Translating Nations in a Global Era: Valeria Luiselli´s Approach to the Child Migrant Crisis

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ABSTRACT

American public opinion towards immigration policies and the legal status of Latinx immigrants have been heavily impacted by economic and political tides throughout the twentieth century. While the Trump era has been regarded by many scholars as an inflection point, this research contends that his electoral victory was merely one of the numerous symptoms lying at the heart of a nativist wave that has engulfed the public sphere in various guises for years. In order to carry out this task, I will focus on Valeria Luiselli´s representation of the child migrant crisis during the Obama era in her nonfiction work, *Tell Me How It Ends: An Essay in Forty Questions* (2017). This article examines the way in which Luiselli´s work opens a discursive space revolving around the metaphor of the translation that adopts different layers of meaning related to connectivity. From the smallest elements to more general entities, from human beings to global flows that transcend nation-states, the author not only offers an account that has been marginalized from mainstream media, but she also exposes the threads that connect nations, human beings, political discourses, and legal structures across different times and spaces.

Key words: Latinx, child-migrant, transnational, nativism, literature, translation

American public opinion towards immigration policies and the legal status of Latinx immigrants have been heavily impacted by economic and political tides throughout the twentieth century. Tony Payan (2006) offers an insightful exploration of the evolution of the US-Mexico border divided into four main stages: the frontier period from 1848 to 1929, the customs age from 1920 to 1970, the law enforcement, and the national security era after 9/11. The examination of the latter period raises the question of whether Trump represents a paradigmatic shift or the continuation of the national security phase. While the Trump era has been regarded by many scholars as an inflection point (Bonikowski, 2018, Gantt Shafer, 2017), this research contends that his electoral victory was merely one of the numerous symptoms lying at the heart of a nativist wave that has engulfed the public sphere in various guises for years. In order to carry out this task, I will focus on Valeria Luiselli´s representation of the child-migrant crisis during the Obama era in her nonfiction work, *Tell Me How It Ends: An Essay in Forty Questions* (2017). Within this context, literature provides a privileged mirror in which dominant discourses on nationhood and immigration are reflected and scrutinized.

Tell Me How It Ends is a long essay based on Valeria Luiselli´s work as a legal interpreter for the Mexican and Central American child migrants in 2014. The book stems from the 40 questions unaccompanied children were asked by US Citizenship and Immigration Services. Throughout her book, writing and translation become part of the same phenomenon, as the difficulties inherent in the translation process set in motion a narrative that outlines the complex webs of relations defined by Anzaldúa as the ontology of "interconnectedness" (Anzaldúa, 1987; Anzaldúa & Keating, 2002). The interdependence between bodies unfurls at manifold levels beyond the confines of a self

that cannot be taken as a basic unit, but as a conglomerate of elements: "you're all the different organisms and parasites that live in your body and also the ones that live in a symbiotic relationship to you (...) You're not one single entity. You're a multiple entity" (Anzaldúa qtd. in Keating 158). The author navigates through her own experience as a migrant, turning each of these questions into a narrative in which the essay form fuses with the memoir genre. Even though the title refers to endings, Luiselli's stories draw the reader's attention to the origins, understood as the roots that triggered the crisis.

This article examines the way in which Luiselli's work opens a discursive space revolving around the metaphor of translation that adopts different layers of meaning related to connectivity, including the translation between nations, cultures, and languages, the translation that takes place as a result of experiences being configured into narratives, as well as translation as the outcome of other people's stories being interwoven with our own. From the smallest elements to more general entities, from human beings to global flows that transcend nation-states, Luiselli's research offers an account that has been marginalized from mainstream media, while exposing the threads that link nations, human beings, political discourses, and legal structures across different times and spaces. The centrality of interconnections culminates with the representation of a transnational framework that takes into consideration the complex interplay between local and global forces, summarized by Clara Roman-Odio and Marta Sierra as "glocalizations", which "entail[s] the intensification of processes of reciprocal dependencies that began with the internationalization and transnationalization of global relations" (9).

