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*Partiendo La Madre: Borders, Thresholds, and Performances of Crossing Among the
Hñähñu*

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree Doctor
of Philosophy

in

Communication

by

Michaela Django Walsh

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2014

The Dissertation of Michaela Django Walsh is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm and electronically.

Chair

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN DIEGO
2014

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Signature Page	iii
Table of Contents	iv
Acknowledgements	v
Vita	vi
Abstract of the Dissertation	vii
Introduction	1
Chapter One: Paulo and the Birds: Towards a Magical Realist Approach to Ethnography.....	20
Chapter Two: <i>Burlando La Migra</i> : Shifting Conceptions of the US/Mexico Border.....	52
Chapter Three: Hope's Dance with Despair: Globalization, Phantom Houses, and Key Historical Turning Points within El Alberto.....	104
Chapter Four: <i>Partiendo La Madre</i> : Border Aporias and Transnational Belonging.....	144
Afterward: Multiple forms of Return.....	169
Works Cited	185

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Partiendo La Madre: Borders, Thresholds, and Performances of Crossing Among the
Hñähñu

by

Michaela Django Walsh

Doctor of Philosophy in Communication

University of California, San Diego, 2014

Professor Patrick Anderson, Chair

This dissertation explores questions of global and diasporic process, and the physical and imagined geography of the US/Mexico border. My project uses ethnographic methods to study a simulated border crossing experience 700 miles from the physical US/Mexico border, operated by the Hñähñu, an indigenous community from El Alberto, Mexico. I make a case for understanding the border as both a structural impediment to transnational movement and an imaginary signifier that can generate liminal spaces, like in my study, where cultural play, experimentation, and resistance intertwine. I also explore questions at the forefront of border studies: how to join conceptions of the border as symbolic, with an understanding of the border as materially situated, as a bio-political force that is a point of entrance *and* exclusion. Culling from fieldwork that traverses Arizona, Nevada, and El Alberto, Mexico, I explore the border as a site that produces both national identities and transnational communities.

Introduction

Even though my family first crossed the US/Mexico border through Laredo, Texas, it was because of the stories that my grandmother told me that on my second day living in San Diego, I found myself in the southernmost part of the city where the streets narrow, where vendors pedal Popsicles, and where the movement of people is tidal. San Isidro is the busiest land border crossing in the world. Standing on the bridge that overlooks the serpentine line of cars slowly inching north, the bridge that you cross to get into Tijuana, I watched the Mexican flag snapping in a fast wind. I watched vendors hustling their wares through the traffic jam. Suspended above a boundary delineating countries, I felt a sense of vertigo, a nameless kind of loss, and at the same time, discovery. A year later I would return to make a short documentary exploring the border as a semi-permeable membrane – a site where commodities like *lucha libre* masks, ceramic suns, wool *panchos* and soccer jerseys can freely cross into the US, while a majority of the men, women, and children selling these goods cannot. Gathering the stories from border vendors of their arrival to Tijuana, of living “on the other side,” and of failed attempts of crossing, I began to more fully understand the border as a zone of classification, a site of inclusion and exclusion, as a prolonged threshold that marks a place of entering or beginning, and also a point where physiological and psychological effect is produced. But it was by way of a simulated border crossing experience 700 miles from the actual US/Mexico divide where participants can pay to perform “an illegal” for the night, that I recognized more powerfully the connection between foreclosure and the physical and imagined space of the US/Mexico border.

My dissertation fuses ethnographic research, storytelling, and analysis to bring into conversation competing conceptions of the border. Through the lens of a mock border crossing experience hosted by the Hñähñu, an indigenous community from the *altiplanos* of Hidalgo, Mexico, I make a case for an understanding of the border as a fictive, liminal space where cultural play, experimentation, and resistance find formation. As constructed spaces, as idealities, I argue that the very existence of borders are performed and contested through the movement of bodies. Culling from fieldwork that traverses Mexico, the San Diego/Mexico border, Arizona, and Nevada I also interrogate the physical site of the border as a zone of entrance and exclusion that delineates the limits of sovereignty and State control. Each chapter is implicitly linked via a theme of movement. Whether it's the metaphoric departure of *los ilegales* (the illegals) trying to make it to *el otro lado* (the other side), or the physical and imaginative navigation of "homeland/s" by the Hñähñu, the chapters work in synthesis to complicate understandings of "arrival" and "return" against the backdrop of the material and symbolic divide of the border.

Located in the Mexican Highlands, Parque EcoAlberto is gaining international recognition for its *caminata*, or "border crossing walk." During the four-hour *caminata nocturna* (night walk) tourists try to evade *la migra* (border police). Led by Hñähñu guides who perform the role of *coyotes*, *narcos*, and *la migra* (the border patrol), primarily middle class Mexican tourists, and occasional travelers from the US, Asia, and Europe, traverse rocky hills, riverbeds, and brambles throughout the night, as they journey to "make it to the other side." Alternately marketed as an extreme sport and a project in consciousness-raising about the dangers of crossing the border, the *caminata*

nocturna has drawn upwards of 7,000 participants since its inception in 2004. Against the backdrop of an increasingly militarized border and the rampant spread of narco-violence throughout Mexico, I explore how empathy is performatively produced through citizens who pay to perform the “illegal.” As a participant observer of the *caminata* who has conducted formal and informal interviews with Hñähñu who play roles within the simulation, I also consider what it means for this particular group to perform the violence associated with the border, for tourists. The Hñähñu have “lost” 80 percent of their population to undocumented immigration and many have encountered state institutions associated with border enforcement in the US, roles they actualize and embody through performance. Their simulations evoke the violence and brutality as well as the sacredness that is often associated with the border.

For the Hñähñu, their sense of identity is predicated on centuries of cultural, economic, and political struggle against colonizing forces. More contemporarily, migrational flows into the United States and the force of Americanization and urban culture driven in part by network TV and consumerism, are viewed as threats to Hñähñu culture, memory, and language. The *caminata*, according to the Hñähñu, functions as an intervention against the erosion of community. Using methodologies rooted in participant observation, my ethnography explores how this simulated border crossing experience is cauterizing the flow of Hñähñu into the United States, as it generates awareness of the risks of migration among the community’s youth and others via enactments of the plights of crossing. Conducting a discourse analysis of narratives within the *caminata* that are largely culled from Hñähñu's firsthand experiences of crossing, as well as from indigenous cosmology and folklore, I argue that among the Hñähñu performance

functions resistively to promote the transmission of cultural memory, social knowledge, and a sense of identity.

Through my fieldwork I show how the border is (re)imagined as both stitched and threaded across this land of mesquite trees, century plant, and thermal waters. I explore why visitors are compelled to participate in an experience that the Hñähñu publicize as a game of “*burlando la migra*” (tricking, or “making fun” of the border patrol). Exploring the creative, cultural, and experimental performance of the Hñähñu and *caminata* participants, I argue that *la frontera* is a resistive construct against which the actual border comes into focus as a repressive site, a physical zone of entrance and exclusion. I use the *caminata* as a vehicle to argue that as constructed spaces the border depends on the movement of bodies - which are at the same time discursively and materially situated - in order to bring these geographies into existence.

My dissertation also explores how increases in border security are putting new pressures on the tribal delegation of El Alberto, who must now reconsider longstanding laws that were created to preserve the integrity of their community during an era where migration wasn't as policed as it is now. Every eight years Hñähñu men and unmarried Hñähñu women must return to El Alberto to perform between one and three years of unpaid community service. For many, this means playing a role in the *caminata nocturna*. Community service, which guarantees Hñähñu their citizenship and its attending privileges and protections, is for a vast majority, the *sine qua non* of what it means to belong to this pueblo. So strong is the sense of belonging to a place and to a people that for the last thirty years, Hñähñu have been making the journey back to El Alberto to complete this obligation, despite risks of not being able to return to the US. To

fault on one's community service, or to fail to pay the requisite fine for faulting, is to lose one's citizenship within the pueblo. The emphasis on homeland and on maintaining one's roots, even if not physically rooted in a particular place, is especially important for the Hñähñu, whose population in El Alberto is already tiny. It also constitutes a reoccurring theme within the *caminata*, where it is explained that the reason the United States is referred to as *el otro lado* (the other side), is because while Hñähñu migrants may be physically situated in the US, their souls remain in Mexico. This not only speaks to the demarcation and differentiation of geographic space, but also to a type of rupture and recovery at the level of the person who resistively uses the term "the other side" to express and maintain a connection to homeland. Through conversations with Hñähñu who are either in the process of serving (which for many, involves participating in the production of the *caminata*), who are currently negotiating what to do now that their term is up, or who made the choice not to return to their community, I explore how questions of "home," "homeland," "belonging" "arrival" and "return," are variously understood and experienced both individually and collectively across geographic divides.

Border studies usually considers the impact of the border on proximate communities but my research shows that the ramifications of border policy are more geographically dispersed, and more penetrating than this framework suggests. Against transnational perspectives that celebrate the relatively new influence of migrants on nation-state building projects across geographic divides I problematize ideals of mobility and connectivity associated with the "transmigrant" body in relation to the Hñähñu, whose experience navigating borders is not only complicated by their undocumented status within the US, but also within Mexico where structural and institutional violence

against indigenous populations is exacting, and continues to contribute to the centrifugal movement of communities like the Hñähñu to the US. I consider challenges of remaining technologically connected in El Alberto, a remote pueblo where cell phone access is tenuous at best, and where the only dial-up Internet connection is used to manage the *caminata's* promotional website. I consider how decisions to return to the pueblo or to remain in the US are shaping the cultural, economic, and geographic topography of El Alberto, a pueblo that depends on remittances for survival.

My study draws on more than six months of fieldwork among the Hñähñu of El Alberto over a three-year period. It encompasses one week of field research in El Alberto in 2009; one month in 2010, four months in 2011, and one month in 2012. Applying Marcus's idea of the multi-sited imaginary to multi-locale ethnography, this study also includes brief trips to Las Vegas, Nevada and to Tucson, Arizona where I visited undocumented Hñähñu, whose families I met while living in the pueblo. The names of the individuals that I met throughout my investigation have been changed to protect their identity.

In El Alberto I lived with a family from the pueblo that I befriended in 2010. While there, I lent a hand at my host-family's food stand and in the store that they operated out of their home. These two sites provided me access to visitors to the park and to the pueblo's inhabitants. Assisting my host sister in washing dishes, preparing tortillas, and attending to her store where many members of the pueblo buy their bread or milk was one way I gained visibility in the pueblo – not as another foreigner visiting for a week and day to make a documentary, but as someone more permanently attached. Following Dwight Conquergood's call to unhinge traditional ways of doing research in a

risky and intimate move that enacts what Donna Haraway calls “a view from a body” in contrast to “a view from above,” my epistemological point of departure in this study was one “relocation, co-presence, humility, and vulnerability,” of proximity, rather than objectivity (Conquergood, 2002).

By attending celebrations in the pueblo, teaching English in the middle school, joining my host-sister for weekly services at the Evangelical temple, playing soccer, and volunteering to enact “the voice of the *migra*” (border patrol) during the *caminatas*, I slowly earned the confidence of many members of the pueblo, who trusted me with their stories. These are stories of crossing. Of return. These are stories of men and women who have never left the pueblo, but whose sons and daughters, brothers and sisters, now live “on the other side.” These are the stories of children who participate in the *caminata* because they want to understand why their father died trying to cross. They are stories that reflect the strangeness of playing the border patrol in El Alberto one night, and being put in prison the next for trying to enter into the US.

In addition to conducting interviews with Hñähñu men, women, and children, I also spoke with a spectrum of people who journeyed to Parque EcoAlberto, the majority having come not for the thermal baths, but specifically for the *caminata*. In observing closely the cultural production of the *caminata*, by gathering first person accounts where subjects theorized their own practice, as opposed to my imposing abstract theories on them, I offer textured perspectives into the US/Mexico border as a site of representation of human experience and representations of the border that not only attends to subjects and the State, but to transnational productions of community. As interested as I was in getting a sense of people’s perceptions and experiences of the border, the driving forces

behind their choosing to participate in the event, and their reflections in the wake of “crossing,” almost everyone I met, including the citizens of El Alberto, were equally interested in my reasons for being in the pueblo. Another way I sought connection was by making transparent my identity as both gringa and guera, as Mexican American, and student. Straddling the grounds of “insider” via my familial connection to Mexico, and “outsider” by way of my nationality, privilege, and what my nationality privileges, I consciously and unconsciously negotiated the tension of that emotionally and necessarily continual process that Gayatri Spivak calls “unlearning one’s privilege as a loss” (Spivak, 1990).

While I employ fictocriticism as a method to transport readers to the "border crossing" experience in El Alberto, I am at the same time concerned with theorizing the political and performative angles of the *caminata* in relation to contemporary debates within border studies. As participant observer of over twenty *caminatas*, I was offered a window into the discursive dimensions of the *caminata* and, in particular, how the political and performative necessarily meld to produce ever-shifting questions of power, identity, and meaning. The *caminata* I participated in during December of 2009 was not the same *caminata* I experienced in 2012. Each *caminata* varied geographically, spatially, in terms of participation, rhetoric, anguish, and passage. In part, this was because the political landscape within Mexico itself had intensified in new and different ways. With the passing of Arizona’s anti-immigration bill in April 2010, tremendous spurts in the country’s unemployment, the assassination of the gubernatorial candidate within the border state of Tamaulipas by drug cartels, coupled with rampant increases in narco violence and election recalls, the certainty that performance offers via reiteration

and the presupposition of a particular subject was refused entrance.

The performative mode of writing that I weave throughout my dissertation, is itself a method. I suggest a magical realist approach to ethnography as an alternative form of theorizing that works against traditional, deterministic, or positivistic approaches to the study of culture. Its medium is narrative in the magical realist style where fiction and reality converge in a way that yields new insight into what Ramón Saldívar describes as "those vitally human experiences to which the fixed forms of consciousness and knowledge do not speak at all" (Saldívar, 2006). A magical realist approach to ethnography, I argue, is a potential vehicle for giving voice to the "subaltern modernity" of the border. As a methodology, its structure accommodates, attends to, and seeks out the movement of memory – its performative renderings, its fluctuations, non-linearity, and contradictions, that determinist approaches to culture mask over in their inability to deal with them. Thus, magical realist ethnography offers an alternative approach to traditional ways of studying culture, history and memory via a re-articulation and a re-sounding of memory from the bottom-up. My method is imaginative, as well as analytic, and represents the "promiscuous traffic between different ways of knowing" (Conquergood, 2001). Magical realist ethnography, which blends anthropology, performance, border, and literary studies, contravenes between competing epistemologies by finding points of convergence and connection between them.

Ramon Saldívar's exploration into the life work of Américo Paredes affirms the existence of alternative epistemologies that aren't grounded in white, hegemonic, and institutional power. Paredes's work underscores the notion that there are multiple ways of theorizing. By trafficking in story and song, in the poetic and the performative,

Paredes recovers the buried bloodlines of a people that run like fractures through a "shipwrecked history" (Saldívar, 2006). What intrigues me about Paredes's approach is that his methodology is rooted in memory. In an affront to positivism, which seeks to quantify, objectify, and create distance, memory is that which is contested. It's non-linear, illusive, dangerous, and always subject to change. For Paredes, political agency becomes activated in history, literature, and folklore. In *The Borderlands of Culture: Américo Paredes and the Transnational Imaginary*, (2006) Saldívar describes the role of memory as the catalyst of Paredes's theory of history and his poetics as anamnesis: a praxis against forgetting. In conversation with Diana Taylor, Saldívar articulates Paredes's view of history as "an act of remembrance," and thus "not obviously an objective reality: it is also a performance" (Saldívar, 2006). In other words, memory and poetry make it impossible for individual and community to forget its past. It is the experience and exploration of the visceral – a recurring theme in each of these works, and which is integral to my own ethnographic project – that functions as a causeway for alternate ways of knowing and unraveling to be passed down and between generations. This proposition works in chorus with Taylor's claim that memory is that which is embodied.

Taylor, who names her work as an intervention in both performance studies and (Latin/o/a American) hemispheric studies, traverses disciplinary divides. In doing so, she brings these fields into conversation with one another. This move functions as a vehicle to "reorient the ways social memory and cultural identity in the Americas have traditionally been studied" (Taylor, 2003). Stepping back from a Western disciplinary emphasis on literary and historical documents, Taylor questions whose voices we might

newly hear by placing ourselves in touch with the performed, embodied, and "vital acts of transfer" (2003). There is an important relationship between embodied performance, she argues, and the production of knowledge, memory, and identity – themes that Joséph Roach and Ellon Diamond also take up in their collection, *Performativity and Performance* (1995). Similar to Roach and Diamond, whose exploration of cultural memory and performance locates the performing body as a site of catharsis, Taylor sees performance as the bloodlines – the capillaries – through which memory and history come to life. These ideas are linked to my project of investigating the resistive functions of performance and memory in relation to the Hñähñu's recreation of their own experiences crossing the border.

In exploring the dynamic of the archive and the repertoire, Taylor calls attention to tension between written and spoken language, and a tendency to too easily dismiss alternative vantages that the repertoire offers. The repertoire, she argues, involves the circulation of verbal performances, prayers, speeches, and song, as well as practices not verbal in nature. In a similar light, Diamond's work speaks to the relationship between performance studies and cultural studies as contributing a mode for understanding how cultural stories, traditions, and political contestations together contribute to and challenge our notions of history. Roach's description of the circum-Atlantic and the role of memory as forming a site where foreclosures can be performatively unraveled - where the unspeakable finds expression via performances, highlights discursive dimensions of performativity that include questions of meaning, power, identity formation, and agency.

In his article "Performance Studies, Interventions and Radical Research," (2002) Conquergood demands that "unlettered" ways of knowing, unraveling, and apprehending

the world be privileged as knowledge. “The root metaphor of the text underpins the supremacy of Western knowledge systems by erasing the cast realm of human knowledge and meaningful action that is unlettered” (Conquergood, 2002). This textualist force, he argues, must be laid bare. It must be probed, rattled, and disrupted. Mere transcription is an inadequate model for imagining and interacting with the world. It is neither transparent, he states, nor is it politically innocent. Alternate subjectivities and ways of knowing that are expressed through song, through movement, that are etched into stone, painted on our skin, felt deep in our guts, and which reverberate with a primal rhythm and urgency, are too easily discredited. Because Western scholarship is so invested in the text, in words that can be seen, that can be bound – and in so doing, bind an idea of truth, authorship, and authority – those ways of knowing that are not so easily traceable or proven are “seen” as unintelligible.

Against traditional forms of writing, I locate my work in relation to Michael Taussig’s style of fusing storytelling and analysis in a way that transports readers into the folds and crevices of people’s lives. Through this performative mode of address, what Taussig calls “warped storytelling,” discoveries, connections, and insights give way to analysis that would otherwise have remained mute. In *Walter Benjamin’s Grave* (2006), Taussig’s account of peasant poetry in Colombia, a pact with the devil, the disappearance of the sea, and the relationship between flowers and violence, among other pieces, are linked by a performative style of writing similar to Paredes, where storytelling becomes a form of analysis. It is corporeal. It is, Taussig states, formed from a “strange love...love of the wound, love of the last gasp” (Taussig, 2006). Taussig’s transgression of style and method, as exemplified in *The Magic of the State* (1997), challenges traditional ways of

doing anthropology, and in turn "writing it up."

Culling from a need to recognize storytelling as a valuable form of analysis, I use magical realism as a mode for de-centering approaches to ethnography. As a style of writing, and indeed of experiencing the world in novel ways, magical realism has been a channel for the emergence and acknowledgment of new regional literatures, contributing a textured dimension to postmodern and (post)colonial literary histories. Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Faris's collection of essays, *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community* (1995) offers an expansive account of magical realism as not fixed to Latin America, but as an international movement. Contributors explore a breadth of critical perspectives and theoretical approaches to the movement, attending to cultural traditions and individual works that span the continents. The text offers a historical grounding of magical realism. In my work, I use it to locate an intersection between magical realism as both literary mode and approach to ethnography. For example, in her essay "Magical Realism in Spanish American Literature," (1995) Luis Leal teases out the visceral experience of magical realism and its relation to threshold in ways that segue with Taussig's approach to ethnography. She writes, "[i]n magical realism the mystery does not descend to the represented world, but rather hides and palpates behind it. In order to seize reality's mysteries the magical realist writer heightens his senses until he reaches an extreme state (*estado limite*) that allows him to intuit the imperceptible subtleties of the external world, the multifarious world in which we live (Leal, 1995). This "heightening" of the senses functions as a mode of embodiment, and in turn, connection.

The pieces in Sedowski-Smith's edited compilation *Globalization on the Line* (2002) also resonate with my magical realist ethnography. How we theorize the

relationship between the discursive and material components of the border is a question that runs parallel to an ethnographic approach where the magical and the mundane, the real and the imagined, the historical and the political, converge in a living narrative that disrupts and perverts Western master narratives of conquest and progress. "A borderlands," writes Martinez, in his essay "Telling the Difference Between the Border and the Borderlands," (2002) resists its appropriation as either a nationalist symbol or a commodified object used to sell some new version of the melting pot" (Martinez, 2002). In drawing critical attention to the border as a very real, material landscape, Martinez maintains a sharp social and cultural critique of this repressive delineation of space, thereby preventing its dissolution into a theoretical, textualized, fetishized set of practices that relegate the lives of migrants to "the footnotes of history" (Martinez, 2002). It is this struggle between the very real place of the border and the imagined space, and the community and consciousness that permeates this geography, that undergirds what Ursula Bieman, in her article "Performing the Border: On Gender, Transnational Bodies, and Technology," (2002) names as producing so much friction within border discourse. In her consideration of the US/Mexico border, the body is the mechanism through which Bieman retains both ends of the discursive-material chain. This is because for Bieman the body is not only discursively situated, by also materially so. Martinez's arguments underscore the inherent risks of exoticization, textualization, and culturalism, at the expense of politics – something I try hard to avoid in my dissertation. As Martinez states, the migrant's experience is not an abstract phenomenon, but grounded in reality all too easily exploited by the intellectual. This intellectualization bates the creation of an essentialized migrant character that becomes the vehicle, which the researcher

appropriates for her own carrier.

What a magical realist methodology yields is a performative entry point into the embodied and lived reality of a culture and people, which is always mediated through the imagination. In this way, the materiality of the experience that's so important to Martinez isn't sacrificed to a liminal, reductionist stance. By locating the experience of the migrant in lived reality, by collecting the variously textured stories, the rising and falling intonations of voice, essentialism is avoided.

Kamala Visweswaran also highlights the importance of striking down the trap of essentialism. In an effort to disrupt the declarative historiography of realist narrative, in *Fictions of a Feminist Ethnography* (1994) Visweswaran argues for a methodological move towards interrogative ethnographic texts that delay dis/closure and represent their subjects as constantly under construction, rather than as cohesive wholes. She calls into question the relationship between memory, experience, historical record, and written testimony, and tests ethnography's mettle against a subject unwilling to give voice to memory. She problematizes moments of "failure" in the field, arguing that they are productive sites for learning – for reconsidering how categories like class, race, and sexuality might be better illuminated within the context of feminist ethnographies that hold the ethnographer accountable in her effort to represent complex identities that refuse the confines of any of these (and other) categories. Visweswaran calls for a more textured, multi-dimensional understanding of the interactions and intersections between them.

In response to an impasse within anthropology in the 1980's-1990's, George Marcus, in *Ethnography Through Thick and Thin* (1998) proposes the idea of a multi-

sited imaginary as a challenge to traditional ways of doing ethnography, a challenge that I take up in my dissertation. He argues that a multi-sited imaginary applied in a multi-locale ethnography engages a textual cultural deconstruction of the macro by examining the dynamic interplay involved in the circulation of objects, meanings, and identities that unfolds between various locations (Marcus, 1998). Importantly, Marcus cautions that such an approach does not slide into a random collection of anecdotes and descriptions of isolated phenomena. This is where Taussig, Paredes, and Bieman's approaches to lyrically translating their experiences in the field informs my own writing, and allows me to avoid what Marcus warns against. He sees the multi-locale ethnography as providing a postmodern cultural analysis of a system of places by exploring "spatially uprooted, mobile cultural phenomena" (Marcus, 1998). Thus the macro isn't discarded in the multi-sited imaginary and its attendant ethnographic project. Rather, it's displaced from its role as a monolithic global force through which localized cultures and identities are theorized and re-conceptualized as a constellation comprised of cultures and identities spanning place.

This dissertation consists of four chapters, and an afterward.

Chapter 1: I argue that magical realism can be used as an analytic to dismantle binaristic impulses by allowing for competing notions of reality to co-exist. This displacement of Western notions of "truth" compels Western ethnographers and their readers to imagine an alternative world where the magical and the mundane are mutually sustaining. I argue that this is significant for its potential to invite the reader into a deeper, more visceral, and thus more intimate relation to another. The genre also invites us to see the world outside of Western notions of truth and linear causalities. In a

magical realist approach to ethnography, the ethnographer follows coincidences, conjectures, and overlaps, not as isolated events, but as connected. I use this approach to draw the readers into an experience of my dissertation that isn't only theoretical, but that is also corporeal.

Chapter 2: This chapter examines the US/Mexico border as a symbolic and material entity through which the nation, and the border itself, comes into being. Using an ethnographic methodology I explore a simulated border crossing experience in El Alberto, Mexico. Drawing from performance studies, anthropology, border studies, and (post)colonial studies, I use the simulated border crossing as a vehicle for complicating understandings of *la frontera* - and its concomitant real/imaginary binary. I hone in on key tensions within the field of border studies. As a structural entity the border is a geopolitical and biopolitical zone of entrance and exclusion determined by the nation state. At the same time, geopolitical boundaries are also always cultural and symbolic. I argue that the *caminata* is a vehicle to understand borders as metaphoric, conceptual, liminal, hybrid sites where cultural play, experimentation, and resistance begin to take shape.

Chapter 3: This chapter provides readers an historical overview of El Alberto. Touring the pueblo, one immediately notices that the majority of houses are designed from floor plans of big Western, suburban homes that Hñähñu themselves spent years building while working construction in the United States. The cement structures, which rise like phantoms out of the hillside of El Alberto are in various stages of disrepair – their construction stopped for lack of resources. To complete them means more journeys north. Against the backdrop of the physical landscape of El Alberto I investigate key

historical turning points within the pueblo. These include the advent of thermal waters, Evangelical conversions, and government initiatives aimed at advancing the economic integration of indigenous communities into Mexico's nation state, as well as the advent of the *caminata nocturna*. This chapter also begins to explore questions of migration, and how the pueblo has transformed as a result.

Chapter 4: I weave an analysis of the term *partiendo la madre* throughout the chapter – a vernacular phrase in Mexico that literally means “splitting the mother,” but that has many other meanings (fucked, I'm going to fuck you up, hopeless, busted open, severed from home) to address the contemporary cultural and political climate in Mexico generally, and more particularly, the Hñähñu's experience of migration – or separation from homeland. I argue that the dislocation and relocation of the Hñähñu, and of immigrant communities in general, complicate long held notions of “home” and “homeland” as stable entities. The chapter also explores a tribal law that requires citizens to perform between one to three years of unpaid community service to the pueblo. I investigate how intensification of border security has put pressure on the pueblo's delegation to re-vision what citizenship to the pueblo should entail – a question that has broad implications with respect to the future longevity of a community that has lost the majority of its members to migration.

Afterword: Applying Marcus's idea of the multi-sited imaginary to multi-locale ethnography, I traverse Las Vegas, Arizona, and El Alberto to provide a window into how several Hñähñu families navigate distance, desire, and the physical and imaginary process of return to the pueblo. I suggest that the unidirectional focus in migration literature largely ignores narratives of return, be it through the force of memory, the

sensual contact with artifacts sent from home, or through the physical arrival to a place one had physically left behind. Following a Hñähñu family from the United States back to their homeland, I explore both the tensions as well as potential for transnational convergences amongst the newest generation of Hñähñu youth who journey for the first time to Mexico to settle with their parents in El Alberto – a place that for them has only existed within the realm of the imaginary.

Chapter One: Paulo and the Birds: Towards a Magical Realist Approach to Ethnography

In this chapter I argue that magical realist ethnography may provide a mode of ethnographic inscription that resists what Michel-Rolph Trouillot calls the “native slot” (1991). It does this by asking both the ethnographer and the reader to suspend disbelief and to enter into a postcolonial hybrid sociosymbolic system. Both of these steps compel ethnographers and their audiences to displace their imaginations from dominant modes of Western thought by suspending the assumptions foundational to it, and then by displacing its logics with an alternative approach to the interconnections that make up “reality.” I use my story, “Paulo and the Birds,” as a way to explore how an ethnographer might go about stepping into another culture in ways that opens up empathy and new modes of seeing the characters who we meet throughout the course of our own research. This story also looks at how alternately and apparently opposed ways of seeing the world can co-exist by presenting the magical as mundane. As such, it invites the reader to both suspend (Western) disbelief and to occupy an alternative set of accounts for the relationships between events, people, and the forces that act upon them.

Building off of the work of José Limón, Kamala Visweswaran, and Clifford Geertz, who investigate the merging of fiction and anthropology in their own work, in my chapter I investigate the tensions and possibilities of magical realist ethnography. Limón, in his essay “Notes of a Native Anthropologist,” (1991) explores challenges to the “native” anthropologist as he struggles to illustrate subcultures that are shot through with cultural contradictions. This endeavor brings with it a critical response to how these worlds have been cast in a stereotypical, one-dimensional light, as well as an exploration

into how prior ethnographic texts portraying the worlds that Limón explores, shape later ethnographies--his own, in particular. Limón renders palpable cultural contradictions not only by immersing himself within the blue collar dance hall world, but also by writing in a literary style that captures the color and the humanity of the people whom he meets, complete with the contradictions that contribute as much to their culture, as perhaps their culture contributes to and shapes them. His use of fiction allows Limón as the researcher to identify with the characters in his project. What's compelling about Limón's approach is how at times he slides out of the first person, positioning himself as the omniscient narrator. For the halfie, the term that Lila Abu-Lugod uses in her essay "Writing Against Culture," (1991) to describe the person who straddles marginalized cultures and the academy, Limón's work has strong appeal. For those interested in decolonialist ways of understanding the negotiation of positionality and culture, his work also finds a home. However, as reflexive as Limón is, he does not acknowledge, or deconstruct the significance of these imaginative moments. Thus while these moments allow him to identify with the characters who animate the polka dance hall, readers are left wondering what it means that the researcher slides from his own authorial voice as ethnographer into the narrator's voice as fiction writer.

While Limón implicitly draws on the imaginative work of fiction, Kamala Visweswaran renders explicit the connections between ethnography and fiction. In *Fictions of a Feminist Ethnography* (1994), she blurs the distinction between these genres as an arbitrary divide that serves disciplinary purposes to protect anthropology's legitimacy – a legitimacy that is contingent upon the science/creative divide. Merging these genres reveals that truth is produced, and that both of these projects set out to "build

a believable world” (Visweswaran, 1994). When she describes the relationship of fiction to anthropology as more than just a question of genre, but one of history as well, she reveals the constitutive role of both forms in telling us who we are, where we’ve been, and where we’re going. Fixed and fluid positions inherently influence what we see, how we see it, and contribute to determining what is revealed and concealed in our own works. Visweswaran argues that the influence of fiction on the researcher’s life and projects shouldn’t and perhaps cannot be avoided as s/he endeavors to do ethnography. It was Marcel Mauss, she points out, who believed that the anthropologist also plays the role of the novelist, whose task it is to bring to life on the page the existence of an entire society. For Visweswaran, fiction infuses the imagination with color and possibility, allowing the researcher to achieve greater closeness to the subject. This in turn produces the condition that gives rise to the reader’s connection, or perhaps disconnection with the informant cum character, a topic that I explore later in this chapter. Just as that move from subject to character is potentially radical, it is also potentially very problematic for dematerializing the lived-experience of the “other” and falling into the Western trap of textual linearity.

For Geertz, too, the anthropological vocation is a literary one. While he enumerates the risks of merging these disciplines (rhetoric and ideology, a slide into philosophical and linguistic quarrels over concepts, and the risk of aestheticism), Geertz passionately defends the literary influence on anthropology as integral to deepening our understanding, not only of other cultures, but also of ourselves, highlighting what’s distinctive and shared across worlds. He writes, “The risks are worth running because running them leads to a thoroughgoing revision of our understanding of what it is to open

(a bit) the consciousness of one group of people to (something of) the life-form of another, and in that way to (something of) their own” (Geertz, 1988). He argues that although no anthropologist can ever succeed in this endeavor, through their attempts anthropologists and their audiences can achieve an approximation of how it is to be in a particular pocket of the world at a particular moment in time. This is where the capacity to transport the reader takes places. He states, “...all ethnographical descriptions are homemade, in that they are the describers descriptions, not those of whom they describe” (Geertz, 1988). This is not to say that the ethnographer does not have the responsibility to render a person’s voice, life story, and experiences, palpable on the page. To the contrary, the ethnographer has an even greater responsibility to do justice to the stories s/he receives.

