

DREAMERS VS. REALITY: LATINX (IM)MIGRATION IN BOOKS FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG ADULTS

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ABSTRACT

Given how important it is to expose young readers to several representations of identity and life experiences, and following Rudine Sims Bishop's concept of "Mirrors and Windows" (1990), this paper compares several stories of Latinx (im)migration to the United States, such as Yuyi Morales's picture book *Dreamers*, Elisa Amado's graphic novel *Manuelito*, Margarita Engle's poetry memoir *Enchanted Air*, and Jacqueline Woodson's young adult novel *Harbor Me*. Using Critical Race Theory (CRT), Latino-critical (LatCrit), and Critical Multicultural Analysis as the theoretical framework, the aim of this paper is to analyze the Latinx (im)migration experience portrayed in children's and YA books of different genres, in which the expectations of Latinx (im)migrant characters are contrasted with the reality they encounter in the US.

Keywords: Children's Literature; Young Adult Literature; Latinx; Immigration; Critical Race Theory.

INTRODUCTION

Since its very own formation, the United States has been a country marked by the history of its immigrants. As such, immigration has not only profoundly shaped American culture and its politics, but also migration influxes themselves have been shaped by US policy. Consequently, controversy regarding immigration is also as old as the American migratory background. From the Naturalization Act of 1790 (which would grant naturalization to free white people of good character) to the Immigration Act of 1924 (which set quotas of immigrants from the Eastern Hemisphere and banned all immigration from Asia) to the recent polemics regarding the Trump administration family separation policy (which detained illegal parents/guardians at the US-Mexican border to prosecute and deport them, whereas their children were placed under the supervision of the US Department of Health and Human Services)—immigrants in the US have struggled not only for citizenship, but also for human rights.

The late 20th and early 21st century have highlighted several issues regarding immigration to the US, particularly Latinx undocumented immigration. Attempting to protect children of undocumented immigrants, in 2001 the Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act was proposed but failed to pass the Senate. The DREAM Act introduced a conditional pathway to citizenship to undocumented youths who had completed high school in the United States and wished to attend a US post-secondary institution. After further several unfruitful attempts to pass it, in 2011 President Barack Obama issued the DACA memorandum (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals)—which protected undocumented youths who had entered the US as minors from deportation. By 2017, under the Trump administration, DACA was rescinded, only to be reinstated by decision of the Supreme Court in 2020. Eight months after President Joseph Biden’s inauguration, US special envoy to Haiti Daniel Foote resigned in protest over the deportation of thousands of Haitian migrants. About thirteen thousand Haitians who had fled from devastation caused by an earthquake, as well as from political instability, had camped under a bridge in Del Rio, Texas. Footage of horse-mounted US officers corralling the migrants shocked many, and the incident led even some of those affiliated with the Democratic party to question President Biden on his migrant policies.

What are the effects of these laws on (im)migrant families, and particularly on (im)migrant children? In this new Latinx diaspora, “many people have come to hear the urgent cries of children and families in immigrant communities who have been villainized by politicians, media, and the public” (Rodríguez and Braden 2018, 47). These cries have been reflected and discussed by children’s and young adult (YA) books. Although it has conquered a place in critical literary studies, children’s and YA literature remain neglected (Wolf, Coats, Enciso, and Jenkins 2011), just as multicultural education (Botelho and Rudman 2009) and inclusive books for children and young adults do (Rogers and Soters 1997). Yet, according to Mickenberg and Nel (2011), children’s literature (and I add YA literature as well) can act as an “important vehicle for ideas that challenge the status quo and promote social justice, environmental stewardship, and greater acceptance of differences” (445).

Minority groups, such as BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color), are still underrepresented in US children's and YA books (Nel 2017), as shown also by research by the Cooperative Children's Book Center (CCBC, University Wisconsin Madison), which, since 1994, has released yearly statistics on the diversity of children's books published in the previous year in the US.

Even though the American educational system has historically not been prepared to deal with concepts of 'otherness,' teaching multicultural literature at school can be a powerful practice, since "[p]edagogy can either reinforce the status quo or challenge existing social structures" (Baxley and Boston 2014, 3). In order to challenge power structures, there is a need to have different models in literature (particularly in texts taught in school), in terms of characters and/or stories young people can relate to, since texts are fundamental for their development. With models of representation more akin to their identities, students can improve both their social and educational skills, search for identity through identification and social understanding, as well as grow a political consciousness, and reach and keep academic interest and success (Baxley and Boston 4, 19).

