

Spring 2023

ya llegamos | we are here

Audrey Hermila Salgado
Bard College, hermila.audrey@gmail.com

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ya llegamos | we are here

Senior Project Submitted to
The Division of the Arts
of Bard College

by
Audrey Hermila Salgado

Annandale-on-Hudson, New York
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GRACIAS | THANK YOU

Paulina Rueda, Jose Delgado, and Elvia Salgado, por compartir sus historias y ser la razón por la que estoy aquí | for sharing your stories and being the reason I'm here.

Dashely Julia, mi ángel, for bringing strength to Saturnina. You showed me how much more I wish I got to see her womanhood, even though I knew she had to leave us. Thank you for always performing with intention and care.

Pedro Emiliano, mi estrellita, for showing me how complicated yet easy it is to love Francisco. I knew from the moment you auditioned for Rocky Horror that I wanted to keep working with you. Thank you for performing with everything you have.

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Mom, for the countless, silent FaceTime calls while you just listened to me type away.

Dad, for teaching me that a dinner table can be wherever and look however I want it to be.

Chiori Miyagawa, for teaching and reminding me that it's okay to let people wonder and not understand. Thank you for always listening and keeping me grounded.

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To all my friends who made me laugh and let me cry. Whether it was holding on for my dear life whenever Gavin was behind the wheel and driving, going to SchwuZ with Allie, losing Scotty in Mauerpark, directing Rocky Horror with Maya, admiring horses with Silas, doing the daily Wordle Aurelius, or getting ice cream at Fortunes with Simon, you all made these past four years a silly, goofy time.

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ya llegamos | we are here

characters:

saturnina - 19 years old. mexican woman. married to francisco.

francisco - 21 years old. mexican man. the youngest man of his siblings.

setting:

a dining area. a somewhat (un)familiar space and a mixture of time. in between adjustment periods.

original cast:

saturnina.....dashely julia

francisco.....pedro emiliano

francisco's understudy.....gabriel medina

production:

director.....audrey hermila

NOTES:

This play takes place in liminal space. We are living in between space and time. These are memories and reenactments. In between adjustment periods caused by migration trauma.

This piece is meant to be performed without the use of surtitles. No translations should be given out before or after the play. Let the audience sit in what is unknown to them.

Esto es para mis abuelos, por hacer el viaje.

Esto es para mi Tío Adrian, para que le digas a todos que esta cabrona es tuya.

Esto es para mis padres, por decirme que puedo.

Esto es para Maximo y el viaje por delante.

(saturnina sets some centerpieces at the table. she exits.)

Scene One

(francisco enters.)

FRANCISCO:

It was tough finding a good paying job in Cuernavaca...

I never ended up going to college. In Mexico, it's kind of different from here. Because in Mexico, I went to a college to take a test - a test to see if I could get in or not.

I went, and I thought it was really easy... because I know what I'm doing. The exam was really easy for me, I thought I did really well, and I *THINK* I'm going to be able to go there. After days, a week I think, they put out a list at the college. They put the names on there and everyone on this list passed... and I don't see my name.

(beat.)

I had a friend from school. Bien flojo.¹ He was lazy. I was more of a... *an academic*, you see? He would always ask me to help him with his homework, and sometimes he'd even give me five pesos... or ten pesos... 'cause I helped him... so when I checked the list, *he* was on there.

(pause. disappointment.)

You know why?...

Si tu eres pobre,² you don't go to college because nobody knows you. You're nobody.

(he exits. she enters.)

¹ Very lazy.

² If you are poor,

SATURNINA:

My mom dedicated her time to making tamales con salsa verde, pero *así* tenía de clientes en Iguala.³ One day, I decided to have a chat with her, estuve platicando.⁴ I said, “Cómo miras tú Amá?”⁵ I told her that I would finish up high school. Voy a regresar me.⁶ I told her that I would leave for a bit and come back to Mexico to finish up school. I would make her proud.

...

I could tell she was sad.

I mean, in a way, so was I.

Y estaba yo platicando con mi mamá, porque ella... mi mamá es como una persona que... que siente como feo de que se vaya a sus hijos, verdad?⁷ It's hard... All of her sons were already in the Estados Unidos. But I told her that when I made it to the U.S., she wouldn't have to worry about anything anymore.

Ya no vas a trabajar, yo te voy a mandar dinero,⁸ I'll take care of you.

I told her to find someone to fix up the house. Las quiero así. Así, así.⁹

Y mi mama dijo, “Está bien.”¹⁰

³ My mom dedicated her time to making tamales with green salsa, but she had clients *like this* in Iguala.

⁴ I was talking.

⁵ What do you think, Mom?

⁶ I will return.

⁷ And I was talking to my mom, because she... my mom is like a person who... who feels bad (ugly) that her children are leaving, right?

⁸ You won't work, I am going to send you money.