Except for the final coda, written during Trump's Presidency, *Tell Me How it Ends* unfolds throughout the summer of 2014 in order to shed light on a continuous negotiation between forces that are transnational in character, like global capitalism, neoliberalism, and an international division of labor, on the one hand, and a nativism firmly rooted in colonial hierarchies and structures, on the other. Therefore, even though nationhood has been, in Hernández's words, "radically transformed by global economic forces" (Hernandez 10), nationalist and nativist discourses are not in decline. On the contrary, nativist discourses, as well as anti-Latinx sentiments, have thrived in a context in which the tension between global forces and a nationalist resurgence (Dionne, Ornstein, and Mann 2017) resonate with, and are reflected in, different approaches to spaces closely interwoven with transnational identities.

Translating spaces

Regarding translating spaces, the book is structured around four sections that could be identified as the different stages that child migrants go through from their point of departure: Border, Court, Home and Community. The triggering forces that propel them to flee their home countries indicate that rather than a goal, the US is their only escape from "extreme violence, persecution and coercion by gangs, mental and physical abuse, forced labor, neglect, abandonment. It is not even the American Dream that they pursue, but rather the modest aspiration to wake up from the nightmare into which they were born" (Luiselli 13). Their journey, which in most cases originates in the Northern Triangle (El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras), is haunted by endless dangers that take different shapes: the train known as The Beast, cartel-governed territories, coyotes, and the ominous menace of being raped, kidnapped, and even killed are some of the threats that loom over their way. The tragic fate of thousands of children crossing Mexico has penetrated the social imaginary of Luiselli's home country: "Beyond the terrifying but

abstract statistics, many horror stories have recently tattooed themselves in the collective social conscience in Mexico" (Luiselli 26).

Stories of violence are not only intricately woven in Mexico's social imaginary, but also in what Yajaira Padilla defines as a "Central American transnational imaginary", "marked by memories of war, settlement in the United States, and crossings through Mexico, and in which individual and communal identities are being continuously defined and renegotiated" (151). For immigrants heading northwards, Mexico resembles Gloria Anzaldúa´s portrait of the borderlands as an open wound or "*herida abierta* where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds" (25). Thousands of narratives are lost as immigrants are reduced to "'bones in the dessert'" in a borderlands characterized by Luiselli as a mass grave (Luiselli 29). For those who manage to cross the border, the labyrinthine legal system of the US confronts them with a new obstacle course. Luiselli draws attention to the bleak prospects faced by immigrants in the US: the inhospitable detention centers, Immigration and Custom Enforcement, also referred to as the icebox, as well as the inhumane ways in which migrants are treated are some of the lesser-known dimensions of their trip.

Luiselli describes the answers given by these children during the screening process as "a snapshot of a life that will wait in the dark until maybe someone finds it and decides to make a case" (Luiselli 69). These reports are comprised of a list of answers that are subsequently handed over to lawyers in charge of selecting those cases they believe to have a better chance of succeeding in court. While the outcome for children who find a lawyer is either gaining legal status or deportation, those who do not are automatically sent back to their home countries. Dislocation, national identity, and belonging are three of the main elements that configure these representations. This exposes the construction of identities intrinsically tied to spaces: "identity emerges in relation to spatiality, to the on-going production of places, to the buried and entangled relationship between time and space" (Brady 152). The reference to a snapshot of a life can also be interpreted as Luiselli's project to give expression to immigrant voices, which leads her to simultaneously reflect on the process of turning these instances into stories with ethical underpinnings. In Paul Ricoeur's words, "We tell stories because in the last analysis human lives need and merit being narrated" (*Time and Narrative* 74).

Translating experience into a story

Translation unfolds into a new layer which refers to the reconstruction of life stories out of fragmented answers identified as the traces Luiselli recovers from her interviews. "As the months go by I interview dozens of children. The stories they tell me bleed into each other, get confused with one another, shuffle and mix (...) Each child comes from a different place, a separated life, a distinct set of experiences, but their stories usually follow the same predictable, fucked-up plot" (Luiselli 51). Isolated events are carefully arranged in a plot that revolves around stories in which children's voices intermingle and coalesce with the author's own search for permanent residence in the US. The process of translating their experiences into a narrative resembles a matrioska, a set of figures, each of which contains the next smallest figure, down to the smallest. Departing from the assumption that language is not a transparent reflection of the world, the reality portrayed by Luiselli is mediated by a multiplicity of elements read and interpreted according to the same frames and conventions constituent of narratives. Paul

Ricoeur acknowledges the subtle and powerful ways in which life and narration are closely interwoven.

