# Living in the Borderlands: Migration, Mestizaje, and Border Identity(ies) in the Narrative Art of Lucia Berlin

Bastián Alvarado, Paulina

**Citation**

Bastián Alvarado, P. (2023). *Living in the Borderlands: Migration, Mestizaje, and Border Identity(ies) in the Narrative Art of Lucia Berlin*.

Version: Not Applicable (or Unknown)
License: License to inclusion and publication of a Bachelor or Master Thesis, 2023
Downloaded from: https://hdl.handle.net/1887/3640940

**Note:** To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

# Living in the Borderlands: Migration, *Mestizaje,* and Border Identity(ies) in the Narrative Art of Lucia Berlin

by

Paulina Pía Bastián Alvarado

Thesis submitted for the Degree of Master of Arts
Cultural Analysis: Literature and Theory
Faculty of Humanities
Leiden University

Supervisor: Dr. Madeleine Kasten
Second Reader: Dr. Nanne Timmer

2023

# Contents

Abstract……………………………………………………………………………...4

Introduction………………………………………………………….…………….....5

1. Chapter One. "I Try to Remember Me": The Shock of a New Culture……………………………………..…………….…………………....12

    1.1 Introduction…………………...………………………………………...……….12

    1.2 The psychological impact of migration and culture shock…...………………...…14

    1.3 The relationship between home, belongingness, and identity…………..………...18

    1.4 The importance of race, gender, and class: an intersectional reading ………………20

    1.5 The consequences for identity: crisis and transformation.......................…………..24

    1.6 Anzaldúa's theory of liminality……………………...…………………….…26

    1.7 Conclusion……………………..…………...…………………….……….….28

2. Chapter Two. "Of Course I Have a Self Here": Life in a Different Language......…………………………………………………………..……...….30

    2.1 Introduction………………………………………………………..…………….30

    2.2 The physical borderland as a starting point..……………………….……….….…31

    2.3 The relationship between culture, language, and identity……………….………….……….36

    2.4 Life in-between languages and multiple, different selves…………....………………..39

    2.5 Anzaldúa's theory of cultural *mestizaje*……...……………….…….…………………42

    2.6 The fragmentation of the narrative as a consequence of the borderlands…….….……45

    2.7 Conclusion…………………………...……………………………………...………49

Conclusion…...………………………….……………………………………………..…...50

Works Cited.….………………….…….……………...…...………………….……..…...…....55

# Abstract

This thesis examines the interface between migration and identity, and more specifically the impact of the migration experience on the subjectivity and identity of migrant women in Lucia Berlin's short story collection *A Manual for Cleaning Women* (2015). By close reading a selection of stories that addresses both the issues of mobility and relocation and the subjective effects of migration, I study if and how the experience of migrating and living in the borderlands leads to the configuration of a border identity –that is, a decentered and multiple subjectivity– in a multilingual and intercultural context. Essentially, I argue that Berlin's stories not only depict different individual experiences of migration and life at the borderlands, but also their impact on the protagonists' sense of self. Furthermore, I contend that the borderlands are not just a physical place; they are also a state of in-betweenness where transformation of identity takes place and a new self emerges. Using postcolonial and feminist theories and drawing primarily on migration studies and identity studies, this thesis is theoretically inspired by Gloria Anzaldúa's theory of the borderlands and, critically assessing some of its main concepts, seeks for additional meanings of what a borderland may be and what it is like to live there. In doing so, this thesis explores issues of culture shock, cultural and linguistic dislocation, belonging, and identity (trans)formation.

Keywords: migration, borderlands, identity, subjectivity, migrant women, Lucia Berlin

# Introduction

> I've lived so many places it's ridiculous… and because I moved so much, place is very, very important to me. I'm always looking… looking for home.
>
> –Lucia Berlin

> Migration is a one way trip. There is no 'home' to go back to.
>
> –Stuart Hall

> In the world through which I travel, I am endlessly creating myself.
>
> –Frantz Fanon

Mobility is one of the most ancient practices of humankind. Throughout history, people have moved from one place to another in many ways and for many different reasons. In today's increasingly interconnected and fast-paced world, the number of people on the move and residing in a country other than their country of origin is higher than ever before[1]. As migration scholar Tony Capstick puts it, "Travelling, moving, and communicating across vast distances are by no means new phenomena, but their ease and accessibility, and aspects of their social and political significance, are distinctive to the contemporary era" (ix). Certainly, the flow of people across the globe, as well as the recent social, technological, and geopolitical developments that have intensified it –along with interculturality and diversity– have shaped the global present. In the era of globalisation, multiculturalism, and transnational mobility, then, the study of migration –its causes and effects at both the macro and micro levels– and the borders people cross have become more relevant than ever. The notion of border, moreover, has broadened its scope and acquired additional and interesting meanings. As more and more people migrate and experience intercultural contact and communication, many find themselves performing different crossings as well as dwelling in-between countries, cultures, languages, and more. This living among worlds, this experience of ambivalence, as different theorists have put it, constitutes life in the borderlands.

---

[1] In "Global Issues: Migration", the United Nations declare that "Today, more people than ever live in a country other than the one in which they were born. According to the IOM World Migration Report 2020, as of June 2019 the number of international migrants was estimated to be almost 272 million globally, 51 million more than in 2010".

In her seminal and highly influential *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987), Chicana feminist scholar Gloria Anzaldúa argues that the borderlands are not only a geographical place, but also a psychological and spiritual one. According to her, they "are physically present wherever two or more cultures edge each other, where people of different races occupy the same territory, where under, lower, middle and upper classes touch, where the space between two individuals shrinks with intimacy" (19). As she and other scholars have argued, the borderlands are not just territories surrounding international borders; they are also, and more importantly, in-between areas where different cultures, ethnicities, and languages meet and where a special subjectivity takes shape: "It is a consciousness of the Borderlands" (Anzaldúa 99). This is the reason why, in the preface to her book, Anzaldúa famously states: "I am a border woman. I grew up between two cultures, the Mexican (with a heavy Indian influence) and the Anglo (as a member of a colonized people in our own territory). I have been straddling that *tejas*-Mexican border, and others, all my life. It's not a comfortable territory to live in, this place of contradictions" (19). To put it in the words of Norma Élia Cantú and Aída Hurtado, writers of the introduction to the 4th edition, "Anzaldúa establishes the border between these two countries as a metaphor for all types of crossings –between geopolitical boundaries, sexual transgressions, social dislocations, and the crossings necessary to exist in multiple linguistic and cultural contexts" (Anzaldúa 6). This is why confusion, ambivalence, and discomfort are some of the prominent features of living there.

Anzaldúa's groundbreaking theorization of the borderlands not only became a hallmark for what has come to be known as border(lands) theory and border(lands) studies, but also influenced diverse fields such as Chicana/o studies, gender studies, postcolonial studies, cultural studies, and some areas of philosophy and psychology. Significantly, the notions of border and borderlands have also been analyzed from the perspective of identity studies in relation to group and personal identity formation. In this context, Alicia Español *et al.* posit that “A border is any division in the flow of experience. Human beings create borders, which generate divisions in the social sphere and help create narratives that modify the identity of those who experience them. International borders are a paradigmatic example for the study of these divisions and their impact on identity” (675-676). They go on to say that borders mark a “disruption in continuity of the territorial experience but also in the continuity of experience of the self” (678), thus shaping the psychological experience of those who live in the borderlands. In like manner, Cristian Berco explains that “the concept of border has been increasingly applied to cultural and identity differences irrespective of geography or space . . . In this wider sense, borders can also be understood as discursive, conceptual practices that create difference among groups and individuals and therefore shape our daily lives” (65). This brief review of some of the recent scholarship on the subject demonstrates that borders, indeed, are much more than a demarcation of land created to delimit and separate nation-states. As Walter Mignolo asserts, “*Borders* are everywhere and they are not only geographic; they are racial and sexual, epistemic and ontological, religious and aesthetic, linguistic and national” (112). Consequently, Nicole M. Guidotti-Hernández affirms that “the study of borders and the borderlands subfield are essential to understanding of communities, self, and subject-formation” (21).

Building on this framework, my thesis explores the interface between migration and identity, and more specifically the impact of the migration experience on the subjectivity and identity of migrant women in Lucia Berlin’s short story collection *A Manual for Cleaning Women* (2015). By analyzing a selection of stories that addresses both the issues of mobility and relocation and the subjective effects of migration, I study if and how the experience of migrating and living in the borderlands leads to the configuration of a border identity –that is, a decentered and multiple subjectivity– in a multilingual and intercultural context. Building primarily on Anzaldúa’s work, this thesis critically assesses some of the main concepts of her theory and seeks for additional meanings of what a borderland may be and what it is like to live there. In my two chapters, I attempt to answer the following research questions: how does the migration experience affect the subjectivity, identity, and perception of reality of Berlin’s female characters? And considering the different types of borderlands, what light can Anzaldúa’s theory shed on this experience and Berlin’s narratives more generally? Essentially, I argue that Berlin's stories not only depict different individual experiences of migration and life at the borderlands, but also the impact of these experiences on the protagonists' sense of self. Furthermore, I contend that Berlin's borderlands are not just a physical place; they are also a state of in-betweenness where transformation of identity takes place and a new self emerges. But before moving on to the thesis outline, I would like to introduce this not-so-known writer and delineate why her narrative is worthy of study.

Lucia Berlin (1936-2004) was a US American[2] short-story writer who went almost unnoticed during her lifetime. Interestingly, she was an itinerant woman who spent most of her life travelling through and living in different countries in Latin America and border cities in the U.S. She was married (and divorced) three times, had four children and worked in all kinds of menial, low-income jobs to support them, all while moving from one abode to another and struggling with alcoholism. Her peripatetic, eventful, and sometimes tremendously difficult life provided the main material for her writing and is greatly reflected in her work. As in autofiction, the protagonists of her stories are almost exclusively female, they live in the same settings as Berlin, and share an overtly similar background. In many cases, they even share the same name –the author's name or a similar variation of it. Additionally, the stories are mostly written in the first person and intertwine with each other as if each one of them were a piece of the same, fragmented puzzle. In fact, by reading them together it seems possible to reconstruct Berlin's own personal and family history. As her son Mark affirms in the introduction to one of her posthumous books, "Ma wrote true stories; not necessarily autobiographical, but close enough for horseshoes" (Berlin, *Evening* xiii). The fact that her writing draws on her own lived experiences and blurs the boundaries between fiction and real life is enthralling, but as Berlin herself used to say, in the end what matters is the story; "the story is the thing" (qtd in *Evening* xiii).

The autobiographical nature of Berlin's work becomes relevant when we consider that, as a migrant, Berlin experienced firsthand the (dis)encounters between Latin Americans, US Americans, and their cultures, and therefore can be analyzed as an example of *mestizaje*.

---

[2] Although the commonly used demonym for people from the United States is 'American', in this thesis I will use the term 'US American'. The reason for this is that the former lacks accuracy and is often misleading: since America is a whole continent, an American could actually be anyone from North, Central, or South America. In my opinion, 'US American' works as a more appropriate and non-imperialist demonym for people from the U.S.

For as I will argue throughout this thesis, more than an issue related exclusively to genetic admixture, *mestizaje* is a matter of "cultural hybridization" (Miller 22). Significantly, Berlin led a rather nomadic and cosmopolitan existence: born in Alaska, she spent many years of her youth living in Santiago, the capital of Chile, and most of her life moving through the Southwest of the United States, living in border cities like El Paso, Texas, and Albuquerque, New Mexico. She also lived many years in Mexico, both in the capital and in small villages. Consequently, she not only spoke Spanish, but also developed a writing style in which she combined it with her mother tongue into what has been called 'Spanglish'. But what is even more interesting for the purpose of this thesis is that in her literature Berlin constantly addresses the experience of borderlands and its concomitant in-between state. In fact, it is in the crossing of borders that her stories situate themselves, giving rise to conflict and transformation. As her fellow author Elizabeth Geoghegan puts it, Berlin "moved, albeit not quite seamlessly, between lives, between worlds", and so did the protagonists of her stories. Although this thesis will not address the similarities between her fiction and her personal life, suffice it to say that Berlin's work centres on the borderland experience because her peripatetic life granted her the necessary knowledge to write about it.

Having been an almost unknown writer in life, it was only with the posthumous publication of *A Manual for Cleaning Women: Selected Stories* in 2015 that Berlin was rediscovered and widely acclaimed. Two more books followed this successful publication: *Evening in Paradise: More Stories* (2018) and *Welcome Home: A Memoir with Selected Photographs and Letters* (2018). But despite becoming a literary sensation, receiving massive media attention –much of it devoted to her convoluted biography, love stories, alcoholism, and the like– and reaching the best-sellers lists, Berlin has barely been addressed academically. This lack of scholarly attention to her limited yet rich oeuvre is something that my thesis seeks to redress. Hence, my aim is to offer an original contribution to the study of Berlin's work and to enrich current scholarship on the representation of migration and migrant women. In a world of "ever-increasing displacement of people from their original country, region, family and language" (Niele 207), I believe it is important to pay attention to narratives –fictional or not– that foreground personal and unique accounts of mobility. As I will demonstrate, Berlin's stories provide a fascinating case study because they portray diverse individual experiences of migration and various ways of living on the borders, with each story revealing a different, yet comparable, perspective of what a borderland, a border woman, and a *mestiza* may be. The fact that these stories offer both a first-person female point of view and a subjective yet realistic migration experience adds to the complexity of Berlin's narrative and enables a rich analysis of the subjectivity of migrant women.

