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Between Love Songs and Open Wounds: Transnational Feminisms and Inter-American Literature

Saskia Hertlein

ABSTRACT: This article builds on a foundation of selected aspects of transnational feminism, theories of borderlands, critical diversity literacy, and intersectionality, as well as Inter-American and Literary Studies. It argues that Urrea's Mexican American *Into the Beautiful North* and Pérez's Dominican American *Geographies of Home* serve as examples of how contemporary inter-American fiction provides readers with characters and writing styles subvert to stereotypical notions of women from diverse backgrounds, representations, and agency. This kind of literature exposes and negotiates a multitude of dominant hegemonic perspectives, underlying dominant narratives, and expectations by oscillating "between 'love songs' and 'open wounds'."

KEYWORDS: intersectionality; gender; women's studies; Inter-American literature; borderlands

In *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Gloria Anzaldúa characterizes "[t]he U.S.-Mexican border [as] *una herida abierta* [a "1,950 mile-long open wound" (24)] where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds" (Anzaldúa 25, emphasis in the original). The allegedly short distance between the two bordering countries, however, becomes longer about mutual exchange because of the obstacle of the—heavily enforced—national borderline. As Susan Koshy cautions, including new media as other means to transcend boundaries such as geographical and/or political national borderlines,

> [i]t may now be time to think carefully about whether feminism travels well across borders, not because distances are as high as they were in the past, but precisely because they are alleged to have shrunk. New media technologies have created the illusion of instant access to and comprehension of the Other and have reduced the time frame for processing ideas (Koshy 302).

The "open wound" that Anzaldúa mentioned long before new media technologies created this illusion Koshy cautions to remember, remains as a painful reminder that allegedly short distances, be it because of spatial proximity or new media, do not necessarily foster mutual exchange. This warning becomes even more apparent when considering the plausible obstacle of communication, the demarcation of the border with the already existing wall or

the wall that the Trump administration plans to build between the USA and Mexico (cf. Trump).

Differing from Anzaldúa's "open wound," Luis Alberto Urrea creates his transborder novel *Into the Beautiful North* as a "love song to both Mexico and the United States" (KeplersBooks). Still, this characterization of a "love song" should not appear as an oversimplification or disregard of the pain engrained in the border. Urrea's non-fictional publications—*Across the Wire: Life and Hard Times on the Mexican Border* (1993) or *The Devil's Highway* (2004), which present the border more harshly than *Into the Beautiful North*—serve as examples that the love song is not meant to be taken lightly. Using an inter-American, critical diversity literate, and transnational feminist perspective (re-) reading of Luis Alberto Urrea's "love song," his novel *Into the Beautiful North*, and Loida Maritza Pérez's novel *Geographies of Home* show how these stories provide venues for literary strategies to expose and counter dominant narratives.[1] Alongside the more encompassing idea of the "love song," the "open wound" also extends to both sides of the borderline, different from what the title *Into the Beautiful North* may suggest, and therefore provides a counter-narrative to the idea that there is a linear move or preference to move to "*the Beautiful North*." Urrea's insistence on the beauty of both sides of the border, along with a recognition of the pain not only of the dividing line itself but complex issues connected to the crossing, provide the basis for the in-betweenness scope of this study creating the narrative of open wounds.

Moreover, this oscillating between "Open Wounds"—obviously to be understood as inherently painful, negative, and problematic—and the more ambivalent concept of "Love Songs" (covering a wide range of potential readings) appears to match the emphasis of both transnational feminism and inter-American literature countering oversimplified notions of

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[1] A reading of *Geographies of Home* is also part of my dissertation (*Tales of Transformation*). However, this reading concentrated on *Emerging Adulthood, Migration, and Ethnicity* rather than a contemporary transnational feminist reading in 2017. "Crossing Boundaries on the Way Into the Beautiful North" explored some aspects about an inter-American reading of this text. However, the focus here proves different as this argument concerns transnational feminism, critical diversity literacy, and inter-American literature in times of Trump.

unproblematic "post-"s as in ideas of this time being characterized as post-feminist, post-race, or other still relevant categories.[2]

