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Consciousness and Resistance in Chicano Barrio Narratives

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by

Ana Arellano Nez

Committee in charge:

Professor Francisco A. Lomelí, Chair

Professor Carl Gutiérrez-Jones

Professor Ellie Hernández

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The dissertation of Ana Linda Arellano Nez is approved.

Francisco A. Lomelí

Carl Gutiérrez-Jones

Ellie D. Hernández

December 2015

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Ana Arellano Nez

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VITA OF ANA ARELLANO NEZ

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EDUCATION

Doctor of Philosophy in Comparative Literature, University of California, Santa Barbara, March 2016

Master of Arts in Comparative Literature, University of California, Santa Barbara, 2001

Bachelor of Arts in Comparative Literature, University of California, Berkeley, May 1999

PROFESSIONAL EMPLOYMENT

2015: Lecturer, Freshman Programs, California State University, Fullerton

2014, 2012: Grant Reviewer, National Endowment for the Humanities, Washington D.C.

2007-2014: Vice President and Board Member, United Natives, Inc., Navajo Nation

2009-10: Adjunct Faculty, Department of English, College of Southern Nevada

2007-10: Adjunct Faculty, Department of English, University of Nevada, Las Vegas

2005-07: Faculty, Division of Humanities, Communications and Fine Arts, Diné College

2001-04: Teaching Assistant, Department of Chicana/o Studies, University of California, Santa Barbara

2000-01: Teaching Assistant, Department of Comparative Literature, University of California, Santa Barbara

PUBLICATIONS

“A Comparative Analysis of Elena Poniatowska’s *Querido Diego, te abraza Quiela* and Julia Alvarez’s *¡Yo!*,” Published thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts degree in Comparative Literature, University of California, Santa Barbara, 2001

“Zonas bélicas paralelas en *Gods Go Begging* de Alfredo Véa, Jr.,” *NERTER: Una Revista Dedicada a la Literatura, el Arte y el Conocimiento*. Ed. María Herrera-Sobek, Islas Canarias, 5-6 (2003)

CONFERENCE PAPERS

“Contesting Boundaries in Coming of Age Barrio Narratives,” National Association for Chicana and Chicano Studies, San Francisco, CA (2015)

“Differential Consciousness and Body Politics in Margarita Cota-Cárdenas’ *Puppet*,” National Association for Chicana and Chicano Studies Conference, Albuquerque, NM (2004)

“Desire, Violence and Rebirth in Alfredo Véa’s *Gods Go Begging*,” National Association for Chicana and Chicano Studies Conference, Los Angeles, CA (2003)

“The Narrative Construction of Ethnicity in Oscar Zeta Acosta’s *Autobiography of a Brown Buffalo*,” Third International Chicano Studies Conference, Malaga, Spain (2000)

FIELDS OF STUDY

Major Field: Chicano Literature

Minor Fields: 20c Mexican Literature, Contemporary U.S. Latina/o Literature, Theories of Identity and Self-Representation, U.S. Third World Feminism

ABSTRACT

Consciousness and Resistance in Chicano Barrio Narratives

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Ana Arellano Nez

Chicano barrios in the U.S. are commonly represented by mainstream media as sites of cultural difference, poverty and delinquency. Prior to the Chicano Movement, barrio communities were relatively invisible in dominant American society. The limited academic literature on barrio communities tended to focus on the social problem of delinquent youth and the barriers to successful cultural assimilation. Similarly, prior to the late 1960s there were very few published literary works that offered authentic self-representations of barrio communities. Nevertheless, when Chicanos seized the tools of representation and established presses that were committed to publishing literature about the Chicano experience written by Chicanos, a wave of literature emerged, including narratives that focused on life in the barrio.¹

In comparison to mainstream representations of the barrio, Chicano barrio narratives offer a deeper understanding of the various forms of political, social and economic displacement that produce poverty and delinquency in barrio communities. In addition to complicating negative stereotypes about the barrio, these narratives demonstrate how Chicano communities resist cultural subordination and challenge social injustice. The recreation and affirmation of a mestizo cultural identity, despite its perceived inferiority by

¹ The following are some examples of early Chicano presses: Quinto Sol Publications (1967), *Con Safos* literary magazine (1968), *El Grito* Quarterly (1968), and *Mango* (1974).

the dominant class and at times at the risk of social and legal repercussions, is one form of internal resistance. Other forms include the development of ideologies such as Chicanismo and Indigenismo, and the use of indigenous spirituality as organic Chicano epistemology.

The strategies of resistance represented in barrio narratives are informed by a consciousness that is grounded in a Chicano, or mestizo, worldview. Chicano consciousness, in its various manifestations from creative cultural production and social activism to academic and theoretical investigations, is inherently oppositional. Accordingly, alongside a well established Chicano literary tradition, there exists a tradition of Chicano scholarly research that stands in opposition to ideologies that support a dominant hierarchical social order that subordinates people of color. Together, they represent a counter-discourse that parallels, and often converges with, other contemporary de-colonial and indigenous movements that are taking place on a global platform. In this study, historical, political, and theoretical studies produced by Chicano scholars are engaged in a discussion on the underlying consciousness and strategies of resistance that are represented in barrio narratives. It is my contention that the relative isolation of barrio communities speaks to its social marginalization at the same time that it allows for greater cultural autonomy. After providing a historical context for the emergence of Chicano barrio narratives in the first chapter, three key features in the barrio narratives written by Mario Suárez during the Pre-Chicano period are identified and analyzed in the second chapter. The third and fourth chapters show how nationalist ideologies fueled collective resistance in a selection of barrio poems, plays and essays of the Chicano Movement. Finally, in the fifth chapter, I examine spatial perceptions and oppositional consciousness in relation to the figurative boundary that isolates barrio communities in two coming-of-age barrio novels.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. Chapter One: Introduction: The Emergence of Chicano Barrio Narratives	1
II. Chapter Two: Place, Culture and Consciousness in Mario Suárez's Barrio Narratives	35
III. Chapter Three: Indigenismo and Chicanismo: Cultural Nationalism in Barrio Narratives of the Chicano Movement	69
IV. Chapter Four: Mestizo Consciousness: Indigenous Spirituality as Chicano Epistemology in the works of Luis Valdez and Gloria Anzaldúa	110
V. Chapter Five: Inside the Barrio: Spatial Perceptions and Oppositional Consciousness in Alejandro Morales' <i>Barrio on the Edge / Caras viejas y vino nuevo</i> and Yxta Maya Murray's <i>Locas</i>	135
VI. Conclusion	160
Bibliography	165

I. Chapter One: Introduction: The Emergence of Chicano Barrio Narratives

Today, Chicanos celebrate a thriving literary tradition that speaks to the diversity of the Chicano experience. While the Mexican-American, or Chicano, technically ‘came to be’ in 1848, a substantial body of published literature that was recognized as Chicano did not surface until over a century later. Amid early debates on the existence and nature of Chicano Literature, however, Luis Leal concluded that “Chicano literature had its origins when the Southwest was settled by the inhabitants of Mexico during the Colonial times and continues uninterrupted to the present.”² Within this broader historical trajectory, there have been various subgenres, themes and trends in Chicano literature. The barrio narrative, in particular, is one distinct subgenre that focuses on the literary representation of place, culture and consciousness in Chicano barrio communities. Notably, barrio narratives appeared in the handful of self-identified Chicano texts published before the late 1960’s, then figured prominently in the wave of literature that accompanied the Chicano Movement, and continue to be prevalent in contemporary Chicano literature. Barrio narratives constitute a critical part of our literary tradition as they testify to the specific forms of displacement that produce poverty and delinquency in barrio communities at the same time that they express and reinforce the cultural consciousness and resistance that lies at the heart of the broader Chicano experience.

Beyond appearing as a simple backdrop for a story, the cultural space of the barrio becomes a primary literary subject in Chicano barrio narratives. At times, Chicano writers

² Leal, Luis. “Mexican American Literature: A Historical Perspective,” in *Modern Chicano Writers*. Joseph Sommers and Tomás Ybarra-Frausto, Eds. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1979). Pp. 21-22.

characterize the barrio through personification and transform it into a protagonist or antagonist. Whether presented as a friend or a foe, the narrator shares an intimate relationship with the barrio and holds it as the home of a cultural community. While the barrio is clearly marked by the effects of social oppression, it is, perhaps more significantly, represented as a communal space where mestizo culture and heritage is most vibrant. Similar to the way in which the isolation of present day Native American reservations accounts for both its social marginalization and a greater degree of cultural preservation, Chicano barrios too figure as a type of urban reservation where elements of Chicano cultural heritage are more actively maintained. Along these lines, this study regards barrio narratives as a rich source for the cultural consciousness and identity that is rooted in a long history of mestizo resistance to political, social and cultural oppression.

To better appreciate the barrio narrative as a central site for the representation of displacement and resistance, this introduction offers a reflection on the historical and thematic parameters of Chicano literature and the various ways in which the terms Chicano and barrio have been conceived over time. Exploring the early origins of the themes of displacement and resistance in the Chicano experience allows for a deeper understanding of their representation in contemporary barrio narratives. Thus, this chapter establishes a historical context for the emergence of barrio narratives within the larger Chicano literary tradition, as defined by Luis Leal, while highlighting the centrality of mestizo consciousness and identity in the representation of displacement and resistance.

Chicano literature encompasses a multitude of diverse experiences claimed by Mexican Americans in the U.S. Generally, it is defined as a literature that is centered on the Chicano experience, and reflective of a uniquely Chicano worldview. More specifically, over time

Chicano writers have explored the racial, cultural, social, and spiritual dimensions of what it means to exist as a politically displaced and mixed-race people. This exploration often takes writers beyond present national boundaries and exclusive hierarchical constructions of race. While the historical period and geographical region can account for variances in a particular text, the themes of displacement and resistance and identity and consciousness have proved to be consistent in the trajectory of Chicano literature. In barrio narratives, these themes are represented explicitly in descriptions of the material conditions and everyday experiences of those living in Chicano barrios. Furthermore, the themes of displacement and mixed-race identity often give rise to narratives that seek social justice, affirm an identity in resistance to oppressive paradigms, and demonstrate cultural mestizaje.

The representation of political and economic displacement in Chicano literature gives expression to a long series of events in the historical memory of the Chicano community. Luis Leal's notion that Chicano literature originated when Mexicans first settled the southwestern region of North America during the Colonial period is particularly useful as a preliminary historical marker from which parallels between the political experiences of the earliest generations of mestizos and the later generations of Chicanos in this region can be made. These two groups, genetically and culturally speaking, can be considered as one and same. Shifts in the political control over this region, however, have blurred the connection between them and undermined their ongoing presence in this region for almost five centuries. Indeed, it was during the Colonial period that the first groups of mestizos, or mixed-race peoples of American indigenous, Spanish and African heritage, came to be.³

³ In *Occupied America: A History of Chicanos* (1972), Rodolfo Acuña provides information from several census reports covering the various areas of Greater Mexico. The categories used for racial identification are: Europeans, Euromestizos, Afromestizos,

To be precise, the Spanish Colonial period officially began in 1521 with the defeat of the Aztec emperor Cuauhtémoc, and ended in 1821 after the Mexican War of Independence led by Father Hidalgo. Early on during the Colonial period, mestizos and indigenous persons from New Spain travelled north with Spanish colonists who sought mineral wealth and Franciscan priests who set out to establish missions. Over five centuries, changes in political authority generated national terms for identification that often took precedence over ethnic or regional identifications. Spanish Californios, mestizos and mulatos, for example, would become Mexican, and later Mexican American. Ultimately, the political subjugation of mestizos in this region has been ongoing since their origins in the late sixteenth century. Consequently, the layered events of Spanish and Euro-American colonization and the accompanying political oppression have been expressed thematically in a long-standing narrative tradition that originates with first generations of mestizos and predates the birth of Mexico and the U.S. as nations.

The first generations of mestizos and Mexicans that settled in what is recognized today as the American West and Southwest as early as the seventeenth century were already a very heterogeneous group. Soon after a mestizo population came to be, the individual social experiences of mestizos in colonial society varied significantly. The historical studies produced by Rodolfo Acuña and Linda Heidenreich, however, show that while racial, cultural and social diversity existed within the mestizo population, displacement was indeed a defining element in their experience. At the same time, their studies show that resistance was often grounded in mestizo cultural consciousness. If we consider the first generations of mestizos as also the first generation of Chicanos, then we can observe historical continuities

Indiomestizos and Indigenous. This example shows how the category of mestizo was further divided by degree and specificity of racial mixture. Pp. 39-40.

between the mestizo experience during the Spanish Colonial period and the Mexican period and the Chicano experience after the Mexican period. And while Chicano barrios and barrio narratives emerged much later, it becomes clear that the events of displacement and resistance during the Colonial period continue to resonate in contemporary literary representations of life in the barrio.

The events of political displacement and resistance among mestizo communities in this region prior to the Mexican War of Independence have been critically examined by Chicana and Chicano historians invested in recovering a largely undocumented history. In *Occupied America: A History of Chicanos* (2000), for example, Rodolfo Acuña begins his study with the reconstruction of foundational pieces of early mestizo history.⁴ While making broad sweeps from the sixteenth century to the end of the twentieth century, Acuña situates Chicano history within the larger context of American indigenous history. Notably, in the first four chapters several specific examples serve to clearly establish the presence of mestizos in the Southwest region of North America and highlight their experience of political subjugation alongside Native Americans and African slaves. Among several examples of early Spanish-led explorations in this region, Acuña identifies Francisco Vázquez de Coronado's 1540 expedition to Arizona and Don Juan de Oñate's 1598 expedition to New Mexico, as well as the later establishment of missions throughout California beginning in 1769 (28-33). Early expeditions driven by Spanish interests in gold and silver would later lead to *presidios*, missions and colonial settlements organized around agriculture throughout the northern region of New Spain where mestizo populations would rapidly increase.

⁴ Acuña, Rodolfo. *Occupied America: A History of Chicanos*, Fourth Edition (New York: Addison, Wesley and Longman, 2000).

The political subordination and assimilation of indigenous communities that took place during the Spanish and Euro-American colonization of the Americas did not occur in uniform fashion. Some indigenous communities were more successful in their resistance to, or negotiation with, colonizing forces. As a result, the social status of their mixed-race offspring, the first generations of mestizos, varied. Under the newly imposed Spanish, Mexican or American political order, a mestizo's social status was dependent in part on the degree of racial mixture, skin color, and the porous nature of the racial order prevailing in the particular local community. A light skinned mestizo, absorbed into the middle class, for example, might enjoy a number of social privileges. However, in most cases the mestizo experience paralleled the social experience of colonized indigenous populations who existed at the bottom of the social pyramid. Undoubtedly, the early mestizos of the colonial era were deeply aware of the deterritorialization and violence experienced by their immediate ancestors and their shared existence as conquered peoples in the new social order.

As colonized subjects, mestizos often functioned as forced laborers in the mines and agricultural fields or wards of the mission system. Acuña explains:

Coercion was rarely absent from the colonial process. Government officials almost always appeared to be in collusion with the agricultural establishment. Both perceived the indigenous populations as key to production. The demographic factor, or the depleted indigenous population, became less important to the mine and hacienda owners as the indigenous population recovered during the eighteenth century. Mining and agricultural used a variety of labor systems. The mining labor force consisted of mestizos, natives (from central and northern New Spain), mulatos, and Blacks. The

hacendados and *rancheros* principally used forced labor, particularly for unskilled jobs. They also used slaves and *naborios*, who were bound to the land without pay, as serfs. (31)

Evidently, mestizos in the early colonial period were relegated to the ranks of colonized subjects and experienced political and economic oppression alongside natives and slaves. In the labor systems used for agriculture and mining, mestizos, like indentured servants, had little opportunity for social mobility and were often legally restricted from holding positions of authority. Similarly, within the mission system, natives and mestizos were often treated as property that could not be taken more than ten leagues from the mission (32). Sadly, the economic exploitation of mestizos and Chicanos in the form of labor coercion began with the first generations of mestizos and continues to the present. The experience of being economically displaced in a new political system imposed by foreign invaders and settlers originated in the sixteenth century and continues to shape the experiences of Chicanos in the U.S. today. Personal stories of political displacement and loss were initially passed on through the oral tradition, and later through song, art and print culture. The central themes in these early stories echo in the later barrio narratives of the Chicano Movement.

At the same time, throughout the colonial period, events of local organized resistance against colonizing forces occurred throughout the region. Among several examples of local uprisings that took place well before the Mexican War of Independence that began in 1811 and ended in 1821, Acuña cites the Tepehuano revolt of 1616, the Tarahumara revolt of 1648 and the Pueblo revolt of 1680 (30-32). Although the armed rebellions were often led by natives, mestizos and mulatos fought alongside the native rebels. For the most part, these rebellions were ultimately unsuccessful and resulted in a large number of deaths and severe

punishments for surviving rebels. In addition to citing instances of large-scale indigenous armed resistance, Acuña also highlights local community efforts in resistance to economic and cultural oppression. For example, the extensive legal activism against the system of *repartimiento* on the part of Josefa María Francisca, an indigenous noblewoman, is noted. With the support of the indigenous women of Ixil, Josefa María Francisca also took a stand against excessive taxation of the indigenous community and the violation of traditional burying practices by locking the local doctor and priest in the church until their requests were approved (27-28).

In a more recently published study, titled “*This Land Was Mexican Once: Histories of Resistance From Northern California* (2007), Chicana historian Linda Heidenreich examines early events of displacement and community resistance among the indigenous and mestizo populations of the Napa Valley.⁵ Heidenreich’s historical study begins with an analysis of the social systems that operated in pre-colonial times among the Wappo societies in the specific region, and then traces key events in their initial colonization by Californios in 1823 and later domination by Euro-American settlers in 1846.⁶ In focusing on the history of a relatively small geographical region, Heidenreich’s study effectively complicates general and simplified understandings of the colonization of Greater Mexico.

While the Spanish invasion of the Americas began as early as the mid-sixteenth century, the Wappo-speaking peoples in present day Napa Valley remained relatively autonomous until shortly after New Spain became Mexico. At this later time, with the presence of a large

⁵ Heidenreich, Linda. “*This Land Was Mexican Once: Histories of Resistance From Northern California* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007).

⁶ Heidenreich explains that in hearing the natives of the region referred to as ‘guapo,’ or handsome, by the Spanish, Euro-Americans began to refer to them as the Wappo peoples. P. 21.

mestizo population, the racial distinction between colonizer and colonized had become somewhat blurred.⁷ Although Mexico had won its independence from Spain, society was still very much shaped by older colonial structures. Spanish expeditions for the establishment of California missions in the eighteenth century were commonly accompanied by soldiers and their families who maintained and reproduced Spanish colonial structures, yet demonstrated racial diversity among them. Drawing from local census records of the period, Heidenreich confirms that “the majority of soldier-settlers and their families who came to the Napa Valley region with de Anza’s expedition were ‘Mexican mixed-bloods’” (48). Mestizos, indios and mulatos, evidently, constituted about half of the colonizer-settlers throughout Greater Mexico during the Mexican Period. Therefore, in this particular case we see that mestizos, as Mexicans operating under the colonial premise of Spanish supremacy, were doing the work of displacing the indigenous communities of the Napa Valley.

While mestizos were aiding colonizers and settlers throughout the colonial period, in the case of the Napa Valley, we also see that neighboring Native American communities, perhaps forcibly, enabled the colonizing efforts of the Californios against the Wappo peoples. Heidenreich states:

The California Indians who accompanied the expedition may have been from the Napa-Sonoma region. As part of their military/religious expeditions, Californios often brought mission converts with them from the area to work as scouts, interpreters and laborers. Such peoples would have been baptized and would have proven their loyalty to Spanish-Mexican socio-political institutions by subjecting themselves to the rule of the missionaries, and by

⁷ Heidenreich points out how the gender imbalance in New Spain contributed to the rapid growth of a mestizo population in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. P. 45.

proselytizing other peoples from their own and neighboring communities, or engaging in expeditions against un-Christianized peoples. (41)

Alta California, including areas near the Napa-Sonoma region, was the last province to become part of New Spain. It is significant that the indigenous peoples of this region, including the Wappo peoples, were conquered and subjugated by a group in which the majority of persons were mestizos and California Indians.⁸ Heidenreich's historical observations bring to light the racial diversity that existed within the colonizing group at this later time in the colonial period and the resulting varied social status among mestizos just prior to and during the Mexican period.

While the Wappo peoples were subject to profound and multi-layered displacement twice over, the mestizos and California Indians acting in service of Mexico had also experienced a level of socio-political and economic displacement, and would soon be severely displaced along with Wappo peoples by Euro-American invaders. As previously noted, Spanish colonial structures were strongly impressed in society and continued into the Mexican period despite the political instability of the time. With regard to the dominance of colonial ideologies amid shifting political dynamics, Heidenreich observes:

Colonization was the primary factor structuring Californio histories throughout Alta California Before the flag of the Mexican Republic flew over the Plaza at Monterey and at San Francisco, the future residents of Napa were colonizers for the Spanish empire. Afterward they were settler-

⁸ For example, Heidenreich explains how Sem Yeto, leader of the Patwin people, became an ally of General Mariano Guadalupe Vallejo and aided in the subjugation of the Wappo peoples. P. 68.

colonizers for the Mexican Republic, subjugating and displacing the Indigenous peoples of the region. (42)

The dominance of a Spanish colonial system that granted political authority and social mobility to those that claimed Spanish ancestry and allegiance to colonial structures was frequently documented. Yet, the increasing racial diversity significantly disrupted the fixed social hierarchies. Although Mexican society continued to be based on a racial class system, racial identity was porous and at times could be negotiated.⁹

In addition to showing how the dominance of colonial ideologies underscored various waves of displacement before, during and after the Mexican period, Heidenreich also examines the way in which the Bear Flag incident of 1846 demonstrates the violence of colonialism and testifies to ongoing indigenous and mestizo resistance to colonizing forces. Only twenty-five years after the Mexican flag waved for the first time in the central town square of the Napa Valley, Euro-American colonizing settlers forcibly overtook the town and waved the Bear Flag as a sign of American dominance. While many early American journalists and writers often described the occupation of the Napa Valley as a relatively non-violent event where U.S. soldiers were practically welcomed, Heidenreich's study brings to light personal accounts from Californios, Californianas and other locals that tell a very different story of the incident and its aftermath (73-74). As an example of silenced counter-narratives, Heidenreich cites the reflections of George C. Yount on the actions of new settlers as follows:

⁹ Heidenreich shares the story Domingo Velásquez, a young man who was identified as mixed race on his baptismal record and thus restricted from entering the priesthood. Upon having three neighbors vouch that his family was Spanish, he was allowed to enter the "racially restricted profession." P. 46.

.... they roamed from Rancho to Rancho, from Rancheria to Rancheria, and left behind only traces of tears and blood- They would shoot down the Indian and even the Spaniard, for mere sport, or as some have confessed upon the gallows, “only to see them jump and struggle, and to hear them yell and groan.” (90)

The violence that came with the Euro-American invasion extended beyond armed racial conflict. In a personal account given by Rosalía Vellejo de Leese, a Californiana, the common-place violence against Spanish, mestizo and indigenous women was such that “ladies dared not go for a walk unless escorted by their husbands and brothers” (74). While the sexual exploitation of indigenous women during the Spanish colonial era was well documented, various accounts suggest that the racist sexual violence enacted by Euro-American settlers against indigenous and Mexican women was significantly more intense. Along with Heidenreich, there are now numerous Chicana scholars that have unearthed the stories of mestizas and Chicanas who have testified to and demonstrated resistance against the gendered violence that was inherent in the colonial process.

As most studies in Chicano history confirm, displacement was always met by resistance. Like Acuña, Heidenreich cites several examples of resistance on the part of the Wappo peoples, the mestizos and the Californios. For the Wappo peoples, resistance took the form of armed rebellions against colonizing soldiers and settlers, as well as “a variety of survival strategies, including making treaties with the Spanish, voluntarily joining missions, and laboring on newly organized ranchos” (58). It is critical to recognize the various ways in which Chicanos have responded to political, social and economic displacement. Indeed, the survival strategies noted above can be seen as form of active resistance as they ensure

immediate survival and long-term cultural survival. Furthermore, in expanding our conception of resistance, Heidenreich argues:

The resistance of Californios and Indigenous peoples in Northern California is important because it demonstrates ongoing resistance to dominant and destructive narratives in a particular space, and because it was part of a larger national resistance. In the post-invasion era, a discourse of resistance infused Californio testimonios and writings throughout the state. This literature of resistance is also found in testimonios, in the Spanish-language press, and in the personal correspondence of Chicanas/os not only in California, but also in Texas and New Mexico. Indigenous peoples throughout California created a similar language of resistance to be passed down through generations in their own communities, and strategically introduced to anthropologists – narratives of resistance that directly challenged the racist and forgetful narratives of the dominant Euro-American culture. (139)

While armed resistance to political, territorial and economic domination was often not a viable option, many colonized peoples were able to devise survival strategies and resist total domination and cultural erasure. The maintenance of language and traditional cultural practices and circulating narratives that document displacement, for example, demonstrate active resistance to cultural oppression. The Chicano barrio narratives examined later in this study are also part of the tradition of narratives of resistance described above by Heidenreich.

Chicano scholars working in various disciplines have critically examined the themes of displacement and resistance in the Chicano experience. Acuña and Heidenreich both show

that the post 1960's Chicano experience emerges from a long history where events of displacement and resistance have continuously shaped the lives of Chicanos, from the first generations of mestizos to the present generations of Chicanos. The titles of their studies, *Occupied America: A History of Chicanos* and "*This Land Was Mexican Once*": *Histories of Resistance From Northern California*, both announce their work as de-colonial projects that contribute to a discourse of resistance. Heidenreich explicitly affirms:

This project is about the colonial past, then, not because it is restricted to histories prior to 1821 – it is not – but because the arrival of the Spanish in Alta California opened a period of colonization against the Indigenous peoples of the area that continues, in the form of U.S. federal practices, today.... it maps the violence Euro-Americans mobilized in taking the space from the Indigenous and mestizo people who preceded them to the area, and excavates the histories the colonizers attempted to erase. (2-3)

Heidenreich's notion that we are still in a period of colonization, where the effects of European domination can be seen in the material circumstances of the poorest communities, is clearly echoed in Chicano barrio narratives. Stories about life in barrio communities continue to be marginalized and subject to silencing in the dominant American narrative. While displacement and resistance are key themes in the larger scope of Chicano literature, I argue that they are most vivid in the subgenre of the barrio narrative.

Exploring the thematic and historical parameters of Chicano literature confirm the continuity of displacement and resistance as fundamental themes from the time of the early sixteenth century mestizo experience all the way through to the more recent twentieth century Chicano experience. Similarly, an inquiry into the various conceptions of the term

Chicano over time shows the implications of historical displacement and resistance in self-identification. To begin, the common definition of Chicano as an American of Mexican descent assumes an identity that rests on national categories. According to this definition, technically, the first generation of Chicanos would be those Mexicans who resided in the region that had just become the American Southwest after the Mexican-American war. With the loss of the war, Mexicans became residents or citizens of the U.S. Given the instability of national boundaries in the mid nineteenth century, however, this definition is somewhat limited.

The generations of Mexicans that were affected by the aftermath of the Mexican-American war were in fact a very racially, culturally and economically diverse group. The Mexican Period, in which much of the Western and Southwestern regions of North America were under the political control of the Mexican government, lasted less than three decades. During the Mexican Period, many Mexicans commonly used regional or racial identities such as the Californios or mestizos. In addition, during the transitional period after the war, U.S. citizenship wasn't immediately assumed by all Mexicans. More often than not, Mexicans were unwilling to readily accept and succumb to the encroaching American society, and therefore didn't immediately identify as American or Mexican-American, much less as American of Mexican descent. To this day, Chicano writers and scholars express an understanding of self-identification that looks beyond shifting political borders. The title of Heidenreich's study, for example, echoes Gloria Anzaldúa's well known words: "This land was Mexican once,/ was Indian always/ and is./ And will be again."¹⁰ Along these lines, a

¹⁰ Anzaldúa, Gloria. *Borderlands/ La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, Second Edition (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1987). P. 25.

historical and cultural understanding of the concept of the Chicano, as a mestizo with over three hundred years of history in this land, takes precedence.

Nevertheless, the term Chicano did surface in the period after the Mexican-American war and generally signified movement across the national boundary that politically separates Mexico and the U.S. Within the Mexican community, the meanings associated to the term Chicano varied over time. In some cases, it referred to those who were risk-takers seeking upward mobility and economic progress in the north. In other cases, the term Chicano was used by Mexicans in a pejorative manner to signify the lack of formal education. Daniel Venegas' *The Adventures of Don Chipote, or When Parrots-Feed* (1928), depicts the Chicano as the *bracero* who foolishly seeks fortune in a corrupt American society, ultimately betraying the simpler yet morally superior Mexican homeland.¹¹ Despite such variance, the term Chicano has consistently signified camaraderie, shared mestizo cultural heritage and the experience of social displacement.

After the Mexican-American war, in newly formed rural and urban barrios, the term Chicano was primarily used internally within the context of daily life in the U.S. The term Chicano announces one's Mexican origins, at the same time that it acknowledges an experience of displacement within dominant Euro-American society in the U.S. While *Chicano* or *Xicano* is an abbreviated form of *Mexicano*, the term more accurately denotes a cultural identity and political experience that exceeds national designations. This cultural identity and political experience, in its numerous local variations over three centuries, culminates in a distinctly mestizo or Chicano worldview. The new dimensions of the post-

¹¹ Venegas, Daniel. *The Adventures of Don Chipote, or When Parrots Breast-Feed* (1928), Translated by Ethriam Cash Brammer (Houston: Arte Público Press, 2000).

1848 “Chicano” experience, however, are significantly shaped by events in Mexico’s political and cultural history.

In 1947, Mario Suárez brought the term Chicano to a public literary arena with his short story titled “El Hoyo.” This foundational Chicano barrio narrative, along with eighteen additional short stories, was published in the collection titled *Chicano Sketches: Short Stories by Mario Suárez* (2004).¹² Writing at a time when the term Chicano was still primarily used internally in the spirit of camaraderie, Suárez offers readers a view of the Chicano community as it was before Chicano Movement. The racial division characteristic of early American society, even at this later time in the late 1940s and early 1950s, is implied as Suárez assumes an audience that is unfamiliar with the term Chicano or the internal character of Chicano barrios. Outside of the immediate community, a Chicano at this time might identify as American, Mexican, Mexican-American or Hispanic, or be identified as Spanish, immigrant, foreigner, illegal alien, *pocho*, *agringados* or *renegados*. The use of such terms and their connotations are, of course, circumstantial. Elevating the term Chicano, Suárez’s early barrio narratives successfully capture the elements of heterogeneity and cultural survival, despite political displacement, as defining features in what it means to be Chicano.

