

**Valeria Luiselli's *Lost Children Archive*: The Borderland,
Vulnerability, and the Need for Care and Attention**

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Abstract

This article analyzes Valeria Luiselli's novel *Lost Children Archive* (2019) in the context of contemporary Mexican American literature, with a focus on vulnerability and the ethics of care. The novel deals with critical themes such as borders, culture, identity, and migration, with a particular focus on the experiences of migrants and their children. Drawing on her experiences, Luiselli sheds light on the 2014 immigration crisis and the plight of separated children at the border. The work highlights the vulnerability that undocumented migrants face and draws attention to human rights violations, family separation, and the isolation of children. Luiselli encourages readers to empathize, raise awareness, and advocate, showing that the border is not just a physical barrier but a complex, construct that profoundly affects lives and identities.

Keywords: Border, identity, vulnerability, ethics of care

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Valeria Luiselli'nin *Kayıp Çocuk Arşivi*: Sınır Bölgesi, Savunmasızlık ve Bakım ve İlgi İhtiyacı

Öz

Bu makale, Valeria Luiselli'nin *Lost Children Archive* (2019) romanını çağdaş Meksikalı Amerikalı edebiyatı bağlamında, kırılğanlık ve bakım etiği çerçevesinde incelemektedir. Roman, sınırlar, kültür, kimlik ve göç gibi kritik temaları ele alarak, özellikle göçmenlerin ve çocuklarının deneyimlerine odaklanmaktadır. Luiselli, göçle ilgili kişisel deneyimlerinden yola çıkarak, 2014 göçmenlik krizine ve sınırda ayrı düşmüş çocukların durumuna ışık tutmaktadır. Eser, belgesiz göçmenlerin karşılaştığı savunmasızlık ve bakım ihtiyacını, kısıtlayıcı yasalar ve sosyal ayrımcılık nedeniyle vurgulamakta ve insan hakları ihlalleri, aile ayrılıkları ve çocukların tecrit edilmesi gibi konulara dikkat çekmektedir. Luiselli, etkileyici anlatıları aracılığıyla okuyucuları empati kurmaya ve farkındalık oluşturmaya teşvik ederken, sınırın sadece fiziksel bir engel olmadığını, aynı zamanda hayatları ve kimlikleri derinden etkileyen karmaşık, siyasi olarak yüklü bir yapı olduğunu göstermektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Sınır, kimlik, kırılğanlık, bakım etiği

Introduction

This article aims to delve into Valeria Luiselli's *Lost Children Archive* (2019) through the lens of the ethics of vulnerability and care, offering a nuanced exploration of the contemporary Mexican American border crisis and its reverberations in Mexican American literature. The primary objective of this research is to analyze how the *Lost Children Archive* gives voice to Mexican American immigrants and draws attention to the condition of children whose immigration patterns have received little attention from population geographers but whose actions are significant enough to warrant further research. As Luiselli states: "No one looks at the bigger map, historical and geographical, of a refugee population's migration routes. Most people

think of refugees and migrants as a foreign problem. Few conceive of migration simply as a national reality” (*Lost Children Archive* 50). This study aspires to provide a comprehensive overview of how immigration is portrayed within this literary tradition. However, it is essential to acknowledge that this analysis represents merely a fragment of the rich tapestry of literature addressing this poignant theme. In *Lost Children Archive*, the imperative to care for others—especially during times of upheaval such as immigration—comes to the forefront, compelling us to tend not only to our world but also to the needs of those around us. Through this lens, the article will illustrate the significance of understanding borders as a formidable phenomenon that shapes our reality, exposing the vulnerabilities inherent in the human experience amidst political and social turmoil. Moreover, it underscores the urgent necessity for empathy and mutual care, fostering a deeper awareness of the challenges faced by marginalized groups and the complexities of immigration—a pressing issue of our time—beautifully encapsulated within Luiselli’s narrative.

The United States has consistently been a nation of immigrants, shaped by diverse waves of people seeking refuge, opportunity, and a new life. Historically, the US has been a nation shaped by waves of immigration, dating back to its founding in the 18th century, when European settlers sought new opportunities. Movements such as the Great Migration in the early twentieth century and the post-World War II influx of immigrants further demonstrate America’s ongoing evolution as a land of opportunity for those fleeing hardship and pursuing their dreams. However, contemporary immigration has become increasingly contentious, with more complex challenges arising than in the past. With the apprehension of 11,500 unaccompanied Central American children at the US-Mexico border in May 2019 alone, the fiscal year was set to surpass the numbers seen in 2014, a year that marked the surge in arrivals of minors as a full-blown crisis (Selee et al.). Public outrage has intensified in response to recent reports detailing the inhumane and unsanitary conditions in Border Patrol facilities, exposing the inability of both the executive branch and Congress to adequately prepare for the growing demand for shelter and care. The continual rise in the number of arriving minors—reminiscent of the 2014 influx—indicates that this immigration pattern is not a temporary emergency but an

enduring and systemic issue. This situation underscores the need to reframe and respond to the crisis as a persistent reality requiring long-term solutions.

