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Lidia da Cruz Cordeiro Moreira

Of Dogs and Men: strategies of control and resistance in the fiction of Helena María Viramontes

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Dissertação apresentada, como requisito parcial para obtenção do título de Mestre, ao Programa de Pós-Graduação em Letras, da Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro. Área de Concentração: Literaturas de Língua Inglesa.

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To Douglas, my everything.

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The only things they cherished, their only private property, were the stories they continued to create and recreate in a world which only gave them one to tell.

Helena María Viramontes

RESUMO

MOREIRA, Lidia da Cruz Cordeiro Moreira. *Of Dogs and Men:* strategies of control and resistance in the fiction of Helena María Viramontes. 2009. 90f. Dissertação (Mestrado em Literaturas de Língua Inglesa) – Instituto de Letras, Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro, Rio de Janeiro, 2009.

O objetivo desta dissertação é analisar a ficção da escritora Chicana contemporânea Helena María Viramontes, focalizando principalmente seu romance *Their Dogs Came With Them*, e secundariamente seus contos "Neighbors" e "The Cariboo Café". Este trabalho concentra-se nas relações entre espaço e poder nos Estados Unidos contemporâneos e como essas relações são refletidas na ficção de Viramontes, tendo como base a investigação da herança Puritana dos Norte Americanos e a discussão de Michel Foucault acerca da sociedade disciplinar. Este trabalho também se concentra no uso que Viramontes faz da múltipla focalização como meio para alcançar um sentimento de fragmentação, a qual reflete a fragmentação nas vidas de seus personagens. Para isso, compara seu uso da focalização à linguagem usada em filmes como "Amores Brutos".

Palavras-chave: Espaço. Poder. Sociedade disciplinar. Focalização. Fragmentação.

ABSTRACT

The aim of this dissertation is to analyze the fiction of contemporary Chicana writer Helena María Viramontes, focusing primarily on her novel *Their Dogs Came With Them*, and secondarily on her short stories "Neighbors" and "The Cariboo Café." This work concentrates on the relations between space and power in the contemporary United States and how these relations are reflected in Viramontes's fiction, in view of America's Puritan heritage and Michel Foucault's discussion of the disciplinary society. It also concentrates on Viramontes's use of multiple focalization as a means to achieve a sense of fragmentation which reflects the fragmentation in the lives of her characters. It compares her use of focalization to the language used in films such as "Amores Perros."

Keywords: Space. Power. Disciplinary society. Focalization. Fragmentation.

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INTRODUCTION

In 2004, the film "A Day Without a Mexican," directed by Mexican filmmaker Sergio Arau, was released in the US. The movie satirically pictured what California would be like if one day all people of Latin-American descent suddenly disappeared. While the rest of the population tried to find an explanation for the phenomenon, garbage started piling up in the streets and rich housewives had to do their own housework. However far-fetched the plot seems, the picture raised awareness to the importance of those fourteen million people – around 32% of the Californian population, according to the 2000 census – to the economy of California and to the impossibility of life without them. Also according to the 2000 census, in the US as a whole, people of Latin-American origin constitute 12.5% of the total North-American population, being now the largest minority in the country (U.S. CENSUS…, 2009).

Moreover, the movie title called attention to how the origin of people of Latin-American descent is taken for granted by some North-Americans of other origins, especially Anglos, who refer to all as simply "Mexicans." Although Mexicans and their descendants account for around two-thirds of all Latin-Americans living in the US today, "there are forty countries south of the border," which the film reminds – or teaches – viewers in one of the informative statements shown in white text on the screen throughout the movie, intentionally named "A Day without a Mexican" and not "without a Latino" or "Hispanic" or "Chicano."

People of Latin-American descent living in the US can be identified by different terms, the most important being "Hispanic" and "Latino/a" and, in the case of individuals of Mexican descent, "Mexican-American" and "Chicano/a." Each of these has a different meaning, though at first they might be considered synonymous.

"Hispanic," an umbrella term meaning "Spanish," refers to people from Spain or any other Spanish-speaking nation, therefore encompassing people from several different origins as part of the same identity. It is a highly problematic term, especially for two reasons. Firstly, it privileges one part of a racially and culturally mixed heritage, not coincidentally that of the Spanish colonizer, and includes in it even those individuals who are not of Spanish descent at all. Secondly, the origin of the North-American usage of the term resides in intrusion in the labeling process carried out by the national government in the early 1970s in an attempt to homogenize different Latino groups. All in all, as Paula Moya affirms in her essay "Postmodernism, realism and the politics of identity: Cherríe Moraga and Chicana feminism," "[a]s it is currently deployed, the term is so general as to be virtually useless as a descriptive or analytical tool," since it

> is generally used to refer to a person of Spanish, Mexican, Puerto Rican, Dominican, Cuban, Chilean, Peruvian, etc. heritage who may or may not have a Spanish surname, who may or may not speak Spanish, who can be of any racial extraction, and who resides in the U. S. (MOYA, 1997, p. 139).

An alternative to the use of "Hispanic" is the term "Latino/a" which, although still broad and inexact, at least does not have a bureaucratic background as "Hispanic" or an association with the heritage of the colonizer. It may be contradictory, however, to use the Spanish word "Latino/a" to resist "Hispanic." As Alicia Arrizón and Lillian Manzor point out in the Introduction to *Latinas on Stage*, "[t]his contradiction is a result of our use of the ex-master's tools, which have now become our own. Most importantly, we are using them now to try to dismantle the 'house' of a new master." (ARRIZÓN; MANZOR, 2000, p. 12).

Individuals of Mexican descent can still choose from at least two other terms: "Mexican-American" or "Chicano/a." Though both terms refer to people of Mexican heritage born and/or raised in the US, the term "Chicano/a" has a political implication. Originally, the word appeared as a derogatory name applied to low class Mexican-Americans not only by the Anglo dominant culture but also by middle-class Mexican-Americans. Nevertheless, it was consciously re-appropriated during the Chicano Movement in the 1960s, gaining the political connotation it has today. In a way, one may say that all Chicanos/as are Mexican-Americans but not all Mexican-Americans are Chicanos/as.

The problem of identification, in the case of Americans of Mexican descent, is usually a political issue. In general, those who have achieved material success prefer to be called "Hispanic," whereas those who are active in the fight for equality in North-American society identify as "Chicanos." As historian Rodolfo Acuña states in *Occupied America: A History of Chicanos*, "[w]hat the term 'Hispanic' represents is a convenience for middle-class professional 'Hispanics' who want acceptance by the majority society. […] [T]he term is the packaging of Latinos to make them a more attractive commodity." (ACUÑA, 1988, p. x). Chicana critic Gloria Anzaldúa, in turn, explains in *Borderlands/La Frontera* how identifying with this or that term is a political action which shows how Americans of Mexican descent may take responsibility for the affirmation or negation of their identity:

> As a culture, we call ourselves Spanish when referring to ourselves as a linguistic group and when copping out. […] We call ourselves Hispanic or Spanish-American or Latin American or Latin when linking ourselves to other Spanish-speaking peoples of the Western hemisphere and when copping out. We call ourselves Mexican-American to signify we are neither Mexican nor American, but more the noun "American" than the adjective "Mexican" (and when copping out). […] When not copping out, when we know we are more than nothing, we call ourselves Mexican, referring to race and ancestry; *mestizo* when affirming both our

> Indian and Spanish […] ancestry; Chicano when referring to a politically aware people born and/or raised in the U.S. (ANZALDÚA, 1999, p. 84-5).

In this dissertation, I will use "Mexicans" when referring to the people of Mexico or to those recently arrived in the U.S.; "Mexican-Americans" to those born and/or raised in the US prior to the 1960s when "Chicano" gained its present-day political connotation; and "Chicano" with the political meaning described above.

Helena María Viramontes is a Chicana writer and critic, who portrays the realities of Chicanos living in the U.S. – and sometimes of Mexicans living in Mexico – in her work in order to give voice to characters who have been silenced hitherto. *The Moths and Other Stories* is a collection of short stories published by Viramontes in 1985. The eight short stories focus on women characters of all ages, from teenagers Naomi, in "Growing," and the nameless protagonist in the title story, to the elderly Olga Ruiz and Aura Rodríguez, respectively in "Snapshots" and "Neighbors." As a matter of fact, the stories are organized in the collection according to the characters' ages, from the youngest – "The Moths" – to the oldest – "Neighbors." All these women face the challenges of being Chicana women[1] living in the U.S. and having to cope with the multiple oppressions they suffer on a regular basis. However, according to Yarbo-Berajano in her introduction to the collection, they are not idealized versions of these women: "Acutely aware of women's dilemmas, Viramontes creates females who are a contradictory blend of strengths and weaknesses, struggling against lives of unfulfilled potential and restrictions forced upon them because of their sex." (YARBO-BERAJANO, 1985, p. 10). Although the stories are focused on the Chicano family and culture, larger conflicts, both social and economic, are usually in the background, such as illegal immigration to the U.S. in "The Broken Web" and the decadence of the *barrio* in "Neighbors."

In 1995, Viramontes published her first novel, *Under the Feet of Jesus*. Although the protagonist is a teenage girl called Estrella, the novel has three other focalizing characters: her mother, Petra; her stepfather, Perfecto; and a young man called Alejo. All these characters are Mexican-American migrant farm workers working seasonally in the fields of California in extremely poor conditions. The novel is written in a non-linear way, going back and forth from one focalizing character to another, and from one moment in time to another, without

[1] "The Cariboo Café" is the only story which has a female character from another Latin-American country and not from Mexican descent, although other characters in the story, namely the children, Sonya and Macky, and their family, are also Chicanos.

signaling these changes to the reader in a clear way. This narrative fragmentation reflects the fragmentation in the life of marginalized migrant workers such as those depicted in it.

Another interesting point worth mentioning in relation to the novel is that its male characters are crafted in much more complex, less reductionist terms than those in the previously mentioned short stories published in *The Moths*, where male characters were either absent or portrayed almost entirely in a negative way (McCRACKEN, 1999, p. 184). Perfecto is not like the oppressive, violent fathers in *The Moths*. He is a responsible, helpful man who treats Petra's children like his own, although he is torn by a dilemma: taking care of them or going back to Mexico to spend his old days at home. Alejo is a smart, sensitive young man, who has his promising future as a geology student changed when he is accidentally sprayed with pesticide in the fields. He treats Estrella with respect and teaches her things, contributing to her awakening and not to her oppression.

This more complex depiction of male characters is also present in "The Jumping Bean," a story published in 1999 in the volume *California shorts*. It focuses on a young woman's relationship with her father, inspired by Viramontes's own relationship with her father. In the story, the father is in fact the central character and, although his behavior towards his family is still authoritarian and even violent sometimes, he is also able to love. Moreover, his behavior is explained as a product of the racial and class oppression he suffers at his workplace. In both the novel and this short story, Viramontes seems to have made peace with Chicano men, responsible for the gender oppression of Chicanas, as she portrays them as a product of their harsh reality and the oppression they themselves suffer in the North-American culture.

Besides the works mentioned above, Viramontes has also published other loose short stories in different volumes, including "Miss Clairol" and "Tears on My Pillow," in which the protagonist is a little girl nicknamed Champ, who lives with her single working mother and her brother in East L.A. These were supposed to be part of a novel called *Paris Rats in East L.A.*, a project which has been abandoned and not published to this date. Viramontes has also co-edited *Chicana (W)rites: On Word and Film* (1995) and *Chicana Creativity and Criticism* (1996), both with Maria Herrera Sobek. She has received numerous awards, such as the John Dos Passos Prize for Literature, a Sundance Institute Fellowship, and the Luis Leal Award for Distinction in Chicano/Latino Literature. In addition, she is currently Professor of Creative Writing in the Department of English at Cornell University. Her latest novel, published in 2007, is titled *Their Dogs Came With Them*.

In this dissertation, I will analyze two short stories – "Neighbors" and "The Cariboo Cafe" – published in the volume *The Moths*, and the novel *Their Dogs Came With Them.* In order to understand certain issues with which Viramontes deals in her fiction, it is first necessary to briefly explore the history of Chicanos. Chapter one analyses this history of conquest, colonization, annexation and migration, from the Spanish invasion started in early sixteenth century to the current days of illegal immigration to the U.S. In between is the Spanish colonization, which decimated the native peoples of Mexico and gave origin to a *mestizo* race; the struggle for Independence from Spain, which finally came in 1821; the immediate interest of the U.S. in the Mexican territory, leading to war and the annexation of a great part of Mexico's territory; the life of Chicanos as foreigners on that which was one day their land. The historical accounts provided by Chicano historian Rodolfo Acuña and Chicana critic Gloria Anzaldúa will serve as the basis for the discussion of Chicanos' history, which will be complemented by the ideas of U.S historians Eric Foner, George Tindall and David Shi in order to provide a less restricted perspective on the subject. Additionally, the works of such diverse writers, such as Stuart Hall, James Clifford, Octavio Paz, Paula Moya, Chandra Mohanty, María-Antonia Oliver-Rotger, among others, will help in my analyses of historical events.

With this history of conquest and annexation, which has repeatedly robbed Chicanos of their land or transformed them into foreigners in their own land, Chicanos have developed a very particular relationship with the space they occupy. As foreigners in a country which oppresses them – the U.S. –, the relationship between Chicanos and space is permeated by relationships of oppression and control by Anglos. That is why chapter two covers the relationships between space and power in the fiction of Helena María Viramontes, mainly in her portrayal of East Los Angeles in the novel *Their Dogs Came With Them.* The chapter analyses how the first narrative moment of the novel – the early 1960s – is marked by neo-colonial power exercised over Chicanos by the construction of freeways which change the landscape of their neighborhood and the lives of both those who are evicted and those who stay. In order to discuss it, the work of Marshall Berman will be used to help draw a parallel between L.A. and what happened in the Bronx in New York at the same time. In the second moment of the novel – the early 1970s – control assumes the form of disciplinary power, through the actions of the Quarantine Authority set to enforce a rabies quarantine in the region. The work of Michel Foucault offered the basis for the theoretical discussion concerning the disciplinary society.

In order to resist the oppression caused over Chicano by Anglo society, Chicana literature makes use of a series of strategies. The use of focalization in Viramontes's works, for instance, "encourages [the] reader to empathetically identify, in turn, with each of the character-focalizers and to undertake, without intervention or help from an external narrator-focalizer, the hard work of ordering the events and synthesizing the character's disparate perspectives." (MOYA, 2002, p. 191-192). Multiple focalization also contributes to the fragmentation of Viramontes's works, which in turn reflects the fragmentation in her characters' lives. Fragmentation is not used just for stylistic effect. It is indeed an integral part of both Chicanos lives and Viramontes's work. I have thus dedicated chapter three to the analysis of these strategies of resistance – namely, fragmentation and focalization – in the short story "The Cariboo Cafe" and in the novel *Their Dogs Came With Them*. In both works, several stories are at first developed separately but then converge in a tragic ending. The work of Paula Moya will be of great importance for this part of this dissertation. In this chapter, I also discuss the influence of a theory popularly called "six degrees of separation" to popular works of art in cinema, theater, and literature, and the influence of this theory and of film language in Viramontes's narrative strategies.

Those who have had the opportunity to read the fiction of Helena María Viramontes realize the richness and complexity of her work. It is my hope that this dissertation is able to show how Viramontes's fiction aims at changing our consciousness as readers, by foregrounding the multiple oppressions affecting Chicanos living in the U.S., especially in their relation to their space, and how literature may be used as a locus of resistance against the control exercised upon Chicanos.

1 *EL OTRO MÉXICO*: A HISTORY OF CHICANOS

The U.S.-Mexican border es una herida abierta where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds. And before a scab forms it hemorrhages again, the lifeblood of two worlds merging to form a third country – a border culture.

Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera*

1.1 Mexico under Spanish rule: Conquest and Colonization

Being a Chicano/a is being aware of a five-hundred-year long history of conquest, colonization, annexation and transnational migration. This history began as the territory which is now known as Mexico started to be conquered in 1521 by the Spaniards, who annihilated most of the indigenous population and subjugated the remaining few. There were almost thirty million indigenous inhabitants living in Mexico when the Spaniards arrived, but only a little more than a million direct descendents of those had remained by 1605. However, a new race was born from the mixing of Spanish and indigenous blood – the *mestizos*, who were the ancestors of most of today's Mexicans and Chicanos. (ACUÑA, 1988, p. 1).

The first *mestizo* was Martín Cortés, the son of Hernan Cortés with an indigenous girl of supposedly noble origin, known as *Malintzin Tenepal* – or La Malinche, or Doña Marina. Not much is known with certainty about this controversial woman, not even her name. Marina was the Christian name given to her by the Spaniards, as they baptized her. However, her birth name is unknown. Although some historians believe that Marina was chosen for being phonetically similar to her original name, *Malintzin*, others defend that it was chosen randomly and that *Malintzin* was, in fact, a corrupted form of Marina. Either way, it is agreed that Malinche is the way the Spaniards pronounced *Malintzin.* (FITCH, 2009, p. 1).

The difficulty in determining her name is only the first obstacle when trying to trace her history. What is known about her is mostly based on the records by Cortés's companion, Bernal Diaz del Castillo, who wrote *Historia Verdadera de la Conquista de la Nueva España*. However, though the title, *Historia Verdadera*, claims to contain the "truthful history", his account of her origin is a rather lively story that seems too far-fetched to be totally accepted. But taking it for granted, since there are no better sources, we can say that Malinche was the older daughter of the lord of a town named Paynala who died when she was very young. As her mother remarried and had a son, Malinche became an inconvenience in the line of

succession, leading her mother to sell her as a slave to other indigenous people from Xicalango. Later, she was given or sold again and taken to the region of Potonchan, until she was finally given to the Spaniards in 1519, when she was presumably in her twenties. She stood out among the other slave girls not only for her beauty but also because her background allowed her to speak more than one indigenous language. Soon she was translating from *Nahuatl* (the lingua franca of Central Mexico at the time) to *Chontal Maya*, and later into Spanish. But her importance in the conquest was even greater than that of a mere interpreter – which alone would have already been an enormous help to the Spaniards. Besides becoming Cortés's lover, she was also an advisor and an intermediary in the conquest, and Spanish men respected her deeply, always using the honorific "Doña" when referring to her. (FITCH, 2009, p. 1).

Because of her participation in the Spanish conquest of Mexico, Malinche has become a controversial figure in Mexican history. Although she is considered the symbolic mother of all Mexicans – being the mother of the first *mestizo* – she is also seen as a traitor who sold her people to foreign invaders, and she is often referred to as "*la Chingada* – the fucked one." (ANZALDÚA, 1999, p. 44). Traditionally, her role in the history of Mexico became a justification to the deep distrust associated with women in five hundred years of Mexican culture, in which they have been seen as natural born traitors, who cannot be trusted and therefore must be watched and controlled by men. The adjective "malinchista" is constantly used to refer to women who do not fit the prescribed gender role of good wives and mothers or to those who are corrupted by foreign influence. According to Cherry Moraga,

> The potential accusation of "traitor" or "vendida" is what hangs above the heads and beats in the hearts of most Chicanas seeking to develop our own autonomous sense of ourselves, particularly through sex and sexuality. Even if a Chicana knew no Mexican history, the concept of betraying one's race through sex and sexual politics is as common as corn. As cultural myths reflect the economics, mores, and social structures of a society, every Chicana suffers from their effects. (MORAGA, 2000, p. 95).

More recently, however, Malinche's role in the conquest has been re-interpreted as some historians defend that, had it not been for her diplomacy, the annihilation of the indigenous people would have been even more violent.

Although Malinche's collaboration with the colonizers was instrumental in the subjugation of her own people, it was, in fact, the Aztecs' relationship with the other indigenous nations that also helped decree their destruction. The Aztecs were the largest indigenous nation at the time of the arrival of the Spaniards and had subjugated many other tribes, such as the Tabascans and Mayans, who, as potential slaves and victims of the Aztecs,

were happy to help the Spaniards conquer the Aztec empire. As Mexican philosopher Octavio Paz explains in *El laberinto de la soledad e postdata* (*The Labyrinth of Solitude and Other Writings*),

> [t]he conquest of Mexico would be inexplicable without these antecedents. The arrival of the Spaniards seems like an act of liberation for the peoples subjugated by the Aztecs. The several city-states join the conquerors or watch with indifference, when not with joy, the fall of each of their rivals, particularly the most powerful one: Tenochtitlán.[2] (PAZ, 1992, p. 86, my translation).

After the initial violence of the conquest, Mexico – named New Spain by the colonizers – would still have to face three hundred years of colonization, which only retarded its economic development. Conditions for the population grew worse, as the colonizers' system was externally oriented, aiming at profit and not at the welfare of the people. The land's resources were plundered by a few landowners and the Catholic Church. When in 1821, New Spain finally became independent, after eleven years of revolution, the newborn Mexico was bankrupt and it would still have to face another fifty years of conflict for the control of national government, which would only impoverish the country even more. (ACUÑA, 1998, p. 2).

1.2 Mexico and North-American expansionism: the Annexation of the Southwest

Rodolfo Acuña describes the plight of Mexicans in the period as follows: "the United States and England circled over her (Mexico), like vultures, waiting for the stillness. Mexico's most vulnerable region lay in its northwest; distance from Mexico City and proximity to the United States were a handicap." (ACUÑA, 1988, p. 2). This Northwestern region mentioned by Acuña was roughly what is now the North-American states of Texas, New Mexico, Nevada, California, and parts of Arizona, Colorado and Utah. After 11 years of war against Spain, Mexico was broke and incapable of controlling the sparsely populated Texas region. The Mexican government allowed North-American families, impoverished by the depression of 1819, to settle in the Texas land. However, the Mexican government's inability to control the border led to a far greater number of North-American settlers moving into Mexican

[2] Translated from the Portuguese: "A conquista do México seria inexplicável sem estes antecedentes. A chegada dos espanhóis parece uma liberação para os povos submetidos aos astecas. As diversas idades-estados se aliam aos conquistadores ou contemplam com indiferença, quando não com alegria, a queda de cada uma de suas rivais, particularmente da mais poderosa: Tenochtitlán."

territory than the Mexican government had foreseen. Soon there were 30,000 North-American settlers while only 5,000 Mexicans lived in the region. (ACUÑA, 1998, p. 10).

