

*Mexican Immigration and Its Effects on
Families Based on Two of Reyna Grande's
Works*

Roseanne López & Dinora Martínez
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Advisor: Dr. Donaldo W. Urioste

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Significance of Study

- To raise awareness of U.S.-Mexico immigration using two of Reyna Grande's works.
- To demonstrate how a family member's immigration to the United States affects family ties between family members who stay in Mexico.
- To analyze the process of acculturation and assimilation faced by Mexican immigrants when they reach the United States.

Research Questions

1. What are the difficulties faced by Mexican families who emigrated to the United States in the two works of Reyna Grande?
2. What is the effect of a family member's immigration to the United States and their families staying in Mexico?
3. In both works by Grande, how does the father's absence affect family life?

Methods of Study

- The analysis and discussion of two works of Reyna Grande: *The Distance Between Us* (2013) and *Across a Hundred Mountains* (2006).
 - *The Distance Between Us* is a memoir based on the life of the writer, Reyna Grande.
 - *Across a Hundred Mountains* is a fictional story about immigration and the effects it causes on families that stay in their country of residence.

Review of Literature

Immigration: the displacement of one or more individuals to a foreign country with the purpose of settling in it (Real Academia Española).

- **Causes of U.S.-Mexico Immigration:**
 - *Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo (1848):* Mexico yields almost half of its territory to the United States.
 - *The Mexican Revolution (1910-1920):* Civil War in Mexico.
- **Mass Deportations through Border Patrol (1921-1939).**



- **Bracero Program (1942-1964):** A program that recruited mexican workers to work on a temporary basis in the United Stated and thus reduce labor shortages in the country (Durand, Massey & Parrado 518).
- **Strategies to Reduce the Number of Undocumented (1986-1994):**
 - *Operation Wetback (1954):* Deportation of more than one million immigrants (Funderburk).
 - *The Road to the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA)(1986):* Granted amnesty to undocumented residents (Durand, Massey & Parrado 521; Eschbach et al. 38).
 - *Operation Hold-the-Line(1993) in El Paso, Texas.*
 - *Operation Gatekeeper (1994) in San Diego, CA.* (Eschbach et al. 39)



Source: Wordpress



Construction of physical barriers

Separation of Families as a Cause of Immigration

- **Main Reason:** State of poverty in the country of origin.
- **Physical Separation:**
 - The father of the family is the first to emigrate to the United States (Partida 243).
 - When both parents emigrate, the children stay in the care of other family members (Bacallao & Smokowski 56).
- **Emotional Separation:**
 - Family ties are broken.
 - Parents do not have good communication with their children (Bacallao & Smokowski 60).



Acculturation and Assimilation



Source: Khabar

- ***Acculturation*** is a process of transmitting cultural traits from one culture to the other (Jean Piaget).
- In this process an individual who is part of a minority group finds himself affected by the majority culture.
 - Aspects of the majority culture are adapted.
- In the process of ***assimilation*** people in a culture learn to adapt to the ways of the mainstream culture.
 - Loss of one's own culture.

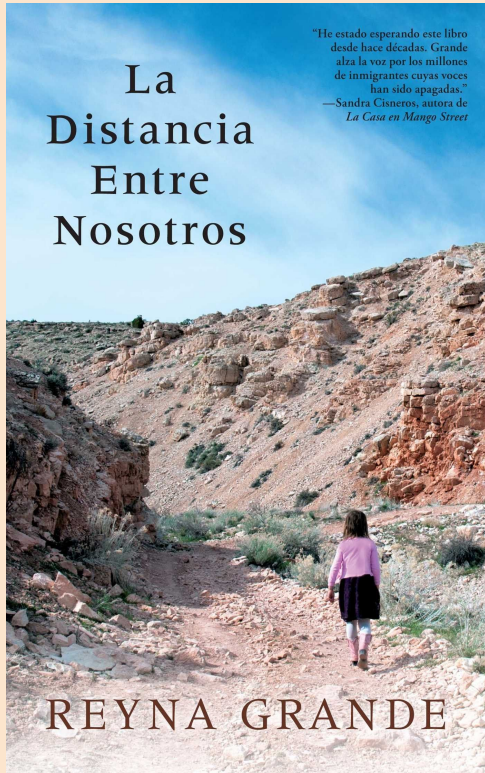
Reyna Grande



Source: NBC News

- Reyna Grande was born on September 7, 1975 in Iguala, Guerrero, Mexico.
- She received a bachelor's degree and a master's degree in creative writing.
- She has written four books: *Across a Hundred Mountains* (2006), *Dancing with Butterflies* (2009), *The Distance Between Us* (2013) & *A Dream Called Home* (2018).
- This last one will be published in October 2018.

