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Labor, Love, and Murder in the Americas:  
Decolonizing the Human in Chicana/o Literature

By

Marcelle Maese Cohen

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the  
requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

English

in the

Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Professor Marcial González, Chair

Professor Colleen Lye

Professor Laura E. Pérez

Spring 2013

Labor, Love, and Murder in the Americas:  
Decolonizing the Human in Chicana/o Literature

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By

Marcelle Maese Cohen

## Abstract

### Labor, Love, and Murder in the Americas: Decolonizing the Human in Chicana/o Literature

By

Marcelle Maese Cohen

Doctor of Philosophy in English

University of California, Berkeley

Professor Marcial González, Chair

My dissertation locates Paulo Freire's theory of *conscientização* within a genealogy of critical theory of the Americas. In contrast to the skepticism of poststructuralist theory, Freire offers an anti-skeptical view of language and provides a method for reading the decolonial hermeneutics contained in the works of the authors I study, each of which, in different ways, teaches us to read as listeners. In particular, I focus on the political significance of reading for what I term the decolonial literary imagination (Chapter 1), and the relation between the novel form and confession (Chapters 2 and 3). With this project, I hope to contribute to the emerging fields of Transnational American Studies and (Human Rights) Law and Literature by formulating a hermeneutical model that considers the ways in which queer of color and feminist conceptions of intersectionality have yet to be incorporated into the study of the novel form.

By coupling María Lugones' theory of pilgrimage (or world-traveling) with Kimberlé Crenshaw's Critical Race Studies, I foreground intersectionality as a shared method for both legal and literary analysis. For Crenshaw and Lugones, the "civil identities" created or legitimated by either the nation-state or a traditional civil rights discourse are limiting insofar as they cannot account for the subject's multiple experiences of oppression. My formal reading of John Rechy's *City of Night* (1963) and Alicia Gaspar de Alba's *Desert Blood: The Juárez Murders* (2005) helps me to show that the novel can embody a similar critique. In this way, I build on what Marcial González names the "politics of form" insofar as my dissertation argues that it is the form of the novel, rather than exclusively the characters or the identity of the author, that teaches us a decolonizing history and ethics.

In my first chapter, "The Decolonial Literary Imagination: *Conscientização* and a Marxist 'politics of form,'" I lay out the theoretical framework for my dissertation by providing a comparative study of Emma Pérez's decolonial feminist praxis of "sitio y lengua" and Paulo Freire's dialogic *conscientização*. This attention to literary and social form, moreover, expands Pérez's decolonial imaginary for literary purposes and coincides with what I term the (w)holistic imperative of decolonial feminist thought. In the two long chapters that follow, I seek to establish the relation between American coloniality and the novel form. In Chapter 2,

“‘American’ Child of Migrants: Confession and the Sexual Outlaw’s Pilgrimage in John Rechy’s *City of Night*,” I argue that the decolonial literary imagination operates within Rechy’s critical restructuring of the relationship between (non)waged-labor, liturgical temporality, and the logic of entrapment at work in legal, migrant, and sexual confession. In contrast to the polemics of a queer (literary) theory that fails to consider intersecting forms of oppression, I claim that the pilgrimage structure of Rechy’s novel extends the problematic of narrating migration beyond the particular Mexican American history of the narrator’s family to become the story of America itself. In chapter three, “Undoing the Value of Rape: A Hermeneutics for Redirecting the Necrophilic Gaze from *Maquiladora Murders* to Life in Juárez,” my reading of representations of femicide understands rape within a theory of sovereign power that remaps Juárez as a legible terrain of material and symbolic struggle. My comparative reading of Gaspar de Alba’s *Desert Blood* and Gregory Nava’s film, *Bordertown* (2007) historicizes the changing nature of transnational feminist organizing in general, and, more specifically, recasts this dynamic history by considering the emergence of the human rights protagonist within postcolonial studies and the Chicana/o detective novel. Furthermore, my reading of the extra-legal project of queer *familia* in *Desert Blood* envisions a decolonial feminist pedagogy for undoing the coloniality of gender operating in contemporary forms of Eurocentric conceptions of the human.

*Para mis padres*

*Gerard Eliauh Cohen*

*y*

*Armida Maese*

*Para*

*Alfred Arteaga (1950-2008)*

*y*

*Lindon Barrett (1961-2008)*

*Para Juárez*

*Ni una más. Ni uno menos.*

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I could not have asked for a better dissertation committee. Marcial González went above and beyond what was required from him as an advisor. His brilliance and commitment to a radical politics is unquestionable. While I expected this much after taking his courses and working as his graduate student instructor and researcher, I am still surprised by, and eternally grateful for, the time he spent teaching me how to improve my writing. Colleen Lye consistently modeled how to balance being a cutting-edge scholar, mindful teacher, and advocate for graduate students. She took an interest in me from the time I visited campus for the prospective weekend, and looked out for me every step of the way. Laura E. Pérez always managed to shift this incredible undertaking of academic knowledge toward the mindbodyspirit. Thank you for encouraging and being a part of our FlorYCantos and decolonizing encuentros.

I also thank Nelson Maldonado-Torres and Paola Bachetta for always welcoming my questions and offering solutions through their commitment to coalition building. Vicki Ruiz has been a source of kindness and wisdom for the past twelve years of my life. I am blessed to have found kindred spirits in graduate students I admire—Xamuel Bañales, Ari Dimitrou, Nilofar Gardezi, Tala Khanmalek, Alejandro Perez, Robert Reyes, and Marisol Silva. I look forward to teaching your books in the future. Peter Skafish persuaded me to join the editorial board of *qui parle*, and, within my first month, convinced me I was ready to put together a special issue on decolonial feminisms. Thank you Peter for believing in me, and for your friendship. My last year of graduate school would not have been as meaningful without students like Mariel Estrada and Wendy Pacheco. During times when I thought the answer was to care less, Mariel and Wendy gave me the strength to find dignity and healing, and to care even more.

There are no words to describe what the Chicana/o Latina/o Student Development Center means to me. I walked into the office a couple of days ago, and Lupe Gallegos said, “*Gente*, we have a Ph.D. here!” Everyone started clapping! Thank you to Lupe, and everyone who continues to fight for academic spaces created by the Third World Liberation Front. As a first-generation college student, I am grateful for the generous support of the Chancellor’s Diversity Fellowship (2004-2007), the Dean’s Normative Time Fellowship (2009-2010), and the Ford Dissertation Fellowship (2011-12). I am especially thankful to have attended the Conference of Ford Fellows these past two years where I was received with open arms and given invaluable advice. I am also honored to have been part of the first year cohort of graduate mentors for Getting Into Graduate Schools (GIGS), organized by Carla Trujillo.

My homegirls—Lucy Azurdia and Linda Ornelas—have loved me, made me laugh, taken me dancing, and treated me to countless meals for the past thirteen years. You were right all along: I finished my Ph.D. and now I’m coming back home. Living with a xicana feminist on the job market can’t be easy! I offer my heartfelt *cariño* to Tsosie Reyhner for loving me through the daily ups and downs of this past year, and for being my best friend. My parents, Gerard and Armida, my brothers and their partners, Carlos and Marlene, and Gerard and Crystal, and my nephew and niece, Carlos and Alex, continue to teach me how to seek happiness in being proud of how I live and where I come from.

**Marcelle Maese Cohen**  
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### **Academic Position**

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**2013-present**                      **Assistant Professor**  
**Department of English**  
**University of San Diego**

### **Education**

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**PhD**                                      **University of California, Berkeley (2013)**  
**Department of English**  
Dissertation Committee: Marcial González (Advisor), Colleen Lye,  
Laura E. Pérez

**M.A.**                                      **University of California, Berkeley (2006)**  
**Department of English**  
M.A. Committee: Jose Saldívar (Advisor), Stephen Best, Marcial  
González, Colleen Lye, Jose Rabasa

**M.A.**                                      **University of California, Irvine (2004)**  
**Comparative Latin American Literature and Critical Theory**  
**Designated Emphasis: Women's, Gender, and Sexuality**  
M.A. Committee: Juan Bruce-Novoa (Advisor), Lyndon Barrett,  
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**B.A.**                                      **University of California, Berkeley (1998)**  
**English and Spanish**

### **Publications**

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“Inheriting the American Nightmare: Decolonial Feminisms, Form, and Pilgrimage in John Rechy’s *City of Night*.” *Arizona Quarterly* (forthcoming)

“Introduction: Toward Planetary Decolonial Feminisms.” *qui parle* 18.2 Spring/Summer 2010

Paola Bacchetta. “Decolonial Praxis: Enabling Intranational and Queer Coalitional Building; An Interview with Marcelle Maese-Cohen.” *qui parle* 18.2 Spring/Summer 2010

“Black Alliance for Just Immigration” *Bay Immigrant Rights Coalition* March-April 2008  
<http://www.immigrantrights.org/memberhighlight.asp>

“Filipinos for Affirmative Action” *Bay Immigrant Rights Coalition* Jan 2008  
<http://www.immigrantrights.org/memberhighlight-faa.asp>

“Chinese for Affirmative Action” *Bay Immigrant Rights Coalition* Dec 2007  
<http://www.immigrantrights.org/memberhighlight-caa.asp>

“Narika” *Bay Immigrant Rights Coalition* Feb2008  
<http://www.immigrantrights.org/memberhighlight-narika.asp>

“Literature” IN: *Latinas in the United States: A Historical Encyclopedia*. Vicki L. Ruiz and Virginia Sánchez Kroll, eds. (Indiana University Press, 2006)

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### **Academic Honors and Fellowships**

Ford Dissertation Fellowship 2011-12  
UC Dissertation Year Fellowship 2011-12 (Declined)  
Normative Time 2008-2009 (UC Berkeley)  
Chancellor’s Diversity Fellowship 2004-2007 (UC Berkeley)  
Faculty Mentor Award Fellowship: 2002-2003 (UC Irvine)  
Cota Robles Diversity Fellowship: 2000-2002 (UC Irvine)

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### **Professional and Community Organizations**

Bay Area Immigrant Rights Coalition  
Caribbean Philosophical Association (CPA)  
Chicana Latino Student Development Center (Graduate Intern), UC Berkeley  
Decolonial Feminisms Project, UC Berkeley  
English Graduate Association (Representative for Equity and Inclusion), UC Berkeley  
Modern Language Association (MLA)  
Mujeres Activas en Letras y Cambio Social (MALCS)  
National Association for Chicana Chicano Studies (NACCS)  
Stanford Transamerican Working Group, Stanford University  
Xican@ Culture Working Group (founder), UC Berkeley

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### **Selected Scholarly Presentations**

“The Decolonial Literary Imagination: *Conscientização* and (W)holistic Form.” Mapping the Futures of U.S. Latina/o Literatures March 2013.

“Undoing the Ethnic Analogy: A Queer and Migrant Literary History of the City.” Guest Lecturer for American Cultures Course on Repression and Resistance October 2012.

“Transnational Feminisms and the Unheard Confession of Sergio Barraza: Redirecting the Necrophilic Gaze from *Bordertown* Rape to Life in Juárez.” Modern Language Association January 2012.

“Decolonial Feminist Praxis as Legal and Literary Constellation.” Conference of Ford Fellows October 2011.

“Reading as Listening: Antigenocidal Praxis and Writing *la vida Xican@*.” Mujeres Activas en Letras y Cambio Social Summer Institute 2011.

“‘American’ Child of Migrants: Confession and John Rechy’s *City of Night*.” Futures of American Studies Summer Institute 2011.

“Looking with María Lugones and W.E.B Du Bois: Historicizing U.S. Transamerican ‘World’-Traveling.” UC Berkeley Transamerican Working Group April 2011.

“Decolonizing Legal Rights and Civil Identities: The Sexual Outlaw’s Pilgrimage.” Critical Race Studies Symposium UCLA April 2011.

“Gloria Anzaldúa’s Spiritual Activism: ‘A third world lesbian feminist with Marxist and mystic leanings.’” Cultural Studies Association Conference 2010.

“Revisiting US Third World/Queer Feminisms.” Decolonizing the University: Fulfilling the Dream of a Third World College 2010.

“Decolonial Science of the Human and Sorrow in *Souls of Black Folk*.” Caribbean Philosophical Association 2009.

“*But the body is smart*”—Teaching and Learning Decolonial Writing/ Living/ Knowledges.” El Mundo Zurdo: First International Conference on the Work and Life of Gloria Anzaldúa 2009.

“Introducing Xican@ Love: Artist-Activist-Academic Carla Trujillo.” Encuentro Xican@ 2009 .

“Anti-Disciplinarity, Ethnic Studies, Grammar, and Literary Form: Pedagogical Notes on Teaching Composition and ‘Ethnic’ Literatures.” Sixth Annual Conference of Ethnic Studies 2008.

“The ‘Old’ and ‘Older’ Civil Rights Movement: Representations of Law in Ruiz de Burton and Acosta.” American Comparative Literature Association. 2007.

“The Labor of Xicana Aesthetics in Gaspar de Alba’s *Desert Blood: The Juárez Murders*.” National Association for Chicana Chicano Studies 2007.

“What is Chicana Enlightenment? Cherrie Moraga’s ‘Art of Not Being [Mothered] Quite So Much’ in *A Mexican Medea: the Hungry Woman*.” Women and Power 2003.

## **Teaching Experience**

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### **U.S. Latina/o Literature and Culture**

#### **English Reading & Composition; Spring 2013; UC Berkeley**

This course taught the various stages of the research process and concluded with a mini-conference where students presented their work to the class before submitting the final research paper. In-class presentations, peer-editing, and group office hours created a collaborative writing process and a shared responsibility for the reading. By beginning with an introduction to queer of color and feminist theories of intersectionality, the reading situated Chican@/Latin@ Literature and Culture within a study of the interlocked and contested terrains of race, labor, sexuality, and nation. In particular, this framework situated representations of indigeneity and Afro-Latinidad

in relation to spirituality, discourses of social justice, and the (post)colonial history of the Dominican Republic, Mexico, and Puerto Rico.

### **Xican@ Art, Literature, and Feminisms**

#### **English Reading & Composition; Fall 2010-2011; UC Berkeley**

This course taught the practice of close-reading for the effects of word choice, form, tone, figurative language, imagery, rhythm, humor, and *mise-en-scène*, and worked across a variety of xican@ artistic forms (autobiography, novel, poetry, film, visual arts, popular culture, and political essay). Taking xican@ aesthetics and feminisms as a nexus for understanding the social construction and intersections of class, race, gender, and sexuality, this class interrogated processes of representation and reification, or what cultural studies scholar Stuart Hall names the “politics of the image.”

### **Decolonial Epistemologies or Self-Reflexive Composition**

#### **English Reading & Composition; Fall 2009-Spring 2010; UC Berkeley**

By focusing on composition as a process of rewriting and rethinking that is always in relation to the social life of the author and the social life of language itself, this class undertook a self-reflexive study of the university as site for the intimate production of knowledge and power. We considered the following presupposition: there is no global social justice without global cognitive justice.

### **Bay Area Social Movements and Literatures**

#### **English Reading & Composition; Spring and Summer 2008; UC Berkeley**

In addition to teaching grammar, composition, reading comprehension, and research skills, this course introduced students to Bay Area social movements and artists and the literatures they are associated with (e.g. AIM, LGBT, The Black Panthers, The Third World Strike or Ethnic Studies, The Free Speech Movement, the Beat Generation, Gonzo journalism, Poetry for the People, etc.) Students were encouraged to research and interview community and campus organizations and artists.

### **English 135C American Cultures: Literatures of Repression and Resistance**

#### **Professor Marcial González; Fall 2007; UC Berkeley**

Taught weekly discussion section on comparative ethnic literatures with a focus on the relationship between literary form and dereification.

### **Humanities Out There (HOT)**

#### **Santa Ana, CA Unified School District & UC Irvine; Fall 2003- Spring 2004**

Through HOT, I recruited and trained undergraduate students for leading small group discussions in eighth grade Language Arts classrooms. I produced a curriculum handbook for teaching state education standards and U.S. Western Expansion through an Ethnic Studies framework.

## **Work Experience**

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### **Berkeley Art Museum (1/08-6/08)**

#### **Museum Docent**

Enrique Chagoya Exhibit *Borderlandia*

### **UCI Department of Planning Policy and Design (7/03-9/03)**

#### **Community Outreach Partnership Center (COPC)**

For COPC, my research helped develop curriculum for Parent Leadership Workshops and college mentoring for high school students, as well as the “Changing Face of Orange County Tour” for incoming graduate students in the Urban Planning program. I also did extensive census research to map changes in population, income, housing, and education, and visited local government offices for interviews regarding the relationship between Vietnamese and Latino communities and resources on public policy.

### **UCLA LABOR CENTER (7/01-12/01)**

#### **Research Assistant and Labor Organizer**

Through the UCLA Labor Center and Service Employee International Union (SEIU Local 1877), I worked on the Justice for Janitors campaign as a research assistant and labor organizer. In addition to researching local businesses and the intersections between city, state, and national legislation, I conducted work site and house visits, helped create bilingual curriculum for popular education, and interviewed women organizers for the center’s archives.

## **Languages**

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Spanish (Native Speaker)

French (Reading)

**INTRODUCTION**  
**Reclaiming Intersectionality:**  
**Decolonial Feminist Thought and**  
**The Chicana/o Novel**

The word, together with love and dignity, is what makes us human beings.  
--Subcomandante Marcos

My dissertation invokes a long history of scholarship on decolonization that has theorized the relation between language, love, and the human.<sup>1</sup> My political affinities, historical moment, and disciplinary locations have cohered around the genealogical privileging of the following critical theorists: Gloria Anzaldúa, Ana Castillo, Frantz Fanon, Paulo Freire, Bell Hooks, Audre Lorde, Cherríe Moraga, María Lugones, and Chela Sandoval. Placing my own project within the intellectual and critical paradigms that have been formulated by this cohort of critical thinkers, I argue that what distinguishes a U.S. feminist of color humanism is an intersectional method for analyzing multiple forms of oppression that ultimately historicizes heterosexism as a colonial imposition. Drawing on this decolonial feminist tradition, I bring intersectionality to bear on the discipline of literary studies by offering a preliminary framework for interrogating the ways in which the study of the novel form can underwrite the project of historicizing the coloniality of gender.

While my training in Ethnic Studies and African American Literature has informed my investment in developing a decolonial feminist literary praxis, my dissertation defines what I term the decolonial literary imagination (Chapter One) in relation to the work of two queer, xican@ novelists from El Paso, Texas: John Rechy (Chapter Two) and Alicia Gaspar de Alba (Chapter Three). These chapters, the last two in particular, address the following question: How can a study limited to Chicana/o literature, and the queer El Paso novel specifically, offer insight into the planetary project of a decolonizing humanisms? In order to answer this question, my review of the term “coloniality of power,” followed by a brief summary of the formal relation between the novel and the human, will demonstrate the ways in which an intersectional methodology for reading literature can displace the primacy (and critical impasse) of understanding discourses of the human in terms of the opposition between, or reconciliation of, the particular and the universal.

**I. Reclaiming Intersectionality in the “coloniality of power” and “Can the Subaltern Speak?”**

---

Xican@ humanisms can best be understood as moving between the reified time-spaces of U.S and Third World, and beyond the reification of our globe toward a version of what Gayatri Spivak has named planetarity. In what follows, I place the “post” and the “de” colonial in conversation by foregrounding intersectionality as a shared method for the unfinished project of transnational feminisms and a xican@ conception of the human. In this way, I argue that

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<sup>1</sup> An earlier version of a section of this introduction was previously published in Marcelle Maese-Cohen, “Introduction: Toward Planetary Decolonial Feminisms,” *qui parle: Critical Humanities and Social Sciences* 18.2 (Spring/Summer 2010): 3-27.

intersectionality is a method for reading across disciplinary locations, a method I enact throughout my dissertation. To this end, I provide a comparative reading of two central texts for postcolonial and decolonial feminisms that have provoked a significant response from Chicana/o literary criticism, Spivak's "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1988) and Lugones' "Heterosexualism and the Colonial/ Modern Gender System" (2007).

### **María Lugones' Critique of Anibal Quijano: Historicizing the "light" and "dark" Side of the Coloniality of Labor**

In "Heterosexualism and the Colonial/ Modern Gender System," Lugones acknowledges the significant emergence of the modern/colonial group (hereafter "M/C group"), an interdisciplinary and international cohort of primarily (U.S.) Latin American scholars.<sup>2</sup> While it is important not to homogenize the various thinkers and projects that have contributed to the M/C group, it is clear that a serious engagement with Anibal Quijano's theory of the coloniality of power informs each of their projects. This engagement is one of the unifying terms that brings them together under the umbrella term M/C. Into this central concept Lugones interjects a more nuanced critique of gender. While Lugones frames her analysis through a direct engagement with Quijano, her contributions are intended for the M/C group as a whole; this is signaled by the addendum of *gender* in her phrase "colonial/modern gender system."

As Lugones explains, it is "politically important that many who have taken the coloniality of power seriously have tended to naturalize gender" (187). While a thorough review is beyond the scope of this introduction, I will provide a brief summary Quijano's theorization of the "coloniality of power" (which takes place, most notably, in his article "Coloniality of Power, Latin America, and Eurocentrism") and then discuss Lugones' critique of it; this will allow me to show the full stakes of a decolonial feminist understanding of the gendered character of coloniality.

Walter Dignolo's oft-quoted statement that "there is no modernity without coloniality" captures what is perhaps the most definitive claim made by the M/C group: coloniality is constitutive of modernity and not derivative of or accidental to it (162). Implicit in this claim is a critique of the Eurocentric Marxist perspective that locates the genesis and particularities of capitalist modernity in the Industrial Revolution and philosophies of the late eighteenth century, thereby ignoring what Enrique Dussel refers to as "the underside of modernity" or "first modernity" that is contemporary with the 1492 conquest of the Americas. The failure to recognize this underside of modernity leads to the view that global capitalism, and its corresponding epistemes and cultures, are autochthonous phenomena that are originally internal to Europe and that then spread outward from it in a unidirectional movement and toward unexplored primitive economies and people, leaving no space or mind untouched, no outside. Dussel's concept of *transmodernity* rejects this closed-system and fatalistic teleology and the

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<sup>2</sup> For a review of the genealogy, participants, and main areas of concern for the M/C group see Santiago Castro-Gómez and Ramón Grosfoguel, eds., *El giro decolonial: Reflexiones para una diversidad epistémica más allá del capitalismo global* (Bogotá: Siglo del Hombre Editores, 2007); Arturo Escobar, "Worlds and Knowledges Otherwise: The Latin American Modernity/ Coloniality Research Program," in "Globalization and the Decolonial Option," special issue, *Cultural Studies* 21, no. 2–3 (March/May 2007): 179–210; Damián Pachón Soto, "Nueva perspectiva filosófica en América Latina: El group Modernidad/colonialidad," *Percipencias* 63 (August 2007).



category of postmodernism to which it gives credence. Instead, it locates the constitutive underside of modernity as the grounds from which to think an “ethics of liberation.”

Quijano makes three broad claims about the concept of transmodernity that are integral to decolonial feminist thought. First, he states that it leaves out the large extent to which “precapitalist” and “premodern” colonial economic practices generated and were in fact contemporaneous with the capitalist modernity ordinarily thought to follow them. As he explains,

[f]rom the Eurocentric point of view, reciprocity, slavery, and independent commodity production are all perceived as a historical sequence prior to commodification of the labor force. They are precapital. They are [supposedly] not only different but radically incompatible with capital. The fact [however] is America didn't emerge in a linear historical sequence. (551)

Instead, he argues, the United States and Europe alike arose as much through their reliance on patron-client relations, debt peonage, the subjugation of colonized workers, and outright slavery in their colonies as through the “commodification of the labor force” that resulted in the system of waged labor thought to be proper to industrial capitalism. Moreover, he adds, many of these “improper” modes of labor occurred concurrently with the commodified industrial labor that is seen as marking the beginning of industrial capitalism. One of the primary consequences of the Eurocentric occlusion of this coexistence of the “capitalist” and the “precapitalist” in modernity is that colonialism can appear to be premodern and therefore in the past—no longer relevant, that is, as a category for analyzing the persistence in the contemporary world of systems formed by ostensibly incompatible types of labor and the imperial mode of power they support.

Second, Quijano details the economic, epistemic, and agential consequences of the M/C group's argument for a shift in the genealogy of modern capitalism from eighteenth-century Northern Europe to the fifteenth-century encounter with people who were forced into the subhuman identities of “Black” and “Indian”: a theory of power that highlights the absolute co-production and contemporaneousness of race, labor, and gender. Quijano claims that the modern conception of race—the biological codification of differences between peoples and genders—was integral to the colonization of the Americas because the heterogeneous structure of labor control that was required for it relied on such distinctions. Since “the historical process of the constitution of America” integrally involved, again, “forms of labor control includ[ing] slavery, serfdom, petty-commodity production, reciprocity, and wages” and since “each form of labor control was no mere extension of its historical antecedent,” therefore

each one of them was also articulated to capital and its market. . . . [A]ll forms of labor as subordinated points of a totality belonged to the model of power, in spite of their heterogeneous specific traits. (535)

Nonetheless, the various forms of labor were hierarchized in terms of race. In fact, “[f]rom the very beginning of the colonization of the Americas, Europeans associated nonpaid or nonwaged labor with inferior races” (538), which is to say that racial categories simultaneously issued from and reinforced the heterogeneity of the colonial division of labor in precise ways. The consequence that Quijano underscores is that

the control of a specific form of labor could be, at the same time, the control of a specific group of dominated people. A new technology of domination/exploitation, in this case race/labor, was articulated in such a way that the two elements appeared naturally associated. . . . [T]his strategy has been exceptionally successful. (537)

In other words, raced identities always functioned to secure different forms of labor for capitalism, and their elaboration is therefore neither separable from the latter's rise as a "modern" system nor anterior to its "advanced" phases.

Third, Quijano identifies how the coloniality of power continues in the present. In the case of Latin America (and in contrast to the United States), the persistence of coloniality after nineteenth-century independence is in part due to the ways in which the entrenchment of racial categories prevented nationalist elites from "developing their social interests in the same direction as those of their peers, that is, converting commercial capital (profits produced either by slavery, serfdom, or reciprocity) into industrial capital" since that would have involved "liberating American Indian serfs and black slaves and making them waged laborers" (566). Faced with the contradictions of commercial and industrial capital that disallowed the economic integration of such negatively racialized subjects associated with "premodern" modes of production, the post-independence projects of creating national cohesion claimed the *cultural* integration of these (sub)citizens through the ideology of *mestizaje*, which celebrated the multicultural, egalitarian fusion of the best of the New and Old World as the defining, anti-European character of Latin American postcolonialism.

Although pro-indigenous and pro-black on the surface, *mestizaje*, or more precisely, as Laura Pérez clarifies, "Euromestizaje" "theories of 'racial' or ethnic and cultural hybridity" maintained "European and Euro-American cultural and physical standards as measuring sticks of progress and beauty," intelligence, and cultural development (Pérez, 128). The postcolonial nation-state could continue denying people of color access to economic, land, and legal rights while pointing to the equality supposedly guaranteed by *mestizaje*. European—now Euromestizo—masculine sociopolitical, economic, aesthetic, and cognitive superiority was once again naturalized as the apex of modernity and humanity.

With the basic outline of Quijano's theory of the coloniality of power now sketched, I now turn to Lugones' criticism of it. For her, Quijano convincingly describes the ways in which the coloniality of power, the system of labor control that, with the "discovery" of the Americas, was the first to cover "the entire planet's population" by geographically differentiating and reserving nonwaged labor for particular groups of people through processes of gender and racialization, persists because of its ability to cohere across the basic areas of all human existence: sexual access, collective authority, labor, intersubjectivity, and the production of knowledge. Nevertheless, his conceptualization of coloniality has yet, she argues, to enter into dialogue with U.S. queer women of color theories of intersectionality, and this despite their similarities. Lugones makes clear her interest in understanding them in terms of each other when she writes that "I do not believe any solidarity or homoerotic loving is possible among females who affirm the colonial/ modern gender system and the coloniality of power" (188) and then continues, "I am also interested in investigating the intersection of race, class, gender and sexuality in a way that enables me to understand the indifference that men, but more important to our struggles, men who have been racialized as inferior, exhibit to the systematic violence inflicted upon women of color" (188). She goes on to argue that Quijano's notion of the structural axis, that is, the understanding of power as a structure in which "the element that

serves as an axis becomes constitutive of and constituted by all the forms of power take with respect to control over that particular domain of human existence” is a “good ground from within which” to “place ourselves in a position to call each other to reject this gender system as we perform a transformation of communal relations” (189). However, while Quijano’s logic of structural axis provides an important framework for thinking the intermeshed qualities of race and gender, Lugones claims that his narrow understanding of gender forecloses a historicized view of patriarchy and a debiologized account of sexuality.

In order to give an account of how “[c]olonialism did not impose precolonial, European gender arrangements on the colonized” but rather “imposed a new gender system that created very different arrangements for colonized males and females than for white bourgeois colonizers,” (186) Lugones draws on the work of U.S. queer, Native, Asian, and black theories of sexuality. In contrast to Quijano’s claim that the “[t]he older principle—gender or intersexual domination—was encroached upon by race” (353), Lugones writes:

Gender does not need to organize social arrangements, including social sexual arrangements. But gender arrangements need not be either heterosexual or patriarchal. They need not be, that is, as a matter of history. Understanding these features of the organization of gender in the modern/colonial gender system—the biological dimorphism, the patriarchal and heterosexual organization of relations—is crucial to an understanding of the different gender arrangements along “racial lines.” Biological dimorphism, heterosexualism, and patriarchy are all characteristic of what I call the light side of the colonial/modern organization of gender. Hegemonically, these are written large over the meaning of gender. Quijano seems unaware of his accepting this hegemonic meaning of gender. (190)

For Lugones, the problem with Quijano’s account of gender, which is relegated to the basic sphere of human existence cited above as “sexual access,” is that it “takes for granted that the dispute over sex is a dispute among men, about men’s control of resources which are thought to be female. Men do not seem understood as the resources in sexual encounters. Women are not thought to be disputing for control over sexual access. The differences are thought of in terms of how society reads biology” (194). In contrast to his emphasis on the *invention* of race, “the color of one’s skin, the shape of one’s eyes and hair do not have any relation to the biological,” Quijano “understands sex as biological attributes that become elaborated as social categories” (193). Hence, his conceptualization of sex “seems unproblematically biological” (193).

The consequence of Quijano’s biologization of gender is that he cannot historicize what Lugones identifies as the “light” and “dark” side of the colonial/modern organization of gender, which produces “different gender arrangements along ‘racial lines’” through a gendering-ungendering nexus.<sup>3</sup> Because Quijano does not recognize the processes by which gendered subjects on the “light” side of coloniality/modernity are co-produced in relation to the ungendering of subjects positioned on the “dark” or negatively racialized side, he cannot register masculinities as “resources in sexual encounters”; he also cannot register the female homosocial dispute over sexual access. Lugones stresses the violent co-production of each of these subjects.

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<sup>3</sup> I take the word “ungendering” from Hortense Spillers, “Mama’sBaby, Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book,” *Black, White, and in Color: Essays on American Literature and Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003, 227–300).

They are produced in an ungendering-gendering process in which a “light” femininity is characterized as private, physically weak, sexually passive, as opposed to women of color who have been dehumanized through the absence of these characteristics. To be less than human is tantamount to being without gender, an animal-like entity defined by hypersexuality and the ability to perform the most difficult labor. Most importantly, however, Lugones draws attention to the very important distinction between the gendering-ungendering nexus that, as stated above, is a matter of colonial history, and precolonial *nongendered* cosmologies that, though not without hierarchical relations of power and violence, *did not* share the Western preoccupation with “biological dimorphism, heterosexualism, and patriarchy.”

Citing Oyéronke Oyewùmi’s study of Yoruba society and Paula Gunn Allen’s study of Native America, Lugones specifies the processes by which the colonial *invention* of gender operated. In *The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses*, Oyewùmi argues against the “validity of patriarchy as a valid transcultural category,” not by opposing it to matriarchal sociability but by demonstrating that “gender was not an organizing principle in Yoruba society prior to colonization” (196). Oyewùmi shows ways in which researchers, unable to think outside a binary or hierarchical understanding of gender, mistakenly translate the “Yoruba categories *obinrin* and *okunrin* as ‘female/ woman’ and ‘male/man’ respectively” (196). For Oyewùmi, colonization and its counterpart, the European nation-state system, established the racial inferiorization of all Africans in tandem with the specific demotion of African “women” insofar as they were excluded from leadership roles in spiritual, public, and economic domains. “Oyewùmi notes that the introduction of the Western gender system was accepted by Yoruba males, who thus colluded with the inferiorization of anafemales” (197).

In her characterization of many Native American tribes as *gynecratic*—an honoring of the feminine as sacred and therefore *as* central to the spiritual that inflects all aspects of life—Allen draws a similar conclusion. She writes, “Now dependent on white institutions for their survival, tribal systems can ill afford gynocracy when patriarchy—that is, survival—requires male dominance” (199). In *The Sacred Hoop: Recovering the Feminine in American Indian Traditions*, Allen further documents the ways in which many gynocratic communities “recognized more than two genders” and viewed “third” gendering, intersexuality, and homosexuality positively (196). Lugones draws on legal history to show that in the United States, by contrast, “law does not recognize intersexual status” and “[i]ntersexed individuals are frequently surgically and hormonally turned into males and females” (195). Given these radically divergent forms of social normativity, Allen claims that “the program of degynocratization” was crucial for the “decimation of populations through starvation, disease, and disruption of all social, spiritual and economic structures” (199).

This documentation of alternative views of nongendered cosmologies and (inter)sexualities is not merely a nostalgic celebration. Lugones’ intervention also does more than just detail the coloniality of violence. At stake are the lines of solidarity that are disabled when the history of the coloniality of gender is not, as happens with Quijano, adequately accounted for. As Lugones explains,

So, when we think of the indifference of nonwhite men to the violences exercised against nonwhite women, we can begin to have some sense of the collaboration between anamales and Western colonials against anafemales. Oyewùmi makes clear that both men and women resisted cultural changes at different levels. Thus, while “in the West the challenge to feminisms is how to proceed from the gender-saturated category of ‘women’

to the fullness of an unsexed humanity. . . . [For the colonized], the notion of an ‘unsexed humanity’ is neither a dream to aspire to nor a memory to be realized.” (197–98)

The reason to historicize gender formation is that without this history, we keep on centering our analysis on the patriarchy; that is, on a binary, hierarchical, oppressive gender formation that rests on male supremacy without any clear understanding of the mechanisms by which heterosexuality, capitalism, and racial classification are impossible to understand apart from each other. The heterosexualist patriarchy has been an ahistorical framework of analysis. To understand the relation of the birth of the colonial/modern gender system to the birth of global colonial capitalism—with the centrality of the coloniality of power to that system of global power—is to understand our present organization of life anew. (186–87)

Lugones’ call for a project of historicization that allows for a “[re]organization of life anew” reveals the tension between the progress made toward unthinking coloniality and the as of yet unsurpassed material realities produced by the shifting relation of the nation-state to global coloniality and, as a consequence, the sociopolitical reification of what qualifies as feminist theory. This shifting, contradictory terrain outlines the grounds from which to enable dialogue among those positioned on the “dark” side. This is an intracolony dialogue that does not deny its interlinked relation to the “light” side but recognizes this relation as historical fact, an imposition that often interrupts “dark” conversations and alliances. It is precisely for this reason that the tropes of the bridge or “bridging” have been taken up by feminists thinking intersectionality and the movement of border crossing between worlds that is otherwise unimaginable or materially foreclosed. My reading of *City of Night* and *Desert Blood: The Juárez Murders* traces the novelistic staging of this foreclosure that, through the decolonial literary imagination, places “dark” subjectivities and the study of their shifting relations to the coloniality of power in conversation.

### **Decolonial Feminisms: A Planetary Undoing of Reified Intersections**

To develop our understanding of decolonial feminisms further, it will help to reframe Spivak’s “Can the Subaltern Speak?” within the terms provided by Lugones and Quijano. I read Spivak’s seminal essay on postcolonial/transnational feminisms as an argument for the importance of theorizing intersectionality as an antidote for what Quijano identifies as one of the central components of Eurocentrism: the racialization of waged labor. I also use Spivak’s term *planetary* to name Lugones and Quijano’s shared critique of a micrological understanding of power. This latter framework’s refusal of “grand narratives” runs the risk of foreclosing theorizations of socioeconomic material change on a planetary level. Each of these anticolonial thinkers (and their corresponding fields of academic scholarship) is weary of being consumed under the sign of multiculturalism or “world literatures.” These disciplines’ discourse of diversity is unequipped for teaching alterity to be recognized. Spivak explains:

I propose the planet to overwrite the globe. Globalization is the imposition of the same system of exchange everywhere. . . . The globe is in our computers. No one lives there. It

allows us to think we can aim to control it. The planet is in the species of alterity, belonging to another system; and yet we inhabit it, on loan. ( 72)

If we imagine ourselves as planetary subjects rather than global agents, planetary creatures rather than global entities, alterity remains underived from us; it is not our dialectical negation, it contains us as much as it flings us away. . . . We must persistently educate ourselves into this peculiar mindset. (73)

What those who are directly engaged with the colonial/modern gender system share with theorists of intersectionality such as Spivak, Allen, and Oyewùmi is an experiential, pedagogical, socioeconomic, and philosophical investment in alternative modes of liberation—modes that are not necessarily “new” but that bear the traces of nonhegemonic or subaltern thinking, the survival of which evinces simultaneously the constitutive underside of modernity and the possibility of other worlds. The “otherness” of these worlds must not be confused with legalistic, capitalist, or moralistic cultural diversity but must instead be understood as an epistemic diversity.<sup>4</sup>

That many worlds are possible because there are many epistemologies is an understanding of difference that moves beyond the personal or cultural and instead views alterity as a heterogeneous source for strategic responses to oppression. As Chela Sandoval explains,

If we are courageous enough to legitimate this multiplicity of tactical approaches as valid, our movement will be less likely to oppress its own people through the forcing of certain “correct” political lines. What U.S. third world feminists are calling for is a new subjectivity, a political revision that denies any *one* perspective as the only answer, but instead posits a shifting tactical and the strategic subjectivity that has the capacity to re-center depending upon the forms of oppression to be confronted. (67)

As the 1981 publication of *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* made clear, Xicana/Latina, indigenous, black, and Asian feminists responded to exclusionary practices and theories of a hegemonically “white” U.S. feminism not by arguing for the inclusion or privileging of either the category of race or negatively racialized people but instead by proposing the intimate co-production of class, gender, and race as both analytical categories and lived experiences. By now, this method of analysis has come to sound familiar, even clichéd, to most, even if it is rarely practiced.

What deserves to be re-emphasized, though, is the way that an analysis of multiple forms of oppression has as its corollary a call for multiple forms of resistance—which do not occur naturally but require the work of dialogue and coalition building. In “Can the Subaltern Speak?” Spivak wrote:

Within the effaced itinerary of the subaltern subject, the track of sexual difference is doubly effaced . . . both as object of colonialist historiography and as subject of insurgency, the ideological construction of gender keeps the male dominant. If in the

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<sup>4</sup> See Boaventura de Sousa Santos, “Introduction: Opening the Canon of Knowledge and Recognition of Difference,” *Another Knowledge Is Possible: Beyond Northern Epistemologies* (London: Verso, 2007).

context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow. (287)

It is important to note that Spivak does not suggest that the subaltern is either mute or without knowledge. More precisely, Spivak's contention that the subaltern cannot speak is an indictment of the ways in which First World intellectuals have yet to enter into dialogue with her. They either view the question of subalternity as an "idealistic red herring," or, as Lugones documents, they have yet to systematically question the presuppositions and language of colonial productions of gender which would require an unlearning of female (and male) privilege (1988, 287).

Spivak demonstrates in her critique of Foucault and Deleuze in particular, and her analysis of Eurocentrism in general, that the inability to enter into dialogue with the "Other" results from the reintroduction of the undivided subject in representations of the worker's consciousness—which is taken to be whole and wholly transparent, despite the well-known critique of the unified Subject (and its correlate in the subaltern woman who cannot speak). "This S/s subject, curiously sewn together into a transparency by denegations, belongs to the exploiters' side of the international division of labor" and is blind to, and therefore complicit with, the ways in which "in the constitution of that Other of Europe, great care was taken to obliterate the textual ingredients with which such a subject could cathect, could occupy (invest?) its itinerary" (1988, 280). Although "Can the Subaltern Speak?" bypasses a conversation about modernity (perhaps for calculated reasons), like most postcolonial critics (Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, and Ranajit Guha, for instance), Spivak's historical framework for theorizing the totality of global capital does not recognize the primacy of the 1492 encounter between Europe and the Americas. Instead, when faulting Foucault as "a brilliant thinker of power-in-spacing" who is nonetheless unaware of "the topographical reinscription of imperialism," she does so by suggesting that his vision of the *first wave of "geographical (geopolitical) discontinuity"* (her description of what is typically referred to as the emergence of capitalist modernity) is "specific to the First World" (1988, 289; emphasis added). For Spivak, Foucault's analysis of geopolitical discontinuities is limited by his theorization of the micrological workings of power as an intra-European phenomenon: "The clinic, the asylum, the prison, the university—all seem to be screen allegories that foreclose a reading of the broader narratives of imperialism" (291). Despite, however, the misrecognition or disinterest in the first waves of transmodernity and its geopolitical relation to the Americas that Spivak evinces here, there is much to be gained by placing what she names "the broader narratives of imperialism" in conversation with Quijano's coloniality of power.

Quijano's thesis that the racialization of wage labor is a central tenet of Eurocentrism is coherent with, and meaningfully expands, Spivak's critique of Foucault and Deleuze for privileging the proletariat as *the* figure with which all localized movements of resistance to power must align themselves; as Quijano suggests, this mythologizes the wage laborer as universal. However, while Quijano outlines the biologization of race and gender by tracing the history of "whiteness" through coloniality, Spivak positions the "Other" of Europe within a discourse of ethnicity—more specifically, Jacques Derrida's understanding in "Of Grammatology as a Positive Science" of European ethnocentrism and its relationship to writing. For Spivak, to assume (as she argues Foucault and Deleuze do) that the prisoner and the oppressed in general can know and speak their conditions of oppression—and therefore do not need the intellectual to represent them, in fact do not need the mechanisms of representation as

such—is to ascribe transparency, problematically, to both the intellectual and the intellectual’s Other. Spivak goes on to describe Derrida’s well-known critique of presence as a “vigilance against too great a claim for transparency” that inevitably leads to a politics of assimilation: “To render thought or the thinking subject transparent or invisible seems, by contrast, to hide the relentless recognition of the Other by assimilation. It is in the interest of such cautions that Derrida does not invoke ‘letting the other(s) speak for himself’ but rather invokes an ‘appeal’ to or ‘call’ to the ‘quite-other’ (*tout-autre* as opposed to a self-consolidating other)” (1988, 293–94). Though arrived through a very different trajectory, one that admits that “the Indian case cannot be taken as representative of all countries, nations, cultures, and the like that may be invoked as the Other of Europe as Self,” it seems to me that Spivak’s use of Derrida as a way to interrupt a politics of assimilation through an insistence on the absolute alterity of the Other has much in common with calls by the M/C group and U.S. queer women of color for epistemic diversity rather than multicultural diversity (1988, 281). This line of inquiry might lead to moving beyond the colonial categories of race, gender, and class altogether and creating a different lexicon for thinking liberation. More specifically, I claim that this movement toward a planetary decolonial feminisms is enabled through theories of intersectionality that attempt to undo the colonial categories of race, class, and gender.

