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The Feminization of Undocumented Migration at
the U.S.-Mexican Border as Represented in
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1. Introduction

The 2007 feature film *It's a Free World*, written by Paul Laverty and directed by the acclaimed English director Ken Loach depicts in its closing scene an Eastern European woman, who is recruited by Angie, the main character, to come to London as an undocumented worker¹. The middle-aged woman hands Angie dollar bills, which probably pay for fake papers, and tells her that she is leaving her children behind in order to make money in England. While in the beginning of the film it is predominantly, though not exclusively men, who are interviewed by the recruitment agents, this last scene indicates a new development in undocumented migration moves from Eastern European countries to Great Britain.

This development, often referred to as “feminization of migration”² is not restricted to a European context but presents a global phenomenon, which was first observed in the 1960s when women’s participation in international migration processes gained more and more importance. The following thesis will look at this trend in the context of undocumented migration at the U.S. – Mexican border, whose long-standing tradition is rooted in the *bracero* program (1942-1964), which allowed Mexican men to come to the United States as temporary agricultural workers in order to fill labor

¹ A number of recent films deal, in one way or the other, with issues of undocumented immigration. *Ein Augenblick Freiheit* (A Moment of Freedom) by Austrian director Arash T. Riahi depicts the odyssey of a young Iranian man who together with a friend tries to bring his niece and nephew to their parents in Vienna. The Austrian documentary *Sneaker Stories* (2008) was partly shot in Ghana, where director Katharina Weingartner depicts a teenager, whose parents work in the United States to make money, and a young man who nearly died on a boat to Europe but is nevertheless desperate to try again since there is no future for him in his home town. The French film *Entre les murs* (*The Class*) focuses on class inequalities in a Paris high school and portrays amongst others a Chinese pupil, who turns out to be an undocumented immigrant. *The Visitor* (USA 2007) deals with a college professor who finds a pair of undocumented immigrants in his New York apartment. *La frontera infinita* (Mexico 2007) and *Mi vida dentro – My Life Inside* (Mexico/USA 2007) are two more examples.

² Sociology uses the term “feminization” in different combinations, for instance “feminization of poverty”, to show that the proportion of women exceeds or converges the proportion of men. In Southeast Asia since the mid-1980s the number of women in independent international migration started to exceed the number of men. This development was referred to as “feminization of migration”. Others used the term “feminization of migration” to describe the rising importance of women in international migration since the mid-1960s (cf. Castles/Miller 1993: 8). In the context of this thesis, the term is used to refer to a global development in which the proportion of women is rising continuously so that it converges or exceeds the proportion of men. In this understanding, it is allowed to talk of a “feminization of migration” if the general trend shows clear signs of convergence, even if women do not yet outnumber men (cf. Han 2003: 60-61).

shortages caused by World War II. I will focus on four works by Latino/a authors and analyze the representation of the development of a feminized tradition of undocumented immigration³ from Mexico and Central America to the United States.

The analysis of Ramón “Tianguis” Pérez’ *Diary of An Undocumented Immigrant* (1991), Rubén Martínez’ *Crossing Over: A Mexican Family on the Migrant Trail* (2001), Reyna Grande’s *Across a Hundred Mountains* (2006) and Sonia Nazario’s *Enrique’s Journey: The Story of a Boy’s Dangerous Odyssey to Reunite with his Mother* (2006) will focus in particular on the existence and use of social migrant networks. In particular, I will argue that the development of a “feminized” tradition of migration from Mexico and Central America to the United States as elaborated on in sociological studies is also reflected in these four works of Latino/a literature.

While *Diary of An Undocumented Immigrant*, focuses on the existing tradition of men migrating to *El Norte*, in which women were mostly left behind, *Enrique’s Journey* tells the story of Lourdes, a single mother who leaves her children behind to make money in the U.S. to provide for their food and education. *Crossing Over* in which Rosa follows her husband Wense to the United States and *Across a hundred Mountains* where Juana sets out on her own to find her father who had left her and her mother in order to make money in the United States, can be placed in between the former two. Since none of these texts has been analyzed in greater detail regarding the issues central to this study, I will base my analysis primarily on my own interpretations of the texts.

In order to provide a theoretical and methodical framework for this analysis, I will provide a brief overview of Mexican-US Borderlands history (chapter 2) and then trace the historical development of the connections between migration and gender issues (chapter 3). I will take a first look at

³ The terms *migration* and *immigration* will be used synonymously throughout this thesis. The term *undocumented* will always be used when referring to a person. The term *illegal* may be used when referring to undocumented immigration or undocumented border crossings in general, but will not be used to describe undocumented immigrants, since a person as such cannot not be “illegal”.

how the widely discussed “feminization of migration” links to the establishment of female social networks and a resulting new tradition of female migration from Mexico and Central America to the United States. The fourth chapter provides the sociological background for the analysis of the primary texts. I will explore in how far migration decisions are also gendered decisions and which role the existence of men’s and women’s social migrant networks plays in the decision-making process. Another central issue will be the rise of female-headed households in Mexico and Central America, which are partly a result of changing Mexican family values and tradition caused by male migration.

The fifth chapter “Making a Decision” will form the main part of my analysis and examine which factors contribute to the characters’ decision to face the dangers of crossing the border illegally. I will show that the findings of sociologists and border studies scholars, as explored in chapter 4, are also reflected in the chosen texts of Latino/a literature. In the introduction to the literary works, the central characters (male and female) that migrate to the U.S. will be presented.

In chapters six - “Crossing Over”- and seven –“On the Other Side/El Otro Lado” I will then complete the analysis by looking at the actual (undocumented) crossing of the border as it is presented in the texts. Finally, I will examine the depiction of men’s and women’s social migrants networks on the other side of the border and also briefly analyze the representation of instances of female migrants’ empowerment.

2. A Concise Mexican – US Borderlands⁴ History

“We did not come to the United States at all.
The United States came to us.”
(Luis Valdez, quoted in Acosta-Belén/Santiago
1998: 32)

This statement by the contemporary Chicano moviemaker and dramatist Luis Valdez and the similar popular saying “We did not cross the border, but the border crossed us” probably best summarize what happened in US-Mexican borderlands history in the course of the nineteenth century (Acosta-Belén/Santiago 1998, 32). This chapter provides a brief outline of the most significant events that marked the history of the relationship between the US and its southern neighbor(s) from Mexico’s independence from Spain in 1821 up to the present. Since an in-depth analysis would clearly go beyond the scope of this thesis, the focus will be on those historical events that are significant for our understanding of the gender-related issues concerning undocumented immigrants which will be discussed in the main part. The important aspects are the introduction of the concept of “illegal aliens”; continuing US interventions in and politics; and US immigration policies that established the tradition of migration and fostered undocumented border crossings.

2.1 From the Mexican Far North to the US Southwest

In 1821, when Mexico gained its independence from Spain, the newly born nation was by far larger than it is today. The borderlands of California, Texas, Arizona and New Mexico composed the northern border regions of Mexico. In terms of size, this area comprised half of Mexico’s total landmass at that time. What proved to be Mexico’s main problem was that it could not compensate for Spain’s failure in strengthening its control over these parts by populating them (cf. Gonzales 1999: 58). As a result, *norteamericanos* continued, as they had before Mexico’s independence, to

⁴ The term “borderlands” was coined by Gloria Anzaldúa, who refers to the U.S.-Mexican border as “an open wound” (“*una herida abierta*”) “where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds. And before a scab forms it hemorrhages again, the lifeblood of two worlds merging to form a third country – a border culture” (Anzaldúa 1999: 25).

enter the borderlands in rising numbers and were the “illegal aliens” of their day”, as Patricia Nelson Limerick has named them (Limerick 1988: 229, cf. Gonzales 1999: 58). Mexico, after 1821, dropped the restrictions that Spain had established in order to keep unwelcome foreigners out of the state of *Coahuila y Tejas*, in the hope that it would be able to assimilate these Anglo-Americans into Mexican society (cf. Limerick 1988: 230, De León/Griswold del Castillo 2006: 233). American filibusters, encouraged by this decision and motivated by the hope for economic benefits, made their way into Texas and quite a number of them came without obtaining government authorization (cf. Gonzales 1999: 70-71. Altogether, more than 30 000 *norteamericanos* immigrated to Texas (cf. De León/Griswold del Castillo 2006: 233). In 1832, finally, Mexico forbade Anglo immigration into Texas since it became obvious that immigrants from the U.S. would resist every effort to assimilate them into Mexican society (cf. Gonzales 1999: 70, Limerick 1988: 230). This measure did, of course, not stop immigrants from entering other borderland areas such as California, where immigration reached a peak by the mid-1840s and continued throughout the nineteenth century (cf. Gonzales 1999: 72).



Map: 1 New America States in 1825 (from González, Juan. *Harvest of Empire: A History of Latinos in America*. New York: Viking, 2000. p.29)

The map of North America changed significantly between the years of 1845 and 1854 when what had so far been known as the Mexican far North became the present-day US Southwest. Texas, which had become independent from Mexico in 1836 after the Texas Rebellion, also known as the Texas War for Independence, was the first one to be annexed by the United States in 1845. The US Mexican War (1846-1848), which ended in the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, continued the US conquest of the Mexican northern regions. With the Gadsden Purchase in 1854, the US bought southern Arizona and Tucson from Mexico and thereby completed its conquest of the borderlands (cf. De León/Griswold del Castillo 2006: 41). Through the American conquest that created the present political border between the Mexico and the United States, Mexico lost half of its national territory but only less than one percent of its population (cf. Gonzales 1999: 79, Gómez-Quiñones 1984: 59). Even so, in the nineteenth century more Mexicans entered the United States through diplomatic treaties and military conquest than through immigration (cf. Engstrom 2002: 34).

Although the U.S. conquest significantly changed the border, an effective administrative border was only established during the 1920s and 1930s (cf. Gómez-Quiñones 1984: 60). Mexicans, who suddenly found themselves living in the United States, had to choose between leaving their homes and moving further south into Mexican territory or staying where they were, which was now the United States (cf. Gonzales 1999: 79). Two percent of the 100 000 Mexicans decided to pack up and leave for Mexico, the rest who chose to stay “were guaranteed “all the rights of citizens of the United States” including “free enjoyment of their liberty and property,” according to Article IX” (Gonzales 1999: 79). Those remaining were forced to change their nationality but that did not necessarily entail that they would change their whole lifestyle (cf. De León/Griswold del Castillo 2006: 43). Now being Mexican Americans, they kept to cultural traditions such as cooking and house keeping (cf. De León/Griswold del Castillo 2006: 43). These cultural traditions were preserved by new Mexican immigrants, who were likely to move to those parts where Mexican Americans already lived,

which were the same as before the conquest (cf. De León/Griswold del Castillo 2006: 45).

Although Mexicans managed to keep at least their tradition, if not their nationality, they often could not keep their land (cf. De León/Griswold del Castillo 2006: 46-48, Gonzales 1999: 86-87). After the occupation of Mexican and Spanish land grants by Anglos, disputes over land ownership broke out which were met by the Federal Congress with the Land Act of 1851 (cf. Gonzales 1999: 86). According to this Act, landowners in California had to prove their ownership, which was a long and expensive process, especially for Mexican *rancheros* that had land but little money and were often unable to monitor their English-speaking lawyers (cf. Gonzales 1999: 87). Consequently, the land loss of many Mexican claimants was predetermined and open fraud added to it (cf. Gonzales 1999: 87). As Mexican Americans were ill treated by Anglos, whose feeling of superiority was reinforced after their victory in the US Mexican War, they tended to keep to themselves and oriented themselves towards self-designated labels such as *La Raza* (cf. De León/Griswold del Castillo 2006: 43). Mexican Americans clustered in rural villages, and in urban areas they formed their own barrios (cf. De León/Griswold del Castillo 2006: 43). In the 1880s and 1890s, the US built railroads that linked to Mexico and that encouraged Mexican migration as it still does today (cf. Gómez-Quíñones 1984: 59).

2.2 The Great Migration

Just as Anglo Americans had poured into the borderlands prior to conquest, Mexican immigrants now started to move into these areas, a trend that has continued into the present. Through these migration flows, the US and Mexico soon became increasingly interconnected and interdependent, a relationship that clearly was not advantageous for both parties but only for the US (cf. Gómez-Quíñones 1984: 60). Mexico's economy, amongst other things, has been shaped by the United States in the past through the appropriation of resources and in the present "through

labor immigration, direct investment, loans and interest on loans, and through political understandings between the two countries” (Gómez-Quíñones 1984: 60). United States policy has varied from supporting Mexican immigration at times of labor shortages to sending already established citizens back by force at times of economic crises (cf. Engstrom 2002: 31). Or as Juan Gómez-Quíñones has put it, “Immigration is a means by which capitalism can regulate the labor market and the supply of workers as it undergoes economic cycles of high and low demand for labor” (1984: 58). If the economy is in need of cheap workers, immigrants can be easily employed, while at times of economic stagnation, especially undocumented workers can be repatriated, since they do not have legal rights that would protect them (cf. Gómez-Quíñones 1984: 58). In addition, they serve as scapegoats for the public, in order to hide who is truly responsible for the economic decline (cf. Gómez-Quíñones 1984: 58, 62, Engstrom 2002: 44). In this way, immigration can be described as a movement that is stimulated by a push-pull process (cf. Gonzales 1999: 114). While the situation in their country of origin pushes people to emigrate, certain conditions, usually the prospect of work, in the receiving country pulls them to immigrate (cf. Engstrom 2002: 32). Although this works as a model by which immigration can be described, it “masks the tremendous complexity of the forces that create the push-pull dynamic” (Engstrom 2002: 33).

**TABLE 4.1: LEGAL IMMIGRATION FROM MEXICO
TO THE UNITED STATES 1869-1973**

YEAR	TOTAL IMMIGRANTS	YEAR	TOTAL IMMIGRANTS	YEAR	TOTAL IMMIGRANTS
1869	320	1905	2,637	1941	2,068
1870	463	1906	1,997	1942	2,182
1871	402	1907	1,406	1943	3,985
1872	569	1908	6,067	1944	6,399
1873	606	1909	16,251	1945	6,455
1874	386	1910	17,760	1946	6,805
1875	610	1911	18,784	1947	7,775
1876	631	1912	22,001	1948	8,730
1877	445	1913	10,954	1949	7,977
1878	465	1914	13,089	1950	6,841
1879	556	1915	10,993	1951	6,372
1880	492	1916	17,198	1952	9,600
1881	325	1917	16,438	1953	18,454
1882	366	1918	17,602	1954	37,456
1883	469	1919	28,844	1955	50,772
1884	430	1920	51,042	1956	65,047
1885	323	1921	29,603	1957	49,154
1886	n.a.	1922	18,246	1958	26,712
1887	n.a.	1923	62,709	1959	23,061
1888	n.a.	1924	87,648	1960	32,084
1889	n.a.	1925	32,378	1961	41,632
1890	n.a.	1926	42,638	1962	55,291
1891	n.a.	1927	66,766	1963	55,253
1892	n.a.	1928	57,765	1964	32,967
1893	n.a.	1929	38,980	1965	37,969
1894	109	1930	11,915	1966	45,163
1895	116	1931	2,627	1967	42,371
1896	150	1932	1,674	1968	43,563
1897	91	1933	1,514	1969	44,623
1898	107	1934	1,470	1970	44,469
1899	163	1935	1,232	1971	50,103
1900	237	1936	1,306	1972	64,040
1901	347	1937	1,918	1973	70,141
1902	700	1938	2,014	Total	1,736,576
1903	528	1939	2,265		
1904	1,009	1940	1,914		

Note: n.a. = data not available.

Sources for 1869-1969, Julian Samora, "Mexican Immigration," in Gus Taylor, ed., *Mexican-Americans Tomorrow: Educational and Economic Perspectives* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1975), 78. For 1970-73, *Annual Reports of U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service*, in Stanley Ross, ed., *Views across the Border* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico

**Table: 1 Legal Immigration from Mexico to the United States 1869-1973
(DeLeon/Griswold del Castillo 2006:65)**

The first major wave of Mexican immigrants that became known as "The Great Migration" took place between 1900 and 1930 and brought an estimated number of over one million people – more than 10 percent of the Mexican population - into the United States (cf. Gonzales 1999: 113, De León/Griswold del Castillo 2006: 86). In their homeland, the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920) raged and killed between 1.5 and 2 million people (cf. Gonzales 1999: 118). Subsequently, the Cristero Rebellion in western Mexico took its toll, killing 80 000 people (cf. Gonzales 1999: 119). In

addition to these push factors, the United States were in need of cheap labor because of shortages due to World War I (cf. De León/Griswold del Castillo 2006: 86). The majority of immigrants settled in the familiar territory of the American Southwest – with California and Texas being the most popular destinations - and often immigrants from the same rural villages would live together in the United States (cf. Gonzales 1999: 120-121).

When the United States started to restrict immigration on the basis of national origin with the passing of the Chinese Exclusion Act (1882), the signing of the Gentlemen's Agreement with Japan (1907) and later on the Immigration Act of 1924, also known as National Origins Act, Mexicans were excluded from these restrictions as their labor was still needed (cf. Engstrom 2002: 38, Gómez-Quiñones 1984: 65). In the same year that the National Origins Act was passed, the US Border Patrol was created which significantly changed the legal status of Mexican immigrants (cf. Gómez-Quiñones 1984: 68). Mexicans without a valid visa now faced the danger of being apprehended and sent back to Mexico (cf. Gómez-Quiñones 1984: 68). Whereas before it did not make much difference whether one had a visa or not, now there was a clear distinction between documented and undocumented Mexicans and "the concept and condition of an "illegal worker" was introduced into the relations of labor" (Gómez-Quiñones 1984: 68). Anti-Mexican sentiments also led to a Congress campaign to put restrictions on Mexican immigration, but the economic argument was still stronger and so the exclusionary bills never passed Congress (cf. Gonzales 1999: 146-147). In order to satisfy immigration critics, Congress passed an Act in 1929 through which illegal entry became a serious crime (cf. Gonzales 1999: 147, Gómez-Quiñones 1984: 68).

Once the depression of the 1930s began to hit the United States, the attitude towards Mexican immigrants worsened and they were made into scapegoats for the economic crisis (cf. Gonzales 1999: 139). What followed were the first major deportation drives in the history of Mexican immigration to the United States, in the course of which an estimated number of one million people were repatriated to Mexico (cf.

DeLeon/Griswold del Castillo 2006: 114-115). The depression practically stopped further immigration from Mexico as there were no more jobs available and many Mexicans living and working in the United States returned voluntarily (cf. Gonzales 1999: 147f-148). Those who were repatriated included American-born children of immigrants who were in fact US citizens and as a result the violation of civil liberties became common (cf. Gonzales 1999: 148).

2.3 1940s to 1960s: The *Bracero* Program and Operation Wetback

Government's policy regarding immigration from Mexico changed again during World War II when approximately 100 000 Mexican Americans fought for the United States' army and the general lack of workers as well as economic prosperity led again to labor shortages (cf. DeLeon/Griswold del Castillo 2006:86). The government, in order to conform to agricultural growers' requirements, responded with the introduction of the *Bracero* Program that would bring temporary workers from Mexico into the United States starting in 1942 and continuing with little interruptions until 1964 (cf. Cerrutti/Massey 2004: 17).

After the end of World War II, US economy was flourishing, but life for many Mexican Americans did not get better, partly because a steady stream of *braceros* lowered their wages (cf. DeLeon/Griswold del Castillo 2006: 135). The increasing number of undocumented immigrants led to another nativist backlash and media coverage of "the wetback invasion" or "the illegal hordes" in particular encouraged already existing negative sentiments against immigrants of Mexican descent (DeLeon/Griswold del Castillo 2006: 136). History repeated itself when, as an answer to public fears, the Attorney General Herbert Brownell started to prepare "Operation Wetback" in 1954 (cf. DeLeon/Griswold del Castillo 2006: 137). Just as in the 1930s when thousands of Mexicans were repatriated during the Depression, once again intimidation tactics were used (cf. Gonzales 1999: 177). Operation Wetback was a military operation carried out by the Border Patrol that at first concentrated on the US Southwest but later on was expanded nationwide (cf. Gonzales 1999: 177). Altogether, 1 075 168

people were apprehended and sent back to Mexico during this military operation (cf. Gonzales 1999: 177). US officials sold Operation Wetback to the public as a victory over undocumented immigration, but already in the 1960s the number of people apprehended at the US Mexican border – more than one million Mexicans were apprehended during that decade – made it obvious that the number of undocumented border crossings was increasing again (cf. Gonzales 1999: 177, 225). On the one hand, Operation Wetback satisfied the public outcry for actions against undocumented immigration but at the same time it interfered with economic interests (cf. Cerrutti/Massey 2004: 17). The government had to react and in the years after Operation Wetback, from 1955 to 1959, more than 400 000 visas were issued per year, an amount that doubled the number of the pre-Operation Wetback years (cf. Cerrutti/Massey 2004: 17).

2.4 Post-*Bracero* Immigration Policies

Cerrutti and Massey call the time that followed the end of the *Bracero* Program, the “modern era of Mexico-U.S. migration” as United States policies regarding Mexican immigration changed significantly (2004: 17). Thanks to the civil rights movement of the 1960s that went hand in hand with political and social changes, the US had to rethink their methods of dealing with immigration and as a result, the *Bracero* Program was dismissed as being exploitative and the 1965 Immigration Act that ended the discriminatory national origins quotas, passed Congress (cf. Engstrom 2002: 40, Cerrutti/Massey 2004: 17).). At the same time, it limited, for the first time in the history of immigration from Mexico to the US, the number of Mexican immigrants to 120 000 and eleven years later to 20 000 per year, a number that was constantly exceeded due to a complex family reunification system (cf. Gonzales 1999: 226). If the intention of the 1965 Immigration Act – also known as Hart-Celler Act after its sponsors – had been to increase immigration from Mexico and Central America, it did not come up to its expectations as it did in fact decrease Latin American immigration to the US (cf. Cerrutti/Massey 2004: 19). Only the further

reduction to 20 000 per year for countries of the Western Hemisphere reduced the number of Mexican immigrants by 25 percent (cf. Cerrutti/Massey 2004: 19). The amendments that were later added to the Act, in combination with the termination of the *Bracero* Program in 1964, resulted in a raise of undocumented immigration as legal entry had become more exclusive (cf. Cerrutti/Massey 2004: 19). Juan Gómez-Quíñones comments that most Mexican immigrant workers, the majority of whom work in poorly paid agricultural jobs and industry, do not have legal papers (cf. 1984: 62).

