees and then released a shower of white pesticide [...] Gumecindo dropped his sack and ran [...] running just ahead of the cross shadow. (Viramontes: 1996, 76)

The scene is reminiscent of war, of people running away from falling bombs or guns shooting. However, this is happening at the work place of so many Mexican migrants in California. Simultaneously, the shadow of the crucifix symbolizes death and alludes to the fate of Jesus on the cross putting Alejo in the position of an innocent man, who is prosecuted by his oppressors and killed in the end. In his case it is also a slow death and changes the history of his people, as Estrella will lead them out of their miserable situation due to Alejo's death. Viramontes does not tell the reader that people steer that plane and are indifferent to the consequences for the lives of the workers while spraying the white cocktail. The reader has to assume that Americans are sitting in this plane, bringing death to the people on the margin of society, people who are always replaceable and therefore not important to society.

Alejo's fight against death is described in detail in order to illustrate the emotional and physical effects on the workers

He shut his eyes tight to the mist of black afternoon. The lingering smell was a scent of ocean salt and beached kelp until he inhaled again and could detect under the innocence the heavy chemical choke of poison [...] Was this his punishment for his thievery? He was sorry, Lord, so sorry [...] as the rotary motor of the biplane approached again, he closed his eyes and imagined sinking into the tar pits [...] Thousands of bones, the bleached white marrow of bones. Splintered bone pieced together by wire to make a whole, surfaced bone. No fingerprints or history, bone. No lava stone. No story or family, bone. (Viramontes: 1996, 78)

In this scene Alejo is thinking of the legacy he would leave behind. He realizes that nothing of him will remain besides the bones in his body which have done the work in the fields. While he is dying he is reduced to the part of his self which people are going to remember: his bones. They are the only thing the people will keep as a memory because they are the only thing he ever put to use. The bones also stand for destruction, for death as well as for the violence the Mexican people had to endure on this land since the Mexican-American war. Additionally, the tar pits serve as a metaphor for the history of US violence against Mexican Americans as well as for the erasure of Mexican history on this piece of land.

The fact that Alejo's full name is Alejo Hidalgo reminds the reader of the Treaty the Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848 and makes one aware of the injustice the Mexicans suffered. Viramontes seems to connect the history of the Mexicans, who were dispossessed and turned into cheap labor with the history of the immigrants. They share the same fate today as there is a joint grave for them in the tar pits, where bones dissolve and make up the surface of the earth. Thinking this further, the tar pits, which are a big part of the land, make the land Mexican again as it is made from the Mexican workers' bones.

This metaphorical reading is supported by Estrella's mother who reclaims the land by telling her daughter

Tell them *que tienes un madre aquí*. You are not an orphan, and she pointed a red finger to the earth. *Aquí*.(Viramontes:1995, 63)

Here, Viramontes re-maps the land through Petra and gives the death of Alejo a deeper sense, however tragic it might be perceived at first. When dying, Alejo is presented as a person without an identity but as work tool which is now unusable and therefore worthless. It strikes him that he does not leave anything besides his bones. The conclusion, which could be drawn is that, he never knew where he belonged or who he was, that he never felt at home or accepted. He only lived for the dream of a better life, never thinking about his Self, his place of belonging or his roots. The desire to live the American Dream kept him working continually and denied him a home and a history. Dying in the tar pits however, brings him back to his homeland, makes him a part of history and reunites him with other Mexicans, who have died on this land.

The attempt of transculturation by working his way into American society is punished by it. Viramontes seems to deny the possibility of transculturation and cultural exchange in this contact zone as long as people surrender to their position as menial workers and stick to their belief in the American Dream. Alejo is the character in the novel who develops least of all and who does not think about his situation but just keeps working to reach an American ideal. While he is fighting death he still believes that his thievery might be the reason for his near death experience. Obviously he imagines God to stand on the side of the powerful Americans and sees the fault in himself.

On the contrary, it seems to be his willing subordination and his unquestioned belief in American society which makes him the victim of this attack. The other characters criticize American society or long for their homes in Mexico. They are all aware of their history and their fate. Alejo is the only character that is longing for a better life in America and

is willing to work hard for it. His goal is not survival but improvement of his social status.

In the end, the battles, which are fought in the contact zone, seem to be fought in vain. Even though Estrella and her family survive this year, it is not clear whether they will survive the next. The structures of American society seem to be so rigid that a breaking of barriers is impossible. It would also need a leader to guide the Chicanos in this fight against inequality. Estrella is the character in the novel that seems to realize this and takes action at the end of the novel.

7.4) Finding a Home during the Process of Transculturation

For the migrant workers in *Under the Feet of Jesus* home is not localizable in a geographic place rather than in a cognitive space. Benedict Anderson called nation Imagined Communities saying that "nation: it is an imagined political community [...] It is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the mind of each lives the image of their communion." (Anderson, 1991:6)¹¹²

In *Under the Feet of Jesus* the characters live in such an imagined community, as they are unable to localize home in a geographic place. Although their birth certificates call the US their geographic home the characters in Viramontes' novel are treated like second-class citizens or, even worse, as illegal immigrants. Estrella's mother reminds her daughter

¹¹² See Anderson, Benedict, *Imagined Communities-Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, (London: Verso, 1983)

Don't let them make you feel you did a crime for picking the vegetables they'll be eating for dinner. If they stop you, if they pull you into the green vans you tell them that the birth certificates are under the feet of Jesus, just tell them.“
(Viramontes: 1996, 63)

Her warning shows the complexity of the problem of being a Chicano/a in the US. Although Estrella and her family are able to call the US their home country they do not live in a house and have to endure racial, economic and cultural discrimination. US society does not accept them as equal citizens but keeps them at the bottom of the social rungs in order to be able to control them and to make sure that they continue to provide a pool of cheap labor which secures American prosperity. This socio-economic reality makes the issue of identifying home a central topic of the novel.

The migrant workers in the novel live a nomadic life, traveling from one farm to the next, living in shacks, tents or barns. There is no place they can call home as home is always subject to change. Their home has to exist within themselves as they can carry it with them wherever they go. Migrant workers have "traveling identities" as James Clifford calls them where the question is "not so much where are you from? But where are you between?" (Clifford, 1992:109)

In-betweenness constitutes the home of these migrant workers as they are always located between cultures without being able to grasp one of them in more detail. It is their imagined cultural identity and national belonging they can take with them as a portable identity as it is inside the Self. They have adapted to the injustice in the American society of which they are only a marginal part if at all. A place for them can only serve as a home site ephemerally and has therefore to be located in the body and the psyche. Going back to Alejo and the tragic accident of pesticide spraying he experiences, it is clear that due to his longing to become American and live the American Dream he does not have an internal home. As he fails to establish a home, whether spiritually or

geographically, he is only leaving bones after he dies. He does not accept this nomadic lifestyle as part of his life and desires a change from that. When he is close to dying he has to realize that he has failed to find a home for himself even if it is only an imagined community he thinks he is a part of. His neglect of the question „Where are you in-between” has led to the fact that he does not have a home at all and has effaced his culture.

Estrella and the other characters in the novel, however, are able to understand that they need a home in order to survive emotionally. However, they all have a different perception of what home means and where it is located. Many of the migrant workers choose Mexico as their home in spite of the fact that they now live in the US. For Ricky, home is a ”stay in one place” which shows that he suffers from the steady change of place. He cannot accept the steadiness of change as his home so he constructs his imagined community in one place, not defining where that one place has to be. For Perfecto, home is where he longs to return to, picturing Mexico the way he has left it and avoiding to think about the fact that it might have changed since he left. He also envisions a certain steadiness. Perfecto and Ricky both imagine their home and so carry it with them and use it as a place of mental retreat. Their homes are similar to Foucault’s notion of heterotopias:

places that are designed into the very institution of society, which are sorts of actually realized utopias in which the real emplacements, all the other real emplacements can be found within the culture are, at the same time, represented, contested, and reversed, sorts of places that are outside all places, although they are actually localizable. (Foucault: 1998, 178)¹¹³

All homes are imagined but are localizable in the heads and the imagination of the characters, which help them to live in a society which excludes them.

¹¹³ See Foucault, Michael, *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology: Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984.*, ed. James D. Faubion (New York: The New Press, 1998)

Estrella, like all the other characters exists in an ethnic space, a space which lies beyond any geographic border. When one of the characters "is nodding his head as if he had known that Texas was part of the United States all along" (Viramontes, 1996:60) the reader understands that Aztlan, the mythical Aztec homeland or any place in the US that Mexicans can think of are perceived as home, a home beyond borders, a home which cannot be lost but lives of memories and history. Estrella realizes that the borders, which have to be crossed in order to exchange cultures and improve their lives, lie in the psyche. This utopian notion of home will help Estrella to develop the strength to cross borders mentally and physically.

In *Under the Feet of Jesus*, the home is spiritual and incorporeal. In order to find it the migrant workers have to come to terms with their lives and their position in society. Debates, questions, doubts and renegotiations are necessary to construct a home and an identity, which can survive in a society which excludes non-Anglos but exploits them for their own benefit. Arjun Appadurai once said that, "Insofar as actually existing nation-states rest on some implicit idea of ethnic coherence as the basis of state sovereignty, they are bound to minoritize, penalize, murder, or expel those seen to be ethnically minor...It may well be that the greatest peculiarity of the modern nation-state was the idea that territorial boundaries could indefinitely sustain the fiction of national ethnic singularity." (Appadurai: 1996, 58ff)

According to his statement and the description of spatial and cultural exclusion of Chicanos in the novel, American society is based on the ethnic singularity of the Anglos and expels other ethnicities. Locating home and building a stable self beyond geographic borders is also important to keep the feeling of collectivity alive as they all have a collective imagined home which is the basis for forming a collective identity. When Estrella is standing on the barn at the end of the novel, she "believed her heart powerful enough to summon home all those who strayed." (Viramontes, 1996:176) As the crossing of cultural borders happens in the psyche it seems possible to form a cultural identity and

national belonging which is and remains a utopia. Once the home and the place of belonging are found in oneself the process of transculturation can commence.

