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Walking Contradictions:
Latina Lesbianas, Immigration and Citizenship

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Walking Contradictions:
Latina Lesbianas, Immigration and Citizenship

by

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Thesis

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

The University of Texas at Austin

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Master of Arts

The University of Texas at Austin

December, 2010

Dedication

Esta tesis se dedica a todas las mujeres, lesbianas, chicanas, tejanas y latinas en la academia.

Que sean gritonas en cada momento.

En memoria de Irma Alicia García.

Acknowledgements

An endless amount of gratitude goes to the women who participated in this research. Their transparency and honesty was much more than I could have ever asked for – and their stories, at times, provided a much-needed laughter during this process. There are many in academia who have contributed time and energy to this project. To my adviser Dr. Gloria González-López for meticulously pushing me to be my best, thank you for your dedicated time and commitment to this project. Many thanks to my second reader, Dr. Néstor Rodríguez. To Dr. Lisa Moore and Dr. Simone Browne for encouragement and support. To Dr. Kean Chansarak for continued support during the IRB process. Dr. Deborah Paredez – you gave me a reason to believe in academia again – thank you and my diva hat off to you. To Dr. Omi Osun Joni Jones and The Austin Project, you have given me the critical space that I needed to do this work. I thank you. To Dr. Henry Dietz, Kimberly Terry and Dr. Charlie Hale of the Lozano Long Institute of Latin American Studies for your endless support, funding and enduring my emails and graduate student hysteria. To Adrian Johnson at the Benson Latin American Collection, my sincere gratitude to your commitment to serving student interests in research. To Alma Jackie Salcedo and the Department of Women's and Gender Studies for financial support and encouragement. To Richard Garcia, Liz McClelland and Dr. Christopher White at the National Sexuality Resource Center in San Francisco – my utmost gratitude for facilitating a space of learning and growth at the Summer Institute.

The remaining acknowledgements look like a big love map. I have been so blessed to have many supportive and loving people around me everywhere I go, and in terms of this thesis many people have contributed to its inception. I give big time love to my mommy and daddy and big brothers for always supporting my academic endeavors. You never let me get away with

anything! To my best friend, my sister Dámaris – you have been my saving grace in this process in more ways than you know. I thank my nephews for being the reason – for many things. To Cousin Stephanie for feeding me and being my number one cheerleader for many many years, and to Aunt Mary for reminding me that academics don't know everything. In Salt Lake City the red star gang – Alex, Jesse and Christina – thank you for your hospitality and for reminding me of my purpose. In California, Justin, Kersu, Sam and Raúl this research would have not been possible without you. No really, it literally would not have happened. From borrowed cars, beds to sleep in and food on the table you have made this project – and most things in my life – possible. Nephresha and Victoria much gratitude for your continued support. Adrionna, many many thanks for your hospitality, constant words of encouragement and positivity. Lorenzo Herrera y Lozano housed me during my field work in San Francisco and for that I thank you. Karla, my soul sister, thank you for keeping me in line and laughing! Nicole López – whom I love and adore – thank you for your unending support.

The map continues in Texas. Mis compañeros Giovanni Batz and Lindsay Adams have held the space for me and kept me accountable, and I am forever grateful. To Lorena Martínez, David Glisch-Sánchez and Rachel Barrera for being real people. Mitsy, what a blessing to have had your insight during this process. To my Nnenna – best friend and sound board extraordinaire – you, my dear, are a treasure. The friends and family at *allgo* – Rose Pulliam, Priscilla Hale, Dr. T. Jackie Cuevas, Jen Margulies, Mary Gonzalez, J.J. Lara, Maricela Infante, Orlando Ramirez, Dino Foxx, Melissa Galvan and Martha Duffer – thank you for being my family, taking me in and treating me as your own. I am so touched and honored by your love and support! Surabhi, Paige and Nayan you have taken care of me with your love and long talks! To Stacy, aka Taytay, what would I have done without you? As my first friend in Austin you set the stage for my crazy experiences in this city, and have taken care of me in more ways than one. Finally, the biggest and probably most surprising acknowledgement goes to Kimberly Curette,

mi luz azúl. You have been here with me since day one without pause – loving and distracting me, taking care of me, leading me on adventures and feeding me in moments of crisis! The most critical education I have received in Austin has been from you – on love, spirituality and crawfish. You tha best!

December 2010

Abstract

Walking Contradictions:
Latina Lesbianas, Immigration and Citizenship

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The University of Texas at Austin, 2010

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In immigration and sexuality research there is new and emerging literature that understands the convergence of these two topics. However, scholarship primarily examining Latina lesbian immigrants is not as visible. This thesis examines the lives of Latina lesbian immigrants residing in Texas and California to understand greater meanings of immigration, sexuality and citizenship. Ten Latina lesbian immigrants participated in in-depth interviews, answering questions about growing up, sexuality, migration, citizenship and meanings of home.

The research questions asked the following: What affect does immigration have on the sexualities and sex lives of Latina lesbian immigrants? How does their age of migration impact their sexualities? How do these women define and conceptualize citizenship? How do immigration and sexuality converge in the lives and on the bodies of Latina lesbian immigrants? The interviews revealed that the age in which the women migrated and their resettlement in

urban areas contribute to their conceptualizations of a "sexually open" United States and a not-as-queer-friendly home country. Second, the women interviewed categorize citizenship in local and global ways. While some saw citizenship as part of every day practice, others found it to be connected with a sense of global community. Migration also developed a consciousness surrounding citizenship, as many of them were confronted with the concept upon migrating to the United States. Finally, immigration and sexuality unfolds in my participant's lives in contradictory and non-linear ways. While many of the women felt a connection to their local gay and lesbian communities in positive ways, their lives are met with adversities in other ways that are affected by their immigrant status – including inability to obtain a driver's license and obligations to become United State's citizens. The women also conceptualize *home* in fluid and unfixed ways. *Home* and the body collapse when discussing migration, citizenship and nation.

The research presented attempts to offer a conversation about the historical and current relationship between immigrants and LGBT people. It is also my objective to further conversations about multiple levels of oppression and how Latina lesbian immigrant women use their circumstances to gain a better awareness of themselves, and hopefully improve their rights and living conditions as human beings.

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INTRODUCTION

From Immigration to Sexuality: Exploring Narratives of Latina Lesbianas

This project examines the histories and journeys of Latina lesbian immigrants who reside in California or Texas. The objective is to give voice to their experiences in order to understand broader topics of sexuality, immigration and citizenship with these women's stories at the forefront. Inspired by Sharon Holland's words, "Its difficult loving a woman in a world that hates women," this study attempts to place these women's experiences at the center of our intellectual inquiry to understand what it means to be a woman-in-love-with another woman in contexts of inequalities brought about by immigrating to the United States.

I'm not sure that I knew much about graduate school when I applied, but I took interest as a senior in college when my professor marked on a paper of mine, "You should consider going to graduate school." I kept this in the back of my mind after graduating in 2000. Four years later I started to seriously consider going to graduate school. Many factors influenced that decision. At that time a friend of mine gave me a book that, after having read it, truly inspired me to pursue my academic interests. The book, *Erotic Journeys: Mexican Immigrants and their Sex Lives*, was written by University of Texas at Austin Professor of Sociology Gloria González-López. I enjoyed reading this book, not just because the topics intrigued me, but because it felt like something I could do too. It felt like a realistic goal to learn about the lives of other people, document them, and try to create some change from it.

During the four years between my undergraduate education and returning to graduate school I became very involved as a volunteer with different organizations. From 2000 until 2004 I became highly involved with the Los Angeles Gay and Lesbian Center, VDAY: To Stop the

Violence Against Women, and a few local domestic violence shelters. With Vote for Equality, a marriage equality campaign housed in the L.A. Gay and Lesbian Center, I helped build a supportive voter database by going door-to-door, to college campuses and locations with heavy pedestrian traffic to talk to people about this particular topic. Through this campaign I was exposed to and very much involved in this aspect of the gay rights movement. I remember when I started volunteering I wasn't so sure about getting involved in a campaign, but that was where the volunteer coordinator directed me when I walked into the L.A. Gay and Lesbian Center wanting to volunteer. The campaign proved to be something that changed my life because through all of the outreach I was doing I was also learning about peoples' lives and how anti-gay legislation affected them on a human level. As I went door to door knocking, asking and looking for support I quickly learned the connection between people and politics. They aren't that far apart. I was often met with discomfort and doors slamming in my face. Although these are vivid memories what I choose to keep with me as motivation are the many people I met who encouraged the work we were doing. At a conference I attended one woman stood up to express her current situation. Her partner had recently passed away, leaving their son for her to care for. She was afraid she might not be able to keep their son because he was not biologically hers. Other instances included families trying to buy homes together or obtain insurance for legal dependents. I was so moved by the reality of legal interjections in non-heterosexual people's lives. I thought to myself – this isn't my life now (buying a home and having children) but it will be in a matter of years. It moved me to work for something better – a life less difficult for me and my family in the future.

I also felt motivated to return to school after attending a workshop at the Los Angeles Gay and Lesbian Center in 2007. At a queer women of color conference, two lesbian activists

from Mexico City, Alejandra Novoa and Mariana Ocaña Pérez, led a workshop about the work they were doing in Mexico for lesbian rights. They had made transforming strides in creating lesbian visibility and fighting for rights as women, as lesbians, and as activists in Mexico, including the inception of a magazine for lesbians, *LeS VOZ*. They were rarely, if ever, paid for their work and they emphasized an exclusive lesbian community, not a homogenous gay and lesbian movement. This impressed me, and made me think about a few things.

First, these women's stories were not as visible as perhaps those of other social movements. As lesbian feminists they might already not gain recognition. Their premise was an understanding that they worked in a patriarchal culture; sexism and misogyny was part of their everyday lives[1]. Second, the perspectives and understandings of lesbian or bisexual women living and organizing in Mexico helped give me a better understanding of myself. I don't identify myself with much of the political correctness of being out, as portrayed by the mainstream gay and lesbian movement in the United States. These women seemed to pursue an opposite ethos. In particular, I remember one part in the documentary they showed when a woman specifically said that the annual Marcha Lésbica was not for politicians or allies. It was for women who identify as lesbians. I felt connected to this sort of exclusivity, helping me realize that I wasn't alone or crazy, really, in my understanding of the specificity of experiences of women who identify as lesbian. Their fearlessness in identifying and owning the term *lesbian* is a stark difference from the sexual fluidity and label-free sexuality I have witnessed in the United States. Finally, these women challenged popular ideas of privilege, class and sexuality, as we might understand them in the United States. Because they were activists working for free,

[1] This information is drawn from the actual program form the Tongue to Tongue Queer Women of Color Conference at the Gay and Lesbian Center, September 7-9th, 2007. Translated, the description reads that "LeS VOZ,A.C., is a non-profit organization that works for the human rights of women and lesbians who are abused for their sexual orientation in a *machista* and misogynist world."

the organizing and activism did not appear to be for recognition or a paycheck – the opposite based on my personal perception of some activism in the United States.

All of these experiences helped me develop a strong desire to support queer Latina women in academic contexts. I just wasn't sure how to frame my interests within the premise of research. Upon entering the University of Texas at Austin as a graduate student in Latin American Studies I began taking courses that I hoped would examine identity and socially based markers such as gender, sexuality, race, and class. However, a few things became very apparent. These courses rarely included critical discussion or dialogue surrounding queer sexuality, race was simply an addendum to most course packets and the two of them never seemed to converge. My desire to examine the experiences of queer women of Latin American origin for my Master's thesis project became obvious and necessary.

Initially the idea for this project was a comparative analysis of lesbian activists living in the United States and Mexico. The idea was to explore the identity formation and beliefs about privilege regarding their Chicana or Mexicana counterparts. This project proved bigger than what I could handle. In exploring Chicana feminist thought I came across literature that really challenged language associated with globalization and the nation-state. Through this literature my conceptualizations of terms such as border, citizenship, nation and home were challenged, became unfixed and demonstrated how they might operate differently for different people depending on their social locations. I placed this alongside the book that had motivated me to return to school, my experiences working with people on the marriage campaign and what I learned from the lesbian activists from Mexico. I placed this alongside research in the social sciences, which had privileged men and gay men in the recently emerging literature on Mexican immigration and sexualities. I placed this alongside Chicana research, which had examined

American-born experiences but not those who were born in Latin America. Where were the lesbian Latina immigrants? Until recently, they were practically invisible in the literature. It was through this body of knowledge that I began to realize the academic and physical placement of Latina immigrant women who identified as lesbian. Although there is new and emerging research being conducted about U.S. Latina lesbian women (Acosta, 2008; Lubhéid, 2002; Espín, 1999), they are still largely absent in many ways.

My research questions evolved throughout the research and fieldwork processes. This is a key component of grounded theory (which inspires this project and I discuss in depth in my Methods section). Initially the questions sought to understand changes in the sex lives of Latina lesbian immigrants after migrating to the United States. But because I struggled to identify informants who had migrated at an older age to this country (for example, as an adult), this changed my research questions. Most of the women I interviewed migrated early in life, for example, as children or as adolescents. Therefore, this project explores answers to the following research questions:

1. What affect does immigration have on the sexualities and sex lives of Latina lesbian immigrants? How does their age of migration impact their sexualities?

2. How do these women define and conceptualize citizenship?

3. How do immigration and sexuality converge in the lives and on the bodies of Latina lesbian immigrants?

This research is an attempt to become part of the ongoing research on Latina women, immigration, and sexuality. I hope these voices become part of this conversation, which never really ends. Like immigration, it is always ongoing and always in process. Some of these Latina women have their roots here, and they continue to live among people who do and don't resemble them.

METHODS

The methodological foundation of this research is based on the theoretical framework of grounded theory. Grounded Theory methods consist of systematic, yet flexible guidelines for collecting and analyzing qualitative data to construct theories 'grounded' in the data themselves. The guidelines offer a set of general principles and heuristic devices rather than formulaic rules (Charmaz 2006:2). Therefore, I concentrated on in-depth, in-person interviews. In this section I will explain the methods used to recruit and interview the participants for the research presented. I will also detail experiences and methods used outside of the interviews, which helped formulate my findings.

In grounded theory, Kathy Charmaz (2006) advises the researcher to "let your research problem shape the methods you choose" (15). I specifically wanted to learn about personal experiences regarding sexuality and immigration, focusing on lived experiences, traumas, celebrations, violations and joy. The most accurate way for me to attain this information was through in-depth interviews. Upon approval by the Institutional Review Board at the University of Texas at Austin (June 10th, 2009), I conducted individual in-depth interviews with eight women in California, specifically in San Francisco and Los Angeles. These interviews took place during the Summer 2009 semester. I also interviewed two women in Austin, TX during the Spring 2010 semester. The interviews were digitally audio recorded, conducted primarily in English (with some occasionally clarifications made in Spanish) and generally lasted about 2 hours. They were conducted in locations most comfortable for my interviewees. They ranged from popular coffee shops to family kitchens. The decision on where to meet was based upon

the availability and comfort of the participants. This was also to ensure privacy and safety of the women and their responses. Based on the IRB protocol, all participants signed permission forms and were briefed regarding the nature and use of their answers. All of the women were born in Latin America and resided in the state of California or Texas at the time of interview. Six women were from Mexico, two were from Cuba, one from Honduras and one from Puerto Rico. They had all migrated to the United States at very young ages, from 6 months to 16 years young with the exception of two women who migrated later in life, at ages 29 and 34. Every woman interviewed identified as gay, lesbian or queer and have been involved or were currently involved in romantic relationships with other women. Only a few participants were in relationships at the time of our interviews, and all either had paid employment or were full-time college students. Table 1 shows demographics of my sample, including name, country of origin, age, age of migration and occupation. In this thesis, I use pseudonyms to protect the identity of my informants. The women I interviewed used "lesbian," "queer," and "gay" as synonymous, therefore, I use these concepts interchangeably in this thesis[2].

Participants were recruited in a variety of ways. To begin, I sent out a call for participants to a number of friends and listservs. I also contacted the Los Angeles Gay and Lesbian Center and Bienestar, two community-based organizations serving gay and lesbian communities in greater Los Angeles. Soon I learned, however, that the snowball method was a more effective method to identify interviewees. One participant, who I knew personally, introduced me to a few other interested women. These few women knew other women through

[2] Concepts such as "lesbian" and "queer" may have different meanings in some academic and activist circles advocating for gay and lesbian rights in this country. For some women in romantic and/or sexual relationships with other women, these concepts are not always synonymous. For example, some women may use "lesbian" to identify relationships between two women, while other women may use "queer" refer to a woman who engages in relationships with both women and men.

their social networks and after interviewing them I was trusted with personal information in contacting other potential interviewees. I attempted to recruit participants at social spaces for Latina lesbians, including but not limited to night clubs. This became problematic for several reasons. This kind of atmosphere wasn't always conducive for academic interests. I did, however, meet one participant at a Los Angeles Pride function, which was marketed for lesbian social activity.

Interview questions were grouped into six categories: demographic, background of education in sexuality, beginnings of sexual behavior, current circumstances, citizenship and concluding questions. I attempted, while inspired by grounded theory fashion, to develop open-ended questions with room for elaboration. I often asked for clarification when necessary and encouraged the participants to speak for as little or as much as they wanted to. My intention was to gather a deep understanding of my participants with regard to their self-perceptions as immigrants, women, and members of a socially marginalized and stigmatized group. I also sought to understand any social tensions they may have encountered with U.S.-born Latinas. Although the option to speak in Spanish was available, all participants chose to participate in the interviews speaking English. Spanish was used intermittently when introduced by my participants. Two participants used Spanish more than English.

The Field

My fieldwork began in the Los Angeles area during the Summer of 2009. I chose this area for a number of reasons. First, Southern California is highly concentrated with Latin American immigrant populations. In 2008 Los Angeles County reported the largest number of

immigrants of any county in the United States, with 37.3 percent of Mexican immigrants residing in the state[3]. This geographic location, along with other states in the Southwest, made for a logical choice in conducting fieldwork there. I had also recently moved from Los Angeles (to Austin) so as a California resident I played witness to the highly active immigrant populations. In my last year living in Los Angeles, 2008, I worked for the American Civil Liberties Union, an organization that came under attack multiple times during my time there, for supporting legal rights for immigrants. Because the organization was committed to this activism I was able to see how communities organized and responded to the mistreatment of immigrants. Los Angeles has a large and very active immigrant population, as well as an active population of immigrants who identify as gay, lesbian, transgender or bisexual. Finally, Los Angeles is a prime city to conduct research while trying to understand the greater landscape of U.S. politics.

The summer of 2009 I had also been accepted to the San Francisco State University National Sexuality Resource Center's Summer Institute. This was to be a four-week intensive in coursework addressing race, sexuality and gender. This provided access to gay and lesbian historical archives, other sexuality scholars and networks with fellow graduate students, all of which were priceless. One of our guest lecturers was Hector Carrillo, an esteemed sexualities studies scholar whose research examines gay Mexican immigrant men and HIV infection rates. The atmosphere was rich for learning about sexuality research and conducting interviews. Therefore, I decided to expand my reach to include not only Southern California but Northern California as well. During the four weeks I was able to connect with several women who were interested in interviewing, including a few who were able to introduce me to other potential participants and LGBT Latino functions in San Francisco.

[3]These statistics were obtained from www.migrationpopulation.org.

The fieldwork went beyond interviewing women and researching databases. I was fortunate to attend several functions that helped my understanding of the visibility or invisibility of Latina lesbian immigrants. Just before returning to Austin I attended a weekend LGBT equality training titled Camp Courage in East Los Angeles. Camp Courage is run and organized by the Courage Campaign, and its mission is to train organizers in California to sustain marriage equality. A stark criticism of the "No On 8" Campaign was that it neglected to reach immigrant and Latina/o populations. There have been several weekends of Camp Courage, but the one held in East Los Angeles specifically sought to include the Spanish-speaking population. East L.A. is historically a predominantly Latina/o area of Los Angeles. At this function I met activists and artists who focused on rethinking what it means to be LGBT. Their work is dedicated to the inclusion and validation of gay and lesbian immigrants by challenging how the dominant LGBT community functions in exclusionary ways. Other more obvious events that I participated in included several Pride functions and artistic performances.

I spent a total of four weeks in San Francisco and four weeks in Los Angeles and was able to obtain 8 interviews. I decided to expand my reach to include Latina lesbians living in the Central Texas area with the idea in mind to conduct interviews while in my final year of graduate school. Geographic location had not been a key element of the interview schedule (although resettlement in an urban location did), nor had it seemed to play relevance with the research questions. Therefore, I found it appropriate, and a choice that would not compromise the previous interviews, to expand the research. I had been organically exposed to different Latina/o groups because of my involvement in activist organizations such as *allgo*: a statewide queer people of color organization located in Austin. Through different work opportunities and activist functions I began to take notice of where immigration and sexuality were coming together in real

time. I would attend rallies or art shows and be introduced to women who were lesbian and immigrant. Immigration reform protests tended to include a queer contingent and pro-LGBT rallies were finally including discussions on immigration. It felt only natural to attempt to speak to more women living in Central Texas. Because of school and work responsibilities, I could not devote my time entirely to this fieldwork. Therefore, I only conducted two interviews in Austin while simultaneously participating in community activism and organizing.