All translation, by its nature is incomplete. The task thus becomes to transcribe as beautifully, compassionately, and as thoughtfully as possible what has been entrusted to the ethnographer in such a way that the subject would recognize herself and be able to hear intonations of her own voice in what the ethnographer records. The ethnographer must be aware of her power. In her book *The Vulnerable Observer* (1996), Ruth Behar quotes George Devereux, who argued, “if the nature of what has been observed is to be understood then what happens within the observer, must also be revealed” (Behar, 1996). This is parallel to Jay Ruby’s idea that reflexivity requires the researcher, or what he terms producer, to show the audience what is “backstage.” In his essay “Exposing yourself: Reflexivity, Anthropology, and Film” (1980), he maintains that a reflexive stance requires that the researcher intentionally reveal to the audience her underlying reasons for framing her questions in a particular way. It also requires that the researcher

explain why she sought answers to those questions the way she did, as well as why she chose to present her findings as she did.

In “Anthropology and the Savage Slot,” (1991) Trouillot launches a cultural critique of anthropology. Anthropology was born in a colonialist empire where its *raison d’être* was to research the life of the savage. This sensationalized both the anthropologist and the savage, on whom the anthropologist has come to depend. In his essay, Trouillot questions how the geopolitical landscape and postmodern context is shaping the larger anthropological discourse. He argues that less and less does the anthropologist have exclusive rights to the voice/story of the “native,” who now enters the debate, “not as academics – or not only as academics – but as situated individuals with rights to historicity. They speak in the first person, signing their arguments with an “I” or a “we,” rather than invoking the a-historical voice of reason, justice, or civilization” (Trouillot, 1991).

Further, Trouillot maintains that “anthropology needs to turn the apparatus elaborated in the observation of non-Western societies on itself, and more specifically, on the history from which it sprang. That history, he states, “does not start with the formalization of the discipline, but with the emergence of the symbolic field that made this formalization possible” (Trouillot, 1991). In this piece he calls for a collapse of the author/native dichotomy, and proposes an exploration of the symbolic world that gives rise to the “native.” Anthropology should not be an apparatus that produces the savage slot. Rather, he argues that anthropologists should seek to reveal the constructedness of the relationship of the self and “other,” what he sees as being a “product – symbolic and material – of the same process that created the West” (Trouillot, 1991). There is a

parallel between the colonialist empire of anthropology, and the birth of Communication Studies, a field that emerged in the Cold War era, in part to combat communism by ensuring that poor countries were not too poor. As Armand Mattelart argues, development projects were largely inspired from a fear of communist invasions from Latin America (1994). How then, does a magical realist approach to ethnography answer what Mattelart critiques, and what Trouillot calls forth?

Let me begin by offering a brief overview of magical realism's arrival on the literary scene. While the term "magical realism" was first used in 1925 by the German art critic, Franz Roh to describe a trend in visual art, magical realism, as an autonomous style of literature was first recognized during the late 1940's in Latin America. Its lineage is rich, tracing perhaps even further back than the work of the Nicaraguan poet and writer, Rubén Darío, whose pioneering of the modernist style during the 1800's inspired generations of Latin American writers. In a review of a new translation of Darío's work published in *The Nation*, Roberto González Echevarría (2006) notes that Darío drew deeply from classical mythology, pre-Colombian myths, and the entire field of Western history and culture. Culture, Echevarría maintains, always remains Darío's point of departure, "whether his own inner reality or that of the external world" (Echevarría, 2006). It's widely noted that Darío's *modernista* aesthetics inspired writers like Gabriel García Márquez, Jorge Luis Borjes, and Alejo Carpentier, among others, but following Darío's 1888 publication of *Azul*, the poet and author Celia Correás de Zapata points out that a greater number of Latin American women started writing (Correás de Zapata, 1990).

In examining the pairing of these apparently contradictory terms - magic and realism - Patricia Hart in the introduction of her book, *Narrative Magic in the Fiction of Isabel Allende* (1990), calls attention to “the fascinating conflict of both terms and literary traditions” (Hart, 1990). This conflict, she argues is born of the attempt to authentically reflect the workings of the everyday world, which in turn, is competing with a romantic longing to use literature for a site of transformation or escape. The working definition that she offers to describe magic will be useful as I seek to flesh out a magical realist epistemology for conducting ethnography. Magic, as Hart proposes, is “Any phenomena which produces a sense of wonder in us that cannot be dispelled by what we think we know or what we assume somebody knows about natural law” (Hart, 1990). While western epistemology is grounded in truth and certainty, the project that I’m proposing calls for an epistemological shift away from the scientific and rigorous approaches to doing anthropology. How would ethnography be remade if, instead of searching for the truth of a culture by harnessing the cold, quantitative facts of scientific method, if we approached culture with a visceral sense of awe and wonder? What would we discover in the undoing of our knowing?

In the wake of Visweswaran’s efforts to blur the line between ethnography and fiction, I want to explore what might become possible from writing magical realist ethnography. What would it look like to converge magical realism with ethnography? Here I highlight some points of magical realism that are relevant to ethnographic inquiry. Magical realism finds beauty and magic in the ordinary, and sees the miraculous as mundane. As a genre that inspires an epistemology, it can be used to explore the intersection of different cultures, systems of belief, and understandings of reality,

highlighting how what is ordinary from one cultural perspective may seem magical from another viewpoint. The anthropologist, as Trouillot argues, cannot escape reproducing the savage slot. One of the appeals of the savage is that it is pliable to the needs of the western self. The savage can be “noble, wise barbarian, victim, or aggressor depending on the debate and the aims of the interlocutors” (Trouillot, 2000). The savage, as a trope, or a figure, can be fit to any group. A decolonialist anthropology, and by extension Communication Studies, has to confront its history as having been created for colonial purposes, itself filling the savage slot, which has become its epistemological life line. We are no longer living in the sixteenth century, Trouillot states. Globalization, shifting geopolitical landscapes, the rise of what Arjun Appadurai terms “ethnoscapes” (1996) – these migrating communities that are no longer geographically bound – are all affecting anthropology. The native, or savage other, no longer exists in our panoptic gaze. Rather, as Abu-Lugod points out, the “halfie” is forcing us to reckon with issues of positionality.

“Magical realism,” states Appadurai, “is interesting not only as a literary genre but also as a representation of how the world appears to some people who live in it” (Appadurai, 1996). Because anthropologists are now rehearsed in writing ethnography – we’ve learned from Pritchard, Malinowsky, and Meade, from Clifford, Marcus, Fisher, and Geertz, to name only a few - Appadurai argues that they are well poised to develop an anthropology of representation that not only draws from recent recognition of the political, but also the poetic – that is, the study of imaginative writing. This is significant for its potential to invite the reader into a deeper, more visceral, and thus more intimate relation to the other. The genre also invites us to see the world outside of western notions of truth and linear causalities. Magical realism does not ask the ethnographer to look for

causality, rather it asks the ethnographer to investigate coincidences, conjunctures, and overlaps, not as isolated events, but as connected. According to Appadurai, “Culture does imply difference, but the differences now are no longer, if you wish, taxonomical: they are interactive and refractive...” (Appadurai, 1996). A magical realist approach to doing ethnography can be a way to tap into the nuances – the gradations, texture, and rhythms -- of culture. This approach does away with seeing culture as stagnant, instead recognizing it as complex and colorful, fiery, fluid, mutable and mercurial. I argue that magical realism is a portal for unraveling and understanding differences, and that it functions as an opening for exploring how people outside of mainstream, western, “objective” reality, experience the world.

Cultural anthropologists like Daman Salzman and Russell Bernard who advocate a scientifically rigorous approach to anthropology argue that anthropologists’ heavy reliance on primary data stems largely from the fact that they aren’t prepared to conduct quantitative research when they leave graduate school. Forced to rely on anecdote and impressions, Salzman maintains that what often results is an ethnographic report that seems “superficial, patchy, and unreliable” (Salzman, 2002). Both feel that implementing research methods that prepare students to use computers for data management, retrieval, and analysis, and training students in research design and data collection, will add more stability, consistency, and also credibility to the field. This approach to doing anthropology is remarkably similar to the development discourse put forth by one of the founding fathers of communication studies, Wilbur Schramm. For Schramm and his contemporaries David Katz, and Daniel Lerner, the role of technology and mass communication was to play a germinal role in bolstering education, which would in turn

spark economic motivation in the developing world, thus bringing these underdeveloped countries closer to a more industrialized, western model of society (1964). This discourse, which was put forth in the 1950's, called on western "experts" trained in scientific method, to enter Latin America, where they were to diagnose and treat the socio, political, and economic ailments that were inhibiting this continent's progress towards modernity. Often overlooked even half a century after Schramm's influential book *The Role of Information in National Development* (1964) is the notion that development discourse is a web of relations tied together by power and knowledge. Further, the tapestry of these relations is what determines dominant, discursive practices. But who is silenced in this process? What happens when western experts and anthropologists enter the field epistemologically and strategically prepared, armed with techniques like how to conduct interviews, execute the participant-observer method, and punch the data that they've collected into their laptops? They enter into a tactile situation where everything around them can be quantifiably explained.

The reason that a critique of these "fathers" of communication studies is possible is in part due to the work of scholars like Armand Mattelard, Herbert Schiller, Daniel Schiller, and Christopher Simpson, among others, whose work on the history and theory of communication studies have attuned us to the problems within the field, and specifically how communication studies has historically been a colonialist venture. Their contributions include research on problematizing the history of communication as progress, a move Mattelart makes in his book, *Mapping World Communication: War, Progress, Culture* (1994) by offering an in depth examination of both the social and political stakes of communications, their relationship to the globalization of

communication systems, as well as how the military is caught up in the practice and study of communication. While the critiques each scholar offers sensitize us to the imperialist complicities of communication studies, their work nonetheless falls short of offering intervention into the way research is conducted. Building on their contributions, this chapter functions as a humble gesture towards bending and transforming the way we approach research. Like these communication scholars who work against the dehumanizing processes that run current through the field, I propose that the imaginary and the visceral are powerful forces that can play a central role in forming an alternative vision that might move researchers to view themselves in relation to the Other in new and potentially more humanized ways. Importing the contributions of anthropologists like Visweswaran and Limón who are playing with the relationship between fiction and ethnography, literature and representation, I question how their work can inform a decolonial ethnography within the field of communication studies.

In magical realist fiction, where men cough up bunnies in elevators, angels have barnacles on their wings and are confined to a chicken coop, men fall in love with an ocean wave, and birds protect men from death, the reader's understanding of reality alters to accommodate what's taking place in the story. If, as readers, we don't suspend our disbelief, we cannot follow the story line. And so we lose the intimacies, injustices, the furies, sufferings, and the beauty that course through a people. We miss out on the roots and rhythm that pulse through culture, making it beautiful and unique. What's more, by not being able to suspend our disbelief, we are unable to locate the potential of encountering what is shared across cultures. In order to understand the story, the landscape, the people, we need to let go of presupposition and allow for the possibility

that suspending our disbelief will allow us to immerse ourselves in, and to more deeply understand the culture we are studying. By relying on the cold tools that allow us to quantify culture, we are no better than children who capture and count fireflies, observing them through glass jars as they blink through the inky night, momentarily illuminating our rooms in an eerie light.

While I am not advocating the abandonment of studying advanced statistics, learning how to create chi-squares, or how to make computers analyze and retrieve our data, I am arguing that a preoccupation with these tools, whose function is to allow us to comprehend a culture (that is, to literally clasp our hands around it) can prevent us from apprehending culture (that is, stepping towards and into it). What I am also saying is that all of the technology and institutional preparation in the world will not account for how the anthropologist's positionality affects her research. The production of the "native slot" is inescapable in any attempt to represent the West's other. But how do we say "an impossible no" to this hailing, both in positioning the "native ethnographer," but also in producing the "native"? While Trouillot calls for a dismantling of the native slot, he offers no suggestions as to how to go about doing this. Perhaps, as Gayatri Spivak suggests, this enterprise involves engaging in a process of what she calls "unlearning one's privilege as a loss" (Spivak, 1990). In other words, this slot prevents an intersect where communication, connection, and humanity can take place. As Spivak points out, it is not that the subaltern cannot speak; rather it is that we do not know how to hear them. This is a collective loss. A magical realist approach to ethnography would fall under the rubric of a

sociosymbolic system that could allow the ethnographer to internalize the rules, rituals, and beliefs that comprise a culture, in a way that is not possible when the gaze is focused on the scientific method and attempts to shape our data collection in such a way that it verifies our hypothesis.

The first principle of magical realist ethnography is the suspension of disbelief. It involves observing people as they are situated in their daily lives: riding through the city on a crowded bus, as they vend shoelaces, fortunes, or brooms, kneel to pray, or skillfully shave a coconut with a machete whose curve is like last night's scythe moon. Recognizing coincidences - how the fish scales left on the street after the vendors pack up for the day mirror the stars, how the flower petals that line the streets are shaped like tears - is integral to magical realism. In a magical realist ethnography, investigating these overlaps, not as isolated events, but as connected, allows a point of entry into a sociosymbolic system, within which our experience of reality begins to shift. Hart quotes from David Young's book, *Magical Realist Fiction: An Anthology* (1984) to emphasize the importance of the reader's attitude toward magic. She notes how magical events cause a falling away within the reader of strict notions of what counts as real, and what does not (Hart, 1990). Young writes: "After seeing ice through the entranced eyes of the natives of Macondo in García Márquez *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, we will never take it quite for granted again, and the relativity of "reality" as we know it will have been made clear to us in yet another way" (as cited in Hart, 1990, p.24). For the anthropologist, yielding to this view of reality requires surrender.

As different from author-evacuated narratives, anthropologists like Geertz, Visweswaran, and Limón write themselves into the text. In so doing, their personal

experiences function as a vehicle to engage readers on an intellectual as well as emotional plane. For example, in his work studying the subcultures in a polka dance hall, Limón attempts to broach a creative relationship with his predecessor Américo Paredes, whose collective cultural perspective on the historical period of the *corrido* merges ethnography and fiction via a fictive persona. Just as the omniscient voice is shot through in Paredes's account of the past, where *corridos* were sung with both passion and heroism, so Limón also assumes the third-person position in his own writing as we hear him imagining what the bartender is thinking when a patron orders white wine. "The manager thinks he's onto a new trend, as he will verify later: warm summer nights in the barely air-conditioned *Cielo Azul*, hot polka music, and cold wine. A gallon at \$8.95, twenty cups at \$2.50 a cup. Keeps the *rucas* happy... And if they don't drink it, *se llevo a mi vieja*" (Limón, 1991). Bending the positionality of the author/ethnographer allows Limón to maintain the flow of his narrative while creating a vivid picture that captures the tone of *Cielo Azul*. More than this, the move towards fiction reveals that truth is produced. The idea that the boundaries between fiction and ethnography are arbitrary does not sit well with traditional anthropologists, who want the corner on power and truth in anthropology – a corner that scientific method has exclusive right to.

While fiction, as a literary device, can grant insight into a culture that scientific method cannot, a magical realist approach to ethnography might be the mode to gain insight into the corners of culture that go unnoticed, or that we cannot reconcile as participant-observers in our research. This approach requires that we step into an alternative system of meaning, and in a deconstructive move, allow for the existence rather than co-existence of apparently competing meanings. For example, it may mean

entertaining the possibility that the birds in my story that fly to the ceiling of a cathedral where they try and pluck fruit from religious murals, are in fact alive, and did in fact do this. A magical realist approach to research requires that for the moment, our ethnographic gaze not be trained, focused, or in pursuit of answers. Rather, if anything, it must move around like a lazy eye. The resultant vertigo we experience should not be suppressed, or controlled via scientific methods that Salzman and Bernard call for. Rather it should be embodied.

Dwelling in the spaces that take place at the periphery of our research sites and recording what strikes us at the visceral level allows us to connect to a culture and a people at a more intimate level. These peripheral sites, the street corner where a man's birds pluck fortunes from a box, or the apartment window where a woman stares at the landscape while recording fortunes on slivers of paper in green ink, are the sites that yield the unexpected. What's more, they yield the possibility of drawing us further in and deeper deep down into a culture. Part of the process of unlearning one's privilege as one's loss is allowing ourselves to momentarily drift astray from what we are studying to sink into the quicksand of a culture long enough to begin to apprehend its color and its subtlety, and to begin to explore those "non ethnographic" moments with a soft, rather than a hard gaze. The descriptions that we write from our guts, from way down low, will yield the writing that allows others to connect to the experiences we describe. Infusing the writing with sensory description, imagery, and emotion – writing vulnerably – as opposed to writing from the protection of distance, demands of the researcher as well as the reader, that she step into a multi-colored and multi-dimensional experiential frame.

At risk in a project like this one is the possibility of perpetuating, rather than dismantling the native slot. Certainly one critique of magical realism is that it seizes on and exploits the “other” via a primitivism that then casts the individual, her culture, and traditions in the red glow of exotic fantasies, as dark, distant, and mysterious, as savage, as submissive, as cute, etc. As Wendy B. Faris points out in her piece, “The Question of Other: Cultural Critiques of Magical Realism” (1995) magical realism which is often written in the language of the colonizer tends to reify Orientalist logics through which Europe and the West imagine and construct a superior, unopposed identity. For Michael Taussig, the sense of wonder that courses through the work of such writers as Garcia Marquez, Carpentier, and Asturias, among others, serves to perpetuate the projections of the colonizer onto the colonized. In his book *Shamanism, Colonialism, and the Wild Man*, Taussig (1987) describes how shamanism infuses the imagery formed in the process of colonization through the characterization of wildness and barbarism to the Indians. Through this mimetic process, the colonizer comes to embody the savagery attributed to the Indians. Moreover colonists who rely on Indian shamans for cures and guidance at the same time despise, fear, and abuse the very individuals whose help they sometimes seek. This dynamic has the paradoxical affect of decreasing the utility of Indian laborers who are so brutalized by the rubber station managers that they are no longer productive. In his work, Taussig explores what feeds the colonial imaginary, arguing that magical realism functions as the vehicle through which terror is created. However, Taussig’s analysis of how magical realism is deployed is specific to this context, and does not undercut the potential for magical realism to be redeployed as a positive framework for understanding culture. Moreover, it is the very fact that magical realism is such a

powerful rhetorical device that potentially enables it to move people “without their knowing quite why and quite how” (Taussig, 1987).

The decolonizing potential of magical realism opens up new spaces of meaning that challenge realist modes of thought and epistemologies. In so doing it offers a possibly radical intervention into how we produce and consume knowledge about self and “other” by shifting the epistemological frame that mediates between the two. In what follows I pursue the idea that as an analytic, magical realism constitutes what Faris calls “a kind of liberating poetics” (Faris, 1995). In striking at the foundations of realism, magical realism calls into question the authority, and by extension the authorship of realism. As Faris argues, and as I try to demonstrate, this allows for new forms of discourse that “reflect alternative ways of being to emerge” (Faris, 1995). I begin to point in the direction of the relationship between the move from epistemology to ethnographic praxis, that is the connection between thinking and being. This is a topic for a future paper.

While I did not write Paulo with the intent of fetishizing him, it is possible that I have, or that my audience will read his character in that light. However, through magical realism, which is a genre that grows out of landscape of oppression, perhaps the native slot can be subverted via subaltern voicing and inscription. In the face of colonialism, Latin American writers composed fantastical literature as one way of combating domination. However fantastical, or what came to be termed “magical,” this genre is not escapist. It confronts violence, jealousy, and colonialism (among other topics). Whether it is even really magical may even be suspect, and I think it fair to ask whether or not it is

magical, or if it emerges out of an alternative view of reality, which we in the West call “magic.”

In order to illustrate some of these tensions I offer my story, “Paulo and the Birds.” This piece is an example of magical realism that, in conjunction with my analysis, attempts to inscribe an ethnographic moment that resists, even as it capitulates to, the reproduction of the native slot. It invites the reader to suspend disbelief and to alter her/his version of “reality” and “causality.” I propose magical realism as a genre and an epistemology, which centers and frames the researcher’s lived experience in the field. Taking my own experience as a point of departure, I analyze the characters in this story, along with the writing process that gave rise to it, in order to demonstrate that creative writing is the bridge between the epistemology of magical realism and the lived experience of ethnographic practice.

I’ve chosen to include a large excerpt from this story for a number of reasons. My hope is that this piece will transport readers to a different place, allowing them to see and feel along with the characters. This is something that cannot be done in a paragraph. My story strives to interpolate the reader into the daily routine of the characters who linger with us even after we have set the writing down. There is a narrative arch to creative writing, and I wanted to protect this, as well allow readers to truly sink into and enjoy the actual craft of writing, just as I savored these qualities of Limón and Visweswaran’s work.

* * *

Of all the places he had stood with his birds, Paulo liked the *Calle Victoria*, a long narrow street lined with cathedrals that cast long crisscrossing shadows across the stone

sidewalks. He liked how the great bells would ring the low din of God's heartbeat, which he could feel reverberating inside of him. The *Calle Victoria*, named after a Saint who wept flower petals, brought people in search of solace – some kind of hope, or at least an answer. With his pointer finger, Paulo would gently stroke the neck of one bird and then the other until their eyes closed in smiling slits. Then lowering his face so that he could almost feel the soft tickle of their feathers against his skin, he would make a soft kissing noise. The birds, which were small enough to fit in the breast pocket of Paulo's coat, nestled in his hands. He could feel their warmth. The staccato of their heartbeats. He would touch his lips to the neck of the bird who he had decided would choose the customer's fortune, and the bird would open its eyes, and then blinking them open and closed, quickly bow towards the box.

On days when it rained Paulo would wander in and out of the cathedrals where the sound of people whispering and weeping could be heard echoing off the walls. He would kneel on the cold hard floors with his birds beside him. Then folding his hands into the shape of a steeple, he would pray. For the health of his little birds. For his wife who slowly and carefully wrote the fortunes in fine green ink as she told Paulo their origin while he looked on, listening to her stories and marveling at her concentration. On days when the rain hummed gray, Paulo would genuflect, and covering his birds, pray for sun.

They were a gift from his grandmother who was ironically named *Gatita* for her light blue eyes. Following the death of her husband she began raising birds, and for his fifteenth birthday, she had given Paulo a male and a female parakeet, a pinecone, and a black wrought iron cage.

“*Nunca cortarás las alas,*” she told Paulo.

He had hugged his grandmother, whose hair was thin and translucent like the strands of a spider's web, and vowed to her that he would never, under any circumstance, cut their wings. Even when, several years later on a day filled with thunderstorms, they escaped from their cage in the middle of a cathedral, he did not clip their wings. They had flown in a flurry of feathers and song to the ceiling of the church where they blended in with the paintings of Gabriel and the angels. Distressed, Paulo had waved his hands at the ceiling and whistled. When he realized that he was disturbing the people who were trying to pray he found his way to the statue of the Virgin of Guadalupe, whose cold ceramic feet he touched with his hands. Bowing before her, he thought about his grandmother and the birds. How upon first holding them his breath had caught in his chest. They were so small. In the Cathedral where his own prayers met those of the other congregants in their ascent towards the colorfully painted ceiling, his birds sought the branches of a fig tree.

"Pesan no mas que un beso," his grandmother chirped. She had tamed them with her own hands, and had taken to carrying them in the pockets of her old sweater. The warmth generated by their tiny bodies surprised Paulo, who held them carefully – as though at any moment they might break.

In the cathedral, Paulo had prayed to his Grandmother Gatita, and to the Virgin of Guadalupe that his birds be delivered to him. When his two birds, who were lost in the color of the ceiling, and who picked fruitlessly at the fig tree, heard Paulo weeping, they returned to his shoulders and kissed his ears for crumbs of bread that he fed them through tears.

* * *

The one-sentence inscriptions were sometimes taken from a dream Matilda had, or they were a simple observation she made as she stared out the window of their small apartment. “Always tie your shoes, or you will fall.” This, she had written after watching a small boy skip across the street with his two shoe laces dancing around him like little jump ropes. How would someone interpret this inscription, Paulo wondered. Would the man who paid the bird to pick this fortune be more cautious that day, looking more often than usual at his shoes, or flicking his head left and right and left and right again before crossing the street? He had closed his eyes and was skirting the edge of a dream when his birds began singing loudly. The man who stood before them held in either hand, a pine cone smothered with honey and birdseed.

“Good morning,” Paulo said to the man, who smiled jovially at the birds. “A fortune?”

The man, who wore a finely pressed suit and obsidian shoes that reflected the sunlight set the pinecones down beside the wrought iron cage. Paulo, who was puzzled but grateful for the gifts, rose to thank him.

“*Señor,*” the man said in a voice raspy from yelling or from smoking too many cigarettes, “*Son milagros, estes pajaros.*”

Paulo nodded at the man who was vigorously shaking his hand as though he was an old friend – as though it had been years since they had seen one another. The wind on *La Calle Victoria* picked up and blew the tiny white flower petals that took to the trees this time of year down the streets. They looked like snow. Paulo looked at the hand that gripped his, felt the dry skin and calluses, and thought momentarily how odd it was for such a finely dressed man to have the hands of a worker.

“*Milagros*,” the man was saying. “Miracles.”

Paulo nodded, trying to ascertain whether the man was drunk, or crazy.

“You don’t remember me, *Señor*?” the man asked, releasing Paulo’s hand.

The birds grew restless and danced on Paulo’s shoulders as they eyed the pine cones the man had set before them. A few people gathered, looking on curiously. Paulo, suddenly thirsty, glanced down the street towards the boy who was vending coconuts and thought for a moment about the five fortunes he hadn’t sold. The coconut milk would be sweet and cool. Gingerly, Paulo set the birds in front of the pine cones. He watched for a moment as they plucked energetically at the seeds, their tiny yellow beaks opening and closing in quick blinks.

“*Don*,” the man said, reaching into his pocket. “Last week your birds plucked a fortune for me.” Paulo stood with his arms at his sides watching the man, who was sweating under the layers of his suit. It said, “Today’s lucky number is three.”

The small crowd that gathered around Paulo and his birds and the man had grown. If each person here buys a fortune, Paulo thought as he counted with his eyes the twelve people that surrounded them, then today will be a good day.

The tremor in the man’s voice rose as he repeated the fortune, “Today’s lucky number is three,” and then, “like the trinity, like the Father, Sun, and Holy Spirit.” He grinned at Paulo, “Like you and your two birds,” he said, pulling from his pocket a wad of bills the size of his fist, or of Paulo’s heart. Paulo stared at the man, dumbfounded. “This is for you. I bet all I had and all I didn’t have on the number three because that’s what this little piece of paper told me,” he said, reaching into his other pocket and extracting a thin piece of paper where you could still faintly read Matilda’s handwriting.

Paulo could hear the collective gasp of the crowd. He could hear the high-pitched voice of a woman saying “*Díos mio.*” He could hear a man say, “I don’t believe it,” and another man whisper, “That’s a lot of money.” Paulo, who stood dumfounded staring at the man whose hand remained outstretched, heard the people around him recounting this strange event as though it had taken place years ago, as though they were experts, or somehow participants in the story. Paulo stared at the thick wad of bills in the man’s chapped hands, at the glint of his wedding ring in the sun, and as he listened to people ask one another if the birds were really magic, he felt like an outsider, an observer of his own story, which he himself had written in his head on those slow days where no one even noticed him or his birds.

“Thank you,” Paulo said. “Really, thank you. But you owe me nothing.”

He was picking up his stool, the fortunes, and preparing to leave, when the man in the gray suit knelt before the bird cage and opening the gate, placed the wad of money inside the small wooden box that Paulo built for his birds. Before Paulo could object, invite the man for a beer, or offer him a small feather as a token of his gratitude, the man had walked into the crowd. Before he could shake his disbelief, the crowd of people swarmed around him, and while the bells of the cathedrals dinned the low throb of noon, they threw their coins into his hat and pleaded for their fortunes.

Two hours later when the throngs of people had slowed to only a trickle, Paulo sat on his stool and sighing, leaned against the stonewall of the cathedral. His shirt was soaked through with sweat and his pockets sagged from the weight of the coins he had continually emptied from his hat. One bird rested on either knee and he stroked their necks affectionately, thinking about all of the pine cones he would buy them. They

peered at him through sleepy eyes as he placed one in each breast pocket of his damp shirt. Lifting the birdcage, Paulo walked towards the boy who was vending coconuts. It was a Tuesday. In the center of the city, the cathedrals cast long crisscrossing shadows across the cobbled streets. They looked like broken railroad tracks. As he walked, Paulo swung the cast iron cage at his side, song rising from his chest and escaping his lips in a crescendo of whistles. At the coconut stand, he watched the boy quickly shave the fruit with the dull blade of a machete.

“Is it true your birds are magic?” the boy asked, pausing to wipe his brow with the back of his arm.

All around them people entered and exited the churches where the smell of burning wax tangled with the sweet scent of myrrh. Before Paulo could answer him, before the boy could puncture the white meat of the fruit to make a small hole where he would insert the straw and then hand the coconut to Paulo, who would pay him with an extra coin, the wrought iron cage, which Paulo had been holding, was wrenched from his hands.

Without thinking about the birds that had fallen asleep in his pockets, Paulo lunged towards the thief, who wheeled around in an attempt to escape the grasp that Paulo now had on his shirt. The abrupt motion caused by the struggle to hold onto the thief’s soiled jacket - caused by Paulo’s desperate attempt to regain possession of the cage – jolted the birds from their slumber. He could feel them beating against his chest when he grabbed the thief’s neck. Some of the crowd that earlier in the day had gathered around Paulo to witness his miraculous birds as they plucked fortunes from his coffin shaped cedar box formed a hushed circle around the two men locked in struggle.

When Paulo sunk his fingernails into the greasy skin of the thief, the pressure of the birds' wings against his chest was indistinguishable from the pressure of his heart knocking against his ribs. In his peripheral vision, Paulo could see the boy still holding the coconut, which he was about to buy. He could make out the faces of some of the people in the crowd who had purchased a fortune, who had congratulated him as they waved the sign of the cross over him and his birds, blessing him. The thief, whose knees buckled under the grip Paulo had on his throat, dropped the cage, which clanged to the ground and rolled a few paces away from them. One bird, which had managed to release itself from the pocket of his faded blue shirt, surged towards the sky like a drowning person desperately seeking the surface of the sea. Before Paulo could realize that his bird was gone, the thief, who felt Paulo's grip on his neck weaken, reached into his jacket, and in one motion pulled out a small switchblade, which he thrust into Paulo's chest.

When the knife struck Paulo, he could feel, before he heard it, the crunching of blade on bone. Collapsing to the cobbled ground where he knelt before the thief who still held onto the knife, Paulo's head fell cormorant wise towards his chest where he stared at the remaining bird whose small body blocked the blade from his heart. Somewhere in the distance he could hear the rusty cry of the street vendors selling bananas and watermelons. A stain of blood the shape of a wet stone formed on Paulo's breast, and the thief stared in disbelief at the bird who had managed to emerge from Paulo's pocket, and whose wings still beat fiercely, despite being pinned to his chest.

"Hijo de puta," the thief whispered. His hands were trembling, and he couldn't pull his eyes from the young man who lay supine in the street, blinking back tears at a sky that was now turning the color of boiled cabbage, Peruvian potatoes, or the color of a

bruise. In the span of the moment that it took the sky to swallow the phantasmal mountains that cradled the city, the thief realized the gravity of what he had done. He felt it like a cold, wet blanket on his body, like an ungodly pressure on his chest that made it impossible for him to breathe. And as he stared at the man who clutched the dying bird in his hands in an attempt to calm the incessant and strange flapping of its small wings, the thief fingered the tarnished crucifix that hung on a chain around his neck.

From where he lay in the street, Paulo could see the cupola of the San Sebastian Cathedral glowing against the night that seeped into the city. Later the stars would emerge shivering in the sky, followed by a listing moon. Underneath him the ground was cold and hard. And yet he had no inclination to move; to reclaim the cage, to chase down the thief, or to make his way home to Matilda, who would be at the window, waiting. A powerful heat rose from Paulo's chest, countering the gravity that pinned him to the ground. A gust of wind blew flower petals the color of coconut and snow from the trees, and when they landed on Paulo, they stuck to his wet cheeks. They weighed no more than a kiss. He did not know what had happened to his bird, who during the fight, had managed to fly away. Breathing deeply he held his chest and searched the sky for some glimpse of its form, for some hope that it would return, but Paulo knew his bird was gone.

Turning away from the man who lay in a posture of surrender, or prayer, the thief cast a sweeping glance across the restless crowd that was now gathering around them. Locating the cage that rested an arm's length from Paulo's body, the thief knelt down and reached his hand into the pine box that Paulo had made for his birds. Then taking out the bills, which he quickly shoved into the pockets of his dark jacket, he disappeared into the

crowd. It was a Tuesday. The smell of honey rose from the streets of the *Calle Victoria*, filling the air with a sweet, stickiness that you could taste. Slowly, Paulo made his way to his feet. He picked up his empty box of fortunes and knowing that he had to do it, reluctantly pulled the bird from his chest. It was still radiating heat. Then placing the bird into his empty box of fortunes, Paulo picked up his cage and casting one final look towards a sky now shaking with stars, made his way home.

* * *

I began writing this story while I was doing research on the liberation theology movement in Ecuador. During this time, a solitary space opened itself to me, at times allowing me to observe, to imagine, and to reflect on what was taking place as I moved through Quito. Every day I walked through the center of the city, and every day I passed an old man who presumably made his livelihood selling fortunes plucked from a small wooden box by either of his two birds. Although I could not name what it was, there seemed to me something magical, something poetic about this old man and his birds. The writer in me began to imagine what his life was like. Who was he as a young man? Did he write the fortunes that were in the box? If not, where did they come from? What would I write, I wondered, if I were this man? I pondered him. I dreamed him. He entered my consciousness.

