

8-2015

Multilingual and Multicultural Identity Exploration

Tyler McCloud
University of Massachusetts Boston

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Multilingual and Multicultural Identity

Exploration

By: Tyler McCloud

Advisor: Nayelli Castro-Ramírez

University of Massachusetts Boston

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1. Introduction

“Go on, lánzate. Lance yourself” into this thesis and experience the labyrinth of identity and inherent complexity involved with the masterful Spanglish that Susana Chávez-Silverman uses in her book *Killer Crónicas: Bilingual Memories/Memorias bilingües* (2004). This thesis is an attempt to analyze different aspects of Chávez-Silverman’s identity as they emerge in her writing, Spanglish being the medium through which she voices this complexity.

The present thesis has three sections, the “Introduction”, where I will reveal my personal justifications for this research, discuss theoretical framework, present relevant biographical information about the author, and briefly describe the book and excerpts I will be studying. I will then move into the analysis of 12 of the 24 crónicas, titled “Challenging Identity at the Intersection of Nation, Gender and Family”. I will finish the thesis with the “Conclusion”, in which I will also include further research questions. This introduction is divided into three sections: “Multilingualism and Multiculturalism: Contested Identities”, “A Writer in Pieces”, and “The Adventures of the Crónicas”.

1.1 Multilingualism and Multiculturalism: Contested Identities

When embarking on this project I was expecting to find a relationship between multilingualism/multiculturalism and identity. Identity self-exploration has been a practice that I have had to face throughout my life. I have found that it is fundamental to know our own identity and experience its intricacies and complexity in order to be better able to understand others. As a white, male born in the US, I inherently have a lot of privileges that many others do not have. These are also aspects of my own identity with which I do not first self-identify. Consequently, I have often felt displaced throughout my life, and I have been

trying to find ways to overcome that feeling of not belonging. It is precisely because of my privileges that I can connect more with other more subtle aspects of my identity, such as my passion for the Spanish language and the Latin@ community¹. Furthermore, many of my closest relationships end up being with Latin@s and I myself grew up in a fairly large Mexican community. However, these facets of my identity tend to isolate me from some parts of the more dominant culture, for which I appear to be a perfect fit. This is where this interest in studying multilingualism/multiculturalism and its relationship with identity comes from. That is how I identify, how I am constantly having to figure out different ways to navigate the, sometimes, conflicting social landscape.

In this section I hope to shed light on some of the theoretical concepts on which I will be basing my analysis of some of the crónicas included in *Killer Crónicas*. Multilingualism, heteroglossia, bilingualism, heritage speakers, multiculturalism, interculturalism, pluriculturalism, and identity have been extensively studied from a myriad of theoretical and disciplinary perspectives, hence the importance of discussing how they have allowed me to study Chávez-Silverman's writing.

What does it mean to be multilingual? Let us examine a few definitions. For Diamond multilingualism is “the ability to understand and speak several languages” (332). For Apeltauer it involves the ability to use three or more languages (275), whereas for Franceschini:

Multilingualism conveys the ability of societies, institutions, groups, and individuals to have regular use of more than one language in their everyday lives over space and time. Language is impartially understood as a variety that a group admits to using as a

¹ Throughout this thesis when discussing the Latin American community in the US I will be using “Latin@s”. The words “Chican@” and “Latin@” because in Spanish gender is separated by ending either an “o” or an “a”, amongst others, however these two are the most predominant. To include both genders and be gender neutral, I will use the “@” to signify this inclusivity.

habitual communication code (regional languages and dialects are also included, such as sign language) (346).

Even though it looks at the multiple presence of languages in a society, multilingualism as a framework has an important drawback when it comes to applying this perspective on identity, for this type of perspective views languages as separate entities, and does not permit studying the overlaps between them. I think this becomes clearer if we consider the link between language and culture, as we cannot simply take language alone. This will allow us to better see the shared aspects that multilingualism tends to obscure.

In the US context, the dominant culture reveals its low tolerance for ‘other’ cultures. Although it does acknowledge that the broader society is not monocultural but multicultural, this acknowledgement hardly suffices to avoid the marginalization of many different peoples, as they struggle to be recognized and celebrated as members of this society. We can look at many different cultural groups in the United States to confirm this: the Native American peoples, still under severe oppression forced to live in cramped reservations, many different African-American communities that are unable to climb the social ladder, and the Chican@ and Latin@ communities as well, with laws such as Proposition 227 in California or the Arizona SB 1070². Therefore, it should be clear that even as it acknowledges that there are different cultures in their territory, United States continues to implement assimilation policies and procedures to insure its social and cultural homogeneity.

As Charles Taylor discusses, in his “Politics of Recognition”, the need for an individual identity to be recognized within a different one arose from an epistemological change in the conception of identity. In his own words:

² Proposition 227 and Arizona SB 1070, passed in 1998 and 2010 respectively by the State governments, are detrimental to the Latin@ communities because they permit the governmental forces to discriminate against them. By eliminating courses taught in Spanish all together or by forcing Latin@s to keep documentation of their legal status on them at all times.

The socially derived identity was by its very nature dependent on society. But in the earlier age recognition never rose to be a problem. General recognition was built into socially derived identity by virtue of the fact that it was based on social categories that everyone took for granted. Yet, inwardly derived, personal, original identity doesn't enjoy this recognition *a priori*. It has to win it through exchange (34-35).

That is to say that the way we conceptualize identity has changed over time. In contexts of colonization, in a sense, cultural acknowledgement of the other was eliminated; in the contexts of the creation of 'nations' cultural difference tended to be obscured for the sake of national cohesion under the postcolonial dominant culture. According to Taylor, we would be moving towards a context of 'decolonization', in which there is a necessity for individual or personal identities—which include collective identities—to be recognized. When this does not happen, then they are forced to integrate into the dominant group, regardless of their own personal identity.

As we can see social identity was recognized and guaranteed by the social structure in earlier times. However this changed the way in which identity was structured in society, through forced assimilation into other identity categories. In order for this to come to be a dialogical mechanism, in which an oppressor and an oppressed, sought to convince each other of the validity of their respective identities. The concept of recognition in our modern multicultural societies is important because it empowers a group to have some social standing within a society. The tension between social power and recognition, however, could be the topic of another thesis, and I will not discuss it further in this introduction.

Multiculturalism is a concept that originated in postcolonial thought, and refers to the coexistence of different cultures in a given society. However its ideological underpinnings correspond to assimilation models. This is, in part, why, there is a need for a different framework which allows for the study of multiple cultures in a society without aiming at their assimilation into a dominant culture. As Taylor has suggested, 'interculturalism' could very

well be an alternative, as it has a more egalitarian feel. In his comparison of multiculturalism and interculturalism, the author states:

The ‘multi’ story decentres the traditional ethno-historical identity and refuses to put any other in its place. All such identities coexist in the society, but none is officialized. The ‘inter’ story starts from the ringing historical identity but sees it evolving in a process in which all citizens, of whatever identity, have a voice, and no-one’s input has a privileged status (Taylor: 2012, 418).

That is to say that interculturalism puts every group in an equal political standing. Although this permits oppressed cultural groups to have higher status, it also forces the dominant culture to relinquish its own. This would also require that there be a deconstruction of national identity, which can be a useful tool to maintain discourse on democratic thought by providing at least one common identity marker. Before turning to the relationship between these concepts and language, there is another framework worth of consideration, ‘pluriculturalism’. Pluriculturalism, “not only recognises cultural diversity but assesses it positively as a source of enrichment to the nation and the state” (Hamel 108). If societies would be able to value cultural diversity then nations could be more accessible in dealing with larger global issues be able to engage in democratic dialogue, regardless of cultural background. One of the reasons I am interested in studying Chávez-Silverman’s writing is because I deem a pluricultural society to be the most valuable. As an author, Chávez-Silverman contributes to create a society in which there is both celebration and recognition of languages and cultural groups.

Just as interculturalism and pluriculturalism could be used as intermediary positions in the arena of cultural diversity, the concept of ‘heteroglossia’ could help to mediate between multiple languages. In particular, ‘heteroglossia’ has been brought forward by José del Valle, in his article “US Latinos, *la hispanofonía*, and the Language Ideologies of High Modernity” for his discussion of how Anzaldúa commits herself to the multiplicity of norms. For del

Valle one can define heteroglossia as an ideology that “constructs diffused speech ... as the realization of multiple coexisting norms and as the product of diverse types of linguistic competence” (44). This term allows for the fluidity between an individual’s idiolect and the shared communicative code between larger groups. Furthermore, the relationship between an individual’s idiolect and a larger linguistic norm allows to reflect on identity, the speaker’s identity tends to be validated –or not– by a social group. As the researcher of Chávez-Silverman’s writing, I am confined to two linguistic codes –three codes if we include Spanglish– thus in order to look into how identity is negotiated in her writing, I must find a similar framework that allows for not just the acknowledgement and recognition but also the celebration. Therefore, in order to conceptualize Spanglish in the text, we have to be able to find its value.

Located in-between Spanish and English, Spanglish could also be studied from the perspective of multilingualism. However, for the time being I am going to limit my scope to bilingualism. Bilingualism has often been at odds within the United States due to the unspoken rule of English only. Particularly in the case of Spanish-speakers, there is often a perceived notion that they cannot be bilingual speakers because they end up speaking Spanglish, which is also considered as a combination of broken languages. In her *The Politics of Language in the Spanish-Speaking World*, Clare Mar-Molinero uses Skutnabb-Kangas’ definition of bilingualism in the following terms:

A speaker is bilingual who is able to function in two (or more) languages, either in monolingual or bilingual communities, in accordance with the sociocultural demands made on an individual’s communicative and cognizant competence by these communities and by the individual herself, at the same level as native speakers, and who is able positively to identify with both (or all) language groups (and cultures) or parts of them (Skutnabb-Kangas 90).

This definition of bilingualism allows us to frame our thought process for identity just as pluriculturalism does by being able to see how speakers are able to identify with languages, or parts of them, but have those parts being celebrated. Chávez-Silverman's use of Spanglish in her crónicas corresponds to this definition. Not only does she show her proficiency in different varieties of Spanish, English and Spanglish, but she also identifies with all of them.

