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**TITLE:** The Chicana Subaltern and the Ethnic Female *Bildungsroman* in Patricia Santana's *Motorcycle Ride on the Sea of Tranquility*

**AUTHOR:** Nadia Avendaño

**AFFILIATION:** College of Charleston

**ABSTRACT:** Patricia Santana's novel is an example of ethnic American women writers that continue to revive and sustain the female *Bildungsroman* in new and diverse contexts. The aim of this article is to demonstrate the genre's ongoing relevance and expanded capacity of representation for Chicana/o subaltern subjects. *Motorcycle Ride on the Sea of Tranquility* (2002) explores the Chicana protagonist's personal journey towards self-discovery, providing the reader with a glimpse into a subaltern American reality, thus assisting—even though it may be in a minuscule way—to fill in some of the gaps in American hegemonic culture. The narrator interrogates the hypothesis that the necessary closure of the Chicana *Bildungsroman* is either dictated by cultural nationalism or assimilation to mainstream American culture, thus redefining “Americanness” through an attempt to go beyond fixed boundaries, deconstruct oppositions, and fashion borderland and transcultural identities.

**KEYWORDS:** Chicana literature, Chicana identity, the subaltern, female *Bildungsroman*, subjectivity, youth literature

**RESUMEN:** La novela de Patricia Santana provee un ejemplo de narrativa de las escritoras americanas étnicas que continúan vivificando y afirmando el *Bildungsroman* femenino en contextos nuevos y diversos. El objetivo de este artículo es mostrar la relevancia del género en la actualidad y la amplia capacidad de representación del sujeto subalterno chicano. *Motorcycle Ride in the Sea of Tranquility* (2002) representa el viaje de la protagonista, una chicana, hacia el auto-descubrimiento al ofrecer al lector una posibilidad de la realidad subalterna americana; asimismo disminuye la brecha entre la cultura americana hegemónica y la chicana. La voz narrativa cuestiona la hipótesis de que el desenlace de una *Bildungsroman* chicana está dictado ya sea por el nacionalismo cultural o la asimilación a la hegemónica cultura americana. Por lo tanto, la novela redefine la “americanidad” al superar las fronteras establecidas, al eliminar oposiciones y al crear posibles identidades fronterizas y transculturales.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** Literatura chicana, identidad chicana, el subalterno, *Bildungsroman* femenino, subjetividad, literatura juvenil

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**BIOGRAPHY:** Nadia Avendaño is Associate Professor of Spanish at the College of Charleston. She earned her M.A. and Ph.D. at the University of Arizona. Her research interests include the female *Bildungsroman*, Chicano/a literature, and Mexican women writers of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries.

# The Chicana Subaltern and the Ethnic Female *Bildungsroman* in Patricia Santana's *Motorcycle Ride on the Sea of Tranquility*

Nadia Avendaño, College of Charleston

During the last few years an increasing number of academics have drawn their attention to the field of Subaltern Studies in the context of literary theory. It will be helpful to review a few of the basic tenets of what Subaltern Studies is and some of the purposes it serves. In order to do that, we look at what Ranajit Guha, the so-called father of Subaltern Studies, appropriately says on that subject. Guha's basic idea is that India's history was written by the elite, for the elite, and about the elite and that this type of one-sided view leaves a gap in India's history. Within this historical fissure is the people on the periphery of society whom he proposes to focus on in his studies: the subaltern. Another academic who has become one of the most important figures with regards to Subaltern Studies and to Latin American Studies is John Beverly. Standing on the shoulders of South Asian scholars led by Guha, Beverly views Subaltern Studies as the means whereby it is possible to achieve a closer approximation to the subaltern, even if it were to be done, as it were, 'imperfectly'. He recognizes that what is being heard may not be the actual voice of the subaltern but rather an approximation to it (40). Beverly like Guha suggests studying the subaltern, and the issues related to them, in an effort to lessen the gap that elitist historiography has created.