A final piece of the fieldwork was and continues to be participation in the arts. There have been several women of color and queer women of color installations, performances and creative writing that have helped me grow intellectually. These spaces have included the performances of Latina women who have challenged and redefined some of the terms I am exploring and attempting to work through in this project. For example, Virginia Grise challenges meanings of Latina and Chicana in her performance of *The Panza Monologues*. Adelina Anthony gives us painfully honest accounts of struggles and celebrations experienced by Chicanas. Other artists include Nicole López, Las Krudas, women involved in The Austin Project, as well as artists at the Mexican American Cultural Center and Mexicarte, Loose Lips open mic nights, just to name a few.

I consider these performance and artistic spaces as part of my fieldwork in researching sexuality and immigration. I have learned that art and activism influence communities of U.S. Latina lesbians. Some of the women I just mentioned are Latina lesbian immigrants, who are also performers. Las Krudas, for example, are a Cuban-born hip-hop group comprised of two lesbians, currently located in Austin, TX. They have been performing together for over ten years and, their lyrics speak to the experiences of migration, capitalism and racism as they have experienced it as immigrants. At a Loose Lips open mic one evening I remember hearing a

young gay Mexican man read poetry about his difficulties and celebrations of being a gay immigrant. Finally, in Virginia Grise's performance of *International Panza*, one of the monologues in *The Panza Monologues*, she complicates meanings of her own Chicana identity by telling a story of her travels to Cuba. She explores how concepts, terminologies and identities change and form through border-crossings.

All of the aforementioned experiences have influenced the development of my own understandings of citizenship, nation, sexuality, gender and immigration. Several of the women I interviewed for this project were involved in the arts and developed their own creative expressions of their experiences through dance, music and visual arts.

Data Analysis

I used the method of in-depth interviewing because intensive interviewing permits an in-depth exploration of a particular topic or experience (Charmaz 2006:25). Immediately after each interview I took notes on my first impressions and answers that stood out to me the most. I transcribed each interview into word documents, keeping each interview separate. With each interview I began to realize some common patterns. For example, the majority of women migrated at young ages and they chose to speak to me in English. Women who migrated later in life spoke more in Spanish during the interview. Another pattern included the silence surrounding sexuality in that all but one of the women were discouraged from expressing or experiencing sex or sexuality. Their discouragement came from their parents, family members and members of their immigrant communities.

The data analysis took many forms. After transcribing the interviews I was able to code them by analyzing the different threads and similarities that were realized. By coding, I refer to

initial, shorthand defining and labeling of common patterns throughout the texts (Charmaz, 2006: 47). Categorization was useful as it allowed me to find abstract themes and common patterns (186). I used a Word document to outline the common themes emerging through women's life stories. In this sense I kept the stories categorized by topic on a Word document. I used a pen and notebook to further outline the different highlights of each interview. On paper, I wrote each woman's name and important contributions given by each. In this sense, I categorized the stories of each individual participant in a notebook. In Grounded Theory, this can be referred to as *memo writing.* Memos are preliminary analytic notes about codes and comparisons within the data. Therefore, the memo writing allows for studying and comparing codes to define ideas that best fit and interpret the data as tentative analytic categories (Charmaz 2006: 3).

Methodological Considerations and Limitations

There are some important considerations and limitations to respond to. To begin, I only interviewed ten women who identified as Latinas, lesbians and immigrants. Some of the women used gay or queer interchangeably throughout their interviews. None of them identified as straight, bisexual, "bicurious" or sexually fluid. Although some of the women used terms other than lesbian during their interviews, it is important to note that they were not, at the time, involved romantically with men. Their sexual and romantic histories play importance in their current states of identifying themselves sexually.

One of my interviewees was in the process of separating from her husband at the time of our interview. She had been married to him for fifteen years, and towards the end of their relationship she became involved in sexual relationships with women. At the time of her interview she was involved romantically with another woman. At least four of the women I

interviewed experienced some sort of sexual interaction with a male-identified person much earlier in their lives, and one woman mentioned having sexual fantasies involving men. Despite these experiences and fantasies at the time that I interviewed all of the women, they confidently considered themselves to be women who are romantically involved with only other women. Lisa Diamond (2008) discusses this sort of sexual fluidity and notes "this flexibility makes it possible for some women to experience desires for either men or women under certain circumstances, regardless of their overall sexual orientation" (3). In knowing and learning of this flexibility I feel it is important and, rather exciting, to have interviewed women who all identified as lesbians. I think about Cheryl Clarke's (1981) essay in *This Bridge Called My Back* entitled "Lesbianism: an Act of Resistance" in which she states "For a woman to be a lesbian in a male-supremacist, capitalist, misogynist, racist, homophobic, imperialist culture, such as that of North America, is an act of resistance" (128). This resonates with my own identification, building a sense of pride in these women who are not afraid to call themselves lesbians. I appreciate this while considering Diamond's assessment that "The well-being of all women will be improved through a more accurate, comprehensive understanding of female sexuality in all its diverse and fluid manifestations" (16).

Second, this is a small sampling and cannot be read as representative of an entire group. Rather, the information acquired here attempts to honor and recognize the complex life experiences of the women I interviewed. Looking in depth at their life experiences challenges our own assumptions and generalizations about categories assigned to the people (e,g., women, immigrants, lesbians, etc.) I interviewed, and those of the terminologies such as citizenship and migration. The number of interviews were limited for a number of reasons. Firstly, the interviews discussed sensitive topics, which might have turned some away from responding to a

call for participants. And secondly, the total amount of time spent in California was 8 weeks, and as a full time student prioritizing fieldwork in Texas proved to be challenging.

Another consideration is that these women are from different countries in Latin America. Conclusions or arguments about these informants as a group could not be made because of the cultural and historical diversity of their countries of origin. Finding and interviewing a cohesive group of women from one country, or even one city, would have proved to be a valuable project. It was, however, beyond the scope of this research and my capabilities. I hope, however, their testimonies help us to recognize the overdue relevance of these discussions, both public and private, of the convergences of sexuality and immigration.

BACKGROUND AND RELEVANCE

Research that looks at the relationship between Latin American immigration to the United States and sexuality has flourished within the last decade. Sexuality is a fairly new framework of analysis in looking at immigrants and their experiences. I begin this section with literature review by some researchers in the area of sexuality and immigration. Because my participants are all from Latin America I focused predominantly on researchers who focus on this demographic as well. And because of my interest in specific aspects of sexuality and immigration, I will examine the literature that studies the following: Sexuality and Mexican immigration; age, migration, and growing up in the United States; and studies on citizenship. I must also add that I found a particularly natural pairing of scholars that primarily informed much of the theoretical groundings for this thesis: Gloria Anzaldúa and Sara Ahmed. As queer women of color scholars I found their writings to inform each other and in ways that deeply inspired and guided this thesis.

Sexuality and Immigration: Selected Works

Migration is one journey amongst a number of journeys that involve the crossing of borders (Ahmed, 2000). The women who participated in this project can be understood to have participated in a "geographical move … across national borders for the purpose of residing more or less permanently" in the United States (Espín, 1999:16). When I discuss sexuality I refer primarily to one dimension of their sex lives, in this case, I refer to their sexual orientations, that is, their erotic and romantic desires for other women, and the social and cultural aspects of their lives associated with and produced by their sexualities within complex contexts of immigration to and settlement in this country. I hope this project helps us expand our understanding of sexuality and the multiple organizations of desire in daily life (De la Dehesa 2010: xv). Significant research has been conducted to examine this very intricate intersection of immigration and sexuality.

First, *Erotic Journeys: Mexican Immigrants and their Sex Lives* Gloria González-López (2005) searches to understand the complex lives of heterosexual Mexican immigrant men and women and the changes in the dynamics of their sexual lives. In her work she addresses the many dimensions that affect the decisions in her participants' sex lives. Based on 60 interviews with these women and men, González-López informs her readers of the complexities within the intersections of immigration, sexuality and gender, as experienced through heterosexuality. She discovered the following social processes shaping the sex lives of the Mexican immigrant women and men she interviewed: First, virginity has been socially constructed by gender and family dynamics as a means of social exchange value. A process she identifies as *capital femenino.* Second, family is the primary institution that creates, organizes and controls Mexican

women's femininities and gender role expectations. Third, Mexican immigrants' sex lives were highly influenced by the migratory and settlement experiences. These included (but were not limited to) the following: (a) women's and men's exposure to a changing culture of fear influenced by new information about HIV/AIDS, crime, and child abuse; (b) women's relationships with other women as they exchanged sexual stories and information through social networks within their communities; (c) women's opportunities to become employed full-time upon immigrating to the United States, and the ways in which these shaped their sex lives. Some women reported an enhanced sexual autonomy within their romantic relationships due to their financial autonomy. And finally, with changing socio-economic and cultural dynamics, parents were prompted to teach their children about sex and sexuality in very different ways (and apparently open and progressive) when compared to their own experiences in Mexico. Teaching their children about sex became an opportunity to create a revised view of their own teachings of sex while growing up in their places of origin before migrating.

Second, I draw upon the work of Lionel Cantú (2009) and his research in *The Sexuality of Migration: Border Crossings and Mexican Immigrant Men.* Cantú's work focuses on the lives of queer Mexican immigrant men. He explains the value of this work by expressing that "viewing the immigrant experiences from the standpoint of the gay immigrant raises critical questions regarding sexual identity formation in a transcultural setting and the linkages among human sexuality, state institutions, and global economic processes" (23). Cantú found that gay Mexican men migrated for reasons concerning discrimination, economic marginalization and transnational gay social relations.

Third, Eithne Luibheid (2002) looks at Mexican immigration and sexuality as it pertains to women. She notes that documented cases involving allegations of immigrants at the United

States-Mexico border primarily involve men, and that discourses about women are largely absent. She looks at immigration exclusion centered specifically on female experiences. She argues that, "the immigration apparatus has been a major site for the construction and regulation of immigrant women's sexual identities" (xxvii). In her chapter titled *Looking Like a Lesbian* in her book *Entry Denied: Controlling Sexuality at the Border*, she finds that "Since 1990 lesbians and gay men have no longer been automatically debarred from emigrating to the United States," but that "lesbians and gay men are still likely to be excluded for lacking good moral character" (99).

From a psychological approach, Olivia Espín (1999) seeks to understand the transformations of gender roles and sexuality experienced by women from different countries as a consequence of migration. In *Women crossing boundaries: a psychology of women and transformations of sexuality*, Espín describes and analyzes women's experiences of migrating to the United States. Through in-depth interviewing, she documents the stories of immigrant women, the joys and trials of this journey. Her final chapter focuses on lesbian immigrants and she argues that, "some of the women experienced more sexual agency as a result of migrating because of the availability of information regarding sex in the U.S. [sic]."

Finally, in "Lesbianas in the borderlands: shifting identities and imagined communities" Katie Acosta (2008) reflects upon her research with Latina lesbian immigrants. She interviewed 15 women who identify as such regarding family and community, through the theoretical framework of the writings of Gloria Anzaldúa. Her argument is twofold. First, she contends that despite the many adversities faced in the many borderlands in which Latina lesbian immigrants reside, mestiza consciousness is still developed. Second, the women interviewed create spaces, or imagined communities, with other women outside of their immediate families. She refers to

this specifically as a borderland space. Outside of this borderland space these lesbian women are in hiding about their sexuality. They create their communities in order to express the "shadow beast" or lesbian self.

Growing up as a Latina woman in the United States:

Thorne et. al. (1999) focus on children and migration in *Raising Children, and Growing Up, across National Borders.* They attempt to incorporate children into the dialogue of migration as a central focus rather than a "luggage like conceptual space" (242). Among other populations they examine Latina and Latino children immigrants living in California. They argue that the decision made by parents to bring children to the United States is contingent upon available resources, and that "more boys than girls make journeys north unaccompanied by parents, both because boys are more likely to claim and be granted autonomy of movement and because girls are perceived as more vulnerable to dangers en route" (248). As migrant children grow up in the United States, decisions made by parents regarding children staying in this country or "returning" are notably gendered. Because "girls help with housework and sibling care" (250) they may be left with family members in order to care for younger children or ailing elders. The researchers also contend that education plays a significant role in decisions to immigrate with parents desiring an opportunity for long-term education for their children.

Specifically speaking to her experience as a Chicana born and raised in the U.S. Southwest, Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) outlines the racial histories located in the physical borderlands of the United States-Mexico border in her influential book *Borderlands/La Frontera*. Through a spiritual aesthetic she weaves her own personal narrative of being a working-class

Chicana lesbian and the multiple levels of oppression and experience met while living in and deciphering this "vague and undetermined place" (25).

In her book Borderlands/La Frontera, Anzaldúa offers the reader a candid portrayal of her childhood experiences while growing up in a region of the United States with painful historical, political and economic tensions. As a child of Mexican origin, she witnessed land dispossession within her Chicano community, noting, "I saw the end of dryland farming. I witnessed the land cleared…big land corporations came in and bought up the remaining land" (31). Additionally she reflects upon the experiences of children as they are affected by capitalist and neo-liberal policies in that, "While women are in the *maquiladoras*, the children are left on their own" (32). A mother's decision within the context of survival can lead to the detriment of these young children, as well as complex dynamics shaping their lives as Mexican or Chicano. Anzaldúa's experience as a Latina growing up in this country reflects the racialization of the United States-Mexico borderlands as well as the gendered implications of Latinas growing up here. Her story also marks the contradictions, complications and multiple levels of identify-formation. She grew up "totally immersed" (43) in her Chicana cultural roots, yet expresses the difficulties of *la mestiza* as she "learns to be an Indian in Mexican culture, to be Mexican from an Anglo point of view. She learns to juggle cultures. She has a plural personality" (101).

Compañeras: Latina Lesbianas (1987) is an anthology of oral histories, art works and personal narratives of Latina lesbians living in New York. Some of the stories include those of women who came of age in the United States after emigrating from Latin America. Juanita Ramos, the editor of the anthology, begins her entry with her memories of moving to New York from Puerto Rico. Her childhood was filled with a constant reinforcement of the "American Dream" which pushed immigrant families like hers to assimilate. Part of this assimilation was

imbedded in her Catholic school system, a reflection of the United State's colonization on the island where classrooms are taught in the English language. She found that the more she attempted to retain her identity as a Puerto Rican woman (for example, by speaking Spanish) the more difficult it was for her growing up. In discussing this she reflects, "the process of reaffirming my Puerto Rican heritage was a very painful one. The price for defining myself either way seemed high, and there were things about both cultures I liked…Slowly I began to realize that the "American Dream" was more like a nightmare for Blacks and Puerto Ricans" (91).

In *This Bridge Called my Back*, Cherríe Moraga (1981) shares with the reader her experiences growing up as a mixed race Chicana. Similar to *Compañeras*, *This Bridge Called my Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* is an anthology of art works and histories of women of color. Moraga's entry, *La Güera*, guides us through her many stages of growing up as a light-skinned Latina. As a child she understood the benefit of her white skin, but as she grew up she recognized her own internalized racism and classism. This had been influenced by the Anglo culture and her cooperation with it, in that "White was right. Period. I could pass. If I got educated there would never be any telling" (31). Like many Latinas growing up in the United States, Moraga confronts her complicit behavior in oppression while recognizing that she is also one of the oppressed. In her emotional confrontation she recognizes that "I feel angry about this – the years when I refused to recognize privilege, both when it worked against me, and when I worked it, ignorantly, at the expense of others" (34). Moraga's personal history demonstrates the inner challenges many Latinas face while growing up in a society that simultaneously accepts, rejects, celebrates and negates their cultural histories.

Finally, Aída Hurtado (2003) examines the relationship between young Chicanas and Chicana feminisms. She interviewed one hundred and one young Chicanas across the United States about a range of topics including family, growing up, feminism and sexuality. Hurtado draws several conclusions from this research. Among other things, she found that the women she interviewed coped with many social realities which forced them to contend with their social positions as young Chicanas, elevating their consciousness (274). In their homes growing up, many of them were forced to deal with patriarchy within their families, something they recognized later in life and eventually disrupted. By developing their own ideas of feminism some were able to negotiate a distance between their family patriarchies that allowed for them to continue relationships yet remain in control of their own agency (300). Finally, many of Hurtado's participants found themselves negotiating beauty in juxtaposition to the white hegemonic standards of beauty. As young girls they learned that beauty was not in the form of being a Latina or Chicana. Therefore they were confronted early on with developing their own standards of beauty. This, in turn, affected their romantic relationships with men, desiring gender-specific treatment (283).

Citizenship and sexuality:

When discussing citizenship, no one definition can suffice. It is a term that is constantly evolving and developing new meaning. While understanding that meanings of citizenship are never contained, for purposes of this thesis I would like to think of citizenship as the state of being a citizen, that is, the state that is produced by a subject who moves through space and across national, political borders (Ahmed, 2000: 85), and the legal rights and responsibilities of

one who lives within these national borders. It is also important to keep in mind that citizenship is defined through and across difference (Alexander, M.J. & Mohatny, C.T., 1997: xxxi).

While citizenship is a legally fixed term it is unfixed and in motion. Citizenship is legally constructed yet socially lived in different conditions. Nicholas de Genova (2002) argues that "'illegality' (much like citizenship) is a juridical status that entails a social relation to the state."] He goes on to say that

> Illegality," then, both theoretically and practically, is a social relation that is fundamentally inseparable from citizenship…The law defines the parameters of its own operations, engendering the conditions of possibility for "legal" as well as "illegal" practices. "Illegalities" are constituted and regimented by the law—directly, explicitly, in a manner that presumes to be more or less definitive (albeit not without manifold ambiguities and indeterminacies, always manipulable in practice) and with a considerable degree of calculated deliberation.

But citizenship needs to be discussed on terms that are irrelevant to legalities. Renato Rosaldo (1997) discusses the term *cultural citizenship* and claims that, "analysts need to anchor their studies in the aspirations and perceptions of people who occupy subordinate social positions" (38). *Cultural citizenship* names a range of social practices which, taken together, claim and establish a distinct social space for Latinos in this country. Latino social spaces are evolving and developing new forms, many of them contributing to an emergent Latino consciousness and social and political development (Flores et. al. 1997). Therefore, citizenship can refer to thoughts, behaviors, beliefs and lived experiences. In *Sexual Citizens: The Legal*

and Cultural Regulation of Sex and Belonging, Brenda Cossman (2007) uses a framework of citizenship that invokes a set of rights and practices denoting membership as well as cultural practices and representations. She also views citizenship as invoking ways that different subjects are constituted as members of a polity, the ways they are, or are not granted rights, responsibilities, and representations within that polity. This is representative of the discourses and practices of inclusion and exclusion, of belonging and otherness and the many shades in between.

A deeper analysis is necessary when discussing citizenship and sexuality. Because gay and lesbian persons have been historically been denied rights and responsibilities as afforded through citizenship this posits them at a location of tension. Cossman furthers her discussion of citizenship and sexuality by stating that gay and lesbian subjects "have begun to cross the borders of citizenship, unevenly acquiring some of its rights and responsibilities and performing some of its practices…reconstituting the terms and subjects of citizenship as well as the borders themselves." In defining sexual citizenship Bell and Binnie (2000) state that citizenship discourse must be recognized as heterosexualized, and that part of the task of the sexual citizen must be to challenge that – so, while we are all sexual citizens, in that citizenship is a particularly contextualized enunciation of identity which must take into account of sexual identity. Furthermore different forms of sexual identity mark claims to citizenship differently. The needs of one sexual minority group will be different than another one's. Tomi Castle (2008) argues that claims for citizenship may go well beyond claims for rights or legal recognition of citizenship status, and may simultaneously be elaborated with little to no reference to the obligations of the nation-state in granting or denying citizenships claims. She further notes that citizenship claims are about full, participatory inclusion in public life and not simply about

access to specific rights. Furthermore in contradistinction to analyses that focus almost exclusively on the obligations of the nation-state in granting and recognizing citizenship claims, that social actors who demand full citizenship may concomitantly place demands on themselves to become what constitutes in their view, "ideal citizens," thereby neutralizing, at least in theory, the possibility of exclusion.

Finally, in reconfiguring ways in which to understand the body in relation to home and migration, I look to the works of Sara Ahmed. This is also useful in ways of understanding what embodiment means. She discusses how the process of migration is felt at the level of embodiment – one way in particular is through skin. In *Strange Encounters* she claims that, "the experiences of migration – of not being in a place one lived as home – are felt at the level of embodiment, the lived experience of inhabiting a particular space, a space that is neither within nor outside bodily space" (92). For Ahmed, this manifests on the immigrant's skin, claiming that "Migration stories are *skin memories*: different sensations that are felt on the skin" (92). Through this movement and memory an immigrant body reclaims and re-inhabits *home*. As I elaborate later Rosa, a Mexican-born woman, discussed feeling Mexico on her skin. She felt these certain skin sensations, perhaps unexplainable, in different places in East Los Angeles in which she *felt* Mexico.

This thesis is structured in the following way. The first chapter examines the background information regarding my participants. I also discuss their demographics, particularly paying close attention to the age in which they migrated. I also look at their responses regarding sexual education and note the similarities around silence and sexuality. I look further into this analysis to understand better how the age in which they migrated and sexual education growing up affected their lives as lesbians.

The second chapter discusses women's interpretations of "citizenship" at a time when immigration reform is a highly contested and visible issue. I seek to examine citizenship from the perspectives of women who are affected by it in different ways. I ask how their perspectives of citizenship have changed throughout their migration experiences and question how this is also affected by being lesbian, an orientation often rhetorically referred to as second-class citizenship. I also discuss how migrating to the United States developed a citizenship consciousness within the women, because as immigrants they find themselves in a social terrain of navigating the U.S. system.