OBJECTIVES AND SELECTION OF PRIMARY BIBLIOGRAPHY

The main goal of this article is to analyze children's and YA books of different genres which portray the Latinx (im)migration experience to the United States, both through the voice of Latinx characters and minority authors. In order to select relevant books, research was conducted on children's books activist platforms, such as Social Justice Books and Diverse Books, and on the independent editorial book site Book Riot.¹ All platforms are concerned with important sociocultural issues, such as fair representation of minorities, voices, and diversity. After careful selection, four titles comprised the corpus: Yuyi Morales's picture book *Dreamers*, Elisa Amado's graphic novel *Manuelito*, Margarita Engle's poetry memoir *Enchanted Air*, and Jacqueline Woodson's YA novel

¹ Please find their websites at: socialjusticebooks.org, diversebooks.org, and bookriot.com.

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Harbor Me. Besides the dialogic potential among these texts, each book was chosen for its portrayal of Latinx (im)migration to young readers for being considered an interesting example of the genre (picture book, graphic novel, poetry memoir, and YA novel, respectively), and for showing how diverse children's and YA literature can be.

Relying on Rudine Sims Bishop's metaphor of "Mirrors and Windows," this article seeks to explore how the Latinx (im)migration experiences represented in these works may contribute to giving voice to Latinx people, work as "mirrors" for Latinx children, and provide "windows" for other children to gain awareness of different realities, life stories and characters.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS OF THE CHOSEN CORPUS

Brief summary of the selected books

For the reader to have a better grasp of the content of each selected text, and to offer a better understanding of the analysis that follows, a brief summary of each will be presented.

Children's picture book *Dreamers* (2018) is both written and illustrated by Mexican artist Yuyi Morales. Through acrylic, ink, photographs, and digital scans of several objects made of different materials, Morales tells her and her son's story of immigration and beginning of a new life in the US. A winner of the Pura Belpré Award (a prize awarded to Latinx writers and/or illustrators for their contribution to the portrayal, affirmation, and celebration of the Latinx culture), the book focuses on issues such as the difficulty of having to speak a different language, the challenges found when arriving and living in a different country, and the dreams of migrants—both before and after their journey.

Manuelito is a 2019 graphic novel by Elisa Amado, a Guatemalan author living in Canada, and illustrator Abraham Urias, born in El Salvador, who fled to the US due to the Salvadoran civil war that devastated the country between 1979 and 1992. With simple yet poignant language, and with realistic and emotional black and white pictures, the book follows the journey of a thirteen-year-old Guatemalan boy: first, as both Guatemalan soldiers and Maras (violent drug cartels) take over his village; later, as

he is sent to the US by his parents, and crosses Mexico with the help of a coyote (a human trafficker); and lastly in his journey of entering and briefly staying in the US. *Manuelito* is the story of how the American dream is closely intertwined with danger and menace for any Guatemalan who tries to flee to the US, particularly children. Margarita Engle is a Cuban American author, winner of several children's and young adult book awards. Her poetry memoir *Enchanted Air* (2015) narrates her and her family's own story, travels, and life between Cuba and the US. Besides going through common child and adolescent phases, this young Los Angeles-born girl (the daughter of a Cuban mother and an American father of Ukrainian ascendance) describes several episodes in the common history of both Cuba and the US, but mostly focuses on how she feels divided between geographical spaces, different landscapes, languages, and cultures. Margarita also reflects on her mother's condition as an immigrant, and on the way she clings onto several cultural artifacts (especially her outdated Cuban passport). In fact, the story takes place before and after the Bay of the Pigs invasion and testifies how both Cuban and American citizens dealt with its consequences.

