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Critical Essay: *The Memories of Ana Calderón* by Graciela Limón

*The Memories of Ana Calderón* by Graciela Limón, offers its audience more than just a memoir, but rather an influential lifelike experience. It depicts the obstacles Ana Calderón had to overcome as a single, mexican-immigrant, mother. Although Ana never becomes a dancer, like she dreamed, she does become the CEO of a multinational clothing company. She was able to do this even after constantly being reminded that women have no say in what they want to do. Therefore, some of the people closest to her were the ones who instilled this idea of patriarchy.

One of the first times we see a character, who is close to Ana, tell her that she has an assigned role as a woman is Tía Calista. This is during the time when Tía Calista and Ana are helping Rosalva give birth to Cesar. During this time Ana notices her mom is in pain and she mentions she is never going to give birth. This is when Tía Calista instills this idea that women don't have a choice as to what they want to do with their life. In example when Limón writes, “ ‘Im never going to have children, Tía’. ‘Ha! When we're young, we women all say the same thing. But in the end, no one asks us what we want, or don't want’ ” (Limón, 14). At this time Ana is only ten years old. For her to hear these words at such young age can only leave one with a sense of hopelessness. This idea of being like every other woman, brought tremendous fear to Ana. Out of all people, Ana's own aunt would tell her she was going to be nothing but a mother because she didn't have a choice. One's family is supposed to support them and their dreams.

As Ana's father, one would think that Rodolfo would support her. Especially since he is her only parent. But instead he does the complete opposite. Because she is not a boy, Rodolfo can not even stand to look at her. As Limón writes, "The men became very drunk every Saturday night. Most of them, and many times my father, spent most of what they earned during the week on tequila. I disliked my father most of all when he was drunk. He frightened me. He glared at me for hours as I crouched with the rest of the kids by the small fire. He often grumbled under his breath at me and most of the times I felt that he wanted to hit me because I wasn't a boy" (Limón, 39). One would think that Rodolfo would be upset with his daughter because of something terrible that she did, like later in the book. But it is only because she is not a boy, that he dislikes her. Although there is the exception that he resents her because he believes that Ana poisoned her mother's womb, causing "every" boy after her birth to die during labor. Which doesn't make sense because Cesar, a boy, survived birth, when Ana was ten. Regardless of this, as a father, Rodolfo should've loved his daughter rather than resented her for not being a masculine boy.

As a consequence of realizing that she is stuck a woman, Ana at an early age wishes she were dead, rather than to be one. For example when she is in her thoughts after the death of Jasmín, "I was the only one who didn't cry because I didn't feel like it. I was happy for Jasmín. I felt joy that she would not live to be worn out like the women we left behind in the Río Yaqui desert..."(Limón, 47). Rather than grieving for the death of her little sister, Ana is happy. Happy, because Jasmín would not continue to struggle as a woman in a patriarchal world, like she would. It is important to keep in mind that during this time Ana is still a growing adolescent. To already be thinking about the idea that women are inferior to men really goes to show how much

Rodolfo has instilled the idea that if one is not a man, the only thing they have to look forward to is becoming worn out. Although this is one example it is not the last.

Another time Rodolfo reminds Ana that women are only put on Earth to work and have babies is when she is begging him to finish high school. Again we see that he is very traditional and believes that men are the only ones who are able to have power. For example, “Your mother worked with her hands as had her mother, and her mother. She did what God had put her on this earth to do; to work and have babies. It’s now your time!” (Limón, 60). Rather than being proud of Ana for wanting to study, he scolds her. Rodolfo again reminds her that women can not do what they want, for their role is predetermined. In today's world, most parents would be delighted to know that their daughter or son is wanting to be more than a migrant worker, like them. But unfortunately, Rodolfo is too stubborn and would rather assert his authority over Ana, than to recognize that his daughter has the potential to bring more money to the family by staying in school. It is almost as if he would rather make it known that women are inferior to men, for they are only good for work and impregnating.

By the time Ana is around Twenty years old, she is brainwashed with the idea that men are dominant and women are inferior. For this reason she believed men never cooked or cleaned. This is obvious when she first sees Franklin washing the dishes after dinner, while she is staying at the Bast’s home. Ana was in awe when she noticed Franklin was helping her and Amy clean, after dinner. For example, “Ana was amused and startled to see Franklin washing dishes and pans. She had never seen a man with soap suds on his hands, especially when washing plates, forks, and knives. She was astounded to see how cheerful he was, and that he whistled softly through his teeth as he wiped down the table with a large rag” (Limón, 97). Since Ana was made

to believe men held the “power” while women were excluded from it, she was in shock when she saw Franklin, a man, washing dishes and wiping down the table. What blew her mind even more was the fact that while he was doing it, he was happy. This may indicate that the few times Rodolfo has cleaned, he was miserable and hated every minute of, because he probably thought that a man should not be doing a “womens job”.

It is crucial for one to note that if a woman wants to do something different then what society has laid out for her, there are going to be consequences. For Ana, that meant being: disowned by her father, left at the altar, going to jail, losing her only son, and unintentionally having sex with her son after not seeing him for several years. On the other hand, Alejandra and her other sisters who followed the predetermined role of a women, are the ones who suffered the least. Although Ana goes through these hardships, she is the one who becomes the most successful out of her siblings. She was able to do this because she went against what society, but more importantly what Rodolfo, wanted her to do.

In conclusion we can see that Tía Calista and Rodolfo were some of the older people closest to her, who instilled the idea of patriarchy. Luckily, Ana was able to see past this. Thanks to those who supported her through her hardships, she became more than a woman who was only good for labor work and delivering babies. She became a woman who was a multimillionaire by the age of forty.