

Małgorzata Martynuska, University of Rzeszów, Poland

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“We are force”: Border Crossings and Intergenerational Trauma in Gabriela Garcia’s *Of Women and Salt* (2021)

ABSTRACT

Gabriela Garcia’s debut novel *Of Women and Salt* (2021) offers an extensive view of Latinx immigration, illustrating how leaving one’s homeland affects not only migrants themselves but also subsequent generations. The article discusses the complexities of remembering, inheriting, and transmitting trauma by exploring the different experiences of Cuban refugees and Salvadoran migrants who cross the U.S.-Mexico border illegally. Secondly, the analysis focuses on the complex themes combining physical and sexual abuse, fractured mother-daughter relationships, drug addiction, and structural violence, which produce or display intergenerational trauma inherited by matrilineal descendants in the Cuban family. Subsequently, the article discusses the issues of undocumented immigration, border crossings, detention, family separation, and deportation, which trigger intrusive memories and function in the novel to express the Salvadoran characters’ individual trauma as well as the collective trauma of other detained migrants. The phrase “We are force” resonates through both intertwining storylines, denoting inherent strength that prevails against traumatic experiences.

KEYWORDS

Cuban refugees; Salvadoran immigrants; intergenerational trauma; collective trauma; border; detention

1. Introduction

Gabriela Garcia’s¹ novel *Of Women and Salt* (2021) tells a multigenerational Cuban family saga intertwining with the story of a lone Salvadoran mother and her daughter. The book’s broad setting combines four countries: El Salvador, Mexico, Cuba, and the American states of Florida and Texas. In a nonlinear narration, the female voices alternate through personal stories that uncover the family history, focusing on matrilineal descendants. The spatial and time shifts,

¹ Gabriela Garcia, a daughter of immigrants from Mexico and Cuba, is a fiction writer and poet. She is the recipient of a Rona Jaffe Foundation Writer’s Award and a Steinbeck Fellowship from San Jose State University. Her first novel *Of Women and Salt* (2021) was named the best book of the year by *The Washington Post*, *The Boston Globe*, and *Harper’s Bazaar*. (Gabriela Garcia’s Biography. Retrieved January 20, 2025, from <https://www.gabrielagarciawriter.com/>).

Małgorzata Martynuska, Instytut Anglistyki, Uniwersytet Rzeszowski, Al. mjr. Kopisto 2B, 35-315 Rzeszów, mmartynuska@ur.edu.pl, <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-5028-5046>



spanning from 1866 to 2019, cumulatively combine into a consistent storyline linking the central female characters. Through twelve chapters, we read about María Isabel, the 19th century cigar roller in Camagüey, her great-granddaughter Dolores in contemporary Cuba, and Dolores's daughter Carmen living with her daughter Jeanette in Miami. The immigration subplot focuses on the Salvadoran characters of Gloria and Ana—a mother and her daughter – who are taken from Miami to a detention center in Texas and then deported to Mexico. The central protagonist, Jeanette, is a contemporary character with connections, often familial, to the novel's other protagonists.

The article discusses the complexities of remembering, inheriting, and transmitting trauma by exploring the different experiences of Cuban refugees and Salvadoran migrants who cross the U.S.-Mexico border illegally. Secondly, the analysis focuses on the complex themes combining physical and sexual abuse, fractured mother-daughter relationships, drug addiction, and structural violence, which produce or display intergenerational trauma inherited by matrilineal descendants in the Cuban family. Subsequently, the article discusses the issues of undocumented immigration, border crossings, detention, family separation, and deportation, which trigger intrusive memories and function in the novel to express the Salvadoran characters' individual trauma.

The realm of trauma studies, situated initially within medicine and psychology, gained significant literary criticism with Cathy Caruth's publication *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (1996) and her essay collection *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (1995). Trauma is related to an overwhelming event that an individual faced in the past and which has particular implications on his/her mental state at present (Craps, 2014, p. 55). The traumatic event, located within a specific cultural and historical context, is often associated with experiences of extreme poverty, war, violence, or displacement from their home country when individuals have to struggle for security and survival (Schick, 2011, p. 1840). Balaev (2008) affirms that the traumatic experience impacts the person's identity formation because his/her response to dramatic events "disrupts previous ideas of an individual's sense of self" (p. 150). Intrusive memories of traumatic events appear suddenly and involuntarily, making the trauma survivor re-experience the distressing occurrence which leads to endless cycles of suffering (Schönfelder, 2013, p. 32).

