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Susana S. Martínez's *Coming of Age(ncy) on the Migrant Trail: Adolescent Journeys in Contemporary Latinx Young Adult Literature* offers an insightful analysis of a broad corpus of young adult (YA) novels about migration from Central America and Mexico to the United States. The novels selected for study were published in English between the early 1980s and 2024 and were written by U.S. Latinx novelists as well as non-Latinx authors. Martínez's primary thesis is that "the popular genre of Latinx YA literature is an ideal medium from which to examine the often invisibilized root causes of migration and through which youth emerge as powerful agents of change to counter hate" (2). She thus aims to challenge the "erasure of Central American lived experiences and make space for stories of the diaspora" (12). Importantly, Martínez views the protagonist's migration as a form of agency and resistance in the face of structural violence rooted in transnational neoliberal policies that shape forced displacement.

*Coming of Age(ncy) on the Migrant Trail* contains an introduction, five chapters, and a conclusion. Each chapter is logically structured by analyzing the broad themes that a particular subset of YA migration fiction has in common. The introduction, "A Road Map and Chronology of Latinx YA Literature on the Migrant Trail," explains that part of the value of focusing on this set of stories is that unaccompanied migrants from Central America and Mexico are often stereotyped in US political discourse as potential gangbangers and drug dealers or as traumatized victims of violence and poverty. Following Sims Bishop's theory of literature as "mirrors, windows, or sliding glass doors," Martínez argues that YA migrant novels allow for the possibility that young Latinx readers might see themselves and/or family members reflected or that others are afforded a clearer understanding of the complexity of Latin American migration (3). She further contends that these novels play an important role in building historical memory, enabling younger generations of the diaspora to understand how US imperialism destabilized the countries from which they fled.

In chapter one, "Defying Death: Fleeing Salvadoran and Guatemalan Political Violence in Latinx YA Coming of Age(ncy) Narratives," Martínez explores the relationship between war and forced migration in YA novels that take place amidst the terror of the civil wars in El Salvador and

Guatemala. Martínez points out that eight of the nine novels studied in chapter one focus on indigenous youth growing up in loving communities that instill pride in their Mayan languages and traditions amid violence. The youthful characters in novels such as *Grab Hands and Run* (1993) by Frances Temple, *Red Midnight* (2002) by Ben Mikaelsen, *Libertad* (2008) by Alma Fullerton, and *Caminar* (2014) by Skila Brown introduce readers to the context of the Salvadoran and Guatemalan civil wars. Several of these novels, Martínez contends, portray Mayans exerting agency to migrate to the US. She further argues that testimonial stories of emigration from Central America contest "the dominant narrative that vilifies migrants or views them solely as traumatized victims" (18). Analyzing these works through the framework of Latin American *testimonio*, Martínez posits that they reconstruct historical memory by denouncing the terror and gendered violence that the protagonists witness during the most violent periods of oppression of the Guatemalan and Salvadoran civil wars. In the second half of the chapter, Martínez analyzes a subset of YA novels representing gendered escape narratives and Mayan girlhood testimonies. She analyzes *Among the Volcanoes* (1991) and *Imagining Isabel* (1994) by Omar S. Castañeda, *Tree Girl* (2004) by Ben Mikaelson, *Journey of Dreams* (2009) by Marge Pelligrino, and *Colibrí* (2003) by Ann Cameron as narratives in which the indigenous protagonists become empowered citizens who denounce unresolved injustices from Central America's wars and subsequent forced migration.