This imaginative process pulled me deeper into my own research, and drew forth questions. Why was the man standing in the religious center of town with his fortunes? Did selling or purchasing the fortunes run contra the church? In conjunction with my research following a priest throughout Quito as he worked to establish and maintain base communities, I began to understand more fully than I had before embarking on this

project that faith is something that does not necessarily take place within the church. Rather it permeates our choice of actions, our way of walking in the world. My ponderings of this man helped me to internalize tenets of liberation theology—primarily that “faith” exists outside of the church, in people’s homes, on street corners, and in unexpected places.

When I did ultimately purchase a fortune, I was disappointed with the manufactured piece of paper that I received. But my fascination with the poetry of birds plucking fortunes from a box, this man’s leathered hands, the one eye that was cataracts blue, and how he lovingly held his birds, which were no larger than his fist, opened my imagination.

The questions that arose as I created “Paulo and the Birds” prompted me to think more reflexively about my own ethnographic work. Did the man on the corner really hold the birds lovingly? Was it my imagination? How do the adjectives I later include in my ethnography color the picture and shape the tone of the moment, the event, or the person that I’m describing? Geertz (1988) underscores how crucial it is that the ethnographer work hard to record as accurately as possible the stories that she is entrusted, the moments she experiences, and the details she observes. Visweswaran (1994) points to the missed moments in ethnography, the failures, so to speak, of the researcher. While I wasn’t doing an ethnography on street vendors, or on this type of vendor in particular, I was doing a project on the intersection of rFabigion, faith, and politics, and maybe this man with his birds had something to tell me. Would it have been possible to get to know him? To ask him questions about his experience, why he chose the religious center of the city, as opposed to the north, which is filled with tourists, and

possibly more lucrative? Why, except in my imagination, didn't I try to engage him? Moments like this brought home Visweswaran's point that our work can never be complete (1994). It also called me to question myself not only as I "gave voice" to the characters in my story, but also as I "gave voice" to Padre Pablo, who was a key informant in my ethnography, and the men and women I encountered as I engaged my research.

Magical realist ethnography also seeks to deconstruct the colonial desire from which it was born – the compulsion to know and master. It strives to subvert this impulse via alternate subaltern voicing, recording, and inscription. Just as Limón, Visweswaran, and Behar write themselves into the text, so I had to write myself into "Paulo and the Birds," but not as Michaela, the omniscient narrator, but as Matilda. In terms of positionality, what does a move like this mean? Is there a way in which stepping into her character allows me to inhabit and overturn, in the double gesture that Derrida refers to, the colonial epistemic structure? Matilda is a subaltern character who has voice. She inscribes what she sees and thinks about in green pen on pieces of paper. These fortunes are not machine-made, or which you can crack open a cookie to receive. Rather in a gesture that speaks to the creativity that becomes necessary when cast into the shadows of the subaltern, these fortunes are created by hand and mind, so that Matilda comes to represent the philosopher queen, writing the world. By writing in green pen, as against the reality of the factory made fortunes, I allow for a subaltern inscription through which her character is empowered. These fortunes are not only purchased by the local community, but also by tourists – including myself.

Alternately, by writing myself into the story do I risk occupying a space that acquiesces to a western desire for the pure “other”? What does it mean that I write myself as Matilda, the woman with the power to speak and write? Is this my idealism shining through? What right do I have? What does it mean if I don’t? These are complicated, uncomfortable questions, which we are called to negotiate as we do our own research. I am not sure that there is a definite answer to any of them. While there are inevitable dangers to “giving voice,” Visweswaran (1994) argues that we risk even greater peril if we swallow our tongues, close our eyes, and retreat into a bell jar where no sound enters and no sound leaves. To do so, to abandon our political struggles, to abandon connections just because discourse is violent, as Linda Alcoff (1998) argues, is not responsible positioning. The stories that we record are always incomplete. Visweswaran (1994) maintains that in the process of trying to give voice, we must also accept the certainty that we will fail in our attempts, but that the fallibility of these projects need not be cause for abandoning them.

I agree with Visweswaran that these soft spots are the places that we should be aware of, not shy away from, but touch with gentle pressure with the hope that they will yield insight. To record, from the Latin *re- cordis*, means to pass again through the heart. It is this compassionate recording that anthropologists like Visweswaran, Geertz, and Limón render in their ethnographic texts, and which allow readers to connect to the people and places they are introduced to, not only at the level of intellect, but also at the gut level. Limón’s approach allows his academic readership to gain access to culture, characters, and community, from which they would be otherwise excluded. Similarly, Visweswaran’s call that we allow ourselves to risk failure and to make ourselves open to

the possibility of intimacy, goes against the scientific grain, and allows researchers to probe deeper into themselves, and into humanity. These anthropological approaches gesture in the direction of Trouillot's call for the collapse of the author/native dichotomy. Their work denaturalizes and reveals the relationship of self and Other by unmasking its constructedness.

One of the risks of merging a literary style with anthropology, Geertz (1988) argues, is that the language will steal the thunder from the ethnographic project. It is possible that the vignette I've included is nothing but aestheticism. Independent of analysis, the language and imagery are seductive. At the same time, the imagery and the characters do not leave you alone. They are not intended to. You wonder about Paulo, what happened to his bird, if he still had pockets full of coins, if the bird that flew away from him ever returns, and whether or not Matilda's fortunes change in light of this event. All of a sudden you are, as I was, pondering about someone's life in a fictitious manner, such that if you were to encounter such a character, your perspective of that person might be altered in light of having read the story. Allowing curiosity in all of its color to deepen exploration is key to any ethnographic project. What would happen, though, if ethnographers entered landscapes not (or not only) searching for laws, truths, rules of a culture, but for coincidences, poetic moments, magic, wonder? If, as Goodall (2000) argues, the goal of fieldwork involves recognizing and expressing patterns, magical realist ethnography invites the researcher and reader to see coincidence not as the absence of pattern, but precisely as pattern.

In this way magical realist ethnography invites both the ethnographer and the audience to question "reality" as we thought we knew it. Even though anthropology

wrangles with its crisis, it is possible that taking experimental approaches, taking risks, and offering alternative modes of writing may open up new understandings and points of connection. There is a lot of work yet to be done on this project. Beginnings, by nature, are fragile. As Goodall (2000) notes, a tension always exists between one's continual unfolding, and the demand for scholarly arrival. This challenge constitutes an integral part of the new ethnographic text. "Writing that tension," Goodall states, "honors the incompleteness, the desire, the learning. It shows the self, and the self's construction of knowledge as a jointly produced work in progress" (Goodall, 2000). What I'm proposing is indeed only a beginning, but I hope that it will blossom into a fruitful approach to studying culture. I offer my ideas as an approach to the field that allows researchers and readers alike a way to engage others in ways that invite us to internalize the culture we are studying by dwelling in liminal spaces. Magical realist ethnography seeks to dismantle the binaristic impulse that is part and parcel of the colonial imaginary by allowing for competing notions of reality to coexist. As such it displaces Western notions of "truth" in favor of a hybrid version of reality, compelling the Western ethnographer and her/his readers to loosen their grip on what counts as "truth" and to imagine an alternative world where the magical and the mundane are mutually sustaining.

Chapter Two: Burlando La Migra, Shifting Conceptions of the US/Mexico Border

In San Diego, *la frontera* extends into the ocean. The metal fence, oxidized by the saltwater, disappears and reappears with the swelling and retreat of tides. It exists equivocally as a trace, on the land, but not of the land. This chapter examines the US/Mexico border as a symbolic and material entity through which the nation, and the border itself, comes into being. Using an ethnographic methodology I explore a simulated border crossing experience in Hidalgo, Mexico. Drawing from performance studies, anthropology, border studies, and postcolonial studies, I use the simulated border crossing as a vehicle for complicating understandings of the border - its concomitant real/imaginary binary, national identity, and notions of home among the Hñähñu Indians, who host this border crossing experience.

Located in the Mexican Highlands, Parque EcoAlberto is gaining international recognition for its *caminata*, or border crossing walk. During the four-hour *caminata nocturna* (journey through the night) tourists try to evade *la migra* (border police). Led by Hñähñu guides who perform the role of *coyotes*, participants traverse rocky hills, cactus pastures, riverbeds, and brambles in this eco-park, which is communally owned by the Hñähñu Indians who live on approximately 3,000 acres of land in the state of Hidalgo (around 700 miles from the US border). The park, which the Hñähñu opened in 2004 originated as a way to offer tourists and locals alike a sense of what undocumented migrants experience in the process of crossing. Alternately marketed as an extreme sport and a project in consciousness-raising around the dangers of crossing, since its inception

in 2004 the *caminata* has drawn upwards of 7,000 tourists – primarily Mexicans.

For the Hñähñu (who were likely the first inhabitants of the central Mexican *altiplano* prior to the arrival of the Nahuatl speakers, circa 1000 AD) their sense of identity is predicated on centuries of cultural, economic, and political struggle against colonizing forces, beginning with the Toltecs, followed by the Aztecs, and then the Spaniards, who replaced Hñähñu with Spanish and a cosmology celebrating the moon with Catholicism. More recently, the Mexican government, migrational flows into the United States, the force of Americanization and urban culture driven in part by network TV and consumerism, are viewed as threats to Hñähñu culture, memory, and language. Against these issues this chapter offers a glimpse into the experience of the *caminata* as it begins to grapple with questions that are at the forefront of border studies, namely how to bring into conversation understandings of the border as metaphoric, arbitrary, as symbolic entities and abstraction, into dialogue with an understanding of the border as materiality situated, as a biopolitical force that is a point of entrance, as well as exclusion.

Through the performative lens of the *caminata* I explore major tensions within the field of border studies. As a structural entity the border is a geopolitical and biopolitical zone of entrance and exclusion determined by the nation state. As Hastings Donnan and Thomas Wilson describe, borders have a “tangible and visible quality.” Many scholars refer to them as “real borders,” in contrast to symbolic boundaries, which lack a territorial equivalent (Donnan and Wilson, 1999). But while geopolitical boundaries are also always cultural and symbolic, Wilson and Donnan, Elana Zilberg, and Americo Paredes, among others, point out symbolic boundaries may not have a correlate spatial dimension. For example, in her scholarship and poetry, Gloria Anzaldúa conceives of the borderlands

as the crucible within which a new politics of identity – at once psychological, political, spiritual, and sexual – finds life (Anzaldúa, 2008). Thus, the challenge within border studies, these scholars argue, is to acknowledge borders as metaphoric, as conceptual, liminal, hybrid sites where cultural play, experimentation, and resistance begin to take shape (Wilson and Donnon, 1999). At the same time, as Roberto Alvarez points out, they are also physical sites where boundaries delineate the limits of sovereignty and state control (Alvarez, 1994).

La Caminata:

The red lights of la migra pulsed against the night. Exposed in the headlights of the vehicle, the phantasma of our shadows were long and strange as we were told to take cover in the brush. Leaving the road we angled into the woods, nothing but stars and a scythe moon for light. We walked single file at a steady pace, the earth forgiving underfoot. Just when the rhythm of our walk had become almost meditative, the sirens flashed against the night. Again we ran. Again we hid. They would have to come into the woods to get us. Under the low arches of branches we lay on our backs, shoulder to shoulder, bodies radiating heat against the cold night. Nobody said anything.

“Michaela.”

Someone was calling my name.

“Michaela y Phillip.”

I crawled out from under the bushes and was joined by Daman, the journalist from Germany who was writing about the *caminata*. We were met by our guide Heladio who, breaking from the performance, told us that this would be a good opportunity to record footage.

“They’ll be coming in from that direction,” he said, referring to those playing the role of the border patrol. Turning my video camera on, I pointed it towards the road, and waited. Sliding back into the performative Heladio retreated into the shadows, but not before telling us that *la migra* would be much kinder because we were there. The implication of this statement was that our subject positions prevented us from fully accessing the horror of the experience. As “foreigners” and as “journalists,” but also as visibly white people, and the only white people in the tour at that, our presence not only made this particular performance a new one – echoing Ruth Behar’s claim that the “observation transforms the observed as well as the observer” (Behar, 2010) – we would never know how the border patrol “truly” act.

During subsequent visits to the park I would have the opportunity to speak with Dario, who performed the role of one of the border patrol agents. He had lived in the United States for seventeen years working construction, and it was more of a home, he said, than the pueblo. When asked what it was like to perform the role of the *migra*, Dario looked at me furtively, as if puzzled by the question. One reason for playing the border patrol was because he could speak English. More than that, he told me, it was fun. “This,” he said, referring to the *caminata*, “it’s not real.” After he completed his year of community service he would return to Las Vegas. Not for the first time, he would make the four-day journey illegally. “If you’re caught,” Dario told me, “you can spend days in jail. But you know, not all the border patrol are bad,” he said. “Believe it or not, some have become friends. But there are those who do what they want.” While he didn’t elaborate on this point, more than once over the course of my summer I watched or read news reports that documented instances in which border patrol on the US side of the

border fatally shot suspected crossers, or denied food for days to pregnant women detained in custody. “Anymore if you’re caught,” Dario said, you aren’t left on the Mexico side of the border. They send you back where you came. So it takes that much longer to try again.”

Across the night came voices crackling through megaphones. The tangled silhouettes of tree branches from the oncoming headlights of the migration vehicles revealed the narrow distance between them and us. One of them was Dario. Barring encounters with the border patrol, this would be the only time on the *caminata* that English was spoken.

“Partner, you see them?”

A conversation ensued between two men speaking in thickly Spanish-accented English. “10-4 partner. They’re out there, partner.”

I wondered who else, besides Daman, understood what was being said.

“It’s dangerous out there. It’s going to get colder.” They were no longer speaking to one another, but to us – the undocumented. “There might be snow. Come out from where you’re hiding. It’s dangerous.”

There was silence. Then the conversation between the border patrol continued, but this time in a performance of broken Spanish heavily inflected by a Western accent.

“Tenemos chor-iso. Muy rico. Muy sabor. Salg-un por com-ida. Nos podemos dar les cob-ias. Esta muy frio. Tus families les estan esperan-do. Sal-gun. No aries-gas tus vi-dus. Hay serpien-etes. Y aryanyas. Les pued-en murir.”

The performance of the Hñähñu performing the gringo border patrol agent is variously captivating. Linguistically, it is a moment where language is exposed as

unstable. At once playful and at the same time wrought with dissonance, Hñähñu agency and resistance surface in this rendering of a border patrol agent who thinks he knows what it will take to extract Mexicans from hiding: sausage, a blanket, threats of spiders and snakes. In this moment of simulacra the Hñähñu make fun of real life border patrol agents, while *caminata* participants hiding in the bushes also share in this “*burla*” (joke). Manifested in this moment are the slippery components of language that Bakhtin celebrates for the “ever-present potential” of language “to mean something else, to betray one set of meanings for another, to slip from one context or set of relation into another's arms, taking carnival pleasure with it, laughing all the way” (Pollock, 1998). In the context of this performance, the Western figure of authority and power is perverted both by the migrants who remain absconded from his vision, as well as by a cultural ignorance betrayed by how the border patrol agent tries to bait the undocumented out of hiding, and the language he uses to do so. This segment of the *caminata* where migrants making their way northward while the sausage-offering border patrol, enacts the layered meanings of the term “*burlar*” - a word whose meanings include: to trick, hide, to make fun of/make an ass out of.

For Homi Bhaba, the undulations of language – its instability – constitutes its very performativity. Here, a type of agency and cultural resistance surfaces among the Hñähñu who remake the sites of their own experiences of crossing, as they simultaneously perform the role of the nation. In *Nation and Narration* (1990) Bhaba, seizes performativity as a vehicle for rupturing totalizing narratives of nation that foreclose the possibility of other tellings. Instead, he “revels in the two-faced, multiaccentual multivalence of representation itself,” (Pollock, 1998). Within the *caminata*, this moment

of trickery, this flipping of faces and performance of the abrasive gringo accent, also functions to mark Western participants, many tone-deaf to the performance of their own accents, as outsiders. In this sense, the joke is also on them. This space of ambiguity becomes a “hidden transcript,” of sorts. Hidden transcripts, “discourse that takes place 'offstage,' beyond direct observation by powerholders,” is the term coined by James Scott to describe the symbolic political resistance mobilized by the subaltern (Scott, 1990). In contrast to the public transcripts, which constitute an outward performance of deference and respect towards the powerful, when located behind the scenes - outside the surveillance of a gaze that can exact punishment - “a sharply dissonant political culture is possible” (Scott, 1990). Within the *caminata nocturna* - a journey that takes place in the nighttime, and across a landscape that doesn't belong to the State, but to the Hñähñu who know the contours of this land that constitute their belonging to a place and a people, the rumblings of dissonance and discontent rise up through their clever maneuvering of language and via performances of authority, which depending on the audience, can function simultaneously as a “behind the back” and an “in your face” critique of power.

Reverting from their renditions of Western-accented Spanish back to English, the tone darkened.

“You hear something partner?”

“I hear something.”

They continued in English. “I’m telling you three people died last week. It’s dangerous. You won’t make it. There are snakes. And water. People drown. Let us help you.”

After a long silence the empathy-laden rhetoric shifted. In a dramatic restatement

of Althusser's street scene, the border patrol directed their bellowing calls towards the tangle of shadows where the group huddled against trees and under branches.

“Come out you Mexicans!”

A rapid series of loud pops punctured the air. Orange sparks flew through the brush. And then men dressed in military fatigues descended into the woods holding powerful lights. They strutted slowly, peering into the night, taunting us with threats and insults.

“Dirty Mexicans. You wet backs. You won't make it.”

The venom behind these words, their steady repetition, and the force vibrating in the voices of the men dressed like soldiers, was palpable. This was a reclaiming, and it was strategic in a way that is different from how “queer” has been re-appropriated as a means of self-empowerment. Within the context of the *caminata*, the repossession of the derogative “wetback” or “*espalda mojada*,” functioned tactically to accent the psychic and visceral terror experienced in crossing, as well as the historical memory of Eisenhower's Operation Wetback.¹

There were more loud pops, and at this two people – a young man and woman who were not in our group – darted out from the shadows and ran towards a clearing. They were shoved back and forth between four men, who asked them where they were coming from. The “illegal,” who was more of a boy, looked to be around sixteen. At first he said nothing. He stared at his feet; the shoulders of his slight frame curled in cower. The woman, maybe a sister, a cousin, or girlfriend, was also silent.

¹ In 1954 President Eisenhower sought to cut off illegal immigration along the US/Mexico border. He mobilized 1,075 Border Patrol Agents in an effort to remove illegal immigrants. The sweeps, which began in California and Arizona, were not unlike those experienced today with stopping of “Mexican looking” people, raids of Mexican neighborhoods, and crack downs in agricultural areas.

“You trying to cross?” one of the patrol asked.

When the boy said nothing he was flung to the ground. The young woman watched as the border patrol pretended to kick at him until he admitted that they were indeed trying to cross.

The ugliness of the performance - whether exaggerated, imagined, or true to the Hñähñu's own experiences – was in large part propelled by rhetorics of terror, racism, and fear. Was this performance by the Hñähñu intended for privileged Westerners like myself, for whom the border between the US and Mexico exists as a permeable membrane, rather than barrier? In the cold wake of the *migra*'s departure, the rest of the group emerged from hiding. Nobody said anything.

The contrast of the beginning of the night riding in the back of pick-up trucks with the other participants in the *caminata*, to the aftershock of having collectively and silently witnessed the performed apprehension and beating of “fellow undocumented” was extreme. Earlier in the night while we waited for our guides, a small group of classmates taking a long weekend off from their university snapped photos of one another and shared pulls from a plastic bottle of vodka. The two Germans and their friend who was an advocate for immigrant rights in Mexico City kept to themselves. When I asked Daman about the angle of his article, he told me he thought it perverse that people would participate in something that was specifically meant to be unpleasant, and would pay to do so.

“*Oye, pollero!*” one of the students shouted, hanging from the gazebo. “*Llevame a Nueve York.*”

At some point the guides appeared. They all wore black masks. And they seemed

to materialize out of nowhere. We were asked to gather in a circle and to announce where we were from. I turned on my video camera. The Germans took photos, and it was only through the illumination of the flash that I was able to see our guide's eyes.

“I want everyone to hold hands,” a masked man directed. “Hold them tight.”

Tall, broad shouldered, he wore a sombrero, which distinguished him from the other two guides.

“The only way we can make it to the other side is if we work together, with honesty and valor. With dignity. Do you know why it's called the other side?” Heladio asked. He repeated the question. “Why do we call it the other side? We call it the other side because even though our bodies are in the United States, our spirits remain here in Mexico. Our hearts remain here. Our thoughts remain here.”

Heladio's explanation of why the United States is called *el otro lado* not only speaks to the demarcation and differentiation of geographic space, but also to a type of rupture and recovery at the level of the person who resistively uses the term “the other side” to express and maintain a spiritual connection to homeland. This emphasis on homeland and on maintaining one's roots, even if not physically rooted in a particular place, is especially important for the Hñähñu, whose population in El Alberto is already tiny. However, given the qualities of our contemporary historical moment, or what Zygmunt Bauman calls “liquid modernity,” the notion of homeland, and of homeland in relation to identity, must be re-explored (Bauman, 2000). Bauman deploys the metaphor of liquidity (mobile, difficult to pin down, its molecules are in constant motion that must be contained by a structure if they're to stand still at all) to account for a shift from pre-existing social forms seen as solid (fixed, stagnant, enduring, impenetrable) to

contemporary social forms, which are marked by their fluidity. Lisa Malkki in her article on territorialization and national identity among scholars and refugees, argues that the symbolic and sedentary concept of roots, conceived as the umbilical cord linking people to place, must be “denatured” and re-explored in the context of this postmodern moment (Malkki, 1992). It is a “global social fact,” she states, that “people are chronically mobile and routinely displaced, and invent homes and homelands in the absence of territorial, national bases – not in situ, but through memories of, and claims on, places that they can or will no longer corporeally inhabit” (Malkki, 1992). These rhizomatic rhythms that mark the movement of a people – the swings, sighs, and unexpected twists, turns, creations, and combinations – stands in contrast to the fixity of arborescent belonging, which Guattari and Deleuze critique as totalizing, unidirectional, and incapable of dovetails and new direction (Malkki, 1992). Given, as Malkki suggests, that we often think of ourselves in “botanical terms” – as having roots that connect us to place – and that it’s in primarily aborescent terms that we understand our belonging, the primacy that Heladio accords to maintaining spiritual connection to Mexico unearths the importance of the meta/physical as it shapes our identity and understanding of “home.”

Américo Paredes’s conception of “Greater Mexico” as linked to a notion of belonging that transcends geopolitical boundaries, also attends to this tension. With the Mexican diaspora multiple rhythms of culture, tradition, language and song that were once unique to a people and its geography begin to pulse within and throughout cities everywhere. The hybrid of two Mexicos, one existing within the Republic of Mexico itself and the other outside of this territory, constitute a Greater Mexican community that is able to transcend imaginary divides via an embodied understanding of culture

expressed through ritual, manifested in folk art, song, and within the imagination. Thus, imagination cannot exist only within the private sphere. Rather, as Ramon Saldívar describes, it participates in the work of the social imaginary at individual, local, and collective levels, thus complicating notions of identity and belonging. In Paredes's theory of Greater Mexico, seen as "an imaginary space of real political and social effect," where traditional notions of citizenship and state membership are continuously challenged, the production of national history is rewritten from the periphery (Saldívar, 2006).

Through his conception of a Greater Mexico and in his poetics as anamnesis – a praxis against forgetting – notions of belonging are refigured, but not from the deficit of the "abject" and "excluded" body. Rather, they are formed from the empowered position of one daring "to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger" (Benjamin, 1937). Where then, do the Hñähñu, whose first language is not Spanish, and whose relationship to the soil, whose upbringing and beliefs, differ from those of the *Chilango* or *Tapatio*, fit into this idea of Greater Mexico? Given its 31 states and the sixty-plus indigenous languages spoken throughout Mexico, maybe the idea of "little mexicos" attends to the complexity and diversity of the country in a way that the idea of Greater Mexico does not. I see little mexicos as rising up spontaneously in people's homes, their gardens, and on street corners everywhere. They are multiple, fleeting, spatially mobile, and they don't presume a contiguous territory like the nation state. Where Greater Mexico – as a political project – might be limited by the uncritical uptake of the Mexican nation-building project, little mexicos don't have a telos that seeks to recreate the nation in its own image. The spatial dispersion of little mexicos – in contrast

to the nation state, which defines itself against demarcated boundaries – is scattered, temporally fleeting, and impossible to contain. As such, there is room within the discourse of little Mexico for the Hñähñu, Taptio, Chilango, the halfie, the queer, the multi-colored and...

In El Alberto our collective gaze was fixed on Heladio. Except for a slight breeze rustling the leaves of the tree we had gathered under, there was only the sound of his voice.

“There are borders everywhere,” he said. “Borders between here and there, borders that we carry inside of ourselves. This journey tonight is to give you a sense of what it’s like to cross. It’s not the real thing.” Before one of the guides handed him a backpack, he asked for two volunteers. “You guys don’t have to carry anything, but if we were really crossing, you would be loaded down with provisions.” In this meta-narrative moment Heladio called attention to the constructedness of the *caminata*, momentarily breaking with the performance, but also leveraging it to invoke indigenous cosmology, social relations, and a critique of recycled stereotypes of Mexicans as lazy. These themes would be repeated in subsequent *caminatas* by different interlocutors, each articulation slightly different, depending on the crowd, depending on the night.

Two students stepped forward. Asked by Heladio to reach into the bag, they unfurled the Mexican flag. The emblem of the eagle clutching a snake in its mouth – the Aztec symbol of where Tenochtitlan, the lake-island, Mexico City, the center of their empire was to be established – was illuminated in the night by the repeated flashes of Daman’s camera. While the flag symbolizes conquest of the Hñähñu, it simultaneously marks their endurance as a community whose capacity to adapt to the flux of historical

forces has ensured their survival. This survival is no doubt founded upon both the root preservation of their language as well as an indivisible understanding of the soil, land – *la naturelza* –and *abolengo* – ancestry – which, even within moments of the *caminata*, assumes a dramatic form, itself becoming a character, an anchor in unfolding narratives of past, present, and future. It is the “center.” Within the shifting context of globalization, convulsive migratory northward flows, the force of Americanization and urban culture driven in part by network TV and consumerism, all of which pose threats to Hñähñu culture, memory, and language, it is one’s identity as Hñähñu that binds the individual to place: Mexico.

“Before we leave,” Heladio said, “I want to propose that from here on out, we are all Mexicans. Is that alright with you?” he asked of the group. Nobody said anything. “Raise your hands if it’s okay with you.” Hands were raised. “Now,” he said, as though baptizing the three outsiders, “We are all Mexican nationals.” In subsequent *caminatas* drawing people in the hundreds, this initiation was replaced with pride-laden, crowd-rousing speeches. “As Mexicans,” one of the coyote’s would call to the mass of people, “They expect us to fuck up.” By “they,” did he mean Westerners, the Mexican government, those in power? “As Mexicans,” he continued, hands cupped around his mouth so that his voice would carry, “We often do! We can’t just do nothing. You’re lucky if you finish the fifth grade here,” he yelled, referring to the almost non-existent educational system in rural communities like El Alberto. “I didn’t go to school,” he yelled. But it doesn’t mean I’m not going to fight! We can’t give up.” Although the majority of *caminata* participants belong to a middle-class demographic, many of them having received university education, the coyote’s rally cry, his evocation of a “We”

functioned to level the playing field, erasing differences in class and opportunity at the same time as it called attention to these very things via his own declaration of never having gone to school.

With Heladio in our small group of fourteen, where three of us were obviously non-nationals, our initiation to become “Mexicans for a night” was also a performance in crossing. In a twist that highlighted our positionality, Heladio excused the newly elected “citizens” for not knowing the country’s anthem. Then he initiated several spirited rounds of the song, each one louder than the next. “Mexicans, at the cry of battle lend your swords and bridle; and let the earth tremble at its center upon the roar of the cannon... But should a foreign enemy profane your land... Think, beloved fatherland, that heaven gave you a soldier in each son.” Watching Daman flash photos, I thought about how the language in the Mexican anthem is not so different from that of the anti-immigration movement, where the presence of the other supposedly compromises your resources and purity. In the next moments, the anthem would be broken by the voice of one of the guides commanding us to run.

In his article *Tourist Performance in the Twenty-First Century*, (2011) the *caminata* becomes the focal point through which Scott Magellsen theorizes the tourist experience as a route to embodied knowledge that is acquired in part through visitor-performer agency in the simulation. He writes, “...in the making of meaning in these performances – in their ability to make choices in the development of the narrative, in their agendas or the “horizons of expectations” with which they approach the experiences, and the autonomous “readings” they might assign the narrative – there is considerable slippage to be found between the meanings intended by the producing

bodies (the ecopark, the museum, etc.) and the bodies that perform them” (Magellson, 2010). While he attends to one of the key tensions within El Alberto – that the *caminata* is supposed to still the outward migration of the Hñähñu, but doesn't really, Magellson's “autonomous reading” of his tourist experience betrays his inability to savor the type of slippage that Bhaba celebrates, and that the Hñähñu enact. While the *caminata* makes for a compelling chapter in his edited book, *Enacting History* (2011), much of the time Magellson misses the point. At the conclusion of his piece, he writes: “in the actual experience of the *caminata* the border patrol came off as buffoonish, the bravery of migrants was celebrated, the thrill of the run was exhilarating, and the car chase scenes were just plain entertaining...” (Magellson, 2011). Perhaps it's because of his self-admitted rusty Spanish, or that he participated in only one *caminata* before leaving the park, that the symbolism, subtlety, and at times overt jokes are out of Magellson's reach. Or maybe it's because even though at the outset of the *caminata* when all participants are nationalized under the Mexican flag to make the experience inclusive, that there always remains an “outside” and an “inside” of nationality. While Magellson apparently knows the Mexican national anthem, which he says he “belts out...over and over again” alongside other participants at the outset of the *caminata*, for me, the experience of outsider and insider was underscored – not for the first time and not for the last – in that moment of being called to sing. Trying to belong, I stood there mouthing the words, pretending like I knew them.

In El Alberto, where, primarily for economic reasons, around eight percent of the Hñähñu population has migrated to Nevada, Utah, Arizona, and Florida, the community struggles to maintain its integrity. Tribal law requires members to return to the pueblo

every eight years to complete between one and three years of social service. This obligation seemingly protects against the dissolution of community. But with the reinforcement of border security, exit and re-entrance have become much more difficult. To leave is to risk death. To “arrive” is to risk never returning. The notion of “arrival” as perpetual displacement is a theme that runs through borderlands literature. As Manuel Luis Martinez interrogates in his piece, “Telling the Difference between the Border and the Borderlands,” (2002) for the migrant body the notion of arrival is constantly deferred. This is particularly so for migrant farm workers where alliance, community formation, and political presence are constantly disrupted and exploited by the force of movement. This movement, against Western notions of individualism and a celebration of the American mythos of mobility, is not a choice. Drawing from Dario Galaraza’s literary works and research, and from Tomas Rivera’s haunting book *Y no se lo Trago la Tierra*, (1971) Martinez argues against the romanticization of the borderlands that he sees articulated within Gloria Anzaldua’s *Borderlands/La Frontera*, (1999) within which “the new post-structural geographical trope...is populated by liminal figures, hybrid border-crossers, and migratory subjects,” which valorize “‘border crossings’ that take the form of mobility, liminality, and hybridity” (Martinez, 2002). There is a difference between the border, Martinez seeks to argue, and the borderlands.

The US/Mexico border is a biopolitical zone. To paraphrase Giorgio Agamben, these geopolitical sites demarcated by rivers and walls, by the invisible gaze of surveillance technology, by the visible gaze of minute men patrolling the border in this “post-panoptic” (Bauman, 2000) moment, represent the soft spots of humanity; the physical, embodied sites where raw power confronts, presses against, into and through,

bare life (Agamben, 1988). Along the *caminata* at the Parque EcoAlberto, the border is (re)imagined as both stitched and threaded – braided – across this land of mesquite trees and cactus pastures where thermal rivers run hot from the throat of mountains, drawing tourists from around the country. Through creative, cultural, and experimental performance, *la frontera* is at once metaphoric, a resistive construct against which the actual border comes into focus as a repressive site, a physical zone of entrance, exclusion, escape, as well as a place where stereotypes are re-inscribed and transformed. For example, at the outset of the walk, the untrustworthy subject position of the *coyote* undergoes a transformation. The *coyote*, or *el pollero* who, within native mythology, assumes the shape-shifting role of trickster, scavenger, thief, and survivor, leads (primarily “his”) paying *pollos* – chickens – across the border. The word *pollero*, which not only connotes the individual that keeps and sells fowl, can also mean “gambler.” Barring their reputation in Western cartoons as the bad guy, among the undocumented *coyotes* are also viewed as heroes and saviors, without whom reunion with family in the US would not be possible. Perhaps in response to the aggressive media campaigns launched by US immigrations offices in Mexico and Central America criminalizing “human smugglers,” the *coyotes* in El Alberto sought to inscribe a different understanding of the men and women who navigate land and law to deliver their clients to “the other side.”