The third chapter focuses on the relationship between immigration and sexuality as experienced by the women who were interviewed. Their experiences reveal a sense of safety and openness in the United States in terms of their sexuality. However, this is met with many contradicting forces as they face adversities in other areas of their lives. The women also combine immigration and sexuality when discussing feelings of home. Their sexualities are often referred to when discussing what feels like home. Although they do discuss geographic location to express home, they move beyond this to discuss it in terms of the body, i.e. their sexuality.

And finally, the conclusion summarizes the findings of this project outlined in the three chapters. I suggest ways in which this research can be expanded, as well as its relevance in the current political climate. Current legislation and social movements involving immigrants and gays and lesbians reflect the timeliness of this kind of research. In the last part of this thesis I will talk about the examination of the Latina performers and politics, as it relates to my informants.

My Personal Journey

I have a contradictory relationship with higher education. I feel so strongly about having an education, but the classroom hasn't always been the most welcoming. My undergraduate experience was met with racism, classism and homophobia. I thought The University of Texas at Austin would be different than the small liberal arts college I attended. In some ways, it has been different. There are resources for LGBT students and students of color. There is not a religious affiliation therefore sex and sexuality can be discussed without fear of repercussion (as was the case at my previous university). However, I've realized that the higher you go in education the fewer people of color there are. Being queer has also been met with challenges, when so many of my classroom experiences have been from heterosexual points of view and "queering" the conversation becomes exhausting and receives raised eyebrows. This is often a very isolating experience, and quite frankly, has made me feel like I'm crazy. I want to believe that education is a place for me - and that it is a place for everybody – and that I have just as much right to be here as any other person. That is why I am incredibly indebted to and grateful for the women, queer folks, people of color and allies who are part of academic institutions and my local community, who have stood by me and reminded me that I am not crazy. In the words of Gloria Steinem "We are not crazy, it is the system that's crazy."

Despite some of the difficulties I may have faced in the academy, I have experienced a tremendous amount of self-reflection. Throughout this project I have realized how connected I feel and am to the lives and experiences of the women I interviewed. Having these conversations, relating them to a greater understanding of the world and thinking about my own life in the process has been rewarding and an incredible moment of growth. The process of

writing and completing a Master's thesis is not an easy one and cannot be taken lightly. It has been agonizing, fruitful, knowledge-filled and well, fun. This has definitely been an experience. I feel more developed as a potential scholar and individual thinker. I have been able to unlock and feel connected to the histories and stories of my queer Chicana predecessors – narratives that I never knew existed until I came to graduate school. What a joyful experience to learn of this world of fierce mujeres speaking their truths and the truths of others. What a soul-excavating journey to turn page upon page of writers, thinkers, scholars, activists and artists who came so long before me but whose words resonate so clearly with my being. To be part of this lineage, and to understand this has been and *is* an honor and a blessing.

In relation to the women who participated in this research, it has been a privilege to be the recipient of such honest accounts. We laughed, we cried, we were shocked and we shared. In doing some personal reflections these interviews have shifted my emotions towards certain things. This process opened a more forgiving heart towards my father, a Mexican immigrant, whose behavior for a long time seemed irrational and unnecessary. I would never say that he is or isn't a certain way because he is an immigrant, but I can try to empathize with the levels of stress, solitude and racism he probably experienced while I was growing up. In terms of sexuality, I have broadened my understanding of myself to recognize that aside from all the labels I ascribe to, I am also just a human being. As trite as that may sound I don't think I understood this before interviewing these women. As one of my participants stated, "I am a lesbian, yes, but I also do many other things," and she proceeded to show me her artwork and remodeling projects around her house. Its not that I felt so tied into my identification as lesbian or queer, but I think that I forgot that these terms are meant to help give meaning to our lives, not hinder or confuse them. As they play great importance they are also meaningless during an

exchange of human compassion – perhaps a contradiction of my own that I discovered through this process.

I hope that the stories documented here will have the same effect on the reader. I hope these women's voices help us understanding the complexity of concepts and experiences we may take for granted. These women never considered themselves to be extraordinary, but simply living their lives as they know how. As Omi Osun Joni Jones once told me, "it's just the *is* of it," meaning that is just how things are, it is only one part of the whole. However it is my hope that the honesty, transparency and humanity associated with these stories will encourage the reader to think critically and to always keep these women in mind in conversations, classrooms, and discussions about issues surrounding immigration and sexuality. I encourage the reader to examine these stories as a means of challenging one's own conceptualizations of what it means to be a woman, a lesbian, an immigrant, and a Latina. Furthermore it is my hope that their stories will encourage a much-needed compassion during the current political climate of xenophobia, homophobia and racism, which are so closely associated with ideologies of immigration, citizenship and sexuality. May the following words and reflections add human compassion to the political, personal and community discussions surrounding these often-divisive topics.

CHAPTER ONE

Window of Opportunity: Age of Migration and Sexual Expression

> At home you couldn't mention anything. There were so many you just – you just couldn't talk about it. That was taboo to talk about it. Anything to do with sex, we're not allowed to talk about it. The only time you could have sex was with your husband.
> -Juanita, 32 born in México

> In public secrecy, one is neither completely hidden nor, short of catastrophe, completely exposed, but always, it would seem, on the cusp of the two: concealed within what is revealed, and revealed within what is concealed; installed in a liminal space of magical transformations and creative spectacle but also of terror, madness and paranoia."
> –Roger Lancaster, "Tolerance and Intolerance in Sexual Cultures in Latin America" in *Passing Lines: Sexuality and Immigration*

Norma emigrated from San Pedro Sula, Honduras when she was 14. She migrated with her family to Mexico City then to Tijuana where she crossed without documents into California. She lived with her father and her sister in Honduras, but her mother already lived in the United States. Their mother arranged for Norma and her sister to travel and be reunited with her in 1988. Upon arriving and living with her mother Norma eventually had to leave her home due to her mother's drinking problems, which made for an unstable living condition. Norma eventually moved in with her aunt, her mother's sister, at the age of 17. Then, the unexpected happened. Norma entered into an eight-year romantic relationship with her maternal aunt. Norma did not

specify her aunt's age, only noting that she was older. Norma knew from an early age that she was a lesbian but wasn't sure how to confront this in rural Honduras. And as with many immigrants, seemingly there were other priorities than exploring her sexuality, such as alcoholism within her family, learning the English language and obtaining legal documentation.

I outline Norma's story to understand some of the intricacies revealed in the interviews. This situation is affected by Norma's understanding of sexuality, the age in which she migrated, the city she migrated to and her status as an immigrant woman. As I later reveal, Norma did not have access to a gay and lesbian community in Honduras, which impacted her own understanding of herself as a lesbian. She moved to the United States at the age of 14, an age in which she might naturally explore her sexuality, and her first sexual experience with a woman was immediately informed by the family networks associated with many newly arriving immigrants.

In this chapter I will outline the sexual backgrounds of my participants as it relates to the age in which they immigrated. Eight out of the ten women immigrated to the United States before the age of 18 and to urban areas, which, through the interview process proved to be critical components in how they eventually came to understand their sexualities.

This chapter is divided into two parts. First, I will discuss their backgrounds as immigrant women and lesbians. This will include their family backgrounds, how they learned about sexuality growing up, and their age at migration. Second, I discuss how their age of migration and settlement in urban areas shaped their sexuality. I find that because they immigrated to the United States at young ages there was a window of opportunity for the women to be exposed to queer sexuality – which was informed by their settlement in urban areas. This significantly impacted their first sexual experiences with women. It is my aim in this beginning

chapter to develop a picture of the women interviewed in terms of sexual histories and backgrounds. As the preface in *Compañeras: Latina Lesbianas* indicates, I similarly "seek to contribute to on-going discussions about what it means to be both Latina and lesbian" and "further the dialogue about what we choose to do with the knowledge of who we are (1987: xiii)."

Backgrounds

As I stated earlier eight out of the ten women interviewed immigrated to the United States at very young ages with the oldest immigrating at 18 years and the youngest at a mere one year. Women who immigrated at such young ages provide interesting and insightful perspectives on migration. Many of them vividly remember "illegally crossing" into the United States, while a few others depend on oral histories, handed down by older family members, to recant this journey. In this first section I would like to shed light on an overwhelmingly similar response the women gave when discussing educational backgrounds in sexuality, particularly focusing on the eight women who migrated at early ages.

When asked what their home environments were like growing up in terms of sexuality, all but one participant stated that sex was never discussed at home. In fact, the majority of my interviewees were strictly advised against it. In *Latina/o Sexualities* Sonya Grant Arreola (2010) discusses sexual silence among Latino/as, a trend experienced by the women interviewed for this study. She claims that, "Traditionally in Latina/o cultures, sex and sexuality are not discussed. Researchers have described how a cultural emphasis on women's innocence may lead Latina/o parents to be reluctant to discuss sexuality with daughters. Sexual silence can prevent gay Latinos from discussing their sexual preferences, instilling low self-esteem and personal shame"

(50). As I will discuss, it was revealed in some of the interviews that the women experienced this shame and low self-esteem, internalizing sexual beliefs and practices that were taught to them at young ages.

I begin with a statement given by Juanita, a lesbian-identified Mexican woman whose story I found to be quite compelling. Juanita immigrated to the United States at the age of 6 with her mother and ten siblings. After arriving in the United States her father, who was already living in the United States, called immigration authorities to have the entire family deported. They returned to Mexico to avoid deportation. Eventually the family was granted legal stay in the United States and they moved back to California eight years later. I asked Juanita if sex or sexuality were discussed in her home growing up. She responded with the following:

> There was no sex education when I was growing up. At least not in my home, not with my mother because I had three younger brothers so you know my mom didn't have time for me. I'm the youngest of the girls. I was pretty much told that girls had to clean and they have to cook and that's it. You know there was never 'hey you know you're gonna get your period and' - none of that. And then when my period came, I think when it happened I'm like hhmm… I think this is it. And then I can remember my older sister saying something about her period so I was like I think this is what I was waiting for. My father would say 'you guys aren't allowed to have boyfriends period'! And if you happened to have them when you are out of high school, do not bring him unless he is going to be your husband and he's coming to ask your hand in marriage. That was the law…The guys had a totally different law. They could bring their girlfriends and they could get them pregnant and they could live with us. So that was always their law. It

was more acceptable for the males than for the females. We had to clean we had to cook and because I had so many brothers we had to *like* cleaning. Our job was just to be homemakers.

Juanita's story is telling in several aspects. She remembers that sexuality operated differently for her than for her brothers in terms of her parent's interactions. Gloria González-López (1999) discusses this gendered double morality in her essay, *De madres a Hijas: Gendered lessons on virginity across generations of Mexican immigrant women*. She discusses how a double morality is associated with the social reproduction of gender inequality, a process she observed in Mexican mothers and the sex education they offer their daughters vis-a-vis their sons. She states, "Mothers living in larger cities…may still promote many gender inequalities" believing that "their sons do not encounter the same social and moral risks women do" (227). In Juanita's house, not only was sex not talked about, but gender roles were explicitly laid out for her and her siblings as well. These roles were evident between her and her father and between her brothers and sisters. She defines these actions in terms of "the law," indicating a strictness and rigidity when it came to sex and sexuality.

Juanita's story is similar to the heterosexual Mexican immigrant women and men interviewed by González-López (2005). In her study, she found that "families selectively defined, shaped, and controlled the sex lives and relationships of the study participants," and that "many of the women received only basic menstrual hygiene information, usually from their mothers, older sisters, and aunts" (98). She finally claims their "sex lives were collective, public concerns that took place within the confines of family regulations, expectations, and norms" (98-99). Like the women mentioned in Gonzalez-López's interviews, the majority of the women I

interviewed understood their sexualities to be defined and shaped by their families, whether it was silence, verbal castigation or in one case a cause for lively discussion.

Cynthia, a Puerto Rican-born informant, experienced a similar silence and restriction surrounding sexuality. When I asked her what was taught to her about sexuality growing up she claimed that,

> Um, just that…sex was a bad thing, um and just to stay away from it as much as possible. Not to get pregnant. That was one thing that was told to us often. Just don't get pregnant cause you can get diseases and all this other stuff. It was taboo you just didn't talk about it. So as far as sexuality that's the thing like… I never really had a conversation about sexuality in my household at all. I mean I always felt…looking back on it I don't know what I would have called it but I always feel really repressed because I felt like I was kind of experiencing these different feelings in terms of sexuality but I wasn't allowed to express it. I even wasn't allowed to talk about it. So, I guess I associated sexuality with shame. And that what I was feeling, its natural for me to feel it but I'm not supposed to act upon it and that was like really really difficult to deal with.

Like Juanita, Cynthia grew up in a home where sex was not discussed. As an adult woman she now reflects upon this situation and realize how repressive it was for her and how it affected her current sexuality. Something else to consider is that later it was revealed to me that Cynthia had experienced sexual abuse within her home. The shame that she has expressed that is associated with sex could reflect not only the silence and restriction, but the violation as well.

Other women also recalled memories of what they were told *not* to do. Cynthia's parents warned her of the dangers of pregnancy. Nancy's parents, on the other hand, did not warn of pregnancy or infection, but of sexual abuse. When prompted with the same question, this was her response:

> Ok well um basically the word sex I never heard of it at home. Um…my parents never mentioned anything my sisters we never talked about anything. The only thing that I can remember thinking you know close to sex was that my mom and my dad used to tell us that we do not let anybody touch us, our private parts. As far as getting pregnant having intercourse all the, you know, possible STDs. Not a word. So I have no recollection of it. We never spoke of it.

Similarly, Indya's family specifically did not talk about sex. She stated that, "You don't talk about sex…and there was no communication with my parents whatsoever regardless."

The final story I would like to include in this segment was given by Norma, a lesbian-identified woman from Honduras. I asked where she learned about sex and sexuality and she enthusiastically responded with "In the street!", meaning she learned from friends, relatives and by observation the sexual standards and norms of her community. When I asked about the atmosphere at home she said,

> No, never not at all. That was the culture we never talked about it. Well back then I thought it was bad. I was afraid, I mean I was really afraid of my family finding out because I knew at a very early age that the way I felt - that I felt attracted to the same sex. Yes. That I knew and I knew for a very long time but I thought that I was the only one or

there were very few of us. It was something bad and something at the same time that I - I didn't know how to change but inside for many many years I felt like I wanted to change that. I wish it would be different just because I knew it was something, it seemed to be something bad something that people will reject you for just for being lesbian or a gay or whatever.

Norma experienced this silence surrounding sexuality to a point of fear. She was afraid to reveal her true self, or explore these sexual thoughts, for fear of repression. What I find to be interesting about her statement is that, for her, being gay "seemed to be something bad," even though sexuality was never discussed at home. How did she understand this to be a bad thing? In Chapter Three I include other parts of her interview, which indicate that she learned, at least, that being gay was a "bad thing" through experiences in her community and by witnessing the foul treatment of gay and lesbian people in her immediate surroundings. She also indicates that she felt like "the only one" or that "there were very few of us," implying she had no access to information, communities or people who were also gay or lesbian. This next section will focus primarily on how the age of migration and resettlement in urban areas of United States impacted the women's sexualities.

Age of Migration

As Norma indicated, she didn't know that there were other women "like her" in her community. She didn't have access in her rural town to other women like her or the idea that a gay and lesbian community might exist. By coming of age in the United States and in a metropolitan city (Los Angeles) she was exposed to a gay and lesbian community and was able

to explore this sexuality in a less fearful environment. All but three of the women I interviewed entered the United States. for the first time as minors. Some do not even remember the journey because they were infants at the time, and others recall vividly being teenage girls and part of an illegal trek, which brought them to the United States. At face value this information is not unusual. Newly arriving migrants often emigrate as a means of providing opportunities for their children. This is just one reason why families may migrate, as children may or may not play a role in the decision to immigrate. However, one thing is clear: children are immigrating with their parents in large numbers. According to the Terrazas and Batalova of the Migration Policy Institute (2009), between 1990 and 2000, the number of first-generation immigrant children grew 42.8 percent (from 1.9 million to 2.7 million). By contrast, the number of first-generation immigrant children declined 13.2 percent between 2000 and 2008 from 2.7 million to 2.3 million.

The statistics provided do not account for gender or sexuality. It is unclear how many of these children are young girls, or if they identify with a queer sexuality. However, I find the age of my participants very interesting for a few reasons reflecting sexual and gendered norms. First, I want to look at this in terms of sexuality. In returning to the literature review, González-López's research reflects that the Mexican women (heterosexual identified) who participated in her study immigrated to the United States as adult women. An overwhelming majority of these women were married or cohabitating during the time of interview. The descriptive nature of the constructions of these marriages, from family involvement to the cult of virginity, assumes that the majority of these women's marriages were performed in Mexico. Because family unification continues to be the main reason for female migration (Messina et al 2006) we can perhaps draw the conclusion that these women's lives were established as heterosexual and married before

migration. Their status as immigrant women, it would seem, is part of the reunification with a family unit.

In comparison with my interviewees, because most of the women were minors at the time of migration, there was not a window of opportunity for them to marry in their home countries. They came of age in the United States and in urban centers, where the majority of my participants felt connected to some form of resource and able to come out as lesbians. There was a dominant sentiment regarding their home countries and the lack of acceptance or inclusion of lesbians. When I asked Norma about the possibility of living openly in a loving relationship with a woman in Honduras, she responded "I think I'm better off here…I think that if I would have stayed at home I would not have come out. I would have probably got married, had children, become a housewife."

It would seem that, based on the interviews, my participants were exposed to an ability to live openly as queer women because they immigrated to the United States at young ages and to urban centers. As I will further elaborate in Chapter Three, their perceptions are that they perhaps could not have come out or lived as lesbians.

What is gendered about these studies is the likelihood of women, especially young women, immigrating by themselves. Perhaps because of patriarchal norms, young gay men would be more likely to migrate by themselves than young lesbians. As was the case in Lionel Cantú's (2009) research with Mexican gay men, many young men made a choice to migrate and were physically and socially able to do so. He also found that tourism played a role in the men's social mobility. Although social class was a major factor in determining the men's migrations, he found that "Tourism can be a response to one's marginality. By traveling to other cities and countries some Mexican homosexual men are able to "escape" temporarily the constraints of

their marginalized status" (116-117). As Chávez (1992) has indicated, it may also be similar to that of a rite of passage. He found that many undocumented immigrants who he interviewed were satisfying a curiosity and came to the United States "for adventure" (53). Some of these men who might be gay (and closeted) may experience this as an opportunity, an opportunity that women may not have, especially those who feel sexual and romantic attraction toward women and who live in the same small towns.

It seems more likely that young lesbian women might migrate with families to the United States, insinuating a gendered norm in "queer migration." Literature on Mexican women and men and migration shows that migration is shaped by gender and gender shapes migration related processes (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994). Gender relations in families, work opportunities and social networks inform women's migration.

To further elaborate on this point, I would like to bring to light a statement given by Nancy, a lesbian-identified woman born in Mexico. Nancy came to the United States at the age of fourteen and came out at seventeen years old. In her interview she expressed a long battle with accepting herself and her sexuality. She eventually sought help at a community college by receiving therapeutic services. Hers was one of a several stories in which undergoing intensive personal attention was a necessity in order to accept her queer sexualities. When I asked her if her sexual desires or sexual orientation changed through migration she answered,

> Oh, a great deal! I can tell you since the culture here I learned that, first of all, you know you are free to do whatever you want. So I thought and I saw a lot of my friends who were butch looking, kind of queer or drag queens and transgender and sexual friends that I had were not as criticized and more accepted here than back home and that gave me basically hope. I have to say gave me hope because it gave me a sense of freedom to let

> myself experience with, you know, my own orientation. And coming here the influence - the culture influenced the opportunities being able to go to school being able to, you know, say that I have a girlfriend and its not a problem, gave me confidence and I have to say it gave my identity, definitely it did. It definitely did… And it was not until I was 17 years old that I met a friend, female, that I developed really really strong feelings towards. And it was mutual. And we didn't know - we were so confused so scared. But of course it led to you know, experimenting and that's how I learned about having intimacy and sex with women. With the same sex. I was 17. It was right here. I got here when I was 14.

Nancy describes her migration experience as one that has defined her and given her an identity. Part of this identity formation centralizes on the ability for her to come out as a lesbian in the United States. She became sexually active at an age in which she fell in love with a woman, and in a location (urban United States) where she felt safe to do so because she feels she is "free to do whatever you want." Her experience in Mexico was that her friends who were LGBT and living in Mexico were criticized or not accepted. She therefore concludes that she had more of an opportunity to be an out lesbian here than in her hometown. Her sexual expression, access to resources, and first sexual experiences were informed by the age in which she migrated to the United States and the city where she migrated. She imagines a life in Mexico that would not have been as easily accepting of her authentic self and she bases this conclusion from memory and witnessing treatments of other LGBT people.