Chapter two, "The Adolescent Migrant Journey through Mexico: Neoliberal Disposability in Latinx YA," examines novels that "feature the clandestine migrant journeys of Guatemalan and Mexican adolescents as they attempt to cross the US-Mexican border" (45). Analyzing these texts through the lens of racialized capitalism, she argues that "their migration is a form of resistance against neoliberal disposability and that as mirrors and windows, the YA novels challenge readers of all ages to question the white supremacist narrative that criminalizes migrants for fleeing poverty created by a long history of US interventionist policies" (45). She offers Patricia Beatty's *Lupita Mañana* (1981) and Ann Jaramillo's *La línea* (1985) as examples of narratives in which the youth protagonists flee poverty, and Alexandra Díaz's *The Only Road* (2016), Jenny Torres Sanchez's *We Are Not from Here* (2020), and Jennifer de Leon's *Borderless* (2023) as stories in which young characters escape Central American gang violence. After meditating on the ways in which some of these narratives emphasize the treatment of Central American migrants as disposable in the context of transnational neoliberalism, particularly by portraying the violent realities of traveling on the train known as *La bestia* and confronting the militarized US-Mexico border, Martínez concludes the chapter by asserting that the protagonists of these novels "counter the violence that surrounds them by openly expressing empathy and solidarity

with people they encounter along the migrant trail, demonstrating that a more humane and dignified path is possible" (62).

Chapter three, "Fleeing Mexican Narcoviolence: Coming of Age(ncy) in Latinx YA," analyzes the portrayal of youth migration in the context of the drug war. The chapter is divided into three sections. In the first section, Martínez examines how violence is depicted as a root cause for migration during the War on Drugs in *Diego's Crossing* (2015) by Robert Hough, *Playing for the Devil's Fire* (2016) by Phillippe Diederich, *Saint Death* (2016) by Marcus Sedgwick, *Disappeared* (2017) by Francisco X Stork, and *The Border* (2017) by Steve Schafer. She argues that situating these narratives within "the larger theoretical context of neoliberalism's politics of disposability, which places economic profits over human dignity, helps us move beyond a stereotypical patronizing gaze, to see the complexities of migration and violence as transnational issues" (66). In the second section, she studies young women's coming-of-age stories in *The Everything I have Lost* (2020) by Sylvia Zéleny, *Thirty Talks Weird Love* (2021) by Alessandra Narváez Varela, and *Brighter than the Sun* (2023) by Daniel Aleman. In her reading of these novels, she convincingly connects the violence against women, and the femicide of the 1990s in Ciudad Juárez in particular, to the broader context of neoliberal policies such as NAFTA. In the third section, Martínez wades into the debate about the ethics of writing and profiting from stories about drug violence, as well as who has the right to tell certain stories. She stakes out a middle ground in the debate, asserting that "Riveting fiction by outsider authors and introspective accounts by Latinx voices can spark discussions on the fraught relationship between drug war violence in Mexico and anti-Mexican racism in the United States, which often go unacknowledged in the representations of immigration and cartel narratives" (85). Following Ignacio Sánchez Prado, she concludes the chapter by asserting that the novels studied invite the rejection of the traditional patronizing gaze toward Mexico so that we may grow in mutual understanding as neighbors (86).

In chapter four, "Cross-Racial Solidarity in the Coming-of-Age(ncy) Journey: Navigating Undocumented Teen Romance in Latinx YA," Martínez analyzes a set of novels that capture the anxieties associated with growing up in a Central American or Mexican migrant family in the US. Set in ten different US states from Vermont to California, she asserts that these YA novels challenge readers to reflect on how migration intersects with gendered structures of violence and white supremacy. In the first part of the chapter, Martínez reads *Journey of the Sparrows* (1991) by Fran Leeper Buss and Daisy Cubias and *Red Glass* (2007) by Laura Resau with a focus on the character arc of the protagonists who overcome traumatic experiences from the Salvadoran and Guatemalan civil wars and learn to "use their agency to create spaces of solidarity and sanctuary for healing justice" (88). The

second half of the chapter is devoted to the analysis of several teen romance novels that portray the fears and coming of age(ncy) of undocumented youth "in the shadows of a white supremacist immigration system" (88). The YA novels analyzed in this section include Julia Alvarez's *Return to Sender* (2009); Laura McNeal's *Dark Water* (2010); Marie Marquardt's *Dream Things True* (2015) and *The Radius of Us* (2016); Jennifer De Leon's *Don't Ask Me Where I'm From* (2020); and Marcia Argueta Mickelson's *Where I Belong* (2021). The common thread of the novels in this chapter is the protagonists who "grow to see themselves as agents of change who model empathy and dignity while resisting purposefully cruel immigration policies as racialized others" (87).