“El Hoyo” is perhaps the first Chicano text to offer an insider’s meditation on the meaning of the term Chicano, and to celebrate it as a collective cultural identity. It stands as one of the few literary works published before the Chicano Renaissance and it is also one of

¹² *Chicano Sketches: Short Stories by Mario Suárez*. Francisco A. Lomelí, Cecilia Cota-Robles Suárez, and Juan José Casillas-Núñez, Eds. (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2004).

the first barrio narratives to emerge on the literary scene.¹³ This short story focuses on Chicanos living in a Tucson barrio and their shared conceptions of home and community. The narrator explains that “while the term *chicano* is the short way of saying *Mexicano*, it is the long way of referring to everybody” (11). This inclusive definition of the Chicano community affirms our *Mexicano* origins as well as our status as a growing and transforming mestizo group in the U.S. Just as Chicanos can be *Mexicanos* on either side of a national border, “El Hoyo” affirms that we are also the new generations of American citizens that carry and transform mestizo culture in the present.

Suárez’s notion of the term Chicano as the “long way of referring to everybody” is elaborated in subsequent descriptions of the heterogeneous community that populates the barrio. The Chicanos of the barrio El Hoyo include the grocer’s sons who are half Chinese, the sons of Killer Jones from Harlem who married Cristina Méndez and “the assortment of harlequins, bandits, oppressors, oppressed, gentlemen and bums who came from Old Mexico to work for the Southern Pacific, pick cotton, clerk, labor, sing, and go on relief” (11). And to further illustrate the inherent heterogeneity of the Chicano community, Suárez compares it to *capirotada*, a traditional dish that is a variation of bread pudding. Suárez explains: “While in general appearance it does not differ much from one home to another, it tastes different everywhere.... fixed in a thousand ways and served on a thousand tables, which can only be evaluated by individual taste” (13). Suárez’s metaphor underscores the multiple layers of diversity that have existed within the mestizo community since well before the political formation of Mexico and the U.S. as nations. Clearly, Suárez expresses a mestizo worldview that is inclusive and celebrates racial heterogeneity.

¹³ “El Hoyo” first appeared in *Arizona Quarterly* in the summer of 1947, and was later reprinted in several anthologies and magazines during the Chicano Movement and after.

Ultimately, Suárez asserts that all of the individually diverse people of El Hoyo are Chicanos, the “spiritual sons of Mexico” (11). Suarez’s use of “everybody” to include all the people of the barrio, regardless of racial identity, national citizenship or relational position to power is reminiscent of the way in which the indigenous peoples of the Americas have commonly perceived collective identity. Among indigenous communities, there is often a term for self-identification that roughly translates into ‘the people.’ Yoeme (Yaqui), Diné (Navajo) and Raza (Chicano) are examples of terms that originate in one particular cultural community but lend themselves to include all people in a collective and democratic spirit. Here, Suárez’s inclusive approach to collective identity demonstrates how indigenous ways of being and perceiving, indeed, persist in Chicano barrio communities.

Furthermore, in recognizing Chicanos as the “spiritual sons of Mexico,” Suárez invites a specific reflection on how the spiritual, racial and cultural history of Mexico informs the Chicano experience of the present. Initially, the mixed-race population that was born during Spanish colonization of the Americas was relatively small in comparison to the indigenous populations which constituted the large majority. Consequently, in both pre-colonial and post-colonial Mexico, indigenous communities, as well as their cultural practices and traditional belief system, have been a consistently strong presence. The introduction of Spanish cultural traditions in the sixteenth century, alongside the deeply rooted ways of the indigenous peoples, informed a process of cultural mestizaje that took place during the colonial period. More often than not, sadly, the persisting indigenous elements in Mexican history and culture go unrecognized. In speaking of Mexican culture, one is also in fact speaking of indigenous cultural practices and traditions that date back to early Mesoamerican civilization.

Along these lines, in *México Profundo: Reclaiming a Civilization* (1987) anthropologist Guillermo Bonfil Batalla argues that there are two distinct Mexicos – *México profundo* and the imaginary Mexico.¹⁴ *México profundo* encompasses the diverse indigenous communities and social sectors that constitute the vast majority of Mexico's population. The indigenous people of Mexico, he explains, "are the bearers of ways of understanding the world and of organizing human life that have their origins in Mesoamerican civilization" (1). The imaginary Mexico, according to Batalla, subscribes to an ill-fitted program of Westernization. Within this framework, Batalla examines the ways in which *México profundo* has been repeatedly denied since the event of Spanish colonization.

Writing against a generalized conception of Mexico as a nation of mestizos existing in a racial democracy, Batalla instead calls attention to the profound indigenous identity and spirit of Mexico. According to his study, the original indigenous population of Mexico was estimated at twenty-five million prior to the European invasion, perhaps the largest population in the world at that time (15). Notably, there were many diverse indigenous communities that contributed to the estimated population of twenty-five million in the geographical region of present day Mexico. These heterogeneous communities were descendants of earlier Mesoamerican tribes and had come to exist as relatively autonomous, yet subordinated subjects in the tributary system of *Mexica* society.

During the colonial period, power became carefully guarded in the realm of the elite Spanish bloodline ruling class. If intertribal marriages were common and offspring were not deemed socially inferior before the European invasion, afterwards an imposed racial hierarchy strongly discouraged interracial unions and mestizo offspring were certainly

¹⁴ Batalla, Guillermo Bonfil. *México Profundo: Reclaiming a Civilization*, Translated by Philip A. Dennis (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996).

deemed inferior. In addition to strict social restrictions, segregation practices also obstructed interracial relationships. With respect to how this affected the present day racial identity of Mexicans, Batalla concludes:

It is evident that the Indian genetic contribution was the fundamental one in the physical makeup of the Mexican population. This is an undeniable reality. However, the predominance of Indian traits in the majority sectors of the population and their much lower frequency in the dominant classes indicates that racial fusion did not occur in a uniform fashion and that we are far from being the racial democracy that is often proclaimed. (16)

The relatively small population of mestizos that emerged after three centuries of colonial rule would later become the privileged ruling class and the indigenous communities would remain at the bottom of the social pyramid. According to Batalla's study, the surviving indigenous peoples were politically disempowered and their respective cultures were denied. In colonial societies, the superiority of the foreign ruling class often relies on the perceived inferiority of the indigenous peoples. Racial division and the social denial of Mesoamerican civilization, therefore, were necessary for the success of the Spanish colonial project. Despite the racial hierarchy and segregation practices, the mestizo class did emerge and were a critical element in the Mexican War of Independence. Achieving independence in 1821, unfortunately, did not eliminate the racial hierarchies that had been established during the colonial period.

The political and social displacement experienced by the diverse Mexican indigenous communities from the time of Spanish colonization to the present is similar to the displacement experienced by Chicanos after the Mexican-American war. Indeed,

understanding Mexico's racial history provides critical insight on what it means to be Chicano. Because Mexico is often perceived as a nation of mestizos, and by extension Chicanos are also identified as such, it is important to consider the complex biological and cultural implications of the mestizo. On this point, Batalla observes:

Much of the mestizo Mexican population, which today forms the largest part of the rural and urban non-Indian population, is very hard to distinguish in physical appearance from the members of any community that is recognized without question as indigenous. From a genetic point of view, both are the products of mixture in which Mesoamerican traits predominate. The social differences between "Indians" and "mestizos" do not follow, then, a radically different history of racial mixture. The problem can be better understood in different terms: the "mestizos" are the contingent of "de-Indianized" Indians.

(17)

According to Batalla, therefore, the "Indians" and "mestizos" of Mexico have a history of racial mixture that is more similar than different; or rather, both "Indians" and "mestizos" are predominantly indigenous genetically speaking. It follows, then, that in claiming Mexican ancestry, and in identifying as mestizo, Chicanos also constitute the "contingent of 'de-Indianized' Indians." Most Chicanos can locate ancestral roots primarily among the indigenous populations of Mesoamerican civilization.

Moreover, in characterizing mestizos as "de-Indianized" Indians, Batalla argues that mestizos suffered the "pressure of an ethnocide that ultimately blocks the historical continuity of a people as a culturally differentiated group" (17). Along these lines, in post-colonial Mexico identifying as mestizo afforded one social benefits at the cost of socially

disconnecting from one's indigenous familial roots. The resulting ruptures or discontinuities in family racial histories over several generations would fuel later civil and human rights movements in Mexico and the U.S. These movements sought to recover collective indigenous identities and oppose racially based social oppression.

With the Chicano Movement and the accompanying cultural renaissance, for example, the question of what it means to be Chicano came to the forefront. It was answered individually and collectively, and the responses were both personal and varied. With the spirit of the civil rights movement, an unprecedented number of Chicano authors published writing that focused on the collective identity and social concerns of the Chicano community. In "An Overview of Chicano Letters: From Origins to Resurgence," Francisco A. Lomelí explains how the Chicano Renaissance marked a symbolic rebirth for Chicano Literature.¹⁵ Tomás Rivera, Alurista, Luis Valdez and Oscar Zeta Acosta are a few highly acclaimed writers among many who contributed to the wave of new literature that sought to unite the community through narrative constructions of a shared cultural identity. In this wave of new literature, writers focused on creating distinctly Chicano characters and often proclaimed their identity as Chicano writers. If, before, the term Chicano was used primarily within the Mexican American community to signify camaraderie and heterogeneity, it was now introduced to a wider audience through American media as cultural and political identity in opposition to social oppression. Indeed, in recovering their indigenous roots, Chicanos were calling attention to a legacy of political displacement and cultural survival.

¹⁵ Lomelí, Francisco A. "An Overview of Chicano Letters: From Origins to Resurgence," in *Chicano Studies: A Multidisciplinary Approach*. Eugene E. García, Isidro D. Ortiz, & Francisco A. Lomelí, Eds. (New York: Teacher's College Press, 1977).

In light of the political history of mestizos in Mexico, or in Batalla's words, "de-Indianized 'Indians,'" and Chicanos in the U.S., the term Chicano now carried with it the spirit of collective resistance to social oppression. Prioritizing a political stance was pressing in this historical moment. More than fellow countrymen sharing a common cultural heritage and the experience of social displacement, to be Chicano at this time also meant to rally together and speak out against the long-standing socioeconomic oppression of Mexican and Indigenous peoples in America. Identifying publicly as Chicanos, this generation of Mexican Americans mobilized on a large scale to contest social injustice and the marginalization of Chicano communities.

Oppositional consciousness and collective movement for social justice has been central to the Chicano experience since the mid-nineteenth century; however, it wasn't until this particular moment in history that an explicit political dimension was linked to the term Chicano. Expectedly, this political stance carried over to Chicano literature. In the above mentioned essay, Lomelí asserts that "we are dealing with a literature that exists within a dominant culture, whose posture is to make a stand against what the latter dictates" (106). Such an overt political stance is most common in the literature of the Chicano Movement. Nevertheless, in considering the historical and thematic span of the Chicano literary tradition, Chicanos have consistently documented displacement and responded with various forms of resistance.

In addition to a social movement in the form of political demonstrations and cultural events that often originated in Chicano barrios, the development of a body of literature that spoke to Chicano experiences would serve to bring the Chicano community together. In "Chicano Literature 1970-1979: The Establishment of a Community," Tomás Rivera noted

that “the Chicano community was a diffused tribe.”¹⁶ While Rivera’s essay largely argues for the need to work collectively in order to make social gains that will benefit the whole of the Chicano community, it is not surprising that he refers to Chicanos as a tribe. In an effort to bring the Chicano community together, during the Chicano Movement artists and writers often employed indigenous symbols and concepts to affirm a shared cultural heritage. Discourse on the indigenous elements within Chicano culture, in turn, gave rise to a spiritual dimension of the Chicano experience and worldview. In claiming their Mesoamerican ancestry, Chicanos celebrated an indigenous identity that is rooted in the land of the Americas and a spirit of cultural survival. The recognition of indigenous ancestry indeed fueled the political, cultural and spiritual dimensions of the term Chicano during this time.

The range of meanings associated with the term Chicano, from notions of the Chicano as *agringado* or *renegado*, to connotations of camaraderie and heterogeneity, and a later emphasis on the political and spiritual dimensions of what it means to be Chicano, has indeed varied over time. In all conceptions of the term, there is an underlying theme of loss and recovery and a desire for self-discovery. The origin of this loss may be traced back to colonial, or even pre-colonial, times. In the spirit of recovery, Chicano writers and scholars have recognized both the rich oral tradition of our indigenous ancestors as well as the formal Spanish literary tradition as important antecedents of Chicano literature. In much of the poetry that was produced during the Chicano Movement, the indigenous root of our culture frequently blossoms in corporal and spiritual discourse that reencounters our indigenous ancestry

¹⁶ *Tomás Rivera: The Complete Works*. Julian Olivares, Ed. (Houston: Arte Público Press, 1988).

At the same time, Chicano literature has inherited the Spanish legacy of a written narrative tradition that dates back to the sixteenth century. In his study on the origins of Chicano literature, Lomelí highlights how the writings of early explorers in the southwestern region of North America, like Fray Marcos de Niza's *Relacion del descubrimiento de las siete ciudades* (1539) and Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca's *Relaciones* (1542) were, in fact, important influences for Chicano literature. He also shows how the Spanish picaresque genre has made its mark on many Chicano writers. As descendents of the indigenous peoples of the Americas and with the influence of early Spanish explorers, our literary tradition derives from much earlier story-telling traditions. Ultimately, as Luis Leal affirmed, the Chicano literary tradition begins with the story-telling traditions of the mestizos in the sixteenth century which were shaped by both indigenous and Spanish narrative traditions. Mestizo testimonios appeared much later in printed texts during the Mexican period. And, more recently, the Chicano literary tradition experienced a symbolic rebirth in the late 1960s and continues to be reshaped by the new generations of mestizos, now self-identified Chicanos. Indeed, the Chicano literary tradition is not a recent phenomenon.

Similar to the way in which the rediscovery of ourselves as mestizos is key to understanding our broader literary tradition, our shared cultural identity is also better understood by examining the various forms of displacement experienced by our ancestors historically. In his study of cultural practices in urban Chicano barrios, *Barrio-Logos: Space and Place in Urban Chicano Literature and Culture* (2000), Raúl Homero Villa asserts that "the experience of being displaced in multiple ways from a perceived homeland has been an

essential element of Chicanos' social identity in this country."¹⁷ As we will see later, telling stories that document events of displacement figure as an important form of resistance in Chicano barrio narratives, along with the affirmation of cultural practices and traditions.

Within the Chicano literary tradition, barrio narratives have a particular focus on the physical and cultural space of the barrio which inherently testifies to the multiple forms of displacement experienced by barrio residents. Having explored the parameters of the Chicano literary tradition as well as the diverse definitions of the term Chicano, I now turn to the etymology of the term barrio and the process of barrioization to better understand the emergence of barrio narratives and their important role in documenting and resisting the ongoing displacement of mestizo communities in this region. Interestingly, both early and contemporary formal definitions of the term barrio suggest some degree of distance or difference from an implied center. Standard collegiate dictionaries, for example, indicate that the term barrio has its origins in the Arabic *barrī*, which means "to be of the open country."¹⁸ In consideration of the Middle Eastern social and historical context, we can assume that to be of the open country is the opposite of belonging to a village or city center. Although the root term *barrī* would seem to solely signify a geographical designation or distinction, in the context of Chicano barrio narratives what is significant is that it suggests a degree of distance from a dominant social center.

Similarly, the contemporary definition of the term barrio as a Spanish-speaking quarter or neighborhood in a city or town, especially in the Southwest, primarily signifies a

¹⁷ Villa, Raúl Homero. *Barrio-Logos: Space and Place in Urban Chicano Literature and Culture* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000). P. 1.

¹⁸ *Webster's New World College Dictionary, Fifth Edition* (Geneva, IL: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2014).

linguistic difference or distinction.¹⁹ Again, in light of the present context, we can gather that the linguistic distinction also suggests a degree of distance from a dominant center. To be distant, different or disconnected, from the dominant social center, is indeed a primary characteristic of Chicano barrios since their emergence in the latter part of the nineteenth century. Here, we might consider middle-class or mainstream America as the dominant economic and social center. The linguistic distinction announced in the contemporary definition of a barrio also suggests a broader cultural difference. The residents of Chicano barrios not only speak Spanish, they also carry and maintain Mexican cultural traditions while actively engaging in cultural mestizaje.

In addition to being defined as a linguistically and culturally different space, barrios are also commonly identified as areas with high levels of economic poverty. Language, culture and economic status are all markers that indicate how barrios are distant or different from middle-class America. While language and culture are internal practices that affirm the distinct cultural identity of barrio communities and stand in resistance to cultural erasure, the physical space of the barrio is also clearly marked by the affects of the economic marginalization that barrio residents are subject to. Consequently, the dynamic space of the barrio is characterized by the tension between forces of social oppression that seek to displace and negate barrio communities, and internal cultural resistance to those oppressive forces.

According to Raúl Homero Villa's interdisciplinary study, this tension can also be regarded as that between external barrioization and internal barriology. Building on historian Albert Camarillo's early conception of barrioization as "the formation of residentially and

¹⁹ *Webster's New World College Dictionary, Fifth Edition* (Geneva, IL: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2014).

socially segregated Chicano barrios or neighborhoods,” Villa adds that barrioization, “understood as a complex of dominating social processes originating *outside* of the barrios— was not imposed without significant response by the *mexicanos* living within, and acting on behalf of, their developing residential milieus” (4-5). Therefore, in response to the external process of barrioization, barrio communities would engage in barriology, defined by Villa as “the expressive practices of barrio social and cultural reproduction— from the mundane exercises of daily-round and leisure activities to the formal articulation of community defense goals in organizational forums and discursive media” (6). The examples of barriology, or Chicano community resistance, analyzed by Villa echo the forms of cultural resistance to colonial forces that were practiced among the first generations of mestizos in this region.

Albert Camarillo’s pioneering study, *Chicanos in a Changing Society: From Mexican Pueblos to American Barrios in Santa Barbara and Southern California, 1848-1930* (1979), opened the door for future studies on Chicano barrio communities.²⁰ In this study, Camarillo examines the external and internal factors that contributed to a process of barrioization for Mexicans shortly after the Mexican-American War. Focusing on the Santa Barbara area, Camarillo explains:

The loss of land, the decline of the pastoral economy, and the continuation of racial antagonism, together with the onset of political powerlessness, began to create a new reality for Mexican people in Santa Barbara. That new reality was perhaps best reflected in what can be called the *barrioization* of the

²⁰ Camarillo, Albert. *Chicanos in a Changing Society: From Mexican Pueblos to American Barrios in Santa Barbara and Southern California, 1848-1930* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979).

Mexican population– the formation of residentially and socially segregated Chicano barrios and neighborhoods. *Barrioization* of *Mestizo* society in Santa Barbara meant more than just segregation from Anglo society; it was also a process that involved a great many social, economic, familial and demographic factors. (53)

While the process of barrioization likely varied from town to town, it ultimately affected the majority of the Mexican population that found themselves suddenly under U.S. governance immediately after the war. Although the term barrioization refers primarily to a set of external political and economic forces that effectively marginalize mestizos, during the transition period after the Mexican-American War Camarillo notes that Mexicans “secluded themselves within the confines of their historic pueblo– the barrio of Pueblo Viejo– where, as before, they could function within a closed Mexican social universe” (53). Although seclusion may have been voluntary during the transition period after the war, later the economic and social isolation of barrios would be the result of external factors.

Of course, Chicano barrios, as we know them today, did not exist until the second half of the nineteenth century. According to Camarillo and Villa, the process of barrioization is largely an effect of various forms of displacement imposed on Mexican communities in the U.S. Political displacement through deterritorialization after the Mexican-American War was certainly a critical moment of displacement. By the 1840s, all or parts of California, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah, Arizona, Colorado, Texas and Wyoming were territories that belonged to Greater Mexico, formerly New Spain. The Mexican Period, lasting less than three decades, was relatively short compared to the centuries of Spanish colonial rule. The transition from Spanish colonialism to Mexican nationhood, however, didn’t involve drastic

political changes in the existing majority mestizo society as did the transition from Mexican nationhood to U.S. nationhood.²¹ In addition, while some towns were under Spanish rule for almost three centuries, other indigenous communities, like the Wappo peoples of Napa Valley, were only under such rule for less than a decade before the event of the Euro-American invasion.

While the loss of the Mexican-American War, confirmed by the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo of 1848 and the Gadsden Purchase of 1854, is a primary example of deterritorialization in Chicano history, it is definitely not the first. Following the lead of decolonial scholars, we must acknowledge mestizo history as Chicano history and recognize the uneven layers of political displacement imposed by Spanish and Euro-American political forces in what is presently recognized as U.S. territory.²² For example, the Wappo peoples, having arrived in the Napa-Sonoma area as early as eight thousand years ago, were politically and socially displaced several times over. Overall, the process of barrioization can be seen as an extension of a long history of political displacement and the accompanying economic exploitation of indigenous peoples and mestizos in this region.

More specifically, the political, social and economic forces that contributed to the initial segregation of Chicanos in the latter part of the nineteenth century continue to exert themselves on barrio communities today. As a result, barrios are typically overcrowded, underdeveloped, and socially marginalized spaces. Although they may exist as economically

²¹ In their historical studies, Rodolfo Acuña, Linda Heidenreich and Albert Camarillo all suggest that the degree of racial conflict and division between Euro-Americans and mestizos was more intense than that between Spanish and indigenous peoples.

impoverished spaces, it is also true that they provide a cultural refuge from the racism and classism prevalent in dominant social spaces. On this matter, Villa argues that cultural practices in the barrio “contribute to a cumulative ‘anti-discipline’ that subverts the totalizing impulse of the dominant social space containing the barrios. Collectively, these community sustaining practices constitute a tactical ethos (and aesthetic) of *barriology* ever engaged in counterpoint to external *barrioization*” (6). Examples of community sustaining practices include the active maintenance of the Spanish language and mestizo cultural traditions and practices which are vividly represented in stories of life in the barrio. Barrio narratives, from the 1950s to the present, allow us to closely trace the themes of displacement and resistance that are so central to the Chicano experience and that of our mestizo ancestors.

In examining consciousness and resistance in Chicano barrio narratives, it is my goal to elevate the historical, cultural, political and spiritual consciousness that is expressed in the barrio narratives produced during the second half of the twentieth century and show how it interrupts dominant American ideologies. This consciousness arises from within the community’s collective experiences and serves as a guiding element for various forms of resistance to ongoing external forces of displacement. In the following chapter, I begin by identifying and analyzing the primary elements that characterize the distinct subgenre of the barrio narrative. Specifically, I look at the representation of place, culture and consciousness in Mario Suárez’s “El Hoyo,” “Southside Run,” “Loco-Chu” and “Mexican Heaven.” Suárez wrote these stories in the 1940s and 1950s, prior to the Chicano literary boom that would accompany the Chicano Movement of the late 1960s and 1970s. These early barrio narratives are not only representative of the distinct subgenre discussed here, they are also

important forerunners to self-identified Chicano texts. To support my discussion of how the primary elements of the barrio narrative demonstrate the ongoing tension between barrioizing and barriological practices, I engage the innovative theoretical notions of Raúl Homero Villa and James Diego Vigil, both of whom recognize the barrio as an important site of cultural resistance.

In the third chapter, I examine the ideologies of Indigenismo and Chicanismo as forms of cultural nationalism in a selection of barrio narratives from the Chicano Movement. The recovery and affirmation of a mestizo or indigenous identity and the history of displacement and resistance deeply informed the political consciousness of the time. The works of Miguel M. Méndez, Luis Omar Salinas, Alurista, Rodolfo “Corky” Gonzales’ and Tomás Rivera demonstrate the strategic use of Chicanismo and Indigenismo in uniting a community for an explicitly political cause. Alfredo Cuéllar’s essay, “The Chicano Movement” (1970), and Marc Simón Rodríguez’s *Rethinking the Chicano Movement* (2015) support an analysis of how these ideologies underscored the collective political activity of the period and were central discursive strategies in the barrio narratives of the period.

Indigenous spirituality as a form of organic Chicano epistemology as represented in Luis Valdez’s barrio play “Dark Root of a Scream” (1973) and Gloria Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands / La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987) is the focus of the fourth chapter. In these works, the return to origins as an aesthetic focus figures as a basis from which a larger project of spiritualization emerges. While their appropriation of indigenous mythologies reflects the desire for a mode of spirituality that is organic to the ancestry of Chicanos, it is evident that these writers are equally invested in constructing a form of spiritualism that is liberating both in personal and social contexts. Here, spiritual consciousness comes to represent an

epistemology that is embedded in the social experiences of Chicanos and thus bent towards revolutionary change.

In the fifth chapter, I examine spatial perceptions inside the barrio in relation to the physical and figurative boundary that contains the space of the barrio in two coming-of-age Chicano barrio novels; namely, Alejandro Morales' *Barrio on the Edge / Caras viejas y vino nuevo* (1975) and Yxta Maya Murray's *Locas* (1997). The young protagonists in each novel question what it means to exist on either side of the boundary, ultimately imagining the possibility of transcending the figurative boundary. Chela Sandoval's conception of oppositional consciousness, as presented in *Methodology of the Oppressed* (2000), is particularly relevant in light of the barrio protagonists who seek alternatives to negative forces within the barrio yet also express an attitude of defiance towards the oppressive social institutions that marginalize the barrio community. In the analysis of several barrio narratives that span the length of the second half of the twentieth century, we will ultimately see various representations of the barrio as a dynamic space of oppositional consciousness and cultural resistance.

II. Chapter Two: Place, Culture and Consciousness in Mario Suárez's Barrio Narratives

Chicano barrio narratives speak to the socioeconomic and cultural conditions of life in the barrio. Defined primarily as segregated Chicano neighborhoods by Albert Camarillo, barrios are formed and transformed through the dialectic between barrioizing and barriological forces.²³ While external barrioizing practices often succeed in displacing and marginalizing working-class Chicano communities, internal barriological practices commonly contest and resist the social injustices against their local communities. Chicano barrio narratives, as formal literary works that focus on critical representations of the physical landscape and the cultural practices and consciousness that shape the barrio social environment, are prime examples of barriology.²⁴ In the barrio narratives that appear in *Chicano Sketches: Short Stories by Mario Suárez* (2004), we see sharp physical descriptions of economically marginalized barrio space, Chicano characters who actively engage in Mexican cultural practices, and the manifestation of a mestizo identity and consciousness in resistance to oppression.²⁵ Suárez's depiction of these elements reflects his personal

²³ Camarillo, Albert. *Chicanos in a Changing Society: From Mexican Pueblos to American Barrios in Santa Barbara and Southern California, 1848-1930* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979). P. 251.

²⁴ Originally appearing in *Con Safos* (1968) as a term that referred to knowledge and practices specific to the barrio, "barriology" was later used by Raúl Homero Villa's *Barrio Logos: Space and Place in Urban Chicano Literature and Culture* (2000) to describe a "cumulative 'anti-discipline' that subverts the totalizing impulse of the dominant social space containing the barrios . . . a tactical ethos (and aesthetic) . . . ever engaged in counterpoint to external barrioization." P. 6.

²⁵ *Chicano Sketches: Short Stories by Mario Suárez*. Lomelí, Francisco A., Cota-Robles Suárez, Cecilia, Casillas-Núñez, Juan José, Eds. (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2004).

commitment to creating a literary space for the experiences of working-class Chicanos and demonstrates an inherent critical awareness of the dialectic between external forces of barrioization and internal forces of cultural resistance.

Among the various scholars who have examined Chicano barrios as critical sites of cultural resistance, the studies produced by Albert Camarillo, Raúl Homero Villa and James Diego Vigil provide theoretical insights that are particularly useful in my analysis of place, culture and consciousness in Suárez's barrio narratives. Building on Camarillo's early notion of barrioization as a process involving complex and diverse external factors, and employing *Con Safos*' concept of barriology as organic epistemology produced in the barrio, Villa examines a wide range of textual and non-textual barriological practices that critically interpret and contest how the Euro-American project of modern urbanism has displaced and disempowered working-class Chicano communities from the mid-nineteenth century to the late twentieth century. In investigating the events that produced the transformation from the Mexican "*El Pueblo*" to "Anglo Los Angeles" in the period from the 1860s to the 1930s, Raúl Homero Villa identifies "physical, repressive and ideological strategies – the landscape, law and media effects – through which Chicanos were subordinately located in the dominant social space" (16). The social critiques embedded in Suárez's barrio narratives speak to how the landscape, law and media effect inform everyday life in the barrio El Hoyo. Interestingly, the dialectic between barrioization and barriology in this period, which is central to Villa's study of spatial practices in the barrio, can be seen as a new phase of the ongoing historical conflict between forces of Spanish and Euro-American colonization and indigenous and mestizo resistance in the Americas.

Similar to the studies of de-colonial scholars who interrupt the dominant narrative of colonialism by recognizing the various forms of resistance enacted by subjugated, yet surviving, indigenous and mestizo communities, Villa argues that the barrios of Los Angeles serve as “a prototypical site for mapping the unending struggles of working-class Raza to make and to mark their place in the larger space of urban capitalist society” (235). Although the barrio figures as a socioeconomically marginalized sector in the city, Chicano barrio dwellers “mark their place” and create a cultural space in which they play an active role in producing meaning. Along these lines, Suárez’s short stories feature a narrator that keenly observes and interprets the effects of poverty and oppression on the landscape of the barrio, but is more intent on affirming the cultural values and consciousness that predominate among the working-class Chicano community.

Mario Suárez’s short stories about the fictionalized barrio El Hoyo and the Chicanos who live there stand as classic barrio narratives in the Chicano literary tradition. Aside from being one of the first authors to publish stories about the Mexican American experience with a mainstream press, Suárez was the first author to explicitly embrace the Chicano identity through a literary medium. His stories are among the earliest self-identified Chicano texts to be published, and they also figure as the first formal barrio narratives in Chicano literature. “El Hoyo,” originally published in 1947, is perhaps the most recognized story in his literary repertoire.²⁶ Among the stories collected in *Chicano Sketches*, “El Hoyo” and “Southside Run” are exemplary barrio narratives as they clearly capture the primary elements of place,

²⁶ *Arizona Quarterly*, Vol 3 (Summer 1947) 112-115.

culture and consciousness in the barrio narrative.²⁷ The focus of both stories is the physical space of the barrio and the cultural community that it contains. Two additional stories, “Loco-Chu” and “Mexican Heaven,” also successfully exemplify the primary elements of the barrio narrative through a character whose identity is inextricably tied to the barrio.