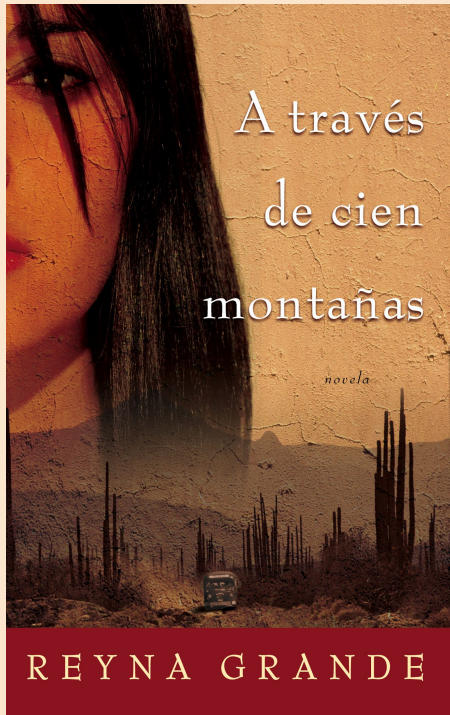
Summary of *The Distance Between Us*



Source: Amazon

- Reyna Grande’s memoir begins at the age of 2 years old until her departure to UCSC in 1996.
- Reyna’s father leaves his wife and three children behind in Mexico and heads to the United States.
- Two years later the mother follows him.
- Grande describes her journey to *el otro lado* and her life in California as an immigrant.
- She also mentions the disintegration of her family and the feeling of abandonment.
- It is important to note that the distance is not only physical but also emotional.

Summary of *Across a Hundred Mountains*



Source: Amazon

- This story focuses on the story of two women: Lupe Garcia and her daughter Juana Garcia also known as Adelina Vazquez.
- Juana Garcia is a twelve-year-old girl who experiences her father's emigration to the United States due to the poverty in which her family lives in Guerrero, Mexico.
- As a result of the father's immigration, Juana and her mother Lupe suffer economic hardships, abuse from the community and a strong feeling of abandonment is originated.

Analysis of *The Distance Between Us*



Carlos, Reyna, Mago and their mother Juana

Source: Coursesite

- Due to the state of poverty in which the Grande family lived in, the father decides to head to *el otro lado* in search of better economic opportunities.
- Two years later, he asks his wife Juana to join him in the United States, and Reyna and her siblings are left under the care of the paternal grandmother, who neglects them.

“By the time the frying pan came our way, there was nothing left. Abuela Evila scooped up spoonfuls of oil she had fried and mixed it in with our beans. “To give it more flavor.” she said (The Distance Between Us 19).

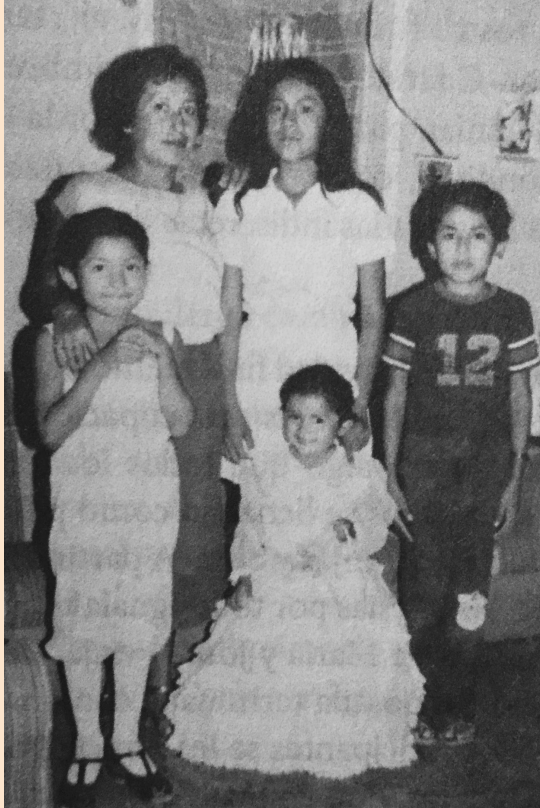
- The hope that their parents will return, soon disappears when they hear that their mother will not return as promised. At the same time the siblings long to be with their father who they have not seen since he left to *el otro lado*.
- Reyna and her siblings experience a sense of abandonment by the community as they make them feel like orphans.

*“The baker’s wife looked at us and said to her husband,
“Mirálas, pobrecitas huerfanitas” (The Distance Between Us 17).*

- For the siblings the most painful thing about the supposed “abandonment” is the yearning to have their parents at their side.
- Mago takes the position to be their *madrecita* for being the older sister.