As Paola Bacchetta explains, this attention to an “undoing” “also opens a space for a different kind of doing.” Thinking intersectionality requires that we dereify categories of “race,” “gender,” and “class.” It also requires that we come to understand the ways in which their theoretical isolation is enabled by a totality of power constituted by the incessant reproduction of their interlocking relationality. The term *totality* here can be understood first in the sense of the world system of power inaugurated by the colonization of the Americas: Quijano’s “coloniality of power.” Second, totality is the object of decolonization for which, as Pérez makes clear, “[g]ender and sexuality, like poverty and racialization, are not problems specific to the negatively marked bodies that bear their burden” (143). Bacchetta further explains:

Those from dominant sectors need to decolonize themselves, albeit differently since their formation is different to begin with. The “de” process has to happen all over the place, and *not* just for subaltern subjects who have been damaged in one way or the other and who are imagined to be the only ones damaged. Colonialism is a damaging process for all involved: colonized, colonizer. Building coalitions—and I’ve done a lot of coalition work—requires a lot of work from all subjects involved. The “de” of decolonial feminisms can help us get there. (181)

The term *decolonial feminisms* responds to Spivak and Quijano’s critique of a micrological understanding of power whose refusal to theorize socioeconomic material change on a planetary level turns to an idealized unified consciousness of oppressed subjects and communities. In other words, the hallmark of decolonial feminism is the acknowledgment of “materialities, power across scales” and “a completely intimate relation of subject formation under conditions of colonialism” (181). Within this context, my project seeks to reveal and develop the intersection of *decolonial feminisms* and the Chicana/o Novel.



## II. The Chicana/o Novel and the Human

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It is time to see Chicano narrative as something more than a simple mirror to the life and folklore to a heretofore invisible segment of American society.

--Ramón Saldivar

*Chicano Narrative: The Dialectics of Difference*

Each Chicano work opens a space for itself, while adding to the total of Chicano art, as well as Art itself.

--Juan Bruce-Novoa

“The Space of Chicano Literature”

My study offers a challenging perspective on what constitutes not only the canon of American literature (as it is usually understood in the Anglocentric model prevalent in our normal curricula) but the notion of America itself.

--José David Saldívar

*The Dialectics of our America: Genealogy, Cultural Critique, and Literary History*

Ramón Saldívar’s *Chicano Narrative: The Dialectics of Difference* (1990), Juan Bruce-Novoa’s *Retrospace: Collected Essays on Chicano Literature Theory and History* (1990), and José David Saldívar’s *The Dialectics of Our America: Genealogy, Cultural Critique and Literary History* (1991) signal the emergence of Chicano/a literary criticism as an academic field, and, though different in approach and content, advance two central claims. First, each of these foundational works insists on the constitutive relation between literature and history by theorizing a methodology that explains the agential role of literature as ideological critique and co-author of historical consciousness. As Ramón Saldívar explains, “Not content with mirroring a problematic real world of social hardships and economic deprivation, Chicano narratives seek systematically to uncover the underlying structures by which real men and women may either perpetuate or reformulate that reality” (5). Second, each advances the dialectical claim that to read the Chicana/o novel as American literature is tantamount to the “worlding” of American studies and the geopolitical conceptualization of America itself. This apparent paradox that couples the historical task of becoming American with an irrevocable access to worldliness bypasses the logic of the modern nation-state all together. I argue, moreover, that this inverted logic of claiming a type of worldliness so as to have access to the nation-state is a particularity of the Chicana/o novel, and, more broadly, characterizes the complicated and historically intertwined relationship between civil and human rights. While the relationship between the canonization of U.S. ethnic literatures and the various civil rights movements of the 1960s has, without a doubt, been recognized, my dissertation seeks to revisit the “worlding” aspect of U.S. Third World literatures by interjecting questions about the relationship between the human and literary form. In other words, I draw a parallel between the inverted logic of Chicana/o narratives that instantiate worldliness as guarantor for national belonging, and the planetary aspiration of human rights law.

In *Human Rights, Inc. The World Novel, Narrative Form, and International Law* (2007), Joseph Slaughter succinctly states the ways in which human rights law replicates logic of the modern nation-state system.

Through the human being's incorporation into "universal" rights and duties as a human person, contemporary human rights law tries to rectify the analogical split between the natural human and the artificial person—to repair the rupture between man and citizen that Marx and Arendt critiqued—by elevating the particular (individual) to the universal (humanity), transporting the individual from the confines of the nation-state to the realm of the international. (21)

Slaughter's important contribution to this well documented problematic, however, resides in his detailing the "ideological confluence between technologies of the novel and that law that manifests in a common vocabulary and transitive grammar of human personality" (4). In particular, and in reference to the trajectory of "transporting the individual" from the nation-state to the international, Slaughter privileges the *bildungsroman* as the literary form that most acutely reveals the ways in which both "human rights law and the novel have been the engine and freight of Western colonialism and (neo)imperialism over the past two centuries" (4). Though I am sympathetic to Slaughter's emphasis on protagonist-centered coming of age narratives, my reading of *City of Night* and *Desert Blood*, by contrast, focuses on what can be considered an anti-*bildungsroman* form—pilgrimage. I claim that each of these novels is acutely aware of the epistemological and geopolitical parameters of the Western frontier, and therefore imagines a type of worldliness in which the trajectory of colonial expansion is circumvented by the imperative to return home both in terms of geopolitical location and self-reflection. In particular, Rechy's El Paso and Gaspar de Alba's Juárez historicize this form of pilgrimage by displacing the frontier with the U.S.-Mexico *frontera*, a displacement that reveals what Donald E. Pease and Amy Kaplan have termed "the cultures of U.S. Imperialism."

### III. Decolonizing the Human in Chicana/o Literature

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My dissertation, "Labor, Love, and Murder in the Americas: Decolonizing the Human in Chicano/a Literature," investigates the relation between U.S. Third World social justice movements and literary form. I claim that for those who have been radically dehumanized by the epistemological and material violence of colonialism and U.S. Empire, the literary imagination can produce a decolonizing consciousness, or what Paulo Freire names *conscientização*. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire outlines the process by which capitalism's dehumanizing labor practices create a necrophilic worldview by producing the belief that humanizing experiences are the exception rather than the norm. *Conscientização*, he argues, retrains the mind by sharpening a critical consciousness of our subjective and agential participation in producing material reality. This shift in consciousness moves away from necrophilic practices towards a loving worldview. In contrast to the skepticism of poststructuralist theory, Freire offers an anti-skeptical view of language insofar as *conscientização* can only begin when two subjects, fully engaged in their vocation of humanization, come together to name the world, an engagement he calls dialogical praxis. Freire's humanizing, positive view of liberatory language and dialogue provides a method for reading the decolonial hermeneutics contained in the works of the authors I study, each of which, in different ways, teaches us to read as listeners. I develop this method in my dissertation and provide a decolonial feminist praxis for reading John Rechy's *City of Night* (1963) and Alicia Gaspar de Alba's *Desert Blood: The Juárez Murders* (2005).

In my first chapter, “The Decolonial Literary Imagination: *Conscientização* and a Marxist ‘politics of form,’” I define the key components of what I term the decolonial *literary* imagination, an adaptation of Emma Pérez’s *The Decolonial Imaginary: Writing Chicanas into History* (1999). In particular, I argue that the disavowal of genocide in the Americas is central for a colonizing periodization of literary history and that this type of coloniality has been reinvigorated through a variety of “new” frameworks for reading literatures by negatively racialized and sexed communities. While there are several, my dissertation highlights the interrelation between Eurocentric conceptions of the human and a (post)modern skepticism toward the constitutive link between subjectivity and language. By contrast, Freire’s anti-skeptical humanism and Marcial González’s “politics of form” advance a reading method aimed at developing a critical consciousness that depends on the overcoming of the fragmentation of knowledge. While Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* lacks a nuanced study of race and sexuality, Pérez and González are invested in documenting the ways in which identity is problematically self-constructed by U.S. communities of color. However, Pérez and González differ insofar that González privileges an analysis of class contradictions while Pérez practices an intersectional view of social oppression that traces the contradictions between categories of race, class, gender, and sexuality. I bring these two views together in my conception of the decolonial literary imagination and claim that in reading for the relation between social and literary form, we gain insight into the ways in which class contradictions reveal the coproduction of dehumanizing forms of labor and processes of ungendering that cohere in what María Lugones has termed the coloniality of gender.

In the two long chapters that follow, I seek to establish the relation between American coloniality and the novel form. To this end, my dissertation builds a literary bridge between Lugones’ early work on pilgrimage (or world-traveling) and her more recent intervention into what she describes as the heterosexist view of patriarchy operating in Quijano’s influential conceptualization of the coloniality of power. My rehearsal of Lugones’ theorization of world-traveling—a teachable form of antiracist loving perception—enables me to show how the study of literary form can advance a project of mapping alternative epistemologies within and beyond the Americas. In contrast to Lugones’ world-traveler who, through memory, can experience the self as multiple, the *protagonists* I study suffer from a fragmented sense of self, a borderlands subjectivity that is similar to the “unworldly” subjectivities created by the legal parameters of the nation-state. By contrast, the form of *City of Night* and *Desert Blood* works against the either/or logic that, as Kimberlé Crenshaw argues, problematically characterizes legal and social activist forms of racial nationalism and feminist critique. I claim, moreover, that this either/or logic is at work in queer (literary) theory that fails to consider intersecting forms of oppression. In this way, I build on González’s “politics of form” insofar as my dissertation argues that it is the form of the novel, rather than exclusively the characters or the identity of the author, that teaches us a decolonizing history and ethics.

Although based, in large part, on Rechy’s experiences with male prostitution and growing up as the child of Mexican working-class migrants in the border town of El Paso, Texas, the confessional form of *City of Night* works to connect these otherwise seemingly antithetical identities insofar as the effort to historicize the particularities of a transgenerational history of family migration coincides with the attempt to historicize the coloniality of America. In “‘American’ Child of Migrants: Confession and the Sexual Outlaw’s Pilgrimage in John Rechy’s *City of Night*,” I argue that in contrast to Whitman’s America, the narrating El Paso “I” documents a palpable and cruel border despite, maybe even because of, the promise of

connectivity and movement. *City of Night*, however, simultaneously documents the failure of the American promise of upward mobility and the persistent desire for other forms of sociability within and beyond the nation. This twin project of positive and negative critique is linked to a politics of place that historicizes genocide in the Americas by revising the colonial imposition of confession—a literary form and form of subjectivity produced for and about ‘New World’ sexualities. In this chapter, I draw on the immigrant scholarship of Eithne Luibhéid in order to show how immigration law has specifically prevented gays and lesbians from obtaining U.S. citizenship, hence contributing to the construction of the “queer migrant” as an impossible subject. Rechy’s “queer migrant” history, narrated through a form imported to the Americas through Catholic colonization—the confession—enables us to see the long view of coloniality as well as the historical specificity of *City of Night*, a history that moves us closer toward Rechy’s theorization of the “sexual outlaw.”

In *Desert Blood*, Ivon Villa, a Chicana queer graduate student of women’s studies, is the protagonist-detective whose attempt to finish her dissertation shapes the narrative of *Desert Blood* thematically and formally. The dissertation, moreover, appears in contradistinction to the genre of the detective novel’s “quest for knowledge.” Instead, Ivon’s *quest to teach* attempts to move beyond the narrow legal concern for identifying the perpetrators of femicide and questions the methodology by which to teach and learn about Juárez. In “Undoing the Value of Rape: A Hermeneutics for Redirecting the Necrophilic Gaze from *Maquiladora Murders* to Life in Juárez,” I argue that *Desert Blood*’s renaming of the crimes as “Juárez Murders” rather than “Maquiladora Murders” is analogous to a pedagogy for reimagining the possibilities for a localized-transnational and popular feminism based on the intimate queering of every day practices of *familia*. I conclude this chapter by linking Moishe Postone’s theorization of antisemitism to the decolonial feminisms of *Desert Blood*. In this way, I enact a decolonial planetary view of the human by historicizing the violent attachment to labor as linguistic referent in both its contemporary, local enunciation in the borderlands, *and* in relation to the universality of Eurocentric conceptions of gender imbedded in human rights discourse, a discourse that emerged and is still plagued by what Postone describes as the immediate postwar response to the Holocaust.

**CHAPTER ONE**  
**The Decolonial Literary Imagination:**  
***Conscientização* and a Marxist ‘politics of form’**

Reading is not exhausted merely by decoding the written word or written language, but rather anticipated by and extending into knowledge of the world. Reading the world precedes reading the word, and the subsequent reading of the word cannot dispense with continually reading the world. Language and reality are dynamically intertwined.  
Paulo Freire  
--“The Importance of the Act of Reading”

Ultimately, when women of color break the silence, our words are rejected. I wish to point out that our works emerge from *un sitio y una lengua* (a space and language) that rejects colonial ideology and the byproducts of colonialism and capitalist patriarchy—sexism, racism, homophobia, etc. The space and language is rooted in both words and silences of Third-World-Identified-Third-World-Women who create a place apart from white men and women and from men of color, if only for a weekend now and again.  
--Emma Pérez  
“Sexuality and Discourse: Notes from a Chicana Survivor”

This chapter will define the key components of what I term the decolonial *literary* imagination, an adaptation of Emma Pérez’s historical treatise entitled *The Decolonial Imaginary: Writing Chicanas into History* (1999). My intention, for the most part, is to move Pérez’s decolonial feminisms from the discipline of history to the field of literary studies and to make a similar intervention into the ways in which we periodize, read, and teach literatures by U.S. people of color. My reconceptualization of Pérez’s decolonial methodology differs only in one main area: I do not subscribe to her adamant alignment of decolonial praxis and postmodern conceptions of the subject and language. For this reason, I supplement Pérez’s third space feminism with Paulo Freire’s theory of dialogism as key for the development of critical consciousness. What makes Freire’s understanding of language distinctly nonpostmodern is a noncelebratory view of the fragmentation of the subject in relation to the avowed difficulty of effectively creating linguistic meaning. Rather than theorize narrative and social agency by beginning with a skeptical view of objectivity or arguing against any claims to a knowable social reality, Freire historicizes the linked epistemological and sociolinguistic postmodern condition as one that we can begin to overcome through a pedagogy of *conscientização*. While Pérez locates the decolonial imaginary between the subject-object dyad of colonized-colonizer, female-male, queer-heterosexuality, and a brown-white inheritance of the coloniality of power, I draw on Freire’s pedagogy to situate decoloniality in the dialogic relation between intracolony subjects that externalize social reality in order to critique and change it. This subject-subject relation to objective reality is what Freire outlines as a process of *conscientização*, a process that I claim is made available for literary studies when we employ a Marxist understanding of the relation between social forms and literary form.

My attention to the constitutive relation between social and literary forms, moreover, places me in a position to expand Pérez’s decolonial imaginary for literary criticism and

coincides with what I term the (w)holistic imperative of decolonial feminist thought, an approach to historicizing antigenocidal practices in the Américas and beyond through the intersectional and therefore dialogic subject of writing, reading, and listening. The neologism (w)holistic is my way of syncretizing the Marxist literary tradition of what Marcial González names the “politics of form”—a hermeneutics for reading racialized subjectivity and class struggle as symptoms of the totality of social relations embodied in the novel form—and what Gloria Anzaldúa names the Coyolxauhqui imperative—the wish to create healing forms of teaching and activism that begins with imagining “a reality that differs from what already exists” (Preface, 5). Given that decolonial feminist thought emerged from an investment in creating political alliances across and *within* differently raced, sexed, and classed communities, I hope that my interest in building a bridge between a formal study of literary dialogism in the novel and the constitutive role of dialogue for coalition building becomes evident for a (w)holistic project of decolonization.

### **I. Anti-skepticism and the Human: Decolonizing the Subjective/ Objective Relation in History, Literature, and Pedagogy**

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It is not enough to say, “The women were there too.”  
To subvert the ideologies of these official histories,  
we must overturn the epistemological register that licenses them.  
--Maylei Blackwell  
*¡Chicana Power! Contested Histories of Feminism in the Chicano Movement*

From the onset of *The Decolonial Imaginary*, Pérez states that her methodological interest in a postmodern skepticism toward objectivity is to formulate a response to the disciplinary limits of history which, in order to define itself as science, albeit a social science, not only demands a disavowal of the subjective parameters of scholarly inquiry, but also denies the subjectivity of the historian. For my purposes, it is important to note that Pérez’s critique of the boundaries of the discipline of history is expressed through an affinity for the literary. Pérez questions the subjective-objective binary that marks the limits of a discipline for which “literature is reduced to or expanded by the ‘imaginary’ while history can only be ‘real’” (xv). Moreover, Pérez argues that traditional historiography uses objectivity as an alibi for the “his” in “history,” “the story that often becomes the universalist narrative in which women’s experiences are negated” (xiv). Drawing on the work of postmodern feminist scholars Joan Wallach Scott and Linda Hutcheon, and adding her own affinity for the literary imagination, Pérez suggests that “There is no pure, authentic, original history. There are only stories—many stories. The ones that intrigue me are the tales by or about women, whether told by men or women” (xv). More specifically, *The Decolonial Imaginary* traces the ways in which the mechanisms of erasure that precluded writing *mexicanas* into history in the early part of the twentieth century are reproduced in the 1960s and 1970s by Chicano movement historians and writers who, through a heterosexist link between nationalism and gender, appropriated *history* and were therefore unable to unthink the colonial antinomies that categorize traditional concepts of historical change.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Pérez explains her choice to write Chicano with the “o” in italics: “I use ‘Chicano’ and not ‘Chicano/a’ or ‘Chicana/o’, because I think that during the early years of conceptualizing Chicano history, the ‘a’ was still so peripheral that I would prefer to accentuate the ‘o’ of Chicano” (*Decolonial Imaginary*, 132).

For Pérez, a postmodern overcoming of binary thinking unhinges the history of coloniality from a heterosexist silencing of women of color on both sides of the border and across the twentieth century because it privileges that “which is different, fragmented, imagined, non-linear, [and] non-teleological” (xiv). To this end, Pérez proposes the decolonial imaginary as way to disrupt traditional categories that will continue to plague the discipline of American history until we engage in a conscious effort to unthink the privileging of East-coast centric concepts such as the “West” and the “frontier,” and the acclaimed historicity of certain dates that reinforce these concepts through a periodization of American coloniality: the Declaration of Independence (1776); the Civil War (1861-1865); World War I (1914-1918); World War II (1942-1945); the Civil Rights Movements of the 1960s. Pérez points to the ways in which this colonizing periodization of American history either completely disavows or truncates Chicana/o history specifically and a planetary knowledge of the Southwest more broadly. For example, Spanish colonization and Native America is placed outside the properly historical insofar as scholars

must cross boundaries from the United States to Latin America and then to Europe to peruse the Spanish colonial Southwest. Studies on the native populations before 1521 are fewer and are held suspect by the tradition of history, because written documents are not plentiful. Oral tradition, codices, and archeological remnants are only a few of the tools for studying pre-Columbian history in the Americas, and the methods are often considered illegitimate by traditional historians. (8)

Unlike historians who “are interested in tracking change,” Pérez’s decolonial intervention resides in interrupting the “epistemological register” (Blackwell) that produces “repetition” across spatio-temporal categories. By tracing “the manner in which rhetoric is repeated to serve similar kinds of purposes,” Pérez demonstrates the ways in which the nation-state limits not only the study of American coloniality preceding 1776, but also how a nationalist rhetoric is implicated in the historical erasure of mexicanas, tejanas, and chicanas living in the twentieth century, and this despite their participation in the feminist movement, the revolution, the court system, public letters, and community organizing, all of which, contrary to their Spanish colonial counterparts, left a paper trail. *The Decolonial Imaginary* republishes and recirculates this paper trail, thereby rewriting the often ignored decolonial history of the following areas of Chicana feminist thought: the relation between Yucatán’s socialist ideology, *la indigena*, and the first Feminist Congress (1916); the debate regarding the relation between anarchy, a worldwide worker’s revolution, and the role of women in producing *Regeneración*, the Partido Liberal Mexicano’s transnational journal; the diasporic and class contradictions of an emerging *tejana* identity of the 1920s and 1930s; and Chicano historiographical practices of the 1970s. More than just an archival recovery of what was lost, Pérez traces the ways in which each of these movements for social change fails to challenge the colonial imaginary despite their attempt to include previously ignored categories of analysis such as woman, Chicano, or immigrant.

In this chapter, I make a claim for the study of literature that parallels Pérez’s decolonial imaginary in the study of history by suggesting that the colonial imaginary is reinforced through the periodization of “American” letters. Consider, for example, the alignment between Transcendentalism, Realism, Naturalism, Modernism, and Postmodernism and the historicity of dates that not only periodizes these literary traditions, but produces a narrative of American empire; the study of the novel in relation to British Romanticism and the French Revolution

rather than say Don Quixote or Haiti; situating the postcolonial in relation to Britain, a framework introduced through traditional American historiography and maintained through the still operative link between postcolonial literary approaches and Indian Subaltern studies; and the lack of literary criticism that studies the relation between literary form and “ethnic” literatures.

The unthinking of coloniality in literary studies, however, cannot be merely an additive gesture. For example, the unAmericanness of history prior to the Declaration of Independence might seem like an obvious blind sight that, once being identified, can be corrected through a dictum of inclusivity or a broadening of scope through either a multicultural or global framework. But the scholarship and literature that I study in this dissertation suggests otherwise and, as I’ve shown elsewhere, contribute to defining a decolonial feminist praxis by advancing a mode of otherness that is not to be confused with a moralistic cultural diversity “but must instead be understood as an epistemological diversity” that “moves beyond the personal or cultural and instead views alterity as a heterogeneous source for strategic responses to oppression” (Maese-Cohen, 14). Moreover, this mode of tracing epistemological difference is specifically historical because part of the project of envisioning an equitable and therefore different future is practiced by investigating “alternative modes of liberation” “that are not necessarily ‘new’ but that bear the traces of nonhegemonic” thinking (Maese-Cohen, 14). To this end, *The Decolonial Imaginary* reveals historiographical practices that are chronologically “new” but that repeat “spatio-temporal categories” that limit “even the most radical” effort to rebel against coloniality (4, 5).

I further claim that if Pérez’s decolonial *historical* imaginary can help us “negotiate Eurocentricity within European historical models or within paradigms of United States historiography” (Pérez, xv), then the decolonial *literary* imagination can help us examine the historical link between critical theory and literary studies that leads us to a postmodern skepticism toward language and Eurocentric conceptions of the human. For example, consider the ways in which American coloniality reproduces itself in the period immediately following World War II through a formal participation in antigenocidal practices by way of the United Nation’s legal codification of the human and, more specifically, how literary studies reinforces this colonial imaginary by historicizing the origins of antigenocidal praxis as an American response to a lethal intra-European racism. By adhering to a genealogy of intellectual thought that associates critical theory with the Frankfurt school’s writing on the relationship between aesthetic practices and political consciousness, the colonial literary imaginary, like its counterpart in the discipline of history, disavows the long history of antigenocidal praxis in the Americas.

However, like Maylei Blackwell’s decolonial feminist dictum suggests, it is not enough to say there *was* genocide here too. I’m more interested in bringing to light the ways in which the colonial literary imagination is central for the disavowal of genocide in the Americas, and, also, how it is continually reinvigorated through a variety of “new” frameworks for reading literatures by negatively racialized and sexed communities. While one can point to several examples of “new” frameworks, my dissertation highlights the constitutive link between a (post)modern skepticism toward the human and language. The interrelation between these two, moreover, hinges on my use of the word skepticism to describe a postmodern view of language and a Eurocentric tradition of humanism. By using the term skepticism I mean to invoke the philosophical tradition that Nelson Maldonado-Torres critiques in *Against War: Views from the Underside of Modernity*. In contrast to the colonial literary imaginary that privileges a twentieth-century framework for understanding American literary aesthetics in relation to the trauma of two World Wars, an aesthetics characterized by the self-reflective exploration of the failure of



language in relation to the fragmentation of the self and the nation, Maldonado-Torres shifts the generative locus of the EuroAmerican existential crisis produced by war to the fifteenth-century colonial encounter. Similar to Pérez's historiography that challenges Eurocentric periodization and paradigms, Maldonado-Torres undoes the American privileging of French and German philosophy not by rejecting everything European—this is not the goal of challenging Eurocentric scholarship—but by providing an alternative genealogy of EuroAmerican skepticism that includes the context of colonial warfare in the Americas. To this end, Maldonado-Torres places the hallmark of modern skepticism--Descartes' infamous "I think therefore I am"—in conversation with the Spanish debate over the humanity of the indigenous and enslaved, a *theological* debate that is often neglected when considering the constitutive relationship between European conceptions of race and the human.

While a full rehearsal of Maldonado-Torres's decolonial revision of the development of the philosophical traditions of skepticism, existentialism, and phenomenology is beyond the scope of my work, a succinct rephrasing of his central thesis is instructive for understanding the importance of refiguring literary studies around a decolonial history of critical theory. Maldonado-Torres advances the claim that doubting the humanness of the indigenous and the African produced a similar affect within the European self-image—a skepticism toward the humanity of the colonial project and the agent of colonial thought specifically, and a skepticism toward knowledge more generally. Expanding Enrique Dussel's signature claim that the homologous relation between colonial and genocidal thought is revealed through the underside of Descartes' rationalist cogito—"I conquer therefore I am"—Maldonado-Torres works his way through the canon of Western philosophy that is often invoked by critical theory in order to reveal "modernity as a paradigm of war" (Reconciliation, 225). To a certain degree, his critique of modern warfare reiterates continental philosophy from Nietzsche's will to power to Husserl's phenomenology, and from the Frankfurt school to (post)structuralism and Derridean deconstruction, the claim that the most violent acts against humanity are an outcome of rather than a departure from Western philosophy has not only been advanced, but defines critical theory as such. Maldonado-Torres' decolonial approach, however, short-circuits the intra-European origin of this critique of violence by showing how doubting the humanness of the other, a necessary component of warfare, is constitutively linked with doubting the humanness of the self and, most importantly, that this self-doubt leads to a suspicion of philosophy itself and knowledge production more generally. So, despite the well-meaning project of traditional critical theory that traces the link between epistemological and material violence, the "epistemological register" of colonial thought remains unchallenged so long as a skepticism toward knowledge, and I would add toward the efficacy of language to mean, remains intact.

Maldonado-Torres further explains that key for the decolonizing politics of an anti-skeptical worldview is a different positionality toward death and toward speech. For example, the decolonial overcoming of "modernity as a paradigm of war" refutes the Nietzschean equation between the search for truth and a will to death (Reconciliation, 226). From the perspective of decolonization, the search for truth opposes "a murderous will to death (of the Other)" and instead is a cry for life (Reconciliation, 227). This life affirming practice of critical consciousness, moreover, runs counter to Foucault's power-knowledge nexus which, according to Maldonado-Torres, is flawed because it understands modernity as "a suicidal episteme" as that "[c]onsciousness becomes the police of the libido...[and] [t]he search for truth becomes the motivation to fight against ourselves" (227). By contrast, to understand "modernity as a

paradigm of war” reveals that the concern for the death of the self obscures the decolonial praxis that protests the murder of the other.

For my purposes, Maldonado-Torres’ privileging of historicizing the murder of the other rather than the existential crisis informed by the death of the self is helpful for developing what I mean by a decolonial literary imagination in several ways.<sup>6</sup> First, consider the ways in which a Eurocentric understanding of twentieth-century existentialism is echoed in our debates regarding the death of the author. What would a framework for studying literature look like from the perspective of historicizing genocide—an understanding of death that necessarily exceeds paradigms of possessive individualism and is inherently multilingual and multinational—in relation to aesthetic form and questions of language? Second, a periodization of humanism that includes Spanish theology and the imprint of the colonial encounter for understanding contemporary processes of racialization unhinges a narrative of humanism from an American legal history and a Eurocentric equation between modernity and secularity. How would the recent literary interest in the relation between secularity, critique and human rights discourse change if we were to take into account the alternative history of humanist thought in the Americas?<sup>7</sup> Lastly, what we have most to gain from an antiskeptical view of knowledge is the privileging of pedagogy as the primary site for self-reflection rather than the disintegration of the ego (Lacan) or the impossibility of unhinging disciplinary power from discourse (Foucault). I think that Pérez’s critique of the rigid boundaries between history and literature is implicitly pedagogical in scope. Ultimately, however, her decolonial *imaginary* depends too much on skeptical paradigms, and they do more harm than good in advancing her primary concern for seeing and hearing discourses that have been relegated to the interstitial dustbin of history.

To this end, in the next section, I shall recast *The Decolonial Imaginary* from what I feel is the movement toward an anti-Lacanian paradigm of Pérez’s earlier work, “Sexuality and Discourse: Notes from a Chicana Survivor,” where she first introduces her theory of “sitio y lengua.” Subsequently, in the following section, I shall articulate “sitio y lengua” within Freire’s

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<sup>6</sup> Elsewhere Maldonado-Torres argues that the “coloniality of being” is the normalization of the non-ethics of war insofar that “the encounter with death is no extra-ordinary affair, but a constitutive feature of the reality of colonized and racialized subjects.” In contrast to Heidegger’s Dasein, “the encounter with the possibility of death does not have the same impact or results than for someone whose mode of alienation is that of depersonalization by the One or They. Death is not so much an individualizing factor as a constitutive feature of their reality.” For this reason, decolonization does not “emerge through the encounter with one’s own mortality, but from a desire to evade death, one’s own but even more fundamentally that of others” (251). “On the Coloniality of Being: Contributions to the Development of a Concept,” *Cultural Studies* 21 nos. 2–3 (March/May 2007) 240-270

<sup>7</sup> See *PMLA* 121.5 (October 2006) on “The Humanities in Human Rights: Critique, Language, Politics”; Kay Schaffer and Sidonie Smith, eds. *Human Rights and Narrated Lives: the Ethics of Recognition* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004); Joseph R. Slaughter, *Human Rights, Inc: the World Novel, Narrative form, and International Law* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007); Judith Butler, et al. *The Power of Religion in the Public Sphere* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011); Talal Asad, et al. *Is Critique secular? : Blasphemy, Injury, and Free speech* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009); Craig Calhoun, et al. *Rethinking Secularism*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011). The lack of scholarship on Chicana/o and U.S. Latino religiosity precedes and is independent from the current interest in secularity and critique. For an overview of the central role of religiosity in social justice movements and cultural production see Gastón Espinosa and Mario T. García, eds. *Mexican American Religions: Spirituality, Activism, and Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008). For more recent work on how a post-911 academic interest in religiosity might intersect with feminisms see Theresa Delgadillo *Spiritual Mestizaje: Religion, Gender, Race, and Nation in Contemporary Chicana Narrative* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), and Linda Martín Alcoff and John D. Caputo, eds. *Feminism, Sexuality, and the Return of Religion* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011).

nonpostmodern view of language, a pedagogical framework that is concerned with the praxis of sustaining community organizing.

### **The Limits of Homi Bhaba's "doubling": Tracing Historical Materialism, the Legal Archive, and Lacanian Skepticism from "sitio y lengua" to *The Decolonial Imaginary***

To address sexuality, discourse, and power, I digress briefly to male theoreticians who, I believe, best defined male behavior. Freud, Lacan, and Foucault classify male behavior, exalt it unknowingly, but when women are concerned, these men were and are "theoretical imbeciles."

Emma Pérez

--"Sexuality and Discourse: Notes from a Chicana Survivor"

It is as if the dialectic has failed women's voices. But has it? If indeed we consider rhetoric about feminism within nationalist movements, we seem doomed to repetition over the centuries. How often have feminists been accused of lesbianism and anti-marriage sentiments (as if either is an insult) because they claim feminist identities. . . . [H]owever, social and political movements through the decades have opened up spaces for feminists who no longer fear being silenced.

I am concerned with tracking discursive formations of feminism during a nationalist movement, acknowledging my own subject position as a Chicana feminist historian with historical materialist tendencies.

--Emma Pérez

*The Decolonial Imaginary*

There is a palpable difference between Pérez's 1991 essay, "Sexuality and Discourse: Notes from a Chicana Survivor," where she fully develops her theorization of "sitio y lengua" and her 1999 book, *The Decolonial Imaginary*. In the earlier work, Pérez explains, "I use this term, *un sitio y una lengua*, to emphasize that as Chicanas we have always had this space and language, however we assert it now in our exclusive organization for women of color. For Chicana academicians, the organization is, of course, MALCS [*Mujeres Activas en Letras y Cambio Social*], where we create for each other" (Pérez 1991, 181). Pérez's claim, moreover, supports my belief that the difference in tone, content, and breadth of interdisciplinarity established in the earlier essay also has to do with the anthology and the publication house that commissioned its writing, *Chicana Lesbians: The Girls Our Mothers Warned Us About* and Third Woman Press, respectively. Already the title of the anthology embodies what the press, and the organization it was closely allied with at the time, MALCS, contributed to Pérez's "sitio y lengua." In contrast to *The Decolonial Imaginary*, which for the most part documents the history of women's organizations she was not directly involved in, the earlier essay is more autobiographical insofar as it traces Pérez's involvement in MALCS: "I am committed to women's organizations because in those spaces we revitalize, we laugh, we mock the oppressor, we mock each other's seriousness and we take each other seriously. This is a process of support, this is living the ideal, if only momentarily to give, to nurture, to support each other in a racist, sexist, homophobic society" (Pérez 1991, 178). Pérez's fluid movement between the various

voices and personas the essay embodies—academic, lesbiana, friend, critical theorist, historian, novelist—was enabled by the personal rapport she had with both MALCS and Third Woman Press and is concretely embodied in the palpable differences between the earlier and later versions of “sitio y lengua.” I also think that *The Decolonial Imaginary* consciously reflects on the generic difference between essay and book and, more importantly, between an alternative venue like Third Woman Press and an established, academic site like that of Indiana University Press.

Pérez makes an effort to overcome the politics of publication by recalling “Sexuality and Discourse” in both the preface and the concluding chapter of her later work. In the preface, Pérez clearly introduces the book that is to follow as an “experiment with my own ‘sitio y lengua’” (xix). Furthermore, the concluding chapter, “Beyond the Nation’s Maternal Bodies: Technologies of Decolonial Desire,” is an expanded version of “Sexuality and Discourse.” Because the earlier essay functions as theoretical bookend for *The Decolonial Imaginary*, I argue that it is worthwhile to revisit “sitio y lengua.” More specifically, I want to point to the way that Lacan’s skeptical model literally interrupts Pérez earlier essay as a performative instantiation of “sitio y lengua,” and make an argument for rejecting the Lacanianism we inherit whenever we use the word “imaginary” to advance the project of recovering the muted narratives of decolonial feminist thought—which is why I prefer the term “decolonial literary *imagination*.”

In a rather moving penultimate and concluding paragraph of “Sexuality and Discourse,” Pérez writes,

I give these words to you now. Like a gift. I tell you who and what I am. This is the gift I offer. Do you understand? *Ya no me van a robar my sitio y mi lengua*. They live inside my soul, with my mother, my sisters, *mis hermanas del tercer mundo*.

But as Lacan was quick to point out, this is not the whole truth. We can only tell half-truths. No one can know all that another is. Culture denies that. The limitation of language denies that. The signifier, the object, lost in a memory, lost in colonization, but reified in my *hermanadad*. We, the subjects, write; we, the subjects, speak. But, do you listen? Can you hear? (Pérez 1991, 179)

Here, the shiftiness of pronouns, most notably from the “I” of “I give these words” to the “my” and “mi” of “*my sitio y mi lengua*,” to the “we” of the “we the subjects write” and “speak,” to the “you” of “Can you hear?” prompts both the planetary community “*del tercer mundo*” and the skepticism toward the “you” that may not receive the gift of telling “you who and what I am.” This skepticism is introduced with the Lacanian concern that we do not have access to the “whole truth” and, because we cannot fully know all parts of the other, we may not be able to speak to the other. Pérez, unlike Lacan, historicizes the lost relation between signifier and object as a colonial imposition. Moreover, Pérez suggests that through memory, that which is lost may be recovered when “we” write and speak. But how does this “we” cohere as the writing and speaking “we?” In other words, how does the dialogue among the “we” enact a decolonial praxis that remembers even when the “you” does not engage?

Unlike Lacan, Pérez’s explication of the limits of language does not universalize an anonymous linguistic antagonism between self and other. Instead, she historicizes the intersectional particularity of the “we” of *hermanadad del tercer mundo* whose work emerges from “*un sitio y lengua* (space and language) that rejects colonial ideology” and historicizes “sexism, racism, [and] homophobia” as “byproducts of colonialism and capitalist patriarchy”

(162). Moreover, a praxis of “sitio y lengua” does not mourn the nondialogic space between Chicanas and “white men and women and men of color” (162). Instead, Pérez finds agency within a Lacanian deferral of meaning and politicizes a disregard for the “you” presumably on the other side of difference. Pérez further historicizes the “you” as well.

I seek faithful allies. I have no enemies. I do not perceive white feminists, white men, heterosexual, or even Chicano males as adversaries. But I see you, who hold sociosexual-racial power, as the subject who objectifies the marginal other—me. Often, I sense you as invasive, conquering and colonizing my space and my language. (178)

To this end, Pérez urges organizations such as MALCS to continue fighting for an exclusive space and language within the university where “*hermanas del tercer mundo*” can study and externalize various mechanisms of coloniality at work in dominant scholarship, (for example, Foucault’s and Lacan’s poststructuralist revision of Freud), and the everyday experience of attempting to speak and write as an academic.<sup>8</sup>

By recalling the organizational based origins of “sitio y lengua,” I don’t mean to recreate an unnecessary binary between the concrete experience of organizing and the abstract, therefore presumably misleading nature of theory. Instead, I show the ways in which the interanimation between the practice of sustaining an organization such as MALCS and a conscious theorization of language that is specifically anti-skeptical and non-Lacanian. I claim that in the former, “sitio y lengua” is more attuned to Freire’s pedagogy, specifically, and the pedagogical imperative U.S. women of color feminisms, generally. The difference between the earlier and later instantiations of Pérez’s “sitio y lengua” is the difference between a theory of language explicitly based in developing a dialogic pedagogy that addresses the structural demands of an organization committed to the project of decolonization—in this case, MALCS—and a theory of language that is alienated from the praxical implications of dialogism. I feel this is compromised by Pérez’s latter engagement with Homi Bhabha’s postcolonial theory to which I will now turn.

In the earlier essay, MALCS provides the space and language from which to recover the intimate and transnational history of decolonial feminist thought from the particular perspective of Chicanas and Latinas, and enables working toward “coalitions that we must build to make the true revolution” (178). Here, *sitio y lengua* is clearly couched within a transdisciplinary framework and pedagogical imperative. In *The Decolonial Imaginary*, Pérez relocates *sitio y lengua* within the particular demands of the discipline of history and renames this type of praxis as “Third space feminism” (33). This shift from “sitio y lengua” to “third space feminism” represents at least two important differences. First, while the earlier essay references revolution by way of an abstract gesture toward the future goal of alliance work across the separate registers of academic organizations like MALCS and other forms of social justice, *The Decolonial Imaginary* provides a historical overview of the Mexican revolution and specifies the nation-state as the space from which to recover the erasure of decolonial feminist thought. Second, Third space feminism is anchored in Bhabha’s concept of “doubling” and the “double signifier” that theorizes a “particular politics of the postcolonial” (33). While I will have more to say about Bhabha’s doubling below and, more importantly for my purposes, will place his understanding of the “double signifier” in conversation with Freire’s critique of an oppressive dual being, for

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<sup>8</sup> See Dolores Delgado Bernal, et al. *Chicana/Latina Education in Everyday Life: Femenista Perspectives on Pedagogy and Epistemology*. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006).

now I will succinctly outline Pérez's definition of "Third space feminism" as it relates to both the decolonial imaginary and postcolonial revolution:

The time lag between the colonial and postcolonial during this historical moment—the Mexican Revolution—can be informed by the decolonial imaginary. Through the decolonial imaginary, the silent gain their agency. To locate these women's voices, I argue that the decolonial imaginary becomes the tool that will write these feminists into history. Third space feminism, then becomes the practices that implements the decolonial imaginary. (33)

While Pérez implicitly (and at times, explicitly) expresses dissatisfaction with a Lacanian paradigm, her later work does not search for an alternative view of language. Instead, Pérez maintains and builds upon her Lacanianism in *The Decolonial Imaginary* by way of Bhabha's postcolonial theory. Because I am ultimately interested in expanding Pérez's Third space feminism for the purposes of literary criticism, an expansion I advance by way of a Marxist theorization of the relation between social and literary form, I want to emphasize what Pérez's sustained engagement with Lacan means for the claims she makes for the relation between feminism and historical materialism.

I have already shown how the difference between the early and later instantiations of "sitio y lengua" can be accounted for, in part, by the generic distinctions between the essay and the book form. A further comparison of each of these works reveals a historical shift in the academic paradigms that contextualize Pérez's feminism. In the former essay she wants to "take us beyond the antiquated Marxist-feminist debate, assuming that class struggle is unavoidable and assuming we agree that race-gender analysis and sexual autonomy must be the vanguard" (160). The desire to begin the work of integrating a Marxist-feminist analysis of race and sexuality rather than continue to rehearse their "unhappy marriage" is as much a critique of feminist dialogue at that time as a challenge toward the scope of her historical research which primarily focused on the sexist discourse embedded in the Marxist doctrines advanced by the Mexican revolution. Paradoxically, however, her desire to move beyond an "antiquated debate" within gender studies ran counter to her then unacknowledged intervention into Chicano historiography, an intervention that called for integrating the critique of heterosexism into an "internal colonial" paradigm for understanding the racist exploitation of Mexican labor. Given the "time lag" between each of these paradigms, Pérez prefaces her engagement with a French feminist critique of Lacan's "male symbolic order" (164) by suggesting that despite the absence of a racial memory, the work of Luce Irigaray, for example, enables her to articulate a Third World Feminism because it links the psychoanalytic interrogation of sexuality with a Marxist intervention into modes of thinking that work in tandem with capitalist forms of exploitation. To this end, Pérez expands Irigaray's link between "capital and the persistence of the Oedipal complex" to include an analysis of coloniality (Pérez 1991, 164). By contrast, *The Decolonial Imaginary* forgoes a conversation with French feminisms and in its place Pérez advances, as I mentioned earlier, a postmodern methodology for addressing the disciplinary limits of American historiography. Here, Pérez's later engagement with Lacan is maintained in two different ways. The first is obviously evinced by her use of Lacan's category of the imaginary to name the decolonial. The second is less explicit and operates through her revision of Bhabha's then influential theorization of the "in-betweenness" of the postcolonial condition advanced in *The Location of Culture*. Here, Bhabha's claim, "It is not the colonialist self or the colonized Other,

but the disturbing distance in-between that constitutes the figure of colonial otherness” (Pérez, 6), is based on his signature Lacanian revision of Frantz Fanon.

