

Grounding Oneself at the Crossroads: *Getting Home Alive* by Aurora Levins Morales and Rosario Morales

CARMEN FLYS JUNQUERA

Instituto Franklin, Universidad de Alcalá

carmen.flys@uah.es

This article analyzes some of the multiple dimensions of hybridity in *Getting Home Alive* (1986) by Puerto Ricans Aurora Levins Morales and Rosario Morales. This revolutionary autobiography is experimental in both form and content, containing poems, stories, journals, reportage and so forth. It is not clearly categorized in terms of genre, it does not defy any one culture or language and it presents a sense of place rooted in multiple places. The voices of mother and daughter fuse into one, together with the voices of all their ancestors. The multiple sensitivities of both women, products of multidirectional migrations, ethnicities, cultures, languages and classes are symbolized in their grounding of themselves at a crossroads which embraces a relational collective identity, wholeness and choice, while rejecting fragmentation or alienation.

Keywords: hybridity; sense of place; multiple sensitivities; migrations; identity; cosmopolitanism

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Arraigarse en el cruce: *Getting Home Alive* de Aurora Levins Morales y Rosario Morales

Este artículo analiza algunas de las múltiples dimensiones de hibridación en el texto *Getting Home Alive* (1986), escrito por las portorriqueñas Aurora Levins Morales y Rosario Morales. Esta autobiografía revolucionaria es experimental tanto en cuestiones de forma como de contenido, al incluir poemas, relatos, diarios y reportajes, entre otros. Se resiste a una tipificación de género literario al igual que rechaza una cultura o lengua única y reafirma un sentido de arraigo en múltiples lugares. Las voces de madre e hija acaban fusionándose en una identidad colectiva con las voces de sus antepasados. Las múltiples sensibilidades de

ambas mujeres, productos de múltiples migraciones, etnicidades, culturas, lenguas y clases sociales se simbolizan en el arraigo en el cruce, donde abrazan una identidad relacional y colectiva, rechazando la fragmentación o la alienación.

Palabras clave: hibridación; sentido de arraigo; sensibilidades múltiples; migraciones; identidad; cosmopolitismo

I am a child of the Americas,
 a light-skinned mestiza of the Caribbean,
 a child of many diaspora, born into this continent at a crossroads.
 [...]

 I am new. History made me. My first language was spanglish.
 I was born at the crossroads
 and I am whole.

Aurora Levins Morales “Child of the Americas” (1986)

These lines are from the poem, “Child of the Americas,” from the autobiography of daughter and mother, Aurora Levins Morales and Rosario Morales, *Getting Home Alive*.¹ The lines speak clearly of multiple migrations and *mestizaje*, but conclude with a strong affirmation of wholeness. This “revolutionary and subversive” (Torres 1998, 276) autobiography, published in 1986, is one of the three autobiographical collections, together with Cherríe Moraga’s *Loving in the War Years: Lo que Nunca Pasó Por sus Labios* (1983) and Gloria Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1987), that, according to Lourdes Torres, marked a new genre for Latina writers (1998, 276). These collections challenge in multiple ways traditional notions of the autobiographical genre, both in terms of form and content, much as seminal works by other ethnic women, such as Maxine Hong Kingston’s *The Woman Warrior* (1976) and Audre Lorde’s *Zami* (1982). Inmaculada Lara-Bonilla considers the text to be “one of the worthiest contributions to the theorization of Latino/a identities before the 1990s” (2010, 358). The authors of *Getting Home Alive* advocate and invoke a *mestiza* consciousness from the beginning. Their work is clearly a conscious effort to create a new type of text, one of *mestizaje* or hybridity. Moreover, both the title and the metaphor of the crossroads standing for *mestizaje* also imply the authors’ grounding of their identity in place. Yet it also problematizes different origins without claiming one sole original home place:

I am Caribeña, island grown [...]

 I am not african. Africa is in me, but I cannot return.

 I am not taína. Taíno is in me, but there is no way back.

 I am not european. Europe lives in me, but I have no home there.

 (Morales and Morales 1986, 50)

The objective of this article is to analyze some of the multiple layers of hybridity in this text. Gender and racial/ethnic issues, frequently addressed in the text, have

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received considerable critical attention. However, this radical text also explores culture, language and class, and underlying it all, there is a strong sense of multiple places, which will be the focus of this article.

Hybridity goes beyond the notion of multiculturalism, or that of several cultures coexisting; it implies “both/and” and the interplay of multiple hybrid states or multiple identities fusing into a new heterogeneous identity. Hybridity can also be viewed as Alfred Arteaga’s use of the cross (1997) and Guillermo Gómez-Peña’s use of X (1993), the crossroads or the matrix, a site of multidirectionality, a simultaneity of cultures such as Mary Louise Pratt’s notion of the “contact zone” (1991), where these cultures meet, collide and grapple with each other. In literature, this hybridity plays out as a new vision of literature, one that clashes with the notion of writing as discrete, coherently structured and monolingual (Benito and Manzananas 2002, 15).

