

Suspending the Desire for Recognition:
Coloniality of Being, the Dialectics of Death, and Chicana/o Literature

by

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Abstract

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Writing, as Abdul JanMohamed posits in relation to Richard Wright's literature, is an alternative manner of negating negation. "Negating the negation" in this sense must be understood dialectically, as a methodology of the oppressed seeking to transcend social negation from a continuous colonial logic that seeks to alienate, exploit, and reify racialized existence. The function of writing for historically marginalized communities, then, is a symbolic gesture that often takes the place of the act of physical resistance seeking recognition—as the Hegelian master/bondsman or Marxist proletariat/bourgeoisie models would describe—from exterior dominating forces. The desire to be recognized is displaced by the desire to know and critique the capitalist world's oppressive forces, especially the forces of racial alienation and gender subjection. The turn to affirm the self from within is manifested in the novels, poems, and plays of people of color in the United States and former colonies around the world. This dissertation examines Chicana/o literature produced between 1968 to the turn of the century to deconstruct the process of racial alienation and the struggle for "dis-alienation" represented in the critical imagination of writers who occupy the position of what Ramon Grosfoguel (2005) has referred to as "colonial racial subjects." The objective is to articulate a philosophical, theoretical, and literary account of the extent and manner in which death (actual, symbolic, and social), violence, and the continuity of the logics/ethics of domination shape the existential horizon of the Chicana/o experience to establish a conceptual grounding for the "coloniality of Being."

This dissertation reads how the persistence of colonial logic and the West's monopoly on the meaning and value of 'Being' has a dynamic relation with figurative renderings of racialized identity, alienated labor, death, violence, love, and war by Chicano/a writers whose literary production spans from the 1970s to the turn of the 20th century. *Suspending the Desire for Recognition* proposes that the existential concerns and the critiques embedded within Chicana/o literature are responses to the pathology of recognition endemic to modernity, the legacies of colonialism, and its persistent logic/ethic of domination in the modern era. Understanding literature as an important tool for the critique of society, this dissertation highlights the literary production of Oscar

“Zeta” Acosta, Luis J. Rodriguez, and Cherríe Moraga, key writers within the Chicano Studies canon whose autobiographies, novels, and plays help us explain the way in which death and violence are fundamental to the existential crises of Chicana/os who have lived through the socio-political realignments of the late 1960s through the present. The dissertation pays particular attention to the existential and psycho-political implications of Chicana/os subjectivities *sutured* in a social context which claims that the violence of racism is a problem overcome in the Civil Rights Era while institutional repression continues to subjugate Chicana/os and a rise intra-community violence is particularly evident.

Para mis padres, mis hermanas y hermano, y todos los que me han dado apoyo, amor, inspiración, y fuego para seguir adelante. La gente vive! La lucha, sigue, sigue... La lucha, sigue, sigue...

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Preface

South Central Los Angeles, although currently undergoing significant socioeconomic changes, has historically been one of the most violent and poverty stricken places in the United States. Its poverty and violence has been brought to the awareness of mainstream America through the African American experience in movies such as *Boys in the Hood* (1991) and *Menace to Society* (1993), however, these compelling pictures cannot be thought to contain “the whole picture,” as it were, of the violent and homicidal environment that South Central Los Angeles has been. We can locate a visual register that functions under a black/white binary in the cinematic representation of South Central because the brown experience, the experience of Chicana/os, *Mexicanos*, and *Centro Americanos* within this urban space, has been omitted from the cultural record. This observation is not meant to make a claim of legitimacy in what some call the “Oppression Olympics,” it is rather a fact that needs to be considered with seriousness and critical attention. I bring this observation to bare here because as a Mexican immigrant and self-proclaimed Chicano, my own upbringing in this section of Los Angeles’s urban landscape left a significant impression on my sensibilities and future political and intellectual development. The fear of—and as some describe my research interests: attraction to—have both held me back and pushed me forward towards the attainment of knowledge.

It may disconcert some to know that children who grow up with death and violence at their side, who are socialized to perceive it as something as “just and necessary” as truth and sunshine, often are very aware that this proximity is related to their racialized and poor status. My own awareness of racism and the power of whiteness came through stories of border crossings. As children we would hear about the treacherous hikes through the desert and about how horrible *coyotes* could be if they turned out to be thieves or rapists, but we also heard about being beaten by *migras*, about being humiliated and harassed for being Mexican. My sisters and I were spared the experience because my parents had sense enough to understand we were much too young to endure such crossing. We were also lucky to have fallen into the hands of an honest and kind *coyota* who even after not being able to find my mother for 5 days after we had crossed with someone else’s documents and having a 27 day old newborn she could sell on the black market had sense and heart enough to return to the motel where the original deal was made to cross me to find my mother. It is difficult to not to want to understand why such risks were necessary to reach South Central once I was old enough to be conscious of them. I was aware of my racialization as Mexican from an early age because U.S. immigration in those days, as ICE is today, were known to raid apartment buildings, corner stores, sweatshops, and industrial workshops throughout South Central. I cannot deny being scared of getting picked up by those light-green vans and also fearing that my parents may be inside those vans on their way to Tijuana, Mexico.