Simultaneously, since life and narratives belong to separate realms of reality, the process of turning lived experiences into stories involves a substantial transformation—or translation—as isolated events are structured around, and accommodated to, a narrative: "Stories are told and not lived; life is lived and not told" (*A Ricoeur* 425). According to the French philosopher, narratives situate the narrated experiences in the realm of fiction, removing "the story from life as lived and lock[ing] it in the realm of fiction" ("Life" 121). Furthermore, traumatic events like the ones suffered by child migrants cannot be easily captured by narratives in which the imposition of an order, a narrative time, and literary conventions interfere with fragmented memories; in Luiselli's words, "I hear words, spoken in the mouths of children (...) I have to transform them into written words (...) The problem with trying to tell their story is that it has no beginning, no middle, and no end" (2017: 7).

In the same vein, the process of rendering words to recollect traumatic experiences is defined by trauma scholars like Gabriela Stoicea as "some sort of translation" (46). Cathy Caruth, Geoffrey Hartman, and Shoshana Felman also studied the difficulties inherent in the representation of events that have not been fully understood: "the traumatic event, registered rather than experienced (...) seems to have bypassed perception and consciousness, and falls directly into the psyche" (Hartman 537). By bridging the gap between words and traumatic experiences, Luiselli triggers a writing process through which specific memories are transformed into a narrative that in spite of defying all comprehension, allows her to come to terms with the past.

The healing potential of narratives has been widely discussed in psychoanalytic theories, ranging from Freud's "talking cure" to more recent scholars, like Suzette A. Henke's "scriptotherapy", which is "the process of writing out and writing through traumatic experience in the mode of therapeutic re-enactment" (36). Luiselli's storytelling, on the other hand, fulfills two main roles. Besides a cathartic function, her narrative casts light and raises awareness on the traumatic experiences endured by children making their way to the US: "Telling stories doesn´t solve anything, doesn´t reassemble broken lives. But perhaps it is a way of understanding the unthinkable. If a story haunts us, we keep telling it to ourselves, replaying it in silence" (69). Luiselli's reluctance to remain an external and disengaged observer lies at the heart of a dialogic process that identifies her as ultimately responsible for selecting, organizing, making sense, and interpreting the events related: "Narrating a life means becoming the author of one's life. Although one cannot control the events in one's life completely, one has a choice how to interpret the data of one's life and how to act on the basis of that interpretation" (van der Merwe and Gobodo-Madikizela 1). On the other hand, the borders between subject and object become blurred as the author intertwines her own story with those of child migrants, pointing out how manifold narratives fuse and converge in a polyphony that highlights the subtle ways in which human beings are entangled.

Translating nativism into the public sphere

The stress on the polyphony of voices can also be applied to a conception that challenges exclusionary understandings of nationhood. The multiplicity of voices claiming their own right to define and be part of the imaginary community differentiates

Luiselli's notion of nationhood from narrow nationalist discourses, like nativism. These discourses rest on a desired homogeneity and the belief that, in Cas Mudde's words, "states should be inhabited exclusively by members of the native group (`the nation´) and that non-native elements (persons and ideas) are fundamentally threatening to the homogeneous nation-state" (19).

Nativism can be regarded as a fierce reaction, a *whitelash* against the perceived threat that foreign influences pose to national values and ideas. This tension activates "powerful in-group and out-group dynamics" (Bonikowski 111) between those who legitimately belong to the nation and those who do not. Latinx immigrants have historically been perceived as "others" according to the clear-cut division between authentic Americans and foreign menaces deeply rooted in colonial structures and processes like racialization and racial hierarchy. This framework provided the justification for US immigration policies that "generally reflected the desires, interests, and purposes of Americans of European descent, thus resulting in the United States having a very high percentage of Americans of European descent" (Nevins 122).The strategic use of racial and ethnic stereotypes invoked by dominant groups of white Anglo-Saxons, identified as legitimate citizens, reinforced racist narratives criminalizing Latinx immigrants.

In *Citizenship Excess*, Hector Amaya contends that nativism is not a marginal tendency, but "a deep organizing framework in the juridical and economic fields", inasmuch as nativist discourses disseminated in US mainstream media are materialized in political and legal structures (92). Furthermore, *Tell Me How It Ends* echoes the extensive media attention received by the arrival of these children: "Questions, speculations, and opinions flash-flood the news during the days that follow, Who are these children? What will happen to them? Where are the parents? Where will they go next? And why, why did they come to the United States?" (12). Unlike mainstream media, Luiselli´s answers revolve around the perspectives and subjectivities of children who have been dehumanized by the use of labels like "illegal alien" or "illegal immigrant". The deprivation of personhood that stems from the identification of Latinx, in general, and Mexican nationals, in particular, with the prototypical illegal immigrant can be understood as a result of direct exposure to nativist discourses in the US public sphere.

Nativist and anti-Latinx narratives have fluctuated depending on different external factors, like labor and market demand. As Mae Ngai´s *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* observes, in periods of economic expansion with increasing demands for workers, pro-immigration policies have been embraced; conversely, in times of economic recession, immigrants have been dismissed, stigmatized, and even deported. An overview of the history of immigration laws and policies casts light on the bidirectional interplay between the media and the sociocultural and political context. It confirms how media portrayals of immigrants have been heavily impacted by economic and political tides, while simultaneously, mainstream media has contributed to laws and policies.

Regarding the Latinx community, the exponential demographic growth from Latin America and the Caribbean exacerbated nativist approaches that projected negative stereotypes and racist narratives criminalizing them: "Rather than focus on immigrants as economic threats, the most dominant negative characterizations of Mexican immigrants

and of Central and South American immigrants focus on their perceived criminal tendencies" (Brown, Jones, and Becker 119). From the 90s onwards, particularly as a result of the North American Free Trade Agreement, the conflation between Latinx, illegality, and criminality converged with the invasion trope. Moreover, illegal immigration increased dramatically as immigration policies became more restrictive: "Since its formation in the 1920s, the idea that Mexican undocumented immigrants are 'criminals' has continued in public discourse, but in the 1970s a new trope was added: Mexican immigration as an invasion of the United States" (Chavez 28). One of the most exhaustive analyses of Latinx in the media is Otto Santa Ana's *Brown Tide Rising: Metaphors of Latinos in Contemporary American Discourse*, which examines the use of metaphors that refer to Latinx immigrants as floods and tides in over 100 articles by the Los Angeles Times in 1994.

Out of the different political and economic factors that have contributed to the representation of Latinx immigrants within the past decades, 9/11 marked the main inflection point. Immigration was reframed into "a matter of state security" within a new context defined by Payan as the "national security era" (Amaya 73). Even though the attacks had nothing to do with Latin America, terrorism triggered nativist discourses that were crystallized in the militarization of the border, which included the construction of a wall dividing the US from southern neighbors. In the aftermath of 9/11, mainstream media also had a key role in the dissemination of xenophobic attitudes prioritizing protection against a perceived foreign threat over a more democratic and equitable society:

> In the post-9/11 era, this coverage has implicitly and explicitly associated Latino immigration with national security, crime, and cultural change. Indeed, the National Association of Hispanic Journalists (NAHJ) 'Network Brownout 2003' report states that in the year following 9/11, sixty percent of network coverage of Latinos involved crime, terrorism, and illegal immigration. (Branton et al 666)

Anti-Latinx sentiments, along with the proliferation of narratives that criminalized illegal immigration reached a new climax in Trump's era. Eduardo González's article "Stereotypical Depictions of Latino Criminality" focuses on the different ways in which Trump's campaign reactivated racist narratives that reinforced the general perception of Latinx immigrants as criminals: "By reproducing stereotypes of violence, lawlessness, and foreign identity, Latinos in the US often exist in the social imaginary of media and political elites as being legally and culturally incompatible with conventional understandings of US citizenship" (47). Paradoxically, instead of considering the media an ally, Trump's continuous attacks reveal his understanding of mainstream media as another enemy of American values, which suggests the beginning of a new era characterized by a much more complex and nuanced relationship between politics, traditional, and digital media.

