UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, LOS ANGELES

THE MEXICAN IMMIGRANT EXPERIENCE IN HISTORY, NANOTEXTS AND NODES

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO
THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE DEGREE OF BACHELOR OF ARTS

BY
JEANELLE DOMENIQUE HORCASITAS

ADVISOR: MARISSA LÓPEZ

LOS ANGELES, CA

MARCH 18, 2013
ABSTRACT

THE MEXICAN IMMIGRANT EXPERIENCE IN HISTORY, NANOTEXTS AND NODES

By Jeanelle Domenique Horcasitas

In my thesis I explore the following three texts: *The Adventures of Don Chipote*, *Lunar Braceros 2125-2148*, and *Sleep Dealer*. I analyze how the Mexican immigrant experience is connected and distinct in each text, particularly through a historical and science fiction perspective. I demonstrate how the Mexican immigrant must leave his/her homeland in attempt to gain a stronger sense of identity in a new world. However, during their migrating experience they encounter physical, economic, communicative, and technological barriers that prevent them from obtaining the identity they desire. Moreover, once they have migrated to the new land and must work as cheap labor, they are completely removed from any type of identity they possessed because their jobs dehumanize them through exploitation and technology. In the end, the Mexican immigrant either fails or is successful in obtaining the identity he/she wants through the experiences and interrelationships he/she has gained from the other land. Regardless of what they accomplished, these characters determine their own success when overcoming obstacles, and establish an individual and communal identity from their experiences. My thesis reveals how the Mexican immigrant gains valuable knowledge from his/her experience to become important figures recognized in society.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

MEXICAN IMMIGRATION THROUGHOUT HISTORY AND LITERATURE........ 1-7
CROSSING OVER NEW BARRIERS AND OBSTACLES.............................. 8-34
LABORERS, LUNAR BRACEROS AND SLEEP DEALERS ......................... 35-57
TRANSFORMING THE MEXICAN IMMIGRANT IDENTITY ...................... 58-61
WORKS CITED .............................................................................. 61-64
SCENES FROM SLEEP DEALER

COURTESY OF SLEEPDEALER.COM

Memo working as a Sleep Dealer

The Sleep Dealer Factory

Memo’s Sleep Dealer equipment

Memo working as a Sleep Dealer #2

Luz sharing her memories of Memo on TruNode

Memo’s robotic counterpart working in the United States
ILLUSTRATIONS FROM *LUNAR BRACEROS 2125-2148*

ILLUSTRATIONS BY MARIO A. CHACON

Cover for *Lunar Braceros 2125-2148*

Children playing on the Reservation (pg.17)

Lydia and Frank discover corpses in the containers (pg. 10)

Lydia and fellow Tecos escape the moon (pg.108)
MEXICAN IMMIGRATION THROUGHOUT HISTORY AND LITERATURE

Don Chipote found himself in this city—where thousands of Mexican *braceros* come with the hope of putting an end to the anguish they have suffered back home—a city where so many proletarians have found protection against the persecution of Mexico’s ruling party—in the company of other countrymen expatriated in the shame of not being able to make a living in their own land—who, lured by the luster of the dollar, abandoned their own land to come to suffer even greater hardship. ¹

Daniel Venegas, *The Adventures of Don Chipote* (43)

Daniel Venegas’ fictional character Don Chipote is a Mexican immigrant from the early 20th century. When he sets off on his journey to the U.S. he sacrifices everything in order to make it to this thriving country. However, when he arrives in the U.S. he quickly learns that all of the tall-tales told by fellow Mexican immigrants had been lies. During Don Chipote’s time in the U.S., he does not find success, wealth or happiness. Instead, he endures great challenges that prevent him from achieving the life he thought he could get by travelling to America. Don Chipote is just one of many Mexican immigrants who learned about the harsh realities of being in the United States. Initially, Mexican immigrants leave their home country to achieve a better life for themselves in the United States. They hope to improve themselves as an individual and return to their country and contribute to their community. However, there are many factors in the U.S. that prevent the Mexican immigrant from achieving this goal.

¹ En esta población, en donde miles de braceros mexicanos llegan con la esperanza de poner término a la miseria sufrida y en donde tanto político ha encontrado amparo contra las persecuciones del partido triunfante, fue donde se encontró don Chipote en compañía de los otros compatriotas que eran arrojados por la desgracia de no poder vivir en su propia tierra, que engañados por el brillo del dólar, la abandonaban para venir a sufrir más (Venegas 34).
In my thesis, I will explore the following three texts: *The Adventures of Don Chipote*, *Lunar Braceros 2125-2148*, and *Sleep Dealer*. My objective is to analyze how these texts portray the Mexican immigrant’s obstacles and struggles during the 20th century and the future. My analysis begins with barriers. Mexican immigrants must endure far more than the typical physical barrier created by the border. They must endure and overcome abstract barriers as well, such as: economic, communicative and technological. These barriers are constantly placed in the Mexican immigrant’s path to derail him/her from the path to self-discovery and understanding. As a result, the Mexican immigrant must remove himself/herself from these barriers in order to form their own identities, which they may or may not do within the United States.

My second section explores another important aspect of the Mexican immigrant experience: labor. Labor is an extremely significant component of each text because the Mexican immigrant is necessary as a source of cheap labor. Although the characters in each text begin their journeys hoping that their jobs will help them gain the identity and life they desire, in reality they are more harmful than helpful. These three texts illustrate how labor dehumanizes the Mexican immigrant through the work itself, exploitation and technology. Ultimately, these factors all prevent the Mexican immigrant from gaining a better sense of who they are because they are constantly identified by people or things based upon what they want them to be, and not who they truly are. Technology also plays a huge factor in each text because it consumes and objectifies the Mexican immigrant and makes him/her completely inhuman. Thus, the characters in these texts must also fight to regain their human identity after technology completely takes control over them.

For centuries the United States has been the landing-place for immigrants hailing from all over the world. Many times, the motivation behind an immigrant leaving his/her country is the
result of: political exile, economic strife, violence/war, and most importantly, the opportunity to pursue the “American Dream” in order to create a better life for themselves and their families. During the 20th century, in the midst of the Mexican Revolution, many Mexicans had no other choice but to immigrate to the United States in hopes of escaping the clutches of President Porfirio Díaz. At the turn of the century, an unguarded border welcomed more than one million Mexican laborers into the United States (Healey). Moreover, even illegal immigrants that were caught were only asked to pay $18 and were allowed to enter legally (Healey). At first, Mexicans were welcomed with open arms into the United States because they provided cheap labor to many of the grueling jobs that Americans did not want. According to Mark Healey the “U.S. welcomed Mexican immigrants as temporary workers, not permanent citizens.” While Mexican immigrants suffered backbreaking labor, they also encountered racism and injustice. The harsh reality that they were “temporary workers” became painfully clear when the Great Depression hit in the 1930s.

Accused of “stealing” jobs from the Americans, animosity grew towards the Mexican immigrants, including their children who many times were citizens of the United States. According to Fernando Saúl Alanís Enciso, “Between 1930 and 1934, unemployment, hunger, deportations, raids, and antiforeigner sentiment led to an unprecedented population movement of men and women from the United States to Mexico” (51). It was not until the 1940s that Mexican immigrants were once again welcomed back into the United States, but only as temporary workers. During 1942-1964, Mexico and the U.S. agreed to contract “guest” workers, or braceros to work. According to Michael Snodgrass, “More than 4.6 million bracero contracts were issued, making it the largest importation of foreign labor in U.S. history” (79). However, this program was short-lived once the United States enacted harsher immigration policies during
the 1960s-1980s. According to Oscar J. Martínez, the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) arrested 161,608 undocumented immigrants in 1967, a number which increased over the years and more than tripled by 1972 (110-111). From this historical documentation, it is clear that there has been about a century of back-and-forth movement and controversy surrounding the Mexican immigrant’s status in the United States. Even in the 21st century, there are still on-going questions and issues revolving around Mexican immigration and how their presence affects the country as a whole.

In 2011, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) reported record numbers for deportation. DHS made a total of 642,000 arrests, with 76% of those being natives from Mexico (Simanski and Sapp 1). From this data it is clear that a large amount of Mexican immigrants are struggling to pursue a better life in the U.S., but are simply sent back to their country because they are undocumented citizens. Although Mexican immigrants may have lived in the U.S. for many years, without proper documentation they are automatically sent back without even being considered for their contributions to the United States. Despite the historical, statistical and political data, what is often left out of the conversation is what the immigrants want to gain from their experiences in the U.S. Oftentimes they are searching for a greater purpose in their life and for their communities. Their stories are often left out of the larger political and historical conversations, but literature offers the Mexican immigrant’s perspective on their journey, their struggles, and their success in the United States.

While there have been many novels written about the typical Mexican immigrant story, there has been an emergence of science-fiction novels and films that explore what the world may be like for immigrants in the near future. *The Cambridge Companion: Science Fiction* defines this genre as “the genre which differed from the world in order to advocate for a better one—or
the genre which spiraled at heel the sensationalist virtual reality world we will now arguably inhabit till the planet dies” (James and Mendlesohn 65). Additionally, SF writers have the imaginative capabilities to create worlds where current social issues have been resolved; or predict a future where the issues have been magnified and transformed into a dystopia (James and Mendlesohn 253). *Lunar Braceros* and *Sleep Dealer* represent the Mexican immigrant in the futuristic worlds they create, and how their experiences may have changed or remained the same. While these texts present a vastly different view of the Mexican immigrant experience, they connect very closely with many of the issues found in the more historical text: *The Adventures of Don Chipote*.

*The Adventures of Don Chipote*, by Daniel Venegas was originally written in Spanish and published during the 1920s. This text is one of the first to truly capture the hardships and struggles of the Mexican immigrant during the early 20th century. This novel has served as an important literary work about immigration history in the United States. *The Adventures of Don Chipote* tells the story of Don Chipote de Jesús María Domínguez, a poor farmer from Mexico persuaded into leaving his country in pursuit of the riches and abundance of jobs that he thinks await him in the United States. However, after the long struggle just to get across the border, once he is finally in the United States he is hurled into a world of poverty, hard labor, dehumanization and disappointment. After months of suffering in the U.S., Don Chipote is discovered by government officials and deported back to Mexico.

*Lunar Braceros 2125-2148* by Rosaura Sánchez and Beatrice Pita, tells the tale of Lydia and her friends during the 22nd century in a series of fragmented technological memoirs. In the technological memoirs she leaves for her son Pedro, she tells the story of the current state of the U.S., which has broken off into quasi-states, hers being the state of Cali-Texas (a combination of
northern Mexican States and U.S. Southwest states). The majority of her story is about her transition from the prison-like Reservations and journey to the Moon to work as a Teco worker. When she discovers being a Teco worker turns out to be a death-sentence, she and the other Teco workers team-up to overthrow the system, and successfully make it back to the United States. When they return to Earth they organize and continue to fight against their oppressive government in hopes to improve their communities.

The film *Sleep Dealer*, directed by Alex Rivera, tells the story of Memo Cruz, a young man living in a small rural village in Mexico. In this futuristic world, a large dam-border separates Mexico from the United States, and the only way to get through is by getting “connected” and becoming a Sleep Dealer. Getting connected means inserting metal nodes into one’s nervous system throughout the body in order to be connected to this “global economy.” A Sleep Dealer is still considered an “illegal” immigrant because they have the ability to virtually “cross” over and work for employers in the United States without documentation. However, the Sleep Dealer never physically enters the U.S. In a turn of events, Memo leaves his small village to become a Sleep Dealer. During his journey he learns the consequences of “getting connected” and in the end stops being a Sleep Dealer. After he decides to stop being a Sleep Dealer, Memo is able to impact his community in a significant way after he has the border-dam blown up.

