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Weaving Transnational Cultural Identity Through Travel and Diaspora in Sandra Cisneros's

Caramelo

Tereza M. Szeghi

Eleven years before the publication of *Caramelo* (2002), Sandra Cisneros previewed one of its core concerns. The conclusion of her short story "Mericans," specifically, offers a snapshot of *Caramelo*'s extended examination of identity formation for Chicanas/os who relate to Mexico as mother country, home, *and* vacation site.¹ Encountering a Chicano youth named Junior in a Mexico City plaza, a Euro-American tourist asks to take his picture (20). She expresses shock when Junior then calls to his siblings in English, which prompts him to reply, "'Yeah, . . . we're Mericans'" (20). The combination of Junior's fluent English and Mexican appearance, along with his self-designation as "Merican," upends the tourist's expectations of clear distinctions between Mexican and (US) American. Junior shifts, in her view, from a commodifiable representation of *Mexicanidad* to a boy whose national, cultural, and linguistic identity bridges the US-Mexico border. Junior's "Merican" identity thereby unravels the logic of cultural distinction and hierarchy entrenched through the border and perpetuated in the contemporary context of travel. More broadly, the term "Mericans" designates the subject position of peoples of Mexican descent living in the US who identify strongly with both nations and speaks to the distinctive relationship many Chicanas/os have to both diaspora and travel.

Whereas much touristic scholarship posits a tourist ontologically removed from the destination site, consideration of the Chicana/o diasporic subject (specifically one who travels cyclically to Mexico from the US), allows us to assess how/if existing theories of travel account for Chicana/o diasporic experiences and what new theories are required.² The factors that make

this diasporic group's travel experiences distinctive include the close proximity of the two nations its members call home and the fact that ever since the US-Mexico border was constructed people have moved regularly and cyclically across it (albeit with increasing difficulty). These repeated movements have generated borderlands cultures that blend US and Mexican norms. Consequently, I argue, the Chicana/o migrant can be understood as working within what Paiute activist Laverne Roberts terms a "hub," a socio-spatial entity that allows for belonging within and movement between multiple home sites.³ My explication of *Caramelo* demonstrates how the hub concept, as Renya Ramirez deploys it in her analysis of indigenous American experiences, can be applied productively in the specific context of Chicana/o diasporic experiences.

Viewing cyclical migration between the US and Mexico as a "hub-making activity"—rather than as a series of discrete departures and returns that entail disconnection or loss—allows us to appreciate the (re)generative aspects of this form of travel, as well as the ways individuals differentially relate to multiple sites as homes (Ramirez 8). For Ramirez,

the hub emphasizes the importance of Indians' relationship to *both* homeland and diaspora, thereby supporting a consciousness that crosses large expanses of geographical terrain, which can bridge not only tribal but also national-state boundaries. . . . The hub, rather than focusing on displacement, emphasizes urban Indians' strong rooted connection to tribe and homeland. The hub, furthermore, highlights the importance of the urban area, stressing the potential for political power as Native men and women organize across tribal lines. (11, 12)

In the context of Chicana/o experiences, we can adapt Ramirez's notion of the Native hub to incorporate multiple sites of identity, inclusive of locations on both sides of the border. Having a

sense of home in both Mexico and the US does not diminish *Mexicanidad*; rather, whereas both urban cities and reservations are Native spaces within the Native hub, so too can multiple US and Mexican locales be constitutive points of connection for the diasporic Chicana/o. Moreover, acknowledging nationally and culturally diverse sites as formative spaces within this hub undermines what Chippewa theorist Gerald Vizenor identifies as “terminal creeds”—namely, externally imposed expectations of cultural purity that misinterpret and calcify non-Western peoples.⁴

Whereas Westerners are encouraged to travel, without fear of losing their cultural identities, non-Westerners are subjected to unrealistic and restrictive expectations of cultural purity. With the rise of tourism in developing (non-Western) nations and the emergence of an ethnic tourism niche industry have come pressures for locals to *perform* their cultural identities in a manner (predominately Western) tourists recognize as authentic (i.e., traditional and untouched by modernity).⁵ When we read Junior’s encounter with the Euro-American woman within this frame, we can appreciate that when Junior’s *Mexicandad* is shaken in her eyes, so too is her hope of locating any culturally pure site.

Importantly, as Cisneros demonstrates, fantasies of cultural purity have been internalized by colonized peoples as well. She presents the Chicana/o children of “Mericans” and *Caramelo* as sandwiched between two prescriptive conceptions of their identities. While Junior deflects the tourist’s assumptions, he and his siblings must also battle their Mexican grandmother’s running narrative about their US birth and upbringing having stripped them of their *Mexicanidad*. Through this juxtaposition of perspectives, Daniel Cooper Alarcón argues, “Cisneros emphasizes that neither Mexican nor Anglo American society easily recognizes or accepts the fusion of cultures that influences and shapes Chicano identity and culture, nor does either accept the

fluidity of cultural identity” (144). Thus, Junior’s self-authorship is rightly understood as defiant of both nation-based cultural scripts (which position “Mexican” and “US American” oppositionally).

Cisneros’s oeuvre is replete with articulations of Chicana/o identity that confront and undermine binary thinking and thereby refuse terminal creeds. Carmen Haydée Rivera observes that while borders of various sorts (linguistic, cultural, racial, and social) are among Cisneros’s characteristic concerns, through her articulations of cross-cultural experiences, Cisneros voices an Anzaldúan *mestiza* consciousness—which claims a multiplicity of influences, the between spaces, and the negotiation of these influences and spaces, as a distinct form of identity (7).⁶ In *Caramelo* particularly, I argue, Cisneros exemplifies the myriad ways in which diasporic travel places scrutiny on the perceived authenticity of individuals’ cultural identities, while also providing Celaya (Lala) Reyes (the novel’s protagonist and narrator) with the lived experiences necessary to forge a functional sense of self. This multigenerational, transnational, cross-cultural, and diasporic novel features the Reyes family’s annual trips from their Chicago home to Mexico City to visit relatives, and, in the process, demonstrates travel’s critical role in cultural identity formation, maintenance, and contestation for members of the Mexican and Chicana/o diaspora⁷—particularly for a second generation Chicana like Lala.