In the US context, of the 291,524,091 people 5 years or older, 37,579,787 people speak Spanish or Spanish Creole, which means 12.9% of the entire US population speaks a variety of Spanish (Ryan 3)³. What is interesting here, is that this data includes 'Spanish Creole' which is not defined in the report. However, it can be assumed that this statistic includes the Spanglish-speakers in the US. Spanglish is often portrayed as being the language of the 1st generation US citizen. This speaks volumes to the idea of heritage speakers in the US, which are those who are, "raised in a home where a non-English language is spoken, who speaks or merely understands the heritage language, and who is to some degree bilingual in English and the heritage language" (Valdés 1). Heritage speakers occupy a grey area, an in-between, in which the languages they speak are essential pieces of their identities. Even though they may not strictly have the traditional cultural practices and beliefs of the 'authentic' culture, the language connects them to family history. In addition to this, they are cultural translators, or they are often gateways between two cultures as they interact.

Cultural group affiliation and languages are key markers of that which composes identity. For K. Anthony Appiah:

Each person's individual identity is seen as having two major dimensions. There is a collective dimension, the intersection of their collective identities, and there is a personal dimension, consisting of other socially or morally important features—intelligence, charm, wit, cupidity—that are not themselves the basis of forms of collective identity. The distinction between these two dimensions of identity is, so to

³ This is a report from the United States Census Bureau after the 2010 Census, data presented in Figure 3.

speak, a sociological rather than a logical distinction. In each dimension we are talking about properties that are important for social life, but only the collective identities count as social categories, as kinds of persons. There is a logical but no social category of the witty, or the clever, or the charming or the greedy (151-152).

Appiah, problematizes the idea of identity, and how there is such an importance put on the collective identities, even though there are other aspects of a person's identity that can be equally important to an individual, but does not hold any recognition. This is an important notion to consider when looking into the identity of Chávez-Silverman, as I will be analyzing more than just her social identity, rather her identity as a whole, which includes her social or collective identity with her personal identity. For there are certain aspects of one's life that may hold more importance than one of their collective identities.

Contrary to Charles Taylor in "Politics of Recognition", Appiah believes that personal identities should hold a larger weight when considered against collective identities. He comments:

The politics of recognition requires that one's skin color, one's sexual body, should be acknowledged politically in ways that make it hard for those who want to treat their skin and their sexual body as personal dimensions of the self. And personal means not secret, but not too tightly scripted. I think (and Taylor, I gather, does not) that the desire of some Quebecois to require people who are "ethnically" francophone to teach their children in French steps over a boundary. I believe (to pronounce on a topic Taylor does not address) that this is, in some sense, the same boundary that is crossed by someone who demands that I organize my life around my "race" or my sexuality (Appiah 163).

In *Killer Crónicas*, individual identity appears to be an intriguing question of the power of identity. As mentioned above, Chávez-Silverman is in part having this piece of literature act as a testament for the Chican@ and, more concretely, the Spanglish-speaking communities, both of which are collective identities. However, Spanglish is also a personal trait for Chávez-Silverman, something of which she is well aware. As a professor in the art of

letters, she has a profound interest in the combination of the most appropriate words to evoke certain sentiments and thoughts. She explains how individual it is to her here:

Me han pedido que (me) explique aquí. I mean, que ehplique mi lengua, my use of language. My odd oral, transcultural ortografía. My idioma, ‘tis of thee. Bueno, mi lengua . . . is a hybrid? Nah! Demasiado PoMo, trendy, too Latino Studies (even if it’s true). Been there, done that. A verrrrr, mi lengua . . . es un palimpsesto? Sí, eso está mejor. It’s a sedimentation of . . . hmm. OK. Para explicar estos mis flights (of fancy), tendría que empezar por decir que soy, it is—my language—cual homing pigeon on acid (Chávez-Silverman, 2004: xix).

In Chávez-Silverman’s writing, language is something a lot more personal than just simply being Chican@ or Latin@ or a Spanglish-speaker. It is who she is. And it is tremendously more complex than sharing a collective identity. However, language is also a communicative tool, which implies that there must be at least two members to continue the dialogue, the dialogue that ultimately shapes our identities. It is this construction of identity, located in the intersection of multiple languages and cultures, that is important, for it allows us to weather any storm of hegemony we may encounter.

1.2 A Writer in Pieces.

Chávez-Silverman⁴ grew up in a diverse environment. She was raised in Los Angeles, Guadalajara and Madrid (“Susana Chavez-Silverman”). Her family background is just as diverse: her mother was a Mexican-Chicana teacher from Guadalajara, and her father was a first generation Jewish Hispanist (Russian and Romanian ancestry), born in New York City

⁴ Susana Chávez-Silverman is a well-published author in the academic arena, with essays and articles, including being an editor and contributing writer to the book, *Tropicalizations: Transcultural Representation of Latinidad* (1997). Her two latest books are, *Killer Crónicas Bilingual Memories/Memorias bilingües* (2004) and *Scenes from los Angeles y otros Natural Disasters* (2010). She is a Chicana from California who is also a member of the LGBT Community and actively promotes both communities through her writing. Also a professor of Romance Languages and Literatures at Pomona University in California. Her Expertise is: Latin American and U.S. Latin@/Chican@ Literature and Culture; Queer Sexualities in Latin@/Latin American Cultures and Poetry. Her education consists of a B.A. from University of California - Irvine, M.A. From Harvard University, Ph. D from University of California - Davis (“Academics: Faculty Profiles and Expert Guide - Profile: Suzanne Chávez-Silverman”).

(Arbas). Understandably, language and education were very important to the family—albeit mother and father held different opinions on the function and usage of languages.

Chávez-Silverman offers a unique insight into heritage speakers' outlooks on displacement. She begs the question of whether or not she can be considered as a heritage speaker, consider that her father learned Spanish as second language. Although it is clear that her mother was a Spanish-speaker her father did not speak Spanish as his native tongue, which perhaps explains their different opinions on the language. Her mother kept Spanish and English apart, and prided herself about being able to speak both well, whereas her father spoke many languages and often played with languages by creating word games (Arbas). I believe, that she is a heritage speaker, if we consider the previously stated definition, “raised in a home where a non-English language is spoken, who speaks or merely understands the heritage language, and who is to some degree bilingual in English and the heritage language” (Valdés 1).

As an academic she combines gender, Latin@ and literary concerns from the perspective of identity in a transnational context. This is one of the reasons why, throughout her adult life, she has continued to live in multiple multicultural and multilingual settings, such as: Boston, Pretoria, Buenos Aires, Los Angeles, Claremont, where she has either pursued higher education or worked as an academic. Her stay in Buenos Aires, during a sabbatical leave, motivated her to write *Killer Crónicas: Bilingual Memories/Memorias bilingües*, the book that I will be analyzing in the present thesis. It is in this book that she gives her identity to the readers, but in pieces. A puzzle where the pieces change and evolve as often as she has changed locations in her life.

1.3 The Adventures of the Crónicas.

Published in 2004, *Killer Crónicas* is a collection of 24 crónicas. We can see that each one of these crónicas is based on memory and is a tribute to different people. However, they are difficult to classify in any given genre of literature. Crónica could be translated as ‘chronicle’ in English, however these pieces do not entirely fit that genre. Formally, they do resemble chronicles as Chávez-Silverman explains, “These crónicas began as letters: cartas a amigos extrañados, love letters to cities, smells, people, voice and geographies I missed. O, por otra parte, comenzaron como cartas a un lugar, or to as situations that I was experiencing intensely, casi con demasiada intensidad and yet pleasurably as well” (xxi). But they are also, “inspired by the somewhat rough-hewn, journalistic, often fantastic first-hand accounts of the so-called New World sent ‘home’ by the early Spanish *conquistadores*” (Newman 228). In other words, not only are the crónicas considered to be letters, but they are also inspired by the 16th century colonizing writing of Latin America. That is, they can be considered as belonging to the epistolary genre, for each crónica has an addressee, a date and a location of when it was written, and derives from electronic missives (ix), which further relates to traditional crónicas.

Although the inspiration behind these pieces is complex, the editor decided to publish them as memoirs instead of chronicles (“Press Kit for *Killer Crónicas*”). However, Chávez-Silverman is at odds with placing her writing into this literary genre. She regards her book as a hybrid that she calls “prose poetry” or even “literary nonfiction” to avoid the idea of truth-telling that is implied with both memoirs and chronicles (Olivas). To sum up these challenges to generic classification, Anna Spyra states:

In terms of genre, however, *Killer Crónicas* avoids easy classification and fits many categories: it is an autobiography or memoir, a journal in poetic prose, code-switching prose poetry (as she refers to it herself in an interview), a travel narrative in epistolary form, a blog, and finally a collection of *crónicas*, both in their historical and contemporary form (175).

Chávez-Silverman's writing starts by defying the very notion of genre and proceeds to challenge norms that are not always contested. That is, she is challenging the standards of the way identity is seen, including the identity of her own written work. She exemplifies the complexity of identity even in literature just by having complicated the genre she uses for her writing. To keep in touch with this complexity I will refer to them as crónicas and not opt for the English translation.

1.3.1 Intertextuality

There are many ways to have this dialogue about identity. One of the most profound ways is through her constant references to other authors and texts. She uses what some have termed as 'intertextuality'. Adrian Blackledge marks it as a cornerstone for Critical Discourse Analysis, "In this model, it is assumed that every text is embedded in a context and is synchronically and diachronically related to many other texts" (301). Another useful way to think about this concept is the way that Gerard Genette defines it:

[A] relation of copresence between two texts or among several texts: that is to say eidetically and typically as the actual presence of one text within another. In its most explicit and literal form, it is the traditional practice of *quoting* (with quotation marks, with or without specific references)" (1-2).

These two definitions of intertextuality help us to understand that every text is within a context but also that it is in relation with other texts as well. That is, every text has an audience and that audience is then asked to respond to this particular piece. It is this response that is also part of intertextuality, and not just simply references. If we understand that every text is a response to another, and then also the catalyst for other responses, we can begin to reflect on the connections of these responses and how they have shaped Chávez-Silverman's writing.