What makes Nancy feel free to live her romantic and sexual life with this sense of personal freedom? If she never lived as a lesbian in Mexico what are the social factors

influencing her stance on an unsafe Mexico? What may underscore Nancy's experience are the multiple factors affecting her life as an immigrant woman. She reveals in her interview that she attended counseling sessions at a junior college to help her work through coming to terms with her sexuality. She also describes the difficulties in learning the English language, the trauma of the physical migration and fear of leaving her home as an undocumented woman. Being a lesbian may comparatively feel less weighing than other factors. It is also important to note that she lives in Long Beach, a city 25 miles outside of Los Angeles. In this cosmopolitan Southern California, each of these cities (along with several others in the area) hosts their own Gay and Lesbian Pride celebrations every summer. This access to gay and lesbian visibility (i.e. Pride, gay bars, etc.) helps create the perception of a gay-friendly and open United States, not to mention the social construction of images of dusky-hued savagery versus the image of a liberal, tolerant, enlightened America we are daily fed with (Lancaster 2005:256). In rural areas of the United States, such as the small town where I am from, living as an open lesbian can be very difficult, if not impossible.

The social constructions of a safe United States versus unsafe Mexico are dangerous yet necessary to consider. Although Mexican and other Latin American LGBT politics may occasionally be reduced to a novel U.S. import (De La Dehesa 2010:57), significant strides are continuously being organized and carried out by gay and lesbian Mexican activists. Rafael de la Dehesa outlines how Mexican activists are bringing the subject of gay rights to the streets and the legislature. He notes, "In 2006 a coalition of…radical student groups, polyamorists, *vestidas*, and sex workers" (176) participated in a series of campaign stops to advance the cause of LGBT rights. Additionally, it is legal nation-wide in Mexico for gays and lesbians to be married – a privilege we have yet to see in our "progressive and safe" United States of America.

Cynthia, a Puerto Rican woman, also imagined a life "back on the island." She claimed that,

> I think that had I grown up through my teenage years in Puerto Rico I think I would have been a very different person. I think I would have been exactly like my cousins. Either exactly like my cousins like obsessed with their...their womanhood in the sense of like what the stereotype of what a woman should be. What a Puerto Rican woman should be, look like, whatever, aspire to. I either would have been that or I would have been a very tortured soul and this is like…it would have been really really difficult and I think migrating to the U.S. has allowed me, its cheesy to say, but it has allowed me the opportunity to be able to express myself the way that I do.

By expressing herself in the way that she does, Cynthia refers to gender presentation and her sexuality. She doesn't want to express herself as a woman in the stereotypical way that her cousins do. This is inherently tied to what she has been oriented to believe how a Puerto Rican woman should dress, act, be, etc. She feels that because she immigrated at the age that she did she did not have to conform to a certain gendered and sexual norm. Like Nancy, she views her life here in the United States as an opportunity to express herself in a way that defines her as a lesbian. She specifically mentions her teenage years as a crucial time that would have created this difference. Cynthia became sexually active at fifteen with men and at seventeen with women. She imagines that, had she not moved to the United States during these years, she may have had to conform to a different lifestyle, one that would have not allowed her to experience intimacy with a woman in an open environment.

What is interesting about Cynthia's story is that she has been violently assaulted in a large cosmopolitan United States city on the basis of her sexuality. She has not lived in Puerto Rico as a lesbian, therefore, the perception that Puerto Rico would not be conducive of her sexuality is intriguing considering her history. Aside from a lesbian friend living in Puerto Rico, whom she is in communication with about living life as a lesbian on the island, how have Cynthia's views of Puerto Rico as less accepting been shaped? Like Nancy, Cynthia has a relative proximity to gay and lesbian resources. At the time of interview she was very involved with her local queer woman of color community in the Philadelphia area (she was a student at a local college). This city has a vibrant gay and lesbian culture one could take part in. And similar to Nancy, Cynthia's views are shaped by social networks in her birth country. It is also important to consider that Cynthia's identification as a queer woman is connected to her gender presentation. Therefore, her conceptualization of Puerto Rico could stem from the ideals of femininity as presented in her family. Because her gender expression is not feminine in the conventional way, this might have influenced her understanding of lesbian life in Puerto Rico as perhaps only feminine-friendly.

Indya attributes knowledge about her own sexuality to migrating to the United States. She also views the United States as more sexually open which allows for her to live more easily as a lesbian. She attributes this openness in part to (apparently mainstream) media, particularly television:

> Its more open…you talk about it more you see it on TV and its not just about the gay community - just sex in general, its something you see on TV here. Yea that whole thing drives me crazy especially growing up over there and sexuality not being as open as it is

over here. It not as open or wasn't as open and still is a struggle but you know I didn't even think about my sexuality until I came over here.

She understands that sexuality is not as "open over there" as is it is in the United States She also reminisces on the fact that she didn't even think about sexuality until she came here. Indya moved to the U.S. at fifteen years old and became sexually active in her early twenties. Her not thinking about her sexuality could very well be associated with the age in which she migrated. She immigrated after an age in which she would eventually become sexually active, and in an environment (Los Angeles) that she feels supports her sexuality.

Cristina attributes her coming out not just because of the age in which she migrated, but also because of her socio-economic status. She was not entirely convinced that the United States allowed for her to come out because of openness. Rather she stated that,

I think it was the age and it was the time that I was living in a different place and my lifestyle changed completely. I mean before I was in Mexico among straight people you know and I was more aware about college you know just trying to survive. I mean imagine like your economic status is not as well and you see your mom struggling here and there so you're not thinking about your relationship; you're thinking about how to survive you know how am I gonna do this? And I really wanna finish college but I can't. And then my sister at the time was only 5 years old, so yea I didn't have time for that.

Cristina specifically understands her coming out process as associated with the age in which she came out and migrated and the "different place" she was in as a teenager. Cristina migrated at eighteen years old and became sexually active with women shortly after that.

Because of her situation in Mexico, helping her mother out financially and raising her sister, her priorities were not on her sexuality but on her family. She was in a different place that was more focused on "surviving" rather than sexual experimentation. She also understands her age, and not the "openness" of the United States, which organically signified the reasons in which she came out. Later, Cristina revealed that she was raised in a home where she learned that "everybody was created equal…without really saying it" and that upon moving the United States that was when she "started learning about racism." Cristina's reality challenges popular images and stereotypes, which have traditionally portrayed families of Latin American origin as homophobic and racist. Her mother had close friends who were gay and lesbian, so unlike my other participants, she had been exposed to family ethics that are accepting and respectful of sexual diversity while growing up, perhaps another factor that allowed for a relatively safe coming out process. As she explained

> I was exposed to a lot of gay people in my house… and they were friends with my mom and my step dad… my stepfather had a huge family so big brothers and sisters would be around the house too but you know no one would trip. We never heard them insulting them or you know disrespecting them.

Finally, I include Norma's account of living in rural Honduras and immigrating to the United States. She became sexually active with women at a time in which she was coming of age and in a place she felt safe enough to do so. She stated that,

> Well, when I was living in Honduras, like I said I was afraid. I didn't want to be what I was. In a way I rejected myself and the things that I learned – like I said I learned them

> on the street…and here like I said well yes I knew about all the different disease transmitted through sex, birth control…I learned to like myself (laughs). I guess the main thing is that I learned to accept myself and it helps that I live in California and here its…I mean lately even on the telenovela they're putting that subject out there and I think people are beginning to open up to see that that's not really something bad and its really just one thing of a whole thing. I mean because its not being lesbian or gay its not just you're just that, you're so many many many many more things right?

By "learning to like myself" Norma responds to an emotional state in which many gay and lesbian people feel rejected for their sexual orientation. Like the participants in Gloria González-López' research, she learned of STDs and birth control in the United States and she understand that her current urban location plays a beneficial role in her ability to live comfortably as a lesbian. Additionally, like many immigrants and Latinas her sexuality is not at the forefront of her life. She recognizes that she is much more than her sexuality. This is a distinction many queer and women of color scholars have made in terms of ethnicity and sexuality. Unlike many white lesbian identified women, lesbian women of color, including immigrants and Latinas, have to deal with multiple forms of oppression and therefore consider other issues to be more pressing in their lives, beyond their sexual and romantic lives. Although Latina lesbian and their families are not necessarily silent about sex in their communities (as illustrated by Spanish speaking media talk shows), the women I interviewed had many concerns beyond sexuality per se. Some of these include (but are not limited to) socio-economic inequality, linguistic challenges (i.e., learning the English language), citizenship and legal status related issues, racial and cultural marginality, and family support networks. Perhaps the most

touching part of this interview was that the most important part of Norma's migration process was learning to love herself.

Conclusion

The women in this study attributed different elements to describe how immigration impacted their sexualities, including feeling able to come to terms with themselves as lesbians. The interviews revealed a few things regarding this. First, the majority of my participants grew up in homes where sex was not discussed. They experienced a silence surrounding sexuality in general, and same-sex sexuality, in particular. Second, the age in which they migrated impacted their sexualities in terms of coming out and feeling internally liberated in accepting themselves and living as out lesbians. Since they immigrated to urban centers this also played a key role in their access to gay and lesbian resources. While some specifically understood their coming to terms with their sexualities as contingent upon the age in which they migrated, others considered the safety and education in the United States and in their birth countries. Ultimately, migrating at a young age seemed to provide a window of opportunity for the women to express and explore themselves as lesbians coming of age in the United States and perhaps bypass the cultural pressure of heterosexual marriage in their home countries.

For my participants, becoming part of American society for them meant becoming part of urban locations where exposure and access to gay and lesbian networks and communities became possible. Had they migrated to and settled in small towns (for example, in West Texas), their sexual and romantic fate might have been completely different. Perceiving their communities as morally safe eventually facilitated a feeling of openness in terms of sexuality. These sentiments, however, are met with contradicting forces. As the next two chapters reveal,

despite a sense of sexual liberation felt by the interviewees, other factors come into play when reflecting upon their experiences as Latina lesbian immigrants. These tensions are evident when discussing the conceptualization of citizenship and the convergence of immigration and sexuality.

CHAPTER TWO

Arriving at Citizenship: From the Perspective of Migration

"Well yea I mean I don't think I've even thought about citizenship before I came here. And right now you asked me that question and I've never thought about that either".
–Cristina, 38, born in Monterrey, Mexico

"You might wonder, then, why I did not immediately seek naturalized citizenship in Mexico. Until 1998, a foreign woman could obtain Mexican nationality by marrying a Mexican man or by bearing children in Mexico. I did not wish to engage in heterosexual matrimony or reproduction. Because I am a woman and because I am a lesbian, my citizenship was incomplete".
–Norma Mogrovejo, *Immigration, Self-Exile, and Sexual Dissidence* in *Passing Lines*

Throughout these interviews I never asked women for their immigrant status. However, many of the women volunteered this information, and for some, in comical ways. Norma, a Honduran woman, recanted how her mother altered her passport in order to be able to migrate from Honduras to Guanajuato, Mexico. She remembered and laughed gently saying, "I don't know how she did it but she changed it." Several women were candid about their undocumented entry into the United States and Nancy honestly discussed the difficulties of living as an undocumented immigrant.

I found Nancy's interview to be particularly revealing in terms of citizenship. Nancy migrated with her family to the San Diego area at the age of 14. She was born in Guadalajara, Mexico. She recalls poor neighborhoods, dark nights, running, hiding and crossing through a tunnel, which she later found out was a California freeway. Her mother did not feel comfortable crossing through the tunnel so she was led by one of the coyotes across the freeway. This surprised and disturbed Nancy because she understands that many people die crossing this freeway. Nancy was never able to obtain a legal status even though other members of her family have. She is now partnered with a woman who is a naturalized citizen from Honduras. Her partner cannot petition Nancy as a spouse because U.S. immigration law does not recognize same sex couples as eligible for this benefit. What struck me about Nancy's story was how the terminology of citizenship has affected her in many forms. Although she is an undocumented immigrant she considers herself to be a citizen, as I will further discuss later in this chapter. She came out as a lesbian when she was a teenager and she faced deep psychological and spiritual issues because of the guilt and shame associated with being queer. This prompted her to receive individual counseling at a local junior college. Perhaps this access to mental health services is connected to a sense of what it means to be a citizen in terms of participating in and benefiting from the local community. However, Nancy cannot legally claim her citizenship, for one reason, because she is a lesbian. Nancy's experience embodies the contradicting forces met with citizenship. I use the term *citizenship* throughout this chapter as outlined in the Introduction.

In this study, I learned that citizenship is a malleable concept; it means one thing while doing another, and its relative to different situations. It carries so much yet so little weight. The women I interviewed demonstrate the interchangeability of citizenship. During their interviews I asked several questions regarding citizenship, but the following questions revealed the more

informative responses: What does citizenship mean to you? Who should be included in the category of citizenship? I found that my participants formulated their own understandings of citizenship based on their experiences immigrating to the United States and regardless of their citizenship status they expressed attachment and ambivalence to the concept. This chapter addresses the following research questions: How do the women I interviewed conceptualize citizenship? How has immigrating to the United States affected their personal views of citizenship? What impact do their sexualities have on how they understand citizenship?

I begin this chapter with a working understanding of citizenship and how it will be understood and referenced in this section. Then I consider the responses given by the women in two sections. First, the women tended to categorize citizenship in different ways including productivity, in terms of legal rights and ability to move (their bodies) freely. What I found to be a pattern among many of the women was the connection of citizenship on a global level (i.e. "we are all citizens of the world"). And second, the act of immigrating to the United States has impacted the women's conceptual development of citizenship. I discovered that through their migration processes they have developed a *citizenship consciousness* – an attention towards and continuously evolving definition of the embodied meanings of citizenship as it is experienced through immigration.

Gloria Anzaldúa (2009) helps us to understand the workings and importance of consciousness. It is also useful to recognize how consciousness is met at the bodily level especially when one is a moving or migrating body. In earlier works Anzaldúa refers to *mestiza consciousness* as a "non-binary way of thinking and acting that includes a transformational tolerance for contradictions and ambivalence (321 as cited in Keating)." Later, she employs *conocimiento* to further develop these ideas of consciousness referring to it as knowledge (241)

and deep awareness (247). The body can aid in enacting *conocimiento* as the eyes represent seeing and knowing which can lead to this understanding. The tongue breaks silences to open communication and the hand activates this communication and *conocimiento* by acting as an agent of change (211-212).

Keeping this in mind the consciousness enacted within my participants reflects the process of migration and the knowledge, awareness and non-binary way of thinking developed as a product of their physical bodies being uprooted and displaced to a different geographical territory. Their migrating bodies produce these knowledges of citizenship by acting as subjects who move through space and across national borders (Ahmed 2000: 85).

Working Through Citizenship

The subject of citizenship has taken on many activist and scholarly forms. This chapter lays emphasis on citizenship as it takes on meanings through immigration, sexuality and culture. There is not one solid definition to use to understand how citizenship will be used throughout this chapter. Rather it is a culmination of different understandings both literal and metaphorical. Therefore, when I reference citizenship in this chapter it is with the understanding that its definition is constantly evolving. I take from writers, scholars and activists who use citizenship in ways that are most meaningful in reference to the women I interviewed.

Citizenship has acted as site of reclamation for some marginalized populations. As a concept, the idea of "Latino Cultural Citizenship" reclaims what it means to be Latina or Latino and living in the United States by contesting exclusionary nation-building practices. Through this model Latina women and Latino men posit themselves as cultural creators of citizenship rather than ones trying to achieve it through a mainstream understanding (Rosaldo 1997).

Citizenship must also be understood as limiting while shaping the lives of gays and lesbians. While citizenship for many LGBT people means being afforded legal rights and recognition it also brings to understanding of inclusion in the public arena (Cossman 2008, Bell & Binnie 2000).

Finally, citizenship can also be understood on a global level surpassing geo-political borders. With increase in globalization and movement across borders, citizenship takes on different meanings as people become more global. Transnational or global movement can prompt uses of phrases such as "citizen of the world" – meaning a person is a citizen wherever they might find themselves. This discourse lays emphasis on an individual as an autonomous person, rather than as part of a national body (Knight Abowitz and Harnish 2006).

Categorizing Citizenship – From Local to Global

The women I interviewed reflected in their responses common theoretical understandings of citizenship as civil, political and social (Marshall 1998). However, they formulate citizenship in ways that create meanings toward their individual situations and reproduce and re-imagine citizenship as an embodied experience. The history of citizenship has been one of conflicts over the real content of the category in terms of civil, political and social rights (Castles and Miller 1993). Its tangibility is in question. For example, when asked who should be able to call themselves a citizen, Nancy, an undocumented woman from Mexico, responded that "I am a citizen…regardless." Citizenship is not within her reach, but she recognizes this as something she can and does participate in regardless of her status. The idea of citizenship is a continual process, evolving through the many ways in which these women live as Latinas, as lesbians and

as immigrants. It is important to note that even though I did not specify that I was speaking about U.S. citizenship most of the women interpreted the question to mean that.

To begin, several of the women recognized citizenship in terms of how it affects their lives on a daily basis. For example, when I asked Cynthia what citizenship means to her she responded by saying that,

> Citizenship to me means having governmental recognition as like being a member of U.S. society. Um, but it also means being a part of the culture of the country being included within the culture and recognized as a part of the culture and having the privileges behind being a citizen of that country. Be it economically, be it with educational attainment, health, whatever. That's what citizenship means to me.

Cynthia recognizes that citizenship comes with certain privileges and benefits. She illustrates how normal every day practices, such as education and health, are affected by whether or not one is a citizen. She also makes a cultural reference in that citizenship includes a sense of belonging. This is reflective of how cultural citizenship operates as was illustrated earlier in this chapter.

Marcia, like Cynthia, recognizes the benefits of citizenship. When prompted with the same question she responded that,

> It means a lot of rights and the opportunity to be what you want and make money. There's a lot of open doors that it just takes…your decision if you want to be someone in life.

Marcia views citizenship as a way to be productive and to become something or someone. She also views this in monetary terms in that she can citizenship allows one to make money and become successful. Norma's response was similar to Marcia's in terms of productivity. When asked who should be able to call themselves a citizen she responded with, "Everybody who lives in that area and who works who contributes." Marcia's response also underlines the privileges associated with citizenship – including money, rights and open doors.

Indya's interviews revealed many different facets of citizenship. At first when prompted with the discussion of this topic she stated, "I'm a citizen of the United States because this is where my family is. This is where I'm living my life and I'm doing something for myself and my family."

It is important to note that with both Marcia and Indya's responses they do not acknowledge citizenship as a legal term. They respond to the question with how citizenship applies to them in terms of personal achievement and success. Indya also claims that citizenship is reflective upon where her family is. I find this to be particularly telling because it is her first response to the question. What makes her a citizen of the United States is not a birthright or naturalization. Rather, a location where her family lives – an experience directly contingent upon immigrating to the United States. However, she later refined her definition of citizenship by claiming that,

> Um, to me citizenship um its mostly political. Its like you know where you're born and yea pretty much where you're born or what legal rights you may have in one place. That's how I see it. I dunno like, we [are] all citizens, like based on the constitution we all have rights. It has nothing to do with race, color or sex.

What is striking about Indya's response is the manner in which she deals with tension while defining citizenship. On the one hand she considers herself a citizen of the United States in geographical and familial terms – this is where she lives and where her family lives. But she also understands citizenship as reflective upon where one is born. Indya was not born in the United States but she still considers herself a citizen of this country. This reveals how, like many of the women, Indya's conceptualization of citizenship may consistently be evolving while including the many experiences and understandings of her personal life. One other thing to consider is that she views citizenship as absolved of "race, color or sex". This, perhaps, leans more towards a universal understanding of citizenship, something I will further discuss in the next section.

Other women responded to citizenship in a less than positive light. Rosa gave an emotionally charged regarding her thoughts on citizenship. In the following segment she refers to the day she attained her U.S. citizenship.

> But in terms of the way we claim citizenship in the U.S. it's the [worst thing] You're saying you're gonna give up your life for this country, but for me my thought – "I ain't gonna go to war for this mother fucking country!" And its not because of the country its because of the way the system is. And unfortunately the system is like this in a lot of countries, not just of this country. So for me its like, I couldn't say that. I couldn't force myself to say those words. Give up you know your other citizenship is telling you - you are emotionally, psychologically giving up the other parts of you…for this. And when I think of this country, unfortunately I don't think of my beautiful neighborhood which I

love and I've grown up in my whole life I think of the system and I'm part of the system like [there's] a nausea that happens when I take that in.

Rosa's reaction to the discussion is so strong that she even notes a negative bodily reaction (nausea) towards the topic. During the citizenship ceremony her thoughts reflected her opinions about serving in the U.S. military. She thinks of citizenship not only in the immediate circumstances, but in terms of a bigger picture and obligations (which she does not agree to) one may encounter as a citizen. Her emotions are conflicted because even though she loves her neighborhood she cannot seem to claim allegiance or pride in the country harboring that neighborhood. For Rosa, obtaining this citizenship was some sort of emotional exchange. She had to give up parts of herself to gain a certain privilege – which she begrudgingly accepts.

Several women considered citizenship on a global level. Bani, a Cuban-born lesbian, reinvents citizenship on her own terms. I found her response to be particularly compelling because she introduces a multidimensional kind of citizenship. She stated that,

> We are Cuban citizens, you know? At the same time I am a Cuban citizen but I think I am a new type of Cuban citizen, because the Cuban citizenship implies many things. I'm Cuban, but a citizen of the world. Because I don't know - I could be here, I could be there or over there. I feel like Cuba is my home – its my home because I was born there. But I also think that my home could be the world.