In my thesis I highlight how these three texts reflect the Mexican immigrant’s desire for a different life, and how they must leave their homeland in hopes of gaining a stronger sense of identity in a new world. However, during their migrating experience they encounter physical, economic, communicative, and technological barriers that prevent them from obtaining the identity they desire. Moreover, once they have migrated to the new land and must work as cheap labor, they are completely removed from any type of identity they possessed because their jobs
dehumanize them through exploitation and technology. In the end, the Mexican immigrants either fail or are successful in obtaining the identity they want through the experiences and interrelationships they have gained from the other land. Regardless of what they have accomplished, these characters determine their own success when overcoming obstacles. Finally, from their experiences they are able to establish an individual and communal identity.
CROSSING OVER NEW BARRIERS AND OBSTACLES

One of the greatest challenges between the United States and Mexico is the border that divides them. Despite the significance of the border, Mexican immigrants have been crossing over for decades with or without the consent of U.S. officials. While the issue of illegal immigration has been an on-going political conversation, there are many periods in history when Mexican immigrants were welcomed into the U.S. However, historical documentation demonstrates that Mexican immigrants were welcomed primarily because they provided cheap labor. Additionally, they were often easy targets to blame when economic hardships hit such as the Great Depression. According to Juan Gómez-Quiñones and David R. Maciel, a few of the reasons why the border has been guarded against “illegal aliens” are because: millions of undocumented Mexicans pose a threat to the U.S., they take away the jobs available to U.S. citizens, they are a burden to the public due to their lack of public, social, educational, and medical needs, and they undermine the wage rates and union efforts (45). Furthermore, Mexican immigrants have been prevented from entering the U.S. due to the prejudice view that they are “dirty” and carry diseases such as Typhus fever.

In the beginning of the 20th century, Mexican immigrants who wanted to cross the border were forced to be bathed and examined by the U.S. Public Health Service, and after being approved, they would be branded on their arm with indelible (permanent) ink stating “ADMITTED” (Stern 57). This is what is known as the “eugenic gatekeeping” that the U.S.-Mexican border heavily enforced throughout the 20th century. Eugenic gatekeeping allowed health officials to conduct embarrassing and degrading examinations of Mexican immigrants that were trying to cross the border. Alexandra Stern explains that, “The quarantine hardened the boundary line between Mexico and the United Stated, facilitated the creation of the Border
Patrol, and fostered scientific and popular prejudices about biological inferiority of Mexicans” (59). Historical texts such as these reflect the discrimination Mexican immigrants encountered when crossing the physical border, which proved especially challenging because of the false assumptions made about them in regards to stealing jobs and carrying diseases. In contrast to the historical stories told about Mexican immigrants crossing the physical border, literature explores the additional barriers they encountered. Mexican immigrants are confronted with barriers that are both concrete and abstract, which interfere with obtaining their ultimate goal: to find themselves in a new country. In *The Adventures of Don Chipote*, *Lunar Braceros 2125-2148*, and *Sleep Dealer*, the protagonists in these texts encounter physical, economic, communicative and technological barriers that prevent them from establishing their individual and communal identity.

In Venegas’ *The Adventures of Don Chipote*, Don Chipote is wrongly identified by U.S. officials based upon their pre-conceived notions about border-towns such as Ciudad Juárez. Although Don Chipote is originally from a rural part of Mexico, he must go to Ciudad Juárez in order to cross over into the U.S. Once he gets there, U.S. officials assume he is the embodiment of this corrupted border-town. The narrator describes the negative aspects of Ciudad Juárez:

> Ciudad Juárez, one of the largest border crossings in Mexico, is without a doubt one of the greatest centers of movement and one of the greatest centers of perversion as well. It is for this reason that the Americans, stranger to our country’s interior, have formed such a negative image of us. It is there that drunkards from El Paso go, lusting for a drink to ease their craving, to escape the prohibitionist laws. Prostitution, so persecuted yet so sought
after in El Paso, has its own district in Juárez. So then, if there are no real industries to be found there, there are the *cantinas*, casinos, and brothels.\(^2\) (Venegas 34)

This excerpt demonstrates the false assumptions Americans made about Mexican immigrants coming from the border-town, regardless of whether they were actually from there or not. The narrator negatively describes the town to convey how it has created the common misconceptions about Mexicans, and as a result, imposed an undesirable identity upon the Mexican immigrant, such as Don Chipote. The Ciudad Juárez border-town is marked as a locus for “movement” and “perversion.” The word “movement,” represents the act of immigration, the constant back and forth movement between the U.S. and Mexico. Ciudad Juárez’s movement embodies the Mexican immigrant, thus implying that he/she is a representation of the corrupt town as well. The narrator’s use of the word “perversion” demonstrates the misunderstandings made about the Mexican immigrant based upon their temporary stop in Ciudad Juárez. Therefore, the Mexican immigrants innocently passing through Ciudad Juárez are manipulated and perverted by the corrupted institutions that inhabit it. Mexican immigrants are not identified based on who they are; they are judged based upon where they come from, in this case the border-town. Not only does this text illustrate the negative perceptions of the border-towns, but historically, Mario T. García explains, “Mexican bordertowns, rather than becoming more civilized, had become barbaric” (94). Therefore, border-towns such as Ciudad Juárez encompass these prejudice views

\(^2\) Ciudad Juárez, una de las principales aduanas con que cuenta la República Mexicana, es sin disputa uno de los centros de mayor movimiento, pero también uno de los lugares de mayor perversión y es por esto que los Americanos, desconocedores del interior de nuestro país, se forman un mal concepto de nostros. Es allí donde los borrachos que viven en El Paso y que por las leyes prohibicionistas están desesesos de trago, van a calmar s used. La prostitución que es tan perseguida y castigada en El Paso, ha hecho su cuartel general en Juárez. De modo que allí, si no se encuentran industrias, se hallan cantinas, casas de juego y casa públicas (Venegas 25).
simply because the city itself is what tarnishes the reputation of Mexico and trickles down to the Mexican immigrant’s identity as a whole.

In *The Adventures of Don Chipote*, Ciudad Juárez highlights some of the negative identifications possible for a Mexican immigrant: a gambler, a drunk, a prostitute, or a thief. These types of people suggest that the border-town privileges the scum of Mexico,welcomeing the worst of the worst. The “drunkards from El Paso,” seek this town as a place of refuge to satiate their alcoholic needs, which demonstrates that this town is also a dwelling for prohibited items and lawlessness. In fact, García states that Mexicans were most often accused of: thievery, delinquency, and uncleanliness (96). Therefore, this image reaffirms the false assumption that a Mexican was an individual who wanted to break the law from the start and posed as a threat to the lawful American society. Moreover, prostitution conveyed Mexicans as people willing to buy another person’s body for sex, or willing to sell one’s body for sex. These two examples illustrate that the corruption of these particular Mexican men and women were reflections of Mexico as a whole because it was the only part of Mexico that the U.S. was fully exposed to, simply because it was closest to the border. Therefore, Americans often misinterpreted the perversion and corruption of the border-town as a direct reflection of the Mexican.

When Don Chipote enters Ciudad Juárez he is misrepresented based on the U.S.’s negative perceptions of the border-town and Mexico as a whole, and as a result, he is prevented from entering into the U.S., even after he is “cleansed”:

Not satisfied with merely impeding Don Chipote’s passage, the officer took note of Don Chipote’s grimy appearance and directed him to the shower room in order to comply with the procedure that the American government had created expressly for all Mexicans crossing into their land. Don Chipote could not understand why they treated him that
way. And since he could not understand a thing they were saying, he stopped in his tracks.  

(Venegas 35)

In this excerpt, the narrator explains how Don Chipote is identified as a “dirty Mexican” not only based on being in Ciudad Juárez, but also based on his appearance. Just as Ciudad Juárez embodies the most filthiest and corrupted people, this scene suggests Don Chipote also embodies these people from his “grimy appearance.” Historically, Stern explains that immigrants from Mexico were “likely to be vermin infested” and forced to be “disinfected” by U.S. health officials. This process consisted of being segregated by sex, stripped naked, chemically scouring their clothing, examining their scalps, cutting their hair to be rolled up and burned if a male, or if female, applying kerosene and vinegar to their hair. Finally, immigrants would be sent to the showers to be sprayed with kerosene and soap, and sometimes vaccinated after for smallpox (62). When the U.S. official directs Don Chipote to the showers, it demonstrates not only the cleansing of the body, but a “cleansing” of the Mexican identity too. The shower suggests that by cleansing his Mexican identity, he will be able to enter into the U.S. with a fresh new start. Don Chipote believes taking a shower and in a sense “abandoning” his Mexican identity will allow him access to cross the physical barrier between him and the U.S. However, he is ultimately unsuccessful because of his lack of documentation.

Since Don Chipote is unsuccessful in crossing the border legally, he must do so illegally, and in doing so he is comparable to an animal when seeking help from the notorious “Coyote.” A Coyote is the word used to describe another Mexican who assists immigrants like Don Chipote.

---

3 No contento el soldado con impedirle el paso, fijándose en lo mugroso que iba don Chipote, lo condujo por el mismo procedimiento al baño que ex profeso ha puesto el gobierno Americano para los mexicanos que deseen pasar a su territorio. Don Chipote no entendió por qué lo trataban así; pero como no podía entender nada de los que le decían, se dejaba conducir y el pobre (Venegas 26).
to illegally cross the border. Often times, the only help the Coyote gives is leading the immigrants to the river that they must swim across in order to get to the U.S. unnoticed. Interestingly, the Coyote is never identified as a person with a name; he is always referred to as the Coyote. Therefore, he takes on the identity of an actual animal, the predatory coyote. Additionally, Don Chipote and the other immigrants become animal-like figures when following the Coyote’s instructions to their desired destination:

It began to get dark when Don Chipote presented himself at the house of the coyote who was going to take him across. And there he was, amid a multitude of Chicanos, who, incapable of crossing the line in accordance with the law, had procured the services of that scoundrel. When night fell, those little lambs, lead by the coyote, started out on the road to the outskirts of town with bearings set on the smelter in El Paso, Texas. Everyone kept utterly silent, following the coyote’s instructions.\(^4\) (Venegas 42)

This scene depicts the predatory nature of the Coyote amongst the poor immigrants. The Mexican immigrants become animals when described as the “little lambs.” In the animal kingdom, lambs actually do fall prey to coyotes and serve as an easy kill. Therefore, the allegorical description of the lambs and the coyote reflect how the Coyote adopts animalistic behavior to abuse fellow Mexicans by taking their money for very little assistance. Additionally, the narrator inserts his own opinion, calling the coyote a “scoundrel,” which suggests the bitter sentiment felt for this “dog-like” man who will do whatever it takes to make fast-cash. Once Don

\(^4\) Cuando la noche cerró, aquella palomilla, encabezada por el coyote, se encaminó a las afueras de la población, con rumbo hacia la “Smelter” de El Paso, Texas. Todos iban guardando el mayor silencio conforme a la recomendación que les había hecho el coyote (Venegas 33).
Chipote and his fellow compatriots are “herded” to the edge of the river like lambs, they are instructed to swim across. Although not directly stated, the physical act of swimming across the river suggests that the Mexican immigrants inherit the aquatic characteristics of a sea creature in order to successfully swim to the other side. Moreover, similar to the shower scene, by swimming across the river Don Chipote is undergoing a second type of “cleansing.” Previously, Don Chipote agreed to the “cleansing” of his Mexican identity because he thought he would be accepted into the U.S. However, this time Don Chipote is swimming across through his own fruition. Although he is symbolically cleansing himself of the remnants of Mexico, this time he is not voluntarily giving into the U.S. and is able to maintain his Mexican identity even while in a different country.

Although Don Chipote successfully overcomes the physical barrier, when he arrives in the U.S. he encounters the economic barriers that prevent him from being successful. After crossing into the U.S. Don Chipote realizes he had used up most of the money he had brought for his journey. As a result, when he gets to the U.S. he does not have a cent to his name or a place to call home. Don Chipote is forced to scrounge for food, take up backbreaking jobs, and even sleep in parks when there is no place to stay. Although Don Chipote is often broke, after staying in the U.S. for a while he begins to gain financial stability. When Don Chipote and his friend Policarpo finally start making a little more money they begin to adopt American commercialist practices such as “splurging” on luxury items. They begin to embrace American values of commercialism and capitalism: “The more they saw, the more they liked the things, which
seemed so inexpensive that they wanted to buy them” (Venegas 107). This statement demonstrates how Don Chipote and Policarpo are consumed by capitalism. The more they “buy” into the American identity, the more their Mexican identity deteriorates. Thus, even though Don Chipote struggles to overcome his economic barriers, when he is finally financially stable enough to shelter and feed himself—he becomes absorbed in consumption. U.S. capitalism and commercialism ultimately alter Don Chipote and Policarpo’s identity into consumers. As a result of Don Chipote and Policarpo becoming consumers, they also become the cause of their constant financial debt, and more importantly the cause of their inability to overcome their economic barriers. As consumers, they will never escape their economic barriers because they will constantly be self-imposing financial hardship through consumption and commercialism.