Harbor Me, the 2018 young adult novel by African American writer Jacqueline Woodson, tells the story of a group of six sixth graders with different learning disabilities and special needs at a New York school, all coming from different racial, ethnic, cultural, and class backgrounds. They become friends as they share personal problems while, during a school activity, they are left reflecting by themselves in a former art classroom. With only a few powerful words, Woodson writes a story about friendship and humanity, while touching upon recurrent issues in American society, such as bullying, racism, liberty and, mostly, the drama of immigration. For instance, through the eyes of the main character and narrator, Hailey, the reader becomes aware of Esteban's (a boy born in the US, whose parents are from the Dominican Republic) family troubles, as his father is arrested by the police for being an illegal immigrant. The group of children are spectators to their friend's fear, until the day Esteban, his mother, and sister suddenly leave for the Dominican Republic without saying goodbye. On a similar note, Tiago, a Puerto Rican boy of the group, also shares his experience of discrimination due to his ethnicity, as he speaks about being mocked for his accent. He

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nevertheless remarks on how lucky he and his family are for being American and not having to live with the constant fear of being deported. This group of six children talking in a classroom can be considered a microcosmos of the US itself, not only as the embodiment of diversity, but also of the contrast between several American foundational myths and reality.

Analysis of the books

I will now move on to the parallel analysis of the books using Critical Race Theory (CRT), Latino-critical Theory (LatCrit), Critical Multicultural Analysis (CMA), and Mirrors and Windows Theory as theoretical frames.

Mirrors and Windows Theory

To face the challenges of underrepresentation mentioned above, and claim the increasingly activist and proactive roles of children's and YA literature, Bishop's 1990 essay "Mirrors, Windows and Sliding Glass Doors" will provide a multicultural theoretical frame for the analysis of the corpus, since it remains relevant even thirty years after its publication (Harris 2007; Brown 2018). Bishop explains the importance for children and adolescents to see themselves reflected in books, view other cultures and experiences, and gain access to different beliefs through varied stories and characters—thus allowing young readers to perceive society differently and take conscious action (Bishop 1990; Harris 2007). The representation of Latinx children's experiences in books allows for them to feel represented and have a voice; other children are also led to feel acquainted with the Latinx (im)migration experience of their peers.

Just as Bishop's theory claims, the four children's and YA books which are the object of this study portray different young people and their (im)migrant identities and backgrounds, with both the good and bad that come with their journeys. These stories and representations not only allow immigrant children to see themselves mirrored in all these characters, they also permit other non-(im)migrant children to look through these windows and take a step inside these sliding glass doors to gain some perspective on the lives of others.

Critical Race Theory (CRT)

The analysis of the corpus applies CRT (Delgado and Stefancic 2017), mainly regarding counter-storytelling—that is, the narration of a story by the ones who actually live it, instead of by the ones in positions of power. According to Delgado and Stefancic, CRT deals with race, racism, and power, while also taking into consideration other aspects of narratives, such as settings, history, interests, emotions, and the unconscious (2017, 18). Despite having started in the field of law, this theory has moved beyond it, to fields such as education, where themes regarding school hierarchy, discipline, and controversies concerning the curricula and multicultural education are debated (Delgado and Stefancic 2017, 20). Even though CRT has several main tenets,² this paper will focus mostly on the one regarding the existence of a unique voice of color (Delgado and Stefancic 2017, 20-22). This concerns the fact that “because of their different histories and experiences with oppression, Black, American Indian, Asian, and Latin writers and thinkers may be able to communicate to their white counterparts matters that the whites are unlikely to know” (Delgado and Stefancic 2017, 22). That is why counter-storytelling is of relevance to the analysis of the selected books for this paper. Not only is it a method which opens a space for telling what is frequently left out (such as the Latinx (im)migrant experience), it is also a tool that challenges stories of power and dominant discourses (such as stories about White characters and their lives) (Solorzano and Yosso 2001, 475). The main functions of counter-storytelling are building community bonds, challenging established belief systems, opening new windows that allow less represented peoples and their experiences to be seen and recognized, and constructing another world through a combination of elements from both the story and reality, therefore allowing for an enrichment of both (Solorzano and

² According to Delgado and Stefancic, CRT’s other tenets are the following: racism is embedded in society; it is difficult to eradicate it because it is not properly acknowledged and because it serves the interests of those in power, namely whites; race is a social construction; racialization changes according to time and the needs of the dominant group.

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Yosso 2001, 475). This supposedly new world could therefore be more aware, conscious and respectful of differences.

All four books analyzed here provide important insights into the subject of (im)migration from Latin American countries to the US. All authors and/or illustrators (Morales, Amado and Urias, Engle, and Woodson) belong to so-called minority groups and all, besides Woodson, have immigrational backgrounds. Even though it is not the aim of this article to debate questions of authenticity and who gets to write about which communities, it is relevant in this regard to analyze CRT's tenet concerning the existence of a unique voice of color. As such, we can acknowledge that all authors come from informed backgrounds and bring an insider perspective on the matters of (im)migration, exclusion, and Otherness to their work. All of them use counter-storytelling, since all stories reflect upon Latinx (im)migration, a subject frequently left out from dominant White discourse.