The first sign of this crossing of cultural borders and selecting elements from the dominant culture in order to incorporate it into the own culture is Estrella's fight for female freedom.

7.5) Feminism as an Element of Transculturation

In her groundbreaking work *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir points out that woman is a category of "other", but fails to point out that Women of color are doubly oppressed.¹¹⁴ Ten years later, Betty Friedan writes in *The Feminine Mystique*, that all women have the privilege to not have to work and are white and heterosexual, overlooking the position of colored women as well.¹¹⁵ Looking at the history of Chicanas in the US, they are doubly suppressed, as women and as so-called aliens. They carry a double burden, which is not considered in first and second wave feminisms.

This is one of the critiques Chicana feminists, along with other Third World feminists have made. Viramontes takes up this criticism and describes the life in double suppression in order to make the reader aware of the situation of Chicanas in general but of Chicana migrant workers in particular. Two scenes in the novel help the reader understand the situation of Chicana migrant workers. When Estrella is on her way home from work at night she passes by a baseball stadium and is suddenly blinded by the lights of the baseball field. Estrella's immediate reaction shows the perception of her position in US society:

¹¹⁴ See de Beauvoir, Simone, *The Second Sex*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1989)

¹¹⁵ See Friedan, Betty, *The Feminine Mystique*, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company Inc., 2001)

The round, sharp white lights burned her eyes and she made a feeble attempt to shield her with an arm. The border patrol, she thought, and she tried to remember which side she was on and which side of the wire mesh she was safe in [...] Destination: home plate. Who would catch the peach, who was hungry enough to run the field in all that light? The perfect target. The lushest peach. The element of surprise. A stunned deer waiting for the bullet. Estrella fisted her knife and ran, her shadow fading into the approaching night. (Viramontes:1995, 60)

This metaphor shows that although Estrella is a citizen of the US she is perceived as an alien, feels hunted and persecuted, and never safe. She also thinks of herself as alien as she is treated as one by the dominant force.

This is also made clear as Estrella automatically compares the situation on the baseball field to the situation on the fruit plants. The sharp white light in the stadium is the same as that of the sun forcing her to her knees, the lush peach would feed a starving worker and therefore is desired and hunted by all like catching an alien is desired and he is hunted down by the border patrol. Seeing herself as a deer waiting for the bullet stresses her inferiority due to her assumed illegal status as migrant worker. Only the shadow gives her the feeling of security as she is invisible.

However, being treated like an alien is not the only burden Estrella needs to cope with. Working in the fields as a woman means being exposed to rape and abuse by the men on the field, who continue to live in the macho tradition. In a scene right before the one just explained the danger and the threat Chicanas face when working in the fields is described:

For a moment, Estrella did not recognize her own shadow. It was hunched and spindly and grew longer on the grapes. Then she noticed another one overshadowing her own, loitering larger and about to engulf her and she immediately straightened her

knees and rubbed her eyes. She went over to the vines clutching her knife [...] There she saw a back [...] The back unfolded and it was toothless Kawamoto [...] Estrella sensed quickly and offered him the one peach she had saved to eat after work, a reward to herself...He thanked Estrella, but it was she who was thankful. (Viramontes: 1995, 56-57)

The shadow looming over Estrella is a metaphor for the inferiority and exposure to male power. The threat of rape is omnipresent for women in the fields and a threat they must cope with as Chicana migrant workers. Viramontes shows the double suppression of Chicanas by juxtaposing the two scenes and establishing Estrella's subjectivity as an alien and a woman, being a "double other". It is also interesting that neither shadow nor light work in Estrella's favor. The shadows make her invisible, meaning on the one hand she will not be heard speaking from her position; on the other hand, the shadows make the crimes enacted in the shadow invisible as well and deprive Chicanas of the opportunity of protection and legal prosecution of the criminals. The light, as I will also explain in detail in a later scene, suppresses her from above.

Viramontes seems to also criticize the lacking unity of women as opposed to male power. As pointed out above, Chicanas face more burdens than a white, heterosexual woman in the US. The disunity among women is described first in the scene when Estrella fights Maxine Devridge and puts her whole family in danger. Up to this point Americans do not take part in the story. In fact, the appearance of white Americans is rare in the novel in order to stress the isolation of the migrant workers from society.

Maxine is described as dirty and uneducated. Her family definitely belongs to the lowest class of American society, but acts superior in the labor camps because they see their whiteness as a reason for dominance. The Devridge family is the only family in the camp known by their last name, which distinguishes them from the Mexican families. The fact that many family members are in prison is the reason why all other families try to stay away from them. As the plant is a lawless zone the

Devriganes can rely on their physical strength and advantage in numbers. It seems paradoxical that one family can dominate so many other families because of their skin color. However, the Devridge's power on the plant remains unbroken as they are not afraid of fights and rely on their family bonds. When Estrella gets into a fight with Maxine over a magazine she is fully aware of the consequences:

When Perfecto returned with the mother she would have to tell her about the fight and the mother would sit outside the tarpaulin tent with aching varicose veins and wait for Big Mac to drive up and tell them to move on for their own good on account of he wasn't responsible for harm or bodily affliction caused by the devil-sucking revengeful Devridges. Migrant families are tight, he would say, you ought to know. They look out for their own. (Viramontes: 1996, 36)

This passage shows that the labor camps are zones without laws, where only the strongest survive and where society does not protect the rights of its citizens. The plant owners are indifferent about the fate of the migrant workers and do not protect them from harm. Estrella's guilty conscience towards her family and her mother especially is shown in this scene as Estrella is very much aware of her mother's physical condition and knows that it will be an unnecessary and additional pain for her to move on.

Both women, Estrella and her mother, are affected by Maxine's hostile behavior towards them. Although Maxine is female like Estrella, she does not unite with her and fight for the same cause, namely survival as women in the fields. Instead, she puts herself into a higher position and fights the seemingly inferior Estrella. After the incident in the scene above, the family has to move on and find other work as the family is afraid of the Devridges' revenge. The same disunity can be witnessed when Estrella fights with the nurse at the hospital, who demands money for a useless service and refuses to give it back although the family needs the money desperately to buy gas. To the nurse Mexican women are not part of the society, and she does not understand their situation or

position, as they are completely segregated from American mainstream society. In both cases, Estrella needs to solve her problems with physically fighting the women of the dominant part of society.

Every meeting with white Americans ends unpleasantly for Estrella, who at first does not question the given imbalance of powers. For a long time, she accepts her position and does not see the need to act. As she matures and gains a better picture of US society she is able to link her hard work with the goods that circulate in globalized economies. Estrella first becomes aware of this connection when she is picking grapes and compares herself to the woman with the red bonnet of the Sun Maid raisin boxes.

Reading this scene, Ester Hernandez' 1982 poster image "Sun Mad" automatically comes to the mind of the reader intensifying the picture of the hard-working Estrella¹¹⁶:

Carrying the full basket to the paper was not like the picture on the red raisin boxes Estrella saw in the markets, not like the woman wearing a fluffy bonnet, holding out grapes with her smiling, ruby lips, the sun a flat orange behind her. The sun was white and it made Estrella's eyes sting like an onion, and the baskets of grapes resisted her muscles, pulling her magnetic weight back to the earth. The woman with the red bonnet did not know this. Her knees did not sink in the hot white soil, and she did not know how to pour the baskets of grapes inside the frame gently and spread the bunches evenly on top of the newsprint paper. (Viramontes: 1996, 50)

Estrella's interior thoughts add humanity to her character and establish an intimacy between her character and the reader. Through his proximity the reader can feel the heat of the sun and the sweat that runs down Estrella's face. Viramontes also uses similes to bring the pain and effort of this work to the mind of the reader. The whiteness of the sun

¹¹⁶ Ester Hernandez' poster image is provided in the appendix.

depicts the extreme heat and the comparison of the sun to an onion illustrates the painful fight against the sun which is almost blinding, making the hard and tiring work even more aggravating. Like the shadows, the light of the sun is not Estrella's friend. The sun oppresses her from above and seemingly forces her to bend her back and knees. Simultaneously, the sun makes the earth so hot, that it is painful to stand on it. Therefore, the sun undoubtedly oppresses her and is a parallelism to her double oppression by border patrols and men. Nature in form of the sun is presented as one of Estrella's enemies, trying to break her and make her capitulate.

The woman on the raisin box provides an immense contrast to Estrella's everyday work, which is a fight against the stinging heat and her own body, as tiredness and exhaustion almost force her to the burning ground she is working on. At this point Estrella is not yet aware of the fact that the forces of society put her in this agonizing condition. However, she is able to establish the connection between her work and the woman on the raisin box who, well known to Americans, represents American mainstream society. Comparing Estrella to the woman with the bonnet the narrator elaborates a striking opposition between poor Mexican migrants and white middle-class Americans.

She didn't remove the frame, straighten her creaking knees, the bend of her back, set down another sheet of newsprint paper, reset the frame, then return to the *pisca* again with the empty basket, row after row, sun after sun. The woman's bonnet would be as useless as Estrella's own straw hat under a white sun so mighty, it toasted the green grapes to black raisins. (Viramontes: 1996, 50)

By describing the monotony of Estrella's work and the natural forces, which the workers in the fields have to fight against, the endlessness of the cycle of exploitation is depicted. The perception that the woman's bonnet would be useless working under the hot sun shows the wide gap between the world of the migrant workers and American society. Americans are not supposed to grasp the inhumane conditions on the

fields. Therefore, the woman on the raisin box sells the raisins with a smile and in a pretty dress, so that the American shopper is not reminded of the backbreaking labor which provides them with raisins. Estrella finally develops an understanding of this disparity. The immense differences between herself and the woman on the box in view of the image of the endless rows and the stinging sun create the uneven picture of two opposite classes in society.

