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Iris Haslhofer

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for my parents
Monika and Hans-Georg

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1 Introduction



When on May 25, 2006 between 500,000 and 1,000,000 people filled up the streets of downtown Los Angeles, their mixed feelings of anger, fear and despair could no longer be ignored. Turning against the proposed anti-immigrant Bill HR4437, the target group of the legislation, illegal migrant workers of Hispanic descent, articulated their resistance against a law that would turn them into felons as well as would provide for stiffer penalties for those who employ them.

Once more in the history of the conflict-ridden relationship between Anglo Americans and people of, especially, Mexican descent, Hispanic Americans openly rose against oppression and discrimination legitimized by laws such as the referred to Bill HR4437. Very similar to what was part of an almost daily practice in the times of the *Chicano Movement*, slogans such as 'Sí, se puede' (Yes, it is possible) conquered the streets as well as illustrated by the above shown photographs, organizations such as *The Mexica Movement* provocatively pointed to the fact that much of the territory of the present United States formerly belonged to Mexico.

Looking even further back into the history of the relationship between Anglo Americans and Mexicans, it becomes apparent that these two groups share a long, complicated record of conflicts. Given the fact that these conflicts most frequently circle around the question of dominance and of being dominated, it seems hardly surprising that this conflict is also repeatedly dealt with in the representations of Chicano/a life. A large amount of Chicano/a cultural artifacts such as novels, movies and lyrics are thematically centered around the fight between Anglo Americans and Chicano/as. In particular, in Chicano/a Literature, the representations of the clash of the Anglo American and Chicano/a culture provide an interesting insight into the complexity of the fight between two opposing cultural systems and the effects it has on the individual.

Thus, the analysis of the ways resistance against the dominating Anglo American cultural system is represented in Chicano/a Literature will form the core of my thesis. I chose to investigate the representation of resistance against Anglo American hegemony in four different literary works by male Mexican Americans. The analyses of *Pocho* by José Antonio Villarreal (1959), *The Revolt of the Cockroach People* by Oscar Zeta Acosta (1973), *Bless me, Última* by Rudolfo Anaya (1972) and *The Rain God* by Arturo Islas (1984) will in particular be concerned with the development of a Chicano cultural identity, that, as I hope to illustrate, necessarily entails resistance against Anglo American hegemony.

As far as the selection of the novels is concerned, I consider all four of them key works in the history of Chicano literature; although of different recognition and distribution, all four novels contribute to the understanding of a certain time in history or indicate a time of transition, a shift of paradigm. Thus, while *Pocho* mirrors a phase of history that opted for cultural assimilation, *The Revolt of the Cockroach People* favored the total rejection of Anglo American dominance that tied in with the construction of a separate ethnic identity.

In contrast to *The Revolt of the Cockroach People*, *Bless Me, Última* serves as a perfect example of a transitional piece of literature that opened up the new era of postmodernist literature. Although some scholars might argue that each of the four works has been analyzed extensively as far as their representation of Anglo American hegemony is concerned, I have not yet come across a cohesive analysis of how the depiction of resistance against Anglo American hegemony has changed over the course of time. In particular, as far as *The Rain God* by Arturo Islas is concerned, few attention has been attributed to novels that articulate resistance both against Anglo American and Mexican dominant meanings.

Therefore, in order to provide a theoretical basis for my study, I will include an introductory chapter on important terminology, in particular on terminology that accounts for the relation of power. Apart from a short definition of the term Chicano/a as well as a brief section on the status of Chicano literature, the initial chapter will be dedicated to the introduction of relevant terms such as *hegemony*, *assimilation*, *identity politics* and *hybridity* (or *mestizaje*).

Then, my thesis approaches the first novel under consideration, *Pocho*, through a detailed analysis of places and spaces of assimilation and alienation, such as school, family and peer group. While the initial part of the chapter explores the novel's socio-economic and socio-historical context, the last part accounts for the limitations of assimilation represented in the novel.

In my chapter on *The Revolt of the Cockroach People*, the primary sections will deal with the most important goals as well as with the ideology of the *Chicano Movement* in the 1960s and early 1970s. Then, finally engaging in a deeper examination of the text itself, I will provide an analysis of the places and spaces of the metaphoric war between Anglo Americans and Chicanos/as represented in the novel. Furthermore, through an analysis of Oscar Zeta Acosta's life and work I hope to reveal the restrictive tendency of a Movement, which primarily opted for the construction of a clearly set apart, separate Chicano identity.

The third novel under consideration, *Bless Me, Última* by Rudolfo Anaya, provides a completely different account of the conflict between two opposing cultures. Anaya emphasizes the fight that needs to be fought within the individual in order to construct a cultural identity. Thus, my analysis will be primarily concerned with the representation of the opposing systems (such as opposed belief systems or the fight between evil and good) the novel's protagonist needs to reconcile.

Finally, in my chapter about Arturo Islas's novel *The Rain God* I will emphasize how, in the course of time, resistance against Anglo American hegemony has changed into a more structural, strategic kind of resistance. As will be illustrated, the protagonist of *The Rain God* attempts to find a way to rid himself from the restrictions of both Anglo American and Mexican dominant meanings. In *The Rain God's* case, it is the body that becomes the site of external and internal resistance against dominant meanings concerning sexuality, ethnicity and physical impairment.

2 Of Being Defined and Resisting Definition – Chicano/a (Literature) and Power Relations

The term 'Chicano' as well as its female equivalent 'Chicana', tend to remain semantically vague to many European scholars, students or readers. Thus, before going into greater detail about theories dealing with the various ways of power negotiations within multicultural settings, it seems crucial to further define the basic key terms related to 'Chicano Literature'.

2.1 *Chicano/a, Mexican-American, Hispanic or Latino/a?*

Who, then, are the so-called Chicanos?
(Oscar Zeta Acosta, *The Revolt of the Cockroach People*, 219)

The term 'Chicano', though uncertain as far as its origin¹ is concerned, was adopted in the 1960s as a

[...] collective identity marker [...] by the Chicano Movement. It [...] signified a desire to differentiate Mexican Americans from other Latino/a sectors and to affirm Chicanos as a distinct US minority formed by invasion, colonization, and capitalist exploitation. Under this name, activists attempted to politicize a community [...]. (Allatson, 61)

As indicated in the above given comment, the ethnic label 'Chicano' emerged in the Social Movement's period of the 1960s and not simply denoted 'persons of Mexican descent residing in the United States' (Fellner, 7) but also transmitted political as well as ideological ideas of the *Chicano Movement*.²

¹ In her *Chicano Folklore* (2001) Rafaela Castro proposes two different plausible origins of the term *Chicano*. She suggests that (1) *Chicano* may derive from a blending of the Mexican City of *Chihuahua* and the word *mexicano* or that (2) the term may derive from the Spanish equivalent of the English noun *boy* (Spanish *chico*). She argues that Anglo Americans in the early 20th Century applied this term to Mexican Americans. She consequently assumes that, due to its pejorative connotation, the term *chico* and its possible derivation *Chicano*, is frequently refused, in particular by the older generation of Mexican Americans. Another scholar, Tino Villanueva supposes that the term *Chicano* may derive from the word *mexicano*, which through native pronunciation became *meshicano* and was consequently changed into *Chicano*.

² John García points out that one of the main objectives of the *Chicano Movement* was to 'liberate Mexican-origin people from a sense of cultural inferiority', to increase cultural awareness and, very importantly, to increase a sense of group consciousness among

However, it needs to be emphasized that ethnic labels necessarily have to be seen in their historical and political context. Thus, while in the 1960s the term 'Chicano' was firmly rooted in the Social Movement of the time, it

[...] lost most of its political overtones and pejorative connotations in the 1970s. Increasingly, Chicano has gained acceptance among people of Mexican descent and among the general public as a synonym for Mexican American.

(*Harvard Encyclopedia of American Ethnic Groups*, 697)

Besides, terms which denote Mexican Americans residing in the USA may differ from region to region. As Thelen-Schaefer sums up, Mexican Americans in Chicago tend to call themselves 'Latinos', in the North of New Mexico and South-Colorado they label themselves 'Hispanics' or 'Spanish Americans', whereas Mexican Americans from the Southwest frequently identify themselves as 'Chicanos' (6-7).

The terms 'Latino' as well as 'Hispanic' are (despite their individual usage in the above given regions) generally applied whenever '[Latinos/as] adopt[ing] a panethnic identification or speak[ing] of self and community in national terms' (Allatson, 140). Both terms usually encompass historical minorities such as the Chicanos/as and Puerto Ricans, as well as persons of Latin American heritage such as Cubans, Dominicans and Central Americans.

However, it needs to be mentioned that the ethnic label Latino (as well as its female equivalent Latina) has been recently favored by Mexican Americans. As Allatson states, it is 'circulating as a self-adopted alternative to the government-imposed and media-preferred 'Hispanic' (140). That also means that people of any Latin American descent, whenever they refer to themselves as 'Latinos/as', 'Hispanics', 'Chicanos/as'³, reflect upon their self-perception.

Mexican-Americans (84). Furthermore, I highly recommend Arturo Rosales' work *¡Chicano! The History of the Mexican American Civil Rights Movement* for a more detailed discussion of the *Chicano Movement*.

Chapter 4 of this thesis also contains crucial information about the political and ideological ideas of *el Movimiento*.

³ Or even Latin Americans, Spanish-Americans, Mexicans, Spanish surnamed, *mexicano*, *la raza*, brown, etc.

For example, when Richard, the protagonist of Villarreal's novel *Pocho*, is identified as a Mexican by an elderly man, he answers "I'm an American" (*Pocho*, 106). In turn, whenever he feels the need to differentiate himself from Mexican nationals he answers "I am a *Pocho*" (*Pocho*, 165).⁴ Richard's reactions clearly reflect his self-representation of ethnic belonging and also the way he, in terms of ethnicity, is longing to be perceived by others. When he adopts the ethnic label 'American' and not any other label such as 'Mexican American', he reflects upon his desire for total assimilation to mainstream Anglo American culture.

In my analysis of the four novels under consideration I will employ different terms to refer to persons of Mexican descent residing in the United States. As my thesis is concerned with the *representation* of Mexican Americans in four different, historically detached novels, I consider it useful to use the terms suggested by the authors of the specific literary work.

Therefore, as *Pocho* was published in 1959, during the pre-Movement time, I will use the term Mexican American to refer to the protagonist, while in the case of *Revolt of the Cockroach People* the usage of the newly adopted term 'Chicano' seems sufficiently justifiable. I will furthermore apply the term 'Mexican' in my analysis of *Bless Me Última*, as Rudolfo Anaya frequently uses this term when he refers to Mexican Americans.

As far as Arturo Islas' novel *The Rain God* is concerned, I will respect the author's statement "I don't like labels and categories"⁵ (Torres, 55) and employ the term 'Mexican Americans', which I consider the least political and yet most straightforward in terms of meaning.⁶

⁴ According to Allatson, the term *Pocho* is a 'derogatory label from within Mexican communities directed at descendents of Mexican immigrants born or raised in the USA' (192). For more details also see chapter 3.2.

⁵ For a transcript of the entire interview with Arturo Islas see Hector Torres' *Conversations with Contemporary Chicana and Chicano Writers*, 2007.

⁶ Please note the absence of a hyphen, which I deliberately left out. Hyphenation of "American" identities has triggered off a tremendous load of debates among cultural critics. For a more detailed discussion see, for example, Seyhan, Azade "From Minor Literature, Across Border Culture, to Hyphenated Criticisms". 15-29.

2.2 What Makes Literature 'Chicano/a Literature'?

As mentioned in the previous section, the ethnic label 'Chicano' appeared in the 1960s and was soon affiliated with a strong political as well as ideological meaning. The construction of a collective Chicano identity also involved what Carlos Muñoz and Juan Gómez –Quiñones called 'a resurgence and positive redefinition of culture and traditions' (quoted in García, 83)⁷. Thus, the time of the *Chicano Movement* not only was a time of immense literary production⁸, but also triggered off a vivid academic discourse about 'Chicano' literature.

The question of what makes literature 'Chicano/a' literature is one of the most controversial among Chicano/a literature critics. Positions, highly influenced by the political climate of the given time as well as the theoretical background of scholars, teachers and also readers, vary significantly and range from prescriptive rules to descriptive attempts to capture the rich variety of Chicano/a literary works.

The prevailing attitude towards Chicano literature is (at least loosely) tied to the main concepts of the *Chicano Movement*. Participants of the Social Movement of the 1960s and early 70s were longing to construct a separate ethnic identity which stood in direct opposition to Anglo American hegemony.⁹ In their attempt to formulate "the" Chicano cultural identity, *Movement* activists also used art as a mouthpiece to promote their newly created collective identity.

⁷ García refers to two different works, namely (1) Muñoz, Carlos *Youth, Identity, Power: The Chicano Movement* (1989) and (2) Gómez-Quíñones, Juan. *Chicano Politics: Realities and Promise* (1990).

⁸ In Luis Leal's *A Decade of Chicano Literature* (1970-1979) from 1982, Francisco Lomelí states that '35 out of a total of almost 45 presently known novels were written in this decade [the seventies]' (33).

⁹ For a definition of the term 'hegemony' please see chapter 2.3.1.

Therefore, literature as a piece of art, was remodeled into a means of socio-political resistance and was only praised and awarded if it incorporated a whole set of inherent features, which I will briefly discuss in the following section.

One of the most important qualities that simply *had* to be encountered in any Chicano novel was English / Spanish bilingualism. In fact, taking into account that Mexico and its traditions served as the basic source for Chicano/a identity construction, the focus on the Spanish language as an essential component of "authentic" Chicano identities seems traceable.

However, when reading Oscar Zeta Acosta's *Autobiography of a Brown Buffalo*, it becomes evident that his, like many other Chicano/a's, linguistic competence in the Spanish language was very limited.¹⁰

Bruce-Novoa critically commented on these linguistic clichés which very clearly reflect the normative rules of the 1970s:

[T]he standard formula for a successful Chicano piece calls for five or six carnales, a dozen eses and batos, a sprinkle of Spanish and a well-placed 'Chinga tu madre'. (*Retrospace*, 16)

On a thematic level, it could be stated that any kind of novel was appreciated that supported the Movement's ideological program. This ideological program was based on the assumption that

[i]dentity was [...] a process of historical review carried out through an ideology of nation building which stressed several key points: retrieval of family and ethnic tradition, identification with the working class, struggle against assimilation, and the dire results if these efforts were not continued. Identity was not simply to be found, but to be forged, with careful attention to history and ideology.
(Bruce-Novoa, *Retrospace*, 134)

¹⁰ Bruce-Novoa at his reading at the University of Vienna, December 3, 2007, made a very similar point. He argued that a considerable amount of (mostly second generation) Chicanos/as did only speak some Spanish and very often their communicative competence in Spanish was limited. Also, some Chicanos/as acquired other European (or even non-European) languages before actually learning how to speak Spanish.

Therefore, Chicano authors, in order to be acknowledged by Chicano literature critics had to focus on a depiction of the Chicano experience. Most frequently these novels portrayed rural working-class struggles to survive, involved descriptions of the life in the barrio or dealt with social confrontations with Anglo American culture.¹¹

In his collection of essays on Chicano Literature *Retrospace*, Bruce-Novoa criticizes the way the *Chicano Movement* forced young Chicano/a writers to follow certain rigid norms in order to be identified as 'Chicano/a'. He reveals how the marginalized Chicano community, in an attempt to oppose dominant mainstream U.S. American culture, was restricting the creative art of young artists. They provided a whole set of norms that, just like the hegemonic norms of U.S. America, were of prescriptive as well as of exclusive character.

Therefore, young Chicano/a authors often only had three different possibilities. First, they could stick to the imposed norms, second, they could establish their own norms and third, they could neglect prescriptive pressures and fully dedicate themselves to the piece of art. However, option two and three always bared the risk of not getting published or of being totally neglected by literary critics.¹²

As Bruce-Novoa stated during a reading at the University of Vienna:

I realized we should not have told our students how to be 'Chicano'. We should have done it the other way around; we should have listened to what they were first and not impose a pre-formulated Chicano identity on them.¹³

¹¹ Ideas are taken from Luis Leal *A Decade of Chicano Literature* 1982, 3.

¹² Cf. Bruce-Novoa, *Retrospace*, 14.

¹³ Statement uttered by the Chicano writer and literary critic Juan Bruce-Novoa during a reading of his book *Only the Good Times* at the University of Vienna at December 3, 2007.

In many ways, this statement echoed what Bruce-Novoa had already written in an open letter to Dr. Philip Ortego in 1973¹⁴:

What I want is post-analysis, that is, for the critic, publisher, reader, anyone, to read first, without any pre-established norms, without fixed absolutes. (*Retrospace*, 17)

However, a glance into the most established literary canons of Chicano literature reveals that literary critics tend to favor Chicano texts that at least show some of the above mentioned qualities postulated by Chicano Movement's ideology.

As far as the four novels under consideration are concerned, at least two of them, namely *Pocho* and *Bless me, Última* are to be encountered in the majority of Chicano canons¹⁵. Bruce-Novoa, in his chapter about canonical and non-canonical texts in *Retrospace* describes the possible motivation for these rigid forms of exclusion and inclusion.

According to Bruce-Novoa, *Pocho* was favored because of its clear focus on ethnicity and identity. It is a novel that

[...] centered around the question of identity as played out in the development of a boy and his immigrant father [...] [it] very easily lent [itself] to allegorical readings of the view of society that the Movement desired. (Bruce-Novoa, 134)

The same explanation for the incorporation into a canon might probably be valid for Rudolfo Anaya's *Bless me, Última*. However, it needs to be emphasized that *Pocho*, in opposition to *Bless me, Última* draws a very negative picture of the Chicano community and its 'creative process'.¹⁶

¹⁴ Letter printed in *Retrospace* by Bruce Novoa, 17.

¹⁵ For example, cf.

Romano, Octavio Ignacio and Herminio Ríos. *El espejo-The mirror selected Chicano literature*. Berkeley: Quinto Sol, 1972.

Antonia Castañeda Shular, Tomás Ybarra-Frausto, Joseph Sommer. *Literatura Chicana: Texto y Contexto*, 1972.

Tey Diana Rebolledo and Eliana S. Rivero. *Infinite Divisions: An Anthology of Chicana Literature*, 1993.

Kannellos Nicolás et al. *Herencia: The Anthology of Hispanic Literature of the United States*, 2002.

¹⁶ Cf. Bruce-Novoa, 136.

Interestingly, the reasons for the frequent exclusion of Oscar Zeta Acosta's novel *The Revolt of the Cockroach People* is of a rather different nature. Though thematically centered around the *movimiento chicano*, Oscar Zeta Acosta was in many ways revealing the *Chicano Movement's* deficiencies and restrictedness.¹⁷ He did not present the ethnic community of Chicanos as a unified ethnic group, but rather illustrated that the kind of unity promoted by the Social Movement was 'untenable under the pressures from both exterior and interior forces' (Bruce-Novoa, 139).

The forth novel under consideration, Arturo Islas' novel *The Rain God* is most frequently completely excluded from Chicano literature anthologies. The most plausible reasons for that fact are his homosexual characters as well as his lack of emphasis of ethnicity. Just like Rechy's *City of Night*¹⁸, Arturo Islas does not convert ethnicity into a problem, nor even a necessary context for the plot of his novel.¹⁹

2.3 Negotiating Chicano Cultural Identity in Relation to Anglo American Hegemony

As already hinted at in the previous chapter, the *Chicano Movement* very openly promoted resistance against the dominance of the Anglo American cultural and political system. Generally, looking further back into the history of the relationship between Anglo Americans and Mexicans, it becomes apparent that they share a long, complicated record of conflicts that most frequently involved the negotiations of power. The question of dominance – and of being dominated – is of central importance for the Anglo American – Chicano cultural interaction.

¹⁷ For a more detailed discussion see Tonn, Horst (125-128) as well as chapter 4 of this thesis.

¹⁸ Mentioned in Bruce-Novoa's chapter on canonical and non-canonical texts, 132-145.

¹⁹ When dealing with the *representation* of the four novels under consideration, the author's perspectives on Chicano literature seem of special importance. However, I decided to postpone these issues to the specific chapters. In particular, please see the subchapters on the authors' biographies.

Therefore, the following chapter will be dedicated to various theories that deal with the relationship between dominant (hegemonic) and marginal (subaltern) cultures and the possibilities of individual identity construction within these theoretical frames.

To begin with, it seems essential to further explain what is actually meant by "the dominant culture" or more importantly in the discourse of Chicano literature, what is meant by "the dominant U.S. (or Anglo) American culture".

2.3.1 The Concept of Hegemony

The theoretical framework of Cultural Studies employs the concept of 'hegemony', which is concerned with the 'relationships between culture and power' (Barker, 106). As Baldwin in her *Introduction to Cultural Studies* points out, this theory is based on the assumption that

there is a strand of meaning within any given culture that can be called governing or ascendant. The process of making, maintaining and reproducing this authoritative set of meanings, ideologies and practices has been called hegemony. (Baldwin, 84)

It was Antonio Gramsci, a Marxist theorist, who originally generated the concept of 'hegemony'. He very explicitly drew attention to the fact that any ruling power can only maintain its governing position by employing force and most importantly, consent.²⁰ In other words, leadership has to incorporate 'coercive use or threat of force via the military and the police' and furthermore organize 'consent based upon [...] developing shared ideas, values, beliefs and meanings' (Barker, 106) in order to legitimate the unequal distribution of power within a cultural system.

²⁰ Cf. Baldwin, 84.

Thus, the notion of 'hegemony' is also trying to capture the process of how dominant (or hegemonic) groups gain and more importantly maintain power through the construction of shared values and beliefs that 'are seen to act in the interests of the dominant' group (Barker, 106).

Therefore, the words "the dominant U.S. American culture²¹" or hegemonic U.S. American culture will be used in this thesis to denote the mainstream U.S. Anglo American culture that is reinforced by politics, jurisdiction, executive power and also by e.g. popular culture products as well as popular ideological ideas that are meant to reproduce the shared values and beliefs of U.S. Anglo American culture. In particular, Anglo American mainstream culture is typically enforced by white, heterosexual, male human beings.

To sum up, it needs to be emphasized that the concept of 'hegemony' per se indicates its temporal limitation. Power and leadership obligatorily have to be renegotiated, have to be re-won and therefore open up a space for alteration of power relationships. This is where social movements as well as subcultures or any counter-hegemonic subaltern groups come into play.

In a way, Chicano/a literature is one of the cultural products that challenges hegemonic ideologies as Neate sums up in his work *Tolerating Ambiguity*:

[...] [C]ritical and theoretical approaches to Chicano/a cultural production [...] propose a view that Chicano/a literature is, in many ways, a literature of resistance or oppositionality and, as the product of a historically-constituted border consciousness, that it effects a symbolic displacement and transformation of hegemonic ideology. (Neate, 1)

Individual identity construction, therefore, cannot be regarded as an isolated process, but has to be investigated in the context of its cultural, political and familial surrounding. Thus, hegemonic power relations provide the overall

²¹ In her work *Show and Tell* Karen Christian points out that 'the widely accepted term 'dominant culture' essentializes both American and minority cultures and reinforces a questionable paradigm of binary opposition'. However, she argues that 'the concept of "dominant culture" is an inescapable essentialism like those Diana Fuss identifies in *Essentially Speaking*' (159).

frame within which individuals need to negotiate their position to the dominant cultural system.

As the concepts of assimilation, identity politics and different notions of identity are of special interest for the four novels under consideration, the subsequent section is restricted to an illustration of the approaches that are concerned with these constructs.

2.3.2 Assimilation and Acculturation - the Absence of Resistance

The USA is definitely a country that, since its foundation (and some may argue even before), has been a nation of immigrants. Therefore, many scholars, artists and politically active people have been occupied with the question of how to incorporate such a large range of different ethnic, cultural and linguistic backgrounds into "the" American nation.

One attempt to provide a solution to the problem referred to above was pushed forward in the early 20th Century. The so-called "Melting-Pot Theory" basically suggests that all immigrants, regardless of their different national, cultural and ethnic backgrounds were to blend into a new American nation. However, after close examination of this promising theory its weakness becomes evident. Allatson most accurately sums up the basic concept of the "Melting-Pot Theory":

in practice it functioned as a euphemism for assimilation, its underlying assumption being that immigrants would lose their original cultural and ethnic traits in the process of becoming "American". (Allatson, 158)

Thus, the blending of all cultural systems into a new one involves what Neate calls 'a gesture of exclusion' (86). In order to become part of the American society, immigrants were asked (or even forced) to rip off their former cultural identities. In fact, as indicated by Allatson's comment on "Melting Pot Theory", it could be understood as a theory that requires total assimilation.

However, when e.g. reading Villarreal's novel *Pocho*, it becomes evident that even if total assimilation to Anglo American hegemony is desperately wanted, complete "melting" is frequently simply denied. Among other issues I will illustrate in chapter 2 of this thesis, how assimilation necessarily ends where racism and discrimination start.

Nevertheless, before I will enroll in a greater analysis of *Pocho* and its favor of total assimilation, it seems essential to further define the concept of assimilation. Basically, on a more general level, assimilation could be said to be a possible option of acculturation which per definition

refers to the social processes by which we learn the knowledge and skills that enable us to be members of a culture. (Baldwin, 2)

Furthermore,

[a]cculturation requires the contact of at least two autonomous cultural groups, and some form of change within one of these groups must result from the contact. (Black, 146)

The above-given definition already hints at one potential interpretation of the term "acculturation", which quite clearly involves the concept of "dominance". Although, generally speaking, changes could happen within both cultural systems, some tendencies point to the contrary. Most frequently, the weaker (socially, economically, also in terms of number) cultural group is more likely to be dominated by the more powerful cultural group (Black, 146).

As far as the individual construction of cultural identity is concerned, acculturation provides three different options, namely 'assimilation, integration, and rejection' (Black, 147). The collective decision of a whole ethnic group not to assimilate, to reject assimilation totally, provides a most promising basis for a social movement. Such a movement of the ethnic group of Chicanos, will be discussed in the following section in connection with the Cultural Studies' concept of identity politics.