⁹ I want it like this. This. This.

¹⁰ And my mom said, “That's fine.”

“Está bien, hija. Si tú decides irte para allá, para Estados Unidos, vete Saturnina.”¹¹

Pues entonces hable con mis cuñadas. I called my sister in laws.

Y si nos venimos.

And so we went.

Nos venimos.¹²

(she exits.)

Scene Two

(he enters.)

FRANCISCO:

I had to do something. For my parents. Mi familia...¹³ *(hesitation)* Myself?

(pause)

Primero,¹⁴ the journey starts way before you even get to the border. There was this section of just desert that my brothers and I had to go through. There were helicopters flying by, and every once in a while, we would have to throw ourselves into these huge mounds of sand.

El Coyote led the way.

He yelled when to run... and when to duck down...

Until eventually, *he* had to run.

...

¹¹ “That’s fine, daughter. If you decide to go over there, to the United States, go Saturnina.”

¹² So then, I spoke to my sister-in-laws. And we went.

We went.

¹³ My family...

¹⁴ First,

We had just made it to America, but there was still so much sand around us. It was endless. I didn't even know how far in we were.

This moment... This moment of excitement was instantly flooded with fear.

El nos abandono.¹⁵ Caminamos durante cinco días, sin saber a dónde íbamos.¹⁶

Five days.

Without a clue...

Suddenly... there it was.

¡Caracoles! Un carro.¹⁷

The one problem was... none of us had any idea how to jumpstart a car.

I know it was probably *unreasonable* for me to believe that everything would go accordingly.

But I had hope. Hope that this journey was just the beginning of our stories. Our lives.

Yet... in a matter of seconds, it seemed as though *everything* was officially coming to an end.

And I don't mean our travels.

I mean *everything* I worked for.

Everything.

(beat)

I was wilting.

Five days all alone is a long time.

¹⁵ He abandoned us.

¹⁶ We walked for five days, not knowing where we were going.

¹⁷ *(slang)* Goodness! A car

Sin comida. Sin agua.¹⁸

The seeds planted across my back were going to waste. Rotting.

They all told me...

"Vamos a Estados Unidos

a ganar buenos salarios,

que los señores patones

necesitan operarios."¹⁹

But did America need me, or did I need her?

I thought we needed each other, but she abandoned me here.

In this desert. In this car.

We came because... we had nothing.

No teníamos nada. We have nothing.

Todo lo que teníamos era... era esperanza.

All we had was... Hope.

So there we were, flicking random wires together and *praying* that something would work.

Wire after wire... and just as we were about to lose the one thing we had left... se prendió!²⁰

We drove until we could find a phone. From there, we called another Coyote we knew.

She got us to California and then on a plane to Chicago.

¹⁸ Without food. Without water.

¹⁹ Mexican Corrido. Translation: "Let's go to America to earn good wages, that the big-footed men need workers."

²⁰ It turned on!

Compró los boletos, I don't even know who bought the tickets, but tú te vas bien arreglado, te vas bien arregladito.²¹ I was nervous. From everything one goes through, I was scared to go out. Pero, El Coyote me dijo "Francisco, mira. Tú vas a ir en un avión, tú no tengas miedo, tu vas a mirar a toda la gente caminando, tú también caminas como si nada, sin nervios ni nada."²² Híjole, I had never been on a plane before, que voy a estar subiendo en un avión? Me dijo, "No tengas miedo."²³

(he exits. she enters.)

SATURNINA:

Todo lo que traíamos, lo dejamos en el desierto porque no podíamos cargar nada.²⁴

We left everything behind.

Clothes... Bookbags...

Todo.²⁵

All I had were the clothes I had on.

I wore a t-shirt and jeans, because why wouldn't you protect your legs?

You're traveling for days, and it gets cold at night...

Entonces ahí había una persona que nos pasó para Tejas.²⁶ At each stop we made, we always had to pass through houses.

²¹ The tickets were bought, I don't even know who bought the tickets, but you go all dressed up, you dressed up very well.

²² But, El Coyote told me "Look Francisco. You are going to go on a plane, don't be afraid, you are going to see all the people walking, you will also walk as if nothing's going on, without nerves or anything."

²³ *(slang)* Wow, I had never been on a plane before, what am I going to be getting on a plane for? She told me, "Don't be afraid."

²⁴ Everything we brought, we left in the desert because we couldn't carry anything.

²⁵ Everything.

²⁶ So, there was a person who passed us to Texas.

Y allí entonces vino El Coyote.²⁷

El Coyote said, “Tú te vas a ir.” He said I was going to sit in front. Dijo, “Tú te vas a ir enfrente (*points at self*) y tú te vas a ir debajo de la cajuela.”²⁸ So, my two sister-in-laws hid under the trunk so that they wouldn’t be seen. I went and sat in the front like he told me to, but, before I did, I turned around and told my cuñada, “No le digas a Francisco que escogí a ir me en frente.”²⁹ Don’t go telling Francisco that I chose to be in the front, because I didn’t choose. He picked me.”

