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**THE BORDERLAND, VULNERABILITY AND THE NEED TO CARE
THROUGH *LOST CHILDREN ARCHIVE* (2019) BY VALERIA LUISELLI
AND *CHILDREN OF THE LAND* (2020) BY MARCELO HERNANDEZ
CASTILLO**

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To All My Loved Ones

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ÖZET

Elif Ergin, Valeria Luiselli'nin *Lost Children Archive* (2019) ve Marcelo Hernandez Castillo'nun *Children of The Land* (2020) Eserlerinde Sınır Bölgesi, Kırılgnlık ve Bakım İhtiyacı, Başkent Üniversitesi, Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, Amerikan Kültürü ve Edebiyatı Tezli Yüksek Lisans Programı, 2024.

Bu çalışma, çağdaş Meksika-Amerika Edebiyatı'nın öncü eserleri arasında yer alan Valeria Luiselli'nin *Lost Children Archive* (2019) ve Marcelo Hernandez Castillo'nun *Children of the Land* (2020) adlı eserlerini analiz etmeyi ve sınır, kültür, kimlik, göç, göçmenlerin, özellikle de çocukların yaşamları ve sınırda ve ötesinde bekleyen zorluklar konularına ses vermeyi amaçlamaktadır. Luiselli ve Hernandez Castillo'nun Meksika kökenli ve Amerika'ya göç etmiş olmaları, bu iki Meksikalı Amerikalı yazarın zaman içinde bu zorluklara bizzat tanıklık etmiş ya da yaşamış olmaları nedeniyle, kurgu ve anı biçiminde bu konulara yeni bakış açıları sağlamaktadır. Bu anlamda *Children of the Land*, 1988 doğumlu Hernandez Castillo'nun 5 yaşındayken ailesiyle birlikte yasadışı yollardan Amerika'ya göç etmesine ayna tutarken, *Lost Children Archive* ise özellikle 2014 Meksika kökenli Amerikalı göçmen krizine ve sonrasına atıfta bulunarak sınırda ailelerinden ayrı düşmüş, yasal statüleri bilinmeyen kayıp çocukların sesi olmakta ve kırılgnlık, bakım etiği ve sınır teorisinin önemine odaklanmaktadır. Amerikan göç yasaları ve kendilerine yönelik genel ayrımcılık nedeniyle savunmasız durumda olan bu kaçak göçmenler, dikkat çekmemek için hayatlarını sessizlik içinde sürdürmeye çalışmaktadır ve bu durum insan haklarından mahrumiyet, göçmenlik yasaları nedeniyle aile bireylerinin birbirinden ayrılması, çocukların tecrit altında tutulması gibi ciddi sorunları da beraberinde getirir. Bu anlamda Valeria Luiselli ve Marcelo Hernandez Castillo, okuyucuyu bu insanlarla empati kurmaya ve onları önemsemeye, en önemlisi de bu konuda harekete geçmeye davet ediyor. Bu yazarlar, çalışmaları aracılığıyla sınırın sadece fiziksel bir yapı değil, aynı zamanda siyasi stratejiler ile şekillenmiş, insanları, aileleri, kültürleri, dilleri ve yaşamları ayırma gücü sahip karmaşık bir kavram olduğunu açıkça ortaya koymaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Sınır, Kimlik Arayışı, Kırılgnlık, Bakım, Susturulmuş

ABSTRACT

Elif Ergin, *The Borderland, Vulnerability, and the Need to Care through *Lost Children Archive* (2019) by Valeria Luiselli and *Children of The Land* (2020) by Marcelo Hernandez Castillo, Başkent University, Institute of Social Sciences, American Culture and Literature Master's Program with Thesis, 2024.*

This study aims to analyze the works of Valeria Luiselli's *Lost Children Archive* (2019) and Marcelo Hernandez Castillo's *Children of the Land* (2020), which are among the pioneering works of contemporary Mexican American Literature, and give voice to the issues of border, culture, identity, immigration, the lives of immigrants, especially children and difficulties await in the frontier and beyond. The fact that Luiselli and Hernandez Castillo are of Mexican origin and immigrated to America provides new perspectives on these issues in the form of fiction and memoir, as these two Mexican American writers have witnessed or experienced these difficulties personally over the course of time. In this sense, *Children of the Land* mirrors the illegal immigration that Hernandez Castillo, who was born in Zacatecas, Mexico and immigrated to America illegally with his family at the age of 5, and *Lost Children Archive* gives voice to missing children at the border who got separated from their families and with unknown legal status, especially by referring the 2014 Mexican American immigration crisis and its aftermath with a great focus on the importance of ethics of vulnerability and care and the theory of border. These undocumented immigrants, who are vulnerable because of the American immigration laws and general discrimination against them, try to continue their lives in silence to avoid attention and this situation brings with it serious problems such as deprivation of human rights, separation of family members due to immigration laws, and keeping children in isolation. In this sense, Valeria Luiselli and Marcelo Hernandez Castillo invite people to empathize and care for these people, and most importantly take action on this issue. Through their work, these authors make it clear that the border is not only a physical construct, but also a complex concept, shaped by political strategies and the power to separate people, families, cultures, languages, and lives.

Keywords: Border, Search for Identity, Vulnerability, Care, The Silenced

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INTRODUCTION

1. THE AIM OF THE STUDY

“Whoever you are—I have always depended on the kindness of strangers.”

(Blanche DuBois, 1951, n. p.)

1.1. Immigration and the Borderland of Mexico – The U.S.

Immigration has become one of the most contentious issues in the U.S., with the discussion of those who favor complete border closure and those who are more understanding of those searching for asylum and a better life to establish a permanent residence. It is a tragic reality that the United States has come to in terms of understanding and dealing with borders and immigration. An inflated emphasis on “sovereign” borders and a surly attitude towards foreign migrants have aided in the rise of dangerous demagogues in the political process that not only threaten immigrants, but the entire democratic system. As McCorkle (2018) states, “In some ways in American society, it has become completely appropriate to stereotype and discriminate against individuals because of their immigration status” (p. 58). Furthermore, In the beginning of 2018, it was declared by the Trump government that the US would be enforcing a policy of separating children from their parents at the border (Horwitz & Saccehetti, 2018). This policy was even applied to certain asylum seekers (Pearle, 2018). In 2018, Betsy DeVos, the Secretary of Education, indicated that school boards had the liberty to create regulations where they could possibly call ICE on students (Balingit, 2018). Initially seen as too extreme, anti-immigrant policies have become accepted, and because of the ever-changing news and media manipulation, may not get as much press as they would have in the past. With the apprehension of 11,500, according to Migration Policy Institute (2019), “Central American unaccompanied children at the U.S.-Mexico border in May 2019 alone, this fiscal year is on track to far exceed the numbers seen during fiscal 2014, when the surge in arrivals of these minors was viewed as a crisis” (n. p.). As the U.S. government strives to take care of these child migrants, public outrage is growing in the wake of reports of the inhumane, filthy conditions in initial Border Patrol custody, highlighting the executive branch and Congress’ failure to plan for increased shelter and care. The

unceasing rise in the number of minors coming—much like occurred in 2014—regularly shows that this immigration pattern is not expected to cease and should be regarded as a persistent event rather than an occasional emergency.

In fact, as Basik (2012) states other eminent figures in history and philosophy, like John Locke, Thomas Jefferson, and George Washington, established the basis for a more lenient immigration policy. Locke (1690) argued that every man should have the right to make their own decision “what government he will put himself under” (p. 407). Thomas Jefferson (1774) characterizes emigration as independence and an innate right, reaffirming American claims to the authority to emigrate and states that,

Our ancestors, before their emigration to America, were the free inhabitants of the British dominions in Europe, and possessed a right, which nature has given to all men, of departing from the country in which chance, not choice, has placed them, of going in quest of new habitations, and of the establishing new societies, under such laws and regulations as, to them, shall seem most likely to promote public happiness. (p. 581)

From a similar perspective, George Washington (1788) stated in his letter to Francis Adrian van der Kemp that “this land might become a safe and agreeable asylum to the virtuous and persecuted part of mankind, to whatever nation they might belong” (n. p.). It can be clearly seen that back in the early days of the United States, immigration was nearly unrestricted, emphasizing a more open immigration system. However, given that developed nations have adopted restrictive immigration as their primary policy in the modern age, it is necessary to reevaluate the prevalent accounts in order to accommodate new points of view. Mexican immigrants and their offspring now have a more essential role in American cultural life than in any other era even though they face difficulties at the borderland and afterwards in the U.S.

The border serves as both a divider and a unifier - a unifier by acting as a bridge and a divider by excluding those who do not fit on either side or on the bridge itself. In that sense, it is crucial to comprehend the divisive and unifying power of borders which have different connotations and representations in different literary texts although the idea of a “borderless world” is often referenced in the context of today’s interconnected and cooperative global society. The theory of border encompasses multiple viewpoints and approaches that strive to grasp the concept, function, and impacts of borders in varying contexts. According to Cathrine Olea Johansen (2018), “Border theory studies the notion of hybridity, diversity and doubling, discusses the

border and the change between the visible and invisibility, reviews binary oppositions and goes on to explore how borders can move beyond binaries and create a new space – a third space” (p. 3). The dynamic nature of borders remains a focal point of academic research and it becomes important to shed light upon its representation in literature as well.

The significance of borders stretches beyond their physical presence on a map and encompasses their symbolic, political, economic, and social implications. The notion of borders can be perceived in physical or abstract terms, yet their impact can be both divisive and unifying for people, nations, groups, and societies. Nation-states in the modern era take their borders seriously. Although borders are often associated with safety and security, Parker & Vaughn-Williams (2012) stress that they also serve “as foundations linked to violence, force, and the deployment of a logic of exceptionalism” (p. 585). They strive to challenge the oversimplified notion that the border is a fixed, immobile, line. On the other hand, Alexander Diener and Joshua Hagen (2010) consider borders as “social constructions” which does not suggest that they are unimportant, yet they are up for negotiation and changeable, not essentially natural or authoritative (p. 3). Anderson, Sharma, and Wright (2009) further discuss the idea of borders and classify them as a distinctive kind of connection based on considerable separations and inequalities between people with different national standings. These critics also stress borders’ oppressive nature stating that they “follow people and surround them as they try to access paid labour, welfare benefits, health, labour protections, education, civil associations, and justice” (p. 6). For that reason, the legal and political landscape surrounding entry and deportation practices is constantly being shaped by challenges based on human rights claims. While human rights frameworks are built on the idea of citizenship and rely on the cooperation of national states for enforcement, they are not well-equipped to address the demands of vulnerable individuals who are deemed illegal.

Borders are not only geographical limits; they are social constructions that can limit movement and prevent access to basic human rights. People with an “undocumented” immigration status can be pursued endlessly, no matter how much time passes or how remarkable their accomplishments are. The attachment between people and borders has been fortified over the years and centuries, and so it will not be a straightforward endeavor to break it down.

Currently, conflict and instability typify social and political issues on the U.S.-Mexico border. The construction of a border fence and the installment of the National Guard (“Operation Jump Start”) along the U.S.-Mexico border serve to portray conflict and instability as social forces that engender social, political, and cultural separation between the United States and Mexico (Cannata, 2006; Moreno, 2007; VandeHei and Weisman, 2006, p. 102).

The “border wall” is an extension of the political state, limiting the number of Mexicans entering U.S. land. It is a tangible structure in the natural environment that upholds politically accepted actions (e.g. U.S. citizens) from any dangers (e.g. Mexican border crossers). As Newman states, “through narrative, we perceive the borders that surround us, which we have to cross on a daily basis and/or are prevented from crossing because we do not ‘belong’ on the other side” (p. 41). Thus, those who cross the border from Mexico into the United States are seen as unlawful or unacceptable to the government, which in turn considers them to be political criminals. Individuals labeled as illegal are at risk of being reported by employers, landlords, law enforcement, concerned citizens, and even acquaintances. Disobeying the regulations and laws pertaining to entry, residence, and access to work and services may lead to detention and deportation.

In that sense, spanning almost two thousand miles from California to the Gulf of Mexico’s border with Texas, the southern border of the U.S. has been the source of greatest concern for Border Patrol agents for a long time. An array of equipment and technologies such as dog teams, blimps, physical barriers, cargo scanners, ground sensors, drones, fixed surveillance towers, planes and helicopters, satellite surveillance, radio and cell data surveillance, specialized gear, biometrics, patrol boats, agents and officers cooperate to protect the US from illegal immigration and safeguard its border. Regarding this, Salter and Mutlu (2012) have raised doubts as to the tools employed for border security, asserting that the technologies employed for the purpose of increased safety, and smart borders generate a higher level of apprehension among the public and are often inefficient for creating a secure society. Furthermore, methods used to protect the border threaten immigrants’ security negatively. As Anderson (2011) states, “migrants are not inherently vulnerable; it is the state that is largely responsible for manufacturing vulnerability through immigration controls and practices. Instead of being treated as complete individuals, ‘migrants’ are viewed as objects to be managed, saved, and redeemed” (p. 57). With these practices, militarized

borders and rigid immigration regulations act as an oppressive power, suppressing the capacities of those who are otherwise capable and autonomous.

Furthermore, Schulze-Wessel (2015) proposes that borders in the modern world are principally aimed at governing less privileged and undocumented people yet, tend to be easily passable for wealthier individuals. She claims that borders are not only “reinforced and expanded in response to undocumented migrants; it also means that they (undocumented migrants) represent the defensive, blocking, and controlling function of the border” (Schulze-Wessel, 2015, p. 57). As Jessica Elbert Decker and Dylan Winchcock (2017) stresses, “Different people in different social contexts do not experience borders in the same way; there are many differences and inequalities around borders. This explains the fact that borders are perceived differently and can acquire multiple meanings and connotations” (p. 26). The U.S.-Mexico border has gradually transformed into a distinct divider between the ‘developed’ and ‘developing’ nations. According to Alan Riding (1986),

Probably nowhere in the world do two countries as different as Mexico and the United States live side by side. As one crosses the border...the contrast is shocking - from wealth to poverty, from organization to improvisation, from artificial flavoring to pungent spices. But the physical differences are least important. Probably nowhere in the world do two neighbors understand each other so little. (p. 11)

Thus, the separation between the U.S. and Mexico creates a sharp contrast between two distinct worlds. In that sense, Fortier (2006) points out, there is a difference between wealthy and underprivileged migrants. The wealthier are able to have “hyper-mobility” which is thought of as an indication of advancement and are encouraged. They are part of the internationalized, diminishing world. On the other hand, for poor migrants, immobility is considered as a necessity. Resources are typically not equally accessible to them, and they may be apprehensive to report abuse to the authorities due to their immigration status. Borders, by this definition - are a practice of social separation, and what all borders have in common is that they establish a split or divergence in the world. Given the present surge in xenophobia, especially in the United States, the introduction of border theory is essential.

Border theory, suggested by various important literary critics such as Pablo Vila, Noel Parker, Nick Vaughan-Williams and especially Gloria Anzaldúa, consists of a diverse set of scholarship with political, social, and academic roots. It challenges the

traditional nationalistic stance on border and immigration, which focuses on the interests of the nation-state instead of the rights of migrants. This is closely associated with the concept of open borders. According to Pablo Vila (2003), “the task of border studies and theory is precisely to look for this multiple reading of the border situation, where different narratives coexist in the same locale” (p. 610). In that sense, critical border analysts attempt to break apart some of the assumptions implicit in a more rigid immigration approach. Noel Parker and Nick Vaughan-Williams (2012) analyze the notions that populations possess about borders, particularly in the current globalized society. In our current time and place, both literal and figurative borders can be found in many places. These borders symbolize the limits; they keep people inside or outside of an area. Crossing a border and being outside of the comfort zone put people in a riskier area. To attempt to breach a border means taking a significant risk. Furthermore, Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) puts emphasis in her *Borderlands/La Frontera* especially on border theory’s cross-disciplinary influence. She discusses,

Borders are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish us from them. A border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge. A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition. The prohibited and forbidden are its inhabitants. (p. 25)

Her initial sentence portrays the boundary between the United States and Mexico as an open wound, “es una herida abierta” in Spanish where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds’ (Gloria Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 25). She further states ‘the lifeblood of two worlds’ merge ‘to form a third – a border culture’ (1987, p. 3). Through the metaphor of borderlands, Anzaldúa provides a fresh perspective on the border, which she expresses through her analysis of ‘the mestiza’ defined as a person with a blended Hispanic and American heritage and ‘nepantla’ which means ‘the in-between space’. As Ana Louise Keating (2005/2008) states, individuals living in ‘the nepantla’ live within and among multiple worlds and develop what Anzaldúa describes as a ‘perspective from the cracks’; namely, a different perspective on borders between identities and ‘systems of difference’ (p. 1). In that sense, she challenges our understanding of the limitations of physical and cultural borders.

Sometimes, natural barriers are adequate to establish the lines of governmental power, but more frequently, man-made barriers are built to mark the boundary between one political body and another. Rosina Conde and Francisco Luna, along with many

others, are in concurrence that in the mid-eighties, that there was an increase in the interest of border culture and its literature, as a result of the preoccupation of Mexico City authorities “to reinforce the romantic ties of nation” (Luna, 1994, p. 79) and “cultivate and nationalize the border states by revealing the essence of what it was to be” (Conde, 1991, p. 52). With the emergence of border studies, there has been a greater awareness of the multiplication and reinforcement of border regulations, with more emphasis on the conceptualizing of the border as a practice, which is formed and reinforced in various forms, for a variety of people and at any place and time. As Jesús Benito & Ana María Manzananas (2003) states “borders and lines (physical or narrative), like national anthems, give countries and our own selves the limits we live by. They territorialize our thinking, our world vision, and provide the parameters we need to live safely within” (p. 1). Furthermore, these borders typically indicate language, cultural, and ethnic distinctions on top, but they may also establish distinctions that are not immediately obvious to individuals who live close to the borders. As David Newman (2007) states in his *The Lines that Continue to Separate Us: Borders in Our ‘Borderless’ World* that “the border is transformed from a barrier, through which the other side is invisible, to a place where reconciliation, cooperation and coexistence take place” (p. 31). Even though Mexico and the U.S. have two distinctive cultures, they share a 2000-mile physical border and a common history and heritage. However, the border represents more than a physical line that divides two countries. It is also the burial place for Mexicans who crossed the border to the United States who get lost in the desert, die of thirst or hunger. The probability of finding Mexican bodies along the Arizona-Mexico border is so high that the area is called the “Devil’s Highway” by Mexicans.