Chicano Sketches presents the full collection of Suárez’s nineteen short stories written from 1947 through the 1980s. When read side by side, these stories create a multi-faceted literary portrait of a Tucson barrio community in the 1940s. “El Hoyo” is among the first five stories that Suárez published in the *Arizona Quarterly* in 1947 while he was a student at the University of Arizona, and it appears as the opening story in *Chicano Sketches*. This highly anthologized story focuses on the depiction of the physical and cultural space of the barrio El Hoyo, while at the same time presenting a pioneering discourse on a Chicano worldview. The story begins and ends with realistic descriptions of the physical features and heterogeneous community that constitute the barrio El Hoyo. Within the context of *Chicano Sketches*, editors Francisco A. Lomelí, Cecilia Cota-Robles Suárez, and Juan José Casillas-Núñez have noted that “El Hoyo” “functions like a gatekeeper narrative, partly because it introduces the barrio (as a protagonist) and its people” (153). As a “protagonist,” the barrio models self-determination in affirming its mestizo identity and consciousness and engages in acts of cultural resistance against social injustice. Similarly, the portrayal of the physical features and cultural character of the barrio take center stage in “Southside Run,” a story that

²⁷ In *Chicano Sketches: Short Stories by Mario Suárez*, editors Francisco A. Lomelí, Cecilia Cota-Robles Suárez, and Juan José Casillas-Núñez include eleven previously published stories, eight unpublished stories, an introduction with biographical background and a critical discussion and analysis of the stories. Collectively, this book offers a comprehensive look at the life and work of an early Chicano writer who ultimately created a literary space for the barrio, described as “the soul of a place where Chicanos thrive and survive.” P. 171.

presents visual observations and personal reflections from the perspective of a bus driver named Pete Echeverría.²⁸ While these stories are specific to a Chicano community in Tucson in the 1940s, the socioeconomic conditions and community values that are depicted resonate with place-identity narratives from poor and working-class American communities in the past and present.

In two additional stories, “Loco-Chu” and “Mexican Heaven,” the primary elements of the barrio narrative are revealed through the development of a character whose *raison d’être* is found in the environment of the barrio.²⁹ In “Loco-Chu,” Suárez presents a day in the life of a mentally challenged homeless man named Chu. As he travels from one barrio street to another asking for coins, “with music on his mind,” Chu becomes a screen that reflects the sometimes, but not always, tolerant and compassionate attitudes of the barrio community. The streets of the barrio are his home, and the local community is the extended family that provides the coins and meals he needs to survive. Despite his economically impoverished existence, Chu finds happiness in the music that comes from the juke box in the Canton Café and continues to play in his mind long after the songs are over. Loco-Chu may be the social pariah of the barrio; however, his ability to experience joyful freedom through music is revealing of the cultural spirit that uplifts the barrio community despite external pressures and the security offered by networks of interdependency. In “Mexican Heaven” we witness the cultural transformation of an Anglo priest into an honorary Chicano Padre. After fully immersing himself in the cultural ways of the barrio residents who belong to his newly assigned parish, Father Raymond gradually becomes Padre Ramón, a “permanent fixture” in

²⁸ This story first appeared in *Arizona Quarterly*, Vol 4 (Winter 1948) 362-68.

²⁹ *Chicano Sketches*, pp. 27-29 and pp. 49-54, respectively.

the community. Called to administer Extreme Unction to a young destitute man dying from pneumonia, Padre Ramón finds himself imagining a Mexican Heaven in order to cajole the bitter young man into accepting the final sacraments. Here, the imagined Mexican heaven epitomizes the cultural practices that transform the marginalized space of the barrio into a desired homeland for working-class Chicanos. In the character of the dying young man we are presented with a humble defense of the unemployed Chicano who lives in the most impoverished space of the barrio community, and through Padre Ramón we witness a Mexicanized Catholicism of strong spiritual convictions and faith that is central to the cultural practices and worldview that operate in the barrio El Hoyo.

Before looking more closely at how these four barrio narratives illustrate the dialectic between barrioizing and barriological forces, it is useful to consider how Suárez's writing was influenced by the social context that shaped his own personal experiences. Unlike other Mexican American writers who succeeded in publishing before the Chicano Movement, Suárez was firmly grounded in and remained committed to the Chicano working-class community. The oldest of five children born to working-class parents who immigrated to the U.S. in the 1920s, Suárez was raised in a Tucson apartment in the barrio El Hoyo. In the introduction to *Chicano Sketches*, we learn the following:

[Suárez's] ultimate goal was to portray and describe the people whom he knew intimately from a barrio in Tucson called El Hoyo, generally considered an urban wasteland. This so-called underside of America inspired him to pay close attention to the people's mannerisms, their language, customs and habits, racial composition, aspirations and complexes, eccentricities, as well as normative tendencies, history, and folklore. (1)

In working towards such a goal, Suárez successfully captured the primary elements that define the Chicano barrio narrative. More than an observer of the barrio community, Suárez identified with this community and endeavored to create an insider's account of the barrio experience that recognizes and affirms the barrio as a culturally different space. Unlike other dominant social spaces in mainstream America, Chicano barrios in the 1940s contained a different set of cultural norms. This difference, often read as resistance to American assimilation, was used to further exclude and misrepresent the Chicano community in mainstream American narratives. In emphasizing the importance of critically interpreting the meaning of this difference from an insider's perspective, Villa asserts that "we must understand the urban barrio as a literal 'place of difference' and a complex site of material and symbolic production" (16).

In the early decades of the twentieth century, American society was very much divided along racial lines. Mexicanos, Chicanos and people of color nationwide generally occupied the lower ranks of society and lacked representation in government, professional fields and academia. In the American Southwest, the Mexican-American War was not yet a distant memory, even as the territorial, political, and economic subordination of Mexicanos was in full effect before the end of the nineteenth century. In describing the initial political and economic marginalization of Mexicanos in this region, Camarillo explains:

The loss of political influence by the Mexican population throughout Southern California resulted in Anglo control of the judicial system, law-enforcement agencies, elected political positions and decision-making bodies... Once the subdivision of rancho and pueblo lands had begun, the

dominance of U.S. capitalism in the once Mexican province was a foregone conclusion. (112-113)

The political and territorial displacement of Chicanos in the latter part of the nineteenth century, therefore, was initially achieved by “Anglo control of the judicial system,” the loss of public and private lands, and by residential segregation. Unchecked discrimination and violence, at times in the form of public lynching, worked to further secure the subordination of Mexicanos. In considering how the spectacle of violence resulted in psychological intimidation, Villa concludes that “it was a severely effective tactic that served to consolidate Anglo rule against any lingering ideas of over mexicano resistance and helped to secure Mexican socioeconomic decline as the groundwork for Anglo-capitalist domination” (24). Having lost a political, territorial and socioeconomic battle, working-class Chicano communities nevertheless persisted in upholding and maintaining their cultural traditions in relative isolation from the larger and now dominant American society.

Failing to conform to new American institutions, Chicanos continued to experience intense racism, discrimination and exploitation in the early decades of the twentieth century. The absence of political representation in local and state governments left Chicanos defenseless against discriminatory laws. In highlighting how racism and discrimination were embedded in the legal system, Camarillo explains:

Racial conflict and racism in Southern California also manifested itself in political tugs of war, discriminatory law-enforcement practices, and judicial proceedings. Whenever and wherever Mexicans lost control of political and judicial influence, Mexican residences were subjected to Anglo law-enforcement agencies, juries and judges who often meted out excessive

penalties. State-laws were created especially to restrain Mexican social activity, such as the Sunday law, which prohibited ‘barbarous’ traditional Mexican pastimes on Sunday, and the anti-vagrancy Greaser Law. Such laws added to the existing enmity. Others affected the economic pursuits of Mexicans. (108)

The Mexicans who witnessed these times, including Suárez’s mother and father, would find themselves subject to such racial discrimination. Rather than encouraging cultural assimilation, these discriminatory legal practices more often intensified existing racial tensions. The ongoing influx of Mexican immigrants into relatively isolated Chicano barrios, nevertheless, would serve to reinforce those cultural practices that were being targeted with discriminatory law-enforcement practices.

Indeed, Suárez came of age in a time and place where racism, segregation and social injustice were very much an everyday reality. Although his talent as a writer surfaced early in his days as a student, a literary career did not figure as the sole pursuit in his life. Having served in the U.S. Navy and earned a college degree, Suárez gained access to greater economic and social mobility. Yet, he was compelled to return to and serve the working-class Chicano community. In the course of his career as a writer, political activist, cultural worker and professor, Suárez wrote socially provocative articles for several newspapers including *Prensa Mexicana*, *Herald-Dispatch*, *La Raza*, and the literary magazine *Con Safos*, and was involved in local grassroots movements that sought social justice for the working-class Chicano community.³⁰ In addition, he was an active member of the East Los Angeles chapter of MAPA (Mexican American Political Association) and he was directly

³⁰ *Chicano Sketches*, pp. 3-4.

involved in developing literacy programs that were geared towards low-income communities.³¹ In describing Suárez's political activism, Francisco A. Lomelí, Cecilia Cota-Robles Suárez, and Juan José Casillas-Núñez note that his "social commitment in the late 1960s and early 1970s developed into a unique brand of cultural and educational militancy while advocating for his community and the voiceless and the powerless" (4). In this sense, Suárez was one of many Chicanos who worked locally to achieve the greater goals of the Chicano Movement.

When Suárez wrote his first stories in the 1940s, the Chicano community was still largely perceived as the foreign other in mainstream media. The social science literature of the time typically used an objective approach to examine the Chicano community's resistance to American assimilation or the delinquency among Chicano youth.³² Along these lines, Francisco A. Lomelí, Cecilia Cota-Robles Suárez, and Juan José Casillas-Núñez have pointed out that Suárez "set out to fictionalize and re-create such a place of ignored characters because he believed their human story was worth telling, and he hoped that American literature would eventually include them or at least recognize their existence" (1). In creating and publishing these stories, Suárez validates the marginalized experiences, both positive and negative, of Chicanos living in the barrio and deems them worthy of literary representation. This, in itself, can be seen as a form of cultural resistance as it contests the absence of Chicano literature in the American literary cannon.

³¹ *Chicano Sketches*, p. 4.

³² In *American Me* (1948), for example, Beatrice Winston Griffith argues that as Mexican Americans "gain about ten years in Americanization" and "change their old ways of living," they will become "like the Phoenix... rising from their own ashes." P. x.

While Suárez was surely not the first to write about the Mexican American experience in the U.S. after 1848, he was the first to concentrate on the cultural space of the barrio and its residents.³³ In publishing literary works that focused on working-class Chicanos in their own right as permanent residents in this country, Suárez charted new territory for aspiring Chicano writers. Prior to the 1960s, Spanish language local newspapers functioned as the primary platform for Mexican American writers.³⁴ Daniel Venegas' early Chicano novel, *The Adventures of Don Chipote: or, When Parrots Breast-Feed* (1928), for example, was originally published in *El Heraldo de México*, a Spanish-language newspaper based in Los Angeles.³⁵ Like Suárez's short stories, Venegas' novel was among the few pioneering works with self-identified Chicano characters published before the Chicano Movement. Venegas' satirical novel, reflecting the distinctions made between Mexicans and Chicanos during the 1920s, characterizes the Chicano as the temporary immigrant worker in the U.S. who foolishly believes that American riches are within his grasp. Written from the perspective of the "intellectual refugee" who ultimately desires a return to Mexico, the repeated message throughout the novel is that the Chicano is better off returning to a humble life in Mexico

³³ In the introduction to *Chicano Sketches*, Francisco A. Lomelí, Cecilia Cota-Robles Suárez, and Juan José Casillas-Núñez argue that "writers such as Mario Suárez prove that a Chicano literary tradition had always existed- though modest in magnitude and more often regional in focus- despite remaining marginalized, unacknowledged or simply forgotten." P. 148.

³⁴ For a discussion on the role of Spanish language newspapers in keeping the Spanish language alive in print and offering a literary space for the middle class Mexican American voice, see Luis Leal's "The Spanish-Language Press: Function and Use" in *The Americas Review*, 17: 3-4, 157-162. See also Gabriel A. Meléndez's *So All Is Not Lost: The Poetics of Print in Nuevomexicano Communities, 1834-1958* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1997).

³⁵ Venegas, Daniel. *The Adventures of Don Chipote: or, When Parrots Breast-Feed*, Translated by Ethriam Cash Brammar (Houston: Arte Público Press, 2000).

than subjecting himself to exploitation in the land of American greed and corruption. The hopelessness of Don Chipote's dream of economic wealth is suggested in the subtitle, "or, When Parrots Breast-Feed," and also in the final passage of the epilogue:

And all the while, [Don Chipote] dreamt And in his dreams he saw bitter adventures, in which he had played the protagonist, unwind like a movie reel, sweetened by the remembrance of his flapper's love. It was a memory that would not allow him to forget the troubles that Chicanos experience when leaving their fatherland, made starry-eyed by the yarns spun by those who go to the United States, as they say, to strike it rich. And pondering all of this, he came to the conclusion that Mexicans will make it big in the United States WHEN PARROTS BREAST-FEED. (106)

Venegas' 1920s tragic representation of the Chicano as the disillusioned *bracero* stands in sharp contrast to the Chicano characters that Suárez created later in the 1940s and 1950s. While Suárez's barrio narratives highlighted the heterogeneity and established cultural bonds among Chicanos who made their home in the U.S., Venegas was intensely of the Chicano who foolishly endured mistreatment in the U.S.³⁶ Both Suárez and Venegas critique the political structures that enable the barrioization of the Chicano community, yet Suárez highlights the agency of Chicanos as they demonstrate various forms of resistance. In an article that compares three early examples of Mexican American literature, Anna Perches argues that Venegas' novel "should be considered as part of a Chicano literary patrimony

³⁶ The narrator speaks to the prevalent racial segregation in Los Angeles in the 1920s when he states "There were a number of restaurants along the way, but they didn't want to set foot inside any of them, fearful that they would be thrown out. It is understood that Chicanos must know their place, as filthy and rotten as it may be, if they don't want to start any trouble." P. 100.

because it raises issues of Chicano identity although not from a Chicano perspective.”³⁷

Unlike Venegas’ novel, Suárez’s short stories are written from a working-class Chicano perspective and they effectively portray a distinctly Chicano worldview.

Within the Mexican American community in the early decades of the twentieth century, the term Chicano was attached to the unskilled working-class laborer that was most vulnerable to exploitation. Without a doubt, Suárez’s barrio narratives are part of his personal mission to advocate for this working-class Chicano community. Then and now, we see that working-class Chicanos are both drawn to and forced into marginalized barrios communities where they experience varying degrees of social isolation and cultural autonomy. Rather than simply suggesting social victimization, Suárez’s barrio narratives argue that external barrioization has always been met by some form of internal resistance. Along these lines, in discussing the tension between the two opposing forces that shape the barrio, Villa explains:

barrioization— understood as a complex of dominating social processes originating *outside* of the barrios— was not imposed without significant response by the *mexicanos* living within, and acting on behalf of, their developing residential milieus. The situating powers of the landscape, law and media effects have been regularly, if not uniformly, contested or circumvented by Chicanos These related and antagonistic forces together define the dialectical production of barrio social space. (4-5)

³⁷ Perches, Anna. “Ni de aquí ni de allá.” In *Nuevomexicano Cultural Legacy: Forms, Agencies and Discourse*, Francisco A. Lomeli, Víctor A. Sorell and Genaro M. Padilla, Eds. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2002). P. 103.

Villa's identification of three specific "situating powers" that contribute to the process of barrioization, as well as his emphasis on uniform contestation on the part of working-class Chicanos encourages a more critical understanding of barrio social space. Nevertheless, while he highlights the "dialectical production of barrio social space," Villa also recognizes that "to foreground this urban dialectic is not to underestimate the predominant capacity of ruling groups or classes to shape the broad contours of social space in Los Angeles or elsewhere" (241).

Suárez's descriptions of the physical landscape and cultural space of the barrio bring the political and personal histories of working-class Chicanos to the forefront. In "El Hoyo" and "Southside Run," we see that the space of the barrio is much more than a setting or a simple backdrop for a story. Instead, elevated through the use of personification, the barrio becomes the central subject of the narrative. In "El Hoyo," the narrator immediately sets out to portray the physical traits of the barrio, and as the story progresses he remains focused on defining the landscape and people of El Hoyo. Like most barrios, El Hoyo is isolated from the larger city or town to which it geographically pertains, it shows visible marks of poverty and it is decidedly neglected by local government. Accordingly, the story opens with the following description of the barrio's physical location:

From the center of downtown Tucson the ground slopes gently away to Main Street, drops a few feet, then rolls to the banks of the Santa Cruz River. Here lies the sprawling section of the city known as El Hoyo. Why it is called El Hoyo is not clear. It is not a hole as its name would imply; it is simply the rivers immediate valley. (11)

The opening lines of Suárez's short story foreground the distance between El Hoyo and the center of Tucson. The distance, both literal and figurative, speaks to the residential segregation of Mexicanos that was initiated shortly after the Mexican-American War. While the dominant center of the city was a source of employment for Chicanos, their homes were most often located in low-income neighborhoods that were clearly set apart from the center. To arrive at the barrio El Hoyo, the narrator explains that one must veer away from the city center and descend into a "sprawling section" that lies precariously close to the river valley. Unlike middle-class neighborhoods that are often positioned safely above or conveniently beside the town center and have views that overlook the landscape, the barrio El Hoyo is located below the town center, in a disconnected sub-terrain of sorts.

Although the narrator makes light of the misnomer, stating that El Hoyo "is not a hole as its name would imply," the language does suggest that it is a figuratively sunken place. The likening of El Hoyo to a figurative social "hole" also occurs in "Southside Run." Here, the narrator follows Pete Echeverría, a city bus driver, on his daily route through the barrio. In driving through El Hoyo, the narrator offers the following anecdote:

For almost two blocks there are not many houses on the west side of Pike Street. It is because off Pike the land drops abruptly to form the more immediate valley of the Santa Inez River and the inner boundary of El Hoyo. Tito Fuentes rolled down this slope one night, ended up in Albertina Cresta's backyard and in the morning found himself only in his pants, with his shoes, socks, hat, billfold, shirt and dignity gone. This does not mean that all slopes necessarily end in holes or back yards. Tito, being romantic, could have lost

everything elsewhere... Where he rolled down a slope he now lives as close to Heaven as is possible to be while on earth. (38)

Again, El Hoyo is presented here as a sunken space that is separate from the rest of the town. It is the place where Tito Fuentes has fallen into and apparently lost his dignity. Tito eventually marries Albertina, happy to access her meager savings, and El Hoyo becomes his home. While Tito did not intend to fall into El Hoyo, a physically undesirable social hole, once he lands there it becomes the place where he finds himself culturally and spiritually at home.

Francisco A. Lomelí, Cecilia Cota-Robles Suárez, and Juan José Casillas-Núñez also make note of how “the name ‘El Hoyo’ contrasts well with the affluent parts of Tucson, but also contains sociopolitical implications of segregation” (153). With racial conflict as a motivating factor for residential segregation, the invisible spatial boundary that isolates barrio communities indicates both class and racial difference. In *Barrio Gangs, Street Life and Identity in Southern California* (1988), cultural anthropologist James Diego Vigil carefully examines how such segregation affects the youth population in Chicano barrios.³⁸ In discussing the forces of socioeconomic marginalization and the common markers that announce the physical separation of Chicano barrios, Vigil notes:

Such forces lead to the spatial and physical separation of immigrant settlers from the surrounding community. It also resulted in their occupying decaying older homes and neighborhoods. The common inference of the words “across the tracks” (or irrigation canals, highways, river or freeway) underscores this physical separation and visual difference. (19-20)

³⁸ Vigil, James Diego. *Barrio Gangs: Street Life and Identity in Southern California* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1988).

The “physical separation and visual difference” of barrio space, keenly represented in Suárez’s stories, also impedes the social and class mobility of barrio residents. While the process of barrioization first sought to create distance between Anglo-Americans and Mexicans, it soon came to represent a separation between the privileged class and the poor working-class Chicanos. Furthermore, such distance contributed to the invisibility or misrepresentation of the Chicano community in mainstream American media.

In “El Hoyo,” we also learn that the barrio’s particular location, specifically its low elevation and proximity to the Santa Cruz River, presents real potential dangers. The narrator frankly observes how “it is doubtful that Chicanos live in El Hoyo because it is safe – many times the Santa Cruz River has risen and inundated the area” (11). Geographically, in fact, El Hoyo is not a desirable place to live. The narrator honestly confirms the marginal and problematic physical location of the barrio, yet his casual tone sees it not as a judgment, condemnation or source of shame. From the narrator’s point of view, the undesirable physical location of the barrio is a simple matter of fact.

In addition to descriptions of the barrio as a geographically marginalized sub-terrain that is prone to flooding, the narrator also confirms, the common perception of the barrio as an urban wasteland. For example, in detailing the physical appearance of the barrio in “El Hoyo,” the narrator suggests:

It is doubtful that the Chicanos live in El Hoyo because of its scenic beauty – it is everything but beautiful. Its houses are built of unplastered adobe, wood, license plates and abandoned car parts. Its narrow streets are mostly clearings which have, in time, acquired names. Except for the tall trees which nobody

has ever cared to identify, nurse or destroy, the main things known to grow in the general area are weeds, garbage piles, dogs and kids. (11)

On the surface, this barrio may resemble a wasteland with makeshift housing, neglected streets, and what appears to be a generally untended wilderness. Nevertheless, this untended wilderness is the place where Chicanos have made their home, and it is also part of a land where mestizos have resided for several centuries. In the candid tone of the passage above, we see what has been described as Suárez's "mild-mannered realism filled with humor, irony and pathos" (1). A closer look, however, prompts an understanding of how such unfinished housing made of scrap materials simply indicates a lack of financial resources in the barrio community. As confirmed by the characters that populate Suárez's stories, barrio residents, often first or second generation immigrants, typically hold unskilled low-income jobs, or are unemployed or underemployed.

The superficial features of the barrio El Hoyo, including the housing structures and public spaces, are clearly marked by visible signs of poverty. The dilapidated housing structures, however, do not mean that there is not a desire for structurally sound and aesthetically appealing housing on the part of the barrio community. Instead, the economically depressed state of the barrio calls into question the larger problematic socioeconomic conditions, such as the limited ability of barrio residents to earn a living wage, that frame the experiences of the working-class barrio community. In addition, the above passage suggests that the town's local government bodies which attend to issues of affordable housing programs, the paving and lighting of streets and community centers for children, apparently do not extend to places such as the barrio El Hoyo. Therefore, with

scarce economic resources, barrio residents make do with whatever materials and options are readily available.

Along these lines, in “Southside Run” we are again presented with descriptions of the unfinished physical state of barrio homes. The narrator observes:

The houses on San Juan are set apart. They are constructed within the limited architecture provided by scant savings and loans which leave very little for the intent of Spanishizing them, Mexicanizing them, Colonializing them, or Puebloizing them. They are simply houses with sometimes plastered but usually unplastered exteriors. With rickety wood porches which seem about to fall the instant one’s foot is set on the decaying wood. Houses with sacred interiors where the photographic history of the family is perched on a little table in the living room with the pictures of friends and sometimes favorite movie stars to give them company. Houses in which family history is well recorded in scratched walls and faded spots where the jelly left by small hands was unwisely washed off with wet rags. (39)

Similar to descriptions in “El Hoyo” that focus on the superficial features of barrio homes, this passage calls attention to the visible marks of poverty in the “unplastered exteriors” and dangerously “decaying wood.” However, as we also learn of the residents’ original intentions to stylize their homes in the various architectural designs of mestizos, we can imagine the visibly appealing homes that might have been. As the narrator delves into the personal desires, sentiments and stories that exist underneath the superficial exterior, the meaning of the physical features of the barrio is transformed. As a result, the materially decaying state of these homes is overshadowed by the more significant image of “sacred

interiors” that hold family histories in photographs and in the worn walls marked by the “small hands” of playful children. The barrio homes that are dismissed as poorly finished, dilapidated housing structures by outsiders are reclaimed by working-class Chicanos as sites for establishing familial roots.

In “Loco-Chu” and “Mexican Heaven,” descriptions of the physical landscape also function to critique the sociopolitical and economic displacement of working-class Chicanos. The character of Chu, a mentally challenged homeless man who spends his days walking the streets of El Hoyo asking for spare coins, can be seen as a figure that forms part of the landscape. Like the physical landscape of El Hoyo, Chu exists in separation from the larger barrio community, his unkempt appearance announces his economic poverty, and his vulgar actions are accepted though not fully understood. The narrator relates:

When people see him coming, walking as if in a daze with his battered hat pulled well over his eyes, with his shredded tie, his old coat and very patched trousers, they cross the street to avoid him. . . . most people try to avoid poor Chu. If one chooses to remain on the same sidewalk until he passes, he is sure to say to him, ‘Go away, Chu. Go away.’ Sometimes he does. But sometimes he does not and will follow, pointing, grunting, and cursing. This, most people find very annoying, so Chu almost always gets the nickel he demands. Then he smiles. Music is on his mind. (27)

Although Chu appears as an outcast in the barrio, his social isolation is the result of a mental disability. Chu is seen with saliva dripping from the corners of his mouth, coffee spilled all over his clothes and at times making faces and dirty signs with his hands, grunting and randomly shouting nasty words (27). Because Chu’s mental world is somewhat removed

from reality, he is separated from the rest of the community. His awareness of this separation is unknown, yet the narrative suggests that Chu's survival rests on the tolerance and generosity of the people of El Hoyo. Despite his decrepit state, when he finds himself in the welcoming space of Canton Café where he drinks hot coffee and eats left-over pastries in exchange for mopping floors, "Chu's tired eyes shine like those of a young boy" (28). Like the "sacred interior" of barrio homes, Chu's inner happiness defines his existence more than his social circumstances of poverty and marginalization.

In "Mexican Heaven," as Padre Ramón sets out to frequent "every kind of Mexican occasion possible in order to learn the true character of his parishioners," we get glimpses of the internal space of barrio homes in times of celebration and times of grieving (49). On one particular occasion, Padre Ramón is called to attend to a dying man who lives among the "winos" in the barrio. The narrator describes the visit as follows:

One rainy night Padre Ramón was called to administer Extreme Unction to a dying man who lived in a lion's den near the edge of town. Now, a lion's den is an old garage or deserted house which serves as shelter for a happy-go-lucky group of individuals referred to as *winos* by the rest of the world. For food they prey on neighbor's chickens. For love they seek out lonely but passionate divorcees. They only go to work long enough to buy a red wine costing 87 cents a gallon. And all sleep around an old stove on discarded blankets, rags, or an occasional mattress rescued from the city dump. (51)

The "lion's den" depicts the living conditions of barrio residents who have absolute minimal means to survive. Like Chu, the *winos* of the barrio are marginal figures within their community, they are not economically self-sufficient and they find "shelter" in structures

that lack the basic conveniences of modern life. Within the context of Chicano barrios, and other poverty-stricken communities in America, alcohol addiction is often linked to factors associated with socio-economic marginalization, such as difficulty in accessing gainful employment. Here, it is important to remember that barrio narratives often represent a specific generation of working-class Chicanos that have recently experienced the effects of displacement. Working-class Chicanos in the latter part of the nineteenth century experienced drastic territorial, sociopolitical and economic displacement as Mexican society and its pastoral economy was swiftly eclipsed by Anglo-American capitalism. Later, in the 1930s and 1940s, Mexican immigrants fleeing from political turmoil in Mexico were kept from fully participating in American society as they were subject to racism and exploitation.

In a conversation with Padre Ramón, we soon learn that the dying young man views death, not poverty, as an unjust sentence for a life lived in a most humble and relatively dignified manner. In his own defense, the young man proclaims:

“Never having been an ambitionist, Padre, I never stepped all over my fellow man in order to gain what I did not really need. Therefore, except on insignificant occasions, never did I ever lie and cheat. Because I never was an *igualado* who thinks that what God did not mean for me I should take by force, I have never coveted anybody else’s possessions. I was always happy with those things that God put within my reach.” (52)

Interestingly, in contesting the injustice of his untimely death, the young man offers a subtle critique of the American “ambitionist” that feels entitled to material wealth and is willing to lie, cheat or exploit others to access it. Beyond differentiating himself from an “ambitionist,” the young man’s speech serves to propose an alternate set of values and worldview where

material wealth, or the economically impoverished living conditions in the barrio, is less significant than an honest life lived in humble manner. With the help of Padre Ramón, he finds hope in the possibility of a bountiful Mexican heaven.

In all four stories, the socioeconomic isolation and the impoverished conditions evident in the physical landscape of the barrio are contested in a subtle or poignant way by the narrator. As the collective voice for working-class Chicanos in the barrio El Hoyo, the narrator shows how barrios represent a space of difference where Chicanos establish cultural norms that contrast with those of the dominant American society. In maintaining and reinforcing these norms despite external pressures, Chicanos are actively resisting and contesting the various forms of barrioization. In explaining the ways in which Mexican immigrants are both pushed and pulled into barrios, Vigil states:

Forced by low income to settle in affordable areas, immigrants developed a barrio niche for themselves. Although they wished to settle in such locations, their decision was also influenced by other social groups. Like so many other ethnic groups, Mexicans preferred to reside in communities that followed their own traditions, for this tended to soften the effects of culture shock and provide a sense of security. However, the rejection that immigrants received from Americans contributed to this barrioization pattern. (21)

Outside of the barrio, the experience of racial discrimination and exploitation in American public institutions is prevalent. Yet, in the culturally different space of barrios, Chicanos find themselves within a community where common traditions and beliefs are a source of security and identity, allowing for internal continuity and validation. Again, while barrioization secures the marginalization of Chicanos, the vibrant cultural life within the

barrio speaks to the survival and celebration of the Chicano's rich mestizo heritage and traditions and ultimately resists total subordination.

Indeed, Suárez's short stories present the barrio as a hub for Chicano cultural practices and consciousness. The characters in his barrio narratives are predominantly Spanish-speaking Mexican Catholics engaged in festive events and everyday interactions that collectively reinforce the cultural norms of the barrio. Furthermore, the cultural space of the barrio provides a source for identity and consciousness that inspires action for social justice. After a series of statements that verify what "the barrio is not" physically, the narrator of "El Hoyo" turns his focus to what the barrio "is" culturally. Similar to the frank tone used to describe the physical condition of the barrio, the cultural space of the barrio is also described with fair attention to both its positive attributes and its instances of internal corruption and dominating practices.³⁹

As noted earlier, Suárez's stories are among the first working-class Chicano narratives to be published in English by a mainstream publisher.⁴⁰ Although his stories are written in English, the narrator makes clear that community being represented is a Spanish-speaking one. The primary use of Spanish for communication in both private and public spaces in the barrio is the most immediate indicator of cultural difference. In "El Hoyo," for example, the overwhelming popularity of a Spanish radio program confirms the preference for Mexican

³⁹ With respect to the presence of intracultural tensions, gang violence, patriarchy and normative heterosexuality, in *Barrio-Logos* Raúl Homero Villa notes that barrios "have been real and rhetorical locations from which, and about which, to enact ideologically expressive critiques of domination, whether this comes from within or from outside their social spaces." P. 15.

