ANCESTOR ROAD:

AN INTERDISCIPLINARY EXPLORATION OF *TESTIMONIO* THROUGH AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL POETRY

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of Southwest Studies

The Colorado College

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

Bachelor of Arts

By

Isabel Cristina Lanzetta

May 2022

With Many Thanks to

Karen Roybal

Thesis Advisor

Introduction

> *In general, my understanding of [where my family came from] was once we hit the United States, we were American. And we were no longer Hispanic ... and, in Prescott, when my mother was growing up, if you were speaking Spanish, it wasn't something that was necessarily looked highly upon.*[1]

In the fall of 2019, I enrolled in my first class within the Southwest Studies Department, a course titled Chicana Feminism. Newly introduced to this distinct feminist praxis, the construction of *mestizaje*, and critical discourse surrounding the southern border, I began to place my academic studies in conversation with a distinct familial heritage for which I had a name but little understanding. Although my paternal family has deep roots in the state of Arizona, I lacked any tangible knowledge of the role our migration pattern had played in shaping our social and cultural awareness, informed by the specific region in which we settled and the social and political conditions of my home state. Stories of my family's migration were seldom discussed by those most directly associated with it, as phenotypical and idiomatic traits associated with *mexicanidad* were perceived with embarrassment and shame by a generation of women raised in the years following World War II—a decade marked by the centering of American patriotism and familial and cultural values that were decidedly male-oriented and white[2]. Complicated by the marriage between my great-great grandmother and an Anglo rancher, alongside my grandmother's marriage to my grandfather, a white individual brought to Arizona by his military service, despite no interpersonal connections his family, my family has long grappled to place

[1] Duane Marshall, interview by author, Arizona, 10 January 2022.
[2] Cadava, Geraldo L. 2013. Standing on Common Ground : The Making of a Sunbelt Borderland. Harvard University Press.

their inherited mixed identities in conversation with larger processes of cultural change, in part supported by a legacy of whitening *mestizaje* through marriage with Spanish colonial elites and the continued classification of Mexicans as "white."[3]

As I began exploring the process of "Americanization" that has marked the previous generations before me, I came to understand how these individual expressions of silence and the erasure of our distinct cultural past was and continues to be informed and guided by larger systems of power revealed through the stories I have collected over the course of my research. My thesis project emerges from each of the creative and analytical frameworks from which I have worked during the course of my education, blending both poetry and the field of Southwest Studies. This interdisciplinary project draws on feminist demography, *testimonio*, and autobiographical poetry writing as a method of discerning how the legacy of colonization has supported the continued devaluation of particular bodies and their stories. By looking at the conjunction of the coloniality of power and the intimate details of an individual's lived reality, my research has produced not only a historical record that documents my family, but it has also unveiled the role systems of power play in shaping the social and cultural consciousness of entire communities. The application of feminist demography and poetry writing bridges two distinct ways of knowing: providing an analytical and demographical approach to retelling history alongside the corporeal and metaphysical experience of the world captured in creative literature. The product is an autoethnographic collection of poetry, inspired by and incorporating the voices of my family and their lived or inherited stories, which serves to depict a landscape riddled with accounts of exclusion and survival that continue to be pervasive today.

[3] Meeks, Eric V., and Patricia Nelson Limerick. 2020. Border Citizens : The Making of Indians, Mexicans, and Anglos in Arizona. Revised edition. University of Texas Press.

Historical Background

The colonization of the Americas had long-ranging impacts on the systems of power, thought, and ideology which defined the region: one of which included the conceptualization of a *mestizo* identity, in an attempt to define those individuals who embodied this rapid collision between the western and eastern hemispheres and the bodies who make each their home. First implemented by the Spanish *hacienda* system, the territory now known as the American Southwest was controlled by a strict racial hierarchy that has since marked the region. Emerging from this economic and political structure of power based on racial and ethnic heritage, the enforcement of the *casta* system served to position *mestizos* and other individuals in a new social order, limiting their social, economic, and political mobility. Country of birth, the color of one's skin, and blood quantum all indicated where individuals would place in this system. Even after gaining independence from Spain in the year of 1810, the country of Mexico struggled to cultivate an image of a unified *mestizo* race as a consequence of this deeply entrenched history of devaluing individuals who represented the—often violent—joining of Spanish and indigenous communities.[4]

Only three decades later, the acquisition of new territory from Mexico signaled a shift not only in the geographic landscape of its northern neighbor, the United States, but in the corporeal landscape as well. With this dramatic territorial expansion across the southwest of the continent, a drastic demographic change occurred among ordinary residents of the United States. Following the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, people who had previously been citizens of Mexico found themselves now surrounded by an entirely new nation, their bodies subject to new legal regulations surrounding their abilities to move within and inhabit this new space. Of these,

---

[4] Overmyer-Velázquez, Mark. 2013. "Good Neighbors and White Mexicans: Constructing Race and Nation on the Mexico-U.S. Border." Journal of American Ethnic History 33 (1): 5–34. doi:10.5406/jamerethnhist.33.1.0005.

one law in particular had a marked effect on the social and economic futures of these communities. Given that the passage of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo was established to honor and protect land grants previously given to Mexican citizens who remained on the north side of this newly transformed border, "Mexican" became an ethnic designation synonymous with "white,"[5] and this racial classification would remain unchanged until the first half of the 20th century.[6] As Marla Andrea Ramírez describes this effect: "US citizenship and racial definitions for Mexicans in the annexed territories were dictated by conquest and colonization".[7] Such determinations have been and continue to be dictated by these factors, transformed only by shifting political, social, and economic motives.