The Department of Homeland Security announced that illegal immigration at the U.S. Southern border is at its highest rate since 2007. In fact, from 2012 onwards, thousands of unaccompanied children have been arriving at the US-Mexico border or have been separated from their parents and transferred to detention centers. In addition, today the number of unaccompanied minors is 54 percent more than last year. In fiscal year 2022, an all-time high, immigration officials encountered more than 152,000 unaccompanied youngsters at or near the U.S.-Mexico border. According to Unaccompanied Children (UC) Program Report, although authorities have also held newborns and toddlers, approximately 72% of the unaccompanied youngsters in

federal care were fifteen years of age or older. According to the Center for Migration Studies of New York (CMS), the American Community Survey (ACS) for 2019 shows that approximately 21,036,500 Hispanics live in the U.S., with 7,410,000 of those being undocumented. According to an analysis conducted by the Center on U.S. Census Bureau data, 61.5% of Hispanics in 2019 were either born in Mexico or had Mexican ancestry. Mexican Americans, the largest Latino group in the U.S. according to the Pew Research Center with 37.24 million according to 2021 statistics, face serious challenges including discrimination in housing, education and employment as well as ethnic and racial prejudice due to immigration, especially in the 21st Century. According to Hector Romero (2005),

In the last few years, with the massive migration of Hispanics seeking a better way of life in the United States, and the exile or displacement of many Hispanic intellectuals seeking a haven from the political unrest in their native countries, the interest in the Latino literature written in the United States has been growing steadily. (p. 3)

Therefore, the subject of Mexican and other Latin American immigrants' assimilation, integration, and contributions to American society is a hotly debated issue in today's media, political sphere, and educational institutions. According to Jiménez (2010), Mexican immigration plays a significant role in shaping the identity of Mexican Americans due to its importance in the historical narrative. He further states that while the recent arrival of Mexican immigrants in a specific part of the country may shape views towards all individuals of Mexican descent, the negative depictions of Mexicans and their homeland have been ingrained in history for a long time. In order to combat and counteract these negative portrayals, a collaborative endeavor is necessary to spread truthful knowledge, foster cultural awareness, and cultivate empathy which Mexican American authors aim through literary works as a way of conveying their thoughts and feelings.

1.2. Children at the Borderland

Fostering informed discussions and advocating for suitable policies is crucial in creating awareness about the experiences of children at the border. To tackle the issues confronted by children residing at the U.S.-Mexico border, it is essential to adopt an encompassing and cooperative strategy that encompasses legalities, human welfare, and policy deliberations. In that sense, in the current discussion of U.S. immigration, children have become a focus of scholarly exploration. In order to gain a better grasp

on the effects of migration, identity development and enforcement policies on children residing at the Mexico-U.S. border, literary works have examined their experiences in great depth. Children are exposed to social and physical stressors during the immigration process, which can have a negative impact on them mentally, physically, and socially. As Philip Nel (2018) states,

More than 244 million people live outside the country of their birth. Of that number, 65.6 million have been forced to leave their homes. Nearly 22.5 million are refugees. Over half of all refugees are under the age of eighteen. Of the world's 10 million stateless people, one third are children. The numbers of refugees, asylum-seekers, the internally displaced. (p. 357)

In the past few years, the number of unaccompanied minors detained at the U.S.-Mexico border for attempting to cross without legal authorization has increased. According to the U.S. Customs and Border Protection, 15,634 unaccompanied Mexican children were taken into custody at the border in 2014. Due to their lack of legal, socio-economic, and racial status as well as cultural and linguistic barriers, children in many countries frequently receive inadequate medical care and legal support.

Neither a social class, nor an ethnic group, nor an age group can accurately describe the children of immigrants. Children, as a subgroup, are vulnerable in the immigration debate. Families may become disorganized during immigration, and children might lose contact with their parents or other adult caregivers which may cause trauma. Trauma is a term for a single or repeated occurrence that has the potential to exceed the body's capacity to respond, leading to a variety of effects. Distressing and traumatizing occurrences can lead to emotional and psychological trauma, making it challenging to open up and causing enduring effects. It is evident that trauma can leave lasting effects, particularly when those who have experienced it are unable to express their feelings and find resolution. As French psychologist Pierre Janet (1904) expresses, traumatized individuals "seem to have lost their capacity to assimilate new experiences as well. It is as if their personality development has stopped at a certain point and cannot enlarge any more by the addition of new elements" (p. 532). Depending on the individual's strength, trauma may be confronted through resilience or growth, aided by positive support systems and adaptive coping mechanisms. However, if the person is unable to deal with it, the trauma may lead to traumatic stress reactions or other incapacitating effects. Due to all of the negative

factors faced during & after crossing the frontier, immigration has the potential to be a significant predictor especially in children and making research into the topic is crucial. Separation from social networks, poor language skills, differences in socioeconomic status, and the impact of traumatic events in the child's native country are just a few of the immigration-related stresses that affect children and families. Other factors include depression, grief, and anxiety. As a result, immigrant children may experience difficulties adjusting to school and social life as well. Considering these crucial effects, many scholars have been critical of the literature for its inaccurate and limited representation of child immigrants. An increasing quantity of research on children's mobility has drawn attention to children's independence and the significance of their influence on family immigration decisions.

The diverse expressions of immigration in Latina/o literature illustrate the multiple facets of life that shape and affect the immigration experience. Narratives, poetry, essays and other literary genres of Latina/o culture demonstrate the varying nature of the immigration experience. Common motifs in these works are nostalgia, discrimination, hybridity, displacement, interculturalism, and survival. By engaging with these topics, Latina/o literature has shed light on the intricacies of immigration and Latina/o identity, while disproving the single-dimensional and defamatory stereotypes about Latinas/os that are widespread in US mainstream society. Most significantly, it reveals to the public that those who go through immigration are human beings, struggling to survive, despite the complexities of the situation. In that sense, contemporary Mexican American writers draw attention to this problem from a critical point of view and provide a distinctive perspective depending on their history, culture, and experience. These writers are united by several recurring themes, including their quest for self-discovery, their depiction of the immigrant journey, and their struggles with adapting to American society, which can be both challenging and emotionally charged. These authors reveal their longing for their homeland, their experiences of crossing the border and immigration, growing up multilingual, and the identity challenge of being in multiple places. In that sense, these writers provide broader views on these significant issues as they know the meaning of being between two languages, cultures, and countries. Some of these writers have crossed the border and become the voice of the invisible minority in the U.S., Mexican Americans, whose lives are forgotten in the border and separated from their families. These Mexican American

writers give realistic depictions of human suffering caused by displacement and immigration.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1. Ethics of Vulnerability in Understanding Immigrants

One of the prominent concepts in the ethical and political debates of recent years is vulnerability. Despite the popularity of describing and classifying certain groups or individuals as ‘vulnerable’, the implications of a focus on vulnerability would appear to be a relatively under-explored area. It plays a significant part in understanding, evaluating, and minimizing threats. According to Stefan Schneiderbauer (2017), “when a hazardous event occurs — be it of natural, technological or man-made origin — the vulnerability of exposed people, objects (e.g. critical infrastructure, etc.) and systems (e.g. socioecological systems) at different scales is key to determine the severity of the impact” (p. 70). In that sense, Butler (2005) states that vulnerability is a relative notion, a tricky one to deal with, and one applying differently according to the groups, places, and circumstances presiding over its manifestation (p. 43). Although this fact is widely acknowledged, different authors and disciplines have varying definitions of vulnerability.

It is stated that vulnerability derives from the Latin word ‘vulnus’ meaning “wound” and emphasizes the capacity for suffering embodied in human beings. According to the Oxford Dictionary, being vulnerable is being “fragile to damage, injury, failure, or abuse” (n. p.). Furthermore, vulnerability is defined as “the quality or state of being exposed to the possibility of being attacked or harmed, either physically or emotionally”. Before Rose and Killien coined the term in 1983, vulnerability was commonly used to describe risk and was often stated as being “vulnerable to”. Rose and Killien established the concept of vulnerability by distinguishing between personal and environmental factors and the related terms of vulnerability and risk (p. 60-73). According to Goodins (1985), for instance, vulnerability refers to the susceptibility to harm to one’s interests, and vulnerability is inherently relational: one is vulnerable to certain agents in relation to specific threats to one’s own interests. In that sense, despite the fact that everyone is at risk from these dangers, certain people or groups are more susceptible than others due to their inability or weakened ability to defend themselves. Aday’s influential sociological work in the 1990s broadened the concept to include physical, psychological, and social health of both communities and individuals, in addition to the resources to deal with them. Upon

transitioning into the 21st century, vulnerability was viewed in the context of shifting demographics and multicultural, intercultural, and intracultural matters. The ideas examined in relation to vulnerability underwent a change, these being marginalization, social connectedness, and health disparity. As we progress further into the 21st century, the usage of the language connected with vulnerability is constantly changing in the literature related to discipline and perspective. Different connotations of vulnerability remain present; however, the concept is usually accompanied by an adjective like “societal” or “personal” vulnerability, implying a broad understanding of the various interpretations of vulnerability.

Jean-Michel Ganteau (2017), one of the leading figures in vulnerability studies, defines it as “a capacity for damage, a liability to harm, an exposure to risk, aggression, or attack” (p. 3). Therefore, being vulnerable can lead to specific problems that are connected to ongoing vulnerability as well as a distressing sense of helplessness, loss of control, or loss of agency. In regard to W. Neil Adger (2006), “Vulnerability is the state of susceptibility to harm from exposure to stresses associated with environmental and social change and from the absence of capacity to adapt”. Levinas, from a different perspective, suggests the absence of protection is vulnerability itself and vulnerability does not belong to the sole property of any certain sex or gender, ethnic group, or cultural tradition. For him, “subjectivity is sensibility—an exposure to others—, a vulnerability and a responsibility in the proximity of the others, the-one-for-the-other” (p. 77). Therefore, the definition of vulnerability is predicated on a vision of the human as vulnerable and as essentially dependent on others and, vice versa, a conception of interdependence that makes humanity essentially relational (Maillard, 2011, p. 16).

Human life is conditioned by vulnerability. By virtue of our embodiment, human beings have bodily and material needs; are exposed to physical illness, injury, disability, and death; and depend on the care of others for extended periods during our lives. As social and affective beings we are emotionally and psychologically vulnerable to others in myriad ways: to loss and grief; to neglect, abuse, and lack of care; to rejection, ostracism, and humiliation. As sociopolitical beings, we are vulnerable to exploitation, manipulation, oppression, political violence, and rights abuses. And we are vulnerable to the natural environment and to the impact on the environment of our own, individual and collective, actions and technologies. (Mackenzie; Rogers; Dodds, 2014; p. 1).

On the other hand, Martha Fineman’s “ethics of vulnerability” is growing rapidly as a defense for extensive social welfare regulations in a political environment where the

function of government is actively being questioned. As a new legal theory, vulnerability theory makes the case for a bigger, more involved state. Although the concept has a use in the field of social and humanities for the potential of people, situations, living things, institutions, the market, or nature to be open to dangers, to be injured, to be harmed, its ethical, socio-political and legal uses are related to the human and human situation in the foreground. In this regard, thinkers who considered the concept in the 1980s and 1990s formulated vulnerability as a predisposition to harm from possible dangers. Although there is no certainty about the perimeter of the concept or the elements that will be specific in the definition of vulnerability, it seems that in its general use it refers to situations such as “vulnerability”, “victimization”, “disadvantage”. MacIntyre (1999), one of the names who dealt with the concept in the mentioned years, defines the term as being able to suffer and being dependent on others while Mary Neal thinks that the concept is the equivalent of a universal truth about people’s capacity to suffer. As for the present, Alison Coyle considers this orientation as a return to the emotional aspect of politics as the reason for the increasing interest in the concept.

As a new concept, vulnerability is considered to have four main elements by Fineman: universality, constancy, complexity, and particularity. The universality component of Fineman’s definition is based on her belief that vulnerability is a shared condition shared by everyone. She says the following of the term “vulnerability” in her *Vulnerable Subject and Responsive State* (2010): “My work has developed the concept of vulnerable detached from specific subgroups, using it to define the very meaning of what it means to be human” (p. 266). The vulnerability theory’s main point is that it views vulnerability as a natural aspect of the human condition. Although Fineman does not assert that vulnerability at the core of “what it means to be human,” it is apparent that she finds it crucial for vulnerability to be recognized as a universal quality. Vulnerability is not a special temporary fragility that certain people have in certain contexts. It is a universal immutable feature of what it means to be human as a constant condition that we all experience. Vulnerability theory attempts to establish a perspective from which we can perceive everyone as enough similar that we feel connected to one another as a claim about subjectivity. We might be able to agree that a strong state is necessary to assist us in avoiding injuries and heal if we acknowledge that we are all vulnerable. In that sense, Fineman states that governments have a duty

to address vulnerability in an effective manner by ensuring that everyone has equitable access to the social institutions that distribute resources. Vulnerability is inherent in the human condition. Thus, the theory offers a different framework for outsized social welfare initiatives and a defense of the function of government.

Fineman paints a picture of humans as universally and constantly vulnerable, heavily impacted by social institutions giving (or not) them the resources allowing them to fend for themselves. Vulnerability does not only apply to certain populations, contrary to how it is perceived in other disciplines. According to Fineman (2010), Vulnerability theory is built upon “the realization that many physically or psychologically harmful events are ultimately beyond human control” (p. 9). Everyone is vulnerable. “Vulnerability is not only experienced universally, vulnerability is experienced constantly. People cannot escape vulnerability; they are vulnerable from birth until death because people are unavoidably embedded in a variety of dependencies” (Fineman, 2010, p. 5). All of us could be harmed by uncontrollable events; in some cases, however, such as during a natural disaster, a disease outbreak, or an economic collapse, there is nothing we can do to entirely reduce our vulnerability to harm. Despite the fact that the theory starts with our fragility as humans, this is an important distinction to make. When vulnerability is acknowledged as a universal constant, the challenge is to investigate ways to lessen this vulnerability. As a result, neither certain traits nor certain life stages make people sensitive, but rather, different levels of resilience affect how vulnerable we are to the world. Because it focuses on society and social systems, vulnerability theory is fundamentally based on the inequality of resilience.

In addition to human beings, social institutions are also considered vulnerable. According to Fineman, “institutions such as the family are unable to eliminate individual vulnerability and are themselves vulnerable structures susceptible to harm and change” (p. 11). Families are recognized by the state and may be helped or injured by its laws, such as through tax benefits, making institutions like the family susceptible. Vulnerability is thus both personal, relational, and institutional. These three aspects co-constitute the concept of vulnerability, and all have an influence on each other which means these elements are all interconnected in some way. Fineman (2010) identifies four key elements of vulnerability in her article *Vulnerable Subject and the Responsive State*: universality, constancy, complexity, and particularity. The

universality element of Fineman's definition is centered on her notion that vulnerability is a shared condition experienced by everyone. The notion that we may build universals in the first place is an essential foundation of universality as understood in vulnerability theory. There is no "view from nowhere," according to many, that would enable us to comprehend "what it is to be human" in any situation. The goal of vulnerability theory is to create a universal subject. According to Fineman, even if it is impossible to produce a universal, we must nonetheless develop one as we're dealing with law. For Fineman (2013), "when we deal with the law, we employ a system dependent on the process of classification, generalization, and universal applicability" (p. 1357). According to her, this means "the most important task for those interested in a social justice project ... is to construct a legal subject with which to replace the abstract liberal subject with its accompanying and unrealistic constructs of autonomy, self-sufficiency, and independence" (p. 620).

The constancy of dependence on others is a key component of vulnerability theory along with the universality of vulnerability. Vulnerability should be "understood as a state of constant possibility of harm" that "cannot be hidden" and "the liberal subject is enmeshed in a web of relationships and... dependent upon them" (Fineman, 2016, p. 11). According to vulnerability theory, people are embodied creatures who really are inherently a part of institutions and social systems. We are inescapably and constantly reliant on one another and on the government because vulnerability is a constant. For Fineman, vulnerability should be considered as "a state of constant possibility of harm" that "cannot be hidden". Hence, the consistency element also establishes the vulnerability theory's claim for a strong welfare state. Furthermore, complexity is the third central aspect of vulnerability theory. The concept of vulnerability is complicated as it may present itself in numerous forms. People may suffer from simple physical harm but that can also affect relationships with others or institutions and can be economic or social. For Frank Rudy Cooper (2015), "physical or other injuries to the individual could also result in intergenerational transfer of the consequences of injuries" (p. 1358). As vulnerability theorists argue, the human condition's complexity is intertwined with the existence of social groups. Moreover, these groups serve as an additional source of vulnerability.

Fineman (2008) stresses that negative economic and institutional harms may cluster around members of a socially or culturally determined grouping who share

certain societal positions or have suffered discrimination based on constructed categories used to differentiate classes of persons, such as race, gender, ethnicity, or religious affiliation (p. 268). Hence, vulnerability theorists consider social groups as contributing to the complexity of the human situation. These social groups themselves may present a further element of vulnerability. In that sense, the post-identity approach of vulnerability theory, which admits that identities play a role in the development of vulnerabilities, is in conflict with the element of complexity. The final component of vulnerability theory, the characteristic of the human condition, is to explain complexity without mentioning identities. For Fineman (2008), we all have different “embodiments” and social positions “within webs of economic and institutional interactions,” according to vulnerability theory (p. 269). We are regarded differently when we have a different physical appearance or social status. As a result of human variety, we each experience vulnerability differently. Fineman suggests that such variations “are not socially neutral, and historical reaction to some human variations, particularly race and gender, has led to the creation of hierarchies, discrimination, and even violence” (p. 637). Furthermore, institutions give us access to resources such as childcare, unemployment insurance or food for resolving our vulnerabilities, which is why social location is crucial. However, we are unable to utilize those resources if our relationships with our family or the government are strained. Fineman (2019) states that “Recognition of fundamental, universal, and perpetual human vulnerability reveals the fallacies inherent in the ideals of autonomy, independence, and individual responsibility that have supplanted an appreciation of the social” (p. 342). In addition to that, she further stresses the “need to develop a robust language of state or collective responsibility, one that recognizes that social justice is realized through the legal creation and maintenance of just social institutions and relationships” (p. 342). Addressing human vulnerability brings to light what we have in common as people, as well as what we should anticipate from the laws, fundamental social structures, and interpersonal connections that make up society and have an impact on everyone’s lives.

In our increasingly individualistic society, the commitment to a communal or societal judgment of justice has been severely damaged. The tremendous social and economic inequality that followed the Industrial Revolution are issues we still have to deal with today. According to Jean-Michel Ganteau (2015), “in contemporary

parlance, “vulnerability” and more generally “the vulnerable”- a phrase that lays the stress on the suffering people even while eschewing individualization and the taking into consideration of singularity” (p. 3). Through the lens of Castillo’s personal story and Luiselli’s fictional portrayals, it becomes evident how individuals can become vulnerable personas when faced with violence from oppressive government and political and social power dynamics. Both works depict the characters as vulnerable victims, as their sensitivity and receptivity on both physical and mental levels make them “open to a violent expression of alterity” (Ganteau and Onega, 2014, p. 3). Instead of a shared sense of justice, we are more inclined to have individual and fragmented perceptions of it. The restricted and inaccurate understanding of legal subjectivity is challenged by vulnerability theory. It implies that the human situation is more accurately reflected by a legal subject that is largely defined by vulnerability and need rather than solely by reason and liberty. People go through continuous change over time, which could result in physical harm, injury, or loss, as well as positive and generative features. For instance, over the course of a human’s life, change also results in improved strength, progress, wisdom, and maturity, all of which can inspire creativity and lead to joy and fulfillment. The fact that our bodies are subject to change throughout time inspires us to build caring relationships that are characterized by joy, compassion, sensitivity, and empathy. Being embodied beings, we rely on social structures and interpersonal relationships all of our lives. Margaret Thatcher proclaimed in a 1987 interview in *Women’s Own Magazine* that “there are individual men and women and there are families. And no government can do anything except through people, and people must look after themselves first. It is our duty to look after ourselves and then, also, to look after our neighbors”. In that sense, human vulnerability as a whole and social and physical interdependence must be the primary focus. Although we may be more or less dependent on care at any particular moment, dependency is present in some form and to some extent throughout our lives. Dependency is most noticeable when we are infants and children. Children and infants are reliant on care because without it, they would not survive. Even though this kind of dependency may decrease or change when we get mature emotionally and physically, many, if not most of us will be dependent on other people’s care when we are aged, are ill, or have a disability. As Robert E. Goodin addresses in *Protecting the Vulnerable* (1985) that, we have “special responsibilities” for those who are not just a part of our family and friends, but also a larger part of our community, society, or state.