LatCrit

Latino-critical Theory (LatCrit) is considered to be a branch of CRT which deals with how Latinx people and legal scholars relate to CRT in the US (Gonzalez, Matambanadzo, and Martínez 2021, 1319). It claims that the Latinx identity is complex and diverse, not only in matters of race, ethnicity, culture, religion, and class, but also in terms of language (usually, Latinx (im)migrants are made fun of for their accent and are continuously asked to suppress their language), and immigration/citizenship status (Gonzalez, Matambanadzo, and Martínez 2021, 1326, 1327; Trucios-Haynes 2000, 3). The Latinx identity is often used to refer to people with nationalities and/or ancestry from countries with Hispanic cultures—in the US, Latinx identity is mainly used to refer to Mexicans, Mexican Americans, Puerto Ricans, Cubans, and Cuban Americans, but not exclusively (Gonzalez, Matambanadzo, Martínez 2021, 1318). Anti-subordination is the main value of LatCrit and it “refers to a positionality that challenges practices and policies that by intent or effect enforce the secondary social status of historically oppressed groups” (Gonzalez, Matambanadzo, and Martínez 2021, 1322). Given that all books analyzed here deal with the Latinx (im)migration experience, as told by Latinx

characters and minority authors, it is possible to apply LatCrit, particularly regarding language and issues of immigration/citizenship. Yuyi Morales starts her and her son's story with the symbolic crossing of a bridge from Ciudad Juarez (Mexico) to El Paso (Texas), and later recalls their first times in San Francisco (California). Her son, Kelly, was already an American citizen (because his father was American), but Morales was not. On the first double spread page, she declares to her baby son: "I dreamed of you/ then you appeared./ Together we became/ Amor -/ Love-/ Amor." (4). Right from the beginning there is evidence of the importance of Spanish as her first language and how both Spanish and English became part of both their lives and identities. She goes on telling: "Migrantes,/ you and I./ The sky and the land/ welcomed us in words/ unlike those of/ our ancestors." (10-11). Once more, the relevance of language is underlined by these lines. However, it is important to remember that *Dreamers* is a picture book composed of both words and images. I would argue that probably even more important than the aforementioned lines is the presence in the background of the images of clouds and smoke that create mirror-inverted sentences, such as "Soy something" (meaning "I am something"³) and "Speak English." When the text claims neutrality ("words unlike those"), the image seems to reveal indignation for objectification ("Soy something"), and the claim of suppression of the native language coming from American citizens ("Speak English"). Yuyi and Kelly travel with a backpack full of elements of Mexican culture (note the symbolism of the backpack, which can be perceived as their cultural baggage), that are present throughout the whole book. They are a skeleton from Día de los Muertos, an *ahuízotl* (a mythical creature shaped like a dog), traditional Mexican fabrics and embroidery, and a *harana* (a traditional folk guitar of Vera Cruz). To add to this cultural symbolism, the first time that Yuyi shows up with a bandana with a Mexican print (which she carries until the end of the story) is when she starts to cross the bridge to the US. In the beginning, while still living in Mexico, she does not wear it.

³ My translation.

Once in the US, she finds a public library that changes hers and Kelly's lives forever—she claims that books became their language and allowed their voices to be heard (Morales's first exposure to picture books took place in American public libraries and later she became an author of picture books herself). She ends her story stating "We are stories./ We are two languages./ We are lucha." (30). Even in the end, the importance of language and counter-storytelling are underlined. Looking closely at the jacket of the book, this constant immigrant struggle is also present—according to the angle one inclines the jacket, the character of Morales appears happy (when looked at vertically) or sad (when viewed horizontally), which reveals both sides of the immigrant journey.