⁴⁰ "La suerte del pobre," originally an oral narrative told to Mario Suárez by Atilana H. Minajares, appears as a short story written in Spanish in *Chicano Sketches*.

music in Spanish and also shows how Spanish-language radio serves as a medium for communication among Spanish speakers in the barrio. The narrator of “El Hoyo” explains:

If one has acquired the habit of listening to Señor Perea’s Mexican Hour in the wee hours of the morning with the radio on at full blast, El Hoyo is where you are less likely to be reported to the authorities. Besides, Perea is very popular and to everybody sooner or later is dedicated The Mexican Hat Dance. (11-12)

The preference for Spanish in the barrio El Hoyo is also clearly implied in “Southside Run.” As Pete makes his rounds, the narrator identifies Spanish-named locations in the barrio such as “Rincon Market,” “Estrella Restaurant,” the “Plazita,” and the “Tiradito,” a “wishing shrine which is said to perform miracles.” And in “Loco-Chu,” we understand that Spanish is the first language for Chu, like most Chicanos in the barrio El Hoyo. The narrator explains that “as Chu eats, leaving food all over the floor and all over the counter, he smiles. He bares his teeth and says with words coming from his heart, “*Buena comida*. Good food” (28).

In light of the legally enforced measures employed by dominant American institutions to suppress its use in public spaces, the ongoing predominance of Spanish demonstrates effective resistance to cultural subordination. It is useful to note here that Suárez’s stories are set in the post World War I period, a time when American media commonly announced Mexicans’ failure to assimilate as social problem. On this point, Villa explains:

Americanization was considered a panacea for the perceived cultural maladjustment evidenced in *mexicano* practices of everyday life: personal hygiene, dietary traditions, religion, public use of Spanish and patterns of household and family care. By changing these quotidian manifestations it was

felt that the cultural traditions at the root of *mexicano* alienation from mainstream “America” would be trained out of the culture. (52)

Rather than equitably negotiating the “alienation” between Mexicans and “mainstream ‘America,’” Americanizing efforts sought to erase Mexicans’ cultural differences, which would effectively sever connections to cultural heritage and identity. Villa further argues that such cultural reprogramming was more accurately intended to “make them more assimilable to the American civic body in their circumscribed role as complacent workers motivated by the Protestant capitalist work ethic” (52).

As noted the above, in addition to the dominance of Spanish as a preferred language for communication, the distinctly Mexicanized Catholicism among working-class Chicanos was also perceived as “cultural maladjustment,” or failure to assimilate. The majority of the celebrations depicted in Suárez’s stories are marked by the Catholic faith of working-class Chicanos and a general awareness of interdependence within the barrio community. The narrator of “El Hoyo” initially explains that “its inhabitants are chicanos who raise hell on Saturday night, listen to Padre Estanislau on Sunday morning, and then raise more hell on Sunday night” (11). He also informs us that “when someone gets married, celebrating is not restricted to the immediate family and friends of the couple. The public is invited” (11). Similarly, in “Southside Run,” on crossing the cement bridge over the Santa Inez River, the narrator reflects on a common symbol of the Mexican Catholic faith and its spiritual meaning. After describing barrio homes as places where *comadres* braid hair and *compadres* get drunk, the narrator adds that “it is also where there are little palm crosses on many of the doors. It is where the humility of men before the will of God comes before envy, malice, hate, and jealousy” (41). In fact, throughout Suárez’s stories, the themes of humility and

interconnectedness are embedded in descriptions of the religious practices and worldview of the barrio community. Furthermore, the final lines of “Southside Run” offer a litany of the many unique Chicanos that the bus stops for and takes to their destination for a nickel, including “Señora Alvedre who goes to mass daily to thank God for the goodness of her sons who built for her a little house with tile in the kitchen and a patio overflowing with flowers” (41).

The way in which Mexican Catholicism is infused in the everyday practices and spiritual beliefs that shape the cultural space of the barrio is perhaps most explicit in “Mexican Heaven.” The way in which Father Raymond was transformed into Padre Ramón, the barrio priest, through the process of immersion in Chicano cultural practices, is representative of the way in which mestizos have transformed Catholicism and made it reflect a pre-colonial worldview. This story begins with the following description of the barrio community:

El Barrio’s inhabitants, with very few exceptions, are a very pious lot. On Sundays and days of obligation the Mexican that does not attend the services is rare. On the walls of all Mexican homes crucifixes and religious pictures can always be seen. However, this does not keep Mexicans from criticizing, but always in tender tones, their parish priests, usually Spaniards or Latin Americans who present the word of God with near comic eloquence. (49)

While this passage confirms the centrality of Catholic practices in the daily lives of the Chicanos from the barrio El Hoyo, it also highlights the criticism of Spaniard and other non-Mexican interpretations of the Catholic faith. We soon learn that when Father Raymond delivered his first sermons, “many a Mexican was halfway out of the church long before he was ready to recite the final prayers” (49). In rejecting sermons that were presented

“insipidly” and performed “too methodically” working-class Chicanos exercised their own agency in determining how they practiced Catholicism. The underlying indigenous spirituality evident in Mexicanized Catholicism can also be seen in other cultural norms observed in working-class barrio communities. Ultimately, the failed imposition of foreign interpretations of the Catholic faith, and much less that of a “Protestant capitalist ethic,” on working-class Chicanos rooted in Mexicanized Catholicism represents an instance where cultural resistance was perhaps enabled by their relative isolation and autonomy from other segments of American society.

The personal, almost familial, relationship between a barrio priest and his parishioners, and its suggestion of the interconnectedness of the barrio community, is also represented in “Mexican Heaven.” Padre Ramón’s presence, for example, is expected at festive celebrations in honor of baptisms, first communions, weddings and funerals. So much so, that he postpones his immediate clerical duties in order to attend and participate in the festivities. The barrio priest’s personal commitment to serving all members of the barrio community, even the most poor, is steadfast. In attending to a dying man who rejects the final sacraments in his anger at the perceived injustice of his impending death, Padre Ramón draws on the cultural practices and values of the Chicano community in order to pacify him. He explains that “since we have every assurance that the Kingdom of Heaven is the finest of all, I do not think it wrong to assume that it borrows some of El Barrio’s finest aspects and even improves on them.” (53). Padre Ramón then goes on to imagine a heaven where St. Peter is dressed in a charro suit and a big sombrero, Mexican angels play Mexican music on their guitars as souls ride around on flying serapes and banquet meals include the tastiest, tacos, enchiladas, tamales and frijoles fried in butter. Although this description borders on

fantasy, it demonstrates the way in which working-class Chicanos must actively visualize and hope for what is often denied to them. The spirit of reciprocity and interconnectedness within Mexicanized Catholicism is also suggested in “El Hoyo” where the narrator confirms that “if one has inherited a bad taste for work but inherited also the habit of eating, where, if not in El Hoyo, are the neighbors more willing to lend you a cup of flour or beans?” (12). The interdependency of the barrio community, similar to that in many poor working-class communities, gives rise to informal networks where goods and services are exchanged in order to support the material and psychological well-being of the community (36).

Another important component of the cultural practices and consciousness represented in Suárez’s barrio narratives is the community’s demonstrated allegiance to a Mexican nationalist identity. The barrio dwellers in Suárez stories have established permanent homes and familial roots in America; yet, their cultural difference from dominant American society is clearly underscored by their public celebrations of Mexican national holidays and their support of the Mexican Army. In “El Hoyo,” for example, the narrator announces that “on Mexican Independence Day more than one flag is sworn allegiance to and toasted with gallon after gallon of Tumba Yaqui” (12). Additionally, the narrator proudly informs us that the Chicanos of the barrio El Hoyo have collectively supported their fellow Mexican countrymen in their revolutionary efforts. The narrator recounts:

When the Mexican Army was en route to Baja California and the Chicanos found out that the enlisted men ate only at infrequent intervals, they crusaded across towns with pots of beans, trays of tortillas, boxes of candy and bottles of wine to meet the train. (12)

Such public demonstrations in celebration and support of Mexican national achievements allow Chicanos to collectively assert their Mexican roots. Although they now reside in what is technically the U.S., the Chicanos of the barrio El Hoyo, bound by a common history and social experience, continue to be the “the spiritual sons of Mexico” (11).

The public assertion of a Chicano’s Mexican heritage demonstrates resistance to the external pressure to assimilate. Along these lines, Villa notes:

Clearly, these public nationalistic celebrations were cherished occasions in which *mexicanismo* (Mexicanness), mediated through expressive cultural practices (music, dance, food, oratory, costuming, etc.), was directly, if momentarily, projected in a broader public sphere in the city, overlaying a strong collective persona upon the enforced anonymity that increasingly characterized the public identity of *la raza* in the Anglo-dominant city. (35)

Seen as a home to a new generation of displaced mestizos, Chicano barrios are re-imagined as a place of cultural identity. The resulting worldview and consciousness draws on a mestizo legacy of resistance and manifests itself in local action for social justice. In “El Hoyo,” for example, when an incident of institutionalized racism directly affects the people of El Hoyo, the community responds collectively. The narrator explains:

When the new manager of a local business decided that no more Mexican girls were to work behind his counters, it was the Chicanos of El Hoyo who acted as pickets and, on taking their individually small but collectively great buying power elsewhere, drove the manager out and the girls returned to their jobs. (12)

Historically, Chicano barrios throughout the American West and Southwest have been a site of collective resistance to social injustice. In considering the effect of such demonstrations, Villa notes that “the many spectacular public manifestation of working-class unrest (including strikes, pickets, rallies, marches and violent confrontations with private and state police strikebreakers) indelibly impressed upon the collective mentality of the bourgeoisie . . . the image and fear of ‘unruly masses’ in public congregation as the great urban evil of the period” (51). While such an example of organized boycotting is an overt manifestation of oppositional consciousness and demonstrates the permanence of Chicano communities, it is also important to recognize the many ways in which working-class Chicano communities resist external pressures of social oppression on a daily basis simply by affirming their cultural identity and maintaining cultural practices that are deemed inferior by the dominant society.

Suárez also shows how the cultural community and consciousness that exists in the barrio serves to restore wounded Chicanos. In describing the healing experienced by WWII veterans upon their return to the barrio El Hoyo, the narrator reflects:

And El Hoyo is something more. It is this something more which brought Felipe Ternero back from the wars after having killed a score of Germans, with his body resembling a patchwork quilt. It helped him to marry a fine girl named Julia. It brought Joe Zepeda back without a leg from Luzon and helps him hold more liquor than most men can hold with two. It brought Jorge Casillas, a gunner flying B-24s over Germany, back to compose boleros. (12)

Felipe, Joe and Jorge return to their home in the barrio physically and psychologically wounded. These Chicano veterans have returned home, literally and figuratively. While it is

common for veterans to suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and often feel displaced upon their return from war, the cultural space of El Hoyo offers these men a form of recovery and spiritual healing. Suárez's descriptions of the barrio as a desired cultural homeland deepen our understanding of the barrio experience and help us to see beyond the superficial exterior and into the intimate spaces of the barrio community. If one initially falls into the barrio unintentionally, it inevitably becomes a cultural homeland and source of healing.

Suárez is among the few writers to emerge from the working class Chicano community in the 1940s and remain committed to its social advancement through writing and other forms of cultural activism. In his short stories, descriptions of the physical landscape call attention to the socioeconomic marginalization of Chicano barrios in a very straightforward manner. At the same time, Suárez demonstrates how the cultural practices and consciousness that dominate in the barrio foster a strong cultural identity that is tied to place. The cultural space of the barrio also allows it to become a cultural homeland and a place of healing for veterans. Interestingly, the physical and cultural space of the barrio are understood differently by insiders and outsiders, just as the meaning of the figurative boundary that separates barrio neighborhoods from other communities differs from one observer to the next.

In reflecting on such contrasting perspectives, the narrator of "El Hoyo" posits:

Perhaps the humble appearance of El Hoyo justifies the discerning shrugs of more than a few people only vaguely aware of its existence. Perhaps El Hoyo's simplicity motivates many a Chicano to move far away from its intoxicating *frenesí*, its dark narrow streets, and its shrieking children, to

deny the bloodwell from which he springs, to claim the blood of a conquistador while his hair is straight and his face beardless. Yet El Hoyo is not the desperate outpost of a few families against the world. (13)

In describing the appearance of the barrio as “humble,” the narrator effectively recasts the physical landscape of the barrio and lends a degree dignity to the people who reside there. Countering the perception of the barrio as a place of economic defeat and social victimization, the narrator of “El Hoyo” asserts that it “is not the desperate outpost of a few families against the world.” The narrator also disqualifies the opinions and “discerning shrugs of more than a few people only vaguely aware of its existence,” and generally seems unconcerned with the views of those who are unfamiliar with and therefore ignorant of the internal cultural quality of the barrio community.

While the detrimental effects of barrioization are very real, Suárez’s stories collectively argue that they do not define the character of the Chicano barrio community. Instead, we see that at the core of the barrio experience there exists a drive for self-determination and social justice. Represented as the site of a living cultural heritage that is rooted in the indigenous ancestry of Mexican mestizos, the barrio is where Chicanos find a cultural homeland. This central notion is communicated most sharply when the narrator of “El Hoyo” warns that to flee from, or turn one’s back on, the barrio is to “deny the bloodwell from which he springs, to claim the blood of the conquistador while his face is beardless.” Or rather, to deny the barrio is to deny one’s true identity. Indeed, Suarez’s pioneering stories captured the key elements of the barrio narrative, elements that consistently reappear in the barrio narratives published later during the Chicano Movement and in following decades leading to the present.

Suárez's representation of the community that resides in the barrio El Hoyo is marked by its historical and cultural specificity at the same time that it resonates with narratives where identity is closely tied to place. Beyond this, however, his barrio narratives use the specificity of the barrio experience to meditate on those innate qualities in human nature that traverse time and geography. With respect to the universal dimension of his literary work, critics have noted that his style of writing was influenced both by Mexican folklore and the work of well-known authors from European and Latin American traditions such as William Shakespeare, François Voltaire, John Steinbeck, Mariano Azuela and Benito Pérez Galdós.⁴¹ While using realism and humor to show us a displaced community that must rely on its resourcefulness and communal support to survive economically, Suárez reminds us that the barrio El Hoyo “laughs and cries with the same amount of passion in times of plenty and of want” (13).

⁴¹ Introduction to *Chicano Sketches*, p. 2.

III. Chapter Three: Chicanismo and Indigenismo: Cultural Nationalism in Barrio Narratives of the Chicano Movement

Chicanos mobilized an unprecedented cooperative effort during the Chicano Movement to protest social injustice and affirm an identity that had long been negated in American society. Described as a “diffused tribe”⁴² prior to this moment in history, Chicanos were moved to lift up a common cultural identity that would serve to unite and empower the numerous Mexican American communities scattered in both urban and rural barrios throughout the Southwest and the nation at large.⁴³ While the Chicano Movement sought to advance the socioeconomic status of Mexican Americans through direct political intervention, the accompanying Chicano Renaissance combated social oppression through assertive self-representation in visual and literary arts. Chicano barrios were often the physical site where movement activities such as protests, demonstrations and boycotts were planned and executed and in turn the barrio, and all that it entailed, emerged as a dominant theme in the flourishing cultural production of the renaissance. As a substantial body of Chicano literature began to take shape in the 1960s and 1970s, the barrio narrative established itself as a subgenre vital to the larger literary tradition.

Closely aligned with the goals of the Chicano Movement, the barrio narratives of this era

⁴² In “Chicano Literature 1970-1979: The Establishment of Community,” Tomás Rivera emphasizes the importance of literature in establishing a community and attributes the diffusion of the Chicano community to geographical dispersion as well as the social and economic pressures of assimilation. *Tomás Rivera 1935-1984; The Man and His Work*. Eds. Vernon E. Lattin, Rolando Hinojosa and Gary D. Keller (Tempe, AZ: Bilingual Press Review, 1988).

⁴³ Marc Simón Rodríguez estimates that the population of Mexican Americans in the U.S. during the 1970s was close to five million. Rodríguez, Marc Simón. *Rethinking the Chicano Movement* (New York: Routledge, 2015). P. 3.

commonly deployed the ideologies of Chicanismo and Indigenismo in response to a growing critical awareness of the institutionalized oppression of Chicanos in the U.S. and in affirmation of an indigenous heritage that confirmed the native status of mestizos in this region. In imagining a diverse, yet unified, mestizo community whose identity was tied to the land, Chicano writers and artists used Chicanismo and Indigenismo to oppose the mainstream conception of the Chicano as a foreigner and source of cheap labor. Barrio narratives, therefore, spoke directly to a Chicano audience and marked a shift towards an explicitly political and nationalist dimension of Chicano consciousness. While Chicanismo and Indigenismo often appeared in the form of cultural nationalism, strategically in direct response to the long-standing socio-economic marginalization of Chicanos, Indigenismo at times exceeded the limits of nationalism as it expressed an inclusive indigenous-based worldview.⁴⁴

Tomás Rivera, Luis Omar Salinas, Alurista, and Rodolfo “Corky” Gonzales were among the influential writers who produced poetry and essays that were grounded in the barrio experience and demonstrated how specific ideologies were being used to shape the emerging consciousness that brought disconnected barrio communities out of isolation and into a larger empowered collective. In this chapter, the works of these writers will be discussed in light of theoretical insights on Chicanismo and Indigenismo as strategies of social and discursive resistance. Like pre-Chicano barrio narratives and those that came after the Chicano Movement, the barrio narratives of this era figured as a distinct discursive space

⁴⁴ The barrio narratives that were produced later during the wave of Chicana writers in the 1980s and the LGBTQ Chicana/o writers in the late 1990s and thereafter allowed for the articulation of new voices and identities within the heterogeneity of the Chicano community that were often silenced by the exclusivity of the cultural nationalism of this period.

within Chicano literature where the socioeconomic conditions of the barrio were critically reflected and layers of oppositional consciousness and resistance unfolded.⁴⁵

In the 1960s and 1970s, the unique experience of the barrio figured as a common ground for many first- and second- generation Mexican Americans. Accordingly, life in the barrio figured as a prominent narrative subject in the emergent wave of literary production that accompanied the Chicano Movement. During this historical period, recognized both as a time of social movement and cultural renaissance, the themes that had previously appeared in Spanish-language newspapers, music and folklore would now increasingly find expression in formal literary genres, popular theater and various visual art forms. Narratives that focused on life in the barrio, in particular, presented a microcosm of the cultural and sociopolitical conditions that prompted the call for political action against social injustice. Highlighting the critical relevance of the barrio experience to the larger Chicano experience, editors Luis Omar Salinas and Lillian Faderman note the following in the preface to the second part of *From the Barrio: A Chicano Anthology* (1973):

What it means to live Chicano at this time in history is to have an intimate knowledge of the barrio . . . which is a source of both strength and weakness, both a home and a prison; it is to have an intimate knowledge of

⁴⁵ Francisco A. Lomelí confirms: “el barrio es un espacio literario único creado por chicanos que tiene resonancia en un mundo globalizado donde una red de fuerzas sociales y económicas se entrelazan, creando así un cuadro de elementos interrelacionadas.” “Entrevista a Francisco Lomelí,” in Cañero, Julio y Juan F. Elices, Eds. *The Chican@ Literary Imagination: A Collection of Critical Studies by Francisco A. Lomelí* (Madrid: Biblioteca Benjamin Franklin, 2012). P. 328.

the earth which should put one in touch with miracles, but now only puts one in touch with poverty and weariness.⁴⁶

Along these lines, Chicano identity would seem to be intrinsically tied to the barrio experience and to “the earth,” or the geographical place and cultural space of the barrio and all its social and existential implications. The strategic assertion of the barrio experience as a common axis for the heterogeneous and diffused Chicano community falls in line with the widespread efforts to use literature and the arts to establish a community poised for action. In this sense, the above passage illustrates how Chicanismo, as an ideology that called for an awareness and appreciation of the cultural and socioeconomic experiences that bind the Chicano community together and obligate them to one another, served to incite Chicanos. The barrio narratives in this early anthology further demonstrate how Chicanismo aimed to unify and mobilize Chicanos. In addition, there are several selections that foreground the indigenous ancestry of the Chicano, such as Ernesto Trejo’s “Chac” and Luis Omar Salinas “Tihuitkli” and “Popocatepetl.” The allusions to Aztec and Mayan figures here lean towards cultural nationalism and serve to reinforce a spirit of cultural survival and inspire active participation in the Chicano Movement. Chicanismo and Indigenismo, often overlapping, represented forms of strategic resistance to Euro-American ideologies that silenced and marginalized mestizo communities.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Salinas, Luis Omar and Lillian Faderman, Eds. *From the Barrio: A Chicano Anthology* (San Francisco: Canfield Press, 1973). Pp. 99-100.

⁴⁷ Within the context of cultural nationalism, both Chicanismo and Indigenismo were strategically employed to unify a community and advance the social movement; however, attention to the indigenous element of the mestizo identity was present in narratives before the Chicano Movement and continues to be a strong force in contemporary barrio narratives.

Faderman and Salinas, like many writers of the period, express a conflicted relationship with the barrio in the above passage. On one hand, it is a “home,” or rather, it is a space where Mexican traditions and mestizo heritage reinforce one’s cultural identity on a daily basis. The cultural memory of the physical land as a territory that was once the home of indigenous and mestizo ancestors and also a source of spiritual identity further underscores the notion of the barrio as a “home,” or a place of belonging, for Chicanos. Indeed, as narratives of place, barrio narratives inherently foreground how Chicano subjectivity and identity is closely tied to land.⁴⁸ On the other hand, the barrio has become a figurative “prison” that represents the political containment and lack of socioeconomic freedom for Chicanos. The barrio, therefore, paradoxically reflects a rich source cultural identity as a well as socio-economic “poverty and weakness.” It is precisely these conditions that prompted a desire for emancipation through social movement.

José Rendón’s poem, “Sparkling Alleys,” included in the previously mentioned anthology, keenly expresses the dual reality of life in the barrio. Shattered glass creates “sparkling alleys,” or physical spaces marked by poverty and neglect, where Chicanos’ everyday experiences teach them about social oppression and cultural identity. The speaker of the poem is deeply aware of this paradox as he observes how “here the power of the government / is felt / coming from both sides / with piercing lights / and leather-covered /

⁴⁸ In discussing land and race in Chicano public art, Rafael Pérez-Torres confirms: “While referencing a sense of displacement and dislocation as part of identification, the art also calls up images of land that evoke a mestizo subjectivity engaged in the revision of political, social, and economic struggle.... the relationship between land and mestizo/a selves proves to be an elemental aspect of Chicano culture. In many ways, land lies at the heart of the Chicano Movement.” Pérez-Torres, Rafael. *Mestizaje: Critical Uses of Race in Chicano Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006). P. 115.

pieces of steel / and here also / our / identity crisis / is solved.”⁴⁹ The enclosing threat of law enforcement officials, represented as “the power of government,” figuratively imprisons the physical space of the barrio, and the Chicanos that reside there. However, the barrio also represents a site where the Chicano’s “identity crisis is solved.” Identity is tied to place, where survival requires resistance to mechanisms of social oppression. For Rendón and many other barrio poets of the Chicano Movement, the critical depiction of life in the barrio became an expression of the oppositional consciousness that synchronized with various political and cultural activities of the Chicano Movement.⁵⁰

The variations in approach to the literary representation of the barrio reflect the diversity of experience within the heterogeneous Chicano community. While barrio poetry often took the form of protest literature that denounced the external pressures that threatened the livelihood of Chicano communities, at times it could also be romanticized. In “El Concepto del Barrio en Tres Poetas Chicanos: Abelardo, Alurista y Ricardo” (1977), Francisco A. Lomelí and Donald W. Urioste note the following with respect to the poetic representation of the barrio during the Chicano Renaissance:

El poeta chicano dispone de varias posibilidades: entre crear una utopía
insular o un infierno atrapador. Puede reconstruir un microcosmos de valores

⁴⁹ Salinas, Luis Omar and Lillian Faderman, Eds. *From the Barrio: A Chicano Anthology* (San Francisco: Canfield Press, 1973). P. 113.

⁵⁰ In an autobiographical note included in *From the Barrio: A Chicano Anthology*, José Rendón shares that after he “discovered” the movement, he worked for the grape boycott. P. 152.

auténticos aún en vigor, o una reliquia del hogar destruido. Su concepto, entonces, puede producir añoranzas, desilusión, amargura y/o rebeldía.⁵¹

Again, the apparent contradiction in the representation of the barrio, as a space of authentic cultural creation and social destruction, is highlighted. Prior to the Chicano Movement, the predominance of Spanish-speaking residents and mestizo beliefs and practices in the barrio served to reinforce a cultural identity that found itself displaced, or made invisible, in the larger American social context. This conflict and the internal effects of institutionalized racism and socioeconomic exploitation surely contributed to the “desilusión, amargura y/o rebeldía” noted above. Notably, such conflicting perspectives of the barrio aren’t necessarily found from one barrio narrative to the next, but rather within a single barrio narrative, thus reflecting the internal conflict on the part of the speaker or narrator. As a result, the barrio narratives of this period consistently speak to the need for change guided by a deep commitment to social justice for the larger Chicano community.

Along these lines, Chicanismo and Indigenismo surfaced as common ideologies that fueled a social movement. Chicanismo, as the underlying ideology or praxis of the Chicano Movement, called for organized political intervention in those American institutions that enforced the social oppression of Chicanos communities, while Indigenismo was used to emphasize the common indigenous roots of all Chicanos who, as mestizos, have a long history in the American Southwest. In an essay written in 1970 and later reprinted in *From the Barrio: A Chicano Anthology*, Alfredo Cuéllar explores the origins of the Chicano

⁵¹ *De Colores: Journal of Chicano Expression and Thought*. (Albuquerque) Special Issue “Chicano Literature and Criticism,” 3.4 (1977): 22-29.

Movement and sets out to identify the central tenets of Chicanismo.⁵² According to Cuéllar, the ideology of Chicanismo is generally based on the life experiences of Mexican Americans and offers an understanding of the role and purpose of Chicanos in the U.S. In an early effort to characterize a social movement that was still in nascent form, Cuéllar identifies and examines three different strands of Chicanismo, as manifested primarily in the realm of student activity. In regards to the origins of the movement, Cuéllar observes:

The exact beginnings of the movement are obscure. There is some evidence that the *Chicano* movement grew out of a group of conferences held at Loyola University in Los Angeles in the summer of 1966. As originally conceived by its Catholic sponsors, the conferences were to create a fairly innocuous youth organization for the middle-class Mexican students attending various colleges throughout California. Very quickly the movement grew beyond the intent or control of its sponsors (Loyola has never been very noted for its interest in Mexican American education) and it drew in yet others, not students and not middle class, who were attracted by the ideology of *chicanismo*.⁵³

While Cuéllar points to a specific time and location that might mark the beginning of the Chicano Movement, it is of course important to recognize that the movement figures as a new chapter in an extensive history of oppositional consciousness and resistance among mestizos in the Americas. Resistance in the form of armed rebellions and revolts against

⁵² Cuéllar's essay, titled "Perspectives on Politics" was originally published in *Mexican Americans*. Moore, Joan W. and Alfredo Cuéllar, Eds. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1970).

⁵³ Salinas, Luis Omar and Lillian Faderman, *From the Barrio: A Chicano Anthology*. (San Francisco: Canfield Press, 1973). P. 3.

Spanish and Euro-American settlers on the part of indigenous, mestizo and Mexican communities took place from the seventeenth century up until the mid-nineteenth century. From the mid-nineteenth century to the time of the Chicano Movement, Mexican Americans continued the legacy of resistance through small-scale local community efforts against discrimination and collective activities that were more moderate in nature. In the 1940s and 1950s, Mexican Americans were often working within the system to reform existing institutions that legally recognized them as “Caucasian” with full citizenship rights, but operated on discriminatory practices that denied them access to such rights. Prior to the Chicano Movement, for example, organizations such as the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) and the American GI Forum (AGIF) addressed issues of discrimination in the areas of education and employment. And, of course, it is important to recognize the social and political advances made by the United Farm Workers (UFW) campaign in the 1960s. This pre-existing history of Mexican American social and political activism likely contributed to the quick growth of the student movement, as noted by Cuéllar. Furthermore, the spread of Chicanismo beyond the student population could also be attributed in part to the fact that this new generation of “middle-class Mexican students” often had direct ties to heterogeneous barrio communities.

Rethinking the Chicano Movement (2015), a more recent study by Marc Simón Rodríguez, considers a wide panorama of political activity in various arenas that contributed to the advances ultimately achieved with the Chicano Movement. Rodríguez identifies political activity in Crystal City, Texas as one of the early critical moments in the Chicano Movement:

One of the first episodes in what became the Chicano Movement for political participation took place in the small community of Crystal City, Texas.

Electoral activism took on a militant ethnic tone in deeply segregated Crystal City in 1963, when that city's Mexican American migrant farm-worker majority erupted in protest and challenged a political system that had barred them from elected office. The national attention garnered by the effort to elect Mexican American representatives in Crystal City introduced the rest of the nation to the then second-largest minority group and its demand for civil rights. (12)

Again, the events that took place in 1963 among the migrant farm-workers in Crystal City highlight local Movement activities originating among barrio communities, or colonias, where Chicanos found strengths in numbers. While Cuéllar's exploration of the emerging Chicano Movement focuses on Chicanismo as the driving force of the movement primarily among the youth sector, Rodríguez's study, conducted almost five decades after the movement, considers a wider scope of political activity and identifies Chicano nationalism as the ideology that characterized the larger movement (20). As noted earlier, both Chicanismo and Indigenismo often appeared as forms of cultural nationalism and, indeed, all three notions are not mutually exclusive as they may have been perceived as one and the same in many instances.

According to Thomas Hylland Eriksen in *Ethnicity and Nationalism*, nationalist movements are driven by a sentiment which adheres to a nationalist principle, namely that

the political and national unit should be congruent.⁵⁴ Indeed, during the Chicano Movement, the nationalist sentiment commonly manifested itself as cultural nationalism which focused on the autonomy and preservation of Chicano culture. In both the political and literary arena, the Chicano community was envisioned as an autonomous entity that should no longer be subject to socioeconomic oppression in a territory that was originally claimed by indigenous and mestizo ancestors. In further explaining how, as a theory of political legitimacy, nationalism requires that ethnic boundaries should not cut across political boundaries, Eriksen asserts that nationalisms are “ethnic ideologies which hold that their group should dominate a state” (98). In a strict sense, therefore, nationalist movements would lead to radical acts of political separatism, such as the land revolts led by Reies López Tijerina in New Mexico and the militant uprising in Crystal City referenced earlier.

