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THE RED FRONT DOOR, A MEMOIR

by

Camila B. Sanabria

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree

of

MASTER OF ARTS

in

English

Approved:

Jennifer Sinor, Ph.D
Major Professor

Christopher Gonzalez, Ph.D
Committee Member

Michael Sowder, Ph.D
Committee Member

Richard S. Inouye, Ph.D.
Vice Provost for Graduate Studies

UTAH STATE UNIVERSITY
Logan, Utah

2019

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ABSTRACT

The Red Front Door, A Memoir

by

Camila B. Sanabria, Master of Arts

Utah State University, 2019

Major Professor: Dr. Jennifer Sinor
Department: English

This is a creative thesis that contains two components. The first component is a critical introduction arguing for representation of mixed-status families and deportation narratives. The introduction makes this argument by reviewing U.S. immigration policy and engaging with narrative theory. The theory it engages with is Viet Thanh Nguyen's concept of a narrative economy. Specifically, the argument looks at the negative consequences narrative scarcity, or the lack of narratives, creates for mixed-status families that identify as Latinx. These consequences make up the base for the argument of representation. This introduction is meant to act as a defense of the second component to my thesis: a memoir that depicts my experience with deportation and as a member of a mixed-status family.

The memoir is a genre that allows the writer to simultaneously unfold the event in its actuality and discover the event's significance in the writer's life. This combination of presenting and considering a story is what this thesis will accomplish in four chapters. These chapters take place the years before my parents' deportation and the year immediately after. The memoir is a coming-of-age story that explores my ethnic identity,

along with themes such as insider versus outsider. This exploration is represented through the image of the red front door and is the central metaphor of this memoir.

(76 pages)

PUBLIC ABSTRACT

The Red Front Door, A Memoir

by

Camila B. Sanabria

This is a creative thesis that contains two components: 1) a critical introduction that defends the representation of mixed-status families and deportation narratives, and 2) a memoir that depicts my experience with deportation and as a member of a mixed-status family. The second component of this thesis will consist of the first four chapters of my memoir, with the remaining chapters to be completed post-graduation. These chapters take place the years before my parents' deportation and the year immediately after. The memoir is a coming-of-age story that explores my ethnic identity, along with themes such as insider versus outsider. This exploration is represented through the image of the red front door and is the central metaphor of this memoir.

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I would like to thank Dr. Jennifer Sinor for encouraging me to write about my father's deportation and to embrace honesty and vulnerability in my writing. I would also like to thank my committee members, Drs. Christopher Gonzalez and Michael Sowder for their continuous support throughout this process. Thank you for validating my experiences and my voice.

I also give special thanks give special thanks to my family, friends, and colleagues for their encouragement, moral support, and patience as I worked my way from the initial proposal writing to this final document. And finally, I would like to thank my parents for the unbelievable sacrifices they made so that I may be where I am today. This memoir is as much for them as it is for me. It is our story, and I could not have written it without them. Les quiero mucho, Mami y Papi—con todo mi corazón.

Camila B. Sanabria

CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT	iii
PUBLIC ABSTRACT	v
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	vi
CRITICAL INTRODUCTION.....	1
Representing Mixed-Status Families and Deportation Narratives	1
The Mixed-Status Family and U.S. Immigration Policy	4
Critical Theory and Application	9
<i>The Red Front Door</i> , A Memoir	15
Conclusion	18
WORKS CITED	20
CHAPTER ONE	22
CHAPTER TWO	26
CHAPTER THREE	37
CHAPTER FOUR.....	53