Regarding LatCrit applied to *Manuelito*, this graphic novel has both a Spanish and an English version,⁴ which means it is intended for a wider audience. The English version of this book also has several words in both languages from the first pages on, particularly salutations (*Hola*), characters' family names (*Tío, Tía, Abuela*) and proper nouns and nicknames (*Rosita, Domingo, Coco Loco, Adela*). However, it is the concepts of (im)migration and citizenship that draw the attention of the reader. Manuelito's journey from his home country, Guatemala, to Mexico and then to the US evokes all the dangers and perils of a child making this trip almost alone. After crossing Rio Bravo to reach American ground, Manuelito asks the Border Patrol for asylum. The next black and white pictures have no words, as the images speak for themselves—the reader sees Manuelito seated in the back of the border patrol truck and then behind metal bars. "I was put in a jail with lots of other kids" (60), he clarifies later. After this episode, he is temporarily put in the facilities of an organization that teaches English to migrants, but which later closes, since "there was no more money from the new government" (70)—which may be interpreted as a critique to the Trump administration. Following the instructions of the organization's director, Manuelito takes a bus for several days to meet his aunt Adela, who already works in the US. After he lived with her for a while,

⁴ The English version of *Manuelito* was chosen for the corpus of this paper to facilitate linguistic comprehension.

several agents of the United States Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency (ICE) knocked on their door and took them out by storm: “You are illegals! You are going back where you came from! We don’t want you here!” (85). Once again, an image with no words follows—at the bottom of the page is a close-up of only Manuelito’s tearful and scared eyes.

In *Enchanted Air*, the importance of the Spanish language is also evident. The title of the poetry memoir is itself a wordplay in Spanish, something which is clarified twice in the book (10, 144): “Air” means both “air” and “dangerous spirit.” The air seems to be the common element which connects Cuba and the US. If the air, at the beginning of the story when Margarita’s parents meet in Cuba, is “enchanted” (3), in Los Angeles where the family later lives the air is “damaged” (26), and after the Bay of the Pigs invasion it is “poisoned” (137) and “dangerous” (139). The symbolism of air works as a premonition: the once-enchanted air, which brought Margarita’s parents together when Cuba and the US kept good diplomatic relations, became the dangerous spirit that announced the embargo on Cuba and the end of diplomacy between the two countries, as well as the permanent separation from her Cuban relatives. Margarita feels the “in-betweenness” Gloria Anzaldúa theorizes about. Her identity is split into her “two selves” (11). After the Cuban civil revolution, when asked by her classmates “What are you?”, she thinks “It’s a question that requires fractions,/ and I don’t like math./ Do I have to admit/ that I’m half Cuban and half American [...]/? Or am I just entirely American,/ all the fractions left behind/ by immigration from faraway nations?” (43). This feeling of in-betweenness is permanently present and also associated with language: “Living in between two ways/ of speaking/ and hearing/ makes me feel as divided/ as the gaps between/ languages.” (101). Even though Margarita is not an immigrant, her mother is. The girl calls her mother “Mami” and her father “Dad,” which are clear allusions to their native languages and cultural identities. But it is relevant to notice that Margarita starts calling her mother “Mom” the exact moment they are no longer allowed to travel back to Cuba due to the conflict between the two countries. This fact denotes the importance of the travels for her mother, whose cultural and national identity was such a big part of her persona. Margarita declares: “Mami turns into Mom, changing/ before my eyes/

from an ordinary person/ who left her homeland/ believing that she would return/ every year –/ to this strange, in-between-nations/ exile, a lost wanderer” (124). “We think they took my papi” is the opening sentence of Jacqueline Woodson’s YA novel *Harbor Me*. As the plot develops, we learn from Hailey (the main character and narrator of the story) that her classmate Esteban’s father is missing. Esteban’s family comes from the Dominican Republic and both his parents are illegal immigrants in the US. One day, the ICE police arrested his father while he was coming out from work in a factory in Queens and took him to a detention center for illegal immigrants in Florida. Even though Esteban and his sister are American citizens (since they were born in the US), his mother is not and is afraid the police may come after her as well, thus separating both parents from their children. Towards the end of the book, we learn that Esteban’s mother fearfully returns to the Dominican Republic to protect what is left of their family. Another Hispanic character, Tiago, narrates an episode regarding the issue of language: “Once when me and my mom were walking down the block speaking in Spanish, this guy yelled at us, ‘This is America! Speak English!’ But I’m from Puerto Rico, and Puerto Rico is part of the United States of America too, so Spanish should be American, right?” (126). This time the issue is more complex than language as a part of individual identity, as mentioned in the previous books. In *Harbor Me* language is debated as part of the American national identity. The subject here concerns the fact that English is considered by dominant American groups to be the US official language, when there is no official national language at all, and Spanish is spoken by about 42% of residents (Statista 2020). The group of friends question the use of English as the supposed official language, and how detrimental it is for thought-to-be minority groups who speak other languages. (Foreign) language becomes an element of “Othering” and consequent discrimination.