The stream of Mexican immigrants grew larger in the 1970s and the 1980s, and, once again, opened up the debate on new immigration policies especially regarding undocumented immigration (cf. DeLeon/Griswold del Castillo 2006: 197). In the 1970s, the number of (documented) Latinos/as in the United States increased by 61 percent and during the following decade again by 53 percent (cf. Gonzales 1999: 223). The number of border apprehensions also increased in the 1970s and more than 7 million Mexicans were apprehended at the US-Mexican border (cf. Gonzales 1999: 225). In 1983 alone, over one million undocumented people were apprehended at the US Mexican border by the INS, a number that can only lead to speculations about how many people did enter the US undocumented (cf. DeLeon/Griswold del Castillo 2006: 197). Apprehensions hit the highest point in 1986 when 1.8 million people were caught at the border and sent back (cf. Cerrutti/Massey 2004: 19). As a reaction to growing public concerns, President Jimmy Carter, in 1971, first suggested to work on a new immigration policy that would include sanctions for employing undocumented workers, strengthening the power of the Border Patrol and amnesty for undocumented workers already living in the US (cf. DeLeon/Griswold del Castillo 2006: 197). It took fifteen years and several proposals for various bills, such as the Simpson-Mazzoli bill, until in 1985 Carter's ideas were finally carried into effect in the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA), "the first salvo in a long battle over the Mexico-U.S. border" (Cerrutti/Massey 2004: 20, cf. DeLeon/Griswold del Castillo 2006: 198). The new law entailed more money for the enforcement of the Border Patrol, sanctions for employers

who knowingly hired undocumented immigrants; amnesty for long-term undocumented residents and a legalization program for undocumented agricultural workers (cf. Cerrutti/Massey 2004: 19). The IRCA was a product of government's efforts to satisfy economy's claims for cheap labor and appease public fears of "the illegal invasion" (Cerrutti/Massey 2004: 19). About 2.4 million undocumented people gained legal status under the IRCA (cf. Gonzales 1999: 230). For four years, until the new 1990 Immigration Act, which increased the number of immigrants, was passed, the new law actually did decrease the number of undocumented entries, but by 1990 everything was back to usual (cf. Gonzales 1999: 230).

2.5 The 1980s and 1990s

The 1980s also saw the arrival of new refugee flows from Central American countries such as Nicaragua, El Salvador or Guatemala, triggered off by poverty, civil wars and persecution (cf. Engstrom 2002: 42, Gonzales 1999: 227). After 1979, thousands of Central American refugees fled from political violence in their home countries, first crossing the border into Mexico and then the US-Mexican border (cf. Gonzales 1999: 227). The United States played an active part in suppressing leftist movements in Central America and because it supported governments in Guatemala and El Salvador it did not welcome refugees from these countries, whereas most Nicaraguans applying for asylum fared well (cf. Engstrom 2002: 42f). The great majority of Central Americans who entered the United States during that period did so as political refugees, in contrast to Mexican documented and undocumented immigrants who continued to come in search for labor.

By 1990, Latinos/as constituted about 9 percent of the US population, out of which 60 percent, about 13.5 million people, were of Mexican origin (cf. Gonzales 1999: 224). The US Southwest was still the area that attracted the highest number of Mexican immigrants with 83 percent living there, and L.A. having the fourth largest Mexican community in the world (cf. Gonzales 1999: 224). The U.S. Census Bureau estimated in the mid-1990s that the Latino/a population in the US was growing by 900 000 per

year and that between 500 000 and 1 million Central Americans were living in L.A. (cf. Gonzales 1999: 227).

In the 1990s growing resentments about undocumented immigration, especially in the states of Arizona and California⁵, led to the Save Our State (SOS) campaign with the aim of supporting Proposition 187, which would deny undocumented immigrants' rights to use public services (cf. DeLeon/Griswold del Castillo 2006: 213). Despite widespread protests by Latino/a organizations, the Catholic Church and Democratic leaders such as President Bill Clinton, it passed Congress on November 8, 1994 (cf. DeLeon/Griswold del Castillo 2006: 214). Although the law was eventually declared illegal as it violated the civil rights of US residents, it did not improve the relationship between Latino/a activists and anti-immigration supporters (cf. DeLeon/Griswold del Castillo 2006: 214). Two years later, in 1996, US Congress passed the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act that tried once more to solve the issue of undocumented immigration (cf. Engstrom 2002: 47). The IIRIRA "gave the INS more resources and personnel for law enforcement, expanded the agency's authority to remove "illegal aliens", weakened the role of the courts in reviewing enforcement decisions, and increased the civil and criminal penalties associated with illegal immigration" (Engstrom 2002: 47). During the second half of the 1990s, a number of military operations were undertaken along the US Mexican border, with the aim of cutting undocumented immigration short, such as "Operation Hold-the-Line" and "Rio Grande" in El Paso, "Operation Gatekeeper" (1994) in San Diego and Operation Safeguard in Tucson (cf. Cerrutti/Massey 2004: 20, De León/Griswold del Castillo 2006: 212). Undocumented women became more evident in the 1990s according to a survey that says that between 60 and 75 percent of all immigrants trying to cross the border with the help of false documents were women (cf. Gonzales 1999: 227). The very fact that the push-pull model, which is generally used to explain migration flows, tends to mask the complexity of immigration processes was already mentioned at the beginning of the chapter. This becomes even more

⁵ In Texas, which also has a large number of undocumented immigrants from Mexico, sentiments were not as strong because businesspeople mostly wanted to keep their good relations with Mexico (De León/Griswold del Castillo 2006: 215).

evident at the end of the twentieth century when the concept of transnationalism gained importance in immigration studies (cf. Gonzales 1999: 228). Furthermore, many undocumented immigrants living in the United States did not actually cross the border illegally – a picture many US Americans have in mind when thinking of undocumented immigrants – but rather entered the States legally with a tourist, student or work visa and then overstayed it, therefore becoming undocumented, and by the 1990s experts estimated that about half of all undocumented immigrants had entered the U.S. in this way (cf. Gonzales 1999: 228).

2.6 The New Millenium

Shortly after the arrival of the new millennium, in 2005, Latinos/as, who are the fastest growing population group in the US, became the nation's largest "minority" group, but the increase in numbers did not go hand in hand with an increase in acceptance in the "majority" group and political setbacks against immigrants continue into the present (cf. De León/Griswold del Castillo 2006: 207-208). The United States was confronted with new issues, such as globalization, the terrorist attacks of 9/11 and the following "War on Terrorism", which caused great harm to image of the U.S. in most of Europe (cf. De León/Griswold del Castillo 2006: 207).

The last U.S. census, which was compiled in 2000, revealed that Latinos/as constitute about 12 percent of the US population and out of these 12 percent, 60 percent are of Mexican origin (cf. De León/Griswold del Castillo 2006: 208). Traditionally, the overwhelming majority – about three quarters of all Latinos/as - is still to be found in the borderlands that belonged to Mexico before the US conquest, especially in California and Texas, and the urban areas of L.A. County – with L.A. being the second largest Spanish-speaking city after Mexico City – and also New York (cf. De León/Griswold del Castillo 2006: 208). As the number of immigrants from Latin American countries continues to be on the rise in and around the new millennium, the political discussion, especially regarding undocumented immigration carries on too (cf. De León/Griswold del

Castillo 2006: 212). Numbers on undocumented immigrants are always estimates since there is no way of counting them officially, – the only official numbers being the ones on border apprehensions – and according to such estimates about 8.5 million immigrants were undocumented in the year of the 2000 census (cf. De León/Griswold del Castillo 2006: 212). More than 50 percent of them were of Mexican origin and 2 million were from Latin American countries (cf. De León/Griswold del Castillo 2006: 212). When the United States started the Iraq War in 2003, large numbers of Latinos fought in the US army – just as they had already done during World War II – and when the war claimed the first casualties, Lance Cpl. José Gutiérrez, who had lived in L.A. as an undocumented immigrant, was one of them (cf. De León/Griswold del Castillo 2006: 220). At the beginning of a new millennium, immigration opponents now had to face the fact that noncitizens were dying for their country (cf. De León/Griswold del Castillo 2006: 220).

3. From a (Male) History to a Gender Analysis

The previous chapter gave a short overview of the historical relations between the United States and its Southern neighbor(s), especially concerning US policies regarding undocumented immigration. While, on the one hand, various US laws and an ongoing border enforcement try to prevent undocumented crossings, it was the United States themselves that created, intentionally or not, with a constant demand for cheap labor, and the introduction of the previously discussed *Bracero* Program, a tradition of crossing over to *el otro lado* which I will refer to as the “male” tradition. Primarily though, the *Bracero* Program offered Mexican men the opportunity to work legally for a fixed period of time in the United States. Their wives and families in turn, would remain at home most of the time and wait for the men to return. As already mentioned earlier, the program also fostered border crossings of undocumented workers and over time social networks that helped undocumented men on all stages of their journey north were established. While chapter 2 explored the economic and political reasons for migration, the following chapters shall try to explain how men and women respond to this call and how their response is influenced by their families and communities.

I will argue that as evinced by the cultural texts that I have selected for discussion the development of a feminized tradition of migration from Mexico and Central America to the United States has emerged that focuses on the depiction of women's own social networks. What this thesis subsequently tries to argue is that, as shown in these texts, women started to establish their own social networks, as more and more women entered the migration process. Consequently, a feminized tradition of migration emerged, which is an important theme in Latino/a literature on undocumented immigration from Central America and Mexico. Before the actual analysis of the literary works, it is therefore necessary to have a look at the so-called “feminization” of migration and to see how migration can be looked at from a gender/feminist studies perspective.

3.1 The “Feminization of Migration”⁶

Although women have always been part of migration processes – a fact that has been long denied by migration scholars – it used to be men that were more likely to take the trip up north, due to the demand for male labor and an existing tradition of men migrating in Mexican families and communities. Hondagneu-Sotelo also holds patriarchal gender relations in Mexican society responsible for the development of this male tradition of immigration (cf. 1992: 394). Men are expected to provide financially for their families and if they are not able to fulfill this role due to high rates of unemployment, they follow the example of their fathers and male friends and migrate to find jobs in the United States. While men have the authority to plan and carry out their migration autonomously and also have the resources to do so, the woman’s part is not to question the men’s decision but to care for the children and the household on her own while the men are absent (cf. Hondagneu-Sotelo 1992: 394). While macro structural processes in the U.S. and Mexico are the reason for these migration moves, the way in which men and women respond to these processes is influenced by gender (cf. Hondagneu-Sotelo 1992: 395), race, class, legal status and nationality.

But things have changed and today women constitute about 50 percent of migrants worldwide (cf. UNFPA 1993, quoted in Kanaiaupuni 2000: 1312) and also Mexican men and women migrate in same numbers (cf. Segura/Zavella 2007: 2). In the introduction to their anthology on *Women and Migration in the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands*, Segura and Zavella argue that it is structural processes that push women to join the migration process (cf. 2007: 1). The aim of this subchapter is to track down some of these processes that have led to the feminization of migration, such as IRCA and NAFTA, and have a first look at social migration networks.

A study of multiple communities in Mexico revealed that in the 1980s women were more likely to cross the border as undocumented persons than enter the United States legally (cf. Donato 1993: 12). This general

trend was only interrupted by the passing of the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) of 1986, a watershed in US immigration history, the aftermath of which saw women tending to enter the United States legally as wives of their now legalized husbands (cf. Donato 1993: 12). Durand (cf. 1999: 525), on the other hand, claims that the majority of immigration motivated by family reunification after the IRCA was undocumented with an average of about 300,000 people each year. The IRCA helped to feminize migration substantially as great numbers of wives, siblings, parents and children of legalized migrants soon entered the country, whether documented or undocumented (cf. Durand 1999: 525). This does not mean that women had not migrated to the United States before; in fact 43 percent of the undocumented immigrants that became legal citizens under the "Legally Authorized Worker (LAW)" program and about 15 percent of those who applied for a citizenship under the "Special Agricultural Worker (SAW)" program were women (cf. Durand 1999: 521, 525).

One determinant of women's migration was land and business ownership. Land ownership would reduce women's chances of migration since it would tie them to the home while the husband went to the US to find work, whereas business ownership would rather tie the man to the home and make women more likely to migrate (cf. Donato 1993: 12). Although in the aftermath of the IRCA women immigrated to the US to reunite with their husbands and families, it is not certain that this is the only motive for women's decision to migrate (cf. Donato 1993: 13). Another study found out that more than 90 percent of the women that took part in that study did not only come to the US to reunite with their families but also to find a job there (cf. Reichert/Massey 1979). Donato concludes that "the self-sustaining nature of female migration suggests that family reunification will be only a partial explanation for the increasing presence of [female Mexican migrants]" (Donato 1993: 13).

Whereas in earlier migration history it was only jobs for men that were needed, women are now much sought-after on the job market. Women come from all different parts of Mexico to the border area, where they will

not have many difficulties in finding jobs in the “free enterprise” zones that were built up there (cf. Segura/Zavella 2007: 2). These free enterprise zones have their origins in the 1970s when so-called *maquila* factories started to open in many northern Mexican cities and much of the migration movements in the developing countries were national, from rural to urban areas (cf. Durand 1999: 518-519). These factories were the result of an agreement between Mexico and the United States that created a special trade zone along the border which was later expanded to the rest of Mexico and ultimately led to the signing of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1994 (cf. Durand 1999: 519). NAFTA created an open market area reaching from Central America to the Arctic Ocean that led to economic growth in Mexican border cities (cf. Durand 1999: 519). In the interior, especially in economically marginalized regions of Mexico, on the other hand, the implementation of NAFTA caused further poverty (cf. Durand 1999: 520). Women in Mexico and Central America, just as women worldwide, had already started to enter the job market in rising numbers since the 1950s as a consequence of macrostructural changes that had increased the need for two salaries in a household but also led to an increase in female-headed households (cf. Kessler 1996: 4). The poverty caused by NAFTA as well as the job opportunities created through it often leaves women and men with no other choice than migration. But women’s employment is not just restricted to the Mexican labor market; many cross the border to the United States, where they find jobs in the service sector and other low-wage sectors (cf. Segura/Zavella 2007: 2). This increase in women’s mobility that leads to national migration within Mexico as well as to migration to the United States goes hand in hand with women’s participation in the job market and the feminization of certain jobs in both countries (cf. Segura/Zavella 2007: 5).

Thus, the stereotype of the passive female migrant that is dependent on a male companion can no longer be upheld and more recent literature on migration does emphasize the active part that women play in international migration (cf. Kessler 1996: 11). Studies that included the migration of young, single women often analyzed it as being part of a collective family decision rather than the women’s own decision (cf. Kessler 1996: 13). But

during the last decade, scholarly literature on Central American and Mexican immigration started to stress the importance of social migrant networks in the migratory process (cf. Kessler 1996: 13). Social networks play a crucial role in reducing the risks of migration (cf. Hondagneu-Sotelo 1992: 396). On the basis of a number of studies, Kessler suggests that women form and use their own social networks, referred to as women-to-women networks that "supply information, financial assistance, job contacts, and other valued social connections" (1996: 15). Similarly, Hondagneu-Sotelo argues that women do not automatically benefit from social networks established by their husbands but that these social networks are gendered and that women and men may rely on different social networks (cf. 1992: 396). Women migrating to the United States helped to form these networks, which will in turn help other autonomous women to migrate.

3.2 Gender and Migration

Whereas in my second chapter the focus of attention was on the history of migration, US immigration policies and different waves of immigration, I now want to turn to migration as a social process and its contribution to identity formation processes. In this area, migration studies have received the strongest input from feminist and gender studies (cf. Hondagneu-Sotelo 2000: 112). The study of migration is not a single discipline in itself; on the contrary, over the years it has and keeps receiving input from a large variety of disciplines, such as anthropology, history, sociology, economics and political science (cf. Hondagneu-Sotelo 2000: 112). Feminist studies as well as the works of other researchers that have put gender at the focus of attention, however, are still being marginalized from the center of migration studies (cf. Hondagneu-Sotelo 2000: 113). Migration and feminist studies both have a rather long tradition in the United States but the two fields have not been connected until recently, which is surprising given that they are "[t]wo of the most radically transformative forces in remaking the United States" that have contributed substantially to the shaping of US society into what it looks like at the

beginning of the twenty first century (Hondagneu-Sotelo 2000: 108). The aim of the next subchapter is to have a look at how the relationship between gender and migration studies has developed and changed over the years and to see what the status quo is today in order to establish a methodical framework for the following analysis of the chosen works of Latino/a literature.

3.2.1 Men Only

Although the great pioneer of migration studies, the geographer E. G. Ravenstein, had already stated in 1885 that “woman is a greater migrant than man” and included men and women in his analysis of migration circuits, women remained invisible in migration studies for the most part of the following century (Ravenstein 1885: 196 in Pessar/Mahler 2003: 814, cf. Sinke 2006: 82). The very term “migrant” suffered from gender stereotyping and whenever mentioned it only carried masculine connotations (cf. Pessar 1986: 273 in Pessar 1999: 578). The connection between migration and gender studies remained problematic until recently and until the early 1970s international migration studies almost entirely put their focus of attention on male migrants (cf. Pessar/Mahler 2003: 814). If women were mentioned at all they were ascribed the role of passive migrants who only followed their husbands or migrated for means of family reunification and not as active participants in the migratory process (cf. Pessar/Mahler 2003: 814, Hondagneu-Sotelo 2000: 113). The almost complete absence of female migrants from the research in the field of migration studies that was undertaken in the 1950s, 1960s, and early 1970s also derived from a common tendency to ignore women’s contribution to the spheres of social, economic, and political life (cf. Pessar 1999: 578). Of course, there were some exceptions, but in general this research bias did not change until the 1970s when women slowly started to play a role in the studies of international migration (cf. Pessar/Mahler 2003: 814).

3.2.2 Women Only

In the 1970s and 1980s then, migration researchers finally started to take female migrants into account and especially those with a more feminist perspective began to document the predominance of women in the migratory process (cf. Pessar/Mahler 2003: 814). After a century of women's absence from migration research, this focus on women was clearly and undeniably an important first step towards the right direction, but although one should not diminish these early efforts, from today's point of view it is hard not to criticize the fact that women were simply added as a variable (cf. Hondagneu-Sotelo 2000: 114). At this stage too, "gender" was widely used synonymously with "sex", but in contrast to gender, which is much more complex, sex is simply a dichotomous variable consisting of male and female (cf. Pessar/Mahler 2003: 813-814, Pessar 1999: 579). Accordingly, sex role theory, which says that men and women "learn and play out different sex role scripts" and which treats gender as something that is static, played a major role (Hondagneu-Sotelo 2000: 114). What was being left out in this approach were crucially important issues such as social change and power relations (cf. Hondagneu-Sotelo 2000: 115). The problem though, in this period of migration research was that this did not help to complete the picture but, orthodoxly the opposite was the case, as the initial male bias was overcorrected in so far as now the research focused on women and started to ignore the male migrant (cf. Pessar/Mahler 2003: 814). A second problem was that these indisputably important findings regarding female migrants were never put into the context of the larger discussion of gender issues (cf. Pessar 1999: 579). One prime, but without doubt not the only, example of such a failed effort is Simon and DeLey's article on "Undocumented Mexican Women: Their Work and Personal Experience", which was published in 1986 in Simon and Brettell's work *International Migration: The Female Perspective*. The article concludes that undocumented women are "a rather timid group of workers who believe they have no real options about their work life and are relatively satisfied with what they have" and the very final sentence says that "[...] they behave very much like the undocumented Mexican

men who are working in the United States” (Simon/DeLey 1986: 131). As one can see, undocumented Mexican women here are simply compared to their male counterparts and the conclusions that are drawn are clearly the result of not putting their findings into a larger framework of power relations.

3.2.3 Bringing Gender into Migration Studies

Subsequent to this period of primarily women-only research, there emerged a phase in the 1980s and early 1990s in which the focus shifted once again, this time to the connection between migration and gender (cf. Hondagneu-Sotelo 2000: 115). In order to avoid a ghettoization of woman-focused studies (cf. Sinke 2006: 87), Joan Scott (1986: 1067) demanded to analyze “gender [as] a constitutive element of social relationships based on perceived differences between the sexes, and gender [as] a primary way of signifying relationships of power”. At this stage, researchers also no longer used the terms gender and sex interchangeably or looked upon gender as being static and fixed but recognized gender as a process which, in turn, opens up a new perspective in which gender relations, identities and ideologies are no longer fixed but fluid (cf. Pessar/Mahler 2003: 813). Gender is being redefined as “a set of social relations that organize immigration patterns” and the importance of “an examination of how gender relations [...] facilitate or constrain both women’s *and* men’s immigration and settlement” (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994: 3). People are seen as doing “gender work”, i.e. gendered practices and discourses through which they “reproduce and/or contest hierarchies of power and privilege” (Pessar/Mahler 2003: 813). Migration research no longer treated women as one category but stressed the importance of the intersectionality of gender, class, race, ethnicity, and importantly, legal status and nationality (cf. Hondagneu-Sotelo 2000: 115, Hondagneu-Sotelo 1999: 568, Pessar 1999: 577). To complete the picture even more, Pessar finds it necessary to also include “migrant’s age, education, employment history (prior and subsequent to emigration), [...] sexual preference, [...] family structures and gender ideologies (prior and subsequent to emigration)” (1999: 586). This new way of research “focused on the gendering of

migration patterns and on the way migration reconfigures systems of gender inequality” (Hondagneu-Sotelo 2000: 115). Migrant social networks and families are seen as gendered institutions, which support immigration efforts and the power relations that are at work in a household significantly influence the decision-making to migrate (cf. Hondagneu-Sotelo 2000: 115).

Although this new stage of migration research marked a great step forward, it had one major weakness, namely that it focused in most cases on gender issues in the domains of the household and the family, thereby suggesting that gender does not play a role on other levels such as the workplace, immigration policies or issues concerning the Border Patrol (cf. Hondagneu-Sotelo 2000: 117).

3.2.4 Gender as Central Theoretical Concept

The latest stage of gender and migration studies just emerged at the turn of the century (cf. Hondagneu-Sotelo 2000: 117) and in contrast to earlier times, it does not completely break with what researchers had done before, but rather takes the research process to the next higher level. At this stage, the focus is no longer just on the domestic areas, which are usually connected to women, such as family and household, but is has extended to the public sphere, that was before almost exclusively associated with men. Scholars are asked to look at gender as a social system that contextualizes immigration processes by women and men (cf. Hondagneu-Sotelo 2000: 114). To move towards “a more fully engendered understanding of the migration process“, Pessar finds it necessary to look at

how men and women experience migration differently, how they create and encounter patriarchal ideologies and institutions across transnational migration circuits, and how patriarchy is reaffirmed, reconfigured, or both as a consequence of migration (1999: 594).

What remains important is not to isolate gender but rather to include race, class, legal status and nationality in the analysis.

4. From *Braceros* to *Braceras* – The Role of Gender in the Migration Decision-Making Process

The aim of this chapter is not so much to focus on why Mexicans and Central Americans have to make the decision as to whether they stay in their hometowns and villages or migrate to *El Norte*, but rather on how they make this decision. In chapter 5 I will then show that the works of Latino/a literature that I have chosen for my analysis are representative of how many migrants make their decision.