Pérez finds Bhabha’s conception of “Third Space of enunciation” useful for unthinking the binary antagonism between the colonizer and the colonized that characterizes early Chicano historiography. Citing the 1970s work of Chicano historians Rodolfo Acuña, Tomás Almaguer, Mario Barrera, and Juan Gómez-Quíñones, Pérez is critical of the internal colonial model they advanced because of its non-intersectional approach to exploitation that privileged labor to the detriment of sexuality and gender. The internal colonial model’s focus on the racialization of immigrant labor, moreover, maintained a nationalist viewpoint both in the cultural sense of a problematic identity politics that silences differences within negatively racialized communities and, more broadly, maintained a nation-state parameter for understanding social change thereby ignoring the unique diasporic configuration of Chicana/os. By way of its anti-nationalism or an anti-Americanism, early Chicano historiography unwittingly reproduced the colonial imaginary by privileging the analytic category of the immigrant despite its namesake “Chicano” that invokes the non-immigrant history of the colonial encounter in the Americas. This immigrant identity of Chicano/as persists by way of the internal colonial model insofar as it privileges a chronology of social change that follows “a class analysis in which race was explicated through the culture of the worker” (Pérez, 10). By contrast, if works such as Acuña’s *Occupied America* “places woman, the concept-metaphor, as laborer and commodity subsumed under a nationalist-domain,” a type of “counter-appropriation of a nationalist project,” the queer feminist politics of Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands*, “writes oppositionally to Acuña issuing a ‘new’ postnationalist project in which *la nueva mestiza*, the mixed-race woman, is the privileged subject of an interstitial space that was formerly a nation, and is now without borders, without boundaries” (Pérez, 25). Like Bhabha’s diasporic subject that is diasporic precisely because it belongs to neither the colonizing nor the emerging anti-colonial nationalizing project, but is instead “the disturbing distance in-between” (Pérez, 7), for Pérez, Anzaldúa’s *nueva mestiza* is the privileged site for an “open consciousness” or a “consciousness of hope in which ‘queerness’ is in the forefront” because it “attempts to ‘reconcile the dualities male-female and white-people of color’” (Pérez, 25, 26). I will return to the reconciliation of male-female dualities in the conclusion of this chapter where I outline my proposed relation between a Marxist “politics of form” and the (w)holistic imperative of decolonial feminist thought. For now, I emphasize the fact that by questioning the internal colonial model of early Chicano history, Pérez does not automatically place this history or queer consciousness within the postcolonial. While there are scholars who either “proscribe to the model of internally colonized people,” or resist with “kneejerk reactions any mention of coloniality,” or are “eager to cross over to postcoloniality,” Pérez explains, “I believe that the time lag between the colonial and the postcolonial can be conceptualized as the decolonial imaginary. Bhabha names the interstitial gap between the modern and postmodern, the colonial and postcolonial, a time lag. This is precisely where Chicano/a history finds itself today” (6).

As a historian, Pérez’s “social science” requires providing a plentitude of archival examples that provide enough evidence that women’s activism produced a constitutive though regularly disavowed discourse that defined the parameters of the epoch in which they lived. She must also provide a coherent argument for why this discourse has thus far been ignored and a method for reading the archive now that she has made it available. The impact of the number of archival examples she provides will be lost, unavoidably, in my paraphrase of her work, and, yet, I use Pérez’s method to make claims about the relation between literary and social form. Despite

Pérez's lack of attention to literary form, her relentless attention to an analysis of the intersection between gender, sexuality, race, and class serves as a model for what I argue is the hermeneutical function of reading for the decolonial literary imagination.

Pérez's intersectional method is particularly useful when considering the historical particularities of the individual who chooses to express dissent through a medium that is supposedly accessible as a communal discourse invested in equity. For Bhabha, to take up the language offered as communal (in his case the nation, in Pérez's example the law) can provide a space of meaningful self-composure despite the non-equitable realities that such a communal discourse attempts to hide. For each, then, there is an implicit statement that the law and the reach of legal discourse extend well beyond the specificities of legislation and contribute to the production of ideologies whose effects may last longer than the chronology of legal events might suggest.<sup>9</sup>

Pérez takes Bhabha's "double signifier" to read the multiple affects, negative and positive, created by women who took up the then emerging discourse of "feminism-in-nationalism" otherwise known as the "woman question" for Mexican Revolutionaries. For example, while Yucatecan feminists in the early part of the twentieth century mimicked a largely middle-class and highly educated discourse of postcolonial nationalism, "there was no space for integration" (33). Pérez explains, "As the Yucatecan women spoke, a kind of 'dialects of doubling' yielded a politics of contradiction, a contradiction to and with male-centered male discourses" (32). While women and men might have acted as "each other's doubles, 'doubling' or even repeating each other's rhetoric," state-sponsored advances in women's education and civil rights did not question heterosexual norms (33). Pérez also distinguishes class and ethnic differences amongst women who took advantage of the progressive discourse of socialist Mexico. In the case of Mayan Camira Palma, who was marginalized by both the heteropatriarchy of Mexican nationalists *and* the bourgeois if not wealthy position of the Yucatecan women's organizations, Pérez argues that despite the court's failure to prosecute those she accused of theft of personal property and racism toward indigenous languages, Palma "was not silenced, even though she was not really heard. Whether or not she won her case is inconsequential. She promptly pointed out the new government's shortcomings and expressed pride in her language when she defended herself" (50).

Pérez's agential reading of Palma's failed lawsuit exemplifies her conceptualization of "third space feminism" which relies, for the most part, on a fusion of Bhabha's postcolonial linguistic doubling and Chela Sandoval's "differential consciousness."<sup>10</sup> Throughout *The Decolonial Imaginary*, Pérez almost always follows Bhabha's explanation of the interstitial, third space enunciation, the postcolonial time lag, and doubling with Sandoval's avowedly postmodern hermeneutics because each works outside traditional notions of social change by tracing the "interstitial moments of history" where gaps in discourse "reappear to be seen or heard as that third space" (*Decolonial Imaginary*, xvi). According to Pérez, these interstitial, aural spaces, moreover, often fall outside a dialectical understanding of change that privileges

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<sup>9</sup> This is, of course, one of the foundational interventions made by Critical Race Studies, an area of study that I review in my analysis of the ethnic analogy at work in the literary history of John Rechy's *City of Night* (Chapter Two).

<sup>10</sup> I disagree with Pérez's alignment between these two thinkers insofar as Sandoval's later work, *Methodology of the Oppressed*, advances a particular brand of U.S. women of color postmodernism that is based on a critique of the Lacanianism that informs Frederic Jameson's hegemonic model for thinking postmodernity. I offer a close reading of Sandoval's critique of Jameson in Chapter Three.



the role of labor and, as Pérez, more than Bhabha and Sandoval, also makes clear, cannot be entirely explained through positive changes in the law. Pérez explains,

With gender infused into the framework, for example, social relations between women and men would have been configured differently, perhaps prompting the recognition that low wages were not the only problem at hand. But none of the initial studies seriously considered gender or sex beyond an economic explanation. (10)

While I would not abandon historical materialism, I would build upon a model with Sandoval's differential consciousness, with the interstitial space where Bhabha locates culture. (11)

In contrast to Pérez's critique of historical materialism that clearly points to particular Chicano Marxists who failed to theorize the link between labor and sexuality, no matter how unhappy that marriage might be, Pérez's critique of legal reform does not locate a cohort of protagonists in the same way.

This leads me to what is perhaps the most under read aspect of Pérez's work and what I find the most important for developing my conception of the decolonial literary imagination: the complicated relation between the law and labor for historicizing change from a decolonial feminist perspective. So, while Pérez positions the decolonial imaginary within the time lag between the colonial and postcolonial, I trace the decolonial literary imagination in the social and aesthetic complexities of literary form—specifically, by considering the ways in which the novel form negotiates the composition of (il)legal identities fashioned in the disjuncture between legal and economic equity. To this end, I reorient Pérez's intersectional view of the subject speaking through the law from Bhabha's Lacianism to Freire's dialogism that offers a different way of thinking through the question of the temporal lag between the law and labor, between the subject and space of enunciation, and the work of creating linguistic meaning that negotiates the oppressive limits of the coloniality of language. This reorientation, moreover, wishes to maintain Pérez's primary concern for the relation between sexuality and language, an area that Freire's dialogism does not specifically address.

## **II. Naming and Externalizing Oppression: Freire's Anti-Skeptical View of Language**

To exist, humanly, is to *name* the world, to change it.

Once named, the world in its turn reappears to the namers as a problem and requires of them a new *naming*.

Human beings are not built in silence, but in word, in work, in action-reflection.

[N]o one can say a true word alone.

--Paulo Freire

*Pedagogy of the Oppressed*

Freire's dialogism theorizes the linguistic subject as always in process and a hermeneutics for reading history from a nonnormative perspective that depends on neither the teleological stranglehold of big events canonized by the colonial historical imaginary nor the presupposition of the necessarily fragmented character of critical consciousness. It is worth

reviewing the detailed path of *conscientização* that Freire outlines as a process of moving away from identifying with the oppressor and how this movement depends upon an integration of the fragmented self that is inextricably linked with recreating a communal “thought-language” that critically analyzes internalized modes of dehumanization.

Like Pérez’s introduction to *The Decolonial Imaginary*, Freire begins with questioning both the parameters of history and how we are to understand the relation between subjective and objective conditions of oppression. Fully aware of the deeply skeptical tradition of philosophy embedded in the subject/object matrix that characterizes Eurocentric Marxisms, psychoanalysis, and classical epistemology, Freire bypasses his own disciplinary limits by advancing a model of knowledge production that addresses the core of what it means to be human in a world in which so many have been radically dehumanized for centuries. Despite the consistency of this concrete situation, Freire argues that it is misleading to admit “dehumanization as an historical vocation” because it “would lead either to cynicism or total despair” (44). Freire further explains,

The struggle for humanization, for the emancipation of labor, for the overcoming of alienation, for the affirmation of men and women as persons... is possible only because dehumanization, although a concrete historical fact, is *not* a given destiny but the result of an unjust order that engenders violence in the oppressors, which in turn dehumanizes the oppressed. (44)

The difficulty of understanding the objective conditions of dehumanization has to do with the ways in which conditions of oppression appear to be subjective because they have been internalized. This internalization of “historical fact” which, because historical, definitively expands beyond the consciousness of individuals, confuses the source of historical action—human community—with the structural consequences of alienated labor and corresponding forms of consciousness—an individualized sense of a “given destiny” that cannot critically engage with or confront the “unjust order that engenders violence.” This confusion, moreover, is evidence of an objectivity that, while not critically assessed as such, evinces the paradoxical relation to human community by way of contradiction. The contradiction between dehumanization as a “distortion [that] occurs within history” and the historical vocation “of becoming more fully human” emerges within an oppressed consciousness by way of a “double consciousness” that cannot distinguish between this difference because the “very structure of . . . thought has been conditioned by the contradictions of the concrete existential situation” (45). Freire explains,

The oppressed suffer from the duality which has established itself in their innermost being. They are at one and the same time themselves and the oppressor whose consciousness they have internalized. The conflict lies between being wholly themselves or being divided; between ejecting the oppressor within or not ejecting them; between solidarity or alienation. (48)

Moreover, this duality of being guarantees that any attempt to struggle against oppression inevitably leads to reproducing oppressive power relations so long as oppressive patterns of thought have not been sufficiently externalized. The difficulty of breaking this pattern resides in the difficulty of no longer identifying with the oppressor even though this identification may produce feelings of rebellion or disgust. This identification with the oppressor has less to do with

personalities and individuals and more to do with how for “the oppressed, at a certain point in their existential experience, *to be* is not to resemble the oppressor, but *to be under* him, to depend on him” (63). Freire further explains that this “total emotional dependence can lead the oppressed to what [Erich] Fromm calls necrophilic behavior, the destruction of life—their own and that of their oppressed fellows” (65). This necrophilic behavior, moreover, is based on a capitalist ontology of having, for “*to be* is to have” (58). This ontology of having produces a sadistic, perverted love of death insofar as in order to maximize being, an oppressive consciousness “tries to deter the drive to search, the restlessness, and the creative power which characterizes life” and therefore “kills life” (59).

In contrast to an ontology of having, Freire advances a model of humanization that enables an analysis of the contradictory or “dual being” of oppression as evidence for the coproduced realms of self and world, a phenomenological entanglement of self, other, and language that replaces the infinite horizon of capitalist having with an epistemological openness that recasts the incomplete project of becoming human within a framework of critically learning *with* rather than learning *about* others. In this way, the corollary between incomplete forms of knowledge and language lends itself to a pedagogy that “makes oppression and its causes objects of reflection” (46). In contrast to an ontology of having whereby objects are concretized through commodification, here, objects become the matrix by which critical thinking and life preserving dialogue emerge.

To return to the “dual being” of oppression that is at once the oppressed and, through mechanisms of internalization, the oppressor, the act of externalizing the oppressed portion of the self requires the oppressed subject to enter a contract with other subjects who are also in the process of externalizing oppressive forms of consciousness. This communal project, therefore, is objective insofar as it cannot proceed from a solipsist encounter with knowledge. This dialogical process, moreover, is at once objective in its encounter with oppression and subjective because to think with other subjects creates a common object of perception, and, in this way, subjectivity is granted not by the violent encounter of subject-object, but through the subject-subject relation of dialogism. I cannot stress enough that this turn away from the epistemological and material violence of privileging a direct encounter with objectifying forms of relationality and consciousness depends upon distinguishing between the contradictory logic of oppression and the violent antagonism between social forms.

Freire writes, “The pursuit of full humanity, however, cannot be carried out in isolation or individualism, but only in fellowship and solidarity; *therefore it cannot unfold in the antagonistic relation between oppressors and oppressed*” (85, emphasis mine). In other words, a conscious encounter with oppression is radically different than the internalized form of oppression that is evinced in the dehumanizing form of duality that simply mirrors the “antagonistic relation between oppressors and oppressed.” Freire distinguishes between two kinds of communities at work in oppressive power dynamics. While the elite cohere through their “*antagonism with the people,*” the project of humanization is located in “*communion with the (united) people*” (173). Because the “concrete situation of oppression—which dualizes the *I* of the oppressed, thereby making the oppressed person ambiguous, emotionally unstable, and fearful of freedom” the alienated portion of the self “is located outside the self, in the mysterious forces” that seem to create “a reality about which nothing can be done” (173). The dualized *I*, moreover, is an individual “divided between identical past and present, and a future without hope. He or she is a person who does not perceive himself or herself as *becoming*; hence cannot have a future to be built in unity with others” (173). Moreover, oppression, “by distorting the

authentic relation between the Subject and objective reality, also separates the *cognitive*, the *affective*, and the *active* aspects of the total, indivisible person” (173). By contrast, the creation of a communal thought-language is able to create a “true individual” that, for Freire, is only possible when a person “begins to integrate as a Subject (an *I*) confronting an object (reality)” thereby “sundering the false unity of the divided of the self” (173). For Freire, and in contrast to Lacan’s skeptical model, language is key for the recreation of material reality, a labor of love that reintegrates the cognitive, affective, and active aspects of the self thereby recreating the link between individual and community as one that neither doubts nor simplifies the struggle to know and change real conditions of oppression. Language is viewed as neither the site of ego disintegration nor an inescapable loop of anxiousness, failure, lack, and difference. For Freire, the dual being cannot perceive that they are in the world with others and, hence, dialogue becomes the route to both externalizing oppression and humanization. In contrast to the dichotomous relation of self and object operating within an oppressed consciousness, “dialogical relations” are “indispensable to the capacity of cognitive actors to cooperate in perceiving the same cognizable object” (79). In this way, subjects are able to have a conscious relation to the structures of oppression, that is, they begin the pedagogical struggle for *conscientização*.

In contrast to Pérez’s Lacanian model, the central claim advanced in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*—the human is constituted by a vocation to love, create, and think critically—rethinks the classical correspondence of Marxism and psychoanalysis characteristic of critical theory by rewriting the Freudian relation between the death and life drives. To this end, Freire outlines the process by which capitalism’s dehumanizing labor practices create a necrophilic worldview by producing the belief that humanizing experiences are the exception rather than the norm. *Conscientização*, he argues, retrains the mind by sharpening a critical consciousness of our subjective and agential participation in producing material reality. This shift in consciousness moves away from necrophilic practices towards a loving worldview. In contrast to postmodern narrative theory, Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* is based on an anti-skeptical view of language insofar as *conscientização* can only begin when two subjects, fully engaged in their vocation of humanization, come together to name the world, an engagement he calls dialogical praxis. Freire’s humanizing, positive view of liberatory language and dialogue provides a method for reading the decolonial literary imagination.

### **The Decolonial Literary Imagination: *Conscientização* and a Marxist “politics of form”**

For Freire, decoding refers to a reading method aimed at developing a critical consciousness that moves toward the overcoming of the fragmentation of knowledge, a process that I claim is analogous to what Marxist literary theorist González names the “politics of form.” Each of these critical acts is based on a presupposition that is fundamentally at odds with Pérez’s agential view of Lacan’s fragmented thinking subject that cannot know the “whole truth” of the other, treating critical consciousness as an act of suturing rather than further fragmentation. In this way, the question of the “whole truth” is revealed as a capitalist ideology that is distinct from the active attempt to contextualize the relation of parts to a limited totality that reveals the contradictions at work in an exploitative yet nonetheless logically coherent situation of oppression. For Freire, historicizing capitalist oppression is one and the same as developing praxis and therefore requires shifting the subject/object matrix advanced by a classical epistemological paradigm to a subject/subject matrix that objectifies oppression as a coherent

field of study. This active hermeneutic that relates the subjective agency constitutive of objective conditions of oppression depends on the humanizing project of revealing the ways in which we participate in a coherent limit-situation. The ways in which we participate can be revealed when we study the way we speak and don't speak to each other. For Freire, dialogic praxis can only be enacted when subjects relate to one another in a way that is invested in objectifying oppressive relations of power. This enactment, moreover, is a profoundly humanizing experience and therefore critical of capitalist modes of production that depend on and produce the fragmentation of knowledge, language, and non-exploitative forms of sociability.

Echoing Pérez's disciplinary limits that prompted an argument for the place of subjectivity within the required objectivity of the social sciences, Freire makes a preemptive move that in some ways foresees the limits of academic disciplines and a narrow, indeed Eurocentric understanding of the place of labor for historicizing social change, the limits of which Pérez's work so eloquently and rigorously outlines. My review of González's "politics of form," then, begins with the following question: how would Pérez's insistence on a historical materialism that includes the body as an archive for racial memory look from Freire's Marxist humanism that opens up the role of labor to include love and critical thinking? And, what would this expanded view of labor mean for theorizing the relation between literary form and history as a positive site for creating decolonizing dialogue across spatial and temporal difference? Despite Freire's lack of writing on the specificity of sexuality and gender in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, his indictment of the constitutive relation between capitalism and violence, followed by a pedagogy for unthinking oppression that attends to the multiple (rather than fragmented) linguistic subject of history, provides the philosophical rudiments for theorizing decolonial planetary feminisms and—equally consequential for my project—establishes the conceptual groundwork for a much needed intervention into literary theory.

Most important for developing a hermeneutics for reading the decolonial literary imagination is Freire's insistence that dialogue is not equivalent to the everyday encounter with the other. Instead, dialogic praxis depends on a decolonizing intersubjectivity that decodes structures of oppression by textualizing the totality of a limit-situation, a hermeneutics and decolonial pedagogy that I claim works as analogue for the "politics of form." In dialogical education, "the object of the investigation is not persons (as if they were anatomical fragments), but rather the thought-language with which men and women refer to reality" (97). Rather than see the linguistic imprint of oppression on consciousness as solely a dehumanizing fragmentation of knowledge that obscures the inherent relation between self and world, it is precisely the fragmented nature of oppression that becomes the catalyst for cohering with others in order to "decode" the relation between parts to whole thereby tracing the contours of a "limit-situation." In Freire's linguistic paradigm, the unconscious is not the privileged source of history nor is the real that which resists representation. Nor is a lack of knowledge the same as a lack of truth. Instead, Freire's humanism advances the ontological status of dialogue whereby the "true word" is constituted by two inseparable dimensions—"reflection and action" (87). Words that are deprived of action are merely "verbalism" and actions deprived of self-reflection are simply "activism," neither of which can transform reality. In this way, true knowledge is something to be produced through dialogue rather than the solipsistic encounter with the subject/object antinomy of capitalist modes of thinking that accompanies the objectification of labor. The ontological status of dialogue, moreover, presupposes the human as incomplete and therefore always in the process of producing knowledge because to "exist, humanly, is to *name* the world, to change it. Once named the world in its turn reappears to the namers as a problem and requires

of them a new *naming*. Human beings are not built in silence, but in word, in work, in action-reflection” (88). The incomplete process of naming new problems to be solved, or Freire’s well known concept of “problem-posing education,” depends on distinguishing between real consciousness and potential consciousness.

Freire identifies the boundary between these different types of consciousness as a “limit-situation.” In reading the thought-language of others through dialogic praxis, decoders identify the generative themes of a particular community. This community is identified through a limited geographical area or “sitio” and the commitment to enter into decolonizing dialogue or “lengua” in order to situate themselves in relation to each other and the “temporal-spatial conditions” they inhabit. Freire explains the ontological relation between dialogue and critical thinking.

[Humans] tend to reflect on their own ‘situationality’ to the extent that they are challenged by it to act upon it. Human beings are because they *are in* a situation. And they *will be more* the more they not only critically reflect upon their existence but critically act upon it. (109)

This requires a profound retraining of the skeptical, hopeless, and therefore “dominated consciousness” that can only understand the “limit-situation” by way of epiphenomena or the limiting of freedom and the reduction of people to things. This type of “fatalism” cannot grasp the contradictions that constitute the limit-situation and therefore cannot imagine the “potential consciousness” that resides beyond contradiction and contemporary reality. Furthermore, fatalism characterizes a dominated consciousness which “has not yet perceived a limit-situation in its totality” (104). In “the process of decoding,” however, a communal study of the thought-language produced in a specified situation externalizes and thereby makes “explicit their ‘real consciousness’ of the world” (105). By externalizing real consciousness through the thought-language embodied in a situation, humans “begin to see how they themselves acted while actually experiencing the situation they are now analyzing, and thus reach a ‘perception of their previous perception’” thereby stimulating “the appearance of a new perception and development of new knowledge” (115). This creates “a sense of *totality*” where

Individuals who were *submerged* in reality merely *feeling* their needs, *emerge* from reality and perceive the *causes* of their needs. In this way, they can go beyond the level of real consciousness to that of potential consciousness. (117)

In this way, dialogical praxis teaches people to decode the ways in which “thought-language” represents reality, a reality that is produced by the entangled relation between subjectivity and objectivity, between language and humanization, and the movement between an individualized, fragmented consciousness and a dialogical, therefore, communal process of objectifying (knowing and transforming) structures of oppression. Here, as I suggested early, the all important difference between the violent and dehumanizing relation between those with and without socioeconomic power and the externalization of this relation enabled by the decoding process depends on identifying the logic of contradiction at work in an externalized object of study. This process, moreover, is what I claim is at stake when we read for the constitutive relationship between the decolonial literary imagination and literary form.

Consider, for example, how Freire’s description of *conscientização* resonates with González’s explanation of the practice of dialectical criticism that unearths the “politics of

form.” González argues for a conception of form that is “roughly synonymous with the ideological ‘world’ of the novel or its totality” that, through dialectical criticism, broadens “historical consciousness beyond the immediacy of the local realities represented in the literature” (14). González further explains that a “politics of form” is an extension of a Marxist theory of reification that advances the claim that “the logic of commodity fetishism has pervaded every aspect of social life under late capitalism, including literary forms and consciousness itself” (2). In the same way that Freire insists that dialogic praxis requires not the encounter with individuals “as if they were anatomical fragments” but, more importantly, a decoding process that studies the ways in which their “thought-language” reveals the contradictions of the limit-situation that determines their encounter with reality (97), González makes clear that to be critical of the logic of commodity fetishism requires a hermeneutics that locates historical meaning in the form or totality of the novel instead of locating critique in either the character’s or narrator’s point of view. In other words, because reading practices that understand the novel as granting access to the individual consciousness of either the empirical author or characters adhere to the individualizing logic of commodity fetishism, we must look elsewhere for historical meaning and social change. This elsewhere, or “politics of form,” assumes that neither “the limited viewpoints of subjects represented” (2) nor the “ideological views of the author,” whether “subaltern or hegemonic” (4) minimizes the social critique that the novel can offer when we presuppose that the concept of totality works as critical counterpoint to reification. In this way, the totality of the novel, rather than specific characters or the author, contests “reification formally in striving toward a comprehension of—or at least allusion to—the relation between the specificity of the novel and social totality” (26). To this end, a “politics of form” is not to be confused with either *genre* (for example, “novels, short fiction, biography, poetry, or drama”) or *structure* (“the component parts of a narrative and their organization”) but instead “designate(s) the manner in which social relations become ingrained in the various levels of significance in a particular literary work” (25-26).

González’s claim that literary form can work as analogue for social form or “social relations” expands Frederic Jameson’s revision of Georg Lukács’ narrative theory in order to consider the ways in which the process of reification is tantamount to the process of racialization. More specifically, González’s study of the novel form specifies the ways in which the “politics of form” in Chicana/o novels “engages in a critique of reified notions of racial identity by drawing the lines of correlation between racialization and its basis in class society” (4). In this way, “the critique of reification in Chicano novels reveals their social class content even in cases where class is not overtly represented” (12). González is also careful to explain the historical particularities of Chicana/o novels.

[W]hat is particular to Chicano literature beyond the commonalities it shares with other traditions is the critique of being racialized in class terms—a reified, racial subjectivity defined by its proletarianization historically. This is to say, Chicanas and Chicanos have been constructed in the national imaginary as part of a subservient labor class—a social construction that Chicano novels attempt to dereify. (27)

González’s identification of the particularities of the Chicana/o novel also provides an important example that complements Pérez’s indictment of various cultural nationalisms that have marginalized queer and feminist praxis when he writes that while “antiracism in Chicano novels constitutes an attempt to go beyond reification,” reification “happens not only in acts of racism

and sexism, but somewhat more complexly and problematically in instances of self-constructed racial identities” (13). For this reason, “Chicano subjects find themselves not only needing to fight racism but also in the contradictory position of needing to go beyond their own constructed oppositional identities” (13). The “beyond” that González points to would be a class consciousness that is critical of democratic liberalism, cultural nationalism, cultural authenticity, and the ideology of individualism. While Pérez and González are invested in documenting the ways in which identity is problematically self-constructed by U.S. communities of color, they differ insofar that González privileges an analysis of class contradictions while Pérez practices an intersectional view of social oppression that traces the contradictions between categories of race, class, gender, and sexuality.

Like Pérez’s decolonial imaginary, González’s politicization of literary form similarly attempts to address the short comings of the historical materialism that Pérez identifies in postrevolutionary Mexico and a civil rights era of Chicano nationalism. Recall how Pérez’s methodological interest in a postmodern skepticism toward objectivity, linear conceptions of history, and cultural authenticity addressed the limits of historical paradigms that cannot account for patterns of repetition or the lack of change over time. In many ways, Pérez’s “third space feminism” documents various forms of critical social consciousness that were enabled by their historical moment but failed to cohere in long term systemic change. For Pérez, the temporal gap of the decolonial registers the unfinished but nonetheless persistent process of *conscientização* and raises questions concerned with the mechanisms and politics of representation that exceed the boundary between the historical as real and the literary as imagined. González accounts for this highly contested relation between the historical and the literary through his revision of Jameson’s “ideology of form.” In contrast to a mechanistic historical materialism that documents social change through the linear movement from let’s say slave labor to wage labor, the “ideology of form”

refers to the manner in which a social formation at any given historical moment is constituted not by one mode of production, but by various modes of production: traces of modes from the past, a dominant mode from the present, and anticipatory modes not yet having coming into existence. The form of literary works resembles the form of social formations in this regard: literary form becomes a battleground of ideologies representative of the various modes of production that gave rise to these ideologies. (24)

For my purposes here, I want to place González’s revision of Jameson in dialogue with Pérez’s concern for contesting the colonial imaginary, and show how González contributes to the project of a decolonizing literary criticism by contesting the link between a traditional periodization of American history (based on the expansion of colonial war) and literary categories.

González’s “politics of form” interrupts a traditional periodization of “realism,” by stating that the novel “can still be interpreted as aspiring toward a kind of epistemological realism made possible not by a direct correlation between representation and object, but by the logic of their formal contradictoriness—a logic that will be found to be consistent with the structural limits of late capitalism” (31). In their different ways, Pérez and González respond to each of their disciplinary locations by interjecting an “epistemological realism” that contests an over estimation of either subjectivity or objectivity when documenting the politics of representation at work in the relation between the literary and historical. While each is critical of oppositional identities that reproduce reified notions of cultural nationalism, Pérez subscribes to



a postmodern affinity for fragmentation and González advances a Marxist theory of (de)reification. Despite these different methodologies, each contributes an important part to what I term the (w)holistic imperative of decolonial feminist thought.

### **III. Decolonial Feminist Thought: *Conscientización*, Intersectionality, and the (W)holistic Imperative of U.S. Women of Color Humanisms**

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I have always wanted to be both man and woman.

--Audre Lorde

*Zami: A New Spelling of my Name*

I began teaching college right after receiving my Bachelor's Degree in 1975 at the age of 22.

Paulo Freire's significant book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* was not recommended by chance. His work was enormously popular among Latino/a activists in the seventies. The concept of the conscientización process was initially intended for all poor people.

By beginning of the new decade, however, many Chicana/ Latina activists, disenchanted, if not simply worn down, by male dominated Chicano/Latino politics, began to develop our own theories of oppression. Compounding our social dilemmas related to class and race were gender and sexuality.

--Ana Castillo

*Massacre of the Dreamers: Essays on Xicanisma*

In an early essay entitled "Learning from the Outsider Within: the Sociological Significance of Black Feminist Thought," Patricia Hill Collins compares the role of the black domestic worker to that of the academic when she states that each is privy to an intersectional view of oppression that demystifies white power, an "outsider within" perspective that has long informed a tradition of black feminist thought. The comparison of these two very different kinds of employment is not meant to analogize nor romanticize the relation between the working class and the highly educated. Instead, this comparison provides the framework for historicizing the long history of dehumanizing forms of labor that precedes (and remains contemporaneous with) black women's entrance into the university. To this end, Collins' history of black feminist thought concretizes the relation between epistemological and material struggle and bypasses the civil rights movements of the mid-twentieth century along with traditional academic institutions in locating the parameters of various forms of black critical consciousness. Collins explains,

There is a long and rich tradition of Black feminist thought. Much of it has been oral and has been produced by ordinary black women in their roles as mothers, teachers, musicians, and preachers. Since the civil rights and women's movements, Black women's ideas have been increasingly documented and reaching wider audiences. (17)

As a sociologist, Collins not only draws on the lived experiences of "ordinary women," but also moves across various forms of writing found in black women's novels, poetry, essay, speeches, and academic scholarship. By way of a transdisciplinary archive, Collins identifies the following

methods employed by black feminist thought, each of which I claim can be found when we read for the decolonial literary imagination.

First, Collins reminds us of the power of words to challenge “externally-defined, stereotypical images” that objectify and dehumanize black women (16). Like Freire’s humanism based on the dialogic and transformative power to rename reality, Collins explains that the insistence on “self-definition reframes the entire dialogue from one of determining technical accuracy of an image, to one stressing the power dynamics underlying the very process of definition itself” (17). Second, Collins states that an “attention to the interlocking nature of oppression is significant in that, implicit in this view, is an alternative humanist vision of societal organization” (21). Collins explains that black women’s studies critique of multiple forms of oppression enables a framework for understanding “how these same oppressive systems affect Afro-American men, people of color, women, and the dominant group itself” (21). Third, Collins further describes this “stand on the solidarity of humanity” as a consequence of the “holistic” approach of intersectional thinking. An attention “to the interlocking nature of oppression” rejects isolating singular epiphenomena, and, like González’s “politics of form” and Freire’s decoding, aims to historicize and reconnect the alienated fragment with the totality of social relations. Collins explains that this “viewpoint shifts the entire focus of investigation from one aimed at explicating elements of race or gender or class oppression to one whose goal is to determine what the links are among these systems” (20). Collins’ outline, then, specifies two important components of decolonial feminist thought: the power of language to name and therefore externalize dehumanizing forms of oppression and identity, and an intersectional analysis of power that, by studying the links between class, race, gender, and sexuality, lends itself to a humanism based on overcoming the fragmentation that each of these reified categories creates.

Like Collins’ black feminist thought, Ana Castillo does not forego the historical particularity of Xicanas when she envisions a decolonizing humanist praxis. And, like Freire’s Marxist humanism, Castillo’s concern for the material oppression of the poor places utmost importance on the imagination as a critical tool for externalizing the fatalism and necrophilia that capitalism’s ontology of having creates within a dominated consciousness. Castillo explains,

The dreamer, the poet, the visionary is banished at the point when her/his society becomes based on the denigration of life and the annihilation of spirit for the sake of phallographic aggrandizement and the accumulation of wealth by a militant elite. This is accompanied by a fierce sense of nationalism and “ethnic pride.” (16)

Castillo, moreover, aligns the annihilation of dreamers and visionaries with a spiritual imbalance that dehumanizes by way of exiling the feminine. In the place of Freire’s Portuguese *consientizaço*, however, Castillo’s explains that her preference for the Spanish term *conscientización* recalls both the popularity of Freire’s *Pedagogy of Oppressed* during 1970s Latino/a activism, and her critical distancing from Latino practitioners who, like the Mexican revolutionaries Pérez studies in *The Decolonial Imaginary*, let antifeminist nationalisms override their socialist ideals. Castillo explains,

At this point in our twenty plus years of Chicana *conscientización* and activism, women have begun an ardent investigation in the many ways our spirituality and sexuality have been denied by male legislature and religion. While, it is crucial for us to grapple with

issues of racism, it is equally crucial to realize that the root of that racism is in a historical, worldwide mind-set of conquest and that abuse of material power is a result of a spiritual imbalance. Four to five thousand years ago, humanity moving toward the deliberate omission of the feminine principle. We all have masculine and feminine within us, but only the masculine has been allowed to reign. (11)

In an act of decolonial renaming, Castillo provides the neologism *xicanisma* in order to expand Freire's *consientizaço* to include an intersectional critique of the male dominated politics of civil rights or *movimiento* politics, and the unhinging of male from masculinity and female from femininity. In this way, Castillo's humanist and queer politics defines the parameters of *xicana* poetics and visionary future that is different from our current limit-situation because "The same institutionalized thinking that ostracizes lesbianism and homosexuality penalizes heterosexual desire" (140). For this reason, Castillo envisions an alternative humanizing existence where "heterosexual society would no longer love man and hate women. In this same world, our sexuality would be truly free to express itself through our spiritual connections with all things on Earth" (140). Like Collins, Castillo's "Third space feminism" insists on forms of writing and speaking that document the historical particularities of *xicana* oppression and activism. At the same time, because *xicanisma* and third space feminism are intersectional in approach, they are also humanist in scope. Castillo explains a theory of the human that is concerned with decolonizing rather than neutralizing gender.

*Xicanisma* is an ever present consciousness of our interdependency specifically rooted in our culture and history. Although *Xicanisma* is a way to understand ourselves in the world, it may also help others who are not necessarily of Mexican background and/or women. It is yielding, never resistant to change, one based on wholeness, not dualisms. (226)

In this way, Castillo contributes a third element to how I understand decolonial feminist thought: a debiologization of feminist praxis that historicizes the colonial imposition of gender is necessarily a queer politics.

To review, then, decolonial feminist thought advances the power of language to rename and therefore reimagine externally imposed identities composed for the purpose of oppression; proceeds through an intersectional methodology and therefore humanist worldview; and debiologizes feminist and queer praxis by seeking redress beyond the dualistic and opposed categories of male and female. My comparative review of Freire and González, moreover, argues that this (w)holistic imperative is comparable to a Marxist literary criticism, and, more specifically, suggests that a "politics of form" and decodification resonates with a pedagogy for critical consciousness that enables a dereified imagining of an alternative to the dualistic and fatalistic worldview created by capitalism's reliance on dehumanizing forms of labor. *The Decolonial Imaginary*, moreover, also provides a feminist interpretation of the important relation between history and literature, and, more specifically, highlights how this relation is complicated by the reified categories of historical change we have inherited from both a narrative of U.S. empire and *Chicano* historiographies that have not employed an intersectional methodology. While Pérez's Third space feminism recovers the historical agency of women who have been erased from official narratives of history because they could only speak and write within the "double voiced" location of "feminism-in-nationalism," I read *The Decolonial Imaginary* as

evidence of the competing registers of economic and legal change. In other words, I rephrase the difficulties of tracking decolonial history as one that negotiates the interaction between changes in modes of labor (historical materialism) and legal rights.

In the following chapters, my analysis of John Rechy's *City of Night* (1963) and Alicia Gaspar de Alba's *Desert Blood: The Juárez Murders* (2005) models a hermeneutics for reading how the novel form also dramatizes the difficulties of narrating decolonial history. In Chapter Two, I focus on the formal relation between pilgrimage and confession, and trace how *City of Night* negotiates the ethnic and sexual identities imposed by the American Dream and the pathologization of the queer migrant. In Chapter Three, I analyze *femicidio* in Juárez as a test case for expanding the anti-globalism and human rights framework for understanding *Desert Blood*, and propose that Gaspar de Alba's dissertation-detective novel asks us to invest in a pedagogy for rethinking how we teach and learn about murder and violence against women *and* men of color. In this way, my reading of *City of Night* and *Desert Blood* clarifies the relation between decolonial feminist thought and a Marxist literary method for reading the novel form, a pairing that I name the decolonial literary imagination.

**CHAPTER TWO**  
**‘American’ Child of Migrants:**  
**Confession and The Sexual Outlaw’s Pilgrimage in John Rechy’s *City of Night***

I know things older than Freud, older than gender.  
--Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands La Frontera: The New Mestiza*

I will never use the word “queer” in approbation...  
I dislike the reference to heterosexuals as “straight.”  
I still don’t care for the word “gay.”  
I often suggest a much more glamorous designation for male homosexuals: Trojans.  
--John Rechy, “The Outlaw Sensibility”

Much of the initial polemics surrounding the relationship between John Rechy’s identity and the publication of his first novel, *City of Night* (1963), has undoubtedly been resolved. For example, we no longer need to pose the question --is *City of Night* a Chicano novel?—nor do we find the need to pose the even more alarming question—is Rechy a real person?<sup>11</sup> We have, moreover, moved well beyond Juan Bruce-Novoa’s early complaint that the Chicano canon rejected writers such as Rechy because “he revealed the irony of homosexuality’s close link with machismo, undermining the chauvinistic stalwart of the male dominated Movement” (121-122). As early as 1997, leading Chicano literary critic, José David Saldívar, cited *City of Night* as an example of a hemispheric text in his foundational work on literature of the Américas, *Border Matters: Remapping American Cultural Studies*.<sup>12</sup> Rechy is now routinely canonized as a Chicano, Latino, and gay writer.<sup>13</sup> In contrast to the unnamed protagonist in *City of Night*, (whose most secret identity is, ironically, not that of being a male prostitute nor of being from a poor, Mexican family, but of being an avid reader and author), the *real* John Rechy has been publishing for the past sixty years, and has enjoyed numerous literary awards and steady employment as a creative writing instructor at various universities.<sup>14</sup>

Written in the early seventies, however, James R. Giles’ essay on the confessional form of *City of Night* is an anachronistic reading of *City of Night* that admirably circumvents the either-Chicano-or-queer polemic that characterizes the early reception of Rechy’s first novel. As one of Rechy’s earliest literary critics, Giles’ accomplishes this circumvention by displacing the primacy of the author’s identity for reading *City of Night* without forgoing the political and aesthetic importance of recognizing a queer of color novelistic tradition. In other words, Giles

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<sup>11</sup> See Alfred Chester. “Fruit Salad.” *The New York Review of Books* 1.2 (1963): 6-7.

<sup>12</sup> See Saldívar *Border Matters: Remapping American Cultural Studies* (Berkeley: University of California Press (1997), and his more recent placement of Rechy within a trans-american literary tradition in *Trans-Americanity: Subaltern Modernities, Global Coloniality, and the Cultures of Greater Mexico*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2012.

<sup>13</sup> See for example, Illan Stavans and Edna Acosta-Belén, eds. *The Norton Anthology of Latino Literature*. (New York: Norton, 2011); Emmanuel S. Nelson, ed. *Encyclopedia of Contemporary LGBTQ Literature of the United States*. (Santa Barbara, CA: Greenwood Press, 2009); David W. Foster. *El Ambiente Nuestro: Chicano/Latino Homoerotic Writing*. (Tempe, Ariz: Bilingual Press: 2006; David J. Vázquez. *Triangulations: Narrative Strategies for Navigating Latino Identity*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011).

<sup>14</sup> For a more nuanced analysis of the import of the “realness” of authorial identity in relation to a Rechean theory of linguistic representation, Kevin Arnold’s “Male and Male and Male: John Rechy and the Scene of Representation” *Arizona Quarterly* 67.1 (Spring 2011): 115-134.

does not attribute the problematic reception of *City of Night* to the invalidity of sexuality and ethnicity as analytical categories. Instead, Giles reconsiders the polemical response to *City of Night* as one operating within, and meaningfully opening the critical parameters of, an American literary history. For example, Giles compares Rechy to John Steinbeck and John Dos Passos, novelists who, in Giles literary moment, faced similar critical challenges given that their aesthetic experimentation was often over shadowed or misunderstood in relation to their use of “reportage.” Giles also places the confessional form of *City of Night* in dialogue with its pre-Stonewall interlocutor—James Baldwin’s *Go Tell it on the Mountain* (1953). Giles’ comparative reading of Baldwin and Rechy marks an early consideration of a queer of color novelistic tradition, although, of course, Giles’ does not use the term “queer of color.” Writing in a moment prior to the canonization of Chicano literature, a literary moment that was also without the benefits of queer studies (and, hence, had yet to register the historical significance of the term pre-Stonewall), I attribute Giles’ ability to bypass the either-Chicano-or-queer critical impasse of his moment to his implicit, yet under-theorized relation between processes of racialization, sexuality, and literary form. In this chapter, then, I solidify Giles’ preliminary claims regarding the operative relation between ethnicity, sexuality, and the confessional form of *City of Night* by drawing on U.S. feminist of color theories of intersectionality.<sup>15</sup>

By foregrounding intersectionality as a method for literary analysis, I develop a hermeneutics for reading the project of decolonial feminisms at work in John Rechy’s novel *City of Night*. This method depends on two central claims. First, I place María Lugones’ theory of pilgrimage (or “world”-traveling) within a broader tradition of U.S. women of color of theories of intersectionality, and, more specifically, place Lugones in conversation with Kimberlé Crenshaw’s foundational essay, “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color.”<sup>16</sup> A pairing of their work provides me with the term “civil identities” and references the legal codification of racialized gendered identities created or legitimated by the nation-state. As Crenshaw and Lugones clarify, “civil identities” are limiting because they cannot account for the subject’s multiple experiences of oppression insofar as they are informed by an either/or logic. Second, I build on Marcial González’s “politics of form” by advancing the claim that it is the form of the novel, rather than exclusively the actions and thoughts of characters or the identity of the author, that teaches us a decolonizing history and feminist praxis.

While González’s claim that the form of the novel exceeds the consciousness of the author is essential for reading literatures by U.S. people of color specifically, and understanding the relation between social and literary forms generally, moving away from the identity of the author is particularly important for analyzing *City of Night* given its semi-autobiographical bent.

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<sup>15</sup> For a critique of the polemicized relation between queer theory and identity politics, see Kevin Arnold’s “Male and Male and Male: John Rechy and the Scene of Representation” *Arizona Quarterly* 67.1 (Spring 2011): 115-134. For a consideration of the ways in which racialization complicates this polemical relation, see José Esteban Muñoz. *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999.); E. Patrick Johnson and Mae G. Henderson, eds. *Black Queer Studies: A Critical Anthology* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005); and Michael Hames-García and Ernesto Javier Martínez, eds. *Gay Latino Studies: A Critical Reader* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011).