2.3.3 Identity Politics and the *Movimiento Chicano* as a Means of Open Resistance

As already hinted at in the previous chapter, the unifying national concept of the 'Melting Pot' resulted in a marginalization of basically everyone who did not fit into the Anglo American cultural system. It was in the 1960's that African American as well as Mexican American Civil Rights Movement activists devoted themselves to the reformation of their position within Anglo American society and the removal of social inequities.

In an attempt to transform political power, they participated in the creation of a separate ethnic identity, which very clearly was meant to form an oppositional counterpart to Anglo American identities. In Cultural Studies, such usages of "identity" are referred to as identity politics. It is

the making and maintenance of cultural rights for those persons making identity claims within society and culture. (Barker, 257)

As the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* states:

The laden phrase "identity politics" has come to signify a wide range of political activity and theorizing founded in the shared experiences of injustice of members of certain social groups. [...] [I]dentity political formations typically aim to secure the political freedom of a specific constituency marginalized within its larger context. Members of that constituency assert or reclaim ways of understanding their distinctiveness that challenge dominant oppressive characterizations, with the goal of greater self-determination.²²

In resistance²³ to Anglo American hegemony, the *Movement* transgressed the 'acceptable boundaries set by established customs, hierarchies and rules' (Barker, 258) and opted for a self-determined and, most importantly, unified Chicano consciousness. Therefore, one of the objectives of Chicano identity politics 'was to liberate Mexican-origin people from a sense of cultural inferiority' (García, 84).

²² See <http://setis.library.usyd.edu.au/stanford/entries/identity-politics/>.

²³ 'Resistance is a kind of counter-power always likely to surface in response to power's expression. Resistance takes many forms ranging from micro political gestures of contempt and alienation in the classroom to full-scale social and political revolution' (Barker 258).

According to Lory Britt, this objective is very likely to be encountered in any kind of social movement.

Historically, a number of social movements, have arisen specifically to alter social responses to and definitions of stigmatized attributes, replacing shame with pride. (Britt, 252)

She further argues that social movements' ideologies not only attempt to turn shame and loneliness into pride (by e.g. positively redefining culture and traditions). They also strengthen the sense of solidarity by clarifying that 'someone with the stigma is not an idiosyncratic individual but rather a member of a definable plurality' (Britt, 262).

To sum up, social movements try to activate people by, according to Esman, basing group identity on objective social distinctions and feelings of solidarity they generate.²⁴ Also, Chicano Movement activists emphasized that stigmatization, economic or cultural deprivation or discrimination are experiences the majority of Chicanos/as share and therefore increase solidarity among the ethnic group.

Participants of the *Chicano Movement* promoted a separate ethnic identity that stood in direct opposition to Anglo American identity. In the process of the 'resurgence and positive redefinition of culture and traditions' (García, 83), they turned back to Mexico which, according to Fellner, 'was seen as the center of cultural identity, serving as the prime source of tradition' (23).

Another interesting point that has to be mentioned is that in an attempt to capture the essence of their newly defined Chicano identity, Movement activists created the myth of Aztlán, the homeland of Chicanos. This cultural symbol forms part of identity politics, as identity politics is a sub-set of cultural politics and is thus also concerned with the 'power to name' and 'the forging of 'new languages' of identity with which to describe [them]selves' (Baldwin, 95).

²⁴ Quoted in García, referring to Milton Esman's text "Two Dimensions of Ethnic Politics: A Defense of Homeland and Immigrant Rights" (86).

At the beginning of his article "Aztlán: A Homeland Without Boundaries" Anaya describes his reflections on the naming ceremony of Aztlán:

The naming coalesces the history and values of the groups or nations, and most important, the naming ceremony restores pride and infuses renewed energy which manifests itself in creative ways. [...] The naming ceremony creates a real sense of nation, for it fuses the spiritual and political aspirations of a group and provides a vision of the group's role in history. (Anaya, 230)

However, in a retrospect, Henry Giroux sums up that

[w]hile identity politics was central to challenging the cultural homogeneity of the 1950s and providing spaces for marginal groups to assert the legacy and importance of their respective voices and experiences, it often failed to move beyond a notion of difference structured in polarizing binarisms and an uncritical appeal to a discourse of authenticity.
(quoted in Chambram-Dernersesian, 203-204)

2.3.4 Mestizaje / Hybridity and its Potential of Resistance

In retrospect, neither the introduction and implementation of the concept of 'assimilation' nor of the concept of 'identity politics' provided a considerable amelioration of the situation of Chicanos/as. While the former concept of total assimilation to Anglo American hegemony frequently reduced the treatment of Mexican cultural heritage to an almost zero degree, the concept of identity politics openly resisted Anglo American hegemony while, at the same time, helped to create a new, Mexico centered cultural identity.

However, as none of the attempts to relate to the dominant Anglo American culture proved successful, recent theoretical discourses engage in a construction of a multicultural identity that rises beyond binaries and essentialism. In the context of what I will term 'the postmodern notion of identity construction', the concept of 'hybridity' as well as its Chicano/a equivalent 'mestizaje' are of special importance.

Despite previous meanings and connotations of the terms '*mestizaje*' and 'hybridity', the two concepts, at least within contemporary theoretical discourse, offer various points of intersection and indisputable similarities, so that it seems legitimate to use them almost interchangeably.²⁵ Both concepts describe, at the very core of their meaning, 'the process of racial intermixing' (Allatson, 18). Whereas '*mestizaje*' derives from the historical background of Latin America, most frequently referring to the mixing of Mexican, Native American and U.S. Anglo American cultures, hybridity

designates any process of intercultural transformation that produces new cultural forms, and subjectivities, out of distinct cultural parents, and that thus challenges the very notion of cultural essentialism or purity. (Allatson, 125)

In order to further elaborate on the underlying conceptions of '*mestizaje*' and 'hybridity', I will primarily focus on the exceptionally influential works of the cultural critic Gloria Anzaldúa as well as on Homi Bhabha's philosophical discourse about postcolonialism and hybridity.

Initially, it needs to be emphasized that the concept of '*mestizaje*' is not a totally new concept but was already "in use" at the times of the *Chicano Movement*. However, as Tilley Spickard emphasizes, the term was rather used to complement the Movement's political ideology:

That upsurge of open rebellion [of the 1960s] revealed, with new clarity, the character of *mestizaje* as a political doctrine strategically developed to complement nationalist projects as well as a larger "Latin American" identity discourse. (Spickard, 55)

It was Gloria Anzaldúa, a Chicana lesbian feminist, who, in her work *Borderlands / La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987), developed and articulated a 'de-essentialized' version of Chicano/a identity.

²⁵ However, as Robert Young in his works *White Mythologies* and *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* elaborates, *mestizaje* is rather used to denote a natural union whereas *hybridity* also connotes a forced, at times violently enforced union.

As Christian Karen points out:

Anzaldúa characterizes the self, which is necessarily nonunitary, by what she calls *mestiza* or border consciousness: a multiple subjectivity constructed at the intersection of gender, class, race, culture, and sexuality. (Karen, 9)

The way she describes living at the borders, including not only the geographical borders but also the borders between cultures, between self and other, between male and female, most frequently involves painful experiences:

Chicanos and other people of color suffer economically for not acculturating. This voluntary (yet forced) alienation makes for psychological conflict, a kind of dual identity – we don't identify with Anglo-American cultural values and we don't totally identify with the Mexican cultural values. (*Borderlands*, 85) [...] Within us and within *la cultura chicana*, commonly held beliefs of the white culture attack commonly held beliefs of the Mexican culture, and both attack commonly held beliefs of the indigenous culture. (*Borderlands*, 100)²⁶

However, as Anzaldúa most eloquently elaborates in the development of her work, these painful experiences, the struggles Chicana/os need to go through, bear a kind of powerful, creative force that generates a new consciousness. This consciousness, in turn, forms a necessary prerequisite for the construction of a *new mestiza* identity.

As Anzaldúa argues

The *new mestiza* copes by developing a tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguity. She learns to be Indian in Mexican culture, to be Mexican from an Anglo point of view. She learns to juggle cultures. She has a plural personality, she operates in a pluralistic mode – nothing is thrust out, the good the bad and the ugly, nothing rejected, nothing abandoned. Not only does she sustain contradictions, she turns the ambivalence into something else. (*Borderlands*, 101)

²⁶ Another quote that indicates the conflict-ridden setting of Chicana identity construction would be: 'Cradled in one culture, sandwiched between two culturas, straddling all three cultures and their value systems, *la mestiza* undergoes a struggle of flesh, a struggle of borders, an inner war' (*Borderlands*, 100).

Through the construction of a constantly shifting consciousness, Anzaldúa manages to rise beyond binary dualisms and creates 'the third space, the in-between, border, or interstice that allows contradiction to co-exist in the production of the new element' (Yarbo-Bejarano, 84).²⁷

Homi Bhabha, being interviewed by Jonathan Rutherford (1990), also alludes to the production of a new element through the painful experience of racial intermixing, when he utters that

[t]he process of cultural hybridity gives rise to something different, something new and unrecognizable, a new area of negotiation of meaning and representation.
(Bhabha in an interview with Rutherford, 211)

According to Bhabha's theoretical point of view, hybridity, in the context of colonialism, develops from a vivid, mutual interaction between colonized and colonizing culture and gives rise to, what he calls, the *Third Space*:

But for me the importance of hybridity is not to be able to trace two original moments from which the third emerges, rather hybridity to me is the 'third space' which enables other positions to emerge. This third space displaces the histories that constitute it, and sets up new structures of authority, new political initiatives, which are inadequately understood through received wisdom.
(Bhabha in an interview with Rutherford, 211)

Furthermore, as Hartely sums up,

Images of a "third space" see subaltern identities as unique third terms literally defining an "in-between" place inhabited by the subaltern. In variants of hybridity, the subaltern is neither one nor the other but is defined by its location in a unique spatial condition which constitutes it as different from either alternative. (Hartley, 116)

²⁷ However, as Karen Christian argues: 'Yet in spite of Anzaldúa's desire to emphasize the breaking down of paradigms, her project tends to rely on images that evoke Chicana/o cultural essence', such as that 'U.S. Latinos and Latin Americans share a "common culture" (*Borderlands*, 87)' (10).

Thus, both Anzaldúa and Bhabha view the process of racial intermixing as a process that is able to give rise to something completely new, something that is

neither the One [...] nor the Other [...] but something else besides which contests the terms and territories of both. (Bhabha, 28)

'Hybridity' or '*mestizaje*' are seen as 'active moment[s] of challenge and resistance against a dominant cultural power' (Young, 23). Rather than simply resisting the dominant culture and embracing the marginalized culture, the notion of a hybrid identity places itself in-between two cultures, creating a new space. As Anzaldúa eloquently describes her position, she

continually walk[s] out of one culture and into another, because [she is] in all cultures at the same time. (*Borderlands*, 77)

In fact, the above described postmodern notion of identity can be read as a celebration of cultural diversity, of a possibility that goes beyond categories and dualisms. Appropriated to the context of Chicano ethnicity, it depicts how the struggle between dominating and being dominated is a struggle that is also fought within the individual. The individual embraces and resists dominance at the same time by creating a 'third' space in which he/she can be 'neither' 'nor'.

3 *Pocho* or José Antonio Villarreal's Version of a Bi-cultural Life

The novel *Pocho* by Antonio Villarreal was first published in 1959 and 'was originally touted as the first novel of Chicano literature' (Coonrod - Martínez, 21). However, though widely reviewed when newly published²⁸, *Pocho* sank into oblivion soon after. It took another eleven years until the novel experienced a fulminate revival and was saluted for its brilliant portrayal of the Chicano cultural identity crisis.²⁹

Holding its secure position as the first Chicano novel released by a major publishing company, it also anticipates, as Bruce Novoa argues, 'if only in segments as small as one sentence, almost every major fictional prose work in Chicano literature to date' (65).³⁰ Thus, José Antonio Villarreal is frequently considered 'as the writer who opened up the door to Latino fiction in the United States' (Stavans, 865). His life and attitude towards 'Chicano literature' will be discussed in the following subchapter.

3.1 *Biography of José Antonio Villarreal*

José Antonio Villarreal was born in 1924 on July 30 in Los Angeles, California. Though born and raised in the United States, he was repatriated in the early 1970s and since then has been a resident of Mexico.

Following the 'pattern of veiled autobiography'³¹, Juan Rubio, the protagonist's father in *Pocho*, just like Villarreal's father, was a Villista who moved from Mexico to California after the Mexican Revolution.

²⁸ Cf. Stavans, 865.

²⁹ Cf. Coonrod-Martínez, 21.

³⁰ Quoted from "Pocho as Literature" published in *Aztlán: International Journal of Chicano Studies Research* in 1975.

³¹ Expression used by Bruce-Novoa in the introduction to his interview with José Antonio Villarreal in 1976 (38). Tomas Vallejos also affirms that the 'success of *Pocho* is due in large part to its autobiographical nature' (284).

His family (in reality as well as in his first fictional work) finally settled in the city of Santa Clara, California. In his early life in the United States, as Villarreal contested in an interview, he and his twelve siblings

[...] spent [their time] strictly within the Mexican peasant culture, speaking Spanish, living in enclaves with their [our] own people. However, after 1930, the situation changed and his [my] life style became one where both Mexican and American cultures were present. (Villarreal in an interview with Bruce-Novoa, 39)

Since his graduation from the University of California, he continued his academic career as a professor and lecturer as well as pursued his creative work as an author.³² In 1959, his first novel *Pocho* was published. Fifteen years later his second novel, *The Fifth Horseman* went into print, in 1984 his third novel *Clemente Chacón*.

As Bruce-Novoa, in the preface to his interview with José Antonio Villarreal points out

Pocho clearly prefigured the major works in the genre that were to appear ten or fifteen years later. Its category of Bildungsroman, its pattern of veiled autobiography, and the treatment of such themes as immigration, Mexican and Chicano sexual taboos, father-son parallelism, mother-son antagonism, and the pressures of assimilation on the family are repeated in novels that follow. (Bruce-Novoa, 38)

However, time did not seem ready for his novel and José Villarreal had to wait another eleven years until his work experienced a powerful comeback. Nonetheless, Villarreal, whose work has been neglected for many years as well as 'has suffered at the hands of nonliterary critics' (Interview with Bruce-Novoa, 38) remains one of the most controversial Chicano authors.

³² When asked about the initial phases of his literary output, Villarreal said "I began to write short tales and some poems at about age eight when my vocabulary in English built up to a point where I felt I could communicate" (Interview with Bruce-Novoa, 39).

In his article on "Chicano Literature: Art and Politics from the Perspective of the Artist", Villarreal presents his attitude towards Chicano literature, which is very similar to what has already been mentioned in the context of chapter 2.2.

There was a proliferation of writing called Chicano literature and, as long as a work fit the mold created by the activists, it was not only considered good but was exorbitantly lauded. [...] We performed a great disservice to the Movement as well as to the idea of literature. It came about because we refused or could not understand that we could be didactic without sacrificing our artistic qualities, that even though the primary aim or intent of our work might be to propound an ideology [...] we need not rule out an aesthetic presence.
(José Antonio Villarreal, 165)

He constantly emphasizes that literature is primarily a piece of art, a piece of writing that needs to fulfill aesthetic standards and therefore should not be exclusively assessed in, what he calls, 'a literary sense based on socio-political or socio-economic terms' (Villarreal in an interview with Bruce-Novoa, 39). Although he is aware of the fact that his work can be used for political purposes, the overall intent of his work is, as he states, 'not political' (Villarreal in an interview with Bruce-Novoa, 43).

Thus, he does not clearly identify with the aims of the *Chicano Movement* and refuses to call himself Chicano, because he thinks that 'the name alone implicitly brings out restrictions and inhibitions detrimental to [his] my achieving the aesthetic level [he] seek[s]'. However, he is not 'disturbed by being classified as such [a Chicano]' (Interview with Bruce-Novoa, 42).

Consequently, though respecting the role of Chicano literature as revolutionary protest literature, José Villarreal opts for something else, namely 'to create a literature with universal overtones' (Interview with Bruce-Novoa, 45). He suggests that artistically well-done literature is able to reach more people as

[i]ntelligent readers will much more easily empathize through the acquisition of information and education with respect to our pueblo³³ through intelligent and artistic presentation of who and what we are. (Interview with Bruce-Novoa , 45)

Thus, he argues, works such as *Pocho*

[...] can improve communication and understanding between the Mexican American community and other ethnic groups, including the dominant portion of American society. (Interview with Bruce-Novoa, 45)

Instead of overtly attacking the dominant portion of American society, he seeks to increase understanding and respect for his own people. In order to reach the Anglo-American readership, he primarily published in English³⁴, leading to the fact that his readership has been largely composed of non-Hispanics and U.S. scholars as well as researchers.³⁵

Villarreal's attempts to reach an Anglo-American readership can easily be linked to what is suggested by Alarcón in his article entitled 'Hacia la nada' (1). He argues that *Pocho* describes and reflects a period of time, when assimilation to the dominant Anglo-American culture was almost a norm, at least for the great majority of Mexican American descendents.³⁶

Exactly these assimilationist tendencies represented and reflected in Villarreal's *Pocho*, will form the core of the following analysis. However, before going into greater detail about the places and spaces as well as the limitations of assimilation, it might be necessary to dedicate a short section to the historical and documental value of the novel, which has also been emphasized by Alarcón.³⁷

³³ meaning 'our people'.

³⁴ As Vallejos mentions in his article about José Villarreal, he 'informs his interviewers that although Spanish is his native language, English is his preferred language' (283).

³⁵ Cf. Ilan Stavans. Stavans also states that '*Pocho* was never translated into Spanish'. (866). However, in the process of my research I came across a Spanish version of *Pocho*, published in the same year Ilan Stavans' article appeared in the *Reference Guide to American Literature*.

³⁶ Please see:

<http://www.cervantesvirtual.com/servlet/SirveObras/12482390889132630754846/index.htm>.

³⁷ Cf. Alarcón, 1.

3.2 Socio-economic and Socio-historical Background of Pocho

Though frequently used to undermine *Chicano Movement's* ideology, *Pocho* is centered around Richard Rubio, who grows up in the 1930s. Written in a pre-Movement time, referring to pre-Movement historical events, *Pocho* is situated at the border between two different, though tightly interwoven, periods of time.

In order to capture the prevailing attitudes towards Mexicans and their relationship to Anglo-Americans, I will provide a short overview of the time of the Mexican Revolution (1910-1922), the Great Depression era, as well as the emergence of the Mexican zootsuiters. I have decided to focus on these three issues, as they are explicitly dealt with in the novel and furthermore provide an important background for the following analysis of assimilation and alienation.

Most of the narrated time of *Pocho* is deeply rooted in what Luis Leal labeled 'The Interaction Period' from 1910 to 1942.³⁸ In an attempt to create a realistic setting for his story, Villarreal, right at the beginning of his novel, refers to a real historical event, namely the Mexican Revolution (1910-1922). He introduces historic figures such as Pancho Villa and Zapata, who later on, in the period of the *Chicano Movement* were raised to the status of revolutionary heroes and idols.³⁹ However, what seems mainly important for the initial part of the novel, is that it serves to introduce the protagonist's father, Juan Rubio.

Ramón Saldívar characterizes Juan Rubio as a 'paradigmatic hero, patriarch, and warrior' (14), who finally is forced to flee from Mexico to the United States. Once a brave fighter and strong supporter of Pancho Villa's struggle to gain power, he finally, as stated in *Pocho*

³⁸ Cf. Luis Leal, "Mexican American Literature: A Historical Perspective", 26-28.

³⁹ Cf. Rosales, 26.

[...] became a part of the great exodus that came of the Mexican Revolution. By hundreds they crossed the Río Grande, and then by thousands. [...] The ever-increasing army of people swarmed across while the border remained open, fleeing from squalor and oppression. But they could not flee reality, and the Texans, who welcomed them as a blessing because there were miles of cotton to be harvested, had never really forgotten the Alamo. The certain degree of dignity the Mexicans yet retained made some of them turn around and walk back into the hell they had left. Others huddled close to the international bridge and established a colony on the American side of the river, in the city of El Paso, because they could gaze at their homeland a few yards away whenever the impulse struck them. (*Pocho*, 15-16)

The above given extract perfectly captures the image of what is also supported by many historical accounts of the situation Mexican Americans had to face in the times after the Mexican Revolution.

With the end of the Revolution, a rapid growth of Mexican American communities in the American Southwest set in. As Rosales sums up, the Revolution 'made refugees out of Mexicans from all walks of life' (26).⁴⁰ Their motherland, Mexico, shaken by political instability and economic weakness, had lost its attraction for many Mexicans who were longing for a new beginning on the other side of the border.

General factors, such as the proximity to their motherland as well as the regional concentration that promoted the maintenance of Mexican culture and tradition, most certainly positively influenced the decisions to move to the United States. Moreover, many Mexicans felt that a movement to California, Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, Nevada or Utah would simply mean a return to parts of the United States that, originally, before the Texan Revolution and the Mexican American War, had belonged to Mexico.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Rosales further explains that '[F]rom the time Francisco I. Madero's El Plan de San Luis Potosí called for an uprising for November 20, 1910, Mexicans endured twenty years of interminable bloodshed. Every political stage of the struggle unleashed new waves of violence. Regimes fell in and out of power, creating exiles of individuals who had held power or who found themselves on the losing side. Those who had no stake in the struggles did their best not to join; sometimes fleeing as refugees was the only solution. The majority of those who fled just wanted to escape the constant violence, pillage and rape which belligerents on both sides inflicted on the Mexican people' (26).

⁴¹ For a more detailed discussion, see Samuel P. Huntington's work *Who are We?*, 283-325.

As also indicated in the short passage from *Pocho*, especially Texas (along with other Southwestern U.S. American states) welcomed Mexicans, since the end of the Mexican American War around 1848, as their inexpensive labor was economically needed in order to expand in mining, ranching, agriculture and railroad construction. Thus, as García points out 'economic subjugation and exploitation of Mexican-origin people rapidly became the norm' (87).

On the other hand, as Villarreal puts it, 'the Texans had never really forgotten the Alamo' (*Pocho*, 15-16). 'The *Alamo*'⁴² refers to a Spanish mission that 'became the site of a famous battle between Texan and Mexican forces in 1836 during the Texan Revolution' (Allatson, 14). Though of minor importance for the future of Texas⁴³, the defeat and death of about 200 Anglo and Mexican Texans, 'remains a deeply politicized symbol of the clash between Anglo and Mexican peoples in North America' (Allatson, 14).

This kind of already existing antipathy towards Mexicans happened to reach another peak in the times after the Revolution. Francisco 'Pancho' Villa, who had at first sympathized with the United States, totally turned against them, when former American president Wilson extended recognition of Villa's political rival, Venustiano Carranza, as the president of Mexico.⁴⁴ Villa ordered the killing of seventeen American engineers as well as 'staged a number of border incursions into Texas' (Rosales, 31). Though of little political effect, Villa's raids, alongside with other violent clashes of Mexican and American forces, nurtured anti-Americanism on the one side as well as anti-Mexicanism on the other side of the border.

⁴² 'The *Alamo*' still is represented in a series of contemporary novels and movies. E.g. 'The *Alamo*' (1960) by John Wayne, who focuses on the Anglo-Texan struggle for liberty; hereby he polarizes the clash of Texans and Mexicans to the point where it becomes the fight between good and evil.

The movie's remake '*The Alamo*' by John Lee Hancock (2003) is trying to deconstruct the binaries established by Wayne by paying more attention to the Texan independence movement itself.

⁴³ Their brief period of total independence was followed by the annexation of the USA in 1845 (see Allatson, 14).

⁴⁴ Cf. Rosales, 31.

Reports about border violence, murders and 'unfair' juridical treatment of Americans supported already established stereotypes about people of Mexican origin. As Rosales states in his work *¡Chicano!* 'images coming out of Mexico during the period of revolution portrayed Mexicans as violent, dangerous and treacherous' (35).

It was exactly this difficult period of time into which Richard Rubio, the actual protagonist of the book was born. Villarreal, while focusing on the historical aspects characterizing his father's youth in his first chapter, had managed to provide the readership with plausible reasons for 'the important generational conflicts, the loss of the old world values and the suspension of Richard between the cultures' (Luedtke, 63) that were to follow.

Though from the second chapter onwards primarily focusing on the protagonist's inner world, Villarreal keeps his realistic tone and, once in a while, refers to historical events. In 1931, within the difficult period of the Great Depression, he mentions violent labor strikes and Communist rallies which provide a context of social instability and tumult.

Interestingly, Villarreal also refers to the phenomenon that the existential problem of hunger among Anglo Americans suddenly silenced insulting statements against the protagonist and created a common basis that, at least momentarily, rose above racial issues:

The boy [Richard] was no longer greeted at noon recess with jeers and hoots. The hated, oft-repeated cries of his schoolmates- "Frijoley bomber!" "Tortilla strangler" – now disappeared, as did the accompanying laughter, and he sometimes shared his lunch with them. (*Pocho*, 47)

Also, towards the end of the book, Richard gets acquainted with the so-called *pachucos* or *zootsuiters*. As Villarreal explains in *Pocho*:

The pachuco was born in El Paso, had gone west to Los Angeles, and was now moving north. To society, these zootsuiters were a menace, and the name alone classified them as undesirables [...] Richard understood them and partly sympathized, but their way of life was not entirely justified in his mind, for he felt that they were somehow reneging on life. [...] They [...] were but making a show of resistance. (*Pocho*, 150 - 151)

Historically, the zootsuiters are an interesting kind of young people who could not, in a strict sense, be called "subcultural" as their new life-style did not propose a 'subordination to, and departure from a preexisting cultural and national parent' (Allatson, 187). Rather, zootsuiters created a hybrid style which was accompanied by certain cultural codes such as distinct fashion, distinct dialect, distinct music and dance steps.

Richard, in an endeavor to describe them, points out that 'they attempted to segregate themselves from both their cultures, and became truly a lost race' (*Pocho*, 149). He also depreciates their particular language style and concludes that 'their Spanish became limited and their English even more so' (*Pocho*, 150).

The word *Pocho* itself is partly used to identify a mixture of English and Spanish, which will be shortly discussed in the following sequence.

3.3 Definition of the Term 'Pocho' and its Relevance in the Novel

The term *pocho* has manifold meanings, which could be basically grouped into two different categories. First, those definitions of *Pocho* which are to be encountered in books (dictionaries as well as the novel itself) and second, those meanings which are established by the everyday language of Mexicans or even other non-Mexican ethnic groups.