Gómez-Quiñonez and Maciel explain that, “Workers recruit themselves, pay for themselves, and strengthen the power of capital power over themselves” (31). This “capital power” is evident from the example above because even though Don Chipote and Policarpo have worked hard to gain a bit of financial stability, the “cheap” products in the store imply that even low-income individuals can afford them. Capital manipulates Don Chipote and Policarpo because they will continue to contribute to consumerism and buy the unnecessary luxury products that they think they can afford. Don Chipote’s economic barriers begin as a struggle, but ultimately become his own fault. Thus, in this case he prevents himself from overcoming these barriers by becoming the consumer.

5 Mientras más veían, más les gustaban las cosas que parecían tan baratas que se proponían comprar en cuanto que tuvieran camello, no solo para ellos sino para sus familiares y, como por ver no se paga, seguían echando la baba delante de los aparadores (Venegas 102).
In addition to the economic barriers Don Chipote encounters, the communicative barriers he faces are also preventative on his journey to self-discovery in a new land. When Don Chipote arrives in the U.S. he does not know a word of English, which often puts him in a vulnerable position because most of the time he does not understand what is going on. Don Chipote is not the only Mexican immigrant to face this problem, his friend Policarpo also struggles to overcome communicative barriers. In one scene, Policarpo tries to get Don Chipote medical attention for the pick-ax that injured his foot, but is unable to communicate through language, “The foreman remained unmoved, because he understood Spanish about as well as Policarpo understood English. Desperate because the foreman didn’t understand, Policarpo tried to explain by way of hand signals” (Venegas 86). This moment demonstrates Policarpo’s separation from the world of communication and language. In addition to not speaking English, he is unable to use Spanish, a language he does know, to be understood. Instead, Policarpo uses his body as a source of language. As a result, Policarpo becomes the words that he is trying to speak through the movement and non-verbal communication of his body. Policarpo’s bodily language proves to be effective when the foreman understands his message, however, this indicates the return to a child-like state. Policarpo’s use of body language to communicate to the foreman implies he is also a “child” that can only use his hands and body to “speak.” Therefore, although Policarpo is able to help Don Chipote, he prevents himself from overcoming his communicative barriers by returning to the linguistic stages of a child and weakening himself as an adult able to speak for himself.

______________________________
6 El mayordomo se quedó como antes y después, pues no entendía español sino tanto como Policarpo entendía inglés. Desesperado Policarpo de que no le entendía, quiso hacerse entender por señas y, como Dios le dio a entender, por medio de gestos y ademanes, le repitió lo que quería (Venegas 79).
Don Chipote suffers his own communicative barriers when he is trying to send a letter to his wife, Doña Chipote. When Don Chipote and Policarpo find themselves unable to order supplies from the store because they cannot write down the order, they seek the help of a scribe. After the scribe helps them to write a list of supplies, Don Chipote considers asking him to help write a letter to his wife: “Don Chipote twisted and turned his hands, because he couldn’t figure out how to ask his literate friend to do this other favor for him” (Venegas 74). In this moment, there is a return to the significance of body language. Don Chipote twists his hands to signify his nervousness and desire to seek help from another man who is able to write. Unlike Policarpo, Don Chipote doesn’t restrict himself to body language and successfully asks the scribe (who also speaks Spanish) to help him write a letter to his wife. Although Don Chipote dictates what he wants written, like Policarpo, Don Chipote attempts to become the words themselves. When beginning his letter, Don Chipote repeats his term of endearment for his wife and states it is because “this way she’ll see how much I’m thinkin’ ‘bout her” (Venegas 75).

From Don Chipote’s explanation, it is clear that not only does he want his wife to read how much he misses her, but he wants her to see, or imagine him emerging from the letter too. Don Chipote hopes to filter himself into the words and language that is being written upon the paper. In becoming the language itself, he hopes that the words will embody who he is as a person, so that the letter will be Don Chipote, not just a letter from Don Chipote. In this moment, Don Chipote asserts a strong sense of his identity because by using Spanish he can successfully convey the message he wants. He allows himself to become immersed in the words to create an actual presence of himself

---

7 Y don Chipote se quedó retorciéndose las manos pues no hallaba como decirle al amigo letrado que le hiciera ese otro favor (Venegas 68).

8 Así verá que me acuerdo mucho de ella (Venegas 69).
when Doña Chipote reads the letter. Not only does Don Chipote attempt to personify himself through language, when he receives a letter back from his wife, the words from her letter become an embodiment of his past Mexican identity.

After the scribe reads his wife’s response, Don Chipote’s reaction is awe: “Don Chipote remained ecstatic, with stars in his eyes and his mouth wide open, because the letter had transported him to the fatherland” (Venegas 81). Once again, Don Chipote becomes the language that is written because he allows this letter to “transport” him back to Mexico. Don Chipote’s reaction suggests his desire to return to Mexico because he clearly embraces that part of his identity more than the one he is attempting to possess in the United States. Although this moment suggests Don Chipote’s desire to return, later on he stops writing letters home, which reflects his rejection toward his Mexican past and identity. However, Don Chipote does not necessarily identify himself as a specific person in the U.S. either because when he is asked for his signature, he simply puts an “X.” This signature not only signifies his inability to overcome the communicative barriers of speaking, reading and writing in English, but reflects who he is within the U.S. Don Chipote becomes this ambiguous symbol “X.” This symbol conveys Don Chipote’s instability as a person straddling two identities—his strong Mexican identity, and the American identity he desires. However, despite the barriers and obstacles he faces in the U.S., Don Chipote is deported back to Mexico at the end of the novel, thrusting him back into his original identity. At first Don Chipote resists going back to Mexico, but when he is forced to return he does come to a conclusion about himself and his community. After pondering his own dreams and hardships in the U.S., Don Chipote states that, “Mexicans will make it big in the

9 don Chipote quedó extasiado con los ojos pelones y la boca abierta, pues con la lectura de la carta se había transportado al terruño (Venegas 74).
United States…WHEN PARROTS BREASTFEED” (Venegas 160). Thus, Don Chipote ultimately chooses to let go of his past desires of finding a new life within the U.S. Instead, he acknowledges the strength of his Mexican roots and decides that this is the person he wants to be. Furthermore, Don Chipote makes a critique about the Mexican community; specifically those who decide to migrate to the U.S. His mocking tone asserts that when parrots breastfeed Mexicans will be successful in the U.S. His statement conveys his belief that Mexicans should stay true to their country and not seek something outside of what they already have because finding success in the U.S. is unlikely. Despite Don Chipote’s failure in gaining an American identity, he maintains his Mexican one, and advises his community not to get trapped by the various barriers that await them in the U.S.

In Rosaura Sánchez and Beatrice Pita’s book *Lunar Braceros 2125-2148*, the protagonist Lydia, and her friends, are constantly fighting to establish a strong identity and community, but are also prevented from doing so due to physical, communicative and technological barriers. Similar to Don Chipote’s border-town Ciudad Juárez, in CaliTexas the “border-town” that exists is called the Reservations, or the “Res.” Metaphorically, the Res are a representation of Mexico, and outside of its borders is the U.S. (although they are ironically in the U.S.), and outer space. The Res are constantly under surveillance by the U.S. officials, and the people within it are “quarantined” from the rest of the population. In a world where borders have supposedly been eliminated by lumping together various states into one, such as Cali-Texas, invisible barriers are created between people who are placed in the Reservations, and those who are not. There is a clear distinction between people that are “Reslifers” and those who are not. Similar to Ciudad

---

10 Los mexicanos se harán ricos en Estados Unidos: CUANDO LOS PERICOS MAMEN (Venegas 159).
Juárez’s separation from the clean, lawful and “desirable” side of the U.S., the Res serve a similar purpose.

The Res create the physical barrier between the lower class and the upper class, which ultimately prevents Reslifers like Lydia from ever obtaining something more than the Reslife. At the Res, there is no escape; Reslifers are forced into this life and identity by their oppressive government. Thus, just as Don Chipote, the Reslifers also desire to gain an identity outside of their own, and seek a better life on a different planet. However, trying to escape the Res means death, and the only path to freedom is if a family member receives a job opportunity outside of the Res. Lydia describes the Res negatively:

The Reservation was like a prison, except that families could leave the reservations if one of the members was offered employment and housing off the Reservation. The wage-less workers worked in exchange for shelter, meals and minimal medical services. Their children could go to school and if they were promising students would be looked over for admission to technological colleges or even universities. (Sánchez & Pita 15)

Lydia identifies the types of people that are sent to these Reservations as people who are unemployed or homeless, with the intention of cleaning up the cities and streets of “filth” or “trash.” Similar to the historical background on eugenic gatekeeping, this futuristic institution, “the Res,” mirrors the U.S. official’s desire to “cleanse” the inferior class. In this case, cleansing the inferior class is done by separating them completely from the superior class, and ensuring that Reslifers stay with other Reslifers, and no one else. Although Reslifers are forced to work for their food and shelter, the last line implies that if one member of the family is intelligent, they will be liberated from the Res. However, growing up as a child on the Res usually meant that there was no hope for them in the future as an adult.
The illustration on page seventeen clearly demonstrates what a child may have experienced while living on the Res. The two children are drawn as skeletons, implying their gradual death as a result of rotting away in the prison-like Reservations. These skeletal children signify the government’s desire to impose the Reslifer identity on them and deteriorate who they truly are. This illustration suggests that they are already dead as Reslifers. At the top of the illustration, a tower is drawn to depict the constant technological surveillance used to prevent anyone from escaping. The children are placed in close vicinity to the barbed wire to indicate the physical barrier that separates them from the outside world. This image truly captures the description of the Res as a prison for the Reslifers. Furthermore, because the illustration has children as opposed to adults, this implies the bleak future that the younger generations will have—a future where they will always be looking out from the inside and always out of grasp from the “better” world just beyond the Res. When Lydia and her brother were growing up on the Res, they encountered communicative barriers not only with the outside world, but also with members of their own community, due to the intense technological surveillance that surrounds the Res:

My brother and I had bikes and we enjoyed riding them to the edge of the Reservation, which was surrounded by razor wire that also separated one complex from another. We couldn’t go beyond our neighborhood but within it we could walk or ride our bikes; each neighborhood had a small plaza, a mall with a movie plex, a clinic and a storehouse where you could requisition supplies and provisions. (Sánchez & Pita 28-29)

From this description, it is clear that the government’s intention to create individual neighborhoods and communities is not only for control, but to prevent them from communicating
with one another. The government’s desire to keep the communities separated suggests their fear that if these communities unite they would be able to overthrow their oppressive rule. Thus, by ensuring that the Reslifers’ communities are separated, they are able to avoid anarchy and rebellion. Although Lydia and her family do live in the United States, and could be considered Americans, because the government has identified them as Reslifers, they are unable to be anything but that, until Lydia decides to pursue a life on the moon.