Trauma studies closely intertwine with the growing recognition of memory studies, defined by Erll (2011) as a "broad convergence field, with contributions from cultural history, social psychology, media archaeology, political psychology, and comparative literature" (p. 1). Returning memories of trauma are frequently incomprehensible, and victims may struggle to articulate them; as Caruth (1995) notes, "The danger of speech, of integration into the narration of memory, may lie not in what it cannot understand, but that it understands too much" (p. 155).

She argues that traumatic memory works irrationally and may destroy the truth because the original experience of trauma may be “losing the precision and the force” (p. 153). The critics of Caruth’s theory place less emphasis on the incomprehensible and unspeakable aspects of trauma (Schönfelder, 2013, p. 31). Pederson (2014) presents an alternative theory claiming that “trauma is memorable and describable”, and the victim’s reluctance to speak of their trauma does not prove that they do not remember it (p. 334). Moreover, the distressing feeling is experienced on individual or collective levels because trauma can both disrupt a community and hold it together (Schönfelder, 2013, p. 40). As an illustration, the cases of the genocide of Native Americans and the slavery of Africans in North America resulted in trauma remembered collectively by individuals sharing a similar ethnic descent (Balaev, 2008, p. 149).

Psychoanalysts and cultural theorists affirm that the effect of trauma can “transcend individual life-spans and continue on as subterranean anxieties” in subsequent generations (Krondorfer, 2016, p. 92). The phenomenon of the apparent transmission of traumatic patterns and memories from a trauma survivor to their descendants is called intergenerational trauma. People who survived historical disasters or went through adverse childhood experiences, such as physical or sexual abuse, emotional neglect, or parental separation, may pass the effects of those traumas to their children or grandchildren (Psychology Today, 2024). Individuals showing symptoms of intergenerational trauma exhibit emotional and psychological consequences of the distressing events the ancestors experienced (Balaev, 2008, p. 154). Those people did not directly go through the trauma themselves, so they do not have flashbacks of intrusive memories. Their stress response to trauma combines physical and mental health issues, which include “a heightened sense of vulnerability and helplessness, depression, suicidality, substance abuse, difficulty with relationships and attachment to others” (APA Dictionary of Psychology, 2023).

Trauma theory and cultural memory studies intersect with literary studies. In the 1990s, trauma theorists developed new approaches to analyzing the impact of difficult histories, with particular attention to how such experiences are remembered and represented in cultural texts (Kennedy, 2020, p. 55). The notion that literature can function as testimony to otherwise inexpressible experiences established a new critical paradigm, one that has been employed, for instance, to convey knowledge about the Holocaust (p. 56). As Erl (2011) notes, literature is capable of vividly representing both individual and collective memory through narrative structures, symbols, and metaphors, thereby producing fictionalized accounts of remembering and forgetting (p. 2). The pattern of memory loss is exemplified in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* by Gabriel García Márquez, particularly in the depiction of Macondo, a town whose inhabitants are afflicted by an insomnia plague that gradually leads to amnesia. Writing within the realm

of magic realism, the author portrays the community's struggle against losing "the name and notion of things" (García Márquez, 1967/1971, p. 28). Rascovsky et al., (2009) argue that García Márquez anticipated, in literary form, a depiction of collective semantic dementia before the condition was formally identified in neurology (p. 2609). Thus, the novel illustrates how literary narratives can both mirror and anticipate scientific understandings of memory, reinforcing the role of fiction as a powerful medium for exploring the complexities of cultural and psychological trauma.

