Journal of American Studies of Turkey
23 (2006) : 49-64

"You can be both the apple and the hand who holds it": Aztlán and the Politics of Storytelling in Anaya's *Heart of Aztlán* and Arias's *The Road to Tamazunchale*

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> 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 Aztlán from whence came our forefathers, reclaiming the 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. […] Aztlán belongs to those who plant the seeds, water the fields, and gather the crops and not to the foreign Europeans.
>
> --"El Plan Espiritual de Aztlan"

The Chicano manifesto El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán, which was presented at the Liberation Conference in Denver in 1969, posits an Aztec/indigenous origin in the Southwester United States. In doing so, they cast the Chicana and Chicano community as the rightful inheritors of the land. This embrace of this indigenous homeland, as Pat Brady explains, "enabled Chicana/os to analyze the United States in terms of its imperialist practices and thus to connect with other land-based struggles across the globe. […] In a sense a turn to Aztlán […] challenged the naturalized boundaries of the United States by positing an even more 'natural' claim to land through references to ancestors and cultural antecedents."[1] Despite the political usefulness of this homeland concept, this nationalist claim to land became a declaration of an "authentic" Chicano identity. Chicano nationalism tended to submerge internal differences in the name of union and promote patriarchal control of family and community as a necessary political stratagem for Chicano liberation. From its very inception, however, nationalist politics and its literature came under critique by Chicana feminists for its heteronormative and masculinist vision of community. As feminist critic Norma Alarcán points out, Aztlán implied "the need to 'repossess' the land, especially in cultural nationalist narratives, through scenarios of 'origins' that emerge in the self-same territory, […] producing in material and imaginary terms 'authentic' and 'inauthentic,' 'legal' and 'illegal subjects."[2]

This critique of nationalist politics and its literature began to gain strength in the early 1980s and took on a definite shape as a movement with the publication of

Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera*, a collection of essays and poems written by a Chicana lesbian. Chicana and Chicano writers and intellectuals, both heterosexual and queer, embraced Gloria Anzaldúa's borderlands manifesto, which called for a non-essentialist approach to identity; the acceptance and cultivation of hybrid identities and bicultural fusion; and the formation of political alliances across sexual, cultural, and racial lines. Critics and historians often see the turn to a borderlands approach—with its aversion to rootedness, origins, and essentialisms—as a corrective to Chicano nationalism. The concept of the Borderlands soon replaced Aztlán as an organizing metaphor for Chicana/o politics and literature.

In the waning years of the Chicano Movement, however, two novels—Rudolfo Anaya's *Heart of Aztlán* (1976) and Ron Arias's *Road to Tamazunchale* (1975)—revised the nationalist approach to Aztlán in order to articulate an ethical praxis that embraced storytelling—rather than origins or land claims—as a means of forging new communal and hence political relationships. Whether it be Aztlán or Tamazunchale, the theme of loss—in particular the loss of land—leads both writers to engage in a narrative ethical praxis that explores, to use Foucault's definition, "what relations can be established, invented, multiplied, and modulated."[3] It is important to make clear that narrative ethics does not imply the moral exemplariness of the text. It is simply "narrative as ethics: the ethical consequences of narrating a story […] and the reciprocal claims binding teller, listener, witness and reader in this process."[4] Instead of a nationalist space with firm borders and a clear distinction between insiders and outsiders, their narratives blur the boundaries between self and other, U.S. and Mexico, reality and myth, modernity and the folk in order to criticize the Chicana/o community's marginalization

New Myth, New Relations

Despite the drawbacks of the use of Aztlán as a mythical homeland, it is important to point out that this nationalist vision of a homeland did help foster a more ethical approach to relations between Mexican nationals and Chicana/os. By embracing Mexican history, myth, and culture, the Chicano Movement traversed the U.S.-Mexico border in order to narrate community. Before the Movement, Mexican Americans would often make a distinction between themselves and Mexican immigrants. The previous generation had believed that only by emphasizing their status as ethnic (rather than non-white) American citizens could they obtain their civil rights. Using the inside-outside politics of borders, many Mexican-American leaders felt that only by emphasizing their "insider" status, their status as citizens, could the community hope to achieve full acceptance into mainstream American society. Any association or alliance with Mexican nationals, especially undocumented workers, was represented as a political liability. Not surprisingly, this approach alienated Mexican Americans from newly arrived Mexicans.