Reyna a los dos años
Source: Coursesite



Reyna, Mami, Mago, Carlos & Betty in 1984
Source: *The Distance Between Us*

- When Juana returns to Guerrero she is no longer the same mother who emigrated two years ago. Now she was separated from Natalio, the father of her children.
- Juana moves away from her children and does not pay attention to them as she used to. Instead of recovering the lost time with her children, she seeks love in other men and the cycle of neglect the children feel continues to increase.

“Our loyalty and our love wouldn’t be enough. Mami was distant with us, indifferent in many ways. She would look at us, but not really see us. She was looking for something we— her children—could not give her” (The Distance Between Us 87).



Grandmother Chinta
Source: *The Distance Between Us*

- Juana leaves them with her mother, grandmother Chinta, where the siblings find the love and affection they did not receive from the paternal grandmother, or from their mother.

“Abuelita Chinta greeted us with a cup of hot chocolate, which though made with water and not milk, was delicious because she was there at home, waiting for us, asking us about our last day of school” (The Distance Between Us 103).

- The children experience an emotional abandonment on the part of the mother although she is physically with them, they keep hoping their father will come back.

“My mother's memory made me tremble, made me clench my teeth, and my eyes filled with tears” (The Distance Between Us 130)

Iguala, Gro. 26 of December, 1984

Dad, don't get mad when I tell you this, but I can't stand this anymore. I think that when you come back you are going to find me dead and buried because I can't stand this life anymore. Dad, I don't know why you don't love my mom if she hadn't done anything bad. She says you tried to hurt her, but I don't believe that, Dad.

Dad, every moment of my life I think of you. Look at my loneliness. Come. I miss you and cry still for you. Take pity on me. Tell me when you are going to return. Beloved. Come to me as I am suffering. Come to me as I am dying. In this loneliness. In this loneliness...

I love you with all my soul.

Magloria Grande Rodríguez

- The father returns from *el otro lado* but not to stay.
- The father takes his three children to the United States.
- The trip to the United States was not easy. The first two tries, the Border Patrol captured them. It was not until the third attempt were they crossed successfully.
- When they arrive to Los Angeles, California, Mago adopts American culture more than Reyna and hides her Mexican culture to be more accepted by her classmates.

“She was known as ‘Maggie’ everywhere” (The Distance Between Us 210).

“She didn’t hang out with any ESL students. She moved in “better circles” now that she’d gotten a good grasp of the English language (The Distance Between Us 246).

“Unlike me, she had no accent when she spoke English. Now I knew why she was trying to erase Mexico completely” (The Distance Between Us 282).



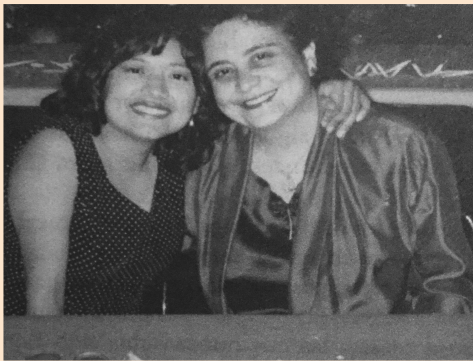
Distance from Iguale to L.A.
Source: Coursesite

- Reyna and her siblings generate a sense of abandonment by the father, both physical and emotional because of his alcoholism and the physical abuse he subjects his children.
- In 1990, the Grande family was able to resolve their immigration status through the IRCA program and Reyna and her siblings were able to attend college and take advantage of other opportunities.
- Reyna was able to overcome the pain she felt, as well as the separation from her family and her struggle in American society through writing.

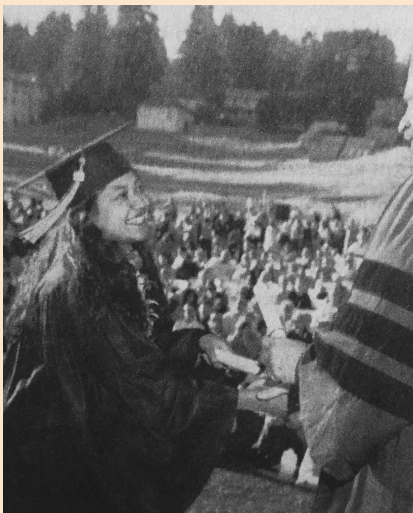


Reyna and family outside of U.S. Consulate in Tijuana finalizing green card applications

Source: *The Distance Between Us*



Reyna and Diana at a scholarship dinner, 1996



Reyna at UCSC graduation, 1999
Source: *The Distance Between Us*

- Dr. Diana Sabas helps Reyna find her identity through Chicano literature and she is the one who encourages her to move forward with her writing and her life.
- Reyna represents the millions of children who are abandoned by their parents, she represents those who are left behind, like herself, her brothers among other relatives.
- In short, immigration is not a phenomenon that only affects one person, but a whole family: Such is the case of the Grande family.

Analysis of *Across a Hundred Mountains*



Source: Association of Organic Consumers

Miguel García is forced to leave his town in Guerrero, Mexico because of the state of poverty that affects him and his family.

- Miguel is a farmer, but it is not enough to support his family. Because of poverty, two of his daughters die.

“It was my fault, Juana. I should have worked harder to get them out of here. I should have worked more hours and little by little have built a better house, closer to the town” (Across a Hundred Mountains 18).

- The feeling of guilt drives Miguel to emigrate to the United States to provide a better quality of life for his family.

“In a few days I'll go to El Otro Lado mija. I'm sorry, but working as a farmer, earning a few pesos a day, is not enough” (Across a Hundred Mountains 27-28).

- Miguel considered that the emigration would be for a short period of time; the necessary time to raise enough money to return to his country.

“Do not think I'll leave for always mija. I'll just go for a little while to make money. I will return as soon as I have money, I promise you” (Across a Hundred Mountains 27-28).

After the emigration of her husband, **Lupe García** becomes the one in charge of providing for her daughter and taking care of the house.

- Lupe does not have the support of her husband's family. As a result, she is sexually and psychologically abused by Don Elías who is a wealthy man of the town. In addition, the people of her community accuse her of being an abandoned woman.

“The things that people say about you, Miguel, are not true. They say you will not write to me. They say you've abandoned me. But I know that is not true” (Across a Hundred Mountains 51).

- As a result of all the injustices suffered, Lupe takes refuge in alcohol, which causes there to be an emotional separation with her daughter. Later, she is imprisoned for murdering Don Elías.

“Lupe was on the ground, with flies dancing around her. Her face was covered with long, dirty hair in desperate need of a good brushing, so tangled and matted. Give me another beer, she told Juana, as she grabbed her arm” (Across a Hundred Mountains 124).

Juana García is also emotionally affected as she felt guilty about her father's emigration to the United States.

“When she felt her face cold again, she knew that Apa had already walked away. She lay in her cot, fighting back her tears. She couldn't help but think that it was her fault Apa was leaving” (Across a Hundred Mountains 36).

- Juana stops attending school because her classmates make fun of her due to her father's absence and as a result she must take care of her mother.

“Well I've heard that your father has forgotten you and your mother. Surely he is looking for a gringa” (Across a Hundred Mountains 69).

- After the imprisonment of the mother, thirteen year old Juana decides to go to *el otro lado* in search of her father because she did not know his whereabouts.



Source: Caracol Radio

- Upon arriving in Tijuana, Juana meets Adelina Vázquez, a prostitute who helps her investigate how to get to *el otro lado*.
- Juana enters the world of prostitution and manages to interact with coyotes, who are people dedicated to crossing undocumented people to *el otro lado*.



- When crossing the border, Juana is captured by immigration agents who deport her to Mexico and destroy her dream of being in *el otro lado* and finding her father.



Source: Telemundo

- Back in Mexico, Juana learns that Adelina was murdered and takes Adelina's birth certificate as her own, so she can cross the border again without problems.

- Adelina, who was Juana in the past, arrives in Los Angeles without money and without knowing anyone. Soon, she adapts to American society and decides to study and learn English.
- At this point, Adelina is still looking for her father Miguel, until she finally finds the coyote who for 16 years knew where the remains of her father were.

"Where is he?" she asked. "Is he well, at least?"

The old man looked at her briefly, but then lowered his gaze once again. "In the middle of the border, at the foot of a boulder, is a large pile of rocks. Your father is buried there (Across a Hundred Mountains 16).

- Finally, Adelina collects the remains of her father and returns to her village to inform her mother that her father had never abandoned them.

Conclusion

- The main cause of immigration is the condition of poverty in Mexico.
- Most immigrants are people from rural areas.
- Principal causes of immigration:
 - Family ties are broken.
 - The feeling of abandonment that occurs in the family members who remain in Mexico after the father emigrates.
- With the emigration of the father to the U.S, there are changes in the family structure of those who remain in Mexico:
 - The mother is in charge of supporting her children.
 - The older brother takes the responsibility of the father and is entrusted with his siblings.

- For undocumented people, immigration is a very difficult process to face since many immigrants perish while crossing the border and miss the opportunity to provide a better life for their family.
- Immigrants who manage to reach *el otro lado* have to adapt to the country by learning the language and the way of life.
- Families who emigrate to the United States suffer from emotional estrangement among their family members and abrupt changes in the parent-child relationship are generated.
- U.S.-Mexico immigration is a major issue in both countries as it continues to affect many Mexican families who wish to have a better life.

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