

Chapter Title: duty

Book Title: *Autobiography of My Hungers*

Book Author(s): rigoberto gonzález

Published by: University of Wisconsin Press. (2013)

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/jj.5864794.5>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



This book is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC 4.0). To view a copy of this license, visit <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>. Funding is provided by Big Ten Academic Alliance.



JSTOR

University of Wisconsin Press is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Autobiography of My Hungers*



leaving the motherland, mother leaving me

duty

For the households without washing machines, the place to do the laundry by hand in Zacapu, Michoacán, was at La Zarcita, the lake on the other side of town. My father carried the basket of clothes on his shoulder; my mother held my hand as we made the journey to the concrete washboards. We were still only three in that family, but my mother was pregnant.

Since this was women's work, my father took me to the part of the lake where young people swam. I squatted at the edge, making the surface of the water ripple with the tip of a twig. I forgot all about my father standing at a distance, he too lost in thought as he looked at my mother kneeling at the washboard, a white mass of suds expanding around her. They were in their early twenties, chained to domestic responsibilities and anxious about money. But I didn't know this yet. I only knew that they were all mine.

An empty bag of laundry detergent floated in front of me, its plastic body bloated with air, so I snagged it with the twig. One more game: I tried to fill it with water. But when I leaned forward I fell into the lake. My father and the sound of the women washing disappeared.

When my father pulled me out, I was too stunned to cry or complain as I stood naked in the sun, my shirt, shorts, and

| *duty*

socks splayed out on rock. I had seen this sight the night before: a tinier version of my clothing stretched across my mother's lap, which was too crowded to sit on. I prayed my father, shaking his head at my stupidity, didn't make the wish I had made last night: for the clothes never to be filled with flesh.