This intertextuality is one of the most significant ways in which Chávez-Silverman builds her identity, her love for writing and for authors has had a grand impact on her. In particular, it is literature that drove her to Argentina. For instance, she mentions how important ‘green’ is to her, but what she finds more fascinating is that William Henry Hudson was part Argentinian, “O mi adorado W.H. Hudson about whom, when I first read *Green Mansions*, a los 12 años, sí, creo que fue in 8th grade, no tenía idea de que fuera argentino. Anglo-argentino” (138). Intertextuality in the work of Chávez-Silverman is a crucial aspect to this piece, for it illustrates the way in which she views the world and determines why she chooses to move and identify with specific elements.

1.3.2 Spanglish

Another contested aspect of these crónicas is that they are written in Spanglish, which can be defined as a structured mixed code –combination of Spanish and English– that is created by code-switching, which includes grammatic(al)ization and lexicalization. Code-switching, has two major processes which are a) grammatical changes of the two distinct languages –grammatic(al)ization (Fairclough 79)– and b) the emergence of new lexicons –lexicalization (*ibid*). These two processes can be further broken down to switches, borrowings and calques⁵. For the sake of simplification in this thesis, I will use the term Spanglish in my own hope of further advocating for its recognition as a language. However, there are two sides to that battle. On the one hand in favor of Spanglish there is Ilan Stavans,

⁵Fairclough has divided code-switching into the differences between single-word transfers and multiple-word transfers. Switches would preserve the English phonology, whereas borrowings –calques and loans are subcategories to this, but calques have their own section in the multiple-word transfers– maintain the Spanish phonology. Examples: Single-word transfers-- Switch: “Ellas son más educated”; Borrowings: “Troca” (loan) and “Aplicación” (calque). Multiple-word transfers -- Switches: “En no sabe hacerlo. I’ll do it.” (intersentential) and “Y luego during the war, él se fue al Valle.” (intrasentential); Calques: “Estampillas de comida” (conceptual/cultural), “se cambia su mente” (bound collocations, idioms and proverbs) and “Tuvimos un buen tiempo” (Lexico-syntactic) (81).

who has translated the first chapter of *Cervantes' Don Quixote of la Mancha* into Spanglish, and is working on a Spanglish dictionary (ix). The other side of this debate finds that Spanglish is an abomination; a combination of two broken languages in which the speaker lacks any form of mastery in any or both languages.

However, this is not the case with Chávez-Silverman, as her writing is evidence to the mastery of both Spanish and English. This author often refers to her writing as code-switching rather than Spanglish because for her it implies a more formal practice. With that being said, she claims to be an avid Spanglish-speaker, “I’m a committed Spanglish practitioner! However, to me it implies an informal, oral practice of combining two languages in one speech-act or conversation. At the most basic level, what I do is bilingual writing, based in a kind of at-homeness in both Spanish and English (and their in-between)” (Newman 228). As we can see, Chávez-Silverman views writing as formal therefore opting to avoid defining it as Spanglish but ‘code-switching’. However, she writes in an informal manner, by the use of phonetic spelling, colloquialisms and dialectical distinctions. As we can see there is a dichotomy between the prestige and the stigmatization of using the term ‘Spanglish’, it can be an oral process or a more prestigious use, which would be writing.

I would like to take a moment here to show some examples of her unique bilingual writing. An example of inventive mixed-code would be her use of “anygüey” (45) to mean the English word, “anyway”. She uses this just as one would in the English context, which is a transitional word that allows for the speaker to return back to their original topic, away from their digression. She also uses the more classic example of “te wacho” (59) which is derived from the English verb of “to watch” but uses the Spanish syntax and phonetics. However, the reader will have to adapt to the multicultural dimension that she brings in with her writing. She uses multiple Spanish dialects in her writing, which directly correlates to her

experiences as a Spanish-speaker living in various Spanish-speaking regions throughout her life. Her writing reflects the orality of her speech, which means there are multiple vowels to indicate an elongation of a syllable (e.g. sardiina pg. 23). She also uses a phonetic spelling to indicate regional accents, in particular the aspiration of the /s/ (e.g. optahte [optaste], pg. 53) and an “sh” to demonstrate that she is pronouncing the Spanish /z/ as an Argentine would (e.g. shoro [lloro], pg. 30). We are also able to see lexical choices based on dialect as well (e.g. pendeja, pg. 9). By writing phonetically, but also through her lexical choices, she is better able to show the different Spanish varieties to which she has been exposed.

Although Chávez-Silverman claims to partake in ‘bilingual writing’, a more appropriate description, coined by Laudres Torres, would be writing with “radical bilingualism” (Torres 86). That is, the reader must be proficient in both languages to be able to read this book. This is, in part, one of the reasons for publishing this type of book. Chávez-Silverman is challenging the norms of what is acceptable linguistically in the United States and in the Spanish-speaking world. She is quoted in an interview with Vicki Chia saying, “I consciously chose to remain bilingual, to resist the imperative to choose between, keenly aware of the marketing and readership risks this decision implied. ... My fervent wish is that my book, in a modest way, may contribute to a reconceptualization of ethnic and/or minority writing and identity, and especially, its relationship to language(s)” (Chia 1 *apud* Torres). These crónicas are a testament to the resistance of the Latin@ community, and the defiance of Chávez-Silverman to the societal norms of languages. And, I would argue, this type of bilingual writing is the way in which the identity of those within this linguistic community, in particular Chávez-Silverman, can be fully expressed.

In this thesis, I will be studying 12 of the 24 crónicas: “Flora y Fauna Crónica”, “‘El Chino’ Crónica”, “Blood/Relations Crónica,” “Celos Pasional Crónica”, “Memory/Lame

Crónica”, “Ticolote Crónica”, “Anti-Suicidio Crónica”, “Otra vez en Hurlingham Crónica”, “Axolotl Crónica”, “Cono Sur Mitzvah Crónica”, “Iguazú Crónica”, and “*Killer Crónica*”. Each of these crónicas took me on an adventure, which is the reason why they were selected. Some of them were chosen primarily based on my own personal interest in the content, and particularly her conversations about identity. Other crónicas were chosen based on other elements such as the prevalence of intertextuality, or linguistic variety.

2. Challenging Identity at the Intersection of Nation, Gender, and Family

2.1 Narratives of place and displacement

Nations can be defined as “groups of people linked by unifying traits and the desire to control a territory that is thought of as the group’s national homeland” (Barrington 713). This definition of nation allows us to look into the ways in which Chávez-Silverman challenges national identity in her writing.

The narrator is constantly travelling, be it from California, South Africa, Mexico or Argentina. We can see that each one of these places has a direct impact on the aspects of her identity, and challenge her association with one particular nation. Chávez-Silverman’s crónicas oppose the traditional idea of a nation, by her narrator being a transnational being. Not bound by border, but constantly in the borderland.

Let us start by considering “*Killer Crónica*”. This is the last crónica of the book, but in a way it is also the first one: it is signed and dated in Buenos Aires in 2001. It was also the first one published independently in *Letras Femeninas* (Chávez-Silverman: 2001). Additionally, it is also the title of this collection of crónicas. In the first lines we are told that the narrator frequently translated *El matadero* as “killer” while teaching her Literature of Hispanic America course. The account goes as follows:

“Saquen Uds. *Killer*, por favor” dije, sin inmutarme, a mis estudiantes. Ellos tampoco se inmutaron not even a hair, acostumbrados a que yo invente palabras, cree interlingual giros neológicos y *faux* traducciones sin pestañear. And they obeyed. They took out obediently *El matadero* de Esteban Echeverría (143).

This playing of language –a characteristic of Chávez-Silverman’s writing– integrates a rich intertextuality which includes *El matadero* by Echeverría, Borges’ short story “El sur”, Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary*, but also “our trusty año 2000 version of ‘Wayne’ aka *The Lonely Planet Guide to Argentina* (edited by un tal Wayne Bernhardson, Ph.D. en geografía from Berkeley no less)” (144).

The story is about a visit to the Feria de Mataderos, in Argentina; a visit which is motivated and inspired by *El matadero* by the Argentine writer Esteban Echeverría, an important reference not only in Argentine literature, but also in Chávez-Silverman writing. After many inquiries, the narrator and her party, Pablo, Gabrielita, and her son, Joey, attend this event on February 24, 2001. When they finally arrived at the Feria de Mataderos, they realize that it is in a lot of ways a rodeo. There are a lot of different tents selling “everything from panchos (hot dogs), gaseosas e ‘ingredientes’ (stale peanuts and potato chips) to full meals” (148). As a part of the show, horse-riders take small sticks and try to get them through rings. As exciting as it sounds at the beginning, there are only a few riders who can perform the trick, and the party soon gets bored, and leaves the fair.

Nevertheless, for the narrator “this feeling, these sights - avid vendors, smoke burning the eyes, music, fierce, hand-forged knives, animals, drink, was what I had been waiting almost eight months for. This was, perhaps, what I had *really* come to Argentina for” (*Ibid*). In other words, through this experience came the realization, that even though she had already been there for eight months, this was one of the main reasons to come to Argentina

after all; i.e. to experience this spectacle. However, the event also makes the narrator realize that she is in fact tropicalizing Argentina:

Ay dios mío, and here I go. Despite all my investigación académica en contra de los estereotipos, here I go, *tropicalizing* a los argentinos. Bueno . . . eso no es posible. OK, dale, gauchificándoles, or whatever. Quiero decir: am I not bringing back from their PoMo, Culti Studies graves the very maniqueísmos I have fought so hard against for years? What is *with* me? The old brain-body split. Pero mirá voh . . . ¿querré que los argentinos sigan siendo gauchos? ¿Jinetes? That this sweat-, aserrín-, and meat-filled barrio fiesta be THE REAL THING? Qué boludez.

Chávez-Silverman makes an intertextual reference to a book of which she was co-editor and contributor, in which she is contesting the idea of tropicalization which means, “to trope, to imbue a particular space, geography, group, or nation with a set of traits, images, and values “ (Aparicio *et al* 8). This brings to light the conflict between being in a place and attempting to enjoy the experience, but still displaced due to being an outsider, in addition to understanding the difference between enjoyment and contradicting her own intellectual work, which would be sense of betrayal for her.