Given the broad, indeed transgressive nature of my research topic, my analysis of the stories utilizes a wide range of theories and concepts from diverse fields of study. Thus, using postcolonial and feminist theories and drawing primarily on migration studies, border(lands) studies, racial and ethnic studies, Chicana/o and Latina/o studies, sociolinguistics, and identity studies, I tackle the interface between migration and identity from an interdisciplinary perspective. In dialogue with such scholarship, my method of analysis will be the close reading of five case studies –i.e., Berlin's short stories– centering on the topics of mobility, interculturality, and translanguaging. In order to critically examine what these stories have to say about life in the borderlands and its effects on the identity and subjectivity of migrant women, in each chapter I select passages from Berlin's writing and pay especial attention to certain observations and expressions –*what* is said by the protagonist and *how* it is said– so as to gain insight into what Capstick describes as "the sometimes disorienting, sometimes stimulating experience of migration" (ix). At the heart of this thesis, therefore, lies an exploration of what occurs to both our subjectivity and identity(ies) when we migrate and experience the clash of cultures, languages, and ethnicities. Each of the chapters focuses on the specific experience of a different migrant subject and, in doing so, engages with broader issues such as culture shock, cultural and linguistic dislocation, belonging, and identity (trans)formation.

In the first chapter, I analyze a single story, concentrating on the geographical, social, and economic features of the borderlands. I also discuss south-to-north mobility and the implications of being a migrant woman of color. Here, the notion of intersectionality and the idea that people experience discrimination, inequality and injustice differently based on their overlapping social identities is fundamental. As I argue, reading Berlin's story through an intersectional lens reveals that the violence, marginalization, and precarity that the Mexican protagonist faces in the U.S., as well the fear and stupefaction that characterize her distressing migration experience, are due to the fact that she is a Latina immigrant. Thus, Chapter One addresses the importance of race, gender, and class in migration-related issues while also paying attention to the psychological consequences of relocation and their impact on identity. In Chapter Two, I analyze four different stories that can be read as one, focusing more on the metaphorical aspects of the borderlands than on their material features. For the borderlands, I contend, are not just a geographical place; they are also a state of the mind and a state of the self. Indeed, the actual physical –yet also symbolic– borderland between Mexico and the U.S. in which the protagonist finds herself is just the starting point for a series of other states of in-betweenness, confusion and contradictions that are psychological, emotional, and spiritual. Therefore, what this chapter primarily addresses is both the sense of cultural and linguistic dislocation and the fragmentation of identity that is caused by the experience of migration and life in the borderlands. Ultimately, in both chapters I engage with the much-discussed concept of *mestizaje* as well as Anzaldúa's notion of *mestiza* consciousness, with each chapter exposing a different vision of what this subjectivity may entail. In doing so, I propose to cast a critical light on these notions as developed by Anzaldúa.

# Chapter One

## “I Try to Remember Me”: The Shock of a New Culture

### 1.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the analysis of the story “Mijito” as well as the geographical, social, and economic features of the borderlands. It also focuses on the transformative potential of these borderlands. The story here analyzed is narrated in the first person by a border teenager who travels from south to north and who experiences the shock not only of confronting a new culture and a different language, but also of having to deal with a very harsh reality. The psychological impact of the migration experience and the vulnerability that is caused by life in the borderlands are very present in her narration. In addition, so are the implications of being a migrant woman of color. Throughout this chapter, I read “Mijito” through an intersectional lens and I argue that both the migration experience and the marginalization to which certain migrants are subjected can cause drastic and profound changes in personal identity and hinder the process of cross-cultural adaptation. As my analysis of the story will show, the precarious situation in which the protagonist finds herself, as well as the hostility and violence she is faced with, all contribute to her lack of belongingness and loss of sense of self. It is in the borderlands between Mexico and the U.S., between the memories of her beloved home and the unfamiliar, hostile US American setting in which she finds herself, as well as in-between her old and her new self, that the protagonist experiences the distress and stupefaction that characterize her migration experience. The borderlands, I will argue, are not just a geographical place: they are also a state of in-betweenness where transformation takes place.

“Mijito” is the story of Amelia, a seventeen-year-old Mexican girl who, sometime in the second half of the 20th century, and following in her boyfriend’s footsteps, illegally crosses the Mexico-U.S. border. As everything in her journey goes from bad to worse, the story progressively turns into a tragedy. Thus, shortly after Amelia has crossed the border and married Manolo in California, he is imprisoned and she is left completely alone. Not only is she moneyless, baffled, and scared, but she is also pregnant. Although she manages to stay at the house of Ramón, Manolo's uncle, where she eventually gives birth, she remains in a constant state of fear, paralyzed by all that she is experiencing. The loneliness and isolation, the harshness of being in a foreign country with a different culture and a language she does not speak, the difficulties of being a teenage mother with a sick baby, and the exploitation and abuse to which she is subjected are simply too much to take in. Hence, as the story of an immigrant and poor, helpless woman of color, "Mijito" encompasses three essential aspects: the precarity and cruelty that Amelia encounters in the U.S., the culture shock and bewilderment caused by her experience of migration and living in the borderlands, and the consequent identity crisis and sense of non-belonging that she develops.

Significantly, "Mijito" is narrated by two different character-bound narrators and focalizers: Amelia, who narrates her own migration story in the first person, and a nameless woman, who narrates her encounters with Amelia while working as a nurse in a children's hospital. Although the passages related by this secondary narrator are also narrated in the first person, hers seems more like a third-person narrative. This is because everything she relates revolves around Amelia –to whom she refers in the third person– and because her own name is never revealed, which gives her a certain air of anonymity. Thus, despite the fact that "Mijito" is composed of the alternating narrations of two divergent character-bound narrators, I believe Amelia never ceases to be the one and only protagonist of the story. The reason why "Mijito" is told by two narrators, I contend, is that Amelia is not capable of understanding, much less explaining the incommensurable entirety of what is happening to her. Thus, an external observer is needed to help convey her story: what Amelia cannot articulate, the secondary narrator does. In this regard, it is important to note that the secondary narrator provides the sociocultural context for the entire story: by giving an account of what kind of people go to the hospital where she works –low-income people, "illegal aliens" (Berlin, *A Manual* 344), "crack babies and AIDS" (Berlin, *A Manual* 335)– and by relating the conditions under which Amelia comes there with her baby Jesus, what the secondary narrator actually does is to testify how marginal Amelia's situation really is. Therefore, her role is as relevant as it is complementary. In what follows, I will delve into Amelia's particular experience of migration, focusing on the profound effects it has on her subjectivity, identity, and perception of reality.

## 1.2 The psychological impact of migration and culture shock

In relation to the above, one of the first things to consider is that the reader only receives the most basic information about the protagonist –her name, her age, her appearance, etc.– thanks to the secondary narrator, who meets Amelia at the hospital. She describes their first encounter as follows: "A teenage mother walks toward me, her infant wrapped in a *rebozo*[3] like in Mexico. The girl looks cowed, terrified. *'No inglés,'* she says" (Berlin, *A Manual* 335). It is only after asking some questions that the nurse realizes the acute problems the girl has. She reports: "Her name is Amelia. She is seventeen, had come from Michoacán to marry her sweetheart but now he is in Soledad prison. She lives with an uncle and aunt. She has no money to go back home. They don't want her here and don't like the baby because he cries all the time" (Berlin, *A Manual* 336). Then, referring to how baffled Amelia looks and how inept she is with her baby, the nurse says: "She holds him like a potato sack. The expression on her face says, 'Where does this sack go?' It occurs to me that she has nobody to tell her anything at all" (Berlin, *A Manual* 336). Finally, after explaining to Amelia what is wrong with her baby –he has a hernia– and how the surgeon is going to fix him, the nurse adds: "She seems to feel better. Hard to tell, she has what doctors call a 'flat affect'" (Berlin, *A Manual* 336). Interestingly, flat affect has been defined as a melancholic condition that is often a symptom of trauma and/or depression. In "Negative symptoms: A review of schizophrenia, melancholic depression and Parkinson's disease" (2006), C. Winograd-Gurvich *et al.* describe flat affect as "poverty of action, or gestures, and communication" (314). Likewise, they describe a person with flat affect as someone who shows "almost no emotional expression" (313). Detachment, reduced emotional reactivity, and limited expressiveness are indeed all related traits, all of which are displayed by Amelia.

In my view, this sort of emotional numbing can be seen as a consequence of the distressing immigration experience that Amelia is going through, as is confirmed repeatedly throughout "Mijito". Not only is she an inexperienced and forlorn mother whose partner has been taken away, but she is also a young immigrant who does not know how things work in a different country than her own and who has no one to turn to for guidance or help. In relation to this, it is important to keep in mind that Amelia is a Spanish-speaking teenager who does not know any English and who comes from a small and rural village. Moving to the U.S. thus represents a real shock for her. Everything is different from what she is used to, and everything seems both confusing and terrifying to her. The perplexity and stupefaction that she experiences, as well as the hostility and lack of empathy she is faced with, can be seen from the very beginning of "Mijito". For instance, when Amelia first meets her boyfriend in California and he does not understand her fear, she narrates: "I was lonely. He was gone most of the time. He got mad at me for being so scared but he forgot how different it was here. We didn't have inside bathrooms or lights at home. Even the television frightened me; it seemed so real" (Berlin, *A Manual* 334). A similar example can be seen in the opening of the story, where Amelia expresses in a mixture of English and Spanish her first impressions of the U.S. and reflects on *who she was* before her journey, a matter to which I will devote more attention later in this chapter. Resembling a stream of consciousness, the story opens as follows:

---

[3] The *rebozo* is a traditional baby wrap shawl worn by Mexican women. It allows the mother to carry her baby either on her back or her chest.

> I want to go home. When *mijito*[4] Jesus falls asleep I think about home, my *mamacita*[5] and my brothers and sisters. I try to remember all the trees and all the people in the village. I try to remember me because I was different then, before *tantas cosas que han pasado*[6]. I had no idea. I didn't know television or *drogas*[7] or fear. I have been afraid since the minute I left the trip and the van and the men and running and even when Manolo met me I got more afraid because he wasn't the same . . . All of the United States was scary coming to Oakland. Cars in front of us, behind us, cars going the other way cars cars cars for sale and stores and stores and more cars. Even in our little room in Oakland where I'd wait for him the room was full of noise, not just the television but cars and buses and sirens and helicopters, men fighting and shooting and people yelling. The *mayates*[8] frighten me and they stand in groups all down the street so I was afraid to go outside. (Berlin, *A Manual* 333)

---

[4] An affectionate contraction of *mi hijito* that means "my little son".
[5] An affectionate diminutive of *mamá* that means "mommy".
[6] So many things that have happened.
[7] Drugs.
[8] *Mayate* is a derogatory term used by Mexicans and Mexican-Americans to refer to a person of African descent.

This fragment is central to my argument as it shows the protagonist giving vent to the various thoughts and emotions that run through her troubled mind, thus reflecting the effects that moving to a new, different environment has on her psyche. The psychological impact of migration has been studied from different disciplines, leading scholars to the conclusion that when immigrants arrive in a new country and immerse themselves in a new culture, they often experience (mental) health issues. Here, the notion of culture shock is fundamental. This umbrella term covers the various psychological problems that result from the experience of travelling, which can include cognitive, emotional, and physiological reactions. In "Culture Shock: A Review of the Literature for Practitioners" (2019), Adrian Furnham explains that culture shock "is conceived as a serious, acute and sometimes chronic affective reaction to a new (social) environment" (1839). According to him, this is "a ubiquitous and normal stage in any acculturative adaptive process that all 'travellers' experience. Going to 'strange places' and losing the power of easy communication can disrupt self-identity, world views and indeed all systems of acting, feeling and thinking" (1838). This explanation confirms what Amelia undergoes in "Mijito": as she recounts in the fragment quoted above, "all of the United States" seems scary, strange, and violent to her, to the point that she is too afraid to go out. The reason is not only that she has moved from one country to another, but more importantly, from one way of life to another. This is why she describes so emphatically the great number of cars and stores she sees in the U.S., as well as the loud noise that comes from the television and the traffic: the transition from rurality to modernity and urbanity is, indeed, too appalling for her.

Another cause of Amelia's culture shock is that she is not used to the US American mindset and belief system, which are different from the Mexican in several aspects. In fact, it is well known that in Mexico most people are very religious: as Roberto Blancarte asserts in "Religion, Church, and State in Contemporary Mexico" (2006), Mexico "is a country with a deeply religious population; it is mostly Catholic and particularly devoted to the Virgin of Guadalupe" (427). In effect, "the religiosity of Mexicans is unquestionable" (Blancarte 425). This is why Amelia repeatedly refers to the Virgin Mary, prays constantly, considers abortion a sin, and names her son 'Jesus'. When she breaks the news of her pregnancy to Lupe – Ramón's wife– and innocently obeys Lupe's instruction to go to the hospital, she narrates:

"I didn't know she meant I should have an *aborto*[9]. 'No,' I told the lady doctor, 'no, I want my baby, *mijito*. His daddy is gone, my baby is all I have.' She was nice at first but then she got mad, said I was just a child I couldn't work, how could I care for him? That I was selfish, *porfiada*[10]. 'It's a sin,' I told her. 'I won't do it. I want my baby'" (Berlin, *A Manual* 339). As is expressed in this fragment, Amelia is too religious to even consider the option of an abortion, which is why the doctor contemptuously calls her "stubborn". Certainly, her worldview and spirituality are very different from what she encounters in the U.S., where she is judged by cultural standards very much unlike her own. Indeed, both her religious beliefs and her rustic customs clash with the US American way of thinking and doing things.