Issues such as heightened political polarization, stricter immigration policies, rising anti-immigrant sentiment, and the humanitarian crises faced by asylum seekers and undocumented migrants have intensified debates around immigration. The topic of immigration in the United States has led to intense debates between those advocating for strict border closures and those who support more lenient policies for asylum seekers and those seeking a better life. This situation highlights the complex nature of borders, which serve as both separators and connectors. While borders can bridge divides, they can also exclude individuals who do not fit neatly into either side or the space in between. Understanding the dual role of borders is essential, as they have different meanings and implications in various literary works. Although the notion of a “borderless world” is often discussed in the context of today’s interconnected global society, the concept of borders encompasses various perspectives and theories that seek to understand their role, function, and impact in different contexts. Cathrine Olea Johansen describes borders as embodying “the notion of hybridity, diversity and doubling” (3). She suggests that borders not only mark divisions but also involve the “change between the visible and invisibility,” inviting us to reconsider traditional binaries. In doing so, borders open the possibility for a “third space,” a concept Johansen explores as a realm where oppositions dissolve, and a new hybrid space emerges beyond binaries. This third space becomes a site of transformation, where the convergence of diverse identities and perspectives fosters new understandings and potential for unity within diversity. The dynamic nature of borders remains a focal point of academic research, and it becomes important to shed light upon its representation in literature as well. Thus, the significance of borders stretches beyond their physical presence on a map and encompasses their symbolic, political, social, and economic implications. The notion of borders can be perceived in physical or abstract terms, yet their impact can be both divisive and unifying for people, nations, groups, and societies. Modern nation-states place immense importance on maintaining borders, which are commonly viewed as symbols of safety

and security. Yet, as Parker and Vaughn-Williams point out, borders are deeply entwined with “violence, force, and the deployment of a logic of exceptionalism,” challenging the simplistic notion of borders as fixed, neutral lines (585). Similarly, Diener and Hagen describe borders as “social constructions” open to negotiation and change rather than rigid or inherently authoritative (3). Expanding on this, Anderson, Sharma, and Wright classify borders as connections that perpetuate separations and inequalities based on national identity (6). They argue that borders are often oppressive, as they follow individuals across different life domains, restricting access to labor, health, education, and civil protections (6). This perspective highlights the dynamic and, at times, restrictive nature of borders beyond their physical presence.

The concept of borderlands was vividly brought to life in Gloria Anzaldúa's seminal work, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, published in 1987. She puts emphasis, especially on border theory's cross-disciplinary influence. She defines the border as,

Borders are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish us from them. A border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge. A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition. The prohibited and forbidden are its inhabitants. (25)

Her initial sentence portrays the boundary between the US and Mexico as “an open wound where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds” (Anzaldúa 25). She further states, “the lifeblood of two worlds” merge “to form a third – a border culture” (3). Through the metaphor of borderlands, Anzaldúa provides a fresh perspective on the border, which she expresses through her analysis of ‘the mestiza’ defined as a person with a blended Hispanic and American heritage and ‘nepantla’ which means ‘the in-between space.’ As AnaLouise Keating states, individuals living in ‘the nepantla’ ‘who live within and among multiple worlds and develop what Anzaldúa describes as a ‘perspective from the cracks’; namely, a different perspective on borders between identities and ‘systems of difference’ (1). In that sense, she challenges our understanding of the limitations of physical and cultural borders.

The task of illustrating immigrant tales and the influence of oppressive borders on young people is more challenging than ever before. The current refugee crisis, wherever it is in the world and whatever its many causes are, is possibly the greatest political and humanitarian challenge facing the world, and yet the processing of new arrivals is handled by clunking overburdened government agencies. What distinguishes an asylum seeker from a refugee and a refugee from an immigrant? Is there a difference between an illegal alien and an undocumented immigrant apart from the emotions each term stirs? Numerous academic fields continue to pay attention to the expanding Mexican American community in the United States. Thirty-two million individuals identified as being of Mexican heritage according to the 2010 census, which accounts for two-thirds of the overall Latino/ population of nearly 50 million people, and this number continues to rise each day. According to Fox, the border has received a great deal of attention in recent literature and art, but this body of work has not yet been fully acknowledged by scholars and critics... this usage is rarely tied to the US-Mexico border (1-2). Considering this, a discourse on the US-Mexico border as a text situated in a specific location must consider the concept of the border, crossing the border, and those who undertake this journey. Even the visual appearance of a border fence challenges the concept of belonging and community, as it divides cultures and individuals.