Through a series of intertextual references that this time include the local press, and her own email correspondence, and last but not least, Argentine poet Alejandra Pizarnik’s work⁶, “Otra vez en Hurlingham Crónica”, brings forward two very distinct perspectives of the Argentine cultural tradition of Feria de Mataderos. The story alludes to a trip to San Antonio de Areco with a friend, Gustavo. In their way there, they got lost, and spent a lot of time driving in circles and having a conversation about national identity, and in particular Argentine identity, against the background of globalization. One of the perspectives on the Mataderos fair considers the event as a part of Argentine identity and thus as attractive for visitors from all over the world. By quoting the internationally renowned Argentine

⁶ Chávez-Silverman did her PhD dissertation studies on Pizarnik’s poetry (Spyra).

newspaper *El Clarín*, the narrator voices Sara Vinocur's, the director of the fair, defense of the event as a community victory:

Con marchas y firmas de los vecinos logramos impedir que se privatizara y que se convirtiera en un lugar tipo Disney World para los turistas . . . La feria tiene un sentido GENUINO y mantiene sus actualidad FRENTE A LA GLOBALIZACION” (85).

In comparison, a second perspective condemns the event as a mere tourist attraction. This view is in particular voiced as a question directed at Chávez-Silverman by a “reconocida crítica literaria, novelista y poeta argentina (residente en el ‘exterior’)”, who “barely concealing a delicate mueca of distaste, “¿Pero por qué querían Uds. ir a Mataderos?” (81). This contrasting perception of Feria de Mataderos is reinforced by the narrator's conversation with “algunos intelectuales lefties porteños”, who state “no, no conohco Mataderos, para qué? Es algo programado por el gobierno de la ciudad, armadito para turihtas, no?” (85).

The narrator is thus caught in the middle of a debate on the cultural traditions that support Argentine national identity. On both sides of this debate, there is a tendency to rationalize and “hyper-intellectualize” the issue, which from her “outsider” perspective is characteristically Argentine. However this leads to an interrogation about the narrator's identity: “But . . . (pausa porteñísima) am *I* any different? Have I ever been? ¿Fui argentina en una vida pasada, o qué onda? (149). Besides interrogating her own identity, in this quotation the narrator challenges national identity by mixing two Spanish varieties: Argentine and Mexican. By asking whether she can be identified as Argentine –“am *I* any different?”- and then by using a mexicanism – “o qué onda?”- she shows that her identity as a Spanish-speaking Latina transcends national identities and borders. Furthermore, the fact that the narrator speaks from a US perspective only adds another dimension to the complexity of

national identity. Who can claim what as their national identity? Is it the way in which we self-identify? Is it determined by our ethnic heritage, or by our place of birth?

Take for a moment, the same two perspectives and return to apply them to the nation of Argentina—referring to the people who desire to control a territory. The debate on national identity and globalization, in this case represented by tourists, uncovers the complexity of views within a national group. The Argentine intellectuals argument is an attempt to control their territory in order to avoid the displacement of locals/insiders, which tourists tend to cause. Tourism raises the question of the significance of cultural traditions, and of what their role in the nation is. Are they for foreigners or are they for the members of the nation in order for them to have cultural perseverance? How is the ‘authenticity’ of cultural traditions defined when considered from the perspective of insiders and outsiders? What are ‘authentic’ cultural traditions?

To begin this conversation on authenticity, there is an important element to consider, which is the dichotomy of the insider/outsider perspective. That is, what is authentic to the outsider, may not correspond to what is authentic to the insider. Often times, an outsider who is looking for an ‘authentic’ experience may be disappointed because her/his experience of a cultural tradition does not meet her/his expectations, or because of her/his lack of understanding of the norms of the insider group.

“El Chino Crónica” allows the narrator to embark upon a discourse of how authenticity is determined from these two perspectives. In this story, the narrator, her son, and some friends go in search of a tango show. With this in mind, information about potential locations for experiencing ‘authentic’ tango is gathered using Wayne’s reviews (outsider perspective), an article in the magazine *Insider* (outsider perspective) (17), and, once again, *El Clarín*. Based off of these sources, they discover “El Chino”, a bar named after its owner,

and acclaimed as ‘authentic’, gritty, and the place for seeing “THE REAL THING” (17). Nonetheless, their decision to go to El Chino is questioned by a taxi driver (insider perspective) when they inquire about a ‘real’ tango place:

—Noooo, para ver algo reaaaaalmente autéentico, habría que ir a ‘Señor Tango,’ por ejemplo, en Barracas, pronounced the remisero. —Y . . . ¿es auténtico? I ventured. —Y claaaro. Allí van mucho turihtah, porque es autéeeentico (17).

The taxi driver is deemed to be a valid source of information, as taxi drivers know the streets of Buenos Aires better than most and, after all they are ‘locals’. However his recommendation is soon discarded as the narrator refuses to admit her role as an outsider. Here we see the distinction between the perceptions of the insider and the outsider. For the taxi driver, they are definitely outsiders, “tourists”. Consequently he suggests to take them to a place for tourists, not to mention by going to a tourist filled area he could potentially get more fares as well. For the narrator, this is not the case, for after being in Argentina for seven months, she does not feel like playing the tourist role anymore. She wants to see something that the ‘locals’ would go see. So as they drive along in their way to El Chino, the narrator rationalizes the long trip to the outskirts of the city, in the following terms:

[Y]o iba recibiendo los definite vibes de un Buenos Aires cada vez má alicaído, más tristón, más abandoned-warehouse and threatening, graffitti-scrawled muros. Más Borges, I told myself firmly, the farther south we drove. Más *compadrito*. En fin, I told the equally-disconcerted Pablo, más *tanguero* (17).

Her use of Borges as an adjective in this quotation allows the narrator to unify a body of literature, however diverse, in order to equate it with the “definite vibes” of Buenos Aires. To her eyes, the roughness of Buenos Aires suburban landscape becomes a promise of authenticity. Additionally, by evoking the author’s name, it ceases to serve the purposes of identifying the person of Borges and becomes a symbol of Argentine ‘authenticity’. That is, the narrator has not just simply cited a specific piece of Borges’ writing, “El Sur”, describing

a similar context to the one in which she is, but rather she uses the name to conjure an entire body of literature, and by doing so she simplifies a complex series of cultural and literary perceptions.

Upon their arrival to El Chino, the group is sorely disappointed on the local, which is described as covered in grease and having an equally distasteful food menu, however unexpected this may be for Argentina. In spite of all their doubts, they persevere, and wait for the show to start. As the night drags on, the owner of the bar gets on the stage and begins to sing off-tune, followed by a blonde lady who starts singing, albeit better. The group realizes that this bar is nothing authentic, and disappointed with the show, and the amount of time and money they have wasted at this local, they leave.

As a recurring theme in Chávez-Silverman's crónicas, authenticity allows for an interrogation of intercultural contact. Can a cultural tradition be authentic if it has value in the tourism market? If authenticity is determined by the viewer, and an event is perceived as authentic when it meets her/his expectations, can there be a common ground for differing authenticities? In her crónicas, Chávez-Silverman brings this discourse of authenticity into light, and suggests that there are so many distinct perspectives of what is authentic, both from the outside and from the inside, that authenticity cannot be simplified— even though it so frequently is. Essentially, the definition of authenticity is context bound. This can also be applied to the challenges to national identity, and its literary reconstruction in Killer and Hurlingham crónicas. By showing that different aspects of national identity can be highlighted depending on the context, Chávez-Silverman's writing foregrounds the importance of context as a potential source for different identities and authenticities.

The bar is in the outskirts of the city, which is not “tourist territory”, perhaps, due to this, they felt the whole experience was a fraud, it did not align with the context . That is,

because they are tourists, even though they may be seeking the ‘authentic tango’ and finding an insider local, they cannot fully escape the tourist framework, even by getting out of the city. This disappointment with the experience can be attributed to the fact that they were displaced, both physically and contextually.

Context thus opens up a series of possibilities when it comes to reconstructing identity. The notion of context uncovers a tension between place and displacement and opens up a discussion about changing perspectives and cultural perceptions. The feeling of belonging, of ‘fitting in’ or of being at home, in our own place, radically contrasts with the feeling of displacement, and of being an outsider. The question ‘where are you from?’ reveals a tremendous amount about a person’s identity. When the narrator in Hurlingham crónica tries to understand why an Argentine literary critic is shocked by her desire to attend the Mataderos fair, she experiences exactly this feeling of displacement and states:

What could I have told her? Intento ponerme en su lugar (what IS “su lugar”?): would I find it strange, ridiculous, o hasta ofensivo que algún extranjero o turista, algún foreign scholar “americanista” (because in some sense I *am* that - sorry Baudrillard - *also* that, y qué?) quisiera ir a conocer un ranch in the Califas Central Valley, o en Wyoming or one of those ranch places, for example –the “wild” west- o Las Vegas, el Ontario Mills Mall, Cape Canaveral, Manasas, Hollywood & Vine? (81).

This tension between ‘place’ and ‘displacement’, as well as the multiple perspectives that go along, is further explored in the narrator’s crónica of her visit to Iguazú. This account provides a good example of the changes of perspective produced by the tension between place and displacement. The crónica of the trip presents three different sides of Iguazú: Ciudad del Este, in Paraguay; the Argentine, and Brazilian sides of the Iguazú cataracts. The characteristic intertextuality of Chávez-Silverman’s writing is here enhanced by the subtitles, “Del lado de ashá: Lado brasileiro” (134), and “Del lado de acá: Lado argentino” (135), which while contrasting the views caught on both sides of the cataracts, are also the titles of

two chapters in Cortázar's novel, *Rayuela*. In each of these places, different emotions emerge, reinforcing their intimate link with the narrator's experience of place and displacement, but also with her previous life experiences.

Ciudad del Este, Paraguay, is described as a city that is just a pit stop in the journey, "Ahora acabamos de completar la primera fase del tour, un abortivísimo duty free shopping frenzy en la super-cutre Ciudad del Este, Paraguay. Oh my god, sooooo much worse than Tijuana" (132). The narrator immediately gets the sensation of displacement, as it is reminiscent of a border-city and borderland culture. Those that live there accept that their life is with those that are passing through. The city is geared towards having a shopping center to fulfill the requirements of the natural site in the neighboring country.