<sup>16</sup> Lugones places world in quotation marks to indicate the epistemic shift that can accompany a historicizing politics of place and movement toward loving perception. I initially encountered her theorization of “world”-traveling in Gloria Anzaldúa’s *Making Face, Making Soul/ Haciendo Caras: Creative and Critical Perspectives by Feminists of Color* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1990). Throughout this dissertation, I use the terms “world”-traveling and pilgrimage interchangeably, and presume this follows Lugones’ line of thinking in *Pilgrimages/ Peregrinations: Theorizing Coalition Against Multiple Oppressions* (Lanham, Md. : Rowman & Littlefield, 2003).

Although based, in large part, on Rechy's experiences with male prostitution and growing up in a Mexican working-class home in the border town of El Paso, Texas, *City of Night* mediates these otherwise seemingly antithetical identities insofar as the form of Rechy's novel extends the problematic of narrating migration beyond the particular Mexican American history of the narrator's family to become the story of America itself. Hence, I align these two forms of critique—an intersectional analysis of oppression and a "politics of form"—by claiming that, in reading for the relation between social form and literary form, we gain insight into the ways in which class contradictions reveal the coproduction of dehumanizing forms of labor and processes of ungendering that cohere in what Lugones has termed the "colonial/modern gender system" (2007, 189).

To this end, my reading of *City of Night* builds a literary bridge between Lugones' early work on "world"-traveling and her more recent intervention into what she describes as the heterosexist view of patriarchy operating in Anibal Quijano's influential conceptualization of the colonality of power. Lugones' theory of "world"-traveling—a teachable form of antiracist loving perception—enables me to show how the study of literary form can advance a project of mapping alternative epistemologies within and beyond the Americas. In contrast to Lugones' "world"-traveler who, through memory, can experience the self as multiple, *City of Night*'s unnamed protagonist suffers from a fragmented sense of self, a bordered subjectivity that is similar to the *unworldly* "civil identities" created by the legal parameters of the nation-state. Even though Rechy's protagonist-narrator lacks the critical perspective of a "world"-traveler, the "politics of form" at work in confession and pilgrimage, as social and literary forms, enacts a worldview that provides an alternative logic to the either/or thinking of various segregating logics operating in "AMERICA as one vast City of Night" (Rechy, 9).

For my purposes, to read *City of Night* within a decolonial literary framework requires giving an account of the debates regarding the usefulness or possibility of claiming a homosexual identity or a "gay and lesbian community" (Warner, xxxv). To this end, I draw on the work of Dennis Altman, Michael Warner, and Christopher Nealon to give an account of how this debate, and its consideration of "civil identities," has influenced American literary categories and periodization, an issue that is relevant for understanding and expanding the critical reception of *City of Night* as a queer, Xican@, and decolonial novel. I also draw on the immigrant scholarship of Eithne Luibhéid in order to show how immigration law has specifically prevented gays and lesbians from obtaining U.S. citizenship, hence contributing to the construction of the "queer migrant" as an impossible subject.<sup>17</sup> Rechy's "queer migrant" history, narrated through a form imported to the Americas through Catholic colonization—the confession—enables us to see the long view of coloniality as well as the post-World War II historical specificity of *City of Night*.

Guided by an attention to the relation of political and literary form, my goal for this chapter is to show how *City of Night* takes up the form of the confession and, more specifically, how a decolonizing revision of liturgical temporality informs Rechy's project of historicizing American coloniality. To this end, I provide a short review of the religious and legal form of confession in order to show how the formal relation between pilgrimage and confession produces a dialectical distinction between the religious and legal imaginary. The religious imaginary introduces a liturgical and communal temporality that interrupts the alienating

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<sup>17</sup> I borrow the term "impossible subject" from Mae M. Ngai's *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (2005).

individuality of the “civil identities” created by the law and advances Rechy’s theorization of the “sexual outlaw.”

In what follows, my close-reading of the opening chapter of Rechy’s novel establishes the ways the migrant home and the border town of El Paso document the logic of entrapment at work in legal, migrant, and sexual confession, a logic that is informed by the coproduced ideologies of the American Dream and the religious promise of salvation. The protagonist-narrator’s desire for escape, though only nascent and under theorized in his childhood home, develops into a sociopolitical critique that protests the condition of being trapped within an either/or logic that accompanies inherited forms of narrativity and sociability, each of which cohere around the difficulties of narrating American history from the perspective of the El Paso borderlands. *City of Night*, however, simultaneously documents the failure of the American promise of upward mobility and the persistent desire for equitable forms of sociability within and beyond the nation-state by revising the colonial imposition of confession—a literary form and form of subjectivity produced for and about “New World” sexualities. In contrast to Giles’ reading, however, my focus on the formal relation between confession *and* pilgrimage historicizes the decolonial feminist praxis of *City of Night*. Each contributes to my ongoing theorization of decolonial feminist praxis because they place the social activist demand for civil and human rights in dialectical relation to an aesthetic imagining of a world that goes beyond subjectivities paradoxically codified and erased by the law.

### **I. No Escape: The Limits of Whitman’s America and the El Paso “I”**

Children, go where I send you—how shall I send you?  
I’m going to send you one by one....  
--“Children go where I send you”

LATER I WOULD THINK OF AMERICA as one vast City of Night stretching gaudily from Times Square to Hollywood Boulevard—jukebox winking, rock-n-roll-moaning: America at night fusing its darkcities into the unmistakable shape of loneliness.

Remember Pershing Square and the apathetic palmtrees. Central Park and the frantic shadows. And wounded Chicago streets....Horror movie floats with courtyards in the French Quarter—tawdry Mardi Gras floats with clowns tossing out glass beads, passing dumbly like life itself.... Remember rock-n-roll sexmusic blasting from jukeboxes leering obscenely, blinking manycolored along the streets of America strung like a cheap necklace from 42<sup>nd</sup> Street to Market Street, San Francisco...

But it should begin in El Paso, that journey through the cities of night. Should begin in El Paso, in Texas. And it begins in the Wind.... In a Southwest windstorm with the gray clouds like steel doors locking you in the world from Heaven.

I cant remember how long that windstorm lasted. (9)

*City of Night* begins with two juxtaposed musical textualizations of America. The first, a lyric from the gospel song “Children go where I send You,” signals the first of four sections. The second, the initial page of the novel proper, introduces the reader to the unnamed protagonist and narrator of *City of Night*. The novel’s opening phrase “Later I would” suggests that while the



journey through America has already happened, the memory of this event is narrated in such a way as to create the temporal sense that the journey, and the structure of memory itself, can unfold in a present tense that the narrator and reader can share. This giving of life to the past, and the possibility for a memory unfolding as if it were a shared present amongst strangers, works in tandem with the personification of American objects as in “juke-box winking, rock-n-roll-moaning” and “wounded Chicago streets.” The personification of America works also to suggest that the aesthetic agency of memoir belongs to the nation insofar as it is America, not the author, narrator, or novel that gives form to this journey by “fusing its darkcities into the unmistakable shape of loneliness” (9). As such, the “I” of the sentence that begins the novel—“Later I would”—is not the individual agent of memoir. Instead, this “I” announces that memory necessitates America as master signifier, and that the re-memory of traveling through America gives life to America, both in the shared present of the meeting of narrator and reader, and in Rechy’s personification of American objects.

This fluid, shareable memory and ethnography of American landscape and culture is narrated by an idealist Whitmanesque “I.” This idealism is both in the tradition of Walt Whitman’s signature sexualized and embodied American transcendentalism, and the less literary, though equally ideological, conceptualization of the American melting pot. The multicultural and integrated viewpoint of America is constitutive of the Whitmanesque “I” and is initially established by the juxtaposition of two different yet genealogically related musical histories: the first, a black spiritual bracketed as preface to the journey that is about to proceed; the second, a rock-n-roll paradox of a shared loneliness between narrator and reader.

*City of Night*’s Whitmanesque “I,” however, is interrupted by a break in the page followed by the statement, “But it should begin in El Paso.” In contrast to the seemingly fluid and familiar historical narratives of the “American” cultural evolution from black spirituality to rock-n-roll, and of the Manifest Destiny movement from East to West, from “Times Square to Hollywood Boulevard,” from “Central Park” to “San Francisco,” the break in the page signifies an untold narrative of movement that is paradoxically the story of stasis and segregation, an untold yet equally historical narrative that exceeds a racial schema of black and white and an East-West historical trajectory, triangulating instead from Southwest to Northeast to West to South and finally back to the Southwest again. By shifting the point of entry into the American multicultural imaginary and national origin story from the East to the Southwest, and significantly, to the U.S.-Mexico border town of El Paso, Texas, *City of Night* offers a cognitive mapping of the borderlands alongside the borderless America of Whitman’s idealistic “I.” The break in the page, moreover, introduces what I call the El Paso “I,” a borderland subjectivity and narrator that attempts to historicize North South patterns of migration, racialization, diaspora, and empire of *América*, with an accent.<sup>18</sup>

In contrast to Whitman’s America, which enables the sensual and fluid connectivity of the nation through lyricism and a personification of the land, the narrating El Paso “I” in the borderlands documents a palpable and cruel border despite, maybe even because of, the promise of connectivity and movement. This promise prompts a desire for leaving the confines of the migrant home and the border town of El Paso, as well as for transcending the physical limits of the body in terms of mortality and physical need. At best, the upward mobility of the American dream extends into Rechy’s “Heaven,” and, at worst, the inaccessibility of an experience free of

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<sup>18</sup> For an understanding of Whitman’s paradoxical relation to American democracy and American empire, see Donald Pease, “The Mexican-American War and Whitman’s ‘Song of Myself’: A Foundational Borderline Fantasy” IN: *Immigrant Rights in the Shadows of Citizenship* (New York: New York University Press, 2008) 385-401.

the materiality of economic and sensual suffering compromises both Heaven and America. *City of Night*, however, simultaneously documents the failure of the promise and the persistent desire for such an experience because Heaven and America operate as interchangeable terms. Moreover, each term is inverted in its failed promise, as America/Heaven becomes a living Hell. In this way, the first page of *City of Night* juxtaposes the promise and the failure of the American dream, the Whitmanesque “I” of “Later I would” and the El Paso segregated “I” that cannot remember, and hence, cannot enter the national narrative of America without an accent. The borderlands subjectivity of the narrating El Paso “I” is birthed in the break of this promise.<sup>19</sup> In contrast to the Whitmanesque narrative of transcendence, regeneration, and movement, the El Paso “I” documents the uncoupling of movement and progress, of America and inclusivity, of Heaven and life beyond physical need.

While the formal break in the page documents the structural and epistemological emergence of borderland subjectivity for the reader, the narrator’s description of his experiences growing up as a child of Mexican parents codifies the U.S. migrant home as the site where he first encounters these competing narrative frameworks for making sense of his borderland identity. The narrator describes the death of his dog Winnie as a catalyst for rejecting the antagonistic narrative relation between America and the América he inherits from his parents’ stories of failed dreams and mourning. The narrator explains that when Winnie dies, he decides to rebel against a Heaven founded on exclusivity because the promise of escape from material and existential suffering should be extended to all sentient beings, including a life as seemingly insignificant as that of Winnie. As a boy, the narrator imagined the possibility of escape: “I would stare at [the sky] sometimes, inexplicably racked with excitement, thinking: If I get a stick miles long and stand on a mountain I’ll puncture Heaven—which I thought of then as an island somewhere in the vast sky—and then Heaven will come tumbling down to earth” (10). Already a rebellious thinker, the young narrator imagines an agency that inverts the trajectory of upward mobility and instead imagines a type of salvation that comes tumbling down to where he is already situated, circumventing the obligatory hardship of travel that is required of immigrants. The young narrator decides he will not suffer, and neither will his dog, when he states, “if she dies, I won’t be sad because she’ll go to Heaven and I’ll see her there” (11). But his mother, who introduced him to the Catholic conception of salvation and the American dream, stifles his vision by telling him, “Dogs don’t go to Heaven, they haven’t got souls.” The narrator continues,

“She’s dead, that’s all,” my mother answers, “the body just disappears, becomes dirt.”  
I stand by the window, thinking: It isn’t fair.... (11)

In contrast to Whitman’s “Leaves of Grass,” the dead will not be resurrected and American soil cannot regenerate life. In his childhood home in El Paso, the earth is “littered with papers and bottles covering the weeds which occasionally we pulled, trying several times to grow grass—but it never grew” (11). Instead of being recycled and reborn through death, in the days following her burial, “we could smell the body rotting” (12). In contrast to an imagined route of salvation that enables him to bring Heaven home to earth and within the space of the migrant

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<sup>19</sup> My reading of the liberatory and humanizing potential birthed in the break of the promise of American freedom is inspired by Fred Moten’s *In the Break: The Aesthetics of a Black Radical Tradition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003) insofar as Moten’s hermeneutical praxis historicizes the economic and embodied legacy of black enslavement in dialogical relation to an anticipatory and performative mode of futurity that unthinks violent and heterosexist forms of relationality.

home and border town, the death of Winnie changes his perception of the vast Texas sky that encourages excitement and possibility.

Then, that day, standing watching Winnie, I see the gray clouds massing and rolling in the horizon, sweeping suddenly terrifyingly across the sky as if to battle, into that steely blanket. *Now youre locked down here so Lonesome suddenly youre cold.* The wind sweeps up the dust, tumbleweeds claw their way across the dirt.... (10).

The wind, which symbolizes migration, operates here as a double incentive for narrative. As a force that is shapeless, it calls for form. It is a forced movement that is uncontrollable and seemingly without logic and without mercy. At the same time, it is an impetus for change and a catalyst for self-reflection. It does not solve the mystery of the soul nor does it comfort the suffering. It is the force of movement without telos; it unburies but it does not explain.

### **Inheriting the American Migrant Nightmare: “No Dogs, Negroes, or Mexicans”**

To expatiate some guilt for what I’ll tell you about later, I’ll say that strange, moody, angry man—my father—had once experienced a flashy grandeur in music [in Mexico]. [H]e clung to those precious manuscripts—and to newspaper clippings of his once-glory—clung to them like a dream now a nightmare..... somehow I became the reluctant inheritor of his hatred for the world that had coldly knocked him down without even glancing back.

The death of Winnie, the adult narrator explains, is not chronologically his “first” memory, because before that, “there are other memories of loss” (12). These “other memories” include those he inherits from his parents’ life in Mexico. His sense of loss, however, is not only for what occurs on the other side of the border, memories of “flashy grandeur” he has inherited; it is also, paradoxically, the protagonist’s own sense of loss of not being able to recreate his father’s movement across national boundaries, a movement that is sexually coded and seen as evidence of his father’s virility or power to “spread his seeds.” The relation between the ability to invent identity, sexual prowess, and traveling are solidified for the young boy in his perception of his father as “that man who alternately claimed French, English, Scottish descent—depending on imaginative moods—that strange man who had traveled from Mexico to California spreading his seed” (14). As patriarch in the migrant home, his father decides when to cross borders and how to name his national identity. This creates a paradox for the young protagonist-narrator whose desire to emulate his father’s masculinity is experienced in conflict with his childhood desire not to move.

While this desire to stay put is told from the perspective of a child, when historicized within the geopolitics of the borderlands, we can consider the ways in which this is not simply a childhood desire but rather part of the teleological aspect of the American dream that is not only of travel but of settlement. Crossing the border is supposed to signify the overcoming of obstacles and bounded circumstances, and yet, more often than not for the protagonist’s family, it is the introduction of many more borders to be experienced in the U.S. Their pattern of movement descends from a house with a picket fence to the projects. The failed migrant story that descends into poverty and the inability to let go of the American dream of upward mobility

is signified here by the father's emasculation that leads to the violent abuse of the son. In his memory, he associates his family's move to a poor barrio in Texas with the eruption of his father's violence. He declares, "from that clean house with white walls [we moved] into the house ... that smelled of rot [and] where Winnie will die. " And it is at this time "that my father plunged into my life with a vengeance"(13). The unnamed protagonist describes the house filled with the paradoxical and decadent loneliness of being "alone" with his "father." In contrast to the dreamlike quality of his father's Mexican life as a widely esteemed classical musician, in his memory of El Paso, his father is "a slouched old man getting up before dawn to face the hospital trash" (17). His father's mourning over the loss of a time of music paradoxically becomes a muted time of violence for the young boy who is required to be in his father's presence and remain silent as his father plays the piano or obsesses over his sheets of music.

In *City of Night*, the crossing of the U.S. Mexico border by the narrator's parents establishes an unmediated difference between Mexican and American, past and present, parent and child, self and other, city and world. In this way, his childhood home serves as the introductory site for the migrant nightmare and documents the conditions of segregation in a violent and nondialogical space of segregation encapsulated by the sign "No Dogs, Negros, or Mexicans" posted throughout a pre-Civil Rights Southwest. The protagonist-narrator's rejection of this unmediated relation between oppositions is recast as a loss of faith in, or the rejection of, the salvation that either the American dream or the Catholic form of confession can offer him, a pairing that defines the parameters of his El Paso home and family migrant history. The collusion between the inheritance of each of these failed narratives signifies the birth of the El Paso "I" as the focalization of a borderland subjectivity that desires to escape the migrant home because it signifies, paradoxically, not the trajectory of movement, upward mobility, or a shifting national consciousness, but the indoctrinated logic of entrapment and racial segregation, made clear by the death of his dog Winnie and represented in the opening chapter's "Nacimiento" scene.

Similar to the "precious manuscripts" that his father clings to as textual record of his life in Mexico, a time and place of creative and economic fulfillment that is forever severed from the violent silence of family life as he digresses into the life of a janitor who "woke up before dawn to face the hospital trash," the young protagonist-narrator describes his assigned role in the construction of his father's "Nacimiento." The traditional cultural practices surrounding Christmas are significant for understanding the coincidence between inherited cultural forms for constructing a world view, here signaled by the religious imagination, and the protagonist-narrator's struggle to construct his own relationship to the world outside the stagnant and racist parameters of his family's El Paso.

The nontranslatability of his father's Mexican Catholicism is signified by the only place in the novel where a word in Spanish appears, *Nacimiento*, instead of its English translation, "Nativity scene." The protagonist recalls how his father would recreate the biblical scene of pilgrimage with "the wisemen on their way to the manger, angels on angelhair clouds" and the "boxlike structure, the miniature houses, the artificial lake; hanging the angels from the elaborate simulated sky, replete with the moon, clouds, stars," while he had to "remain there, not talking. Sometimes my mother would have to stand there too, sometimes my younger sister"(15). The silent interchangeability between himself, his mother, and his sister parallels the nonagential parts of the *Nacimiento* that make up a mini-cosmivision of his father's worldview. Moreover, the interchangeability—or the logic of substitution—that building the *Nacimiento* enacts voids the relation between parts to whole thereby short-circuiting the meaning of the whole as aesthetic activity. The painful silence in which they are not allowed to participate in creating the

Nacimiento is subsequently repeated throughout various forms of coerced confession and the logic of entrapment practiced by police interrogation during the protagonist's pilgrimage through "America as one vast City of Night." The forced imitation of movement that is not movement but stasis—that is, the parallel relation between the "wisemen on their way to the manger" and the statue-like (non)participation and exchangeability between mother, son, and daughter—represents the imposition of a form of communality that disciplines in the Foucauldian sense rather than creates an intersubjective and critical relationality. Like the "wisemen" or "angels on angelhair clouds" in his father's Nacimiento, the figure of the angel is a recurring motif throughout *City of Night* that signifies the various forms of entrapment that the "sexual outlaw" endures.

Furthermore, the building of this miniature cosmivision contradicts the celebration of Christ's birth. The narrator's revelation that "we knelt before the Nacimiento, [and] we placed the Christchild in the crib" is supposed to memorialize the change from the punishing father of Old Testament violence to a life that emulates a loving father/God who gives up his most treasured possession—his son—for the love of humanity. Instead, the protagonist "loathed Christmas" because his "father's violence erupted unpredictably over anything." "He would smash bottles, menacing us with the sharpfanged edges. He had an old sword which he kept hidden threateningly about the house" (15). By contrast, the only "moments of tenderness" he experiences with his father are completely outside the religious imaginary. They reside within moments when his father "got paid" and "would fill the house with presents" "[e]ven during the poorest Christmas" or "take us to Juarez to dinner, leaving an exorbitant tip for the suddenly attentive waiter" (15). In this sense, the Nacimiento signals an absence of the "Christchilds" birth or the giving up of worldly possessions for a higher form of consciousness and eternal life. We see the contradiction between the performance of a redemptive narrative without its practical or embodied affects, a schism in which the El Paso "I" is born as unsaved and yet determined to find a form of relationality and focalization that is not a "substitute for salvation" but a movement toward a planetary world view. This movement, moreover, displaces the privileging of the Christ figure altogether—here represented by the "primitive-faced Christ" statue "up the mountain of Cristo Rey"—and the father-son form of relationality that it signifies by privileging the figure of the exiled angel as "sexual outlaw." In his recounting of the Nacimiento he foreshadows his own pilgrimage to New Orleans and Ash Wednesday that will challenge his parents' migrant nightmare and the logic of substitution which, as the underground hustling economy teaches us, is analogous to the logic of commodification.

During his experiences of feeling trapped with his father's Nacimiento, he begins to have a recurring dream about "the rocklike wood" "located on either side of the manger," wood which looked "very much like the piece of wood" that his father kept "on his desk, to warn us that once it had been the hand of a child who had struck his father, and God had turned the child's hand into stone." In the dream, the pieces of wood descend on him and he fears they will crush him. As he braces himself "for the smashing terrible impact, they become soft," enveloping "him like melted wax" (16). He further explains, "I will dream theyre draped with something like cheesecloth, a tenebrous, thin tissue touching my face like spiderwebs, gluing itself to me although I struggle to tear it away.... [I]n New Orleans I will experience it awake (16)." I read this nightmare, whose source is the Nacimiento, and the sensation of "thin tissues touching my face" as a narrative that is similar to W.E.B Du Bois' description of the veil of double consciousness. In the place of a veil, however, *City of Night* privileges the mask as sociopolitical and literary motif that historicizes the split consciousness of racialization. I will return to the

relation between a racialized multiple consciousness and the staging of an American pilgrimage to New Orleans in my conclusion. For now, I want to stress the relation between his childhood home, the logic of substitution, and dreaming, or more precisely, how the logic of substitution invades the protagonist's childhood consciousness insofar as the inheritance of the American dream circumvents his ability to dream altogether.

The interruption of private dreams, or the nonagential position of perpetually existing "in someone else's dream" (360) is supplemented by, for example, the narrator's preference for watching rather than doing, a central contradiction that plagues him throughout *City of Night*. The ability to watch others will serve him well as he perfects his hustling techniques which depend upon being able to read others while remaining a blank screen for the sexual fantasies of others, a nonreciprocal exchange of desire that he both celebrates and suffers. He describes this almost agoraphobic fascination with watching others from a safe and nonreciprocal distance as something he inherited from his older brother.

When my brother was a kid and I wasn't even born (but I'll hear the story often), he would stand moodily looking out the window; and when, once, my grandmother asked him, "Little boy, what are you doing by the window staring so hard?"—he answered, "I am occupied with life." I'm convinced that if my brother hadn't said that—or if I hadn't been told about it—I would have said it.

I liked to sit inside the house and look out the hall-window—beyond the cactus garden in the vacant lot next door. I would sit by that window looking at the people that passed. I felt miraculously separated from the world outside: separated by the pane, the screen through which, nevertheless—uninvolved—I could see that world.

I read many books, I saw many, many movies.

I watched other lives, only through a window. (17-18)

Here we see how the narrator imagines a time before he was born, how the story of something happening before he was born affects him as if it had happened in his time. In contrast to the forced substitution that happens in the Nacimiento scene, however, here the narrator chooses to sit at the window. This choice exposes several other interrelated claims: the preference of brother to brother relationality that circumvents the logic of substitution, a logic that hides the power relation between father and son; the desire for a life of contemplation and aesthetic education through the only other cultural forms—books and movies—that enable him to travel outside El Paso and that, like the religious imagination, are available to a working-class subject like himself; and the nonantagonistic relation of sharing a common past or history that precedes his birth with another that is very different from his position as "the reluctant inheritor of [his father's] hatred for the world."

One more example will suffice to solidify the decolonial difference between this brotherly relationality and the law of the father in relation to an aesthetic imagination that supplements the absence of agential dreaming. If at the window he takes his brother's place by looking outward to the social world rather than inward to the family, then in this following memory he recounts how he takes his mother's place to protect her from his father.

Some nights I would change beds with my mother after he went to sleep—they didn't sleep in the same room—and I surrounded the bed with sticks, chairs. The slightest noise,

and I would reach for a stick to beat him away. In the early morning, before he woke, my mother would change beds with me again. (16)

Here he takes his mother's place as his father's violence interrupts his sleep. The night is codified as a time of struggle during which the narrator, along with the categories that define his identity, experiences several reversals. At night he is his mother's protector, and in the morning he returns to his bed as child. This reversal also implies the reversal from son to father, from femininity (the object of the patriarch's violence) to masculinity (the subject of agency), and from the hunted to the hustler. These reversals, moreover, while first introduced within a matrix of violence, are also the catalyst for inverting, or at least expanding, the experiences and categories that initially structure the coproduction of violence and subjectivity to include pleasure, connectivity, movement, and self-invention, all of which contribute and sharpen the narrator's sensibilities as narrator or his desire to revise inherited forms of narrativity—a migrant history, the Catholic imaginary, the American dream—toward a mediated narrative of the various oppositions and identities he first becomes cognizant of in his parents' El Paso.

My reading of *City of Night's* first chapter has attempted to show how Rechy's use of the confession form is established at the novel's inception where the unnamed protagonist describes his migrant family home.<sup>20</sup> It is important to note that aside from his veiled confession of his parents' migrant history—"To expatiate some guilt for what I'll tell you about later"--the protagonist never utters the words migrant or migration to describe either his own movement through the U.S. or that of his parents' border crossing from Mexico to El Paso. The traumatic itinerary of migration is not that of his parents' generation, but of his own. Or, more precisely, migration becomes a form of exile rather than the agential narrative he imagines when recollecting his parents' stories of crossing the border.

Moreover, and as my reading of the Nacimiento scene demonstrated, the first chapter entitled "City of Night," sets up the formal relation between pilgrimage and confession. The shared title of this first chapter and the novel signifies the importance of this chapter's structure for understanding the relationship between the parts of the novel and its meaning as a whole. Furthermore, the recurring chapter title that works in juxtaposition to the alternating narratives, or confessions by other characters, stages the movement between different forms of confession—religious, legal, and literary—as the protagonist-narrator travels from the El Paso "I" and toward a narrative form that can "embrace the fusion of savage contradictions within this legend called America" (280). The protagonist-narrator's desire for both a form of narrative and form of communality that, like the "Cities of Terrible Night" provides a holding environment for "Lonely-Outcast America" (93) or "all the world" that have been exiled from "an uncaring Heaven" can be traced through a meditation on the refrain "no substitution for salvation." The staging of different forms of confession meditate on the protagonist-narrator's twin project of positioning his own disappointment with the failed promise of the migrant American dream to other forms of exclusion and gender oppression that constitute a negative Americanness defined by a shared experience of exclusion and alienation.

While the first chapter reads like autobiography, the rest of *City of Night* narrates an adult's experiences within the underground world of male homosexuality; in the subsequent

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<sup>20</sup> It is important to note that the novel never describes the narrator's identity as the child of immigrants. The use of the term migrant home to describe his childhood and familial experiences is my interpretation. To my knowledge, *City of Night* has not traditionally been read as a migrant narrative.

chapters, each of which are alternately titled “City of Night” or the name of a score,<sup>21</sup> the novel loops back to key images and tropes from the protagonist’s childhood: the ruby ring, the angel, the wind, the Texas sky, sheets, Winnie, the window, procession to Cristo Rey, the thrill of the mirror image, the smell of rot, decay, inherited fear, the shape of loneliness, the unpredictable patterns of water, the desire for Escape. This template of looping back to theological and historical concerns, as well as the repetition of motifs and poetic phrases and phrasing introduced in the first chapter, works in tandem with the cyclical structure of the novel. This cyclical pattern of *City of Night*—what I call its pilgrimage form—is key for understanding how Lugones’ antiracist perception of “world”-traveling is at work in the form of the novel, though not necessarily in the consciousness of the protagonist or characters. As I will show in my formal reading of *City of Night* as confession, the logic of substitution introduced by the American dream functions as the template for the logic of commodification that codifies his role as hustler in the underground economy of a then emerging gay identity. More to the point, in the movement between spoken and written confession, a “transgender” understanding of oppression is catalyzed by the ways in which confession by others, here in written form for the reader, sometimes resides outside the protagonist-narrator’s consciousness though not outside narrative. For Rechy, the mapping of America’s “cities of night” enables an “outlaw sensibility” as we are moved beyond the either/or logic of immigration and antidiscrimination law, of queer or Chicano masculinity, and the “troublesome myth of Stonewall [that] does damage to a whole body of literature” and “falsifies history” by “labeling everything before Stonewall an assertion of the repression of the times; everything after, ‘liberated’” (“Outlaw Sensibility,” 163).

## II. Intersectionality, Pilgrimage, and Loving Perception

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I remember a dead bracero near the bank of the Rio Grande,  
face down drowned in the shallow water,  
the water around him red, red, red.  
--John Rechy “El Paso del Norte” (1958)

[The Negro is] born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world—a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity.  
--W.E.B. Du Bois. *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903)

For my purposes, to read *City of Night* within a decolonial literary framework requires giving an account of the debates regarding the usefulness or possibility of claiming a homosexual identity or a “gay and lesbian community” (Warner, xxxv). To this end, I draw on the work of Dennis Altman, Michael Warner, and Christopher Nealon to give an account of how this debate has influenced literary categories and periodization, an issue that is relevant for understanding and expanding the critical reception of *City of Night* as a queer, Xican@, and decolonial novel.

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<sup>21</sup> See Appendix, the table of contents for *City of Night*. A “score” in the novel refers to men who pay to have sex with male prostitutes.



Furthermore, in what follows, I make an argument for using the term “civil identities,” and the intersectional critique of the law that it signifies, in order to undo the unnecessary polemic created by positioning queer studies in antithetical relation to identity politics. Of course, the dissatisfaction with a queer studies whose critique of identity politics has the unintended effect of bypassing the categories of race and the methodologies proposed by U.S. feminisms of color has already been well argued, and I reference these well-known critiques throughout this chapter. However, providing a cursory review of this scholarly polemic in relation to *City of Night* helps me to open up a largely post-Civil Rights debate to include a longer history of coloniality.

In his early and foundational work, *The Homosexualization of America* (1982), Dennis Altman articulates the then emerging sense that “homosexuals have increasingly come to see themselves as another ethnic group and to claim recognition on the basis of this analogy” (viii). For Altman, this is truly a celebratory claim that gets to the heart of what it means to be American: the struggle for recognition based on a communal identity that has thus far existed at the margins of America’s nationalizing promise of democratic inclusion. Altman welcomes this Americanization of homosexuality as “the greatest single victory of the gay movement” because it marks a shift from “behavior to identity, thus forcing opponents into a position where they can be seen as attacking the civil rights of homosexual citizens rather than attacking the specific and (as they see it) antisocial behavior” (9). This movement from “pathology to politics” (Jonathan Dollimore’s phrase), moreover, signifies not only the consolidation of gay community in terms of intersubjective sociability and an external visibility within American political life. Altman’s salutary view of the ethnic analogy—the claim that homosexuals are America’s new minority—suggests that in addition to the renewed legal promise of social equity that Civil Rights discourse embodies, becoming American also promises the bidirectional flow of cultural production between nation and margin. In this way, Altman suggests that American legal rights are inevitably linked to cultural ones, and he signals this pairing by advancing the claim that America is “becoming homosexualized in the sense that more people are behaving in the way traditionally ascribed to homosexuals, and that lesbians and gay men are exploring models for living everyday life that are relevant to everyone” (224).

The Americanization of homosexuality and the homosexualization of America, however, have not evolved without a set of problematic contradictions. Altman points to the economic limits of American minority and group-based politics when he states that one “of the ironies of American capitalism is that it has been a major force in creating and maintaining a sense of identity among homosexuals” (20). Like the sociohistorical scholarship that Nealon cites for his theorization of founding texts, a different account of the “ethnic analogy” that I will review shortly, Altman recounts the relation between economic mobility and queer social identity. Different than Nealon, however, Altman advances Michel Foucault’s thesis in *The History of Sexuality* by rearticulating the constitutive link between modernity and the invention of a new homosexual subject from a twentieth-century Americanizing perspective. Altman explains, “the mass political and cultural movement through which gay women and men have defined themselves as a new minority” was made possible “under modern consumer capitalism, which for all its injustices has created the conditions for greater freedom and diversity than are present in any other society yet known” (104). Altman’s positive view of narratives of freedom associated with capitalism and the relation between sexuality and identity, however, obviously runs counter to Foucault’s skeptical history of sexuality and modern subject formation. Furthermore, unlike *The History of Sexuality*, Altman is less concerned with the link between modernity and the production of the homosexual, and, instead, provides a framework for

understanding the relation between legal rights and cultural nationalism, each of which escape a Foucauldian analysis of power that does away with the conceptual and political framework of the nation-state. Despite these theoretical differences, and although he never cites Foucault directly, Altman's investment in revising Foucault's Eurocentric account of the history of sexuality from an American perspective is made clear in the following claim:

If the idea of the homosexual is a product of the nineteenth century, then the idea of seeing her/him in sociological rather than psychological terms, as a member of a minority rather than as an aberrant individual, is largely a product of the 1970s. (224)

Here, Altman implicitly argues for integrating the emergence of the gay minority within an expanded Foucauldian framework. However, let us note *The History of Sexuality* and *The Homosexualization of America*, published in 1978 and 1982 respectively, are cotemporaneous works that respond very differently to the "sexual revolution" of the 1970s. Recall that while *The History of Sexuality* traces the change in European attitudes toward sex and sexuality from the seventeenth century onward, Foucault makes clear that the purpose of this archival study is to address his contemporaries who subscribe to what he alternatively calls a "juridico-discursive" understanding of power or "repressive hypothesis." Put in plain language, each of these terms embodies Foucault's skeptical attitude toward the liberationist view of sexual agency that characterizes the "sexual revolution," a critique that is epitomized in his claim that "We must not think that by saying yes to sex, one says no to power" (157). In other words, despite Altman's conditional statement, "if the idea of the homosexual is a product of the nineteenth century," then the ethnic analogy is "largely a product of the 1970s," his salutary view of the legal agency of the homosexual as new minority is directly antithetical to the central thesis advanced in Foucault's classic text: legal reform fails to challenge the operations of power because it presupposes the repressive function of the law rather than challenge the ways in which the law socially constructs, and then enforces through disciplinary measures, the constitutive relation between normativity and the pathological. In other words, despite the homosexual's upward mobility vis-à-vis civil and economic rights, the disciplinary mechanisms by which the homosexual persona was invented in the nineteenth century persist (albeit through different social formations) and therefore preclude something akin to the sexual rights that Altman prematurely celebrates in his theorization of the homosexualization of America. Altman's subsequent postcolonial critique of AIDS discourse and advocacy for a transnational and non-Western framework for understanding gay activism acknowledges the limits of his earlier work.<sup>22</sup> However, placed in the context of *City of Night*, Altman's belated move toward an intranational framework becomes more obvious and problematic precisely because the racialized civil rights movement he references advocated a clearly pronounced U.S. / Third World framework.

By contrast, *City of Night* historicizes a mid-twentieth century form of American coloniality by providing an analysis of the material, legal, and psychic terrains of heterosexism at work in both the migrant family home, racial segregation, and emerging gay city. The thoroughness of this negative creativity works in tandem with an anti-skeptical, planetary politics that searches for a form of relationality that moves beyond the "smothering love" of family and exclusionary nationalisms, and theorizes an "outlaw sensibility" whose critique of the pathologizing operations of the law does not include either an argument for inclusion, or

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<sup>22</sup> See "Global Gaze/ Global Gay" *GLQ* 3 (1997): 417-436.

movement from the margins to the center of American rights or culture. Instead, the formal relation between confession and pilgrimage aspires toward a type of loving perception that theorizes the ways in which the “whole screwed-up world would have to change” (352). This “outlaw sensibility” also foresaw the limits of “civil identities” insofar as it does not simply negate or react against the *civil* or reified notion of sexual propriety required of citizenship. In Foucauldian fashion, *City of Night*'s documentation of the underground hustling economy concretizes the many ways in which saying yes to sex does not necessarily say no to power.

By disjoining Foucault from Altman, and aligning *City of Night*'s *avant la lettre* critical race studies in contradistinction to Altman's ethnic analogy, I don't mean to simply be critical of the individual deficiencies of a single scholar. Instead, my aim is more structural in scope and invested in providing an alternative literary history that attends to what Rechy describes “troublesome myth of Stonewall [that] does damage to a whole body of literature” and “falsifies history” by “labeling everything before Stonewall an assertion of the repression of the times; everything after, ‘liberated’” (“Outlaw Sensibility,” 163). More specifically, I claim that *City of Night* provides an important alternative example to the attempt to homogenize the before and after “queer” theory. To this end, by reading Foucault against Altman's claims regarding the movement from “pathology to politics,” I show that using Foucault to understand the relation between identity and the law does not necessarily lead to the central claims advanced by Warner's influential queer theory that, as many have already argued, fails to embrace the intersection of queer and U.S. communities of color. To this end, my rehearsal of Altman's *Homosexualization of America* serves as exemplary model of what Warner is critical of while *City of Night* provides a neglected critique of the ethnic analogy that advances a U.S. woman of color theory of intersectionality.

The positioning of queer studies as the antithetical response to the ethnic analogy proposed in early 1970s is clearly advanced in Warner's introduction to *Fear of a Queer Planet*. Here, Warner rejects both the ethnic analogy and the U.S. women of color theorization of intersectionality when he claims that the slogan “race, class, and gender” “implies not alliance or intersection ...but rather a fantasized space where all embodied identities could be visibly represented as parallel forms of identity” (xix). “Whatever the connections might be locally, they are not necessary or definite for any of these antagonisms. Anyone can do without the others and might have more connection with political conflicts less organized by identity” (xiv). Moreover, Warner implies that these categories are just too normal, too attached to the nation-state and tropes of the reproductive family and as such, his intervention resides in moving away from “gay and lesbian community, “where the buried model is racial and ethnic politics” and towards a queer politics as “thorough resistance to regimes of the normal” (xxxv).

In *Foundlings: Lesbian and Gay Historical Emotion before Stonewall*, Nealon advances my project of circumventing the seemingly unnecessary opposition between Warner's “queer theory” and Altman's “new minority.” Nealon proceeds by neither disregarding nor affirming the validity of intersectionality or analogy, nor by discrediting the desire for, or theoretical efficacy of, what I've been calling “civil identities.” Furthermore, Nealon does not replicate Altman's narrow focus on the development of a nationalizing identity that neatly coincides with the development of American capitalism, nor does he confirm Warner's suspicion that the category of “class” is “conspicuously useless.” Instead, Nealon questions the theoretical framework for the analysis of gay and lesbian community by interjecting questions of history, periodization, and affect.

*Foundlings* succinctly provides an overview of “the two poles between which the history of U.S. lesbian and gay sexuality was shaped in the twentieth century” (2). Roughly speaking, “the inversion model of homosexuality—the idea that homosexuals are people whose souls are trapped in the body of the ‘other’ sex” dominated the first half of the century, while the latter part was dominated by the “ethnic model—the idea that gay men and lesbians, either separately or jointly, constitute a people with a distinct culture” (Nealon, 2). Nealon further explains that his study of pre-Stonewall authors rejects this “progressive or liberationist narrative of the development of U.S. queer politics and culture” (8). Instead, Nealon shows how founding texts do not subscribe to either the inversion or ethnic model “in any pure form. What such texts do illuminate is the tension between, which manifests itself in an overwhelming desire to *feel historical*” (8).

Like *City of Night*, Nealon’s conceptualization of founding texts is an attempt to historicize the contradiction between a legal and community based identity politics and a queer sensibility that posits a politicized subjectivity without a predetermined subject. As a literary scholar, moreover, Nealon’s theorization of the relation between literature, history, and the politics of queer (non)representation is able to provide a self-reflective account of the ways in which these issues have been shaped by disciplinary location, and, more specifically, the methodological differences between a humanities and social science approach to history.

What emerges from the difference between queer theory and lesbian and gay history, then, is something about ideology and self-consciousness: is homosexuality most potent as a force for social change when it is inarticulate, unconscious, and acting as a threat to representation? or when it clothes itself in specific historical forms, which pose challenges to particular arrangements of power and authority? Does homosexuality have to be the conscious possession of a person or a group of people—an identity—for it to shape history? (18)

Here, Nealon argues that the methodological differences between the disciplines of theory and history emerges from the same question—how do we think about sexuality in a way that is “most potent as a force for social change.” Nealon goes on to very plainly state that his “own solution to this problem” is to turn to a New Historicist approach whose critical merits reside in the ability to document the historical and protohistorical subject by marking, though not condemning, the difference between “historical fantasy and historical ‘experience’” (18). For Nealon, New Historicism offers a “sympathetic, unpunishing description of the relation between” the desire for social change and the inability to materialize revolution.

By privileging the fragment and antidote, New Historicism fosters a healthy skepticism toward the “thoroughness of historical explanation” and counteracts “narratives of development or progress,” thereby providing a way to imagine a “more complete array of the options at a given moment in the past, instead of selecting only those realized as ‘historically significant’” (“Counterhistory and the Anecdote”54). Part of this imaginative counterhistory, moreover, insists on the historical value of literary texts that do not neatly correspond to dates saturated with historical significance such as “1789, or 1930, or 1918” (18). Because New Historicism offers a historicizing hermeneutics for authors and texts that exist in between the temporal signposts of official historiography, Nealon draws on this method for reading literatures by gay and lesbian authors writing before the equally historically saturated date of 1969. Nealon further argues that, because founding texts operate outside recognizable forms of historical

representation and periodization, they extend our understanding of the properly historical by documenting the desire to feel historical. They pose the provocative question, what does it mean to “*feel historical*”? (8) In this way, Nealon attends to Rechy’s call to question the “the troublesome myth of Stonewall” that the year 1969 signifies.

I want to add, moreover, that *City of Night* articulates the question of how to feel historical within the immigrant polemic of how to feel American. More specifically, Rechy’s *City of Night* narrates the legally impossible subject of queer migrant as the focal point from which to historicize the coloniality of gender in relation to the formation of the American nation-state.<sup>23</sup> The documentation of this alternative history is as much a point of historiographical struggle as the cultivation of Lugones’ “world”-traveling, and Crenshaw’s reconceptualization of a racialized sexuality as the ground from which to build a politicized intersubjectivity. *City of Night*, moreover, also attends to the legal history of spatial segregation and racist *and intraracial* sexual and gendered violence that Lugones’ and Crenshaw’s feminisms outline. For this reason, I now turn to a comparative study of Crenshaw’s theory of intersectionality and Lugones’ conceptualization of pilgrimage or “world”-traveling. Like Nealon’s critique of the reified historical periodization of a before and after Stonewall, Lugones’ and Crenshaw’s critique of “civil identities” moves us toward an “outlaw sensibility” that works against either/or thinking.

In “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color” (1991) Crenshaw claims that legal discourse fails to address the totality of multiple and contradictory experiences of oppression because while it attempts to recognize differences in class, gender, race, and sexuality, it understands the relationship between these categories as additive rather than interaminated or coproduced. Crenshaw writes,

Although racism and sexism readily intersect in the lives of real people, they seldom do in feminist and antiracist practices. Thus, when the practices expound identity as “woman” or “person of color” as an either/ or proposition, *they relegate the identity of women of color to a location that resists telling. My objective in this article is to advance the telling of that location.* (Emphasis mine, 357)

Crenshaw further explains,

the problem is not simply linguistic or philosophical in nature; rather, it is specifically political: the *narratives of gender* are based on the experiences of white, middle-class women, and the *narratives of race* are based on the experience of black men. (Emphasis mine, 376)

Crenshaw moves beyond a negative critique of the law insofar that she gestures toward, though does not theorize, a project of narration and location. Moreover, her critique of the law enacts one of the central epistemological concerns for decolonial thinking in general and U.S. Third World Feminism specifically: the critique of either/ or thinking.