Bani develops her own definition of citizenship while reflecting upon her experiences as a Cuban immigrant. She also considers citizenship on a more global scale. For her, citizenship

is boundless because she considers the world to be a dwelling place. I find this particularly telling because of the many restrictions Cuban nationals face when emigrating from Cuba. For Bani, to consider herself to be a citizen of the world --yet in real terms very restricted-- this conceptualization reflects the contradictory nature of citizenship as intangibly within reach. Laura, also from Cuba, articulates citizenship in terms of elitism, white supremacy and something that is global and powerful. When asked what the word citizenship meant to her, she responded,

> Its just a convenience. For me, countries and citizenship and everything is like supremacy people stuff. For us like regular people everything is the same. Citizenship should be nothing. Like birds don't have citizenship – snakes they cross borders like whatever – so I think they want to domesticate the people and say "you are a citizen of this country, you need to fulfill these laws", and those are supremacy people stuff. Its not my stuff. But I know that I need to play and so for me its like these are the things that I need to play the game with. I am in this country and I think this country has the most powerful citizenship in the world – to be free in the world, to be able to travel, because if you have an American citizenship no one will deny you a visa. The whole world will say – ok you can enter. In the end, for me, its very absurd – the division, the borders. I am totally against borders.

So while some of the other women considered the privileges of citizenship in a more positive light, Laura discusses them as they relate to great structures of oppression and supremacy. She also looks to these privileges as "not my stuff". Her consciousness surrounding

citizenship is intriguing because while she understands this concept to be one of supremacy, she knows that this is part of a "game" she has to play in order to live her life in the United States. She lucidly articulates the access to mobility one has when possessing a U.S. passport, or U.S. citizenship and by standing firmly against borders she ultimately is for the free flow of people between countries. In this respect her views on citizenship reflect a more globalized perspective.

Finally, the last response I would like to highlight is one made by Cristina. She encapsulates what may be an overarching sentiment expressed by a large number of participants in this study.

> I think we're a citizen everywhere in the world where you go. You know it doesn't matter where you are you are a citizen of the human race. The other citizenship is like a piece of paper but it doesn't define who you are and what country you decide to live. You know but a citizen - you're a citizen of, you know, the human race!

Cristina articulates the many tensions surrounding citizenship and, in the end, suggests it to be something that connects us all on a human level. It is something we can all partake in because, according to her, it is something we all self-evidently possess. Although she understands that is a legal recognition, she feels that this "piece of paper" does nothing to define a person or develop their identity. Then again, how could it if we are all already citizens of the world?

Anzaldúa (1987) employs her race, sexuality and nationality to express an embodied and boundless existence, similar to the women interviewed here. She states that, "as a *mestiza* I have no country, my homeland cast me out; yet all countries are mine because I am every woman's

sister or potential lover. As a lesbian I have no race, my own people disclaim me; but I am all races because there is the queer of me in all races" (102). Here, Anzaldúa expresses a universality of queer sexuality that transcends lines of nationality. She conflates sexuality and race to complicate and make these terms flexible in accordance with her experience. These women develop their own ideas of citizenship and what it means to be a citizen because of the interacting components working in their daily lives. As immigrant women, their understanding of citizenship is informed by their experiences in migration (i.e. crossing borders, return visits, illegally entering the United States). Not only have their personal experiences informed their conceptualizations of citizenship, but the actual act of migration has also facilitated to an extent the emergence of a consciousness surrounding this personal conceptualization.

Next, I discuss how immigration has precipitated a citizenship consciousness among some of the women interviewed.

Citizenship Consciousness

AnaLouise Keating (2009) outlines Gloria Anzaldúa's work on *conocimiento*, or consciousness, by defining it as something that "represents a non-binary mode of thinking which unfolds within oppressive contexts and entails a deepening of perception" (320). The participants in my study developed a citizenship consciousness throughout their immigration and settlement processes to the United States. As the interviews reveal, the women's development and perception of consciousness was met with tensions and contradictions, a consciousness that developed through arguably oppressive but also circumstances offering safe social spaces as lesbian women, social contexts they would have not enjoyed had they stayed in their places of

origin. I use Anzaldúa's definition of consciousness because it reveals the complexities and messiness often encountered when Latina immigrant women are invited to think about terms such as citizenship. The women I interviewed understand a deep perception of citizenship because of their experiences as immigrants, often revealing that they had never really thought about citizenship until they migrated, or even, until their interview with me.

I begin with a longer narrative given by Nancy, a Mexican-born lesbian, who explained to me how immigrating to the United States directly impacted her views on citizenship and what it means to be a citizen. In her statement she makes reference to her current partner, who is a naturalized citizen. People within Nancy's family have obtained documents even though she hasn't. In her response she said,

> At first I thought if I have my documents if I have my you know - I'll do this and I'll do that and I know that my sisters for instance they all got legalized and pretty much they haven't been able to do anything with their – a lot of things don't change. I was under the impression that the documents would change a lot of things but I think that I realized that its an individual thing. I have friends that are born here and take for granted being born here, having this citizenship which is the opportunity to be whatever they want. But yet its you know as a person whether a person has documents or not, whether a person is citizen or not is within the person you know - up to them - he or she to make the best – the things that she wants or he wants in life or in this country. So it has changed. Right now I think that the citizenship would be more helpful just for the legal aspect because we have a house. We bought a house together. And uh um…I know that if we declare that we are married if it was legal to get married we would get a break on the taxes you

know. If she dies then I'm gonna have a big problem on my hands because you know the circumstances of the documentation of the house. Other than that, and to vote. That's the only thing that really really hurts me - not being able to vote and voice myself. But I honestly can say that immigrating to the states definitely define me as right now what I am.

Nancy expresses a number of relevant concerns in her statement. First, she thought that begin closer to citizenship meant having more rights, which would lead to an easier life. She finds, however, that people take advantage of their citizenship, even when the citizenship doesn't seem to be benefiting them, and she makes these realizations that being a citizen of the United States doesn't necessarily guarantee everything that she thought it did. Her statement speaks to current modes of oppression that keep people marginalized even when they are legal citizens. This can be read in many ways – from denying LGBT people some of the rights only heterosexuals enjoy, to the institutionalized and everyday life racism faced by many ethnic minorities in this country.

Second, she makes the connection between citizenship and her sexuality. One thing she knows for sure is that she can't reap the benefits of marriage in this country, a circumstance that would greatly improve her living conditions. Her sexuality does not encourage any sort of benefit, so in this way her views of citizenship are impacted by her immigrant status and her sexuality because neither can seem to positively affect the other to change her situation. Finally, not having a citizenship silences her. She is most affected by her inability to vote – something she views as part of citizenship rights and having a voice in this country. Her immigration status – which is affected by her sexuality – denies her say in public politics.

Indya also expressed discontent with people she considered to be taking advantage of the system in a way that she can't. She said,

> Well me being an immigrant and also being gay it has been um… it has been a struggle. But at the same time because of the struggle I see it as motivation. It sucks though that I know a lot of people that are in my situation that have gone to college, have their degree, and trying to do something for themselves and also contribute to society but because of our situation we cannot do that. And then I see people that are citizens you know from this country that are not doing anything with their lives instead they're just abusing the system and I see well ok I'm trying to do something and contribute and you're not giving me the opportunity. I'm not asking you for anything I'm just asking for the opportunity to do what I can.

Indya views citizenship as an opportunity to do what she can. She never explicitly states what she means by "my situation," but considering her explanation she reflects upon her status as an immigrant and a lesbian. Like Nancy's statement, she recognizes the benefits of being a citizen, but understands the drawbacks, including playing witness to those who take advantage of, and don't recognize the privilege in citizenship. She later recants how immigrating to the United States has changed her views of citizenship. She contends,

> Actually in a way it changed because I have learned that after moving here a lot of people who have migrated they even though their legal citizenship will be another nation they come to in a way adopt this new country and love it as much as probably even more than their native ones. So in a way they become citizens of this one. And I think that has to

do also with perspective. How you see yourself and what do you invest in yourself and where you wanna go.

Again, the mention of productivity and development enter the conversation in terms of citizenship. She claims that people become citizens because they choose to make an allegiance to this country – whether that allegiance has been legalized or not. This is also contingent upon one's perspective and where they want to invest themselves in this country. What is most revealing about this response is how transparent she understands the formation of her opinion to be. Her ideas of citizenship have changed throughout migration because she sees how immigrants adopt this country as their own. She now understands citizenship to be more than just legal and possibly geographic. She also understands it now in more cultural and behavioral terms.

Marcia, like Indya, mentioned being productive and development when asked how immigration impacted her views on citizenship. She responded with the following:

I just started thinking about that recently. I don't know what I used to think before. It was just I did it day by day. Whatever went around me I just accepted it. It never stood for anything. I was just doing my own thing. But now it's easy. [I'm] more open about everything now. I guess at one point I really don't know how but at one point I used to think like people that just cross the border with no papers they should just stay over there. But now its different. I think there should be no barriers for people or borders for them to become citizens. I think there should be some sort of questionnaire or some sort of test for people that would wanna become citizens and they are productive to this country and

> not just come over here and create more crime and being negative. I think that's how it should be based. If you are productive to this country why not give them their citizenship. Not at a burden to this country but I think that everybody who wants to makes something out of themselves, they should become a citizen.

Marcia admits that at one point she felt that people who crossed into the United States illegally should instead remain in their home countries. Perhaps her idea of citizenship was one of exclusion and legalities. However, her opinion has changed throughout her migration process to reflect a more productive idea of citizenship. If people want to come to the United States to create a life, not harm anyone else and be productive then they should be able to become a citizen, regardless of their current status or how they entered the country.

Bani, also transparent in how her understanding of citizenship changed throughout migration, discussed citizenship on political terms. Her migration process took her from Cuba to Russia at the age of 29. She entered the United States at the age of 30 after travelling from Russia to Spain then Mexico after the course of a year. Her story not only challenged my assumptions as a researcher about what it means to be an immigrant, but she also challenged the concept of citizen on a global scale. When I asked her if immigrating had impacted her view of citizenship she responded,

> Yes, of course. Because when I lived in Cuba I just thought I was a Cuban citizen – not much else. Leaving the country I realized that the citizenship that I have – the Cuban citizenship – is very hard. Because we have been in several embassies asking for visas and they tell us, the citizenship that you have – the Cuban citizenship – is very bad.

> Because surely whichever country you want to go to, you will end up staying there. So I have realized more what it means to be a citizen from a third world country, what it means to be a citizen from a poor country, what it means to be a citizen of a first world country – there is a scale of values that before coming to this country I didn't understand.

I find Bani's story to be compelling for a number of reasons. Before leaving Cuba for a permanent relocation she considered her Cuban citizenship to be self-evident. It wasn't until she left Cuba that she began to realize how devalued her Cuban citizenship was to the rest of the world and how much value is placed on citizenships in first world nations. This experience was amplified by interactions with embassies and immigration officials.

Bani has learned about the existence of a larger system of power and control which operates based on "a scale of values," an apparatus that promotes privileges for citizens born and raised in developed nations vis-à-vis those born and raised in underdeveloped nations. Being born and raised in Cuba –a country with complex political and economic circumstances-- means belonging to a devalued and stigmatized class of citizens in this world. The irony and contradiction comes by being from a globally rejected country yet one that is accepted by one of the most privileged nations - the United States.

Finally, I include Norma's narrative regarding citizenship. This was her response when I asked how immigrating to the United States altered her views of citizenship:

> Yes well when I was in Honduras like I said I never left the country. I wasn't aware that you needed permission to cross borders because I never had to, right? I never experienced any of that so all that was non-existent for me. Once I came here and the

way we enter the country, I knew it was illegal and once I was here and I was illegal here for two years I felt that I had to be cautious. I couldn't just tell anyone um because of immigration and because we were not supposed to be here. So yea it is very different when you are not a citizen. You live with fear. I wanted to be here because my mom was here – my brothers my sisters you get used to - and yes life was very much different than Honduras. Here is like I had a lot of food and more clothing and over there everything was more limited even the food it was like you cannot eat that much you know they just give you portion and that's it. If you're still hungry you have to wait until the next meal. So you know all those things I noticed right away and after a while I didn't want to go back. But I still - I was afraid. I was insecure and remember that during that time I didn't have to be a provider. I cannot imagine the pressure that people who have to, you know, bring food to their families who are the main providers and not having the citizenship. I mean, or not being able to work legally because to me citizenship is like the right of being where you are. Living where you are. So it is difficult and I'm glad I don't, I'm not in that situation anymore.

I find Norma's story to be particularly revealing because has experienced living undocumented and in fear, and as a privileged United States citizen. What is most compelling is her naivety in not knowing that she needed permission to cross a geo-political border: She didn't particularly have a concept of what citizenship meant because she didn't know that she had to be a citizen of a given country in order to enter. She was not aware of the "illegality" of her body. Her knowledge of this "illegality" was understood by *the way* she entered the United States, understanding that she is not supposed to be there. For instance, she reveals in her interview that

she and her family crossed through Tijuana, Mexico with a coyote. Norma's story reflects the plight of many Central Americans who move through Mexico to enter the United States and the structural containment they experience (i.e. living in fear). Often the result of neo-liberal policies affecting Central America, such as CAFTA, migrants move North to the United States for better living standards. The unequal balance of power in these negotiations generally means that developing countries are required to abandon state support for key elements in their national economies (Flynn & Kofman, 2004: 67). Norma mentioned the lack of food and clothing in Honduras, perhaps as a result of the country's economic recession and political turmoil[4]. This simultaneity of desire to stay and fear of being deported may respond to low-wage labor demands, which keep immigrants hidden and out of sight yet working behind the scenes in the United States economy.

By living in the United States without and without documents, like Bani, Norma recognizes the "levels" of privilege associated with citizenship and the value of her undocumented status. For Norma, her understanding of citizenship is leading fearless life – a conclusion she has made based on experiences of "illegal" crossings, structural fear and access to resources. Norma's citizenship, however, only goes so far when it comes to her relationships. She is currently in a relationship with an undocumented woman from Mexico and has expressed fear of her being deported. Although Norma is not fearful of her own life, in this capacity, she is fearful of the impacts that citizenship may play within her own family.

To return to the previous definition of consciousness by Anzaldúa, the women's words presented here are testament to a non-binary mode of thinking (2002: 541). The interviews there were multiple levels of understanding when discussing citizenship, including a recognition that

[4] It is important to consider the economic impacts of El Salvador's Civil War, and the military coup in Honduras in 1972. Norma was born in the mid-seventies and migrated in 1988.

citizenship moves and works beyond its legal implications. Their conceptualizations reflected personal experience as immigrant women who have crossed geo-political borders, resettled and been confronted with issues of legality and citizenship.

Conclusion

In this chapter I discussed the conversations I had with my participants surrounding citizenship. Some of the questions I sought to answer were the following: How does immigration impact one's views of citizenship? How do Latina lesbian immigrants conceptualize citizenship? How do they make sense of what it means to be a citizen? First, the interviews revealed that, from local to global, the women's perceptions of citizenship were categorized on many levels. Most of the women understood citizenship to be a multi-layered concept in ways that reflected the tension within the term. For some it is within their grasp, but for others out of reach. They recognized that while there are legal and privileged implications with citizenship, there are cultural and day-to-day interactions as well. It is not a linear term, but rather complex and it emanates contradictions within. Their more global connections with citizenship reflect their own personal journeys of uprooting, immigrating and resettling as immigrant women, within and across their home and foreign countries where they have deciphered their personal and family struggles.

As lesbians and immigrants, they understand two-fold how citizenship does or doesn't operate on different social terrains, especially if those terrains are met with oppressive forces. They know the (ir)rationality[5] of citizenship, and redefine it on their own terms despite the simultaneous tensions constantly working within it. Second, immigration has enacted a

[5] I use *(ir)ationality* as a means of demonstrating how opposite meanings work in conjunction with one another.

citizenship consciousness within the women. Because of their actual physical displacement and settlement between nations, ideas of citizenship and what it means to be a citizen entered their worlds, at times, in unexpected ways. This was evident in many of their experiences as living undocumented, from a third-world country or becoming naturalized citizens.

In her chapter in *Passing Lines* entitled "'Yo no estoy perdida': Immigrant Women (Re)locating Citizenship," Kathleen Coll states that "for non-citizen immigrants, formal exclusion from citizenship makes claiming belonging and entitlement especially complex, both in regards to their nation of origin and their states of residence (2005: 389)." Similarly, for the women I interviewed, being born in a different nation invited them to reflect about the politics of citizenship and exclusion in the United States and at the international level. Based on these interviews, developing a sense of cultural belonging informs the conceptualization of citizenship. Many struggled with the question of what citizenship meant because their processes of migration perhaps affected some of their predisposed ideas. However, some did not have many predisposed ideas to begin with. Migration --and the obligatory physical displacement between a home country and the United States-- helped them to develop this sense of citizenship consciousness – a consciousness rife with tensions and contradictions.

In the next chapter, I further discuss some of the conflicting forces affecting the lives of these women. Forces that are not only concepts, but actual embodied experiences.

CHAPTER THREE

Walking Contradictions: Immigration and Sexuality Converge

> And so I think I feel like I live a contradiction sometimes. You know, I think I'm a walking contradiction, which, I don't mind.
>
> -Rosa, 32 born in Ensenada, Baja California, México

> The U.S./Mexican border is, without doubt, one of the most contradictory geopolitical lines in the world. –Lionel Cantú, *The Sexuality of Migration*

Rosa, a 32-year old lesbian born in Ensenada, Baja California, Mexico migrated to the United States at less than one year old and worked as a theatre arts teacher at the time of the interview. Perhaps it would seem that because she doesn't remember the actual migration she might not be able to comment on it. However, I found her story to reveal the opposite. Through oral history she learned that her mother decided to give birth to Rosa and her siblings in Mexico so that there would be no discrimination within the family due to varied immigration statuses. The family was living in Mexico when at a certain point, her father crossed back into the United States with her passport. For a reason that was unknown to her, immigration officials confiscated her passport and Rosa was left in Mexico without legal means of entering the United States. She then had to "sneak back in" to the States.

Rosa discovered in her teenage years that she began to develop crushes on her female friends. She grew up in a home where her mother openly discussed sexuality, therefore, Rosa felt it was normal for children to be sexual. Even though her mother encouraged sexual behavior

and even discussed her own, Rosa considers her mother to be homophobic because she rejects Rosa's sexuality to the point of discomfort surrounding words like gay and lesbian. She found this to be very contradictory to her mother's beliefs about sexuality. How could a woman who speaks so openly about sexuality be so rejecting of queer sexuality?

Like many gays and lesbians Rosa felt guilt and shame growing up because she could not be what her family expected of her: heterosexual. The experience of (queer) sexual repression met with the difficulties of coming from a low-income immigrant family, all collided in complicated ways in her life; I further elaborate on this later in this chapter. As she indicated in the above quote she considers herself a "walking contradiction." Why she refers to herself in this manner will be discussed later in this chapter. There is a relationship between inhabiting an immigrant body and a queer body that cannot be overlooked. But what happens when one's body inhabits each social location? Where does sexuality find itself on an immigrant body in a geographic location that may or may not feel like home?

Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) discusses feelings of home as an in-between terrain in *Borderlands/La Frontera.* She describes the borderlands, both physical and psychic, as a "vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary" (25). The inhabitants of the borderlands are also those living in the margins of society. This is a place that is in a constant state of transition that can place one in a position to encourage or discourages growth. Anzaldúa's premise is that Chicanas, queer people, third-world women, immigrants and others live in this uncertain and always evolving terrain. Additionally she discusses *nepantla, which* is an in-between state (psychic, spiritual, emotional, etc.) or terrain that one crosses when moving from one place to another (2009:180). Nepantla is useful in understanding the internal contradictions and processes my participants experienced (and discussed with me) as part of their

migration process. Because they navigate many terrains (legal, social, spiritual, bodily) their responses reflect upon these multiple layers of affect.

In this final chapter I listen to the voices of women who occupy both of these social locations and ask the following questions: How do sexuality and immigration converge on the bodies of Latina lesbian immigrants? How do these women conceptualize *home* if home may be recognized as uncertain terrain or an in-between state? How have their sex lives, sexualities and perceptions about sex and sexuality changed or altered throughout their migration processes?

The interviews reveal that there is no simple answer to these questions. I find that immigration and sexuality unfold in contradictory ways within the lives of these women. First, the majority of the women interviewed expressed that migration to the United States has allowed for them to express their sexualities more freely. This is due to a socially constructed perception of their home countries as non queer-friendly societies. Therefore, migrating to the United States helped construct ideas of national morality of this country vis-à-vis the one they migrated from. And second, the women interviewed expressed a general sense of gratitude towards the United States because of a sexual freedom they understand to exist and benefit from. However, this gratitude is paralleled with contradictory statements describing their experiences as immigrant women – experiences including loss of cultural identity, an inability to be legally married and the confinements of living without documentation.

Finally, immigration, body, and home coincide and collapse when discussing the topics of citizenship and sexuality. I found that some of the women intertwine language used to describe their queer sexuality and ideas of home. I suggest that because migration is an experience that becomes embedded on the body, this in turn informs the conceptualizing of home in a way that is particular to these women as lesbians. As immigrant women who self-identify as

queer or lesbian, their migratory experience is particularly informed by their sexuality, which in turn affects the description of home.