However, the first glimpse on the Brazilian side, "el lado de ashá", is filled with split emotions:

Confieso que the first heartstopping, panoramic vista de las Cataratas is beyond el cine. Beyond toda descripción, toda foto. Todo video. Just *beyond*. Los irritating porteño turista faded out of my consciousness, along with 3-4 other head-to-toe Supplexed and fanny-packed strapping blond East Coast gringos que inmediatamente se habían puesto a comparar estas cataratas with their other 'favorite' falls: Niagara, Victoria (muéranse, ecoturistas, yuppie scum!). Manera de necesitar domar, conquitar all over again (134).

The falls put the narrator in such an awestruck that she was able to distance herself from the porteño and gringo tourists. Doing so she is able to take comfort in being displaced and embrace the entirety of the Brazilian side. As she and her son show this with their silent mouthing of "have you EVER" (135), having their complete focus on the cataracts.

On the Argentine side or "el lado de acá", in contrast, her focus is elsewhere, particularly on the 'terrifying' catwalk they have to cross: "Yo, con mi acrofobia, que consta de equal measure de terror y deseo de la altura, tengo que pedir que me retengan" (136). Due to the familiarity with the Argentine side we do not see the wonder and awe of the falls. We

can see this familiarity with the deictics “asha” y “acá”, which implies that the narrator speaks from the Argentine side. By saying “acá”, which is Argentine way of saying ‘aquí’, has a lot of resonance to the relationship she establishes with this country, particularly, with Buenos Aires, and its literary tradition. She speaks from this perspective illuminating that she has possibly found “her home” in Buenos Aires, but in particular with Argentine literature.

The narrator ponders on this ability to cross borders so fluidly, “Estoy en Argentina again. Or am I? Fronteras porosas aquí, one minute en el extremo sur del Brasil, the next in the far Northwest de la Argentina, y luego en el sureste de Paraguay” (136). As she has a fairly nomadic existence, the ability to be in and out of places so quietly and fluidly is worthy of thought. We may then state that *Iguazú crónica* balances feelings of place and displacement by means of contrasting multiple perspectives on the experience of this natural site; a meeting point for the borders of Paraguay, Argentina and Brazil.

Interestingly, this balance between the experiences of place and displacement, and the fragility of national borders that emerges thereupon brings forward another recurring theme in Chávez-Silverman’s writing: nature. This becomes more evident in the narrator’s references to the novel *Green Mansions* by the Anglo-Argentine writer W.H. Hudson. It is as if the narrator had a calling towards nature. In Misiones, Argentina, upon her return from Iguazú, she marvels at all of the natural beauty, even as she begins to head more south, deeper into Argentina, the green color of the vegetation is able to hold her attention in a unique fashion. “La verdad, she states, es que I’ve always been fascinated with plants. Vegetation. No digo jardín, sino algo más wild, inclasificable incluso” (138). This ‘wild’ side of nature; this savageness is perhaps in correspondence with her feelings of displacement and her defiance to society. If nature is wild, and it is a part of the narrator’s identity, what are the societal rules to wilderness? The tension of nature versus society exists within the narrator,

probably favoring nature above society because nature provides some sort of stability in her very nomadic existence.

The importance of nature can be further confirmed in “Flora y Fauna Crónica”, in which the narrator offers a retrospective look at places in her past, where she has felt displaced, and where nature has either provided some sort of comfort to the feeling of displacement, or marked a personal experience through which a lesson was to be learned. I call these places ‘growing environments’; they provide us with some major pieces to reconstruct the narrator’s fragmented identity.

In “Flora y Fauna Crónica”, we learn about the narrator’s experience of displacement in three different locations: Pretoria, South Africa; Buenos Aires, Argentina; and Los Angeles, United States. Jacarandas are constantly present and fulfill an important role in each one, “Sólo luego vendría a reconocer, a entender the special secret bond between the jacarandaes and me. Una necesidad, un destino cartográfico. De geografía, latitudes” (8).

In Pretoria, “la Jakarandastad, ‘ciudad de los jacarandaes’”, where the narrator “was living alone, realmente sola, por primera vez en mi vida. No TV, not even a radio” (7), jacarandas enhanced her creativity as “me aferraba a la incongruente idea de que mi vida and my writing—the two were inseparable—were enabled, somehow, por esa breve nube de jacarandá, which seemed to shimmer and float sólo para mí” (7-8).

But there was also a lesson to be learned, i.e. that of withholding judgement of Afrikaans:

Como que no quería interact with people, con los Afrikaners I was surround with in the governmental capital, por temor a que su savage racismo se me contagiara, sería hasta que mi amigo africano del xeroxing room en UNISA, Neppe Selabe, me comentó, ‘Suzi, you *have* to learn their language, to understand them. To understand us,’ que something in me would shift, crack open. I needed to let it happen” (7).

These trees then are also markers of lessons, places of growth, amidst her ever changing location.

In Buenos Aires, the narrator speaks from the perspective of her apartment across the botanical garden. “Bueno, y just guess qué es lo que abunda, qué representa la idiosincrasia misma de Buenos Aires, according to the porteños? You got it: los jacarandaes” (9) In a way, it is perhaps this re-encounter with jacarandaes that takes her to the ceaseless conversation about identity and its relationship with place:

So qué es lo que esto nos dice about borders, identidades, transnational studies, about nationalisms, sobre el supposedly-shrinking global mundo? Shrinking para quién? My ascendent in Sagittarius me confirm y reitera un destino peregrino. Ay, *utópica*. Yes, ou-topos. Not out of this mundo, sino no-place. Bueno, no one place, quizás. It’s all about place (10).

Finally, in Los Angeles, where the narrator reluctantly moves for a job opportunity, she is caught by surprise by the Claremont’s central island’s “stand of mature, baroquely blooming jacarandas, as far as my eye could see. Y te juro que right then and there, como que decidí que it was gonna be OK. Living there. Digo, here” (9). Jacarandaes create a feeling of ‘home’ or ‘feeling of belonging’ no matter where she finds herself. They are a transnational mark of belonging and learning that transforms her experience of displacement into one of belonging by giving her a place.

I would like to discuss one more instance in which Chávez-Silverman’s crónicas expose the reader to the tension between the experience of place and displacement. In “Axolotl Crónica”, Chávez-Silverman converses with Cortázar’s short story “Axolotl”, published in his collection *Final del juego* (1969). While agreeing with the author’s

description of an axolotl⁷, in this crónica provides the reader with a different description that opposes and even contradicts Cortázar's: "En eso, Julio, tuviste razón. Per no sé si en todo lo demás. Ni sé si en mucho más. Eso que escribiste eras todo vos" (102).

The story is set in the context of the narrator's nearing departure from Buenos Aires. In her visit to the *Boquitas Pintadas* hotel, the narrator stares at an aquarium containing a couple of axolotls.

She is nostalgic of Buenos Aires as the end of her stay approaches, and reflects upon her experience of displacement by comparing herself with the axolotls in the aquarium, much in the fashion of Cortázar's short story. Just as Cortázar gets lost in the axolotl's eyes, at the end of his short story, where it is unclear from which perspective the narrative is taking place, the narrator loses herself in the axolotl's eyes. However, contrary to Cortázar's axolotls, and much as the narrator herself, the axolotls described here are fast and constantly moving. In the narrator's own words: "[a] vos, black beauty, te bautizo mi axolotl porteño. Sos como yo. Animal oximorónico, fronterizo, incómodo, desesperado. En constante movimiento" (103). The use of the adjective "fronterizo" emphasizes the feeling of displacement and is also a reference to the border as an unstable location as Gloria Anzaldúa has described it in her *Borderlands/La frontera*. As the discourse of the border has taught us, those that are "fronterizo" have usually been condemned to a small portion of their ancestral land, have been severed from their culture group by an arbitrary national border, or have lost the feeling

⁷ Axolotl, (*Ambystoma*, formerly *Rhyacosiredon* or *Siredon, mexicanum*), salamander of the family Ambystomatidae (order Caudata), notable for its permanent retention of larval features, such as external gills. It is found in lakes near Mexico City, where it is considered edible. The name axolotl is also applied to any full-grown larva of *Ambystoma tigrinum* (tiger salamander) that has not yet lost its external gills. *A. mexicanum* grows to about 25 cm (10 inches) long and is dark brown with black speckling. Both albino and white mutants, as well as other colour mutants, are common. The legs and feet are rather small, but the tail is long. A fin extends from the back of the head to the tip of the tail. A lower fin extends from between the hind legs to the tip of the tail ("Axolotl").

of belonging to a group. Chávez-Silverman draws on this the discourse when the narrator in her “Axolotl Crónica” compares herself with the axolotl: a displaced being constantly in search for a ‘place’.

Axolotls have also been used by Mexican anthropologist Roger Bartra for discussing this idea of displacement in his comparison of these amphibians to Mexican identity. In his book, *Cage of Melancholy* (1992), he compares the Mexican identity with the axolotl as well, but because a creature that is neither here nor there, but in between. That is, Mexican identity is conflicted with returning to its indigenous roots or ‘fully developing’ towards its European future, therefore resulting in ambiguity. The axolotl is just that, a creature that did not fully develop out of the larva stage to become a salamander, but developed enough to become sexually reproductive, creating more creatures in this border between ‘childhood’ and ‘adulthood’, not belonging to either.

Bartra claims that this is exactly what is happening with Mexican national identity. It is an attempt to balance two distinct cultures, indigenous roots and European industrialism, but they are unable to blend. Hence Mexican identity attempts to have two distinct cultures, which is contradictory “because a national culture is both dominant and popular” (Bartra 165). That is, the two opposing cultures are unable to mix creating this ambiguity and displacement. Living in the borderlands, where there are even more cultural distinctions, only reinforces this hybridity. As a symbol of heterogeneity, axolotl is then a powerful metaphor that allows us to better understand the process of reconstruction of a national identity. However, complex, heterogeneous that is.

2.2 Narratives of gender and metamorphosis

Neither larvae nor salamander, but instead an animal that has maintained its early childhood form with adult-like actions (sexual reproduction), axolotls are creatures stuck

midway through metamorphosis. As it was mentioned earlier, these amphibians have captured the attention of writers and anthropologists. Because it sheds light on another facet of Chávez-Silverman's writing, it is necessary to go back to Cortázar's short story "Axolotl". In his account, the narrator returns day after day to the *Jardin des Plantes* in Paris, to stare into the eyes of a motionless axolotl, until he is unable to distinguish himself from the axolotl. As we saw before, this also happens in Chávez-Silverman story, but while Cortázar sees a motionless creature that defies time, Chávez-Silverman sees an animal constantly moving.