Being physical beings, we are inevitably dependent on both physical and psychological care from others.

2.2. Ethics of Care in Taking Action for Immigrants

In recent years, research has once again turned its attention to care and caring. In fact, there are several names and words used in the literature for the theory of care. Various authors have used care, caring, the ethic or ethics of care, care ethics, and occasionally the same author has used more than one. The "first" and "second" generations of care theorizing can be used to characterize the many stages of development that the ethics of care have through (Hankivsky, 2004). The early formulations were mainly connected to Carol Gilligan's (1982) work which is connected to women's morals, particularly to their experiences and behaviors related to mothering, caring, and nurturing (Held 1993; Noddings 1984; Ruddick 1989; 1992). Such conceptualizations were overcome by second generation care theorists, inspired by the work of Tronto (1993) which suggests "species activity that includes everything that we do to maintain, continue and repair our 'world' so that we can live in it as well as possible. That world includes our bodies, our environments, all of which we seek to interweave in a complex, life-sustaining web" (p. 103). Therefore, one of the defining characteristics of care ethics is the understanding that humans are tangible individuals, existing within complex and interdependent relationships with one another, which may often be unequal which represents the moral and political significance of caring which will be focused on in this thesis.

According to care theorists, caring is "a social practice that is essential to the maintenance and reproduction of society" (Streuning 2002, 87; Baier 1994, Fineman 2004, Kittay 1999, Walker 1998, and West 1997 use similar language). In order to arrive at a more adequate description, one only requires to be more specific about what care tends to in the advancement of human existence and society. By contributing to this idea, Sibyl Schwarzenbach (1996) compares providing care to reproductive labor, referring to "all those rational activities (thinking about particular others and their needs, caring for them, cooking their meals, etc.) which go toward reproducing a particular set of relationships between persons over time rather than the biological processes associated with reproduction (sexual activity, pregnancy, childbirth)" (p. 102). While productive labor helps to support relationships and the continuation of

human life, it typically does so secondarily or indirectly. In order to obtain the resources required to take care of themselves and others, people typically engage in productive activities. Typically, caring happens before and after these activities in the ways that directly meet needs (feeding, clothing, providing medicine to others, and so on). According to Daniel Engster (2015), “caring involves a subject confronting another subject and responding to his or her needs and abilities” (p. 51). Caring’s “end is not in the first instance transformation of the external, physical world but rather its end is interactive or ‘communicative’; it aims at the transformation of social relations’ undistorted by dependency or force” (Schwarzenbach, 1987, p. 154). Thus, caring has another person’s growth and fundamental well-being as its primary goal. In a more general sense, caring can be described as a type of reproductive work that satisfies three requirements for human existence: survival, growth, and social reproduction. As a concept, caring is about protecting and preserving our humanity. It reveals our actual attitudes, feelings, and thoughts and enables us to interact with others more honestly. Over the past 40 years, care theorists have made significant improvements towards defining caring as a functional moral and political concept. However, there is still a lack of a fully developed theory of the ethical responsibility to care, and the idea of caring as a foundation for moral and political theory is still underdeveloped. Joan Tronto (1993) provides a good spot to start when creating the basis of caring by stating “Care places at the forefront human flourishing and the prevention of harm and suffering, and... rethinks “human nature, human needs, and how political judgments are made to ensure more democratic policies in which power is more evenly distributed” (p. 1995).

Thus, ethics of care is considered as maintaining one’s own health and well-being. On the other hand, Petra Bowden (1997) states that the “caring perspective” is marked by “a concern for care, responsiveness and taking responsibility in interpersonal relationships, and by a context-sensitive mode of deliberation that resists abstract formulations of moral problems” (p. 6). Furthermore, according to Selma Sevenhuijsen (1998), care is closely tied to the action of caring, and is mainly perceived as a skill and a desire to be aware of needs, and to take on the burden of these needs. In that sense, as scholars in the theory of care and of ethics have persuasively shown, the concept is based on the notion that vulnerability is shared, that it is something that is common, and that it allows for an image of the human as

basically interdependent and in no way autonomous. According to care theorists, we learn to take care of others and of ourselves by taking care of others. On the other hand, as Noddings (2002) suggests “To develop the capacity to care, one must engage in care giving activities” (p. 19). It is obvious that caring can only be fulfilled by taking an action and practicing it. As Sevenhuijsen (1998) further states that “We cannot understand care unless we practice it,” and “our practicing of care can also be improved in quality by trying to understand it as well as possible” (p. 23). In other words, it is crucial prioritizing care, responsiveness, and accountability in relationships, and utilizing a contextualized approach to tackle moral issues especially in the contemporary age.

We, as human beings, care for others when we support them in obtaining the fundamental biological requirements for survival and daily living. In addition to the need for physical contact and holding, at least for newborns and young children, fundamental biological needs also include the need for nourishment, clean water, clothing, housing, rest, a neat environment, basic medical care, and safety from harm. Since different people and groups express their need for food, clothes, and shelter in different ways, one crucial aspect of caring is providing for these needs in accordance with each person’s unique situation and preferences. This list should also be viewed as open-ended and provisional because certain groups of individuals might suffer from basic biological needs that are not covered by the above list. Helping others acquire or maintain their fundamental capacities for feelings, communication, reason, creative thinking, relationships, and, in the majority of modern countries, literacy and other pursuits, is the second goal of caring. The objective is to give people the tools they need to pursue their ideas of the ideal life and to develop and maintain, as much as possible, the skills required for basic social functioning as these abilities are necessary for survival and basic functioning in society.

It can be clearly seen that ethics of vulnerability and care are intermingled and remarkably connected. Both ethical systems acknowledge the importance of taking into account vulnerable individuals’ needs and overall welfare within a larger social and moral setting by placing emphasis on connectedness, compassion, and acknowledging how people rely on each other. Every human is reliant at some time in their lives, whether it is during infancy, old age, illness, or being disabled, or when a person’s resources and social environment are insufficient to meet her requirements

and ensure her autonomy. The definitions of vulnerability and care are based on an image of the human as weak and fundamentally dependent on others, as seen in these examples, and vice versa, on a conception of interdependence that renders humanity fundamentally relational. Dependence is a state of vulnerability that need the care and attention of a particular person or individuals. Being dependent is having to rely on the help of others to access, meet, or secure one's requirements as well as to encourage and support the growth of one's own independence or agency. In that sense, the fundamental preconditions of our humanity as embodied creatures are human vulnerability and dependency. The unsettling experience of the other's severe vulnerability in the face, which holds us captive and demands for our responsibility for the other, is the foundation of the ethical relationship. The concepts of dependence, vulnerability, and care are central topics of *Lost Children Archive* and *Children of the Land* as a fiction and a non-fiction respectively and reflect the reality that we depend on each other and how important to care for the other for a better world. These two pieces of literature address ethical concerns, empathy, and the human element surrounding social problems. Immigration is a key area explored in both works which implores readers to try to understand the struggles faced by immigrants. By exploring personal accounts from individuals and families affected by immigration, they encourage reflection on the moral implications posed by these challenges.

2.3. Frontier Writers: Valeria Luiselli and Marcelo Hernandez Castillo

The challenges and exploits of living on the frontier are frequently portrayed by frontier writers, who explore themes like the westward movement, encounters with Indigenous cultures, the fight for survival, and clashes between civilizations. The spirit of the frontier was encapsulated by these writers, helping to define the American identity. As a contemporary and well-known example, Valeria Luiselli, born in 1983 in Mexico City, is a Mexican American writer and immigration advocate who lives in New York where she writes her novels. Due to the duty of his father, who is a diplomat, her childhood passed in various countries of the world including South Korea, South Africa, and India. She is the author of *Faces in the Crowd* (2011), *Sidewalks* (2013), *The Story of My Teeth* (2015), *Tell Me How It Ends: An Essay in Forty Questions* (2017) and *Lost Children Archive* (2019). Luiselli is a writer who constantly tests the boundaries of fiction and documents. In terms of language and thought, it moves between English and Spanish, and between Mexico and the United States. She is one

of the 5 Promising Young Writers Under 35 determined by the National Book Foundation in 2014 and has distinguished herself among the new generation writers of Contemporary Latin American literature with her distinctive voice and has received praise especially in the U.S. and England with her works translated into more than 20 languages. Luiselli's latest work *Lost Children Archive* (2019) is a striking, powerful, and unforgettable road novel with its playful and deep structure, aside from its unique focus on the horrific events that took place on the U.S.- Mexico border in the early 21st century. She has received a Bearing Witness Fellowship from the Art for Justice and the Los Angeles Times Art Seidenbaum Award for First Fiction (2014). After the publication of *Lost Children Archive*, which is considered among the best books of 2019, Luiselli received the Guggenheim Fellowship presented to gifted artists and scientific researchers in 2020. She has won Los Angeles Times Book Prize for Best Fiction (2016), the American Book Award (2018), the Andrew Carnegie Medal for Excellence in Fiction (2020), and was a finalist for the Booker Prize (2019), Women's Prize for Fiction (2019), Kirkus Prize, and National Book Critics Circle Award which one of only two Mexicans ever to be nominated in the U.S. She was also awarded the MacArthur Genius Fellowship and the Vilcek Creative Literature Award. *Lost Children Archive* also brought the Folio Award to the author in March 2020 and the International Dublin Literary Award in 2021. Her works have been translated into more than 20 languages and have appeared in publications from the New York Times, The New Yorker and McSweeney's. As an acclaimed writer, she has been nominated as one of the three Latin American Women Writers for 2024 Neustadt International Prize for Literature and was awarded the Premio Metropolis Azul in Montreal, Quebec along with numerous well-known awards and nominations in literature thanks to her contributions to Mexican American Literature by drawing attention to an urgent global issue – immigration, displacement and vulnerable children at the frontier. Her work also appeared in *Where You Are*, a brilliantly curated collection of maps in writing and art that also includes well-known colleagues like Sheila Heti, Geoff Dyer, and Asymptote contributor Alain de Botton. In fact, the writings of Luiselli have far deeper origins that touch on Joseph Brodsky, G.K. Chesterton, and Montaigne which offer a rich content in her writings. Valeria Luiselli joined the ranks of the best and smartest writers working today and quickly won readers worldwide with a style that blends essay with memoir, fiction, and urban exploration.

Valeria Luiselli is a well-known productive Mexican American writer whose works have received widespread praise starting from her debut book, *Papeles Falsos*, a collection of essays, was published in an English "version"—in MacSweeney's translations—as *Sidewalks* (2013), *Los Ingrávidos*, or *Faces in the Crowd* (2011), *the Story of My Teeth* (2013), *Tell Me How It Ends: An Essay in Forty Questions* (2017) and *Lost Children Archive* (2019). At the Times Literary Supplement, Adam Thirlwell hailed *Sidewalks* as one of his "books of the year," while the Daily Telegraph praised Luiselli as an "astounding talent." Concepts of absence and loss are evident throughout Valeria Luiselli's works, as she talks about her nomadic background. Themes such as alienation, adaptability and fragility of identity prevail in Luiselli's narrative works including fiction and non-fiction. Her works cross national boundaries by taking place in both Mexico and the U.S. Luiselli's narrative is organized around concise textual sections that shift between the characters and their numerous instances by wandering in time and location, giving the reader the sense that the various elements of the story are constantly exchanging information.

Luiselli's writing touches on the topics of immigrants, exiles and those wandering through urban areas - all while incorporating some of Bourriard's definition "figures of contemporary culture" (Bourriard, 2010, p. 51). Thus, she regularly delves into the topics of globalization and immigration in her works which explore the contemporary challenges faced by child immigrants. It is obvious from her debut collection of essays and novel that Luiselli wanders around various places which exceeds time, space and offers a piece of idea about changing places constantly and trying to adapt new environments while everything seems vogue and often refers to other well-known traditional artists by working on making their voices into the forefront. She pays special attention to displacement, uncertainty of life and echoes of lost voices which make her writing particular and genuine in both American and Mexican Literature. Aspects of autobiography, fiction, and literary experimentation are obvious in her works praised by critics for her ability to capture the forgotten spaces in Mexico, bringing them to life. Luiselli makes an effort to go beyond traditional writing style which follows the borders of a specific literary genre. Her books can be interpreted as both a celebration of the way words can influence how we perceive the world and a criticism of the ways in which some voices are silenced or removed from the literary community. Moreover, her fictional and non-fictional works provide us a

distinguished point of view about nomadic lifestyle, inbetweenness and immigration crisis including a deep understanding of these subjects in real life and what kind of feeling to be the other. As Gies (2016) states “the old distinction between fiction and nonfiction (from the point of view of the reader, not of the author’s ethical responsibilities) is that we read fiction in order to feel, nonfiction in order to learn... Luiselli’s works refuse such categories, an obfuscation” (p. 24). Luiselli states that she immerses herself in fiction to encounter individuals she would not otherwise have the chance to, and she completes a book because she has become strongly attached to the characters.

The task of illustrating immigrant tales and the influence of oppressive borders on young people, which is unfolding in an unsustainable way in the present, is more challenging than ever before. The current refugee crisis wherever it is in the world and whatever its many causes, it is possibly the greatest political and humanitarian challenge facing the world and yet the processing of new arrivals handled by clunking overburdened government agencies. What distinguishes an asylum seeker from a refugee and a refugee from an immigrant? Is there a difference between an illegal alien and an undocumented immigrant apart from the emotions each term stirs? According to Juliet Cohen (2008), “the term asylum seeker might be expected to denote those who have not (or not yet) been given international protection. The term refugee should then cover all those who are seeking asylum, regardless of the recognition of their claim – an argument frequently made by organizations such as the Refugee Council. “Refugees” may refer to all those fleeing persecution or only to those with the legal right to remain in the country of refuge” (p. 235–44). Numerous academic fields continue to pay attention to the expanding Mexican American community in the United States. Thirty-two million individuals identified as being of Mexican heritage according to the 2010 census, which accounts for two-thirds of the overall Latino/a population of nearly 50 million people and this number continues to rise each day. According to Fox (1999),

The border has received a great deal of attention in recent literature and art, this body of work has not yet been fully acknowledged by scholars and critics. Meanwhile, an abstract, metaphorical ‘border’ has gained widespread currency in academic writing...but this usage is rarely tied to the U.S. – Mexico border. (p. 1-2)

In light of this, a discourse on the U.S.-Mexico border as a text situated in a specific location must take into account the concept of the border, crossing the border, and those who undertake this journey. Even the visual appearance of a border fence challenges the concept of belonging and community, as it divides cultures and individuals. In that sense, the implementation of a “border wall” erases the potential for a multicultural and inclusive area. The border separating the United States and Mexico generates a discourse that encompasses the social, economic, political, and physical constraints of both social and geographical spaces along with its physical entity.

Luiselli stresses in her interview with VCU News (2018) that “we have to start thinking about immigration in a different way, not as a problem to be solved in a messy, emergency kind of way, but as a reality that we are going to live with and grow up with” (n. p.). As a migrant herself, she draws attention to urgent immigration crisis in her fictional novel *Lost Children Archive* connected to her previous non-fictional work *Tell Me How It Ends; An Essay in Forty Questions* (2017) which forms a basis for the novel and depends on her experience with undocumented immigrant children. In that sense, *Tell Me How It Ends; An Essay in 40 Questions* by Valeria Luiselli is not just timely but also an urgent non-fictional work. She presents an account of the treatment of undocumented children that is both deeply personal and powerfully lucid. As Alma Guillermoprieto (2017) states, “with Valeria Luiselli as our guide, we navigate the corridors of a system that tries and fails to reconcile America’s long-standing welcome of the poor, the terrorized, and the adventurous with its current fear and mistrust of immigrants” (n. p.). *Tell Me How It Ends; An Essay in Forty Questions* is based on her interpretation for child migrants in New York immigration courts. Using the forty questions of the intake questionnaire devised by the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services as a frame, she uncovers the many failings of the system exposes the cruelties. It perpetrates and most importantly of all introduces us to the children themselves reminding us that behind every statistic. Every questionnaire is a human being fundamentally no different from us. This book was basically born from the crisis and a sudden surge that was announced in 2014 even though children had been arriving alone in the U.S. for many years. Immigration authorities noticed that 80.000 children had arrived alone without parents at the border between October 2013 and June 2014 – in such a brief period of time. They were seeking asylum or some

form of immigration relief. In that sense, Luiselli urges us to engage in the complicated task of converting language, experience, bodies across time, thought, and culture. *Tell Me How It Ends: An Essay in Forty Questions* pleads for a total reformation of the forces that have constructed present immigration into the United States and the way many Americans, removed from fact, view it. It also appeals for action. As Proximity Magazine (2017) puts it perfectly, “it is another step forward in the strange struggle of our modern age, or maybe it is any age, the humanizing of humans. The very least we can all do is to hear these stories” (n. p.).

When a child or a migrant arrives in the U.S. without documents, typically they are first placed inside a facility under the Immigrations and Customs Informant and Enforcement which is called colloquially the ice box, or it is more commonly in Spanish as “La Hielera” meaning “the refrigerator.” It is a very cold room where they supposedly keep people for a maximum of 72 hours but during this crisis in 2014, that period extended for many days. From that facility, children are taken to a shelter where they are able to contact their family members and a family that declares themselves as their sponsors for any kind of visa. Afterwards, they are sent to whichever town or city where they have the family member that will sponsor them. Then they receive a notice to appear which is basically an appointment at court where they are charged with a deportation order unless they find a lawyer to defend them. Previous to the crisis, children had by law one year to find a lawyer to defend them. After the crisis, Obama administration declared children as a part of a priority docket and their cases were pushed up to the priority in court and led these children to get deported before anyone else unless they find a lawyer. Currently, they have 21 days to find a lawyer which is practically impossible. She (2017) further states: “the exception is: being Mexican. Mexican children detained by Border Patrol can be deported back immediately” under U.S. law by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) (n. p.).

Tell Me How It Ends: An Essay in 40 Questions is structured around the questionnaire asked children in court in order to determine whether they might be eligible for immigration relief through a legal representative. In the book, Luiselli observes a chalkboard leaning against a wall in the court. Someone had written a list of words on it that was broken up into four groups:

Border: coyote, migration police, icebox, shelter

Court: The Door & other organizations, lawyers

Home: family, guardians

Community: ???