INTRODUCTION

Representing Mixed-Status Families and Deportation Narratives in Trump's America

In the field of literature, the experiences of deportation and mixed-status families remain underrepresented as narrative subjects. This fact is especially pronounced when narrowing the focus to Hispanic and Latino/a communities. The amount of representation diminishes even further when examining such narratives written by authors who identify as members of mixed-status families or who have been directly affected by deportation. While I have read various immigrant memoirs depicting the struggles Latino/as face when immigrating to the United States, none of them represented, or focused on, the experience of a mixed-status family and the role deportation plays in those families. Either every member of the family was undocumented, as in Reyna Grande's *The Distance Between Us* (2012), or every member had some form of legal documentation, seen in Esmeralda Santiago's *When I Was Puerto Rican* (1993). If there was a mixed-status family dynamic involved, the author did not highlight their documentation status as a main issue, an example being Daisy Hernandez's *A Cup of Water Under My Bed* (2014). Despite these memoirs' significant contribution to the literary representation of the Latina-American and immigrant's experience, they demonstrate the scarcity of narratives representing mixed-status families and deportation.

At present, only one memoir falls under the category of both, representing mixed-status families and deportation and having an author who identifies with that experience:

Diane Guerrero's *In the Country We Love: My Family Divided* (2016).¹ Guerrero has appeared on various talk shows and given interviews since going public with her story to share more about her experience with deportation and to promote immigration policy reform. This attention is in part due to the author's already established presence in the media. A Colombian-American actress and activist, Guerrero is known for her supporting roles in Netflix's hit series *Orange is the New Black* and the CW's *Jane the Virgin*. Aware of her public platform, Guerrero raises in her memoir the question, "Why am I choosing to reveal so much now?" Her answer is as empathetic as it is political:

It would've meant everything for me to know that someone, somewhere had survived what I was going through. For the thousands of nameless children who feel as forgotten as I did—this memoir is my gift to you. It's as much for your healing as it is for my own... These days, we're surrounded by a lot of talk about immigration reform... Behind every one of the headlines, there is a family... A real-life story that's both deeply painful and rarely told. At last, I've found the courage to tell you mine. (Guerrero and Burford 2-3)

Her words establish both the lack of stories about citizen-children who fear their parents' deportation despite their demographic relevance and the emotional and psychological need for them, especially in the current political climate. Guerrero further illustrates this need in an updated edition of her memoir. Re-published after President Trump's inauguration, Guerrero's memoir includes an afterword that emphasizes the need for these stories—these narratives about mixed-status families and their experience

¹ In addition to Guerrero's memoir, literature surrounding the subject of mixed-status families and deportation exists primarily in the genre of Young Adult fiction. Titles include Julia Alvarez's *Return to Sender*, Marie Marquardt's *Dream Things True*, and Jaqueline Woodson's *Harbor Me*. Of these titles, only two are written by authors of color, and of those two, only one is Latina.

with deportation—now more than ever.

It is also necessary to mention Luis H. Zaya's *Forgotten Citizens: Deportation, Children, and the Making of American Exiles and Orphans*, published in 2015. Although his book is categorized as nonfiction, it is not memoir—the genre on which my introduction is focused. Instead, it is a study on the psychological toll deportation has on citizen-children born to undocumented parents. Despite this distinction, however, Zaya's effort to give these children a voice through the inclusion of case studies and personal narratives is a significant contribution to my argument for representing mixed-status families and deportation narratives. In his book, Zaya claims, “the citizen-children of unauthorized or illegal immigrants are the collateral damage of the laws and policies and immigration enforcement practices that our government enacts. Their situation seldom rises to the critical attention of legislators, other policy makers, and the enforcers of immigration laws” (xiii). In other words, citizen-children in mixed-status families often go unnoticed. The silence surrounding their narratives thus demonstrates the narrative scarcity surrounding the experiences of mixed-status families and deportation.

Building on the conversations Guerrero's memoir and Zaya's study started, this introduction advocates for literary representation of mixed-status families and deportation narratives. To do so, I will liken the lack of representation of these narratives to what Pulitzer-prize winning author and scholar Viet Thanh Nguyen calls “narrative scarcity” (203). Though Nguyen focuses on the limitations and pressures narrative scarcity puts on ethnic writers—specifically, Vietnamese and Asian writers—my introduction will instead focus on two negative consequences narrative scarcity presents for mixed-status families: the simplification of illegal immigration as an issue and the dehumanization of

undocumented immigrants. These consequences are especially relevant when considering the Trump administration, which promoted its presidential campaign on anti-immigrant rhetoric and policies.²

As a response to these consequences and to the argument for representation, I will provide my own experience with deportation as a member of a mixed-status family. Like Guerrero, I will provide my narrative in the form of memoir. However, before I introduce how my narrative will respond to the argument for literary representation, I must first explain the prevalence of mixed-status families and the policies surrounding them.