I argue that this change of perspective is caused by her relationship to gender. Being a woman academic and advocate for the LGBTQ community, Chávez-Silverman sees the need to provide a different account, and finds herself disgusted that she has been identifying herself with the "lector macho" (104) in her reading of Cortázar's story. Therefore, when describing the axolotl, the narrator in the story considers it as a male instead of a female: "Tú, black beauty, I've never heard of your kind . . . Me tinca que eres varón. Además, hombre atrapado. *Contenido*" (102). Varón, hombre are all masculine nouns, just as the adjectives that describe them "atrapado" and "contenido". This is how she is referring to the axolotl through the lense of a "lector macho".

In order to change lenses and revisit the story and her reading from a feminine perspective, the narrator challenges Cortázar by asking:

Ay Julio, ¿qué dirías si supieras que la *queer theory* was being wielded . . . well, not against, exactly pero definitely on you, about you, around you, all over you? You'd fall out laughing, me parece. Anyways, me quedo con esta feliz turn of phrase: *la lectora macho*. Y me satisfice" (104).

Through this intertextual exercise, Chávez-Silverman refers to the conversation that she is having with Cortázar, but rather than setting this conversation on literary grounds, Chávez-

Silverman takes it to the field of queer theory, and coins a more appropriate term, “la lectora macho”, thus refusing to accept the traditional options: “lector macho” and “lector hembra” (104).

This discourse on the appropriate usage of gender is vital, for it demonstrates the importance of gender for reconstructing identity, in particular, the narrator’s identity. This time I am interested in discussing how sexual orientation, maternity, and her family role as a daughter are depicted. By focusing on how these three aspects are reconstructed in Chávez-Silverman’s writing, I will attempt at reconstructing an important facet of the narrator’s identity.

Let us start by considering “Anti-Suicidio Crónica”. In this story, the narrator begins remembering her son Joey when he was at a young age, around the age of a preschooler. This is the age of innocence, the age in which many do not understand pain and have yet to experience anything too painful. This is the age where they do not care what they look like, even if it is horrible. Despite all of this, this is also the start of peer pressure. A preschool outing makes her remember her son through his ups and downs and how at times it was challenging being a member of the LGBTQ Community. Now that Joey is in adolescence, things are not nearly as simple as they used to be, rather he has this constant indifference to the world (except with his friend group) and his mother. This is the time where his biggest insult is “That’s so gay!” which is highly offensive to a mother who is part of that community. She wonders what she did wrong as a mother to raise her child in such a way that he would be so insensitive to the issue. Here she discusses this insult in a hypothetical form after remembering what he looked like in preschool clothes:

Yeah, con tus little saltwater sandals and your baby Converse high-tops in citrus colors about which seguramente en esta tu actual teen-encarnación you’d say “that’s so ‘gay,’ mom” [...] ¿Cómo llegamos a este lugar, en el que tu máximo insulto, glibly

and frequently (and unconsciously?) tossed–all-purpose–is an epithet hurled, like a hate-fueled meteor, de otro planeta? Marciano homofóbico. My Favorite Martian. Are you (still) mine? ¿Qué hay en ti de mí? Hello in there. Anybody home? (72).

In this instance we can see just how strongly this insult affects the narrator, to the point in which she starts questioning her influence on him, and if he is even from this planet. Sexual orientation is an important element to define gender identity. In Chávez-Silverman's writing, however, the celebration of the LGBTQ community and academia intersects with her role as a mother. That is, being part of the postmodern celebration of the LGBTQ community does not necessarily include other aspects of life, i.e. the relationship mother-son.

This relationship can be better studied in "Blood/Relations Crónica". In this story the narrator gives an account of another moment where her maternity feelings are challenged by an episode in which Joey gets into a troublesome situation at his school in Buenos Aires, contesting another part of her identity, writer. The boy gets into a fight with a couple of boys at school and in the process he breaks a door. The mother-narrator is called to the school to come and pick up the kid. The incident is retold with a hint of frustration as the writer-narrator describes how she was just entering the flow of writing, when she received the phone call and now is attempting to figure out a way to become more normal to help insure that nobody blows the situation out of proportion. When she arrives she gets the details of the situation, where Joey was getting picked on and reacted violently. This event triggers a discussion of male/female use of violence, but also a discussion of family ties and heritage. The narrator recalls that as a young girl back in Spain, she also experienced bullying and worries that her son experiences the same fate:

I'm 4 years old and asthmatic and no puedo respirar and I'm wheezing, I'm wheezing y los otros niño me peshihcan por ser . . . por ser extranjera, skinny, shy pigeon-toed and pathetic. [...] y mamá no me puede shevar al cole, hace que papá me lleve porque

ella no aguanta, no puede ver a su hyper-sensitive, socially maladapted oldest daughter in so much pain (29).

The narrator's son violent reaction, she fears, must come from his biological alcoholic father. The narrator worries that violence may be in the son's genes, and that he will become everything that she despises in males. Her questioning begins with how hereditary factors are going to shape her son, and ultimately leads to her asking how will she be able to combat that with her own flawed self.

The story retold in this crónica allows the narrator to intersect her discussion of maternity with that of masculinity. In particular, the narrator focuses on how violence is normalized and socialized into male identity. This can be seen by the way in which the receptionist talks about the kid: "Joey está bien pero . . . ehte, cometió un 'acto irreflexivo'" (27), and in "Y la Rectora que entona que Joey es un buen chico pero en algunas cosas todavía sigue siendo muuuy niño" (29). In both of these descriptions Joey is seen as being a "boy", and his violent behavior as "normal". This relationship between violence and the male identity is better described in this quotation:

[Joey was t]an *canchero*, friendly, y ahora shoe en el otro pie baby, y cómo puede ser que le hasha salido esa veta de su padre (and him, from his *own* alcoholic, pathologically shy father): explosiva, de kicking a hole in the closet door, in the wall, y ahora esto, running after the younger kid (I wasn't gonna hit him Mom, I swear) y rodeado de sus classmates, quienes le chishaban 'maTAlo, Jowy, maTAlo.' Ay, it's just too much for me on ths winter morning, esta terrible writerly interpucción and Joey SOOOOO *Lord of the Flies*, and I abhor male violence especially (30).

In this quotation, violence is shown as encouraged by peers, but the narrator fears that the father is also to blame. In her view, Joey has internalized a common discourse when it comes to male violence and alcoholism:

[M]e mira y dice I don't know Mom, what, am I a monster? Siempre con el discurso de I'm gonna change. I'm gonna start cleaning up my room, it's ALL gonna be different when we get back. Que fresh slate. Y pa'mis adentros ay, that is SOOO much el clásico discurso de un alcohólico. Of an addict" (30).

This battle with Joey's gender identity is in conflict with the narrator's role as a mother: "Al llegar a casa me siento on the floor y shoro y me siento totally overwhelmed, wiped out por la maternidad, suddenly" (30). The incident is resolved "muy a lo gringo" (31), by the design of a "self-improvement course on paper: 1) write an essay about how this situation could have been resolved without the use of force 2) pay for broken glass with allowance 3) leer *Lord of the Flies* y analizar su moraleja" (31).

By referring to the way in which the issue was finally sanctioned as "a lo gringo", the narrator takes some perspective on her own education as a U.S. citizen and as an Anglophone, and sheds light on another facet of her identity, that is her relationship to her own mother and father. As we can see in "Celos Pasional Crónica", the discussion about her maternity also brings into question her relationship between her mother and her father and the roles they are called to fulfill as a heterosexual couple. These relationships are fundamental to understanding and reconstructing the narrator's gendered identity.

"Celos Pasional Crónica" tells the story of a fight between the narrator's mother and father. Their marriage is described on the basis of the reactions they both have during an argument. The event takes place while in being away in a research trip to Spain, the mother finds a letter addressed to the father by an ex-girlfriend of his. In the letter, the sender reaches out and suggests the possibility of a fling. Although the father is in Spain, and has not had previous correspondence with the sender, an accusation of infidelity is unavoidable. The mother is convinced the father has an affair and threatens to leave while in a loud argument on the phone. As a consequence, the father cuts his research trip short and goes back to California.

The incident is an opportunity for the narrator to go into detail with some of the characteristics for each of her parents; how her mom was very guarded, secretive and modest,

but emotional and fiery, whereas her father was smooth, funny, handsome, and had girls flirting with him all the time. They are in many ways opposites of each other, but can be seen as very similar. They are both (com)passionate, meaning that they have the motivation and skills to do what they are passionate about and they are compassionate or empathetic. This contradiction is precisely why their relationship is described as, “intense, loud, sarcastic, grand gestures, mucho grito y polémica y door slamming y bailes y cocktail parties y viajes y lágrimas y risa” (33).

Furthermore, the narrator describes her mother as socially sensitive to the norms that surrounded her. To better illustrate this characteristic, the narrator describes how, although good driver -compared to the father-, when someone made an annoying driving maneuver, the mother was able to maintain her personal social sensitivity:

Mamá was good, per ojo, if anyone cut her off nos pedía (ella tan señorita, tan correcta, never a palabrota out of her mouth): honey, roll down your window, will you, and give that guy the finger? (34).

The mother is further described as “a Scorpio, guarded and lethal” (34), emotionally unavailable, but still able to display the traverse effects of being socially sensitive. On the other hand, the father is described as an academic -smooth with his words, melodious and attractive (35)-, who took a lot of pride in his work, and who was sometimes difficult to be around because of his constant drive for understanding and betterment. The mother gives a different description though: “You think Daddy was sexy and romantic and funny all the time? No. Daddy es un melancólico. It’s not easy living with him, it’s never been easy, you know. Daddy is never satisfied with himself, and he has *terrible* moods, and self-doubt” (37).