If we think about the Civil Rights era as the historical period in which “civil ethnic identities” emerged, then my alignment of Crenshaw and Rechy via Lugones’ concept of

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<sup>23</sup> See Roderick A. Ferguson “Race-ing Homonormativity: Citizenship, Sociology, and Gay Identity” in *Black Queer Studies: A Critical Anthology* (Duke UP, 2005) for a study of the racialization of American citizenship from the perspective of black (il)legality and the relation between the social constructionist turn in sociology and the codification of ethnic formation.

pilgrimage begins to make more sense. First, let us recall that that Critical Race Studies emerged, in part, as a response to “a deep dissatisfaction with traditional civil rights discourse” (xiv). The critique of traditional civil rights discourse remains an important site of contestation because, for CRS,

the reigning contemporary American ideologies about race were built in the sixties and seventies around an implicit social compact. This compact held that power and racial justice would be understood in very particular ways. Racial justice was embraced in the American mainstream in terms that excluded radical or fundamental challenges to status quo institutional practices in American society by treating the exercise of racial power as rare and aberrational rather than as systemic and ingrained. (xiv)

CRS scholars also maintain that “liberal race reform thus served to legitimize the basic myths of American meritocracy” (xiv). The suppression of radical race consciousness was justified by the American cultural mainstream, or as Crenshaw explains, “because race-consciousness characterized both white supremacists and black nationalists, it followed that both were racists. The resulting ‘center’ of cultural common sense thus rested on the exclusion of virtually the entire domain of progressive thinking about race within colored communities”(1995, xiv). To this progressive thinking about race, we can add Lugones’ critique of hyphenated Americans.

In contrast to a “traditional civil rights discourse” that narrates the simultaneous events of desegregation and the cultural emergence (or national inclusion) of negatively racialized communities, Lugones explains that the “dual personality,” or what we might align with configurations of hyphenated Americans or “civil identities” (African-, Asian-, Native-, Mexican-, etc. Americans), produces “a split and contradictory being” for which “the selves are conceptually different, contradictory but not complementary; one cannot be found without the other” (135-6). For Lugones, the descriptive moniker attached to the proper noun American suggests that the non-American portion of this identity “can assimilate because their culture is ornamental rather than shaping or affecting American reality” (136). This hyphenated and fragmented subject “cannot participate in public life because of their difference, except ornamentally in the dramatization of equality” (Lugones, 135). Moreover, this othered American can never fully enter modernity because the politically liberal view of difference “lacks a conception of a multiple subject who is not fragmented” and “fails to address the problem of interlocking oppressions. Fragmentation is conceptually at odds with seeing oppressions as interlocked” (Lugones, 139). In the case of *City of Night*, for example, we can see the competing logics of fragmentation and multiplicity at work in both the literary reception of Rechy and the focalization of the El Paso “I” insofar as each is caught between the either/or categories of Chicano or queer, literary or historical, migrant or native American.

The effects of this fragmented rather than interlocking view of subjects with multiple identities is what Crenshaw’s critique of the legal response to violence against women of color had in mind when she writes that feminist and antiracist legislation “expound identity as either ‘woman’ or ‘person of color.’” However, different than Warner’s queer politics that remains suspicious of theories of intersectionality because race remains the buried model of group politics, Crenshaw offers a view of a racialized sexuality that sees each term as “potential coalitions waiting to be formed” (376). Crenshaw specifies the historical experience of black men and women in which the U.S. national imaginary and the law, especially the relation between cultural and legal discourses of rape, desegregation, and affirmative action, short

circuits a mutually empower relationship between black masculinity and femininity. For this reason, I stress that what is often overlooked in Crenshaw's seminal essay on intersectionality is her insistence on the ways in which an intersectional view of oppression challenges the reified relation between the subject's multiple identities and creates the possibilities for reintegrating the individual's multiplicity within coalition work.

Like Lugones, Crenshaw ultimately defines the recognition of the multiple subject as the starting point for a group identity that doesn't replicate the imposition of the coloniality of gender in which men and women of color sexualities are coproduced in antagonist relation to their white counterparts and then to each other. Crenshaw explains,

intersectionality provides a basis for reconceptualizing race as a coalition between men and women of color. For example, in the area of rape, intersectionality provides a way of explaining why women of color must abandon the general argument that the interests of the community require the suppression of any confrontation around intraracial rape. Intersectionality may provide the means for dealing with other marginalizations as well. For example, race can also be a coalition of straight and gay people of color, and thus serve as a basis for critique of churches and other cultural institutions that reproduce heterosexism. (377)

The emphasis on "intraracial" sexual violence, in the case of rape and heterosexism, provides a praxical way for communities of color to shift their gaze away from "white" oppression out there in the law or American ideology, and begin the healing work of how not to internalize the coloniality of gender. Consider, for example, how CRS' critique of racialism advances a theory of coproduction that undercuts a biological or static understanding of race and racism. Similar to Foucault's critique of a "juridico-discursive" understanding of power, part of CRS critique of those that adhere to traditional civil rights ideology is that they subscribe to "racialism" or the presumption that "racial interests or racial identity exists somewhere outside of or prior to law and is merely reflected in subsequent legal decisions adverse to nonwhites" (xxxiv). By contrast, Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality debiologizes racial identity and racism by historicizing both "how law has *constructed* race" and how "racial power" works in tandem with, but cannot be reduced to, "the narrow scope of" "antidiscrimination remedies" or legalized racism (xxv). Instead, the scope of racial power reaches beyond a "cramped conception of racial domination" that can only attend to the "evil of racism when—and only when—one can point to specific, discrete acts of racial discrimination, which is in turn narrowly defined as decision-making based on the irrational and irrelevant attribute" (xv).

The rationalization of antiracist legislation thereby places "virtually the entire range of everyday social practices developed and maintained throughout the period of formal American apartheid—beyond the scope of critical examination or legal remediation" (xv). The term "civil identities" is my attempt to account for the ways in which Lugones and Crenshaw contribute to studying "everyday social practices." Of these, as I have suggested earlier, is the ways in which Crenshaw and Lugones are committed to "investigating the intersection of race, class, gender and sexuality in a way that enables" an understanding of "the indifference that men, but more important to our struggles, men who have been racialized as inferior, exhibit the systematic violence inflicted upon women of color" ("Heterosexualism," 188). And, in expansion of Crenshaw's claim that race can serve as the potential for a coalition critique of heterosexism, Lugones writes, "I do not believe any solidarity or homoerotic loving is possible among females

who affirm the colonial/modern gender system and the coloniality of power” (“Heterosexualism,” 188). My reading of *City of Night* suggests that by reading the form of *City of Night* through Lugones’ concept of pilgrimage, readers can begin to map this impossibility in terms of homoerotic loving within the coloniality of gender. While clearly not about women of color, *City of Night* attends to the processes by which queer men of color have been constructed as inferior. Most importantly, *City of Night* attends to Lugones’ call to debiologize gender within Quijano’s model of the coloniality of power. Within the underground economy of male hustling, a critique of violence against women is advanced by considering the relation between acts of violence or cruelty and a male homosexual hatred for femininity. The mask that the protagonist-narrator is forced to wear has to do with this evacuation of all behavior ascribed to the weaker sex, and his unwillingness to confess to his desire to no longer have to hide all signs of vulnerability.

By way of conclusion, Crenshaw suggests that her conceptualization of intersectionality as feminist critique offers a different version of racialized sexuality and identity that summons “the courage to challenge groups that are after all, in one sense, ‘home’ to us, in the name of the parts of us that are not made at home” (377). To this project of understanding that which is home and that which is not home, Lugones contributes her theory of pilgrimage which, like Crenshaw’s CRS, contests the spatialized parameters of U.S. racial segregation and the pervading phenomenological sense that “Latina/Lesbian is an oxymoron, an absence of relation. Latina/Lesbian lacks a hyphen” (175).

Like CRS, Lugones’ description of a self-reflective consciousness is situated within a U.S. history of racial segregation.

Your life is spatially mapped by power. Your spot lies at the intersection of all spatial venues where you may, must, or cannot live or move. . . . You recognize signs that you are familiar with or signs that you see for the first time in this exploration since they are nowadays, in many geographies, mostly hidden: too little time, unsafe, only for smart people seeking degrees, for whites only (except if you’re going to serve or clean), too little money, not my community or my people, for heterosexuals only, or simply just private property (“keep out”). (8, 9)

Though clearly material in construction, this map of power also depends upon abstraction insofar that it produces a “you” “understood as thoroughly socially constructed in terms of power” (9). But alongside the “you” produced by power, there is also a concrete *you* without quotation marks that is “looking for signs of power and of limitations, reduction, erasures, and functionalist constructions” (9). Lugones describes the difference between you and “you” in terms of “having double consciousness” and “in terms of logical levels, the first transgression” (9). Double consciousness introduces a form of cognitive mapping that concretizes various circuits of power by allowing you to

see that people are organized and channeled spatially in ways that contain them in a systematic way from getting together against the grain of power. Or, you may not quite realize that. You may not realize how you collaborate in the production of that spatiality. (9)



Most importantly for the shift from the “veil” to “gift” of double consciousness, or what Gloria Anzaldúa describes as *conocimiento*, is Lugones’ theorization of pilgrimage that provides a detailed analysis of the constitutive link between antiracism and antiheterosexism, a form of critique that is at the heart of the decolonial feminist potential of *City of Night*.<sup>24</sup>

In contrast to the forced movement of the middle passage and the forced containment of segregation, the historical self travels. This type of pilgrimage is different than the colonizing travelogue because there is an element of return, both to the geographical point of departure and to the self in terms of self-reflexivity. In this way, “world”-traveling is not a form of settler colonialism. The topos of pilgrimage, moreover, interrupts U.S. literary and political narratives of Manifest Destiny and the Western Frontier, a colonial history that is questioned on the first page of *City of Night* and focalized from the perspective of the El Paso “I.” Lastly, Lugones’ pilgrimage builds on Du Bois’ “second-sight” or the “sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others” (Du Bois, 11), and explains the link between loving perception and “world”-traveling.

[B]y traveling to their “world” we can understand *what it is to be them and what it is to be ourselves in their eyes*. Only when we travel to each other’s “worlds” are we fully subject to each other. (97)

In this way, the circuit of seeing provided by “world”-traveling understands the difference between the fragmented self, that is, the epistemological violence of a racist double consciousness, and the multiple self, that is a *looking with* others that requires getting to know the “several ‘worlds’” in which others exist. This type of openness to historical difference and human sameness breaks the wretched cycle of the negatively racialized subject that can only see herself through a fragmenting and non-self-reflective logic.

For Lugones, the mythologies of national, racial, and cultural purity all depend on “social homogeneity” and a “hierarchical ordering of split social groups [which] are connected tightly to fragmentation in the person” (141). For this reason, the recognition of the multiple self is unlike the poststructuralist disavowal of unity insofar as Lugones, Crenshaw, Rechy, and Du Bois align the violent fragmentation of American landscape along sexualized color lines with a corresponding theorization of oppressive forms of consciousness. To refuse the either/or logic at work in a segregated “American” world is tantamount to acknowledging the experience of double consciousness as only one of several ways of experiencing the self as multiple and interrupts what Lugones describes as the “fascination with those who dominate us” (227). Central for the refusal of a fragmented identity that the “ethnic analogy” implies by registering only queer community as analogy for racialized community is an antiskeptical view of language and history.

Cathy J. Cohen, moreover, argues that one of the consequences of a queer theory based on the refusal of an intersectional view of subjectivity and intersubjective politics is the reinforcement of “simple dichotomies between the heterosexual and everything ‘queer’” (22).<sup>25</sup> Cohen argues that anti-heterosexuality alone cannot adequately theorize nor create coalitions

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<sup>24</sup> See “now let us shift . . . the path of *conocimiento* . . . inner work, public acts” IN: Gloria Anzaldúa and AnaLouise Keating, eds., *This Bridge We Call Home: Radical Visions for Transformation*. (New York: Routledge, 2002) 540-576.

<sup>25</sup> For a view of queer woman of politics that rejects an intersectional approach to identity and literary criticism, see Sandra K. Soto’s *Reading Chican@ Like a Queer: The De-Mastery of Desire*. (Austin: U of Texas P, 2010).

with, for example, women of color “who may fit into the category of heterosexual but whose sexual choices are not perceived as normal, moral, or worthy of state support” (26). By contrast, a decolonial praxis like that of *City of Night* works to provide a negative critique of the heterosexism of the coloniality of gender alongside a positive example of how to develop life affirming practices. This twin project of positive and negative critique is linked to a politics of place that historicizes genocidal praxis in the Americas by revising the colonial imposition of confession—a literary form and form of subjectivity produced for and about “New World” sexualities.

### III. The Religious Imagination and the Troubling Legal Confession

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Eithne Luibhéid’s *Entry Denied: Controlling Sexuality at the Border* (2002) and Thomas Brooks’ *Troubling Confessions: Speaking Guilt in Law and Literature* (2000) represent the larger trend in studies of the law that render confession within Foucault’s skeptical view toward writing and speech. By contrast, studies of confession from the religious perspective tend to focus their analysis on the ways in which confession, in its positioning of god as radical other and the subject as inherently dependent on this radical alterity, offers an alternative to Foucault’s narrative of autonomous subject formation that always already disciplines the subject through the false promise of independent and individualizing forms of agency and consciousness. In contrast to the intersection of law and literature, the pairing of the religious and literary tends to highlight the transformative potential of confession. My brief review of Kristine Ibsen’s *Women’s Spiritual Autobiography in Colonial Spanish America* (1999) and Björn Krondorfer’s *Male Confessions: Intimate Revelations and the Religious Imagination* (2010) will help explain this religious perspective, and offer a cursory review of the colonial and gendered history of confession in the Americas. Most importantly, I claim that *City of Night* works to place these two different histories of confession—the legal model as strictly disciplinary in the Foucauldian sense and the religious potential of relinquishing all notions of the autonomous will—in dialogic relation.

The 1960 arrest and interrogation of Sara Harab Quiroz provides a case study for Luibhéid’s claims regarding the production of an impossible queer subject and, for the purposes of this chapter, helps to contextualize *City of Night* historically. By reading against the grain, Luibhéid’s close reading of court transcripts and police procedure serves to situate the unspoken and unwritten historical, legal, and cultural politics of Quiroz’s borderland experience. Luibhéid’s reading, moreover, resembles and confirms the difficulties of narrating history from the “sexual outlaw” perspective of the Rechean El Paso “I.” However, we might look at another legal case study that is also a contemporary of *City of Night*—the 1966 Miranda Act—to consider the ways in which the courts became self-conscious of the logic of entrapment. In some ways, we can think of the 1966 Miranda Act as a legal attempt to fully sever itself from the religious logic of entrapment whereby not to speak is as much a sign of guilt as an admission to it. The “right to remain silent” registers (although doesn’t follow through with) Foucault’s argument for moving away from a juridico-discursive understanding of power that buys into the law’s project of normalization, a process that works through the enticement to speak about sexuality in particular and the truth about the autonomous self more generally. Moreover, by alternating between the specificity of the El Paso “I” and the general ideological workings of American law, we can better approximate *City of Night*’s aspiration toward historicizing

American coloniality from the focalization point of queer migration. This also attends to my critique of queer theory that does not provide an intersectional analysis of race, nationality, class, and sexuality. In my previous section, I argued that an intersectional methodology is better equipped for historicizing American coloniality in works by queer authors of color, and, perhaps, less obviously, is just as important for “white” queer theory insofar as it helps situate the coproduction of the “light” and “dark” side of (un)gendering. A thorough review of immigration law and a study of the Miranda Act is beyond the scope of this chapter, and I consider only the criticism of Luibhéid and Brooks respectively for this chapter. However, I feel that even this cursory overview offers an important historical and legal context for *City of Night*’s moment of publication and the evolving form of the confession generally.

Similar to Luibhéid’s immigrant scholarship, Brooks’ *Troubling Confessions* reveals the ways in which the law generally depends upon the subject’s self-articulation of criminality. Brooks further suggests that all forms of confession—the religious, legal, and literary—proceed from criminality to rehabilitation and allow the outcast to reenter into human community (2). While the general trajectory of confession follows punishment, absolution, rehabilitation, and reintegration, Brooks states that each has a different end in mind: the religious confession offers salvation, the legal confession offers a public testimony of the subject’s free will, and the literary confession evokes a search for authenticity. Like Brooks’ study, in what follows, I focus on the legal sphere of confession as it relates to the 1966 Miranda Act.

According to Brooks’ review of legal confession, for the law, confession is the ultimate proof of a crime (9). Moreover, the legal debates regarding confession have concerned the relation between the free will of the subject and reliability—in order for a confession to be considered reliable evidence it must be given without coercion, or what Judge Warren describes as the narrator’s right to tell his story without fear (9). For Judge Warren, the probability that this story will be told without fear is decreased by virtue of the environment in which the defendant testifies—the closed room. The privacy of the police confessional implies secrecy, and therefore a gap in knowledge (12). However, contra to the debate regarding the commitment to the free will of the defendant that best guarantees reliable testimony, police manuals are written such that they are guided to create an atmosphere of fear in the closed room of the police confessional (13). The police manuals, and the contradiction to the law’s stipulation of a free willed confession echoes the religious confession to heresy, and effectively cancels out Miranda’s purpose of the right to say nothing (15).

Despite the paradoxical, indeed, hypocritical relation between Miranda’s legislation against speaking against the self and police procedures which guides interrogations through a question and answer session that aim not at learning the truth, or at least the defendant’s version of the crime, but rather, at getting the accused simply to confirm the prewritten police narrative that evinces their guilt, the law still upholds that an involuntary confession is not a reliable source of evidence. The payoff, Brooks explains, is the ideological component of a justice system that depends upon conveying the agential practice of the law’s punishment and the criminal’s agential choice of illegality, a willing illegality that can at any moment, through the act of confession, be left behind in exchange for a fully just, and therefore socially acceptable subject.

Brooks, for the most part, leaves this paradoxical, indeed menacing understanding of the relation between confession and the law unquestioned insofar as, on the one hand, he essentially repeats Foucault’s well known claim in *History of Sexuality* that the confession is central for the legal equation between autonomous subject formation and subjection. However, elsewhere

Brooks suggests a less menacing version of the “I” produced through modern conceptions of the self. Drawing on the linguistic work of Emil Benevise, Brooks suggests that the “I” of language inherently constitutes a “you,” and therefore creates a form of dialogism. This gesture toward a dialogic “I” and “You” that confession makes possible runs counter to the central concern of *Troubling Confessions*, which, as the title suggests, documents the troubling relation between subjection (or the ideology of free will), legal discourse, and sociality.

According to Brooks, the troubling part of legal confession can be succinctly stated by the following claim: despite its proclaimed secular departure from the religious codification of the confession, contemporary law replicates the logic of entrapment that has characterized the church’s use of confession in relation to accusations of heresy. Like the law, in the case of religious heresy, the church offers the confession as a way to mitigate punishment. However, to refuse to confess confirms heretical guilt and further aggravates the offense committed against the governing communities’ rules for inclusion in a just society. We also see this tautological logic of guilt at work in Luibhéid’s study of the role of confession in immigration law and the pathologization of queer sexuality as unamerican.

*Entry Denied* places the El Paso “I” within the larger context of nineteenth and twentieth-century immigration law. Luibhéid’s study of the restrictive legislation enacted for the purposes of disciplining Asian and Latino migrants reveals the ways in which the law’s construction of these “civil identities” contributes to the ideological and legal codification of the heterosexual and racially white parameters of American citizenship. In particular, Luibhéid’s analysis of the constitutive relation between coercion and confession historically contextualizes why *City of Night* presupposes the link between confession and the formation of Americanness. As Luibhéid explains,

A very basic “inducement to speak” is built into the immigration system, in that one’s ability to gain entry into the United States depends on the willingness to respond to any and all questions of immigration officials. One risks a substantial penalty for lying or omitting information that the immigration service might consider pertinent to one’s application. This substantial inducement to speak is compounded during the experience of being held for secondary inspection, as happened to Quiroz when she attempted to reenter at El Paso. (88)

Luibhéid also documents the coercive tactics used to force Quiroz to admit to being a lesbian such as being placed in isolation, being denied food and restroom facilities, the threat of becoming permanently incarcerated, and especially dangerous for a domestic worker like Quiroz, the risk of unemployment and permanent separation from family on both sides of the border.

Despite her punitive experiences with the El Paso border patrol, Quiroz challenged the legitimacy of the written confession she was forced to sign. Quiroz tried to use her daughter as evidence of heteronormativity, and, when that failed, she married. The court upheld their decision to deport her by arguing that her single-mother status was evidence of a failed relationship with a man, which, in turn, must have been the reason for Quiroz turning to lesbianism. Her subsequent marriage was not enough to overturn the decision to deport her because the court argued that regardless of her belated rehabilitation, she needed to be punished for the crime of lesbianism at the time of her arrest.

Luibhéid argues that Quiroz's discursive and performative acquiescence to the discriminatory alignment between heterosexuality, sanity, and citizenship failed because of the laws hierarchal positioning of spoken confession. Luibhéid explains,

Quiroz's confession, but not the existence of procedures that compelled the confession, became the subject of adjudication in her case. Unfortunately for Quiroz, the alleged "perversity" of lesbians and gay men is often backed up by the claim that they "willingly" talk about their deviant sexual practices so as to "recruit" others into lives of depravity. (90)

While we may never know what Quiroz confessed to at the border, Luibhéid uses Quiroz's failed attempt to contest the "speech that was attributed to her" (88) as evidence for the inefficacy of Quiroz's written declaration that she was not a lesbian. Given Quiroz's failed attempt to challenge the authority of legal confession, it is no wonder that studies of the relation between law and literature operate within a Foucauldian understanding of power. By contrast, and as I mentioned earlier, studies of the religious confession challenge Foucault's framework.

In contrast to Luibhéid's and Brooks' respective study of *troubling* legal confessions, Krondorfer's study of the relation between the religious imaginary and masculinity brackets out all forms of coercion and skepticism toward the writing "I" of self-formation. This distinction, moreover, specifies that the written confession that Krondorfer analyzes, or "confessiography," does not include the well documented emergence of the subjected "I" central for the disciplinary function of medicine, law, and psychoanalysis. That Krondorfer is able to distinguish a writing *or* speaking subject that does not have to attend to the material and cultural aspects of these discursive registers is the first of several elements of the form of confessiography that does not fit *City of Night*. Despite this disconnect, a review of Krondorfer's theorization of confessiography reveals the general terms of the confession form that Rechy is attending to in his conceptualization of the El Paso "I" and the project of historicizing the American coloniality that necessarily exceeds the consciousness of the protagonist-narrator and author.

For Krondorfer, the "religious imagination" is central for confession as a mode of self-examination that allows men to reimagine themselves beyond a normative masculinity. Though different from official forms of religious practice and inclusive of secular worldviews, writing in the confession form and drawing on religious language and images enacts a belief in a transcendental Other that is different than the other of intimate relationships. The address to a transcendental outside of a known or knowable interlocutor affords a public site for exposing a self-questioning and therefore vulnerable self. Krondorfer suggests that the origins of this seemingly paradoxical staging of public intimacy reside in the *sigillum* of the auricular confession. Like its secular counterpart in the psychoanalytic relation between analyst and analysand,

priests and therapists are not truly human listeners. Rather, they are signs or representations of a greater power, which, in the religious imagination, is God, and in the psychoanalytic situation, the Unconscious. . . . [O]ral confession promises to restore the individual. Its restorative power lies in the listener's pledge to guard the content of the confession from a potentially hostile, noncompassionate public. (Krondorfer, 13)

Given the transpersonal relation between speaker and listener, the confessant is “freed from the obligations normally required or social regulations” and allowed to “reveal, unravel, and then reconstitute the self” (Krondorfer, 14).

The traditional understanding of the confessing “I” assumes that a transformation has already taken place and the confessant writes from the perspective of a newfound identity that acknowledges past sins or a life abandoned. Writing from this transformed and reflective point of view allows the confessant to reveal the most deviant or heretical of behavior and positions the reader outside from the writer’s detached past (Krondorfer, 24, 34). The trajectory of the confession, moreover, follows a moment of rupture or crisis that leads to a search for an authentic self that can narrate the transformative consequences of that rupture (10). For Krondorfer, the text of the written confession simultaneously evinces the writer’s sense of a self and a public that recognizes his subjectivity.

Confessional texts require a subject. Witnessing or testifying to oneself is an activity that assumes a subject that is legally recognized and that knows of its ability to act morally and politically. If one does not perceive oneself as a subject, or is not perceived as such by one’s social environment, one cannot write a confession. . . . Without subjectivity, no story of the self can be told. Without a sense of self, there is no *I* that can confess to the past not owned. (21, 18)

Krondorfer specifies that this sense of self-possession and public recognition is awarded only to a male writing subject. “Robbed of access to education, to a public voice, and to subjectivity,” women do not have access to the self-composition of the writing, confessant “I.” Given women’s traumatic relation to writing and voice, their writing can only testify to a form of survival rather than enact a trajectory from crisis to transformation that the confession form affords male writers (18). As such, Krondorfer argues against being seduced by male privilege when reading confessions. By practicing a “hermeneutics of suspicion,” readers can maintain a critical distance from the false pleasures of having access to an authentic self. This critical distance, moreover, circumvents the “desire to know” which motivates reader’s interest in confession and that can lead to missed opportunities for a critical reading of heteronormative constructions of masculinity (19).

The argument for a critical distancing from the “desire to know” the authentic writing subject is not only the gendered consequence of the privileged, male confession. According to Krondorfer, the textual mode of writing itself, because of its address to a reading interlocutor rather than a listening one of the *sigillum* contract, cannot reach the same “degree of self-effacing truthfulness as in the ideal situation of auricular confession” (15). Krondorfer further explains that without the *sigillum* of the auricular confession, a number of replacements take place in confessiography: the “impersonal listener” for the “ideal reader as public witness”; “an imagined dialogical *I* and *You* materialize in a text that is not transient” like the undocumented speech of liturgical confession “but fixed and preserved”; “the hidden self is revealed not in face-to-face conversation but through the detour of the imaginary power of the written word” (14-15). Without the protection and intimacy afforded by the *sigillum*, the dialogism of confessing narratives resides on “rhetorical and textual operations” whereby the ideal reader is placed outside the scene of intersubjectivity and textual production. The reader, moreover, fulfills the transpersonal function of interlocutor through a different position of an abstract public rather

than embodied listener and, as such, can in no way interrupt the writing subject's self-composition.

With this review of traditional confession and Krondorfer's confessionalography in place, I now turn to Ibsen's colonial history of the Catholic "religious imagination" to show how, in *City of Night*, the novelistic revision of the confession form is an attempt to historicize American coloniality. In contrast to Krondorfer's transhistorical writing subject who is afforded the male privilege "I" of self-possession and public recognition, the protagonist-narrator of *City of Night*, as impossible queer migrant subject, does not write from the remorseful or retrospective view of a life abandoned. *City of Night*, moreover, does not follow the traditional trajectory of confession that concludes with a reintegration into society. Instead, the protagonist-narrator remains a sexual outlaw from beginning to the end and his narrative, a development of character that is less about a movement toward rehabilitation. Instead, the refusal of rehabilitation or the compliance with the fiction of free will provides a critique of the American public imaginary that has not moved beyond the heterosexist modern colonial gender system, a history to which I will now turn.

As a form of seventeenth-century Spanish American spiritual autobiography, the *vida* was written by nuns at the request of a priest who acted as their assigned confessor given that women were not allowed direct access to theological debate and were considered in need of constant surveillance given the presumed lack of rationality that accompanied the inherent transgressive character of the female body (Ibsen, vii, 1). Because women did not have the authority to judge their own thoughts or spiritual development, they were assigned by their confessors to write down "every thought, action, and dream as part of their daily routine" (10). Ibsen suggests that because *vidas* were written for both the priests that commissioned them and then circulated amongst cloistered religious women, *vidas* are double-voiced in their address to two very different sets of readers. Ibsen explores this double-voiced address in terms of the gender hierarchies that were central for viceregal Spanish-American society and also contextualizes *vidas* in relation to the non-reading public that, while not part of the privileged exchange amongst church readers, played an important part of the gender politics that informed church life specifically and the project of colonization more generally.

By using an intersectional hermeneutic for understanding the coproduced processes of racialization, religious governance, sexuality, and class, Ibsen's study documents how, in the Americas, "the establishment of covenants paralleled the consolidation of colonial rule" (3). Only those who could prove their "limpieza de sangre" and could afford the dowry could enter covenant life which included access to black and indigenous slave labor, property, and the profits from small business. Paradoxically, however, *vidas* were used as evidence of the success of the Catholic colonial mission to prove that "if the New World could produce saintly men and women, it was proof of God's favor toward the colonies" and to counteract "the peninsular contention that *criollos* were inferior by virtue of their contact with other races" and the "physical environment into which they were born" which led "to wickedness and material ostentation" (12). Contesting "the conventional view of the *criollos* as materialistic" *vidas* functioned to consolidate nationalistic and religious arguments to continue with their colonizing mission. Given the political ends to which *vidas* served, the aesthetic form was highly structured.

Before being commissioned by her confessor, cloistered women understood the constitutive connection between the writing and spiritual subject through the church's instruction of "examination of conscience" for which she kept a daily journal of all of her thoughts, routine of religious practice, and visionary experiences. These journals were kept with little attention to literary form until they were edited and presented in person during confession. This preliminary

stage of *vida* writing was the basis of dialogue with her confessor and continued independently of whether or not she was asked to rewrite her daily experiences for publication and distribution. In this latter case, her confessor would act as textual editor as she rewrote her journalistic writing into coherent life story from a retrospective gaze that usually began with a childhood marked with prophetic signs of sainthood. Because *vidas* were always mediated by the physical presence of their confessors and almost always written with the hope of beatification, confessants practiced a careful formal balance between the repetition of certain tropes established within the hagiographic tradition and more personal, direct relation to God that circumvented the patriarchal politics of the confessor/ confessant relationship.

Although it seems that Krondorfer's focus on masculinity and the literary possibilities that the religious *imagination*, rather than official practices of religious institutions, opens up for contesting heteronormativity would provide a closer fit than Ibsen's study of sixteenth-century *vidas* written by cloistered Catholic nuns, I find the opposite to be true. Some initial thoughts on why Krondorfer's historically closer and literary focused work is less compatible with *City of Night* than Ibsen's historically distant and liturgical study of written confession come to mind. First, Krondorfer writes about *the* religious imagination as a general mode of thinking in order to accommodate his movement from his model for male confession—Augustine's fifth-century Christian *Confessions*—to writers that engage the Jewish, Catholic, and Protestant imaginary from varied historical and geographical sites that range from the early twentieth-century Ukraine, French surrealism, Nazi Germany, to contemporary U.S. gay theologians writing in the past decade. This transcultural view of religion and transhistorical account of the imagination, moreover, is also aligned with his transhistorical analysis of gender formation. By contrast, Ibsen's narrowly focused study of gender power dynamics within Spanish colonial America provides a historically specific account of the relation between sexuality, writing, and coloniality. Second, while Krondorfer's study makes a clear distinction between written and spoken, and forced and freely composed confession, the latter of which he terms "confessiography," Ibsen carefully navigates the ways in which the porous relation between these contributed to both the disciplinary and transformative qualities of women's church life in general and the task of *vida* writing in particular. For these reasons, I conclude that Krondorfer's succinct survey of the generic elements of confession is useful for contextualizing the literary tradition of confession that frames *City of Night*, and Ibsen's detailed history of Spanish American coloniality provides what Rechy has referred to as the Mexican Catholic aesthetic that has informed the formal experimentation of all his writing. In other words, despite Krondorfer's avowedly literary concerns, Ibsen's insight into the specificity of the Catholic imaginary of colonial Spanish America provides an often ignored aesthetic and historical framework for understanding of *City of Night*.

#### **IV. Pilgrimage and the "politics of form"**

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By early January, say (depending on when Lent will begin that year, and therefore Mardi Gras) ....Quilted jalopies will tackle the highways of manymasked America. [T]hey will come to join this determined pilgrimage to Frantic Happiness



In “Religious Alienation and ‘Homosexual Consciousness’ in *City of Night* and *Go Tell it on the Moment*”, Giles explains the relation between subjective and objective chapters, main and minor characters, and confession:

The organizing motif of the novel is the “confession,” and each “objective” chapter should be seen as essentially a confession of pain and suffering. It is crucial that these confessions of personal horror are spontaneously delivered to the central character, because his reaction to them is the thematic basis of *City of Night*. (370)

Giles also argues that the “pattern of the novel” enacts a “form of a quest” whereby the narrator overcomes his resistance to feeling compassion for others, a form of nonreciprocity that constitutes the role of hustler who is not supposed to feel in exchange for getting paid. Giles explains, “Despite the detached and unresponsive manner in which he engages in sex, he hears confessions from other characters. There is something in him which occasions sudden outpourings of grief and pain from others—the recitals of what his mother’s church would call ‘sins’” (372). Giles, moreover, marks the main character’s encounter with Neil as the turning point in the “spiritual realization that he cannot deny his compassion for others” (370). That is, his encounter with Neil is significant and evinced by the fact that when he gets to New Orleans, “He is still a hustler, but, in non-sexual moments, he now wants to hear the ‘confessions’ of others if doing so will their pain” (Giles, 373). In this way, Giles marks the role of confessor as essential for the development of the main character’s compassion because his confessants have “taught him that there is something that he will call ‘sin’—the humiliation and destruction of others because they are different. He has seen in Mardi Gras evidence that he lives in a country that is truly dead” (Giles, 375).

That the only formal criticism to date focuses on confession suggests that the relation between form and confession is undeniable when reading *City of Night*. However, there are important points where my understanding of form and confession differ. First, I argue that the relation between subject and object is disturbed from the first chapter insofar the “main” subject’s chapters are named “City of Night.” That the main character remains nameless throughout the novel is significant for understanding the birthing of an El Paso”I” that questions both the traditional “subject” of American literature and that autonomous subject constituted by the legal imaginary that we saw at work in Luibhíed’s study of Quiroz’s immigrant confession and the 1966 Miranda Act. Giles’ erasure of the city as character therefore places too much emphasis on the individual progress of the main character thereby overlooking *City of Night*’s sharp critique of the troubled history of legal confession that works to produce the American fiction of democratic free will.

Second, because Giles does not read the main character’s veiled confession in the first chapter, he places the main character’s realization that “this country is truly dead” at the end of the novel when he has reached his final destination of his “quest” rather than in the first chapter, in the migrant family home. In this way, Giles aligns travel and consciousness in a teleological manner which privileges the end point rather than the process and replicates the logic of the American dream in the place of understanding the migrant nightmare. This teleological framework is exactly what Lugones’ concept of “pilgrimage” and “world-traveling” work against. Moreover, that Giles places the realization that “this country is truly dead” at the end of the novel ignores the role of Winnie in relation to the material realities of segregation, a legal and racial reality to which Lugones’ concept of “pilgrimage” also attends. Giles’ erasure of the

sociopolitical importance of Winnie's death is part of his general ahistorical framework for reading confession as form and the pilgrimage structure of the novel that concludes with a return to, and important textual revision of, the migrant home. This is also why Giles only considers the pressure to role play when discussing the role of hustler, foregoing the ethnic, racial, gendered, and sexualized categories that the protagonist inherits in the Nacimiento scene and the ways in which the religious imaginary that confession invokes can be used for historicizing American coloniality.

Third, not to recognize the protagonist-narrator in his capacity as both confessor and confessant has important consequences. Most importantly, Rechy's decolonizing revision of the confession relies on the alternating positions of confessor and confessant. Of central importance for understanding the ways in which Rechy's decolonizing revision of confession operates is the personalizing of the abstract schema of liturgical time. One example of this personalization is the unnamed protagonist's confession to the New Orleans priest. Although we don't read what he says to the priest, the narrator states that "he [the priest] spoke to me and spoke—and I can remember only one thing he said, *"I know, he said. "Yes, I know."* The sound of the priest's voice, and his reception to the difficulties of narrating from the position of the El Paso "I", undoes the Foucauldian theorization of the confessant who enacts disciplinary power by not being enticed to speak. The non-silence of the priest establishes the parameters of dialogic speech and undoes the transpersonal relation established through the auricular *sigillum*. This dialogic speech that revises the colonial and legal history of coerced confession, however, is not secular in strict terms. The dialogic encounter between the El Paso "I" and confessant that occurs over the phone rather than the border police interrogation room or the church confessional takes place on Ash Wednesday. This politics of place and revision of liturgical time enable a third subject—the reader—to have access to what alternates between the unspeakable and unheard. In this way, the novel does not trace an unmediated or transparent access to the narrator's consciousness, nor does it place meaning in the completion of a heroic quest as Giles suggest. Instead, meaning is placed in the revised liturgical and therefore communal time of dialogic confession.

Giles immobile alignment between subject and object, and confessor (main character) and confessant (minor characters) misses the protagonist-narrator's heard (by Jeremy) and unheard confession (with priest). This follows Giles erasure of the first chapter as a veiled confession and is part of his more general negligence regarding the role of the reader and the difference between main character and narrator, which do not have to, and in *City of Night*, do not coincide. Instead, Giles' understanding of confession is limited to moments when characters confess in a spoken medium, undoing the complicated relation between written and spoken confession that Ibsen and Kronerfer demonstrate in their analysis of the religious imagination.

By contrast, González's understanding of "contradictory form" enables a decolonial feminist and humanizing planetary worldview when he writes that form is neither genre nor structure but "roughly synonymous with the ideological 'world' of the novel or its totality" (14). Moreover, his conception of totality as a methodological postulate corresponds as counterpoint to the Marxist theory of reification, which, stated succinctly, describes "the failure to understand how objects, events, situations are intricately connected to and constituted by dynamic social processes that evolved historically at different levels: locally, national, and globally" (11). This aspiration towards dereification both historicizes the coloniality of power—or the intersectional matrix that reifies the relation between race, gender, sexuality, labor, and class—and desires to move beyond it. This critical consciousness cannot therefore be analogous to the consciousness

of either authors or characters of a novel but is instead developed through an attention to form or the “conceptual logic for comprehending the relation among the various parts of the narrative as a whole” (González, 25). In this way, a “politics of form” enables a more nuanced understanding of the work of decolonial confession in *City of Night* that is mediated through a complex set of relations between what is spoken, unheard, and read.

While the logic of substitution or reluctant inheritance is established in his memory of childhood El Paso and exemplified in the Nacimiento scene, as an adult he finds an antidote in non reciprocity which interrupts the lie of exchange value and establishes his own value by being wanted but not reciprocating. As a hustler, his worth is established through a circuit of desire that interrupts the logic of equivalence that establishes the commodification of wage labor. This alternative circuit of intersubjectivity is followed through to its logical endpoint because the object that is received—money—is of no value to the protagonist-narrator. He is not interested in wealth and circumvents the concept of surplus value insofar as his self-value increases because of his impulse to spend whatever he earns as soon as possible. At first glance the underground economy of hustling seems to provide an exit from this logic of commodification. But this exit depends upon an explicit homophobia and the censuring of male-male desire specifically and male desire more generally because masculinity is scripted in strict terms. The protagonist-narrator is quick to adapt to the underground code of conduct where he learns that “to hustle the streets you had to play it almost-illiterate” because “real masculine men don’t read! (32), and that “a hustler became more attractive in direct relation to his seeming insensitivity—his toughness.” “I would wear that mask” (33). However, in contrast to the veiled confession of his family migrant home where the law of the father introduces the logic of substitution, the various confessions we are privy to because of his hustling offer a critique of both this logic and a male point of view. The complicated and mobile relation of confession between hustler and score and confession between narrator and reader is established by this transgendered relation and is central for the planetary and humanizing politics the novel traces. More specifically, we see this relation between speaking and reading, between individual memory and a shared vulnerability that confession introduces, and movement toward a multigendered world view of oppression and sexual desire through various characters that stand in critical relation to a heteronormative matrix of gender, sexual desire, and the logic of commodification. While it is the relationship between scores and hustlers that establishes the homophobic claim that if “he does it for money, that dont make him queer. Youre still straight,” (40) the transgender critique of the hustling code is solidified in *City of Nights*’s revision of the relationship between spoken and written confession, a decolonial intervention that is analogous to a “politics of form.”

The protagonist-narrator’s friendship with Barbara will serve as an example of the movement between spoken and written confession, and a “politics of form.” Barbara first speaks to the narrator as they sit at a coffee shop and watch “the cops [who] had stopped a madeup queen” (144). While their roles in the underground economy positions them such that it is beneficial for them to speak—Barbara is one of those pretty girls who sleep with and make public appearances with hustlers in order to maintain the hustler’s image as straight—they discover that they are drawn to each other because their critique of the legal antagonism toward queens enables them to confess to their “toughmasked loneliness” (144). Like Jeremy much later, Barbara is quick to point to the general contradictions of the hustling code “All of you keep telling yourselves you’re straight” because you do it for money, but “I bet you’ve never even clipped a wallet” (146). The narrator is drawn to Barbara’s ability to point to these contradictions, and his suspicion that they have much in common is confirmed when Barbara

plays the only record she owned, Bartok's *Music for Strings, Percussion and Celesta*. As his father's music plays "scratchily on the cheap machine—but still beautifully" (145), this "haunting, haunted music" opens up a space for vulnerability and confession. He holds her when Barbara confesses, "*Youve got to pretend you dont give a damn and swing along with those that really dont—or you go under.*" This refrain first appears in a chapter entitled "City of Night" and is the only chapter that is not named after the confession of its main character, Barbara. Most importantly, Barbara's spoken statement to the protagonist appears as a quote later in the novel and hence confirms the novel's decolonial revision of confession. Despite their failed friendship, the dialogic confession that enabled their preliminary theory regarding the relation between the hustling code and pretending "you dont give a damn" is transferred and therefore preserved within the form of the novel and subsequent encounter between novel and reader.

The figure of the queen initiates the dialogic encounter between Barbara and the narrator, and, perhaps, more importantly for my purposes, clarifies the formal relation between pilgrimage and confession. In *City of Night*, the representation of the queen advances an argument for legal rights, and solidifies the reader-narrator relationship insofar as the "politics of form" grapples with undoing the language that solidifies the heteronormative matrix of gender identity. "She-he (Miss Destiny is a man)—went on about her—his—restlessness" (95). Most significantly, the movement toward the liturgical time of confession that enacts an "American" pilgrimage to New Orleans, and the formal consequences it enacts for *City of Night* as confession, is based on the claim that it is only during Mardi Gras that "queens (prematurely sentenced to a purgatory of half-male, half-female) will begin their fe-male plans" for "that one glorious day!—of not possibly hassling getting busted (as they were in New York, Los Angeles, Points in Between" (284). In this way, the circular temporality of pilgrimage and the form of confession, each of which operate within the "religious imagination," opens a space of critique that is distinguished from the legal pathologization of queer sexuality, a space that is opened up for all America to participate in. However, this long history of, and collusion between, Spanish coloniality and contemporary forms of immigrant confession often resides outside the protagonist-narrator's consciousness though not outside narrative.