And from there, we went to San José. There was a checkpoint where security checks the car - te chequea todo.³⁰ We passed through another checkpoint at San Juan and San Pedro... and again, they checked the car and let us pass. Every time we got through, I’d turn and whisper to my sisters, “Ya casi llegamos.” We’re almost there. I don’t know if they could hear me, I couldn’t really hear them... but part of me would imagine them whispering back. “Ya casi.” Almost. Cuando ya pasas todas esas garitas, ya estás tú diciendo ya llegas a Estados Unidos. At last, you tell yourself, “You finally made it to the United States,” y se siente uno bien bonito, ves?³¹

I looked at the buildings, and thought to myself, how gorgeous...I was filled with joy. You can’t help but look around and think, you made it... I made it... I’m here...in the United States.

²⁷ And there came El Coyote.

²⁸ El Coyote said, “You will go.” He said “You will go in the front, and you will go under the trunk.”

²⁹ ...I turned around and told my sister-in-law, “Don’t tell Francisco that I chose to be in front...”

³⁰ They check everything.

³¹ When you pass all those checkpoints, you are finally saying, you arrived in the United States. You tell yourself, “You finally made it to the United States,” and it feels pretty good, you see?

Híjole! Yo miraba y miraba unos edificios grandotes, bien bonito y... Y se quedó uno bien contento...³²

Scene Three

(he enters. saturnina and francisco are both on stage.)

SATURNINA:

Did something happen, Francisco?

FRANCISCO:

What do you mean?

SATURNINA:

How did you get that? *(points to his arm)*

FRANCISCO:

Oh this? *(a scar.)*

This was from a long time ago.

SATURNINA:

How long ago?

(he shrugs.)

SATURNINA:

I hadn't noticed it before.

³² *(slang)* Wow! I looked and looked at these large buildings, so pretty... and it left me very happy.

FRANCISCO:

When I fell, I got this huge cut on my arm. It was bleeding pretty badly, but I pinched my arm, grabbed some dirt, and slathered it over the wound.

...

It's okay now... It healed up perfectly, porque somos de la tierra...³³

Pero, ¿qué pasa cuando la tierra que está debajo de ti no es la misma tierra de la que viniste?³⁴

What happens when the land below you isn't the same land from which you came from?

Te quedas con el dolor,³⁵ and I guess you just don't heal. Not in the same way at least.

SATURNINA:

Tú ya llegaste a tierra americana, ya estás allá.³⁶

And after everything... you finally made it... to American soil.

De tanto que sufre uno.³⁷

FRANCISCO:

*My wounds healed perfectly porque soy de la tierra...*³⁸

(he reaches for her hand and places it on her scar.

she pulls away from his healing. it scares her.)

FRANCISCO:

Saturnina, are you ready?

³³ ...because we come from the earth.

³⁴ But what happens when the land below you isn't the same land from which you came from?

³⁵ You're stuck with the pain.

³⁶ You finally made it on American soil, you're finally here.

³⁷ After everything that one suffers.

³⁸ *My wounds healed perfectly because I'm from the earth.*

(francisco sits down. saturnina takes a deep breath, she joins him at the table. she holds his hand, but he pulls it away.)

Scene Four

(lights shift. something is different. it's urgent. we're living in the present... and the future.)

FRANCISCO:

Do you ever think you'd go back?

SATURNINA:

Why are you asking this again? You already know my answer.

FRANCISCO:

I guess I was hoping you would have changed your mind.

SATURNINA:

Why?

FRANCISCO:

I didn't want to come. I had to... you of all people should understand that.

SATURNINA:

I know it hasn't been easy.

FRANCISCO:

Hasn't been easy? I wanted more... *(hesitant)* for us... I'm working at a warehouse loading trucks. You're working at a factory making dog treats. You come home and *stink*.

SATURNINA:

And sometimes you don't come home at all.

(beat)

FRANCISCO:

Vámonos...³⁹

Let's go back.

SATURNINA:

Porque?⁴⁰

FRANCISCO:

No somos de aquí...⁴¹

SATURNINA:

...ni de allá.⁴²

FRANCISCO:

That's not true.

SATURNINA:

Are you sure about that?

(he's not.)

FRANCISCO:

Are you scared to return?

SATURNINA:

Pues si.⁴³

³⁹ Let's go

⁴⁰ Why?

⁴¹ We're not from here...

⁴² ...nor there.

⁴³ Well, yes.

FRANCISCO:

Porque?⁴⁴

(he knows why. she doesn't answer.)

FRANCISCO:

Hey, do you still keep in touch with your mom?

SATURNINA:

...of course I do.

FRANCISCO:

I just haven't heard you talk about her much recently. She misses you, you know.