Though there are dissenting voices who oppose the use of postcolonial theory in the context of Latin American and Latino/a subjects, one of the basic principles of Subaltern Studies which validates this present article is simply that one of the main intentions of

Subaltern Studies is to study what Guha calls "the politics of the people" (Guha 4).<sup>1</sup> Guha's interest as well as Beverly's is in looking at the parts of society, specifically the subaltern, which has been left out by historians and others. With this notion in consideration—the idea that Subaltern Studies brings to the foreground those who were previously excluded from academic studies—it is possible to apply at least that basic principle of Subaltern Studies to almost any country in the world without needing to consider if the nation in question is postcolonial or not. Therefore, the application of Subaltern Studies to Latinos and for the purpose of this study to Chicanos in the U.S. is possible because Chicana/o Studies and Latino Studies are still not part of the canon or at the very least are considered subordinate to Anglo-American literature canon. Another postcolonial theory that generated extensive scholarship in the Chicana/o Studies field in the 1960's, (at the time in which the story in the novel to be analyzed takes place), is the internal colonial theory. This theory supports the application of Subaltern Studies to Chicanas/os because it reinterprets the history of Chicanos as that of a colonized group, rather than an immigrant group. The history of colonization of the Southwest is the distinguishing characteristic of Chicanos' negotiation of their identity.<sup>2</sup>

Patricia Santana's first novel, *Motorcycle Ride on the Sea of Tranquility* (2002) is a *Bildungsroman* that explores the Chicana protagonist's personal journey towards self-discovery, providing the readers with a glimpse into a specific, often ignored American reality, thus

assisting—even though it may be in a miniscule way—to fill in some of the historical gaps Guha referred to in his discussion on the subaltern. The *Bildungsroman* itself, in recent decades, has been transformed and resuscitated, not by males of the dominant culture in the United States but by subaltern groups, thus functioning as the most salient genre for the literature of social outsiders, primarily women and minority groups. According to Bonnie Hoover Braendlin, the *Bildungsroman* of these disenfranchised Americans—women, Blacks, Chicanas/os, Native Americans, and homosexuals

portrays the particular identity and adjustment problems of people whose sex or color renders them unacceptable to the dominant society; it expresses their struggle for individuation and a part in the American dream [...] (75)

Women writers of the female *Bildungsroman* subvert the very structure of society, raising questions of equality, not only related to social class but also to gender. Thus, more important than social class issues, the female version of the *Bildungsroman*, unlike the traditional male model, holds as the most important theme that of the equality between the sexes. Questions of sexuality, sex roles, and sexual identity figure largely in the female version as contrasted with their virtual absence in the male counterpart (Labovitz 251). Because the focus of the *Bildungsroman* is on the relation between individual and environment, it encourages female authors to expose and condemn established patriarchal social norms and values. Moreover, because the genre focuses on repressive societal factors, on the process of disillusionment imperative for personal growth and maturity, and on the possibilities for transformation offered by individual choice, it becomes an attractive genre to contemporary ethnic women authors who wish to express female development, self-realization, and self-defined identification (Hoover Braendlin 77). The

Chicana, being twice a minority, has been silenced both by the larger American hegemonic culture and within her own Chicana/o culture. Annie Eysturyoy believes that the ethnic context is a crucial component of the female *bildung* process. She states:

It is through the interactions with the social and cultural environment, and therefore also with the traditions of her ethnic heritage, that the Chicana bildungsheld gains an understanding of her individual self as a woman and as a Chicana. (26)

*Motorcycle Ride on the Sea of Tranquility* gives the female gendered subject, visibility and a multilayered identity. Santana's work offers a Chicana's perspective of the historical moment. Set in 1969 the novel begins with the return of Yolanda's brother from Vietnam. The fourteen-year-old Yolanda Sahagún and her family are shocked to see a completely different Chuy, one who suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder. The novel depicts Yolanda's process leading to self-definition. Throughout her narrative, Yolanda becomes increasingly self-aware and is able to assert and arrive at a self-circumscribed identity. The Chicana protagonist becomes a conscious subject as opposed to a passive object who, through the act of questioning and interpreting her socio-cultural context, gains a new understanding of herself and her place in the world as a Chicana. The novel traces Yolanda's rites of passage through a series of initiations that lead her from the innocence of childhood into a deeper, more serious understanding of her complex world.

