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**Transnationalism and Chicana Literature:  
Transnational Perspectives and the Representation of  
Transnational Phenomena in three Chicana Narratives**

**ReMA Thesis**

Natalia Villanueva Nieves, 3297470

Supervisor: Prof. Dr. Paulo De Medeiros

Second Reader: Prof. Dr. Claire Joysmith

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## **Introduction**

The main purpose of this thesis is to analyzing the connection between Chicana literature and transnationalism. Therefore, this thesis departs from the following research question: are recent Chicana narratives involved in transnational phenomena or are they still only concerned with local (American) issues? This question is fundamentally related to a current discussion in Chicana/o studies. Nowadays, Chicana/o critics, such as Ellie D. Hernández (2009), are inquiring if Chicana/o literary forms could be defined in global and transnational terms, or if they are still fundamentally determined by “a cultural nationalistic-based critical study of the U.S” (Hernández 2009, 16).

According to these critics, and specifically to Ellie D. Hernández, although Chicana literature is not anymore only a national literary phenomenon, it also is not yet totally a transnational or global literature. This literature is essentially a “post-national” literary form, which means that it fundamentally is integrated by “cultural works in which the connection between two nations plays a central and vital role by offering a new critique” (Hernández 2009, 15). For Hernández, this bicultural or bi-national character is still fundamentally focused on legitimizing Mexican-Americans’ position in the U.S –therefore it is still fundamentally related to a specific national context and to an ethnic nationalistic movement; but, at the same time, it expresses “an important experience that is part of the global encounter” (Hernández 2009, 15). Thus, the post-national character of Chicana literature could be understood as a transition “from a cultural nationalistic-based critical study of U.S Chicanas/os as the group begins its entry into transnational globalization” (Hernández 2009, 16).

In order to understand completely this transition phase in which Chicana literature is involved, it is necessary to explain briefly the historical development of Chicana literature and its fundamental connection with a national-based critique. This literary tradition emerged in relation to the Chicano social and nationalistic movement that took place in the United States, during the 1960’s and 1970’s. As Ellie D. Hernández suggests, “for ethnic minorities living in the United States, few avenues of self expression have been as powerful as cultural nationalist’s drive to formulate group solidarity and political resistance against

the dominant cultural ordering of people” (Hernández 2009, 17). Consequently, Mexican-Americans were influenced by the social mobilization of other American racial minorities – especially by the Black nationalistic movement- and created a militant civil right and ethnic movement which underlined Chicano community historical legacy of discrimination and structural inequality in American society; and which challenged the hegemonic notions of American nation.

As Alma M. García stresses, this social movement, known as “the *movimiento*” or “*La Causa*”, “focused on social political and economic self-determination and autonomy for Mexican-American communities throughout the United States. This focus at the same time manifested a paradoxical agenda of civil rights and equal opportunity demands, on the one hand, and a more separatist ethnic rebellion, on the other” (García 1997, 2). Therefore, the *movimiento* was fundamentally supported by a cultural nationalistic basis called *Chicanismo*, which:

emphasized cultural pride as a source of political unity and strength capable of mobilizing Chicanos and Chicanas into an oppositional political group within the dominant political landscape in the United States. As an ideology, *Chicanismo* crystallized the essence of a nationalist ideology: a collective ethnic consciousness. Chicano Cultural nationalism placed the socio-historical experiences of Mexican-Americans within a theoretical model of internal colonialism. Chicano communities represented ethnic “nations” or “internal colonies” under the domination and exploitation of the United States (García 1997, 3)

This nationalistic ideology was expressed not only through the multiple social and political agendas that integrated the *movimiento*, but also by artistic and cultural manifestations. In this sense, the *movimiento* released a new energy of artistic and literary expression. Literature and other artistic manifestations were used and mobilized to express, on the one hand, the social and political demands of *La Causa*; and, on the other, the particular Chicana/o experience (see García 1997 and Rebolledo 1993). Therefore, Chicana/o literature emerged principally as means to communicate the particular bicultural Mexican-Americans’ experience -which at the same time was the basis of the Chicano nationalistic ideology-, and to make visible the racial, social and political discrimination to which individuals of Mexican origin were subjugated in the American landscape.

In this sense, Chicana literature has its origin in a national-based critique which had as principal objective the legitimation of Mexican-Americans' experiences and positions in the racial, social and political American landscapes. Nonetheless, in contrast to literary forms written by male individuals of Mexican origin, Chicana literature also emerged in relation to a feminist movement that questioned patriarchal structures within the Chicano social and nationalistic movement.

As Alma M. García stresses, although the Chicano movement challenged “persistent patterns of social inequality in the United States” (García 1997, 1), it was supported by cultural patriarchal structures which oppress and subjugate women into the Chicano community as well as inside the *movimiento*. In consequence, Chicanas started to produce an “ideological critique of the Chicano cultural nationalist movement that struggles against social injustice yet maintained patriarchal structures of domination” (García 1997, 1). This critique promoted the emergence of a Chicana feminist movement, which did not only denounce the sexism involved in *La Causa*, but also stressed gender and sexuality as fundamental factors involved in the oppression and subjugation of individuals in the Chicano community, and in the social and political American landscape in general.

In consequence, Chicana feminism created a fundamental opposition against nationalistic structures which subjugate women –in this sense Chicana feminism could be defined as an anti-nationalistic movement-; but, at the same time, it promoted an ethnical-based critique supported by sexual and gender disparities. This means that Chicana feminism expressed and underlined the particular vectors of oppression and the gender and sexual constructs that specifically subjugate women of color in the U.S, and had not been noticed by White feminists.

As mentioned, Chicana literature was fundamentally influenced by this feminist movement. Consequently, Chicana writers created their own literary forms in order to emphasize their marginalization in the Chicano patriarchal, social and political order (Rebolledo 1993, 22); and to stress the fundamental role that gender and sexuality play in the construction of social and power structures that marginalize and subjugate specific groups and individuals in the U.S. Hence, Chicana literary forms are fundamentally

counter-hegemonic activities which “mark both a commitment to, and a continuity of, the decolonizing practices emerging with the civil rights movements and a rupture and discontinuity that insist on the inscription of gender and sexuality as the missing elements of the initial male nationalist propositions” (Klahn 2003, 115).

According to critics, such as Tey Diana Rebolledo (1993 and 1995), the double counter-hegemonic character of Chicana literature evolved during the 1980’s and 1990’s, creating literary practices which do not only interconnect gender and sexuality to the specific Chicana/o experience, but also to the experiences of other minorities in the U.S, and which argues for the dislocation of gender, racial and social categories and, therefore, for the creation of identities that allow the convergence of multiple gender, racial and social vectors.

These literary practices, principally represented by authors such as Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherrie Moranga, are the ones identified by Ellie D Hernández as principal examples of post-nationalisms features in Chicana literature. As Hernández correctly emphasizes, these literary forms, by claiming for the dislocation of identity categories and for the creation of multi-identities, are clearly separated from nationalistic delimitations, and express a multiculturalism which has been constantly related to globalization and transnationalism. Therefore, they could be defined as literary practices which recreate Chicana literature transition from a nationalistic basis to global and transnational terms. Nonetheless, as Hernández also emphasizes, these texts are still fundamentally interconnected with an American context, and, hence, they do not express completely globalization or transnationalism. In consequence, in order to demonstrate a clear connection between transnationalism and Chicana literature it is fundamental to analyze Chicana narratives focused on issues outside just the particular Chicana experience or the American context, and which involved transnational or global concerns, and other national contexts.

This thesis is based on the analysis of three recent Chicana narratives which are focused on issues relating not only to the Chicana experience in America, but rather enjoying transnational relationships and interchanges between Mexico and the U.S. This

means that these three narratives represent a significant difference with post-national Chicana narratives and, hence, illustrate a clearer interconnection between Chicana literature and transnationalism. These three novels, which are *Caramelo* (2002) by Sandra Cisneros, *Desert Blood* (2004) by Alicia Gaspar de Alba, and *If I Die in Juárez* (2008) by Alicia Pope Duarte, develop a transnational perspective from which they recreate fundamental topics in Chicana literature, such as memory, space, and gender and sexual relations, to express individuals' position and experiences, not in an American landscape, but in a landscape integrated by the continuous interchanges between Mexico and the United States. Therefore, I refer to these novels as examples of how Chicana literature in the last decade has developed a transnational perspective, which separates it from a more limited American national context.

The analysis of the transnational perspective recreated in these novels is supported by theoretical notions developed by transnational studies in recent years, and specifically by critics such as Steven Vertovec, Alejandro Portes and Luis E. Guarnizo focused on immigrant transnationalism. According to Steven Vertovec, transnationalism could be defined in the following terms:

Transnationalism broadly refers to multiple ties and interactions linking people or institutions across the borders of nations states [...] transnationalism (as long-distance networks) certainly preceded 'the nation' [...] Transnationalism describes a condition in which, despite great distances and notwithstanding the presence of international borders (and all the laws, regulations and national narratives they represent), certain kind of relationships have been globally intensified and now take place paradoxically in a planet-spanning yet common –however virtual- arena of activity (Vertovec 1999, 447).

The different kinds of activities that could be related to the previous definition have produced a series of different perspectives from which transnational phenomena could be studied. According to Vertovec (2009), transnationalism has been understood principally as a social morphology, which implies that transnational phenomena, such as migration, have transformed social structures in many localities. Hence, this perspective focuses on the study of diasporas. Also, transnationalism has been related to a type of consciousness, which specifically refers to the double consciousness or diaspora consciousness of



immigrants; and to modes of cultural production, which underlines the link between hybrid cultural manifestations and transnationalism. Moreover, as Vertovec correctly emphasizes, transnationalism has been defined as an avenue of capital, a site of political engagement, and a reconstruction of place or locality.

These multiple perspectives and definitions have enriched the study of transnational phenomena. Nonetheless, as critics such as Alejandro Portes stress, this multiplicity of implications have made it difficult to distinguish between transnational phenomena and phenomena which are not totally transnational. For instance, from three of the perspectives above mentioned –transnationalism as a social morphology, as diaspora consciousness and as cultural hybridity-, Chicana literature, as the artistic expression of hybrid literary forms, the social position of immigrants in their host society, and of a bicultural consciousness, is *per se* a transnational phenomenon. Therefore, from these perspectives, the difference between recent Chicana narratives as developers of transnationalism and previous Chicana literary forms is not sustainable. For this reason, the notion of transnationalism that supports this work is based on the delimitation of the term suggested by Alejandro Portes and other critics of transnational studies in the analysis of immigrant transnationalism.

For Portes, Guarnizo and Patricia Landolt, immigrant transnationalism refers “to the creation of a transnational community linking immigrant groups in the advanced countries with their respective sending nations and hometowns” (Portes, Guarnizo and Landolt 1999, 217). In consequence, the field is integrated by “a growing number of persons who live dual lives: speaking two languages, having a home in two countries, and making a living through continuous regular contact across national borders” (Portes, Guarnizo, and Landolt 1999, 217). According to these critics, this “continuous regular contact across borders” produces the construction of networks beyond and between borders. These networks are integrated by the constant links and interchanges that immigrants promote between their place of settlement and their community of origin. In consequence, transnational networks are processes which could not be totally identify with a single national context. They are based on activities that promote the constant interaction among two or more national contexts. For Portes, Guarnizo and Landolt, the production of these networks is

fundamental to define transnational phenomena, and, consequently, to distinguish between immigrants and transmigrants (immigrants involved in transnational interchanges).

As these critics correctly stress, not all immigrants are transmigrants (Portes 2003). This implies that the fact that immigrants express a bicultural consciousness or bicultural experiences does not make them participants of transnational interchanges. To define immigrants as transmigrants, they should be involved in activities which engage the constant communication and interchanges between them and their place of origin. This delimitation of transnational immigrants' activities is central to understand the difference between the novels analyzed in this work and previous Chicana narratives. The three novels that are at the core of this thesis do not focus on expressing the bicultural Chicana/o experience in the U.S, but on the networks produced and promoted by the constant interchanges between Mexico and the U. S. Like transmigrants, the narrators of these novels are not focused on the American national context, but on a transnational context, integrated by the Mexican and American realities and territories.

Nonetheless, although the delimitation of transnationalism to networks that involved the interchanges among different national contexts is useful to determine how the three novels analyzed in this thesis express transnationalism, the notion of immigrant transnationalism suggested by Portes, Guarnizo and Landolt do not explain at all the transnational networks reproduced in the novels, neither the transnational perspective developed in them. This is because immigrant transnational studies are principally focused on political and economic interchanges; hence, they do not offer a directly applicable theoretical background to analyze cultural phenomena involved in transnational networks such as literature.

The novels analyzed in this thesis, fundamentally, recreate and depict transnational networks integrated by cultural notions and images, such as memories, spatial formations and gender constructs. Even though, these networks are fundamentally interconnected to the economic, politic and social transnational interchanges between Mexico and the U.S, they could not be measured or depicted in the same way as material transnational interchanges. For this reason, in this thesis, I interconnect the term suggested by immigrant

transnational studies with theoretical notions of other fields, such as memory studies, globalization studies and gender studies. These fields have developed theoretical models which underline that global connections and interchanges as well are engaged with the movement and interconnection of cultural notions and images. Although these studies focus on globalization, and globalization and transnationalism although related are different phenomena (see Vertovec 2009), these studies could be used as a possible theoretical basis for understanding cultural interchanges and networks in a transnational scale.

Moreover, in order to support the notion that the three novels analyzed in this thesis express a transnational perspective, and that this perspective implies a clear connection between Chicana literature and transnationalism, I define transnationalism not only as the material interchanges between two national contexts, or as the generation of networks beyond national borders, but also as a change of perspective. In this sense, as Alejandro Portes (2003) suggests that immigrant transnational studies implies the emerging of a new analytical lens, which has transformed the traditional perspective of immigrant studies focused only on analyzing immigrants in relation to their host society; I argue that transnationalism as well could be understood as a phenomenon which affects:

how people think about and position themselves in society both here and there; how they undertake aspects of their everyday activities while taking account of their multiple connections across borders; and how they organize themselves collectively according to multiple criteria and participate within encompassing contexts and scales –within or spanning specific localities – (Schuerkens 2005, 534)

Therefore, in my study, I suggest that transnationalism could be also expressed in the ways that individuals develop, recreate and express a perspective which involves not only their position in a single national context, but also their impressions and positions in the transnational networks integrated by the continuous material and non-material interchanges among different national contexts. As such, this thesis has a twofold objective: on one hand it attempts to contribute to Chicana/o studies as regards current discussions about the integration of Chicana literature in transnationalism and globalization. On the other, this thesis attempts to contribute directly to transnational studies, through the definition and

analysis of non-material items, such as cultural notions, and artistic manifestations, such as literature, as factors fundamentally involved in transnational relationships and interchanges.

In order to achieve these objectives, this thesis analyzes the three novels above mentioned in relation to three topics: memory, space, and gender and sexual relations. The selection of these topics is based firstly on the fact that the novels clearly develop these topics as transnational formations. Secondly, it is based on the fundamental role that these topics have in Chicana literature in general, as it has been suggested by Chicana/o critics such as Juan Velasco (2004), Tey Diana Rebolledo (1993), Mary Pat Brady (2002), Monika Kaup (2001) and Norma Klahn (2003). Hence, the recreation of these fundamental topics as transnational formations illustrates how recent Chicana narratives are developing a transnational perspective, from which, fundamental topics in this literary tradition are being reconfigured. And thirdly, it is based on the centrality that these topics have as cultural formations; consequently, they clearly illustrate how transnational interchanges are fundamentally integrated by the convergence, movement, and redefinition of cultural notions.

Based on the above mentioned, this thesis is organized in the following three chapters: in the first chapter, I analyze how *Caramelo* by Sandra Cisneros recreates memory as a transnational network, integrated by memories and experiences of two national contexts. In this chapter, I emphasize that this integration illustrates, on the one hand, how transnational interchanges promote the movement and redefinition of memories, and on the other, how transnational interchanges generate in this case a transnational memory network which could not be totally identified with a single national context, and constitutes thus a memory network beyond or between nations. This analysis is supported by the theoretical notions developed by critics of memory studies, such as Astrid Erll, Daniel Levy and Natan Sznaider.

The second chapter is devoted to analyzing how *Desert Blood* by Alicia Gaspar de Alba and *If I Die in Juárez* by Stella Pope Duarte recreate the border zone, integrated by El Paso, Texas, and Ciudad Juárez, Mexico, as a transnational process which involves the geographical remappings promoted by the constant transnational interchanges between

Mexico and the U.S; and the convergence among Mexican and American spatial imaginaries. In this chapter, as well, I argue that the representation of the border between Mexico and the United States as a transnational process exemplifies how transnational phenomena have a fundamental influence in the definition and redefinition of geography and spatial structures. The analysis developed in this chapter is supported by globalization studies critics, such as George Ritzer, Jan Aart Scholte, and Anna Tsing, who argue that transnational and global transactions imply geographical and spatial redefinitions.

Finally, in the third and last chapter, I analyze how *Desert Blood* by Alicia Gaspar de Alba and *If I Die in Juárez* by Stella Pope Duarte represent the gender notions and the sexual violence that rule in the border zone integrated by El Paso and Ciudad Juárez, as a result of the transnational interchanges between Mexico and the U.S, and of the convergence among American and Mexican gender notions and sexual practices. In this chapter, I emphasize that this representation illustrates how transnationalism as well is related to the construction and redefinition of gender structures and sexual practices; and that transnationalism also could be understood as a gendered and sexualized process. The analysis developed in this chapter is supported by critics, such as Tine Davids and Francien Van Driel, who suggest that transnational and global processes involve the movement and renegotiation of gender categories; and by feminist critics, such as Patricia Hill Collins, who have analyzed the fundamental interconnections between gender, race, violence, power and sexuality.

## **Chapter 1:**

### **Chicana Literature and the Formation of a Transnational Memory Network: Sandra Cisneros' *Caramelo* as literary transnational memory formation**

“For me these things, that song, that time, that place, are all bound together in a country I am homesick for that doesn't exist anymore. That never existed. A country I invented. Like all emigrants caught between here and there” (Cisneros 2002, 434).

This first chapter is devoted to analyzing the relationship between memory and transnationalism in Chicana literature, taking as example Sandra Cisneros' most recent novel, *Caramelo* (2002). Memory is one of the fundamental topics in Chicana literary production and it is at the core of Cisneros' text as a transnational formation. In *Caramelo*, the essential role that memory has in Chicana literature as source of a sense of belonging and community converges with a transnational perspective, which combines the particular Chicana experience in the U.S with individual and collective Mexican experiences.

Because of the use that it makes of memory, I employ Cisneros' novel in this chapter to argue that it exemplifies how in Chicana narratives of the last decade a transnational perspective is emerging. And how, from this perspective, topics developed by Chicana authors since the emergence of this literary tradition –such as memory, the border, and gender discrimination- are being relocated in a transnational context constituted by the social, cultural and economic interchanges between Mexico and the U.S.

In order to make clear this argument, this chapter is divided in four sections. In the first section, following Chicana/o cultural and literary critics, I explain briefly the importance that memory has in general in Chicana literature. This explanation is essential to understand in which sense the construction of memory in Cisneros' novel signifies a change in relation to previous Chicana narratives. In the second section, I point out and explicate the theoretical notions of memory that allow understanding the memory formation in Cisneros' novel. The third section is devoted to analyzing the use and representation of memory in *Caramelo*. In this third section, I illustrate and demonstrate how Cisneros' text

creates a transnational memory network which supports identity and gives a sense of home and belonging. The last section is integrated by the conclusions of this chapter.

### **Chicana Literature: Space for Remembrance and Collective Memory Bank.**

Since the emergence of Mexican-Americans as social and ethnic group in the United States, Chicanos and Chicanas have created literary forms that work as spaces of resistance but also as collective memory banks. This fact has been noticed by Chicana critics, such as Norma Klanh who claims that:

Since the 1848 war, Mexican-Americans had voiced persistent critiques of their treatment as second-class citizens. These works marked in lived experience a space of resistance and a collective memory bank [...] Chicano literature as representing the implicit desire of a people for a sense of community, particularly the centrality of memory and language (Klahn 2003, 115)

This implies that Chicana/o writers have used their literary texts to recollect personal and collective memories. This recollection has a twofold objective. On the one hand, it has the goal of creating a sense of community and history that allows Chicanos and Chicanas to defy as a group the American political and social order which locates them in the lowest social status. On the other, this memory recollection makes explicit the marginalization and discrimination that Mexican-Americans suffer as bicultural individuals in the U.S. Thus, the interconnection between memory and literary practices, at the same time; generates a counter-discourse which challenges the American mainstream historical accounts. In this sense, Chicanos and Chicanas understand literature as a place for remembering where “the redrawing of socio-cultural and symbolic boundaries has memory as its organizing element” (Klahn 2003, 115).