Dissatisfied with decisions made by the Mexican government – especially the Constitution of 1835, which prohibited slavery, and the centralist Constitution of 1836 – Texans (North-American settlers living in Texas) started rebelling, which culminated in the 1836 Texas Revolution. Though at first General Santa Anna's army won the Battles of the Alamo and Goliad, he was surprised by the Texans in the Battle of San Jacinto and, taken captive, was forced to sign the Treaties of Velasco, which recognized the sovereignty of the Republic of Texas and the Rio Grande as the border between Texas and Mexico. Though the government of Mexico never recognized the Treaties or reopened the war, it kept considering Texas a rebel province. (ACUÑA, 1988, p. 10-11).

During the Texas Revolution, the North-American government remained officially neutral, not taking sides in the fight. However, in reality, volunteers, money and supplies went into Texas territory to help Anglo-Americans, despite the protests by the Mexican government. As a matter of fact, North-American plans to annex Mexican territory dated back to before the revolution and even the Mexican independence from Spain. As early as 1767, Benjamin Franklin had already marked Mexico and Cuba for future expansion. Furthermore, after the Texas Revolution, a distorted version of the events, especially concerning the Battle of the Alamo, contributed to fueling a feeling of bitterness against Mexicans. Although Mexicans were indeed a majority – around 1,400 soldiers against 187 Anglo-Americans – they had endured a long journey on foot from Mexico City, they were less prepared and less equipped than the professional Anglo-Americans soldiers and they were not protected by the walls of the fort. More importantly, the defenders of the Alamo, portrayed as selfless heroes who sacrificed their lives to defend their homes in the name of independence and democracy, were, in fact, adventurers recently arrived from the US – where some of them were even wanted for crimes – and had gone to Texas mostly to obtain riches and glory or to escape the law. However, "Remember the Alamo!" became a battle-cry against Mexicans during the Texas Revolution and the supposedly Mexican cruelty in the Alamo helped spread myths to justify American expansionism over Mexican territory. (ACUÑA, 1988, p. 10-11). The importance of the Alamo as a myth is brought to our attention by Anzaldúa: "The Battle of the Alamo, in which the Mexican forces vanquished the whites, became, for the whites, the symbol for the cowardly and villainous character of the Mexicans. It became (and still is) a symbol that legitimized the white imperialist takeover." (ANZALDÚA, 1999, p. 28).

In *America,* George B. Tindall and David E. Shi tell the same historical event from a different viewpoint. In their narration of the decisive moments of the Battle, the discourse of Americans as victims of cruel Mexicans is clear:

> In the chilly, pre-dawn hours of March 6, the defenders of the Alamo were awakened by the sound of Mexican bugles playing the dreaded "Deguello" (no mercy to the defenders). Soon thereafter Santa Anna's men attacked from every side. They were twice repulsed, but on the third try, as the defenders ran low on ammunition, the Mexicans broke through the battered north wall and swarned through the breach. Colonel Travis was killed by a bullet in the forehead. Davy Crockett and the other frontiersmen used their muskets as clubs, but they too were slain. Jim Bowie, his pistols emptied, his famous knife bloodied, and his body riddled by Mexican bullets, lay dead on his cot. Santa Anna ordered the wounded Americans put to death and their bodies burned with the rest. It was a complete victory, but a costly one. The defenders of the Alamo gave their lives at the cost of 1,544 Mexicans, and their heroic stand inspired the rest of Texas to fanatical resistance (TINDALL; SHI, 1989, p. 339).

Strengthened by this myth, the Anglo-American rhetoric affirmed that "the Texas War was caused by a tyrannical or, at best, incompetent Mexican government that was antithetical to the ideals of democracy and justice." (ACUÑA, 1988, p. 6). Furthermore, Anglo colonists in Texas believed themselves to be morally and intellectually superior to the Mexicans, acting as if they were doing them a favor by saving them from Mexican rule. Nevertheless, according to Acuña, the expansion over Mexican territory, in reality,

> stemmed from the need to accumulate more land, to celebrate heroes, and to prove the nation's power by military superiority. […] The urge to expand […] was not based on the need for land – the Louisiana Purchase, central Illinois, southern Georgia, and West Virginia lay vacant. Rather, the motive was profit – and the wars proved profitable, with the Euroamerican nation seizing over half of Mexico. (ACUÑA, 1988, p. 5).

The wars mentioned by Acuña are the Texas Revolution, in 1836, and the Mexican-American War, triggered by the annexation of Texas by the US in 1845. As the Texas government was favorable to the annexation, it was only a matter of time until it happened and the Republic lasted for less than ten years. The Mexican government had never recognized Texas as an independent territory and, therefore, considered the annexation a declaration of war, which forced them to attack the North-American troops inside the Texas territory, starting the war. However, the North-American rhetoric declared from the start that they wanted to avoid war at all cost, but it had been forced upon them by the Mexicans who attacked their troops. The poorly trained and poorly directed Mexican Army did not stand a chance against the North-Americans. Furthermore, the country was afflicted with economic problems, ethnic conflicts and weak leadership. (ACUÑA, 1988, p. 12-13).

By September 1847, the North-American army had taken Mexico City and US troops were in control of most of Mexico. On February 2, 1848, Mexico signed the Treaty of

Guadalupe Hidalgo, giving up not only the Texas territory over which the war had been started but also all other Northwestern territories (the present-day states of California, New Mexico, Nevada, and parts of Colorado, Arizona and Utah) in exchange for $15 million. In fact, the results of the war could have been much more dramatic, had it not been for Nicholas Trist, the peace commissioner sent to Mexico by the US, who disobeyed President James K. Polk, who, after the fall of Mexico City, wanted to continue fighting for even more land from Mexico. Acuña tells us that "Polk was disappointed in the settlement. There was considerable support in the United States for acquisition of all Mexico." (ACUÑA, 1988, p. 19). As for the treaty, it has been infringed by the Americans and compensation has never really arrived for Mexicans, as we can see in the words of Ana Castillo in *Massacre of the Dreamers: Essays on Xicanisma*:

> Chicanos/as-Mexicans are the only people besides the Native Americans who have a treaty with the United States. As with many of the treaties between Native Americans and the U. S. government, ours, The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo has been largely violated. This appropriation of territory came as a result of what is known on this side of the border as the Mexican-American war (1846-1848). In Mexico it is known as the North American Invasion. Again, we see that history depends on the view of the chronicler. (CASTILLO, 1995, p. 3).

1.3 A new identity is born: the Mexican-Americans' history in the nineteenth century

When the war, or "invasion," was over, Mexicans who lived in the annexed territories became foreigners in their own land. According to Anzaldúa,

> With the victory of the U.S. forces over the Mexican in the U.S.-Mexican War, *los norteamericanos* pushed the Texas border down 100 miles, from *el río Nueces* to *el río Grande*. South Texas ceased to be part of the Mexican state of Tamaulipas. Separated from Mexico, the Native Mexican-Texan no longer looked toward Mexico as home; the Southwest became our homeland once more. The border fence that divides the Mexican people was born on February 2, 1848 with the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo. It left 100,000 Mexican citizens on this side, annexed by conquest along with the land. (ANZALDÚA, 1999, p. 29).

During the treaty talks, Mexican negotiators, worried about these people's futures, had tried to secure them some rights and they actually succeeded in their plans, at least on paper:

> Under the treaty, Mexicans left behind had one year to choose whether to return to Mexico or remain in "occupied Mexico." About 2,000 elected to leave; most remained in what they considered *their* land. […] Article IX of the treaty guaranteed Mexicans "the enjoyment of all the rights of citizens of the United States according to the principles of the Constitution; and in the meantime shall be maintained and protected in the free enjoyment of their liberty and property, and secured in the free exercise of their religion without restriction". (ACUÑA, 1988, p. 19).

However, in practice, the treaty was ignored and most Mexicans were treated as second-class citizens in the US territory, confirming what Mexican diplomat Manuel Crescion Rejón had foreseen at the time of the signature of the treaty:

> Our race, our unfortunate people will have to wander in search of hospitality in a strange land, only to be ejected later. Descendants of the Indians that we are, the North Americans hate us, their spokesmen depreciate us, even if they recognize the justice of our cause, and they consider us unworthy to form with them one nation and one society. (REJÓN apud ACUÑA, 1988, p. 20).

And so it was. In Texas, throughout the second half of the nineteenth century, Anglos were determined to drive Mexicans out of the land. Police repression was legitimated by the political system and the Texas Rangers had a license to use violence, and murder, against Mexicans. Besides, racial clashes led to constant lynching. Many resisted violence by living outside the law of the society that oppressed them. These were considered *bandidos* by society, but were admired by many of the poorer *Tejanos* (Texas Mexicans). There were also rebellions of revolutionary proportions, such as that led by Juan Cortina started in 1859, and people's revolts, such as the El Paso Salt War of 1877. It is important to note that this resistance came in general from the lower-class *Tejanos*, since the small elite preferred to align with the Anglo government in return for privileges. For these families, intermarriage was an attempt to mingle with Anglos and become North-Americanized but usually only the women and children with Anglo surnames and lighter skin managed to do so. In order to escape Anglo violence, many *Tejanos* moved farther South and concentrated in the border with Mexico and in San Antonio, the only town in Texas where the Mexican population outnumbered the Anglos by the 1860s. However, in the rest of Texas, "[d]uring the 1860s the size of the Mexican population declined in relation to Anglos. In 1860 about 12,000 Mexicans versus just over 600,000 Anglos and 182,000 Blacks lived in Texas." (ACUÑA, 1988, p. 31).

The end of slavery, nevertheless, made the demand for Mexican labour increase. Sharecropping, a highly disadvantageous system for the tenant, by which landowners lend them land in return for up to two-thirds of the crop, became a pattern and attracted many Mexicans who had no better alternative. By the 1880s, migration from Mexico to Texas increased again and now there were 43,000 Mexicans in Texas, mostly in the South. However, though they were valued as labour force, they were not viewed as first-class citizens and there were even attempts in the 1890s to officially deny them citizenship. Also in the 1890s, the railroad attracted a large number of Anglos to Texas, strengthening even more

the Anglo control of politics and institutions. They controlled the poorer *Tejanos* by the use of 'machine politics' (or 'clientelism'), exchanging votes for privileges. (ACUÑA, 1988, p. 37-38).

Texas was not an isolated case. Despite the differences in history and geography, all in all, the situation was quite similar in the other annexed territories where the violence against Mexicans legitimated by law and the use of 'machine politics' led to resistance on the Mexican side or attempts at acculturating through intermarriage.

1.4 No more "going home": The first half of the twentieth century

In the beginning of the twentieth century, the situation of Mexicans in the US did not change considerably. The Southwest became a prosperous producer of raw materials, but still depended economically on the East, which controlled prices and taxes. To afford the cost of these oppressive practices, corporate farmers exploited the labor force, by resorting to the proximity of Mexico to hire Mexicans at wages lower than those paid in the rest of the US. Mexicans accepted these because conditions in their homeland were even worse. With the Immigration Acts passed by the government reducing immigration from China and parts of Europe, the demand on Mexican labor increased even more in the Southwest and in other parts of the country.[3] Others came as political refugees fleeing the dictatorship of Porfírio Diaz. After the Mexican Revolution, emigrants were from the upper- and middle-classes now fleeing those who had substituted the dictator. All in all, "[b]etween the turn of the century and the Great Depression, approximately one-tenth of Mexico's population shifted 'north from Mexico,' in one of the largest mass migrations of people in the history of the world." (ACUÑA, 1988, p. 188), joining those Mexican-Americans who were native to the land.

Most Mexicans at the time worked in agriculture, in the most exhausting and badly-paid jobs, and their poverty was reinforced by the seasonal nature of their jobs, which made them move from farm to farm, as employment was available, and stopped them from uniting and organizing associations. The impressive urban growth, however, started attracting them to some cities in the Southwest, especially Los Angeles and San Antonio, and also in the North,

[3] In 1921, the American government passed the Emergency Immigration Act, restricting European immigration to "3% of the foreign-born of any nationality" (TINDALL; SHI, 1989, p. 657), which was even more reduced to 2% in 1924. The Act aimed mainly at restricting immigration from Eastern Europe and, by then, immigrants form East Asia had been completely excluded. However, "it left the gate open to new arrivals from Western Hemisphere countries, so that an ironic consequence was a great increase in the Hispanic Catholic population. People of Latin American descent (chiefly Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, and Cubans) became the fastest growing ethnic minority in the country." (TINDALL; SHI, 1989, p. 657).

mostly to Chicago – which became the “Midwest Mexican Capital” (ACUÑA, 1988, p. 175) – as growth meant more jobs mainly in construction. These jobs were not much better than those offered in agriculture and Mexicans were generally found in lower-paying industries.

Both in the country and in the city, Mexicans faced the same problems: poverty and racism. Signs of “No Mexicans Allowed” were common and their Indian features only made prejudice more blatant. Even organized labour associations as trade unions did not accept them at first, since they were mainly unskilled workers. However, by the 1920s, with the decrease in migrancy from farm to farm, militancy among farm workers started with the organization of more permanent associations, usually *mutualistas*, mutual aid societies based at communities. Also, the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) was founded in Texas by the small professional middle-class arisen from urbanization, but their main purpose was the Americanization of Mexicans. Despite their growing organization, the economic and social system of the Southwest still made Mexican workers suffer with recessions, proving that their poverty was less temporary than they had believed when arriving. Since the North-American government would only help US citizens, Mexicans were forced into taking charity, creating the stereotype still existent that they are burdens to society. (ACUÑA, 1988, p. 189).

The Depression in the 1930s worsened the situation even more. Nativism and consequently racism against Mexicans and Mexican-Americans strengthened as a defense mechanism against general impoverishment. As job opportunities dwindled all over the country, the cheap Mexican labor force was not in demand any more. California, for example, attracted poor whites to work in its agriculture as the Dust Bowl phenomenon caused a series of catastrophic dust storms throughout Texas, Arkansas, Oklahoma and the rest of the Great Plains, forcing farm workers to move West. Part of the huge surplus of Mexican immigrants was repatriated to Mexico by authorities in the Southwest and Midwest. At least 500,000 Mexicans were sent back to Mexico. Although legal immigration almost came to a halt, undocumented Mexicans still crossed the border. Conditions in the countryside forced many Mexicans and Mexican-Americans to migrate to the cities and, by 1940, 60% of them lived in urban areas. Housing was usually inadequate and racism favored the growth of ghettoization. (ACUÑA, 1988, p. 198, 253).

By the end of the 1950s, the number of Mexican-Americans living in urban centers had staggered to 80% of their total number. As they and other minorities had been moving to these towns during the decade, the Anglos had started fleeing to the suburbs, leaving the city centers to be shared by those minorities. As a consequence, at the end of the decade, property

values in the inner city had fallen and, to protect the urban elites' investments, the government launched renewal projects to redevelop "blighted areas," evicting the poor and giving the land to the rich. The effects of this process would only be felt in the following decade. (ACUÑA, 1988, p. 299).

1.5 The Chicano Movement and the birth of a new identity awareness

In the 1960s, the struggle for civil rights started by African-Americans in the previous decade, forced the government and the media to acknowledge that there was indeed poverty in the US and Presidents John Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson launched several programs to better the conditions of the poor. The success of the Civil Rights Movement encouraged other minorities to start their own National Movements and the contemporary Chicano Movement began in 1965 as César Chávez started the union of farm workers. Anzaldúa's words show us how important this fact was for the whole Chicano people:

> Chicanos did not know we were a people until 1965 when Cesar Chavez and the farmworkers united and *I Am Joaquín* was published and *la Raza Unida* party was formed in Texas. With that recognition, we became a distinct people. Something momentous happened to the Chicano soul – we became aware of our reality and acquired a name and a language (Chicano Spanish) that reflected that reality. Now that we had a name, some of the fragmented pieces began to fall together – who we were, what we were, how we had evolved. We began to get glimpses of what we might eventually become. (ANZALDÚA, 1999, p. 85).

Education was the major issue defended by the Chicano Movement. Due to the low number of schooling years, Mexican-Americans had limited access to jobs now that the modernization of industries made specialized workforce necessary. Unemployment among Mexican-Americans staggered, while, in fact, specialized labor was in demand. Also, Mexican-Americans were almost completely excluded from Universities. Even for those employed, the average income of families was lower than that of Anglos and, if per capita income was considered, the situation was even worse, since Mexican-American families were in general larger than Anglo families. These factors only widened the gap between Anglos and Mexican-Americans. It seemed that the only alternative for them to reach upward mobility was to try to Americanize themselves as much as possible despite racism. (ACUÑA, 1988, p. 355-356).

Bearing this in mind, we can better understand the emphasis the Chicano Movement placed on family union as "the safe site against capitalist and Anglo domination"

(SALDÍVAR-HULL, 2000, p. 132) and the role prescribed to women within this movement. As sociologist Alma García, quoted by Paula Moya, states:

> Historically, as well as during the 1960s and 1970s, the Chicano family represented a source of cultural and political resistance to the various types of discrimination experienced in American society. At the cultural level, the Chicano movement emphasized the need to safeguard the value of family loyalty. At the political level, the Chicano movement used the family as a strategic organizational tool for protest activities (GARCÍA apud MOYA, 1997, p. 142).

Resisting North-American capitalistic oppression meant resisting their values; therefore, the movement based its project of cultural survival on an emphasis on that family union which traditionally represented the Mexican people so well. The family thus became a source of cultural resistance and strength against the discrimination experienced in American society.

However, as María Antónia Oliver-Rotger (2003, p. 141) states, if "it is in the home where working-class women may find support, […] it is also there where their caretaking and domestic activities destroy their sense of the self and silence them." In other words, for the Chicana woman, the family is not only a source of strength but also of gender oppression, since the maintenance of the family unity is based on the sacrifice of women's aspirations to self-fulfillment as anything other than a wife and mother. As Chicana writer Helena María Viramontes states in her essay "Nopalitos":

> Family ties are fierce. Especially for mujeres. We are raised to care for. We are raised to stick together, for the family unit is our only source of safety. Outside our home there lies a dominant culture that is foreign to us, isolates us, and labels us illegal alien. But what may be seen as a nurturing, close unit, may also become suffocating, manipulative, and sadly victimizing. As we slowly examine our own existence in and out of these cultures, we are breaking stereotypes, reinventing traditions for our own daughters and sons. (VIRAMONTES, 1989, p. 35).

As in the traditional Mexican family, women in the Movement were denied decision-making positions and their participation, though active, was rarely acknowledged. Moreover, any woman who did not fit the role of good wife and mother, especially lesbians and the ones who married white men, were viewed as a threat to the cultural integrity of the community and criticized as *vendidas* or *malinchistas*. This disadvantaged position of women in the Chicano movement led to the appearance of what is known as Chicana feminism.

Chicana feminists criticized the Chicano Movement from which they were part by pointing out how contradictory it was to try to attack one form of oppression – the Anglo-American oppression of Chicanos as a race – while reinforcing another, the oppression of women within the patriarchal Chicano family. As a counter-argument, the Chicano Movement

criticized Chicana feminists as acculturated "sell-outs" and defended that all Chicanos and Chicanas should unite against the one oppression facing all of them, racism. In short, Chicana feminists wanted to fight not only racial but also gender oppression from their own culture and in order to do so, they had to look for other means outside the Chicano movement.

Some of these Chicana feminists tried to work within white women's liberation movements in the 1970s. However, now they had to face the reverse kind of contradiction from their counterparts: white feminists insisted that all women should fight against gender oppression before they fought against class and racial oppression. This resulted in the creation of a "women of color" or "border feminist" movement in the 1980s, formed by Chicanas and other nonwhite racial groups, as a way of theorizing and fighting the triple form of oppression which they had to face. The words of Anzaldúa explain not only how women felt in this context but also how the Chicano subject – especially the Chicana woman – feels in relation to his/her hybridity and the multiple-oppression engendered by its hybrid nature:

> Though I'll defend my race and culture when they are attacked by non-*mexicanos, conozco el malestar de mi cultura.* I abhor some of my culture's ways, how it cripples its women, *como burras*, our strengths used against us, lowly *burras* bearing humility with dignity. The ability to serve, claim the males is our highest virtue. […] I can understand why the more tinged with Anglo blood, the more adamantly my colored and colorless sisters glorify their colored culture's values – to offset the extreme devaluation of it by the white culture. It's a legitimate reaction. But I will not glorify those aspects of my culture which have injured me and which have injured me in the name of protecting me. (ANZALDÚA, 1999, p. 43-4).

According to Cherríe Moraga, in the preface to *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, a pioneer work in the Women of Color resistance movement,

> [they] are not so much of an affinity group, as women who have come together out of political necessity. The *idea* of Third World feminism has proved to be much easier between the covers of a book than between real live women. There *are* many issues that divide us; […] Still, the need for a broad-based U.S. women of color movement capable of spanning borders of nation and ethnicity has never been so strong. (MORAGA, 1983, s/p, italics in the original).

That means to say that "Women of Color," or even "Chicana Feminism," are broad umbrellas terms used to cover women from different backgrounds. If, on the other hand, these terms protect them all at once, on the other hand, they are too broad to encompass their specificities. The anthology was, therefore, a result of their determination to face the "simultaneity of oppressions" they experienced on a daily basis, that is, the fact that, in the national movement, they fought against social and class oppression, whereas in the white feminist movement, they fought against gender oppression. They could fight all these at the same time only if they started their own movement and that is how "Women of Color" appeared.

Chandra Mohanty ratifies Moraga's words in the following passage of *Feminism Without Borders: decolonizing theory, practicing solidarity*:

> The term "women of color" (a term often used interchangeably with "Third World Women") […] designates a political constituency, not a biological or even sociological one. […] Similarly, it is Third World women's oppositional political relation to sexist, racist and imperialist structures that constitutes our potential commonality. (MOHANTY, 2004, p. 49).

In other words, women of color unite under this loose denomination out of a political necessity, as it is the only way to fight both the class and racial oppression suffered by Chicanos and the gender oppression suffered by women.

1.6 A growing minority: the Present Day

Nowadays, Latinos/as are already the largest growing minority in the US, reaching a total of 40 million individuals, among which, around 25 million are of Mexican descent. Estimates show that, if this progression persists, by 2100 one-third of the American population will be of Latinos/as. Alarmed by the numbers and encouraged by the ultra-patriotism sprung from the War on Terrorism, North-American conservative representatives are constantly trying to pass legislation against immigrants. Among these, there is the criminalization of immigration and plans to build a fence along the entire US-Mexican border. Meanwhile, large numbers of Mexicans cross the border into the US looking for a better life. Recently non-Mexicans have also been using the border as a way of entering the US illegally. (U. S. CENSUS…, 2009).