2. Intergenerational trauma and Cuban family

The first chapter establishes the connection between Victor Hugo's words: "We are force" and Cuban characters in the book. The novel begins in 1866 in Camagüey, Cuba, with the story of María Isabel, who works in a cigar factory. Although she endures misogyny from her male supervisors, María feels empowered by the lector's readings of the books: Cirilo Villaverde's iconic novel of Cuban race and class conflict, *Cecilia Valdés*, and Victor Hugo's historical novel, *Les Misérables*. The lector also reads a public letter from Victor Hugo to the workers of Cuba, in which the author asks, "Who are we, weakness?" and answers, "No, we are force" (Garcia, 2021, p. 17). María Isabel receives the copies of *Cecilia Valdés* and *Les Misérables*; the books become her family's inheritance. She marries the lector, but their happiness does not last long, as her husband is killed amid the political and social tensions of the Ten Years' War (1868–1878). María Isabel repeats the sentence "*We are force*" (Garcia, 2021, p. 26) at the moment of giving birth to her baby daughter, which is precisely the time of her husband's execution for alleged crimes against the government. Structural violence, defined by Chuya (2020) as violence "located within the social, political, and economic structure of society" (p. 20), becomes the source of trauma transmitted in subsequent generations of María Isabel's family. She writes a note, "We are force" (Garcia, 2021, p. 150) in her copy of *Les Misérables*, leaving a permanent mark of her struggle against hardships, and this phrase inspires her matrilineal descendants to rebel against the oppressive systems.

The cultural constructs of machismo and marianismo act as both risk and protective factors for oppression in Latinx communities (Zavala & Carabello, 2024, p. 2375). An exaggerated sense of manliness, known as machismo, combined with male dominance, patriarchy, and overdrinking increases the risk of family violence (Chuya, 2020, p. 34; Nolasco, 2022, p. 6). While machismo intrinsically interconnects with domestic abuse, marianismo contributes to the ways Latinx females react to violence. The concept of marianismo reflects the attributes of the Virgin Mary and refers to Latinx women's prime identification as mothers who sacrifice for the sake of their children (García-Leeds & Schneider, 2017, p. 314). The novel illustrates the impact of machismo on Latinx women with the story of María Isabel's great-

granddaughter, Dolores. She faces oppression from a brutal, sexually abusive, and heavy-drinking husband who becomes a threat to her children. Dolores feels empowered by the strong sense of *marianismo*, but her rebellion against *machismo* takes an unexpected turn when she commits the act of premeditated murder of the violent man. Her daughter Carmen watches her father's burning body, and this dramatic experience transitions into her silenced trauma. Dolores's choice to kill her husband and the imperative to silence the trauma create a legacy of suffering, which impacts the next generation of women in the family.

Despite immigrating to Miami and living in a wealthy suburb "among the Cuban elite, the First Wave" (Garcia, 2021, p. 37), Carmen is processing the trauma of violence in her family, which shapes how she performs her own motherhood. The ineffability of her traumatic memories impacts Carmen's relationship with her drug-addicted daughter, Jeanette, and further transcends into Jeanette's inherited trauma. Carmen's daughter silences the trauma of being sexually abused by her father because she believes that revealing the truth would destroy her mother. The Latinx female characters demonstrate a strong commitment to the family, defined as *familismo*, which involves prioritizing "family cohesiveness" over individual needs (Nolasco, 2022, p. 7). As observed by Zavala & Caraballo (2024), *familismo* is the main reason for the victims of domestic violence to remain silent about the abuse (p. 2379). Jeanette experiences trauma in her own home, a supposedly safe location that transforms into a threat-generating place. The novel demonstrates a dual perspective of home through the panther metaphor—the wild animal juxtaposing with the idea of domestic safety. When Carmen investigates violent, wild-animal-like noises from her neighbor's house, she discovers a panther in captivity. Despite the potential danger the panther creates, she does not report her neighbor to Miami Animal Control, confirming that the violence occurring within domestic space is kept out of public view. The panther trope metaphorically informs about the Latinx culture of silencing violence, suggesting that even if she acknowledged her daughter's sexual violation, Carmen would never report it. Silencing the truth about sexual abuse aggravates Jeanette's trauma. As affirmed by Phillips (2015, p. 65), "What makes silence dangerous in the aftermath of violence is that it invites and intensifies trauma".