In that sense, a love song can entail a feeling of pain, as well as other aspects of a close, long-term relationship that includes both "open wounds" and reaffirmations of the connection in different ways as love songs may consist of them, like sincere affection or a deep, intimate association. Given the long-term relationship, and having gone through some different difficulties, may have led to a grounding or a solid foundation of a close relation, but one that includes a legacy of pain that reveals itself in some instances as well. Beauty, another term that Urrea uses, embodies equally ambivalent characteristics. Especially in such an in many ways uncertain context as the US-Mexican border and Mexican-US relations, such doubtful terms may, therefore, encapsulate the broad spectrum of approaches to the region.

Both transnational feminism and Inter-American Studies have the potential to recognize that underlying hegemonic power structures—including normative whiteness, which sometimes informs even transnational feminist or inter-American approaches—affect contemporary relationships and policies no matter whether they are recognized—in particular by the dominant group(s)—or not. In that sense, transnational feminism characterized by "a relational understanding of feminism, that is, … a nonfinalized and conjunctural definition of feminism as a polysemic site of contradictory positions" along with Inter-American Studies, following "the premise that genders, sexualities, races, classes, nations, and even continents exist not as hermetically sealed entities but, rather, as part of a set of permeable, interwoven relationships" and understood as a counterhegemonic, supranational attempt at engaging with the Americas, differ in some ways from an essentialized understanding of feminism and area studies' limited discursive spaces that Shohat cautions to take into account when she points to "the dangers of studying women and gender in isolation, within ghettoized and geographically defined discursive spaces such as area studies" (Shohat

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[2] For a discussion of ideas such as post-race and eight so-called conversations problematizing this and related approaches, please refer to Moya and Markus' introduction to *Doing Race*.

1269).[3] Both perspectives engage in not only exposing these existing hierarchies, but they also seek alternatives to the status quo. Furthermore, grounding both views on a critical diversity literate foundation integrates the recognition that a multitude of potential categories may serve as excuses for dominating others and creating hegemonies. Melissa Steyn explains that

> "diversity literacy" can best be characterised as a "reading practice"—a way of perceiving and responding to the social climate and prevalent structures of oppression. The analytical criteria employed to evaluate the presence of diversity literacy include the following: 1) a recognition of the symbolic and material value of hegemonic identities, such as whiteness, heterosexuality, masculinity, ablebodiedness, middle-classness, etc.; 2) analytic skill at unpacking how these systems of oppression intersect, interlock, co-construct and constitute each other; 3) the definition of oppressive systems such as racism as current social problems rather than a historical legacy; 4) an

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[3] In Inter-American Studies, "[o]ur treatment of the Americas as a multifaceted continent marked by inequalities and interconnections impacts our approach" (Hertlein and Raab 5) to the phenomena explored with that perspective. As Josef Raab and Martin Butler argue concerning cultural identity in an inter-American framework, "[f]ollowing this notion of *hybridity* and cultural difference, we have moved away from the utopia of a 'cultural diversity' or 'multiculturalism,' in which the Other is an object with a certain essence that can be known or controlled. Rather, the polyphony and simultaneity of cultural practices—no matter whether they contest one another or are joined together into a new cultural discourse, whether they illustrate or constitute contacts, contrasts, or confluences—account for the general departure from essentialist notions of cultural identity. When we speak of 'cultural difference' nowadays, we imply a willingness to accept and further develop what one perceives to be useful in the mainstream, while also fostering critical subcultures and an open ear for alternate voices" (4; emphasis in the original). "Thus, we end up with complex and constantly changing interfaces of center and margin as well as with competing narratives and representations of 'America' and 'the Americas.' What is needed, therefore, is an openness for challenges to national and cultural identities, a willingness to live with and respect difference and to acknowledge the pervasive interconnections and hybridities that have long characterized American cultures (and that go far beyond Bhabha's 'interstices')" (Raab and Butler 16–17).