Whereas in other chapters Martínez includes YA novels by non-Latinx authors because they "enrich the chronology of Latinx YA literature" (45-46), in the fifth and final chapter, "All Cages Must Break!: Latinx YA Finds Its Voice and Tells Its Own Story," she reflects on the importance of diversity and equitable representation in YA publishing through her analysis of a corpus of Latinx YA novels whose authors' identities match those of their protagonists and whose primary focus is resistance to "the structural violence of detention and deportation regimes" (114). The first part of her argument focuses on the depiction of youth agency in families of mixed legal status in novels that portray one or both parents' deportation. The novels analyzed in this section are *Gaby, Lost and Found* (2013) by Angela Cervantes, *Efrén Divided* (2020) by Ernesto Cisneros, as well as *Indivisible* (2021) and *Brighter than the Sun* (2023) by Daniel Aleman. In the second section of this chapter, Martínez offers readings of several novels through the lens of neoliberalism's politics of disposability, with a particular focus on how this corpus of YA fiction denounces the traumatizing practice of jailing undocumented youth. Here she analyzes Alexandra Diaz's *The Crossroads* (2018) and *Santiago's Road Home* (2019), Jenny Torres Sanchez's *We Are Not from Here* (2020), Aida Salazar's *Land of the Cranes* (2020), Francisco X. Stork's *Illegal* (2020), Jonny Garza Villa's *Ander & Santi Were Here* (2023), and David Bowles and Guadalupe García McCall's *Moon Conch* (2023). In the chapter's final section, Martínez focuses on the depiction of US Central American girls' coming of age(ncy) through the exploration of their cultural identities and histories. She argues that *Shine On, Luz Véliz!* (2022) by Rebecca Balcárcel, *Turtles of the Midnight Moon* (2023) by María José Fitzgerald, *The Weight of Everything* (2023) by Marcia Argueta Mickelson, *Mani Semilla Finds Her Quetzal Voice* (2024) by Anna Lapera, and *Libertad* (2024) by Bessie Flores Zaldívar provide heightened visibility to US Central Americans who have long been underrepresented in both YA literature and Latinx Studies (114). The novels in this chapter, Martínez asserts, add Latinx voices as agents of change.

In the conclusion, Martínez presents a brief historical overview of the trajectory of YA youth migration narratives since the 1980s. She reaffirms her decision to include texts by Latinx and non-Latinx authors, insisting that "until there is greater own voiced representation, more Latinx, Chicanx, and white solidarity is needed to amplify stories that serve as mirrors to readers of the Central American diaspora" (142). She also reminds the reader of the important role that YA migration literature can play in an antiracist education and in cultivating critical awareness of the impacts of US imperialism and neoliberal capitalism.

In sum, Martínez's monograph is an important contribution to the fields of Latin American / U.S. Latinx studies, migration studies, and young adult literature. The focus on YA fiction is particularly welcome, given that it is a genre that is often left out of scholarly discussions of Latin American cultural production. She thoughtfully builds upon prior scholarship on Mexican and Central American migration and provides illuminating analyses of a vast array of YA migrant novels. While the sheer volume of texts analyzed does not always allow for detailed analysis of each work, every chapter puts subsets of YA migration novels into fruitful dialogue with one another and provides an instructive method for categorizing this diverse genre of writing. Martínez's overarching thesis that these works provide a more profound understanding of the complexities of Latin American migration and that their youth protagonists emerge as powerful agents of change to counter hate is well supported by the examples she provides. She productively incorporates Bishop's concept of literature as mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors as the overarching theoretical apparatus, and avoids overwhelming the text with superfluous jargon. Her stated aim is that "this book will serve as a springboard for antiracist conversations and curriculum building among academics, parents, teachers, librarians, and volunteers, along with graduate and undergraduate students interested in raising critical awareness about immigrant justice" (7). She has indeed created a helpful resource replete with insightful analysis of YA novels that shed light on the complexities and systemic injustices of Central American and Mexican migration to the US. This study would be a useful and accessible resource for undergraduate and graduate Latin American cultural studies courses, as well as for courses on Mexican and Central American culture, literature, and history.