At the turn of the 20th century, immigration from Mexico began to shift on both sides of the border. Increased demand for labor and the political upheaval of the Mexican Revolution brought masses of migrants up from the southern border into the state of Arizona[8]. As Meeks details this pattern in his book, *The Making of Indians, Mexicans and Anglos in Arizona*, "the violence of the Mexican Revolution and an agricultural boom in the Salt River Valley...enticed more Mexicans into Arizona than ever before." Cotton-growing farmlands across Maricopa County became the main destination for Mexicans by the year 1920, surpassing even Tucson, Arizona.[9] Between 1910 and 1920, up to ten percent of the Mexican population had migrated from Mexico, comprising the largest sustained movement of migratory workers in the 20th century.[10] In 1922, 75% of fruit and vegetable workers and 50% of cotton workers in the

---

[5] According to the Naturalization Act of 1790, US citizenship was reserved for "free white persons," or in reality—white men, exclusively. This was one of the driving catalysts for the ethnic designation of Mexicans as "white," following the stipulations of the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo. (Ramírez, Marla Andrea. 2018. "The Making of Mexican Illegality: Immigration Exclusions Based on Race, Class Status, and Gender." New Political Science 40.)
[6] Overmyer-Velázquez, "Good Neighbors and White Mexicans."
[7] Ramírez, "The Making of Mexican Illegality."
[8] Cadava, Standing on Common Ground.
[9] Meeks, Border Citizens.
[10] Ramírez, "The Making of Mexican Illegality."

Southwestern United States were of Mexican descent[11]. In Arizona, citrus fields and orchards dotted the landscape from what is today central Phoenix to Mesa and the northwest valley, making the state the second largest producer of lemon in the United States, after California.[12] Encouraged by the bifurcation of work into "skilled" and "unskilled" tasks and xenophobic language surrounding the intellectual and social capabilities of Mexican individuals, Mexican labor became synonymous with "unskilled" labor, leading these communities to receive low wages in return for their work and exacerbating cycles of poverty within Mexican-American communities.[13]

Despite increasing American reliance on Mexican labor, both documented and undocumented, this migration surge was targeted through a process of racialization and removal, better known as the phenomenon of "attraction repulsion".[14] Among bureaucratic changes, the United States' response was marked by the formation of Border Patrol in 1924 and a wave of deportations between 1929-1933 that targeted all peoples of Mexican descent, motivated by a political framework which considered working class individuals ineligible for US citizenship.[15] The militarization of the border was exacerbated by the political polarization of World War II and the Cold War, during which period individuals across the state of Arizona were accused of affiliating with enemy nations. For individuals of Mexican descent, their behavior and movement became increasingly regulated and monitored as their ethnic identity came under increasing social scrutiny. According to Geraldo L. Cadava in his historical account of Arizona's

---

[11] Galindo, René. 2011. "The Nativistic Legacy of the Americanization Era in the Education of Mexican Immigrant Students." Educational Studies 47 (4): 323–46. doi:10.1080/00131946.2011.589308.
[12] Cuádraz, Gloria, and Luis F. B. Plascencia. 2018. Mexican Workers and the Making of Arizona. The University of Arizona Press.
[13] Cuádraz, Mexican Workers.
[14] Wilson, Mike, Isabel Garcia, Ray Borane, Robin Hoover, Ray Ybarra, Joseph Mathew, Daniel DeVivo, Chris Simcox, and Byrd Baylor. 2019. Crossing Arizona. Kanopy Streaming.
[15] Overmyer-Velázquez, "Good Neighbors and White Mexicans."

borderlands, *Standing on Common Ground*, discrimination against people of Mexican, Japanese, and native descent, including seeing them as security threats or invoking much older ideas about their racial inferiority, contradicted the “harmonious inter-American relations" pledged by the United States and Mexico alike. In response to the perceived threat posed by Mexican border crossers, border security across southern Arizona became increasingly stringent, and Mexican individuals living within the United States were required to declare their “political activities, the organizations they belonged to, and whether they endorsed the politics of an enemy nation.”[16]

Not only did increasing border militarization serve to regulate the movement of Mexican individuals across the southern border, but the forced removal of individuals of Mexican descent became commonplace during the first half of the 20th century. At the onset of the Great Depression in the third decade of the century, the country already had the infrastructure in place to implement a mass deportation of Mexican laborers. Blamed for the labor and resource scarcity that marked this era of US history, approximately 80,000 Mexican migrant workers were deported on average each year between 1929-1937, and many more migrants voluntarily left the country for fear of deportation. Between 1931 and 1934, around one-third of the Mexican population had been deported or repatriated to Mexico, with 60% of those deported being U.S. citizens.[17] At the end of this peak period of deportations, not only did conversations around citizenship for Mexican migrants change, but the racial classification of Mexican citizens changed as well.

Across the state of Arizona, Mexicans were classified as white under law, a significant determination given the state’s draconian restrictions on non-white individuals. In the year of 1865, the territory that would later be named the state of Arizona passed an antimiscegenation

[16] Cadava, Standing on Common Ground.
[17] Galindo, “The Nativistic Legacy of the Americanization Era.”

statute which prohibited marriage between “whites and Indians, Mongolians, or Blacks.” In the early 20th century, this law was amended to state that marriages between individuals of Caucasian blood as well as their descendants, with non-white individuals as well as their descendants, were null and void. Under the antimiscegenation statutes, marriage between Anglos and ethnic Mexicans remained recognizable in a court of law, in which space Mexicans were generally regarded as white regardless of their social custom.[18] Although Mexicans were legally classified as white, discrimination against people of Mexican descent materialized in economic and social structures across the state of Arizona. Even during the years of the second World War, which were perceived as a period of social progress by the United States and Mexico alike, restaurants still displayed signs citing their refusal to serve “‘Mexicans and Negroes,’” and only a handful of Mexican-American students enrolled at the University of Arizona.[19] However, segregation and discrimination against individuals of Mexican descent was not unique to the state of Arizona, but was rather prevalent across the southwestern United States.