In order to understand completely this twofold function of memory in Chicana literature, it is fundamental to emphasize that it is a result of the position occupied by Mexican-American narrators in their social and political context. Chicana writers are located in a marginal and minor position in the American social landscape. Because of this,

Chicanas' writings as repositories of memories acquire an essential political function, as it is underlined by Norma Klahn:

It [literature] serves a political function because the speaking subject is positioned outside the dominant symbolic order. This positionality of 'becoming minor' [...] is not a question of essence [...] but a question of position: a subject position that in the final analysis can be defined only in 'politica' terms –that is, in terms of the effects of economic exploitation, political disenfranchisement, social manipulation, and ideological domination on the cultural formation of minority subjects and discourses (Klahn 2003, 118)

This marginal position and this political function promote that Chicanas recreate memories in first person accounts which not only are testimonies of personal experiences, but also of the collective experiences of Mexican-Americans as community. This means, that Chicana narratives by telling individual memories, at the same time, tell the memories of a silenced and marginalized community. In this sense:

Chicana writers bear witness from a particular space gained through struggle that permits them to act as the interlocutors/mediators of marginalized voices lacking access to the printed word. It is from this culturally or politically rooted position that the narrator become the voice, her own, of a self who recollects her memories and those of other members of her community (Klahn 2003, 120)

Therefore, Chicana narrators create discursive spaces where the silenced memories of Mexican-Americans acquire a voice capable of testifying the political, racial and social marginalization of Chicanos and Chicanas in the American context. As mentioned, this recollection of marginal individual and collective memories, at the same time, generates a discursive support for a sense of community, identity, and belonging. This implies that moreover Chicana narratives express how the recollection of memories is fundamental in the creation of Mexican-American community. Chicana narratives recreate the fundamental link between memory and the construction of collective identity, and recognize memory as “the central faculty of our being in time, the negotiation of past and present through which we define our individual and collective selves” (Olick 1998, 385).



The centrality of memory as creator of community in Chicana literature indicates that Mexican-Americans principally construct their collective identity through the creation of an imaginary community. This is consequence of the dislocated position of Chicanos and Chicanas as immigrants and as racial minority in the United States. As Chicana/o critics, such as Juan Velasco (2004), point out, Mexican-Americans have been displaced from their national and cultural roots. By the process of migration, Mexicans have lost the fundamental contact with their national territory which supports their individual and collective identities. By their relocation in a marginal racial and social status, Mexicans in the U.S are unable of identifying with an American national context that discriminates and marginalizes individuals of Mexican origin. This implies that for Chicanos and Chicanas the nation, “traditionally described as the people’s place of governance, as it is also a mark of citizenship, a moniker of origins, an identity, a tribal unity, a geographical space, and a site of economic and cultural exchange” (Hernández 2009, 17), has lost its traditional function as primary basis for identity and community.

According to Juan Velasco (2004), the absence of a national context along with the marginal position of Mexicans in the U.S, generated in Mexican-Americans an identity crisis, as well as the necessity of creating a sense of collective identity and belonging. As a result of this urgency, Chicanos and Chicanas recognized the fundamental role that images and discourses have in the construction of community; and, consequently, started to generate spaces to develop images and discourses capable of generating a Chicano sense of community in the United States.

This implies that Mexican-Americans understand community and its construction principally in terms of Benedict Anderson’s imaginary communities. According to Anderson:

All communities, and specially nations, are unities that are fundamentally imagined. The very belief that there is something fundamental at the bottom of them is the result of a conscious myth-building process. The nation-state, at the turn of the twentieth century, depended for its coming into existence on a process by which existing societies used representations to turn themselves into new wholes that would act immediately upon

people's feelings, and upon which they could base their identities –in short to make them into groups that individuals could identify with (Levy and Sznajder 2002, 90)

This means that Chicanos and Chicanas, in the same way as Anderson, understand that a community “is not a ‘natural’ phenomenon, but is rather a social and political construction” that “has to be literally created” and “has to be defined by those within it, as well as those without, as such an entity” (Ritzer 2010, 147).

As Norma Klahn suggests, the creation of an imaginary community requires the creation of an imaginary space (Klahn 2003, 116). To construct their imaginary community, Chicanos and Chicanas have employed literary forms. This implies that Mexican-Americans have used literature as a repository of stories, myths, histories and memories which are the images and representations that support the Chicano community in the U.S. In this sense, Chicana narratives as repositories of individual and collective memories have a fundamental role not only as texts that have the political function of making explicit the marginal experiences of Chicanas and Chicanos, but also as creators of collective identity and of a sense of belonging.

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, the novel that is at the center of this analysis, *Caramelo*, reproduces the function that memory has had in Chicana literary production. In this sense, Cisneros' novel, like previous Chicana narratives, recollects individual and collective memories to create an identity and a sense of belonging. Nonetheless, in *Caramelo*, the narrator not only recollects memories provided by the Chicana/o experience in the United States, but also memories that were tied in the past to a Mexican national context, and then dislocated by the process of migration. In this sense, in Cisneros' novel, memories travel in the bodies of immigrants, and could be relocated in different bodies and national contexts. This relocation generates that memories lose their national character, and acquires a transnational character. In consequence, in *Caramelo*, identity and belonging are not only supported by memories, discourses and images that generate a sense of community for Chicanos in the U.S, but also by a transnational network in which the Mexican experience converges with the Chicana/o experience.

As argued at the beginning of this chapter, this transnational memory network implies a change of perspective in the narrator. In *Caramelo*, the narrator is not only concerned about recreating memories that express Mexican-Americans' marginal position in the American territory, or which generate counter-memories opposed to the American mainstream representations; but she is also recollecting memories and stories that supports Mexicans in Mexico as a imaginary community, and using these memories as basis for her Chicana identity.

In order to understand and analyze deeply how the recollection of memory in Cisneros' novel generates a transnational network like the one depicted in the previous paragraphs, it is necessary to explain the notions of memory that allow to define and analyze Cisneros' text as a repository of transnational memory. These notions are fully explained in the next section of this chapter.

### **Memory: a Trans-cultural and Transnational formation**

According to memory studies researchers, such as Astrid Erll (2010), Daniel Levy and Natan Sznaider (2002), traditionally, cultural and collective memory has been studied in relation to the nation state. Nevertheless, these critics realize that, nowadays, as result of globalization and processes related to global practices, such as transnationalism, there are memory formations dislocated from their original national context. This means that memory is not anymore understood only as a phenomenon exclusively tied to the nation, but it is a formation capable of creating memory-scapes beyond the national space. In this sense, these critics are pioneers of an emerging field in memory studies which focuses on studying collective memory beyond its traditional national ties. In consequence, their redefinitions of memory are helpful to analyze a memory formation like the one developed in *Caramelo*, which displaces national memories, and generates a memory network beyond national contexts.

Levy and Sznaider (2002) define these remembrance formations and networks beyond the nation-state as "Cosmopolitan Memory". According to these researchers,

nowadays, collective memory takes distinctive forms in the age of globalization. These forms are consequence of the collision and convergence between processes of globalization and specific local contexts. In other words, global processes necessarily land on in localities, generating an ‘internal globalization’ in which global formations are integrated into local experiences. This integration between the global and the local has been called ‘cosmopolitanism’ which is defined by Levy and Sznajder in the following way: “Cosmopolitanism refers to a process of ‘internal globalization’ through which global concerns become part of local experiences of an increasing number of people” (Levy and Sznajder 2002, 87).

For Levy and Sznajder, this process of ‘internal globalization’ or ‘cosmopolitanism’ not only refers to the influence that global economic, political and social forces have in specific localities, but also this process involves the influence that the global movement of ideas and cultural formations, such as memory, have in the local experiences of people. In this sense, Levy and Sznajder understand that:

Globalization disconnects culture from a specific locality –also known as the phenomenon of ‘deterritorialization’- only to become re-territorialized in another locality or dimension [...] It is not just tangible things and people, but also ideas and images such as democracy, modernity and gender relations that travel (Davids and Van Driel 2005, 10).

This implies that the movement of memories promoted by globalization and the relocation of these memories in a context different to the one that originally produced them generate that “alongside nationally bounded memories a new form of memory emerges which we call ‘cosmopolitan memory’” (Levy and Sznajder 2002, 87).

According to Levy and Sznajder, collective memory usually is thought as memory structures bound by tight social and political groups like the “nation” or “ethos” (Levy and Sznajder 2002, 88). In contrast, ‘cosmopolitan memory’ broadly could be defined as “a memory transcending ethnic and national boundaries” (Levy and Sznajder 2002, 87):

The conventional concept of ‘collective memory’ is firmly embedded within the ‘container of the Nation State’. We argue that this container is in the process of being slowly cracked. It is commonly assumed that memory, community and geographical proximity belong

together. We direct our attention to global processes that are characterized and increasing process of 'internal globalization' in recent years, which implies that issues of global concern are able to become part and parcel of everyday local experiences and moral life worlds of an increasing number of people (Levy and Sznajder, 2002, 88).

This means that for Levy and Sznajder there is a transition from national to cosmopolitan memory cultures; which is explicit in the formation of cosmopolitan memory networks that is taking place nowadays.

It is necessary to emphasize that, as Levy and Sznajder point out, the formation of cosmopolitan memory is not essentially different to the way in which national and collective memories were formed in the past. According to Levy and Sznajder, critics against this emerging type of memory base their critiques on the supposedly inauthentic nature of mediated cosmopolitan memories. Nonetheless, as Levy and Sznajder underline, it is erroneous to understand national memories as real experiences, or as more real memories than memories dislocated of their national container. Collective and national memories, like cosmopolitan memories, are fundamentally integrated by images and representations that are constantly mediated and remediated; and, consequently, dislocated or separated of real life experiences. In this sense, the formation of cosmopolitan memory parallels the national memory-building process; with the difference that, in cosmopolitan memory, the memory network is not limited by the national territory. It has the globe as space of performance and formation (Levy and Sznajder 2002, 91).

In a similar way as Levy and Sznajder, Astrid Erll (2010) identifies the existence of memory networks beyond national boundaries. For Erll, these memory-scapes are principally constituted by memories which travel from one context to another. Using the term coined by Aby Warburg in his *Mnemosyne-Atlas* in 1924, Erll defines these traveler memories as 'travelling memory'. This concept implies that memories are not strictly tied or fixed to bodies and spaces; but that memory is a series of images and discourses which could travel across physical, cultural or imaginary boundaries. In this sense, Erll recognizes that memories could travel in artistic and cultural items as consequence of global processes; and that, as suggested by Sallie Westwood and Annie Phizacklea, the national plots, which

give a sense of belonging to individuals, could travel with these individuals as result of processes of migration:

Nations and national stories construct national time, the time of heroes and special events which bring the nation together if only temporarily and into which new members are inducted. This form of national time stays with people when they leave one nation state and move to another as part of the migratory process (Westwood and Phizacklea 2000, 6)

Erll also suggests that collective memory principally is constructed by 'travelling memory'. This means that Erll understands memory not as a fixed notion, but as a process in constant recreation, reconstruction and interchange. In this sense, for Erll, national and local collective memories are fundamentally trans-cultural formations which are constantly transformed and renovated by the continuous movement and reception of travelling memories. For Erll, the idea of memory as a process in constant construction and movement allows understanding the formation not only of local and national memories, but also of memory-scapes beyond national boundaries. This implies that travelling memories could land on in spaces or networks which are not tied to specific national contexts, and, therefore, generate a trans-cultural memory network that transcends the limits of the nation.

As mentioned at beginning of this section, the memory notions of Erll, Levy and Sznajder are extremely helpful to understand how memory is recreated in Cisneros' novel. Although, the memory network in *Caramelo* is not integrated by 'cosmopolitan' or global memories –due to it still being tied to an ethnic origin-, the ideas of Erll, Levy and Sznajder are useful because they described memory-scapes beyond national boundaries.

In this sense, these memory notions allow to define memory as a phenomenon which could be untied from specific localities, and relocated in spaces outside the national limits. In consequence, following these notions, it is possible to analyze Cisneros' novel as a transnational memory network, which is constituted by two national experiences: the Mexican-American experience and Mexican experiences; and which, by the integration of these two national memories, generates a different memory network that is neither completely American nor Mexican, but a memory network between and beyond both national boundaries.

Furthermore, Erll, Levy and Sznajder's notions are helpful to understand that the transnational memory construction in *Caramelo* is not essentially different to the memory construction of previous Chicana narratives. As mentioned in the first section of this chapter, because of their dislocated position, Mexican-Americans understand the importance of images, representations and memories in the construction of a sense of belonging. Hence, they understand that identity and community are fundamentally imaginary and linguistic formations. Cisneros in her novel reproduces the fundamental role that memories and linguistic formations have as constructors of identity. Because of this, in Cisneros' novel, remembering means creation. It is to create a fiction. And the narrator constantly emphasizes that she has to invent for remembering, that she has to write the story of her family to keep her memory, and to create her identity and a sense of home. The difference is that in *Caramelo* a sense of belonging is not only supported by the local Chicana/o experiences and by the local Chicana/o imaginary, but also by a Mexican imaginary and by memories dislocated of their original Mexican context.

Finally, the dynamism that these critics concede to memory allows defining memories as formations which are not fixed to specific bodies and localities, but as formations which could travel in the bodies of immigrants, could be relocated in different locations and bodies, and could generate different and new memory networks. This is fundamental in *Caramelo* where "communicative memory" (Assmann, 1991) -which refers to lived and in witnesses embodied memory- is transformed in a transnational memory independent or separated of their original carriers. In Cisneros' novel, in a first moment, memories that were located in specific bodies and national spaces, are transported and communicated by these bodies. Later, these memories become discourses and stories which are re-located in different bodies and in a transnational space.

Therefore, following these notions of memory it is possible to analyze the memory network of Cisneros' novel as a transnational formation, and to illustrate how this memory network works as a transnational formation in *Caramelo*. This is fully developed in the next section of this chapter.

### ***Caramelo*: a Transnational Memory Network**

*Caramelo* tell us the story of the Reyes family. The story is narrated by Celaya Reyes, daughter of the Mexican immigrant Inocencio Reyes. The novel is divided in three parts. In the first part, Celaya tells us about one of the annual trips that the Reyes brothers, Inocencio, Uncle Fat Face and Uncle Baby, make with their families from Chicago to Mexico City, to visit their parents, the Awful Grandmother and the Little Grandfather, in their house in Destiny street. In this first part, the idea of trip is emphasized as generator of memories and as a fundamental way of transporting these memories from one national context to another. Moreover, in the specific trip that Celaya narrates, the Reyes family travels to Acapulco. This trip is fundamental in the story of the family, because in it the most important secret in Inocencio Reyes' life is revealed. Thus, the novel emphasizes that memory not only is constructed by real and true facts, but also by lies and secrets. In this sense, the narration makes explicit that memory as basis of identity and belonging is fundamentally integrated by fictions, by lies; and that it is principally an imaginary construction.

In the second part, Celaya, with the help of the spirit of the Awful Grandmother, recreates the story of her ancestors. In this part, Celaya recollects and remakes the Mexican experiences of her great-grandparents and of her grandparents. These experiences are profoundly related with a Mexican national and collective past. In the last part of her narration, Celaya tells us about the last family trip to Mexico City, as consequence of the Little Grandfather's death. This fact produces that the Awful Grandmother decides to sell her house in Destiny street, and to move north with her sons to Chicago. With this, the direct relationship between Mexico and the Reyes family is broken. Nonetheless, the Reyes family's Mexican memories travel north with the Awful Grandmother. Once the Awful Grandmother dies, these Mexican family memories are transformed into stories, narrations, and plots which Celaya recuperates and incorporates into her own Chicana experience and into the Mexican-American experiences of her family. Thus, Celaya generates a transnational memory network and recognizes it as the fundamental support of her identity and of her sense of belonging.



The narration of the plot summarized in the previous paragraphs is presided in the book by the following epigraph: “Tell me a story, even if it’s a lie” (Cisneros 2002, without page). With this, since the beginning, Cisneros establishes a specific notion of remembering for her story. This epigraph emphasizes the necessity of narrating stories to generate a memory network capable of giving a sense of identity and belonging. This implies that Cisneros in her novel expresses memory as fundamentally “active remembering” (Westwood 2000b, 41). In this sense, the transnational memory network created in *Caramelo* is essentially a process which requires the construction and reconstruction, the narration and re-narration of memories and stories.

Thus, Cisneros is reproducing the relevance that Mexican-Americans give to images and narrations as creators of community; and, at the same time, is transporting this relevance to the transnational space generated in her novel. In this sense, on the one hand, *Caramelo* expresses that memory is not a fundamental identity mark because of its veracity, but because, through its constant reproduction and recreation, memory is capable of generating a sense of belonging. On the other hand, Cisneros in her novel creates a transnational memory network that is not ready made, that is a discursive process which requires a constant reconstruction. This implies that, as suggested by Sallie Westwood, in *Caramelo*: “Spaces between nations, those transnational spaces, are not yet spaces of belonging and do not come ready-made but are in the process of being created from the myriad diasporas and migrations that mark the modern world” (Westwood 2000a, 40).

The idea of the false nature of the story narrated in *Caramelo* is again emphasized in the introduction of the book, as the following quotation illustrates:

The truth, these stories are nothing but story, bits of string, odds and ends found here and there, embroidered together to do something new. I have invented what I do not know and exaggerated what I do to continue the family tradition of telling healthy lies. If, in the course of my inventing, I have inadvertently stumbled on the truth, *Perdónenme* [I’m sorry].

To write is to ask questions. It doesn't matter if the answers are true or *puro cuento* [just stories]. After all and everything only the story is remembered, and the true fades away like the pale blue ink on a cheap embroidery pattern. (Cisneros 2002, without page)

This means that Cisneros in her novel recognizes the importance of fiction in the construction of memory. As the memories of the narrator's family are integrated by "the tradition of telling healthy lies", *Caramelo* is fundamentally an imaginary memory construction. It is a reproduction of how collective, family and individual memories are essentially constructed by imaginary processes. This indicates that Cisneros recognizes the importance of linguistic fictional forms, such as literature, not only as containers of memory, but also as fundamental creators of memory.

These ideas –memory as “active remembering” and as fictional construction- are the basis of the transnational memory network reproduced in *Caramelo*, and the basis of the perspective from which Celaya narrates the story of her family. This perspective is clearly indicated in the novel in the first memory that Celaya tells us. This memory is supported by a photograph of the trip to Acapulco that is at the core of the first part of the novel. The photograph is described by Celaya in the following way:

Here are the Acapulco waters lapping just behind us, and here we are sitting on the lip of land and water. The little kids, Lolo and Memo, making devil horns behind each other's heads; the Awful Grandmother holding them even though she never held them in real life. Mother seated as far from her as politely possible, Toto slouched beside her. The big boys, Rafa, Ito and Tikis, stand under the roof of Father's skinny arms. Aunty Light-Skin hugging Antonieta Araceli to her belly. Aunty shutting her eyes when the shutter clicks, as if she chooses not to remember the future, the house of Destiny Street sold, the move north to Monterrey [...] I'm not here, They've forgotten about me when the photographer walking along the beach proposes a portrait, *un recuerdo*, a remembrance literally. No one notices I'm off by myself building sand houses. They won't realize I'm missing until the photographer delivers the portrait to Carita's house, and I look at it for the first time and ask –when was this taken? Where?

Then everyone realizes the portrait is incomplete. It's as if I didn't exist. It's as if I'm the photographer walking along the beach with the tripod camera on my shoulder asking -¿*Un recuerdo?* A souvenir? A memory? (Cisneros 2002, 3-4)

In this description, Celaya is a mere spectator of her family. She is not part of the photograph and, therefore, she is not a direct participant of the memory that the photograph represents. This photograph works as metaphor of the position of Celaya as narrator. Like she is telling the memory behind the photograph despite her absence, and telling it as her own memory -“Here are the Acapulco waters lapping just **behind us**, and here **we are** sitting on the lip of land and water”-, Celaya tells the story of her family despite she was not witness of most of the memories that she narrates; and she incorporates these memories into her own memory. In this sense, as emphasized in the last lines of the photograph description, Celaya is like the photographer in Acapulco. She recollects and creates memories.