Lydia is finally successful in overcoming the Res’ physical barrier by getting a University education and migrating to the moon in hopes of making a better life for herself, her family and her community. Despite Lydia’s ability to leave Earth entirely, she is still subject to various barriers on the moon that inhibit her ability to grow as an individual and be who she wants to be. In fact, her friend Jake comments on their inability to ever escape their oppressive government regardless of what planet they are on, “But they gave some of us a choice. We could either be fucked up on Earth or fucked up on the Moon, and by that time, it didn’t matter much. Same shit, different place” (Sánchez & Pita 19). While on the moon, Lydia and her friends work as Tecos, technicians who remove waste from the Earth. Just like the Res, the Tecos are a separate community from the others working on the moon, such as the Miners and the Chinese. Additionally, outside contact with Earth is filtered and read by a government official, which makes privacy nearly impossible for the Tecos. Moreover, when Lydia and her partner Frank discover corpses, including Frank’s brother Peter, in the containers of waste they work with, their goal to surpass the communicative and technological barriers proves to be extremely difficult in an environment where nothing can be hidden from the government. As a result, Lydia and the other Tecos are never allowed to actually be themselves, they are constantly being watched to ensure that they reflect the identity that the government wants them to have.
After Lydia and Frank’s discovery of the corpses in the containers, they do everything they possibly can to overcome the communicative and technological barriers imposed by the government. As a result, Lydia and Frank must stop technology completely and even further, use a code language to get their message across, “Because Maggie and Leticia had picked up enough of the ASL and knew a bit of Spanish, we managed to convey that something was horribly wrong at one of the pavilions” (Sánchez & Pita 26). Luckily, Lydia and Frank are able to communicate their message, but more importantly they are able to form a small community with the other Tecos to unite and strategize how to save themselves from being killed by the government. This scene is similar to Don Chipote’s own struggles when communicating with his wife. However, instead of Lydia and Frank realizing an aspect of their individual identity (such as Don Chipote did with being Mexican), they are concerned with creating a community that will help one another to be successful together. Nonetheless, the government attempts to destabilize this community by giving Frank and Lydia the impression that Peter is still alive on Earth, despite the fact that they found his corpse in one of the containers. The government creates fake messages from Peter to give Lydia and Frank hope that he is still alive on Earth. Additionally, the government uses a technological holographic to create a mirage of Peter, to convince Lydia and Frank that nothing is wrong:

—Let me go, Lydia. Let me go. It’s Peter.

We could both see him directly in front of us, but he was in his spacesuit.

He had on a t-shirt, jeans, and sandals. It was incredible. Yes, we could both see him. I saw him too. It was a mirage. (Sánchez & Pita 65)

In this scene, Peter’s identity appears to be legitimate at first because both Lydia and Frank can see him as if he truly existed. However, Lydia ultimately concludes that it was a mirage; a tool
the government was using to throw them off their trail. Isiah Lavender III remarks that, “Science fiction produces alien and divergent neighborhoods, with strange and dissimilar signs, shifting identities, and distorted realities of existence” (21). Lydia and Frank are able to overlook Peter’s fake identity and this distorted reality by getting straight to the point: they need to escape their impending death by completely destroying all technological and communicative barriers the government created.

After Lydia and Frank successfully relay their message about the murders being committed by the government, they team up with the Miners, completely defying the government’s desire to keep these two communities separated. Lydia and Frank decide that in order to escape the moon, they must first destroy all communication and technological devices. When making their escape, the first and most important step is for Lydia and Frank to disconnect the Com Center. Thus, Lydia and Frank “destroy the communications system and disrupt the satellite transmitter…assist in disabling the antenna and the satellite dish on the north end of the transport center landing pad (Sánchez & Pita 99). The significance of this moment is that Lydia and Frank successfully destroy the communicative and technological barriers that had held them back from pursuing the life they wanted: one without government supervision and ultimately, saving themselves from their imminent death. However, once Lydia and her friends return to Earth they still struggle under the government’s supervision while fighting to bring people together to create a stronger community and sense of identity.

Once Lydia and Frank return to Earth they have a child named Pedro, and in their fight for change they leave him a series of technological journals and memoirs that will tell their story and urge him to find his own path in life. At the beginning of the novel, it is established that Lydia and Frank are no longer in Pedro’s life because they have left behind memoirs for their
son to read, “Tío, my mother left me these nanotexts with lunar posts, lessons, bits and pieces of
conversations, and notations with friends who sent them to me after she and my dad went up
North” (Sánchez & Pita 5). Thus, these nanotexts and memoirs demonstrate their escape from the
physical, communicative and technological barriers on the moon and Earth, and persuade Pedro
to do the same. These memoirs serve a similar purpose as Don Chipote’s letters to his wife. They
signify a part of his parent’s identity and as a result, a reflection of his own identity. However,
toward the end of Lydia’s memoirs she tells Pedro after returning from the moon that she learned
“This is not merely a personal thing, not an individual battle, although I have much to resent. It
will be a collective struggle, a class struggle…Our struggle will be the beginning of a different
world” (Sánchez & Pita 118). Lydia’s statement asserts that although she feels victimized as an
individual from the numerous barriers preventing her from the life she wanted; she understands
that it is a communal struggle to overcome these obstacles.

Although Lydia and her friends are successful in escaping the moon, their success in
gaining an identity differs from Don Chipote. Unlike Don Chipote, who is forced back into his
Mexican identity, Lydia chooses to return home, but is not content with finding herself as an
individual. Instead, Lydia and her friends are concerned with establishing a communal identity
with those who share their struggle. When the novel ends, Pedro learns of his parent’s past but
readers also discover that they have been missing for eight years. Thus, Lydia and Frank’s
identity becomes uncertain and ambiguous at the end. As a result, their son is given the choice to
create a path of his own, or the path of his parents. Ultimately Pedro decides, “What I really hope
is to find my Mom and Dad and join them in their struggle” (Sánchez & Pita 120). Despite Lydia
and Frank’s disappearance, there is a message of hope at the end. Lydia and Frank still exist for
Pedro, and he hopes to find them again amongst the communities they are struggling besides.
Moreover, their success in overcoming the physical, communicative and technological barriers brings hope to the reader that they will be successful in creating a strong identity for their community. Thus, *Lunar Braceros 2125-2148* demonstrates the solidarity that is created within the community to strive for a stronger identity so that they may be recognized as important individuals to society as a whole.

In the film *Sleep Dealer*, like the protagonists from the previous texts, the protagonist Memo Cruz suffers physical, economic, and technological barriers that prevent him from gaining new perspectives of himself and his community. The basic barrier between Memo and the U.S. is the physical border created by a dam. The dam that separates the two countries causes a drought in Mexico and forces Mexicans to buy water from the U.S. However, dams are built everywhere around the U.S., and as the film’s trailer describes: “Sooner than you think, a wall will seal the borders. People will do anything to survive, even if it means getting connected.” As a result of these dams, Mexicans choose to “get connected” or become Sleep Dealers, in order to survive the economic and physical drought of their country. In comparison to Don Chipote and Lydia, crossing the physical barrier is no longer an option. Instead, the Mexican immigrant must cross over illegally by entering into the world of the Sleep Dealer: a complete immersion of the mind and body into technology. Hunter Heyck explains that in these futuristic societies, “The physical and the virtual, the body and the world, are inseparable” (243). Those who choose to “get connected” to the network are given access to jobs in the United States by inserting “nodes” into their forearms, upper arms, and shoulder blades. These nodes are metallic contraptions on the body that allow wires to be inserted into the body and most importantly, give them access to the U.S. Additionally, just as Don Chipote required the services of a Coyote, in *Sleep Dealer*, Memo also requires the assistance of a Coyotek to install his nodes. Since Memo comes from a rural
part of Mexico (like Don Chipote), in order to work for the U.S. and become a Sleep Dealer, he must go to the border-town Tijuana to find a Coyotek that will help him cross over.

Similar to the characters in the previous texts, Memo must overcome the physical and economic barriers to gain the Sleep Dealer identity he desires. Contrary to the other protagonists, Memo is certain about the type of identity he wants, and is determined to achieve this goal. However, Memo is not interested in becoming a Sleep Dealer simply for his own selfish needs. When his father is murdered (an act provoked by Memo’s hacking), Memo becomes the provider, and leaves his home to find a job that will help his family through their economic hardships. When Memo arrives in Tijuana, the film illustrates the border-town in a similar manner as The Adventures of Don Chipote. Like Ciudad Juárez, Tijuana is represented as a sinful, dangerous, and unpleasant place of corruption. The imagery of Tijuana’s landscape portrays it with dark alleyways, cheap motel-style businesses, and most importantly the shady presence of the Coyoteks. Memo knows that the only way to become a Sleep Dealer and get connected is through a Coyotek. However, he must be careful about who he trusts as a Coyotek because the process is delicate, and he only has twenty dollars to get it done. Thus, in the scene of Memo’s arrival to Tijuana, he immediately begins seeking out the cheapest Coyotek to fulfill his request.

The scene begins with the image of a large sign that says “La Estrella” (the star), which emulates a tacky yellow glow from what is most likely to be a bar. The image of this star also suggests that it is a guide for weary travelers. The star embodies a symbol of hope for those traveling to the “promised land,” or in the case, immigrating to the U.S. However, La Estrella is presented more as a sleazy aspect of Tijuana. The glowing light that La Estrella emits can be likened to the allure that a bug may have toward a light that actually harms them when they
touch it. In Memo’s case, he embodies the innocent fly being lured into a bright light that he
thinks will bring him closer to his goal (Rivera 24:16-26:24). Immediately after setting the scene
of Tijuana through La Estrella, Memo turns to the dimly lit alleyway flocking with Coyoteks
offering him their assistance to get connected. The Coyoteks immediately begin listing off all of
the possible occupations and identities he could have, such as a cab driver in London, or an
orange picker in Florida. Overwhelmed, Memo ignores these offers and stands a part from the
Coyoteks, uncertain of his next move. However, a Coyotek approaches him with a different sales
tactic.

The Coyotek that approaches Memo offers him a deal that is hard to refuse. His offer will help Memo surpass his physical and economic barriers: he will install his nodes, and he will do it for a cheap price. Memo asks, “How much?” to indicate that the Coyotek has sealed the deal. In this particular moment, the Coyotek asserts his power over the vulnerable immigrant looking for work. The Coyotek possess the ultimate power in the eyes of the Mexican immigrants simply because he is their access to the U.S. However, the Coyoteks in Sleep Dealer hold an even greater power because they have the ability to completely transform one’s identity and make him/her a Sleep Dealer. Thus, the Coyotek plays an extremely important role because they take on God-like characteristics to manipulate a person’s genes and nervous system, by installing their nodes and getting them connected. Memo understands the amount of power he is giving the Coyotek, but nonetheless agrees to have the installation done right away.

Once Memo agrees, the Coyotek leads him up a flight of stairs into a strange building where he says he will install his nodes. Once the two men enter into an empty warehouse, the Coyotek disappears and Memo’s eyes become worried. Through the windows the yellow glow from La Estrella seeps into the room, while the rest of the scene is a mass of darkness and
shadows. Suddenly, the Coyotek hits Memo over the head with a piece of wood and a new image fills the screen: a red, veiny, fleshy and muddled background. This moment is briefly shown and then returns to the dark, with the yellow glow trickling back into the room where the Coyotek is stealing Memo’s twenty dollars. This moment directly aligns Memo with the fly that is lured by the yellow glow of the light, because he is lured and manipulated by the Coyotek easily, and ultimately harmed physically and economically. Thus, instead of Memo overcoming the physical and economic barriers he faced originally, his obstacles grow worse because he is still unable to make the physical change into a Sleep Dealer, and his Coyotek stole the only money he had.

Despite Memo’s failure to find a good Coyotek, fortunately, he is able to become a Sleep Dealer with the help of a woman he had met the previous day on a bus, Luz. Although Luz presents herself as an aspiring writer, she is also a Coyotek. Contrary to the dim yellow glow of La Estrella that initially led Memo to the Coyoteks, Luz, which means “light” in Spanish, becomes the embodiment of his guiding star. Moreover, because Luz identifies herself as a writer and not a Coyotek, this suggests why she is the only one that he trusts to transform him into a Sleep Dealer. When Luz installs Memo’s nodes, the entire process is gruesome as she injects a metal like contraption through his skin and into his veins. Although the scene is clearly an operation for Memo, the imagery and tension between Luz and Memo suggest a sexualized exchange. Heyck explains that, “the body does matter in films about networked/social machines, but the body matters as the locus of experience” (243). In this case, Luz and Memo experience the transformation of the body together. As Luz penetrates each node into Memo’s skin, he breathes deeply and she stares intensely into his eyes (Rivera 32:30-35:56). Luz takes on the dominant role in this scene because she is the one in control of Memo’s body and experience. In addition to the sexualized aspect of this scene, Luz is taking on the God-like role of the Coyotek
by completely changing his human identity. As Luz installs Memo’s nodes, the screen reflects the internal change happening to Memo’s body. With each puncture into his skin, a red fleshy screen appears that shows his veins transforming into a blue metallic color to portray his connection to the technological network. As he undergoes this process, he is able to disintegrate the physical barrier preventing him from gaining access to the U.S. Additionally, he destroys the economic obstacles he faced because now he can work as a Sleep Dealer and provide for his family. Ultimately, the end of this scene signifies Memo’s success overcoming two of his barriers. However, in exchange for his new life as a Sleep Dealer, he accumulates the technological barriers that come with his new identity.