The words were written in Spanish...one of the lawyers explained that the list was there to help children recall the phases of their journey during the interview. She didn't say, but in some way, we understood that the words scribbled on the board were also a kind of scaffolding holding all of those broken stories together. (p. 41-42)

According to Luiselli, governments of Mexico, the U.S., and the northern triangle – Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras are co-responsible for this situation. Until those governments accept their shared responsibility – historical and current, it is not possible to find a real and long-lasting solution. One of the main problems in the U.S. is that the situation is always described as another government's problem by the U.S. instead of considering it as a transnational situation. Valeria Luiselli wishes to change the language around how we think about immigration. Violence against people starts with language and calling an undocumented migrant illegal or calling deportation removal creates a negative meaning which leads people feel lesser, criminal and not entitled to anything. In her interview with Rolling Stone (2017), Luiselli discussed that,

To eradicate the term 'illegal' from people's normal conversation. To think of children from the Northern Triangle as refugees and not as migrants – not that migrants should receive bad treatment, or lesser treatment, but in particular these children cannot be seen as migrants because they come from situations of war and need the kind of protections that refugees are entitled. (n.p.)

In that sense, Luiselly stresses that educating Americans about the motives behind immigration is essential to reforming our dysfunctional system and going beyond the current government's aim to "construct a wall."

She stated that most of the children she spoke to during her interviews in courts had reached their destination via 'La Bestia,' the beast, referring to the freight trains that cross Mexico to the United States. As 'La Bestia' does not provide any passenger service, migrants had to ride atop the railcars or in the recesses between them. 'La Bestia' has already taken the lives of thousands, with many more wounded due to its recurrent derailments and its nocturnal victims who accidentally fall off the train. The slightest mistake can be fatal, with some likening it to a demon and others to a vacuum

that swallows up unsuspecting passengers. During 2015, Mexico accomplished the deportation of more than 150,000 Central Americans, a number greater than that of the United States. As a result, dangerous alternate routes have come into existence over the ocean. She outlines the brutality that children encounter when they enter the United States as well. In her interview with Boston Review (2017), she stated that “we know, for instance, that civilian vigilantes and owners of private ranches go out to hunt undocumented migrants, either as a matter of conviction or merely for sport” (n. p.). The increase in actions influenced by nativist movements that encourage individuals to enforce the law independently, resulting in illegal and violent acts with no accountability under the law which is also emphasized by Gallegos (2004) as “silence on the part of judicial and policymaking bodies in response to vigilante justice indicates assent” (p. 1757).

As Bertrand Westphal asserts that “fiction does not reproduce reality, but rather actualizes virtualities that have not been expressed until now, which then interact with reality.” In that sense, the fictional work *Lost Children Archive* provides a unique perspective of serious happenings taking place at Mexico – the U.S. border which takes *Tell Me How It Ends: An Essay in Forty Questions* as a basis. Children immigrants are at the center of Luiselli’s latest novel *Lost Children Archive*. In the novel, a group of Central American children approach the U.S. – Mexico border from the south. At the same time, an unnamed family- a mother, a father and two children who belong to each one of the parents- in New York heads for the border on a road trip across the U.S. towards the borderlands. The husband is a soundscape recorder and documents the sounds around areas or events to understand them. On the other hand, the wife is a journalist, but she does similar audio projects that her husband does, but she is more of an archivist. They bring seven boxes alongside them in the car trunk for their trip. They fill them up with images and traces of their experience throughout the journey and try to catch echoes of others by recording sounds which were not “a collection of sounds that have been lost—such a thing would in fact be impossible—but rather one of sounds that were present in the time of recording and that, when we listen to them, remind us of the ones that are lost” (p. 141). The novel utilizes sound as a storytelling tool to highlight the political, historical, and ecological elements of the Desert Southwest. Through the efforts of two of the main characters, constructing an inventory of sounds and a sound documentary, a complex and multifaceted image of

the region is given. As Luiselli's first novel written in English, *Lost Children Archive* deals with diverse topics including a Mexican- American family's road trip and a marriage's disintegration, immigrant children and families. Moreover, a lot of things happen on the border, real and imagined, in the characters' minds. The novel questions how and where we should stand in order to document political violence. It is a story of survival, in-betweenness, (un)belonging and an example of how we depend on each other by stressing the importance of togetherness. With the clash of political realities and human values, the novel discovers the boundaries of place and people and how important it is to care for the other in times of crisis.

From a similar perspective, Marcelo Hernandez Castillo also illuminates the same issue depending on his own experience by shedding light on other lives in *Children of the Land*. He talks about his own experiences and puts emphasis on family, problems at the border and life in the U.S. from the eyes of Mexican Americans. Marcelo Hernandez Castillo, born in 1988, is a Mexican American writer, poet, essayist, translator, immigration advocate and one of the founders of the UndocuPoets campaign which eliminated citizenship requirements from all major US poetry prizes and provides poetry scholarships. He was born in Zacatecas, Mexico, crossed the border to the U.S. with his family at the age of five and currently lives in California. He was the first undocumented student to graduate from the Helen Zell Writers Program at the University of Michigan. He is the writer of *Cenzontle* (2014), *Dulce* (2018) and *Children of the Land* (2020). *Cenzontle* won the A. Poulin, Jr. Prize in 2018, the Great Lakes Colleges Association New Writers Award in poetry in 2019, was awarded the Foreword Indie bronze prize for best book of the year and was a finalist for the Northern California Book Award and named a best book of 2018 by NPR and the New York Public Library. *Dulce*, his debut chapbook, won the Drinking Gourd Poetry Prize published by Northwestern University Press which is the first book award for poets of color. Furthermore, his short essay "Poetry as a Passport" is published at BuzzFeed in 2014 and he currently teaches at Ashland University.

In his debut poetry collection, *Cenzontle*, Marcelo Hernandez Castillo has created a complex narrative of his life the chain of events while crossing the border of the U.S. and Mexico. Castillo claimed that the turning point in his life—the transition from being illegal to being a protected student under DACA- the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals —was the source of inspiration for his art. Castillo's

use of imagery and dreamlike language enables him to discuss his immigrant status in a way that was previously impossible in his life as an undocumented migrant. His poems are about how he felt after moving to a new country, the idea that the American dream not being real and feeling worried about being different in a marriage. He also talks about always wanting to find a place where he belongs. In his interview with Leticia Urieta (2020), he states that he became severely depressed after he completed *Cenzontle* which he views the book as an embodiment of his individual experiences and was not aware that he was exhibiting the initial signs of bipolar disorder. He had been attending therapy and seeing psychiatrists for his depression and anxiety. His poems smoothly transition between Spanish and English, like a song. They do not just go from one language to another, but instead, the languages blend. In that sense, *Cenzontle* shows the trauma between generations and how we look at our past to understand ourselves better. In his second collection of poetry, *Dulce: Poems* (2018), the winner of the Drinking Gourd Poetry Prize, Marcelo Hernandez Castillo continues to navigate the trauma of displacement, human lives behind headlines and his journey as a man and a citizen. He questions if poets can produce stories and approach that angle of the larger advocacy work to fill the gaps that are needed to take action. By doing so, he obscures and eliminates the boundaries of borders and classifications by inviting the reader to face and contest them.

As Marcelo Hernandez Castillo states in *Children of the Land*, “It was useless to try to negotiate two worlds at once when only one of them was visible while the other one threatened to collapse” (p. 8). When he was five years old, he temporarily lost his sight after crossing the border from Mexico to the U.S with his family. He was able to see again, yet he realized that before moving in with his parents in California, he had to cross a threshold into invisibility. The new existence of always being extremely cautious and hiding in visible places with the dread of being genuinely noticed as he puts in words, “I was negotiating a simultaneous absence and presence that was begun by the act of my displacement” (p. 19). He was a young man who worked hard at perfecting his English in the hopes that he would not ever come across something unusual before becoming one of the most well-known poets of his time. Marcelo Hernandez Castillo describes how a system treated him and his family as criminals merely because they wanted safe, regular lives. His last novel and first prose work *Children of the Land* is a memoir about immigration from Mexico to the USA in the

late 20th century. It was the International Latino Book Award Finalist in 2020, an Entertainment Weekly, The Millions, and LitHub Most Anticipated Book of the Year. In *Children of the Land*, Hernandez Castillo basically reflects on his family's undocumented experience of being an immigrant in the United States while providing a broader view of the often-overlooked experience of immigrants, migrant workers and their families. It is the story of humanization, a collective narrative, and an opportunity to relate and empathize with a larger community. In that sense, it is the representation and voice of all Mexican Americans and reflects the trauma of immigration on families and individuals. According to Hannah W. McDermott and Ricardo C. Ainslie, "the violence that Mexican and Central American migrants to the United States experience is a defining feature of contemporary American immigration." *Children of the Land* reflects the author's real-life traumatic experience starting from his immigration at the age of 5 and his and his family's life afterwards.

This memoir is considered an important addition to the literary canon discussing immigration concerns in the United States. It offers a unique and intimate perspective on the larger conversation surrounding immigration laws and how they affect people and families. With a larger community, the story revolves around Castillo's own experience of immigration at an early age and trauma caused by the separation of deportation. In *Children of the Land*, this experience is at the center. It revolves around Castillo's own experience as he migrated to the U.S. with his family when he was just five. The memoir is broken up into four parts and each part focuses on a specific period in Castillo's life by sweeping back and forth in time. It presents how he went blind while waiting to cross the border in 1993. He tells the story from the first point of view which creates a stronger effect on readers: "it was not like someone suddenly turned off the lights. First it was the colors that started fading, then it was shapes, and then shadows altogether" (p. 182). Even after crossing the borderland, life seems full of challenges and trauma for immigrants as Castillo puts in words his own traumatic experience, "in this way of life appeared monotonous, nothing was a surprise, but my body never really stopped shaking, a small breakwater holding back the tidal wave of the past" (p. 1). Starting his memoir by telling his trauma caused by immigration process and fear and risk of deportation afterwards shows how powerful his experience was and its life-long challenging effects. There are many lines he talks about the traumatic effects of immigration such as "I am starving myself...I go from 180 to 110

pounds in a year. This is called “learned helplessness,¹ my therapist tells me” (p. 355). He further says “I am slowly depriving myself of everything that gives me pleasure”, and “I isolated myself from the world and refuse to come out” continues “I still blame myself for many things that aren’t my fault” which show the power of his traumatic experiences and his vulnerable condition under the U.S. immigration system (p. 356).

While it is difficult to understand the far-reaching scope of the difficulties in our world, Valeria Luiselli and Marcelo Hernandez Castillo are able to successfully depict the present-day issues in their works. In light of the United States’ pledge to construct barriers and close its boundaries to immigrants from abroad, many of whom are escaping inescapable danger and destitution, *Lost Children Archive* and *Children of the Land* are of greater importance than ever. A fundamental component of the U.S. literary cannon, Hispanic and Latinx American literature encompasses works composed by members of Latin American ancestry. Hispanic and Latinx authors are necessary in depicting the American way of life. Examining this literature reveals the remarkable stories of Hispanic and Latinx Americans while also highlighting the multidimensionality of American identity in its entirety. In that sense, as Mexican American frontier writers who have experienced immigration from the first hand due to various obligations in a very young age, Valeria Luiselli and Marcelo Hernandez Castillo both stress one of most urgent and undermined issues of our age – immigration by putting a special emphasis on children as the primarily vulnerable group in terms they need care and attention. In that sense, their works carry the word “children”- *Lost Children Archive* and *Children of the Land*, respectively. Even though *Lost Children Archive* is a fiction and *Children of the Land* is a memoir - a narrative based on the author’s own life, delving into their intimate emotions and experiences during a particular time by definition, the main topic of both works revolves around crossing the border, inbetweenness, life around the frontier which brings people together to cross and also separates people. Both Luiselli and Castillo have been the subject of much critical analysis from border studies, which have focused on Mexican- American identity and matters of displacement, homeland, in-betweenness, and immigration and their works have highly received scholarly attention and excellent reviews. They contribute to Mexican American literature through their search of the established understanding of the border and immigration by attempting to break taboos and provide a glimpse into understanding migrants’ lives. Both Luiselli and Castillo bring

to the fore the elements of storytelling or archives that are usually overlooked and evidentiary, thus making their readers conscious of realities that they might have been unaware of by using the power of literature.

Their works span a broad variety of topics, delving deeply into displacement, the complexities of immigration, experience of loss, alienation, disillusionment, being silenced and rootless as important topics started constructing contemporary Mexican American literature by addressing on social issues. In that sense, Mexican American writers possess a unique talent for combining various issues in their writing, with a focus on the complexities of cultural transition. Although they are physically distanced from Mexico, it remains a large part of the narrative, often symbolized through characters that are situated between two identities. As the U.S. and Latin American literary canons are being re-defined and articulated, U.S. Latino literature has been gaining more prominence, especially in regard to the requirements for multi-cultural curriculums and to look at the potential of cultural and symbolic changes which make *Lost Children Archive* and *Children of the Land* prominent contemporary works of literature. Luiselli and Hernandez Castillo redirect the outsider's gaze, reprocess that vision, and reconfigure the manner in which their cultural heritage has been portrayed by others from a different point of view by providing direct insight to their minds and lives.

3. INVISIBILITY OF PAIN THROUGH *LOST CHILDREN* *ARCHIVE AND CHILDREN OF THE LAND*

The trauma of immigration is at the heart of *Lost Children Archive* by Valeria Luiselli and *Children of the Land* by Marcelo Hernandez Castillo. Trauma and Mental Health Professor Zachary Steel (2006) points out that “the effects of refugees’ traumatic migration experiences are immeasurable, long-lasting, and shattering to both their inner and outer selves” (p. 429). The characters whether as fictional or non-fictional have been deeply affected by traumatic incidents caused by before, during and after immigration process, shaping both their personal lives and roles in society. Mexican people’s lives are under risk in certain areas because of crime rate. The issue of violent crime in Mexico is a significant one. In 2019, statistics revealed that Mexico had a staggering 70.6% of violent offenses reported, which far surpassed the United States’ rate of only 8.7%. along with the difficulties Mexicans experience in their own homeland, they also face a lot of hardships while crossing the border including rape, difficult physical and mental conditions throughout the desert which continues even afterwards as they are questioned by the Border Patrol, stay in detention for a long time and live in silence not to take any attention and without basic human rights. The traces of migration trauma manifest itself physically and psychologically throughout the whole lives of the immigrants. The migrant is leaving a familiar and integrated cultural space and is moving into a new one with what it entails of loss, mourning and re-adaptation. The displacement caused by immigration, loss of culture, language, friends and family, search for a new identity may highly create the situation of estrangement and longing for homeland, family, and mother culture. As Merve Sarıkaya-Şen (2018) also states “as a result of their traumatic experiences before, during and after migration, the immigrants might suffer from the pain of (un)belonging” (p. 51). In that sense, *Children of the Land* is a memoir of how a family faces the destructive effects of immigration and it becomes the voice of others whose voices are not heard and whose lives are separated by the border. Moreover, the fragmented structure of the memoir supports the traumatic experiences Castillo and his family had been through. They are reflected in an experimental form, which shows how difficult it is to express traumatic events that took place in the border and presents the feeling of unbelonging. From a distinct perspective, *Lost Children Archive* reveals the difficult and isolated lives of immigrant families, looking for echoes and voices of

others in the U.S. and children's point of view about immigration – all are recorded and saved in the boxes and never forgotten.

As obvious, Luiselli and Hernandez Castillo keep the issue of immigration at the center of their works – *Lost Children Archive* and *Children of the Land*. Luiselli, who has an experience of working in immigration courts as a translator, is an immigrant herself. She witnessed refugee children's difficult and traumatic life and lost families on the border caused by political and social point of view of the U.S. She brings to the forefront the human pain caused by the brokenness of the system, as well as the possibility that it can be mended rather than walls. On the other hand, Marcelo Hernandez Castillo immigrated to the U.S. with his family at a noticeably young age and got separated from his father because of the immigration policy in the country while living in the U.S. with fear of deportation after going through numerous hardships. Their individual experiences reflect the serious political and social problems of Mexican Americans created by the compulsory separation and adaptation problems caused by immigration. By writing with clarity, Luiselli and Castillo Hernandez emphasize the troubling conditions and chaotic bureaucracy undocumented children endure while traveling to America and striving for U.S. citizenship. Depending on their lives in the U.S. as immigrants, *Lost Children Archive* and *Children of the Land* draw attention to this significant contemporary issue and show readers what happens to families while crossing the border of Mexico, the U.S., and the life afterwards.

Lost Children Archive and *Children of the Land* both focus on themes of family, displacement, in-betweenness, sense and pain of unbelongingness, vulnerability and trauma of immigration. In these two works, it is clear that Mexican immigrants remember life in Mexico and their roots, but they try to adapt American culture after many years of living there. The clash created by two countries, lives, policies, and cultures is present in *Lost Children Archive* and *Children of the Land* strikingly with the contribution of their fragmented style and realist language. Moreover, as it can be seen from the titles, both center upon the condition of children in particular. While *Lost Children Archive* focuses on lost children on the border and their experience from the eyes of a mother with a focus on real-life experiences, *Children of the Land* tells the reader Hernandez Castillo's own experience starting from his childhood and draws a critical image of the situation from the eyes of a child in the form of a memoir.

Therefore, these two works draw attention to family relationships especially through the condition of children. Borders do not serve only as a passage for more opportunities for families but also separate cultures and lives. Two sides of a border might have extremely different views as exemplified in detail in *Lost Children Archive* and *Children of the Land*. Furthermore, the problems of immigration, separated families, lives and the condition of children make Luiselli and Hernandez Castillo focus on the importance of care and how we depend on each other.

3.1. Vulnerable Immigrant Children and Families at the Mexico- the U.S.

Borderland

It is a clear fact that the issue of immigration has not been solved today even if it is one of the hottest topics that concern nearly all countries in the world, especially the U.S. and Mexico. According to Migration Policy Institute, the number of unaccompanied children crossing the U.S.-Mexico border first increased notably in 2014, drawing the attention of the U.S. government, media, and public. The current policy of immigration applied in the U.S. – Mexico border does not focus on solving problems and advocate Mexicans rights in any terms. On the contrary, the number of unaccompanied and undocumented children continues to increase and the movement of children across international borders leads vulnerability politically and especially in terms of family relationships. As Dembour (2015) stresses, “it has been claimed that its deferential attitude to States and their sovereign right to control migration has left notable gaps in human rights protection” (p. 13). There are not enough precautions for immigrant children or their families to provide humanly conditions as immigrants are seen as the invisible population in the country and their voices are not heard in society. As Arifin-Cabo (2020), Deputy Representative of UNICEF Mexico, points out “there is uncertainty on what is going to happen to these children and adolescents. The instability impacts their well-being and has consequences for their survival and development. The anxiety of small children is evident when they are far from their parents, even when it is only for a moment” (n. p.). According to Koirala (2014), “Protecting children during disasters from violence, exploitation and abuse is an integral component of protecting their rights to survival, growth and development” (p. 224). It is evident that children are more vulnerable than adults, as they are not as strong and resilient, having not yet reached full physical and psychological maturity and having less experience navigating society. In that sense, it becomes even harder to imagine the situation of children without any accompany at the border or the ones who

have lost their connection to their families and they do not have guidance at all. Special attention must be paid to the layout and implementation of disaster response, recuperation, and preparedness programs due to their particular susceptibility to sickness, malnutrition and mistreatment, their status, and their uniquely dependent social standing, and the vulnerability of their physical and mental development.