The Mixed-Status Family and U.S. Immigration Policy

The mixed-status family is not only underrepresented in U.S. literature, but, as a general subject, it has not received much scholarly attention. Studies surrounding these families have only begun to emerge within the last two decades. Michael Fix, former Director of Immigration Studies at the Urban Institute, is among the first to study issues surrounding mixed-status families. In his 2001 study “All Under One Roof: Mixed-Status Families in an Era of Reform,” Fix and senior researcher Wendy Zimmermann define a mixed-status family as “a family in which one or both parents is a noncitizen and one or more children is a citizen” (397). However, the authors make sure to point out that despite the simple definition, the individual structures of such families are often complex. Such complexity, they claim, in turn complicates the “design and implementation of the

² Williams, Breanna. “Trump’s immigration policy (or what we know about it) in 13 illuminating tweets.” *CNN*, 26 Aug. 2016, www.cnn.com/2016/08/26/politics/donald-trump-immigration-tweets/index.html.

already complicated arenas of immigration and immigrant policy” (398). In other words, because the structure of mixed-status families varies on an individual basis, enforcing immigration policy is a much more complicated matter. While their study focuses specifically on how social policies disadvantage citizen children of undocumented parents, they raise two important points surrounding the subject, which will contextualize the validity of my argument.

The first of these points that their study raises is the demographic relevance of mixed-status families. Fix and Zimmermann’s 2001 study reviews the 1998 Current Population Survey to obtain their data. Their study reveals that “9 percent of families with children in the United States are mixed-status families, 85 percent of immigrant families are mixed-status, and one in ten children in the United States live in mixed-status families” (Fix and Zimmermann 399-400). Though these numbers are almost twenty years old, current surveys show that mixed-status families remain prevalent in the United States. The Pew Research Center’s most recent data on undocumented immigrants within the United States was collected in 2016. Their results state that 43 percent of undocumented immigrants live in households with U.S.-born children. Additionally, there were approximately 5 million U.S.-born children under the age of 18 living in mixed-status families, a half a million increase since the last survey in 2007. These numbers, however, do not account for the U.S.-born children over the age of 18 with undocumented parents, which “has risen sharply in recent years as children born in the 1990s have come of age” (Passel).

The other point which Fix and Zimmermann raise in their study is that of family unification and how it is “immigration policy’s abiding commitment... that citizens

should be able to unite with immediate family members” (403). The study first refers to the Immigration and Naturality, or Naturalization, Act of 1965, which changed visa preferences to favor immigrants who had familial relations with U.S. citizens. This act is especially relevant because of how its passing altered the demographic of the United States by removing the racial preferences placed in earlier policies.³ Twenty-five years after the Immigration and Naturalization Act’s passing, U.S. immigration policy continued to preserve “family unification as a central goal” with the 1990 Immigration Act. However, despite these policies’ goals to keep families together and to make legal immigration more accessible, immigrants still face lengthy delays to legalize their status. Fix and Zimmermann claim these delays are caused because of “administrative inefficiencies in adjudicating naturalization benefits,” thus redirecting their study to focus more on social policies and welfare reform (407). However, for my argument on representing mixed-status families and deportation narratives, I will instead look further into immigration policy changes and how they have contributed to the creation of mixed-status families, and thus, the need for representing their stories.

