MAPPING SPACES, MARKING TIME: Transnational Subjectivity, Home, and Family in Stories by Manuel Muñoz and Sandra Cisneros

Yvonne Yarbro-Bejarano

This analysis of Manuel Muñoz's "By the Time You Get There, by the Time You Get Back" and Sandra Cisneros's "Never Marry a Mexican" highlights their craft in writing characters in relation to sexuality, gender, family, and home. I analyze narratorial techniques and imagery constructing the characters' transnational imaginary and, particularly, a handling of space and time that resonates with queer critiques of reproductive futurity. Both characters stand in queer or skewed relationship to the Chicano familia romance and the transborder family; their non-normative gendered experiences are sites of potential critiques vis-à-vis the supposed singularity and universality of the family and national culture. "Never Marry a Mexican" features a self-destructive looping of time in Clemencia's relation to the family's heteronormative spaces. In Muñoz's story, the words "there" and "back" are reversible along a transnational south-north axis, depending on where the man locates himself in relation to his Mexican family. Both narratives of geopolitical border crossings show us how these queerly gendered transnational subjects experience time and space along the axes of race, nation, and class.

Key Words: transnational imaginary, transborder family, heteronormative spaces

In this reading of Manuel Muñoz's "By the Time You Get There, by the Time You Get Back" (2003) and Sandra Cisneros's "Never Marry a Mexican" (1991), I am interested in how the authors write the experience of their characters, mexicano and Chicana respectively, in relation to sexuality, gender, family, and home. To this end I analyze narratorial techniques and imagery that construct a transnational imaginary, as conceptualized by Ramón Saldívar and Paula Moya,[1] and a particular handling of space and time that resonates with queer critiques by Lee Edelman, Judith

Halberstam, José Esteban Muñoz, Elizabeth Freeman, and Lisa Adkins of reproductive futurity and related concepts of generational logics and straight or linear time. I examine how the stories figure transnational imaginaries through a time-space narrative matrix illuminating the experiential terrain of subjects whose families span both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border. These two narratives translate historical conceptions of time and space created by transnational flows of various kinds to produce subjectivities that cannot be interpreted within the confines of a singular national discourse. Both stories present characters who stand in queer or skewed relationship to the Chicana/o familia romance[2]; their non-normative gendered experiences, as painful or alienated as they may be, are sites of potential critiques, exposing contradictions around race, gender, sexuality, and class that contain ruptural possibilities vis-à-vis the supposed singularity and universality of the family and national culture.[3]

In both stories, the origin point of the transborder family is the father character's migration north from Mexico. In Muñoz's story, the father joins the stream of migrant labor at the age of fifteen, "a Mexican national on his own who had been heading north to pick apples in Washington State but ran out of money in the small farm town" (72) halfway between Los Angeles and San Francisco. In Cisneros's story, the father flees his Mexico City home, eventually settling in San Antonio, Texas, to evade paternal punishment for frittering away his time at the university (70). Besides the class differences signaled by the two fathers' reasons for migrating, and the rural/urban contrast, there are significant narratorial differences as well. Muñoz's father focalizes a third-person narration while Cisneros's story features a first-person narrator: Clemencia, the daughter of the Mexican national who crossed the border. The title of each story provides my entry point into the discussion of the particular handling of space and time. I will also analyze images in each text that crystallize the production of transnational subjectivity.

"By the Time You Get There, by the Time You Get Back" is about a man in Los Angeles who telephones his gay son in San Francisco to ask for money to travel to the deathbed of his own father in a poor village in central Mexico. Later the same day the son calls back with flight information and reveals that he is also sending some money. At the end of the story the man goes to the wire office to collect the money. These sparse actions barely hint at the story's richness, which resides in how the narrator interweaves these present events with the man's memories of his youth, his thoughts and feelings about his estranged son, and his fears about his family in Mexico.

The narration is focalized exclusively through the perspective of the man in Los Angeles, an undocumented migrant settled in the United States for over twenty-five years.[4] Besides his few spoken words on the telephone, the son in the heavily-coded queer space of San Francisco is presented to the reader only through the man's perceptions. "By the Time You Get There" thus belongs in the category of Muñoz's stories that Ernesto Martínez characterizes as "shifting the site of queer enunciation" from a queer to a non-queer character (2011, 227), although Martínez does not analyze this particular story. Of particular interest to my argument is that in "By the Time You Get There," non-queer focalizer and narrator do not converge entirely. The opening phrase,"There is a man on a telephone," drives a wedge between the focalizer and the narrator that encourages a detached view of the father and invites the reader to pay attention to the filter through which the man sees. It is not a large wedge, but it is sufficient to make readers wonder about the reliability of the man's perspective, particularly on his son's relationship with his lover, whom the father refers to as "that man." The father's perspective is, in part, legitimated by a telling detail during the second call—but only in part. The narrator's impersonal tone prepares the ground for the broader global framing that comes at the end, suggesting that this story is not unique, that this nameless man is typical of many men.

Curiously, the same narrative technique that encourages the reader's critical distance from the man also provokes compassion by revealing the isolation in which he lives, suggestive of his undocumented status.[5] In Los Angeles, the vacuum surrounding him is almost complete. We have the barest map of his movements through space: his "tiny apartment," the warehouse where he works as an inventory clerk, his path to the wire office, and the cantina where he occasionally meets a woman he brings home for sex (74). Extending north and south are other narrative paths, the transborder route between central and southern California and rural central Mexico, and a dotted line connecting Los Angeles with San Francisco, since the man has traveled there only in his imagination. Together with a mental state characterized by indeterminacy and vacillation (ruminating on what he has, what he does not have; how his son is like him, how his son is not like him, etc.), these markers evoke what Alicia Schmidt Camacho calls "migrant melancholia," or endless grief over the loss of family and homeland (2008, 286). It is as if the man hangs suspended in empty space between his lost objects: his kin in rural central Mexico to the south, but also his alienated son to the north.