Aside from the subaltern status that her ethnicity creates by making her a part of the margins of American society, Yolanda also finds herself even more subalternized as a woman outside as well as within her community. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak explains how this is possible:

Within the effaced itinerary of the subaltern subject, the track of sexual

difference is doubly effected. The question is not of female participation in insurgency, or the ground rules of the sexual division of labor, for both of which there is 'evidence.' It is, rather, that, [...] the ideological construction of gender keeps the male dominant. (287)

Chicana/o culture as projected in *Motorcycle Ride on the Sea of Tranquility*, creates a form of the double subalternization Spivak mentions above. As Yolanda learns to deal with her beloved brother's pain and madness as well as with her own daunting and confusing experience of becoming a woman, she begins to realize how differently the boys and girls in her family are treated by her parents, the neighbors, and each other. Santana portrays the family as a source of physical and psychological nurturing, but also suggests that a traditional Chicano family can constrain women by insisting on rigid adherence to traditional practices and values.

Throughout the novel, the protagonist comments on the clear and distinct gender differences established in her family. She states that her family life was not built on "democratic, egalitarian principles" (76). Though she is aware that outside of her home the Women's Liberation Movement is in full swing, she states that her parents are oblivious to this movement. The protagonist narrates the manner in which her father rears her daughters "much as he had raised and tended ranch animals. We five daughters were his fillies, and he wasn't about to let us wander off and start reproducing at the first sign of heat" (77). Yolanda and her sisters are not allowed to date but her brothers are allowed to do so. "Our parents were strict and we weren't allowed—not even poor Carolina who was already twenty—to go out on dates with guys" (34).

Santana clearly wishes to comment on the difference between a traditional Chicano family and an Anglo-American family. Rogelio Díaz-Guerrero describes the traditional Chicano family as one where the father reigns supreme and the wife is totally self-sacrificing

(25). This seems to be consistent with Yolanda's characterization of her parents. Throughout the novel there are many references made to what is accepted in American mainstream culture. When Yolanda's twenty year old sister asks if her boyfriend can meet the family, her mother lets her know that it is out of the question. Her sister replies: "Mamá, I'm going to do it the American way. No secret notes, no meeting at the corner. These are modern times, Mamá, and I am a modern woman of the sixties" (79).

Throughout her narrative, Yolanda negotiates the gendered roles that exist in her family and in her community. An important aspect, crucial to the process of her own ongoing discovery of self, is Yolanda's conscious growing awareness of her gender and what it means to be female. The protagonist depicts the patriarchal family house in which she grows up as a constraining physical space. She shares a room with all four sisters. Yolanda comments on the dual purpose of her bedroom. Because "it served as the hallway to the only bathroom in the Sahugún Estate" (36), it moves back and forth from a private female space to a public space. Yolanda describes the constant invasion of their private domain when anyone in the family has to go to the bathroom. "The girls' room once more served as hallway, our sanctuary always temporary and precarious as we retreated into an automatic, practiced silence" (37). To get to the bathroom, one has to go through the girls' room. This impedes any privacy. Yolanda asks herself: "Were we in some way just a convenient hallway for men to pass through?" (37). This rhetorical question is central for the analysis of the Chicana subaltern because it is connected to the sexual violence towards women discussed later in this study.

A counterbalance to this restrictive space is Yolanda's brothers' room. They have their own room set apart from the main house. They are free to come and go as they wish. Yolanda comments on their freedom. "The boys' room was a private domain by virtue of its geographical placement and relation

to the rest of the home and seemed to me a symbol of freedom and independence" (38). Yolanda questions the confining atmosphere within the home for her and her sisters, subjected to the traditional gender-role expectations of both her parents and her brothers. Santana employs the protagonist's family as a microcosm for traditional Chicano families but also perhaps as a microcosm of the Chicana/o movement (which is taking place at the time) and the marginalization of women. According to Sylvia Gonzales, the dilemma of the Chicana was in fact highlighted by the Chicana/o movement. Though the Chicana joined the Chicano struggle with equal commitment to self-actualization for her people, at no time did she step beyond her traditional role and assume leadership. Gonzales affirms that if the Chicana did transgress "she was met with the same questioning of her femininity which the culture dictates when a woman is not self-sacrificing and seeks to fulfill her own needs (49).