As already previously stated in this thesis, the origins of undocumented migration from Mexico lie in macro structural processes and economic and political transformations in the U.S. and Mexico (cf. Hondagneu-Sotelo 1992: 395, Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994: 7). But the way in which men and women respond to these processes is influenced by gender, race, class, legal status, nationality (cf. Hondagneu-Sotelo 1992: 395), and “the immediate context of family and community relations (such as social networks)” (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994: 7). Similarly to Engstrom, who was previously quoted, saying that the push-pull model “masks the tremendous complexity of the forces that create the push-pull dynamic” (2002: 33), Hondagneu-Sotelo stresses that neither the push-pull model nor theories based on macro structural transformations alone can explain the immense variety of migration patterns (cf. 1994: 5, 187). These theories might be helpful for explaining changes in the sex composition of migrant streams, but they do not explain the distinctively gendered way in which migration and settlement take place, or in other words, they “set the stage for migration, but they do not write the script” (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994: 187). A macro structural perspective would neglect the social dimensions of migration and any sense of subjectivity and human agency (cf. Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994: 6). Migrants are not a homogeneous group of victims of structural and historical forces who respond uniformly and mechanically to these forces, they are active participants in the migration process (cf. Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994: 6).

The key factors that play a crucial role in the decision-making process of migrants are human capital investments including education, work history and previous migration experiences; family considerations, socioeconomic status, social networks and local opportunities in the home country compared to opportunities in the United States (cf. Kanaiaupuni 2000: 1312, 1332). Concerning socioeconomic status, it has to be said that while studies portray immigrants as being unskilled and poor, migrating from Mexico or Central America to the United States is an expensive undertaking and therefore not an option for the poorest of the poor who cannot meet the expense of the start-up costs that are necessary, such as paying a *coyote* in order to get to the border and/or to cross the border undocumented (cf. Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994: 190, Kanaiaupuni 2000: 1313).

In the Mexican case the most important factors that differentiate men's and women's decisions to migrate are migrant networks, education and familial considerations (cf. Kanaiaupuni 2000: 1325, 1335). While men's migration decreases with education, women's migration increases which means that well educated women are more likely to migrate than women with little or no education, whereas men with more than six years of education are less likely to decide to migrate than men with less education (cf. Kanaiaupuni 2000: 1332). A possible explanation for this difference is that in Mexico educated women are subjected to great gender discrimination and scarcely receive any occupational rewards and, for that reason, they may be more likely to immigrate to the United States where chances to earn bigger wages are enhanced, whereas educated men might profit more from internal migration (cf. Kanaiaupuni 2000: 1337). Another factor that differentiates men's and women's migration is that of family considerations. Marriage and children influence men's and women's migration decisions differently in as much as women are more likely to migrate after the separation from their husband or partner whereas men are less likely to migrate after a divorce (cf. Kanaiaupuni 2000: 1325-1326). The presence of small children, on the other hand, increases men's migration but only insignificantly influences women's decision to migrate (cf. Kanaiaupuni 2000: 1326). The fact that migrant social networks may not be shared

equally among men and women has already been mentioned and will be explored in greater detail throughout the course of this chapter.

A few words should be said regarding the work history of migrant women in their countries of origins prior to their migration. In her study on Mexican migrant women Curry-Rodriguez found out that 75% of the women were employed in Mexico before their migration (cf. 1988: 158). These findings do not only counter the stereotype usually associated with women as non-productive but also demonstrate that these women possess important skills that allow them to search for work on the other side of the border (cf. Curry-Rodriguez 1988: 185). Employment prior to their migration - might also influence women's migration decisions in as much as they "become aware of their own capacity as economic agents" and therefore "may be more likely to transfer work experiences to a destination where wages are higher" (Kanaiaupuni 2000: 1316). But female employment does not necessarily entail rising awareness or autonomy among women or signify economic power, particularly among underprivileged women who do not work by choice but have to work because they are poor. They work because they do not have another alternative rather than because they are empowered (cf. Kanaiaupuni 2000: 1316, Curry-Rodriguez 1988: 162).

Kanaiaupuni has analyzed how these key factors in the migration-making process (human capital investments, family considerations, socioeconomic status, social networks and local opportunities in the countries of origin compared to opportunities in the migration destination) interrelate with the social context and gender relations, coming to the conclusion "that migration is a process influenced by gender relations that are established and perpetuated within families and societies" (Kanaiaupuni 2000: 1314). Since migration is a gendered process and therefore also "migration decisions are gendered decisions" (Kanaiaupuni 2000: 1317), standard explanations for men's migration are not necessarily valid for women's migration as these

decisions are made within a context of socially recognized and mutually reinforcing expectations that reflect several dimensions of gender relations – between individuals, within families, and in societal institutions. (Kanaiaupuni 2000, 1312).

As mentioned earlier in the historical overview, most immigrants from Central America came to the United States in the 1980s as refugees who fled from political violence. Mexicans, on the other hand, rarely migrate because of political reasons but rather because their “conception of the marketplace for their labor [...] extends to the U.S. side of the border” (Chavez 1992: 8), a notion that was enforced by the *Bracero* program. Mexican immigrants have been developing social networks with the United States over generations, whereas migration from Central American countries is comparably recent and few migrants have the historical connections to the U.S. that Mexican migrants have due to the *Bracero* program (cf. Chavez 1992: 8, 35, 38-39).

4.1 Women and Children First? - Not When It Comes to Migration

In order to understand gendered migration patterns, such as why men are more likely to migrate before their wives rather than the other way round, it is necessary to look at internal organizational characteristics of community and familial relations (cf. Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994: 8). In the Mexican case it is important to put the decision-making process into the context of the socially constructed gender system prevalent in this country (cf. Kanaiaupuni 2000: 1317). Immigration from Mexico to the United States has been traditionally dominated by men because of U.S. immigration policies, institutionalized economic roles and social norms (cf. Kanaiaupuni 2000: 1317). The former two will be discussed in the next chapter but the later, prevalent social norms in Mexico, shall be explored at this point.

A discussion of migration by Mexican women to the United States needs to consider the cultural context, which plays a crucial role in differentiating opportunity structures for men and women (cf. Curry-Rodriguez 1988: 31). Cultural and social norms forced upon women present insurmountable obstacles for women's equality (cf. Curry-Rodriguez 1988: 31). Kanaiaupuni (2000: 1317) states that

by accounts both new and old, the ideal woman is subordinate to men, primarily responsible for domestic duties, and crucial to the integrity of the family unit. The ideal woman is, of course, a stereotype and does not always reflect reality, but it is a key ideological component underlying gender relations.

Women are not only subordinated to the authority of their fathers but are also under the control of their brothers and other male relatives (cf. Curry-Rodriguez 1988: 33). Whereas men dominate the public sphere, women are restricted to the private or domestic sphere of the family home and when leaving these assigned areas they are very often in the company of their husband, a brother or another relative (Kanaiaupuni 2000: 1317). Women who do not conform to these norms run the risk of being called “*muy callejera*”, which does not bear positively on their integrity (cf. Kanaiaupuni 2000: 1318). In order to be regarded as a *good woman*, women are expected to show deference and docility (cf. Curry-Rodriguez 1988: 31). The cultural context of women in Mexico is also highly influenced by religion and the social institution of the Roman Catholic Church, which present a set of norms that define what is appropriate for a woman’s behavior (cf. Curry-Rodriguez 1988: 33). The Catholic Church’s position concerning the use of contraceptives and the decriminalization of abortion express its immense power over women as it ensures the role of married women as mothers and “imposes the negative sanction of pregnancy on single women who are sexually active” (Curry-Rodriguez 1988: 33). So in addition to their fathers, brothers and husbands, women are also subjected to the control and authority of the Church represented by the pope and priests (cf. Curry-Rodriguez 1988: 35).

The possibility of autonomous migration to the United States, something that would have scarcely been an option for a woman prior to the 1950s, indicates significant changes to the position of women in Mexican society (cf. Curry-Rodriguez 1988: 35). But clearly not all cultural norms have broken down, especially those parts of culture that seem to be “natural” to women and men alike such as interpretations and expectations of traditional gender roles, which are likely to differ from reality (cf. Curry-Rodriguez 1988: 35). A young Mexican woman who ventures out on her own to migrate to the U.S. is still breaking traditional cultural norms and a male relative who may support her migration is also going against tradition (cf. Curry-Rodriguez 1988: 35).

4.2 Men's Social Migrant Networks

In the introduction to chapter four, the key factors, which - according to sociological writings - influence the decision-making process, were identified and now the role of migrants' social networks shall be examined in greater detail. In *Shadowed Lives* – an ethnographic account of Mexican and Central American undocumented migrants – Leo Chavez uses the story of Enrique Valenzuela to exemplify how the *Bracero* Program set the tradition of Mexican men migrating to the United States in search for better wages (cf. Chavez 1992: 22-24).

Enrique's father had worked in the United States as a *bracero* for twelve years, during which he usually worked for periods of three to six months in *El Norte* and in between he would return to his *rancho* and his wife and children in Mexico. When the *Bracero* Program finally ended in 1964, Enrique's father, like many other Mexican men, continued to migrate to the U.S. as an undocumented worker. During his *bracero* years he had been able to establish contacts with employers in the United States who now helped him to find work as an undocumented worker. When Enrique was sixteen-years-old, he left the *rancho* and migrated to *la Ciudad de México* because there was no work for him at the *rancho* and his family suffered from hunger. For seven years he worked in a small factory where he earned just enough to eat and pay his rent. That is when he remembered how his father talked about the U.S. as an opportunity to "get ahead". At that time, in 1970 when he was twenty-three-years-old, Enrique's father had a job at a ranch in northern San Diego County and helped his son to migrate to San Diego.

The need for labor in the United States and the resulting Bracero Program created the opportunity for Enrique's father's migrations, which in turn laid the foundation for Enrique's own migration. His father's experiences provided Enrique with a psychological and social bridge between himself and the United States. (Chavez 1992: 24)

While his scarce income in Mexico and the demand for workers in the United States might be the reason for Enrique's migration, it is the immediate context of his father's long-lasting history of migrating to the

U.S. first as a *bracero* and later on as an undocumented immigrant, that shaped his decision to become an undocumented worker as well. Since the initiation of the *Bracero* Program and continuing afterwards, Mexicans' labor market has been no longer restricted to Mexico but extends to the U.S. where almost every Mexican man knows a relative or a friend who works there and who provides them with the necessary information on how to cross the border undocumented and find work, during their return trips back home (cf. Chavez 1992: 39). The stories told by men returning home from their trips as undocumented workers in the United States help to nourish the culture of men migrating to *el otro lado* (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994: 84). Migrating to the United States may be an individual undertaking, but the process of migrating is only made possible with the help of others who provide prospective migrants with their own experiences, contacts in the United States, fiscal funding and assistance for those who have to remain behind, traditionally the migrants' wife and children (cf. Curry-Rodriguez 1988:5).

Recent migration theorists, including the sociologist Douglas Massey, call attention to the significance of migrants' social networks. Massey in particular says

that migration is ultimately a social process that gains its own momentum, outstripping its economic origins. As human networks develop between places of origin and destinations, they contribute to the institutionalization of migration in sending communities. (Massey 1987a, 1990, in Kanaiaupuni 2000: 1313)

In 1987, Massey further argued, "the most important kin relationships in migrant networks are those between fathers and sons, uncles and nephews, brothers and male cousins" (Massey 1987b: 141). Kanaiaupuni, on the other hand, states that "[w]here migration is dominated by men, networks tend also to be composed of men and arranged around their concerns" (2000: 1315). These male-dominated social networks support men's ambitions to journey north while they discourage women's desires to migrate to the United States (cf. Kanaiaupuni 2000: 1315). Similarly, migrants who have settled in the United States tend to avoid supporting female relatives' or friends' migrations "because they imply more responsibility and obligation than men" (cf. Kanaiaupuni 1995, in Kanaiaupuni 2000: 1315-1316).

As already stated above, it would be easy to explain Enrique Valenzuela's decision to migrate as being a result of shared household or family needs (cf. Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994: 56). His decision is also a gendered decision, especially when considering the question as to who owned the power and authority to make such a decision and act accordingly (cf. Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994: 56-57). Traditionally, women have been left out in the decision-making process and have been forced into the position of passive participants whose approval is demanded on the basis of economic needs (cf. Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994: 57). In order to understand why women are being forced into this position, it is necessary to have a look at the power relations of domination and subordination that are at work in a household, the place where migration decisions are made (cf. González de la Rocha 1994: 140).

A relation of power is a type of relationship in which one party has the power over necessary resources and therefore is in control of the behavior of others (cf. Adams 1975: 9-10). In the case of migration decisions made in a household these necessary resources include social migrant networks as well as financial resources, which are traditionally in the hands of the male head-of-household. As in the case of working-class households in Mexico, women and their children have, in general, less access and control over resources, so gender relations are also power relations (cf. González de la Rocha 1994: 140). The relations of power existing in a household are closely related to the different positions women and men hold inside this household but also outside this domestic sphere, in the public space (cf. González de la Rocha 1994: 140). Even though women might be working, their wages tend to be lower than men's, so married women are very often still dependent on their husband's income (cf. Kanaiaupuni 2000: 1319). Although already stated in the introduction to this chapter, it needs to be stressed once more at this point that participation in the labor market does not necessarily go hand in hand with more power in the household. The uneven contributions to the household budget and the better position of the men outside of the household translate then, even if they share their incomes, into a better position,

meaning control over necessary resources, within the household context (cf. Benería/Roldán 1987: 119).

González de la Rocha argues that there are several reasons for women's ongoing subordinated positions in households despite their participation in the labor market (cf. 1994: 141). The first two reasons are the types of jobs that are available for married, non-educated women, namely usually the ones that only allow for extremely meager earnings, and the fact that "waged activities have not freed women from domestic unwaged work and the performance of domestic chores is still women's responsibility" (González de la Rocha 1994: 141-142). Alongside their jobs outside the household, women still have to take care of all the work inside the household including the care of the children, and therefore their "[w]aged activities [...] have to be adapted to the work that "by nature" society has attributed to them" (González de la Rocha 1994: 142). What is particularly striking is that even if women are the primary or sole income earners in the household, for example if the husband cannot work because of alcoholism, this position as de facto head of household does not translate into more power over resources for these women (González de la Rocha 1994: 141). With regard to the migration decision-making process, in many parts of Mexico this "traditional division of productive and reproductive labor encourages married women and those with young children to remain home while men migrate" (Kanaiaupuni 2000: 1315). While female migrants are commonly looked upon as motivated by a desire to reunite with their husbands in the United States, their male counterparts are viewed as being economically motivated (cf. Kanaiaupuni 2000: 1315).

4.3 Migration as a Patriarchal Rite of Passage

Hondagneu-Sotelo characterizes young men, like Ramón Pérez – the author and main character of the autobiographical text *Diary of an Undocumented Immigrant*, one of the primary texts that will be analyzed in chapters 5 to 7, as "the heroes of the mainstream immigration literature" (1994: 83). While on the surface they cross the border with the aim of finding work and therefore being able to send money to their families back

home, their primary reason might not lie in supporting their families financially as much as in seeking adventures and seeing new sights, and sending money home might just serve in order to rationalize their behavior (cf. Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994: 83). Popular folklore, which is kept alive by vibrant social networks and the glorious stories told by return migrants, defines the crossing of the border as a rite of passage (cf. Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994: 191). By migrating to *el norte*, a young man undergoes a significant patriarchal rite of passage, as it is a sign of challenging the authority of the father and a move towards independence (cf. Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994: 191). Most of the men do not plan their migration a long time in advance but leave rather suddenly if an opportunity in form of an invitation by a friend or relative arrives, and thereby they are instantly drawn into a social network developed by generations of men migration to the north (cf. Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994: 86).

4.4 “The Woman Left Behind”

After an introduction to men’s social migrant networks, I will now give a socio-cultural overview of the situation of women who remain in their countries of origin while their husbands or partners migrate to *el norte*.

The role played by women who stay behind while their partners migrate to make money in the United States is central to the migration behavior of the latter. In the Mexican case, men’s circular migration patterns – working in the United States for certain periods of time and returning back to their hometowns and families in between – are only made possible because women assume responsibility for the productive and reproductive household duties, while their partners are away (cf. Kanaiaupuni 1998 n.p., quoted in Kanaiaupuni 2000: 1336). Split-household strategies like this are to be observed not only in Mexico but also in countries all over the world, such as Columbia, Peru, Brazil, South Africa, the Philippines, China, Egypt, Turkey, and Portugal (Kanaiaupuni 2000: 1336). A study conducted by Curry-Rodriguez (1988) showed similar findings, namely that all members of a household are affected by the migration move of a

household member; no matter whether they themselves migrate or another household member, “because of the ensuing restructuring due to the absence of a family member” (4). For the wives of migrants, their husband’s migration lead to a new situation when they became the head of household, and in many of these households, this meant that they were also responsible for securing money for survival (cf. Curry-Rodriguez 1988: 140). Hondagneu-Sotelo argues that women cannot always count on the help of relatives (cf. 1994: 66-67) and that the tradition of men migrating to the United States to make money, leaving their wives and children behind, is one of the factors that has accelerated women’s participation in Mexico’s labor market (cf. 1994: 12). While their husbands are in *el otro lado*, their wives’ work routines expand and so do their responsibilities, also due to the fact that remittances promised by their husbands do not arrive regularly but often only sporadically (cf. Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994: 62). Hondagneu-Sotelo further suggests that just as men’s migration to the United States can be viewed as a patriarchal rite of passage, women’s employment in places where men have migrated from becomes a sort of rite of passage for them as well (cf. 1994: 13). As mentioned earlier in this thesis, it is important to note that women’s participation in the labor market does not necessarily entail women’s empowerment, especially since they earn significantly less than their male counterparts (cf. Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994: 12). Another result of men’s tradition of migration is generations of absentee fathers causing their daughters to no longer obey them as they used to, and although this indeed has been observed in Mexican households, it should not be overstated since men are still in authority (cf. Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994: 13).

In order to understand why the majority of women do not migrate, but stay in their countries of origin, one needs to look at the way the Mexican gender system shapes the decision-making process of who migrates and who does not (cf. Kanaiaupuni 2000: 1338). Many husbands are very much against the idea of their wives migrating and one of their arguments is that crossing the border as an undocumented immigrant is too dangerous for them (cf. Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994: 70). While men usually openly voice their reservations against women’s migration initiatives,

women, on the other hand, rarely voice their objections to their husband's migration (cf. Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994: 60). If they do, they express their worries and fears sometimes in silence, through the form of prayers, in which they plead for their husbands to be apprehended so that they have to come back home (cf. Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994: 60).

4.5 Women's Social Migrant Networks

In chapter 5.5 I will analyze the representation of Rosa and María Isabel's migration decisions to follow their male partners to the United States. But before the analysis of the texts, I will say a few words about women's social networks in general and the role they play in women's decision-making processes.

As a result of men's migration to the United States, the women who were being left behind have to face a new situation in which they are the sole breadwinners of the household during their husbands' absence that could last for several months up to several years. One of the motives for women's decisions to follow their partners to the other side is to relieve this burden and share the responsibilities of the household and childcare with their partners rather than having to struggle on their own while their partners are away (cf. Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994: 69). As already stated, U.S. migrant networks and especially village networks are vital to first migration risks among women and men as they significantly raise the probability of migration to the United States (cf. Kanaiaupuni 2000: 1334-1335). All of the women in Curry-Rodriguez' study had at least one contact person in the United States prior to their migration and they were socialized in households, in which migration to the U.S. in order to make money was common practice and the circulatory nature of this type of migration provided the women with important information for their own migration (cf. 1988: 167). It is not only sons and grandsons who heard the *bracero* stories of their male forefathers but the daughters and granddaughters too, and over time, female voices started to be among the tellers of migration stories. Chavez gives, amongst others, the example of

Angelina, a woman who decided to migrate to the U.S. after she had heard the stories told by her sister, who had migrated before her (cf. 1992: 30).

According to for instance Boyd, “little systematic attention is paid to gender in the development and persistence of networks across time and space” (1989: 656). Kanaiaupuni argues that “[w]here migration is dominated by men, networks tend also to be composed of men and arranged around their concerns” (2000: 1316). Since men dominate these social migrant networks, they are, as with other necessary resources for migration, not shared equally with female members of households (cf. Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994: 54), but on the contrary, these networks encourage migration by men while at the same time discouraging migration by women (cf. Kanaiaupuni 2000: 1316). It is wrong, therefore, to assume that women who are married automatically profit from their husbands’ networks. They also do not necessarily benefit from the help of other women (cf. Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994: 7). But there has been a tendency since the 1970s and 1980s for women to receive support from other women (cf. Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994, 72). The difference to men’s social migrant networks at that point was that women’s networks offered married women help in either convincing their husbands to agree with their migration or in migrating without their husbands knowing it (cf. Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994, 72). So in cases where men did not agree with their wives’ migration, women with the help of women’s social migrant networks arranged their migration on their own, raising the necessary funds and hiring *coyotes* without their husbands’ help (cf. Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994, 72-74). These women in turn then helped other women to migrate to the United States and over the time the pool of social resources available to prospective migrant women has increased (cf. Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994, 74). Cases of “family unit migration”, on the other hand, are characterized by a relatively egalitarian decision-making process between the husbands and wives, and the social migrant network used for the family’s migration is often composed of the woman’s relatives (cf. Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994, 75). In many cases in which couples migrate together, an “absence of strict relations of patriarchal authority” can also be observed, which facilitates the migration of the family as a unit in contrast to cases in which men

migrate on their own leaving their wives and children behind (cf. Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994, 79).

4.6 “La Mujer Abandonada

According to sociological studies, accounts of women who become a *mujer abandonada* (an abandoned woman) because their husbands have left for *el Norte* to make money but then were never heard of again, are by far not isolated cases (cf. Chavez 1992: 119, Chant 2007: 364-365, Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994: 59, Curry-Rodriguez 1988: 144). Many women, whose husbands or partners have left, live in constant fear that they will meet another woman in *el otro lado* and therefore abandon their wife and family at home (Chavez 1992: 119). Curry-Rodriguez reports that most of the women she interviewed knew at least one case of an abandoned woman in their extended family (1988: 144). Hondagneu-Sotelo also states that out of ten men who leave to work in the United States, only six return back home to their family and that this is also one of the reasons why women have ambivalent feelings regarding their husbands' migration (1994: 59).

4.7 The Rise of Female-Headed Households in Central America and Mexico

Although the predominant family structure in Latin American low-income urban communities is still nuclear households headed by men, there are also a considerable number of households headed by females as a result of male instigation (cf. Chant 2007: 360). The two main explanations for men leaving their family are to establish a new home with another woman or in order to find work and never return (cf. Chant 2007: 363). But it is not in every case that the man leaves his wife, since women also leave their husbands if they are no longer willing to deal with situations of infidelity, violence or lack of financial support (cf. Chant 2007: 360). These women have to move out of their family's house and establish a new home for themselves and their children, often with the help of a relative, whose home they might move into (cf. Chant 2007: 363, 365). The great majority

of women who are heads of households work, and in order to cope with the double burden of household work and earning an income, they either work “double days” or have to rely on help from their children (cf. Chant 2007: 362).