The first of these changes that is important to understand is the Immigration Reform and Control Act, which passed under the Reagan administration in 1986 and was a direct amendment to the Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1965. There are many aspects to this bill, but its main goal was to provide a more accessible path to legalization for undocumented immigrants who met the mandated requirements. This accessibility, then, aligned with immigration policy’s commitment to family unification, since family

³ This act replaced the National Origins Formula, which had been in effect since the 1920s. The National Origins Formula changed US immigration policy due to its addition of numerical limits and the use of a quota system, but it also created racial barriers because of its preference for northern Europeans.

members could more easily legalize their status. However, in ten years, this accessibility would change.

Dramatic change to US immigration policy occurred during the Clinton administration, with the passing of the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA) and the Anti-Terrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act (AEDPA) in 1996 (Cardoso, et al 200). These two policies are especially relevant to examine because of their focus on large-scale removals, or deportation. The IIRIRA opened the door to an increase in deportations by not only granting a larger budget for border control efforts, but also by “expand[ing] the list of deportable crimes” to include non-violent misdemeanors. The AEDPA then “eliminated prosecutorial discretion,” meaning judges could no longer suspend or cancel deportations (Cardoso, et al 200-201).

The IIRIRA and the AEDPA do not account for immigration policy after the September 2001 attacks, which propelled increased efforts to strengthen the nation’s borders. These efforts included the passing of the USA PATRIOT ACT and the creation of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). One of ICE’s actions was to formulate a strategic enforcement plan, which they called Endgame. The plan included the following programs: The Criminal Alien Program, Operation Return to Sender, and Secure Communities (Cardoso, et al 201).

With this understanding of immigration policy, my own narrative surrounding mixed-status families and deportation can enter the conversation. On December 3, 2008, my father was deported—three weeks after ICE arrested him from our driveway. At the time of his arrest and deportation, I understood very little of the immigration system. Like most children with undocumented parents, I was aware of their legal status. Their story is

a complicated one, which I will indulge further in my memoir, but for now I will provide the basics. At the age of fifteen, my father left Colombia and arrived in Miami, Florida with his family on a B-2 visa.⁴ My mother came to the United States on a student visa in her mid-twenties. They met, married, and had my brother and me all while still “legal,” but then their visas expired just before my younger sister’s birth. Recognizing the need for legal assistance, they had hired lawyers to ensure their spot “in line” to legalization and waited patiently for their court dates. Growing up, the threat of deportation was always there, but I never believed it would actually happen. My father was a real estate agent and my mother was an elementary music teacher. They were “in line” and “on the path to citizenship.” As far as I knew, at the age of fourteen, my family was as good as American and belonged in this country.

It has only been in the last two years that I have begun to investigate how deportation happened to my family and educate myself on the immigration system. In my research, I discovered that the Immigration Reform and Control Act of ’86 only accepted applications for a twelve-month period. During this period, my father’s immediate family members would gain their legal status. My father, however, could not resolve his immigration paperwork at that time due to his service as an ecclesiastical missionary from December 1986 to December 1988. This missed opportunity would not have been so critical had Clinton not passed the IIRIRA and AEDPA ten years later in 1996—which coincidentally was also the year my parents’ visas expired. The combination of my father missing his window with the Immigration Reform and Control Act and the increased efforts against illegal immigration, along with the misfortune of malpractice on behalf of

⁴ The B-2 visa is also known as a tourism visa.

his immigration lawyers, ultimately allowed for my father's deportation just twelve years later. Because of the IIRIRA and AEDPA, more deportations and less court hearings occurred, turning US immigration policy away from its commitment to family unification and towards a system that promotes division—especially since the hearings held for deportees often examined the best interest of their children, many of whom were US-born citizens. In other words, had the AEDPA not passed, my father could have had a better chance at standing before a judge and pleading for suspension—or even a cancellation of his deportation. And with four citizen children, he could have had a strong case.