I often remark that my interest in the nature and structure of death came early when at around age 10 I would stay up, not being able to sleep, wondering about what

happens when we die. I would think about the apparent loneliness of death, its coldness and permanence, and would panic. I cannot say this wonder was not related to the fear I had that my father would kill my mother during his “*macho* man” drunken, violent fits. Thinking of death overwhelmed me when I thought of loosing my mother at the hands of my father. Death became a sociological matter when as a teenager I began to see that police officers saw me with disdain and as a possible threat to the public at large. During this period South Central went from being a childhood paradise—I say this because I had no point of reference to understand the lack around us—to become an abysmal place that could swallow me up and spit me out dead. Everyday was a race to beat death, to out-run it almost literally some days, to stay alive and out of the system’s hands. On one side were the guns and drugs of the street and on another side was the apparent bleak horizon of *Mexican work*, of labor that was bound to be meaningless and not very well paid. So many of us, male and female alike, asked ourselves: Why try if we are set up to be less than we are and die? Others see even further into the situation’s perverse nature and realize that trying and succeeding will never be enough in a world dominated by racism’s logic and the law of profits.

In the pages that follow I put forward an argument that maintains the notion that experiences such as the one I encountered in South Central are expressions of the extension and intensification of colonialism into the present. It points to the naturalization of what Maldonado-Torres calls the “non-ethics of war” that European colonization unleashed in the Americas to account for the rampant death and violence both brown folks, particularly Chicana/os, encounter in places like South Central Los Angeles. The articulation of the Coloniality of Being, the most significant conceptual intervention this dissertation attempts to make, should not be read as a concept that either lumps all experiences of oppression together nor as a theoretical justification for the incommensurability of racial, gender, and sexual subordination between groups. It should be read as a concept that facilitates the analysis of the cry that expresses the agony of existing under such abysmal conditions. The analysis itself should be read as a testament to the wisdom that Chicana/o literature imparts to “death-bound-subjectivities” seeking to put distance between themselves and actual-death, while trying to find life behind the constraints the social-death that racism, sexism, and homophobia foment.

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The intellectual support and mentorship that my dissertation committee provided has been invaluable to me along the process of completing this project. This includes Dr. Marical González and Dr. Abdul JanMohamed for providing the seeds of thought for what would later become the research questions I have followed in the pages below. These two professors are not only exceptional thinkers but are also wonderful individuals for going above and beyond their duty to see me through this project. Professor Laura E. Pérez has helped me find balance and confidence in my intellectual abilities. Her feminist perspective and fine sense of humanity and community has aided my maturity as a critical thinker immensely.

I could not have been more fortunate to work with such a prolific, talented, disciplined and rigorous professor as my mentor and Dissertation Chair, Nelson Maldonado-Torres. This individual has seen me through this project through thick and thin. He has been tough, honest, and inspirational. I hope that the completion of this project lets him know it was worth the effort. Professor Maldonado-Torres has provided me with a great model for becoming a scholar that values excellence as much as justice.

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Lastly, I want to express my profound appreciation to my family. Their love and support has walked with me step-by-step on this long, and often difficult road. I have endured thanks to the love I have for them and the desire to work hard for the future I hope we can continue to create together.

Vita

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INTRODUCTION

CHICANA/O LITERATURE AND THE CRITIQUE OF COLONIALITY

The politics of the social act of writing have always involved questions of discursive economy: who has access to the modes of production and under what social conditions? How many subject positions are available at any given time and who can represent whom? What is value, how is it determined, and where is it housed? [...] If I pose these questions of ideology abstractly, it is because I want to cast the social act of writing in terms of both a theory and a practice. As a theoretical practice, it is the vehicle for the construction of modern knowledge and as such is deeply embedded in relations of power. The social construction of knowledge through the act of writing is the frank concession that knowledge is power and whoever can write about the one assumes a measure of the other.

--- Hector A. Torres

And for some reason or other we have to exist, we have to survive.

--- Gloria E. Anzaldúa

Suspending the Desire for Recognition is a doctoral project that seeks to continue elaborating an emerging concept in Ethnic Studies: “the coloniality of Being.”¹ This dissertation thus revisits old questions and problems, and examines all too familiar themes that because of their complexity, dark nature, and the liberal state of affairs, which privileges the new and eventful over what is historically continuous, are rarely systematically studied. I make this assertion plainly because when it concerns understanding the actual living conditions and possibilities of racialized folk around the globe we still need to reckon with the residues of colonialism. I speak here about the manner in which colonialism extends into the present and how in some ways the present becomes an intensification of colonialism itself. That is to say, this project concerns itself less with the breaks (or shifts) that have arisen historically since the eruption of mid 20th century anti-colonial revolutions, which brought on the emergence of the so-called post-colonial moment, than with the *continuities* indicating that the contemporary moment is an extension and result of the West’s colonial projects. This proposition is not

¹ This concept was initially elaborated throughout Nelson Maldonado-Torres’ work, particularly and most directly in his essay “On the Coloniality of Being: Contributions to the development of a concept,” *Cultural Studies* 21.2 (March 2007): 240 – 270.

merely a matter of legality and temporality, but rather, as Engels (1887) would put it, of “[t]he role of force in history.” We cannot underestimate the lasting power of colonial aggression’s logic and ethic. Colonialism’s logic and ethics of domination, its sadistic violence and pervasive murder, its unforgiving proselytizing, although conventionally characterized as benevolent and divinely sanctioned in the West, continues to penetrate the capillaries of subjectivity in communities historically linked to colonial conquest in insidious ways. Accordingly, one of the main objectives of this work is an analysis of violence and death vis-à-vis the lived experience of Chicano/as existing under the historical conditions of modernity/coloniality.²