From this perspective, Celaya begins the story of her family with one of the family trips to Mexico City. In this narration, the notion of trip is emphasized as fundamental carrier of memories. Every summer, Celaya recollects memories in Mexico, which she carries with her when she returns to the United States. These memories are principally integrated by her experiences in her grandparents' house in Mexico City and by the different sensations and impressions that are activated once the family Reyes crosses the border between Mexico and the United States:

As soon as we cross the bridge everything switches to another language [...] Mopping with a stick and a purple rag called *la jerga* instead of a mop. The fat lip of a soda pop bottle when you tilt your head back and drink. Birthday cakes walking out of a bakery without a box, just like that, on a wooden plate. And the metal tongs and tray when you buy Mexican sweet bread, help yourself. Cornflakes served with hot milk! A balloon painted with wavy pink stripes wearing a paper hat. A milk gelatin with a fly like a little black raisin rubbing its hands. Light and heavy, loud and soft, *thud* and *ting* and *ping*. (Cisneros 2002, 17).

Along with these sensations and experiences, after this trip, Celaya returns to Chicago with two memories that are fundamental to the reconstruction of the Reyes family story. The

first of these memories is the girl Candelaria, who is Inocencio Reyes' illegitimate daughter, and the secret that is revealed during the trip to Acapulco:

The first time I see anyone with the skin the color of *caramelo* I am walking behind the Grandmother and step on the Grandmother's heel.

-Clumsy! Look where are you looking

Where I am looking is the rooftop laundry room where the girl Candelaria is feeding clothes through a wringer washer. Her mother, the washerwoman Amparo, comes every week on Monday, a woman like a knot of twisted laundry, hard and dry and squeezed of all water. At first I think Amparo is her grandmother, nor her mama (Cisneros 2002, 34)

The second memory is when Celaya discovers her grandmother's *caramelo rebozo* (shawl):

-And what's this? I say, tugging an embroidered pillowcase.

-This? The Grandfather says, pulling out of the pillowcase a cloth of caramel, licorice, and vanilla striped. -This was your grandmother's *rebozo* when she was a girl. That's the only *recuerdo* she has from these times, from when she was little. It's a *caramelo rebozo*. That's what they call them.

-Why?

-Well, I don't know. I suppose because it looks like candy, don't you think?

I nod. And in that instant I can't think of anything I want more than this cloth the golden color of burnt-milk candy

-Can I have it, Grandfather?

-No *mi cielo*. I'm afraid it's not mine to give, but you can touch it. It's very soft, like corn silk.

But when I touch the *caramelo rebozo* a shriek rises from the courtyard, and I jump back as if the *rebozo* is made of fire.

-¡¡¡Celayaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa!!!

It's the Awful Grandmother yelling as if she's cut off a finger [...] (Cisneros 2002, 58)

It is not coincidence that, as illustrated in the previous quotations, these two memories have a similar characteristic which overlaps the title of the book. Both the Girl Candelaria and the Awful Grandmother's *rebozo* are the color of *caramelo* (caramel). Therefore, they are fundamental symbols in the construction of memory of the novel. The girl Candelaria with: "Her skin a *caramel*. A color so sweet, it hurts to even look at her" (Cisneros 2002, 37), symbolizes that, at the core of Reyes family memories, there is not always the true, but also and principally there are lies and fictions. Moreover, the girl Candelaria with her skin the color of *caramelo* symbolizes the importance that the body has as constructor and repository of memories in the novel. In Cisneros' text memories are not only performed in discourses or objects, but also in the body. In *Caramelo*, memories are principally carried in the bodies of the characters, and once these memories are separated of their original carriers, they are integrated into new bodies, and specifically into the body of the protagonist.

The Awful Grandmother's *rebozo* symbolizes a *recuerdo* (a remembrance) of the grandmother's childhood. It is the legacy of her mother, and a container of the grandmother's past. The shawl, as symbol of past memories and as material representation of the transmission of memories between generations, is emphasized by Celaya's father who insists in buying a shawl for his daughter, although the Awful Grandmother's rejections:

-We were talking about silk *rebozos*, Papá, father says.- I wanted to find one for  
Lalita

-I was saying you can't find them anymore, Narciso. You tell him. Better he buy Celaya one of the cotton ones in the market, am I right? No use spending on something she can't even wear till she grows up. And what if she grows up and doesn't even want to wear it. Then what, eh? So that she can save it for her funeral? Over there on the other side do they even wear them? I don't think so. They're too modern. Why my own daughter doesn't even want to be seen wearing a *rebozo*. In another generation they'll look on them as rags,

barbarities, something to spread on a table or, God forbid, a bed. If you find a real silk one, better buy it for your mother. I'm the only one who knows the true worth of a *rebozo* around here (Cisneros 2002, 39)

In this sense, the *caramelo rebozo* which has traveled with the Awful Grandmother since her childhood, and which travels with her when she moves from Mexico to Chicago, symbolizes how memories could travel across boundaries and how them could be relocated and reconstructed in different contexts. The shawl as well, as symbol of Mexicanity, represents a connection among personal memories, collective memories and national context. This means that it also represents how the Awful Grandmother's memories are interconnected with her national context, and how these memories are dislocated from this national context, when she moves to the United States. Furthermore, as the Awful Grandmother emphasizes in the last quotation, the *caramelo* shawl also represents how memory is integrated by a process in which some past memories or traditions are forgotten and substituted by different and new memories. Thus, the *caramelo* shawl could be understood as a "memory site".

According to Ann Rigney (2008), memory sites are common points of reference for individual and collective memory practices. They "do not always take the form of actual locations but they have in common the fact that, by encapsulating multifarious experience in a limited repertoire of figures, they provide a placeholder for the exchange and transfer of memories among contemporaries and across generations" (Rigney 2008, 345). These sites do not mean that memories are permanently tied to them, but they are sites where the dynamics of memory perform (Rigney 2008, 345). This means that these sites are points of reference to carry out the mediations, remediations, recreations, dislocations and forgetting processes involved in remembrance. The *caramelo* shawl is a fundamental "memory site" in the novel not only because it represents the place where most of the Awful Grandmother's memories are contained, or because it represents the interconnection between the Awful Grandmother's past and a Mexican national past; but also because it symbolizes how memories are fundamentally defined by their constant dislocation, relocation and transformation. Thus, the *caramelo* shawl represents how the memory network recreated in the novel is integrated not only by the transmission and relocation of

memories between generations, but also by processes of forgetting, creation and recreation, and by processes that dislocate memories from their original contexts and carriers.

Hence, the coincidence among Candelaria's caramel skin, the *Caramelo rebozo* and the title of the book, indicates that *Caramelo* is a memory network supported not only by facts but also by fictions and imagination –by “healthy lies”-, by the substitution and transformation of past memories, and by memories that can travel across physical and temporal borders, and could be relocated in new bodies, temporalities and locations. Moreover, this coincidence indicates that the memory network recreated in the novel emphasizes the importance of the body and other objects or sites, such as the *caramelo* shawl, not only as repositories of memories, but also as elements fundamentally involved in the displacements, dislocations, and recreations which essentially defined remembrance and memories as processes in constant construction, reconstruction, dislocation and relocation.

These characteristics are fully developed in the book, in the second part of the story, which begins with the following introduction:

When I was dirt... is how we begin a story that was before our time. Before we were born. Once we were dust and to dust we shall return. Ashes to ashes, dust to dust. A cross on our forehead on Ash Wednesday to remind us this is true.

For a long time I believe my first moment of existence is when I jump over a broom. I remember a house. I remember sunlight through a window, sunlight with dust motes sparkling in the air, and someone sweeping with a corn broom. A pile of dust on the floor, and I jump over it. Feet jumping over a dust pile, that was when the world began.

When I was dirt is when these stories begin. Before my time. Here is how I heard or didn't hear them. Here is how I imagine the stories happened, then. When I was sparking and twirling and somersaulting happily in the air. (Cisneros 2002, 89)

This introduction indicates that the second part of the novel means a connection between the narrator's personal memory and a past which she did not witness, but which she recognizes as her own memory. This connection is constructed by a fictional process in which the narrator uses her imagination to reconstruct her grandparents' story and her

father's story. In this sense, in the second part of the novel, Celaya tells Mexican personal memories fundamentally interconnected with a Mexican national and collective past. Also, in this second part, Celaya tells us how these memories were dislocated from their original national context, and relocated in an American context from which she is capable of renewing and transforming these memories into something different. Hence, the second part of *Caramelo*, recreates the formation process of the transnational memory network that is at the core of the narration.

This second part begins with the narration of Soledad's –the Awful Grandmother– childhood. According to Celaya, her grandmother was from Santa María del Río, San Luis Potosí, a Mexican village well known for its production of *rebozos*. Soledad's parents, Ambrosio Reyes and Guillermina Reyes, were inheritors of the art of elaborating shawls, which was transmitted from parents to children since immemorial times:

Guillermina's mother had taught her the *empuntadora's* art of counting and dividing the silk strands, of braiding and knotting them into fastidious rosettes, arcs, starts diamonds, names, dates and even dedications, and before her, her mother taught her as her own mother had learned it, so it was as if all the mothers and daughters were at work, all one thread interlocking and double-looping, each woman learning from the woman before, but adding a flourish that became her signature, then passing it on (Cisneros 2002, 93)

In consequence, since she was a baby, Soledad was dressed up with one of the famous shawls of Santa María del Río and she learned the different names of the shawls according to their color and design:

And so my grandmother as a newborn baby was wrapped within one of these famous *rebozos* of Santa María del Río, the shawls a Mexican painter claimed could serve as the national flag, the very same shawls wealthy wives coveted and stored in inlaid cedar boxes scented with apples and quinces. When my grandmother's face was still a fat cloverleaf, she was seated on a wooden crate beneath these precious *rebozos* and taught the names given each because of their color or design. (Cisneros 2002, 93)

As the previous quotation indicates, baby Soledad was dressed up with a cloth that was considered equivalent to the Mexican national flag. This is a very significant fact because,



as Celaya explains later, *rebozos* were considered a symbol of Mexicanity, and a cloth that all Mexican women wore in times of her grandmother:

Women across the republic, rich or poor, plain or beautiful, ancient or young, in the times of my grandmother all owned *rebozos* –the ones of real Chinese silk sold for prices so precious one asked for them as dowry and took them to the grave as one’s burial shroud, as well as the cheap everyday variety made of cotton and bought at the market. Silk *rebozos* worn with the best dress –*de gala*, as they say. Cotton *rebozos* to carry a child or to shoo away the flies. Devout *rebozos* to cover one’s head with when entering church. Showy *rebozos* twisted and knotted in the air with flowers and silver hair ornaments. The oldest, softest *rebozo* worn to bed. A *rebozo* as cradle, as umbrella or parasol, as basket when going to market, or modestly covering the blue-veined breast giving suck.

The world with this customs my grandmother witnessed (Cisneros 2002, 94)

This implies that the novel employs a fundamental symbol of Mexicanity as repository or site of memories. In this sense, the Awful Grandmother’s *rebozo* not only symbolizes her personal memories which, after her death, are transmitted to Celaya, but also a Mexican national past that with the final Soledad’s migration to the United States is dislocated from its national context and relocated in a different national context.

Furthermore, as mentioned previously, Soledad’s *rebozo* also means the loss of memories and traditions. This is emphasized in the narration of Soledad’s childhood, in the fact that Soledad’s mother dies when she is still a little girl. Consequently, great-grandmother Guillermina cannot introduce Soledad to the art of making shawls, and only gives Soledad an unfinished shawl, which is the *caramelo rebozo*:

When Soledad was still too little to braid her own hair, her mother died and left her without the language of knots and rosettes, of silk and *artisela* of cotton and ikat-dyed-secrets. There was no mother to take her hands and pass them over a dry snakeskin so her fingers would remember the patterns of diamonds.

When Guillermina departed from this world into that, she left behind an unfinished *rebozo*, the design so complex no other woman was able to finish it without undoing the threads and starting over. (Cisneros 2002, 94)

This implies that Soledad is incapable of continuing with her family tradition. For her, the art of making shawls is an unknown and forever lost language:

Because she didn't know what else to do, Soledad chewed on the fringe of her *rebozo*. Oh, if only her mother were alive. She could have told her how to speak with her *rebozo*. How for example, if a woman dips the fringe of her *rebozo* at the fountain when fetching water, this means –I am thinking of you. Or, how if she gathers her *rebozo* like a basket, and walks in front on the one she loves and accidentally lets the contents fall, if an orange and a piece of sugarcane tumble out, that means –Yes, I accept you as my *novio* [...] But who was there to interpret the language of the *rebozo* to Soledad?. (Cisneros 2002, 105)

Nonetheless, the unfinished *caramelo rebozo* is with Soledad along her life and in the fundamental moments of her life. When her father sends her to Mexico City to live with her Aunt Fina, the only thing that Soledad carries is her unfinished shawl. When she meets Narciso, the Little Grandfather, she is wearing her *caramelo* shawl. When she moves to Narciso's parents' house as a maid, Soledad only finds relief when she covers her body with the *caramelo rebozo*. When she marries Narciso, and moves south Mexico to the *Istmo de Tehuantepec*, she also carries her shawl. And when she gives birth to her sons and daughter also the *caramelo* shawl is present.

Therefore, the Soledad's incomplete shawl not only symbolizes a past impossible to recover, but it also keeps Soledad's memories and part of the memories of the members of family Reyes. In this sense, the shawl also symbolizes how lost memories could be renovated by new and different experiences; and by different relationships between personal and collective and national memories.

In the case of Soledad's story, her personal memory is not anymore related to the national tradition of elaborating shawls, but it is renewed by the integration of her personal experiences and the experiences of the people around her into her Mexican national temporality. This temporality is determined by Mexican historical facts, such as the Mexican Revolution at beginning of the twentieth century. In consequence, in the second part of *Caramelo*, the personal experiences of Celaya's grandparents are fundamentally interconnected with a Mexican collective past as the following quotation illustrates:

Eleuterio Reyes was trying his best to rise from the ashes of his near-death, and the Mexican nation was doing the same. So it happened that Narciso returned at a time when Mexico City was busy with balls, benefits, and fundraisers, as if reconstruction began by filling a dance card. Who could blame the citizens? Men were tired of jumping over death bodies. Women were sick of grieving. The city, like its troops, was exhausted, sad, and dirty, disgusted with seeing ten years of things they wished they hadn't seen, ready to forget with a *fiesta*. (Cisneros 2002, 149)

Moreover, this relationship between personal and national collective memories produces that Celaya's grandparents embody some chapters of the Mexican national history. This is fully illustrated by Celaya's grandfather who, during the Ten Tragic Days of 1914, receives a shot which produces a wound that marks his body forever:

And because my Narciso was very clever, they gave him a little paper that certified he had been loyal to the Constitutional Government during the Ten Tragic Days of 1914 and assigned him a nice comfortable position with the National Roads Commission because of his war wound. A wound he suffered from a terrible *susto*. Which is why your grandfather could never bathe in the ocean when we went to Acapulco. Ah, but that story is another story, inside another story, inside another story. (Cisneros 2002, 122)

With this, as Sallie Westwood and Annie Phizacklea suggest, Cisneros' novel illustrates how: "Belonging is not fixed despite the level of ideological investments made by the nation-state. Instead the sense of being a part of the nation is contingent upon specific moments which tie individual biography and national history together" (Westwood and Phizacklea 2000, 11). Moreover, with this, Cisneros' novel illustrates that, as suggested by Sallie Westwood, imaginary communities not only are produced in relation to national contexts and territories, but also they are produced in their articulation with the body:

One [site] is the imaginary and the ways in which imaging nations provides the context in which national identities are called forth. The second site, articulated with the first, is the body as site for the play of powers so crucial to the management, discipline and identification processes of nationalism and national identities [...] Finally, the spatial, from the power of maps to symbolize to the sense of place offered by localities (Westwood 2000a, 41)

As mentioned previously, this solid link between personal memories and Mexican national past is dislocated once Celaya's father, Inocencio Reyes, and his brothers decide to move to Chicago. With this, as Celaya emphasizes, Inocencio Reyes continues with the family tradition of travelling across boundaries, and of carrying memories and depositing them in distant places. In this sense, in Inocencio Reyes' life is where Mexican memories start to converge with a Chicano experience. Because of this, Inocencio Reyes' personal memories are not only related to a Mexican national background, but also to American historical references. Furthermore, his personal experiences are related to historical convergences and transnational agreements between both countries, as the following quotation illustrates:

Like the Chinese blessing-curse, Inocencio Reyes had the misfortune to grow up in interesting times and witness the beginning of Mexico's Golden Age. While the U.S suffered its Depression, Mexico was undergoing its finest decade. President Cárdenas threw out the foreign investors and nationalized the oil companies to the cheers of all the nation. Assisted by the new government, the arts flourished, creating a new *mestizo* identity proud of its Indian heritage, though in reality Indians were still treated like Indians everywhere, like dirt. National industries were created to fabricate the imported goods no longer available because of the war. Franklin Roosevelt's "Good Neighbor Policy" invited Mexican workers to harvest U. S. crops, since the U.S. labor force was depleted by the draft. And young men like Inocencio could even brag that Mexico has done its part to aid the Allies by sending a small but brave air unit, Squadron 201, to assist General MacArthur in the Philippines. (Cisneros 2002, 206).

This means that Inocencio Reyes as immigrant embodies the convergence between the memories from the homeland and the experiences in the host society. He exemplifies how memories from a specific national context could travel in the bodies of immigrants, and could be relocated in a different national context. Moreover, Inocencio Reyes illustrates how in the immigrants' consciousness there is a double national imaginary integrated by the collective memory of the homeland and the personal experiences in relation to the national context of the host society.

Nonetheless, although Inocencio represents a first movement of memories from Mexico to The United States, this movement is not the total dislocation of Mexican

memories from their national context. For Inocencio, his personal and national roots are still in Mexico with his parents. Because of this, he has the necessity of travelling every year to Mexico City and visiting them. Therefore, as mentioned at beginning of this section, in the novel, the dislocation of Mexican memories is completed once the Little Grandfather dies and the Awful Grandmother decides to move to the United States with her sons. This implies that the family Reyes' roots are represented by the grandparents and their location in the house of Destiny Street in Mexico City. Once the Awful Grandmother migrates to The United States, she carries her *caramelo rebozo* and with it she carries her Mexican personal and collective experiences. Therefore, the Awful Grandmother's migration, as last personification of the family roots, is the final dislocation of the Mexican past of the family Reyes.

Because of this, in the third part of the novel, Celaya narrates how these dislocated memories are integrated to her Chicana experience and to the Chicano experience of her family. Once the Awful Grandmother dies in the United States, her ghost asks Celaya to tell her story. The spirit of the Awful Grandmother needs this to cross the border between life and afterlife. In this sense, after her grandmother's death, Celaya not only receives her *caramelo rebozo*, but also her memories, and acquires the function of recreating and keeping her grandmothers' memories.

Nonetheless, during this reconstruction process, Celaya realizes that she not only has to retell her family story to help her grandmother to cross to the afterlife, but that she has to integrate these travelling memories into her own Mexican-American experience, and into the Mexican-American experience of her family. Because of this, although the ghost of her grandmothers' complains, Celaya uses her imagination to retell the story and to make it her own memory:

**Why did I think I could expect any understanding derer. You're killing me with this story you are telling. *Me maaataaas.***

Please. Quit the theatrics.

**That's what comes from being raised in the United States. *Sin memoria y sin vergüenza.***

You're mistaken. I do too have shame. That's how I know where the stories are.

**Don't you have any self-respect? I'm never going to tell you anything again. From here on, you're on your own.**

The less you tell me, the more I'll have to imagine. And the more I imagine, the easier it is for me to understand you (Cisneros 2002, 205)

In this sense, at the end of the novel, Celaya realizes that her function is to interweave her American present to the Mexican threads or memories of the *caramelo* shawl of her grandmother. For Celaya, who complains along the entire novel about her lack of sense of home and belonging, this new transnational memory formation represents her home and her identity:

And I realize with all the noise called "talking" in my house, that talking that is nothing but talking, that is so much part of my house and my past, and myself, you can hear is as a several conversations, but as one roar like the roar inside a shell, I realize then that this is my life, with its dragon arabesques of voices and lives intertwined, rushing like a Ganges, irrevocable and wild, carrying away everything in reach, whole villages, pigs, shoes, coffeepots, and that little basket inside the coffeepot that Mother always loses each morning and has to turn the kitchen upside down looking for until someone thinks to look in the garbage. Names, dates, a person, a spoon, the wing tips my father buys at Maxwell Street and before that in Mexico City, the voice that gasped from the hole in the chest of the Little Grandfather, the great-grandfather who stank like a shipyard for dyeing *rebozos* black all day, the car trips to Mexico and Acapulco, *refresco* Lulú soda pop, *taquitos de canasta* hot and sweating from a basket, your name on a grain of rice, *crema de nácar* sold on the street with a vendor doling out free samples like dollops of sour cream, feathered Matachines dancing in front of the cathedral on the Virgin's birthday, a servant girl crying on television because she's lost and doesn't know where in Mexico City she lives, the orange Naugahyde La-Z-Boy. All, all, all of this, and me shutting the noise out with my brain as if it's a film and the sound has gone off, their mouths moving like snails against the glass of an aquarium. (Cisneros 2002, 424)

In consequence, Celaya concludes her narration recognizing that the memories, which travel in the past into her grandmother's body from Mexico to the United States, now are part of her body and of her identity. And, she also recognizes that by acquiring these memories, she personifies her grandmother, her father's double consciousness, and the incarnation of the transnational connection between the Mexican past and the American present of her family:

It hits me at once, the terrible truth of it. I am the Awful Grandmother. For love of Father, I'd kill anyone who came near him to hurt him or make him sad. I've turned into her. And I see inside her heart. The Grandmother, who had been betrayed so many times she only loves her son. He loves her, and I love him. I have to find room inside my heart for her as well, because she holds him inside her heart like when she held him inside her womb, the clapper inside a bell. One can't be reached without touching the other. Him inside her, me inside him, like Chinese boxes, like Russian dolls, like an ocean full of waves, like the braided threats of a *rebozo*. *When I die you'll realize how much I love you*. And we are all, like it or not, one and the same (Cisneros 2002, 425).