But this introduction is not meant to be an exploration of what ifs and could haves. My experience with deportation as a member of a mixed-status family is meant to demonstrate my interest in representing such narratives. The most obvious reason for my interest is my close connection to the subject. As a nonfiction writer, or memoirist, I seek to create room for my voice—for my story to be heard. My paper then is a defense of my memoir's place in the field of literature. But it is not just my story which interests me. As previously mentioned, five million American children share my experience—if not with deportation itself, then the fear of its threat. And yet, only one published memoir exists. Such a statistical disparity is what Nguyen defines as narrative scarcity. However, before I dive further into Nguyen's concept, I will first explain the need for such critical theory in this argument for representation.

Critical Theory and Application

Critical theory is necessary for understanding experiences of deportation in mixed-status families for two primary reasons. First, it provides a model for thinking

critically about the lack of these narratives. Second, it explains the negative experiences of such scarcity. My approach to engaging with critical theory will first briefly review the relationship between literature and ideology, before focusing in on Nguyen's concept of a narrative economy. This theoretical lens will provide the basis for understanding why literary representation matters, as well as demonstrate how theory allows us to think critically about the lack of mixed-status and deportation narratives and to understand the negative effects of their absence.

The argument for literary or narrative representation is an argument about ideology. As Marxist criticism has established, literature reflects a culture's superstructure, or ideological base.⁵ Critics such as Lukacs and Macheray disagree that literature is simply a reflection of ideology. Instead, they argue that literature works on existing ideologies. The claim about literature's power to shape and transform an ideology is where Nguyen's concept of narrative plenitude and scarcity has room to enter (Klages 130).

Nguyen introduces us to the idea of a narrative economy in his first nonfiction book, *Nothing Ever Dies: Vietnam and the Memory of War*. Though some read the book as memoir, his claim that "all wars are fought twice, the first time on the battlefield, the second time in memory," demonstrates how *Nothing Ever Dies* is primarily a study on the relationship between memory, war, and identity (Nguyen 4). He specifically seeks and argues for what he calls a "just memory that strives both to remember one's own and others," an argument which he divides into three sections: ethics, industries, and aesthetics (12). It is in the third section, where he claims aesthetics projects a world

⁵Theorists include Frederick Engels, Bertolt Brecht, and Walter Benjamin.

without marginalization, that the idea of a narrative economy manifests.

In Nguyen's narrative economy, there are two sides to the spectrum: narrative plenitude and narrative scarcity. In the United States, he writes, "white Americans experience this [plenitude]...from the side of the narratively wealthy, for they control the production of stories," or in other words, they live in a state of narrative plenitude (202). This means that they have the luxury of having their narratives represented, choosing which narratives they want to consume, and curating the expectations of those narratives. On the other side of the spectrum, however, we see how "while dominant Americans exist in an economy of narrative plenitude with a surfeit of stories, their ethnic and racial others live in an economy of narrative scarcity," meaning fewer of their stories are told or represented (203). Nguyen's claim is that this scarcity results in increased pressure and limitations on writers from these marginalized communities (203). Because they do not have the same luxuries of those who live in narrative plenitude, writers in a narrative scarcity must meet the standards and expectations which those in narrative plenitude set. Such expectations are unfair when considering the amount of opportunities given to these writers in the first place. Those living in narrative plenitude have more opportunities to tell their stories, thus increasing their margin for error—while those in narrative scarcity have the opposite effect of limited room for failure. While I agree with what Nguyen lists as the negative consequences of narrative scarcity, this paper aims to bring attention to two other consequences narrative scarcity presents for mixed-status families: the simplification of illegal immigration as an issue and the dehumanization of undocumented immigrants.

The first consequence I illustrated earlier in this paper, with a brief explanation of

my parents' case. When discussing the issue of illegal immigration, those in favor for stricter policies often claim that they have nothing against immigrants if they arrive legally and get "in line." The problem with these claims, however, is that they discount the complicated nature of the legalization and naturalization process. Additionally, these claims also do not account for instances of malpractice many immigration lawyers commit. My parents' case is an example of how complicated the "line," or path to citizenship is and how malpractice further complicates this path.⁶ Despite the limited hearings undocumented immigrants could request because of the AEDPA, my parents' lawyers claimed they could still request a cancellation of deportation and that they would have a strong case.⁷ They reassured my parents that the process would be straightforward. However, that would not be the case. Instead, their process would turn into a long sequence of rescheduled and postponed court dates, which also included misplaced files and failure in submitting required evidence prior to court hearings.⁸ To make matters worse, their lawyers made efforts to cover their negligence by filing a motion to reopen their case, which the judge denied. After this failure to reopen, they reassigned my parents' case to a new attorney, a recent law school graduate. During all of