In addition to Memo, Luz is a victim of technological and communicative barriers that she has created for herself by having a set of nodes. As a writer, Luz utilizes her nodes to connect to a program called TruNode. TruNode is an online application where memories and stories can be stored and sold. Luz states her objective for becoming a writer “I came here to tell stories. To connect people” (Rivera 1:07:31-1:07:37). Although Luz claims that she wants to use her stories to connect people, she does the exact opposite, particularly with Memo. Throughout the film Luz spends time with Memo primarily because she is investigating stories of his past at the request of her paying customer, Rudy. Therefore, she prevents herself from making a meaningful and long-lasting connection with Memo because she is more interested in making money. Ironically, as a writer she should be able to communicate her stories the way she wants, but TruNode prevents her from doing so. TruNode judges the identity and attitude its users should portray in their stories, including Luz’s, through a technological feature called “bio-thentication.” This bio-thentication feature uses its judgment to determine what the person is truly feeling. When Luz recounts her initial meeting with Memo, the bio-thentication feature
demands that she repeat herself, and this time describing how she really felt (Rivera 22:55-23:39). Luz is forced to tell her experiences as technology sees fit, and not necessarily how she wants it.

Luz’s decision to be a writer for TruNode signifies her willingness to give up her human identity to technology. She gives TruNode access to her mind and heart in order to write her stories. Unlike Don Chipote and Lydia who used communication (letters, memoirs) as a means to connect with others—Luz allows technology to dictate what she will and will not write. Ultimately, Luz permits TruNode to alter the memories she has of herself or with others (such as Memo), in order to make it a desirable sale to the public. It is not until Memo discovers that Luz had been selling his memories that she realizes how technology had been preventing her from being human. After Luz disconnects from TruNode and returns Memo’s memories to him on a microchip, she is finally able to overcome her technological and communicative barriers and gain back her human identity so that she can treat Memo as a person and not as a product for sale. Around the same time as Luz, Memo comes to the realization that technology is ultimately detrimental to a human’s ability to grow and understand oneself.

After working as a Sleep Dealer for a while, Memo realizes that he is preventing himself from being human because he is so immersed in technology. In the end, Memo decides to escape these technological barriers by returning to his human identity instead of being a Sleep Dealer. However, he is only able to do this with the help of a person from his painful past: Rudy. Rudy had been the one controlling the military drone that murdered Memo’s father at the beginning of the film. Rudy hopes to redeem himself by returning to Mexico and making amends with Memo. Furthermore, Rudy is only able to locate Memo’s whereabouts because he had coincidentally been the “anonymous” buyer of Luz’s TruNode stories. Ironically, Rudy faces the
physical barrier between the U.S. and Mexico. Coming from San Diego, Rudy drives his car down to Mexico where signs are made clear he should turn back: “WARNING: ENTER MEXICO AT YOUR OWN RISK” (Rivera 1:08:14). However, Rudy ventures on into Mexico determined to apologize to Memo for what he had done to his father. After Rudy and Memo’s tense meeting, they both come to an agreement. Memo requests that Rudy uses his drone to destroy the dam that separates Mexico from the U.S., and Rudy fulfills this request. More importantly, this moment signifies Rudy’s own desire to change his identity from a drone, into a human being. Although Rudy knows the government will target him as an “Aqua-Terrorist,” he is content with his actions and gains a better understanding of who he is and what he wants to contribute to the world (Rivera 1:19:40-1:21:21).

The destruction of the dam plays a pivotal moment in the entire film not only because it deteriorates the physical border created between Mexico and the U.S., but it also signifies the opportunity for change and rebirth. While Memo had spent the majority of his time wishing to be a Sleep Dealer, when he finally becomes one, he realizes that technology had been the one in control, and not him. Therefore, once the dam is destroyed Memo is able to return to his home in the rural part of Mexico and create a new identity for himself. Although Memo still has his nodes and can still be a Sleep Dealer, he decides to be a farmer. In comparison to the other two texts, Memo is the one who is able to take full control of his identity and create the life that he wants. Additionally, because Memo chooses to be a farmer that is completely separated from the technological world, this signifies his return to the past, like Don Chipote’s. Memo is ultimately successful in destroying his physical and technological barriers. Moreover, his desire to plant crops and renew the Earth signifies a hope for change in his community. Memo is now concerned with creating a community where people do not depend on technology to survive.
Memo is able to identify himself as a leader of change by first improving himself individually and by creating an entirely new community for Mexico to thrive from.

These three texts highlight various aspects of the Mexican immigrant experience through the common barriers each character encounters throughout their journey, such as: physical, economic, communicative and technological. Each text overcomes these barriers (or does not) in its own way, however, the ultimate goal is for the particular individual to discover who they are at the end of their journey despite their success or failure. In *The Adventures of Don Chipote*, Don Chipote did attempt to make a new life for himself in the U.S., but in the end was deported. Regardless of his deportation, Don Chipote learned that his Mexican identity outweighed his American one, and he decided Mexico was the best place for him to be. Additionally, his experience serves as a message to his community that being Mexican is acceptable, and one should embrace their roots before attempting to create new ones in a country where many hardships await them. In *Lunar Braceros 2125-2148*, Lydia and her friends tell their stories through a series of memoirs that piece the book together, specifically for her son Pedro. Although Lydia seeks to escape the life imposed upon her by the government, when she finally does escape she learns that a similar fate awaits her on the moon. Thus, Lydia and her friends create a strong community with one another and successfully defy the government’s plan for them. Lydia and her friends return with a better understanding to better their lives by improving the lives of all people who are struggling. Therefore, Lydia and her friends dedicate themselves to strengthening the identity of their community and fighting in solidarity to be recognized in their world. Finally, *Sleep Dealer* demonstrates that although characters like Memo or Luz are successful in gaining the identity they *thought* they wanted, they realize that it is an identity entirely controlled by technology. Therefore, Memo ultimately chooses his human identity over
his technological one, and urges his community to identify itself with a life that does not depend on technology. While the individual identity and self-exploration proves an important aspect within these texts, the Mexican immigrant’s experiences are what become the most significant because they influence their communities to have different perspectives about who they are and who they might want to be if they choose to migrate to a different land as well.
LABORERS, LUNAR BRACEROS AND SLEEP DEALERS

Immigration in the United States has existed for many years, and Mexican immigrants have been a large part of that history. At the beginning of the 20th century, the United States inherited a large population of Mexican immigrants. According to Juan Gómez-Quiñones and David R. Maciel, there were about 200,000 Mexican immigrants in the U.S. by 1900 (30). The common geographic area that immigrants settled in was the Southwest, in search of employment, which usually consisted of hard labor in the mining, railroad, and agricultural industries (Gómez-Quiñones and Maciel 31).

Oftentimes, Mexican immigration is associated with the “American Dream” and pursuing a better life in the United States. Although many Mexican immigrants left their country to pursue better opportunities in the U.S., these “better opportunities” actually meant jobs. In fact, Mexican immigrants normally migrated to the U.S. because there was a lack of employment and low wages within Mexico (Gómez-Quiñones and Maciel 34). The U.S. provided Mexicans with the opportunity to improve their lives by working undesirable and laborious jobs. However, Mexican immigrants did not anticipate the racism and injustices that they would encounter during their stay in the U.S. as “temporary” laborers. In short, Gómez-Quiñones and Maciel assert that “Mexican immigrant workers are particularly concentrated in jobs considered unattractive, demeaning, dangerous, dirty, temporary, or comparatively poorly paid—i.e., ‘Mexican work’” (35). During the early 20th century, the U.S. welcomed Mexican immigrants because they were the source of cheap labor they needed to get some of the toughest work done in the country.

Although Mexican immigrants provided much of the cheap labor for the U.S. during the beginning of the 20th century, when the Great Depression hit in the 1930s, a tension and disdain developed toward these temporary workers for a number of reasons. The major issues include:
Mexican labor replaced the Anglo native’s work (especially because they accepted lower wages), cheap labor was observed as a short-term gain and a long-term cost, and the racial issue was that Mexicans posed a social threat to the “white race,” because Mexicans or mestizos, miscegenated and were therefore an inferior race (Gómez-Quiñones and Maciel 37). During this economic crisis, Mexican immigrants faced great scrutiny and discrimination by Americans who were also struggling to find employment and make a living.

Despite the labor movements and reforms throughout the years, Mexican immigrants are still an important aspect of the U.S.’s cheap labor force. As discussed in the previous section, Mexican immigrants leave their country in hopes of gaining a new identity in a different land. Additionally, an important aspect of the Mexican immigrant’s identity is the job he/she has. In The Adventures of Don Chipote, Lunar Braceros 2125-2148, and Sleep Dealer, each text explores the different types of jobs a Mexican immigrant may have and how it ultimately prevents him/her from obtaining the identity they want. In these three texts, labor is a factor that prevents the characters from being who they want to be because the work and technology dehumanizes and exploits them. Although there are vast differences between the time periods of The Adventures of Don Chipote and LunarBraceros 2125-2148/Sleep Dealer, each text deals with how these characters’ jobs ultimately remove them from their identities and how they struggle to gain it back.

In The Adventures of Don Chipote, Don Chipote is forced to work a variety of hard labor jobs because that is what the U.S. wants him to be: a cheap laborer. Don Chipote must seek out employers who hire cheap laborers regardless of the miniscule wages and harsh treatment he will receive. One of the hardest jobs that Don Chipote is forced to take is on the traque, or railroad track. The development of the railroad track in the United States was an extremely important part
of history because it paved the way for advanced transportation and travel for millions of Americans. The hard work that went into the development of the railroad track required the hands of many, and these hands often go unrecognized and overlooked simply because these temporary laborers meant nothing more than just that. Regardless of the fact that Don Chipote is always identified as a cheap Mexican laborer, his work on the traque proves to be a significant transformation in his life and identity.

For Don Chipote, labor is his only source of survival, and although he is only using his job as a means to create a better life for himself—he must endure dehumanization and exploitation by his employers that prevent him from doing so. The narrator of The Adventures of Don Chipote describes the inescapable realities of labor when he describes the “Supply,” which is the laborer’s only source of food and resources. Even though the Mexican immigrant laborers such as Don Chipote are provided with housing, the narrator states:

In the whole time that this writer [Venegas] had to work on the traque, he doesn’t remember ever having received a paycheck consistent with the amount of time worked; nor had they ever received his rations as he ordered them, because the infamous Supply sends whatever it feels like and charges whatever it wants.  

(Venegas 79)

This description illustrates the unfair labor practices that were being committed by the suppliers and the employers. Additionally, the narrator uses Daniel Venegas as the prime example of this injustice in order to reflect the reality of what was being done at the time. Inserting the author’s
personal experience gives the novel a non-fiction quality in order to make stronger connections with the Mexican immigrants whom were experiencing this same discrimination. Moreover, inserting the author’s experience causes instability within the narrative because reader’s become uncertain about who the story is actually about. The narrator tells the story about Don Chipote, but includes an example from Venegas’ life. Thus, Don Chipote’s identity is less certain to the reader because of the narrator’s shift between an imagined character, and Venegas’ real character. However, the narrator’s primary goal is to make a critique about Mexican immigrants being exploited by the Supply, and how this prevented them from making any substantial amount of money.