The field of Chicana and Chicano Studies has historically addressed questions of colonialism, violence, and death; however, it has made its interventions on these themes in a sporadic fashion, falling short of accomplishing a systematic focus on violence, death, and the relation of these forces to the meaning and value of being a subjectivity profoundly over-determined by colonial history. Indeed it would be a worthy academic project to compile an anthology of literary fragments that deal with questions relating to these three recurring themes within the Chicano/a canon. This anthology could include historical fragments that document the homicidal antagonism between Anglos and “*indios*” and between Anglos and Mexican-mestizos from writings by historians such as David Montejano (1987), Rodolfo Acuña (1988), and Juan Gomez-Quiñones (1982, 1994). Sections of Barrera’s (1979) and Almaguer’s (1994) seminal works, arguing through the Internal Colony Model, would bring into relief structural violence and the social-death it foments in *barrios*. This anthology would have to include pieces by Gloria Anzaldúa (1987), Norma Alarcón (1990), and Emma Pérez (1999), who represent the strong feminist theoretical interventions that have emerged post Chicano Movement to stress a critique of the relation between colonial history, gendered/sexualized racialization, and violence, which had always been there during the Movement but had been muted by male chauvinism. In fact, Chicana thinkers have been the most consistent in drawing connections between colonization and modern oppression. On another level, literary critics the likes of Luis Leal (1979), Rolando Hinojosa (1979), Juan Bruce-Novoa (1990), and more recently the brothers Saldívar, Ramón (1990) and José David (1997), including their sister Sonia Saldívar-Hull (2000), and the Aldamas (both Arturo James and Frederick) have theorized Chicano/a writing and its relation to the resistance of being Other, of the push-back on violence and exclusion Chicana/o writers enact while contributing to the making of cultural meaning. The table of contents of the anthology I am imagining here would surely be extensive and interdisciplinary. The undertaking of such a task is surely beyond the scope of a doctoral project, but I dare to imagine it in these opening remarks to make two points. The first is to highlight how these three

² I refer to the ‘modern/colonial condition’ ironically alluding to Jameson’s own articulation of the “post-modern condition” here to situate the temporal conceptual frame I am thinking from. “Modernity/coloniality,” as scholars like Ramón Grosfoguel (2002, 2011) and Walter D. Mignolo (2002) indicate, refers to darker side of modernity, to the horrifying imperial and colonial dimensions of the West’s so-called ‘enlightenment and civilization’ projects launched during the 16th century. Along with the racial categorization of the newly colonized populations and the coercion of its labor, this in fact meant the almost complete eradication of indigenous knowledges and the subjugation of any subsequent intellectual production by systematically devaluing both the brown body and the brown mind. Chicana/o literature, I venture to say, is a critical response to this subjugated positionality, not only within the nation but also within the larger scheme of Being. I will revisit this proposition below.

themes consistently undergird Chicana/o discourse. Secondly, to say that by no means does my project purports to achieve such a comprehensive undertaking. Having said that, the works and authors selected here arguably provide an important point of entry into the thematics treated in this dissertation. To that affect this project is selective to the extent that it is not so much interested in achieving breadth but rather profoundness.

By profoundness I mean infusing the understanding of Chicana/o literature with philosophical and theoretical dimensions. *Suspending the Desire for Recognition* aims to build on the notion that Chicano/a literature functions as resistance against racialization and domination by stressing Chicano/a literature's critical elements, particularly in its epistemic and philosophical scope. The implication of this proposition puts forth a few questions: To what extent does Chicana/o literature allow us to surpass the traditional notion that literature simply holds up a mirror to society to reflect it?³ Just as important is to ask to what extent does the work of Chicana/o literature embody and represent resistance to hegemony, and to what extent can it be thought of as active critical wisdom geared towards attaining clarity on questions of meaning and value? As the epigraph above affirms, writing has always involved questions of discursive economy. The economy of language determines the meaning of subjectivity and determines who holds value and who can reproduce it. I want to expand on Torres' observations above by adding that "the coloniality of power," defined by Anibal Quijano (2000) as *a historical process that views the present globalized world as a culmination of the consolidation of Western power via the colonization of America and the establishment of world capitalism in the 16th Century by instituting racial categorization and imposing a division of labor structured by these categories*,⁴ subtends economies of meaning and value because production, knowledge, and subjectivity have been monopolized through imperial and colonial endeavors in the Americas and abroad. In other words, the voices we find in Chicana/o literature, particularly those who openly identify and accept to be part of the development of this genre and community of writers, resist—which I define here as a stand in the refusal to accept Anglo domination and racial subordination—by being engaged in humanizing projects that are active in the articulation of subjectivity and

³ I am making reference to the prominent place that American Realism holds in our common understanding the function of modern literature. The significant sociopolitical and economic changes that spurred the emergence of this genre during the late 1800s, with the rise of industrialization, the closing of the frontier, and emergence of urban geographies, also gave way to a strong literary movement that sought to faithfully report all facets of the changing American social landscape. Distinguished from early popular and sentimentalist romance, the realist novel, like the newly invented photographic camera, sought a true rendition of people and places. Realism becomes intermingled with the age of mechanical reproduction, as the *Heath Anthology of American Literature* suggests, because like a photograph, "[o]n the simplest level, realism was a matter of faithfulness to the surface of American life, and in its interest in accuracy it reflected the rise of science and, by the end of the [nineteenth] century, the social sciences as a source of empirically derived truths, an interest that was also manifest in everything from the spate of investigative journalism at the end of the century to the popular fascination with the Kodak camera, invented in 1888" (11). For more on the rise of this literary genre and its influence on successive literary movements in the 20th century see Richard V. Chase, *The American Novel and Its Tradition* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1980) and the section titled "Late Nineteenth Century, 1865-1910" in *The Heath Anthology of American Literature* (Volume 2), Ed. Paul Lauter (Boston: Houghton and Mifflin Company, 1998): 4-34.