Estrella does not only see the hard work but also realizes that white America does not care about the destiny of the migrant workers. She understands that the cheap labor provided by the Mexicans on the margins of society is taken as a given but is also hidden from society in order to preserve them from guilty feelings. The comparison of her own situation to that of American commercialism marks the beginning of her rebellion as a migrant worker and as a woman.

Alejo's death towards the end of the novel marks the climax of exploitation and neglect of Mexican migrant workers. This scene stresses one last time that Mexican migrant workers are treated as replaceable machines in the fruit picking industry and that transculturation cannot take place, as the dominant culture does not perceive Mexican Americans as equal human beings but as tools for the economy. The incident also has an effect on Estrella and her family as all of them start thinking about their future in this country.

The novel starts with the question "Had they been heading for the barn all along?" The reader does not understand the full meaning of this question until the very end of the text. It becomes clear soon that the barn is a feminine place that belongs to and is controlled by Perfecto, who does not allow women in the barn. Throughout the novel it is Estrella's aim to take possession of the barn and save it from Perfecto's desire to destroy it. During the fight for the barn Estrella's development from obedient daughter to rebellious and strong mother who reclaims female space as the male world has failed them completely is portrayed. The male characters in the novel are all either absent, sick, emasculated or effete. Estrella's father left the family when she was a young girl,

making her the surrogate mother of her siblings at a very early age. Estrella takes on this responsibility and takes good care of her brothers and sisters, which is the first sign in the novel that women, even if they are much younger than the men, can be relied on and are not shy to take on responsibility.

Women who take the lead are desperately needed. Perfecto, Petra's new lover is described as a "phantom of a man" and abandons his adopted family in spite of the fact that Petra is pregnant. Alejo is a very weak character in every respect as he surrenders to American dominance, is physically impaired and is so ill that he cannot stand by himself. Due to the incapability of the men, the female characters have to create their own space and find their new place among a male dominated society. In contrast to the weak, nonexistent, dependent and unreliable men, the women's ties remain unbroken throughout the novel and they maintain stability and guarantee continuity for the family. It depends on them whether the families have a future in this country.

They break with the traditional roles of being housewives, and mothers and grow into their new roles as leaders of the families, workers and spokeswomen for their people. The strength and reliability of matriarchal ties is symbolized by the doilies under the feet of Jesus, where the documents lie, which prove their American citizenship. Although they remain second class citizens this statue is a transcultural site as it also symbolizes the cultural clash as religion is a very important element in Mexican culture and their documents of citizenship is essential to being American. It is clear that this opposition will bring out two selves in Estrella. The doily itself is a maternal family heirloom, which assures the reader that the Mexican culture will be passed on in the future because motherhood will continue and maintain the family. The female role change is completed when Estrella tears down the barn at the end of the novel.

At first Perfecto declares the barn to be a male territory where women are not allowed. He tells her "You have no business in the barn." (Viramontes, 1996:14/15) Later on in the novel he asks Estrella to help

him tear it down which Estrella refuses to do. It becomes clear that the desire to tear down the barn is not only economic exploitation but also fear of female power.

Can you help tear down the barn? Perfecto asked. He was not a man who minced words [...] I thought I had no business in the barn, Estrella replied. She walked over to its shade. I thought you said it was dangerous...It's not fair, Estrella said. Except for the dress she'd pulled over her work clothes, she resembled a young man, standing in the barn's shadow. (Viramontes, 1996: 74-80)

Perfecto would like to destroy the barn because he could sell the wood but also because he perceives it as a dangerous place. He has the desire to control and exploit the barn economically, which is a sign of machismo and the wish to control the female body. Perfecto is intimidated by female domination and has to destroy it to be able to cope, which is a definite sign of weakness. In this scene it becomes clear that Estrella will turn the barn into a female space once she is ready. Resembling a man she now has the power to make her own decisions and has also gained control over Perfecto as she confronts him with his formerly presented views. Determining that the barn should not be torn down yet she resists the male will and forms an independent opinion.

When Alejo is very ill Estrella comes to the decision that the time has come to destroy the barn and she asks Perfecto "We'll tear down the barn starting tomorrow, right Perfecto? " Deciding when to tear down the barn and making Perfecto agree shows her newly won female strength.

Alejo's expected death is the right time for Estrella to demolish the barn as he has passed on all knowledge to her which she needs to form a stable and strong female identity.

The destruction of the barn symbolizes the birth of her new self which is initiated by Estrella's making use of her knowledge passed on to her by

Alejo when they take him to the hospital after his poisoning in the fields. When the nurse at the hospital requests their last nine dollars which they need for gasoline Estrella recalls what Alejo had told her about the tar pits:

She remembered the tar pits. Energy money, the fossilized bones of energy matter. How bones made oil and made gasoline. The oil was made from their bones, and it was their bones that kept the nurse's car from not halting on some highway [...] Their bones. Why couldn't the nurse see that? Estrella had figured it out: the nurse owed them as much as they owed her. (Viramontes, 1996: 148)

In this scene Estrella exploits the connection between their backbreaking work and the benefits American society is granted because of it. She comes to the conclusion that the Chicano migrant workers in the fields have the same status as the Americans working in offices in the cities and tears down barriers assigning equal powers to both cultures. At that moment she steps outside of the social discourses and roles which restrain her and reveal to the reader that, "she felt like two Estrellas.

One was a silent phantom who obediently marked a circle with a stick around the bungalow as the mother had requested, while the other held the crowbar and the money." (Viramontes, 1996: 150) Estrella gives a voice to her strong female side which enables her to end the speechlessness which has characterized the Chicanos in the novel up to this point. Her newly gained second Self will enable her to lead her people and create a collective identity. When the family comes home after this incident Estrella feels ready to tear down the barn: "Okay, she said to her other self" (Viramontes, 1996: 172) preparing the reader for the change in her identity formation.

The barn itself is described as "a cathedral of a building", emphasizing its spirituality. It is the barn that the female body which gives symbolic birth to Estrella's new Self.

The inside was dark and dank [...] Estrella clasped the chain and hoisted herself up. There was no turning back now. She pulled her arms to raise her shoulders up until her feet could brace the chain better. The wood above her croaked and cracked [...] Estrella tried pushing, palms up, but the door only moaned [...] She pressed her back like a shovel against the door and pushed up once again [...] again and again until whatever resistance there was gave way to her back [...] The light broke through and the cool evening air pierced the stifling heat of the loft. (Viramontes, 1996: 172-175)

When standing on top of the barn "the termite softened shakes crunched beneath her bare feet like the serpent under the feet of Jesus." (Viramontes, 1996: 175) She ends the patriarchal curse of Genesis, of which the serpent is a symbol, and has the aim to summon home all who strayed. The birth of her double consciousness is essential to cope with the fate of being a member of a minority in a dominant culture. Estrella's second self has the strength to take care of her people, to form a unity against discrimination. The new Estrella unites the two different cultures in her breast and is able to teach others how to do the same. She is able to complete the process of transculturation for herself. The discrimination, the hard work and the social and economic deprivation might continue but she has found a bridge between the two cultures. From this position she was able to form a new cultural identity, which will help her and her fellow Chicanos/as to cope with their fate as migrant workers as they have a collective community to rely on.

8) Conclusion

I have analyzed the presentation of the transcultural process as theorized by Ortiz in novels and autobiographies by Chicano authors.

The reason for writing about the process of transculturation, as coined by Ortiz and its (re)presentation in Chicano literary texts is to illustrate the increase of assimilationist tendencies among Chicanos as well as the resistance towards US culture and the rise of nationalism in the United States in the last few years. Ortiz' model leaves space for the development of hybrid identities, although very indirectly formulated. However, his theory, which is supposed to describe a dynamic process between two cultures, mainly describes resistance and assimilation before reaching a stage of comfort and integration. For him the clash and following adaptation to the superior culture is a main factor in achieving integration. At the moment, US society presents itself as split between Mexican and WASP culture. The presence of so-called minutemen at the US-Mexican border in Arizona and the rising numbers of nationalist clubs on the one hand and the increase in gang violence and Mexican nationalist clubs in the US are only a few examples for the polarization of US society. This polarization is also visible in the architecture of cities such as Los Angeles where poor Latino immigrants and white US Americans are clearly segregated.

The steadily rising immigration and the turbulences in the world economy are likely to enhance the problems of marginalization concerning Mexican immigrants and Chicanos. This is likely to lead to opposite and unidirectional approaches to US culture as in times of a bad economy immigrants are more likely to assimilate or resist. The necessity to assimilate when immigrating to the US is non-existent for many Mexicans. David Gutierrez states in his essay "Migration, Emergent Ethnicity and the Third Space" that:

Thus, despite the fact that the United States Immigration and Naturalization Service has recently made it much more difficult to move back and forth across the international frontier, once they do cross *la linea*, immigrants and migrants know they have entered a social and cultural world that in some respects is simply a more affluent version of the one they left behind.” (Gutierrez, 2000:20)

This statement shows that the parallel Mexican society in the US borderlands also provides job opportunities for the newly arrived and provides a culturally secluded space. However, the situation in the expanding borderlands is different from the immediate border region. The employment and education opportunities in these regions have worsened in the last years, affecting not only recent immigrants, but also long-term immigrants and Mexican-Americans born in the US.