Women who separated from their husband are also more likely to migrate to the United States, in contrast to formerly married men who are less likely to migrate after the end of their marriage (cf. Kanaiaupuni 2000: 1326). Jobs available to women are usually in the domestic sector or they work as informal street vendors, occupations that hardly pay enough to support a family, which makes (temporary) migration to a country with higher wages one of the few options available for single mothers (cf. Kanaiaupuni 2000: 1325). The consequence of these migration moves by single mothers, which leads to a phenomenon that has been termed “transnational motherhood” will be explored in the following subchapter.

4.8 The Concept of “Transnational Motherhood”

“Transnational motherhood” refers to the arrangement in which Latina migrant women live and work in the United States while their children stay behind in their home countries (cf. Hondagneu-Sotelo 2007: 388). This concept has also been prevalent in migration patterns of African American and Caribbean women, who left their homes and children in the South in order to make a living in the United States (cf. Hondagneu-Sotelo 2007: 388). Starting in the early 1980s, first primarily Central American, and then increasingly Mexican women, followed this model and left their children with their grandmothers, other female family members or their father while they themselves migrated to *el Norte* to seek work (cf. Hondagneu-Sotelo 2007: 388).⁷

Not all transnational mothers are heads of household – many are married - but the rise of female-headed households in Central America and Mexico

⁷ Larry Siems’ collection of letters between undocumented Central American and Mexican migrants and their families and friends contains a letter, dated with June 4th, 1990, from an undocumented Mexican woman called Lety, who writes her family back home asking how her little baby boy, whom she had to leave behind, is doing (1992: 7).

together with scarce job opportunities in their countries of origin, civil war in Central American countries in the 1980s and most importantly, a demand for Latina migrant women in the U.S., especially in paid domestic work, have accelerated situations of transnational motherhood. Transnational mothers contradict U.S. white middle-class notions of motherhood as well as those of Central American and Mexican traditional models of motherhood (cf. Hondagneu-Sotelo 2007: 388-389). This “ideal” notion of motherhood, in which the woman as a mother and wife is confined to the domestic sphere, came into being with the industrial revolution in the 1860s that allowed husbands and fathers to earn a “family wage” which, in turn, allowed their wives to focus solely on their children (cf. Hondagneu-Sotelo 2007: 391). But working-class women of color usually did not have the economic security that would make full-time mothering an option and therefore “mothering is not just gendered, but also racialized” (Makano Glenn 1994: 7).

In a way, transnational mothers are the “new *braceras*”. While the *bracero* program brought about generations of “absentee fathers”, it is now mothers who leave their children and sometimes a husband behind in order to earn money (cf. Hondagneu-Sotelo 2007: 392-393). However the key difference between *braceros* and transnational mothers is that women in most cases do not make enough money in the United States to feed a family and in contrast to generations of men who have left their children and wives behind while they migrated to the United States, Latina migrant women have to deal with guilt, stigma, and criticism from other people (cf. Hondagneu-Sotelo 2007: 393). In Central America and Mexico, single mothers are in a position of low social status, especially if they are “abandoned women” and they often come to the United States to escape society’s judgment only to be judged again (cf. Chavez 1992: 31). In villages where migration by women is common, on the other hand, society’s perception of migrant women is more relaxed and their potential as breadwinners more appreciated compared to areas where migration by women is rare (cf. Kanaiaupuni 2000: 1320). In addition, the networks established by previous migrant women offer valuable information and assistance to new female migrants, thereby encouraging them and

transforming the migrant experience of women by providing help and support (cf. Kanaiaupuni 2000: 1320).

Regarding the establishment of women's social migrant networks, there are in general two different views (cf. Kanaiaupuni 2000: 1328). In one view, women take advantage of men's social migrant networks and over time establish their own networks especially when it comes to finding a job in the United States since occupations for men and women differ widely (Kanaiaupuni 2000: 1328, 1338). The second view argues that women do not automatically have access to men's social migrant networks and that therefore women over time establish their own networks as the number of migrant women increases (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994). Hondagneu-Sotelo (1997:124) stresses that "[s]ocial network exchanges help to mitigate disadvantages of race, class, gender, and legal status".

5. Making a Decision

5.1 Introduction of the Texts to be Analyzed

So far, the sociological background, in form of a brief overview on U.S.-Mexico borderlands history and the feminization of immigration studies, as well as the central theoretical concept of gender have been introduced and explored. What follows in chapters five to seven is an in depth analysis of representations of instances of migration in Latino/a literature. I have identified three “stages” of migration that structure these texts, namely “making a decision, “crossing over” and “on the other side/*el otro lado*, and I will arrange my analysis according to this classification. But before carrying out this analysis, the texts shall be briefly introduced in the following.

The literary texts, which will be discussed in this thesis, range from (auto-)biographical, to journalistic and fictional texts. In terms of date of publication, they cover a time period from 1991 to 2006. In her M.A. thesis on the discourse on Latin American immigration, Katharina Kurzmann based her analysis on socio-political publications and remarked that interestingly enough, most of the texts belonging to this genre are rather conservative, while more liberal approaches that put a human face⁸ on the phenomenon of (undocumented) immigration can be found rather in the genre of “novel-like accounts of individual [undocumented] immigrants’ stories” (2008: 44). This classification seems well chosen and is particularly suitable for describing my selection of literary texts, which belong to different subgenres of the narrative, but are indeed all novel-like accounts of undocumented immigrants’ experiences. It is also interesting to note that it seems comparatively easy to find literary texts that deal with the topic of undocumented immigration which are at least partly based on “true stories” than “purely” fictional accounts of undocumented immigrants’ lives. This is also reflected in the selection of the four texts for this thesis,

⁸ This very phrase is used on the back covers or the dust jackets of *Crossing Over*, *Enrique’s Journey* and *Across a Hundred Mountains* to describe the book’s content.

with one text being autobiographical, two being journalistic and telling real-life stories, and only one being entirely fictional.

As mentioned above, the four texts were first published between the years 1991 and 2006. In terms of publication, therefore, they only cover a time span of fifteen years. However, the events related in the books date back to as early as the 1940s and span over a period of more than sixty years, ranging almost until the very present, with the year of publication of the latest two books being 2006. The 1940s are, of course, a crucial decade in the long history of undocumented immigration along the U.S.-Mexican border. Even though undocumented migration from Mexico to the United States has existed as long as the border itself and the “concept of being undocumented” was already introduced in 1924 with the establishment of the border patrol, it was not until the beginning of the *bracero* program in 1942 that a (male-defined) tradition of crossing over to *El Norte* was inaugurated. The following decades saw increases in the numbers of undocumented immigrants that would almost always call anti-immigration voices into action. In the 1980s and 1990s rising numbers of Central American refugees entered the United States and two prominent immigration laws passed U.S. congress, the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) in 1985 and the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA) in 1996. Both of these acts strengthened the power of the border patrol and in the second half of the 1990s a number of large-scale military operations were launched with the aim of cutting down the number of undocumented border crossings. The unsolved issues surrounding undocumented immigration were carried into the twenty-first century and, at a time when anti-immigration sentiments are still growing and the U.S. continues to militarize their Southern border, it seems to be of more importance than ever to let those voices speak which give undocumented men and women a human face.

This thesis centers primarily on works by Chicano/a authors, with the exception of Sonia Nazario, who is not of Mexican descent but a Latina.⁹

⁹ The term Chicano/a authors refers to Mexican authors who live in the United States or U.S. American authors with Mexican roots. Latino/a is a more general term that tries to

Nazario was born in Wisconsin - to a Polish-born mother, who migrated to Argentina where she met Nazario's father, a second generation Syrian - but grew up in Argentina and Kansas. At this point, I deem it appropriate to address the issue of cultural appropriation or appropriation of voice - which is important in contexts where an author writes about a culture other than their own - in a brief excursus in order to explain why I decided to focus on texts written by Latino/a authors alone, leaving out authors like T.C. Boyle and Ted Conover. The issue of "whether it is possible to adequately or justifiably speak for others" is a very complex one but I will try to focus on the most important points (Alcoff 1991: 6).

Trinh T. Minh-ha argues that anthropology is "mainly a conversation of 'us' with 'us' about 'them,' of the white man with the white man about the primitive-nature man ... in which 'them' is silenced" (1989: 65 quoted in Alcoff 1991: 6). It is also important to recognize that the "social location" one comes from will inevitably influence the content of what is said (Alcoff 1991: 7). But who is then allowed to speak for whom, if at all? Linda Alcoff offers herself as an example of the difficulties of where to draw the boundary:

I am a Panamanian-American, and a person of mixed ethnicity and race: half white/ Angla and half Panamanian mestiza. The criterion of group identity leaves many unanswered questions for a person such as myself, since I have membership in many conflicting groups but my membership in all of them is problematic. On what basis can we justify a decision to demarcate groups and define membership in one way rather than another? No easy solution to this problem can be found by simply restricting the practice of speaking for others to speaking for groups of which one is a member. (1991:7-8)

She then suggests that "wherever possible the conditions for dialogue and the practice of speaking with and to rather than speaking for others" should be created and that "anyone who speaks for others should only do so out of a concrete analysis of the particular power relations and discursive effects involved" (Alcoff 1991: 23).

Before going into the analysis of the primary texts, I want to present two prominent examples of books written on undocumented immigrants by

unite all people with a Latin American background living in the United States under one umbrella.

non-Latino/a authors: Ted Conover's *Coyotes: A Journey Across Borders with America's Illegal Migrants*, first published in 1987 as *Coyotes: A Journey Through the Secret World of America's Illegal Aliens* and T.C. Boyles's *The Tortilla Curtain*, which was first published in 1995.

Ted Conover is a renowned US author whose book *Newjack* was finalist for the prestigious Pulitzer Prize. In *Coyotes* he follows, similarly to what Sonia Nazario and Rubén Martínez do in their books, undocumented immigrants through the different steps of crossing the border undocumented and finding work in the United States. While *The New York Times Book Review* describes *Coyotes* as "important" and "remarkable" because of "Conover's realization that he is dealing neither with a crime nor a tragedy, but with another of those human adventures that make America a country that is constantly renewing itself" (Conover 2006: back cover), it seems to me that precisely this treatment of undocumented border crossings as being an adventure is what makes the book questionable. This adventurous character of the book manifests itself especially in Conover's reaction when he is told that finally, after several unsuccessful attempts, he is allowed to join a group of undocumented immigrants on their road trip from Phoenix to Florida. "'Really?'" I answered, trying hard to act calm. [...] I could barely sleep that Friday night, and all the next day I was antsy." (Conover 2006, 115). Although undocumented immigrants, especially male ones, who uphold their fathers' and grandfathers' tradition of crossing over to *El Norte*, might view their experience as an adventure, for them the risks they take are clearly higher than those of a white U.S. American citizen like Ted Conover.

T.C. Boyle, on the other hand, does not claim to have lived and travelled with undocumented immigrants, which did not stop him from writing a novel about an undocumented couple in Los Angeles. While Conover's *Coyotes*, in fact does provide the reader with valuable and profound insights into the lives of undocumented immigrants, Boyle's narrative of the tragic story of América and Cándido seems plausible at first but, on closer inspection, lacks insider information. The main point that seems to be entirely missing from the story is the depiction of the existence of any

kind of social network. This is even more surprising in light of the fact that Cándido had lived and worked in the United States, before he crosses over with his teenage wife to *El Otro Lado* and can therefore be expected to be involved in some kind of cross-border social network. Also, América and Cándido live an underground existence that is not necessarily representative of undocumented immigrants' lives.

Leo Chavez makes a point when he talks about "a continuum" of undocumented immigrants' experience (Chavez 1992, 2). At the one end of this continuum he places for instance undocumented strawberry pickers who have to live in makeshift camps in the canyons near their fields (cf. Chavez 1992, 1-2). At the very other end of the continuum, on the other hand, one can find people who settled in the United States many years ago and built themselves a good working class life that does not fundamentally differ from other U.S. Americans' lives, despite not having legal papers (cf. Chavez 1992, 1-2). Another prime example of an undocumented experience at this end of the continuum would be the life of Ignacio Suarez, the father of Betty Suarez in the popular TV-series *Ugly Betty*. Ignacio has lived in the United States for about thirty years and not even his daughters know that he is an undocumented immigrant until he gets health problems and it is revealed that his social security card is not his own but rather somebody else's. T.C. Boyle's *The Tortilla Curtain* is to be placed outside this cline as even the strawberry pickers live in a kind of community whereas América and Cándido are left on their own. This is not to say that a story like theirs could never happen; it is just a very extreme case of an undocumented experience. Similarly, Kessler criticizes that scholars tend to depict undocumented immigrants as living in a kind of underground existence (cf. 1996, 16). She further argues that

"[w]hile it is certainly true that undocumented immigrants fear deportation, and go out of their way to minimize apprehension, most are living a life that could hardly be characterized as an underground existence" (1996, 16).

Therefore, it seems important to focus on accounts of undocumented immigrants' lives that do not put them into the underground but place them where they are, as part of U.S. American society. The instances of migration represented in the texts I have chosen can be placed at different points along the continuum identified by Chavez and their position might

shift towards one end of the continuum or the other depending on the characters' living situations, which might improve or worsen in the course of their stay in the United States.

As already mentioned (above), the texts can all be classified as novel-like accounts of undocumented immigrants' experiences. In my analysis, I will focus on the following four texts in detail but might also draw on a number of other texts in order to support my argument: Ramón "Tianguis" Pérez' *Diary of an Undocumented Immigrant* (1991), Rubén Martínez' *Crossing Over: A Mexican Family on the Migrant Trail* (2001), Sonia Nazario's *Enrique's Journey: The Story of a Boy's Dangerous Odyssey to Reunite with his Mother* (2006) and Reyna Grande's *Across a Hundred Mountains* (2006).

In the following, I will present the four texts that are going to be analyzed, especially focusing on the male and female characters in these texts, whose migration experiences I will detail, from the decision-making process to the eventual arrival in the United States. In addition, a few words will be said about the authors.

5.1.1 Ramón "Tianguis" Pérez' *Diary of an Undocumented Immigrant*

Ramón "Tianguis" Pérez was born in San Pablo in the late 1950s Macuiltianguis, a rural Zapotec village in the Sierra Juárez region of the Mexican state of Oaxaca, where his family owned a cabinet-making shop (cf. Pérez 1993, back cover). In 1979, he started to cross the U.S.-Mexico border as an undocumented immigrant in order to find work on the other side of the border (cf. Perez 1993, back cover; Gutierrez 2003, 85). The book *Diary of an Undocumented Immigrant* is an autobiographical account of his experiences during this time, and it is also his first work. This first-person account, which he dedicates to his "fellow *mojados*"¹⁰ was

¹⁰ *Mojados* is the Spanish word for "wetback", which is an offensive term for a Mexican who goes to live in the United States. In the chapter entitled "Mojados", Pérez recalls how he went to a church in Houston and asked whether that is the place where they help *mojados*. He is confused about the answer "Here there are no *mojados*." Until a Cuban immigrant informs him that he should have asked whether they offer help for

originally written in Spanish with the title *Diario de un Mojado* and later translated into English and published in 1991.

The events narrated in *Diary of an Undocumented Immigrant* take place in the mid-1980s. Although no dates are mentioned in the book, a chapter towards the end of the book concerns itself with the promulgation of the Simpson-Rodino law (cf. *Diary*, 229), also known as IRCA, that was put into effect in May 1987 and therefore gives us a clue about the time frame. In the second chapter entitled “Headed North” though, he goes back in time to the early 1940s when his forefathers learned about the *bracero* program and started to cross the border in search for work (cf. *Diary*, 12).

5.1.2 Rubén Martínez’ *Crossing Over: A Mexican Family on the Migrant Trail*

Rubén Martínez is a teacher, essayist, playwright, poet, record producer, musician, performance artist and an Emmy Award-winning journalist, who earns his living by writing about his experiences while travelling through Mexico and the United States (cf. Heide 2002, 52). He is “[s]econd generation on [his] father’s side and first on [his] mother’s” (*Crossing*, 217). His father was born in Los Angeles but was raised on both sides of the border, in Mexico and Southern California and eventually married a woman from El Salvador, Martínez’ mother (cf. *Crossing*, 222). His own ethnic background essentially influences his writings and like the Chicana feminist writer Gloria Anzaldúa, he sees himself as being in-between worlds and sees his role as that of a mediator with the aim of healing through writing (cf. Oliver-Rotger 2006: 184).

In his third book, the journalistic chronicle *Crossing Over: A Mexican Family on the Migrant Trail* he visits the Chávez clan, an extended Mexican family in their small southern Mexican hometown Cherán, Michoacán and then follows some of its members on their journeys northwards. He initially becomes aware of the Chávez family because of

“undocumented workers” which would have been the “correct term” (*Diary*, 72). Martínez explains that migrants often use the word *mojado* proudly, because for them it refers to their braveness of crossing the river (cf. *Crossing*, 27).

the tragic fate of three of the Chávez brothers who had been on their way to work in the strawberry fields of Watsonville, near Santa Cruz, California when they died in an overloaded truck that crashed after fleeing from the Border Patrol. Three weeks later he visits the grieving family and gets to know the mother *Dña* María Elena Chávez, a woman in her early fifties “with the deeply lined dark brown face of an Indian matriarch” (*Crossing*, 32). Her dead husband Efraín Chávez, like many men in the highlands, had been an alcoholic and abusive (cf. *Crossing*, 68f). Martínez describes her as a traditional Purépecha woman:

Like most of the other Purépecha women of Michoacán, she wears the traditional rebozo, the embroidered shawl of blue and black bars divided by thin white lines, over a plain checkered country-style dress of thin cotton and knee-high dark blue stockings that have lost their elasticity and bunch up halfway down her calves. Her shoes are low-heeled, of cheap black felt, with gold buckles of plastic. (*Crossing*, 33)

While María Elena represents the older generation of Mexican women who can hardly imagine living anywhere else other than in their home community and who want to prevent their children from taking the risks of crossing the border, her twenty-one-year-old daughter Rosa represents a generation that is drawn to the other side of the border. She has “the look of women who’ve lived in the United States” (*Crossing*, 33):

Sunday best for Rosa is what she wears most every other day of the week – a succession of T-shirts (ranging from Bruce Springsteen to CHOOSE LIFE) and jeans [...] and a rebozo draped across her shoulders. (*Crossing*, 33)

Not too long ago it would have been a disgrace for a woman to get caught wearing jeans in Cherán. But nowadays some women even refuse to wear the traditional rebozo (cf. *Crossing*, 33). Rosa is married to the nineteen-year-old Wense Cortéz, who is equally dressed in the latest urban U.S. fashion:

Wense [...] wears his trademark white baggies, an equally oversized black T-shirt, and a baseball cap emblazoned with Jesus’ upturned face in that “My God, why hast thou forsaken me?” look. Beneath that countenance is Wense’s own face, striking for its black-brown color and intense dark eyes. [...] This is the look he needs in order to fend for himself not just up north but here in Cherán as well. (*Crossing*, 63f)

Wense has been crossing the border as an undocumented immigrant since the age of thirteen but is currently in Mexico. Rosa herself crossed the border only once, together with her husband (cf. *Crossing*, 34). They now have a little daughter called Yeni, who is two years old.

Martínez first meets the family in April 1996 and follows their fate for the next five years. Unlike Conover in his book *Coyotes*, Martinez is clearly aware of the differences between him and his “observant” Wense and openly reflects on it: “We are both nomads, but there is a vast gulf between us. My road is essentially middle-class; I travel because I can. Wense and his migrant brothers and sisters travel because they must” (*Crossing*, 63). In his account of the Chávez family’s migration experiences, he does not hide his social and political obligation as a Chicano and mixes objective facts and figures on United States immigration policies and the testimonial account of undocumented immigrants with his own impressions and autobiographical reflections as a Chicano writer and journalist (cf. Oliver-Rotger 2006: 186).

5.1.3 Sonia Nazario’s *Enrique’s Journey: The Story of a Boy’s Dangerous Odyssey to Reunite with his Mother*

Like Rubén Martínez, Sonia Nazario is an award-winning journalist and writer in whose work factual information about undocumented immigration merges with the life stories of the members of a family that is being torn apart by migration. *Enrique’s Journey* was initially published as a newspaper series in the *Los Angeles Times* in 2003 and received two Pulitzer Prizes for feature photography and feature writing. Nazario, who has a master’s degree in Latin American studies from the University of California, Berkeley, has written extensively on the subject of Latinos/as.

The idea for writing *Enrique’s Journey* originated from a conversation Nazario had one day in 1997 with her cleaning lady Carmen. In the course of their chat, Nazario learned that Carmen had to leave four of her children behind in Guatemala and that she was by far not the only immigrant woman with this fate. The year after, Carmen’s son Minor could no longer stand to be without his mother and hitchhiked all the way from Guatemala to the United States. Minor told Nazario how he was robbed and threatened during his trip and that thousands of children each year set off

to find their mothers in *El Norte*. As a journalist, Nazario, like Martínez, was keen on getting a first hand experience of what it is like to cross the border as an undocumented immigrant but to travel all the way from Central America to the United States on the top of freight trains, as so many child migrants do, was just too dangerous. So finally she decided to search for a child like Carmen's son Minor in northern Mexico who had made it that far, following him or her for the rest of their journey and retracing the first part of the trip. In May 2000, through a nun at one of the churches in Nuevo Laredo, she "found" Enrique, a seventeen-year-old boy from Tegucigalpa, Honduras and decided to stick with him and retrace his steps (cf. *Enrique*, x-xix). Enrique was five and his sister Belky seven-years-old when their mother Lourdes left her Honduran hometown eleven years earlier, on January 29th, 1989. Belky was left in the care of Lourdes' mother and sisters while Enrique is taken care of by his father Luis. In *Enrique's Journey*, Nazario shows how Central Americans have to overcome two borders, the one to Mexico and the one to the United States.

5.1.4 Reyna Grande's *Across a Hundred Mountains*

The last text that I will analyze is Reyna Grande's novel *Across a Hundred Mountains*. In contrast to Pérez' *Diary of an Undocumented Immigrant*, Grande wrote her debut novel in English and it was then translated into Spanish (cf. Solis 2006: n.p.). At first glance, it stands out from the rest of the selected texts in so far as it is the only entirely fictional account. On the other hand, the author states that she did use many of her own experiences when writing her first novel:

This story is fictional, but it is based on some of my experiences. The girl's fear of never seeing her father again is real. Her fear of being forgotten is real. Her struggle to maintain her hope alive is real. I lived it. (Grande, "In First Person": n.p.)

Reyna Grande left her native country Mexico and crossed the border as an undocumented immigrant in 1985 when she was only nine years old. Five years earlier, her father had left the family for the United States in order to find work there. One year later, he sent for his wife and Grande and her brothers and sisters were left in the care of their grandmother until their father returned to Mexico to bring them to the United States (cf. Grande,

"In First Person": n.p.). In 1999, Reyna Grande graduated from the University of California, Santa Cruz with a Bachelor of Arts in creative writing and film and video. Asked about what inspired her to write *Across a Hundred Mountains*, Grande answers:

As I was growing up, I read a lot of books written by Chicano/Chicana authors. Most of them were about American born individuals of Mexican descent, children who came from a foreign country to the U.S., or illegal immigrant adults who were struggling to survive in this country. I never found a book that dealt with the experiences I went through-- being left behind in another country while my parents worked in the U.S.

