

2012

"Nudge a Mexican and She or He Will Break Out With a Story": Complicating Mexican Immigrant Masculinities through Counternarrative Storytelling

Berenice Villela
Scripps College

Recommended Citation

Villela, Berenice, "'Nudge a Mexican and She or He Will Break Out With a Story': Complicating Mexican Immigrant Masculinities through Counternarrative Storytelling" (2012). *Scripps Senior Theses*. Paper 98.
http://scholarship.claremont.edu/scripps_theses/98

This Open Access Senior Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Scripps Student Scholarship at Scholarship @ Claremont. It has been accepted for inclusion in Scripps Senior Theses by an authorized administrator of Scholarship @ Claremont. For more information, please contact scholarship@cuc.claremont.edu.

“NUDGE A MEXICAN AND SHE OR HE WILL BREAK OUT WITH A STORY:”
COMPLICATING MEXICAN IMMIGRANT MASCULINITIES THROUGH
COUNTERNARRATIVE STORYTELLING

By
BERENICE VILLELA

SUBMITTED TO SCRIPPS COLLEGE IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
DEGREE OF BACHELOR OF ARTS

PROFESSOR CHRIS GUZAITIS
PROFESSOR TOMÁS SUMMERS SANDOVAL

April 20, 2012

Acknowledgements

Many thanks to the professors, students, faculty, and staff who have supported me throughout this journey. Professors Chris Guzaitis and Tomas Summers Sandoval, thank you for your patience, guidance and encouragement. You pushed me to produce a thesis I can be proud of, and for that I am indebted to you. Thank you, too, for the laughter that sustained me throughout this process. Professor Runions, I don't think I would have gotten to the finish line if you hadn't challenged us in Senior Seminar. I am grateful that you pushed me to think harder. Professor Ochoa, although you are on sabbatical, you were present throughout this entire process. WWOD?

Para mi'apa, mil gracias por contarme sobre tu vida. Yo se que a veces fue difiicil, pero igual compartiste conmigo detalles increíbles. Te prometo que un día vamos a continuar la platica. Como dijo Helena Maria Viramontes, podrías haber sido un autor. Tus palabras siempre han sido tan instrumentales en mi propio crecimiento, que me agradece poder haber completado mis estudios con ellas. Para mi'ama, aunque siempre me preguntas si ya mero acababa para hacer platica, gracias por apoyarme y preocuparte tanto por mi salud.

To my friends, thank you so much for being patient and forgiving. To Lilly, for the routine check-ins and encouraging videos of small children and animals being cute. You're the best curmudgeon I could ask for.

*Note: The quotation used in the title comes from Gloria Anzaldua's *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*.

Table of Contents

| | |
|--|----|
| Introduction | 4 |
| Chapter 1..... “En esta vida se sufre mucho.” Complicating Vergüenza at the Borderlands | 26 |
| Chapter 2..... “Ya Dejela Caer.” Negotiating Heteropatriarchal Policing on the Border | 56 |
| Conclusion | 76 |
| Bibliography..... | 79 |

Introduction

On August 16th, 1962, Joaquin Villela, mi'apa¹, was born into a family that, four children later, became a family of 16. When he was a toddler, his father and the older boys traveled up el cerro² to build a ranch away from my great-grandparents' rancho. That ranch would be where he lived and worked until he was twenty and began his migration north. After becoming a citizen, he married my mother and fathered two daughters, my sister and me. Throughout my childhood, mi'apa would share stories of his life on the ranch, his experiences with migration, and his upward mobility. My relationship with mi'apa was always an open dialogue. We were most known for talking hours at a time and ending up in tears. The life mi'apa has lead to date has been an incredible one of resilience and strength. But I knew the picture wasn't so simple as that. I also knew that if I didn't tell his story, it wouldn't be told.

This thesis rose out of a paradox. At the same time that my investment in Chicana Feminism grew, so did my relationship to mi'apa, who might be accused of machismo, a problematic stereotype convinced that Mexican men are somehow compensating for being otherwise oppressed. I am deeply implicated in the storyline of this thesis, both literally and academically. The problem to which I want to contribute resolution is the limitations of essentialized constructions of straight Latino men that prevent contextualizing masculinity as anything but problematic. Many reconsiderations of

¹ In my methodology section, I discuss my intentional choice to use *mi'apa* when referring to my father. Mi'apa is a contraction of "mi papa," which translates to "my father."

² Hill

masculinity ultimately point to a sense of “nonnormativity;” that is, that men who do not exhibit problematic tropes of masculinity are “nonnormative,” queer, or otherwise outside of masculinity. I am critical of normativity, but am convinced that it is possible to not wholly dismiss it. Therefore, rather than reconfiguring masculinity *within* the boundaries of masculinity, disassociating with masculinity has been posited as the only way to not be oppressive.

Reconsidering masculinity is a project in which I am personally invested. When I think of mi’apa, I see a humble man born into poverty in rural central Mexico, for a few years an undocumented worker and now an upwardly mobile small business owner in Dallas, Texas. His positionality complicates his sense of male privilege, which I argue is not absolvable because of the racism, classism, and xenophobia under which he has suffered, but is tainted and shaped by those systems of oppression. Through the years, I have seen him reject and accept the roles impressed upon him in a paradoxical, arbitrary, and nuanced way. In the chapters that follow, I document these complexities. In other words, I argue that Latino masculinities must be reconsidered and reconfigured. I came to be more forgiving of mi’apa’s masculinity as I also came to know feminisms of color. I was confounded that both my critical feminism and my relationship to mi’apa could flourish simultaneously, and I became interested in exploring the possibility of their coexistence.

I care to problematize the ways that masculinity is constructed in ways that do not leave space for my dad's narrative. This project, then, purports to interrogate the limits of sites of Latino masculinity constructions. It’s important to note that this thesis is mindful and aware of the impulse to put forward a masculinist understanding of systems of

oppression like immigration. I begin with the knowledge that colonization and other structures of oppression have battered Latino men, but do not conclude that therefore heteropatriarchy within Mexican culture is not valuable to protest. It would be too easy to simply present a masculinist thesis that serves to reify masculinity and pretend as though it is not implicated in systems of domination and violence. The theoretical framework presented below serves to resist that impulse by preventing the blind adoption of masculinity. Regardless of intent, this thesis could easily serve to re-center masculinity in a discipline that lays claim to feminism and queer interpretations of gender. I engage queer of color critique and Chicana Feminism, exposing the potential to complicate normative masculinity.

Chicano Nationalism and Masculinity

This project intervenes in essentialist constructions of identity that posit Latino masculinity as a monolithic and uniform phenomenon. My positionality as a queer Chicana feminist scholar puts me in conversation the history of that scholarship. Chicana Feminisms directly grew from a critique of Chicano nationalist masculinity, but in the context of this thesis, I approach mi'apa's experiences by putting a Chicana feminist approach in conversation with queer theory, like gender performativity and disidentification, in order to reconstruct masculinity in the borderlands of identifications. Chicano nationalism had the potential of creating of an anti-racist society where Latinos in the U.S. were not subjugated by white supremacy, but instead perpetuated sexism as Chicano liberation. Masculinity is constructed in three different sites as oppressive. U.S. Hegemonic and imperialist racist views of "machismo," for example, construct Latino masculinity worthy of criminalization. Another component of a paradoxical view of

Latino men in the U.S. is that they are lazy therefore a drain on the U.S. economy. Omar S. Castaneda wrote in *Muy Macho: Latino Men Confront their Manhood*, an anthology of reflective essays written by Latinos and edited by Ray Gonzales, “Machismo is complex and multifaceted and too often, in Anglo-American interpretations, reduced to self-aggrandizing male bravado that flirts with physical harm to be sexual, like some rutting for the right to pass on genes (Gonzalez xiii).” Machismo is an Anglo construction that caricaturizes Latino men to justify the criminalization of Latinos.

In the 60s, Chicano Nationalism rose and argued that U.S. racism "emasculated" men and that Chicanos needed to regain that masculinity by promoting "Chicanismo." The same could be said of male identification in globalized and migrant Mexico. Richard T. Rodriguez, author of *Next of Kin*, furthers, “Nationalism typically has sprung from masculinized memory, masculinized humiliation and masculinized hope. Anger at being “emasculated”—or turned into a ‘nation of busboys’—has been presumed to be the natural fuel of igniting a nationalist movement. (Rodriguez 44).” The Chicano movement of the 1960s uncovered the racist undertones of the U.S., covert and overt, institutionalized and individualized, and called for an end to racism. The Chicano movement perpetuated the idea that a woman’s place was in the home, in transmitting cultural tropes to children and in caring and supporting Chicano men in the struggle against racism by adhering to gender roles of marriage. Much of the racism the Chicano Cultural Nationalist movement fought against came from a heteronormative, sexist perspective. Chicanas were meant to care for the fathers of the movement while they fought to end racism. The family, heteronormatively define, recreated Mexican and Chicano culture, countering the erasure of Chicano identity. According to many

Chicanos, bringing attention to the misogyny of el movimiento³ was dividing the cause. It is with this history of the heteropatriarchy of Mexican and Chicano culture that I approach this thesis.

Chicana Feminism rose in direct contest to the masculinist and heterosexist tropes embedded in Chicano Nationalism. In Cherrie Moraga's essay "Queer Aztlan: The Reformation of Chicano Tribe" in her book titled *The Last Generation*, she writes, "what was right about Chicano Nationalism was its commitment to preserving the integrity of the Chicano people. What was wrong about Chicano Nationalism was its institutionalized heterosexism, [and] its inbred machismo (Moraga 148-149)." Here, Moraga mourns Chicano Nationalism while remaining critical of the problematic tenets on which it was founded. Moraga continues, "The preservation of the Chicano familia became the Movimiento's mandate and within this constricted 'familia' structure, Chicano politicians ensured that the patriarchal father figure remained in charge both in their private and political lives (Moraga 157)." The family was central to Chicanismo; in the family, Chicanismo can live on. The family was the site of identification. As I discuss in Chapter two, the family is the location where behaviors are learned, especially in the context of mi'apa's upbringing in the rancho.

Therefore, Chicana Feminism argued that Chicano Nationalism, although effective in addressing racism, classism & xenophobia, propagated a masculinist and misogynistic Aztlan. One of the shortcomings of Chicana Feminism, however, was in its readiness to vilify masculinity; any man who did not oppress women is relegated to nonnormativity. In other words, the way masculinity was constructed did not allow a

³ El movimiento refers often to the Chicano movement which itself has a rich and complicated history.

middle space. Mi'apa's investment in his masculinity, present in his description of proper masculine and feminine behavior, Gloria Anzaldua wrote in *Borderlands/La Frontera*:

The New Mestiza:

Tenderness, a sign of vulnerability, is so feared that it is showered on women with verbal abuse and blows. Men, even more than women, are fettered to gender roles. Women at least have had the guts to break out of bondage. Only gay men have had the courage to expose themselves to the woman inside them and to challenge the current masculinity. (Anzaldua 106)

The above quote is telling of the limit to Chicana Feminism's construction of masculinity. Anzaldua argues that women are able to break out of gender oppression, but men aren't. She further argues that gay men are also able to distance themselves from their manhood, but presumes that finding "the woman inside" is necessary to not participate in systems of gender oppression. She continues, "I've encountered a few scattered and isolated gentle but straight men, the beginnings of a new breed, but they are confused, and entangled with sexist behaviors that they have not been able to eradicate. We need a new masculinity and the new man needs a movement (Anzaldua 106)." She then, however, acknowledges that some "gentle but straight" men exist, but claims they are rare and not the norm. She presents here an understanding of masculinity that is uniform and unchangeable; to be oppressive is a prerequisite of masculinity and a manhood, to not be oppressive is to not be a "real man" "For men like mi'apa who are invested in their masculinity, this would mean that there would be no way for him to be anything but oppressive. This history of Chicano masculinity is important considering the conversation it is joining.

Methodology

The methodology of this thesis employs Chicana Feminist Epistemologies to contest traditional sites of knowledge production by deriving knowledge from the lived experiences of one man, mi'apa. The primary source of this thesis is a collection of short stories derived from the interview transcript; all of the theories and their uses are derived from a close analysis of the knowledges mi'apa shared with me. During his visit in October, I conducted a recorded interview in the Cafe con Leche office, an explicitly Latino/a space that was welcoming, not intimidating but also neither of our personal spaces. On campus, we were either in an unwelcoming and cold academic space that is inaccessible to mi'apa or in a highly personal space such as my room. I intentionally chose a neutral space from which we could rest by going to my room or another recreational area in my dorm. Further, the privacy we were afforded created a safe space where my dad felt comfortable sharing stories spanning childhood to adulthood. We conducted 11 hours of interview in two days. The questions were always open-ended and organized intentionally to encourage honest and complete answers. The questions were sometimes very linear and concerned with chronology, such as, "Then what happened?" Other questions, in contrast, asked about relationships between mi'apa and people in his life, such as his father and mother, his wife, peers, colleagues and strangers. When directly asked to describe himself, he struggled to find a narrative to tell, so I chose to primarily focus on interactions with others, because it gave him the opportunity to talk about himself without needing to be direct. Other questions were concerned with location and not time, such as "tell me about life on the ranch?" In fact, one of the stories in

Chapter one, “El Señor Aristeo” is the story mi’apa told when prompted by “Tell me about school, your education.” My close relationship with my dad gave him permission to tell long-winded stories with life-lessons, much like the stories he’s shared before during casual conversations. Some questions explicitly asked him to retell stories I already knew. This exercise was useful both to have a recording of a particular story, but was also useful to verify the truthfulness of my recollection of his many stories.

When I wondered what to do with the interview I had collected, I was amazed at the ease with which my dad told *stories*, cohesive stories with a tension, climax, and resolution. One question prompted a series of questions, each book-ended by a short pause. Throughout my adolescence and now my young adulthood, my dad has taken advantage of every opportunity to tell me a story. Unlike others in my nuclear family, I was always willing to listen. I validated his insistent need to pass down his knowledge on life; attached to each story was a life lesson on humility, hard work, kindness, and family. The life lessons speak to my relationship with mi’apa as well as to role that stories play in Mexican culture.

A surprise that caught my attention while I reviewed the interview is that mid-story, mi’apa would interrupt his nostalgic recounting to recognize his subjectivity and positionality in the present. This is most notable in the story “El Señor Aristeo.” Mi’apa recognizes me as his audience and blends narrating the life lesson his father passed on to him and also passing on a life lesson to me. He also describes el señor Aristeo’s style of dress through his own outfit and present class level. For that reason, it made sense for me to approach this thesis in a way that validates the importance of storytelling in Mexican culture, and employ Chicana Feminist epistemology to use these stories in this project.

The collaborative authors of *Telling to Live*, a collection of *testimonios*, argue that “Our group histories and lived experiences are intertwined with global legacies of resistance to colonialism, imperialism, racism, anti-Semitism, religious fundamentalism, sexism, and heterosexism (*Telling to Live* 19).” Similarly, I intend to draw these themes from the stories themselves as well as by grounding the stories historically and socially. Although storytelling and personal narrative are typically excluded from academia, I deploy a theory in the flesh, as described by Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldua in their seminal Chicana Feminist text, *This Bridge Called My Back* (Anzaldua & Moraga). I derive academic and theoretical knowledge from the extraordinarily real and raw stories mi’apa is passing down to me.

