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Emotional Displacement in Reyna Grande's *Across a Hundred Mountains*

¹Dhivya R, ²Dr. Sheela Banu R,

¹Research Scholar, ²Associate Professor,

¹PG & Research Department of English,

¹Government Arts College (Autonomous), Salem-7, Affiliated to Periyar University, Salem, India

Abstract: Reyna Grande's *Across a Hundred Mountains* (2006) depicts the themes of emotional displacement from the perspectives of migration, family, poverty, trauma, and identity. Juana García's childhood is determined by tragic events involving the death of her sister Anita and the migration of her father Apá to the United States. Even before Juana's crossing of the border, she is devastated and emotionally displaced by the migration of Apá and the death of her sister. Juana begins her search for her father in the US, where she takes on a new identity as Adelina Vásquez to survive. The present paper analyzes the impact of the events of Juana's childhood on her understanding of home, family, and self from the perspectives of Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherrie Moraga, who discuss the challenges of living in the borderlands and the loss of identity in marginalized groups. The paper argues that migration resulted in Juana's lifelong emotional displacement, which continues to affect her sense of belonging, family relationships, and self-identity.

Index Terms - Emotional displacement, migration, trauma, family separation, Borderlands, divided identity, memory, belonging.

Emotional displacement refers to a condition when a person is disconnected from home, family, and belonging. Displacement can occur in different contexts and in various forms, but the key feature is the detachment that occurs in the person's mind or family where they have lived for a long time. Such a phenomenon is different from political or geographical displacement since the latter one involves crossing borders, which changes the location of a person in space, and detachment is not a crucial part of the definition. However, for a migrant, coming to a new place and changing its relationship with their own homeland is still a form of detachment that affects their psyche.

Moreover, people left at home can also experience emotional displacement since a family member who plays a crucial role in their lives stays gone. *Across a Hundred Mountains* depicts this theme because the migration of the protagonist's father is inextricably linked with the sense of loss and hardship that Juana García has to endure. Migration in the novel is not a happy border-crossing adventure but a sad experience connected with poverty, family tragedy, and suffering from gender violence. The author demonstrates that the migrant experience changes people for the worse.

Juana's emotional displacement starts before even before her migration to the United States. Her childhood is closely connected with Anita's death, which haunted her and changed the relationship with her family forever. Anita's death was an unfortunate tragedy; however, it had a particular impact on Juana, which led to the development of her emotional displacement. After that, another disaster happened, which affected Juana and her family even more severely. Juana's father decided to go to the United States to find a better job, which would have been impossible if he had stayed in Mexico.

It is unclear what caused him to migrate, whether it was a severe economic crisis or if the family would have survived without his income. Anita's death creates guilt and grief, while Apá's migration produces absence and uncertainty. However, Juana's displacement is also caused by these events, which means she has complex feelings about her father and his migration. She sees her family home as her sanctuary but also feels incredibly devastated and loses the feeling of belonging there. Thus, migration does not necessarily cause emotional displacement, but it amplifies emotions and suffering from existing fears and problems.

The link between Apá's migration and Anita's death is primarily connected to the economic hardships that force Apá to go. His migration creates an emotional gap that eventually starts to deteriorate the whole family. Migration has two meanings in this case: on the one hand, it is the responsibility to care for the family, while on the other hand, it is also an abandonment. This problem is not presented from Apá's perspective, but he is seen as a hero and a villain at the same time. He is a villain because of his migration, which makes the family bonding even more fragile. In addition, the narration does not make Apá appear as an irresponsible father, whose decision has nothing to do with the subsequent family problems.

Apá's had no choice because of the existing difficult economic situation, which is why his migration should not be seen as a villain act. Apá's absence has emotional repercussions, not only for Juana but for the whole family, as they become insecure about everything related to men. This family insecurity is even more significant due to the fact that Apá's migration occurs after Anita's death. Juana experiences two-fold devastation: the loss of her sister, the person she used to take care of, and the loss of her father, who abandons them shortly after Anita's death. The latter seems even more devastating because it is not sudden like Anita's death. Apá's departure is a slow process that makes Juana more and more lonely and insecure about her family life.

Juana feels devastated several times during her childhood when her family undergoes some significant losses. She is unable to protect Anita, which always haunts her. Her trauma seems to be universal because it is not only personal but also affects the family members, making them sad and anxious. Cathy Caruth notes that trauma does not remain confined to the moment in which it occurs; its effects can continue through memory and later experiences, making the past an active part of the present (Caruth).