### **Conclusions of the First Chapter**

The analysis developed in this first chapter demonstrates that Cisneros' novel recreates a discursive community. *Caramelo* concludes establishing that this discursive community, integrated by memories and fictions, is the principal support to the narrator's identity and sense of belonging. This means that Cisneros in her novel reproduces the way in which Mexican-American literature has created a sense of belonging and home for Chicanos and Chicanas. Nevertheless, in *Caramelo*, the discursive support of identity is integrated not only by Chicana/o experiences, or by stories and memories which deconstruct the mainstream American historical accounts; but also by "travelling memories" at first tied to a specific Mexican national context, and then dislocated from this context and relocated in the Mexican-American experience.

Therefore, Cisneros' novel recreates a "Transnational Discourse Community" (Ritzer 2010) which is a discursive network integrated by memories beyond their national

ties and between two national contexts. In *Caramelo*, Mexican memories, once dislocated of their original national context and relocated in the United States, become part of a transnational memory network which expresses the in between position of Chicanos and Chicanas.

This transnational memory network is created from a transnational position; from which, the narrator turns back to the national context where her origins are located, and picks up memories and stories, which she incorporates to express her minor position in the U.S. In this sense, *Caramelo* expresses a significant change of position in Chicana literature. Cisneros' novel illustrates how Chicana narratives of the last decade are creating a convergence between Mexican experiences and Chicanas' experiences as part of an American social and ethnic minority.

This convergence between Mexican and Mexican-American memories not only expresses Chicanas' interest in their place of origin, but also is generating a literally communication between Mexico and Mexican-Americans which did not exist before. *Caramelo* is the first Chicana novel distributed and promoted in Latin America and Spain by a Spanish publisher (Morales 2002). Therefore, Cisneros' novel is the first Chicana literary item that generates a transnational literary relationship between Mexico and Mexican-American writers.

In this sense, on the one hand, *Caramelo* illustrates a transnational perspective in Chicana literature. On the other, Cisneros' novel exemplifies that transnational relationships are not only integrated by economic and social flows, but also by the memories and ideas that travel in the bodies of immigrants or in cultural and material items. Consequently, *Caramelo* exemplifies how transnational networks are not only supported by economic and political interchanges, but also by cultural notions and manifestations, such as memories and literature.



## Chapter 2:

### **Transnational Flows and the Reconfiguration of Space: the Recreation of the Border as a Transnational Process in *If I Die in Juárez* by Stella Pope Duarte and *Desert Blood* by Alicia Gaspar de Alba**

The U.S-Mexican border *es una herida abierta* where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds. And before a scab forms it hemorrhages again, the lifeblood of two worlds merging to form a third country –a border culture. Borders are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish *us* from *them*. A border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge. A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in constant state of transition (Anzaldúa 2007, 25)

This chapter is devoted to analyzing the relationship between transnationalism and space in Chicana literature. In it I argue that recent Chicana narratives, such as *If I Die in Juarez* (2008) by Stella Pope Duarte and *Desert Blood* (2004) by Alicia Gaspar de Alba, illustrate how a fundamental topic in Chicana literary production is being reconfigured from a transnational perspective.

In *If I Die in Juárez*, Stella Pope Duarte tells us the story of three Mexican women, Evita (a teenager of the lowest Mexican social status), Petra (a *maquiladora* worker) and Mayela (a *Tarahumara* girl), who inhabit Ciudad Juárez, Mexico. The story focuses on how the transnational infrastructure which defines and has transformed Ciudad Juárez affects the lives of these three women. In her book, Duarte also narrates how these women attempt to survive in this infrastructure, and how they create and represent a significant opposition against the transnational forces which have generated a particular violent environment for women who inhabit this Mexican city.

In *Desert Blood*, Alicia Gaspar de Alba tells us Ivon Villa's story. Ivon is a Chicana professor who returns to her city of origin, El Paso, Texas, to adopt the baby of a *maquiladora* worker in Ciudad Juárez. Ivon's plans change drastically when her unborn baby is violently killed in the womb of his biological mother. Since this moment, Ivon investigates the reasons behind this crime, and discovers a series of transnational relations

which are promoting the murders of hundreds of women in Ciudad Juárez. Ivon's research becomes a more personal issue, when her little sister, Irene, is kidnapped and disappears in Ciudad Juárez. In consequence, Ivon desperately looks for her sister and, at the end, discovers that the transnational relationships between Mexico and the United States are not only based on legal activities, but also on illegal industries, such as the transnational pornography industry which kidnapped and almost kills her little sister.

As both plots illustrate, the two novels profoundly analyze and represent the transnational forces which have transformed the border zone between El Paso and Ciudad Juárez into a place for illegal and violent activities against women. In both novels, the transformation of the border motivated by transnational relationships is fundamentally interconnected with the violence against women which both novels denounce. Therefore, both texts illustrate not only how transnational relationships have affected women's lives in the border zone, but also how the transnational relationships between Mexico and the United States have reconfigured the space integrated by El Paso and Ciudad Juárez.

For this reason, in this chapter, I use these two novels to exemplify how the reconfiguration of space is acquiring a transnational character in recent Chicana narratives. In order to demonstrate this argument, this chapter is organized in the following five sections. In the first section, I briefly explain how previous Chicana narratives have been defined as essential deconstructions of space. This explanation is central to understand why the reconfiguration of space is fundamental in the two novels that are at the core of this analysis; and how this reconfiguration illustrates a transnational perspective.

In the second section, following critics such as George Ritzer (2010), I define the transnational interchanges between Mexico and the United States as flows that have the capacity of transforming and affecting spaces. This definition allows understanding transnational relationships as fluid structures which constantly travel across borders, and which are not fixed structures, but processes in constant formation and transformation. In this second section, I also point out the transnational flows that both novels identify as the principal forces behind the transformation of the border zone integrated by El Paso and Ciudad Juárez.

In the third section, supported by critics such as Jan Aart Scholte (2005) and Anna Tsing (2000), I explain how the transformation of the border zone by transnational flows is represented in both novels. In this third section, I also emphasize that this spatial transformation is not only determined by transnational flows, but also by the power relations that they promote and generate.

In the fourth section, I argue that spaces are also defined and transformed by the convergence between different geographical formations and by the convergence between different ideas and images about space. In this section, I illustrate how *If I Die in Juárez* and *Desert Blood* recreate the transnational space integrated by El Paso and Ciudad Juárez as a process in which not only transnational relations are involved, but also the convergence among diverse spaces, and different spatial imaginaries.

The last and fifth section is devoted to the conclusions of this chapter. In this last section, I conclude arguing that *If I Die in Juárez* and *Desert Blood* not only are examples of a transnational perspective in Chicana literature; but also they exemplify how spaces could be redefined by transnational relationships, and how this redefinition is determined by the constant convergence and collision with previous spatial constructions.

### **Chicana Literature and the Deconstruction of Spaces**

“Since the Mexican-American War in 1848, in which Mexico lost half of its territory to what is today the Southwestern United States, the concepts of territory, space, and nation have suffered a series of changes” (Velasco 2004, 313). These geographical changes have affected the way in which Mexican-Americans interact with space, and the way in which they understand this notion.

According to Chicana/o critics, such as Juan Velasco, the Mexican-Americans’ dislocation from their national territory (as consequence of historical facts such as the Mexican-American War of 1848 and migration phenomena) and their relocation in a foreign and unpleasant space have generated in Chicanos and Chicanas the necessity of redefining spaces. In consequence, Chicanos and Chicanas have created their own spatial

representations which transform American spaces of exclusion into spaces of inclusion where Chicana/o culture could develop.

As Chicana/o critics, such as Monika Kaup (2001), point out, the border and the borderlands are spaces that Chicanos and Chicanas have fundamentally deconstructed and redefined in political, cultural and artistic manifestations, such as literature. For Chicanos and Chicanas, the border and the borderland territories in the American Southwest do not represent the division line between Anglo-Saxons and Latinos, or the physical proof of American progress on of an American Manifest Destiny. For Mexican-Americans, the border and the Southwest borderlands are Chicano spaces *per se*. They are the physical and metaphorical representation of the bicultural Chicano experience, and, at the same time, they represent how, since its emerging as a nation, The United States have been integrated by different peoples than Anglo-Americans:

Chicano literature began to express the ideas of larger social movements of cultural nationalism that situated itself in opposition to American notions of culture, identity, place and home. The view from the U.S. Atlantic coast that projected the West and the Southwest as extensions and progressive developments of Eastern colonial “beginnings” was challenged by Chicano writers. Chicano authors insisted that the space of their culture, the *mexicano* borderlands of Southwest, was not the peripheral fringe of the American historical process, but a place in its own right, home, Aztlán<sup>1</sup>, the native homeland of different peoples than Anglo Americans (Kaup 2001, 1)

Therefore, Chicanos and Chicanas have used the border to generate a counter-narrative which not only constructs a space of inclusion for Mexican-Americans, but also deconstructs one of the American foundational myths: the Frontier Myth<sup>2</sup>. Because of this, Chicana/o critics, such as Juan Velasco (2004), Monika Kaup (2001) and Mary Pat Brady (2002), have indentified the reconfiguration of spaces as one of the principal characteristics

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<sup>1</sup> Aztlán myth narrates how the Aztecs traveled from today’s U.S Southwest to Today’s Mexico City, where they founded their capital, Tenochtitlan. This myth has been used by Mexican-Americans to claim their position as direct descendants of the original inhabitants of this U.S region. For more information about this see Rudolfo A. Anaya and Francisco Lomelí (1989).

<sup>2</sup> For a more detail explanation about the Frontier Myth, see Sylvia Hilton and Cornelis A. Van Minnen (2004); Patricia Nelson Limerick (1994); Paul Otto (2004); and Richard White (1994).

of Mexican-American narrative. For these critics, the border is the paradigm that essentially defines Chicana/o literary production.

According to Monika Kaup (2001), Mexican-American literature could be classified according to the way in which the border is represented. For Kaup, Chicano narrative could be divided in two basic narrative structures. The first represents the border as homeland, and, therefore, as a counter-narrative that challenges American mainstream representations. The second structure represents the border as crossing or as a state that is necessary to transcend in order to achieve a complete integration into American society<sup>3</sup>. According to Kaup, Chicana narratives represent a juxtaposition of both structures. This implies that Chicana writers are a kind of “revisionist architects” who, on the one hand, understand spaces as processes in constant change, or as continuous states of transition; and, on the other, they understand that these processes are essentially determined by power relations, and, consequently, their deconstruction could generate significant counter-narratives<sup>4</sup>.

In this sense, as suggested by Mary Pat Brady, Chicanas not only create alternative representations of space, but also create a spatial theory which allows pointing out the importance that the configuration of spaces has in political, social, economic and cultural processes (Brady 2002). This means that, as suggested by Elizabeth Hermann-Jozwiak, Chicanas have created a “Spatial politics of resistance” which is based on the notion of spaces as processes which could be defined and redefined by social and political forces, as well as by counter-discursive practices. (Hermann-Jozwiak 2004, 471). For Chicanas, spaces, like the border and the borderlands, are processes in constant re-signification. They are sites of convergence, conflict and creativity (Arredondo 2003, 5).

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<sup>3</sup> For Kaup, Chicano narratives, such as *With His Pistol in His Hand: A Border Ballad and Its Hero* (1958) by Americo Paredes and *Pocho* (1959) by José Villareal –which, for many Chicana/o critics and writers, are foundational narratives of the border paradigm in Chicana/o literature-; and the narratives of writers, such as Rudolfo Anaya, are examples of the first narrative structure. Meanwhile, the second structure is principally illustrated by Richard Rodriguez’ narratives.

<sup>4</sup> This has been studied and identified by Monika Kaup and other Chicana critics in texts by Chicana writers, such as Gloria Anzandúa, Cherrie Moranga, Terri de la Peña, and Pat Mora. About this see Mary Pat Brady (2002), Monika Kaup (2001), Rebolledo and Rivero (1993), and Rebolledo (1995).

This notion of space is reproduced in the two novels that are at the center of this analysis. *If I Die in Juárez* and *Desert Blood* recreate spaces as constructions which could be affected by different kind of forces. In both novels, spaces are transformed by transnational relationships. These spatial transformations are not isolated, they constantly converge and collide with other spatial configurations. In this sense, Duarte and Gaspar de Alba's texts, like previous Chicana narratives, recreate the border zone integrated by El Paso and Ciudad Juárez as a process in constant re-definition, in which different forces and spatial representations collide and converge.

Nonetheless, in contrast to previous Chicana Narratives, *If I Die in Juárez* and *Desert Blood* do not use the border to generate a counter-narrative opposite to mainstream American spatial representations. These two novels recreate how this fundamental space for Chicanas and Chicanos is affected not only by the collision between Mexican and American culture as consequence of processes of migration, but also by the transnational relationships between both countries. In this sense, both novels recreate how the collision between Mexico and the United States affects not only the U.S territory, but also the Mexican side of the division line. Thus, Duarte and Gaspar de Alba in their novels develop a transnational perspective. From this perspective, they determine the border as a transnational process which is defined and transformed by the constant interaction between two national contexts.

### **Transnational Flows and Transnational Power Relations in the Border**

In order to understand how *If I Die in Juárez* and *Desert Blood* represent the border zone as a transnational process, it is necessary to identify the transnational structures and processes that both novels point out as the principal forces behind the transformation of this zone into a transnational space. To do this, it is useful to define these forces as flows. This definition is based on Zygmunt Bauman's notion of "liquid modernity" (Bauman 2000), which is followed by George Ritzer to establish globalization as a 'liquid' and 'gaseous' phenomenon which is characterized by multidirectional flows which travel among multiple territories and temporalities. In this sense, according to Ritzer, globalization could be

defined as: “transplanetary process(es) involving increasing liquidity and growing multidirectional flows as well as the structures they encounter and create” (Ritzer 2010, 2).

As Ritzer correctly underlines, transnationalism and globalization are different phenomena. Transnationalism refers to activities and organized groups or networks of individuals across national borders which require coordination across these national borders (Portes 2001, 186). In consequence, “transnationalism is limited to interconnections that cross geo-political borders, especially, those associated with two, or more, nation states” (Ritzer 2010, 2). This means that transnational relations are still limited by nation-states, and the nations involved in these relations are still identifiable. In contrast, global relations are characterized by multidirectional connections which fade away geo-political borders.

Nonetheless, as researchers of transnational studies such as Steven Vertovec indicate, transnationalism and globalization are different but related phenomena:

Enhanced transnational connections between social groups represent a key manifestation of globalization. [...] Facilitated, but not caused, by important transportation, technologies and telecommunication, globalization has entailed the increasing extent, intensity, velocity and impact of global interconnectedness across a broad range of human domains [...] Of course there are numerous other ways of looking at aspects of globalization. These include new or modified uses of technology (such as the internet and mobile phones), the changing nature of the global labor force (surrounding de-industrialization and the rise of service industries in some places countered by industrial growth in others, feminization, ‘flexibility’, migration and outsourcing) the development of interconnected supply chains and markets, the growth and expansion of non-governmental organizations and social movement, and the changing capacity and roles of nation-states, multilateral agreements and international political frameworks. *Change within each of these spheres has implications for the transnational forms and activities of many kinds of groups and institutions* (Vertovec 2009, 2, emphasis mine)

Therefore, due to transnationalism and globalization being promoted and affected by similar factors, they are phenomena which behave in similar ways but in different scales. Meanwhile, transnationalism refers to connections among national contexts promoted and increased by technological, social, political and economic transformations; globalization is

the increase of interconnections in a global scale. Because of the relation between both phenomena, it is helpful to use some of the metaphors employed to describe globalization to define interconnections in a transnational scale.

Therefore, following Ritzer's notion of globalization as a phenomenon determined by liquidity, which means "increasing ease of movement of people, things, information, and places in the global age" (Ritzer 2010, 6), and by gaseousness, which is "hyper-mobility of people, things, information and places in the global age" (Ritzer 2010, 6); it is possible to understand transnational relationships as the increasing movement of people, things, information, and places among national contexts. In consequence, transnational connections could be defined as fluid processes determined by the constant interchanges among two or more nations.

Moreover, Ritzer underlines that "liquid phenomena fix neither space nor time. That which is liquid by definition opposed to any kind of fixity, be its spatial or temporal. This means that the spatial and temporal aspects of globalization are in continuous flux" (Ritzer 2010, 6). In this sense, transnational relationships could be depicted as liquid formations which are not fixed to a single national context, but which are a continuous flux among two or more nations. This continuous flux generates the "rise of new communities and formation of new social identities and relations that cannot be defined as nation-states" (Ritzer 2010, 2), but as formations among or beyond nation-states.

In this sense, as global phenomena could be described as flows which involve the "movement of people, things, information, and places due, in part, to the increasing porosity of global barriers" (Ritzer 2010, 7); transnational connections could be defined as the movement of people, things, information, and so on, due to the increasing porosity of national borders. Therefore, the notion of globalization as a phenomenon characterized by the increased movement of different kinds of flows is extremely helpful to realize how transnationalism is principally characterized by multiple flows which interconnect different national contexts, and which generate the formation of networks beyond national borders. This means that transnational relationships are determined by the constant movement of



different kinds of flows which have the capacity of generating transnational networks which transform and redefine national spaces.

In the two novels that are analyzed in this chapter, the transnational flows which have transformed the border zone integrated by El Paso and Ciudad Juárez are principally the economic transnational relationships and interchanges between Mexico and the United States, which radicalized after the signature of NAFTA<sup>5</sup> in 1992. In consequence, both novels are temporarily located in the 1990's -The story narrated in *If I Die in Juárez* occurs in 1995 and the story of *Desert Blood* occurs in 1998-; and both emphasize the immediate transformations promoted by NAFTA in this border zone. This is broadly illustrated by the following quotation from *If I Die in Juárez*, which describes how the father of the protagonist, Petra, claims that NAFTA promoted the influx of transnational corporations, and how this influx affected the Mexican social context:

He blamed the American government for supporting NAFTA in 1992, which caused thousands of villagers to lose their farmlands and granted big corporations the right to establish themselves in foreign countries, making huge profits on the sweat of the poor. The Mexican government was as greedy as los Estados Unidos in allowing factories to take advantage of Mexico's low wages, paying Mexican employees a fraction of what Americans made for the same work. Both countries were interested in reaping billions by building industrial factories –las maquiladoras- along the border between the United States and Mexico, and thus the rich remained rich, and the poor got poorer. Life for the poor in Mexico took a turn for the worse. Thousand immigrated to the cities to start from the ground up, hoping to get jobs in maquiladoras, or as taxi drivers, or cleaning houses, digging ditches, doing anything and everything they could to survive –even joining in the illegal trade of people and drugs across the border (Duarte 2008, 39)

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<sup>5</sup> The North American Free Trade Agreement or NAFTA is an agreement among the governments of Canada, Mexico, and the United States. It was signed in 1992 and implemented on January 1<sup>st</sup>, 1994. The objective of NAFTA was to gradually eliminate barriers of trade and investment between the USA, Canada, and Mexico. The implementation of NAFTA on 1994 brought the immediate elimination of tariffs on more than one half of US imports from Mexico and more than one third of US exports to Mexico. In 2004, all U.S-Mexico tariffs were eliminated except for some U.S agricultural exports to Mexico. In 2009, the tariffs for these U.S agricultural exports to Mexico were as well eliminated.