Critical Multicultural Analysis (CMA)

Critical Multicultural Analysis (Rogers and Soters 1997) discusses the importance of a multicultural education through reading, particularly in a country so diversified as the US. When applied to children’s and young adult literature, it targets power relations

present in societies, namely what gets to be published, written and/or illustrated (Rogers and Soters 1997, 101). Since books for youngsters reflect these power relations, CMA is important for questioning both the dominant culture and ideologies of the US society, in order to deconstruct binaries and fight white privilege and the notion of “Otherness” as an inferior category (Rogers and Soters 1997, 101-103). It provides a critical lens on multiculturalism, since it requires an analysis based on historical, sociopolitical, and cultural contexts that have influenced the construction of a work (Rogers & Soters, 1997 101-103). When analyzing a text through CMA, it is important to keep in mind the following aspects: contradictions, construction, and effect. The first concerns how the different meanings in a text are combined to convey a message; the second how the meanings are constructed; and the last how these contradictions may affect people both as individuals and as a society (Rogers and Soters 1997, 108). Botelho and Rudman (2009) consider CMA as a “multi-layered lens” through which one can analyze a children’s text (119). For that they use the center of the lens as the focal point of the story, answering the questions: “Whose point of view? Who sees? Who is observed?” (Botelho and Rudman, 2009 119, 120). Then they analyze the sociocultural processes of the characters [“How is power exercised? Who has agency? Who resists and challenges domination and collusion? Who speaks and who is silenced? Who acts? And who is acted upon? Who waits? What reading subject positions are offered by these texts?” (Botelho and Rudman 2009, 120)]. Finally, the end/closure of the story is the last aspect of the analysis [“How did the writer close the story? What are the assumptions imbedded in this closure? Is the ending ideologically open or closed?”] (Botelho and Rudman 2009, 120). The article will also further focus on these questions to analyze its corpus, since CMA analysis of the texts will allow for a better comprehension of how the Latinx (im)migration experience is one of inferiority, when it should not be considered so.

Applying CMA is also crucial for this analysis, particularly in terms of whose point of view is present, who claims a position of power and what the end of the stories reveal ideologically. In Morales’ *Dreamers*, the story is told through her point of view, one of a Mexican immigrant in the US who at first is both unable and afraid to speak.

In one of the double-spreads, while playing in a public water fountain with her son, one can read “we made lots of mistakes” (13) and one can see a US police officer standing tall and facing Morales. This authority figure represents the country and is in a position of power, whereas she shows up curved and embarrassed, denoting her submission. In *Manuelito* we find a very important point of view: one of a Guatemalan migrant child. Manuelito is never in a position of power—not at the beginning, when his village is taken by soldiers and maras, nor during his journey to the US (when he is taken advantage of by the mischievous coyote and must obey the ones who truly help him), nor when he is in the US with his aunt and is taken away by the ICE police. If children are usually perceived as having no agency and being powerless, migrant children seem to be at even greater risk of that. *Enchanted Air* comes from the perspective of a bilingual Cuban American girl who, even though she is also mocked for not being “completely American” nor “completely Cuban,” is not afraid to use her voice. Engle claims her power when she declares “I do dare to sing/ and that is what matters/ on this island” (8). Later, when one of her teachers accuses her of being ungrateful for Cuba not wanting American citizens in their territory, she argues: “Why should such an ignorant grown-up/ imagine/ that she knows me?” As for *Harbor Me*, the story is told from each of the six children’s point of view and all of them are silenced in some way (for racial, ethnic, language and class reasons). What is relevant to keep in mind is that, in all the four books, the point of view comes from Hispanic (im)migrant characters and that (im)migrant children do not come from a position of power—not only because children rarely do, but also because of their (im)migrant condition. When analyzing the end of each work, it is possible to find some common aspects. *Dreamers*, *Enchanted Air*, and *Harbor Me* all mention dreams. The first claims agency, and citizenship not as national but as a global category [“We are dreamers,/ soñadores of the world./ We are/ Love/ Amor/ Love” (30, 31) and now that the family is in the US, the English word is repeated twice, whereas at the beginning of the book, “Amor” was the repeated word, which may also denote closure and a full circle]. *Enchanted Air* also mentions dreams on a hopeful note. In the closing poem one can read: “Someday, surely I’ll be free/ to return to the island of all my childhood/ dreams.” (185). *Harbor Me* speaks of ancestors’ dreams and