SATURNINA:

How would you know?

FRANCISCO:

She called while you were getting groceries the other day.

SATURNINA:

Why didn't you tell me?

FRANCISCO:

It's been 3 years, Saturnina. You told her you'd / go back

SATURNINA:

¿No crees que lo sé?⁴⁵ *(pause)* We've worked too hard, Francisco...

⁴⁴ Why?

⁴⁵ Don't you think I know that?

FRANCISCO:

Agarra tus cosas.⁴⁶ Let's go. Ya nos vamos.⁴⁷

(francisco gets up and reaches out his hand to help saturnina up. they start to leave. just as they are about to cross again, francisco lets go of her hand and stays.)

(saturnina leaves.)

FRANCISCO:

She was right. We did work too hard.

She left first. I told her I'd follow. I told her that I had to sort a few things here first.

First, it was a week. Then a month. I sent her money whenever I could to help out back home.

Until I...

I couldn't let go of that feeling.

That feeling you get when you finally make it here.

You can't just describe it.

I can't just tell you and expect you to understand why I left or why I stayed.

When I got to Chicago for the first time, I needed to buy some new clothes porque dejé todo cuando me vine.⁴⁸ I didn't have any. Pues, me fui al Discount Mall,⁴⁹ and when I got home, I put everything away.

My brother had been out all day and when he came home... and I remember how...

⁴⁶ Grab your things.

⁴⁷ We're leaving.

⁴⁸ ...because I left everything when I came.

⁴⁹ So, I went to Discount Mall...

Mi hermano me compró unos tenis bien bonitos. Nunca me ponía unos tenis Nike y me da gusto que mi hermano me compró unos tenis bien bonitos y nuevos.⁵⁰

I never had anything as beautiful. I promised my brother I'd take care of those shoes forever. Yo dije, "Me los voy a querer siempre," porque en realidad éramos bien pobres.⁵¹ Four years ago, I would have never imagined that anyone in my family would ever be able to afford something like this. Never.

Entonces le di un fuerte abrazo y le dije, "ya llegamos."

I gave him a big hug and told him, "We are here."

Ya llegamos.⁵²

⁵⁰ My brother bought me some really nice sneakers. I never wore Nike shoes and I'm glad my brother bought me some really nice new shoes.

⁵¹ I said, "I will always love them," because in reality we were very poor.

⁵² So I gave him a big hug and told him, "We are here."
We are here.

Introduction

ya llegamos | *we are here* is a glimpse into the type of theater I wish to see in the world. Growing up, I never got to see people like me on TV or on the stage. I never heard stories like mine or my family's. The stories in this piece are based on stories shared and interviews conducted with my own family.

This play is meant to be performed around a dining table in order to give people a sense of home. This is a multilingual home; although it isn't the characters' and it surely isn't the audience's. This home is just an encapsulation of time and memory. The table is meant to represent the present and the future – and the audience is a part of that.

This is a piece on gender and migration. It explores how family dynamics, class issues, education, and gender play a role in why people leave their home country. The character of Saturnina represents femininity and the voice. Francisco represents masculinity and decision-making. Their independent travels show just a snippet of the hardships some people face when traveling across the border, and it is only the beginning.

CHAPTER ONE

Code-Switching and Bilingual Theater

When I first sat down to write this play, the first thing I knew was that if I introduced Spanish into the piece, I would not be providing any surtitles to the audience. I have often felt “othered” when watching American theater due to the lack of representation of cultures and identities on stage. Multilingualism in theater is still a fairly modern concept. In *Multiculturalism and Postmodern Theater: Staging Québec's Otherness*, Jane Moss explores how multiculturalism and immigrant experiences in theater are features of “modern mentalities.” In this piece, she translates:

According to Sherry Simon, for example, the representation of foreignness, of ethnicity, is a feature of modernity: "*l'écriture de la modernité est celle qui se maintient dans un espace entre identités, dans un espace hors-identitaire. Ce ne sont pas les régimes d'appartenance, mais les espaces de l'exil, réel ou imaginaire, qu'expriment les grandes oeuvres de la modernité*" - “the writing of modernity is that which sustains itself in a space between identities, in a space outside the identitary. It is not states of belonging, but spaces of exile, real or imaginary, that are signified by the great works of modernity” (“*Espaces*” 14). (Moss 75).

Whether it be French, Turkish, German, Spanish, or other languages - when speaking in a language other than a country’s most commonly spoken language on stage, theater makers can uncover practices of oppression and stereotyping. Furthermore, multilingualism can also be a practice of inclusion and diversity. When writing *ya llegamos | we are here*, I created a bilingual piece in order to explore multiculturalism through the lens of Latin American migration with both monolingual and multilingual audiences.