I think that most of the time when people talk about the "immigrant experience", they're referring to the struggles immigrants face here in this country. Yet there is another side to that experience--and that is what I wanted to portray. The children who are left behind have many issues to deal with, especially their fear of being abandoned and forgotten by their parents.¹¹

Across a Hundred Mountains tells the story of Juana, a Mexican girl whose father leaves her and her mother in order to find work in *el otro lado*, when she is twelve years old and never returns.

Reyna Grande currently lives in Los Angeles with her husband and their two children. In October 2009, her second book *Dancing with Butterflies* will be published. Currently she is also working on her memoir, the screenplay for *Across a Hundred Mountains*, and a self-help book for young Latinas entitled *Things My Mama Never Told Me: A Guide to Surviving the Teenage Years*.¹²

What these four texts all have in common is that they shed light on the present-day undocumented experience, and the characters Rosa, Wense, María Elena, Juana and her Amá and Apá, Lourdes, Enrique, Belky, María Isabel and Ramón Pérez himself, give face and voice to these undocumented border crossers. In the subsequent three chapters, I will analyze the depiction of their migration experiences, starting with the difficult decision to leave their Mexican or Central American hometowns, continuing with the undocumented crossing of the border and ending with the arrival on "the other side", the United States.

¹¹ Quoted from Reyna Grande's homepage <http://www.reynagrande.com/Q&A2.htm#Q1>

¹² Cf. Reyna Grande's homepage
<http://www.reynagrande.com/reyna%27s%20current%20projects.htm>

5.2 Following the Village Tradition – The Depiction of the Decision-Making Process of Male Migrants

5.2.1 *Diary of an Undocumented Immigrant*

In the book *Diary of an Undocumented Immigrant*, Ramón Pérez' decision to migrate is represented as a direct consequence of the *bracero* program.

It didn't take me a lot of thinking for me to decide to make this trip. It was a matter of following the tradition of the village. One could even say that we're a village of wetbacks. A lot of people, nearly the majority, have gone, come back, and returned to the country north [...]. [...] My townsmen have been crossing the border since the forties, when the rumor of the *bracero* program reached our village [...]. (12)

Peréz does not agonize about the decision as to whether he should remain in Mexico or go to the United States as an undocumented immigrant. The situation is set in the mid-1980s, forty years after the introduction of the *bracero* program and twenty years after its termination. Peréz, at that time, is a single young man to whom the decision to migrate seems only natural. He vividly remembers how the return of the *braceros*, who would usually stay for about six months in *el otro lado*, was celebrated in his village, especially since the men would not come back empty-handed but with large boxes full of foreign goods, clothes in particular (13).

The contractual system came to an end with the *bracero* program, in the mid-sixties, but ending the program didn't end Mexican desires to cross the border. [...] So when the *bracero* program ended, the *coyotes* kept working on their own. They looked for employers in the U.S. and supplied them with workers illegally. (13)

For the men of Peréz' village the final termination of the *bracero* program in 1964 did not mean the end of their working trips to the United States. With the important exception of now having to face the dangers of an undocumented border crossing – an issue that will be explored in greater detail in the fifth chapter – things stayed the same. By now, crossing the border to *el otro lado* had become a routine for the people of the village and they went there so frequently that crossing the border felt “like they were visiting a nearby village” (13).

The trip to the United States, Pérez describes in his book, is in fact not his first one; he has been to “the other side” several times before. In keeping with the tradition of his forefathers, he is crossing back and forth between Mexico and the United States. His father too had worked as a *bracero* in the United States and two chapters are devoted to the theme of following his father’s tradition, “Like Father, Like Son” and “In my Father’s Footsteps”.

In “Like Father, Like Son”, Pérez is lost upon searching for a job in Houston, Texas when he recalls one of the *bracero* stories his father used to tell to the family circle (68-69). *Coyotes* did not only come into being after the end of the *bracero* program as smugglers for undocumented immigrants, but before that their business had been to influence positively the authorities in charge of choosing those men who would have been allowed to legally enter the U.S. as temporary agricultural workers. Pérez’ father and two of his townsmen had paid one of these *coyotes* to help them to get into the program but unfortunately this very *coyote* was killed as they learned from a newspaper three days later and so they were stuck in the Mexican border town of Juárez, Chihuahua with neither enough money to hire another *coyote* nor to return home to their village. The moral of the story was, however, that even in the most desperate situations someone would help them to get back on their feet. ““We had the look of beggars,” my father would say with a bit of smile when he was telling the story [...]” (69). While his father was obviously enjoying sharing his *bracero* stories with his family, Pérez’ mother did not take equal pleasure in hearing them.

“Bad times,” Mother would always comment. She knew all the incidents in the travel tales that Dad told, and she hated to even hear *El Norte* mentioned. (69)

Although Pérez’ mother’s comment is not elaborated on in the book, this remark does suggest that she did not have a voice in the decision-making process of whether her husband would migrate or not, or, at least, that she was not content with the result, namely her husband’s migration.

In “In My Father’s Footsteps”, Pérez is riding on a bus in California, when the view of rows of tomato fields makes him remember another one of his

father's *bracero* stories he had heard when together with his younger brother he was weeding their cornfield (180-183). On one of his *bracero* trips Pérez' father had been to California where "the rows of fields were long and perfectly flat" (180), something that was unbelievable for the boys since there were no plains near their village. In the story, one of his father's co-workers started a fight with one of the foremen, who was treating them very badly and was therefore much hated. Although the workers were afraid of getting fired and sent back home, they stood up and chased the foreman away and in the end the contractor told them that they were within their rights and that he had laid the foreman off.

Through these stories, heard by Pérez as a child and teenager from his father and most likely also from other village men who had worked as *braceros*, he was raised with the consciousness that working in the United States was clearly an option that was worth considering once he was old enough. His father and other townsmen provided a role model for him and the (male) village youth, and to follow in their footsteps then only seemed natural. The *bracero* program, and its resulting tradition of men migrating to the United States as undocumented immigrants, also laid the foundations for a social network, which helped the sons and nephews of the *bracero* generation to initiate their own migration.

This time, I want to try my luck in the state of Texas, specifically, in Houston, where a friend of mine has been living for several years. He's lent me money for the trip. (14)

Pérez' friend in Houston provides him with the necessary information as well as with the financial resources for his trip across the border.

Pérez spends the night before his departure to the border with his friends "making the rounds", drinking (9). Then he says farewell to his family:

My mother was so touched that she made the sign of the cross over me with a wax candle that is probably burning upon the altar of the church right now. My father, more used to goodbyes than mothers, told me to, "Stay on your toes, boy," while he is giving me a hug. My brothers told me to send them postcards from the places I will find myself. (9)

Pérez farewell is represented as an event that needs to be celebrated rather than a moment to be sad. At least on the side of his father, his brothers and his (male) friends who give him good advice and tell him to

send postcards from *el otro lado* while his mother, on the other hand, seems to be the only one who is expressing signs of anxiety over her son's departure on a trip that could cost him his life. Although he does not know how long he will be gone or whether he will return at all, he can only take a small, vinyl suitcase with him that contains one change of clothes (9).

5.2.2 *Crossing Over*

Also in *Crossing Over: A Mexican Family on the Migrant Trail*, the *bracero* program together with U.S. immigration policies such as the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986, and the Mexican economic crisis of 1994 are represented as laying the cornerstones for undocumented migration from Mexico to the United States (8). At the same time, Martínez suggests that Mexican men who migrate to *El Norte* are not only motivated by the necessity to fulfill their basic economic needs but that they are also driven by the wish to

get the hell out of provincial towns like Cherán, whose timber-based economy is in tatters. [...] To move, to make some money, to buy some gold chains, or a 1984 Plymouth with 145,000 miles on it but a nice interior, or an Osterizer food processor so that your *madrecita* back home doesn't have to chop-chop the vegetables every night, or some snazzy snakeskin boots for yourself – or hell, to just come back with a wad of greenbacks in your billfold, enough to peel off a few Jacksons and pin them on the statue of your patron saint and buy a dozen of bottles of Barcardi rum, enough to get your entire block drunk for at least one night. (9)

Although women, in contrast to *Diary of an Undocumented Immigrant*, do play a more prominent role in *Crossing*, the picture Martínez presents here of migration is clearly a male-dominated one. According to estimations, one-third of the population of Cherán journeys up north each spring to earn money as undocumented agricultural workers (31). Official statistics say that about three million Michoacanos work and live in the U.S., varying according to the season. While the “majority of able-bodied men – and a good many women –” are up in *el otro lado*, the population of some towns in the highlands decreases by sixty to seventy percent (31). Purépechas have a very long tradition of migrating to the United States; they have done so since the early twentieth century and the name *purépecha*, loosely translated, stands for “a people who travel” (31).

And so just like Pérez, Wense Cortéz and his brothers-in-law grew up in a village where undocumented migration to the United States was a common practice, especially and foremost for young men. Probably as in every other Mexican village, men returning from their trips north have been telling idealized stories of their adventures in *el otro lado* for decades and thereby influenced the next generation of young undocumented immigrant workers as well as providing them with the knowledge and vital contacts for migration.

One of the Cheranes who loves to tell his “tales of conquering the northern frontier” (91) is Mario, who is in his late teens and the son of José, who is having an open call for migrant workers. Mario seizes the opportunity of having such a captive target audience and sits down in front of the prospective (documented) migrants – ranging from anxious first-time teenagers to wrinkled migration experts – in order to tell them of the time he worked in *Carolina del Norte*, which is a “favorite Purépecha hunting ground, especially for young migrants with a taste for adventure” (92). Mario’s tale is another one of those stories that is about rebellion. The prospective migrant workers know “that the kid is about to start spinning a tall, tale, but this actually makes the story all the more enjoyable. It’s a movie now, a new Cherán myth being born, everyone’s fantasy of playing the hero against a villainous *patron*” (92). In the story, Mario, the teenage hero from Cherán, starts a fight with the evil *patrón* that soon turns from being merely verbal to becoming physically violent when Mario threatens to hit him and eventually gets down to action and pays back the *patron* by humiliating him in front of all the workers just as he had been humiliating them for several months (92-94).

Another one of Cherán’s migrant veterans is José Izquierdo, who is “[d]epending on whom you talk to, [...] either a wetback hero or a guy who scares the locals with his cholo style” (94). José had been all across the United States and when he first came there he worked in the fields like the other migrants from Cherán but then embarked upon a career as a drug dealer, which got him into jail and now he owes his boss a job he cannot deny because he got him out of jail and in addition he has a court

appearance pending in the United States (96-97). Martínez, who is listening to José's tragic life story – while he was in jail in the United States his girlfriend back in Mexico also left him for another man – is not sure whether he should really believe these stories. On the one hand, they might be true, on the other hand, José “might merely have seen the classic Chicano gangbanger films *Bound by Honor* and *American Me*, both of which are available at Cherán's *videocentro*” (97). Although Wense wants to walk the line, he is still impressed by stories like José's and even though he does not openly admit it, a small part of him would like to lead a life as adventurous as his fellow townsman's (94). There are several other examples of townsmen who love to tell their migrant stories depicted in the book, for example Francisco Sr., an almost ninety year old man, who likes to tell others of his *bracero* trips, back in the 1940s (171).

Cherán, the hometown of Wense and his brothers-in-law is presented as being poor, but by no means as poverty-stricken as other villages in the Mexican provinces, such as for instance some villages in the deep south of Mexico (44). The ground in Cherán is not the best for farming; corn, staples and beans are only produced to cover the locals' needs, and are not used for export, and there is virtually no industry to speak of. The job options for Cheranes consist of selling food or wares at the market, tapping the pines for resins, producing wooden furniture, opening up a small store of which there is already a great number in Cherán, or working as taxi driver (44). None of these options are especially appealing for a young man who is in need to provide for a family. A survey conducted in 1996 reported that among Cherán's population of about 30,000 people there were no more than six cases of malnutrition but a high number of diseases resulting from a lack of hygiene (44-45). Most inhabitants have access to electricity, but running water, especially hot water, is infrequent and sewage lines almost non existing (45). The people of Cherán will not have to starve if they stay in their hometown, but, on the other hand, the town is only able to continue successfully due to the remittances from its migrants, since the migrant dollars correspond to the town budget a dozen times over (45). Regarding education, there are barely any options for those who decide to stay in Cherán. Children do not attend school any further than

elementary school and they have to start working as soon as they are physically able to do so. Women, on the other hand, usually marry and have children when they are in their early teens (45). For these and other reasons, the state of Michoacán ranks amongst Mexico's top four migrant "sender" states (125).

With Rosa's brothers having been killed in a tragic car accident at the U.S.-Mexican border¹³, Rosa and her husband Wense now have to make the difficult decision as to whether they and their little daughter Yeni are going to stay in Cherán or whether they should go back to St. Louis, Missouri, where they have lived before. There are several factors that push them away from Cherán, such as the meager future prospects that lie ahead of them should they decide to stay, and the job opportunities together with the better prospects of life that await them on the other side of the border (90). But there are also aspects that pull at them in order to keep them in Cherán, for instance Rosa's grieving mother and the rest of the family who do not want them to face the dangers of crossing the border as undocumented immigrants again (90). Although a better life is waiting for them in *el otro lado*, they would first have to overcome the border with its Border Patrol agents waiting for them (90).

While this is the immediate context of their decision-making, there is also Rosa's personal family history that influences their decision. The main reason that played a decisive role in the migration of Rosa's oldest brothers Benjamín and Fernando Chávez was their father's alcoholism and abusiveness (68-70). Alcoholism among men is unfortunately widespread in the highlands of Mexico (68). Efraín Chávez, just like their neighbor's husband, who had also been an alcoholic, is now dead but before that they had made their wives' and children's lives unbearable. Doña María's life was so miserable that she would pray for her husband's death although the very thought of it made her feel extremely guilty (69). But "[a]fter all, Jesus was one of the only men she knew of who didn't drink himself into a

¹³ Another book that depicts an instance of undocumented immigrants dying in a car while trying to make it to the United States is *Crossing* by Manuel Luis Martínez (1998), based on a newspaper article about thirteen undocumented migrants who died in a boxcar outside of El Paso.

stupor and beat women” (69). Efraín was already an alcohol addict, a *desmadroso*, when María met him.

One night María was walking home when Efraín and a friend of his appeared, both stumbling drunk. Upon her rejection of Efraín’s advances, they dragged her by arms and legs and hair along the street until Samaritans intervened. But in those days, doña María says, a woman didn’t have much recourse against unwanted advances. (69)

That happened when María was eighteen years old, which, by Cherán standards, translated into being an old maid and María’s mother therefore wanted her to marry as quickly as possible no matter what kind of man the future husband of her daughter would be (69). So María was married to an abusive man against her will, as her mother would not answer her daughter’s prayers. Efraín got drunk on a daily basis and they regularly had fights that resulted in slaps and sometimes punches. One time Efraín tried to strangle the oldest boy, Benjamín, at other times he would send the children into the woods in the middle of the night to tap the pines, or he would throw the children’s clothes onto the cooking fire (69). In other words, he was a demented dictator who tortured his entire family with his totally unpredictable behavior.

The children pleaded with their mother for her to leave her husband for good and buy some ground to build her own house (70). In order to make this possible and to support their mother in establishing an independent life, the two oldest brothers Benjamín and Fernando started to migrate as undocumented immigrants to the United States in search of work to earn money to help their mother (70). Later Jaime joined them in California and together they were able to save enough money to buy some land in Cherán and build their mother a modest home. A few years later, Florentino joined them on the migrant trail and eventually, Salvador, the youngest brother, followed suit in 1994. In 1995, Wense and Rosa got married and until the fatal accident, they had worked and lived in St. Louis (71).

Nineteen-year-old Wense Cortéz is described as being “the most volatile and variable” member of the grieving clan, who gets drunk from time to time but then again will “act mature beyond his years, thinking not of

himself but of his wife and daughter and their future in the States” (63). While his wife has made up her mind to remain with her mother and the rest of the family, Wense is restless and is constantly thinking about whether he should stay as well or go back to St. Louis on his own (63). He is fully aware of how much anxiety he would cause for the rest of the clan if he decided to cross the border on his own, especially since only two and a half months have passed since his brothers-in-law were killed while fleeing from the border patrol (65). Not only is his family scared for him but also Wense himself admits to Martínez that he is also scared - something uncommon among Mexican men - and that he would be scared all along the way until he was safe in St. Louis, (65). Despite his fear of causing worries among his family, Wense seems to be willing to pay the price in order to provide his family and himself with a better future (65-66). A better future means foremost a good education for Yeni, a new car for himself, a nice apartment in the States and a piece of land in Cherán to build a house there (66). Martínez never gets to meet Wense’s parents or siblings, only at one point does Wense talk about them, when he is drunk during the Easter *fiesta* and wants to explain to Martínez why he never took him to meet his family (163).

“Because I’m ashamed, because ... my family is poorer than you can imagine [...]. I saw my brother today, his shoes were taped together to keep them from falling apart. He’s fourteen years old [...]. At his age, I was already across the border. And today I saw him and I gave him the last of my money. I was going to buy myself some jeans, but I gave it all to him so he could get some shoes. [...] I’m going back up there, fuck the *migra*. [...] I’m going to cross that line no matter what anyone says about it [...]. [...] [A]nd I’ll bring Rosa and my little daughter up north, too. We’ll be together once again, in St. Louis, and my mother-in-law, and the widows, and all my brothers, and my father, even the old man, we’ll all be there together ... [...].” (163-164)

Wense makes the decision to migrate on his own. “[B]y the time we arrive at the house, it’s all set. It’s a matter not of whether but when Wense will leave” (67). Wense’ decision is depicted as deriving from conversations he has with himself or Martínez, rather than as the outcome of a mutual agreement between him and his wife Rosa whom he leaves behind with their little daughter Yeni. In fact there is one more person he does consult before making his decision, one of Cherán’s many witches, a woman named Ana, who essentially tells him what he longs to hear, namely that

everything will be fine as long as he follows her suggestions such as to clean out his house first (75-77).

When and how Wense then makes the actual decision to leave his wife and daughter behind and to take on the journey to the border is not depicted in the book. We only learn that he has left Cherán on September 17th, together with one of his younger brothers (104). While Wense and his brother are on the way to *el Norte*, his wife Rosa and her family are condemned to wait for news from them.

5.2.3 Across a Hundred Mountains

In the following section, I will analyze how the decision-making process of Miguel García, the main character's father, is represented in Reyna Grande's *Across a Hundred Mountains*. At first I will briefly summarize the events narrated in the book that lead to this decision.

Miguel García and his wife Lupe have already lost two daughters, Josefina and María, when a tragic accident claims the life of a third daughter. Josefina was stillborn when Lupe was only four month into the pregnancy. María died from the consequences of a scorpion sting because the family did not have the money to pay a doctor and the healing woman of the village was no longer able to save her (19). Their baby daughter Anita dies because of a horrible misfortune. Miguel works as a *campesino* in the fields on the other side of the river and on the day Anita dies there is so much rain that the river floods the shack in which the family lives while the father is stuck on the other side of the river (5-8). Lupe, holding Anita, and Juana, her older daughter, have to climb onto a table when the water starts to reach their waist (7). Hours later Miguel still has not returned and Lupe decides to go and look for help and hands the baby over to Juana, telling her that she now has to take care for her little baby sister (9). By the time Lupe leaves in search for help, Juana is feeling almost sick because of hunger and the cold makes her shiver. Juana tries hard to stay awake but when her parents return they find her asleep on the table and Anita is found dead in the water that is still covering the shack's ground (13-14).

Miguel blames himself for the loss of their little baby:

"It was my fault, Juana. I should've worked harder to get us out of there. I should've worked more hours, and little by little I could've built us a better house closer to town." [...] "I should've tried harder to swim across the river to get to you in time. Then this would never have happened." (18)

He also suffers from insomnia and instead of resting at night he walks up and down the shack, sighing, cursing and weeping (19). On Sunday, the family, now without little Anita, walks up the hill from where they can see the houses on the other side of the river (20). They have been there many times previously, but before they used to ignore the colorful houses they could spot in the distance. But this time Miguel no longer ignores the sight of the houses and starts talking about them.

"Look at these houses over there," Apá said as he pointed to a cluster of concrete houses. "Aren't they beautiful? See those little lights flickering on? They have electricity there, running water, and gas. When it rains, the houses never get flooded, and the roofs don't leak, and the people stay warm." [...] "You see that blue one over there?" Apá asked. "Isn't that a beautiful house?" [...] One day we will live in a house like that," he said. (20-21)

Some days later, he tells Juana about his plans to leave for *el otro lado* in a few days (26-29). He assures his daughter that he will only stay away for as long as it is necessary to make enough money to build his family a real house so that they no longer have to live in a shack worrying about the rain and the resulting floods. In order to prove to Juana that he will be able to make enough money on the other side of the border, he shows her a letter from a friend of his who is already working in the United States and who speaks in his letter of the great amount of money one is able to make there. Juana tries to convince him that they do not need a new house and that she is happy with their life as long as he will stay with them, but Miguel seems to have already made up his mind and tells her that there is no other way and that he has to go to *el otro lado* if he wants to build his family a house. On the day after Juana's twelfth birthday, Miguel leaves to make his way to the border (32-36). On her birthday he promises her that he will get them out of the shack in which they now have to live. To his wife he promises as well to work hard in order to be able to pay back the money he owes Don Elías for Anita's funeral. When he leaves the house,

his wife is crying and Juana runs after him, handing him a rosary that should protect him on his way.

5.3 María Isabel: “The Woman Left Behind”

After the analysis of the depiction of the existence of social networks and other important factors that play a crucial role in the decision-making process of the male characters in the chosen works of Latino/a literature, I will now have a look at the representation of two female characters that are being left behind in Honduras and Mexico respectively, namely María Isabel in *Enrique’s Journey* and, in the next subchapter, Lupe, Miguel’s wife, in *Across a Hundred Mountains*.

In the following, I will analyze how the decision-making process is represented in *Enrique’s Journey*, especially in how much María Isabel plays a part in Enrique’s decision to migrate and how she deals with his decision and the resulting situation. In *Enrique’s Journey*, the fifteen-year-old Enrique falls in love with María Isabel, who is two years older than him. The two teenagers share a common fate since they both live separated from their parents. Like Lourdes, Enrique’s mother, María Isabel’s mother has also left an unfaithful husband and they both now live with relatives, separated from their mothers. María Isabel lived with her mother and seven other people in a tiny shack without bathroom, kitchen, running water or electricity (cf. 33). When she was ten, María Isabel moved to a neighbor whom she helped in the household and then at the age of sixteen, because of a fight with a cousin she was forced to move again, this time to her aunt Gloria, who lived across town and next door to Enrique’s maternal grandma (cf. 33-34). There she helps in her aunt’s small food store and is happy with the modest two-bedroom house, in which she and Gloria’s daughter both have their own bedroom (cf. 34). María Isabel had been a good student, but her mother Eva, who never went to school and started to work when she was twelve, was not able to afford an education for her daughter past sixth grade (cf. 34).