However, though Mexicans are not welcome in the US, the same does not apply to North-American companies invading Mexico. In recent years, North-American conglomerates have opened factories in the Mexican side of the border called *maquiladoras*, in which they exploit the cheap workforce without having to deal with immigration issues. This kind of industrialization contributes little, if anything, to the economic development of Mexico, since profits are almost entirely returned to the US. Furthermore, they contribute greatly to Mexico's dependency on the US market, as roughly one-fifth of Mexico's population works in *maquiladoras* and they have become the country's second source of US dollars, after oil.

1.7 Chicana Literature today

This brief historical account shows that Chicanos

> are both postcolonial and neocolonial subjects: post-Spanish colonialism and neo-U.S. colonialism. Thus, [their] identity in the United States is a product of a creative process of understanding the self in relation to paradoxes and contradictions caused by conquest, annexation and migration. (ARRIZÓN; MANZOR, 2000, p. 12).

Furthermore, if we take into account the broad definition of the term *diaspora* given by anthropologist James Clifford in his essay "Diasporas," the Chicano subject can also be considered a diasporic subject. According to him, the main features of diaspora are: "a history of dispersal, myths/memories of the homeland, alienation in the host (bad host?) country, desire for eventual return, ongoing support of the homeland, and a collective identity importantly defined by this relationship." (CLIFFORD, 1994, p. 305). Therefore, although Chicanos live in a territory which was originally theirs and many of them have never experienced geographic displacement, they are also diasporic subjects.

Being a postcolonial, neocolonial and diasporic subject, Chicanos have to constantly negotiate between two cultures. In the dilemma between total Americanization and total uncritical defense of tradition, there is a third alternative which Stuart Hall calls "translation". He uses this term to refer to the subjects who, like the Chicanos, are products of the new postcolonial diasporas and "are obliged to come to terms with the new cultures they inhabit, without simply assimilating to them and losing their identities completely." (HALL, 1992, p. 310).

This is the position followed by many Chicano/a writers and critics nowadays, "who write from a deep and conscious understanding of the multiple backgrounds that make up their identity" (CÁLIZ-MONTORO, 2000, p. 10). In "*El desorden*, Nationalism, and Chicana/o Aesthetics," Laura Pérez (1999, p. 20) speaks of this Chicana/o cultural production – "the products of a social, economic, ideological *spectrum* of 'politically conscious' Mexican Americans scattered throughout the United States." She considers this production to be "heterogeneous and conflictive" in relation not only to the dominant U.S. culture but also to the Chicana/o culture. (PÉREZ, 1999, p. 20). Furthermore, according to Pérez, Chicana/o discourse has been denied within the order of U.S. dominant culture, which has led Chicana/o cultural practices to operate in disorder within that order:

> Cultural practices that code themselves as “Chicana/o” function as paradoxes within the ordering logic of dominant U.S. discourse, for as they bear the identifying graffiti of a tenacious, socially and economically overdetermined biculturality, so do they operate bidiscursively, articulated both within and without the oppressive ideological territories of ‘Occupied America.’ (PÉREZ, 1999, p. 19).

This ambivalent position of many Chicana/o writers, such as Gloria Anzaldúa, Sandra Cisneros, Helena María Viramontes, and Ana Castillo, and critics, such as Cherríe Moraga, Norma Alarcón, Alvina Quintana, and Rosaura Sánchez, reflects the “translation” viewpoint mentioned by Stuart Hall and discussed previously. As they negotiate between two cultures, they “translate” their hybrid realities into fiction.

In this context, Helena María Viramontes writes as a *translated subject*, standing on an ambivalent position regarding both Mexican and Anglo-American values (OLIVER-ROTGER, 2003, p. 135). According to Yvonne Yarbo-Bejarano in her introduction to *The Moths and Other Stories*, “at the same time that (Viramontes) recognizes her collective and familial history as a source of strength, she challenges values which continue to oppress women within the Chicano family and culture.” (YARBO-BEJARANO, 1985, p. 10).

2 *HOW THE EAST WAS WON*: THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SPACE AND POWER IN THE FICTION OF HELENA MARÍA VIRAMONTES

2.1 The freeways and neo-colonial power

If you have ever wondered if you're in Hell, then you are experiencing a rather normal spiritual quandary that you share with many. If however, you know without the shadow of a doubt that you are in Hell, then you must be on the Cross Bronx Expressway!
Jeff Saltzman

In section V of *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air* (1982), called "In the Forest of Symbols: Some Notes on Modernism in New York", Marshall Berman analyses the urban metamorphoses which took place in mid-twentieth century New York. He starts by focusing on the work of Robert Moses, the controversial urban planner who helped reshape the landscape of New York at the time. Moses was responsible, among many other constructions, for the building of the Cross Bronx Expressway, which forever changed not only the scenery of the Bronx but also the lives of its inhabitants.

Built between 1948 and 1963 as part of a network of parkways and expressways covering the metropolitan area of New York, New Jersey and Connecticut, and believed to be the solution to the city's traffic's problems, the 8.3-mile long Cross Bronx Expressway had tremendous repercussions on the lives of those who lived in the Bronx (NEW YORK…, 2009, p.1). Born in 1940, Marshall Berman remembers the impact that the news of the construction of the Expressway had on him as a teenager living in the Bronx:

> But then, in the spring and fall of 1953, Moses began to loom over my life in a new way: he proclaimed that he was about to ram an immense expressway, unprecedented in scale, expense and difficulty of construction, through our neighborhood's heart. At first we couldn't believe it; it seemed to come from another world. First of all, hardly any of us owned cars: the neighborhood itself, and the subways leading downtown, defined the flow of our lives. Besides, even if the city needed the road […] they surely couldn't mean what the stories seemed to say: that the road would be blasted directly through a dozen solid, settled, densely populated neighborhoods like our own; that something like 60,000 working- and lower-middle-class people, mostly Jews, but with many Italians, Irish and Blacks thrown in, would be thrown out of their homes. (BERMAN, 1988, p. 292).

Berman mentions two aspects of the Bronx population upon which we can further reflect: first, they were mostly from working- and lower-middle class and very few of them owned cars. That Expressway was not being built so that *their* lives would be made easier and *their*

time in traffic shortened. It was being built to benefit people from outside the neighborhood, and we may assume that these people were from a different social class, and could afford cars. Moreover, the Bronx population was basically made up of minorities, as Berman describes it. Therefore, one may wonder whether Moses would have succeeded in destroying the neighborhood had its inhabitants been from a different class and race. In the name of progress, we may notice a great deal of veiled racial and class prejudice, although Moses himself was Jewish.

If we take Berman's words and replace the minorities he mentioned with Latinos, mainly from Mexican descent, we might as well be talking about East Los Angeles, an area which has the largest Chicano population in the country, and is, in fact the largest Hispanic community in the U.S. (BENITEZ, 2004). L.A. was seeing the construction of the East Los Angeles Interchange complex – among other freeways – at about the same time the Cross Bronx Expressway in New York was being built.

According to *Los Angeles A to Z: An Encyclopedia of the City and County*, written by Leonard and Dale Pitt, the freeway system, which consists of "four-to-six-lane concrete motorways with no crossings" (PITT, 2000, p. 158), "unified and defined the physical structure of the Los Angeles area since the 1960s. The sprawling and decentralized metropolitan region was once said to be '72 suburbs in search of a city.'" (PITT, 2000, p. 157). As early as the 1920s, there had been talks of creating a system of "motor parkways," but only in 1947 the creation of a complete freeway system was made possible by the increase in freeway taxes and the availability of Federal funds. The heaviest construction, however, took place only in the 1960s and 70s and by then, most of the original planned freeways had already been built. However, some of the original plans have never been put in practice due to public pressure. Neither in New York nor in L.A. were the freeways ever a consensus among public opinion. (PITT, 2000, p. 158-161).

The East Los Angeles Interchange complex is the busiest Interchange complex not only in L.A. but in the world. Six paths of travel are created as the Santa Monica, Golden State, Pomona, and Hollywood freeways intersect. Over five hundred thousand vehicles travel by the Interchange every day[4]. Considered a marvel of engineering at the time of its construction, much like its NY "cousin," the Interchange was also responsible for the displacement of numerous local families, who had to clear their homes overnight.

[4] According to Pitt (2000), the Interchange carries 547,500 vehicles a day, whereas the narrator in the novel mentions 547,300 cars a day (VIRAMONTES, 2007c, p. 169).

Their Dogs Came With Them starts with Chavela, an old resident of First Street in East L.A., packing her things to move out. The Zumaya child, Ermila, who lives across the street, watches Chavela labeling her boxes in broken English mixed with Spanish:

> Bulk-filled pillowcases leaned against the coffee table, tagged by the old woman with words so scratchy they could have been written by the same needle used to pin the notes to the pillowcases: **cobijas,** one note said; **Cosa del baño,** said another. **No good dreses. Josie's typewriter. Fotos.** (VIRAMONTES, 2007c, p. 5, author's emphasis).

Ermila listens to the old woman's story about the Earthquake which had destroyed her land in her youth. The passage ends with Chavela comparing the earthquake that caused her first displacement to the bulldozers responsible for her present displacement:

> Pay attention, Chavela demanded. Because displacement will always come down to two things: earthquakes or earthmovers. The child stared at Chavela's cigarette smoke coiling as thick and visible as the black fumes of the bulldozer exhaust hovering over the new pavement of First Street.
> Now go home! the old woman said abruptly, packing a set of newspaper-wrapped plates in the box. At least you have one. (VIRAMONTES, 2007c, p. 8).

The earthmovers – or bulldozers – mentioned by Chavela and remembered by the girl were those used for the construction of the East Los Angeles Interchange freeways. They became part of the landscape of the neighborhood while the freeways were being built, inciting childhood games, like that played by Luis and Turtle, the "Gamboa boys":

> Luis convinced Turtle to believe they could reach a place called New Mexico where you awoke banging your head against the sky or sucked on sweet cactus pulp for lunch or watched lizards transform into alligators in the afternoon. To escape, all them two had to do was bulldoze a tunnel through the hill on Eastern Street, Luis explained, and the country awaited their arrival. (VIRAMONTES, 2007c, p. 25).

However, they do get caught by their mother and "New Mexico remained a region undiscovered, and they would never know what it was to be somewhere else, *be* someone else." (VIRAMONTES, 2007c, p. 26). It is interesting to note that the children's "promised land" is New *Mexico*, not Arizona or Nevada, which are geographically closer to California. This reflects a certain desire for return to Mexico, which the children never fulfill.

On the other side of the country, Marshall Berman also poignantly describes how the presence of the bulldozers influenced the neighborhood children's routine:

> For ten years, through late 1950s and early 1960s, the center of the Bronx was pounded and blasted and smashed. My friends and I would stand on the parapet of the Grand concourse, where 174th Street had been, and survey the work's progress – the immense steam shovels and bulldozers and timber and steel beams, the hundreds of workers in their variously colored

> hard hats, the giant cranes reaching far above the Bronx's tallest roofs, the dynamite blasts and tremors, the wild, jagged crags of rock newly torn, the vistas of devastation stretching for miles to the east and west as far as the eye could see – and marvel to see our ordinary nice neighborhood transformed into sublime, spectacular ruins. (BERMAN, 1988, p. 292-293).

In "Neighbors," a short story published in the volume *The Moths and other stories* in 1985, Viramontes provides a literary representation of the physical and emotional uprooting that accompanied the construction of the freeways. The reader can see the transformations in the landscape through the eyes of an older character, Fierro, as he walks across the freeway on-ramp crossing:

> He heard the sirens again, the swift traffic whirling by beneath him. He was suddenly amazed how things had changed and how easy it would be to forget that there were once quiet hills here, hills that he roamed until they were flattened into vacant lots where dirt paths became streets and houses became homes. Then the government letter arrived and everyone was forced to uproot, one by one, leaving behind rows and rows of wooden houses that creaked with swollen age. He remembered, realizing as he watched the carelessness with which the company men tore into the shabby homes with clawing efficiency, that it was easy for them to demolish some twenty, thirty, forty years of memories within a matter of months. As if that weren't enough, huge pits were dug to make sure that no roots were left. The endless freeway paved over his sacred ruins, his secrets, his graves, his fertile soil in which all memories were seeded and waiting for the right time to flower, and he could do nothing. (VIRAMONTES, 1995, p. 113).

In *Their Dogs Came with* Them, Viramontes again focuses on the displacement brought about by the freeway construction. As mentioned previously, Chavela has to move out. Luckily, the house belonging to Ermila's grandparents was on the other side of the street, the side that stood erect, "the living side of First Street"[5] (VIRAMONTES, 2007c, p. 12), since the freeway project only destroyed the houses on one side of that street. Chavela is never to be seen again in the novel, unless in the memories of some of the other characters, as in the following passage, focalized by Turtle:

> […] when she looked out from her porch steps as she was doing now to see the blue house like all the other houses disappearing inch by inch just like Chavela and all the other neighbors. In its place, the four-freeway interchange would be constructed in order to reroute 547,300 cars a day through the Eastside and would become the busiest in the city. (VIRAMONTES, 2007c, p. 169).

The isolation of those who stay is clear. Ermila is left with a new "neighbor" that she sees from her bedroom window: the Interchange. Chapter seventeen, which takes place about ten years later, starts with a description of the transformed landscape:

> A perpetual drowsy fog of gaseous fumes hovered over the freeway routes. Divergence and convergence, six freeways in Ermila's front yard, right across from her bedroom window,

[5] This phrase is used repeatedly by the narrator throughout the novel to refer to the remaining side of First Street.

> though she rarely had use for the delineated corridors. Velocity and trucks, vans, motorbikes, speed blasts, trailers and more cars, right there. But Ermila couldn't, even for a minute, imagine where to go but straight to bed. (VIRAMONTES, 2007c, p. 313).

This short passage points to two important aspects. Firstly, although the girl has to see the six freeways from her window every day, she rarely uses them; much like the Cross Bronx Expressway had no use for the locals of the Bronx. The next passage corroborates Ermila's feeling:

> Four freeways crossing and interchanging, looping and stacking in the Eastside, *but if you didn't own a car, you were fucked*. Many were, and this is something Ermila always said in her head: You're fucked. Though this morning she said, We're fucked, as the men passed her window to gather on the corner for the Rapid Transit 26 bus where the women already waited, all ready. (VIRAMONTES, 2007c, p. 176, my emphasis).

Besides, we can see a further dimension of the destruction caused by the construction of the freeways: not only did it shatter the lives of those who left and were never to be seen again but also of those who were "lucky" to stay. They had to live with the "perpetual drowsy fog of gaseous fumes" coming from the freeways, which harmed both their health and the "health" of the neighborhood. In *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air*, Marshall Berman also dwells on the ruinous effects of the Bronx Expressway for its neighborhood:

> Indeed, when the construction was done, the real ruin of the Bronx had just begun. Miles of streets alongside the road were choked with dust and fumes and deafening noise – most strikingly, the roar of trucks of a size and power that the Bronx had never seen, hauling heavy cargoes through the city, bound for Long Island or New England, for New Jersey and all points south, all through the day and night. Apartment houses that had been settled and stable for twenty years emptied out, often virtually overnight. (…) Thus depopulated, economically depleted, emotionally shattered – as bad as the physical damage had been the inner wounds were worse – the Bronx was ripe for all the dreaded spirals of urban blight. (BERMAN, 1988, p. 293).

Many defenders of the Expressway argue that the Bronx's decline was not caused solely by the construction of the Expressway and that it would have happened with or without it. However, what is certain is that the deterioration of the neighborhood immediately followed the Expressway, as many of its most well-to-do residents moved away to escape the problems described above by Berman, and a new set of poorer neighbors established themselves there, leading to the Bronx's impoverishment. Berman states that:

> [t]en minutes on this road, an ordeal for anyone, is especially dreadful for people who remember the Bronx as it used to be: who remember these neighborhoods as they once lived and thrived, until this road itself cut through their heart and made the Bronx, above all, a place to get out of. (BERMAN, 1988, p. 291).

In East L.A., the impact of the freeways was very nearly the same. The fiction of Viramontes illustrates the decline of the neighborhood and the deterioration in the behavior of youngsters. In the second main moment portrayed in *Their Dogs Came With Them*, ten years after the construction of the freeways – therefore, in the beginning of the 1970s –, we see a much more impoverished neighborhood, in which the children's games have been replaced by the much more dangerous "games" played by gangs – the McBride Boys and the Lote M Homeboys. Alfonso, a.k.a Big Al – Ermila's boyfriend –, is the leader of the Mc Bride Boys. Luis Lil Lizard and Turtle are part of his gang. They get together in the evening to cruise around the neighborhood and mark their territory by spray painting their names on walls. Lote Maravilla Homeboys are their enemies. In the following passage, after Turtle is gone AWOL from the McBride Boys, she wonders the streets alone at night and reads the writing on the walls:

> She could read, Turtle wasn't stupid. The cross-outs, tags, new gang emblems trashed all over McBride's graffiti on the walls of the bridge – all bad news. Lote M had fingered out the McBride Boys big time, singled them out for a class-grade-A, full-blown showdown. […]
> The Lote M vatos meant business and crudely chiseled away at the calligraphic tags – **Alfonso aka Big Al, Sir Santos, Palo, Lucho Libre, Luis Lil Lizard, Turtle, McBride Boys Que Rifa.** Perforating new conquerors over old ones with a blunt hammer, the remaining tags erased, shitted on, with strokes of red runny spray paint. Bold, ballsy headlines, Turtle was thinking, staring at Luis's old sketch of a lizard, a blueprint for his tattoo, now effaced under red initials from Lote M. That's exactly what the Maravilla vatos planned to do on the bridge, send a dispatch announcing erasure. (VIRAMONTES, 2007c, p. 217).

In another passage, the honesty of the boys is put into check by Salas, the owner of the local car dealership:

> Alfonso, a.k.a. big Al, owned a fine pair of wheels, a hydraulic powder-blue Impala he had purchased from Salas himself. Salas never asked how such a young man acquired hundreds of dollars so withered that the faces of the presidents were cracked and veined. It was not his role as a car-lot proprietor to ask how a nineteen-year-old man whose signature revealed he had not made it past middle school could proudly display various bills from a crowded billfold and spread them across the cashier counter like a winning poker hand. (VIRAMONTES, 2007c, p. 65).

In "Neighbors," the behavior of gangs plays a more important role in the story, which begins as follows:

> Aura Rodríguez always stayed within her perimeters, both personal and otherwise, and expected the same of her neighbors. She was quite aware that the neighborhood had slowly metamorphosed into a graveyard. People of her age died off only to leave their grandchildren with little knowledge of struggle. As a result, the children gathered near her home in small groups to drink, to lose themselves in the abyss of defeat, to find temporary solace among each other. She shared the same streets and corner stores and midnights with these tough-

> minded young men who threw empty beer cans into her yard […]. (VIRAMONTES, 1995, p. 109).

It is interesting to note the irony in the fact that Aura "always stayed within her perimeters" after the freeways, intended to open new pathways, were built. Later in the story, as she cannot sleep due to the boys' noise outside, she tries to reason with them and asks them to go home. However, as all she gets in response is that "they are home" and a laughter, she decides to call the police; she realizes, however, that she has made a huge mistake as soon as they arrive:

> The five cars zeroed in on their target, halting like tanks in a cartoon. The police jumped out in military formation, ready for combat. […] When the boys were lined up, spreadeagled for the search, Toastie made a run for it, leaping over Aura's wrought-iron fence and falling hard on a rose bush. His face scratched and bleeding, he ran towards her door. […] When the two policemen dragged him down the porch steps, she could hear the creak of their thick leather belts rubbing against their bullets. She began to cry. (VIRAMONTES, 1995, p. 115-116).

The police is, therefore, present in the neighborhood only to exert their repressive power. They approach the boys with a violence disproportionate to the boys' actions, which, in turn, only generates more violence by the boys against their old neighbor. In a way, the neighborhood is caught up in a vicious circle from which it will not be easy to get out of. Petrified by the boys' threat that they will get her, the story ends with Aura sitting on her chair, holding a gun and aiming at the door as someone attempts to open it.

According to Carole Boyce Davies in the introduction to *Black Women, Writing and Identity*, "[o]ne of the final moves of conquerors, after conquest, is the dividing up of territories, creating unnatural boundaries and thus ushering in perpetual struggle over space and place. In that context, invasions take on complex meaning." (DAVIES, 1994, p. 16). Bearing this in mind, we may read the construction of the freeways as a continuation of the series of invasions suffered by the Mexican people and analyzed here in chapter one. In the nineteenth century, the United States government had created an unnatural border by invading Mexico and leaving a considerable part of its population on the now North American side, making them foreigners in their own territory. About a hundred years later, the Chicanos of East L.A. suffered another invasion, which expelled part of its population, redesigned the neighborhood's geography and changed its landscape forever. This echoes Alicia Arrizón and Lillian Manzor's affirmation that Latinos in the U.S. "are both postcolonial and neocolonial subjects: post-Spanish and neo-U.S. colonialism."[6] (ARRIZÓN; MANZOR, 2000, p. 12).

[6] Cf chapter one of this dissertation for the complete quotation.

At this point, we may travel back to the Bronx of Marshall Berman and evoke the following passage, in which he analyses the role of the government in protecting the Bronx's inhabitants from the construction of the Expressway:

> And even if [Robert Moses] did want to do it, we were sure it couldn't happen, not in America. We were still basking in the afterglow of the New Deal: the government was *our* government, and it would come through to protect us in the end. And yet, before we knew it, steam shovels and bulldozers were there, and people were getting notice that they had better clear out fast. (BERMAN, 1988, p. 292).

Here we can see that *their* government was only theirs in rhetoric. When it was time to choose between the rights of those minorities living in the Bronx and of the Anglo residents who needed the Expressway, government officials did not think twice. Likewise, in East L.A., the neo-colonial government defended the Anglos' interest and left the Latino minorities in second place.