My analysis works against existing criticism on *Caramelo* that perpetuates terminal creeds and expectations of cultural purity/stasis. For instance, Heather Alumbaugh argues that the Reyeses’s various migrations erode familial and cultural links, and militate against the transmission of intergenerational knowledge (63), leaving Lala “confused about her identity” (68). However, I contend that this figuration is incomplete and, moreover, perpetuates a deficit discourse that places a disproportionate expectation of continuity and purity on certain cultural

groups. Further, Alumbaugh consistently correlates migration with loss and narrowly frames Lala's storytelling innovations as responses to that loss.⁸ In so doing, she overlooks how such innovations exemplify broadly utilized mechanisms of cultural continuance that enable families and peoples to retain a sense of shared identity while adapting to changes that necessarily occur with time—even without a history of migration. In a similar vein as Alumbaugh, Ellen McCracken writes of *Caramelo* and Cisneros's self-representation,

visual displays of ethnicity are part of a larger constellation of semiotic performance through which Cisneros deploys hundreds of ethnic signifiers to define and individualize herself. They function as second-degree signifiers of ethnicity, assemblages that creatively mix elements of a Mexican past denied to the children of immigrants who were shaped in the United States by the ideology of the melting pot. The individual signifiers in these displays of ethnicity are removed from their original sources and functions (par. 2)

Not only does the term “second-degree ethnicity,” which McCracken uses throughout her article, position the Chicana/o diaspora in a deficit position vis-à-vis Mexico, but it also paints an artificially monolithic and static conception of Mexico itself. Indeed, a central theme of the novel is that all families, nations, and cultures are always already in flux. In this manner diaspora, although it entails particular types of flux, is continuous with a prior history of change, along with the necessity of each generation—positioned at whatever cultural, national, or ideological crossroads in which it finds itself—to repurpose its inheritance, recover a usable past, and forge new modes that accommodate their own multiplicities. This is not to suggest that strained familial and cultural connections are not common features of diaspora or part of Chicana/o diasporic experience, but to argue against the view that such straining is a necessary or

defining feature of any diaspora. Moreover, overstatement of the relationship between diaspora and loss risks misidentifying common generational shifts as consequences of diaspora alone.

Linguistic Parameters of Culture and Nation

Routine trips to Mexico allow the US Reyeses to maintain connections with their Mexican family and Mexico itself; however, when they first arrive, a feeling of alienation most often confronts the second generation—particularly through linguistic differences. Language marks the boundaries of culture and identity, with inadequate or underutilized Spanish and linguistic norms differentiating Lala and her siblings from their Mexican family, while connecting them to one another. Like the children in “Mericans,” Lala and her brothers have knowledge of Mexico derived from family connections and time spent there, but also are seen by Mexican family members as comparative outsiders due to their acculturation to US norms. Lala recounts that, upon their arrival in Mexico City each year, she and her siblings initially speak only to each other, and only in English (due to shyness, though cognizant of their perceived rudeness). They do not answer their grandmother with appropriate formality, leading her to conclude that her “daughters-in-law have given birth to a generation of monkeys” (28).

On the opposite linguistic-cultural pole, achieving Spanish fluency carries its own risks, as Lala’s brother Rafa learns after living in Mexico for a year. Although necessity forced him to improve his Spanish—without which he lacked the “words to speak the things inside” him—his facility with Spanish ostracizes him from his siblings after returning to the US. Lala recalls, “He tries talking to us in Spanish, but we don’t use that language with kids, we only use it with grown-ups” (23). Importantly, Lala and her brothers ignore Rafa because he violates a linguistic norm they have developed as a transnational sibling set, not because they fail to understand him.

For the Mexican and Chicana/o Reyeses generally, sustaining and developing relationships with one another entails continuous negotiations of the linguistic and normative dimensions of their multiple and competing cultural influences. Their experiences demonstrate the urgency of Paul Gilroy's claim, as Keith Hollinshead encapsulates it, that diasporic identities "must be comprehended not in terms of notions of shared territory or ancestral lineage alone, but rather in terms of the complex dynamics of intercultural living and transcultural inhalation" (38). For the Reyeses, ancestry, country of origin, and host country are not givens but are negotiated through the business of living annually in two nations and maintaining family relationships complicated by competing cultural influences.

With her crafting of *Caramelo*, however, Cisneros refuses the linguistic binary the Reyes children face and creates what I characterize as Chicana/o hub linguistics. Bill Johnson González rightly argues that Cisneros's translations create interpenetrations between the two languages, forcing each to stretch to accommodate the other and, through the inevitable strangeness created when a translator refuses to sublimate the particularities of one into the norms of the other, calls attention to the cultural norms and ideologies showcased in each. He situates the novel's linguistic praxis at the crossroads of Chicana/o/Mexican diaspora and carefully attends to the implications of Cisneros's translation choices as they pertain to diasporic Chicana/o and Mexican identity and experience (translating badly by dominant standards, partially translating, or not translating at all). For example, Cisneros translates "¡Que barbaridad!" (a common expression of shock) literally as "What a barbarity!" (González 7). Of course this literal interpretation of a saying voiced repeatedly by Soledad has an important function given that her shock is directed most often to aspects of US culture she indeed finds barbaric. Such linguistic adaptations, I would add, are hub-making activities in that they speak to the particular needs and multicultural

understandings of those living within and between Mexico and the US.

Return Visits and Hub Formation: Diasporic Relationships to Tourism and Belonging

Return visits to Mexico are critical for Lala's understanding of her cultural and familial identity (as they are for diasporic peoples generally) and for her construction of a transnational hub inclusive of her cultural and geographic influences. The US Reyeses' visits to Mexico can be understood as ethnic tourism, specifically the form motivated by a desire for ethnic reunion and belonging (King 173-74). Whereas for Lala's father and his siblings the visits *maintain* connection, for Lala and her siblings (along with other second generation diasporic subjects) the visits both *forge* and *maintain* connection. They provide her with a direct relationship to Mexico and thereby foreclose the conventional immigration arch in which connections to country of origin fade with subsequent generations.⁹ Indeed, with her brief encapsulation of her origins, "All Parts from Mexico, Assembled in the USA. or I Am Born," Lala attributes to Mexico not just some but *all* of her constituent parts, thereby subordinating the US's influence to Mexico's (231). At the same time, she invites us to evaluate the influence of the US assemblage of those parts through what reads as an invocation of the classic nature/nurture dichotomy. Lala's coming of age experience is defined largely by her struggle to understand what it means to be Mexican while finding herself wholly at home, using the novel's oft-repeated phrase, "neither here nor there." Lala lives primarily in the US and, when in Mexico, is expected to conform to cultural norms she does not understand or embrace. Her experiences in Mexico, shaped as they are by her self-identification as Mexican and her US acculturation, are evidence of the fact that ethnic tourism (when motivated by a desire for belonging) involves a recognition and negotiation of difference.

Although the US Reyeses have a deep connection to Mexico (forged through annual visits, family ties, and, for some, having been born and raised there), they sometimes encounter the country through touristic media. These forays into tourism raise critical questions about the nature of their relationship to Mexico, and about the commonalities and distinctions between diasporic subjects and tourists generally. As Tim Coles and Dallen Timothy argue, “particular patterns and processes of tourism consumption and production precipitate from the diasporic condition. However, travel and tourism have crucial roles to play reflexively in the processes of learning and self-discovery that define the fluid, constantly unfolding nature of diasporic identities” (13). *Caramelo*—particularly the Reyeses’ trip to Acapulco—offers opportunities for more fully examining and understanding the precise relationship between diaspora, travel, and tourism alongside (and in relation to) the elasticity of diasporic identities.