As in this scene, throughout "Mijito" Amelia is repeatedly attacked both psychologically and physically for not doing things the way she should –which is to say, *the way people in the U.S. do things*. Doctors and nurses get persistently angry with her because she does not do what they tell her in terms of prenatal care, medical checkups, vaccines for her baby, surgeries, etc. The mistreatment she receives is so shocking to her and so dissimilar to the treatment she received in Mexico that she declares: "In my whole life at home nobody ever got mad at me" (Berlin, *A Manual* 343). No doubt it is because Amelia is so affected by the clashes of ideas and beliefs and by the hostile environment in which she finds herself that she misses home so badly. This is why, in another scene, she refers to the clarity and calm she feels when, after a long time of lonesome suffering, she feels called upon to travel back to Mexico. She relates that, for the first time, "I wasn't afraid. Jesus was sleeping. It seemed like the Virgin Mary answered me. She told me to take my next welfare check and go home to Mexico. The *curandera*[11] would take care of my baby and my *mamacita* would know how to stop him from crying. I would feed him bananas and papayas. Not mangos because sometimes mangos give babies stomachaches" (Berlin, *A Manual* 348). This fragment is interesting as it shows Amelia not only being homesick and yearning to return home, but also comparing the rural-Mexican way of treating a baby with the US American healthcare system she is being forced to follow –and to which she is a complete stranger. In Mexico, she reflects, there would be no need to go to the hospital and abide by western medicine because the local healer would heal her baby and her beloved mother would calm him down. To these observations, one might add that people would stop misjudging her and treating her badly for doing things differently.

---

[9] Abortion.

[10] Stubborn.

[11] Traditional healer who, without being a doctor, exercises healing practices using natural methods or rituals.

### 1.3 The relationship between home, belongingness, and identity

The fragment quoted above reveals two different yet related feelings: the nostalgia with which Amelia remembers her country, and her longing for her family and home. This yearning is very present in Amelia's narrative and, as I will show, is an important cause of her lack of belongingness and identity crisis. In "Home and Migration: Mobilities, Belongings and Identities" (2011), David Ralph and Lynn A. Staeheli explain that both identity and the sense of belonging are linked to the notion that individuals have of home. This notion is embedded within relationships: people, sociocultural practices, daily routines, and material objects form the basis of what we articulate as home. As Ralph and Staeheli state, "Those relationships and processes that construct home are also involved in creating identities and feelings of belonging" (521). When individuals migrate and no longer feel the presence of those attachments, both their identity and their sense of belonging are affected. Here, Ralph and Staeheli make an important remark, arguing that although "belonging is a subjective feeling held by individuals, it is also socially defined" (523). They go on to say that "belonging is never entirely about migrants' subjective feelings of 'fitting in' or not, but also relates to how (powerful) others define who belongs to home according to specific spatial norms and expectations" (523). In other words, the notion of belonging encompasses both power relations and practices of incorporation and exclusion. They elaborate:

> This social element [of belonging] speaks not so much to the feeling of identification and familiarity as it does to experiences of inclusion and, very often, of exclusion. Belonging, therefore, does not simply invoke warm feelings of fellowship to various peoples, places and cultures, because it depends on, or takes its meaning from, the inability of some people to participate in mainstream societal practices . . . This experience of exclusion is often pointedly the case for migrants' encounters with members of the places to which they have moved. (523)

The point made by Ralph and Staeheli here is confirmed by "Mijito" since the story presents a visceral experience of rejection that simply precludes any possibility of belonging. From the moment Amelia arrives in Ramón's and Lupe's house, they let her know very explicitly that she is an unwanted guest. In fact, they both repeatedly –and aggressively– inform her that she has to move out as soon as she can. Amelia's awareness of being unwelcome aggravates her isolation, sense of non-belongingness, and yearning for home, which play a central role in her subjectivity: as she herself recounts, she spends much of her time reflecting on her home and the ones she loves. In one scene, Lupe asks Amelia what she is doing –and has been doing for hours and hours– and she answers "Thinking. About Manolo. About my *pueblo*[12]" (Berlin, *A Manual* 338), to which Lupe acidly responds: "Start thinking about moving out of here" (Berlin, *A Manual* 338). In a different scene, Amelia tells Lupe about Jesus' need for surgery and, feeling emotionally overwhelmed, begins to cry. Without any empathy or compassion, Lupe shakes her, saying: "You're a woman now! Face it. We'll give you some time till Jesus is okay, then you're going to figure out your own life. The apartment is too small. Ramón and I are dead tired and your kid cries day and night, or you do, worse. We're sick of it" (Berlin, *A Manual* 340). Consequently, despite having been living in California for over a year, Amelia never stops feeling rejected and out of place.

The fact that Amelia never becomes adapted to the US American way of thinking and doing things and never becomes a member of US American society is significant as it stands in contrast to the high sense of belonging she maintains with regard to her homeland. Indeed, she never stops regarding her Mexican domicile as her one and only home. Her strong attachments to her village and local community, as well as to her mother and siblings, remain very present in her narrative. As her situation becomes more and more precarious, so do her feelings of nostalgia and longing. What it is interesting is that the harsh reality she encounters in the U.S. and the abuses she suffers in her day-to-day life lead her to both yearn for and idealize Mexico, resulting in "a romanticised, nostalgic view" (Ralph and Staeheli 520) of her Mexican home. This is why she spends so much time thinking about it and why, after being raped by Ramón, she exclaims almost poetically: "Oh how I miss my *pueblo*, where the laughter is soft like breezes" (Berlin, *A Manual* 342). This is also why she finally decides to travel back to Mexico and, announcing her plans to Lupe, decisively proclaims: "I'm going home" (Berlin, *A Manual* 349). When Lupe tries to make her understand that she has no money to go back and to convince her to stay in the U.S., meet guys, and "have some fun"

---

[12] Village.

(Berlin, *A Manual* 349), Amelia does not even consider this option and firmly declares: "I want to go home" (Berlin, *A Manual* 349).

In my view, this state in-between yearning-to-be-home and being-away-from-home constitutes a metaphorical borderland. Although the reality is that Amelia is living in California and waiting for Manolo to get out of prison, both her memories from the past and her wishes for the future are placed in Mexico. Thus, she not only lives in-between two countries, cultures and languages, but she also lives in-between affects and attachments: her home and family in Mexico, and her husband and baby in the U.S. In relation to this predicament, MariaCaterina La Barbera asserts in her introduction to *Identity and Migration in Europe: Multidisciplinary Perspectives* (2015) that migrants' "new condition is in between" (3) because they live in-between their past and their present, as well as in-between nostalgia, disappointment, and idealization. This is precisely the state she refers to when she defines migration as "the material and existential condition of being at the borderland, in-between, in transit" (10). Significantly, Amelia's strong identification with home reveals that her sense of self remains persistently tied to her homeland. Personal identity is closely related to the sense of belonging, which in turn is closely related to attachments –to both people and places–, membership, and the notion of home. However, since Amelia is far from her beloved community and experiencing more cruelty than ever before, her sense of homeliness and belongingness are shattered. As a consequence, so is her sense of self. As I will explain in the last section of this chapter, this is the reason why her identity becomes conflicted and why throughout "Mijito" she remains in-between her old Mexican self and a newer, developing self. As I will demonstrate, this state in-between identities constitutes yet another borderland.

### 1.4 The importance of race, gender, and class: an intersectional reading

Although both the experience of migration and the process of cross-cultural adaptation are subjective and different for everyone, research shows that certain groups of migrants may experience more difficulties and adverse effects of culture shock (Furnham 1834). According to Furnham, the culture shock experienced by a travelling professional or a student, for example, is likely to differ from that of a refugee or illegal immigrant (1834). In my opinion, this distinction is directly related to the notion of intersectionality and the idea that people experience discrimination, inequality and injustice differently based on their overlapping social identities. As Anna Carastathis explains in “The Concept of Intersectionality in Feminist Theory” (2014), this notion has its roots in Black feminist thought and “the political movement of Black women, Chicana and Latina women, and other women of color” (306) that gained strength in the late 1960s. Introduced in academe by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989, the goal of intersectionality is to render visible the convergence of “multiple, intersecting systems of oppression” (Carastathis 304). In her renowned essay “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color” (1991), Crenshaw addresses the intersection of race, gender, and class and states that “the experiences of women of color are frequently the product of intersecting patterns of racism and sexism” (1243), which makes those experiences “qualitatively different than [those] of white women” (1245). According to Anne Sisson Runyan, author of “What Is Intersectionality and Why Is It Important?” (2018), over the years the list of social categories has expanded to include others such as sexuality, age, (dis)ability, ethnicity, culture, language, religion, nationality, and immigration status, all of which confer “either disadvantages or privileges on each of us” (13).

Reading the story “Mijito” through an intersectional lens is illuminating as it reveals that both the oppression and marginalization that Amelia faces are due to her overlapping identities, as she is not just any immigrant, but a woman *and* a Latina[13]: a non-white, non-English speaking girl who not only comes from a rural village in a so-called third-world country, but who is also poor, uneducated, and illiterate. In addition, she is a catholic, and on top of this, she is a teenage mother. The precarious situation in which she finds herself in the U.S., as well as the sexual abuse and labor exploitation to which she is subjected, occur as a consequence of the combination of all these factors. Explaining how both Ramón and Lupe take advantage of her and the little money the government gives her after she becomes a legal resident, Amelia confides: “It was very bad living with them . . . I gave them my check and food stamps. They gave me just a little money for things for me. I took care of Tina and

---

[13] The term ‘Latina/o’ is used both by scholars and the U.S. government to refer to people of Latin American descent –usually immigrants– living in the U.S. As Frances R. Aparicio explains, the term has not only been highly debated, but also “critiqued and rejected as a label that homogenizes the rich heterogeneity of our [Latin American] communities” (113) and their cultural and ethnic differences.

Willie [their kids], but they didn't speak Spanish, didn't pay me any attention. Lupe hated having me there and Ramón was nice except when he got drunk he was always grabbing me or poking at me from behind" (Berlin, *A Manual* 338). This situation, Amelia explains, aggravates when she becomes a mother: "I had the baby at Lupe's house. She helped but Ramón hit her when he got home and hit me too. He said bad enough I showed up. Now a kid too" (Berlin, *A Manual* 339). As can be seen, the problem of Amelia is not only that she is all alone in a completely unfamiliar, different world, but also that she falls prey to abuse by the very people –apparently migrants like herself– to whom she appeals for help. This is confirmed when, at the beginning of "Mijito", the nurse says that "she seemed a victim" (Berlin, *A Manual* 337) and that she had "that hopeless look you see on battered women" (Berlin, *A Manual* 336).

It is important to realize that as a Latina, Amelia qualifies as a *mestiza* not only because of her blood –that is, for being Latin American and having a mixed lineage–, but also because of her intercultural experience and her intersectional struggles. In this regard, it is imperative to note that the term *mestizaje* does not just refer to the interbreeding of peoples in the Americas; it also, and more importantly, denotes the mingling of different cultures that results in new ones. According to Marilyn Grace Miller, author of *Rise and Fall of the Cosmic Race: The Cult of Mestizaje in Latin America* (2004), *mestizaje* originated as "The genetic and cultural admixture produced by the encounters or 'dis-encounters' (*desencuentros*) between Europeans, the Africans who accompanied them to and in the New World, indigenous groups, and various others who arrived in the Americas" (1-2). Although the phenomenon of *mestizaje* has been historically condemned –mainly due to white supremacy, European hegemony, and racism–, it has also been celebrated. An example of the latter is the work of Gloria Anzaldúa as presented in her *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987) and the Chicano movement, which embraced its mixed identity and appropriated the term *mestizaje* as a form of empowerment[14]. As a Chicana scholar, Anzaldúa writes from the standpoint of a *mestiza* who defends the value of multicultural and multilingual experience:

---

[14] 'Chicanas/os' are people of Mexican descent who were born in the U.S. or migrated there from Mexico as children. According to Sheila Marie Contreras, the term became popular thanks to the Chicano political activism in the 1960s, during which Chicanas/os reclaimed the once pejorative term and "transformed it into an empowering alternative to "Mexican," "Mexican American," or 'Hispanic.' To name oneself as 'Chicana' or 'Chicano' is to assert a gendered, racial, ethnic, class, and cultural identity in opposition to Anglo-American hegemony" (32). The term 'Chicano', therefore, is one of self-identification.

in her theory, therefore, the concept *mestizaje* is reclaimed and “defined more in political than in ethnic terms” (Miller 8). Similarly, in her theory the notion of borderlands implies more than just a territory surrounding a geopolitical border. This is why, when Anzaldúa analyzes the phenomenon of Mexican migration to the U.S., with all the dangers and uncertainties that it entails, she explains that many cross the border through Rio Grande, “where two worlds merge” (33) and where “The convergence has created a shock culture, a border culture, a third country” (33).