The diverse expressions of immigration in Latina/o literature illustrate the multiple facets of life that shape and affect the immigration experience. Narratives, poetry, essays, and other literary genres of Latina/o culture demonstrate the varying nature of the immigration experience. Common motifs in these works are nostalgia, discrimination, hybridity, displacement, interculturalism, and survival. By engaging with these topics, Latina/o literature has shed light on the intricacies of immigration and Latina/o identity while disproving the single-dimensional and defamatory stereotypes about Latinas/os that are widespread in US mainstream society. Most significantly, it reveals to the public that those who go through immigration are human beings struggling to survive despite the complexities of the situation. In that sense, contemporary Mexican American writers draw attention to this problem from a critical point of view and provide a distinctive

perspective depending on their history, culture, and experience. These writers are united by several recurring themes, including their quest for self-discovery, their depiction of the immigrant journey, and their struggles with adapting to American society, which can be both challenging and emotionally charged. These authors reveal their longing for their homeland, their experiences of crossing the border and immigration, growing up multilingual, and the identity challenge of being in multiple places. In that sense, these writers provide broader views on these significant issues as they know the meaning of being between two languages, cultures, and countries. Some of these writers have crossed the border and become the voice of the invisible minority in the US, Mexican Americans whose lives are forgotten at the border and separated from their families. These Mexican American writers give realistic depictions of human suffering caused by displacement and immigration.

Vulnerability has become a central concept in recent ethical and political discussions. Although the term “vulnerable” is frequently used to describe certain groups, the broader implications of focusing on vulnerability remain underexplored. It is essential for understanding, assessing, and mitigating threats. As Schneiderbauer notes, “when a hazardous event occurs—be it natural, technological, or man-made—the vulnerability of exposed people, objects (e.g., critical infrastructure), and systems (e.g., socioecological systems) at different scales is key to determine the severity of the impact” (70). Similarly, Butler describes vulnerability as subjective and complex, with varying effects based on specific groups, locations, and situations (43). Although widely acknowledged, definitions of vulnerability differ across authors and disciplines. It is stated that vulnerability derives from the Latin word *vulnus*, meaning wound, and emphasizes the capacity for suffering embodied in human beings. According to the Oxford Learner’s Dictionary, being vulnerable is being “fragile to damage, injury, failure, or abuse.” Furthermore, vulnerability is defined as “the quality or state of being exposed to the possibility of being attacked or harmed, either physically or emotionally” by the *Oxford English Dictionary*. Rose and Killien established the concept of vulnerability by distinguishing between personal and environmental factors and the related terms of vulnerability and risk (60-73). According to Goodin,

for instance, being vulnerable means being exposed to potential harm or danger that can affect one's interests, and it is closely tied to the relationship between certain agents and the specific threats they pose. In that sense, even though everyone is at risk from these dangers, certain people or groups are more susceptible than others due to their inability or weakened ability to defend themselves. Aday's influential sociological work in the 1990s broadened the concept to include the physical, psychological, and social health of both communities and individuals, in addition to the resources to deal with them. Upon transitioning into the twenty first century, vulnerability was viewed in the context of shifting demographics and multicultural, intercultural, and intracultural matters. The ideas examined about vulnerability changed, these being marginalization, social connectedness, and health disparity. As we progress further into the twenty first century, the usage of the language connected with vulnerability is constantly changing in the literature related to discipline and perspective. Different connotations of vulnerability remain present; however, the concept is usually accompanied by an adjective like societal or personal vulnerability, implying a broad understanding of the various interpretations of vulnerability.

Vulnerability theory illuminates the intricate fabric of human dependency, portraying vulnerability as a perpetual condition of exposure and interconnectedness, where harm is an ever-present possibility woven into the human experience. Fineman describes this state as one that "cannot be hidden," emphasizing that individuals are not isolated entities but rather deeply entwined within a web of relationships, social systems, and institutions (11). This universal vulnerability forms the ethical foundation for a strong welfare state, which seeks to address these inherent dependencies and provide support where needed. The concept of vulnerability is also richly complex, encompassing not only physical susceptibility but also the social and economic ramifications that ripple outwards, impacting relationships and institutions alike. This multiplicity reflects vulnerability as an enduring, layered condition that resonates through every facet of human life, deepening our understanding of the essential protections required to nurture and sustain communities. Both nationally and internationally, vulnerability as an idea and the vulnerable as a group are marginalized,

silenced, and othered (Russell and Schick 1-3). Therefore, as Robert E. Goodin addresses in *Protecting the Vulnerable*, we have “special responsibilities” for those who are not just a part of our family and friends but also a larger part of our community, society, or state (110).

