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Mourning Migrants across
Borders:
'*Mestiza*' Consciousness and
Transmodernity in Tim Z.
Hernández's Novel

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Abstract

In his latest documentary novel *All They Will Call You* (2017) Tim Z. Hernández merges factual evidence, testimony, fiction, poetry, and Western and Mesoamerican knowledge to pursue and convey the unknown truth of lives shaped by immigration and deportation referred to in Woody Guthrie's song 'Plane Crash at Los Gatos Canyon' (1961). The novel establishes connections between identity, history, and memory in a specific spatio-temporal context by including and conversing with multiple ignored others, thus creating epistemological, phenomenological frameworks that may be related to Gloria Anzaldúa's 'mestiza consciousness,' Enrique Dussel's 'transmodernity,' and Walter Dignolo's 'border thinking.' Hernández's poetics relies on listening to both subaltern and non-subaltern others, on intertwining multiple approaches to the truth, and on incorporating multidimensional memory. These poetics destabilize a 'hierarchy of mourning' grounded on ethnicity, race and legal status and construct a 'pluriversal' community beyond the political, emotional boundaries established by the nation state.

Keywords

Testimonial fiction, history, immigration, transmodernity, *Mestiza* consciousness

Author's biographical note

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In seeing so many inaccuracies in what we call ‘non-fiction,’ I now question everything that is deemed to be ‘true.’ The only solution, I feel, is to seek our own answers.

TIM Z. HERNÁNDEZ, ‘Author Tim Z. Hernandez Gives Voice to Farm Workers Killed in 1948 Plane Crash’ (Interview with Rigoberto González)

She is called by many names. La Huesera, Bone Woman; La Trapera, The Gatherer; and La Loba, Wolf Woman.

The sole work of La Loba is the collecting of bones. She is known to collect and preserve especially that which is in danger of being lost to the world. [...]

[W]hen the last bone is in place and the beautiful white sculpture of the creature is laid out before her, she sits by the fire and thinks about what song she will sing.

And when she is sure, she stands over the criatura (creature), raises her arms over it, and sings out. [...] La loba (female wolf) sings some more, and more of the creature comes into being [...].

CLARISSA PINKOLA ESTÉS, *Women who Run with the Wolves: Myths and Stories of the Wild Woman Archetype*

1. Immigration and American history ‘from below’

In the days of ‘America first’ rhetoric and ‘zero tolerance’ immigration policies, white supremacy, and the explicit banishment of sexual and racial minorities, immigrants and asylum seekers from the sphere of civil rights and constitutional democracy, we are reminded once and again of the Master Narrative of American History:¹ What is now the United States, the narrative claims, was settled by ‘white,’ Christian, European immigrants whose cultural, social, political and economic history have provided the foundations of national identity. The original 1940 verses of Woody Guthrie’s scathing ‘This Land is Your Land’ have stunning validity for Blacks, Mexicans, Muslims and any ostensibly undesirable, anonymous, and usually unheard individuals who, far from being interpellated by the reassuring claim, are relegated to the lines of the ‘hungry’ by the ‘relief office,’ the margins of the nation. In the same

¹ In *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* Jean François Lyotard refers to ‘grand narratives’ (master-narratives in Fredrik Jameson’s words) as those all-encompassing theories or philosophies that are taken to be universal and that provide a comprehensive understanding of experience and knowledge. In the light of these theories, the smaller, local accounts gain clarity and meaning.

spirit of social protest against inequality and support for civil rights, Guthrie's song 'Plane Wreck at Los Gatos,' also known as 'Deportee,' offers us a view 'from below'² of American history and society and reclaims American hills, valleys, orchards and plains for those who work them, in the revolutionary spirit of American and Latin American working class movements.³ Both a counter-hegemonic American story and a lament for the tragic death of Mexican migrant workers in an airplane crash as they were being deported in 1948, Guthrie's poem, set to music by Martin Hoffman in 1961, dwells on the invisibility of the workers and creates an affective bond between the listener and those whose lives mean little in a production system built on the surplus of deportable (disposable) labor power.⁴

Tim Hernández noticed the connection between Guthrie's popular song⁵ and a 1948 newspaper reporting the news story of the plane crash as he was doing documentary research for his novel *Mañana Means Heaven* (2012). The discovery stirred the writer's curiosity to the point of becoming the object of unprecedented, meticulous research on the media coverage of the plane crash, the migrant workers' real names, the descendants and friends of the passengers on both sides of the Mexican border, the witnesses of the accident, and those involved in the musical rendition of Guthrie's lyrics. In the very spirit of the song, Hernández saves from oblivion some of the unknown Mexican and American local stories related to the fatal accident, places them in space and time, reworks them through imagination, and contextualizes them within a history of trans-American relations. The text reaches at the truth through personal memories, testimony, socio-historical documentation and imagination to answer Guthrie's question 'Who are all these friends, all scattered like dry leaves?'

This discussion of Hernández's composite multimedia text focuses on the ways it exemplifies 'border thinking' or a transmodern '*conciencia de la mestiza*' or '*mestiza*

² I'm drawing on the use that Postcolonial and Subaltern studies have made of Antonio Gramsci's expression.

³ The phrase 'The land belongs to those who work it' ('La tierra es de quien la trabaja') is popularly attributed to Mexican revolutionary leader Emiliano Zapata and has been invoked by multiple agricultural peasant movements across the Americas, ranging from Mexican agricultural workers in California, led by César Chávez in the 1960s, to the later Zapatista movement in Chiapas.

⁴ As Nicolas P. De Genova has shown, the illegal status of migrant workers and the need of disposable labour and services of American citizens is rooted on the 'legal (political) economies' of the state. Illegal migration waves, the material effects of legal practices, are by no means random, but carefully planned and patterned depending on historical contingencies.