In addition to textual or cultural hybridity, place is another area of meeting. Sense of place traditionally has implied being grounded in one place for a long time, knowing its physical features but also having an emotional attachment. For example, for Setha Low and Irwin Altman this means “the symbolic relationship formed by people giving culturally shared emotional/affective meanings to a particular space or piece of land that provides the basis for the individual’s and group’s understanding of and relation to the environment” (1992, 2). For historian John Brinckerhoff Jackson, sense of place “is something that we ourselves create in the course of time. It is the result of habit or custom” (1994, 5). Modern technology and mass media have dissolved distances; special places seem to disappear, often succumbing to urbanization or resource extraction and are increasingly being substituted with more uniform places. According to Edward Relph, placelessness is both an environment without significant places as well as an underlying attitude which does not acknowledge significance in places (1976, 143). While *Getting Home Alive* does highlight the difficulties of migrations, displacement and nomadism, it refuses to return to a traditional, idealized “home” place, nor does it float in placelessness. Lawrence Buell mentions as one of the dangers of place attachment the “maladaptive sedentarism, hankering to recover the world we have lost, [and] xenophobic stigmatization of outsiders and wanderers” (2005, 68), which this autobiography avoids by recognizing the “multilayering [of places] and openness to others” (Goodbody and Flys Junquera 2016, 20).

In an increasingly globalized world, fewer people have traditional attachments to one place. Ursula Heise, in *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet* (2008), points out that contemporary cultural critiques are questioning the role of the local, regional, national and global in identity formation, and addressing the seemingly ultimate modern non-places, such as hospitals, malls and airports (Augé, 1995), precisely those places of uniformity which Relph denounces. One of the major insights of these theories is on the “emergence of new forms of culture that are no longer anchored in place” (Heise 2008, 10). Yet place remains important, albeit in a different manner. In

a text where both authors are immigrants and have moved several times, the ability of grounding oneself in place becomes a key issue. According to Lara-Bonilla, *Getting Home Alive* links personal experience, grounded in the body, to collective experiences, situated in other specific locations, creating a new identitary map (2010, 359). Thus, an analysis of place in *Getting Home Alive* becomes a relevant issue in an increasingly globalized world.

Getting Home Alive can be seen as a hybrid text from multiple perspectives. Firstly, the cover of the book depicts a multicolored quilt, which seems to portray an abstraction of two homes, identical in structure but varying in tones, separated by a field; yet both the homes and the landscape are clearly part of the same whole. In the tradition of quilting, this design points to the idea of making a home, of making a new identity out of fragmented bits and pieces. Secondly, the co-authoring by a mother and daughter, whose voices end up blurring into one voice reinforces this. From a generic point of view, this clearly clashes with the traditional notion of autobiography, both in structure and in the creation of the self. The subjectivity of the authors is also hybrid in nature, in that their multiple identities meet and fuse, and no aspect is denied or rejected—both mother and daughter embrace each and every one of their multiplicities. And finally, the language of the text is not monolingual, although it is heavily English-dominant.

The text is strongly feminist and militant, and while issues of gender and ethnicity have been the primary focus of previous studies, this article will focus on other issues, particularly textual and cultural ones, which are noticeably grounded in place. The two voices are marked in the table of contents, each fragment having a title and specific author, which is also reflected throughout the text by a different type of font for each voice. However, in the work itself, no allusion to authorship is made in the individual pieces. Although the different typeface theoretically sets them apart, the fonts are very similar, and in reading, the difference becomes blurred, the reader not being able to clearly distinguish which fragment belongs to whom, without returning to the table of contents. The book is structured into several sections, the titles of which very clearly reveal aspects of the authors' *mestiza* consciousness linked to metaphors of place: the borderlands, the meeting of roads, racial identity, shared roots and heritage, the growth of the new from the old, hurricanes and chaos, ideological commitment, and the blending of voices in the final poem which brings us home. Not only the sections, but the individual fragments also highlight migrations and *mestizaje* as for example "Getting Out Alive," "Immigrants," "Africa," "The Other Heritage," "El Salvador," "Roadkill," "Old Countries," "California," and so forth. While at times, given the subject matter or date, the reader can deduce whether it is Rosario or Aurora speaking, at others, their voices become a kind of "call and response" where one fragment speaks to the other, such as in the fragments "I Recognize You" and the following "I Am The Reasonable One," or "Storytelling" and "I Never Told My Children Stories." And

yet in others, this relationship is not clear, at least until the end of the fragment. The life stories, dreams and meditations of the two women overlap, offer different perspectives on the same experience, talk about each other and their difficult moments. The combination of the narratives, furthermore, according to Lara-Bonilla, “creates an effect of constant interchangeability and mutation, of dynamism and spatial/subjective simultaneity that facilitates the constant superposition and alteration of enunciatory spaces and points of departure” (2010, 360). But in the end, the two voices unite. The use of two voices becomes an act of re-definition, a relational self-fashioning. The autobiography does not create a monolithic self, but a relational one, between mother and daughter but also as the creation of the self as a member of an extended family, group of friends and multiple oppressed groups.