It is interesting to note here that the Long Beach Freeway, which was supposed to have cut through South Pasadena, never came out of the drawing board. Residents of the area fought for decades against the freeway, "arguing that it would sever an older residential community and lead to the destruction of many historic homes and neighborhood." (PITT, 2000, p. 161). In this case, the population was heard by their government which stopped construction. Not coincidentally, South Pasadena is a middle-class town, where, according to the 2000 census, about 60% of the population is white. (CITY…, 2009).

2.2 The Quarantine Authority and disciplinary power

Big Brother is watching you!
1984, George Orwell

All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others.
Animal Farm, George Orwell

In *Their Dogs Came with Them*, the police exercise their repressive power over the neighborhood in a much broader way than in "Neighbors." As mentioned in the previous section, the second main moment depicted in the novel takes place about ten years after the

first moment. Now, after the bulldozers have been long gone, there is a rabies quarantine going on. The Quarantine Authority implements roadblocks and their helicopters circle over the neighborhood all through the night. They are allowed to shoot any stray dogs wondering in the streets. Ermila is now a young woman

> watching the QA helicopters burst out of the midnight sky to shoot dogs not chained up by curfew. Qué locura, she thinks. The world is going crazy. The chopper blades raise the roof shingles of the neighborhood houses and topple TV antennas in swirls of suction on the living side of First Street. […] Above the woven arteries of freeways, a copter's searchlight sweeps over the roadblocks to catch a lone stray running out of the edge of light. The bitch zigzags across the pavement of First Street, its underbelly droopy with nursing nipples. (VIRAMONTES, 2007c, p. 12-13).

In another passage, we see the roadblocks in action:

> Ermila waited at the First Street roadblock, behind five children all clinging to one woman. The woman, a stalk of branchy bark and bones, reported to the QA how her purse was stolen, not a dime left, her grandmother's miniature scissors – an heirloom – vanished with the rest of the contents, arguing with increasing intensity to be allowed to fetch her rent receipts to prove that she did live at 3151 East First Street, rear house, and had lived there for all five births of her children. As Ermila listened, she wondered if she was the only person to doubt this peculiar situation or had found it as confusing and crazy as she. (VIRAMONTES, 2007c, p. 62).

As Ermila waits, she dwells upon the role of official papers for the residents of East L.A.

> The city officials demanded paper so thin and weightless, it resisted the possibility of upholding legal import to people like herself, her cousin Nacho, her girlfriends and all the other neighbors with or without children who had the misfortune of living within the shaded designated areas. Didn't the QA know that in the Eastside getting a valid ID was more complicated that a twelve-year-old purchasing a six-pack from Going Bananas? […] For those without papers, legal status became a shift in perspective, a matter of dubious demarcation, depending on who the border belonged to. (VIRAMONTES, 2007c, p. 62-63).

Like the bulldozers ten years earlier, the QA invades the neighborhood, but instead of destroying its landscape, it implements a twenty-four seven surveillance of the area. Because of its power over the neighborhood and its population, the actions of the Quarantine Authority may be read in the light of Michel Foucault's ideas about what he names our disciplinary society.

2.2.1 Michel Foucault's disciplinary society

In *La Verité et Les Formes Juridiques* (*Truth and Judicial Forms*), the French philosopher, Michel Foucault, discusses the formation of the disciplinary society in which we

live nowadays. According to him, the origins of our disciplinary society date back to the end of the eighteenth century, coinciding with the French Revolution, when a reorganization of the judiciary and penal system took place. At this time, crime – or, more technically, infraction – was separated from the moral or religious flaw. Crime or penal infraction is the breaking of the civil law established within a society by the legislative power, whereas the flaw is the breaking of the moral or religious law. Therefore, there must be a political power which creates the law for there to be crime and this crime represents a "social damage," not a sin. Moreover, the penal law must represent what is useful to society, instead of reflecting the moral law. It defines as reprehensible that which is harmful to society, thus defining negatively what is useful. (FOUCAULT, 1994, p. 588-590).

Following a new definition of what crime is, there is also a new definition of what a criminal is. If crime equals damaging society, "the criminal is the one who damages, disturbs society. The criminal is the social enemy. […] The criminal is an internal enemy"[7] (FOUCAULT, 1994, p. 590, my translation). In short, the figure of the public enemy is born. Furthermore, if crime equals social damage and the criminal is considered a social enemy, it follows that the penal law must simply impose the reparation of the damage caused to society. It must correct, erase the evil caused or, in cases when it cannot be erased anymore, it must prevent that similar evil doings be committed again (FOUCAULT, 1994, p.590).

However, according to Foucault (1994, p. 592), these principles that had been established in theory at the end of the eighteenth century by thinkers such as Beccaria, Bentham and Brissot, were not applied this way in practice. Throughout the nineteenth century, growing urbanization and the dislocation of rural populations to urban areas led to an astonishing increase in the population of cities. These masses were fundamental to the development of industrial capitalism, since they were the working force of factories. Nevertheless, they were also capable of rebelling against their bosses. Popular revolt, which had its origins in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in rural areas, where the concentration of people was much smaller, now gained momentum in urban areas, where the concentration of poor, employed or unemployed people, able to revolt was much larger (FOUCAULT, 1994, p. 598).

Foucault (1994, p. 604-605) adds that the nature of wealth had also changed, contributing to the potentiality of the masses to rebel. Until the seventeenth century, wealth was mainly monetary and the poorest had no access to it. In other words, the wealthiest could

[7] The original text is: "Le criminel est celui qui endommage, trouble la société. Le criminel est l'ennemi social. [...] Le criminel est un ennemi intérieur."

keep their wealth sheltered from the poorest. Now, with the advancement of capitalism, a new form of wealth appeared, which had a materiality that monetary wealth did not have: goods, merchandise, machines, raw materials, with which the poorest were in direct contact, since they were the ones using the raw materials and operating the machines in order to produce the goods. Therefore, this kind of wealth was much more vulnerable than monetary wealth and more subject to depredation and pillage, which had become a serious concern in England by the end of the eighteenth century.

In the countryside, this change in the nature of wealth was parallel to the change in the way land was divided among landowners. There were no large deserted or uncultivated spaces any more, nor was there common land to be used by everybody. In consequence, rural properties were more and more fragmented and needed more and more protection, since now they were more subject to invasions and depredations too. (FOUCAULT, 1994, p. 605).

These threats to wealth thus had to be controlled and that was why the penal law developed in the eighteenth century suffered major transformations throughout the nineteenth century. The penal law turned away from what we may call "social usefulness" and, in turn, started focusing on the individual, with the appearance of the so-called "extenuating circumstances." Now, the enforcement of the law as it is written in the penal code could be modified by the judge or jury in accordance with the individual being tried. "The principle of a universal law representing solely the social interests is considerably falsified by the use of extenuating circumstances, which will become more and more important with time."[8] (FOUCAULT, 1994, p. 592, my translation).

Furthermore, the penal law deviated from its eighteenth century theory in other aspects as well. It did not aim any more to "define in an abstract and general way that which is harmful to society, shun the individuals who are harmful to society or prevent them from starting again."[9] (FOUCAULT, 1999, p. 592, my translation). Instead, throughout the nineteenth century, the law became more and more focused on the control and reform – psychological and moral – of individuals' attitudes and behavior. "All the penalty in the nineteenth century becomes a control, not so much over that which the individual does – is it according or not to the law? –, but in relation to what they may do, what they are able to do,

[8] The original text is: "Le principe d'une loi universelle ne représentant que les intérêts sociaux est considérablement faussé par l'utilisation des circonstances atténuantes, qui vont avoir une importance de plus en plus grande."

[9] The original text is: "[...] définir de façon abstraite et générale ce qui est nuisible à la société, d'écarter les individus qui sont nuisibles à la société ou de les empêcher de recommencer."

what they are subject to doing, what they are about to do."[10] (FOUCAULT, 1999, p. 593, my translation).

According to Foucault (1994, p. 593), the notion of "dangerosity" (*dangerosité)* is then born, which means that the individual should be considered by society in regard to his or her potentialities instead of his or her actions. What is at stake now is not the actual infractions to an actual law, but what these infractions virtually represent in terms of behavior. It follows that the control of individuals is not the penal reaction to an individual's deeds any more but the control of the individual's behavior even before he or she does anything.

In order to exercise this kind of control, the judiciary power cannot be the sole guardian of the penal law any more. A series of other institutions needed to be created in order to correct individuals' potentialities, and that was how the police and a network of other institutions of vigilance and correction – the school, the hospital, the asylum, among others – appeared. In Foucault's words (1994, p. 593, my translation), "[w]e have thus entered the age of what I would call social orthopedics. It is a form of power, a kind of society I classify as a disciplinary society in opposition to the properly penal societies that we used to know previously. It is the age of social control."[11]

The disciplinary society was thus born in order to control the previously mentioned threats to wealth, both urban and rural: "It was therefore due to this new spatial and social distribution of industrial and agricultural wealth that made necessary new social controls at the end of the eighteenth century."[12] (FOUCAULT, 1994, p. 605, my translation). Foucault (1994, p. 604-605) even calls attention to the fact that the London police was created out of the need to protect the docks, the warehouses and stocks. Its creator, Colquhoun, had first been a merchant and later was designated by a ship operating company to organize a system to watch the goods stocked in the London docks.

This also explains why this control fell more sharply over the poorest members of society. They were the ones who could rebel against wealth; therefore, they had to be watched and disciplined before they could commit this crime. They were the ones with more

[10] The original text is: "Toute la pénalité du XIXe siècle devient un contrôle, non pas tant sur ce que font les individus -est-ce conforme ou non à la loi? -, mais sur ce qu'ils peuvent faire, de ce qu'ils sont capables de faire, de ce qu'ils sont sujets à faire, de ce qu'ils sont dans l'imminence de faire."

[11]The original text is: "Nous entrons ainsi dans l'âge de ce que j'appellerais l'orthopédie sociale. Il s'agit d'une forme de pouvoir, d'un type de société que je désigne comme société disciplinaire par opposition aux sociétés proprement pénales que nous avions connues auparavant. C'est l'âge du contrôle social."

[12] The original text is: "Ce fut donc cette nouvelle distribution spatiale et sociale de la richesse industrielle et agricole qui a rendu nécessaire de nouveaux contrôles sociaux à la fin du XVIIIe siècle."

potentiality for committing the crimes the police wanted to avoid, the ones with a high level of "dangerosity." Control became thus an instrument of power used by the higher classes over the lower classes, conferring a new political and social polarity to the instances of control. Foucault quotes *A Sermon Preached Before the Society for the Suppression of Vice, in the Parish Church of St George (3 may 1804)*, in which Reverend Richard Watson stated that: "The laws are good, but unfortunately they are being flouted by the lower classes. Certainly the higher classes do not take them much into consideration either, but this would not be of much import if it were not for the fact that the higher classes provide an example for the lower ones."[13] (WATSON apud FOUCAULT, 1994, p. 599). It is clear in the sermon that the laws are indeed made for the poorest exclusively. However, the richest should also follow them at least to serve as an example for the poor.

Moreover, in order to maintain the social order, the kind of control which had to be exercised over the poorest was exactly the kind that the eighteenth-century philosophers wanted to avoid when they created the new penal law: moral and religious control. Ironically, their attempt to separate law from religion, crime from moral flaw led to the reunion of these two instances in mid-nineteenth century. Those who drank, gambled, prostituted themselves, these were the ones who needed to be controlled and corrected by the disciplinary or vigilance society, since they were the ones more likely to commit crimes.

A scheme or model of this vigilance society had been proposed by English philosopher Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832): the *Panopticon*. In "L'Oeil du Pouvoir" ("The Eye of Power"), which was published in France in 1977 as a preface to Bentham's *Le Panoptique*, Foucault (1980, p. 148) offers this description of the *Panopticon:*

> The principle was this. A perimeter building in the form of a ring. At the centre of this, a tower, pierced by large windows opening on to the inner face of the ring. The outer building is divided into cells each of which traverses the whole thickness of the building. These cells have two windows, one opening on to the inside, facing the windows of the central tower, the other, outer one allowing daylight to pass through the whole cell. All that is then needed is to put an overseer in the tower and place in each of the cells a lunatic, a patient, a convict, a worker or a schoolboy. The back lighting enables one to pick out from the central tower the little captive silhouettes in the ring of cells. In short, the principle of the dungeon is reversed; daylight and the overseer's gaze capture the inmate more effectively than darkness, which afforded after all a sort of protection.

This architectural model could be used by a series of different institutions of vigilance, as is implied in the fact that "a lunatic, a patient, a convict, a worker or a schoolboy" could occupy its cells. But more important than its actual use is its metaphoric value. At Bentham's time, it

[13] The original text is: "Les lois sont bonnes, mais, malheureusement, elles sont transgressées par les classes inférieures. Les classes supérieures, certainement, ne les prennent pas très en considération. Mais ce fait n'aurait pas d'importance si les classes supérieures ne servaient pas d'exemple aux classes inférieures."

was a utopian model of a kind of society and a kind of power that did not yet exist but in which we actually live nowadays. Bentham's utopia has become reality and Foucault gave this kind of power the name of "Panopticism."

In a panoptical society, there is permanent vigilance over individuals by someone who exercises some kind of power over them – the teacher over the student, the prison warden over the prisoner, the doctor over the patient. While they exercise this power, they not only watch their subjects but also develop a kind of knowledge about them. For this knowledge, what matters is not "who did what" any more, but "who follows the rules, the norms," who is "normal." (FOUCAULT, 1994, p. 595).

Foucault gives the example of the French Code of Criminal Instruction, which had a major influence over the whole world, to show that this new form of justice consisted of a "great pyramid of gazes": the prosecutor – who represents the power of the state or the social power – is not simply someone who acts when the law is broken; he is before anything a gaze, "an eye perpetually open over the population."[14] (FOUCAULT, 1994, p. 609, my translation). His eye must, in turn, transmit all information to the eye of the public prosecutor, who, in turn, transmits it to the Minister of Police, the highest vigilance authority at the time. This one finally transmits the information to the eye of the highest one in society, the emperor, who at the time was symbolized by an eye. "The emperor is the universal eye turned to society in all its extension. Assisted by a series of gazes, disposed as in the shape of a pyramid starting from the imperial eye, and that surveils all society."[15] (FOUCAULT, 1994, p. 609, my translation).

2.2.2 Discipline and punishment in the U.S. society and Viramontes's fiction

The United States of today may be considered the epitome of the panoptical society described and analyzed by Foucault. It seems like no one can go anywhere in America without feeling observed all the time. Security cameras, surveillance cameras, traffic cameras watch one's every step with the justification that they are there to protect law-abiding citizens against a common enemy. "Smile! You're on camera!" One might argue that there are cameras watching people anywhere in the world, but nowhere else do they seem to be so

[14] The original text is: "[…] un oeil perpétuellement ouvert sur la population".

[15] The original text is: "L'Empereur est l'oeil universel tourné sur la société dans toute son extension. Oeil assisté par une série de regards, disposés en forme de pyramide à partir de l'oeil impérial, et qui surveillent toute la société."

ubiquitous. Anyone can access Google Earth on their personal computer and find almost any address in the world from a bird's eye view, but the upgraded version now also allows anyone to "drive" around almost any street in the U.S. and "park" in front of one's home, whereas this feature is not available for almost anywhere else in the map. It is indeed a handy tool if you need to go somewhere where you have never been before, but one may wonder whether most people actually access it with this sole purpose.

The terrorist attacks of September 11th, 2001, and the subsequent War on Terror perpetrated by the George W. Bush administration seem to have provided the government and the population with the perfect justification to intensify even more the vigilance and control over anybody who might resemble a threat. For the first time, the enemy was close to home for North Americans, so used to fighting wars outside their territory but unable to accept that their inner peace might be disturbed. A culture of fear has been installed in the U.S., where the enemy must be stopped before anything remotely similar to what happened on that sunny Tuesday morning happens again.[16]

The New York's MTA (Metropolitan Transportation Authority) safety ad campaigns launched since 2001 are the perfect example of the frenzy caused by the terrorist attacks and how the American society has reacted to them. The now famous slogan "If you see something, say something," the first one released after the attacks, shows that the population is under constant vigilance; what is more, everyone is expected not only to accept the situation but also to collaborate with it, reporting suspicious activity. The MTA website claims that "the vigilance of all New Yorkers has kept MTA buses, subways, and railroads safe." (METROPOLITAN…, 2009). They go on to thank their passengers *and remind them* to, among other things, "be alert to unattended packages; be wary of suspicious behavior; take notice of people in bulky or inappropriate clothing; [and] report anyone tampering with surveillance cameras or entering unauthorized areas." Although the campaign has been considered a waste of money by many New Yorkers, many others agree with it, and the slogan has become so popular that it has been "exported" to other towns around the country and the world. According to an article by Pete Donohue, published on the NY Daily News on September 11th, 2008, "[t]he trademarked 'See Something' phrase has gone global. The MTA has authorized its use by 37 transportation authorities and government agencies around the world for use in their own anti-terrorism campaigns." (DONOHUE, 2008, p.1). Another more

[16] On October 26th, 2001, only forty-five days after the terrorist attacks, President Bush signed the PATRIOT Act, which enabled the government to access from medical records to tax records, and even library records of American citizens, threatening civil liberties in the name of national security. (USA PATRIOT…, 2009).

recent campaign poster, nicknamed “The Eyes of New York,” says “There are 16 million eyes in the city. We’re counting on all of them” and shows close-ups of twelve pairs of eyes of people, of different ages and ethnicities, looking at you. (METROPOLITAN…, 2009). What we see nowadays is that fear has affected a large segment of the American population; people seem to be willing to relinquish their privacy and freedom in the name of greater control.

Nevertheless, some argue that it is not fear which leads to control, but control which leads to fear. Among the defenders of this thesis is filmmaker Michael Moore, whose documentary “Bowling for Columbine”, released in 2002, takes as a starting point the Columbine High School massacre in order to investigate America’s culture of fear and the elite’s interests in promoting this culture for their own personal gains. Moore defends the idea that fear is not naturally born amidst society but fabricated and instilled by the government and the elites in order to use it as a mechanism of control of the masses. A population living in fear is easier to control, does not ask many questions, and even helps the government “fight the enemy.” Professor Barry Glass ratifies Moore’s view in the introduction to his book *The Culture of Fear*, in which he compares the decreasing numbers in crime statistics in the U.S with the growing fear of the population:

> Why are so many fears in the air, and so many of them unfounded? Why, as crime rates plunged throughout the 1990s, did two-thirds of Americans believe they were soaring? How did it come about that by mid-decade 62 percent of us described ourselves as "truly desperate" about crime-almost twice as many as in the late 1980s, when crime rates were higher? Why, on a survey in 1997, when the crime rate had already fallen for a half dozen consecutive years, did more than half of us disagree with the statement "This country is finally beginning to make some progress in solving the crime problem"? (GLASS, 1999).

In fact, this culture of fear and vigilance is not something new for the U.S. society. Ever since the colonization of New England in the seventeenth century, several episodes have illustrated how the American society has been built upon a constant feeling of suspicion and intolerance over what others do. The infamous episode known as the Salem Witch Trials well illustrates that. In 1692, in the village of Salem, Massachusetts, a group of teenage girls accused a West Indian slave, Tituba, and two other white women – Sarah Good and Sarah Osburn – of witchcraft, arguing that they had been bewitched and started behaving strangely after listening to some of Tituba’s stories. The highly religious Puritan community immediately went into a state of panic, believing that the devil might be among them. After Tituba confessed to the accusations, things only became worse, as the “afflicted” girls started pointing fingers at dozens of other people, with the endorsement of the community. Ten months, nineteen deaths by hanging, and more than a hundred imprisonments later, the girls

were finally stopped when they started accusing people like Samuel Willard, pastor of Boston's First Church and president of Harvard college, and even the governor's own wife. The girls had meddled with the "wrong" kind of people. (TINDALL; SHI, 1989, p. 56-58).

This shows that the Salem witch hunt might have had, in reality, social and economic motivations behind its religious justifications. According to Vanessa Nogueira, the Salem society

> lived a period of transition, going from a predominantly rural community dominated by puritans to a more commercial and secular society. Many of the accusers were representatives of the traditional way of life, connected to agriculture and the church, whereas several of the supposed witches were part of the ascending commercial class, formed of small merchants and artisans.[17] (NOGUEIRA, 2008, p. 41, my translation).

The whole episode might, therefore, be read as a struggle for political and social power between traditional groups and a new commercial class.

Another interesting aspect of the Salem witch hunt is the fact that accusations were usually made against the accuser's own neighbors. This shows that, since its origins, the American population has had this bizarre interest not only in watching but especially in reporting to the authorities the person living next door. Everyone was subject to the eyes of their neighbors, who would say something if they saw something. We can see that this aspect of the society of vigilance described by Foucault had been installed in the U.S. much before the nineteenth century where Foucault situates its origins.[18]

This society of vigilance, at first sight, seems to be discrepant with the principle of freedom so cherished by North Americans. According to Eric Foner,

> No idea is more fundamental to Americans' sense of themselves as individuals and as a nation than freedom. The central term in our political vocabulary, "freedom" – or "liberty," with which it is almost always used interchangeably – is deeply embedded in the documentary record of our history and the language of everyday life. (FONER, 1998, p. xiii).

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[17] The original text is: "[…] vivia um período de transição, passando de uma comunidade predominantemente agrária e dominada pelos puritanos para uma sociedade mais comercial e secular. Muitos dos acusadores eram representantes da forma tradicional de vida, ligada à agricultura e à igreja, enquanto que várias das supostas bruxas faziam parte da classe comercial em ascensão, de pequenos comerciantes e artesãos."

[18] Another infamous moment in American history was the 1950's communist witch hunt, the period known as McCarthyism. In 1950, the Republican Senator for the state of Wisconsin, Joseph R. McCarthy, started a witch hunt against hundreds of alleged communists, though he rarely produced any proof of his accusations. In four years, many famous as well as anonymous people were accused of communism and blacklisted, being killed or imprisoned. After four years, McCarthy finally began to be discredited after his attacks reached even the President of the United States himself, Dwight Eisenhower. However, the witch hunt would still go on well into the 1960's, though less intensely. Both witch hunting moments have striking similarities: they were moments of intense public fear directed to a common enemy; in both cases, the government used its powerful rhetoric to manipulate the public opinion and count on the population's help; both governments had political and economic ulterior motives – in the 1950's the U.S. government wanted to reduce the power and influence of the Soviet Union in the world; and, finally, in both cases, the hysteria and the irreversible consequences went far beyond the real danger that might have been caused by the enemy itself. These similarities and his own persecution by McCarthy led playwright Arthur Miller to write *The Crucible*, staged for the first time in New York in January, 1953. The play takes place in Salem at the time of the witch hunt, but what Miller actually wanted was to equate the Salem witch hunt with McCarthyism. (NOGUEIRA, 2008, p. 62-66).

If one takes into account the definition of freedom provided by the *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* – "the right to do what you want without being controlled or restricted by anyone" (LONGMAN…, 2000, p. 563) – one may indeed believe this definition is in conflict with the American history, especially at its present moment. However, a closer look at freedom as Americans see it will show that the discrepancy is merely apparent.

This definition of freedom is common place nowadays, in our capitalist individualistic society, but history has seen many other understandings of the idea. At the time of the colonization of North America in the seventeenth century, one common definition of freedom in Europe was of a spiritual condition more than a political or social status. According to Foner, in the ancient world, lack of self-control was equaled to slavery and not to freedom. (FONER, 1998, p. 3-4). Therefore, freedom meant submission to a moral code and not the abandonment of all restraints. This idea was inherited by Christianity, which preached liberation as a spiritual condition, not as an earthly one:

> Since the Fall, man had been prone to succumb to his lusts and passions. Freedom meant abandoning this life of sin to embrace the teachings of Christ. "Where the Spirit of the Lord is," declares the New Testament, "there is liberty." In this definition, servitude and freedom were mutually reinforcing, not contradictory states, since those who accepted the teachings of Christ simultaneously became "free from sin" and "servants to God." (FONER, 1998, p. 4).

This was the concept of freedom brought to the New World by the Puritan settlers who arrived in America aboard the Mayflower in 1620. A speech by the colony's governor, John Winthrop, to the General Court of Massachusetts in 1645, gives a good example of how the early settlers understood freedom. In his speech, given after he had been exonerated for exceeding his power as a magistrate, he stated his views on Puritan ideals of liberty. He distinguished between "natural liberty" as liberty to evil and "moral liberty" as liberty to do that which is good (FONER, 1998, p. 4):

> There is a twofold liberty, natural (I mean as our nature is now corrupt) and civil or federal. The first is common to man with beasts and other creatures. By this, man, as he stands in relation to man simply, hath liberty to do what he lists; it is a liberty to evil as well as to good. This liberty is incompatible and inconsistent with authority, and cannot endure the least restraint of the most just authority. The exercise and maintaining of this liberty makes men grow more evil, and in time to be worse than brute beasts; *omnes sumus licentia deteriores.*[19] This is that great enemy of truth and peace, that wild beast, which all the ordinances of God are bent against, to restrain and subdue it. The other kind of liberty I call civil or federal, it may also be termed moral, in reference to the covenant between God and man, in the moral law, and the politic covenants and constitutions, amongst men themselves. This liberty is the proper end and object of authority, and cannot subsist without it; and it is a liberty to that only which is good, just, and honest. This liberty you are to stand for, with the hazard (not only of

[19] "All are weakened by excess liberty."

> your good, but) of your lives, if need be. Whatsoever crosses this, is not authority, but a distemper thereof. This liberty is maintained and exercised in a way of subjection to authority; it is of the same kind of liberty wherewith Christ has made us free. (WINTHROP, 1974, p. 69-70).

Therefore, the Puritan conception of freedom is not absolutely in conflict with restraints on personal freedoms, as we understand them today. No freedom – of speech, religion, movement or personal behavior – was above the freedom to submit to the will of God, no matter how contradictory this may sound.

This Christian understanding of freedom survived until the American Revolution in the eighteenth century. "On the eve of independence, ministers like Jonathan Boucher were insisting that 'true liberty' meant 'a liberty to do every thing that is right, and being restrained from doing any thing that is wrong,' not 'a right to do every thing that we please.'" (FONER, 1998, p. 5). In fact, the conception of "religious liberty" as obedience to God was equivalent to a conception of "civil liberty" as obedience to the law, as long as the law was written by elected representatives. This concept was inherited by the North Americans from their British colonizers, who believed their nation to be the freest political system ever known to men. Nonetheless, the British saw no contradiction between considering themselves the freest nation in the world while they colonized and enslaved half the planet. Freedom was for the Englishmen and for the Englishmen only.

Influenced by these ideas, the early settlers of the U.S., especially the Puritan pilgrims who colonized New England, believed their new nation to be the Promised Land and themselves to be the chosen people. Furthermore, they believed that it was their obligation to spread this freedom around the world. According to Mary Junqueira, they believed that:

> A people elected by God would show humankind how to create a country based on ethical and morally virtuous principles: this would be their Providential mission. Like a lighthouse to the world, those men believed that they were not only creating a new system but also a universal one. A unique creation, a model that they started and humankind would inevitably follow. In their perspective, it was the only possible moral way and any other model would be in the wrong direction.[20] (JUNQUEIRA, 2001, p. 34-35, my translation).

If we bear these ideas in mind, it is easier to understand the view the American society has had of "the other" since its foundation. Anyone who is not WASP (White Anglo-Saxon Protestant) is not part of the people elected to rule the Promised Land and must either

[20] The original text is: "Um povo eleito por Deus mostraria para a humanidade como criar um país a partir de princípios éticos e moralmente virtuosos: essa seria sua missão providencial. Tal qual um farol para o mundo, aqueles homens acreditava que estavam não só criando um sistema inédito, mas de alcance universal. Uma criação única, modelo que eles iniciavam e que a humanidade, inevitavelmente, iria seguir. Na perspectiva deles, era o único caminho moral possível e qualquer outro modelo estaria na direção errada."

"convert" to the WASP ideals or be eliminated. The elected people had the divine right to subjugate other peoples while following their mission to spread freedom to the world – and they have: first, the native-Americans; then, the Mexicans; also, the African-Americans; nowadays, the "Arabs." In the following passage of an 1848 editorial of the New York Evening Post, we can see how the North Americans equated different peoples and considered them undeserving of an elected destiny:

> The Mexicans are Indians – Aboriginal Indians… They do not possess the elements of an independent national existence. The Aborigines of this country have not attempted and cannot attempt to exist independently along side of us. Providence has so ordained it, and it is folly not to recognize the fact. The Mexicans are Aboriginal Indians, and they must share the destiny of their race. (apud NOGUEIRA, 2008, p. 23).

Furthermore, the strong puritan tradition also collaborated to the association of the "other" with evil in the U.S. society. For the Christian tradition, evil is always associated with the devil, which, in turn, is in opposition to God. If the Puritans are the chosen ones, God's people, any other people is, consequently, the devil's people – therefore, the embodiment of evil. Even though things have changed dramatically since the seventeenth century, these ideas are still ingrained in the American spirit, oftentimes leading the Anglo population to oppress other peoples living in the U.S.

In *Their Dogs Came with Them*, especially in its second narrative moment, we can see how this oppression works in the U.S. disciplinary society. The Quarantine Authority, with the pretext of chasing rabid dogs, guarantees that the Latino population of East L.A. be watched twenty-four hours a day by its helicopters and roadblocks. Even if they are not actually watched all the time, this is the feeling they have: constant vigilance.

> The girlfriends [Ermila and her friends] lived within the shaded boundaries of the map printed in English only and distributed by the city. From First Street to Boyle to Whittier and back to Pacific Boulevard, the roadblocks enforced a quarantine to contain a potential outbreak of rabies. Back in early February, a pamphlet delivered by the postman read: *Rising cases of rabies reported in the neighborhood (see shaded area) have forced Health officials to approve, for limited time only, the aerial observation and shooting of undomesticated mammals. Unchained and/or unlicensed mammals will not be exempt.* (VIRAMONTES, 2007c, p. 54, italics in the original).

It is important to highlight that the information in the government pamphlets was "printed in English only," the official language, the language of the government, which many of the inhabitants of East L.A. could not understand; nonetheless, they were expected to follow the printed instructions. Moreover, the "rising cases of rabies reported in the neighborhood" hint at the fact that the neighbors must have reported their neighbors' dogs themselves, showing

that the constant vigilance of neighbors predominant in U.S. society is already present in the Chicano community. But what is most striking about this passage is that the pamphlet talked about observing and shooting “undomesticated mammals” and not “undomesticated dogs,” which apparently authorized the police to shoot any moving being in the streets after dark and automatically exempted officers from any “mistakes” they might make. In other words, any person walking the streets “from eight in the evening to six in the morning” (VIRAMONTES, 2007c, p. 55) could be mistaken for a dog and the police would have permission to shoot them. It was the individual’s responsibility to be home before curfew. The police actually does commit a fatal mistake in the ending of the novel, which will be focused on in the next chapter.

The narrator goes on to say that “the mayor had signed the brochure with such a spectacle of a signature, Grandfather Zumaya had judged the man incaspable of ignorance or wrongdoing. *Let’s work together to keep our families and our city safe*, the end of the message urged.” (VIRAMONTES, 2007c, p. 54). In this passage, we see the power of propaganda at work. Those who opposed the helicopters and roadblocks did not merely oppose the arbitrary control of their lives by a government and a police that did very little to actually help them; the pamphlets conveyed the idea that they opposed order and health and were in favor of chaos and disease. “Except for the troublemakers, the neighborhood people bit into the quarantine without question. […] Ermila’s own grandparents were convinced that the curfew and the shooting and the QA all *contained the rabies epidemic*.” (VIRAMONTES, 2007c, p. 55, italics in the original).

However, the girls, Ermila and her friends, were able to sense that the roadblocks were more a mechanism of oppression established to control them than anything else: “In a suspicious tone, the QA examined the girlfriends from sneakers to earrings, studied their IDs, long pauses of distrust to unnerve them, to convince them of some guilt.” (VIRAMONTES, 2007c, p. 55). By convincing the Chicano population of their “dangerosity”, the QA helped in the interiorization of a feeling of inferiority and mistrust in relation to their people and themselves. In this context, many of these oppressed people might actually believe they deserve whatever punishment is given them. Moreover, the association of “the other” with evil and the devil in Christian tradition, as discussed previously, helps explain this mistrust is associated to the Latino population.

If we consider that the QA officers were in fact members of the community, this passage gains an even more disturbing aspect. Not only did the Anglo government oppress the Chicano community but it also led some of the members of the community to oppress their

peers. Later on in the story, Ermila is again prevented from getting to her own home, which was "[j]ust over the heads of the forty-eight people in front of her" (VIRAMONTES, 2007c, p. 289) in line at the First Street roadblock. However, this time she is so eager to get home, she decides to defy the city officials:

> Hey, what's the holdup? Ermila blurted out. We all wanna get home! The neighbors who stood in front of her turned from their quiet conversations because she said it loudly, flippantly, a rabblerouser stirring trouble, and suddenly they had opinions and whispered between themselves. […] One stocky officer walked over to Ermila, wheezing and creaking, and the neighbors followed the noise with their eyes. They unconsciously separated themselves from Ermila. (VIRAMONTES, 2007c, p. 289).

At this point, the reader may connect the title of the novel and its epigraph with the roadblock episode. At first, it might seem that the dogs from the title are the rabid ones being chased by the QA. However, as we read on and examine more closely the role of the QA, a scenario that is both more complex and disturbing is revealed. Although the QA enforces the law imposed by the Anglo government on the largest Hispanic community in the U.S., the name of the officer who approaches Ermila as well as his physical appearance reveals that, like the young woman, he is of Mexican descent: "The officer was an oldish man with grayish sideburns and his nametag read **Ulysses Rodriguez.** He was dark-skinned like Grandmother, the color of cocoa […]." (VIRAMONTES, 2007c, p. 289, author's emphasis).

Here, a reference to the novel's epigraph is necessary in order to clarify the title and the connection between the dogs and the QA officials:

> They came in battle array, as conquerers, and the dust rose in whirlwinds on the roads, their spears glinted in the sun, and their pennons fluttered like bats. They made a loud clamor as they marched, for their coats of mail and their weapons clashed and rattled. Some of them were dressed in glistening iron from head to foot; they terrified everyone who saw them.
> Their dogs came with them, running ahead of the column. They raised their muzzles high; they lifted their muzzles to the wind. They raced on before with saliva dripping from their jaws. (VIRAMONTES, 2007c, n/d).

This epigraph taken from *The Broken Spears: The Aztec Account of the Conquest of Mexico*, by Miguel Leon-Portilla, represents a native's account of the invasion of Mexico by the Spaniards. The invaders' dogs race ahead of their owners, proudly protecting them with their muzzles held high. Without a clue of what is actually going on, they help the conquerors impose their law, much like those Chicano officials, who even seem to believe – or pretend to believe – that the quarantine is justified. Officer Rodriguez asks Ermila if she thinks he likes to do that job, if she thinks she is doing him a favor. He asks, "You think rabies is a good thing?" (VIRAMONTES, 2007c, p. 290).

However, one may wonder whether the QA is simply an excuse for the police to impose order in the neighborhood with the cooperation of part of its population influenced by the fear aroused through the rabies propaganda. It seems that, in fact, there is no rabies outbreak – at least, there is no record of it in the narrative. That Ermila does get bitten by a dog halfway through the novel and develops no symptoms helps ratify this hypothesis. At a time when minorities were gaining space and rights in the U.S., in the wake of the civil rights and other minority movements, controlling these populations was of capital importance for governmental strategies of discipline. Stopping people from going out after eight p.m. seems like a pretty efficient way of preventing people from meeting neighbors after work and getting organized to fight the Anglo government. Making neighbors believe in the "dangerosity" of other neighbors may also be an excellent way of making them snitch on their peers.

Ermila is finally cleared out from the roadblock by officer Rodriguez when she tells him that she is in violation of curfew because she was working overtime at Salas Used Cars. The officer immediately remembers with nostalgia the car dealership where he bought his first car as a young man. He cannot believe Salas is still in business. "He smiled the smile of a man who might have just come upon his own yearbook photograph twenty years later. Rodriguez sighed deeply with middle-age nostalgia. […] The neighbors nodded in commiseration" (VIRAMONTES, 2007c, p. 291). His tone changes completely and he tells Ermila to go. This passage shows the contradiction of being part of the community and simultaneously reinforcing upon it the law of "the conqueror." When the neighbors are simply nameless faces, it seems easy for those officers to do their job, but when they somehow get involved into their lives, even if only by a memory, they seem to soften and become part of the community again, exposing a flaw in the strategies of control and discipline.

In conclusion, although the two narrative moments discussed in this chapter – the construction of the freeways and the rabies quarantine – seem to be, at first sight, totally isolated facts that happened to occur in the same neighborhood coincidentally, they are actually closely connected to each other. This connection is, in fact, suggested by the narrator right at the beginning of the novel: "The wheeling copter blades over the power lines rise in intensity, louder and closer and closer and louder, just like the unrelenting engines of bulldozers ten years earlier when the young woman [Ermila] was a child." (VIRAMONTES, 2007c, p. 13).

But the link between those two moments goes far beyond the noise they produce: they are both moments in which the Anglo government exercises its oppression over the Chicano community. Another passage that helps corroborate this idea is the following: "the bulldozers

had started from very far away and slowly arrived on First Street, *their muzzles like sharpened metal teeth making way for the freeway*." (VIRAMONTES, 2007c, p. 6, my emphasis). The language used to describe the bulldozers responsible for the construction of the freeways in the first moment of the novel suggests the connection between the two moments. By describing the bulldozers as if they were animals, and especially using the word "muzzle" present in the epigraph, Viramontes makes a parallel between the bulldozers of the first moment and the "dogs" (i.e., the QA officials) of the second moment of the story. Furthermore, she raises our awareness to the fact that both episodes – the construction of the freeways and the rabies quarantine – are moments in which the Anglo government exercises its oppressive power over the Latino minority of East L.A.

3 *IT'S A SMALL WORLD*: DIVERGENCE AND CONVERGENCE IN THE FICTION OF HELENA MARÍA VIRAMONTES

3.1 Six degrees of separation: representations in literature and other media

> *I read somewhere that everybody on this planet is separated by only six other people. Six degrees of separation between us and everyone else on this planet. The President of the United States, a gondolier in Venice, just fill in the names. I find that extremely comforting, that we're so close, but I also find it like Chinese water torture that we're so close because you have to find the right six people to make the connection.*
>
> *Six Degrees of Separation*, by John Guare

In May 1967, psychologist Stanley Milgram published "The Small World Problem" in the first issue of *Psychology Today*. He described his "Small World Experiment" which aimed at solving the long-lasting small world problem: "If you randomly choose any two people in the world, how many acquaintances would be needed to link them?" (KLEINFELD, 2002, p. 74). To tackle the problem, Milgram asked a few hundred people in Omaha, Nebraska, and Wichita, Kansas, to send a package to anyone they knew personally that might be able to make the package get to a certain man in Boston, Massachusetts. By doing so, he was able to trace back how many people were between the original sender and the final receiver. By the end of the experiment, the average number of links between the first and the last person was six, which led Milgram to the conclusion that any two people in the United States are linked by no more than five other people.

Although highly discredited in the academia for lack of scientific basis for his conclusion, Milgram's experient, however, made its way into popular imagination. After all, who has never had that small-world feeling, such as described by Milgram himself in his article? He tells the story of a man from Peoria, Illinois, who meets a stranger from England while travelling in Tunisia and finds out they are both acquainted to another man in Detroit. The fascination caused by such coincidences in a world that is both becoming bigger and smaller every day, has led playwrights, filmmakers and writers to base some of their works on Milgram's theory.

In fact, his theory is now widely known as "six degrees of separation" after John Guare's play, *Six Degrees of Separation*, published in 1990 and made into a critically

acclaimed movie in 1993, directed by Fred Schepisi and starring Will Smith, Stockard Channing and Donald Sutherland. In the play, a young man named Paul appears at the Kittredges' doorsteps claiming to be their son's friend from Harvard University and asking for help, as he is wounded. He also says he is in New York to meet his father, a filmmaker who is directing an adaptation of *Cats* for the screen. The couple welcomes him into their apartment, without knowing that he is in fact a con trying to scam them into giving him money. Later, after he is ejected from the Kittredges' home, for having a homosexual encounter, he scams against a young man, who ends up committing suicide after being seduced and losing all his money to Paul. He searches for help from the Kittredges and agrees to turn himself in to the police, but before he does so, he disappears and his fate is left unknown.[21]

Another famous movie which also appropriates Milgram's theory to structure its plot is the Mexican *Amores Perros*[22], starred by Gael García Bernal and directed by Alejandro González Iñárritu in 2000. It takes place in Mexico City, where three separate stories converge in a tragic accident. Octavio is a young man who needs to make money fast in order to escape with his sister-in-law, Susana, whom his brother treats very badly. He then gets involved in the dog fighting business, where one day he stabs the owner of his dog's rival for shooting his dog during a fight. As he escapes, he gets involved in a car accident, in which his best friend dies and he is badly injured. In the other car is the Spanish supermodel Valeria, whose leg is injured in the accident and later amputated as a result of another injure, which happened as she was trying to help her own dog. El Chivo witnesses the accident. He is apparently a homeless man, who walks the streets pushing a junk cart, accompanied by a bunch of dogs. He seems to have never recovered after serving twenty years in prison for involvement in the guerrilla; however, at the time of the accident, he is in fact preparing to kill a man. El Chivo is in reality a professional hitman. After the accident, he takes Octavio's dog and takes care of it. He decides not to kill his victim, but leaves both the victim and his client – the victim's brother – tied up in a room with a gun, which both could reach. Their destiny, as well as El Chivo's, is left unknown.

Besides the part played by dogs in the plot and in the title, and the fact that characters are either Mexican or of Mexican descent, *Their Dogs Came With Them* has a lot more in

[21] In 2006, ABC released a TV drama series of the same name as the play and movie. However, the series shares with them only the title and the fact that it takes place in New York. It is about six residents of New York and how their lives are connected to one another more and more as time passes. The series was short-lived, being cancelled in the middle of its first season.

[22] Released under its Spanish title in the U.S. market, it is, however, sometimes translated as *Love's a Bitch*.

common with *Amores Perros*. Helena María Viramontes constructs her plot in the same fashion as it is done in the movie: different stories with different characters, at first, separated and unrelated, which then converge in the novel's climax. We will go back to these characters and their plots soon, but first we need to analyze the structure of the novel. In an interview given to Daniel Olivas and published on the website *La Bloga* in April, 2007c, Viramontes herself refers to the structure of the novel as an "intersection structure" and acknowledges its resemblance to the structure of the movie, *Amores Perros*, though she recognizes it was not intentional, since the movie was released after she had started writing the novel. (VIRAMONTES, 2007a). However, intentional or not, the influence of cinematographic technique in the novel is undeniable. In a lecture called "Finding the Metaphorical Key *Under the Feet of Jesus*," delivered at the 2001 meeting of the Latin American Studies Association (LASA), in Washington D.C., Norma Helsper (2009, p. 6) affirms of Viramontes's novel, *Under the Feet of Jesus*, that "[t]he handling of space and simultaneity often owes a debt to film, with the equivalent of wide-angle camera sweeps from one scene to another." We may perfectly extend this affirmation to *Their Dogs Came With Them*. In the interview, Viramontes tells of the moment when she actually recognized this structure and its resemblance to the freeway structure:

> The list of characters kept increasing and with this increase, the stories multiplied like freeway interchanges. Having this Eureka moment, I realized that the structure of the novel began to resemble the freeway intersections. […] The intersection structure had always been in the drafts of the "Dogs" novel, but never as strongly until I recognized it." (VIRAMONTES, 2007a).

Like the freeways, the stories of the several characters in the novel flow separately until they converge in an interchange – in the case of the characters, in a cinematographic climax.