In 1936, El Paso, Texas announced that Mexicans, a demographic majority in this border city, would no longer be classified as ethnically white, but as “colored,” a determination that served to justify the segregation of communities within schools and other public spaces. Encouraged by changing racial ideologies, anxiety, and xenophobia prompted by the economic depression, this was the first and only time the census listed Mexican under its own category, which seemed to be defined simply as “other”. Here, *Mexican* indicated an individual born, or whose parents were born, in Mexico, and who was “‘not definitely white, Negro, Indian, Chinese, or Japanese’”. Following debates leading up to the 1940 decennial census on how to classify Mexicans, these individuals were reclassified as white by the time of the census’ release,

---

[18] Meeks, Border Citizens.
[19] Cadava, Standing on Common Ground.

unless "definitely Indian or of other non-white race". Despite the social and political capital instilled by this re-classification, El Paso revealed the fragility behind the ethnic designation and institutional inclusion of Mexicans. Mark Overmyer-Velazquez describes this phenomenon in his work on the Good Neighbors Policy, writing: "'faced with an intensifying territorial encroachment by white americans on the one hand and by a pervasive atmosphere of racial and cultural hostility on the other, ethnic Mexicans were increasingly forced to devise defensive strategies of adaptation and survival in an intermediate 'third' social space that was located in the interstices between the dominant national and cultural systems of both the United States and Mexico".[20]

Accompanied by shifting ethnic and racial designations, nativistic and nationalistic cultural ideologies profoundly impacted the development of migrant communities and family structures. The "Americanization" era marked the turn of the 20th century in the United States: an ideology marked by the rise of nativism and established exclusions through the creation of "Other". As René Galindo emphasizes, nativism creates a distinction between foreigners, or aliens, on the basis of different cultural beliefs, language, political ideologies, religion, or race, and seeks to replace the identities of the "Other" with the dominant culture and language on which the nation is thought to be based. In the Southwest, this shift was marked by educational reform, including the segregation and English-only education of Mexican students following the 1920s, in a region where *mexicanidad* was constructed as an "inferior race," incapable of being Americanized.[21] This perception of Mexican communities relied not only on the exclusion of new migrants, but also on the role of women in community development and as conduits of

[20] Gutierrez, quoted in "Good Neighbors."
[21] Galindo, René. 2011. "The Nativistic Legacy of the Americanization Era in the Education of Mexican Immigrant Students."

cultural knowledge in order to ensure generational assimilation into the widespread attitudes and beliefs that characterized an "American".[22]

The remnants of these ideologies and their impact on my region of study, Arizona, are visible even into the current era. Policies that encourage the exclusion and removal of individuals from the southern border are a primary topic of contention within the State Capitol, from which many restrictive laws have emerged. Passed into law by Arizona courts in 2010, SB 1070 made it a crime to fail to display immigration documents to authorities upon request, giving police the power to detain any individual suspected of being in the country unlawfully.[23] Named one of the "broadest and strictest immigration measure in generations," SB 1070 was effectively "an open invitation for harassment and discrimination against Hispanics regardless of their citizenship status".[24] According to an analysis of over 250,000 tweets, SB 1070 not only permitted the racial profiling of individuals to discern their citizenship status, but according to the University of Chicago Sociology associate professor and researcher René D. Flores, the passage of this bill also negatively impacted digital conversations regarding Mexican and Hispanic immigrants.[25] Not only do emerging bills influence conversations around race, but serve also to control and restrict such discussions.

In 2021, Arizona passed a bill that attempted to outlaw critical race theory in schools. This bill proposed far reaching impacts on institutional conversations surrounding power and equity. It served to "effectively ban the ways teachers can discuss with students topics such as

---

[22] Sanchez, George J. 1993. Becoming Mexican-American: Ethnicity, Culture, and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles, 1900-1945. Oxford University Press.
[23] Archibold, Randal C. "Arizona Enacts Stringent Law on Immigration." The New York Times. The New York Times, April 23, 2010.
[24] Archibold, "Arizona Enacts Stringent Law."
[25] Flores, René D. 2017. "Do Anti-Immigrant Laws Shape Public Sentiment? A Study of Arizona's SB 1070 Using Twitter Data." American Journal of Sociology 123 (2): 333–84. doi:10.1086/692983.

white supremacy, systemic racism, and sexism, among other things," rejecting curriculum that encouraged critical inquiry into expressions of power on the basis of race or ethnicity.[26] Although the law was determined unenforceable by the State's Department of Education, the law will be voted on in the 2022 November ballot.[27] The potential impact of HB 2906, should it pass, will be tremendously significant on the students it is set to affect. According to America's Promise Alliance Report, "for young people from historically marginalized groups, this content [critical race theory] provides validation and corroboration that their experiences as marginalized young people have affected the way they learn and are treated in the world".[28] The elimination of these conversations in academic settings would signify a continued silencing of the state's long history of discrimination and exclusion of non-white individuals, revealed in part by the perceptions and treatment of individuals of Mexican descent.

Methodology

Ethnic Self-Identification

To conduct demographic research on my paternal family, this research uses the terms *mestizo* and *mestizaje* in order to conceptualize and discuss an ethnic identity that bridges both indigenous and Spanish heritage. Other ethnic identities, such as *hispanic*, *Latinx,* or *Mexican* will not serve as appropriate replacements to describe *mestizaje*, as they value national, idiomatic, or regional traits over socio-political and historical factors that have contributed to the development of this identity. The terms *mestizo* and *mestizaje* emerge from a long tradition of

---

[26] Pendharkar, Eesha. "Critical Race Theory Law Runs Into Legal Trouble in Arizona." Education Week. Education Week, October 19, 2021.

[27] Gloria Gomez, Arizona Mirror March 30. "Constitutional Ban on 'Critical Race Theory' in AZ Schools, Universities Is One Vote Away from the November Ballot." Arizona Mirror, March 30, 2022.

[28] Camera, Lauren. 2021. "Bills Banning Critical Race Theory Advance in States Despite Its Absence in Many Classrooms." U.S. News & World Report - The Report, June, C18–21.

racialized caste hierarchies implemented by the Spanish occupation of the Americas, primarily impacting the regions of the American Southwest and Central America. The *casta* system, the name by which these social and political hierarchies were named, valued a higher colonial, or Spanish, blood quantum and devalued and displaced indigenous and black communities.