⁵ The song was covered by renowned musicians such as Bob Dylan, Joan Baez, Bruce Springsteen Dolly Parton. More recently a collaboration between the band *Outernational* and Tom Morello resulted in the recording of a version that protests the 2010 Arizona law against illegal immigration. Fresno singer *Lance Canales & The Flood* recorded yet another version featuring Tim Z. Hernández calling out the real names of the Mexicans deceased in the accident.

consciousness' (Anzaldúa, 1987) echoing deep epistemological, ethical tensions in a globalized, transnational American society. These tensions are illustrated through complex self-other dynamics at the rhetorical, imaginative and socio-political level. Since *All they Will Call You* constructs self-other relationships beyond nationality, region, ethnicity, and legal status, it brings to foreground the tension between the 'truth' transmitted through overarching official narratives of America on Mexican immigration, and the 'truth' or 'truths' that emerge from a multidirectional approach to a single event in which several American and Mexican citizens were tragically involved. The novel not only reflects a postmodern epistemological crisis—the absences, misinterpretations and voids that ground the Master Narrative of American history and nation building—but also proposes alternative forms of seeking and telling the truth. These alternative approaches involve literacies that combine the knowledge of European and Mesoamerican tradition and embrace the ethical challenges posed by globalization, diaspora, and the suffering of subaltern subjects.

2. Transmodernity and *Mestiza* Consciousness

At the turn of the 20th century the Cuban poet and thinker José Martí expressed his concern with those native peoples of America who, like the natives of colonized countries by Europe, would be chased out of their land (*'nuestra América,'* our America) in the face of the imperialist expansion of the United States onto the Caribbean and South America: Those Europeans and Americans who desired alien land used the word 'barbarie' to designate 'the present state of the man who is not from Europe or European America' (Martí, 1891 in Vitier, 2002: 29). Just as barbarism was attributed to indigenous peoples to justify their exclusion from a land that would soon cease to be theirs, so is barbarism and criminality attributed to non-European immigrants who leave their country, often precisely as a result of imperialism and colonization. As Chicana feminist writer Gloria Anzaldúa notices, displaced individuals, those inhabiting a borderland as subjects both affected by the dominant structures of power and excluded from them, will always be described as physically and morally abnormal and troublesome, and hence deserve to be treated harshly. The ostensible barbarism of all those who do not fit into the white, heteronormative national imaginary is used to validate the closing of the nation's geographical borders:

‘The prohibited and forbidden are its inhabitants. Los *atravesados* live here: the squint-eyed, the perverse, the queer, the troublesome, the mongrel, the *mulato*, the half-breed, the half dead; in short, those who cross over, pass over, or go through the confines of the ‘normal.’ Gringos in the U.S. Southwest consider the inhabitants of the borderlands transgressors, aliens—whether they possess documents or not, whether they're Chicanos, Indians or Blacks. Do not enter, trespassers will be raped, maimed, strangled, gassed, shot. The ‘legitimate’ inhabitants are those in power, the whites and those who align themselves with whites’ (Anzaldúa, 1987: 4).

Judith Butler and Sara Ahmed have scrutinized the performative power of the terms used by the media and the state to designate supposedly undesirable others. These terms delimit the contours of reality, create an attendant emotional ‘sealing’ of the nation towards the predicament of these others (Ahmed, 2014: 2), and establish the limits of the national community, which will act on behalf of its citizens instead of incorporating the claims of immigrants and other others (Ahmed, 2014: 2). For Butler, the reiteration and accumulation of meaning in hegemonic discourse fixes and establishes the limits of the public sphere and the ‘demarcation’ of ‘we the [American] people,’ which, in line with the hegemonic Master Narrative of the American nation, is imagined as homogeneous and monochrome, that is racially and culturally white, heterosexual and male-dominated (Butler, 2015: 2-5). Ahmed’s approach to the performative focuses on the emotional imprint of naming within a history of reiteration to create ‘shared objects of feeling.’ Emotions work through the “‘sticking” of signs to bodies’ by attributing feelings to others or turning them into objects of feeling (Ahmed, 2014: 13). For Ahmed, words like ‘deportee’ are the effect of ‘histories of articulation’ that explain its association to other names in a wider semantic chain. Thus, ‘Mexican,’ ‘immigrant,’ ‘illegal,’ and lately, in president Trump’s pronouncements, ‘criminal,’ ‘rapist,’ and ‘animal,’ would be connected to what Ahmed terms ‘bad feelings’ such as unruliness, anger, and aggression, which turns others into ‘objects to be hated as well as feared’ (227). If the nation is represented as too ‘emotional’ or too ‘soft’ towards these others (Ahmed, 2014: 2), it may be subject to abuse or it may allow racial others and migrants to become too close to the national body.

Woody Guthrie’s ‘Plane Wreck at Los Gatos Canyon’ highlights the impersonality of the term ‘deportee’ in the hands of the media and implicitly relates it to the dehumanization of the Mexican victims of the plane wreck and to the emotional

irresponsiveness of American society: ‘All they will call you will be deportee’ (Guthrie, 1961). The song exposes and denounces the performative power of the term ‘deportee’ as used in hegemonic discourse, showing that it effaces the workers’ identity and obliterates the exploitative relationship the American nation has established with the individuals it designates. Alternatively, however, the song appeals to a soft, hospitable America: In saying goodbye to ‘*mis amigos* (my friends)’ (Guthrie, 1961), the lyrical voice draws attention to the affective bonds these individuals have established with others and, in line with Butler’s notion of ‘being awake to the precariousness of life in general’ (Butler, 2006: 134), it underscores the vulnerability of those chased out of America ‘like outlaws, like rustlers, like thieves’ (Guthrie, 1961).

