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***Reyna's Grande The Distance Between Us : A Mirror  
of Chicano Life***

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requirements for the degree of Master in English Literary and Cultural Studies*

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## **Dedications**

*To my lovely mother and my little sister*

*To those who helped me through my hard times; I dedicate this work*

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## **Abstract**

*The Distance Between Us* (2012) is an autobiography written by the Mexican American award winning novelist and memoirist, who crossed the US-Mexico border as an undocumented child, and portrays life before and after illegal immigration. She describes the rifts caused by the pursuing of the American Dream and the struggle to hold family relationships. She also depicts the cultural differences between the two countries emphasizing on the issue of language and identity. Through her memoir, Reyna Grande meant to humanize the perception of undocumented immigrants and gives them the key for a successful life. Indeed, her poignant life story seems to be as an inspiration and a hope for many Dreamers. It is proclaimed by the vast majority of critics as a true representative creative nonfiction Chicana memoir. Therefore, this extended simple essay aims to provide a historical over view about illegal immigration of Mexican Americans and to elicit the themes found in the memoir.

**Key terms:** *The Distance Between Us*, American Dream, illegal immigration, Border, Mexican American, Chicana literature, *Otro Lado*

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# **General Introduction**



After the war between Mexico and USA (1846-1848) which led to the signing of the treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, Mexicans were living in miserable conditions, violence, starvation, and epidemic diseases, while America was witnessing new developments which enticed migration from Mexico. Also, the conscription of a million American citizens into the military during the Second World War and the escape of poor white and black Americans to the North for better jobs caused a real shortage of workers that Mexicans were ready to fill. Therefore, those Mexican Americans brought new cultures to the society and were influenced by the American ones too, which output to many struggles. Immigration and especially undocumented immigration produces many issues: risk of crossing the border, family's separation, the struggle of acquiring English, defining identities etc. As a result, the emergence of Chicana literature was an emergency to present those problems and suggest solutions.

As a sample of Chicana literature, *The Distance Between Us* by Reyna Grande is tended to be a good representative of Mexican American's strife with borders since the writer herself crossed the US-Mexico border at the age of nine. The story is about Grande children's life in Mexico and how it became after crossing the border. It portrays the tribulations caused by illegal immigration and gives hope to those young undocumented immigrants to fight for their future in *El Otro Lado*.

Through *The Distance Between Us*, Reyna Grande restores past memories to portray her journey to cross the border. She depicts her sufferance with illegal immigration from different angles. She innocently from a child point of view tenders different problems within illegal immigration that need to be solved. Her memoir circles around various themes of Chicana literature mainly language, identity, poverty and family. The research question, however, is: Is *El Otro Lado* a hope for Mexicans? Does it improve their life or destroy it?

In order to answer the initial question, a number of sub-questions have been raised:

- What image does Reyna Grande manage to describe the American Dream?

- What is therefore her attitude toward The Other Side?
- Is she convinced with life in Mexico?
- Does she see herself belong to America?

In order to answer the research question, this extended essay will explain the historical background of Mexican Americans and the issue of illegal immigration in the novel.

This work is divided into two chapters. The first one is a an over view about the history of Mexican American and Chicano literature, while the second one is a practical chapter in which a literary analysis of the memoir occurs to demonstrate the way Reyna reflect *El Otro Lado*.

**Chapter One: *Mexican immigrants in  
the US: Between Myth and Reality***

### 1.1 Introduction

USA is the nation of immigrants. It is the country of diversity which includes different races, minorities and ethnic groups. The Mexican Americans are one of these groups who live there in more than a century, but their existence is different than any other minority. The majority of them did not move to US but the borders moved to Americanize them under the treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. As it is said, “we did not cross the border, the border crossed us”. Consequently, the situation creates a status of duality and identity crisis especially for those who came after as descendents who faced all kinds of marginalization. As a reaction, the Chicano literature has emerged as a new literary movement to illustrate this suffering and misery, and to define the different meanings of the concepts of “Borders” and “*El Otro Lado*”.

### 1.2 History of Mexican American

US history has known a long struggle of many ethnic groups and minorities to impose themselves as American citizens. From the day it was discovered, human waves have travelled there searching for new opportunities, longing for a better life (Lapis Segreue, Katherine, Mexican Repatriation Program). The American dream is the dream of everyone especially for those who are from the country’s closest neighbour, Mexico. The US census of 2010 has revealed that more than 32 million Mexican people origin spread in Texas, Arizona, Illinois and Colorado. This huge number of Mexican population in the US makes us wonder about the history of this migration (“Mexican American Migrations and Communities” 1).

#### 1.2.1 The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo:

Much of American Southwest was once Mexican territory. Texas declared its independence in the mid-1830, and ultimately joined the US in 1845. This led to the US Mexican war from 1846 until 1848, which ended with the signing of the treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. In this treaty, the US acquired 500.000 square miles of Mexican territory; it covered what is known today as Texas, Arizona, New Mexico, California,

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Colorado, Nevada, Utah and Wyoming. In addition, the United States purchased another 30,000 square miles in 1854 in what is known as Gadsden Purchase. Overnight, more than 80,000 people who considered themselves Mexicans, crossed to the US territory, they were promised that they would retain their properties and their civil rights, and become US citizens in two years' time. The treaty of 1848 is no longer available to protect the properties of Mexican citizens in the areas annexed by US. The United States Court failed to support those rights, and the new Americans lost their properties in court decisions (1-2).

### **1.2.2 The Reclamation Act 1902**

In the latter half of 19th Century, the discovery of gold and copper and the growth of US economy, led the Mexicans to leave their country toward US, searching for job opportunities especially in ranching and agriculture. In 1900, about 500,000 of Mexican ancestry lived in US mostly in the Southwest, and due to the Reclamation Act in 1902; more lands became agricultural, which means the need of farm workers. This drew more Mexicans across the border (Englekirk, and Marin).

### **1.2.3 The Mexican Revolution 1910**

The Mexican Revolution of 1910 and its violent aftermath led even more Mexicans to emigrate to the U.S. Moreover, due to the growth of the U.S. economy in the 1920s, there were better-paying jobs in the United States than in Mexico. The increase of the Mexican immigrants in US lasted until 1924, people before this time went back and forth freely between the two countries, and the traditions were enriched by the cultures of both nations, from religious services influenced by Mexican customs, to bilingual or Spanish-language newspapers (ibid).

### **1.2.4 The Swing of US Economy**

During the 1930s, American economy decreased due the global crisis of 1929, and many American workers protested against the low wages in mining and

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agriculture. As a result, the Mexican immigrants were forced to go back to their country pursuing the Repatriation Program of 1930<sup>1</sup>.

By the 1940s, the intensification of the Second World War opened the doors in front of the Mexicans to join US. More than 35.000 served in us military in addition to many others who worked as temporary workers in agriculture. During this period, 437.000 Mexican workers travelled annually to US, and the majority of residents moved beyond the southwest to the industrial Midwest. The situation and the number of the Mexican immigrants increased and decreased with the economic swings and due to the changes in immigration law (Mexican American Migrations and Communities 2).

### 1.3 US Politics toward Mexican Americans

The tide events in US history and the way it deals with the Mexican immigrants revealed the importance of the Mexican Americans in the US Whether these politics serve the interests of Mexicans or not. They represent a large social class which includes all layers from the worker until the highest rank. This can be obvious in the timeline of immigration policies from 1924 to 1986 when many laws and provisions were enacted as follow:

#### A. The National Origins Act of 1924 or the Quota Act:

This act aimed to reduce the number of Southern and Eastern European immigrants in US. This did not mean that the Mexican were welcomed or preferred, but the law established the border patrol along the US-Mexican border in addition to the head tax on, a fee paid upon entering the US. This made the Mexican immigrants as a target of racial discrimination (Phyllis 1).