Indeed, the emphasis on the man's interiority and the melancholic tone of the story, focusing on the psychological costs of perilous border crossing and the abandonment of family and homeland, places this text squarely within the cultural representations singled out by Camacho as restoring humanity to migrants debased in anti-immigrant policies and discourses. Muñoz gives a fully replenished account of this migrant character's subjectivity, but without idealizing him, showing instead his tendency to think of relationships as transactions, and the heteronormative bent of his thinking about family, gender, and sexuality.

In addition to setting up a time frame oriented toward the future, the title plots a circuit involving two places: going *there* and coming *back*.

The subjectivity of the main character is mapped by traveling this circuit, and marked by these travels in the past and in the immediate future. The son speaks the words of the first half of the title during the first telephone conversation in the middle of the story. He offers a plane ticket to Mexico City, but the father wants money to drive to the village. The son's words, "by the time you get there," are meant to discourage the man from driving, implying that he would get there too late to see his father alive. Oriented from the son's location in San Francisco, the circuit plotted by the first half of the title maps the father's journey from Los Angeles to rural central Mexico and back again. The opposition between the two modes of travel, the awkward conversation filled with silences, the linguistic difficulties, and the son's lack of knowledge about crossborder travel, reveal the distance between them.

Of major importance in the representation of the man's transnational subjectivity and sense of difference from his son is the fact that he feels he has an epistemological advantage with respect to his family in Mexico and choosing the best mode of travel. It frustrates him that his son doesn't get why he needs to drive, or what it feels like to arrive with empty hands; in short, that the son lacks any experiential knowledge of his Mexican family or of crossing the border, a technology the man possesses. His resentment at the pronoun "we" when his son says "we can fly you down" includes his fear that his son's partner considers him "backward, a product, of older, more stubborn times" for insisting on driving rather than flying. As an undocumented Mexican national, the man fears flying, for "the triple glances over his documents, the suspicion of a man like him able to buy a plane ticket—his son cannot understand" (77). Crossing by car is arduous, difficult, and dangerous, but it is within his comfort zone because he knows how to do it. He knows how to save money on the trip so he can give it to his family. He knows how to hide the hundred-dollar bills he's taking back to them, how

to get through the checkpoints with the dogs and the guns (77). The vivid memory of navigating these dangers contrasts sharply with the emptiness of his life in L.A. But the man himself recognizes that the trip home could be easier now, that "things are the same, but different" (78). Besides signaling the rapid changes in border crossing technologies since the man's last trip ten years ago, this paradoxical holding of sameness and difference characterizes the man's subjectivity.

Because the first paragraph reveals that the son is living with a man in San Francisco, "a fact that knots the man terribly" (72), the reader thinks that his queerness has resulted in the alienation between the two, and this is certainly a factor: "the curious distance suddenly grown when his son told him (at age fifteen) that he liked boys" (74). But other reasons emerge related to the dynamics of the son's relationship in San Francisco that mirror the father's own experience as a young man at precisely the same age that his son evacuated his own heteronormative position. The father feels that his son is dominated and controlled by the man he lives with, whom he imagines as older and well off (and implicitly white). It rankles him that his son is economically dependent on this man, and that he himself is dependent on his son for the money he needs. The man's discomfort with this reversal of the usual parent/child roles and the perceived dependency of his son on an older white man have roots in the father's past, in his own dependency on an authoritative white male. After settling in the small farm town at age fifteen, he impregnates the daughter of the farmer he is working for, and soon after the birth of their son, the young mother is killed in a car accident. Besides forging documents for him and facilitating his entry into the local high school, for what the man sees as "selfish reasons" (his cheap labor power), the farmer raises the child. It is only through a bilingual advocate that the father learns he can see the boy while he is still growing up. As a result, father and

son are culturally and linguistically, alienated as well as geographically and emotionally distanced, to the point where the man wonders why they even bother to maintain their connection. After the first phone call, his perception of his son's dependency triggers memories of his own:

> He hangs up the phone with the heavy receiver, the feeling so familiar, even at forty-two, this sense of being held captive to someone else's whim. . .he had believed he should somehow be grateful for what the farmer had given him. How to explain to his son, this feeling? Does his son feel it. . .knowing all of it was made possible by the man he lived with? (79)

One could say that his perspective on his son's relationship is so thoroughy colored by his own experience of dependency that the man is unable to see any benefit accruing to his son from his relationship, other than a hierarchical, economic one.