The negative stigma of the *coyotes* who might at any time trick, rob, rape, beat, and abandon you along the trek – is upturned in Heladio’s emphasis on alliance, solidarity, and the importance of working as a team along the journey. “We make it together, or we don’t make it at all.” Against a neoliberal emphasis on the individual,

Heladio shifted attention to the roll of the collective, which for the Hñähñu, is constitutive of survival. This emphasis on the collective and an invocation of Catholicism, Evangelicalism, and indigenous cosmology is also figured in Heladio's critique of Darwinism. "We're not descended from monkeys, like that guy Darwin said. This isn't about being the strongest one that survives. Nature is divine. We are all children of God. And we will be protected from what's out there." After a dramatic pause, Heladio continued. "On this walk, nobody leaves the other behind." This last statement was also a practical and moral reminder to look out for one another, and it took on even more importance in the context of later walks when a stampede mentality was sometimes unavoidable as hundreds of people ran and walked and hid together. It may be that by emphasizing the figure of the *coyote* as a trustworthy and experienced guide, and by having a woman *coyote* also leading the *caminata*, that any potential uncertainty felt by participants in relation to these masked figures and this unknown landscape is dispelled. At the same time, the stereotype of the *coyote* as a male trickster is replaced with a new understanding or humanization of the *coyote* as also being female and, perhaps more importantly, as being an ally. While the subject position of the *coyote* is reconfigured, so is that of the undocumented; *los pollos* -the chickens, also assume a previously unacknowledged agency. Though vulnerable, they are neither dumb nor passive followers. They are responsible for themselves, but also for one another.

My experience and interpretation of the coyote differs from that of Magellson, who describes Heladio, in his "sinister-looking black ski mask" as having "no trouble in getting us to obey." In part, he writes, "because our very safety, if not lives depended on following his every direction" (Magellson, 2011). Magellson continues, "he was also

arrogant and demanding...as though he elicited pleasure from our discomfort and vulnerability...he had us wrapped around his finger the entire time. Vulnerable and in the dark, we wanted him to like us...We were at his mercy (Magellson, 2011). This sensation of vulnerability and frustration comes off in Magellson's piece as a critique of the coyote, who it later turns out, as Magellson states, "had been lacing in crude sexual allusions and digs about women" (Magellson, 2011). In the twenty-plus *caminatas* that I participated in, I never experienced this as the case. Whatever Magellson's experience, in this moment he fails to turn the corner on his critique and reflect on what the *caminata* intends to do: provide a glimpse of the realities that undocumented border crossers often navigate on their northward journey. Although the masks worn by the coyotes may come off as intimidating, there are practical reasons for putting on the costume.

The press that the *caminata* has received since its inception has included a mini-documentary produced by National Geographic, visits from Televisa (Mexico's largest conglomerate), and write-ups in newspapers from Germany to Japan. Within the US, the *caminata* has been written about in the New York and LA Times, and across websites advertising adventure tourism. As costume, the masks function to distinguish the guide from participants. Another reason that masks are worn is because of the negative reactions that the *caminata* has generated on the US side of the border. These have included accusations that the Hñähñu are running a "training ground for illegal aliens," irate commentary demanding that US politicians get more serious about keeping "these people out," and ironic suggestions that the Hñähñu charge "an extra ten bucks" to "offer an authentic Ciudad Juarez Experience," cut their heads off and hang them from a bridge with a crudely written message" I was told that in the wake of such reactions the ski

masks also protectively preserves the anonymity of those playing the coyotes.

In her article, “Playing at Border Crossing in a Mexican Indigenous Community...Seriously,” (2011) Tamara L. Underiner suggests another function of the mask, pointing to their symbolism as representative of the nameless/faceless coyote that many undocumented crossers may encounter. She extends her analysis, stating that it is also a symbolic gesture to the Zapatistas whom, as she notes, have been staunch and innovative defenders of indigenous rights. To very briefly contextualize, on the same day as the 1994 passage of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN), led by anonymous spokesperson *Subcomandante* Marcos, declared war on the Mexican Army in an attempt to undermine the treaty's fair trade goals, and to protest the nation's mistreatment of indigenous peoples. Within Chiapas, already Mexico's poorest state, the adoption of NAFTA meant that the land indigenous communities had been constitutionally promised after the Mexican Revolution, could be purchased by multinational corporations. This move allowed Mexico to partially pay back the approximately 51 billion dollars that the US loaned to supranational banks who attempted to steady the value of a plummeting peso. The subsequent revolution that occurred in Chiapas was, according to *Subcomandante* Marcos, deliberately timed to coincide with the signing of NAFTA, which he named, “a death certificate for the Indigenous peoples of Mexico” (Barta, 2011). Underliner, who participated in three *caminatas*, describes her ultimate visit:

Here, in this territory, Heladio's mask serves a tacit reminder of the Zapatista critique not only of the Mexican government, but also of the place of the indigenous of the whole neoliberal world order. On my last visit, when Heladio arrived on the scene to deliver his opening remarks,

the chant “Marcos-Marcos-Marcos” - a good natured but possibly with a tinge of irony – went up among the assembled group of some 200 young adults, mostly from Mexico City (Underliner, 20).

The parallel that Underliner and *caminata* participants locate between Heladio and *Subcomandante* Marcos is interesting, in part because of each man's subject position, as well as their unique relationships to indigenous communities to which neither actually belongs. Barring certain personal details that *Subcomandante* Marcos has disclosed of his own identity – that he was raised in a middle class family where reading and learning were celebrated - and barring public knowledge about his role's in the mid-1980's serving with the Sandanistas in Nicaragua – the “real” identity of *Subcomandante* Marcos remains conjecture. By refusing to show his face, he undercuts and simultaneously augments his own identity (Klein, 2001). Embodying a “non-self,” as Juana Ponce de Leon points out, “makes it possible for Marcos to become the spokesperson for indigenous communities. He is transparent, and he is iconographic” (Klein, 2001). The black mask, according to Marcos, is a mirror that reflects the individual and collective struggles of humanity. He states: “We are you. Marcos is gay in San Francisco, black in South Africa, an Asian in Europe, a Chicano in San Ysidro...a single woman on the Metro at 10pm, a peasant without land...an unhappy student, and of course, a Zapatista in the mountains.” His simultaneous transparency and invisibility allows him to be a conduit for the plight of the indigenous in Chiapas, and more generally, for those who for one reason or another, have been broken. Just as Marcos performs the voice of the indigenous communities in Chiapas, there was a time when Heladio also seemed to be the voice of the Hñähñu of El Alberto.

Although from Ixmiquilpan, the closest city to El Alberto, Heladio's affiliation with El Alberto was initiated while his wife was doing a project in the pueblo for credits towards her Masters degree at the University of Ixmiquilpan. Prior to the invention of the *caminata*, Xocil Galvez who at the time was Secretary of the CDI, honed in on El Alberto as a pueblo with resources that could be turned into capital. Almost the entire pueblo receives governmental support in the form of roughly fifty dollars a month. Galvez's hope, as stated during the inauguration of the water plant, is for this community to one day be self-sustaining. Before the water purification plant was actualized and before the *caminata* was imagined, three things happened. With CDI support, a road connecting El Alberto to the neighboring pueblo of Cantinela, was created. Around the same time money was also being filtered into El Alberto to create the infrastructure for what is now called the Gran Canyon. This included funds to support the construction of cabanas, an open-air restaurant with a flat screen TV, sporting equipment like kayaks, boats, ziplines, and protective gear for the “extreme sport” camp that the Hñähñu sought to create.

The actual idea to utilize the land for the purpose of adventure sports originated from a Hñähñu man, Pato. During his year of community service he began to use his 4X4 trucks to ferry tourists across parts of the river Tula, a thrill that later gave way to imagining how the landscape could further be transformed into an adventure park. Pato, who worked professionally as a coyote, also developed the concept of the *caminata*. But because of his undocumented status, and also because of his line of work, he couldn't publicly take credit for the *caminata*. However, Heladio could. And did. During the height of the *caminata* when the event was drawing upwards of two hundred tourists a night, Heladio performed the lead coyote, ironically – Pato's real-life job. Charismatic

and poetic, Heladio – who remained masked for all of his interviews, not unlike *Subcomandante* Marcos – became the spokesperson of the *caminata*, and of the experiences of those Hñähñu who make the journey north. The outsider status of Marcos and Heladio, and even that of Xocil Galvez, who is not from El Alberto, but who advocates on behalf of indigenous communities, becomes more interesting when considering whether or not significant, sustainable social change can only occur from the bottom-up, or if outside intervention – whether in the form of interlocutors, government aide, or both, is also necessary. In the case of the liberation theology movement that celebrated momentum throughout Latin America beginning in late 1960's, before losing its strength following the collapse of the Eastern Block, the failure of the Salvadoran revolution in 1989, and the 1990 electoral defeat of the Sandanistas, one question that arises in the wake of the movement is whether or not social change can occur from the “outside-in”².

Among the primary factors contributing to a growth of agency within communities throughout Latin America at this time was the emergence of base communities - small lay-lead groups that met in people's homes to read, discuss, and

² Widely viewed as the “father of liberation theology,” the Colombian priest Gustavo Gutierrez's manifesto, *A Theology of Liberation*, (1973) joins theology with sociopolitical concerns in a condemnation of oppression as a violation of humanity and of God's will. In his book, Gutierrez interrogates the social, political, and economic conditions that perpetuate the exploitation, hunger, and misery of a majority of Latin American's. Against theologians like Jacques Maritain, who drawing from Thomas Aquinas, sees the vertical path to God figured in the contemplative life of prayer, Gutierrez assumes a revolutionary stance within the Catholic Church, and advocates that the horizontal movement figured in concrete social action is the way to manifest “heaven on earth.” He maintains that merely praying for the salvation of the malnourished and miserable is not enough. Rather, it is by entering the world of the marginalized, sharing in their faith, and identifying with the fury of their struggle that one becomes a neighbor in the gospel sense of the word. To walk past the wounded, ignore the hungry, and to turn away from those whose dignity – whose humanity – has been robbed from them, is turn away from Christ, whose image is reflected in the suffering bodies of the poor.

interpret the Bible as it applied to their socio-political and spiritual circumstances. As these communities organized and increased in number, as they began to rise up against the oppressive hand of the Church and the government, so these institutions counteracted these bottom-up gestures towards social change in titanic measures that included assassinating priests and nuns, as well as men and women within these communities. I include this context not only because of its importance within Latin American history, but because one critique of the movement, as well as one proposed explanation for its subsequent “failure,” is that it was imported.

Although many of the movement's leaders were originally from countries throughout Latin America, they were trained in Europe alongside political theologians who at this time were calling for “an enlightenment of the enlightenment.” These priests and sisters, upon their return to Latin America, would take the helm in establishing base communities to fuel grassroots change. What Gutierrez contributes to the equation is not only an opus of literature that he has written on liberation theology, but also alliance in the form of praxis. This is something that *Subcomandante* Marcos³ has been able to achieve, and that Heladio, was not. Appearing in photos in the New York Times and the LA Times, the masked Heladio had become somewhat of a celebrity. But unlike *Subcomandante* Marcos, Heladio was asked to separate himself from the community. Whether it's because the Hñähñu, who have been self-described as insular didn't want someone from the outside wielding power within, or because the Hñähñu themselves are a humble community where no “one” face takes the credit for communal efforts, or for

³ Although it remains conjecture, the Mexican government alleges that during his high school education at a Jesuit school in Tampico Tamaulipas, Marcos first became acquainted with liberation theology. This would have been during the height of the movement.

reasons other than these, I don't know. While I talked to Heladio briefly after my first *caminata*, when I returned to El Alberto he was no longer there. My assumption was that he had returned to the states, having served his community service.

At the risk of halting the narrative flow of descriptions of the *caminata*, I have included this background information about Heladio's status within El Alberto's community for various reasons. The first is to call attention to the assumptions and errors that often arise when one enters and exits a community within the span of a day or two, hoping to come away with enough material to compose an article, a chapter, or to make a "short." Writers, film crews, and scholars like myself run the risk of misunderstanding that can lead to misinformation. A key mistake that many who have reported on this particular site have made is assuming Heladio's belonging to the community. Dwelling in El Alberto longer than a day or two would dispel this notion. Another significant error is the notion that the *caminata nocturna* receives – or has received funding – from the Mexican government, which for writer's like Magellsen and Underliner, becomes a juicy point of departure for theorizing Mexican nationalism, which exists in part because of the very presence of the border. Magellsen writes, "One must remember, this is a coproduction with the Mexican government, which has footed part of the bill for the development of the park and its feature program" (Magellsen, 2011). According to the park's accountant, secretary, and "jack of all trades," who is the woman you talk to if you are the Times, Nat-Geo, or scholars like Magellsen and Underliner, the *caminata nocturna* has received zero funding from the Mexican government.

"This is purely the effort of the Hñähñu," I was told. "The patrol vehicles, the flashlights, everything that goes into the production of the *caminata*, has been paid for by

the Hñähñu community in El Alberto.” Even those performing community service have to foot the bill of their uniforms for whatever role they play in the *caminata* – something that's not easy when you have no income.

While publicity is important to Parque EcoAlberto, even if it isn't always accurate, it is also, as Augustin told me one morning, tiring. I met Augustin on my first visit to El Alberto in 2009. He had given me a lift to the bus station in Ixmiquilpan, where he was also heading in order to buy a ticket to Sonora. In 2011 when I met him for a second time, I had been living in the pueblo for just over a month, when a film crew from Mexico City arrived to document the *caminata*. I watched as Augustin, clad in camo for that night's tour, answered the crew's questions.

“Yeah, you're always scared that the INS is going to come,” he said, when asked about his experience living in the US. “I crossed over in car,” he told them. “When I was a kid. The first time we were caught. The second time we made it. That was when crossing was easier. In the *caminata*, I'm the border patrol,” he said. “The idea is to give people a taste of what migrants experience.” Behind the lights of the film crew, his nine year old daughter looked on while trying to control her two year old brother, whose attempts to get to his father, was disturbing the composition of the frame. What Augustin didn't say was that before returning to the community at the end of 2009 to begin his community service, he hadn't been back to the pueblo since he was a kid. Nor did he say that the children behind the crew were his. He didn't tell them that his first week back in El Alberto, that his wife, who had just given birth, contracted swine flu in Utah, where they lived. Blinking at the lights of the film crew, he told them that the *caminata* was a simulation. And that he was selected to play the border patrol because he speaks English

fluently. Augustin didn't tell them that he brought his daughter to the pueblo with him. This was so she could meet her grandparents and cousins for the first time, and also because he wanted her to learn Hñähñu. He didn't tell them that the hardest thing about doing community service was that he didn't have any money, or that besides performing the border patrol, he worked during the day at the Grand Canyon ferrying tourists on boats down the river Tula, running ziplines, and helping build cabanas. He didn't tell them that when his wife got sick, he tried to return to the states by legal routes. He didn't have the seven thousand dollars it would have cost to pay a coyote. And even if he did have the money, he couldn't risk getting caught and going to jail – not with his wife so sick, not with a newborn son, not with his daughter in El Alberto, not with his hope of becoming a US citizen. Augustin's petitions to return to Utah to be with his wife were denied. And his third week in the pueblo, she died. A cousin drove his son from Salt Lake City to the Sonora border, where somehow, the boy was passed across to Augustin, who then rode in bus with his son, all the way back to El Alberto. These things, he didn't say to the crew.

“They come and they go,” he told me when I asked how he felt about outsiders like myself coming into the park for their projects.

As a commodity, the *caminata* and to some extent, the Hñähñu, have become objects of consumption. While I was living in the pueblo a French film crew arrived at the park for the second time – the idea behind this visit was to make a film about how the fictive elements of the *caminata* bleed into lived experiences of the Hñähñu, as told and performed by the Hñähñu themselves. The two women pioneering the project received a grant that enabled them to hire two French actors, two Mexican actors, and a film crew

comprised of French and Mexican Nationals, a Mexican guide, the purchase of camera equipment, the rental of a van, and a two-week stay in El Alberto. In addition to paying for food and accommodations for the actors – an economic boom to the pueblo – the women also made a three thousand dollar donation. In exchange, the tribe's delegate and sub-delegate required that all Hñähñu men who played a role in the *caminata* also be available to the crew, who would film from 5 pm – when most of the men got off of work for the day – until 11 pm. A light evening meal would be provided. At first there was excitement. Maybe fame would come as a result. What followed was resentment, helplessness, and anger. Night after night the fifteen or so men had to tell their stories of crossing – some very painful. And then together with the imported actors, they had to perform and re-perform these experiences (sometimes upwards of twenty times) until the “take” was right.

“It's ridiculous,” Emilio, who is also Augustin's first cousin, told me. He had also just returned to the pueblo, having lived in Utah his adult life. “We work all day, and then we have to come here at night. And play this game.”

Participating in the film had become part of the mandatory community service. Whomever chose not to participate would be fined 100 pesos a day, a considerable amount when factoring that one doesn't receive pay during community service, or that the average daily wage in Hidalgo is around that much.

The French women – one of whom didn't speak very much Spanish – had rented the sub-delegate's house – a two story, furnished, and finished project, the kind that few actually complete. Until 5 pm when filming began, the women kept mostly to themselves. In a pueblo where the majority bathe in their clothes, on some afternoons you could see

them sitting shirtless by the side of the public swimming pool. Fixated on finishing their project, they didn't take into account the stress that their film had exacted on those who were essentially forced to participate. For David, who has five children, time with his family had been sacrificed to this project. Midway through the production, people started to quit. On the day filming came to a close a small party was thrown. That same night the French women and their film crew (with the exception of the actor and actress from Mexico City who made friends and wanted to stay to celebrate) returned to the nation's capital. They promised to send a copy of the edited product back to the park in March. That was over two years ago. And since they left, I was told, nobody has heard a word from them.

“They get what they need, and then they leave,” Augustin told me. From his cell phone he was showing me a trailer that one crew from Mexico had produced. This was prior to the arrival of the French crew, at a time when I had just started to ride in the border patrol vehicles on *caminatas*. My role was to perform the voice of the *migra* – to chat back and forth with Augustin on our search for “illegals”. Staring at the tiny screen of the cell phone, at the throngs of young men and women running through the night, I heard my own voice.

“I see them, partner,” I said in English. I have a read on a group of fifteen aliens. Stop!” I yelled into the hand held device that boomed my voice across the canyons. The following day my host sister’s nieces and nephews would told me they heard me on the *caminata*. “This is the US border patrol,” I yelled. “This is the United States border patrol! Go back to where you came!”

My experience riding in the border patrol vehicles and performing *la voz de la*

migra (the voice of the border patrol) was distinctly different from the first time I participated in the *caminata*, where I assumed the role of the “illegal alien” that I would later pursue.

On my first *caminata*, we hurried behind a lithe woman who urgently commanded us to move quickly. The lone light of her flashlight cast shadows across the dirt.

“*Por alla,*” she whispered, ushering us into the ruins of a building. We crouched, our backs against the wall as she waited for the rest of the group to join us. There in the half-darkness Heladio told us to be quiet and still. And then he asked us what our dream was. By this he meant our point of arrival. Heladio’s earlier analysis of the geographic and internal divides that come with the territory of living on the other side – *por el otro lado* – suggests that even if one does make it successfully into the United States, that arrival, not unlike the shifting landscape of the dream – an experience which can only, if ever, be partially translated, exists in a perpetual state of suspension and uncertainty. Susan Bibler Coutin calls these liminal zones “spaces of non-existence,” which “derive from the conflation and disjuncture between physical and legal presence” (Coutin, 2000). In other words, citizens are assumed to be geographically located within particular national territories, and it is because of this physical presence that they are granted legal rights. Without legal authorization to live in a certain country, one is “legally absent” (Coutin, 2000). One becomes “homo sacer” (Agamben, 1998). She describes the “space of non-existence” as both imagined and material. At the same time that these spaces are culturally constructed, they are “real,” she states, “in that the practices that make people not exist have material effects ranging from hunger to unemployment to death” (Coutin,

2000).

The notion that one can never fully arrive, as in “get there, land, enter, appear,” – concepts that connote a physical place (land/earth), possibility/futuricity (entrance/exit), as well as recognition and acknowledgment (visibility, appearance, entrance) – pushes up against an enduring hope for new found freedoms (geographic, political, economic, social...) that are configured in and often conflated with a promise of “arrival.” Heladio’s articulation of *el otro lado* as the experience of physically existing in one place while imaginatively embodying another, speaks to the experience of exile and exodus. Exile, as Ira Nadel describes in his work *Joyce and the Jews* (1989), connotes dislocation and rupture. It is an experience figured in a sense of homelessness and a longing for return to one’s origin. In contrast to exile, exodus implies direction and agency, which in the Judeo tradition, gives way to emancipation. The distinction between these words, as Nadel points out, rests in their roots. While they share the same prefix, “ex,” which means “out of,” the suffix of exile (*exilium*) is the root of the word banishment. In contrast, *hodos*, the suffix of exodus, means “way” (Nadel, 1989). This connotes path, direction, or promise. The exilic condition, Nadel argues, is figured in “enforced estrangement” from a past that one seeks. It is characterized by yearning, and loss.

In many ways, the immigrant body is one marked by various forms of enforced estrangement. This is captured in the experience of the individual who by seeking asylum, can never return to her country. It’s captured in the experience of those families who have built a life in the states, but who are then deported to a “homeland” more foreign than familiar. “Expelled,” writes Nadel, “the exile thinks of (her) displacement as only temporary, and constantly recalls (her) earlier home” (Nadel, 1989). In his analysis

the exile is sent away, retreats, or is banished “with no goal or purpose to pursue” (Nadel, 1998). This is an analysis that strips the individual of any agency and thus the exiled individual embodies the figure of homo sacer. Deprived of recourse to juridical protection, mostly inhabiting society’s periphery, the undocumented migrant body is vulnerable and disposable. In contrast to the exilic condition, exodus, as Nadel describes, is an act of freedom that speaks to the re-inscription of destiny as being one of purpose and self-fulfillment. While it’s important to maintain the distinction between the two, in the case of the undocumented migrant, I see these conditions as more intimately linked than Nadel suggests. Granted Nadel’s analysis focuses exclusively on the marginality and exclusion experienced by European Jews, in the case of the undocumented (Mexican) body, might it not be that dislocation and rupture, – the conditions that Nadel assigns to exile – are also the very circumstances that give way to exodus: a “path” guided by new understandings of freedom, purpose, and self-fulfillment? It may be that the and growth of Parque EcoAlberto and, in particular the conception of the *caminata* – which is birthed from the painful labor of a people’s dislocation – subverts traditional notions of exile through its formation of new paths, both figurative as well as literal.

Throughout the night our ensuing exhaustion was on occasion startled away when hands would reach out from the bushes and grab at us. For Magellsen, the “wild pig-snorts” coming from the bushes, “was a low-tech haunted-house thrill...but it generated a visceral bodily reaction all the same” (Magellsen, 184). In his chapter, Magellsen concentrates on how the *caminata* elicits corporeal reactions that produce greater personal and emotional engagement as they perform what Diana Taylor calls “vital acts of transfer.” It’s this co-presence according to Magellsen, that makes the *caminata* so

powerful - “we gave framing to the experience,” he states, “and co-produced its points (Magellssen, 2011). Indeed, as Conquergood points out, “performance, because it's embodied – is a way of deeply sensing the other” (Conquergood, 2002). I agree with Magellssen that the participatory element of the *caminata* – the physical exertion that it demands – is part of what makes it so powerful. The description of his experience participating in a reenactment where visitors pretend to be slaves escaping from bounty hunters and slave drivers on their northward journey to freedom, speaks to a similar production of empathy that takes place within the *caminata*. Of the slave reenactment, he writes: “...even though my body and those of my fellow group members did not match those of nineteenth-century black slaves, by being made abject and discomfited (though in a necessarily less traumatic manner than in the original), our bodies more adequately bore witness to the lives and trauma of those who had gone before than had we pursued history from a comfortable subject position” (Magellssen, 2011). The exertion of the *caminata*, the physical stress of running through the night, wading through mud, navigating ascents, crawling on your knees under barbed wire and through cement tunnels, not only registers corporeally, but also psychically. “The body and its specific behavior,” writes John Fiske “is where the power system stops being abstract and becomes material. The body is where it succeeds or fails, where it is acceded to or struggled against. The struggle for control, top-down vs. bottom-up is waged on the material terrain of the body and its immediate context” (quoted in Pollock, 1998). This physical – and by extension, psychic struggle – is what makes the *caminata* so powerful.

The border, whatever one's previous relation to it, suddenly becomes closer, more immediate - more intimate. The convergence of movement and exertion evokes the

resilience and fragility of our mortality, as well as the infinite possibility for transformation that's marked by the imagination. Not unlike the magical realist analytic that I propose in Chapter One, disbelief is momentarily suspended. In the context of this “extreme sport” the body stutters in struggles and strides towards an untranslatable threshold – the border embodied. This visceral sense of awe and wonder, this merging of the political act of crossing with the poetic, opens new spaces of meaning that frame an epistemological shift in how knowledge between self and other is absorbed and transmitted, produced and consumed. Within this process, performance functions as what Taylor calls “a (quasi-magical) invocational practice” (Taylor 143). The term performance – itself inadequate – at once implies “a process, a praxis an episteme, a mode of transmission, an accomplishment, and a means of intervening in the world...” (Taylor, 15). The very idea behind the *caminata*, that it is physically experienced, that it is waged from the bottom-up – which is to say from the lived experiences of the Hñähñu and their communal efforts to raise consciousness around their own histories of crossing, are details that *must not* be overlooked. For this reason in particular, erroneous claims by Magellsen and others that the *caminata* is sponsored by the Mexican government, is problematic. It detracts from the cultural agency of the Hñähñu by shifting attention away from the bottom-up resistance this community has waged, and instead emphasizes a top-down narrative of power.

It's Magellsen's inability to suspend his own disbelief that gets in the way of his experience – and later his analysis – of the *caminata*. For example, he describes the hands that reach out from bushes in the darkness to startle participants during segments of the journey as being no more than a “low-tech haunted-house thrill, to be sure.” Because he

is caught up in a critique of the production of the *caminata*, the potential symbolism that this moment expresses is lost to him (one wonders if Magellens would be satisfied if he was kidnapped and fake tortured). At this point in the journey when one's body – disoriented, tired, vulnerable – is startled into hyper-alertness by hands grabbing at it, who, except for the western academic for whom Halloween figures only as part of *his own* culture, would think to compare these symbolic gestures to a “low-tech haunted-house thrill”? This moment calls to mind questions of how ethnography – and by extension, academic writing – can be reshaped and opened up. If instead of searching for the “truth” of a culture via the examination of cold facts (how many people have migrated, how many have returned, etc.), if instead of chasing the tails of a story for the purposes of career advancement, if instead we relinquished our thirst for teleological closure, and dwelt for longer than the sound bite of a heartbeat in the sites of our arrival, how might we sense our surroundings and the people we encounter anew?

In the wake of the *caminata*, what I couldn't help but wonder, and where Magellens doesn't even venture, is to question what the “low tech haunted house thrill” of those hands reaching out from the bushes represented. In subsequent incarnations of the *caminata*, the Hñähñu would leave nothing to the imagination. Instead of hands reaching out from the bushes, Hñähñu men now performing gang members would run at the crowd with pistols screaming at us “to get the fuck down, motherfuckers,” as they looked for a certain *coyote* who had ripped them off. “Who knows where Hector is!” they would shout. “Motherfuckers, where is Hector! He owes us.” Our cheeks to the ground, we would watch sideways as they shot him execution style and then disappeared into the night. Later, we would come face to face with a pack of drug traffickers. At gun point,

they would make us get on our knees. Many of us would huddle on our sides, knees tucked to chins.

“Who wants to join us?” the lead narco, played by a man named Mario, asked. “Come on assholes, we're looking for someone to help us pass *mota*.” Popping a round of real bullets into the air from one of his guns – he used to live in the US, where he worked cleaning guns during the Gulf War – he shouted at us. “Do you know what the colors of the Mexican flag represent? Do you know what they stand for?” The flag, which is divided by three vertical bands of color, are popularly understood to represent hope for the future of the pueblo (green), unity among the Mexican people (white), and blood spilled by Mexicans in the war for independence (red). Clad in a sombrero, a flannel shirt, and jeans, and still pointing his rifle to the sky, Mario’s questions were met by silence. “Weed, coke, and blood,” he yelled. “Now who wants to join us?! There's money for you!” At this point, a young Hñähñu man pretending to be part of our group stood up and ran in the opposite direction of Mario. One of the narcos fired shots at him. He fell face first, just paces away from us.

Before there was time to process what had taken place, before mothers and fathers who brought their children on the *caminata* could offer comfort or assurance that what just happened wasn't “real,” we would be urged to get up, to keep walking, to run.

While the performance of violence within the *caminata* captivates its participants' attention, making it especially more exciting for thrill-seeking teenagers and college students, the recent spikes in drug-related violence along the border have influenced a shift in the intensity of what's performed in the *caminata*, and how. For example, in the wake of the August 26, 2010 massacre of 72 migrants at the hands of drug lords trying to

recruit smugglers, the role of the *narco* took on added importance within the *caminata*, as they would appear not just once, but throughout the journey – always with guns, and always with threats.

Within the *caminata* thieves (and here, I am not speaking of *narcos*) were alluded to through the physical action of hands reaching out from the shadows to grab at participants, but their presence as a real threat to border crossers did not play a role in the performance. It was along the San Diego/Mexico border while volunteering for the Desert Angels, and not in El Alberto, that I learned about crooks preying on crossers.

The Desert Angels are a humanitarian group based in San Diego that makes treks through the rugged terrain of the north side of the border, leaving provisions as they search for undocumented who have become lost trying to cross. At the US/Mexico border, *Don Rafael*, the organizer of this group, made it a point of showing us the different spots where *los ladrones*, or “the crooks” were known to wait. On this day, we were five – a fellow graduate student, two volunteers from *Don Rafael*’s church, and a sixteen year-old who joined these searches two years earlier after a family friend died along these mountains. In contrast to the cool night along the *caminata* in the Mexican highlands, on this afternoon along the San Diego/Mexico border the pressure of the sun elongated our shadows. Along this division, this long stretch of dry land stitched with threads of barbed wire distinguishing “here” from “there,” “legal” from “illegal,” this invisible zone made visible by the scars of wire, *Don Rafael* explained how thieves use the landscape to their advantage. From the height of the hill, with their presence absconded by boulder-sized rocks, they have the vantage of perspective.

In San Diego we left bottles of water along the wire. Then we hiked along

embankments of rock searching for a man whose family reported to Don Rafael that they hadn't heard from him for over a week. The man's trek was supposed to take four days; a tremendous contrast to the three to five hour hike experienced along the *caminata*, where ten kilometers is nothing, and where arrival is guaranteed. This contrast shores up a significant difference between the border as imagined, as performed, as a place where style, even in the terms of the performance itself by Heladio, the other *coyotes* and the "undocumented," and the writing that attempts to document this journey, may sacrifice substance to romanticism and image. According to Customs and Border Protection Agency's most recent end-of-the-fiscal year report, there were 416 border-crossing-related deaths from January to October 2009 (this does not include 390 deaths in 2008 and 398 deaths in 2007). (Cardenas, Carroll, Dominguez and Stalbaum, 2010). With *Don Rafael*, we followed vultures circling the air, looking for the dead. In El Alberto, we paid to perform the "illegal."

700 miles from barbed wire and chain link fences, low flying helicopters and surveillance cameras, we gathered on the edge of the river Tula. The following morning, tourists would kayak its slow moving current, last night's landscape transformed by the daylight. Here, Heladio asked us once again to gather hands. In the center of the circle he told us that we were surrounded by the sacred. "The rocks, the sky, your connection to nature," he said, is "ancient and profound...it is what connects us to this place, and to one another." Despite a pronounced decay of indigenous tradition within Hidalgo, especially when contrasted to other regions in Mexico, attention to the land, body, and the night, all figure within the *caminata*. For example, within Otomi - or Hñähñu tradition - night is represented by Otontecuhtli, the fire god, who makes a symbolic

appearance at the end of the *caminata*. One of the oldest Mesoamerican deities, he is “the preeminent lord of nocturnal spaces and grottoes, the realm of an imaginary world that mirrors in miniature the world of humans” (James, 1984.) This understanding of night as imaginary realm that parallels the presumably “waking world” of humanity reflects an inter-fusion of reality and fiction, a suspension of disbelief and a concomitant willingness to believe – dynamics that are both component to the *caminata*, as well as to magical realism. For the Hñähñu, the *caminata* necessarily takes place at night. “In the dark you don’t as easily see the face of the man next to you,” Heladio had told us at the outset. Perhaps alluding to racist dynamics along the Guatemala/Mexico frontier, a territorial divide that Mexicans defend with vigor, cruelty, and pride, Heladio added, “You don’t judge him because of how he looks. Those distinctions disappear.” In between navigating the various dangers of the waking world – being apprehended by the *migra*, the indifference of natural and human obstacles to the body in the form of fast rivers, barbed wire, tunnels, and precarious passes – the dreamscapes of the nocturnal world are visited and re-visited as participants are urged to perceive deeply connections between themselves and the breathing world around them. The seeds of what Raymond Williams called “structures of feeling,” those emergent, ever-dynamic ways of knowing and unraveling, that when translated can affect action, are sewed throughout the *caminata* (Williams, 1977). The land not only contours participants' corporeal experience of the *caminata*, but (potentially) stirs psychic and spiritual awareness of being connected to something much larger than the individual self.