According to classical Spanish dictionaries, the term *pocho* is defined as 'colorless', 'faded away' or 'cut-off'.⁴⁵ Figuratively, it also conveys the connotation of 'sadness and disillusion'. Within the novel, Richard only once directly uses the word *pocho*. Being laughed at by a newly immigrated girl from Mexico, who considered his Spanish awkward, he defends himself, uttering the following words:

"I am a Pocho", he said, "and we speak like this because here in California we make Castilian words out of English words. But I can read and write in Spanish, and I taught myself from the time I had but eight years'. (*Pocho*, 165)

Thus, Richard's definition of *pocho* refers to its linguistic sense, designating 'a mixture of Spanish, English and some unique elements' (Luedtke, 79).

However, in everyday language of the 1940s and even later on, *Pocho/a* 'was a derogatory label from within Mexican communities directed at descendents of Mexican immigrants born or raised in the USA' (Allatson, 192). Nowadays, *Pocho/a* still is a commonly used term in Mexico, denoting any Chicano/a or Americanized Mexican.⁴⁶

Originally, the term *Pocho* was coined by Mexicans in order to refer to Mexicans who fled their homeland across the border during the upheavals that followed the Mexican Revolution. Thus, the term also implied a kind of 'cultural treachery' and

was uttered by Mexicans in reference to other Mexicans – native or U.S. born – who feign being other than they are, and in doing so dissociate themselves from their Mexican heritage. (Cantú, 421)

Therefore, some critics argue that the novel's title simply identifies Juan Manuel Rubio, Richard's father, who also left Mexico during the revolutionary period.

⁴⁵ An interesting suggestion for the origin of the word *pocho* was brought up by John Bright. He writes that '[f]olk definition links the term to the fact that Mexican women upon arriving here [the United States] cut off their hair in the *yanqui* fashion' (36).

⁴⁶ Cf. Allatson, 192-93.

Also, what might be of main interest for my thesis, the term '*pocho*' alludes to a high degree of acculturation and assimilation to Anglo American hegemony.⁴⁷ In fact, Villarreal's novel has often been read as a promotion for assimilation, which will be the focus of the following chapter.

3.4 In Favor of Assimilation – The Representation of the Relationship of Anglo American and Chicano Culture in Pocho

As pointed out above, Antonio Villarreal has been frequently criticized by literary critics as well as by 'Chicano *la Causa* enthusiasts'⁴⁸ for his high degree of assimilation. What seems to be a major problem is that, despite the fact that Villarreal's *Pocho* in many ways foreshadowed the upraise of Chicanos in the 1960s, the novel still is intrinsically connected to the 1940s and 50s.

The first point to be made is that Villarreal was raised in a time when the so-called "Melting-Pot Theory" was very much in vogue. Villarreal himself seems to be a supporter of the melting pot theory, uttering in an interview:

When I was perhaps thirteen years old, I realized that the non-Mexican population in my country did not know about us, did not know we existed, had no idea that we could be part of the mainstream of America and contribute to what I believe is the melting pot. (Interview with Villarreal, *Contemporary Authors*, 412)

Though the Melting Pot Theory was, in retrospect, highly criticized for its exclusive character and attempt to legitimate cultural domination, the pre-1965 generation, as Hernández-Gutierrez most accurately summed up, 'was a generation that avoided recognizing the context of cultural domination and opted instead for assimilation' (40). Ramón Eduardo Ruiz follows a similar

⁴⁷ Cf. Herms, 294.

⁴⁸ I came across the expression 'Chicano la causa enthusiasts' in Sedore, T.S. (240). He also provided a list of critics that vilified Villarreal's *Pocho* for being too assimilated, among which are: Shirley Carl and Paula (100), Vallejos Tomás (284-285), Paredes Raymund (806).

path when he writes that *Pocho* could be read as a piece of art that reflects 'Mexican American thinking of the time... the 'assimilationist' phase that prevailed then' (quoted in Vallejos, 285).⁴⁹

Secondly, Paredes refers to another interesting observation, already mentioned in the chapter on Villarreal's autobiography. Villarreal's position as an A_c kind of Mexican American⁵⁰ is undermined by the fact that his readership is primarily composed of Anglo Americans as well as his writing style is primarily influenced by the Anglo American tradition. In this context Paredes states:

Pocho is an American book with Mexican American characters and themes. To its largely Anglo readership, *Pocho* was a moving portrait of a necessary if painful process of assimilation. To a Mexican American audience, awash in a rising tide of ethnic pride, however, *Pocho* was a story of terrible loss. (Paredes, 806)

Thirdly, to come back to the novel itself, its protagonist appears as a strong defender of 'dominant ideologies and accepts their definitions of reality' (Sánchez R., 115).⁵¹ Most of all he embraces the myth of individualism⁵² and hereby, as Rosaura Sánchez points out 'accepted the ideological representations, discourse and power configurations of entrepreneurial capitalism' (115).

Another interesting issue, the generational aspect, also needs to be emphasized here. Generally, as it has been formulated in 'Hansen's law', 'what the son wishes to forget, the grandson wishes to remember.'⁵³ Thus, while Juan Rubio tries hard to remain fundamentally rooted in the Mexican cultural system, his son, Richard Rubio, just like many second generation

⁴⁹ Cf. Vallejos (285). Ramón Eduardo Ruiz's introduction to *Pocho* was originally attached to the 1970 edition of *Pocho*. However, as Vallejos points out Villarreal did not approve of the introduction and therefore later editions appeared without it.

⁵⁰ Black suggests to use an A to refer to the Anglo-American cultural sphere and a C to refer to the Chicano cultural sphere. Thus, A_c would be used to describe the highest level of assimilation into the dominant, mainstream cultural sphere. AC would be used if the two cultural spheres would interfere or influence each other on an equal basis and C_A would denote the least amount of assimilation (Black, 147).

⁵¹ Cf. Sánchez Rosaura, 115.

⁵² Cf. Chapter 3.6. for a more detailed discussion.

⁵³ Referred to in Luedtke, 69.

immigrants is 'embarrassed by his [their] forbearers' backwardness and eager to prove [themselves] himself 'American' (Luedtke, 69).

In an attempt to explain his way of living to his father he says: "This is America, Father," [...] 'If we live in this country we must live like Americans'" (*Pocho*, 133).

Thus, Luedtke concludes with the statement that

the setting of Villarreal's novel in the 1930's and its actual writing in the 1950's bracket an extended second generation of assimilation when the Mexican American community [...] accepted the public attitudes of conformity and patriotism. (Luedtke, 70)

Therefore, as the following analysis of places and spaces of assimilation and alienation will illustrate, assimilation indeed is favored and partly promoted in Villarreal's representation of Richard and his surrounding. However, although Richard's attempts to integrate and assimilate sometimes prove to work out, complete access to Anglo American dominant culture remains impossible.

3.5 Places and Spaces of Assimilation and Alienation in Pocho

Richard's attempts to assimilate to Anglo American hegemony are firmly tied to a process of cultural alienation.⁵⁴ The more he intends to prove his Americanness, the more he, often quite unconsciously, alienates from his Mexican roots. At the same time, whenever assimilation is being refused to him, he turns back to Mexican tradition, which once more increases his feeling of isolation.

⁵⁴ Defined as the '[t]heory developed in the early writings of Marx, that seeks to characterize and to explain the estrangement of humanity from its society, and its essential or potential nature' (Edgar, 18). Appropriated to the above given context of 'cultural' alienation it could also be interpreted as a process in which an individual (or whole ethnic group) estranges himself / itself from his/its former cultural roots. Most frequently, alienation is connected with a feeling of isolation and loneliness.

However, though constantly shifting between Mexican and Anglo American culture, reaching a state where he neither belongs to the one nor the other, Richard tries hard to assimilate to Anglo American hegemony. With the exception of his own family, his contact to Mexican Americans or Mexicans never really reaches upon a superficial level. At the same time, in school as well as in his peer group, he favors the contact with Anglo Americans or other international ethnic groups.

3.5.1 School

At the beginning of Richard's educational career, Mexican traditions and customs still seem to be the primary source for his identity construction. In contrast to his schoolmates, 'his old-country manners made him most courteous' (*Pocho*, 103), which was well received by his teachers. Despite his profound connection to Mexican tradition in the initial phases of his life, and the depreciation of the English language within his family⁵⁵, he is alphabetized in English, his first book being *Toby Tyler, or Ten Weeks With the Circus*.

Even in puberty, Richard primarily continues to read artifacts of Anglo American culture. Most of the books he gets acquainted with tell the story of successful young men who leave everything behind and finally, after periods of hard work, end up economically successful. As Luedtke points out, his teachers' and librarians' choice of literature is certainly of little help for Richard, as it derives 'from a wrong phase of the American Dream to suit either the contemporary milieu or Richard's special temperament' (Luedtke, 74).

However, as might be interesting in the context of processes of assimilation, Villarreal never mentions that Richard reads books by Mexican or Mexican American authors. Thus, his literary education is restricted to Anglo American classics⁵⁶, written in English, which thematically contribute to one of the most

⁵⁵ Please see *Pocho*, e.g. "Silence!" roared Juan Rubio. "We will not speak the dog language in my house!" (132).

⁵⁶ such as *Gone with the Wind*, mentioned in *Pocho* (103).

important concepts of Anglo American identity: The possibility of upward mobility or the concept of the American Dream.

However, as soon as Richard is trying to become an active leader in his personal American Dream, longing to go to college, to improve his education, to rise above social boundaries, it becomes obvious that neither the American nor the Mexican cultural system would allow such a choice. Although he is a good and talented student, the adviser in high school, as indicated in the novel, proposes a different way for him: She

[...] insisted he take automechanics or welding or some shop course, so that he could have a trade and be in a position to be a good citizen, because he was a Mexican, and when he insisted on preparing himself for college, she had smiled knowingly and said he could try those courses for a week or so, and she would make an exception and let him change his program to what she knew was better for him. (*Pocho*, 108)

His mother, when confronted with her son's desire to go to college, also feels obliged to remind him of his familial position. She says:

We cannot help you, and soon we will not even be able to encourage you, because you will be obliged to work. We could not afford to spare you to go to school even if there was a way for you to do it. (*Pocho*, 61)

Thus, while the economic situation of the family as well as its ties with the Mexican tradition⁵⁷ would not allow Richard to complete his assimilation, to rise above boundaries and live his individuality, the Anglo American hegemonic system bases its denial of assimilation on prejudices against Mexicans.

⁵⁷ Usually male protagonists of a family who follow the conventional path of Mexican culture are fully responsible for the economic welfare of the whole family (see Gilden). The same issue is indicated in the following passage from *Pocho*: 'He could almost hear his father say..."Make nuns of all the females if that will make you happy-let the boy be, for he is on earth for other things!" And Richard smiled that he would be spared that, at least. Then suddenly he felt a responsibility so heavy as to be a physical pressure, and first he became so sad that his lot was to dictate and that his parents believed so strongly in the destiny, and then he was angry that traditions could take a body and a soul... and mould it to pattern' (63).

Interestingly, at the end of the novel, when Richard is definitely forced to leave school and take care of his family, he finally decides to enlist in the US Navy. Though frequently read as an escape from the meaninglessness of his world, his decision to join the Navy could also be interpreted as a powerful sign of assimilation. Turning against Mexican tradition, leaving his familial ties to Mexico behind, Richard supports the United States of America, joining one of the most patriotic institutions of North America or as Paredes formulated it

[...] what better proof of one's absorption into a culture than by showing one's willingness to die for the country that produces it?
(Paredes, 805-06)

3.5.2 Family

The family, as represented in Villarreal's novel, most transparently becomes the place of cultural clashes. Formerly held together by rigid patriarchal rules and fixed gendered roles, the family, as referred to in *Pocho*, more and more departs from a strictly Mexican type of family unit and slowly strives to convert into a typical Anglo American one. However, this reconstruction of a typical Mexican into a typically Americanized family, finally leads to the family's break-up.

The family is, as Vallejos points out 'eventually shattered by the encroachment of American culture upon Mexican tradition' (7), resulting in chaotic conflict situations, in which Richard's father becomes the defender of Mexican traditions and values, while Richard's mother opts for assimilation and most importantly, emancipation.

According to Juan Rubio, a family father's role is to provide money and goods for the survival of his family. In turn, he regards it as his moral right to have extra-marital sexual liaisons, to occasionally beat⁵⁸ his wife and 'to leave no room for authority but his ' (*Pocho*, 122).

⁵⁸ Line of argumentation based on the following passage in *Pocho*: '[...] he had beaten her occasionally' (92).

Although Consuelo, Juan Rubio's wife, initially accepts her prescribed role as a 'submissive, nurturing woman devoted to home, family, and church – a true *angel del hogar*' (Zimmermann, 63), she slowly more and more rebels against her submissive role. Not only does she sexually emancipate herself, finally enjoying intercourse with her husband, but also 'challenges her husband about his infidelities', hereby 'insulting his *machismo*⁵⁹' (Zimmermann, 62-63).

Juan Rubio, desperately trying to regain his patriarchal power, verbally attacks his wife when she complains about his sexual relationships with other women:

"Enough", he said. "I have had my fill of your whimpering and your back talk! You are thinking yourself an American woman – well, you are not one and you should know your place. You have shelter, and you have food and clothing for you and the children. Be content! What I do outside the house is not your concern." (*Pocho*, 91)

However, once having realized that in the United States an American woman is protected against domestic violence, that an American woman could sit down to dinner with her family and need not wait until they finished⁶⁰, that adultery was not necessarily a man's moral right, Consuelo pushes her own assimilation in a most extreme way.

Finally, she refuses to do the housekeeping, as indicated in the following passage from *Pocho*:

The house was unkempt... but Consuelo, who had always been proud of her talents for housekeeping, now took the dirty house as a symbol of her emancipation. (*Pocho*, 134-5)

⁵⁹ According to Allatson, 'machismo is the conventional term for the codes, ideals, behaviors, and appearances by which masculinity is structured and assumes meaning in Latin American and Latino/a societies' (146).

⁶⁰ Argumentation based on the following passage in *Pocho*: 'She wished that once, only once, she could sit to dinner with her family, but she could not. She must wait on them until they finished, and not until then could she sit down' (92).

Nonetheless, when Juan Rubio finally leaves his family, firmly clinging to Mexican tradition, Consuelo strongly refuses her newly adopted, emancipated position and reverts back to the traditional Mexican rule that forces her son to take care of the whole family. Although Grajeda claims that towards the end of the novel 'the process of Americanization, for the rest of the family, if not for Juan himself, becomes almost total' (334), this Americanization nevertheless leads to the break-up of the family or as Villarreal wrote in *Pocho*:

To be just no one could be blamed, for the transition from the culture of the old world to that of the new should never been attempted in one generation. (*Pocho*, 135)

Richard's, the protagonist's, position within his family is hard to capture, as his role is of a rather ambivalent character. Although he disliked the gradual assimilation of his family to the U.S. Anglo American dominant culture and it 'saddened him to see the Mexican tradition begin to disappear', he 'unconsciously became an active leader in the change' (*Pocho*, 132).

He is the one who tells his father that they are in America and that they should live like Americans; he is the one who tries to teach his parents English. Furthermore, Richard's alienation from Mexican culture culminates, when he depreciates the deep Catholicism that is common among Mexican people.

By his refusal of the Catholic church as well as the belief in God himself, he consciously acts against the doctrine that especially his mother has favored since their move to the United States. He unapologetically makes clear that the belief in Catholic doctrines may be an important part of his mother's identity, whereas he in the process of finding his own identity, decided to become an atheist.⁶¹

No mamá. You go to your church and light the candles to your God. I am finished with such things. [...] I have left the Church. [...] I find I am through believing [...] I no longer believe in God. (*Pocho*, 172)

⁶¹ Cf. Gilden, 2.

Furthermore, Richard claims to reject his father's *machismo* after Juan's aggressive reaction to his wife's accusations concerning adultery and concludes that 'he [Richard] could never again be wholly Mexican' (*Pocho*, 95). However, in his first relationship with a non-Mexican girl, he imitates his father's behavior while the young woman most willingly adopts her submissive role. As indicated by the following passage:

[s]he responded to his newfound and now ever present dominance, and made token resistance to his whims only because it pleased him that she occasionally showed spirit. Yet she knew that she would have obeyed his every wish without a whimper. Her only fear was of pregnancy, because she knew he would leave her if that happened. (*Pocho*, 143)

Just like his father, who had left one of his girlfriends when she got pregnant⁶², Richard would leave his girlfriend in case of pregnancy. Furthermore, he, very similar to his father, is frequently unfaithful and generally treats his girlfriend as if she were his property.

However, it does not seem legitimate to interpret his dominant behavior towards women as a sign of refusal of Anglo American hegemony. Indeed, both cultures are clearly patriarchal and the image of the 'angel of the house' (or the *ángel del hogar*) have been promoted by both societies.

Towards the end of the novel, when he is forced to take over his father's role, he falls back to the pattern of *machismo* and *patriarchism*. He controls his sisters who remain without names throughout the entire novel, and directs their future. However, as referred to above, he finally blends into Anglo society by joining the Navy, substituting his own decaying family by another 'abstract family' (Lomeli, 146).

⁶² Cf. *Pocho*: 'He moved his family to Isleta, and there he picked cotton and gambled and drank; occasionally, he fought. But every weekend he visited his Dolores, whom he loved until the day she told him she was pregnant' (21).

3.5.3 La Pandilla

During his first years of education, Richard befriends a group of young people of different nationalities. Irish, Japanese and Italian boys (and a girl named Zelda) regularly meet and play without any obvious conflicts based on ethnicity.

The only notable situation in which ethnicity is an issue, involves one of the Japanese boys, Thomas. When the boys persuade Zelda to undress and lend her body to the boys, she agrees, but argues "Okay, but not the Jap." (*Pocho*, 118). However the conflict is quickly solved, when Richard answers "They do it, too." She finally agrees and turns to the Japanese boy, uttering: "All right, Thomas. After all, you're one of the gang", (*Pocho*, 119).

Though feeling comfortable within his multicultural peer group, Richard also seems to be fascinated by the group of Mexicans who especially during the 1940s immigrated to California. Despite his feeling of separation from those Mexicans, even called zootsuiters⁶³, which most frequently appeared in gangs (or pandillas), he

began to attend their dances and fiestas, and, in general, sought their company as much as possible, for these people were a strange lot to him. He was obsessed with a hunger to learn about them and from them. They had a burning contempt for people of different ancestry, whom they called Americans, and a marked hauteur toward Mexico and toward their parents for their old-country ways. The former feeling came from a sense of inferiority that is a prominent characteristic in any Mexican reared in southern California; and the latter was an inexplicable compensation for that feeling. They needed to feel superior to something which is a natural thing. The result was that they attempted to segregate themselves from both their cultures, and became truly a lost race. (*Pocho*, 149)

Thus, Richard decides not to integrate into one of the so-called '*pachuco*' groups and rejoins his international group. Together with some of his friends he regularly plays football, one of the national sports of the United States.

⁶³ Please also see chapter 3.2. for further information.

Though not particularly talented, he appreciates his trainings, enjoying the contact with other (partly hyphenated) Americans.

Also, especially since 'he feels more and more alienated from his decaying family', he shares his friends' enthusiasm for American 'popular heroes, icons and formulas which the dominant culture offers' (Luedtke, 66).

For example, in the following extract from *Pocho*, the narrator mentions that

He [Richard] sat at the table with his chin in his hands and said aloud, in English, 'I am Buck Jones and Ken Maynard and Fred Thompson, all rolled into one- I'm not Tom Mix, too, because I don't like brown horses. (*Pocho*, 96)

Thus, as the novel unfolds, it becomes apparent that Richard is longing to assimilate into Anglo American society. In turn, Anglo American society frequently makes him feel the limitations of assimilation, as will be further illustrated by the following subchapter.

3.6 Of Being Refused– the Disillusion of the American Dream

While Juan Rubio firmly believes in destiny and tradition⁶⁴ as the main cornerstones of a man's life, his son Richard seems to rely most insistently on the American myth of individualism. Quite unconsciously, he hereby accepts, as Rosaura Sánchez points out, 'the ideological representations, discourse and power configurations of entrepreneurial capitalism' (115).

Richard, similarly to what AnaLouise Keating remarks about "the U.S. Americans" in general, is shaped by 'the highly celebrated belief in a radically independent, solipsistic 'American' self' (Keating, 63-64). [He] is seduced by the rhetoric of American individualism' and views himself as a 'unique, fully autonomous human being with distinct boundaries separating from all other' (Kating, 63-64).

⁶⁴ Cf. Lomelí, (145).

More than once, Richard refers to his ideas of individualism, exemplified by the following two passages:

(1) I can be part of everything, he thought, because I am the only one capable of controlling my destiny ... Never – no, never – will I allow myself to become part of a group – to become classified, to lose my individuality ... I will not become a follower, nor will I allow myself to become a leader, because I must be myself and accept for myself only that which I value, and not what is being valued by everyone else these days. (*Pocho*, 152-53)

(2) I want to learn, and that is all. I do not want to be something – I *am*. I do not care about making a lot of money and about what people think and about the family in the way you speak. I have to learn as much as I can, so that I can live... learn for *me*, for *myself*. (*Pocho*, 64)

However, Richard's social reality painfully demonstrates that the control over his destiny is frequently very limited or at times even non-existing. Although he chooses to assimilate into the dominant U.S. American culture, refusing to be Mexican, his Mexican identity is often forced upon him by Anglo Americans. Especially when he happens to be a victim of racism, prejudice or discrimination, it becomes obvious that it does not suffice to "choose" an identity. More precisely that means that Richard is forced to feel Mexican because of being marginalized by Americans although he, at first hand, had been refusing his Mexican roots.⁶⁵

The following passage serves as a perfect example of the way Anglo Americans marginalize *Pocho's* protagonist:

[The] little old lady who was so nice and let him read the Horatio Alger books was thinking of him when she told him he should work hard to be a gardener and someday he could work on a rich person's estate. (*Pocho*, 107)

Also, the high school counselor who advises him to study automechanics, or the boxing trainer who wants him to box because 'it's the only way people of [his] nationality can get ahead' (*Pocho*, 106) or the police detective who urges him to work for the police because 'there's a lot you can do for your people that way' (*Pocho*, 162), all seem to have a common intention: to try to

⁶⁵ Cf. Gilden.

identify him as a Mexican, or in particular, to reconcile him to "the typical Mexican role" within the American economic system.

Also, the liberals he gets acquainted with in his creative writing class, threaten his possibility to live his own individuality when they 'insist he dedicate his life to the Mexican Cause' (*Pocho*, 175). Though earlier in his personal development he had already become aware of 'the demands of tradition, of culture, of the social structure on the individual' (*Pocho*, 95), he, throughout the novel, attempts to 'wind his way through the many obstacles that he sees as attempts at stifling him as a person' (Grajeda, 334).

Despite his determined words towards the very end of the novel, 'Never – no, never – will I allow myself to become part of a group – to become classified, to lose my individuality' (*Pocho*, 152), a close reading of the novel reveals that quite the contrary was the case. As Grajeda sums up, 'to an extraordinary degree Richard *has* being molded and continues to be molded by what is outside him' (338).

4 *The Revolt of the Cockroach People* and the Work of Collective Resistance

Whereas Villarreal's novel *Pocho* is firmly rooted in the assimilationist phase of U.S. American history, Oscar Zeta Acosta's novel *The Revolt of the Cockroach People* depicts a time of social upheavals and tumults. In fact, the (seemingly) stabilized tranquility of American society in the 1950s was replaced by a general tendency towards social revolution in the 1960s. The problematic war in Indochina, internal racism within the United States, as well as various youth and student movements that tackled political and countercultural problems, provided a common basis for a widespread rise of social resistance.⁶⁶

In his novel *The Revolt of the Cockroach People* Oscar Zeta Acosta explicitly focuses on the Chicano Revolt in Los Angeles, California, between 1968-1970, 'a period during which thousands of Chicanos mobilized publicly to assert their self-determinant presence in the U.S.' (Alurista, 227). Though thematically centered around the *Chicano Movement*, Oscar Zeta Acosta in many ways revealed the Movement's deficiencies and restrictedness. Thus, many *Chicano Movement* enthusiasts disapproved of Oscar Zeta Acosta's representation of *The Movement* and neglected his work strategically. Ramon Saldívar intends to provide another plausible reason for the fact that Oscar Zeta Acosta's work suffers from frequent neglect of historians. He proposes that Oscar Zeta Acosta meant to create a 'truly radical art' (Saldívar, 126) and therefore '[made] some readers uneasy, and others hostile' (Roe, 181).⁶⁷

⁶⁶ Cf. Tonn, 98.

⁶⁷ Cf. Alurista in his article "From Tragedy to Caricature ... and Beyond" further elaborates that '[the] grotesque realism in the novelistic narrative of Oscar Zeta Acosta produces the alienated antihero with whom readers will experience a nihilism and a deglorification of cultural tradition, causing antipathy, disgust, and actual repulsion which will distance the reader from the protagonist of the story' (96).

However, some of the most prominent Chicano literary critics dedicated articles, theses and dissertations to the analysis of Oscar Zeta Acosta's works.⁶⁸ Though of different foci, one of the central problems that usually arises whenever literary critics seek to analyze Oscar Zeta Acosta's two novels *Autobiography of a Brown Buffalo* as well as *The Revolt of the Cockroach People* is to maintain the distinction between reality and fiction. Both novels constantly blur actual and fictional events, to a point where the reader is puzzled about what is real and what is fictional.

Even the representation of Oscar Zeta Acosta's personality in his two novels embraces a significant amount of contradictory and ambiguous details, so that at the end the majority of readers perceive Oscar Zeta Acosta's self-portrayal as highly perplexing. In particular, it seems hard to 'distinguish the writer Oscar Zeta Acosta from his central figure, Buffalo Zeta⁶⁹ Brown' (Rodríguez, 5). The fact that Oscar Zeta Acosta's books encompass elements of 'fiction, journalism and autobiography' (Bruce-Novoa, 44) further complicates the problem of categorization of the text. While some scholars treat it as a novel, others regard it as a semi-autobiographic, fictionalized account of the *Chicano Movement* or even a documentary.