For that reason, vulnerability is a crucial topic to be discussed to understand immigrants, especially the children who are not documented or accompanied. In the light of the preceding remarks, Jean-Michel Ganteau (2015) states, “Vulnerability is everywhere and nowhere at the same time: everywhere, because the notion has been given pride of place over the last few years, and nowhere because vulnerability is not a reality that is systematically addressed in public policies and international relations” (p. 3). “Both nationally and internationally, vulnerability as an idea and the vulnerable as a group are marginalized, silenced, othered” (Russell Beattie and Schick, 2013, p. 1–3). The traumatic experience of immigration and its life-long effects put immigrants in a vulnerable situation. Vulnerability is a fundamental aspect of the human experience and governments have a duty to address it positively by guaranteeing that everyone has equal access to the institutions of society that distribute resources. As Adger and Snyder point out “People face potential threats to their security, human rights, and health when they lack personal, social, and legal resources to face and prevent adverse social, economic, and environmental conditions, a phenomenon scholars call social vulnerability” (Adger 2006; de Snyder et al. 2007). In that sense, “vulnerability theory is based on a recognition that we are all born defenseless, become feeble, must fear natural disasters, and might be failed by social institutions” (Cooper, 2015, p. 1339).

There is a strong connection between theories of vulnerability and care. Therefore, in the second chapter, the theory of care will be used to understand the condition of vulnerable immigrant children and families. As Fineman (2022) points out, “vulnerability theory takes seriously the political and legal implications of the fact that we live within a fragile materiality. We are, all of us, vulnerable. Sometimes our vulnerability is realized in the form of dependency on others for care, cooperation, or assistance” (n. p.). Carol Gilligan (2011), on the other hand, states in an interview that “the ethics of care starts from the premise that as humans we are inherently relational, responsive beings and the human condition is one of connectedness or

interdependence” (n. p.). Sandra Laugier (2015) further explains “the ethics of care affirms the importance of care and attention given to the others, in particular to those whose lives and wellbeing depend on particularized, continual, and daily attention: ordinary vulnerable others” (p. 219). Moreover, Joan Tronto (1998) stresses “Caring requires that one start from the standpoint of the one needing care or attention. It requires that we meet the other morally, adopt that person’s, or group’s, perspective and look at the world in their terms (p. 19).

Mexico is so vast and diverse that its literature is equally as multifarious and vibrant. In this sense, Mexico’s geographic and cultural variety is represented in its literary canon. Mexican American literature is identified by a solid feeling of transition, which is caused by its writers’ physical separation from Mexico and their clear understanding of the future of Mexican culture. *Lost Children Archive* and *Children of the Land* are contemporary examples of Mexican American literature that give voice to important social issues as well as their own unforgettable experience. These two works highlight mostly undermined and ignored social issue – child migrants – as well as notions of nationality, identity, family and themes of leaving home, the sense of (un)belonging, discrimination, being vulnerable and the need for care – in the form of fiction and memoir respectively. In that sense, the aesthetics of these novels run parallel to the content. In both works of literature, non-fictional elements contribute to the creation of real-life material. The non-fictional elements in both *Lost Children Archive* and *Children of the Land* create a documentary-like effect and a strong connection between them, which is why these two works were brought together in this study. Thus, these two works help us to understand and hear lost voices of Mexican Americans and provide us a different point of view from the eyes of the other by drawing the real picture of immigrant families, focusing on children and the vulnerability created by the process of immigration. The dangers of crossing the border and life in the U.S. as undocumented immigrants are presented remarkably in these two works. By doing so, *Lost Children Archive* and *Children of the Land* draw attention to the problems of immigrant children and families as a contemporary issue and invite the reader to take action and reconsider the condition of immigrants by putting light upon the events happening between Mexico-the U.S. border.

4. IMMIGRATION, RESILIENCE, AND UNBELONGING IN LOST CHILDREN ARCHIVE BY VALERIA LUISELLI

“They were not looking for the American Dream, as the narrative usually goes. The children were merely looking for a way out of their daily nightmare.”

(Luiselli, 2019, p. 19)

Valeria Luiselli is the writer of various genres, including novels, essays, and non-fiction. She lives in New York with her daughter and her husband Álvaro Enrigue who is also a well-known Mexican author of six novels, three collections of short tales, and one book of essays. Contemporary social and political matters, particularly those surrounding immigration and the Mexico-US border, are the focus of Luiselli's writing. She is highly appreciated by critics for her skill in sensitively and insightfully approaching these complex issues. Luiselli's writing often incorporates multiple languages, a reflection of her bilingual and multicultural heritage. Many critics have praised her seamless blend of English and Spanish, creating a dynamic linguistic tapestry as well. As Cheyla Rose Samuelson (2020) states, “Luiselli and her texts occupy a privileged space in the imagination of world literature, Latin American literature, Mexican Literature and literature in the United States that makes her an important touchstone for understanding contemporary conundrums presented by these increasingly interconnected fields of cultural production” (p. 176).

When Luiselli was 2 years old, her father moved the family to Madison, Wisconsin, so he could finish his doctoral work. After that, her father's diplomatic duties carried them to South Korea, Costa Rica, and eventually South Africa, where they landed in 1994, just after Mandela's crucial election in terms of being the first democratic election and election of the first multiracial president in South Africa. Her mother had already left the family by that point to join Mexico's Zapatista uprising which lasted 12 days and towns and cities were destroyed, and many prisoners were released by rebels in 1994 in Chiapas, Mexico. Because of her family's nomadic lifestyle, Luiselli had lived in Mexico, Wisconsin, Costa Rica, and South Korea by the time she was 11 years old and came to South Africa with her father, the Mexican ambassador to the young multiracial republic. She (2019) states in her interview with New York Times that “I come from a matriarchal line of women who have always been very involved politically and socially” (n. p.). Luiselli was raised overseas,

including in South Korea and South Africa, and attended international schools where she majored in English. Then, she travelled across the world on her own as well. She says in her interview with Publishers Weekly (2014),

My parents were separated, and when I went back to Mexico City with my mother when I was 16, I couldn't quite adapt; I had learned how to be a foreigner, but I didn't know how to be a Mexican. I got a scholarship in India and finished high school there by myself, then I did half my college in Mexico and half in Spain, with a bit in France. (n. p.)

At the age of nineteen, after living away from home for a lifetime, she visited her birthplace- Mexico City. At the National Autonomous University of Mexico, Luiselli majored in philosophy and began writing more frequently. She graduated from Columbia University with a Doctorate. Luiselli came to New York on an internship with the United Nations and currently lives in Harlem with her family. Luiselli, who has published five books in total, is a writer in residence at Bard College and spends a lot of time engaging in activism. She and her niece assist detained adolescents in creative writing at a migration center in northern New York.

According to Valeria Luiselli, one of the earliest methods of exchanging our lives and experiences is through stories. They serve as a means for us to reflect on the past while also keeping track of how far we have come and how far we still have to go. In that sense, she makes an effort to access the gaps in national archives in order to try to comprehend what has been left from them. Her works gain additional depth from the ideas and customs she borrows in connection with the American Dream defined as “the ideal by which equality of opportunity is available to any American, allowing the highest aspirations and goals to be achieved” according by Oxford Dictionary and the customs and cultures lost to that dream by focusing on Mexicans and Latin Americans lives on the border, culture shock and difficulties followed by immigration, especially challenges children face on the way to and in the U.S.. By telling these stories through literature, Luiselli's fictional and non-fictional works become migrants' silenced voice and somehow defends their rights, especially immigrant children who are not able to express themselves and have migrated to the U.S. without their parents or accompaniment on the way or afterwards as well as facing many hardships.

Auditory elements enhance the sensory experience of a literary work. According to Chapman (1984), “sound plays a prominent role in narrative description of

characters and environs in mainstream American literature. Auditory experiences are represented in literature in several ways” (n. p.). It is often employed to evoke emotions, create atmosphere, establish a particular tone or mood, and emphasize certain aspects of the narrative. Valeria Luiselli finds sound fascinating and is constantly thinking about how her work with refugees and displaced migrants will apply to her own career. She is continuously gathering resources and pieces of the outside world. Therefore, sounds, echoes and sound mapping which means searching sounds and echoes where it comes and finding connection between the place and voices is one of main topics in her writings. She frequently mentions about Mexican ancestors, poets, and authors in the history by tracking their roots and hearing their echoes from the past. By doing so, she remembers her own roots, makes strong connections with Mexican ancestors, becomes their voices, and connects past, present and future. These echoes and sounds give her a sense of belonging and helps her to track her roots in American land. Luiselli tries to tell stories of the region that both divides and also connects two nations by using Polyphony – having a lot of different voices. There are diverse ways of having voices emerge, very intimate voices; the close voices of family, and also lost voices, voices of other writers, etc. As an example, In *Tell me How It Ends: An Essay in 40 Questions*, there are voices of the children in certain ways with a direct narration of non-fiction while in *Lost Children Archive*, there are voices of children in a fictional way. Using related voices in these sound pieces creates a feeling of recognition. Luiselli, in that sense, functions as an archivist who searches and puts things together and then creates a kind of thread that can bring them together in the same space. The usage of auditory elements and sound mapping in Luiselli’s works help us to understand the voices of the other as well as helping their voices to be heard by the world which may create an awareness and a change.

The process of being silenced, of uncommunication caused by language barrier, being situated between cultures and spaces, and feeling of in-betweenness, displacement and ghostliness are Luiselli’s the main themes in her writings. “The figure of misplaced baggage also serves as a metonym for recent Latin American Fiction, in particular for a group of contemporary novels that addresses the cosmopolitan experience of those who lose their culture, language, and nation while being out in the world” (Campisi, 2018, p. 114). Her work deals with dislocation, vulnerability, isolation, unbelonging and immigration. Her characters in her writings

are unnamed and not quite easy to place. She tries to write between novel and nonfiction, something that might be called documentary fiction and that is basically documentary practices that lead towards fiction making. By living in about 8 different countries and four continents, she reflects her feelings of nonbelonging and foreignness. Luiselli's writing, which emerges from the gap between life and art, is intensely, creatively concerned with both defining identity and liberating it from definitional restrictions. The core of artist-hood and personhood is centered in this method in the illusive space between the two, offering a novel by connecting written and lived experience. She uses geographical metaphors, such as cities, maps, architecture, and navigation, and while she examines how her characters interact with their actual environment. According to Luiselli, language may connect the world's material objects to the life of the mind. Luiselli successfully transmits the voices of migrants, especially migrant children's stories which she (2017) describes as "shuffled, stuttered, always shattered beyond the repair of a narrative order. The problem with trying to tell their story is that it has no beginning, no middle, and no end" (p. 7).

Although she currently writes in English, Luiselli's first works were written in Spanish. In order to recover the language, she wrote in Spanish. Her nonfiction and fiction writings include *Los Ingrávidos* translated in English by Christina MacSweeney as *Faces in the Crowd* (2011), *Papeles Falsos* also translated by Christina MacSweeney as *Sidewalks* (2014), *La historia de Mis Dientes* translated by Christina MacSweeney as *The Story of My Teeth* (2015), *Tell Me How It Ends: An Essay in 40 Questions* (2016), *Lost Children Archive* (2019) which is translated into Spanish by the author as *Desierto Sonoro*, and, all of which have won significant honors and prizes. In her first novel, Valeria Luiselli made an effort to write in her native tongue. Luiselli, who is descended from the country's first ambassador to South Africa, spoke Spanish at home but English at school when she was growing up. Luiselli's three books that have been published so far were all written in Spanish and then translated in collaborative efforts of Christina MacSweeney, with the results frequently connecting into the Spanish "original," despite the fact that she currently resides in New York and occasionally writes in English.

Obama's speech in 2014 about undocumented people coming from South of the U.S. shows how the state of immigration gets difficult for undocumented people migrated because of various reasons to the U.S. in basis. He states (2014) that,

Tracking down, rounding up, and deporting millions of people is not realistic" or "who we are as Americans. They work hard, often in tough, low-paying jobs. They support their families. They worship at our churches. Many of their kids are American-born or spent most of their lives here, and their hopes, dreams, and patriotism are just like ours. (n. p.)

Furthermore, George Bush (2006) states that Mexicans "are a part of American life, but they are beyond the reach and protection of American law" (n. p.). Despite these political statements and the two nations' - Mexico and the U.S.- agreement to intensify their attempts in Central America to deal with the underlying causes of immigration and widen legal avenues, the systematic violence that these migrants face on their way through Mexico seems immane and takes different forms. It ranges from robbery, extortion and injuries to kidnapping, abuse of authority, threats, intimidation, rape, drug trafficking people, homicide to offer an idea of the magnitude of the tragedy, it is necessary to give figures: this is a story where some 120,000 Central American migrants have disappeared since 2006 (Luiselli, 2016, p. 27); where 80% of women and girls are raped while crossing Mexico (Redacción Animal Político 2014; Luiselli 2016, 27). Furthermore, it makes little sense to hold children responsible for being brought to the United States and even less sense to hold them responsible for their parents' decisions once they are adults because children have little say in their parents' living arrangements or relocation practices, despite the fact that they may have some influence over the decisions made. The hard reality of migrants waiting at the U.S. – Mexico border even gets more difficult when they are able to arrive to the U.S. as undocumented by losing track of their families. Priority juvenile docket by Obama government was a crucial policy which was a way of putting all the cases – all children together and giving them priority in court. However, they had less time in being able to get a lawyer to defend them against deportation as Luiselli often emphasizes in her writings and speeches.

Lost Children Archive has won the Dublin Literary Award for 2021, which is sponsored by Dublin City Council. The Award is the largest reward in the world for a single English-language novel, with a prize fund of €100,000. This fictional work is deeply connected with *Tell Me How It Ends: An Essay in 40 Questions* in terms of its

main topic as immigration and children in the border. Her debut English-language book, *Lost Children Archive*, reimagines the American road trip novel by incorporating the story of a failing marriage. The narrator's growing anxiety over the unaccompanied minor immigration situation drives their journey. In her interview with Vilcek Foundation (2020), she says that "I wonder, always, about the way that younger generations will retell the story of these dark times". She further states, "so at the heart of the book is a question about how we tell stories, intergenerationally, and how they form the foundational myths by which a society lives." As Lori Feathers from Los Angeles Review of Books (2019) states "*Lost Children Archive* brings into sharp focus the deep wrongs that are being inflicted upon immigrant children in our name. It demands that our numbed complacency be shaken, and our rage unleashed. The novel was inspired by her own experience, road trip with her family in 2014" (n. p.). *Lost Children Archive*, as a novel that vividly depicts the immigration crisis, was released to excellent reviews, establishing her position as a key author of the twenty-first century.

4.1. *Lost Children Archive* as a Response to the Mexico-the U.S. Refugee Crisis

Lost Children Archive is a response to the refugee crisis of children arriving alone and undocumented at the border seeking asylum. As Valeria Luiselli translated in court for these children in the U.S., she involved with that crisis and used the novel as a kind of dumping ground for all her political rage, frustration. Therefore, she stopped writing the novel and wrote a short essay called *Tell me How It Ends: An Essay in 40 Questions* that addresses the issue directly and completed the novel later. *Lost Children Archive* is a kind of sound map of femicide in the U.S. – Mexico borderlands, especially on this on the U.S. side of the border. The United States and Mexico share a border that extends nearly 2,000 miles along the southern borders of California, Arizona, New Mexico and Texas. In most areas, the border is located in remote and sparsely populated areas of vast desert and rugged mountain terrain. The two neighbors are joined together by the border, like a seam between two pieces of cloth on a quilt. The U.S. – Mexico border engenders a discourse that encompasses the social, economic, political, and physical confines of social and geographical space (Aguirre, Jr.; Simmers, 2008, p. 99). Her work comes through a combination of anger and clarity, or an attempt to find clarity in a world that is constantly filling us with fear

and confusion. As the narrative progresses in the gaps between the cities of Arizona, the “ghost maps” denote the places where the skeletons of refugee children are discovered — their identities, stories and causes of death commonly a secret. As Luiselli (2017) states; “Numbers and maps tell horror stories, but the stories of deepest horror are perhaps those for which there are no numbers, no maps, no possible accountability, no words ever written or spoken” (n. p.). The novel takes place in this era of the Central American Diaspora. It deals with the summer where the arrival of Central American children to the U.S. who were seeking asylum surged. There were 60 – at that moment, 60,000 children alone at the border waiting for permission to reunite with family members, seeking asylum, and hoping not to be deported back. In the novel, a family is going on a road trip, the marriage is disintegrating.

It is a part of modern history that children have been compelled to migrate by governments and families alike. Though often disregarded, Western modernity is established by the vast and forced movement of children (Dunne, 2006). It is stated by Prout (2011) that relocating children and families is a crucial element of nation-building. Both adults of the past and present acknowledge that modernity is symbolized by, and painfully impacted by, the displacement of millions of children, due to war, movement, or labour, who are forced away from their families and native lands (Briggs, 2016). Despite the importance of children’s involvement in colonial projects all around the world, their roles still remain largely unrecognized, misunderstood, unrecorded and underexamined. This is due in part to the fact that the lives of children are not included in the concepts and theories created by adults about social and political life. Despite the resources adults have put into children through personal, political and scholarly means, the issue of kids seeking asylum, with or without their parents, over multiple generations have failed to attract the attention or evoke action from the adult community. Sadly, regardless of global leaders’ awareness, the plight of these children continues to be ignored.

Lost Children Archive places children into the narrative of history and re-introduces them into the modern realm of humanity. The author finds that all children, regardless of their parents and privilege, are strongly influenced by the experience of being a child subjected to the emotional requirements of adults who have little or no regard for their developing personhood. In her initial work, a compilation of interviews with young migrants at the US border, *Tell Me How It Ends: An Essay in 40 Questions*,

Luiselli asserts: “Children chase after life, even if that chase might end up killing them. Children run and flee. They have an instinct for survival that allows them to endure almost anything just to make it to the other side of horror, whatever may be waiting there (p. 18). The fictional novel, *Lost Children Archive*, carries on from the point where the true-life interviews finish: a moving illustration of children, over time, who continue striving despite the obstacles brought on by the adult world. Luiselli’s book does not use the factual record of displaced children for adult objectives. The chronicles Luiselli offers are neither state-approved nor individual. Exploring real and imagined records, the novel brings to life the reader’s sense of a fleeting childhood, which is marked by displacement and disruption of family, community, and beloved ones. *Lost Children Archive* seeks to narrate the stories of children who have been split up from their families, without any reference to the past, politics, or particular details. The narratives of the children consist of the mother’s memories of her own children; the documents from the children in previous immigrations; the mother’s conversations with two missing children in NYC; and the reports on children broadcasted on the radio. The accounts of the countless, unnamed children from disparate social and historical contexts merge as Luiselli’s novels collate and re-create their journeys of immigration on land, over deserts. Luiselli collects and arranges the fragments, functioning as an addendum to a perpetual story recording the ongoing conditions of multitudes of children have been rounded up and trafficked and gone missing.