This latter aspect, the creation of a relational self, was initially posited by Nancy Chodorow who claimed that feminine identification was based on learning “a way of being familiar in everyday life [...] [and was] continuous with [a girl’s] early childhood identification and attachments” (1978, 51). These attachments are exemplified by the person(s) with whom the “girl child” had been more involved and, rather than the firm, differentiated boundary usually developed by the “boy child” (50), girls develop a fluid relationship between self and others (51). Chodorow’s theory was a major influence on literary critics (Smith and Watson 1998, 17) and this relational and fluid identity has been a constant feature in much feminist literary criticism, particularly linked to life writing—see Mason ([1980] 1998) and Friedman ([1988] 1998). Another landmark definition of women’s autobiography, comes from Estelle Jelinek’s “Introduction” to *Women’s Autobiography. Essays in Criticism*, where, among other characteristics, she states that the genre tends to be disconnected, fragmented into a pattern of diffusion and diversity, and multidimensional, in contrast to the linear, ordered and coherent male autobiography (1980, 17; quoted in Smith and Watson 1998, 9). These two aspects, the relational self and the multidimensionality, are clearly manifest in *Getting Home Alive*. Other than the fragmentation of the two voices, the book consists of small texts belonging to different genres, styles and registers: essays, sketches, short stories, poems, meditations, journal entries and references to an oral tradition. There is no privileging of any set genre or style. There is no apparent logic, neither chronological, nor in the sequencing of the fragments. Rosario and Aurora do not alternate systematically. While this structuring could be viewed as chaotic or confusing, Torres sees it as a “daring experiment with structure” (1998, 277), or it could be perceived as an attempt to represent the “fragmentary, interrupted, and formless nature” of women’s lives (Jelinek 1980, 19; quoted in Smith and Watson 1998, 9). This structure, new at the time of publication, incorporates the often contradictory aspects of gender, ethnicity, class, sexuality and feminist politics while refusing to accept any one single position and the radicalness of the text lies precisely in that refusal, which leads them to create radical personal and collective identities (Torres 1998, 279). Suzanne Bost claims that the Morales women, together with Rosario Ferré, Ana Lydia Vega and Judith Ortiz

Cofer, are the first generation of self-proclaimed “feminists” writing from Puerto Rico and as a result of their crossing of gender and sexuality with issues of nationality, race and culture, their stories divide subjectivity “into multiple, overlapping components” (2000, 191). Bost, in highlighting how *mestizaje* problematizes conventions of race, nation and gender, contrasts writers from either side of the US/Puerto Rico divide, finding more similarities than differences, the latter being only a question of degree (190). Although Lara-Bonilla does focus on aspects of diaspora, displacement and exile, neither she nor Torres or Bost refer to the actual grounding of identity in place, the focus of this article.

One of the most interesting aspects of *Getting Home Alive* lies in the subjectivity of the self-fashioned multiple author. As the poem “Child of the Americas” reflects, Aurora is a “US Puerto Rican Jew” (Morales and Morales 1986, 50). But that is only a brief synthesis of her life. She is “daughter and grand-daughter of immigrants” (50). Her mother, Rosario is the daughter of Puerto Rican immigrants to New York during the Depression (one could question here the term “immigrant” given the particular status of Puerto Rico vis-à-vis the United States). She arrives at age thirteen first to El Barrio, the Spanish Harlem, and then to the Bronx Jewish Community, where she marries a Jew, Dick, the son of Ukrainian immigrants. They are active in the Communist movement and decide to return to Puerto Rico to escape political difficulties. Aurora, daughter of a Ukrainian Jewish immigrant father and a New York, Puerto Rican mother, is thus born in New York, but raised in Puerto Rico. She calls New York “the Old Country” and has the same nostalgic curiosity as other immigrant children have of Europe:

I grew up in a rainforest, hearing, like earlier immigrant children, of the horrors and delights of the Old Country. Schools there were called PS and then a number. There were neighborhoods with lines as clearly marked as any international border: Italian, Irish, Polish, Black, Jewish, Chinese, and the new populations seeping in: Puerto Ricans, Dominicans, Haitians, Jamaicans, Cubans. In the old country they sold hot chestnuts on the street (“What’s a chestnut, mami?” I think, sucking on a fresh-picked orange), and there were vendors who sold hot yams. (Morales and Morales 1986, 89-90)

Here it is interesting to note the issue of which is the Old Country and which the new, the sense of multidirectionality. According to Arnold Krupat, hegemonic narratives mark progress in a movement from East to West and South to North (1996, 52). If the directions of the grandparents follow the hegemonic logic (both Ukraine and Puerto Rico to New York), Rosario and Dick counter the direction by moving East and South to Puerto Rico, a supposedly less developed area than New York. In this sense, the US-Puerto Rican border is a true fluid border separating the two cultures and countries in terms of distance, language, racial difference and civic rights, although at the same time there is a merging of developed and developing countries. Bost posits that Puerto Rican writers highlight the *mestizaje* which forces

a radical rethinking of the terms of national identity and complicates the drawing of national borders (2000, 189). Later, Aurora and her mother move more times, both together and separately: to Chicago, Minnesota, New England and California. Krupat affirms that hegemonic history erases the tracks of migration because the movement seemingly goes from low to high, thus marking progress (1996, 52). However, the counter-hegemonic narrative of *Getting Home Alive* does the contrary: it narrates the tracks themselves, and their implications, and even retraces them in the opposite direction. This fluidity and shifting of place undoubtedly contributes to the grounding of identity in multiple, rather than a single, place, thus pointing to a more cosmopolitan perception.