⁶ This information comes from a lawsuit my parents attempted to file against their former immigration lawyers. However, due to the statute of limitations, they cannot file this case, meaning the lawsuit was never assigned a case number.

⁷ *Sanabria v. Punancy & Constentino*, lines 35-38.

⁸ The following is a timeline of those dates. The first master hearing was scheduled for July 13, 1999. The hearing was rescheduled for September 14, 1999. Following his lawyers' advice, my father turned himself into immigration on July 27, 1999. A notice of individual hearing was then set for April 7, 2000 but protests outside of the courthouse on this date due to the political unrest surrounding Emilio Gonzalez's separation from his father in Cuba led to a postponement of my father's trial. The new date was scheduled for September 13, 2000. The lawyers then filed a Motion to Consolidate in order to combine my father's case with my mothers, setting a new court date for August 22, 2001. On November 14, 2001, a Notice of Hearing in Removal Proceedings was ordered for both of my parents for June 29, 2002. On July 22, 2002, an individual hearing was set for May 16, 2003.

this, they never once communicated to my parents the status of their case, leading my parents to believe that their case was active and in the appeals process. It would not be until after my father's arrest, when my mother called the lawyers' office to request their file that she learned their case had long been warehoused.

My parents' experience with such malpractice is only one of many cases undocumented immigrants face. In her memoir, Guerrero mentions a slightly different experience. While her father hired an immigration lawyer, their case never reached the convoluted process like my parents. The reason was primarily because the lawyer her father hired had been a fake. He would reassure Guerrero's father that he was on top of their case, when he was just pocketing her father's money, until one day, he stopped communicating with her father altogether. Such an example is often more common because Guerrero's father, like many undocumented immigrants, did not speak English.⁹ My aim in mentioning these two examples is to demonstrate how the actuality of illegal immigration is a much more complicated issue than the majority think. This misunderstanding is in part because of the narrative scarcity surrounding mixed-status families and deportation.

The second consequence narrative scarcity creates when it involves mixed-status families and deportation is the dehumanization, or othering, of such subjects. One does not have to look very far to notice an increased othering of undocumented immigrants in the United States, especially if we look at the president of this country's social media presence. President Trump's Twitter page provides us with multiple examples of his efforts to "other" immigrants both before his election and during his administration. One

⁹ My parents are both fluent in English and Spanish, and had no difficulty understanding their lawyers. Even then, their lawyers were also bilingual. These circumstances, however, are not the norm.

example of how Trump others the immigrant is seen in a Tweet of his regarding the Democratic Debate thirteen months before the election: “Notice that illegal immigrants will be given ObamaCare and free college tuition but nothing has been mentioned about our VETERANS #DemDebate.”¹⁰ The Tweet is a clear example of how Trump pits Americans against immigrants, by pointing out how the Democrats ignore US veterans through their provision of benefits for undocumented immigrants. This “us versus them” strategy is a popular tactic politicians use during election season, ignoring how detrimental such othering causes on the culture. A more recent example of dehumanizing language towards the undocumented immigrant occurred earlier in 2018. In a Cabinet meeting held in May, Trump said the following about immigrants: “We have people coming into the country, or trying to come in — we’re stopping a lot of them... You wouldn’t believe how bad these people are. These aren’t people, these are animals, and we’re taking them out of the country at a level and at a rate that’s never happened before.”¹¹ In this example, the dehumanization is not implicit. Trump explicitly states that these are not people, but “animals.” While some argue that this quote was taken out of context and that Trump was speaking about criminal immigrants, a large portion of the American people ignore this technicality, instead jumping on the mentality that illegal immigrants should not be seen as human. While most would want to place all the blame of dehumanizing the undocumented on Trump, anti-immigrant rhetoric in US immigration policy demonstrates that such sentiments and practices have long been in

¹⁰ Trump, Donald J. (@realDonaldTrump). “Notice that illegal immigrants will be given ObamaCare and free college tuition but nothing has been mentioned about our VETERANS #DemDebate.” *Twitter*, 13 Oct. 2015, 7:33 p.m., twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/654122760860495872.