In spite of their different characters, as a heterosexual couple, the narrator’s parents share a common concern regarding her own gender role as an adult ‘woman’. Indeed, “Celos

Pasional Crónica” allows the narrator to elaborate on the social expectations she is called to meet in the arena of marriage:

Y mis padres were asking me (again) que por qué siempre tenía que decir que *nunca* me iba casar? Que after all they’d taught us, que por qué y cómo yo era capaz de manifestar tanto desprecio for that institution which they so successfully embodied? [...] Y ellos, shaking their heads, desesperados de que su success augurara, para mí, mi fracaso, por poco lloraba de rabia y de (let's face it) a lo mejor un poquitín de vergüenza that their muy marriageable oldest daughter steadfastly refuse to enter into holy (or otherwise) matrimony” (38).

Marriage is clearly a social pressure that strains the narrator’s relationship to her parents. Although, their marriage mixes different cultural traditions, for both of them it seems to be an institution of which her daughters are expected to participate as adult women.

However, the descriptions of the gender roles and expectations of the narrator’s parents are not only illustrative of their grand impact on her own gender identity, but are also important for understanding some of the characteristics that, I find, to be the most prevalent in the narrator’s identity reconstruction, which are her being emotional and (com)passionate. Both of her parents are emotional and (com)passionate, albeit in different regards, but nonetheless they passed this onto the narrator. Both parents are shown as emotional when they feel jealousy and fear, but also sympathy towards those who have felt the touch of oppression. Both of them are (com)passionate when they show their own resilience in academic rigor, and quest for equity in the context of social injustice. The narrator in Chávez-Silverman’s crónicas shares in these characteristics by voicing in a rather emotionally way her internal attachments to social injustice. But this narrator is also (com)passionate by demonstrating her resilience to embark on her own path, pushing away limitations, while still maintaining an understanding of her social reality.

Gender identity intersects both with a gendered family history and sexual orientation. Through the metaphor of the axolotl, a creature stuck in its process of metamorphosis halfway through, the (re)construction of the narrator's identity is necessarily shown as being in constant flux, and never fully developed. By using it as a symbol of a border existence between national and gender identities, Chávez Silverman's writing allows for expressing the confusion and blurriness that, I believe, encompasses our identities.

2.3 Narratives of family and coming of age

In the previous two sections we have discussed national and gender identity in their intersection with the experience of place/displacement, and with the gender roles within social institutions such as marriage and family. In this section, I will inquire further as to how the narrator's identity in Chávez Silverman's writing is informed by the social context in general and her family background in particular. Although, in this research, I am examining national, gender, and social identity as they are represented in a literary piece as if they were separate, they cannot be fully understood separately, but must be considered as they intersect with each other. Take sexual orientation for example, a person could identify as homosexual, but their nationality, sex, ethnicity, and religion can determine how explicitly this identity can be expressed and recognized. Identity can be determined both by auto-identification and social identification. Social identification shapes individual identity by means of socialization, or social learning, which in turn is internalized by individuals (Aronson 279). In this process the role of the family is fundamental as it is shown in the "Tocolote Crónica" and "Memory/Lame Crónica". In both of these crónicas, the narrator embarks in an autobiographical journey to describe her relationship with her parents from the point of view of the diverse cultural background in which she grew up. It is only understandable that any account of such a journey has recourse to memory. Through the mechanism of memory she

identifies moments in her life that are important to the reconstruction of her identity. Thus the narrator aims at reconstructing her pieced identity by looking into her past. These crónicas are moments of reflection, about who she is, what has shaped her, what the factors that have contributed to the acting of certain decisions are.

Let us start by considering “Tecolote Crónica”. In this crónica, which is in fact a letter to her mother, in memoriam, the narrator presents the impressions of her re-encounter with her mother’s homeland and culture. The letter reminisces of her mother’s ethnic background by writing a description of her visit to Oaxaca, Mexico. Born in Guadalajara, Mexico, the mother passed a cultural heritage on her daughters, which contributed to shape their bicultural identity. The city of Guadalajara in which the mother grew up is described as no longer the same: “Pues ese México ya no existe en mi Zapopan de antaño. I always thought we lived way out in the country all that time, growing up. Pero cuando volví en ‘97, it had stretched and morphed into just another Guadalajara suburb” (47). In contrast, the narrator identifies Oaxaca as the Mexico she came to know as a child during family trips:

Porque tu México sí lo encontré en Oaxaca. Hot, chapopote scented-roads as you ride into the city center tiny aeropuerto. Burros ambulantes y green mayates entraña-smelling mercados you only let us go once in a blue moon (47).

The narrator’s relationship to her mother is reconstructed through the cautious recommendations about street vendors that her mother used to give her when visiting her country: “nothing en la calle” (46), but also through her account of a visit to a market in Oaxaca, during which the narrator brings back memories of her mother’s preference for little alebrije owls:

Mom, how is it that today –al mediodía en México, a las 10 de la mañana en Califas-time– caigo? I remark on the absolute symmetry, la coincidencia between you and your favorite bird. But *was* it even your favorite bird really, el tecolote? You loved all birds. Oye Mom, maybe you put one over on all of us—inescrutable, reticente, mysterious and unknowable. Representante sine qua non del conocimiento (48).

After this description, we learn that the narrator's mother passed away while she is visiting México. In that sense, this account can also be read as an eulogy to her mother, an homage paid in recognition of her hybrid cultural heritage.

The narrator's relationship to her father is, in turn, reconstructed in "Memory/Lame Crónica". In this crónica, in memoriam for her father, there is a profound discussion on the idea of memory and the influence that her father had in the narrator's identity. For most people in her family her father was a mean man. However, this was not the case for her. No matter how much she tried she was unable to see her father as a mean person. Upset, yes; melancholy, yes; passionate about his literary enemies, yes. She remembers many different emotions and aptitudes of her father, but "mean" is not a characteristic she sees. Her mother, her sister and her grandparents, all found that her father was not only mean, but also distant. For the narrator this was only a self-defense mechanism, for he was also constantly threatened by his own insecurity as she states in the following quotation:

What is it about memory? ¿Qué es lo que hace que Laura [the sister] te recuerde tan (auto)exigente, tan distante? Y que yo, en cambio, vea una jumble de imágenes solapadas en el tiempo y el espacio, pero en casi todas - even when that little muscle at the side of our jaw is twitching - casi siempre you end up collapsing into a snort of laughter? Qué es lo que me permite (me obliga) creer fervientemente que esa crueldad tuya was a self-defense mechanism? (42).

The ethnicity of her father, a Jewish-American, is important for the narrator's description of her relationship to him. Being a first generation immigrant as a "Bronx Jew boy" determined also the narrator's relationship to books, literature, scholarship, and in general her career choice. The narrator describes her father in the following terms:

[A] Bronx Jew boy who grew up to be famous and handsome and suave and world-travelled and elegant (and who even taught me how to waltz) pero who never outgrew la inseguridad de haber sido short, miope, poor, hijo de una inmigrante rusa judía y de un inmigrante rumano judío under- (and later directamente) unemployed, y encima

divorciados. Ese Yossie, the smallest boy en la Bronx ganga [...] Ese boy was always inside you, Dad. Yossie. You never outgrew him (42-43).

Thus, in her eyes, her father was never able to break out of the religion-ethnicity socialization of being a first generation immigrant in the United States. The same aspects that were socialized onto him were then transposed onto his daughter, as can be seen in Chávez-Silverman's reflection, "Y ese knowledge pieced me, fucked me up for years, even *warped* me, diría. Cursed me con la misma jodida inseguridad and need for approval from others you took with you to your grave" (43). Furthermore, the narrator's account seems to resent a severed link with her father's side of the family "after su cross-cultural, tumultuous courtship que terminó en una modesta boda en el front lawn de mis abuelos Chávez en San Diego, Califas, y after el subsecuente distanciamiento de papá de su familia judía de New York (especialmente de su mamá, Grandma Edna)" (33).

In spite of which, throughout this crónica, the narrator provides an endearing and moving description of the father-daughter relationship, and acknowledges his massive influence as she grew up: she was constantly trying to match him, to do the same things, including writing together and pondering over a single line for hours and hours. According to her, her affinity with her father could perhaps explain many of her eccentricities, one of which seems to be her literature and academic vocation.

Indeed, in "Memory/Lame Crónica" we learn that her father was a melancholy academic, more precisely a hispanic literature specialist:

Un dulce melancólico en tu study en casa, shaking your head back and forth en ese gesto milenario, casi rabínico about some historical injustice, alguna tragedia you felt as keenly on your owns skin cual si te la hubieran perpetrado - tatuado - a ti (40).

He filled the void of melancholy with his academic work. On his deathbed he reminded Chávez-Silverman that he had over 300 items on his curriculum vitae (43), and

encouraged his daughter to continue down the same path, which she ultimately did, although reluctantly:

Pero part of me never wanted to sip from the same cup que te nutrió a ti. I didn't want—yet I was fatally drawn to—los clásicos. Hell, si no hubiera sido por Pizarnik, habría hecho, casi seguro, una tesis sobre Cortázar. O Quevedo” (41).

In the end, by sharing this academic vein with her father, albeit in a different field, lead the narrator in the *crónica* to confess: “Pero its *you*, Daddy, I'm always looking over my shoulder pa' ver dónde estás. Are you watching me? Do you like what you see? Do you? Ah, why did I ever have to become a writer? Pero so much of you in me, qué más podría haber hecho? What could I ever do? [...] When will you leave me alone? ¿Por qué me dejaste?” (43).

Through the reconstruction of the narrator's relationship to her mother and father, particularly as it is recounted in “*Tecolote Crónica*” and in “*Memory/Lame Crónica*”, we have been able to probe into how family relationships and family cultural background shape her identity. In the last *crónica* we will examine, “*Cono Sur Mitzvah Crónica*”, we will study how the narrator reconstructs her coming of age through a process of self-exploration which takes place during her stay in Buenos Aires.

“*Cono Sur Mitzvah Crónica*” tells the story of how the narrator came to live in Buenos Aires, and in what ways this experience allowed her to connect with her past and her identity as a writer. It starts by describing the encounter with her old landlady, Dr. Susana Lustig de Ferrer, an Austrian Jew, who fled to the Americas when she was a girl in order to evade the Holocaust. Immediately, the narrator links this bit of her landlady's biography with that of her own Aunt Gertrude, who also fled Europe during World War II. When her time in Buenos Aires is about to come to an end, and the narrator meets her landlady once more, she confesses her how happy she has been in Argentina this last year, and inquires about a painting in the apartment she would like to buy from her landlady. After hearing how much

the apartment has helped the tenant, the landlady refuses to give a price for the painting, and offers instead to give it to her as a gift.