The Chicano Movement in the 1960s and 1970s bridged the divide between Mexicans and Chicanos. Immigration historian David Gutierrez notes how the Movement's use of Mexican cultural symbols to create a Chicano identity caused Chicanos to redefine and expand the concept of community:

> Their appropriation of Mexican cultural symbols as integral parts of Chicano culture seemed to open the doors to establishing a new level of solidarity with immigrants from Mexico. […] Having attempted to redefine the Chicano community by rejecting the assimilationist model and emphasizing the central importance of Mexican culture, history and language to contemporary Chicano society, Chicano activists had raised some complex questions as to the boundaries of their community. [5]

This new relation to the Mexican community created, in turn, a new political vision:

> Mexican American advocates were also beginning to recognize a new level of convergence between their civil rights efforts and the issue of the rights of Spanish-speaking immigrants in the United States, a concern Chicano activists were articulating with growing vehemence. […] As Armendáriz later recalled, "the combined efforts of the militants and mainstream Mexican American civil rights groups had contributed to the growing realization that our previous position was not a realistic goal in our society. We realized that we needed to include non-citizen—both legal and illegal—in our [civil rights] efforts."[6]

This new ethico-political vision may ground a vision of community on land and territory, but in doing so it created a borderlands ethical vision of community that traversed the U.S.-Mexico border and abolished the divide between Mexicans and Chicanos.

Influenced by Mexican nationalists of the 1920s and 1930s, Chicanos also adopted and adapted an indigenous heritage in order to create a coherent nationalist identity. Mexican nationalists, however, embraced their indigenous roots at the same time that they urged Mexicans to become modern subjects. The Chicano Movement, on the other hand, would use native myths and traditions in order to critique the social ills caused by modernity and racism. As Alurista asserts in his review of nationalist Chicano literature, Aztlán was a myth that celebrated a pre-modern society; it pre-dates most forms of oppressions associated with both modern and nascent capitalism:

> The literary products of the period sought to affirm a nationalist fervor founded on the most ancient and pre-colonial origins available to the modern Xicano writer. It was a search for […] a system of production which predated slavery. […] [It was] a precursor to feudalism in its national and oligarchical form. A pre-mercantilism, which knew not the gold as coin, was central to the neo-myth of "the newly born children of the sun."[7]

For many Chicano nationalist writers a just and ethical society was at odds with American modernity and capitalism.

Rudolfo Anaya's *Heart of Aztlán*: The Merger of Myth and Modernity

In Anaya's *Heart of Aztlán*, the symbol of an intrusive modernity is the railroad, which creates a Chicano proletariat and threatens the Chicano

community's land, traditions, and even their lives. The railroad represents the unevenness of Mexican Americans' incorporation into the nation and their relegation to a disposable laboring class. Heart of Aztlán is seen as a significant departure from his first, more well-known book, *Bless Me, Ultima* (1972), which celebrates the formative powers of myth by writing a tale of a small boy growing up in a New Mexican community that exists in a place of myth and magic. Despite its popularity with the Chicano community—it is often referred to as the "first Chicano bestseller"—many critics saw this novel as an evacuation from the political and social realm, and, as Genaro Padilla explains, "objected to *Bless Me, Ultima* on the grounds that it seemed non-referential even though it was set in a definable historical moment in a New Mexican village."[8] As a corrective to the first novel, *Heart of Aztlán* attempts "to invest the mythic component with direct political consequence by setting it squarely alongside a story in which the community is engaged in a bitter strike against railroad management."[9] In contrast to *Bless Me, Ultima*, Anaya's second novel adopts the myth of Aztlán in order to narrate a direct confrontation between folk traditions and Anglo-American modernity.

The novel begins with the sale of Clemente Chávez's land. As Clemente sells his land so he can pay his debts, the economic contract comes to represent an unnatural divorce from the land:

> "When I sell my land, I will be cast adrift, there will be no place to return to, no home left to come back to-- […] Without land, the relationship a man created with the earth would be lost, old customs fall by the wayside, and they would be like wandering gypsies without a homeland where they might anchor their spirit."[10]

Clemente defines his home in a movement of return, which is the antithesis of forward-moving modernity. This movement of return appears to conform to a nationalist definitition of a homeland in which only an ancestral home can give one a true sense of history and of self. Furthermore, only a strong patriarch can maintain the bond to tradition.

Clemente's children, on the other hand, are future- and movement-oriented. While the patriarch of the family laments the move, his daughters Juanita and Adelita cherish the thought of movement and mock those who cannot travel. The past for them is insubstantial, something less than reality and less than full consciousness. They characterize those who remain not as grounded but as trapped; a people with no future, only the past. As his daughters celebrate their movement away from their rural home, Clemente whispers, "We leave the land and the dead"(8). In the contrast between movement and land, we become aware of a dead son that we as readers never encounter except through Clemente's memories. Unlike his sisters, the dead son will remain connected to the land—and abandoned. His burial, in other words, links the family to the land. Although mention of this dead son ceases after chapter two, he plays an important role in the beginning. His death makes it clear that the Chavez family is leaving behind not only a parcel of land but a place that grounds family relations and holds their ancestors.