As I treat the text *The Revolt of the Cockroach People* as a mixture of both fiction and non-fiction, I sympathize with scholars that regard the book as a fictionalized account of the *Movement*. While the term 'documentary' demands a complete reliance on non-fictional documents, the term 'novel' does not sufficiently emphasize the tie to historical events presented in *Revolt of the Cockroach People*. Given the selective and subjective character of Oscar Zeta Acosta's accounts of the *Movement* the adjective 'fictionalized' seems sufficiently justifiable.

⁶⁸ Please consider the bibliography of this thesis which includes some of the major works on *The Revolt of the Cockroach People*.

⁶⁹ According to Rodríguez, 'Oscar Zeta Acosta added *Zeta* (perhaps taken from the name of a Mexican revolutionary he heard about in a film) to his name because he experienced a transformation. Assimilation to him had meant the rejection of Mexican culture and the Spanish language. For him the name signified that he had crossed the threshold in terms of identifying with Chicanos' (5).

Thus, in order to differentiate the writer Oscar Zeta Acosta from his central figure, Buffalo Zeta Brown, I will use the name 'Buffalo Zeta Brown' whenever I engage in an analysis of Oscar Zeta Acosta's book *The Revolt of the Cockroach People*. Whenever historical information about Oscar Zeta Acosta, the writer and person, is given, I will simply use the name Oscar Zeta Acosta.

As far as the reconstruction of Oscar Zeta Acosta's biography is concerned, most of the information about his life can only be derived from his fictional narratives, in particular, from his *Autobiography of a Brown Buffalo*. Chapter 4.6. will explicitly deal with the representation of Acosta's life in his two texts. However, for the time being, as both of Acosta's books suffer 'from a deliberately unrestrained subjectivity' (Alurista, 97), they have to be considered most unreliable resources of information about Acosta's non-fictional life. Thus, the following biography of Acosta's life is only based on verifiable data and due to the lack of resources needs to remain short.

4.1 Oscar Zeta Acosta – the Mystery of his Life

In fact, according to his close friend Hunter S. Thompson, even Acosta's birthday has never been 'noted on any calendar'.⁷⁰ In his autobiographical novel Oscar Zeta Acosta offers April 8, 1934, 1935 and 1936 as possible dates for his birth. Additionally, 'his birth is officially recorded in El Paso, Texas, on April 8, 1935' and according to his application formula for 'the California bar, was on April 6, 1935' (Rodríguez, 4).

Generally speaking, Oscar Zeta Acosta's childhood and youth was shaped by an experience of alienation and disintegration.⁷¹ Though an intelligent student, he starts abusing alcohol in high school and joins the Airforce after his graduation. It is in the Airforce that he gets affiliated with Baptism and finally converts. Later on, Acosta managed to finish College, attended Law School and 'was admitted to the California bar on 28 June 1966' (Rodríguez, 4).

⁷⁰ Cf. Introduction to *The Revolt of the Cockroach People* by Hunter S. Thompson (5).

⁷¹ Cf. Tonn, 94.

After his return to Los Angeles, he actively involves in the *Chicano Movement* and also runs for the election of sheriff in 1970. In the mid-1970s, the drug and alcohol addicted Chicano attorney, author, politician and *Chicano Movement* activist, vanished during a trip to Acapulco and was never seen again.⁷² According to his friend and mentor Hunter S. Thompson, the most plausible explanation for Oscar Zeta Acosta's disappearance is that he became insane.⁷³ In particular, Thompson⁷⁴ refers to his paranoia and his urge to be 'a messiah' (Rodríguez, 9). However, whatever explanation there might be, his departure from the platform of public life remains a mystery as his life itself. Above all, it leaves the reader doubtful about the boundary between reality and fiction.

4.2 About Vatos Locos, Gonzo Journalism and the Cockroach People

As already indicated in the initial chapter on the term 'Chicano', the construction of a separate ethnic Chicano identity was one of the major objectives of *Chicano Movement* activists. As a consequence, the problem of how to determine such a common, universally acknowledged Chicano identity occupied and partly divided a vast majority of *la raza* enthusiasts.

In order to 'articulate such a possible Chicano identity', as pointed out in the article "The Figure of the Vato Loco" by Smethurst, Oscar Zeta Acosta seized upon 'the instability and individualism of the *vato loco* in *The Revolt of the Cockroach People* and *Autobiography of a Brown Buffalo*' (Smethurst, 120).

Thus, by focusing on the instability of Chicano identity, by providing a vivid example of a de-essentialized version of Chicano identity which culminates in the figure of the *vato loco*, literally a "crazy guy", Oscar Zeta Acosta indirectly

⁷² Oscar Zeta Acosta's disappearance is mentioned in Rubén Salazar's compilation of articles entitled *Border Correspondent*, 234.

⁷³ Cf. Rodríguez, 9.

⁷⁴ In his reminiscence about Oscar Zeta Acosta (printed in *Rolling Stone*, December 15, 1977), Thompson hypothesizes about reasons for Oscar Zeta Acosta's disappearance.

opposed the attempt to create a pre-formulated, 'essentialist or static model of Chicano identity' (Smethurst, 120)⁷⁵

Furthermore, Smethurst argues that

[...] the vatos, like the pachucos before them, are among the most visible figures of a self-assertive Chicano difference. While the parameters of the category "Chicano" are problematic for Oscar Zeta Acosta, the vatos are resolutely Chicano – they can be nothing else. Other Chicano figures in the two narratives – gangsters, politicians, lawyers, housewives, policemen, judges, students, labor leaders, merchants and even "average" workers – are connected to various "Anglo" institutions and ideologies; the vatos, however, are in permanent conflict with these institutions, particularly the police and various aspects of the legal system. The vatos do not go to school; they have no jobs; they are uninterested in ideology. They drink and take drugs. They mark off and defend their turf. They wait for something to do and when that something presents itself – often involving some sort of violent behavior- they do it. (Smethurst, 125)

Interestingly, whereas the *pachuco* (which is often regarded as the direct antecedent of the *vato loco*) is still presented as a culturally degenerated figure in Villarreal's *Pocho*, Oscar Zeta Acosta's representation of the *vato loco* 'is used to connect Chicano resistance to "Anglo" political and cultural domination from 1848 to the present' (Smethurst, 125):

The vato loco has been fighting the pig since the Anglos stole his land in the last century. He will continue to fight until he is exterminated. (*RCP*⁷⁶, 91)

Buffalo Zeta Brown 'is a man on the brink of madness from the very beginning of the book' (Bruce-Novoa, 44), and even calls himself *Vato Numero Uno* (*RCP*, 12). Thus, as the novel unfolds, Buffalo Zeta Brown becomes the supreme representative of Chicano identity.

⁷⁵ Smethurst further elaborates on Oscar Zeta Acosta's subversion of essentialist notions of Chicano identity, which is predominantly expressed by Oscar Zeta Acosta's emphasis on regional differences among Chicanos and between Chicanos and Mexicans, as well as by his focus on class differences among Chicanos (120-123).

For a more detailed discussion, please see Smethurst "The Figure of the Vato Loco and the Representation of Ethnicity in the Narratives of Oscar Zeta Acosta".

⁷⁶ For means of straightforwardness, the title *The Revolt of the Cockroach People* will be abbreviated to *RCP* from now on.

In order to increase the instability that is inherent in Oscar Zeta Acosta's representation of almost every single character (including himself), he stylistically employs what was called *Gonzo Journalism*.⁷⁷ According to Bruce-Novoa, *Gonzo Journalism* is the 'parody of the great individualist gone mad, the writer as protagonist, as central actor, as powerful voice of criticism, and as victim of the forces at play in the society at large' (43). In general, its main objective seems to be to blur the boundaries of order and chaos to a point where they both coexist.

Hunter S. Thompson, definitely the most prominent representative of *Gonzo Journalism*, and Oscar Zeta Acosta not only seem to have mutually influenced and inspired each other in terms of literary works.⁷⁸ They also shared a common attitude towards the failure of the Social Movements of their time.

As Bruce-Novoa explains,

[b]oth Thompson and Oscar Zeta Acosta chronicle the defeat of the sixties dream and attribute its demise to the same source. Each sees that his respective community prefers to remain locked within its traditional myopia, in its racist intolerance, in its isolationist introversion. True, both men witnessed and participated in the efforts to change the society as well as in the key occurrences of official repression. (Bruce-Novoa, 47)

Apart from the terms *Gonzo Journalism* as well as *vato loco*, the labels *Brown Buffalo* and *Cockroach People* seem of immediate relevance for the novel under consideration and will therefore be defined in the following section.

⁷⁷ However, it seems necessary to add that Oscar Zeta Acosta's books are not entirely written in 'Gonzo' style, but also encompass elements of 'fiction, journalism and autobiography' (Bruce-Novoa, 44).

⁷⁸ Dr. Gonzo, a character based on Oscar Zeta Acosta, appears as a three-hundred-pound Samoan attorney in Thompson's report-fantasy *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*.

According to Spitta, Oscar Zeta Acosta adopts the American buffalo as a symbol of *mestizaje*, as it is 'an animal characterized simultaneously by strength and extreme vulnerability given the fact that it was brought to near extinction' (341). In particular, the renaming of himself and the rest of Chicanos as *Brown Buffalos* has been generally regarded as an act of cultural identity construction. Oscar Zeta Acosta manages to establish a Chicano 'ethnogenesis', which, according to Sollors denotes 'the growth of a sense of peoplehood among people who previously had other bases of group identification, [...] bringing about each time, organically speaking, "the birth of a nation"' (57).

Additionally, the metaphor *cockroach* transmits the image of a small, hopelessly inferior group that tries to fight an enormously powerful enemy. However, cockroaches are not only irritating little bugs, 'the little beasts that everybody steps on' (*RCP*, 135), but usually manage to survive under most adverse conditions. Practically, it seems almost impossible to eradicate them, which at least grants them the certainty of survival.

The image of a cockroach as a symbol of oppression originates from the revolutionary song "La cucaracha".⁷⁹ Oscar Zeta Acosta refers to the song, when he writes: 'The old revolutionary song is just about the only Spanish I know' (*RCP*, 23).⁸⁰

⁷⁹ Cf. Tonn, 125-126.

⁸⁰ Insects or cockroaches seem to have served as symbols for Mexicans more frequently. The following (I would argue highly irritating) lyrics, recorded on one of my daughter's CD's (entitled: Wee sing animals, animals, animals), proposes the Boll Weevil as a possible image for Mexicans. It is a traditional American folk song:

Well, the boll weevil is a little black bug
 Come from Mexico they say
 Well he come all the way to Texas
 He was lookin for a place to stay
 Just lookin' for a home,
 He was lookin' for a home
 [...]
 Well, the first time I seen a boll weevil,
 He was sitting on a square,
 And the next time I seen the boll weevil,
 He had his whole damn family there,
 They were looking for a home,
 Just looking for a home.

However, though many activists such as Oscar Zeta Acosta had only limited competence in the Spanish language, at least most of their rallying cries⁸¹ indicated the *Movement's* attachment to Mexico, particularly in terms of (revolutionary) tradition as well as far as language is concerned. The request for further integration of the Spanish language into Anglo American society formed part of "the" *Chicano Movement* ideology.

4.3 Ideology and Basic Ideas of the Chicano Movement

The mere idea of writing a chapter on "the" ideology of the entire *Chicano Movement* seems problematic. To provide a holistic description of "the" ideology and basic ideas of a Social Movement that was composed of different organizations with different foci, whose descriptions range from 'militant-reformist' to 'the beginning of a revolution' (Rosen, 172), whose participants differ in terms of educational status as well as regional origin, seems hardly possible.⁸²

Nonetheless, I have decided to pin down general ideological tendencies as well as some of the main ideas promoted by the *Chicano Movement*. However, it needs to be emphasized that such an overview neither can nor wants to provide a detailed analysis of the entire *Movement*. As Oscar Zeta Acosta's *RCP* 'narrates events historically situated in Los Angeles, California during 1968-70' (Alurista, 99), I will put emphasis on the ideological tendencies that prevailed at that time.

The majority of scholars attributes the upraise of the *Chicano Movement* to a feeling of powerlessness which could not be endured any longer. Chicanos in the 1960s tended to be a politically, economically and institutionally weak

⁸¹ Despite the English slogan 'Chicano Power!' Oscar Zeta Acosta most frequently involves variations of the slogan '¡Viva La Raza!'.

⁸² Mariscal observes that '[w]hen scholars are too quick to generalize about "the Movement", that is, when they commit the same error some Movimiento militants have committed – taking an ill-defined "Chicano nationalism" to bet the exclusive ideology or philosophy for the entire *Chicano/a Movement* – the possibility for recuperating positive lessons for the future is squandered'(64).

ethnic group with a comparatively low level of education. Additionally, many Chicanos felt oppressed by the dominant Anglo American system. This feeling of oppression frequently led to a feeling of cultural inferiority and as a consequence often triggered some kind of cultural alienation. In many cases, cultural alienation created a feeling of deculturation, leaving the individual in search of an identity.

Thus, *Chicano Movement* activists generally combined two interconnected objectives in order to compensate their powerlessness: (1) the removal of social inequity on all levels and (2) the creation of a separate ethnic identity. While the first objective is concerned with what Carlos Muñoz and Juan Gómez-Quiñones identified as the 'removal of exclusionary practices - the adoption of direct confrontation politics with unresponsive institutions and political actors', the second is directly linked to a 'self-determination and self-definition of the Chicano experience in American society' as well as to the 'liberation from a sense of cultural inferiority.'⁸³

Generally speaking, though methodology ranged from 'open to compromise', non-violent organizations, to militant, separatist organizations, they shared a common goal: the removal of social inequity. In order to initiate direct confrontation with unresponsive institutions and political actors, different members of the Chicano community engaged in various activities. Again, activities ranged from peaceful sit-ins, picketing, critical journalism⁸⁴, legal trials, to blowouts, walkouts and even bombings.

In their fight against institutional and structural racism against Chicanos, schools and universities, capitalist, exploitive institutions such as banks, political headquarters and even Churches became the target of the *Movement*. At the same time, Chicano activists needed to increase the solidarity among Chicanos, needed to create a sense of cultural and political

⁸³ Cf. Carlos Muñoz and Juan Gómez-Quiñones quoted in García (83).

⁸⁴ For example, *La Raza* as well as *Inside Eastside* were two of the most important underground newspapers. For a more detailed discussion, please see Rosen (163-165).

unity, a kind of proto-typical, separate Chicano identity, in order to have a strong basis to regress to whenever political action was needed.

The problem of exclusion of many Chicanos who simply did not fit (or did not want to fit) into the pre-formulated pattern subsumed under the term 'Chicano' has already been dealt with in the initial chapter of this thesis. In particular, the so-called, pejoratively used, 'traditionalists' did not want to be associated with the *Chicano Movement*. Some of them felt that the term itself was immediately linked to violent militancy which they did not support. Others simply considered themselves apolitical or did not 'form bonds of solidarity with the working classes and migrant workers' (Spitta, 338). Especially many middle-class Chicanos felt offended by the *Chicano Movement* rhetoric, which frequently labeled them as 'acculturated' or 'sell outs' (Spitta, 338).

Generally speaking, in the 1960s, the term 'Chicano' was almost never used without mentioning its relation to Anglo American society. 'Chicano' did not only denote an ethnic identity, it denoted an identity that positioned itself as far away as possible from "the" Anglo American identity. Thus, it was part of *Chicano Movement* ideology to keep a clear distance to Anglo American hegemony, to openly criticize and attack the dominant portion of the United States.

In his attempt to define the essence of a *Chicano*, Chicano journalist Rubén Salazar wrote:

A Chicano is a Mexican American with a non-Anglo image of himself. He resents being told Columbus "discovered" America when the Chicano's ancestors, the Mayans and the Aztecs, founded highly sophisticated civilizations centuries before Spain financed the Italian explorer's trip to the "New World".

Chicanos resent also Anglo pronouncements that Chicanos are "culturally deprived" or that the fact that they speak Spanish is a "problem".

Chicanos will tell you that their culture predates that of the Pilgrims and that Spanish was spoken in America before English and so the "problem" is not theirs but the Anglos' who don't speak Spanish.

(Salazar, 235, February 6, 1970)

In the process of the 'resurgence and positive redefinition of culture and traditions' (García, 83), Chicano activists used Mexican heritage as a major source of tradition. Also, referring to Coonrod-Martínez, 'native, indigenous roots became a principal identity factor of the *Chicano Movement*' (20). In this context, the myth of Aztlán⁸⁵ becomes *the* metaphor which best codifies the nationalist Chicano fervor of the sixties.

4.4 *La familia de la Raza - the Chicano Nationalist Dream*

We were monolithic in thinking about culture. We tried to amalgamate everyone under certain types of strictures [...] We had to create this imagined community that was whole and holistic, and total and energized. We *had* to do this to struggle against a dominant culture that made you segmented and unaffiliated. The notion that we were united was, in a way, a myth [...] It was a mistake because we didn't allow for the particularities to come forth.
(Ybarra-Frausto, quoted in Mariscal 66)

In the above given statement, Ybarra-Frausto refers to the dangerous generalizing as well as exclusive effects of cultural nationalism. However, as he admits when he writes 'we had to do this', the construction of an imagined community of Chicanos was necessary in order to gain an effective opposing tool against Anglo American hegemony.

Alurista underlines this notion when he states:

A nationalist consciousness which could unify the heterogeneous Chicano population in the United States was a clearly necessary dimension in the self-definition of Chicano identity. (Alurista, 42)

Thus, together with other ideological postulations already mentioned in the previous chapter, ethnic and cultural nationalism became the guiding ideology of the *Chicano Movement*. Similarities between Chicanos were soon extracted and emphasized. A common culture as well as language, certain common territories 'traditionally inhabited by Chicanos' (Alurista, 43) and a

⁸⁵ According to Coonrod – Martínez, 'Aztlán is the fabled lost paradise of the Aztecs [...] the homeland or origin of the Mexican American, said to be located in northern Mesoamerica, therefore in what is now the US' (21).

commonly weak economic basis were utilized as unifying factors for the construction of a 'Chicano nation'.

In the context of cultural nationalism, manifests such as the 'Plan spiritual de Aztlán', presented at the *Chicano Youth Liberation Conference* held in Denver in March 1969⁸⁶, are most frequently cited. The following extract from the *Spiritual Plan of Aztlán* provides an interesting insight into how *el Movimiento* created a common basis of identification for ethnic group of Chicana/os:

In the spirit of a new people that is conscious not only of its proud historical heritage, but also of the brutal "gringo" invasion of our territories, we, the Chicano inhabitants and civilizers of the northern land of their birth and consecrating the determination of our people of the sun, declare that the call of our blood is our power, our responsibility, and our inevitable destiny.[...]

Brotherhood unites us, and love for our brothers makes us a people whose time has come and who struggles against the foreigner 'gabacho' (white) who exploits our riches and destroys our culture. With our heart in our hands and our hands in the soil, we declare the independence of our mestizo nation. We are a bronze people with a bronze culture. Before the world, before all of North America, before all our brothers in the bronze continent, we are a nation, we are a union of free pueblos, we are Aztlán.

(Anaya and Lomelí, 1)

Constructing a common nationalist body, the *Plan* established a 'rigid dichotomy between whites and *mestizos*' (Spitta, 337). While Anglo Americans are represented as the major enemy, as 'materialists, lacking in humanity, aggressive, racist, individualists and arrogant exploiters' (Spitta, 337-338), Chicanos are characterized by a strong sense of community, with powerful family units as well as a firm, ancient connection to the land they inhabit. Thus, according to Alurista, 'Aztlán is used as a metaphor which unifies the various delegations from all over the United States into one nationalist body' (222).

In the representation of the *Chicano Movement* in Acosta's novel, it becomes obvious that his protagonist, Buffalo Zeta Brown could never really rely on

⁸⁶ Cf. Alurista, "Myth, Identity and Struggle in Three Chicano Novels", 222.

strong family bonding. It is the cultural nationalist body of Chicanos that could easily compensate the absence of his sense of belonging. From the very beginning of his narrative, Buffalo Zeta Brown attaches himself to various religious⁸⁷, countercultural and political groups. Just like any other group, The *Chicano Movement* functioned as a welcome substitute for his own family, a group of people and ideology he felt close to. Throughout the novel, Buffalo Zeta Brown tries to do away with his isolated as well as alienated 'I', attempting to substitute it for a collective 'we'.⁸⁸

However, particularly towards the end of the *Movement*, many Chicanos, who did not feel included in the repressive cultural nationalism promoted by the Movement, started to criticize it overtly. Also, Chicanas generally did not feel part of the Movement as

[...] the centrality of the terms *carnalismo* and *brotherhood* in key documents such as the "Plan Espiritual de Aztlán" left the lasting impression that the future nation was to be for boys only or at least it would have to be based on the unequal relations of the traditional patriarchal family. (Mariscal, 63)

Though constructed as a collective cultural identity, the term 'Chicano' never meant to include the female part of Chicano community, the 'Chicanas'. Despite the fact that they resisted the U.S. American system that favored social inequity, *Chicano Movement* activists generally tended to grant the right for equal treatment to men only. In related literature, scholars frequently link the exclusion of women in the *Movimiento* to the Mexican tradition of *machismo*.

However, although a further analysis of the exclusion of women from the Movement would be highly interesting, it, due to the focus and scope of this thesis, cannot be provided at this point.⁸⁹ Instead, before I will proceed with

⁸⁷ Please see chapter 4.1. on information about Oscar Zeta Acosta's conversion to Baptism.

⁸⁸ Cf. Tonn, 118.

⁸⁹ Various researchers dedicated their works to the involvement of Chicanas in the *Movement*. The official homepage of the UCLA, California, offers a rather detailed bibliography of relevant literature, available under <http://www.chicano.ucla.edu/library/Chicanasmovement.html>

an analysis of the representation of resistance in *RCP*, it seems crucial to add some general remarks on the thematic structure of the text.

As mentioned earlier, Oscar Zeta Acosta's text focuses on the Chicano Revolt in Los Angeles, California, between 1968-1970. The plot centers around the main character 'Buffalo Zeta Brown', 'a fat, pugnacious attorney with a gargantuan appetite for food, drugs⁹⁰ and women, who came to Los Angeles to become a writer.

In Los Angeles, he soon gets affiliated with a group of militant Chicano/as who recruit him as their official lawyer. With increasing affection, Buffalo Zeta Brown is drawn into *The Chicano Movement*, fighting for equal justice both in the courtroom as well as on the barricades. Presenting himself as a leading figure in the battle between Anglo Americans and Mexican Americans, Buffalo Zeta Brown participates in open, sometimes violent fights, engages in the dismantlement of the Anglo American legal system and even runs for the election of sheriff. However, towards the end of the text, the pressure on Buffalo Zeta Brown increases from both his military group as well as from the Anglo American police until he is practically forced to leave the country.

In order to further elaborate on the fictionalized accounts of the *Chicano Movement* mentioned in *The Revolt of the Cockroach People* I will analyze the places and spaces of open resistance as well as Oscar Zeta Acosta's personal role within *el Movimiento*.

⁹⁰ Cf. Bookcover *RCP*, 1989.

4.5 The War of the Cockroach People – Places and Spaces of Open Resistance in The Revolt of the Cockroach People

Oscar Zeta Acosta uses different settings for the representation of the revolt of his cockroach people. In particular, the courtroom, the streets as well as the political arena serve as platforms on which his own as well as the Chicano community's identity construction is brought forward. As a prototypical example of 'identity politics', Buffalo Zeta Brown and his militant friends 'reclaim ways of understanding their distinctiveness that challenge dominant oppressive characterizations, with the goal of greater self-determination.'⁹¹

4.5.1 The Battlefield 'Courtroom'

The courtroom in Oscar Zeta Acosta's novel *The Revolt of the Cockroach People* is frequently presented as a metaphoric battlefield, as the place where the "war" between Chicanos and Anglo Americans is fought. 'The Hall of Justice' in Los Angeles repeatedly provides the setting for Buffalo Zeta Brown's triumphal victories for the *Movement*.

Typically, Buffalo Zeta Brown uses the courtroom as a stage for self-dramatization in order to distract from the actual trial:

By the time the closing arguments rolled around, the issue was no longer whether the defendants had rioted but whether or not Nebon [the judge] would throw Brown in jail again. The crowds packed the courtroom and waited in the hallways for empty chairs. It was the best show in town. Standing room only. (*RCP*, 156)

Buffalo Zeta Brown hardly shows any respect for legal proceedings and thus transforms the hearings of witnesses into political demonstrations as well as turns closing arguments into destructive social criticism. In the courtroom, Buffalo Zeta Brown manages to distract from the actual crimes his fellow Chicanos had been accused of and meanwhile calls the entire US-American legal system into question.⁹² In an attempt to prove that 'the judges who

⁹¹ Please also see chapter 2.3.3. of this thesis.

⁹² Cf. Tonn, 129.

selected the Grand Jury discriminated against' (*RCP*, 218) Chicanos, he is allowed to call a professional in the field of Ethnic Studies into the witness stand. It is Dr. Moore who finally answers the question 'Who, then, are the so-called Chicanos?', already quoted in the preface to Chapter 2.1.:

Most of them are Catholic. Most of them speak some Spanish. Most of them have had a relative in prison. Most of them have parents or grandparents who were born south of the border. [...] Unlike the black American who cannot return to Africa, the mother country, the Chicano is within his own mother country. (*RCP*, 219 -220)

In the above given passage, Dr. Moore creates the basis on which one of the major postulations of Movement activists is getting justified: the Chicano is within his own mother country, therefore many Chicano activists argued that the United States should reattribute the land to its former owner. The claim for a separate, Chicano-ruled piece of land was closely tied to militant demands that clamored for a unified Chicano nation, already discussed in the previous chapter. The dream of a Chicano nation intrinsically entailed the possession of land, which is also referred to in *The Revolt of the Cockroach People*:

[...] there is only one issue: LAND. We need to get our own land. We need our own government. Nothing less will save the existence of the Chicanos. (*RCP*, 201)

In general, courts represented in *RCP* are depicted as instrumentalized institutions that share a common destination: to secure the privileges of the most dominant portion of Anglo Americans. Furthermore, executive forces are 'here for the protection of the few, the maintenance of the status quo' (*RCP*, 136), thus, supporting the court's mission to protect the rich and powerful. Therefore, above all, Oscar Zeta Acosta's depiction of various trials functions as a systematic exposure of the deficiencies of the US-American legal system.