The beginning of *Lost Children Archive* is marked by a rendition of the migrants’ prayer— “To leave is to die a little/ To arrive is never to arrive”. This work of fiction serves to remind us of our common humanity and invites us, as a nation, to reconcile our differences. Luiselli asserts that the U.S. should be accountable for providing care to migrant children whose lives and families have been weakened by destructive federal policies. However, how immigrants are seen in the U.S. does not help to this urgent issue to be understood clearly as Luiselli (2019) states, “the broadcasters are calling it an immigration crisis. A mass influx of children, they call it, a sudden surge. They are undocumented, they are illegals, they are aliens, some say. They are refugees, legally entitled to protection, others argue” (p. 40). *Lost Children Archive* makes an effort to address legal issues that exist in portraying the scope of continuing indigenous displacement and refugee immigration in Central America. The novel is heavily based on the first-hand experiences of Luiselli, who volunteered as an interpreter for

migrants in New York City's federal immigration court. It is a road novel of four – a mother, a father, a daughter, and a son whose ages are five and ten and names are unknown. No other information about the family or any insight into the characters or their families' backstories is provided, except for the fact that they are connected through current and fragile family ties. Initially, the couple originally crossed paths while working on a soundscape Project that documented the hundreds of languages of New York City. The husband and wife swiftly fall in love, get married, and combine their families. The wife has a daughter, and the husband has a son from their previous marriages. In the novel, a husband, and a wife travel by car with their two young children from New York City to the Southwest while their marriage slowly disintegrates. Working on a project that intends to record "a soundscape of New York City" for NYU's Center for Urban Science and Progress as the couple makes their income by recording sound. According to the wife, they spend their days compiling "an archive full of fragments of strangers' lives" (p. 30). The wife has her own goals for the trip, including tracking down two young girls who were being held in detention but went missing during deportation, and documenting the tragedy surrounding the detention and deportation of underage migrants at the US / Mexico frontier.

On the other hand, the husband has to conduct research for a project about Geronimo – originates from Native American language and the name of the Apache leader who was prominent in the revolt against Mexican and American growth in the late 1800s. In that sense, the narrative both focuses on the experiences of refugee minors in the region of the Mexico-United States border and the background of Geronimo and the Chiricahuas, the last Apache faction that held out against colonization from either side of the frontier. The siblings question: "what if Geronimo had never surrendered to the white-eyes? –What if he'd won that war? –Then the lost children would be the rulers of Apacheria!" (p. 75). In accordance with this purpose, the family is traveling to the deserts of New Mexico and Arizona. The husband immerses himself in a new project documenting an inventory of echoes about Geronimo and the Apache nations that "lived a place called Echo Canyon, a place where the echoes are so loud and clear that even if you whisper, your voice comes back right back you, crisp" (p. 74). He informs his wife that he must move to Arizona for an extended period to be in closer proximity to the topic of his endeavor. The boy

asks, “why Apaches?” And the father answers “because they were the last of something” (p. 26).

In the same timeframe, as the wife puts in words “the lost children’s stories are troubling our own children” (p. 74). Furthermore, the wife is worried for lost children alone in detention centers and works to get her friend Manuela’s two daughters out of a detention camp and back to their mother safely. This auxiliary work eventually evolves into a bigger project, with the purpose of preserving the voices of all the refugee children who have gone astray, especially those in the midst of the immigrant border crisis. However, As the couple’s professional goals and desires move further apart, so too does their emotional connection and their capacity to converse. Together, the family commences a voyage to Arizona, each of them understanding that the end of the trip will be the end of their time as a family. In their travels, they visit many places, seeing a variety of towns and historic landmarks that the couple believes will bring to light the aims and objectives of their projects. In the course of her journey, the wife struggles with a range of political, personal and psychological issues while she tells the story of Manuela’s children,

The girls made it safely to the border, but instead of taking them across, the coyote left them in the desert in the middle of the night. They were found by Border Patrol at dawn, sitting by the side of a road near a checkpoint, and were placed in a detention center for unaccompanied minors. (p. 18)

She is determined to tell the story of her friend Manuela’s daughters, while shielding her kids from the harsh truths of modern life, all the while trying to grapple with the disintegration of her marriage.

4.2. Ethics of Care in Immigration

As care ethics is built upon the impulse to care for those who are in need and delicate, and is fueled by memories of being looked after, she gets frustrated by current U.S. political and social environment regarding her own family and also other lost children at the border. Her search along the frontier reflects her own vulnerability of not being able to take an action to solve immigration crisis and uncertainty of her own family’s future as well as trying to protect her current status while trying to catch lost voices in desert. All these become a worrying fact in her family’s life including her children even though they are quite young but aware of all unknowingly by

experiencing on the way which make them vulnerable as they come closer to the border. In that sense, as Aparna Mishra Tarc (2021) states:

The zone of displacement at the arbitrary and fragile border of nations is also the place where childhood and adult interest meet and collide. Both adults are in search of lost histories of colonized peoples—the father seeks to retrieve soundscapes of erased American Indian tribes, and the mother, the stories of refugee children at the border. (p. 78)

Over the span of 2018 to 2019, thousands of kids were incarcerated in metal enclosures, a lot of them based in detention facilities in the desert. Emily C. Vázquez Enríquez (2020) states that “this is the context surrounding the story of Manuela’s missing daughters, and therefore the social and political frame for the wife’s documentary project” (p. 78). Unlike *Tell Me How It Ends*, where the author includes fragments of migrant children’s stories, Luiselli avoids direct representations in her novel. The former conveys the voices of those kids who are in the midst of trauma and the risk of deportation, in the latter she is addressing those who cannot be found.

The boy and the girl are able to take part in their parent’s conversations with regards to children, immigration, history, and social and political life throughout the journey. It appears that the children have their own opinions and control when it comes to matters of great importance to them. In fact, they’re the ones who offered the mother the term ‘lost children’s instead of the political word ‘refugee’ broadcasted in the media.

Whenever the boy and girl talk about child refugees, I realize now, they call them ‘the lost children.’ I suppose the word ‘refugee’ is more difficult to remember. And even if the term ‘lost’ is not precise, in our intimate family lexicon, the refugees become known as the ‘lost children.’ And in a way, I guess they are lost children. They are children who have lost the right to a childhood. (2019; p. 75)

Furthermore, their 10-year-old later begins his own project in the documentation of their family’s travels. The boy directs his narrative passages to his younger sister. His pages are an enactment of his own attempt to document the truth of their trip as an archive of remembrance he can later give the girl. Oftentimes he retells the same experiences and sites from his mother’s narrative in the first part of the novel. The children are captivated by the archives their parents are dealing with, forming new words and games that are inspired by the material. But the games stop being merely fun and cause a dramatic change in the plot. In the car, the boy hears his parents quarrel

and comes to the realization that the family would be divided once they reached Arizona. He was desperate to maintain the best of the journey for his sister and started looking through his mother's items when the rest of the family was sleeping in a cabin they had rented. He was certain he had pinpointed the spot of Manuela's girls on one of his maps, so he devised a plan to set out on the Continental Divide Trail with his sister in order to locate them.

The boy further contemplates if they get lost, will their mother finally care for them, much like she does for the immigrant children she has been sharing stories of in their dreams. After days spent aimlessly travelling, the siblings get split up. He left a map and a note for their parents in the car. After being on the road for weeks, the two children escape one morning. As soon as they reach Bowie, they jump off the train and proceed to wander even deeper into the desert, hoping to come across Echo Canyon where they say they will meet their parents. The boy describes the brutality of the desert: "the heat always getting heavier and the sun on our foreheads stinging us like a thousand yellow bees" (Luiselli, p. 325). As the siblings wander for days, they become separated, leaving the boy alone and scared on the train until he finds his sister. After a while, they locate the canyon. Fear and uncertainty accompany the boy and his sister on their desert journey, and the boy passes the time by reading stories of other lost children. As they shout their names, their parents' voices revoice back, resounding across the rocky expanse. When they eventually make it to the airport, it is already too late as the refugee children are getting on the airplane and the wife comments "they'll be removed, relocated, erased, because there is no place for them in this vast empty country" (p. 182). Drawing attention to the hardships faced by the characters, the author underscores the difficulty of conveying the tribulations of the children being addressed. The last portion of the story serves as the boy's testament for his sister, expressing his affection for her and affirming that they reunite in the future again. Alongside the subject of parenthood and family, the book also takes on the ethical and political management of delicate matter. It is made evident that archiving is necessary, and that it is important to be aware of the proper way to do it. Hastening with sensitivity and compassion, *Lost Children Archive* leads the reader to experience of a family while questioning the concepts of justice and equality of today's world. Children's going missing makes the parents vulnerable as they are acknowledged of happenings to refugee children who got lost in the frontier.

Lost Children Archive has a narrative about stories and how children convey them while examining the potential for grieving the missing migrant children who have been metaphorically removed from the landscape — but from the viewpoint of the narrator’s family, rather than the missing children’s own. It addresses how certain immigration stories have been remembered in the nation’s past while others have been neglected completely and it ponders how these absent records relate to issues of the family. In the novel, the family travels to Apacheria the couple’s two children go missing. Luiselli perceives the Southwest as a desolate and cursed place, the result of genocide and xenophobia, controlled by a cruel border guard. The loving relationship between the two children eases the somber atmosphere.

Noone has quite been able to capture what is happening or say why. Perhaps it is just that we send an absence of future because the present has become too overwhelming, so the future has become unimaginable and without future, time feels like only an accumulation. Maybe the boy’s frustration of not knowing what to take a picture of....is simply a sign of how our ways of documenting the world have fallen short. (Luiselli, 2019; p. 103)

The experience of crossing the border or thinking that one’s ancestors, relatives, people including children of all ages from the same origin having hardships and facing death on the border leaves a deep mark which makes imagining the present and future hard. When the couple loses their own children who goes missing to find other lost children, their anxiety grows gradually. “Uncertainty, risk, and emotional exposure”, definition of vulnerability according to Dr. Brené Brown (2012), become the main topic of the novel as the novel evolves around lost children who depend on assistance and care and are more vulnerable at the time of hazard.

The novel’s structure is centered around the archive of the journey: the boxes the family has taken with them, labeled I - VII. Boxes I - IV contain the husband’s research on Geronimo. Box V is the wife’s, with her notes, maps, readings, pictures, studies, ephemera which is defined as the short-lived written documents of everyday life such as Polaroid photos, envelopes, transcriptions of audio recordings, brochures, newspaper cuttings, letters etc. inside. Boxes VI and VII belong to the kids, though they are empty, waiting for what they might gather on their voyage. Documenting is crucial for the family members to keep track of their journey across the border, and it also provides a realistic characteristic to this fictional novel. The mother expresses in the novel that “I read and read, long sleepless nights reading about archive fevers,

about rebuilding memory in diasporic narratives, about being lost in ‘the ashes of the archive (p. 23). As it is further stated in *Lost Children Archive*,

As we drive further west into Tennessee, we pass more and more abandoned gas stations, empty churches, closed motels, stores and factories that have shut down. Looking at the window and to the lens of his camera, the boy asks me again: what does it mean, Ma, to document stuff?

I try an answer:

Documenting is just means to collect things of the present for posterity. What do you mean, posterity? I mean- for later. (p. 102)

Thus, the archive is a fundamental and apparent aspect of the central narrative of the novel and reference to archival “sources —textual, musical, visual, or audio-visual”— in the novel should not be viewed as mere footnotes or decorative additions to the story by highlighting many voices involved as Luiselli specifically explains in the Works Cited section of *Lost Children Archive* (p. 381). Titles such as ‘Archive’, ‘Inventory’, ‘Itemization’, ‘Document and Order’ are used as section headings in *Lost Children Archive*, suggesting an archival theme. Descriptions of box contents, including notes, reports and court documents, are transcribed. Polaroid photographs at the end of the novel related to the research and to the journey itself are also included and provides the novel a nonfictional aspect.

4.3. Representation of Vulnerability in *Lost Children Archive*

Undoubtedly, the child has been a recurrent figure in literature, symbolizing innocence, ferocity, emptiness, frailty, independence, and the infinite possibilities. However, the exploration of children’s inner and outside worlds has benefited much from children’s literature, but there is still much to be done to address the issue of some ethnic groups not being well represented. *Lost Children Archive* is an expressive work examining displacement, relocation, family ties and the depiction of parenting in the era of US Immigration and Customs Enforcement detention facilities. It combines parental fears with the current news regarding the refugee plight on the US border, the Apacheria story, and tales of children who have gone astray which brings the importance of understanding vulnerability and care in today’s world where immigration is a hot topic. The early years of life are often considered the most precarious stage of human development. Children rely heavily on others to fulfill their essential needs, leaving them susceptible to harm. Children construct their models of

reality using a variety of bricks, including tales, songs, plays, movies, and other experiences which assist in enacting reality into repeatable common patterns. They learn about themselves and the environment they live in through these factors as exemplified in the novel by repeated curious questions. In that sense, as Hunter (2018) states “children, especially in the early years, are like little sponges, absorbing all the information around them and then actively making sense of it” (n. p.). In that sense, they are more vulnerable than adults to negative environments and harsh conditions and these experiences may have a life-long effect.

It is usually assumed that some form of vulnerability is implicit in our everyday debates of ethical issues, as well as in theoretical and philosophical analyses of ethical and political importance. Vulnerability is commonly accepted as a universal characteristic of the human experience, and this is the basis for our ideas of harm and well-being, interests and rights, equality, and inequality. Vulnerability carries with it an implicit power and requires our attention and response. Despite its ubiquity as a feature of the human condition, there has been remarkably little discussion of the concept of vulnerability. In *Lost Children Archive*, through their respective undertakings on the Apache and the missing children, both the husband and wife are attempting to rediscover the essence of these exiled, vulnerable groups by collecting any recoverable parts of their ephemeral presences. They are trying to regain what is barely visible, “the layer that goes unnoticed”. In the novel, as the wife explained to the boy, the very act of collecting and organizing data to recreate an event produces its own emptiness as the documentary evidence of a past event cannot be total- it is merely a collection of parts isolated from the totality of the actually experienced event which shows every vulnerability differs and leaves an absence at one point of life. Spouses are clueless to how this notion applies to them: their concentration on reviving the pasts of others has left them removed from their family’s sentiments, and they are unable to be present for their children or recognize the destruction that their tense relations and impending separation are causing them. In many respects, this is a family in limbo, suspended in liminal states of time, geography, and emotional commitment. Luiselli’s writing is modulated in tone and pacing in a way that amplifies the feeling of irresolution. The American Southwest, with its vast emptiness, epitomizes the transient state of being for both the family and the long-ago expelled Apache and the contemporary immigrant children. All of them journey through this land, so sparsely

inhabited yet with no place for any of them. These three groups of “exiles” share a number of meaningful similarities — displacement, homelessness, and rejection. The Southwest is full of canyons and hollows, which increase the sound, and echoes become a recurring element in the novel.

Throughout history, there has been a long tradition of people moving around within the countries of the region, and this may leave people more exposed to various forms of exploitation. Though individuals from different parts of the world may have their own individual stories, invariably their struggles are all alike- full of difficulty, chaos, and frequently violence. Most of the academic resources including fictional and non-fictional ones deal with the adaptation problems or of migrant children, especially in the U.S. However, unfortunately just a few endeavors to seek empathy for the lost children on the border without any accompaniment. In that sense, *Lost Children Archive* represents the vulnerable children in the border and creates a piece of sympathy to understand what they are going through. *Lost Children Archive* shows that people who got anxious for lost Mexican children at the frontier again are mostly Mexicans, but it is a humanitarian issue that needs every human being’s attention and care. It highlights the severe injustices being done to migrant children in the U.S. should waken people from apathy and arouse anger and make people and governments take an action against one of biggest problems of modern age – the borderland of Mexico – the U.S.

5. THE FEELING OF INBETWEENNESS IN *CHILDREN OF THE LAND* BY MARCELO HERNANDEZ CASTILLO

“Would a sudden coldness come over us when our bodies moved over the actual line of the border? Wasn’t that how loneliness began, with the coldness of our bodies?”

(Castillo, 2020, 14)

As a well-known and highly appreciated author Marcelo Hernandez Castillo currently lives in the California central valley with his wife and son. As his parents brought him across the border of Mexico and the U.S. undocumented in a noticeably young age, it resulted in a life of adversity, such as financial difficulties, continuous displacement and fear of immigration raids and life-long trauma including temporary blindness which he still mentions in his interviews. Even though Castillo has been empowered to express himself openly thanks to being granted DACA and permanent U.S. residency, he experiences occasional episodes of depression and anxiety and has turned to mental health treatment to cope with his changed residency situation. Castillo’s father was a flea market vendor of fruit in California and his mother worked in a fruit processing factory. At the age of 15 in 2003, Castillo’s father got deported, which then caused much of the events that are described in his memoir *Children of the Land*. In 2013, Castillo was accepted to the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program (DACA) - a policy for those who had arrived in the U.S. before 16 years of age and before 2007. This enabled him to become the first undocumented scholar to get an MFA from the University of Michigan and he took the opportunity to travel to Mexico to re-connect with his father, whom he had not seen in 10 years. Despite the disagreements, Castillo worked relentlessly to gain his father’s repatriation to the USA, a long and strenuous journey through the immigration system. Despite the initial attempts failing, Castillo’s mother returned to Mexico in 2016, which the family later considered as a mistake. After much effort, Castillo and his family were able to bring both parents back to the United States, where their asylum requests are still awaiting resolution.

Castillo, who was raised without legal documentation, stated that fluency in English and poetry were the means he used to shield himself from being deported. He said that these experiences allowed him to gain a new view of the trauma that had been

present throughout his journey with the immigration system of the U.S. He states in his interview with PBS (2016) that “It is very traumatic. It is a fear that is ingrained in you,”. “It wasn’t until much later in life that I began thinking in terms of my identity and how much that fear has caused” (n. p.). Through his poetry, he challenges the very systems that fuel fear and silence his own experiences. In his writing, Castillo frequently tackles themes of immigration, identity, and the toll that policies targeting marginalized communities take on humanity. Therefore, he further states in the same interview (2016) that “People write about the river without seeing the bodies beneath. People write about a tree without seeing who’s been hung from its branches. To me, that erasure has to be purposeful” (n. p.). *Dulce*, his chapbook, was highly praised, and he extended it to a full-length work, *Cenzóntle* which means Mockingbird in English, which garnered several accolades, including a Golden Poppy from the California Independent Bookseller Alliance. As a Canto Mundo fellow and Pushcart nominee, Castillo was granted fellowships to join the Squaw Valley Writer’s Workshop and the Vermont Studio Center. He was a candidate for the New England Review Emerging Writer Award and his manuscript was shortlisted for the Alice Book Prize and the National Poetry Series. His poems challenge the frameworks that support apprehension and render his experiences undetectable. Through a collaborative effort with composer Reinaldo Moya, his work has been adapted to opera and featured in an array of publications, including The New York Times, The Paris Review, The Academy of American Poets, PBS Newshour, Fusion TV, Buzzfeed, Gulf Coast, New England Review, People Magazine, and Indiana Review, Southern Humanities Review, amongst other journals, with his poems and essays. Further, Castillo has translated the work of the Argentinian poet Jacobo Fijman and engages in translating the poems of Mexican Peruvian Yaxkin Melchy.