#### B. Mexican Repatriation:

As a result of the Great Depression, the conflicts between the native workers and the immigrants increased. The latter's were preferable due to their bad work

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<sup>1</sup> Herbert Hoover authorized the Mexican Repatriation Program, which was the removal - by force if necessary - of both American Citizens of Mexican descent and Mexican immigrants from American soil

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conditions and the low wages which increased hostility against them. In 1929, the US government began a campaign of repatriating, or sending back to Mexico, both Mexican immigrants and their American-born children (del Castillo 59). A series of raids and arrests was conducted by the Immigration and Neutralization Service (INS)<sup>2</sup> to deport the Mexicans and their children. As a result, many other Mexicans left US voluntarily because of the undesirable life.

### C. The Bracero Program 1943:

As a result of the Second World War, many Americans left their jobs in railway and agriculture, hoping for new jobs with high wages. This created a labour shortage which led the US government to sign a guest worker agreement with Mexico. From 1942 to 1964, more than 4.5 million agreements were signed, allowing Mexicans to fill the labour shortages. The agreement guaranteed the workers' rights from the minimum wages to housing and workmen's compensation. All those terms and conditions were not respected by the employers, and many Mexicans' rights were violated (ibid).

### D. The McCarran-Walter Act:

The act was known as the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952. It came as a result of the Cold War. The act reflected the climate of US politics toward the nations which may cause a threat to its national security. If the Quota Act of 1924 was seen as a strict one, the McCarran-Walter Act was more restrictive. The law created more categories for deportation, especially for the immigrants whose political beliefs were subversive to national security (Phyllis 2).

### E. Operation Wetback:

Bracero Act made a set of instructions to fill the shortage of labour in US, but the number of Mexicans which were allowed to enter US was insufficient in comparison with the required number. This situation led more than 4 million Mexican immigrants to enter US without contracts, which means they were not protected. In response, in

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<sup>2</sup> The name of the former federal agency in the Department of Justice that was responsible for the administration and enforcement of the U.S. immigration laws

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1953 the Immigrants and Nationality Service (INS) launched a campaign known as Operation Wetback<sup>3</sup> (in reference to the RIO Grande River) that immigrants crossed to enter the United States) to deport the undocumented Mexican immigrants. The number of deported was more than 1 million (ibid).

### F. Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 (the Hart-Celler Act):

It came side by side with the Civil Rights era and Voting Right. The act increased the number of immigrants who were allowed to enter US from all over the world. It is the same as the quotas act of 1924 with some improvements. For instance, the number of annual immigrants increased to 290.000 (ibid).

### G. Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) of 1986:

The act came to fix the problems resulted from Bracero program. The government launched a reform which allowed the undocumented immigrants to gain the US citizenship, under a set of condition such us: continuous residence in the United States since January 1, 1982, a clean criminal record, proof of registration with the Selective Service, and a basic knowledge of the English language, US government, and US history (ibid).

## 1.4 The Mexican American's Life in US

The first wave of Mexican immigration during the 20<sup>th</sup> century to US was not welcomed; it was faced by verbal and physical attacks from white Americans. Many politicians lobbied against the existence of Mexicans in US, and considered them as unwanted future American citizens. The discrimination and the inferior view toward the Mexican race reached the peak, especially when the nativist scholars expressed their fears from the “mongrelisation” as a kind of abasement (Englekirk, and Marin). This decadent view point toward the Mexicans remerged in 1928 when the government set limits on immigration from Western hemisphere. John Box, a Congressman claimed that Mexican immigration was a product of mixing by the

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<sup>3</sup> Operation Wetback was an immigration law enforcement initiative created by Joseph Swing, the Director of the United States Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), in cooperation with the Mexican government. The program was used to deal with illegal border crossings into the United States by Mexican nationals.



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Spaniard and “low-grade” Indians. This mixture might cause an obstacle for the future of United States (ibid).

The barbarism view toward the Mexican American spread during the Second World War era. In 1943, describing the Zoot Suit Riots<sup>4</sup>, the sheriff of Los Angeles department alleging that the Mexican American had criminal tendencies to spill blood, it was inborn characteristic. Moreover, the report claimed that Mexican Americans were violent because of their Indian blood (ibid). In another case in 1969, a California judge stated in court concerning an incest case: "Mexican people ... think it is perfectly all right to act like an animal. We ought to send you out of this country... You are lower than animals ... maybe Hitler was right. The animals in our society probably ought to be destroyed" (ibid).

### 1.4.1 Acculturation and Assimilation

It is hard to preserve an in-group from the outer one, the interference between them can be strong enough to break some traditions and cultural heritage, and the big loser is the smallest one, especially if these groups are found in a big society like US. However, Mexican Americans are exception; they protected their belonging and their origins due to their ancestry generations. They lived in rural Colorado and Northern New Mexico pre-date the Anglo American presence in that region. As a result, many of them had not acculturated. Moreover, the successive Mexican immigration waves to enter US reinforced their existence as Mexicans; this helped to preserve their language, to maintain their relationships, to convey their traditions and culture from a generation to another one. In addition, the mother tongue was the corner stone around all these interferences; the Spanish language played a big role to maintain the Mexican culture and to preserve their sense of belonging. McLemore has stated that Mexican Americans "have been the primary contributors to the maintenance of the Spanish language over a comparatively long period of time" (Liebman 261).

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<sup>4</sup> The Zoot Suit Riots were a series of conflicts in June 1943 in Los Angeles, California, United States, which pitted European American servicemen stationed in Southern California against Mexican American youths and other minorities who were residents of the city.

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According to 1990 census, the Mexicans were the largest Hispanic group in US, representing about 61 percent of the 22.3 million Hispanics (We the American Hispanics 4). The 2010 US census revealed the number of Mexican origin which became approximately 32 million (Mexican American Migrations and Communities<sup>1</sup>). This demographic growth reflects the importance of this ethnic group and illustrates the dominant role in the persistence of traditional culture patterns. These members of this ethnic group share the same language, if not, they share the same culture or the same background, or at least they have one of their family still preserve his origins.

### 1.4.2 Terms of Identity

In the 1990s, there were two terms to identify Spanish speaking people, Hispanic and Latino. The term Hispanic is enforced by the government in 1980 census, to identify and count all people from the western hemisphere by taking into consideration their Spanish speaking backgrounds. Since the term was used by the official authorities, the media soon appropriated it and popularized its use. Some members of Hispanic community used the term for alliances' reasons with all the ethnic groups who share the same language. Otherwise, the Latino National Political Survey revealed that majority of these Hispanic people preferred to indicate their identities in term of place origin. Among them, 62% of Mexican immigrants defined themselves as Mexican origins not as Hispanic (Englekirk, and Marin)

The question of identity differs from one place to another and from a generation to generation. For example, the residents of Northern New Mexico defined themselves as Spanish Americans or Hispanos. In the other hand, people from Texas referred to themselves as Latin Americans. In the same context, there is a growing use of the term *Tejano* by Texas residents (ibid).

This variety of identity perspective reveals the changing of self definition through time. For example, the term Chicano for the old the generation was considered as an insult, referred the unsophisticated immigrants. In the mid-1960s, with the Civil rights movement, the Chicano used as a political term which reflects the aware individual who contributes in the changing of his society to the best. So, the term became a

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symbol of belonging to their ethnic group and a sign of pride toward their cultural heritage (ibid).