This trend is undoubtedly due to the cultural separation but also to the declining economy. When in the 1990s the US experienced an economic recovery, some of these worrying long-term prospects for Mexican immigrants in the US seemed to improve only to rapidly decline again. Today either a segmented assimilation of Mexican-Americans or a lingering at the bottom of the social ladder due to unemployment describes the main social perspectives of Mexican-Americans. These trends tend to reestablish old patterns of assimilation and cultural “whitening” as many Americans of Mexican descent have ceased to regard themselves as Mexican but look upon themselves as Whites.¹¹⁷

This group also believes that the steady immigration from Mexico inhibits the assimilation of other Mexicans into American society. Like Richard Rodriguez they criticize programs such as Affirmative Action and Bilingual Education and see it as a responsibility of the newly arrived Mexican immigrants to adapt to US culture. However, there is also a party of resistance which tends to grow stronger in the wake of economic instabilities. Chicano youths especially live on the outer

¹¹⁷ See <http://pewhispanic.org/files/factsheets/hispanics2009/Table%203.pdf>

margins of society as their chances to receive a good education are slim and lead to unemployment, gang activity and incarceration. As described in *Always Running - La Vida Loca* the formation of antisocial counter identities can be witnessed as resistance to US society. Gutierrez states that:

there are clear signs...that in a growing number of communities ethnic Mexican children of both nationalities are increasingly less likely to think of themselves as “hyphenated Americans” (with all that implies for their eventual assimilation) and are instead consciously defining themselves in oppositional terms as “Mexicans”, as “Chicanos”, or as members of some self-defined subnational community that has little to do with a conception of “being American”. (Gutierrez, 2000, 26)

Gutierrez describes two opposite reactions to the results of a declining economy which can be seen openly in the US today, especially in the South West. These reactions can be seen as an increasing polarization of Mexican-born Americans as well as Mexican immigrants but also as a division of US society. The importance of these binary oppositions within the US is enhanced when keeping in mind that the number of births of Mexican-Americans has overtaken the number of immigration for the first time in the last decade.¹¹⁸

As many Mexican-Americans have now resided in the US for more than one or two generations, the problem of unemployment and therewith the polarization of society manifests as it also affects the later generations.¹¹⁹ Therefore, the transcultural process as describes by Ortiz is still present when Chicanos and Americans meet in US society today. Transculturation has also been one core theme in texts written by Chicano authors and remains so until today, representing former and current struggles for identity in a polarized society. Every text provides the reader with different aspects concerning the

¹¹⁸See <http://pewhispanic.org/topics/?TopicID=16>

¹¹⁹ see <http://pewhispanic.org/files/factsheets/hispanics2009/Table%2037.pdf> for statistics on poverty among Hispanics in US

formation of an individual as well as a collective Chicano identity when struggling between two opposing cultures. Assimilation, resistance, uprootedness, identity confusion and the formation of hybrid identities are results of this complex process which Ortiz described for the Cuban people. The development of Ortiz' theory by Pratt takes the theory to describe the construction of hybrid identities in so-called contact zones.

Although Pratt's development of the theory aims at the utopian construction of a hybrid identity which combines two opposing cultures, forming a new culture, her idea of the contact zones which exist everywhere is useful. The contact zones, which are created in the texts analyzed, are not only placed along the border but also include everyday locations such as schools and parks. In the first texts contact zones were placed on the border, like in *George Washington Gomez*; they are later placed in the outskirts of the cities and then in the inner cities. Looking at this movement of contact zones it seems that the two cultures are approaching each other and that the transgression of cultural borders is possible.

As time progresses, cultural exchange seems to be more likely. However, whereas in the first three texts assimilation was a proclaimed aim this changes in the texts written during and after the Chicano Movement. Luis Rodriguez and Helena Maria Viramontes do not present assimilation as the ideal approach to integration of Mexicans into American society, but voice resistance to the practices which keep Chicanos at the margins of society. They convey the message that the formation of a new culture, which combines elements from both cultures, might be a possibility of solving the identity crises many Mexicans face when coming to the US.

All texts show a constant change of perspective with regard to assimilation due to historical changes. In *George Washington Gomez* the characters either have to assimilate or resist in order to form a stable identity, whereas in *Hunger of Memory*, an exceptional text for the 1980s, assimilation is presented as the only possible access to American society. The novel *Chicano* shows the development from resistance

towards Americans to the desire to live the American Dream and thus assimilation. This view changes in *Always Running* and *Under the Feet of Jesus*, where resistance to cultural marginalization is explicitly shown. Over time development in perception of Chicanos' place in society can be observed as historical and socio-political factors also change.

Resistance and assimilation to the dominant culture are the two core phases in Ortiz' theory of transculturation. However, the phase of comfort or integration is not realized in most texts by Chicano authors. In all texts analyzed at least one of the two phases is presented. Stereotyping on both sides causes this polarization throughout the transcultural process. The fear of the unknown on the one hand and the fear of the division of US society into Mexican and American way of life enhance the building of barriers. The formation of identity when placed between the binary poles is a constant struggle that is narrated in the texts. As most characters aim at either assimilation or resistance they often end up with a confused identity, although it seems as if they have chosen one side in the cultural battle. In most texts the criticism of assimilation is voiced, calling for the opportunity to constantly cross borders in order to develop an identity, which includes both cultures. The wish to be able to have an identity with multiple facets is also voiced in the texts that describe resistance to US culture and globalized capitalism.

The creation of an identity, which belongs to one nation but is in constant fluctuation between the two cultures, might be the solution that the illegal immigrants were rallying for when requesting American citizenship. They are ready to efface a part of their Mexican culture in order to belong to American society and call the US home. Their rally is the attempt to move from the margins of society to the center and become part of a society and a culture, which they have been a part of for a long time, but this time their goal is to be noticed by American society.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

Paredes, Américo. *George Washington Gómez*. Houston: Arte Publico Press, 1990.

Rodriguez, Luis. *Always Running: Gang Days in L.A.* Connecticut: Curbstone Press, 1993.

Rodriguez, Richard. *Hunger for Memory*. New York: Bantam, 1982.

Vasquez, Richard. *Chicano*. New York: Harper Collins, 1970.

Viramontes, Helena Maria. *Under the Feet of Jesus*. New York: Plume, 1995.

Secondary Sources

Acuna, Rodolfo. *Occupied America: The Chicano's Struggle Towards Liberation*. San Francisco: San Francisco UP, 1972.

Acuna, Rodolfo. *Occupied America: A History of Chicanos*. New York: Harper & Ro., 1972.

Alarcón, Norma. "Topology of Hunger: The Miseducation of Richard Rodriguez." *The Ethnic Canon: Histories, Institutions, and Interventions*. Ed David Palumbo-Liu. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1995.

Alèman, Jesse. "Chicano Novelistic Discourse: Dialogizing the Corrido Critical Paradigm." *MELUS* 23, no.1, (spring 1998).

Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities-Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso, 1983.

Anzaldúa, Gloria. *Borderlands/La Frontera- The New Mestiza*. San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1987.

Appadurai, Arjun. "Sovereignty without Territoriality: Notes for a Postnational Geography." *The Geography of Identity*. Ed. Patricia Yeager. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1996.

Arteaga, Alfred, ed. *An Other Tongue: Nation and Ethnicity in the Linguistic Borderlands*. Durham: Duke UP, 1994.

Ashcroft, Bill, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin. *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*. London, New York: Routledge, 1989.

Babcock, Barbara. *The Reversible World*. New York: UP, 1978.

Avila, Oscar, Olivo, Antonio. "A Show of Strength: Thousands March to Loop for Immigrants' Rights." *Chicago Tribune* (March 2006)

Bakhtin, Mikhail. *The Dialogic Imagination*. Austin: U of Texas P, 1981.

Barrera, Mario. *Race and Class in the Southwest: A Theory of Racial Inequality*. London: UP of Notre Dame Press, 1979.

Barthes, Roland. "Death of an Author." *Image, Music, Text*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1977.

Bean, Frank D. and Tienda, Marta. *The Hispanic Population of the United States*. New York: Russel Sage, 1987.

Beauvoir de, Simone. *The Second Sex*. New York: Vintage Books, 1989.

Bhabha, homi. *The Location of Culture*. New York: Routledge, 1994.

Boewelhower, William. *Through a Glass Darkly: Ethnic Semiosis in American Literature*. New York: Oxford UP, 1987.

Brockmeier, Jens. "Identity." *Encyclopedia of Life Writing. Autobiographical and Biographical Forms Vol 1*. London/Chicago, 2001.

Bruner, Jerome S. "Life as Narrative." *Social Research* 54, 1 (1987).

Cardenas de Dwyer, Carlota. *Chicano Literature 1965-1975: The Flowering of the SouthWest*. Diss. University of New York: Stonybrook, 1976.

Clifford, James, Geroge E. Marcus, eds. *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1986.

Cohen, Lizabeth. *Making a new Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago 1919-1939*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1991.

Davis, Mike. *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles*. London: Verso, 1990.

Decker, Jeffrey Louis. „Mr. Secrets: Richard Rodriguez Flees the House of Memory“, *Transition 61* (1993).

Derrida, Jaques. *Position*. Chicago: UP, 1972.

Dickey, Dan W. "Tejano Troubadours," *Texas Observer*, (July 16, 1976).

Dickey, Dan W. *The Kennedy Corridos: A Study of the Ballads of a Mexican American Hero*. Center for Mexican-American Studies, Austin: U of Texas P, 1978.

Dyer, Richard. "The Role of Stereotypes." *Media Studies: A Reader*. Ed. Paul Marris and Sue Thornham. Edinburgh University Press, 1999.

Dyer, Richard. "Stereotyping." *Gays and Film*. Ed. Richard Dyer. London: British Film Institute, 1977.