As the previous quotation points out, in *If I Die in Juárez*, Duarte identifies, along with NAFTA, the *maquiladoras* (American manufacturing industries) as one of the principal transnational flows which have transformed the Mexican social and economic context. In a similar way, in *Desert Blood*, Alicia Gaspar de Alba emphasizes *maquiladoras* as a powerful transnational structure which controls Ciudad Juárez:

In Juárez only two institutions have power: the government and the *maquiladoras*. Even the police are nothing but pawns.

The government and the *maquiladoras*. Were they two separate suits, one of spades, one of diamonds, say? Or were they just two different face cards in the same suit? If they were different suits, they'd stack up separately, but these two had something in common. What was it? The U.S.-educated rich men who ran both of them? (Gaspar de Alba 2004, 242)

In this sense, both novels underline the transnational economic connections between Mexico and the United States, represented by NAFTA and the *maquiladoras*, as fundamental factors in the transformation of the social context in the landscape integrated by El Paso and Ciudad Juárez. Furthermore, as the previous quotations illustrate, both novels also emphasize the social disparities produced and radicalized by these transnational economic flows.

In consequence, in a similar way as George Ritzer suggests (Ritzer 2010, 14) that global flows produce movement but also fixed, solid, and heavy structures; and that “immobility and exclusion are thus as much a part of globalization as movement” (Inda and Rosaldo 2008, 29), both novels recreate how transnational flows not only mean the free movement or interchange of goods and commodities; but also the generation and fixation of social hierarchies and disparities. In this sense, in both novels, transnational flows influence the “matrix of oppression” of specific localities; and could be one of the vectors which oppress and define minority groups in specific contexts.

Therefore, *If I Die in Juárez* and *Desert Blood* point out transnational economic flows -specifically NAFTA and the *Maquiladoras*- as the principal factors involved in the transformation and redefinition of the social relations in the border zone integrated by El

Paso and Ciudad Juárez. Moreover, both novels emphasize that these flows are involved in the reinforcement and redefinition of social hierarchies and inequalities.

In consequence, these flows and the social redefinitions that they promote are fundamental aspects in the formation of the transnational space that both novels recreate. In both novels, the transnational processes which redefine social and economic relationships, at the same time, redefine the landscape where these relationships take place. This is fully developed and analyzed in the next section of this chapter.

### **Transnational Flows and the Redefinition of Space in the U.S-Mexican Border**

As mentioned in the previous section, the transnational flows stressed in Duarte and Gaspar de Alba's texts not only affect the social position of people in the transnational context in which the U.S. and Mexico participate, but also the way in which spaces are constructed and reconstructed in this context. This implies that, as Jan Aart Scholte stresses, in both novels:

Space matters [...] On the one hand, the geographical context shapes the ways that people formulate knowledge, relate to nature, undertake production, experience time, organize governance, construct identities, and form collectivities. Concurrently, culture, ecology, economics, history, politics, and psychology also shape the spatial contours of social relations" (Scholte 2005, 60)

In this sense, in both novels, there is a fundamental interconnection among transnational flows, social relationships, and space. On the one hand, in the novels, space is defined by the same forces which affect social structures; consequently, spaces are reflections of the transnational flows which affect the border zone El Paso-Ciudad Juárez, as well as mirror images of the social configuration promoted by these flows. On the other, spaces transformed by transnational flows have an enormous influence in the redefinition of social relationships. This means that, as Jan Aart Scholte suggests, *If I Die in Juárez* and *Desert Blood* recreates how due to the fundamental interconnection between social structures and space,

A major change of spatial structure affects society as a whole. A reconfiguration of social geography is intimately interlinked with shifts in patterns of knowledge, production, governance, identity and social ecology. So a transformation of social space –like large-scale globalization- is developed in larger dynamics of social change (Scholte 2005, 60)

Therefore, the two novels recreate, first, how the geography of El Paso and Ciudad Juárez has been transformed by the economic relationships between the U.S and Mexico into a transnational landscape. Secondly, how these economic and spatial transformations are interconnected with the reconfiguration of the social landscape in the border zone. And, thirdly, how the geography of El Paso and Ciudad Juárez is defined as well by the social hierarchies and disparities promoted by transnational flows.

The first point summarized in the previous paragraph is clearly illustrated in Gaspar de Alba's novel. In *Desert Blood*, the narrator describes the territory integrated by El Paso and Ciudad Juárez not as the evident political division between the U.S and Mexico, but as an interconnected territory, determined by the constant fluxes between El Paso and the Mexican city. This is illustrated in the following quotation in which the protagonist of *Desert Blood*, Ivon Villa, observes the border zone from the plane in which she travels to El Paso, Texas:

The plane plowed through the usual gauntlet of air pockets on the landing. Settling back with a clenched belly, she raised the plastic screen on the window and looked out at her hometown, the lights of the valley glowing under the huge pearl of a full moon.

Unless it's twilight, the only thing you see when you fly into El Paso is the desert – the brown, pachydermal, sagebrush-stubble sky, the green veil of sky that stretches between Mount Franklin and the Guadalupe Mountains. From the plane you can't see the boundary line, the cement riverbed that separates El Paso from Juárez. The borderland is just one big valley of lights.

You can see the chain-link fencing of the Tortilla Curtain, or the entrepreneurs in rubber inner tubes transporting workers back and forth across the Rio Grande, or the long lines of head-lights snaking over the Córdoba Bridge –One of three international bridges that keep the twin cities umbically connected. For the locals on each side of the river, the

border is nothing more than a way to get home. For those nameless women in the sand, those tortured bodies she'd just been reading about in the *Ms.* Article, the border had become a deathbed. For Ivon Villa, it was the place where she was born. The plane landed with a jolt (Gaspar de Alba 2004, 7)

The previous depiction recreates El Paso and Ciudad Juárez as “twin cities umbically interconnected”. With this, the depiction exemplifies how Gaspar de Alba’s novel recreates the border zone El Paso-Ciudad Juárez not as the encounter and radical separation of two national territories, but as a transnational zone where flows from the two nations are constantly crossing from one side of the Río Grande to the other. Therefore, the border zone is fundamentally defined by the transnational flows that constantly travel between Mexico and the United States. Moreover, this depiction illustrates how the border zone as a transnational process could have different meanings. It could be “a way to get home”; it could be homeland, and, at the same time, it could be “a deathbed”<sup>6</sup>.

These different meanings or spatial representations depend on power relations. As suggested by Jan Aart Scholte:

Human geography is no more politically neutral than any other aspect of social relations like culture or economics. Space always involves politics: processes of acquiring, distributing and exercising social power. A social field is never a level field. Thus transplanetary and supraterritorial connections invariably house power relations and associated power struggles, whether latent or overt. Global links are venues of conflict and cooperation, hierarchy and equality, opportunity and its denial (Scholte 2005, 82)

This implies that like global flows, transnational flows invariably address power relations and struggles. Therefore, transnational flows transform and redefine spaces in relation to power structures. In the previous quotation of *Desert Blood*, the transnational border space means a deathbed for the murdered *maquiladora* workers, because the transnational economic flows between Mexico and the United States have generated a power hierarchy in

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<sup>6</sup> These different meanings as well could be interpreted as representations of the two notions about the Border developed for Mexican-Americans –the border as homeland and as crossing-; and as the incorporation of the border as transnational process to these notions, represented by the border as “deathbed”.

which *maquiladora* workers are located in a social position that make them vulnerable to exploitation and violence.

The influence of power relations in the construction and transformation of spaces is also emphasized in *If I Die in Juárez*. In this novel, the border zone not only is recreated as a transnational process, but also as the representation of the power structures generated by the transnational relationships between Mexico and the U.S. This is illustrated in the following quotation, in which one of the protagonists of Duarte's novel, Mayela, observes El Paso from the marginal neighborhood –*Los Tres Magos*– where she lives in Ciudad Juárez:

Visible from the dwelling, on the Texas side of the border, was la chiminea, a tall chimney blackened by years of usage in the smelting of copper. The structure was owned by ASARCO, an American copper company from El Paso, and was built in a manner that allowed the billows of noxious black smoke, laden with chemicals and toxins, covering everything in Los Tres Magos like a black mesh entrapping the land, the primitive dwellings, and the people. Mayela's amazement came when she looked across el Río Bravo and into los Estados Unidos, where she saw tall buildings outlined on the distant horizon and well-built houses and paved streets that ran everywhere. [...] Los Tres Magos was close to a huge garbage dump, one of the biggest in Juárez (Duarte 2008, 111)

In this sense, Duarte stresses in her novel that the border zone El Paso-Ciudad Juárez is not only determined by the constant interaction of transnational relationships; but also by power structures which generate an unequal geography in the border zone. Meanwhile, El Paso is characterized by its skyscrapers and paved streets. The landscape of Ciudad Juárez is integrated by marginal neighborhoods close to pollution sources.

Therefore, both novels emphasize that the border zone has been defined and redefined by transnational flows. This implies that Duarte and Gaspar de Alba understand that transnational flows “are not just interconnections but also the re-carving of channels and the remapping of the possibilities of geography” (Tsing 2000, 327). In Duarte and Gaspar de Alba's novels transnational flows transform not only social and economic relations but also spatial configurations. This is stressed in the following quotation, in

which the protagonist of *Desert Blood* realizes that El Paso and its Mexican counterpart have been transformed by transnational forces which she does not understand at all:

Was this cold-blooded, she wondered, to do a case study on a girl she'd just seen at the Juárez morgue and another who was dying of cancer? Or would it help her understand what was going on in her own hometown? Eight years ago when she'd left El Paso, she vowed she'd never live here again; things were stagnant here –nothing ever changed. Even as a child, when people asked her what she wanted to do when she grew up, she'd say, "leave El Paso." She thought she knew everything there was to know about this place. The truth was things *had* changed, and she didn't understand any of it –not the murders, not the silence that surrounded the murders, not even the context in which the crimes were committed (Gaspar de Alba 2004, 98)

Moreover, both novels recreate how the reconfiguration of spaces by transnational flows not only depends on transnational interconnections; but also on the power relations that these interconnections address and produce. This last point is beautifully expressed in *If I Die in Juárez*, through the legend of the Río Gris. This legend narrates how the Río Gris, located in Montenegro –the Mexican village where Petra, one of the protagonists of the novel, was born-, resists the attempts of the Spanish conquerors to control the flow of its water:

Every day there was talk that the wells would run dry and the people of Montenegro would die. Everyone hated the rich Spanish landowner who had built a dam many years ago, so many that no one could remember exactly when. He had forced the water from el Río Gris to flow into his land alone, to his hacienda, to water his crops and fatten his castle, but the river broke loose and spilled its water wherever it willed, on the land and on the people of Montenegro. There were great floods. Then it dried up as a last act of vengeance, and the people of Montenegro cheered the river's wrath and said they possessed the same power to resist the proud and arrogant (Duarte 2008, 37)

In this sense, this legend illustrates how power structures have influence in the modification of the landscape; but also how elements located in the landscape can resist power structures and also affect spatial formations. This implies that, as suggested by Anna Tsing (2000), both novels recreate how spatial formations and transformations are not a one way process

in which only transnational power flows have the capacity of define geographical elements; but they are processes which are define by the convergence and collision between power structures and the individuals affected by these structures.

This convergence is also represented in *If I Die in Juárez* when the *maquiladora* worker, Petra, resists the sexual attack of the owner of the factory where she works. With this, she becomes the Rio Gris of Montenegro, and like this landscape element, she resists the power structures that are transforming her geographical and social context. Furthermore, like the Rio Gris, Petra survives the transnational power flows which have transformed Ciudad Juárez into a space of death; and becomes an element which could transform this place of death, into space of resistance and life:

When Petra felt Agustín body over hers, inflicting new pain, his howls and shrieks in her ears, she became like one of the crouching figures on the mountains of Montenegro and danced silent and exuberant within herself. Sometimes she climbed up to the dark chandelier and perched there, hidden among its shiny globes. And when he told her she would submit, and submit and submit, Petra resisted and became el Río Gris, fighting the pride and arrogance of the ancient conquistador. She became, once more, el mestizo rising, and she lived for another day (Duarte 2008, 308)

Thus, both novels as well recreate how the transformation and definition of spaces is fundamentally determined by the convergence among diverse elements and influences. In both novels, the transnational border zone is transformed and constructed by the convergence, collision and interaction among transnational flows, the power and social structures that these flows generate, and the different ways in which individuals and other elements of the landscape interact with these transnational flows and power structures. From this perspective, both novels identify and reproduce geographical elements that represent the transformation of the border zone by the convergence described in the previous lines.

One of these geographical elements is the industrial parks that have been established in Ciudad Juárez as consequence of the transnational relationships between Mexico and the U.S. As the following quotation of *Desert Blood* illustrates, these parks represent, on the



one hand, the transnational flows that have modified the border zone; and, on the other, the social structure that these flows have produced, as well as the way in which individuals and social groups interact with these modifications:

The night air was laced with diesel fumes. Ximena had parked across the street from the Phillips *maquila* in the Benavídez Industrial Park, and after waiting fifteen minutes, she'd go inside to see what was keeping Cecilia. Ivon got out of the van and leaned against the hood to watch the activity outside the plant. Buses moved in and out of the gated lot, their yellow headlights beaming on the golf-course like lawn that wrapped around the factory. The workers arriving for the midnight shift streamed out of the buses and filed into the fluorescent lights of the lobby. All women, they looked like clones. Same lipstick. Same blue smocks. Same long dark hair. Lines of other young women –the thinner ones in jeans and baby-tees, the plumper ones in skirts and loose blouses –carrying purses and plastic shopping bags, waited to board the same buses, to be shuttled back to their respective *colonias*. (Gaspar de Alba 2004, 21)

In a similar way, both novels underline *colonias* as a geographical element and a consequence of transnational flows. Thus, *colonias* represent the transformation of the geography of the border zone as result of transnational relations. *Colonias* are extremely poor neighborhoods, without properly built houses and basic services, which started to flourish with the transformation of Ciudad Juárez into a transnational industrial zone. These characteristics are emphasized in the following depiction of Duarte's novel:

...la colonia Los Tres Magos, named after the three wise men who had once followed the start of Bethlehem to honor the Christ child with gifts. Los Tres Magos was one of the poorest colonias in all of Ciudad Juárez. The people here lived in tents and in houses made of cardboard, old tires, and pieces of metal and rusty pipes. They were like rats living in hovels, dirt all around, with no running water and no electricity (Duarte 2004, 109)

*Colonias* are as well geographical representations of the inequalities produced by the transnational relationships between Mexico and the U.S. Immigrants from South Mexican states and other Mexican North villages looking for jobs in the *maquiladoras* of Ciudad Juárez inhabit the *colonias*. In fact, *colonias* were built by these immigrants, therefore, they perfectly exemplify how individuals and social groups interact with transnational flows,

and, more important, how these individuals have a fundamental role in the transformation of the transnational border zone. This interaction and influence is emphasized in the following depiction of *Desert Blood*. In it, *colonias* are fundamentally defined not only by their evident poverty, but also by the features that their inhabitants incorporate to them:

Past the downtown traffic of buses and *rutera* vans, bicycles and taxis, pedestrians and barefoot Tarahumara women with babies slung in bright *rebozos*, the boulevard narrowed to a one-lane street as soon as they entered the *colonias* sector of Juárez, the squatter colonies. The neighborhoods closest to downtown area had been incorporated into the city decades ago and now they had paved streets and electric poles and running water. Here, the houses were made of cinder block, painted in exotic colors like lime green and lilac, and they have fences and iron bars at windows, and SUV's squeezed into the tiny driveways.

Further west, directly across the border from the exotic Bhutanese buildings of the university in El Paso, the houses got shabbier and shabbier. Shack made of wooden pallets and old tires, corrugated tin roofs. Here and there and *Abarrotes* store [grocery store] or a dance hall with beer logos and naked female torsos painted on the wall. They passed a junkyard of rusty, gutted cars and old red buses. A clump of trailers that Ximena said was a public school. In front and behind them, it was mostly buses and bicycles circulating up and down the unpaved streets. Some of the buses were public transportation, others had "Transporte de Personal" [Personnel's transport] written on the side. One of them said "Viaje Especial" [special trip] on the back (Gaspar de Alba 2004, 35-36).

Another geographical element that Gaspar de Alba's novel emphasizes as a fundamental representation of the transformation of the border zone by transnational flows is the desert between El Paso and Ciudad Juárez. In *Desert Blood*, the desert zone between both cities has become a cemetery for hundreds of women. Therefore, this geographical element is a representation of how transnational economic forces have transformed the border zone into a space of death and sexual violence. This is also emphasized in the novel by the reconfiguration of El Paso. As the following quotation illustrates, El Paso, as result of the sexual violence promoted by transnational relationships between Mexico and the U.S, has become the home of sexual offenders:

A map flashed in Pete's mind. The map of all the registered sex offenders in El Paso, pinned to the bulletin board in his office. What the citizens of El Paso did not know was that El Paso was the largest dumping ground of sex offenders in the country. More and more of them were being given one-way tickets to El Paso when they go out on parole (Gaspar de Alba 2004, 234)

In this sense, both novels recreate specific geographical elements as essential representations of the transformation of the border zone promoted by the radicalization of the transnational relationships between Mexico and the U.S. As mentioned, in both novels, this transformation involves not only transnational flows, but also the power structures that these flows address; and the ways in which individuals and social groups interact with these flows and power formations. Thus, both novels identify that the convergence of these elements define the border zone as place and representation of transnational economic flows and of transnational power relations; which have define El Paso and Ciudad Juárez not only as place of economic interactions, but also as place of radical social inequality, death and extreme gender violence.

### **Transnational Border Space: Convergence among Diverse Spatial Formations**

According to Anna Tsing, “places are made through their connections with others not their isolation” (Tsing 2000, 330). This means that spatial formations are constructed not in isolation, but through their relation to other places and spatial formations. In the specific case of the border zone integrated by El Paso and Ciudad Juárez, both cities have been fundamentally defined by their geographical closeness. In consequence, the transnational formation described in the previous section, is not only a consequence of the transformation and radicalization of the transnational relationships between Mexico and The United States, but also a result of the closeness of El Paso and Ciudad Juarez, which historically has generated a series of relationships, dependencies, and interchanges between both cities. This implies that the transnational spatial formation recreated in *Desert Blood* and *If I Die in Juárez* converges with previous spatial formations generated by the geographical closeness and historical relationships between both cities.

As Oscar J. Martínez points out in his historical analysis of the economic and social formation of Ciudad Juárez:

Juárez has developed an economy with a strong external orientation, a condition characteristic of the Mexican border communities. Events which have transpired immediately across the demarcation line in other parts of the United States have had a profound impact on Juárez, as have developments within Mexico, and in particular policies of the Mexican government. Proximity to the highly industrialized country to the north and remoteness from Mexico's centers of production have bought a multiplicity of assets and liabilities. Vulnerability to external conditions has led to alternating cycles of prosperity and depression since the town became an international port in 1848 (Martínez 1978, 7).

This implies that, since the establishment of the border zone El Paso-Ciudad Juárez in 1848, changes promoted by Mexico or/and the United States have affected concurrently both cities. For instance, the construction of railways, during the nineteenth century, in the American Southwest, transformed El Paso in an important commercial point. El Paso became a prosperous Southwestern city connected North-South and West-East by the railways. In contrast, Ciudad Juárez developed only railway connections North-South and depended on El Paso to commerce with cities in the West and the East. According to Martínez, since this moment, Ciudad Juárez created a fundamental economic dependence on El Paso (Martínez 1978, 19).

This dependence was radicalized and transformed, during the twentieth century, and, specifically, during Prohibition. In this time, casinos and other kind of entertainment establishments closed their doors in El Paso, and moved their operations to Ciudad Juárez. In consequence, Juárez became a place of entertainment for inhabitants of El Paso, and its economy practically was totally supported by American investors in the entertainment industry (Martínez 1978, 31). This produced particular transnational relationships between El Paso and Ciudad Juárez. On the one hand, inhabitants of El Paso crossed the border looking for entertainment. On the other, residents of Ciudad Juárez crossed to El Paso to buy basic items and goods that were not produced in the Mexican city, because Juárez lacked of local industry. This situation ruled and was reinforced, during the 1940's and 1950, with the establishment of American military bases in the Southwest. This caused

large groups of soldiers crossing to Ciudad Juárez looking for entertainment and spending money in the Mexican city (Martínez 1978, 96).