Once separated from the land and trapped in the industrialized setting of the city, Clemente undergoes an almost immediate degradation and demoralization. He is rendered superfluous to family life and loses the patriarchal power he had once wielded in the family. The loss of land creates a series of other losses: he loses control over his sons and daughters; he loses his job working for the railroad because he refuses to be humiliated by his boss; he loses his dignity and finally, he loses his family. When he becomes financially dependent on his daughters, he becomes an alcoholic, which only exacerbates his isolation and alienation from his family. Clemente's deterioration seems complete when he resorts to violence and force in order to regain his position as patriarch. This tactic backfires and creates a near-break between Clemente and his family.

Through Clemente's decline, *Heart of Aztlán* reminds readers that the loss of land does not merely signify material loss. Politics may have stripped Chicanos of their land, but more importantly, this loss has had an impact on the community's relations to their family and to their neighbors. In other words, what is far more catastrophic is that the loss of land leads to a soul's deterioration, which in turn leads to a break with one's family and one's neighbors. With the loss of land, the one traditional method of healing a patriarch's soul is no longer available, as the mother explains to her children:

> "You see," she spoke earnestly to her daughters, "once there would have been land to make him whole again. A man who met defeat could go out on the land and the earth would make him well again. It might take weeks, a month, or years, but always the man who looked found himself in his earth and he was well. And there were also the people, los compadres, los vecinos, the people of the small pueblos, they understood and lent their support, so a man was never lost, never separated from his soul."(78)

In other words, the loss of land has had an ethical impact. The land and the relations it fostered could guarantee a man's rehabilitation and reintegration into both the family and the community. With the loss of their land, they must find a new way to heal members of the Chicana/o community.

In its quest to heal the patriarch's soul, the text explores and rejects a number of political and spiritual approaches. The first option that the text rejects is the Catholic church, which can play no part in the ethico-political action of the community. This point is driven home to the reader when the priest explains to Clemente why he cannot join the workers' strike against the railroad corporation:

> "But where would the stability of the church be if it joined every movement that reared its head from the gutters of the barrio! […] The church cannot commit itself to these temporal movements. Its primary commitment is to save your soul, the soul that belongs to God. […] Do you think the people of the barrio pay for the upkeep of the church? No! Wealth flows from wealth! And sources of wealth need stability to exist. And the Church provides stability! We teach the poor how to bear their burden; they are promised the

> kingdom of heaven, which is far more important than the little gains your strike would offer them…"(141-142)

The Church stands outside the present and exists in an apolitical universal time. Unlike myth, whose function is to be integrated into daily life for the betterment of the Chicana/o's soul, Catholic spirituality defines the soul as essentially removed from material concerns. The Church cares for the soul by removing it from the political realm. In doing so, the church functions much like any other corporation. It depends on the stability of the status quo; its fortunes are directly dependent on the fortunes of other corporations. The church, the corporations and the nation have developed systems of wealth that exclude the common worker. The Church's focus on the soul may be spiritual but it is not ethical. In other words, it has no connection with reconfiguring social and economic relations for the betterment of the community. In contrast, myth in the text will help preserve one's soul by joining the spiritual with the political. Clemente's soul can only be healed through political engagement and rebellion. His soul cannot be separated from political and social concerns.

If *Heart of Aztlán* discounts an approach that separates matters of the spirit from matters of politics, it also rejects a form of Chicano rebellion that separates itself from tradition: pachuco culture. Anaya characterizes the pachuco as another symptoms of the ills of modernity and urban life; he is a figure of degeneration. Anaya's characterization falls in line with those of older nationalist Chicano writers, who James Smethurst asserts, represented pachucos as boys who create a "strident sense of difference" out of "materials—language, clothing, music, dances, etc.—from substantially, if not predominantly, non-Mexican sources."[11] According to Smethurst, this type of bricolage was criticized because it resisted "both assimilation and various cultural nationalist notion of origins, tradition, and ethnic identity."[12]

In *Heart of Aztlán*, the pachucos' style, their language and clothes, are seen as empty gestures of revolution. They create no change. They only replicate old values, as Clemente's daughter Juanita makes clear,

> "Well, when I first met Chuey [a pachuco] I felt as if I was talking to a liberator, someone who was going to break all the rules and create a new way of living. Maybe I expected too much, but it is true that they don't accept the old ways. They've changed the language, the way they dress, everything. They say they aren't afraid and that they will fight against oppression, but then they turn around create their own rules and regulations that are almost the same as the old ones."(70)

The pachucos have mistakenly abandoned tradition and myth in order to create a defiance through style. However, with the loss of this tradition, such actions can only further accelerate the degradation caused by modernity and capitalistic oppression. The *pachucos* may rebel, but their rebellion is born out of violence and drug addiction. Out of touch with the land and with tradition, they have become mere symptoms of urban decay. Even worse, it is a form of rebellion that replaces rather expands the Chicano family.