When Enrique starts courting her, she refuses his advances at first but slowly she warms to him and they start a relationship (cf. 32-33). María Isabel does not want to get pregnant and a cousin of hers agrees to take her to a talk on birth control (cf. 35). Enrique, on the other hand, desperately wants to get his girlfriend pregnant, because in his reasoning, a common child would prevent María Isabel from leaving and abandoning him like so many other people have done before, such as his mother Lourdes, who migrated to the United States or other relatives whom he had lived with (cf. 35). Enrique runs into a lot of trouble, he sniffs glue like so many other kids in Mexico and even steals jewelry from his aunt, wanting to use it as bail to pay for his drug addiction (cf. 35-41). He has talked about going to the United States before but at this point even his grandma wants him to leave and does not hold him back any longer (cf. 41). Enrique decides to leave for the United States despite María Isabel begging him to stay with her in Honduras (cf. 42). She tells him that she will never abandon him and that she would even move in with him into his stone hut, but Enrique has made up his mind and although he feels ashamed for what he has done and knows how much pain he is causing his girlfriend, who might be pregnant, he does not change his plan (cf. 42).

The depiction of María Isabel's relationship to Enrique reflects the consequences of the rise of female-headed households in Central America and Mexico. Both of their mothers left their unfaithful husbands, therefore having to move out of their homes and establish a new home for themselves and their children. In order to deal with the double burden of earning an income and running the household, they have to rely on the help of relatives and their own children. While María Isabel's mother stayed in Honduras, Enrique's mother migrated to the U.S. as an undocumented immigrant, thereby becoming what sociologists have termed a "transnational mother". Enrique is represented as a teenager who is torn between his conflicting emotions of feeling like an abandoned child on the one hand, and a young man, who wants to start a family, on the other hand. At the same time he is a teenage boy who encounters regular teenage problems and talks of going to the United States. Enrique's dream

of starting a family clashes with María Isabel's desire not to become pregnant.

After he has left, María Isabel cannot believe that he is really gone. She knows how much he longed to reunite with his mother but she still cannot understand how he could leave her and worries about him being harmed or killed on his way to the U.S.-Mexican border in addition to blaming herself for his departure (cf. 56).

Then she prays. "God," she whispers, "grant me one wish. Get Mexican immigration authorities to catch Enrique and deport him back to Honduras. Send him back to me." It is a well-worn prayer in Honduras, especially by children whose mothers have left them to head north. (56)

When María Isabel hears from Enrique's grandmother that Enrique has made it – after 122 days and more than 12,000 miles – to his mother Lourdes in the United States, she does not show any signs of happiness but "wails, "He's not coming back!" She locks herself in her bedroom and cries for two hours" (190, 193).

Chapter seven, which is entitled "The Girl Left Behind", deals with María Isabel's life in Honduras while her boyfriend Enrique lives in the United States. Every Sunday he calls her:

She waits for his call at the home of one of Lourdes's cousins. When she answers the telephone, she is so overcome with emotion she cannot speak. Enrique talks for one or two hours. María Isabel cries and cries. "María Isabel, say something, anything," Enrique pleads. "I miss you. I love you. Don't forget me," she says. He sends her \$100 or more a month. He vows he will be back in Honduras within two years. (202-203)

As she has already suspected before Enrique's departure, María Isabel is pregnant and on November 2nd, 2000, their little daughter Katerin Jasmín is born (cf. 195-196). It is not easy for María Isabel to raise her daughter on her own in Honduras, while Jasmín's father is in the United States, especially since his family constantly faults her (cf. 203). During their phone conversations, when María Isabel finally commits her problems to him, Enrique tells her not to listen to them, but his grandmother, his sister Belky and three aunts of his live across the street from María Isabel, which makes it virtually impossible to ignore them (cf. 203). A month before Jasmín's birth, one of Enrique's uncles indicates that Enrique is not the father of the child, but when Jasmín is born, she has Enrique's eyes,

mouth and nose (cf. 203, 196). But this does not put an end to María Isabel's problems with Enrique's family; in fact quite the contrary is the case. They accuse her of not taking good care of Jasmín and of spending the money Enrique sends from the United States on her family, rather than on Jasmín (cf. 204-205). Mirian, Lourdes's sister, who is a single mother of three children and in desperate need of money thinks it to be unfair that Enrique, whom she has taken care of as a baby and teenager, does not send her any money, and when Jasmín is eight months old, she tells Enrique in a letter that María Isabel is a bad mother and is misspending the money he is sending to her (cf. 207). Instead of sticking up for his girlfriend, Enrique believes Mirian and asks her to watch María Isabel (cf. 207). When he talks to María Isabel on the phone, he even threatens to take Jasmín away from her if she does not take good care of her. At first María Isabel is speechless but "[t]hen her voice turns stiff. "No one takes my daughter away from me."" (207)

When Enrique stops sending money because he is temporarily out of work, María Isabel takes on a job in a small furniture factory, which brings her \$35 a week (cf. 209). In the meantime, the relations between her and Enrique's family become worse and worse. They spy on her and whenever she is out doing errands, they accuse her of meeting another boyfriend and cheating on Enrique (cf. 208). When Jasmín is one and a half years old, María Isabel cannot stand living under the surveillance of Enrique's family any longer. Her aunt Gloria's house is now inhabited by twelve people, which means she has to share a bedroom with five other people (cf. 212). Therefore, she decides that it is better for her own as well as daughter's well being if she moves back to her mother's humble hut. In order to be independent from Enrique's family, she asks him to wire the money for Jasmín directly to her, rather than to his family like he used to before.

Eva, María Isabel's mother, owns a "tiny wooden hut" that is currently housing nine people (213). Since María Isabel left some six years earlier, there has been an improvement in the form of a small house built by a relative, which contains a bathroom that Eva's family can use as well. They

are among the poorest in their neighborhood and the family's survival is for the most part based on Eva's oldest daughter, María Isabel's sister, who migrated to Texas and sends them money (cf. 214). Despite the family's poverty, María Isabel's life is better there than at her aunt's house, across the street from Enrique's family. She has also taken on a new job at a store in the city's Mall downtown, where she works six days a week from 11 in the morning till 10 in the evening and earns \$120 a month. While she is away at work, her mother and her younger sister take care of Jasmín, who soon puts on more weight and seem to enjoy herself in the new neighborhood. When Jasmín turns two and regularly from there after, her mother takes her to the cybercafé where she calls Enrique in the United States (cf. 215). Jasmín is proud of her daddy, who sends her things, although she has never seen him. She starts talking to him on the phone and asks him when he is coming to Honduras to see her. When Enrique stops sending money again, María Isabel is worried he might have another girlfriend in the United States on whom he spends his money. Her aunt Gloria warns her not to wait for Enrique forever but to find someone else as long as she is still young and pretty (cf. 221).

María Isabel is represented as a woman who openly disagrees with her boyfriend's decision to migrate to the United States as an undocumented immigrant. Still, like Rosa, Wense's wife, she does not have a word in the decision-making process and Enrique leaves for the U.S.-Mexican border without her agreement. Although she is worried about him being killed on the way to the border, or while crossing it, she is not happy when she hears that he has arrived safely in the United States because it means that he will not return to her anytime soon. Since she cannot rely on him sending money regularly, she takes on a job in order to be able to raise her daughter. While Enrique's family does not help her but, on the contrary, makes her life even more difficult than it already is by telling Enrique lies about her being a bad mother to his child, María Isabel receives help from her mother Eva and her family, who can rely on the money Eva's eldest daughter sends them from the United States. Away from her absent boyfriend's family, María Isabel is finally able to take her life into her own hands and grows more confident with herself.

In chapter 4.1.6, I will then analyze how, after Enrique's departure, María Isabel is torn between following Enrique to the United States and staying in Honduras.

5.4 Lupe: "*La Mujer Abandonada*"

After the loss of three children and the departure of her husband Miguel, Lupe finds herself alone with her now only daughter Juana, whom she blames for the death of little Anita, which complicates their relationship in a time when it would have been necessary for them to stick together in order to survive on their own. The sight of women, who wait outside their houses for the mailman to bring them letters from their husbands in *el Norte*, which "rarely, sometimes never" come, is a familiar picture in the village where Lupe and Juana live and they know that these are "the forgotten women, the abandoned women" (36-37). What makes things even worse for Lupe are her mother-in-law's accusations that it is her fault that Miguel has left and that she will end up as an abandoned woman (cf. 38). When her good friend Antonia, Juana's godmother, tries to console her by telling her not to pay attention to Miguel's mother, but rather think of all the wonderful things they will be able to afford once her husband returns from *el Norte*, like a proper house, a refrigerator or a stove, Lupe replies that these things are not important to her, but that she only wishes to pay Don Elías the money they owe him to be without debt again (cf. 39). Lupe's statement reveals that Miguel's motives to migrate to the United States as an undocumented immigrant – building a nice house for his family amongst others – do not coincide with his wife's wishes and expectations of being able to pay their debts and be together as a family, however poor they may be.

In addition to her own worries, Lupe, in the absence of her husband, has not only to deal with her mother-in-law's accusations but with the other women gossiping about her husband's and her own fate.

Whenever Juana and her Amá went to town, whispers floated all around them. Juana heard the words clearly. The women said things to each other, being careful to put a hand over their mouths as if to muffle the words. "He's been gone for four weeks now, and he hasn't sent word." "Has he abandoned them,

you think?" "No, Miguel is an honest man. He wouldn't do such a thing." "Honest or not, once they find themselves in El Otro Lado, surrounded by all those golden-haired gringas, a man cannot help himself." "Poor Doña Lupe," they said and smirked. (48)

Since Miguel has not sent his family any news of him since he left four weeks earlier, they automatically conclude that he must have forgotten and abandoned his family back home in Mexico. To live in such a state of uncertainty and to be constantly talked about behind her back, visibly wears Lupe out, but when Don Elías comes to their family home to demand payment, their lives start to fall apart. Don Elías, whom almost everybody in town owes money, first threatens to arrest Lupe if she does not pay the money she owes him, then while "pressing his huge belly against [Lupe]", he suggests that "there are other ways we can arrange for you to pay back your debt..." (58-59). When Lupe throws him out of her home, he threatens to come back in a week, and in the meantime he would tell people not to give her a job (cf. 59). He keeps his word and Lupe loses her job at the food stand at the train station, which she has taken on after her husband left the family (cf. 61). In this desperate situation, Antonia, Juana's godmother and Lupe's *comadre*, offers to help them by sharing what her husband brings home, although this is very little, but Lupe does not want to be a burden to anyone and refuses the generous offer (cf. 62).

As he has announced, Don Elías returns in the company of two judiciales, who carry rifles and tell Lupe that they have to take her to the police station and imprison her (cf. 67-68). Lupe says she cannot go to prison and leave her daughter behind and when Don Elías offers once more to "make other arrangements", she takes her daughter aside and tells her that she will always love Juana's father, but that she knows how painful it is to grow up without a mother's love since she was an orphan when she was very little and that therefore she cannot go to prison and leave her behind on her own, even if her decision will condemn her (cf. 68). That night Lupe does not sleep but cries until dawn and then waits motionless until the afternoon comes and with it Don Elías who returns, "to collect his first payment" (69, 71). Lupe sends Juana away to Antonia's house, but Juana worries about her mother being alone with Don Elías and when she peeks through the

bamboo sticks of the shack, she witnesses her mother's rape (cf. 72-73). When Juana returns to the shack in the evening, Lupe is lying in a corner, rocking herself back and forth, but then gets up and full of rage smashes all but one of her plates, Juana's inheritance (cf. 74-75). "How could you do this to me? How?", Lupe yells, accusing her husband of deserting her (75).

From that day on, Don Elías comes to Lupe's and Juana's home every day and rapes Lupe (cf. 79). By the townspeople she is now referred to as "Don Elías's puta" (78). Nine months after Miguel's departure and seven and a half months after Don Elías's first came to rape Lupe, she bears a son and names him Miguelito, but loses yet another one of her children when Don Elías and his wife steal him from her. Lupe becomes an alcoholic and on the day of the baby's baptism, which marks Don Elías's triumph over her, she kills him and is put into jail (cf. 138-140).

The representation of the character of Lupe in *Across a Hundred Mountains* demonstrates the ways in which migration affects the family members who are being left behind. Lupe loses the last thing she had been proud of, her dignity.

5.5 Rosa & María Isabel: Following Their Men

In *Diary of an Undocumented Immigrant*, migration from Mexico to the United States is represented as being dominated by men due to an existing tradition of men migrating to *el Norte* as a result of the *bracero* program. Although women were always part of the migrant stream, they were mostly left behind in their country of origin, while their husbands migrated in search for work. In *Crossing Over*, on the other hand, Rubén Martínez portray the character of Rosa, a woman who indeed stays behind at first, while her husband Wense migrates, but then follows him to the United States. Also in *Enrique's Journey* María Isabel is at first "the woman left behind" but later on follows her boyfriend Enrique to the United States.

In the following section, I will analyze the representation of these two characters and how they come to their decision to follow their husband and boyfriend respectively.

Rosa is the first woman of her clan who is “allowed to accompany her husband” to the United States or “[r]ather, she forced her husband to take her along” (105). It is clear from these two lines that Rosa first had to obtain her husband’s approval and that convincing him to let her accompany him involved serious debates. Her sisters-in-law María and Eudelia, on the other hand, have never been “allowed” to accompany their husbands to *el Norte* and María confesses that “[she]’d go up there if it weren’t for the fact that the men won’t let [them]” (105). Also Eudelia is tired of staying in Cherán and thinks, “[they]’d all be better off up there” (106). María’s statement shows that she has made her decision that she wants to go to the United States, but that her husband Fernando, Rosa’s brother, and the other male members of her clan forbid her to cross the border. After the death of three of the Chávez brothers, their widows, as well as the wives of Fernando and Florentino, the surviving brothers of the Chávez family, are forced to stay in Cherán. Rosa, the only daughter of María Elena, the family’s matriarch, on the other hand, follows the tradition of her brothers and migrates to the United States. The remaining female members of the clan are confined to stay at home, worrying about their husbands and sons like so many other women in Mexico. Also the Chávez family’s neighbor María Huaroco, whose son miraculously survived the car accident in which the Chávez brothers died, complains that she has not heard from her youngest son, who is in the United States, for half a year and that she can only pray after her children leave (cf. 38-39).

Like her neighbor, María Elena wants her daughter and the rest of her family to stay in Chéran instead of risking to lose their lives at the border, but Rosa and her brothers are “possessed of the migrant spirit” and the death of their brothers make their journey even more necessary because if they stayed in Chéran, where they have no future, their death would have been meaningless (35). For some time, Rosa seriously considers staying in Chéran while her husband returns to the United States. Influenced by

the time she has already spent in the less patriarchal north, she does not close her eyes to the possibility of becoming a single mother since Wense might not make it safely to the other side or make enough money in *el Norte* to support his family, but makes plans about how she could make a living so that she and their daughter Yeni could survive in Chéran without Wense's help (cf. 88).

"I don't know whether I'll succeed or not," Rosa says. "All I know is that my brothers died trying to make something better of themselves, and I'm going to keep trying, down here or up there, whether Wense's around or not." (88)

Rosa is determined to take her life into her own hands and while she had to obtain her husband's approval the first time she accompanied him to the United States, shortly before the accident (cf. 34), she now no longer seems to have to ask for his permission, but rather makes her own decision, thereby considering her own, her little daughter's and her grieving mother's needs. Although she is torn between staying in Chéran and following Wense back to St. Louis, she clearly prefers the latter option (cf. 149). Not only because her husband "acts differently up there; he even helps with the dishes" but also because she envisions a house of their own there where her mother, the widows of her brothers and her nephews and nieces can also live (149). So while her surviving brothers, Fernando and Florentino, do not allow their wives María and Eudelia to join them in the United States, Rosa is thinking about ways in which she could bring her widowed sisters-in-law, their children and her mother, who is also no longer confined by a husband, to the United States. She also does not want to "[w]atch her daughter, Yeni, grow up, attend a few years of elementary school, and get knocked up by a local boy who will surely run away to the north himself" (149). Rosa herself attended junior high school, but since there are no jobs in her hometown, this does not better her situation (cf. 88). She does not want her daughter Yeni to have to face the same dilemma of having to convince her partner to let her join him in the United States and being torn between her Mexican home and family and a future on the other side of the border.

In an episode later in the book, when Rosa is in a so-called safe house at the Mexican side of the border, waiting for the next attempt to cross after

her group had been detained by *la migra*, she and the other women of the group discuss “macho irresponsibility” while their coyotes together with the men of the group, who is made up of people from Cherán only, are out drinking (180-181).

Machismo itself was one of the primary reasons that so many women were heading north these days. The old migrant tradition in small towns like Cherán permitted only the men to become adventurer-providers, journeying north alone to tame the frontier. After a few years, many were able to bring their families up to the States to join them. But the separations were hard on the women [...]. (181)

Because there are so many rumors of men who have left for the United States and abandoned their wives back home in Mexico, there are now stories of women who decided to join their husbands, whether they approved of it or not, to keep them from building so-called *casas chicas* with another woman in *el Norte*. These women no longer seek their husbands’ approval, nor do they rely on them to help them organize the journey north, but they organize and set out on their own to cross the border as undocumented immigrants.

Unlike Rosa in *Crossing Over*, María Isabel in *Enrique’s Journey* has never been to the United States before. But different from Rosa, she would not be the first woman in her family to migrate to the United States since three female members of her family already live and work in the United States (cf. 228). Two of her mother’s sisters, Tina and Laura, and her own eldest sister, Olga, left their children behind in Honduras and went to the United States to make money (cf. 228). Tina was the first one to leave in the early 1980s, Olga left in 1990 and Laura followed in 1998 (cf. 228). After having to leave their children behind in the first place, all three women were eventually able to bring them to the United States (cf. 227).

The first time María Isabel makes the plan to go to the United States is when her boyfriend Enrique is on his way to the U.S.-Mexican border (cf. 56). She plans on going together with a female friend of hers, who is willing to split her money with María Isabel if she joins her (cf. 56). María Isabel hopes that they will find Enrique in Mexico and they set a date for their departure, but then María Isabel’s aunt, cousin and mother convince her to

stay in Honduras and not to take the risk of crossing Mexico as an undocumented immigrant (cf. 56).

After the birth of her daughter Katerin Jasmín, another aunt urges her to leave her hometown for the United States and to leave her daughter with her (cf. 196). ““If I have the opportunity, I’ll go,” María Isabel says. “I’ll leave my baby behind.” Enrique agrees. “We’ll have to leave the baby behind.”” (196). The next years María Isabel spends torn between growing more and more attached to her little daughter and Enrique’s promises to either save enough money for a *coyote* to send for her or to return home to María Isabel and his daughter, whom he has not seen yet. Like her aunt, some of María Isabel’s friends urge her to go to the United States since she will not find a job in Honduras anymore when she is older (cf. 227). But María Isabel cannot imagine leaving Jasmín anymore and decides not to leave her until she is at least five years old and able to understand what is happening (cf. 226-227). Jasmín’s absent father Enrique was also five years old when his mother Lourdes left him and his sister Belky for the United States (cf. 227). In the meantime, Jasmín has come to call her uncle Miguel, who is the only man in Eva’s home, *papi*. María Isabel is not only afraid of leaving her daughter, who already has to grow up without a father, but is also afraid of the dangers of the journey to the border (cf. 229). Irma, one of her sisters, was on her way to the United States when she ran out of money in Mexico and had to make her way back to Honduras (cf. 229). Another sister who made the journey tells her that she often suffered from hunger but when María Isabel asks her if she was raped, she does not answer (cf. 229).

Then, four years after Enrique has left Honduras, he finally convinces his girlfriend to leave their daughter behind and join him in the United States (cf. 237-238). He threatens to abandon María Isabel and find another woman in the United States (cf. 237). He further argues that it would be the best thing for their daughter since together they would be able to provide Jasmín a better life and return back home to Honduras sooner (cf. 237). María Isabel agrees and decides with Enrique that Jasmín will stay with Enrique’s sister Belky during the week and at the weekend with María

Isabel's mother Eva (cf. 238). A week later, she leaves with a hired *coyote* and, because she is too scared, she never tells her daughter she is going to the United States (cf. 238-240).

María Isabel leaves because she does not want Enrique to abandon her since this would mean that Jasmín would grow up with a man who is not her real father and because she counts on being reunited with both of them, Enrique and Jasmín, sooner if she leaves now. In her family, there is already an existing tradition of women migrating to the United States and leaving their children behind in the care of other family members. With her decision, María Isabel follows this tradition and although the primary reason for her migration may be to reunite with her partner and father of her child, it is her aunts and sisters who have provided her with a role model to follow.

It needs to be mentioned that in *Crossing Over* there is the one odd case, in which it is a man that is being left behind in Mexico while his wife and children are in the United States (cf. 48). Macías is a local schoolteacher and longs to be reunited with his family and says that he will try to visit them on the other side of the border, and if he does not get the necessary papers he will cross the border as an undocumented immigrant. What is especially interesting is that the migration situation is not completely reversed since the children are in *el Norte* as well, so even if the wife migrated prior to her husband she is, at least in this case, still responsible for the childcare.

5.6 Reyna Grande's *Across a Hundred Mountains* & Sonia Nazario's *Enrique's Journey*: Migration of Single Women

In this chapter, I will analyze the representation of instances of migration by single women in *Across a Hundred Mountains* and *Enrique's Journey*. Juana in *Across a Hundred Mountains* sets out on her own to cross the border to the United States in order to find her father, who had left the family to earn money on the other side of the border. Lourdes, a single mother, in *Enrique's Journey* leaves her children behind in Honduras to

work in the United States because otherwise she would not be able to feed them and pay for their schools. Later on, she is followed by her sister Mirian, who, just like Lourdes is a single mother that has to leave her children behind in order to be able to provide for them. I will analyze the depiction of the existence and use of social networks and argue that the characters of Lourdes and Mirian reflect the establishment of a feminized tradition of migration and that this goes hand in hand with the establishment of women's own social migrant networks. Concluding, I will question my own findings by looking briefly at the representation of Lourdes's daughter Belky, who does not follow the tradition of her mother and aunt and decides to stay in Honduras with her children and husband after a brief visit to the United States. In the subchapter 4.2.2 and 4.2.3, I will have a look at the rise of female-headed households in Central America and Mexico and the emergence of transnational motherhood as a consequence of the former.