The anti-colonialist, anti-capitalist stance of Martí’s *Nuestra América* and the hospitality of Guthrie’s view of the migrants as ‘*mis amigos*’ (my friends) and ‘these friends’ are characteristic of Anzaldúa’s ‘borderland,’ ‘*mestiza* consciousness,’ a radical thought that counters the racist, xenophobic, heterosexist exclusions of the hegemonic ‘we the people.’ The Chicana thinker envisions an alternative way of thinking human relations, society and, in turn, Americanness, which springs from the ‘dormant areas of consciousness’ of the inhabitants of the existential territory she calls the Borderlands (Anzaldúa, 1987: Unpagged Preface). A borderland, ‘a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary’ (Anzaldúa, 1987: 4) is an existential predicament and a conceptual and epistemological standpoint between cultures from which one can refashion one’s land and one’s community through alternative narratives of cultural, geopolitical and affective belonging. This ‘*mestiza* consciousness,’ constantly shifts habitual systems of thought and moves between the analytical reasoning that tends to use rationality to move toward a single goal to a phenomenological movement away from set patterns and goals. Anzaldúa’s ‘New’ ‘*conciencia de la mestiza*’ has inspired such terms as Walter Dignolo’s ‘border thinking,’ and is a manifestation of what Enrique Dussel terms a ‘transmodern intercultural dialogue’ (Dussel, 2012: 28–59, 43). Dignolo refers to a ‘fractured enunciation’ emerging from the other half of modernity, ‘colonial subalternity’ that cannot ignore modernity but cannot entirely subjugate to it (Dignolo, 2002: 9, 27). For Dussel, transmodernity involves a wider understanding of modernity that acknowledges the humanity, the ‘disinherited of modernity,’ of those who have survived ‘in silence, in the shadows, simultaneously scorned by their own modernized and westernized elites,’ listens to them and creates an improved or enlarged rationality, ingrained on the

body and on local histories: “Trans-modernity points toward all of those aspects that are situated ‘beyond’ (and also ‘prior to’) the structures valorized by modern European/North American culture, and which are present in the great non-European cultures and have begun to move toward a *pluriversal* utopia’ (Dussel, 2012: 13-14). I identify this transmodern ‘*mestiza*’ consciousness with Tim Z. Hernández’s creative challenge to normative approaches to American history and immigrant narratives of assimilation. His comprehensive collection and reinterpretation of ‘emotional residues’ left by single events like Los Gatos Canyon plane accident reconfigures the public ethos around the ‘pluriversal’ right to be mourned and grieved through a writing practice that blends together Western forms and Mesoamerican knowledge and myth.

3. ‘Who are these friends?’: ‘Truth’ and multidirectional memory

The testimonies, documentation, sequencing, and chronologies evidencing Hernández’s research process, establish a pact with the reader based on the reliability of factual details. Yet, the imaginative, poetic recreation of events and the author’s self-reflexive comments, create ambivalence towards the referentiality of the text. The epistemological premises of documentary, journalistic and testimonial fiction that developed both in the United States and Latin America around the 1960s, shed light on the suitability of these genres to address the question that motivates Hernández’s quest: ‘Who are these friends scattered like leaves?’ (Guthrie, 1961). These genres also allow the recovery of multidirectional memories that go beyond the ‘consent/descent’ assimilationist formula or ‘Master Narrative’ often applied to U.S. immigration narratives. According to the overarching pattern outlined by reputed critic Verner Sollors, the tension between the culture of origin and the host culture culminates in the ‘socialization into Americanness,’ the development of ‘a characteristic sense of American selfhood,’ and the adoption of ‘the central codes of Americanness’ that weld Americans as ‘one people’ (Sollors, 1987: 4-10).

Hernández’s premise, stated in the preface or ‘author’s note’ to *All They Will Call You*, that ‘perception is truth’ and the unknown parts are filled by ‘our own glaring humanity,’ applies not only to his loyalty to the testimonies on ‘the people of memory’ but also to himself as a compiler/novelist/editor who resorts to ‘embellishment, guesswork and even re-imaginings’ for storytelling (Hernández, 2017: xiv). Accordingly, an analysis of his work shouldn’t regard fictional or subjective narration

and factual account as ‘antithetical narrative poles’ (Flis, 2010: 3) it should rather look at them as complementary or ‘collaborative’ in the rendition of a complex, multifaceted or multidimensional truth (Pedri, 2001: 48-49). In *Factual Fictions* Lenora Flis argues that ‘once official representations of history have been discredited, the only reality that can be reproduced with any degree of assurance is that of a given event or situation’ (2010: 11). Hernández’s focus on one single event in American history is probably the only way of approaching truth in all its transmodern complexity and multiplicity; he is particularly interested in reconstructing and transmitting the event from the emotional perspective of those directly or indirectly affected by the terrible accident, but also from an interpretation of the way the history and society of the moment shaped subjective and collective identities.⁶

As Flis observes, documentary fiction clearly shows the impingement of socio-cultural and socio-historical narratives on the lives of individuals at the same time as it presents their subjective impressions on reality. Literary journalists and documentary novelists combine ‘personal engagement with perspectives from sociology, anthropology, memoir writing, fiction, history—writing, and standard reporting’ (2010: 28). Although the latter have more freedom of invention both tend to avoid ‘closure,’ thus bringing to the foreground the subjective import of social, historical issues and favoring the exchange of subjectivity with the other (Flis, 2010: 25). Lucille Kerr has likewise underscored the ways in which truth is approached in the Latin American *novela testimonial* (testimonial novel) and *novela documental* (documentary novel): They both turn the reader’s attention to how the truth is told and to the role of the author telling it. Documentary and testimonial novels transform the role of the author, as it is ‘investigative and editorial, textual and testimonial’ (Kerr, 1991: 371). A figure that speaks through another, says Kerr, seems ‘less’ than the traditional authorial figure, but it also seems ‘more’ than an actual editor/compiler because s/he may refashion and interpret the testimonial account and is ultimately responsible for the overall structure and composition of the text (Kerr, 1991: 388).