The Supply and the employers are portrayed as exploiters, and the Mexican immigrants become more than just cheap workers being exploited for their labor. Mexican immigrants are also being exploited for their money in order to have shelter and food. Like the narrator, Don Chipote comments on what really happens to his hard-earned cash, “‘Cause you’ve awready seen how that Supply store fetches back most o’ these paychecks they’ve been givin’ us. Seems like we don’t work fer nothin’ ‘cept the food we eat” (Venegas 83).12 In this comment, Don Chipote reflects on his lack of earnings and his inability to save any significant amount of money, especially money that he could send to his wife and children in Mexico. His labor is not simply a means of survival for himself, but for his family as well. However, because Don Chipote is subject to exploitation, he is only able to give very little to his family and survive on the miniscule amount he is able to gain from the working. Since the only way Don Chipote can survive is by working, and his eating/living expenses are made up from the resources

12 Esto me pone triste, pues ya ves que de estos pagos que nos han dado la mayoria lo ha recogido la tienda del suplai. Parece que trabajamos por la pura comida (Venegas 76).
conveniently “provided” to him by his employers, this life appears inescapable. He will never be able to be anything more than a cheap laborer because he will constantly be working to survive and making up for the exploitation he undergoes by his employers and the Supply.

In addition to the exploitation that Don Chipote suffers economically and physically, he is also subject to injury, abuse, and even death while on the job. The issues of injury or even death within the work place are addressed by the narrator who offers his own opinions regarding labor violations that were committed and ignored, asserting that “the foreman is the slavedriver of the Mexican infidel…He cares very little about the suffering of those who are so grateful to the company that employs them” (Venegas 70). The narrator argues that the foreman is a slave driver to imply that Mexican immigrants have taken on the role of slaves. However, the narrator’s argument proves to be inadequate because Mexican immigrants were getting paid for their work. Thus, the narrator chooses to dramatize Mexican immigrants as slaves in order to convey that even as wage laborers, they worked for almost nothing, and could be considered slaves based upon what little they had to survive on. Mark Reisler’s article in Between Two Worlds describes the similar prejudicial comments made about Mexican immigrants that had been made about black slaves in the United States: “Grower representatives claimed that the Mexican’s racial background made him perfectly suited, both biologically and psychologically, for monotonous, backbreaking, stoop-labor in the desert heat” (35). Therefore, since Mexican immigrants were identified as almost-slaves (since they were wage laborers), this dehumanizes the Mexican immigrant into a low-class citizen. As “slaves” they are dehumanized by their

---

13 En estos trabajos el mayordomo es el amo negrero de los infieles mexicanos que tiene a sus órdenes, le importan muy poco los sufrimientos de éstos, con tal de tener grata a la compañía que los ocupa (Venegas 63).
employers because when they are no longer able to work due to injury or death, they are quickly replaced with another eager Mexican immigrant ready to work.

In addition to Mexican immigrants being treated as if they were slaves, illegal Mexican immigrants were treated as if they did not exist at all, especially when they were abused, or even killed. The narrator explains that there were some foremen “who have gone as far killing a Mexican, such crimes going unpunished” (Venegas 71). This statement demonstrates the complete dehumanization of the Mexican immigrant by his/her employer. More specifically, illegal Mexican immigrants without documentation become the most vulnerable in these situations. Not only do they not exist as citizens in the U.S., they do not even exist as people. Employers with illegal immigrants are able to exploit them and even kill them, simply because they have no identity in the U.S. or a legal system to protect them. Alberto Ledesma argues in Culture Across Borders that Don Chipote “cannot lobby for better working conditions or strike for labor rights, because doing so would get him deported (71). Mexican immigrants such as Don Chipote acknowledged that they only existed in the U.S. as cheap laborers, and they knew if they tried to challenge their employers, it could lead to their deportation, or in some cases, their death. Illegal Mexican immigrants are subject to dehumanization because if they die or are wrongly abused, their suffering goes unnoticed because they are not considered citizens of the nation. Reisling concludes that, “To most Anglos, the immigrant from south of the border was always the peon laborer and never the potential citizen” (38). Therefore, despite the Mexican immigrant’s desire to assimilate and be a U.S. citizen, Anglos viewed them simply as cheap

---

14 Casos por el estilo pasan a diario en las secciones y no son pocos los mayordomos que hasta han matado a mexicanos, quedando tales crímenes sin castigo…se decide a comersel un mayordomo, es porque éste ya le colmó el plato con sus abusos (Venegas 64).
labor that would eventually disappear after the job was done. As a result, the injustices towards
Mexican immigrants became just a part of daily life, and their only choice was to continue
working and never challenge the system. Thus, Don Chipote, like many other Mexican
immigrants, must settle for what the employers have made him: a cheap laborer.

In a pivotal scene in *The Adventures of Don Chipote*, Don Chipote suffers from an injury
that transforms him through labor and technology. While working on the railroad track, the
narrator states that Don Chipote “struck at the rail with such bad aim, that, instead of hitting the
beam, the pick-ax buried itself into his foot” (Venegas 85). This particular example highlights
the dangerous environments that Mexican immigrants were forced to work in, and the possibility
for violent injuries. More importantly, this scene demonstrates the connection between Don
Chipote’s physical body, and the product he is working on. The railroad track is an emerging
technology and this moment signifies Don Chipote’s intermingling with technology and how it
effects who he is. His buried foot creates a metaphorical fusion between his physical body and
the railroad beam that he is laboring upon. Don Chipote’s body becomes consumed by the
technology of the railroad, and as a result he becomes objectified and dehumanized by it. His
human body becomes fused with a metallic body, and his identity takes on the form of the
railroad track, causing him to no longer be human. Additionally, the narrator’s mocking tone
toward Don Chipote’s injury implies that he knew this incident would happen because ultimately
working too hard will eventually consume the individual. Don Chipote’s work causes him to take

---

15 Don Chipote volvió en sí como si le hubiera picado una vibora, levantó el pico sobre su cabeza lo más alto que pudo y lo dejó caer sobre la talla con tan mala puntería, que, en vez de darle a ésta se encajó el pico en un pie (Venegas 78).
on a technological identity, which completely removes him from the human one he had, but at the same time, ironically removes him from his identity as a cheap laborer.

Despite Don Chipote’s fusion with the railroad, he maintains a strong Mexican identity in comparison with other Chicanos who have exploited themselves or exploit other Mexican immigrants in order to survive in the U.S. Whereas Don Chipote was forced into the identity of a cheap laborer, other Chicanos in the U.S. use their jobs as a performance of the way they would like to be perceived by the outside world, or “audience.” Although Don Chipote suffers abuse by his Anglo employers, when he stumbles across a theater with entertainers that remind him of his country, he is an easy victim to their false performance. The narrator states that, “The horde of Mexican performers who entertain in the United States know that the Chicano community goes crazy when something reminds them of their blessed cactus land. And, naturally, they exploit it all the time” (Venegas 117). The Mexican performers choose to create an identity that will manipulate the public into thinking they are actually the characters they represent. As a result, they convince people like Don Chipote to keep returning to watch their performances and exploit them financially because they represent the memories of Mexico that they long for. Don Chipote becomes obsessed with watching these performances, which suggests his dissatisfaction with what the U.S. has to offer because his Mexican identity is too strong to assimilate to a different culture. Don Chipote is not only exploited by the Mexican performers, but other Chicanos as well who use their jobs as a performance. For example, Don Chipote seeks the legal advice of a 

---

16 La palomilla de cómicos que la vacila en los Estamos Sumidos, sabe que la chicanada se pone de puntas cuando le ponen por enfrete algo que le recuerde su santa nopalera y, como es natural, esta flaqueza se la explotan por todos lados (Venegas 113).
lawyer, and the romantic advice of a witch doctor—both whom exploit him and put him under
the spell of their performance.

The lawyer and the witch doctor perform in their respective jobs in order to manipulate
Don Chipote into thinking that they can help him gain things that they really have no access to.
For example, Don Chipote’s “lawyer” persuades him to give him money to help him win some
cash for his injured foot. The lawyer’s performance gives Don Chipote the impression that he has
the legal power to collect money for him and that the U.S. will compensate him for his injured
foot. However, as discussed earlier, Don Chipote is an illegal immigrant and would never have
any legal protection simply if he were discovered as undocumented he would be immediately
deported. The narrator states that, “If the lawyer had collected anything, it remained in his own
hands, and Don Chipote was left out in the cold” (Venegas 124).17 Therefore, Don Chipote had
been entranced by the lawyer’s false performance to win him money, and in the end was
swindled out of the cash he gave him. Similar to the lawyer, the witch doctor must also perform
in order to persuade Don Chipote to continue paying him to help get a woman (the flapper) to
fall in love with him. The narrator explains that, “As soon as the witch doctor sees him, he
knows that Don Chipote is his…he says to him, ‘Yours is a tricky one, but I can fix it for you’”
(Venegas 125).18 Thus, the witch doctor uses his elaborate performance of potions and spells to
convince Don Chipote that he can win the flapper’s love. Once again, Don Chipote is swindled
and exploited by the witch doctor that successfully lures him into his performance and makes him believe that he is actually a witch doctor that can do the things he says.

*The Adventures of Don Chipote* reflects the physical labor that many Mexican immigrants had to endure during the 20th century. Moreover, Don Chipote’s story explores other aspects of the Mexican immigrant as a cheap laborer. Don Chipote’s story represents the dehumanization through exploitation and technology that occurred at his jobs in the U.S. Additionally, this text demonstrates how dehumanization removes Don Chipote from the identity he had from the past, and how it prevents him from gaining one in the U.S. Furthermore, Chicanos already living in the U.S. use their jobs as a performance to exploit fellow Mexican immigrants out of their money. The Chicanos’ performance reveals their lack of identity because they choose to “sell out” and create the illusion of that person—when they are really nobody because it is all an act. Don Chipote’s immigrant experience in the work force ultimately prevents him from being the person he wants to be and pursuing the life he wants.

Whereas *The Adventures of Don Chipote* serves as the historical model for Mexican immigrants travelling to the U.S. for work, the labor conditions do not appear to alter very much even in the projected future of the 22nd century. Unlike *The Adventures of Don Chipote*, which dealt with an emerging technology within the work force (the railroad), *Lunar Braceros 2125-2148* combines both labor and technology for its workers. Since technology and labor are closely tied together during this century, dehumanization is extremely evident in this text and how it affects its laborers. Although this futuristic society relies on technology, it still relies heavily on a cheap labor force. Lydia and her friends work as Tecos, who clean up waste from the earth, and coincidentally fulfill the government’s need for cheap labor. Therefore, similar to Don Chipote, Lydia and her friends are subject to abuse by the combination of labor and technology. As a
result, they become consumed by their jobs and lose their human identities to the technology they are working with.

In *Lunar Braceros 2125-2148*, Lydia explains the government’s need for cheap human labor that can replace the robotic units that were constantly breaking down on the moon. Lydia states that, “hands-on workers who could adapt to changing lunar situations and were capable of solving unforeseen problems” were needed, but simply says, “we were cheaper” (Sánchez and Pita 6). Lydia’s explanation illustrates the need for cheap labor, but also the dehumanization of human laborers who decide to work those jobs. Cheap human laborers are needed to replace robots on the moon that cannot perform properly because they malfunction or breakdown. Thus, the laborers on the moon are given less worth than the robots. Instead of replacing the robots, or getting them fixed, the government chooses to hire cheap workers to get the job done because they are not concerned if they lose a human life. In this case, it is cheaper to replace a human with another human, than to buy a new robot to do the job. The employers and the government do not view their laborers as humans, they view them as objects that replace robots, except humans are easier for them to dispose of and cheaper to purchase. Similar to Don Chipote’s fusion with the railroad track, the workers in *Lunar Braceros 2125-2148* also become fused with a technology that changes them. Whereas Don Chipote is ultimately replaced with human labor, in this case, robots are replaceable with human laborers. Furthermore, by working in these types of jobs, the laborer becomes the robot and completely replaces the human identity with a technological one.