According to Oscar J. Martínez, the transnational relationships between El Paso and Ciudad Juárez were significantly transformed during the last years of the 1960's. In 1965, the Mexican government initiated the Border Industrialization Program. This program began with the construction, in Ciudad Juárez and other Mexican border cities, of Industrial Parks where foreign manufactured factories (principally American factories) were established (Martínez 1978, 131). With this, the manufacturing industry established in El Paso since 1885 with the inauguration of the American Smelting and Refining Company (ASARCO) was extended to the south side of the Rio Grande. Therefore, since the second half of the twentieth century, Ciudad Juárez became an Export Processing Zone which is defined as an industrial area, "often in developing countries, designed to draw foreign companies and capital investment. EPZs offer multinational companies incentives including exemption from labor and environmental regulations, taxes, tariffs, and quotas" (Ritzer 2010, 459).

As the previous historical account summarizes, the closeness and historical relationships between El Paso and Ciudad Juárez have constantly remapped the geography of the border zone. In this sense, Ciudad Juárez, because of its essential interconnection with El Paso, has become a place of entertainment and tourism for Americans; and an export processing zone. It is fundamental to stress that these historical remappings do not mean that previous spatial constructions are totally erased and substituted by new ones; but that previous spatial formations converge and collide with new spaces. In this sense, the border zone integrated by El Paso and Ciudad Juárez is a kaleidoscope of multiple spatial formations.

This last point is recreated by the two novels analyzed in this chapter. In *Desert Blood* and *If I Die in Juárez* the transnational spatial formations described in the previous section collide and converge with spaces that represent past interconnections between El Paso and Ciudad Juárez. In Gaspar de Alba's novel, the protagonist, Ivon Villa, remembers

how, when she was a teenager, Ciudad Juárez meant a cheap place to have a good time, as the following quotation demonstrates:

They were approaching downtown Juárez now, and the bridge loomed like a concrete hill in front of them. She could see a line of people crossing the bridge on foot. She remembered doing that as a teenager, walking over to hang out on Juárez Avenue, at bars like the Kentucky Club and Faustos, clubs like El Noa Noa –none of them carded, and the drinks were cheap. For ten bucks, you could get wasted and still have some money left over for one of Fred’s famous *tortas*, ham and avocado sandwiches on Mexican bread laced with jalapeños and slathered with mayonnaise (Gaspar de Alba 2004, 56)

Although Ciudad Juárez is not anymore only a place of entertainment, like during Ivon’s teenage years, the geography of the city is still determined by entertainment establishments for locals and foreigners. This is depicted in the following quotation of *Desert Blood*, in which the geography of the Mexican city is still fundamentally determined by streets full of bars and brothels:

The brothels on Mariscal Street, which runs directly behind Avenida Juárez, are the ones the tourists from across the border go to, a clientele of high school students, college kids, and business-men. The seediest bars, the ones that line the darker streets near the old gymnasium are for the locals and the drug lords (Gaspar de Alba 2004, 185)

In this sense, in the novel, geographical representations of the radicalization of transnational relations between Mexico and America as result of NAFTA - such as the *colonias* and industrial parks analyzed in the previous section- collide and converge with spaces created before the Free Trade Agreement between Mexico and the U.S. In a similar way, in *If I Die in Juárez*, *colonias* and *maquiladoras* converge with historical buildings which are touristic attractions. This is illustrated in the following quotation of the novel, which depicts how the American soldier Harry Hughes enjoys crossing to Ciudad Juárez, because of its colonial architecture:

Harry Hughes was far from St. Louis, Missouri, where he had been born. He was a young soldier, only eighteen years old, stationed at Fort Bliss in El Paso, Texas. Little by little he had learned to appreciate the deserts, mountains, sunsets, and the Mexican culture of the

area. Mexico was only a short ride from Fort Bliss, across one of the bridges that connected El Paso to Ciudad Juárez, but for Harry Hughes, Mexico was like another world. He couldn't get over the beautiful architecture of the buildings in the center of Juárez, elegant churches, marketplaces, and hundreds of shops filled with colorful curios and souvenirs. He loves the gaiety of the Mexican people, their humility, warmth, and their music (Duarte 2008, 241).

Therefore, both novels represent the transnational space integrated by El Paso and Ciudad Juárez, as a process in which more recent spatial formations do not totally remove previous ones. In both novels, spatial formations are determined by the convergence, integration and opposition between more recent spaces and old ones. This convergent process is creatively emphasized in *Desert Blood* by a graffiti that Ivon finds in a public bathroom. As the following quotation indicates, the graffiti is constituted by a saying of the Mexican President Porfirio Díaz which is modified by someone else:

Once her hands had cooled down, she sat in one of the stalls a long time, reading the graffiti. In between the usual *So-and-So Sucks Pussy* and *X loves Y* she found something that chilled her blood. Someone had scrawled that old saying of Mexican President Porfirio Díaz: *Poor Mexico, so far from god, so close to the United States*. Underneath it somebody else had written in red nail polish and shaky lettering *Poor Juárez so close to Hell, so far from Jesus*. (Gaspar de Alba 2004, 98)

This graffiti, which is fundamental for the resolution of the novel, indicates in first instance how Mexico historically has been affected by its closeness to the United States. Secondly, it indicates how Juárez has become "hell" and space of death as consequence of this closeness. In this sense, the graffiti represents a convergent historical process in which Juárez has been affected by its interconnection with the U.S. This convergence is totally emphasized in the same graffiti when it is modified days later, and this modification is noticed by Ivon Villa:

She saw some fresh graffiti on the wall, couldn't find the one she was looking for, and then she saw it, but it said something else now: *Poor Juárez, so far from the Truth, so close to Jesus*. The old version, she could still see traces of it –*tan cerca del infierno, tan lejos de Jesús*– had been scratched out with something sharp (Gaspar de Alba 2004, 187)

This modification indicates that Juárez is “so close to Jesus”. With this, it makes reference to a geographical element: the statue of Christ that is located in the border between Juárez and El Paso. This statue is close to the American refinery ASARCO, which, in the novel, represents the transnational manufacturing infrastructure which has transformed the border zone in space of violence and death for hundreds of women. Therefore, the modification of Porfirio Díaz’ saying is a metaphor of how Ciudad Juárez has become a transnational space of death and violence by a convergent process which involves the historical interconnections between Mexico and the U.S, and the recent radicalization of these interconnections.

This convergent process between new and old spatial formations not only is evident in the juxtaposition of diverse geographical elements, but also in the concurrence of diverse imaginaries about the border zone, which have been generated, across time, by the historical interconnection between El Paso and Ciudad Juárez. As researchers such as Oscar J. Martinez (1978) and Sallie Westwood (2000b) point out, spatial processes and transformations not only generate geographical remappings and convergences, but also produce images and ideas about these geographical transformations. This implies that the spatial transformation of the border zone promoted by the interconnection between El Paso and Ciudad Juárez has generated images and ideas about the border zone. These images converge with more recent spatial imaginaries; and have a fundamental influence in the construction of new spatial images and ideas.

According to Sallie Westwood, the historical imagining of the USA and Latin America could be described broadly in the following way:

The imagining of the USA and of Latin America constitutes a two way process in which, not surprisingly, the U.S. is constructed as a land of things to be bought and sold, of high technology, wealth and power for many in Latin America. It is constituted [...] as part of a binary between the poverty and hardship of the South and the opportunities and money of the North [...] From the North, Latin America is constructed and read as both exotic, with shamans and ancient peoples defending the Amazonian forest, and as a place of corruption, generals and drug cartels which needs policing by the ever-vigilant U.S. military, CIA and agents of the state department (Westwood 2000b, 59)



These general images about North America and Latin America have a fundamental influence in the definition of the border zone. The border zone as representation of the disparities between the U.S and Latin America has been defined as the spatial representation of the collision between first and third world (see Anzaldúa 2007). Consequently, this territory has been imagined not only as the spatial representation of the interconnections between Mexico and the United States, but also as the geographical demonstration of the dichotomy integrated by both countries. In this sense, the image of the border is integrated by the convergence of diverse and, sometimes, opposite spatial imaginaries. On the one hand, it is space of connections and interchanges; on the other, it is the radical separation between first and third world.

This convergence between diverse images and ideas, and its influence in how the border zone is represented, is fully developed in the two novels analyzed in this chapter. In *Desert Blood*, the border zone is not only defined by the transnational interconnections between Mexico and the U.S, but also by the dichotomy between first and third world, as is exemplified by the following quotation:

ON A CLEAR DAY IN WEST EL PASO, you can see the forty-foot statue of Christ the Redeemer at the top of Mount Cristo Rey. Against the western skyline, the huge white – robed limestone Christ stretches its crucified arms out like a holy bridge between the First World and the Third, like a mirage of faith across the desert. Any day of the week but specially on Sundays and holydays, you can always spot a few hard-core believers trekking up the craggy dirt trails. In hundred-degree heat or sixty-mile-an-hour winds, people come to pray, do penance, honor a promise, or offer flowers to the miraculous white man, Christ the King (Gaspar de Alba 2004, 236)

In this sense, Gaspar de Alba's novel defines the border zone as the spatial representation of the social and economic disparities which have defined the border between Mexico and the United States. With this, Gaspar de Alba generates in her novel a spatial formation in which diverse images and ideas collide and converge. In *Desert Blood*, the transnational space integrated by El Paso and Ciudad Juárez is constructed not only by the geographical elements and transformations that define this area as a transnational place, but also by

previous images and ideas that have defined this border zone as a space of contradictions and oppositions.

In a similar way, in *If I Die in Juárez*, Stella Pope Duarte recreates the border zone as the reproduction of the images and ideas that have defined this area as the collision and opposition between first and third world. This is illustrated in the following quotation, in which, one of the protagonists of the novel, Evita, observes El Paso from one of the *colonias* in Ciudad Juárez:

From Ofelia's house Evita could see el Río Bravo in the distance, and across the river she could see, clearly, los Estados Unidos –America, with its fine houses, freeways, and tall buildings. Evita had visited El Paso once, when Reynaldo had gotten his job at the golf course. He had taken them all over in his car to see the Golden Crest Country Club that faced a mountain range known for its golden-colored sunsets. A marker stood on one of the hills, announcing, Golden Crest, the most beautiful sunsets in the Southwest, and there were benches set up for tourists to sit and enjoy the late afternoon sky.

Evita knew that the Americans could see Mexico as easily as she could see America. She wondered if she's ever travel to the other side, like many others had done, and work for a rich family, spying on the poverty of her people from across the river (Duarte 2008, 32)

As the previous quotation illustrates, the border zone is still defined by spatial images which have defined the U.S as a modern, rich and prosperous country, and Mexico as a poor and undeveloped country. In this sense, both novels stress that spatial formations are not only integrated by geographical transformations and convergences, but also by spatial imaginaries which have a fundamental influence in spatial constructions.

As mentioned, not only spatial images have a fundamental role in the remapping of spaces, but also these remappings generate ideas about spaces. As Oscar J. Martinez suggests, the geographical remappings in the border zone promoted by the historical interconnections between El Paso and Ciudad Juárez have generated a series of ideas about this border zone. According to Martinez, since entertainment establishments were open in Ciudad Juárez during Prohibition: “To Americans, as well as Mexicans from the interior,

Juárez and the border cities represented blatant centers of sin and degradation” (Martínez 1978, 57).

For Americans this degradation is understood as a result of the poverty and lack of material progress in Mexico. For Mexicans from states in the center of Mexico, the degradation of the border cities is a consequence of their Americanization. In the Mexican imaginary about the United States, America means material prosperity, but also a loss of fundamental moral values. In consequence, Mexicans from the center have defined Ciudad Juárez as “Babilonia Pocha” (Culturally corrupted Babylon), “Black city of Mexico”, “Swamp of Immorality”, “Gomorraah city”, “New Sodom”, “Sin City”, “Center of Vice”, “Center of Corruption”, and “Center of Prostitution” (Martínez 1978, 103).

This imaginary about Ciudad Juárez is amply illustrated in the next note published in the Mexican newspaper, *El Universal*, on August of 1944:

Ciudad Juarez is not a city, it is a great Tívoli, a perennial fair of low caliber, a center inhabited only by people of vice or lovers of money without regard to its source. To prove this, one needs only to walk its streets and see nothing but run-down hotels..., cabarets of all kinds, bars, many bars, wine stores disguised as curio shops, and... brothels. During the day this city gives the impression of the scenario of a great theater in which technicians and stagehands prepare for the night’s performance. In contrast, to any orderly city with honest commerce, the streets in Juárez remain without activity until two or three in the afternoon. The numerous centers of vice are closed, their personnel busy cleaning and preparing them for the soldiers’ arrival. Only a few restaurants cater to native *Juarenses*, as the majority only serve tourists... In reality there is a lack of serious and respectable commerce... The *güeros* [“Blondies”], the *bolillos* [“Whites”], the *gabachos* [“Foreigners”], as Americans are known in Juárez slang, behave not as people who are visiting a city, but as persons who hold the impression that they have crossed a threshold of an entertainment center in which anything goes, from yelling and frolicking to caressing and kissing women impulsively on the street... The few decent families who reside in Juárez live a quiet and discreet life and do not go out during “performance time” because they know that as soon as the first rays of the sun set, the festive life takes over the central district. Proof of this is that all the families of government officials, from the mayor on down, live in El Paso or in Chihuahua City (Quoted and translated by Martínez 1978, 104-105)

As the previous quotation emphasizes, because of its interconnection with El Paso, Ciudad Juárez has been imagined as a place polluted by American immorality and vices. It is space of illegitimate activities and inhabited by corrupted people. This imaginary about the border zone –generated during the first half of the twentieth century- still has a primary role in the configuration of this place.

This last point is recreated in Gaspar de Alba and Duarte's novels which stress how previous ideas about the border zone still are factors that determine this territory. For instance, in *If I Die in Juárez*, many characters, like Estevan, father of the protagonist Petra, describe Ciudad Juárez as place of degradation, polluted by American immorality: "Estevan glared at her. He had no intention of going to Juárez, he said, where the poor lived like rats and the materialistic world of el gringo proved to be a lure, enticing many to run the risk of crossing into el otro lado, never to return" (Duarte 2004, 40).

In this sense, both novels recreate how previous spatial images and ideas still are current in the definition of the border zone. Moreover, both novels represent how these previous images converge with the images about the border zone which emerge as result of the radicalization of the transnational economic relationships between Mexico and the United States. This convergence is stressed in Duarte's novel by the juxtaposition of previous ideas about Ciudad Juárez and images promoted by the transformation of the Mexican city into an export processing zone. In Duarte's novel, Ciudad Juárez is a corrupted city, but, at the same time, it could mean a prosperous economic center, and a land with many opportunities of work and material success:

Work? You want work? Gustavo asked. "Well, what are you waiting for? You'll find it in Juárez. Thousands, yes I repeat, thousands of women work in las maquiladoras and make plenty of money to support their families. The Americans can't get enough of us Mexicans. They bring more and more of their factories to Juárez, and we supply their labor. What do we care as long as we get paid. Women are what they want. They say women make for better employees. They're not out drinking every weekend and demanding higher pay. They work hard, they get paid, they make a living. It's that easy. I work at Western Electronics. You can apply there, and I'll help you get in (Duarte 2004, 45)

Hence, in the transnational space integrated by El Paso and Ciudad Juárez, diverse, and, sometimes, opposite imaginaries converge. Furthermore, in *Desert Blood* and *If I Die in Juárez*, previous spatial images combine with more recent ones, generating different imaginings. This is illustrated in Duarte's novel, in which the fame of Ciudad Juárez as a decadent, immoral and, consequently, dangerous place combines with the more recent image of the city as a site of extreme violence and death for women. This is illustrated by the following dialogue between Petra's mother, Flor, and her relative, Ofelia:

I tell her not to be out on the streets, but she doesn't listen. It's dangerous for women with all the violence in Juárez”

“This city's always been violent”, Flor said, “That's nothing new.”

“Yes and now more than ever. They've uncovered the bodies of women, raped and murdered- young women, left out in the desert to rot. And of course, no one is talking.”

Flor put one finger to her lips, looking in the direction of the room where Estevan was resting , and she leaned toward Ofelia.

“Please, I don't want Estevan to know too much about all this. He knows Juárez is violent, but if he knows details of all that's happening, he'll make us leave –and you know we can't go back! He'll die on the way, and I-“ (Duarte 2008, 91)

In this sense, both novels recreate the transnational space, integrated by El Paso and Ciudad Juárez, not as a process in which only are involved recent transnational relations between Mexico and the U.S; but as a process in which the remapping of the geography of both cities is fundamentally determined by the convergence between recent spatial formations and previous spatial configurations. Moreover, in both novels, the formation of this transnational space is fundamentally determined by previous spatial imaginaries, and, at the same time, by new imaginaries which collide, converge and combine with previous spatial images and ideas.

## Conclusions of the Second Chapter

The analysis developed in this second chapter demonstrates how *If I Die in Juárez* and *Desert Blood* are recent Chicana narratives that recreate a transnational perspective. This perspective is evident in the way in which both novels represent the border zone El Paso-Ciudad Juárez as a transnational complex process which involves multiple and diverse convergences, transformations, juxtapositions, and collisions. In this sense, both novels illustrate how spatial notions developed in previous Chicana narratives could be used to recreate the border zone between Mexico and The United States not only as a place in the American Southwest where American mainstream representations and minority counter-narratives converge and collide; but also as a place fundamentally determined by the multiple and diverse transnational relationships and interchanges between Mexico and the United States.

In consequence, in both novels, the border is a transnational place fundamentally integrated not only by two cultures or ethnical backgrounds, but also by two national geographies and territories. Thus, the border transcends the political limits between Mexico and the U.S, and it is a spatial representation of how transnational networks and relations could redefine geographies, and generate spaces which are not totally limited by national borders, and not totally defined by a single national context.

Therefore, *If I Die in Juárez* and *Desert Blood* not only illustrate a transnational spatial perspective in Chicana literature, but also recreate how transnational spaces are constructed, transformed and defined by complex processes which involve transnational flows and power relations, as well as previous geographical formations and spatial images and ideas.

### Chapter 3:

#### **Transnational Gender Relations and the Generation of Transnational Sexual Violence in *Desert Blood* by Alicia Gaspar de Alba and *If I Die in Juárez* by Stella Pope Duarte**

In these streets out there, any little white boy from Long Island or Westchester sees me and leans out of his car and yells –“hey there, *hot chocolate!* Say there Jezebel! Hey you- ‘Hundred Dollar Misunderstanding! YOU! Bet you know where there’s a good time tonight...” Follow me sometimes and see if I lie. I can be coming from eight hours on an assembly line or fourteen hours in Mrs. Halsey’s kitchen. I can be all filled up that day with three hundred years of rage so that my eyes are flashing and my flesh is trembling –and the white boys in the streets, they look at me and think of sex. They look at me and that’s *all* they think... Baby, you could be Jesus in drag –but if you’re brown they’re sure you’re selling! (Hansberry, 1969, 98)

This third chapter is devoted to analyzing how transnational relationships produce and reconfigure gender notions, hierarchies and relationships. In the two novels analyzed in this chapter, *If I Die in Juárez* and *Desert Blood*, the transnational interchanges between Mexico and the United States promote a series of gender categories which support a particular kind of sexual violence in the border zone integrated by El Paso and Ciudad Juárez. In consequence, in this chapter, I employ these novels to illustrate how transnational relationships affect gender notions and structures, and how the interconnection between transnationalism and gender developed in both narratives exemplifies a transnational perspective in recent Chicana narratives.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, Gaspar de Alba and Duarte’s novels principally focus on how transnational flows, such as NAFTA, have produced not only geographical remappings and significant changes in social hierarchies and power relations; but also gender and sexual structures which are fundamentally interconnected with the transnational social hierarchies and power relations that nowadays define the border between Mexico and the U.S. In this sense, both novels continue with Chicana literature’s tendency of emphasizing gender and sexuality as fundamental vectors involved in the definition of social and power structures<sup>7</sup>. Nonetheless, *If I Die in Juárez* and *Desert Blood*

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<sup>7</sup> As mentioned in the Introduction of this thesis what defines and distinguishes Chicana literature is the incorporation of gender and sexuality as fundamental factors in the definition of social and power categories, and in the oppression of specific social and racial groups in the United States.

do not incorporate gender and sexuality to explain Mexican-Americans' social position and oppression in the United States; but to analyze the position of a specific group of female individuals in the transnational interchanges between Mexico and the U.S. Hence, both novels employ fundamental notions of Chicana literature from a transnational perspective. From those notions, the novels explore how gender constructs are related to transnational social and power structures; as well as how the fundamental link between gender and transnational social hierarchies is interconnected with the extreme sexual violence against female individuals which have emerged in the border zone during the last decades.