In the narrative, both mother and daughter discuss the pull of both identities, the Puerto Rican and the Jew, yet they refuse to choose one and discard the other. In the excerpt called “Synagogue” Rosario recalls passing the Synagogue and crossing herself in the Catholic manner and then being afraid that someone would see her. Yet she had grown up questioning both customs, and the history and the typical insults—“who killed Christ.” She observed and learned: “I know now [referring to the 1940s and the contested creation of Israel] who it was did the killing, who the dying” (Morales and Morales 1986, 112). Within these diverse contact zones, the Morales women begin to practice “creative appropriations” (Benito and Manzanar 2002, 10) and set up new areas of negotiation. A graphic example of this creative appropriation is seen in the following excerpt. Rosario returns to the Bronx and reminisces on her childhood:

The knish place is still there selling knishes in every flavor: potato (that goes without saying), and cabbage and dasha and cheese and apple and strawberry. Though not the ones I made in Chicago one year, with (forgive me!) pork, and raisins and garbanzos and green Spanish olives, the inside of pasteles, in fact. I want a pure Jewish neighborhood to return to but I make Puerto Rican knishes in Chicago, make Morales blintzes in the mountains of Maricao, make my Jewish chicken soup with cilantro and oregano, raise Jewish-Puerto Rican-American children on aceite de oliva and kosher pickles, pasta de guayaba and pirozhni, empanadas and borscht mit sour cream. (116)

Rosario and Aurora end up creating a greater self, a composite of all the oppressed peoples of the world. In the section called “Getting Out Alive” written by Rosario, she reflects on seeing the Bronx on TV. The poem begins with the Bronx as a war zone with refugees, despite the official US rhetoric of multiculturalism; it continues with more war in Chicago and finally turns to international war zones.

{I}t was a war zone of sorts
I'd known
and I hadn't known.
[...]

I wear a yellow star behind my heart
 Above my liver
 I still hear Guernica burning
 Yesterday I walked the dusty miles to a hungry reservation.
 Today I staggered from Shatila bleeding. (17, 21)

In another section, "The Dinner," also written by Rosario, she identifies with and pays homage to all the unknown women and downtrodden people whose work permits the rest to live in comfort:

Perhaps you have seen The Dinner Party, tables set with linens and fine tableware. Dinner, in the dining room, decorous.

I didn't go. My folks didn't either, not my women folks. They don't go to things like that, weren't invited {...}

My womenfolks are giving their own party. In the kitchen. First names only, or m'hija, negra, ne, honey, sugah, dear. The table is scrubbed and each plate and bowl is different, wood, clay, papier mâché, metal, basketry, a leaf, a coconut shell. Each is painted, carved by a woman {...}

This is the dinner. We don't know our forbears' names with a certainty. They aren't written anywhere. We honor them because they have kept it all going, all the civilizations erected on their backs, all the dinner parties given with their labor. And they gave us life, kept us going, brought us to where we are. (51-52)

Thus, her identity is the product of a collective historical subjectivity. In another extract, "I'm On Nature's Side," Rosario identifies with nature and again makes common cause with all exploited subjects, human and non-human, in a very ecofeminist way. This excerpt is one of the few clearly environmentalist pieces, echoing environmentalisms from the south—to use Guha and Martinez Aliet's term (1997)—or those of environmental justice, taking into account both oppressed people and nature, rather than the traditional US environmental concerns. In the last section of this extract she also seems to echo Anzaldúa's description in *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1987) of people on the border and their capacity to adapt and survive:

I'm on nature's side. Man the scientist, white man the scientist, white ruling class man the scientist, the entrepreneur, the corporation president set out to control nature—to make it behave!

But I'm a Third World, born working-class woman. I look at it from nature's point of view, from the insects' point of view [...]

Pest control takes on a different meaning now. Pest control [...]

We know we're pests for wanting to live our lives in peace and plenty. We're pests for not fitting into the grand plan of cornering markets and conquering peoples, increasing

profitability and productivity, of sheltering taxes and fixing prices. And we've got to be made to fit in, we've got to be controlled. A la buena o a la mala, or come quietly cause I carry a big stick [...]

To control [pests], gardeners and agricultural schools, farmers and multinationals spray poisons, distribute infected blankets, unleash predators and armies, demolish nesting sites and villages and neighborhoods. And we die. Many of us die.

But not all. Some of us survive. Our survivors are stronger in some ways, more wily, more versatile. We protect ourselves. We fight back.

[...] We will survive! (Morales and Morales 1986, 68-69)

This fragment echoes an ecofeminist analysis of the logic of domination which is used to justify the parallel subordination of *othered* groups. Despite the many types of ecofeminism that exist, all agree on, according to Karen Warren, the “interconnections among the unjustified dominations of women, other human Others and non-human nature” (2000, 43). The passage quoted, while denouncing political and economic forms of colonialism, conflates the suffering of insects and people, nests and homes, and highlights the strength and resilience of those who are oppressed. In several fragments, the Morales women identify not only with other peoples but also with earth *others*—for example in “Distress Signals,” where Rosario takes on the persona of dying beached whales—in a clear ecofeminist strategy.

In one of the final sections, “If I forget Thee, Oh Jerusalem,” Aurora begins by recalling the suffering of the Jews, but then turns to the suffering the Jews are causing in Palestine, and to all the suffering of the world. In this gloss to Psalm 137 she calls for the solidarity of all people, rejects the vision of revenge found in the Psalm and speaks of another vision, one of a truly hybrid community in Jerusalem, living in peace:

The music would be Arabic and Mediterranean and Eastern European and Latin and African and Asian [...]