Yolanda is aware of the double standard that exists for boys and girls and questions this social construct. She realizes that she should suppress her natural sexual urges in order to conform to the patriarchal norms imposed upon her by her parents and by society. Historically, the Chicana has been defined and confined within the mother/virgin/whore stereotype of the past, both within her own Chicano culture and the larger American cultural context. Yolanda is very aware of these strict roles by which women are traditionally defined.<sup>3</sup>

If you went 'too far' your reputation was ruined and, marriage out of the question, you would need to resign yourself to either being a *piruja* or dressing saints like all the old maids for the rest of your life. (68)

Santana criticizes this double standard that exists in the Mexican-American culture and moves Yolanda's narrative out and away from the virgin/whore polarities toward a center of female selfhood.

Yolanda is becoming an adolescent and though she is very close to her family, she also feels that it can be confining and rigid to her self-development. She states:

I was eager to be reckless and independent, eager to be against my family and upbringing—those old-fashioned Mexican values that stunted one's growth, one's sexuality, one's individuality. (135)

According to Tey Diana Rebolledo, both Mexican and Chicana/o society, in general, perceive women as docile and submissive, whose primary purpose in life is to marry, become supportive wives and have children. The cultural expectation for women is the ideological model of being good: selfless, nourishing, respectful, and passive (204). Santana wishes to explore this possibly crippling role that a traditional Mexican upbringing can play on the development of an adolescent girl. In order to grow up, Yolanda must rebel against her parents' rules. However, this does not mean that Yolanda seeks to become more Anglicized or that she rejects her ethnicity. In fact Yolanda's rebelliousness and growing feminist consciousness has its communal counterparts that convey a sense of closeness to her family as well as her ethnic community without annulling the more individualistic or feminist counter narratives. Thus Santana's novel interrogates the assumption that the necessary closure of the Chicana *Bildungsroman* is either dictated by cultural nationalism or assimilation to mainstream American culture. Santana maintains a healthy distance from both, a ruthless individualism and the practices of a repressive Chicano family/community.

In addition to allowing the reader a glimpse of a subaltern culture in the United States, the way in which this novel is narrated also allows Santana to project her subaltern character in an individual way. According to Manuel M. Martín-Rodríguez, Chicana authors have been interested in expanding the spaces in which female characters have appeared, and frequently this has meant writing

the author and/or her readers into the texts as well, in order to create a novel literary space for women (72). Santana gives Yolanda a metaphorical “room of her own” by making her the narrator and protagonist of the novel. As a narrator, Yolanda is interested in letting the reader know/enter her world as she grows up. She shares her emotions, discoveries, observations, and fears with the reader. The reader follows Yolanda’s progressive maturing and her budding literary vocation marked with a contestatory discourse of femininity. Santana’s work contributes to the “effort of creating a female-to-female Chicano literary tradition” by “feminizing the repertoire for an implied feminine reader” (Martín-Rodríguez 90). This revisionist feminist discourse seen throughout the protagonist’s narration is an example of how the novel “reads” tradition while constructing an image of a female ideal reader, a reader who will rejoice in the narrator’s rebellious criticism of tradition and social roles.

Yolanda’s journal writing serves as an indispensable tool to her process of self-definition and actualization. Yolanda confesses: “Only in my diary could I make a complete ass of myself; only my diary could see all my dimensions” (61). Yolanda has a special place where she writes as well. “Ever since I was a little girl, as long as I could remember, I visited my canyon every day—my diary and a new book in hand [...] Only there in the privacy of my pastoral sanctuary” (60). Santana presents us with not just one but two atypical images of the Chicana (the writer and the reader) when Yolanda mentions “her diary and a new book in hand.” Her lack of space at home urges her to find a space of her own: “to scratch out a little cubbyhole for myself, a peaceful retreat” (60). This is an alternative space that subalterns create and/or recreate from canonical literature (the pastoral) and reappropriate. Santana uses this subaltern space as well as the protagonist’s writing, as a double idea of subalternity. Her journal writing represents the personal, intimate, female experiential domain of her development

which is therapeutic. It serves as a catalyst for understanding, accepting herself, and seizing subjectivity, as well as a reaching out cross-culturally to explain Chicana subjectivity and culture. Rebolledo posits:

Writing, after all, is naming, mapping, and leading, as well as creating. It forms an explanation of the meaning of existence; it can order chaos, introduce reason into ambiguity, recreate loss, call up the past, and create new models and traditions. In sum, it orders existence and creates new worlds. It can denounce injustice and prejudice and may function as a focus for a shared experience. (117)