Social Constructions of National Morality

Without prompting a discussion about safety in their home countries, a majority of the women expressed that living in the United States has allowed for them to live their lives as open lesbians than if they would have stayed in their countries of origin. However, eight out of ten of the women did not live in their birth countries as lesbians. The other two women, from Cuba, discussed the difference of living in the United States in terms of access –i.e., adult stores, sex toys, pride parades, etc.-- rather than safety. How have they formulated these ideas of safety and openness? As I discussed in Chapter One, the age in which these women migrated impacted their coming out processes in terms of perceived safety. In this chapter, I look at their perceptions of safety and morality as it has been constructed through their migration.

To begin, eight out of the ten women interviewed specifically marked the United States as a more sexually liberal country, in comparison to their birth countries. Many of them verbally imagined a different life in which they would not have migrated, and they considered this life to be limited and closeted. In Olivia Espín's (1997) *Latina Realities,* she discusses lesbian immigrants crossing geographical and identity borders. In recanting an interview with a Cuban lesbian immigrant she states that her interviewee is "convinced that she would have never come out as a lesbian had she stayed in Cuba and believes that immigration to the United States made it possible for her to come out" (187). This specific narrative and perception of a non queer-friendly home is the sentiment I will discuss next.

Cynthia, a young Puerto Rican woman expressed, perhaps most lucidly, the lack of openness in terms of sexuality in regards to her country of origin. When asked how immigration impacted her sexuality, she responded by saying,

> I think it [immigrating] allowed me the freedom to be able to [be openly queer[6]]. Because there's no way in hell I would have been able to be as open sexually with my sexual orientation on the island, in Puerto Rico.

In our conversation, she further she provided an elaborate response to the question. She continued,

> Yea I mean...Puerto Rico is…I love it…but I mean there's the mentality that, like, no black people exist in Puerto Rico. There's no such thing as black Puerto Ricans right? Which is a problem, like that's the mentality that people think that there's no black Puerto Ricans. Even though my grandfather's black. Right, so the same thing goes, applies for like sexuality. There's no gay people in Puerto Rico. That's a U.S. thing. The gay people that are in the U.S., that's because these are the gay people that are on the island, that's because the U.S. has influenced the island. So that's like the mentality and it works in so many ways. Like that's the excuse you use for race as well. They use, like, oh that's a U.S. thing. That's a U.S. thing, that's a far away, even though that understanding that Puerto Rico is part of the U.S. I know for a fact that like I wouldn't be able to be as open sexually and I have a lot of friends that are still in Puerto Rico that are lesbian who are queer and they have to hide it. They have to hide it and they go to their little bars in e*l campo* or whatever. They're in *el campo* in the countryside. Like

[6] I use the term *queer* in this way because this is how she self-identified during the interview.

they...they can't they just can't express it in anyway. They have to hide it. Now if they are in a little more metropolitan area if they are in the city a little different but it's still...still very stigmatized over there.

There are some striking elements to be recognized in this interview. First, Cynthia recognizes how queer and Black Puerto Ricans are socially believed to be non-existent. This making-invisible of a people is possible through the social narratives of what belongs in the United States. The United States is a place for others – it is a place where the sexually and racially deviant exist (and are supposed to exist). It seems as though, in Cynthia's experience, homophobia is dealt with in Puerto Rico by deflecting the existence of gays and lesbians onto the United States. Second, the conflation of race and sexuality is especially intriguing as it demonstrates the disasporic practices of pushing out of unwanted peoples. As I discuss in other areas of this project, the collapsing of racial and sexual minorities as undesirables is not uncommon in the United States as well. Becoming a witness of the personal journeys of her lesbian and gay friends living in Puerto Rico have confirmed the isolation gays and lesbians may experience in living there. When I asked Cynthia why being queer is so stigmatized she offered the possibility that the influence of Catholicism has further isolated gays and lesbians. The United States, however, is home to some devout and militant evangelical church leaders who organize against gays and lesbians having the right to marry, adopt children, have job security, among other privileges only heterosexual women and men have the right to enjoy.

Susan Bibler Coutin (2000) discuses a similar type of nonexistence that immigrants may face with her investigating Salvadorans living in the United States. In *Legalizing Moves: Salvadoran Immigrants' Struggle for U.S. Residency* she examines the complex ways in which

undocumented Central Americans are situated within and outside of both the United States and their countries of origin. She refers to domains occupied by legal non-subjects as spaces of nonexistence, and she states that, "nonexistence is produced through excluding people, limiting rights, restricting services, and erasing personhood" (28).

Rosa, a lesbian-identified woman from Mexico whose captivating interview inspired the title of this project, has also never lived in her birth country as an out lesbian. Like Cynthia, she also spoke from an imagined place of non-acceptance. She noted that,

> I've resisted going to visit [Mexico] because all my cousins that are my age are married and have kids and …in reality it's really difficult because it's really different. Like there's no way that I can see [me] bringing into our family life like my partner. You know? And I think that I feel that um…me being in the States is a blessing in a sense.

Unlike Cynthia, Rosa does necessarily consider all of Mexico as less open than the United States in terms of sexuality. Rather, Rosa is more concerned with her relationship with her family. There is an obvious difference between her and her cousins that are her age – they are married in heterosexual unions and with children. The discomfort she may feel in bringing a partner to visit her family reflects the anxiety many gays and lesbians have in this situation. The knowledge of difference – and openly living those differences – can make for tense circumstances. Living in the United States may be a "blessing" for her, not necessarily because Tijuana, Mexico appears to be more homophobic than Los Angeles. Rather the proximity of physical distance from her family (not to mention the difficulties and expenses involved in travelling to and from there) make it possible for her to not have to face this discomfort on a

regular basis. Her sexuality and immigrant status are informed by each other. The contradiction she lives and expresses in further statements will be discussed later in this chapter.

Indya, a lesbian-identified woman from Mexico spoke about the relationship between sexuality, settlement, and everyday life in Los Angeles in California in terms of her coming out. She said that,

> My transition over here made it more acceptable since it was more acceptable in the community and in society in general it made it easier for me to start coming along and I didn't even come out until I was in junior college. I was 19…. Well yea it just made it easier for me to come out and to come to my own terms of who I am and what that meant to me pretty much.

The community Indya refers to in here is her group of friends during her junior college experience in the greater Los Angeles area. She explained to me that she was always involved in sports and at her junior college she joined a recreational basketball team. As I explain in Chapter One, the age of migration has a particular impact on the sexualities of the women interviewed. For Indya, not only did she have a community to come out in, but she also had a safe community in which she felt comfortable revealing herself. During this line of questioning she discussed the fear surrounding coming out to her mother. Like many immigrants, Indya is one of the financial providers for her family. She has many nephews and nieces, and she lives with her extended family. She definitely did not want to disappoint them. However, some of the women with whom she played basketball during her early 20's were out lesbians. This development of a social network and community of queer women made it easier for her to come out. Perhaps the lack of resources (e.g., junior college, women's recreational sports) and patriarchal ideologies

controlling women's bodies and their sex lives in her rural hometown and other pueblos in Mexico would not have provided a necessarily easy coming out experience (see González-López, 2005). She also recognized the United States as a "more open" country because of what she perceived as representative in the media--mainly mainstream television.

> Its more open…you talk about it more you see it on TV and its not just about the gay community - just sex in general, its something you see on TV here exposed to it since you were really little …So I think TV as well as media has a lot to do with it and how it influences the acceptance of sex in itself in our society and over there this is something that is taboo just because of religion as well as communication. But nowadays I can see that everything is changing too.

Norma, a Honduran woman who identified herself as a lesbian, expressed adamant sentiments towards her birth country, similar to the way Cynthia did. When asked about how she learned about sex and sexuality growing up, she described the atmosphere in terms of her local community of San Pedro Sula. Although she knew at a young age that she was "different," she was unsure of these feelings and what they were associated with. She described this further by saying,

> Well I didn't want to be a lesbian. That's because of…you know I saw how people reacted to that…in a negative way. They wouldn't want to be close to that person they wouldn't want that person to be part of the circle they would criticize the person so I didn't want to be that person… those are the ones that I was able to see like on the streets

or someone lived a few blocks away but I never talked to those people and I don't think I wanted to be associated with them either.

Norma's association with a non queer-friendly home derives from childhood experiences in Honduras. Like gays in lesbians in many countries, including the United States, the queer people she witnessed in Honduras were rejected and stigmatized. As Adrienne Rich (1986) has stated, "heterosexuality has been both forcibly and subliminally imposed on women" (57). This compulsory heterosexuality has invisibilized the existence and acceptance of lesbians in Honduras and the rest of Latin America in a deeply embedded way. Norma's experience is reflective of this reinforcement of heterosexuality as the norm and as a social institution, an accordingly, being associated with women who are lesbian is something she was socially trained to avoid being part of. Gays and lesbians in fact existed in her neighborhood but fear of social stigma prevented Norma from associating with them.

When asked of her relationship to Honduras she stated that, "Bottom line, I'm never going back. That's the bottom line. I'm never going back. The times I've been back I don't feel safe. I don't feel I belong." Norma's feelings of belonging and "not belonging" in Honduras could be associated more with her current life in a metropolitan resourceful area of the United States – Southern California. Later she stated, "Yes, yes I think I'm better off here and not just for the sexuality thing but for many other aspects. Yes definitely." The aspects she refers to in her interview are financial and employment opportunities, gender equity and being within close proximity to family.

For the women who participated in this research, there is a perception that their countries of birth are not safe for them to reside in as lesbians. Many of them imagine a "life back home"

as less tolerant of their sexualities. Immigrating to and settling in the United States has, according to them, played a significant role in their ability to express themselves as queer women. Their sense of liberation seems to be heightened by their negative perceptions of their home countries. However, their perceptions may be based on negatively constructed images of gays and lesbians in Latin America. The reasons the women gave for imaging a less open sexual environment in their home countries could be argued as existing in rural and conservative areas of the United States as well where not only lack of access to resources affects lesbian women and gay men, they might also be exposed to conservative, anti-lesbian and gay political agendas. Their constructions of "what it would be like to be back home" are influenced by their current living situations – that is their proximity to large metropolitan cities with vibrant gay and lesbian communities. For these women, their local settlings have affected their over-all views of morality and sexual liberty in the United States. However, this is not to say that their experiences in the United States have all been positive. It seems as though other factors (such as access to steady employment and education) have reinforced their understandings of the United States as well. However, as I will elaborate further, their lives in the current time and space are contradictory on many planes.

In Gloria González-López' (2005) research with 60 heterosexual Mexican immigrants, she found that many of them were exposed to dangers upon migrating to the United States which affected their sex lives. Many reported that living in the United States was more dangerous than living in Mexico (132). These fears included possibilities of child sex abuse, AIDS and HIV as well as drugs, gangs and alcohol. As a result of these dangers and other experiences, a majority of the men she interviewed described North American society as a place dominated by *el libertinaje* – or a lack of moral restraint (217). This is an interesting contrast considering that the

women I interviewed described the United States as a "sexually open" place but towards their benefit (i.e. adult stores for women, LGBT parades and rallies, etc.). These experiences speak to the differing gendered and sexual experiences of heterosexual men and women and Latina lesbian immigrants.

In the following section I discuss the most fascinating dimensions of our interviews. Despite the apparent gratitude for having access to gay and lesbian resources and communities, the women interviewed encountered many opposing forces that exist in contradiction to their sense of liberation. Some of the women seemed to be aware of this contradiction while others perhaps were not. For the later, it became evident in less obvious ways.

Walking Contradictions – The Coatlicue State

Coatlicue is the Mexica goddess of birth and death. She is believed to be the Earth Mother who conceived all celestial beings, and according to Gloria Anzaldúa, she depicts the contradictory. Simultaneously she represents duality in life, a synthesis of duality, and a third perspective – something more than mere duality or synthesis of duality. Anzaldúa further examined Coatlicue by developing what we now know as the *Coatlicue State,* something she describes as "a way station or a way of life." She elaborates on the *Coatlicue State* by stating,

> Let the wound caused by the serpent be cured by the serpent. The soul uses everything to further its own making. Those activities or *Coatlicue* states which disrupt the smooth flow (complacency) of life are exactly what propel the soul to do its work: make soul, increase consciousness of itself. Our greatest disappointments and painful experiences –

if we can make meaning out of them – can lead us toward becoming more of who we are. Or they can remain meaningless (Anzaldúa 1987: 66-70).

Inspired by Anzaldúa's theorizing, I incorporate the paradigm of *Coatlicue State* as a foundation to examine and understand the many contradictions experienced and expressed by the women I interviewed. I suggest that the women interviewed recognize these contradictions and lead them toward becoming more of who they are. *Coatlicue* depicts and embodies the contradictory, and the *Coatlicue State* is a *contradictory state.* As AnaLouise Keating (2008) has stated in an online article Anzaldúa encourages us to "embrace the apparent contradiction and insists that the spiritual/material, inner/outer, individual/collective dimensions of life are parts of a larger whole, joined in a complex, interwoven pattern[7]." The women interviewed experience these contradictions with the many forces affecting them as immigrants, lesbians and women. These contradictions do not seem to hinder their livelihoods. Rather, they create meaning and lead them towards better understandings of themselves.

I begin this section with a compelling statement from Nancy, a 39-year-old Mexican woman who identified herself as a lesbian. She described the United States as a place that allows her to live openly as a lesbian, yet restricting at the same time because of her immigrant status[8]. When I asked how she reconciles these two conflicting emotions she responded by saying,

> It's a love-hate type of feeling. Um…because I know on one side I don't have my documents and you know I've been waiting for so long and you know and the other hand I can be myself more. I have more freedom here than if I was back home. I think that

[7] Source: http://www.accessmylibrary.com/article-1G1-187797733/im-citizen-universe-gloria.html
[8] At the time of the interview, Norma was undocumented and waiting for status papers to be processed through her sister.

being able to leave back home and live here gave me a perspective of to um…to evaluate my situation. I can't go back. This is all I know so I call this home so I love the country because I live here but uh at the same time you know we can't get married you know…we don't have the same rights so how do you reconcile those things? I don't, I guess . I don't. I cant. I can't.

This particular interview was revealing in several ways. First, she clearly describes her relationship with the United States as a contradictory one, or "love-hate". She is aware that despite certain benefits there are also drawbacks. Second, she understands her process of migrating to the United States as a means of evaluating her situation, or, as Anzaldúa might say, "increasing consciousness." Her situation refers to who she is as a woman and a lesbian. As an immigrant she is further faced with understandings of who she is. Finally, her inability to reconcile her limitations with liberations indicates that these two forces work and live simultaneously in a current time and space for Nancy. They are irreconcilable – a state of being that may never change, nor does it have to.

Cristina, a Mexican-born lesbian experienced a similar contradiction when she obtained her citizenship. She takes a lot of pride in being a Mexican-native, but she understands the certain privileges in becoming a U.S. citizen. She articulated that, "Life in the U.S. is full of opportunity, but its also very stressful and very antsy." Here she describes the day she became a U.S. citizen.

But I remember when you know she told me I passed. 'Congratulations you are now a citizen… how does it feel like'? And my answer to them – there were three women – I remember one was Asian. And I said I just feel like I betrayed my country you know like

> I'm selling myself and I have to because in order for me to live here I have to kind of give away, you know, my nationality. And they were just looking at me like I can't believe she just said that! At the INS whatever place! They asked me a question and I answered. But to me it's kinda hard because I do have my dual citizenship so when I go to Mexico I enter as a Mexican; when I come back I enter as an American. But never in my life would I claim myself American…you know or Mexican American. I'm a Mexican who got the chance to be here you know and became a citizen because its part of the process. It's part of, like, what they require. But I'm Mexican…. You know *soy mexicana, nací en México, soy americana* (I'm Mexican, I was born in Mexico, I'm American) because I have to be in order for me to stay in the United States.

There are many factors working together in this narrative. First, the memory that Cristina recalls is still vivid in her imaginary in a way that maintains the strong emotional reaction she experienced the day she attained her citizenship. She clearly remembers details and emotions such as betrayal and a sense of nationalism. This is similar to Rosa's emotional response to becoming a citizen. Second, she is lucid about the privileges that she is afforded by becoming a U.S. citizen (i.e. ability to move freely to and from Mexico). The messiness of crossing the U.S.-Mexico border as one person and re-entering as another is caught up in the contradictory allegiances associated with citizenship-based identity. She knows she is Mexican, but has to be an American at the same time. Her identity is compromised as a direct result of her immigrant status, and ironically, her privilege – because she is a naturalized citizen who can travel freely with an American passport.

Rosa, also a naturalized citizen, expressed her discontent and feelings of betrayal by becoming a U.S. citizen. When prompted with a question regarding citizenship she responded by saying, "when I became a U.S. citizen and I remember doing the whole thing…and it was so ugly for me. I felt, like, ugly. I felt like a traitor." These negative sentiments are met with conflicting emotions of gratitude about a perceived safety by living in the United States as an out lesbian. Later in her interview she stated that,

> I don't really like this country but knowing that I can be queer and find and have access to women who love women so easily is a blessing. I guess. So whenever my mom says that she hates living here and that she wished she would have stayed in Mexico or whatever. In my heart I'm like, you're here because of me. The universe wanted me to be happy and to be a little loved like the way I feel like I'm loving right now, you know?

I find Rosa's response to be particularly revealing because she conflates her migration process with her sexuality in a number of ways. She admittedly dislikes the United States but considers it a blessing in terms of access to a lesbian community. She also connects her contradictory feelings in a spiritual way to her relationship with her mother[9] to understand the deeper meaning within this tension. This inner process is a reflection of what Anzaldúa (1987) identified as *la facultad*, which is "the capacity to see in surface phenomena the meaning of deeper realities to see the deep structure below the surfaces" (60). By invoking *la facultad*, one

[9] The majority of the women expressed a deep and loving relationships with their mothers, and how immigrating to the United States has affected their relationships. These particular mother-daughter relationships are compelling because the nature of these relationships are contingent upon the process of migration. Although I would have liked to include a section about the mother-daughter relationship, this discussion will not be included in this project.

confronts "anything that tears the fabric of our everyday mode of consciousness and that thrusts us into a less literal and more psychic reality [that] increases awareness" (61).

The following account given by Indya highlights an in-between space in which several of these women reside. Indya examines this contradictory space in terms of time spent in each location. She aligns herself with her native country, yet recognizes certain opportunities in the United States.

> I love my country. You know, I love my country and if you were to ask me that I say like three years ago I would have been more into like yea I am Mexican. I'm still Mexican, that hasn't changed but my perspective has changed in the sense that I've been given here opportunities that I haven't been given over that and because I'm almost to the point where I've been here the same amount of time that I was over there. I'm, like, right in the middle you know so I dunno.

The final selection of interviews that I found particularly intriguing came from two lesbian-identified women from Cuba. Their story began as street performers who emigrated from Cuba to Russia then Mexico in 2006 at ages 29 and 34. During this year, the transition from Russia to Mexico was met with some difficulties. Initially they had planned to travel through Spain before arriving in Mexico, but Spanish immigration officials would not let one of the women enter the country. The women hypothesize that Bani, the woman who was denied entrance, was rejected because of her appearance. She is Afro-Cubana and "looks like a lesbian." They rerouted their plans and were allowed to travel through England to get to Mexico. At the Mexican border they entered the United States legally since Cuban citizens are allowed entrance without question. At the United States-Mexico border, border patrol agents took their Cuban forms of identification. The literal and metaphorical actions of border agents taking the

women's identification speaks to how citizenship and belonging in the United States means the elimination of national origins. This will be made evident later with some of the participants discussing their American citizenship ceremonies.

What is interesting about this story is that the women altered their appearances (to look more "straight") before passing through British customs because friends warned them that women who "looked" gay may not be granted entrance. They had already experienced this kind of denial in Spain. This is a process Eithne Lubhéid (2002) addresses in the chapter entitled "Looking Like a Lesbian" in *Entry Denied.* Although her work in this chapter primarily addresses the U.S. immigration system, I find her work to be valuable and applicable towards other geopolitical borders, such as the ones addressed by the Cuban interviewees. Lubhéid argues that "lesbian and gay exclusion functioned…not because of its grounding in rational thought but because of its ability to weave together a range of disparate, sometimes contradictory, and often clearly unreasonable homophobic discourses and practices into a chain or system" (100). Furthermore, she adds that, "racial and class histories integrally structure how gender and sexual identities are produced, negotiated, oppositionally deployed and sanctioned at the border" (101).

Laura and Bani were allowed to cross at the United States-Mexico border because of their Cuban nationality[10], a sort of ironic political privilege, which has resulted in part from a long history of political relations with Cuba. This political privilege eclipsed the fear of "looking like a lesbian," it did not apply to them, though it may still be reason for denying visas to other foreign nationals. On the one hand, in Laura's words, the Cuban visa is "denied by every

[10] The Cuban Adjustment Act (CAA), Public Law 89-732, is a United States federal law enacted on November 2, 1966. The law applies to any native or citizen of Cuba who has been inspected and admitted or paroled into the United States after January 1, 1959 and has been physically present for at least one year; and is admissible to the United States as a permanent resident. Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cuban_Refugee_Adjustment_Act

country in the world, except the United States and Russia." Therefore they were able to take advantage, ironically, of their Cuban citizenship by entering the United States without question. On the other hand, it is difficult for most other Latin American nationals to enter the country legally, and it is very difficult for a gay or lesbian immigrant to enter the United States, considering that not all are accepted for sexual asylum and gay and lesbian citizens cannot petition their non-citizen partners.

