

DIANNE WALTA HART: *Undocumented In L.A.: An Immigrant's Story*. Wilmington, Delaware: SR Books (Latin American Silhouettes), 1997.

This book tells the story of the immigration to the United States of a Nicaraguan woman, a Sandinista activist from Esteli, who fled her home town in order to join relatives in Los Angeles.

The commitment of the rural population of Esteli to the Revolution is underscored by the fact that they were among the first to join the insurrectionist movement against the dictatorship of Somoza. To this day, the image of the *campesinos* warding off an attack by Guard troops during the last months of Somozan rule, in April 1979, is cherished in Nicaraguan revolutionary lore as a poignant example of the heroism of the Sandinistas' revolt.

Yamileth's family took an active part in *la lucha armada*. Once the Sandinista Revolution became a reality, Yamileth was forced to face the tragic consequences of the Nicaraguan Civil War: with her husband and a brother killed in the fighting, she is left alone to support the family. Another brother, Omar, the only remaining male in the household, never recovers from a deep depression.

Yamileth then assumes responsibility for the family. In addition, her loyalty to the Revolution earns her a position in the Asociación de Mujeres Nicaragüenses Luisa Armada Espinoza (AMNLAE), coordinating women's activities in rural areas under FSLN control from 1979 to 1987. In the story, both Yamileth and Hart appear to accept this involvement as a natural extension of her commitment to building the new Nicaragua.

Dianne Hart first met Yamileth's family in 1983, during a visit to Nicaragua as a member of the Eugene-based Committee for Solidarity with Central America. This encounter with the Lopezes prompted Hart to write a book on the Sandinista Revolution — *Thanks to God and the Revolution: The oral history of a Nicaraguan family*— which recorded the story of the López family in Esteli during the revolutionary outbreak. In the present book, Hart tells the tale of Yamileth's migration to the United States, and the conflicts that it generated.

Both in Hart's narrative and in Yamileth's testimonies, the heroine's migration to the United States is explained as a *temporary solution*, in order to escape from the economic chaos and the political tension of her homeland. Yamileth is presented as a committed Sandinista, determined to return to Nicaragua as soon as possible. However, as systematic research in international labor migration has shown, the factors that create migration are not necessarily the same factors that perpetuate the phenomenon in the

long run. A reshuffling of risk among family members in order to improve the survival strategies of the household unit, as in the case of Yamileth, may provide initial motivation for trying one's luck in a foreign land as a temporary measure. Yet, in time, new and independent factors appear that help sustain the decision to migrate: a) the creation of social networks; b) participation in ethnic organizations that inform and provide various forms of assistance, and opportunities which condition the social integration and assimilation of individual immigrants; c) new role divisions within migrant families, for example changes in the role and status of women. These are crucial factors for understanding both the world and settlement process of undocumented migrants, yet Hart refrains from discussing them in a systematic manner.

Conversely, Hart carefully reconstructs the dangerous border crossing from Nicaragua to Honduras, through El Salvador, Guatemala and Mexico to Los Angeles, an 'odyssey' that has become a rite of passage for illegal South and Central Americans attempting to join their co-ethnics in the United States. Hart offers a detailed description of the coyote *in situ* —a middle man, whose job is to help undocumented migrants cross the borders in the most perilous conditions. The coyote partnership functions as an *ad hoc*, risky but necessary, system that enables inexperienced border transgressors, such as Yamileth and her lot, to reach America.

Once there, Yamileth joins the urban Latino poor of Los Angeles in 1989. Her situation is compounded by having to live in the dangerous and uncertain world of the undocumented. Meanwhile, Nicaragua endures the economic recession brought about by the "embargo" imposed after the contra war and the neo-liberal privatization policies of Violeta Chamorro's administration. Chamorro won the 1990 national elections, at the head of the Unión Nacional Opositora (UNO), endorsed and financed by the US. After a short visit to Esteli, Yamileth relinquishes her intentions to return to Nicaragua.

Compelling as this story might be, Hart's account remains, at best, a collage of the informant's reminiscences and colorful testimonies. Whether these are regarded as examples of 'oral history at its best' (Introduction, pp. xxvi, xxvii) or her story is seen as paradigmatic of Central American patterns of migration to cosmopolitan, multi-ethnic cities like New York, Los Angeles, Chicago and Miami (where a high concentration of wealth and highly educated workforce create a strong demand for unskilled workers), the fact remains that Hart's work lacks a clear methodology and totally disregards the vast research that has accumulated in the area of international migration. *Undocumented in L.A.* has almost no footnotes, and no bibliographical references to scholarly works on the patterns of immigration and settlement of Central Americans in the United States.