Finnegan William. *Cold New World: Growing Up in a Harder Country*. New York, 1998

Foucault, Michael. *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology: Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984*. Ed James D. Faubion. New York: The New Press, 1998.

Friedan, Betty. *The Feminine Mystique*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company Inc., 2001.

Garcia, Mario T. *Mexican Americans: Leadership, Ideology, and Identity, 1930-1960*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1989.25-61 and 145-174

Gilman, Sander. "The Deep Structures of Stereotypes." *Difference and Pathology* London: Cornell, 1985.

Grajeda, Ralph F: "Jose Antonio Villareal and Richard Vasquez: The Novelist Against Himself." *The Identification and Analysis of Chicano Literature*. Ed. Francisco Jimenez. New York: Bilingual Press, 1979.

Guthman, Julie (2004). *Agrarian Dreams: The Paradox of Organic Farming in California*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Gutierrez, David G. "Migration, Emergent Ethnicity, and the Third Space. The Shifting Politics of Nationalism in Greater Mexico." *Journal of American History* (2000)

Gutierrez, David G."Ethnic Mexicans and the Transformation of American Social Space: Reflections on Recent History." *Crossings: Mexican Immigration in Interdisciplinary Perspectives*. Ed. Marcelo M. Suarez-Orozco. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1998.

Hall, Donald E. *Subjectivity*. New York: Routledge, 2004.

Hall, Kim F. *Things of Darkness: Economies and Gender in Early Modern England*. Cornell: UP, 1995.

Hall, Stuart. "Cultural Identity and Diaspora." *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory*. Ed. Laura Chrisman. New York, London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993.

Hall, Stuart, "Old and New Identities, Old and New Ethnicities." *Culture, Globalization, and the World System: Contemporary Conditions for the Representation of Identity*, Ed. Anthony King. London: MacMillan, 1991.

Hall, Stuart. *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*. London: The Open University, 1997.

Harrison, Jill. "Abandoned bodies and spaces of sacrifice: Pesticide, Drift, Activism and the contestation of neoliberal environmental politics in California". *Geoforum* (2008)

Hawley, John Charles. *Encyclopedia of Postcolonial Studies*. Connecticut: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2001.

Heide, Markus. *Grenzüberschreibungen: Chicano Erzählliteratur und die Inszenierung von Kulturkontakt*. Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2004.

Hulme, Peter. *Colonial Encounter: Europe and the Native Caribbean 1492-1797*. London: MacMillan, 1986.

Huntington, Samuel P. "Dead Souls. The Denationalization of the American Elite" *The National Interest* (2004)

Huntington, Samuel P. "The Hispanic Challenge" *Foreign Policy*, (Spring 2004)

Huntington, Samuel. *Who Are We? The Challenges to America's National Identity*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2005.

Jehlin, Myra. "Introduction: Beyond Transcendence." *Ideology and Classic American Literature*. Ed. Sacvan Bercovitch and Myra Jehlin. Cambridge: UP, 1986. 14

Klor de Alva, Jorge. The Postcolonization of the (Latin) American Experience: A Reconsideration of Colonialism, Postcolonialism and Mestizaje." *After Colonialism: Imperial Histories and Postcolonial Displacements*. Ed. Gyan Prakash. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1995.

Kristeva, Julia. *Powers of Horror*. New York: Columbia UP, 1982.

Lomeli, Francisco/Urioste, Donald W. *Chicano Perspectives in Literature: A Critical and Annotated Bibliography*. Albuquerque, Pajarito Publications: 1976.

London, Scott. "A View from the Melting Pot: An Interview with Richard Rodriguez." *The Sun* (1997)

Marquez, Antonio C., „Richard Rodriguez’s Hunger of Memory and the Poetics of Experience.” *Arizona Quarterly* 40, no.2 (Summer 1984)

Martin, Michael E. Residential Segregation Patterns of Latinos in the United States, 1990-2000. New York: Routledge, 2007.

Martinez/Lomeli, Francisco. *Chicano Literature. A Reference Guide*. Westpoint: Greenwood Press: 1985.

McLemore, Dale and Romo, Ricardo. “The Origins and Development of the Mexican American People.” *The Mexican American Experience: An Interdisciplinary Anthology*. Ed. Rodolfo O. de la Garza. Austin: U of Texas P, 1985.

Mendoza, Vincente T. *El corrido mexicano*. Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1954.

Mendoza, Vincente T. *Lírica narrativa de México: El Corrido*. Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas, 1964.

Moore, Joan W. *Homeboys : Gangs, Drugs, and Prison in the Barrios of Los Angeles*. Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1978.

Moretti, Franco. *The Way of the World: The Bildungsroman in European Culture*. New York: Verso, 2000.

Nieto Garcia, Michael. Ethnic, Feminist, Universal?: Helena Viramontes’s Under the Feet of Jesus. *Phenomena: Journal of Language and Literature Vol 7 No3*, Feb 2004.

Ortiz, Fernando. *Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco and Sugar*. Durham: Duke UP, 1995.

Page, Clarence. “The Foreign Flag Rule.” *The Baltimore Sun* (April 2006)

Paravisini-Gebert, Lizabeth. “Richard Rodriguez’ Hunger of Memory and the rejection of Private Self.” *US Latino Literatures: A Critical Guide for*

Students & Teachers. Ed. Harold Augenbaum and Margarite Fernandez Olmos. Westport: Greenwood Press, 2000. 81-92

Parèdes, Amèrico. *A Texas-Mexican Cancionero: Folksongs of the Lower Border*. Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1976.

Paredes, Amèrico. *Ballads of the Lower Border*. M.A. Thesis, University of Texas, 1953.

Paredes, Americo, *El Corrido de Gregorio Cortez: A Ballad of Border Conflict*. Ph.D. dissertation, University of Texas, 1956.

Paredes, Americo. *With His Pistol in His Hand: A Border Ballad and Its Hero*. Austin: U of Texas P, 1958.

Pease, Donald. „National Narratives, Postnational Narration“ *Modern Fiction Studies* 43.1 (1997).

Pew Research Center's report, *Mixed Views on Immigration Bill: Democratic Leaders Face Growing Disapproval, Criticism on Iraq*, June 2007.

Pisarz-Ramirez, Gabriele. *MexAmerica: Genealogien und Analysen postnationaler Diskurse in der kulturellen Produktion von Chicanas/os*. Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2005.

Pratt, Mary Luise. *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*. New York: Routledge, 1992

Pregaman, Peter, “Protesters Work to Change Image” *Associated Press, Long Beach* (April 2006)

Priewe, Marc. *Writing Transit*. Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2007.

Ressner, Jeffrey. “How Immigration is Rousing the Zealots” *Time Magazin* (May 2006)

Rivera, Tomas, “Richard Rodriguez’ *Hunger of Memory* as Humanistic Antitheses”, in: *MELUS* 11, no.4 (Winter 1984).

Rhodes, James Ford. *History of the United States from the Compromise of 1850*. Harvard: Harper & Brothers, 1892.

Rushdie, Salman. *Imaginary homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-1991*. London: Granata, 1991.

Ruiz, Vicky. *From out of the Shadows: Mexican Women in Twentieth Century America*. New York: Oxford UP, 1998.

Said, Edward. *Orientalism*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1978.

Saldivar, Jose. *Border Matters: Remapping American Cultural Studies*. California: UP, 1997.

Saldivar, Ramon. *Chicano Narrative: The Dialectics of Difference*. Madison: Wisconsin UP, 1990.

Saldivar, Ramon, „Ideologies of the Self: Chicano Autobiography.” *Diacritics* 15, no3 (1985). 26

Sanchez, Rosaura. „Calculated Musings: Richard Rodriguez’ Metaphysics of Difference.” *The Ethnic Canon: Histories, Institutions, and Interventions*. Ed. David Palumbo-Liu. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1995. 160

Sheridan, Clare. „Another White Race:” Mexican Americans and the Paradox of Whiteness in Jury Selection” *Law and History Review*, (Spring 2003)

Shuter, Bill. „The Confessions of Richard Rodriguez”, *Cross Currents* 45, no. 1 (Spring 1995). 95

Simmons, Merle. *The Mexican Corrido as a Source of an Interpretive Study of Modern Mexico, 1870–1950*. Bloomington: U of Indiana P, 1957.

Sollors, Werner. *Beyond Ethnicity-Consent and Descent in American Culture*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1986

Sollors, Werner, "Ethnicity." *Critical Terms for Literary Study*. Chicago: Chicago UP, 1993.

Sorensen, Self. "The Anti-Corrido of George Washington Gomez." *American Literature*, vol. 80, 2008.

Spitta, Silvia. *Between Two Waters: Narratives of Transculturation in Latin America*. Texas A&M: UP, 1995.

Takaki, Ronald. *A Different Mirror: A History of Multicultural America*. Boston: Back Bay Books, 1993.

Vaughan, Mason and Vaughan, Alden T. *Shakespeare's Caliban: A Cultural History*. Cambridge: UP, 1993.

Vigil, James D. "Cholos and Gangs: Culture Change and Street Youth in Los Angeles." *Gangs in America: Diffusion, Diversity, and Public Policy*. Ed Ronald Huff, C. Beverly Hills: Sage, 1990.

Villarreal, Roberto E., and Norma G. Hernandez. *Latinos and Political Coalitions: Political Empowerment for the 1990s*. Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1991.

Wald, Elijah. *Narcocorrido: A Journey into the Music of Drugs, Guns and Guerillas*. New York: Rayo / Harper Collins, 2001.

Weber, Max, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft: Grundriss der verstehenden Soziologie*. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1956.

Wills, Gary. *Inventing America*. New York: Vintage Books, 1979.