Key to Hernández’s task is the use of fictional techniques for the involvement of the reader in the hermeneutical process of making sense of the bits and pieces he found throughout his research. The first chapter of the novel is a sequential reconstruction of

⁶ For further discussion of the genres of *testimonio* and testimonial novel see Beverley and Achúgar (2002).

the events of January 28th, 1948 as perceived by witnesses, government officials and reporters. The chapter recreates the procedures of investigating and collecting evidence to identify whatever remnants of bodies remain, working also as a meta-narrational commentary on the imaginative component of factual interpretation and on the subjective dimension of truth-telling. Since, like in a mystery or detective novel, the dead are no longer there to tell the truth, the author must approach the telling of the truth by resorting to documentary evidence, to the testimony of journalists, police investigators, and public officials, and to any leads to relatives and friends of deceased. The testimonies stem either from the direct memories of eye-witnesses and living descendants and friends of the deceased, or from the ‘memories of memories’⁷ of later generations. In this chapter, the techniques of the reporter (such as the time sequence of events and references to official reports) blend with the author’s imaginative recreation of multiple testimonies conveying the witnesses’ intense emotions at the site and time of the accident: The ‘echoes of godforsaken screams’ reverberating in Red’s ears as the plane is falling, according to his granddaughter’s testimony (2017: 5); her own childhood memories of a stench she could only relate to the ‘burnt pieces of cattle’ in her family’s ranch, and her perception of the scene of the accident ‘as if staring through “a window, or a dream”’ (6); a little girl’s memory of the plane as a flying ‘monster’ underlying her lifetime terror of planes (15). Hernández also incorporates the subjective perspective of reporters and photographers: Henry Stuart, the photographer hired for the newspaper *The Coalinga Record* seeks to capture ‘the sensory reality whole’ of the wreckage, focusing sometimes on ‘[e]mpty spaces. Gaps that invite the mind to make their own meaning’ (10). In contrast, Lew Hegg, the photographer working for the *Fresno Bee* was instructed ‘to get a bird’s-eye view of the crash’ (10).

These myriad subjective approaches to reality contrast with the factual but inaccurate ‘official’ documents and records described in the second chapter of the book ‘Reconstructing Stories (La Huesera)’ (17), suggestively titled after the Mexican myth and folkloric tale.⁸ The Mexican consul seems to have been interested in making a list of remaining items and survivors, while, as the narrator suggests, investigators’

⁷ I’m using Avishai Margalit’s phrase to refer to shared memories that go ‘beyond the experience of anyone alive’, that is, to ‘alleged memories’ of the past (2002: 58-59). Margalit’s term is closely related to Marianne Hirsch’s notion of post-memory developed later (2008).

⁸ Hernández is drawing on Clarissa Pinkola Estés’s anthropological study on the role of the ‘wild woman’ archetype on the female psyche *Women Who Run with the Wolves* (1992), and more particularly, on Ir’ene Lara Silva’s short story ‘La Huesera or Flesh to Bone’ (2008). These references are later discussed in this essay.

reconstruction of names through evidence and guesswork is deficient. The narrator mentions unresolved issues that generate mystery and intrigue: Why would passengers James A. Guardaho, Julio Barron, and Ramon Portello be mentioned once and never be referred to again in later lists of passengers' names? Why were the baby clothes found on the plane thought to belong to a female Mexican passenger? What are the real names of the passenger Mexican nationals? Most of them, dismembered and recklessly put together like their bodies, would be utterly misspelled, entirely wrong or simply missing in what would become official documents and records (Hernández, 2017: xiv, 16-19).⁹ If in the mystery or detective novel, the development of the plot hinges on the difficult resolution of a crime case and the identification of the culprit, here it revolves around the historical absence of the names, stories, and identities of most of the passengers, and on the emotional consequences of this absence for other human beings.

Critical attention on *All they Will Call You* has emphasized the historical relevance of Hernández's discovery of the names and the telling of the stories of the disappeared Mexican migrants.¹⁰ Although the novel focuses on a group of individuals who the author, a son and grandson of Mexican migrant workers, may feel affiliated to, it also pays homage to other American anonymous stories of immigration, loss and struggle. The work is indeed a tribute to these disappeared and many others, as proves Hernández's dedication to missing victims of violence in several international contexts: 'For Ayotzinapa, Sri Lanka, Argentina, Ciudad Juárez, and for the missing everywhere' (viii). The novel further extends the community of those to be honored by incorporating testimonies of family members and friends of the crew, Pilot Frank Atkinson, Stewardess Bobbie Atkinson, of co-pilot Marion Ewing, and of Martin Hoffman, the composer of the music that would turn Guthrie's poem into a song. We are drawn to the extraordinary struggles of lives shaped by immigration, loss, loneliness, and perseverance within and beyond the geopolitical boundaries of the United States. These are all stories induced by Guthrie's song that bespeak the collective 'I' / 'You' / 'We' of

⁹ The list at the Fresno Cemetery contained no names and the list of names in the County Hall of Records is incorrect. Jaime Ramírez, the grandson of passenger Guadalupe Ramírez Lara, responded to Hernández's call for the families of the passengers published in a local newspaper and provided him with the most definitive list of passengers that exists to this date. The list had been published in an independent Spanish-language newspaper, *El Faro*. Hernández does not reveal the outcome of his encounter with Jaime until page 187 for the sake of suspense.