¹¹ Davis, Julie Hirschfield. “Trump Calls Some Unauthorized Immigrants ‘Animals’ in Rant.” *The New York Times*, 16 May 2018, www.nytimes.com/2018/05/16/us/politics/trump-undocumented-immigrants-animals.html.

place. However, regardless of who created the implications of immigrants as threats, narrative scarcity of undocumented immigrants and their families is a great contributor to their dehumanization.

The Red Front Door, A Memoir

The previous section provided not only the theory which my argument engages in, but also how I apply that theory to the subject of mixed-status families and deportation experiences; in this section, I respond to the negative results of narrative scarcity by providing my own narrative. As I mentioned earlier, this narrative will be in the form of a memoir. Before I develop my response, I must first defend my choice of form.

My narrative is an exploration of how my father's deportation has influenced the way I view my ethnic identity. Because of this, it requires a form that will allow me to simultaneously unfold the event in its actuality and discover the event's significance in my life. According to Patricia Hampl, the memoir is the exact genre which will allow me to do that. In her book, *I Could Tell You Stories*, Hampl writes, "Memoir is the intersection of narration and reflection, of storytelling and essay writing. It can present its story *and* consider the meaning of the story" (33). This combination of presenting and considering a story is what I hope to accomplish in my memoir. In addition to this combination, my narrative also needs to foster empathy from the reader. Michael Steinburg writes about this important characteristic in his essay, "Finding the Inner Story in Memoir and Personal Essays." He writes, "I don't want the reader to come away from the memoir thinking that it's another 'poor, poor, pitiful me' story. I want the reader to feel the humiliation and shame that I did, as well as to understand that I willingly chose to

make the tradeoff in order to prove myself to this hard-nosed coach” (Steinburg 186). In order to accomplish more than just sympathy, a narrative needs to dance between scene and narration, description and declaration. Because of the duality in purpose the memoir provides, the form will also allow me to accomplish this dance.

Having defended my choice for form, I can explain how my memoir will respond to the narrative scarcity of mixed-status families and deportation experiences within the field of literature. In my application of Nguyen’s theory to the subject of mixed-status families and deportation, I list two negative consequences of narrative scarcity: the simplification of illegal immigration and the dehumanization of undocumented immigrants. Regarding the first consequence, I provided a brief but thorough account of my family’s narrative to exemplify the complexity of illegal immigration and to correct misconstrued assumptions toward a simple solution. My memoir, however, will provide a more detailed and descriptive version of my parents’ legal case, thus further illustrating this complexity although in a manner which engages the reader.

For the second consequence, my memoir will prove a necessary tool in humanizing the undocumented immigrant by fostering empathy for them as a subject. It will accomplish this in two ways. First, by familiarizing the reader with the subject through my father’s depiction as a member of a family instead of simply an undocumented immigrant. Despite the memoir focusing on myself—a U.S.-born citizen—my relationship to the deportee, my father, will remind readers that these unwanted aliens are more than just criminals. In fact, my memoir will illustrate how my father was not a criminal, as the label of deportee suggests, but rather a man in search of a better life. By showing my father as a father, my memoir will hopefully bridge the distance between those in the center, the majority, and the other. This bridging of

communities then, will hopefully mitigate hostile attitudes towards the undocumented and the topic of illegal immigration. Though I do not expect my memoir to change every anti-immigrant zealot's mind, by illustrating my father's position in a family, I can provide a humanist perspective to this otherwise hotly contested issue.