5.6.1 Juana: Searching for her Apá

Juana's father Miguel has followed a friend to the United States in order to be able to provide a better life for his wife and daughter. Juana's mother, Lupe, blames her for the death of Juana's little baby sister Anita and Juana thinks that it is her fault her father left the family (36). Since Lupe does not receive any letters from Miguel, everybody in her hometown is convinced that Miguel has abandoned his family, and the other children at Juana's school taunt her because of that, causing her to leave school (cf. 49). Because Juana and her mother do not have any money, she is forced to search for vegetables in the garbage. When Don Elías starts to come to Juana's and Lupe's home every day "to collect his payment", Juana becomes *la borracha's* daughter (cf. 69, 122). Instead of continuing to go to school like she should, Juana decides to look for a job to make some money in order to be able to cover her own and her mother's basic needs (cf. 85, 110). In the meantime, her mother starts drinking heavily because she cannot cope with her situation and also starts blaming Juana again for the death of Anita (cf. 96).

When Miguel told Juana about him leaving for the United States, he also told her that he would be just on the other side of the mountains, which they can see from their town. So Juana is convinced that she would only have to get across these mountains and there she would find her *apá* and this is also her only wish for her thirteenth birthday, to find her father (cf. 102, 105). Doña Martina shows her where Los Angeles, her father's migration destination is (cf. 106) and later on Juana asks a man about how to get to *el otro lado* and he tells her the way (cf. 112). Initially, Juana plans on going together with her mother to search for her father and then reunite the family with her baby brother Miguelito who had been taken away from her mother (cf. 115). But her mother's murder of Don Elías puts an end to this dream. Juana again blames herself for what has happened and she argues that, had she stayed with her mother that day and not gone to work, she would have been able to prevent her mother's deed (cf. 140).

Two weeks after her mother's arrest, she makes her way down to the train station and although she has been inside the train many times selling food to the passenger, this is the first time she will not get off when the whistles blows (cf. 141). Before the train leaves, Doña Martina appears at the train window handing her the map, on which she had shown Juana the way to the United States, and promising her that she and her granddaughter will take care of her mother and their shack while she is away. In addition, Doña Martina hands her a bundle full of coins and a piece of paper with the phone number of the town's store so that Juana can leave messages there for her (cf. 142).

When Juana makes her decision to leave her home for the United States, there is no parental authority anymore that could hold her back since her father has left the family and has not been heard of since, and her mother, in an act of desperation resulting from her husband's absence, has killed the man who had sexually abused her and taken away her child, and has been imprisoned. Juana's decision can be seen as a consequence of her father's migration to the U.S., which is a result of a migration tradition set by men, starting with the *bracero* program and the physical violence inflicted on her mother during his absence. A female friend of her mother,

Doña Martina, provides her with money, a map, an emergency phone number and promises to take care of everything while she is away. Juana herself has saved money for the trip by taking on a job instead of going to school, which is also a consequence of her father's absence since that had made it necessary for her to start working in order to provide for her own food. Juana gathers the necessary information for the trip to the border on her own initiative and also makes the decision to leave on her own.

5.6.2 Lourdes & Mirian: Representing a New Tradition?

In the introduction to *Enrique's Journey*, Sonia Nazario states the following:

I was struck by the choice mothers face when they leave their children. How do they make such an impossible decision? Among, Latinos, where family is all-important, where for women motherhood is valued far above all else, why are droves of mothers leaving their children? (xii)

A few pages later, she gives an answer to this why-question, describing how most women in Honduras have to take on jobs in factories or in the domestic sector, providing child care or cleaning houses for a pay ranging between \$40 and \$120 a month (cf. xxiii-xxiv). But then these meager salaries are not enough to feed their children and so the only way out of their desperate situation is to go to the United States as an undocumented worker, make money and send it back to their children. While economic reasons can explain why women are forced to leave their children behind and migrate to the United States, the question as to how "they make such an impossible decision" remains open at first. In the following, I will analyze how the character of Lourdes and the way she makes her decision to migrate is represented in *Enrique's Journey*.

Lourdes has had a very difficult childhood herself since her mother could not provide enough food for her children (cf. 199). Therefore, Lourdes had to start working when she was only eight years old and when she was nine and her sister Rosa Amelia ten, they were both dispatched to work as live-in maids. Lourdes had to quit elementary school and when she was fourteen, she was sent away to live with her oldest brother Marco in southern Honduras.

When Lourdes decides to leave Honduras, she is twenty-four-years old and has two children, Enrique who is five and Belky who is seven, but lives separated from her husband. Lourdes can barely afford enough food for herself and her children and cannot afford uniforms and pencils for school or toys for them to play with (cf. 4). The only jobs available to her are to do other people's laundry or selling tortillas and other small things, but with these jobs Lourdes cannot make enough money to feed her children (cf. 4).

Lourdes knows of only one place that offers hope. As a seven-year-old child, delivering tortillas her mother made to wealthy homes, she glimpsed this place on other people's television screens. [...] On television she saw New York's spectacular skyline, Las Vegas's shimmering lights, Disneyland's magic castle.
(4)

Although she feels guilty leaving her children behind, she decides to leave for the United States since there is no other way she can provide for her children (cf. 4). She argues that she will only be gone for a year or even less if she is lucky and if she has to stay longer, she will send for her children (cf. 4).

Lourdes makes her decision to leave to the United States on her own. She is no longer together with her husband with whom she could have discussed her decision to migrate and who might have held her back. The absence of the children's father also makes her the sole breadwinner of the family, a responsibility she cannot assume since there are no jobs available to women in her hometown that would earn her enough money. The way in which Lourdes's childhood and motherhood is represented makes her decision the only possible option left for her.

Fourteen years after Lourdes left, her sister Mirian makes the same decision and follows her sister to the United States (cf. 218- 220). Mirian – also a single mother - is out of work and can no longer afford to buy enough food for her children or send them to school (cf. 218-219). The only way out of her desperate situation is to make it to the United States (cf. 219). When she tells her sister Lourdes of her plan to set out for *el Norte* on her own, Lourdes is alarmed because of the dangers of the trip and promises her sister that she and her boyfriend, whom she has met in the U.S., will provide enough money to pay for a *coyote* (cf. 219). Like

Lourdes, Mirian tells herself that she will only go to the United States temporarily and that she will return after a few years so her children will not feel abandoned (cf. 219).

Lourdes had only known the United States from television pictures when she decided she would leave her children behind and make it to the U.S. as an undocumented immigrant. Her sister Mirian, on the other hand, gets her picture from her telephone conversations with Lourdes. It is also her sister who provides her with the necessary financial support and information to make her migration possible. While Lourdes had to organize and pay for her migration on her own, she can now offer help and assistance to her sister, who is in the same situation she was in fourteen years earlier.

5.6.3 Belky: Already Breaking the New Tradition?

Belky is Lourdes's oldest daughter and Enrique's older sister. When she is only seven-years-old, her mother leaves her to make money in the United States, so she basically only knows her from telephone conversations and the presents and money Lourdes sends back home. After her mother leaves, she lives with one of her mother's sisters Rosa Amalia and struggles with the question "How can I be worth anything if my mother left me?" (10). Eleven years later, her only brother Enrique leaves to reunite with their mother in the United States and when Belky hears about his arrival at Lourdes's home, she is depressed because now that Enrique is with Lourdes, she is the only child left in Honduras – Lourdes has another daughter Diana with her new boyfriend in the United States as well – and Belky regrets not having left with Enrique because she yearns to be with her mother too (cf. 193).

Her aunt Rosa Amalia, who raised her, wants Belky to stop being preoccupied with reuniting with her mother but rather concentrate on finishing her studies and forming her own family in Honduras (cf. 230). When Belky's secret boyfriend Yovani asks Rosa Amalia permission to date her, she agrees and soon Yovani and Belky get married.

Yovani is not handsome. He lives with his mother, a tamale maker, in a tiny wooden shack. But he is kind, drinks rarely, and buys her little presents. He treats her like a queen. She loves him. (230-231)

Belky asks her mother for money to build a tiny house beside her grandmother's, where actually Lourdes was supposed to build a house after her return from the United States (cf. 231). When Belky is expecting her first child, Lourdes cries because as with Jasmín she will not be present at her second grandchild's birth (cf. 263). Belky does not tell her mother, but finally after so many years, she has given up her nightly prayers of reuniting with her mother since over the years she has lost any hope (cf. 263).

After the birth of her son Alexander Jafeth in the summer of 2006, Belky gets an invitation from a television show to the United States to meet her mother – seventeen years after she left –, her brother and also her U.S. born sister Diana (cf. 263-267). Belky tells the TV presenter Don Francisco how hard it was to leave her only forty-day old baby with her husband in Honduras, but that she decided to do so because it was her only chance to get a visa to see her mother (cf. 266). She explains that with her mother's financial help she was able to build a house but that money cannot replace a mother's love (cf. 266).

Belky best answers Don Francisco's question [whether the separation was worth it] eight days later: On September 19th, 2006, she gets up early. At a Florida airport, she gives Lourdes one last tight hug. Then she boards an airplane back to Honduras. Back to her son. (267)

While in the representation of Lourdes's decision-making process, social migrant networks do not play a role, her sister Mirian who leaves their Honduran hometown fourteen years later can rely on information and financial help provided by Lourdes. Since the age of five, Belky has always longed to be with her mother again, and she decides for herself after marrying her boyfriend Yovani, whom she loves and who loves, respects and cares for her, and whilst expecting her first child, at whose birth her mother will not be present, as on so many other occasions in the past fourteen years, that she will no longer wait and hope for her mother's return back home to Honduras. With the financial support of her mother, who sends money from the United States, she is able to build herself and

her little family a home in Honduras, on the very plot that was initially reserved for Lourdes to build a house once she returned. Like her aunt Mirian, Belky relies on Lourdes's financial support, made possible by her migration to the United States. Also the very fact that Lourdes does not return opens up the opportunity for Belky to build a home on the little piece of land reserved for her mother. Even when Belky gets a visa to meet her mother in the U.S. she decides against overstaying her visa and living like her mother and brother as an undocumented immigrant in the United States – without having to make the dangerous journey on land -, and without hesitation returns back home to her baby and her husband. The social migrant network established by her mother and her aunt would have provided Belky with all the necessary assistance for settling in and finding work in the United States. On the one hand Belky thereby breaks with the migrant tradition in her family, but, on the other hand, it is her mother's migration that makes Belky's starting of her own of a family in Honduras possible. In a way Belky's return to Honduras could also be interpreted as pursuing what her mother initially planned to do – only staying for a short time and then returning home – but never managed to realize. One also needs to take into account that while Lourdes and Mirian are both single mothers, struggling on their own to provide for their children's needs, Belky is in a healthy relationship and shares the responsibility for her family with her husband.

6. Crossing Over



*The gatekeepers want so to stop
The flow of history slipping from them
As it undulates underground.
They collar us into migra vans
For the trip back
And we
Plan another crossing to
Another piece
Of the simple earth
In union with our version
Of the Mexico/US map.
This cycle becomes permanently fixed.*
(from "Crossing "a Piece of Earth"" by Teresa Palomo-Acosta)



6.1 The Depiction of Men's Social Migrant Networks in *Diary of an Undocumented Immigrant* and *Crossing Over*

Two instances of Pérez crossing the border as an undocumented immigrant¹⁴ are depicted in *Diary of an Undocumented Immigrant*. The first time he hires a *coyote* to help him cross the U.S.-Mexican border¹⁵. As a precautionary measure he sews all the money he has into the lining of his jacket before he makes his way to the border and tells the *coyote* that his (male) friend will pay him upon his safe arrival on the other side of the border (cf. 15). Unfortunately Pérez' jacket containing all his money gets stolen while he sleeps, which means that he can no longer afford to pay the *coyote* to cross the border (cf. 29). Pérez is angry about his own incautiousness. When he finally calls his friend on the other side of the border, his friend assures him that he should not worry, but that together they will surely find a way to replace the stolen money and pay the *coyote* once he has crossed the border (cf. 30).

Not long after the successful crossing Pérez gets caught by *la migra* and is deported to a Mexican border town. He immediately decides to try his luck again but this time without the help of a *coyote*. Instead he meets with another male friend - who is legally in the United States - in a different Mexican border town (cf. 49). With the help of his friend he finds a "*patero*" or "duck man" there, who, in contrast to a *coyote*, only provides help in crossing the Rio Grande – known as Río Bravo in Mexico – that separates Texas from Mexico. He charges twenty dollars in advance and with an inner tube of a truck tire, which Pérez and *the patero* use as a raft, the two

¹⁴ For secondary literature on migrant smuggling see for instance Andreas' article on "The transformation of Migrant Smuggling across the U.S.-Mexican Border" (2001) and Spener's article "Smuggling Migrants through South Texas: Challenges Posed by Operation Rio Grande" (2001).

¹⁵ In *Crossing Over*, the border – which Anzaldúa (1987: 3) calls an "open wound" - is repeatedly represented as "an idea" (195-197, 218, 325), a line that is mostly invisible "safe for certain stretches near San Diego, Nogales, and El Paso, where the idea of the U.S.-Mexico border takes physical form through steel, chain links, barbed wire, concrete, and arc lamps" (1). Similarly Samora (1971: 13) states that "[t]he border region is labeled so only because there is an imaginary line separating two political entities, not because of any cultural, physical, geographical or natural phenomena which make the territory distinctive and distinguishable". In the early nineties then, the "the idea became a reality" (*Crossing Over*, 196). Fregoso (2003: xv) argues that under the banner of counterterrorism, the U.S. exercises state terrorism against immigrants – "the excluded citizens of the nation" - by intensifying border militarization.

men make it across the river without being noticed. Pérez' friend then meets him again on the U.S. side of the river.

In *Crossing Over*, Wense, on the other hand, does not receive any help from friends while crossing the border, but on his second attempt he takes his younger brother Melchor with him. On his first attempt, Wense gets caught after crossing the river with the help of a *coyote* (cf. 146-147). The group is spotted by a border patrol helicopter and hauled "back to the line" by a Border Patrol truck (147). The second time he takes his younger brother Melchor with him and because they are almost out of money, they just pay a man to ferry them across the water, instead of hiring a coyote (cf. 147). They make it safely across, but after days of wandering through the desert, they hear the familiar sound of a helicopter and soon the Border Patrol jeep arrives and picks them up (cf. 148). Back home in Cherán, Wense admits that "he'd considered giving himself up to the *migra* even before the bust, more for his brother's sake than his own. The boy was severely dehydrated [...]. [...] Real tragedy might have occurred had the BP not picked them up" (148). While Wense tells the story, "casting himself as the hero", Rosa's look veers between amusement and annoyance (148). For Wense this story is just another migrant tale, but Rosa looks at these stories differently since her family's loss. Only on his third attempt, does Wense makes it to his final destination in the United States, St. Louis, where he and Rosa had lived before (cf. 169).

While getting caught by *la migra* when trying to cross the border is frustrating for undocumented migrants, Martínez also presents it in *Crossing Over* as a way of gathering information and improving methods of crossing so that the next groups of undocumented immigrants can profit from it (cf. 109).

[F]or every high-tech weapon the *migra* employ [...] there's a guerilla-like response from the wetbacks and coyotes. Take the laser traps, for example, grids of beam that, when breached, immediately alert the *migra* to movement. One wetback crew [...] was equipped with spray cans. You sprayed ahead of you an area already known to be a problem from previous busts. The beams glittered in the mist, and you made your way around the grid. The coyotes claim that the Border Patrol constantly relocates its tracking equipment. But each group of migrants that gets caught actually helps new migrants cross. Each bust is valuable intelligence gathered. (109)

Except in *Crossing Over*, the *coyote* business is presented as consisting of men only, or at least there is no mention of any female *coyotes*. In *Crossing Over*, Martínez comes across two female *coyotes*. The first encounter happens on his way to Cherán, at the Zamora bus station *la central* (cf. 25-27).

And then I see her. She makes her way through the bustle like a Mafia don. A short, tough Indian woman with the trademark blue-black rebozo of the Purépecha Indians. Age has begun to crease her face, but her hair is dark black still and she's got the don't-fuck-with-me look of our adolescent Wild One. She is followed by about fifteen dirt-poor Indians [...]. She's all business. Another journey north. She barrels through a crowd of customers at one of the counters, makes a quick transaction. [...] The *pollos* get their own chartered bus. The coyote readjusts her rebozo before she walks up the steps, wrapping it over her head and across the shoulder. She is the last one to board. (27)

In Cherán, Martínez encounters the town's most successful *coyote* team consisting of El Músico and his mother La Licuadora (cf. 89). La Licuadora means 'The Blender' in Spanish and she received this name "because, it is said, she will dice you up like a fruit in a blender if you cross her" (89). The depiction of the *coyote* business with regard to the existence of female *coyotes* in *Crossing Over* differs from the other three works. The Purépechan woman at Zamora's bus station and La Licuadora from Cherán's most successful *coyote* team are represented as strong and powerful women whom one should not provoke.

In *Diary of an Undocumented Immigrant*, there is one reference to a possible *coyote* tradition that is passed down from father to son (cf. 37).¹⁶ But there is also a woman mentioned who was among the first women from Pérez' home village who left her home and "by twists of fate, has wound up living in Tijuana; it is she upon whom the duty falls of helping townsmen who arrive at the border to find *coyotes* [...]" (164).

¹⁶ Activist and biculturalist Santiago Maldonado, in an interview on undocumented migrants in Texas, states that by becoming a *coyote*, he followed in his grandfather's footsteps. (c.f. Martínez 1994: 168)

6.2 The Depiction of Border Crossings by Female Migrants

6.2.1 *Diary of an Undocumented Immigrant*

Although *Diary of an Undocumented Immigrant* represents migration from Mexico to the United States as being dominated by men who leave their families behind to make money in *el norte*, the book does acknowledge the fact that women are migrating too, with several instances of women crossing the border as undocumented immigrants being portrayed. When Pérez is waiting at the Mexican side of the Rio Grande for his time to cross the border, he witnesses the arrival of more migrants and “among them two women, one of them with a two-year-old child in her arms” (27). At another point, he meets three migrant women from El Salvador, a housewife, a workingwoman and a college student (cf. 39). The Salvadoran college student is eighteen-years-old and has left her hometown San Salvador with a *coyote* who has smuggled them through Mexico to the U.S. border.

At the end of each day the *coyote* assigned hotel rooms to members of the group, and... always gave the college girl a separate room, he said, for security reasons. Before the journey was over, he told her that if she didn't cooperate, he'd abandon her on the road, and then he raped her. (41)

In *Enrique's Journey* sexual abuse of women during their trip from their hometowns to the U.S.-Mexican border is depicted several times.¹⁷ Especially women from Central America who have to cross the whole of Mexico as undocumented immigrants before even reaching the U.S.-Mexican border are likely to be raped on their way (cf. 77-78, 97-98, xxi).¹⁸

¹⁷ In her collection of migrants' stories, Alicia Alarcón also represents an instance of rape of three Colombian sisters by their *coyotes* (2004: 59-60). For secondary literature on female migrant's experiences of rape and sexual assault see for instance Menjívar 1999: 606-607; González-López 2007: 224-246. For literature on the militarization of the border, that enforces violence against migrants, both men and women see for instance Fregoso 2003: xv; Falcón 20007; Segura and Zavella 2007: 12, 18 and the reference section.

¹⁸ Also on the other side of the border, immigrant women are subjected to sexual violence as depicted in “We Call Them Greasers” in Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1987), where an indigenous woman is first raped and then murdered by a white man, while her husband is tied to a tree and afterwards murdered as well (156-157). In Rosaura Sánchez' short story “Barrio Chronicle” an undocumented migrant woman from Mexico is raped and brutally beaten up by her sister's husband, but is threatened not to press charges (2000: 226-236).

6.2.2 *Crossing Over*

The female characters in *Crossing Over* and *Enrique's Journey* pay a *coyote* to get them to the United States. Rosa hires a local *coyote* called "Mr. Charlie", who offers a "door-to-door" service for \$1,000 and will bring not only herself but also her two-year-old daughter Yeni to the United States so that they can reunite with her husband Wense in St. Louis (170). The bus trip to the Mexican city of Nogales in Sonora that borders the U.S. city of Nogales, Arizona takes thirty-eight hours and on board there are two men, eighteen women, and five children from Cherán (cf. 179). The actual crossing proves to be very distressing. During the first four attempts, the whole group gets caught by *la migra* and is deported back to Nogales, Sonora (cf. 180-183). After the fourth unsuccessful attempt, the men in the group start to complain about the babies' crying, which they fear will give away their location. The *coyotes* decide to let the men cross slightly ahead of the women and their children and indeed this time the men are able to escape *la migra* while the women and the children are deported again (cf. 183).

Only on their seventh attempt do Rosa and the rest of the women make it across the border and to a so-called safe house in Phoenix (cf. 184-185). Mr. Charlie calls Wense and threatens to leave Rosa and Yeni there if Wense does not pay another five hundred dollars in advance (cf. 187). Only with the help of relatives and friends is Wense able to generate the money within a day and wires it to Phoenix (cf. 187). Two days later Mr. Charlie calls again, announces Rosa's and Yeni's safe arrival in Illinois and asks again for money, which Wense does not have (cf. 187). Wense does not worry too much since he knows the *coyote* and is convinced that once he is there to pick Rosa up, he will not refuse to let her go. The problem is that Wense does not know where exactly Mr. Charlie keeps the migrants. However, relatives of a friend who happen to live in the same area give him directions and finally the whole family is reunited (cf. 189-191).

6.2.3 *Enrique's Journey*

Lourdes's border crossing in *Enrique's Journey* is not depicted in much detail (cf. 7-8). She hires a *coyote* and after crossing Mexico on different buses she reaches the border town of Tijuana. From there she crosses the border to San Diego, unnoticed at night through a rat-infested sewage tunnel and moves on to Los Angeles. The *coyote*, whom she has paid in advance to take her to Miami, abandons her at the Greyhound bus terminal in L.A., and Lourdes finds herself alone, and without any food and money in the country she has dreamed of for so long.

6.2.4 *Across a Hundred Mountains*

Juana, the main character in Reyna Grande's *Across a Hundred Mountains*, makes her way to Tijuana on her own. There she is falsely accused of stealing a man's wallet and thrown into jail after having to go through a body search by the judiciales who also touch "her most intimate places" (169). In the cell she gets to know the eighteen-year-old prostitute Adelina and after their release, Adelina takes Juana, who does not have any money or a place to stay or work, under her wing (cf. 173-174). Adelina was born in *el otro lado*, but when she was fifteen she fell in love with Gerardo, a much older man, whom her parents disapproved of, so they ran away to Tijuana, where Gerardo introduced her to prostitution because he did not find work and they were out of money (cf. 175-177). In turn Gerardo only sees her to collect his cut and regularly beats her black and blue. Somehow Adelina is convinced he will eventually change. Besides she cannot go back to her family because she is ashamed of having lived and worked as a prostitute (cf. 175). Juana tells Adelina that she wants to talk to the *coyotes*, many of whom are customers of Adelina, about whether they have met her father, after he left home (cf. 179).