The father even imagines the son's partner "knowing some version of [the son's] upbringing, who his son really considers family" (76), but this version is not totally reliable. Toward the end of the story, the man ponders two more versions of his son's connection (or non-connection) with his Mexican family, hinging on contradictory appeals to the generational discourse of blood. On one hand, he wants to tell his son "that the dying father is really just *his* father and not his son's grandfather," negating the efficacy of blood in kinship ties; on the other hand, he cites blood as the key connection to his son in such a way that voids kinship ties of any value *except* biology: "He might be able to tell his son that he loves him only because of blood" (82). He wonders how much money the son has sent and what the amount might reveal:

> If it is only a little, does that mean his son does not care for him? Or does it mean his son is just as helpless as he is, under the thumb of the man he lives with? And what if it is a great sum of money? Is it a show of love for him, despite their distance? Or is it a way to wish a connection with the larger force of family, the blood ties that go back so much further than the generosity of the farmer who raised him? (82)

Whether it is a little or a lot, the man remains open to some form of connection, through the discourse of shared non-normative masculinity ("just as helpless as he is"), crossed with the generational discourse of paternal genealogy that trumps the farmer's non-biological fatherhood. Characteristically, the two possible points of identification with his son turn in contradictory fashion on queering the heteronormative family (non-normative masculinity) and consolidating it (blood).

The second phrase of the title, "by the time you get back," does not appear anywhere in the story. If the orientation remains the son's location, it would refer to the man's return from central Mexico to Los Angeles. But the fact that the second temporal clause is not anchored in any particular place by any particular speaker activates the circuit's mobility and reversibility. The only time the place marker "here" appears in the story is to establish the family's poor village in Mexico as the originating point, and to define the social pact that writes the migrating family member into the script of generational transmission and reproductive futurity. On the man's last visit ten years earlier, the patriarch had wept over the grandson's graduation picture: "It spoke to the old man, he knows, of a promise of family branching strong in some other place. . . . It spoke to him of *having something*—here, the old man had only his cinder block house with one room and a stove" (75). The story's discourse of (not) having often turns in this way on the elusiveness of kinship

ties, as when the man counts his own father among the things he "*does* have but will never keep" (74), given the imminent death of the patriarch and the man's perception of his own and his son's reproductive failure.

It would appear that the son's sexuality is to blame for the hiatus in the travels there and back, and this is definitely part of it. But it turns out the man has his own reasons for avoiding his family. He has lied to his father not only about his son, inventing a pretty white girlfriend for him that he will marry after finishing his "university studies," but he has invented a wife for himself as well; he has not revealed the death of the young mother or the fact that they were never married. In this sense both the son and the man himself stand in a queer relationship to the heteronormative family and reproductive time. The fact that the man believes that because his son is gay "he cannot continue his name" (82) reveals the limitations of his perspective that fuses reproduction and heteronormativity, a belief that resounds upon his own sense of failed masculinity.

Reorienting "by the time you get back" to the heteropatriarchal village in Mexico puts a different spin on why the man wants money instead of a plane ticket. He needs it to "deflect the hard questions about the pretty wife of his son, the lack of recent pictures, what his son's house must be like (!)" (79–80).[6] But elsewhere the man confronts a more complete sense of failure that has distanced him from his family:

> The father needs the money to go back and rectify the mistake of not telling. . .he does not know if he will tell the whole truth, but he will at least *go back* and ask his father's forgiveness for having left and not returned with the immediate gifts of money and strong English and a wife who never had to work. He is forty-two and has not been able

> to produce any of this to his family as proof that his flight north was worth the risk and the loss of time together. (75, emphasis added)

The man's perception of his failure to perform the masculine migrant role in this poignant passage is overdetermined by his racialized dependency (on the older white farmer in the past, on his younger biracial son in the present) as much as by his deviance from the expectations of his family in Mexico with respect to family ties, economic responsibility, and child-producing sons.

Paradoxically, this perception enables the man to see the possibility that he and his son are the same, but different, in relation to that family; both father and son are described in the text as the "end [of the] line." Compiling a mental list of what he has and does not have, the man reflects: "He knows there are so many people who would say that he has more than *nothing*—so many people he left behind in Mexico—but he feels that at forty-two, he is nearing an end line" (74). Planning the half-truth he will tell his family upon arrival, he remarks: "he wants to say nothing about his son in San Francisco and how his son's life there means that there is end line in the United States" (76). The peculiar wording, "end line" instead of "end of the line," even more foreshortened in the second case with the omission of the indefinite article "an," functions to flag the foreclosing of reproductive futurity in the story.

The text's imagery privileges the field of instantaneous communication shaping this particular historical experience of time and space, manifested in the telephone and the wire office. The telephone organizes transnational as well as translocal inequalities. In the case of the father and the son, their phones reflect their unequal lot in life: "One has always struggled, the other will be taken care of" (79). The father's is a clunky old phone, beige, corded, with a heavy receiver and gray buttons, bought broken at a yard sale

and fixed a la rasquache with a screwdriver. It contrasts with his son's cell phone: expensive, silver, tiny, pristine, held "close to his ear" (78–79). On the other hand, the older brother's frantic call from the village with the news of his father's impending death, his "voice dim and scratched over the bad connection" (75), conveys a sense of transnational inequities.

The verbal echo here of the man's "tiny" apartment in the son's tiny phone helps to depict the economic differences between them mapped onto the spaces and commodities they do or do not possess. The man imagines his son's abode as part of a (stereo)typical gay lifestyle: "His son's apartment, the one he shares with that man, is all windows probably. His son is staring out of one, he thinks, at the red swoop of the Golden Gate Bridge" (78). His reflex reaction, typically, is to relate this opulence to the foreclosing of reproductive futurity: "*Who will you leave that to?* He wants to ask his son. . .but he stops himself because he believes that it is all his son will ever have, and he cannot tell if it is more or less than nothing" (78). His son may or may not live in such an apartment, but what is interesting about this passage is how the man backs his way out of generational logics to question what it means to have what his son has, just as he questions the value of what he himself has and does not have. By admitting the limits of his knowledge, the man offers a glimpse of the son and his life outside the limitations of his perspective.