In addition to the technological alterations that the laborers must suffer, they are subject to exploitation and can be identified as “slaves” similar to the workers in Don Chipote:
We became a controlled laboratory labor force, like lab rats, a disciplinary society that was useful to the state; we produced not only the usual goods that had formerly been shipped South to sweatshops and assembly plants, but also high tech items not then under production elsewhere (Sánchez and Pita 14).

The *braceros* of the 22nd century are treated as experimental labor and “property” of the state. They are experimented on through two different occupations: those that require hard physical labor, and the more sophisticated jobs to create new technologies. More importantly, whether these laborers are working in a sweatshop or with technology, they are “property” of the state. As property of the state, this suggests that these laborers (like the ones in Don Chipote) are similar to slaves, but are ironically wage laborers. The description of the laborers as “lab rats” signifies how the government treats them. Instead of being treated as humans they are used as animals that can be manipulated, experimented with, and controlled. These laborers are closely related to slaves because they have essentially no power over their lives or the jobs that are given to them by their “masters,” or in this case the government. This example demonstrates the exploitation and dehumanization that laborers were suffering while on Earth. When Lydia decides to work on the moon as a Teco, she hopes to escape the jobs on Earth that force her into a slave-like identity and prevent her from being human. However, Lydia immediately learns that the lunar *braceros* are subject to even more abuse by the government and technology on the moon.

During Lydia’s time on the moon, she and the other Teco workers discover that their jobs are meant to consume them (literally and figuratively) and prevent them from ever returning to Earth. When Lydia migrates to the moon she takes on a job as a Teco, a laborer who disposes of the Earth’s waste on the moon’s sites. One of the days when she and her partner Frank are inspecting the waste containers, they make a disturbing discovery about past Teco workers,
including Frank’s brother Peter. When Lydia reveals their discovery she describes that, “Inside were the bodies, more like the skeletons, of Frank’s brother Peter and other Tecos, probably the seven that had supposedly returned to Earth five days after we arrived to take their place” (Sánchez and Pita 57). This scene demonstrates the complete dehumanization of the Teco laborers because they have been killed and stuffed into these containers. Placing these Tecos into waste containers reflects the complete consumption of the laborer by his/her job. Similar to Don Chipote who becomes consumed by the railroad track, the Tecos are also literally fused with their work. The metal containers represent the technological object that consumes them. Additionally, these metal containers are used as a space to put the waste from the Earth. Thus, not only are the Tecos fused with the object they work with, figuratively, they are the object itself, in this case the metal container and heap of trash. The Tecos become identified as “trash” to the government because after they are killed, they are disposed of just like trash. The deterioration of the body into skeletons demonstrates the complete lack of identity these Tecos have. Now that they are dead, they no longer exist to the government, which is why they are thrown into a container never to be seen again. Also, their skeletons are intermingled with other skeletons and trash, making it difficult to decipher their true identities. Ultimately, the discovery of the dead Tecos in the metal trash containers conveys their complete dehumanization by the government and the technology that they work with.

In addition, the replacement of the old Tecos with Lydia and the other new Tecos demonstrates the government’s intention to completely dehumanize its laborers by working them until their death (or murder). Tecos like Peter become objects for the government, objects that they can exploit to their satisfaction, and dispose of at their demand. Lydia’s bitter tone that she and the other Tecos took “their place” conveys that she realizes despite being able to escape the
abuse on Earth, she faces an even greater challenge on the moon: avoiding her death. In fact, Lydia and the other Tecos learn from their supervisor Bob why the government killed the Tecos, “They don’t want to use valuable shuttle or cargo space to transport us braceros back when they can take back more titanium or bauxite in their payloads” (Sánchez and Pita 64). Similar to the replacement of robotic units with human laborers, the braceros on the moon are not viewed as “products” of value to the government because they are killed in order to make more room for the loads that are actually do value. The state is not concerned about whether or not the laborers make it back to Earth. From their capitalistic point of view, the lunar braceros are disposable objects that can be easily replaced with other cheap workers. Additionally, not having the extra weight of the braceros on the ship helps them to be efficient and carry more profitable payloads back to earth. Thus, just as the government preferred saving money by using cheap human labor instead of replacing their expensive robotic units, the same idea applies for those working on the moon. Although the government is clearly guilty of exploiting its cheap laborers on the moon, it also completely controls its own employees, such as Bob, by literally objectifying the body through technology.

After Lydia and Frank discover the containers with the dead Tecos, and their supervisor Bob confesses to the government’s corrupt acts, they take over his identity by pretending to be him and writing all of his reports for headquarters. However, when they are unresponsive to the state, Bob suffers more than they had anticipated. They discover Bob lying on the floor, convulsing from a pain that is emanating throughout his entire body. Lydia and the Tecos learn that Bob is also abused by the government because of a technological chip that is inserted in his body. Lydia explains that one of the other Tecos, “searched all over Bob’s skull for the sensor, and found the small lump behind the left ear and cut into it to remove the sensor” (Sánchez &
Pita 96). This moment signifies the literal objectification of the government upon its own employees. Not only does the government aim to dehumanize its laborers, it inserts microchips near its own employees’ skulls to monitor and control them like puppets. The piece of technology in Bob’s skull removes him from his human identity and aligns him with a robot-like figure. Bob knows that it is helpless to report the government’s wrongdoings because they are the ones in control of him, and if he tries to challenge them he will be tortured or killed. When Lydia and her friends remove the microchip, they liberate Bob from the government’s control and allow him to return to his human identity. Ironically, Lydia and her friends make Bob their prisoner in order to ensure that they are successful in their escape back to Earth.

In addition to Bob, there are two characters that are also used as “puppets” of the state to put on a performance for the public. In *Lunar Braceros 2125-2148*, the president of CaliTexas is a Latino. The Latino president’s background suggests that CaliTexas maintains a strong Latino identity and community. However, the Latino president is not a leader concerned with helping other Latinos in the community; instead he is a puppet for the government. In regards to the president’s background, Lydia states, “Ultimately capital can undo any ties or links on the basis of race, ethnicity, language or color” (Sánchez and Pita 31). Thus, the government is given the ultimate power to remove someone completely from his or her ethnic identity. In the case of the Latino president, the government asserts full control over him, just as they did Bob. Although not explicitly stated that he is micro chipped, his complete compliance to the government suggests that he too is under some sort of mind-control. Therefore, the Latino president’s true identity is removed because he is not truly a human anymore; he is a puppet for the state. While the Latino president’s performance suggests that he desires to help his community, his identity is not his own, and the government is the one that decides what happens in the country. However, the
government also makes puppets of resistance leaders who organize directly with communities so that they can maintain control of the country and ensure it is functioning the way they want it to.

In the beginning of Lydia’s story, she and her first partner Gabriel are a part of a political resistance group led by Juan Gómez to try and combat the government’s oppression. Somehow, Gabriel is discovered by the government officials and is killed for his illegal activities. Later, Lydia learns that their rebel leader Juan Gómez “had been in their [the government] pay, reporting on political resistance activities” and was the one who tipped-off Gabriel’s whereabouts to the officials (Sánchez and Pita 41). Once again, the government uses leaders of the public as their puppet to maintain the control they have over their country. In this case, the government targets the heart of the community by using Juan Gómez as a decoy. Juan Gómez pretends to be a political resistance leader but in actuality is paid by the government to tell them where the people are organizing so that they can get rid of them, just as they did Gabriel. Similar to the Latino president, Juan Gómez is completely removed from his identity because he is whatever the state wants him to be. They control the strings, and he must follow their every command. Both the Latino president and Juan Gómez are considered “sell outs” to their people. They contribute to the people’s oppression and disable the community from strengthening its presence and identity in the country. However, Lydia and her friends resist the government’s oppression by creating a community of Tecos and miners who successfully return to Earth from the moon. Thus, unlike the political leaders that are controlled by the government, Lydia and her friends unite as a group to reach out to other communities to form one strong identity that will overcome the government’s oppression. Lydia and her friends are determined to continue their struggle until they are recognized and treated fairly by the government. The film *Sleep Dealer* is also concerned with addressing an oppressive government that dehumanizes and exploits its
people. Additionally, *Sleep Dealer* emphasizes the complete consumption of humans by technology in jobs across the board.

In the film *Sleep Dealer*, when Memo decides to accept a job as a Sleep Dealer, he willingly gives up his identity and transforms himself because he chooses to become a robot. Unlike the other texts where laborers are dehumanized by technology and jobs because it is out of their control, the laborers in *Sleep Dealer* voluntarily give up their human identities in order to get a job in the factory. Additionally, labor becomes more complex than the physical or intellectual work; it becomes a virtual workspace. The laborer becomes the embodiment of technology when he/she becomes the robot that virtually works in the U.S. As discussed in the previous section, Memo undergoes the installation of his nodes by Luz in order to get “connected” to be a Sleep Dealer. Before Memo even begins working, he is already allowing himself to be consumed by technology. He has bits of metal injected into his skin all over his body and begins the gradual transformation into a robot. More importantly, Memo *chooses* this identity despite the loss of his humanity in the process.

When Memo first steps into the Sleep Dealer factory, he is in awe of the other workers around him. Similar to Don Chipote’s awe of the Mexican performers, Memo is also entranced by the identity that he *thinks* the Sleep Dealer possesses. All of the Sleep Dealers are working in their individual workspaces, connected to wires inserted in their nodes and are completely immersed in the world on the other side. The manager of the Sleep Dealer factory notices Memo’s awe and states, “This is the American Dream. We give the United States what they’ve always wanted…all the work—without the workers” (Rivera 36:21-36:28). Although Memo is completely enchanted by the idea of being a Sleep Dealer, he fails to understand the weight of the manager’s words. The manager’s statement implies that the U.S. wants to remove the
Mexican community and identity completely from its country. However, just like the previous two texts, the government desires a source of cheap labor. In this case, the U.S. has found a loophole to avoid Mexican immigrants from entering into their country. The U.S. completely removes the Mexican immigrant’s human presence by replacing it with a robotic unit that is controlled by the laborer in Mexico. When Memo plugs in for the first time, he allows his job to consume him; he completely transforms into the robot working in the U.S. and allows himself to be dehumanized by his employers. First, Memo plugs the cords into his nodes, allowing the immersion of technology with his nervous system. Next, he places a contact in his eyes giving him the digitized virtual vision he needs to see the robot’s perspective in the U.S (Rivera 37:01-38:00). This entire scene demonstrates Memo’s complete loss of identity because he is giving up all internal and sensory aspects of his body to become the robot. Chris Pak explains that in a technological world, “we began to think of ourselves more and more as biological machines, which made it harder and harder to say what makes us different from our gadgets” (Pak 232). Thus, Memo identifies himself as a robot because he is the embodiment of the “biological machine.” In the same way that the characters in the previous texts had to perform in their line of work, Memo must also perform in accordance to the robot he is controlling. Memo is now the robot working in San Diego, instead of the human being working in Mexico. However, Memo learns from a fellow co-worker that being a robot also means being disposable like an object, even when one is injured or killed by a surge in the network.

During one of Memo’s shifts, there is a sudden a surge in the system that connects all of the Sleep Dealers to the same technological network. As a result, one of the Sleep Dealer workers is shocked by the surge because it directly affects his nervous system because he had been plugged into the network. After the shock, the worker shakes uncontrollably until someone
unhooks the connections from his nodes, and then his body goes limp. His eyes become gray and he is unconscious. It is unclear whether this man is dead or alive when he is carried away (Rivera 50:25-51:13). After the commotion from the surge, Memo and the other Sleep Dealers are ordered to get back to work and ignore what just happened. Similar to The Adventures of Don Chipote and Lunar Braceros 2125-2148, the laborer is disposable to the employer regardless of injury or death. Memo realizes that as a Sleep Dealer he is the object (the robot), and just like his co-worker, if he is struck by a surge, he too will be carried off and replaced by another man or woman who wants to take his place. Later, Memo learns that not only is he dehumanized by his job as a robot, aspects of his human identity such as his memory also gradually deteriorate the longer he works as a Sleep Dealer. Hunter Heyck explains that, “In films with networked/social machines, the estrangement from our bodies is near total, for in these films we are estranged from the whole world of our sensory experience, sometimes even from our memories” (Heyck 233). Thus, in Memo’s complete immersion to the robotic identity, he sacrifices his humanity far more than he thought by sacrificing intrinsic aspects of his identity, such as his memories.