In retrospect, both the potential and the limits of nationalist movements become clear. The successful political interventions made during the Chicano Movement paved the way for the advances in education and workers rights that were further established in the following decades, just as the cultural nationalist themes in the literature of the Chicano Renaissance helped to develop it as a distinct entity within American literature. Nevertheless, because nationalisms generally rely on binary distinctions between insiders and outsiders in order to maintain internal cohesion and solidarity among its members, internal conflicts can often result in the dissolution the collective unit. Or rather, when nationalisms are employed in rigid forms, it is likely that the homogenization of internal

⁵⁴ Hylland Eriksen, Thomas. *Ethnicity and Nationalism* (London: Pluto Press, 1993). P. 5.

differences would lead to its demise.⁵⁵ In *Methodology of the Oppressed* (2000), Chela Sandoval examines various modes of oppositional consciousness and movement and suggests that nationalism can be viewed as a representative form of separatism:

[P]ractitioners of separatism recognize that their differences are branded as inferior with respect to the category of the most human. . . . the subordinated do not desire an “equal rights” type of integration with the dominant order. Neither do they seek its “revolutionary” transformation, nor do they stake a supremacist position in relation to any other group. This form of political resistance is organized, rather to protect and nurture the differences that define its practitioners through their complete separation from the dominant social order. The separatist mode of oppositional consciousness is beckoned by a utopian landscape that stretches from Aztlán to the Amazon Nation.⁵⁶

Accordingly, nationalism can function as an effective oppositional strategy in circumstances where survival within the dominant social order is not feasible. Nonetheless, Sandoval argues that the use of separatism as an oppositional strategy must be done tactically.

⁵⁵ Upon reflecting on the notion of unity during the Chicano Movement, Lomelí makes the following distinction: “no existe un solo pueblo chicano, aunque muchos compartíamos esa fantasía en los setenta con términos como “chicanismo” y “carnalismo”. Antes había un espíritu de cooperación. Creo que no existe tanta solidaridad como imperaba en los años setenta, donde, gracias al Movimiento, se creó un espíritu de solidaridad y colaboración que empujó al pueblo chicano a trabajar conjuntamente.” “Entrevista con Francisco A Lomelí”, in *The Chican@ Literary Imagination: A Collection of Critical Studies by Francisco A. Lomelí*, Cañero, Julio y Juan F. Elices, Eds. (Madrid: Biblioteca Benjamin Franklin, 2012). P. 330.

⁵⁶ Sandoval, Chela. *Methodology of the Oppressed* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2000). P. 57.

Although nationalism aims to encourage solidarity and preserve ones cultural tradition, if adhered to too rigidly, it can become oppressive.⁵⁷

Within the context of the barrio narratives produced during the Chicano Movement, the manifestation of cultural nationalism as a form of separatism is well demonstrated in the works of Miguel M. Méndez. Originally born in the “Tin Town” barrio located near the Arizona - Sonora border, financial misfortune forced his family to relocate to Sonora where he spent his early childhood and became familiar with Yaqui history, traditions and beliefs. Méndez returned to Arizona as a young man in the mid 1940s to work various labor jobs before he turned to writing and teaching.⁵⁸ In “*Peregrinos de Aztlán: Textimonio de desesperanza(dos)*”, Lomelí offers a social and literary context for Méndez’s texts:

Miguel Méndez forma parte de la primera ola contemporánea del llamado *boom* chicano o Renacimiento de los sesenta. Más específicamente, se le encaja dentro de la Generación Quinto Sol, la cual surge en 1967 en torno a la empresa editorial Quinto Sol de Berkeley, California, con *El Grito: Journal of Contemporary Mexican American Thought*, de donde se desprende una nueva ideología y agenda literarias con el fin de promover un nacionalismo cultural. Aparece por primera vez en *El Grito* en 1968 su muy elogiado cuento metafórico, “Tata Casehua”, cuya contextura neo-indigenista

⁵⁷ Separatist sentiments also underscored the underlying goals of *planes*, such as “El Plan de Santa Bárbara,” “El Plan de San Diego,” and “El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán.”

⁵⁸ Lomelí, Francisco A. “*Peregrinos de Aztlán: Textimonio de desesperanza(dos)*”, in *The Chican@ Literary Imagination: A Collection of Critical Studies by Francisco A. Lomelí*, Cañero, Julio y Juan F. Elices, Eds. (Madrid: Biblioteca Benjamin Franklin, 2012). P. 256.

concuerta bien con los valores en boga durante el apogeo del Movimiento Chicano.⁵⁹

Indeed, Méndez's use of Indigenismo as a form of the cultural nationalism that characterized the Chicano Movement is especially evident in the short story "Tata Casehua".⁶⁰

In this narrative, the underlying differences between indigenous and modern Western worldviews are intensified. As experienced by three generations of Casehua men, the differences are ultimately irreconcilable, thus demanding a decisive and tragic separation.

This highly metaphorical and seemingly apocalyptic narrative tells the story of the young Jesús Manuel Casehua and the lessons he receives from his Tata Casehua, or Juan Manuel Casehua. Tata Casehua figures as a last vestige of the traditional Yaqui people. While his people once thrived in the more fertile areas of the Arizona - Sonora region, they now have become imprisoned in the parched and barren desert landscape that initially provided the hope of a refuge from encroaching invaders and subjugation. In the desert, however, much like Chicanos barrios of the 1960s, the Casehuas face an equally unjust fate:

Acá le ofrecieron los confines hasta donde lo condujeran sus pasos; pero
pusieron sobre sus espaldas exhaustas, una losa pesada, más que el plomo;
hambre y sed. ¡Ay! Qué muerte más cruel. (7)

The story of the Casehuas, a socially isolated people, can be read as a metaphor for the generations of Mexicans who leave their homelands in search of a better life only to find

⁵⁹ Lomelí, Francisco A. "Peregrinos de Aztlán: Textimonio de desesperanza(dos)" in *The Chican@ Literary Imagination: A Collection of Critical Studies by Francisco A. Lomelí*, Cañero, Julio y Juan F. Elices, Eds. (Madrid: Biblioteca Benjamin Franklin, 2012). P. 257.

⁶⁰ Méndez, Miguel M. *Tata Casehua Y Otros Cuentos* (Berkeley: Editorial Justa Publications, 1980).

themselves imprisoned by the poverty resulting from socioeconomic oppression. The newly adopted home of the Casehuas, the deficient Sonora Desert, foretells the death of a people as the sand dunes transform into tombs in the burning desert that is nothing more than a vast Indian burial ground.

The epigraph simultaneously announces the text as tribute to the Chicanos' indigenous ancestors and highlights the central theme of death: "*A mis abuelos indios, calvados en el signo omega de su trágico sino*" (1). The themes of death, social injustice and the vilification of all that is Western, or anti-assimilation, as presented through the ideology of Indigenismo, become manifest in powerful archetypal images. As Jesús seeks wisdom and guidance from Tata Casehua, he goes to him in the desert and finds him, first assaulted by the Saguaro:

De una mejilla pendía una penca asida a sendas espinotas a medio penetrar;
tres estrías rojas corrían sobre la penca, se juntaban abajo en las espigas más
grande que las iba desprendiendo en gotas gruesas. (11-13)

The images of Tata Casehua suffering at the hands of nature, or the cruel destiny of the socially oppressed, continue regularly throughout the story until we see him being buried alive by the sand: "El indio Casehua se está muriendo, agita la cabeza, ya la arena le llega al cuello," and ultimately consumed by the landscape and subject to a subsequent death of historical obliteration (21). The final death of Tata Casehua at the end of the story overlaps with a blunt retelling of the historical massacre and mass suicide of Indians that occurred in the Bacatete Mountains on a hill called Mazocoba in Mexico on January 18, 1900. In response to the impending attack by General Torres and his army, Chief Opodepe instructs his fellow Yaqui: "Sólo las razas degeneradas conviven con el verdugo. Esta nación para los

indios o para nadie. ¡No seremos ni raza de escalvos ni de prisioneros!” (21). In recreating this historical moment, Méndez’s use of Indigenismo expresses what Sandoval identified as “the separatist mode of an oppositional consciousness,” or cultural nationalism as political separatism. Méndez likely observed a parallel between the government-enforced pressure to assimilate and abandon traditional practices experienced by the Yaqui and the social pressures experienced by Chicanos in the 1960s. The underlying message of resistance to cultural assimilation and active recuperation of indigenous epistemologies is explicit in Méndez’s text.

In varying degrees, Indigenismo and Chicanismo were both engaged to foster an appreciation for the indigenous elements embedded in mestizo culture and to celebrate a legacy of indigenous resistance to social injustice. Along these lines, Cuéllar argues that the ideology of Chicanismo was expressed as a radical intervention in the existing role of Mexican Americans in the economic, cultural and racial paradigms in American politics. Beyond seeking reform within the system, many Chicanos, “intimately” connected to the experience of social oppression in the barrio, would now demanded revolutionary change. Rodríguez similarly examines the Chicano Movement within the larger historical context of an era of global social movements that were characteristically revolutionary and optimistic. Recognizing both the radical and practical intentions demonstrated in the political and cultural arenas of the Chicano Movement, Rodríguez ultimately characterizes the social movement as a nationalist project. Nevertheless, he highlights how Chicano nationalism fueled efforts to redefine models within the existing socioeconomic system. On this point, he explains:

The revolutionary aspect was embodied in the many examples of upwardly mobile and often acculturated youth rejecting the proscribed model of mobility without ethnic identity in favor of an Americanism that allowed them the liberty to define and shape a new identity as Chicanos and call attention to the many injustices of the past, as well as the ongoing discrimination against and persecution of their people by the police, educational system and the broader society. (55)

In contrast to a nationalism that leaned towards political separatism, therefore, Rodríguez recognizes how cultural nationalism was also employed in service of “a radical refashioning of Americanism” (55). Interestingly, critical discourse on the limits of cultural nationalism, as it was employed during the Chicano Movement, in turn inspired new conceptions of nationalism. Chicana scholar Ellie D. Hernández, for example, proposes that, within the framework of postnationalism, “a nationalist movement does not remain static but changes” to accommodate redefinitions necessitated by sociopolitical circumstances.⁶¹

While viewing cultural nationalism as the central ideology of the movement, Rodríguez defines Chicanismo as the praxis of the movement and links it to the preexisting practice of *carnalismo* among Chicanos. On the nature of *carnalismo*, he states:

With some long-standing regional variations, for example, the *pachucos* and *cholos* of Texas and California and the *manitos* of New Mexico, the links of unity drawing young men [and also young women] together in working-class Chicano communities served as the foundation for much of what became Chicanismo. Unlike locally constructed and limited ties among particular

⁶¹ Hernández, Ellie D. *Postnationalism in Chicana/o Literature and Culture* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009). P. 34.

groups of young men in and outside of gang life, this new view of *carnalismo* tied all Mexican Americans (men and women alike) together in a family; they were now linked to an identity transcending the barrios of Texas, California, Illinois, or the smaller *colonias* of the rural Southwest. Chicanismo, by expanding the bonds of friendship and obligation to the community as a whole, tied Chicanos together as a people – with obligations to one another and a shared history of struggle from which to draw. (12)

Indeed, Mexican Americans from all walks of life, including students, farm workers, veterans and barrio scholars joined in the political efforts that addressed a web of issues that contributed to their socioeconomic marginalization. Although there are differences in Cuéllar's and Rodríguez's understandings of Chicanismo, both scholars highlight the influence of concurrent social movements, heterogeneity within the movement and the common tenets of shared cultural heritage and an obligation to participate as a community in organized efforts for social justice.⁶² Together, these factors shaped a system of ideas that became the shared beliefs and responsibilities of the newly imagined Chicano community.

Therefore, within the scope of the Chicano Movement, Chicanismo served to encourage a critical awareness of racism and discrimination in American institutions and demand a revision of the social, cultural and racial politics that marginalized Chicanos. Developing a critical awareness of social injustice and fostering a sense of pride in the collective Chicano identity was a necessary precursor to the various political activities that took place. Within

⁶² On the evolution of Chicanismo after the Chicano Movement, Ellie D. Hernández (2009) observes: "If in the beginning we understood Chicanismo narrowly and critically, after 2000 and after 9/11 we came to realize that its significance is its survival because it changed. From early MEChA (Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán) doctrines of "no gringos" to the mixed race "It's my political heritage, too" that occurs on college campuses, the movement toward a redefinition is clear and necessary." P. 34.

the barrio narratives of the Chicano Renaissance, Chicanismo commonly manifested itself in sharp critiques against American government, the celebration of a mestizo identity and cultural heritage and in the assertion of a new “brown” category for racial identification. These facets are clearly represented in the poetry of Luis Omar Salinas and Alurista. Recognized as important figures that advanced the political agenda of the social movement, Salinas and Alurista are also among the early Chicano poets to focus on the barrio.

While both poets contributed to the emerging Chicano consciousness with their explicitly political writing, Alurista also became well-known for his leadership in organizing local and regional activities that developed into long-term advances for the Chicano community. Luis Omar Salinas published his first collection, *Crazy Gypsy*, in 1970 which included several poems that embodied the central tenets of Chicanismo. Many of his early poems focused on his childhood experiences of life in a barrio in Robstown, Texas in the 1940s. Although he was born a third generation Texan, Salinas also lived in Mexico in his childhood years and later moved to Bakersfield, California. While studying in the Central Valley, he became associated with the “Fresno School” of poets, a cohort that contributed significantly to early Chicano literature. Alurista was born in Mexico City and was already in his teens when his family immigrated to California in the early 1960’s. As a college undergraduate he worked to establish the San Diego chapter of MEChA, Centro Cultural de la Raza, Festival Floricanto and he was a leader in the development of Chicano Studies at San Diego State University. Among his early essays and political manifestos, he co-authored “El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán” which he delivered at the First National Chicano Youth Liberation Conference in Denver in 1969. Alurista’s *Floricanto en Aztlán* (1971) features

one hundred of his early poems that capture the daily struggles of Chicanos in the barrio and the rising spirit of resistance that was fundamental to the cultural nationalism of the period.

In Salinas' poetry, the depiction of an economic reality of dire poverty affecting many Chicanos – a reality that is largely dismissed, becomes a means of critiquing institutionalized oppression in American government. The poems "In a Farmhouse" and "Mestizo," included in *From the Barrio: A Chicano Anthology*, both address how the practice of labor exploitation, key to private profit, is part of a racially-based system of oppression that is ignored, or endorsed, by American institutions. In addition, "Mestizo" presents the notion of brown as a self-determined category for racial identification in American society where bodies are racialized according to skin color. Instead of signifying racial inferiority, within Chicanismo, brown skin becomes a positive indicator of indigenous heritage and mestizaje. In the first poem we are presented with a young speaker's reflections after a day's work in the cotton fields of Robstown, Texas. The speaker ponders the relationship between hunger and death:

I made two dollars and
thirty cents today
I am eight years old
and I wonder
how the rest of the Mestizos
do not go hungry
and if one were to die
of hunger
what an odd way

to leave for heaven. (116)

Death and hunger are considered in a material and spiritual context. From the perspective of an eight year-old Chicano, working in the field is necessary to eat and to survive. Material survival is the immediate reality that prompts a spiritual reflection on life after death. The young Chicano is aware that the basic necessity for survival, food, and the opportunity to earn the money that is needed to access it is not guaranteed to the mestizo people of his community. The tone and structure of the poem conveys the simplicity of the child's everyday reality which contrasts sharply with the implicit shadow of a corrupt agricultural economic system that depends on his labor and steers him away from a formal education and future economic independence. Although the innocent speaker is unaware of the larger political dynamics that shape his everyday reality, his reflection on how starvation is an "... odd way / to leave for heaven" calls attention to the lack of social justice for mestizos (116). Rather than presenting surface images of a poverty-stricken rural barrio to illustrate the conditions of oppression in which the child exists, Salinas presents the profound inner thoughts of a child whose mind is preoccupied with the reality of hunger that threatens the survival of his community.

Salinas' poetry indeed speaks out against labor exploitation and incites Chicanos to take a collective stance against social injustice. The above poem uses a child's perspective to depict the shared experience of economic oppression and the need for collective action in a subtle manner; however, in "Mestizo" we see the ideology of Chicanismo manifest itself in a very overt manner. In the second stanza, the speaker announces the mobilization of Chicanos that is taking place:

In the fields

and in the barrios
our
Mestizos
are fed up with conditions
and we believe
in our man from Delano
César Chávez
because the rich man
has put us down
for many years
so when you hear Huelga
watch it
'cause we're on our way. (32-33)

The swelling rhythm and adamant tone of this poem mimics the physical movement and visual spectacle of public marches and rallies that were taking place at the time. While the language expresses a somewhat simplistic vision of the opposition, it captures the revolutionary spirit that was felt among many Chicano activists as well as militancy that often accompanied the call to action. Explicit references to César Chávez and the “Huelga” here exemplify the convergence of the political and aesthetic realms that was common in the literature of the Chicano Renaissance. Notably, the preceding stanza of this poem is markedly militant as it makes explicit material demands accompanied by threats of specific violence: “We have walked for miles / Without water or food to your church / America / how about getting us a bus / and some food and water / or we'll burn the / church down”

(32). Such radical sentiments, read literally or figuratively, indeed echo the more militant manifestations of Chicanismo during the Chicano Movement.

Like many barrio narratives of the Chicano Movement, the speaker assumes a collective voice that encompasses the urban and rural Chicano community, and establishes an oppositional relationship between working-class Chicanos and American institutions that exclude people of color through the practice of discrimination and labor exploitation. More specifically, this poem positions César Chávez who is leading Chicanos in organized political action in the form of a labor strike, in direct opposition to “the rich man” who profits from the labor exploitation of Chicanos. While such oversimplification of social relations can be strategically effective in certain scenarios, it can also be seen as a shortsighted take on complex relationships and lead to the replication of oppressive and exclusive social structures. Nonetheless, the imagery of Chicanos moving in unison, like a rising wave across the land towards its figurative opponent, effectively communicates an urgent demand for institutional change. In contrast to the public decree expressed in the first stanza, the fourth stanza turns inward and expresses a more compassionate appeal to all allies of the political cause: “Let’s help our Mestizos / America / It’s about time / No?” (33).

Salinas’ preference for the term *mestizo* to represent the Chicano community highlights Chicanismo’s focus on recognizing, appreciating and strengthening the Chicanos’ racial and cultural identity. The choice to use the term Chicano, Mestizo, La Raza or *la raza de bronce* for self-identification during the Chicano Movement symbolized an act of self-determination and resistance. Challenging mainstream representations of Mexican Americans as illegal immigrants or foreigners who resisted American assimilation, the literature of the Chicano Movement emphasized the mixed racial ancestry Chicanos and the notion of equality within

the American national imaginary. In the penultimate stanza of “Mestizo,” the speaker declares:

Our color is brown
our blood
comes from the Spanish
the Aztec
and the Mayan
we had a great empire once
we are rich in tradition
and we know what it is to suffer. (33)

Using a plural voice to uplift the morale of his community, the speaker reminds mestizos that although there has been much suffering, “we had a great empire once / we are rich in tradition.” Indeed, in light of the regional history of colonization and the present reality of racial inequality, Chicanos became a relatively invisible nation within a nation. In a society where racial politics were based on a black and white binary, the introduction of a “brown” racial category into U.S. national politics served to confirm the presence and role of mestizos in American society. It is worth noting here that in proclaiming an identity that was rooted in the brown or bronze body of indigenous ancestors, many Chicanos were consciously reviving the ideology of Indigenismo that had fueled the Mexican Revolution of 1910-1920. Within a twentieth-century U.S. context and during a time of concurrent national and global social liberation movements, Chicanos imagined themselves free to pursue the American ideals of “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.” Mestizos, whose racial lineage included the bronze races of the Aztec and the Mayan, as well as Spanish, African

and Asian ancestry, would argue for equality within the context of American democracy. Notably, the words “Brown Power” were often visible in the walk-outs on school campuses in Los Angeles, California and Crystal City, Texas, where demands for educational reform proved to be more practical than radical.⁶³

Critiques of social inequality and labor exploitation and the accompanying call for collective political action as well as the affirmation of a shared mestizo cultural identity and the common experience of oppression in the barrio are perhaps more pervasive in Alurista’s *Floriscanto en Aztlán*, which features one hundred of his earliest poems.⁶⁴ With this work, Alurista becomes the first Chicano poet to introduce the concept of Aztlán as the imagined, mythical homeland of mestizos within a nationalist paradigm and to develop what was then identified as “bilingual” poetry.⁶⁵ While Alurista’s poetry was concerned with unifying the Chicano community and inspiring a new consciousness that called for collective action for social justice, he is more often recognized for his use of the indigenous past to conceptualize the social struggles and worldview of Chicanos during the 1970s. Since then, the notion of Aztlán has been further developed by Chicano artists and scholars in discussions on how place, land and the body are central sources for identities in resistance to hegemonic paradigms. Indeed, this collection captures the spirit of resistance that was central to the oppositional consciousness that was embedded in the ideologies of Chicanismo and

⁶³ With regard to the practical reforms demanded by students, Marc Simón Rodríguez comments: “there was nothing particularly radical about their demands – except for the fact that Mexican American students were making them.” P. 66.

⁶⁴ Alurista. *Floriscanto en Aztlán* (Los Angeles: Regents of the University of California, 1971). N.p.

⁶⁵ In addition to Spanish and English, Alurista’s poetry also incorporated Nahuatl.

Indigenismo during the Chicano Movement. Like Salinas' poems, Alurista's poetry engages an oppositional framework to raise awareness and encourage active participation in the movement against social injustice.⁶⁶ The collection begins with "when raza?" which urges Chicanos to move out from a state of passive action.⁶⁷ The speaker of the poem demands:

when raza?
when . . .
yesterday's gone
and
mañana
mañana doesn't come
for he who waits (Np)

Speaking directly to a Chicano audience, identified in this poem as "LA RAZA," the speaker prods and questions those Chicanos who have not committed to the movement that intends to take "our people to freedom" (Np). Along these lines, Alurista's poetry encourages a dialogue among the Chicano community and also creates a space where many voices, stories and concerns from the barrios can be heard.

⁶⁶ In the preface to the second printing of *Floriscanto en Aztlán*, Roberto Sifuentes observes how Alurista's poetry positions Chicanos and all indigenous cultures in opposition to modern cultures that are driven by economic profit. He states: "Alurista presenta en su libro al pueblo chicanomexicano determinado a mantener sus valores humanos a pesar de encontrarse en un ambiente deshumanizante y opresivo." N.p.

⁶⁷ Alurista points out the inaction on the part of some Chicanos as depicted in "hombre ciego" and "the man has lost his shadow." N. p.

Interestingly, Alurista's oppositional framework doesn't necessarily position the "Raza de Bronce" against Euro-Americans.⁶⁸ Throughout *Floriscanto en Aztlán*, the ongoing "cultural assassination" that threatens the immediate survival of Chicanos is instead represented by the symbolic concept of "the man," "fat Mr. Jones" or "américa."⁶⁹ Accordingly, we see that specific critiques are against the inhumanity of a corrupt government system. Throughout his poetry, the root of the oppression to which Chicanos are subject to is located in a "lust for power / and possessions," in "the tripas / of scepter holders / of decisions / of lies / and oppressive dictates," and in "el suicidio de américa (y su dieta inhumana)."⁷⁰ In opposition to the social inequalities, inhumane labor practices and wasteful consumerism, which are perceived as insidious elements in American culture, Alurista presents holistic values that maintain respect for all living things and pertain to all indigenous cultures. The shared cultural identity of Chicanos, as descendants of indigenous peoples, is developed throughout this collection of poetry with imagery and symbols of indigenous bodies and cultural practices that are connected to the earth and its natural elements.

Within the historical context of the Chicano Movement and the Chicano Renaissance, Indigenismo functioned as both a political and discursive strategy of resistance that fueled the emerging nationalist consciousness. However, it is useful to further consider its role within the Mexican Revolution of 1910 and the nationalist program that unfolded in the first

⁶⁸ Alurista, "i can't" N.p.

⁶⁹ Alurista, "unexpectedly" N.p.

⁷⁰ Alurista, "the man has lost his shadow," "hombre ciego," and "i can see reality" respectively. N.p.

half of the twentieth century. The sharp contrast between the aesthetic celebration of indigenous images in the art of the Mexican Revolution and actual *Indigenista* policy that governed the treatment of Mexico's indigenous populations resulted in an Indigenismo that resembled manipulative appropriation. This inconsistency informed the social context for the historical event that was fictionalized in Méndez's "Tata Casehua". According to Guillermo Bonfil Batalla in *México Profundo: Reclaiming a Civilization*, the use of the image of the Indian as a national symbol during the revolution served as "an ideological exaltation of the Indian, which has made his presence visible in the public sphere under state control."⁷¹ Batalla further explains that while identifying one's ancestral roots can legitimize a national culture, revolutionary governments selectively choose those aspects of the culture that are conducive to the nationalist agenda. Indeed, while the presence of the Indian was made visible in the art and literature "under state control" of the Mexican revolutionary government, his material body and voice remained invisible in the public sphere. Of course, Batalla makes a critical distinction between the controlled use of indigenous images and symbolism in the arts which represents a selective engagement with one's ancestral roots and the Indigenismo that is the ideology that shaped the sometimes violent *Indigenista* government policy that followed the revolution. By comparison, the reclaiming of indigenous ancestral roots in the literature of the Chicano Movement also appeared in a controlled and selective manner, yet in most cases it simultaneously figured as part of a personal search for identity that was common among Chicanos who were seeking emancipation from institutionalized oppression.

Interestingly, the process of barrioization that marginalized Mexican American

⁷¹ Bonfil Batalla, Guillermo. *México Profundo, Reclaiming a Civilization* Translated by Philip A. Dennis (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996). P. 53.

communities in the U.S. during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries has some parallels to the barriozation of indigenous communities in Mexico that has been ongoing since the eighteenth century. According to Batalla, after the Mexican Revolution of 1910 the rural Indian population in Mexico had come to exist in isolated communities that were severely marginalized from the westernized dominant class (41). “Indian” communities were commonly viewed as “backward societies” because of their resistance to the cultural changes that accompanied western modernization. The diverse indigenous communities, nevertheless, constituted a significant part of the Mexican population that was often at odds with the central Mexican government; therefore, their presence was perceived as “the indigenous problem” (115). Initially designed in response to this problematic relationship, Indigenismo began as a social movement in defense of Indian cultures.⁷² Based on the concept of cultural relativism born out of a new North American school of anthropology, Indigenismo held that all cultures and their individual values should be understood within their own context, independently of a single dominant hierarchy that subjectively deems certain cultural values superior to others.

Sadly, however, as an effort under the controls of a government that sought a homogenous nationalist identity, Indigenismo was unsuccessful in culturally integrating or assimilating the diverse indigenous communities. In observation of how Indigenismo influenced *Indigenista* policy for several decades, Batalla comments:

The language and theoretical dressing changes with the years, as they were brought up to date and refined. But the conception of *Indigenismo* as a theory

⁷² Batalla cites Manuel Gamio’s *Forjando patria* (1916) as the fundamental text on the ideology of Indigenismo. P. 115.

and practice, designed and put into place by non-Indians to achieve the “integration” of Indian peoples into the nation, continued. The definition of what is “good” and “bad” in Indian cultures, what is useful and what should be discarded, was not, of course, a matter in which the opinion of the Indians themselves counted. It was a matter, like all *Indigenista* policy, in which only the non-Indians, the “nationals,” those who exercised cultural control in the country and hoped to extend it further, had a voice. (117)

The contrast between the use of indigenous symbolism to create the image of a united nation in which indigenous communities continue to thrive and develop and the reality of the marginalized and silenced status of indigenous communities calls into question the integrity of such revolutionary governments. Resistance to cultural oppression and the struggle for sovereignty on the part of indigenous communities however has been continuous. Batalla does highlight a more recent phenomenon in the 1970’s where urban Indians have become a political presence by “affirming their Indian identity [and] claiming the right to participate as Indians in the public life of the country. Their actions reach beyond the local borders of their communities without their having to renounce their origins or the cultures they come from” (147). Ultimately, the case of Indigenismo in Mexico in the first half of the century warns of the shortcomings of nationalist programs that insist on cultural homogeneity for diverse indigenous populations. An ideology that allows for pluralism and redefinition, as proposed by Ellie D. Hernández, is necessary if it is to stand the test of time.

Within the context of twentieth-century Mexican government, Indigenismo sought to assimilate its unwilling indigenous communities; the use of indigenous imagery and symbols in public government-commissioned art was appropriated in a controlled manner. During the

Chicano Movement, I would argue that various forms of Indigenismos were being employed strategically for the overall social advancement of the Chicano community. At times, the indigenous past was idealized and conflated with the Chicano present in a revolutionary way in order to politically legitimize and authorize the Chicano community, as seen in the poetry of Salinas. In other cases, Indigenismo exemplified cultural nationalism as it highlighted and exalted the indigenous base of Chicano culture. In its various forms, Indigenismo commonly sought to validate a subculture and community that was perceived as an oppressed “nation within a nation.” And further still, Indigenismo sometimes suggested a larger spiritual and philosophical project that exceeded the limits of nationalism and asserted the human right to exist and culturally thrive in any society.

To better understand the forces contributing to their current state of social and cultural oppression, Chicanos embarked on a “search for ancestral roots.” By engaging in a process of remembering the past, Chicanos activists and writers hoped to recover and reclaim what had been lost in a long history of territorial, political and social displacement. Along these lines, while the early sixteenth century marked the beginnings of a mestizo race in the Americas, it also marked the initial event of territorial and political displacement with the Spanish conquest of diverse indigenous communities. In remembering this historical moment of conquest, Chicano poets recognized the indigenous peoples of the Americas as their ancestors and “brothers of the soul.” In the poem “America . . . America . . . America,” Rodolfo “Corky” Gonzales, activist and poet, highlights this newfound awareness and alliance. He writes: “Indio brother, blood of mine,/ now is the time./ Move, Move, arise new chiefs with the/ Fire and courage of Old Chiefs..../ Arise, dance, sing, take your land/ but

remember your brothers of the soul.”⁷³

The Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo and the Gadsden Purchase, in 1848 and 1853, respectively, mark a second critical historical moment in the social history of Chicanos. Beyond signifying a change of national citizenship for the mestizos in the Southwest region of North America, these events also signaled a demotion to secondary citizenship. In recovering formal negotiations from this period that specified the legal protection of the cultural rights of Mexicans who remained in the territory after the Mexican-American War, Chicanos became further disillusioned with the integrity of American government. In his well-known epic poem and book, *I am Joaquin*, Gonzales critiques such violations of the treaty by the U.S. government and recounts the losses suffered by mestizos:

I have made the Anglo rich
yet
Equality is but a word,
the Treat of Hidalgo [Guadalupe-Hidalgo] has been broken
and is but another treacherous promise.
My land is lost
and stolen,
My culture has been raped,
I lengthen
the line at the welfare door
and fill the jails with crime. (25-26)

⁷³ Gonzales, Rodolfo “Corky.” *Message to Aztlán: selected writing of Rodolfo “Corky” Gonzales* (Houston: Arte Público Press, 2001).