The telephone condenses the man's relationship with his son: connected but distant. His perception of his son as weak, dependent, and fragile clashes with the sharp, authoritative tone of his son's voice when he takes his father's phone call in English. The man wishes the son spoke Spanish so he could tell him about the shame he feels over his failed relationships. But this is a safe fantasy; since the son does not speak Spanish, the man will not have to reveal these things, just as he probably will not tell the (whole) truth to his father. Shifting the site of

queer enunciation from the gay son to the man reroutes kinship regulations that usually heap shame on abject queer relations; here the heterosexual father shares the shame of being in non-normative relationship to familia.

The telephone also authorizes the man's perception of the power dynamic in his son's relationship, with the telling detail of the sound of the wind on the cell phone receiver, indicating that the son has stepped outside, beyond his partner's earshot, to tell his father he is sending him some of his own money. Besides enabling the man to smooth his difficulties with his family, by making the second call secretively the son allows the father, again paradoxically, to see him in a dependent position, like him, and yet somehow still caring enough about his biological father to literally and figuratively step outside of the subordinate role in his domestic relationship.

Already during the second phone call, the time-space frame of the story is shifting to the wire office, the immediate future, and the global social relations mapped by phone calls and electronic transfers of funds. The man knows what to expect: the many "men just like him" waiting in line to send or receive money, and how different it feels to be sending or receiving. The phone card advertisements offer rates to other nations in Latin America as well as Mexico, and countries in Asia: "He knows the duplicate offers in what is probably Chinese, the square-and-circle Korean lines, the Asian women hovering together with children firmly in hand" (81). The man does not know English but he does know this language of transnational movement, of money, phone calls, and men.

Even as the wire office opens up the transnational frame of the story from a U.S.-Mexico north-south axis to global migration and economic circulation, the space is racialized, gendered, and sexualized. Only men are depicted as sending or receiving money, Asian women "hover," and the women who work

at the wire office are "pretty Mexican girls born in the States who speak both English and Spanish" (81). At the end, the man focuses on the face of the woman counting out the money, who reminds him of his one-night stands: "how pretty she is, dark skinned and long lashed" (83). The desired Chicana in the flesh supplants those other absent, even "fictional" female bodies in the text: his own dead mother buried in Mexico, the dead white mother of his child, the women he brings home from the cantina, the (racially unmarked) wife he invents for himself and the white girlfriend he fabricates for his son. This reassertion of heterosexual masculine desire for the Mexican/American female body deflects the man's displacement from the properly paternal role, here signified by his being on the receiving end, and distracts him from his need to know what the money means with respect to his son's relationship to him and his family.

The final gesture of the story eloquently captures the indeterminacy that characterizes the man's subjectivity through a shifting, mobile construction of space and time in relation to the coercive force of heteronormative family, gender, and racialized desire: "She asks him to sign in acceptance of love or responsibility, then lays it all out before him" (83). By not revealing the amount of money the son has sent, the narrator suspends any resolution of the man's vacillations and invites a reading strategy that cultural critic Sandra K. Soto calls "de-mastery" (2010, 125–26). It is less important to answer definitively whether or not the son values the father and his Mexican family, or whether or not the man himself desires the familial connection to continue, than to see this undecidability as precisely the particular modality of this character's transnational subjectivity.

Unlike the title of the Muñoz story that alludes to both space and time, Sandra Cisneros's title, "Never Marry a Mexican," communicates an imprecise

temporality that stretches from some unmarked point in the past into an endless future, the word "never" signaling a prohibition against marrying a Mexican that is always in effect, now and forever. On two separate occasions, the narrative attaches this prohibition to a specific time and place, each with particular national, gender, race, and class resonances that impinge differently on Clemencia's subjectivity and sexuality, and her experience of family and home. At the very beginning of the story she attributes the title words to her Chicana mother forbidding marriage to a man from Mexico based on her own experience with one. Later Clemencia recalls these words when it becomes clear to her that her white, married lover Drew could never marry a Mexican (her). Her mother's admonishment against marrying Mexicans boomerangs back to disqualify the narrator herself as a suitable marriage partner. This two-sided interdiction constructs Clemencia's transnational subjectivity and both sides impact her sexuality in equally damaging ways.

Clemencia's first-person narration permits no doubling of narrator and focalizer —featured in Munőz's story—oriented instead directly to Clemencia's subjectivity and perceptions. From a vantage point in the present of the narration, where she is an artist and teacher, Clemencia turns repeatedly to the past to tell her family's story: the mismatched crossborder element, the father's death, and the mother's affair with her foreman, a white man she eventually marries. The Chicana narrator also tells the story of Drew's family, including the affair in the past, her continuing obsession with him (and, significantly, his wife Megan), and her sexual toying with his teenage son in the present. The style is densely poetic and inventive, typical of Cisneros's writing, sculpting the character of Clemencia through her very use of language. Lushly ornamented, boldly rhythmic, and emotive, it is the opposite of Muñoz's usually detached, spare, and elegant style, with its finely observed details, and concentrated yet restrained moments of lyricism.