Whereas tourists seeking “authentic” experiences might avoid touristy sites in quest of locations inhabited by locals, Lala’s mother Zoila makes an impassioned argument for a trip to Acapulco based on the claim that all she ever sees in Mexico are living rooms (68). She hopes to exchange the mundaneness of the family home in Mexico City for the uncomplicated pleasures she associates with Acapulco (a popular tourist destination that promises to remain impenetrable due to a lack of prior experiences or family connections there). The family’s annual trips to Mexico, motivated as they are by Zoila’s husband Inocencio’s need to see his parents, arguably function more as family visits than vacations. Zoila might escape her daily routines in Chicago during these trips, but she substitutes strained relations with her mother-in-law, Soledad, and many of the same trials of child-raising and inter-familial disputes. It is the superficial, exterior position of the conventional tourist that Zoila covets and which Acapulco promises.

Indeed, at the outset, it appears the Reyeses become conventional tourists in Acapulco, as signified by their participation in the tourist economy: from paid photos to a booze cruise and cheap straw hats (adorned in yarn with the word “Acapulco,” and with images of a palm tree and the stereotypical sleepy Mexican under a sombrero). Although they buy the hats with the pragmatic aim of preventing sunburn (rather than as souvenirs), the children undoubtedly appear as tourists while wearing them. When a photographer sells them “a remembrance,” the Reyeses delve deeper into the tourist economy (4). Lala even elevates the photo’s authority in touristic fashion by declaring that her absence from the picture renders her non-existent (4).¹⁰

Although Lala’s absence is indisputable, the reasons for it become subjects of competing narratives—underscoring that stories function as a form of memory and, given the instability and subjectivity of memory, generate multiple and competing tellings. A photograph taken to commemorate an exceptional experience in the family’s history does not just capture a moment but comes to represent the trip as a whole, making it a touchstone for each individual’s distinctive experience of it. Lala recalls, “I was off to the side making sand castles, and nobody bothered to call me when the photographer came by. Same as always, they forgot all about me.” For Lala, her absence confirms that, “same as always,” she is undervalued. For Rafa, however, “You were mad, and that’s why when we called you over, you wouldn’t come. That’s the *real* reason why you’re not in the picture. And I ought to know, I’m the oldest” (422). Rafa emphasizes his privileged access to the “*real* reason” as a function of his superior memory as the oldest child. Even so, and even if we take Rafa’s memory as accurate, is Lala’s recollection false? Because it conforms to a lifelong sense of being forgotten, of being glossed over through her father’s common assertions that he has “*siete hijos*,” rather than six sons and a daughter, it has its own claim to truth.¹¹

The photograph, then, is not just a representation of the family's vacation to Acapulco, as photos often are for tourists, but a heightened representation of Lala's position in the family—whether seen from her perspective or Rafa's. This remembrance and the trip itself become reference points for ongoing negotiations and debates about Lala's character. Alumbaugh reads Lala's interrogation of her absence from the photo as the inauguration of what McCracken characterizes as Lala's "excavation" of the histories her family aims to suppress. By contrast, I contend that it has more to say about the multiplicity and subjectivity of truth claims (rather than a single objective truth Lala can unearth), along with, as González argues, the incomplete nature of memory (16). The contested nature of this photograph also invites us to question the degree to which any touristic memento truly represents a vacation site or individuals' experiences of it. Photographs often are valued for their ostensible objectivity and yet, as Lala and Rafa demonstrate, much of their touristic value lies in their relation to tourists' subjective experiences of the moments they capture.

By the end of the day on which the photograph is taken, however, the family's touristic experience of Acapulco is complicated in a manner that exemplifies the inherent fluidity and complexity of diasporic cultural identities.¹² When Zoila learns that her husband had a daughter out of wedlock before their marriage, the ensuing argument makes the family a spectacle for Acapulco residents and tourists alike. Lala recalls,

In two languages Mother hurls words like weapons, and they thump and thud their target with amazing accuracy. . . . The corn-on-the-cob vendor ignores his customers and moves in for a better view, as if we're the last episode of a favorite *telenovela*. Vendors, townspeople, tourists, everyone gathers around us to see who it is Mother is calling a big

caca, a goat, an ox, a fat butt, a shameless, a deceiver, a savage, a barbarian, *un gran puto*. (84)

Zoila, speaking in Spanish and English (often with Spanish syntax), makes some portion of her speech accessible to these multiple audiences. Born in the US, her connection with Mexico may be more remote than Inocencio's, but by bringing a personal altercation into the streets, Zoila demonstrates a resident's comfort level—perhaps derived from her repeated trips to Mexico. Alternatively, her grief may strip away social conventions that might otherwise cause her to mask her feelings and reserve them for a private venue. Either way, Zoila, Soledad, and Inocencio become entertainment for everyone within earshot. Soledad, jealously hoping to drive a wedge between her son and his wife, informed Zoila of Inocencio's indiscretion, and is thus a subject of argument. Zoila and Soledad each entreat Inocencio to cast the other aside:

—*Mijo*, the Grandmother intervenes. —Let her be. You're better off without her kind. Wives come and go, but mothers, you have only one!

—Who are *you* to get involved in our affairs, *metiche*! Zoila snaps.

At this, some people cheer, some jeer. Some side with Mother. Some with Father. Some with the Grandmother. Some just stand there with their mouths open as if we're the greatest show on earth. (85)

Like all good entertainment, the family offers something for everyone in the crowd. This spectacle, however, becomes more than simple entertainment; it evolves into a public showcase of the family's competing cultural ideologies and allegiances, complemented by the audible endorsements and derisions of their audience.

As Soledad entreats her son to abide by the Mexican custom of honoring his mother before all others, Zoila invokes her legal status as Inocencio's wife (and thus a *Reyes*) to counter

Soledad's view that she never belonged in the family in the first place. Soledad asserts, "You climbed up in life marrying my son, a Reyes . . . My son could've done a lot better than marrying a woman who can't even speak proper Spanish. You sound like you escaped from the ranch. And to make matters even more sad, you're as dark as a slave." Soledad draws upon Mexico's racialized socioeconomic hierarchy to denigrate Zoila's status while also accusing her of being insufficiently Mexican due to not speaking "proper Spanish" (a "barbarity" Soledad attributes to being born in the US). Zoila fails on both counts to be the type of Mexican Soledad sees as befitting the Reyes family, seemingly forgetting, as Lala notes, that one of her own sons shares Zoila's complexion. Lala wonders, "Is that why the Grandmother loves him less than Father?" (85). Lala thusly begins to understand not only how Soledad uses racial logic to refuse Zoila acceptance within the family, but also how that same logic may account for Soledad's preferential treatment of her own children (each of whom was born and raised in Mexico). It may be that this line of questioning is propelled by Lala's position as inheritor of both the Chicana/o lineage Soledad repudiates and the Mexican lineage Soledad heralds, along with her desire to understand the grandmother she sees just once per year during most of her youth. By drawing an analogy between her US-born mother and Mexican-born uncle, Lala undermines Soledad's attempt to draw a racial distinction between Chicana/o and Mexican and the border logic on which it relies.