The only viable political strategy becomes storytelling. With the absence of land, one must return to myth and storytelling in order to rehabilitate the fallen patriarch and to create a new vision of community. In the rhetoric of nationalism, land grounds both tradition and self, thus creating a bounded relation between oneself and land. However, despite the fact that characters will state again and again how land is the only true ground for identity and tradition, the narrative seems to undermine such statements, or at the very least render them nostalgic. While the characters assert that land is the primary ground for their culture, it is also clear that their land has been lost and a bounded connection to the land no longer serves as a viable political strategy. Simply put, grounding a cultural identity and politics on material homeland is no longer possible because the land is lost. This loss creates the need for an ethical praxis based on narrative and storytelling. Aztlán may designate a homeland, but it is a narrative of migration. It is a quest that can only be pursued through a narrative ethics that binds storyteller and listener in order to reshape political and social relations.

It is myth and storytelling—not land—that will provide the new ground for Chicana/o identity, community and tradition. However, in order for the myth of Aztlán to have any ethico-political power, the lines between modernity and myth must be blurred. In *Heart of Aztlán*, only the bond between storyteller and listener can merge myth and modernity. If this bond is not maintained, myth will remain separate from our daily lives, thus rendering the myth of Aztlán politically and ethically useless:

> "But where is this place called Aztlán?" Clemente persisted, but the story was done and the men were spent. […] It was a beautiful story they all agreed, and the legend of the past had been fulfilled, [….] but that was all; when the story was done the grime and poverty of the barrio enveloped them again and they understood the intriguing story did not get them back their jobs. The stories of the past did not put beans and meat on the table for the family. (85)

The story, the men agree, has an aesthetic value, but it has no practical or political purpose. It is completely removed from issues of survival. For most of the listeners, these stories belong in a pre-modern realm—in the realm of the past. Only Clemente, in his search to rehabilitate himself and to reconnect with his family, has faith in the power of myth.

Anaya is not simply concerned with the material aspects of oppression—issues of survival, food and shelter. Anaya's vision of activism is ethico-political in nature because it focuses on matters of love, relationships, and one's soul. While basic issues of survival are important, the novel asserts that they are not—nor should they be—the substance of political action. In order to bridge the divide between spiritual and material, the myth of Aztlán needs to be reactivated. The first step towards this goal is to fuse myth and modernity together. In doing so, both Crispin the storyteller and Clemente transform storytelling and the act of narrating community into a hope for change. Instead of a merger, perhaps "translation" is a better term.

As the above passage shows, when we separate myth and storytelling from our everyday lives, Aztlán is defeated by everyday poverty and not an integral part of our quotidian lives. Consequently, the bond between storyteller and listener does not become a binding one; it affects a moment but not the manner in which people relate to the world or to each other. In order for myth to achieve an ethico-political force one must translate our everyday reality into myth. Crispin, for example, helps Clemente envision Aztlán and his heroic role in the strike by singing a story that transforms the trains into mythical poisonous serpents:

> Crispin sang and in his song the winding trains were like the thrashing poisonous serpents, and while one was born of the earth the other was born from the imagination of the foreigners to the east. […] Shadows with forms he called them, monsters that have spread over the earth to enslave the people. […] "So now we need a man who will rise like the eagle to and melt the power of the steel snakes! The soul of the people is trapped in steel and the cry is for the man who will let them go!"(84)

Through his song the railroads become "shadows with forms." As products of the imagination, they too can be fought through a counternarrative. This blurring between modernity and myth recasts the struggle between the Mexican-American strikers and the railroad corporation into a story of good and evil. Trains are represented as mythical evil serpents, and the police siren as la Llorona.

Myth, therefore, is not solely an antidote to modernity's ills; it is also an agent of oppressive institutional forces. The myth of la Llorona becomes especially powerful as it begins to accumulate a number of connotations that are either associated with modernity or with forces outside of nature's cycle of life and death:

> Each afternoon at five the shop whistle blew and released the men from work. The wail of steam carried as far as the darkest corner of Barelas where la India grubbed for roots and herbs along la Acequia, the deep irrigation canal that ran parallel to the river. There her many dogs returned the howl of the whistle and for a few seconds a strange dread filled the air. Mothers hushed the children and told them to be good or la Llorona would come and take them away. For a moment, time stood still as women prayed the day had ended well and the whistle was not signaling death.(33)

La Llorona is associated with the witch, an evil woman who lives outside the natural rhythm of life and death. However, the myth has also been modernized: la Llorona no longer wanders the river, but la Acequia, a man-made irrigation canal that runs parallel to the river. Significantly, the witch is associated with man-made river that competes with and drains a natural source. Furthermore, the wail of la Llorona has become the whistle of the railroad shops. It is a whistle that signals both the end of the workday and the death of a worker.