As the Chicano ethnographer, poet, novelist, and journalist Américo Paredes sought to evoke in his own work, these “structures of feeling” are constitutive of the

intimate, ineffable, and crucially human experiences that are unique to and embedded within certain places. This also resonates with Keith H. Basso's anthropological investigation of how the Western Apache conceive of and imagine their geography. His book *Wisdom Sits in Places* (1986) explores the meaning behind attachments to place; how memory and narrative, story and song, relics and "footprints," function in relation to a people and its land to establish identity and confer origins. For the Western Apache, history is intimate. It is subjective. And as such, subject to variation. It is, Basso states, "a form of narrative art," a performance (Basso, 1996). Within this re-visioning of history, landscapes function in symbolic terms to excite the imagination, introducing a "measure of wonder" that captivates participants as it deepens their sense of belonging to place.

Here on the river Tula, our metaphorical Rio Grande that Paredes describes in his earliest poem, "El Rio Bravo," we were asked to gather hands. For Paredes, as perhaps for the Hñähñu, the river is personified through experiences of ache and longing, and longing to return – *la anura* – a word that doesn't exist in English, but that is in encapsulated in the following lines from Paredes's poem: "With your swirls and counter-currents/As though wanting to turn back/as though wanting to turn back/Towards the place where you were born/While your currents swirl and eddy/While you whisper, whimper and mourn" (Saldívar, 2006). Along the San Diego/Mexico border, the Tijuana River, a drained concrete half-pipe inhabited by drug addicts and the dispossessed who never made the crossing the border figures less romantically into the landscape.

Forced into a concrete trench by the levees on either side of it, the river's pollution is due in part to a weak sewage/collection/treatment/and trash collection

infrastructure within Tijuana itself, but which has also been exacerbated by environmental violations wrought in the wake of NAFTA. On the Southwest corner of the Tijuana River Estuary, one of the only remaining salt marshes in Southern California, there's a marker on a bluff, first placed in 1851, following the 1848 treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, which demarcates the International Border. Where the border fence extends in uneven gauges into the Pacific Ocean, families gather. Through the spaces in between the rusty poles, people would once talk, touch, share food, and music. Here, the power of the physical divide is transcended by intimacy, by the mundane activity of throwing a ball back and forth across the fence, or by flying kites over the vertical space that no wall can cancel out. While another solid fence is being constructed, even the secondary chain link fence recently erected 90 feet from the original cannot withstand the recessions and swells of the Tijuana River, its twists that feed the Pacific's tides, nor the power of the ocean's currents that swallow the sand, dissolving land. Here, the secondary chain link fence has been knocked down and is half-buried in sand. Here, the physical border waxes and wanes, recedes, collapses, and rises. The US notion of territory, be it along the Texas or San Diego border, is subject to the capricious movements of different rivers.

On the edge of the Tula, Heladio instructed us to find a rock. We let go of one another's hands. "I want you to throw it into the river," he told us. "Clean yourself of the evil," he said, again evoking the spiritual. "Then I want you to find the rock that carries the good energy. Keep that one close to your heart."

In *The Archive and the Repertoire* (2008) Taylor describes the heart as a locus of memory. It is, she states, a "site of convergence binding the individual with the collective, the private with the social, the diachronic and the synchronic, memory with

knowledge” (Taylor, 2008). Examining Emilio Carballido’s 1965 play, *Yo tambien hablo de la rosa*, Taylor locates a relationship between the protagonist’s internal geography – memories arching back and forth across time, the circulation of her blood – with the physical geography of the ancient city of Tenochtitlan, whose canals and bridges visually resemble arteries that transmit goods back and forth across the membrane of the city. “How,” Taylor asks, “does one come to inhabit and envision one’s body as coextensive with one’s environment and one’s past, emphasizing the porous nature of skin rather than its boundedness?” (Taylor, 2008). The protagonist in Carballido’s play is known as the Intermediary. She traverses borders and boundaries, moving back and forth across space, place, and time. Her body is both archive and compass, and it’s from “within” that she navigates the external landscape, which in turn informs her internal circuitry. “Each,” Taylor writes, “is the product of the other's performance” (Taylor, 2008,). In *El Alberto* along the river’s side looking for the rock that would carry whatever individual or personal burden we wordlessly imparted into this piece of land, we were invited to merge – in whatever small or grand ways – with the environment. Here the deeply private became an embodied, sensual and shared social act: finding and casting a stone into the water, selecting a new one, sharing it with Heladio, holding that “piece of place” closest to the heart.

Both Taylor and Basso conceive of cultural memory as embodied. For Taylor, it is stirred through the sensual, and connects the private with the social. Like the heart, cultural memory provides “a lifeline to present and future” (Taylor, 2008). In contrast to archival memory – which takes the tactile form of documents, bones, maps, and literary texts – the repertoire, Taylor argues, is the medium of embodied memory. It is enacted in

movement, song, dance, performances – in those transient intangibles that allow for an unfolding of multiple understandings and imaginings of history that resist the chokehold of normative scenarios nested in centuries of colonialism. For the Hñähñu, the *caminata* functions like arterial acts of transfer, circulating identity, cultural memory, and social knowledge. Here, performance provides passage, both in the physical sense of bodies crossing borders, but also through the communication of memory and the assertion of political claims that partially comprise a people's collective identity and sense of belonging.

Central to Taylor's work is exploring questions of how performance transmits memories, asserts political claims, and marks a group's sense of identity. For Basso, memory and imagination form the catalyst of both place as well as "place-making." He argues that "place" is often taken for granted, our experience of it being natural and for the most part uncomplicated. There is familiarity in the outward appearances of place – in their surfaces – and unless something shifts our perceptions of place, our sense of it remains fixed in space and time, unthinkingly experienced. Part of Basso's project involves locating the threshold when "ordinary perceptions lose their hold..." (Basso, 1996). In these moments, as throughout the *caminata*, physical and psychic borders are crossed, awareness is altered, and the patina of place is transformed. When the familiar is made strange our relationship to place is reconfigured. Acts of remembering and imagining are, for Basso as well as Taylor, closely linked, each providing a basis for the other.

Against an archival approach to understanding history and place, each author defends the embodied and the imagined as forming the roots of construction, invention,

and the remaking of what Basso calls “place-worlds,” and what Taylor identifies as the repertoire. Here, a geography of place and the physical beat of the body merge in empowering and resistive ways that run counter to normative, and primarily Euro-Western modes of knowledge production. For the Hñähñu memories of crossing are transmitted through performances where nature figures as character perhaps as much as the individual herself. In this way place-making circulates within the womb of body and land. It is a corporeal and spiritual force through which the personal and the collective re/vision and re/create – “re-believe and re-create” an “un-authored” past (Basso, 1996). Within these moments the potential for re/membering takes hold. It is an embodied act, intimate and sensual, deeply intertwined with the very process of recording. Indeed, the word “record” from the Latin *rechordis*, means: “to pass again through the heart.” In some ways each rendition of crossing, each act of casting a rock into the metaphoric Rio Grande while holding another close to our hearts, constitutes an act of transfer; the warp and wolf of the relationship between memory and recording.

The actual Rio Grande, 1,885 miles of current dividing Mexico from the United States, indicates the historical site of the US-Mexican war for territory. The border itself, now marked by the undulating movement of the Rio Bravo, also known as the angry river, speaks to the idea of the border as constructed, as being in constant flux, influenced by rain and wind, as untamable and unpredictable, despite our human efforts to delineate its boundaries, control its movements. This “shifting border,” as Oscar Martinez describes in his book *Troublesome Border* (2006), constitutes, on the one hand, historic and contemporary zones of conflict and strife. On the other hand, as Roberto Alvarez interrogates in his piece “The Mexican-US Border: The Making of an Anthropology of

Borderlands” (1995), what would it mean to unfasten the conception of “border” from its more literal definitions, a metaphoric move that allows for more various, and potentially imaginative, interpretations of borderlands – in a vein similar to Paredes, or Heladio’s personal conception of borders as existing at the interstices of internal and external plains – as the threshold that constitutes entrance, arrival, beginning, as well as problematics inherent to these states?

How we theorize the relationship between the discursive and material components of the border is a question that runs parallel to magical realist ethnography, where the magical and the mundane, the real and the imagined, the historical and the political, converge in a living narrative that disrupts and perverts a Western master narrative of conquest and progress. “A “borderlands” understood through the experience of the material order in all its repressive, exploitative power,” writes Oscar Martinez, “resists its appropriation as either a nationalist symbol or a commodified object used to sell some new version of the melting pot” (Martinez, 2002). In drawing critical attention to the border as a very real, material landscape, Martinez seeks to maintain a sharp social and cultural critique of this repressive definition of space, thereby preventing its dissolution into a theoretical, textualized, fetishized set of practices that relegate the lives of migrants “to the footnotes of history” (Martinez, 2002). It’s this struggle between the very real place of the border and the imagined spaces of the community and consciousness that permeates this geography – which undergirds what Ursula Bieman notes as a “constructed space...an imaginary line...a river or a wall” that depends on the movement of bodies to bring it into existence – that produces so much tension in border discourse (Bieman, 2002).

Four hours into the night our shoes were wet, our clothes were soiled with mud. We were exhausted, thirsty, and hungry. From the crest of the hill where we stared out at a night soaked in darkness, the only visible lights were from the truck of the border patrol. While disconcerting, there was also something almost reassuring about seeing the vehicle. We knew where it was in relation to us. And as long as it was in the distance, we were safe. But whatever reassurance was located in the red glow of the silent siren was ruptured when the border patrol killed the lights of the vehicle, completely disappearing from our view. Then, as though playing cat and mouse, the lights would appear again, only from a different place, much closer now than they had been before. Surrounded by barrel cactus luminescent in the night, one of the students asked: “Can we rest a little more?”

At the end of the journey we walked along a mountain road until we were met by a pick-up truck. Climbing into the cab, we were given blindfolds. Were they a metaphor for what you don't see but must sense when you cross the physical border? It could be that the blindfolds, which are often used in hostage situations, were supposed to provoke a measure of fear and confusion, thus underscoring our vulnerability. If so, they also indicated the extent of our trust. In the backs of the trucks we helped one another tying them on. There was a certain intimacy in this. Maybe it was a metaphor for the loss of and recovery of site and the attending gratitude one must experience in the wake of having something that you've thought was permanently lost, returned. Did the blindfolds symbolically enact our own blindness, that we could never understand the experience of crossing? Cathy Caruth and Agamben complicate the possibility of bearing witness. For Agamben, we must bear witness to the impossibility of bearing witness. For Caruth,

bearing witness involves ethical quandary and self-reckoning. The only possibility for history's emergence, she argues, is through this failure to stand witness to the histories of others. This, she argues, is where the ethics of historicity emerge as a purely intersubjective project of failure. Trauma, then, is the encounter that isn't ever experienced during the scene of a traumatic encounter. It only emerges later as an ungraspable mode of suffering.

On the *caminata* the group of us whom for different reasons embarked on this journey had succeeded in the quest to make it to *el otro lado*. One by one we were guided from the truck. Forming a line, we held the shoulders or the waist of the person in front of us and walked in a slow, silent procession, following cues from Heladio to step left or right.

"Now," Heladio directed, "don't peek. Hold the hand of the person to either side of you," he said.

We gathered hands.

"Listen," he said. "Feel."

I could feel the heat of those standing next to me, their hands, the sound of the water, the river Tula – our imaginary Rio Bravo – where earlier in the night we cast our rocks. Someone stroked our cheeks with something soft – a feather, the wisps of leaves. A couple of people giggled.

"What do you notice?" Heladio asked.

His question was answered with silence.

"What do you notice with your body?" Heladio repeated.

"The river," the man holding my hand said.

“The air, the smell of fire,” said another.

“What else do you notice?” Heladio asked.

“The wind.”

“Part of our work,” Heladio said, “is to connect our minds to our hearts. To be aware of the land, our ancestors, our bodies – that which is sacred.” He asked us to reach our hands towards the sky as far as we could stretch. We were the point of connection between the earth and the sky.

“There is magic all around us,” Heladio said. “Take off your blindfolds,” he instructed.

The first thing I saw was a *mola* design of fire draped across the sky. I couldn’t figure it out. We were standing on the edge of the river, the mountains above it were lined with hundreds and hundreds of torches. The surface of the water reflected the fire from the mountains back up to the sky.

“This is a little gift for you,” Heladio said.

“But how?” we puzzled. “How could the sky be on fire?”

Conclusion:

For the Hñähñu, memory and the work of the imaginary combine powerfully to produce ever-shifting performances of threshold that displace binaristic understandings of the border. The *caminata* offers a kaleidoscopic portrait of the US/Mexico border – not as fixed to approximately 2,000 miles of land that divides the territories. It is at once solid and liquid, internal and external. It resides in the collective and cellular memory of a people, some buried in its sands. Others in its waters. While the theme of the *caminata* may remain the same, the Hñähñu who run the simulated journey, the geopolitical

situations, people participating in the walk, and even the weather, combine to create novel experiences and understandings of what it might be like to cross. While one function of the *caminata* is to generate national and international awareness of the plight of the migrant, within El Alberto another hope is that by participating in the walk, Hñähñu youth will be discouraged from leaving their community. In recent years the publicity of the park has contributed to surges of visitors, which in turn has bolstered what had been, and in many ways continues to be, a dire economic situation in the pueblo. With growing economic stability, perhaps there will be less incentive for people to leave. What remains a given is that Hñähñu will continue to make the journey into the United States, some for the first time, while others to return to a home they've known their whole lives (see Chapter 4). The dislocation and relocation of the Hñähñu, and of immigrant communities more generally, complicate long held notions of "home" and "homeland" as stable entities. This movement also underscores the importance of memory in the re/creation of place(s) to which one may or not return (Malkki, 2002).

Within the *caminata*, the systems of power that participants confront in the way of narco violence, gang violence, State-sponsored violence, are themselves abstractions of what has been made quotidian via media outlets like newspapers and the nightly news. Throughout Mexico, it has become normal to see photos of decapitated and mutilated Zetas on the covers of the dailies that are pedaled at traffic stops. There's nothing unusual about encountering DVD's called *Narcos Vs. Zetas* next to the latest Disney flick at the Saturday market. In the comfort of your own home, you can even play cartel video games where your role as a bad cop is to traverse Texas, Mexico, and LA, in a bloody journey to bring narcos to justice. The nightly reports on the 10:30 news of migrants gunned down

or tazed to death along the border and mainstream television shows like *Border Wars* where Customs and Border Patrol in South Texas are filmed catching “illegal aliens, human smugglers, and drug smugglers,” all speak to how the spectacle of (primarily) border violence, has become normalized. To examine this in relation to the *caminata* and Taylor's claim that the efficacy of performance has to do in part with how performances access “public fantasies and leave a trace, reproducing and at times altering cultural repertoires” is a question worth exploring (Taylor, 143).

Even as the *caminata* capitulates to “public fantasies” of the dumb or violent border patrol agent or the figure of the merciless narco or *cholo*, does the experience actually leave a “trace,” some sort of visceral echo that shapes – in whatever small way – one's relation to the border as well as one's understanding of the experience of the “other,” who in the midst of the simulation, we momentarily become? According to Taylor, performance “rests on the notion of ghosting, that visualization that continues to act politically even as it exceeds the live” (Taylor, 143). In the way that the *caminata* is embodied, in the way that the events that transpire within the *caminata* are themselves composed through the merging of the imaginary and experience of a people, by participating in this journey, one – in whatever small ways – embodies part of that story. Here, the performative work of the *caminata* potentially fans outward. By participating as agents in the co-production of cultural meanings – what it means to cross, what it means to be Mexican, what it means to be Hñähñu, what it means to live in the midst of violence – *caminata* participants are positioned as social agents. As Underliner notes:

...the *Caminata's* creators don't allow tourists to sit cozily with our preexisting notions of subaltern subjectivity – where such subjects are forever consigned to the status of victim. Instead, they work insistently to

foreground indigenous coexistence in the creation of hemispheric history, as co-creators of the world we share and which has become increasingly marked by transnational movements of people and thought (Underliner, 2011).

In El Alberto the *caminata* provides a glimpse into that “open wound where the third world grates against the first and bleeds” (Anzaldúa, 1987). It is both a historical and contemporary site of trauma. It is individual. And it is collective. The body of trauma, Caruth argues, becomes a national body. It is a body of forgetting in the same way that amnesia underwrites the production of a national history where abjection and exclusion come to define belonging, topics that I will take up in Chapter Four. What the *caminata* (potentially) enacts is the imaginary space that Paredes describes where “real and political social effect” takes hold (Saldívar, 2006), where – when made public, when performed – productive sites of connection are forged.

Chapter Three: Hope's Dance with Despair: Globalization, Phantom Homes, and the Re-visioning of Citizenship and Belonging among the Hñähñu of El Alberto

The homes in El Alberto are identical in floor-plan to those you see in suburban neighborhoods throughout the United States. These are the types of homes that round quiet cul-de-sacs. Homes with two-car garages, white fences, and manicured lawns. These are homes where the local paperboy dutifully deposits USA Today or the Daily into mailboxes decorated to express cheer. These are the brand of houses that Hñähñu men, like Xavier, spent decades building in neighborhoods throughout Las Vegas, Arizona, Utah. They represent a certain ideal of home as a place of luxury and repose. At the end of the day you can take a jacuzzi, watch TV from the big screen, enjoy a meal in the dining room, and retire to your own bedroom, closing the door behind you (every member of the family has his or her own bedroom). The blueprints that map the space of these homes become ingrained in your memory when you build hundreds of them. They become a part of your imaginary. When you're living in Motel 66's with your three brothers, when you're renting an apartment with four other families, these blueprints are the road map, the reminder, a promise of what you will one day have. The blueprints also find root in the imaginary of your family – your parents, your wife, your children. The thin lines demarcating space and scale become part of the musical score of your conversations. Across geographic divides, you collectively imagine home. It is one of the things that keeps you connected. Twenty-five years ago the dream of being able to buy a truck, to own a piece of land, to cultivate that land, to build a single-family house and have a little extra to live on, was a driving force behind why a majority of the Hñähñu in

El Alberto migrated to the United States. When Xavier returned to the pueblo after working fifteen years in construction, as well as brief stints with his three brothers as a coyote, it was to manifest this ideal.

When I arrive in El Alberto – bags in hand to spend three months living in the pueblo – it is night time. Nobody has a numbered address. The population here hovers around 600, rising and falling with the exit and return of people to the community. Socoro is Xavier's wife, and the only directions she gives me when I talk to her on the phone to confirm my arrival, is that she lives in front of the Tele-Secondaria, the pueblo's middle school. I met her the year before while doing preliminary fieldwork. With her three *concuñas* (the sisters in law of her husband) Socoro runs a small outdoor restaurant catering to tourists and locals. As the only westerner in the park, and as a woman camping alone in a bright yellow tent, I stood out. Over meals, and later through a slow unfolding of conversation, I introduced myself to her family, who agreed to host me. In El Alberto there are no street lights. I walk down an unpaved road, the air reverberates with the last of the day's heat; the sky is shocked with stars. In the dark the houses rise like shadows from the mountains. I can't see them. But I can sense them. It's my first time in this part of the pueblo. And I don't know where I'm going. There are several families walking by. I ask where to find Socoro. Someone points to the light of a *tienda*.

Socoro and Xavier's home is made up of two large rooms divided by a curtain. Their two sons, Gilberto and Oscar, who are seventeen and eighteen years old, share the other room. The house, like every house in El Alberto, is made of cement. The bedroom, which doubles as a living room, opens onto a gravel courtyard filled with miscellaneous items that range from a claw foot bathtub to shredded tractor tires and collections of scrap

metal. To get to the bathroom, shower, or kitchen – which is connected to the *tienda* - you must cross the courtyard. Of all of their family, Socoro and Xavier are the only ones who have a telephone and cable. Their only furniture is a queen-sized bed, nightstand, an entertainment center, and plastic lawn chairs. On weekends when there are soccer or boxing matches, the bed gets taken over by nieces and nephews, brothers, and wives. Blankets are spread across the floor. More plastic chairs are brought in from the kitchen. Bags of chips borrowed or bought from Socoro's store will circulate around the room. In the minutes following my arrival and introductions, the realization that I will not be living in this space with Socoro and her family, but in her other house, begins to sink in. I didn't know she had another house. I stand on the white tiled floor with my hands at my side, luggage at my feet. The floor reflects the light from the raw bulb that dangles from the ceiling. Before she and her son will take me to my new home, she asks me if I want to shower.

In El Alberto, water is both sacred and abundant. It is what distinguishes this pueblo from all others within hundreds of miles of its circumference. The river *Tula*, which originates in Mexico City and flows through the *altiplanos* of the central valley has, for however many centuries, pulsed through this *poblado* (tiny pueblo). Socoro tells me that when she was growing up she would swim in the river. It was a place where people gathered, bathed, washed clothes, were baptized. In the 1970's three things happened that would change the infrastructure of El Alberto.

Maurilio Muñoz, a Hñähñu anthropologist, was appointed director of the *Patrimonio Indigena del Valle del Mezquital* (PIVM) (Indigenous Patrimony of the Mezquital Valley). In the twenty-two years prior, attention to and intervention in the dire

poverty and desolation of indigenous populations was minimal. Beginning in 1948 with the *Instituto Nacional Indeginista* (INI) (National Indigenous Institute), the Mexican government's effort to integrate indigenous communities into the Nation State, it was undecided as to whether or not “the 'indigenous problem' was one of culture or biology” (Schmidt, 2007). In 1952 PIVM was created and joined to INI in order to promote the economic integration of indigenous communities. However, what resulted was a widespread growth of clientelist relationships between the Mexican government and regional and local *camarillas*, who were at odds with respect to whether indigenous organizations should maintain their autonomy, or be controlled by the central government (Schmidt, 2007). When Muñoz, who as a Hñähñu and as an insider to the community, and as someone who was educated, became director of the PIVM, the paternalist and clientelist structure was replaced with one that sought to give voice to the people. In this way the exchange between indigenous communities and the PIVM became more dynamic as well as egalitarian. For the first time indigenous communities were recognized as agents in the cultivation of their own economies.

What this meant for the Hñähñu of El Alberto was the construction of a road that cut through the mountains, connecting their pueblo to the industry of Ixmiquilpan, a pueblo that has since grown into a city. Xavier's father, El Suegro, was the president of the delegation of the pueblo at that time, and instrumental in negotiating with the government the implementation of a road. Forty years later, Xavier and his brother would do something similar. The building of the road constituted one of El Suegro's greatest contributions to the community in his one-year term as delegate. What the road allowed, El Suegro told me, was a channel into Ixmiquilpan. No longer would women –

and it was principally the women – have to trek fifteen miles over a mountain, often carrying their children in a sack on their backs, often barefoot, to vend or trade the loofah sponges they wove from the fiber of maguey plants, in exchange for *masa* (ground corn, used to make tortillas) and other food staples. *Combi's*, or small buses, would begin to run between the pueblo and Ixmiquilpan. With this road, travel obviously became more efficient, which meant that women had more time to dedicate to their homes, to fabricating crafts to sell, and later, to agriculture. Importantly, the Hñähñu of El Alberto weren't as isolated. Around this time, another thing happened.

Don Alfredo, a Hñähñu man who spent twenty years living in the United States, would tell me that God's gift of rain to the *altiplanos* (high plateaus) in the late 1960's and early 1970's radically changed the infrastructure of the pueblo. In addition to working with El Suegro and the Hñähñu delegation to build the road, organizations like the PIVM also sent machines to pueblos like El Alberto to clear and prepare the land for cultivation. The combination of the heavy rainfall and the sowing of corn crops brought a sustainable food source to the pueblo. Whereas before, *masa* was something that one had to travel great distances to purchase, now families could harvest, dry, and store masses of corn for tortillas. The heavy rainfalls coincided with another event, which over the years would prove central in lifting the economy – if only a little – of El Alberto. In 1968, prior to the arrival of the Evangelicals, *Don Alfredo* told me, thermal waters emerged from the land. Over the years, this source of water would be converted into thermal pools and showers – a place where nationals seeking relief from the heat that scorches Mexico City in the summer, could come for a weekend. El Alberto was now on the map. But the *balneario*, which now has multiple swimming pools, two small water slides, cabañas that line the

pools, and which come equipped with barbeque grills, public bathrooms, shower facilities, and a sprinkling of booths where you can purchase bathing suits and water wings, Popsicles, *Micheladas* (beer with lime juice and salt), or a meal from a stand like the one Socoro runs – a far cry from what it was 40 years ago – represents more than just a source of industry for the Hñähñu. Access to the *balnearios* marks one's membership to this community. I learn this on my first night in the pueblo when Socoro asks me if I want to shower.

There are three places where people shower. Although they can, nobody in the pueblo ever uses the tourist locker rooms, which look like what you find in any fitness club. While Hñähñu men shower in an outside area, Hñähñu women bathe underground. To get there, you descend several stairs, which open onto a very dimly lit cement space. Ten metal shower heads poke out of the walls. There is a designated space for washing clothes, and a designated space for changing. There are no partitions. For a number of reasons it's rare that the Hñähñu shower in their own homes. It may be that they don't have a shower, or a boiler, or in Socoro's case - a boiler that functions. In El Alberto, where water is a resource, the monthly cost to have your tank filled is around seven dollars. Water is used sparingly to wash dishes, to scrub the bundles of cactus thread that are later crocheted into loofahs, and when it's warm outside, water is used to wash clothes. As a citizen of El Alberto, it is free to bathe in the *balneario*. As an outsider, the cost is thirty pesos, or almost three dollars. But more than these factors, bathing in the *balneario* is a marker of belonging, and for women and men, it's a space of gathering. The following day, Socoro will fix her boiler, and for the majority of my stay in the pueblo, I will bathe alone in the dark shower off of her courtyard. But on this first night,

I am invited to shower – without the price of entry – beside the other women in the pueblo.

Whether or not this is a good introduction to many of the women of the community who have gathered to bathe at 9 pm, I cannot say. Besides Socoro, who like several others, bathes in a skirt and dark t-shirt, I stand in my shorts and shirt under a shower head that comes up to my shoulders. I don't know it yet, but at 5'5 – an average height for a North American woman – I will be among the tallest in the pueblo. Slouching under the funnel of hot water, I stare at my bare feet, their whiteness, the whiteness of my body. The room echoes with the sound of water, with the cries of children, with the tonal sound of Hñähñu. Here, this is the first language that is spoken. Spanish is second, and it's not a forgone conclusion that everyone speaks Spanish, especially among men and women over fifty years of age. I am embarrassed because I have forgotten my soap.

“You can use mine,” Socoro tells me. In the four months that I live in the pueblo observing Socoro as she also observes me, I'll learn that very little escapes her attention.

I take the slippery bar from her hands.

“*Jamadi*,” I tell her. It's the only word I know in Hñähñu. “Thank you.”

In El Alberto, the land is communally owned. Only Hñähñu are allowed to develop. Laying the foundation and lifting the structure of one's own home is both an act of pride, and a badge of citizenship. For many Hñähñu living in the United States, the house that they are building or have built in El Alberto is also a beacon - a promise that they will one day return to the pueblo. The house that I live in during the course of my fieldwork, constituted one such promise. Almost all of the money Xavier earned in the

United States was invested in a paving and construction business that he started with his brothers, and which continues to be the family's primary source of income. With the rest of his earnings, he began constructing a home. It sits at the bend of a dusty pebble-strewn road on a spread of land that overlooks *milpas* (fields) and the shoulders of mountain, which cradle the pueblo. One hundred yards away is the house his brother, Salvador, began building around the same time. Over the course of eleven years - almost as many as Xavier was away - tractor and auto parts, rusted, twisted pieces of metal, plastic tubing, pipes, tools, and trash have accumulated in the yard. When there's work, the vehicles – cement trucks, a yellow CAT tractor, the cab of a semi – disappear, sometimes for months at a time, depending on the job. While Xavier, who oversees the construction visits the sites once a week, it's his brothers and cousins, along with Oscar, who will live together in a rented room in the town or city where they're working, until the job is done. They will be responsible for paving the main road that cuts through El Alberto. In the night, the magnitude of the odds and ends that are strewn throughout the yard is obscured by the darkness.

When Socoro opens the front door, a wrought-iron frame patched with plastic tarp where glass or wood should have been, she tells me that Oscar and Gilberto would prefer to live here.

“They don't like having to go outside to go to the bathroom,” she says.

I don't factor in that they have to cut through their parents room every time they want to enter or leave the house, something that Gilberto will later tell me makes it difficult to sneak out – or back in - late at night.

“Someday Gilberto and Oscar will move into my house,” Socoro says. A couple of months later when we're talking about the nightmare of tourist visa applications and her degrading experience at the embassy in Mexico City, I'll understand better the importance of ownership, as well as the struggle among many indigenous to be recognized as something more than third-class citizens.

She turns on the lights one at a time as she guides me on a tour of the first floor. Even though the house is not finished, I can tell by her voice, the way she points out certain things – the running water, the electricity, windows that open and close, a jacuzzi tub, that for Socoro this space is layered with meaning. The house is two-stories. In El Alberto, where there are several three and four-story houses, the number of levels you build can be read as a marker of accomplishment. The first floor of Socoro's house boasts a large living room with a jumbo 5X6 foot television screen shoved against the wall. It hasn't worked since Xavier's brother bought it several years ago after another return from working in the U.S. The furniture - two couches covered with sheets are pressed side by side against a wall - seems like an afterthought. Aside from a dining room table surrounded by eight chairs, a broken refrigerator, and a cabinet, there is no furniture on the first floor. With the exception of the two bedrooms, the ground floor has been carefully laid with shiny black tile, a poor choice, Socoro tells me, because you can see every fleck of dust and dirt on the floor. I come to appreciate the color of the tile because it allows me to spot scorpions that enter in through the cracks of the house.

My room, like the other, is unfinished. Long cracks spider across the unpainted walls. There is a double bed layered with covers to keep out the mountain cold, and I have a small dresser/nightstand. Socoro has put up yellow curtains that will catch the sun

early in the morning, filtering streams of golden light that branch across the cracking cement floors. One window looks onto the yard, the other onto the pebble road where yet another house is under construction. Socoro has offered to move into the other room to keep me company at night, and Gilberto has told me jokingly that he will be my *guarda espalda* - my body guard - and stay there too, if I get scared. The upstairs, as I'll discover the following day, is where the construction stopped. The openings where windows and a wall should be let in the rain and wind, the dust and sun, and on occasion a bird or butterfly. Clothes, dresser doors, papers, a broken crib, and other miscellany are scattered across the floor. This is a home that Socoro and Xavier have never lived in. It has become a place to store forgotten and broken things. Most of the houses in El Alberto are in various stages of construction or ruin. They stand like phantoms under the shadow of the mountains, these gray structures without windows or doors, inhabited only by the seasons that wear at their foundation.

Although abandoned, Socoro's home holds promise. This is what she will give to her sons. If it was their choice, they would already live here. Even though Socoro tells me that she doesn't like this house because it is far from everything – everything being the main road that everybody walks dozens of times daily, and where she strategically placed her *tienda*, this house that Xavier gave up on eleven years ago still plays in her imaginary.

“Can you imagine me in the tub?” We're standing in the bathroom. It's divided from the living room by a shower curtain. I've only been in the pueblo for a night, but after my experience in the *balneario*, even I can tell that this bathtub makes no sense here. “With bubbles,” she giggles.

Two months later Fabi, who is Xavier's sister-in-law, will take me on a tour of the baron house that faces the one in which I now live. There is no water or electricity, no windows or doors. We stand in the hollow living room staring out at an impressive view of the fields, now dry with the onset of winter. Pueblo dogs, a couple of chickens, and a rooster move through the various rooms around us.

“We ran out of money,” she tells me. “Later the animals moved in.”

After several years working as a house cleaner in Las Vegas, her first son was born in the US. Among his cousins, this is a bragging point. Under the fourteenth amendment, a child born in the US to undocumented parents can advocate for their citizenship once he or she turns eighteen. Although it's no guarantee that they'll be granted citizenship, particularly in cases where the parents raise the child outside of the US, what remains irrevocable is the child's legal right to return to the US. This may translate into greater educational opportunities for children born in the US, but mostly represents the economic prospect that at some point that person will find work abroad, and will send remittances back home. The majority of the money Fabi receives comes from her parents, who have been living without papers for more than a decade in Arizona. Although she has a work visa – something that nobody else in the extended family has – Fabi has no desire to leave the pueblo, even if it means never completing this house. While she is the envy of many within the pueblo who would board a bus to the US the following day if they had her “golden ticket,” she's not alone in her desire to stay put. Whether or not her eldest son, who is thirteen, one day makes the journey to the US remains to be seen. Although unspoken, he represents the only other opportunity they have of completing the house.