Grewal and Kaplan further explore the complicated relationship between feminism and nationalism as a basis for transnational feminism: "By paying attention to the interactions between women from different nations, we can understand the nature of what are being called 'transnational' relations, i.e., relations across national boundaries. By such a transnational analysis, one can get a quite different picture of the relation of feminism to nationalism. This kind of analysis contradicts the popular belief that feminism exists in an antagonistic relation to nationalism. The complexity of nationalism is that although nationalism and feminism are often opposed, such opposition cannot be seen simply as resistance to nationalism because often one cannot exist without the other and often one is constructed only through the other."

More precisely, Shohat argues that "Feminist studies is diacritically defined by its relation to the various disciplinary configurations with which it engages. On the one hand, it engages with area studies, whose origins lie in cold war containment policies. On the other hand, it engages with ethnic studies, whose origins lie in minority activism in a single nation-state—the United States. Yet, ironically, despite the progressive genealogy of ethnic studies, it too has neglected to engage with transnational analysis. Even within the critical space of ethnic studies, we tend to find an implicit and almost invisible U.S. nationalism." (1271)

> understanding that social identities are learned and an outcome of social practices; 5) the possession of a diversity grammar and a vocabulary that facilitates a discussion of race, racism, and antiracism, and the parallel concepts employed in the analysis of other forms of oppression; 6) the ability to translate (interpret) coded hegemonic practices; 7) an analysis of the ways that diversity hierarchies and institutionalised oppressions are mediated by class inequality and inflected in specific social contexts; and 8) an engagement with issues of transformation of these oppressive systems towards deepening democracy/social justice in all levels of social organisation. (Steyn 2007, qtd. in Steyn 20)

This "reading practice" that sociologist Steyn uses for "reading" diversity literacy in social organizations can be transferred to "reading" both theory and practice of transnational feminism and inter-American Studies as well. In that sense, it may support a notion of both approaches that raise awareness of inherent power structures to transform these approaches.

As Grewal and Kaplan remind us, "there IS NO SUCH THING as a feminism free of asymmetrical power relations. Rather, transnational feminist practices, as we call them, involve forms of alliance, subversion, and complicity within which asymmetries and inequalities can be critiqued" (emphases in original, n. pg.). Moreover, "[w]e must look for ways in which our variegated pasts and presents parallel and intersect, overlap and contradict, and analogize and allegorize one another to place contested perspectives in dialogical relation within, between, and among cultures, ethnicities, and nations" (Shohat 1272).

Therefore, (re-) reading Luis Alberto Urrea's *Into the Beautiful North*, as well as Loida Maritza Pérez's late 1990s novel *Geographies of Home*, from an inter-American, critical diversity literate, and transnational feminist perspective, I argue that these novels provide an example for literary strategies to expose and counter dominant narratives. Thereby, they serve as reminders to rethink them, as well as one's own position and practices. Along with Fernandes,

> [i]n this endeavor, I want to argue for a trans/national feminist theoretical approach that moves away from a binary choice of either invoking or rejecting the 'real' and focuses instead on multiple narratives of hegemony and resistance that are produced in varying and often contradictory ways in the textual strategies (124)

also in these novels. These particular texts use a variety of approaches to address and include different audiences, exposing ambivalences and—sometimes unexpected—situations and perspectives on various sides.[4] Re-reading these novels in times of heightened tensions some of the issues appear even more painful. They "boil over like a newly hit open wounds, whereas at the time of their original publication the dominant US narrative presented itself more inclusively. This assertion is by no means meant to mean that the issues raised in the novels did not exist or were not problematic in many ways during the time of the previous US administration and the novels' times of publication. Despite some hopes for "post-s" like post-race or other hopes for more equality, many challenges remained under the first African American president as well. However, recent shifts in public debate both within the United States and beyond provide yet another perspective in a re-reading. While the novels may have contributed more to also exposing silenced narratives during the previous administration, they now may also serve as a counter narrative to problematic stories that now seem to be more readily accepted to be openly spoken out in public. Moreover, one might well come across a significant number of people that do not recognize the—in my view—flawed nature of assumptions that feminism was not needed anymore or that the respective societies mentioned in the novels could be regarded as post-race/-feminist/-etc.