¹⁰ The interest of Hernández's work has extensively been covered by the press and the author has granted multiple interviews. See Luis Guzman's interview in *Poet's Quarterly* (2013), at <http://www.poetsquarterly.com/2013/07/>, accessed December 2018. See also recent book review by Christopher Rollason (2017), at <https://rollason.wordpress.com/>, accessed December 2018.

its lyrics,¹¹ a nameless collective that is however made of many names, integrated by all those affected by the plane accident that January morning of 1948. The community of memory created by Hernández encompasses lives brought together by a common tragic destiny, one that will forever be tied to the location of Los Gatos Canyon in Coalinga, California, a place whose forgotten history is revisited through the mediated testimony of June Gaston. While the morphology of the canyon may have changed, the testimonies of its inhabitants voice a material experience of the place and a relationship with its charged history that wouldn't otherwise be heard. Besides being the site of the tragic accident, Los Gatos Canyon has also been the location of the massacres of Yokut Indians, a home to oil miners and agricultural migrants of diverse regions, and a hide-out for Mexican bandit Joaquín Murrieta (Hernández, 2017: 20-22). In recovering the multi-layered memory of the place, Hernández is connecting it to silenced episodes of American history concerning the displacement and decimation of native tribes, and the Mexican resistance to Anglo-American economic and cultural domination in the mid-nineteenth century.

All They Will Call You brings together local, national and diasporic memory in ways that recall Andreas Huyssen's suggestion that national memory formations may learn a few lessons from diasporic memory (Huyssen, 2003: 152). The author's metabolization of Guthrie's emotional appeal and his emphasis on 'history from below' brings together the memories of displaced individuals of different origins independently of their race and legal status in the United States: The agricultural Mexican workers displaced in the 1940s, the deported workers' descendants who migrated to the United States years later and survived a 'revolving door' deportation and immigration policy in the 1980s and 90s, the Polish immigrants (Bobby Atkinson's mother Elisabeth Liebersbach) in the 1900s, the displaced from home during their deployment in World War II (Frankie Atkinson), and the affectively displaced from a healthy family environment (Martin Hoffman). The resulting historiographic memory is that of a multiple American 'we' around a single event and song that comes close to the notion

¹¹ Guthrie's poem uses the singular 'I' and the collective 'You,' to convey a hypothetical Mexican migrant's viewpoint and address to the American people/citizen. The Mexican worker speaks of 'my peaches,' 'my orchard,' 'my good fruit,' and 'my hills,' thus claiming his entitlement to the land and the product of his labor. In the official song lyrics, two voices are discernible: The voice of a narrator telling about the workers' fate ('they'), who also addresses them as 'you' (*mis amigos*), and the voice of a migrant telling of about a collective ('we') and their abuses in the hands of farmers and officials (they). The final two strophes of the song go back to the narrator, but in the coda there is a certain ambivalence about 'we' and 'my', as the voices of the migrant and the narrator merge into a single one that asks whether the best way to cultivate orchards and fruit is letting fruit rot as well as letting people die.

of Michael's Rothberg 'multidirectional memory' (2009) as it looks at the exchanges, borrowings and connections between the articulation of several memories, and eschews the primacy of the memory of a group over others without making them fit into a single national Master Narrative. For Rothberg, memory is dynamic and constantly redefined through the interaction between multiple groups within and across nations, whose experiences may have elements in common. Differences between historical experiences of violence and oppression are unique in their specificity but may also illuminate others and create bonds of solidarity across territories and nations.

Hernández's work often brings out unexpected bonds and connections that the protagonists of the story themselves ignore. In 'A Genealogical Breakdown of the Chaffin name,' the author uncovers the Chaffin family's forgotten ancestry to an English indentured servant who embarked in the *Mayflower* in 1620 and who, upon arrival in the New World, sought the help of the natives for the planting of crops, and became an indispensable agricultural worker for the new arrivals. Chaffin's ancestor was the 'Juan Ruiz Valenzuela of his time,' says Hernández (154). Historical amnesia stands in the way of Chaffin's realization of this connection as he is staring into the patched clothes and dirty boots of the deportee, feeling 'a world away' from him (151-152). A multidirectional approach to memory highlights the connection between the indentured workers of the 'first' American white settlers, the indigenous inhabitants of the Americas, and present-day Mexican migrant labor, thus challenging the Master Narratives beneath the hegemonic understanding of 'We the people' as essentially white or of European origin. In other instances, as the account of the embrace between the nephews of pilot Frank Atkinson and deportee Guadalupe Ramírez in the memorial stone funeral service, Hernández emphasizes the bonds established beyond social, cultural and geographical boundaries by the shared experience of loss and grief (210). There is also the Chicano writer's initial realization upon his grandfather's imminent death that his story cannot remain in the dark (xiii-xiv), which brings him emotionally close to the migrants and makes him see, in staring into the eyes of Mexican witnesses and story keepers Guillermo and Jaime Ramírez, 'how their faces resembled those of my own family' (46). Toward the end of the novel, the words of Don Fermín Ramírez, pronounced during a conversation with the writer in Charco de Pantoja (Guanajuato), suggest that the feeling is reciprocal: He is 'one of our own' who has 'come back' (214).

4. The poetics of ethical engagement

Hernández states his personal involvement in the story and relates it to his own personal project to ensure that ‘certain stories [are] never lost’ (Hernández, 2017: xiv). As a son of agricultural workers professing loyalty to ‘the people of memory’ of Mexican migrant labor (xiv), Hernández’s narrator/character is not a distant reporter or chronicler, but rather one whose simultaneous respectful detachment from and deep commitment to the story of others is attained by means of fictional strategies. As a complicit ‘outside-insider’ (Vivancos, 2013: xix), he is an ethically engaged mediator who introduces the element of relating to and conversing with others through imagination, thus coming close to Judith Butler’s philosophical understanding of ‘political community’ around the question of vulnerability and precariousness: A political community, she says, is wrought by speaking to another. Relations of interdependence and mutual vulnerability *are* a dimension of our lives, and we should admit them and be attentive to them (Butler, 2006: 26-27). Aware of the vulnerability of anonymous, unacknowledged human beings, Hernández uses imaginative story-telling to make these lives ‘real’ by ‘keeping their otherness from slipping into the unsayable’ (Ricoeur, 1988: 184). I suggest, in line with Richard Kearney’s interpretation of Paul Ricoeur’s concern with the capacity of imagination to retrace the past and transmit ‘the debt we owe the dead,’ that Hernández makes use of imagination and poetics in its most ethical dimension (Kearney, 1995: 174-176).