Santana’s use of the diary is not meant solely to “order chaos” or to confess the protagonist’s most intimate thoughts, it also serves as a subaltern form of writing, an important tool to retaliate against the explicit and implicit narratives of patriarchal domination. Yolanda’s diary contains her deepest, most private thoughts. Her entries consist of her growing sexual awakening, which as stated earlier she feels she should suppress. However, her writing allows her to become uninhibited:

*That’s all I want. His gentle hands inching their way from my waist, up under my warm sweater, finding my heaving virginal breasts. Yours! Yours! Yours! And then grasping and rubbing and fondling them for dear life. His! His! His! I can’t breathe, my dear diary, my eyes are out of focus.* (135, original emphasis)

By writing about her own body and sexual feelings, Yolanda releases herself from her condition of object becoming aware of the fact that an essential part of her identity is anchored in female sensuality. The narrator describes her desire to feel sexual pleasure, which contributes to the destruction of the cultural myth that adolescent Chicana girls, or any girls for that matter, do not have sexual desires. According to Aída Hurtado, Chicana

feminists have written explicitly about sexual pleasure to counteract the silence and repression around sex in Chicano communities (8). Melissa Fitch further adds that “physical pleasure, historically denied, regulated and repressed in women, is a necessary component in self-discovery” (59). Through Santana’s protagonist, the author demonstrates the inherent nature of a girl’s sexuality and its importance in her coming of age. It negates the notion that a virtuous (virgin) girl is not supposed to think or talk about sex because it is considered a social taboo. The author wishes to erase the socially constructed distinction between a “good” girl and a “bad” girl by suggesting that all girls experience different degrees of sexual desire. Santana joins other Chicana authors in writing the body in her text which proves to be an effective method of gendered communication between Chicanas.

Yolanda is curious of her own sexuality and because the boys’ domain is so different from her own, Yolanda is drawn to their room. She spends countless hours rummaging through their things. She is innocent and intrigued by this masculine world. However, she is abruptly initiated into the world of adult sexuality when she spies her older brother Octavio and a girl having sex in his room. This girl refuses Octavio’s sexual advances, only to have him force himself on her. This scene indeed answers Yolanda’s earlier question, that women are (in the public and private sphere) just bodies or “a convenient hallway for men to pass through.” After he finishes, the girl sobs and tells Octavio that she did not want to have sex and that “you were hurting me” (169). Yolanda is a witness to this and realizes that what she has seen is wrong. While her brother is having sex, she wishes to jump out and reveal herself but she is paralyzed by what she describes as a “perverse fascination” (169). The protagonist feels guilty and sick that by not acting she becomes an accomplice to Octavio’s rape of this girl. At the same time, she identifies with this object of violence and feels as if she has just gone through this traumatic sexual

initiation. “I heard some crying and at first I thought it was me, but then realized it was her, weeping” (169). “My knees were weak and I felt drained, as if I had gone through the whole horrible pain that Octavio’s girl must have felt” (171). This is an important rite of passage for Yolanda because the reality of this sexual initiation stands in sharp contrast to what she has been told about sexual relationships. She feels betrayed by what Eysturoy calls a “framework of omnipresent cultural myths that shroud the reality of patriarchal violence in idealistic romance” (100). The protagonist discovers a conspiracy of two forms of silence: silence in not *denouncing* the “real” facts of life about sex and its negative aspects in violent sexual encounters, and *complicity* in romanticizing and idealizing unrealistic sexual relations (Herrera-Sobek 252). She is disillusioned with the reality of sexual encounters and this ends her fascination with her brother’s room: “it wasn’t fun anymore. Maybe I was better off not knowing too much about a man’s world” (173).