Re-reading the novels may serve as a reminder for everyone to continually and carefully question one's ideas and practices as the danger remains to be trapped by one's best intentions, as I would argue is one possible reading of Wendy Wasserstein's play *Third*. In this piece the protagonist—Professor Laurie Jameson—declares her "classroom … a hegemonic-free zone" (Wasserstein 5; 1.1) but begins to painfully realize that "despite [her] endless babbling about open perspective," she has become "the most limited person [her husband and daughter] know" (Wasserstein 34; 2.2), as her daughter confronts her during

[4] These "sides" are referring to a wide range of possible views, including different actors on both sides of the national border differing in, for example, sex and gender, age, nationality, legal status, race, class, job, and others.

an argument. My reading reflects ambivalences, chances, and grievances inherent in the "possibility or impossibility of transnational feminism" in connection with inter-American literature in the time of Trump along Koshy's conclusions concerning transnational feminism.

> Transnational feminism, at the best of times, remains a precarious project negotiating neoliberal universalism, cultural relativism, asymmetrical knowledge flows, the demand for authenticity, and its commodification. Its mediatization may short-circuit it. These shifts invite us to reflect on the possibility or impossibility of transnational feminism in our time (Koshy 303).

In the following, potential transnational feminist and inter-American readings of Urrea‘s *Into the Beautiful North* and Pérez‘s *Geographies of Home* will be explored bearing in mind the complexities of both counter-hegemonic approaches.[5] While the authors use different strategies in their respective texts, both convey transnational feminist issues in an inter-American setting. What both texts share is the notion of moving beyond stereotypical notions of gender and agency, neither granting support to only males nor developing "'third-world' women" along "Eurocentric definitions of feminism [that] have cast 'third-world' women into a fixed stereotypical role, in which they play the part of passive victims lacking any form of agency" (Shohat 1269). Instead, their methods may differ, but in both texts, women play crucial parts in overcoming not only individual but also community- and respectively family-wide challenges, in some ways even more than their male counterparts. Furthermore, the writings provide examples of countering hegemonic or stereotypical notions—that Chimamanda Adichie has called "[t]he Danger of a Single Story"—by providing more than one perspective or narrative.

Urrea's *Into the Beautiful North*, avoiding a limited readership opposed to the inter-American, border-crossing character of the text, was almost simultaneously published in

[5] Scholars like Gloria Anzaldúa, with her diverse borderland experience, as well as other women who have experienced intersectional discrimination, have made and are continuing to bring about significant changes to the status quo of both transnational feminism and inter-American Studies. As part of the diversity literate transnational feminist and inter-American endeavor, their voices deserve an ever more prominent space in the strife to overcome normative whiteness or normative Eurocentric perspectives.

Spanish as well.[6] Leela Fernandes argues concerning text production and consumption in a globalized economy:

> First, in the context of a globalized economy, texts that may be produced for a particular national audience are in fact simultaneously consumed within the context of other national audiences. Second, such consumption occurs at the same temporal moment and is not a teleological process in which Third World countries will eventually consume First World texts (Fernandes 123).

With an almost simultaneous Spanish translation, Urrea deliberately provides both sides of the national border that he has addressed in particular with the text, Mexicans, and the United States, with a language-wise accessible version. Moreover, throughout the book, reflexive background information is inserted for multiple potential target groups or implied readers to begin to problematize their view of the potentially unknown "other" or facts that neither side may be aware of, including not only context information but also a writing style to support the notion of unexpected beauty or harshness. [7] Through the use of this strategy, Urrea creates an inclusive text that provides numerous incentives to reconsider one's perception and position. This assertion about the novel may come as a surprise as it does not only carry a title that appears to confirm existing stereotypes, but also begins with an extremely stereotypical—and thereby ironical—description of the Mexican village that the four young protagonists wish to save from the threat of drug dealers and extinction due to the lack of men:

> The bandidos came to the village at the worst possible time. Of course, everyone in Mexico would agree that there is no particularly good time for bad men to come to town. But Tres Camarones was unguarded on that late summer's day when so many things had already changed. And everything that remained was about to change forever.
> Nobody in the village liked change (Urrea 3).