Sarah Ahmed argues that pain has a history and that, most importantly, this history has ‘a bodily life’ since it is the bodies of communities and families that are damaged when affective ties are severed (2014: 34). Hernández’s retracing of the past through testimonies entails becoming involved: Relating, talking to and listening others, which in turn involves us readers in this reality of pain. Reflecting on the role of readers alien to the pain of others, Ahmed says that testimonies allow readers to be part of the story and take it personally, but not as if the story was about their feelings or their capacity to feel what others felt, but rather, as the unique stories of others with whom we share a human condition. As readers, we are both ‘in’ the story and ‘not in it’ (Ahmed, 2014: 35-36). In this case, we participate in the rendition of a story that results from the relationship between the story-keeper, who is ‘in it’, and the story-teller, who, like the reader, is not ‘in it’: The listener and story teller in the testimonial narrative has been involved in a process of semantic innovation where he has to transcend his horizons of

pre-understanding and presupposition to explore new possibilities of meaning (Kearney, 2007: 348-349). In this case, the possibilities afforded by the imaginary surplus of narrative, poetry, and graphological disposition allow the writer to represent the emotional content of the story and incorporate a particular experience, perception and consciousness of reality. The participation of readers of this process of making meaning and perceiving is attained through a narrative voice that gradually involves the reader in the construction and interpretation of stories and gives unity to multiplicity of inter-related imaginative and referential discourses.

In *All They Will Call You*, photographs and letters function as documentary evidence provided by the relatives of the deceased and as an interpretable, narratable mnemonic truth that relates to these relatives' testimonies. The absence of photograph captions is a 'literary' gesture or approach towards photographs, whereby they are linked not so much to the factual realm as to the narrative inspired by the testimonies. The 'imaginary surplus' is provided by the interaction between the document and the stories in an imaginative recreation of what Barthes terms the *punctum*, a detail that, while being partial, moves, disturbs, and affects us so deeply that it feels the whole photograph, and suggests a 'blind field' or a 'beyond' that a cultural or historical interest in a photograph cannot reveal (Barthes, 1981: 57-59). In the story of Guadalupe Ramírez Lara's separation from his wife Micaela before he leaves Charco de Pantoja (Guanajuato), the photograph of Guadalupe is described through several possible *punctums* suggested by the testimonies of his nephews and family members: His hand on the hat given to him by his grandfather may highlight his insecurity and fears, or his indebtedness to the old man's legacy; it may spark a memory of Elisa's 'victory' in their argument about whether he should take off the hat or not to have the photograph taken. For Michaela, however, the narrator suggests, the most piercing detail, what would 'give her peace' given her concern for his 'tendency to be alone whenever he found himself in strange places,' would be the light that accidentally emanates from her husband's shirt, a hint of the light in him to confront 'the darker times to come' (Hernández, 2017: 63-64).

In the story of Luis Miranda Cuevas and Casimira Navarro, the author prioritizes the emotional response to a photograph that it is not reproduced in the text but remains central in conveying Luis's struggle and vulnerability: Casimira's sultry expression in the photograph would make him laugh and remind him of the nickname her father gave her, 'Cara de Dolorosa' (painful face) in the hardest moments of backbreaking labor the

photograph enabled him to relive past moments, look forward to the end of the season and to his eventual marriage to his beloved back home. Imagination captures the hypothetical memories and emotions of Luis evoked by the photograph, which become verisimilar in the light of the narrative inspired by the testimonios of Casimira, his fiancée back in 1948, and Yrene Miranda, his niece. Luis's story is contextualized within the backdrop of the immigration routes followed by migrants in the 1940s and the historical and economic factors making Mexican labor disposable after World War II (Hernández, 2017: 33). Hernández recreates Luis' fears along his route to 'el norte' (north, to the US) and gives a meticulous description of 'test of degradation' he undergoes as an 'enganchado'¹² during the humiliating mandatory medical examination and disinfection Mexican laborers underwent under the guest-worker Bracero Program.¹³ The photograph that Casimira shows the author, which Luis would always carry with him on his trips, is Hernández's point of entry into Luis' melancholic disposition, a trace of the past whose 'imaginary surplus' of significance Hernández exploits to convey the emotional effect of the three-year long separation between him and Casimira and their hopes of a married life together.

The truth value of real letters also depends on the interaction between them and the recreated stories and *testimonios* the author attaches to them. Ramón's polite, measured letter to his wife Elisa, which appears in translation, gains its dramatic power from the contrast between the emotional containment of his written expression and the facts known from Hernández's narrative recreation of testimony.¹⁴ Ramón and Guadalupe's decision to migrate is a response to the needs of a poor agricultural community to which they feel indebted as members of the ejido committee; Ramón and Elisa have six

¹² The origin of the Spanish word *enganchado* (literally meaning 'hooked') is to be found in the advance payment given to Mexican workers since the 19th century to incite workers' recruitment, commit them to future labor away from their region and later return them. This debt-based system was called the *enganche* (hook) (Durand and Arias 2000: 28-29).

¹³ The Bracero program was a guest worker initiative that spanned the years 1942-1964. Resulting from a binational agreement between Mexico and the United States, it allowed 4.6 million Mexican workers to work short-term mainly in agriculture. The temporary measure to fill a wartime labor shortage was so lucrative that it was extended until 1964. The program increased growers' control over farm immigrant and native labor, as it enabled them to thwart union organizing efforts and drive down wages of all farm workers. Hernández draws partially on Ernesto Galarza's *Merchants of Labor: The Mexican Bracero Story: An Account of the Managed Migration of Mexican Farm Workers in California 1942-1960* (1964). The Mexican workers whose story Hernández tells did not all enter the United States through this program.