Online Sources

<http://www.journalofamericanhistory.org/projects/mexico/dgutierrez.html>

<http://pewhispanic.org/files/factsheets/hispanics2009/Table%203.pdf>

<http://pewhispanic.org/topics/?TopicID=16>

<http://pewhispanic.org/files/factsheets/hispanics2009/Table%2037.pdf>



SUN MAD RAISINS

UNNATURALLY GROWN WITH
INSECTICIDES • MITICIDES • HERBICIDES • FUNGICIDES

Zusammenfassung der Dissertation „The Dialectics of Transculturation in Chicano/a Literature“

Das Thema der Dissertation „The Dialectics of Transculturation in Chicano/a Literature“ ist die literarische Darstellung des Prozesses der Transkulturation in Texten von Chicanos/as und die daraus entstehenden Folgen für die Identitätsbildung für Chicanos/as.

Basierend auf der Theorie der Transkulturation des Kubaners Fernando Ortiz, der diesen Begriff 1940 in seinem Werk „Cuban Counterpoint“ prägte, und der Weiterentwicklung dieser Theorie durch Mary Luise Pratt wird die Literarisierung dieses Prozesses in Romanen und Autobiographien von Chicano Autoren untersucht. Es wird festgestellt, dass der Prozess der Transkulturation in Werken von 1940 bis in die zweite Hälfte der 1990er Jahre ein vorherrschendes Thema ist und die Frage nach der Identitätsbildung und der Beziehung zwischen unterdrückter Chicano Kultur und dominierender US Kultur diskutiert wird. Fragen, die in dieser Arbeit beantwortet werden sind zum Einen wie der Kampf der Kulturen, welcher in der Phase des Überschreitens nationaler und kultureller Grenzen stattzufinden scheint, initiiert wird und wie dieses Verhandeln zwischen den Kulturen die nationale und kulturelle Zugehörigkeit von Chicanos/as beeinflusst. Des Weiteren wird erörtert, ob und in welchem Maße dieser Prozess zur Zurückweisung und Ausblendung der ererbten Kultur führt und wie mit diesem Verlust umgegangen wird. Schließlich wird untersucht, wie die eben angeführten Diskussionen literarisch und ästhetisch dargestellt werden und welche literarischen Mittel verwendet werden, um diesen Prozess und dessen Folgen zu artikulieren.

Die Theorie der Transkulturation, die der Interpretation der literarischen Werke zugrunde gelegt wird, wurde im Jahre 1940 von Fernando Ortiz als ein Neologismus eingeführt, da aus seiner Sicht weder der Begriff Akkulturation, der eine vollkommene Anpassung der unterlegenen Kultur an die dominante voraussetzte, also ein Begriff, der dem der Assimilation sehr nahe stand, die Prozesse des Aufeinandertreffens und der Annäherung zwischen unterschiedlichen Kulturen nicht adäquat erfassen konnte. Gleichzeitig stellte er fest, dass dem Vorgang der Dekulturation, also dem teilweisen bis fast vollkommenen Verlust der eigenen Kultur, in diesem Begriff gar nicht Rechnung getragen war.

Ortiz versuchte in dem Begriff der Transkulturation die multidirektionalen Vorgänge eines Aufpralls unterschiedlicher Kulturen darzustellen und beide Kulturen, die des Unterdrückten und die des Unterdrückers, mit einzubeziehen. Gleichzeitig verstand er den Prozess des kulturellen Austauschs als einen dynamischen und spontanen, der von allen daran beteiligten Kulturen gleichermaßen durchgeführt wurde. Trotzdem wurde sein Modell als verdecktes "Whitening" kritisiert, da er diesen Prozess in fünf Phasen einteilte: Aufeinandertreffen, Unterwerfung, Anpassung, Selbstbestärkung und Integration. Besonders Phasen zwei und drei wurden von Kritikern als Aufruf zu Assimilation gesehen, was er in seiner metaphorischen Darstellung von Transkulturation in seinem Werk „Cuban Counterpoint“ zu bestärken schien, da er den Prozess in binären Oppositionen beschrieb, z. Bsp. Tradition/Moderne oder maskulin/feminin. Bei näherem Hinsehen bezog er in diese Beschreibung native, europäische und kubanische Eigenschaften mit ein. Daraus entsteht eine Theorie, die aus binären Positionen das Entstehen von Widerstand und Assimilation genauso wie das Hervorbringen von Kulturen „in-between“, also neue, hybride Kulturen beschreibt. Daher bietet diese Theorie eine gute Grundlage zur Analyse von Identitätsbildung marginalisierter Subjekte.

Ortiz Theorie wurde von Mary Luise Pratt weiterentwickelt und um den Begriff der Kontaktzone erweitert. Sah Ortiz seine Theorie auf Situationen der Sklaverei oder des Kolonialismus beschränkt, so entwickelte Pratt den Begriff weiter und bezog diesen Prozess auf schlichtweg alle Situationen angefangen von Eroberung bis zum alltäglichen Geschehen auf dem Schulhof, kurz, für sie ist der Begriff anwendbar auf alle Situationen, in welchen unterschiedlichen Kulturen miteinander in Kontakt kommen. Dieser kulturelle Austausch, in dem die unterdrückte Kultur die Elemente der dominierenden Kultur annimmt, die sie als wertvoll und sinnvoll erachtet, findet in Kontaktzonen statt, also den Orten, an dem die Kulturen aufeinandertreffen. Daher ist durch ihre Erweiterung des Begriffs diese Theorie auf alle Austauschprozesse zwischen unterschiedlichen Kulturen anwendbar, solange ein asymmetrisches Machtverhältnis besteht.

So gesehen ergänzen sich beide Theoretiker gut und die Theorie der Transkulturation lässt eine Untersuchung der Probleme bei der Findung von nationaler und kultureller Zugehörigkeit der Chicanos /as in den

USA zu. Die Bildung einer nationalen und kulturellen Identität ist in Zeiten wirtschaftlicher Unsicherheit und einer zunehmenden Globalisierung von Wichtigkeit, da besonders in solchen Zeiten die Zugehörigkeit zu einer Nation und einer Kultur ökonomische aber auch emotionale Sicherheit bringen soll. Mexikanische Einwanderer in den USA sehen sich also mit der Frage konfrontiert, wie viel sie von der eigenen Kultur aufgeben wollen /müssen um diese emotionale und wirtschaftliche Sicherheit zu erlangen und wie weit sie die Grenze zu der andere Kultur überschreiten. Des Weiteren müssen sie mit den Schwierigkeiten dieser transkulturellen Prozesse umgehen, denn die dominierende Kultur, die sie in der Kontaktzone treffen, ist oftmals nicht bereit, diesen kulturellen Austausch stattfinden zu lassen. Stereotypisierung, Marginalisierung, Diskriminierung, Ausbeutung und Ausgrenzung sind Probleme, die eine Identitätsbildung in der neuen Heimat, so man sie als solche anerkennt, nicht unbedingt einfach machen und Widerstand und Ablehnung gegen die dominierende Kultur auslösen können, genauso wie Assimilierung und die Zurückweisung der ererbten Kultur.

Der Marginalisierung von ethnischen Minderheiten in den USA wird mit literarischer Produktion begegnet, da sie ein Weg ist, um eine Minderheit vom Rand der Gesellschaft in die Mitte der Gesellschaft zu schreiben. In den literarischen Produktionen von Minderheiten werden die o.g. Fragen aufgeworfen und diskutiert, es werden mögliche Identitätskonstrukte skizziert genauso wie Entwürfe von sogenannten „imagined communities“, was im Fall der Chicanos/as der Mythos von Atzlan wäre, der Ort im Südwesten der USA, der einst ein Teil von Mexiko war. Das Schreiben von gemeinsamer kultureller und nationaler Identität, auch wenn diese nur auf Vorstellungen beruht, vereinen ethnische Minderheiten und ermöglichen Identitätsentwürfe beruhend auf einer gemeinsamen Geschichte und Herkunft. Die Thematisierung des Überschreitens nationaler und kultureller Grenzen und der damit verbundenen Entwurzelung, Identitätsneufindung und Anpassung und Widerstand gegenüber der dominierenden Kultur in literarischen Werken ist ein Weg, um Diskriminierung, Marginalisierung und Ausbeutung zu begegnen und zu kritisieren. Es erlaubt, die eigene Herkunft festzuhalten und sich gleichzeitig der anderen Kultur anzupassen genauso wie es ermöglicht, Widerstand zu formulieren und dem unterdrückten, ausgegrenzten Anderen eine Stimme zu geben und sich von der dominierenden Kultur und Literatur abzugrenzen und eine

neue, hybride Form der Literatur und Kultur zu schreiben, die zwischen binären Polen existiert und eine neue Form der Identität proklamiert. Diese Literarisierung kultureller Überschreibungs- und Überschreitungsprozesse wird in den für diese Dissertation ausgewählten Werken vollzogen.

Anfangen mit dem Roman *George Washington Gomez* von Americo Paredes, welcher 1940 verfasst wurde bis zu *Under the Feet of Jesus* von Helena Maria Viramontes (1995) werden unterschiedliche Folgen des transkulturellen Prozesses für die Identitätsbildung der Charaktere dargestellt. Die beschriebenen Lebensentwürfe reichen von Assimilation und Verneinung der ererbten Kultur über Hybridität bis hin zu Widerstand und Ablehnung der US Kultur und zeigen daher die facettenreichen Auswirkungen von Transkulturation.