In other words, while the form of the novel mediates the "savage contradictions within this legend called America" (280), it is unclear whether or not the protagonist-narrator can ever fully integrate all the contradictory parts of his subjectivity. He provides a clear example of the ways in which Lugones describes the unfortunate (though unnecessary) coproduction of the fragmentation at work in nationalist narratives of cultural purity and the self that finds itself similarly entrapped in a series of either/or logics. After hustling in New York for a year, he visits the town square, San Jacinto Plaza, which he describes as "the crossroads between the Eastcoast and the Westcoast, for the stray fairies leaving other cities for whatever restless reason" (83). His travels outside of the migrant home and El Paso do not only teach him more about the world out there, but also enable *City of Night* to narrate a different memory of his childhood, a queer one that displaces New York as privileged site for both the American origin story of immigration and the "troublesome myth of Stonewall" ("Outlaw, 163). In contrast to the opening chapter, his return to El Paso reveals that, as a child, he was aware of the gay and hustling scene of San Jacinto Plaza where alongside kids playing with the sleepy alligator in the pond, he remembers "giggling birles camping with the soldiers" (83). This pilgrimage home, moreover, historicizes queer El Paso, "Now the inevitable smalltimecity roundup had come. The cops had swooped jealously on the fairies and to jail they went—and from jail: Away Again" (83). In this way, the novel reveals that it is not only his father's Nacimiento scene that censors and imposes but that it

is also the politics of the border city. Despite this newfound historical consciousness, however, as an adult cruising San Jacinto with other “stray hunters,” the protagonist explains he “couldn’t remain there long” and decides “that no matter how long I would be in El Paso, I would never again allow that other life of New York to touch me here”(83).

Even though the protagonist cannot integrate a queer and El Paso sexuality, the form of *City of Night* teaches the historical reasons for this fragmented consciousness.<sup>26</sup> This awareness created in the reader is developed further because the migrant home introduces the formal relation between confession, pilgrimage, and the logic of substitution, and this triangulation travels outside El Paso thereby extending the problematic of narrating migration beyond the particular Mexican American history of the narrator’s family to become the story of America itself. This becomes most evident in New Orleans, where the novel enacts the liturgical temporality of confession and the protagonist is able to vindicate his father because “I had seen enough in that journey to know with certainty that the roots of rebellion went far, far beyond that. Beyond the father, beyond the mother. Far beyond childhood—and even birth. An alienation that began much earlier” (357). In his way, *City of Night* both returns to and revises his migrant family home *and* moves toward a planetary view of alienation. This alternative, and, I would argue, decolonial feminist consciousness, historicizes a form of rebellion beyond the Freudian nuclear family romance, “beyond the father, beyond the mother,” and therefore casts every person located within the boundaries of the nation-state as complicit with an itinerary of migration. However, while this realization is important for the protagonist of *City of Night*, it is not enough to suture the heterosexist segregation of America and beyond.

While sex and sexuality remain, for the most part, segregated from the protagonist’s description of the *straight* world, the novel itself acts as a holding environment for the reader to either experience or theorize these seemingly antagonistic straight and queer worlds as both segregated and porous. While the nameless protagonist experiences these various normative regimes as phenomenologically distinct from a life lived in the underground circuits of queer escape, the reader may, through an attention to the formal elements of *City of Night*, choose to act upon, experience differently, or at least imagine a social world in which many worlds are possible.

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<sup>26</sup> For a more recent study of queer El Paso, see Emma Pérez “Decolonial Border Queers: Case Studies of Chicana/o Lesbians, Gay Men, and Transgender Folks in El Paso/ Juárez.” Arturo J. Aldama, et al. *Performing the U.S. Latina and Latino Borderlands*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012). 192-211

**CHAPTER THREE**  
**Undoing the Value of Rape:**  
**A Hermeneutics for Redirecting the Necrophilic Gaze**  
**from *Maquiladora Murders* to Life in Juárez**

I had seen some of the photographers' work that took pictures. They took pictures of the girls when they were destroyed and found, and it was very gory and very degrading. And the girls just became numbers, and it was very upsetting for most women to see these bodies. So I made a point of never showing a dead body. You see bones, you see things, but what I wanted to do was create a feeling of love for the girls. It was a requiem.  
--Lourdes Portillo<sup>27</sup>

In many ways, the term femicide works to undo the “myth of maquiladora murders,” a deeply colonizing, heterosexist account of murder in Juárez that cannot adequately historicize nor theorize violence against women.<sup>28</sup> Despite ample evidence proving that *maquiladora* workers represent only a minority of victims, the term persists within academic and popular descriptions of Juárez as a Third World space beyond political, economic, and cultural redemption. In short, the phrase “maquiladora murders” is central for cautionary tales that use Juárez as an analogue for the postmodern condition. Alongside the celebrated (albeit widely debated) narrative of postmodernity and indigeneity that arose from the Lacandon Jungle in Chiapas, popularly represented as a high tech rebellion, the contemporaneous and underreported crimes of femicide in Juárez, Mexico and elsewhere continue with impunity.<sup>29</sup> As Alicia Gaspar de Alba states in the preface to her novel, *Desert Blood: the Juárez Murders*, “an epidemic of murdered women has plagued the Juárez-El Paso border since 1993” (v). Between January and August of 2010, at least 167 women were murdered, bringing the total number of women killed to 1,000 since 1993. In contrast to the exemplified Zapatista narrative, Juárez has become a postmodern cautionary tale popularized by public scholars such as Noam Chomsky and Charles Bowden.<sup>30</sup>

By revisiting the article responsible for popularizing the phrase “maquiladora murders”—Sam Quiñones essay with the same title published in *Ms* magazine—I plan to show how this phrase embodies the central contradictions that plague any attempt to represent these murders

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<sup>27</sup> Lourdes Portillo’s documentary film *Señorita Extraviada* (2000) has been instrumental for raising international consciousness regarding *feminicidio* in Juárez. Artists also view this film as foundational for thinking about and overcoming the formal challenges of representing violence against women in a respectful way.

<sup>28</sup> I borrow the term “the myth of maquiladora murders” from Rosa Linda Fregoso’s *meXicana Encounters: The Making of Social Identities on the Borderlands*. (Berkeley, U of California P, 2003)

<sup>29</sup> The term “femicide” was coined by Diana Russell and refers to the misogynist murder of women. See Jill Radford and Diana Russell, eds. *Femicide: the Politics of Woman Killing* (New York: Maxwell Macmillan International, 1992). “Femicide” has been used to describe the hundreds of murdered and disappeared women in the border town of Juárez, México, a phenomenon that continues with impunity. Rosa Linda Fregoso, however, makes an argument for using “feminicide” (the English translation of the Spanish *feminicidio*) in order to register the Latina feminist tradition of unthinking the heterosexist framework for understanding violence against women. For Fregoso, the term femicide interrupts the unidirectional flow of theory from the North to the Global South. See Rosa Linda Fregoso and Cynthia Bejarano, eds. *Terrorizing Women: Femicide in the Américas* (Durham : Duke University Press, 2010).

<sup>30</sup> See Charles Bowden. *Juarez: The Laboratory of our Future*. (New York: Aperture, 1998)

visually.<sup>31</sup> Furthermore, this myth and the image that accompanies it (See Figure One below) is of particular interest to me because it is reproduced in the opening chapters of *Desert Blood*, and is also the last image we see in Gregory Nava's film *Bordertown*. Both Gaspar de Alba and Nava advance a primary concern for the possibilities of feminist solidarity across the U.S.-Mexico border. However, while *Desert Blood* begins when Ivon Villa closes the *Ms* magazine article, *Bordertown* enacts a return to Quiñones' frame of reference by concluding with "a close up of a woman's legs, half-buried in the sand, skin the color of bruises" (3). In Nava's version, however, there are brown instead of "white sandals on her feet" (3). My comparative reading of *Desert Blood* and *Bordertown*, therefore, historicizes the changing nature of transnational feminist organizing in general, and, more specifically places this dynamic history in relation to human rights discourse and the construction of a meXicana identity. Furthermore, my reading of the extra-legal project of queer *familia* in *Desert Blood* envisions a decolonial feminist framework for understanding transnational social activism across the U.S.-Mexico border.

*Desert Blood*'s renaming of the crimes as "Juárez Murders" rather than "Maquiladora Murders" is analogous to a pedagogy for reimagining the possibilities for a localized-transnational and popular feminism based on the intimate queering of every day practices of *familia*. Ivon Villa, a Chicana queer graduate student of women's studies, is the protagonist-detective whose attempt to finish her dissertation shapes the narrative of *Desert Blood* thematically and formally. Her drive to find the perpetrators of murder in Juárez informs the content of her dissertation project. Formally, the dissertation rewrites the genre of detective fiction insofar as *Desert Blood* literally takes the form of dissertation writing, a mode of representation that addresses the pedagogical imperative of decolonial thought. The dissertation, therefore, appears in contradistinction to the genre of the detective novel, which, according to Ralph E. Rodriguez, is characterized by a "quest for knowledge" (8). Drawing on *Desert Blood*'s pedagogical imperative, I supplement Rodriguez's understanding of the Chicana/o detective novel with my conceptualization of the meXicana detective novel's *quest to teach*. Ivon's detective-dissertation narrative attempts to move beyond the narrow legal concern for identifying the perpetrators of feminicide and questions the methodology by which to teach and learn about Juárez.

As I will demonstrate, the development of this pedagogy requires shifting our framework for understanding murder in Juárez from a postmodern cautionary tale toward what Chela Sandoval names a loving hermeneutics for reading oppression. *Desert Blood* redirects the reader's gaze from the fetishization of the Juárez cadaver to the living "friends and families of the dead and disappeared" (346). This pedagogical shift from the economic determinism of the "myth of the maquiladora" to the living narratives of *juarances* enacts Sandoval's "hermeneutics of love" for seeing life in Juárez, a decolonizing feminist method for humanizing Juárez as a space of symbolic and material struggle that is based on undoing the value of rape that currently informs human rights discourse.

In section one, I show how the development of a meXicana consciousness for each of the protagonists sleuths in *Desert Blood* and *Bordertown*, Ivon Villa and Lauren Adrian respectively, depends upon distancing themselves from, and developing a critical dialogue about, a transnational feminisms that replicates a human rights investment in the dehumanizing image

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<sup>31</sup> For an understanding of the relationship between *Ms. Magazine* and popular feminism, see Amy Erdman Farrell, *Yours in Sisterhood: Ms. Magazine and the Promise of Popular Feminism*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998)

of the cadaver. In the section that follows, I draw on Marx's theory of variable capital in order to outline the discursive and material economic value of rape for postmodern cautionary tales of *maquiladora* labor. I compare Melissa Wright's visual analysis of the Juárez cadaver as "still life" to Moishe Postone's analysis of the anti-Semitic consequences of resorting to scapegoat theories of the Holocaust. In particular, I highlight Postone's link between the anticapitalist fetish, the display of the tortured Jewish body, and the theoretical inadequacy of using the categories of modernity and postmodernity for periodizing history in relation to narratives of capitalism.

In contrast to postmodern accounts of history that link exploitative labor practices to a skeptical view of linguistic and aesthetic possibilities, signaled here by Frederic Jameson's signature claim in *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, in section three I explicate how Sandoval's "hermeneutics of love" offers an alternative to Jameson's influential claims. In particular, I expand Sandoval's critique of Jameson's comparative reading of Vincent Van Gogh's *A Pair of Boots* (1884) and Andy Warhol's *Diamond Dust Shoes* (1965) by highlighting how Jameson's "modern" Van Gogh and "postmodern" Warhol advances a Eurocentric privileging of labor as linguistic referent *par excellence*. Furthermore, I argue that savior narratives that depend on the coproduction of Juárez and the indigenous subaltern as unintelligible are constituted by a similar privileging of labor as linguistic reference. The "myth of maquiladora murders" is a case in point, and I place this myth's corresponding image—the white sandals buried in the Juárez sand—within Jameson's visual trajectory (from Van Gogh to Warhol) for understanding the "cultural logic of late capitalism." I conclude section three by linking Postone's theorization of the anticapitalist fetish to Alicia Schmidt Camacho's decolonial feminist analysis of "discourses of the cadaver" that force *juaranses* to travel under the "sign of death." By linking Postone to the decolonial feminisms of Sandoval and Schmidt Camacho, I enact a decolonial planetary view of the human by historicizing the violent attachment to labor as linguistic referent in both its contemporary, local enunciation in the borderlands, *and* in relation to the universality of Eurocentric conceptions of gender embedded in human rights discourse, a discourse that emerged and is still plagued by what Postone describes as the immediate postwar response to the Holocaust.

In section four, I concretize the decolonial humanist project of historicizing the language of violence in the Américas by reading *Bordertown* within Rita Laura Segato's feminist framework for reading rape as "a real act that occurs *in societate*—that is, in a communicable niche that can be penetrated and understood" (74). Segato's call to historicize the *language* of femicide develops a theory of sovereign power that remaps Juárez as a legible terrain of political struggle. I expand Segato's discursive framework for investigating the historical particularities of sexual violence on the U.S.-Mexican border by including questions of genre and literary form and placing *Desert Blood* and *Bordertown* within a comparative study of the Chicana/o detective novel.

In the fifth and concluding section of this chapter, I show how Gaspar de Alba's new literary form—the dissertation-detective novel—addresses the particularities of contemporary Juárez. In particular, I argue that *Desert Blood's* queer "hermeneutics of love" responds to the limits of the savior narratives produced about the subaltern *women* of Juárez by anticipating the question that we are now forced to ask—how does the postmodern cautionary tale of murder in Juárez change when the execution style murder of men has far exceeded the number of victims



of feminicide?<sup>32</sup> The pedagogical and political value of queering *familia* should not be underestimated as simply rhetorical if we are to begin answering this question. *Desert Blood*, written prior to *Bordertown* and in response to *Ms.* magazine, foresaw the limits of the coloniality of gender that currently informs U.S. representations of the meXicana subaltern who cannot speak so long as the discourse of antiglobalism is framed within the narrative of white men [and women] saving brown women from brown men.

### I. The Myth of the *Maquiladora* Murders, meXicana Feminisms, and Human Rights



**FIGURE ONE**  
**“The Maquiladora Murders”**  
**Ms 8.6 (May/June 1998): 10-17**  
**Sam Quiñones**

Ivon closed the magazine and leaned back against the leather headrest, feeling queasy. Reading on airplanes didn’t bother her usually, but that article on the murdered women of Juárez had unsettled her. “The Maquiladora Murders” it was called by a male freelance writer, which she found surprising for a piece in *Ms.* She opened the magazine and stared at the picture: a close up of a women’s legs half-buried in the sand, skin the color of bruises, white sandals on her feet. A dead woman’s body, dead brown women.

“You should’ve said something,” Ivon insisted. “It’s not even on the news.” “I had to read about it in *Ms.* magazine.”

“*Ms.* magazine, huh? Well, [Ximena responded,] it’s about time somebody covered these crimes. Other than those stupid little newsbytes they publish in *El Paso Times*, nobody’ interested. People think of it as Juárez news, not *El Paso* news, like the two cities weren’t fucking Siamese twins. Leave it to white women to scoop a good story.”

“Hey, they’re doing us all a favor. At least somebody in this country is paying attention.”

“Oops, I keep forgetting you have a gringa girlfriend. No offense intended, okay?”

--*Desert Blood: The Juárez Murders*  
 Alicia Gaspar de Alba

Quiñones begins “The Maquiladora Murders” by imagining Sandra Juárez’s life before she became the victim of feminicide, a time and space he places in antithetical relation to the decadently modern and urban landscape of the border. His description of Sandra’s migration from “a village of 40 adobe houses, 30 miles from the nearest telephone,” to the “swarming, asphalted modernity of Ciudad Juárez” epitomizes a capitalist narrative of history that pushes workers and forms of labor from village to city, and, for third world subjects, from a peaceful coexistence with the land and family to the chaos and corruption of the metropole. Quiñones explains,

<sup>32</sup> Sadly, while 167 women were murdered between January and August of 2010, the number of men murdered in Juárez for the same period is 2,000. How these murders will be placed in dialogue with current humanist rights movements against *feminicidio* has yet to be seen. See Diana Washington Valdez. “Women’s slaying continue in Juárez.” *El Paso Times*. September 12, 2010

Juárez today is part Dodge City, part Dickensian London, nestled in the twilight of the twentieth century. The growing stack of unsolved cases of murdered women is a measure of the city's development, of the distance it's putting between itself and the rest of the country. (16)

Several of his interviewees agree that "the forced modernization being wrought in Juárez plays a role in the killings. Nothing about life in the Mexican *campo* prepares a young woman for Juárez" (14). Esther Chávez confirms, "They've been taught to work. But they haven't been taught to live in a violent city. They come here very trusting because in rural areas customs are much different" (14). Graciela de la Rosa adds, "It's obvious that many of these girls went willingly with their murderers. This is part of the collision of the migrant who's just arrived and has no resources to confront the dangers and complexities of this forced 'modernization' we have going on here" (14). According to Quiñones, within two weeks of her arrival, Sandra's "blouse was found on the Mexican side of the Rio Grande. She lay strangled to death across the river on the U.S. side" (11). Like the labor she sought, the devaluation of her life is signaled by the fragmentation and forced movement of her corpse across national boundaries.

Quiñones renders the commodification of the female body complete. "Many of the young women had been raped, several were mutilated, and a large number had been dumped like worn-out machine parts in some isolated spot" (12). Moreover, Quiñones implicitly affirms Jameson's signature claim that the hallmark of late modernity is the hyper-spatialization of time that disables the ability to think historically thereby producing an epistemological crisis that interrupts the subject's ability to map local experiences cognitively in relation, or as an alternative, to the logic of global capitalism. By way of conclusion, Quiñones places the commodification of the female body in direct relation to questions of knowledge production and the desire to know.

Sandra Juárez's people up on Capulin street [are left] with a lifetime of wondering ahead of them. "What we'd like is to know something," says her aunt, María de Jesus Vasquez, holding her hands out pleadingly. "We don't know anything." (16)

However, this concluding quotation, "We don't know anything" runs counter to the rest of the article that advances the idea that "Juárez's people" are absolutely certain of the following: the coincidence between capital's eschatological development and the spatialization of Juárez as a privileged site for the postmodern condition is guaranteed by a gendered narrative of the struggle for or misuse of agency. The spatialization of Juárez as a place that either introduces or fatally forecloses gendered agency typifies an ahistorical account of patriarchy that understands women's entrance into the workforce, belated or denied, as the theoretical lynchpin for feminist critique. In contrast to decolonial feminist thought that documents the radically different position of women of color in relation to labor and the national-family romance, this account is ahistorical because it misreads the colonial imposition of an ungendering biopolitics for a nineteenth-century American narrative of women's emancipation from the domestic sphere and nuclear family.

Juárez as postmodern cautionary tale depends, in large part, on a narrative framework that positions the murder of women in relation to what happens when women go to work. According to attorney María Antonietta Esparza murder in Juárez "is symptomatic of the way

men respond when women begin to leave home” (Quiñones, 14). Esparza explains, “men feel unprotected in not having a woman to cook and clean for them” (Quiñones, 14). Quiñones supports Esparza’s statement by providing a cursory historical overview of U.S. Mexico labor relations and an abstract reference to the Bracero Program. Quiñones explains that Mexico intended to absorb “the farmworkers returning home after the U.S. ended an agreement that allowed Mexicans to work legally harvesting U.S. crops” (14). However, Mexico failed to “target the men returning from the U.S., preferring instead to hire young women on the grounds that they were more “docile and dexterous” (14). Quiñones concludes,

The maquiladoras lured women from the farm with the offer of their first paychecks and turned time-honored sex roles upside down. Women became the family providers, men the caretakers. They created a new Mexican woman—but a not a new man. (14)

This new Mexican woman, moreover, is alternatively villain or victim, innocent *indigena* or sexual deviant, depending on how she manages her newfound agency in the border city. According to Quiñones, “Many people believe the clubs of downtown Juárez—the same clubs that once made the city infamous—have become important staging areas in the killing spree” (14). Quiñones further explains,

At some clubs, male strippers are a routine offering. Nothing measures the cultural distance between Juárez and the isolated villages that provide it with workers like a woman who spends her own money at a club and gives a thumbs-up or a thumbs-down to a man feverishly undressing onstage for her pleasure. [...] The same bars that once offered for sale to gringos must now cater to Mexican women’s new economic power. (15)

In contrast to the village newcomer to modernity whose life is marked by either her fatal or questionable relation to the *maquiladora* wage, the human rights activist provides a celebrated counterpart to this bleak image of economic empowerment. Similar to Quiñones’ article, in *Desert Blood* and *Bordertown*, the human rights protagonist is the primary author for creating narrative bridges that extend from the myopic and fatalistic space of *maquiladora* labor and toward an international call for legal rights and feminist solidarity.

Alicia Schmidt Camacho warns, however, that the implementation of human rights in Juárez should not be seen as way to reform the aberrant violence isolated within its national boundaries, but instead, crimes against humanity need to be prosecuted within an international framework which indict the global processes that make denationalized women susceptible to violence regardless of their “first” or “third” world location of (un)employment. Femicide should not be considered solely a Mexican problem, but an international problem in which the U.S. must be indicted. Moreover, in the move to make *juarenses* legible for legal protection, Schmidt Camacho states that we must “understand gender violence as a central feature of nation-formation and capitalist development, rather than seeing it as an expression of their failure” (281). In other words, gender violence is an organizing logic that informs both the underdeveloped or denationalized “third” world and the “modern” first world nation-state which holds out the promise or protocols of citizenship. Of more consequence for transnational feminism, the dynamics of gender violence mapped out by the hierarchal power dynamics

between the West and the rest is all too often reproduced in more subtle and yet as equally divisive ways between U.S. and “third” world women organizers.

Similar to Schmidt Camacho, Inderpal Grewal has argued for the denaturalization of the “regime of truth” constituted by human rights discourse, an act that would open up the hitherto foreclosed debate regarding the rhetoric of universality embedded in human rights activism. Grewal provokes us to think about “how something *becomes universal*. What are the power structures, the processes that make something universal?” (vi). Too often, Grewal argues, claims for universality suggest that once a subject learns the language of human rights, she can give voice to an argument for redress that had earlier been blocked by some aspect of her non-Western culture. Rather than a top-down model in which the first world elite evangelizes the third world woman in need of rescue, Grewal suggests that a global culture of human rights discourse has yet to be produced or shared. This would require a shift from the *a priori* status of human rights culture that implicitly requires a framework of sameness to an analysis of the ways in which human culture is a subject-in-process and a site for ideological contestation (Grewal, ix).

However, the interlinked problems of the politics of representation, cultural production, and reification should not be underestimated. In her preface, Gaspar de Alba attends to this conundrum by way of a disclaimer.

It is not my intention in this story to sensationalize the crimes or capitalize on the losses of many families but to expose the horrors of this deadly crime wave as broadly as possible to the English-speaking public, and to offer some conjecture, based on research, based on what I know about the place on the map, some possible explanation for the silence that has surrounded the murders. (vi)

Gaspar de Alba ultimately justifies the production of *Desert Blood* as an effort to raise a transnational, indeed, worldwide political consciousness that would end the silence surrounding these murders. In this way, her address to an “English-speaking public” presupposes the claim that the aesthetic and other forms of extra-legal representations of the human are vital for contesting Western discourses of universality which are plagued with a (post)modern neoprimitivism, a discourse that renders the possibility of organizing across the “first” world (read white) and “third” world (read woman of color) divide nearly impossible.

The seriousness of this divide is evinced by the stark difference between Gaspar de Alba’s international call to end the silence and the critical distance from the “English speaking-public” maintained by Marisela Ortiz and Norma Andrade, cofounders of *Nuestras hijas de regreso*. In 2004, Ortiz and Andrade refused to participate in the “V-Day” March in Mexico, organized by U.S. feminist Eve Ensler, acclaimed author of the *Vagina Monologues*, and which featured celebrities Jane Fonda and Sally Fields. A few days before the scheduled march, Ortiz and Andrade emailed the following message to Ensler.

As we have been the object of manipulation and accusations by the local V-Day committee, we, as mothers, relatives and close friends of young women victims of kidnappings and murders, would like to convey to you that we have been forced to reduce or limit our 14<sup>th</sup> February program to:

A mourning mass for the anniversary of the vanishing of Lilia Alejandra García Andrade, and to the performance of the play “Women of Ciudad Juárez,” from the group Sinergia from Los Angeles and directed by Rubén Amevizca.

You are cordially invited to both of them, in any circumstances; we hope to have the short interview with you as it was proposed by your representative. It is not in our mind nor is it our intention to boycott the celebrations of V-Day you generously preside. But unfortunately we need to set aside ourselves from any organization or person repressing local interests fostering or protecting abuse of power.

Unfortunately again, murdering women in our city it has been and it is a political matter. We cannot collaborate with people who are attacking and discriminating us fiercely. (Rojas, 221)

In contrast to the high profile media event of the V-Day march, *Nuestras hijas de regreso* chose to commemorate the death of one young woman in particular, Lilia Alejandra García Andrade, through a religious ceremony. Ortiz and Andrade were especially critical of the fact that the V-Day events were to be held “on the premises of the ‘Carta Blanca,’ owned by the de la Vega family, one of the most powerful families, not only in Juárez, but also in México” (Rojas, 221). Because the V-Day organizers were uninterested in learning from neither local knowledge of the particularity of Juárez history and politics nor cultural practices, the well intended efforts of U.S. feminists were ineffective and perceived as “charitable and not a quest for structural change” (Rojas, 222).

It is precisely this “first”/ “third” world divide and international disregard of local knowledges and practices that *Desert Blood* and *Bordertown* enact in order to call attention to the increasing importance of theorizing and practicing meXicana consciousness. Rosa Linda Fregoso’s neologism, meXicana undoes the facile legal or reductive cultural distinction between Chicanas (native U.S. citizens) and Mexicanas (residents of or immigrants from Mexico). It also reveals a shared Mexican and Chicana history of otherness within the U.S. cultural imaginary, a landscape marked by the exploitation of labor, state sanctioned terrorism, and the “contradiction between the visibility of meXicanas in cultural representation and their invisibility in the history of the nation” (xiii). This contradictory yet binding relationship, moreover, can serve as a general model for transnational feminist organizing across the U.S. / Third World precisely because, as Fregoso evinces, this relationship is historical and agential and not inherently given or unjust. Anticipating, or perhaps responding to, critics of a celebratory theory of hybridity, Fregoso documents the absolute duress under which women on both sides of the border organize a collective response to femicide in Juárez. The type of “borderlessness” which requires the transnational cooperation of activists is far from utopic; rather, the borderlessness of Juárez feminicidio is “a dystopic nightmare, a design reserved for the new global empire of the United States as it reasserts its imperial role as a state above all states and as beyond the rule of international law” (xv).

In *Desert Blood* and *Bordertown*, the development of a meXicana consciousness for each of the protagonist-sleuths, Ivon Villa and Lauren Adrian respectively, depends on their coming to terms with their role as meXicana human rights activist. Each are given the task of mediating between first and third world subjects insofar as Ivon and Lauren are required to theorize the ways in which they have been interpolated into a first world subject position by both the nation-

state and their personal relationships. For each, fighting for an international framework for social justice requires an introspective reconsideration of their self-positioning towards the border town of Juárez and their employment in the United States, the contradictions of a borderland subjectivity situated within a generational history of migration, the anxious relation to their femininity with regards to the particularity of their family dynamics (Ivon is happy to leave El Paso for graduate school because of her homophobic mother and Lauren is an orphan), all of which complicates their detective work in Juárez. Like the activist discourse of Juárez that draws on tropes of mother and daughter, the success of Ivon's and Lauren's detective work depends on coming to terms with their relation to family history and their own ambivalent relation to the term sisterhood as a keyword for the discourse of popular feminism.

In *Bordertown*, Lauren's ability to find the two men who raped and left Eva for dead in the Juárez desert depends on Lauren's ability to transform from an exploitative journalist to a human rights activist. Lauren's journey across the U.S. Mexico border, and from cultural orphan to meXicana, revises the popular discourse of sisterhood through the recuperation of indigeneity, here figured through her relationship with Eva, the only known survivor of *feminicidio*, and the recovery of Lauren's farmworker family history.<sup>33</sup> Nava's pairing of Lauren Adrian and Eva Jimenez is central for his Chicana/o aesthetics and recasts the relation between the U.S. and Mexico through the lens of transnational feminisms. In this way, Nava conflates a Chicano Civil Rights politicization of indigeneity and migrant labor epitomized by "El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán" and the United Farm Workers movement. Different than Civil Rights aesthetics, however, Nava's indigenous figure, Eva, is Oaxacan, and Lauren's return to her indigenous Mexican roots does not enable a reunification with her Chicano counterpart Alfonso Diaz. Their failed relationship symbolizes the end of the Chicano family romance of the 1960s and 1970s, and, eventually, Diaz's effort to protect Lauren leads to his death. In contrast to Eva and her mother's initial assumption that it will be Diaz that will listen to them and print their story, it turns out to be Lauren who will repair the severed link between Chicanismo and indigeneity. In this way, Nava revises the *movimiento* reclamation of indigeneity as an affair between women rather than the product of the Chicano family romance.<sup>34</sup> While Nava stages this revision as a post-Civil Rights aesthetics, Chicana feminist thought historicizes this intervention as contemporaneous with, if not altogether previous to, the 1960s. In contrast to Nava's belated inclusion of meXicana activism, Gaspar de Alba's contemporary accounting of the status of the *movimiento* ideals is situated within a feminist genealogy of Chicana/o aesthetics and politics and a self-reflexive critique of ethnic studies scholarship, the epistemological counterpart to the Mexican American Civil Rights movement that Nava's film does not address.

I am not unlike other Chicana feminists who have, for the most part, expressed a great deal of skepticism toward the feminist politics of *Bordertown* in particular and Nava's films

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<sup>33</sup> I find Nava's idealistic portrayal of Oaxacan indigeneity problematic. But because I would expand the particularities of that critique to the history of Chicana/o aesthetic practices in general, a thoughtful analysis of this problematic is currently beyond the scope of this chapter. See for example Sheila Marie Contreras *Blood Lines: Myth, Indigenism, and Chicana/o Literature*. (2003) For a critique of the idealization of indigeneity within Chicana/o studies see Nicole M. Guidotti-Hernández *Unspeakable Violence: Remapping U.S. and Mexican National Imaginaries*. (Durham : Duke University Press, 2011).

<sup>34</sup> I borrow the term "Chicano family romance" from Karen Mary Davalos description of Jose Montoya's mural in Chicano Park "Leyes-La Familia" (1975). See Yolanda M. López (U of Minnesota Press, 2009).

more generally.<sup>35</sup> My reading of *Desert Blood*, moreover, participates in the current trend of literary criticism that appreciates the novel's pedagogical value for teaching about Juárez and coalitional politics. In her recent review of various cultural productions concerned with Juárez feminicide, Irene Mata describes *Desert Blood* as one "of the best received productions" (15). Mata contends that *Bordertown*, however, participates in the production of an "ideology of the 'savior from the North' that reinforces the racist portrayal of the Mexican people as inept" (16). According to Mata, Lauren's character is "paternalistic and patronizing" insofar as she insinuates "that investigative reporters who have no real knowledge or connection to the city can accomplish a task that activists embedded in the communities of Juárez have been unable to accomplish" (16). Moreover, Mata faults *Bordertown* for focusing more on Lauren's psychological needs than a "tangible historical context the novel provides" (16). By contrast, "Ivon is a complex character whose story traverses an intricate web of transnational structures of power. A Chicana born and raised in El Paso," she is unlike Lauren who cannot give us an insight into either the historical, material reality of the border city or a "strategy of reading signs and symbols that Chela Sandoval identifies as a 'methodology of the oppressed'" (15).

Mata's article makes clear that I am not the first to claim that *Desert Blood* provides a literary accompaniment to Sandoval's hermeneutics for reading oppression. While I generally agree with Mata's negative review of *Bordertown*, I disagree with her claim that Nava simply reproduces a savior narrative. Instead, I argue that by establishing a nonhierarchical relationship between Lauren and Eva, Nava makes every effort to correct the "savior from the North" script. I further argue that the character of Teresa Casillas solidifies Nava's attempt to distance the film from both the "savior from the North" narrative and the reductive, often racist, representation of indigeneity that Chicana/o and Latin American cultural production has had to account for given the vexed history of mestizaje. Teresa represents this vexed history and the elite mestiza who cannot help Eva or Lauren because of her liberal racism. She acts as foil for Lauren's meXicana, nonhierarchical relationship to Eva. I point to this difference because I think it is important to study how, despite Nava's well-meaning intention to politicize the socioeconomic links between the U.S. and Mexico, his representation of feminist solidarity and appropriation of indigenous epistemologies reproduces the colonial script of the "myth of maquiladora." By pointing to the ways in which Nava appropriates the aesthetic strategies of Xicana feminisms without incorporating a self-reflective interrogation of pedagogical strategies that enable a critique of epistemic coloniality, I validate the historical importance of our work that persists despite, or precisely because of, various appropriations.

In section three, where I contextualize Lauren and Ivon within the genre of Chicana/o detective novels, I compare Nava's empty aesthetics that fails to incorporate Gaspar de Alba's epistemological concerns embodied in *Desert Blood* as dissertation-detective novel. While I fully agree with Mata's central thesis--*Desert Blood* provides an "example of the power of writing in creating alternative paradigms for challenging the social inequality of globalizing processes"—I disagree with her idealistic reading of Ivon and completely disparaging account of Lauren. I think that what we have to gain from Ivon as a character includes recognizing her imperfections: she is not comfortable with either her academic life in Los Angeles or the rigidness of her family life in El Paso, she is unfaithful to her partner Bridget and physically abusive to Raquel, she is guilty of her own homophobic assumptions, and her politics unwittingly reproduce discourses

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<sup>35</sup> For example, see Emma Perez's analysis of Nava's *Selena* in "Beyond the Nation's Maternal Bodies: Technologies of Decolonial Desire" from *The Decolonial Imaginary: Writing Chicanas into History* (Indiana UP, 1999).

that presuppose the forward thinking of life in America as opposed to the backwardness of Mexico. While I agree with Mata that Ivon enacts a “methodology of the oppressed,” I would add that part of being able to read for signs of oppression and alternative *movidas* requires a self-reflective accounting of oppressive behavior. In this way, *Desert Blood* documents Ivon’s struggle to develop a meXicana politics and an ethnic studies framework for theorizing women’s studies, a development that requires personal and structural decolonization.

For me, the problem with *Bordertown* is not that Lauren is too American or not committed enough to Juárez. Nor do I think that Ivon’s detective work is either more credible or commendable. Instead, I show how each narrative historicizes the changing nature of transnational feminist critique and Chicana/o aesthetic practices, each of which converge, I claim, within representations of sexuality, indigeneity, and the coloniality of labor. For me, the problem with *Bordertown* is that it remains faithful to the “myth of maquiladora” and its theoretical counterpart: the privileging, and therefore, reifying relation between labor and linguistic signification. Though not articulated in the particular relation I lay out between labor and language, Mata also analyzes the political limitations of restricting our understanding of *Desert Blood* to a character study of Ivon or Lauren. In other words, “Writing on the Walls” advances the claim that Sandoval’s “hermeneutics of love” can be used for literary purposes insofar that it helps us decode an “analysis of transnational systems of power” (16). To this end, I hope to contribute to Mata’s use of Sandoval for reading murder in Juárez by placing Sandoval in conversation with Moishe Postone’s analysis of genocide and fetishized anti-capitalism. My intervention aims to make a distinction between an anti-capitalism that constructs a homologous relation between narratives of history and narratives of capitalism (an intervention that aligns Postone’s critique of the fetish and Fregoso’s call to end the “myth of the maquiladoras”) and a Marxist literary criticism that moves us beyond the consciousness of characters and toward a critique of epistemological reification (González’s “politics of form”). This is all important for literary representations of Juárez because it moves us away from simply feeling empathy for *juarenses* and toward understanding how rendering Juárez as a legible site of critique enables the scaffolding of a non-Eurocentric critical theory invested in human rights for the living.

## II. ‘Was she a good girl?’: Unthinking Fetishized Anti-Capitalism and Discourses of the Cadaver

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In her essay entitled “The Dialectics of Still Life: Murder, Women, and *Maquiladoras*,” Melissa Wright analyzes the discursive and material links between the rhetorical justification for refusing to take action in prosecuting the *feminicidio* of Juárez employees and the multinational reproduction of value. Wright’s analysis of *maquiladora* murders is confined to the discourse of impunity and value production and does not focus on the “lives of the victims” (125). Wright’s contribution resides in showing how the “*managerial discourses of noninvolvement* in the serial murders of young female employees is indeed linked to the *materialization of turnover* as a culturally driven and waste-ridden phenomenon attached to Mexican femininity” (emphasis mine; 128). Wright’s analysis of the link between “managerial discourses of noninvolvement” and the “materialization of turnover” is framed within a feminist reading of Marx’s theory of variable capital, a dialectical process of value production that is discursively registered by the positing of an antinomial relation between waste and value.



The “tale of turnover” provides an explanation for (and ultimately enforces) the “coming and going of workers” (Wright, 126). The managerial narration of turnover rates for *maquiladora* employees claims that worker unreliability obstructs the “complete transformation of the maquila sector from a low-skilled and labor-intensive industry to one with more sophisticated procedures staffed by highly skilled workers” (Wright, 126). In other words, *maquiladora* managers recognize the importance of worker development for the maximization of profit and a healthy working environment but have no control over the trainability or untrainability of their employees. In the same way that they absolve themselves from the production of trainability and place the possibility of being a “good worker” within the willful consent of the employee, managers also rearticulate the rape and murder of women as the consequence of the victim’s willful refusal to be a “good girl.” The managerial absolution of responsibility replicates and is reinforced by

onlookers [who] try to determine if the victims were prostitutes, dutiful daughters, dedicated mothers, women leading “double lives,” or responsible workers.... Circulating through the media and by word of mouth ... is the question: “Was she a good girl?” The question points to the matter of her value. (Wright, 128)

The coincidence between the public and managerial interest in “good girls” reveals the ways in which gender “is a critical marker for differentiating between” untrainable and trainable labor (Wright, 126). For feminist scholarship, the cultural evaluation of workingwomen is not divorced from the economic production of value. The conterminous relation between variable capital and the “differential valorization of the labor force” is articulated here as a causal relation between the variability of worker reliability and the variability of worker skill; moreover, this causality is naturalized by the category of gender. In other words, the dual ambiguousness of Mexican femininity and worker skill produces an ambiguous or variable labor power, which, as we will see shortly, produces an exploitable surplus value that is managed through the opposition between value and waste. The discursive and material management of (surplus) value ultimately produces a permanent temporary workforce which preserves the sociopolitical and gendered legacy of the Bracero labor contract.

To be clear, the deterioration of female labor is as much an imagined as a material construct. The fluctuation of labor power is volatile precisely because the process of commodification, both in the production of objects and in the purchase of labor time, is never a complete or guaranteed operation. Whether because of the literal deterioration of the laboring body caused by physically abusive working conditions, or the sexual and psychic harassment by managers, or when workers organize against or leave their exploitive condition, the balance between waste and value is always contingent. Wright, moreover, reveals the labor intensive production of the dialectical-narrative image of the *maquiladora* body evinced by the repetitive “naming of her waste” which conceals and therefore maintains her value which always “lurks in the background” (Wright, 144).

While Wright successfully accounts for the various processes that either produce or imagine the deterioration of the female laboring body she is unable (or perhaps unwilling) to account for the role of torture involved in Juárez femicide. Wright’s project stops short of posing the question that plagues those affected by the murders, a nightmarish concern encapsulated by Ivon Villa’s frustration. “What I can’t understand is why they don’t just put a bullet in their heads and get it over with, without all the torture and mutilation?” (*Desert Blood*,

254). Perhaps Wright offers an implicit and theoretical gesture towards a possible explanation for torture through her use of Walter Benjamin's concept of "dialectical image" to describe the "still life" of women and murder in Juárez.

Wright's term "still life" is a modification of Benjamin's "standstill" which appears in the epigraph that introduces her essay.

*Ambiguity is the pictorial image of dialectics, the law of dialectic seen at a standstill. This standstill is utopia and the dialectical image therefore a dream image. Such an image is presented by the pure commodity: as fetish. —Walter Benjamin, Reflections (italics original; Wright, 125)*

Wright defines Benjamin's "dialectical image" to mean an image "whose *apparent* stillness obscures the tensions that actually hold it in suspension. It is a caesura forged by clashing forces" (emphasis mine; 125). As demonstrated above, Wright's use of Marx's theory of value identifies the "clashing forces" as waste and value, a dynamic and ambiguous production of surplus value that manages a contradictory yet profitable "differential valorization of the labor force." While Benjamin implicates a visual commodity, Wright limits her analysis of the *maquiladora* to the *narrative* image of discourse. She gestures toward the importance of the visual, however, when she explains

Benjamin renovated Marx's analogy of the fetish as phantasmagoria to refer not only to the social relations of the market that were embedded in the commodity but also to the social relations of representation that were sustained in the commodity. According to Susan Buck-Morss (1989; 82), Benjamin's concern with "urban phantasmagoria was not so much the commodity-in-the-market- as the commodity-on-display." Benjamin's point is that the mechanics of representation are as critical to the creation of value as the actual exchange of use values in the marketplace (143).

In considering the circulation of the spectacle of the sexually abused victim of Juárez feminicide, an image that is visually familiar yet routinely disavowed by Juárez residents, we can begin to interrogate the role of torture in reifying "her dialectical constitution [which] is suspended through the pitting of the two antithetical conditions [waste and value] that she invariably *embodies*" (emphasis mine; Wright, 144). By thinking through Wright's use of Benjamin's dialectic image and incorporating Postone's review of the difficulties in historicizing the Holocaust, we can begin to theorize the critique of fetishized anti-capitalism and its similarity to a planetary decolonial feminism. A focus on the laboring and subsequently tortured and displayed body will reveal the relation between the periodization of modernity and the biologization of race that is outlined by Postone's analysis of anti-Semitism.

Postone's analysis of the genocidal codification of race coupled with a critique of ahistorical accounts of the relation between reified narratives of anti-capitalism and social formation provides an important framework for expanding contemporary decolonial feminist thought beyond the segregated or isolated phenomena of feminicide in Juárez. On the other hand, and as I will show in the closing sections of this chapter, Segato's analysis of the relation between the discursive value of the fragmented cadaver and the formation of Juárez as a "second state" within and beyond the formal boundaries of Chihuahua and México provides an important

gendered supplement to Postone's critique of fascism. Segato's analysis also furthers Wright's gendered analysis of the economic "tale of turnover" to include a legal register for reading feminist activism.

A comparison of feminicide in Juárez and the genocide of Jewish people immediately warrants Postone's disclaimer.