In recovering the territorial and political history of mestizos, such poetry that represented and spoke to the social experiences barrio communities across the Southwest gave rise to nationalist sentiments among Chicanos. Revisiting these two historical moments of conquest necessarily precluded the rise of Indigenismo and cultural nationalism as primary oppositional strategies in the Chicano movement and literary renaissance.

Indigenismo contributed to a growing oppositional consciousness in the barrio narratives of the Chicano Movement as it celebrated the oppositional activity and cultural resistance of our indigenous ancestors. In addition to providing a link between our ancestors' struggles in the past and indigenous and Chicano struggles during the 1960s and 1970s, it also prompted literary scholars to re-conceptualize the historical parameters of the Chicano literary tradition. The term Chicano only began to circulate widely during the mid 1960s, yet the scope of Chicano literature was always inclusive of any literature that reflected a Chicano based worldview. Although the term Chicano initially implied a U.S. context, the ideology of Indigenismo at times expanded beyond such a context and reintroduced terms such as mestizo and la raza, terms used synonymously with Chicano. These terms added a broader historical dimension to the Chicano cultural identity and worldview that was being expressed in the literature and art of the Chicano Movement. Chicano literature, therefore, was conceived as that which encompasses the literary expression of the Southwest region of North America, including the folklore of early mestizos.⁷⁴

The reinterpretation of history that was occurring during the Movement period, as

⁷⁴ Lomelí, Francisco A. "An Overview of Chicano Letters: From Origins to Resurgence" in *Chicano Studies: A Multi-Disciplinary Approach*, G. García, I. Ortiz and F. A. Lomelí, Eds. (New York: Teachers College Press, 1984). In this essay, Lomelí explains how "the majority of literary expression prior to the conclusion of the Hispanic period in 1821 is in the form of folklore, a popular literature in the oral tradition." P. 107.

exemplified by the varied manifestations of Indigenismo, enabled a new understanding of what constitutes both Chicano literary and social history. The concept of Aztlán, for example, as a figurative homeland, for example, allowed Chicanos to establish a shared racial and cultural identity based on a pre-Colonial and pre-Nation connection to the land. Along these lines, in examining the use of land and race in Chicano public art, Rafael Pérez-Torres notes the following:

The idea of Aztlán as an alternative geopolitical frame ties history to land, envisioning a unity beyond ideological constructs such as the nation.... The concern with land is part and parcel of the way in which Chicanos come to terms with the past and the present in hopes of a better, more just, and less violent future.⁷⁵

Aztlán, as a primary example of the early engagement of Indigenismo by Chicanos, enabled a historically land-based identity that added a new dimension to the place identity that was already being developed in early barrio narratives.

As defined by Marc Pizarro, Indigenismo generally refers to the investigation and reclamation of our indigenous ancestry.⁷⁶ More specifically, Indigenismo has been viewed as both an ideology and a practice that has been deployed in varying manners to promote internal cohesion in diverse contexts. Many Chicano writers and artists have emphasized the coalitional possibilities made possible by Indigenismo as well as its inherent respect for the environment. Within both urban and rural barrio narratives of the Movement, the use of

⁷⁵ Pérez-Torres, Rafael. *Mestizaje: Critical Uses of Race in Chicano Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006). P. 146.

⁷⁶ Pizarro, Marc. "Contesting Dehumanization: Chicano/o Spiritualization, Revolutionary possibility, and the Curriculum." *Aztlán*, 23:1 (Spring 1998) P. 62.

indigenous spiritual concepts, symbols, and dialects and references to the indigenous features of the Chicano body often served to reinforce shared ancestral roots among Chicanos.

An immediate example of the employment of Indigenismo in the political arena is evident in the visual image of the United Farm Workers of California flag. In recalling the inspiration for the design of the flag, César Chávez states,

I wanted desperately to get some color into the movement, to give people something they could identify with, like a flag. I was reading some books about how various leaders had discovered what color contrasted and stood out best. The Egyptians had found that a red field with a white circle and a black emblem in the center crashed into your eyes like nothing else. I wanted to use the Aztec eagle in the center, as on the Mexican flag.⁷⁷

The choice to place the Aztec eagle as the centerpiece on the flag that represented the National Farm Workers Association demonstrates the popular use of Indigenismo in the political arena. As a local rural movement that aimed to end labor exploitation and demand a living wage for farm workers, the boycott led by César Chávez was strongly supported by barrio communities and other allies. As illustrated in the poetry of Salinas and Alurista, César Chávez's political leadership in the struggle for workers rights led him to become revered figure in the community.

The inherent desire in Chicanismo to affirm a cultural identity that had been consistently

⁷⁷ César Chávez, "An Organizer's Tale," In *Tomás Rivera: The Complete Works*, Olivares, Julián Ed. (Houston: Arte Público Press, 1988). P. 276.

suppressed and the search for ancestral roots that accompanied Indigenismo both suggest that Chicanos, as historically displaced and marginalized people, sought to realign themselves so that they constituted part of the social center. Some may argue that feelings of social alienation and fragmentation can be generally attributed to a widespread trend in which all community formations are adversely affected by the goals of modernization and capitalist production, phenomena which prioritizes innovation, competition, and independence. The experience of Chicanos, however, is distinct and feelings of displacement and alienation cannot be completely explained in terms of the social effects of larger economic changes.

The overt political and economic exploitation that Chicanos were subject to within American institutional and labor systems created a sense of powerlessness that was further maintained by the marginalization and socioeconomic oppression experienced daily in urban and rural barrios. The experience of exclusion from the political and economic protection of the American legal system is directly related to the cultural displacement experienced by Chicanos. While the process of assimilation allowed one to increase their access to economic and political benefits, for Chicanos it often entailed compromising one's cultural traditions. Therefore, in coping with their political and economic displacement, Chicanos had to negotiate their own cultural values in exchange for social advancement. Along these lines, the conflict between retaining and esteeming one's cultural values and surviving in American society is exemplified in a passage from Rodolfo "Corky" Gonzales's *I am Joaquín*. He writes:

I am Joaquín

Lost in a world of confusion,

Caught up in a whirl of a
gringo society,
Confused by the rules,
Scorned by attitudes,
Suppressed by manipulations,
And destroyed by modern society.
My fathers
have lost the economic battle
and won
the struggle for cultural survival.
And now!
I must choose
Between the paradox of
Victory of the spirit
despite physical hunger
Or
to exist in the grasp
of American social neurosis,
sterilization of the soul
and a full stomach. (16)

The above passage illustrates the angst of having to choose between cultural preservation for spiritual well being and assimilation for immediate survival. In emphasizing the fact that his forefathers have lost the economic battle but succeeded in keeping their cultural traditions

alive, the speaker of the poem acquires a sense of pride that suggests he will not exchange his cultural beliefs for material wealth. On a broader note, this passage is representative of the common desire for community articulated by many Chicanos during this period, a desire which fueled the ideologies of Chicanismo and Indigenismo. Beyond critiquing the American capitalist institutions of the period, Gonzales seems to anticipate broader critiques of modernity that would emerge at the turn of the twenty-first century.

Tomás Rivera is another key literary figure who engaged the ideology and practice of Chicanismo in his life's work. Rivera was known for his extensive efforts to increase Chicano enrollment in institutions of higher learning as well as authoring the classic Chicano novel, "*. . . y no se lo tragó la tierra*" (1971), which is set in rural barrio.⁷⁸ This short fragmented novel is often recognized as having set the precedent for future Chicano novels. Several of the vignettes in this novel also demonstrate the place-identity central in barrio narratives. In addition to being active on the political front and writing an exemplary novel, Rivera was also the first Chicano Chancellor at the University of California at Riverside in 1979. He is one among many Chicano scholars who were committed to making advances for the Chicano community both inside and outside the academy.

In a paper presented at the Chicano Literature Roundtable at the University of California at Santa Barbara in 1979, titled "Chicano Literature 1970 - 1979: The Establishment of a Community," Tomás Rivera loosely defines literature as the history of customs.⁷⁹ He argues that while Chicano literature functions to document the existence of a people who are often

⁷⁸ Rivera, Tomás. *. . . y no se lo tragó la tierra* (Houston: Arte Público Press, 1992).

⁷⁹ Olivares, Julian Ed. *Tomás Rivera: The Complete Works* (Houston: Arte Público Press, 1988).

deemed non-entities, politically, economically and culturally, it also functions as a response to “an anxiety to have a community... to feel, sense and be part of a whole... a hunger for community” (80). While the diffusion of the Chicano community can be partially attributed to the effects of socioeconomic subordination, the many smaller local Chicano communities that make up the larger Chicano community are, in effect, geographically, linguistically and racially diverse. Therefore, while the project of shaping a collective identity involved an emphasis on our shared mestizo heritage and cultural practices, it inevitably brought to light the heterogeneity of the Chicano community. Furthermore, in addressing the establishment and development of the Chicano community as a whole, Rivera uses Robert Hines' theories of community formation. Accordingly, there are three elements which are central to the maintenance of a community: place or a set of features which express continuity; conversation or a set of personal relationships dependent upon the size of the community; and a set of shared values. Rivera translates these three elements into *lugar*, *conversación*, y *valores*. Interestingly, while these three elements may represent sites of convergence for the larger Chicano community, they can also represent sites of divergence among the many local barrio communities. Pre-existing local barrios communities can be seen as a prototype for the larger Chicano community that was being imagined by Chicano artists and activists of the Movement era.

With regards to the first element in community cohesion, *lugar*, urban and rural barrios figured as a common place that most Chicanos were familiar with. As noted in the previous chapter, the physical space of the barrios often reveal the marks of socioeconomic marginalization while the social space that is created by community members offers a sense of cultural belonging. The *carnalismo* that naturally develops in barrio communities, again,

was recognized as an earlier form of Chicanismo. The notion of Aztlán, as conceived within Indigenismo, also provided a conceptual land or geographical place on which to base a collective identity. *Conversación*, the second element critical for community cohesion, was facilitated for the larger Chicano community through increased cultural production which established a space where diverse Chicano voices, inclusive of the linguistic diversity of the community, could engage in collective discourse. The third, and most ambiguous, element which can prove to be both a site of convergence and a site of divergence within local Chicano communities and the larger collective Chicano community is *valores*. If the family is the basic building block for the community, Rivera comments, then there is bound to be the tensions of the family within the community. To democratically manage these differences and collectively advance the Chicano community, there must be a set of egalitarian structures that function to balance power. In this scheme, Chicanos tactically committed themselves to advancing the primary goal of the social advancement of all Chicanos.

In a sense, the large scale development of Chicansimo and Indigenismo during the Chicano Movement was prompted by an initial desire for community on the part of Chicanos who existed in relatively isolated barrios across the nation. Outside of the barrio, this isolation was intensified by social discrimination and labor exploitation. In barrio narratives, this desire could be seen in the transition of a protagonist's search for identity into a more focused search for community. Among the many memorable Chicano protagonists who undergo this transition are the boy in " ... *y no se lo tragó la tierra*" who finds his Other in the collective history of the migrant worker, the lawyer in *The Autobiography of a Brown Buffalo* who does not want to live in a world without other

brown buffaloes like himself and so decides to join the Brown Beret movement in Los Angeles, the young boy in *Bless Me, Última* who discovers that his destiny lies in the synthesis of the diverse elements of his cultural background, and finally the disillusioned Harvard drop out in *I Don't Have to Show You No Stinkin' Badges* who ultimately decides that the best way to serve his community is to return to Harvard and serve as a representative. Ultimately, the individual search for identity inevitably leads to the search for community, which was a pressing concern during the Chicano Movement. Presently, four decades later, our ability to conceive of an “exclusive” culturally nationalist movement is no longer desirable or even possible. Yet, the ideologies of Chicanismo and Indigenismo, often in revised and updated versions, continue to be expanded, disrupted, and re-engaged in a political and discursive manner as oppositional strategies in today's global social movements and contemporary Chicano cultural production.

IV. Chapter Four: Mestiza/o Consciousness: Indigenous Spirituality as Chicano Epistemology in the work of Luis Valdez and Gloria Anzaldúa

The barrio is a social space where the indigenous elements of our culture and consciousness are visibly manifested in the physical bodies and daily practices of the community. Accordingly, in Chicano barrio narratives, the distinct Indian features of a character or the markedly indigenous nature of culinary, ceremonial or faith-based activities at once announce the indigenous roots of the Chicano. In a more subtle manner, however, the indigenous concepts of reciprocity and interconnectedness inform a mestiza/o consciousness that necessarily demands inclusivity and the transcendence of imposed divisions and hierarchies. In the face of social oppression and injustice that is often felt in the barrio, mestiza/o consciousness informs a mode of resistance that envisions a new unity.

Interestingly, in early Chicano barrio narratives, the indigenous component of the mestiza/o, and similarly the Mexican component in the Chicano, was undoubtedly paramount in its constitution; yet, not necessarily consciously interrogated, it simply was. The pressing need to explicitly recognize and merge two experiences into one context, symbolically climaxing in the Chicano Movement, gave rise to new discourses that critically appropriated the indigenous origins of the mestizo. Of course, then and now, the engagement of Indigenismo by individual artists can vary significantly. Along these lines, in *The Future is Mestizo: Life Where Cultures Meet* (2000), Father Virgilio Elizondo recounts how his childhood in a Mexican quarter of San Antonio secured his primary identity as a

Mexican, yet his later experiences as a minority student in college and as a Chicano priest in the Catholic Church in the 1960s and 1970s prompted him to critically reflect on his mestizo identity.⁸⁰ His investigations into Hispanic theology and Liberation theology as well as his life experiences, led him to conclude:

The mestizo existence is by its very historical nature and origins a radical biological, cultural, and spiritual openness to others – no matter who they are. It is the biological-spiritual opposite of ethnic and racist boundaries. In fact, it is the deepest and most far-reaching transgression of ethnic and racial laws of segregation. (129)

In his own theoretical postulations on mestizaje, Father Elizondo echoes the spiritual and humanistic insights that were intimated early on by Luis Valdez in the 1960s and 1970s, Gloria Anzaldúa in the 1980s, and many other Chicana/o thinkers and artists who were writing the mestiza/o experience into history.

While Chicanos sought to break down external social barriers and demand equality in an American society that was divided along racial lines during the Chicano Movement, mestiza/o identity and consciousness, with its inherent internal heterogeneity, allowed for the new possibilities in community formations. Granted, Indigenismo during the Chicano Movement frequently engaged as a form of cultural nationalism, sometimes resulted in defining the Chicano community in opposition to, or separate from, dominant American society. In an effort to legitimize a land-based identity, Chicanos emphasized their status as descendants of the indigenous peoples who resided in the Americas centuries before Euro-

⁸⁰ Elizondo, Virgilio. *The Future Is Mestizo: Life Where Cultures Meet* (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2000). Pp. 25-26.

Americans colonizers and settlers arrived. The search for ancestral roots, common in ethnic based nationalist movements, in turn, prompted Chicanos to consciously reclaim a part of their genetic and cultural identity that had been long repressed under the political pressures of colonization and assimilation.⁸¹ Beyond serving the nationalist intentions of the political agenda, however, Indigenismo would also lead Chicano intellectuals and artists to recuperate and embrace an indigenous-based worldview as a springboard for a broader project of indigenous spiritualism. In Luis Valdez's *Dark Root of A Scream* (1967), "Pensamiento Serpentino" (1973), and *Zoot Suit* (1978) and Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands / La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987) such indigenous spiritualism also functions as an organic epistemology that informs the development of mestiza/o consciousness. In these works, the worldview encountered in indigenous myths and symbols was necessarily interpreted as an inclusive and liberating one that allowed the "indio" and the "hispano" to coexist in a unified mestizo identity.⁸²

While Valdez's earliest experiences as a playwright were with the political theater group El Teatro Campesino during the Chicano Movement, in a few short years he set off on his

⁸¹ Elizondo observes how the Chicano embodies two events of mestizaje: the racial mixing of indigenous and Spanish peoples during the Colonial period and the cultural mixing of Mexican and U.S. American peoples thereafter. He elaborates on the "shame" that was produced in these encounters: "The dominant societies created, believed and imposed the image of the inferior, ugly, pagan, and backward native. This produced a deep existential shame that unfortunately continues to be promulgated by modern media and Western religious groups of every denomination. This shame in our Native American parentage produced a very painful destructive psychosis.... Out of this emerged a perpetual sense of alienation and non-belonging.... It forced the mestizo to put on many masks and assume many personalities." P. 126.

⁸² In *Postnationalism in Chicana/o Literature* (2009), Ellie D. Hernández highlights the centrality of mestizo subjectivity in cultural nationalism: "Hybridity is a fundamental physical reality of Chicanismo. A consequence of essential hybridity.... is subjective ambiguity. The mestizo, the mixed-race European-American and native-indigenous person, can therefore be both *indio* or Indian and *hispano* or Hispanic." P. 178.

own and soon came to be recognized as a leading Chicano playwright and director. Although he established his artistic independence from the Movement early on, the theme of social justice is indeed prevalent throughout the trajectory of his work. If Valdez is celebrated as one of the most important figures in Chicano theatre, Anzaldúa is widely recognized for her creative theorization of mestiza consciousness, or “la conciencia de la mestiza,” in *Borderlands/ La Frontera, The New Mestiza*. The mode of consciousness developed and enacted in this book is not limited to the mestiza or Chicana. Instead, it opens itself to all who inhabit literal or figurative “borderlands” and are willing to “reprogram” their consciousness in order to transcend the (painful) internal dualities that come with living in-between or at the margins of opposing conceptual territories. The borderlands can refer to a physical or psychological territory where nations, cultures, languages, genders, ideologies, spiritualities, classes—in short, where two or more ‘worlds’ meet, clash and overlap. Throughout the book, Anzaldúa discursively performs mestiza consciousness through various innovative yet traditional narrative strategies or movements that together make up a serpentine “crazy dance.”⁸³ The employment of diverse discursive movements seems to be the only way to express her specific individual and collective/plural identities (her Self), yet this same liberating strategy is what makes mestiza consciousness accessible to a wider audience.

Before further examining the narrative strategies which Valdez and Anzaldúa employ to invoke the indigenous past that becomes central to their spiritualization projects, it is helpful

⁸³ Gloria Anzaldúa refers to her stories as “acts encapsulated in time” (89) to be enacted by the reader. Accordingly, her narrative discourse can be viewed as a series of spontaneous yet calculated discursive movements that she performs. The way in which she blends different genres and voices (ie. spiritual and political discourse) is innovative, yet she also engages “traditional” historical discourse.

to make some preliminary remarks on the notion of “indigenous spiritualism” as it applies to the work of both writers. Indigenous spiritualism can refer to a range of indigenous spirituality movements that have taken place in many realms since the Chicano Movement. Indigenous spirituality, in its mestizo formations, can be observed in the myriad examples of Mexicanized Catholicism throughout the U.S., as well as outside of religious institutions, such as Chicano political and academic organizations, environmentalist coalitions, dance troupes, music, film, theatre, and of course, Chicano literature. Not only is the topic of indigenous spirituality being increasingly addressed and developed in these areas, it is also being examined as a possible method for humanistic and revolutionary change.

The most notable feature of indigenous spiritualism is its tendency to look towards the indigenous past for an understanding of the historical and social conditions that have both shaped the experiences of Chicanos and their ancestors in a negative way and, perhaps more importantly, have also opened up the possibility for liberation. This process often results in the appropriation of indigenous mythologies to project a humanitarian vision. Along these lines, it is important to note that indigenous spiritualism doesn’t seek a romanticized, personal reclamation of the past for the sake of asserting an identity that is in opposition to “white America.” Rather, indigenous spiritualism is invested in taking this personal identification one step further into the realm of collective action on behalf all oppressed peoples.

These features of indigenous spiritualism are distinct from those in New Age forms of spiritualism which, according to AnaLouise Keating, “focus almost exclusively on the personal (so that the goals become acquiring increased wealth, a ‘good life,’ or other

solipsistic materialistic items).”⁸⁴ Evidently, the humanitarian aspect that is central to indigenous spiritualism is absent in New Age forms of spiritualism. Indigenous spiritualism, in its mestizo manifestations, is more closely aligned with contemporary versions of spiritual activism that have emerged among communities of color. Although indigenous spiritualism does have its roots in an ancestry that is specific to Chicanos, it is closely aligned with Keating’s conception of spiritual activism. She states:

Spiritual activism begins with the personal yet moves outward, acknowledging our radical interconnectedness. This is spirituality for social change, spirituality that recognizes the many differences among us yet insists on our commonalities and uses these commonalities as catalysts for transformation. (18)

While Keating refers to the importance of using the commonalities among the many different communities that exist today, indigenous spiritualism has an initial focus on the commonalities between Chicanos today and their indigenous ancestors. Nonetheless, indigenous spiritualism is also invested in the formation of alliances on behalf of all oppressed peoples. Keating does recognize that Gloria Anzaldúa likely coined the term “spiritual activism” as she has been using it since the 1980s.

Indigenous spiritualism perhaps can be positioned somewhere in between the above mentioned concept of spiritual activism, which has only become popularized in recent years, and the concept of Indigenismo which has prevailed for over three decades. Although the works of Valdez and Anzaldúa do engage in an investigation and reclamation of the

⁸⁴ Keating, AnaLouise, “Charting Pathways, Marking Thresholds . . . A Warning, An Introduction” in Anzaldúa, Gloria and AnaLouise Keating, Eds. *This Bridge We Call Home: Radical Visions for Transformation* (New York: Routledge, 2002). P. 18.

indigenous ancestry of Chicanos, the term Indigenismo does not adequately describe the spiritual and activist dimension that emerges from their return to origins approach.

Indigenismo is a term that can be used to describe even those Chicanos whose sole interest lies in identity politics, or the personal project of claiming an oppositional identity. Under these circumstances, according to Marc Pizarro, Indigenismo can lead to the inclusion of “a problematic glorification of an indigenous past, ignoring holistic histories and actually creating ‘traditions’ in the name of reclamation.”⁸⁵ The “creation of traditions in the name of reclamation” clearly can be interpreted by some as the misappropriation of pre-Columbian mythologies. Pizarro then goes on to point out how “student manipulation of identity politics often recreates 1960s sexism, as well, a problem that often prevails in the new Indigenismo” (64).

Nonetheless, Pizarro does recognize that even such problematic formations of Indigenismo, although not indigenous spiritualism in particular, do figure as critical interventions as they attempt to “fulfill a desire for community and spirituality [among Chicanos] that has been drowned by contemporary popular culture and the models of consumption espoused therein” (64). Practitioners of Indigenismo are indeed invested in contesting the dehumanizing effects of social institutions whose power dynamics are manipulated by corporate interests. Furthermore, Pizarro’s field work suggests that Indigenismo, as a radical form of oppositional identity, is viewed by some Chicano as being a simple “phase” due to the difficulty of remaining committed to such radical politics after college. He concludes, “thus it is only a few Chicana/o students (and only in specific times

⁸⁵ Pizarro, Marc. “Contesting Dehumanization: Chicana/o Spiritualization, Revolutionary Possibility and the Curriculum” *Aztlán*, 23.1 (Spring 1988): 64.

in their lives and through specific organizations) who are engaged in Indigenismo” (67).

Although Indigenismo figures as an important aspect of indigenous spiritualism, indigenous spiritualism in effect goes beyond the local, and perhaps reactionary, tendencies of Indigenismo. Therefore, because of its definite relationship to Indigenismo, indigenous spiritualism perhaps can best be viewed as the spiritualization of Indigenismo.

If viewed strictly as the investigation and reclamation of indigenous ancestry, Indigenismo is an element that appears to varying degrees in much of Chicano literature, especially in the works of Valdez and Anzaldúa. Valdez is primarily recognized as the father of Chicano theater, yet he has also made important contributions to Chicano cultural production in the form of essays, a narrative poem and film production. Throughout his work there is a marked interest in the importance of the indigenous past as it relates to the social conditions experienced by Chicanos today. In his critical biography of Luis Valdez, Nicolás Kanellos highlights the centrality of Indigenismo in his early plays produced in conjunction with El Teatro Campesino, a theater group founded in 1965 in alliance with the United Farm Worker movement led by César Chávez.⁸⁶ The first of three points presented by Kanellos to summarize the “canonizing ideology” articulated by Valdez in “Notes on Chicano Theater” reads as follows:

Chicanos must be seen as a nation with geographical, religious, cultural, and racial roots in Aztlán, the mythic homeland of the Aztecs (a geographic region roughly equivalent to the five

⁸⁶ Kanellos, Nicolás. “Luis Valdez” in *Dictionary of Literary Biography: Chicano Writers*, Vol 182, Eds. Francisco A. Lomelí and Carl R. Shirley (Detroit: Gale, 1997).

Southwestern States of California, Colorado, Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas). Teatros must further the idea of nationalism and create a national theater based on identification with the Amerindian past. (283)

Valdez's aesthetic and cultural ideology, albeit nationalistic, clearly foregrounds the identification of the Chicano community with their indigenous, or Amerindian, ancestry. Although such an ideology that is grounded in the unification of the past with the present is evident throughout most of Valdez's work, the element of Indigenismo is perhaps most developed in his less popularized form of the *mito*. According to Valdez in "Notes on Chicano Theater," the *acto* is the Chicano through the eyes of man, whereas the *mito* is the Chicano through the eyes of God. Along these lines, it is notable that in those works where pre-Columbian myths are prioritized, especially *Dark Root of a Scream*, the theme of spirituality is indeed most prominent.

Dark Root of a Scream was both Valdez's first *mito* as well as the first play he wrote independently of El Teatro Campesino.⁸⁷ *Dark Root of a Scream* is set in a Chicano barrio during the Vietnam War. In addition to using this play as an opportunity to actively denounce the Vietnam War, Valdez also presents the presumably Chicano audience with a lesson in Aztec mythology. The current social circumstances which led to the death of the central, yet absent, character is interpreted within the context of Aztec mythology. The *mito* begins at the *velorio* of a young Chicano community leader who has become one among an endless number of casualties of the Vietnam War, many of whom were people of color. The

⁸⁷ Valdez, Luis. *Dark Root of A Scream*, in Faderman, Lillian and Luis Omar Salinas. Eds. *From the Barrio: A Chicano Anthology* (San Francisco: Canfield Press, 1973). Pp. 79-98.

scene is described as “a collage of myth and reality. It forms, in fact, a pyramid with the most real artifacts of barrio life at the broad base and an abstract mythical-religious peak at the top” (179). Much like the physical characteristics of the scene, the *mito* itself attempts to bring together the indigenous past and the current conditions faced by Chicanos through the representation of a young Chicano named Quetzalcóatl “Indio” Gonzales. Although we never get to see it, Indio’s body comes to metaphorically represent the site at which the past and present converge, or more specifically the site at which the indigenous world and the contemporary Chicano barrio converge.

The connection between the mythological Aztec figure and the young Chicano is explicit as they both bear the same name, Quetzalcóatl. Nonetheless, Valdez further emphasizes the connection between these figures and the worlds they represent in two ways. First, the personal traits of Quetzalcóatl the god and Quetzalcóatl the deceased Chicano soldier are closely paralleled through the narrative overlapping of two different dialogues. In this scene, Indio’s girlfriend is describing him to a priest while his friend, Conejo, is simultaneously describing Quetzalcóatl, the god, to a fellow vato. The scene reads as follows:

Dalia: I don’t think you understand what Indio was trying
to do, father.

Lizard: So what did he do?

Conejo: He built great pyramids.

Dalia: He wanted the Raza to be close to God.

Conejo: He give the indios corn and fire.

Dalia: He wanted our people to have enough to eat.

Conejo: He show ‘em how to make pottery and paint and

write books.

Dalia: He wanted Chicanos to express and educate themselves.

Conejo: He teach 'em how to make their own government.

Dalia: He wanted us to live free and equal.

Conejo: He was against all the wars.

Dalia: He didn't want his carnales to die uselessly.

Conejo: He was the God of Civilization.

Dalia: He was a beautiful nuevo hombre.

Conejo: He was a vato de aquellos. (88)

The symbolic effect of Valdez's narrative overlapping is one in which the two figures are collapsed. Indio becomes a modern day representation of Quetzalcóatl, a point which is asserted when his girlfriend claims in desperation "You're wrong, father. Indio was Quetzalcóatl. You just can't see it because you're racist" (90).

Secondly, the climax of the *mito* also presents a moment in which the indigenous world and present day world of the Chicanos converge. Compelled by the shock of seeing blood seeping from the American flag which is draped over her son's coffin, Indio's mother opens it and discovers a feathered headdress and pulsating heart in place of her son's body. This scene transposes the young Chicano soldier as a sacrificial god rather than a casualty of the Vietnam War, consequently, his death takes on an elevated mythical dimension. The events that take place perhaps can be described in terms of magical realism. These two examples demonstrate Valdez's employment of narrative strategies to affect an Indigenismo that not only draws upon the mythologies of the indigenous past, but also uses them to interpret the

current realities faced by Chicanos. While the audience is encouraged to link the oppression experienced by their indigenous ancestors with their own, they are also encouraged to take pride in their perseverance.

Although some may read Valdez's appropriation of Aztec mythology as an oversimplified glorification of the past, one could argue that his explicit critique of the Vietnam War necessarily implies a critique of Aztec sacrificial practices. In this sense Valdez is not uncritically embracing all that emerges from Aztec mythology. Furthermore, with respect to whether or not Indigenismo is complicit with 1960s sexism, it is evident that the women in this *mito* are rather flat characters, typically overwhelmed by grief, and helpless before their harassment by men. Nevertheless, it is notable that barrio characters in this *mito* do embody a strong resistance towards institutionalized religion, represented in the figure of the priest, and a preference for indigenous spirituality, represented in the duplicitous figure of Quetzalcóatl.