¹⁴ Tim Hernández showed me the original letter, written in delicate penmanship. For the characterization of Ramon, Hernández had it analyzed by a graphologist (Unpublished Exchange with the Writer).

children; Ramón suspects Elisa is losing her mind; Guadalupe and Ramón, who migrated together, have been forced to part and he is now on his own.¹⁵

In the case of the story of Guadalupe Ramírez Lara and Ramón Paredes González, Hernández resorts to an epic embellishment that emphasizes the communal transmission of history and a sense of self bound to a community. Ramón and Guadalupe's struggle for their rights to the land as *ejidatarios* ('ejido' owners, or communal land owners) is a story that 'their children's children would speak of generations later.' In the aftermath of the Mexican Revolution in the late 20s and early 30s they fought against organized 'hacienda's posse' and shed their own blood to defend a communally-owned land as opposed to the colonial privately owned *haciendas* (estates) in Charco de Pantoja (Guanajuato) (Hernández, 2017: 87).¹⁶ Once constituted as an *ejido* (lands farmed communally), they participated in the improvement of the irrigation and production system.¹⁷ In the context of this history, their immigration to 'el Norte' reveals 'overlapping selves' whose identity cannot be defined independently from the *ejido* collective relationships (Mouffe, 2008: 454). The author's free indirect speech gloss on Guadalupe's thoughts on the word *enganchado* further underscores an individual consciousness deeply embedded in collective lives:

'And the label *enganchado* carries a whole other connotation. It suggests the allure of earning little money, enduring physical labor, not to mention a constant longing for home, is something one comes to rely on, like an addiction. Enganchado or not, Guadalupe returns time and again to los Estados, because if he doesn't then the ejido withers. It's that simple. And if the ejido [sic] withers, then so do his plans to make a family with Micaela' (Hernández, 2017: 76).

Through multiple narrative and visual means, Hernández's work evokes a collective consciousness, that of a nameless community in which names matter, bound together through the participation in 'the telling of the plane wreck at Los Gatos Canyon.' *All They Will Call You* conveys the trans-American and even transnational

¹⁵ Their migration north to build a well matches records on the later construction of wells assumed by solitary groups of *ejidatarios* after the 1940s. As Jaime Ramírez said to me in an informal conversation made possible thanks to Tim Hernández 'they were the first ones who gathered money for the construction of those wells in Charco de Pantoja.'

¹⁶ They were probably *cristero* militias opposed to the division and distribution of land among farming families the Mexican Revolution had accomplished (Steffen and Echánove Huajuca 2003: 87).

¹⁷ Their migration north to build a well virtually matches historical records on the construction of wells assumed by solitary groups of *ejidatarios* after the 1940s, who sought to cut down the risks of seasonal crops (Steffen and Echánove Huajuca 2003: 88).

dimension of an authorial project whose telling would have been impossible without many others: the composer of the music for Guthrie's poem that became a popular song, the story keepers and all those individuals and institutions who helped the author in his research, the colleagues reviewing his writing, the memorial stone donors, and a long etc. Hernández's acknowledging lists of names almost act as a counter-discourse to the anonymity his novel strives to redress, an anonymity that is powerfully suggested by visual devices. A three-page visual poem suddenly interrupts the narration of the passengers' panic as the plane begins to burn and fall. Scattered and jumbled across the pages, the passengers' names evoke Guthrie's image of 'dry leaves' and point at the fragmentation of history and memory that results from the Mexican workers' silenced disappearance (Hernández, 2017: 160-162). A single black page, placed after the recreation of the crash in chapter 35, powerfully symbolizes the disappearance of the passengers and the grief of their loved ones after unacknowledged deaths. Where there used to be the names, lives and words, which Hernández has so far recreated, there is now only silence. Hernández structures the chapter that follows the black page through very short vignettes that are titled after the name of the story keeper or testimony. They describe how news of each death were first heard through neighbors and media reports and the devastating emotional effects of the news on the families.

Conclusion: *La huesera* (the bone woman or healer), the embodied text, and the transmodern politics of mourning

The last chapter of the book, titled 'Fieldnotes,' is a sequence of diary entries where Hernández records the painstaking efforts to find the list of the real names of the deceased. The fieldnotes emphasize Hernández's role as researcher and compiler, and the epigraph to the chapter, a quote from Ire'ne Lara Silva's short story 'La Huesera,' retrospectively glosses on the role of the Chicano writer as 'huesero' (bone man or healer) a concept indebted to the wild woman archetype vindicated by Chicana feminist scholars and artists like Clarissa Pinkola Estés and Ire'ne Lara Silva. These women have gone back to ancient, Mesoamerican sources of knowledge to rescue female roles that break molds, challenge cultural expectations of silence, victimhood and submissiveness, and have transformative effects on the individual and the community. As the myth has it, *la huesera* is a female figure that brings together the psychological and the biological, gathers together the memories of her ancestors, sings over the bones

of the dead, and acknowledges the psychic value of remembering them. Hernández's text mirrors Silva's short story 'La Huesera' in the dialogic interaction it establishes between imagination, story-telling and the memory of the dead to record the psychological impact of the disappearance of loved ones onto families and communities; it also summons the strength derived from the memory of ancestors, and underscores a female spirit nurtured by the legacy of the stories of those who died. The vindication of this strong female figure is significant, as in this work most testimonies are female and it is mainly women (mothers, wives, sisters and fiancées) who stay back and wait. Adopting her very spirit, Hernández becomes an assembler of stories loyal to 'people of memory' rather than to 'people of fact' (Hernández, 2017: xiv), a caller of the spirits once the pieces and bodies have come together, a rebuilder of a community across national borders around the mourning of the passengers of the plane. The writer's textual assemblage of multi-vocal testimony, documentation and re-creation becomes a 'corpus' or embodied text, a compilation of texts/bodies, which, in the life-giving spirit of a Mesoamerican myth dignifies and humanizes both victims and mourners through the author's telling. In recovering this myth as a structural leitmotif, Hernandez's *All They Will Call You* reminds us that, as Butler and Ahmed have postulated, those lives that are imagined as 'lovable' and those that are imagined as grievable are intimately connected (Ahmed, 2017: 130). When lives are recognized as mattering, they can be mourned and are 'harder to kill' (Butler, 2006: 33).