Indeed, the simple ancestral and national distinctions Soledad invokes do not hold up to scrutiny. As Lala reveals in her narrative, the Reyes ancestral line contains all that Soledad disavows: the Indian, the poor, and the North American. As McCracken suggests, Lala thusly excavates sublimated components of her lineage (par. 15). For generations, at least as far back as Lala's great grandfather who emigrated from Spain, the Reyeses have favored the Spanish thread

of their family ancestry while feigning ignorance of its poor and indigenous threads. Lala attempts to narrate—and thereby recover—the complex interweavings of what she reveals to be a richly textured fabric.

Recovering Mexican *Mestizaje* for/from Family and Nation

By highlighting Mexican *mestizaje*, Lala exposes as fallacious notions of cultural purity that animate certain forms of tourism and that have functioned as sources of family pride for generations.¹³ In the process, Lala gestures toward the complex interconnections between macronarratives of national identity—perpetuated in part via the tourism industry—and familial self-authorship. Arguably, Lala's dual position as insider-outsider vis-à-vis Mexico gives her the requisite combination of firsthand knowledge and critical perspective necessary for exposing the fallaciousness of such purity narratives. And it is the drive to understand her cultural inheritance, in large measure, that leads her to gather and record her impressions.

Lala calls attention to her family's diverse heritage and characterizes Mexico itself as a culturally heterogeneous nation, not just in its present form but also historically. Her portrait of Mexico is achieved through blending her direct observations of Mexican cultural diversity with information gathered from family stories. The detailed notes Cisneros provides for each chapter also contain historical and cultural context for these observations. Lala, for instance, describes Mexicans as follows:

There are green-eyed Mexicans. The rich blond Mexicans. The Mexicans with the faces of Arab sheiks. The Jewish Mexicans. The big-footed-as-a-German Mexicans. The leftover-French Mexicans. The *chaparrito* compact Mexicans. The Tarahumara tall-as-desert-saguaro Mexicans. The Mediterranean Mexicans. The Mexicans with Tunisian

eyebrows. The *negrito* Mexicans of the double coasts. The Chinese Mexicans. The curly-haired, freckled-faced, red-headed Mexicans. The jaguar-lipped Mexicans. The wide-as-a-Tula-tree Zapotec Mexicans. The Lebanese Mexicans. Look, I don't know what you're talking about when you say I don't look Mexican. (353)

Lala's cataloguing of Mexicans' physical and cultural diversity exemplifies Mexico's long history of cross-cultural contact—before *and* after Spanish conquest (the former indicated by Mexico's tribal diversity). Mexico is, on this view, no purer than Western nations, and it never was. Lala renders absurd the notion that a Mexican can be recognized phenotypically and instead asserts a conception of *Mexicanidad* which, like Junior's English speech and "Merican" identification, defies cultural binaries. It is through the time she spends in Mexico that she experiences Mexican diversity directly, which she can then reference to counter homogenous notions offered in the US and in her family's mythology.

Importantly, Lala is prompted to detail Mexican diversity by a few classmates' allegation that she does not *look* Mexican. She reflects, "A part of me wants to kick their ass. A part of me feels sorry for their stupid ignorant selves. But if you've never been farther south than Nuevo Laredo, how the hell would you know what Mexicans are supposed to look like, right?" (352-53). This comment reflects the certainty of identity Lala develops as the novel progresses, in tandem with her summer trips to Mexico. She comes to understand these trips, which often had felt like chores to her, as critical means of knowledge and connection. By comparison, her classmates' worlds seem narrowly circumscribed, with southward migrations that barely take them into Mexico. Immediately after asking Lala if she is Mexican, they follow-up with: "On both sides?"—thereby suggesting that, to be valid, her Mexican ancestry must be absolute (352). However, Lala refuses to engage with this line of thinking and simply asserts, "I *am* Mexican.

Even though I was born on the U.S. side of the border” (353). For Lala, blood quantum and nation of birth do not dictate identity; rather, Mexican is something Lala *knows* herself to be. Therefore, while Lala may dismiss easily assessable markers of *Mexicanidad*, on which tourists may rely to designate authenticity or difference, she does place a premium on first-hand experience as a vehicle for knowledge about a place, much as tourists do.

Lala’s presentation of Mexican diversity also speaks to the nation’s history, a history that runs counter to the official state narrative frequently staged for both Mexican nationals and tourists. She highlights insidious relationships among fictions that justified European conquest, selective nationalist narratives, and stories aimed at maintaining or elevating a family’s status within a hierarchical society—and indicates how each of these filters into the touristic commodification of a nation. Lala reveals that ancestral fictions are not only fabrications utilized by families out of pride or prejudice, nor are they only constructs produced by and for tourists with a superficial understanding of the sites they visit; they also are a means by which nations aim to tell their own histories to serve particular ideological and political ends. Lala, for instance, uncovers how nationalistic Mexican celebrations submerge historical conflicts between its various peoples:

Parades, bullfights, rodeos, receptions, balls, all to celebrate Don Porfirio’s birthday as well as Mexico’s independence Day. Indians and beggars were routed from the downtown streets where you lived so as not to spoil the view. Thousands of pairs of machine-made trousers were handed out to the poor with instructions to wear these instead of those peasant cotton-whites. The parents of the shoeless were scolded into buying their children footwear or else face terrible fines, while the little girls of the well-to-do were recruited to

toss rose petals in the Centennial parade before a phalanx of Indians dressed as “Indians.”
(125)

While Mexico’s government decides that “real” Indians are not presentable for this display, a constructed version of “Indianness” stands in for them. “Traditional” Indian attire masks Mexican Indians’ poverty—and the racial hierarchies that propel it—while relegating them to a past removed from Mexico’s current sociopolitical reality. The parade acknowledges Mexico’s Spanish and Indian histories but situates them, via their costumes, in different historical moments and thereby perpetuates a progressive, colonially rooted history whereby the Spanish supplanted indigenous cultures. Further, rather than simply overlooking the history of bloody contact between Spain and Native America, the parade reverses that history by depicting the Mexican elite honoring Indians with rose petals. The romanticized, sanitized, and anachronistic depiction of Mexican Indians Lala witnesses is, in fact, representative of Mexico’s official promotional displays—from ritual celebrations to touristic materials.¹⁴

Lala cannot tell or understand her family’s story without confronting the cultural divisions and inequalities Mexico sublimates and repackages in national celebrations and promotional materials—which again demonstrates the deep interconnections between the state’s official narrative and family stories as they have interwoven and unfolded over multiple generations. Notably, for a diasporic Chicana like Lala who grapples with her own sense of (trans)national belonging, telling her family’s story involves tracking a series of migrations in and out of Mexico (as represented by her ancestors); in the process she confronts the formation and implications of racial hierarchies that privilege/d certain immigrant groups at the expense of the nation’s first peoples. The Reyeses’ partiality toward their Spanish heritage, paired with the

disavowal of their own indigeneity, manifests within several Reyes marriages, including that of Lala's great-grandparents, Eleutorio and Regina:

He was like a big grizzled vulture, but so pale and hazel-eyed, Mexicans considered him handsome because of his Spanish blood. She, on the other hand, thought herself homely because of her Indian features, but in reality she was like la India Bonita . . . whose beauty brought [emperor] Maximilian to his knees. (117)

Through her physical comparison of her great-grandparents, Lala points to the myopic engine of racial superiority that underlies sustained socioeconomic imbalances. The Reyeses celebrate Eleutorio's Spanish blood (deeming features analogous to a "grizzled vulture" handsome) at the expense of Regina's, despite her superior beauty. Lala juxtaposes Mexico's pervasive suppression of its indigeneity, as encapsulated by this anecdote about her great-grandparents, with an alternative narrative of historical contact between Mexican cultures: here Indian and Austrian. In the case of Maximilian, Austrian blood—far from containing inherent superiority—bows before indigenous beauty. Lala's gaze thus operates as a corrective lens on the distorted vision of her ancestors. By highlighting Regina's indigeneity, Lala challenges her family's exclusive claim to Spanish heritage—which reifies European superiority—while falsifying assumptions inherent in her family's desire to make this exclusionary claim. Further, Lala adopts the stance of Anzaldúa's new *mestiza* who stands at the juncture of her multiple cultural inheritances with the capacity to tolerate their contradictions so as to assemble the parts, not into a unified whole, but in a manner that produces "a third element which is greater than the sum of its severed parts. That third element is a new consciousness—a *mestiza* consciousness—and though it is a source of intense pain, its energy comes from continual creative motion that keeps breaking down the unitary aspects of each new paradigm" (101-2). Lala accordingly re-visions

indigeneity, reinserts it into her family's narrative, and thereby engages in the "hub-making" process of "re-membling" the social body of Mexico (synecdochically represented by the Reyeses) as deeply culturally syncretic and thus more accommodating of a diasporic Chicana like herself.¹⁵

The Body on the Border: Migration and Memory

Lala's cultivation of a syncretic identity comes not only through familial relationships but also via her repeated geographic movements between and within nations. These movements are hub-making activities in the sense that they forge and renew ties between hub sites while transmitting knowledge between them. By representing body and space as dynamic and mutually constituting, *Caramelo* exemplifies several foundational understandings that define the field of Human Geography¹⁶ and does so in a manner that advances Mary Pat Brady's argument about the centrality of space to Chicana literature in *Extinct Lands, Temporal Geographies*. She identifies Cisneros as one of several Chicana authors who helps us appreciate the "bodily instantiation" of "the production of space" and the ways in which "categories such as gender, race and sexuality are not only discursively constructed but spatially enacted and created as well" (8).¹⁷ Although Brady does not address *Caramelo* specifically, having published her book in the same year, *Caramelo* undoubtedly bolsters Brady's argument regarding Cisneros' spatial interventions.

Throughout the novel Lala attends to the ways in which crossing the US-Mexico border is inscribed and stored within her body, thereby demonstrating that the body itself is, as Sally Munt explains, "a product of space, and a performance of space, a thing and a process, a configuration of spatial dialectics, crucially a 'lived experience' where conceptualisations

materialise and are materialised, in historically specific ways” (“Framing Intelligibility”). Before she is old enough consciously to recall what she will find in Mexico, the physical experience of crossing the border activates her memories and prepares her for what to expect. Lala reflects, “Every year I cross the border, it’s the same—my mind forgets. But my body always remembers” (18). Therefore Mexico is, for Lala, not a site of discovery or an encounter with an unknown other (as it might be for the average tourist) but rather a series of recollections she accesses and builds upon each time she replicates the journey.¹⁸ Movement from one nation-space to another alerts Lala to the daily habits and behaviors her body stores—which she likely would not be conscious of were it not for exchanging one set of habits and behaviors for another. For example, when preparing to cross into Mexico, Lala does not anticipate sites featured in travel guides but remembers and thus foresees a series of everyday substitutions, such as Pato Pascual instead of 7-Up, cornflakes served with hot milk instead of cold, and cars making a “*tán-tán*” sound instead of a honk (17).

Even as Lala’s experiences in Mexico and the US position her as a transnational diasporic figure, the border itself remains a distinctive and material presence. That is, her forging of a transnational identity does not require obscuring the physical realities of the border but, instead, articulating its meaning for individuals who cross it regularly—literally (through annual migrations) and figuratively (through negotiating familial and cultural ties on both sides). As Lala compares daily life on one side with the other, she communicates her ability to operate within each domestic space and her awareness of cultural distinctions, while underscoring that there *are* in fact differences between life in Mexico and in the US.¹⁹ Thus, in this novel, transnational identity and cross-cultural fluency do not erase the border in either a metaphorical or a material sense. Lala recalls, “Not like on the Triple A atlas from orange to pink, but at a

stoplight in a rippled heat and a dizzy gasoline stink, the United States ends all at once, a tangled shove of red lights from cars and trucks waiting their turn to get past the bridge” (16). Contrary to the subtlety implied by the map’s color-coding, the border asserts itself here by slowing traffic (a veiled reference to border security) and protracting the unpleasantness of crossing (underscored by the heat and gasoline smell that make visceral the climate of the border region between Texas and Mexico).

Rather than discouraging the Reyeses from crossing, however, being waylaid at the border heightens their anticipation and enthusiasm when they finally glimpse Mexico City:

The center of the universe! The valley like a big bowl of hot beef soup before you taste it. And a laughter in your chest when the car descends. A laughter like ticker tape. Like a parade. People in the streets shouting hurray. Or do I just imagine they are shouting hurray? . . . Hurray when the green iron gates of the house on Destiny Street, number 12, open, abracadabra. In the belly button of the house, the Awful Grandmother tossing her black *rebozo de bolita* crisscross across her breasts, like a *soldadera*’s bandoleers. The big black X at the map’s end. (25-26)

As though her exclamatory identification of Mexico City as the center of the universe inadequately expresses her excitement about the city or its significance, Lala searches for comparisons—comparisons that link private joys to public celebrations which signal welcoming, entrance into the grandmother’s home, and the striking appearance of the grandmother herself (the destination personified). The city appears to open itself in layers to embrace Lala, from the sounds that all seem to cheer her arrival to the iron gates that open, as if magically, to the center of the home (in the center of the universe) where the grandmother stands. Soledad symbolizes a distinctive form of Mexican womanhood by wearing a traditional *rebozo* in a manner evocative

of female soldiers who fought in the Mexican Revolution. Only she does not open her arms in welcome but keeps them crossed—a stance that represents her role in communicating aspects of Mexican culture while blocking Lala from claiming them for herself.