Carmen and Jeanette's lives inextricably interconnect with the legacy of their ancestors. Jeanette believes that her mother's family history is the genesis of her own self-destruction, so she attempts to redefine her identity by visiting Cuba: "And even as a child, Jeanette understood that another narrative she couldn't access had shaped her life. She didn't have the vocabulary to say, *I want to know who I am, so I need to know who you've been*" (Garcia, 2021, p. 36). Cuba and her mother's past have existed as an imaginary mythology for Jeanette, corresponding with Cuban Americans' myth about the life-altering qualities of the pilgrimage to their ancestral island (Whitefield, 2018). In her grandmother's house in Cuba,

Jeanette finds the copies of *Cecilia Valdés* and *Les Misérables*, which inform about the family legacy; however, the books do not provide a “connective tissue” (Garcia, 2021, p. 140) for Jeanette’s broken relations with Carmen. The trip to Cuba does not meet Jeanette’s expectations because, as she narrates, “There is no Meaning here. Only questions” (Garcia, 2021, p. 140). Wondering whether “loss unspoken becomes an inherited trait” (Garcia, 2021, p. 38), Jeanette refers to the transmission of trauma in her family. María Isabel and her descendants find strength to endure hardship, but they are silencing their individual trauma, which transcends into intergenerational trauma.

The stories of Cuban and Salvadoran families intersect when Jeanette watches the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) authorities taking her Salvadoran neighbor, Gloria, into custody. Jeanette takes care of Gloria’s daughter, Ana, while her mother is transported to the detention center in Texas. Initially, Jeanette provides shelter and support to the girl, but soon, persuaded by Carmen, she reports Ana to the police. Jeanette, an American of Cuban descent with no migratory experience, shows more solidarity with a minor separated from her mother than Carmen, the first-generation Cuban American who received refugee status just after she arrived in the USA. Carmen represents a broader perspective of Cuban Americans² who do not identify with other Latinx, claiming, “we’re not like them, we belong here, we’re political refugees” (Garcia, 2021, pp. 100–101). Jeanette confronts Carmen about her immigration experience and asks: “Do you ever think about how Cubans get all this special treatment, like literally you step on US ground and you have legal status” (Garcia, 2021, p. 36). Jeanette refers to the so-called “wet-foot, dry-foot policy”, which, from 1995 to 2017, granted refugee status to Cubans who managed to reach the American shore. They were then qualified as legal U.S. residents who could eventually apply for citizenship (Florida, 2017). Cubans such as Carmen, who arrived in the aftermath of the Cuban Revolution in the early 1960s, formed a part of the first wave of exiles admitted to the United States for resettlement. Their designation as refugees aligned with U.S. anti-communist propaganda during the Cold War (Duany, 2017), providing the American government with a clear incentive to emphasize repression in Cuba (Brown, 2022). In addition, these early Cuban exiles were predominantly light-skinned (Duany, 1999, p. 76), and their relative ease of acculturation into mainstream American society further contributed to their preferential treatment (Fulger, 2012). The juxtaposition of Cubans’ privileged status with the treatment of Salvadorans underscores the unequal application of U.S. immigration law.

² The Cuban American community is unique from other Latinx immigrants due to various socioeconomic indicators, such as generally higher economic success than other Latinx, strong anti-Communist beliefs, and higher voting participation (Moreno, 2013).

3. Border crossings and Salvadoran immigrants

The novel negotiates the complexities of the U.S. immigration system, highlighting the difference between the legal status of a refugee and an illegal immigrant. These terms cannot be used interchangeably since each has different implications in the legal context. Refugees are individuals forcibly uprooted and escaping oppression in their home countries (Chak, 2018, p. 9); consequently, they are usually treated favorably in comparison with immigrants. However, recognizing Salvadorans as asylum seekers has been politically contentious, given that the United States provided military assistance to the Salvadoran government during the civil war from 1980 to 1990, thereby contributing to the conditions of violence that persist today (Musalo, 2021, p. 184). As a result, Salvadorans are frequently classified as “economic migrants” rather than refugees (Menjívar & Gómez Cervantes, 2018). Furthermore, because many Salvadoran migrants are poor, mestizo individuals from rural backgrounds (Migration Policy Institute), they are overrepresented in public discourse as “illegal immigrants” (Ryo et al., 2025, p. 283) associated with a so-called “border crisis” (Young, 2023).