Bilingual theater gave me the unique experience of deciding how much information I wanted to hold or share with my audience. My play opens with English, as most American

theater does. In *Code-Switching In Conversation: Language, Interaction and Identity*, J. Norman Jørgensen claims:

There is little doubt that bilinguals by some of their code-switching do relate to differences in power and status that go beyond the particular communication situation. Code-switching from the relatively powerless of two languages into the relatively powerful may have certain meanings, and switching in the opposite direction other meanings which are related to the difference in power and status between the languages. Something shifts in the world of the play the moment Francisco says, "Bien flojo." The play moves from the "more powerful" language to a "less powerful" one. Not only is English the most widely used language in the United States, but there is also a shift in formality in this text in particular. The literal translation of flojo means "loose," but in this context, it means "lazy." This use of the word is not universal in all Spanish speaking countries, but is common in Mexico. So, I started off using Mexican slang when introducing Spanish into the world of the play.

Francisco and Saturnina both decide to leave Mexico in order to find better opportunities for themselves and their families. When speaking in Spanish, both characters speak less formally in comparison to when they are speaking in English. When overcome by emotion, they would utter interjections - all being in Spanish. *Hijole! Caracoles!* There's comfort when they revert back to their native language whereas there's this need to appeal to English speakers as "refined and polished." They are speaking "Formal English " as some people call it - aka Standard English. Francisco and Saturnina could have easily told their stories entirely in Spanish; however, the storytelling aspect of it all makes the audience aware of the fact that they are adjusting their speech patterns for them. They're accommodating for the general English speaking audience.

Bilingualism and the Act of Revealing Information

Writing bilingual theater is an act of give and take. I found myself asking: What needs to be translated? What doesn't? How do I communicate a story in two languages without sacrificing the plot? What special moments do I want to give Spanish speakers that non-Spanish speakers don't get? When text is not translated, Spanish speakers get the small crevices of anxieties and insecurities that they don't want non-Spanish speakers to know about. For example, when Saturnina was telling her mom that she was planning on leaving to the United States:

SATURNINA:

Y estaba yo platicando con mi mamá, porque ella... mi mamá es como una persona que... que siente como feo de que se vaya a sus hijos, verdad?

Non-translated text also gives Spanish speakers the opportunity to listen in on moments where Saturnina and Francisco are reliving moments with other people within their stories. For example, Francisco's interaction with El Coyote:

FRANCISCO:

Pero, El Coyote me dijo "Francisco, mira. Tú vas a ir en un avión, tú no tengas miedo, tu vas a mirar a toda la gente caminando, tú también caminas como si nada, sin nervios ni nada."

When writing the script, I tried to give enough to the general non-Spanish speaking, American audience for them to follow along key moments of their journeys; however, being able to use another language gave me a tool to communicate special moments with those who would understand the Spanish/Spanglish/Chicano language.

Reactions

I distinctly remember the first dress rehearsal for the fall production of *ya llegamos | we are here (part one)* and how a member of production came up to me afterwards to give me a

note. They told me that Dashely should slow down her speech just a tad, because for non-native Spanish speakers it would be helpful to give them the time to translate it in their minds. For a moment, it made sense to me. *Slow down so everyone can catch everything your actor is saying.* Then I realized, it wasn't the matter of Dashely going too quickly so people couldn't grasp onto her words. She was speaking in Spanish relatively at the same pace as she was speaking in English (unless it was a moment where it was a specific choice to speed up). It was more-so a matter of who gets to understand the words she is saying. At that moment, I realized that maybe if that person didn't understand the text, maybe it wasn't for them to know.

There was another moment after the first Spring performance of *ya llegamos | we are here* in the Old Gym where someone stated that whenever they did not understand something in Spanish, they would try to fill in the gaps with their own storyline they gave the characters. They said, "I was really sad when the sisters died." For a moment, I was confused, but they went on to clarify that they thought Saturnina's sisters had died because she said she could not hear them while she was in the car. There's something so unique about this. There's no controlling how the audience fills in gaps of knowledge.

On the other hand, I also had a few audience members who were fluent in Spanish and a few audience members that were Latin American immigrants. Their reactions were much different. People would come up to me and thank me for being a source of representation. On the one hand, it felt strange to me, being thanked for putting on a piece that represented my own culture and history. Some thanked me for sharing stories like their own, and others thanked me for giving them the opportunity to know something non-Spanish speakers did not have access to. The thing that felt strange to me was that, I sometimes wish I wasn't being thanked, because I

wish Latin American representation was already the norm. So, on the other hand, I felt proud. I was proud of what I achieved by giving immigrants and Spanish speaking audiences a sense of accessibility, especially when the United States isn't always as accessible to them. I was proud to be able to share stories that would otherwise be forgotten.



When unable to understand a language, audiences grasp onto the information they have and try to connect the dots in their head. Performers can do their best to convey a message, but audiences hold the power of understanding in the end. In this case especially, Spanish speakers have the privilege of insight while non-Spanish speakers have the privilege of being able to bridge the gaps in whatever way they please. However, in order to comprehend what is going on to any extent, they both just need to have an element of curiosity; this is the bridge between all audience members at the table.