The legal system represented in Oscar Zeta Acosta's novel, as most of Buffalo Zeta Brown's as well as his friends' experiences seem to prove, only infrequently approaches the ideal of justice. The climax of degradation of the legal system of the United States is dramatically reached when Buffalo Zeta

Brown tries to clarify the circumstances of Chicano journalist Rubén Salazar's death. Altogether, the entire collection of witness accounts reveals an irritating, interwoven construction of lies, unexplained ambiguities and obvious attempts of concealment.

The main issue in this case is not an ethnic one, as both attorney and judge are of Mexican descent.⁹³ Rather, the whole trial effectively contrasts witness accounts, leading to the conclusion that the truth, due to self-delusion and self-centeredness, necessarily needs to remain undiscovered.⁹⁴

Thus, as Saldívar concludes, 'Brown shows us [...] that the truth of justice is intimately tied to its differential opposite, the lie of justice (96)':

All of them ... every single witness, both prosecution and defense... is lying. Or not telling the whole truth. The bastards know exactly what we have done and what we have not done. They *know* for a fact that Corky was not involved in any conspiracy, in any arson, in anything. And they know how and why Zanzibar was killed. But they have all told their own version of things as they would like them to be. (*RCP*, 251)

According to Ramón Saldívar, the public dismantlement of the American legal system is the most shocking and irritating statement of Oscar Zeta Acosta's text:

Despite the narrator's overt sexism, his blatant anti-clericism, and his heavy-handed egoism, no single feature of this novel offends the common reader more than Buffalo Zeta Brown's assessment of the American legal system as an arbitrary weaving of semantic threads created to hide the empty forms of notions such as "justice" and "natural rights". (Saldívar, 96)

Thus, it seems legitimate to argue that Oscar Zeta Acosta, by criticizing the American legal system, openly attacks one of the major cornerstones on which Anglo American's society rests: the notion of legal justice. The American legal system, per se a universally valid corpus of rules, is

⁹³ Cf. *Revolt of the Cockroach People*: 'Chicano defendants and defense attorney and prosecution. And there on the bench is good old Chicano lackey, Superior Court Judge Alfred Alacran' (217).

⁹⁴ Cf. Tonn, 130.

constantly dismantled as a system that works in favor of the dominant portion of Anglo Americans.

4.5.2 The Battlefield 'Streets':

Apart from Buffalo Zeta Brown's function as the official lawyer of many of his fellow Chicanos, his role as a political activist seems of equal importance. The street frequently becomes the battlefield where resistance against the American educational, linguistic as well as economic system is expressed. In particular, the text, '[h]istorically] grounded in the author's political and legal wranglings' depicts,

[...] the 1969 Saint Basil protest against race and class segregation in Los Angeles's Catholic church; the 1968 public school protests ("the blowouts"); and the 1969 Chicano Moratorium, primarily denouncing the disproportionate number of Chicanos being killed in Vietnam. (Gutiérrez-Jones, 125)

Due to the fact that most of the demonstrations develop into open, violent riots, it seems understandable that Oscar Zeta Acosta, in order to characterize the conflict between Chicanos and Anglo Americans, employs war related metaphors throughout the entire text.⁹⁵

Even the initial sentence of *The Revolt of the Cockroach People* refers to the ancient Aztec God of War 'Huitzilopochtli': 'It is Christmas Eve in the year Huitzilopochtli, 1961' (*RCP*, 11).⁹⁶ Furthermore, after an open conflict with Los Angeles police officers, Buffalo Zeta Brown shouts at his people 'to go home, bandage the wounded and heal the sick' as well as 'to regroup here tomorrow for another battle' (*RCP*, 20).

The spectacular riot inside as well as outside one of the richest Churches in Los Angeles, Saint Basil, is the first to be narrated in the *Revolt of the Cockroach People*. According to Amaya, the very purpose of the demonstration was to illustrate the 'cultural and economic difference between Chicanos and Catholics of St. Basil's' (74). On a more general level, the

⁹⁵ Cf. Tonn, 126.

⁹⁶ According to Miguel León Portillo, the Aztec God Huitzilopochtli's 'mission was to subdue the nations of the earth in order to provide sacrificial blood for the nourishment of Tonatiuh, the heavenly body which makes the day' (161).

entire Catholic Church is criticized for presenting itself as a major supporter of the Chicano community whereas, according to Buffalo Zeta Brown's point of view, it was playing 'an active role in the disenfranchisement of Chicano people' (Amaya, 74).

As religion, or to be more precise, Catholicism still was (and partly still is) an important part of Mexican American identity, Buffalo Zeta Brown had to deal with angry reactions by many, mostly elderly, Chicanos:

"The Church," the Cockroaches of old say to us, "is the only institution we can turn to for help. [...] We are a very religious people." I try to explain: "But we aren't against religion, we're not attacking religion," I tell them. "It's the power of the church, the administration of funds. We want them to become involved in social-action programs. The people make up the Church. They should be the ones who control it." (*RCP*, 79)

In fact, *The Movement* represented in *RCP* lost many supporters through the risky venture of criticizing one of the most powerful institutions of both Anglo American as well as Mexican society, as indicated by the following statement:

All but the most fanatic amongst us separate themselves from the struggle against the Church. (*RCP*, 79)

In his third chapter, Oscar Zeta Acosta refers to the "East Angeles School Blow outs". In general, the struggle against Anti-Mexican American school policies was an important constituent in the overall fight against institutional racism instigated by *Chicano Movement* activists.⁹⁷

In particular, Mexican American students used the relative low number of Mexican Americans in schools as well as universities, the irrelevance of education offered – 'in terms of what is taught, who teaches, what degrees and certificates are offered, what research and special programs are fostered

⁹⁷ As the historian Rosen adds, 'educational institutions are a highly visible and primary point of contact between dominant and subordinate groups' (159) and are therefore prone to become focal points for more general conflicts.

and by whom' and the general neglect of Mexican American specific 'problems, concerns and interests' (Salazar, 208) as starting points for their proposals.

The walkout of almost 10.000 students in more than five schools of East Los Angeles in March 1968 is the first protest that Buffalo Zeta Brown participates in. The importance of this historical event is emphasized by the historian Gerald Rosen, who summed up some of the major achievements of these blowouts:

The East Los Angeles student strike was of central importance because (1) it brought into prominence direct confrontation as a political tactic; (2) it involved high school and college youth in a dramatic confrontation on their own turf; (3) it served as a point of conjunction for movement organization; and (4) it was an action on a basic issue that generated a whole series of related actions and issues important in mobilizing organization, publicity and support for the fledging movement. (Rosen, 159)

Initially, Buffalo Zeta Brown's role in the strike is restricted to that of an observer who is looking for interesting information to write an article. However, shortly after, he finds himself part of the demonstration, 'caught up with them' (*RCP*, 40).

The rapidly increasing euphoria amongst students soon takes hold of Brown, until he states:

Tears are in my eyes. I am breathing with difficulty. I am in the midst of the first major public action by the Chicano community. (*RCP*, 36)

In 1969, in the year when Nixon⁹⁸ became President of the United States, the number of anti-war movements throughout the country tremendously increased. Even within the Chicano community the resistance against the war intensified. In particular, Chicanos criticized the 'disproportionate number of Chicanos (first, second, and third generation Mexicans) [that] had died in the front lines' (Alurista,95).

⁹⁸ Nixon became President of the United States after Robert Kennedy was assassinated in 1968. Oscar Zeta Acosta refers to Kennedy as the person that '[..] was the last hope for the Chicano... I don't mean him, personally, but the whole white liberal bit, it's dead now' (*RCP*, 61).

The 'Chicano Moratorium', which took place in Los Angeles, August 29, 1970, articulated the climax of anti-war demonstrations induced by Chicanos. About 20 000 to 30 000 Chicanos participated in the protest march. Although initially totally peaceful, a small number of violent conflicts between police and demonstrators led to an uncontrollable mass panic causing an unsure number of dead and injured people.

In the midst of the tumult the famous Mexican American journalist Rubén Salazar was killed by the police. The death of a central figure of the *Movement* was a gigantic loss for the political struggle of Chicano activists. Salazar had been the journalistic mouthpiece of Chicanos, an individual who had energetically produced articles about the *Movement* and its activists.

In Buffalo Zeta Brown's view the fictionalized character of Rubén Salazar, called Roland Zanzibar in *The Revolt of the Cockroach People*, becomes the first martyr of the battle: 'Our first martyr, Roland Zanzibar, is dead' (*RCP*, 197). Although Buffalo Zeta Brown desperately attempts to prove that Zanzibar was assassinated by the police, at the end none of the involved police officers is officially accused of murder.⁹⁹

Towards the end of the narrated time of the novel, Buffalo Zeta Brown, after having been unable to save one of their leaders, Corky Gonzales, from a forty-day-sentence in the 'New County Jail' (*RCP*, 253), decides to 'take some form of political action against the whole system of government' (López, 37). He places a bomb in the toilet of the 'Hall of Justice', which ironically kills 'one man of presumably Latin descent' (*RCP*, 256).

However, Buffalo Zeta Brown states

No, I don't feel guilty about the kid that got killed. I feel terrible. But not guilty. Lots more will die before the fight is over. (*RCP*, 257)

Despite the generally desperate situation of the entire *Movement*, Buffalo Zeta Brown, when leaving Los Angeles, does not declare the end of the

⁹⁹ Cf. Tonn, 104-105.

fightings between Anglo-Americans and Chicanos. Rather, he defines the situation as a kind of interim truce: 'The truce we've signed for the moment doesn't mean anything. Just because the Viet Cong or the Chicano temporarily lay down their arms doesn't prove shit' (*RCP*, 257).

4.5.3 The Battlefield 'Politics'

On the brink of the narrative, Buffalo Zeta Brown also informs the reader that he intended to become sheriff of Los Angeles. Thus, the aspiring candidate 'attempted to change the system from within' (López, 38), with the final goal to dissolve the office as soon as he was elected.

In an interview with Roland Zanzibar, a fictional character based on the character of Chicano journalist Rubén Salazar, Buffalo Zeta Brown states:

I have but one issue. I know there's no hope for actual victory at the ballot box. I have no money and no supporters other than a few ragged friends. We can hardly compete with the pros. My effort is an educational endeavor. I expect to carry my message to as many as are interested in my views. (*RCP*, 136)

Thus, Buffalo Zeta Brown uses the political stage as another basis for the propagation of the aims of the *Chicano Movement*. Moreover, he attempts to increase his own popularity, knowing 'that he will get a lot of instant name-recognition by running for public office' (López, 38).

Later on in the novel, Buffalo Zeta Brown refers to the outcome of the fictional election, when stating:

In a field of four, in a county of seven million and with the expenditure of less than a thousand bucks, I receive some half a million votes. Zanzibar wrote in the *LA Times* in the first week of June, 1970: "Zeta's campaign was the only little ray of sunshine for the Chicanos."
(*RCP*, 183)

Interestingly, in clear contrast to Acosta's fictionalized account of the outcome of the elections represented in *RCP*, the historical journalistic article written by Rubén Salazar in the 1970s, reads as follows:

Oscar Zeta Acosta, easily recognized in court by his loud ties and flowered attaché case with Chicano Power sticker, didn't come close to Sheriff Pitchess' 1,300,000 votes but did beat Everett Holladay, Monterey Park chief of police. [...] Why he got **100,000** votes for sheriff will have to be analyzed by political pundits. **But in the Chicano community Oscar Zeta Acosta's impressive loss was an enigmatic ray of sunshine.** (258) (emphasis mine)

Thus, in his fictionalized account of the election in *RCP*, Oscar Zeta Acosta exaggerates the number of votes he actually received. Also, more importantly, through the inserted quotation marks he uses, presumably citing Salazar's article, he adds a realistic, objective notion to his book. However, when contrasting the historical article by Rubén Salazar with the "quotation" cited in *RCP*, it becomes apparent that Acosta reinterpreted and fictionalized the content of the actual phrase 'but in the Chicano community Oscar Zeta Acosta's impressive loss was an enigmatic ray of sunshine'. By remodeling the phrase to 'Zeta's campaign was the *only little* ray of sunshine for the Chicanos' (*RCP*, 183), he manages to distract from Buffalo Zeta Brown's 'loss' while he simultaneously exaggerates his position within the community by adding the words 'only little' ray of sunshine.

Thus, by contrasting both, the fictionalized account of the election in *RCP* and an article written by the "real" historic journalist Rubén Salazar in the 1970s, the intersections of fiction and non-fiction presented in the Acosta's work once more become apparent. In his text *The Revolt of the Cockroach People* even the representation of Acosta's own character seems to be highly fictionalized, as will be investigated in the following subchapter.

4.6 A Schizoid - Cultural Mexican or a Cultural Schizoid American¹⁰⁰

To start with, it seems crucial to repeat that the reader of Oscar Zeta Acosta's novels always needs to bear in mind that Oscar Zeta Acosta's depiction of the *Chicano Movement*, though closely linked to real historical events, 'suffers from a deliberately unrestrained subjectivity' (Alurista, 97). Thus, Oscar Zeta Acosta's representation of the *Movement*, its participants as well as his own character is a highly selective one.

However, due to a lack of external information about Oscar Zeta Acosta, his *Autobiography of a Brown Buffalo* as well as *The Revolt of the Cockroach People* became the primary reference source whenever scholars investigated Oscar Zeta Acosta's personal role within and outside the *Chicano Movement*.

At first glance, Oscar Zeta Acosta's first book, his *Autobiography of a Brown Buffalo*, reads like a classical countercultural piece of writing, including stereotypical elements such as decadent drug abuse as well as people who withdraw from conventional lifestyles.¹⁰¹ However, instead of trying to escape his cultural background, Oscar Zeta Acosta drops out 'in search of his [my] past' (*Autobiography*, 71). In fact, according to Padilla, the necessary context for Oscar Zeta Acosta's perspective on the *Movement* is established when, in his *Autobiography*, he 'lay[s] bare his long alienation from his culture' (244).

In 1968, in order to rediscover his cultural roots, Buffalo Zeta Brown embarked on a journey, traveling back to Riverbank, the place where he was born. Right there he, for the first time, openly referred to his cultural roots as well as to his personal feeling of ethnic belonging:

¹⁰⁰ The words 'a Schizoid - Cultural Mexican or a Cultural schizoid American' were used by Enrique López in his article "Back to Bachimba" in *The Chicanos: Mexican American Voices* by Ludwig and James Santibáñez, 261.

¹⁰¹ Cf. Roe, 182.

What I see now on this rainy day in January, 1968, what is clear to me after this sojourn is that I am neither a Mexican nor an American. I am neither a Catholic nor a Protestant. I am a Chicano by ancestry and a Brown Buffalo by choice. (*Autobiography*, 199)

Furthermore, the return to his birthplace triggers interesting childhood memories, which illustrate the prevailing 'division between racial minorities and whites' (Roe, 183) in his hometown:

Living in Riverbank was no different than living in a strange, foreign town. I was an outsider then as much as I am now [...] In my corner of the world there were only three kinds of people: Mexicans, Okies and Americans. Catholics, Holy Rollers and Protestants. Peach pickers, cannery workers and clerks. (*Autobiography*, 77 - 78)

Thus, as to be a Mexican meant to be situated at the lower end of American society, Buffalo Zeta Brown desperately tried to become American. However, just like Antonio, Villarreal's protagonist in *Pocho*, access to Anglo American society remained denied. According to Roe, 'even his "Okie buddies" all call[ed] him "Jigaboo" – a *nigger* not by race but by cultural and socioeconomic status' (85).

In various attempts to reconstruct his cultural identity, he constantly changes his name, associates himself with different groups and also converts to Baptism, as referred to in the following passage from his *Autobiography*:

I finally gave up on Catholicism and admitted to Duane Dunham that he knew more about Jesus than I did. We went into the boiler room under the barracks and he called down the Holy Ghost to save me. I took Jesus as my savior and became a Baptist right on the spot. I talked Jesus morning, noon and night. I was a fanatic of the worst kind. (*Autobiography*, 131)

However, none of these attempts to reconstruct his cultural roots brings an end to his identity crisis. The climax of his crisis is reached when, 'after having been found guilty of a misdemeanor offense' (Saldívar, 94) in Mexico, having been unable to defend himself in Spanish, a Mexican magistrate proposes: "Why don't you go home and learn to speak your father's language?". In a similar way, only a few hours later, an American border patrol at *la frontera* between Mexico and the United States questions his

Americanness when she says: "You don't *look* like an American, you know?" (*Autobiography*, 193).¹⁰²

Due to the fact that in Los Angeles Buffalo Zeta Brown 'recognizes that the development of his cultural identity will always occur in the cultural space between American and Mexican' (Amaya, 44), he soon gets involved in the *Chicano Movement*. At first, longing to become a writer, Buffalo Zeta Brown tries to gain material from a Chicano Militant Group in order to compose an article for the *New York Times*. However, instead of impressing the members of the group, he needs to prove that his 'cultural credentials are in order' (Amaya, 79).

From the very beginning, Buffalo Zeta Brown's relationship to the group of Chicano Militants could be said to be highly ambiguous. The relationship shifts from harmonization to dissociation. On the one hand, Buffalo Zeta Brown does not completely trust his group of Chicano militants, whereas they seem to mistrust Buffalo Zeta Brown.

Though he soon becomes their lawyer and functions as a leading figure of the entire *Chicano Movement*, he remains 'always on the periphery of revolution' and is 'unable to participate, except for two conciliation bombings' (Smith, 95). Brown generally rather adopts the role of an observer than of an activist. Even in situations which call for intensive, collective action, he frequently does not fully commit himself to it, but rather keeps some kind of reflective distance.¹⁰³

After the above referred to violent outburst of his militant Chicano group in St. Basil, his role as an observer rather than a participant becomes obvious:

And there is swinging and screaming and shouting and we are into a full-scale riot in the blue vestibule of the richest church in town. But I am standing stock still. All around me bodies are falling. Terrified women and children are wailing. [...] Nobody touches me. (*RCP*, 16, 20)

¹⁰² Cf. Roe, 184.

¹⁰³ Cf. Tonn, 118.

Towards the end of the novel, when the *Movement* continually breaks apart due to outside as well as inside pressures, the pressure on Buffalo Zeta Brown as a person increases. After a trip to Acapulco, he is accused of having abandoned his militant friends. Again, just like the Anglo American system had not allowed him to live freely, the *Movement* forces him into conformity.

Buffalo Zeta Brown complains about the pressures he feels from inside the *Movement*, stating: 'Why should anybody give me trouble about what I do with the rest of my life? Is this what we've been fighting for?' (*RCP*, 205). 'Whose life is it?' (*RCP*, 230). Self-determination seems to become less and less possible as 'coalitions fell apart when Chicanos themselves begin to oppose each other' (Bruce-Novoa, 47).

At the end of the novel, Buffalo Zeta Brown frees himself from 'White America's repeated attempts to define him' (Amaya, 47), as well as from the increasing pressure from his militant Chicano group. In fact through his text *RCP*, Oscar Zeta Acosta opens the door to the contemporary sense of *mestizaje* and positions himself in between the American and Mexican culture without any attempt to clearly define himself as either or.

Consequently, as Amaya summed up:

Oscar Zeta Acosta is unwilling to conform to any cultural identity, and as a result, Oscar Zeta Acosta's narratives provoke both Anglo and Chicano readers because he refuses to conform to the political, social, and cultural identification of either group. (Amaya, 47)

5 *Bless me, Última* or the Reconciliation of Opposites

The Revolt of the Cockroach People explicitly depicts how, at the end of the 1960s, the construction of a Chicano cultural identity was linked to a strong refusal of Anglo American hegemony. In turn, the construction of a new Chicano identity augmented the already existing, increasingly irreconcilable, contradictory dichotomy between Anglo and Mexican Americans.

Although both, *The Revolt of the Cockroach People* (1973) as well as Rudolfo Anaya's *Bless Me, Última* (1972) were published at a time that was shaped by a 'militant and disruptive political climate' (Tonn, 59), the two novels differ considerably as far as their representation as well as their attitude towards cultural identity construction is concerned.

Thus, I will dedicate the following chapter to the analysis of how Rudolfo Anaya's novel *Bless Me, Última*, in clear contrast to *The Revolt of the Cockroach People*, ties in with the 'contemporary emancipatory tendency' (Tonn, 59) that opts for the reconciliation of cultural opposites as well as for the deconstruction of exclusive dichotomies.

As *Bless Me, Última* is still one of the most prominent and successful books ever written by a Chicano/a author, I will provide a short section on the critical response to Anaya's work and proceed with a chapter on Rudolfo Anaya's biography.

5.1 *Periods of Transition and Critical Response to Bless me, Última*

Bless me, Última's success story seems to speak for itself. - The *Premio Quinto Sol Award* winner of 1971¹⁰⁴, with more than 300.000 sold copies, translated into six different languages, the novel inspired 'the largest body of [predominantly favorable] criticism in contemporary Chicano literature' (Márquez, 42). Still a significant milestone in Chicano literature, *Bless me, Última*, written in English, granted Anaya a fix place in Chicano as well as US-American literature anthologies.

As countless critics have pointed out before, Anaya's success can largely be attributed to the overtly positive, harmonizing message of the novel. In fact, Anaya manages to illustrate that periods of transition, although usually full of conflict, can be overcome by the recreation of something new, something beautifully reconciled.

As Horst Tonn in his article "*Bless Me Última: Fictional Response to Times of Transition*" pointed out

Both, the narrated time and moment of the novel's first appearance can be called periods of transition. Both United States society at large during the 1960s and early 1970s and the rural New Mexican community in the mid 1940s portrayed in the text were undergoing major changes. Traditional life-styles had become obsolete; newly emerging patterns of meaning were competing to replace them. Values and identities were seriously questioned and required adaptation or replacement. (Tonn, 59)

While Josè Antonio Villarreal still presents the rejection of Chicano heritage that coincides with the creation of an assimilated Chicano identity as the only possible, though negative, solution to the dilemma of the Chicano cultural conflict, Anaya 'introduces the contemporary Chicano concept that the past can be the stuff of which the future is made' (Cárdenas-Dwyer, 160).

¹⁰⁴ Cf. García, *Luis Leal – An Auto/Biography*, 123.

Just like Gloria Anzaldúa, who views identity construction as conflict bound yet bearing a kind of good, creative force, Anaya succeeds in presenting the complexities of cultural conflict without denying the possibility of the creation of a harmonized new consciousness.

However, critics such as Enrique LaMadrid as well as Joseph Sommer criticized Anaya's novel for being 'a-historical', presenting, in the midst of a revolutionary time, a story of a young protagonist that is only peripherally affected by Anglo American influence. Seemingly detached from any available ideological concept (be it militant, nationalistic or even assimilationist)¹⁰⁵, *Bless Me, Última* has frequently been accused of 'not being Chicano enough' (Cantú, 13), of not having contributed significantly to the aims of the *Chicano Movement*.

Though in a different context, Rudolfo Anaya, provides a counter argument that is occupied with the general question of politicization of creative art:

What many critics forget is that every man's or woman's creative, imaginative endeavor is an act of rebellion. An artist, to begin with, is a person rebelling against the status quo. He doesn't need any political mentors, or he has no business calling himself an artist.
(Interview with Bruce-Novoa in *Conversations with Rudolfo Anaya* by Dick and Sirias, 19)

5.2 Biography of Rudolfo Anaya

In contrast to Oscar Zeta Acosta's dramatic, adventurous and mystic biography, Anaya's biographical details offer a strand of overall continuity and stability. Born, raised and educated in New Mexico, he still lives in New Mexico.¹⁰⁶

Born on October 30, 1937, in Pastura, New Mexico, Rudolfo Anaya attended primary school in the nearby town of Santa Rosa. As an adolescent he and

¹⁰⁵ Cf. Tonn, 63.

¹⁰⁶ Cf. Tonn, 138.

his family moved to Albuquerque where he graduated from high school. Just like Antonio, the young protagonist of *Bless me, Última*¹⁰⁷, Anaya grew up in a predominately Spanish speaking environment, as he contested in an interview with Bruce-Novoa:

Both my father and mother spoke Spanish and I was raised speaking Spanish in an almost completely Spanish background. I did not learn English until I started first grade. (Anaya in an interview with Bruce-Novoa, 189)

After his graduation, he studied at the University in New Mexico and received a B.A. and M.A in English in 1968 as well as an M.A. in Guidance and Counseling in 1972.

As a result of his academic education in English, his linguistic competence rapidly grew until it finally became his preferred language:

Now I speak more fluently in English. The thrust of my education has been in English literature and I wrote in English when I began to write, so I am more fluent and more comfortable with English.
(Bruce-Novoa, *Chicano Authors*, 189)

After having been employed as a teacher in several public schools in Albuquerque, he returned to his alma mater as professor of English (Candelaria, 25). However, since his successful publication of his "New Mexico Trilogy" (which includes *Heart of Aztlán*, *Tortuga* and *Bless Me, Última*), he dedicated most of his time to the creation of his novels. Apart from his creative work, he, according to Baeza, 'lectures throughout the country and attends book fairs, book signings, and symposia, emphasizing in his talks the importance of cultural diversity' (17).

¹⁰⁷ Rudolfo Anaya himself comments on the biographical elements in *Bless Me, Última*, when he says: 'To me all writing is biographical. It comes out of experience, it comes out of things that you have felt, that you have seen, that you have been involved in; people that you have met, that you have bumped into on this bare stage of life or that you have heard about in stories. And all that became the material for *Bless Me, Última*' (Johnson and Apodaca, in *Conversations with Rudolfo Anaya* by Dick and Sirias, 29).

Also, in his account of his own cultural identity, Anaya focuses on the cultural diversity within his own personal identity when he says:

'I fit easily and completely into the Chicano community – that's where I was born and raised, that's where my family resides – and the Movement, because I was active in it and have seen its different areas of development. I think that in part I fit into the mainstream society, what you call U.S. society. I know it's fashionable for many Chicano writers to say that they do not belong to this society that has oppressed minorities. Nonetheless, the fact exists that we are a part of that society'.