The most important corollary of Hernández's *huesera* compilation of the memories, voices, and spirits that are 'in danger of being lost to the world' (Estés, 1992: 27-28) is the performative resistance and opposition to a 'hierarchy of grief' (Butler, 2006: 32) generated by American master narratives of history and immigration that privilege the lives of those who represent or assimilate European values and deny the importance of other stories in the narratives of the American nation-building. Contrary to these narratives, this documentary novel brings to the foreground the stories of previously anonymous individuals who now have a name. The implication of reassigning names and retelling stories is that knowing about their stories and their identity are conditions for the acknowledgement of their experience as human beings and for grieving their deaths. If Guthrie's poem emotionally voices a multiple, collective American 'I/We/You' where the voice of the migrant merges with the voice of the putative American citizen in a disruption of the distinction between self and other, Hernández's novel, the memorial stone, and the ceremony arising from the authors' research process

take this further by performing, enacting and raising consciousness about a ‘we’ based on the critical consideration and opposition to the ‘conditions under which some lives are more vulnerable than others, and thus, more grievable than others.’ (Butler, 2006: 31). *All They Will Call You* exposes the dehumanization of the workers and their families resulting from their exclusion as grievable lives and grieving subjects respectively. The author pays homage to the ‘white’ members of the crew and their families, who receive the remains of their loved ones and mourn them in a proper burial and funeral ceremony. Their destiny was however tied to the higher vulnerability and lack of protection of Mexican immigrants: Copilot Marion Ewin’s wife files a suit under the suspicion that “‘the plane was in imperfect condition’” and that it was “‘overloaded with passengers’” (Hernández, 2015: 175). The funeral service for the Mexican passengers in Fresno brings together several hundred local Mexican workers around nameless, almost empty caskets that would go unidentified and lumped together for sixty-five more years under the administrative categories of ‘Mexican national’ and ‘deportee’ (178). Mexican families were not notified of the service, and, despite the government’s unremitting deportation of Mexican workers, the workers’ bodies were never sent back home (179).

The author’s initiative of a proper memorial headstone where the Mexican workers’ names would be inscribed, and his account of the massive attendance at the subsequent memorial ceremony in 2013 reinforce the performative effect of the reconstruction and documentation of the lives affected by the plane crash. Like *la huesera* he has established a connection between the living and the dead, and gathered a ‘we’ around the historical event that encompasses the workers, their families and friends across two countries, the plane crew and their relatives, Woody Guthrie, those who put music to his poem and gave life to a song, the memorial stone donors, the 800 people who attended the memorial stone ceremony, all those who collaborated with the author in his research process, Fresno singer Lance Canales with his 2014 version of the song,¹⁸ and Hernández himself. In January 29th, 2018 California Senate gave a special recognition to the writer for his efforts at bringing awareness to the plane crash and presented memorial resolutions to the families of the victims. Folk singer Joan Baez joined California legislators at the capitol in the commemoration of the 70th anniversary of the

¹⁸ A video clip of this version is available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CeCstLTB0EI>. Hernández is featured as voiceover to Lance Canales’ music reciting the names of the Mexican dead.

plane crash (California State Senate: 2018).¹⁹ Through this wide public assemblage of grieving subjects, Hernández creates, in Sarah Ahmed's words, an unapologetic, friendly 'soft-touch' 'we' based on the 'rubbing together' and 'coming together' (Ahmed, 2014: 1-4) of 'I' and 'you,' 'us' and 'them,' which transcends the barriers erected by the performative, emotional power of terms like 'migrant' or 'deportee' within a hegemonic history of articulation reinforcing the Master Narrative of American history. At a moment of toughening policies against Mexican immigration,²⁰ Hernández's work reaches out to grassroots movements for the rights of immigrants and to a public awareness of the political economy where they are easily disposable and deportable. Among the ethical challenges posed by this novel is the transmission of the responsibility we have towards others (Butler, 2006: 22), a responsibility conveyed through a narrator/character/editor who involves the reader in relationships where silence and loss reveal the common vulnerability of testimonies, victims and listener. The acknowledgement and public recognition of the immigrants' lives and of the 'emotional residues' left by their deaths, repairs a damage felt 'on the skin' (Ahmed, 2014: 34) of their Mexican and American families, thus generating a politics of mourning that extends beyond national boundaries and that is inextricable from the socio-historical context of the victims and the communities that suffered their loss. Hernández's *Telling of the plane wreck at Los Gatos Canyon* proposes a transmodern, multi-directional national memory to change and deepen our perception and knowledge of the history and identity of the American nation: It stretches beyond the United States into Mexico, and beyond itself into the memorial stone and ceremonies at Fresno cemetery and California Senate to dispute the social, geopolitical and emotional hierarchies that establish that some lives matter more than others.

¹⁹ A video clip of the senate floor session is available at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vst2ruQDAMs> [Last visited, January 2019].

²⁰ *All they Will Call You* was published at a moment in which immigrants face high risks of deportation and mistreatment by state officials. The executive relief programs (DACA, DAPA), implemented during the Obama administration, an alternative to the comprehensive immigration reform that Congress failed to pass, have disappeared and caused the traumatic separation of thousands of children from their parents. Donald Trump's criminalizing language responds to a yet tougher approach toward clandestine immigration: The crack-down on sanctuary cities accused of not cooperating with federal immigration authorities, the proposal of the RAISE Act and a pro merit-based immigration system, the encouragement of Police brutality in the enforcement of the law, a militaristic approach to the border, and the ICE raids targeting undocumented teenagers, are only a few recent examples.

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