CHAPTER TWO:

Performance: Time and Space

This piece takes place somewhere that reminds us of home, but it isn't necessarily ours. It's not the audience's; there are photos of Saturnina and Francisco... but it isn't really their home either. As Francisco and Saturnina share their stories, we see them being sucked into the past, present, and future. They're never truly in one place or time. They're in liminal time - in between then, now, and the future.

No Somos De Aquí, Ni De Allá | We Aren't From Here, Nor There

There is this moment that Francisco tells Saturnina, "no somos de aquí" (we aren't from here) and she replies back with, "ni de allá" (nor there). This phrase holds a lot of weight. In the most basic sense, this phrase refers to the fact that they stand out as the Mexicans in America, but once you cross the border, you are considered to be an "American" back home. They do not fit in either environment. This moment of *ni de aquí, ni de allá* feeds into the use of multilingualism in this piece. Bilingualism holds a lot of stress and tension in both Latin American and U.S. households. Garcia-Pena states:

Bilingualism, Spanglish, and the emerging variations of Latino/a languages in the United States have been a source of anxiety for both US and Latin American nationalists since the 1970s. In the Dominican Republic, the linguistic bordering of the nation, exemplified in the case of Díaz, is entangled with the gruesome anti-Haitian violence of 1937, when "proper use of the Spanish language" was often used as a marker of national belonging. (Garcia-Pena 207).

Bilingualism causes a lot of anxieties for immigrants and their children. They are caught in between two cultures. There is a pressure to assimilate while also maintaining fluency in their

native tongue. There is this expectation to navigate living in a new country while still holding onto their cultural identity.

In Spanish speaking Latin American countries, people view knowing both Spanish and English as a sign of privilege or elitism. Especially if you have traveled to the U.S. at any point in your life and returned to Mexico/Latin America. You are labeled as “American” even if you weren’t born in the United States/were raised in Mexico or other Latin American countries. In the United States, while some people view multilingualism as a useful quality, while others see it as a threat to the dominant use of the English language.

Ni de aquí, ni de allá also parallels the in-between the characters are living through. The in-between of adjustment stressors and experiences of migration trauma. It sits in between the knowing and not knowing if one will even survive the journey, if one will overcome the hurdle of language barriers, and what life will be like post-migration. The audience is a part of this. They are guests welcomed at the table who will, in their own way, decide what is understood and what is left behind. All of these in-betweens is where this play takes place.

Dining as a Ritual

Dining in Latin American households is a ritual. A gender ritual. Women cook in the kitchen and must have food set by the time the men arrive. Depending on the size of the household, the men eat first and women eat after. Women begin this ritual in the kitchen and end the ritual once they have picked up the table and washed dishes. These ideas are things that are taken with families even after they migrate to the United States. However, once you cross the border, dining also becomes an establishment of life.

SATURNINA:

I know it hasn't been easy.

FRANCISCO:

Hasn't been easy? I wanted more... (hesitant) for us... I'm working at a warehouse loading trucks. You're working at a factory making dog treats. You come home and stink. Once you cross the border, you do whatever it takes to survive. You need food, but to obtain it you need money. The jobs undocumented immigrants are taking are rarely easy and don't have the best pay, but you take what you can get.

This past summer (2022), I remember attending my Tio Carlos's funeral, and one of his children went to speak at his reception. He said, "We were poor... we *are* poor, but we were *poorer*. But no matter how much we were struggling, we would always come home to food on the table. It could be just rice and beans. Tortillas con limon y sal. There was always something." This is why I chose the table. It represents gender. It represents the day to day routines. It represents the things people, just like Saturnina and Francisco, will do in order to survive.

CHAPTER THREE:

Stories and Storytellers

Discovering the Stories and Story-Building

I was sitting in the waiting room of Humboldt Park Health where, just a few doors down, my mother's favorite uncle - Carlos - was laying in a coma from a heart attack. In a room full of sad faces and tears, there was one particular face that stood strong. My Tia Chuy's. Carlos's wife. My Tio Joselito enters the room and asks me how I've been. I had just returned from Berlin a week prior, and I told them about how I devised a short piece on childhood and gender across borders. Chatter fills the room. Curiosities being thrown and questions being asked.

Chuy suddenly speaks. I was surprised by how strong her voice was in comparison to others in the room. She begins to tell me about how she first came to the United States with my grandmother. She tells me about her car ride, and how she was made to sit in front with El Coyote. Chuy tells me about how she told my grandmother not to tell Carlos that she chose to sit in front with this man - he picked her. My mom walked in near the end of the story and we all had to chuckle a bit... We all knew my Tio Carlos was a jealous man when he was younger, but not how much of a gossip my grandmother was.