Luiselli draws attention to the intricate webs that connect politics, economics, and the media by addressing the salient question of who has the legitimate right to be, to reside, and to belong to the nation. The book denounces how within the logics of nativism, unaccompanied minors fleeing their home countries are no longer regarded as children; their humanity is erased as they "are treated more like carriers of diseases than children" (Luiselli 22). These depictions are consistent with the reluctance on the part of

the US government to ratify the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). One of the cruelest reflections of the dehumanization of migrant children is the Minuteman Project, promoted by vigilantes or volunteers, who internalized nativism and simultaneously externalized it by taking out their shotguns in order to haunt undocumented immigrants: "civilian vigilantes and owners of private ranches go out to hunt undocumented migrants, either as a matter of conviction or merely for sport" (Luiselli 28). The proliferation of vigilante practices is informed by nativist forces fueling citizens to take the law into their own hands, perpetrating violent and criminal acts with no legal liability: "silence on the part of judicial and policymaking bodies in response to vigilante justice indicates assent. The failure of US authorities to meaningfully work against these instances of brutality reinforces the national vision" (Gallegos 1757).

The interplay between nativism, contemporary racialization and racial hierarchies engenders an ethnically, racially, and culturally exclusionary understanding of national membership deeply grounded in colonialist power structures that place nonwhite minorities like Latinx lower at the racial scale. Dynamics of national exclusion and inclusion rely on racial issues that identify a majority group of *white* males as guardians protecting the nation from foreign invaders racialized as nonwhite and, consequently, as "un-American". Racist biases also determines the approach and depictions that mainstream media and pubic opinion project on migrant children, concealing their personhood beneath their legal and racial status: "They will make a racket, they will bring their chaos, their sickness, their dirt, their brownness (...) We wonder if the reactions would be different were all these children of a lighter color: of better, purer breeds, and nationalities. Would they be treated more like people? More like children?" (Luiselli 15). The dehumanization of children cannot be separated from the acceptance of racial hierarchies and white supremacist perspectives that fail to recognize non-white immigrants as subjects of rights.

Translating words into actions

The meaningful ways in which linguistic choices determine our approach to reality is explicitly addressed by the author when she brings to the fore the importance of designating these children as refugees rather than illegal immigrants. Within this framework, language not only reflects, but it also contributes to the dissemination of nativist and racist prejudices and stereotypes: "In the media and much of the official political discourse, the word ‘illegal’ prevails over ‘undocumented’ and the term ‘immigrant’ over ‘refugee’" (Luiselli 44). Since words have referential and representative, as well as performative, functions, the conceptual difference between a refugee and an illegal alien also implies a critical distinction regarding their legal status. Like language, legal status is portrayed as a social construct based on arbitrariness. For example, while Central American children are allowed to apply for humanitarian relief, including asylum or special immigrant juvenile (SIJ) status, Mexicans are excluded from this option due to "voluntary return", which denies them admission to the US, sending them back through an expedited process, unless they are victims of trafficking and persecution (Galli 6).

During one of her first interviews, Luiselli recollects her frustration as she was required to stick to formalities so that in spite of being aware that certain answers would make children more likely to be eligible for humanitarian relief, she was not allowed to intervene in any way: "The interpreters have no control over the type of legal assistance a

child receives. We listen to their stories and note key points in English" (61). Luiselli's lack of control during the screening process is defied through a narrative that allows her to shape how their stories are described, recollected, and imagined. Her inability as an interpreter to alter these children's destinies is channeled into a narrative force that contributes to debates and discussions on migration from a perspective that has been largely underrepresented: "Few narratives have made the effort to turn things around and understand the crisis from the point of view of the children involved" (Luiselli 44).

The humanitarian crisis is examined from angles commonly ignored by mainstream media, leading us to gain a better grasp on immigration issues imbued with political undertones: "Because being aware of what is happening in our era and choosing to do nothing about it has become unacceptable. Because we cannot allow ourselves to go on normalizing horror and violence. Because we can all be held accountable if something happens under our noses and we don't dare even look" (Luiselli 30). As an immigrant waiting for her green card at the time of writing, Luiselli advocates for her right as a noncitizen to engage in, and contribute to, political debates in the public sphere. Her approach can be related to Amaya´s revision of nation-state centered analyses of public sphere theorists like Habermas and Foucault. While their seminal work contended that cultural capital could be converted under certain circumstances into political capital, their theories of interconvertibility between the political, economic, social, and cultural fields were circumscribed to the framework of the citizen (Amaya 49).