In economically depressed pueblos like El Alberto, these remittances are crucial when it comes to affording the cost of such basics as school uniforms and food. Ella Schmidt, in her article on global movement of Hñähñu between Hidalgo and Clearwater, Florida, argues that the use of remittances extends beyond the individual, to the communal. Remittances are used to build sewage and potable water systems, as well as to pave streets. This is key to maintaining and augmenting the community's infrastructure (Schmidt, 2008). The sense of local agency among the Hñähñu - what Schmidt calls a “bottom-up” resistance that's testimony to the resilience that indigenous populations have for centuries endured - has also been important to the maintenance and promotion of local culture in El Alberto and Ixmiquilpan. One example of this is *Radio Bilingue*, a weekly radio program that's broadcast in Hñähñu and in Spanish, and which “showcases everything Hñähñu, from herbal medicine, to ancient ways of life, tales and legends, to music, and contemporary news” (Schmidt, 2008). Funded in part by the Mexican government, the majority of the money needed to keep the radio program on the air come from remittances sent from Clearwater, Florida. According to Schmidt, this example illustrates “an ambitious effort to revitalize indigenous culture,” as well as disseminate a message “that migration, modernization, and indigenous traditions are not mutually exclusive” (Schmidt, 108). During my three-plus months in El Alberto and my sojourns into Ixmiquilpan, I never heard this radio station. From my experience living with Socoro and talking with people like Fabi, the remittances and gifts sent to them from their families living in the US were not for the pueblo specifically, but rather to help support their own families with the daily costs of living.

The downturn in the US economy, intensification in border security, and an overall weariness at the thought of leaving the pueblo community, even if it does mean carving out a monetarily richer life, has for many Hñähñu, stilled their desire to leave. Life on “the other side” is something Xavier doesn't want to imagine returning to.

He tells me this one night when we're watching TV. Socoro is at the temple, and it's when she's away that he's most talkative, sharing a detail here and there with me about his life, or asking me questions about my own.

“There's no way I'd go back,” he says.

We're watching the *telenovela* “*Una Familia Con Suerte*,” (A Lucky Family) a comedy about a family who goes from being homeless to millionaires in one night. Gilberto and Oscar are sitting on the floor, backs resting on the bed.

“How much do you weigh Oscar?”

Oscar is playing a game on his I-touch, a gift from an uncle who lives in Las Vegas, and Gilberto – as he does almost every night – is posting to Facebook from his beat up cellphone. Every now and again they glance at the TV, laugh at Pancho Lopez, the dim-witted protagonist of the show who becomes the president of Avon makeup.

“63 Kilos.”

At eighteen, Oscar is taller than his father by several inches. Although both have strong shoulders, Oscar has no body fat. Self-described as “Brad Pitt, only black,” he's popular among the pueblo boys for his speed and skill on the soccer field.

“When I was your age, I weighed 54.”

Oscar isn't paying attention.

At eighteen, Xavier had followed his older brother Ismael to Las Vegas. He was single, and strong, and determined to make a life for himself beyond what he could have, had he stayed in Hidalgo. Socoro, who he had been courting before he left El Alberto, was fifteen, and would later join him, crossing the Arizona border by taxi – a popular mode of traversing the border in the mid-eighties. She would return to El Alberto just before Oscar was born – a decision she says she regrets, and which Oscar sometimes playfully questions: “Why couldn't I have been born *en el otro lado* - the other side?” While Socoro raised Oscar, Xavier stayed in Vegas.

“I worked like a dog,” he says, staring at the television. “You know what I'd eat?” he asks of no one in particular. “In the morning a banana, and half a *burro* (burrito). In the afternoon I'd eat the other half, another banana and an apple. And at night I'd have a glass of milk and bread. I'd wake up at five or six a.m. and work until night time.” Then switching to English, he says, “Every fucking day.”

A scene with a limo flashes across the television as the theme song of “*Una Familia Con Suerte*” plays. This triggers another memory. He tells me that as a *pollero* (a “coyote” or guide of undocumented migrants) he once used a fleet of limos to smuggle people into the states. Another time, an ambulance. One of his highest netting jobs was when he and his brothers hired a Grayhound bus driver, giving him fifty dollars per passenger to take them across the border. But Xavier's favorite story involves the time his friend, who had connections with the US border patrol, arranged for him and his “*pollos*” (literally “chickens”, but meaning undocumented migrants) to be picked up on the Mexican side of the border.

“The cars had government plates,” he says. Then delivering the punch line, “We entered officially.”

When the *telenovela* ends, I walk home alone. My first weeks in the pueblo, Gilberto would accompany me. We would ride bikes down the dirt road, past the dogs who would sometimes give chase. He would steer with one hand while shining the light from his cellphone in the other to counter the darkness. Unlike the majority of the pueblo boys who have lived in the US, or whose dream it is to make it “to the other side,” Gilberto tells me has no interest.

“I’ve been to California,” he says. “I’ve been to Disney Land.”

Through the 1980's television commercials promoting Disney Land as the grand prize of life, better than winning the Super Bowl, better than being voted Most Valuable Player of the winning team, were broadcast throughout the US. In one spot, the MVP – surrounded by the joy and commotion of success – is asked his plans now that he's won the Super Bowl. Directed solely to him, presumably the best player, the question plays on Western ideals of individualism. “I’m going to Disney Land!” he shouts. Xavier - after years of separation from his family - finally *could* take his boys to Disney Land. This vacation that he planned and saved for was an announcement – perhaps to himself, more than anyone else – of having arrived. In some ways, he had won. The fantasy world of Disney Land as a representation of the quintessential Western middle class childhood dream, was something that Xavier could provide for his kids – if only for a day.

When asked what he remembers, Gilberto doesn't talk about California. He doesn't talk about Space Mountain, Mickey Mouse, or Never Never Land. At that time, the family didn't own a television. He didn't know who Donald Duck was. What he

remembers is the journey to California. As a family they took a bus from Hidalgo to Sonora – a fifteen hour ride. From there they crossed – just as Xavier had done so many times alone – but this time, as a family. Besides the exhaustion of walking, it's being with his parents and his brother that Gilberto remembers.

“I was so tired of walking,” he says. “We'd rest during the day, walk at night. We had to carry all of our food and water. I was so tired. But I was with my family, with my dad” he says, “And it was fun. It was an adventure.”

How much being separated from his father for the majority of the first eight years of his life plays into Gilberto not wanting to go to the US is hard to say. If *el otro lado* is symbolic of a place that took from him somebody that he loved, he doesn't say. What he does tell me is that he doesn't want to be away from his family, from his pueblo. When I press him, asking if he doesn't want to visit other parts of the world, France, England, or to go the US where all of his aunts and uncles on his mother's side of the family have been living for the last decade, he tells me that he doesn't. It's a point of consternation for Socoro, who pays close to two-hundred dollars a year to send him to a private high school in Ixmiquilpan. She wants her sons to have an education, to attend college, to be able travel to the US. Whether or not they decide to live and work in the states doesn't concern her as much as that they having the opportunity to do so. Every morning at 6 am Gilberto squishes into one of the two *combis* that leave the pueblo. They are filled with other students who may or may not also share the aspirations of their parents, for whom living in the US was an experience often tinged with the struggle, stress, exhaustion, and fear that being “illegal” begets. For Socoro, as for many others in the pueblo, education represents a possible vehicle through which their children can enter the US legally. For

Gilberto, a mediocre student who is more interested in watching television, making bracelets, playing with his nephews, and social networking on Facebook – a way, he says, to keep in touch with his uncles in Vegas and a girl from the pueblo who moved there last year – school is something he has to get through. For many kids in El Alberto where education is mandatory only through fifth grade – the same holds true.

There are two schools in the pueblo. The elementary school, which hosts students in grades one through five, holds approximately sixty students, for whom there are three teachers. The *Telesecundaria* has seventy students who are divided into sixth through ninth grade, with one teacher for each grade. Usually they are from the state of Hidalgo and usually they are randomly designated their teaching site. Each is responsible for teaching all of the basic subjects. These include Math, Science, Mexican History, Geography, English, and Hñähñu – a language that in Socoro's day, all children spoke. No teacher at either school is from El Alberto, none speak Hñähñu, and with the exception of one, all live outside of the pueblo. This is typical of almost all rural pueblos throughout Mexico. The *Telesecundaria* project (lower secondary learning with television support) was instituted in 1968 by the Ministry of Public Education in order to reach students in rural communities who had completed their primary education, but because of geographic isolation, had no access to further their education. A key component of this project was the use of television as a means of outreach. Originally twenty minute lessons were broadcast live. The teacher, equipped with a manual to orient her to the material, which he or she would sometimes have to (re)learn on the spot, would then lead a discussion for the remaining forty minutes of class. In the last forty years there have been significant pedagogical strides in *Telesecundaria* education. The

lessons (which are now pre-recorded) are designed to be more interactive. Student textbooks are now designed in conjunction with the televised lessons, and according to an abstract published by the General Ministry of Education, students have access to a thematic encyclopedia (something I never saw in the *Telescundaria* in El Alberto) that they can consult during the broadcast. While announcements and supposed accolades of the Ministry of Education in the last two decades highlight a new focus on individual students, family, and community, and the role of the *Telesecundaria* instructors in promoting inter-generational learning and community action, in El Alberto these ambitions – if they do exist – are unrealized.

Before ever entering the *Telesecundaria* where I would later teach English in a stint that lasted as long as the bags of lollypops I'd bring with me to class to bribe students to try and speak, I met Esmeralda, the actual English teacher of the school. We were sitting on tombstones in the pueblo's only cemetery, which borders the main road, waiting for a *combi* to take us into Ixmiquilpan. This is where Esmeralda is from. Having done her time teaching throughout the state of Hidalgo, she says that her request to be closer to home was finally granted. For the last eight years she's taken the early morning *combi* into El Alberto, likely crossing paths with Gilberto and his classmates who ride in the opposite direction. When I asked her about the biggest challenges of teaching in this community, she told me that one significant problem was the lack of resources. Rural communities are all but ignored by the government. In contrast to schools in cities or more largely populated pueblos, El Alberto's *Telesecundaria* still does not have Internet. The school's two antiquated computers remain unused.

“Election time is around the corner and the politicians are already making promises about what they'll do for us,” Esmeralda tells me.

One example of this comes in the form of Presidential frontrunner Peña Nieto's 134 promises to reform Mexico, one of which includes getting “all Mexican students to attend preschool to high school, and to get 45% to go to university.” In reaction to Mexico having scored among the lowest of 71 countries in the PISA (Program for International Student Assessment) test⁴, Nieto has also pledged to improve the country's scores. Although the other candidates are not as prolific in their pledges, the importance of education, and of rural education in particular, is a central part of their platforms.

According to Esmeralda, these promises are empty. Standing to meet the slowly approaching *combi* she vented her frustration. “Instead of bringing wireless or dial-up connections to the school, instead of buying us computers, things that would actually help, what they do is pick up the cost of the students' uniforms. Nobody here asks for anything more. The parents are happy enough that they don't have to pay for their child's uniform that year, not thinking about how their kids will outgrow the uniform, and then what? Then what do they have?”

With one or both parents living “on the other side” the responsibility of caring for children is often distributed among the family that has remained. Her latter remark was underscored for me when I entered the classroom and asked students to raise their hands if they had a parent living in the states - an uncle, aunt, brother, or sister. One student, Pajaro, a fifteen year old whom I first encountered on the soccer field, raised his hand

⁴ Pisa was initiated in 2000 as a way to evaluate education systems worldwide by testing skills and basic knowledge skills of 15 year-old's in participating countries.

multiple times. He wasn't the only one. But his was the only name that I knew. Fierce and foulmouthed on the pitch, he was – Socoro told me – a drifter. Small for his age, Pajaro was ten when his parents moved to Vegas. As a teenager he began wandering from one friend's home to another, and for several months had crashed on the floor of Gilberto and Oscar's room, living with the family until Socoro caught him stealing money. When I asked students what they wanted to know about the state or city where their families were living, Pajaro's hand shot up. “Is there work for me there?”

Along the twisting accent and descent into Ixmiquilpan Esmeralda explained that it wasn't only the lack of resources that was a problem, but that students no longer had much interest in learning. This, she attributed to a lack of parental control as well as the proliferation within the pueblo of hand held technology like I-touches, cell phones, and other material items that get sent to them from family living in the US. At Socoro's house, packages would arrive once every few months. Some of the items – a sweatshirt or a pair of jeans – might be a surprise. But for the most part, everything that came tightly packed in the cardboard boxes or in duffel bags were items that Socoro and her family had requested. For Gilberto and Oscar, it was a pair of Nike's, Levi's, and the I-phone 4.

“Brand names...” Socoro told me, carefully examining a D&H sweatshirt. Her sister and law had sent it for Xavier, who was in Pachuca, pursuing a possible contracting job. “The quality is better if it's a brand name.”

Beyond whether or not the quality of the clothing or shoes was better than the knock-offs for sale at the market for a tenth of the price you'd pay in the US, the allure of brands captivated Socoro. Once a year or so she would send money she stashed away from her businesses to family in Las Vegas with specific requests – an Este Lauder face

cream, Oscar de la Renta perfume, a pair of Adidas soccer cleats for Oscar, a jean jacket for Gilberto. The clothesline in their yard is colored with fashion – something that at some level, even if only to them, symbolizes both a form of wealth, as well as being on the “inside” in terms of knowing quality. In her bedroom where her boys modeled their Nike's, Socoro would pass me clothes, asking me whether or not they were new, and how much they cost. Pausing for a moment to watch the closing minutes of the *telenovela*, “*Una Familia Con Suerte*,” which wasn't her favorite, but was Xavier's, she confessed to me her obsessions with shoes. And then opening a cupboard that doubled as a closet, she revealed her collection.

Perhaps coinciding with her appreciation of brand name fashion, Socoro told me that one principle of her practice as an Evangelical is always looking nice. For her this doesn't entail putting on make-up, something that almost no woman in the pueblo wears, but it does mean having new clothes, always wearing a skirt – a sign of modesty and femininity – and having classy footwear, which I gathered upon seeing all of her shoes, made her feel individual as well as beautiful. The particulars that go into the process of deciding what to send - how to buy gifts for a sister, her children and her husband, knowing their favorite colors, the size of their bodies even though they have not seen them for years, and imagining what they will like, was something I would learn about half a year later, while visiting Socoro's family who lives in the US (see Chapter 4). But on this particular night in El Alberto, the excitement of the gifts Gilberto received wore off quickly when he realized that he hadn't been given the latest I-phone, which his uncle – Socoro's younger brother, had promised to send. Resigned, he chatted over Facebook

on his flip phone, lamenting the slow motion of technology, not realizing that even the latest and fastest – at this rural location – couldn't make the connectivity any faster.

The idea of movement as a central force of globalization has in El Alberto wrought new challenges within a tightly knit community whose identity is premised in part on centuries of survival against various colonizing forces. In his article, “Right Moves? Immigration, Globalization, Utopia, and Dystopia,” (2003) Marcelo M. Suarez-Orosco addresses the power market forces can wield in poor, developing countries, especially with respect to how it infiltrates local, and cultural imaginaries. This results in the creation of what he calls “structures of desire and consumption fantasies” (Suarez-Orosco, 2003) that local economies – if they do exist – cannot come close to satisfying. While this may be true, Schmidt's (2008) study of an all woman's cooperative in El Alberto and her investigation into how remittances within Ixmiquilpan have been used to promote and maintain indigenous culture and identity, suggests globalization as a potentially positive force. *Mujeres Reunidas* is a cooperative situated at the end of the pueblo, which through the support of NGO's that promote cottage industries for women, has been in operation for over seventeen years. In a pueblo with almost zero economy, this global connection has, and continues to represent a way for women to help support their families, especially in the absence of husbands, sons, or brothers who have migrated to the US. For Rosa, a woman in her early thirties who also runs a food stand in the *balneario*, the money she earned selling sponges was at one time the only source of income she had to support her family. Originally from Guadalajara, Jalisco, Rosa met her husband, Esteban, in Las Vegas when she was in her late teens. The two married and returned to the pueblo where Rosa had to learn a new language and the nuances of a

culture she had never before heard of. When the money they saved to build their home ran out, Esteban returned to the US, leaving Rosa and their two small children in a partially finished cement structure. The money that he promised to send her, the money that he promised to save, never came. Before finally returning to El Alberto, he disappeared for two years, partying, he told me, with women he met. While he worked construction and went out drinking and dancing, Esteban's mother taught Rosa the art of extracting fiber from maguey to weave into sponges, and introduced her to *Mujeres Reunidas*.

Whether riding on the *combi* or walking down the main road of the pueblo, it's not uncommon to see women spinning spools of maguey fiber into thread; later used to crochet loofahs, which are then sold internationally through the Body Shop, a beauty store that can be found in almost any suburban shopping mall. This global connection, Schmidt argues, has not only been influential in terms of its contribution to El Alberto's economy, it has also been important to the revival of a tradition that forty years ago was on the edge of obliteration (Schmidt, 2008). In the weeks before a big shipment of sponges is due the labor intensive process of extracting the fibers from the maguey will begin. The sweet smell of burning century plant will cling to the air along the main road and the inner grooves of the pueblo as women in their backyards burn the flesh off the thick plant, reducing it to threads, which they will scrub, bathe, and bleach. The clothes lines that hang with bundles and tangles of this thread will later be carefully separated and spun into balls, and then the crocheting will begin. At one time this was a principle way that Hñähñu in El Alberto supported themselves. With the construction of a road from El Alberto into Ixmiquilpan, government intervention to “modernize” indigenous

populations, and the tremendous amount of rainfall that gave way to crops and the geysers of thermal waters which would be harnessed into the creation of the *balneario*, the pueblo began to change. But that's not why the practice of harvesting and crocheting the maguey, which at that time colored the land in abundance, almost ceased.

Prior to the arrival of Evangelical baptists in the late 1960's, El Alberto - named for a Jesuit Saint - was, as El Suegro, told me, “nothing but a bunch of lazy drunks.” The maguey, which was harvested to make loofahs, was also harvested for the production of *pulque* – Hidalgo's variant of *tequila*, which is made from the *agave* plant in the state of Jalisco. According to Don Alfredo, one of the few remaining Catholics in the pueblo, booze-induced fights were at this time common. Relations within the pueblo were marked by discord brought on by drunkenness, which became a form of escape and numbing in the face of impoverishment. According to Schmidt (2008), it was the Mexican elite and the middle classes efforts to modernize indigenous populations that brought an end to the manufacturing of *pulque*. “(T)his stigma,” Schmidt writes, “led to the replacement of traditional weavings of *ayates* – made of the maguey fiber – with plastic and synthetic fibers leading to the abandonment of maguey plantations and the disappearance of small but important sources of income for women” (Schmidt, 2008). For the majority of those living in El Alberto, the disappearance of this tradition was related to the arrival of the Evangelicals, who, according to El Suegro, offered the Hñähñu, spiritual cleansing and rebirth. The pueblo, who looked towards change – a change perhaps also inspired by the middle class and Elite intervention - accepted the Evangelical presence as a sign. 90 percent converted. The planting and harvesting of

maguery for *pulque* ceased – mainly because the consumption of alcohol is prohibited within the Evangelical faith.

In El Alberto, the only form of economy up until the recent inauguration of a water purification plant and the invention of the *caminata nocturna*, comes from *Mujeres Reunidas* and the *balneario*. But money generated from the *balneario* is filtered back into the maintenance and marketing of the park as a tourist site, leaving nothing for salaried positions. For pueblo youth, many of whom already have family situated in the US, the struggle to establish themselves as Xavier and his brothers had to twenty years prior, isn't as extreme. Although those making the journey northward have to contend with a crippled US economy (whose downturn is magnified to even greater extremes in Mexico) and heightened border security, it tends to be the case that their families have established homes in the US, which provide an important point of arrival and entrance into a new way of life. According to Orosco-Suarez, the paradox of globalization exists in its “uneven effects on the world economy and the emergence of a global imaginary of consumption, which, he states is the driving force “behind the largest wave of immigration in human history” (Orosco-Suarez, 2003). It may be that Hñähñu, and the youth in particular, are migrating in order to actualize greater consumption and lifestyle standards. One of the first things I noticed while visiting undocumented Hñähñu families across several US states were the new cars and trucks they drove, along with super-sized flats screen televisions fastened to living room and bedroom walls (See Chapter 4). For many like Gilberto, who last saw his aunts and uncles when he was six years-old on his way to Disney Land, the photos of their family in the US that are posted to social media sites like Facebook, along with the things that they have, and the things that are sent to

the pueblo, constitutes a force that teases and confuses the difference between “want” and “need.”

The soccer field is the place in El Alberto where young men and youth gather to scrimmage every evening at 5:30. There are days when the game is played full-field – eleven on eleven, at times reaching a crowded fifteen on fifteen. From the road where the ball sometimes comes flying over the chain link fence you can hear the game. It's the slap of the sound of cleats connecting with the ball, and men yelling in Hñähñu punctuated by cuss words in Spanish. Those who either grew up in the US or who lived there for a long period of time tend to have decidedly less skill than those who remained in the pueblo, and it may be because of this that the daily scrimmages brim with humor, teasing, and laughter. On the field where the game is played until darkness pools in between the mountains it's not uncommon for the guy you were guarding one day, to be gone the next. He may be your cousin, your neighbor, the little brother of a best friend. Maybe for this reason the number of bodies on the field fluctuates. Whether or not a person made it across, ended up in jail, or was returned to Mexico is common discussion within the pueblo. In the same way that some will talk sports scores and weather, dialogue of departure and the forms of arrival and return, can be heard outside of the church, in the *combi*, at the *tienda* where women go to have the *masa* ground for their tortillas. Leaving the pueblo is quotidian - even to the extent that every weekend the Hñähñu who work the *caminata* perform their own exits. If it weren't for a tribal law that every eight years requires Hñähñu to give between one and three years of unpaid community service, it's possible that El Alberto would die out. In many respects, completing one's social service is, in this pueblo, the *sine qua non* of being Hñähñu.

While the pursuit of a higher standard of living and the seduction of material desire constitutes a major reason why people in El Alberto leave, their citizenship within the pueblo is contingent upon them completing their service, which in addition to maintenance of the park, over-seeing its security and that of the pueblo, often includes facilitating some portion of the *caminata*.

Citizens of El Alberto are afforded the protections of the tribal delegation, which has an entire set of laws and infrastructure that is separate from the State. As a member of the community, Hñähñu can build a home, cultivate the land, and start a business. Each year families receive packages of goods – food staples, primarily - that are doled out by the delegation. As a woman, one can join the artisan cooperative that manufactures handmade loofahs and soaps, which are exported to Canada and England. For many, this constitutes a supplemental form of income. Access to the *balneario*, the thermal pools and showers, is something that citizens have free access to 24-hours a day. Among other things, being from El Alberto is a marker of belonging – to a history, culture, and language. To fault on one's community service, or to fail to pay the requisite fine for faulting, is to lose one's citizenship within the pueblo.

“Nobody wants to pay to use the *balnearios*,” Miguel, who is a cousin of Xavier's told me. “Nobody wants to feel like a tourist in their own pueblo. It's a sacrifice,” he said, describing how he had to put money aside for two years in order to support his wife and children who live in Utah when he returned to El Alberto to complete his service. “But you do it with joy.”

It was during the Immigration Reform and Control Act, a policy passed by Reagan that granted any immigrant that entered the country prior to 1982 eligibility for

amnesty, that Miguel got US citizenship. The law also doubled-up on border security. Now home for three weeks, Miguel showed me photos of his neighborhood in Salt Lake City where the ground was thick with snow – a contrast to the December sun and the lush green of the Hidalgo hills. A painter of houses and a layer of siding, his work was seasonal. With an early winter hitting Utah, he decided to return home for the first time in several years since completing his last round of service. Showing me photos of the home he rents with his sister, brother, and with his wife's family, he explained that with the downturn in the US economy his work had been cut to quarter time. The financial drain of returning to visit El Alberto is something that a majority of the Hñähñu living abroad confront. During my sojourns to Las Vegas and Arizona one recurring theme in conversations was a desire, but inability to make the journey.

“You have papers, and you don't have the money,” Socoro's brother told me from the living room of his Las Vegas home. “Or you have money, and you have no papers.”

To some extent, the back and forth movement between the states and El Alberto captures a transnational perspective of migration put forth by Nina Glick Schiller. She explores the various ways migrants establish connections in their new lands at the same time as they maintain and cultivate relations (familial, social economic, political, religious) within their home of origin. Here, the confines of borders that define the nation state are permeated, shifted, spanned, and expanded. Preferring the term “migrant” or “transmigrant” to “immigrant,” - restrictive for its expression of unilateral movement and permanent settlement - Schiller underscores the fabric of connectivity, mobility, belonging, and identity that's forged through migrant participation in nation-state building projects across geographic divides (Schiller, 2003). While “cultural understandings” and

“orientations” that migrants carry with them may influence their re/actions to their new places of arrival, and while encounters with new people, culture, and geography can contribute to mutual changes in and of person, place, and culture – something that can be seen in the architecture of El Alberto itself – for the undocumented Hñähñu migrants, this concept of “transnational” isn’t as fluid, or seamless as Schiller seems to suggest. This is in part because the transnational body of the Hñähñu doesn’t hold the same cultural capital as a foreign counterpart who is educated, and who likely specializes in technology systems, skills that are celebrated in a neoliberal market.

“Different worlds, different rhythms,” he said in English. Then pulling up more photos on the same Android on which his son had wracked a thousand dollar bill while he was visiting Miguel in El Alberto, he added, “This is home.” Not realizing that US cell phone companies charge five dollars per megabyte for each piece of information downloaded, the unknown cost of his son staying in touch with friends in Utah, as well as web browsing, was punishing. The photos that he showed me from his phone could have been taken in any US state. The green of the land, corn stalks rising to meet a sky heavy with thunderheads, and the two-story house with a two-car garage framing the center of the photo, reminded me of Iowa. Miguel’s own house, right next to the *balneario*, was finished and furnished - more a vacation home, a place he had never lived for an extended amount of time. He told me he would settle only after he had seen each of his children through college. But it was his sister's home, iconic for its western suburban architecture and the backdrop of the land, disorienting for how it reminded me of the Midwest that stood out to me, because it was one of the few homes of this style in the

pueblo that was almost complete. When she had enough saved to furnish the house, Miguel told me, his sister would return.

Because of the tribal law and a tremendous fidelity to the pueblo, the Hñähñu have historically made their way back and forth between the US and Mexico. Men and women return to El Alberto after having saved enough to live for a spell of six months, a year, or more. The northward journey is waged again when the money runs out. This was the situation for Xavier and his brothers. Before Miguel had children, it was the same for him. Ask almost any man in his forties in the pueblo whether he has lived in the US, and he'll tell you a similar story of crossing. To the extent that Hñähñu leave their pueblo with the expectation of returning, they are what Orozco-Suarez's would describe as "sojourners" (Orozco-Suarez, 2003) That is, their movement back and forth makes up a pattern of labor that's underscored by extended temporality. But how has the intensification of border security influenced decisions to return to El Alberto? What's the broader significance for Hñähñu who don't complete community service in terms of their "citizenship" within El Alberto, both in terms of a sense of belonging to a people and a place, as well as the protections that belonging to a community affords? The emphasis on homeland and on maintaining one's roots, even if not physically rooted in a particular place, is especially important for the Hñähñu, whose population in El Alberto is already tiny. It also constitutes a reoccurring theme within the *caminata*, where it is explained that the reason the United States is referred to as *el otro lado*, is because while Hñähñu migrants may be physically situated in the US, their souls remain in Mexico. This not only speaks to the demarcation and differentiation of geographic space, but also to a type

of rupture and recovery at the level of the person who resistively uses the term “the other side” to express and maintain a sacred connection to homeland.

What's unique about El Alberto is that it's a community that takes care of its own. Although there's a great discrepancy in standard of living that's based almost entirely on whether or not one worked in the states, and how much they earned, and managed to save, or whether or not family members who live there are gainfully employed, and send steady remittances back to the Mexico – homelessness does not exist in El Alberto. Nobody in the pueblo is starving. Here, Socoro told me, people can live off the land. There is always something growing. There are always tortillas, salt, limes. However for those in their mid-twenties and early thirties who have children to support, the land isn't enough. The choice to leave isn't motivated by material desire, but rather by a strong sense of obligation to family that's often met with a forward-focused drive to ensure that their children are educated beyond ninth grade. In El Alberto, this costs money. The scarcity of jobs in Mexico and the possibility of earning in one day the amount of money they can earn in one week in Hidalgo, is often enough of a reason to try one's hand in the states.

This also isn't so different than it was thirty years ago.

But between Gilberto's generation and that of his father, what's changed is the penetration of globalization into local fantasies and cravings, down to Oscar requesting that his father bring him back a BigMac and fries when he goes to Pachuca, the closest major city to El Alberto, or Gilberto's obsession with owning the latest I-phone. The desire to achieve a standard of living that more closely matches what they see on television than their actual reality, is a factor that could not have been present twenty-five

years ago. Even if television had been available within the pueblo, Xavier and Socoro's parents like everyone of that generation in El Alberto, would not have subscribed.

Besides the costs, no television broadcasts have ever existed that are in Hñähñu, the only language that the majority of the people in El Alberto who are over sixty speak. It's not only the media that influences perceptions of “the other side” and imaginings of what stands to be gained. The return of Hñähñu to their pueblo in order to complete obligatory social service also contributes to local perceptions of the United States as a node of opportunity. Not unlike the scene from the Mexican film *Rudy and Cursi* (2008) where two brothers, after being contracted by professional soccer teams, return briefly to their pueblo with big trucks that boast wealth, Hñähñu youth are similarly wowed by the glitz of new cars with Vegas plates, the X-boxes, and pristine soccer cleats that their uncles, brothers, and cousins, bring back to El Alberto. These objects, which mask the struggle to find work, the sorrow of being separated from family and of navigating being undocumented in a country that has become increasingly hostile to “illegals,” are more often than not, read as markers of accomplishment. And they are. But what's often *not* conveyed is the sacrifice that was required in order to obtain these things.

“Globalization's paradoxical power,” writes Orosco-Suarez, “lies in its manufacture of despair and hope” (Orosco-Suarez, 2003). The hollow houses that in El Alberto rise like phantoms out of the landscape are one such example of hope's duel with despair. One reason why many Hñähñu make the difficult decision to return north, if not to earn money to complete the physical structure of their homes, is to earn enough to complete the interior, a dream that as evidenced by the number of empty houses in the pueblo, is rarely actualized.

The idea of globalization as being propelled by movement – of capital, distribution, populations – is variously seen in El Alberto. Its tentacles are outstretched in the entrance and exit of Juan Carlos, a local man who journeys between Hidalgo and the border-states ferrying a truck load of goods that he either sells, or charges by the pound to deliver. One of the first things that captured my attention when I arrived with a beat-up, off-mark mountain bike that I bought in Ixmiquilpan, was the multi-suspension, shiny blue “Trek Liquid” mountain bike (complete with pedal clips), which belonged to Xavier, who has never mountain-biked in his life. The bicycle, which retails for around eight-hundred dollars in the United States, was purchased from Juan Carlos for two hundred. Hands down the finest in the pueblo, it glimmered as a status symbol. While bicycles, appliances, computers, and clothing are the principle items that Juan Carlos brings back to the pueblo, the things that he carries northward are more personal. They may include hand knit scarves and hats, loafahs, boomerangs carved by hand, and *salsas de molcajete* – which taste like home.

When I asked him how he got into this business, Juan Carlos told me that it was easier than leading people North – a responsibility laden with risk and grave potential for loss.

“If you bring people from your pueblo to the other side, you're not only accountable to them,” he said, “you're also accountable to their families.”

Although he did not say it, the coyote by extension is also accountable to the pueblo, which in El Alberto forms the heart of one's identity.

When I'd travel to Arizona and Las Vegas to meet undocumented Hñähñu who are living in the US, they would often mention Juan Carlos, who sometimes even

transported their children, who are US nationals, back and forth with him to the pueblo so that they could visit their grandparents, or aunts and uncles, family that their parents had at times not seen for decades. In addition to the movement of goods across borders, the exodus, return, and first arrivals of Hñähñu who make up the first generation of US citizens, globalization's tentacles are suctioning to the pueblo in ways never before anticipated.

With the recent controversial creation of Bonafont's water purification plant in the pueblo, the pueblo's thermal waters are now being packaged in plastic bottles and outsourced throughout the Republic of Mexico. In exchange for access to these *posos* (a word that means well, or source, but also connotes “prize”) Bonafont – a French company that markets bottled water throughout the country - partnered with the tribal delegation in a plan that promised a form of sustainable industry within the pueblo. For the Hñähñu, the creation of jobs is essential to keep people from leaving. Without outside support, this is all but impossible. At the inauguration festivities, which drew all of El Alberto and visitors from neighboring pueblos, Xocil Galvez, the national coordinator for the indigenous cultures in Mexico, and the first indigenous woman to be *secretaria del presidente*, gave a speech highlighting the importance of initiatives like the water plant. For El Alberto, she joyously announced, this was only the start. Plans were already in the works to capitalize on the pueblo's pomegranate crops.

“Instead of fruit rotting on the trees, instead of earning a few pesos selling them at the market, this water plant can be a future resource to manufacture juice, which can be sold throughout the republic.”