Immigration, Resilience, And Vulnerability in *Lost Children Archive* by Valeria Luiselli

Valeria Luiselli, born in 1983 in Mexico City, is a Mexican American writer and immigration advocate who lives in New York, where she writes her novels. She is the author of *Faces in the Crowd* (2011), *Sidewalks* (2013), *The Story of My Teeth* (2015), *Tell Me How It Ends: An Essay in Forty Questions* (2017), and *Lost Children Archive* (2019). She is one of the 5 Promising Young Writers Under 35 determined by the National Book Foundation in 2014 and distinguished among the new generation writers of Contemporary Latin American literature with her distinctive voice and has received praise, especially in the US and England with her works translated into more than 20 languages. After the publication of *Lost Children Archive*, considered among the best books of 2019, Luiselli received the Guggenheim Fellowship presented to gifted artists and scientific researchers in 2020. She has won Los Angeles Times Book Prize for Best Fiction (2016), the American Book Award (2018), the Andrew Carnegie Medal for Excellence in Fiction (2020), and was a finalist for the Booker Prize (2019), Women’s Prize for Fiction (2019), Kirkus Prize, and National Book Critics Circle Award which one of only two Mexicans ever to be nominated in the US Valeria Luiselli’s writing profoundly explores themes of silence, language barriers, cultural dislocation, and the feeling of being between worlds. Her work frequently addresses the experiences of displacement, isolation, and unbelonging, particularly within the context of immigration. As noted by Campisi, “the figure of misplaced baggage” in Luiselli’s work symbolizes the broader Latin American literary exploration of the cosmopolitan experience and the loss of culture and identity while navigating the world (114). Luiselli’s characters often remain unnamed and difficult to categorize, reflecting the complexities of identity and belonging. Her unique approach blends elements of novel and nonfiction, creating what could

be described as “documentary fiction,” where documentary practices inform and shape the narrative. Having lived in various countries across four continents, Luiselli’s personal experiences of nonbelonging and foreignness deeply influence her writing. Her work operates in the space between life and art, aiming to define and liberate identity from restrictive definitions. Through geographical metaphors—cities, maps, architecture, and navigation—she examines how her characters interact with their surroundings. Luiselli views language as a bridge between the material world and the inner life, which is evident in her portrayal of migrant stories. As she describes in an interview, these stories are often “shuffled, stuttered, always shattered beyond the repair of a narrative order,” illustrating their fragmented and unresolved nature (“Translating the Stories”).

Lost Children Archive by Valeria Luiselli is a pivotal literary work that captures the immigration crisis, especially the challenges faced by unaccompanied and undocumented children at the US-Mexico border. The novel received critical acclaim, establishing Luiselli as a significant contemporary author. It offers a deep examination of the refugee crisis, highlighting the personal and systemic struggles of these vulnerable children. Luiselli’s engagement with the crisis was hands-on; she worked as a translator in court for these children, which profoundly influenced her writing. Her direct involvement in the crisis fueled her political frustration, initially leading her to pause the novel in favor of writing a short essay, *Tell Me How It Ends: An Essay in 40 Questions*, which addresses the legal battles faced by undocumented children. This essay provided an immediate outlet for her concerns and shaped the completion of the *Lost Children Archive*. The novel serves as a “sound map” of the socio-political realities along the US-Mexico border, with a particular focus on the US side, blending personal narrative with broader political and social commentary. The novel intricately weaves together the themes of displacement, loss, and systemic failure, reflecting the broader discourse surrounding the border. This border, stretching nearly 2,000 miles across California, Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas, acts as both a physical and metaphorical divide, representing the complex and often harsh realities faced by those navigating its boundaries. The US-Mexico border is not merely a line on a map but a dynamic and contested space that embodies various socio-economic,

political, and geographical tensions. It serves as a locus for discussions about identity, migration, and human rights, challenging readers to consider the profound impacts of these issues on both individuals and communities. In essence, Luiselli's novel and essay collectively engage with the border as a site of intense human drama and systemic conflict. By integrating her personal experiences with broader socio-political commentary, Luiselli offers a nuanced and impactful perspective on the immigration crisis and its human cost (Aguirre and Simmers 99). Her work comes through a combination of anger and clarity or an attempt to find clarity in a world that is constantly filling us with fear and confusion. As the narrative progresses in the gaps between the cities of Arizona, the "ghost maps" denote the places where the skeletons of refugee children are discovered — their identities, stories, and causes of death are commonly a secret. As Luiselli states, "numbers and maps tell horror stories, but the stories of deepest horror are perhaps those for which there are no numbers, no maps, no possible accountability, no words ever written or spoken" (*Tell Me* 30). The story is set during the time of the Central American Diaspora, focusing on the summer when a large influx of Central American children arrived in the US seeking asylum. As the novel unfolds, amid a failing marriage, a family embarks on a road trip while 60,000 children are unaccompanied at the border, seeking asylum and praying for the chance to reunite with their families and avoid being deported back.