⁴ See Anibal Quijano, "Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America," *Nepantla: Views from South* 1.3 (2000): 533-580.

modern/colonial existence itself through the active creation of meaning and value in writing.

As the title of the dissertation alludes, the dialectical relation between recognition and negation figures prominently throughout its pages. *Suspending the desire for recognition* describes the manner in which the social act of writing becomes an alternative avenue of negating negation for Chicanas and Chicanos. By negating negation I refer to the manner in which writing becomes a conduit for surviving and resisting the often-severe conditions of racial oppression. I make this argument following Abdul JanMohamed's own reading (1990) of Richard Wright's work. Commenting on Richard Wright's *Black Boy* in particular, he writes:

The content of *Black Boy* describes how Wright manages to resist Jim Crow society's attempt to limit his development to that of a "black boy," a sub-human creature devoid of initiative and entirely compliant to the will of white supremacy, whereas the very existence of *Black Boy* as an articulate and penetrating discursive text demonstrates his ability to overcome the drastically limiting formation. In short, *Black Boy* is a testament to the struggle over the formation of black subjectivity in a racist society. (103)

As a way of complementing JanMohamed's observation about Wright's work, I propose that the work of nullifying social negation through writing represents a step beyond passive resistance and simple "demands for recognition"—as Charles Taylor (1994) among others would have it. This shift can be discerned historically through the way in which since the 1960s social movements have made apparent that oppression manifest itself, not only in properly political fields, as in through repression of parties and the institution of laws that openly and overtly subjugate the Other, but rather as Fanon once pointed out in *Black Skins, White Masks* (1967) more precisely also in terms of forms of description (meaning) and evaluation (value). While my analysis is focused on the traumatic effects of Chicano and Chicana racialization in the U.S., following Fanon's indications about black racialization, "It remains, nevertheless, evident that for us the true disalienation [...] implies a brutal awareness of the social and economic realities. The inferiority complex can be ascribed to a double process: First, economic. Then, internalization or rather epidermalization of this inferiority" (*BS, WM* (2008), xiv-xv). *By re-situating Chicana/o literature within the perimeters of Fanon's critique, as vital thought that forwards the critique of the Western monopoly on meaning and value rather than simply "protesting" or "resisting" racial domination, it becomes a methodology of the oppressed that is working toward transcending negation from a continuous colonial logic that paradoxically both seeks to fold the racial Other into an abstract universal by disavowing its contingency, yet continues to alienate and exploit it by insisting upon and even reifying the Other's sub-alterity.* The idea that some of these writers divest from the politics of recognition, I contend, warrants such a theoretical move. I think that the work of the writers I examine below represents perspectives that are intent in providing critical articulations of the coordinates of racial, gender, and sexual oppression that posit change.

Given the significant shifts in the dynamics of racial power since the end of the Second World War, evident in the turn away from bold racial domination towards racial

hegemony,⁵ the function of writing for historically marginalized communities must be re-assessed. That is to say that writing by people of color must be read beyond the conventional views that bracket it as passive resistance through terms like “protest literature,” or even current trend of criticism that reads it as anti-protest literature, that is, as cultural production that is a means toward integration into main-stream society.⁶ This historical observation opens the space for a hermeneutic approach that reads Chicana and Chicano literature as symbolic gestures that enact resistance to oppression by not simply representing oppression, but also by posing questions through its critical representation. This interpretive move couches the analysis of Chicana/o literature beyond notions that identify its function one-dimensionally, simply as counter-narratives seeking recognition from exterior dominating forces. Contesting the Hegelian master/bondsman model, the Marxist proletariat/bourgeoisie model, and the more recent multicultural model that Charles Taylor has recently theorized—, I posit that for many of the communities that have suffered through the history of colonization and racialization in the U.S., the desire to be “recognized” by power has been displaced by the desire to know and critique the modern-colonial-capitalist world’s oppressive forces, particularly its entanglement with racial alienation and gender subjection. My reading of Chicana/o literature positions itself in Marxist terrain to the extent that it confirms that notion that the end of knowing the world is to change it.⁷

This gesture towards Marx comes with ambivalence because my thesis works with and against Marxist and Hegelian categories. That is to say that although my propositions are historically grounded in the political economy of modernity/coloniality, a perspective that places “Capital” as a crucial category and capitalist development as central to societal dynamics, they do gesture towards a philosophical perspective that holds that objects of knowledge depend on the activity of the mind. To posit the notion that Chicana/os deconstruct hegemonic meaning and generate a decolonial reality through writing will always evoke Idealism for those who situate reality between Hegelian and Marxist thought. However, I depart from a decolonial philosophical perspective where to

⁵ Although they do not use the term “racial hegemony” to describe such changes in the politics of race in the U.S., these shifts are discussed at length by Howard Winant and Michael Omi in *Racial Formation in the United States, From the 1960s to the 1990s* (New York and London: Routledge, 1994). On an international level, David Harvey’s *The New Imperialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005) illustrates how what has been commonly known as the “Third World” has continued to be dispossessed and economically alienated bureaucratically through the post-war institutionalization of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank.