Recovering Cultural Identity and Forging it Anew

For Lala, Soledad functions as a cultural gatekeeper and judge, as she repeatedly comments upon Lala's "barbaric" American traits and thereby designates Lala an outsider within Mexico. This dynamic exemplifies a common phenomenon within diasporic tourism, wherein the diasporic tourist feels her cultural authenticity being questioned in her homeland (Hollinshead 46). In addition to irritating Lala, Soledad's criticism propels her curiosity about her Mexican roots—which drives her to explore Soledad's past. Soledad's *caramelo rebozo* specifically becomes, for Lala, synonymous with Soledad and Mexico itself. When Lala asks her father for a *rebozo* of her own, after Soledad refuses to lend Lala her *caramelo rebozo*, Soledad informs him that people no longer make hand woven *rebozos* like hers and highlights the artificiality of contemporary *rebozos* by noting their factory manufacture (39). She thereby denies Lala access to the cultural identity the *rebozo* signifies. At the same time, Soledad clings fiercely to the *caramelo rebozo* because of her own sense of precarious connection to her family legacy and, more specifically, to her mother, Guillermina, who skillfully crafted it (but died too young to pass her weaving skills on to her daughter). Thus Lala and Soledad are connected through their common desire to seize a connection with their maternal forebears via the *rebozo* and the weaving tradition it signifies. Further, they both manifest bodily inscriptions of memories that pertain to this shared desire. Of the young Soledad, for instance, Lala recounts:

No one would touch her again with a mother's love. No soft hair across her cheek, only the soft fringe of the unfinished shawl, and now Soledad's fingers took to combing this, plaiting, unplaiting, plaiting, over and over, the language of the nervous hands. —Stop that, her stepmother would shout, but her hands never quit, even when she was sleeping.

(95)

In a manner analogous to Lala's physical memory of border crossing, Soledad's body recalls what her mind cannot: the lost weaving skills that were to have been her primary matrilineal inheritance. The fringe of the unfinished shawl communicates several interrelated aspects of Soledad's experience: the loss of her mother, the break in the family lineage (symbolized by Soledad's inability to complete the shawl herself), and the sustained deprivation Soledad carries (communicated through her substitution of the shawl's fringe for her mother's hand upon her cheek). At the same time, however, Soledad's physically stored memories of her mother and of weaving—signified through her seemingly irrepressible impulse to plait and unplat the shawl's unfinished threads—suggest the possibility of cultural renewal and continuance.

For both Soledad and Lala, then, the *rebozo* represents a partially inaccessible family history and serves as a marker of what MacCannell might identify as a “back region” of *Mexicanidad* and Reyes authenticity. In his seminal study of twentieth-century tourism, *The Tourist*, MacCannell adapts Erving Goffman's theory of social establishments being divided into front and back regions to address issues of authenticity in a touristic context (91-107). MacCannell conceptualizes back regions as authentic cultural sites distinct from constructed public performances (or front regions) made readily available to tourists. Tourists seeking authenticity thus aim to locate such back regions. The backmost region Soledad yearns for is what the *caramelo rebozo* signifies: namely, her mother.²⁰ She substitutes a mother's embrace

with sucking on the *rebozo*'s unfinished threads and crying into its fabric. The *rebozo* also links her to an era in Mexican history signified by the weaving skills her mother took to her grave. Nonetheless, sheer possession of the *rebozo* distinguishes Soledad from most contemporary Mexicans who, in her view, only have access to artificial versions of the original. Soledad tells her son, "They're disappearing. If you want an authentic one, you'll have to find a family that's willing to part with it. . . . No, the famous *rebozos* from my village you can't find anymore" (38). The only *rebozos* broadly available in Mexico City, and thus available to Lala and tourists alike, are, Soledad contends, inauthentic. The contrast in authenticity of handmade silk *rebozos* versus their factory-produced counterparts is underscored by the spaces in which each can be accessed: the former in a Mexican family home (a back region) and the latter in stores (front regions).

Alumbaugh reads the lost inheritance of the *rebozo* weaving tradition as symptomatic of migration (within and outside of the nation) and its consequent cultural and familial ruptures (66). By contrast, I contend that it says more about the always already fluid nature of culture and the fact that traditions change and sometimes are lost even without migration—particularly between generations. Even had Soledad remained with her father, Guillermina's death still would have mitigated against her ability to inherit her mother's weaving skills. Moreover, the traditional production and uses of the *rebozo* generally, as Soledad suggests, have given way to market forces (related, no doubt, to tourism and tourists' desire for "authentic" cultural artifacts, as well as to changes in fashion). Therefore, reading the *rebozo* as a nostalgic signifier born of migratory loss is an incomplete assessment that fails to account for *Caramelo*'s statements about various forms of cultural change that occur within families and nations over time. Such an assessment also overlooks the novel's critique of discourses of authenticity that differentially

motivate cultural insiders (e.g., Soledad), cultural outsiders (e.g. tourists), and diasporic subjects who craft identities that bridge nations (e.g., Lala).

Rebozos exemplify cultural continuance born of heterogeneity, not policed cultural purity. Several other critics have observed that the *rebozo* symbolizes the cultural syncretism of the Reyes family and of the Mexican nation more generally—and, through its unfinished threads, the related but distinctive identities of Lala’s generation.²¹ I would add that, as material manifestations of Mexico’s long history of multiple cultural influences, *rebozos* counter exclusivist conceptions of *Mexicanidad* that not only have influenced official Mexican and Reyes family histories but also have implications for traditional touristic assumptions. Rather than manifesting the untainted cultural lineage Western tourists demand from the non-Western world, they embody the disparate threads of Mexican history. In her footnote on the *rebozo*’s diverse cultural influences, Cisneros pays particular attention to the *rebozo de bolita* and thereby invites readers to recall that it is this *rebozo*—“quintessential” via its invocation of snakes venerated by pre-Columbian Indians—that Soledad wears like an “X” at the end of Lala’s journey to Mexico (96). Notably, this symbolization of *Mexicanidad* contains an irony unknown to Lala at the time: her grandmother, adorned thusly, evokes not just the *soldadera* or the craft Soledad stood to inherit, but also the indigeneity Soledad repudiates. In this respect, Lala is, indeed, positioned to excavate—as McCracken puts it—Mexican indigeneity.

Cisneros trains her readers to read *rebozos* against the grain of touristic frameworks and selective Mexican histories. She firmly unites Mexico’s indigeneity with its Spanish influences by pointing to the *rebozo*’s Spanish fringe, Indian cloth, and pre-Columbian design, while also extending Mexican culture beyond its oppositional colonial (Spanish versus Indian) framework by tracing the *rebozo*’s Asian influences (96). The *rebozo* thus is an artifact of the Mexican-

Chicana/o hub in the sense that it knits together the multiple cultures that interact/ed within it.²² As we will see, its sustained hub-making function is illustrated through its ability to connect Lala to her familial and cultural inheritance. Cisneros likewise articulates the strength of Indian cultures through their ability to adapt to new influences while sustaining their traditions, thus countering colonialist histories that assert Indian inferiority so as to naturalize European conquest. Rather than being a nation in which one culture triumphed over and replaced another, Mexico, in Cisneros's view, is a land whose authenticity resides in its very taintedness. Thus the *rebozo* is not a marker of the Mexico packaged for the Western tourist but of a Mexico in which the diasporic Chicana can locate herself. By recovering the suppressed indigenous thread within her ancestral inheritance, Lala has the opportunity to reject a deficit discourse that frames cultural change and migration as necessitating loss, and instead to see her own hybridity as quintessentially Mexican.