Anzaldúa continues to explain that the migrants who make it to the other side of the border “find themselves in the midst of 150 years of racism in Chicano *barrios*[15] in the Southwest and in big northern cities” (34). In fact, it is not uncommon for them to be disparagingly called ‘wetbacks’ –a pejorative term that refers to the river crossing–, ‘beaners’ and/or ‘greasers’. Anzaldúa elaborates: “Living in a no-man’s-borderland, caught between being treated as criminals and being able to eat, between resistance and deportation, the illegal refugees are some of the poorest and the most exploited of any people in the U.S.” (34). This is exactly Amelia’s situation in “Mijito”: with no family, no money, and no English skills, she finds herself in a state of extreme precariousness. In exchange for having a place to sleep with her newborn baby –that place being a kitchen corner–, she works as a full-time maid in the house of Ramón and Lupe. In addition, she is abused by Ramón, who harasses her whenever he wants to. In one particular scene, Ramón explicitly tells her that as long as she lives with them, she must fulfill his sexual requirements: “So I suck your tit you think you get something back? . . . Don’t get any ideas about telling Lupe nothing. Your ass would be out of here in five minutes. Which would be fine with me, but as long as it’s here I mean to get me some” (Berlin, *A Manual* 341-342). After saying this, he rapes her. Exhausted and vulnerable as she is, Amelia is willing –or rather, has no other option– to put up with it all, but when Lupe witnesses Ramón harassing Amelia, she kicks her out and Amelia ends up in a shelter for homeless and drunken people, where the story takes an even more tragical turn. In this context, Anzaldúa’s words about Mexican immigrants resonate like a dramatic prophecy that cannot be escaped: “As refugees in a homeland that does not want them, many find a welcome hand holding out only suffering, pain, and ignoble death” (34).

---

[15] Neighborhoods.

As a feminist theorist, Anzaldúa adopts an intersectional approach and reserves a special place of analysis for Chicanas, Latinas and *mestizas*, demonstrating that in discussions regarding ethnicity and race, gender simply cannot be left out. According to Anzaldúa, in the context of south-to-north migration to the U.S., the *mestiza* "is doubly threatened in this country. Not only does she have to contend with sexual violence, but like all women, she is prey to a sense of physical helplessness. As a refugee, she leaves the familiar and safe homeground to venture into unknown and possibly dangerous terrain" (34-35). This vulnerability and powerlessness are exemplified by Amelia. Because of the countless difficulties that she experiences in the U.S., she feels both the need to talk to someone and the desperation of not being able to communicate and ask for help; as a consequence, she remains silent, paralyzed, almost as if in a catatonic state. Indeed, in the face of adversity, Amelia simply becomes mute: "I was so worried and too frightened to talk" (Berlin, *A Manual* 334-335). In one of her encounters with the nurse, she thinks: "I wanted to tell her that I needed to talk to somebody" (Berlin, *A Manual* 352); however, she remains speechless. In this regard, Anzaldúa posits that due to isolation and anguish, "the *mexicana*[16] suffers serious health problems. *Se enferma de los nervios, de alta presión*[17]" (34). Amelia, young and inexperienced, is so affected by her distressing experience of migration and life in the borderlands that she loses her common sense and, out of desperation, accidentally kills her baby while trying to stop him from crying. Her excuse, as she herself admits, is that she was overwrought and "couldn't think about what to do" (Berlin, *A Manual* 354) without quietness. The story ends at the hospital with Amelia, stunned, looking "even more blankly than usual" (Berlin, *A Manual* 354), her subjectivity and identity more conflicted than ever.

### 1.5 The consequences for identity: crisis and transformation

Migration involves many stressful life changes, as adapting to both a new society and a new reality is not an easy or neutral process. Much research has been conducted on the influence of migration on identity processes, as one of the many consequences of relocation and culture shock is precisely identity change: according to Furnham, these experiences can "have a sudden and profound impact on an individual's identity" (1834). In her article "Identity Construction in the Context of Migration" (2014), Adelaida Reyes builds on psychologist Erik Erikson's notions of identity development and identity crisis and, going one step further than Furnham, argues that migration is "a force that is both formative and transformative" (110) and that "migrants in general are vulnerable to identity crises" (118). I believe this is especially true of difficult, traumatic experiences like the one Amelia goes through, "where pressures become a true test of human endurance and creativity" (Reyes 111), and where "the emotional conflicts, the myriad stressful events that are part of the migration experience leave their mark" (Reyes 111). Likewise, La Barbera asserts that "migration implies drastic and profound changes in personal identity" (8). According to her, the arrival of migrants in a new country can be considered a "total event" in the sense that

---

[16] Mexican woman.
[17] She gets sick due to nerves and stress.

> it requires the complete (re)construction of identity. Indeed, leaving their country of origin, migrants lose their social status, family, and social networks. In the receiving country, they find themselves without a history and without an image. Faced with an unknown universe of meanings, migrants feel lost, alone, and without reference points. As much as they strive to become integrated, migrants remain strangers. Moreover, migrants face distrust and hostility. The harsh reality of exclusion differs from the idealized image of the receiving country as a place to better one's life that originally drives migrants to leave their country of origin. Disillusionment and nostalgia contribute to idealizing the country of origin, which is in turn beautified through memory. (3)

What La Barbera describes here is consistent with Amelia's predicament and with her own observations on different occasions. From the very beginning of "Mijito", it is clear that the culture shock, rejection, and brutality that Amelia experiences in the U.S. have a significant impact on her subjectivity and identity. To illustrate this, let's take a closer look at an excerpt from the fragment of "Mijito" quoted earlier: "When *mijito* Jesus falls asleep I think about home, my *mamacita* and my brothers and sisters. I try to remember all the trees and all the people in the village. I try to remember me because I was different then, before *tantas cosas que han pasado.* I had no idea. I didn't know television or *drogas* or fear" (Berlin, *A Manual* 333). This quote shows Amelia reflecting on her past self and identity, before she left her home, her people, and her culture. Importantly, it is because "so many things have happened", because she now knows violence and fear, and because she senses that she has changed, that she reflects on *who she was* before moving to the U.S and *tries to remember herself*. Certainly, it is because her sense of homeliness and belongingness are shattered and because her identity is in crisis that she has trouble maintaining her sense of self. Being so young and innocent, she arguably lacks the emotional maturity and resilience necessary to cope with the various shocks she experiences. Her immersion in a new environment, a new culture and a new language, as well as the great adversity she faces, are simply too much to assimilate. For this reason, her identity becomes conflicted to the point of her feeling detached from the person she used to be.

## 1.6 Anzaldúa's theory of liminality

According to Anzaldúa, this 'forgetting' of one's own self occurs because living in the borderlands is a transformative experience full of ambivalence. As she points out, this is because when "having or living in more than one culture, we get multiple, often opposing messages. The coming together of two self-consistent but habitually incompatible frames of reference causes *un choque*[18], a cultural collision" (100) that generates great confusion. Anzaldúa asserts that "The ambivalence from the clash of voices results in mental and emotional states of perplexity. Internal strife results in insecurity and indecisiveness" (100). The internal strife that Anzaldúa alludes to can be seen throughout "Mijito". Given that in the U.S. Amelia experiences the clash between two different worlds –the US American and the Mexican– and finds herself living in-between cultures, languages, and attachments, she is persistently dealing with unfamiliarity and bewilderment. Consequently, she senses that she has changed. In this regard, Anzaldúa contends that the experience of living in the borderlands has the power to cause shifts in personal identity and generate a new consciousness. Furthermore, it is precisely the *mestizaje* and hybridity –understood as "the coexistence of different conflictive belief systems, languages, styles, and linguistic consciences" (Miller 22)– that causes this transformation. Anzaldúa affirms that due to the "racial, ideological, cultural and biological cross-pollinization, an 'alien' consciousness is presently in the making –a new *mestiza* consciousness, *una conciencia de mujer*[19]. It is a consciousness of the Borderlands" (99).

---

[18] A clash.

The *mestiza* consciousness originates in what Anzaldúa calls *Nepantla*, a Nahuatl term that designates "the space between two worlds . . . a space where you are not this or that but where you are changing. You haven't got into the new identity yet and haven't left the old identity either –you are in a kind of transition" (Anzaldúa 276). *Nepantla*, indeed, can be described as a state of liminality and a process of identity configuration that *mestizas* and border women go through: "It is very awkward, uncomfortable and frustrating to be in that *Nepantla* because you are in the midst of transformation" (Anzaldúa 276). As AnaLouise Keating states in the introduction to *Entre Mundos/Among Worlds: New Perspectives on Gloria E. Anzaldúa* (2008), the reason why *Nepantla* is so uncomfortable is that it entails not only an in-between state, but also "temporal, spatial, psychic, and/or intellectual point(s) of liminality and potential transformation" (1). During the transitional stage of *Nepantla*, "individual and collective self-conceptions and worldviews are shattered. Apparently fixed categories . . . begin eroding. Boundaries become more permeable, and begin to break down. This loosening of previously restrictive labels and beliefs, while intensely painful, can create shifts in consciousness and opportunities for change" (Keating 1). Surely, this is a process that demands time and psychic effort: no one forgets their habitual mindset and adopts new and "foreign ways of seeing and thinking" (Anzaldúa 104) overnight. This is why *Nepantla* is associated with "space/times of great confusion, anxiety and loss of control" (Keating 6).

The notion of *Nepantla* leads me to one of the most important findings of my analysis: although in her theory Anzaldúa insists on the idea that the *mestiza* is on her way to a new consciousness (100) that will allow her to better face the "clash of cultures" (103) and the several difficulties of living in the borderlands, I believe that in the course of "Mijito" Amelia does not develop this consciousness. On the contrary: far from being able to cope with and adapt to the borderlands, throughout the story she remains utterly affected by them. Moreover, she remains in-between her old Mexican self and a newer, developing self without fully developing a new identity; she remains, indeed, stuck in *Nepantla*. In my opinion, the reason why despite being *mestiza* Amelia is unable to develop a *mestiza* consciousness is that in her case the alienating experience of finding herself in *Nepantla* is further aggravated by external forces that she cannot resist –notably the brutality that she suffers at the hands of Ramón and Lupe. Amelia is, in fact, a vulnerable teenager with insufficient emotional capacity, no resources to change her unfortunate situation, and no other choice but to submit to misery and oppression. Here, La Barbera's words come to mind: "Although painful, the condition of being at the borderlands offers opportunities for improving one's life. Indeed, mobility is essentially a search for better economic, working, and living conditions . . . a search for happiness. This expectation helps migrants to persist in a process that often worsens their living conditions during the initial phases" (4). In "Mijito", however, the initial phase is never overcome. Thus, while the borderlands are certainly a transformative place, Amelia's experience offers no hope of her taking charge of her fate and achieving peace of mind. In this manner, Berlin's story challenges the notion of borderlands and *mestiza* consciousness as developed by Anzaldúa: "Mijito", indeed, casts a critical light on Anzaldúa's theory, which fails to acknowledge the possibility that the borderland experience could result in disaster and even (self-)destruction.

---

[19] A woman's consciousness.

## 1.7 Conclusion

What my analysis of Berlin's story has shown is that the experience of migrating and living in the borderlands can have profound, indeed disastrous effects on the subjectivity, identity, and perception of reality of certain migrants. Reading "Mijito" through an intersectional lens reveals that the marginalization that Amelia faces, as well as the abuse to which she is subjected, occur as a consequence of her being a poor and uneducated migrant woman of color, a Latina, and a *mestiza*. The fact that Amelia experiences the shock not only of a new culture and a different language, but also of a very harsh reality, is significant as it causes profound changes in her psyche and identity. Such is the transformative potential of life in the borderlands, which, as I have argued, are not just a geographical place. In effect, "Mijito" demonstrates that it is in the borderlands between Mexico and the U.S., between the memories of her beloved home and the unfamiliar, hostile US American setting in which she finds herself, as well as in-between her old and her new self, that the protagonist experiences the stupefaction, lack of belongingness, and loss of sense of self that characterize both her distressing migration experience and her identity crisis. While it is true that the borderlands offer opportunities for improving one's life, what should be noted is that not everybody has the resources or competences to access those opportunities. “Mijito”, indeed, presents a visceral experience of cruelty and misfortune that simply precludes any possibility of cross-cultural adaption, happiness, and flourishing.

# Chapter Two

# “Of Course I Have a Self Here”: Life in a Different Language

## 2.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the analysis of four short stories that can be read as separate yet complementary segments of one single tale. It also focuses more on the metaphorical and symbolic aspects of the borderlands than on their specific geographical and material features. For the borderlands, as I argue, are not just a physical place, they are also, and more importantly, a state of the mind and a state of the self. The four stories here analyzed are narrated in the first person by a border woman whose name, significantly, is never disclosed and who has a new life both in a foreign country and in a different language. For this reason, she constantly reflects on the different yet superposed borderlands in which she lives, as well as on the persistent feelings of confusion that derive from them. The sense of alienation that is caused by the experience of migration and life in the borderlands is in fact very present in her narration. As my analysis of the four stories will show, living in the borderlands affects the protagonist’s subjectivity, identity, and perception of reality, as one of the many consequences of migrating and changing languages is precisely the fragmentation of identity and the emergence of a new self. Throughout this chapter, I argue that it is in an attempt to understand her state of in-betweenness and to cope with her geographical, cultural and linguistic dislocation that the protagonist pinpoints the many contrasts she perceives, builds a comparative portrait between Mexican and US American cultures, and travels back and forth between the present and the past: her new life in Mexico and her former life in the U.S.