This watercolor painting is significant because to the eyes of the narrator it looks like some of the Pizarnik's drawings and reminds her of one of her favorite authors. The painting, the apartment and her encounter with Dr. Lustig de Ferrer are symbols of how far the narrator has come in her process of self-exploration through:

Le dije no sabe how happy, how happy I've been in your apartment. Era como heredar la vida de alguien muy erudito, conocido, querido. Me sentí como en casa y a la vez no. Free from the trappings of my former self (digo life, en mi casa en Califas) y le conté que I'd been happier this year than for many many years, y cuánto había escrito, pero cosas diferentes "nada que ver" con lo académico *sensus strictu*, quizás (109-110).

It is important to note here the relationship the narrator has with writing, and how much writing is part of her identity. Rather her being persists because of the need to write:

Sola con mis preciosos felt-tipped pens y y mis Chinese cuadernos from Little Ricky's en New York y mis libros de segunda mano, me aferraba a la incongruente idea de que mi vida and my writing –the two were inseparable– were enabled, somehow, por esa breve nube de jacarandá (7-8).

As we can see, there is no difference for the narrator between her life and writing. The narrator must write or she would cease to exist. In this case, her life was 'enabled' due to the jacarandá because she was able to continuously write.

However, there is a drawback when it comes to writing, experiencing life. The narrator brings this to the forefront when she is asked a direct question:

Me preguntan si me he dado cuenta de que un overriding theme de mis crónicas es la superioridad de la literatura versus la vida. Respondo irritada, aterrada: no. No, not really. Yo, que soy tan viva. (Todo el mundo lo dice. Mis estudiantes lo dicen. Mis amigos lo dicen). Yo, que viajar tanto. ¿Cómo va a ser? Pero claro, caigo en que in a way, of course it is. My longing for the dead and gone, the lost, for the impossible, even for the never-lived! Mi constante extraña nostalgia (136).

Even though she tries to deny the question, by saying that everybody says that she is 'lively', she ultimately agrees. This constant desire for literature, through which she experiences her

life, leaves the negative consequence of nostalgia. This is something that she has faced while being in Argentina.

As result of her writing in Buenos Aires and of being able to be free from her ‘former self’ –which could also be interpreted as an awareness of her complex identity– the narrator reaches happiness. This is the goal of self-exploration, and of using memory as a means to have a better grasp of our identities. When we understand how we react in many different situations, it is easier to understand how to interact within the socializing context of societies. Although the narrator refers to this stage as “happiness”, I would like to argue that it is more a sense of positive growth or a coming of age, which she has finally reached by accepting and celebrating her complex identity, during her time in Argentina.

She ends this crónica with the following lines:

Me abrazo on the densely overcast and wet Recoleta winter streets, walking back home bajo los now-blossomless jacarandaes and fancy cheto balcones de la Avenida del Libertador. Happy happy happy. No voy a tener que despedirme de mi adorado “lugar en el mundo” argentino (111).

These lines summarize some of the themes I have discussed so far: national identity, the experience of place/displacement, learning environment, happiness/recognition, and authenticity. ‘Recoleta’ and ‘argentino’ speak to Argentine references and thus bring national identity to the fore, while recreating a certain relationship between the narrator and Buenos Aires, her ‘place in the world’, where she can be recognized (‘liberated’) from her melancholy and be her authentic self. The jacarandas reminisce of her learning experience and synthesize some crucial moments of her ‘displaced’ identity.

3. Conclusion

In this thesis I have attempted to unveil some of the aspects of Chávez-Silverman's identity through her writing. I focused on the intersection of three overarching concepts:

national identity, gender identity, and coming of age, which are studied in three different subsections. In “Narratives of place and displacement”, I was interested in analyzing how the narrator is shaped by a number of concepts such as nation, authenticity, and the tension between the experience of place and displacement. The chronicles used for this exploration of Chávez-Silverman’s challenge to national identity take the reader through a voyage of interwoven geographical contexts in which the narrator interrogates her identity. In “Narratives of gender and metamorphosis”, I was interested in analyzing how gender identity intersected with the narrator’s reflection on her role as a mother and as a daughter. The crónicas that I studied for this section, allowed me to problematize the often conflicting roles that these identities have within many different situations. Finally, in “Narratives of family and coming of age”, I was interested in retracing the narrator’s remembrance of her family’s history in the process of reconstructing her identity as a writer and as an academic. The mechanism of memory was one of the most helpful tools for analyzing the crónicas in this section. Chávez-Silverman’s writing reconstructs her identity as if she was coming of age, “Mitzvah”, through a self-exploration rite of passage, so to speak. I finished this section with examples of how ‘family’ and ‘coming of age’ play an important role in Chávez-Silverman’s identity development.

The initial goal of this research was to investigate the relationship between multilingualism/multiculturalism and identity through literature. However, since the first steps of the process, it was hard to choose an appropriate material to work with. I began looking for bilingual literary works as it was a way to find potential objects of study. However, once I entered into the process of selecting the appropriate material, I found that many pieces that were considered ‘bilingual’ weren’t good candidates for my project of

analyzing the links between language and identity. The content of many of these potential objects of study was more than promising, though. Take for example *Lotería*, by Mario Alberto Zambrano, which is a novel about a young girl narrating memories through the Mexican card game of *lotería*. This novel was rich with content, but after reading it, I realized that it was almost all exclusively written in English, and thus not very helpful for my interests in looking at the combination of languages. This is, in part, due to the usage of the Spanish language in this novel, which seems to consist on the insertion cultural words, which are in turn supposed to refer to a Mexican setting. *Lotería* had some Spanish words, which referred to cultural words such as curses and names that would be italicized to make sure that the limits between Spanish and English weren't blurred. However, if I were to look for the question as to why that Spanish word came out versus a potential English translation, for example, it would be extraordinarily difficult to offer a systematic analysis, due to the limited use of Spanish.

A second potential object of study, *La Pérdida*, a comic book by Jessica Abel was also very promising. It tells the story of a young woman from the U.S. going to Mexico in an attempt to find her lost Mexican roots. As exciting as the narrative sounded at the beginning, I soon realized that it was linguistically lacking. The first chapter of the story was indeed in both in Spanish and English, and as the protagonist was learning more and more Spanish words, so too would there be more Spanish words in the text. However, by the second chapter, the author makes a note saying the rest of the book will be in English, and it is to be assumed by the reader that the narrative is almost entirely taking place in Spanish. Although, this is an interesting idea for discussing how the author shies away from challenging the dominance of English, the book stopped to provide the wealth for linguistic analysis.

After revisiting my research proposal, it became clear that I needed an object of study that would be closer to having an egalitarian perspective on the languages involved, that is English and Spanish. I was about to start looking into translation, such as text that has English on one page and the Spanish translation on the next, or vice versa, when I stumbled across *Killer Crónicas*. As it has been previously mentioned, this book written in Spanglish or “radical bilingualism”, proved to be the object of study that I was looking for. After a careful reading and summarizing of the 24 crónicas included in this collection, I chose 12 of them, based not only on what I considered as a personal invitation to adventure, but also based on what I could see linguistically, that is a diverse mix of Spanish, English, and a rich presence of highlighted dialects.

In my approach to analyzing the form, that is the linguistic features of this literary piece, I wanted to find out if the author was differentiating Spanish and English in the text, in order to have a comparative look at her language use, i.e. I wanted to see what words were used to transition into Spanish or English. Through reflection and categorization of the types of words, I discovered that most of the transitions from English to Spanish were through linking words, such as “y”, “que”, “pero” etc. On the other hand, in her transitions from Spanish to English, there were more nouns and adjectives. As I was unable to find a systematic pattern in the way the author alternates both languages, I realized that the analysis of this research needed to take a slightly different direction, though I hope to be able to explore this idea in a future research.

As for the analysis of the content, my reflection aimed at extracting the main lines of analysis as they emerged in the crónicas. Nation, authenticity, the tension between the experience of place and displacement, the reflection on gender roles, and last but not least,

the reconstruction of the narrator's process of coming of age revealed as recurrent themes in these stories. It has to be noted, however, that in each crónica these recurrent themes are difficult to tell apart. The three sections in which I have engaged with each of the facets of identity in Chávez-Silverman's writing are therefore artificially constructed to reflect what I found as a helpful analytical order for my thought process. The overlaps between the sections only reiterate the intricacy and complexity of the narrator's identity. For example, the "Axolotl Crónica" plays a role in the analysis of the experience of displacement and being in the borderlands, just as much as it can be considered as a rereading of Cortázar's short story from a gender perspective. This obviously leads to the point that all the aspects of identity come to be intertwined and cannot be fully separated.

My preconceptions going into this project were not that different, as I started this research thinking of identity, as a solid concept, which could be used differently depending on the context. Although I believe that this statement still holds some true, I now realize just how many aspects to identity there are, and how often they are in flux.

Another very important lesson I have learned, however, is about the writing process. Not just to write essays or reviews, but to write something with a lot of detail, interest and having a much larger requirement than the ones I am accustomed to. This thesis project has been challenging because I have never seen myself as a strong writer, and taking on a task such as this has been very insightful. The way that a researcher has to gather ideas, and then try to find the right material, read, continuously write in order to preserve any ideas. To plan and organize the thought process on a larger scale than just an essay, to no avail. These are all stages of the writing process. It has been a journey, one that has been frustrating, challenging,

exciting and, finally, rewarding. I have learned many things through this project, and there are still many more to go.

This leads me to future research. One of the first questions that should continue to be explored is the role that memory has in the reconstruction of our identity. I was only able to touch upon it, but it appears to have had a significant role in the narrator's identity, as I am aware that it does in mine. Another, line of research that I would like to pursue in the future are the rules of Spanglish. Near the end of my analysis I came across the idea that the way the Chávez-Silverman writes in Spanglish follows a set of rules, and that there are ways in which code-switching can be done poorly or well. The rules of this are intersentential and intrasentential code-switching. These two aspects help guide the mixture of two languages. It would be worth exploring the material that is already out there on them in order to see if we can probe deeper into the linguistic aspects of this text, and hopefully expose some of the areas where identity is linked to the ways in which we

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