Curdling: Identity through Storytelling

When Soledad asks Lala (posthumously) to tell her story in hopes of being understood and thus freed to pass into the next world, she grants Lala access to the personal history she refused in life. Ultimately, storytelling is the critical mechanism *Caramelo* offers for recovering, reinventing, and sustaining identity in a manner that subverts expectations of cultural purity. Just as Cisneros recovers the *rebozo*'s genealogy through narrative, and thereby validates Mexico's varied cultures, storytelling is Lala's means of interweaving disparate Reyes ancestral threads into a common fabric. As Alumbaugh argues,

Because the art of shawl making dies with Guillermina, Lala's migratory narrative voice, her "talk," replaces her great-grandmother's art. This explains why Cisneros figures the

art of *las empuntadoras* [the fringe-maker] and the art of *la cuentista* (the female storyteller) in stunningly similar terms. Lala understands that “*a life contains a multitude of stories and not a single strand explains precisely the who of who one is*” (115) just as her great-grandmother understood how to link the silk strands of the *rebozo*. By retelling her grandmother’s past, Lala links her personal history to her familial history. (71)

Lala takes up a piece of her familial inheritance—an inheritance that accommodates multiple cultures, nations, migrations, and perspectives—through her retelling and editing of the Reyeses’ multigenerational narrative and creates a space within its pages for second generation Chicanas/os like herself.

By embracing multiplicity and rejecting dominant conceptions of cultural purity Lala demonstrates her emergent *mestiza* consciousness and, moreover, engages in what María Lugones terms “curdling”: “Curdle-separation is not something that happens to us but something we do . . . in resistance to the logic of control, to the logic of purity” (478). Lugones counters purist understandings of separation as fragmentation into distinctive wholes with a view of separation as curdling, as in an emulsion that is inherently unstable and which, when curdled, cannot neatly separate. *Mestizaje*, on this view, is thus a curdled and multiplicitous identity that *resists* the logic of purity (which would divide the world into pure/unified, read: white, male, heterosexual; and impure/fragmented, read: non-white, female, homosexual). Lala’s narrative recovery and often messy stitching together of Chicana/o and Mexican experiences are curdling acts that entail her hub-making re-memberings. When Lala recognizes the deep interconnections between herself and Soledad, she extends her family’s narrative across the US-Mexico border and encompasses all of the Reyeses’ experiences within a transnational and multidirectional hub.

Spain, Mexico City, Acapulco, San Antonio, and Chicago all are sites within this hub that operate in relation to one another vis-à-vis the Reyeses' collective identity.

Alumbaugh characterizes Lala's storytelling as entailing "the ability to cross supernatural, spatial, and narrative boundaries (54). I would add that bodily memory and regular summer visits to Mexico City are critical to Lala's ability to piece together a narrative of familial and individual identity. For instance, while in the process of collaboratively telling Soledad's story, it is no coincidence that Lala comes to appreciate the deep commonalties she shares with Soledad shortly after she takes to unconsciously sucking the fringe of her grandmother's shawl and tasting something familiar and comforting (388). Just as Soledad unconsciously wove and unraveled the unfinished threads of the *rebozo*, calling upon an embodied memory of her mother's lessons, Lala unconsciously interacts with the *rebozo* as her grandmother once did—arguably activating sense memory in the process. Thus the act of constructing the Reyes multigenerational story and developing an understanding of her place within it occurs in tandem with Lala's physical enactment of the memories she inherits, which manifest physically.

Significantly, Lala and Soledad achieve mutual understanding not by agreeing on the objective truth of the Reyes family narrative but, through disputing and revising the narrative at every turn, *performing* the view of story the Reyeses have articulated and bequeathed for generations—a view communicated most succinctly in *Caramelo*'s epigraph: "Tell me a story, even if it's a lie." The novel itself is subtitled "*Puro Cuento*," an expression that translates as "all lies," "healthy lies," or, literally, "pure story." It is part of Lala's inheritance to view story as both essential and fallacious; indeed, the subjective aspects of storytelling are critical components of their truth. José David Saldívar argues that the deferral of any singular authoritative resolution to the novel's many narrative threads—with its contradictory accounts,

interruptions between characters, and unanswered questions—is indicative of its overarching meaning (175). The suspension of narrative resolution and destabilization of any one character's truth claims are, as Saldívar asserts, constitutive components of *Caramelo*'s form as a transnational and decolonial novel. He writes,

Like the U.S.-Mexican border-crossing experiences represented in *Caramelo or Puro Cuento*, the border-crossing *puros cuentos* and histories are in the last instance recalcitrant and liminal spaces that cannot be totally assimilated or translated. We might even say that *Caramelo or Puro Cuento* goes on to question our most basic assumptions about origins and their ends. Cisneros permits the introduction of a critical study of *cuentos* and discourse where space and rhetoric are entwined and where rhetoric depends on space. (181)

This fluidity and contestation of narrative truth, I would add, is a critical part of the hub's vitality. The hub enables a non-hierarchical, mutually constituting, but not uncritical exchange of ideas between people and places within it. Lala must negotiate what she takes to be the truth of her family's stories, in part through the lens of her own coming of age and subjective experiences. What the novel directs us to understand is that the truth of stories lies not in their correspondence to an objective reality but in their articulation of an individual's or family's lived experience, and to pay more attention to the many purposes for which stories are told (and how the purpose shapes the telling). Such an understanding works against the binary logic of colonization and the expectations of cultural purity/authenticity that have been central to tourism and deficit constructions of diaspora.

Caramelo thus challenges any form of narrative that claims to communicate objective truth and, in so doing, sets itself in opposition to Western epistemologies, histories, and

travelogues (which are replete with assertions of objective accuracy). The novel ultimately insists that *all* (re)tellings are motivated. Factors that influence the way in which a story is told include aesthetic preferences (e.g., Lala altering the season to fit the mood of a story, 175); subjective perceptions of events (e.g., Rafa's versus Lala's accounts of the family photo in Acapulco); a hope for upward social mobility (e.g., Soledad's denigration and denial of indigeneity); or a desire to aggrandize a nation's image (e.g., Mexico's centennial parade). The Reyes narrative theory keeps the ink wet on any story (even as individual Reyeses insist upon the truth of their iterations), thereby leaving it open to revision and creating a space to supplement or counter accepted histories. In Lala's case, gaining access to and authorship of her grandmother's story allows her to inhabit, interpret, and grapple with her ancestral inheritance in relation to her own experiences and needs.