I want to see a flowering of Arab and Jewish cultures in a country without racism or anti-Semitism, without rich or poor or spat-upon: everyone beneath the vine and fig tree living in peace and unafraid. A homeland for each and every one of us between the mountains and the sea. A multilingual, multireligious, many-colored and -peopled land where the orange tree blooms for all. I will not surrender this vision for any lesser compromise. (Morales and Morales 1986, 205-209)

As mentioned earlier, another important aspect of this hybrid identity is that of place. Traditionally, a sense of place derives from an intimate knowledge of the surrounding environment together with its emotional dimension. Like most environmentalists, Mitchell Thomashow states that in order to achieve a sense of place one needs to ground oneself in the land and explore “home and community, ecology and history, landscape and ecosystem.” It implies a deliberate search for one’s

ecological roots, linking them to one's identity (2002, 76). Place, history, community and identity are all linked. Thomashow argues that the interpenetration of species, peoples and landscapes are the basis of any local language and thus the stories of inhabitation provide the necessary knowledge of habitat and history (178). Rosario writes about this interpenetration of habitat, history and identity, noting that she needs her natural surroundings to blossom. For example, she addresses the needs of an American from the mainland saying "You, / You're like a crocus, like a sugar maple / Your juices ooze in the tepid sun" (Morales and Morales 1986, 140), and then contrasting them with her character:

I need steady warm breezes to unfreeze my blood
 I need to sink my chilled bones in a soup warm sea [...]
 Oh! I will be a lizard and sit on a sun hot stone
 I want to lie flat, lie lifeless [...]
 Eyes closed
 Limbs still
 Soaking
 Waiting
 For the strong, slow, baking heat
 To stir me into life. (140)

In the poem "Coffee Bloom" Aurora describes Puerto Rico and her rootedness—note she says *my* country—in these terms:

In *my* country
 the coffee blooms between hurricanes
 [...]
 Here in the green shadows we whisper, the bush and I, our secret,
 that hidden root
 the reason we don't tremble, though the bruised petals flail
 no matter how wildly the wet wind blows. (61; *my* emphasis)

Rosario remembers her childhood in the Bronx where summers "smelled of concrete, of asphalt melting [...] of sticky bus seats, of sunburn carried home from the beach, like seashells, all the long hours of subway to my room" (124), which contrasts with the summer she went to Puerto Rico and lived among "the wide green leaves of the plantain [...] my feet stained pink by the red mud, my skin dark from the noon sun. I will taste the sweetness at the pit of the red hibiscus bloom with a child's tongue [...] jump from the tall rock into the springy ferns below [...] into the green of their summers again and again" (125). While she lived in the Bronx, Rosario agonized to see nature. She writes about looking forward to seeing the starlings every

evening as they fly through the city. She would try to sketch them because it was “all [she] had to replace the banana plants, flamboyanes, hibiscus, avocados and fern trees [she] had left behind” (143). That sketch would carry her through the “brick and cement insane asylum of a city [where she] could reach out and reel in some bird lines, a bird shape wrapped in paper for the winter, to feed [her] hunger for the joy, the winged aliveness that had shot through [her]—eye to hand to paper—pinned to the creamy page” (143). While the sense of place of both Rosario and Aurora evolves, as we will see, that soft, sweet and warm climate, has its permanent niche within each of them.

Yet, in “Child of the Americas” Aurora states that she finds her home at the crossroads. A crossroads is a similar metaphor to that of “contact zones” or “borderlands” as stated earlier, although it has the added nuance of choice. As we have mentioned, one of the characteristic signifiers of our postmodern society is that of rootlessness and a loss of the sense of place, which may entail a loss of identity. Yet it is not necessarily so. Gloria Anzaldúa (1987), Guillermo Gómez-Peña (1993) and Homi K. Bhabha (1994), all anchor themselves to the borderlands, to a third space, to the site of multiple crossings. Currently, theorists are identifying changes in the concept of sense of place, given the increasingly globalized world. While Ursula Heise invokes an eco-cosmopolitanism where we can “envision individuals and groups as part of planetary ‘imagined communities’ of both human and non-human kinds” (2008, 61), I developed the notion of a “cosmopolitan sense of place” where “place becomes the locus of multiple tensions” and it is felt through “multiple sensitivities, allegiances and identities” and a “confluence of habitat and history” (Flys Junquera 2015, 57). As suggested by Val Plumwood, travel can be perceived as the goal, as multiple sites of encounters with place (2002, 233). In these encounters, each previous place enriches and modifies the traveller, providing “learning both about the place and about the self, a reciprocal exploration which adds new layers of meaning to both the world and the self” (Flys Junquera 2015, 57). And finally, I argue that cosmopolitans choose a home place, adapting it to their own multiple subjectivities. This chosen place—which echoes the crossroads—expresses those multiple identities, yet cosmopolitans are “always aware of the interplay of transience and permanence, of the factors of contingency that bring about change” (57).