Clemencia's narration prominently features food and animal imagery, especially birds, and a second-person "you" that shifts between her ex-lover Drew and his unnamed son. The narration is divided into ten segments of varying length that narrate crucial moments in both sets of her familial relationships. Halfway through, two segments of just one paragraph are juxtaposed, further breaking up the non-linear narration to replay key scenes involving Drew and Megan, one from the past and one from the present, that deliver a quick shock of intense affect.[7] Clemencia is a sympathetic and flawed character. Myriad choices of phrase, tone, and vocabulary show her actions emerging from the pressures, contradictions and fissures in heteronormative family formations spanning both sides of the border.

When her mother says "never marry a Mexican," she refers to different kinds of Mexicans, divided into those born in the United States, like her, and those born in Mexico. Her advice is really more about class than nationality or race, stemming from her own marriage as a working-class, seventeen-year-old Chicana to a man from a family in Mexico City with social pretensions: "Having had to put up with all the grief a Mexican family can put on a girl because she was from *el otro lado*, the other side, and my father had married down by marrying her" (69). Food imagery captures the transborder class differences of Clemencia's Mexican family. In her mother's paternal home, they eat watermelon off newspapers on the kitchen table, but with a spirit of abundance and generosity. In her father's Mexico City home, a servant serves watermelon "on a plate with silverware and a cloth napkin" (71). As an artist, Clemencia feels "amphibious" (71) with respect to class: "I don't belong to any class. Not to the poor, whose neighborhood I share. Not to the rich, who come to my exhibitions and buy my work. Not to the middle class from which my sister Ximena and I fled" (72). Not unlike her relation to the institution of marriage, her evasion of class reads as an attempt to dodge her family history,

in which the father finds U.S. Mexicans "so foreign from what he knew at home in Mexico City" (71). Since she cannot occupy both parents' class positions, she identifies with neither, only to reinscribe class dynamics in her imagined classlessness.

While for the mother, socioeconomic differences structure her prohibition, the Mexico City family racializes the mother's class inferiority, according to the Chicana narrator, ever attuned to hierarchies of race, in that the father would have married up if he had married a white woman in the United States, even if she was poor (69). Clemencia distorts the lessons learned at her mother's knee through a distinctly U.S. racial imaginary devaluing men of color; for her, "never marry a Mexican" translates into a rejection of all racialized men. Clemencia attributes her preference for white sexual objects to her mother's command: "For a long time the men clearing off the tables or chopping meat behind the butcher counter or driving the bus I rode to school each day, *those weren't men*. Not men I considered as potential lovers. . .I never saw them. My mother did this to me" (69, emphasis added). She blames her mother for this desexing and degendering of Latino men, but surely it has more to do with Clemencia's own exposure to racist U.S. discourses on sexuality. Ironically, she seems to be aligning herself with her father's Mexican family, essentially treating working-class Latinos like they treated her working-class Chicana mother. Clemencia misrecognizes her mother's advice, or more precisely, the specific transnationality of the prohibition is lost as it enters her subjectivity distorted by the racialized class imaginary of U. S. society.

Clemencia also generalizes her mother's advice to mean that she will never marry any man, but will only be the other woman in affairs with married men. Yet in assuming this role she does not escape the heteronormativity and gender hierarchy of the family, since its structure defines the mistress. It is the

narrator's racialized position outside Drew's family, yet relationally bound to both married man and legal wife/mother, that drives Clemencia to the brink.

As in Clemencia's prejudice toward men of color, supposedly prescribed by her mother, yet more in tune with her father's class attitudes, the story sets up situations in which a maternal identification cloaks a paternal one—and vice versa. The complex shifting of maternal and paternal identifications in Clemencia's transnational subjectivity sheds light on the gender, racial, and sexual politics of home. For Clemencia, once the father dies, "[t]here was no home to go home to" (73), because of the paternal absence and because of what Clemencia perceives as the mother's sexual and racial betrayal, not only in marrying a white man, but having an affair with him while the father was still alive. Clemencia experiences the intrusion of the white man and his boys into the father's house as maternal abandonment or death (73). She compares her lack of feelings for her mother to a bird she had that survived for a long time after losing a leg: "My mother's memory is like that, like if something already dead dried up and fell off, and I stopped missing where she used to be. Like I never had a mother" (73). Paradoxically, in her own affair with a white man, Clemencia follows her mother's advice (she doesn't marry a Mexican), assumes the mother's unforgivable infidelity as her preferred role in the heteronormative marriage script, and betrays her Mexican father, if we extend the racial logic she applies to her mother. This complex layering and crisscrossing of nationality, gender, race, and class is typical of Clemencia's transnational subjectivity.

Drew enters the narration via *the* Mexican national discourse of betrayal, La Malinche, to the detriment of the Chicana subject: "Drew, remember when you used to call me your Malinalli?" (74). Playing Malinche to the black-bearded Drew's Cortés, Clemencia enjoys what she calls their "joke, a

private game between us," contrasting the darkness of her skin against his in the context of rough sex tinged with colonialist domination: "My Malinalli, Malinche, my courtesan, you said, and yanked my head back by the braid. . . . Before daybreak, you'd be gone. . .as if I'd imagined you, only the teeth marks on my belly and nipples proving me wrong" (74).[8] In her misappropriation of her mother's advice in the context of U.S. racism, Clemencia negates Mexican men in general, and seeks her own value in the eyes of a white lover. Her relationship with Drew, who besides being white and married, is much older, and her art teacher to boot, inscribes the nineteen-year-old Clemencia in a set of varied power relations—all of which place her in the subordinate position.