The four stories are titled “So Long”, “Fool to Cry”, “Panteón de Dolores” and “Wait a Minute” and can, as mentioned above, be considered one fragmented narrative about the same set of characters, circumstances, and moreover, the same borderlands; one single story narrated by one and the same character-bound narrator and focalizer –the female protagonist– in which facts, people, and events overlap. In each segment, the protagonist is a US American middle-aged woman whose sister Sally, who is also US American but lives in Mexico City, has terminal cancer. For this reason, the protagonist has quit her job, moved out of her home in Oakland, California, and relocated to Mexico indefinitely with the purpose of taking care of her sister and helping her get everything in order before she dies. Significantly, even though each story is set at a different point in time –in “Fool to Cry” Sally has just been diagnosed, while in “Panteón de Dolores” and “So Long” she is in the final stage of the disease, and in “Wait a Minute” she has died–, they all complement each other and tackle the same topics. Thus, in all four stories the prospect of death, the bonding of the sisters, and the evocation of memories of the past intertwine with the peculiarities of living in a multilingual, multicultural context and the effects that the migration experience has on the protagonist’s subjectivity. As I will argue, it is in the in-between state among life and death, between the present and the past, as well as between Mexico and the U.S., that we find additional meanings of what a borderland may be and what it is like to live there.

## 2.2 The physical borderland as a starting point

One of the first things to be noticed when reading these stories is that, unlike in “Mijito”, the transits are made in the opposite direction and under very different circumstances. Undoubtedly, although the passages are made through the same U.S.-Mexico border, the conditions in which US American characters cross are not the same as those of Mexicans and Latinas/os. As I explained in the preceding chapter, one of the reasons why the latter head north is because they are in search of a better life: if they take the risk of crossing the border illegally, facing both uncertainty and danger, it is in the hope of leaving poverty and violence behind. Contrary to this reality, the protagonist of the four short stories analyzed in this chapter moves from a much more privileged point of departure since she travels not because of necessity –that is, economic, social, or political strife–, but by personal choice: although motivated by plausible personal reasons and family issues –i.e., her sister’s illness– her migration is nevertheless completely voluntary. Therefore, she does not cross the border in such urgent and deplorable conditions as others who travel from the south. As Iain Chambers points out in *Migrancy, Culture, Identity* (2001), “the induced, often brutally enforced, migrations of individuals and whole populations from ‘peripheries’ towards Euro-American metropolises and ‘Third World’ cities, are of a magnitude and intensity that dramatically dwarf any direct comparison" (6) with the transits made in the reverse direction. As opposed to these experiences, the aforementioned protagonist faces a very different set of problems.

This difference points to a significant distinction that we must take into account regarding the status and mobility of migrant bodies. For, as Suresh Canagarajah explains in the introduction to *The Routledge Handbook of Migration and Language* (2017), this status is in fact a matter of socioeconomic inequality: "In policy and public discourse, the privileged who enjoy the resources and access for travel are considered mobile, and the less privileged are referred to as migrants. The mobile are welcome everywhere and have the resources to shuttle across borders as they please; migrants seek opportunities and refuge elsewhere" (5). This distinction, then, determines how travelers are received at their destinations. Following Canagarajah, the US American protagonist of the four stories could be considered mobile instead of a migrant. In the story "Fool to Cry", for example, she says: "Mexico City is a huge metropolis but people have titles . . . I am the American sister. Everyone greets me with hugs and cheek kisses" (Berlin, *A Manual* 222-223). As can be seen from this quote, thanks to the fact that the protagonist is a white woman who comes from a so-called first-world nation, she is very well received in Mexico. Her reception and acceptance are completely contrary to those of the protagonist of "Mijito". This, however, does not necessarily mean that the various experiences that arise from her journey will be less significant for her: although we cannot ignore the great difference in status between mobile and migrant bodies –and in this case, between US American and Latina women–, my aim is to show that despite their unequal socioeconomic conditions, the sense of dislocation and the identity shifts that are caused by the experience of migration and life in the borderlands are certainly predominant in both protagonists.

The stories "So Long", "Fool to Cry", "Panteón de Dolores" and "Wait a Minute" contain compelling observations about the various borderlands in which the protagonist lives. These borderlands are of different types, since some are tangible and others are not. The first one that we recognize in all four stories is the actual physical borderland between Mexico and the U.S. In my view, this is not only the most explicit borderland of all, but also the one that lays the foundations for the protagonist's overall state of in-betweenness. Throughout the stories, the protagonist observes with the eyes of a foreigner what occurs in her immediate surroundings and describes what she finds beautiful, exotic, and strange about Mexico City.

This is because when living in a different country –and especially in a different language– a process of defamiliarization takes place: as everything we are familiar with is left behind, we encounter things that may be unknown to us and/or very distinct from what we are used to. For this reason, the perception of novelty and the quirks of living in a different culture are very present in the protagonist's narration. The following quote from "Wait a Minute" sums up her experience of the borderland between Mexico and the U.S: "The *camote*[20] man whistles in the street below and then you help your sister into the *sala*[21] to watch Mexico City news and then U.S. news with Peter Jennings" (Berlin, *A Manual* 381). As is evident from this fragment, the protagonist not only writes using both English and Spanish, the two languages she lives in, but she also refers to two different national newscasts which, in turn, symbolize –and explicitly refer to– the two different worlds that come together in this sequence of stories: the US American and the Mexican. Together, these two worlds encompass a set of conflicting duos: two countries, two cultures, two social systems, two languages, two systems of knowledge, and so on.

What is interesting about the protagonist's narrative is that she constantly reflects on, and tries to understand, her state of in-betweenness. In this respect, it is important to realize that during the time she has been residing in Mexico City, she has not only been observing and experiencing what it is like to live in a foreign country, but she also has been giving care and support to her ill sister. Thus, in all four stories the protagonist recounts how her psyche has been affected by migration as much as by her sister's illness, and she describes different moments and situations in which she has felt bewildered, gloomy, and displaced. The borderland between Mexico and the U.S. is therefore just the starting point for a series of other states of in-betweenness, confusion and contradictions. Throughout her narration, the protagonist ponders her perceptions and repeatedly pinpoints the many contrasts she perceives in a variety of issues. Certainly, one of the most prominent causes of her gloominess is the proximity of Sally's death, which correlates neither with Sally's apparent vitality nor with that of their relationship, which has become a very dear and special one.

---

[20] The *camote* is an orange, sweet root vegetable native to Central and South America that is very popular in Mexico. In English it is known as 'sweet potato', and thanks to globalisation, today it can be found all over the world.

[21] Living room.

This state in-between life and death constitutes yet another borderland. In “Fool to Cry”, the protagonist describes how full of life her sister is as follows:

> Everyone stares at her, fascinated . . . Everyone knows she is dying, but she has never looked so beautiful or happy . . . it is as if the sentence [of death] had been a gift. Maybe it’s because she fell in love with Xavier the week before she found out. She has come alive. She savors everything. She says whatever she wants, does whatever makes her feel good. She laughs. Her walk is sexy, her voice is sexy. She gets mad and throws things, hollers cusswords . . . She is strong, radiant now; her zest is contagious. (Berlin, *A Manual* 222)

Although a central theme of the four stories is Sally’s illness, the protagonist thus tells us that her sister simply does not appear to be sick. This, of course, will inevitably change over time, but the bottom line is that even though Sally’s show of health will gradually fade, the relationship the protagonist has with her sister will not deteriorate. In fact, as time passes and Sally’s condition worsens, the closeness of the sisters becomes even more significant and noticeable. Their friendship and connection become stronger and more alive than ever before, a development which stands in striking contrast to the prospect of death. At the beginning of “So Long”, the protagonist recounts what her life with Sally is like as follows: “I have lived in Mexico City for almost a year now. My sister Sally is very ill. I take care of her house and children, bring her food, give her injections. I read to her, wonderful books. We talk for hours, cry and laugh, get mad at the news, worry about her son out late” (Berlin, *A Manual* 252). Interestingly, as a result of this intimate routine, a sort of symbiosis seems to exist between the sisters. Referring to this close bond, the protagonist says: “It is uncanny, how close we have become. We have been together all day for so long. We see and hear things the same way, know what the other is going to say” (Berlin, *A Manual* 252). This bonding becomes especially relevant when the protagonist remarks that they were not friends in the past. This is, indeed, the first time they experience true sisterhood: “She and I have become close, sisters. That’s been like falling in love” (Berlin, *A Manual* 230). But precious though their bonding is, as a negative consequence of this very same closeness the protagonist feels as if she were losing her individuality, and more importantly, her personal identity.

In the borderlands between life and death and between Mexico and the U.S., then, it is very significant how attached to one another the sisters have become. As a matter of fact, it is because the protagonist has become a substantial part of Sally's life and spends so much time with her sister that her notion of selfhood becomes confused. Since she has left her home in the U.S. and lives in a country and a household that are not her own, she feels persistently displaced. For this reason, the protagonist repeatedly reflects on her mixed feelings regarding her living in Mexico City while being Sally's caregiver: on the one hand, she cares for her sister and wants to help her with everything she needs, but on the other hand, she feels as if her very existence had been put on hold indefinitely. Additionally, she has a permanent sense of strangeness as to how things work in Mexico and admits to feeling both fascinated and annoyed by how different everything is from her life in the U.S. In fact, she constantly thinks about how peculiar Mexican culture is compared to her own. One particular reason for this experience of difference is that wherever she is, she never gets the chance to be all alone; on the contrary, she is always in the company of Sally, relatives, friends and/or strangers. Precisely because she feels the need to be on her own, in "So Long" she notes: "I miss solitude . . . In Mexico there is never not anyone else there. If you go into your room to read somebody will notice you're by yourself and go keep you company. Sally is never alone. At night I stay until I am sure she is asleep" (Berlin, *A Manual* 249-250). And then, at the beginning of "Fool to Cry", she adds:

> Solitude is an Anglo-Saxon concept. In Mexico City, if you're the only person on a bus and someone gets on they'll not only come next to you, they will lean against you.
>
> When my sons were at home, if they came into my room there was usually a specific reason. Have you seen my socks? What's for dinner? . . . But in Mexico, my sister's daughters will come up three flights of stairs and through three doors just because I am there. To lean against me or say, *Qué honda?*[22] (Berlin, *A Manual* 221)

This fragment contains one of the many comparisons between Mexican and US American cultures that the protagonist makes in an effort to contextualize and comprehend what she is experiencing: in Mexico people and their children behave differently from what she was used to in the U.S. In like manner, in "Panteón de Dolores" the protagonist compares her sister's personality with her own, saying that her own character is "more Mexican" than Sally's. She explains that "Sally and her children have lived here for twenty-five years" (Berlin, *A Manual*

---

[22] What's up?

248), after which she writes: “Sally adores Mexico, with the fervor of a convert. Her husband, her children, her house, everything about her is Mexican. Except her. She’s very American, old-fashioned American, wholesome. In a way I am the more Mexican, my nature is dark. I have known death, violence. Most days I don’t even notice that period when the room has sunlight in it” (Berlin, *A Manual* 248). The protagonist goes on to say that unlike her, Sally “sees beauty and goodness everywhere, in everyone. She loves her room, all the souvenirs on the shelves” (Berlin, *A Manual* 248). While the protagonist seems to essentialize both the Mexican and US American characters, what I want to highlight is the way she looks at the two conflicting worlds around her as she is trying to identify the prominent features of each culture, form an opinion about them, and thus understand the borderlands in which she finds herself. By stating that everything in Sally is Mexican “except her”, what the protagonist is conveying is that although her sister was not born in Mexico, she *grew into* Mexican culture and way of life. However, based on what the protagonist has seen while living there, she thinks Sally is too “wholesome”, cheerful and positive to be like the Mexicans.

## 2.3 The relationship between culture, language, and identity

This kind of comparison between characters and cultures can be found throughout all four stories, and in my view can be seen as an attempt by the protagonist to understand her state of in-betweenness and to cope with geographical, cultural and linguistic dislocation. In his article “Cultural Dislocation and Ego Functions: Some Considerations in the Analysis of Bi-cultural Patients” (2018), Karim G. Dajani defines dislocation as “the removal of a person from a location organized by a particular set of cultural practices and placing them in another location organized by a substantially different set of cultural practices” (16), as well as different ways of seeing, understanding, and doing things. As Dajani explains, being removed from one’s original habitat and collective and being relocated in another world can affect a person in profound and fundamental ways, as this dislocation can both shock and alter the ego and produce “perceptual distortions, cognitive confusion and emotional turbulence” (Dajani 19). This affective response, in turn, can “generate serious problems like depression, alienation, confusion, excessive anger, frustration and other intense negative emotions” (Dajani 18). Dajani’s explanation confirms what the protagonist undergoes in the four stories, as she repeatedly claims to feel overwhelmed by her new life in Mexico. Cultural displacement, indeed, affects her state of mind and causes her to experience emotional turmoil to the point that she feels not only stressed, but also angry about Mexican culture. In addition, she is afflicted by Sally's illness. Thus, she asks herself: "Am I really just mad because Sally's dying, so get mad at a whole country?" (Berlin, *A Manual* 249).