This project is mi’apa’s testimonio. Testimonio is grounded historically and culturally in Latino communities. Perpetually denied access to academia and history, storytelling comprises a wealth of knowledge for Latinos and culture. Testimonio, a form of storytelling, uncovers the way that systems of oppression conspire in the lives of Latinos and Latinas. This methodology is predicated on an understanding the theoretical implications of lived experience. Testimonio is an exercise of agency; the very insistence on storytelling is an act of resistance against the silencing and subordination Latinos experience. Testimonio is self-produced, it is not a victimizing story where the oppressed incite sympathy. I intentionally chose to align myself with this movement and join a Chicana Feminist legacy of testimonio and storytelling in order to give a forum for mi’apa to share his truths. In the final products of mi’apa’s stories, I worked tirelessly to edit the stories while staying true to the original words spoken by him. The authors of *Telling to Live* further,

Testimonio is often seen as a form of expression that comes out of intense repression or struggle, where the person bearing witness tells the story to someone else, who then transcribes, edits, translates, and publishes the text elsewhere. Thus, scholars often see testimonies as dependent products, an effort by the disenfranchised to assert themselves as political subjects through others, often outsiders, and in the process to emphasize particular aspects of their collective identity (Telling to Live 13).

This methodology could very well be misunderstood as what the authors of *Telling to Live* describe above, and indeed, a criticism of this methodology I am grappling with is whether or not I am perpetuating problematic hierarchies such as classism and xenophobia by manipulating interview text in order to create cohesive short stories that are legible to readers. The narratives shared often resemble stories so well that my presence as the interviewer is made invisible by the structure of the stories. I've sat with this self-criticism and have been intentional in how I edit the transcript. It is also important to me that I remind myself of the ways I could strip mi'apa and his family of agency. It is with this understanding that I can move forward to attempt to provide a thesis that does not reinscribe hierarchies of which sources of knowledge are more credible than others.

With regard to the actual process of transcription and translation, I slowed the recordings, and translated while I transcribed. I transcribed much of the interview, and some of the raw transcriptions follow in an appendix. For the sake of being able to engage the theories of this project, I had to translate mi'apa's words into English. I couldn't bring myself to translate certain phrases I thought were more relevant or understandable in Spanish. I invoke Anzaldua's politics surrounding her own Spanglish. Anzaldua furthers,

“Until I am free to write bilingually and to switch codes without having always to translate, while I still have to speak English or Spanish when I would rather speak Spanglish, and as long as I have to accommodate the English speakers rather than having them accommodate me, my tongue will be illegitimate. I will no longer be made to feel ashamed of existing. I will have my voice... I will overcome the tradition of silence (Anzaldua 25).”

Following Anzaldua’s tradition of having her own voice, I decided to use “mi’apa” to refer to mi’apa. Although he is my “interview subject,” he is also mi’apa, mi’apa, and I could not call him anything but mi’apa. As a code switcher myself, “mi’apa” feels truer to how I actually think, talk about and talk to him. In the stories, I tried my best to stay true to the sentiment of what mi’apa shared, although in my first run through I translated close to literally. I then experimented with different methods of editing a particular story, in order to explore the intent of the story rather than simply the words. I edited each story significantly, making sure that my translations were true to the whole story. For the sake of efficiency, I removed many filler words and repetitions so as to not distract from the content of the story.

The collaborative authors of *Telling To Live* explain the epistemological nature of testimonio. They write,

The flesh and blood theory many of these narratives deploy marks the Latina feminist subject in process as a new type of intellectual whose knowledge of the political economy of cultural constructions serves to decenter what counts as theory and who can engage in theorizing. These *testimonies* offer the language of Latina intellectuals as an alternative site of knowledge (Telling to Live ix-x).

In other words, theorizing from storytelling serves to dethrone traditional or normative avenues of theorizing. Storytelling, traditionally excluded from academic epistemology for not being a legitimate site of knowledge, is deployed intentionally to challenge what is permitted and what is discredited within academia. With regards to this project, translating the oral history into the short story format honors the storytelling nature of the interview itself as well as uses knowledge created by a subject whose voice is unheard and subaltern in academia. I am the Latina intellectual charged with creating short stories that represent life, struggles and accomplishments of her father. I honor the truths he shared. As a thesis grounded in contesting hierarchies and systems of domination, I remain critical of “Truth.” Richard T. Rodriguez argues, “Historical “truth” reflects a process of systematic domination suppressing discrepant narratives (Rodriguez 3).” I present here a discrepant narrative, a story that both fits and does not fit into metanarratives regarding Latino men. Rather than simply theorize masculinity without grounding in the lived experiences of Latino men, I theorize from a very real experience, which I don’t argue is representative of Latino men, but rather is exemplary of disidentificatory practices.

Testimonio is a form of counternarrative. Here, I engage Tara J. Yosso’s methodology of composite counterstorytelling. Yosso further explains the political significance of counterstorytelling, “Counterstories can challenge the perceived wisdom of those at society’s center. As they expose the White privilege upheld in majoritarian storytelling, counternarratives provide a context to understand and transform established belief systems (Yosso 15).” This thesis is a counternarrative of masculinity in that it

provides one example of masculinity and from that draws larger implications for masculinity.

Storytelling or *testimonio*, follows a history of liberatory movements throughout Latin America, as well as is a foundational cultural trope that is integral to Latinidad. The women of *Telling to Live* further, “Testimonio has been critical in movements for liberation in Latin America, offering an artistic form and methodology to create politicized understandings of identity and community (Telling to Live 3).” The historical importance of the testimonio is another reason why this methodology was chosen; it is, at its core, liberatory. I am hoping that this format, the testimonio, is liberatory for mi’apa whose voice has been silenced by xenophobia, race, class, gender, and education status, both literally and figuratively. Further, storytelling is also creative; it is a performance that serves a liberatory purpose, and creates alternate possibilities. Gloria Anzaldua personifies her stories and calls attention to their longevity,

My “stories” are acts encapsulated in time, “enacted” every time they are spoken aloud or read silently. I like to think of them as performances and not as inert and “dead” objects (as the aesthetics of Western culture think of art works). Instead, the work has an identity; it is a “who” or a “what” and contains the presences of persons, that is, incarnations of gods or ancestors or natural and cosmic powers. (Anzaldua 89)

Storytelling, in this regard, is also a coping strategy, a way to make immortal my dad’s life, to bring life to the stories he tells. This methodology subscribes to Moraga and Anzaldua’s “theory in the flesh (Moraga & Anzaldua 23).” Storytelling concretizes mi’apas experiences. Eden E. Torres, Chicana pioneer in autoethnography writes in *Chicana Without Apology: The New Chicana Cultural Studies*, “Snippets of lives not inclusive or cognizant of the complicatedness. This method has produced highly readable accounts of lived theory and practice in the past, I have used it to paint my own verbal

portraits (Torres 3).” This thesis does not pretend to represent all manifestations of masculinity, nor does it assume the ability to speak to all types of liberation. I recognize that this is one voice telling one story through the lens of one daughter. However, I also contend that by grounding the stories in their socio-historical context, I can extract larger implications from the stories told and examine the possibilities for alternate ways to engage power. These stories are useful, too, because they are exemplary of how Latino lives can be lived. Torres furthers, “I do not mean to imply that the life of one Chicana can speak for all others, but that it can be used as a lens through which to analyze and critique oppressive phenomena, behaviors, and symbols (Torres 3).” This thesis intends to complicate constructions of masculinity, and the narratives my dad shared with me unearth the ways in which masculinity can be worked on through and within. Storytelling, as a methodology grounded in Latino culture, becomes the modicum for creating a new masculinity.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this thesis puts into conversation theories of, performativity/performance, disidentification, and intersectionality and mestizaje as the frame by which to analyze my primary source material. As was discussed further in the methodology section, the oral history gathered has been transformed into short story format. The themes extracted from the short stories are discussed through the following framework. I draw heavily from queer of color critique, Chicana feminism and feminisms of color to engage the overarching themes of this project.

The first theory this thesis employs is that of performativity. Judith Butler, author of texts such as *Bodies that Matter* and *Gender Trouble*, describes a performative as an

“echo of prior actions” that cites authoritative powers in order to become normalized and unquestionable (Butler qtd in Muñoz 80). Identities such as masculinity and Chicanismo are performative in the sense that actions and behaviors associated with either identity marker are inherited interpersonally until it is internalized. Butler would argue that there is no space where there exists a vacuum of identification. Nevertheless, she would also argue that identifications are not stable and unchangeable. Nevertheless, identity categories, although constructed, are very much real and present in people’s lives.

Michael Omi and Howard Winant, quoted in Richard T. Rodriguez’ *Next of Kin*, write: “[Understanding race] is to avoid both the utopian framework which sees race as an illusion we can somehow ‘get beyond,’ and also the essentialist formulation which sees race as something objective and fixed, a biological datum” (Omi 55, qtd in Rodriguez 12) This understanding of race concedes the omnipresent nature of identity categories while also recognizing its that it is constructed and therefore unstable.

Related to this theory but is also the idea of performance. A performative is not a performance in the sense one cannot take off masculinity by removing certain markers such as clothing or mannerisms and all of a sudden be stripped of gender norms. A performance, on the other hand, is a deliberate intention to follow a script in order to be legible as normative. This theoretical lens is inspired by Peter Andreas’ analysis of the border in *Border Games*. He argues that “actors” follow a “script” on the “political stage” of the border in order to give the impression that the laws of the border are actually being enforced. Border officials seek a performance of enforcing legal code on the border because it is such a porous entity that it is impossible to actually seal. Similarly, certain performances are required of people who need to be recognized as normative in any

given context. In Chapter one we'll explore mi'apa's performance of respeto toward el señor Aristeo, who intended to humiliate him. In Chapter two we'll investigate mi'apa's performance on the border, his command to convince INS officials that his marriage was in fact heteronormative and "real." This survival strategy is also exemplary of the possibility of resistance.

The theory on which the rest of this framework relies is Jose Esteban Muñoz's theory of *Disidentifications*, presented in his book, *Disidentification: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*. In particular, I am interested in Muñoz's theory of disidentification as applied to mi'apa's relationship with masculinity and other markers of his identity. Muñoz argues that multiply-minoritarian subjects must negotiate their identity within structures of domination. This means that multiply subordinated peoples, such as a impoverished undocumented immigrant with a disability, like mi'apa, deploy disidentificatory practices in order to negotiate privileged and unprivileged aspects of their identity. Muñoz' *Disidentifications* investigates the way queer of color artists survive and use their art to neither identify nor counteridentify with normative constructions of queerness and race. He argues that they instead create a third space where queerness and being of color coexist. He writes,

Disidentification... neither opts to assimilate within such a structure [dominant ideology] nor strictly opposes it; rather, disidentification is a strategy that works on and against dominant ideology. Instead of buckling under the pressures of dominant ideology (identification, assimilation) or attempting to break free of its inescapable sphere (counteridentification, utopianism), this 'working on and against' is a strategy that tries to transform a cultural logic from within...." (Muñoz 11)

Jose Esteban Muñoz' theory of disidentification demands a reworking of "dominant ideology," such as masculinity or other identity categories, in a more nuanced way than a wholly acceptance or rejection. In this thesis, I use disidentification to pinpoint the moments where identification with socially imposed identities such as race, class, and gender are not neatly aligned with the norms meant to govern that identity category. Further, this thesis seeks to accomplish more than a simplistic acceptance or rejection of Latinidad. Richard T. Rodriguez describes a similar approach to "la familia" "Although Next of Kin interrupts those discourses intimately linking nationalism and heteropatriarchy as underpinning of a compulsory normative Chicano family romance, it does not result in its dismissal. Ultimately, the critique carried out points to a return, not transcendence (Rodriguez 3)." With regard to this project, I do not intend to problematize masculinity to an extent where I argue that mi'apa exhibits gender nonnormativity. I interrogate the way masculinity is defined, but validate the way mi'apa uses his masculinity in a liberatory and simultaneously oppressive way. Rodriguez recognizes the way "crucial family attachments... have been predicated upon diverse modes of kinship by various constituencies—maintained by Chicanos and Chicanas as historical moments in which economic exploitation, racism, sexism, and homophobia persist (Rodriguez 3)." In other words, the Latina family has been used in contest with economic exploitation, racism, and other forms of oppression in liberatory ways. I read the primary text with this understanding; that is, I do not intend to reject masculinity outright. Rather, I suggest a similar return to masculinity. The challenge facing this thesis, however, is how to accomplish this without simply recentering masculinity. In that regard, I do not assume a

nonproblematic masculinity; rather, remaining critical of masculinity, I suggest a disidentificatory lens in order to accomplish this return.

This thesis also draws from theories of intersectionality, first coined by Kimberle Crenshaw. Crenshaw argues that social categories like class, gender, race, education level, nationality, and ability are all affected by all other categories. In this thesis, disidentification is used to analyze the ways in which my dad neither fully adopts nor rejects a sense of masculinity. This disidentification is possible because of the liminality of his positionality. Throughout this project, I explore the liminal spaces mi'apa inhabits, and the disidentification that liminality encourages. As an immigrant man with severely limited education on an upwardly mobile trajectory, mi'apa's masculinity is made complicated by race, xenophobia, education attainment, class and other identity markers. In this project, I argue that mi'apa inhabits liminal spaces, further allowing him to disidentify with norms. Disidentification is a useful term to describe the power relations within each story. Further, this theory is also descriptive of the methodological choices. As an academic, I disidentify with the rules academia has established in regards to what qualifies as worthy of academic attention. I myself am an outsider and an insider. I have the tools and language to be able to participate in an academic setting, but I am also an immigrant, Latina, queer, and a woman. Disidentification, in this thesis, explores the myriad ways that multiply-minoritized subjects are able to negotiate a space for themselves.

Disidentificatory practices are made possible through border theory. Gloria Anzaldúa, prolific Chicana Feminist author, theorized the borderlands in her foundational work, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. In this text, Anzaldúa argues for a

“new mestiza” that is flexible and fluid. Anzaldua further elucidates the importance of understanding identity categories as fluid. Her theory of “la nueva mestiza,” otherwise known as “border theory,” theorizes the borderlands, the interstitial spaces where multiple subjectivities and norms intersect. She writes, “Rigidity means death... The new mestizo copes by developing a tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguity (Anzaldua 101-102).” Anzaldua’s border theory calls attention to the way Chicanos straddle two cultures, two systems of norms. As will be made evident in subsequent chapters, that straddling occurs along multiple identity lines, including race, gender, ability and class. Following Muñoz’s theory of disidentifications, which calls for a simultaneous identification and counteridentification, Anzaldua furthers, “Only by remaining flexible is she able to stretch the psyche horizontally and vertically (Anzaldua 102).” Flexibility is integral to mestiza identification. Flexibility is a coping mechanism under overlapping systems of oppression. This flexibility, when applied to masculinity, also signifies a departure from the rigidity of gender norms through disidentificatory practices. This is important when investigating varied expressions of masculinity along class and race lines. Anzaldua establishes who inhabits the borders; “The prohibited and forbidden are its inhabitants. *Los atravesados*⁴ live here...in short, those who cross over, pass over, or go through the confines of the “normal (Anzaldua 25).” According to Anzaldua, those at the borderlands are those who cannot or will not fully adhere to norms regarding identity, those who straddle identification and counteridentification, those who disidentify.

⁴ This phrase loosely translates to “The crossed over”

This theory will be useful when analyzing the different social positions occupied by mi'apa throughout his life, in various relationships to other men, the state, and family. Mestizaje can also be understood as hybridity, which Muñoz also calls for. He writes, "The cultural work I engage here is hybridized insofar as it is cultivated from the dominant culture but meant to expose and critique its conventions (Muñoz 31-32)." This cultivation and exposure serves to simultaneously problematize masculinity while at the same time be built from it. In that regard, it is not a blind adoption of the sexist tropes of masculinity. Rather, much like Rodriguez's work in *Next of Kin*, this thesis seeks a return to masculinity that does not simply re-center masculinity but rather remains critical of its oppressive norms while exploring the opportunity to disidentify in order to survive but also to break down masculinity.

The idea of hybridity is also helpful when trying to understand masculinity because it admits the newness and the composite blending of identities. This theory will help me resist the impulse to provide a masculinist iteration that serves to devalue the contributions of Chicana Feminism and congratulates a misogynistic and nationalistic understanding of Mexican manhood. By understanding masculinity with Anzaldua and Muñoz's theory of hybridity and fluidity, I will be able to investigate masculinity in a complicated lens. In *Sexuality of Migration*, Leonel Cantu further analyzes Anzaldua's theory of liminality and borderlands. He writes, "Anzaldua asserts that the liminal "borderland" position, like the performativity model, serves as a site for both political resistance and theoretical analysis... The "mestizo" position the incongruities of binary systems are made visible, as are the congruities, the intersections, of multiple marginal positions and relations of power draws meaning from marginality (Cantu 36)." This

thesis purports to accomplish the same; to both unearth the sites of resistance against identities of oppression by analyzing the life story of a marginalized man. The borderlands, or the place where identities clash and contradict is a site for resistance and a theorizing of elusive identifications. Leonel Cantu was the first to interrogate the ways in which sexuality and migration are inextricably linked. He investigated the ways that nonnormative sexualities are governed on the borderlands. His theory will be most useful in Chapter two, where I will discuss the state's investment in manipulating sexuality.

Under a framework of disidentification and hybridity, I draw themes that stood out to me, and through those themes employ the above theories. In chapter one, for example, I investigate the interpersonal actualization of gender and classist conflict and the *vergüenza* and *respeto* that govern those kinds of conflicts. Chapter two discusses the performance and performative of heteropatriarchal configurations- marriage and opportunities to contest or resist those hierarchies. Each chapter will begin by presenting the lens through which the stories will be analyzed, presenting the theoretical framework unique to each chapter. In the introduction to each chapter, I outline the structure of the stories and which themes are the most salient. I will then present four or so short stories, grouped together by theme, and then I will analyze the content of the stories and draw conclusions from the narrative. I derived this structure from *Wide Open Town: A History of Queer San Francisco to 1965* by Nan Boyd who kept her oral histories in tact and presented them at the beginning of each chapter. I have insisted on the importance of giving *mi'apa* a coherent voice rather than breaking it apart according to my own needs to make some argument or another. Chapter one will consider questions of class, focusing in particular on the ways in which masculinity is classed. This chapter will explore

humility and humiliation and the subversion of power. Chapter two will focus on the theme migration. Here, I will engage border theory to explore the ways in which masculinity is controlled by the state through its involvement in migration practices. I closely analyze the process to qualify for U.S. residency, including participating in a heteronormative marriage with a U.S. citizen. In this chapter I explore the performance required of mi'apa in order to be considered a desirable inhabitant of the United States.

Chapter One

“En esta vida se sufre mucho⁵:” Complicating Vergüenza at the Borderlands

In the eleven hours I spent interviewing mi’apa, he offered “me dio vergüenza⁶” as an explanation for many of his actions. Indeed vergüenza⁷ and respeto⁸ informs Mexican culture. External policing of behavior became an internalized sense of right and wrong scripts daily interaction with “Si, señor⁹,” lowered gazes, and other forms of humility in the face of those who “deserve” it according to class, gender and other hierarchies. Anzaldua criticizes the deference directed at the privileged, and the way shame has been used against those on the borderlands in order to ensure their subordination. In this chapter, I investigate the role shame and respeto has played in mi’apa’s life, and interrogate the potential of vergüenza and shame. Indeed, respeto, in particular, serves to reinscribe gender and race hierarchies, as Chicana Feminist authors like Gloria Anzaldua argue. Many of mi’apa’s experiences have been informed by respeto and shame, and in this chapter I investigate the opportunities for resistance within such a monolithic source of rules. I argue that respeto and vergüenza, although typically deployed for the sake of maintaining gender-, race- and class-based hierarchies, can also be deployed under a disidentificatory framework in order to resist these same hierarchies. In this chapter I investigate gender performativity and disidentification as part of

⁵ “In this life, one suffers very much.”

⁶ This phrase literally translates to “it gave me shame,” but more neatly translates to “I felt embarrassed.”

⁷ Shame

⁸ Respect

⁹ “Yes, Sir”

mi'apa's liminal positionality. My intervention is to put vergüenza and respeto into conversation with disidentification, performativity, and border theory.

The stories that follow take place around the same time in my dad's life, but they were not paired because of their chronology. Rather, these stories reveal a larger narrative regarding the intersections between gender and class, of the internalized commitment to behave according to what is proper for men, reified by performative practices of emulation and repetition. The theme that is the most salient to me is the idea of vergüenza, or shame, and the implication of these structures of behavior on masculinity and manhood. Vergüenza, which literally translates to "shame," has significant and specific connotations for Latino/Mexican culture and is used in a myriad of ways along race, class, gender and other identity category axes. Vergüenza requires a direct identification with established hierarchies of who deserves power and who does not. Deference to those who deserve it translates to deference to the wealthy, able-bodied, male, and powerful. Disidentifying through vergüenza, as will be explored in this chapter, involves deploying vergüenza and respeto strategically for survival. Vergüenza guides behavior, creating an internal set of what is right and wrong. It also enforces hierarchies, in particular around class issues. For example, poverty might be a source of vergüenza for not being able to attain class status. Vergüenza works in concert with respeto to determine proper behavior. A young child who does not show respeto to a señor may inspire vergüenza in his or her family. Vergüenza follows into adulthood, becoming an internalized police. Those at the borderlands of identifications are taught to feel vergüenza or be ashamed of not being in the norm. Miguel Diaz Barriga, author of "Vergüenza & Changing Chicano and Chicana Narratives," argues that internal conversations determine what "constitutes proper

behavior and norms (Barriga 281).” In other words, vergüenza is a process of performativity; it inscribes gender, class and ability norms. To not subscribe or fit into any of these norms is grounds for vergüenza. In “The Fruit Man,” for example, mi’apa cites vergüenza as the reason why he couldn’t accept food from the fruit man and his wife. In this regard, vergüenza inspires the need to feel capable and self-sufficient. In this chapter, I argue that the vergüenza described in these stories disidentifies with “traditional” embodiments of vergüenza by contesting what constitutes proper behavior and through maintaining certain aspects of proper behavior.

Vergüenza is a useful lens by which to analyze the conflict within the four stories presented in this chapter because vergüenza takes on many forms, typically orbiting around issues of race, class, gender, ability and other identity markers. Barriga writes the following, “On one hand, vergüenza involves a sense of living up to the standards of a community and is therefore founded on a fear of rejection or scorn. On the other hand, vergüenza encodes a sense of social responsibility and well being (Barriga 281).” By his interpretation, vergüenza is reflective of a collectivist culture. Particularly in the rancho, every member of the family shared a responsibility that contributed toward the economic welfare of the whole family. Vergüenza is nonetheless also an internal phenomenon of personal achievement. Facundo Valdez, quoted in Barriga, argues, “A man *con mucha vergüenza*¹⁰ ‘is a helpful person to other people (Valdez 1979 qtd in Barriga 281).” Valdez usefully articulates the role a man with vergüenza plays in his community. As someone who strives to receive respeto, mi’apa holds onto vergüenza and describes often how much it regulates his own behavior. To have vergüenza is to be deserving of respect,

¹⁰ With much shame.

but it also is to show respect to others. Expressing vergüenza is a way to avoid external policing. Someone with the restraint to avoid raising his voice to a man like el señor Aristeo will not experience vergüenza. Indeed, in that story, my grandfather feels so much pride because his son was able to offer respect to el señor even though he was so intent on humiliating mi'apa. To have vergüenza, within minoritized communities, is to gain stature in the community as someone who exhibits proper behavior. Barriga's investigates the purpose of vergüenza, ultimately contesting its role and its possibility as a site of resistance.

I argue that mi'apa's relationships and interactions were guided by principles like respeto and vergüenza. Butler writes, "If a performative succeeds, that action echoes prior actions, and accumulates the force of authority through the repetition or citation of a prior, authoritative set of practices... [a performative] works to the extent that it draws on and covers over the constitutive conventions by which it is mobilized (Muñoz 80)." In other words, respeto and vergüenza are performative; they are not feelings that just arise in people like mi'apa, it was taught, often unintentionally, to him through his family and society. Butler would similarly argue that because vergüenza and shame come to be through repetition, an understanding of performativity also allows for an interruption of the intended use of vergüenza. This further offers the opportunity to disidentify with vergüenza because the performative of vergüenza can also be interrupted and molded as a survival strategy. Although vergüenza and respeto demanded mi'apa speak humbly to el Señor Aristeo in the first story, he nonetheless used his humility in order to pretend his subservience toward el Señor. Had mi'apa talked back to el Señor without respeto, my grandfather would have felt shamed that his son would raise his voice or be rude to an

older, wealthier man. Here, both mi'apa and grandfather are disidentifying with the impetus to offer respect to the privileged. Although being disrespectful would have inspired vergüenza in mi'apa and his family, outsmarting someone of privilege was a larger source of pride. In this regard, respeto can be understood both as a script to follow and a site of resistance. This site falls at the interstice of gender and class, which mi'apa inhabits. His poverty landed him in the borderlands of manhood. Butler's theory of performativity is a useful lens through which to understand vergüenza because it is a mindset that becomes codified as "natural," or a "feeling" that induces responsibility. According to Butler, a performative "works to the extent that it draws on and covers over the constitutive conventions by which it is mobilized (Butler qtd in Muñoz 80)."

Vergüenza is imposed through interpersonal policing of behaviors but primarily it is an internal process that is normalized by this external policing. The constant policing (interpersonal and internal) of behavior serves to normalize vergüenza and respeto, establishing rules and norms of proper behavior. Nevertheless, a performative lens also offers the opportunity to deviate from these emulations, because those emulations can be disrupted, manipulated, and changed. In other words, the performativity of vergüenza and respeto contests its uniformity; where there is power there is resistance. Vergüenza is present in the moral conflicts of this collection of stories. As an internal process, vergüenza allows for an understanding of the ways in which disidentifications are also personal. Barriga describes vergüenza as a "structure of feeling because it engages lived experience and involves an appreciation of 'impulse, restraint, and tone.'"

The first story, titled *El Señor Aristeo*, is a story of class conflict between mi'apa and a wealthy educated man in mi'apa's birthplace, San Luis Potosi. The rancho where

mi'apa grew up is approximately a two-hour bus ride and a forty-five minute walk from the city of San Luis Potosi and Salinas, where most of this story takes place. The state of San Luis is in central Mexico, and, like many other states in Mexico, has both crowded urban centers such as the capital of San Luis Potosi, and isolated and impoverished rural areas. Mi'apa, young when this story took place, remembers extremely vivid details of the encounter because it immediately became instrumental and relevant to his sense of self. The antagonist, El Señor Aristeo, is un hombre de dinero¹¹ relative to others in the area. His son, a high school graduate, thought himself to be educated. This speaks to the micro manifestations of class conflict, contesting the idea that class is static, clearly definable and uniformly present in any situation. In his transaction with my grandfather and father, El Señor Aristeo attempts to *humillar*, or humiliate, them for being uneducated and impoverished. This attempt to shame them contests their sense of self as men; to belittle mi'apa and grandfather was to be a bigger man, a more important man, a man better capable of providing for his family. Although el Señor attempts to *humillar* mi'apa by humbling him, he nonetheless still claims a sense of humility for himself, invoking it in an empowering way.

The second story, titled “El Sol”¹², reveals one of the main reasons for mi'apa's migration North. Speaking to the hybridity and mestizaje of Mexico, the people of the rancho practiced Catholicism compatible with superstition and magic. It was rumored that someone had bewitched him so that he could not be in the sun. The sickness mi'apa had that was intolerant of the sun directly attacked his sense of self and his prospects to independisarse, or become independent. In the rancho, men provided for themselves and

¹¹ A man of wealth

¹² The Sun

their family with their bodies, by laboring long hours under the unforgiving sun and in the outdoors. When mi'apa stopped being able to contribute, he felt desperate. He felt trapped in his body, which ached and bled on a regular basis. Although his sickness would go away when he went to the city of San Luis Potosi and could stay indoors for most of the day, he still felt desperate, wanting to leave so that he could become independent. Mi'apa's illness rendered him incapable of performing masculinity, leaving him in the borderlands between ability and manhood. Because he could not perform, provide for himself or his family, or become independent, he was relegated an outsider.

The third story, "Como Que Ahi Vez Que Ahi No Es¹³," which is really a continuation of the second, mi'apa discovers his penchant for negocio, for being his own boss. He found himself to be a convincing salesman, and imagined the opportunity to work on his own. Although this might translate to desiring class attainment, this also speaks to my dad's desire to be free of working under men who would seek to humillar him like El Señor Aristeo. Pride is obviously present, as is the urgency to leave. Mi'apa's urgency contests and transcends traditional migrant narratives, which strip migrants of the agency to control their migratory patterns. Theories of male-centric push/pull factors are, in many ways, irrelevant in the narrative mi'apa told. Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo writes, "At its most extreme, this [push/pull factors] perspective casts the individual migrant as a purely self-interested economic agent, as an actor who compares present income with potential earnings in alternative locations. This analysis yields a one-dimensional view of human action, flattening complex social processes into a random

¹³ This is perhaps the hardest phrase to translate. I offer a larger explanation of this phrase later in this chapter, but for the time being, to me it translates to "It's as if you can see that where you are is not where you want to be."

composition of generic, individual calculations (Hondagneu-Sotelo 5).” Rather than merely adopt dominant narratives regarding the economic push/pull factors that supposedly govern migration, this story presents a migrant counternarrative, and keeps gender, as it intersects with ability, as the analytical framework by which to view mi’apa’s impulse to migrate.

The Fourth Story, titled The Fruit Man, shares a narrative that disrupts the concept of migrant networks, vergüenza/ self-reliance, and fictive kinship. Out of pride and self-reliance, mi’apa refused to let his family take him to the border. In this story, kinship takes on many forms. The fruit man, having no familial “responsibility” to mi’apa, despite economic limitations, invited mi’apa to breakfast. Although he can’t remember his name, mi’apa has felt indebted to the man who helped him find an address and offered him a meal for thirty years. The idea of paisano¹⁴ or fictive kinship between Mexicans interacts with a sense of vergüenza that demands self-reliance. Upward mobility is also evident in mi’apa’s description of wanting to give back, but his wealth attainment does not cloud his sense of integrity. Rather than desiring to humillar the fruit man, he remembers the kindness of someone who is willing to help.

Despite how insignificant these events might seem, mi’apa remembers extraordinarily minute details some thirty years later. The detailed nature of these stories are telling of which events were formative in mi’apa’s identifications. Methodologically, I chose these stories because they elucidate sites of disidentification and produce knowledge in the interstices of traditional rites of passage. The stories that follow are

¹⁴ Although paisano directly translates to “civilian,” it is important to note that pais, the root of this word, translates to “country.” Paisano is used between Mexicans to signify comrade or brother.

extremely revealing of mi'apa's character and his relationship to class, vergüenza and respeto.

El Señor Aristeo:

I didn't go to school past the second grade. The two years I was there, I liked math. To tell you the truth, I was lazy when it came to reading and writing. I never had girlfriends at school because I wouldn't write them letters. No te creas.¹⁵ I just didn't like words like I liked numbers.

When I stopped going to school, I started to work. Siempre era trabajo y trabajo y trabajo.¹⁶ Everyday. But I kept playing with numbers. The notebook I had in el rancho was a spot right outside where there was loose dirt. It had to be really fine, almost like dust. I wiped an area with my hand, then either with a finger or a stick, I would do my accounting. If I saw that I made a mistake, I could erase what I needed to with my hand then I would do it over again. That was my notebook and pencil, because there were a lot of things I could not afford. I kept practicing even though I couldn't go to school anymore. I had passed to the third grade, needed to start working. So I kept pretending that I was selling and buying, dividing and subtracting.

When I was nineteen, mi'apa decided to sell all of the young sheep and goats. He was selling to a man who was, well, wealthy. His business was to buy and sell ganado. That man, he had a son. He had more, but at that time he had that one muchacho with him, who was exactly my age. He had just graduated de la secu¹⁷.

I remember really well that we started by loading big trucks of livestock. He bought, in total, 860 heads of livestock. We started by taking a group of sheep in big trucks to the little town of Salinas. We unloaded trucks of sheep into a big room that was actually a scale. De un jalon¹⁸, we fit as many into the room. Once that group was

¹⁵ Just kidding. Literally: Don't believe it.

¹⁶ It was always work, work, and work.

¹⁷ Colloquial term for "high school"

¹⁸ In one fell swoop

weighed, there was another door leading to a corral, and we'd send in more sheep. The other boy and I would write down each weigh-in.

To add the kilos, that part was easy, but the hard part, the complicated part, was multiplying the total weight by the price per kilo. When we finished weighing the sheep, our 'apas said, ok boys, how many kilos did you get? We had all been keeping track, so el Señor Aristeo asked each of us, what did you get? 'Well, I got 7,950 kilos.' And the other boy, also 7,950. Ok, we got the same answer. The owner, too. Ok.

Confident, El señor turned to mi'apa and suggested, "Instead of going to the bank, my boy here can do the numbers. My son just finished his schooling."

"Well, my son can do it, too."

El señor was tall, dark, bigotón¹⁹. I remember that he stood tall, over me, looked down and let out a laugh. 'Tu tambien sabes hacer cuentas²⁰?' "Si señor, a little bit." He could see that I was from el rancho. Did you finish school? Well, no. How far did you get? Second grade in elementary school. He laughed again. And you know how to do numbers? Without waiting for an answer, he turned to mi'apa and said, "Don't worry, Don Ladislao, my son here can do it."

Ignoring his arrogance, mi'apa turned and said simply, "Well, do it, m'ijo²¹." I grabbed my notebook, because by then I had one that was mine. I did it slowly, to be sure I was right. I finished, and the other boy wasn't even done yet. When I practiced, if I saw that the answer was wrong; I would keep solving the problem until I got right. But I never just copied answers. I didn't get nervous; I felt sure of myself. El señor saw that I had dropped my hands.

"You're done?" Yeah. You know when someone says something and they laugh? You can feel or see how they say it. I felt something when he said that.

The boy finished too.

"Well, let's see."

¹⁹ With a mustache

²⁰ You also know how to do calculations?

²¹ Similar to "mi'apa," this translates to "my son."

We saw how much I got, and then the other muchacho²² says what he got. We didn't get the same answer.

"Well, do it again."

I got the same answer. The boy got an answer he hadn't gotten before. Again. One more time. A third. Fourth. I kept getting the same answer. He stopped believing his son was right, but he turned to me and said, "You're wrong."

"How can I be wrong?"

"One of you is wrong."

I never got a different answer.

"Let's go to the bank, because there they have a calculator. Let's see who is right."

Ay m'ija, do you want to know how we showed up at the bank? Mi'apa, bien de racho, mal vestido.²³ And me, too. We looked humilde.²⁴ When you're poor, you can tell. We looked dirty, slouched. Very different from someone from the city, someone educated, someone who knows how to dress and have good clothes. The señor was well dressed, with pants like these, the ones I'm wearing now, and us, in old jeans, thin and worn out.

"Good day."

Taking charge, the man said, "We have a problem that these muchachos couldn't solve for us. Can you put this in the calculator? Here's the weight, and this is the price per kilo." The teller wrote the answer on a piece of paper. El señor asked his son, "How much do you have?" "Well, this."

"And you?"

El señor just turned and told his son, "What happened, m'ijo? You're making me look bad. Aren't you embarrassed, that this boy who didn't even go to school beat you? What happened?"

Me senti tan contento, mija.²⁵ So proud.

Mi'apa too. "Mira, hijo,²⁶ he said. "I didn't know what to do. I felt so much happiness. So proud. I had never been so proud. Not even of myself, I hadn't even felt so

²² Colloquial for young boy.

²³ My father, very much from a rancho. Not well dressed.

²⁴ In this use of the word, humilde translates to poor, although it also means humble.

²⁵ I felt such happiness, my daughter.

proud of myself, like I was proud of you. I didn't know what to do with myself," he said. "I wanted to scream, run, jump. M'ijo, de verdad.²⁷ Did you see Don Aristeo's face? He face was like ash; pale from anger. He wasn't angry that his son couldn't do the multiplication, he was angry that you beat him. Te fijaste²⁸ that when he asked if you could multiply, he mocked us?"

That was what made me control myself. It gave me courage, coraje,²⁹ anger. And I thought, maybe I can't even do it, me va fallar³⁰, but I tried not to get angry, to concentrate, to put everything so that I could do the same as the muchacho. Once I saw that he kept getting different answers, I thought, that's it; he doesn't even know what he's doing.

Mi'apa said, "And, you always got the same answer. The same answer, you couldn't get anything but the right answer. Where do you want to go eat? Let's go get some pollos rostisados³¹. I wouldn't want to be in el señor's shoes. You saw he made fun of you at first. You didn't brag, and he laughed at you. That's all right. There's nothing the other boy could do. He was lost. Proud he would have felt if we got the same answer.

That's when I thought, well, I won one already, so I'm going to try to keep winning. If you lose one, don't lose morale, don't get angry, because you're giving it your all, but be prepared to lose. Be prepared; know what you're about to do. There have to be people who are better than you, but keep competing. You'll catch up to them if they're not careful.

I think mi'apa, well, he always loved me a lot, always believed in me but since then, but that day it's like he believed completely in me. He was confident that if I wanted to do something, I could achieve it. There are some things that are too impossible, but things so simple like that, you can. I felt proud of myself, and that mi'apa would believe in me. There are other times mi'apa would feel proud of me, but nothing like that.

²⁶ Look, son

²⁷ Truthfully

²⁸ Did you notice...?

²⁹ Coraje translates to anger and courage

³⁰ It's going to fail on me

³¹ Rotiserrie chicken

El Sol

I had a sickness on my face. If I was half an hour in the sun, or one hour, I felt a lot of heat inside my body. My bottom lip would balloon and I felt it be hard. The skin of the lip would get bright with yellow spots, like when you get burned, these blisters. When I would stretch my lip, the skin would break and something like water would come out. I couldn't be in the sun because that would happen. It started when I was fifteen. I spent many years with that condition.

So they say, someone gave me something malo³² to eat because they were angry with me. I don't know if it's true or not, but when I went into San Luis Potosi, the city, my sickness would go away, like I didn't have anything at all. After a few days of descanso³³ from the pain, I would take a train back to the rancho. My stop was Piña, and by foot it was 45 minutes to the rancho. I would walk, and it's as if I was afraid of the sun. When a cloud blocked the sun, walk, walk, and as soon as it went away, I jumped into shadow; like under a huisache tree. I would go straight through the shade. Sometimes, there wasn't shade so I had to walk. I would feel my body heating up. By the time I got to the house, I felt heat through my body. I wouldn't go back out for the rest of the day, and by the next morning, amanecia³⁴ the same as before. A little more sun and my skin would burst, like I had been burned.

Later, I started getting more blisters above my lip. When I showered, it was like my skin peeled off. My skin would be left bare. I had carne viva³⁵. When I would dry myself, I could only pat my head. When it would dry, I had a torta of pus was on my face. Then it spread to my nose. Then on my neck. It was extremely itchy. When I was awake, I would just touch them. But asleep, I would scratch myself and wake up bloodied. I couldn't work in the rancho, so I got desperate. Esta muy feo decirlo, hija³⁶, but one time I just stared at a rifle that stood in the corner of our room.

³² Although this translates to “bad,” in the context of magic it also means cursed.

³³ Rest

³⁴ I would wake up

³⁵ This literally translates to “live meat” but means scraped, or raw, skin.

³⁶ It's really ugly to admit, my daughter...

“Mira, ‘ma, hace un rato me queria dar un balazo.³⁷” Hugging me, mi’ama cried and begged me not to do it.

“Ama, ya no lo aguanto.³⁸”

Era bien feo. Feo, feo, feo.³⁹ I couldn’t just be. I felt una comezón.⁴⁰ I felt like there were worms inside my face. I felt it on the inside. I could even look at myself in the mirror, and imagine the worms crawling inside. I wanted to shoot myself that day. And my mom hugged me and told me not to.

She said, “vete, hijo.⁴¹ If you’re ok in San Luis, go there. Don’t stay here. Don’t come back. We’ll go visit you there. Ponte a trabajar⁴² where you’re in the shade, lo que tu quieras, pero no te vayas a matar⁴³.”

Supposedly, the mal was in el rancho. I couldn’t be there. I was twenty one, in ’83. “Leave,” she told me, “but don’t do that. Work where you can, but don’t do that.”

“Ahi te quedas⁴⁴.”

“Go to the train station and wait for us there. Meet us there so we can go to the feria de Salinas. I’ll wait for you that Friday.” I wasn’t planning on going. I stood him up that day. I was never going to meet him. I was going to go to the U.S. I left him there waiting. I decided before I left the rancho.

At the rancho, I told Maria my sister to pack me two extra changes of clothes. In el rancho, you showered once a week, once every couple of days, so I didn’t need more than two changes of clothes for my trip, but I asked her for four changes.

“Why do you want that many clothes?” she asked.

“I’m going to el otro lado.”

“What do you mean, you’re crossing the border?”

³⁷ Look, mom, I wanted to shoot myself...”

³⁸ I can’t stand it anymore.

³⁹ It’s so ugly.

⁴⁰ I felt an itch.

⁴¹ Leave, son.

⁴² Put yourself to work

⁴³ Whatever you want, but don’t you go killing yourself.

⁴⁴ There, you’ll stay.

“I don’t want to be here anymore,” I told her. “I’m going to el otro lado⁴⁵. Just put the clothes in my suitcase, and don’t tell anyone. When I leave, tell mi ama not to worry, that I had told you that I would be leaving.” Mija, Mi’apa y ‘ama wouldn’t have wanted me to leave. There was no other way for me to leave. Mi’apa, menos⁴⁶. And I was sick, too. They wouldn’t have wanted me to go. They would have been worried that I wouldn’t be able to work.

You have to work in what comes up, and I couldn’t because I was sick. Forget that you need shade; you need to eat. If I left the rancho, I had to work but I was sick. She packed my clothes. I bought my ticket the day before I left. I told Angela and Adelina, my sisters, I’m leaving. They asked me to say hi to mi’ama.

“You don’t want to eat breakfast before you leave?”

“No, I’m not hungry.”

“Eat something.”

“I’m not hungry.”

“It’s not time for the train. I’m leaving now.” I was nervous, I was anxious. Esta canijo,⁴⁷ mija.

“Say hi to mi ama,” they said.

I had no other choice. “I’m not going to meet them.”

“What do you mean you’re not going?”

“I’m going pa’l’otro lado.”

“Have you told mi’apa?”

“No.”

“M’ama?”

“No.”

Panic set in. “Wait, we’ll tell mi ‘apa and we’ll take you to the border. Don’t go alone.”

“There’s no more time. I have to go.” I had the train ticket already.

“On the border, they kill people. They take your money; they throw you in the river.

That doesn’t happen to everyone. They were tercas, so scared for me.

⁴⁵ “The other side” is a colloquial phrase meaning the United States

⁴⁶ Even less

⁴⁷ It was really difficult

"We'll go with you. Let's go to el rancho to get my dad."

"There's no time. I'm leaving now." I left. There weren't phones, just letters, and until they got to el rancho; weeks could pass by.

Como que tu ves como que ahi no es

Mija, how can I explain it to you? Como que tu ves como que ahi no es. Sometimes, I would get so desperate at el rancho that I would just come to San Luis. I wouldn't tell anyone, I would just walk to the bus stop. Once, I came to San Luis without telling anyone. Sin avisarles a nadie⁴⁸. I said, I want to work here, see what happens. I went to a hardware warehouse. The boxes I would have had to carry were like dust to me, I was used to the heavy stuff but the manager told me I was too skinny. He asked me how old I was and I told him nineteen and he said, no you can't carry these boxes. Fix up these boxes, take wood from the broken ones. They're done, I told him, a little later. All of them? Yes, all of them. I'm done. Well, sort this fruit. Put here the overripe fruit. He didn't let me unload trucks. Me fastidiaba⁴⁹. You can eat whatever you want, bananas, apples. Not spoiled, but very ripe. The first day I ate six bananas, the second day, two, then nothing.

I got tired of them. He told me I could take whatever I wanted, so I took them to my sister, Adelina. These are so good, she said. How much do they charge you to take them? They're free, I told her. Well, I'll start selling smoothies then. She would just buy the egg and the milk, and the banana was free. I did that for a while but at the job itself I was so bored, and they paid me so little; I was just the person to sort the good fruit from the spoiled fruit. I told my sister; there are too many bananas. We're not selling smoothies. I know someone around the corner who sells smoothies, I told her. Let me go see if he'll buy them from me. I went to the lady around the corner and let her know I worked at the warehouse and got bananas for free. Would these be good for your smoothies? I took them to her and made some money. I would split the bananas among

⁴⁸ Without letting anyone know.

⁴⁹ I would get frustrated, bored.

people who sold licuados⁵⁰ on the street, and I ended up making more than I made at the store.

I learned that I could make more money selling. I would go buy a big bag of oranges, swing it over my shoulder, and walk around the block. I just went one time around the block and like this, I'd sell them all. I sold my hold bag of oranges and I would make more money than at the job I had. That's when I knew I liked el negocio, business...Business, si le hechas ganas y tienes suerte⁵¹, if you give it your all and have good luck, you'll make it, and in little time. I was selling then, I knew where the big construction sites were, and that's where I would go to workers there.

I'll never forget this one man, he was thirty or so, and he looked to me like an old man. He said, "Hey! Hey, come over here. Pay him. This chavo is working; you can't steal from him. Whatever you get, pay him for it. How are you going to steal from someone who's working?" Turning to me, he advised, "Pongase listo⁵², mijo. Always pay attention or they'll leave without paying you. I'll help you here." Every day, I sold my entire bag of oranges. I didn't earn a lot, but I earned my money.

One day, my mom came to my sister's house and asked, "What are you doing here, mijo?" I told her that I went to the city to work, and she started to cry. She said, "Why are you struggling here? Why would you work so hard here? Come home." I said, No, 'ama, I'm here already, you know how mi'apa is. What if he says something?" I felt desperate at el rancho. I was sick, and I couldn't work there. I can't do anything at home. I feel desperate; what can I do there? I feel like I just get in the way. The last time I left without telling anyone was when I came over here.

Fruit Stand

The train arrived sometime in the morning. With me, I had about four or five changes of clothes and, after purchasing the ticket, a couple of pesos. In the afternoon, a woman boarded selling gorditas. I didn't have breakfast the day I left, so my stomach was empty. I didn't want to be left with no money, so I only bought two. I would have been

⁵⁰ Smoothies

⁵¹ If you give it your willpower and you have luck...

⁵² Put yourself on guard

happy with six or eight gorditas, but I didn't know what would happen. I didn't even buy a coke to go with them. They were so good que se me atoraban⁵³. If I was on the streets, with the money I had I could buy a loaf of bread and a bottle of coke; tomorrow, let's see what God says.

The train pulled into Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas, a whole twenty-four hours after I boarded. Everyone scattered. They knew where they were going. I stepped off the train and kind of stood there for a while. I looked every which way, but everything looked the same. Where do I begin? Well, no. I just stood there. Passengers pushed past me to meet family, climb into a taxi, or walk home. The crowd guided me outside and I saw a fruit man. I stood close by him. He had fewer and fewer customers as they boarded cars, taxis, buses. He noticed me.

"What can we get for you, amigo?"

"Oh. Nothing, thanks."

Me dio vergüenza asking him for help while there were people around. I waited until no one else was there. "Actually," I confessed, "I was hoping you could help me. I'm looking for mi tia. I have an address here but I don't even know where to begin."

"That's right by my colonia," he offered. "I can take you there when I go home for lunch."

We stood there for a few long minutes. "Let's go," he said, when one last customer left with a cup of mango sticky with jugo de limon and chile. We pushed his cart home, rounding corners and walking streets I had never met; I couldn't tell you now which direction we went.

At the threshold to his house, the fruit man called out to his wife. "Mujer, I'm home. Is el almuerzo ready? We're eating first, then I'll take you, compadre," he said, addressing me.

"I'm really not hungry," I promised. "I just ate in the train." Me dio vergüenza to let him feed me. Really, I hadn't eaten anything but the two gorditas. Empty. My stomach was empty. Those two gorditas were long gone. He sat at his table, in his regular seat, it looked like, and his almuerzo was already on the table. He ate freely, offering every so often.

⁵³ They were so good they got stuck in my throat.

His wife asked, “Are you sure you’re not hungry?”

“No.”

“Well, here. Have as much as you want. I know que te da verguenza⁵⁴, so I’ll just leave this here.”

She set down a platter of all kinds of fruit and left. I had two pieces of pineapple. You know me, facil, me hechaba el plato.⁵⁵ I could eat it all. The whole plate, and I still would have been hungry. Me dio verguenza, m’ija. How can I tell you?

“You didn’t eat anything!” She scorned me.

“I had a bit of pineapple. En verdad.”

The man rose and I followed him out. I don’t know exactly how but we made it to my aunt’s house. It only took a couple of blocks. I told el señor, “Thank you,” and he asked me to visit one day. I wish I could see him again. I want to see him, thank him, and invite him out to eat. Give him money for helping me. What’s a hundred dollars? It’s nothing, m’ija, for what he did for me. If I could today, I would give him what I could.

I knocked on mi tia’s door and a young girl opened the door. She must have been sixteen. She stayed behind the steel door. “Is this where mi tia Eulalia lives?” I asked.

“Yes. Who are you?”

“Your cousin, Joaquin.”

“You can wait there for her. She’ll be back soon.” We chatted for a bit, her behind the railing.

“She’ll be back soon,” she said, and walked back inside. I stood there until an older woman rounded the corner. That must be her. I think I remember that’s her, I thought.

I begged for it to be true.

“Are you mi tia Eulalia? I’m Joaquin. Estanislado’s hijo.”

“What are you doing out here?”

“Mi prima came out but I waited for you here.”

Mi tia Eulalia went inside to regañar⁵⁶ her daughter for leaving me outside.

⁵⁴ I know that you’re embarrassed to take food...

⁵⁵ Easily, I could have thrown back the plate and eaten it all.

⁵⁶ Scorn

“No, no. I promise que esta bien⁵⁷. I could have lied, I told her. She did the right thing.”
“Alright then,” she said, unconvinced.

“Come in, come in. Sit,” she commanded. Unlike the fruit man’s wife, she didn’t ask if I wanted something to eat. Nomas dijo⁵⁸ “sit” and almost immediately poured me a bowl of beans. After one bowl, she insisted on pouring another. When she offered a third, I refused, never convincing her I was full. “I know your family son comelones⁵⁹.” You know I could have kept eating, m’ija, but by then me dio vergüenza. But it was so nice to finally have food. And a place to stay.

The stories of this chapter center around vergüenza, and the many forms it takes in interactions with family and strangers. The vergüenza of these stories rests at the intersections of race, gender and class. These interactions are informed by both vergüenza and fictive kinship, which clash and contradict. In this chapter, I theorize vergüenza as a catalyst for borderland identification. I argue that these stories lie in the borderlands between gender and class expectations, that in these interstices a complicated form of Mexican manhood can, and does, exist within these narratives. I investigate the way vergüenza is used to interrupt appropriate gender behavior and therefore offers the opportunity to disidentify with these hierarchies of behavior. Analyzing the complicated nature of vergüenza serves to further the argument that the policing of what constitutes appropriate behavior is not monolithic or from one source, the “oppressor.” This offers agency to mi’apa, who, despite being severely limited by poverty, was able to subtly contest gender and class dominance. In the following chapter, I explore the state’s role in identity formation and worth; in this chapter I investigate the micro actualizations of

⁵⁷ I promise it’s ok.

⁵⁸ She simply said.

⁵⁹ Big eaters

gender and class policing, the interpersonal manifestations of vergüenza. The project of this chapter is elucidated by the author Barriga, who writes, “Reinterpreting vergüenza is an aspect of creating a sense of identity within cultural borderlands (Barriga 290).” Using borderland and disidentificatory theory, I explore the multiplicity of identities through these stories, the multiple identities that are so inextricably linked and inform mi’apa’s negotiations. Mi’apa lies at the intersections of identifications and in the borderlands between normative and nonnormative behavior. He simultaneously subscribes to vergüenza while he uses it to contest its own purpose of maintaining hierarchies.

The stories of this chapter take place in multiple borderlands, which are important to recognize as part of the larger concept of borderland identifications, in other words, borderlands that extend beyond the literal U.S.-Mexico border and envelop both el rancho and mi’apa’s later life in Texas. In many ways, this collection tells a coming-of-age narrative; mi’apa, as the son of Don Ladislado, inhabits the borderlands between boyhood and manhood. In this time period, he is caught between disability and manhood. Relying on others for help contested mi’apa’s sense of self, his sense of being able to provide for himself. Raised with a staunch working class ideology, mi’apa expected himself to be able to engage in menial physical jobs. When he took a warehouse job in the city of San Luis Potosi, he argued with the foreman who thought he was too young and skinny to be able to lift the heavy crates of fruit. He described them as “dust,” indignant that he was underestimated as weak. Deborah Boehm reports on the experiences of labor migrants to the United States from rural Mexico. She argues that in their ranchos, men “control[ed] their labor by managing their farms,” and that “masculinity and male privilege as it is defined in men’s home communities, where men’s identity is often equated with their

identity as farmers.” In other words, with masculinity being defined in the rancho as having autonomy and the ability to engage in strenuous labor, mi’apa was relegated to the borderlands between ability and masculinity. Aida Hurtado and Mrinal Sinha, authors of *More than Men: Latino Feminist Masculinities and Intersectionality*, write, “Intersectionality allows for such an analysis with men of color in that it provides the opportunity to explore contradictory experiences of power (and disadvantage)... prior studies of masculinity with men of color analyses have focused on experiences of powerlessness *or* privilege, without explicit attention to the space ‘in-between’ (Hurtado and Sinha 340).” This border theory perspective uncovers the complicated relationship to power, that it is neither fully present or fully absent.

Mi’apa’s insistence on becoming independent or being self-reliant indicates the persistent desire to access manhood. Mi’apa’s adolescence was rocked by an illness that was rumored to have originated in witchcraft. The story goes that he did not reciprocate the feelings of another young girl in the area, and that her family bewitched mi’apa out of spite. Since he was fifteen years old, he could not go out in the sun or else suffer from painful blisters all over his face. The doctors in the area could not find a medical explanation to his condition, and, to date, mi’apa and his family have not found one. The pain he endured left him debilitated and restless, incapable of emulating and practicing normative gender performatives. Telling this story inspires a sad nostalgia in mi’apa, because the sickness on his skin left him disabled, in pain, and desperate for a cure. It actually wasn’t until his first year in the United States that he was cured of his disability. His first girlfriend’s mother knew how to practice white magic. The woman was able to offer him a treatment that involved herbs, rubbing alcohol, and a strict ritual. Before the

herbal cure, neither doctors, nor medicine would help his condition, except for remaining indoors. The symptoms were heightened in the rancho, and subsided when he went to the city. The sun made him sick, and despite being encouraged to not work, mi'apa felt restless. Nevertheless, these feelings of restlessness are primarily embedded in a sense of personal responsibility and independence. He was desperate he could not contribute to his family's and his own livelihood. Poverty taught him to be resourceful and self-sufficient, and strong feelings of independence were also integral to these feelings. In many other instances, mi'apa mentioned the deep-seeded feelings of inadequacy with regard to his inability to contribute economically to his family. Mi'apa shared the deep depression that stemmed from his inability to work, "I couldn't work in the rancho, so I got desperate. Esta muy feo decirlo, miija, but one time I just stared at a rifle that stood in the corner of our room." In this story, mi'apa feels shame for being unable to actualize signifiers of manhood. Although a thorough discussion of ability is beyond the scope of this thesis and this chapter, I would like to point out to what extent masculinity is predicated on ability. Internalized ableism and feelings of incompetence are embroiled in the masculine imperative to be self-sufficient and resilient. The shame of physical disability inspired restlessness. Barriga furthers, "On the other hand, [the values associated with vergüenza] involve the ability, when these values are not realized, to feel ashamed, expressed as embarrassment, shyness, timidity or disgrace (Barriga 282)." In other words, because mi'apa could not actualize proper behavior for a man (independence, hard work), he felt ashamed of himself and his disability. Barriga argues that these expressions of vergüenza "encompass one's social, economic, and political sense of belonging and engagement in a community (Barriga 282)." In the case of mi'apa, this passage refers to mi'apa's feeling

that he did not belong in San Luis. When asked why he had to leave, he said “Como que ahi vez que ahi no es,” which translates to “it’s as though you see that there isn’t it.” A difficult translation, this passage signifies the piquing fixation on migration. He could see that San Luis wasn’t for him, even though he couldn’t articulate precisely why that was true. When asked why he left San Luis Potosi, the rhetoric mi’apa chose was that of becoming independent. Justifying his decision to leave without consulting his family, mi’apa said, “Mija, Mi’apa y ‘ama wouldn’t have wanted me to leave. There was no other way for me to leave. Mi’apa, menos. And I was sick, too. They wouldn’t have wanted me to go. They would have been worried that I wouldn’t be able to work.” Addressing me, he is extremely aware of how much he hurt his parents for leaving. Despite his sun allergy, mi’apa was willing to travel unaccompanied, with no guidance, to migrate north. As was discussed earlier, this counternarrative disrupts the presumptions about Latino men’s supposed calculated and economic decisions to migrate. Although he did access support from extended family, most of his trip was mediated and predicated on self-sufficiency. Maintaining a sense of self-reliance trumps self interest in many of the situations described above. Such strong feelings of self-reliance could be attributed to patriarchal actualizations of gender norms, stubbornness guided by the impetus for a man to provide for himself. Barriga quotes Galarza, author of *Barrio Boy*, “vergüenza is not necessarily ‘based on the fear of being caught’ but involves a sense of ‘personal dignity; conscience; doing right; modesty; responsible behavior; trustworthiness’ (Galarza 1971, 275 qtd in Barriga 281).” Vergüenza then is both an actualization of masculinist gender norms as well as working class dignity. Mi’apa could

not be discovered to be incapable of providing for himself or making it on his own. As a young adult, he was all the more invested in proving his resilience.

The subtle and otherwise petty conflict between my dad and El Señor Aristeo reveals class tension and the impulse of el Señor, who had attained some amount of wealth relative to others in rural San Luis Potosi, to *humillar* or humiliate mi'apa and grandfather for being from the rancho, working class and poor. El Señor's intent to *humillar* mi'apa attempted to invoke a sense of *vergüenza* or shame for being an inadequate man, or uneducated and poor. In this regard, expectations of a Mexican man, *vergüenza* and conflict between men of different classes all work in concert to replicate systems of class, gender and racial domination. The descriptors mi'apa used spoke clearly about the way that el señor Aristeo used his class attainment to shame mi'apa. Mi'apa remembered, "He could see that I was from el rancho. Did you finish school? Well, no. How far did you get? Second grade. He laughed again." The physical embodiment of class and ability is legible in the demeanor and educational attainment of mi'apa. El señor Aristeo's desire to invoke class-based humiliation is also present in his cockiness. Here, I invoke Cherrie Moraga's theory in the flesh to understand the implications of the lived and embodied realities of mi'apa.

In other instances, mi'apa spoke of the visibility of class. "When you're poor, you can tell. We looked dirty, slouched. Very different from someone from the city, someone educated, someone who knows how to dress and have good clothes," he said. His description is reminiscent of characterizations of the oppressor/oppressed. In this narrative, mi'apa also nods to his own current class attainment. Now a small business owner who no longer participates in the strenuous physical labor component of his

business, he said, “The señor was well dressed, with pants like these, the ones I’m wearing now, and us, in old jeans, thin and worn out.” This recognition that he now shares visible class markers with el Señor Aristeo presents a disidentification with class attainment and wealth. Rather than being shamed of his class status, his demeanor allowed him to beat the other boy in a calculation. Now, mi’apa inhabits the liminal space between poverty and class attainment. Although he has now achieved wealth, especially compared to how he grew up, he identifies with his lived experience with poverty, not with el señor Aristeo. He describes his poverty as a sad beauty, recalling the values of respect and care while remaining critical and aware of the violence poverty inflicts on the body. This calls attention to the borderlands mi’apa inhabits even after becoming a citizen of the United States. It’s important to remember this present liminality in the next chapter. He is at the borderlands before his migration. I further argue in the following chapter that his experience in the INS office did not mark a shift in his identification. Rather, it was through his disidentification that he was able to negotiate a space for himself.

The contest between the boys at the interstices between adolescence and adulthood was, in many ways, a match of manhood and class privilege. The pride that stems from this event is not in humiliating the other boy, but rather in preventing el Señor from exercising his class status. My grandfather’s reaction to the situation explains this better; “You saw he made fun of you at first. You didn’t brag, and he laughed at you.” Maintaining a sense of integrity during the interaction reflects not a desire to access wealth and therefore be a “better man.” Here, dignity and an internalized set of standards of behavior governed this interaction. Mi’apa never intended to show el Señor that he

was a better man than him. Rather than wanting to engage in a match of abilities, mi'apa simply wanted to prove *himself*. El Señor wanted to prove his son was *better*. In “Chicano Men and Masculinity,” Maxine Baca Zinn writes, “The widely accepted interpretation is that machismo is the male attempt to compensate for feelings of internalized inferiority by exaggerated masculinity (Baca Zinn 30).” Traditional notions of masculinity posit that Latino men, collectively traumatized by colonization and conquest, exert their masculinity in exaggerated ways. Machismo, then, stems from the history of domination over Mexican men. In other words, Machismo is overcompensation for feelings of inferiority and emasculation. In *El Señor Aristeo*, Aristeo was fixated on engaging in a contest of power. His intent was to shame mi'apa and his father for being smaller, less capable men. El señor Aristeo was intent on imposing a uniform notion of gender normativity, that he was more capable of performing these expectations. On the other hand, mi'apa resisted that impulse through this performance of vergüenza and resolve to prove el señor wrong.

In “The Fruit Man,” the intersections between gender and class are made relevant in mi'apa's disidentification with multiple uses of vergüenza. Mi'apa rejected and resisted fictive kinship offerings over and over again. In *The Fruit Man*, mi'apa said often how much vergüenza he felt accepting offers from the fruit man. To a certain extent, mi'apa articulated his cognizance of the fruit man's class status and his inability to share a meal without costing him and his family. Out of respect, he wouldn't take from the man or be *conchudo* because the fruit man did not have the means to give to my dad. The fruit man felt a responsibility for mi'apa despite having just met him. This camaraderie reflects a kindness stemming from fictive kinship feelings. Unlike el señor Aristeo, the

fruit man did not seek to belittle mi'apa, but rather to ensure his safety in his migratory trip. On mi'apa's end, he exemplified a sense of humility in his lack of entitlement. Rejecting a meal speaks to the theme of being *humilde*, or humble. Mi'apa did not feel entitled to take from the fruit man. Unlike mi'apa, then, El Señor Aristeo felt a sense of entitlement to take up space and disrespect mi'apa and grandfather. This clarifies the ties between vergüenza and respeto. Shame and respect dictate proper behavior, which are structured to maintain class and gender roles in order. In other words, who is meant to feel shame are the poor and members of other subordinated groups. In the above stories, however, respeto and vergüenza are manipulated to reflect a sense of responsibility and humility. Barriga reports, "In addition to the values of *confianza* and *respeto*, a man *con mucha vergüenza* also knows when to defend his community and his rights." In other words, vergüenza mediates resistance at the same time that it perpetuates oppression. Vergüenza is located "in a complex web of oppressions that silence borderland voices (Barriga 292)." Vergüenza is how mi'apa's sense of manhood came to be shaped. Feeling responsibility and craving independence stems from feeling vergüenza. Vergüenza shapes identifications, because vergüenza represents, in many ways, internalized oppressions. Attempting to recover masculinity, as evidenced by these stories, may not have much to do with machista ideals. Baca Zinn furthers,

"To be more 'hombre' may be a reflection of both ethnic and gender components and may take on greater significance when other roles and sources of masculine identity are structurally blocked. . . My point that gender may take on a unique and greater significance for men of color is not to justify traditional masculinity, but to point to the need for understanding societal conditions that might contribute to the meaning of gender among different social categories (Baca Zinn 39).

Baca Zinn argues that reconfiguring masculinity to allow the complexities between gender and class is integral in reconsidering the possibility for masculinity to exist as a source of empowerment for men like mi'apa. Vergüenza offers up the opportunity to resist traditional masculinities. These stories elucidate mi'apa's relationship with class, gender, and ability. These systems of identification became all the more salient precisely because they were contested. Hurtado and Sinha write, "Unproblematic group memberships, ones that are socially valued or accorded privilege and are not obvious to others- may not even become social identities... Thus, people belonging to social categories that are problematic and devalued in various contexts are more likely to engage in psychological work aimed at revaluing their group memberships in order to preserve a positive sense of self (Hurtado & Sinha 340)." In this chapter, I have explored the reconfiguration of vergüenza and respeto through disidentification. Vergüenza and respeto are loci for the entrenchment of normativity as well as of resistance. This reconfiguration of vergüenza sets the stage for a reimagining of Mexican masculinity. Mi'apa's deployment of vergüenza served to contest gender norms rather than uncritically adopt them.

Chapter Two

“Ya Dejela Caer⁶⁰:” Negotiating Heteropatriarchal Policing on the Border

The nearest rancho was thirty minutes away by burro; the nearest town, an hour and a half. In Ahualulco, the area in the state of San Luis where mi'apa grew up, institutions of social control like the government and education were absent. Laws did not mandate daily life; education was inaccessible; and running water and electricity were still in the distant future. Birth certificates were hard to come by; being certain about a birthdate was a luxury since births took place at home. Medicinal practices were passed along through the family; generational home remedies practiced before pills and procedures. In *Queering Freedom* by Shannon Winnubst, the author writes, “For Foucault, it is never that this kind of power, which he calls sovereign power, does not exist, but that it is not the singular, natural, or given form in which power expresses itself. (Winnubst 178)” Although institutions of social control were absent in the day to day of el rancho, it was not that power was absent from the rancho, or that there were no interactions with manifestations of institutions, such as the frequent visits from the federal police.

The nuclear family, however big, was the primary, and on most days, only source of socialization. Richard T. Rodriguez writes in *Next of Kin* that la familia and nationalist sentimentality have been paired because the former is seen as the prerequisite to the latter, namely, that the family exemplifies and perpetuates nationalist ideals (Rodriguez 7). Rodriguez describes the “compulsory normative Chicano family romance” as the foundation of nationalism (Rodriguez 3). In other words, Rodriguez would argue, the

⁶⁰ Let it fall already.

family is the site of the reproduction of the nation, the place where values are passed down performatively. Even though Rodriguez's project is to unveil the myriad ways that family reinscribes normative hierarchies for the sake of the nation, he ultimately argues for a return to *la familia* as a site of resistance against normalizing systems. This lens is useful in this chapter because it offers the possibility to silently destabilize demands for a normative relationship in order to access citizenship through silent and subtle resistances and negotiation. Mi'apa and his family spent most of their time working from before sunrise to well past sunset. With the nearest neighbor being so far away, most days were spent in isolation. Nevertheless, outside influences were not totally absent. Extended family and *ranchero* connections as well as established and flourishing migrant networks offered *el rancho* sources of socialization beyond the family. Regardless, however, the family was the locus of policing and the family set up rules regarding when and how self-governing needs to occur.

Mi'apa's identity development was shaped by the isolation of the *rancho*; the family was the primary site for the emulation of values. As the family aged, the area changed; it became more and more connected to the outside world. Because the family was so big, many moved away as they got married, grew older and wanted to become independent. Migrations to and from San Luis Potosi and *el norte* became commonplace in the lives of mi'apa and his family. As Hondagneu-Sotelo argues in *Gendered Transitions: Mexican Experiences of Immigration*, many men in rural areas of Mexico found exciting adventures, economic opportunities, or a chance to explore by migrating (Hondagneu-Sotelo 3). Migrants who came back told stories of betterment and adventure, enticing the next generation of migrants. By the time my dad was an adolescent, many of

this brothers and sisters had made the move away from el rancho. Many had already tried stints in the USA, and the rest had just recently made the permanent move. No one stayed in the rancho once they entered adulthood, perhaps signifying an industrial shift in the area. When mi'apa decided to migrate, some of his sisters and brothers had moved into the city of San Luis Potosi, while others had already moved to the U.S. As was discussed in the previous chapter, the restlessness and shame embroiled in mi'apa's illness encouraged his migration, providing a counternarrative to traditional narratives of economically motivated migration. As was explained in the previous chapter, migrant narratives argue that migration is determined by economic push/pull factors. Mi'apa provides a counternarrative, offering himself the agency to control his own migration. He had a semblance of a migrant network that facilitated his step migration, first to San Luis, then to Nuevo Laredo, to Wichita Falls, TX, and ultimately to Dallas. His migration followed the legacy of other family members.

This chapter follows a similar model as the previous chapter, offering a collection of short stories that are organized around exploring outside forces that mold and shape identifications. These stories also do not necessarily fall into chronological order, but they do generally contrast two life stages, childhood and young adulthood. They can be understood through border theory and the performativity of institutions such as government, education, immigration and urban areas play in mi'apa's identification. Butler establishes a definition of performativity that will offer a framework by which to analyze daily life on the rancho in contrast with mi'apa's interview for residency. She writes, "Such acts, gestures, enactments, generally constructed, are *performative* in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are *fabrications*

manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means (Butler 136).” Understanding the theory of performativity is imperative in this chapter, because it interrupts constructions of the state as a totalizing force. This chapter argues that mi’apa’s interaction with INS officials do not mark a sudden change in mi’apa’s identifications, or a sudden coming to being a U.S. resident. The game and theatrics acted out marks an in-betweenness, a liminality that is negotiated in front of an institution that pretends to be omnipotent and that is part of the larger borderland identification that I have been exploring in this thesis. I chronicle the interpersonal interactions that are exemplary and manifestations of systems that govern identities, movement and legality and, through that analysis, disrupt the notion of the supremacy of these institutions.

The first story is, unlike other stories shared in this thesis, a collection of vignettes, spliced together to construct a landscape of every day life. Even though mi’apa was three or four years old when his family moved out of his grandparent’s rancho and up a mesa to *desmontar*⁶¹, he remembers details of the every day chores he and his siblings were assigned. The move happened in one day, and his older brothers and his father set up camp by building shelter with the leaves of a maguey plant. Using branches and magueys to contain the sheep, my grandfather and the older male children lived an hour and a half by burro from my great-grandparent’s home. In this rural setting, it is blatantly obvious how little access organizations of social control such as government agencies had on the daily life of his family. Daily reminders of these systems, such as roads, running water and telephone wires were absent from the landscape of the rancho. This story should be read with the understanding of the isolation of rural life as well as disidentificatory

⁶¹ To *desmontar* is a verb meaning to clear a space in the rancho for planting or grazing.

gender practices facilitated by a rural context. This story contrasts starkly with the interaction with INS and their insistence on maintaining “legitimate” marriages by questioning the heteronormativity of the relationship.

The performance of identification is present in “If You Do, We’ll Take Away Your Papers,” where multiple INS officials repeated the same questions, in the hopes of “catching” mi’apa in a lie by confusing him. Border policing is both present in the every day fears of mi’apa, but also is extremely performative in its attempt to convince the U.S. that only certain people are allowed to become citizens. As an undocumented worker in the U.S. the fear of deportation was omnipresent, even though enforcement was lax and the stakes were not so high. Not yet having established a life in the U.S., and with no family to take care of, the threat was relatively minimal. His most memorable interaction with the immigration system took place during his appointment to interview for naturalization. He had been advised by a friend not to travel with his new wife. He was told exactly what to expect, namely, that the INS officials would question the legitimacy of his relationship. Much of the interview was a balancing act of truth and consistencies. Mi’apa’s task was not to be truthful, but rather to maintain consistency. Having to be interrogated by immigration officials exemplifies the state’s insistence on maintaining control over who deserves or does not deserve citizenship and certain “rights” and “freedoms.” Lionel Cantu writes *The Sexuality of Migration: Border Crossings and Mexican-Immigrant Men*, “American citizenship itself impels a performance, a fabricated act by which an actor must convince others that she/he is what she/he purports to be (Cantu 36).” Despite the truth, mi’apa could not contradict himself, and he had to answer questions as though he and his wife adhered to traditional gender roles, or else become

suspect as fraudulent. The game between mi'apa and INS officials is a similar game that is played in other aspects of border politics. The acts between any father and the INS officials is exemplary of the performativity of policing as well as the interpersonal manifestation of otherwise intangible organizations.

This chapter extends the borderland imagery used in the previous chapter. The state takes it upon itself in naming and categorizing immigrants in “desirables” and “undesirables.” This role is maintained by policing the types of relationships and bodies that are permitted in the country, regardless of its ability to enforce such policies. The state plays a direct role in calling mi'apa into being as a U.S. Resident. The consequences of that decision directly impact mi'apa's mobility. He is now able to freely cross the fictional border between the U.S. and Mexico. This legitimacy is a stark contrast to the often lawlessness of central Mexico. Enforcement agencies such as the federal police would neglect the laws it was meant to enforce. Corruption was rampant, as were bribes. When mi'apa crossed the border, he had been living in the borderlands between rural and urban life, isolation to being directly under the control of government agencies. He never became the ideal citizen and, indeed, in his interview he was mandated with pretending as such; he remained in the borderlands, learning to negotiate different systems of governance.

Muerte y Chivas

When I was very young, maybe three or four, a rancho from another rancho got into a fight with a man. I can't remember why the fight broke out, but he killed him in the fight. Probably with a gun or a machete. He knew the man's family would want to avenge his death. El rancho needed to leave his rancho until the situation was over. At that time,

mi'apa had 30 chivas⁶² and we all lived in my mom's parent's house. El señor wanted to sell his 150 chivas. For us back then, that was a lot. He trusted mi'apa, so he asked him to buy them. Mi'apa couldn't afford that many chivas, but el señor told him to take them anyway, that he just needed someone to leave them with or they would be stolen, run away or die from coyotes, hunger or disease.

We'll meet at this palm tree or this huisache tree. Those were our addresses. People from el rancho know the names of different trees. That's where my dad paid for the chivas- at this huisache tree everyone knew. After he made the murder, el señor didn't go home. He came straight to our rancho, to sell the chivas. He even left the gun he used to kill the man with mi'apa. He sold the older chivas to pay for the rest of them.

One of my brothers, 15 at the time, suggested we all move to el yano, up the hill to live on the mesa. They had to leave immediately, because there wasn't space for the 140 chivas at mi abuelo's rancho. From one day pa'el otro, they decided to move up the yano, without a house, without anything, with the chivas.

"We'll build in a day." And they did, chopping up trees and magueys to block holes in a clearing. You just had to watch out for coyotes then. They put branches above the magueys, kind of like barbed wire to reach 4 feet tall, and that was enough. Those first nights, they slept under a huisache tree.

The man's family knew who took el rancho's chivas. They came looking to cobrar his death, to collect the life that was owed. They asked mi'apa where the man was, but he wouldn't tell them anything. He knew nothing would happen to him, because he didn't owe the death. The police would come by but they couldn't take his brother or anyone else. The family of the person who was murdered didn't either. They had that kind of respect back then. Now it's not like that. Now they just want somebody to pay for the death.

Vignettes de la Vida Humilde

Mi'apa showered and shaved while mi'ama washed his clothes- the same ones he had out in the milpa- and leave them out in the sun for a while. Mi'apa was headed to a bautizo. He was the godfather and had to be present. Mi'apa would put his clothes back

⁶² Goats

on, still damp from being handwashed. He wrung the clothes a little. Since he was on horse for two hours, under an unforgiving sun, his clothes would quickly dry. Mi'apa had one shirt and he would wear it until it was so thin you could see him under.

He suffered so much. We would say, "Ama, give me more frijoles!" and she would. Mi'apa would say, serve them first. And sometimes, they would run out. We're out of frijoles. "Give me a tortilla with chile. And tunas⁶³ from the cactus."

Can you imagine? To drink water, we had to go thirty minutes by burro to a well. We took cantaros de barro⁶⁴. You'd take good care of water. You wouldn't even wash your hands. Your hands had mugre⁶⁵. You would shower on Saturday, put on your clean clothes. You didn't even brush your teeth. You'd wash your hands, your feet, your face in charcos en el monte⁶⁶. When it rained, you could wash yourself in the charcos. You had water to drink, and that was it.

Vicenta, my oldest sister, she died of pulmonia- pneumonia. My grandfather had no money. If someone got sick, it was un tesito of this yerbita or canelita⁶⁷, cinnamon tea. She was five years old when she died. Ater her it was Lola, Lupe, Severo, Santos, Fidel, Toña, Angela, Adelina, Rogelia, then it was... me, Maria, Teresa, Carmela. Oh wait. It was me... Now I got confused. It was Vicenta, Lupe, Lola, Severo, Santos, Fidel, Toña, Angela, Adelina, Rogelia, then me, Maria, Lorenzo, Teresa y Carmela. That was all of us.

I was something like seven and I would go to school in Aqualulco, so at 4 am we would go on a burro. It was about an hour and a half away. We left the burro there, and Jose, my uncle, picked up the burro and brought it back to the rancho. I couldn't always go to school, because I had to stay with a woman during the week. She would keep my money for lunch sometimes. So I had to stop when I was seven, because I had to work and we didn't have enough money.

⁶³ Prickly fruit

⁶⁴ Jars of clay

⁶⁵ Dirt

⁶⁶ Puddles in the fields

⁶⁷ Herbal tea or cinnamon tea

When you were in el monte, if you saw someone, you would get near a nopal or a maguey so no one would see you. You had to wear something dark, or you could spook someone into shooting you. You shoot at whatever moves. You would put your sombrero in your chamarra⁶⁸. You always had a dark chamarra, dark clothes. That's the story. Sad and beautiful. Even if you don't want to admit it, you have some sustos⁶⁹. A witch or something, you can't escape. You have to be strong. I learned how to use a gun when I was around ten, like my brothers. Mi'apa taught me to point it away from me and make sure it's not loaded, because sometimes the cartridges got stuck in the barrel. When I was young, I carried a rifle. It's harder to accidentally shoot yourself since the barrel is long. That's a precaution people took, but they would still give really young kids guns. My mom carried her gun, too, for emergencies. If a vibora or a coyote came by, you would shoot in its direction for it to leave. You can scare the coyote and make him go away from the sheep. Guns aren't legal in Mexico, but we all had one.

The people over there are corrupt. So corrupt. Es bien difcil⁷⁰ to accomplish anything. It's been five or six years ago that Santos was caught drunk. Let's go, he told his wife. They went drunk, trying to get back to the US. The cops stopped him on the way out of the city, and they took him in the patrol car. To get your truck out of the lot, Santos would have to pay more than the truck is worth. They were real bravo, cops. They could ask for anything and get it. If you couldn't pay the fees, they would just keep the truck.

He knew a lawyer that was one of the big shots. They went to horseraces and cockfights. The cop went into the station and they talked. If the cops treated him poorly, or jailed him up, they would get it. Santos told them whom he knew and they became scared to make him angry. They said, "we already made the report, so we can't let you go, but you're going to stay here." Your wife can take a taxi home. At 5 am, you can leave. From 6-6:30am, the feds come to take people to jail. "Your wife has to be here at 5 am.

⁶⁸ Coat

⁶⁹ Scares

⁷⁰ It's so difficult...

You'll be sober by then." They just let him go. When you know someone who's big in San Luis, you get whatever you want.

That's not right, mija. If you do something, you get away with it and never learn. Someone who doesn't have connections pays for you. When you have someone helping you out, nothing holds you back. When you're on your own, even the easiest thing, you can't do it.

In those years, we had guns and rifles, even when the feds came by. There were always seven feds in one truck. They'd have their rifles and ak-47s. We also had a rifle or a gun in front of them. We'd tell mi'apa, now they caught you with a gun. "Pues ni modo⁷¹," he said.

Mi'apa would invite them over. Beans and homemade cheese. My mom would give them these huge blocks of cheese. In el rancho, we always fed the police when they came by.

"We came by because there was a death in the area so we thought to stop by." That's the kind of things they would say for a taco.

They really just came by to eat and take things. You don't have a sheep to sell us? Mi'apa gave them seven sheep. One chivo per person.

They asked him, "When will you make us a barbacoa?"

They sometimes came with the person they had just picked up. He would be in the back in handcuffs, tied up. And they would come by to the rancho. My dad told them to take off the man's handcuffs and that he could eat, too. Before they left, mi'apa would give them a sheep or a queso. They gave him a license, and said, if any cop stops you and wants to take away your gun, show them this. Just don't show it to the feds. You can't show it to the feds because they'll get angry. My dad had his gun with him wherever he went.

Once, we showed up to the state fair and we would be standing around. The feds saw him and they all came by. Don Ladislao, how are you?

Abundio, one of them, came by and said, "We're going to arrest you Don Ladislao."

⁷¹ So be it

“Alright, then. Just tell me the motive.”

“Well, first we’re going to search you. If you don’t have your gun, we’re going to take you away.”

They searched him found it stuck in the back of his jeans and said, “don’t go anywhere without it. You should always protect yourself”

If you give them everything they want, they’ll give you what you want. Everyone ran away from Abundio. It didn’t matter what you did, if you made him mad, he would give you a tranquisa. A beating. It didn’t matter how small; Abundio was mean. Real mean. But not to us.

I came back with an eight year old car. I crossed the border again, without papers. I got to the house. The car I had was a carrazo, a fancy car. I got to the prima’s house. She looked at me and kept sweeping. Beep beep. She turned, but didn’t say anything. Primo! She finally recognized me. “Primo, how do you do it? When you stopped by you had a morralito⁷², and now look. You really did change.” I had boots, new clothes.

“Primo, you left me with a mirada⁷³. So many go pa’el otro lado. If immigration doesn’t throw them back, they come back the same way they left. They’ll just go to get drunk and they come back because they don’t have anything. And you? Look at you.” I told her, “I’m here to arreglar mis papeles, ahora si⁷⁴.” “Your papers?” she asked, not believing me. Yes mis papeles.

I had to go to the city of Monterrey for a checkup. Mi’ama came with me. At the doctor, it came out that I had tuberculosis, and other people at the same clinic. We’ll give you your papers, they said, but you need a letter from the U.S., from your employer and your doctor that states that as soon as you get back you will start treatment. We went back to Nuevo Laredo. They told me my case was open, that as soon as I got the paperwork I could go to the office.

⁷² Diminutive of “small bag”

⁷³ You left me with a look- surprised.

⁷⁴ I’m here to get my papers, right now.

Three or four came by to ask me questions. I guess they all compared my answers.

“Señor Villela, could you please step forward.”

Yes, sir?

“Come here. We asked you some questions and you said you would answer with the truth.”

“Si, Señor.”

Silence. Then, “We have one more question. What’s the name of your wife’s doctor? You said she couldn’t come because she’s pregnant?”

“I know he’s a white man, but in all honesty I can’t remember his name. I could tell you a name right now that’s not his, but I won’t lie.”

He waited a long time, wondering if I would confess. “Ok, then. We need to take your fingerprints. Show your hands.”

My hands were sweaty from the threat of being caught and deported.

“Your hands are sweaty. Why are you nervous?”

“To tell you the truth, you’re the first person from immigration I have ever interacted with.”

He got the seal, held it over the passport.

He said, waiting for my response. “We’ve taken your fingerprints, but that doesn’t make you a resident. *Todavía no estas arreglado*⁷⁵. As soon as I set down this stamp, you’ll be able to cross the border all you want, whenever you want, however often you want. We just want to be sure you’re telling the truth. That’s why we’re asking you over and over again.” “Si señor,” I said, but inside I was thinking, “Please, just do it. Let the stamp fall. *Ya dejalo caer*⁷⁶.”

He said, “It looks as if you’re telling the truth. Every question we gave you, you answered. Every time you gave the same answer.” I could have been caught in a lie.

They asked me the same questions multiple times. Then they would compare answers, and see if I ever contradicted myself. They were trying to catch me. You have to be sure you’ll remember what you say so that you can say it right. One question they

⁷⁵ You’re not a resident yet.

⁷⁶ Just let it fall already.

asked me often was what we did on the weekends. They would have asked her, too, if she had come with me. So instead they asked me questions in different ways to see if I said one thing and then another. If they asked, “Where do you like to go on the weekend?” and I had said, “Go to the park,” and then when they asked me “What do you do on the weekend?” and I had said, “Go to the grocery store,” then they would think I was lying. They wrote everything I said down, and I had to give the same answers over and over again or they would deport me and keep records of me. Then someone else came, as if they hadn’t asked me these questions before, and ask them to me again. They asked, “Where do you go grocery shopping?” and another one will ask you, “Do you go grocery shopping with your wife?”

“Here you go. There you are. Now you’re a resident. You can come and go at whatever hour. Whenever you want. You just can’t smuggle drugs or people. If you do, we’ll take away your papers. I fixed up my papers and they asked me who was with me. “Mi’ama y mi tia. They’re outside waiting for me.” I got in my car and se me hacia que no pasaba,⁷⁷ but no problem, I got through.

This collection of stories presents the stark contrast between the isolation of the rancho and the hyper-presence of the government in the INS office. When mi’apa was growing up, he and his family, by nature of living in a rancho, had very limited contact with institutions of social control. As was discussed in the previous chapter, *respeto* and *vergüenza* governed action. Justice was often handled by *la gente del rancho*, as is evidenced by the casual description of collecting the debt of a murder, *cobrando la muerte*. Chapter One discussed *respeto* and *vergüenza* as an opportunity for disidentificatory practice. In other words, these rules and regulations created within interpersonal relationships were not monolithic or inflexible. They were performative,

⁷⁷ I felt as if I wouldn’t pass (this trial)

passed down through generations through emulation, policing by the whole family, and, ultimately, self-governance. Because a performative is a repetition, an “echo of prior action” it also offers a site of resistance, the opportunity to feign adhering to the rules, which is an important survival strategy for borderland identification.

This Chapter departs with this idea in tow. Within the nuclear family, identifications were modeled, emulated, and created generationally performatively, but it was also this family that disidentified with traditional roles. Mi’apa’s sense of identity came directly from isolation, the lack of education, and the values and code of ethics passed down, between and within. When mi’apa sat in the INS office, he already occupied a liminal space. He walked into the INS office in Nuevo Laredo an “illegal alien” and walked out a “permanent resident” of the U.S. but neither what came before, what happened during, or what came after was at all neat. His relationship with law enforcement always was of survival, and in this need he found himself disidentifying with the mandates of masculinity and heteronormativity. He found strategies to relate to law enforcement that permitted him to avoid punishment.

As an undocumented worker, the fear of deportation followed mi’apa. Not yet having established a life in the U.S., and with no family to take care of, the threat was relatively minimal. By 1985, the national narrative regarding “securing [the] borders” of the United States was escalating, and “illegal aliens” were painted as posing a threat to the U.S. Peter Andreas argues, “loss of control is the dominant border narrative. The basic story line is that border defenses are under siege or entirely bypassed by clandestine transnational actors (Andreas 7). Andreas would argue that it is not necessarily that the border patrol wants to or can control who may cross the border but rather, to give the

impression to the media that the border is under control. Andreas furthers, “These images and messages are part of a public performance for which the border functions as a kind of political stage. For those state actors charged with the task of managing the border, the way their actions shape the perceptions of the audience ultimately matters more than whether or not the illegal border crossers are actually deterred (Andreas 10).” “Regaining” control of the border was a dominant narrative that gained popularity in the eighties, leading to the passing of the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA), a few short months after mi’apa’s own interview for residency. This narrative of “regaining” control crafted a narrative that once the border was protected, and that a slow Reconquista by Mexico was taking place. Pierette Hondagneu-Sotelo argues that “IRCA codified this xenophobia,” the xenophobia embedded in the rhetoric of the time (Hondagneu-Sotelo xv). Andreas argues, “Border policing is not simply a policy instrument for deterring illegal crossings but a symbolic representation of state authority; it communicates the state’s commitment to marking and maintaining the borderline (Andreas 8).” As the eyes of the media turned to border politics, it became more and more clear that the border wasn’t “protected,” and that undocumented workers flowed northward toward the U.S. The state finds a physical representation of itself in the INS officials themselves.

Mi’apa’s most memorable interaction with the immigration system took place during his appointment to interview for residency. This interaction with the INS was both empowering and disempowering, because he was able to access residency status but at the consequence of having to negotiate with the INS officials who were ready to deny him access. Tapping into his migrant network, a friend whom he had known from a neighboring rancho advised him not to travel with his new wife. The friend’s uncle has

recently been deported because he wanted to “show off” his new wife in San Luis, even though it was a marriage based on immigration sponsorship. The INS separated the couple and asked them gender conforming and heteronormative questions regarding their marriage. They were found to be fraudulent because they answered questions such as “What’s your husband’s favorite dish?” incorrect. Mi’apa was meant to travel on his own, so that he would only have to remain consistent to himself. Had his wife at the time traveled with him, INS officials would have asked questions that determined whether they were truly a good couple. If she didn’t know mi’apa’s pants size or favorite dish, their marriage would be determined to be fraudulent, mi’apa would be deported and she could lose her papers, too. In this regard, the interview was primarily a script to remain consistent. Andreas writes, “Border policing, from this perspective, is not only the coercive hand of the state but a ceremonial practice, not only a means but an end in itself (Andreas 11).” Andrea’s *Border Games* confronts the games immigration officials play in determining who will be admitted to the country and who will be excluded and negotiating this process is part of borderland identifications.

The interviews the INS conducted under sponsorship law served to determine whether or not the marriage in question was real by questioning its adherence to heteronormative gender roles. A marriage that was found to not obey strict gender roles was also “found” to be “fraudulent,” and grounds for denying legal resident status to the spouse. Because mi’apa was an undocumented worker in the U.S., the legitimacy of his marriage was immediately suspect. Obviously, the citizenship of people born in the United States is not determined by their marriage status, but for immigrants, to forgo emulating appropriate gender roles in heteronormative marriage was grounds for

expulsion. This draws upon what Lionel Cantú describes as “Foucault’s assertion that sexualities and identities can only be understood through discursive strategies and an ‘analytics of power’ that examines the multiple sites where normalization occurs through discourse and knowledge production (Cantú 27).” The state decides desirability of people in a myriad of ways, including health, intelligence, class attainment, race, gender, etc. In other words, when mi’apa was discovered to have tuberculosis, he had to certify that he would receive treatment and not contaminate other people in the U.S. he was not able to cross the border himself to receive that certification. Historically, people have been excluded in the U.S. based on ability and health. The eugenic based logic behind only letting in the “fit” carries on to today. It was only recently, for example, that the ban on people with HIV was lifted. Whereas citizens with disabilities or illnesses were not considered a ‘threat’ to people in the U.S., immigrants with disabilities and illnesses are. They were seen as carriers of diseases and in need of quarantine and segregation. This mentality was actualized in the quarantining of mi’apa. Cantú writes, “To function, the performance depends upon both difference and similarity. Immigrants to the United States are impelled to perform certain acts or gestures in order to make claims as if they were “citizens”- whether a citizenship “test,” the manner of their dress, or the language they speak (Cantú 36).” Being able to emulate the ideal citizen was a prerequisite of citizenship more than actually being one. Cantú invokes a “queer borderlands approach,” which, he argues, “questions binary systems of identity; it allows for fluid and shifting identities that may be context specific... and it “fixes” an analytical eye at the precise point where binary systems are challenged...at the margins. (Cantú 36).” The questions themselves were extraordinarily revealing of what the U.S. classifies as a desirable and

legitimate citizen. Citizenship, then, is performative in the sense that norms of appropriate behavior delineate between who qualifies for citizenship and who should not. All of the questions asked of candidates presume a seamless heteronormative relationship. At the interview, INS officials asked why mi'apa would think to travel without his wife, signifying that he was a bad husband for leaving her alone. When mi'apa said that his wife was pregnant, some of the suspicions subsided because it made sense that childrearing took precedence. Her doctor had supposedly advised mi'apa not to take his wife. They asked him banal questions such as the name of the baby on the way, to which mi'apa responded: "Joaquin if it's a boy and if it's a girl, I'll let my wife decide." The name of mi'apa's baby should have no bearing on whether or not to let him be a citizen, but questions like these were primarily intended to "catch" mi'apa in a lie. Otherwise mundane details about the married life come into question during these sessions, and all of a sudden the government is very invested in knowing these details, because they somehow reflect the eligibility for citizenship. There are many other ways that citizenship is held above the heads of immigrants as if they have to meet some kind of standard before they can have the honor. The questions asked are gendered, creating idealized archetypes of the middle class American dream. Accessing this dream would make mi'apa and others in his situation seem more desirable to the U.S. for citizenship. Rather, mi'apa maneuvered through the questions, in some way feigning normalcy just to access freedom of mobility and other "rights" granted to eligible residents and men.

Mi'apa's informal knowledge network allowed him to maneuver himself through an overwhelming and violent experience. He developed this network out of his larger borderland experience and practices of disidentification. Otherwise, he would not have

known what to expect and he very well could have been denied citizenship and be deported. His cousin gave him the tools to interact with the state, signifying a conspiracy to subvert the government's designation of desirability. Mi'apa was allowed to qualify for residency because he knew how to play the game. When mi'apa was practicing for the citizenship test, for example, he bought the booklet and, because he didn't understand English, memorized the answers to the questions on the test. On the test, there are questions such as "what do the thirteen stripes mean" and "who was the first president." The questions in this test are explicitly and intentionally meant to inspire a white-supremacist patriotism. Mi'apa, by memorizing the words alone, subverted the nation's desire to demand ideal citizenship from immigrants. His experiences with race class and gender inform his complicated and subversive identifications/disidentifications. Rather than adopt the American dream myth, despite class attainment, he identifies with working class and poverty values. He is not haste to leave behind his culture or language, and he is constantly reminding himself of the privileges he now has access to.

Toward the end of the interview, the INS official held a literal stamp of approval over mi'apa's passport. He mentioned time and time again that he, that one INS official, was in control of whether mi'apa was able to move freely between the U.S. and Mexico, and within the U.S. with no fear. He was in control of whether mi'apa would have mobility or not, whether he would have access to wealth and comfort and be in accordance with the government. He held so much power over mi'apa's livelihood in those short minutes, and he reveled in it. Although this interaction was an interpersonal one, it shows the macro consequences of institutions like racism, precisely because this and had the "power" of the nation-state behind him. Nevertheless, mi'apa's maneuvering

left him a resident whereas he, according to U.S. standards as what good immigrants are, may not fit the bill of an ideal citizen. Foucault argues, “We must conceive discourse as a series of discontinuous segments whose tactical function is neither uniform nor stale... We must make allowance for the complex and unstable process whereby discourse can be both an instrument and effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling-block, a point of resistance power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it (Foucault 19).” Foucault’s analysis of power elucidates the subversion mi’apa engaged, but performing the role of an ideal citizen solely to access residency. The discourse surrounding immigration created an ideal citizen through marriage, but it also offered the opportunity to disidentify with this performance as a survival strategy. Muñoz writes, “The postcolonial hybrid is a subject whose identity and practices are structured around an ambivalent relationship to the signs of empire and the signs of the ‘native,’ a subject who occupies a space between the West and the rest (Muñoz 78).” Muñoz’ analysis is helpful in understanding mi’apa’s acting and negotiation in the INS office. The moment when the INS official placed a seal on mi’apa’s paperwork symbolizes the moment where mi’apa was called into being as a citizen. Regardless, he remains at the borderlands, and, as was explored in the previous chapter, his disidentificatory practices in el rancho signify that he was at the borderlands before he became an immigrant. Deborah Boehm closes this chapter with, “This process [of crossing the U.S.-Mexico border] is dialectical- gendered selves shape migration and transnational movement transforms gender identities (Boehm 17).” Boehm’s argument is that gender is an analytic of immigration, that immigration processes directly interact with gender. Gloria Anzaldúa first presented border theory around the same time that

mi'apa immigrated to the U.S. and was sponsored for residency. She wrote the following of borders, "Borders are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish *us* from *them*. A border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge. A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary (Anzaldua 25)." Although mi'apa found himself crossing the physical U.S./Mexico border, he resided eternally in the borderlands. He never became, nor did he want to become, the ideal citizen. Neither did he fully assimilate to the United States. The stories of this chapter speak of agency, of resourcefulness, resilience, and intelligence, in the opportunity to subvert the normalization of the nation-state.

Conclusion

In this thesis, I have investigated the opportunities for a disidentificatory masculinity that could belong to a man who would otherwise be described as machista. As a cisgender, heterosexual Latino man from central Mexico, I wanted to contest that mi'apa had to identify in a minoritized gender or sexuality category before he could relate to masculinity in a complicated, nonlinear way. As I translated and transcribed the interview I conducted with mi'apa, I realized the subtle ways that mi'apa contested traditional gender norms. I wanted to apply disciplines such as queer of color critique and theories such as disidentification to uncover the way intersectionality works with privileged identities. Focusing in on the intersections between race, class, gender, ability, nationality and educational attainment, I found the ways gender roles were policed internally as well as institutionally. Chapter one discusses minute and detailed interpersonal interactions between mi'apa and people of differing class backgrounds. Chapter two primarily focuses on the implication of institutions such as immigration have on the lived experiences of mi'apa.

The stories analyzed primarily take place during mi'apa's own entrance into adulthood. He was no older than twenty-two or twenty-three years old in any given story. In the present context, it was rewarding to ask mi'apa about his life when he was the age that I now am. Choosing those stories empowered me to reflect on my own growth as a student, as I write this capstone thesis to my career as an undergraduate student. In many ways, this thesis was extraordinarily reflexive and unabashedly self-serving. I was prompted by the fact that my relationship with mi'apa became strengthened at the same time that my knowledge of Chicana feminism and queer of color theory grew. This

correlation prompted my interest in exploring the possibilities of subverting heteropatriarchal values without necessarily having access to the language to describe it.

Currently, mi'apa is a forty-nine year old husband and father of two, the owner of a small business, and a car owner at that. Although he now inhabits spaces that were inaccessible to him thirty years ago, he is nostalgic on a daily basis and is willing to share with me and my sister life lessons about humility, work ethic, and respeto. He's been able to maneuver in his life, teaching himself how to speak English, read, write and calculate arithmetic problems. To this day, he remains in a borderlands. Now a full U.S. citizen actualizing a form of the American dream, he reminisces about his days in the rancho. He resides the borderlands between wealth and poverty, identifying with both and counteridentifying with both. He disidentifies with class, understanding his positionality of being someone of wealth, someone deserving of a lot of respect, while at the same time maintaining his working poor class ideals of humility and giving respect. This duality exists in mi'apa on many fronts. In terms of gender, he follows certain strict rules and will not bend them. But he readily discards other rules. In particular, I'm reminded of his attitude toward my own lesbian identity. He replicates gender roles as a product of the heteropatriarchal norm in el rancho and his upbringing. And, although he does not have access to the language or translation thereof to participate fully in conversations or dialogue regarding my sexual identity, he is nonetheless open and accepting of people with LGBT identities.

This thesis is significant beyond the scope of mi'apa's personal narrative because it offers concrete examples of the intersections between social markers like race, class, gender, sexuality and more. Although a majoritarian identity might not be salient as a

minoritatrian identity, this thesis contests the impulse to explore the possibilities of resistance of minoritized identifications. Although that analysis is critical in considering ways of resisting hierarchies and structures of oppression, I wanted to tackle applying these theories on a subject whose gender category is privileged. I conclude with the end of an Anzaldua quote I shared in the Introduction to this thesis. She wrote, “We need a new masculinity and the new man needs a movement.” This thesis hopes to have provided a new lens by which to view masculinity. Although it is one story, it reflects strategies and opportunities to disidentify with manhood in order to contest heteropatriarchy.

Bibliography

- Acevedo, Luz del Alba, ed. *Telling to Live: Latina Feminist Testimonios*. Latin America Otherwise. Durham [N.C.]: Duke University Press, 2001.
- Andreas, Peter. *Border Games: Policing the U.S.-Mexico Divide*. Cornell Studies in Political Economy. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000.
- Anzaldúa, Gloria. *Borderlands: The New Mestiza = La Frontera*, 3rd ed. (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 2007).
- Zinn, Maxine Baca, "Chicano Men and Masculinity," *Journal of Ethnic Studies* 10 (Summer 1982): 29-44.
- Barriga, Miguel Díaz. "Vergüenza and Changing Chicano and Chicana Narratives." *Men & Masculinities* 3, no. 3 (January 2001).
<http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=aph&AN=5044088&site=ehost-live>.
- Boehm, Deborah. "'Now I am a Man and a Woman: ' Gendered Moves and Migrations in a Transnational Mexican Community.'" *Latin American Perspectives*, Issue 158, Vol. 35 No 1, January 2008 16-30.
- Boyd, Nan Alamilla. *Wide Open Town: A History of Queer San Francisco to 1965*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003.
- Broughton, Chad. "Migration As Engendered Practice: Mexican Men, Masculinity, and Northward Migration." *Gender and Society* 22, no. 5 (2008): pp. 568-589.
- Butler, Judith. *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"*. New York: Routledge, 1993.
- Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. 10th anniversary ed. New York ; London: Routledge, 1999.

- Cantú, Lionel. *The Sexuality of Migration: Border Crossings and Mexicanimmigrant Men*. Intersections. New York: New York University Press, 2009.
- Cantú, Norma Elia. *Canícula: Snapshots of a Girlhood En La Frontera*. 1st ed. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1995.
- Collins, Patricia Hill. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. 2nd ed., Rev. tenth anniversary ed. New York: Routledge, 2000.
- Crenshaw, Kimberle, ed. *Critical Race Theory: The Key Writings That Formed the Movement*. New York: New Press : Distributed by W.W. Norton & Co, 1995.
- Fonow, Mary Margaret, and Judith A. Cook. "Feminist Methodology: New Applications in the Academy and Public Policy." *Signs* 30, no. 4 (2005): pp. 2211-2236.
- Foucault, Michel. *The History of Sexuality*. 1st Vintage Books ed. New York: Vintage Books, 1990.
- Gonzalez, Ray, ed. *Muy Macho: Latino Men Confront Their Manhood*. 1st Anchor Books ed. New York: Anchor Books, 1996.
- Griffith, David. "Class Relations Among Old and New Immigrants." *Journal of Latino-Latin American Studies*, Vol 1, No. 4 (2005) 89-107
- Hondagneu-Sotelo, Pierrette. *Gendered Transitions: Mexican Experiences of Immigration*. Berkeley, Calif: University of California Press, 1994.
- Hurtado, Aída, and Mrinal Sinha. "More Than Men: Latino Feminist Masculinities and Intersectionality." *Sex Roles* 59, no. 5 (2008): 337-349.
- Moraga, Cherrie & Anzaldua, Gloria, Eds. *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women Ofcolor*. 2nd ed. New York: Kitchen Table, Women of Color Press, 1983.

- Moraga, Cherríe. *The Last Generation: Prose and Poetry*. Boston, Mass: South End Press, 1993.
- Muñoz, José Esteban. *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*. Cultural Studies of the Americas v. 2. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999.
- Rodríguez, Richard T. *Next of Kin: The Family in Chicano/a Cultural Politics*. Latin America Otherwise : Languages, Empires, Nations. Durham [N.C.]: Duke University Press, 2009.
- Torres, Edén E. *Chicana Without Apology = Chicana Sin Vergüenza: The new Chicana Cultural Studies*. New York: Routledge, 2003.
- Villela, Joaquin. Personal Interview, Oct 15-16 2011
- Winnubst, Shannon. *Queering Freedom*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2006.
- Yosso, Tara J. *Critical Race Counterstories Along the Chicana/Chicano Educational Pipeline*. The Teaching/learning Social Justice Series. New York: Routledge, 2006.