The term *mestizo* derived from Mexico in the 1530s, and was initially synonymous with illegitimacy, especially the "mixing" of animal species. Under this definition, mestizos were not subject to tribute and labor regimes as were their indigenous counterparts. The social position of *mestizos* in the early colonial landscape therefore occupies "an intermediary buffer zone between indio and white ... inherently implicated in the continued economic marginalization, racism, and social and cultural erasure of indigenous peoples".[29] This intermediary space in which *mestizaje* lies is defined by the conjunction of Mexicans of European descent and indigenous peoples, and is simultaneously hostile as it is romanticized. This work uses *mestizo* in order to define a unique ethnic identity which emerges from the enduring legacy of control and violence inflicted upon indigenous bodies, and where "indigenous women's wombs are the epicenter of *mestizaje* as an absorbing process into whiteness".[30] It is through this frame that my research utilizes the term *mestizo* in order to conceptualize the ethnic and racial self-identification of family members with indigenous heritage originating in Mexico, while recognizing the legacy of harm and erasure of indigeneity associated with the term, and the continued displacement of indigenous communities by systems of power that continually value whiteness and proximity to colonial social, ideological and cultural frameworks.

[29] Urrieta Jr., Luis, and Dolores Calderón. 2019. "Critical Latinx Indigeneities: Unpacking Indigeneity from Within and Outside of Latinized Entanglements." AMAE Journal 13 (2): 145–74. doi:10.24974/amae.13.2.432.
[30] Urrieta and Calderón, "Critical Latinx Indigeneities."

Feminist Demography, Storytelling and Oral History

In analyzing my family from an ethno-biographical lens, I have drawn from the writings of Luz del Alba Acevedo, Vanessa A. Massaro, and Jill R. Williams. I utilize feminist demography as my primary research method to engage with my family's history due to the utility of this methodology in documenting macro and micro-inequalities. As outlined by Jill R. Williams in her work "Feminist Engagements with Geopolitics," a great benefit of feminist research is its "commitment to producing knowledge useful in opposing the many varieties of gender injustice". Demography as a practice is built on quantitative research, the scientific method, and objective research. Under the examination of feminist theory, Williams demonstrates how demography is not as objective a practice as it appears to be, but is influenced by researchers' social locations, motives and interests, and their social identities. Thus the creation of knowledge, through the practice of demography, is situated within the context of the researcher and their social position, and is marked by bias and incomplete data.[31]

Feminist theory applied to demography and geopolitical studies provides a framework with which to investigate and disclose the manner in which knowledge is produced, and contribute an additional analytic approach that examines the relationship between knowledge production and power. Emerging from feminist geography and critical geopolitics, feminist geopolitics "traces nascent forms of power, oppression, and resistances at and between multiples scales (e.g. body, home, and nation-state), discerning the manifestation of various forms of power through situated, embodied, and politically transformative theories and research methodologies".[32] Feminist geopolitics provides a way of engaging with "transnational processes

[31] Williams, Jill R. 2010. "Doing Feminist-Demography." International Journal of Social Research Methodology 13 (3): 197–210. doi:10.1080/13645579.2010.482250.
[32] Caroline Faria, Jill Williams, and Vanessa A. Massaro. 2020. "Feminist Political Geographies: Critical Reflections, New Directions." Environment and Planning C: Politics and Space 38 (August): 1149–59.

of economic development, imperialism, state violence, militarization, and securitization" in the development of Otherness by studying how geopolitical relations manifest in everyday life.[33]

Both feminist demography and geopolitics have informed this project's examination of the banal, everyday life to explore micro inequalities and geopolitical patterns through *testimonio*, both by recording oral histories from my family members and writing and reflecting on these memories. According to literary scholar Gillina Whitlock, *testimonio* signifies "an ethical turn to recognition of distant strangers, debates about empathic engagement with others and compassionate concern for their suffering". In this form, testimonial narrative "speaks publicly on behalf of the many who have suffered, and lays claim to truth and authenticity in accounts of social suffering".[34] *Testimoniadoras*, or producers of *testimonios*, may be oral historians, literary scholars, ethnographers, creative writers, or psychologists.[35] The practice of *testimonio* is one observed by Alba Acevedo in *Feminist Testimonios.* In her work, Acevedo outlines how the process of narrative and storytelling allows for life trajectories to become a source of inquiry, providing an artistic form through which to conceptualize identity and community. For Acevedo and her colleagues, *testimonio* resists the "repression of language, culture, and race," while recognizing the interstitial spaces formed by individuals with complex identities as it makes visible the lives and memories of these women, and thus the historical climate in which they have experienced their lives. As Acevedo describes this process:

> We learned to acknowledge and tell how our bodies are maps of oppression, of institutional violence and stress, of exclusion, objectification, and abuse. Since our bodies

---

33 Faria, Williams, and Massaro, "Feminist Political Geographies."

34 Whitlock, Gillian. 2015. Postcolonial Life Narrative: Testimonial Transactions. Oxford Studies in Postcolonial Literatures. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press.

35 Acevedo, Luz del Alba. 2001. Telling to Live : Latina Feminist Testimonios. Latin America Otherwise. Duke University Press.

> hold the stress and tensions of our daily lives, we also shared stories of body breakdowns, of how we take care of ourselves, or how we do not. We discussed how our bodies express creative and carnal experiences, and compared our many styles of dancing, our appreciation of good food, relaxation, and laughter.[36]

Testimonio provides a space in which the innate knowledge of the body and memory emerge from lived experience, where communities whose voices are largely displaced may reclaim agency over how and in what context their interaction with larger socio-political climates is framed. Emphasizing lived experience is essential in order to identify the shortcomings of research based in data rather than in cultural knowledge, granting marginalized communities the opportunity to contribute to conversations which are central to their recognition within demography and other social sciences. For Acevedo, this process of retelling history serves to create "narratives lodged in memory"[37]. This practice, although widely rejected as an objective tool of social study in the majority of academic circles, has been utilized as a mode of discourse by the Latina Feminist Group since the late twentieth century, and has contributed abundant literature to the field of demography. For the purposes of this project, I will read the oral history as *testimonios*, and will apply these individual stories to my process of testimonial writing.