It is important to realize that on top of being relocated in a new sociocultural, semiotic environment and having become indispensable to her ill sister, there is the fact that the protagonist has a completely new life in a language that is not her mother tongue. Although she has spoken Spanish from an early age –as she herself recounts, she spent her childhood in Chile (Berlin, *A Manual* 224)–, she is, however, a native English speaker. In effect, one of the most important causes of her feelings of alienation are the different languages to which she is constantly exposed. This is the reason why she recurrently reflects on the subject of language and, more importantly, why she seems to be losing her own sense of self. In fact, right after describing how close she and Sally have become, she relates: "I speak Spanish with her and her children, everybody" (Berlin, *A Manual* 253). And then, as if it were a consequence of living both in another country and in another language, she goes on to observe:

> I feel I have vanished. Last week in the Sonora market I was so tall, surrounded by dark Indians, many of them speaking in Nahuatl. Not only was I vanished, I was invisible. I mean for a long time I believed I wasn't there at all.
>
> Of course I have a self here, and a new family, new cats, new jokes. But I keep trying to remember who I was in English.
>
> That's why I'm so glad to hear from Max. He calls a lot, from California. (Berlin, *A Manual* 253)

This fragment is central to my argument as it shows the protagonist reflecting on her identity specifically in terms of language. As we can see, the idea of nationality is not mentioned here, and neither are the notions of race, ethnicity, social class or, for that matter, any other identity markers or ways of grouping people. Rather than referring to the protagonist's place of origin, the quoted passage brings to the fore the relationship between language, culture and identity, a relationship that has been studied by diverse disciplines and scholars. In this regard, I believe the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis cannot be disregarded. Developed in the 1940s by Edward Sapir and Benjamin Lee Whorf, this theory claims that "the language and culture into which one is born shape the way one thinks. They create mental 'tracks' upon which our minds run" (qtd in Nunan and Choi 5) to the point of conditioning our perception of reality and what we can and cannot see. In like manner, at the beginning of the 20th century, the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein famously wrote in his *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (1922): "*The limits of my language* mean the limits of my world" (155), which is to say, I only know what I can express in words –that is, the words of the language *I* speak. Even though this linguistic determinism has been widely discredited and is now considered unfashionable (Nunan and Choi 5), I believe it continues to induce reflection on the fact that languages not only influence our sociocultural understanding about the world and our experiences of it, but also influence who we are. As Chamber affirms, languages "constitute our sense of identity, place and belonging" (4) and are related to our very notion of self.

Understanding the complex relationship between language, culture and identity allows us to realize the role that the first two play in the processes of identity formation and its possible fragmentation. According to Vera da Silva Sinha *et al.* in their introduction to *Language, Culture and Identity – Signs of life* (2020), "Language has an inextricable connection with cultural identity and cultural practices, which in turn shapes personal identity" (1). As they go on to say, "Language is the cord that ties the individual to their community, and it is by means of language that human beings become fully immersed into their culture and active participants and constructors of its subsequent development" (2). The language we speak is connected to where we come from and the culture(s) we are familiar with; moreover, it is intimately related to who we are and how we perceive the world. Indeed, Vera da Silva Sinha *et al.* affirm that "Since language is always used in social and cultural context, it reflects people's socio-political values and world views" (2). What happens, then, when we suddenly find ourselves bereft of our native language and culture? As is shown by the fragment from "So Long" quoted above, the protagonist feels estranged and struggles to remember who she was before migrating because at present she is immersed in a foreign context that is both multicultural and multilingual: when she goes to the Mexican market, she finds herself surrounded by otherness in the form of short, "dark Indians" who speak a local indigenous language with which she is not familiar. The reason why she feels alienated and out of place, then, is that she has relocated to a completely different world in which her own language (English) has become useless, in which there are languages she does not know –such as Nahuatl–, and in which she needs to speak a second language (Spanish) in order to communicate.

## 2.4 Life in-between languages and multiple, different selves

Here, the essay "Wandering Words: Reflections on Ambivalent Cultural Belonging and the Creative Potential of Linguistic Multiplicity" (2014) by Irmina van Niele is illuminating. The author investigates language as a place of belonging and reflects on the cultural dislocation that occurs when people migrate and move "through and across linguistic worlds" (221). As she puts it, one lives and grows up inside a language, and therefore one *is* that language (211). Consequently, who a person is in one language is not quite who they are in a different one: in fact, what Niele proposes is that within each language there is a specific self, that each identity is imbricated with a particular language. She thus argues: "Language is a cultural construction within which our identities exist; we cannot simply finish with one language and start with another, abandoning our previous identity" (210). Migration involves constant changeovers, of which switching between languages is one of the most challenging. In this respect, Niele explains that "language utters culture, through cultural thought-patterns expressed in words. The difficulty with translation is that it aims to transfer a particular set of thoughts, experienced by a particular self and in a particular place, into another language, while *different selves operate within these different languages*" (213; emphasis added). Here, translation is not considered simply as a practice of finding equivalent meanings in different languages, but rather as finding equivalent ideas conceived by different identities. For this reason, Niele argues that switching between languages is neither neat nor easy as it "involves a changeover that is beyond translation. *Other selves speak those other languages*" (213; emphasis added). Interestingly, this notion of multiple, different selves is predominant in Niele's work just as it is in the four stories here analyzed.

In line with the above, Chambers asserts that "Language is not primarily a means of communication; it is, above all, a means of cultural construction in which our very selves and sense are constituted. There is no clear or obvious 'message', no language that is not punctuated by its contexts, by our bodies, by our selves" (22). This idea allows us to understand that the importance of language in the migration experience goes far beyond the ability to express and exchange information. For language is intimately linked to our identity(ies) and our sense of place, time, and belonging. In “So Long”, the protagonist feels estranged precisely because she has a new life in another language, and therefore, a new identity. The reason why she feels “invisible” in the Mexican market to the point of believing she is not there at all is not that she cannot communicate with people, because in fact she can –at least in Spanish. The reason is that nothing seems familiar, no one around her speaks the language to which her (old) identity is attached, and nobody pays attention to her. In other words, nobody recognizes her individuality. In this respect, it is important to note that the otherness that surrounds the protagonist while she is in the market also mirrors her own alterity: as she is the only white, tall, English-speaking person, she is the one rendered different from the rest, the outsider, the Other. It is because she is physically distinct from everybody else, because her presence seems to go completely unnoticed, and because no one interacts with her that the protagonist feels as if she had “vanished”. To put it in another way, she has lost her sense of self.

Since humans are inherently social beings, interaction with others is a constitutive part of personal identity. In her brilliant study *In-Between: Latina Feminist Phenomenology, Multiplicity, and the Self* (2016), Mariana Ortega indicates that “being an “I” is always connected to other selves and to the rest of the world” (44). Identity, indeed, has an important relational aspect because it “doesn’t depend on individuals alone but on those with whom one interacts” (Ortega 36). In a similar manner, the essay “A Translation of the Self: An Analysis of Identity through Language in Literature of Migration” (2011) by Juliana Díaz Baldocchi offers an account of the human condition as dialogical, for which she draws on Mikhail Bakhtin’s theory of dialogism. Baldocchi explains that “the notion of the self is dialogically constructed through interrelationships with others, through language in a relation to social and cultural forces” (97-98). The importance of others lies, then, in the fact that they play an active role in the self’s awareness of itself: it is in the encounter of looks, dialogues and actions, in the relations with others, that we become aware of our own being. To put it in Baldocchi’s words, “it is the ‘other’ that completes the ‘self.’ An outsider is necessary in order to form selfhood not only as an understanding receiver in communication but as an Other who allows definition through opposition” (100). The relational and dialogical aspect of identity is particularly relevant in contexts of migration since one of the many consequences of migrating is precisely the occurrence of identity shifts. In this respect, and in line with the scholars cited above, Baldocchi argues that “Identity for the migrant is recomposed as it fluctuates from a past native tongue and culture that is left behind, and a new language that constructs and defines the new self in a new place” (98). Indeed, identity changes as the language we speak changes.

Let’s take a closer look at the last part of the fragment from “So Long” quoted above: “Of course I have a self here . . . But I keep trying to remember who I was in English. That’s why I’m so glad to hear from Max” (Berlin, *A Manual* 253). This confession implies that, in addition to the *current self* the protagonist has in Mexico, as well as her way of life, bonds and affects related to it, she has *another self*, one that exists in English and belongs to the U.S. Interestingly, she refers to this self in the past tense, as if English had become the language of both the life and identity she has left behind. Now that she has a new life in Spanish she also has a new identity. Because the protagonist has trouble remembering who her former self was and feels both perplexed and nostalgic, she enjoys her ex-husband’s calls very much. Significantly, the story opens with the following observation: “I love to hear Max say hello” (Berlin, *A Manual* 252). These words are repeated on different occasions, thus showing that Max works as a link to the protagonist’s past life, and therefore, past identity: by talking about things as trivial as their grown-up children or the weather in California (Berlin, *A Manual* 252), Max reminds her who she is –or rather, who she used to be–, where she comes from, and what her life story is. In effect, every time he calls her, the protagonist starts narrating fragments of other episodes in her life, thus remembering the time when they were happily married. Max, indeed, catapults her into the past and fills her with familiarity: in the midst of so much confusion and alterity, he represents the old, the familiar, and the safe. But no matter how effective Max’s role may be as a reminder of what is known to her –including her former self–, the truth is that the protagonist’s current self continues to feel completely adrift in-between languages, cultures, spaces, times, identities, life, and death.

Indubitably, these two selves, each of which can be associated with a country, a culture, and a language, coexist as integral parts of the protagonist’s subjectivity; together, they constitute who the narrator is. However, due to the fact that they are embedded in different cultural frames of reference –the Anglo-American and the Latin American– these two selves are divergent. The protagonist has, indeed, multiple identities, or, to put it in the words of Edwina Barvosa, author of *Wealth of Selves: Multiple Identities, Mestiza Consciousness and the Subject of Politics* (2018), a "decentered and multiple subjectivity" (13). Expanding on Anzaldúa's theory, which affirms that this multiplicity is a byproduct of the experience of living in the borderlands, Barvosa argues that, rather than being unitary or monolithic, "the self is formed by a complex intersection of different cultural groups and contexts that construct the self in multiple ways, analogous to the borderlands itself" (58). Like Niele's, her theory belongs to a paradigm that regards individuality "not as a self-unifying system, but rather as a collection of selves that operate independently in different contexts" (qtd in Barvosa 59). I believe this paradigm can be applied to Berlin's protagonist as she is a woman who lives between two conflicting worlds and who constantly reflects on her *selves* as if she were made up of "a mixture of different and contradictory identities" (Barvosa 58). As I will argue in my next section, it is precisely the protagonist's multiple subjectivity and constant state of in-betweenness that qualifies her as both a border woman and a *mestiza* whose plight offers a comment on existing theories on *mestizaje* such as Miller's –which I addressed in the preceding chapter– and Anzaldúa's, in the sense that the latter's concept of *mestizaje* can be fruitfully expanded to denote not exclusively a biological but likewise a cultural condition.

## 2.5 Anzaldúa's theory of cultural *mestizaje*

In *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987), Anzaldúa states that the *mestiza* is a woman who "is a product of crossbreeding" (103) and who has or lives in more than one culture (100). Situated in an in-between place –i.e., the borderlands– and immersed "In a constant state of mental nepantilism, an Aztec word meaning torn between ways, la *mestiza* is a product of the transfer of the cultural and spiritual values of one group to another" (Anzaldúa 100). Given that she lives in a multilingual, multicultural context and is persistently dealing with ambivalence, she develops a *mestiza* consciousness, which is a specific consciousness of the borderlands. In her analysis of Anzaldúa's theory, titled "Mestizaje as Method: Feminists-of-Color Challenge the Canon" (1998), Chela Sandoval explains that this consciousness "is born of life lived in the 'crossroads' between races, nations, languages, genders, sexualities, and cultures: It is a developed subjectivity capable of transformation and relocation" (359). This consciousness works, in fact, as a coping mechanism. According to Anzaldúa, the *mestiza* copes with the difficulties of life in the borderlands "by developing a tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguity . . . She learns to juggle cultures. She has a plural personality, she operates in a pluralistic mode – nothing is thrust out . . . nothing rejected, nothing abandoned. Not only does she sustain contradictions, she turns the ambivalence into something else" (101). In essence, some of the main features of the *mestiza* are her state of in-betweenness, her multiple subjectivity, her constant bewilderment, and her resilience potential.

When reading Berlin's narrative, it is possible to recognize many of these features in the nameless protagonist. As I have pointed out, she is a border woman who lives in-between worlds and is perplexed by the many changeovers, which is why she writes using both English and Spanish, is constantly comparing the two countries and cultures she lives in, travelling between her identity in English and her identity in Spanish, her past and her present, and admitting to feeling emotionally overwhelmed. This is also why, in all four stories, her perceptions and comparisons between Mexico and the U.S. overlap with the contrast between life and death –which is represented by the non-correlation between Sally's vitality, the bonding of the sisters, and the prospect of death–, and why her notions of selfhood remain both uncertain and unstable. Since the protagonist has a new life both in a foreign country and in a different language, she constantly reflects on the different yet superposed borderlands in which she lives, as well as on her persistent feelings of confusion that derive from living there. Following Anzaldúa, it could be argued that precisely due to her borderland experience, she develops a *mestiza* consciousness, which helps her deal with her geographical, cultural and linguistic dislocation. Yet we must not forget that unlike Anzaldúa's *mestiza*, Berlin's protagonist is US American, not Chicana, Latina or, for that matter, any woman of mixed lineage. As a white woman who has relocated to a different sociocultural, semiotic environment, she moves from a much more privileged standpoint than these women. Significantly, she is never discriminated against or marginalized by others; in fact, she does not struggle in any way with "the dilemma of the mixed breed" (Anzaldúa 100) as Anzaldúa's *mestiza* does.