(Bruce-Novoa, in *Conversations with Rudolfo Anaya* by Dick and Sirias, 17)

5.3 The Influence of Anglo American Society in *Bless Me, Última*

Generally speaking, in clear contrast to earlier key texts such as *Pocho* by José Villarreal that explicitly focused on cultural conflicts that involved the struggle between assimilation and cultural preservation, *Bless Me, Última* 'presents a world where the Anglo is of little consequence' (Kanoza, 160). In her article "Jason's Indian" Caminero-Santangelo even goes as far as to deny any obvious influence of the Anglo American cultural system on the identity construction of Anaya's protagonist Antonio.

Indeed, a closer reading of the text reveals that Anglo American hegemony is only dealt with at the periphery of the novel. Nonetheless, historical references and minor conflicts between Anglo Americans and the protagonist are mentioned. Therefore, as the novel develops its structure, it becomes more and more obvious that 'the Anglo world is the dominant culture responsible for the choices the Chicanos are being forced to make' (Black, 148).

5.3.1 Historical References in *Bless Me, Última*

In particular, references to the historical 'encroaching Anglo presence' (Kanoza, 160), though almost entirely indirectly, serve as reminders of cultural oppression and conflict. The building of railroads and highways, the testing of atomic bombs as well as the cultural alienation of Antonio's brothers are generally attributed to the negative impact of Anglo American influence.

From a historical point of view, the history of New Mexico was shaped by the connection of New Mexico to the transcontinental railway network which brought a comparatively high number of Anglo Americans into New Mexico. The first contact between the eastern newcomers and New Mexico natives triggered conflicts which frequently resulted in violent fights. In *BMU*¹⁰⁸, the construction of the railway network represents an important turning point in the history of the region. For many natives of New Mexico, the cultural clash between Mexican and Anglo Americans provoked a feeling of oppression and deculturation, as referred to in *BMU*.¹⁰⁹

Then the railroad came. The barbed wire came. The songs, the corridos became sad, and the meeting of people from Texas with my forefathers was full of blood, murder and tragedy. The people were uprooted. They looked around one day and found themselves closed in. The freedom of land and sky they had known was gone. (*BMU*, 125)

The second major historical event mentioned various times in the novel is the Second World War. Some of the characters of the novel who served as soldiers in this war suffer from psychological diseases, which the inhabitants of Guadalupe represented in *BMU* label as "war-sickness". In particular, Lupito, who suffers from total amentia, kills the sheriff and is consequently shot by male citizens of Guadalupe.¹¹⁰ Repeatedly, this act of self-justice is justified by the assumption that Lupito was the victim of unprocessed

¹⁰⁸ The title *Bless Me, Última* will be abbreviated to *BMU* from now on.

¹⁰⁹ Cf. Tonn, 157.

¹¹⁰ Cf. Tonn, 163.

traumas triggered by cruel war experiences: 'The war made him sick' (*BMU*, 18).

The war is also held responsible for the partial breakdown of the protagonist's family. While Antonio's father, Gabriel, still clings to the old *vaquero*¹¹¹ tradition and dreams about moving to California and working in the vineyards, Antonio's elder brothers, Leon, Gene and Andrew, who had to serve in the US Army during World War II, have completely different plans after their return.

Instead of allowing Gabriel the traditionally patriarchal authority over their fate, they reject their father's plan. Rather than embracing the traditional, rural way of life favored by their father, the young men reject the old ways of their culture and opt for an Americanized life-style. Trying to escape the economic limitation of Chicano culture, they long for the fulfillment of their personal "American Dream". Thus, they 'are assimilated into the Anglo world in ways that result in their desire to leave *la familia* and move into the dominant cultural sphere' (Black, 149).

The third historical event referred to in *BMU* that needs to be mentioned here is the testing of an atomic bomb. At the end of the Second World War, on July 16, 1945, a military basis in New Mexico became the setting for a nuclear testing. Only shortly after, the same basis was used in order to fire the fatal bomb which seconds later totally destroyed the city of Hiroshima.¹¹²

The massive detonation of the atomic bomb also becomes an issue in Anaya's novel. Within the novel's imaginative world, the atomic bomb is held responsible for an uncommonly harsh winter as well as for sandstorms in the following spring:

¹¹¹ According to Allatson, 'the cowboy (in Spanish *vaquero*) has long been romanticized as one of the quintessential icons of "Americanness". But the cowboy is a paradoxical national figure given that the archetype's culture (clothing, diet, music, language) continually reveal his origin in Mexico. Historians concur that the US cowboy tradition was marked by, and evolved from, the Mexican ranching tradition [...]' (238).

¹¹² Cf. Tonn, 164.

The spring dust storms of the llano continued and I heard many grownups blame the harsh winter and the sandstorms of spring on the new bomb that had been made to end the war. "The atomic bomb", they whispered, "a ball of white heat beyond the imagination, beyond hell. (*BMU*, 183)

Deeply rooted in their traditional belief that scientific development is like engaging in a competition with God, the townspeople state that 'they seek to know more than God Himself' and 'in the end, that knowledge they [Anglo Americans] seek will destroy us all' (*BMU*, 183). Thus, it seems legitimate to argue that the conflict between Anglo Americans and Natives of New Mexico is, at times, dealt with in the novel.

5.3.2 Antonio's Contact with Anglo – Americans

As far as the protagonist's contact with Anglo-American dominant culture is concerned, the only situation worth mentioning seems to be Antonio's first day at school. Having been raised in an exclusively Spanish speaking environment, he becomes aware of his difference when his schoolmates speak, at least for him, an intelligible language.

Furthermore, very similar to *Pocho's* protagonist who was laughed at because his lunch packet consisted of tortillas, Antonio is provided with 'his first taste of prejudice' (Black, 149) when he arrives with his home-packed lunch:

My mother had packed a small jar of hot beans and some good, green chile wrapped in tortillas. When the other children saw my lunch they laughed and pointed again. Even high school girl laughed. They showed me their sandwiches which were made out of bread. Again I did not feel well. (*BMU*, 54)

However, in the process of finding his identity, Antonio does not seem to be traumatically influenced by such instances of prejudice. Rather, Anaya rapidly engages in the representation of Antonio's positive reaction. He soon bands together with two Chicano schoolmates, using their communal strength in order to extend their peer group's size: 'We found a few others

who were like us, different in language and custom, and a part of our loneliness was gone' (*BMU*, 55).

In sharp contrast to many other novels that emphasized the impact of Anglo-American hegemony on the development of young adults, *Bless Me, Última* has set its focus differently. As Juan Bruce-Novoa notes, 'Antonio is not torn between and Anglo and a Chicano world, but between two ways of being Chicano (Juan Bruce-Novoa quoted in Burns, n.p.).'¹¹³

Before going into greater detail about Antonio's efforts to reconcile his ethnic heritage, some general remarks on the plotline of the novel seem useful. The setting of the novel is Guadalupe, a small town in New Mexico during the Second World War. The story revolves around the coming of age of Antonio Márez, who needs to construct his identity. Hereby, Última, an old woman who came to live with the family, functions as his guide. Última functioned as the midwife at the birth of Antonio and as the story unfolds, she introduces Antonio to the magic of her *curanderismo*¹¹⁴, teaches him the oneness with nature and initiates him to the secrets of how to exorcise evil forces. Together with Antonio she struggles against the evil witchcraft of the Tenorio Tremetina family.

Despite the main plotline that deals with Última's fight against the evil, Antonio's fragmented identity is one of the major themes of the novel. Torn between the two sides of his family, the Márez and the Lunas, the *vaqueros* and the farmers, Antonio is forced to reconcile the opposing parts of his heritage. Also, as far as his religious belief is concerned, he is presented with three different options as will be further elaborated on in the following chapter.

¹¹³ Please see Chapter 5.4. for a detailed analysis of Antonio's conflict that results from his 'two ways of being Chicano'.

¹¹⁴ *Curanderismo* is a Mexican-American healing tradition. For further references please see chapter 5.4.1.3. of this thesis.

5.4 The Reconciliation of Ethnic Heritage - Anaya's Creation of a Distinct Chicano/a Identity

Though historically rooted in a time of social and political upheavals, Anaya's work is primarily concerned with the depiction of its protagonist's passage from childhood toward manhood. In contrast to many of Anaya's contemporaries, he neither explicitly supports the goals of the *Chicano Movement* nor attempts to deepen already existing, politically loaded, dichotomies that exclusively provide either/or possibilities (such as either Chicano/a or Anglo American). Rather, the novel concentrates on the protagonist's development and illustrates how the struggle between dominating and being dominated is also fought within the individual.

Anaya's depiction of the protagonist's puberty clearly celebrates cultural diversity and draws on the cultural constructs of 'mestizaje' and 'hybridity'. Antonio, in various ways embraces and resists dominance at the same time by creating a 'third' space in which he can be 'neither' 'nor'.

However, as Gloria Anzaldúa illustrated in her work *Borderlands - La Frontera*, identity construction most frequently involves painful experiences. Nonetheless, these painful experiences bear a kind of powerful, creative force which forms a necessary prerequisite for the construction of a new mestizo/a or hybrid identity.

Antonio, the young protagonist of *BMU*, has to face a whole range of painful experiences that involve dying people as well as the earlier mentioned breakdown of his family's structure. However, the most difficult conflicts Antonio needs to solve almost always involve some kind of reconciliation of opposites. Torn between the dichotomies between Roman Catholicism, the myth of the golden carp and *curanderismo* or between the opposites of good and evil, Antonio is asked to provide solutions in order to proceed with the construction of his own identity.

5.4.1 Between Roman Catholicism, the Myth of the Carp and *Curanderismo*

Antonio, like many other Mexicans or Mexican Americans, is caught in the tension-filled area between different religious belief systems. However, as Caminero-Santangelo argues, 'a hybrid religion' provides the generally accepted solution for this conflict, as many Mexican Americans 'routinely incorporate aspects of belief systems inherited from Native American ancestors with the Catholicism imposed by the Spanish conquerors' (Caminero-Santangelo, 118).

Furthermore, Cárdenas-Dwyer argues that the three different options available for Antonio, namely Roman Catholicism, the myth of the carp and *curanderismo*, represent the three sources of identity construction he inherited from his forefathers: 'the indigenous, the Spanish, and more recently, the mestizo or mix of both' (161).

5.4.1.1 Roman Catholicism:

Roman Catholicism, which is the belief system Spanish colonizers introduced to the New World, is the first belief system Antonio encounters. Antonio's mother, herself a devoted Roman Catholic, introduces Antonio to the related world view from the very beginning of his life.

However, Anaya's direct and indirect criticism of institutional Catholicism cannot be disregarded. Constantly, Anaya 'debunks the merits of dogmatic Catholicism' (Kanoza, 163). First of all, representatives of the Catholic Church are presented as totally helpless and ineffective in the fight against evil wizardry. When the three Trementina sisters put a spell on Antonio's uncle which causes severe illness, Roman Catholic priests fail to exorcise the evil: 'Even the holy priest at El Puerto had been asked to exorcise el encanto, the curse, and he had failed' (*BMU*, 83-84).

Another representative of the Catholic Church, Father Byrnes, an Irish priest, is characterized by an unmatched coldness and unawareness of his lambkin's needs. While teaching Antonio and his classmates an ineffectual kind of catechism, he does not encourage the boys to attempt to understand 'the faith to which they are being indoctrinated' (Kanoza, 163).

Confused by the concept of God presented to him by Father Byrnes and his surrounding, Antonio more and more doubts the existence of God.¹¹⁵ Especially when he is unable to feel a real communion with God, Antonio expresses his doubts: 'I wonder if God was alive anymore, or if He ever had been' (*BMU*, 236).

In turn, most of his friends do not seem to question 'the dogmatic imposition of religious adherence' (Caminero-Santangelo, 117). In an improvised role play, they enact the punishment of their friend Florence, a so-called 'nonbeliever'. In order to liven up the scene, they ask Antonio, whose fate was said to be that of a priest, to play the priest:

"Make his penance hard!", Rita leered. "Make him kneel and we'll all beat him", Ernie suggested. "Yeah, beat him!", Bones said widely. "Stone him!" "Beat him!" "Kill Him". They circled around me and advanced on Florence, their eyes flashing with the thought of the punishment they would impose on the nonbeliever. (*BMU*, 213)

After Antonio rejects to act as ordered, Florence comments on the fact that Antonio refused to adhere to the dogmas preached by the Catholic Church by saying: "You could never be their priest" (*BMU*, 215).

5.4.1.2 The Myth of the Golden Carp:

The second belief system Antonio encounters is the myth of the golden carp, which can be directly linked to indigenous belief systems. One of Antonio's friends, Samuel introduces him to the mystic history of the golden carp. Though of a strong indigenous character, the myth can easily be linked to passages in the Old as well as New Testament, as will be shown in the following passage.

¹¹⁵ Cf. Cárdenas-Dwyer, 167.

This myth is based on the story that gods benevolently placed a group of human beings into a fertile valley. The only thing they forbade them was to eat a fish called 'the carp'. However, as the valley was soon stroke by a major famine, people decided to kill the carp. While most of the gods opted for a complete destruction of the people, 'one kind god [...] who loved the people' (*BMU*, 80) insisted on a different solution. He suggested that the people were turned into carps, 'destined to swim the treacherous waters of the earth' (Cárdenas-Dwyer, 167). As the good god loved the people, he pled for his own transformation in order to be able to assist his people.

In a very similar way ,

The Old Testament tells of a group (Adam and Eve) being placed in a fertile place (Garden of Eden) by the gods (God). Their transgression of a divine prohibition (eating the forbidden apple) results in expulsion to a hostile environment (earth). [...] In the New Testament the loving god (Jesus Christ) is introduced as a god who assumes the form of the sinners (incarnation / incarpnation) in order to show the unfortunate people the way to salvation.(Cárdenas-Dwyer, 168 - 169)

While these points of intersections could have helped Antonio to combine the two, seemingly unrelated religious concepts, it rather is the 'dovetailing of the emotional response expected with Holy Communion later occurring with his vision of the golden carp' (Cárdenas-Dwyer, 170), that brings the myth of the carp and Catholicism together:

I knew I had witnessed a miraculous thing, the appearance of a pagan god, a thing so miraculous as the curing of my uncle Lucas. [...]and then a sudden illumination of beauty and understanding flashed through my mind. This is what I had expected God to do at my first holy communion. (*BMU* ,114)

Though Antonio seems emotionally affected by the sight of the ancient pagan God, he is unwilling to renounce Christ. When one of his friends advises him to turn his back to the Christian God because he was a jealous God who would sooner or later long for the murder of the golden carp, Antonio does not embrace such an exclusionary point of view.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁶ For a more detailed analysis, please see Kanoza, 164.

In the development of his own identity, Antonio needs to resolve the dilemma that involves the reconciliation of his 'priestly devotion to Catholicism' (Vallejos, 8) and the myth of the golden carp. Instead of abandoning one or the other religious belief system, Antonio learns that both Catholicism and paganism do have points of intersections which could be used in order to create a new, hybrid kind of religion. In a dialogue with his father, at the very end of the novel, Antonio actively recognizes for the first time that he could 'take [...] God and the golden carp – and make something new' (247).

5.4.1.3 *Curanderismo*:

Antonio's spiritual conflict is further complicated by the phenomenon of the *curanderismo* represented in the novel by Última's character. *Curanderismo*, as mentioned before, is an old Mexican-American healing tradition. The figure of the *curandera* is a frequent heroine in Chicano/a literature. However, due to her connection to the supernatural, the *curandera* is sometimes labeled a *bruja*, a witch. As Rebolledo points out

The *curandera* / *bruja* encodes both positive and negative attributes. In general, the *curandera* is the positive side – a woman whose life is devoted to healing, curing, helping. [...] The *curandera* emerges from the history and traditions of multiple cultures: the complex and intricate healing knowledge that the Arab culture had brought to Spain, the medieval Euro-Spanish healing traditions, and the Native American (both Mexican and southwestern) traditions of herb women, folk doctors who taught the Spanish arrivals their knowledge. (Rebolledo, 81)

Thus, *Curanderismo* itself is of a hybrid nature, as it contains elements of 'European as well as indigenous origin' (Cárdenas-Dwyer, 172).

Facing a third option of religious belief to be reconciled into a new and hybrid religion, Antonio has problems to weigh the effectiveness of Última's powers against that of the Catholic Church and the golden carp. Última, whose powers are frequently labeled 'magic', manages to cure Antonio uncle's, Lucas Luna's disease. In the preparatory phase of his cure, Antonio asks himself if 'the magic of Última would be stronger than all the powers of the saints and the Holy Mother Church?' (BMU, 97).

Towards the end of the novel, when Antonio's spiritual crisis hits its peak, the question of religious belief follows him into his dreams. In a dream sequence, his brothers urge him to choose from his tripartite heritage:

“But you have the power of the church, you are the boy-priest!”, they cried. “Or choose from the power of the golden carp or the magic of your Última.” (*BMU*, 225)

As Jung points out, Anaya incorporates the motif of *curanderismo*, which is a regionally typical motif of New Mexico, in order to represent a 'modern Chicano who knows and loves his Mexican cultural heritage, yet does not simply look back nostalgically' (162). Rather than choosing between his tripartite heritage, Antonio just like many other Mexican Americans, involves in a creative reconciliation of elements of the three, in order to 'make something new' (*BMU*, 247).

In other words, following the concept of 'hybridity' presented by Homi Bhabha, Antonio creates a 'third' space, a space in between Roman Catholicism, the myth of the golden carp and *curanderismo*, where he can embrace all three systems. In a way, Antonio's experiences, seen from a more holistic point of view, achieve 'significance as a cultural expression':

The conflicts of Antonio as the narrator among the various aspects of the past which form his spiritual legacy and the future which must be his own creation, becomes a metaphor not only for Chicanos in their struggles to form an identity, but for all readers who yearn for ultimate unity. (Cárdenas-Dwyer, 176)

5.4.2 Hybrid Landscapes – Between the *llano* and the River Valley

In addition to the above mentioned spiritual conflict Antonio needs to solve, he is torn between the two different Chicano cultures he inherited from his parents. Hereby, the concept of 'hybrid landscapes' is of major importance.

As Martin explains

[landscape can serve] as a catalyst that jolts the character into a heightened state of awareness of his own cultural hybridity. Such realization occurs when the land itself embodies hybrid characteristics, containing the histories of both conflicting cultural groups, and thereby, reflects the cultural conflict occurring within the character. When the character contemplates such a landscape (or landscapes), an anxiety arises within him or her that leads to a moment of crisis. To resolve the crisis, the character *usually* works out a self reconciliation of the two disparate parts of his or her identity. (Martin, 131)

5.4.2.1 New Mexico – a Place of Reconciliation of Past, Present and Future

When Rudolfo Anaya uses the geographical setting of his homeland, New Mexico, as a stage for *Bless Me, Última*¹¹⁷, he draws deeply on the psychological concepts of 'self-actualization' as well as 'self-reconciliation'.

Constantly, Anaya emphasizes 'the connection of land and identity' (Martin, 133) and the importance of the individual confrontation with one's homeland.

To start with, Anaya, in an interview with David Johnson and David Apodaca in 1979, expresses his view that to work out a relationship with the landscape we live in, is a crucial part of self-actualization. Self-actualization, as a theoretical concept, was founded by Abraham Maslow who is famous for his 'Hierarchy of needs' theory proposed in his paper "A Theory of Human Motivation" presented in 1943.

¹¹⁷ In a response to Bruce-Novoa's question on the geographical setting of *Bless Me, Última*, Anaya states: Santa Rosa is a geographical setting, in a sense, that I use to set the stage for *Bless Me Última* (Bruce-Novoa, 185).

Basically, Maslow provided a hierarchy of human being's needs, arguing that basic needs need to be fulfilled in order to proceed to real self-actualization. Including his view of human beings' curiosity, Maslow's 'Hierarchy of needs' is most frequently illustrated by the below printed pyramid:



Rephrased into words, Maslow's term 'self-actualization' refers

to man's desire for fulfillment, namely to the tendency for him to become actually in what he is potentially: to become everything that one is capable of becoming [...].

(<http://www.performance-unlimited.com/samain.htm>)

Appropriated to the context of identity construction and its relationship to land, Anaya argues that

[...] if we have been alienated or disassociated or torn apart from the earth itself, to self-actualize you have to rediscover that.
(Johnson and Apodaca, *Conversations with Rudolfo Anaya* by Dick and Sirias, 34)

In particular, the rural setting of New Mexico, with its long history of cultural meetings and melting, serves 'as a catalyst that jolts the character [Antonio] into a heightened state of awareness of his own cultural hybridity' (Martin, 131). When Antonio under the tutelage of Última becomes aware of the hybrid character of the land he inhabits, when he rediscovers the land that contains the histories of both 'indigenous' and Anglo American groups, he is forced to reflect upon his own torn apart cultural identity. Thus, in order to solve his crisis he attempts to reconcile the two opposing parts of his identity.

Martin argues that *Bless Me, Última* 'demonstrates how landscape itself may induce a character to reconcile a fragmented identity' (131) as will be illustrated in the following subchapter.¹¹⁸

5.4.2.2 Between the *Llano* and the River Valley

As already referred to earlier in this thesis, Juan Bruce-Novoa has recognized the fact that Antonio's identity is not so much torn between Anglo and Mexican American heritage, 'but between two ways of being Chicano' (Juan Bruce-Novoa quoted in Burns, n.p.). In order to characterize the two conflicting ways of being Chicano Antonio inherited from his parents, Anaya uses two opposing landscapes: the *llano* and the river valley. As Martin observes

the Lunas, on the mother's side, are a farming family who live in the river valley; the Marézs, the father's family, are *vaqueros* who herd cattle on the plains [llano]. (Martin, 144)

While Antonio's father's side of the family is shaped by the nomadic tradition of the *vaqueros*, his mother's cultural background is tied to a civilized, settled tradition. Even in the protagonist's name, the elements of sea or ocean (Márez which derives from the Spanish word 'mar') as well as the qualities of the 'moon' (Luna which is Spanish for 'moon'¹¹⁹) hint at Antonio's dual heritage.¹²⁰

Throughout the entire novel, Antonio is caught between the seemingly irreconcilable dichotomy between his two families. Right at the beginning of *BMU*, the reader is let in on the source of Antonio's cultural split which comes to him in a dream about his own birth:

¹¹⁸ In particular, the passage quoted on page 93 of this thesis illustrates the importance of the landscape in the novel.

¹¹⁹ Cf. Jung, 160.

¹²⁰ Anaya in an interview with Johnson and Apodaca Anaya refers to two different cultural backgrounds represented in *BMU*:

'In *Bless Me Última* I happened to attribute the lifestyle of the jinete, the *vaqueros*, to the *llanero*, which are the Márezes who are tied to the restless sea, the ocean. And the lifestyle of the more passive, more settled Luna to the lifestyle that goes on along the river valley. The dichotomy of a nomadic versus a civilized, a settled people' (Anaya, 30).

This one will be a Luna, the old man said, he will be a farmer and keep our customs and traditions. Perhaps God will bless our family and make the baby a priest.[...] Then the silence was shattered with the thunder of hoofbeats [...] Gabriel, they shouted, you have a fine son! He will make a fine vaquero!. (*BMU*, 5-6)

Only little later, a heated discussion over the fate of the young offspring as well as over his afterbirth breaks out, which Última, Antonio's midwife, energetically brings to an end:

Cease! She cried, and the men were quiet. I pulled this baby into the light of life, so I will bury the afterbirth and the cord that once linked him to eternity. Only I will know his destiny. (*BMU*; 6)

The conflict of the two competing families continues to be one of the major struggles Antonio needs to settle. On the one hand, Antonio's father, Gabriel Maréz, who feels deeply attached to the *llano* (the plains), attempts to awake a sense of 'independent spirit' and 'racial wanderlust' (Martin, 144) in his son. As his three elder sons do not support his plans to move to California and work in the vineyards, Gabriel secretly hopes that at least his youngest offspring would follow him.

On the other hand, María Luna, who descends from hardy farmers, hopes for her remaining son to become a priest. While her husband's people are associated with the sun and the oceanlike plains, who live near Las Pasturas, Maria Lunas' clan is associated with the moon and its cycles of fertility and lives in a river valley in El Puerto.

However, in order to facilitate the breakup of binaries, Última, just like in the afterbirth scene, serves as a guiding medium for Antonio. In another dream Antonio observes a fight between his mother and his father who quarrel over his fate. Again, it is Última who reveals to Antonio the answer of how to incorporate the dichotomies of his life¹²¹, shouting

¹²¹ For a more detailed analysis of this dream sequence please see Carrasco, 209.

Cease [...] the sweet water of the moon which falls as rain is the same water that gathers into rivers and flows to fill the seas. Without the waters of the moon to replenish the oceans there would be no oceans. And the same salt waters of the oceans are drawn by the sun to the heavens, and in turn becomes again the waters of the moon. [...] The waters are one [...], you have been seeing only parts.
(*BMU*, 120 -121)

Thus, Antonio is allowed to see the interconnections of the river and the ocean and the moon and the sun. As soon as Antonio becomes aware of the linkage between his two heritages, he actively involves in the reconciliation of the river valley and the plains. Breaking down the binaries, he engages in 'the possibility of finding a third alternative that combines both of his heritages' (Martin, 146). Opening up a 'third space', finally being encouraged by his father to find an alternative way of life, he states: 'Then maybe I do not have to be just Márez, or Luna, perhaps I can be both' (*BMU*, 247).

Nonetheless, Antonio Márez's negotiation of his dual heritage, of components that 'seem incompatible if not mutually exclusive' (Caminero-Santangelo, 1) resemble Gloria Anzaldúa's description of her new mestizo identity:

The new mestizo copes by developing a tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguity. She learns to be an Indian in Mexican culture, to be Mexican from an Anglo point of view (*Borderlands*, 79).

Última, in all her magical presence, finally opens Antonio's eyes until he is able to see the holistic nature of the universe that lies way beyond dualities and dichotomies. Última continually encourages Antonio to look beyond binary oppositions, to incorporate dualities into a complete as well as whole vision.

5.5 The Fight between Evil and Good – Última as the Incarnation of a Reconciling Force

In the midst of all the difficult, seemingly irreconcilable conflicts Antonio needs to solve, the figure of Última 'acts as a symbol of balance between all of the oppositional forces in the text' (Burns, n.p.). Apart from the already mentioned religious and cultural dichotomies, Última teaches Antonio how to deal with the opposites between good and evil.