Yolanda’s sexual initiation is thus an initiation into knowledge about herself as a sexual object in society who has been manipulated by a framework of cultural myths. She begins to understand her nascent sexuality via modes of oppression that are unquestioned traditions in her home. Yolanda’s identification with victims of sexual violence enables her to begin to arrive at a resistant gender identity. She recognizes her subordinate position within the household power structure, and though she is not a victim of rape, witnessing the rape reflects the structural trauma of female adolescence. As a *Bildungsroman*, the novel may even imply that Yolanda’s new understanding of violence may be a necessary condition for her passage into Chicana womanhood. Elizabeth Ordóñez perceptively associates the theme of rape dominating Chicana literature with the archetypal Malinche figure when she posits that rape, a

universal trauma for all women becomes exacerbated in the Chicana

experience by those remnants of the collective physical and cultural rape which she carries buried within her collective unconscious. The Chicana's attitude toward her own sexuality must be colored by that original rape by European culture, as well as by the sexual violence which often exists in her immediate personal environment. (328)

Chicana writers have utilized the rape-as-metaphor construct to critique the patriarchal system that oppresses them (Herrera-Sobek 245).<sup>4</sup> The rape scene occurs in Yolanda's brother's room. The geographic space of the deflowering denotes the total encompassing nature of patriarchal rule. The juxtaposition of the nameless girl contrasts sharply to the named brother, Octavio. By the opposition named/nameless, Santana conveys the precarious existence of women; an invisible, powerless minority within a minority. The rape in the narrative can be construed as a political statement underscoring women's physical and emotional vulnerability.

The climax of the novel which coincides with Yolanda's most defining moment in the novel is when she finds Chuy hiding from the cops in a culvert near her house. He had been missing for several weeks after he had assaulted a neighborhood girl. Yolanda feels drawn to the culvert and senses that he is there waiting for her. "All this time I had been waiting for him to come to me, to take me away, not realizing, until now, it was *I* who had to go to him. I knew Chuy was there waiting for me" (247, original emphasis). At this moment the protagonist crosses the threshold into adolescence by leaving behind the fantasy that her big brother will come and save her, but rather, realizes she is the saviour. Her brother is experiencing a post traumatic episode believing "the gooks" are there: "Charlies all over the place" (248) and is violently screaming at Yolanda confusing her with them. Though Yolanda is terrified, she slowly wraps her arms around him, rocks him like a baby and sings him a lullaby. She whispers to him "It's

going to be OK, mi'ijo" (251) until he calms down. Though not a central theme in the novel, Chuy's condition after the war serves as a criticism of not only the Vietnam War but more importantly of the disproportionate numbers of Chicanos that served in it.<sup>5</sup> And while Santana clearly highlights this as an example of the subaltern position of Chicano men in hegemonic American society, she also criticizes the Chicano tradition of assimilation through proud military service and the predominance of warrior masculinity—the drive to claim authentic manhood through aggression in Chicana/o culture.

Yolanda's evolving identity is mirrored by the emerging Women's Movement as well as the Chicana/o Movement. The year 1969 signals Yolanda's passage from preadolescence to adolescence. This time period is also important with regards to the history of the United States. The country itself was evolving, questioning its values, re-shaping itself. It was going through an identity struggle as well which would result in a type of rebirth for the country. These were turbulent but exciting times as well much like for Yolanda. According to Irene I. Blea:

Historically these were loud, angry, and hostile times, times of Vietnam War protests, boycotts of grape and lettuce purchases, demonstrations on College campuses, sit-ins, and pickets. Hippies were singing love and peace songs and wearing flowers in their hair. White youth, women, Asians, Native Americans, blacks, Chicanos and Chicanas were all active at the same time. (13-14)

At no other time were young women and men more active and visible. The nation was ablaze with activity. As stated in the introduction, Santana attempts to fill in some of the historical gaps Guha referred to in his discussion on the subaltern by inserting or writing Chicanos into American history through Yolanda's first person narrative. Therefore, the public world plays a role in Yolanda's development



as she serves as witness and is a part of these events.<sup>6</sup> Her own personal and private experiences become the context which frames or encircles all the other facts about the exterior masculine public world, that of the panoramic vision of the 1960's. In other words, the feminine Chicana discourse encircles the masculine hegemonic discourse placing at the center what is typically marginalized and moves masculine hegemonic discourse to the periphery. Santana does this with the purpose of inscribing Chicana women's voices and presence in this historical American context.