Furthermore, although the narrative humanizes Yamileth's experiences as an illegal migrant, it disregards ethnographic writing conventions. Hart's *own version of ethnographic realism* pays close attention to detail and strives to convey the feeling that, as a researcher, she shares and experiences the world she is transmitting. Nevertheless, the narrative, encumbered by trivial detail, fails: it supplies information but is bereft of *ethnographic authority*, despite the (many) appeals to the researcher's 'experience'.

Ethnographic authority is achieved according to the extent to which the writer succeeds in convincing the audience of his firsthand *knowledge* of the world he is describing. Experience demands a participatory presence, sensitive and permanent contact with the world that is to be understood and systematic interaction with its people. Hart's text does not convey either cumulative or profound knowledge of the field. In other words, if the aim of authoritative ethnography is to produce cultural interpretations through intense research experiences, Hart does not meet this basic requirement. The field work is limited to Yamileth's visit to Hart's family in 1989, two later visits in 1995 and 1996, and the researcher's visits to Los Angeles in 1989, 1990, twice in 1992, once in 1994 and every year after that (Introduction, xxvi, xxvii). This being the case, the question that begs to be asked is to what extent can arbitrary and non-systematic encounters, sporadic meetings and long-distance calls be transformed into an authoritative written account.

Moreover, no attempt is made by the author to reflect upon the way in which images of 'the other' are constructed. Hart's text remains conspicuously silent or, even worse, unaware of the *rhetorical devices* that she herself resorts to in order to construct her images of Yamileth and the latter's experiences in a new and alien environment. Neither does Hart explore the manner or extent to which the relationships of knowledge and power that bind her to Yamileth and her family might affect the way that she, as a researcher, shapes her images of the migrants. This lack of self-awareness leads Hart to ask questions that reveal a *blurring* of the borders between personal involvement and academic objectivity, and accounts for her flirtation with social activism. This epistemological confusion, implicit throughout the text, is taken to extremes in chapter IX ("Thoughts along the Way"), where Hart compares the different cultural and behavioral patterns of Yamileth's family with her own.

While it is true that no one method or ethical stance can guarantee the truth of a researcher's portrayal of the subjects and the world he describes, Hart's voice in this ethnographic text lacks assertiveness and credibility. All the more so since it functions in isolation, removed from the major epistemological debates in the Humanities over the problem of writing and constructing representations of *the other* and of *otherness*.

The book's major asset is, without doubt, its contribution to a gendered understanding of migration, focusing, as it does, on the experiences as a migrant of a single-parent woman. Many questions are left open, however: a) how gender affects the decision to migrate and to what extent patterns of migration vary for men and for women; b) what are the different (or similar) reasons that prompt women and men to emigrate; c) to what degree the experience of migration holds different benefits for women than for men; and last but not least; d) what are the patterns of labor market incorporation and settlement of women immigrants in the host country as opposed to men's. Hart loosely delineates these questions, but fails to conceptualize them in such a way as to bolster her argument.

Criticism notwithstanding, the book certainly gives life to a moving story that is shared by the thousands of undocumented immigrants who cross the American border in the hope that 'the north' will provide them with the political and economic stability that eluded them in their native homeland.

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RAANAN REIN: *Peronismo, populismo y política. Argentina 1943-1955*. Buenos Aires: Editorial de Belgrano, 1998.

Este nuevo libro de Raanan Rein consiste en una colección de ensayos sobre algunos aspectos que el autor considera como los menos estudiados de uno de los temas más investigados de la historia argentina moderna. Como ya nos tiene acostumbrados Rein, el libro está en general bien argumentado y sostenido por una impresionante compulsa de fuentes primarias. Los tres ejes temáticos alrededor de los cuales se articulan los ocho capítulos del volumen son: la segunda línea de liderazgo dentro del sistema peronista, la socialización política mediante el uso de la educación y el deporte y ciertos aspectos de las relaciones internacionales. Respecto de esto último, algunos de los aspectos tratados en este libro ya habían sido explorados por Rein en obras anteriores, con mayor grado de detenimiento.

Como toda colección de ensayos, el volumen reseñado presenta heterogeneidades. Está claro desde el comienzo que el autor se encuentra pisando terreno más firme cuando trabaja en temas de su especialidad (las relaciones internacionales) que cuando incursiona en otras áreas que ya han sido elaboradas por otros y en las que su contribución es menos sólida y original. El primer capítulo comienza con una revista de la literatura sobre la naturaleza populista del peronismo, donde se reiteran argumentos en el