The problem should not be posed quantitatively, whether of numbers of people murdered or degrees of suffering. There are too many historical examples of mass murder and genocide. (Many more Russians than Jews, for example, were killed by the Nazis). The question, is, rather, one of *qualitative specificity*. Particular aspects of the extermination of European Jewry by the Nazis remain inexplicable so long as anti-Semitism is treated ... as an example of scapegoat strategy whose victims could very well have been members of any other character. (105)

Central to Postone's concern in disproving a "scapegoat" theory is the project of historicizing the specificity of Nazism as a distinctively "modern" anti-Semitism opposed to the transhistorical narrative of the persecution of the Jews. For Postone, modern anti-Semitism should not be understood as either a particular example of the general condition of racism or an extreme (atypical) example of the "bureaucratic police state" which terrorizes in the service of "big capital" (104). Postone's argument against scapegoat theories resonates with what Fregoso describes as the problematic equation between exploitation and extermination. While Postone points to the limits of a dehistoricized analysis of the relation between capitalism and racism, specifically, the German genocide of Jews, Fregoso is critical of a dehistoricized analysis of gender violence, specifically the understanding of feminicide in Juárez in terms of a Mexican *machismo* inherited from the colonial "black legend" of the border.<sup>36</sup>

In the case of Juárez, it is the coalitional politics of meXicana organizing against feminicide, based in large part on theories of intersectionality, that offers a critical social theory capable of grappling with the under theorized link between exploitation and extermination proposed by the well-meaning progressive narrative of antiglobalization. Fregoso explains,

Established as a major interpretive framework during the mid-1990s, the discourse of globalism equated *exploitation* with *extermination* of gendered bodies, tracing both conditions to a single process: economic globalization. And, on the Mexico-U.S. border, globalism was most visibly embodied in the *maquiladora* industry. (6)

The repeated equalization of exploitation and extermination ignores the gendered complexity of feminicide and the role of the state, producing the "myth of maquiladora murders," "a cliché that continues to this day" and cannot "offer us the nuanced account of violence that feminicide demands" (8). Fregoso concludes, "for a Left drawn to critiques of global injustice, the maquila murders are certainly alluring victims. As convincing as this narrative may be, there is ample evidence disputing the myth" (8). Fregoso attributes the uncritical equation between extermination and exploitation to a homogenizing critique of globalism. While she acknowledges

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<sup>36</sup> For the relation between Juárez and "a modern-day incarnation of the Spanish Inquisition out to hunt down, torture, and sacrifice young women" see Alicia Gaspar de Alba's introduction "*Femicidio: The "Black Legend" of the Border*" IN: *Making a Killing: Femicide, Free Trade, and La Frontera*" (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010).

that “there is no doubt that the process of economic globalization is ‘out of control’” and points to the abuse of civil and human rights as the direct consequence of the newly founded institution of Homeland Security, she describes the discourse of antiglobalization as a “monolithic, top-down analysis that neither captures nor explains the complexity of feminicide” (8). Like Postone, she questions uncritical narratives of anti-capitalism that offer facile explanations for the spectacle display of the tortured and murdered body of negatively racialized subjects.

My reading of Postone, moreover, expands Wright’s description of the dialectical contradiction of value and waste to include Marx’s characterization of the commodity form as the embodiment of the constitutive contradiction of modernity—the antinomy of the abstract and the concrete. The “double character” of the commodity form, and its corresponding form of consciousness that thinks in terms of the contradiction between the abstract and the concrete, emerged with the formation of the nation-state whose inaugural moment is marked by the false distinction between the state and civil society. This nineteenth-century distinction introduces the formation of the political citizen and his *abstract* equality before the law represented by the state in opposition to the private person represented by civil society, an entity embedded in the *concrete* and apolitical relations of the “private” market. The nineteenth-century emergence of the split modern subject whose social positioning was formed by the societal division between political and market relations, between the abstract and the concrete, was of great consequence for the Jews because unlike, say, the Frenchmen or Englishmen they were the only European group “which fulfilled the determination of citizenship as a pure political abstraction” (113). Following their political emancipation, the Jews were “of the nation abstractly, but rarely concretely” because they remained foreign to national language, culture, religion and traditions (113). The catastrophic coincidence between an intra-national diaspora cohered in a specifically modern anti-Semitism that escapes the logic of productivity implied in the orthodox historical materialist understanding of class antagonism. Postone’s claim that “the Jews could not have been replaced by any other group” (113) exposes the historical coincidence between the rise of modern anti-Semitism and the European nation-state, a theory of racialization that simultaneously implicates the relation between history and capitalism and attempts to account for the subsequent twentieth-century “extermination of the Jews [that] was marked by its apparent lack of functionality” and economic profit (2003, 84).

Why, for example, “in the last years of the war, when the German armies were being rolled over by the Red Army” was “a significant proportion of vehicles used to transport Jews to the gas chambers, rather than for logistical support[?]” (Postone, 105). Like Ivon Villa, who wants to know, “[Why didn’t they] just put a bullet in their heads and get it over with, without all the torture and mutilation?” Postone attempts to account for the (anti)value of torture when he writes

A capitalist factory is a place where value is produced, which “unfortunately” has to take the form of production of goods. The concrete is produced as the necessary carrier of the abstract. The extermination camps were *not* a terrible version of such a factory but, rather, should be seen as its grotesque, Arian, “anti-capitalist” *negation*. Auschwitz was a factory to “destroy value,” i.e. to destroy the personification of the abstract ... to transform it into smoke, trying in the process to wrest away the last remnants of the concrete material “use-value”: clothes, gold, hair, soap. (114)

In other words, the public wasting of Jews and the subsequent display of the mutilated body evinces Benjamin's claim that the "mechanics of representation are as critical to the creation [or attempted destruction] of value as the actual exchange of use values in the marketplace" (Wright, 143). For Postone, the visual display of the tortured Jewish body is a grotesque and anti-capitalist attempt to concretize the abstract, to destroy the historically specific body which had become "the *personification* of the intangible, destructive, immensely powerful, and international domination of [finance] capital" (112). Moreover, the Jewish body as the *personification* of the abstract is a type of anti-capitalism "based on a one-sided attack on the abstract" which misrecognizes its antinomical relation to the concrete and should not be mistaken for the Jews as "merely *representatives* of capital (in which case anti-Semitic attacks would have been much more class-specific" and hence profit oriented (112).

Postone's naming of a type of anti-capitalism which misrecognizes its relation to the defining antinomy of modernity cites Nazism as only one example of a fetishized anti-capitalism whose "power and danger" reside in its ability to provide an ideological and "comprehensive worldview which explains and gives form to certain modes of anti-capitalist discontent in a manner which leaves capitalism intact, by attacking the personification of that social form" (113). Postone further explains how this misrecognition takes on an ideological and racialized form. In a fetishized anti-capitalism

[t]he abstract and the concrete are not seen as constituting an antinomy where the real overcoming of the abstract—of the value dimension—involves the historical overcoming of the antinomy itself as well as *each* of its terms. Instead there is the one-sided attack on abstract Reason, abstract law or, on another level, money and finance capital ... [that does not, however,] remain limited to the attack against abstraction. Even the abstract dimension also appears materially. On the level of the capital fetish, it is not only the concrete side of the antimony which is naturalized and biologized. The manifest abstract dimension is also biologized—as the Jews. The opposition of the concrete material and the abstract becomes the racial opposition of the Arians and the Jews. (112)

Modern biology functions as the scientific evidence for historical truth and its enshrined visual representation—the racialized body—serves as the grounds for the ideological warzone over fantasies of origin and value production rooted in the material. The modern emphasis on the scientific biology of capital and the racialized body is constitutive of the "fetish which presents the 'natural' as more 'essential' and closer to origins, and the course of history as one of increasing artificiality. Such forms of thought become prevalent *with* the development of industrial capitalism" and give rise "to the notion that the concrete is 'natural,'" a nationalistic ideology "which increasingly presents the socially 'natural' in such a way that it is perceived in biological terms" (111).

More specifically, the National Socialist biologization of the German state could proclaim an anti-capitalist rhetoric while financially supporting the development of industrial capitalism because the manifest abstract was exclusively identified with *market* capitalism. In this way

[t]he attack on the liberal state, as abstract, can further the development of the interventionist state, as concrete. This form of "anti-capitalism," then, only appears to be looking backwards [through biology] with yearning. As an expression of the capital fetish

its real thrust is forward. It is an aid to capitalism in the transition to quasi-state capitalism in a situation of structural crisis (111).

The seemingly paradoxical looking back through the lens of a biologized history and looking forward to the technological development of capitalist profit recalls the nineteenth-century “structural crisis” in which the (inter)national restructuring of capital required the ideological shift from a mechanistic to organic world. The shift from the mechanical or religious world views of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to the ontological theorization of historical process served as the epistemological foundation for the Enlightenment’s secularization of knowledge and “the ideological preconditions of the Holocaust” (2003, 96).

Postone, however, distances himself from Adorno and Horkheimer’s classic thesis regarding the irreversible forward march of the totalitarianism inherent in Western rationalism (*Dialectic of Enlightenment*) insofar as he complicates the subsequent theoretical opposition between *modernity* as the forward movement of universal rationality and technology and the *postmodern* end of history which inaugurates the local politics of memory and ethnicity in reaction against “master narratives.” For Postone, the work of Charles Maier emblemizes the problematic ways in which rendering the opposition between modernity and postmodernity as the shift from universalistic to local politics fails to escape the antinomy of the abstract and concrete. According to Postone, Maier argues

that the growing centrality of historical memory in public discourse expresses a historical break that marks the end of the forward-directness of the postwar decades: at the end of the twentieth century, Western societies have reached the end of a collective project, of the capacity to found collective institutions that rest upon aspirations for the future. For Maier, the new discursive centrality of historical memory expresses a “surfeit of memory” and, as such, represents a retreat from universality—from transformative politics encompassing political communities—to particularity, to the politics of ethnicity. (2003, 97)

Maier’s declaration that the politics of ethnicity cannot think futurity nor universality suggests that making history implicates abstract universalism and that memory is divorced from the universal; in other words, memory can only function locally and does not qualify as “world” history. While Postone is critical of a local politics that replicates the logic of a fetishized anti-capitalism by way of a one-sided attack on either term of the abstract-concrete antinomy, unlike Maier, Postone doesn’t neatly align the forward-movement of abstraction with history and transformative politics nor does he consider memory to be the “looking backwards with yearning” to the concrete.

Postone generalizes the (patho)logical endpoint of National Socialism to the general condition of modernity insofar as he privileges an analysis of the commodity to demonstrate the essentiality fetishistic nature of each.<sup>37</sup> He outlines the “double character of the commodity” in

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<sup>37</sup> Postone also uses the historicization of the Holocaust to question “the theoretical adequacy of categories such as ‘modern,’ ‘postmodern,’ and ‘antimodern’” (2003, 89). For Postone, theories of the Holocaust which equate anti-Semitism with anti-modernism occlude the fact that Nazism simultaneously rejected and admired certain features of modernity. Trying to come to terms with the “the pattern of those aspects of modernity rejected by the Nazis and those aspects accepted” calls “into question characterizations of Nazism as antimodern or modern” and “also calls

order to illustrate that the Marxian concept of the commodity fetish offers a more rigorous analysis of “the relation of ‘modern’ and ‘antimodern’ elements of Nazi ideology” because unlike the conceptualization of the modern, commodity fetishism reveals “systematic forms of misrecognition (i.e., ideologies)” by distinguishing “between what is and what appears to be, between the historically specific social relations of capitalism and the way they appear” (2003, 90).<sup>38</sup> For Postone, antigenocidal praxis requires not only an anti-racist understanding of difference or local memory, but also, and perhaps more importantly, a form of consciousness that works to unthink the antinomy of the abstract and the concrete which, though inaugurated through the advent of the commodity form, persists in postindustrial or postmodern modes of production by way of fetishized anti-capitalism.

For Postone, the problems created by scapegoat, anti-capitalist theories of the Holocaust are inseparable from the contemporary problematic of periodizing History in terms of narratives of capital. His call to “differentiate” between an impulsive drive to repress the past in order to leap forward (a stilled dialectic that ultimately simply reproduces the past) and a memory of the past that helps provide “an opening through which we can begin thinking a future without betraying the past” (2003, 106) is precisely the kind of “differential consciousness” that Sandoval’s *Methodology of the Oppressed* outlines. Postone’s claim that ideology, severed from the privileging of class antagonism, remains an operative term for social analysis is tantamount to Sandoval’s concept of decolonial counter-ideologies that work to undo (post)modernist binary thinking. Like Postone, Sandoval’s methodology for unthinking oppression moves beyond the false distinction between a universalist, abstract understanding of history (read as racially unmarked) and the concrete, local grassroots activism of sexually and racially cognizant subjects. Furthermore, I argue that Jameson’s conceptualization of postmodernity, insofar as it mourns the loss of historical agency, participates in the Eurocentric erasure of genocide in the Americas, an erasure that will continue to plague critical theory so long as we fail to understand the Frankfurt School’s *immediate postwar* response to the Holocaust as such, and so long as contemporary critical theory continues to silence *juarenses* by ignoring their contribution to theorizing an antigenocidal praxis that historicizes the relation between economic and discursive forms of violence.

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into question more generally the theoretical adequacy of categories of ‘modern,’ ‘postmodern,’ ‘antimodern’” for understanding history in relation to capitalism (2003, 89).

<sup>38</sup> Postone, moreover, declares that “history did not end with the Holocaust.” This indictment serves several still operative projects of historicization, including that of the Holocaust itself. Postone makes clear that the issue of historicizing the Holocaust necessarily appears differently from the perspective of the end of the twentieth century than it did in the immediate postwar decades (2003, 84). It is precisely this inability to differentiate between the consistently changing status of the discourse and memory of the Holocaust in relation to contemporary events that characterizes an uncritical privileging of the foundational assumptions of critical theory whose emergence and constituency can be understood as part of the *immediate postwar* response of German scholarship to Nazism.

### III. Can Juaranses Speak? The Role of Labor as Linguistic Reference

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**Van Gogh**  
*A Pair of Boots*  
(1884)  
**FIGURE TWO**



**Andy Warhol**  
*Diamond Dust Shoes*  
(1965)  
**FIGURE THREE**

Andy Warhol, "Diamond Dust Shoes"



Similar to Postone's warning that antigenocidal praxis must move beyond the modernist antinomy of the abstract and the concrete, decolonial feminist thought identifies the limits of understanding feminicide in terms of the universality of Eurocentric conceptions of gender embedded in human rights discourse, a discourse that emerged and is still plagued by what Postone describes as the immediate postwar responses to the Holocaust.

My reading of *Methodology of the Oppressed* suggests that Sandoval's analysis of "academic apartheid" implicitly acknowledges Postone's project of unthinking the modern antinomy of the abstract. In her diagnosis of the current production of scholarship, Sandoval describes the segregation between theory and practice as that which isolates white or Eurocentric abstract theory from the concrete, grassroots politics of racially cognizant subjects. Like Fregoso's neologism *meXicana*, Sandoval's differential consciousness can be defined as "a set of processes, procedures, and technologies for decolonizing the imagination" (69) and creating a coalition of theoretical thinkers across the colonizer/ colonized and first world/ third world divide. This worldwide coalition of theoreticians is not only politically necessary but thematically justified given the shared response to the historical situation of national liberation movements around the world, historical events that were directly affected by the geopolitical remapping of the post-World War II planet (Sandoval, 69).

In this section, I supplement Sandoval's critique of Jameson, based on her alignment of decolonial semiotics and love, to include an analysis of the relation between language and the function of labor as linguistic referent. Moreover, this supplement to Sandoval's critique of Jameson allows me to return to Postone's theorization of the fetish and show that Sandoval's differential consciousness, though not explicitly stated as such, answers Jameson's often unheard call for "an aesthetic of cognitive mapping—a *pedagogical political culture* which seeks to endow the individual subject with some new heightened sense of its place in the global system" (emphasis mine, 54).

Sandoval's theorization of "differential cognitive mapping" or "one love" draws on the decolonial theorists Frantz Fanon and Roland Barthes. Two foundational scholars of the relation between love and language, Fanon and Barthes "were poised on the cusp of the ending colonial era and the beginning of the postmodern" (82) and are rarely placed in conversation as such. Like Fanon, Barthes' semiotics understood that Marxism's "emphasis on the centrality of labor to social self-creation would not lead to equality and to the emancipation" of the "colonized people who assume *to the full* the ethical and political condition described by Marx as being that of the proletariat" (Sandoval, 88). Sandoval, however, finds Barthes' semiotics limited because he describes the worker (i.e. the oppressed) as being able to "speak the tree," and hence, places her in the "Real" and outside of an analytic self-consciousness that can produce counter ideologies. In contrast to Fanon's claim in *Black Skin, White Masks*, "every colonized person must at some point come face to face with the *language* of the civilizing nation" (Sandoval, 87), Barthes' understanding of the "speech of the oppressed" forecloses an imminently theoretical response for the (neo)colonized. He uses the example of the manual labor of cutting down a tree to make a distinction between the worker's use of language and the intellectual labor of theorizing the woodcutter. For Barthes, the consciousness of the worker is "operational" because (s)he is

transitively linked to her or his object: between the tree cutter and the tree, there is nothing but action. It is this transitivity—the *connection of language through labor*—that creates the outright and specifically political "speech of the oppressed" that is *de-ideologized* and emancipatory, according to Barthes. If, on the other hand, one should

speak about a tree while “*not a woodcutter*” who intends to cut it, he continues, then the person is consigned to the realm of ideology, cut off from what is real. Of this second consciousness caught in ideology, Barthes writes, “I can no longer speak the tree” (Sandoval, 106).

While Sandoval states that Barthes’ speech of the oppressed “generates a language intimately tied to the referent” (107), I expand her critique to specify that the referent in question is that of *labor*. In this way I suggest that Barthes’, (and as I will show later, Jameson’s) privileging of labor as the necessary referent for dialogic speech has the unintended effect of maintaining reified divisions between intellectual and manual labor, between praxis and theory. I show how Barthes’ and Jameson’s unrequited admiration and long distance love triangle between the intellectual, labor, and the referent slips into a problematic consciousness that can no longer serve the purpose of moving toward a humanistic and planetary project of decolonization.

According to Sandoval, for Jameson, the break with diachronic sensibilities produces an agoraphobic and schizophrenic postmodern condition that (sadly) differs from modern alienation because the self loses the critical distance and space from which to think the other, and hence, can no longer think critically or “cognitively map” a time and place in history. Sandoval suggests that Jameson’s eulogy for the autonomous and centered self of first world modernity describes a process of the “democratization of oppression” in which “the first world subject enters the kind of psychic terrain formerly inhabited by the historically decentered citizen-subject: the colonized, the outsider, the queer, the subaltern, the marginalized” (27).

In contrast to Jameson’s Lacanian world where “signifiers are severed from their signified, inducing in the once-centered first world subject” a “form of historical amnesia” (21), Sandoval’s differential consciousness takes up a politics of metaideology which no longer mourns the loss of the referent as a loss of self and instead evokes the sense of “falling in love” which is an “alternative mode of being, not consciousness in its usual mode, but not unconscious either,” ( 144) not a schizophrenic but a multiple and textually complex consciousness. Moreover,

This understanding of power is not syntactical in nature, that is, is arranged in order of meanings that make “sense,” insofar as power is viewed as continually regenerating, and intervened in differentially, according to the contingences necessitated by social crisis. Power, thus, is viewed as performative. ( 77)

I will later return to this “non syntactical in nature” sense of “falling love” when I review Jacques Derrida’s queer reading of Van Gogh’s *A Pair of Boots*, an image that plays an important role in Jameson’s account of (post)modernity that I will now turn to.

Sandoval’s identification of the limitations of Barthes melancholic lost, “I can no longer speak the tree” runs parallel to her critique of Jameson’s visual-spatial work presented in *Postmodernism or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. Sandoval implicitly suggests that Barthes, like Jameson, equates the loss of the role of the referent (of labor) with the postindustrial world of simulacra and hyper-reified social relations in a techno-virtual reality. Similar to Barthes’ inability to “speak the tree,” Jameson defines the culture of simulacra as

a society where exchange value has been generalized to the point at which the very memory of use value is effaced, a society which Guy Debord has observed, in an

extraordinary phrase, that in it “the image has become the final form of commodity reification” (*The Society of the Spectacle*). The new spatial logic of the simulacrum can now be expected to have a momentous effect on what used to be historical time [;] ... the past as “referent” finds itself gradually bracketed, and then effaced altogether (18).

For Sandoval, Jameson’s eulogy for the death of the modern (European) subject (a death that implies the death of ideology, political praxis, and historical knowledge) makes the decolonial and historically cognizant practices of queer US third world feminism invisible. I claim that this eulogy is equivalent to the image of the anti-capitalist fetish embodied by Figure One.

Similar to Barthes’ interest in the relationship between language and the referent of labor, Jameson’s turn to the visual arts through Heidegger’s analysis of Van Gogh is guided by an attempt to narrate the interlinked relation between the political work of theory and changes in economic modes of production. In *Postmodernism*, Jameson compares Van Gogh’s “modern” *A Pair of Boots* (1884) and “postmodern” Warhol’s *Diamond Dust Shoes* (1965) (in order to signal the shift *from* a modern hermeneutics by which “the work [of art] in its inert objectal form is taken as a clue or a symptom for some vaster reality which replaces it as its ultimate *truth*” to the postmodern image which “does not really *speak* to us at all” because “[n]othing in this painting organizes a minimal place for the viewer” (emphasis mine, 8). *A Pair of Boots*, however, offers a historical truth because Van Gogh’s “peasant shoes” maintains a hermeneutic link to the referent of labor insofar as it represents “the whole object world of agricultural misery” and “the whole rudimentary human world of backbreaking peasant toil” (7). The “truth” that Jameson speaks of is historical knowledge and is based in large part on his uncritical use of Heidegger’s reading of Van Gogh’s painting featured in “The Origin of the Work of Art.” In staging his analysis for the postmodern loss of historical knowledge, Jameson turns to the visual, modifying Heidegger’s phenomenological understanding of truth in relation to being and the work of art to include a relationship between subjectivity and the periodization of capitalism. Using Heidegger’s Van Gogh as a frame of reference, Jameson describes *Diamond Dust Shoes* as

a random collection of dead objects hanging together on the canvas like so many turnips, as shorn of their earlier life world as the pile of shoes left over from Auschwitz **or** the remainders and tokens of some incomprehensible and tragic fire in a packed dance hall. There is therefore in Warhol no way to complete the hermeneutic gesture and restore to these oddments that whole large lived context of the dance hall or the ball, the world of jetset fashion or glamour magazines. (emphasis mine, 9)

Jameson’s reference to Auschwitz amidst Warhol’s popular and ambivalent (therefore controversial) aestheticization of commodities and commodity culture might seem curious unless understood within Adorno’s analysis of the link between a fascist culture industry and the erosion of the individual capacity to think critically. While this intertextuality between Jameson’s reading of Warhol and Adorno might seem unalarming for most, it reads very differently when we consider Postone’s analysis of ahistorical accounts of Auschwitz and fetishized anti-capitalism. Through his description of *Diamond Dust Shoes*, Jameson implicitly suggests that history did end with the Holocaust and thereby validates Postone’s concern that periodizations of history based on narratives of capital cannot adequately account for the historical specificity of racialized acts of genocide. Jameson’s facile juxtaposition between Auschwitz “or” a dance hall is a case in point. Elsewhere Jameson explicitly claims that

The last few years have been marked by an inverted millenarianism in which premonitions of the future, catastrophic or redemptive, have been replaced by senses of the end of this or that (the end of ideology, art, or social class; the “crisis” of Leninism, social democracy, or the welfare state, etc., etc.); taken together, all of these perhaps constitute what is increasingly called postmodernism. The case for its existence depends on the hypotheses of some radical break or *coupure*, generally traced back to the end of the 1950s or the early 1960s. (1)

It is clear that here, Jameson ironically distances himself from the “etc. etc” of the “end” of many things that can only “perhaps” constitute “theory” or “postmodernism” because based on a “hypothesis” that he does not reject but doesn’t necessarily buy. The citation of “the 1950s or the early 1960s” is very telling and supports Sandoval’s claim that Jameson is completely blind to decolonial movements. And so despite his ironic distancing from alarmist discourses of the end, he contributes to their reproduction insofar as he doesn’t include the hypothesis that for the U.S. third world this time period marks many beginnings.

In contrast to Sandoval, however, it is important to note that Jameson’s turn to the aesthetic is in fact his gesture towards a beginning and a critical theory capable of accounting for historical agency. Jameson explains that in looking at this famous portrait, we cannot ignore Heidegger’s analysis “which is organized around the idea that the work of art emerges within the gap between Earth and World, or what I would prefer to translate as the meaningless materiality of the body and nature and the meaning endowment of history and of the social” (7). That Jameson turns to the aesthetic is underestimated by Sandoval’s reading of his skepticism. His use of Heidegger to get at the truth of history recalls Kant’s aesthetic model situated between noumena and phenomena, or here, what Jameson translates as the meaningless materiality of the body and the meaningful endowment of history and the social, Heidegger’s Earth and World respectively.<sup>39</sup> However, unlike Sandoval, Jameson’s uncritical use of Heidegger for visualizing the postmodern lack of historical knowledge and affect does not advance Postone’s project of unthinking the modern antinomy of the abstract and concrete. Jameson’s turn to the visual arts through Heidegger’s reading of Van Gogh privileges the concrete insofar as he draws connections between the materiality of painting and agricultural labor.

“In them,” says Heidegger, “there vibrates the silent call of the earth, its quiet gift of ripening corn and its enigmatic self-refusal in the fallow desolation of the wintry field.” “This equipment,” he goes on, “belongs to the *earth*, and it is protected in the world of the peasant woman....Van Gogh’s painting is the disclosure of what the equipment, the pair of peasant shoes, *is* in truth.... This entity emerges into the unconcealment of its being,” by way of the mediation of the work of art, which draws the mediation of the work of art, along with the heavy tread of the peasant woman, the loneliness of the field path, the hut in the clearing, the worn and the broken instruments of labor in the furrows and at the hearth. Heidegger’s account needs to be completed by insistence on the renewed materiality of the work, on the transformation of materiality—the earth itself and its paths and physical objects—into that other materiality of oil paint

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<sup>39</sup> Jameson’s revision of Kantian aesthetics is made explicit in his likening of postmodern lack of affect to the Kantian sublime, and hence still capable of critical thought. Of course, while Kant is interested in moral judgment, Jameson is interested in historical knowledge. See *Postmodernism*, especially pages 34-37.

affirmed and foregrounded in its own right and for its own visual pleasures, but nonetheless it has a satisfying plausibility. (8)

While Jameson's recuperation of historical knowledge through aesthetic modes of subjectivity and practice is similar to Sandoval's differential consciousness, Sandoval is not invested in labor as the privileged referent for linguistic meaning and cohesion of the subject. Sandoval's unhinging of labor from linguistic meaning, and the subsequent effects for understanding history and the language of the Other, is central for the queering of transnational feminisms. Central for this project is moving away from an identity politics that places the burden of gender analysis on women, sexuality studies on queers, and decolonial thinking on the colonized, in essence, what Jameson does in his analysis of postmodernity despite his ironic distancing from it. His distance from these concerns is evinced by his lack of comment on the gendered nature of Heidegger's reading—the recuperation of being depends upon not only peasant labor but more specifically, the peasant *woman*. Moreover, it makes no difference to him whether Warhol's painting is reminiscent of Auschwitz or a dancehall fire or that all the *Diamond Dust Shoes* are women's shoes.

To better understand what a gender inflected reading of Van Gogh would look like, let us now turn to a critical reading of Heidegger provided by Jacques Derrida in *The Truth in Painting*. Jameson's reference to Derrida, like his reference to gender, is only parenthetical—“(Derrida remarks, somewhere, about the Heideggerian *Paar Bauernschuhe*, that the Van Gogh footgear are a heterosexual pair, which allows neither for perversion nor fetishization)” (8). In this way, Jameson misses an opportunity to inflect the Marxist understanding of the fetish with an inquiry into the reification of gender and sexuality. By contrast, Derrida claims that Heidegger's reading of Van Gogh is not only explicitly heteronormative in that he assumes they are a “pair,” but also, in Heidegger's binary reading of the pair, he is trying to avoid perversion and the fetish, a project of aversion that Derrida aligns with heterosexuality specifically and normativity more generally.

Derrida's explanation of the relationship between the question of truth and the sexual fetish is helpful for undoing Jameson's easy alignment between Heidegger's being and historical knowledge, “The whole [Heideggerian] question of the thing in truth exercises the notion of fetishism” (334). Derrida's reading of the aversion to the fetish in Heidegger is based on his review of Meyer Schapiro's counter claim that the pair of shoes belong not to Heidegger's peasant woman but to the urban man, specifically, Van Gogh himself. Rather than take a side, as Jameson does when he agrees with Heidegger, Derrida faults Schapiro and Heidegger for not moving beyond Kantian metaphysics, a move that would have been precipitated by asking, “what makes him [Heidegger, Schapiro, and we can add Jameson] so sure that they are a *pair of shoes*? What is a pair?” (259). Derrida continues, “I wonder whether Schapiro and Heidegger aren't hastening to make them into a pair in order reassure themselves. Prior to all reflection you reassure yourself with the pair. And then you know how to find your bearings in thought” (265). Unlike Jameson's privileging of Heidegger's coproduced feminization of earth and labor, the loss of which can be understood as a loss in “how to find your bearings in thought” or “cognitive map,” Derrida writes of the metaphysical restitution of the logocentric subject,

[The shoes are] attributed to a subject, tied on to that subject an operation the logico-grammatical equivalent of which is more or less relevant. ...In what sense (whom?)

what?) do they *faire marcher*? and make speak? There's the subject, announced. (264-25)

Moreover, Derrida specifies how the announcement of the subject is fused within the binary contract of Heidegger's antimetaphysics which, in rejecting the likening of thought to traveling, prefers the earth or ground, a concretized speech act in which "the ground (of thought) comes then to be lacking when words lose speech [la parole]" (288). So despite Heidegger's claim that the metaphysical injures the thing in itself, his binary system of thing and work, through its use of the double usefulness of the gendered binary of Western speech, depends on the visualizing of a figure that is without lack and therefore always reliable—the peasant woman who does not speak and therefore like the ground of thought simply *is* speech.

In the context of *The Origin*, reliability (*Verlässlichkeit*) comes back to [*revient à*] a commitment (debt, duty, restitution, truth) whose concept cannot but precede all the notions which make a system with those of matter/form: the symbolic, the semiolinguistic, etc. . . . "Thanks to" this reliability, and thanks to the product which presupposes it, the peasant woman is "entrusted," . . . accorded to the silent call of the earth, to that language without language of correspondence with the earth and the world. Without the *silent* call . . . without the absolute prerequisite of this commitment, in this preoriginary reliability, no symbolic contract, no production, no utilization would be possible. (352)

In contrast to Jameson's investment in the aesthetic as a recuperative moment for postmodern critique which replaces Heidegger's authentic being with historical truth, Derrida questions the desire to find "the truth in painting" and suggests that despite Heidegger's distrust of the metaphysical, the fact that the truth of Van Gogh's painting is dependent upon that which exists outside the painting, outside the frame or parergon—the peasant woman, her work, and the earth—proves otherwise. Derrida's reading of Heidegger's Van Gogh helps reveal the heterosexist bias at work in Jameson's influential, if not hegemonic, framework for understanding the (post)modern relation between global capitalism and the death of critical aesthetic practices. Derrida's critique of the "preoriginary reliability" of the peasant woman's labor and "language without language," moreover, echoes Wright's analysis of the "tale of turnover" emblemized by the question, "Was she a good girl?"

In contrast to Jameson's implicit gender politics inherited from a Heideggerian investment in a the faithful linguistic referent, Sandoval's methodology for reading oppression suggests that the hermeneutic of understanding dehumanized labor did not end with postmodern erasure of the worker who can no longer speak the tree but persists in the consciousness of decentered, though not Deleuze's skitzo, understanding of the intersecting vectors of the colonality of power. This mobile consciousness that unhinges the reified relation between faithful labor and langue practices is not the ambivalent product of the postmodern condition that interrupts the relation between referent and language, but the hard work of coalitional praxis, or what Sandoval names a "hermeneutics of love" and what *Desert Blood* embodies in its pedagogical project of queering *familia*. In contrast to a fetishized anticapitalism, *Desert Blood's* queer "hermeneutics of love" is based neither on pure blood lines of race or family, nor on the equivalent heteronormative understanding of the patronymic necessity of linguistic signification.

Within the particularities of Juárez, we see evidence of the practical repercussions of a hermeneutic framework that fails to unthink the heterosexism at work in contemporary forms of anti-capitalist critique. To date, it is reported that “roughly only 20 percent of the murdered women have been factory workers” and “no evidence exists that *obreras* are, or have ever been, the prime targets of the killings” (Schmidt Camacho 2004, 31). However, “the link between the murders and border factories remains an important mechanism for drawing international attention to the situation in Juárez” (Schmidt Camacho 2004, 32). Schmidt Camacho further explains how this insistence on understanding “gender terror” as the “*inevitable* outcome of this economic scheme” produces a “discourse of the cadaver.” By contrast, however, meXicana activists question the inevitable link between exploitation and extermination (Fregoso) and expand the discursive framework in which to interpret “the tragedy of Chihuahua” as “a wholesale inability to imagine a female life free of violence” (Schmidt Camacho 2004, 36). In contrast to discourses of the cadaver for which “the *obrero* represents zero degree subjectivity tied to the undifferentiated violence and tedium of the border space, a subjectivity that can only be recuperated in death” (Schmidt Camacho 2004, 25), Schmidt Camacho interrupts the semantic and political value of traveling “under the sign of death” (2004, 37).

Schmidt Camacho, moreover, helps us further understand the preliminary link made by Wright’s managerial tale of turnover and the utopian or stilled life image, that is, between the wasting of factory of labor and the value of the spectacle, in her explanation of the “reified image of *feminicidio* as wasted humanity” (2004, 25). From Schmidt Camacho we learn the ways in which the analogy between postmodern “truth” and narratives of capital take on a visual form. Taking the work of photographer Charles Bowden as primary example, we see the ways in which the cautionary postmodern tale of Juárez depends upon discourses of the cadaver. Schmidt Camacho explains,

The deliberate conversion of the dead body into an aesthetic object repeats the violence of the murder itself, subjecting the young woman to the possessive gaze of the male viewer. Bowden represents himself and the photographer as guerilla journalists, documenting the true horror of the border space, but tellingly, neither of them concerns himself with what the dead girl might be saying.

The value of the image has nothing to do with its reference to the girl’s living existence, but rather in its service to Bowden’s governing narrative about Juárez as the space of death. (2004, 39)

But Schmidt Camacho’s critique moves beyond a facile or clichéd feminist indictment of Bowden’s governing narrative. The reproduction of the reified image of the cadaver is not simply the work of American outsiders or men. Her review of protest art produced by Mexicana and Chicana activists is also weary of “how much they mimic the photos of crime victims carried in the Juárez newspapers: they show exposed mutilated bodies without reference to a single actual victim or crime. Like newspaper images, these paintings appear to claim a transparent, documentary status” (2004, 38). What Bowden’s explicitly heterosexist gaze shares with “[s]cholars, journalists, and *activists*” is the coincidence between “their depiction of the victims as the inevitable causalities of globalization, effectively dead prior to their brutal killing” (2004, 32, emphasis mine). Like Wright’s explication of the visual and utopian imagining of Juárez women as embodiments of stilled life, Schmidt Camacho suggests that

[t]he uncritical repetition of this trope *as cultural fact* forecloses prematurely on the emergence of distinct narratives of gender and value voiced by mexicanas at the border, displacing women from the very debates meant to be about them. (2004, 32)

In other words, Schmidt Camacho's decolonial feminist framework works to denaturalize the link between a gendered critique from a feminist one. Her critique reminds us of reasons why Marisela Norte and Norma Andrade of *Nuestras hijas de regreso* refused to participate in the V-Day March in 2004. In the place of a media celebrated march, Ortiz and Andrade chose to focus on the death of Lilia Alejandra García Andrade through a private, religious ceremony, which no doubt included the men affected by Lilia's murder.

This latter example, moreover, shows us how an understanding of local knowledges need not devolve into either a nationalist, paternalist, or gendered identity politics. In fact, Schmidt Camacho makes clear that

An incomplete solidarity with the *obreras* of the maquiladora has engendered an incomplete solidarity with the communities afflicted by the feminicidio; international campaigns have tended to reproduce neocolonial, patriarchal constructions of Mexican women as *bodies without consciousness* (Schmidt Camacho 1999). The legacy of this construct may be found in similarly abstracted depictions of the feminicidio's victims as anonymous cadavers, without reference to the victims' biographies. ... Solidarity requires making room for narratives of personhood that unsettle cosmopolitan observers of the border. (2004, 32 and 24)

It is important to note that the unsettling of cosmopolitan observations enabled by "narratives of personhood" on the border is the same as the biographical understood in the traditional sense of either the literary genre or unified sense of the subject that informs it. In my overview of the link between labor as referent and signification, I explained that to work against understanding representations of subaltern women who cannot speak, a different kind of subjectivity must be heard and read. In this case, solidarity with the women of Juárez would require solidarity with the entire community as a *living* community. This shift from the necrophilic gaze invested in the Juárez cadaver to the living narratives of her family is at once a dereification of the utopian image and a political investment in the legal rights of citizenship. Therefore, while the focus of this narrative requires the biographical details of the life that has been murdered, the fact that it is the community who must write this rehumanizing "narrative of personhood" recasts such speaking within a very different relationship between voice and protest, one that does not function within the logocentric mechanisms identified by Derrida's recasting of the debate surrounding the "truth" of Van Gogh's painting. Schmidt Camacho details how narratives of personhood are able to interrupt the "reified image of *feminicidio* as wasted humanity" as acts of *testimonio* rather than biography.<sup>40</sup>

Schmidt Camacho concludes that complete solidarity with the community of the border town of Juárez depends upon "how it partners with the melancholic work of pursuing justice. The melancholic manifests itself above all as a refusal to fully relinquish the missing to the logic of reification, to place memory above abstraction and forgetting" (2004, 52). Her turn to the

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<sup>40</sup> For the use of *testimonio* for social justice see Nance, Kimberly. *Can Literature Promote Justice? Trauma Narrative and Social Action in Latin American Testimonio*. (Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt UP, 2006).



psychoanalytic understanding of melancholia is situated within the Latin American feminist use of Judith Butler's reading of Antigone as potential symbol for the politicization of female mourning. In her reading, Butler suggests that the state's refusal to recognize a subject's civil identity (and the civil rights that constitute that identity as such) requires the construction of the subject as unethical.<sup>41</sup> This line of feminist thinking that reads the coproduction of the ethical and civil subject through the lens of mourning is succinctly referenced by Schmidt Camacho in her use of Jean Franco's analysis of the invocation of the mother's suffering as "a posture with deep roots in Latin American social movements, that of Antigone before the state" (2004, 48). While I do not dispute either Schmidt Camacho's or Franco's use of Butler's Antigone, a tradition of scholarship that, as Schmidt Camacho indicates, emerged with the transnational feminist interest in the Argentinean *Madres de la Plaza de Mayo*, I feel that for contemporary Juárez, the psychoanalytic framework of mourning and melancholia compromise Schmidt Camacho's project for dereifying discourses of the cadaver insofar as it accommodates the binary counterpart to the truth of postmodern late capitalism—the illegible or unspeakable act of violence against third world women. By contrast, a focus on the colonial and heterosexist framework of *the discourse of rape* provides a historical analysis of the discourse of the cadaver and its ideological counterpart—the figuration of *juarenses* as "bodies without consciousness."

In contrast to the use of the suffering subject as evidence for the ethical subject deserving of civil rights that Butler's Antigone highlights, I claim that undoing the value of rape functions as a necessary component of disassociating juarenses from traveling under the "sign of death." Following what Schmidt Camacho rightly identifies as the importance of understanding that "gender violence is also *spatialized* as a natural feature of the postcolonial periphery" (2004, 51), I link my analysis of Jameson's implicit homological association made between earth, woman, labor, and faithful linguistic referent to the ways of in which the scene of rape is central for the human rights advocacy at work in Nava's film *Bordertown*. Moreover, in order to expand Schmidt Camacho's melancholic framework based, as stated above, on Butler's reading of Antigone, my reading of representations of feminicide understands rape within a theory of sovereign power that remaps Juárez as a legible terrain of material and symbolic struggle. This hermeneutics of reading for signs of life is crucial for attending to what Segato describes as the project of historicizing the *language* of feminicide.

#### **IV. The *meXicana* Detective Novel: Historicizing the Language of Violence**

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The great gains made by the U.S. labor activism of the 1930s and 1940s were undermined by what Justin Chacón describes as "the creation of a differentiated urban-rural workforce" in which a "virtual union-free zone" was created in "one of the most significant sectors of the US economy"—agriculture (140). Introduced in 1942 during World War II, the Bracero Program was justified as "a 'wartime expediency' plan to ease a labor shortage in agriculture" (Chacón, 140). However, the shortage of agricultural workers was less the result of patriotic farmworkers leaving the fields to take up arms as soldiers and more a kind of "white-flight" from non-unionized labor. Chacón explains, "As white, native-born workers fled the low wages, grueling conditions, and totalitarian structure of work in the fields in favor of urban union jobs, a shortage of 'exploitable' labor did truly arise, from the vantage point of

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<sup>41</sup> See Judith Butler *Antigone's Claim: Kinship between Life and Death* (New York: Columbia Press, 2000)

growers”(Chacón, 140). Reminiscent of nineteenth-century agricultural work by Asian immigrant labor, the Bracero Program recruited an entirely male labor force, a restriction that emphasized the temporary nature of guest work insofar as the guest was to return to his national homeland where wives and families would faithfully wait for him until the completion of his labor contract. As a form of bonded labor,

Any “breach” of the contract by the individual, such as stopping work, leaving, or otherwise “willfully refusing” to carry out the agreement, resulted in deportation. By individualizing the contract, collective bargaining was precluded. This secured a way to detach bracero labor from the rest of the working class and legally redefined temporary workers as the virtual property of the growers. (140)

Of the millions of workers that traveled from all over Mexico to the recruitment sites along the border, the Bracero Program accepted one out of six. Those who were denied Bracero status were encouraged to cross the border without proper documentation. The undocumented worked side by side with the Bracero, sometimes outnumbering those who were temporarily invited. As such, it can be argued that the greatest profits reaped by the legalization of temporary guest worker was in fact the creation of an even more vulnerable labor force, that of undocumented workers.

From Chacón’s account of the Bracero labor contract we should note the ways in which the justification of the “wartime expedience” of Mexican labor disavows 1) the racialization of agricultural work 2) the gendering of the international division of labor in which social reproduction and production are coded female and male, Mexican and U.S. respectively and 3) the ways in which criminalization, that is, the distinction between illegal and legal immigration, plays a vital role in the management of exploitable labor. The end of the Bracero Program in 1964 signaled the beginning of Mexico’s transition from a state-led program of industrialization to a market-led program of industrialization. This shift was characterized by the dissolution of the social pact between labor and the state, the geographical relocation of leading factories from the central parts of Mexico to the U.S. border, a predominantly female workforce, and a change from the business of producing primary products such as mineral and agricultural commodities to the *maquiladoras*, foreign owned assembly plants. Following the demise of the Bracero Program, the 1965 Border Industrialization Program facilitated the growth of these bordertown *maquiladoras* and was the model for the 1994 North American Free Trade Agreement.<sup>42</sup>

From the perspective of the Mexican state, the *maquiladoras* were introduced as a temporary solution to the U.S. shifting demands for a legal and exploitable labor force. From the perspective of U.S. organized labor, however, the termination of the Bracero labor contract held a different meaning. It was viewed as “the first significant victory for [Cesar] Chávez and the new generation of farm worker advocates, later organized into the United Farm Workers” (Chacón, 280). As such, it can be argued that the end of a guest worker program marked an important beginning for the UFW and its important influence on Chicana/o aesthetics and civil rights activism. It is precisely this historical narrative of Mexican labor which highlights the complicit legislation of immigration and multinational capitalism that the Chicana/o detective novel documents.

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<sup>42</sup> See Cravey, Altha J. *Women and Work in Mexico’s Maquiladoras*. Boston, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishes, Inc, 1998.

Susan Baker Sotelo and Ralph E. Rodriguez agree that Chicana/o “whodunits” concern themselves with historicizing the effects of migrant labor. This historical project, moreover, subverts the traditional genre insofar that “we are not led to a traditional follow-up, resolution and return to status quo” (Sotelo, 79). Instead, Chicana/o detective fiction is characterized by a fundamental rejection of absolute truth, a skepticism whose failed quest for truth functions as a narrative of historicization and call for social justice. Rodriguez explains the ways in which Chicana/o noir rejects the following ontological and epistemological niceties which traditionally inform the genre.