3.2 "The Cariboo Cafe": narrative strategies – focalization and fragmentation

In the interview mentioned previously, Viramontes also recognizes she had used this same structure in a previous short story, "The Cariboo Cafe," published in the volume *The Moths and other stories*, in 1985. In this short story, three stories intersect and converge in a dramatic ending. It opens with Sonya and Macky, two young children, who are illegal Mexican immigrants in the U.S. As both parents have to work "until they saved enough to move into a finer future where the toilet was one's own and the children needn't be

frightened" (VIRAMONTES, 1985, p. 65), after school the girl has to pick her younger brother up at a neighbor's house and take care of him until their parents arrive in the evening. Being only five or six years old, the job proves to be too much for her, as she loses the key to their apartment in a school fight, though she considers the key to be her "guardian saint." (VIRAMONTES, 1985, p. 65). Locked out of the apartment, she tries to go back to the neighbor's house where she had picked her brother up, but eventually they get lost in the neighborhood. Scared of the police, since their father told them that they should avoid the police at all cost: "[t]he polie are men in black who get kids and send them to Tijuana" (VIRAMONTES, 1985, p. 67), Sonya does not know what to do. The first part of the story ends with Sonya and Macky heading to the zero-zero place, where she thought they could be protected.

The second part of the story is narrated in first person, a resource very rarely used by Viramontes, in a tone that leads the reader to suppose the narrator is giving a deposition or an interview. It is immediately clear in the first paragraph that the narrator is the owner of the zero-zero place where the kids were heading to in the first part. He calls it the double zero cafe, since the paint is peeled off in the sign and all one can read now is the double "o." It is evident that the zero-zero place is the Cariboo Cafe from the story's title. The narrator claims to be an honest man, who only tries to provide the best service he can to his customers, although, at the same time, he describes them as the worst kind of scum. He also seems to feel guilty after snitching on three "illegals" that had entered the cafe to the police. The reader also finds out he is divorced and had a son, who died young and would be about thirty-six years old if alive. In the third part of the story, it becomes clear that his son died in Vietnam. The cafe owner seems to miss his son so much that he takes a liking of a junky who is a regular at his place, for the only reason that he is about the same age his son would be. In the following passage, we realize that something very serious happened at the cafe: "I tried scrubbing the stains off the floor, so that my customers won't be reminded of what happened. But they keep walking as if my cafe ain't fit for lepers." (VIRAMONTES, 1985, p. 68). Later the narrator also mentions that a crazy lady and two kids started all the trouble and that he recognized the two kids on a bulletin about missing children on TV that night, but he decided not to call the police immediately, since he was not really sure. However, the next day the woman and the kids enter the cafe again and at this moment the second part ends.

The third part of "The Cariboo Cafe" starts with first-person narration and focuses on the story of a woman whose son, Geraldo, disappeared. The reader may infer that she comes from a Latin-American country, since the Contras are mentioned. The woman goes to the

police looking for her son, for she believes he was taken by them, who must have mistaken him for a Contra. She cannot believe it when the police officer tells her they only arrest spies and criminals and she answers, “Spies? Criminals? […] He is only five and a half years old. […] What kind of crimes could a five-year-old commit?” (VIRAMONTES, 1985, p. 73). Without any help from the police, the woman returns home to her endless waiting, until a nephew decides to take her to his home in the U.S. One day, as she walks the streets of the North-American city where she now lives with her nephew, she spots a little boy in the crowd whom she believes is her Geraldo and she takes him with her. A few paragraphs later, we realize she also took the boy’s sister. The woman bathes the boy, changes his clothes and puts him to sleep, but she seems not to be aware of the presence of the girl in the room.

The next day, they return to the Cariboo Cafe where they had been the night before. This part is narrated in third person and a few paragraphs are focalized by the cafe owner. This time he calls the police because “[c]hildren gotta be with their parents, family gotta be together […] It’s only right.” (VIRAMONTES, 1985, p. 77). As the police enter the cafe, the woman realizes they are going to take her son from her a second time, and she does what she can to stop them, including throwing steaming coffee into their faces. The last paragraph is again narrated by the woman, as she heads towards her tragic ending:

> And I laugh at his ignorance. How stupid of him to think that I will let them take my Geraldo away just because he waves that gun like a flag. Well, to hell with you, you pieces of shit, do you hear me? Stupid, cruel pigs. To hell with you all, because you can no longer frighten me. I will fight you for my son until I have no hands left to hold a knife. I will fight you all because you’re all farted out of the Devil’s ass, and you’ll not take us with you. I am laughing, howling at their stupidity because they should know by now that I will never let my son go. And then I hear something crunching like broken glass against my forehead and I am blinded by the liquid darkness. But I hold onto his hand. That I can feel, you see, I’ll never let go. Because we are going home. My son and I. (VIRAMONTES, 1985, p. 78-79).

In “Hungry Women: Borderlands Mythos in Two Stories by Helena María Viramontes,” Wendy Swyt mentions the fragmentation of time, space, memory, and voice in “The Cariboo Cafe”. (SWYT, 2001). Firstly, time is fragmented since the story takes place at two different moments: the present of all the characters, with the kids’ struggle to get home and their meeting the woman and the owner at the Cariboo Cafe; and the past of both the cafe owner and, mainly, of the woman. Secondly, space is fragmented too, since the present events happen mainly in the cafe and the streets surrounding it, but the past of the woman in a Latin-American country breaks this unity. Furthermore, the memory of all the characters, who either narrate the story themselves or focalize it, is also fragmented. And finally, the use of polyphony, a multiplicity of voices, is the last aspect in its fragmentation.

It is interesting, however, to note that the story begins in a quite conventional fashion and fragmentation only escalates little by little throughout it, as these different types of fragmentation influence the structure. The first part is structured in a traditional manner. The first paragraph briefly explains the kids' background and their present situation; the second paragraph explains why the kids are locked outside their apartment; it proceeds for a few paragraphs as a description of what Sonya sees while she waits for her parents until she has the idea of returning to Mrs. Avila's home; then, it goes on as a description of their unsuccessful journey until they reach the Cariboo Cafe. The whole first part is narrated in the past tense, without any shift in time, place or voice. Verb tense and focalization are a constant. However, fragmentation is already present in the memory of the girl who cannot find her way back to Mrs. Avila's home, since "[t]hings never looked the same when backwards." (VIRAMONTES, 1985, p. 66). The setting is described as "a maze of alleys and dead ends, the long, abandoned warehouses shadowing any light." (VIRAMONTES, 1985, p. 67).

Fragmentation begins to deepen in the beginning of the second part. Firstly, there is a clear change in voice, as it is now narrated in the first person. We also realize the narrator is a different character, who had not been introduced before – the owner of the Cariboo Cafe. The time is still the same – the present –, although it takes the reader a few paragraphs to realize it. The use of verb tenses contributes to this feeling, since the cafe owner usually starts his stories using one tense and abruptly changes to another for no apparent reason:

> I *was scraping* off some birdshit glue stuck to this plate, see, when I *hear* the bells jingle against the door. I hate those fucking bells. That was Nell's idea. Nell's my wife; my ex-wife. So people won't sneak up on you, says my ex. Anyway, I'*m standing* behind the counter staring at this short woman […] Funny thing but I *didn't see* the two kids 'til I *got* to the booth. All of a sudden I *see* these big eyes looking over the table's edge at me. (VIRAMONTES, 1985, p. 69-70, my emphasis).

His changing from past to present, and back to past and present again dazes the reader. (MOORE, 1998). Moreover, it becomes clear later that he is narrating the events at a future point in time, since he mentions the terrible events started by the woman and the children, which are the story's dénouement.

Furthermore, his story is not as cohesive as the one in the first part. According to Deborah Moore (1998), "the narration of the story seems to lack a center. We no longer have a unified story line as in the first section. Instead, it is full of half-told stories and partial descriptions." Here, memory plays an important role. Since this second part is narrated in first person by the cafe owner, his memory is what shapes the facts narrated. But he himself is a

fragmented man, with a fragmented memory. Probably as a result of his past – the loss of a son at war, the parting of his wife, the decadence of the cafe he has owned for more than twenty years – his present state of mind is quite confusing: “See, I go bananas. Like my mind fries with the potatoes and by the end of the day, I’m deader than dogshit.” (VIRAMONTES, 1985, p. 71). This reflects in the fragmentation of the second part of the short story, which becomes a “jumbled interior monologue” (MOORE, 1998), an entanglement of facts and impressions, present and past events, through which different characters, both relevant and irrelevant to his narrative, parade.

In the third part of the story, fragmentation finally reaches its peak. First of all, the reader is transported to an uncertain place, probably a country in Latin-America, where unspeakable acts are committed against children:

> He’s got lice. Probably from living in the detainers. Those are the rooms where they round up the children and make them work for their food. I saw them from the window. Their eyes are cult glass, and no one looks for sympathy. They take turns, sorting out the arms from the legs, heads from the torsos. […] But the children no longer cry. They just continue sorting as if they were salvaging cans from a heap of trash. (VIRAMONTES, 1985, p. 72).

The time is also not clear. This part is mostly narrated in the present tense, but later on in the story we realize that its beginning – the part which does not take place in the U.S. – is a flashback from a few years before. Suddenly, the woman is transported to present-day United States and is sitting at the Cariboo Cafe after miraculously finding her son in the street. Later we realize that the boy is, in fact, little Macky from the first part of the story. The use of focalization and narrative voice contributes even more to the growing sense of fragmentation, when the narrative abruptly changes from first to third person: “*I bathe* him. He flutters in excitement, the water gray around him […], his hair shiny from the dampness. He finally sleeps. So easily, *she thinks*.” (VIRAMONTES, 1985, p. 76, my emphasis). Fragmentation expands one step further when the focalizing character also changes from the woman to the girl and back to the woman again in the following paragraphs:

> The hotel neon shines on his back and she [the woman] covers him.
> All the while the young girl watches her brother sleeping. She [the girl] removes her sneaker, climbs into the bed, snuggles up to her brother, and soon her breathing is raspy, her arms under her stomach.
> The couch is her [the woman’s] bed tonight. Before switching the light off, she checks once more to make sure this is not a joke. Tomorrow she will make arrangements to go home. […].” (VIRAMONTES, 1985, p. 76).

This criss-cross use of focalization is emphasized more and more as the end of the story approaches and “a cacophony of voices appears.” (MOORE, 1998). The woman and the cafe

owner alternate as focalizing characters until the woman finally recovers her first-person voice in the very last paragraph, already transcribed previously, in which the tormented character reaches the pinnacle of her disorientation, culminating in her death.

The sense of fragmentation produced in the reader by all these narrative strategies used by Viramontes parallels the different levels of fragmentation in the lives of her characters. Sonya and Macky are momentarily, but dangerously, separated from their family; their section of the story is, therefore, the least fragmented one. The cafe owner is permanently separated from his son and wife; however, though confused, he is still capable of retaining his sanity and moving on with his solitary life. His section of the story is thus more fragmented than the first, but less than the last. The woman is permanently separated from her son, and also from her home and her sanity. She is no longer capable of distinguishing reality from imagination; therefore, her section of the story is the most fragmented one. It is interesting to note here that the children have names and so do some of the secondary characters, but neither the cafe owner nor the woman has a name. Their fragmentation is so deep that they are robbed of their names.

Here we can also see the important role played by family in Viramontes's narrative, especially in the characters' sense of fragmentation. According to Deborah Moore (1998), "Viramontes builds her story around the form created by the image of a tight nucleus, the family, beginning to spin and gain momentum, until it spirals and fragments outward." In other words, the expanding fragmentation of the short story finds a parallel in the expanding fragmentation of families. It starts mildly fragmented, as Sonya and Macky's family is only temporarily broken. It becomes more and more fragmented as the families of the cafe owner and the woman are permanently shattered. Deborah Moore (1998) adds that:

> [w]ith this powerful image as the structure of her story, Viramontes demands that the reader take note of the pattern of increasing fragmentation of families, individual and collective, in our society. […] Viramontes is able to disrupt reader perception, thereby causing the reader to refocus and rethink the causes of and possible solutions for the problem of expanding fragmentation in our cultures.

This excerpt points to the challenging and transforming character of Viramontes's literature. The reader is called into action after reading the story. As the discomfort caused in the reader by the zigzagging narrative parallels the uncomfortable position of those displaced fragmented characters, the reader identifies with the characters and his or her consciousness is awakened to social injustices and called into action. The reader is challenged "to become a

better, more sensitive, interpreter of the social world represented in the text." (MOYA, 2002, p. 191).

What further contributes to the disruption of the reader is the fact that fragmentation also expands from an isolated case – the kids' – to a multitude of cases when they reach the café – besides the owner and the woman, Paulie, the junkie; Delia, his girlfriend or wife; JoJo, the owner's lost son; his ex-wife, Nell; and the illegals that are captured by the police in the cafe's bathroom are all fragmented characters. This way, Viramontes engages the reader in a condition which seems to be universal in contemporary reality. Moreover, the lack of clarity concerning who those characters are and where they come from – we are not sure what country the woman is from; we have no idea what the origin of the cook is, among other things – also contributes to this feeling of universality. The reader ultimately indentifies with the characters, even if he or she is thousands of miles away, since fragmentation is not dealt with as an individual's condition, or even a community's condition, but as a condition omnipresent in today's society. According to Moore (1998), Viramontes "hopes to widen the scope of the narrative, bringing the reader to understanding that this reality speaks to and about an increasing audience. Viramontes achieves this with a structure of the expanding scope of fragmentation within the story."

Furthermore, narrative fragmentation requires from the reader what Gloria Anzaldúa calls "la facultad": "the capacity to see in surface phenomena the meaning of deeper realities, to see the deep structure below the surface." (ANZALDÚA, 1999, p. 60). According to Wendy Swyt (2001), "[b]ecause temporality and point of view are deliberately fragmented, meaning is dependent on deep structures that suggest the interconnections between events that manifest racial, gendered and political oppression." The reader is, therefore, invited to read below the surface, to interpret the layers of oppression to which Latinos are subjected to in the U.S.

In the very beginning of the story, little Sonya already knows the weight of being a female in a Chicano displaced family: she is not older than six and already responsible for taking care of both her younger brother and their apartment, while their parents are at work. Furthermore, as she ponders about how to tell her parents how she lost their key, she does not know which offense carries the worse penalty: the loss of the key itself or the fact that she had lost it while fighting a boy who wanted to see under her dress and succeeded. Here, gendered oppression is at work together with economic oppression. Were her family not poor and displaced, Sonya would never have to face such responsibilities at so early an age. Were she not Chicana, she would not have to worry about telling her parents that a boy had seen under

her dress. However, in Chicano culture, the mistrust associated with women is so overwhelming that the girl feels guilty for what had happened. She seems to have already internalized her culture's prejudice against women at a very early age.[23] To these layers of oppression, political oppression is also added, since while looking after her brother, the girl also has to worry about the police, which was "La migra in disguise and thus should always be avoided." (VIRAMONTES, 1985, p. 65). As illegal immigrants, Sonya and her family cannot count on the police for help. The scope of the political oppression is expanded through the stories of the cafe owner, who lost a son to the Anglo war in Vietnam, and the woman, who also lost a son to the war in her country. Here, Viramontes turns her focus to the plight of women in several countries who lose their children to war or violence. Therefore, we may conclude that

> [t]he narrative design illustrates the experience of cultural hybridity as it exposes and critiques structures of domination in Chicano/a border culture. Fragmenting temporality, place, memory and voice, Viramontes's narratives inscribe the ways that various oppressions interact in situated contexts." (SWYT, 2001).

Besides raising awareness to the social conditions of her characters and the multiple discriminations suffered by them, Viramontes also empowers unprivileged, marginalized characters traditionally silenced by canonic literature, by giving them a voice. Viramontes's brand of "democratic fiction" (VIRAMONTES, 2007b, p. 41) which does not focus on a protagonist but on several characters is certainly enhanced by her skillful use of focalization. Introduced by French critic Gérard Genette in 1972, the term has helped make certain issues clear, such as "*who is the character whose point of view orients the narrative perspective?* […] *who is the narrator?* – or more simply, the question *who sees?* and the question *who speaks?*" (GENETTE apud MOYA, 2002, p. 185).

Furthermore, by allowing several distinct characters to focalize their share of the story, Viramontes also avoids portraying the Latino subject as a monolithic homogeneous subject, again breaking with the conventional view on this subject. Although she does not avoid portraying the conditions in which many Latinos live in the U.S. – poverty, illegality, displacement, oppression – she avoids reducing these conditions into a stereotypical portrait. In Wendy Swyt's words (2001), "[t]he information constructed by each voice challenges, undercuts, and supplements the perspectives of the other characters, suggesting a referencing pattern that resists reduction."

[23] The explanation for the mistrust associated with women in Chicano culture may be found in chapter one of this dissertation, where the legendary figure of *La Malinche* is discussed.

3.3 Narrative strategies of resistance in *Their Dogs Came With Them*

In *Their Dogs Came With Them*, all the aspects of fragmentation discussed previously will be developed to a much greater extent by the author. If in "The Cariboo Cafe" there were a present moment and a past moment, in the novel there are two present moments, and several other moments are interwoven to these two main presents through the use of narrative flashbacks and flash-forwards, thus contributing to the non-linearity and fragmentation of he novel.[24] Except for the laconic indication "1960-1970" placed before chapter one, these moments are not signaled to the reader, who has to untangle the web in order to make sense out of the plot.

Although there is unity in setting throughout most of the novel – all the main events take place in the neighborhood of East L.A.[25] – the story also moves down to Mexico a few times, especially in flashbacks narrating the background of some of the characters. However, what is more important to consider in relation to the fragmentation of space is the fragmentation experienced by the characters in the first moment of the story as a result of the construction of freeways in the city, as has been discussed in chapter two of this dissertation. The fragmentation caused in the lives of those characters by the freeways is reflected in the structure of the narrative.

If in the short story there were three focalizing characters, in the novel they are countless and there is not one protagonist, although the novel is narrated in the third person by a single narrator. These characters are also Chicanos living in unprivileged conditions, already described and analyzed in chapter two of this dissertation. The multiplicity of voices here is much more disconcerting to the reader, since it is almost impossible to keep track of all the focalizing characters. Moreover, focalization changes not only between chapters but sometimes also within chapters without any warning to the reader. Frequently, characters invade each other's lives, when the same scene is shown more than once through different viewpoints, showing the reader that a character's interpretation of reality depends largely on

[24] These two main moments of the narrative – the first one in the beginning of the 1960s, marked by the construction of freeways, and the other one ten years later, marked by the rabies quarantine in the neighborhood – were analyzed in more detail in chapter two of this dissertation.

[25] More information about East L.A. is available in chapter two of this dissertation.

his or her racial, gender and class location and on how he or she understands this location. In chapter two, for instance, which is focalized by Turtle, we read:

> Turtle sought shelter under the awning as two women crossed the street. One was short and plump, and the other one, her younger companion, was taller and hunched under an umbrella, cradling a package wrapped in white paper. Was it possibly a white bag containing bolillos or pan dulce from La Pelota Bakery? Turtle saw an opportunity: simply bump her and run with the package. God-sent easy. […]
> But then she leaned over to whisper in the short woman's ear, and the short woman burst out in laughter and the taller one emerged from under the umbrella and ran ahead like a schoolgirl as the light turned red. When the taller one reached the corner first, she stopped momentarily to lift her arms and open the wings of her poncho. While the winds pinched up the corners of the poncho, and the clouds clacked with terrifying force, the taller woman turned and smiled at Turtle with incredible delight and then rewrapped her flapping poncho to nestle the package once again in the cradle of her arms. (VIRAMONTES, 2007c, p. 27-28).

A few pages later, the same scene is narrated, but now Tranquilina is the focalizing character:

> Tranquilina elbowed Mama and they laughed. […]
> The butcher's package felt chilled against Tranquilina's chest, and she ran to the corner and readjusted the bulk, the cloak of her poncho raised to shield it form the rain. The she turned to Mama; but instead her gaze locked with the razor-cut head of a cholo under an awning. Between them a fence of lashing rain, Tranquilina recognized his glassy yellow-eyed hunger. […] She held the package tightly.
> The storm fractured his face. Tranquilina tried to revive the compassion she once had for those with such hunger, when hunger meant empty bellies or an overwhelming desire for a better life. […] And as a way of this gangster youth to forgive her immediate condemnation, her abrupt suspicion, she lifted the corners of her mouth (just as she lifted the corners of her poncho seconds before), delivering upon him a broad, toothy smile. (VIRAMONTES, 2007c, p. 31-32).

For Turtle, Tranquilina seems to be smiling "with incredible delight," although, as we read the passage as focalized by Tranquilina, we realize she is smiling out of fear of Turtle. Later on in the novel, we discover that her suspicion is justified by her background since she had a traumatizing experience when she was raped in Texas by a man, whom Turtle, in her gang-like attitude, probably resembled. Tranquilina, in turn, has no idea that Turtle is actually a girl. Right after bumping into turtle – or perhaps before – Tranquilina and her mother also meet Ermila and her friends by chance, when they stop and ask the girl for directions: "They stopped once more to ask for directions at a patio table where a group of noisy girls laughed loudly." (VIRAMONTES, 2007c, p. 35). Later on, we see this event through the eyes of the girls: "Two women in long black skirts and rubber boots stopped at the table to ask for directions. […] Creepy, huh? Rini asked after the woman left." (VIRAMONTES, 2007c, p. 53).

These accidental and apparently unimportant meeting of the characters – as many others that occur throughout the narrative – gains a totally new significance by the end of the novel, when the lives of Turtle, Tranquilina and Ermila, as well as those of other main

characters, converge in a tragic climax. Not coincidentally, the last chapter of the novel starts with the words: "A perpetual drowsy fog of gaseous fumes hovered over the freeway routes. *Divergence and convergence, six freeways* in Ermila's front yard, right across from her bedroom window, though she rarely had use for the delineated corridors." (VIRAMONTES, 2007c, p. 313, my emphasis). Six is also the number of focalizing characters whose lives diverge throughout the novel, finally converging in the ending: Ermila, Nacho, Turtle, Tranquilina, Ana and Ben.[26] Throughout the novel their stories had been told in three more or less separate nucleuses – Ermila and Nacho; Turtle, Tranquilina, Ana and Ben. It is curious to note here that six is also the number of degrees of separation between people appointed by Stanley Milgram in his theory described in the beginning of the chapter. Furthermore, the fact that the same scene is narrated from different points of view shows the simultaneity of the stories which will converge at the end. A closer reading of the novel will reveal that all the second present moment in the narrative – in the early 1970s – accounts for no more than two days, although the stories stretch for more than a hundred of pages. This technique helps convey an idea of compression of time.