Nevertheless, unlike Habermas, Foucault, and Fraser in her early work, both Luiselli and Amaya take into consideration diasporas and transnational subjects underrepresented and traditionally excluded from public sphere theories. Within this context, mainstream media is one of the main components of the cultural realm from which immigrants, in general, and Latinx ones in particular, have been largely ignored: "This muting of minority speech was made possible, and perhaps even predictable, by a majoritarian public sphere that is predetermined by politics, law, and a political economy of media that follows capitalist and ethno-racial principles" (Amaya 86). Even though little scholarly attention has been given to the specific ways in which noncitizens can shape the public sphere, (the) political underpinnings of narratives have been made salient in Latinx literature. More specifically, the borderlands has occupied a central place: "the US-Mexico border (...) becomes a site for ideological, political, and national debate" (Aldama and González 5).

Regarding the immigrant crisis, literary works like Luiselli's offer insightful representations from the perspective of noncitizens like herself and the undocumented minors relegated to the margins of mainstream media. In the same vein, Luiselli's book explores how certain actions within the realm of culture can lead to changes in the political and economic sphere, as literature turns into a channel for noncitizens to address public debates, articulating and giving visibility to their concerns, stories, and preoccupations. Therefore, while mainstream media, legal and economic structures have silenced Latinx voices, literature represents a platform to act on a reality that transcends linguistic, cultural, human, and geopolitical borders. The outcome is an activist narrative that redefines and expands the confines of the public sphere in an increasingly complex and globalized world in which nations cannot be understood as isolated units, but as connected nodes.

Translating Nations

As was previously mentioned, *Tell Me How It Ends* challenges public sphere theories that rely on the nation-state as the basic unit of analysis by outlining the transnational nature of immigration processes like the one deftly examined by Luiselli. The explanatory limitations of national paradigms lead to the reconceptualization of certain phenomena in a transnational era "centered around the necessarily reciprocal position of the US within global networks of exchanges" (Giles 12). Despite the popularization of the "transnational turn" (Robinson, 1998), mainstream media approached the migration crisis as a national security, which prevented them from paying attention to the significant part played by US foreign policy nor to the "multiple ties and interactions linking people and institutions across the borders of nation-states" (Vertovec 447). Luiselli, on the other hand, understands immigration processes within a transnational framework by highlighting the hemispheric dimensions of issues that complicate and transcend national borders and nativist perspectives.

> No one suggests that the causes are deeply embedded in our shared hemispheric history and are therefore not some distant problem in a foreign country that no one can locate on a map, but in fact a transnational problem that includes the United States -not as a distant observer or passive victim that must now deal with thousands of unwanted children arriving at the southern border, but rather as an active historical participant in the circumstances that generated that problem. (85)

Besides casting new light on the immigration crisis, the representation of stories like Manu López´s, one of the children she interviews, personifies the circular movement of the "harvest of empire" (González, 2000). Mass movements of Central Americans heading northwards are merely the effects of decades of military intervention by the US government, which helped financed military juntas and dictatorships in Central America and South America from the 1980s (Schmidt-Camacho 198). Mainstream media, policies, and immigration laws have traditionally been informed by nationalist, specifically nativist perspectives, challenged by Luiselli´s transnational shift. The importance of acknowledging the roots before speculating on possible endings for this crisis resonates throughout this narrative.

Departing from dispassionate historical accounts and nation-state centered analyses, Luiselli focuses on personal accounts that humanize and map the flows and circuits underlying migratory processes like Manu's. International division of labor, neoliberalism, and colonial hierarchies are intimately interwoven in a context in which two opposing forces converge and negotiate, engendering what Andrea Fernández defines, based on Manuel Castell's *The Information Age*, as space of flows—connected to the transnational circuits—and space of place "interpreted as an evasion, as a retreat from the (actually unavoidable) dynamic and change of life. In this reading, place and locality are foci for a form of romanticized escapism from a rapidly changing world, equating place with states and reaction" (55).