Indigenismo also appears in *Zoot Suit*, one of Valdez's most popular works.⁸⁸ Based on the actual Sleepy Lagoon murder trial of 1942, this play presents the character of the Pachuco and addresses the way in which U.S. legal systems tend to criminalize Chicano youths from the barrio, as well as other people of color who reside in the barrio. Although this play doesn't focus heavily on the indigenous past, it is a barrio narrative where the protagonist, Henry Reyna, is described as "dark, Indian looking, a little older than his years" (26). The emphasis on the "rasgos indígenas" of Chicano characters as a mode of invoking the indigenous past is common throughout Chicano literature in general. In scene six of *Zoot Suit* there is a critical moment in which the Pachuco, who functions as a narrator and

⁸⁸ Valdez, Luis. *Zoot Suit and Other Plays* (Houston: Arte Público Press, 1992).

mediator between the actors and the audience, is attacked by sailors and marines who then proceed to strip him of his Pachuco drapes. The parenthetical description of the scene reads as follows:

El PACHUCO stands. The only item of clothing on his body in a small loin cloth. HE turns and looks at Henry, with mystic intensity. HE opens his arms as an Aztec conch blows, and HE slowly exits backwards with powerful calm into the shadows. (81)

Here again the contemporary Chicano body is collapsed with el cuerpo indígena. Like numerous other moments in Chicano literature, the merging of the two bodies in this scene signifies the common experience of suffering and exploitation experienced by our ancestors throughout our history, and perhaps more importantly, persistent pride. In his introduction to *Zoot Suit and Other Plays*, Jorge Huerta comments on this critical moment in the play. He states, “This image suggests the sacrificial ‘god’ of the Aztecs, stripped bare before his heart is offered to the cosmos.”⁸⁹

In addition to invoking the indigenous past through the explicit metaphorical representation of the body, Indigenismo also manifests itself in the works of Valdez in a more subtle manner through the incorporation of pre-Columbian concepts. For example, in the work mentioned above, Jorge Huerta identifies the use of the Aztec concept of the ‘nahual’ in his description of the relationship between the Henry Reyna and El Pachuco. Huerta explains how “the character of El Pachuco also represents the Aztec concept of the “nahual”, or other self, as he comes to Henry’s support in the solitary scene in prison” (15).

⁸⁹ Huerta, Jorge. “Introduction,” in Luis Valdez, *Zoot Suit and Other Plays* (Houston: Arte Público Press, 1992). P. 14.

Because the Aztec concept of the “nahual” generally refers to an “other” that is not physically distinct, one could argue that the “nahual” figures as a type of (sub)conscious. Accordingly, El Pachuco can be viewed as Henry Reyna’s (sub)conscious. In another sense, this “nahual” figures as a spiritual guide which offers guidance to Henry Reyna during trying times. Thus, in the above example, Indigenismo gives way to indigenous spiritualism as Henry’s nahual supports him and the other pachucos in their efforts towards social change.

The incorporation of pre-Columbian concepts within a spiritual context, however, is most evident in Valdez’s narrative poem, *Pensamiento serpentino* (1973).⁹⁰ In this work, Valdez appropriates and develops a humanitarian concept which originates in Mayan philosophy, namely that of “In Lak Ech” which means “my other Self”. The humanizing vision which emerges from this concept, in effect, permeates much of his work and is especially echoed in the call for social justice that comes through in almost all his work. Nonetheless in contrast to those works which problematically demonstrate an exclusive formulation of nationalism or an insurgent militancy, this narrative poem posits a vision for social revolution and justice that is non-violent and most importantly grounded in spirituality. The Mayan concept of “In Lak Ech” is represented in the following poem:

Tú eres mi otro yo / You are my other me
Si te hago daño a ti / If I do harm to you,
Me hago daño a mí mismo / I do harm to myself
Si te amo y respeto / If I love and respect you,
Me amo y respeto yo / I love and respect myself

⁹⁰ Valdez, Luis. *Early Works / Actos / Bernabé / Pensamiento serpentino* (Houston: Arte Público Press, 1990).

“In Lak Ech,” embodied in the above poem, suggests that one must love and respect all other people in order to love and respect oneself. In addition, an act of violence toward another is seen as an act of violence toward the self. Valdez’s poetic meditation on the Mayan concept of “In Lak Ech” demonstrates how a project of spiritualization can emerge from Indigenismo, or the investigation and reclamation of the past. When such spiritualization occurs, the possibility for revolutionary social change opens up. It is important to distinguish here between efforts towards social change which seek simply to reverse the conditions of oppression and efforts towards revolutionary social change which seek to transform social relations in a way that might correct their inherent oppressive nature. While the former type of change may be achieved through militant action, the latter seems to be attainable only through spiritual forms of non-violent activism. On a related note, Pizarro views the spiritualization of Indigenismo as “the process whereby students see the nature of oppression and seek opportunities to transform those injustices” (74). Notably, the desire to change the injustices that result in oppressive conditions is one which is not circumscribed within the Chicano community, but rather seeks transformation for all people.

While such a humanizing spirituality is indeed projected in the poem *Pensamiento serpentino*, its broad revolutionary potential is in some instances undermined by nationalistic tendencies. Of course Valdez’s nationalistic and militant tendencies are much more apparent in earlier works such as *Los vendidos* and *The Militants*. Although these tendencies are comparatively muted in *Pensamiento serpentino*, one could argue that they still function in limiting Valdez’s project of spiritualization within the context of humanitarian social revolution. Exclusive nationalistic tendencies arise in subtle forms in this essay. Valdez calls for the Mexicanization of the gabacho, or Anglo man, and for the

replacement of Catholic religious figures with indigenous mythical figures. He writes:

Jesucristo is Quetzalcóatl
The colonization is over
La Virgen de Guadalupe is Tonantzin
The suffering is over
The universe is Aztlán

Much like the work of Valdez, Anzaldúa's writing reflects a preoccupation with the indigenous past, the call for an end to the socioeconomic oppression of all Chicanos and an open-faced critique of the ethnocentric racism of Anglo-American culture. Committed to social change through their writing, both writers embrace a non-Western approach to aesthetics, viewing their art as an object or image that comes alive when enacted.

Nevertheless, the nationalistic tendencies that are evident in the above quote are not present in Anzaldúa's *Borderlands / La Frontera: The New Mestiza*.⁹¹

In Anzaldúa's work, Indigenismo consistently emerges within a larger project of spiritualization that strives towards the inclusive emancipation of all oppressed peoples. Rather than leaning towards a glorification of the past, Anzaldúa employs a critical appropriation of it from the subject position of a queer Chicana who has been dually oppressed within her own culture. Her use of the concept of Aztlán, and the images of Coatloapeuh and Coatlicue, for example, are all incorporated into a vision of spirituality that seeks social justice for all who have suffered oppression. In "Tlilli, Tlapalli, The Path of the Red and Black Ink," Anzaldúa reflects on the creation of *Borderlands / La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. She observes:

⁹¹ Anzaldúa, Gloria. *Borderlands / La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1987).

Numerous overlays of paint, rough surfaces, smooth surfaces, make me realize I am preoccupied with texture as well. Too, I see the barely contained color threatening to spill over the boundaries of the object it represents and into other 'objects' and over the borders of the frame. I see a hybridization of metaphor, different species of ideas popping up here, popping up there, full of variations and seeming contradictions, though I believe in an ordered, structured universe where all phenomena are interrelated and imbued with spirit. This almost finished product seems an assemblage, a montage, a beaded work with several leitmotifs and with a central core, now appearing, now disappearing in a crazy dance. (88)

Centered on aesthetic discourse, in this chapter Anzaldúa compares Western and non-Western approaches to art and explores her own identity as a writer. In describing the sensuous and transformative qualities of the writing, she explains:

I look at my fingers, see plumes growing there. From the fingers, my feathers, black and red ink drips across the page. *Escribo con la tinta de mi sangre*. I write in red. Ink. Intimately knowing the smooth touch of paper, its speechlessness before I spill myself on the insides of the trees. (93)

The barely contained color that threatens to spill over the boundaries of the 'object' and the borders of the frame in the former quote can be read as Anzaldúa's own color (blood) spilling into the aesthetic discourse. Her color (blood), a hybrid of the multiple parts of her mestiza body and identity, cannot be contained by borders or organized according to ideological boundaries. The seven chapters (or sections) appearing in Anzaldúa's *Borderlands / La Frontera, The New Mestiza* are not characterized by a uniform perspective,

nor does each section reflect one dominant view (a feminist view, a lesbian view, a Chicana view). Instead, in each section Anzaldúa employs multiple perspectives simultaneously.

Through a comparison of Valdez's and Anzaldúa's representation of the indigenous image of the serpent, one can examine the different ways in which Indigenismo and indigenous spiritualism are manifested in their work. It is important to recognize the different historical contexts from which Valdez and Anzaldúa emerged. Notably, Valdez was writing during a time in which the Chicano community was in great need of a collective identity in order to mobilize large-scale efforts against their socio-economic subordination. During the 1960s and the 1970s the Chicano community was in need of collective representation, a need that Valdez responded to. Accordingly, Valdez and El Teatro Campesino are commonly associated with the predominantly male writers of the Chicano Movement, whereas Anzaldúa is associated with the subsequent "Movimiento Macha" in which Chicana writers became visible. Taking such historical context into consideration, it is not surprising that Valdez's *Pensamiento serpentino* is geared specifically towards the Chicano community alone. This narrative poem has been viewed as part of a nation-building discourse that calls for immediate revolutionary action in order to establish political and economic independence from the U.S. As discussed in the previous chapter, such sentiments are also expressed in the works of other important Chicano writers that were writing during the Movement. Consequently, the transgressive Chicano actors which populate Valdez's *actos, mitos*, plays and films are predominantly male, militant and often archetypical.

Although the humanistic vision advocated in Valdez's *Pensamiento serpentino* aims to ultimately transcend cultural difference, rigid paradigms still operate in his narrative poem. The definite boundary between Chicano culture and Anglo-culture remain intact. The

indigenous identity which Valdez recuperates appears in strong opposition to Western concepts of reality, an ideological stance that is also evident in the work of Anzaldúa. Unlike his early plays where political, social and economic separatism is more pronounced, in *Pensamiento serpentino* separatist sentiments are somewhat muted by his utopic vision for a universal Raza, a cosmic race that is nonetheless headed by Chicanos. Valdez looks towards the day when the Chicano will say to the world:

raza, te comprendo y te
quiero because I know
where you're coming from
and where you're going
Desde Borneo al Congo
Desde Moscow a Mercedes,
todos son mi Raza
Humana- (1990 189)

Nonetheless, this humanitarian vision is consequently undermined by an evident subdued anger and a potentially divisive mentality. Although such subdued anger resulting from the experience of oppression is also evident in the work of Anzaldúa, it is defused by her deconstruction of the borders that are binaristic and divisive. Her critique of Anglo culture is matched by her owning of her Anglo parts. In Valdez's narrative poem, the Chicano must swallow "gabacho racism, capitalism / and imperialism" then dispose of it as waste matter (1990 194). Anglo culture is represented only by its negative features and is always in opposition to Chicano culture. Just as the boundary between these two cultures remains intact, so do other rigid boundaries. For example, Valdez calls for:

Justice between man and woman

Justice between man and nature

Justice between man and God (1990 177)

Valdez doesn't consider the spaces in which these dualities overlap, where a Chicano culture overlaps with Anglo culture, where a male identity overlaps with a female identity, where women's and men's spirits directly interact with those of the gods. Thus, Valdez's project of spiritualization relies on the reinforcement of divisions, whereas Anzaldúa's project of spiritualization seeks to deconstruct them. While many Chicanos romanticized the culture of our indigenous ancestors as one of perfect balance among men, the gods and the earth, Anzaldúa remains critical when revisiting the "erased" history of her indigenous ancestors. After informing us that the serpent symbolizes the soul, the earth and the mother, she argues that "the symbolic sacrifice of the serpent to the 'higher' masculine powers indicates that the patriarchal order had already vanquished the feminine and matriarchal order in pre-Columbian America" (27). Later in the narrative Anzaldúa critiques the way in which (Chicano) (male) culture keeps women in rigidly defined roles, deeming them "failures if they don't marry and have children" (39).

In addition to being part of the national symbol of Mexico, the symbol of the serpent, according to Valdez should be embraced by all Chicanos because it refers to the spiritual-material duality of all things. In contrast to Western conceptions of a material reality that is separate from the spiritual realm, the serpent is used as a metaphor for the Chicanos' vision of reality which combines the spiritual and the material, giving equal weight to both. Valdez writes:

But REALITY es una Gran Serpiente

a great serpent
that moves and changes
and keeps crawling
out of its
dead skin
despojando su pellejo viejo
to emerge
lean and fresh
la nueva realidad nace
de la realidad vieja. (1990 172)

In addition to highlighting the spirit of renewal, the image of the serpent functions to reinforce Chicanos' connection to their indigenous past. The use of the image of the serpent is similarly used by Anzaldúa to critique the divisive and oppressive nature of Western social institutions. Anzaldúa, however, employs the image of the serpent in order to transcend a slew of culturally imposed binaries which threaten to split her in half. For Anzaldúa, the image of the serpent also represents evolution, rebirth and renewal; yet, her serpent does not reconcile oppositions by simply turning them on their heads.

Indeed, Anzaldúa's appropriation of the serpent, a figure grounded in the Aztec mythological figure of Coatlicue, is much more complex and concrete than Valdez's use of the serpent. Coatlicue represents the process by which internal contradictions and ruptures can be transcended through the reprogramming of one's consciousness. Significantly, Anzaldúa's representation of Coatlicue goes beyond the call for justice between man and woman, between man and God, between man and nature. As a symbol of contradiction,

Coatlicue allows one to be both man and woman, both woman and God, both woman and nature. Differences are internalized rather than negotiated. Social change is primarily sought through the abolishment of divisive institutions and notions, an effort which is spiritual and humanistic in nature and truly revolutionary. In reference to the transformative potential of the ideology embedded in Anzaldúa's representation of Coatlicue, Erika Aigner-Varoz makes the following observation:

[Anzaldúa] goes beyond what AnaLouise Keating observes as "reclaiming and reinterpreting the figure of Coatlicue . . . [to] invent an image of female identity." Anzaldúa manipulates the serpentine surface metaphors to change the basic conceptual metaphors affirming racism and sexism within humanity.⁹²

Furthermore, Anzaldúa's reinterpretation of existing ideologies allow for a version of Chicanismo / Chicananess where she can own her Anglo parts and embrace her indigenous and Spanish ancestry. In equating linguistic identity to ethnic identity and asserting the need to overcome a tradition of silence, Anzaldúa writes, "I will have my voice: Indian, Spanish, White" (81). According to Anzaldúa, linguistic identity is twin to ethnic identity, therefore White/Anglo culture and language is just as much a part of her ethnicity as a Chicana, as is Indian and Spanish culture and language. The notion of interculturalism closely approximates Anzaldúa's view of Chicana/o culture. In brief, interculturalism refers to the idea that every culture is a product of its interaction with other cultures.⁹³

⁹² Aigner-Varoz, Erika. "Metaphors of a Mestiza Consciousness: Anzaldúa's *Borderlands / La Frontera*." in *MELUS* 25.2 (Summer 2000) 47.

⁹³ See Tully, James. *Strange Multiplicity: Constitutionalism in an Age of Diversity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

In the chapters “Entering into the Serpent” and “Tlilli, Tlapalli / The Path of the Red and Black Ink,” Anzaldúa makes some important distinctions between Western and non-Western approaches to knowledge and art, a critique which is grounded in her appropriation of the concepts from the indigenous past. Through an investigation of the culture of her indigenous ancestors, Anzaldúa encounters a vision of reality in which the spiritual / other / under world directly interacts with the material / physical world. Unlike Western culture and Anglo rationality which separates the spiritual / psychic / unconscious world from the physical / material / conscious world, Anzaldúa rediscovers a worldview that allows her to bring these two modes of consciousness together, thus healing an ancient psychological split. The split of these conceptual realms, according to Anzaldúa, are at the root of all systems of oppression. In accordance with this new worldview, knowledge can be accessed through the conscious/rational part of the brain as well as the unconscious/imaginative part of the brain. In linking the previously mentioned split to Western institutionalized religion, Anzaldúa argues:

The Catholic and Protestant religions encourage fear and distrust of life and of the body; they encourage a split between the body and the spirit and totally ignore the soul; they encourage us to kill off parts of ourselves. We are taught that the body is an ignorant animal; intelligence dwells only in the head. But the body is smart. It does not discern between external stimuli and stimuli from the imagination. It reacts equally viscerally to events from the imagination as it does to real events. (59-60)

In addition to validating the immediate importance of the other/psychic world and the

knowledge gained through that pathway, Anzaldúa demonstrates the way in which the other/psychic world can be accessed through the body. She asserts how “only through the body, through the pulling of flesh, can the human soul be transformed” (97). The body, mouth, or pen can function as mediators between that other world and the physical world. This process is further elaborated and explained through various conceptual approaches in the chapters “The Coatlicue State” and “Tlilli, Tlapalli, The Path of the Red and Black Ink.”

Along these lines, Father Elizondo’s personal experiences recounted in *The Future is Mestizo* confirm that Catholicism, as a Western institutionalized religion, has indeed imposed such divisiveness on the individual and the society. Nevertheless, his own search for personal and spiritual identity lead him to draw from his experiences as a mestizo to envision opportunities to transcend divisions. Along these lines, Father Elizondo affirms:

What needs to change radically is the social appreciation of mestizaje from that of being a pariah to that of being a gift.... We are truly in the springtime of a new humanity – a newness that is within our bodies and souls, a newness that we wish to share with others.... For within our mestizaje bodies the veins of all the human groups of the earth are already blending to produce new bodies, but it is our privilege and challenge to create the new soul that will animate this new body of humanity. (130)

Father Elizondo’s affirmation that the mestizo body is the source of a new and liberating conception of humanity aligns with how the indigenous concepts of reciprocity and interconnectedness are centralized in the indigenous spiritualism expressed in Valdez’s and Anzaldúa’s texts.

While Western ways of knowing rely heavily on what can be visually perceived and scientifically proven, indigenous spiritualism opens itself to alternate ways of knowing. As the work of Valdez and Anzaldúa demonstrate, the body itself can figure as a primary source for accessing knowledge. Knowledge figures not as something gained strictly from texts, but rather something acquired through one's personal and collective experiences both within and without their respective communities. Indigenous spiritualism, therefore, can be viewed as representing a distinct form of epistemology that is grounded in the intersection between an indigenous based worldview and the lived experiences of Chicanos as mestizos. Chicanos exist at an intersection where diverse and oftentimes conflicting cultural forces converge; and in the marginal and relatively isolated space of the barrio, mestizaje is experienced on a daily basis and more readily accepted and expressed in the cultural practices and narratives of Chicanos who reside there.

**V. Chapter Five: Inside the Barrio: Spatial Perceptions and
Oppositional Consciousness in Alejandro Morales' *Barrio
on the Edge / Caras viejas y vino nuevo* and Yxta Maya
Murray's *Locas***

Whether it functions as a transitional space or a final destination for Chicanos, the barrio represents an integral part of the Chicano experience for most first- and second-generation Chicanos. The trajectory of Chicano literature shows that the Chicano experience cannot be limited to one specific geographic, linguistic, socioeconomic, gendered or ideological space. However, the distinct cultural and socioeconomic features of the barrio, even as they have transformed significantly in past decades, often produce a space where ethnic identity is inherently tied to a physical place. In coming-of-age barrio narratives, specifically, young protagonists commonly embark upon a search for identity that prompts an interrogation of the figurative boundary that separates the physical space of the barrio from the larger society. While this boundary marks cultural and socioeconomic difference, it cannot be oversimplified as a divider between the oppressed and the oppressor. Accordingly, as critical spatial perceptions reveal oppressive structures inside and outside the barrio, young protagonists engage in a process of “coming into consciousness” and develop strategies for resisting and transcending oppressive ideologies.

Alejandro Morales' *Barrio on the Edge / Caras viejas y vino nuevo* (1975) and Yxta Maya Murray's *Locas* (1997) each offer an insider's perspective on the coming-of-age

experience in a Chicano barrio through the eyes of a pair of complementary narrators.⁹⁴ In both novels, the narrators' coming-of-age experiences are shaped by the multiple marginal positions they occupy. Consequently, their perceptions of and experiences within the physical and conceptual spaces of the barrio are informed by institutionalized and internalized forms of oppression. The barrio at once affirms the ethnic identity of the young Chicano protagonists who are shaped by daily "Mexican" or mestizo cultural practices, it also subjects them to the social perils of poverty and segregation. The barrio, therefore, becomes a space that resists cultural assimilation at the same time that it is subject to the substance abuse, violence and delinquency that is common in economically impoverished communities.

Although there are many similarities between Morales' and Murray's representations of the barrio, each becomes distinct when examined in light of its historical specificity, gendered perspective and the protagonist's experiences with the world "outside" of the barrio. Set in Southern California, Morales' barrio novel is narrated by two young male protagonists, Julián and Mateo. Like Murray's protagonists, Lucía and Cecilia, these two young characters can be viewed as two complimentary parts of a whole. In each pair of protagonists, one explores the possibilities of a life beyond the barrio while the other remains within the confines of a barrio mentality. As they seek to define their identity and purpose in life, Mateo and Cecilia's critical reflections on their social circumstances prompt the development of an oppositional consciousness that allows them to envision a transcendence of the inside - outside boundary, while Julián and Lucía are ultimately

⁹⁴ Morales, Alejandro. *Barrio on the Edge / Caras viejas y vino nuevo*, English Translation by Francisco A. Lomeli (Tempe: Bilingual Press / Editorial Bilingüe, 1998). Murray, Yxta Maya. *Locas* (New York: Grove Press, 1997).

consumed by the dark undercurrent of barrio life. Indeed, Morales and Murray both show how life in the barrio can have very different effects on two seemingly similar characters.

In considering the representation of the barrio in Chicano literature from the mid-twentieth century to the present, it is evident that there have been several shifts that reflect both the changing character in actual barrios as well as a change in how writers and social scientists perceive them. Mario Suárez's pre-Chicano barrio narratives presented a barrio that was essentially heterogeneous and clearly culturally and economically different from mainstream America. During the Chicano Movement, writers elevated the barrio both as a site of cultural authenticity as well as a point of continuity as a socioeconomically oppressed space that tied the long-standing social oppression of mestizos and indigenous peoples in the past to the oppression of Chicanos in the present. Varying significantly from such representations of the barrio, Morales' *Barrio on the Edge / Caras viejas y vino nuevo* offered a more internally critical look at the oppressive structures that were reproduced among Chicano youth in the barrio.

In "Remapping the Post-Barrio: Beyond Turf and Graffiti," Francisco A. Lomeli notes the following with respect to how Morales anticipated a new direction in the narrative conception of the barrio:

In 1975 Alejandro Morales in *Caras viejas y vino nuevo* challenged common knowledge and radically broke the mold of romanticizing this social milieu. His portrayal of a hard-core barrio as a cesspool of unbridled violence and cannibalistic forces shattered a sense of security, turning our attention toward a place in dire need of structural and fundamental changes. Morales felt

compelled to take his manuscript to Mexico because no Chicano publisher dared to publish such an apocalyptic view of the barrio.⁹⁵

Indeed, Morales representation of the barrio flashed a spotlight on the pervasive problems of drugs, alcohol and violence in the barrio – problems that are nevertheless closely tied to the economic poverty and social segregation commonly experienced by first- and second-generation Chicanos. In addition, the representation of life in the barrio in *Barrio on the Edge / Caras viejas y vino nuevo* reflects the dramatic perceptions of coming-of-age youth whose experiences are often veiled with emotional angst, social rebellion and desperation.

In critically exploring the more recent trend in Chicano literature where it is “even fashionable – perhaps partly exotic – to offer hard-core barrio depictions,” Lomelí observes a “post-barrio” construct where negative portrayals of the barrio challenge a false conception of ethnic solidarity typically associated with the barrio (183). *Locas* is in fact one among many barrio narratives of the 1990s that offers an up-close look at the harsh life experienced by Chicano and Chicano youth involved in gang-life. If Morales novel was equally invested in aesthetic innovation and an original narrative approach to the barrio experience, Murray’s novel is more concerned with social realism and telling the stories of young women who become involved in barrio gang life. In fictionalizing the experiences of Chicana gang-bangers, Murray is also interrogating the social dynamics that surround this phenomenon and giving voice to experiences that had been previously silenced. Such “negative” portrayals however can also be read as a form of internal criticism that ultimately seek new narratives of social justice for even the most marginalized members of the Chicano

⁹⁵ Lomelí, Francisco A. “Remapping the Post-Barrio: Beyond Turf and Graffiti,” in Cañero, Julio and Juan F. Elices, Eds. *The Chican@ Literary Imagination: A Collection of Critical Studies by Francisco A. Lomelí*. (Madrid: Biblioteca Benjamin Franklin, 2012). Pp. 183-192.

community. Furthermore, in demonstrating a conflicted love-hate relationship with their barrio, Chicana and Chicano coming-of-age protagonists also recognize how the cultural community affirms and ensures a part of their identity that is often negated outside of the barrio.

Although Murray's novel was published twenty-two years after Morales', both offer very similar descriptions of the physical characteristics of the barrio. In Morales' *Barrio on the Edge / Caras viejas y vino nuevo*, we see a space where apartments and houses are in desperate need of renovation and the neglected streets are lined with piles of junk and garbage. Old men and young veterans gather together in shacks to drink and children play in streets covered with puddles of muddy water because there are no sidewalks. In perceiving the physical impoverishment of the barrio, Mateo observes:

.... the skeletal framework of a building joins the cement tangle on the horizon. Posts, electric cables, telephone wires, gigantic tanks all rise above the land: threatening warehouses, foreboding black lethal chimneys puff pollution into the air. To the left, apartments, row after row of windows, and cars unleashing irritating glints of sunlight at the eyes through glistening glass; a ragged and happy child playing on the dusty street, a famished dog, a young man combing his long hair and passing by a mangled automobile carcass that belongs in a junkyard instead of decorating the street in front of a shabby wooden house. Barely perceptible mountains can be seen way off. Here only the lights tried to shine, sparkling as if the stars had disappeared.

(34)

Mateo's perceptions of the physical landscape of the barrio portray the dismal and neglected state of barrio space. Beyond despair, the effect of economic poverty on barrio space suggests a sense of defeat.

Similarly, in *Locas*, the poverty-stricken conditions of the barrio are evident in Cecilia's and Lucía's description of their own living conditions. Lucía, for example, makes references to the noise of the rats moving around in the walls of her apartment. Because Cecilia and Lucía live in the midst of a sprawl of urban barrios, the state of deterioration is not limited to state of residential structures but also characterizes the local institutions that must provide services to this large population. Cecilia's description of the local Junior High School, for example, exemplifies the inadequate state of local institutions made available to barrio residents. She explains:

Garfield's one of the schools they send us all to. What a low-down place that is, nothing but a concrete square all falling apart, the bricks rotted and a few windows smashed and patched up again with tape or thin wood board. It's circled in rusty chain-link that's supposed to keep bad people like me away, but the building's still covered with dark blue spiky spray-paint letters that scream at you when you walk by. (124)

While both Morales and Murray offer comparable depictions of the physical characteristics of the barrio, the further degree to which Murray's barrio is alienated from middle-class institutions is emphasized by the dilapidated condition of school institutions that exist for the sprawls of urban barrios in the 1980s and 1990s.

Despite the fact that Morales novel is set in the late 1960s and Murray's novel takes place over the specific time period of 1980 to 1997, the descriptions of the physical space of

the barrio in both novels demonstrate some significant parallels. Specifically, in both novels the barrio is described as an enclosed, isolated physical space in which living conditions are very poor. Along these lines, in his 1988 study of barrio gangs in Southern California, James Diego Vigil reports that barrios “whether old or new, urban or rural, all. . . shared the qualities noted earlier: spatial separation and visibly inferior housing.”⁹⁶ In addition, Vigil observes how “barrio youth are in general agreement that their neighborhoods constitute a separate, distinct and different environ” (22).

Morales’ and Murray’s depictions of the barrio, indeed, align with Vigil’s findings. In both novels, the implied figurative inside - outside boundary operates to highlight the territorial and socioeconomic divisions that separate a specific barrio from other barrios as well as from the outside world. In *Barrio on the Edge / Caras viejas y vino nuevo*, the narrator describes the physical isolation of his unnamed barrio. He observes:

The barrio was situated in the pit that was enclosed on two adjoining sides by small embankments, the third side was formed by a hill, and the fourth ascended gradually toward the airport, becoming a large plateau used as a landing strip. (204)

Although the space of the barrio seems to be enclosed by natural physical boundaries such as hills and embankments, it is evident that these physical boundaries also function as racial and class boundaries that isolate the poor, working-class Mexicanos and Chicanos. The barrio portrayed in *Locas* is similarly described as a contained, territorial space populated by poor, working class Chicanos. In Murray’s novel, however, there is a significant emphasis on how many of the residents of the Echo Park are in fact recent immigrants. In this

⁹⁶ Vigil, James Diego. *Barrio Gangs: Street Life and Identity in Southern California* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1988). P. 21.

scenario, language also appears as a marker of difference between those inside and those outside the barrio. Unlike the unnamed barrio in *Barrio on the Edge / Caras viejeas y vino nuevo*, Echo Park is not enclosed by seemingly natural boundaries. Instead, Echo Park figures as one barrio in the midst of many other barrios. Nonetheless, through the eyes of the (former) gangbanging protagonists in this novel, the barrio is perceived as a distinct yet dynamic territory whose boundaries are clearly marked and defended.

Jeffrey Fagan, in “Gangs, Drugs and Neighborhood Change,” links the socioeconomic changes in neighborhoods and local communities to the changes in the nature of barrio gangs specifically.⁹⁷ Fagan argues that fundamental changes, such as increased gang-related fatalities, the increasingly corporate structure of barrio gang organizations and the increasing participation of young women in gangs, are reflective of a broader urban crisis in the wake of deindustrialization. Noting the social and economic forces that contributed to the isolation of low-income ethnic barrios in the latter part of the twentieth century, Fagan reports:

As the middle class residents of the urban core left for the better housing and schools of the suburbs or the promise of greater racial tolerance in integrated neighborhoods, the insulation of the neighborhoods was reinforced by the depletion of the housing stock and the flight of basic commercial services. In gang cities including Detroit (Taylor, 1990a) and South Central Los Angeles (Quicker, 1992), thriving commercial districts transformed within a decade into areas dominated by liquor stores and fast food outlets. In turn, the informal commercial activity that vitalized street life also weakened. ... These services which were often locally owned, closed or moved elsewhere

⁹⁷ Fagan, Jeffrey. “Gangs, Drugs and Neighborhood Change” in Ronald C. Huff Ed. *Gangs in America* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1996).

removing jobs and the small amount of capital they created. These stores and the traffic they generated were stabilizing parts of both the commercial and the cultural life of the neighborhood. Their departure altered the normative patterns of interaction that constituted “street life,” an important part of the social regulation for children. (67)

According to Fagan, the isolated state of the barrio is caused in part by its’ abandonment by local commercial businesses and the consequent exodus of barrio residents seeking better economic opportunities and racial integration.