The Interviews

In my research, oral history provided the basis for viewing my paternal family through the lens of feminist demography. During the winter of 2021 into 2022, I conducted five interviews in total. Four were conducted virtually during the peak of the Omicron pandemic, and one was conducted in person. The interviewees represented a range of ages, in order of eldest,

---

[36] Acevedo, Telling To Live.
[37] Acevedo, Telling To Live.

from 69, 65, 67, 51 to 49. These individuals represent the majority of the surviving second-generation to be born and raised in the United States. The content of these interviews served to distinguish several themes centered on family and community development, including language retention, the self's relation to a distinct cultural and ethnic heritage as well as indigeneity or mestizo identity, the role of food within the family, the role of women and marital relations within the family structure, and educational and income status across generations. Questions addressed each speaker's childhood and adult recollections, including memories and stories passed down to them from their parents and grandparents, the physical and social landscape in which they were raised, the foods they ate, their educational background, and the role of language in their communities. Each interview lasted on average between sixty to one-hundred and twenty minutes, and were recorded and transcribed using digital software.

From these interviews, I discerned important details surrounding my paternal family's migration, labor, and cultural development over the span of several generations. According to my interviewees, my family initially migrated from Mexico between the 1920 and 1930s, fleeing the violence of the Mexican Revolution. When my great-great grandmother, Justina Corral, arrived in the United States, she and her family worked as laborers across the state of Arizona: picking cotton, fruit, and working in the mines and as ranchers between the 30s and 40s, predating and paralleling the boom of Mexican migrants that followed the enactment of the Bracero Program, which comprised the largest guest worker program in the nation's history, as it brought over four million Mexican agricultural workers into the United States between the years 1942-1964.[38] In the mid twentieth century, my great-grandmother Justina Contreras worked cleaning houses and selling tamales during the holidays alongside her sisters until her death in 1980. My

[38] Kosack, Edward. 2021. "Guest Worker Programs and Human Capital Investment: The Bracero Program in Mexico, 1942-1964." Journal of Human Resources 56 (2): 570–99. doi:http://jhr.uwpress.org/content/by/year.

grandmother, Bertha Mae Romero, was a housewife for many years before working as a librarian in the later years of her life.

Across three generations, my grandmother, her mother, and her grandmother each spoke and understood Spanish fluently, although this acquisition ended with my father's birth in 1970, alongside those of his siblings in the decade prior, in an attempt to "Americanize" subsequent generations as much as possible. These effects were outlined by my father in during the course of his interview:

> My understanding was when my mother was growing up and when my grandmother was living [in Arizona] earlier on, especially in the areas that they worked, they worked as ranch hands. And I don't believe that Spanish was necessarily desired around the ranch or or a ranch ... I do remember my mom mentioning to me about being harassed as a Mexican. Called a Mexican and not in a good way. Called a cholo. Called a wetback, scratch-back. A number of other words.[39]

Here, not only does the interviewee stress the significance of cultural dynamics on language retention, but he also addresses a level of discrimination that was notably pervasive during this time period. His observations of language were mirrored in his cousin's interview, as she reflected on her ability to converse with her great-grandmother, who spoke no English: "I remember that she talked to me, now everybody said she only spoke Spanish but I remember talking to her and knowing what she was saying."[40] Here, the interviewee signifies that they either could understand Spanish during their formative years, or that they had reached a level of mutual understanding with this family member that permitted them to communicate across their vast language barrier.

---

[39] Marshall, interview.
[40] Suzy Turrentine, interview by author, Virtual, 12 January 2022.

My interviewees stressed the importance of food above all other childhood memories as integral to their experience of their inherited and blended culture, and view themselves primarily from a nationalistic lens, before stressing any other self-identifying traits. From interviews, I discerned that the primary motivation for adopting a homogenized "American" identity emerged from shame and embarrassment their predecessors experienced upon arriving in the country. As my aunt recounted in her interview:

> And when she would walk around town with, particularly with me, when we'd go to the store or something like that the Hispanics would walk up and talk to her in Spanish. And it always irritated mom, because then she was forced to speak it. And I don't know ... I think she was still embarrassed by it. Because in my book, things have changed, because I don't think of myself as Mexican. However, I'm only second generation here.[41]

This depiction of the emotional experience of the interviewee's mother surrounding her own ethnic identity and her desire to hide it revealed how external perceptions of a *mestiza/o* ethnic heritage acted as one of the driving catalysts for framing familial and cultural development across several generations under national, rather than ethnic, ideals. Much of the information divulged in these oral interviews built the sonic and lyrical structure from which my manuscript is based, and is frequently referenced or alluded to throughout the project. Some of my poems even include direct or indirect quotes taken from the interviews themselves, a reference noted in the final section of my manuscript.

The Manuscript

[41] Cheri Marshall, interview by author, Virtual, 11 January 2022.

As Helen Rickerby outlines in her work "Articulating Artemisia: Revisioning the Lives of Women from History in Biographical Poetry," poetry offers a liminal space which supersedes the limitations of fact and fiction. According to Rickerby, poetry provides a method of distilling experience and uncovering and creating meaning; where lived experience is juxtaposed with literary devices such as metaphor and subtext, and facts serve a symbolic or subtextual purpose. Poetry acts as a vessel through which to communicate individual narratives in a manner that does not center chronology, but rather the intersections between feeling, experience, fact, and symbology, which places greater emphasis on meaning making than on the evidence presented by hard data itself. Used in conjunction with feminist demography and the process of *testimonio*, poetry acts as the intersection between somatic knowledge and evidence-based information, and serves to reanimate reality in order to create a "deeper, more beautiful truth".[42] For the purposes of this project, biographical and autobiographical poetry were the primary forms I utilized in order to communicate the lived experiences of myself and my family members, while conveying larger themes, emotions, and memories associated with lived experience through symbology, structure, language, and other literary devices.