3.3.1 Ermila and Nacho

Before we get to the ending of the novel, though, we first need to focus on each character individually in order to show how fragmentation is present in their lives. The first chapter is focalized by Ermila; however, at this point she is simply referred to as "the Zumaya child," Zumaya being her family name. In fact, in all the passages in which we see her as a child, she does not have a name. We find out her name only when we see her as a young woman, at fifteen, in chapter four. There is actually a fast-forward within chapter one which briefly shows the girl as a young woman, but her name is not yet mentioned. Besides being deprived of a name, she is also deprived of a voice as a child, since she will not speak to anyone:

> The child had heard people like Mrs. M. of the Child Services say she was deaf; but she wasn't – was she? – if she could hear them say she was deaf. It seemed fortuitous to the child, an option she commanded early on – to have the ocean's sob and then to decide the noise, the

[26] In the interview previously mentioned, given by Viramontes to *La Bloga*, she affirms: "And like the freeways upheld by pillars, I realized I had four pillars in four characters of which most other characters orbited around." (VIRAMONTES, 2007a). The author is referring to the four main female characters: Ermila, Turtle, Tranquilina, and Ana. I have decided to analyze two male characters as well – Nacho and Ben – due to their importance for the dénouement of the novel.

> external reverberation of language and landscape, until she demanded the silence again. (VIRAMONTES, 2007c, p. 11).

We do not know when she starts talking, but at age fifteen, she has already overcome her speech impairment. It is never clear in the narrative whether she really had a physical problem or if she did not talk voluntarily, as suggested in the passage above.

Mrs. M from the Child Services, mentioned above, is the person who reunites Ermila and her grandparents. Ermila's mother and father had left her when they ran away to join the *guerilla* and disappeared in the Mexican-Guatemalan border:

> Ermila knew little of her mother, but even less of her father. Grandmother couldn't even utter his name without trembling, and yet, in Ermila's bedroom, Gradmother had hung a photograph of her parents, so young and eager and blurred, before they ran off like thieves in the night, before becoming communists, before they disappeared forever, leaving only a child. (VIRAMONTES, 2007c, p. 57-58).

The child spent some time, we do not know precisely how long, away from her family – we only know she had three foster parents (VIRAMONTES, 2007c, p. 14) – until Mrs. M delivers her to her maternal grandparents at age five. Her grandmother has to defy her grandfather in order to have the girl live with them:

> Hide her; hide her so that I don't have to see her! His graying mustache bristled like the spine needles of the opuntia cactus.
> She's our flesh and blood, Grandmother said.
> I said hide her.
> No! Her eyes were glassy. […]
> If she goes, I go, Grandmother said in an exhausted murmur [...]. (VIRAMONTES, 2007c, p. 70).

It is clear in this passage that Ermila does not have her Grandfather's love; perhaps, as a result of her mother's actions in the past, he considers his wife's bringing her home "a big mistake." (VIRAMONTES, 2007c, p. 73). Grandmother, in turn, despite bringing the girl home, is never able to get past the fact that Ermila is her mother's daughter and is incapable of trusting her. As she sees it, "Ermila was fated, punto final." (VIRAMONTES, 2007c, p. 72). Although she denies it, Grandmother even gets a dog to watch Ermila and stop her from going out a night; the dog eventually bites the girl. Here, an immediate connection is made with the dogs of the novel's title and with the Quarantine Authority officers, discussed in chapter two. Grandmother's dog reproduces, in a private individual scale, the oppression caused by the Anglo government in a public collective scale. Two layers of oppression – social and gendered – overlap in Ermila's life.

In another desperate attempt to protect the girl against herself, Grandmother one night decides to hang a crucifix above Ermila's headboard.

> Maybe this will protect you, Grandmother said, slipping the wire hoop of the bulky metal and wood crucifix onto the nail, because I can't anymore. I can't. […] Ermila's fate was something Gradmother could not challenge, and it wearied her to the point that, though she was not a churchgoing woman, she sought out God's assistance, a thing she should have done, in hindsight, when her daughter first showed signs of femaleness. All of Grandmother's rational thoughts were absorbed in preventing Ermila's sex from entering their decent household. She also knew too well that this prevention was absolutely impossible; her efforts seemed as feeble and futile as raising her palm to halt the coming of a hurricane." (VIRAMONTES, 2007c, p. 72-73).

Reading the previous passage below the surface, we can see that Viramontes deals with two important issues for Chicanos: the mistrust associated to women in their culture and the role of the Catholic Church for them. As discussed in chapter one of this dissertation, women are seen in Mexican/Chicano culture as potential traitors, partly due to the role of *La Malinche* in the conquest of Mexico, partly due to Mexican's deep patriarchal roots. Grandmother's affirmation that "Ermila was fated, punto final" can be interpreted as "women are fated, punto final." The following passage corroborates this idea. As Ermila returns home from a night out, she stops before the porch steps, wondering what Grandmother's reaction will be:

> On the porch steps of her grandparents' home, Ermila hesitated, nausea overwhelming her. She placed her books on the top step and then she pulled her long hair back like a thread through the hole of a rubber band and wrapped it into a tight and slick ponytail to keep her hair quiet against Grandmother's constant complaints. […] Ermila could only imagine what went speeding through Grandmother's thoughts at the crucial moment when Grandmother stared down at her *not seeing a granddaughter but a female with such wicked potential* that even her hair […] boldly defied bobby pins. That was why Ermila wore the ponytail even if it spread her headache. (VIRAMONTES, 2007c, p. 67-68, my emphasis)

In this passage, we see that even the girl's hair is cause for Grandmother's mistrust. Since the girl's arrival, "Grandmother had rejected Ermila's hair as if it were a personal affront. Raven-black and as straight as an arrow, her hair was proof of her father's mestizo blood." (VIRAMONTES, 2007c, p. 57). As a *mestiza*, Ermila can be considered a direct descendent of *La Malinche*. Grandmother thus attempts to have the girl's hair cut, but she resists it and goes home with half a haircut. From this day on, she wears her hair in a ponytail, although oftentimes she lets it loose as a way of defying Grandmother, as, for instance, in the crucifix episode: "No more, Grandmother repeated, shaking her head. Ermila freed her waist-length hair from its rubber band and shook it loose." (VIRAMONTES, 2007c, p. 73).

It is interesting to note that Grandmother is herself a woman, although she is the one who helps reinforce oppression on her granddaughter. According to Anzaldúa (1999, p. 38, my emphasis), "Culture forms our beliefs. […] Culture is made by those in power – men. Males make the rules and laws; *women transmit them*." Therefore, in this culture, women are both the victims and the perpetrators of oppression. Anzaldúa continues:

> How many times have I heard mothers and mothers-in-law tell their sons to beat their wives for not obeying them, for being *hociconas* (big mouths), for being *callejeras* (going to visit and gossip with neighbors), for expecting their husbands to help with the rearing of children and the housework, for wanting to be something other than housewives?

Grandmother thus seems to perfectly embody the "patriarchal mother" described by Anzaldúa.

Still according to Anzaldúa (1999, p. 39), women in this culture only had three possible directions to follow: as a nun, a prostitute, or a mother. However, she says, "[t]oday some of us have a fourth choice: entering the world by way of education and career and becoming self-autonomous persons. A very few of us." (VIRAMONTES, 2007c, p. 39). Ermila seems to be trying to follow this path, although she is still only fifteen. Three afternoons a week, she works as a part-time bookkeeper at Salas Used Cars, the local car dealership. Despite the hassle she has to endure in working surrounded by semi-nude pictures of women and the obscene comments of Salas and his mechanics, "[a] paycheck somehow assured Ermila that she took care of personal business like an adult." (VIRAMONTES, 2007c, p. 64). What is implicit here is that she is taking care of herself not only like an adult but also like a man, by having a job. With her first paycheck she buys a yellow mohair sweater, which she is very proud of. When her friend Rini asks her if she got it from Alfonso – her boyfriend – she answers, "Salas Used Cars paycheck." (VIRAMONTES, 2007c, p. 56). At the same time, "Ermila appreciated that Alfonso's gang-banging reputation was known by the mechanics," (VIRAMONTES, 2007c, p. 65), which guarantees that they will not harass her. Being the girlfriend of the leader of the McBride Boys' also has its advantages. Ermila's ambiguous behavior – being proud of herself for working while depending on her boyfriend for protection – illustrates very well what Anzaldúa (1999, p. 40) says:

> Through our mothers, the culture gave us mixed messages: *No voy a dejar que ningún pelado desgraciado maltrate a mis hijos*. And in the next breath it would say, *La mujer tiene que hacer lo que le diga el hombre*. Which was it to be – strong, or submissive, rebellious or conforming?

Ermila's behavior in her relationship with Alfonso shows her ambiguous position. She endures several abusive attitudes from him – from constantly forgetting their dates to throwing her out of his car one night: "Homeboys laughing and giving her shots of tequila until she vomited in the Impala, and then Alfonso said, Fucken no, get out of my ride. It was Mousie's cousin, Lucho, she vaguely remembered, who gave her a ride home [...]." (VIRAMONTES, 2007c, p. 55). Later on in the novel, we discover that Lucho is more than Alfonso's friend: they have regular homosexual encounters, although Alfonso does not consider himself a homosexual: "Alfonso had always blamed the angel dust or the whiskey or the mota for his cocksucking because he wasn't a joto like Lucho. Alfonso even had a girlfriend he fucked in order to prove he wasn't a joto, never ever a joto like Lucho." (VIRAMONTES, 2007c, p. 308). His thoughts in the previous passage echo a culture which is highly prejudiced against homosexuals, leading Chicano men to behave ambiguously like Alfonso. Ermila in turn is totally oblivious of this relationship between the two boys. As for her own understanding of her sex life, all she seems to feel is guilt: "Like a border crossing, sex promised a different, uplifting life and yet all she encountered was intolerable guilt, a filthy feeling that bathing couldn't cleanse and the fear that her body would someday call for mutiny." (VIRAMONTES, 2007c, p. 74). She seems to decide to have sex with Alfonso solely to please him, or in fear of losing him. In short, in Ermila's relationship with Alfonso, one sees how Chicanas can be oppressed as women within their culture, in which they are made to feel that they need a man to protect them, even if they are in an abusive relationship.

Ermila's cousin, Nacho, is another focalizing character, though he focalizes very few pages of the novel. Having recently arrived from Mexico, he appears only in the second narrative moment of the novel, in the early 1970s, when he is eighteen years old. In fact, at first he seems quite irrelevant to the plot, but at the end he becomes central to the dénouement, as will be discussed later on. Nacho has been living with Ermila's family, sleeping on their couch, for the past five months. He came to the U.S. in order to do what many Mexicans do there – work and send money back home: "Nacho had been sent by his family five months ago to come live up north and help out since Grandfather had been disabled. Coming to the Eastside would be a good opportunity for him to learn English, have a chance at learning a trade and earn money to send back home [...]." (VIRAMONTES, 2007c, p. 71). In the passage, it is hinted that it was not Nacho's choice to come to the U.S., but his family's, and he does not seem to make any effort in order to adapt to the impositions:

> Two weeks after he began his ESL classes, he dropped them; laid off from a car-washing job, he felt busing tables to be below him. He informed his parents via a letter that he proposed to paint – which was well and good, until his family found out that he intended to paint murals, not houses. […] Nacho dreamt of following in the footsteps of the three great Mexican muralists, Rivera, Siqueiros and Orozco. (VIRAMONTES, 2007c, p. 71).

Nacho's artistic aspirations are thus smothered by the impending necessities of daily life. The reader is led to wonder how many other Mexicans/Chicanos have had their dreams crushed because of their social status. Moreover, his unwillingness to adapt to the American way of life is mistaken for "lack of ambition" and "downright laziness." (VIRAMONTES, 2007c, p. 71). Needless to say that Nacho does not have a very harmonious relationship with his grandparents, who "waited for a time when Nacho was prepared to embark on his artistic career outside of their time and dime." (VIRAMONTES, 2007c, p. 71). In another passage, Ermila dwells upon the difference between Nacho's behavior and the pace of her grandparent's American way of life:

> Her absentminded cousin never thought about the rhythm of her grandparent's lives and seemed forever out of sync with their set patterns. Nacho paid dearly for this: every time Nacho left water running in the sink, drawers pulled out, lights on during the day, windows opened, toilet seat up or water boiling to evaporation, Grandmother wanted to pull his ear because this irresponsible, ill-bred young man was incapable of completing one fluid act – to open, then close a cabinet, to turn on, then off a faucet. (VIRAMONTES, 2007c, p. 76).

However, later on in the story, we discover that Nacho is not as lazy as Grandfather accuses him of being. He has labored physically since the age of five (VIRAMONTES, 2007c, p. 243) and despite not having a steady job, he does odd jobs now and then in the U.S. As for his ESL classes, "[t]he language class was so basic, it made him feel stupid and small, and he was everything but." (VIRAMONTES, 2007c, p. 242).

We also realize that his infatuation for Ermila is what is holding Nacho to U.S. soil. It is also what will seal his destiny in the dramatic climax of the novel. At first, it seems like all he wants is to peep at his cousin through the bathroom window as she undresses, but later we see his feelings are deeper and apparently not corresponded. Realizing that "Ermila would never appreciate a man, a healthy and talented man like him, at least until she grew older" (VIRAMONTES, 2007c, p. 240), Nacho decides to buy a bus ticket and return home, to Mexico, but not without first saying goodbye to Ermila. Knowing that the girl is meeting Alfonso at the beach, he drives his van there with the excuse of handing her the identification card she forgot at home – and without which she would have trouble with the QA. In order to be left alone with Ermila, he first manages to attack Alfonso and lock him up in a lifeguard booth. As Nacho kisses Ermila, however, she feels so overwhelmed by her own desire for him

that she leaves the van and takes the bus home. Later they meet again at home as he is packing his bags to return to Mexico. As Nacho leaves to the bus station, Ermila looks at the van and dwells upon her own fear of leaving:

> As long as she could remember, Ermila had dreaded the accusation of possessing too much of her mother's blood. Now she realized as she pulled her key chain from her pocket that she hadn't possessed enough. Her mother had been brave; her mother had fled into the night unafraid to leave a place of locked doors and police chases and quarantines and all the other things that made her desperate to escape. (VIRAMONTES, 2007c, p. 295).

However, Nacho himself will never make it back to Mexico, as he will meet his fate outside the bus station in the tragic ending of the novel, leaving the reader with the feeling that he symbolizes the impossibility of a return to Mexico for the Chicano people.

3.3.2. Turtle

Turtle/Antonia is another focalizing characters. She is a Chicana girl (and here I have opted for using the feminine form when referring to her as that is Viramontes's option), born and raised in East L. A.. At the two main moments in the novel, she is eight and later eighteen years old, but some other important moments of her life are also narrated, such as her twelfth birthday.

The very first reference to Turtle/Antonia in the novel is in the first chapter, which is focalized by Ermila, whose grandparent's house is next doors to Turtle's family's house. As Ermila approaches Turtle/Antonia and her brother, Luis Lil Lizard, he tells the little girl to get out and Turtle/Antonia interferes: "Leave her alone, said *the bald-headed Gamboa brother, the one who was really a girl, but didn't want to* be and got beaten up for it." (VIRAMONTES, 2007c, p. 11, my emphasis). It is clear in the passage that Turtle/Antonia has been a transgender[27] since a very early age – she is about eight years old in this passage – as she wears her head shaved and dresses and behaves "as a boy," that is, in a masculine way, according to the binary gender system. This is emphasized in two other passages a few lines down: "The lizard boy pointed the knife at *his brother who was really a sister*"

[27] 'Transgender' is used as an umbrella term that encompasses a vast range of experiences, including all people whose appearance is gender atypical – that is, males who behave as women and females who behave as men – such as cross-dressers, drag queens, drag kings, butches and even transsexuals and intersexuals. The term describes gender, not sex or sexuality, and, contrarily to what is commonly believed, being a transgender does not necessarily imply being homosexual. (PROSSER, 1997, p. 309-326).

(VIRAMONTES, 2007c, p. 11, my emphasis) and "The Gamboa boy *who was a real boy* cursed the child." (VIRAMONTES, 2007c, p. 11, my emphasis).

Later in the novel, other physical features of Turtle/Antonia will also be described, accentuating even more her transgendered appearance. She has always been very tall for her age. At eight years old, she was five feet one inch tall and by the time she was twelve, she could already see over her brother's shoulder and she was taller then all her classmates. This – together with her shaved hair and her boyish behaviour and clothes – leads to comments such as the following one, made by her Aunt Mercy, her uncle Angel's third common-law wife: "Why she getting so tall? Aunt Mercy asked, as if there were something defective about Turtle's size." (VIRAMONTES, 2007c, p. 168). Besides being tall, Turtle is also lanky and muscular, which she considers "a birthmark of luck in a neighbourhood where might makes right." (VIRAMONTES, 2007c, p. 20). The only thing that gives her away is her 'unmanly timbre of voice', which may explain why she talks to strangers only when necessary.

After that first brief reference to Turtle/Antonia in chapter one, she returns to the narrative in the second chapter, in which she is the focalizing character. At this point, she is about eighteen years old. The chapter opens with the first reference to her name in the novel, since so far the reader only knows her as one of the Gamboa boys:

> The name skittered. *Turrrtle*, someone screamed, wrenching the name out of thin light and hurling it into the street like the metal lid of a trash can. […]
> It wasn't the name Antonia María, tenderly whispered into the ear of a Mexican movie actress Turtle's mother had admired from the balcony of the Million Dollar Theater and which came immediately to mind as soon as she filled out the birth certificate at the General Hospital. […] The name was her *For Real* one. She had been christened Turtle – always and por vida till death do us part – when she joined the McBride Boys with Luis Lil Lizard hasta la muerte. (VIRAMONTES, 2007c, p. 16).

It is clear in this passage that, although her birth certificate says 'Antonia,' she considers 'Turtle' her real name, the one she was baptized with by her brother – as she could not keep up with his pace – when she joined his gang, the McBride Boys. Therefore, from now on, I will refer to the character simply as Turtle, since this is the name mostly used to refer to her throughout the narrative. In this extract, the reader also realizes how important her brother is in her life. Called 'the Gamboa brothers' while they were growing up, Turtle and Luis always played together, and their games were those considered masculine by society: "Alone on a campout, they smoked frajos and conducted farting contests, burned plastic toy soldiers to see how long they took to melt." (VIRAMONTES, 2007c, p. 157). On these campouts, Turtle would even attempt to "pee like a man, standing up, legs apart." (VIRAMONTES, 2007c, p.

157). Besides being Turtle's everyday companion, Luis was of great importance for her in at least two decisive moments in her life.

The first of these moments was when he cut off her shoulder-length chestnut hair and shaved her head, during an argument with their mother:

> Like the time Amá had yanked and yanked Turtle's hair in an argument over her choice of boxers under her cutoffs, of her erasure of breasts and dresses and all that was outwardly female, over her behaving like some unholy malflora. What the hell do you think you're doing? Luis Lil Lizard challenged Amá, and shoved Turtle into the bathroom. (…) Luis took a pair of manicure scissors and sat Turtle down on the toilet seat and cut Turtle's hair, asking, What she gonna grab now? Over her arched shoulders, Turtle's chestnut curls fell like commas on the tiled floor and then Luis took the dull razor from the soap dish in the tub and rasped it against her scalp. (VIRAMONTES, 2007c, p. 25).

This is a milestone in Turtle's life, as from this point on her shaved head will become her trademark and will accentuate her transgenderism, though it is patent in the passage above that, despite the long hair, she already expressed herself in a masculine way, which was in fact the reason for their mother to start the argument. Luis seems to want to put an end to the fight by cutting his sister's hair and removing the last trace of femininity in her. From this point on, no other mention is made of their mother demanding a feminine behaviour from Turtle, which seems to show that Luis and Turtle actually won the argument. But it is also from this point on that Turtle appears to be doomed and destined to her tragic ending. The shaving of her head is associated with the start of her "going bad," as Aunt Mercy tells the story of a neighbour girl who stabbed her own father to death and concludes the story by saying that she started going bad when she shaved her head. Aunt Mercy also refers to this girl using the word 'malflora,' meaning 'bad flower.' The word gets stuck in Turtle's head and she thinks "it was a word you shouldn't be left alone with." (VIRAMONTES, 2007c, p. 168). Later on, she wonders if Chavela, the old lady who lived across the street from her when she was a child, would still serve her lemonade, now that she was "a Grade-A cold-blooded malflora." (VIRAMONTES, 2007c, p. 236).

The other decisive moment in Turtle's life of which Luis is an important part is when she joins his gang, the McBride Boys, on her twelfth birthday, despite the resistance of the other members of the gang. However, this opposition is not due to the fact that Turtle is not 'a real boy' since the other boys do not seem to realize she is a female at this first moment, as they refer to her using the pronouns 'he' and 'him.' Later on, the gang will have an important part in Turtle's woeful dénouement. Notwithstanding, although Luis is Turtle's 'other half,' he also feels ashamed that he has 'a girl for a brother.' The first time it is patent in the story is when they both attempt to rob the Val U Mini Mart and get caught. As the bagman catches

Turtle, he starts to search her to find the stolen goods beneath her overcoat and discovers that she is in fact a girl:

> At first he believed what he felt on her chest were not breasts but stolen apples, hard and concealed, and he clamped his big man fingers on her flesh under her loose T-shirt to make sure. This boy had tits, this boy was really a braless girl with growing, firm chi-chis, her big brown nipples just there, under the shirt for him to pinch in utter disbelief. Then he did it again. The bagman groped her body under the draping wool coat again to make sure they weren't stolen produce, and then he slowly dug his metal-cold fingers between her thighs again, this time pressing harder, palming her buttocks, swirling his two hands much slower and slower to make himself believe. (VIRAMONTES, 2007c, p. 24).

Unable to defend herself from the bagman's violence, all Turtle can do is close her eyes until her brother appears and saves her. After that,

> Turtle could think of nothing to say except, Luis, and then she began to cry.
> Shut up, Luis snapped, because *he had a girl for a brother and he profoundly resented it.* No matter how many asses she kicked after that, or how bad, how really bad she was, he learned not to care. (VIRAMONTES, 2007c, p. 25, my emphasis).