⁶ I am making reference to a forth-coming book by Patrick Lawrence Hamilton, *Of Space and Mind: Cognitive Mappings of Contemporary Chicana/o Fiction* (April 2011, University of Texas Press), which seemingly challenges the “resistance paradigm” of Chicana/o cultural production. A forthcoming-book, the on-line editorial review bills it as a paradigm-shifting book because it “argues that the narrative ethics of ‘resistance’ within the Chicano/a canon is actually complemented by ethics of ‘persistence’ and ‘transformation’ that imagine cultural differences within the United States as participatory and irreducible to simple oppositions” (*Amazon.com*). While I have not had the opportunity to fully review this text, the point I am trying to establish by mentioning it here is that “resistance” paradigm for some contemporary critics like Lawrence Hamilton and Marcial González (2009) has become of secondary importance and problematic for the “us vs. them” reductionism it purportedly affirms.

⁷ See Marx’s “Theses on Feuerbach” in *The Marx-Engels Reader, Second Edition* (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1978), particularly thesis number eleven, which states: “The philosophers have only *interpreted* the world, in various ways; the point, however, is to *change* it” (145).

suspend the desire for recognition utilizing the critical imagination means to posit an alternative nature of reality, one that does not allow reality to hinge on Modernity's tendency to naturalize war and the ethic of domination against those the West deems its Other. I thus follow Linda Nicholson's critique of Charles Taylor's thesis of modernity and recognition (1996) where she posits that "[those] more challenging voices [on the margins of oppression] are not those saying, "Recognize my worth" but rather those saying, "Let my presence make you aware of the limitations of what you have thus far judged to be true and of worth" (138). This critique, which I argue is also very legible in the literature I review below, moves away from the politics of recognition in two significant directions. Inwardly, for the turn to affirm the self from within the limits of subjectivity and Being is a *critical reflexivity erupting against the pressure of modern/colonial oppression*. The outward movement becomes manifest in the novels, poems, and plays of people of color in the United States and former colonies around the world, which center the existence of the Other as the condition of possibility for critiquing modernity.

I posit that we can map the emergence of what Maldonado-Torres (2008) has identified as a "de-colonial attitude" among Chicana/o writers, an attitude characterized by the duty and readiness of affirming rather than negating the "sub-Other," by underscoring what I perceive as Chicana/o literature's decolonial tendencies. That is to say that *the body of literary work produced by Chicana/os between 1968 to the turn of the century unsettles the conventional view that perceives it simply as protest literature (although it does enact it), or literature whose sole concern is the politics of recognition and representation. Beyond such dimensions Chicano/a literature demonstrates a propensity to elicit questions about the coloniality behind racialized subjugation and the affective outcomes of its internalization*. Underscoring the decolonial turn in Chicana/o Studies⁸ is important because it signals the self-proclaimed—as opposed to "granted"—arrival of colonized subjectivities once thought incapable of "Reason" into the realm of critical reflection, for their literary and intellectual productions are "contributions of racialized and colonized subjectivities to the production of knowledge and critical thinking" (*A/W* 8).

As a project that positions itself within the fields of Ethnic Studies and Critical Theory, this study is interested in understanding the convergence of colonization, capitalism, and Mexican/Chicano/a racialization in the United States. As an exercise in literary criticism, on the other hand, my aim is to put the literary work examined here in what I think is its proper context to thereby locate its questions and elucidate their meaning. Put simply, my function, as critic, is to uncover what I think is at stake in the written work. When we realize that Chicano/a literature directs its protests, its criticisms, its questions, against the forces of oppression it often represents, i.e. premature death and ubiquitous forms of violence perpetrated against racialized subjects since the so-called

⁸ The "decolonial turn" within Chicano/a Studies refers to the recent shift of focus in the themes and problematics by emerging scholars in the field. As a roundtable of young scholars engaged in questions of coloniality in the 2011 National Association of Chicano and Chicana Studies observed, the turn demonstrates an invigorated interest in understanding how the coloniality of power, culture, and institutions systematically mediate the Chicano/a condition. Participants of the 2011 NACCS roundtable session titled "Coloniality of Power and the Decolonial Turn in Chicana/o Studies" included Gabriel Soldatenko, Manuel Chavez, Michael Calderon-Sacks, and Roberto D. Hernandez.

colonial period, it becomes clear that what is at stake in it are questions about life and death, meaning and value, and at its most basic level, are questions about existence and oblivion.