In order to move from the oral interviews into the writing process, I studied the broader implications my individual subjects indicated through their stories and memories. My research revealed the manner in which cultural assimilation and erasure implemented on the state and social level serves to eliminate divergent ethnic and cultural identifiers within the communities of Phoenix and Prescott, Arizona. The prohibition of the Spanish language in places of education alongside nationalistic ideologies commonly distributed during the mid twentieth century, which stressed the "americanization" of the family and family structure, as well as environments of

---

[42] Rickerby, Helen.. 2016. "Articulating Artemisia: Revisioning the Lives of Women from History in Biographical Poetry." Biography 39 (1): 23–33.

shame surrounding Mexican heritage, drove my family to engage exclusively with their national identity, above all other ethnic or cultural histories. In developing conclusions surrounding the results of my interviews, I came to view this process of nationalization as a form of targeted violence, servicing to eradicate difference, or the "Other," from homogenic and hegemonic social and cultural structures. Looking towards the impact a sense of place had on my interviewees, my project also engages with the dichotomy between land lost through violence alongside land lost to urban sprawl, studying the fetishization of southwestern topography and challenging external perceptions and assumptions surrounding these communities.

My manuscript borrows its form and language from a resource stored in the Arizona Memory Project, titled "An Archaeological Survey of Chihuahua, Mexico". Given this work's reliance on *testimonio* and feminist demography in order to tell stories of migration, community development, and family, formatting this manuscript similarly to an archaeological survey demonstrates both the role of stories as a form of history making, as well as their utility in the field of demography. Each "portrait in monochrome" depicts the female members of my family from various periods of time, and includes a short description in which these pictured subjects are listed in a particular geographic region, with their names redacted. The decision to redact these subjects' names serves to honor these individuals' agency—many of whom have since passed—but also to comment on the invisibility and erasure of individual stories that occur on micro and macro scales. The subsequent poems, also titled "portrait in monochrome," serve to accompany each snapshot with an intimate view into a shared family history, including food, stories, dreams, and the acquisition of knowledge. "Topography" serves to reframe the rural regions of Arizona, and challenges popular narratives surrounding this landscape and the romanticization and fetishization that accompanies them. "All the new thinking is about loss"

addresses the political history of this region, record keeping and documentation, and self-identification and the process of absorbing whiteness. Throughout this work, I utilized the mouth, tumbleweeds, and plural subject nouns recurrently, in order to look at the nuanced trends of language, movement, and storytelling that arose in my research.

The Creative Process

Although this project is interdisciplinary in scope and practice, I must acknowledge the role an array of writers have played in forming my own creative process and inspiration. Just as this work centers the stories from previous generations, so too does it lie in conversation with several fundamental works of literature, to which this project owes many thanks. It is thanks to Valeria Luiselli's novel *Lost Children Archive* that this text weaves fragments, titles, and photographic material from other texts and sources. Throughout her work, Luiselli borrows language from other authors in order to guide her narrative, as she documents a family road trip from New York City into the southern borderlands of Arizona, paralleling the displacement of indigenous peoples from east to west alongside the limitations placed on migration across the U.S. Mexico border. *Lost Children Archive* clearly documents other works of literature from which Luiselli draws inspiration, within the text itself, and through a detailed bibliography which positions her work within larger conversations focused on the bureaucracy of immigration detention centers, the rights of child migrants and asylum seekers, and deteriorating interpersonal relations.[43] In my own work, intentionally borrowed language has emerged from the substance of my interviews, and centers geographical association, embodied memory, and family legacies.

---

[43] Luiselli, Valeria. 2019. Lost Children Archive : A Novel. First edition. Alfred A. Knopf.

The central pieces from which I worked in order to engage with the process of writing autobiographical poetry are Diana Khoi Nguyen's first book of poetry, *Ghost Of*, alongside Cristina Peri Rossi's *State of Exile*. Conversations throughout Nguyen's work surrounding place, identity, and belonging have shaped many of my creative investigations into a sense of place, self-identification, and cultural processes of change. As Diana Khoi Nguyen documents her upbringing as the child of immigrants in Southern California, stigma surrounding mental illness and self-harm, and the grief that followed her brother's suicide, she returns repeatedly to the *ghost* as a symbol which binds her work to itself. Using mixed media techniques, Nguyen incorporates photographs of her family in which her brother's image has been cut away, leaving only negative space in its wake. Family portraits have been purposely manipulated during the scanning process so that the faces and forms of family members are blurred, surrounded by a murky halo of light that contrasts the grayscale image. This method creates a sense of surrealism and ethereality, where Nguyen and her family exist within an intermediary space, not fully tangible on the page, but not entirely missing, as her brother appears to be. Nguyen's poetry reflects this balance between transparency and opacity as well, as she layers, erases, and conceals her language across the page, forcing readers to read and reread her work, as they attempt to fill in the missing spaces in her text.[44]

It is thanks to Cristina Peri Rossi's work that I began to consider the utility of brevity and clarity of thought in my own work. *State of Exile* returns to recurring concepts such as displacement, home, and longing with language that engages an internal dialogue more than external images, metaphors, or similes. Rossi's work discusses exile with a simplicity that stages these shared experiences from a conclusive and exploratory lens, whose theoretical language

[44] Nguyen, Diana Khoi. 2018. Ghost Of. Omnidawn Publishing.

outweighs the significance of place or setting.[45] My work, although it leans heavily into geographic and regional imagery, evokes a critical inquiry surrounding several key theoretical concepts, including cultural loss and change, a sense of place, and the tension between memory and truth.

Many other artists and authors have inspired this work. I also give thanks to Greg Norminton and Yuri Herrera,[46] for writing about issues of migration in the state of Arizona, Luis Alberto Urrea,[47] for his conversations surrounding liminal spaces throughout the borderlands, and Naima Yael Tokunow,[48] whose explorations of ancestry and inheritance led me to this work.