In a project that lasted over five years, the idea behind the water purification plant, its design, and later its construction, were initiated by Bonafont. The construction costs, which the pueblo will have to pay back, exceed 150,000 dollars. While 9 new jobs have been created, and while its arguable that having El Alberto's name on the white water trucks that move in and out of the pueblo bring publicity to its Ecopark, the presence of a foreign company extracting and earning money from one of the pueblo's natural resources, is viewed by many of El Alberto's citizens, as an unbalanced exchange. Moreover, only two people from El Alberto actually work at the plant, the remaining seven are from neighboring pueblos. This is a point of frustration for many in El Alberto, who imagined that the plant would create more jobs, and that the jobs created would remain local. If globalization feeds on movement, it's possible to see these *posos* that rise deep from the belly of El Alberto's land, as an example of mobile capital. In Tijuana, Sonora, Laredo or Chiapas, the northern and southernmost points of the republic of Mexico, you can purchase a bottle of Bonafont that may have been sourced from El Alberto. The extraction of water from El Alberto, it's bottling, and distribution, the pueblo's fiscal debt to Bonafont, the foreign company's footing in the pueblo, and the unraveling of plans for greater expansion by entering the juice market, are reflective of the unraveling of vertigo and sense of danger in the face of prospective change that globalization can produce.

On Saturday nights those working the night shift at the “Gran Canyon,” the more expensive tourist destination for its cabins and outdoor restaurant with a flatscreen TV, gather to watch boxing matches broadcast live from Las Vegas. The sounds of gunfire from the *caminata* and the voices of the *migra* in pursuit of “illegals” typically heard on

the weekends, on this night were absent. Not enough people had signed up for the *caminata*. On the one hand – the men had the night off. On the other, this also meant less revenue for the pueblo. Dressed in hoodies and hats to keep out the cold, about twenty or so men who would otherwise be dressed from head to toe in black guiding “illegals” to Arizona, San Diego, or Texas, gathered to watch the long-anticipated rematch between Manny Pacquiao, a Filipino boxer renowned for his fast jabs, and the Mexican boxer Juan Manuel Marquez, one of the only contenders to ever beat Pacquiao. Next to soccer, boxing is perhaps the most popular sport in Mexico. Practiced not only by men, but also women, it's also a sport of dreamers who hope one day to have a shot at title fight in Vegas. For many of the men sitting around the tables, the aerial views of the glimmering city provides a glimpse of a place where they once lived, where they may have grown up, a place of longed-for return, or a first-time future destination.

I was sitting next to Santiago, who I met my first time performing the border patrol in the *caminata*. Selected for his fluent English, he also played the *migra*. He had returned to the pueblo three months ago. Called for community service, he and his younger brother of four years drove Santiago's shiny, silver VW Beetle back “home.” Loaded to the brim with their belongings and gifts, they crossed through Sonora, listening to hip-hop, rap and regatron, trying to imagine what it would be like to live in El Alberto. His younger brother, Salvador, has no recollection of ever having lived in Mexico. Santiago, who was six when his family crossed illegally recalls his connection to El Alberto only through language.

“We always spoke Hñähñu at home,” he told me. “Hñähñu first, Spanish second.”

Santiago and Salvador are unique in this sense. If in El Alberto where Spanish dominates as the language spoken among children and adolescents, to maintain a first degree connection to the language while growing up in the States is something rare (See Chapter 4). On his re-arrival to the pueblo, Santiago was not only admired for his facility to move between three languages, but because he had returned. Without papers, without US citizenship - or even a tourist visa that would grant him easy access back to the life he had momentarily left behind - he had come back to protect his citizenship in the pueblo. Despite having completed kindergarten through high school in Las Vegas, despite having worked his whole adult life in the US, Santiago was still “illegal.” He had also returned to the pueblo with the hope of properly applying for US citizenship. In his early twenties, broad-shouldered, and with a shaved head that fits the image of the role of the border patrol he enacts in the *caminatas*, his arms are tattooed with the name of his one year-old son and the wife that he left behind.

“As soon as I finish my service,” he told me one night when we were performing the border patrol, “I’m going back.”

On every *caminata* there were long pauses where those working that night waited for the undocumented to unknowingly make their way towards us. Across different mountain passes, a group of ten would stand beside the two white pick-ups with police lights fixed to the tops— the official vehicles of El Alberto that every Thursday through Saturday in peak season are used in this charade of fugitive versus authority, alien versus sovereign subject. These pauses, which among some would give way to jokes, fits of laughter, wild chases by foot down the road, or the sharing of music and video downloads on cell phones and I-touches, were among others met by stillness, weariness, silence. For

Eliades, who was the principle voice of the *migra*, renowned for his imitation of bad Spanish accents, the nights spent chasing tourists was time away from his wife and five children. Proud of having lived in the US, proud because he had lived there with his wife – not apart from her, as many men in the pueblo do – he was now looking at returning illegally, and alone, to find a job that would support his family. The irony of performing the role of the border patrol didn't escape him. For Domingo, a man in his fifties, and a US citizen since the Immigration and Reform Act, the nights were also long. Chasing tourists who were blinded by the high-powered flashlight that he and other border patrol carried, who were blinded into giggles or terror by the headlights and flashing red-white-and-blue lights of the white trucks and the voice of Eliades or myself reverberating threats across mountains, the nights were just short of tedious. When his number came up to serve - not one but three years of unpaid service, Domingo told me that it made more sense to return to the pueblo than to pay the fine. It would have numbered over ten thousand dollars. He left his two sons, his job at a factory where he worked for over twenty years alongside his wife, and returned to El Alberto to live alone in the house that he had built for his family.

Santiago rode in the back of the truck that I was assigned. Although he had been in the pueblo only three months, he had a following of friends. A fierce goalie on the soccer field, an organizer of the pueblo's basketball team and popular for his charisma, he had found his place and rhythm within the pueblo. On the mountain pass, he stood next to me, watching his buddies from a distance.

“It's different here, isn't it?” Santiago said, leaning against the hood of the truck.

A car drove by, stopped, a couple of men from the pueblo handed everyone plastic bottles of Bonafont water. Depending on the group of tourists and whether or not they had requested the extreme version, the *caminatas* could last until three in the morning. During longer nights, the water that was sometimes delivered was a relief.

Twisting the cap off and taking a long drink, Santiago told me that it sucked working for nothing. Money – not having any – was a constant stress. In the states he worked and earned and could buy what he wanted. In El Alberto, where the State police don't enter, the Hñähñu have their own sets of laws and systems for protecting their pueblo. A couple of times a month it fell to Santiago to cover the night shift, grueling because in the morning, work thatching roofs from maguey plant, work cleaning the bathrooms, work servicing the thermal pools, resumes. On the weekends Santiago's work also fed deep into the night as he played the militaristic roll of the border patrol, herding tourists into the back of patrol vehicles in a hunt for the undocumented. If he didn't get his papers, he acknowledged to me one afternoon, he would be the one running. Leaving the heat of the Las Vegas pavement, a paying job, the pulse of the city, his wife and son and their friends was, hands down the hardest thing he had ever done, he said. But he wouldn't change it.

On the mountain pass, the night rattled with stars.

“You don't get this in Vegas,” he said, “There's no way you'll ever see so many stars in Vegas - there's no way.” Crossing his arms against his chest to stave off the mountain cold, he repeated, “I've never seen so many stars in my life.”

On this Saturday night in the “Grand Canyon,” Marquez knocked Pacquiao down once. Ruled a slip, Pacquiao returned with fast combinations, which were returned by

Marquez's forceful blows. To every Mexican viewing this fight – to anyone – it would seem that Marquez won. When the judges read the scores the men sitting around the table watching the match shook their heads, spoke to each other in Hñähñu, and stood to leave. The referee raised Pacquiao's hand in the air, the camera panned to the crowd, and then to another aerial shot of Vegas. While the commentator postulated whether or not there would be a rematch, Santiago nudged me.

“That's where I lived,” he said, pointing at the blur of lights. “That's my home.”

Chapter Four: *Partiendo La Madre*: Border Aporias and Transnational belonging

Depending on the form of the verb, the word “*partir*” can mean to break open by violence, to cut and cleave. It can mean to divide, separate, and sever. It can be a temporal marker of an intended beginning, as in “*a partir de manana...starting tomorrow....*” It can also indicate movement – a parting - a setting forth. In its reflexive form, the verb means to “give one's all” in the way of effort, intention, hope, and to be split open in the process of trying. The colloquial phrase “*partiendo la madre,*” joins these “*sentidos,*” these intentions and actions that signal threshold – the moment just prior to a turning point - with the figure of the mother. What's compelling about this phrase - especially within Mexico, where two of the country's most important mythical figures are mothers - is the force of anguish and anger that seethes like a clinched fist or a seized heart just under its surface. In El Alberto where the majority of families live divided, the experience of migration has become a quotidian part of life. It is a point of connection among the boys who play soccer together, who imagine arriving for the first time in Vegas or Utah, or who under the shoulders of the cerros of Hidalgo, plot their return. Mothers don't weep for their sons, or sons for their mothers, or grandmother's for their nieces, anymore. The hollow homes have become a part of the landscape. Inhabited by animals, by furniture still wrapped in plastic, by dust and emptiness worn by the seasons, they, like the roads to and from the pueblo, figure in the production of dis/locality. So do the McMansions, the super trucks with Vegas plates, an ebb and flow of tourists, and the presence of a foreign water purification plant that imports workers from neighboring pueblos as it exports El Alberto's resource of water throughout the entire republic of

Mexico – here, even the land itself – Mother Earth, *Pachamama* - has been split open. In this chapter I link an exploration of the various inflections behind the colloquialism “*partiendo la madre*” as it relates to the recursive migratory movements of the Hñähñu of El Alberto and their navigation of borders and cleaved spaces. Traversing Nevada, Arizona, and the arterial roads of this pueblo, I explore the social and political possibilities that arise at the breaking point of being “split open.”

El Alberto:

“I don't think I'll ever see my son again,” the *combi* driver tells me. His son, who crossed over a decade ago, lives in Chicago. “He calls me twice a week.”

The last thrust of sun spreads over the mountains. The windows are down. I stare at the towering cacti, their swollen blossoms, at the goat herder who ushers the animals up the road with a cane-like stick. It could be Socoro's mother. But it's not.

“My other son,” he tells me, “My other son wanted to go to the other side because he wanted to buy a car.” He takes his eyes momentarily off the road and looks at me. It's my first time riding in the front seat of a *combi*. Under the brim of a red Nike cap that is faded a washed color of pink, I can see his brow furrow. “I couldn't lose another one,” he says. “So I had to get him his own car. Now,” he says, smiling “now he doesn't want to go to the United States.”

From Ixmiquilpan, there are two ways to get to El Alberto. There is the old road, the one that El Suegro advocated and actualized decades back. And then there is the more direct route, which is the access point to the Gran Canyon. At the summit, one has a view of the river Tula parting through sheers of rock wall, of the expanse of land:

mesquite trees, century plant, barrel cactus, pomegranate trees. In the distance, a Mexican flag lists folded in on itself as we make our twisting descent into the pueblo.

“California?” he asks me. “Is that close to Chicago?”

We pass the house where Socoro's mother and aunt live, the skeletal structures of homes, the thick roman pillars of a building that was originally meant to be a restaurant, but which has now become a resting place in the *caminata*. From here, there is a view of the Catholic Church, its thin stone peaks, the heavy bell. There is also a view of the house where I am living, recognizable for the yellow tractors in the yard that, from this distance, look more like toys. Up until mid-December of 2012 there were only three signs that signaled you had arrived in El Alberto, each installed on different sides of the road leading to the pueblo by the tribal delegation. All of the signs bear EcoAlberto's logo – a large cactus foregrounded against a river flowing through a canyon – but the largest sign welcomes visitors in Hñähñu, a tonal language that emerged in written form after the Spanish conquest, and which was only officially recognized in 2003 as an indigenous language under Mexican law. Written below the Hñähñu is the Spanish translation: “Welcome to Parque EcoAlberto.” It's in front of this sign that I exit the *combi*. A year later portions of this road that I stand on will be repaved via a continued government initiative to reach out to rural communities. A green sign – the type you see on an overpass – will be installed in front of the *balneario* with the pueblo's name writ large in white block letters. For the first time ever, El Alberto will be officially on the map, not only physically, but also virtually.

Just as El Alberto's name wasn't on the map until recently, so the other pueblos that exist in the cuffs of these mountains also remain invisible from the bird's eye view of

Googlemaps. In these places marked by mile, rather than by name, the only tourism that exists is in the form of passengers making their way to El Alberto that might pause at the local *tienda* to purchase a soda and a snack. Unperceivable from Googlemaps directions – a long series of cues gauged by odometer only, are the landmarks that, like the shadow of clouds across the mountains at certain times of day, form the birthmarks of a place.

Intimate, communal, navigated through the imaginary, these are the smells of woodsmoke early in the morning, burning century plant, the sound of the river, dust in the back of the throat, the bitter taste of *pulque* made by the man who plays leaves. It is the sweat of fifteen people packed into a *combi*, the rise and fall of language, the weight of a bucket of *masa*, the footpaths to the temple, and the same song and prayer that's lifted each week: “That our brothers and sisters on the other side are protected, that those in prison are released, that those who are sick encounter health, that our brothers and sisters on the other side come home.” Invisible from the east/west directional cues of Googlemaps is a sense of locality formed in part from “structures of feeling” - those visceral experiences, intimate and un-nameable, that comprise a sense of belonging to place. It was Paredes's idea that one's embeddedness within the world of nature is facilitated through the body's social sensorium (Saldivar, 2006) a proposition that takes on new meaning when considering the subject position of undocumented migrants and the sociopolitical conditions that shape their environment, especially along the borderlands where walls, fences, and border patrol have become normalized fixtures.

Embedded along the California/Mexico border is the rusty fence, first constructed in 1990 from recycled air force mats - remainders from the Vietnam War. Approaching the Tijuana airport along the *Avenida Internacional* hundreds of white crosses are drilled

into what is known as the first fence. They bear the names of the dead and where they were from. On the reverse side huge numbers are spray painted – also in white - across the fence. These are used by border patrol as location indicators. Along the more highly trafficked portions of the land, foreboding cement pillars topped with seismic sensors, layers of steel mesh, and in some parts – razor wire, dwarf this first fence in a spectacular show of resistance. Central to Wendy Brown's *Walled States Waning Sovereignty* is the argument that nation-state walls reveal a key tension of state power – the dilution of sovereign mite from the nation state. (Brown, 24). The Mexican saying, “*Dime de que presumes y te dire de que careces*” (what you show off is in an indicator of what you lack), underscores the contradiction of the very presence of this reinforced fence as a visible demonstration of US strength whose fixture across the land projects an air of control, impenetrability, and for some, safety. Through their very materiality – in their height, the decoration of tangles of wire, steel mesh, and jagged triangular points that will impale, these structures, as Brown notes, “function theatrically, projecting power and efficaciousness that they do not and cannot actually exercise and that they also performatively contradict (Brown, 2010). It's not that men, women, and children have ceased attempting to cross the border. In El Alberto, people leave on an almost daily basis. Only now, as opposed to two decades ago, the price is more costly. If you can't afford false documents or to pay for a coyote – the current going rate is around eight thousand dollars – then the journey is waged via more precarious means that include wading deeper into more remote areas where the fierceness of the land becomes one's biggest obstacle in circumventing walls and surveillance. Despite an increasingly militarized border, which groups like the Desert Angels identify as co-constitutive with

spikes in migrant deaths, undocumented men, women, and children continue to the wage the journey northward.

In his article, “Strangers as Enemies, Further Reflections on the Aporias of Transnational Citizenship,” (2005) Etienne Balibar argues that as global capitalism becomes more pervasive and as it extends and folds its reach into more geographic areas that there's a corresponding increase in the commodification of human activity. In El Alberto this can be seen in the exportation of loofas to the Body Shop in England, the establishment of Bonafont's water purification plant, and in the creation of the *caminata*. It can be witnessed in the goods – giant flat screen TV's, cell phones, and shiny shoes that are ferried back to the pueblo on the back of money earned working manual labor in the US. Global capitalism's tenacity, as Balibar, Christopher Nevens, and Brown note in their most recent work, results in a concomitant supraterritoriality that's fastened to new borders, fences, laws, restrictions, as well as “police actions and militarization to control human movement and to secure capitalist power” (Balibar, 2005).

Because of technological advances, a fixed correspondence between space and time no longer exists, and it is this dynamic, according to Zygmunt Bauman, that makes the occurrences of power instantaneous, and which makes crossing the border today even more precarious. Technology yields the possibility for the bodily dispersion between the rulers and the ruled. For Nevens, this increasing concentration on boundary interdiction has resulted in a hyper-militarized border society that's resulted in a growing cleft between those who "work for the watchers, or are watched by the state” (Nevens, 2010). The borderlands, he states, has become a “society comprised of police and thieves” (Nevens, 2010). In some respects this calls to mind my excursions with the Desert

Angels, and the moment I describe in Chapter 2 where *Don Ramon* points to the rocks where crooks play on crossers, robbing from and sometimes brutalizing them.

Particularly in relation to Bauman's notion of "liquid modernity," Nevens observation of dialectics of surveillance is manifested in Texas Governor Rick Perry's attempt to mobilize a multi-million dollar plan to place cameras alongside the Mexico/Texas border so that "the eyeballs of millions of voyeuristic web surfers" are leveraged "into a defacto army of unpaid border guards" (Blass, 2006). By recruiting the general public to peer at live streams that are trained on the border from the comfort of their homes, from their work spaces, or even from their cell phones, which they can then use to call a toll-free number to report illegal crossings, the individual is sutured into the apparatus of the state, and the militarization and surveillance of the border. In Anne Friedberg's idea of cinematic spectatorship, "the model of the panoptic guard (the *unseen seer* in the position of omnipotent voyeur) is not literal, but figurative and metaphoric" (Friedberg, 2005). Within a post-Panoptic approach to visual culture where eyeballs are leveraged for political reasons, the spectator is no longer a passive recipient of images.

In conversation with Bauman's notion of how liquid modernity has affected the individual, Ulrich Beck sees individualization as an ongoing process of dis-embedding and re-embedding identity. What was taken for granted as unwavering (kinship forms like tribe, family, community, the sanctity and homogeneity of the nation) splinters, so that the individual is left constantly re-sculpting herself as an individual. In this case, citizenship and a sense of patriotism become paramount. For the majority of Hñähñu living without papers in the US, part of this process of "re-embedding" one's identity involves returning to the pueblo, where citizenship is once again confirmed through one's

physical presence. Within Beck's conceptualization of the "risk society," (a marker of modern society) in which individuals confront enumerable and contradictory personal and global risks with no framework to adjudicate, make sense of, or protect themselves, action is disabled. Risks, he points out, alert individuals as to what to avoid. However, no affirmative action is generated from risk paradigms. Within this context, being recruited to become a border guard, and to "protect..." becomes a concrete way of participating in the nation by protecting its future. Thus, the citizen assumes the responsibility of the nation state. Society's production of "its own kind of stranger," Balibar argues, is not only a phenomenological or sociological idea, but also a political one. As such, "it opens to door to antagonistic choices" (Balibar, 5). Intensification of security along the border, installment of e-verification programs, and the mass deportation of undocumented individuals by the Obama administration, among other acts - increases in white supremacist anti-immigration rallies, the popularization of night time TV shows like *Border Wars* and *Cops* that feature the State triumphing over the "criminal" brown body, speak to what Balibar observes as "a growing confusion of the historical and political categories of the "stranger" and the "enemy" (Balibar, 2005). This proposition has broad implications for the possibilities and limits of a "translation process between cultures," and the acceptance of "a new transnational figure of the citizen" (Balibar, 2005).

As a social type the foreigner/stranger - those who belong to other territories, whose citizenship is wedded to other states by birth or by adoption, and whose presence in other soils is regulated via passports, ID controls, and different social rights - is produced by borders (Balibar, 2005). Once "assimilated" the strangeness of the foreigner

dissolves, and she transitions into being a “neighbor.” Balibar calls attention to those who are “dissimilated,” who become “more than foreign” to the extent of being “absolutely strange,” or “aliens,” (Balibar, 2005), a pass we've seen the US perform, most recently in the Obama administration's Janus-faced political promises to crack down on deporting hard criminals over individuals with no criminal record. As of April 2013 his administration continues to deport at a rate of 1,078 a day (Golash-Boza, Tanya “The Real Deal on Obama’s Deportation Record”, Counter Punch). These categories, like plausibility structures – the term coined by sociologist Peter Berger to describe the process by which personal and, by extension societal beliefs are joined together to the extent that they become a normalized part of institutional and sociocultural processes – are produced. And reproduced. As such, there are cracks in the stability of the category of the Stranger, which gives way to the possibility that who today was your neighbor (take the case of Bosnia and Croatia as an example), can tomorrow become a Stranger/enemy. At stake in this process of disassimilation, according to Balibar, is that “the category of the “national” (or the self of what it requires to be the same) also becomes split and subject to the dissolving action of “internal borders” which mirror global inequalities” (Balibar, 2005). This exclusion, he notes, also runs counterpoint to notions of equality that supposedly forms the fabric of democratic nation states. This shores up one of the paradoxes that Nevens addresses throughout *Operation Gatekeeper*. The West thrives off the backs of cheap, (in)disposable, immigrant labor at the same time as it castigates and stigmatizes undocumented individuals, framing them in the category of “illegal.” What's problematic about this framing, Nevens states, is that “it represents a new way of looking at non-US nationals that justifies an increasingly punitive set of social practices.” This

shift, he argues, “represents a particular stage in the development of the US as a nation state, one in which, at least in terms of immigration, the division between Mexico and the US has shifted from a border, one of gradual transition, to a boundary, a stark line of demarcation, one that divides law and order from chaos and lawlessness, and thus civilization from something less than fully civilized” (Nevens, 2010). In Balibar's terms, Mexico as a nation, and by extent those Mexicans without authorization to be in the US, have been dissimilated, consigned and castigated as Stranger/enemy, something and someone to avoid, a danger to be feared, and in some cases, attacked.

This transition of border to boundary, of neighbor to enemy, represents one example of the cleaving force embedded within the word “*partir*.” It speaks to a violence that Brown, Agamben and Antonio Negri locate as a byproduct of the waning power of the nation-state, and subsequent increases in interventions within civil society - what the latter two term “a global civil war” (Balibar, 2005). This notion hinges on a shift in how the historical hegemony of the nation-state differentiated between security and war: “the police dealt with strangers, and the war concerned enemies” (Balibar, 2005). Balibar suggests that one configuration of global civil war can be found in what Italian sociologists Alessandro Dal Lago and Sandra Mezzadra have described as a new war of the European and American borders that also takes place within their territories (Balibar, 2005). The “frontier war” that Balibar describes in New Europe where “the hunting down of men is taking place along racial criteria,” can also be seen along the US/Mexico border with the rise of Minute Men groups and the passing of Arizona's Safe Neighborhoods Act (also known as Arizona's 1070), which grants police the right to determine the immigration status of individuals when there is “reasonable suspicion” that they aren't in

the US legally (<http://www.aclu.org/arizonas-sb-1070>). It is unfolding in the competition among the nation's largest military contractors, who in the wake of federal budget cuts and withdrawals from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, are now competing for the multi-billion dollar prize of tightening security along the Mexican border, should immigration legislation become law. Dal Lago and Mezzadra (2002) attribute this type of violence to an inherent mobility of people worldwide, a mobility that's an emergent property of what they see as the last stage of capitalist modernization (Balibar, 2005). Hitting on the paradox of globalization and questions raised by Balibar – (“for whom is a border a “symmetric” entity, and for whom a ‘dissymmetric’ one”) they identify frontiers as imperial capitalism's vehicle for dominating and defending itself from the threat of “the Transnational Proletariat” that it has produced and exploits” (Balibar, 2005).

Balibar equates Dal Lago and Mezzadra's notion of civil war, or frontier violence, with the untranslatable, where the possibility for dialogue is foreclosed, and any hope of recognizing the humanity of the Stranger, not as enemy or dissimilated alien other, but as an individual deserving of the “right of residing with rights,” is forsaken (Balibar, 2005). Taking the potential uniting power of translation as his point of departure for what he calls a “*virtual deterritorialization*,” Balibar argues that translation “in all its forms, as a “spontaneous,” “pragmatic,” as well as an “elaborated” institutional practice” potentially bridges the chasm of distance and fear associated with the Stranger/enemy. He culls from Bauman's discussion of the relationship between translation and universality, specifically Bauman's proposition that translation (not so unlike the production of the stranger, which has become a quotidian process that Balibar identifies as unfolding in social and juridical practices) comprises “the texture of everyday life, the

work that we perform each day and each hour of the day” (quoted in Balibar, 2005). The disconnect that occurs in the face of foreclosure and the short circuiting of translation creates an anesthetic that cauterizes contemporary and historical memory, as well as an attending knowledge of self and other. We are not autonomous, Bauman, and Balibar argue. Translation is by necessity, a relational act. As such, it is also political. Without community, without the exposure of self to other, politics becomes impossible (Cavarero 1997). Building on Arendt’s notion of the political, Anna Cavarero advances the claim that narration, and by extension translation, is also a political act for its capacity to reveal what is uncommon, fragile, what within the individual is like non other – in short, “who” rather than “what” one is (ibid).

Cavarero's argument that we exist in a state of dependence and exposure in relation to the other on whom we rely for the narration of our own story – a life story that we can only come to know via our exposure to others - is part and parcel to Bauman and Balibar's faith in translation as a means of formulating mutual understanding. This argument is also linked to Judith Butler's interrogation of what constitutes a grievable life, a question that the US, in its effort to curtail the entry of undocumented individuals into its territory, has answered by way of directing would-be border crossers into what Cynthia Weber calls “topographies of cruelty where violence directed against undocumented migrants is so extreme that it appears to us to be worse than death” (Weber, 2011). When the names, narratives, and images of individuals are erased before they can even make an imprint in our memory, forming part of our private and public consciousness - when disappeared - grief and accountability are foreclosed. The process of translation, according to Balibar, is imperative to justice; that which Paul Ricoeur

defines as an opening of self to other (Ricouer 2004).

The prefix “trans” means “across, beyond, to move through.” Implicit in the idea of translation is movement – a bridging of distance – a forging of connection, the localization of a common ground. For Balibar, translation displaces and transforms the meaning of borders, potentially creating a more inclusive public sphere that gives way to community and to transnational notions of citizenship and belonging. Accordingly, he identifies a link between the construction of the stranger, the status of the “citizen,” and the theoretical object of the border, not as stagnant concepts, but rather as “a permanently open problem, which has already been subjected historically to mutations, collapses, redefinition” (Balibar, 2005). As such, according to Balibar, “The enigmatic issue of the border and its evolution linked with the successive figures of the stranger, become then seen and analyzed through the prisms of different relationships of State and political space, or territory” (Balibar, 2005). Thus, and playing on the momentum and movement located in the word “trans,” the interrelated notions of stranger, citizen, and border, must be addressed not from a single vantage, which would limit and collapse the meaning of each, but rather from multiple perspectives that speak to what's distinct and shared in each concept.

For Balibar the issue isn't so much whether or not the Stranger, or the undocumented individual acquires citizenship, but rather that the playing field of access to civil rights is leveled, thus collapsing some of the disparity between those who have, and those who have not. To think of citizenship not only in terms of sovereignty, or of belonging to a specific territory, but as “a right of residing with rights,” potentially transforms the figure of the Stranger into that of “co-citizen”, as “compatriot” (Balibar,

13). Tracing the etymology of the term citizenship to its ancient Roman roots, Balibar highlights the relational component embedded in the word *civis*. “It does not mean the unity of the citizens,” he states, “but before that the relationship between the co-citizens, those who are “equals” or “equally enjoy” the rights of freedoms of the city” (Balibar, 13). And yet what exactly co-citizenship spells out juridically remains unclear. Balibar doesn't outline how to arrive at that practice of translation where the meaning of borders is transformed, or how to overcome the foreclosure that arises when “experiences of circulation and association of culture,” cannot be identified (Balibar, 2005). Nor does he detail how co-citizenship can be sustained, what rights would be determined, by whom, how they would be regulated, and whether or not the institutionalization of rights and their accompanying limitations would in the end reduce them to nothing. What is certain in his address is that fortified and hyper-borders cleave geopolitical spaces, contributing to the production of the Stranger, and what Balibar sees as an increasing perceptual blurring of Stranger and enemy. To this end, Brown states, “Walls respond to and externalize the causes of different kinds of perceived violence to the nation, and the walls themselves exercise different kinds of violence toward the families, communities, livelihoods, lands, and political possibilities they traverse and shape,” (Brown, 2010) and in this way fracture the potential for a more diversified and textured cultural community that could give way to the visions of greater equality via the virtual deterritorialization of borders proposed by Balibar. At the same times as he proposes what may seem idealistic a vision, Balibar also concedes the following:

The political problem seems to be a circular one, and therefore an insoluble one: how to create or impose elements of a post-national citizenship or a new transnational figure of the citizen, if the conditions of

world politics today are making every “democratic intervention” more and more difficult and unlikely? But also, conversely, how to “resist” the brutalization of world politics, how to set up *civic* resistance when the institutions and practices of political democracy find themselves everywhere in the midst of a deep crisis and distrust? Since such a circle cannot be dissolved through a revelation, a sudden collective decision, or a revolution...the only thing to do is to explore projects and efforts, which would be untying the *knot*, in the guise of a struggle against time without illusions, if not without hope (Balibar, 2005).

Probing the possibilities and limits of transnational citizenship and what this vision might entail isn't possible without first arriving at working definitions of “transnationalism” and “territorialization.” In their article, “Transnationalism: A Category of Analysis,” Laura Briggs, Gladys McCormick, and J.T. Way survey the contested and varied meanings of this term, drawing attention to the conceptual confusions and paradoxes embedded in its various appropriations. Against modernist traditions where the nation comprises the backdrop through which literature, history, music, and art, etc. is studied, the authors identify transnationalism as a vehicle through which to throw understandings of the nation itself into flux, thus challenging its physical and temporal fixity in order to ultimately reveal nationalism as ideology that changes over time. Like Balibar, who sees in the figure of the citizen and the theoretical object of the border concepts that are shaped by historical changes that are continually reconfigured in connection to different relationships to State, the authors call attention to how sliding articulations and expanding and contracting elaborations of the nation have “profound effects on wars, economies, cultures, the movements of people, and relations of domination” (Briggs, 2008). In unmasking the power-play of nation as an ideology slapped onto territory, and through the untethering of boundaries to territory, the possibility of alternative narratives, struggles, symbols, and identities emerges. The

undoing of nation as ideology cannot occur without an interrogation of what territorialization entails, both in the way of material and imaginary effects.

The process of “territorialization,” according to Balibar, involves a concomitant assignation of “identity,” a labeling and regulation of individual bodies and the population as a whole. Thus, the categorization of “citizen” and “non-citizens” becomes one key mode of control. In more ways than one, this notion connects to Foucault’s discussion of the emergence of biopower as a technique to monitor populations - and by extension - territory. In *Society Must be Defended* (2003), Foucault describes how the sovereign state of exception converged with new mechanisms and techniques of power organized around the discipline and regulation of the species. Not so unlike the threat that globalization – or “liquid modernity” – poses to the power of the nation state, in the 1800’s it was the boom of industrialization and population growth that challenged archaic mechanisms of sovereignty. What resulted was a shift away from the disciplining of the individual, towards a disciplining of the human race. He argues that racism is a force written into the fabric of the modern state, functioning in two principle ways as the precondition for justifying murder. First, it is a means of fragmenting the biological field (via hierarchies of race, distinctions within and between races, etc.). Beyond the division this creates, racism also functions to make the relationship of war, which is conditioned on the premise that one’s life is guaranteed when the enemy is dead, operate in a way that makes it compatible, and indeed necessary to biopower. In the same way that Foucault argues that evolutionism functioned throughout the 19th century as the backdrop to justify confinement, killing, and colonization, in Balibar’s analysis, territorialization depends on that figure of the other, the stranger, to be either “violently or peacefully removed,

coercively or voluntarily destroyed” (Balibar, 2004). Killing, argues Foucault, extends beyond the physical act itself, and actually takes place at symbolic and economic levels. The mere fact of exposing an individual to death, exile, rejection, etc, all constitute acts of annihilation. This links back to Bibler Coutin’s analysis of “spaces of non-existence” and the disjunction between physical and legal presence as laden with material and mortal affects.

When Balibar’s figure of the “stranger,” (not unlike the figure of the undocumented migrant) grows in number, becoming a visible participant in the economic and cultural life of a territory, she poses a threat to the State insofar as she “disturbs the representation of the population for itself as a “unified” people” (Balibar, 2004). For these reasons, among others (the exacerbation of resources belonging to the citizens and the State), an idea of “multiple citizenships” is rejected, in part because of the threat of “dubious loyalty” on behalf of the subject to the state and its citizenry (Balibar, 2004). One part stranger, one part neighbor, the guiding belief behind this presupposition is that one cannot truly pledge belonging to a particular place if she also belongs to another, a notion that scholarship on transnationalism necessarily and urgently takes to task. Bibler Coutin in her work on transnationalism and naturalization of Salvadorans in US immigration politics, explores how naturalization ceremonies, not so dis-similar from the perception of uni-directionality that dominates migration narratives, traditionally presumed individuals relinquished one nation base for another. She observes that while naturalization ceremonies honor the incorporation of new citizen-subjects, that these “subjects are created by (ritually) erasing histories and rendering difference generic” (Bibler Coutin, 2000), a move that symbolically severs the person from her homeland. In

so doing, her allegiance to a new nation is assured in part via a foreclosure of alternative narratives that could reveal cracks in the structure of the nation state and, as Briggs (et al.) argue, potentially throw its monolithic façade into question by creating space for multiple subjectivities, histories, and sites of belonging that give way to a “post national citizenship” that Balibar advocates.