Although the myth is part of Chicano/Mexican culture, the text makes a very clear separation between La Llorona and the Chicano community. One of the boys,

Pete, at first creates a connection between La Llorona and the community, by presenting them both as victims of police harassment: "Can you imagine la Llorona in the barrio," Pete said cynically, "the cops would bust her ass! That pinche ley doesn't understand any of that stuff; as far as they're concerned la Llorona would be one more tecate crying withdrawal pains!"(49). But this connection is soon broken. The other boys disagree:

> "Los vatos locos […] say there's only one Llorona now," Dickie added "and that's the siren of a cop's car. That mother friggin' ley comes blaring down the street, busting heads, throwing vatos in the can […].
>
> "Maybe so," Willie said, "It's funny how things aren't like they used to be. La Llorona was a ghost, a shadow, a cry one heard in the brush of the river or near la 'cequia. Now it's becoming more and more real, now it's the cop's siren, now we can see it, we actually see it eating up the men of the barrio--" (49)

La Llorona is not a victim of police harassment but an ally of the police. Her cry has blended with the howl of the police siren. The text will take this a step further and align her with a repressive police state: "Somewhere a siren wailed, and for a moment they thought they heard the cry of la Llorona as she ran along the dark river valley, crying for her demon-lover, mourning the death of her sons. But no this was a new Llorona! It was the siren of a police car crying through the streets of the barrio, searching out the young men who possessed the magic plant of summer, marijuana."(18).

Willie, often represented as the wisest of the boys, claims that this myth no longer resides in the realm of shadows and ghosts. Through her association with the police and with modernity, she has gained near-corporal form. In doing so she has slipped from the world of myth to become a constitutive element of an oppressive reality. La Llorona does not offer hope; she devours men. The myth of la Llorona has no ethical function: it does not have the power to form either a new ethical vision of society or to bridge the ethical gap from "what is" to "what ought to be."

Willy, as the person who notices La Llorona's new reality, is a constant source of wisdom; he is someone who reads the signs correctly. Willie belongs to a family that stands outside of modernity and the rules governing the modern sphere. His father is called a "dog-eater," which marks him as someone who lives beyond the conventions of propriety. Willie's brother Henry, however, is the person who truly removes the family from modernity and propriety. He is represented as a primitive man, without clothes or language. He lives in the backyard, chained to a tree. Governmental and health institutions have tried to take hold of Henry, but his family refuses to have him institutionalized. Because Willie's family refuses to conform to the codes of modernity, they are marginalized from the rest of the Chicano community. As a result, they must live apart from their neighbors and on the edge of the law.

Henry, as the wild man, truly communes with nature. Despite his lack of clothes and language, Henry is represented as a kind soul who is in touch with the

earth and who therefore holds a kind of wisdom that is invalidated as insanity by the modern institutional world. When Henry drowns in the river, worshipping the moon, his death is represented as necessary sacrifice to begin a new, better way of living for the community. His wake, which takes place in violation of health codes, allows the community to grasp an understanding of the eternal.

If modernity and reality are translated through myth, then the movement goes both ways: the afterlife is also defined by the reality of political and economic oppressions. As Clemente undergoes a spirit quest in search of Aztlán, he realizes that even in death the people are still bound to the steel chains of the railroad and industry:

> *Deliver us Clemente Chavez! They cried and Clemente drew back in horror. Strike down the snakes of steel that bind our soul, the people cried. Deliver us from this oppression! Strike down injustice! […] Injusticia! the long lines of men bound in chains called to him. […] Pobreza! the masses echoed, and the torrent was so strong it lifted him up and tossed him into raging waters.* (130-131)

Unlike the Catholic Church, in his vision there is no separation between the present and the afterlife. While the Church has used the separation between material concerns and heaven, Clemente's vision shows that there is no such easy delineation between the two spheres; they are, in fact, intertwined.

Clemente begins the process of freeing his people from the railroad by communing with the myth of Aztlán. Once he is willing to have the boundaries of his body and skin punctured, letting his blood mingle with the blood of the community, he can join with the heart of world and transform himself into Aztlán:

> The river at its source sang with the same message as the wind: it whispered that he was Aztlán, and when he understood that, he could reach out and touch his people. Wounds opened in his hand. He held his breath and thrust deeper into the river of the manswarm, mixing his blood with theirs. […] There at the core lay the dark, pounding heart. […] He reached out and grasped with bleeding hands the living heart of the earth. […] A joyful power coursed from the dark womb-heart of the earth into his soul and he cried out I AM AZTLAN! […] Deliverance, the river moaned, and cutting a new channel into the future it tossed him upon a mossy bank. (130-131)

Clemente finds Aztlán through his efforts to fight oppression and free his community. Aztlán, therefore, is no longer a place; it is the relationship one has to the Chicano community. In other words, once he can place himself within a network of relations, Aztlán is transformed from site—a material homeland—to an ethical relation. It is Aztlán-as-relation that offers deliverance and creates a "new channel into the future."