Conclusions

> Indulging in nostalgia for a romanticized Old West is widely thought to be a harmless pastime. But overdoses have produced serious side effects: the trivialization of the complex lives and characters of the people of the western past; a narrow and brittle definition of 'heroes' and 'heroism'; and a propensity to fatalism and a sense of inevitability.[49]

What my work explores regarding cultural loss, processes of change, expectations of assimilation and xenophobia is certainly nothing new. Across the globe people who migrate into external communities, especially those who migrate forcibly, are expected to adapt their own way of life

[45] Rossi, Cristian Peri. State of Exile. Translated by Marilyn Buck. San Francisco: City Lights Books, 2008.
[46] Herrera, Yuri, and Lisa Dillman. 2015. Signs Preceding the End of the World. and Other Stories.
[47] Tippet, Krista. "Luis Alberto Urrea - Borders Are Liminal Spaces." On Being With Krista Tippett, 26 August 2021. Podcast, website, 50:58.
[48] Tokunow, Naima Yael. 2019. Planetary Bodies. 45. Vol. 45. Black Warrior Review.
[49] Limerick, Border Citizens.

in order to mimic a distinguished cultural proficiency that reflects the new spaces into which they enter. To collect and preserve these stories and their nuanced relationship with community development, self-identity, and a sense of belonging provides an integral approach to making sense of the movement of peoples across time and space. At a microscopic level, my work provides a form of *testimonio* whose stories are particularly unique to my region of focus, and are often neglected when surveying the lived experience of Mexican individuals who migrated to Arizona in its first two decades of statehood. Although works of literature and academic study surrounding migrants in the state of Arizona are abundant, personal testimony is integral in understanding how a deeply entrenched cultural consciousness, which centers the construction of these individuals as "Other," has emboldened legislature and political discourse that is particularly divisive. As my oral interviews demonstrated, each individual recalls and values distinct stories and memories over others, and discerning exact dates, locations, and the chronology of events is difficult to pinpoint using these types of sources. However, this form of *testimonio* allowed me to record a history that, although unique to my family and their way of navigating the world, was indicative of larger social and political processes which informed the ideological climate across the state of Arizona, and which continue to be seen today. At the academic level, my work provides a narrow portraiture that illuminates the changing (or retaining) landscape of migration and cultural retention in rural Arizona.

As an interdisciplinary scholar, engaging with several ways of knowing and understanding my own movement through the world has allowed me to study my family's experiences and stories both from an archival lens, which served to determine how systems of power transform community development, while while also granting me the space in which grief and celebration could share space with one another across a work of creative literature. This

tension between expressions of loss and memorial also recognizes that *culture* is adaptive, transformative, and elusive. Culture is the continual process of change, and is marked by the way we engage with its movement. My own movement through the world over the course of my life is certainly determined by where I was born, how I was brought up in my community, and my individual consciousness, but it is also directly linked to the experiences and encounters embodied by those who lived before me, and their responses to internal and external information surrounding their positionality in the world. Looking at the silencing of personal testimony, particularly through the voices of women in my family, recognizes how the erasure of intergenerational knowledge is a particular form of violence that aids structures of hegemony and coloniality. This work serves to speak back to that legacy and to provide insight into how these communities have survived, changed, and re-shaped the landscapes which they now call home. It is my hope that these records and my own creative musings will demonstrate that the reclamation and exploration of personal testimony can provide clarity in discerning our individual positions within our communities. Moving forward, it is my wish that this retelling of history can begin to heal the loss of intergenerational wisdom ruptured by a national identity dependent on uniformity and selfsameness, and will provide a new way of framing self-identity not only through the expressions of our inner worlds, but by recognizing the shadows of those who came before: their sacrifices, their survival, and their expressions of love.

Bibliography

Historical Background

Archibold, Randal C. “Arizona Enacts Stringent Law on Immigration.” The New York Times. The New York Times, April 23, 2010. https://www.nytimes.com/2010/04/24/us/politics/24immig.html.

Bean, Frank D., Susan K. Brown, Mark A. Leach, and James Bachmeier. 2008. “Parental Pathways: How Legalization and Citizenship Among Mexican Immigrants Relates to Their Children’s Economic Well-Being.” Conference Papers -- American Sociological Association, 1. https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=edo&AN=36955482&site=eds-live.

Cadava, Geraldo L. 2013. Standing on Common Ground : The Making of a Sunbelt Borderland. Harvard University Press. https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=cat07660a&AN=cclc.836866&site=eds-live.

Camera, Lauren. 2021. “Bills Banning Critical Race Theory Advance in States Despite Its Absence in Many Classrooms.” U.S. News & World Report - The Report, June, C18–21. https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=f5h&AN=151115069&site=eds-live.

Caroline Faria, Jill Williams, and Vanessa A. Massaro. 2020. “Feminist Political Geographies: Critical Reflections, New Directions.” Environment and Planning C: Politics and Space 38 (August): 1149–59. https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=edsair&AN=edsair.doi...........d46ad28dcf58891b3e8730582823f366&site=eds-live.

Cuádraz, Gloria, and Luis F. B. Plascencia. 2018. Mexican Workers and the Making of Arizona. The University of Arizona Press. https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=cat07660a&AN=cclc.1022043&site=eds-live.

Durand, Jorge, and Douglas S. Massey. 2019. “Evolution of the Mexico-U.S. Migration System: Insights from the Mexican Migration Project.” Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science 684 (July): 21–42. doi:http://ann.sagepub.com/content/by/year.

Flores, René D. 2017. “Do Anti-Immigrant Laws Shape Public Sentiment? A Study of Arizona’s SB 1070 Using Twitter Data.” American Journal of Sociology 123 (2): 333–84. doi:10.1086/692983.

Galindo, René. 2011. "The Nativistic Legacy of the Americanization Era in the Education of Mexican Immigrant Students." Educational Studies 47 (4): 323–46. doi:10.1080/00131946.2011.589308.

Gloria Gomez, Arizona Mirror March 30. "Constitutional Ban on 'Critical Race Theory' in AZ Schools, Universities Is One Vote Away from the November Ballot." Arizona Mirror, March 30, 2022. https://www.azmirror.com/2022/03/30/constitutional-ban-on-critical-race-theory-in-az-schools-universities-is-one-vote-away-from-the-november-ballot/.