Again, landscape is effectively used in order to create an appropriate setting for the forces of both good and evil. While idealistic landscapes are typically characterized by sunlight, their demonic counterparts are described with storms and whirlwinds.¹²² After Lupito had shot the sheriff without any obvious reason, Antonio followed him to the place where Lupito is soon after shot by townsmen:

The dark shadows of the river enveloped me as I raced for the safety of home. Branches whipped at my face and cut it, and vines and tree trunks caught at my feet and tripped me. In headlong rush I disturbed sleeping birds and their shrill cries and slapping wings hit at my face. The horror of darkness had never been so complete as it was for me that night. (*BMU* , 22)

The mystic, self-contained world represented in *Bless Me, Última* forms the basis for the overall fight between good and evil powers. Hereby the figure of Última, at least in the eyes of Antonio, represents "the good", whereas Tenorio Trementina and his family serve as a powerful reincarnations of "the evil".¹²³

However, as Cárdenas-Dwyer points out, 'Anaya manages to avoid simplistic categories in the creation of the *curandera* as a morally good character' (152). Última herself encompasses elements of good and evil that guide her way. She is both called a saint but also a witch¹²⁴. In particular, her magic

¹²² Cf. Cantú, 35.

¹²³ Cf. Thelen-Schäfer, 95.

¹²⁴ Burns in his article points out that 'while she [Última] only uses her healing abilities for good, many in the community regard her as an evil witch' (n.p.).

power which enables her to exorcise demons and to lift curses actually derives from her own experiences with evil forces.

Nonetheless, the dichotomies she needs to face do not damage or bewilder her. Rather, the knowledge as well as understanding of evil forces improves her own ability to act in a good and healing way. As she recognizes the connection between good and evil and the necessity of both elements in human nature, she 'instructs Antonio to respect rather than to fear difference' (Kanoza, 165), because 'we fear evil only because we do not understand it' (*BMU*, 236).

Also, in terms of religious conflicting belief systems Última serves as a role model for Antonio. As she, on the one hand, is a devout Catholic, but on the other hand adores the sun, the wind and the plains, she 'acts as a mediating influence on the family and as a moderating influence in Tony's life' (Mitchell, 59).

Apart from a strong reliance on the natural spirit whenever she heals people and a strong belief in the golden carp, she prays to the Virgin of Guadalupe with Antonio's family as well as attends Sunday masses. Última, rather than drawing on the exclusiveness of either/ or possibilities, manages to 'integrate her heterogeneous beliefs' (Kanoza, 165).

When, at the end of the novel, Última is killed by her evil counterpart Tenorio, the reader still does not feel like the evil had won over the good. Rather, since Tenorio is also killed, the impression lasts that the fight between the evil and the good was finally ended.

6 *The Rain God* or a Family Holding its Past while Embracing its Future

If we trace Chicano literature's development still a little further, we finally reach *The Rain God*, written by Arturo Islas, published in 1984. Given the extreme complexity¹²⁵ of Arturo Islas's work, it seems a difficult task to present a cohesive analysis of its themes and in particular, its representation of resistance. Initially it needs to be mentioned that the complexity and diversity that constitute the novel, on a meta - textual level, mirror the complexity as well as the overtly ambiguous and contradictory elements inherent in the identities presented in the novel.

Furthermore, since the time when Oscar Zeta Acosta wrote, the meaning and expression of resistance had undergone profound changes. According to John García, the development was substantial as violence and activism slowly declined, whereas Chicanos/as more intensively tried to pressurize Anglo-American institutions in order to gain economic as well as political power.¹²⁶ In other words, instead of openly attacking Anglo American hegemony, Chicanos/as have started to opt for 'resistance from within', which has made patience and partial compromise key strategies in the struggle for their social as well as economic rise.

In addition, in order to increase the involvement of Chicanos/as in national policy, the narrow definition of Chicano/a identity promoted by *Chicano Movement* activists was partly remodeled. The definition of 'community'

¹²⁵ Román accounts for the thematic complexity of *The Rain God* when he writes: 'We hear of a grandmother who refuses to identify with an "Indian" past, of aunts who disdain the "illiterate riff-raff from across the river", of a mother who endures the humiliation of a cheating husband's affair with her best friend, of a father who attempts to assimilate in a white hegemonic power structure, of a cousin's surrender to drugs and addiction, and finally an uncle's hideous death at the hands of a gay-basher' (Román, 222).

¹²⁶ García writes in his article on *The Chicano Movement and its legacy for politics and policy*: 'The reliance on direct action, protest, and mass demonstrations has been less prevalent from the mid-1980s to the present. More extensive use of class-action litigation, conventional lobbying of elected officials, use of the mass media, community policy advocacy, and compromise and negotiation by Chicanos in legislative bodies have been more the mode of operation' (García, 102).

underwent a significant change, when in the 1980s 'community' no longer only included people of Mexican descent but also encompassed 'other Latino-origin groups (e.g. Cubans, Puerto Ricans, Central Americans)'. Strategically, the population base was increased and legitimated 'Chicanos as part of a larger, national minority group' (García, 101).

If we regress to Islas's novel, *The Rain God*, it is, just like Rudolfo Anaya's novel, not primarily concerned with the struggle between Anglo Americans and Chicanos. Instead, the novel focuses on three generations of a family that are caught in the tension-filled area that encompasses ethnic, sexual and bodily aspects. In strong resistance to essentialized binaries – be they Indian vs. Spanish, male vs. female, heterosexual vs. homosexual, disabled body vs. abled body – Islas emphasizes the importance of a detailed examination of the past of one's family or more precisely, an examination of one's roots.

While Villarreal's and Oscar Zeta Acosta's characters still very much focus on the question of what constitutes Chicano/a identity, Islas's characters are already able to rely on a clearly defined Chicano/a identity. Now, as it seems, Islas's task does not so much lie in the construction of a separate ethnic identity, but rather in looking beyond the border, of expanding the pre-fabricated ethnic identity provided by Movement activists. In particular, Arturo Islas adds the questions of gender and sexuality as well as the issue of physical impairment to Chicano/a identity construction. Thus, according to Ortiz, the protagonist of *The Rain God*, Miguel Chico struggles to 'reconcile the cultural and other conflicts arising from the gay, [disabled] and Chicano dimensions of his identity' (33).

Islas openly criticizes the competition of dominant ideology in Chicano society which leaves only little space for diversity and divergence. However, despite his focus on his own family characters, I do not support Sánchez's statement that the Angel family 'are strong proponents' of American hegemony, 'consenting to their own subordination' because 'their relation to

the dominant class in society is never analyzed or questioned' (Sánchez Rosaura, 123).

In fact, Islas's criticism of Anglo American society is, just as it was the tendency at the time the book was written, much more indirect, but it is definitely there. With beautifully crafted universal overtones, he exposes both U.S. American and Mexican American tendencies to homogenize differences, to punish transgression from the norm by constant marginalization. In particular, as Torres pointed out

Islas has developed his craft to critique patriarchal paradigms governing issues of masculinity, sexuality, race, and class, at the U.S. – Mexico border, but also in the Anglo American nation. (Torres, 56)

Before I will continue with an analysis of the three major issues of the novel, ethnicity, sexuality and disability, I will provide Islas's biography as well as a short section on his personal role in the slow but substantial change of the curricula at Stanford University, which serves as a proto-typical example of what I label as 'resistance from within'.

6.1 Life and Death of Arturo Islas

6.1.1 Biography of Arturo Islas

Arturo Islas was born on May 24, 1938 to his parents of Mexican descent in El Paso, a border town in Texas. Although Spanish was his first language¹²⁷, he was educated in English. He also learned *caló*, a 'hybrid Spanish/ English slang' from his father. Due to his fairly light skin condition as well as his fluency in both English and Spanish, he 'was accepted into the Mexican American' (Aldama, 132) as well as into the Anglo American collective at school.

¹²⁷ Cf. Román, 220.

Already in El Paso High School his outstanding intelligence and effort finally granted him a scholarship to study at Stanford University.¹²⁸ Islas received his B.A. in 1960 and due to his graduation with distinction he received another scholarship in order to complete his Master Studies.

After having received his M.A. in 1963 he took some time off, and accepted teaching jobs at a local hospital and an adult school in San Francisco. However, he finally returned to his alma mater in 1967 in order to write his dissertation. Despite his coming down with intestinal cancer, Islas, nonetheless, finally earned his Ph.D. in English in 1971.

In the same year, he was employed as an assistant professor at Stanford and 'was granted a full professorship of American and Chicano literatures in 1986' (*Contemporary Authors Online*, 2). Apart from his work as a professor, who, as will be explored in the following subchapter, introduced Chicano literature to Stanford, Arturo Islas is the author of three creative works: *The Rain God* (1984), *Migrant Souls* (1990), *La Mollie and the King of Tears* (1996). Arturo Islas died in 1991 in Stanford of 'complications due to AIDS' (Román, 220).

As far as his attitude towards Chicano cultural identity is concerned, Islas was aware of the dangerous effects of nationalism¹²⁹, Islas's description of cultural identity rose above labels and categories and focused on the diversity, complexity and constant development of cultures. In an interview with Hector Torres, he used a beautiful image in order to describe his attitude towards Chicano cultural identity:

¹²⁸ Cf. Cantú, 147.

¹²⁹ 'In his correspondence with a friend in Spain in 1976, Islas noted of his ethnic identity, 'I am not, as you know, a nationalist. Chicano does not conjure up rifles and slogan shouting and sentimentality about 'The People' for me' (Cutler, 21). Furthermore, in another interview with Hector Torres he concretizes his thoughts: 'As a writer myself I don't even like to think in terms of nationalism or traditions because all of that seems ridiculous to me' (67).

It's just like a cut crystal with lots of different facets. It's the same crystal, but you get lots of different lights shining on it, and that's how it is. A culture that is static is dead. (Torres, 66)

6.1.2 The Reformation of the Anglo American Educational System

As soon as Islas started to work as an assistant professor at Stanford University, he strove to trigger a reformation of 'students' scholarly interests, identity and imagination' (Aldama, 146). However, in clear contrast to the Blowouts of the *Chicano Movement* era, Islas followed his aims in a more careful and strategic way. He was aware of the fact that to bully the powerful portion at Stanford University would necessarily lead to immediate counter-reactions instead of showing the desired effects.

Thus, as Aldama pointed out, 'Islas learned quickly that he would have to use the master's tools to rebuild – gradually – the master's house' (138). Slowly, with increasing prominence, he introduced 'non-Western views of humanity' (Los Angeles alumni lecture quoted in Aldama, 138) in his lectures about Western views of humanity, always emphasizing the points of intersection of both.

Slowly gaining the support of the department and administration, he instigated the introduction of Chicano/a literature courses at Standford. At the same time, the incorporation of Chicano/a literature into the curriculum, without directing his lectures exclusively to students of Mexican descent, led to an immense popularity of his lectures among students.

Especially since he was granted a full professorship at Stanford University, he more openly demanded a change of the curricular up to a point where his success triggered reactionary sentiments of Anglo students.¹³⁰ However, through Islas's strategic and effective tactic of gaining the ear of the powerful

¹³⁰ Cf. Aldama, 143.

portion of Stanford and his subsequent bending of curricular expectations, much was changed in favor of “minority” literature.

Building his strategy of reform rather on the creation of consent with those in power than on open resistance, Islas became a proto-typical example of what I call 'resistance from within'. Also, in order to attract Anglo Americans as well as Asian, African Americans, etc. Islas always, as Aldama sums up,

[...] taught American literature as multiculturally inclusive, lecturing on both canonical and noncanonical authors within the same analytical frame, with the goal of reshaping the students' imaginative expectation. (Aldama, 154)

This strategy to circumvent the postulations of his superiors also functioned with New York Presses as will be illustrated in the following sequence.

6.2 Anglo American Publishing Industry – About Prevailing Ideology and Resistance against it

Arturo Islas's novel *The Rain God* has been largely reviewed (by literary critics such as by David Saldívar, Antonio Márquez, and Marta E. Sánchez) as a key work of Chicano literature as it served to 'reshape the American and Chicano literary canons' (Cutler, 17). Though lesbian women of Mexican descent, for instance, Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherríe Moraga, had contributed largely to the originally male-dominated Chicano literary production, *The Rain God* was one of the first novels that focused attention to the **male**, homosexual experience of Chicano characters.

However, as already pointed out in chapter 2.2. on *Chicano Literature*, Arturo Islas's novel *The Rain God* is often completely excluded from Chicano/a literature anthologies. The most plausible reasons for this fact are his homosexual characters as well as his lack of emphasis on ethnicity.

In fact, it is frequently suggested that *The Rain God's* protagonist, Miguel Chico, is homosexual, although no direct reference to his sexual orientation is given in the novel. Also, Islas introduced the character of Miguel Chico's uncle Felix who constantly tried to seduce young soldiers and finally died at the hands of a gay-basher.

However, homosexuality is not the only theme that did not correspond with publisher's expectations about ethnic literature. Apart from Miguel Chico's latent homosexuality, the protagonist is further marginalized by his disabled body. As his father, the policeman Miguel Grande, ignores signs of polio, young Miguel Chico is left with a limp ever after. Also, he nearly dies because of intestinal problems and has to live with a colostomy bag at his side.

Nonetheless, the ethnic component plays an important role in the novel as well. Especially the matriarchal figure, Mama Chona, shapes the family's attitude towards ethnicity. As Román sums up:

We [also] hear of a grandmother [Mama Chona] who refuses to identify with an "Indian" past, of aunts who disdain the "illiterate riff-raff from across the river", of a mother who endures the humiliation of a cheating husband's affair with her best friend, of a father [Miguel Grande] who attempts to assimilate in a white hegemonic power structure. (Román, 222)

However, before proceeding with a closer analysis of the novel itself, I decided to further elaborate on the publisher's normative tendencies, as I consider this aspect of a Chicano writer's life as highly interesting. Nonetheless, it seems of equal importance, to emphasize Islas's circumvention of linguistic postulations of the publishers, which ties in with the notion of 'resistance from within'.

6.2.1 Publishers' Ideas of Ethnic American Literature

When Arturo Islas finished his work *The Rain God*, originally containing the bilingual title *Día de los muertos*¹³¹ / *Day of the Dead* in 1976, he had to face one of the major problems many Chicano/a writers have to face: how to get a major publishing press to publish the novel.

Largely ignoring 'the complex literary and cross-cultural influences from both North America and Latin America that shape' (Saldívar José David, 106) Islas's writing, publishers primarily focused on his Chicano background. They ignored the novel's universal overtone and argued that *The Rain God* would only be read by a small number of Chicanos/as.¹³²

Another reason editors refused to publish *The Rain God* was, as pointed out earlier, his lack of focus on ethnicity. They argued that the work 'did not indulge in determinism, survival, the immigrant experience, and violence as [for example] Villarreal's text did' (Saldívar, 111-112).

Furthermore, in the same line of reasoning, publishers in New York rejected Islas's work because, in their point of view, it lacked 'believable ethnic characters' (Román, 224). Indeed, Islas's Chicano/a characters do not easily lend themselves to already established stereotypical interpretations. Rather than indulging in a pre-fabricated representation of static cultural characters such as *the vaquero* or *ángel del hogar*, he presents the complexity and diversity among Mexican American identities.

Also, Islas's introduction of the theme of male homosexuality into Chicano literature could not be easily combined with ideas about 'marketable stereotypical "ethnic themes"' (Román, 224). To build a mental connection of

¹³¹ According to Allatson, 'the folk tradition of *El Día de los Muertos* has been a constant presence in Chicano/a cultural production, and it has also been the target of resemanticization. Among gay Chicano/as, for example, the practice of building *ofrendas* [offerings to the soul] became an important mode for ritualized mourning during the AIDS epidemic in the 1980s and 1990s' (95).

¹³² Cf. Saldívar, 108.

a typically patriarchal, macho society that traditionally worked only in favor of heterosexual males and the homosexual characters in *The Rain God*, was a difficult task for many publishers.

It took another eight years until 1984 *The Rain God* was finally printed by Alexandrian Press. However, the publication did not come without sacrifices. Islas was forced to change the original title *The Day of the Dead* as 'his publisher told him that if you have the word *dead* in a book title no one will buy it' (García Mario, 175). More importantly, in order to make the novel accessible for a monolingual Anglophone or Chicano readership, Islas had to translate many of the Spanish expressions he had originally used.

6.2.2 The Circumvention of Restrictions – Increasing the Understanding of a Bilingual Experience

However, as will be illustrated in the following section, Islas, just like when he strategically reformed the curricula at Stanford University, circumvents the postulations of those in power (this time the publishers) and uses certain narrative techniques and linguistic devices in order to 'bring monolingual readers closer to understanding a bilingual experience' (Sánchez Marta, 300).

For the very purpose of increasing the sense of difference, Islas constantly disorients and challenges monolingual as well as bilingual readers' conceptions of their cultural categories. For instance, on the one hand, when he writes about his convalescence in hospital after his operation that left him with a colostomy bag, he refers to an Anglo American nurse, who mispronounces his name, uttering: "Mee-gwell", sang the nurse, 'wake up, Meegwell' (*The Rain God*, 8).

On the other hand, Islas mentions Spanish speaking characters who mispronounce words like "Jitterbug", which becomes "Yitty-bog" (*The Rain God*, 16) and "joke" which is pronounced as "yoke". Especially the former example will encourage monolingual readers 'to wonder about the desirability

of being like this nurse who does not know she is mispronouncing a proper name.' (Sánchez Marta, 301).

Besides, he makes implicit comments on the impossibility of providing precise translations of certain Spanish words into English: 'Miguel Chico's aunts Jesus Maria and Eduviges left notes for the 'domestics' (the Spanish word *criadas* is harsher)' (*The Rain God*,15) . Thus, Islas apologizes for the use of the English word 'domestics' while he knows that the Spanish word *criadas* captures better '[...] Miguel Chico's family's attitude toward "the illiterate riff raff" from across the river' (*The Rain God* ,15), but he refuses to use it because it is too "harsh".

At the same time, there are a few words in the novel that Islas deliberately refuses to translate because they carry culturally specific connotations which would be lost by a simple translation. Thus, he does not translate *la familia* into the English word *family* as he longs for a better understanding of the 'resonances of this word, the different attitudes toward life, death and history that it conveys to Chicanos and Chicanas' (Sánchez Marta, 301).

Another interesting passage, which could be said to be openly directed to the bilingual as much as to the monolingual readership, is the following dialogue between Nina and Juanita, who loves reading Southern belle romances:

"Why don't they write about us?" Nina exclaims. "Who wants to read about Mexicans?" retorts Juanita. "We're not glamorous enough. We just live." (*The Rain God*, 41)

The irony of the passage is apparent: As non-Chicanos, at the very moment of reading this novel, read about a novel with Mexican American background, the notion that 'no one reads about 'Mexicans' cannot be true. Indirectly Islas criticizes both Juanita's 'blindness to her own cultural difference' and Nina's 'resistance to reading about cultures other than her own' (Sánchez Marta, 303). What Islas proposes is an ideal reader who exhibits a fusion of both Nina's and Juanita's attitudes towards literature.

Furthermore, at one point in his second novel *Migrant Souls*, he explicitly turns against those readers and publishers who opt for 'celebrations of traditional culture or conventional affirmations of ethnicity' (Márquez, 7): 'The dumb sociologists want only positive images, whatever they are, from fiction writers. As if the whole world, especially their own little one, were one big happy collection of ethnic groups' (*Migrant Souls*, 211).

Therefore, as Marta Sánchez puts it,

Islas has gone out of his way to make his novel accessible to an Anglophonic audience, although by no means so accessible that he neither challenges them nor preserves ethnic characteristics. His text reveals and discloses but also withholds, refusing to speak fully. (Sánchez, 303)

6.3 Fictionalizing/Reconstructing a Family's Past in The Rain God

One of the major themes dealt with in *The Rain God* revolves around the questions of how to struggle with a family's moral code as well as with a family's history. In particular, the novel focuses on the generational conflict that involves three generations of the Angel family. While the matriarch Mama Chona serves as the main representative of the first generation, second and third generations are divided between 'sinners' and 'angels' and their specific roles within the family's structure.

The novel especially draws deeper on Miguel Chico's experience and struggle to position himself within his family by rewriting his family's history. As Rice aptly noted,

Miguel Chico finds himself doubly marginalized, both as Mexican American in the white-dominated world of the U.S. and as sinner among the Angels as he fights the ultra-moral mythology of his family with his actual experience as Angels in the real world. (Rice, 170)

Miguel Chico is the one who reveals that his grandmother's account of the family's history is highly fictionalized, appropriated to Mama Chona's morally exclusive ideology and attitude.

6.3.1 Mama Chona's Fictionalized Version of her Family's Past

To start with, one of the generational conflicts that separates the Angel family originates from Mama Chona's 'favor of the Spanish in the Angels blood' which was 'a constant puzzlement to most of the grandchildren' (*The Rain God*, 142). Believing devoutly that her descendants were 'elevated into civilization for all time' (*Migrant Souls*, 8) due to her marriage to her "Castilian" husband, she constantly taught other family members

[...] that only the Spanish side of their heritage was worth honoring and preserving: the Indian in them was pagan, servile, instinctive rather than intellectual, and was to be suppressed, its existence denied. (*The Rain God*, 142)

Ironically, she goes so far as to completely ignore the significance of her real name 'Encarnacion Olmeca de Angel', which, translated into English, means 'angelic incarnation of the Olmec' (López, 54). Thus, her name clearly points to her connection to the Olmecs, a Mesoamerican Indian culture. In other words, despite her own definition of her ethnic identity, Mama Chona is a classic *mestiza*, a hybrid of both Indian as well as Spanish blood.

In her rigid denial of her native roots, she superimposes 'a cultural self-contradiction' (López, 54) on the entire family. Even when her son Felix opposes her views and marries a woman of Indian descent, she does not restrain to express her racist thoughts:

She said she did not understand how Angie had even gotten through school. Obviously she belonged to that loathsome group of Indians who were herded through the system, taught to add at least since they refused to learn any language properly, and then let loose among decent people who must put up with their ignorance. (*The Rain God*, 128).

Basing her understanding of ethnicity on the notion that dark-skinned, poor people are automatically Indians and therefore not worthy of any civil treatment, she is 'part of Spanish conquistador snobbery that refused to associate itself with anything Mexican or Indian because it was somehow impure' (*The Rain God*, 27).

In a similar manner, Mama Chona manages to ignore her former weak socio-economic status and 'subscribes to the most snobbish attitudes of the Mexican upper class' (López, 56). Her class snobbery makes her feel superior to other people of Mexican descent, in particular to her children's housemaids.

She openly opposes her children's choice of Miguel Chico's nursemaid, whom Mama Chona simply calls *la India*, as referred to in the following passage:

Mama Chona did not approve of any of the Mexican women her sons and daughters hired to care for her grandchildren; these women were ill educated and very bad influences, particularly when allowed to spend too much time with her favorites. (*The Rain God*, 14)

6.3.2 Miguel Chico's Reconstructed Version of his Family's Past

Right at the beginning of *The Rain God*, through the introduction of a very simple but beautiful image, Islas points to the difficult question of how to incorporate one's past, a past that has a direct influence on the present, into one's life. In other words, the question repeatedly reoccurs how to stay true to one's cultural roots without becoming static. It seems to be one of the major issues in the lives of bi-cultural people to find a balance between a flexible identity that is not prone to some kind of rootlessness and vice versa, to be aware of one's roots without rejecting new ways of living.

The close relationship between past and present can best be illustrated by Islas's initial scene in the *Rain God*. Miguel Angel is sitting in his office in San Francisco, looking at a photograph that 'hovers above his head on the study wall beside the glass doors that open out into the garden' (*The Rain God*, 3). The picture shows himself as a young child walking down a busy street, clinging to his grandmother's hand.

Islas points out that the photograph

was taken in the early years of World War II by an old Mexican photographer who wandered up and down the border town's main street on the American side. [...] In the middle of the street life around them, they are looking straight ahead, intensely preoccupied, almost worried. They seem in a great hurry. Each has a foot off the ground. [...] The camera has captured them in a flight from this world to the next. (*The Rain God*, 3)

Thus, the distant past that 'hovers' over his head invades Miguel Chico's present (his writing table and garden), setting the stage 'for the cultural negotiations of time and place' (Skenazy, 198) presented in *The Rain God*.

Miguel Chico's and his grandmothers' mutual moment of crossing the border, might enable them to look both forward and back, to move into and out of the territories of childhood and adulthood that are synonymous not only with episodes of their lives, but with distinct languages, cultures, countries. (Skenazy, 199)

However, though Miguel Chico is aware of the fact that the embracing of one's cultural roots is of immediate importance, he is unable to identify with Mama Chona's purified version of the family's history and tradition. Thus, he distances himself from 'the oppressive and hypocritical elements of his life in *'la familia'*, just to find out that this rejection of his past leaves him estranged from 'his family and society and in danger of having no stable ethnic identification at all' (Rice, 176). Thus, the only option that is left to Miguel Chico is to confront himself with 'the burden of history' (Rice, 174) he carries. Hereby, his almost fatal illness as well as a dream of the monster of his family's past will guide his way to the reconciliation of his fragmented identity.

The images of his dream of the monster of the past are poignant and clear. Miguel Chico is confronted with the monster of the past, in particular the repressed past of his family, the past of the family that revolves around the binaries of manipulator vs. manipulated, slayer vs. victim, judge vs. advocate.

As the monster possesses and embraces him, Miguel Chico embraces it in return, knowing that 'he must accept the contradictions inherent in his ethnicity if he is ever to make sense of his identity or his family's story' (Rice, 182). Together they 'fall through the fog and plunge into the sea' which represents 'Mickie's decision to break the silence' (Rice, 182).

In order to work out the tensions within his own fragmented identity, Miguel Chico sets out to rewrite his family's history, to deconstruct the binary construction of 'Sinners' vs. 'Angels', so long perpetuated through Mama Chona's influence. As a transformative figure in the novel, Miguel Chico realizes that only a reconnection of the family to its repressed and denied past can save it.¹³³ As Rice sums up, Miguel Chico 'is at last able to see the meaning of "la familia" as a process of embracing the disparate parts of his family equally' (182).