The scenario presents a strange conflation of sexuality and nationality. While immigrants from all countries meet obstacles in obtaining visas or legal entrance or stay, Cuban nationalists surpass this specific task by just being in their Cuban bodies at the border. As moving bodies they carry with them the history of United States imperialism and contradictory policies.

What the two women found quite contradictory in their migration process was the heightened surveillance surrounding sexuality in the United States, yet the simultaneous feelings of openness in regards to queer sexuality. The women are self-employed artists who perform Cuban hip-hop. Because they are both out lesbians, and because their lyrics carry strong political language, they attract a devout following of Latinas and Latinos, political radicals and LGBT people. Their primary reasoning for immigrating to the United States was to be able to pursue their music careers. They have performed at Gay Pride festivals in many large cities in the United States and Latin America. Therefore, they both share a deep appreciation for the visible gay and lesbian communities that support them musically and politically.

This deep appreciation for their Latino gay and Latina lesbian fans however, was met with the women's witness to the hyper-concern over sex and sexuality that they have experienced in the United States. For example, upon entering this country the women were sent to a non-profit immigrant resource organization located in Austin, and were required to watch a

video about sexual harassment. This was part of their responsibilities as newly arrived Cubans. This was something Laura found to be quite strange and contradictory. According to her

> It was like hey – there is something in the United States laws and its called sexual harassment. You can't ask people to have sex just like that. No, no, no you need to respect people.

She explained that Cuban people are viewed a certain way by immigration officials as being sexually careless and forward. Therefore she felt that this portion of the video was meant to specifically target their Cuban sexuality. Considering how open they felt the United States to be in terms of sexuality, they both felt that this sexual regulation was quite contradictory. The fact that potential legal permanent residents were confronted with information about sexual harassment speaks loudly unto itself. It reflects how immigration is informed by sexuality in terms of assimilating newly arrived people to "fit in" and perhaps better understand the working of daily American life. The women learned very quickly that despite the exposure to gay and lesbian resources and communities that they so appreciated (as I discussed in Chapter One), there was also a felt containment surrounding the subject of sexuality. Laura, very direct in her understanding of this odd double standard, reflected on this by saying that, "It's a contradiction." Bani also stated "in theory and visually maybe here its more liberal but physically…corporeally not really."

Next, I highlight the sections of these interviews that illustrate the contradictory circumstances that are the embodied experiences of the Latina lesbian immigrants in this study. In discussing embodiment, I refer to how the process of immigration (uprooting, resettling, etc.)

is felt within the body. First, because most of the women migrated at such an early age, this places them in a circumstantial category of gay and lesbian immigrants. None of the women immigrated to the United States *because* of their sexuality, nor did they flee homophobic persecution in their home countries as sexual refugees. They came from their countries of origin to the United States with their families; migration was not a personal decision. They came of age, and, came out at a time in the United States when they were able to reflect upon their migratory experiences later in life. Much like many of the dynamics in their lives, this reflection is rife with contrasting feelings of acceptance, liberation, allegiance and limitations. As the interviews revealed the women felt they had access to gay and lesbian resources, for which they were grateful. However, some women expressed feelings of limitation in being undocumented, sense of betrayal in becoming citizens and witness to racist actions. They are, as Rosa stated, *walking contradictions*.

I do not suggest that this term –walking contradictions-- is a way of categorizing, nor do I wish to negatively imply that they live their lives in contradictory ways. Rather, I rely on Rosa's introspective reflections to examine the sentiments my participants have expressed regarding gratitude yet frustration, isolation yet liberation and fear yet happiness are potential contradictions. Rosa used the term 'walking contradictions' to describe her feelings toward her family's attitudes and beliefs about her lesbian identity. Despite the fact that her mother was available and willing to discuss sexuality related topics such as discussions of birth control and even her own sex life (perhaps something many Mexican families may not feel comfortable doing), she was in constant disapproval of Rosa's lesbian sexuality. This paradoxical process of tension with regard to sexuality (as in "let's talk about sex but I do not like you as a lesbian") is what Rosa identified as a contradiction. Rosa relied on "walking contradiction" to discuss the

many contradictions in her life, including the gratitude of being able to live openly as a lesbian in the United States, yet a hatred for this country because of the pain and trauma she has felt as a Mexican immigrant woman. As Sarah Ahmed states, "migrations involve complex and contradictory relationships to social privilege and marginality" (90).

A compelling observation is that Rosa referred to herself as a *walking body*. Her body moves through and with these contradictions. The movement of the body resonates with the movement migration. The recognition of her body as not only contradictory but also in movement reflects a resilience and "making sense of" these contradictions. Anzaldúan theory is one that recognizes this movement as imperative to experience growth, healing and understanding of oneself. Nepantla – or an in-between state – occurs when the body moves from one place to another, when it travels (2009:180). In employing the Coatlicue State she claims "We have a tradition of migration, a tradition of long walks (1987: 33)." This is where the moment of growth and consciousness occurs. She continues, "Every increment of consciousness, every step forward is a *travesía*, a crossing…if I escape conscious awareness… I won't be moving. 'Knowing' is painful because after 'it' happens I can't stay in the same place and be comfortable" (70). Rosa, as well as several of the other women, experience this growth and consciousness through movement. In the previous chapter citizenship consciousness developed as a result of their moving, migrating bodies. In the following section the women become more aware of themselves, their bodies and their presence as walking, moving contradictions.

Home, Migration and Body

I will explore the body in relationship to sexuality and immigration in the final section of this chapter. There are several terms working together here so I will first explain my intentions. Several of the women collided descriptions of home with body and migration during their interviews. Laura, a Cuban-born lesbian, eloquently answered, "My home is my body. I think that my roots have wings," when we talked about citizenship. Regardless of where her 'wings' take her she is always at 'home'. As I listened to Laura and the other women, I kept asking myself, how do we begin to make use of the body in conversation? Anzaldúa understands the body as a location of deep meaning and understanding. In a 2002 email dialogue included in *The Anzaldúa Reader*, she explained that,

> When your entire antenna quiver and your body becomes a lightning rod, a radio receiver, a seismograph detecting and recording ground movement, when your body responds, every part of you moves in synchronicity. All responses to the world take place within our bodies (as cited in Keating, 2009: 293).

I am particularly drawn to this description of the body because it illuminates the reaction the body has to a woman's lived experiences. I encourage the reader to consider the depth of Anzaldúa's words when thinking about how the intersection of body, immigration and home would manifest on the bodies of the women I interviewed. Like some of my participants, Anzaldúa also discusses the fear of going home to her community because of homophobia she might face. For her, *home* indicates a bodily experience. She states "Not me sold out my people but they me. So yes, though 'home' permeates every sinew and cartilage in my body, I too am

afraid of going home (1987:43)." This statement captures the essence of the many contradictions of home and the body. How can one inhabit home as her body, yet live in fear of it at the same time? The layers and responses to this question are many, and several of the women I interviewed shared this sentiment. When Anzaldúa means 'home' she refers to the U.S. Southwest, part of the same territory my informants perceived as 'safe' for lesbians.

Additionally I refer to the writings of Sarah Ahmed to continue this conversation about home and the body. In *Strange Encounters* she explains that,

> The question of home and being at-home can only be addressed by considering the question of affect: being-at-home is a matter of how one feels or how one might fail to feel…experiences of migration – of not being in a place one lived as home – are felt at the level of embodiment, the lived experience of inhabiting a particular space, a space that is neither within nor outside bodily space…The process of moving away or estrangement involves a reliving of the home itself: the process of moving is a movement in the very way in which the migrant subject inhabits the space of home (2000: 92).

It is this very embodiment of the migration experience that I further explore as the women interviewed seek to understand home. As Ahmed explains, the remaking of home is produced through migration and felt at the level of embodiment. What does this embodiment sound like? What does it look like? As expressed in the last section, these feelings are often contradictory, but very much remembered and valued.

I begin this section with an interview that I feel most highlights this convergence of home and body. Rosa, a lesbian born in Mexico, expressed one of the more articulate responses when prompted with the question, "What does citizenship mean to you?" This was her response:

> I don't know. I don't know because for me originally it was something I never, it meant where I was from. Of course I was born in Mexico in my heart. And my hearts in a lot of places but that's primarily one of the places because every time I went there as a kid on and off…just the smell of what Mexico is...the feeling the way it touched your body. It was...it felt like home like what was real. It's like being with a woman…it is…it's like home. It's the feeling of being sucked in by the light. And so for me when I say that I still don't know what that means…it's like…I'm grateful…as grateful as I am to be in this place….and home as this might feel it doesn't give me…it's like if I decided to settle for a man. That's what [having] a U.S. citizenship means for me. Like I'm settling for a man, it's like I'm settling for the U.S. citizenship. This is my home for now.

Rosa's description of smells tied to home is similar to the experience of other Latinas. Anzaldúa (1987) conflates skin sensations and smells as part of her identity formation, noting, "For me food and certain smells are tied to my identity, to my homeland" (83). Ahmed (2005) offers insightful elements to understand Rosa's bodily memories of home:

> Throughout the story, the trauma and pain of not being fully at home is narrated through skin sensations. The physical sense of moving through space is enough to trigger a memory of another place. Memory hence works through the swelling and swearing of the skin: the memory of another place which one lived as home involves the touching of the body, and the animating of the relation between the body and the space which it inhabits and is inhabited by.

I found this particular interview to be one of the most compelling for several reasons. First, she is unsure of what home is but understands it through body sensations – smells and sensuality. Being in Mexico *feels* like home because of the way that it smells. Smell activates this emotional connection to home and belonging. Being at home is also being with a woman. For Rosa, home is fluid in some aspects but firmly rooted in others. She is uncertain about where *home* is, but is certain about the fact that *home* is with a woman. This is a comforting home. Second, she conflates a United States citizenship with what it would mean to be with or "settle for" a man. She associates a United States citizenship with heterosexuality. She wants neither but understands that they both afford certain privileges. Her statement responds to the deployment of heterosexuality as state-endorsed norm. United States immigration has a history of coupling citizenship and heterosexuality (Luibéid 2002); therefore it is no surprise that she compares these two privileged social spaces. As a lesbian, she is at its worst "undocumented" but she "feels at home," while heterosexuality (an expression of sexual supremacy) is associated with a privileged legal status in this country.

Other women conceptualized home in terms of productivity and development. I primarily use these terms in economic means. By productivity and development I refer to my participant's desires and efforts to create financial, social, and cultural stability. Indya expressed a loyalty to her native country by referencing popular culture, as many of the women did. In the following statement she discusses home as a location of development, while at the same time referencing her body.

> Yea I have to say this is my home now. Its funny because to some extent like I said I'm Mexican and I love my country you know and recently I don't know if you saw the U.S.

> and Mexican match, soccer match I was lovin' it! 5-0! Come on! I was lovin' it! It's been 10 years since we won here in the United States so you know when it comes to certain things you know my heart is over there but at the same time part of my heart is over here because of my family but I consider my family is here, my life and where I see my life is going I see it developing here, I don't see it developing over there.

The very fact that Indya is an immigrant woman places her in a position to feel the processes of identification within her body. She describes these sentiments through feelings of her heart – that it is torn between two places. She is reminded of this feeling when referencing a U.S.-Mexico soccer match, and finally she concludes by considering home through development ("I see it developing here").

Marcia, a 39-year old lesbian from Mexico, also considered home in terms of productivity and development. She expressed that,"…this is my home for right now. This is the home where we're gonna eventually – I see it as a productive home – because we're working, making money for our future."

Nancy was the only interviewee who candidly spoke about currently residing in the United States. without documentation. Although other women admitted to having entered the country "illegally," Nancy was the only women who referenced her undocumented status. She stated that,

> And…if you know I have to speak openly as right now I've been in this country for 23 years and I still don't have my documents. I adopted this country as my country as my

home and yet I cannot drive because I don't have a drivers' license. I'm still waiting through one of my sisters so definitely another obstacle that I had to overcome.

When asked what citizenship meant to her, she replied,

The word citizenship means to be able to drive. To be able to…you know pretty much be in the system because right now I feel like I'm not in the system – I'm like outcast. I wanna be able to vote. Can't vote. I wanna be able to leave the country if I want to come back. You know…and I dunno because right now its...its came to the point that I – I dunno whether it is so important anymore. It became…I mean I've been living without those documents…now its more like the legal thing. I wanna be able to you know...I do my taxes every year regardless but I don't I never ask for financial aid or any type of help. Ever. So you know and I do need it. (laughs) . So that's frustrating! You know...I can't…I dunno but overall it's the sense to belong to …I left home when I was 14 years old so if I ever go back I don't even know where to start to you know…I wouldn't know where to go you know because honestly I would not…this is home.

Nancy's story is particularly compelling for many reasons. First, as the previous section indicated about many of the interviewees, she is met with contradictory feelings about her current living situation. Even though she would call the United States her home, this is a still a home that doesn't engage with her in a safe way. She cannot drive, vote or be "in the system." Her body is contained and unable to engage in movement, freely. She is also in a middle and "frustrating" place that she calls "home." She has made home of the Borderlands – or the potentially transformational space where opposites converge, conflict and transform (Anzaldúa

2009: 318). Structurally, she is limited because of her immigrant status – a situation informed by her sexuality in that her partner (a United States naturalized citizen) cannot petition her as a spouse.

To return to Susan Bibler Coutin's (2000) work with Salvadoran immigrants she outlines several features of nonexistence that may help us understand Nancy's situation. First, nonexistence denies the ability to document oneself in daily life, i.e. utility accounts, leases or rent receipts. Second, undocumented persons are denied existence by policies that define wage labor. Because undocumented persons lack work authorization they are ineligible for employment, forcing them to work under false pretenses or as independent and often exploitable workers. Finally, Coutin argues that the unauthorized are confined to illegality through practices that limit their mobility. Because they are subject to deportation and detention, undocumented persons may limit their travel and are confined to social and territorial non-locations. In short, there are multiple senses in which migrants can be said to not exist. Whether or not Nancy lives in a space of non-existence is relative to given situations. The structural limitations affecting the everyday life of Nancy are revealing as well as the ways in which women like her become creative in their conceptualization of home, despite this containment.

Finally, I would like to discuss a statement given by Norma, a Honduran woman who articulated emotion and experiences on her body through different means.

> I know I was born there I have lots of cousins and uncles and I still have family over there but I don't feel I belong there mainly. It doesn't feel like home. Whereas here, this feels like home. I mean I became an adult here I've been here a long time because I see my dad he came here when he was 65, he's 69 right now and he can't get used to it so I

> think that the age factor its – it has a lot to do. My mom on the other hand she came here when she was 26 um she knows English but its not very good…but she feels just like me – she's never going back. She's gonna die here she doesn't wanna live anywhere else but in the U.S. I mean if you, we don't know any other country anyway. I mean we know Honduras but we're not thinking about going back there we're not thinking about investing there. Everything we think about the future it's all here. I'm not even thinking about when I die to send my body – forget it! I actually wanna be cremated by the way, just get rid of it. This is my present, I tell [my partner]. This body is the present.

Norma configures home in a variety of ways in relation to her body and her process of migration. She mentions a specific sense of belonging associated with feeling like *home.* But, what does that belonging look and feel like? First, like Indya, who in the previous section associated her migratory experience through expressions of time and space, Norma considers time spent in the United States as a means of establishing home. She and her family have both spent a significant amount of time residing in the United States, therefore this feels more like home for her/them. Second, like Marcia and Indya, she considers how productive and developmental her life is in the United States. This is a place for her to work and live, and thus invest and imagine a future.

Finally, I find this interview to be particularly revealing because of Norma's association with her body and its relationship with death. Her experience as an immigrant woman has informed her decision-making in what to do with her body after she dies. Her description of home is permanent, in the sense that she will never move to Honduras, whether she is alive or dead. As a lasting impression she chooses to leave her cremated body with her current partner as

a gift. "This body" will not return to her country of origin. Rather her body will stay at home with the woman she considers to *be her home*, a circumstance born from the experience of being a lesbian immigrant. Her body also plays double meaning as both present, in that it exists for now with no past or future, and as a gift.

Conclusion

Throughout the different sections of this chapter it has been revealed the many lived contradictions that these women have experienced. First, I introduced a general sentiment felt by my participants about the perception of queer-friendliness in their countries of origin. Regardless of what may currently be occurring in these countries, their perception of their native countries is where the focus lies. I began this chapter with these narratives to depict how, regardless of their feeling of safety as lesbians in the United States, their lives are met with overlapping tensions along racial, gendered, sexual and national lines. They may feel more liberty in certain aspects, but containment because of their legal status in this country, which resulted in the inability to drive, get married or a general sense of identity. Some of these expressed contradictions were discussed in the second section of this chapter. While some of the women used the word *contradiction* in their statements, others did not, indicating a certain continuum of fluid consciousness regarding their positions as lesbian Latina immigrants.

Finally, I examine how the women express their migratory experiences as a bodily experience in narrations of what it means to be home. While some women understood *home* as a productive and developmental concept – that is they were able to create financial and social stability – others envisioned home by means of freedom of expression and imaginations of the afterlife.

When listening to the stories of these women I can't help but think of different discriminatory laws against LGBT and immigrant individuals. The message being sent is a narrative that certain individuals are not welcome, supported or visible. To reiterate an earlier quote by Sarah Ahmed, these narratives shape bodies and lives in the ways in which they live and love. This is not a new phenomenon in the history of U.S. immigration. Eithne Luibheid (2001) argues that "lesbian and gay exclusion never functioned as an isolated system, but instead was part of a broader federal immigration control regime that sought to ensure a "proper" sexual and gender order, reproduction of white racial privilege, and exploitation of the poor" (xiv). Although same-sex marriage is legal in Connecticut, Iowa, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Vermont, and Washington, D.C., non-citizens cannot be petitioned by their United States citizen partners. However, there is legislation in place that could change this, which I will further elaborate on in the Conclusion.

The U.S.-Mexico geopolitical border (where all but one of my interviewees travelled through upon entering this country) has served as a site of exclusion in terms of gender, sexuality, ethnicity and skin color to uphold a national project of an American identity and image. Yet at the same time the deceivingly inclusive and popular rhetoric including "nation of immigrants", "liberty and justice for all" and others contradict the many policies and actions taken at the border. Ultimately, the border serves as a site of many contradictions for my participants when considering their gender, sexuality and national origin in a way that recreates and reproduces embodied meanings of home, belonging, citizenship and nation.

Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) recognizes the potential development of ambiguity when met with such overlapping and conflicting worlds of navigation, contending that one

> Constantly has to shift out of habitual formations; from convergent thinking, analytical reasoning that tends to use rationality to move toward a single goal to divergent thinking, characterized by movement away from set patterns and goals and toward a more whole perspective, one that includes rather than excludes (p.101).

She encourages us to cope "by developing a tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguity" (101) and to not only sustain these contradictions but to turn the ambivalence into something else. As I stated before the women inhabit a *Coatlicue State*, a contradictory place where they can become more of who they are. These contradictions, tensions, sentiments are not consuming. They are real, understood and perhaps even a way of life. The women would seem to have no other choice than to turn any ambivalence into something else – a something else that recognizes the many levels and layers as productive and that help create them as individual women. Anzaldúa (2002) describes seven stages of *conocimiento* as a space in which

> You struggle with the shadow, the unwanted aspects of the self. Together, the seven stages open the senses and enlarge the breadth and depth of consciousness, causing internal shifts and external change. In a day's time you may go through all seven stages, though you may dwell in one for months. You're never only in one space, but partially in one, partially in another, with nepantla occurring most often – as its own space and as the transition between each other others. Together, these stations constitute a meditation on the rites of passage, the transitions of life from birth to death, and all of the daily births and deaths in-between. Bits of your self die and are reborn in each step (545-546).

In thinking about the women I interviewed, they are within their levels of consciousness experiencing internal and external changes. Their conceptualizations of citizenship, how they understand home and where sexuality converges on their immigrant bodies are all met at different levels of consciousness – dying and reliving in each day.

CONCLUSION

Walking Forward: Where to go From Here

The soul speaks, the body acts. – Gloria Anzaldúa

But as a critical map user with an erratic sense of direction, I know that the topographies of knowledge that will face us will always present a wrinkle or two worth saving. One can also learn a thing or two from misreading maps and even from getting lost. -Carlos Decena in *Latina/o Sexualities*

On April 23rd, 2010 the Governor of Arizona, Jan Brewer, signed into law a highly controversial piece of legislation. Senate Bill 1070 allows for the state criminal enforcement of undocumented people living in the state of Arizona. As it stands, law enforcement agents can now identify, prosecute and deport undocumented individuals (Archibold, 2010). Around the same time, a bill popularly referred to as the "Ethnic Studies Ban" (HB 2281) was also passed and signed into law. This bill prohibits within the public education system "classes that advocate ethnic solidarity, that are designed primarily for students of a particular race or that promote resentment toward a certain ethnic group (Cooper, 2010)." This bill effectively disallows for courses that would specifically focus on the histories and experiences of ethnic minorities. The passing of SB1070 and HB 2281 has created a negative backlash across the country. To begin, a long list of states (VotoLatino, 2010) are currently considering passing similar legislative bills that would criminalize undocumented persons living within those relative states. Dr. Sandra Soto, a Chicana professor at Arizona State University, was verbally attacked during her

commencement address last Spring. In response to these and other similar actions, activists have organized en masse to protest the adamant and newly legalized racism and xenophobia[11].