Haverluk, Terrence W. 1998. "Hispanic Community Types and Assimilation in Mex-America." Professional Geographer 50 (4): 465. doi:10.1111/0033-0124.00133.

Kim, Joon K., Ernesto Sagás, and Karina Cespedes. 2018. "Genderacing Immigrant Subjects: 'Anchor Babies' and the Politics of Birthright Citizenship." Social Identities 24 (3): 312–26. doi:10.1080/13504630.2017.1376281.

Kosack, Edward. 2021. "Guest Worker Programs and Human Capital Investment: The Bracero Program in Mexico, 1942-1964." Journal of Human Resources 56 (2): 570–99. doi:http://jhr.uwpress.org/content/by/year.

Lardieri, Alexa. "Arizona Gov. Doug Ducey Signs Bill Banning Critical Race Theory." U.S. New & World Report. U.S. New & World Report, July 9, 2021. https://www.usnews.com/news/education-news/articles/2021-07-09/arizona-gov-doug-ducey-signs-bill-banning-critical-race-theory.

Meeks, Eric V., and Patricia Nelson Limerick. 2020. Border Citizens : The Making of Indians, Mexicans, and Anglos in Arizona. Revised edition. University of Texas Press. https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=cat07660a&AN=cclc.1143866&site=eds-live.

Overmyer-Velázquez, Mark. 2013. "Good Neighbors and White Mexicans: Constructing Race and Nation on the Mexico-U.S. Border." Journal of American Ethnic History 33 (1): 5–34. doi:10.5406/jamerethnhist.33.1.0005.

Pendharkar, Eesha. "Critical Race Theory Law Runs Into Legal Trouble in Arizona." Education Week. Education Week, October 19, 2021. https://www.edweek.org/policy-politics/critical-race-theory-law-runs-into-legal-trouble-in-arizona/2021/10.

"President Bush Attends Naturalization Ceremony." National Archives and Records Administration. National Archives and Records Administration. Accessed April 13, 2022. https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2006/07/text/20060724-3.html.

Ramírez, Marla Andrea. 2018. "The Making of Mexican Illegality: Immigration Exclusions Based on Race, Class Status, and Gender." New Political Science 40 (2): 317–35. doi:10.1080/07393148.2018.1449067.

Sanchez, George J. 1993. Becoming Mexican-American: Ethnicity, Culture, and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles, 1900-1945. Oxford Univ Pr. https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=rfh&AN=ATLA0000141848&site=eds-live.

Urrieta Jr., Luis, and Dolores Calderón. 2019. "Critical Latinx Indigeneities: Unpacking Indigeneity from Within and Outside of Latinized Entanglements." AMAE Journal 13 (2): 145–74. doi:10.24974/amae.13.2.432.

Wilson, Mike, Isabel Garcia, Ray Borane, Robin Hoover, Ray Ybarra, Joseph Mathew, Daniel DeVivo, Chris Simcox, and Byrd Baylor. 2019. Crossing Arizona. Kanopy Streaming. https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=cat07660a&AN=cclc.1556589&site=eds-live.

Methodology Articulation

Acevedo, Luz del Alba. 2001. Telling to Live : Latina Feminist Testimonios. Latin America Otherwise. Duke University Press. https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=cat07660a&AN=cclc.121439&site=eds-live.

Fonseca-Chávez, Vanessa. 2020. Colonial Legacies in Chicana/o Literature and Culture: Looking through the Kaleidoscope. Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona Press. https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=mzh&AN=202122679182&site=eds-live.

"The Institute for Oral History." University Libraries | Baylor University. Accessed April 13, 2022. https://www.baylor.edu/Library/index.php?id=974108.

Rickerby, Helen.. 2016. "Articulating Artemisia: Revisioning the Lives of Women from History in Biographical Poetry." Biography 39 (1): 23–33. https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=edsjsr&AN=edsjsr.24803336&site=eds-live.

Ritchie, Donald A. Doing Oral History. New York: Twayne Publishers, 1995.

Whitlock, Gillian. 2015. Postcolonial Life Narrative: Testimonial Transactions. Oxford Studies in Postcolonial Literatures. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press. https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=mzh&AN=2016306804&site=eds-live.

Williams, Jill R. 2010. "Doing Feminist-Demography." International Journal of Social Research Methodology 13 (3): 197–210. doi:10.1080/13645579.2010.482250.

Yow, Valerie Raleigh. 2015. Recording Oral History : A Guide for the Humanities and Social Sciences. Third edition. Rowman & Littlefield. https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=cat07660a&AN=cclc.804990&site=eds-live.

Oral Interviews

Alan Marshall, interview by author, Virtual, 19 January 2022.

Cheri Marshall, interview by author, Virtual, 11 January 2022.

Duane Marshall, interview by author, Arizona, 10 January 2022.

Michael O'Hagan, interview by author, Virtual, 27 January 2022.

Suzy Turrentine, interview by author, Virtual, 12 January 2022.

Creative Literature and Inspiration

Luiselli, Valeria. 2019. Lost Children Archive : A Novel. First edition. Alfred A. Knopf.

Herrera, Yuri, and Lisa Dillman. 2015. Signs Preceding the End of the World. and Other Stories.

Nguyen, Diana Khoi. 2018. Ghost Of. Omnidawn Publishing.

Urrea, Luis Alberto. 2004. The Devil's Highway : A True Story. Little, Brown.

Rossi, Cristian Peri. State of Exile. Translated by Marilyn Buck. San Francisco: City Lights Books, 2008.

Tippet, Krista. "Luis Alberto Urrea - Borders Are Liminal Spaces." On Being With Krista Tippett, 26 August 2021. Podcast, website, 50:58. https://getpodcast.com/podcast/onbeing/luis-alberto-urrea-borders-are-liminal-spaces_26db5c0731.

Tokunow, Naima Yael. 2019. Planetary Bodies. 45. Vol. 45. Black Warrior Review.