

Reconstructing the Border: Social Integration in Reyna Grande's *The Distance Between Us*

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Chicano literature emerged as a part U.S. literature, an example of a minority literature or an immigration literature. This literature has been a vehicle for Chicanos to express their voices relating to crossing the border and the differences they found on the other side, including their experiences with prejudice from the native-born. This article aims to examine Reyna Grande's *The Distance Between Us* with the goal of offering a new perspective on the border in Chicano literature and from this perspective to suggest a remedy for collective justice in the twenty-first century. David José Saldívar (1997) and Ramon Saldívar (1979) discuss the arrival of Chicano literature as a new form within U.S. letters. Grande's memoir tells the story of an immigrant's life on the U.S.-Mexico border with the dialectics of difference a fundamental truth in her life. Her experience with the border gives Grande the chance to give voice to life changes for Chicanos living in the U.S. This article proposes that the dialectics of difference generates significant individual change, starting first as dreams and then leading to individual fulfillment and integration into the host country.

Key words: *Chicano literature, immigration, border crossing, dialectics of difference, integration*

Introduction

Chicano literature, a sub-field of writing produced by Latin American immigrants to the United States of America, historically came into existence starting in 1848 when Mexico and the U.S. signed the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo – terminating a war that resulted in the U.S. annexing a large swath of formerly Mexican territory (and the Mexican citizens who lived there) (Eysturoy & Gurpegui, 1990; Spiller & Thorp, 1964). The emergence of Chicano literature added a subfield to American literature and has contributed in enhancing Mexican-American cultural and historical creativity and identity in the U.S. (J.D. Saldívar, 1997). Chicano writers used writing (and other artistic creations) as vehicles to express and represent their own voices. Paredes (1995) says that Chicano literature emerged as a distinctive form within mainstream U.S. and Latin American



literature. Chicano literature has its roots in Mexican literature but includes characteristics of U.S. literature; Mexican-American writers combine aspects of the home and host cultures to create a mixture between Mexican and U.S. cultures. According to Hinojosa (1975), Chicano writers frequently discuss aspects of their origins and background in Mexico, but move to a consideration of their new lives in the United States. The depictions of the new land and the lives of Mexican-Americans provide American literature a unique cultural combination, adding a unique hybrid color to the U.S. palette.

While Chicano literature has a long history, it came into own starting in the 1959 with the publication of *Pocho* by José Antonio Villarreal. The genre took on its own particular themes in contrast with mainstream U.S. literature, revealing Mexican-American life in the 1960s (Gray, 2011). For example, Chicano literature from this period commonly is realistic and tells the struggles of fieldworkers, life in the barrio and confrontations with majority culture (Jiménez, 1974). These subjects commonly use the border as a major theme – with literary productions signaling the critical influence of this boundary on Chicano life. The border is a common issue in most Chicano literature. J.D. Saldívar (1997) noted that the “*U.S.-Mexico border text can be seen as nodes in a network of seemingly unrelated discourses such as novels, poetry, political rhetoric, aesthetic, popular, corrido, etc.*” (p. 185).

The border in the context of Chicano writing takes on such importance that Hickman (2000) describes its use as a subject matter in “border literatures,” that represent “*Latino sociocultural contact with ‘mainstream’ twentieth century American literature*” (p. 4). The border developed sociologically and historically during the period of the Mexican Revolution. This conflict caused great suffering in Mexico and provoked a continuous movement of refugees to the U.S.

In the case of the line between the U.S. and Mexico, the border takes on additional significance due to the differences in economic development. People on the less developed side of the line view crossing into the richer country as potentially beneficial, permitting an improvement in economic position. In many border discussions, a common reason for traversing the border is a quest for change in living conditions and social situations. This search to improve conditions means that economic and educational motives are key factors in the immigration decision. Large numbers of Mexicans border-crossers lack documentation and traverse outside of official channels –leading some to use coyotes (guides for hire) and other informal and illegal means (J.D. Saldívar, 1997). The difference in economic development can also drive smuggling and contribute to border criminality as citizens on the richer side of the border attempt to acquire contraband such as narcotics.

Recently, the border has become an even more critical issue in the U.S. due to Donald J. Trump – using it as major campaign refrain that drove his pathway to the presidency. When Trump announced his candidacy, he began his campaign by appealing to racism, denouncing Mexican immigrants as rapists who bring drugs and crime into the U.S. (Sanchez & Gomez-Aguinaga, 2016; Schubert, 2017). He specifically proposed building a wall on the U.S.-Mexican border,



justifying his desire by pointing to chaos emanating from the border. Trump's statements further increase the importance of line marking the limits between the U.S. and Mexico. His advocacy for a wall, as a way to avoid negative influences from the border, attempts to strengthen the power of the boundary. His many rhetorical attacks have been put into policy by an administration that seeks to exclude immigrants and limit their rights.

The overt use of racial stereotypes and fear of immigrants to drive political discourse has a long history in the U.S. context, although the recent manifestation has been much more overt than had recently been seen at an official level. Immense issues arise for Mexican immigrants as they become members of a minority group in the U.S. J.D. Saldívar (1990, p. 51) underlined the prejudice found in border narratives as crossers encounter a majority culture marked by a history of white majority domination. In a racialized context, relations of Mexican immigrants with whites and non-whites take on a special importance, with out-groups members developing some common ground in reaction to the majority white culture. In the twenty-first century, issues of racial prejudice remain relevant to Chicanos in the U.S.

In addition, the president's desire to fortify the border runs in the face the historic forces of globalization that have in many ways diminished the importance of borders. Globalization, brought by modern technology, including ease of travel, allows people to interact and integrate. As globalization in some senses erases the borders between countries, it also increases interest and enthusiasm in the development of social sciences, economics, humanities, and education (Lamont & Molnár, 2002). Globalization includes not only the U.S. and Mexico but connects both to all of Latin America and the world. Building a higher rampart in the end is a rather quixotic quest, attempting to dissuade potential immigrants though punitive measures instead of addressing the root causes that push disadvantaged populations to seek refuge on the other side of the border. The failure to improve the individual lives of potential immigrants will simply force them to find a different way to cross the border since the underlying driving causes will remain.

For these reasons, individuals will continue crossing the border seeking to improve their circumstances. Reaching the other side has been a marker of transformation for individuals from the native to the new culture, combining aspects of both in a unique transcultural hybrid (Ortiz, 1940). Chicanos have continuously adapted to life in the U.S. by absorbing many of the values and the underlying philosophy of the U.S. In general, Chicanos have not complained about their experiences in in the U.S., but instead have tried to provide "a mediated truth about a culturally determinate people in a historically determinate context" (R. Saldívar, 1990, p. 5). Theorists emphasize the importance of the border in literature and art with R. Saldívar (2006) discussing the heterogeneous, dialogical nature of cultural products.

Border narratives have become a literary sub-genre within Chicano cultural productions that draws heavily on the experiences of Mexicans who cross to *El Otro Lado* (the other side). Many examples of these border narratives exist in creations by Chicano artists since the 1960s. Border narratives correspond with a main character's struggles crossing the U.S.-Mexico border, adapting



to the new land, and fading connections to the homeland. Some analyses have underlined how Chicano literature reveals resistance to assimilation, raising issues that emphasize identity formation (Gallego, 2014), displaying themes of social protest and life in barrio (Jiménez, 1974), and bringing new dimensions to identities and experiences (Martín-Rodríguez, 2005).

Many critiques of Chicano writing find that it ties into the border in one way or another. According to Martín-Rodríguez (2005), Chicano literature has a transnational dimension, which allows writers to record and write according to their circumstances. Chicano writers frequently reconnect the experience of their lives in relation to the border in the literary works that they produce. Gloria Anzaldúa in particular marked a critical development in the issue of border as an important theme in Chicano literature with the publication of her popular work, *Borderlands/La Frontera*, in 1987. From a hegemonic perspective, Anzaldúa views borders as spaces that represent paradigmatic shifts in the subject's systems of knowledge and construction, which reconnect power relations in hegemonic and dominating cultural and political practices (Bornstein-Gomez, 2010). The border according to Anzaldúa is also a form of resistance of the colonized Chicano people in the struggle for freedom (Orozco-Mendoza, 2008). Orozco-Mendoza's (2008) criticism reveals how Anzaldúa uses the border to connect a series of emotional, psychological and spiritual processes for self-reconfiguration. Makela's (2008) piece found that Anzaldúa reconstructed and legitimized a new *mestiza* Chicana identity by validating language use, lived history, and socio-cultural heritage. Criticism notes that Anzaldúa's work has inspired additional writers to develop the border theme. In the twenty-first century, issues of racial prejudice remain relevant to Chicanos in the U.S. Chicano narrative is then delivered and written as the result of their experiences in the United States of America. Chicanos are often referred to as 'alien immigrants' or 'illegal or legal aliens' (Anzaldúa, 1987; Perez-Torres, 1995; J. D. Saldivar, 1997), 'gringos' (Anzaldúa, 1987), 'wetback' (Saldivar, 1990), and 'criminal' (Trump, 2017). Some studies in Chicano narratives also reveals their existence in the U.S. (Jacobs, 2006; Kasih, 2018)

The present study aims to examine a contemporary border-crossing memoir, Reyna Grande's *The Distance Between Us*. Grande's narration of her experience starting as a young girl portrays her and her family's journey to the other side as well as the cultural bridging of her and her siblings' passages to adulthood. Facing difficult challenges and conflicts, the autobiographical narrative clearly captures the border as the marker of a contrast between mobility and enclosure, division and unity, becoming and belonging as well as a site of struggle among multiple identities. Grande wrote her memoir in the first person, revealing herself as having been an undocumented immigrant who crossed the border as a young girl in the company of her father and siblings with the help of a coyote. At the beginning of the memoir, the girl had been left behind with her mother and two siblings by her father who had moved to the place called *El Otro Lado* originally with the goal of returning after saving enough money to build a house in Mexico. Hence, the present article examines Grande's *The Distance Between Us* with the goal of offering a new perspective on border in Chicano literature especially as a dialectics of difference and from this perspective to reveal a remedy for collective justice in twenty-first century.

Theoretical Framework

R. Saldívar's theory (1990) of the dialectics of difference underlines "*the Chicano novel's ideology of difference emerges from a more complex unity of a least two formula elements: its paradoxical impulse toward revolutionary deconstruction and toward the production of meaning*" (p. 88). The Chicano novel brought a discussion of difference to what they had previously existed in the mainstream homogeneity of Anglo-centric literary production. In dialectics of difference, the border in Chicano literature develops as a major theme with the differences represented by the border entering into a continually developing dialogue between the two sides of the border, the cultures, and individuals involved (R. Saldívar, 1990). For this reason, the border causes a separation from canonical Mexican and US literature. The border allows Chicano literature to move out from the *bildungsroman* and novels of *barrio* life to modernize thought within Chicano communities. Chicano cultural productions join new perspectives on diversity within U.S. culture and criticism, permitting an opening up to non-mainstream cultures. The dialectics of difference created by the border and captured by R. Saldívar's (1990) theory allows us to examine the formal and thematic dynamics within Chicano literary texts and to account for the nature of special interactions with both Mexican and U.S. cultural and literary history with a clarity that other critical methods do not allow. In short, this theoretical perspective situates Chicano literary criticism where it properly belongs, as part of the history of dialectics in general and the dialectics of difference in particular.

The current paper highlights the negotiation of differences between the two sides of the border as characters become involved in the process of creating a hybrid identity combining aspects from both source cultures. The border creates this dialectic of difference, first inspiring dreams due to differences between sides. These dreams lead to crossing, forcing a further dialogue between differences as the individual becomes immersed in the society on the other side and adapts to the new environment. The characters' crossing of the border forces them to build a new identity within the new environment causing physical and psychological effects as they transition to a new way of being, frequently tied into the passage from childhood to adulthood, ultimately leading to fulfillment. R. Saldívar (1990) further points out the dialectic nature of Chicano narrative as "*the difference of contemporary Chicano literature [...] allows [...] special relation to both its Mexican and American contexts, while also letting it be marked by its relation to its own still unconditioned future*" (p. 8). In some narratives, the characters develop of a sense of belonging on the other side of border as an open wound and the wounds healing through embracing the new *mestiza* identity (Anzaldúa, 1987). The border not only marks a "difference" between two different countries, but determines how Chicanos position themselves in relation to judgments from Anglo-centric perspectives.

The Border as a Dialectics of Difference

Grande's *The Distance Between Us* treats the border in one form or another from the first chapter until the last while she captures her life experience. Grande's memoir takes the reader on a journey



as the young Grande is directly affected by her parents decision to go to *El Otro Lado* (the other side) and her own subsequent passage to and encounter with *El Otro Lado*. Grande's memoir uses the term "*El Otro Lado*" repeatedly, exactly 46 times. Her voyage to *El Otro Lado* created a psychological effect for the young Mexican girl similar to what Anzaldúa (1987) meant when she stated, "*a borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition*" (p. 3).

Grande viewed the U.S. as a place of hope where people like her family could fulfill their dreams, a notion that draws people to the U.S. and helps give it a positive reputation. Grande's vision of *El Otro Lado* as a place for hope, for positive social change, for a better life gave Grande the power to remake her life once she arrived to *El Otro Lado*. Hope motivated Grande to dream while encountering difficulties being brought up by her grandmothers in her poverty-stricken hometown of Iguala, Guerrero, initially holding out for her parents' return and finally aspiring to cross the border to reunite with her father permanently.

Grande was two-years-old when her father first left her and the rest of the family to go seek fortune in the U.S. Two years later, when she was four-years-old, her father sent for her mother who departed Iguala to cross the border and to work in the U.S. Grande and her seven-year-old brother Carlos and her eight-and-a-half-year-old sister Mago found themselves abandoned to the care of their unaffectionate, strict, and sometimes cruel paternal grandparents. Two and a half years after her mother left for the U.S., she returned with an infant sister, Betty, saying that her husband had abandoned her for another woman and had been abusive towards her. At this time, she took her offspring to stay with her own mother. The children's reunification with their mother was brief, as she abandoned them to the care of her mother –first to be with a boxer and then in order to move closer to job in a record shop in downtown Iguala. Thus, from her initial departure to the U.S. onwards, Grande's mother would remain a sporadic presence in her life, making short-term appearances but with the deep level divide from the first border crossing never healing.

The children stayed with their Abuelita Chinta who lived in even greater poverty than their paternal grandmother, but who was at least affectionate toward her grandchildren. She lived in a flimsy shack that flooded during monsoons and had scorpions crawling on the walls that sometimes stung the lice-ridden, ringworm-infested children. More painful than her poverty, though, was her longing for her parents. She writes in simple, child-like language: "*I felt I had a kind of scorpion inside me that was stinging my heart again and again*" (Grande, 2012, p. 95). Indeed, Grande describes the border as a force that separates parents from children, detailing how her paternal grandmother told the Mexican folktale of *La Llorona* to inspire fear in her grandchildren and how her maternal grandmother would seek a way to comfort them from the fear the myth inspired.



“My father’s mother, Abuela Evila, liked to scare us with stories of La Llorona, the weeping woman who roams the canal and steals children away. She would say that if we didn’t behave, La Llorona would take us far away where we would never see our parents again”. (Grande, 2012, p.3).

Grande connects *La Llorona* to how the border separated her from her parents, describing how, *“Neither of my grandmothers told us that there is something more powerful than La Llorona -a power that takes away parents, not children. It is called the United States”* (Grande, 2012, p. 3).

When Grande was almost ten-years-old, her father returned from California and swept his children away to cross the border illegally to live with him in the U.S. Grande and her siblings believed that their troubles were over at last in as they arrived in *El Otro Lado* themselves. She hoped that her happiness would result from finally gaining a connection with a parent. However, her hope for a loving relationship with her father succumbed to the reality of the chasm created by their long separation, his occasional abusive behavior, and his repeated failure to apologize.

Describing the aftermath of an early abusive incident, Grande wrote, *“I wanted him to say he was sorry, but we’d lived there long enough to know that Papi never apologized for anything. He still hadn’t said he was sorry for leaving us in Mexico for eight years”* (Grande, 2012, p. 179). After he dumped a plate of spaghetti that she refused to eat on her head, she felt that *“the father in this house didn’t know me. He didn’t know me at all. And I didn’t know him”* (Grande, 2012, p. 191). When Grande recounted how her cousin had also failed to develop a close relationship with her own mother when they had finally been reunited in the U.S. like her, her siblings and her father, she concluded, *“Immigration took a toll on us all”* (Grande, 2012, p. 207). In the end, she described how the border separated her and her parents, making it impossible to recapture their relationship as it once was: *“I thought that about the border that separates the United States and Mexico. I wondered if during their crossing, both my father and mother had lost themselves in that no-man’s-land.”* (Grande, 2012, p. 315)

Ultimately, because of the divisive effect that the border has already had on Grande’s and her siblings’ relationship with the father, they found it difficult to reconstitute themselves and their father as a loving family, demonstrating how the border acts to divide and creates deep separation even within immigrant families. Grande’s autobiographical experience demonstrates the dialectics of difference, as the family as she and her family enter into dialogue to try to heal the gaping fissure created within the family by the border (Saldívar, 1990).

The Border as a Creator of Change

Despite finding that the streets were not paved in gold, after crossing the border Grande’s material conditions improved. Grande explicitly described the different conditions between her home in Iguala and her new land. For example, for the first time, she had shoes in contrast to her life in Mexico. *“But here, in El Otro Lado, I had tennis shoes”* (Grande, 2012, p. 203). She also lived in



a clean house and was able to study in a quality school that served delicious food they had only dreamed of before. For Grande crossing the border meant arriving in a place that could provide a decent living and where she dreamed she could realize her desires.

However, after she arrived, Grande finally realized the difficulties and problems that would be a part of her new life. Some of these were due to great cultural differences. She experienced great cultural change and she had to face new conditions in all aspects of her life. For example, on her first day in school, instead of following the main lesson from her teacher, Mrs. Anderson, she found herself sidelined being taught the alphabet by Mr. López, the assistant, with four other Spanish-speaking students. *“I wished I could understand what she was saying. I wished I didn't have to sit here in a corner and feel like an outsider in my own classroom. I wished I weren't being taught something kids learned in kindergarten.”* (Grande, 2012, p. 172)

Ultimately, Grande missed many things about her home in Iguala, including her relative freedom in a neighborhood where everyone knew everyone and she and her siblings were able to roam at will. In contrast, in L.A., because of gang activity in her new neighborhood, no one went outside and the streets were empty of other children to play with. At times, Grande found herself waxing nostalgic about her home and her life there. Because of the different conditions from her home, Grande developed culture shock. She slowly overcomes her difficulties in adapting by learning about the culture and changing.

Grande's father was the one who pushed her to adapt and to pursue a better life. He told her, *“Just because we're illegal doesn't mean we can't dream,”*(Grande, 2012, p. 228) and she learned to cling to that and to listen to his exhortations that she needed to complete her education. He helped all of his children get green cards through the 1986 amnesty. Grande's father also encouraged them to take advantage of opportunities. He insisted on the importance of getting good grades and an education, so that they could go to college and get good jobs. He told them from the beginning, *“you three better do well in your classes because if you don't, I won't wait for la migra to deport you. I'll send you back to Mexico myself!”* (Grande, 2012, p. 166).

Grande's father's prioritization of education was a constant theme that he shared with his children, repeating such refrains as, *“Here in this country, if you aren't educated, you won't go far. School is the key to the future. Without an education, you're nothing. So you kids have to study hard.”* (Grande, 2012, p. 227). For this reason, Grande and her two older siblings, Mago and Carlos, all got very good grades in school and all were able to gain admission to college. Sadly, her siblings both quickly ended up dropping out as they chose other priorities in life: Mago preferred consumption, buying attractive clothes and a new car, and needed to work to pay her debts while Carlos espoused his first love, marrying and having a child, instead of staying in school. When their father found out that they had dropped out and moved out of the house, he disowned them both, saying that they were never allowed to see him again and that they were ungrateful for not choosing the opportunity for a better life that he had tried to give them.



Her father's struggle and desire for a better life for himself and his children than the life they would have had if they stayed in Iguala comes clear to Grande when she returned to Mexico to visit when she was a senior in high school. At the same time, she appreciates the enormous personal cost to her and her family. When her uncle was asked why he did not go to *El Otro Lado* to give his children a better life, his answer made Grande see the two sides of her family's choice clearly.

"I'd rather be poor, but together," was my uncle's reply. ... I thought about my father, the choice that he had made to go north, and the price we had paid for that decision". (Grande, 2012, p. 280).

Grande therefore accepted her father's desire for opportunities and a better life, but understood that the experience of separation from crossing the border led her to experience irreparable divisions between her and her parents.

Because of the division created by the border, her father usually did not know how to express his love and desire for his children in positive ways. He often said mean things and wasn't present for important events, like when Reyna got to be in the Rose Parade. He would frequently hit them if they missed school or did something he disapproved, going so far as to break Grande's nose when she insisted on seeing her sister despite his prohibition after Magno had moved out. Nonetheless Grande valued her father's opinion and anything affirming coming from him. After he bought Carlos a car when he started college, Grande hoped for the same herself, saying, "As long as it came from my father, I knew I would treasure it, the way I treasured anything positive he said to me in his rare sober moments" (Grande, 2012, p. 272).

All Grande wanted was to make her father proud, even when he abused her. Partly because he didn't leave her behind in Mexico, she wanted to prove herself to him: "*We were here because of him. I begged him to bring me. I got what I wanted, after all. How could I complain now, simply because things weren't all that we had hoped for?*" (Grande, 2012, p. 256). When Magno began to distance herself from their father as a result of the mistreatment, Grande did not feel she could do the same: "*Unfortunately, it wasn't the same for me, and I could not so easily dismiss my desire to please him. My father's acceptance of me had become my sole reason for being*" (Grande, 2012, p. 259). Because of her father and the message of opportunity he gave his children, Reyna understood the importance of succeeding, stating after her visit to Iguala.

Reyna becomes the first in her family to graduate college. Sadly, many people in her situation (like her brother and sister) are waylaid by other life priorities (including personal and financial problems) instead of finishing their education. For various reasons, not a lot of people like her succeed in completing college. Grande was fortunate that her father really encouraged her to value her education and she did not end up called away by other sirens. In fact, because of family difficulties, including her siblings' first children and her father's angry reaction, Grande deferred beginning college a year. Some of the delay came from her father refusing to sign forms for her to accept admission to the University of California-Irvine and then not allowing her to enroll in



community college. Grande finally confronted her father and insisted that she was going to enroll in classes at Pasadena City College, fearing his reaction but gaining his support. Grande enrolled in a college English class instructed by Diana Savas, a professor she bonded with and eventually moved in with because of problems with her father. This professor introduced her to Sandra Cisneros and other Chicana/o authors, and suddenly Grande found that she was no longer alone and others shared her experiences. She learned that others looked and talked like she did. In the end, Grande's achievements in education would make her father proud. One thing he certainly showed up for was her college graduation.

Based on her graduation from college and her success as a writer, Grande demonstrated an ability to dialogue with differences between cultures created by the border and to ultimately change, creating a transcultural identity. She adapted to her new home, creating a hybrid between her homeland and her new home. *"The United States is my home; it is the place that allowed me to dream, and later, to make those dreams into realities"* (Grande, 2012, p. 320)

Crossing the Border into "An Unconditioned Future"

Border narration frequently invokes and examines the dark life of the border crosser. However, it experienced a transition in the twenty-first century with Grande's memoir representing a more positive vision of Chicanos and focusing on how to achieve success in the U.S. Grande does not dwell on prejudice that Chicanos experience. Instead she focuses on how Chicanos should position themselves by having the right profile. From her (and her father's) perspective, Chicanos need to prepare themselves to live in America (through education and taking advantage of opportunities). Throughout her experiences, Grande narrated how her father prepared his children to succeed and to face the majority culture by being successful. In fact, Grande experienced the same sort of encouragement from the assistant Mr. López when her 5th grade teacher refused to consider her writing for a contest because it was in Spanish. *"There is no reason for any of you not to get ahead in life. You will learn English one day. You will find your way. Remember, it doesn't matter where you come from. You're now living in the land of opportunity, where anything is possible"*. (p. 218)

Living in the U.S. frequently can be a struggle for Chicanos. Large cultural differences create a gap between Chicanos and mainstream Americans. Grande's father immigrated earlier than his children and his experiences helped him integrate into American culture. When her father said *"how important it was to get an education so that one day we could have a good career and not have to ask anyone for anything"* (Grande, 2012, hal. 227), it showed that he had adopted some U.S. values. For this reason, Grande's father motivated his children to be better and have a good career. Her father's attitude showed an evolution in Chicano narrative. In Villarreal's *Pocho*, the main character Richard's father, in contrast, maintained a strong connection to his Mexican origins and a continuous desire to return to Mexico, still thinking when Richard was 12 years old that: *"He wanted to return to Mexico, and would one day do so. In another five years definitely, but for now he must reclaim his family before it was too late"* (Villarreal, 1959, hal. 22). Additionally, in many pieces of Chicano literature, writers have discussed the discrimination that marked their



lives in the U.S. For example, Anzaldúa (1987) described how: “*The only “legitimate” inhabitants are those in power, the whites and those who align themselves with whites. Tension grips the inhabitants of the borderlands like a virus. Ambivalence and unrest reside there and death is no stranger*”. (pp. 25-26)

In contrast, Grande’s memoir relates almost no incidents of discrimination and few incidents of exclusion. The only incident of discrimination or name calling in the book is when a boy described as a *pocho* (a Chicano who does not speak Spanish or otherwise has lost connections to Mexican culture) calls her sister a “wetback” (p. 211). The only exclusion she described was in school before she learned English. Instead of focusing on discrimination and exclusion, Grande used the motivation from her father as a tool for integration into U.S. culture. Grande was able to prove herself a worthy person in U.S. society by surmounting the differences created by the border. Grande, through her academic success, sought to overcome whatever prejudice and social isolation she encountered, discussing how her father’s desire for success helped her overcome exclusion: “*One way or another, Papi said, ‘we will stop living in the shadows’*”. (Grande, 2012, hal. 229)

Conclusion

Living in the U.S. as a result of crossing the border can be a struggle for Chicanos as they confront the differences between their home and *El Otro Lado*. For this reason, many Chicano artistic productions, including Grande’s memoir, revolve around the border and the differences it creates (J. D. Saldívar, 1997). The boundary line between the U.S. and Mexico creates a dialectics of difference, always at the heart of Chicano literature as writers and artists confront their relationship to the two sides of the border and create a unique hybrid that combines aspects of both Mexican and U.S. cultures (R. Saldívar, 1979). Grande clearly confronts this difference, creating her own unique hybrid between her home and host cultures and opting to pursue success through education.

Many pieces of Chicano literature have discussed the discrimination and prejudice that have marked Chicanos in the U.S. In contrast, Grande emphasized that life in the U.S. gives Chicanos an opportunity to improve themselves and to integrate themselves into the host country. Grande has been able to become a success in the U.S. by resolving the dialectics of difference created by the boundary in a manner that permitted her to become a productive member of the larger U.S. society. She has fulfilled her dreams by changing and adapting to the host culture. Grande, through her achievements, sought to overcome whatever prejudice and social isolation she encountered. In this way she reveals how the U.S. will overcome the appeals to racism and prejudice common in current public discourse. Because of the ongoing importance of immigrants in the U.S. and their continued integration into public life, U.S. mainstream culture will ultimately reject the political usage of prejudice and racism. Grande’s memoir reveals an important shift in Chicano literature, demonstrating adaptation to U.S. culture and integration into the U.S. mainstream. In this manner, Chicano literature is crossing the border into “an unconditioned future” (Saldívar, 1979, p. 88).



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