Der Roman *George Washington Gomez* spielt in der Zeit direkt nach dem Mexikanisch-Amerikanischen Krieg und berichtet über die Identitätsfindung eines Jungen, der in diese konfliktrichtige Zeit hineingeboren wird und einmal ein großer Führer seines Volkes werden soll, weshalb er auch den Namen eines großen amerikanischen Generals bekommt, der mit Hinzufügen des spanischen Nachnamens eine Voraussetzung für Hybridität schafft. Der Anspruch, die beiden verfeindeten Nationen zu versöhnen durchzieht den Roman nicht nur thematisch, sondern auch formal, da verschiedene Genres, wie Bildungsroman, Social Protest Novel und Corrido, eine mexikanische Form der mündlichen Erzählung, in diesem Roman vereint werden um eine neue, hybride Form zu erschaffen. Im Roman wird der Aufeinanderprall der Kulturen und die Unterdrückung, Schikane und Diskriminierung der Mexikaner sowie die Auswirkung des feindlich geprägten sozialen Umfelds auf George und dessen Aufwachsen zum Anführer seines Volkes erzählt. Der Kampf zwischen beiden Kulturen in der Kontaktzone „Jonesville-on-the-Grande“ in Texas prägt George, was sich in seiner Symphatisierung mit der mexikanischen Kultur und dem Hass auf die Texaner ausdrückt. In jedem der ersten vier Kapitel wird ein Teil des Erwachsenwerdens von George erzählt, welcher sich zu einem mexikanischen Widerstandskämpfer im Sinne der Corridotradition zu entwickeln scheint. Umso größer ist im letzten Kapitel des Romans die Überraschung, als George zurück in sein Dorf kommt und der Leser feststellen muss, dass er angesichts der übermächtigen texanischen Unterdrückung resigniert hat und nun als

Spion bei der US Armee dient. Vollkommen assimiliert zieht er Bilanz und kommt zu dem Schluss, dass Mexikaner ihr Schicksal der Unterdrückung in den USA nicht werden ändern können, außer sie assimilieren sich, was hier nach Überschreitung kultureller Grenzen der einzige mögliche Weg zu sein scheint, aus der Position der Marginalisierung heraus zu kommen.

Auch in dem Roman *Chicano* von Richard Vasquez wird Assimilation thematisiert, allerdings wird Assimilation hier nicht ein sicherer Weg in die Mitte der Gesellschaft dargestellt, sondern als vergebliches Bemühen entgegen der ethnischen Herkunft ein Teil der Gesellschaft zu werden. In dieser Familiensaga werden insgesamt 70 Jahre der Sandoval Familie erzählt, die aus einem kleinen Dorf in Mexiko in die USA auswandern, wo sie über Generationen hinweg am Rande der Gesellschaft leben, was am Anfang des Romans noch verständlich ist, da die erste und auch die zweite Generation weder Englisch sprechen noch sich anpassen möchten. Nachdem aber auch die dritte und vierte Generation, deren Mitglieder alle Englisch sprechen und sich assimilieren genauso wenig einen Zugang zur amerikanischen Gesellschaft finden, muss der Leser den Schluss ziehen, dass der Prozess der Transkulturation, welcher in diesem Fall durch Assimilation ausgedrückt wird, fehlgeschlagen ist und auch in Zukunft nicht von Erfolg gekrönt sein wird. Die einzige Annäherung zwischen Anglos und Mexikanern in diesem Roman findet als Studienprojekt statt und findet in der Abtreibung des einzigen Mischlingsbabys ein jähes und finales Ende. Vasquez scheint die Botschaft verkünden zu wollen, dass unter den Bedingungen, die in der amerikanischen Gesellschaft gegenüber ethnischen Minderheiten, insbesondere der mexikanischen, herrschen, ein transkultureller Prozess nicht erfolgreich verlaufen kann.

In der Autobiographie *Hunger of Memory* von Richard Rodriguez werden die Programme Bilingual Education und Affirmative Action, die zur besseren Integration von Chicanos in die US Gesellschaft eingeführt wurden, aufgegriffen und kritisiert. Es ist hier bezeichnend, dass Richard Rodriguez selbst der Sohn mexikanischer Einwanderer ist und von Affirmative Action profitiert hat, in seiner Autobiographie allerdings seine Landsleute zu Assimilierung und Erlernen der englischen Sprache auffordert. In seiner Sammlung von Aufsätzen, die er als Autobiographie zusammengefasst hat, beschreibt er die graduelle Loslösung von seinen mexikanischen Wurzeln, die Entfremdung von

seiner Familie und Kultur und das Verlernen der spanischen Sprache zugunsten der englischen. Auf das Ergebnis dieses transkulturellen Prozess ist er stolz und beschreibt das Erlernen der englischen Sprache und somit Entwicklung einer öffentlichen amerikanischen Identität, welche ihm eine Teilnahme an der amerikanischen Gesellschaft und finanziellen Wohlstand ermöglicht, im Gegensatz zu einer privaten mexikanischen Identität, welche ihn am Rande der Gesellschaft und den unteren sozialen Rängen gehalten hätte. Rodriguez sieht sich selbst als Teil der amerikanischen Mittelklasse, von welcher er sich nur durch seine Hautfarbe unterscheidet, was aus seiner Sicht ein sichtbares Zeichen seiner ethnischen Herkunft ist, welches er nicht durch Bildung oder Anpassung los wird. Das Minderwertigkeitsgefühl, welches seine Hautfarbe in ihm auslöst, zeigt eine koloniale Gesinnung, die im Jahre 1982 befremdlich anmutet und Chicanos in den ganzen USA zu Kritik an seiner Autobiographie veranlasst hat, welche sie als klaren Verrat an seinem Volk empfinden.

Die zweite Autobiographie, die ich in meiner Dissertation untersuche, stammt von Luis Rodriguez und stellt die Rolle von Gangs in den Leben junger Chicanos dar, die von der Gesellschaft ausgegrenzt werden und sich, zumeist, von deren Familien alleine gelassen im Kampf zwischen der eigenen und der fremden Kultur, einen Ersatz an Rollenbildern und einen Ort der Zugehörigkeit suchen, der als Parallelgesellschaft fungiert und eine zunehmende Bedrohung für die amerikanische Gesellschaft darstellt. In *Always Running: La Vida Loca* erzählt Rodriguez vom Aufwachsen in Watts, einem Ghetto auf der Ostseite des L.A. Rivers, wo er, der englischen Sprache nicht mächtig, von Schule und Polizei, die stellvertretend für die gesamte amerikanische Gesellschaft stehen, diskriminiert und gejagt wird, da er als Mexikaner nicht dazugehört und für amerikanische Behörden genauso wie amerikanische Jugendliche Freiwild ist. Aufgrund der Erfahrungen mit diversen amerikanischen Institutionen und der Ohnmacht seiner Eltern, die genauso an den Rand der Gesellschaft verbannt sind wie deren Kinder, sucht die Rodriguez ein Ventil, um sich an der amerikanischen Gesellschaft für deren diskriminierendes Verhalten an den Chicanos zu rächen. Die Gang ist für ihn der ideale Ort, um seine Aggressionen zu bedienen sowie der amerikanischen Gesellschaft den Spiegel vorzuhalten. Die Unmöglichkeit, kulturelle Grenzen zu überschreiten ohne sein mexikanisches Selbst aufzugeben und sich der anderen Kultur zu unterwerfen machen Transkulturation für Rodriguez zu einem nicht

enden wollenden Kampf zwischen Unterdrückten und Unterdrückern, die sich jagen und bekriegen. In diesem Werk ist der transkulturelle Prozess sehr von physischer Gewalt und Verrohung geprägt und es erscheint sehr fraglich, ob die Barrieren, die zwischen Amerikanern und Chicanos existieren je eingerissen werden können. Eine abrupte Wendung am Ende des Textes gibt den Anlass zur Hoffnung, als Rodriguez im Zuge des Chicano Movement einen Weg zu seinem Chicano Selbst findet und durch literarische Produktion Missstände in der amerikanischen Gesellschaft anprangert anstatt durch physische Gewalt. Am Ende ist der Leser beruhigt, dass ein friedlicher Weg gefunden wurde, um nationale und kulturelle Spannungen zu diskutieren, aber er weiß auch, dass die Gangkultur weiter leben wird, da sie für viele Jugendliche in ausweglosen Situationen, die im selben Stadtteil zusammen leben, immer ein Weg sein wird, um Widerstand zu leisten. Integration, was das proklamierte Ziel von Transkulturation ist, ist auch im Jahre 1993 noch in weiter Ferne.

Das letzte Werk, welches in dieser Dissertation analysiert wird, ist der Roman *Under the Feet of Jesus* von Helena Maria Viramontes. In diesem Werk wird die Ausbeutung mexikanischer Wanderarbeiter auf den Obstplantagen Kaliforniens und die Entwicklung einer neuen weiblichen Rollenverständnisses, welches aus

dieser Unterdrückung erwächst, thematisiert. Die Hauptfigur in diesem Roman ist, wie die anderen mexikanischen Figuren in diesen Roman eine Wanderarbeiterin, die eine nur spärliche Schulbildung hat, sich aber mit Fortschreiten des Romans notwendiges Wissen von den schwachen männlichen Figuren aneignet und am Ende als emanzipierte junge Frau das Volk der Chicanos zusammenholt und es eine kollektive Identität schafft. Dieses sehr metaphorische Werk parallelisiert die Entwicklung der Hauptfigur und die immer schlimmer werdenden Zuständen auf der Plantage, die im Tod einer ihrer Freundes endet. Es scheint, als ob die zunehmende Unterdrückung und Ausbeutung der Chicanos, die durch den Glauben an den amerikanischen Traum in ihrer marginalisierten Position gehalten werden, zur Entwicklung eines Widerstandes gegen die amerikanische (Konsum)Gesellschaft zum Einen und zum Anderen gegen die patriarchale Unterdrückung beiträgt und diese befeuert. Das Heraustreten aus der Unsichtbarkeit und der Unterdrückung ermöglicht eine individuelle genauso wie eine kollektive Identität für Chicanos, die im Prozess der Transkulturation in der Phase der Unterwerfung stehen

geblieben sind und schürt im Leser die Hoffnung, dass eventuell durch die starke Persönlichkeit der Hauptfigur, welche die Zusammenhänge zwischen notwendiger Ausbeutung einer Minderheit und Globalisierung verstanden hat, eine Veränderung möglich ist. Transkulturation wird in diesem Werk als Werkzeug zur Ausbeutung dargestellt, da der amerikanische Traum, der von allen Figuren im Roman außer der Hauptfigur, als erstrebenswert angesehen wird und nicht in Frage gestellt wird, die Chicanos in deren marginalisierter und unsichtbaren Position hält, da der Glaube an ein besseres Leben inmitten amerikanischen Gesellschaft als erreichbar erscheint, wenn man nur hart genug arbeitet und sich tief genug beugt.