In this regard, it is important to keep in mind that Anzaldúa's notion of *mestiza* does not refer exclusively to a biological but likewise to a cultural *mestizaje*, i.e., "not a mixture of blood, but a mixture of culturally constructed identities formed by socialization in a confluence of lifeworlds and social relations" (Barvosa 242). For this reason, while we cannot ignore the fact that Anzaldúa's work is grounded in her mixed lineage and indigenous ancestry, as well as the fact that her theory emerges from the historical and sociocultural context of Chicanas and tackles specific struggles of women of color, we must also acknowledge that her work is not solely addressed to these women. As Martina Koegeler-Abdi affirms in "Shifting Subjectivities: Mestizas, Nepantleras, and Gloria Anzaldúa's Legacy" (2013), the fact that Anzaldúa's writing is based on her own experience "focuses her work on the specificity of being Chicana, but it does not restrict access to a mestiza consciousness only to Chicanas" (76). On the contrary, Anzaldúa's vision exceeds their particular reality and identity politics. "The inclusivity and intentional ambiguity of mestiza consciousness" (Koegeler-Abdi 74) and the fact that it is "not exclusive to any ethnic group" (Koegeler-Abdi 76) renders the notion of *mestiza* consciousness highly versatile, suitable for people of all races, ethnicities, and nationalities. Thus, I completely agree with Koegeler-Abdi when she rejects the idea that the "mestiza consciousness cannot be transferred to white identities" (75). In her view, Anzaldúa's theory "might be more powerful for women of color, but is also possible for white women" (75). Consequently, it is also possible for Berlin's protagonist.

This leads me, however, to another key point: although Anzaldúa's account of *mestizaje* is highly symbolic –in the sense that those who experience life at the borderlands do so "not just geographically but also culturally and metaphorically" (Ortega 18)–, we must not forget that the material situatedness of her being Chicana is a crucial aspect of her thought (Ortega 231). Her theory, indeed, explicitly appeals to an embodied lived experience in a context with specific economic and geographical conditions: the US-Mexican borderlands. This is why in *This Bridge Called my Back* (1981) Anzaldúa and Cherríe Moraga declare that theirs is a "theory in the flesh". According to them, "A theory in the flesh means one where the physical realities of our lives –our skin color, the land or concrete we grew up on, our sexual longings– all fuse to create a politic born out of necessity" (23). This claim, however, does not deny the fact that Anzaldúa's theory also appeals to the psychological, emotional, and spiritual consequences that the experience of living in the borderlands gives rise to. In short, her notion of *mestiza* “captures both material as well as metaphorical aspects of a life in the borderlands” (Ortega 25). The four stories analyzed here reflect the metaphorical and symbolic aspects of the borderlands much more than their specific geographic and material characteristics. For the borderlands, as my analysis of Berlin’s stories has shown, are not just a physical place; they are also, and more importantly, a state of the mind and a state of the self –or rather, a state of the *selves*.

## 2.6 The fragmentation of the narrative as a consequence of the borderlands

In this sense, it is significant that the protagonist of the four stories constantly ponders her state of in-betweenness and tries to understand the several borderlands in which she finds herself. I believe it is to cope with the dislocation and alienation she persistently experiences that she delves into her own life story and builds such a fragmentary narrative filled with comparisons and flashbacks, as well as a narrative voice that combines English and Spanish and travels back and forth between the present and the past over and over again. During the time she lives in Sally’s apartment, the two sisters spend their precious last moments analyzing their lives and recalling each other’s past. Hence, the protagonist observes: “When you are dying it is natural to look back on your life, to weigh things, to have regrets. I have done this, too, along with my sister these months” (Berlin, *A Manual* 253). Interestingly, what the protagonist mostly remembers in the course of her narration is another state of in-betweenness: the period when she had two romantic relationships going at the same time and was undecided about which man to choose. Opposites in many ways, these two men were not just two different partners, but more importantly, they represented two distinct lifestyles and future prospects. To put it differently, while living in the borderlands between Mexico and the U.S. and between life and death, the protagonist recalls a past borderland of a different sort, emphasizing the confusion she felt during that time at being torn between those two men. Coincidentally, this first in-between experience also took place in-between Mexico and the U.S.

The protagonist thus tells us that, after a period of drama and confusion, she ended up choosing Max, with whom she would leave the U.S., travel through Mexico, and finally settle there. Many years later, Max would become the ex-husband who calls regularly from California and whom she loves to hear saying hello. It is interesting that while living with Sally in Mexico City and dealing with the latter's illness, the protagonist feels the need to examine her past, paying special attention to her cross-cultural journeys and intermeshed love stories. The proximity of death calls life into question, and for this reason, the protagonist wonders about the meaning of love, family, time, and death. In "So Long" she writes: "For months Sally and I worked hard trying to analyze our lives, our marriages, our children . . . So what is marriage anyway? I never figured it out. And now it is death I don't understand. Not just Sally's death. My country, after Rodney King and the riots[23]" (Berlin, *A Manual* 260). As can be seen here, the protagonist is bewildered not only because of her complicated relationships or her sister's illness, but also because she no longer comprehends what is happening in the U.S: the injustice, violence, and racism. As one association leads to another, one borderland follows another, and the protagonist ends up making more comparisons among Mexico and the U.S. The remembrance of times past brings her back to the present only to push her into the past again. Thus, she relates:

> My husband and I lived for many years in Mexico. We were very happy during those years. But we always lived in villages, by the sea or in the mountains. There was such an affectionate ease, a passive sweetness there. Or then, as this was many years ago.
>
> Mexico City now… fatalistic, suicidal, corrupt. A pestilential swamp. Oh, but there is graciousness. There are flashes of such beauty, of kindness and of color, you catch your breath.
>
> I went home two weeks ago, for a week, at Thanksgiving, back to the USA where there is honor and integrity and Lord knows what else, I thought. I got confused. President Bush and Clarence Thomas and antiabortion and AIDS and Duke and crack and homelessness. And everywhere, MTV, cartoons, ads, magazines –just war and sexism and violence. In Mexico, at least a can of cement falls off a scaffold on your head, no Uzis or anything personal.

---

[23] Rodney King was an African American man who in 1991 became famous for falling a victim to police brutality. Outraged by injustice and violence against racial minorities, African American and Latinx communities rioted in the streets of Los Angeles and other cities in the U.S. for several days.

> What I mean is I'm here for an indefinite period. But then what, where will I go? (Berlin, *A Manual* 244)

What I want to highlight in this fragment is the number of places and times the protagonist remembers as dwellings as she moves back and forth between her current life in Mexico City, her previous life in the U.S., and her even older life in other Mexican locations. In her peripatetic narration, a certain notion of home is at stake. As the protagonist recalls, what she used to call "home" –that is, the country where her sons and ex-husband live, where her former abode was located, and where her former identity belongs– is not considered home by her anymore. Indeed, she has become detached from it. For this reason, and also because she knows that her stay in Mexico is indefinite yet temporary, she asks herself where she will go after Sally dies. What is interesting here is that besides travelling between her present and her past, the protagonist also worries about her future. The uncertainty she feels resonates with Chambers' notion of an "impossible homecoming" and the idea that once movement begins, the journey never ends (Geraghty and Conacher 15). According to Chambers, migration "involves a movement in which neither the points of departure nor those of arrival are immutable or certain. It calls for a dwelling in language, in histories, in identities that are constantly subject to mutation. Always in transit, the promise of a homecoming –completing the story, domesticating the detour– becomes an impossibility" (5). For this reason, he goes on to explain, the experience of migrating "inevitably implies another sense of 'home', of being in the world. It means to conceive of dwelling as a mobile habitat, as a mode of inhabiting time and space not as though they were fixed and closed structures" (4).

In my view, what Chambers describes here is consistent with what Berlin's protagonist undergoes and the way in which her particular experience of migration is represented in all four stories. Since the protagonist is a border woman continually moving across various borderlands, neither time, nor space, nor the sense of belonging are fixed for her. Indeed, for her, home is no longer one specific place or another; rather, home has become the overall state of in-betweenness in which she finds herself. This is why the four stories are built as separate yet complementary segments of one fragmented narrative that, furthermore, is recounted by the same narrative voice that constantly travels between languages, cultures, spaces, times, and identities. The fragmentary way in which the stories are delivered is therefore both a representation and a consequence of the protagonist's borderland experience.

It is precisely because she finds herself living between two different worlds, no longer knowing where her home is, and feeling as if she were losing her identity, that she repeatedly admits to feeling overwhelmed and confesses: “I am terrified, I am losing all sense of what is… precious, true” (Berlin, *A Manual* 244). No doubt it is in an effort to make sense of the borderlands and thus find some peace that she pinpoints the many contrasts she perceives, builds a comparative portrait between Mexican and US American cultures, and travels back and forth between the present and the past, her new life in Mexico and her former life in the U.S, and her identity in Spanish and her identity in English.

The question of whether or not the protagonist is successful in her endeavor leads me to the conclusion that, regardless of her turmoil, she does succeed in her attempt to comprehend the borderlands. Following Anzaldúa, I believe this insight occurs thanks to her constant reflection and her development of a *mestiza* consciousness. As Anzaldúa explains, although one of the main characteristics of the borderland experience consists in undergoing “mental and emotional states of perplexity” (Anzaldúa 100), what it is interesting is that it is the very same borderlands that gives the *mestiza* the power and ability to overcome those states and deal with the various difficulties that arise from living there. Indeed, even though in the course of the four stories the protagonist faces a series of personal issues that make her feel overtly upset, at a certain point the tone in which she narrates these issues changes. Thus, in the ending of “So Long” she ponders her situation with a different attitude and, wondering about love in the face of death, she relates: “Sally and I write rebuses[24] to each other so she doesn’t hurt her lung talking . . . We laugh, quietly, in her room, drawing. Actually, love is not a mystery for me anymore. Max calls and says hello. I tell him that my sister will be dead soon. How are you? he asks” (Berlin, *A Manual* 260). In my view, this short fragment is packed with meaning as it conveys a sense of calm and acceptance that the protagonist simply did not have before. After analyzing her life and spending a long time feeling gloomy and confused, she seems to finally realize what is truly important to her –i.e., being in Mexico with her beloved sister– and accept life as it is, including Sally’s forthcoming death, Max’s friendly affection and support, and her own uncertain future. Instead of denying reality, becoming desperate, or losing her sound judgment –as for example the protagonist of

---

[24] As the protagonist herself explains, “A rebus is where you draw pictures instead of words or letters” (Berlin, *A Manual* 260).

“Mijito” does–, I believe the protagonist of the four stories ends up assimilating the borderlands as a part of (her) life. Her endurance and resilience, in this regard, are truly salient.

## 2.7 Conclusion

What my analysis of Berlin’s stories has shown is that living in the borderlands affects the protagonist’s subjectivity, identity, and perception of reality. This plight, in turn, affects her narrative. The stories “So Long”, “Fool to Cry”, “Panteón de Dolores” and “Wait a Minute” demonstrate that it is in the in-between state among life and death, between the present and the past, as well as between Mexico and the U.S., that we find multiple examples of what a borderland may be and what it is like to live there. As I have argued, the distinct yet superposed borderlands in which the protagonist finds herself are of different types, since some are tangible and others are not. Although the most obvious one is the actual physical –and yet also symbolic– borderland between Mexico and the U.S., this is just the starting point for a series of other states of in-betweenness, confusion and contradictions that are psychological, emotional, and spiritual. Together, they constitute the overall state of in-betweenness in which the protagonist lives. Similarly, although the protagonist has divergent identities, each of which is embedded in a different language and cultural frame of reference, these two selves coexist as integral parts of her subjectivity; together, they constitute who the narrator is. While one of the many consequences of migrating and living in the borderlands is precisely the sense of dislocation and the loss of sense of self, and while emotional turmoil is very present in the protagonist’s narration, what should be noted is that the four stories I have analyzed are not a mere illustration of the experience of borderlands but are also a sincere effort to make sense of and get through them.

# Conclusion

In this thesis I have analyzed five stories from Lucia Berlin's short story collection *A Manual for Cleaning Women* (2015) that present subjective, yet realistic accounts of migration. Although fictional, Berlin's stories foreground personal and unique narratives of mobility with a first-person female point of view that reflects the impact of the migration experience on the subjectivity and identity of migrant women. To paraphrase Anzaldúa, while the five stories here analyzed are situated in the same actual physical borderland between Mexico and the U.S., the psychological and spiritual borderlands involved are not particular to the Southwest (19) or, for that matter, to any specific location on the globe. In fact, they are present wherever different cultures, ethnicities, and languages meet. To put it in Sandoval's words, "It is possible to locate such alter-spaces, those borderlands, geographically, materially, yes. But that space entremundos, between worlds, Anzaldúa insisted, also exists in consciousness and culture, in all economies of power" ("Foreword" xiii). Expanding on Anzaldúa's theory, I have argued that the borderlands are a state of in-betweenness where a transformation of identity takes place, and moreover, where a new self emerges. As I have demonstrated, the experience of migrating and living in the borderlands leads to the configuration of a decentered and multiple subjectivity in which different selves coexist. The borderlands, I have concluded, are not just a physical place; they are also a state of the mind and a state of the self –or rather, a state of the *selves*. This is the reason why they are not a comfortable place to live in (Anzaldúa 19) and why perplexity, ambivalence, and emotional turmoil are some of the prominent features of dwelling there.