This returns us to Balibar’s Gordian knot, to those Hñähñu who inhabit sites of “non-existence” in the United States. It returns us to a notion of separation, the dizziness of dislocation and longing that are also figured in that violent turn of phrase “*partiendo la madre*” – busting open the mother. Balibar at once advocates for a “post-national citizenship” at the same time as he concedes that any actualization of it is a near impossibility. Such a move would require a rupture of the nation -- a hemorrhaging of history - a touching and mixing of blood and tongue, blood on tongue, a recording – a “passing again through the heart.” It would require a crisscrossing and spiraling of peripheries – picture a Venn diagram of connection and distinction, or something akin to what Edward Said in a lecture entitled “The Myth of ‘the Clash of Civilizations,’” (2000) describes as “co-existence with the preservation of difference” (Said, 2000). Within this equation, what’s nascent to nationalism – its weddedness to exile, – cannot be whited-out by historical narratives that purport to hold the corner “on truth,” and which bind the narratives of a people - its furies and its sufferings - to the spines of books, to lettered – and thus authoritative – accounts of a people’s past, a people’s being. Nationalism, Said argues, “affirms the home created by a community of language, culture, and customs; and by so doing, it fends off exile, fights to prevent its ravages” (Said, 2000). As nations, we have forgotten that nationalism – this powerful declaration of belonging to a people, a

place, to what it is to feel the familiarity of the folds and creases of culture – emerges from estrangement, from that unbearable sense of vertigo that comes when you can no longer physically return to the place you once called home.

At stake in failing to remember what it is to be dislocated, to feel viscerally the simultaneous sense of hollowness and ache of being severed from one's roots, is a distancing from self and other, and ultimately a short circuiting of translation – that act that Balibar and Bauman identify as a first principle in imagining a transnational psychic and political space where the meaning of borders is transformed. To be sure, this proposition isn't without challenges. "The great difficulty," Balibar writes, "is to elucidate what common ground there is between two experiences of circulation and association of cultures" (Balibar, 2005). Balibar's stalemate has to do with what to do when no common ground can be found, when the brutalization of world politics forecloses possibilities of civic resistance, when nationalism – as Said describes – "consigns truth exclusively to themselves and relegates falsehood and inferiority to others" (Said, 2000). The result is an increasing chasm, a divide between people, place, and the possibility of interconnection.

"...(J)ust beyond the frontier between "us" and the "outsiders," Said states, "is the perilous territory of not-belonging: this is to where in a primitive time people were banished, and where in the modern era immense aggregates of humanity loiter as refugees and displaced persons" (Said, 2000). If, as Foucault argues, we are constituted by discourses, then harkening back to Briggs, to begin to intuit nationalism as ideology, and then to begin the process of unbinding a claim to history that has been "selectively strung together in a narrative form," (Said, 2000) is a necessarily painful process that

involves risk-taking and an “undoing of self” – as Butler would say, in relation to other. For Butler, it is precisely when no common ground can be found, when the limits of dialogue, “the limits of our schemes of intelligibility,” finds us literally stuck, that the question of ethics - and relatedly a question of our vulnerability - emerges (Butler, 2004). At the crossroads of interrogation of norms and a concomitant interrogation of self, the “center” begins to tremble and falter and the protective façade of plausibility structures fracture. “Self-questioning,” according to Butler, “involves putting oneself at risk, imperiling the very possibility of being recognized by others” (Butler, 2004) or, in Balibar’s terms, exposing oneself as Stranger/Enemy. It’s at this point of delirious vulnerability marked by moments of unknowingness, “when what forms us diverges from what lies before us, when our willingness to become undone in relation to others constitutes our chance of becoming human” (Butler, 2004). This moment – initiated from no common ground on which to stand or from which to continue to dialogue or from which to move forward, may represent a moment of foreclosure - the moment of impasse. But it also potentially represents a moment of positive rupture, interpolation, and call to agency.

Perhaps the approaches that the Hñāhñu have taken to protect their community and to cultivate a sense of belonging via citizenship and the duties it entails constitutes one people’s effort to reform, revision, and create a political space that accommodates an approximate vision of Balibar’s transnational citizen. What’s remarkable about the pueblo is that understandings of citizenship have over the years been communally adapted in order to accommodate principally Western shifts in the economy and immigration policy, or “the brutalization of world politics.” To prevent the dissolution of community, the

tribal delegation implemented a law in the 1960's requiring Hñähñu men and unmarried Hñähñu women to serve between one and three years of unpaid social service to the pueblo once every eight years. Up until the September 11 attacks on the World Trade Center in New York City and subsequent intensification of border security between the US and Mexico, this law that bound Hñähñu to return to their pueblo, functioned seamlessly. Men like Xavier and his brothers lived for extended periods in the US where they worked to save money that they reinvested in El Alberto by building homes and starting businesses. Some, like Fabi (see Chapter 2), who is Xavier's sister-in-law, and whose first son was born in Las Vegas, began families there. Because of the porous nature of the border a transnational movement formed where primarily Hñähñu men sojourned back and forth between the US and Mexico to take advantage of what, for decades, was a booming US economy. Following 9/11 and the intensification of border security, the US financial collapse, and an increasing climate of fear towards the Other, Balibar's neighbor turned Stranger/enemy, combined to wedge those Hñähñu living in the US into a space of double-exclusion. Many, like Socoro's brothers and sisters who had been living in Las Vegas for a decade or more, and who were in the process of constructing their homes in El Alberto and whose families continued to depend on remittances, had to make a choice when it came time for them to perform community service. Would they remain in the United States and forgo the homes they had been slowly building in the pueblo, along with their right to return to El Alberto as citizens, or would they return to the pueblo to serve their community, figuring out later what to do in the way of re-entering the US, if they hadn't (as Lalo and Maria had) decided to relocate to El Alberto permanently? The situation presented itself as a Catch 22.

For those families whose sons and daughters had been born in the US, and who like Manuel and Dominique couldn't imagine their parents *poblado*, the prospect of dismantling a sense of home and an opportunity for education that can't be paralleled in El Alberto where economic opportunity is also scarce, was unresolvable. At the same time, renouncing one's belonging to El Alberto and to community and history in favor of pursuing a kernel of affluence and the openings that money provides in the way of inversion, purchase, material pleasures and opportunity, was also unbearable. Nonetheless, Hñähñu living in the US have continued to return to the pueblo, risking the possibility of not being able to re-enter the US, or to be imprisoned as Dario was. Santiago (see Chapter 2) and his younger brother returned together for the first time since they were children in order to protect their right "to reside with rights," but more than that, to participate in a community - to tend to and grow a sense of belonging to place and people and its attending solidity and pride. Santiago, who now lives with his wife and son, who left the US to join him in Leon, a state in Mexico with a stronger economy than that of Hidalgo, is working with immigration lawyers to make a case for dual-citizenship. While he wants to return to the US with his family, another reason why he returned to Mexico was to be able to go through the legal channels to actualize his citizenship. The combination of intensification of border security and the tribal law requiring Hñähñu to return to El Alberto was damaging the community both psychically and economically. Those who didn't return to fulfill their communal duty had less impetus to send remittances given they no longer technically belonged to El Alberto. Neither belonging to their pueblo, nor to the United States, these Hñähñu exist in a double-state of exclusion. They are at once estranged from their pueblo of origin and their new land

where they reside without juridical protections. Those who did return to their pueblo to defend their citizenship, but who failed in their attempts to cross back into the United States, also represented a financial loss to their family, and the pueblo. More than that though, the emotional challenge of being separated from one's spouse and children who lived “on the other side” was painful enough that some would risk being sent to prison, or dying, in order to return.

In 2011 the delegation in El Alberto amended the ways that one could maintain citizenship. Instead of leaving the US to return to El Alberto, Hñähñu now have the option to hire someone within the pueblo who can complete social service for them. In a transformative move the Hñähñu have re-appropriated neoliberal ideals of individualism, redirecting it to the collective. Previously, the only other option besides return was to pay an exorbitant fine, something that the majority of the Hñähñu couldn't do. With this recent shift in policy by the delegation, Hñähñu can effectively purchase their citizenship, but not without giving back to the community. Hñähñu in the US now maintain their belonging to the pueblo without having to return before they are ready. What has resulted from this new law is a boom in El Alberto's economy. Remittances continue to flow forth from “the other side,” and at the same time, men and women in El Alberto who were once without employment now have work. Another result is that where before it was principally men who performed community service, now women – wives, cousins, sisters, and aunts – contribute in various visible ways to the infrastructure of El Alberto. This includes working in the woman's clinic, holding workshops on health and education in one's home, working in the elementary school, preparing food for pueblo celebrations, and maintaining the parks, among other things. In some ways, the Hñähñu 's re-visioning

of citizenship represents an intervention in the struggle embedded in the phrase “*partiendo la madre*” to the extent that a geographical severing, being forced to choose between one's pueblo and the US and one's family in the US, and one's family in Mexico, is no longer so one-sided.

Not to minimize the sacrifice that purchasing citizenship entails, or the cold fact that one still cannot move easily between countries, the new tribal law has generated greater infrastructure within the pueblo, as well as protected the “right of residing with rights” of those Hñähñu living abroad. In this way transnational modes of belonging are honored, and the Catch 22 of having to choose between one's place in the pueblo and one's trajectory in the US is circumvented. Right now, what the Hñähñu are figuring out is how to embrace transnationalism as joined to the originary meaning of nationalism, as that which is rooted in an affirmation of home - conceived as the umbilical “chord” that connects one, regardless of physical location, to a people and a place where belonging is neither mutually exclusive, nor exclusionary. In the adaptations that the Hñähñu have made to tribal law, the pueblo of El Alberto is effectively working to defend against the anguish of exile wrought by the frayed promises of “progress.”

At this contemporary breaking point, this threshold of being split open, busted and beaten down by disjunctive forces of globalization, by the ever-present reminders in the way of steel fences and razor wire, massive deportations, and initiatives to prevent undocumented migrants from not only attending public schools, but also from using public restrooms, the challenge of forging new paths – of prying open new possibilities in the face of foreclosure, bears a colossal weight. At this breaking point of poverty, of few prospects of advancing beyond the fifth grade, of shouldering the weight of oppression

exacted against indigenous communities for centuries now, at this breaking point of trying to complete the construction of a hollow home collapsing with the force of seasons that mark your absence, the challenge of forging new paths, of prying open new possibilities in the face of foreclosure, bears a colossal weight. But it also at this threshold of desire and ache that exists at the interstices of language and longing, love and loss and the powerful lines of those *lazos* that connect us to our roots (as they also propel us forward,) that the word *partir* takes on new meaning. It speaks duly to release and contact, to exertion, and hope - even if it sometimes means being busted open in the process of trying.

Afterward: Multiple forms of return

In Spanish, the word *lazo* connotes a tie – a bond – but it can also mean lasso or a knot. For many Hñähñu living in the US the fact that they return to El Alberto is testimony to the force of the bond they have to culture, land, language, and family – and it’s this return to the pueblo that, by varying degrees, is always being rehearsed in the imaginary when one is no longer physically there. In her article, “*Imaginariorios migratorios del retorno: lazos y lugares*,” (1998) (Migratory imaginaries of return: ties and place) Susana Maria Sossone explores the role of the imaginary among migrants, and how an idea of “return” – be it material or immaterial – figures into the migrant experience. “*El pueblo de origen*,” writes Sossone, “*esta siempre presente como lugar de referencia permanente en la vida de los migrantes, como un polo de obligacion, de refugio, un lugar de inversion, a la vez mistico, sentimental, y material*” (Sossone, 1998). (One’s pueblo is always present as a permanent and obligatory reference in the life of the migrants, it’s a refuge, a place to invest, at once mystical, sentimental, and material). The physical and (imaginary) experience of “return,” she argues, is a theme that remains under-addressed in the majority of literature on migration, which tends to articulate migration as unidirectional, and thus permanent. Experiences of return, be they corporeal, registered as inversion of capital, a sending and receiving of material goods, or as unfolding in flights of the imaginary where time and space are transcended, are complicated when one straddles multiple sites of belonging. The transnational migrant – the individual who physically and figuratively inhabits an extended territory, navigates “*una doble dialectica: alla en el aqui – del aqui en el alla*” (Sossone, 1998). (...a double

dialectic, “the otherside” in “the here” and the “here” in the “otherside”). Figured within this experience, according to Sossone, is a permanent tension between one’s place of origin and one’s destination. The obligation and/or desire to return to the pueblo, like the obligation and/or desire to return to the US, also functions figuratively as the lariat that physically halts the individual from maintaining the momentum of the direction in which she was moving. From one perspective this interruption not only halts the acquisition of capital, but also variously weighs on those family members and friends who are in the US.

Once in the pueblo, the imaginary direction of return is reversed. Its things like the dry heat of Las Vegas, the pulse of the city, making money, accessibility to stores, schools, and even the nostalgia for the pueblo that’s thickly felt in gatherings and celebrations that take place in the homes Hñähñu have established in the US, that one misses. It’s these places, objects, and unravelling that now become the blueprints of the imaginary – the sensual score of one’s return. “*Se ponen en juego los lazos con el lugar, el lugar en el sentido fenomenológico, el lugar donde se vive y/o construye el sentido de pertenencia,*” writes Sossone. “*Hay lazos en la tierra el la que se nacio y en la que se vive...*” (Sossone, 1998). (At play are ties to place in the phenomenological sense; a place where a feeling of belonging resides, and is cultivated. There are ties to the land where one was born, and lives.” In understanding how the Hñähñu navigate multiple sites of belonging, it’s important to underscore that their range of life experiences – their “mystic, sentimental, and material” investments cannot be bound to observed geographic boundaries.

Arizona:

Up until three years ago the Desert Angels sojourned through remote San Diego passes –mountainous areas of boulder, cactus, precipice and dust – searching for undocumented migrants who were disoriented and lost, who were injured, or dead. With increases in border security and surveillance in this region, the Desert Angels pressed east into Arizona where the majority of migrants now attempt to cross. Last year after being ambushed by a vigilante group affiliated with the Zetas, a Mexican gang preying on crossers and defending its territory – these invisible lines drawn in sand, lines demarcating the arbitrariness and violence of borders - the Desert Angels disbanded. In the outskirts of a Tuscon neighborhood, Ofelia, who is Mario’s daughter, the man who performs the lead narco in the *caminata*, tells me that she can't return to El Alberto because the risks of re-entry into the US have become too extreme.

“It was hard enough getting here,” she says. “And that's when things were easier.”

She offers me a salad made of diced nopal and mint – the cactus, along with two plastic Bonafont bottles filled with the *pulque* her grandfather makes - are ferried to her from El Alberto by Roberto every few months. It's one way she stays in touch. It's one way she feels less separated from her home. She asks me about her brother – El Gordo – a gentle 20 year-old who loves punk and classical music, and who aspires to open a pizza joint in the pueblo. We talk about her dad, and how he took me out shooting bottles with his collection of guns. He used to work in the US on a visa that's since expired, cleaning guns for the US government during the Iraq war. I tell Elena that her grandmother tried to get me drunk on *pulque*, that there are more chickens and chicks than you can count in their yard, and that the goats stand in the lower branches of the mesquite trees, calmly

watching all of the movement. Some afternoons, it's just her dad sitting on the stoop outside of the home carving boomerangs and slingshots, or polishing his rifles. I tell her about the canaries in the kitchen, the beauty of her mother's flour tortillas - the shape of the Eucharist or a full moon. I tell her about the evening her father and grandfather pulled leaves from the tree and began playing them in harmony, and then singing. I relate these details to Elena, what's she has lived intimately and what I've only very briefly known. She tells me about working as a nanny, how the family loves her because she's a hard worker, and because they want their daughter to be bilingual. They don't know that her first language is Hnahnu. Her husband, also from the pueblo, works construction. As with Socoro's brothers in Las Vegas, this line of work in a recession climate is tenuous, and sometimes – in a reversal and re-inscription of gender roles – it's the man who stays home tending to the house and the children while the woman works – cleaning houses, carrying for other people's children.

Her youngest daughter, a US national sits in the living room adjacent the kitchen drawing a picture of trees and smiling stick figures on a dry erase board. Elena's nephew who arrived in Arizona from El Alberto the previous week, still exhausted from the journey, is asleep on the couch. Over quesadillas Elena tells me how she crossed – saving to hire a coyote, and then journeying with a group of men, women, and children through the desert. The experience still haunts her. She describes her memory of a girl in the group whose feet became so blistered that her mother had to carry her.

“It slowed down the group, and the coyote wanted to leave them behind. Then after describing the girl's feet to me, Elena tells me that the girl wouldn't give up. “Her motivation,” Elena tells me, “was to see her father. The worst part was that when we

crossed over the coyote holds you blindfolded in a house until someone – a family member or friend or whomever - pays the rest of the cost of crossing. Well, the girl's dad never came for her or her mom. I don't know what happened to them after that. I just know that I don't ever want to cross over like that again.”

Elena's oldest daughter emerges from her bedroom. She was too young to remember how her mother hired someone to drive her across. Unlike her younger sister who makes the journey to El Alberto every couple of years with family or friends who are returning to the pueblo to complete community service, or to visit, she isn't legal. When I ask her what she remembers about El Alberto, she tells me that she doesn't remember anything. Against transnational perspectives of migration that celebrate how migrants navigate their new land while simultaneously maintaining connections to home, be it economically, socially, organizationally, or politically – for Elena's oldest daughter and others like her, a double exclusion exists that prevents her from fully belonging to the United States and to El Alberto, a place she can't even begin to imagine. Like her parents who are also undocumented, she doesn't have the same juridical protections and privileges that her sister has. I don't ask how this affects her, although when Elena relates another story about getting in a car accident and the quaking fear she experienced worrying that the police would arrive on the scene and ask for papers, it's clear that being undocumented bears psychically on the family.

What much of the scholarship on transnationalism fails to address is the difficulty of building a life in the face of temporariness. In an interview on imagination and the production of locality, Appadurai posits that the temporary quality of spatial arrangements – homes, habitations, and construction of any type, produces anxiety. The

finite qualities of space and place, he argues, “shoots the project of producing locality through with a constant under-text of anxiety” (Appadurai, 2003). For the Hñähñu, the challenge of establishing a life in the US while simultaneously knowing that one's return to the pueblo is mandatory makes for powerful sacrifices that speak to the ache within the phrase, “*partiendo la madre.*” It's not only a constantly lingering fear of being deported that marks the migrant life, but for the Hñähñu, it's also knowing aspects of the lives they've created in the United States will be disassembled when they return to El Alberto to complete their community service. Beyond giving up a job and adjusting to living on less, beyond the vertigo of returning to the pueblo – often to live with one's parents, or in a house that's only partially finished – there's also the question of being separated from one's spouse and one's children, the effects of which cannot be quantified.

Here, lines of connection are maintained mostly by phone calls. There's no Internet connection in the pueblo, and by the time the workday has ended in El Alberto, the *combis* that go to Ixmiquilpan have stopped running. Here a communal type of courier service replaces instant messaging and the instantaneous gratification of technology that marks our modern moment. Actual items – nopal picked from an aunt's yard, loofas made by a cousin, buckets of masa, handmade soaps, drawings, hand written letters, bottles of perfume, new shoes, technology– are transported back and forth between loved ones by those who are leaving the pueblo, or by those who are returning. There's an intimacy in these acts of transfer.

As different from purchasing gifts online, in El Alberto and across those regions of the US where the Hñähñu have settled, objects are delivered by hand. Often it's not only their particular arrival that's anticipated, but it's also the arrival of the person passing

them on. This sharing and exchange of place – of objects that evoke memory – is one way that geographic distance is transcended to produce a sense of locality: a reminder of belonging to the pueblo. The rhythm of kneading masa, the taste of the tortilla – different from the store bought kind – the familiarity in the scent of a certain soap, or the unraveling of a loofah against the skin – these things, these acts, these patterns – are constitutive of a corporeal practice of remembrance. Even if El Alberto can only be reached through the forward and backward bend of a desire that fuels the imaginary, these gifts formed from the land and shaped by human touch constitute a force of connection wrought from place and transferred – despite the barricade of walls and fences - from one body to another. Nonetheless, the dance of straddling distance, trying to broach it - to keep it from growing so wide that traditions and connections fray, is an endless endeavor. According to Appadurai “A huge amount of social energy and personal creativity is devoted to producing, if not the illusion, then the sense of permanence in the face of the temporary” (Appadurai, 2003).

In Arizona I follow Elena, her husband, and their daughters in their white Frontier pick-up truck to a celebration of her niece's high school graduation. The summer heat rises on the blacktop of the highway, sunlight buckles off the dashboards of cars, and every few miles or so, a border patrol vehicle branded white and green is parked in the shade of an overpass or along the median dividing east from west. Elena's family – everyone is from El Alberto – gathers in her sister's home, which pulses with children and brims with the smoky smell of beef on the grill. If it was El Alberto, they would have marked the occasion with barbacoa, a pre-hispanic meal traditional to Hidalgo. A sheep would have been slaughtered and then seasoned with herbs and wrapped in the membrane

of the maguey leaf, it would have been cooked on hot rocks in a pit underground. Despite the distance, the difficulty of acquiring a sheep, maguey leaves, and the risks of digging a fire pit in the small backyard of their rental property, it's the array of salsas which Elena's sisters have made in the heavy stone *molcajetes* that at some point they had ferried to the US, that transport you back to the pueblo. While I never meet Elena's niece, who has gone to a friend's graduation party, I sit down on the couch with Elena's older sisters who haven't seen their parents, grandparents, or their brother in person physically for over a decade. I pull up a video on my phone of El Gordo singing and dancing at a party. Then another of their mother making tortillas. Then another of their father and grandfather drinking beer, playing leaves, and singing. Huddled around the small screen of my phone, they play and replay the videos over and over. They are talking memory and time. They are talking *anura* - a word that doesn't exist in English, but which connotes nostalgia, longing, and an ache that's intertwined within that phrase, "*partiendo la madre.*"

Las Vegas:

In Las Vegas, three of Socoro's brothers live with their families in a single house they rent in a mostly Latino neighborhood (her two sisters live with their families a couple of blocks away). Their home is the main gathering hub. Sticking together is one way that they maintain tradition - circulate memory. Collectively they create an imaginary that among other things, includes future trips to Disney Land, what colors to paint the interior of their home in El Alberto, and finding a way to get Socoro the professional popcorn popper they bought off Ebay. They wheel it out for me when I visit - ask me if I agree that it will be a good way to make money in the pueblo. Their kids

who range in age from two to twelve set down their iPhones and Ipods to grab a bag upon hearing the staccato of the kernels. Then they retreat to the living room where they watch Mexico's national soccer team on the jumbo flat screen. Fabiano, the eldest brother, tells me that they contracted SKY cable – one of the companies popular throughout Mexico so that they can watch soccer, box, and telenovelas.

Among the Hñähñu living in Arizona and Nevada, TV becomes another medium for transcending geographic distance and maintaining a connection to homeland. At the same time as Gilberto and Oscar are gathered with their cousins around their parents bed to watch Saturday night box, *La Voz de Mexico*, or *Una Familia con Suerte*, in Las Vegas Fabiano and his brothers are doing the same thing. Having Mexican TV also helps their kids – all of whom prefer to speak English – to maintain their Spanish. When Socoro's older sister and her family return to El Alberto with their three sons – ages two, twelve and ten - it's television that will provide a semblance of cohesion in the boy's lives because it's one of the only familiar things that they have from home.

In Las Vegas the boys, Eric and Robert, don't talk to me. They sit with their cousins at a table separate from the adults to eat the chicken, rice, and tortillas that their mother and aunts have prepared. The poultry is fresh – the butcher shop in this neighborhood has thrived with the presence of immigrants who can't stand the taste of prepackaged meat. It's one example of how economy and culture have developed to accommodate the customs and desires of people from other countries. When they're done eating they'll pull Cokes from the extra refrigerator – necessary when you are a household of three families – and resume their video games. Socoro's sister, Maria, a slight woman with high cheek bones, tells me that in six months she'll return to the

pueblo with her sons and her husband, Lalo. The grind of living in Vegas, cleaning houses, being a nanny, scurrying to find work to make ends meet – it's taken its toll. She tells me that if it weren't for her kids and wanting them to get a solid education, that they would have left long before.

“I miss my mother,” she says. “It's been fifteen years. I miss Socoro. It hasn't been easy. The boys don't want to leave, they have their lives here.” She glances over at her son who is sitting on the couch – his two younger cousins leaning against him, watching him play a game on his Iphone. “He's outgoing. But Robert - he doesn't like to speak Spanish. He answers everything in English. It hasn't set in for them yet that we're moving,” she says.

Lalo, a small, gregarious man with an easy smile tells me that when he was notified to present for community service that there was no question that he would return, but whether or not it would be with his family – and permanently – was the dilemma. In Las Vegas he worked construction and painted houses. It was a hustle. On Maria's unsteady wages alone, they couldn't support their family for the year he would be gone. Beyond these logistics, it was the idea of being separated from his sons and of leaving it to his wife to shoulder the burden of raising their family on her own that secured his decision.

“It's not only leaving my family here,” he said. “It's more. After you're done with your service, you've got to get back to your wife and kids.”

When one's service has been completed, when one's body has adjusted again to the rhythm of El Alberto and to those things that one now remembers having missed upon first leaving: bathing communally in thermal waters, the quiet, the homecoming of

speaking one's mother tongue, fresh produce and meat – not the kind glossed with wax, or wrapped in plastic and stamped with an expiration date – the abundance of stars not blotted out by Las Vegas light pollution or Arizona smog – the question becomes one of return. This not only entails practical challenges – the question of how to hire a coyote when you haven't earned money for a year or more – but it also includes the physical and psychic challenge of crossing and re-entry into a life that you've been separated from. The more Hñähñu that get caught trying to cross back into the US, the more who are put in prison or sent home, so the more foreboding the prospects of re-entry begin to seem. These stories of being captured, released, and of arrival and return, are commonly heard on the *combi*, or outside of temple on Wednesday nights when the community gathers for tacos or tamales, and by now, the story of Dario, the man who played the *migra* during my first visits to El Alberto, has become legendary for the grit and determination that it took him to return to Vegas, where he had lived with his wife and sons for over 17 years. Thwarted by the real life *migra* over and over again, his cousin Esteban told me that it took Dario two years to get back home.

“He was caught three times. I was with him the last one, and we both ended up doing time.” But whereas Dario was trying to return to the family he left behind, Esteban was leaving his wife and three children in El Alberto to be able to see his kids through school, to finish the construction of their house, and to live a little more worry free. “Dario had more motivation to keep trying,” Esteban told me. “It's a horrible situation to be in.”

For Fernando, who took over the lead role of border patrol in the *caminata* after Dario completed his service, the idea of leaving his wife and five children in El Alberto

to wage a life in the US was unbearable. But he would try, he told me. During the lulls of the *caminata* when the *migra* wait on the roadside for tourists to make their way through the mountain passes and into visibility, I'd listen to him talk on the cell phone, telling each of his children goodnight. When his community service ended, Fernando would try to evade the *migra* to make it into Arizona where his sister lives - where he lived in his twenties. He would get caught. But because it was his first offense, would be returned to El Alberto. At around the same time, and in a reverse course, Lalo would make the journey back to the pueblo he hadn't set foot in since he left in his early twenties to take over the role of lead coyote in the *caminata*. For the first time he would introduce his sons to another homeland. His only regret was not being to take his kids to Disney Land, a trip that everyone in the collective family fantasized about, but that nobody would make because of the risk of inspection points and border patrol.

“Even if I earned a million dollars here I'd go back,” Lalo tells me. At some point it's not about the money anymore.”

They would spend the coming 6 months taking apart the life they had created in the US – un-enrolling their boys from school, saying goodbye to friends and family, selling their car, furniture, much of their clothes, dishes, pots and pans, toys – belongings that would be necessary to finance their return, as well as help them get by on the year that they'd live without an income. Before I left Las Vegas, they would give me two suitcases to bring with me when I returned to El Alberto – a mixture of the boy's clothes and gifts: shoes for Socoro and a heavy Spanish picture dictionary for a nephew. The next time I would see them would be in Socoro's kitchen.

El Alberto:

The production of locality, according to Appadurai, is twofold. On the one hand it encompasses the seemingly mundane, mechanical form of social order that seemingly operates “without design, contingency, or intentionality, but simply by the force of routine” (Appadurai 2003). And yet despite the appearance of unintentionality where locality emerges in its habitus dimension, Appadurai notes that the force of routine actually requires a tremendous amount of deliberate attention and exertion. Among other things, in El Alberto this is the labor of tending to the *milpas*, preparing the fibers of maguey that will be crocheted into loofas, pasturing animals, preparing meals. It is the task of separating the dried kernels of corn from the cob to be ground into masa, the process of making tortillas, it is walking to and from the *balneario* to wash clothes, to bathe, to tend to one's food stand. Despite the contractions in El Alberto's population, the community itself remains relatively stable. It is held together first by family, pride of mother tongue, culture, religion, and tribal law. Secondly, it functions via remittances, sporadic government initiatives, and a small tourist economy. Even though the pueblo has been penetrated by movement, whether in the form of exodus and return of Hñähñu, or the entrance and exit of tourists who propel themselves through the night in imaginary attempts to cross the border, there are certain aspects of El Alberto that are seemingly indelible, and which constitute a sense of locality driven as much by the force of routine, as by a foundational unraveling of belonging to place that registers at the transnational level. It was Paredes's belief that one's sense of identity “is drawn from the long past, the deep kinships, the longitudinal prerogatives that denote identity and tradition and constitute the very essence of geopolitical change” (Saldivar, 1998). Implicit within this

position, Saldivar states, is an appreciation of social geographies as fields of care. Rooted in phenomenology, this humanistic notion of place taken up by the Chinese-American geographer Yi-Fu Tuan, is the idea of place as infused with emotion, and as permeating an individual and collective sense of identity.

In Socoro's kitchen we sit around the plastic table eating *caldo de pollo* while Lalo and Maria's boys watch TV with Gilberto and Oscar. Preferring Doritos to soup, they sprawl on the bed eating chips – something familiar from home. The transition for Eric had been easy, Maria tells me. But they also decided to send him back to Las Vegas, where he would live with his aunts and uncles until he finished high school. Later that night riding back from the temple in the back of the pick-up truck, Eric says that he considers his time in the pueblo “like a mini vacation.” He liked El Alberto, especially getting to meet his grandmothers and cousins, and he liked learning Hñähñu, which had never before interested him. Now, he tells me, it is necessary if he is going to be able to communicate with his family. Robert, on the other hand, still refused to speak Spanish.

“I cried every day for the first two weeks,” he tells me. “I hate it here.”

Despite his homesickness he had made friends with a couple of other kids from the pueblo who also speak English. And that has made the transition easier. But what neither Eric, Robert, nor their parents address is what it will be like not to live together as a family. One of the main reasons that they decided to return to the pueblo, besides not being able to afford living apart, was so as not to be separated. And yet one of the reasons why Maria and Lalo had weathered being in the US as long as they had, besides the economic question of financing the construction of their home in the pueblo, was to see that their children received an education. This is typical of the majority of Hñähñu

families living in the US.

In a twist of previous migratory patterns where children remain stationary and one or another of the parents makes the recursive migratory movement between Mexico and the US, at thirteen years old, Eric will be one of the first youth in El Alberto to journey back and forth between El Alberto and Las Vegas, his only job being to excel in school and to hopefully win a scholarship to a university.

When it comes time for Robert to go to high school, his parents will decide based on their older son's experience whether or not to send him back. For now, Lalo told me, what was most important was that Eric get a good high school education – something hard to come by in rural Mexico, and especially in indigenous communities like that of El Alberto where education for the majority of youth stops at the 5th grade. It would be a sacrifice. They hoped that when he returned to Las Vegas the following Fall to begin high school that he would not only be trilingual, but also carry with him a sense of pride as well as a sense of fidelity that is a hallmark of belonging to El Alberto, and which will one day – should he live even as far as Australia – bring him back home.

The production of locality and its relationship to imagination as a social practice goes back to the roads. These twisting roads, the flat roads and the back roads which have become the front roads – those secret and sacred paths that have yet to be paved - comprise the circuitry of El Alberto. The generation of youth with dual-citizenship who are returning with their parents to El Alberto, or who like Elena's youngest daughter make the journey to Mexico to visit her grandparents, potentially marks a transnational moment of convergence of cultures, experiences, and translation. To this end, the process of translation may constitute an antidote to the act of severing implicit in the concept,

“partir.” The crisscrossing movement of first generation American-Hñähñu youth across geographic divides - what they bring forward and what they carry back – may in fact suture the distance imposed by the walls and fences that mark difference and enforce estrangement, splitting “here” from “there.”

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