Furthermore, Luiselli's account suggests that a failure to acknowledge the dialectical tension between transnational and national insights impedes grasping the Trump phenomenon. The author draws attention to the common ground shared by Obama and Trump's approaches to immigration policies; in spite of the numerous differences

between both administrations, the long history of nativism and the pervasive stereotypes invoked by dominant groups identified as racially and culturally superior paved the way for the intensification of anti-Latinx sentiments within/throughout the past few years. As was previously discussed, a direct result of the demographic increase of the Latinx community reinforced the collective perception of Latinx as both a threat, and an invasion. Luiselli's overview of the immigration crisis during Obama's era reveals how Trump's exacerbated rhetoric is ingrained in the same nativist roots pervading immigration policies from 9/11, when immigration, in Payan's words, started to be regarded as a "national security" issue.

In the final part of the book, the coda written in 2017, the author regrets that writers and scholars were not able to predict Trump´s election: "We should have predicted it, but we did not. I should have foreseen some of it: I am a novelist, which means my mind is trained to read the world as part of a narrative plot, where some events foreshadow others" (110). In hindsight, Luiselli´s account of the immigration crisis demonstrates that while nativist discourses thrived with renewed vigor from Trump's candidacy announcement, they were already present under different guises throughout Obama's era. Obama's administration was in fact responsible for creating a priority juvenile docket in immigration courts for undocumented children which resulted in a significant increase of deportations at a much faster rate. According to Luiselli, "[t]he priority juvenile docket, in sum, was the government´s coldest, cruelest possible answer to the arrival of refugee children (...) In legal terms, it was a backdoor escape to avoid dealing with an impending reality suddenly knocking at the country´s front doors" (41). Moreover, even though Obama approached the influx of child migrants as a humanitarian crisis, he failed to provide effective tools to fortify a legal framework that would secure humanitarian protection. On the contrary, by funding border enforcement in Mexico, Obama displaced the conflict outside of national borders, disregarding the significant part US foreign policies played in migratory movements from Latin America (Galli 5).

Departing from these insistent silences, *Tell Me How It Ends* illustrates how one of Luiselli's greatest achievement is precisely her ability to cast light on the invisible threats connecting a multiplicity of interrelated elements that tend to be overlooked, such as the links between different nations and administrations. While there are conspicuous differences between Obama and Trump with regard to immigration policies, *Tell Me How It Ends* highlights the nativist foundations on which Trump's anti-immigration discourses proliferated. Within Luiselli's framework, Trump does not represent a rupture, but an intensification of a nativist wave that has been overflowing US foreign policies for decades and which can only be grasped through a transnational lens. In the same vein, nationalist tendencies need to be renegotiated in an increasing globalized world through analyses that capture the dialectical tension between national and transnational forces. *Tell Me How It Ends* opens up a discursive space that interfaces and negotiates with other discourses in the public sphere by highlighting the ways in which time (present, past and future), places, and identities converge in the stories recollected by Luiselli.

Conclusion

Unlike the title, Luiselli's essays and stories give visibility to the roots, engaging in a negotiation between the transnational, material, and discursive conditions that led to the child-migrant crisis in 2014. As exemplified in the section titled Community, Luiselli's narrative points towards the construction of alternative spaces that interface,

interact, and ultimately shape the majoritarian public sphere from the point of view of an immigrant, illustrating the ways in which noncitizens can participate in public debates, redefining the country they have chosen to live. Luiselli's choice to write in English, teach at an American University and adopt transnational approaches in national debates can be identified as attempts from the perspective of a noncitizen to contribute to the majoritarian public sphere. The metaphor of the translation invokes notions of "process, fluidity, and evolution" (4) that Nancy Mirabal and Agustín Lao-Montes associated with Latinidades in *Technofuturos. Critical Interventions in Latina/o Studies*. By reassembling the pieces that link human beings, narrative processes, and global flows and imaginaries, Luiselli's narrative replaces borders with a multiplicity of connections captured by the translation metaphor.

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