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[6] *Rumbo al Hermoso Norte*, translated by Enrique Hubbard Urrea.

[7] Urrea's implied reader is addressed in a rather inclusive way: Instead of seemingly presupposing much cultural or linguistic knowledge, by exposing or explaining phenomena within the course of the plot development, so not as an addition, but inserted in the text, readers are invited to see the events from different perspectives and to negotiate these perspectives with the one(s) that they bring to the text. In that sense, Urrea invites the reader to expand one's schemata to broaden one's reference framework. For further explorations of the act of close reading and expanding schemata, please refer to, e.g., Moya.

The description of the setting conjures up an image of a remote village defined by pre-modern forces of nature. Stereotypically remote and reluctant to introduce basic technology until external circumstances forced the issue, and the women's desire to keep their electronic appliances, replaced the notion of migration as referring to animals by a male exodus to work in the United States. The description in the beginning of the text conjures up this image of a stereotypically remote village that is reluctant to introduce basic technology until the so-called "visionary mayor, García-García the First" lobbied for power connections from the neighboring town (Urrea 3). During the quarrel he is "denounced as the Antichrist," but since even the traditionalists want change even less than this electricity they reinstate him as a mayor. These changes continued and were taken up—again—by traditionalists when the economic crisis forced the men to leave the village. The traditionalists called to remove the electricity, but, by then, the women in town refused to give up their electronic appliances, so revoking electricity in order to preserve the status quo presented as impossible. This section is the only one to highlight the roles of women, and it showcases their insistence on their electronic appliances (not men's insistence on them). Thus, it makes the traditionalists idea to step back to pre-electricity life impossible.

> So the men started to go to *el Norte*. Nobody knew what to say. Nobody knew what to do. The modern era had somehow passed Tres Camarones by, but this new storm had found a way to siphon its men away, out of their beds and into the next century, into a land far away (Urrea 4, emphasis in the original).

While the men leave for a story reminiscent of a fairy-tale, which is later deconstructed as frequently being a nightmare, the remaining mostly women appear stereotypically "unguarded" and vulnerable in the face of any external forces that might hit the village. This notion is countered by not only presenting a woman—referred to as "La Osa—the She-Bear"—campaigning for the position of the mayor but even more so by her having encouraged protagonist Nayeli to participate in "fútbol" and karate (Urrea 3, 17). However, on their quest to travel to the United States to bring back their own *Magnificent Seven* (inspired by the movie with the same title), Nayeli may remain the protagonist and a mostly altruistic hero whose mental and physical skills enable her to overcome numerous obstacles.

She also draws her strength from her circle of friends, two girls and a gay young man—who has remained in the village—who each represent partly stereotypical characters.

On their journey, they as well as the readers with their diverse backgrounds begin to realize various complexities underlying not only notions of gender, but also issues like safety, race, migration, success, or dominance which challenge a variety of dominant, normative perspectives. In part, this is achieved by unexpected turns or reflections, but also by the introduction of other characters. A significant example of this concept is Atómiko, a hypermasculine character whose knowledge about the border helps them cross and who represents the subversive 'guide' for both the group and the readers concerning various issues connected with the border. His introduction is highly ironical, starting "There he stood, surveying his realm, the warrior Atómiko. King of the Hill. Baddest of the trash pickers. The master of the dome, known by all, feared by many" (Urrea 121). Alongside multiple references from Zapatista to Native Americans and samurais, he is described as having "beside him, his long samurai sword. Well, it was a staff. But it was noble and powerful in his hands" (Urrea 121). While Atómiko carries "a big stick" reminiscent of Theodore Roosevelt's so-called "big stick policy" but equally yearns for Disneyland and stereotypical US pancakes, the group will also repeatedly run into the complex border character Border Patrol Agent Arnie.[8] Arnie is also introduced in more detail than most other characters, and he is attributed a Christian, non-conservative perspective that provides statistical information on the border. He destabilizes threatening ideas of an ever-growing number of potential border crossers from the Americas south of the USA, and he decides to help Nayeli and Tacho by driving them back to the border instead of turning them in towards the end of the novel. Throughout their journey, repeated surprises continue to expose the