He was an AB 540 student - A legal measure enacted on October 12, 2001, authorizes any student, including undocumented students who fulfill the set criteria, to pay in-state tuition fees at public colleges and universities in California. After high school, he attained his B.A. from Sacramento State University and was the first undocumented scholar to graduate from the Helen Zell Writers Program at the University of Michigan. Upon earning his Master of Fine Arts, Castillo returned to the vicinity of Yuba City and is presently the renowned visiting writer at St. Mary’s College of California in Moraga, where he coaches poetry. He also instructs in the

limited residency MFA program at Ashland University in Ohio. Taking into consideration the need to aid others with a similar background, he co-created Undocupoets, having successfully lobbied to eliminate the need for citizenship in a number of poetry awards and it continues to provide financial assistance to lessen the cost of entries to journals and contests for undocumented writers. With his own journey as an undocumented immigrant as inspiration, he still speaks out to shed light on the struggles faced by those trying to navigate the immigration system. Castillo's commitment to promoting a more inclusive and compassionate society is evident through his poetry readings, public speaking events, and written pieces. His impact on the cultural landscape is significant, as he leaves a lasting imprint on literature and drives change in the conversation surrounding immigration.

Marcelo Hernandez Castillo's *Children of the Land* is commented by Times reviewer Rigoberto Gonzales (2020) as: "the experience of being an undocumented immigrant from Mexico, written as a personal account, is seldom seen in American literature even though it is a reality for millions of Mexicans residing in the United States" (n. p.). Moreover, Sandra Cigneros, author of *the House on Mango Street*, mentions of *Children of the Land* by saying "this moving memoir is the document of a life without documents, of belonging to two counties yet belonging to neither. Hernandez Castillo has created his own papers fashioned from memory and poetry" (n. p.). As a diverse artist, Marcelo Hernandez Castillo's talent extends beyond the realms of poetry, essays, and social advocacy. He writes with exquisite accuracy and sensitivity about his experience of maturing from a boy into a man in the U.S. that does not recognize him, and his family divided by borders. The story of Castillo's immigration to the United States provides a moving backdrop to his creative endeavors, offering insight into the obstacles and successes of the immigrant narrative. He vividly paints the psychological effects this has on a tender soul who desires for his family to be secure, unified, and able to relish a peaceful Sunday. Castillo's memoir, an intimate representation of times before and after his immigration to the US, combines his poetic tones with a factual portrayal of the difficulties and disrespect his family encountered. Castillo's background as a poet is evident in his prose: the words are strung together in a tale of personal and collective recollection, connected by silence and the urgency of persisting in a nation that denies your existence. Castillo invites the reader into the ambiguous realm of his memory as he works through the

impacts of bodily trauma, the seemingly irresolvable instability of life as a government backed exile, and the pressures of inherited memory. The five chapters – “DACA,” “Interview on Allegiance,” “Sentence Served,” “Glass,” and “Asylum”- are labeled as musical “movements” which take the reader on a poetic exploration of ancestry, reminiscences, and moments of childhood by illustrating his mental state and his family’s past. Sections of increased length and complexity document the struggles to obtain permanent resident status for his family, including some reports written at the same time as the events of the multiple journeys over the border had taken place.

Movement can have a variety of meanings to different individuals - from activist movements to artistic movements, from immigration and mobility to birth. For Hernandez Castillo, movements demonstrate the instability that immigration induces throughout generations and the psychological strain that it leads to and the ways of managing every other aspect of life to cope with the unpredictability, to transience, as the feeling of unbelonging continuously shows itself. In *Children of the Land*, the author eventually finds out that he has always been nomadic. He is aware of the ancestors who followed the same rhythm of leaving and relocating, learning to seen and unseen in order to endure his life in the U.S. The memoir starts with the experience that Castillo had of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents raiding his home while living with his mother at the time and they were looking for his father who had actually been deported long time ago. Yet, “they only found the life we had to make up without him, nothing more” (p. 5). Castillo believes that “the biggest threat to immigrants who succeeded in crossing was the fear that the apparatus was always watching you” (p. 29). In the memoir, ICE officials still believe that his father lived in the U.S. even though it was not true. In fact, “It had been about three years since Apa was deported in 2003. There was nothing left of him in the house...the outline of his absence weathered beneath the weight of his stillness over the years” (p. 3). Bringing all these accounts his family faced throughout the years, *Children of the Land* reflects on what a traumatic experience this was for Castillo. Besides, the novel draws on this experience as a way to talk about Castillo’s father being deported. Until he sees his father again, everything changed as he states, “he left me as a child, and I was coming back to him as a man” (p. 33). At the same time, Castillo reflects on different concepts related to him including his family life and being an undocumented person in the U.S. for so many years in his memoir. In this way, the reader witnesses human lives behind

the headlines and how trauma of displacement affects people on a large scale. The fear and inbetweenness continue even after Castillo crosses the border and he is aware that he will not ever feel safe in the U.S. as he is acknowledged “it didn’t matter how good I was at hiding, I knew they would always find me if they wanted. It was useless to blend in, to not bring attention to myself- speak neither too loud nor too soft” (p. 8).

The U.S. Congress terminated the Bracero program, which permitted up to 800,000 temporary Mexican migrants to mainly work in agriculture each year; reduced legal immigration from Mexico by 50%; and discontinued the long-established practice of not expelling the parents of US citizens which all these decisions taken by the U.S. government affected Marcelo Hernandez Castillo’s and his family’s life directly and negatively. One of the many stories passed between countries by braceros – Mexicans who have been issued temporary work permit to mitigate labor deficiencies in the U.S. and labor under unfavorable circumstances for a meager salary - like Castillo’s grandfather Jesus was the myth of *Children of the Land*, a story that moved in and out of the lush vineyards and strawberry fields of California, following the changing seasons. He mentions that “this was a myth brought back to Mexico from the U.S. by braceros like my grandfather Jesus. I liked to think of these myths crossing the border as well, returning to their origin from thousands of miles away” (p. 58). He further states he did not want to risk being misunderstood, because there were real consequences at hand. Therefore, he keeps the identities of his family members private, only referring to his mother as Amá, and not disclosing the names of his siblings. In the concluding pages of the book, in “Further Notes and Observations,” he states, “I am always looking ten seconds into the future—looking for the nearest door to run through. Always needing to move” (p. 357). The memoir is focused on the transmission of stories, heritage, identity, and people over the U.S.-Mexico border, and narrates the hardships of his family, along with three events that transformed their lives: Castillo obtaining a green card when he got married, his father’s exile and request to come back, and his mother’s application for a visa. Every occurrence brings the family face to face with the irritating processes of the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), endowed with all the inadequacies of government bureaucracy: never-ending lines, conflicting directions, and unpredictable eligibility criteria. The cruelest effects of changes in political opinion cause Castillo’s family unbearable suffering with his conflicted feelings of being stuck between his father’s

home in Mexico, his mother in California, and his own as a writer-in-the-making on the East Coast. With every movement of the immigration laws of the U.S., lives are fragmented, identities are split, families are divided, and the feeling of being part of something is lost.

Hernandez Castillo is finally liberated to reveal his background thanks to his writing, deciding which parts of the narrative to present and which to conceal. He simply explains to us that, for instance, when his father was kidnapped by clashing cartels in the Tepechitlán area; “They found Apa blindfolded and tied up by the side of a road. He lived. That is all I have to say about it” (p. 355). He seeks to communicate something bigger than merely romanticizing suffering. He is documenting the exasperation that comes from living with duality, the patience required for transformation, and the effort it takes to conceal. He is confronted with a multitude of issues in the book: an unpredicted change in laws, a disagreeable presidential hopeful, insignificant paperwork mistakes, the domination of one person willing to take out their difficult day on someone at their mercy. This book makes it evident that deporting people tears them apart, yet they are still linked to each other, bonded in a way that can sometimes be strengthened and at other times tested, stretched so much that it almost breaks and more. Coming to the realization that the policies that support America’s immigration system bring about gaps in the lives of the people, as well as those around them, is what brings it to life. Following his father’s deportation, the memoir seeks to make visible the effects of his absence by mapping out a constellation of the unseen. This is not a yearning for an origin story, but instead a way to illuminate the invisible. It examines what it means to belong to a nation, to a family, to a body, in a new perspective and voice that has been missing from this conversation.

In her essay *On Being Moved: Sympathy, Mobility, and Narrative Form* (2011), Miranda Burgess examines “the migrancy of affects”, noting that between the 18th and 19th centuries, global transportation advancements stimulated a heightened sensitivity to the emotions of others. The relocation of people from agricultural to metropolitan regions, combined with the rapid spread of literature and visual media, blended social distinctions. In that sense, Burgess posited that the closer we are to someone—both visually and physically—the more likely we are to gain insight into them. In the past few years, given the proliferation of social media networks and the ever-changing news cycle as well as the heightened focus on immigration and its regulations, people

have developed a misconception that they are closer to their neighbors - especially Mexicans. Through these accounts, the novel incorporates what American Studies professor Jennifer Nez Denetdale (2016) describes as “histories of violence ... that have everything to do with the United States as a settler nation whose thirst for Indigenous lands and resources remains unabated” (p. 112). Burgess also questions if people can truly comprehend what migrants are going through just by looking at the news and images of people enduring heart-wrenching separation. According to her, only a close-up look such as Marcelo Hernandez Castillo’s book, *Children of the Land*, can help us remember the key factor in immigration reform talks—the individuals and their families.

5.1. Liminality, Immigration and *Children of The Land*

In the midst of the twenty-first century’s push towards internationalism and globalization, the study of borders has emerged as a crucial aspect of cultural and literary studies since the mid-1980s and the border, as a liminal space, has become an important part of human life, especially in Mexico-the U.S. for a long time. Liminality, as described by Victor Turner in *The Ritual Process* (1969), refers to a state of being that arises during rites of passage. The state of liminality refers to the transitional or marginal phase that an individual experiences before being fully integrated into their new social position. While going through the transition, the individual’s state remains unclear as they are apart from a clearly established past state and have not yet merged into a clearly defined future state. In that sense, border crossing is liminal or transitory phase and puts the immigrants in an in-between space where the future is unclear. The border marks the line between entities, their origins, and their ultimate destinations by surpassing its physical entity. As Jessica E. Decker and Dylan Winchok stress in her *Borderlands and Liminal Subjects: Transgressing the Limits in Philosophy and Literature* (2017),

Both physical and conceptual, the production of a border is never a neutral act. Borders are invisible lines crisscrossing social spaces, worldviews, and perception. They are drawn to distinguish between races, between genders, and between socioeconomic classes. As such, with every border drawn, a structure of power materializes alongside it. (p.2)

In that sense, the border presents itself as a complex space where opposing forces of attraction and repulsion clash, resulting in many individuals feeling resistant and

averse. By acknowledging the liminal space that exists along nation-state borders, it can be better understood that the dynamic and precarious borderland encounters that involve both opportunity and heightened danger.

For Hernandez Castillo, the wall and the border itself are not only physical terms but also psychologically chase him and his family for a long time which creates a kind of hatred to the political and social difficulties he has faced, and he expresses his feelings in *Children of the Land* by stating:

Part of me hated the U.S. I hated what it had done to my family. But maybe Mexico would have done the same thing... And yet where else was there for me to go, for us to go? What other choice did we have, when America forced us to come, and a return to Mexico was no longer an option? (p. 327)

During these challenging times, it is certain that he had but no one except for his family and everybody in his family but Castillo has already had an uncertain legal status in the U.S. which makes the family vulnerable to any decisions taken by the U.S. government. His family's unity is under risk and care for the other gains more importance than any other time for him which creates a strong effect on readers as well. Through poetic language, Castillo chronicles his family's experience in *Children of the Land* of remaining undetected yet constantly divided by outside and inner forces. It serves as evidence of the authors' express goal to delve beyond the confines of national boundaries, particularly those of the United States, and delve into the complexities of transnational and cross-cultural subjects. Castillo dexterously alternates between time frames, taking readers back and forth between the past and the present. From one moment to the next, Hernandez Castillo is a child, vending oranges with his father. In the next, he is being praised at a literary gala on Park Avenue, his first time in New York City. Then, the reader suddenly finds him in the restroom in tears streaming from his face due to the pain of being separated from his mother and the realization of having crossed social and national boundaries. Castillo illustrates the repetition of certain family histories by toying with the boundaries of time and he gives the example of his father's crossing the border with the remembrance of his own passage as a child by stating that he "was tapping into an inheritance" that he "didn't know he had." Castillo writes of his journey towards adulthood as an immigrant by stating "I started to become undone, like a loosely coiled ball of yarn that was bound to come apart eventually" and continues "I felt like neither the U.S. nor Mexico wanted

me and that I was between two opposing magnets...my chest heavy beneath their weight” (p. 22). It is obvious that the border continues to separate people even after crossing it and risk everything in the search of a better life. As Singh and Schmidt (2000) state that “a part yet apart, home and not-home, neither ‘here’ nor ‘there’. A boarder who can suddenly become uninvited. Borders on the edge and on the inside” (p. 7). He draws us to the brink of understanding the hardship of lacking a home and a shifting identity; through his personal journey he finds a shared truth: he is seeking tranquility; he is searching for acceptance in places that are not yet willing to welcome him. He wonders how he should respond to the arrival of his green card and the phrase “Welcome to America! Had he not been here for all those years?” Through both personal and political boundaries, Castillo transcribes his physical experience as an immigrant by writing it down by pointing out the importance of care in that matter. It is an important point that care theory does not suggest that the duty to care for others is the most important value, yet it does recognize caring as a fundamental ethical commitment that requires those with the ability to provide it to do so in some capacity as Castillo aims to in his *Children of the Land* by providing probably telling the world his most vulnerable fragments of his past who still chase him psychologically.

He narrates his experience of growing up without legal status in California and his difficult journey through the complex and inhumane American immigration system. Hernandez Castillo presents how the emotional and psychological strain of being both ignored and observed from an early age affects someone as they grow. Despite his success as a poet and educator, Hernandez Castillo still feels the pressure of anxiety and estrangement from a sense of home. The unbearable weight of not being in the public eye, the stress of hiding all the time, feeling of insecurity, fear and being undocumented prevented Castillo from making his voice heard for many years as he asserts,

It did not matter if I perfected my English – speak like a person who is wandering but not lost. It was useless to try to negotiate two worlds at once when only one of them was visible while the other one threatened to collapse. (p. 8)

He further recounts that he was hit by a car, yet his terror of drawing attention was so strong that he implored the EMTs – emergency medical technicians to let him go promptly. Later, while he was recuperating in the hospital, his mom refused to file a complaint to evade dealing with the justice system, but also due to the fact that, as an

undocumented resident, she did not feel it was her right. Even though he has gone through a multitude of struggles over the years, he continues to feel uncertain, questioning “how much more I could have done with my life if I’d been spared the energy it took to survive” (p. 8).

Despite the success he has had in the fields of teaching and poetry, Hernandez Castillo still carries the burden of anxiousness and a feeling of not belonging anywhere. Through his memoir, *Children of the Land*, he is paying homage to his father’s story of deportation, his mother’s challenges with immigration, and their bond with each other. He also recounts the stories of his family’s several migrations, both voluntary and mandatory. With subtle and intricate considerations on immigration, nationality, and a fragmented identity, Castillo masterfully crafts a narrative about the influence of the US-Mexico border on his family through many generations. In 2006, a frightful visit occurred when Marcelo Hernandez Castillo was a teenager. ICE agents wearing green fatigues appeared at his family’s household in Northern California. They were searching for Castillo’s father, not aware that he had been deported three years prior. Castillo and his siblings prevented their mother from getting captured by translating for her, but the episode had a long-lasting result on Castillo’s already unstable sense of security. He states in his memoir that “Home was suddenly something to add to the list of dangers, we never opened our doors or windows again” (p. 8). The States’ security forces, which can be deployed without warning, become an all-encompassing watchtower. Castillo finds out that he can try to appear more American, less foreign, another way of staying out of sight. As Castillo grows and reaches adulthood, marriage, and fatherhood, he recounts, “memories lie to me, and this is why my body can never be a map” (p. 355). He has been placed in a situation of clashing expectations between two cultures for so long, that his past and present have been intertwined. Thinking about immigrants’ difficult lives before and after crossing the borderland, the importance of care comes to the fore and becomes crucial more than ever.

Joan Tronto (1998) utters in his *An Ethic of Care*, “caring about” involves becoming aware of and paying attention to the need for caring. Genuinely to care about someone, some people, or something requires listening to articulated needs, recognizing unspoken needs, distinguishing among, and deciding which needs to care about” (p. 16). However, it is not possible to see someone out of Castillo’s family who

takes care of him and help his family in their long and challenging journey which brings focus on the importance of caregiving to vulnerable individuals in need. Castillo's wife Rubi immigrated to the U.S. with her family in 1992 as well. Over the years, they must have crossed paths as children living in the same government migrant labor camp and connected each other as immigrants from a non-immigrant person in his memoir. In fact, there is no connotations of care for immigrants shown by a non-immigrant person or a U.S. citizen which shows people lack empathy and understanding of vulnerability or care for the other in the contemporary age which immigration is a reality and becomes more common and is increasing each year but still, immigrants are seen as the other, unwanted and unknown in most cases. Castillo explains it as "everyone around us kept moving, nobody stopped. It was as if they were water, moving around and away from us, and we had become two large boulders in the middle of a river" (p. 340). Therefore, Castillo's writing aims to humanize the immigrant experience, challenging stereotypes and misconceptions and encouraging readers to see the humanity of those who are often dehumanized or reduced to mere statistics in conversations about immigration. The insights shared by Marcelo Hernandez Castillo on immigration are valuable not just to the immigrant population, but to all those interested in gaining a deeper understanding of the human experience of migration. His personal account helps foster a deeper understanding and thoughtful dialogue about the struggles that immigrants encounter in the United States.