In order to demonstrate those points, this chapter is organized in the following three sections. In the first section, supported by critics such as Tine Davids and Francien Van Driel, I argue that *Desert Blood* and *If I Die in Juárez* illustrate how transnational flows and the power structures that they promote reshape gender notions and hierarchies. In this section, I also argue that both novels illustrate how this reshaping is a consequence of the collision and interaction between the gender notions carried by transnational flows and previous gender formations. In the second section, I analyze how both novels at the core of this chapter recreate the extreme sexual violence of the border zone as a consequence of the fundamental link between gender and power structures. In this section, supported by feminists such as Patricia Hill Collins, I argue that both novels recreate how the sexual violence of the border zone is result of a transnational infrastructure which connects gender and power hierarchies and which sexualizes power relations. The third and last section is devoted to the conclusions of this chapter.

### **Transnational Interchanges and the Reshaping of Gender Notions and Gender Relationships**

In their research about the interconnections between gender and globalization, Tine Davids and Francien Van Driel suggest that “gender shapes and curves the globalization landscape and vice-versa” (Davids and Van Driel 2005, 3). For Davids and Van Driel, this interconnection between gender and globalization is based on the idea that globalization is



a multidirectional process which involves the movement and travelling not only of material goods but also of cultural formations, such as gender notions:

When we look at all these travelling goods, capital, people and technology, we also notice the scripts attached to them, specific connections, images and ideas. These scripts represent specific cultural notions that travel over the globe through these networks of complex connectivity, regardless of its local origin (Davids and Van Driel 2005, 10).

This means that global flows carry with them gender notions and hierarchies which interact with the gender formations present in the specific contexts where global flows land on. Consequently, global gender formations are reshaped by local gender notions and vice-versa; and new gender formations are produced by the interaction and collision among global and local gender notions. This interaction among global and local gender categories underlined by Davids and Van Driel is extremely useful to understand the gender formations recreated in Gaspar de Alba and Duarte's novels in a transnational scale.

*Desert Blood* and *If I Die in Juárez* recreate how the transnational landscape integrated by El Paso and Ciudad Juárez is shaped not only by the economic interchanges of material goods, but also by the cultural non-material formations carried by transnational flows. In this sense, both novels emphasize that transnational flows carry gender notions which reshape gender formations, relationships and hierarchies in the border zone. Both novels also emphasize that transnational material and non-material interchanges and interactions are bidirectional processes which involve the interaction between the notions and goods carried by transnational flows, and the notions and goods present in the specific context where transnational flows operate. This implies that *Desert Blood* and *If I Die in Juárez* recreate the gender notions and relations which define the border zone as formations consequence of the interaction and collision between transnational gender formations and local gender categories. In both novels the gender categories which define gender relationships in the border are result of the collision and convergence of American and Mexican gender notions.

As mentioned in the second chapter of this thesis, transnational flows carry not only material and non-material items and formations, but also power structures and relations.

These power structures have a primary role in the construction and organization of cultural formations such as memories, spatial imaginings and gender notions. Therefore, the gender notions brought by transnational flows represent and contain specific power hierarchies; and the power relations carried by these flows have a primary influence in the formation of new gender categories and relationships.

The interconnection between gender and power is not a new phenomenon. As suggested by Sallie Westwood and Annie Phizacklea, in the course of history, gender notions and relationships have been fundamentally defined by power structures, and power structures have been fundamentally gendered and racialized. In consequence, economic and power structures, such as capitalism, have been historically integrated by processes of racialization and gendered:

Capitalism was constituted within processes of racialisation that is from the periods of enslavement through indentured labor and into the current processes of the global supply and demand of labor, capitalism in its formation and development has been constituted as a racial formation. Capitalism is not an abstract system, although it may be understood in an idealized form. The production of commodities on a world scale involves both racialised and gendered labour power (Westwood and Phizacklea 2000, 5)

The two novels analyzed in this chapter recreate the gender formations in the border zone not only as a consequence of the convergence and collision among transnational and local gender formations; and among Mexican and American gender notions; but also as a result of power structures which generate social hierarchies based on gender and race. In consequence, both novels recreate the transnational gender notions and relationships that define the border zone as participants and result of historical processes which have created social hierarchies and disparities based on gender and racial differences.

In *If I Die in Juárez*, the transnational infrastructure which position female individuals in the lowest social status is consequence of a colonial process which since the Conquest of Mexico has defined colored female individuals -especially indigenous women- as objects of physical, sexual, and economic exploitation. In the novel, this historical process is represented by the relationship between Agustín Cortés Gúzman Miramontes and

the indigenous protagonist Petra. Agustín, on one hand, as owner of the *maquiladora* where Petra works, represents the transnational infrastructure that is sexually and economically exploiting female individuals in the border zone. On the other, as descendant of Hernán Cortés, he represents the colonial forces that since 500 years ago have been exploiting female individuals. Therefore, when Agustín attacks and rapes Petra, he represents not only the transnational infrastructure which employs economic and sexual violence to oppress female workers, but he also represents a historical process of exploitation and oppression.

In a similar way, *Desert Blood* recreates the connection among race, gender and power as part of a historical process which involves American gender, racial and power hierarchies. In Gaspar de Alba's novel, the transnational gender formations which defined the border zone integrated by El Paso and Ciudad Juárez are fundamentally a continuation of the historical American exploitation and discrimination of female colored individuals.

In this sense, both novels emphasize that the reshaping of gender formations in the border zone promoted by the transnational relationships between Mexico and the U.S is fundamentally determined by the power structures that these relationships carry, and by a historical tendency which has gendered and racialized power relations. In consequence, in both novels the principal reshaping of gender relations in the border zone promoted by transnational flows is fundamentally interconnected with the social and power hierarchies constituted by these same flows. In both novels, this main transformation is represented by the feminization of labor in the border zone. This term is defined by George Ritzer in the following way:

This refers to the rise of female labor participation in all sectors and the movement of women into jobs traditionally held by men. This global trend has occurred in both developing and developed countries [...] The feminization of labor in the developing economies is often accompanied by the feminization of poverty and by female proletarianization. In many of those economies, women's increased participation in paid employment is caused mainly by the shift from import substitution to export-oriented manufacturing (Ritzer 2010, 458).

In *Desert Blood* and *If I Die in Juárez*, the feminization of labor means, as suggested by Ritzer in the previous quotation, the proletarianization of women. In *Desert Blood*, this is emphasized by Ximena, cousin of the protagonist of the novel, who along the novel constantly underlines that the transnational infrastructure of the border zone, represented principally by *maquiladoras*, has generated a social class of workers defined mainly by their sex and place of origin. According to Ximena, in the transnational economic infrastructure of the border, the working class is mainly integrated by “*muchachas del sur*” (girls from the South) (Gaspar de Alba 2004, 24). This means that *maquiladoras* have gendered and racialized power hierarchies and have located a specific group of individuals in the lowest social status. This location is a consequence of gender notions based on the idea that young female individuals are better workers and more exploitable than men. Therefore, the gender and power structures carried by transnational flows and their interconnection have defined a specific group of women in the border as objects of exploitation.

At the same time, the location of young women from the south into the working class has generated a fundamental transformation in the gender relationships and positions in the border zone. As the following quotation of *If I Die in Juárez* illustrates, the Mexican traditional gender categories, which position men as workers and women as housekeepers, have been dislocated:

Now, there are women from all over Mexico working here and with them come more men. Some of the men are worthless, to tell you the truth, and more than this, they're mad at their wives for making money. You know el machismo rules their lives. They feel worthless because their wives support the family, and so they take it out on them, beating them up and making their lives miserable. Then there's women who get big heads and think they can wear the pants in the family. Pretty soon, the couple fights, and the man takes off to el otro lado, to make his fortune in los Estados Unidos. That leaves more children on the streets for gang members to recruit, and so it goes on and on (Duarte 2008, 143)

This dislocation exemplifies how transnational flows have reshaped gender notions in the border zone, and how they promote the creation of different gender categories. Both novels identify the creation of a female working class as the principal gender transformation

promoted in the border zone by transnational interchanges. Nonetheless, as mentioned at the beginning of this section, both novels recreate transnational gender formations not only as one-dimensional processes, but also as bidirectional processes in which gender transnational formations converge and collide with local gender notions. In this sense the female working class created by transnational relationships is as well integrated and defined by the interaction between Mexican and American gender notions.

As Davids and Van Driel emphasize, global interchanges and the non-material formations tied to them have a fundamental influence in systems of representation:

Globalization as a cultural process has a profound impact on ways of living. Whether globalization presents itself in hybrid forms, in a spread of western-style consumer culture or in some degree of fundamentalist militancy, it directly and profoundly interferes with systems of representation and identification.

These constant flows of people, images and commodities have become a matter of everyday life, influencing what we eat, how we dress, what music we listen to, and so on. *It is a process that alters cultural representations* of who we are and what we are, and directly interferes with identity building (Davids and Van Driel 2005, 10-11)

This means that the scripts or cultural notions which travel with global flows interfere in systems of identification and representation in the localities where global flows land on. For Davids and Van Driel, the interaction and collision of global and local scripts promote a process of negotiation among global and local cultural plots which redefines and reshapes systems of representation.

The two novels analyzed in this chapter recreate a similar influence and interaction in a transnational scale. In *Desert Blood* and *If I Die in Juárez*, American and Mexican gender notions are involved in processes of collision and negotiation which fundamentally determined the gender formations and transformations promoted by transnational flows in the border zone. In this sense, in both novels, the gender category of “*maquiladora* worker” is not only defined by the transnational infrastructure of the border and by transnational power formations, but also by the convergence of Mexican and American gender notions,

and by the gender imaginary that Mexicans have in general about American women, and Americans have about Mexican female individuals.

In their plots, both novels emphasize the traditional Mexican gender imaginary which fundamentally defines Mexican femininity. This imaginary is supported by a dichotomy which classifies women in two categories. Women could be defined as Virgins or as Whores<sup>8</sup>. In Mexican culture, the virgin category is fulfilled by women who accept their role as housekeepers and accomplish their function as mothers and wives. This category also implies that women accept male authority and limit their sexuality to their obligations as wives. The second category is fulfilled by women who in different ways do not accomplish the submission and functions of the virgin category or by women who refuse to play the virgin role.

The following quotation of Duarte's novel illustrates how the text recreates this fundamental Mexican gender dichotomy. In it, one of the protagonists of *If I Die in Juárez*, Evita, has a conversation with a taxi driver who claims the following: "You're too young to be out on the streets like a prostitute. It's girls like you who end up dead in el Lote Bravo. If you were my daughter, I would beat you and make you stay home. That's what women need. They need to be beaten and kept at home for their own safety" (Duarte 2008, 21). With this, Duarte's novel exemplifies how Mexican gender notions are based on the belief that women should be at home playing the virgin role. This quotation also illustrates how women who go out of the home are classified by Mexican gender formations as prostitutes, and how Mexican gender relationships justify and legitimize the use of violence to maintain women in their position as housekeepers.

As mentioned, this Mexican gender structure has been redefined by the transnational relationships in the border zone; and it fundamentally interacts with the gender notions tied to transnational flows. In consequence, the gender notions promoted by transnational flows are fundamentally determined by this Mexican gender dichotomy. This

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<sup>8</sup> This dichotomy, which is fundamental in the definition of female Mexican individuals, has been analyzed by Chicana critics since the 1970's. For an early analysis of it see Cotera 1976. For a more recent analysis see García 1997.

is mainly illustrated by the incorporation of *maquiladora* workers into the Mexican gender dichotomy. As the following conversation between Evita and her brother Reynaldo in *If I Die in Juárez* illustrates, due to *maquiladora* workers are not anymore accomplishing the Mexican female role of wives and mothers, and they are playing the male role of economic providers, they have been defined by Mexican gender notions as prostitutes:

“Haven’t you heard, Evita? They’ve found the bodies of two more women, in el Lote Bravo. They were tortured and raped, murdered! You have to go home. Don’t believe anybody on the streets who says they can protect you. They can’t.”

“Everybody’s saying the women were prostitutes who walked the streets late at night. I told you. I’m not doing that. I live with a lady and help her clean and cook meals” Evita was ready to tell him that she had heard they had caught the murderers, but Reynaldo didn’t give her a chance.

“What lady?” he shouted, with his face pressed into hers. “There aren’t ladies around here! So, you think the murdered girls were prostitutes, do you? They were maquiladoras, girls who worked at one of the American factories. Their uniforms were found next to their bodies. What are you thinking? There are men in this city who kill women. They don’t ask questions. They seek out beautiful women, women skinny like you, Evita –women who are easy to kill.” (Duarte 2008, 20)

As the previous quotation underlines, the location of *maquiladora* workers in the Mexican whore category not only demonstrates the interaction and convergence between transnational and Mexican gender notions, but also shows how the power structures tied to transnational flows have influence in the exploitation of these women and in the violence against them. The violence against *maquiladora* workers is also justified and promoted by a Mexican culture which legitimizes the use of violence against women who do not follow traditional Mexican gender structures. Therefore, *maquiladora* workers and their location as objects of exploitation and violence are determined by the integration of multiple gender plots and imaginaries.

This multiplicity of gender plots and imaginaries which define transnational gender formations is not only integrated by Mexican gender notions, but also by American gender

definitions, and by the ideas that Mexicans have about American women, and Americans have about Mexican women. In consequence, the Mexican notions of American women as materialist and immoral individuals as well interfere in the definition of *maquiladora* workers. This Mexican imaginary about Americans is fully illustrated in the following quotation of *Desert Blood*. In it, the protagonist of the novel, Ivon Villa, thinks about how she, as a lesbian Chicana, means for Mexicans not only a betrayer of her culture, but also a betrayer of her femininity and of her fundamental functions as woman:

He probably thought she was *una de las otras*. Mexican men weren't used to seeing women in men's shirts, not unless they were *cholas* or lesbians. Either one was bad news in Juárez. As far as Mexicans were concerned, they meant the same thing: traitors. As Americanized Mexicans spoiled by First World liberties and behaviors, *cholas* betrayed their own culture. Lesbians, although every macho's wet dream –to voyeurize or to conquer- of course betrayed not just their culture, but their gender, their families, and their religion. (Gaspar de Alba 2004, 134)

These Mexican ideas about Americanized women –which have defined Chicanas since immemorial times-, are applied in the transnational border zone to define as well *maquiladora* workers. This means that the location of these female workers in the whore category is reinforced by their definition as Americanized women. In this sense, in the border zone, *maquiladora* workers are Americanized not only because they work principally in American manufacturing industries, but also because their behavior –as family providers who go out of home and do not maintain their role as housekeepers- is considered by Mexicans a consequence of the influence of American culture in the border zone. Therefore, from Mexican gender notions, *maquiladora* workers develop American attitudes which are essentially opposed to Mexican traditional gender structures. In this sense, *maquiladora* workers are not only women who do not fulfill the Mexican virgin category, but also, and above all, Americanized women who fundamentally neglect traditional Mexican gender notions and in consequence are positioned in the whore category. This interaction between Americanization and the definition of *maquiladora* workers as whores is represented in *Desert Blood*, through the image of the *Maqui-Locas*:



Someone tapped on the windshield and startled Ivon. It was a boy on a bicycle holding up four Barbie dolls with singed hair and high-heeled shoes, their shiny dresses cut high on the hip and low on the cleavage.

“*Maqui-Locas*,” the boy said, flashing a gap-toothed smile at them. “*Muy Cheap!*” (Gaspar de Alba 2004, 43)

As the previous quotation illustrates, through the image of Barbie dolls, dressed up as prostitutes and defined as representations of *maquiladora* workers, this group of women is fundamentally defined in the border zone as “Maqui-locas” which is “the vernacular way of referring to *maquiladora* workers who become Americanized and turn into whores” (Gaspar de Alba 2004, 211). In this sense, both novels underline that gender definitions and relations in the border zone are not only reshaped by gender categories promoted by the transnational infrastructure which defines this location, but also by the interaction between two cultural gender formations promoted by the transnational interchanges between Mexico and the U.S. In this way, like Mexican gender notions affects gender formations in the border, American gender plots as well have a fundamental influence in these formations.

This last point is principally developed in *Desert Blood*. In this novel, Alicia Gaspar de Alba constantly emphasizes that the definition of *maquiladora* workers as exploitable individuals, as well as the construction of this gender and economic category, is result of American power structures which have positioned colored women in the lowest social status. For Gaspar de Alba, *maquiladora* workers are principally poor women from the South, because the transnational infrastructure of the border is supported by an American imaginary which historically has defined colored women as the most exploitable individuals. In consequence, in *Desert Blood*, the interconnection between *maquiladora* workers and whores is not only based on Mexican gender notions, but also on American gender notions in which color women “inhabit a sex/gender hierarchy in which inequalities of race and social class have been sexualized” (Collins 1993, 87).

In this sense, like in the United States the position of colored women in the lowest social status has been maintained by sexualized and gendered notions which define colored women as sexually deviant; in the border zone, the economic exploitation of *maquiladora*

workers is supported by sexualized and gendered notions which define this group of women as prostitutes. Therefore, the American power hierarchies, which have created interconnections between colored women (especially African-American women) and the image of the White prostitute<sup>9</sup>, in order to generate a image of a sexual deviant and corrupted colored woman which justifies her economic and sexual exploitation, have a fundamental influence in the definition of *maquiladora* workers –as colored women from the South- as sexually corrupted.

In this sense, the novels analyzed in this chapter illustrate how the reshaping of gender notions in the border zone is a result not only of a transnational economic infrastructure which has gendered and racialized power relations and social hierarchies, but also of the interactions among a multiplicity of gender formations promoted by the transnational interchanges between Mexico and the United States. In consequence, both novels underline that *maquiladora* workers, as a social class and as a gender formation, are defined by a transnational economic system, as well as by the interaction among Mexican and American gender notions. These convergence and interactions produce a gender discourse which links *maquiladora* workers with sexually deviant practices, and consequently, supports and justifies not only the economic exploitation of these women, but also the use of extreme violence against them. This last point is fully developed in the next section of this chapter.

### **Transnational Gender Formations and Extreme Transnational Sexual Violence**

As Barbara Fawcett suggests, violence is always present in society. It is interconnected with social structures and power relations, and takes multiple forms:

Violence is always with us. It is both historically persistent and immediately topical. It exists in the very structure of society and it repeatedly surprises. Violence also takes many forms: physical, sexual, emotional, verbal, representational, cognitive [...] Violence can be

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<sup>9</sup> About this see S. L Gilman's analysis of the exhibition of Sarah Bartmann as the "Hottentots Venus" in Europe during the nineteenth century (Gilman 1985).

directly from one person to another and can be between people; it can be interpersonal or institutional, local or global, between known others or between strangers. It is a clearly multifaceted set of actions and activities (Fawcett et al. 1996, 1)

In both novels analyzed in this chapter, violence means extreme sexual violence against a specific group of women. Gaspar de Alba and Duarte's texts emphasize how the transnational infrastructure which has reshaped gender notions, hierarchies and relationships in the border, as well as promoted the use of extreme sexual violence against women, and the murders of thousands of female individuals in this territory. In both novels, violence is not a new phenomenon. It has been at the core of gender relationships in the border since immemorial times, and, therefore, it has been a common practice to maintain gender structures and hierarchies. This is broadly recreated in *If I Die in Juárez*, through the stories of female secondary characters. In the novel, the three female protagonists, Petra, Mayela and Evita, realize how violence is a primary factor in the gender relations of their social context, through the stories of the women around them. As the following quotation illustrates, Mayela's aunt, Cina, migrates to Ciudad Juárez, in order to escape from an interfamily violence which has put her life in risk:

Cina was desperate to get out of Chitlitipin. Her husband, Zocotl had already tried to kill her three times, and she bore a scar on her throat from his last attempt. His jealous rages had cost his first wife her life. Cina told Chavela that she either escaped from Chitlitipin or Chavela would be burying her dead body (Duarte 2008, 108).

In a similar way, the women with whom Evita lives in Isidora's house, tell Evita how they migrate to Ciudad Juárez, running away from patriarchal structures which employ sexual and physical violence to subordinate women:

Anabel told Evita she was from Durango and ran away from home after her mother died and left her with a stepfather and five small children. Anabel was the oldest and was the only one born to her mother from another man. After her mother died, her stepfather got the idea that Anabel could take her mother's place and be a mother to his children and sleep with him at night.