[8] Theodore Roosevelt's imperialistic policy towards Latin America based on the quote "Speak softly, and carry a big stick." Ricard argues that this announcement should not be regarded as a corollary to the 19th century Monroe Doctrine which claims the American continent for Americans instead of colonial powers, but as a new policy legitimizing the US claim of superiority in inter-American affairs. Urrea's character Atómiko, however, carries his "big stick" across the border into the United States instead, but equally yearns for US consumer products and culture like pancakes and Disneyland, which could be read as both subverting and aligning with US dominance towards Latin America.

readers to potential prevalent stereotypes that they may have had and foster a reconsideration by providing alternatives to dominant narratives on both sides of the (physical) border. While the US-Mexican border may serve as a visible demarcation of difference, Urrea's characters begin to realize its—albeit dangerous—permeability as well as the previously invisible borderlines within their home country Mexico and the United States. While they succeed in bringing back their "Magnificent Seven" men, they have also got to know their strength and power during the journey, claiming their agency and exploring different roles that they might wish to take on in the future. Urrea's characters, therefore, are not represented as third world victims without agency, but much rather as more and more self-conscious characters who pursue their way in life.

Nonetheless, the story is more complicated than a straightforward fairy tale. While it unfolds, the protagonists, as well as the reader, are confronted with some sometimes extreme challenges. Moreover, from a critical diversity literate perspective--while the text is comparably inclusive in its characterizations, perspectives, and writing style--it is interesting to note that the author not only quotes his movie agent to have characterized the text as "a combination of *Cinema Paradiso* [and] *The Magnificent Seven* for girls,", but continues to explain that the plot features "a group of 19-year-old women" (KeplersBooks). Ironically, the group consists of three 19-year-old women and their male, gay—but not transgender—friend, Tacho. Still, *Into the Beautiful North* explores multiple intersections (cf. Crenshaw) or jeopardies (cf. King) and in many ways provides alternative approaches that mirror the complexity of the issue at hand. In the context of a transnational feminist and inter-American reading, it may also be worth noting that the text is written by a man who grew up in this region on both sides of the national border. *Geographies of Home*, on the other hand, is written by a woman, a woman of color to be more precise, who grew up in the "borderlands" between the Dominican Republic and the USA, and her diverse characters are equally exposed to multiple intersections and jeopardies as are those created by Urrea.

The physical setting in *Geographies of Home* does not include international travels between the Dominican Republic and the USA despite the plural of *Geographies* in the title, but the family at the center of the plot may serve as an example of representing transnational

feminist issues within one country. The family members each bring a noticeably different perspective to the storyline, which is supported by the chapters being told by different narrators representing different family members and their unique situation and heritage. Their challenges to, e.g., issues like safety or vulnerability are not only external as for Urrea's group of four who set out to recruit their "magnificent seven" to save their town, but equally lie within the family and the presumed "safe space" of their home. While the father insists on his rigid version of Seventh Day Adventism and struggles with defining his role as a father and protector of his family, his daughter Iliana gets injured by her sister Marina during an episode of Marina's mental condition and his daughter Rebecca is caught in an abusive marriage together with her children. The dominant narrative perspectives, however, are by the women in the family but destabilized not only because of their individual experiences and visions for the future but also because of Marina's mental condition or mother Aurelia's supernatural means of communicating with her grandmother and her daughter Iliana. The reader only slowly begins to be able to evaluate the impact of each perspective on the aspects that are told.

At first, the reader is introduced to how the mother receives a spiritual gift which, as the reader soon realizes, is passed on to her daughter Iliana as well. It allows them to communicate supernaturally, which is how the mother summons back this daughter from a comparably far away college to help her with the situation at home, reconnecting allegedly "Western" notions of modernity, life, progress, and communication with allegedly "backward" traditional and religious Dominican American notions. While Iliana had been vulnerable in college as well, being exposed to racism and to some extent classism, her father's firm belief—which gives him a structure to feel safe in—and rules had haunted her in college as well. At home, however, all present men fail to save her when her sister Marina attacks her during one of her psychological states. The reader first learns about the attack from Marina's bipolar perspective, which attempts at making the attack seem to be a 'normal,' necessary action. Furthermore, the reader gets hints that Marina may have been raped herself as well, which had confronted her with a new perspective on her sexuality and sense of security. Also, during another episode in church Marina attempts at integrating her

version of Seventh Day Adventism in a bold way that transcends stereotypical notions of women, particularly submissive women as cherished by some forms of Christianity and some patriarchal societies.