The concept of “coloniality of Being,” as Nelson Maldonado-Torres (2007) theorizes it in an essay titled “On the Coloniality of Being: Contributions to the development of a concept” (2007), refers to the colonial dimensions of being, expressed partly in Western civilization by the West’s philosophical discourse’s monopoly on the meaning of Being, or to be more precise on its exclusive possession, control, and exercise of the philosophy on existence.⁹ Maldonado-Torres’ initial formulation launches a critique of Descartes and Heidegger as two side of the same coin. On the one hand, Descartes’ philosophy is co-constitutive of the coloniality of power because it helped to elaborate formally and systemically the new constellation of relations principally through Western Rationalism and its epistemological imperatives during the 17th century.¹⁰ On the other hand, Heidegger’s return to the question of Being in the early 20th century neglected to consider the historical implications of colonialism when he established what he considered to be the universal structures of Being. As Enrique Dussel and Maldonado-Torres have demonstrated in their critiques of these philosophies, Descartes’ and Heidegger’s thought have conceptual precursors located in the time/space of colonial conquest. That is to say that what Dussel has identified as the “*ego conquiro*,” mastery’s conviction of itself as master and its responsibility to master Others, is the condition of possibility of Descartes statement because it is “the practical foundation of I think” (Dussel 1985, 3). On the other hand, what Maldonado-Torres (2007) has defined as “misanthropic skepticism,” a skeptical posture characterized by the attitude of permanent suspicion about the humanity of those who have been colonized and enslaved, is implicated in Descartes’ and Heidegger’s thought because they both assume the imperial gaze to justify their philosophical propositions. Colonialism ushered in a new world perspective and experience through colonial domination precisely because “the ‘barbarian’ was the obligatory context of all reflection on subjectivity, reason,” and Being (Maldonado-Torres 2007, 245). As Maldonado-Torres indicates, the relation between epistemology, ontology and Being is germane to understanding how these philosophical

⁹ The ‘coloniality of Being’ is part of a theoretical trajectory that includes Quijano’s ‘coloniality of power’ (2000) and Mignolo’s “coloniality of knowledge” (2000). According to Maldonado-Torres, “while the coloniality of power referred to the interrelation among modern forms of exploitation and domination (power), and the coloniality of knowledge had to do with impact of colonization on the different areas of knowledge production, the coloniality of being would make primary reference on the lived experience of colonization and its impact on language” (242). Furthermore, as Maldonado-Torres indicates, “The concept of the ‘coloniality of Being’ responded to the need to thematize the question of the effects of coloniality in lived experience and not only in the mind.” For a full elaboration on how Heidegger, Levinas, Fanon, and Dussel come to inform Maldonado-Torres’ initial formulation of the concept see Maldonado-Torres, “On the Coloniality of Being: Contributions to the development of a concept,” In *Cultural Studies* 21.2 (March 2007): 240-270.

¹⁰ Here I am paraphrasing Anibal Quijano (2000) who writes, “But it was Western Europe that, since the 17th century, formally and systematically elaborated the new intersubjective universe in a new knowledge perspective. And it was Western Europe that termed that knowledge perspective ‘modernity’ and ‘rationality’. Therefore, it appears to be an exclusively European product” (221). See A. Quijano “Coloniality of Power and Eurocentrism in Latin America,” *International Sociology* 15.2 (June 2000): 215-232.

traditions systematically omit the lived experience of the colonized to make its universal claims:

Heidegger's critical response to the subjective and epistemological turn of modern philosophy achieved by Descartes consisted in pointing out an alleged forgetfulness in Descartes' thought. Heidegger correctly suggests that Descartes and basically all of modern philosophy after him focused rather exclusively on the question of the *ego cogito*. "Cogito, ergo sum," "I think, therefore I am," however, introduced, what was for Heidegger a more fundamental notion than the cogito itself: the very concept of Being. "I THINK, therefore I am" turned for him into "I think, therefore I AM." The question of Being appears in the second part of the Cartesian formulation— I AM. Focusing on the second part of expression, Heidegger wanted to oppose the modern tradition of philosophy as epistemology with his own fundamental ontology. Now, in light of what has been said about the *ego conquirō* and the misanthropic doubt that remains unquestioned in Descartes's formulation, it is possible to point out what both Descartes and Heidegger missed in the philosophical views. If the ego cogito was built upon the foundations of the ego conquirō, the "I think, therefore I am" presupposes two unacknowledged dimensions. Beneath the "I think" we can read "others do not think," and behind the "I am" it is possible to locate the philosophical justification for the idea that "others are not" or do not have being. In this way we are led to uncover the complexity of the Cartesian formulation. From "I think, therefore I am" we are led to the more complex and both philosophically and historically accurate expression:

"I think (others do not think, or do not think properly),
therefore I am (others are-not, lack being, should not exist
or are dispensable)." (252)

I expand on Maldonado-Torres' initial contributions to the development of this concept by positing that "coloniality of Being" can also be thought in terms of the very condition of failure Fanon diagnosed in *Black Skin, White Masks*, as an existential condition set in motion by the dehumanization of racialized subjectivity through "white Reason." The nexus of white reason, colonial logic, and master morality, I argue, become constitutive elements of an existential disposition filled with racial angst. Given that the continental philosophical tradition has historically colluded with the development and maintenance of capitalism by justifying colonial aggression and racial categorizations "rationally," my contribution to the elaboration of this concept holds that the coloniality of Being functions not only on the level of meaning, but also, as Quijano's historical sociology stresses, on the level of the production of value "expressed in the racial distribution of work, [...], in the concentration of the control of productive resources and capital" (218). That is to say that the coloniality of Being is a phenomenon that afflicts those burdened by colonialism's imposition of Eurocentric meaning on all fields of knowledge, and, according to my own observations following the work of Barrera (1979), Almaguer (1994), JanMohamed (2005) and Quijano (2000) in particular, "white" capitalism's monopoly on the production of value. It engenders an existential disposition shaped by the proximity to the political economy of violence and death that colonial

racial logic insists on maintaining and reproducing through the ethics of domination. It generates existential concerns for racialized existents that makes them call into question the constitution, not of the facticity of their mortality, as Heidegger would assert, but of the meaning of subjectivity and humanity enunciated by Western economies of materiality and signification. To ask “What or who am I?” is the most fundamental expression of the coloniality of Being because while it gestures towards the desire of self-certainty by positing the question, it signals a double bind: a confrontation with one’s race and modernity. W.E.B. Dubois ((1903) 1999) thought of this confrontation in terms of the “twoness of being” that double-consciousness produces. My research will indicate that only after the confrontation with the meaning and value of one’s own racialization that the question becomes generative. Only then does the question signify a turn towards a decolonial attitude, which affirms both an identity and establishes dignified value with and among “Others.”