Caruth's notion about trauma perfectly applies to Juana's family and her experience because the effects of various emotional wounds that they undergo are not diminished over time. They remain in the memories as they have a significant impact on people's lives. Juana's family is not only haunted by the tragedy but also by their own memories. This is why Juana, who runs away from home, seems to be a victim of her family, her father, and herself. It is also noteworthy that in the end, she is the one who leaves her family, while her father is the one whose migration caused the family to start dissolving.

The narration emphasizes the importance of the little things that Juana notices and remembers as harbingers of something that has already occurred or will occur a sense of loss. The moment she hears the owl and remembers the belief that "owls always brought bad news. News of death"(Grande 41) the incident with Apá's leaving is connected to the death of others. The belief may appear simple, but it becomes psychologically significant because Juana interprets subsequent events through memories of previous loss. The past remains active in the present. Her emotional world is therefore not organized according to a clear division between what has happened and what is happening. Earlier experiences continue to influence how new experiences are perceived. This persistence of memory contributes to the sense of emotional displacement because Juana is unable to occupy the present without carrying the emotional weight of the past.

For this reason, Juana's decision to look for Apá assumes a completely new meaning. It is not the choice of a daughter to move away from home but the necessity to heal the emotional wound that has already occurred. Juana is not trying to chase away the emptiness; she is trying to fill the space that has become vacant after Apá's departure. Her migration is the result of emotional trauma, not its healing mechanism. Juana's moving away begins before she reaches the border because the border has already crossed her life, and she is trying to outrun the emotional turmoil.

This condition can be related to Gloria Anzaldúa's view on the border as the phenomenon existing within individuals and between nations. In *Borderlands/La Frontera*, the US-Mexican border becomes an "open wound" (Anzaldúa 25). The border here is the condition of existence, involving people within their own minds and cultures. Juana's experience perfectly illustrates this situation as she lives within the memories and feelings of her past and nationality and cannot wholly move on from them. Hence, it becomes a condition of living between different locations, identities, histories, and cultural expectations. Juana's experience perfectly illustrates this situation as she is living in the memories and feelings of her past and nationality and cannot entirely move on from them. Therefore, it becomes a condition of living between several places, identities, histories, and cultural expectations. Juana's experience, in this case, perfectly illustrates such a condition because the border is always there, even after crossing. The memories of Mexico, Anita's death, and Apá's disappearance are still part of her life in the United States, which means that the border between Mexico and the U.S. is still inside Juana.

The definition of the Borderlands provided by Anzaldúa is one of the best and most accurate because it highlights the impossibility of controlling the border from within. Individuals cannot stay in one place moving from one condition to another, living within one environment but interacting with others. Juana's existence, for instance, is the result of such living, but it is not wholly positive as she lives within the constraints of her mind, a part of her being in Mexico and the other in the United States. However, her case is more complex because she did not choose to live within the borders of two countries with two sets of rules, values, and conditions. Instead, the circumstances forced her to, and Juana had to adapt her identity to cope with the new reality. Hence, the border allowed her to move to proceed with her life, but it also introduced new limitations and feelings of uncertainty.

Cherrie Moraga's exploration of the theme of double identity adds another layer of meaning to the discussion of Juana's identity. In her work titled *La Güera*, Moraga comments on the feeling of "having a foot in both worlds" (Moraga 29) despite rejecting. The perspective applies to Juana's scenario in a similar vein, the identity of Juana belongs to the childhood worlds of Mexico, family, Anita, and Apá, while Adelina becomes associated with the adult life that develops after migration, which makes the two identities intertwined. In other words, the same woman possesses two lives, which have brought her different experiences and cannot coexist in one person.

The adoption of Adelina's identity presents the next stage of Juana's experience of emotional displacement. To a degree, she manages to escape the troubles of her homeland by starting anew under a different name, but the cost of this identity switch is additional displacement. The new name allows Juana to feel safe, but it also denies her the chance to fully escape her past, as it now becomes a part of her. She leaves the old self and the old country behind and, in effect, leaves herself behind. As such, emotional displacement transforms Juana's identity crisis into an existential crisis.