Iliana's continued growth into maturity and her safety are challenged not only by her facing racism and ethnic exclusion or the realization that her father's religion haunts her even in college, but Marina physically attacks her. This attack can also be read as having the most substantial impact on her sense of sexuality and the vulnerability of her body, especially since Iliana frequently faces criticism by others because of her allegedly slightly boyish features which she supports by her choice of clothes. Along with her attempts to break free from her family's home, these characteristics could be read as stereotypically more male. Moreover, Iliana takes on responsibility and supports her mother in trying to persuade her sister Rebecca who can be interpreted as representing a traditional, mostly submissive wife who lives in an abusive relationship to return to the family home with her children. This sister and her children are treated worse than the chickens that her macho-type husband with the telling name "Pasión" (engl. passion) makes her raise; their run-down house, in which he wishes her to remain while spending most of the time away from it himself, thereby does not provide the shelter it is supposed to provide since he abuses and starves her, exposing the issue of domestic violence towards wives and children. In the end, Iliana and her mother only manage to free Rebecca by their mother killing Pasión through a spiritual practice. This point reverses the image of the victimized woman without agency—the mother had 'practiced' this transgression by creating her escapes through her spiritual gift before and now applies it to resolve the situation of Rebecca and her children after the mother realizes that the children are starving. Addressing the situation successfully with allegedly "pre-modern", spiritual practices may also serve as a challenge to allegedly "more modern" Western practices and, since the mother resolves the situation, provide an alternative narrative to comparably elderly, immigrant wives as being victims without agency. While nurturing and caring for a family might be a stereotypical expectation of a "good wife or mother," by creating complex, ambivalent characters among the men—who do not receive as much space in the plotline as the women and hardly receive chances to

speak/narrate from their position—and by having a woman resolve the issue with Pasión, several potential reference points for transnational feminism and an inter-American perspective are provided. While her husband is unable to cope with the situations in his family, through a complex combination of Western and non-Western strategies and resilience the mother can contribute a significant part to their resolution. The mother thereby clearly reverses the simplistic notion of a helpless female victim waiting to be saved by a man/her husband. This conclusion is further enhanced by the character development from seemingly stereotypical to complex characters being exposed to multiple intersections and jeopardies. The family, therefore, serves as a fitting example for how diversity carries both an individual and collective component in its characteristic and how systems of oppression may intersect or co-construct each other even within one family. Moreover, due to each family member representing a different position between the Dominican Republic and the USA as well as their individual and collective family history and memory in the spiritual and metaphorical borderlands, the complexities behind transnational feminist issues in an inter-American setting are exposed. The narrative strategy of a decentralized, shifting narration thereby supports the multiplicity and instability of narratives and perspectives even within a smaller entity like a nuclear family.

Both examples, *Geographies of Home* as well as *Into the Beautiful North*, feature unexpected, untraditional ways to expose and negotiate a multitude of dominant hegemonic perspectives and expectations. In these negotiations, different forms of agency and the necessity to think from a variety of positions instead of seemingly taken for granted dominant positions challenge essentialized notions and perspectives both in a transnational feminist and inter-American framework of reference. Both structures expose and challenge underlying dominant narratives ranging from reference points as different as gender roles, safety, or agency to more abstract notions like dominance and may include difficult, at times painful experiences both for the characters and—by extension—the readers. In times of rising conservatism and growing tensions within nations like the United States, inter-American and transnational feminist perspectives may profit from each other by exposing asymmetrical power relations and exploring potential alternatives to dominant narratives

through literary means while rejecting oversimplified conclusions by oscillating "between 'love songs' and 'open wounds'."

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