In both *Barrio on the Edge / Caras viejas y vino nuevo* and *Locas* there are specific references to this socioeconomic trend and the consequently isolating effects on the barrio and its inhabitants. After taking his reader on a journey through the chaos of the barrio, at the end of the novel the narrator in Morales’ novel alludes to an important factor that partially explains the increasing socioeconomic deterioration and isolation of the barrio represented in his novel. He observes:

The children used to play in the pasture of the dairy, which workers were leveling to build factories and warehouses that constituted part of the industrialization program proposed by the president. The owner had sold the brick factory, and everyone was forced to move out.... The brick factory was located at the near the foot of the hill that led up to the plateau. (204)

Here, Morales points to a critical factor, the closing of the brick factory, and its role in the transformation of a socially and economically diverse town into an ethnically homogenous, low-income barrio. It is significant that throughout the novel Mateo makes references to the “pit where the town used to be.” Interestingly, Morales’ description of the physical location

of the brick factory with respect to the barrio implicitly suggests that the brick factory functioned as a stepping stone towards middle-class America, or simply as an exit from the socioeconomic space of the barrio. It is positioned near the outskirts of the barrio and leads up to a plateau. It is possible, therefore, to read the closing down of the brick factory as the elimination of class mobility opportunities for the inhabitants of the barrio.

The increased socioeconomic isolation of the barrio in *Locas* is not so much marked by a perceived decrease in commercial business and the economic and socially integrative opportunities they provide as it is by a shift in the ethnic and class makeup of the population. Early in the novel, Cecilia explains:

Twenty-five years ago the Park was just that, a park with regular joes walking around. In 1970s Echo Park, you had white families in tract houses with rose gardens and barbecues, and all of us Mexicans squeezed into the little spaces left over. We made our money by pumping their gas and bussing their tables and cleaning up after them with our hair wrapped up to keep cool.

(5)

In comparison, the Echo Park barrio in which Cecilia and Lucía come of age, the Echo Park of the 1980s and 1990s is a poverty stricken city divided territorially into the East Side and the West Side according to gang created boundaries. The possibility of Cecilia and Lucía interacting with middle-class people as well as their access to middle-class institutions is almost non-existent. The appeal of the barrio gang and participation in the illegal market of drug and weapon sales is much stronger for these protagonists than it is for Morales' protagonists. Situated within a sprawl of urban barrios, the outside world seems more inaccessible to these protagonists. Consequently, the internalization of the logic of the barrio

and its alternate set of rules or laws is less likely to be disrupted by the outside world. The observations made by Fagan in his sociological study generally tend to resonate more with late twentieth-century representations of the barrio, such as *Locas* where there is a focus on exploring the factors that shape the relatively recent phenomenon of Chicana gangbangers.

In both *Barrio on the Edge / Caras viejas y vino nuevo* and *Locas* the authors utilize social realism to illuminate the harsh realities of the barrio; however, Morales' representation of the barrio has a lyrical and abstract quality to it while Murray's representation of the barrio is done at face value and is consequently less aesthetically innovative. Employing poetic language and stream of consciousness, Morales simultaneously depicts both the beauty and repulsiveness of a disintegrating barrio. The combination of Julián's and Mateo's perspective reveals a love - hate relationship with the barrio. As Lomelí points out in "Hard-Core Barrio Revisited: Violence, Sex, Drugs and Videotape Through a Chicano Glass Darkly," the barrio is portrayed "as a place that was their best friend and worst enemy."⁹⁸ On one hand, the barrio is cherished as the site of ethnic solidarity, cultural values, family history and personal memories. Yet, it is also viewed as a site of socioeconomic stagnation and perpetual violence. Therefore, at any given moment the narrative can abruptly shift from descriptions of the physical space of the barrio that are veiled in a tone of tenderness to the gross amplification of its most violent features. For example, in describing the view of the barrio from a rooftop, Mateo initially observes the gushing sound of a train, the constant buzz of an airplane, a caressing breeze and "strange familiar sounds. . . blending with the jungle" (34). This description, however, is

⁹⁸ Lomelí, Francisco. "Hard-Core Barrio Revisited: Violence, Sex, Drugs and Videotape Through a Chicano Glass Darkly" in Cañero, Julio and Juan F. Elices, Eds. *The Chican@ Literary Imagination: A Collection of Critical Studies by Francisco A. Lomelí* (Madrid: Biblioteca Benjamin Franklin, 2012). Pp. 229-244.

unexpectedly eclipsed by violent mental images such as “brains over asses of the three hundred who were killed here. . . emerging from all the vulvas evidently worshipping and wanting to vomit” (38).

Aside from the narrators’ paradoxical relationship to the barrio, the representation of the barrio in *Barrio on the Edge / Caras viejas y vino nuevo* is also shaped by the author’s narrative style in which descriptions of the physical space of the barrio and the activity that occurs within it are juxtaposed with extended internal dialogues where the meaning of life and death are contemplated by either of the two protagonists. At several points throughout the narrative these two elements converge, thus resulting in a surreal vision of the barrio and its inhabitants that is both singular and collective. Consequently, descriptions of the physical space and activity of the barrio can be both shockingly explicit and abstract at the same time. In describing a menial dispute occurring between two local *vatos* on a barrio corner, for example, the narrator states:

In the midst of the birth of millions, the rape of millions, and the agony of all, the men laughed at the row raised by Melón and Lucio. Each laughed in his own way, but the diabolical cackle of the Buenasuertes was conspicuous in the emptiness of space full of incommunicable voices. (182)

In weaving together the depiction of a confrontation in the barrio with the magnitude of the image of “the birth of millions, the rape of millions,” the barrio momentarily is experienced as an abstract hyperspace where time collapses. Mundane events and encounters in the barrio are dramatized as they gain the weight of a long history of pain and suffering.

Furthermore, in *Barrio on the Edge / Caras viejas y vino nuevo*, the anachronistic and fragmented structure of the novel, the use of the imperfect tense, the lack of quotes to

distinguish dialogue from narration or internal monologue, and the indecipherability of who is speaking all contribute to the portrayal of an ambiguous and unstable vision of the barrio. Nevertheless, even though the above factors create a distorted portrayal of the barrio, the Chicano reader who is familiar with the barrio experience is sure to readily identify the distinctive features of the barrio. In the above noted essay, Lomelí observes the anonymous yet familiar quality of Morales' barrio:

Morales chose a refraction of various barrios into one metaphorical barrio that is anonymous, geographically imprecise—although he indicates that it is in the general area of Los Angeles—and devoid of physical markers except for “this side” and “the other side.” What concerns Morales is an experiential, subjective barrio—a state of being rather than a place—that questions referents and the activity of referents. People live here, experience it from within, and perpetuate its vices as well as its virtues. (6)

Indeed, in representing “an experiential, subjective barrio,” Morales succeeds in creating a barrio that transcends its immediate time period, the late 1960s, and its geographical location, on the outskirts of Los Angeles. The narrative structure and style of the novel work to transform the concept of the barrio into “a state of being,” thus making time and place relatively impertinent to the representation of the barrio as complex dynamic of oppression and resistance.

Although Murray too employs social realism in her representation of the physical space of the barrio and the activity that occurs within it, her descriptions are not filtered through a distorting lens. The Chicano barrio in which her protagonists come of age, Echo Park, is a

real, geographically specific barrio.⁹⁹ In comparison to *Barrio on the Edge / Caras viejas y vino nuevo* which dramatically depicts a series of pivotal events that occur within a few critical months in the lives of two barrio boys, *Locas* seems more concerned with documenting the life experiences of two young women in the barrio and the social factors that led to their involvement in barrio gangs. In examining the narrators' relationship to the barrio in this case, gender becomes an important factor. Lucía is an illegal immigrant, while Cecilia is a first generation Chicana born of illegal immigrant parents. As mentioned in the beginning of this essay, Lucia doesn't view her present living conditions in the barrio as a significant improvement from those in Tecate, described as:

.... a poor cow town where you have to eat beans and bread for dinner every single night and we didn't have any cows, just miles of short gold-brown grass... four walls and two beds, the toilet's outside and the water's brown and muddy, but we learned to drink it all right. (143)

As coming-of-age young women in the barrio, both Cecilia's and Lucía's lives are restricted by the socioeconomic constraints of the urban barrio as well as those imposed on women in a traditional Mexican cultural context.¹⁰⁰

Because they have virtually no access to middle-class institutions, Cecilia and Lucía see themselves as bound to the barrio. Initially, within the barrio, they can exist only as disempowered wives or mothers, and in both cases the rates of domestic abuse are high.

⁹⁹ The gangs portrayed in Murray's novel are, in fact, real gangs that exist or existed in the past. The White Fence gang, for example, is included in several sociological studies of Chicano gang culture in Southern California. See James Diego Vigil (1998) and Joan Moore (1978).

¹⁰⁰ See Longauey y Vásquez, Enriqueta. "The Women of La Raza," in Salinas, Omar Luis and Lillian Faderman, Eds. *From the Barrio: A Chicano Anthology* (San Francisco: Canfield Press, 1973). Pp. 20-24.

While gang membership provides a sense of solidarity as well as some financial relief for both young women, as females, or “sheep,” in Chicano gangs, the sense of empowerment to be gained through marginal participation is ultimately limited. The limited roles available to them as coming of age women in a Chicano barrio result in their resignation and indifference, an attitude which is reflected in their description of the barrio as a cold and lonely place. As is common for some youths in the barrio, these bleak circumstances lead Lucía to pursue a leadership role in the gangbanging scenario.

To gain a greater sense of independence and empowerment, one that exceeds those prescribed to Chicanas in the barrio, Lucía adopts a masculine persona as a tough gangbanger, forms her own “clika,” and eventually becomes the first “bosswoman” of the Echo Park gang. Assuming such a role, however, is done at the cost of having to conceal her emotions and become indifferent to the casualties that are to be expected in barrio gang culture. In comparison to Morales’ novel, the role of the barrio gang in the socialization of youths in the barrio forms a central component in Murray’s narrative. Like Morales’ representation of the barrio, Murray’s representation of the physical space of the barrio is also juxtaposed with the extended internal dialogues that reflect the way in which the external space of the barrio becomes internalized and developed into a worldview. Furthermore, the documentary style of Murray’s narrative is facilitated by the linear structure of the novel in which Cecilia and Lucía alternate in telling their version of the story of the Echo Park barrio gang.

Both Morales’ and Murray’s representation of the barrio demonstrate how physical boundaries also operate as socioeconomic boundaries. The perception of the barrio in terms of inside and outside is internalized, consequently making the protagonists dismiss or fear

the possible entrance into the “outside” world. While there are many ways in which to interpret the real and perceived boundaries that separate the barrio and its inhabitants from the rest of the world, both authors also demonstrate the way in which the rules of the barrio can be seen in light of the basic human phenomena that binds people of all classes and races, such as greed, love and violence.

For many Chicanos, the experience of life in the barrio acquires a permanence in their consciousness, regardless of whether he or she succeeds in transcending the divisions within and without the barrio. Although the barrio is most immediately associated with poverty, oppression and hard life experiences, memories of the barrio often invoking feelings of nostalgia for those Chicanos who no longer physically reside in that space. Morales’ dedication, “*Para mi barrio, que esatará conmigo siempre,*” in *Barrio on the Edge / Caras viejas y vino nuevo* suggests that once experienced, the barrio becomes transformed into a concept ever-present within the psyche, ceasing to be a mere external physical space. In this context, the concept of the barrio is inclusive of diverse elements including poverty, glorified violence, drugs, camaraderie, fiestas, the good and the bad alike.

The transformation of the experience of barrio life into a concept that is consequently internalized is also illustrated in *Locas*, yet with a different slant. Although Cecilia remains within the physical boundaries of the barrio, she has consciously chosen to distance herself from the violence, drugs and delinquency associated with gangbanging life. Even though she ultimately opts for the “good life” instead of that of a gangbanger, she realizes that she “still had that gangbanging blood running out my heart, somewhere inside I have that old wild horse in me same as my brother. . . I [feel] my blood quick up like a hot boiling loca’s even if I didn’t want it to” (85). Although a person can distance himself from the barrio or the

gangbanger lifestyle, they can never leave behind the inscriptions made on their consciousness.

Indeed, *Barrio on the Edge* / *Caras viejas y vino nuevo* and *Locas* both demonstrate how the coming-of-age experience in the barrio strongly impacts one's individual sense of identity and developing consciousness. Clearly, the barrio cannot be wholly dismissed as a social wasteland. Although it may suffer the common social symptoms of poverty, it also reinforces those practices that affirm the protagonist's ethnic identity. In both novels, Spanish is presented as a dominant language and barrio characters are readily identified as Mexicans. The predominance of mestizo cultural practices in the barrio is undoubtedly secured by the consistent flow of Mexican "immigrants" into barrio communities and the barrio's relative social distance from mainstream American culture. The consequent cultural richness of the barrio, or the omnipresence of the mother culture, informs the protagonists' conflicted relationship with the barrio. The Chicano protagonist coming of age in the barrio simultaneously expresses *carnalismo*, or the desire to remain loyal to the barrio community, as well as contempt towards the self-destructive tendencies that permeate the barrio. However, as the Chicano protagonist becomes aware of the structural forces that both marginalize the barrio and its residents and promulgate internalized oppression, he develops an oppositional consciousness that addresses that conflict and enables a revision of the inside-outside binary. The desire to escape the barrio is consequently eclipsed by the desire to transcend internal and external divisions and in some cases to work towards the conceptual or actual transformation of the barrio.

Along these lines, in the study referenced earlier, Vigil acknowledges how Mexican immigrants are on one hand drawn to the cultural community of the Chicano barrio, and on

the other hand are forced to reside in these socioeconomically depressed neighborhoods as a result of limited employment and housing opportunities as well as a blatant rejection by Anglo American society. Interestingly, Vigil suggests that the formation of Chicano barrios reflects both an aspect of individual agency on the part of Mexican immigrants as well as racist segregation on the part of society. This perception, indeed, resonates with Raúl Homero Villa's theorization of the barrio as a dynamic space produced by internal barriological forces in counterpoint to external barrioizing forces in *Barrio-Logos: Space and Place in Urban Chicano Literature and Culture* (2000).¹⁰¹ In his study, Villa expands our understanding of the various modes of agency and resistance to displacement that are embedded in the cultural practices of the barrio.

The cultural character of the barrio is largely influenced by the socioeconomic factors that lead large numbers of Mexican immigrants to settle in the particular neighborhoods that accommodate their circumstances. Because familial networks play a key role in Mexican immigration patterns, it is often the case that barrio residents are not only connected by a common cultural heritage and the harsh experience of the immigration process, but also by actual familial relations. In many instances, upon arriving in the U.S., Mexican immigrants initially take up residence in or near the homes of extended family members or *paisanos* who reside in existing Chicano barrios. Therefore, a densely populated Chicano barrio for many Chicanos not only figures as the site of ethnic community, but also as a site where brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles and cousins are located.

A long-standing, dynamic and ongoing process, the (il)legal (im)migration of Mexicans to the United States of America is more often than not accompanied by racial and

¹⁰¹ Villa, Raúl Homero. *Barrio-Logos: Space, Place and Culture in Urban Chicano Literature* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000).

socioeconomic segregation. The case of the Mexican immigrant who easily transitions into middle-class America is very rare, if not non-existent. In comparing the living conditions in Tecate to those in her present situation, for example, Lucía's disillusionment is expressed when she cynically comments: "Just cause you're standing in sunny California it don't mean a thing. Run away from Mexico? You can't. Mexico's right here" (143). While Lucía's comment primarily refers to the living conditions in the barrio, it can also be viewed with respect to the ethnic population of the barrio. In many areas throughout California, barrios can be more ethnically homogenous than diverse. Under these circumstances, the barrio figures as a space where Mexicano/Chicano/mestizo cultural traditions are more likely to form a part of daily life.

The correlation between limited job opportunities and limited housing options is an issue also addressed in *Locas*. In describing the effects of Lucía's father's inability to secure employment on her home life, she recalls:

But it was different when my papi started coming home full of piss and fire like a monster cause he can't get work as a janitor, cause he can't be no house painter. 'Hey, Mexican,' the gabachos said then, 'Gotta speak some English.' And when he can't find some job, scrubbing shit from gas station toilets or picking dates down in Palm Springs, he's only making pennies. I remember feeling hungry in that shack we was living in, seeing the scared and sour look on his face. (133-134)

Notably, Lucía's observations reveal the way in which limited job opportunities for new Mexican immigrants is closely tied to the institutionalized racism. The experiences of poor

immigrant families, therefore, are distinct from those of other ethnic families across the nation. Not only are Mexican immigrants subject to systematic racism which targets people of color in general, they must also overcome a language barrier.

As is the case for most economically impoverished communities, family members and residents in general who live under these circumstances often become interdependent, relying on each other for financial and emotional support. This communal interdependency further reinforces the strong sense of cohesion which is characteristic of the Chicano barrio, Morales' *Barrio on the Edge / Caras viejas y vino nuevo* describes a more general interdependency that exists among the majority of residents in a Chicano barrio. For example, in Morales' narrative, Mateo's family is often called upon to lend support to Julián's family who lives across the street. In times of medical emergencies or instances of domestic violence, Julián's family initially turns to the family next door before calling local authorities.

For Mexican immigrants, cohabitating with extended family members and fellow countrymen in densely populated barrio can be necessary for survival; yet it simultaneously strengthens the bonds within Chicano barrio communities. In the Chicano barrio, residents share a common cultural, linguistic and class experience that is relatively disconnected from mainstream America. While it is clear that racism and economic oppression play an important part in the isolation of poor ethnic barrios, along the same lines one could argue that the predominance of ethnic traditions and values in these spaces figures as a form of resistance to mainstream American culture. The predominant use of Spanish and caló in Chicano barrios is one among many examples which testifies to the barrio's resistance to the hegemony of mainstream America. Furthermore, the fact that Morales chose to write a

narrative concerning the experience of coming of age in a Southern California barrio in Spanish in effect exemplifies resistance to the dominant language of mainstream America. Similarly, Murray chose to incorporate Spanish diction in the titles of their narratives as well as in the actual text. Because language is a critical aspect of culture, if one were to assume that the barrio experience is comprised of a common cultural and class experience, he must assume that it is also comprised of a common linguistic experience. It follows, therefore, that the narration of the experience of coming of age in a Chicano barrio perhaps necessitates the use of Spanish and caló.

Ultimately, because the Chicano barrio is relatively isolated, Chicano culture is less likely to be subsumed by dominant American culture. In other words, a densely populated Chicano barrio facilitates a greater retention of Mexican values and traditions as subsequent generations inevitably become increasingly Americanized. More so than those Chicano youth who come of age in a multiethnic, middle-class social environment, Chicano barrio youth emerge into adulthood with a clear sense of how their class and cultural experiences differentiate them from other Americans.

The experience of racism in the social spaces outside of the barrio also indirectly contributes to the internal cohesion of barrio communities. In the case of *Locas*, the Echo Park barrio figures as a symbolic prison that paradoxically offers a sense of ethnic security in contrast to the experience of racism. The singular instance in which Cecilia ventures out of the barrio onto the streets of Beverly Hills is described as a painful experience. She writes:

... I knew we weren't invisible out there. Usually white people look right through you.... But out there under the bright rich sun we were sticking out

sore... There wasn't one good reason for us to be there, so they looked at us straight on... I was trying not to feel shamed next to them. (88)

The experiences of these young Chicano protagonists shape their ethnic identities and contribute to the development of oppositional consciousness which allows them to reinterpret the boundaries which threaten to limit their life opportunities. Whether or not they leave the barrio, all protagonists arrive at a new understanding of the boundaries.

The development of oppositional consciousness in barrio narratives can be understood as a critical revision of dominant ideologies that insist on subordination, or rather a process of decolonization. Along these lines, in *From the Barrio*, Luis Omar Salinas and Lillian Faderman observe how barrio narratives demonstrate this critical revision: "It is defined by the struggle against the shame which is treacherously implanted in the Chicano child... and by a victory over that shame" (99). As the protagonists in *Barrio on the Edge / Caras viejas y vino nuevo* and *Locas* struggle to find their way in life, and question their place in the barrio community and in the larger society, they engage in a process that seeks to overcome that shame.

The "shame" identified by Salinas and Faderman is evident in the reflections of young barrio protagonists and it can also be seen as a result of ideologies that seek to legitimize the worldview of the dominant group. Indeed, a dominant social order is held in place by a number of ideologies which are nevertheless subject to change. Interestingly, the beliefs associated with predominant ideologies can simultaneously affirm some parts of one's identity and subordinate others. The experience of subordination for an individual or a collective group not born into privilege can be very detrimental. On a national level for example, one's ethnicity, gender, sexuality or religion can result in severe prosecution. More

often than not, the ideologies that underpin a given national order do not provide for mutual recognition of difference.

In cases where dominant ideologies function to subordinate and oppress a targeted group, the development of oppositional consciousness is necessary for survival. Because dominant ideologies are dominant, the internalization of beliefs which insists on one's inferiority by oppressed peoples is common. The internalization of ideologies which are detrimental to the self is the painful outcome of all forms of colonization. In order to resist or overturn the internalization of such ideologies, to de-colonize one's mind, it is necessary to develop an oppositional consciousness. In *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) Frantz Fanon speaks of the "epidermalization" of inferiority on the part of the colonized blacks in Algeria.¹⁰² In this work, Fanon alludes to the way in which de-colonization must exist within the minds of colonized peoples before the process is actually physically manifested. In other words, the development of an oppositional consciousness is a necessary precursor to any social movement that seeks to transform a dominant order. For Fanon, however, the development of an oppositional consciousness must take the shape of a radical break from dominant ideologies rather than a peaceful transition. Because decolonization involves the confrontation of two radically opposed ideologies, Fanon argues that violence is necessitated in the process of decolonization.

Fanon's assertion of the need for forceful, even violent, action in order to liberate a people calls for careful consideration. As mentioned earlier, the dominant order is held in place by ideologies that are created by and for those who are politically and economically empowered. It is unlikely that this group would willingly give up some of their power in an

¹⁰² Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York: Grove Press, 1952).

effort to create a society where power was more evenly distributed. Nonetheless, in relinquishing some of their power, the empowered sector is also relinquishing some of their agency. Here in the United States the turbulent period of the 1960s and 1970s witnessed a variety of social movements, such as the black power movement, the Chicano Movement, and women's liberation, in which underrepresented social groups demanded recognition. Although these movements are not comparable in scale to the Algerian revolution, they do demonstrate the way on which forceful assertion of oppositional consciousness is necessary to affect existing ideologies.

Similar to the way in which Fanon argues that de-colonization must occur within the minds of colonized peoples before the process can be socially actualized, the development of oppositional consciousness, as demonstrated in barrio narratives, has been fundamental in the ongoing project for social justice that is central to Chicano literature. Whereas consciousness can be understood as one's perception and experience of the world and its social relations, oppositional consciousness, in particular, can be regarded as consciousness organized in opposition to the dominant social order. Chela Sandoval's *Methodology of the Oppressed* (2000) identifies multiple modes of resistance located within the context of a history or topography of oppositional consciousness.¹⁰³ Therefore, while a subject's subordinated existence to power can function in affirmation of one's identity and agency in society, it can cause the internalization of an inferiority complex which denies one's identity and agency. In the latter case the development of an oppositional consciousness is necessary to overturn internalized ideologies which are detrimental to the subject.

Individual and collective modes of liberation begin in the form of oppositional

¹⁰³ Sandoval, Chela. *Methodology of the Oppressed* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000).

consciousness then progresses into practices of resistance. While oppositional consciousness functions to mobilize social movements and revolutions, it is also a strategy for survival employed by individuals whose identities are subordinated or marginalized by dominant ideologies. Furthermore, because one's identity is comprised of a range of factors including ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, class and religious faith, it is often necessary for a subject to enact different modes of oppositional consciousness according to the ideological space in which he or she finds himself or herself. As they seek their *raison d'être*, the young Chicano and Chicana protagonists in *Barrio on the Edge / Caras viejas y vino nuevo* and *Locas* demonstrate a process of coming into oppositional consciousness through their spatial perceptions and introspective reflections.

VI. Conclusion

From Mario Suárez's early barrio narratives of the 1940s and 1950s, to the barrio poetry of the Chicano Movement, and more recently the "post-barrio" novels of writers like Alejandro Morales and Yxta Maya Murray, we see that life in the barrio continues to figure as a central narrative focus in Chicano literature.¹⁰⁴ Within the trajectory of the Chicano literary tradition, the barrio narrative subgenre constitutes a discursive space where the experiences of working-class Chicanos and the consciousness that accompanies acts of cultural and social resistance are presented in a critical fashion. Interestingly, writers and critics have both affirmed and contested the representation of the barrio as a site of cultural authenticity. Diverse sociopolitical, historical and geographical contexts can partially explain the contrast between celebrative representations of the barrio as a "little Mexico" where Spanish-speaking Catholics share common cultural traditions and beliefs and take pride in their Mexican mestizo identity¹⁰⁵ and conflicted representations of the barrio as a space where external and internalized forms of oppression create a violent and self-

¹⁰⁴ For a discussion of the concept of the "post-barrio," see Francisco Lomelí's "Remapping the Post-Barrio: Beyond Turf and Graffiti," in Cañero, Julio and Juan F. Elices, Eds. *The Chican@ Literary Imagination: A Collection of Critical Studies by Francisco A. Lomelí* (Madrid: Biblioteca Benjamin Franklin, 2012). Pp. 183-192.

¹⁰⁵ Virgilio Elizondo's describes his boyhood barrio in San Antonio Texas in the 1940s as follows: "The whole atmosphere was Mexican and there were no doubts in our minds about the pride of being Mexican. Radio stations provided us with good Mexican music and the local Mexican theaters kept us in contact with the dances, folklore, romance and daily life of Mexico" (12). This passage resonates with Mario Suárez and Daniel Venegas' narrative conceptions of the distinct cultural space of Chicano barrios in the early decades of the twentieth century. Elizondo, Virgilio. *The Future is Mestizo: Life Where Cultures Meet* (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2000).

destructive environment.

As autobiographical experiences and social realism often inform representations of the barrio, Chicano and Chicana writers more accurately present a complex and dimensional depiction of life in the barrio that incorporates both positive and negative attributes. Suárez's short stories present a barrio that is visibly marked by the poverty of economic oppression, yet the rich Mexican identity and vibrant mestizo practices located within the barrio are affirmed in such a way that it stands in resistance to cultural and social oppression. Accounts of a local boycott against racist management, the dominant use of Spanish and Caló, the practice of Mexicanized Catholicism and the informal networks of community interdependence all represent forms of resistance that are fueled by oppositional consciousness. These acts demonstrate a form of agency in the barrio that is otherwise denied in a society that seeks to marginalize working-class Chicanos. In Suárez's stories, the barrio is ultimately a cultural home and place of healing for humble Chicanos who share a mestizo worldview.

In contrast, Morales' *Barrio on the Edge / Caras viejas y vino nuevo* and Murray's *Locas* present the barrio as a dystopic space where options for coming-of-age youth are almost non-existent. While the protagonists of these novels carry the language and cultural practices of Mexican tradition, they also struggle against the substance abuse and criminal delinquency that accompanies gang life in the barrio. Rather than regarding the barrio as a home, the protagonists in these barrio narratives are driven to seek an escape from the self-destructive dimension of barrio life. It is important to recognize, however, that such violence in the barrio is intrinsically tied to the various forms of displacement and oppression imposed on low-income barrio communities by external political and socioeconomic forces.

In this respect, the desire to escape the violence of the barrio parallels a desire to escape various forms of external and internalized oppression. In reflecting critically on the cultural and social dynamics within and without the barrio, these protagonists demonstrate the development of a consciousness that seeks personal and social liberation.

The barrio narratives of the Chicano Movement, specifically Alurista's poetry and Miguel Méndez's *Tata Casehua*, exemplify how Indigenismo functioned as a form of social resistance and oppositional consciousness. These narratives explicitly engage in a discourse that intends to create a critical awareness of the historical and sociopolitical forces that perpetuate the socioeconomic and cultural marginalization of indigenous and mestizo communities, as well as other non-conforming communities. The struggles of Chicanos in the 1960s and 1970s were positioned within a larger context of indigenous resistance in the past several centuries. Using a shared cultural and class identity as the base for coalition, the barrio narratives of the Chicano Movement have tactically unified and mobilized Chicano communities that had previously existed in relative isolation from one another, resulting in large-scale resistance to cultural and socioeconomic oppression. Beyond documenting political resistance to institutionalized oppression and giving rise to voices that spoke to oppressive structures reproduced within the barrio as well the psychological violence of internalized oppression, the barrio narratives of the Chicano Movement also introduced innovative and experimental narrative techniques that reflected a mestizo identity and worldview.

Barrio narratives are essentially "narratives of place" where the storyline is used to develop specific thematic features that collectively approximate a landscape portrait of a unique cultural community. In varying degrees and in accordance with the particular lens

employed by individual Chicano and Chicana writers, the range of barrio narratives discussed in this study demonstrate how shared cultural history, the impetus towards social justice, and mestizo identity and consciousness are, indeed, primary thematic features that define the barrio narrative. The barrio narratives discussed in this study present characters that are unmistakably working-class Mexicans, yet they exist within a larger multicultural context where cultural mestizaje is dynamic and ongoing. In addition, the encounter with the social world “outside” of the confines of the space of the barrio, as represented through educational institutions and the work place, prompt the characters to engage in an introspective critical reflection that rediscovers the internal heterogeneity of the mestizo identity and worldview. This awareness is simultaneously liberating on a personal level and conducive towards coalitions that cross the divisions of race, class gender and sexuality. Along these lines, Luis Valdez’s *Dark Root of a Scream* and Gloria Anzaldúa’s transgeneric writings illustrate how Indigenismo in barrio narratives inspires organic epistemologies that offer new possibilities for resistance to oppressive paradigms.

Chicano barrio narratives provide a voice and a discursive space for the experiences of a sector of the Chicano community that continues to experience multiple forms of economic and social displacement- and to respond to that displacement with various strategies of resistance. Resistance can take the form of explicit critiques of institutionalized oppression and radical demands for revision and change, or it can appear subtly as a quiet refusal to engage with social norms that are oppressive in nature, or even in the simple will to survive. Such strategies of resistance in barrio narratives can be observed both on a thematic level as well as on an ideological level. Furthermore, in demonstrating resistance to those dominant social structures that seek to subordinate and marginalize working-class Chicanos, barrio

narratives provide a blueprint for the development of oppositional consciousness.

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