6.4 The Body as a Site of External / Internal Resistance against Dominant Meanings – Intersections of Ethnicity, Sexuality and Disability in The Rain God

The burden of Mama Chona's version of the family's history does not only refuse to acknowledge the *mestizo* character of the family but also condemns any deviation from patriarchal norms. Through Miguel Chico's reconstruction of the family's history, he functions as a mouthpiece for difference, for the unconscious and repressed elements in his family's past.

As Rice eloquently resumes:

Miguel Chico's physical survival as a human dependent upon a mechanism creates for him a primary symbol of hybridity and otherness beyond simple categories of Chicano, Angel, and physical man. Because of this intense otherness, his desire to "water" himself is the impossible wish to generate an identity from himself and for himself (Rice, 177).

¹³³ Cf. Rice, 184.

For the very purpose of illustrating the intersection of ethnicity, sexuality and disability, Islas frequently uses the body as a site of external and internal resistance against dominant meanings. Due to Miguel Chico's disabled, homosexual, Chicano identity, his experience is not only marked by marginalization by his own family but also by Anglo American society. Through the recovering of the history of the 'sinners' of the Angel's family, he, however, finally manages to reconcile his fragmented, marginalized identity.

6.4.1 The Body and Ethnicity

The same way Mama Chona ignores the meaning of her real name, she denies 'physical manifestations of the indigenous on her own body' (Neate, 234). Miguel Chico realizes the contradictions of Mama Chona's Spanish snobbery and her outward experience, wondering:

What did she see when she looked in the mirror? As much as she protected herself from it, the sun still darkened her complexion and no surgery could efface the Indian cheekbones, those small very dark eyes and aquiline nose. (*The Rain God*, 27)

Miguel Chico's body serves a similar pattern as far as ethnic belonging is concerned. While both his colostomy bag as well as his limp are expressions of his difference which are undeniable, his body, through its connection to a cleansing ritual, reconnects Miguel Chico to his Indian past. Brilliantly, Islas 'links the changing of the colostomy bag with the cleansing ritual of the native peoples of central and northern Mexico' (Perkins, n.p.).

Indigenous Mexicans strongly believed that alien objects inserted into the body were the sources of illnesses. These illnesses were said to be caused by hidden evil forces which, through the implantation of the foreign object, invaded the body. Thus, the changing of the bag becomes equal to an extraction of the evil. As Perkins observes, '[e]ach time [Miguel Chico] extracts the physical object of waste from his body, he also attempts to remove the "evils" from his mind' (n.p.).

6.4.2 The Body and Sexuality

Apart from the representation of the body as a reminder of ethnic belonging, Islas uses the symbolism of the body to articulate the contradictions brown people are confronted with 'when up against dominant prescriptions of sexuality' (Román, 221). In particular, Islas introduces the theme of male homosexuality to Chicano literature. Hereby, he criticizes the way Chicano culture is prone to the perpetuation of patriarchal, typically homophobic, structures which do not allow for difference.

6.4.2.1 Marginalized Characters – Representation of Homosexuality in *The Rain God*

First of all, it seems crucial to emphasize that Miguel Chico's homosexuality is never explicitly mentioned, though hinted at in passages such as 'because he was still not married and seldom visited them in the desert, they suspected that he, too, belonged on the list of sinners' or 'whenever younger cousins asked him why he had not married' he would self-consciously answer: "Well, I had this operation," stop there, and let them guess at the rest" (*The Rain God*, 5).

Apart from his family's classification of homosexuals as 'sinners', the family's way to deal with Miguel Chico's uncle Felix homosexuality and his related death strengthens Miguel Chico's decision to keep his own homosexuality in the shadows. What Miguel Chico experiences is a family that is guided by strong machos as well as an Anglo American system that reacts with 'apathy [...] toward crimes committed against homosexuals' (Cantú, 150), as will be further elaborated on in the following section.

Felix is referred to as an honorable member of El Paso's society, a policeman who is married with children. However, as the reader is soon informed, his actual interests are focused on young soldiers, whom he loves to seduce. Though rumors are spread about his homosexual tendencies,

both his family and other members of society deliberately uphold his picture of a loving family man.

One evening, when he, once again, tries to seduce one of the young soldiers he happens to be fond of, he is brutally murdered by the young adolescent. As Cutler points out, 'his murder redefines the marginalized ethnic and sexual body as always mediated by horrific trauma' (Cutler, 13). However, instead of overtly revolting against the homophobic act that caused Felix's death, the whole family camouflages "the issue": "The family," as usual – more concerned with its pride than with justice – had begun to lie about the truth' (*The Rain God*, 85). Especially, Miguel Grande, a stereotypical *macho* figure, refrains from telling the truth, as he is afraid that 'such a story would have some effect on his chances for chief' (*The Rain God*, 80) of the police department.

In fact, even the Anglo American legal system collaborates in the deed of camouflage. Instead of appropriately punishing the perpetrator, they argue that 'the young soldier had acted in self-defense and understandably' (*The Rain God*, 182). The way Felix's dead body is described immediately counters such an argument of 'self-defense'. Even if the "victim" had acted in self-defense, it would not have been necessary to completely destroy his face and to cut off one of his testicles. Furthermore, due to this "incident", the police department denies Miguel Grande the position of chief, revealing Anglo American society's homophobic tendencies.

Feeling the strong refusal of both Anglo American society as well as his family's inability to acknowledge homosexuality, most explicitly expressed by Miguel Grande's reaction to his brother's death, Miguel Chico feels vulnerable to rejection. In fact, homosexuality is largely viewed as a betrayal to manliness, established as a key characteristic of male Mexican American identity. As Octavio Paz has famously stated, one of the inherent qualities of Mexican American identity is the 'ideal of the manliness' which 'is never to crack, never to back down' (Paz, 29).

It is not until the very end of the novel, tying in with Miguel Chico's end of his narrative, that the burden of history will be elevated from his shoulders when Miguel Chico learns how to reconcile his own homosexual identity. As Cutler correctly observes, 'Felix's body works as a surrogate¹³⁴ for Miguel Chico's own queer, diseased body' (Cutler, 15).

At the beginning of the novel, Miguel Chico interprets his grandmother's dying words 'la familia' as an 'attempt to bring him back into the fold' (*The Rain God*, 5) as far as his sexual orientation is concerned. The same utterance adopts a quite different meaning at the close of the novel. In contrast to the first scene, the last scene is accompanied by a beautiful image of Felix walking towards his mother 'out of the shadows'. He picks his mother up and takes her in his arms, smelling 'like the desert after a rainstorm' (*The Rain God*, 180).

Felix comes back as the incarnation of Tlaloc, which also serves as a reminder of the family's connection to an ancient Indian culture. In fact, as López points out,

With the soothing raindrops of death, the rain-god renews the parched existence of life, and in the process, the human spirit is quenched, nature is cleansed, and life is reconciled all over again (López, 46).

Providing a powerful image of the reconciliation of the Angel's family, *la familia* 'resonates differently, as unconditional love and acceptance coincide with Felix's reappearance as the Rain God' (Cutler, 15). Thus, Miguel Chico, after having reconciled the family's past through his writing process, is finally able to see that Mama Chona's dying words *la familia* could also be interpreted as an expression of the importance of the family's unity. Such familial ties are ties to the past and the present, which need to be embraced mutually in order to live a harmonized as well as rooted life.

¹³⁴ Cutler defines 'surrogation' as 'a process of substitution in which communities attempt to fill "actual or perceived vacancies [that] occur in the network of relations that constitute the social fabric' (15).

6.4.2.2 Abandoning Sexuality – Mama Chona

As already pointed out in chapter 6.4.1. on the relation between body and ethnicity, Mama Chona does not want to be reminded of her Indian descent inscribed on her body. In a very similar way, she 'does not want to be reminded of the necessary filial relationship her body has produced in childbearing' (Cutler, 25). Having been raised by devoted Catholic nuns in Mexico, her attitude towards sexuality is highly influenced by Catholic ideals. Actually denying 'all parts of the body below the neck', (*The Rain God*, 164) she adopts the Catholic premise that the mind is closer to God, while the body is strongly connected to sins. As Anzaldúa eloquently describes the interconnection of mind and body in the Catholic and Protestant belief system:

The Catholic and Protestant religions encourage a split between the mind and body. They encourage us to kill off parts of ourselves. We are taught that the body is an ignorant animal; intelligence dwells only in the head. (Anzaldúa, 59)

When Miguel Chico awakens in hospital after his almost fatal surgery, the narrator refers to above mentioned split between the mind and the body, proposed by both Catholic and Protestant religions:

Without his pain, he would have possessed for the first time in his life that consciousness his grandmother and the Catholic church he had renounced had taught him was the highest form of existence: pure, bodiless intellect. No shit, no piss, no blood – a perfect astronaut. (*The Rain God*, 8)

Thus, Mama Chona's internalized hierarchy of mind and body is reflected in the way she regards her role as a mother as well as a wife. Viewing marriage as 'a handicap and burden' she 'bore her children out of duty to her husband and the Church' (*The Rain God*, 164). Besides, she plays out her role of a matriarch when teaching her granddaughters that they are inferior simply because they happen to be female: "It's more difficult for girls to be like angels because they are born wicked in a different way from boys." [...] "[That] has something to do with down there" (*Migrant Souls*, 14).

Towards the end of the novel, as soon as Mama Chona noticed 'that something unnatural was coming out of her womb' (*The Rain God*, 174), she decided to ignore it and in her confused state of mind scolded her dead husband for producing 'another worthless creature' (*The Rain God*, 174). When she is forced to see a doctor because her uterus falls out, she 'is glad that it showed no signs of life'. Indeed, she does not understand why 'everyone else was making such a fuss over it' (*The Rain God*, 177). In fact, she once again reveals her attitude, thinking: 'One should ignore those parts of the body anyway. Filthy children, all they ever thought about was the body' (*The Rain God*, 177).

6.4.3 The Body and Disability

When Arturo Islas was asked about his sexual orientation in an interview, he openly speaks about his relationship to his own body:

Why can't I regard sex casually? Why can't I see it for what it is? It has to do with my *physical condition*, with feeling rejected and humiliated because of my limp and my bag, though in *fact*, no one has rejected me for those reasons. Still, I feel the constant spectre of rejection there everywhere, always worrying about the moment of explanation when I'm finally, completely naked. (quoted in Cutler, 8)

As indicated in the above given statement, Islas holds the 'physical condition' of his body, or to be more precise, the physically impaired status of his body, responsible for his feelings of insecurity before sexual encounters. In a very similar way, 'Miguel Chico displaces his discomfort with his sexuality onto his disability' (Cutler, 12). However, as becomes obvious when reading *The Rain God*, the different components that make up Miguel Chico's identity all influence each other, up to a point where it seems impossible to clearly define the source of his crisis.

Breaking and transgressing the traditional boundaries of sexuality, ethnicity and 'bodily norms', Miguel Chico experiences the hard way that 'Chicano culture has no tolerance for deviance' (Perkins, n.p.). In particular, as Anzaldúa further explains, deviant Chicano bodies are generally viewed as

'other and therefore lesser [...] sub-human, in-human, non-human' (40). In other words, as Rosemarie Garland Thomson points out, disability is 'not so much a property of bodies as a product of cultural rules about what bodies should be or do' (6).

As mentioned before, Islas established a complex relationship of ethnic, bodily and sexual concerns in order to account for Miguel's inner struggle against dominant meanings. As far as the intersection between ethnicity and disability is concerned, it seems of immediate importance to mention, again, the connection between body and mind as described in the previous chapter on Mama Chona's abandoned sexuality.

Despite the fact that Miguel Chico rejects his grandmother's conquistador snobbery, he internalized her notion of superiority of the intellect over the body. By unconsciously privileging the Spanish side of Chicano culture, he gives way to their tradition of interpreting deviant bodies as deprived, whereas he totally ignores the way ancient Mesoamerican cultures usually dealt with disabled bodies.¹³⁵

In fact, as Perkins points out,

The European side of Chicano culture demonized othered bodies, upholding the tradition of reading the physically impaired individual as marked and sinful. Outward impairment was a way of signifying depravity.(n.p.)

Mesoamerican cultures, usually interpreted physical differences in quite the contrary way. They viewed disability as a sign of uniqueness and attributed great power to the person that had subdued enormous physical suffering. Frequently physically challenged people functioned as healers or shamans for the rest of the community.¹³⁶

¹³⁵ Cf. Perkins.

¹³⁶ Cf. Perkins.

Although having internalized 'traditional perceptions of the body' (Perkins, n.p.), Miguel Chico, at times, longs for a stronger connection to his body. Especially when he is in pain, he 'long[s] to escape from the drugged and *disembodied* twilight in which he had lived for weeks' (*The Rain God*, 6) [emphasis mine]. However, the task to accept his bodily deviance is further complicated by his cultures' perception of disability and manliness. It is especially Miguel Grande, who, due to his strong belief in Mexican *macho* tradition, increases his son's feelings of shame and insecurity. Sadly ironically, Miguel Grande is the one who refuses to call the doctor when Miguel suffers from polio, as he opts to make 'a man of the adolescent boy' (*The Rain God*, 95). Due to his father's pride and neglect, Miguel 'would have a slight limp for the rest of his life' (*The Rain God*, 95).

Like a stereo-typical macho Chicano male, Miguel Grande consistently denies disability, and the narrator explicitly acknowledges this fact by informing readers that Grande 'was never sick and he ignored the illnesses of others' (*The Rain God*, 69). Grande not only ignored Mickie's first complaints of symptoms, but actually refused to let him seek medical attention, despite the fact that 'many children were dying of polio at the time' (*The Rain God*, 94).

Himself an archetype of a traditional Mexican American patriarch, Miguel Grande 'is obstinate and emotionally distant as well as exhibits great physical prowess' (Perkins, n.p.). Instead of having learned from his mistake that led to Miguel Chico's physical handicap, Miguel Grande constantly ignores his son's illnesses while he instigates a feeling of shame in his son for his physical otherness. In one scene, Miguel Grande deliberately smokes next to his son, although he knows that the smell of the cigarette makes him feel dizzy. In turn, the son tries to hide his weakness and waits until he is allowed to go to the toilet in order to vomit. In the same passage, Miguel hides from his father that he 'has blood in his stool' (*The Rain God*, 68-69).

Although 'it pained him [Miguel Grande] to see his son walk', he is still determined to make 'a man of the adolescent boy' (*The Rain God*, 96). Trying to minimize his son's physical impairment, Miguel Grande asks Mickie's friends at school 'to engage him in fistfights so that he might learn to defend himself'. Besides, he enrolls him in swimming classes, instructing the teacher 'to be harder on him than on the other boys of his age' (*The Rain God*, 96).

In his endeavor to make a hyper-masculine, traditional Mexican *macho* out of his son, Miguel Grande ignores both his son's physical deviance as well as his homosexual orientation. Thus, as Miguel Grande could never serve as a role model for him, his mother and grandmother became major figures of identification.¹³⁷

All in all, it seems legitimate to argue that Islas's novel *The Rain God* presents a resentment 'against the patriarchy as constituted in traditional Western society, with its gender roles, power relations and values' (Sánchez Rosaura, 120). However, Islas leaves the reader with a glimpse of hope, as, towards the end of the novel

La familia [...] learns to love its sinners after all, and a sinner [...] learns to love his *familia* in return. Difference no longer removes bodies from the norm; instead, it becomes the very grounds of relation. We may not understand much better than before what the body *is*, but we do catch a glimpse of what the body can *do*: touch and be touched. (Cutler, 28)

¹³⁷ Cf. Perkins, n.p.

7 Conclusion

Despite obvious similarities such as their author's cultural heritage, all four novels under consideration involve the portrayal of marginalized, fragmented identities. In other words, all four novels represent Chicano cultural identity construction as a process that is intrinsically bound to perpetual attempts to redefine boundaries.

However, the four literary works, due to their historical distance, vary significantly as far as the solutions they propose for such a redefinition of margins and centers are concerned. The first novel under consideration *Pocho* by José Antonio Villarreal is most clearly connected to the 1940s and 50s, a time when cultural assimilation, though depicted in a negative way, served as the ultimate model for a successful reconciliation of the cultural clash between Mexican and U.S. Americans.

Although supporting the prevailing concept of the 'Melting Pot Theory', Villarreal also reveals that even if total assimilation to Anglo American hegemony is desperately wanted, complete "melting" frequently remains denied. As illustrated in my analysis of the different places and spaces of assimilation presented in Villarreal's novel, I concluded that assimilation necessarily ends where racism and discrimination start.

Whereas Villarreal's novel *Pocho* is firmly rooted in the assimilationist phase of U.S. American history, Oscar Zeta Acosta's novel *The Revolt of the Cockroach People* depicts a time of social upheavals and tumults. In fact, the (seemingly) stabilized tranquility of American society in the 1950s was replaced by a general tendency towards social revolution in the 1960s.

In their fights against social inequity, *Chicano Movement* activists, as depicted in Oscar Zeta Acosta's novel, actively involved in the construction of a Chicano cultural identity. Hereby, their newly created identity did not only denote an ethnic identity but it denoted an identity that positioned itself as far

as possible from "the" Anglo American identity. Thus, it was part of *Chicano Movement* ideology to keep a clear distance to Anglo American hegemony, to openly criticize and attack the dominant portion of the United States.

Nonetheless, though centered around a *Social Movement* that opted for unity and communal strength, Oscar Zeta Acosta illustrates how the kind of unity promoted by the *Movement* was 'untenable under the pressures from both exterior and interior' (Bruce-Novoa, 139). When he, at the end of the novel, frees himself from repeated attempts to be defined by both Anglo Americans as well as by his militant friends, Oscar Zeta Acosta opens the door to the contemporary sense of *mestizaje*.

Both, *The Revolt of the Cockroach People* (1973) as well as Rudolfo Anaya's *Bless Me, Última* (1972) were published at a time that was shaped by a 'militant and disruptive political climate' (Tonn, 59). However the two novels differ considerably as far as their representation as well as their attitude towards cultural identity construction is concerned. In clear contrast to Oscar Zeta Acosta's novel, *Bless Me, Última* ties in with the 'contemporary emancipatory tendency' (Tonn, 59) that opts for the reconciliation of cultural opposites as well as for the deconstruction of exclusive dichotomies.

Instead of promoting a universal, common Chicano identity, Anaya embraces a celebration of cultural diversity, presenting a possible identity construction that goes beyond categories and dualisms. In particular, *Bless Me, Última* depicts how the struggle between dominating and being dominated is a struggle that is also fought within the individual. Being part of what I have labeled a 'postmodern notion of identity', the individual embraces and resists dominance at the same time by creating a 'third' space in which he/she can be 'neither' 'nor'. Hereby, as has been analyzed, Anaya draws a very positive image of the Chicano community and its creative process.

The last novel under consideration, *The Rain God* by Arturo Islas (1984) most openly attacks dominant meanings promoted by both Anglo American as well as Mexican society. Instead of focusing on the question of what

constitutes a Chicano/a identity in the way Villarreal and Oscar Zeta Acosta had done it before, Islas rather looks beyond the border and expands the pre-fabricated ethnic identity provided by Movement activists. In particular, Islas adds the questions of gender and sexuality as well as the issue of physical impairment to Chicano/a identity construction.

Thus, if we trace back the representation of Chicano resistance against Anglo American hegemony in recent Chicano/a literature, it becomes obvious that, though it changed from an absence of resistance to open, violent resistance and back to a more structural, subtle and strategic resistance that works from within the system of Anglo American institutions, the depiction of resistance has always been an essential tool for the constant redefinition of boundaries. On a more personal level, resistance becomes an important means of transformation of a marginalized identity which enables to move margins and centers.

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Deutsche Zusammenfassung

Die Grundlage meiner Forschung bildet eine Analyse der folgenden vier Werke: *Pocho* (1959) von José Antonio Villarreal, *The Revolt of the Cockroach People* (1973) von Oscar Zeta Acosta, *Bless Me, Última* (1972) von Rudolfo Anaya und *The Rain God* (1984) von Arturo Islas. Die Auswahl der Werke erfolgte nicht nach deren Bekanntheitsgrad bzw. deren Beliebtheitsgrad, sondern aufgrund des Kriteriums, dass jedes dieser Romane eine Schlüsselstellung in der Geschichte der Chicano Literatur innehält.

Ausgehend von der Hypothese, dass die Konstruktion einer kulturellen Identität in der Chicano/a Literatur zwingend mit einer bestimmten, sich ständig im Wechsel befindlichen, Art von Widerstand gegen die Anglo-Amerikanische Hegemonie einhergeht, deutet jedes der analysierten Werke einen Paradigmenwechsel an. Während *Pocho* in einer Zeit geschrieben wurde, in der kulturelle Assimilation die bevorzugte Art von Zusammenleben in den Vereinigten Staaten war, widmet sich *The Revolt of the Cockroach People* der Zeit des *Chicanos Movement*, einer Periode, in der die Anglo Amerikanische Dominanz am deutlichsten zurückgewiesen wurde und gleichzeitig die Konstruktion einer separaten, deutlich abgrenzten ethnischen Identität vorangetrieben wurde.

Das wohl bekannteste Werk, *Bless Me, Última* kennzeichnet den Übergang von einer radikalen, kämpferischen Literatur, die sich der Verbreitung einer Anti-Anglo-Amerikanischen Ideologie widmete, zu einer postmodernen Literatur, welche sich vermehrt der Lösung der Gespaltenheit der bi-kulturellen Identität der Chicanos/as hingibt. Das aktuellste Werk *The Rain God* erweitert das Spektrum der Chicano Literatur durch die Einführung der Diskussion von Geschlechterrollen und den Umgang mit körperlich Beeinträchtigten. Hierbei übt Arturo Islas Kritik an dem allgemein gültigen Wertesystem von sowohl Mexikanischer als auch Anglo-Amerikanischer Gesellschaft.

Neben der Abklärung der Definitionen des Begriffes Chicano/a, wird dem Leser ein sehr kurzer, prägnanter Abschnitt über den Status der Chicano Literatur geboten. Außerdem wird im Speziellen auf die wichtigsten Begrifflichkeiten wie zum Beispiel Hegemonie, Assimilation und Akkulturation, Mesitzaje und Hybridität eingegangen.

Durch eine genaue Analyse der Lebensräume Schule, Familie und Jugendgruppe nähert sich meine Diplomarbeit dem Werk *Pocho*. Während im ersten Teil des Kapitels der Roman in seinen sozioökonomischen und soziohistorischen Kontext eingebettet wird, versucht der zweite Teil aufzuzeigen, dass die angestrebte Assimilation des Protagonisten in die Anglo Amerikanische Gesellschaft immer wieder scheitert. Durch meine Analyse wird im Speziellen verdeutlicht, dass Assimilation dort endet, wo Rassismus und Vorurteil beginnt.

Die kritische Auseinandersetzung mit dem Roman *The Revolt of the Cockroach People* widmet sich zu Beginn der Erfassung der wichtigsten Ideen, der Ideologie der sozialen Bewegung der Chicanos/as in den 1960ern und frühen 1970ern. Durch eine Analyse der Schauplätze des Krieges zwischen Anglo Amerikanern und Chicanos, welche im Werk präsentiert werden, wird versucht die Intensität des *Chicano Movements* begreiflich zu machen. Ebenso zeigt die Analyse des Lebens und Werkes von Oscar Zeta Acosta die restriktiven Tendenzen einer Bewegung auf, die sich vor allem für die Konstruktion einer separaten, klar von der Anglo Amerikanischen Identität abgrenzten Identität, einsetzte.

Sowohl *Bless Me, Última* als auch *The Rain God* propagieren andere, weniger gewaltvolle Wege des Widerstandes gegen die Anglo Amerikanische Hegemonie. Beide Werke widmen sich vermehrt dem Individuum, welches gezwungen ist an der Bürde seiner/ihrer Familiengeschichte bzw. an der Aussöhnung von Dualitäten zu arbeiten um sich selbst als „vollständig“ begreifen zu können. Während *Bless Me Últimas* Protagonist versucht religiöse Glaubenssysteme zu vereinen, versucht Miguel Chico, der Protagonist von *The Rain God*, einen Weg zu finden, sich von den Begrenzungen des Anglo Amerikanischen bzw. des Mexikanischen Wertesystems zu befreien.

Wenn man also anhand der bearbeiteten Werke die unterschiedlichen fiktionalen Artikulationswege des Widerstandes gegen Anglo Amerikanische Hegemonie verfolgt, liegt der Schluss nahe, dass dieser in den 1940ern bzw. 1950ern beinahe inexistent war, in den 1960ern und frühen 1970ern zu einem offenen, oftmals gewalttätigen Widerstand ausartete und sich erst ab circa Mitte der Siebziger Jahre zu einem strategischen, weniger aggressiven Widerstand wandelte, der versuchte innerhalb des Systems Dinge zu verändern. Wie aus diesen Romanen ersichtlich wird, ist Widerstand daher ein wichtiges Werkzeug für eine konstante, niemals endende Verschiebung von Grenzen. Auf einer persönlichen Ebene bedeutet dies, dass für einen Menschen am Rande der Gesellschaft der Widerstand ein wichtiges Instrument ist um immer wieder Grenzen und Mittelpunkte zu verschieben und neu zu definieren.

Curriculum Vitae

Name: Iris Haslhofer
Address: Lustkandlgasse 10/7
 1090 Wien (Vienna)
Phone: 0650-770- 81-62
Email-Address: irishaslhofer@gmx.at
Date of Birth: 08-27-1981
Nationality: Austrian

Education:

10/01-: University of Vienna, study of English and Spanish as teaching subjects
10/00- 02/01: University of Vienna, study of journalism and politics
June 2000: A-level
1992-2000: High school in Upper Austria (Linz)
1988-1992: Primary school in Upper Austria (Enns)

Work:

08/07-09/07 Visiting researcher at the University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, five weeks
10/02-04/05: Tutoring lessons in Spanish and English for Schülerhilfe (tuition institution) in Vienna
02/01- 02/02: Multilingual secretary for the law office of Dr. Friedrich Schwank, Stock Exchange Building, Vienna
Summer 2004: Language course in Cadíz, Spain, three weeks
Summer 1997: Secretary for Viessmann Heiztechnik (German heating technology company), five weeks

Languages:

German (mother tongue)
 English and Spanish (fluent)
 French