“Every night I slept between the younger children, and ese cabrón would get mad and put his hands all over me and try to make me get up. He breathed on me, and he smelled so bad –tequila, cigarettes. I don’t know. One night he spit in my face and said I would regret it. That was the night I ran [...]” (Duarte 2008, 14)

With this, Duarte’s novel recreates how the interconnection between violence and gender relations and hierarchies is not a new phenomenon in the border. Nonetheless, *If I Die in Juárez* as well as *Desert Blood* underline that the interconnection between violence and gender relations in this territory have acquired new features as consequence of the radicalization of the transnational relationships between Mexico and the U.S. In both novels, the most significant change in this interconnection is the use of extreme sexual violence against a specific group of women mainly integrated by *maquiladora* workers. The extreme character of this violence is described in detail by the following depiction of Gaspar de Alba’s novel:

THE ROPE TIGHTENED AROUND HER NECK, and she felt her belly drag over sand and rocks, the wound on her breast pricked by sage-brush. She was numb below the waist, and her face ached from the beating. One of them had given her an injection, but she could still move her arms and wedge the tips of her fingers under the noose. They’d stuffed her bra into her mouth, and the hooks in it hurt her tongue. When the car stopped, her head slammed into something hard. The pain stunned her, and she was crying again, but suddenly, she felt nothing in her arms. The numbness spread quickly up her spine. Her jaw, her belly -everything felt dead [...] (Gaspar de Alba 2004, 1)

In both novels, on the one hand, this extreme violence is supported by the reshaping of gender notions, hierarchies and representations promoted by transnational flows, which defines *maquiladora* workers as subjects of exploitation and as sexual deviant individuals. On the other, this extreme sexual violence is a result of the collision and interaction of social practices in which “dominance and subordination are erotized” (Bart and Moran 1993, 1). In this sense, in both novels, “murder is in short a form of patriarchal terrorism” (Caputi 1993, 6) and “rape is a direct expression of sexual politics, a ritual enactment of male domination, a form of terror that function to maintain the status quo” (Caputi 1993, 6). Therefore, as the reshaping of gender notions and structures is fundamentally

interconnected with power and social structures, the extreme sexual violence against women in the border zone is also essentially linked with power relations.

This means that in the two novels rape and murder –as the primary forms of violence against women in the border- are not only acts of violence or sexual acts, but also forms of power “where oppression takes sexual forms, and where sexuality is the very ‘linchpin’ of gender inequality [and where] Sexual murder is the ultimate expression of sexuality as a form of power” (Caputi 1993, 7). This implies that the oppression of *maquiladora* workers is not only exercised by gender categories and representations, but also by specific sexual practices which are employed as mechanisms of oppression and submission. This last point is fully recreated in *If I Die in Juárez*. In this novel, one of the principal perpetrators of the murders of women in Ciudad Juárez, Agustín Cortés Guzmán Miramontes, employs rape and murder as ways of reaffirming his power over his female workers. As the following quotation illustrates, for Agustín, rape and murder are mechanisms of conquest, and ways to achieve the submission of female individuals:

“And look over here.” He pulled on her hair and spun her around to face a fireplace with an elaborate mantelpiece. Over the mantelpiece was a fancy coat of arms with his family name etched in silver and gold: CORTES MIRAMONTES GUZMAN.

“He was my grandfather, el conquistador himself. Who knows which one of his bastard son I am! Do you like it? I’m a conqueror –there’s nothing you can do but submit, again and again and again!” He yanked her hair as hard as he could, and Petra screamed in pain, feeling blood oozing from her scalp. He shook strands of her hair off his hand, as if it meant nothing to him. (Duarte 2008, 293)

In this sense, Duarte in her novel recreates how rape and murder as mechanisms of oppression are employed in the transnational infrastructure of the border to maintain and reaffirm the submission of female individuals. In the novel, the interconnection among sexual violence, oppression and the transnational infrastructure is recreated through Agustín who, as owner of *maquiladoras* and perpetrator of the murders of women, represent a transnational infrastructure which not only has defined *maquiladora* workers as

subjects vulnerable to exploitation, but also as subjects who could be oppressed economically and through the use of extreme sexual violence.

In *If I Die in Juárez* and *Desert Blood*, the interconnection between the transnational infrastructure of the border and the extreme violence against women is not only recreated by characters who are perpetrators and, at the same time, heads of transnational industries, but also by the interconnection between the mechanism of control employed in *maquiladoras*, and the control associated with sexual practices. As Diana Scully and Joseph Marolla suggest in their study about the motivations behind sexual crimes, sexual offenders “gained control over the only source of power historically associated with women, their bodies. In the final analysis, dominance was the objective of most rapists” (Scully and Marolla 1993, 39.) This implies that rape and murder are fundamentally mechanisms to gain control over female bodies. In a similar way, in both novels, *maquiladoras* fundamentally control female workers’ bodies in order to maintain their submission. This is emphasized in *Desert Blood*, in the following conversation between Ximena and Ivon, in which Ximena explains to her cousin how *maquiladoras*’ infrastructure is based on the strict control and supervision of female workers’ bodies:

“The girl’s been wearing a girdle, you know, so they can’t tell she’s pregnant or else she’ll get fired. She stands up all day at the factory, and it’s made the baby ride too low, or something like that. But like I said, the baby’s fine, Cecilia’s fine, it’s all good”

“She’ll get fired if she’s pregnant?”

Ximena turned to look at Ivon. “Well, yeah, the factory would have to pay maternity leave. That would cut into its profits. Take your birth control if you want to keep your job.”

“Are you shitting me?” Ivon took mental note of this detail for her dissertation.

“Company logic is there’s plenty of girls lining up for your job,” said Ximena. “More supply than demand, you know. They don’t need to hang on to anybody who’s pregnant and can’t fulfill her quota.” (Gaspar de Alba 2004, 12)

Therefore, in the novels the violence against *maquiladora* workers is not only consequence of the sexualization of power relations, but also, and above all, of a transnational

infrastructure which promotes the strict control of female bodies as mechanism of oppression. Moreover, Duarte and Gaspar de Alba's novels emphasize that this strict control of female bodies in the transnational border economy has produced the objectification of *maquiladora* workers. This implies that the transnational infrastructure of the border has reduced female workers to bodies or objects which could be easily manipulated and thrown away. Thus, the transnational border infrastructure, by employing methods of oppression which radically subjugate female individuals and reduce them to mere bodies and objects in the border economy, is a primary promoter of extreme sexual and violent practices.

This interconnection is constantly stressed by Gaspar de Alba in her novel. In *Desert Blood*, the torn dead bodies of *maquiladora* workers are constantly compared with machine parts which are thrown away by the border economy: "*Many of the young women had been raped, several were mutilated, and a large number had been dumped like worn-out machine parts in some isolated spot*" (Gaspar de Alba 2004, 4). With this, Gaspar de Alba underlines the brutality of the crimes, and, at the same time, emphasizes the fundamental link between the transnational border economy and the radicalization of sexual violence in this location. This link as well is emphasized in the novel through the image of female dead bodies which contain American pennies. As Gaspar de Alba explains in the disclaimer that precedes her story, this image is a metaphor of how the murdered women of Ciudad Juárez are mere expendable objects in the transnational border economy:

I have also added a metaphorical dimension to the story, using the image of American coins, particularly pennies, to signify the value of the victims in the corporate machine; the poor brown women who are the main target of these murders, are, in other words, as expendable as pennies in the border economy (Gaspar de Alba 2004, V)

This image also represents how the convergence between American and Mexican sexual practices is behind the radicalization of the sexual violence in the border zone. The image of American pennies inside brown women's dead bodies, as well represents how the confluence of American and Mexican sexual practices as methods of oppression is a fundamental factor in the extreme sexual violence against women in the border zone. As

pointed out at the beginning of this section and in the previous section, Mexican gender formations historically have justified and legitimized the use of violence to maintain gender hierarchies. In a similar way, Americans have erotized and sexualized power structures in order to maintain social and gender hierarchies.

As Patricia Hill Collins suggests, the interconnection among power, violence and sexuality is evident in the United States in the case of Black women. For Collins, Afro-American women's sexuality has been strictly controlled by an American power system which interlocks race, gender, and class oppression with violence and sexual practices (Collins 1993, 86). In consequence, American power structures have employed sexual violence as a method to maintain Black women in the social and racial lowest stratus. This implies that Black women were located not only as slaves in economical terms but also as sexual slaves; and that the sexual submission of Black women reinforced their economical exploitation.

The two novels analyzed in this chapter identify American interconnections between gender and race as fundamental factors in the reshaping of gender notions in the border zone; both novels also identify American interconnections among gender, race, economic exploitation, sexuality and violence as primary vectors in the extreme violence against women in the border. In both novels, this extreme violence is also a consequence of the historical use of sexual violence against colored women in the U.S. For this reason, Collins' analysis about the sexual and economic control of Black women is essential to understand how Duarte and Gaspar de Alba's novels recreate how American practices against colored women are reproduced and reshaped in the transnational border zone.

In this sense, as Black women were reduced to sexual slaves in order to reaffirm their economic exploitation and low position, in *If I Die in Juárez* and *Desert Blood*, *maquiladora* workers -as colored women in the lowest social status- are sexually exploited, in order to reaffirm their position as the most vulnerable individuals in the transnational border infrastructure. This is recreated in Duarte's novel, in which Agustín Cortés Guzmán Miramontes reaffirms his power over his female workers not only exploiting them economically, but also using them as sexual slaves:



El conquistador, he told them, the bastard child of Cortés. He violated them as often as he liked, cursed them, relieved himself on them and forced electrical wires deep into their bodies, sending electrical currents to destroy their wombs, where he said were conceived the most despicable forms of life, clots of blood that must be destroyed. And Hilo recorded it all, his one good eye pressed up to the camera lens. He made a video that he played over and over again for Agustín and his friends, who sat and watched in the darkness, commenting on the most brutal parts, moaning with pleasure, and devouring the scenes with howls and shrieks that made Hilo feel as if he had descended into Hell. (Duarte 2008, 305)

Therefore, the objectification of *maquiladora* workers, in both novels, is also a consequence of the influence of American power practices against colored women in the border zone. As Patricia Hill Collins (1993) and Yi-Fu Tuan (1984) suggest, Black women were reduced to animated nature in order to support their sexual and economic exploitation:

Power as domination involves reducing humans to animate nature in order to exploit them economically or to treat them condescendingly as pets. Domination may be either cruel and exploitative with no affection or may be exploitative yet coexist with affection. The former produces the victim –in this case, the black woman as “mule” whose labor has been exploited. In contrast the combination of dominance and affection produces the pet, the individual who is subordinated but whose survival depends on the whims of the more powerful (Collins 1993, 97).

In this sense, African-American women were defined as animals or pets which could be easily used sexually and economically. In a similar way, *maquiladora* workers are animated and objectified to justify their sexual and economic exploitation. *Maquiladora* workers' bodies are used as machines which easily could be thrown away. At the same time, in the border infrastructure, these women are animals which could be extremely exploited or pets for the entertainment of privilege people. This last point is fully recreated in *If I Die in Juárez* by Petra, who at first is a kind of pet for her bosses, Agustín Cortés Guzmán Miramontes and Gustavo Ríos, and later was reduce to an animal or thing which could be raped, tortured and killed.

As Patricia Hill Collins stresses, the animalization of Black women justified the extreme control of their bodies and of their grades of nativity. This control at the same time was fundamentally interconnected with economic systems of production:

Humans practice certain biological procedures on plants and animals to ensure their suitability as pets. For Animals the goal of domestication is manageability and control, a state that can be accomplished through selective breeding or, for some male animals, by castration. A similar process may have affected the historical treatment of African-Americans. As dominant groups have generally refrained from trying to breed humans in the same way that they breed animals, the pervasiveness of rape and lynching suggests that these practices may have contributed to mechanisms of population control (Collins 1993, 101)

The transnational border infrastructure is recreating, in some way, an American economic structure which objectifies a specific group of individuals, according to their race and gender, in order to justify their extreme sexual and economic exploitation. Like colored women in the United States, *maquiladora* workers in the border are subjected to a strict natal control and to an extreme supervision of their bodies to maintain levels of productivity and to reduce costs in the transnational border economy. This last point is perfectly expressed by Ximena, cousin of the protagonist of *Desert Blood*:

“Listen, you have no idea the kind of things they do to women at some of those *maquilas*. They give them birth control shots, they make them show their sanitary napkins every month, they pass around amphetamines to speed up their productivity. Hell, they’re even got Planned Parenthood coming over to insert Norplant, which basically sterilizes the women for months [...]” (Gaspar de Alba 2004, 90)

In this sense, both novels emphasize that the extreme violence against women in the border zone is a consequence of, and supported by a transnational infrastructure which not only sexualize power relations, but also has promoted the radicalization of the interconnections among violence, sexuality and power. Moreover, in both novels this extreme violence is a result of the convergence of American and Mexican gender, racial and power structures, which legitimize the use of sexual violence as mechanism of subjugation and oppression.

This convergence is recreated in detail in *Desert Blood*. In this novel, one of the principal causes behind the murders of women in the border is a transnational pornography industry, linked with *maquiladoras*' infrastructure and managed by Americans and Mexicans in power positions. With this, Gaspar de Alba, on the one hand, underlines how the transnational border economy has promoted the extreme objectification of *maquiladora* workers and the economic and sexual subjugation of this group of women. This extreme objectification and subjugation is represented by the use of *maquiladora* workers in pornographic practices. As Jane Caputi suggests in her analysis about pornography's implications, pornography as "sexually explicit material that represents or describes degrading or abusive behavior [...] is a modern mode of communicating patriarchy's necessary fusion of sex and violence" (Caputi 1993, 17-18). Therefore, in *Desert Blood*, the interconnection among the murders of women, the transnational border economy, and pornography represents how the extreme violence against women in the border is fundamentally supported by a transnational economic and cultural system which not only locates *maquiladora* workers as vulnerable individuals, but also promotes extreme mechanisms to control and subjugate female bodies.

On the other hand, in the novel, this transnational pornography industry, called "Lone Ranger Productions", is managed by Mexican rich men, *maquiladoras*' supervisors, and an American man named J. Wilcox, who dresses like a cowboy and is chief of the Detention Enforcement of the Border Patrol. Therefore, it represents how the transnational infrastructure of the border promotes the use of sexual violence against female individuals because it is integrated by the confluence of two national power structures which sexualize power relations and legitimize the use of sexual violence as a mechanism to maintain the economical, social, and gender oppression of specific groups.

In this sense, as the protagonist of *Desert Blood*, Ivon Villa, claims at the end of the novel, in both novels, the murders of women in the border zone are essentially interconnected with the protection and effectiveness of the transnational cultural and economic system that nowadays defines the border zone integrated by Ciudad Juárez and El Paso. This extreme sexual violence is a bilateral assembly line integrated by the

interconnection of Mexican and American individuals, and of Mexican and American gender, sexual, power and economic structures:

The threat that pregnancy posed to “free trade” revenue. The heavy policing of female reproductive power in the *maquiladoras* to safeguard that revenue. The use of pregnancy tests to filter the desirable from the undesirable, who were still desirable in another context. The overt sexualization of the bodies –not just murder, but violation and mutilation of the maternal organs, the breast and nipples, the wombs and vaginas. The use of Internet as a worldwide market for these same organs in easily accessible tourist sites and affordable online pornography. A cost-effective way of disposing of non-productive/reproductive surplus labor while simultaneously protecting the border from infiltration by brown breeding female bodies. (Gaspar de Alba 2004, 333)

### **Conclusions of the Third Chapter**

The analysis developed in this chapter does not only demonstrates how *Desert Blood* and *If I Die in Juárez*, by focusing on gender relations and sexual violence in a transnational scale, are examples of recent Chicana narratives which are developing a transnational perspective; but this analysis also shows how these two novels recreate transnational relationships and interchanges that have repercussions in cultural formations and relationships, such as gender notions and sexual practices.

Moreover, the two novels analyzed in this chapter stress how transnational interchanges are not only determined by economic and power structures, but also are gendered, racialized and sexualized processes. In this sense, as suggested by Anna Sisson, Gaspar de Alba and Duarte’s novels understand transnational relationships not only as “the transfer of power and resources from the natural world to the human dominations, from communities to elites, and from local societies to national and transnational centers” (Sisson 2003, 139) but also as the increasing mobility of female labor, and, consequently, as the essential interconnection among gender, sexuality and power and economic structures.

Therefore, *Desert Blood* and *If I Die in Juárez* fundamentally underline how transnational interchanges are sexualized processes in which “women bodies are commodified and circulated along transnational circuits which bring together power and wealth, structure and agency, identity and culture, within a global frame. They are marked by unequal relations between rich and poor (states and classes), between men and women, and between different women” (Pettman 2003, 157). Furthermore, these two novels emphasize how transnational flows as gendered and sexualized processes could produce the reshaping of sexual and violent practices in the contexts where they operate. In this sense, both novels illustrate how transnationalism also could also mean extreme sexual and gender violence or gendercide<sup>10</sup>, and could be a primary factor in the formation of gendercidal institutions<sup>11</sup>.

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<sup>10</sup> This term refers to “the victimization of women and girls worldwide, including the structural forms of violence (“gendercidal institutions”) directed against them” (Jones 2009, without page)

<sup>11</sup> These can be defined “as patterned human behavior, enduring over time, that leads to large-scale, disproportionate mortality among particular gender groups” (Jones 2009, 283)

## Conclusions

The analysis developed in this thesis clearly demonstrates how the three Chicana narratives studied represent an interconnection between Chicana literature and transnationalism. This interconnection is based on the fact that these three novels recreate different transnational formations or networks promoted and integrated by the continuous interchanges between Mexico and the U. S.

In the case of Sandra Cisneros' *Caramelo*, the transnational network is integrated by memories which are dislocated from their original national context and relocated in a different locality. This process is promoted by immigrants' dislocation from their place of origin, and their relocation in another society. Therefore, in *Caramelo*, memories are formations capable of travelling in immigrants' bodies, and, above all, are formations capable of landing on different contexts, and on different bodies. In this sense, the transnational memory network recreated in Cisneros' novel is a process which involves the constant negotiation between two national experiences, and which is supported by these national experiences. In consequence, it could not be identified with only one national context.

*Desert Blood* by Alicia Gaspar de Alba and *If I Die in Juárez* by Stella Pope Duarte recreate the transnational relationships between Mexico and the United States as processes which are fundamentally linked with the formation and redefinition of cultural notions and images. In these two novels, spatial formations, geographical remappings, gender notions and sexual practices are primarily affected by the transnational interchanges between Mexico and the U.S. Therefore, these two novels recreate how these cultural structures could be transnational networks integrated by the collision, negotiation and convergence among the plots, scripts, and ideas carried by transnational flows and provided by different national contexts.

Therefore, the three novels clearly recreate cultural processes which, instead of involving the integration of the Chicana/o experience into specific American landscapes, focus on the current transnational interchanges between Mexico and the U.S. Thus, these three novels represent a significant change of perspective in relation to previous Chicana

narratives. As immigrant transnational studies are not anymore focused only on studying immigrants in relation to their host society, the narrators of these novels are not focused on representing Chicanas/os' experiences and position in the U.S; but they are focused on recreating issues which concern and involve Mexicans, Americans, and Mexican-Americans in similar degrees. Consequently, these three novels could be defined as transnational literary formations themselves, which produce a literary transnational interconnection between Chicanas/os and Mexicans. This means that these novels by recreating issues which concern Chicanas/os and Mexicans as well, such as Mexican national memories or the gender violence in Mexican border cities, are producing literary forms that clearly link Chicanas with what is currently happening in their place of origin.

In this sense, the analysis of these three novels illustrates how recent Chicana narratives are becoming transnational not only by the representation of Mexican-Americans' bicultural experiences in the U.S, but also by the recreation of a transnational perspective, which allows narrators to recreate fundamental topics in Chicana literature, such as memory, space, gender and sexuality, as transnational formations fundamentally integrated and promoted by the current transnational interchanges between Mexico and the U.S.

As such, this thesis does not attempt to argue that all recent Chicana narratives are transnational, but that, nowadays, there are Chicana narratives that clearly recreate a transnational perspective and transnational formations. This implies that in this work, the transition of Chicana literature from a nationalistic-based critic to transnationalism is understood not only as the biculturalism or multiculturalism expressed by post-national literary forms, but as the convergence among recent Chicana narratives which clearly recreate a transnational perspective, post-national literary forms, and nationalistic narratives.

Finally, the analysis developed in this thesis also illustrates how transnational phenomena are not limited to material interchanges, but also imply the convergence, interchange and transformation of cultural notions. As the networks recreated by *Caramelo*, *Desert Blood*, and *If I Die in Juárez* demonstrate, transnationalism also has a fundamental

influence in the definition and redefinition of cultural formations and systems of representation. Therefore, transnational networks and relationships could be defined not only by the quantity of material interchanges among two or more national contexts, but also by how individuals, ideas, and images are defined by the collision and convergence of cultural formations promoted by transnational interchanges. In consequence, as the three novels studied in this thesis illustrate, transnational formations could also be identified and studied in systems of representation such as literature. In this sense, transnationalism is a current phenomenon which is not only affecting and transforming economic, social and political relationships, but also cultural formations, and the artistic representation of them.



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