Es ist festzustellen, dass in allen analysierten Werken die durch Transkulturation erstrebte Integration nicht realisiert wird und so ein deprimierendes Bild für Vergangenheit und Zukunft der Chicanos in der amerikanischen Gesellschaft gezeichnet wird. In Anbetracht der immer weiter fortschreitenden Globalisierung und der Tatsache, dass mexikanische Einwanderer in Amerika in radikalerem Maße auf die Unterdrückung und Stereotypisierung durch die amerikanische Gesellschaft, reagieren werden, werden Widerstand oder Assimilation immer häufiger. Natürlich sind hybride Identitätsbildungen immer möglich, aber in Zeiten wirtschaftlicher Turbulenzen, steigender Einwanderungszahlen und Terrorismus, wird die Zahl der Einwanderer, welche die komplette Anpassung an die amerikanischen nationalen und kulturellen Werte verfolgen sowie die Bildung von Gangs und Vereinigungen auf beiden Seiten, die sich gegenseitig bekämpfen, weiter ansteigen und polarisieren. Es wird wohl noch etwas dauern, bis eine vollständige Integration erreicht ist, da beide Formen des Zusammenlebens eine frühe Phase des transkulturellen Prozesses, wie von Ortiz eingeführt und von Pratt weiterentwickelt, darstellen und es angesichts der zusammenwirkenden globalen, sozialen und politischen Prozesse ein schwieriger Weg zur vollkommenen Integration zu werden scheint.

Summary of “The Dialectics of Transculturation in Chicano/a Literature”

In this paper, I have analyzed the presentation of the transcultural process as theorized by Ortiz in novels and autobiographies by Chicano authors.

The reason for writing about the process of transculturation and its (re)presentation in Chicano literary texts is to illustrate the increase of assimilationist tendencies among Chicanos as well as the resistance towards US culture and the rise of nationalism in the United States in the last few years.

The struggles and difficulties associated with transculturation are articulated in all selected texts.

The first novel to be discussed in this chapter is *George Washington Gómez* by Americo Paredes. The text describes life on the border, the presence of white, English-speaking authorities, the vulnerability of Mexican-American families and the resistance to the American intruders. These factors contribute to the protagonist's formation of a cultural identity and his allegiance with American nationalism.

The family saga *Chicano* by Richard Vasquez focuses on a change of approach to the dominant culture and a shift in loyalty to the new fatherland. Over the generations development from a decisive rejection over forced assimilation to desired acceptance in the US is described. However, the gradual Americanization of the family over time is not rewarded by American society, and many characters are left homeless and uprooted.

In *Hunger for Memory* Richard Rodriguez narrates how education facilitates the blending into US society and presents a clear national and cultural affiliation with the US, while attacking the concepts of bilingual education and Affirmative Action.

Always Running: Gang Days in L.A. by Luis Rodriguez moves the definition of national borders into neighborhoods in L.A. where gangs and the police wage war on each other, in order to gain or defend territories and cultural codes.

Under the Feet of Jesus by Helena Maria Viramontes depicts the economic exploitation and deprivation of Mexican migrant workers while paving the way to a collective identity. The text also narrates the way towards a new role for women and the adjustment to the dominant culture fueled by the dreams of upward mobility.

The aim of the concluding chapter is to provide an outlook on the possible development of the national and cultural affiliations of recent and long-term Mexican immigrants and Chicanos in the US.

At the moment, US society presents itself as split between Mexican and WASP culture. The presence of so-called minutemen at the US-Mexican border in Arizona and the rising numbers of nationalist clubs on the one hand and the increase in gang violence and Mexican nationalist clubs in the US are only a few examples for the polarization of US society. This polarization is also visible in the architecture of cities such as Los Angeles where poor Latino immigrants and white US Americans are clearly segregated.

The steadily rising immigration and the turbulences in the world economy are likely to enhance the problems of marginalization concerning Mexican immigrants and Chicanos. This is likely to lead to opposite and unidirectional approaches to US culture as in times of a bad economy immigrants are more likely to assimilate or resist. The necessity to assimilate when immigrating to the US is non-existent for many Mexicans.

The parallel Mexican society in the US borderlands provides job opportunities for the newly arrived and provides a culturally secluded space. However, the situation in the expanding borderlands is different

from the immediate border region. The employment and education opportunities in these regions have worsened in the last years, affecting not only recent immigrants, but also long-term immigrants and Mexican-Americans born in the US.

This trend is undoubtedly due to the cultural separation but also to the declining economy. When in the 1990s the US experienced an economic recovery, some of these worrying long-term prospects for Mexican immigrants in the US seemed to improve only to rapidly decline again. Today either a segmented assimilation of Mexican-Americans or a lingering at the bottom of the social ladder due to unemployment describes the main social perspectives of Mexican-Americans. These trends tend to reestablish old patterns of assimilation and cultural “whitening” as many Americans of Mexican descent have ceased to regard themselves as Mexican but look upon themselves as Whites.¹

This group also believes that the steady immigration from Mexico inhibits the assimilation of other Mexicans into American society. Like Richard Rodriguez they criticize programs such as Affirmative Action and Bilingual Education and see it as a responsibility of the newly arrived Mexican immigrants to adapt to US culture. However, there is also a party of resistance which tends to grow stronger in the wake of economic instabilities. Chicano youths especially live on the outer margins of society as their chances to receive a good education are slim and lead to unemployment, gang activity and incarceration.

As many Mexican-Americans have now resided in the US for more than one or two generations, the problem of unemployment and therewith the polarization of society manifests as it also affects the later generations.² Therefore, the transcultural process as describes by Ortiz is still present when Chicanos and Americans meet in US society today. Transculturation has also been one core theme in texts written by Chicano authors and remains so until today, representing former and

¹ See <http://pewhispanic.org/files/factsheets/hispanics2009/Table%203.pdf>

² see <http://pewhispanic.org/files/factsheets/hispanics2009/Table%2037.pdf> for statistics on poverty among Hispanics in US

current struggles for identity in a polarized society.

Every text provides the reader with different aspects concerning the formation of an individual as well as a collective Chicano identity when struggling between two opposing cultures. Assimilation, resistance, uprootedness, identity confusion and the formation of hybrid identities are results of this complex process which Ortiz described for the Cuban people. The development of Ortiz' theory by Pratt takes the theory to describe the construction of hybrid identities in so-called contact zones.

Although Pratt's development of the theory aims at the utopian construction of a hybrid identity which combines two opposing cultures, forming a new culture, her idea of the contact zones which exist everywhere is useful. The contact zones, which are created in the texts analyzed, are not only placed along the border but also include everyday locations such as schools and parks. In the first texts contact zones were placed on the border, like in *George Washington Gomez*; they are later placed in the outskirts of the cities and then in the inner cities. Looking at this movement of contact zones it seems that the two cultures are approaching each other and that the transgression of cultural borders is possible.

As time progresses, cultural exchange seems to be more likely. However, whereas in the first three texts assimilation was a proclaimed aim this changes in the texts written during and after the Chicano Movement. Luis Rodriguez and Helena Maria Viramontes do not present assimilation as the ideal approach to integration of Mexicans into American society, but voice resistance to the practices which keep Chicanos at the margins of society. They convey the message that the formation of a new culture, which combines elements from both cultures, might be a possibility of solving the identity crises many Mexicans face when coming to the US.

All texts show a constant change of perspective with regard to assimilation due to historical changes. In *George Washington Gomez* the

characters either have to assimilate or resist in order to form a stable identity, whereas in *Hunger of Memory*, an exceptional text for the 1980s, assimilation is presented as the only possible access to American society. The novel *Chicano* shows the development from resistance towards Americans to the desire to live the American Dream and thus assimilation. This view changes in *Always Running* and *Under the Feet of Jesus*, where resistance to cultural marginalization is explicitly shown. Over time development in perception of Chicanos' place in society can be observed as historical and socio-political factors also change.

Resistance and assimilation to the dominant culture are the two core phases in Ortiz' theory of transculturation. However, the phase of comfort or integration is not realized in most texts by Chicano authors. In all texts analyzed at least one of the two phases is presented. Stereotyping on both sides causes this polarization throughout the transcultural process. The fear of the unknown on the one hand and the fear of the division of US society into Mexican and American way of life enhance the building of barriers. The formation of identity when placed between the binary poles is a constant struggle that is narrated in the texts. As most characters aim at either assimilation or resistance they often end up with a confused identity, although it seems as if they have chosen one side in the cultural battle. In most texts the criticism of assimilation is voiced, calling for the opportunity to constantly cross borders in order to develop an identity, which includes both cultures. The wish to be able to have an identity with multiple facets is also voiced in the texts that describe resistance to US culture and globalized capitalism.

Ortiz' model leaves space for the development of hybrid identities, although very indirectly formulated. However, his theory, which is supposed to describe a dynamic process between two cultures, mainly describes resistance and assimilation before reaching a stage of comfort and integration. For him the clash and following adaptation to the superior culture is a main factor in achieving integration.