Stories and storytelling, when understood as always in process, malleable, and subjective, can, through the art of curdling, unfix rigid binaries that differentiate peoples and nations, and provide a means of negotiating identity in a manner that refuses established truths and reworks temporalities. Storytelling allows Lala to move backwards and forwards in time, come into close contact with ancestors, and articulate a sense of self in relation to generations of Reyeses; Lala's experience thereby argues against linear notions of time that would irrevocably remove her from family members who precede her. In tandem with her deployment of a storytelling methodology that asserts a circular, non-Western conception of time, is Lala's developing understanding of herself and her cultural inheritances through repeated movements within transnational spaces constitutive of the Mexican-Chicana/o hub. *Caramelo* argues for a dynamic understanding of space that informs and is informed by those who move through it.²³ For a diasporic subject like Lala Reyes, then, country of origin and country of birth are not static reference points that

prescribe a fixed identity, but rather spaces of flux through which she actively navigates an ever-unfolding conception of self.

¹ “Mericans” was published in Cisneros’s 1991 short story collection entitled *Woman Hollering Creek: and Other Stories*.

² For discussion of Westerners, specifically with the dawn of modernity, perceiving their own cultures as irrevocably inauthentic, see Dean MacCannell 3 & 41.

³ See *Native Hubs*.

⁴ See Deborah Madsen 32-33.

⁵ See Daniel Cooper Alarcón, 156-159 and Coles and Timothy.

⁶ For Gloria Anzaldúa, “The work of *mestiza* consciousness is to break down the subject-object duality that keeps her a prisoner and to show in the flesh and through the images in her work how duality is transcended” (102). Regarding Cisneros’s enactments of *mestiza* consciousness, Rivera cites Alicia Gaspar de Alba (291).

⁷ Susana Rinderle contends that peoples of Mexican descent living in the US constitute a diaspora on the grounds that “they have experienced the following: (a) a history of physical displacement, (b) cultural dislocation and hybridity, (c) a yearning for homeland, (d) structural displacement and a complex structural relationship between nation-state and diaspora, (e) alienation from the hostland, and (f) a collective identity defined by the relationship between homeland and hostland” (295).

⁸ Alumbaugh writes, for example, “In Part Two, Cisneros uses Lala’s poignant and humorous co-narration of Soledad’s painful life to document an individual history of loss, betrayal, and strength as *emblematic of migratory Latina experience*” (65, emphasis mine).

⁹ Monika Kaup explains that, although the traditional Mexican immigration experiences differs markedly from European immigration experiences, immigration historians and Chicano authors

of migrant literature have retained “the traditional American model of ethnicity as generational change to discuss the Mexican experience of the process of ‘becoming American’” (113). However, as Kaup argues, “Through laying bare the infrastructure of borders and migrations, Chicanas, by contrast, revived the fluidity of transnational migrant worlds that had been lost in the conceptualization of the homeland as a bounded and unified nation-space” (82).

¹⁰ For discussion of the power of touristic markers relative to tourists’ experiences and memories of the site itself, see MacCannell. As Cooper Alarcón explains, photography has become one of the most common media for experiencing, documenting, and shaping one’s understanding of a travel experience, and photographs have become prime touristic markers (154-155). Indeed, for many travelers, according to Susan Sontag, photographs are more authentic than the realities they represent (qtd. in Cooper Alarcón 158).

¹¹ The word “*hijos*” translates either as “sons” or as “children,” depending on context. However, Lala suspects her father uses the word to bend the truth and thereby imply that he did indeed have the seventh son for which he had hoped.

¹² Many post/colonial theorists, such as Homi Bhabha and Stuart Hall, reject rigid definitions of diaspora that, in their view, fail to account for the variability and fluidity of diasporic identities and experiences (see Coles and Timothy, 6-7). See Hollinshead for analysis of contemporary conceptions of diaspora that recognize diasporic diversity.

¹³ The Reyeses’ denigration of their indigenous heritage is not unrelated to the Orientalism propagated in imperialist writings. The family internalizes the colonialist logic that justified the conquest of the Americas (namely, the contention that indigenous peoples were savage heathens whose land claims were invalidated by a lack divine mandate or having made proper use of the natural world).

¹⁴ For instance, Mexico's official tourism website (www.visitmexico.com) forefronts references to the nation's rich indigenous *past* through descriptions of ancient temples, ruins, and paintings. Pages embedded within the site that do forefront contemporary indigenous life-ways, most notably the one dedicated to San Cristobal de las Casas, present them as quaint and easily identifiable attractions

¹⁵ According to Ramirez, "re-membering" involves sharing of historical and contemporary experiences and, in the process, reconstructs "the Native social body that has been torn apart by colonization" (9).

¹⁶ Laura Gillman explains, "Human Geography developed in the late '60s as a critical reaction against logical positivist forms of knowledge that prevailed in the discipline to reconcile the objectivity of social science with human subjectivity, as well as to reconcile the materialism of space/place with idealism, that is, with the meanings given to space" (136).

¹⁷ Gillman advances a similar argument about *mestiza* feminists generally: namely, that they pay particular attention to the spatialization of lived experience and "articulate the embodied dimensions of race-gender formation at the crossroads of cultures, races, and nations, in order to construct knowledge of place and identity along multiple perspectival axes" (134).

¹⁸ "[H]abitual comportments," Gillman observes, "become manifest not only in physical behaviors, such as walking or eating, but also . . . in our social behaviors. Because habitual social behaviors, that is, preconscious raced and gendered codes that bodies internalize and reproduce, are just that—habitual—it is difficult to have consciousness of them" (137).

¹⁹ Moreover, if we understand Mexico City, Chicago, and later San Antonio as nodes within a hub, we can appreciate their differences as potentially productive rather than divisive. As Ramirez explains, part of the hub's vitality comes from the transmission of new knowledge from

one site to another—knowledge that can be incorporated or adapted in the interest of a tribe’s vitality and ability to effect social change (see, for example, 2-8).

²⁰ For additional discussion of the impact of her mother’s death on Soledad, and thereafter her father’s abandonment of her, see Alumbaugh 66.

²¹ See Gabriella Gutiérrez y Muhs (28-29) Carmen Haydée Rivera (81) for discussion of the *rebozo* symbolizing the Reyes’ family’s cultural syncretism and, through its unfinished threads, the related but distinctive identities of Lala’s generation. See Hunt for consideration of the many cultural influences that have been incorporated into Mexico and that shape the style and craft of the *rebozo*.

²² As José David Saldívar argues, the *rebozo* functions as a type of archive in which its maker “might have produced meaning and recorded memory” (172).

²³ Edward Soja, with his 1989 *Postmodern Geographies*, called attention to the inaccuracies and limitations produced by a century of privileging time over space as the key factor in social inquiry and argued for a dialectical understanding of relationships among time, space, and being. Other thinkers, from Doreen Massey to Henri Lefebvre, Michel Foucault, and Fredric Jameson, critiqued and elaborated on Soja’s thesis by articulating space as dynamic and relational (see Minca). As James Tyner explains, “Now, rather than viewing space as an inert backdrop, or a stage on which human operate according to abstract physical laws, space is increasingly understood as an actor in its own right. The forwarding of relational space suggests that space, in effect, is produced; but so too does space produce” (15).

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