The relationship between Juana and Adelina further complicates the discussion of the differences between true and false identities. With the exception of switching back to her true identity, neither Juana nor the reader can tell which of the two names was truly used by the woman at any given moment. Adelina becomes more and more real with time, as Juana builds her life anew in the United States. Both names coexist in the woman's mind, with one being the source of her memories and the other being the future she is building in tandem with her new self. As a result, the two identities, which ought to be mutually exclusive, merge into one. In that sense, Juana is much like any other character Moraga describes in her essay the only difference is that Juana has to migrate in order to create the conditions for her life to continue.

Trauma breaks memories, migration breaks the connection between past and present, and new identities can emerge that partially break old ones. The broken nature of the plot itself is reminiscent of these interruptions. Juana's childhood is intertwined with Adelina's adulthood, punctuated by a piercing climax that makes the reader realize that these are the lives of one woman. The very structure of the narrative strongly suggests that broken pieces can sometimes be combined into a whole.

Trauma makes people forget, migration breaks continuity with the past, and identities can be combined in such a way that it is not obvious which part belongs to whom. All of that is put together through the shape of the story itself, as the seemingly two different plots actually belong to the same character. Juana's childhood and Adelina's adult life are put together in a way that suggests that these are two halves of the same life. The same is true for the two identities – they are fragmented but combined together, thus portraying a single one. So, the structure of the story helps to emphasize the content within it.

The moon is used as a metaphor for this peculiarity of identity. Although the two faces of the moon are united, they are unseen from one side. The same applies to Juana and Adelina: they are two aspects of the same individual. In this way, the moon as a metaphor highlights the peculiarity of identity being multifaceted and

varying depending on the observer's position. However, the core remains the same, and the memories form the identity regardless of the person's location or social role.

Gender further complicates the issue of emotional displacement because the women in the story experience being uprooted and face vulnerability in more ways than one. Juana's mother faces emotional displacement due to Apá's absence and the burden of extreme poverty. Other women experience such feelings due to spousal abuse or controlling partners that put them in danger. Essentially, any form of harassment is a root of emotional displacement, which adds credence to the idea that not only international migration causes being uprooted. A person can face emotional displacement in another's home if the environment is no longer safe or welcoming.

This reading connects back to Moraga's feminism by which gender cannot solely define who we are; other elements include class, ethnicity, family, or cultural background. Juana's case involves migration as a root cause of emotional displacement, but other issues interplay with it, for example, poverty. Migration causes family separation, which leads to trauma, which causes more severe fragmentation of Juana's identity, and finally, the need to survive, which leads to her alternate identity. It is all a connected chain of events and circumstances. Emotional displacement has multiple causes, but they run concurrent with other issues in a person's life.

Juana's later life and work with abused women show the link between her personal and professional life. She helps other people with severe emotional displacement as she understands their struggles and hardships. In her personal life, Juana is also dealing with emotional displacement as a result of her difficult upbringing and trauma, but she cannot openly discuss it. Therefore, the shelter connects people with diverse backgrounds and struggles. While some residents face displacement due to international migration, others, like Juana, come from families where emotional displacement occurred, which affected their lives. The narrative, therefore, speaks of emotional insecurity and displacement of a more complex nature than international migration.

Ultimately, emotional displacement in *Across a Hundred Mountains* is achieved through poverty, family separation, trauma, migration, gender vulnerability, and divided identity. The protagonist experiences emotional displacement from Apá's leaving, which she carries with her into adulthood. Anita's death causes Juana to feel guilty and responsible, although her attempts to find Apá fail. Juana comes close to giving up on her search when she crosses the border and finds her adopted sister Adelina. However, crossing the border does not heal the emotional trauma caused by migration and family separation; instead, Juana is faced with a new identity and name. In conclusion, the protagonist undergoes multiple forms of emotional displacement across hundreds of mountains and borders.

The narrative suggests that migration is not only a physical change of location but also a psychological shift that involves the sense of home, family, or self. Juana's migration is manifested through the loss of Anita and Apá as her travel triggers feelings of exile. Her crossing over the bridge in the United States marks the beginning of her realization of the separation from her previous environment. In addition, the transition from Juana to Adelina is the source of her exile since the change in identity means geographic isolation from herself. However, the process of searching, remembering, returning, and recognition helps Juana restore her lost parts. Therefore, the farthest distance in the story is not between Mexico and the United States but Juana's transformation from one self to another through migration. The emotional isolation defines the narrative because Juana's migration entails continuous feelings of exile. The memories, sense of belonging, and recognition follow Adelina throughout migration but do not allow her to become free from her previous self.

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