I track the contours of the coloniality of Being through Chicano/a literature because I think that the critical representation of Chicano/as’ lived experience are excellent sites to locate critiques of the way violence and death inscribe what Walter Mignolo calls the “colonial difference.” As Maldonado-Torres indicates, “people of color become the radical point of departure for any reflection on the coloniality of Being” precisely because the colonial difference often occludes the existential traits of the colonized, what he often refers to as the *Damn * or the condemned of the earth (253):

The *damn * is for the coloniality of Being what Da-sein is for fundamental ontology, but as it were, in reverse. The *Damn * is for European Da-sein the being that is “not there.” I want to argue that they are not independent of each other but that, without awareness of coloniality, reflection on Da-sein and Being involves the erasure of the *damn * and the coloniality of Being. If there has been a problem in modern Western civilization it has not been so much forgetfulness of Being, as Heidegger believed, but suppression of the understanding of coloniality in all its aspects and lack of recognition of the efforts by the *damn * to overcome the imposed limits by the cruel reality of damnation or the naturalization of war. (Ibid.)

While Dussel’s and Maldonado-Torres’ work demonstrates how coloniality orients continental philosophy, ultimately demonstrating the conditions of possibility for the coloniality of Being, I reach into Chicana/o literature to map the “ontological colonial difference” that damnation generates by exposing the proximity and ubiquitous nature of the death and violence it critiques. According to Maldonado-Torres the sub-ontological difference signifies the “difference between Being and what lies below Being or that which is negatively marked as dispensable as well as a target of rape and murder” (254). Given that the historical record shows that Chicana/os have been marked as “killable” and “rapeable” in the American imaginary, we can gain access to the existential modalities of Chicana/o damnation through an examination of the function of actual-death, social-death, and symbolic-death within a section of this body of writing. This exercise yields insight into the ontic and existential meaning of being Chicana/o under coloniality and even allows us to locate and generate critiques about the universal assertions on subjectivity and existence made by the continental theoretical and philosophical traditions.

In *The Death-Bound-Subject* (2005) Abdul JanMohamed writes, “the road to freedom is revealed precisely by the slave’s ability to recognize that while the master can appropriate the value of his labor, by confining him to the realm of social-death, even the value of his life, the only thing that the master cannot appropriate is the use-value of his actual-death” (18). This means that affirming the possibility of one’s own death becomes a sort of declaration of independence in the face of domination, or using Maldonado-Torres’ own terminology, *damnation*. I think that the dialectical relation between actual-death, social-death and symbolic-death are important categories to consider when we elucidate the coordinates of the coloniality of Being precisely because “the hellish existence of the colonial world carries with it both the racial and gendered aspects of the naturalization of the non-ethics of war,” which normalize and perpetually reproduce death and violence within communities of color (Maldonado-Torres 2007, 255). The Chicano community knows this death and violence all too well, for it has encountered it historically through racial hate during labor battles in rural and industrial sites since 1848 as much as it has encountered on the streets during the Zoot Suit Riots and the Chicano student movement through “white” authoritative repression. As the second division of my thesis will demonstrate, during more recent times (from the 1980s to the present) the so-called “gang problem” shows another dimension of the proximity and pervasive nature of death and violence within the Chicana/o community. In this sense the death-bound-subject of Jim Crow society that JanMohamed theorizes, the *damné* of the colonial situation that Maldonado-Torres identifies, and the Chicano/as represented in the literary work I examine below have definite affinities. Just as it is for both the “death-bound-subject” and the *damné*, so too for Chicana/os “the murderous and raping social body projects the features that define it to [them as] sub-Others, in order to be able to legitimate the same behavior that is allegedly descriptive of them” (Ibid). Identifying the manner in which the dialectics of death function within Chicana/o experience can bring us closer to a theoretical and philosophical articulation of the coloniality of Being because within it we can observe how dispensability of “brownness” becomes a key expression of Anglo domination and hegemony. To quote Maldonado-Torres once more:

The appearance of the *damné* is not only of social significance but of ontological significance as well. [...] This is in great part achieved through the idea of race, which suggests not only inferiority, but also dispensability. From here that not only poverty, but also the nearness of death—in misery, lack of recognition, lynching, and imprisonment among so many other ways—characterize the situation of the *damné*. (259)

In light of these considerations what follows are some of the questions that guide my thinking in regards to the function of death and violence within Chicana/o literature: What does it mean to grow up being conscious of one’s own dispensability and one’s own subordinated value? What happens to the psycho-political development of a subject who is “confronted by his race” through discursive and physical violence both within the private and public spheres of sociality? How do the proximity to racial violence and its internalization create the conditions for the reproduction of oppression and the maintenance of coloniality? And, finally, most importantly how does the proximity to death and violence hinder entelechy, which I define as the condition where a person fully realizes his/her potential, and how does this proximity effect the existential dispositions of Chicana/os, which ultimately inform their attitudes and actions? I offer these

questions echoing JanMohamed's wish to show that black literature's value transcends its label as cultural production, for "I [also] hope that this study of ways in which subjectivities are bound and hence formed by the threat of death can play a useful role in illuminating a small portion of the 'political wisdom' that constitutes [the Chicana/o literary] archive" (4).