In *Getting Home Alive*, we have seen Aurora’s description of the “Old Country,” which is a significant variation of the traditional concept. She claims to have “inherited all the cities through which [her] people have passed”: Kirovograd, Granada, Jerusalem, Cairo, Damascus, Dakar, Lisboa, New Orleans, Ellis Island (Morales and Morales 1986, 90). Doreen Massey views the spatial as an “everlasting social geometry of power and signification” (1994, 3). Thus, any place inherently implies a multiplicity of spaces which intersect, clash or merge in meanings and relationships. In the “Old Countries” section Aurora considers herself part of the different cultures of the world, and to be at home at the crossroads, where all histories and races meet, reaffirming her *mestizaje*.

Her identity deliberately lies in multiple places. These multiple spaces acquire layers of meaning, a physical narrative of the multi-directional migrations of her family history, stories of settlements and re-settlements, but no final destination, thus acknowledging the transience of all homes. Her ancestors have traveled and migrated, and each place has left its imprint on her identity. As she speaks of all the cities of her people, she reflects on the importance of place:

Place. How I always begin with place: the most potent imagery for a wandering Jew, an immigrant Puerto Rican. "What will this place give me, do to me? What landscapes, what houses will it leave in my dreams? What layers will it add to the collage of my identity, my skin, my permanent passport?" (Morales and Morales 1986, 192; emphasis in the original)

Jamil Khader posits that neither Aurora nor Rosario can make their home in Puerto Rico due to the gender oppression (2003, 68) which is clearly present there. Furthermore, he claims that they cannot make a home in continental United States due to the inherent violence there (69). While that violence is openly portrayed in different passages of the text, in the end, I believe, both of them do establish a home. Aurora has chosen her home place, California, "the place no one took me or sent me to. The place I chose for myself" (Morales and Morales 1986, 192) and she makes her kitchen the site of the multiple crossings. The kitchen, as cooking is in other extracts, is a significant metaphor because it has been viewed as a traditional female space—the matrix of feminine culture based on story-telling, female control and domesticity. However, as Bost points out, it is also the place where one brews new concoctions, producing new blends, new selves (2000, 201). Here Aurora cooks the foods of all her identities, following all the traditions, and breaking each of them, inhaling different places and refashioning her new self:

So I peel my bananas under running water from the faucet, but the stain won't come out, and the subtle earthy green smell of that sap follows me, down from the mountains, into the cities, to places where banana groves are like a green dream, unimaginable by daylight: Chicago, New Hampshire, Oakland. So I travel miles on the bus to the immigrant markets of other people, coming home laden with bundles, and even, now and then, on the plastic frilled tables of the supermarket, I find a small curved green bunch to rush home, quick, before it ripens, to peel and boil, bathing in the scent of its cooking, bringing the river to flow through my own kitchen now, the river of my place on earth, the green and musty river of my grandmothers, dripping, trickling, tumbling down from the mountain kitchens of my people. (Morales and Morales 1986, 38-39)

In the section "Puerto Rico Journal" Rosario writes of a trip back to Puerto Rico and her contradictory feelings on different occasions. The idea of home blurs throughout the passage, oscillating between Puerto Rico and Cambridge, Massachusetts. The idea shifts according to where she is, what she is doing. It illustrates that tension between

transience and permanence. She begins writing her diary on the airplane going to Puerto Rico: "Home [...] and the happiness bubbled in me and spilled over. Home to the broad split leaves of the plantain and banana, the gawky palm, the feathery tree fern, to the red bell of the hibiscus and the yellow trumpets of the canario, to the warm moist sweet smell of the air" (76). Her bicultural experience is expressed as language and nature: "My tongue has been clipped and trimmed and trained, but my heart is all softness, like the air blowing through the palm leaves. My core is red and orange and bright green, and the turquoise of the sea. I am a tropical child, I carry my island tucked inside and I'm going home" (76). But, once in Puerto Rico, she realizes she is displaced:

But this was never home! [...] I bounce around Santurce like a tourist [...] I'm more at home with the vegetation than with this city's streets.

Home, like Australians talking about an England they have never seen. The home country: Italy, Ireland, Poland, Puerto Rico. Photographs, someone else's memories and my vivid dreams as I grew up. Home? A place where I am never completely at home. But then where am I completely at home? [...]

Ironic. On the plane down I'm conscious only of my soft tropical core. Here I'm only aware of the North American scaffolding surrounding it, holding it up. (76-79)

The journal passage continues and several weeks later, on her return flight to Cambridge, Massachussets, she writes:

It has been a hard wearying trip. I look forward to my own life as to a rest cure. I've been anticipating the return home so much, and now as I pack for it, I'm sad about leaving. Ah me, no peace [...]