Let me return to the research questions that I posed in the introduction, i.e., how does the migration experience affect the subjectivity, identity, and perception of reality of Berlin's female characters? And considering the different types of borderlands, what light can Anzaldúa's theory shed on this experience and Berlin's narratives more generally? Throughout my thesis I have demonstrated that regardless of one's nationality or socioeconomic status, migration is always a disorienting, destabilizing, and decentering experience. Living in-between cultures and languages is not devoid of effort or suffering, as it can generate significant problems such as distress, vulnerability, and identity crises. While in Chapter One I addressed south-to-north migration and focused on the experience of a

Mexican immigrant in the U.S., in Chapter Two I discussed north-to-south mobility and focused on the experience of a (white) US American migrant in Mexico. I concluded that although the transits of these female characters are made under very different conditions, both the sense of cultural and linguistic dislocation and the loss of sense of self that are caused by the experience of migration and life in the borderlands are very present in their narrations. What my analysis of Berlin's stories has thus shown is that migrating and living in the borderlands has profound effects on the subjectivity and identity of migrant women, especially women of color. As my intersectional reading of "Mijito" has revealed, this is because women's overlapping social identities play a significant role with regard to their privilege and/or disadvantage. Indeed, the violence, oppression, and marginalization that Amelia faces in the U.S. occur because she is not just any immigrant, but a poor woman of color, a Latina, and a *mestiza.*

Here, it becomes necessary to revise the concept of *mestizaje.* As I have argued, both Amelia and the nameless protagonist of Chapter Two are border women and *mestizas.* The reason for this, I contended, is that rather than an issue related exclusively to genetics, *mestizaje* is a matter of "cultural hybridization" (Miller 22). According to Anzaldúa, the *mestiza* is a woman of "mixed breed" (100) who lives in-between countries, cultures, and languages and who consequently develops a *mestiza* consciousness. This subjectivity is a consequence of her living in diverse states of in-betweenness and it allows her to both deal with the difficulties of the borderlands and embrace the transformation that comes with them. The *mestiza* consciousness as theorized by Anzaldúa works, then, as a coping mechanism. For this reason, one of the main features of Anzaldúa's *mestiza* is her resilience potential. Now, as I have argued, far from being exclusive to women of mixed origins in the Americas, the notion of *mestiza* consciousness is applicable to identities of all races, ethnicities, and nationalities. This is the reason why, despite being US American –and not Latina, Chicana or, for that matter, any woman of mixed lineage–, the nameless protagonist of Chapter Two is able to develop this consciousness and thus overcome her bafflement: by means of endurance and reflection, she succeeds in her attempt to make sense of the borderlands and the multiple identities she develops there. Consequently, I read Berlin's nameless protagonist as offering a comment on existing theories on *mestizaje* such as Miller's and Anzaldúa's, which proves that the latter's notion of *mestiza* does not refer exclusively to a biological but likewise to a cultural *mestizaje*.

Nevertheless, although *mestizaje* as I see it is a cultural phenomenon that may be experienced regardless of one's ethnicity, not everyone is able to develop a *mestiza* consciousness. As my analysis of "Mijito" has shown, despite being *mestiza* by 'right of blood' –that is, because of her being Latin American and having a mixed lineage–, Amelia does not develop this consciousness. In fact, far from being able to cope with and adapt to the borderlands, she remains stuck in the liminal state of *Nepantla* and ends up more conflicted than ever. Thus, while the borderlands are certainly a transformative place, Amelia's experience offers no hope of her taking charge of her fate and achieving happiness. In my view, the story analyzed in Chapter One thus challenges the notion of borderlands and *mestiza* consciousness as developed by Anzaldúa: "Mijito", indeed, casts a critical light on Anzaldúa's theory, which fails to acknowledge the possibility that the borderland experience could result in disaster and even (self-)destruction. Arguably, Anzaldúa takes an overly optimistic view and neglects the great impact that external forces such as brutality and misfortune can have on a person's subjectivity and their destiny –especially when they are young, vulnerable, and helpless– and which, sometimes, they simply cannot overcome. This powerlessness is exemplified by Amelia, who is deprived of agency and all human rights, and who therefore experiences the borderlands not just as an in-between space or a transitional state of transformation: for Amelia, the borderlands are also where tragedy, trauma, and death take place.

Future research on borderlands, migration, *mestizaje,* and border identity(ies) will benefit from my thesis, I hope, as it showcases both the material and the symbolic aspects of migration and life in the borderlands while also highlighting the fact that those who experience them do so "not just geographically but also culturally and metaphorically" (Ortega 18). For this reason, I agree with migration scholars Barbara Geraghty and Jean E. Conacher when they assert that, despite the myriad of surveys and reports on the subject of mobility, "migration for the individual remains an intensely personal, and sometimes painful, experience" (5). In this regard, I believe it is important to stress that the study of migration cannot be undertaken only at macro level but must also take into account the micro level. As Geraghty and Conacher explain, in an era characterized by the flow of people across the globe, forced displacement, and data collection, “It has become clear that the diversity of human movement can only be captured partially by official statistics” (19). For my part, I agree with their claim that the study of migration must “be enriched by the adoption of multi-perspectival approaches addressing both individual case studies and their import for broader debates” (19). My contribution to current academic discussions consists in the fact that in this thesis I have tackled the interface between migration and identity from an interdisciplinary perspective focusing on the subjective effects of migration. In each of my chapters I have paid close attention to the unique, indeed heartfelt experience of a particular migrant and I have scrutinized the subjectivity of different migrant women. In doing so, I have engaged with broader issues such as culture shock, cultural and linguistic dislocation, belonging, and identity (trans)formation. Ultimately, I have highlighted the importance of narratives –fictional or not– that foreground specific and intimate accounts of mobility and relocation, as well as their relevance to migration studies, border(lands) studies, and related fields.

In addition to contributing to current scholarship on the representation of migration and migrant women, my thesis offers one of the few academic analyses of Berlin’s literary work. The lack of scholarly attention to her limited yet rich oeuvre is an omission that this thesis attempts to successfully redress. As I have demonstrated, her stories portray diverse individual experiences of migration and various ways of living on the borders, with each story revealing a different, yet comparable, perspective of what a borderland, a border woman, and a *mestiza* may be. To further enrich the analysis of Berlin’s work, there remains a variety of topics, formal aspects and narrative techniques that require more attention. Future research might, for example, analyze the autobiographical nature of Berlin’s writing and address the many similarities between her fiction and her personal life. This could be done by looking at her memories published in *Welcome Home: A Memoir with Selected Photographs and Letters* (2018). To return to the significance of personal accounts of migration and life at the borderlands, exploring these narratives could “provide us with a deeper understanding of the experiences of those living in intercultural contact, language learning and migration” (Geraghty and Conacher 14). After all, as mentioned, Berlin’s work centres on the experience of borderlands because her peripatetic and cosmopolitan life granted her the necessary knowledge to write about it; not only Berlin’s work, then, but Berlin herself can be analyzed as an example of *mestizaje*. In conclusion, both Lucia Berlin and her narrative art offer a promising source of further relevant research topics.

# Works Cited

Anzaldúa, Gloria. *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. 4th ed., Aunt Lute Books, 2007.

Aparicio, Frances R. "Latinidad/es". Vargas et al., pp. 113-37.

Baldocchi, Juliana Díaz. "A Translation of the Self: An Analysis of Identity through Language in Literature of Migration". *Bonds and Borders: Identity, Imagination and Transformation in Literature,* edited by Rebecca DeWald and Dorette Sobolewski, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011, pp. 97-105.

Barvosa, Edwina. *Wealth of Selves: Multiple Identities, Mestiza Consciousness and the Subject of Politics.* Texas A&M University Press, 2008.

Berco, Cristian. "Crossing borders: identity, difference and community". *Journal of Eastern Township Studies,* vol. 37, 2011, pp. 63-76.

Berlin, Lucia. *A Manual for Cleaning Women: Selected Stories*, Picador, 2015.

---. *Evening in Paradise: More Stories,* Picador, 2018.

Blancarte, Roberto. "Religion, Church, and State in Contemporary Mexico". *Changing Structure of Mexico: Political, Social and Economic Prospects,* edited by Laura Randall. M.E. Sharpe, 2006. pp. 424-437.

Canagarajah, Suresh. "Introduction: The nexus of migration and language: The emergence of a disciplinary space". *The Routledge Handbook of Migration and Language,* edited by Canagarajah, London & New York, Routledge, 2017, pp. 1-28.

Capstick, Tony. *Language and Migration.* London & New York, Routledge, 2021.

Carastathis, Anna. "The Concept of Intersectionality in Feminist Theory". *Philosophy Compass,* vol. 9, no. 5, 2014, pp. 304-314.

Chambers, Iain. *Migrancy, Culture, Identity.* London & New York, Routledge, 2001.

Contreras, Sheila Marie. "Chicana, Chicano, Chican@, Chicanx". Vargas et al., pp. 32-35.

Crenshaw, Kimberlé. "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color". *Stanford Law Review*, vol. 43, no. 6, 1991, pp. 1241-1299.

Dajani, Karim G. "Cultural Dislocation and Ego Functions: Some Considerations in the Analysis of Bi-cultural Patients". *International Journal of Applied Psychoanalytic Studies*, Vol. 15, no. 1, 2018, pp. 16-28.

Español, Alicia, et al. "Border identities: Theoretical approach to the study of self from bordering processes". *Theory & Psychology*, vol. 31, no. 5, 2021, pp. 675-691.

Furnham, Adrian. "Culture Shock: A Review of the Literature for Practitioners". *Psychology*, vol. 10, 2019, pp. 1832-1855.

Geoghegan, Elizabeth. "Smoking with Lucia". *The Paris Review*, 18 Aug. 2015, https://www.theparisreview.org/blog/2015/08/18/smoking-with-lucia/. Accessed 20 Dec. 2022.

Geraghty, Barbara, and Jean E. Conacher. "Introduction: Approaching Migration, Intercultural Contact and Language Learning". *Intercultural Contact, Language Learning and Migration*, edited by Geraghty and Conacher, London, Bloomsbury, 2014, pp. 1-22.

"Global Issues: Migration". *United Nations*, https://www.un.org/en/global-issues/migration. Accessed 10 Jan. 2023.

Guidotti-Hernández, Nicole M. "Borderlands". Vargas et al., pp. 21-24.

Keating, AnaLouise. “Introduction: shifting worlds, una entrada”. *Entre Mundos/Among Worlds: new perspectives on Gloria E. Anzaldúa*, edited by Keating, Palgrave Macmillan, 2008, pp. 1-12.

Koegeler-Abdi, Martina. “Shifting Subjectivities: Mestizas, Nepantleras, and Gloria Anzaldúa's Legacy”. *MELUS*, vol. 38, no. 2, 2013, pp. 71-88.

La Barbera, MariaCaterina. “Identity and Migration: An Introduction”. *Identity and Migration in Europe: Multidisciplinary Perspectives*, edited by La Barbera, Springer, 2015, pp. 1-13.

Mignolo, Walter D., and Catherine E. Walsh, editors. *On Decoloniality: Concepts, Analytics, Praxis*, Duke University Press, 2018.

Miller, Marilyn Grace. *Rise and Fall of the Cosmic Race*, University of Texas Press, 2004.

Moraga, Cherríe, and Gloria Anzaldúa, editors. *This Bridge Called my Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color.* Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press, 1981.

Niele, Irmina van. “Wandering Words: Reflections on Ambivalent Cultural Belonging and the Creative Potential of Linguistic Multiplicity”. *Intercultural Contact, Language Learning and Migration,* edited by Barbara Geraghty and Jean E. Conacher, London, Bloomsbury, pp. 207-221.

Nunan, David, and Julie Choi. “Language, Culture, and Identity: Framing the Issues”. *Language and Culture: Reflective Narratives and the Emergence of Identity,* edited by Nunan and Choi, London & New York, Routledge, 2010, pp. 1-13.

Ortega, Mariana. *In-Between: Latina Feminist Phenomenology, Multiplicity, and the Self.* State University of New York Press, 2016.

Ralph, David, and Lynn A. Staeheli. “Home and Migration: Mobilities, Belongings and Identities”. *Geography Compass* vol. 5, no. 7, 2011, pp. 517-530.

Reyes, Adelaida. “Identity Construction in the Context of Migration”. *Il Saggiatore musicale*, vol. 21, no. 1, 2014, pp. 105-121.

Runyan, Anne Sisson. “What Is Intersectionality and Why Is It Important”. *Academe,* vol. 104, no. 6, 2018, pp. 10.14.

Sandoval, Chela. “Foreword: Unfinished Words: The Crossing of Gloria Anzaldúa”. *Entre Mundos/Among Worlds: new perspectives on Gloria E. Anzaldúa,* edited by AnaLouise Keating, Palgrave Macmillan, 2008, pp. xiii-xvi.

---. “Mestizaje as Method: Feminists-of-Color Challenge the Canon”. *Living Chicana Theory,* edited by Carla Trujillo. Third Woman Press, 1998, pp. 352-370.

Sinha, Vera da Silva, et al. “Introduction: Language, culture and identity: Signs of life”. *Language, Culture and Identity – Signs of life,* edited by Sinha et al., Amsterdam & Philadelphia, John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2020, pp. 1-6.

Vargas, Deborah R., et al., editors. *Keywords for Latina/o Studies*. New York University Press, 2017.

Winograd-Gurvich, C., et al. “Negative symptoms: A review of schizophrenia, melancholic depression and Parkinson’s disease”. *Brain Research Bulletin,* vol. 70, 2006, pp. 312–321.

Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus: Centenary Edition,* edited by Luciano Bazzocchi, Anthem Press, 2021.