Despite the disturbing and compelling occurrences in Arizona (not to mention nation-wide), what is more intriguing to me is the third attack on individual liberties. In a final sweeping move to voice loud and clear who is and who isn't recognized as part of the American standard, House Bill 2013 was enacted into law within weeks of the previously mentioned bills. HB 2010 repeals already present domestic partnership benefits for Arizona state employees (Pallack, 2009), a move that was essentially directed towards gay and lesbian state employees. The combination of anti-immigrant and anti-gay and lesbian legislations reflects upon a greater national backlash against those deemed as unwanted. It would seem to be no coincidence that one would allow for permission of discrimination of the other. A study conducted by Danielle Antoinette Hidalgo and Carl Bankston III (2009) measured public opinions towards immigration and gay marriage, contended that "these two controversies, over immigration policy and over sexuality and marriage, are, in fact, closely connected" (5). They found that attitudes towards same-sex marriage were similar to those of immigration noting, "support or opposition of individuals regarding same-sex marriage tends to be associated with support or opposition regarding immigration" (5). Together they are rejected or accepted. Sexuality and immigrant status are conflated to recognize the undesirables, the unwanted.

There is a relationship between inhabiting an immigrant body and a queer body that cannot be overlooked. But what happens when one's body inhabits each social location? Where does sexuality find itself on an immigrant body, in a geographic location that seemingly accepts neither? The chapters outlined here have attempted to answer these questions. The

[11] I reference these events as they were brought to me personally. I received emails, phone calls, flyers and invitations to participate in anti-SB1070 actions.

contradictions yet relationships between the women's identifications as lesbians and as immigrants are reflective of the current greater political climate. SB1070 is just one piece of the anti-immigrant puzzle currently making its way in the public arena. At the same time key LGBT legislations are virulently being debated including the Employment Non-Discrimination Act, Uniting American Families Act, repealing Don't Ask Don't Tell and the most recent overturning of Proposition 8 in California[12]. Some activist groups, such as Out for Equality and Immigration Equality, have recognized the overlapping discriminatory sentiments being directed towards these two groups, as well as the obvious understanding that they are not mutually exclusive. For the most part these activist groups have been focusing on same-sex marriage among bi-national couples as a means of including LGBT immigrants in the public discussion. The Uniting American Families Act, if passed, would make it possible for U.S. citizens to petition their non-citizen same-sex partner. Although this is a step in a positive direction it does not necessarily address the core issue of exclusion as it is legally scripted by the U.S. government. The possibility of LGBT immigrant equality, as it stands, is embedded in the possibility of marriage between same-sex couples. In this sense LGBT activists follow a hetero-centric rhetoric that deems a union between two people as quintessential American – an argument we've heard from traditional marriage coalitions. It is also one of the more common ways of becoming a citizen when it comes to heterosexual bi-national couples. What does this say when marriage seems to be the easier, or idealized, way "in" for many immigrants?

The stories presented here reflect that Latina lesbian immigrants cannot be filed under one storyline. Some of the women were romantically partnered with U.S. citizens at the time of interview while others are not. They are students, activists, teachers, mothers, homemakers and

[12] As of August 5th, 2010 federal Judge Vaughn Walker of the Northern California Federal Court deemed Proposition 8, which repealed gay marriage in the state of California, as unconstitutional.

professionals. They challenge popular ideas and beliefs about immigrants, Latinas and lesbians while desiring to make home of their situations. The research has revealed threads among many different fronts, although only three are outlined next.

First, chapter one discussed how all but one of the women interviewed never discussed sexuality growing up with their parents. For the most part, sexual education came in the form of learning from friends at school, "in the streets" and upon self-discovery through sexual experimentation. Sex and sexuality were viewed as taboo topics of discussion and all but one of the women were encouraged to explore their own sexualities. In some cases sexuality was not a priority because other elements were deemed as more necessary for time and energy. For example, Cristina dismissed the idea of sexual curiosity because she had to focus on her family's financial situation and work to help support her mother and take care of her sister. Other women were in the midst of migrating during an age that would seem appropriate for beginning relationships and sexual expression. Other women chose not to address their sexualities because they were already having romantic feelings for other women yet had no community to explore those sentiments. Clearly, several of the women interviewed had other priorities that did not include beginning or developing their sexual lives. Their age of migration also affected their timeliness in when and how they developed this.

Chapter one also discussed how their sexual education and first sexual experiences were impacted by the age in which they migrated. Because 8 out of 10 of the women migrated at the age of 18 or younger, their first sexual experiences took place in the United States and in urban areas. As young women coming of age in metropolitan cities they were exposed to LGBT communities at a time when they were exploring their sexualities. A number of women felt that if they had stayed in their native countries they might have been too afraid to come out as lesbian

or queer. By coming of age in the United States they did not have to deliberately face this possibility – perceived or real. Most women did not have to face the pressure of marriage in their rural home communities because the age in which they migrated did not give the opportunity for this to occur. Finally, several of the women were already experiencing romantic and sexual feelings towards other women but did not express them. Therefore, because they migrated at the ages in which they did, and to cities with vibrant LGBT populations, this combination allowed for them to express their sexualities in communities and at moments that felt safe and natural for them.

Chapter two examined my participants' views and conceptualizations surrounding citizenship. For many of the women interviewed it is a site of many contradictions and tense feelings. The women developed their own ideas of citizenship or what it means to be a citizen. Some women mentioned geographic location or place of birth, while others focused on political contributions to society. For at least two of the women interviewed obtaining a U.S. citizenship was a painful process. It involved sentiments of betrayal towards their countries of birth and feelings of disgust towards the United States. Even though they recognized the benefits in having a U.S. citizenship they still expressed a sort of discontent with the necessity of having one. Other women viewed it more as an arbitrary device, for even though having citizenship meant the privilege to certain rights these rights were not always guaranteed in practice due to other forms of discrimination such as racism or gender-based bias. A strong majority of the women also connected citizenship towards a more global belief in participation. They made descriptions of what it means to be a citizen in ways that transcend time, space, borders and nation-states, implying that everyone is a citizen of the world. For them, human beings by nature are citizens somewhere.

The second aspect discovered in the conversations regarding citizenship was a sense of citizenship consciousness, which developed as a result of the women's migration to the United States (and in some cases to other countries before arriving and settling in this country). Because the women moved across the U.S. geo-political border they were forced to confront issues and situations surrounding citizenship. This is not to say that they did no think about citizenship before immigrating. Rather, they had to address citizenship as it affected their daily lives. Circumstances would include obtaining a visa or resident status to live in the United States, becoming a U.S. citizen or being unable to drive due to an undocumented status. These situations elevated their citizenship consciousness, with many of the women expressing that they had not thought about citizenship until migrating to the United States.

The interviews highlight the extreme weight, yet arbitrary nature of citizenship. It is intangible yet within reach. The rights guaranteed are not necessarily practiced as the women have experienced. An example of this involves Pedro Guzman, a U.S.-born citizen who was arrested in California and deported to Tijuana. Because Guzman is a mentally disabled man, could not communicate to police authorities that he was born in the United States. His citizenship, in that moment, meant very little yet very much all at the same time. It was insignificant at the time of his deportation, yet cause for witnesses to remain appalled at how a U.S. citizen could possibly experience this. Because his body was read as a foreign or non-white body, it was deemed more suspect than if he had Anglo features.

And finally, chapter three highlighted the women's lived experiences as they see them in contradictory ways – from liberation to limitation. First, the majority of women communicated sentiments that their presence in the United States has connected them to access and resources in the gay and lesbian community. They viewed the United States as sexually "open". There was a

general sentiment of "you see it everywhere" – meaning sex and sexuality. This visibility included gay and lesbian pride functions, LGBT programming on television and a general idea that Americans and open-minded. Their perception of a liberal U.S. was also highly affected by their perceptions of a home that is not queer friendly. Several women remembered how lesbians were treated in their neighborhoods and how queer sexuality was frowned upon and not accepted during their childhoods. Other women were in contact with lesbians in their home countries, and understood the disparities in their experiences. Clearly their perceptions of a queer-friendly U.S. reflected early childhood memories and current communications with gays and lesbians living in the countries they emigrated from, as well as migration to metropolitan cities in the United States that are connected with vibrant gay and lesbian communities and cultures.

All of the women migrated (or eventually moved to) San Francisco, Los Angeles or Austin. All of these cities, despite homophobia in all parts of the United States, have access to gay and lesbian resources. For example, in Los Angeles, the L.A. Gay and Lesbian Center has an anti-violence program, low-cost counseling, free HIV testing, cultural arts programming and many different kinds of support groups. These cities are also home to junior colleges and universities. I emphasize this to further understand how resettlement in urban areas of the United States may directly impact my participants' views of the United States as a whole and their hometowns in Latin America. There are many areas in this country that do not have the kind of cultural, social and health resources that I just described. Perhaps if the women would have moved to more rural areas of this country, their perceptions of their hometowns in Latin America may be different. Or, if they had stayed and moved to cosmopolitan areas such as Mexico City, their romantic destiny might have been different.

Finally, home and body come together in the narratives about migration. Several of the women I interviewed understood meanings of home as it pertained to their bodies. For some, home was something they could feel on their bodies. For others home meant where they would bury their bodies, their migrating body or their non-conforming queer body. What it meant to be home was also met with contradictions and tensions. While a physical home may be rooted in the United States, there was the sentiment that one is a different person when crossing geo-political borders to visit or to go back to a place that was once home. Home, as it would seem, is internally felt and affected by migrations to and from their countries of birth.

Many countries in Latin America have progressive and inclusive legislation benefitting LGBT people. As I stated earlier, Mexico City has legalized same-sex unions and Argentina recently became the first Latin American nation to legalize same-sex marriage. Brazil, Uruguay, Ecuador and Colombia have national legislation that benefits gays and lesbians in terms of adoption, civil unions and cohabitation. Legal recognition does not always guarantee safety, comfort and belonging in a social setting. However, it speaks volumes that some Latin American countries are more progressive in terms of gay equality than the United States. So while many of my participants view the United States as more open, liberal and accepting of sexuality, many Latin American countries have made great strides in including gays and lesbians into the national social body.

Although the women perceived the United States to be a safe place for them to live openly as lesbians, their experiences were met with many contradictions. This sense of liberation was met with many limitations. Only one woman admitted that she was undocumented which placed her in a strange position with her relationship to the United States. Although she expressed a sense of gratitude towards this United States for being able to live as

an out lesbian, she understood that her life was limited because of her legal status. Other women expressed a sense of gratitude as well, which was also met with distaste due to other forms of discrimination or dissatisfaction within the mainstream gay and lesbian movement. They understood that while they may feel fortunate to have been able to come out in the United States, they have also struggled with learning the language, class and social discrimination at the hands of Chicanos and Chicanas, exclusion from education and work opportunities, and general incompatibilities with white, middle class mainstream American culture.

While the relationship of immigration and sexuality has been examined from a global perspective (i.e. non-area specific immigrants) special attention is being paid to Latin American LGBT immigrants. To begin, migration in general is strongly affected by an increasingly globalizing economy. The movement of people resources across borders is front and center. In the U.S., immigration is a highly contested issue with immigrant rights groups and nationalist groups fiercely disagreeing about what it means to live in this country. This conversation is not had without the recognition of sexuality as part of this movement, as Lionel Cantú (2009) states, "[sex] tourism [is]…also a form of migration itself" (98). Somewhere in the middle of this LGBT immigrants seem to remain invisible, but homophobia has never quite made its exit. Immigrant rights and LGBT rights are remaining polarizing issues with only some understanding that these groups are not mutually exclusive. In an era of multi-issue movements and strong political activism it is necessary to recognize the circumstances of LGBT immigrants and research is needed.

Immigration as a research topic has been reviewed and researched under many disciplines. Immigration scholarship has undergone vast revision in recent decades, impelled in part by the enormous growth in migration worldwide. Traditionally, studies of immigration have

been framed by a view of migrants as individual actors making rational choices based on cost-benefit analysis, the horizon of the nation-state, and models of assimilation (Luibhéid, 2005). So, when researching specific populations one is met with the question, why is this kind of research important? What significance does Latina lesbians have and what can we do with these testimonies? As researchers have taught us, immigration and sexuality are intimately connected (Espín, 1999 & 1997; González-López 2005, Luibhéid, 2002; Acosta, 2008; Cantú, 2009), and it is important to place the experiences of queer immigrants in these conversations. This is important given the public debates over sexuality and immigration over recent years. This discussion is timely considering the recent legislative back and forth with same-sex marriage and the intensely xenophobic post-9/11 sentiments towards immigrants. For a country that devoutly touts a tagline of democracy and equality under the law it is only natural for the marginalized to hold their government accountable to this ethos. Government officials have spoken and the people living in this country are answering back and in full force. Activists and organizers are beginning to understand that single-issue movements would only make sense if we were single-issue people. The reality is that we are simultaneously affected by what surrounds us as human beings – healthcare, sexuality, gender, race, class, geographic location, and the list goes on.

So what does the above have to do with the women I interviewed? A simple answer includes both visibility and invisibility. Legislation advancing the current situations of LGBT immigrants cannot progress if there is a belief that this group of people does not exist. Without this visibility, the mainstream LGBT movement will continue to overlook anyone who has not stereotypically fit their idea of what it means to be gay or lesbian in the United States. There needs to be an understanding that being queer is much deeper than sexuality – it should be met with the knowledge that our sexualities are impacted by our nationality, country of birth, and

social location. And it goes beyond conventional understanding of sex: being in a lesbian relationship is not just about sexuality, it is about romantic and family relationships, it is about caring about and supporting the people lesbian women love, including their children, it is about commitment and sharing a life together. Lesbian immigrant women and their families are human beings.

Without visibility those in the struggle for immigrant rights--which often coincides with labor rights--will neglect how immigration has historically been informed by sexuality. These dominant ideas of who belongs in what group become self-evident when they are not challenged. Within dominant academic conversations, scholarship privileging queer Latina women needs special attention. Areas of academic inquiry such as Latin American Studies in the United States have the potential to grow and create safe spaces for these women. Again, the assumption that U.S. Latina lesbians do not have a place in these discussions on topics such as development, economics or political science moves us towards monotonous conversations. When these voices are silenced this creates an invisibility. This is manifested in specific ways. For example, when research on family reunification patterns in migration makes no mention of queer families this maintains heterosexuality as the norm and further marginalizes gay and lesbian immigrants. We must remain critical of all scholarship in these areas and promote the inclusion of traditionally marginalized families and social groups. We must continue to challenge the absence of these voices, especially when the voices, like the ones of my participants, want to be heard.

We must also learn to have these dialogues, discussions and calls to actions on our own terms. It is not our responsibility to inform and educate the mainstream about non-White, middle class gays and lesbians. We must decide an act on the needs of our community as we see fit – not as someone else decides for us. It is also time to recognize the historical relationship

between immigration and sexuality. This country and this immigration system have historically used one against the other. The U.S. border has a history of denying immigrants and gays and lesbians. When immigrant populations are targeted, so are gays and lesbians. It is time to recognize there is a collective struggle, with a long-standing history that must be addressed if we want to achieve the rights we so desire.

This visibility can also be manifested through performance. I mentioned in the Introduction that creative expression played a particular role in how I formulated my own ideas of citizenship, identity and sexuality. Many performances and spaces of creative agency have influenced my work as a graduate student. They also develop spaces for Latinas to work through some of the issues, concepts and ideas discussed in this thesis. At least five women I interviewed were somehow involved in artistic creation. Nancy showed some of her artwork to me in her home after she finished her interview. Despite expressing some of the difficulties as an undocumented person, she showed me her artwork as a way of continuing to go about her life. Rosa works with youth in an arts program, and expressed to me some of the socio-cultural issues she is working on with the youth which reflect some of her own struggles as a Mexican immigrant. She also writes creatively of stories involving issues of race, sexuality and gender. Bani, Cynthia and Laura are all involved with and producers of conscious hip-hop. Their music helps open a space for other lesbians of color to pursue their music interests in a historically male, heterosexual genre.

In sum, performance has, for these women, become a means of addressing their social locations as Latinas, lesbians and immigrants. Queer Latinas have a rich history of struggling to create a space for creative expression that seeks to challenge hegemonic notions of race, sexuality and nationality, and specifically Chicana theatre has been and continues to evolve as a

critically engaging location. From Marga Gomez to Emma Perez and beyond, these Latinas have engaged the arts to tell creative and collective stories. Marga Gomez, a Latina lesbian performer and comedian has unashamedly placed her sexual and racial identifications centrally in her work. This speaks to the much needed visibility for Latina lesbians, such as myself, in mainstream media. Emma Perez' novels speak to experiences of Latinas in the borderlands, among other groups of women. As an academic and creative writer she traverses both terrains setting the example for those of us who cannot separate the creative from the scholarly.

José Esteban Muñoz (1999) describes *disidentification* as a "performative mode of tactical recognition that various minoritarian subjects employ in an effort to resist the oppressive and normalizing discourse of dominant ideology. It is a reformatting of self within the social" (97). To perform disidentity is to resist dominant ideologies by placing queers of color at the foundation of a story, as is the case with many of the queer Latina artists I have mentioned. Many of the women I interviewed performed disidentity, not just through their artistic crafts, but in everyday living. Based on my own personal journeys at UT Austin, I invite my participants and the reader to consider this powerful strategy of resistance (i.e., performance and disidentity) as an avenue to continue challenging dominant belief systems while simultaneously facilitating a space for marginalized persons.

Women of color, lesbian feminists and third world women have struggled to be able to participate in academic conversations. They are still a minority in academic institutions and classrooms. In our academic work, it is urgent to place them as the standpoint from which we should conduct critical analysis. As Carlos Decena states,

> Women who self-identify as Latinas and as lesbians have made invaluable contributions to intellectual and social movements currently identified as feminist, queer, and ethnic nationalist throughout the last decades of the twentieth century in U.S. history. It is terribly ironic that…there is a scanty archive of social science scholarship on Latina lesbians…It is even more ironic that there is so little research, given how important their contributions have been to the creation of spaces where Latinas and other women of color of diverse sexual and gender orientations can talk about and work through their understandings of sexual desires, gender expressions, and agency (2010: 281).

These works are the motivation from which many Latinas derive strength to survive, not only in the academic system, but also in our daily lives. We connect with what is most like us, and we must continue to fill these gaps with our narratives and histories. The research presented is a small drop in the larger untapped pool of stories waiting and wanting to come to surface.

My aim with this research has been to challenge some of the dominant ideologies of what it means to be an immigrant and a lesbian. My hope is to continue to build that space where Latinas and other women of color from diverse sexual, gender orientations and nationalities can speak their truths and know that it need not be hindered, altered or made to feel insecure. My hope is that we may heal the wounds that need to be healed and make them productive for the next generation of Chicana, Latina, feministas, lesbianas and mujeres in activism and academia. I end this thesis with words that I have returned to over and over again during this process:

> "By sending our voices, visuals and visions outward into the world, we alter the walls and make them framework for new windows and doors. We transform the *posos*,

apertures, *barrancas*, *abismos* that we are forced to speak from. Only then can we make a home out of the cracks."

–Gloria Azaldúa, Haciendo Caras, una entrada

Appendix

Name	Country of Origin	City of Residence	Age	Age of Migration	Occupation
Rosa	Mexico	Los Angeles, CA	32	1	Educator/Artist
Marcia	Mexico	Huntington Park, CA	39	6	Deputy Sheriff
Juanita	Mexico	Inglewood, CA	32	6	Laboratory Technician
Cynthia	Puerto Rico	San Francisco, CA	21	8	Full Time Student
Nancy	Mexico	Long Beach, CA	39	14	Full Time Student
Norma	Honduras	Long Beach, CA	35	14	Accountant
Indya	Mexico	Wilmington, CA	28	15	Manager
Cristina	Mexico	San Francisco, CA	38	18	Advertising
Bani	Cuba	Austin, TX	33	29	Self-Employed Artist
Laura	Cuba	Austin, TX	38	31	Self-Employed Artist

Table 1: Study Participants

**All information reflects accuracy at time of interview

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Vita

Candace López was born in Victoria, TX on August 29th, 1982. Her mother, Elizabeth López, is a public school educator and her father, Aroher López, is a minister for the Church of Christ as well as an entrepreneurial carpenter. She grew up in Dumas, TX then moved to St. Anthony, ID where she graduated from South Fremont High School. In 2004 she graduated from Pepperdine University in Malibu, CA with a B.A. in Intercultural Communication and a minor in Spanish. She spent the next four years living in the greater Los Angeles area working for non-profit organizations, The Los Angeles World Affairs Council and the ACLU of Southern California. She also spent those four years volunteering at the L.A. Gay and Lesbian Center and avidly fundraising for organizations that work to end violence against women. Inheriting from her parents the inability to stay in one place for too long at a time, Candace moved to Austin in 2008 in pursuit of her Master of Arts in Latin American Studies with a portfolio in Women's and Gender Studies. After volunteering for two years with Austin-based *allgo*: a statewide queer people of color organization, she now serves as their Director of Community Organizing. She also works with high school women as part of a leadership program though the Institute for Community, University and School Partnerships. Candace credits her family for an endless amount of energy and instilling in her the innate belief that anything is possible. After completing this thesis she finally feels justified in knowing that *home* is never fixed and always changing.

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This thesis was typed by the author.