The novel ends with the protagonist commenting on her own self-formation comparing her *bildung* to that of the different phases of the moon:

first a new moon, the sky clean and alone and waiting; then slowly the peek of a silver sickle, preparing itself for the harvest that lay ahead; patiently growing-all in due time-now the half moon, a crisp white boat bobbing gently and tranquilly in a sea of infinite nights and possibilities. Little by little, then, the moon would reveal itself, until finally, slowly, ever so slowly—making a grand entrance as befits Her Majesty—the full moon, regal and victorious and ripe. (260)

Yolanda is aware that she was an innocent girl and that she has grown and matured this past year, yet she is astute enough to realize that there is more to learn, to see, to experience and she is no longer afraid to venture forward into "a sea of infinite nights and possibilities." She is optimistic about her future and happy with the person she is becoming and is confident that she will be a "full moon, regal and victorious and ripe."

In conclusion, the kind of development outlined in the novel is not from ethnicity to Americanization, but does not blindly submit to communal precepts either. Santana maintains a healthy distance from

both closures. Santana carves a space that becomes the meeting ground of several of the dichotomies that define ethnic female identity: the discourses of individualism and solidarity; the realms of the public and the private; and the categories of gender and ethnicity. Stella Bolaki states that challenging the fact that the diverse loyalties of ethnic subjects are mutually exclusive is a political act that serves to multiply the sites of identification and allows people who grow up in the interstices of varying territories to claim a more inclusive and potentially empowering subject position (131). This novel is grounded in the protagonist's conscious exploration of the contradictions between internal and external definitions of the self, between socio-cultural values and gender role expectations and the female self. The narrator/protagonist articulates her own experiential perspectives on her own *bildung* process, and becomes, through the act of articulation, an active agent of her own self-education.

The central theme of the novel is thus Yolanda's articulation of her own growing consciousness of the position as a woman within her socio-cultural context, an understanding that enables her to imagine herself beyond patriarchal confinement. Santana's protagonist gains authenticity and selfhood by openly opposing such entrapment in prescribed female roles and by imagining different ways of being in the world. By shaping and narrating her own *bildung* story, Yolanda claims a subjectivity that subverts essentialist definitions of female and ethnic identity. Thus, the text reinscribes "Americanness" through an attempt to go beyond fixed boundaries, deconstruct oppositions, and fashion borderland and transcultural identities. Patricia Santana's novel is an example of ethnic American writers who continue to revive and sustain the female *Bildungsroman* in new and diverse contexts. It demonstrates the genre's ongoing relevance and expanded capacity of representation for Chicana subaltern subjects.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Jorge Klor de Alva has criticized the practice of using postcolonial theory in a Latin American and American context because the theory originated in a geographic region distinct from the Americas. Nevertheless, Beverly, as a founding member of the Latin American Subaltern Studies group, proposes to “represent subalternity in Latin America in whatever form it takes wherever it appears [...] to find the blank space where it speaks” and encourages other intellectuals to concentrate their efforts on this field (Latin American Subaltern Studies Group 119).

<sup>2</sup>Joan Moore was the first to apply this theory to Mexican Americans in her article titled “Colonialism: The Case of the Mexican Americans.” Many Chicano scholars echoed Moore such as sociologist Tomás Almaguer (“Toward the Study of Chicano Colonialism”) and historian Rudolfo Acuña (*Occupied America*).

<sup>3</sup>Traditionally, the options for Chicanas have included two extremes of the madre santa/wife and the feminist/whore. These essentializing poles have been mitigated by recent theoretical and literary work of such writers as María Herrera-Sobek, Gloria Anzaldúa, Norma Alarcón, Tey Diana Rebolledo, Cherrie Moraga, Sandra Cisneros, and Helena María Viramontes. For a thorough study on this issue see Ana Castillo’s essay in *Massacre of the Dreamers*.

<sup>4</sup>For a study on the structurization of the rape scene in literary works by Chicanas see Maria Herrera Sobek’s article “The Politics of Rape: Sexual Transgression in Chicana Fiction.”

<sup>5</sup>See John Alba Cutler’s article, “Disappeared Men: Chicana/o Authenticity and the American War in Viet Nam” for a study on Chicana/o War literature from the 1980’s to present. This study highlights the absence of Chicana/o characters in canonical American literature dealing with the War in Vietnam and how the Chicana/o war narratives serve as a corrective to this blind spot.

<sup>6</sup>In 1969 Neil Armstrong landed on the moon, thousands marched to Washington, D.C. to protest the Vietnam War, and Woodstock took place. In Santana’s novel, Yolanda recounts her emotions and that of her family’s when they sit glued to the television like every other American family and witness man’s first landing on the moon (118).

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