The novel ends by breaking away from a certain forms of Chicano nationalist political activism. In doing so, violence is discounted as a viable political strategy. A faction of the strikers want Clemente to encourage the use of violence and

destruction to fight the railroad. As Clemente speaks to the crowd, a member of this faction hands him a torch, expecting that he will advocate violence and tell the crowd to set fire to the railroad. But as he holds the torch, he tells the people,

> "—We know that violence breeds violence, and that this fire the gods stole from heaven is the same fire that melts the steel and forges the chains that enslave us! […] There is a heat more intense than the fire of the torch! […] It is the fire of love that burns in each man, and woman, and child; it is the fire of the soul of the people that must serve us now!" (207-208)

As the novel transforms the nationalist myth of Aztlan into an ethical relation, Chicano political activism is no longer a militant political approach but an ethico-political program that channels love—not anger or hate—to effect change.

Ron Arias's *The* Road *to Tamazunchale*: An Ethical Re-Mapping of Los Angeles

Like *Heart of Aztlán*, Ron Arias's *The Road to Tamazunchale* merges myth and modernity in order to enact a narrative ethical praxis in which myth and imagination have the power to reshape political and social relations. In this novel, Fausto, an elderly Chicano man, begins traveling around the city, re-imagining and re-mapping the cityscape of Los Angeles in order to overcome the physical borders placed on the East Los Angeles Chicano community by a history of city development. As Raul Hombrero-Villa points out in his excellent reading of *The Road to Tamzunchale*, the novel refers to an existing barrio "known popularly as Frog Town, [which] is situated at the intersection of 110 (Pasadena) and Interstate 5 (Golden State) freeways and is an urban residential isthmus produced by a historical succession of infrastructural developments."[13] Like the railroad in *Heart of Aztlán*, the presence "of these technologies of mobility have physically and psychologically aggravated the hegemonic constraints on social mobility in the barrio community."[14] The city of Los Angeles has strategically worked to isolate and fracture the Chicano community at the same time that is has worked to improve mobility between different sectors of the city. The railroad tracks, the Los Angeles River, and the freeways are borders that serve to isolate and separate the barrio from the rest of the city.

As the novel opens, the reader is immediately made aware of these imposed limits through the eyes of the protagonist, an elderly Chicano man, who is dying: "Fausto lay still, listening to the faint groan of freeway traffic. […] Slowly he stood, then shuffled to the window and peered through the rusty screen, across the river to the tracks. More smog. "[15] As Fausto looks out the window, he sees the limits placed on him and the other residents by the city of Los Angeles: the tracks, the river and smog from the freeways. Amidst this entrapment, he begins to remember his days of mobility, when he was a successful door-to-door encyclopedia salesman. He decides to end the stasis of his life and travel. At this moment of decision, the Shepard's flute is heard. As Hombrero-Villa points out, throughout the novel, the flute's notes "intermittently contest the aural dominance of the automobile and

railroad traffic."[16] The Shepard's flute, in other words, interrupts the soundtrack of modernity.

Appropriately, Fausto uses the city's transportation network—a city bus—to set his fantasy in motion and to begin the reconfiguration of the Los Angeles cityscape. Fausto begins to re-map Los Angeles by contracting the spatial distance between the city and Latin America, specifically Cuzco, and the temporal distance between colonial Cuzco and modern Los Angeles. The reader witnesses this contraction of space and time during Fausto's first bus trip:

> At last they approached Cuzco, and Fausto leaned over his neighbor's armrest for a glimpse. No it wasn't like the Valley of Mexico […] But below the city, along the highway, he could see the green fields, young with corn, wheat, barley and potato plants. Indian families squatted in doorways, watching the bus jog by in swirls of dust. This time Fausto ignored the driver's refusal to stop and simply descended from the machine of noise, odors of urine, and grimy bodies. […] Leaving the road, he struggled to push away annoying reminders of time. Telephone poles along the train tracks refused to vanish, a billboard advertising […] beer remained in the distance. (33)

Fausto's vision is not transposed upon Los Angeles. Instead a hybrid reality—a borderlands between two spaces and two times—is created. The Chicanos become Indians; the highway is filled with green fields. However, reminders of modernity remain—no matter how hard Fausto attempts to dispel them. Fausto's fantasy is not escapist. As the novel progresses, Fausto's visions gains an ethico-political power precisely because they do not evacuate the reader from the social and political realm of Chicana/o Los Angeles in the 1970s.