Although Memo works long hours he is never physically picking up large objects, his robot is doing it. Therefore, Memo’s exhaustion does not necessarily emerge from physical labor, but instead from the mental deterioration caused by working as a Sleep Dealer for too long. In the beginning of the film Memo remarks that in the life of a Sleep Dealer one’s memories become hard to recall after long hours of working. Additionally, throughout the film a red mist constantly fades and reappears on the screen to signify the deterioration of Memo’s mind and memories. Thus, not only is Memo’s physical body transformed by technology, his mind becomes a target too. Similar to Lunar Braceros 2125-2148, all aspects of Memo’s life and body become controlled by the machine. In one scene, Memo is working a long shift and begins
to fall asleep. As he begins to doze off, his robot counterpart begins to lose its balance and almost falls over the edge. Before the robot falls Memo wakes up and the machine tells him that his pay is docked for falling asleep. Thus, because the machinery had been in danger of falling, and it had not been performing its duties through Memo, he loses his pay (Rivera 1:06:30-1:06:40). It is clear that Memo’s exhaustion is not important because he is believed to be the robot that must continue working without a break. This scene demonstrates that Memo’s job as a Sleep Dealer completely consumes his identity, and the only way that he can escape this life is to return to being a human instead of a robot. Thus, Memo gets the help of an unlikely ally to take control of the machine and use it against itself to bring change and opportunities to his community.

As mentioned previously, labor and performance often go hand-in-hand for some of the jobs that the characters have, and in *Sleep Dealer*, Rudy performs his job as a military drone, and Luz does the same as a writer. Similar to Memo, Rudy is connected to a robotic counterpart, a drone. Rudy accepts being modified by labor and technology because he chooses to give up his human identity to be a military drone. However, Rudy also accepts that in his line of work he is performing for an audience, specifically a show called “Drones.” Rudy is expected to perform as a drone that kills terrorists and entertain the audiences watching the show. As the commentator on “Drones” states, it is Rudy’s job to find the terrorist, “And blow the hell out of the bad guys” (Rivera 13:30-15:03). In the beginning of the film, Rudy’s first mission is to blow up Memo’s home in Santa Ana for a connection they picked up the night before from Memo. As a drone, Rudy has weapons built into his plane and uses guns to blow up Memo’s house, and more importantly, Memo’s father. Thus, not only is Rudy changed into a drone, but he is also removed from human compassion. When he is ordered to kill Memo’s father, he contemplates the killing
of another human, but ultimately kills his father with a single shot. The commentator congratulates Rudy for a job well done and an audience enthusiastically applauds his “good” deed. Thus, Rudy is not considered to be human by the audience or the commentator, instead he is perceived as the drone that shoots and kills humans, not the actual human killing another human for entertainment. This moment is critical for Rudy because he realizes how he has become consumed by his job and technology, and chooses to correct the error of his ways by finding Memo to make amends for the crime he had committed against him.

In order to find out more about Memo, Rudy finds Luz’s TruNode stories online and pays her to investigate more about Memo and his past. Luz is a writer who uses TruNode to sell her stories to interested readers. As a writer, Luz must also perform on some level in order to entertain her readers and persuade them to keep purchasing and reading her stories. When Luz first writes about Memo she does not expect anyone to purchase the story, but someone does: Rudy. As a result, instead of writing about Memo because she is generally interested, Luz writes about him because she wants to earn money from his memories. However, when Memo discovers that she had been exploiting him, Luz realizes that she had been straying from her original goal as a writer to connect people. Thus, Rudy and Luz become coincidentally connected by Memo, and ultimately learn that their jobs disconnect them from human compassion. Luz and Rudy decide that they no longer want the identity they thought, especially when it requires them to be completely inhuman. At the end, Memo, Rudy and Luz finally realize that their jobs are harmful to themselves and others around them. Thus, they decide to use technology to fight against itself and regain their human identities.

After Rudy confesses to Memo that he had murdered his father, he begs Memo to let him try to alleviate the pain he caused Memo and his family. Memo decides that in order to regain his
old life, he must use technology to fight against those who prevent him from being the person he wants to be. Heyck states that, “Worlds merge; minds and selves change bodies; humans fight machines by becoming one of them” (233). In this case, Memo and Rudy are no longer being controlled by technology, but using technology to make a change in a world dominated by machines. When Rudy blows up the dam, this serves as a triumphant moment in the entire film. As the water from the U.S. gushes back into Mexico, it signifies the revival of the human identity (Rivera 1:19:40-1:21:21). Whereas the Mexican community had been under an extreme drought, it is now able to have the resources to create a better life. Additionally, Memo uses this opportunity to replenish the land, his identity, and his community. Memo’s choice to reject technology and return to physical labor signifies his success in self-exploration. Memo had been able to become the Sleep Dealer he wanted to be, and when he found that he did not fit into this identity, he was able to return to being a human being. Memo’s choice produces a domino effect because Rudy and Luz also reject technology. After the attack, Rudy can never return to being a drone for the U.S. because he is now considered a terrorist. However, he is content with his choice and stays in Mexico to rediscover his roots and escape the world of technology he once lived in. Luz also changes her ways and decides takes a break from writing and forms a relationship with Memo, and not just to sell his memories. Ultimately, each character is able to rediscover their human identity and make a greater contribution to their community. The film ends with Memo planting crops into the ground, which signifies his desire to return to a life without technology. Memo states, “But maybe there’s a future for me here. On the edge of everything. A future with a past. If I connect. And fight” (Rivera 1:23:19-1:24:00). Memo’s replanting of the crops signifies his hope to revive a world with organic growth. Additionally, he
hopes to connect with his community from the past and present in order to form a better future where they will no longer suffer from a technological world that dehumanizes them.

These three texts demonstrate how characters from the past to the future suffer from similar abuse at their jobs. These characters are dehumanized and exploited by labor or technology in some way and it ultimately leads to the loss of their identity. Additionally, some of the characters use their jobs as a performance to exploit others, while exploiting themselves at the same time. Although each character overcomes their struggles in their own ways, they each come to the realization that they do not want to encompass the identity that is often forced upon them. Therefore, the characters are able to make their own decisions about the type of people they want to be and how they want this to reflect within their community. In The Adventures of Don Chipote, Don Chipote is deported to Mexico, but even though he has a choice to go back and try to assimilate to American culture, he decides to embrace his Mexican identity and be apart of that community instead. In Lunar Braceros 2125-2148, Lydia and her friends escape the moon and return to Earth still resisting their oppressive government and organizing their communities to become stronger together. In Sleep Dealer, Memo, Rudy and Luz all adopt identities they initially think they want, but realize that when technology takes over, they would rather be human beings than slaves to technology. Sleep Dealer signifies the complete destruction of the barrier between the U.S. and Mexico, but also the return to a human identity that is immersed in the community, nature, and a world without technology and dehumanizing labor.
TRANSFORMING THE MEXICAN IMMIGRANT IDENTITY

And all the while, he dreamt…And in his dreams he saw bitter adventures, in which he had played the protagonist, unwind like a movie reel, sweetened by the remembrance of his flapper’s love. It was a memory that would not allow him to forget the trouble that Chicanos experience when leaving their fatherland, made starry-eyed by the yarns spun by those who go to the United States, as they say, to strike it rich. And pondering all of this, he came to the conclusion that Mexicans will make it big in the United States…WHEN PARROTS BREAST-FEED.19

Daniel Venegas, The Adventures of Don Chipote (160)

After Don Chipote’s long journey in the United States, he returns to Mexico. In Mexico he feels as though his time in the United States was all a dream. Originally, he began his journey with the American dream in mind, but realized later on that it had actually been a nightmare. In this ending statement, Don Chipote has learned the truth about what the Mexican immigrant experience is really all about. He is no longer blinded by the lies and stories told about the U.S. After he has endured its hardships, he concludes that no Mexican will ever be successful in the United States. Although Don Chipote had suffered greatly in his attempt to assimilate into U.S. culture, his return to Mexico ultimately signifies the strength of his Mexican identity.

Additionally, the characters in Lunar Braceros 2125-2148 and Sleep Dealer return from their

---

19 Y mientras tanto, soñaba…y en sus sueños veía pasar como cinta películera las amargas aventuras de que fue protagonista, las que eran endulzadas por el recuerdo de sus amores pelonescos, recuerdo que no le hacía olvidar los fracasos que los chicanos se llevan por dejar a su patria, ilusionados por los cuentos de los que van a los Estados Unidos, dizque a barrer el dinero con la escoba. Y pensando en esto, llegó a la conclusion de que los mexicanos se harán ricos en Estados Unidos: CUANDO LOS PERICOS MAMEN (Venegas 159).
journeys with a different perspective and alternatives to improve themselves and their communities.

These three texts reflect how the Mexican immigrant is a victim to countless barriers in their lives before and after they migrate to the other side. These physical, economic, communicative and technological barriers are what prevent them from achieving success and being the person that they want to be. Additionally, the jobs that these Mexican immigrants must take on ultimately dehumanize and exploit them through labor and technology. However, despite the hardships that these characters face, they determine their own paths at the end. They become in charge of their identities and life, and choose to improve their communities with their newfound knowledge.

What makes these texts most interesting is that they explore Mexican immigration from the 20th century and the 22nd century and beyond. However, whether the texts reflect on the past or future, they definitely coincide with aspects of immigration from the 21st century. In the 21st century, Mexican immigrants are still valued as cheap laborers, discriminated against based on race, and if they are undocumented, they lack an identity within the United States. For example, with the passage of Arizona’s SB 1070 law, it allowed, “law enforcement to question a person’s immigration status based on ‘reasonable suspicion’ that the person is in the U.S. illegally” (Jonsson). This “reasonable suspicion” allows law enforcement to question one’s identity, profile people based on race, and interrogate anyone who looks Mexican. Thus, current laws such as these reflect similar issues demonstrated in these texts. Mexican immigrants today are judged on appearance and viewed with an “illegal” identity, instead of their actual identity. Consequently, what becomes most important is whether they can be identified on paper, not as human beings.
However, there have been movements within the community to resist being identified solely based on a piece of paper. U.S. Legislation such as the DREAM act aim to help undocumented students so that they may have equal access to the educational opportunities that the U.S. has to offer. These movements are similar to the ones found in the texts that want to motivate their communities to obtain a better life. Characters such as Lydia and Memo, inspired by their own struggles, choose to make a positive impact in their community by strengthening and unifying it. Even within politics, the latest presidential election has proved how valuable the Latino vote is for the U.S. Thus, as the Latino demographic becomes larger in the U.S., their importance in the country becomes even greater. Mexican immigrants, who make up a large part of the Latino demographic, are finally being recognized in the U.S. as individuals who contribute to society as a whole. Whether it is through labor, education, or politics—their presence and significance has become crucial to the country.

_The Adventures of Don Chipote, Lunar Braceros 2125-2148, and Sleep Dealer_ address the past, current, and possible issues of the future that prevent the Mexican immigrant from reaching his/her full potential due to the barriers (physical, economic, communicative, technological) and labor (dehumanization, exploitation, technology) they endure in the United States. Although these texts demonstrate how these factors stop the Mexican immigrant from achieving some of his/her goals, their experiences are what make a greater impact on their individuality and their communities. From their experiences they are able to discover who they are and the person they want to be. Moreover, they contribute their stories to their communities to improve them and give them new insights. These texts highlight how the Mexican immigrant influences his/her individual and communal identity regardless of his/her personal success in a new land. They demonstrate how immigrants have been resisted as citizens, disregarded by the
government, disliked for taking jobs from Americans, and restricted from crossing into U.S. territory altogether. Finally, these texts construct the Mexican immigrant as a central figure to the U.S. and Mexico. The Mexican immigrant defies political and historical assumptions to successfully establish himself/herself as an important and valuable member to society.
WORKS CITED


*Sleep Dealer*. Dir. Alex Rivera. Perf. Luis Fernando Peña, Leonor Varela, and Jacob Vargas. Maya Entertainment, 2008. Film.