Children of the Land starts with a striking sentence, "there were moments when I didn't need to tell my body how to move" (p. 1). Nevertheless, from the outset of the novel and onwards, Hernandez Castillo consistently questions the idea that shifting to a new location brings with it improvement, that the immigrant should only make a journey to a better place, one that is more secure and fruitful. Castillo discusses the interconnectedness of his identity as undocumented and also seen as an alien, unknown by others. Furthermore, his parents, particularly, are situated in that state of uncertainty just like him. This inclusion of intersectionality deepens his account, underscoring the multitude of experiences and hardships encountered by those with multiple marginalized identities. In a narrative composed of "movements" rather than chapters, Hernandez Castillo instead illustrates a succession of back-and-forth, of being in-between. In his interview with Vanity Fair (2020), he states that "we have been doing this for a hundred years. My great-grandfather came to the U.S. for the first time in

1916, and a hundred years later we're still doing the same thing. We're still trying to just stop" (n. p.). It recounts the invisibility of the sorrows of a broken immigrant family and the writer's attempt to have a life under the trauma of displacement while trying get his residence in the U.S. that denies his existence which Hernandez Castillo further states in *Children of the Land* as "you were not a ghost even though an entire country was scared of you. No one in this story was a ghost. This was not a story" (p. 319). For those who wish to gain a more profound comprehension of the factors that cause unauthorized immigration and what difficulties undocumented immigrants face—especially unaccompanied youngsters passing the border—this memoir provides an absorbing point of view. His integration into the Latin/o literary environment is a much needed and appreciated supplement to this corpus. *Children of the Land* supplies an essential contemplation of Central American immigration from his point of view of an immigrant child.

In the midst of the strongly opinionated discussion about undocumented immigration in the United States, Castillo's writing gives a face to the facts and shows the suffering, isolation, violence, deprivation, and despair that the children of undocumented migrants have to face as one of them. In addition to his aptitude for inviting readers to share his life with a generous attitude, Castillo also has the ability to enter the minds of others. The pride of his father, the affection of his wife and the support of his siblings all lend to the sense of community that he experiences. Nevertheless, it is his mother's voyage, a needle and thread knitting her family together. We are informed quickly of his mother's persistent efforts to protect her children after his father's deportation; Castillo dedicates much of his life to repaying her gesture. He takes her through the labyrinthine immigration system; from office to facility to lawyer to court and back, as the rules seem to change constantly. The reader will come to appreciate his heartache in relation to her silent strength; her love is boundless and ever-present. In *Children of the Land*, Castillo brings readers into the delicate aspects of his life, unveiling a ruthlessly broken political system. He displays his family's voyage as they attempt to reconcile their relationships, prompting us to not merely look but to pay attention. His story dates back to his grand fathers and crossing the border was inherited from them to his family. He talks about his great-grandfather Leon Talamantes who came to the border in 1919 for the first time, further states that "one hundred years after Leon's first crossings, we were still trying to cross,

still moving in maddening helplessness, a revolving door without an exit” (p. 168-9). He emphasizes what the U.S. thinks of immigrants has not changed much till then by saying “just like my grandfather and great-grandfather before him, the U.S. also believed that I, along with every other immigrant, was diseased until proven innocent and had to undergo a physical, or “screening,” before my immigration interview (p. 166). Castillo asserts one of the most challenging steps await for Mexican American immigrants as immigrant interviews in his memoir,

Interviews reminded me how much of my life was lived through questions – interrogations – how much of it was just someone waiting for me to them an answer... The U.S. government was good at asking questions, and it got in a lot of trouble when people learned just how it got its answers. (p. 79)

Additionally, he gives insights about the current U.S. presidential administration’s anti-immigrant rhetoric which has intensified the already existing fear of deportation and family separation among the unauthorized Latinx community. Therefore, an overwhelming number of families, including U.S. citizen minors living in households with mixed immigration statuses, are enduring tense environments as they acclimate and cope with their social surroundings. At the end, Castillo gets his residence but emphasizes “that was it, the U.S., right there, just a few dozen feet away, but it might as well have been as far away as the moon” (p. 332).

In that sense, *Children of the Land* delves into the difficulty of dealing with bureaucracy and the ever-changing legal framework, all while striving for safety and security. It follows the story of people living on both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border, offering an in-depth look at the border landscape from both aerial and ground perspectives. Initially crossing the border as a child, then as a DACA permit holder, and finally with a green card, he tries and fails to reunite his deported father with the United States. He brings his mother, living in the U.S., back to his father in Mexico, and takes his mother to apply for asylum once more. As he states, “Something always drew us back to the border,”. While visiting Mexico, Hernandez Castillo ponders his origins and identity, yet in the U.S., he must figure out who he must become and which version of himself is safe. He explains that this need to find security led him to become a poet as he “thought (naively, ashamedly so) that the farthest association from an immigrant was a poet” as well as complete fluency in English. Although Hernandez Castillo is not subjected to deportation, he pays a heavy price for staying in the United

States. To stay safe, he has had to hide parts of himself - sometimes hiding his skin from the sun to avoid getting darker - while selectively revealing certain parts of himself. Obviously, the idea of the boundary between Mexico and the United States is pervasive and internal, having far more influence than a physical wall or a line on a map. Its psychological presence affects the lives of those who are subjected to it.

It mainly argues that the border wall is not only present at the southern border, but also in people's minds. It is almost as if one is constantly being monitored, with no clue as to when or by whom which creates a feeling of constant tension. As Hernandez Castillo expresses in his memoir,

I ventured to believe that the function of the border was not only to keep people out, at least that was not its long-term function. Its other purpose was to be visible, to be seen, to be carried in the imaginations of migrants deep into the interior of the country, in the interior of their minds. It was a spectacle meant to be witnessed by the world, and all of its death and violence was and continues to be a form of social control, the way that kings of the past needed to behead only one petty thief in the public square to quell thousands more. (p. 29)

In that sense, *Children of the Land* illustrates the dread that undocumented immigrants live under due to state surveillance, and in reference to philosopher Michel Foucault's *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1975), argues that the wall at the Mexican-US border functions as a form of display employed by the government to regulate and terrorize migrant population. Castillo alludes to the impact of ceaseless dread and watchfulness, the lost bonds due to extended periods of division, the capricious and outlandish nature of movement enactment/guidelines, the total desensitization of the immigration forms, and how these has changed over the years with his family's continuous transition from Mexico to the US and back. Castillo devotes much of his time to examining his family's dynamics, the harm that the immigration process inflicted on them, and the pre-existing issues in their relationships. He illuminates the quick and enduring effects of a parent's volatility, as well as the way difficult circumstances can widen the gaps between family members. He comprehends a person's flaws, and frames them within the context of their life, and the tenderness and thoughtfulness in his approach is profoundly touching. In the same way, he reflects inwardly, exposing pieces of himself that were both affected and harmed by unfortunate conditions, and striving to show himself the same kindness and acceptance he readily gave others. Through his work, Castillo examines the

interconnectedness of vulnerabilities, analyzing how factors like race, class, and immigration status interact to shape an individual's unique experiences by engaging with the vulnerabilities and resilience of immigrant communities.

In addition to considering all these aspects, *Children of the Land* is a unique work as American literature rarely features personal accounts of the experience of being an undocumented immigrant from Mexico, though millions of Mexicans in the United States live this reality. *Children of the Land* is an exceptional inclusion to this limited but fundamental body of work, demonstrating that within each immigrant lies a unique narrative that must be heard. Although it is merely one individual's voice, it still magnifies the difficulties and contradictions experienced by many others in the past, and those who will go through them in the future, especially in the current political atmosphere of hostility against migrants. Castillo emphatically states that undocumented individuals must live in apprehension of being watched:

Every act of living became an act of trying to remain invisible. I was negotiating a simultaneous absence and presence that was begun by the act of my displacement: I am trying to dissect the moment of my erasure. I tried to remain seen for those whom I desired to be seen by, and I wanted to be invisible to everyone else. Or maybe I was trying to control who remembered me and who forgot me. (p. 19)

Castillo's memoir sets out to uncover what is wanted by the state to traverse the border, its only accepted currency being proof of torment: the border, amnesty, and legal status are all portrayed as changeable, impermanent, and imprecise. It illuminates the critical situation many immigrants must endure, in order to traverse the legal bureaucracy of the state. The poetic elements express the troubles of immigrant life in the U.S. for people who may have major misconceptions about what it means to be illegal. In this memoir, Hernandez Castillo lets us in to his most intimate moments. It is as much about the experience of being undocumented in America, as it is about the fragile relationship between him and his father, which became more strained after his deportation. It illustrates how the southern border, both the physical entity and the concept it holds, has an impact on so many facets of a person's life as well as familial and intergenerational trauma, and living with the ever-present feeling of doubt in one's life. It speaks of the infuriating frustration that comes with living a dual existence, the work of waiting for something to alter, and the labor that comes with hiding. Drawing a line between nations on the outside and instilling inner divisions in the people

entangled in it and the regulations that come with it, the border in the memoir is both a living presence and a ghost which Castillo puts in words as “even though the U.S. was just a stone’s throw away, we could have been thousands of miles farther south and it would still feel just as distant” (p. 149). The memoir reflects Castillo’s fears and unpredictable life along with his family in the U.S. and his concerns for people around him, especially his father and mother which he calls them Apá and Amá in Spanish throughout the memoir – full of flashbacks to Mexico and his young self and shows how vital to understand the issue of immigration, displacement and life beyond borderlands within the context of ethics of vulnerability and care which provide empathy and understanding people who are distant from us both physically and mentally.

CONCLUSION

Lost Children Archive by Valeria Luiselli and *Children of the Land* by Marcelo Hernandez Castillo shed light upon today's and the near future's potentially the most urgent issue of immigration, displacement, and cross-bordering which the majority of these immigrants involve children by focusing on the theory of border, ethics of vulnerability and care and the theme of inbetweenness. These two Mexican American authors specifically tackle the significance of linguistic decisions in shaping our perception of reality, highlighting the need to identify these children as refugees instead of labeling them as illegal Mexican American immigrants. They show their ultimate care on vulnerable immigrant children and families as liminal subjects through literature by giving voice to this issue. Valeria Luiselli and Marcelo Hernandez Castillo are highly charged with intense debate around the governance of borders and the treatment of migrants. This study has argued by focusing on these two urgent works that each human being must be treated with the respect they deserve, regardless of their race, gender, sexual orientation, nationality, or economic standing and stressed the importance of understanding Mexican American Literature from Luiselli and Marcelo Hernandez's point of views as contemporary Mexican American writers. When dealing with immigrants and asylum seekers, due consideration should be given to the importance of providing proper care for each individual. Those in society who are vulnerable require particular protections. These protections must be implemented while taking the vulnerability of the individuals into account, without resorting to social contracts to determine the obligations of other people to them. Thanks to the critical works of Luiselli and Hernandez Castillo, regardless of their works being fiction and non-fiction respectively, recent migrant "crises" across the world have once again raised the issue of the obligations of states towards migrants and they become the voice of undocumented Mexican Americans who are not able to express themselves due to fear of deportation and stay invisible in the U.S. which commonly enforce tighter border controls because of seeing these groups of displaced people and asylum seekers as a danger to their nation. The structure of their novels is usually straightforward, and the themes often involve battling the agricultural struggles that led to their families' emigration, as well as a sense of being detached from the customs of rural Mexico yet desiring to preserve them.

Even though different urgent subjects are emphasized in *Lost Children Archive* and *Children of the Land* including family, unity, culture, creating a universal subject becomes the important part of these works by stressing immigrant lives, unknown and most of the time not cared by many and only seen from screens and news. Both the United States and Mexico should aim to create a hospitable environment for nationals from the other country. Even though the issue of immigration can be a source of conflict, society as a whole is strengthened when the newly arrived are integrated into the workforce, educational institutions, healthcare services, and public life. Migration Policy Institute (2019) suggests that “even today, there is room for cross-border engagement at different levels of government, and for efforts to visualize a different kind of bilateral cooperation for the future” (p. 4). At this point, it is necessary to contemplate a different binational policy that would represent the actual compatibility between Mexico and the United States regarding immigration matters, although it may be hard to implement in the current atmosphere. Presently, there is a long and increasing backlog of asylum applications in the US, with some cases taking several years to process. Restructuring asylum systems to enable faster decisions would guarantee prompt protection for those who are eligible. Attempts to limit access to asylum are likely to result in unintended consequences, such as the encouragement of undocumented, illegal crossings as represented in *Lost Children Archive* and *Children of the Land*. The results of undocumented crossing of the frontier are so harsh for these people who are only looking for asylum and children who are not even aware of their actions and mostly led by their families that they get lost afterwards both in the U.S. without any guardian and in system that does not approve their existence and look forward to deport them after getting through lots of physical and psychological hardships.

Immigration is the new universal reality of today’s world and immigrants are legal subjects which should be behaved in that way by creating new opportunities, by caring family unity and providing rights to visit their homelands and travel without the fear of deportation and separation from their beloved ones. Even though there is a high wall reaching out long miles till the ocean, equipped with high technology, and watched by agents all the time, immigration is not a stoppable action completely. It is constant and children are the ones most affected from this. It is complex by actions and by law. It needs to be searched and understood by people and government and

must be paid great attention by considering human rights of surveillance and resilience. As Luiselli and Hernandez Castillo's own stories, it is clear that these experiences are particular to the individual and cannot be examined generally. Everyone's storyline differs eminently, and everyone deserves a special care and support when it comes to immigration, especially children who are not even aware of the procedure and shuttles between courts and immigration facilities after arriving from a long and dangerous journey, mostly unaccompanied by any family member. Immigration is universal and constant, represents a unique storyline for every individual which makes it complex to understand and put standards.

Luiselli and Hernandez Castillo's texts present the first-hand experience and hardships gone through individuals, families, and children alone at the frontier which demand understanding vulnerability and practice care to those in need regardless of their social status or nationality. They draw attention to scholarly texts which do not usually mention the ethical criteria used for establishing border controls. To act ethically, one must adopt the ethics of care, which states that we take into account the welfare of others since our own welfare and the welfare of the collective are contingent on our relationships with others. Human connections are not confined to the structure of the law; instead, they are broadened by considerations of empathy, affection, and care. It can be argued that the ethics of care is founded upon a shared humanity, thus establishing benevolence and compassion as essential ethical duties between individuals. It is essential to be aware of our interdependence with other human beings, even those outside of our political community, when we consider the ethics of care. As our own welfare and that of the collective relies on our relationships with them, we must act with the welfare of others in mind.

When it comes to the U.S. immigration policy, the social, economic, and political debate is contentious and heated, often accompanied by one-sided views and contradictory facts. Nevertheless, some of the data remain unaltered. This argument is mainly focused on the 12 million "illegal" immigrants, though there is a population of 19 million documented immigrants in the US. The fifteen million children living in immigrant families, many of whom have undocumented parents, are seldom addressed. It should however be noted that ten million of these children are U.S. born citizens. "As U.S. citizens, immigrant children are entitled to public services, aid, and assistance; however, their undocumented parents typically do not interact with public

agencies for fear of deportation” (Peguero; 2008, p. 1). Until recently, the scholarly community has largely overlooked both child immigrants and the offspring of immigrants, resulting in a large disconnect between the relevance of these children and the knowledge of their circumstances.

Movement and displacement have always been integral aspects of Mexican American literature, given the fact that these concepts are so deeply embedded in the US Mexican experience. Immigration is a deeply personal experience for those that have gone through it; for others, it is an inherited memory that has been passed down from one generation to the next. Through Mexican American literature, we can explore the implications of immigration, which reaches far beyond the physical act of relocation and affects individuals, families, and communities on an emotional, psychological, and socioeconomic level. As Moreno (2009) states, “there is not only one typical Latina/o immigration experience, but rather there are multiple ones, and Latina/o literature offers a window into that diversity” including ideas such as displacement due to political and economic conditions, nostalgia, lack of roots, transculturation, cultural combination, dual culture, bilingualism, endurance, adaptation, exclusion, and discrimination (p. 2). How immigration is seen as a beneficial or detrimental occurrence is reflective of its highly personal nature. Immigration does not take place in isolation; it is greatly shaped by economic, political and social influences and structures beyond an individual’s power. Thus, literary works often manifest the clash between individual and collective influences as of *Lost Children Archive* and *Children of the Land*.

Scholars of children’s literature may not be in charge of shaping humane policies for governments. But they can, to borrow the words of Russian American journalist Masha Gessen, help people to envision “a world without borders as we have known them—a world in which nation-states are not prized or assumed” (n. p.) Books that harness the imagination’s power to nourish empathy can guide, and we can steer them away from those that reinforce bigotry. It is obvious that that such work is necessary and complicated: A work’s propagation of prejudice can be both subtle and overt. Art is often ideologically ambivalent, humanizing in some ways and dehumanizing in others. Another thing we can do, then, is to teach people how to spot the difference. Careful, thoughtful readers can resist lies, misinformation, and scapegoating. By helping us develop the necessary critical literacies, the articles in this issue foster these

vital skills. A special issue of a journal cannot repair the damage wrought by long histories of pain, but scholars and creators of literature for young people can play at least a small role in helping readers to imagine a future that overcomes the follies of the past and present. We can promote books that foster the “development of respect for human rights” and assist in the “preparation of the child for responsible life in a free society, in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes, and friendship among all peoples, ethnic, national and religious groups and persons of indigenous origin” (p. 361).

Examining the border as a space of transcultural communication deepens the discourse regarding nationhood and identity between the U.S. and Mexico. In particular, the idea of the body as a border is crucial for understanding the association between Mexican identity and their presence and expression in U.S. society. Fostering the welfare of people and communities that are vulnerable necessitates comprehension of the idea of vulnerability and a realization of the complexity of the interconnection between vulnerability and individual and social factors. To ensure a resilient response to vulnerability, strategies are typically called for at the individual and community levels. Enhancing resources is vital to help individuals or populations become more resilient in the face of vulnerability. This will assist in the accomplishment of certain objectives. Thus, it is necessary to bolster the capacity to respond to vulnerability. Furthermore, providing care goes beyond the basics of supplying necessities, and helping to alleviate pain; it also involves a sensitivity, receptiveness, and consideration of those in need. As academicians in this field, Luis Xavier López-Farjeat and Cecilia Coronado-Angulo (2020) further state that “the insertion of the idea of “care” as an essential ethical attitude in the recognition of every human being, especially the most vulnerable among us” is extremely critical (p. 9). Noddings (2002) further suggests that, with care ethics being based on values and practices of proper personal care, demands us to reassess the aims of politics and the language of justice, freedom, privacy, and similar, in the context of what is needed to foster and support good personal care. Instead of merely labelling social and political issues as either right or wrong, disregarding their individual contexts, care ethics presents a more relationship-based way of looking at them as obvious in *Lost Children Archive* and *Children of the Land*. They stress the need to look at people and their actions in a holistic manner, acknowledging the links that exist between them. Luiselli and Hernandez Castillo draw

a parallel between the reader's attachment to the lost children and the insights of the perception of the world is shaped by language, and it also serves as a method of defining interactions with the unfamiliar especially when faced with something beyond our comprehension. It is the obligation of those with greater power, knowledge, or possessions in any kind of human relationship to shield the weak and to refrain from exploiting the less privileged. This must be kept in mind when exercising strength, knowledge, or any other possessions. In this manner, the ability of ethics-based society to preserve national security initiatives linked to surveillance initiatives and protect privacy rights must urgently be evaluated. As Luiselli (2017) asserts, "Because being aware of what is happening in our era and choosing to do nothing about it has become unacceptable" (p. 30). Normalizing horror and violence is not an option. We must hold ourselves accountable and not turn a blind eye to what happens in our midst.

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