future hopes through the voice of Esteban (recorded by Hailey, since he is no longer in school) reading one of his father's poems sent to him from jail: "We are all the dream come true of the people/ who came before us./ And when he asks, [...]/ Tell him I am free./ Tell him the mountains go on and on/ and where they stop, Pico Duarte's peak points up/like lips/telling God a story" (168, 169). It is meaningful that Pico Duarte is the Dominican Republic's highest geographical point, and here it represents a beacon of hope. By contrast, while the US is mythically purported to be the beacon of hope for immigrants and the rest of the world, this representative immigrant family is forced to return to their home country for the harbor they did not find in the US. The cover of the book—the silhouette of six children against a sunny-golden background illuminating the Statue of Liberty—alludes to the unfulfilled promise of Emma Lazarus's 1883 *The New Colossus* poem ("Here at our sea-washed, sunset gates shall stand/ A mighty woman with a torch, whose flame/ Is the imprisoned lightning, and her name/ Mother of Exiles. From her beacon-hand/ Glows world-wide welcome") and the supposed liberty immigrants could find in the US. However, one can also perceive a sense of hope for the future, represented by the group of children. The end of *Manuelito* is the exception to the hopeful closing tone of the other books. At the beginning of their journey with the coyote, Manuelito and his best friend, Coco Loco, are still full of hopes and dreams. Coco Loco declares joyful: "We'll get rich. It's the USA—the land of everything" (28). As the two boys are locked away in a cement hut by the coyote, Coco Loco starts screaming for help. Afraid of getting into trouble because of all the screaming, the coyote hits and drags Coco Loco out of the hut, and both disappear. Manuelito's friend is nowhere to be found—a repetition of what had happened to Manuelito's Tío Domingo when he was also a child, many years before. The last page of the book reveals Manuelito's thoughts when he is back in Guatemala, to which he had been forced to return: "Are the maras going to kill me now?" (87).

CONCLUSION

Even though children's and YA literature is still perceived as simple and undervalued by many, these four books (*Dreamers*, *Manuelito*, *Enchanted Air*, and *Harbor Me*) clearly

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show that it is possible to discuss important and intricate matters such as Latinx (im)migration with young people in respectful and enriching ways. No matter the genre (picture book, graphic novel, poetry memoir, or YA novel), children's and YA literature are able to portray characters and their life experiences in a dignified way, along with all their historical, social, and cultural backgrounds. This paper wanted to prove that it is possible not only to use children's and YA books as primary bibliography to discuss complex matters, but also to show that these books have the capacity to act as "windows and mirrors," allowing for children and young adults to see themselves represented and to have a grasp of other people's experiences. According to Sciorba, Hernandez and Barton, "alternative perspectives about (im)migration can enter into and transform the minds of young audiences. Children's literature about Mexico-US (im)migration [...] has the potential to raise children's level of consciousness above that of the people making everyday decisions and enacting policies that dehumanize human beings" (15).

It is possible to find parallels among these books, especially concerning what surrounds Latinx (im)migration to the US, which makes it a shared journey. *Dreamers* and *Manuelito* both speak of crossing bridges and the act of crossing Mexico to the US. *Enchanted Air* and *Dreamers* talk about immigrants as wanderers and *caminantes*, respectively. *Manuelito* opens with an introductory note on immigrant people and refugees:

Sixty million people around the world become refugees every year. Half of them are under 18 years of age. [...] It is happening in North America. Over 200,000 unaccompanied minors from the Northern Triangle of Central America [...] have made the very dangerous trip across Mexico [...] in the hope of finding safety and refuge in the United States." (1)

Enchanted Air is dedicated to "the estimated ten million people who are currently stateless as the result of conflicts all over the world" (dedication). That is why it is so important to help giving voice to (im)migrants, through their own counter-storytelling, which deals with issues of language, immigration and/or citizenship—especially when these narratives are told from the point of view of (im)migrant characters, particularly (im)migrant children full of dreams. Lastly, every single one of the four analyzed works

speaks of the US as the land of dreams for all, and of the bleak reality of it harboring far fewer (im)migrants than promised.

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