The atmosphere on this plane is completely changed since the passengers got off at Philadelphia [...] I'm stretched out with my journal on my lap. I have to smile. I've written, "I'm going home." (82-83)

Her home is home, but not necessarily permanent or just one home. Both Puerto Rico and Cambridge are home, depending where she is and how she feels. Her identity is grounded in multiple places, shifting with her moods and needs. As we have seen in the poem "Child of the Americas," Aurora feels part of several continents and countries: Puerto Rico, Africa, the Caribbean and Europe. But place and nature also inhabit her body, physically. Place, language and culture are all embodied and interrelated aspects of who she is:

I am Caribeña, island grown. Spanish is in my flesh,
ripples from my tongue, lodges in my hips:
the language of garlic and mangoes,

the singing in my poetry, the flying gestures of my hands.
 I am of Latinoamerica, rooted in the history of my continent:
 I speak from that body. (50)

A final yet essential element of *mestizaje* is that of language, but language is also grounded in place, as Thomashow commented (see above). Likewise, David Abram writes that “each Human language arose not only as a means of attunement between persons, but also between ourselves and the animate landscape” (1996, 263). In his book he carefully traces the development of language and its ties to the natural world and place. Similarly, Tom Lynch notes that any given landscape shapes and influences the development and use of language. Different realities require different languages (2008, 30–34). In some of the excerpts we have seen the mixing of Spanish and English. This code-switching is a way to call attention to a multiple identity, the claim to both languages, cultures and places. In the first poem Aurora clearly states that her “first language was spanglish” but she highlights the emotional quality of her Spanish which contrasts with the precision of her English: “I speak English with passion: it’s the tongue of my consciousness, / a flashing knife blade of crystal, my tool, my craft (Morales and Morales 1986, 50). Rosario admits that she will always be “clumsy with the language” (79), referring to Spanish, not her mother tongue; but her identity is clearly mixed in with the Spanish of the Barrio. She describes El Barrio and “the high rapid fire of Puerto Rican speech with the softness of dropped syllables and consonants, round and soft and familiar. The laughing: high loud laughter out of wide open mouths” (19). Lourdes Torres, however, notes that although *Getting Home Alive*—different to the autobiographies of Moraga and Anzaldúa—does not present the theme of Spanish as a lost tongue to be reclaimed (1998, 282), I believe, there is a slight sense of loss. English is clearly the dominant language of the text; however, there are significant lines in Spanish and a sprinkling of Yiddish. In the fragment “I Recognize You” Rosario does indeed lament the loss of Spanish in her daughter Aurora: “But I am sad, too. For the English language robbed of the beat your home talk could give it, the words you could lend, the accent, the music, the word-order reordering, the grammatical twist. I’m sad for you too, for the shame with which you store away—hide—a whole treasure box of other, mother, language” (Morales and Morales 1986, 145). For Rosario, speaking in her Puerto Rican inflected Spanish affirms the multiracial components of her identity. More important than the actual use of the languages in the text are the comments made on language and its relationship to identity and place. Rosario recalls, in the passage “Immigrants,” the mixture of languages in Central Park but also her mother’s experience of language:

My mother, the child in the Central Park photo, grew up an immigrant child among immigrants. She went to school speaking not a word of English, a small Puerto Rican girl scared out of her wits, and learned fast: learned accentless English in record time, the sweet cadence of her mother’s open-voweled

words ironed out of her vocabulary, the edges flattened down, made crisp, the curls and flourishes removed. First generation. (24; emphasis in the original)

Language is one of the first obstacles for immigrants, yet it also becomes the key to acculturation and security. In the following excerpt, written in the style of stream of consciousness, we see how Rosario learned “to pass” but doesn’t feel at home unless she is surrounded with her linguistic and racial mix where she can hear “Black folk speak and the sounds of Spanish” (56) together:

{W}hat I do remember is to walk in straight and white into the store and say good morning in my see how white how upper class refined and kind voice all crisp with consonants bristling with syllables protective coloring in racist fields looks white and crisp like cabbage looks tidy like laid-out gardens like white aprons on black dresses like please and thank you and you’re welcome like neat and clean and see I swept and scrubbed and polished ain’t I nice que hay de criticar will I do will I pass will you let me thru will they let me be not see me here beneath my skin behind my voice crouched and quiet and so so still not see not hear me there where I crouch hiding my eyes my indian bones my spanish sounds muttering mielda qué gente fría y fea se creen gran cosa ai! Escupe chica en su carifresca en su carifea méate ahí en el piso féo y frío yo valgo más que un piso limpio [...] yo quiero salir de aquí yo quiero salir de ti yo quiero salir you see she’s me she’s the me say safe sarita safe when I see you many and Black around the table. (57-58; irregular spacing, spelling and capitalization in the original)

And finally, the text addresses the issue of class, as related to migrations and *mestizaje*, one often neglected in American critical discourse, masked as racial and ethnic issues. Rosario’s cultural and ethnic identity was betrayed by her accent, by language and she quickly learned English so she wouldn’t have to “[s]ee embarrassed faces turning away, getting the jeering voices, singing “Puerto Riiico [*sic*], my heart’s devotion [...] let it sink into the oceans!” (25). Social class often hides behind racial and ethnic difference and language becomes the telltale sign of immigrant status. As we have seen, hybridity can be viewed as a privilege and a new multilayered identity. Debra Castillo questions this theoretical *locus* for a better world, saying that *mestizaje*, in reality is the *locus* of refusal, of waste, the margins of society (1999, 187). Rosario’s descriptions of their home in Indiera, Puerto Rico, of El Barrio, of the Bronx, are just that: the waste and the dividing line between them and us, between privilege and non-privilege. Aurora, however, doesn’t speak of these feelings but is well aware of class. Her stance in her “Class Poem” is highly significant.