A week passes and suddenly all my Tios have heard about my interest in writing Latin American stories. They tell me tens and dozens of stories, all which I hope to share someday. During this time, I heard from some Tios about how they were abandoned by a Coyote and had to figure out how to jumpstart a random car they found. Another Tio told me about why his sister was still in Mexico; she had made it to the U.S. and was working on getting her papers when her

husband pressured her to go back to Mexico. She went back, and he ended the relationship shortly after.

Time passes, and I notice there is one voice I have not heard much from. My grandma Pauli. A few weeks after my great uncle passed away, I decided to sit down with my maternal grandmother and ask her to tell me how she got to the United States. She told me about how, first, her father left for the United States to work as a *bracero*. Then, she began her story. The sewage systems, the car rides, the plane ride. My grandmother left Mexico the same reason many other women do... because the men left first.

I sat with these stories and knew I needed to share them. *ya llegamos* | *we are here* started to unfold, and it barely scratched the surface of all of these journeys. Not every man's journey is embodied in Francisco and not every woman's journey is embodied in Saturnina's. So, I went through these stories and cherry picked moments that I thought would emphasize their intricate, gendered marriage and separation.

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Saturnina and Francisco have a complex relationship filled with both love, connection, disconnection, and words lost in translation. The first day of rehearsal, we talked through how although we sometimes see so much distance between the two characters (physically and emotionally), we also have to remember that there is, or at least was, love there. The audience never sees Saturnina and Francisco on stage at the same time until the very end of the piece. This is because, as they are sharing their migration stories, they are telling their separate journeys.

Saturnina and Francisco did not travel together. Francisco starts the play off since the men are the first to travel, and Saturnina would follow.

Francisco

Francisco is a 21 year old man, the youngest male of his siblings. Meaning, he was 18 when he crossed the border. Pedro embodies this youthfulness, yet there's so much strength in his voice. The deepness in his vocals helped when thinking about how much responsibility was placed onto him. Even in moments of anxiety and insecurity, there was this intuition to still take charge. In Mexico, the youngest male is the one in charge of taking care of their parents.

Migrating to the United States started off as a necessity, more than anything else.

FRANCISCO:

I couldn't let go of that feeling.

That feeling you get when you finally make it here.

You can't just describe it.

I can't just tell you and expect you to understand why I left or why I stayed.

These lines are incredibly important to Francisco's character. He's the one who wants to leave America, yet he's the one who stays. He lets Saturnina leave, despite their marriage. Talking to people in colloquium after my first 2nd semester sharing (February 14th), I could feel people's curiosity peak. I asked, "How do you feel about Francisco?" A shared feeling amongst all was, they felt conflicted. They did not know if they should support him or not, but they wanted to root for him so badly. I then followed up with, "why?" Everyone heard his journey, they know how hard he worked, yet he did something harmful to someone close to him. People said they wanted to think that they wouldn't have made the same decisions he made; yet at the end of the day, no

one has ever actually been in that position. None of them have ever or will ever experience migration in the same way Francisco and Saturnina have.

On March 16th, I had Pedro and Dashely do an activity where they read Scene Four of the script and took a step towards each other every time they felt as though their characters were trying to connect and take a step back when they felt their characters try to pull away from each other. I was surprised to see how close together they were by the end. I always felt like the characters were distancing themselves, but I discovered how much they were actually pleading, wanting, and pulling at each other. They're just pleading and wanting different things, and that's what distances them.

We did a run through afterwards, and while I was listening to Francisco's end monologue, I began to empathize with him in an unexpected way. I think a part of me was always angry at him for letting Saturnina leave. (Even if I didn't want to admit it.) This time I listened and was just sad, because I realized there's more to him than even I can ever know. What I do know is that he didn't stay for the shoes. He just happens to have them. He didn't stay for money. The dollar is just worth more. He didn't stay because it was easy. *It was never easy.*

When beginning to work with an understudy, on April 1st, I sat down with Gabriel after we did a run through of the piece and asked him "What do you think of Francisco?" I was shocked when they told me that they didn't like him. I always knew this was a possibility... for someone not to like him. I think I was so used to hearing people's conflicted feelings towards him, but to be completely honest, I didn't always like Francisco either. (It was just the other rehearsal I had with Pedro where I was just starting to find a deeper love for him!) So, I understood where Gabriel was coming from. The way Gabriel read Francisco felt very different

than the way Pedro read Francisco. There was much more joy, but also a greater need to justify Francisco's joy. We agreed that it's rooted in guilt. Gabriel and I sat down to identify Francisco's wants. Comfort. Growth. A chance. Self preservation. Why? Gabriel told me that he thinks it's because growth was denied to Francisco.