The hierarchical processes of inclusion and exclusion within the national community are established on the basis of the person’s legal status. Instead of finding a home and safety, the Salvadoran characters of Gloria and Ana face what Brady (2022) calls the “deportation regime” (p. 202), which transforms their legal status by taking away their human rights. The novel showcases the “deportation regime” when the migrants’ individual stories are replaced with Alien Registration Numbers, Gloria is denied the right to a Credible Fear Interview (CFI) and persuaded to sign a Voluntary Departure form, which directly leads to initiation of deportation proceedings. The detention practices developed by the U.S. immigration authorities reflect the concept of “bureaucratic violence”, that is, violence combined with state power, which produces harmful outcomes for vulnerable individuals, making them suffer from “heightened stress, uncertainty, and feelings of hopelessness” (Martinez, 2023, p. 3). The exclusionary policies situate the Salvadoran migrants in a precarious position of liminality in terms of their belonging to the national community. According to Baelev (2008), one of the indicators of trauma is a “re-evaluation of one’s relation to society” (p. 165); thus, Gloria’s distressing situation transcends into trauma.

The case of a Salvadoran mother and her daughter illustrates a significant theme of separating parents and children during the detention procedures. Although this practice had already existed under Barack Obama’s administration, the issue gained widespread attention during the presidency of Donald Trump (Seitz, 2019). Gloria is detained during her daughter’s absence from home, and the experience of separation violates her understanding of the world, leaving her vulnerable and distrustful. In response, she turns to the symbolic certainties offered by the Latinx

culture, especially the significance attributed to birds³. The species of burrowing parrot becomes a metaphor for immigrants' situation in a detention center. Gloria imagines herself as a migrating bird who is "off to do battle at the end of the earth" (Garcia, 2021, p. 49), and who may be killed during the journey, but "Birds fly even if it kills them" (Garcia, 2021, p. 54). This observation means that migrants at detention centers cannot stand their captivity and attempt to achieve freedom despite the danger it involves. Gloria realizes that it is unsafe if migrants are detained for a long time because burrowing parrots "become exasperated and violent if caged for too long. Burrowing parrots need interaction" (Garcia, 2021, p. 48). She hopes she will eventually reunite with Ana because "If you separate two burrowing parrots, in short order the one left behind will die. She will die of loneliness" (Garcia, 2021, p. 48). Ana is ultimately detained as well after Jeannete reports her to the police, and she joins her mother at the facility. Despite this reunion, Gloria remains concerned about the lasting psychological effects of detention on her daughter, fearing that the experience may shape her "into something new and unrecognizable" (Garcia, 2021, p. 84). Ana herself recollects captivity at the detention center as "a jail for mothers, babies" (p. 193), emphasizing that the U.S. authorities imprison even small children.

The migrant's positioning on one or the other side of the border determines their status as a national or a foreigner and if they feel safe or unsafe. As stated by Anzaldúa (1987), "Borders are set up to define the places that are safe, to distinguish *us* from *them*" (p. 7). The mother and her child are repatriated to an unfamiliar place in Mexico where "They'd been dropped off over the border in Mexico instead of flown to El Salvador" (Garcia, 2021, pp. 115–116). The border in the novel functions not only to draw state boundaries but also to exclude, which reaffirms the observations of Cruz and Forman (2024), claiming that the purpose of the border is "more to separate than to demarcate" (p. 138). After the deportation, Gloria is confronted with three options: to travel to El Salvador, to cross the U.S.-Mexico border again, or to remain in Mexico. The novel presents El Salvador as a location of Gloria's traumatic experience, which triggers intrusive memories of "Simmering violence" (Garcia, 2021, p. 62) in the place where "death shadowed" (p. 87). While considering the option of returning to the USA, Gloria experiences the recollections of her previous border crossing, highlighting the magnitude of border deaths: "all those bodies turned skeleton in the desert, all those bodies stacked atop one another in the morgues;" (Garcia, 2021, p. 87). "Border death" is defined by Gombeer et al. (1967/2022) as "the physical death of a person crossing a border, who drowned, suffocated, fell, froze to death, was struck by a vehicle, was shot or got dehydrated,