After this occasion, whenever Turtle shows any sign of cowardice or fear, Luis calls her 'pussy' and she herself thinks she is 'a fucken girl' whenever she feels afraid. In another occasion later on, when she wants to show a shopkeeper that she is not dangerous, she gestures that she is not carrying any weapon and thinks to herself "Empty-handed, no cuete, no screwdriver, (…) you got it? *Harmless as a girl.*" (VIRAMONTES, 2007c, p. 255, my emphasis). Furthermore, not only does her brother resent her not being a real boy but she also resents that. After the episode at the mini mart, the narrator affirms that "[i]t shamed them both" (VIRAMONTES, 2007c, p. 26) that she was a girl.

It is clear in the previous passages that not only Turtle undervalues women in general for being weak and fearful, as the stereotype claims, but she also downgrades herself for being a female. She feels diminished for being "the only McBride Boy lacking, as in **S** for *sin* huevos." (VIRAMONTES, 2007c, p. 229), although she is as brave as all of them most of the time – and she even breaks a record during her initiation ritual in the gang. The only thing she lacks is the male genitalia, but she is not 'forgiven' for this flaw. It is so important a symbol, that when Luis goes to war, an image haunts him: he is terrified of land mines because he is afraid he might come back without his genitalia, "because having balls was what Luis was all about" (VIRAMONTES, 2007c, p. 228). As he wonders about this possibility, the narrator tells the reader that "[n]o matter how many asses Turtle kicked or how bad, how bad she was, *Turtle was someone he hoped never to become. Better to return in a body bag than become a pussy.*" (VIRAMONTES, 2007c, p. 230-231, my emphasis).

The only thing Luis could tell her to make her feel better about it is “I didn’t make the rules” (VIRAMONTES, 2007c, p. 25), meaning it is not his fault as an individual that he is ashamed of her. Without knowing, he blames it on the binary gender system, which prescribes different roles for females and males and imposes that one’s sex be in harmony with one’s gender, as it has been discussed previously. Living within this system, Luis believes that his manhood is in his anatomy, hence his obsession with being wounded and unmanned in Vietnam. Turtle, in turn, feels lost in relation to her identity, as she is not able to see the difference between sex and gender, between being a female and a woman, or to understand that the imposed correspondence between them is a consequence of a cultural process. Therefore, although she feels as a man and acts as one, she internalizes the prejudice against her transgenderism and feels that there is really something wrong with her.

Nevertheless, her appearance is so masculine that she does not have to face any gender prejudice from the rest of society, since no other character in the novel who does not know her closely seems to notice she is a female. She is always addressed as a male, as in the following passages: “The man shoved Turtle’s chest again to prompt a reaction, and said with jackknife sharpness, ¡No te ‘toy molestando, *pendejo*!” (VIRAMONTES, 2007c, p. 21, my emphasis); and “¿Estás *loco* o qué?” (VIRAMONTES, 2007c, p. 22, my emphasis). Moreover, although the narrator refers to her as a female when she is the focalizing character, when any other character who does not know her closely is the focalizing character, the narrator uses the masculine form to make references to her, as in the following passage and in many others:

> The butcher’s package felt chilled against Tranquilina’s chest […] Then she turned to Mama; but instead her gaze locked with the razor-cut head of a *cholo* under an awning. […] Tranquilina recognized *his* glassy yellow-eyed hunger. […] The storm fractured *his* face (VIRAMONTES, 2007c, p. 31-32, my emphasis).

Even a character who had known Turtle in her childhood, the owner of the Friendly Shop, Ray, believes she is a boy later on when he sees her again: “Ray finally recognized Turtle. Of course, and he knew *his* brother too. How much weight had *this young man* lost?” (VIRAMONTES, 2007c, p. 255, my emphasis). This same Ray even goes to the police station to correct the news published about Turtle the next day: “First things first: Ray wanted to correct the newspaper typo, the misprint of the name Antonia. No, it was Antonio, with an *o* at the end.” (VIRAMONTES, 2007c, p. 258). The police seem to take his word for it: “The police report filed on Sunday morning after the incident read: (…) suspect rendezvoused with

Antonio Gamboa a.k.a. Turtle at 23:07 hours, corner of City Terrace/Eastern." (VIRAMONTES, 2007c, p. 296, my emphasis).

The incident mentioned in the previous extract is Turtle's violent death during the tragic ending of the novel, which will be discussed later. After Luis goes to Vietnam and their mother moves away, Turtle is left behind with no one to count on and nowhere to live. To make matters worse, she goes AWOL from the McBride Boys. She lives in the streets for a while, and she survives by asking for money, helping out street vendors in exchange for food or doing small thefts. One day, it seems like her luck is changing, as Ray, the owner of the Friendly Shop, suddenly offers her a job, after being relieved she was not going to rob his store. She accepts it and he tells her to be there the next day at 7.00 a. m. Afraid of oversleeping, as she knows Ray is obsessed with punctuality, she decides to wander the streets at night instead of sleeping. As she roams the streets, a chance meeting with Santos, one of the McBride Boys and supposedly her friend, will seal her tragic destiny. As he tells her to get into his car, she is reluctant, but when the Quarantine Authority helicopter appears, she has to jump into the car in order to escape, since after curfew the police will shoot anything that moves. She is still worried that she might lose that "once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, her first job" (VIRAMONTES, 2007c, p. 264), but little by little she succumbs to sleep and the effects of marijuana on an empty stomach. As Santos is driving to meet other McBride Boys in order to beat up Nacho for getting involved with Ermila and fighting with Big Al, Turtle gets involved in the beating without really knowing what is going on, as she feels sick and intoxicated the whole time. The fight will eventually lead to her death.

Ironically, she could not have had a more stereotypically masculine death, during a gang fight. She suffered doubly for being a transgendered girl in that society: on the one hand, because of her anatomical sex, she was never fully recognized as "one of the boys" by the gang and, on the other, she died as one, because of her gender expression. Even more ironically, after her death she became "officially" a man, as the police registered her as 'Antonio' in the police report, something which would never have been possible for her during her life at the time, even if she had wanted it. At the same time, this may be interpreted as an erasure of her history as a transgendered subject in that society, and her last thoughts, told by the narrator, right before she is shot are quite prophetic: "Why? Turtle forgot why. Turtle didn't know why. She didn't make the rules. Why? Because a tall girl named Antonia never existed, because her history held no memory. Why? Go ask another." (VIRAMONTES, 2007c, p. 324).

3.3.3 Tranquilina, Ben and Ana

Another focalizing character is Tranquilina. She appears in chapter three, although we have a glimpse of her before in chapter two, in the passage previously cited, when she bumps into Turtle in the street. Tranquilina is a very religious young woman, the daughter of a pastor who runs a church in East L.A. Her parents escaped Mexico when her mother was pregnant with Tranquilina, since the owner of the ranch where they lived threatened to keep the baby when she was born. Furthermore, they also had economic reasons to flee, since they worked, in fact, as indentured servants in the ranch:

> They were told they were free to go where they wished. But their families had signed promissory notes to Horseback, to Horseback's father, and before, to his grandfather. Thus the kneeling shoemaker [Tranquilina's father], the peasant girl holding up a heavy basket of mangoes [her mother] and the other hundred and five men, women and children living and dying penniless at the Rancho Paradiso were indentured servants, obliged to pay historic debts, because one had always to be accountable to history. (VIRAMONTES, 2007c, p. 41).

During their crossing to the U.S. – three nights and four days – Mama and Papa endured a very harsh time, especially due to Mama's pregnancy. As they reached the bottom of a canyon impossible to be surmounted, Mama thought it was their end, particularly after she started feeling labor pains. However, they managed to finish their journey and arrive safely in L.A. with their baby. After this crossing, both Papa and Mama became extremely religious. In fact, during her plight, Mama promised her baby to God and she is sure that the miracle that saved them occurred only after this promise. Ironically, this miracle had connection with their Aztec past, not with their Christian beliefs. According to Mama, at the worst moment of their journey, Papa was able to levitate and fly above the canyon in order to see the best path out of there. He then returned to get Mama and managed to cross to the other side. Mama explains to Tranquilina the power of her father:

> According to Mama, Tomás was a man strung together by iguana bones and wire. Fine, slender bones and wrists so thin, Mama could wrap her two fingers like a bracelet around them. Since the first sun, she told Tranquilina, the Azteca priests singled out men like her father to be voladores. Strong but balsa-wood light, the chosen men held hefty faith in the wind to cradle their bodies on the breath of its sighs. (VIRAMONTES, 2007c, p. 44).

This passage illustrates the *mestizaje* of the Mexican people and their religious syncretism, which makes them combine both the Christian and the native faith.

Tranquilina, being from a second generation, tends to doubt her mother's story: "If Papa Tomás could fly away, why didn't he just escape the Horseback's ranch?" As a matter of fact, despite her apparent full devotion to religion, Tranquilina has been having doubts for a while: "The rigorous travelling, the endless list of hostels, the constant flow of pitiless doubters and forever larger supply of ravished believers had worn on Tranquilina, though she refused to admit this to Mama and Papa Tomás, even to herself." (VIRAMONTES, 2007c, p. 30-31). Her increasing lack of faith makes her feel guilty for the attack her family suffers in Cuero, Texas, when a man jumped the three of them after a service and raped Tranquilina:

> Tranquilina blamed herself for Mama's face swelling twice its size in bruised weight. Although the man pushed Tranquilina down face first, her mouth grit-full of soil, it was she who felt culpable for infecting Papa Tomás's thoughts so that he now slept only in seizures of anxiety. (VIRAMONTES, 2007c, p. 31).

In this passage we may read a reference to the guilt associated with being a woman in that society, although Tranquilina does not refer to it herself. We also see the weight religion has for those people, ratified in the following passage:

> Hadn't she learned? Hadn't she realized that experiences teach, and if God loved the meek enough to deliver them from evil, if God loved the poor and the broken and the worst of men, then it stood to reason that Tranquilina's brokenness, her dismembering, should only bring her closer to God? (VIRAMONTES, 2007c, p. 32).

After the assault, Mama decides that the family must return to East L.A., Tranquilina's birthplace, from where they had parted a long time before to tour the country preaching. Papa does not want to go back, for he believes going back is not possible; however, they go anyway. But Papa was right – the place was not the same any more:

> The two women struggled through the rain in a maze of unfamiliar streets. Whole residential blocks had been gutted since their departure and they soon discovered that Kern Street abruptly dead-ended, forcing them to retrace their trail. The streets Mama remembered had once connected to other arteries of the city, rolling up and down hills, and in and out of neighborhoods where neighbors of different nationalities intersected with one another. […] But now the freeways amputated the streets into stumped dead ends, and the lives of the neighbors itched like phantom limbs in Mama's memory […].
> The city of Tranquilina's birth was hardly recognizable. (VIRAMONTES, 2007c, p. 33).

Not only did the landscape change but also did the attitude of neighbors:

> The two women had convinced the new butcher of El Zócalo Fine Meats to donate a five-pound chuck roast for the after-services meal. In previous years, the former butcher, Obdulio, never hesitated in donating pork rinds or stew bones for their ministry; however, since his departure to Jerez, Zacatecas, he had been replaced by a skittish, nervous man. (VIRAMONTES, 2007c, p. 30).

Also, Tranquilina's and Mama's lives will never be the same again, since one day Papa Tomás dies all of a sudden one day. The death seems to make Tranquilina more doubtful of her faith whereas Mama's faith increases progressively.

On the day Papa dies, one of the people attending the service in twenty-one-year-old Ben. Ben is the son of a dark-skinned Chicana mother and a blue-eyed Midwestern Anglo father. His mestizo origin is reflected in his Anglo name – Ben Brady – and in his dark skin, just like his mother's. From a very early age, Ben showed very sensitive traits, which later develop into a mental illness, after his mother leaves him and his sister, Ana, with their father. His hybridity contributes to his overall anxiety, since he does not know where he belongs:

> First it was his last name, Brady, in a roomful of Rodríguezes and Pérezes and Holguins. Who the fuck did he think he was? White, did he think he was white? And then it was his sandwich, the way it looked to the Mexican boys. Ana made him a peanut butter and jelly sandwich, and it was all smashed, strawberry bleeding through the white bread. (VIRAMONTES, 2007c, p. 105).

It is interesting to note that the boys who picked on him were "the lizard boy" and the "bald-headed one," that is, Luis and his sister, Turtle. Later on, Turtle's and Ben's fate will cross again.

The episode narrated in chapter six, when Ben is eleven, at the first narrative moment in the novel – the early 1960s – illustrates the kind of behaviour Ben has had from childhood. He is forced by his father, who has been in the Army and is very strict, to go alone to a department store to buy new tennis shoes for gym class. His father thinks eleven is old enough to shop alone and Ben does not have the courage to tell him he has never done it by himself – this is right after his mother has left. His father is also trying to make him act "like a man," and stop all the crying he has been doing since his mother left. What could be the chance for an adventure for any boy – to be left alone with a five-dollar bill in a department store – for Ben only causes excruciating pain. He does not know where to go, what to do, and as soon as he leaves his father's car, he is sure of his failure in the mission. His feeling is aggravated by the fact that his father says he must go in, get the shoes, and be out of the store in an hour. With this deadline haunting him all the time, instead of looking for the shoes, he wanders around the whole store, in a crescendo of anxiety that will lead to an accident that will change his life. As he cannot bear it any more, he grabs the hand of a small boy and runs out of the store. As they cross the street, a truck hits them. The small boy dies. However,

instead of being blamed by the death, Ben is treated like a hero, for people believe he was, in fact, trying to save the small boy.

The guilt for the boy's death, the life-long pain of the injuries sustained in the accident, added to the guilt he felt for his mother's leaving, do not allow Ben to heal. His confusing mental state grows more and more serious with time. He is so disturbed that he feels guilty for the disappearance of a young girl, Renata Valenzuela, who used to go to school with him, but whom he barely knew. He is under the impression that the life he leads does not belong to him, but to Renata. After graduating from high school, Ben receives a full scholarship to the University of Southern California. "In a community rife with conflict and upheaval, Ben's story was a lapse, a breather, a burning reminder of individual accomplishment against all the odds." (VIRAMONTES, 2007c, p. 117). However, he feels that Renata should have been the one to get it.

At the beginning of the 1970s, Ben is attending university and living by himself in an apartment. He has good and bad days, and that is why he goes to Tranquilina's church: to try to avoid the bad days. He also starts writing what seems to be a novel in order to fill the void left by his mother's absence. "Ben's hands surprised him. In a bewildering sort of way his longish and dirt-encrusted nails had the capacity to mold a mother's life." (VIRAMONTES, 2007c, p. 122). Nonetheless, more often than not, he cannot avoid bad days. He has periods of complete prostration, when he will not leave the apartment or will disappear completely. His sister, Ana, is the only one who will take care of him, since their father has long given up.

Ana has taken more after their father than Ben. Physically, she has white skin and red hair, like her father. She also seems to embody the American way of life, to be more acculturated than any other Chicano character in the novel: she works in an office, constantly does overtime, drives her own car and is ambitious about moving on in her career. Whatever part hybridity plays on Ben's paranoia, it does not affect Ana the same way, perhaps because, despite being a hybrid subject, this is not patent on her skin. However, she also carries the weight of being a woman and having to look after her little brother Ben. When Tranquilina calls her to tell her that Ben is missing, the narrator affirms: "Yes? Ana never said hello, as if she knew whoever was on the other line would ultimately require something from her." (VIRAMONTES, 2007c, p. 205). After Tranquilina informs her of Ben's disappearance, "Ana's not-again breath sifted through the receiver. So what else is new?" (VIRAMONTES, 2007c, p. 205). All she can do is get her car and start looking for Ben. Tranquilina helps her in this endeavour. The two young women then decide to drive around East L.A. and look for Ben.

3.3.4 The End: six degrees of connection

The incident in which all the characters' stories converge starts exactly when Ana and Tranquilina are driving around looking for Ben. It is about 2 a. m. At the same time, Nacho is heading to the bus station to take his bus back home to Mexico. Ermila in turn is heading to the bus stop to try to warn Nacho about the McBride Boys' intentions. As Nacho has some time to kill, he decides to go to a stand nearby and eat something. At this moment, Tranquilina and Ana see Nacho and mistake him for Ben. After realizing they are wrong, they stop Nacho in the street anyway to ask him if he has seen Ben. At first, he is suspicious and regrets having left the station to eat. He pretends not to hear the girls, but then in all his friendliness he decides to talk to them. At this moment, he dwells upon his adventures in the city: "Nacho had to admit: one characteristic of this city he appreciated was its melodrama: his departure accented with rain. (...) Pure Hollywoodlandia. Would Nacho have tales to share back home!" (VIRAMONTES, 2007c, p. 320). It starts to rain. Since Nacho cannot help the girls, they leave, but first Tranquilina says "Go with God."

As if on cue with Nacho's thoughts, in a scenario reminiscent of those often seen on the Big Screen, a dramatic scene starts unravelling: "A flash of lightning blazed on the horizon of Fifth Street, camera-bulb, blinding light, splashes of brilliant white light on the chain of smooth metal bodies of parked cars linked bumper to bumper. Nacho never knew what hit him." (VIRAMONTES, 2007c, p. 320). The McBride Boys – Alfonso, Santos, Palo and Turtle – get out of Santos's Pontiac and assault Nacho. At first, the boys only use their fists against Nacho, but Turtle is so intoxicated and out of her mind that she pulls out her faithful screwdriver against him. The rain becomes heavier and lightning flashes.

> Her instinct alerted, she willed her body to move in the direction of the brick wall, where the boy struggled to lean, a palm held out to stop her.
> And Turtle lunged at the boy with all the dynamite rage of all the fucked-up boys stored in her rented body. Bits of flesh splattered on Turtle's face and it struck her as funny until panic set in like the freeze of cold rain. She pushed the screwdriver against a bone, felt her arm muscle thrust forward with greater force, then pulled back with all her strength. When she plunged the screwdriver in again, it went so deep through the pit of the boy's belly, it hit the brick wall and when she heard the snap-crack of bone, she took it to be the boy's rib and not her own wrist and arm bones breaking. (VIRAMONTES, 2007c, p. 322).

By now the rain is torrential. Tranquilina has seen the attack and has left Ana in the car and gone towards the fight. Meanwhile, the McBride Boys have abandoned Turtle to take

the blame for Nacho's death. Now the QA shooters are aiming at them and Tranquilina shouts "We'rrrre not doggggs!" but they have already hit Turtle. The novel ends with Tranquilina like a postmodern-day Pietà, taking Turtle in her arms and watching her die. She ignores the commands to place her hands on her head and faces her destiny:

> Her arms by her side, her fists clenched, she would not fear them. Shouting voices ordered her not to move, stay immobile, but she lifted one foot forward, then another, refusing to halt. Two inches, four, six, eight, riding the currents of the wilding wind. Riding it beyond the borders, past the cesarean scars of the earth, out to limitless space where everything was possible if she believed. (VIRAMONTES, 2007c, p. 325).

4 CONCLUSION

The history of Mexicans/Chicanos is a history of unresolved conflicts. In "Politics, Representation, and Emergence of Chicana Aesthetics," Alvina Quintana reflects upon Rosa Linda Fregoso's ideas. Fregoso sustains that the loss of Mexican territory during the Mexican-American war in mid-nineteenth century has determined the subsequent Mexican immigration to the U.S., in search of better conditions of life, but also as a return to their own native land. Quintana continues: "Chicano/as have inherited a Mexican history of colonialism and imperialism that subjects them to conquest, marginalization, and domination within their *native* (southwestern) territories." (QUINTANA, 1996, p. 16). The Chicanos' position is indeed very peculiar: they are considered foreigners on what was one day – and historically, not a long time ago – their own territory. But Quintana sees a positive side in their condition: "this political dilemma has inspired myriad mediations that contribute to a rich assortment of cultural interpretations." (QUINTANA, 1996, p. 16).

Among these cultural interpretations is the fiction of contemporary Chicana writers, such as Sandra Cisneros, Ana Castillo, and Helena María Viramontes. Still according to Quintana (1996, p. 29), "[a] sustained analysis of the literary production of Chicanas then provides a basis for reflecting on form and genre as historical byproducts of a perspective formed in relationship to both Mexican and American culture.". In Helena María Viramontes's fiction, one can see how "form and genre" complement each other in order to challenge history and the politics of domination by foregrounding the multiple oppressions to which Chicanos are submitted. In other words, Viramontes does not describe the plight of Chicanos in simple terms; she does so using intricate narrative strategies in order to foreground certain issues not only through subject but also through form.

In her short stories "Neighbors" and "The Cariboo Cafe" and her novel *Their Dogs Came With Them*, the main theme of all stories is the struggle of Chicanos to overcome oppression. In "Neighbors," two old characters, an old Chicana woman and an old Chicano man, have to cope with the deterioration of their *barrio* after the construction of freeways which have changed the landscape of the neighborhood. "The Cariboo Cafe" deals with broken families in the same neighborhood. Two children cannot find their way through the streets of East L.A. and end up entangled in the suffering of an old woman and a cafe owner. In *Their Dogs Came With Them*, different stories of young Chicanas and Chicanos focus on violence, religion, family, and, ultimately, the oppression of Chicanos by Anglos in two

different moments, with the construction of freeways in the early 1960s and the imposition of a rabies quarantine in the early 1970s.

Nevertheless, however rich the subject matters of Viramontes's fictional work are, to focus solely on *what* Viramontes tells is not enough to understand the magnitude of her writing. *How* she tells the things she narrates matters equally. In "The Cariboo Cafe" and in *Their Dogs Came With Them*, several stories first diverge and then converge in a tragic ending. These stories are told separately, but in a fragmented way, with the use of flashbacks and flash-forwards. This use of fragmentation is not done merely on a whim. Viramontes's use of strategies of fragmentation and multiple focalization is "unique in the way it attempts to call into existence an ideal reader […]. She employs a narrative structure […] that is designed to reproduce in her ideal reader a transformation of consciousness." (MOYA, 2002, p. 185). The consciousness of the reader is set into action as he or she feels so lost in the fragmented narrative that he or she identifies with the equally lost characters. Furthermore, her use of multiple focalizing characters allows the reader to have a multiple insight into the Chicano subject, instead of a reductionist monolithic stereotyped view.

In "Nopalitos," Viramontes sums up in a very synthetic fashion the complex path she has been following as a writer: "Subject matter and form. They met, became lovers, often quarrelled, but nonetheless, Helena María Viramontes was born." (VIRAMONTES, 1989, p. 37).

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