The merger between reality and Fausto's fantasy becomes complete when the realm of the pre-modern invades modernity. Just when the reader thinks that Fausto's vision is an internal one, a Peruvian Shepard and his alpacas suddenly appear on the freeway and stall modernity's forward movement, which the novel represents as a funeral procession:

> The Shepard, lagging behind, seemed confused by the traffic lights and horns. At the intersection leading to the freeway on-ramp the frightened alpacas blocked a row of funeral cars, headlights on. Fausto, shouting and waving his hoe, stumbled up the ramp and tried to turn the herd from disaster. (45)

However, as the police attempt to arrest Fausto and the Shepard, his entry into modernity is not only an interruption, it is illegal. As the borders between past and present, reality and fantasy, pre-modern and modern begin to unravel, so will the border between Latin America and the United States, Chicana/o and Mexican begin to become porous.

Marcelino's entry foreshadows the entry of undocumented Mexican immigrants. This association with illegal immigration is strengthened when Fausto

finds Marcelino, the Shepard, near the police complex, where Fausto's neighbor, Tiburcio, was detained after being mistaken for an "illegal":

> Fausto remembered his neighbor's face behind the tall, chain-link fence. Tiburcio had been mistakenly corralled in an Eastside roundup of Mexican illegals and was in a terrible mood. […] "Remember, you [Fausto] could be in here too," [said Tiburcio]. The rest of the afternoon Fausto sat by the fence pretending he was inside with Tiburcio. What else could he do? His neighbor would have screamed and shaken the fence if Fausto dared take a step away. (50)

When the police mistakenly arrest Tiburcio in their round-ups of illegal immigrants, they have failed to make a distinction between legal and illegal Mexican residents.

Fausto's actions transform this racist conflation into an ethical relation. Although Fausto is not being detained, he keeps his friend company on the other side of the fence. In fact, Fausto pretends to be in Tiburcio's place behind the fence. Instead of ignoring Tiburcio's seemingly absurd request, he stays and in doing so the fence no longer separates Tiburcio from "legal" Mexican residents. This sense of responsibility that he felt towards Tiburcio is extended to Marcelino. When his sidekick, Mario, tells him to forget the Marcelino, Fausto cannot; he has accepted a responsibility for the lost Shepard.

When a dead man is discovered in the Chicano neighborhood's riverbed, this sense of responsibility is soon expanded to include undocumented Mexicans. Though the riverbed is dry, the man is wet, and the people assume that he has drowned. Fausto, however, immediately recognizes him as a *mojado*, a wetback. The text raises the possibility that the man did not die of drowning but expired once he crossed the border and became illegal. The entire Chicano community has a strong aesthetic reaction to the dead man. He is the most beautiful man they have ever seen, so beautiful that he is compared to a statue. The dead illegal immigrant becomes the center around which the neighborhood becomes a community in action. The community symbolically adopts him when he is named David, after a neighborhood boy who drowned in the river. This renaming characterizes his appearance as a return or homecoming. He is further integrated into the community when he is given to woman who has never known the love of a man, Mrs. Rentaria, the neighborhood spinster. (The title of "Mrs." is given to her out of a sense of respect.) She takes him home and symbolically marries him. The entire neighborhood celebrates the happy union and continues to admire David's beauty. He and the spinster spend a few happy weeks together. He feeds her chocolates and they walk in the garden. Then he begins to decompose, and he "dies." Fausto and Marcelino, the Shepard, restore the decomposing body to its former state and take him further down the river where another barrio can take responsibility for him and organize their community around him.

With David's arrival and departure, Fausto begins to reconsider the purpose of his fantastic travels:

> Fausto quietly engaged the image of David's coming and going. Did he die of a weak heart, as Mrs. Rentaria said? Was the young mojado good because he was dead or was he dead because he was good? Something must have killed him. […] Mojados like David would continue coming—dead, half-dead, or alive […] What better guide could they have than someone, someone like himself, […] who could bring them across with style. No more hiding, no more crossing the hills like wild dogs. (80)

The movement of Fausto's expeditions take a different direction. Instead of rewriting and reliving colonial travel narratives of discovery and conquest, Fausto begins to journey to contemporary Mexico in order to reimagine the process of migration. In other words, the dead illegal immigrant introduces a different movement to Fausto's travels, His fantastic re-mapping begins to involve both barrio residents and Mexican nationals. In doing so, the prior movement, which was associated with conquest, becomes a movement of migration—and illegal immigration—that directs Fausto towards rather than away from the barrio.

Fausto goes to Tijuana, where he finds a group of men intending to cross. He has come up with a plan for getting them across the border with no hindrance: he dresses them like U.S. sailors and marines and gets them drunk. The Mexicans stagger across the U.S.-Mexico border without a problem. When they arrive in the barrio, the entire neighborhood helps feed them. Mrs. Rentaria, once again, takes charge. A bathtub full of eggs is being whisked; a neighbor has donated fish; women bake bread and make tortillas for the new arrivals. After the presence of hundreds of migrants begins to take its toll on the barrio, Fausto decides to send them not to Mexico but to an imaginary place called Tamazunchale. However, they can only get there through storytelling. The barrio forms a community theater and puts on a play for the illegal Mexican men. Taking over an abandoned theater, the barrio residents begin to re-enact Fausto's journey on the bus. When the boy, who plays Fausto, and a little girl, who plays his niece, arrive in Tamazunchale, the Mexican migrants step onto on stage and are magically transported there.

During the play, Tamazunchale is separated from the real town of Tamazunchale; the name of the town is not important. The narrator explains that if there were a resident from Tamazunchale in the audience, someone who could give referential power by attaching a geographical place to "Tamazunchale," they would have to change the name. Tamazunchale is not a place but a marker to orient people on their journey. As the narrator of the play explains, "They were all either coming from or going to Tamazunchale. […] We may not know it, but it's the same road. Everyone is on the same road"(103). Tamazunchale is both a site of departure and arrival, the past and the future. Between these points of departure and arrival, Tamazunchale comes to resemble the act of migration made into a figural site. In other words, it is a place of movement and fluidity that escapes any nationalist definition of a place with firm borders that defines a person or state through separation.

On the contrary, Tamazunchale is a place of movement and fluidity where boundaries between self and other, the living and the dead, human and animal blur. In Tamazunchale, as the boy-as-Fausto explains to the girl-as-niece, "If you see a bird, you can talk to it, and it'll talk back. If you want something, it's yours. If you want to be an apple, think about it and you might be hanging from a tree or you might be held in someone's hand, maybe your own"(107). Tamazunchale is a place where a human can form a relationship with a bird; where you can take any form and where there are no lines of ownership. Most importantly, it is a place where relationships to others and to yourself can be changed: you can be both the apple and the hand who holds it; you can be both separate from and connected to yourself and others.

Conclusion

As writers associated with Movement politics, Anaya's and Arias's ethical vision of incorporation involves the integration of Latin American and Mexican history and culture into Chicano daily life in order to transcend the limitations placed upon the Chicana/o community. For both Anaya and Arias, once the material home has been destroyed, either through the loss of land or the fragmentation of a barrio by city development, the community must turn to the act of narrating to create a new home. In the absence of a material homeland, these texts urge Chicana/os to (re)turn to myth, figure, and storytelling in order to create the "ground" for their community. It is such a turn that gives these works a borderlands ethics in that identity is not grounded on firm political borders and lines of ownership but on the blurring of boundaries between the U.S. and Mexico, past and present, myth and reality, modernity and folk culture. In doing so, Ron Arias and Rudolfo Anaya practice a narrative ethics—storytelling that creates new relations and strengthens old one—that critiques modernity's ills and Chicanos' uneven incorporation into capitalist America.

Notes:

[1] Mary Pat Brady, *Extinct Lands, Temporal Geographies: Chicana Literature and the Urgency of Space* (Durham: Duke UP, 2002) 145.

[2] Norma Alarcon, "Anzaldua's Frontera: Inscribing Gynetics," *Displacement, Diaspora, Geographies of Identity*, eds. Smadar Lavie & Ted Swedenburg (Durham: Duke UP, 1996) 45.

[3] Michel Foucault, *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. Paul Rabinow, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: New Press, 1997) 135.

[4] Adam Zachary Newton, *Narrative Ethics* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1995) 11.

[5] David Gutierrez, *Walls and Mirrors: Mexican American , Mexican Immigrants, and the Politics of Ethnicity* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1995) 190.

[6] Gutiérrez 196.

[7] Alurista, "Cultural Nationalism and Xicano Literature during the Decade of 1965-1975" *MELUS* 8.2 (Summer 1981): 22.

[8] Genaro Padilla, "Myth and Comparative Cultural Nationalism," *Aztlán: Essays on the Chicano Homeland* (Albuquerque: U of New Mexico P, 1989) 128.

[9] Genaro Padilla 128.

[10] Rudolfo Anaya, *Heart of Aztlán* (1976; U of New Mexico P. 1986) 3. All subsequent references to this book will be cited parenthetically in the text.

[11] James Smethurst, "The Figure of the Vato Loco and the Representation of Ethnicity in the Narratives of Oscar Z. Acosta" *MELUS* 20.2 (Summer 1995): 120.

[12] Smethurst 120.

[13] Raul Hombrero-Villa, *Barrio-Logos: Space and Place in Chicano Literature and Culture*. (Austin: U of Texas P, 2000) 157.

[14] Hombrero-Villa 163.

[15] Ron Arias, *The Road to Tamazunchale* (1975; Tempe: Bilingual Press, 1987) 28. All subsequent references to this book will be cited parenthetically in the text.

[16] Hombrero-Villa 162.