³ The national bird of El Salvador is the *torogoz* (a turquoise-browed motmot), which embodies the spirit and resilience of the Salvadoran people and fosters their sense of belonging and collective memory (Vasquez, 2024).

at the border” (p. 133). Border death evokes Mbembe’s (2003) concept of “necropolitics” because the increased militarization of the border channels migrants toward perilous alternative routes, which frequently turn into lethal spaces. Gloria’s resignation from the subsequent border crossing confirms the research of Smith et al., (2016) who claim that the bodies of migrants left in the borderlands “strengthen the border” (p. 259), acting as a deterrent for repeated border crossers. Eventually, Gloria and Ana remain in Mexico, where they are foreigners and undocumented immigrants again. Their deportation produces what Brady (2022) calls “a new form of subjectivity” because the Salvadoran migrants find themselves “situated but without state attachments” (p. 198).

Interpersonal memory sharing becomes a process of remembering and narrating the multiple border crossings. Ana has no recollection of her first attempt to cross the border, which occurred when she was a baby, but according to her mother’s version of the story, they were returned to El Salvador by the “government people” (Garcia, 2021, p. 42). Then, her memory triggers reflections on their second border crossing in a car trunk, which she recalls as: “musty and hot, pinpricks for light and air over a piece of cardboard that covered her” (Garcia, 2021, p. 193). The reminiscences of dramatic events from the past appear when Ana feels vulnerable and in despair after her mother’s death. She becomes confused about her real memories and “those instilled by her mother’s stories” (p. 193). Although her narration of different crossings delves into traumatic memories, her recollections are “Somebody else’s story” (p. 193).

Ana’s account of her third border crossing reflects a growing trend for unaccompanied minors to cross the border alone⁴. At the age of thirteen, she exhibits remarkable resilience amid sudden changes in her personal circumstances. While in Mexico, her mother is diagnosed with cancer and dies shortly thereafter. In the aftermath of Gloria’s death, Ana is left confronting an uncertain future and ultimately joins a group of strangers being guided across the border by a smuggler. Rather than emphasizing the financial arrangements, Garcia centers the narration on the emotional toll and perilous journey. To evade detection, the smuggler selects less-patrolled routes and leads the group under the cover of night, when visibility is limited. Ana stands out in the group whose members can locate their homeland in countries like “El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras” (Garcia, 2021, p. 189) because she has no memory of her home country, and her migrant identity has transformed into an exiled one. The border-crossing in Ana’s narration is not a one-way move between two fixed poles but a dangerous journey requiring confrontation with the deadly attributes of the physical environment, confirming the research of

⁴ According to U.S. Customs and Border Protection reports, 15,634 unaccompanied children from Mexico and 16,404 from El Salvador crossed the U.S.-Mexico border in 2014 (Donato & Perez, 2017, p. 116).

Chatterjee et al., (2020) who claim that international border-crossers experience "a high level exposure of death and violence" (p. 324) due to natural obstacles such as mountains and deserts. The life-threatening part of Ana's trip involves crossing the river with the support of tires, which terrifies her because "The mud could swallow them like quicksand if they touched the ground" (Garcia, 2021, p. 190). Extended militarization of the border produces the effect of a "territorialized national space" (Agnew, 2007, p. 401) and transforms the borderlands into a "zone of captivity for asylum seekers" (Martinez, 2023, p. 5). The narration reveals the logistics behind the smuggler's practices and his awareness of the Border Patrol's routines when he keeps the border crossers waiting for a "one-hour window" (Garcia, 2021, p. 191) when the agents change shifts. Finally, Ana manages to reach the country "that made her, expelled her" (p. 193) but experiences confusion due to the unfamiliarity of the Texan borderlands.