This book was born from the crisis and a sudden surge that was announced in 2014, even though children had been arriving alone in the US for many years. Immigration authorities noticed that 80,000 children had arrived alone without parents at the border between October 2013 and June 2014 – in such a short period. They were seeking asylum or some form of immigration relief. In that sense, Luiselli urges us to engage in the complicated task of converting language, experience, and bodies across time, thought, and culture. *Tell Me How It Ends: An Essay in Forty Questions* pleads for a total reformation of the forces that have constructed present immigration into the United States and the way many Americans, removed from fact, view it. It also appeals for action. The very least we can all do is to hear these stories" (n.p.). According to Luiselli, the governments of Mexico, the US, and the northern triangle – Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras are

co-responsible for this situation. Until those governments accept their shared responsibility – historical and current, it is not possible to find a real and long-lasting solution. One of the main problems in the US is that the situation is always described as another government’s problem by the US instead of considering it as a transnational situation. Valeria Luiselli wishes to change the language around how we think about immigration. Violence against people starts with language, and calling an undocumented migrant illegal or calling deportation removal creates a very negative meaning, which leads people to feel lesser, criminal, and not entitled to anything. In her interview with *Rolling Stone* Luiselli discusses thinking of “children from the Northern Triangle as refugees and not as migrants – not that migrants should receive bad treatment or lesser treatment, but in particular, these children cannot be seen as migrants because they come from situations of war and need the kind of protections that refugees are entitled” (“Translating the Stories”) In that sense, Luiselli stresses that educating Americans about the motives behind immigration is essential to reforming our dysfunctional system and going beyond the current government’s aim to construct a wall.

Lost Children Archive is deeply informed by Valeria Luiselli’s personal experience as an interpreter for migrants in New York City’s federal immigration court. It provides a different perspective of serious happenings taking place at Mexico – the US border, which takes *Tell Me How It Ends: An Essay in Forty Questions* as a basis. Children immigrants are at the center of Luiselli’s latest novel, *Lost Children Archive*. In the novel, a group of Central American children approach the US–Mexico border from the south. At the same time, an unnamed family- a mother, a father, and two children who belong to each one of the parents- in New York heads for the border on a road trip across the US towards the borderlands. The husband is a soundscape recorder and documents the sounds around areas or events to understand them. On the other hand, the wife is a journalist, but she does similar audio projects that her husband does, but she is more of an archivist. They are working on a project for NYU’s Center for Urban Science and Progress, recording the city’s sounds and compiling an “archive full of fragments of strangers’ lives” (Luiselli, *Lost Children Archive* 30). Meanwhile, the wife is focused on her mission: Locating two young girls who disappeared from detention and documenting the broader

tragedy of underage migrants at the US-Mexico border. They bring seven boxes alongside them in the car trunk for their trip. They fill them up with images and traces of their experience throughout the journey and try to catch echoes of others by recording sounds that were not “a collection of sounds that have been lost—such a thing would be impossible—but rather one of the sounds that were present in the time of recording and that, when we listen to them, remind us of the ones that are lost” (Luiselli, *Lost Children Archive* 141). The novel utilizes sound as a storytelling tool to highlight the political, historical, and ecological elements of the Desert Southwest. Through the efforts of two of the main characters, constructing an inventory of sounds and a sound documentary, a complex and multifaceted image of the region is given.

As the family travels through the deserts of New Mexico and Arizona, the narrative juxtaposes the experiences of displaced children with the historical background of Geronimo and his people. The children wonder: “What if Geronimo had never surrendered? What if he’d won that war? Then the lost children would be the rulers of Apacheria!” (Luiselli, *Lost Children Archive* 75). This road trip represents both a physical and emotional odyssey as they visit various towns and landmarks to advance their project’s goals. Throughout the journey, the wife grapples with political, personal, and psychological challenges. As Luiselli’s first novel written in English, *Lost Children Archive* deals with various topics, including a Mexican American family’s road trip and a marriage’s disintegration, immigrant children and families. Moreover, a lot of things happen on the border, real and imagined, in the characters’ minds. The novel questions how and where we should stand to document political violence. It is a story of survival, in-betweenness, and an example of how we depend on each other by stressing the importance of togetherness. With the clash of political realities and human values, the novel discovers the boundaries of place and people and how important it is to care for the other in times of crisis.