Building on this new perspective, the second way my memoir will humanize the undocumented immigrant is by establishing deportation as a traumatic event. This will allow readers to understand the emotional hardships deportation causes, potentially fostering empathy towards those whose lives deportation affects. To accomplish this establishment, I will refer to a study published in the journal *Crime Media Culture* back in 2009. Drs. David C. Brotherton and Luis Barrios conducted a study which investigated the social displacement and moral stigma deportees face. Their study spanned a period of five years and focused on Dominican deportees both in the United States and in the Dominican Republic.

For my argument, I will focus on how deportation affected these men's perception of self-identity to establish how deportation is a trauma. While the study identified various examples of deportation causing these men a self-identity crisis, the aspect I will call attention to is that of double-consciousness. Because these men consider themselves both Dominican and American, "their lives are much more affected by their relationship to the past than to the present, which psychologically is difficult for them to reconcile, let alone overcome" (Brotherton and Barrios 42). The study further illustrates this by clarifying three forms which double-consciousness takes: resisting stereotypes that go against their "true selves," facing discrimination, and struggling with constant "tension between their Dominican and American selves" (42). This inner conflict the men face is

what then makes deportation so traumatic. They are constantly fighting mental and emotional battles just so that they can maintain a sense of identity. However, more often than not, their identity is undermined, which is a devastating loss and distressing experience for any person. Such loss of self, then, can be argued as a form of dehumanization, bringing me back to my memoir.

Although I did not get deported, I still ended up leaving the United States to be with my family, thus allowing me to claim a shared experience with these Dominican men. My memoir will depict my experience leaving the United States for a country I never knew and the constant battles with my shared identities this displacement caused in me. By sharing this traumatic experience through memoir, I hope to reclaim the loss of identity deportation caused and remind readers of my humanity. In so doing, I will also be moving the subject of mixed-status families and deportees towards an economy of narrative plenitude. For it is with plenitude and representation that an “other” can be moved towards the center and seen as human.

Conclusion

In addition to responding to the problem of narrative scarcity, my memoir also provides a new angle to the way previous critics have viewed issues of ethnicity and race. In his essay “The Location of Culture,” Homi Bhabha examines the concept of a national identity—a critical component to the discussion of illegal immigration. He seeks to answer the question of how such an identity is determined and proposes a new perspective by inviting us to examine the concept of hybridity. Specifically, Bhabha provides the examples of “the migrant, the homeless, the refugee, the displaced

indigenous peoples” to support his argument that “the idea of a nation is a fiction” (Klages 159-60). Building on this idea of hybridity then is Chicana lesbian feminist Gloria Anzaldúa with her analysis of the border in *Borderlands/La Frontera*. Her argument uses the metaphor of the literal, physical border—such as the one between the United States and Mexico—as a way to also describe “the space between cultures, classes, races, sexual orientations” (Klages 162). While she uses language to illustrate her argument, this idea of dual identities she and Bhabha explore is one in which my own memoir will engage. Because my memoir will be a coming-of-age story—since my father’s deportation occurred at the cusp of my adolescence—it will naturally be an exploration of identity. Specifically, it will reflect upon how deportation shaped the way I view my ethnic identities. As a Chilean-Colombian-American woman, the concept of a split national identity is a familiar struggle, so the themes my memoir will explore are conventional to the field of ethnic and racial literature. However, where my memoir will differ from what Bhabha, Anzaldúa, and other postcolonial critics have proposed, is in its examination of the mixed-status family and the deportee, instead of just the immigrant or of the refugee.

As I explained earlier in this paper, the subject of mixed-status families and deportation is an overlooked narrative which exists in scarcity. While this scarcity is ultimately negative, as I argued throughout my paper, such scarcity does allow room for scholarly and creative exploration. In this sense, then, my memoir—and this paper which is a defense of my memoir—will be contributing a new perspective to the conversations of both narrative scarcity and ethnic criticism.

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