The prohibition against marrying a Mexican resurfaces textually in this context of colonialist and racialized sexual fantasy when Drew decides to end the affair. His decision is as overweening and one-sided as the Malinalli/Cortés erotic script, in spite of the spin Clemencia puts on it: "We had agreed. All for the best. Surely I could see that, couldn't I? My own good. A good sport. A young girl like me. Hadn't I understood…responsibilities. Besides, he could *never* marry *me*. You didn't think…? *Never marry a Mexican. Never marry a Mexican*…" (80). The echo of the mother's words in Clemencia's mind at this point reveals their devastating reversibility depending on the site of enunciation, from dictating Clemencia's sexual object choices and marriage options to branding her as an unfit marriage partner on the basis of her race, leaving her bereft of agency and power. Unlike the possibility of misreading her mother's words, there is no escaping Drew's meaning. Just as she is scarred by the transnational divisions of family and home, she never recovers from this wounding.

But Clemencia appears to be equally obsessed with Drew's wife Megan. I read Clemencia's highly charged relationship with Megan in light of the narrator's symbolic killing of her own mother. Megan evokes Clemencia's absent

mother, still powerful in her imposition of heteronormative regulations. Clemencia's power struggle with Megan enacts her desire to recover the maternal body, her own mother's body as well as her desire to embody the maternal role outside the dictates of the heteronormative family. Yet the paternal identification flickers in and out through various shifts of gender and race, with the father's class remaining a constant. Importantly, the narration folds class privilege across racial, gender, and national differences (Drew and the foreman, but also Megan and the Mexican father).

The episode of the gummy bears, the image that best condenses the story's transnational imaginary, comes on the heels of Clemencia's realization that Drew could never marry her. They are spending their last time together in Drew's house, when mother and son are away. While Drew is making dinner, Clemencia goes through Megan's things. As she fingers Megan's fine clothes she repeats the same words she had used before to describe her father's: "Quality. Calidad" (81). This repetition figures her class and racialized distance from Megan, in terms of ownership and possessions (of Drew, of fine things), through the beloved and class-privileged Mexican father. Clemencia then proceeds to put gummy bears where only Megan will find them, in places associated with femininity and sex:

> One in her Lucite makeup organizer. One stuffed inside each bottle of nail polish. I untwisted the expensive lipsticks to their full length and smushed a bear on the top before recapping them. I even put a gummy bear in her diaphragm case in the very center of that luminescent rubber moon. (81)

The gummy bear incident is different from Clemencia's other interactions with Megan in the story in that she wants Megan to know she has been

there, to force her to acknowledge her presence and her importance.[9] Yet even here Clemencia's sense of empowerment is undercut by the humilating awareness that other than as "other woman," the only place for her in this house of heteronormative race and class privilege, would be as a servant. Clemencia evokes and aligns herself with this figure when she surmises that either Drew would take the blame for the gummy bears or "he could say it was the cleaning woman's Mexican voodoo" (81). The inappropriate term "voodoo" skewers Drew's ignorance of Mexican cultural practices, in spite of his fetishization of Mexican women as La Malinche.

Clemencia reveals that she has had sex with Drew in his and Megan's house before, and has a practice of sleeping with her lovers in the marriage bed at the precise time their children are being born, justifying her secretive gender betrayal of other women through a racializing discourse: "If she was a brown woman like me, I might've had a harder time living with myself. . . . She's not *my* sister" (76). Race, class, and sexual jealousy override any solidarity Clemencia might feel with Megan on the grounds of shared gender.

Clemencia's clandestine acts of gender betrayal give her intense pleasure: "It's always given me a bit of crazy joy to be able to kill those women like that, without their knowing it" (77). When she sees Megan's nested Russian dolls exactly like the ones Drew brought back for Clemencia from his trip to Russia, she removes "the tiniest baby inside all the others" and replaces it with a gummy bear. On the way home, she throws the baby into the filthy river: "It gave me a feeling like nothing before and since" (82). We might say that these acts connecting Clemencia and Megan are better than (hetero)sex. The intense pleasure that Clemencia experiences instructs the reader to investigate the investments in her relationship with Megan.

There is something queer in these insertions, phallic extensions, and penetrations of the white female reproductive body. Both of the one-paragraph segments marking the halfway point in the story center Megan. In the second, Clemencia explores the son's body, noting his resemblance to Megan; she imagines Drew and Megan having sex, and, queerly, focuses on Megan's body, with her "long, long legs that wrapped around this father who took me to his bed" (77). The repetition of the word "long" underlines Clemencia's erotic involvement in this scene lingering on Megan's body rather than Drew's.

Similarly, the rubbery texture of the gummy bears evokes not only the diaphragm Megan uses but also condoms—both contraceptive instruments. Through the gummy bears, Clemencia stations herself at the gateway between Drew's and Megan's bodies in the act of monitoring or thwarting the ends of reproductive sex, just as she, godlike, has shifted the maternal role away from reproduction elsewhere in the story through her creativity. For example, in her subject position as artist, she uses reproductive imagery to foreground her power over Drew by painting him the way she wants people to see him: "I created you from spit and red dust. . . . You're just a smudge of paint I chose to birth on canvas. . . . And if that's not power, what is?" (75). Clemencia also claims to be responsible for the son's existence, since she convinced Drew to let Megan have him. Clemencia arranges these instances of alternative maternity against Megan's reproductive sexuality; in replacing the tiniest doll with a gummy bear she says "I have been here," foreshadowing the way she will take sexual possession of the son. She represents herself as waiting, "patient as a spider" (75), for Drew's son to come of age to seduce him.