The plight of asylum-seeking children, therefore, remains a significant yet underaddressed issue in global discourse and policy, highlighting a need for more focused attention and action. *Lost Children*

Archive places children into the narrative of history and re-introduces them into the modern realm of humanity. It seeks to narrate the stories of children who have been split up from their families without any reference to the past, politics, or details. The children's narratives consist of the mother's memories of her children, the documents from the children in previous immigrations, the mother's conversations with two missing children in NYC, and the reports on children broadcast on the radio. The accounts of the countless, unnamed children from disparate social and historical contexts merge as Luiselli's novels collate and re-create their journeys of immigration on land, over deserts. Luiselli uses these diverse narratives to create a collective account of the journeys and struggles of immigrant children. The novel acts as a compilation and re-creation of their experiences, merging various stories and contexts into a singular, poignant commentary on the ongoing crisis of child displacement. The beginning of the novel features a rendition of the migrant's prayer: "To leave is to die a little. / To arrive is never to arrive." This poignant opening sets the tone for the book, emphasizing the profound sense of loss and unfulfilled hopes experienced by migrants. The prayer serves as a reminder of our shared humanity and the need for collective reconciliation. Luiselli's novel also critiques how the US handles the issue of migrant children. She points out the conflicting and often dehumanizing rhetoric used in media and political discourse. For example, the term "immigration crisis" and the labels "undocumented," "illegals," and "aliens" are used to describe these children, reflecting a lack of clarity and compassion in addressing their needs. Luiselli contrasts this with the argument that these children are refugees legally entitled to protection, highlighting the tension between legal definitions and human realities. Furthermore, *Lost Children Archive* addresses the broader issues of indigenous displacement and refugee immigration in Central America. By incorporating these themes, Luiselli underscores the systemic nature of displacement and the historical continuity of migration crises. Her novel serves not only as a reflection on contemporary issues but also as a commentary on the historical and ongoing injustices faced by displaced populations.

As care ethics is built upon the impulse to care for those who are in need and delicate and is fueled by memories of being looked after,

she gets frustrated by the current US political and social environment regarding her own family and other lost children at the border. Her search along the frontier reflects her vulnerability of not being able to take action to solve the immigration crisis and uncertainty of her own family's future, as well as trying to protect her status while trying to catch lost voices in the desert. All these become a worrying fact in her family's life, including her children, even though they are quite young, but aware of all unknowingly by experiencing the way which makes them vulnerable as they come closer to the border. In that sense, as Aparna Mishra Tarc states:

The zone of displacement at the arbitrary and fragile border of nations is also the place where childhood and adult interests meet and collide. Both adults are in search of lost histories of colonized peoples—the father seeks to retrieve soundscapes of erased American Indian tribes, and the mother, the stories of refugee children at the border. (78)

Throughout 2018 to 2019, thousands of kids were incarcerated in metal enclosures, a lot of them based in detention facilities in the desert. Emily C. Vázquez Enríquez states that “this is the context surrounding the story of Manuela's missing daughters, and therefore the social and political frame for the wife's documentary project” (78). Unlike *Tell Me How It Ends*, where the author includes fragments of migrant children's stories, Luiselli avoids direct representations in her novel. The former conveys the voices of those kids who are in the midst of trauma and the risk of deportation, in the latter, she is addressing those who cannot be found.

The child has long been a potent symbol in literature, representing qualities such as innocence, fragility, and boundless potential. *Lost Children Archive* is a powerful work that delves into themes of displacement, relocation, and family dynamics within the context of the United States Immigration and Customs Enforcement detention facilities. The novel interweaves contemporary concerns about refugee crises at the US border with the historical narrative of the Apachería and the stories of lost children, highlighting the critical importance of care in today's immigration debates. Children

learn about their world through various influences—stories, songs, plays, and media—which shape their understanding and experience of reality. As Hunter notes, “children, especially in the early years, are like little sponges, absorbing all the information around them and then actively making sense of it” (n.p.). This makes children particularly vulnerable to negative environments and harsh conditions, with potential lifelong impacts on their development and well-being. Despite advances in children’s literature, there remains a significant gap in the representation of certain ethnic groups, underscoring the need for continued exploration and inclusion.