"It's going to be hard to get them to talk, Juana," she said. Juana thought about Amá, about the things she had done with Don Elías, the things people used to say about her, the sin that weighed so heavily on her mother's back. Her mother had done what needed to be done. Juana would have to do the same. (179)

After Juana is raped and beaten by Gerardo in the room where she is living with Adelina, she convinces Adelina to come with her to the United States (cf. 201-204). Since Juana, in contrast to Adelina, does not have any documents, she has to cross the border with the help of a *coyote*. She plans to call Adelina once she has made it across the border safely to meet her on the other side (cf. 206). In Juana's group that plans to cross the border illegally there is only one other female migrant; the rest are all men (cf. 204). The other woman is called Lourdes and she tells Juana that she lives with her children in the United States but that she was deported and now needs to get back to her children (cf. 208-209). Since the two women and especially Lourdes are slower than the rest of the group, the *coyote* threatens to leave them behind. From then on the two women stick together and Juana once runs back to pick up Lourdes so that they will not get caught by the border patrol helicopter (cf. 212). In the end the whole group is caught by *la migra* and sent back to Tijuana (cf. 219).

When Juana gets back to the house where she shares a room with Adelina, she hears that Gerardo killed Adelina when she told him that she was going to leave him (cf. 223). Juana feels that a part of herself dies as well. Since she can no longer stay there, she does not hesitate to take Adelina's birth certificate and make her way to the border, while practicing how to best answer the immigration officials' questions (cf. 223-224).

In *Diary of an Undocumented Immigrant* and *Enrique's Journey*, the journey of female migrants from their hometowns to the border as well as the actual illegal crossing of the border itself are represented as being especially dangerous in regard to sexual violence, enacted by *coyotes* as well as Mexican officials. Juana, who leaves her Mexican hometown because of her father's disappearance and her mother's resulting sexual abuse, consciously decides to endure the same tortures her mother has in order to find out where her father is. With the help of Adelina, she learns English and when Adelina dies, she uses her birth certificate to cross the border to the United States. On her first attempt to cross the border illegally she bonds with the only other woman in the group and they help each other as much as they can in order to make it across safely. Apart

from Juana who gets help from Adelina and in turn helps Lourdes, social migrant networks do not seem to play an important role in the representation of border crossings in the four works. While all female characters cross with the help of a male *coyote*, they only receive help from others in the form of financial aid, but for the rest are on their own. Rosa is the only character that receives help from her husbands' network, when her *coyote* threatens to leave her behind in a safe house. In the next chapter I will analyze how the role of social migrant networks once the characters are in the United States is depicted in the four works.

7. On the Other Side/*El Otro Lado*

7.1 Men's Social Migrant Networks in *Diary of an Undocumented Immigrant*

Diary of an Undocumented Immigrant is full of references to the existence of men's social migrant networks, especially in the parts of the book that depict Pérez' life in the United States. When he first arrives in Houston, a friend lends him money to rent an apartment in a Latino neighborhood, whose owner is Mexican as well, but has become a legal resident many years before (cf. 53). It is not as easy to find work as he had thought, but Pérez keeps his spirit alive by thinking of his father's *bracero* stories, which almost always had a happy ending, even if there were bad times in between (cf. 69). A little later, Pérez meets another Mexican American, who came to the United States during the *bracero* years and with the help of his employer became a legal resident and who offers him a job (cf. 84). Pérez also reflects on the fact that undocumented immigrants are able to recognize each other and so can the police (cf. 88, 113).

It only takes an instant for me to recognize the others, and they also recognize me. It's as easy as if each of us were wearing a sign saying "Wetback." Maybe it is because we're from the country and have a walking style that comes from being used to encountering rises and dips in our path. (88)

I'm sure that they know I'm a wetback, because people see that immediately, as if they were watching through memory eyeglasses, seeing us crossing the Rio Grande; the drops of water never dry on us. (113)

When he moves on to San Antonio, he again has a Mexican landlady, who recalls for him the Day of the Dead festivities in her native Mexican town of Querétaro, from where she and her husband had migrated forty years earlier (cf. 110). Her husband had first come to Texas as a *bracero* and also became a legal resident with the help of his boss, which allowed him to come back to Querétaro to bring his wife to the United States as well.

When Pérez' parents send him the address of his uncle Vicente, who lives in California, Pérez calls him and learns that his uncle has a big house there and would be happy to have him (cf. 149).

My uncle and three other townsmen live in a garage apartment [...] Although my arrival brings the number of us living in the apartment to five, there is

sufficient space. Everybody from the village lives in the same way. We rent big apartments so that four to ten people can live in them, and as to save money on rent and be able to save money for our returns. It is also so that we can be in a position to help other arriving townsmen. (153).

Uncle Vicente is forty-three years old and has worked in *el norte* for fifteen years, only returning to Mexico to see his wife and four children (cf. 153, 165). Now he works in a Toyota agency where he earns a good salary (cf. 153) and is therefore able to help his nephew and other relatives and friends from back home. He places Pérez at a car wash where almost only undocumented immigrants work.

Pérez refers to this social migrant network established by men as “The International Grapevine” (164-166).

In Los Angeles it's not hard to stay in touch with other townsmen, since almost everybody knows where everybody else lives and works. I calculate there are about four hundred of us in different locales in California [...]. [...] Thanks to the free communication between townsmen, we always know who has recently come to California from home and where the newcomers are staying. When a man arrives, for a few weeks he greets with beer and food a steady stream of visitors, who ask about affairs at home.

There are numerous instances where friends come to aid Pérez, or the other way round, depicted in *Diary of an Undocumented Immigrant*. When Rubén and Benjamín, who are also staying at his uncle's place, are deported, they collect money to pay a smuggler to bring them back (cf. 172). On his return to Los Angeles, Pérez finds his uncle's home already too full, but he can stay with another villager and his wife who then leave him their apartment when they leave to visit Mexico (cf. 206). When Pérez finally decides to return to Mexico, he brings a townsman to take on his current job (cf. 233).

Female migrants in *Diary of an Undocumented Immigrant* are frequently represented as wives who have followed their husbands to the United States or as young single women who work as maids in the United States. In contrast to Pérez and his male friends – mostly also undocumented immigrants from Mexico – these women are not depicted in greater detail, except for one thirty-five-year-old undocumented woman from the state of Michoacán, whom he meets in a café, where she works and who seems to interest him (cf. 133). There is also another woman working in the café

who plans on marrying a United States citizen in order to become a legal resident herself (cf. 133).

7.2 Female Migrants' Empowerment in *Crossing Over*¹⁹

“En el norte la mujer manda”

(In the North, women give the orders)

(Popular Mexican saying quoted in Hirsch 2007: 438)

In contrast to *Diary of an Undocumented Immigrant*, the focus in *Crossing Over* is no longer exclusively on undocumented male migrants and their social migrant networks – with female migrants only briefly being mentioned –, but the focus shifts to the representation of a young couple, Rosa and Wense, and their little daughter²⁰. In *Crossing Over*, female migrants in the United States are also represented as experiencing more gender equality than back home in Mexico²¹. María, an immigrant from Mexico, for instance, states that she “feels she’s much freer here than she is back home” (243). The advantages of migrating to the United States are also represented in a more general way:

In the “liberal” north, women don’t have to wear rebozos, no one cares much if you shack up with your lover without getting married first, and any night of the week teenagers stay out past midnight without facing a severe beating with a belt from Papá. In the north, Mexican women can drive cars, and their husbands might even help wash the dishes and tend to the children. In the north, workers take retirement, a concept that does not exist in Mexico. (45)

Rosa grows more independent from her husband Wense as well once they are in the United States (cf. 280). Together they build a home in St. Louis and while it is not clear whether their plan to bring the rest of Wense’s family to the United States will become reality, Rosa indeed succeeds in

¹⁹ For secondary literature on the issue of gender roles in migrant families from Mexico and Central America see for instance Repack (1997), Fernández-Kelly and Garcia (1997), Coltrane and Valdez (1997), Hirsch (2007) and Segura (2007).

²⁰ The conflicts that arise between children who grow up in the United States and their parents is a central theme in Mexican ballads on immigration, as for instance in the *corrido* “La Jaula de Oro” (“Golden Cage”) written by Enrique Franco (1995) and performed by Los Tigres del Norte.

²¹ A *corrido* or Mexican ballad entitled “Modern-Day Girls” and written as early as 1924, on the other hand, already ridiculed Mexican women’s changing behaviour by saying that they “do not think about housework” but “are always on the street/Cruising up and down” (Herrera-Sobek 1993, reprinted in Gjerde, Jon (1998: 249-259).

carrying out the first step of her plan by bringing her mother María Elena to live with them in the United States (cf. 327-328).

By focusing on the two female *coyotes* – the elderly Purépechan woman at the Zamora bus station and La Licuadora, one member of Cherán's most successful *coyote* team – Martínez portrays two strong and powerful women – besides Rosa and her mother María Elena - on the Mexican side of the border. On the United States side of the border, he depicts two other Mexican women who have migrated to the United States and who do not fulfill the stereotype of passive appendages to their husbands. La Lupe de Guerrero followed her sister – who was the first one in her family to migrate to this area - to Watsonville, near Santa Cruz, California, where she now wants to build a *hacienda* for women (cf. 309-311). Reyna Guzmán, who has been divorced three times since she came to the United States, which would never have been possible in Mexico, on the other hand, organizes a strike to fight for migrant's rights (cf. 316-19).²²

7.3. The Establishment of Women's Social Networks in *Enrique's Journey*

While Lourdes's crossing of the border is not depicted in much detail in *Enrique's Journey*, her life on the other side of the border is represented in greater detail. After her *coyote*, whom she has paid to bring her to Miami, abandons her in downtown Los Angeles, Lourdes begs for work and gets a temporary job packing tomatoes that pays very little. Her situation improves when a friend of Lourdes's brother helps her to get a fake social security card and a job (cf. 8). She starts working as a live-in nanny but after seven months she has to quit because she cannot bear to take care of somebody else's children while she misses her own so much (cf. 9). The life she leads in *el norte* is not at all like the television images she saw back in Mexico (cf. 13). She has to sleep on the floor before she moves in with her new boyfriend Santos, who is an alcoholic and who is the father of

²² For an account of three (undocumented) migrant women's fight for better working conditions in L.A.'s swethop industry see the excellent Emmy Award winning documentary *Made in L.A. - Hecho en Los Angeles*.

her third child Diana (cf. 13-15). After the birth of Diana, she loses everything including her child's father and has to take on a job as a *fichera* (cf. 15). "For nine months, she spends night after night patiently listening to drunken men talking about their problems, how they miss their wives and children left behind in Mexico" until a friend helps her finding another job (15). Later she follows a female friend to North Carolina (cf. 27) where she settles down with her daughter Diana, her new boyfriend and is later on joined by her son Enrique, his girlfriend María Isabel and her sister Mirian, whom she helps to find work in the U.S. (cf. 220).

The representation of Juana's life in the United States in Reyna Grande's *Across a Hundred Mountains* differs quite fundamentally from those of the women and men depicted in the other three works since Juana takes on her friend Adelina's name and therefore does not live the life of an undocumented immigrant but is able to attend school and become a social worker.

While Pérez' representation of his life as an undocumented immigrant in the United States illustrates the importance of men's social migrant networks, Martínez in *Crossing Over* presents women, who might initially have come to follow a partner like Rosa, but who do play an active role in the migration process and who profit from the more "liberal" life in the United States which in turn empowers them to help other women. Lourdes's establishment of a life in the United States in *Enrique's Journey* and her sister Mirian's successive migration, whom she helps finding a place to stay and work, on the other hand, indicates the establishment of women's own social networks. Juana's fate, once she takes possession of Adelina's United States birth certificate, then illustrates the difference this document, which gives proof of the owner's citizenship, makes for migrants from Mexico or Central America.²³

²³ Esmeralda Santiago's (1996) representation of her main character América, a Puerto Rican woman who escapes her violent partner to work as a live-in nanny in the United States, in contrast to the other undocumented nannies from Mexico and Central America, whom she meets at the playground, also shows the difference that a birth certificate makes.

8. Conclusion

In his autobiographical novel *Diary of an Undocumented Immigrant* (1991), Ramón Pérez depicts a male-defined tradition of migration from Mexico to the United States. His father had worked in *el norte* during the *bracero* years and together with many other village men who had done the same built a network that allowed the following generations, after the termination of the *bracero* program, to come to the U.S. as undocumented workers.

Hondagneu-Sotelo suggests that young single men like Pérez undergo a patriarchal rite of passage by migrating in search of adventures rather than because out of an economic necessity (1994: 191). While women do not play a prominent role in Pérez' depiction of undocumented immigrant life, they are not completely absent from the scene which mirrors the fact that women have always been migrants as well.

As the title already indicates, Rubén Martínez' *Crossing Over: A Mexican Family on the Migrant Trail*, no longer focuses on the adventures of one single male migrant, but depicts a whole extended Mexican family clan at which center are Rosa, her husband Wense and their little daughter Yeni. Typically Wense is the first one to migrate, but Rosa does not settle for staying behind, constantly worrying about the safety of her husband.

While Wense returns to St. Louis on his own, Rosa makes plans on how to survive in Mexico as a single mother in case Wense dies on the way to *el otro lado* or abandons her and their daughter once he is there. Rosa's considerations suggest that single mothers are no longer out of the ordinary, even in a strict Catholic country like Mexico. Later Rosa becomes the first female member of the Chávez clan who is "allowed" to follow her husband to the United States. All of Rosa's brothers have been migrating for years, and three of them died in a tragic border accident.

It can be argued that by migrating to the U.S., Rosa follows the migration tradition set by her brothers and since her father died due to alcoholism, there is no longer patriarchal authority that could hold her back. Her

relationship with Wense is for the most part based on equality, so in contrast to Rosa's brothers, Wense concedes to his wife's wish to migrate. By migrating to the United States Rosa lays the foundation for a possible successive migration of her mother and the widows of her brothers and their children.

The third novel under consideration, *Across a Hundred Mountains* (2006) by Reyna Grande, reveals the consequences the tradition of men migrating to the United States can cause. As a result of her father leaving the family and her mother's following sexual abuse, Juana decides to go to the U.S. to search for her father. As illustrated in my analysis, I have argued that Juana's migration is a consequence of the tradition of men migrating to the United States. While also Rosa's migration is a result of the migration of the male members of her family, Juana sets out on her own and does not use men's social migrant networks.

The last novel under consideration, Sonia Nazario's *Enrique's Journey: The Story of a Boy's Dangerous Odyssey to Reunite with his Mother* (2006) then focuses on a new feminized tradition of migration. I argue that like Rosa in *Crossing Over*, who clears the way for her sisters in law's migration, the single mother Lourdes, who is later on followed by her sister Mirian, likewise a single mother, in *Enrique's Journey* represents the establishment of a new tradition of migration. In this new tradition women do not any longer just follow men to the other side, but take an active part in the decision-making process, the actual crossing and with the help of women's social migrant networks find their way on the other side of the border.

Thus as more and more women from Mexico and Central America migrate to the United States, women's social migrant networks expand, providing vital information as well as financial resources to other prospective migrant women. That this development of a feminization of migration is, just like the existing tradition of men migrating to the United States, not without consequences for the children of those migrating, can be seen in the fate of Lourdes's son Enrique, who sets out on a dangerous journey to be with

his mother. Lourdes's daughter Belky, on the other hand, is able to build a home and a life for herself and her family in Honduras. So while Belky is breaking the tradition of women in her family to leave their children in order to migrate, she is only able to do so relying on her mother's support.

Hence, if we look at the representation of undocumented migration at the U.S. – Mexican border in recent Latino/a literature, it becomes evident that the depiction of the experience of migration has changed. It developed from an absence of descriptions of female migrants to the depiction of female migrants as “the woman left behind”, “*la mujer abandonada*/the abandoned woman” or the appendage of their migrating husbands to a preponderance of depictions of single female migrants. This development in the literary representation of undocumented migration reflects what border studies scholars and sociologists have termed “the feminization of migration”.

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La frontera infinita. Screenplay by Juan Manuel Sapulveda. Dir. Juan Manuel Sapulveda. 2007.

Mi vida dentro. Screenplay by Lucía Gajá. Dir. Lucía Gajá. 2007.

Sneaker Stories. Screenplay by Katharina Weingartner. Dir. Katharina Weingartner. 2008.

The Visitor. Screenplay by Tom McCarthy. Dir. Tom McCarthy. Anchor Bay, 2008.

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11. German Abstract

Die vorliegende Diplomarbeit befasst sich mit dem aktuellen Phänomen der Feminisierung internationaler Migration im Kontext der unerlaubten Migration an der U.S.-Mexikanischen Grenze, insbesondere mit der Darstellung der Entwicklung einer feminisierten Tradition unerlaubter Migration aus Mexiko und Zentralamerika in die Vereinigten Staaten in vier ausgewählten Werken der Latino/a Literatur: *Diary of an Undocumented Immigrant* (1991) von Ramón "Tianguis" Pérez, *Crossing Over: A Mexican Family on the Migrant Trail* (2001) von Rubén Martínez, *Across a Hundred Mountains* (2006) von Reyna Grande und *Enrique's Journey: The Story of a Boy's Dangerous Odyssey to Reunite with his Mother* (2006) von Sonia Nazario.

Gemeinsam ist diesen Werken die Beschäftigung mit Erfahrungen illegal anwesender MigrantInnen bei dem Überqueren der Mexikanisch-US Amerikanischen Grenze sowie den Problemen, welchen sie sich auf der US Amerikanischen Seite der Grenze stellen müssen. Der für diese Diplomarbeit wichtigste Bereich ist jedoch die Darstellung des Entscheidungsfindungsprozess, den die Charaktere dieser Texte durchlaufen, bevor sie sich dazu entschließen, die Gefahren einer illegalen Grenzüberquerung auf sich zu nehmen.

Vor der literarischen Analyse dieser Werke steht ein theoretischer Teil, der die methodischen Grundlagen für diese Analyse liefert. Nach einem sehr kurzen, prägnanten Überblick über die Geschichte der U.S.-Mexikanischen Grenzgebiete wird auf den für die Analyse zentralen Begriff der „Feminisierung von Migration“ sowie die Beziehungen zwischen Migration und Genderaspekten eingegangen. Die Analyse der vier ausgewählten Werke konzentriert sich besonders auf das Vorhandensein sozialer Netzwerke von MigrantInnen und basiert auf der These, dass die Entwicklung einer feminisierten Tradition von Migration aus Mexiko und Zentralamerika in die Vereinigten Staaten, die Entwicklung frauenspezifischer sozialer Netzwerke bedingt und sich dies auch in den literarischen Werken zeigt.

Der Hauptteil der Analyse beschäftigt sich mit der Darstellung des Entscheidungsfindungsprozesses der mexikanischen und zentralamerikanischen Migrantinnen und Migrantinnen in den vier ausgewählten Werken. Das Hauptaugenmerk wird dabei auf der Analyse der Faktoren, die diese Entscheidung beeinflussen, liegen, sowie der Rolle sozialer Netzwerke im Entscheidungsfindungsprozess. Zwei weitere zentrale Themen sind das Ansteigen der Zahl alleinerziehender Mütter in Mexiko und Zentralamerika und das Phänomen der transnationalen Mutterschaft, als soziale Konsequenz von Frauenmigration. Die beiden kleineren Teile der Analyse beschäftigen sich mit dem illegalen Überqueren der Grenze und dem Ankommen in den Vereinigten Staaten, und bilden eine Art Ausblick auf das Geschehen, nachdem die Entscheidung zur unerlaubten Migration getroffen worden ist.

Ramón Pérez stellt in seiner Autobiographie *Diary of an Undocumented Immigrant* eine männlich definierte Migrationstradition aus Mexiko in die

Vereinigten Staaten dar. Diese Tradition hat ihre Wurzeln im sogenannten *Bracero* Programm, ein Gastarbeiterprogramm für mexikanische Arbeiter, das während des zweiten Weltkrieges ins Leben gerufen wurde. Die Zielgruppe dieses Programms waren ausschließlich Männer, die dadurch soziale Netzwerke zwischen Mexiko und den USA aufbauen konnten. Nach Beendigung des Programms konnten mexikanische Arbeiter mit Hilfe dieser Netzwerke weiterhin als illegale Arbeiter in die USA emigrieren. Hondagneu-Sotelo zufolge stellen die Migrationsbewegungen junger, alleinstehender Männer wie Pérez eher einen Initiationsritus als eine ökonomische Notwendigkeit dar.

In seinem Werk *Crossing Over: A Mexican Family on the Migrant Trail*, beschreibt Rubén Martínez hingegen einen mexikanischen Familienclan in dessen Zentrum Rosa, ihr Mann Wense und ihre gemeinsame Tochter Yeni stehen. Der Tradition entsprechend emigriert zuerst Wense und lässt dabei seine Frau und seine Tochter in Mexiko zurück. Während Wense in den USA ist, überlegt sich Rosa, wie sie als alleinerziehende Mutter überleben könnte, was bereits darauf hindeutet, dass eine solche Situation keine Ausnahme mehr ist in Mexiko. Allerdings beugt sich Rosa nicht der Tradition, sondern entschließt sich, gemeinsam mit ihrer Tochter ihrem Mann in die Vereinigten Staaten zu folgen und stellt damit die erste Frau ihres Clans dar, die ihrem Mann nachfolgt. Zugleich legt sie den Grundstein für eine mögliche Migration ihrer Mutter sowie ihrer verwitweten Schwägerinnen.

Der Roman *Across a Hundred Mountains* deckt die schrecklichen sozialen Konsequenzen von Männermigration auf. Mexikanische Frauen, deren Männer sich entschließen in die USA zu gehen, um Geld für die Familie zu verdienen, dann aber nichts mehr von sich hören lassen, werden als verlassene Frauen stigmatisiert und der im Buch beschriebene Fall von Juanas Mutter zeigt, wie leicht eine solche Frau Opfer sexueller Ausbeutung werden kann. Juanas eigene Migration kann als Konsequenz einer männerdefinierten Migrationstradition gedeutet werden. Im Gegensatz zu Rosa folgt Juana jedoch nicht einem Ehemann oder Partner, sondern macht sich alleine auf den Weg, ohne die bestehenden Migrationsnetzwerke von Männern zu benützen.

Als letztes Werk widmet sich *Enrique's Journey* einer neuen feminisierten Tradition von Migration. Die Darstellung der Migration der beiden alleinerziehenden Mütter Lourdes und Mirian zeigt, dass Frauen nicht mehr nur Männern in die Vereinigten Staaten nachfolgen, sondern eine aktive Rolle übernehmen und mit Hilfe frauenspezifischer Netzwerke ihren Weg auf der anderen Seite der Grenze finden. Die Analyse der vier ausgewählten Werke aus dem Bereich der Latino/a Literatur zeigt, dass Frauen nicht die bestehenden Netzwerke von Männern benützen, sondern ihre eigenen sozialen Netzwerke aufbauen, und dass dies sowohl Folge als auch Teil einer feminisierten Tradition von Migration sind.

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Sprachen	Englisch, C1 Französisch, B2 Estnisch, A1 Spanisch, A1
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