Clemencia inserts food into Megan's things, but it is a kind of non-nutritious junk food. The neon-colored, stick-to-your-teeth little teddy bears parody the maternal position that Clemencia usurps. It is also interesting that she

chooses gummy bears rather than a kind of food that signifies mexicanidad, for instance, chile pequín. The medium that Clemencia chooses to establish a relationship with Megan is a commodity that, although originating in Germany, ignores national boundaries in its circulation through the global economy. The ubiquity and proliferation of gummy bears in popular cultural representations such as cartoon series and films belie attempts to read Clemencia solely in terms of a singular nationalist script.[10] Clemencia's figurative penetration of the white maternal body and symbolic killing of Megan's baby embody a transnational subjectivity in action, mapping the spaces of home and marking the times of family informed by transborder alliances and defined by aggressive acts of exclusion and aggressive responses to such exclusion.

Still, the handling of space and time in the story shows that Clemencia cannot escape the prison of racialized gender and sex constructed by the dual injunction of the title. Her position remains on the outside of all the heteronormative families in the story, whether Mexican from here or there, white and privileged, or racially blended. She believes that her only weapon is her sexuality; for example, as giving her power over the boy, represented as a "stupid little bird," whom she lulls until that time she should choose to "snap my teeth" (82). Her art and her teaching could be seen as other avenues to empowerment, but the past she cannot release subverts them into channels for her obsession (birthing Drew through her painting; seducing her student, Drew's son). The particular commingling of nation, family, class, race, gender, and sex in her subjectivity keeps her circling a space-time loop that has her teetering on the verge of insanity. Her dubious relationship with the boy in the present stems from her continuing longing for Drew, and her dead mother keeps her locked into engaging with Megan. Clemencia is caught in a space that must repeat the past, including the beloved father's problematic legacies, just as she seems compelled to repeat her mother's racial betrayals and sexual

infidelity. The intrusion of the white foreman and his sons into her father's house could be the root cause for Clemencia's practice of invading white women's homes to sleep with their husbands, a kind of cross-gender revenge in which she takes gleeful pleasure. When she no longer has access to Drew's house, she continues to intrude into Megan's space in the more abject form of phone calls, fueled by alcohol, as in the first one-paragraph segment in which Clemencia coarsely mocks Megan's overly polite response to her phoning Drew in the middle of the night, or, more alarmingly, not fueled by alcohol, but by a more desperate need.

With the late-night call to Drew she cannot keep herself from making at the end, she moves from predator to prey once again: "you've answered and startled me away like a bird" (83). Tellingly, she imagines Megan sleeping at his side, with food imagery that once again conveys the importance and significance of the white reproductive female body in the story: "smelling a bit like milk and hand cream, and that smell familiar and dear to you, oh" (83). Ultimately, Clemencia cannot compete with Megan's value as maternal body. Megan is both what Clemencia is not and what she does not want to be (white, privileged, a mother, a wife), yet she cannot help being caught in the competition with and desire for the maternal body. Without condoning Clemencia, the story goes deeply and bravely into those messy and transgressed spaces where gender, family, and sexuality get acted out. Readers see through Clemencia's perspective what it is like to experience the double-bladed prohibition of the title, and how Chicana subjectivity and sexuality get wounded and twisted in the process.

Cisneros employs a writing strategy she calls "buttons" in which she imports fragments of other writings into the story at hand.[11] The last paragraph of "Never Marry a Mexican" is such a button, taken from a letter she wrote once

while she was in Berkeley: "Human beings pass me on the street and I want to reach out and strum them as if they were guitars. . .and say There, there, it's all right, honey. There, there, there" (83). Rather than end the story with Clemencia holding the receiver after that sad phone call, Cisneros allows her this final maternal gesture, but this time one of self-soothing and connection with others outside the obsessive circle of sexuality, family, and home.

In both stories the handling of space and time maps out the transnational subjectivity of a character belonging to a transborder family. Yet the effects created by each story's particular narratorial techniques and imagery differ sharply. "Never Marry a Mexican" features a self-destructive looping of time in Clemencia's relation to the heteronormative spaces of the family. In Muñoz's story, the words "there" and "back" are reversible along a transnational south-north axis depending on where the man locates himself in the present and the past, or is located by his son, in relation to his Mexican family. In Cisneros's story, the temporal imperative of the title shifts in meaning in relation to the two different families, from the complex transnational inequities captured in the Chicana mother's advice to avoid Mexican men, to an anti-miscegenation motto in Drew's singular U.S. perspective. In both cases, Muñoz and Cisneros tell us about geopolitical border crossings, and show us how these queerly gendered transnational subjects experience time and space along the axes of race, nation, and class.

Notes

[1] See their discussion of the transnational or trans-American imaginary, which they define as "a cultural geography, or as a chronotope, that is both historical and geographical, discursive and real, populated by transnational persons, whose lives intersect in complex ways with the heterogeneous meanings of the symbols of 'Americanness'" (2003, 16).

[2] In her critique of Chicano nationalism's gender politics, Fregoso claims that the movement's "political familism," linking familia to Chicano nation, converges with the dominant culture's insistence on "family values," including heteronormativity and gender hierarchy. See also Richard T. Rodríguez.

[3] This formulation and the queer of color critique that informs this essay are indebted to Roderick Ferguson.