Vulnerability is an important concept in ethical and philosophical discussions, highlighting its role in shaping ideas about harm, well-being, and rights. Despite its importance, it is often underexplored. In *Lost Children Archive*, this theme is central as the husband and wife delve into the experiences of the Apaches and missing children. They aim to piece together the fragmented stories of these vulnerable groups, revealing the inherent challenge of fully capturing past events through incomplete documentary evidence. Their focus on documenting the past leads them to become increasingly detached from their own family. The couple’s efforts to reconstruct the experiences of others result in a growing emotional distance within their relationships. The novel depicts them as a family in limbo, suspended between past and present, struggling with their emotional disconnection. Luiselli’s shifting narrative tones and pacing effectively mirror this sense of unresolvedness and fragmentation.

The American Southwest, with its vast emptiness and harsh landscapes, reflects the displacement and rejection faced by both the historical Apaches and contemporary migrant children. In *Lost Children Archive*, the region’s echoes and hollows underscore themes of exile and the profound sense of being without a place. Historically, migration within the region has often exposed people to various forms of exploitation. While many academic and literary resources address the adaptation challenges of migrant children, few truly empathize with those who are lost and alone at the border. *Lost Children Archive* aims to represent these vulnerable children and foster an understanding of their plight. It underscores that while concerns about migrant

children are often highlighted by Mexicans, this issue is fundamentally a humanitarian one that demands global attention and compassion. The novel exposes the severe injustices faced by migrant children in the US, challenging readers and policymakers alike to move beyond apathy and address this critical modern issue with urgency and care.

In her essay *On Being Moved: Sympathy, Mobility, and Narrative Form*, Miranda Burgess explores how advancements in global transportation between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries increased people's sensitivity to the emotions of others. This period saw a shift from agricultural to metropolitan living and a proliferation of literature and visual media, which helped to blur social distinctions and foster greater empathy. In recent years, the rise of social media and the rapid news cycle have given many the impression that they are closer to their neighbors, particularly migrants from Mexico. Burgess also raises critical questions about whether the media's portrayal of migrants and their struggles truly conveys the depth of their experiences. She argues that real understanding requires more than just viewing images and news reports. In this context, Valeria Luiselli's *Lost Children Archive* is highlighted as a crucial work that brings the human stories behind immigration issues into focus, reminding us that immigration reform discussions must center on the individuals and families affected by these policies.

Conclusion

Valeria Luiselli's *Lost Children Archive* illuminates one of the most pressing issues of our time: immigration, displacement, and the harrowing journeys of countless children crossing borders. Luiselli masterfully explores the profound impact of linguistic choices on our perception of reality, urging us to see these children not as illegal Mexican American immigrants but as refugees deserving of compassion and dignity. In this context, her work—and Mexican American literature at large—stands as a testament to the ultimate care extended toward vulnerable immigrant families, giving voice to their struggles and aspirations. Luiselli finds herself at the heart of intense debates surrounding border governance and the treatment of migrants,

asserting that every human being must be treated with the respect they deserve, regardless of race, nationality, or economic status. This article argues for the necessity of understanding Mexican American literature through Luiselli's perspective as a contemporary Mexican American writer, emphasizing the moral imperative to offer proper care to everyone, especially those who are marginalized and vulnerable. In our interactions with immigrants and asylum seekers, we must consider the crucial importance of providing thoughtful and appropriate care. Those in our society who are vulnerable require specific protections, implemented with a keen awareness of their circumstances rather than dictated by rigid social contracts that outline our obligations to one another. Through her critical work, Luiselli brings to the forefront the responsibilities of states towards migrants, and *Lost Children Archive* emerges as a powerful voice for undocumented Mexican Americans who often remain silenced by the fear of deportation, rendered invisible in a landscape where they are frequently perceived as threats to national security. The structure of *Lost Children Archive* may appear straightforward, yet its themes resonate with complexity, exploring the agricultural struggles that propelled families into migration while grappling with a profound sense of disconnection from the rich customs of rural Mexico. Luiselli weaves a narrative that captures both the yearning to preserve these traditions and the challenges of forging a new identity in an unfamiliar land. In doing so, she invites us to reflect on our collective responsibilities toward one another in a world marked by division and uncertainty, urging us to recognize the humanity in every story.

