

Memory, Identity, and Belonging in US Latina Narratives of Displacement and “New Memory”

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Abstract

Drawing on the framework that Ylce Irizarry develops in *Chicana/o and Latina/o Fiction: The New Memory of Latinidad* (2016), this paper explores representations of immigration and exile in two US Latina young-adult novels as narratives of “fracture” and “new memory” (Irizarry 7) that resist migrant narrative paradigms of arrival and assimilation. Julia Álvarez’s *Return to Sender* (2009) and Marjorie Agosín’s *I Lived on Butterfly Hill* (2014) are responses to historical US intervention in Latin America, albeit in distinct contexts, and capture the young female protagonists’ negotiation of identity and belonging after displacement from their native countries and arrival in the Northeastern United States. The characters’ construction of “new memory” is a transnational process that does not entail reclamation of the cultural artifacts and heritage of their parents; rather, the texts depict the creation of novel conceptualizations of identity and home as the characters attempt to make sense of their past and current sociopolitical contexts. Problematizing such notions of identity, belonging, and home is the placelessness that each protagonist experiences—one as an undocumented Mexican girl on the migrant trail who is separated from her deported mother, the other as an eleven-year-old Chilean exile who flees the repression of military dictatorship, leaving behind her parents who remain in hiding. Both texts counteract the representations of migration in hegemonic discourse, and exemplify “[t]he narrative of new memory [that] combines experience, imagination, and agency to tell a new story of one’s identity, culture, or other community defining her or his belonging” (Irizarry 159). As such, they reformulate notions of cultural belonging, contribute to the construction of a new collective memory, and inscribe placelessness and immigration in juvenile literature.