My approach in this project thus entails a phenomenological deconstruction of *the process of racial alienation* and *the struggle for "dis-alienation"* represented in the critical imagination Chicano/a writers whose writing indicate they occupy the positionality of "colonial/racial subjects of empire."¹¹ The goal is to articulate a theoretical, philosophical, and literary account of the coloniality of Being by demonstrating the manner in which the ubiquity of death (actual, symbolic, and social), the proximity to violence, and the continuity of the colonial logics and ethics of domination—both of which are foundational to the West's monopoly on meaning and value—implicit in capitalism's structure, shape the existential horizon of Chicano/as within the literature of three writers of this period, namely Oscar Z. Acosta, Luis J Rodriguez, and Cherríe Moraga.

These three Chicana/o authors all have a complex relationship with death's permutations and racialized/gendered violence in their lived experience. The historical moments from which Oscar Z. Acosta's *The Autobiography of Brown Buffalo* (1972) and *The Revolt of the Cockroach People* (1973) emerge points to the Second World War, the Korean War, and the anti-colonial struggles that surged during the mid to late nine-teen-sixties. War became normalized for Acosta through the manner in which his father brought the rules and regulation of military service in the Navy during the Second World War to his boys upon returning home. The realities of the Nuclear Age and the Cold War were impressed profoundly upon Acosta's sensibilities through his father's post-war insistence on wartime conservation and military discipline. Acosta's dark-brown complexion was an early source of negation and angst because his mother berated the *indio* resemblance she thought Acosta had inherited from his father. Oscar Z. Acosta was violently confronted by his race on two levels. The first pointed to a confrontation with

¹¹ According to the editors of *Latin@s in the World-System* (2005) *colonial racial subjects of empire* are "those subjects that are inside the [U.S.] empire as part of a long colonial history that included racial slavery"(8). This kind of categorical distinction is important to make because it allows us to signal diverse migrant experiences in the U.S. and allows us think about these migrant communities relative to imperial and colonial history. As the editors of *Latinos in the World-System* indicate, "Migrants do not arrive to an empty or neutral space. Rather, migrants arrive to metropolitan spaces that are already "polluted" by a colonial history, a colonial imaginary, colonial knowledges, a racial/ethnic hierarchy linked to a history of empire. That is, immigrants arrive to a space of power relations that is already informed and constituted by coloniality" (8). What is significant here about the category and its relations to Chicana/os is that "[t]he metropolitan colonial imaginary, racial/ethnic hierarchy and racist discourses are frequently constructed in relation to these colonial subjects. They arrived to the United States or the United States "arrived" to them as part of a colonization process that gave wealth and privileges to Euro-Americans. There is a long history of racialization and inferiorization towards "colonial/racial subjects of empire" that informs the present power relations of the U.S. empire. The "coloniality of power" of the metropolitan country is organized around and against these colonial subjects within a long history of empire. Colonial subjects are frequently at the bottom of the racial/ethnic hierarchy"(9). See Ramón Grosfoguel, Nelson Maldonado-Torres, and José David Saldívar "Latin@s and the "Euro-American Menace: The Decolonization of the U.S. Empire in the Twenty-First Century," *Latin@s in the World-System: Decolonization Struggles in the 21st Century U.S. Empire* (Boulder, London: Paradigm Publishers, 2005): 3-30.

the pseudo-Jim Crow form of social-death to which Mexicans were relegated to in the San Joaquin Valley, the California region where Acosta grew up in the late 40s and 50s. The second concerned a confrontation with his-own Mexican American/Chicana/o community because for an extended period in his life Acosta refused to accept the racial identity that he thought his community was too willing to accept. Still today, Acosta is an enigma because some believe (Stavans 1995, Moore 2003) the internal contradictions he struggled with because of his battles with the racist society around him, the Chicana/o community that often did not understand his critiques, and his own narcissism might have led him to stage his own disappearance, what I read as a sort of symbolic suicide. True or not, that fact is that Oscar Z. Acosta as a presence and a voice ceased. In a larger sense, his disappearance got the best Chicana/o community, as it were, because the community has not seen a truly principle driven lawyer, political organizer, and writer—all in one—since he was last seen sailing off the coast of Mazatlán, Mexico shortly after the second book was published in 1974.

Luis J. Rodriguez's work has been informed by the racism and violence he encountered in the barrios of East Los Angeles during and after the Chicano movement. Rodriguez's work vividly renders the emerging crisis of Chicana/o youth violence that has gripped barrios in Los Angeles and Chicago since the early 1970s. This time period is significant socially and politically because it marked the decline of grass roots civil rights political activism and the emergence of gangs and the crack cocaine epidemic within the inner cities of the United States. It also marked a shift in the political definition of the struggle for life by political movements on the margins as it became re-articulated through the rise of liberalism and the consumer society. