

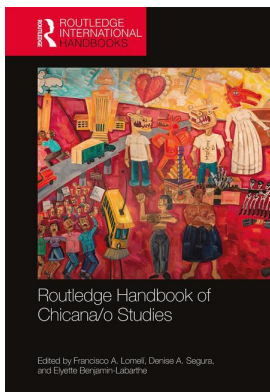
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Francisco A. Lomelí, Denise A. Segura, Elyette Benjamin-Labarthe

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Sophia Emmanouilidou

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Narrative identity and the dialectics of selfhood in Chicana/o writings

Sophia Emmanouilidou

Introduction: when personal interest transmutes into a field of research

At some point purely out of chance I undertook a research endeavor – quite odd for a Greek – to delve into the identity hermeneutics of Chicanismo and explore the intertwined academic fields of borderlands existence, barrio liminality and the rite(s) of self-identification. Professor Yiorgos Kalogeras of the Department of American Literature at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece handed me a worn-out copy of Tomás Rivera’s “ . . . y no se lo tragó la tierra”/“ . . . And the Earth Did Not Part” (1971) and asked me to return it with some feedback on a Mexican American writer’s collection of vignettes and anecdotes. Given that I had had no prior formal academic tutoring in Chicana/o Studies as a young graduate student in Greece in the 1990s, I returned with an enthusiastic critical response, which defined *Tierra* as an engaged depiction of *Mexicana/o* experience on the peripheries of the United States. In my early attempts at literary criticism, I read *Tierra* as a magnificent mediation of the Chicana/o ordeal against the backdrop of Anglo dominance, and as a painstaking effort at constructing a collective consciousness for a marginalized ethnic grouping.

Tierra ingeniously embraces multiple aspects of Chicana/o culture and presents the reader with snapshots of experience in marginal locales of the United States. The text creates an intricate architextuality that enlightens an avid reader’s quest for answers to some of humankind’s most persistent existential queries.¹ The literary representation of the interconnected narratives of thinking that Rivera lays bare define the arbitrations occurring in the obscure seams of sociopolitical agendas as a painful relationship between two seemingly antagonistic contexts of being. More to the point, Rivera creates interlaced layers of sociopolitical nuance through which the Chicana/o identity (re)surfaces as a powerful collective agent. *Tierra* masterfully unveils the duplicity or even schizoid quintessence of Chicana/o experience and proposes that the understanding of public affairs is a complex detour into political correlations and juxtapositions. Much in accordance with Gerard Genette’s critical approach to textual quality in *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree* (1997), *Tierra* dwells in a twofold narration of being that creates “the old analogy of the *palimpsest*: on the same parchment, one text can become superimposed upon another, which it does not conceal but allows to show through” (Genette 1997, p. 398). In short,

Rivera does not simply introduce readers to Chicana/o experience *per se*, but also enriches our understanding of a second background narrative: the discriminatory Anglo status quo.

Tierra exposes the injustices suffered by *Mexicanas/os* across the United States, but not in the monolithic and didactic mode of militarist writing composed during the Chicano movement of the late 1960s and 1970s. Rivera approaches the interplay between past and present histories in the context of postmodernity and postcoloniality, and initiates the rise of a new social order for Chicanismo. By illuminating the immense possibilities of enunciation, the palimpsest of *Tierra* emerges by recounting past, present and future definitions of selfhood. In fact, it is the spectrality of subjugation within the United States that disturbs the reader while it questions the legitimacy of the democratic ethos widely proclaimed by Anglo American society. *Tierra* withholds the multidimensional experience of a cultured subjectivity and presents the collection of anecdotes and vignettes as intertwined with a series of master-narratives that establish the characters' life stories. The subversive mood of the text is evoked when Rivera reverses the order of reading, uncovers the effaced narratives of *Mexicanas/os* and does so in the setting of dominance that constantly haunts the stories but rarely monopolizes the textual flow.

Tierra puts forward a compelling call to examine the treatment of Chicanas/os as a pre-meditated praxis of exploitation. The text becomes a bold venture at collectivization, which seems to fully manifest itself at the junctures between individual perceptions of sociopolitical affairs and the formation of a communal sense of being. Notably, both modes of thinking are effectuated through Rivera's awareness of Anglo supremacy and the ingenious application of a series of memories. In "Collective memory and historical consciousness" (1989), Amos Funkenstein discerns a problematic association between memory and collective identification when he writes that "consciousness and memory can only be realized by an individual who acts, is aware, and remembers. . . . Remembering is a mental act, and therefore it is absolutely and completely personal" (Funkenstein 1989, p. 6). *Tierra* is a text of reminiscence, but certainly not a solitary moment of introspection.² In fact, the powerful impact that *Tierra* has on the reader relates to the regenerative awareness the boy protagonist achieves. This quaint character frames the individual stories with his initial voluntary regression into isolation beneath the house and his final revitalization, enriched with the optimism of a personal epiphany that he experiences:

To discover and to rediscover and to synthesize. To relate this entity with that entity, and that entity with still another, and finally relating everything with everything else. That was what he had to do, that was all. And he became even happier.

(Rivera 1971, p. 177)

Like that of the boy protagonist, my reading experience with *Tierra* proved to be far from an individualistic moment of contemplation. More to the point, it became an instance of cultural communion across borders, both literal and metaphorical ones. Despite the fact that at that time I was a pure novice on Chicanismo, I found the book intriguing, so much more for enabling me to unearth the striking analogies between Chicana/o experience in the *llanos* (plains) of the United States, and my forefathers' memorial mediations of migration from Asia Minor to Greece at the turn of the 20th century. In other words, I traced in *Tierra* the cosmopolitan and/or transnational parameter of denigration that characterizes the monstrous abuse of migrant groupings throughout the world. Whether through the lenses of agricultural industrialism, urban struggles or the historical approach to the violent exodus of Greek populations from Asia Minor, *Tierra* enhanced my personal and scholarly insight into imperialist cruelty. With knowledgeable hindsight, I realize that this first encounter with Chicana/o literature sparked a lifelong

research interest in the recurring mistreatment of grassroots populations, and engendered my deep emotional attachment to the underprivileged beyond national borders.

Taking my initial reading experience with *Tierra* coupled with the *déjà vu* emotional reactions it spawned concerning my family history of forlorn migrants from Asia Minor as a point of departure, my subsequent research into Chicana/o writings has been fundamentally prompted by the fuzzy correlations between personal attachment and textual analysis. So, as a literary critic, I recurrently indulge in a search for instances of bravery that create safety mechanisms against prejudice and peregrination. In a way, *Tierra's* account of *campesino* experience and my overall understanding of a migrant's experience triggered a mode of productive reading during which I could reconfigure my own historical legacy. In *Time and narrative vol. 3* (1988), Paul Ricoeur aptly describes this reading approach as a "vital experience" that calls for readers to decipher the images that a text creates through the reassessment of their own being-in-the-world (Ricoeur 1988, p. 35). So, far from constituting an estranging or quixotic experience, presumably due to the geographical distance between the United States and Greece, reading *Tierra* brought to the fore an intrinsic connection between the hordes of Chicana/o migrants, Greek refugees and other diasporic populations. The dynamic exchange between the text and myself succeeded in transforming the experiences of reading and writing into a dialectic between "freedom and constraint" (Ricoeur 1988, p. 35). Admittedly, *Tierra* is still one of those seminal page-turners of literature because it notably fuses the often-incompatible generic elements of the sheer realistic exposure to injustice, the power of a deviation into the realms of fantasy, and the dialogic relationship between individual identity and collectivization.

The intention of this chapter is to explore the encrusted ways in which the creative and the personal dimensions of being convene in the obscure interstices between autobiographical fiction, literary criticism, intercultural communication, and the philosophy of consciousness. Without of course exhausting the contingency of intercultural communion in combating the equity deficit in the heralded democratic societies of the West, this chapter explores the philosophical dimensions of literary texts that seek a tripartite thematic concern: the narrative aspects of being, the fundamental right to utter personal and/or communal predicament, and the claim to individuation. The study of Chicana/o literature offers readers the opportunity to explore the therapeutic effects of reading and to perceive selfhood from the angle of an ill-treated ethnic group. In the heterotopic locales of the borderlands, Chicana/o writers and thinkers transform into knowledgeable interpreters of social norms and political agendas, transcend stereotypical projections of success, and reconfigure selfhood in subtle and anti-conformist ways. Chicana/o writings cultivate the democratic ethos in postcolonial societies that are to date torn by crises related to civil liberties, and illuminate the immense possibilities of teaching Chicana/o literature, especially when cultures convene, co-exist or fuse and identities crisscross.

Narrative identity and the impetus of Chicana/o literature

In "Narrative identity" (1991), Paul Ricoeur destabilizes fossilized or even canonized notions of selfhood, and puts forward the proposition that identity formation is delivered through purposeful accounts of being. Through the notion of narrative identity, Ricoeur suggests that the apprehension of oneself through the lenses of narration defines the individual's presence in the world, but also delineates the normative sociocultural facets that determine a grouping's milieu. Ricoeur investigates the correlation between accounts of being-in-the-world and actual experience, and with the narrative aspect of identity he claims that self-identities are told, performed and contextualized. He also advocates the unfeasibility of attaining a cemented identity profile because selfhood is always mediated by the "long detour [of] signs, symbols, and texts" (Ricoeur

1991, p. 15).³ Ricoeur's philosophical contention holds that the idea of a stable personality is a perverse fixity or a frivolous fabrication, because identities are defined by alternate and inordinate diversions in historical time.

The narrative aspect of identity is a recurrent element in Mexican American literature and informs most of the philosophical detours in the canon's textual elucidations of actual life. For example, in the introduction to the magnificent collection of prose and poetry entitled *The Last Generation* (1993), Cherríe Moraga tackles the issue of identity mutation with a laudable declaration of personal detachment from her own culture and with a literary sojourn that effectuates her generational transgression. Moraga signals her disparity from the broader Chicana/o community with an anecdote that reveals some of the most complicated stipulations in her quest for self-identification. As a powerful textual intervention, detached and yet correlative with her ensuing literary writings, Moraga's ingenious use of the introduction paratext is confirmation of her liminality. The story informs the concurrent, yet antipodal, conditions of differentiation and attachment that she experiences. Moraga recollects attending a Christmas gathering of her extended family, and, as an educated, childless, lesbian Chicana, she is consumed with the narrative of dissimilarity that she embodies among her kin. The writer openly defines herself as

the space occupying the middle of the sofa. Since I have no children I am worse than an inept musician. My hands have been so busy touching things, getting themselves on as much as fast as they could, that I have nothing to show for my life. No babies. No little feet dangling from the piano bench with just my curl of baby toe, like my father's.

(Moraga 1993, pp. 7–8)

Grappling with the obvious divergence she represents among her Mexican American family creates an epic crisis, which simultaneously creates the impetus of sagacity. In fact, Moraga's differentiation turns into an illuminating moment in her quest for self-conceptualization. On the one hand, she revels in the accumulation of the varied stimuli she has acquired over the years and, on the other hand, she shudders at the thought of being rejected or singled out due to her heterogeneity. Ultimately, Moraga connects her ambivalent feelings related to individuation with the spectral fear of being effaced:

I am disappearing in this couch. I envy them, my cousins – the men – and their trim *morena* [brown-skinned] wives: patient, pregnant, steadily middle-class, and climbing . . . to what? Their almond-eyed children who will never hear from their mothers' mouth the meaning/memory of that *chata* face [pug nose], that high rooster'd chest.

(Moraga 1993, p. 8)

Quite similarly, but from a critical angle, in *Methodology of the oppressed* (2000) Chela Sandoval alludes to the fruitful instances of meaning extraction that difference can create. Disparate readings that destabilize or deconstruct entrenched notions of being have the power to create the conditions for a novel outlook on life. Sandoval calls this state "the differential consciousness," which represents

a cruising, migrant, improvisational mode of subjectivity . . . prodded into existence by an outsider's sensibilities: a lack of loyalty to dominant ideological signification, combined with the intellectual curiosity that demands an explosion of meaning (in semiotic or deconstructive activities), or meaning's convergence and solidification (in meta-ideologizing), for the sake of either survival of a political change toward equality.

(Sandoval 2000, p. 179)

And from a transcultural angle, Mary Louise Pratt seeks the inventiveness of intercultural associations, which can be instances of both coalition and separation. In *Imperial eyes: travel writing and transculturation* (1992), Pratt translates the contact zones of different cultures as imbued segments of learning-by-being. For Pratt, the interlocution of varied identities

is an attempt to invoke the spatial and temporal co-presence of subjects previously separated by geographical and historical disjuncture, and whose trajectories now intersect. By using the term contact [we] foreground the interactive, improvisational dimensions of colonial encounters so easily ignored or suppressed by diffusionist accounts of conquest and domination. A contact perspective emphasizes how subjects are constituted in and by their relations to each other.

(Pratt 1992, p. 7)

In this light, identities become well rounded when infused in the intercultural possibilities during our constant reinterpretation of existence. The accessibility of productive meaning-exchange can develop in the contact zones between separate conscious minds and also through the numerous elucidations given to stimuli for analysis, whether literary texts, *testimonios* (testimonies) or philosophical treatises. In short, the readjustment of perceived notions of selfhood is a positive turn in the direction of democratizing societies, and it certainly facilitates the potential of reinventing one's worldly standing. But above all and even more importantly, it creates numerous instabilities in the heart of biased and discriminatory societies.

The Chicana/o literary canon certainly offers countless case studies that unearth those fuzzy contact zones between cultural convention and individuation. Indeed, the reading experience that Mexican American writings offer "includes a moment of impetus. This is when reading becomes a provocation to be and to act differently" (Ricoeur 1988, p. 249). The suggestion is that the intuitive linkages between time and self-identity convey the dynamics of a profound reading experience, one that transforms the reader into an astute interpreter of human histories. According to Ricoeur, "the aporetics of time and the poetics of narrative correspond to each other in a sufficient way" and thus inform the reader's self-consciousness (Ricoeur 1988, p. 274). The core of this theoretical lens is that the temporal dimension of existence converges with our narrative identities, because both history and self-understanding are mutually sustaining hermeneutics of being. In this context, Chicana/o literature relates textual essence to personal and/or collective rites to self-cognizance, and reinforces the ongoing relationship between telling a story, decoding obscure messages and reconfiguring oneself, as discussed in the next section of this chapter.

Identity dialectics and selfhood in-between in Chicana/o literature

The ego, which seems to me to be given in my self-consciousness as what is purely my own, cannot be maintained by me solely through my own power, as it were for me alone it does not "belong" to me. Rather, this ego always retains an intersubjective core because the process of individuation from which it emerges runs through the network of linguistically mediated interactions.

(Habermas 1992, p. 170)

The emergence of the Chicano movement in the late 1960s and 1970s coincided with the genesis of an overarching ideological matrix regarding identity, which initially excluded the

possibility of disparity within the larger community. In the rite of passage to becoming full-fledged activists, nationalistic ideology meticulously charted Chicano identity so that the group members' sociocultural profile would become a potent identifier against Anglo Protestant sovereignty. In *Brown-eyed children of the sun: lessons from the Chicano movement, 1965–1975* (2005), George Mariscal explains that “these brown-eyed children of the sun rejected dominant versions of U.S. history, and began the arduous journey toward self-determination and self-definition” (Mariscal 2005, pp. 2–3). Similarly, in *Youth, identity, power: the Chicano movement* (1989), Carlos Muñoz argues that identity politics were crucial to *el movimiento* and implies that the ideological intensities of the time outlined a strictly defined collective self. For Muñoz, the Chicano movement was primarily a political force that “needs to be placed in the context of what [he] call[s] the politics of identity or the identity problematic” (Muñoz 1989, p. 8). As a turning point in the delineation of Chicanismo's civil presence in the United States, the pro-autonomy agendas of *la causa* (the Cause) constituted

a historic first attempt to shape a politics of unification on the basis of a nonwhite identity and culture and on the interests of the Mexican American working class. The movement rejected all previous identities, and thus represented a counter-hegemonic political and cultural project.

(Muñoz 1989, p. 12)

The nationalistic ideology of the Chicano movement unfolded as an accentuation of the infringement of *la raza* and was expressed not only through the multiple political strategies that *el movimiento* integrated, but also in numerous artistic and cultural manifestations. Literature and other creative expressions of Chicanismo were summoned to enhance the demands of *la causa* and depicted the Mexican American experience in barrios, *llanos* (plains) and institutions of education from the angles of counteraction and self-empowerment. In a way, Chicana/o thinkers and writers became engaged activists, who resisted the handicap of underrepresentation in society and undertook to circulate the realities of the community's deprecation. In this light, Chicana/o literary writings of the late 1960s and 1970s emerged principally as a means to communicate the unique bicultural and bilingual Mexican American experience, and also to make visible the racial, social and political preconceptions to which individuals of *Mexicano* origin were subjected.

Among the most powerful pronouncements of Chicanismo is Rodolfo “Corky” Gonzales's epic poem *I am Joaquín/Yo soy Joaquín* (1967). First published in 1967, but with many reprints and collection entries following ever since, *I am Joaquín/Yo soy Joaquín* is a seminal depiction of the Mexican American plight and a *bona fide* existential pursuit of selfhood. The poem reverses Chicanismo and puts forward a succinct call for solidarity and mobilization:

Yo soy Joaquín,
perdido en un mundo de confusión:
I am Joaquín, lost in a world of confusion,
caught up in the whirl of a gringo society,
confused by the rules, scorned by attitudes,
suppressed by manipulation, and destroyed by modern society
(Gonzales 1967, p. 1)

...
La raza!

Mejicano!
 Español!
 Latino!
 Chicano!
 Or whatever I call myself,
 I look the same
 I feel the same
 I cry
 And Sing the same.
 I am the masses of my people and
 I refuse to be absorbed.

I am Joaquín

(Gonzales 1967, p. 8)

The speaker identifies himself in opposition to “the whirl of a gringo society,” declares his compound existence and reiterates the humanness of his being-in-the world. The poem invites the critical reading of a structured definition of selfhood and articulates the universal claim to merely survive the anathema of social exclusion. The steady voice of the speaker persistently reproduces the name “Joaquín” to infuse the reader and/or listener with the strength of the underdogs and invigorate the agonizing struggle he embarks on against dogmatism. This epic poem is a definitive moment in the formation of Chicana/o identities and the Chicana/o literary canon because it attains a twofold purpose: on the one hand, it prompts the “inter-subjective core” of communication between the poet and the Chicana/o community, and, on the other hand, it achieves the assertion and reification of a particular ego-identity that claims the basic human right to evade and/or refute extraneous narratives of being (Habermas 1992, p. 170).

The notions of selfhood (personal identity/*ipse*) and sameness (collective identity/*idem*) recurrently transpire in the thematic concerns of Chicana/o literature and propose an analysis of social being at the theoretical crossroads between collectivization and individuation.⁴ For instance, in “The meaning of the Chicano movement” (1972), Lydia Aguirre approaches the distinct Chicana/o identity with a definitive and straightforward negation: “No somos Mexicanos. We are citizens of the United States with cultural ties to Mexico and in some instances to Spain, but within our ties of language and culture, we have developed a culture that is neither Spanish nor Mexican” (Aguirre 1972, p. 1). But despite the occasionally uncouth early projection of the homogenous essence of Chicanismo articulated against the backdrop of Anglo supremacy, the canon proceeded in an unprecedented elaboration of difference as the fundamental factor of self-determinacy. In fact, although Chicana/o writings focused on specific referential markers of Mexican American culture for approximately two decades, in the aftermath of *el movimiento* Chicana/o writers undertook to evade nationalistic norms and recast identity as an imprecise and evasive aspect of sociocultural presence. From the 1980s onwards, Mexican American writings constantly deconstruct selfhood and expound identity formation as an enigmatic and inconclusive concept. The fluidity of being entails a major challenge for Chicana/o thinkers as they are beckoned to grasp the immense power of multitudinous self-identities that associate with and interact in the vast coalitions formed within their micro-society, but also in the macro-alliances shaped across the globe.

In “Cultural identity and diaspora” (1993), Stuart Hall deciphers cultural identity as a positioning in the spiral-like temporal dimensions of past and present. Hall notes the transgressions

that selfhood undergoes and that are commensurate with the numerous emplacements that are often haphazardly relegated to a specific cultured sense of being. For Hall,

[c]ultural identities come from somewhere, have histories, but, like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being grounded in mere recovery of the past, which is waiting to be found, and which when found, will secure our sense of self into eternity, identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past.

(Hall 1993, p. 394)

In the preface to the collection of short stories *The man who could fly and other stories* (2006), Rudolfo Anaya suggests the existence of this fertile interplay between past and present narratives of existence, which in effect elicits his literary compositions. Anaya relates the act of writing to a mystical brooding that takes place between the subconscious mind and present (re)formulations of self-understanding. In this context, writing becomes “an instant illumination . . . as characters leap into consciousness” (Anaya 2006, p. xi). Anaya’s interpretation of a literary endeavor – as an inexhaustible memorial interposition that does not merely settle in the mind of an aloof intellectual – implies that a literary text emanates as a powerful intermediary of social enactment, or an “organic unity” that creates a world of significance (Anaya 2006, p. xi).

In addition, Tino Villanueva seizes the import of his racial categorization in white America in connection with a recollection he excruciatingly retains in the cavities of his memory archives. In the award-winning narrative poem, *Scene from the movie GIANT* (1993), Villanueva commences the arduous negotiation of his self-empowerment with the memory of himself as a naïve, 14-year-old boy watching the Hollywood film production of *Giant*. The narrative poem is a deferred autobiographical transmission of Villanueva’s abrupt initiation into a discriminatory social order. Put differently, from 1956 to 1993, Villanueva was enveloped in the experience of a shocking movie scene, which reconstructed the unconstrained prejudicial treatment of *Mexicanas/os* in the United States. The movie *Giant* constitutes a shocking account of social reality that thrusts the young speaker into a series of interlocking displacements and/or positionings: from his liminal adolescence, which is depicted as an unsuspected phase of social existence, Villanueva suddenly acquires the identity profile of a colored individual, racially affiliated with the *Mexicana/o* characters who were violently barred entrance into a roadside café in the movie. Villanueva recalls the shock wave that petrified him “[l]ocked into a back-row seat” of the Holiday Theater in 1956 and confesses to “how in the beginning [he] experienced almost nothing to/ Say and now wonder if [he] can ever live enough to tell/ The after tale” (Villanueva 1993, p. 12). However, the speaker matures in time, releases himself from his mental captivity and the narrative poem becomes the “after tale” or the *exodus* from his selfhood in abeyance.

In *La Llorona on the Longfellow Bridge: Poetry y Otras Movidas* (2003), Alicia Gaspar de Alba embarks on her collection of poems and essays with a unreserved *aporia* on “the self-indulgent practice of writers” who scribble down fleeting moments of nuance in “stacks of notebooks . . . writers accumulate like karma” (Gaspar de Alba 2003, p. v). Identifying herself as an academic, a writer, and a 44-year-old lesbian Chicana, Gaspar de Alba seeks to pinpoint her *duende* (goblin) “the black sounds. . . [the] power that expresses itself through all forms of art” (Gaspar de Alba 2003, p. vi). In fact, her poetics are charged with an insurgent force that initially relegates Gaspar de Alba to a state of limbo. The poet testifies to her being in quiescence as she “indulge[s] in this archaeology of private knowledge, but all [she has] is the memory of having said something pertinent” (Gaspar de Alba 2003, p. v). However, in the essay “Name that border” (2003), Gaspar de Alba empowers her self-cognition and retraces her life story in parallel to her three different

first names: Teyali, Alice and Alicia. The three names correspond to separate temporal segments of her life and make allusion to the ominous borders that pigeonhole and contain her individuation. It is the agonizing adversity of her three sociocultural identities that creates the conditions for her poetic sirens to emerge. From her initial identity as a *Mexicana* proudly called “Teyali” among her kin, she transforms into Alice, when she enters institutionalized education, and then establishes Alicia. Gaspar de Alba’s three identities converge in a dreamscape, like specters of the past negotiating her future multidimensional selfhood. The three personae inhabit the poet’s subconscious mind, create layers of selfhood and brew the conditions of “cultural schizophrenia [that] transcended the realm of [her] unconscious and became a conscious demon, grinning over [her] shoulder at every time” (Gaspar de Alba 2003, p. 42).

There are three of me in this dream: two Alices, aged twenty-six and nine, and one Teyali, age four. The twenty-six-year old is my present self, the spinner of the dream, who wanders into the scene. The four-year-old Teyalita is stubborn and energetic. And the nine-year-old in long braids (who is Alice at school but Alicia at home) is transfixed by the sea. Both of the younger me’s are standing at this huge chain-link fence that separates us from the ocean. There’s no way of getting to the water because of this fence.

(Gaspar de Alba 2003, p. 70)

At the end of the autobiographical anecdote, Gaspar de Alba attains a sense of equilibrium within her tumultuous, self-cognition rite and manages to reconcile her incompatible identities. In fact, she valorizes all facets of her being-in-the world as distinct and yet interconnected stages in her arduous search for self-identification. However, she concludes the essay with a profound insight into the insurmountable border between Mexico and the United States that she cannot cross, either culturally or geographically:

Alice was with me for twenty-seven years. Now, I am Alicia. Chicana from the border who can speak Spanish like a Mexican and English “without an accent.” Lesbian/tortillera who shames her family because she loves women. Radical feminist who isn’t politically correct enough to find the rhetoric of separatism convincing. Mujer (woman) de color whose skin and phenotype have often been “praised” for not looking Mexican. A Ph.D. candidate. A child archeologist digging a path to her own land. Teyali is a border I cannot cross.

(Gaspar de Alba 2003, p. 74)

Conclusion

Chicana/o literary writings have been largely construed through the historical resonance of the civil rights movement, when political engagement and/or activism gave a laudable impetus to the troubled voices of the grassroots across the United States. This specific tumultuous era begot the Chicana/o literary canon, which initially constituted a rebellious literary response to the social exigencies of the time. Highlighting the acuteness of injustices committed against Mexicanas/os, Chicana/o literature revealed explications of a discriminatory social reality. In this light, the writings of the 1960s and 1970s primarily tackled a series of political divides such as dominance versus subordination, sovereignty vis-à-vis marginalization. Faced with the normalizing forces of politics that excluded disparate self-identities, numerous Chicana/o writers and thinkers were deprived of the option to define selfhood freely within the community. With this chapter, I have undertaken to highlight a handful of literary and critical efforts at differentiation against the politicized and homogenizing *poesis* of the Chicana/o identity. The theoretical

background that principally informed my approach to Chicana/o literature was based on Paul Ricoeur's philosophical insight into identity as a narrative process to being, fundamentally charged with and/or defined through interlocution and (in)coherence. The writings discussed in this chapter tackle some of the ubiquitous identity crises sweeping societies across spatial and temporal boundaries, and align with the universal and/or transnational claim for autonomous self-conceptualization.⁵ Finally, the Chicana/o writers who were discussed in this chapter refute prescribed social roles and/or codes of conduct, juggle with the antithetical notions of collectivization and individuation, and define self-differentiation as the democratic right to explore the infinite dimensions of selfhood.

Notes

- 1 For an extensive approach to the palimpsestic quality of a literary text, comprised of interlaced hypotexts and hypertexts, see Genette (1997).
- 2 For a discussion of the Chicana/o dual and interdependent pilgrimage to self-conceptualization and communal understanding, see Emmanouilidou (2013).
- 3 In *Time and narrative vol. 3* (1988), Paul Ricoeur elucidates the complex interdependence between narration and self-identification, reading and being. His notion of the narrative identity clarifies the complicated connections between the text, the reader and the act of reading. According to Ricoeur, "the practice of narrative lies in a thought experiment by means of which we try to inhabit worlds foreign to us. In this sense, narrative exercises imagination more than the will, even though it remains a category of action" (Ricoeur 1988, p. 249).
- 4 For a concise definition of the terms *ipse* and *idem*, see Ricoeur's essay "Narrative identity" (1991).
- 5 The term "transnational" refers to the similarities in historical experience that communalities share no matter how dispersed they are in geographical terms. In *Imagined transnationalism* (2009), these "connectivities . . . flow . . . within the Western Hemisphere and at times reaching to Europe and Asia. According to such a focus, cultures organize themselves not around delimitation, the shoring up of unique, indistinguishable features (however 'hybrid' they may be); rather, they are centrally about people being 'in touch,' about negotiation and dialogue" (Concannon, Lomelí and Priewe 2009, p. 5). For more on the transnational connections between varied sociocultural identities spread across the globe, see Concannon, Lomelí, and Priewe (2009).

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