This is my poem in celebration of my middle class privilege
This is my poem to say out loud

I'm glad I had food, and shelter, and shoes,
 glad I had books and travel, glad there was air and light
 and room for poetry. [...]
 This poem is for the hunger of my mother
 discovering books at thirteen in the New York Public Library
 who taught me to read when I was five [...]
 This is a poem to say:
 my choosing to suffer gives nothing
 to Tita and Norma and Angélica
 and that not to use the tongue, the self-confidence, the training
 my privilege bought me
 is to die again for people who are already dead
 and who wanted to live. (Morales and Morales 1986, 45-47)

Aurora recognizes her privilege, and refuses to apologize for it. Rather she states that it implies a debt, the need to speak out for those who can't. Something she sees as the role of artists. In the section called "The Flute" she tells a story, a story reminiscent of Native American oral traditions. In this story she calls for committed artists, for the need for the privileged to use their craft to help the others:

Then they take us to the mouth of the cave. We look out and see everything has changed.
 We are high above the earth now. There are clouds below us, and far, far below, a green
 plain where two groups of people are gathered. They are praying and calling out and
 crying up to the keepers in the cave, asking to be sent poets, medicine ones, singers of the
 great Song. (178)

Aurora makes clear that she must use her privilege, her tongue, her language, her writing for the people, to give voice and hope to those who cannot speak up. In "Sugar Poem" Aurora writes:

My poems grow from the ground.
 I know what they are made of:
 heavy, raw and green. [...]
 I don't write my poems
 for anybody's sweet tooth.
 My poems are acetylene torches
 welding steel.
 My poems are flamethrowers
 cutting paths through the world.
 My poems are bamboo spears
 opening the air.

They come from the earth,
common and brown. (40-41)

She is clearly aware of the power of words, but also that words are grounded in place, in the soil, the fundamental basis of everything. So, while concepts such as hybridity and cosmopolitanism can evoke issues of privilege and elitism, the Morales women see privilege as an injunction to act. David Johnson and Scott Michaelson ask whether the concept of hybridity is too idealistic, a politically exciting concept that lends itself to intellectual creativity and moral wishful thinking, but stripped of reality (1997, 2-3). Steven Vertovec and Robin Cohen, in studying contemporary cosmopolitanism, state that cosmopolitanism has more to do with an attitude or worldview than with a geographic or economic reality. They note that more and more analysts admit that expressions of cosmopolitanism “exist among a wide variety of non-elites, especially migrants and refugees” (2002, 8). In this globalized world, connected by fast transport and digital media, it is increasingly more difficult to remain “pure” or loyal to one national or territorial identity. Jamil Khader makes reference to this aspect in his definition of a “subaltern cosmopolitanism.” He claims that the multidirectionality of subaltern cosmopolitans situates them in a broader transnational context, and this perspective provides them with a sense of oppositionality, empowerment and agency (2003, 70). Furthermore, Khader posits that this position makes it possible for the Morales women to denounce colonialism and articulate new social agendas (74), something they actively do.

Migrations upon migrations, whether forced or voluntary, physical or virtual, have changed identities, allegiances and sensitivities. For those artists who can use their art, for theorists who make the art visible, for those who can see the advantages or wealth of multiple identities, who can reinvent themselves with multiple sensitivities and ground themselves at the global crossroads, these privileges imply giving to those who cannot.

Getting Home Alive ends with a poem that is co-authored by both mother and daughter, a poem that combines lines from preceding passages, but with alterations, a hybrid poem of multiple voices, which fashions a new self, one that is both mother and daughter, all their ancestors and also all those other people who need to see a new possibility.

I am what I am.
A child of the Americas.
A light-skinned mestiza of the Caribbean.
A child of many diaspora, born into this continent at a crossroads.
I am Puerto Rican. I am U.S. American.
I am New York Manhattan and the Bronx.
A mountain-born, country-bred, homegrown jíbara child,
up from the shtetl, a California Puerto Rican Jew. [...]
We didn't know our forbears' names with a certainty.

They aren't written anywhere.
First names only, or mija, negra, ne, honey, sugar, dear.
 I come from the dirt where the cane was grown.
My people didn't go to dinner parties. They weren't invited. [...]
 I am not European, though I have dreamt of those cities.
Each plate is different.
 Wood, clay, papier mâché, basketry, a leaf, a coconut shell.
Europe lives in me but I have no home there. [...]
 I am a child of many mothers.
They have kept it all going
 All the civilizations erected on their backs.
All the dinner parties given with their labor.
 We are new.
They gave us life, kept us going.
 brought us to where we are.
Born at a crossroads.
 Come, lay that dishcloth down. Eat, dear, eat.
History made us.
 We will not eat ourselves up inside anymore.
And we are whole. (Morales and Morales 1986, 212-213; emphasis in the original)

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Carmen Flys Junquera is an Associate Professor at the University of Alcalá (Spain). She has co-edited a number of books devoted to ecocriticism and served as the President of the European Association for the Study of Literature, Culture and Environment (EASLCE) for the 2010-2012 term. She is the editor in chief of the journal *Ecozon@*. Most of her publications deal with contemporary ethnic American literatures, sense of place, ecocriticism, environmental justice and ecofeminism.

Address: Departamento de Filología Moderna. Facultad de Filosofía y Letras. Universidad de Alcalá. Plaza San Diego, s/n. 28801, Alcalá de Henares, Spain. Tel.: +34 918855344.