### **1.4.3 Language**

After the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, the Spanish language remained the first if not the sole language of the majority of Mexicans in the south Western United States for many decades. The need to learn English language was a minor importance since they interfered generally to each other. In other words, Mexican American immigrants keep themselves away from the other ethnic groups, and the continued entry of additional immigrants revitalized their culture and language especially for those who become permanent residents in US (ibid).

If the traditions and cultures are described as soft boundaries that can be stretched and shrunk through time, language is seen as a hard one, it is the bulletproof that contains the whole community with all its components. In the twentieth century, the latter generations of Mexican Americans were somehow obliged to learn English as a need for their professional life. Besides, the children had no choice in schools; English language is a necessary part of their curriculum. Moreover, the use of Spanish outside classroom was discouraged and sometimes prohibited until the mid-century, especially for the barbaric campaign against anything related to Mexican Americans. Add to that the impact of television in that era (ibid).

Regardless of the encroachments used by the English rulers against the Spanish community in their public and private life, but the spirit of challenge of the Spanish groups did not allow their language to disappear. The Chicano movement has played an important role to preserve the Spanish language and has renewed the pride of the Mexican Americans to their cultural heritage. Some statistics reveals that there were more than 100 Spanish-language newspaper, approximately 500 radio station and 130 television stations whose programming was partially or completely in Spanish. (ibid).

Despite the pride of the Mexican American in their language and cultural heritage, but the dominated language among them is English. The Spanish language became

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less frequent with each new generation born in US. According to 1976 US Census, 68 percent of the Mexican Americans speak English with a good proficiency. In addition, a poll was made by Meier in 1990 indicated that among the Mexican Americans who participated, there were 90 percent of them who speak and comprehend Spanish, but only 5.3 percent used it at home (ibid).

The Bilingual act of 1968 is considered as a critical factor which affects all the languages existed in US. The Act is an extent of the Civil Right Act of 1964 which ensures the right of learning the English language for all the ethnic groups in US. The Act gave a special attention especially for those students and children whose skills in English were deficient. The amount of spending on these schools increased to 107 Million Dollars. Despite these instructions, various individuals and organizations did not receive the message positively, and they dealt with the act of bilingual as a threat to the dominant Anglo American culture. In 1978, Emmy Shafter created an organization English Only as a reaction against any concept which encouraged the bilingualism or biculturalism. (ibid).

Though many Mexican Americans supported the learning of English language as a need, but many of them have found that their Spanish language is threatened. They proposed The English Plus proposal which was a method of teaching "maintenance bilingual instruction", it is less employed but supported by the League of Latin American Citizens (LULAC)<sup>5</sup>. The technique utilizes the students' language and English language in parallel but never denies the importance of the student's ethnicity.

### **1.4.4 EDUCATION**

In the late 1800s and early 1900s, the aim of Mexican American immigrants was to provide their children with opportunities for education. This "dream" was somehow difficult to reach due to many other needs the families were not able to satisfy. Regardless to the availability of schools in rural places which helped the children to attend their primary school, but the quality of teachers and the way of teaching were

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<sup>5</sup> The League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) is the oldest surviving Latino civil rights organization in the U.S.[2] It was established on February 17, 1929, in Corpus Christi, Texas, largely by Hispanic veterans of World War I who sought to end ethnic discrimination against Latinos in the United States

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inferior. Moreover, they were not able to continue their education career because of many aspects. The most important one is the insufficient wages which did not cover their living; the children worked side by side with their parents to provide additional incomes. The second major aspect was the instability of these families which led school dropout; the families were obliged to change their places searching for new job opportunities in farms and railway (ibid).

### **1.4.5 THE ROLE OF WOMEN**

In the late 1960s, women began to write about their situation and the obstacles they faced in their lives which consisted of: the practices of discrimination in all fields of life especially in labour markets, ; inequality in educational opportunities; the suffering of Chicano women in poor American Mexican neighbourhoods; absence of political representation locally or nationally (ibid).

During the 1970s and early 1980s, the most of Mexican American women were not attracted to the emerged ideas from the women's movement in the United States; they were somehow independent in their thought, bearing their cultural heritage as something they proud of. These ideas derived from Chicano movements which established the first seeds for the future Mexican American women (ibid).

### **1.4.6 Health Care Beliefs and Practices**

The majority of Mexican Americans have some beliefs concerning their health. They don't believe in medicament and chemical treatment, they have their methods to resolve their health problem by using herbs or other natural medicines or remedies (Englekirk, and Marin). These beliefs are widespread among mothers or grandmothers. The following example explains the Mexican view:

"I went to the doctor. He made me get undressed and put on a little robe. He examined my hands and knees. Then he told me I had rheumatism. I already knew that! He said he couldn't do anything for me, just give me a shot. He charged me \$15; now I go to him only when I feel real sick and need the drugs. Otherwise I go see [a healer]. I

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don't know why but I have more confidence and faith in him. He gives me herbs, and I feel fine" (qtd in. Trotter 51).

### 1.4.7 CUISINE

Corn, beans, squash, and tomatoes were the basic diet of the inhabitants of Mexico in the beginning years of recorded human history until the arrival of Spaniards in the early 1500s. The trade centred in Manila brought pork, beef, rice and various spices among other foods to the diet of this region (Englekirk, and Marin).

### 1.5 The Chicano Literary Renaissance

In 1970, the Modern Language Association included a workshop on Chicano studies. One year later in Detroit, the Midwest Modern Language Association accepted a paper on Chicano literature. In December 1971, the American Association of Teachers of Spanish and Portuguese, meeting in Chicago, dedicated an entire section of its program to the examination of Mexican American literature. This condition of affairs has been aptly called by a Mexican American writer Philip D. Ortego y Gasca a "Chicano Renaissance" (D. Ortego 1).

The origin of Chicano literature is still debatable; some critics claim that Chicano is a part from American literature, because it reflects the reality of the Mexican minority in US who are considered as American citizens. However, reality proves the contrary and the documented history reflects the neglect and the persecution of this minority in US. But, this rejection of Chicanos does not mean that it was accepted in Mexico or even by Mexicans visiting the United States. In 1900, the Mexican poet Amado Nervo says:

Walking the streets of San Antonio, Texas, I come across one or another type of Mexican, but all so distasteful that I dare not approach them, because I know that from their lips I can expect only gutter sentences, and I do not wish to witness the profanation of the harmonious treasure of my old Latin language. (Stavans 16)

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In other words, Amado Nervo reveals the dark side of the Mexican Americans and how their identity became a heavy burden. The blind imitation of the Americans' culture makes them faded away and decayed. The Mexican poet sighs on his language and how it is shattered in front of him.

On the other hand, the Mexican poet Octavio Paz says:

Something similar occurs with the Mexicans whom one meets in the street; although, they have lived there for many years, they still wear the same clothing, speak the same language, and are ashamed of their origins. No one would confuse them with authentic North Americans (ibid).

That is to say, although the Mexican American still live as Mexicans, there is a problem of identity. The feelings of inferiority make them ashamed of their origins.

Jose Vasconcelos in defining *pochos*: "A word that is used in California to designate the outcast who rejects Mexican culture although he has it in his blood, and who attempts to adjust all his actions imitatively to those of the present rulers of the region" (ibid). in other words, it is a Denial of identity and origins. In the same perspective, the sociologist Manuel Gamio, in 1931, collected this testimony from Anastasio Torres, of Leon, Guanajuato:

I don't have anything against the *pochos*, but the truth is that although they are Mexicans, for they are of our own blood because their parents were Mexicans, they pretend that they are Americans. They also want to talk in English and they speak Spanish very badly. That is why I don't like them (ibid).

According to Anastasio, the *pochos* reflects the Mexican Americans' life in US. Although they hold the Mexican heritage in their blood, but they pretend and behave as Americans. In other words, *pochos* have a problem of belonging. Anastasio shares the same idea as Jose Vasconcelos by shedding light on identity crisis that the Mexican Americans face.

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From another perspective, some critics distinguish the origins of Chicano literature from the language used. Since Spanish is a primary language in Chicano literature, so is Mexican. On the other side, others see that many Chicano works are bilingual, a mixture between English and Spanish, which means that the study of Chicano literature is conducted by the Spanish American literature. Each side wants to make the Chicano literature part of their country's heritage, but reality reveals that Chicano is an identity itself, neither American nor Mexican (16-17).

Chicano as an independent literature which is a result of toughness and sufferance went through many phases to take its contemporary shape. These stages are also debatable and the critics distinguish between different periods. Here, we are going to discuss the most acceptable idea as the follow (18).

### 1.6 The Development of The Chicano Literature

#### A. Pre-Chicano literature to 1848:

During the Spanish colonialism in Mexico, there were many literary works realized by the *conquistadors* in a sort of diaries, chronicles, reports, and correspondences. It was the same thing as the British settlers who wrote about their experiences in the Atlantic coast (O. Eysturoy and Gurpegui 51).

The first Spanish explorers who came to the southwest left behind them descriptions and semi historical writings describing the new world. For example, the *Relación* by Álvaro Núñez Cabeza de Vaca, published in Zamora, Spain in 1542; It is a narrative description not only of the landscape but it mirrored the lifestyle of various Indian tribes in the region. Cabeza de Vaca reflected his experience in the southwest and California during his eight years of living there after an expedition shipwrecked off the coast of Florida in 1528. Another of these early accounts, *Relación de descubrimiento de las Siete Ciudades* by Fray Marcos de Niza, describes what is known today as New Mexico and Arizona. *Relación de la jornada a Cibola* by Pedro de Castaneda de Nájera describes his experience to find gold which leads him to Kansas (ibid).



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A significant literary work was written by Gaspar Pérez de Villagra like *La Historia de la Nueva Mexico*<sup>6</sup>. The writer was a soldier in Juan Onate's expedition into New Mexico in 1598. They were going to colonize the northern frontier of New Mexico where they met San Gabriel, the first European settlement in the southwest. "*Villagra's Historia*" is an epic poem which chronicles the Spanish entry in to New Mexico. It consists of thirty four rhyming cantos. Other works to be mentioned are *Viaje* by Hernando Alarcon and *Viaje y descubrimiento* by Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo. Both of them are expeditions toward the Californian coast in 1540 and 1543 respectively (ibid).

During the 1600s, there were few expeditions to the southwest and California due to the meager incomes of previous expeditions. The 1700s is the period of religion; the friars accompanied the expeditions to facilitate their mission and to set up permanent communities around the missions. As a result, these residents left behind them many diaries and experiences. Among the works found there, the diaries of many friars like Fray Juan crispí; Fray Pedro Front, Padre F. Garcés, Fray Junípero Serra and others; Francisco Palou and his four volume *Noticias de la Nueva California*, and *La Poesía de Miguel de Quintana* 1693 by Miguel de Quintana. Other works illustrated in religious writings such as *Manuel Para Administrar Los Santos sacramentos* (1760) by Fray Bartolomé (O. Eysturoy and Gurpegui 51-52).

In 1821, Mexico gained its independence from Spain, the Southwest and California became parts of Mexico and one of the most important changes that the government established concerning the region is to cancel the Spanish laws that prevented the foreign trades to enter the territory of Santa Fe Trail. Consequently, this was the first seed of the first interaction between the Anglo traders and the Mexicans. Texas was proclaimed independent from Mexico by the Anglo settlers in 1836 due to the huge number of people who moved into the southwest and California with the support of US government (O. Eysturoy and Gurpegui 52).

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<sup>6</sup> One of the first travel journals of its kind to be published, this epic poem about Juan de Oñate's entrada that led to the founding of Nueva México in 1598 (to become the state of New Mexico 314 years later) is full of the hopes and dreams of those who traveled with Oñate

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### B. Transition Period 1848 -1910

Overnight, many Mexicans found themselves Americans after the treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo and the years after 1848 to 1910 seemed to be a transition period in many critics' opinions. As a result, they brought with them their cultural heritage and since the absence of formal education, they used to explain their situation orally. The narrative ballads and the corridos are seen as an echo to illustrate their sufferance as a major theme that came after many conflicts in different sides between the Anglo Americans and the "New Americans". Another example of protesting is depicted in a popular drama known as *The Texans*. It is a play that narrates the conflict between Texas and New Mexico after the independence of Texas; it is based on a historical incident in 1841 when Texans attempted to annex parts of New Mexico (Stavans 21)

The traditional literary forms remained a way to figure the Mexican American's life, the language used is Spanish as a symbol of belonging to their real identity and to raise people's awareness about the Mexican heritage which they think is in danger. The works are limited in descriptive narratives of personal or semi-historical character. Among these works we find *Cosas de California* (1877) by Antonio Franco Coronel, *Recuerdos* (1875) by Florencio Serrano, and *Noticias históricas de la Antigua y Nueva California* (1875) by Fr. Francisco Palou. Some other works are written in English such as Miguel Antonio Otero's *autobiography* about life in the old west. *My Life on the Frontier*, and *Tough Trip Through Paradise 1878-1879*, a Picaresque Narrative by Andrew Garcia. (O. Eysturoy and Gurpegui 53-54).

### C. Interaction Period 1910-1942

In this period, many Mexican fled the turmoil of Mexican revolution and this led to strengthen the Mexican American relations and help them to protect their traditions and Culture and reinforce the existence of their language in the southwest and California. As a result of this great development, Spanish language periodicals and many newspapers host many works in their columns, not only social debates or political essays, but also many other creative outcomes. *LULAC News in Texas* and *Alianza in Arizona* played a vital role in the development of Chicano literature, they

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published poetry, short stories, novels and scholarly articles at time where the publication of Mexican Americans works were limited and restricted. One of the most famous novels is *Los de Abajo* (The Underdogs) by Mariano Azuela; it was published by the newspaper *El Paso del Norte* in 1915. (Stavans 23)

The Mexican American writer Philip D. Ortego y Gasca in his study of Chicano poetry, cites some names of the poets who published in some periodicals (24). He discusses the poetry of Vicente Bernal and Fray Angelico Chavez, the former the author of an early book of poems, *Las Primicias* (1916), and the latter a representative of the mystic tradition in three works, *New Mexico Triptych* (1940), *Eleven Lady-Lyrics and Other Poems* (1945), and *The Single Rose* (1948) (24).

In 1936, the *Corrido* still being the dominant way of expression in social and politic protest. Senator Bronson Cutting's defense of the lawmen elicited a protest poem narrates the events of coal miners who had been subdued with gunfire by the sheriff and his men during a strike. The poem ended with the following lines:

Usted se come sus coles  
Con su pan y mantequilla  
Y yo me como mis frijoles  
Con un pedazo de tortilla  
You eat your cabbages  
With your bread and butter  
And I eat mine with beans  
And with a bit of tortilla (25)

### D. Chicano Period 1943-Present

With the advent of the civil rights movement during 1960s, the Chicano literature witnessed new path in its history by including the various facets of the Chicano experience. New symbols joined the way of writing like *Aztlan*; the ancient Indian homeland in the southwest in addition to many new other concepts which used in many works to fix or to represent the Chicano community such as the position of

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Mestizaje and Gringa, the wide dimensions of the borderland, *El Otro Lado* as an exile.

### 1.7 The Borderlands Theory and *El Otro Lado*

Border as it is known is a thin line which separates a country from the other ones. This line territorializes our vision's dimensions and determines our thinking with specific parameters. In other words, borders determine the physical space where people share a common history, traditions, language, culture and identity. In this spatial interval we distinguish between two types of groups, the outer group which includes the majority of people who share the same characteristics, and in the other hand we have the inner group. The latter represents the minorities and the ethnic groups who co-exist with the whole community. This type of co-existence engenders a special atmosphere between the different cultures. This diversity of cultures and ethnicity in one country provides a kind of conflicts between the natives and the foreigners at the level of acceptance and integration.

However, border is not only a geopolitical line, but it is a concept which considered as one of the most fertile subjects in current critical works, this appears in the American scholar of Chicano cultural theory Gloria Anzaldua's (1942-2004) groundbreaking *Borderland / La Frontera* 1987, the American Chicano poet, writer, and scholar Alfred Arteaga (1958-2008) in his visions of the border in *Chicano Poetics* (1997), the Mexican-American author Ramon Saldivar in his work *Border Matters: Remapping American Cultural Studies* (1997). In additions to the seminal writings of Chicano thinkers and writers, we have the work of the Silver Professor and Professor of Spanish and Portuguese Languages and Literatures at New York University Marry Louis Pratt: *Imperial Eyes: Studies in Travel Writing and Transculturation* (1992), the American and Canadian scholar and cultural critic Henry Giroux in his lucid *Border Crossing* (1992), the American journalist, filmmaker Paul Jay: *Contingency Blues* (1997), the Professor, Director of Undergraduate Studies David E. Johnson and the associate professor of English at Michigan State University Scott Michelson: *Border theory: The Limits of Cultural Politics* (1997). All these

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works have contributed to creating a theoretical framework concerning US national and cultural spaces as well as their connection with other literatures and cultures (Benito, Manzanos 2).

Border as a theory is not a peculiar to Chicano literature but it is taken as a paradigm which is discussed in other cultural and literature manifestations. The decentring of the locus of culture led to the change in methodological terms, and the Border theory seems to require a borderlands approach to literature and culture (ibid).

The concept of Borderlands started with the imposition of an artificial boundary between Mexico and United States in 1848, the border is not only a geographical line but as Gloria Anzaldua has remarked:

the psychological borderlands, the sexual borderlands and the spiritual borderlands are not particular to the southwest. In fact, the Borderlands are physically present whenever two or more cultures edge each other, where people of different races occupy the same territory, where under, and upper classes touch (ibid).

In other words, Anzaldua's perspective claims that the meaning of Borders is not fixed in the edge of two countries with fences and walls, but the border follows those people who bear another culture in another nation. This idea is clarified in her book *Borderlands / La Frontera* where she distinguishes between two terms:

- 1- A border is a dividing line, narrow strip along a steep edge (ibid)
- 2- A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary (ibid)

In the same context, the dimension of Border is not restricted only for physical lines as it is said, but it can be wider than we think. Alfred Arteaga makes a distinction between "the thin and the severe borderline", and the notion of a broader zone, a borderlands, "the borderzone" (ibid).

Manuel Aguirre, the 20th-century Mexican general and leader of the Escobarista rebellion, the American scholar Roberta Quance and Philip Sutton give

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the term “Threshold” (3-4). It is a situation where the border transgresses itself. That is to say, if the borders are concrete or imaginary, threshold is the opening which permits passage from one space to other. Mary Louise Pratt has coined the term “contact zones”, “I use the term to refer to social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out in many parts of the world today” (4). In other words, there are hidden conflicts between the different traditions and cultures in a given society. These conflicts are happened in the edges of each group where the cultures meet, clash and spark.

The multiple terms and dimensions of Border are not the only way where the border transgresses itself. But there is unpredictable boundary which exceeds the physical borders and repeats itself in different times and locations; it is the repeating borders. For instance, the limits of the physical borders can exceed the actual border between Mexico and US; it can reach the outskirts in different shapes as in Sandra Cisneros’ novel *The House on Mango Street* (77). She depicts the situation of a Latin girl in US society and how she is raped repeatedly by a male who defines her as a *Spanish girl*. Oscar Hijuelos, the first Hispanic writer to win a Pulitzer Prize for Fiction, said that the novel has “conveyed the South-western Latino experience with verve, charm, and passion”. As a reaction, the novel received critics and has been banned from some school curriculums. In response, teachers, authors and activists organized a caravan in 2012 called the *Librotraficante Project*. The caravan aimed at rehabilitating the removed books from the curriculum. The given example shows how the literature textualizes the conflicts and clashes between cultures, races, minorities, classes, and how the border can transgress itself in many shapes (SparkNotes Editors)

The polymorphism of borderlands is not peculiar to the Chicano literature; the psychological borderlands, the sexual borderlands and the spiritual ones have become textualized in the writing of African Americans, and Asian Americans. For example, the Mason-Dixon Line is a boundary between Maryland and Pennsylvania, taken as the northern limit of the slave-owning states before the abolition of slavery. The line separated the slaves from the presumable Free States. Toni Morrison illustrates the

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psychological borderlands through her novel *beloved*. The torture is symbolized in the characters of the novel and their situation. Morrison marks a double border, the physical one is between plantation ironically called “Sweet Home” and “Freedom”. The desire of the slaves to escape from their “Sweet Home” to “Freedom” represents the time border between the power of the past and the will to live in the present (Benito and Manzananas 5). The invisible border between Americans and Asian Americans is discussed in the writings of Maxine Hong Kingston through The separation between Chinese Americans and “ghosts” in the *Women Warrior* and *China Men* (ibid).

### 1.7.1 The Borderlands: a Concept of Affiliation and Alienation

Borderlands, contact zones, borderzone, repeating border, thin and severe borderline are concepts refer to a situation where a group of people or an individual experience the living outside their mother country. The situation of these individuals is governed by the place and time as crucial criterions that shape their identity. The shift between the mother nation and the country they live in creates an ambivalence of self with a special and personal space. To clarify, Biemann declares that:

The shifting of the border has created a permanent liminal zone that exists into the present and has become part of my experience. The border is “a place that is constituted discursively through the representation of two nations” and “at the fringe of two societies (Treviño 8).

According to Biemann, the border is what divides two nations and what makes him in the margin of two societies. It is what makes him in another place he called the luminal zone.

### 1.7.2 *Gringa* and *Mestiza* Self

Ana Treviño in her Master thesis “*EL OTRO LADO (THE OTHER SIDE)*” 2016 reflects her situation through her real experience of crossing the border back and forth, and tasting the mixture of the Mexican and American cultures (7). The discussion is moved from the different meaning of Borderlands to the concrete results which are

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reflected on the individuals. Ana Treviño narrates her experience by depicting the bridge she walks through as a “liminal space, in-between the designations of identity” (8) and the connective tissue that constructs the difference between her Mexican and American self (8). The instability makes her in a position where she cannot fix her identity, and makes her as a product of both cultures. This hybridity leads Ana Treviño to understand her *Mestiza*<sup>7</sup> self and to adopt her *Gringa* self<sup>8</sup> (8).

Between Gringa and Mestiza, there is a place of divergence where individuals experience the feelings of marginalization and emptiness. Their identity is decayed and dissolved in the two cultures as Anazuldia says: “As a mestiza “I shift out of habitual formations” when going to and from Mexico and as a result I operate “in a pluralistic mode” (9).

This dispersion creates a special perspective especially for the Mexican American. This perspective reflects the immigrant’s point of view about *El Otro Lado* and how they deal with. Other questions may be introduced about the real meaning of the “Other Side”, and from which point the individual is able to categorize himself as a foreigner or as a native.

By going back to the dimensions of the borderlands, one can say that the meaning of the other side ‘*Otro Lado*’ is something that differs from another. Generally, the interference between the Mexican and US culture produces that abstract space which is nor American neither Mexican. It is like an exile in which the *Mestizo* / *Mestiza* and the *Gringo* / *Gringa* act in different ways when they shift back and forth between the two countries looking for their molten personalities.

### 1.7.3 Luggage and Memory

People who live in the edge of two cultures, who shift between two different countries, who have special feelings for their mother country and the one which

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<sup>7</sup> Mestizo, plural mestizos, feminine mestiza, any person of mixed blood. In Central and South America it denotes a person of combined Indian and European extraction

<sup>8</sup> Gringo (male) or gringa (female) is a term, mainly used in Spanish-speaking and Portuguese-speaking countries, which may have different meanings depending on where it is used, such as in Spanish-speaking countries in Latin America, gringo refers to someone who is foreign and English-speaking, particularly someone from the United States. It is a term that is sometimes used disparagingly



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embraces them, people who do not know themselves, who do not recognize their real identities in the midst of this Diaspora. Those unknown bodies in the airports and border areas that wait their plane to return home, those who holds their papers in hand and their luggage in the other hand. They are just unknown bodies with a stream of stories, suffering and memories.

The English writer Irit Rogoff sees the luggage as a metaphor that symbolizes “multiple marker: of memory, nostalgia and access to other histories” (22). Those memories are “objectified concretized, virtually museumified in a suitcase” (ibid). In other words, bags and luggage in their physical shape have an abstract meaning which illustrates the alienation, marginalization and a long history of struggle.

Between the luggage and the quest for self, Ana Treviño describes her American self when she travels to Mexico and her Mexican self when she goes back to US. The two perspectives make her to feel “Othered”. This “Otherness” is a result of displacement, a result of juggling cultures (24).

### 1.8 Genres of Chicano Literature

The Chicano literature provokes many topics that are related especially to the identity problematic. The way Chicano activists reflect their ideas differs from one to another using different genres and literary devices, and the common aim between all these authors and poets is dig deep into their life, ethnicity, history and cultural heritage.

#### Fiction:

The question of identity in Chicano literature is the orbit which the majority of the writers try to identify. Fiction is a genre used by Chicano as a way to transmit and convey the hidden problems in the community. For example, the Chicano novelist José Antonio Villarreal (1924 –2010) through his first novel in Chicano literature *Pocho* (1959) depicts the protagonist as a person who rejects his Mexican origins and his parents’ traditions while unable to identify with the North American culture. In the end of the story he refuses both cultures (O. Eysturoy and Gurpegui 51). The novel of

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the American author Rudolfo Anaya *Bless Me, Ultima* (1971) depicts the struggle of a Chicano person who wants to determine his identity away from Spanish, Mexican and Indian cultural roots (56). The problem of identity is found also in the work of Oscar Z. Acosta in *The Autobiography of a Brown Buffalo* (1972), the protagonist has a lack of belonging either in the US or in Mexico, and after a long journey he came to Mexico where he understand that his identity defies the borders (ibid).

### Autobiography:

Among the autobiographical works published by Chicanos is Richard Rodriguez's autobiography *Hunger for Memory: the Education of Richard Rodriguez* (1982). It is a kind of composed series reflects the role of education by depicting the author's life from the first day when he was socially disadvantaged child until his completion of doctoral degree. During this period he shed light on how the US society assimilated him and alienated from his family and culture (61).

### Poetry:

A landmark in contemporary Chicano is *I am Joaquin/Yo soy Joaquin* (1967) written by Rodolfo Gonzales. The poem chronicles the Chicano history and calling for a revolution and unity, for reclaiming the lost land and the dignity and pride of the *mestizo* identity. The poem is famous due to its political realities (ibid).

## 1.9 Conclusion

The Chicanos' dream is not just a question of existence but a wreckage of identity that the Mexican Americans are struggling to gather and to impose themselves as a vital minority with complete rights. All the literary works have succeeded in a way to depict the reality of the Mexican ethnicity in US, and to give a clear image with limitless dimensions about the concept of borders in Chicano's view. The psychological side of the border's concept portrays the reality of *El Otro Lado* (the other side) and how the Mexican Americans deal with this concept in addition to their daily struggle against the feelings of the "otherness".

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**Chapter Two: The Distance Between Us  
as a Vivid *Testimonio***

### 2.1 Introduction

Reyna Grande's *The distance Between Us* is possibly regarded as one of the most emotional works in the history of Chicano literature. Reyna Grande in her heartbreaking memoir captures a vivid image about life before and after illegal immigration to America. Her autobiography is divided into two sections -one primarily taking place Iguala, her hometown in Mexico, and the other in Los Angeles, California. She skilfully describes the hard tribulations of crossing the border to pursue the American Dream. Hence, *The Distance Between Us* portrays the inner and outer struggle for the search of identity and belonging. It also deals with the failure of holding a family in such a situation where unity is needed. Besides, it represents the intellectual differences between Mexican and American women. Commonly, *The Distance Between Us* is a good model of chicana memoir that depicts the issue of illegal immigration in Mexico.

### 2.2 The Broken Beauty of Reyna's Family

A separated family is a failed family. In her prologue, Reyna Grande initiated her memoir by comparing *The Other Side* to *La Llorona*; a weeping woman who steals children away from canals, but *The Other Side* took instead parents "neither of my grandmothers told us that there is something more powerful than *La Llorona*, a power that takes away parents, not children. It is called The United State" (Grande 3). She was desperately sad because she did not have a hope for their return "what I knew was that prayers didn't work, because if they did, *El Otro Lado* wouldn't be taking my mother away, too" (4). A tone of sadness dominates her words expressing the deep loss of being far from her parent. Her dream was simple as any child's dreams ; having a family , a united complete family but the pursuing of the American Dream was a big obstacle to this little innocent girl "Immigration took a toll on us all" (207).

While reading this memoir, we feel that Reyna and her Siblings craved for only one thing, a family. They were not dreaming to be rich, having fancy toys or a

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beautiful house though they were living in a real misery. The two thousand miles were enough to break their relationship as and made it cold “the distance between us and our parents was destroying our relationship more than any one of us could have imagined” (57). Her mother followed her husband earning more money to build a house for their children. Surprisingly, the father sent them their mother back but with a different version “The woman standing there wasn’t the same woman who had left” (76). Therefore, She became disappointed upset and bitter which made her somehow careless about her kids. Reyna believed that her mother was always near to her since her umbilical cord connected between them, thinking: “It doesn’t matter that there is a distance between us now. That cord is there forever” (21).

There was a very special agony Reyna resisted was that her parents never really come back but also they had not completely left. Their separation was episodic. The Grande children were seen as orphans though their parents were still alive “look, there goes the little orphan” (20). About life in Mexico she thought that beauty is everywhere around them but in the condition of the presence of her parents otherwise she saw it: “without my parents here, it was a place of broken beauty” (65). After going to the USA, Reyna was still insisting that her father and mother who made all the places beautiful, commenting: “we were already living in some kind of Hell in this strange place of broken beauty” (262). This emotional expression means one thing that her family was falling apart.

### 2.3 Language, the Way to *El Otro Lado*

Reyna Grande depicts through her novel the role and the position of language for the Mexican Americans. She illustrated this crucial aspect in three different perspectives in which language is seen from multiple corners. The first is concerned with her father who supposedly represents the old generation. During the long time he spent in the US, he did not learn English and preferred to live in the gloom. He did not make a great progress in his life; he preserved his Spanish language, the same as his wife. This mentality kept them away from the American Dream. Later, he decided to

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learn English to get the American Green Card which was the easiest way to integrate him with the other side. After getting the Green Card he realized that he was living in the dark, and staying in the shadow is one of his worst mistakes. He understood that the key of the other side was to learn its language, and this message was transmitted to his daughters as Reyna's recalled: "One way or another, papi said, we will stop living in the shadows" (229).

The second perspective is touched through Reyna's elder sister; Mago. The sister in the novel represents a slice of Mexican Americans who live in US and they were assimilated in different ways by eliminating their identity and erasing their existence. The first obstacle that Mago encountered was in her school where she was impressed with her friend Pepe. This glimpse from Reyna represents the inferior position of Spanish language and Mexican identity in US society, and this crisis is put to light. When Mago met Pepe and they started to talk. The plot began where Pepe asked about her name, and while telling the incident she said: "All I managed to say was Maggie." (210). Maggie, is the name which was given by her history teacher as Mago claimed, and the reason behind was as she said: "her teachers had trouble saying her real name, Magloria" (ibid).

Regardless if the story of Mago is true or not, this may reveal two main views. The first is, if Mago's story is true, so the American society is "industrializing" people and changing them based on its standards. The second, if Mago's story was just imaginative to avoid her sister's blame, so she was definitely neglected and marginalized and her behavior was governed by a super power which is the assimilation. Mago continued her story to Reyna: "After I told him my name, Pepe started asking me more questions, and very soon he figured out I don't speak English well. He caught up his friends and didn't talk to me again" (ibid). Mago was lost, but the most heartbreaking piece in her story is when she was with her brother Carlos walking home along the train tracks "that run parallel to Figueroa Street, they ran into Pepe and his friends. To Mago's surprise, the boys started throwing gravel at them from the other side of the tracks yelling, "Watbacks, Watbacks!" (211). Mago, Maggie or Magloria experienced the meaning of *El Otro Lado* in her classroom and in her

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daily life, and Reyna expanded her idea when she described the track of Pepe and his friends as the other side. She symbolized her sister's story to match any other immigrant sufferance. Reyna sums up the experience of her sister with a tone of sorrow, sadness and moaning; an experience made her bemoans on her bad English "Ay, Nena. You don't know how much i wished today that i knew every bad word in English" (ibid).

Reyna represents the different perspectives of Language by giving vivid examples from her close environment, she moves to another scale and tells the audience about herself in this maze of *EL Otro Lado* and how language could be a crucial criterion in the immigrants' life. One of the language obstacles she encountered was in her school; the beginning was when she wanted to introduce herself to her teacher Mrs. Anderson, but she was not able to produce or to understand any English word. Then, she was separated from her classmates in addition to other immigrant students to teach them English. Reyna describes them by their eye's, color, skin and hair, as an allusion to the differences between them and the Americans. Reyna depicts this separation as another level of *El Otro Lado*. In the same class, there are two groups with different teachers. The American group has some privileges and advantages in more than the other group as Reyna illustrates "Mrs. Anderson didn't tell them to keep their voice down" (172). On the other hand, she and her group were obliged to whisper as she demonstrated: "Sometimes it was hard to hear what Mr. Lopez was telling us. Then he couldn't hear what we told him because we had to whisper" (ibid).

Reyna during her class was wondering about what was happening in the other side "I watched her mouth open and close, open and close as she talked. I wished I could understand what she was saying" (ibid). The last given image can summarize everything Reyna wanted to say. Reyna declared that English is the way to the American Dream, exactly as she said: "One way or another, papi said: "We will stop living in the shadows" Back then, I hadn't known what exactly he'd meant by that, but when I thought about the way Mrs. Anderson had ignored me, about the fact that I couldn't express myself in class and my lack of English kept me silent, I thought I understand what papi meant" (229).



### 2.4 Identity crisis

The composition of identity is a crucial part in person's life. This process helps individuals to recognize themselves and to be recognized and gives them a clear path to struggle for life and the trials people face. It gives them a comprehension of the self and the world around. However, immigration puts people in ambiguous situations; those immigrants would feel lost and unknown which leads to what is called identity crisis. Through her memoir, Reyna Grande portrays her struggle with immigration and identity at the age of nine, Reyna and her siblings left Mexico and its misery finding themselves enforced to fit into a new society they do not belong to. Because of the huge divergence between the two countries, the author felt herself lost "where do I belong? Do I belong here? Do I belong there? Do I belong anywhere?" (175). As a teen, Reyna was introduced to a new language, customs and cultural values. Yet, with all these differences, she was obliged to comply with the rules of American social standards. Her first concession was her name since she was not allowed to keep her two last names "I wanted to tell him that I had already lost my mother by coming to this country. It was not easy having to also erase her from my name. Who am I now, then?" (172) Besides, this heartbreaking position, when she went back to Iguala for a quick visit, she was shocked by Mexican's views "when you come from the U.S., people look at you differently. They treat you differently" (280). She was not treated as Mexican anymore "Eventhough my umbilical cord was buried in Iguala, I was no longer considered Mexican enough. To the people there, who had see me grown up, I was no longer one of them" (281). In this respect, Reyna was seeking her true identity feeling the pain of belonging and the mistery toward herself-defining. She was not a Mexican in Mexico and she was neither Mexican nor American in USA.

Despite all the US's offers, Reyna had always felt that this land had stolen people's identity as she said: "I wondered if during their crossing, both my parents had lost themselves in that no-man's-land." (315). She thought that her family melted into the American culture and they forgot their roots. Especially, when her parent named their new baby Elizabeth. Then, her description to Mago's view toward

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Mexico and its inhabitants during their visit by saying “Mago no longer cared about Mexico, her home was now the United State “ (282). Also, portraying her happiness when she was called Maggie by her American teachers, Reyna commented: “It was the beginning of her assimilation“(210). The writer felt a kind of sadness because the Grandes were losing their culture and become Americanized.

Conjointly, Reyna as a child grown up without love or support of a stable family which affected her identity and made her always struggle: “what group did I belong to?” (299), because there were no set to follow after. However, she showed her pride of being Mexican through the whole memoir “I hated the fact that I was being stripped of my Mexicaness .I would tell people, `am Mexican, from Mexico`“(246). But she emphasized on her American belonging at the end of the novel “I consider myself Mexican American because I am from both places. Both countries are within me. They coexist with me. And my writing is the bridge that connects them both”(320)

### 2.5 Female Achievement and Failure in *El Otro Lado*

Between hell and paradise, Reyna portrayed the situation of women in the midst of this struggle through the American Dream by illustrating different pieces to highlight the Mexican American women’s life. The feminine sufferance and struggle was present in Reyna’s novel; she treats their role and situation from different views. Indirectly, she moves the reader not just from extracting the hidden messages of the novel, but to make comparison between the woman in Mexico, and the *mestiza* life. By shedding light on Reyna’s mother who crossed the border to US with her husband. The aim was to ensure their children’s future and to build a house but they failed. The mother left her husband and US to Mexico and she attempted to do what she was not able to do in US but she failed again. She wanted to challenge her husband as she said “I’m going to show your father that I can build my own dream house, too” (125). Reyna’s mother’s story was so complicated, and her life moved from the bad to the worst gradually. The mother represented an important element in Mexican women who experienced immigration and failed. The problem happened due to their inability

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to integrate themselves in US community, and the second obstacle is the Mexican mentality which sanctifies man. Reyna's mother showed up her disability to find her way without her husband, which led her to lose herself and her family. For more clarification, the Mexican woman prioritizes her husband in everything, even though the cost is her children and her family.

Tía Emperatriz is Reyna's aunt; she represents the real Mexican background. She reflects the limited prospects and ambitions of the Mexican American women. All she needed was a man to marry her. This idea emphasizes the dependency of Reyna's mother to her husband. On the Contrary, Reyna's step mother is totally different than her mother and her aunt as Reyna describes her saying: "Mila wasn't the typical Mexican woman. She wasn't afraid of Papi. She didn't cater to his every whim as women in Mexico are taught to do, as Mami done while living with him" (187), she was educated and "knew her way around this American society in a way Papi did not" (ibid). The different captures concerning woman in Reyna's Novel, emphasize the differences between the Mexican and American societies, also she reflects the position of women in both cultures and the role of freedom in making strong women.

### 2.6 *Testimonio* in Chicana literature

The suffering of the Mexican Americans in US especially the undocumented ones led to a proliferation of memoirs in the past decades. Auto-biographical narratives, novels, films and documentaries have stimulated the immigrants' plight of the mothers who left their children in the care of their relatives, or those mothers who took their children with them in a perilous journey with the belief that they will never be able to return to Mexico; it is the journey of no return. We recall here some fictional tales which were presented as movies such as, *La Misma Luna* (Under the same Moon), and *A better Life*. These works have aimed to highlight the relation between Mothers in *El Otro Lado* and their children by shedding light on the violent experience of immigration which severely damaged the familial bond (Rohrleitner 39).

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In this corner, Reyna Grande's 2012 *The Distance Between Us: A Memoir* is a feminist reinvention and literary expansion of *testimonio* which is considered as a political and social power of the chicana memoir. According to John Beverly, one of the founders of the area testimonial literature in Latin America, the *testimonio* is a "novel or novella-length narrative told in the first person," (40) which conveys the individual's harsh experience. This mode in the context of Chicana literature has attracted the feminist attention, and helped them to create a hybrid of life writing which is partly memoir, partly *testimonio* and partly autobiography. In addition, the *testimonio* blurs the lines between fact and fiction which simplifies the expressing of the complex and contradictory border-crossing experiences of Mexican immigrants to US. Moreover, the *testimonio* genre fulfills two major functions; firstly, the plight of undocumented immigrants is related to the plight of the victims of the genocide and political violence in 1980s; second, it highlights the sexual abuse to women and girls which is considered as a reason to immigrate (41). This style of writing creates interference between the author and his audience. The written text represents the author in a way that seems to be the same as the reader, and this is what Mary Louis Pratt called "autobioethnographies" in "*Art of the Contact Zone*" (43). It is a style of writing that influenced the Chicana memoirists mainly for two reasons; the first is that the Chicana memoirists dealt with the painfully situation of misrepresentation of the Mexican Americans in US, and the second reason, authors could see the impact of their works as a reflection on their community (44).

*The Distance Between Us* is an autobiography that is based first on memory. It is considered as creative nonfiction. The latter known as literary or narrative nonfiction is a branch of writing which deals with the use of inventive and dramatic techniques of real factual events. Reyna Grande narrated her life story from a child's perspective by recreating the grief of infancy. She did not give comments or explanation as a conscious adult but instead she restores those painful emotions and acts. For example, she did not mention understanding of her parent's motives. However, she utilizes dialogues which give clearer ideas personalities, paint an image about their body language and add drama to the actions. This method makes the excerpts emotionally compelling. Therefore, any reader would identify with the child Reyna and understand

her pain. Moreover, the inclusion of family photos in her memoir expand the reader imagination And make the events more authentic and real.

### 2.7 Conclusion

In *The Distance Between Us*, Reyna Grande clings to memories and revives her years of childhood spent shredded between two parents and two countries. With eloquent expressions, she portrays her emotion's fluctuation of pain, sorrow, anger and happiness because of her parents' absence. She intelligently conveys her messages in awakening the Dreamer generation and their consciousness toward the future in the land of opportunity. Yet, She explains the challenge of being an undocumented immigrant facing variant borders such as language and cultural borders and pushes Mexican immigrants to impose themselves as part of the American society since they contribute to the progress of The United States too. Also, she frankly speaks about the price those Chicanos pay and how they sacrificed everything to better their lives. Moreover, Reyna gave a clear image of women in both societies by narrating different stories from her environment, and how this helped her to figure out the reality of *El Otro Lado*.

# **General Conclusion**

The target behind this dissertation was to shed light on the tribulations caused by illegal immigration on Mexican society based on the analysis of a Chicana memoir that portrays enough facts about those undocumented immigrants. Through the first chapter, the aim was to cover the first seeds of Mexican Americans and their history in US. Moreover, the focus was on the terms of identity, language and woman as important pillars. Also, this chapter discussed the Chicano literary renaissance and its development through different stages. The last part examined the problematic of the Borderlands and *El Otro Lado* which took the biggest part due to their necessity that appeared clearly in Reyna Grande novel.

The second chapter was the practical part of this dissertation; it made connections with the theory of *El Otro Lado* and the Borderlands by discussing the creative novel of Reyna Grande *The Distance Between Us*. It raised up the author's confusion toward her belonging and identity. Also, it gave a brief comparison between the Mexican and American females and how the place could change mentalities and principles.

*El Otro Lado* was the orbit which manipulated everything in Reyna's life experience. It took different shapes in different levels with different dimensions and places. Reyna felt "othered" in her origin country and in US, she felt neglected in both countries which means that the other side is a problem of belonging. These feelings of "otherness" occurred not just at the level of nationality and origins, but the shape of *El Otro Lado* was expanded to everything in Reyna's life such as her school, street, train track...These forms of *El Otro Lado* are summarized in the Borderland theory which includes all what Reyna and her family faced.

The language was used as a crucial aspect in the novel, and considered as a corner stone to fix the problem of identity and belonging. Reyna portrayed her life and her family life before they learnt English and after. She illustrated this situation through her father's advice: "One way or another, papi said, we will stop living in the shadows" (Grande 229). The life between English and Spanish is like the difference between day and night, and the American Dream could not be real without learning English.

Reyna in her experience discussed an important pillar in every immigrant's life which is the family. She gave two different images between Mexico and US. Her parent wanted to build a house, in this process they failed not just to reach their goal, but they failed to keep their family together. In other words, the meaning of a family is not just a group of people who share the same rooms between the same walls, but the meaning is broader, a family needs a home.

The problem of identity and belonging was discussed by Reyna. She said "I hated the fact that I was being stripped of my Mexicaness .I would tell people, `am Mexican, from Mexico` "(246). On the other hand, she declared her Americaness "I consider myself Mexican American because I am from both places. Both countries are within me. They coexist with me. And my writing is the bridge that connects them both"(320). To explain, Anazuldia says: "As a mestiza "I shift out of habitual formations" when going to and from Mexico and as a result I operate "in a pluralistic mode" (Treviño 9).

To answer the research question, it is very important to mention that America is really a hope for Mexicans and it helped them to improve their lives, however at the cost of many important things. In my opinion I came to a conclusion that the other side is a world that is specific for those Chicanos, neither America refers to El Otro Lado nor Mexico





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