The Salvadoran migrant's "journey to statehood" (Agnew, 2007, p. 401) ends in Miami, the place where she spent "the happiest years of her life that she could remember" (Garcia, 2021, p. 193); however, the city fails to provide her with a feeling "of home, a place in the world?" (p. 199). In the novel's last chapter, Ana gets unexpected support from Carmen, whose daughter had died of a drug overdose. This concluding scene offers commentary on motherhood, suggesting that a mother who did not manage to save Jeanette may still save another daughter. Carmen gifts Ana the copy of *Les Misérables* with the 19th-century note "*We are force*" and Jeanette's words "*We are more than we think we are*" (p. 204). Although both *Les Misérables* and *Cecilia Valdés* present narratives of survival that help women transform suffering into a sense of collective endurance, Ana receives Hugo's novel. This choice signals a shift away from confronting the rigid Cuban social structures of race and class embodied by *Cecilia Valdés* toward the broader themes of redemption and overcoming adversity in *Les Misérables*. Carmen's gift is not merely a book, but the suggestion that cycles of trauma can be broken rather than inherited. The book passed across generations in the Cuban family becomes the legacy of the Salvadoran girl. Jeanette's sentence functions as "a cry across time" (Garcia, 2021, p. 204), empowering the matrilineal descendants who endure trauma by providing a framework that enables survival. Just as Villaverde's phrase rallies against oppression, the female characters' actions in *Of Women and Salt* challenge systems that marginalize them. Women's "force" manifests as endurance transmitted across generations, making each one stronger despite displacement and trauma. Ana plans to pass the book to "Someone drawn to stories" (p. 204), another woman with a similar life experience.

4. Conclusion

Of Women and Salt offers an extensive view of the Latinx immigration experience, illustrating how leaving one's homeland affects not only migrants themselves but

also subsequent generations. This aspect of the novel resonates with *Dreaming in Cuban* (1992) by Cristina Garcia. Both novels explore themes of family, migration, and the intergenerational impact of displacement. In their narratives, Gabriela Garcia and Cristina Garcia show how personal experiences, family secrets, and political choices intertwine. The Latinx protagonists' stories in *Of Women and Salt* intersect in a reflection of the broader experience of women who struggle for survival within the home and while crossing the borders. The titular "salt" means all the hardships women endure, from abusive men to structural violence, separation, detention, and deportation. Garcia proves that Latinx do not represent a monolithic identity, and their immigration experiences vary depending on their nationality. The Cuban character of Jeanette tries to establish her identity as attained by inheritance; thus, she represents the concept of ascribed identity. Gloria's Salvadoran character defines the collective identity of undocumented immigrants.

The Cuban plot of the novel explores the complexities of transmitting and displaying intergenerational trauma, while the Salvadoran section investigates the multiple border crossings that intertwine with the process of remembering trauma. The book demonstrates that trauma transcends across generations of matrilineal descendants of the Cuban family through the imperative to silence structural violence and sexual abuse. Furthermore, intergenerational trauma does not appear through the flashbacks of intrusive memories but takes the form of substance abuse and complicated mother-daughter relationships. Traumatic reminiscences are triggered by distressing events that make the migrants extraordinarily vulnerable and helpless. Gloria's intrusive memories reappear after her separation from her daughter during the detention procedures, and Ana's traumatic recollections occur after Gloria's death through the process of interpersonal memory sharing. Contrary to Gloria, whose intrusive memories discourage her from repeating the border crossing, Ana's reminiscences of the stories shared by her mother do not serve as a deterrent to crossing the U.S.-Mexico border again. The motifs of detention, family separation, and deportation function in the novel to express the Salvadoran characters' personal trauma and the collective trauma of other detained migrants. Nonetheless, the Latinx female characters try to leave the past behind while drawing strength from their experiences. The phrase "We are force" resonates through their stories, denoting inherent strength that prevails against traumatic experiences.

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