Lost Children Archive artfully brings to light a multitude of pressing themes, including family, unity, and culture, while at its heart lies a deeply human narrative that emphasizes the often-overlooked lives of immigrants—people whose stories are too frequently reduced to distant images on screens or fleeting headlines in the news. While immigration can stir conflict, it's vital to acknowledge that society flourishes when newly arrived individuals are embraced and integrated into the workforce, schools, healthcare, and the very fabric of public life. Andrew Selee et al. insightfully notes, “even today, there is room for cross-border engagement at different levels of government and for efforts to visualize a different kind of bilateral cooperation for the

future” (4). In this light, we must reflect on the possibility of a new binational policy that genuinely acknowledges the shared realities of Mexico and the United States in addressing immigration issues, even if the current political landscape makes this challenging. Today, the US is grappling with an overwhelming backlog of asylum applications, where some cases remain unresolved for years. Streamlining the asylum process to facilitate quicker decisions would provide timely protection for those who genuinely need it. However, limiting access to asylum can lead to tragic unintended consequences, such as an increase in undocumented crossings—a reality poignantly depicted in the *Lost Children Archive*. The repercussions for those who undertake such perilous journeys can be devastating, particularly for children who often lack awareness of their circumstances and are guided by their families in search of safety. Once they reach the US, many of these children become lost, left without guardians in a system that seems to erase their existence, relentlessly pursuing their deportation after subjecting them to unimaginable physical and psychological hardships. Luiselli's narrative calls us to confront these stark realities and urges us to recognize the humanity in each individual seeking asylum. It challenges us to envision a society where immigrant stories are not marginalized but woven into our shared experiences, fostering empathy and understanding for their struggles and dreams. In doing so, the *Lost Children Archive* invites us to see these children and families not merely as statistics or headlines but as human beings deserving of dignity, care, and a chance at a better life.

Luiselli's texts present the first-hand experience and hardships of individuals, families, and children alone at the frontier, which demand an understanding of vulnerability and the practice of care for those in need regardless of their social status or nationality. They draw attention to scholarly texts that do not usually mention the ethical criteria used for establishing border controls. To act ethically, one must adopt the ethics of care, which states that we consider the welfare of others since our welfare and the welfare of the collective are contingent on our relationships with others. Human connections are not confined to the structure of the law; instead, they are broadened by considerations of empathy, affection, and care. It can be argued that the ethics of care is founded upon a shared humanity, thus establishing benevolence

and compassion as essential ethical duties between individuals. It is essential to be aware of our interdependence with other human beings, even those outside of our political community, when we consider the ethics of care. As our welfare and that of the collective relies on our relationships with them, we must act with the welfare of others in mind.

Movement and displacement have always been integral aspects of Mexican American literature, given the fact that these concepts are so deeply embedded in the US-Mexican experience. Immigration is a deeply personal experience for those who have gone through it; for others, it is an inherited memory that has been passed down from one generation to the next. Through Mexican American literature, we can explore the implications of immigration, which reaches far beyond the physical act of relocation and affects individuals, families, and communities on an emotional, psychological, and socioeconomic level. As Moreno states, “there is not only one typical Latina/o immigration experience, but rather there are multiple ones, and Latina/o literature offers a window into that diversity,” including ideas such as displacement due to political and economic conditions, nostalgia, lack of roots, transculturation, cultural combination, dual culture, bilingualism, endurance, adaptation, exclusion, and discrimination (2). How immigration is seen as a beneficial or detrimental occurrence is reflective of its highly personal nature. Immigration does not take place in isolation; it is greatly shaped by economic, political, and social influences and structures beyond an individual’s power. Thus, literary works often manifest the clash between individual and collective influences as of *Lost Children Archive*.

Examining the border as a space of transcultural communication deepens the discourse regarding nationhood and identity between the US and Mexico. In particular, the idea of the body as a border is crucial for understanding the association between Mexican identity and its presence and expression in US society. Fostering the welfare of people and communities that are vulnerable necessitates comprehension of the idea of vulnerability and a realization of the complexity of the interconnection between vulnerability and individual and social factors. To ensure a resilient response to vulnerability, strategies are typically called for at the individual and community levels. Enhancing resources

is vital to help individuals or populations become more resilient in the face of vulnerability. This will assist in the accomplishment of certain objectives. Thus, it is necessary to bolster the capacity to respond to vulnerability. Furthermore, providing care goes beyond the basics of supplying necessities and helping to alleviate pain; it also involves sensitivity, receptiveness, and consideration of those in need.

Luiselli draws a parallel between the reader's attachment to the 'lost children' and the insights into the perception of the world, which is shaped by language, and it also serves as a method of defining interactions with the unfamiliar, especially when faced with something beyond our comprehension. It is the obligation of those with greater power, knowledge, or possessions in any kind of human relationship to shield the weak and refrain from exploiting the less privileged. This must be kept in mind when exercising strength, knowledge, or any other possessions. In this manner, the ability of an ethics-based society to preserve national security initiatives linked to surveillance initiatives and protect privacy rights must urgently be evaluated. As Luiselli asserts in *Tell Me How It Ends*, "being aware of what is happening in our era and choosing to do nothing about it has become unacceptable" (30). Normalizing horror and violence is not an option. We must hold ourselves accountable and not turn a blind eye to what happens in our midst.

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