Detective novels, then, combine epistemology and ontology in the following fashion: the driving force behind the narratives is a quest for knowledge. Indeed the successful detective enlists and combines multiple ways of knowing the world—interviews, rational deduction, empirical data (such as fingerprints, photographs, time of death, etc.), and very often intuition or hunches—in order to solve the crime or crimes under investigation. In working through these epistemological concerns—How do I know what I know? How do I know what I know is true? How do I use this knowledge to apprehend the criminal?—the detective invariably enters into an ontological query into his/her own sense of being in the world. (8)

For Rodriguez, the simultaneous quest for knowledge and identity that characterizes detective fiction is revised and taken up by Chicana/os at a very specific historical juncture: the postnational turn in Chicana/o studies which emerged in the late 1980s.<sup>43</sup> As such, the detective genre is particularly apt at staging the construction of an identity-in-process. Rodriguez also suggests that the politicized nature of this new fiction resides in its concern and narration of Chicana/o history. The imperative to narrate Chicana/o history coincides with and yet undoes the representation of causality provided by the traditional detective novel. Rodriguez states, “in the face of a discontinuous present, writers like Corpi seek to build a causally linear narrative about the development of the Chicana/o community, linearity consistent with the epistemology of the detective novel” (67). In contrast to the traditional detective novel, however, where “there is no projection into the future [and] [t]he ‘present’ of the novel is a trail of clues that leads to the ‘past’ of the crime,” Chicana/o fiction moves beyond the temporality of the detective novel insofar as it simultaneously narrates the historical past of the Chicano movement and envisions a different future (Sotelo, 83). Moreover, for Chicana/o detective novels, the call for social justice is often conjoined with revisiting the historical significance of the various Civil Rights movements of the 1960s.

Published in 1989, Lucha Corpi’s first novel *Delia’s Song* documents the Chicana/o movement through the fictionalized account of Delia Treviño, a student activist turned poet who develops a Chicana consciousness through her participation in the UFW, the founding of Mecha, and the Third World College movement on the University of California, Berkeley campus. Not

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<sup>43</sup> Rodriguez also suggests that Chicana/os previously refrained from writing detective fiction for fear that an already marginalized literature would be further trivialized. Hinojosa’s inaugural work published in the late 1980s coincides with the moment in which detective fiction is legitimized, leaving its non-literary and popular stigma behind. I disagree with Rodriguez’s implicit claim that Chicana/o authors only take up a literary form when it has been legitimized in some way. I also disagree with his periodization of Chicana/o thought as postnational during the 1980s. For a more interesting (and feminist) account of the recent (non)emergence of Chicana/o detective fiction see Lucha Corpi’s posting on [www.labloga.com](http://www.labloga.com) This posting was initially delivered at the 2007 NACCS conference roundtable on Chicana detective fiction which also featured Gaspar de Alba.

only does Delia reappear as a character in Corpi's subsequent Gloria Damasco detective series, but the historical documentation of the various struggles of the Chicana/o movement throughout the U.S. functions as the narrative framework for all of Corpi's fiction. Chicana activism is literally re-activated by Corpi's detective fiction insofar as it frames the unfolding of the generic mystery plot. In Corpi's *Cactus Blood* (1995) it becomes impossible to solve the mystery of Sonny's death, a participant in the historical UFW strikes led by Cesar Chávez, without documenting Carlota's contemporary experiences as an undocumented worker. Similarly, *Desert Blood* and *Bordertown* retell the history of Mexican labor from a meXicana perspective. More specifically, each places a post-NAFTA critique of migrant labor in relation to the work of human rights activism and traces the ways in which the project of transnational feminisms is either complicit with or critical of postmodern cautionary tales of Juárez that depend upon discourses of the cadaver.

In *Bordertown*, Juárez as postmodern cautionary tale is visually established by a sequence of apocalyptic sites—the chaotic squalor of the border city, the shanty towns or *colonias* that signify third world poverty, and then, finally, the interior of the *maquiladora*. The blue glow of technology emanating from the large television screens that are being pieced together creates a *bladerunneresque* vision of immigrant dystopia and, in particular, envelops two workers, a man and a woman, who have their backs to the camera.<sup>44</sup> The interruption of this gender binary, and the framework it provides for understanding cultural and economic reproduction in Juárez, is signaled when the male *maquiladora* on the left exits the factory and scene of production, never to return. But different than Quiñones, Nava introduces the indigenous voice (and presumably its Chicana/o counterpart) as the ethical voice of postmodern critique. That this point of view has yet to be incorporated is signaled by an indigenous singing voice that is heard but not visually present on screen. This fourth scene, moreover, recalls the agency of Quiñones' human rights narrator and places her in relation to a different historical figure that emerged contemporaneously with narratives regarding Mexican postmodernity—the *zapatista* specifically and the *indigena* more generally.

Like Ivon in *Desert Blood*, Lauren first appears in *Bordertown* en route to the border city while contemplating the Juárez cadaver. As she studies a disturbing sequence of cadaver images on her laptop, Lauren's face is illuminated by the same blue glow of technology that signified the precarious existence of *maquiladora* workers. Nava cuts to and from Lauren's flight to Juárez and a flashback of her discussion with her boss, George, as he tries to convince her to report on the "maquiladora murders." This narrative sequence establishes the flashback structure for which we, and Lauren, come to understand the reasons for which she claims, "I don't know anything about Mexico" and initially rejects the Juárez assignment. Like the narrative of postmodernity that relates what happens when women go to work with an inability to cognitively map the historical circumstances of femicide, Lauren's agency as an American career woman runs counter to an investment in Mexican social justice. Not persuaded by George's reminder of the John F. Kennedy award for her journalism work in El Paso, or the civil rights history the awards namesake symbolizes, she negotiates a better paying and highly esteemed position within the company, "I'll do it. But when I do, I want the foreign correspondence job. Deal?"

As Lauren's disembodied Chicago voice announces, "I'll leave tonight," we see two more images on her laptop screen. The first is a version of the *Ms* magazine, white sandals buried in the sand. The second image, the rows of pink crosses, signifies the elegiac image of

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<sup>44</sup> See Lisa Lowe's foundational analysis of comparative immigrant scholarship and Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* in *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics* (Duke UP, 1996).

social protest that *juarenses* have produced in response the necrophilic romancing of the cadaver. These last two images imply the two alternative narrative endings for Lauren's trip to Juárez: will she continue Quiñones' journalistic script of Juárez as analogue for the postmodern condition? Or will her time in Juárez lead her to the kind of social activism and political consciousness that the crosses signify?

Nava gestures toward the second alternative insofar as the image of the pink crosses acts as a narrative bridge from Lauren's subconscious to Eva's story. Following this gesture toward the elegiac rather than fetishistic response to the Juárez cadaver, the film takes on a dreamlike version of the desert night. The camera guides us toward a downward gaze of the Juárez desert and follows the movement of the wind that stirs up grains of sand, revealing a face. Eva opens her eyes and screams. Her emergence from the desert sand, where her rapists left her for dead, creates an analogue between the wind and camera's movement insofar as each is responsible for bringing Eva, and the earth she is buried in, back to life. In this way, the filmic camera is distinguished from the journalistic camera that produces the reified image of the cadaver. Instead of feet buried in the sand, our focus is on Eva's face. Our eyes are placed in line with her eyes, providing a humanizing form of recognition that records the rebirth of Eva and the earth where she is buried. Nava's filmic camera that humanizes through an alignment between the female laboring body and the Juárez desert, however, reproduces the redemptive positioning between woman and land as narrative exit to the postmodern condition exemplified in Jameson's privileging of labor as linguistic referent based on Heidegger's reading of Van Gogh. It is important to note this Eurocentric form of the human informing Nava's filmic camera because it stages the ways in which a static aesthetic of the human short-circuits a well-intended representation of transnational feminist solidarity. The historical particularities of this general problematic, moreover, can also be seen in Nava's Chicano revision of this narrative through his portrayal of Lauren and Eva's transnational feminisms.

As Eva escapes what should have been her tragic death in the Juárez desert, we hear the sound of indigenous singing as she stumbles away from her shallow grave. The indigenous voice creates a narrative bridge between the geographical and temporal shift from contemporary Mexico to a black and white flashback to an unidentified little girl running through agricultural fields. While Eva escapes becoming an anonymous cadaver in the desert sand, this little girl leads us to a different woman who is dying. The filmic camera replicates a close up on the serene, almost dead face of a woman whose body is visually framed by the earth that she rests on. But unlike Eva who opens her eyes and screams, the camera follows the movement of blood that escapes this dying woman's nose, dripping down the side of her face and into the earth where it eventually disappears. The little girl cries over the dying woman's body, "No quiero que te vayas, Mama." The disembodied word "Mama" is repeated as we return to Lauren asleep on the plane, revealing that the flashback images of the agricultural fields and dying mother belong to Lauren's dreaming subconscious. Eva's triumph over becoming an anonymous cadaver displayed on a foreseeable endless loop of images on Lauren's laptop is placed within a sequence of film images that implies a causal relation between Eva's survival and Lauren's retrieval of buried memories. But while Eva literally comes back from the dead, Lauren's mother, and the migrant farmworker narrative that she symbolizes, is only revived in Lauren's memory. That this remains in the past, albeit a remembered past, is visually signaled by the fact that memories of Lauren's childhood always occur in black and white while the events that trigger these memories—Eva's unfolding narrative as a living survivor of feminicide—remain in color.

The viewer's first insight into Lauren's family history is followed by an inside view of Eva's home. Moreover, this psychic and political relation is enabled by Nava's revision of Chicana/o aesthetics that have traditionally, albeit sometimes problematically, narrated the syncretic encounter between indigenous and Catholic spiritual practices. Through a construction of filmic images that follows a trajectory from the pink crosses to Eva's home, Nava positions the indigenous family outside Juárez's postmodern condition. In contrast to the blue glow of technology of the maquiladoras, a warm glow of candles envelops Eva's resting body as her family and *curandero* pray over her in a cleansing, indigenous ceremony. This fourth scene of unincorporated indigenous spirituality is then visually linked to Lauren. The continuity between Eva's story and Lauren's story, between indigenous and Chicana, first introduced by the juxtaposition of Eva crawling out of her grave and young Lauren finding her mother dead, is further established by the *curandero* blowing smoke over Eva's body and Lauren smoking a cigarette in a hotel room. In this visual connection it seems as if the indigenous healing practices of ceremony is extended to Lauren as she sits in her hotel bed, researching murder in Juárez. To the list of unresolved murders we must add Lauren's mother, and the Chicano civil rights activism that her farmworker narrative symbolizes.

In contrast to Lauren's orphan existence in the United States, our second view of the indigenous home reveals Eva's close connection to her family and her rising position within the hierarchal relations of indigenous spiritual practices. Nava's first representation of the indigenous home places the *curandero* center stage as he directs the women in Eva's family through a healing ceremony. By contrast, and recalling the opening scene in the maquiladoras when the male worker exists the scene of production never to return, in the following scene, Eva replaces the *curandero*. Eva takes his place within the indigenous household, sitting where the *curandero* was originally positioned within the healing circle that prayed over her corpse-like body. Eva's newfound status and second resurrection from near death is once again established when she stares straight into the filmic camera. Different than her scream that accompanies Nava's alignment between laboring body and feminized earth, here, the female indigenous voice confidently counsels the women in her family regarding what to do next. Eva decides that because the police "won't protect us" and "The government...all they do is steal," then they must go to the newspaper "El Sol" because "Alfonzo Diaz can help us."

*El Sol* headquarters, where Eva and Lauren finally meet, symbolizes the space into which Nava stages his filmic intervention into Quiñones' journalistic script. And, most importantly for Nava's revision of Chicano aesthetics through a transnational, human rights framework, despite Eva's assumption that it will be Alfonso Diaz that will listen to them and print their story, it turns out to be Lauren who will repair the severed link between Chicanismo and indigeneity. Through a series of replacements, then, Nava's version of transnational feminist politics depends on the elimination of men altogether. First, Eva replaces the *curandero*, and, subsequently, Laura replaces Diaz. The relinquishing of relationships with indigenous and Chicano men, moreover, requires that Lauren and Eva learn to trust each other by developing a reciprocal friendship. That this newfound alliance requires effort, moreover, is Nava's way of offering an alternative to the savior narratives that position Third World women in need of a U.S. feminist intervention.

Like Ivon in *Desert Blood*, Lauren's time away from the border town has affected her ability to read local cultural practices, leaving her vulnerable and unable to help Eva. Assuming her role as reporter, Lauren wants to know if Eva's body bares any of the traces that characterize feminicide, information she learned through her journalistic research. "Does she have any marks on her left breast?" As her translator, Diaz cannot bring himself to repeat this text or Lauren's

Americanness. Despite his disinterest in what he considers “Indian superstition,” his understanding of gender roles, especially sexual propriety between men and women, prevents him from speaking Lauren’s question. In contrast to the images of the cadaver and details of sexual and physical abuse that *El Sol* features, as a gentleman, Diaz is sensitive to the undignified script. He whispers Lauren’s question into Eva’s mother’s ear. Equally reluctant to repeat the violent script, her mother says in Spanish, “I don’t need to ask. I have already seen....she does.” This refers back to the *curandero* scene in which the family prayed over Eva’s raped body and points to Lauren’s limited understanding of indigenous communality and mothering. Lauren is enacting the masculinist and voyeuristic gaze she has learned from her U.S. journalism, but Diaz and Eva’s mother refuse to do so. This first meeting, moreover, is central for Nava’s attempt to distance *Bordertown* from the “savior from the North” script. Lauren is an incredibly fast learner, and from then on does everything possible to create a reciprocal relation between herself and Eva.

Lauren’s effort, and the unfinished project of transnational feminisms that it symbolizes, is solidified when Lauren accompanies Eva as they retrace her steps the night she was raped. Lauren’s detective work requires that they wait at the bus stop, camera in hand, with the hope that Eva can identify the bus driver who raped her. As they wait at the bus stop, a friendly conversation ensues, and Eva complicates the migrant narrative we saw in *Ms* magazine. In contrast to the rural/city dichotomy characterized by the movement of young women to the border town, Eva explains how a post NAFTA economy affected her entire family. In the place of the village newcomer who leaves her rural ways for the city, Eva’s migrant narrative explains the bidirectional flow of “modernity” insofar as economic exploitation reaches her home in the form of taxation, affecting the entire family and community. Eva, moreover, refuses the hierarchical relation between reporter and object, between first world researcher and third world object of study, when she says to Lauren, “I tell you about me, now you tell me about you.”

But it is with the introduction of Teresa Casillas that Nava finally solidifies his attempt to distance himself from both the “savior from the North” narrative and the reductive, often racist, representation of indigeneity that Chicana/o and Latin American cultural production has had to account for given the vexed history of *mestizaje*. That Lauren is not Teresa, the elite Mexican *mestiza* who only sees Eva as a decorative part of her persona, is confirmed when she attempts to dissuade Lauren from pursuing Aries Rodriguez, Eva’s second assailant. Teresa explains that the psychologists “are convinced that Eva imagined the second killer” because she “comes from an Indian culture. Her people often don’t distinguish between real things from the things they imagine. “That Lauren believes that there were two men that attacked Eva proves that Lauren sees what Teresa is unwilling to see. Despite Teresa’s warning that the pictures of the bus drivers will only push Eva further into psychosis, Lauren hands Eva the series of photographs with the hope that Eva will identify her attacker. In contrast to the journalistic photos featured in Diaz’s newspaper, Lauren’s photojournalism works to redirect the viewer’s gaze from the victim of femicide to the perpetrator. Lauren’s camera work also enacts Nava’s filmic point of view that initially redirected our gaze from feet buried in the sand toward Eva’s face one step further by focusing on the perpetrators of the crime. Recalling our initial point of recognition when we are positioned in Eva’s gaze as she opens her eyes, we are now positioned within Eva’s point of view as she looks through the various pictures of bus drivers. When Eva points to Domingo and states, “That’s him,” Teresa walks off camera, officially exiting *Bordertown*’s narrative of *meXicana* solidarity.

As viewers, we learn to trust Lauren because she believes Eva's story despite not having the eye witness view that we have of Eva's rape's scene. I read Lauren and the viewer's shared commitment to finding her second assailant, Aries, within Rita Laura Segato's feminist framework for understanding rape. According to Segato, the first problem for outsiders to Juárez is that the violence of feminicide renders Juárez and the people who live there illegible. This illegibility, moreover, is founded on two central truth claims that everyone seems to agree upon. First, the image of the rapist is that of the *narco* or thug subject which works to affirm the ideologically produced fear of the margins of social life. Second, the counterpart to this social marginalized subject is the claim that the crimes are sexually motivated. These claims, however, exist in paradoxical relation to perhaps a third truth that everyone seems to know: "no common outcast criminal would remain in complete impunity for this long. This makes Juárez shudder and become unspeakable" (73). To Segato's analysis I would add that the rendering of Juárez as unspeakable contributes to the possibility of superimposing postmodern cautionary tales of sexual violence and the subaltern woman who cannot speak. Since the act of rape is central for the portrayal of these women as victims of late capitalism *par excellence*, then it follows that the act of rape, and its constitutive counterpart, "the myth of maquiladora murders" are also central for the rendering of Juárez as unspeakable. To counter this logic, Segato advances the feminist thesis for reading rape as neither a social anomaly nor sexually motivated. Instead, a feminist framework advances that rape is an "enunciation addressed to one or many interlocutors" present physically or in the rapist's imaginary" (75). Moreover, this enunciation operates within "a deep symbolic structure that makes fantasies intelligible" (74). In this way, rape is not simply the product of individual mental illness. Instead, the "aggressors share the collective gender imaginary. They speak the same language and can be understood" (74).

Different than the classic view of femicide established by Jill Radford and Diana Russell, Segato does not limit the act of feminicide to hatred of women.<sup>45</sup> Although she acknowledges that such acts do occur in a misogynistic context, she thinks that this type of analysis only recognizes the vertical relationship between rapist and victim. By contrast, Segato suggests that the enunciation of rape travels along two axis: a vertical one that acts as a line of communication between the male and female *and* a horizontal in which men speak to other men. In this way, the world of Juárez is not "limited to the consciousness of the perpetrator but a universe of intertwined meanings and intelligible motivation" (78). What the horizontal axis communicates, moreover, is rape as an "act *par excellence* of sovereignty" insofar as death power itself is not enough to establish sovereignty. Rather, sovereignty "requires control of the living, of life as such, or domination cannot complete itself" (75). As such, death power, and for that matter, all acts of violence exceed an instrumental quality. The power over the living is in fact a colonial sovereignty because the extermination of a population would be counterproductive. Instead, rape and the death power it codifies transforms the living "into a receptive audience for death power" that must be repeatedly performed. Juárez speaks us to then, not because we can share in the suffering of the people that live there. Instead, the perpetrators stage a "dialogue with all who seek shelter under the law" (89). For this reason, it is important to understand ourselves in the position of receptive audience so that we may cognitively remap Juárez as a legible space of symbolic and material struggle. To this end, we must oppose the sovereign power that currently enacts what Segato names "the second state," or a regional micro-fascism in Juárez, when we

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<sup>45</sup> See *Femicide: The Politics of Woman Killing* (New York: Twayne, 1992)



insist that “Ciudad Juárez is neither outside Mexico nor outside the world” of representation (88).

When Eva insists that she has two attackers, she is also insisting upon a horizontal axis of communication between men that only Lauren and the viewer recognize. In this way, *Bordertown* opens up the possibilities for listening to and seeing Juárez along the horizontal axis of sovereign language between men thereby potentially serving the purpose of resituating the living narratives of *juarenses* within a decolonizing locus of enunciation. By guiding the viewer through a pattern of visual recognitions along a horizontal axis (between Domingo and Aries) and a vertical axis (between Aries and Eva), Nava’s filmic camera distinguishes itself from the reified image that accompanies Quiñones’ journalistic script that renders Juárez illegible. Moreover, Lauren’s meXicana detective work functions as analogue for the filmic camera that guides the viewer through this series of visual recognitions and the power dynamics they enact. When Teresa reinforces the psychologists’ racist claim that Aries does not exist, “Eva imagined the second killer” because “her people often don’t distinguish between real things from the things they imagine,” she also reinforces a partial and colonizing view of the scene of rape that only registers the vertical power dynamic of male sovereign and female victim. In contrast to Teresa, who sees Aries and the look he gives Eva but disavows that it was a moment of recognition, Lauren insists, “I saw the look on that man’s face. He recognized her. That is the man.”

The dialogic circuit between men (Segato’s horizontal axis), and empowering relation between North and South (the unfinished project of transnational feminisms) is disabled when Eva murders Aries to stop him from raping Lauren. Eva’s act of murder functions as the climax of Nava’s inversion of the “savior from the North” script insofar that it argues that, unlike Lauren who arrives too late on the scene, it is the *indigena* from the South that is able to interrupt the socioeconomic and symbolic value of rape at work in Segato’s analysis of the constitutive link between colonial sovereignty and Third World illegibility. Nava’s hyperbolic inversion of the “savior from the North” suggests that the solidarity between meXicanas requires the murder of mexicano men. This colonial mimicry is comparable to the use of maquiladora wages for becoming an agential consumer rather than commodified object of Juárez’s tourist economy that we saw highlighted by Quiñones analysis of women who flip the script on Mexican gender dynamics by frequenting male strip clubs. Nava’s inversion—brown women saving brown women from brown men—also replicates Quiñones’ scenario in which postmodern feminist agency is practiced in antagonist relation to masculinity or, more precisely, through a hyperheterosexuality that depends upon the opposition between gender alliances, a type of postmodern revenge story for the hyperheterosexual woman that mimics the colonial sovereign’s death power. While Lauren and Eva’s meXicana detective work initially begins in contradistinction to Teresa’s Euromestizaje, by the film’s end, there is no community of women or transnational world view to speak of. By the film’s end, Lauren has made no connections to the women of Juarez, Alfonso’s wife or Teresa. In a similar act of hyperbolic inversion, Nava’s critique of the effects of global capitalism in Juárez implies an argument for a return to Mexico narrative that completely undoes *movimiento* aesthetics. While the claim to Aztlán argued for the nonimmigrant conceptualization of Chicana/os as indigenous to the Américas, Lauren’s human rights activism acts as a corrective to her parent’s migrant mistake. Her reverse migratory pattern does not open borders but questions the possibility for a hemispheric conceptualizing of *latinidad*.

In contrast to the idealization of the pairing of indigeneity and human rights introduced at the beginning of the film, this relationship and the transnational project it initiates is completely undone by both the content of the plot and the last image of the film thereby contribution to yet another postmodern cautionary tale about Juárez. While the filmic camera initially made us conscious of the vertical axis of communication that Segato names the *lingua franca* of feminicide, and Lauren's feminist photojournalism redirects the viewer's gaze away from the victim of feminicide to the perpetrators, these new points of view culminate in replacing the female cadavers that appeared on Lauren's laptop with two murdered mexicanos: Alfonso and Aries. Lauren's return to Mexico, moreover, is epitomized by replacing Alfonso as renegade journalist in search of the truth. Despite Nava's series of reversals, which culminate in the disfigured corpse of the rapist replacing the maquiladora's cadaver, *Bordertown* returns us to its initial point of departure—Juárez as postmodern cautionary tale. Aries' mutilated corpse prefaces the last image of the film, "a close up of a woman's legs, half-buried in the sand, skin the color of bruises," brown "sandals on her feet" (*Desert Blood*, 3).

## V. Undoing the Value of Rape

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In contrast to Nava's cadaver fetish that yokes *juaranses* to a legibility consigned to "the sign of death," and different than the traditional detective novel that begins with the discovery of a dead body, *Desert Blood* begins with the consciousness of an unnamed *mujer* who is being abducted. "The pain stunned her, and she was crying again, but suddenly, she felt nothing in her arms. The numbness spread quickly up her spine. Her jaw, belly—everything felt dead" (1-2). Her own uncertainty of whether she is dead or alive persists through this first chapter and we will not learn that she is Ivon's sister, Irene, until halfway through the novel. As such, with every introduced female character the reader is forced to wonder whether she was or will be the victim of feminicide. In this way, we are introduced to Juárez not as a foreclosed space of death, symbolized by the spectacle of the cadaver. Instead, through the paradox of that which "felt dead," we learn to see life. The trajectory of this life is unknown and precarious; Irene's life depends upon Ivon's ability to read for signs of life in Juárez.

In many ways, *Desert Blood's* evolving and critical relationship to the "close up of a woman's legs half-buried in the sand" marks Ivon's struggle to queer *familia*, which, as I hope to show, is analogous to a decolonial feminist intervention into Juárez as postmodern cautionary tale. The manner in which Ivon responds to the *Ms* magazine is our first insight to her character and the series of challenges that she will encounter during her return home. When "Ivon closed the magazine" she "couldn't figure out what upset her most: the crimes themselves or the fact that, as a native of that very border, she didn't know a thing about them until just now" (3). En route to El Paso from Los Angeles, Ivon is as ignorant of what is really happening in Juárez as she is anxious about seeing the women in her family, especially her homophobic mother and her activist, social worker cousin, Ximena. When Ivon confronts Ximena, "Why didn't you tell me about it? I had to read about it in *Ms* magazine," Ximena explains, "Hell, any time you come to town it's like a doctor's visit, *prima*. You're in and out the door, practically, because you're done with this place. I didn't think it mattered to you" (23). Rather than defend herself, Ivon silently agrees, "She had to admit her cousin was right. She had abandoned her hometown" (22). Seeing that Ivon feels ashamed, Ximena further pursues this line of badgering, "Leave it to white women to scoop a good story. Oops, I keep forgetting you have a *gringa* girlfriend. No offense

intended, okay?” (23) The irony, of course, is that the *Ms* magazine was not written by a *gringa* and that Ximena does mean to insult her cousin for leaving home and not knowing about feminicide in Juárez despite, or as Ximena and others seem to suggest, because of her doctoral study in Women Studies.

When Ivon closes the *Ms* magazine version of Juárez, we learn the reason for her return to Juárez—she is looking for the love and life denied to her in the United States. Ivon and her partner Brigit wish to adopt a child. Given the civil rights denied to queer couples and the difficulty of working through the process of adoption, her cousin Ximena, a social worker employed in the El Paso-Juárez area, suggests to Ivon that she and Brigit should adopt a Mexican child from Juárez. When Ivon and Ximena arrive to the surrogate mother’s home, they find out that she and the child she was carrying have become victims of feminicide. Bereaved and outraged, Ivon, drawing on her dissertation skills, begins her own investigation into the surrogate mother’s murder. Exhausted after a full day of research, which includes witnessing the surrogate mother’s autopsy, Ivon passes out from exhaustion and forgets to meet her sister, Irene, and her ex-girlfriend, Raquel, at the fair in Juárez. Ivon’s fascination with the Juárez cadaver, coupled with her desire to produce the nuclear family through adoption, distracts her from taking care of Irene. Moreover, Raquel, jealous of Irene’s new found “gringa” love in the states, also neglects to take care of Irene who is kidnapped. The reader can only hope that Ivon will find Irene before she shares the fate of the unnamed woman buried in the sand.

By the novel’s end, however, Ivon is able to decipher and participate in the cultural practices of Juárez and El Paso thereby accomplishing both the rescue of Irene, and the creation of a coalition of meXicana activists across national, ethnic, employment, and sexual differences. Moreover, Ivon incorporates her experiences into her dissertation thereby addressing the epistemological concerns of decolonial feminist thought that seeks redress beyond legal categories. Situated within this feminist genealogy of Chicana/o aesthetics and politics, Gaspar de Alba’s contemporary accounting of the status of the *movimiento* ideals is couched within a self-reflexive critique of ethnic studies scholarship, the epistemological counterpart to the Mexican American Civil Rights movement that Nava’s film does not address.

In contrast to Nava’s use of the filmic camera to question Quiñones’ journalistic image of postmodern Juárez, a critique that ultimately fails because it depends too much on the idealization and then erasure of Eva’s indigeneity, *Desert Blood*’s investment in a transnational feminist project resides in theorizing the methodology by which we teach and learn about Juárez. While Nava’s attempts to distance himself from Quiñones by making a distinction between the filmic camera that traces the development of a meXicana consciousness and the journalistic photograph associated with savior narratives constructed around the women of Juárez, *Desert Blood* stages the epistemological concerns of this project through the introduction of a new novel form: the detective-dissertation novel.

In *Desert Blood*, the text of Quiñones’ article literally appears as part of Ivon’s unspoken unconscious and without quotation marks, “*Many of the young women had been raped, several were mutilated, and a large number had been dumped like wornout machine parts in some isolated spot*” (6). Ivon does not passively accept Quiñones’ script for reading Juárez or the necrophilic gaze it forces her to enact. Rather than simply repeat the “myth of maquiladora murders,” Ivon transcribes the sentence in “her dissertation journal. The dead women of Juárez had nothing to do with the topic of her research, but she was beginning to think this issue would have made a much better project for the dissertation” (5). Moreover, she puts the magazine away and redirects her gaze away from the cadaver by looking out the airplane window as she lands in

her hometown of El Paso, a point of view that literally and epistemologically places Juárez in sight. Ivon's refusal of the necrophilic gaze acts as catalyst for what she has yet to fully theorize: a method for reading signs of life in Juárez. However, this redirection of the gaze proves not to be as simple when Ivon begins to interact with the structural reification of power dynamics at work in her family as well as in the border towns of El Paso and Juárez. Ivon quickly realizes that her academic study of feminism through her dissertation work in women's studies is not enough to counter her seductive fascination with the Juárez cadaver, a seduction that is epitomized by her willingness to witness an autopsy.

In contrast to Ivon's imperfections, however, the success of Gaspar de Alba's dissertation-detective novel resides in the ways in which the reader is afforded the imaginative space to rethink Juárez through various anti-necrophilic perspectives. *Desert Blood* literally takes the form of a business card, a missing person's photo, song lyrics, a newspaper article, dissertation notes, and multiple conflicting temporal experiences of various named and unnamed consciousnesses. The constant movement between different visual and temporal modes of representation codifies Gaspar de Alba's new literary form that addresses the historical particularities of contemporary Juárez—the dissertation-detective novel—and enacts an oppositional or mestiza consciousness which requires an impurity of literary form that is neither a celebratory hybridity nor an apolitical pastiche (as understood by Jameson) but rather a historically cognizant indictment of the redundancy of unrequited love produced by the gendered (and sexualized) U.S.—Mexico social-labor contract. Moreover, the dissertation-detective novel dismantles the liberal stereotype of queer love as inherently revolutionary or transgressive. The documentation of queer desire in *Desert Blood* is a testament to the endurance and function of love as a catalyst for self and communal valorization, cohesion, memory, and pleasure. (Queer) desire, however, is not enshrined as an uncritical mode of sexual (and therefore political) liberation but reveals a kind of repressed desublimation insofar as queer love kills, it abandons sisters, and can manifest itself in a patriarchal desire for the nuclear family.

In this way, *Desert Blood* theorizes the difficulty of escaping hegemonic modes of representation. Ivon's newly found motherhood—in the last chapter, she decides to adopt Jorgito—recapitulates the debiologized and political activism of “*Madres*, protect us” from Gaspar de Alba's “Disclaimer.” Unlike the primal scene of mother and newly born in the hospital room, the last scene of *Desert Blood* takes place in Irene's bedroom; and it is Irene, the victim of abduction and rape, and not Ivon, that rests in bed surrounded by flowers and loving smiles. It is also this intimate scene of new motherhood and Irene's return that functions as a coming out scene for Irene's aunt, Ximena, who enters the bedroom with Raquel and Jorgito.

Ivon stared back and forth between Ximena and Raquel. Something about the way that Ximena's nostrils flared when she looked at Raquel and the way Raquel looked down, embarrassed. . . . Brigit was in the kitchen helping Ma make *flautas* for the reunion picnic tomorrow, and Raquel, the woman whose bed she'd been in just a few days ago, was here too, and, it turned out, she was not only Ivon's ex, but also Ximena's girlfriend. She didn't even know her cousin was a dyke. So much for my gaydar, she thought. “And when did you come out that I wasn't looking,” Ivon whispered to her cousin. (340)

Ivon's queer adoption of Jorigto, a child of rape, interrupts what Segato refers to as the *lingua franca* of patrimonial and nationalistic contestations over public and private property when discussing the (heteronormative and homosocial) masculine discourse of rape. *Desert Blood's*

narration of rape and murder of Juárez women counters the mythology of the “fucked one,” la Malinche-Llorana figure whose children are at best, doomed to a life of orphanage, cultural schizophrenia, and sexual shame, and at worst, die at the hands of a crazy mother-of-color. The novel ends with Ivon remembering “the families of the murdered women” (341). She keeps the memory of their inconsolable grief and daily confrontations with the state in purview and in juxtaposition to the somewhat festive activities taking place in her mother’s home given Irene’s return. Ivon looks around the room and hears voices from other parts of the house and registers the motley crew of people who helped her navigate Juárez and save Irene’s life. She has to come to accept and love them as family. Ivon utters the last words of the novel, “¡Qué familia!”

Ivon’s dissatisfaction with the popular feminism and sensationalist journalism of *Ms* magazine prompts her to change her dissertation project. The novel, like Ivon Villa’s dissertation, reconceptualizes Juárez as a living space of rights for the living. Irene’s life, though saved, points to larger problems of representation and legal protest given the history of the colonial pornographic gaze and contemporary modes of image production. The only space available for the horrific discoveries of Ivon’s detective work is her dissertation, the novel it informs, and, of course, the consciousness of *Desert Blood* readers.

“¡Ni una más! ¡Ni uno menos!”<sup>46</sup>

**A un año del asesinato de Marişela Escobedo**  
**MARCHA** **Viernes 16 Dic. 5pm**  
 Ángel de la Independencia—Hemiciclo a Juárez

**EN SOLIDARIDAD  
 CON NUESTRAS HIJAS  
 DE REGRESO A CASA**

**Ni una más!  
 Ni uno menos!**

**Acto Cultural 7pm**  
 Hemiciclo a Juárez  
 Prendamos una luz de resistencia,  
 trae tu veladora en memoria de los asesinados.

**¡Contra la represión a los luchador@s sociales!**  
**¡Fuera ejército de las calles!**

**COMITÉ POR NORMA ANDRADE** **CONAGOM**

Rather than dismiss *Bordertown* all together, I argue that we have much to learn from Nava’s failed feminist project. A critical reading of *Bordertown* explains the transnational consequences of a Chicano historiography that places Chicana feminism as the consequence of, rather than contributing agent to, *movimiento* political consciousness and activism. As Maylei Blackwell explains in her recently published study of xicana civil rights activism, “It is not

<sup>46</sup> This roughly translates to “Not one more (female)! Not one less (male)!”

enough to say, ‘The women were there too.’ To subvert the ideologies of these official histories, we must overturn the epistemological register that licenses them” (4). The “epistemological register” that I seek to overturn is *Bordertown*’s Eurocentric account of patriarchy that links the relation between masculinity and femininity to the heterosexual couple and envisions a feminist politics devoid of men of color. For this reason, Nava is unable to hear what *juaranses* have articulated for the past twenty years, “Más que un caso de horror, se trata de una historia de exterminio de una familia entera” “More than a singular case of horror, it’s a history of the extermination of an entire family.”

Though well-intended, Nava’s Eurocentric attempt to humanize Eva reveals what Postone describes as the reification of critical theory that fails to historicize our analysis of genocide beyond the immediate, post-World War II response to the Holocaust. My comparative analysis of *Bordertown* and *Desert Blood* expands Sandoval and Postone’s comparable, though not identical, analysis of postmodernity by showing the ways in which the coloniality of gender informs Nava’s filmic privileging of labor as linguistic referent. I argue, moreover, that Nava’s film participates in the U.S. codification of the Mexican male body as an unredeemable site of violence, which, through dehumanized representations of the rapist, immigrant, and drug-lord, is viewed as essentially amoral and incapable of following the rule of law. In this way, Mexican masculinity is constructed as unethical and in contradistinction to his female counterpart who currently remains the privileged subject of first-world feminist theory and governmental and popular imaginings of democratic freedom. But it is not enough to say, “The men were there too.” *Juaranses* have responded to the limits of the savior narratives produced about the subaltern *women* of Juárez by documenting the ways in which a Eurocentric humanism depends upon the ungendering of men and women of color. In opposition to these official histories, we must say “Ni una más. Ni uno menos.”

**CONCLUSION**  
**Toward a Literary Criticism of U.S. Ethnic Literatures  
and Human Rights Discourse**

The ideology of difference of Chicano narrative emerges from a more complex unity of at least two formal elements: its paradoxical impulse toward revolutionary deconstruction and toward the production of meaning. Theories of Chicano narrative must be able to handle this duality.

--Ramón Saldívar

*Chicano Narrative: The Dialectics of Difference*

Other novelistic forms have other relations to human rights, engage other aspects of the law, feature other figures, and perform other sociocultural functions.

--Joseph Slaughter

*Human Rights, Inc.*

How might [Anibal] Quijano's and [Immanuel] Wallerstein's Global South-Global North trans-American collaboration help those of us working in mainline American studies, critical U.S. studies, Latin American studies, and U.S. Latino/a studies project a transnational, anti-national, and outernational model? Why has Quijano's and Wallerstein's trans-American (even planetary) conceptualization of Americanness not been more central to the current vitality of these divergent fields?

--José David Saldívar

*Trans-Americanness: Subaltern Modernities, Global Coloniality, and the Cultures of Greater Mexico*

My reading of *City of Night's* El Paso and *Desert Blood's* Juárez has provided a preliminary framework for thinking about the relationship between a U.S. feminist of color humanisms and the logic of Chicana/o narratives, each of which invert a human rights trajectory that idealizes the transportation of the "individual from the confines of the nation-state to the realm of the international" (Slaughter, 21). In this way, I have attended to Ramón Saldívar's claim that a theory of Chicano narrative must study the dual nature of "revolutionary deconstruction" and the "production of meaning." More specifically, I have articulated this duality within a decolonial feminist praxis that places the social activist demand for civil rights in dialectical relation to an aesthetic imagining of a world that goes beyond subjectivities paradoxically codified and erased by the law. Furthermore, I have shown how a Marxist understanding of literary form can provide a method for tracing the ways in which the decolonial literary imagination negotiates the composition of (il)legal identities fashioned in the disjuncture between legal and economic equity. In other words, my dissertation has privileged the complex relation between the law and labor for historicizing change from a decolonial feminist perspective. In this way, my reading of the queer El Paso novel might help supplement Joseph R. Slaughter's study that, while groundbreaking, excludes U.S. ethnic literatures. In contrast to the "worlding" of American literature that can enable a critique of U.S. cultures of imperialism, *Human Rights, Inc.* foregoes the conceptual importance of the borderlands, and obeys the traditional frontier between American and world literature. For this reason, my dissertation

begins and concludes with the following question: how can a study of U.S. literatures of color contribute to undoing the collusion between colonizing forms of law, literature, and the human?

I have argued that, to begin to answer this question, we must expand our current historiography of the human to include the coloniality of gender. For example, Slaughter frames *Human Rights, Inc.* by recognizing the difference beyond modern human rights, “those articulated in the language after the American and French revolutions,” and contemporary human rights, “those positivized in international legal instruments by the UN and regional organizations after World War II” (Slaughter, 16). While clearly critical of Eurocentric conceptions of the human, Slaughter’s framework does not aim to decenter European philosophy, (this is most evident in his privileging of German idealism and the postcolonial *Bildungsroman*), and an “eighteenth-century European articulation” of “colonialism and the civilizing mission” (36). By contrast, my theorization of the decolonial literary imagination placed the 1492 conquest of the Americas in purview, and my formal reading of confession and the dissertation-detective novel registered the ways in which the El Paso “I” narrates a transamerican critique of the coloniality of power.

My theory of the decolonial literary imagination, moreover, advanced the (w)holistic imperative of Paulo Freire’s humanism which, similar to María Lugones’ “world”-traveling and Marcial González’s “politics of form,” seeks to liberate the dualized being from a capitalist ontology of having whereby “to be is to have” (Freire, 58). As Freire explains, the oppressed suffer from a duality which has been established through the internalization of dehumanizing forms of consciousness. In other words, “They are at one and the same time themselves and the oppressor whose consciousness they have internalized. The conflict lies between being wholly themselves or being divided; between ejecting the oppressor within or not ejecting them; between solidarity or alienation” (Freire, 48). In opposition to an ontology of having, and the fragmentation it produces by way of an oppressed consciousness, I have drawn on Freire, Lugones, and González in order to produce a type of literary criticism that can trace the development of critical consciousness as an act of suturing rather than further fragmentation. That is to say, I have traced the ways in which *City of Night* and *Desert Blood* revise and invent forms of solidarity that challenge a violent and overwhelming sense of legal, economic, and sexual alienation.

To this end, my reading of the pilgrimage form of *City of Night* revealed the logic of substitution operating in the American Dream of upward social mobility, as well as the polemical inheritance of either-or thinking that is reinforced by the legal codification of “civil identities.” Furthermore, my argument for recognizing the ways in which a pre-Stonewall John Rechy foresaw the limits of “civil identities” is comparable to my comparative reading of Gregory Nava’s *Bordertown* and Alicia Gaspar de Alba’s *Desert Blood*. This comparative analysis questioned the efficacy of contemporary human rights discourses that neglect the decolonial feminist critique of gender advanced by living *juarenses*. In this latter example of limiting “civil identities,” I made a distinction between an anti-capitalism that constructs a homologous relation between narratives of history and narratives of capitalism (an intervention that aligned Moishe Postone’s analysis of anti-Semitic critiques of the Holocaust and Rosa Linda Fregoso’s call to end the “myth of the maquiladoras”) and a Marxist literary criticism that moves us beyond the consciousness of characters and toward a critique of epistemological reification (Freire’s decoding and González’s “politics of form”).

I have also established an important link between a decolonizing relation of history and literature, and an intersectional hermeneutic for reading multiple forms of oppression. This



pairing, moreover, also underwrites a model for a decolonial feminist literary criticism. To this end, I have drawn on Emma Pérez's *Decolonial Imaginary* and Chela Sandoval's *Methodology of the Oppressed* to highlight the ways in which intersectionality can provide an important intervention into the ways in which we historicize the relation between social change and communities of color. While my reading of Pérez focused on the limits of the law, my assessment of Sandoval's analysis of the reified relation between labor and linguistic signification advanced my critique of postmodern cautionary tales about Juárez. In particular, I stressed the constitutive link between intersectionality and an insistence on a non-additive approach to opening up literary studies to previously ignored fields of study. For example, *The Decolonial Imaginary* traces the persistence of heterosexism within Chicano historiography despite the well-intended inclusion of immigrant and woman as categories. Similarly, *Methodology of the Oppressed* outlines the ways in which a hegemonic periodization of U.S. feminism—Equal Rights, Revolutionary, Supremacist, Separatists—radically misunderstands or altogether erases Third World Woman praxis. In this vein, and if we are to take the project of theorizing the relationship between human rights and U.S. ethnic literatures seriously, it is important that we do not simply add the category of the human without a complete reconceptualization of what the human might mean. Or, perhaps more precisely, we need to revisit what the human or projects of humanization have meant for U.S. communities of color despite not being recognized as such. Given that the colonial imposition of gender conjoined the question of the human to racial *and* theological categories, one important avenue for future research would include questions of religion and spirituality. In other words, I am suggesting that rather than simply add the category of the human to an existing field, say, Chicana/o literature, a rethinking of the human from the perspective of U.S. literatures of color might, for example, unhinge the reified relation between the human and the secular.

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**c/s**