When beginning to work with Gabriel, there was this new development I had to make with my actor and it is: how to differentiate between being a bad person and making “bad” decisions. What is Francisco’s tone like? His attitude? Do his wants shift? Does he create distance? We found that Francisco is not an aggressive character. He may be frustrated at times, but he’s only human. Francisco wants to be able to provide for the family, but he is fighting an internal battle where he truly wants to provide for himself. He wants both, but the circumstances just didn’t work out for him. I don’t know if he could have ever had both. Who’s to say that if Saturnina stayed, things would be any better. At the end of the day, Francisco had to make a decision, and consequences had to follow.

Saturnina

Every time people have watched the performance of this piece, someone asks me about why Saturnina pulled away from Francisco’s scar and why she reacted in such a negative way. I directed Dashely to pull away from the scar and wipe her hands away. When I originally wrote this moment, the stage directions called for Francisco to rub mud on Saturnina, and she would pull away to try and clean herself up. This was meant to represent the need for women to represent themselves as cleanly and beautiful. (This moment, for me, would have paralleled the moment that Saturnina was told that she would sit in the front of the car. It is implied that she

was chosen to go in front, because she would have been the best looking to be paired with El Coyote.) I could not have this moment with mud on stage when first performing the piece in Luma, so I had to scrap that idea for the fall performance.

When I ended up changing this gesture, I learned a lot from how Saturnina pulled away from Francisco's scar. The question that popped up for me in that moment when I first saw her pull away from his scar was, "How does Saturnina react when confronted with Francisco's healing?" It's unfamiliar, and that scares her. Francisco is learning to heal in a new environment, with a different land below his feet. Saturnina and Francisco are clearly adapting to living in the United States differently.

In Scene Four, as I brought up earlier, Francisco tells Saturnina, "no somos de aquí" (we aren't from here) and she replies back with, "ni de allá" (nor there). Something I realized during the rehearsal process was that this moment reveals a lot about Saturnina's disposition. Saturnina is a character that holds so much strength and goodness. She cares for people, yet her goodness doesn't fog her perception of the world. She's extremely aware of her surroundings and how people perceive her; this is especially revealed when she tells us "ni de allá." She knows what Francisco wishes they were to the world, but she also knows the reality of where they stand in society.

"Are you scared to return?"

Francisco asks Saturnina this question, and she responds back saying that she is. The reason I was inspired to ask this question in the script is because this is one of the many questions that immigrant children are asked when arriving in the United States without papers (Luiselli). Saturnina responds to this question saying that she is scared, although she doesn't say

why. A part of it is this fear of not belonging. Another part of it is the uncertainty of what will happen to them next. This entire dialogue between the two characters goes on to reveal how Saturnina was begging Francisco, not to stay but to understand. This moment feels significant to me because when she doesn't answer Francisco asking, "porque," she gives up a little of her voice. It then shifts to Francisco pulling any of the cards he has up his sleeve, like the information he has pertaining to her mother. A directing choice I made for this moment was for Francisco to tuck Saturnina's hair behind her ear as he asks her about her mom. This moment of physical connection paralleled his pulling and pleading to connect with her.

When speaking about Saturnina to those who have watched my piece, I have heard time and time again, "I wanted better for her." There was always this sadness surrounding her leaving. The moment Saturnina tells Francisco, "We've worked too hard," she is trying to stake whatever claim she has at the table. Unfortunately, she has none. Although she can give her input (to a certain extent), Francisco has final say. That is why he begins the play and ends it, Saturnina is just in the midst of it all. She will live on, but her life has already been changed forever; Even if she continues on without Francisco, her life will likely continue in a male dominated world. Saturnina represents the voice, but unfortunately we don't always get to hear it.

Deslenguadas. Somos los del español deficiente. We are your linguistic nightmare, your linguistic aberration, your linguistic *mestisaje*, the subject of your *burla*. Because we speak with tongues of fire we are culturally crucified. Racially, culturally and linguistically *somos huérfanos* - we speak an orphan tongue.

– *Borderlands | La Frontera: How to Tame a Wild Tongue, Anzandula.*

Creating the Art I Wish to See

Producing this piece has taught me a lot about the type of artist I am and the artist I hope to become. From the moment Saturnina holds Francisco's hand to the moment he pulls away, I found pleasure in finding safety and joy within connection and disconnection. I want to keep exploring these moments of intimacy in all work I do. Whether it is sharing a glance or sitting in silence.

Putting on a piece of work about my history and culture felt like the opportunity of a lifetime, and getting to share that with other immigrants and Chicanos was life changing. I will never forget the look in my grandparents' eyes after they witnessed *ya llegamos* | *we are here*. I want to continue making theater that represents people like me, people unlike me, and people who just need to be heard.

Performance Pictures

fall performance captured by chris kayden. pictured: dashely and pedro



Performance Pictures

spring performance captured by caleb wyatt. pictured: dashely and gabriel



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The Salgado, Delgado, and Rueda families.