[4] I refer to the man as undocumented because there is no textual evidence for the possibility that he might have arranged his legal standing after IRCA was passed in 1987. Instead, the reader is told that his employer "forged documents" for him when he was a young man of fifteen, and, when contemplating flying, the man lists his tenuous "U.S. documents": "There is an official residence in Los Angeles. There is a family member in San Francisco. There are traveler's checks more easily obtained than ever before" (78). While this type of documentation may be sufficient protection for more routine activities, they would not stand up to scrutiny at the airport. At any rate, his long-term undocumented existence influences his mental state and affective experience of travel.

[5] Thanks to Julie Minich for pointing out the dual effects here of Muñoz's narrative strategy.

[6] The odd inclusion of the exclamation point here echoes the Spanish (¡!) in how, as a very young man, he imagined the accident site where the young mother died: "only as pictures from the Mexican tabloids and their lurid (¡!) black-and-white wreckage" (74). The parenthetical punctuation seems to convey an emotional reaction on the part of the man, not an editorial comment by the narrator. In the case of his son's house, the parenthetical exclamation could indicate that the man himself has never even seen where his son lives, necessitating even more lies. In the case of the accident site, the double exclamation points in parentheses clearly correspond to the Mexican popular cultural referent, while the reason for the emotion seems to be related to the sensationalist nature of the photographs. In other words, he imagines the horrific accident on the foggy road between small farm towns in central California through his affective experience of Mexican tabloid visuality. This is but one example of how the story constructs the man's subjectivity as transnational.

[7] The first recounts a drunken late-night phone call to Drew, focusing on Megan's reaction more than on Drew's; similarly, in the second, the narrator's sexual interest in their son turns her thoughts to Megan's body in sex with Drew.

[8] Interestingly, when Drew is out of his Cortés drag, he takes on a child-like quality in Clemencia's eyes: "You're almost not a man without your clothes. . . . You're so much a child in my bed. Nothing but a big boy who needs to be held. I won't let anyone hurt you. My pirate. My slender boy of a man" (78). As object of sexual desire, Drew's shift between conquistador and boy indicates Clemencia's fluid erotic inclinations. She enjoys playing bottom to Drew's top in their Malinche/Cortés fantasy, but assumes a maternal, yet dominant role vis-à-vis Drew as child-boy. Her current sexual involvement with Drew's teenage son suggests yet another instance in which she assigns herself a maternal role in erotic scenarios.

[9] Many years later, in the present of the narration, Clemencia appears to answer a question posed to her by the son ("Your mother? Only once" (79).) by relating her encounter with Drew and Megan at an art exhibition. Unlike her youthful escapade with the gummy bears and the Russian doll, which gave her great pleasure and a sense of power, in this segment she feels humiliated, "as if everyone. . .could see me for what I was" (79). The role of other woman, defiantly claimed at the

beginning of the story, now mortifies her, an emotion she deflects onto the shoes she is wearing, "ashamed at how old they looked" (79). Her description of Megan is merciless: "a redheaded Barbie doll in a fur coat. One of those scary Dallas types, hair yanked back into a ponytail, big shiny face like the women behind the cosmetic counters at Neiman's" (79); her use of animal imagery to capture her plight is somewhat less pitiless: she "just stood there dazed like those animals crossing the road at night when the headlights stun them" (79); "I grinned like an idiot and held out my paw" (79); and "chattering like a monkey" (80). The pride of ownership in Drew's introduction of his wife, "*This* is Megan" (79), drives home her legitimacy and Clemencia's shameful illegitimacy, both poles neatly contained within heteronormative discourse.

[10] The 2001 gender-bending cult film, *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*, pits the American gummy bears against the German Gummibær in a struggle for power similar to the way Cisneros uses gummy bears to figure Clemencia's struggle for power with Megan.

[11] Lecture, Stanford University, May 2006.

Works Cited

Adkins, Lisa. 2004. "Passing on Feminism: From Consciousness to Reflexivity?" *European Journal of Women's Studies* 11: 427–44.

Cisneros, Sandra. 1991. *Woman Hollering Creek and Other Stories*. New York: Random House.

Edelman, Lee. 2004. *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press.

Ferguson, Roderick. 2003. *Aberrations in Black: Toward a Queer of Color Critique*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Freeman, Elizabeth. 2000. "Packing History: Count(er)ing Generations." *New Literary History* 31.4 (fall): 727–44.

———. 2010. *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories*. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press.

Fregoso, Rosa-Linda. 2003. *meXicana Encounters: The Making of Social Identities on the Borderlands*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Halberstam, Judith. 2005. *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives*. New York: New York University Press.

Hedwig and the Angry Inch. 2001. Dir. John Cameron Mitchell. California: Fine Line. DVD.

Martínez, Ernesto. 2011. "Shifting the Site of Queer Enunciation." In *Gay Latino Studies: A Critical Reader*, edited by Michael Hames-García and Ernesto Martínez. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press.

Moya, Paula M. and Ramón Saldívar. 2003. "Fictions of the Trans-American Imaginary." *Modern Fiction Studies* 49.1 (spring): 1–18.

Muñoz, José Esteban. 2009. *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*. New York: New York University Press.

Muñoz, Manuel. 2003. *Zigzagger*. Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press.

Rodríguez, Richard T. 2009. *Next of Kin: The Family in Chicano/a Cultural Politics*. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press.

Schmidt Camacho, Alicia. 2008. *Migrant Imaginaries: Latino Politics in the U.S.- Mexico Borderlands*. New York: New York University Press.

Soto, Sandra K. 2010. *Reading Chican@ Like a Queer: The De-Mastery of Desire*. Austin: University of Texas Press.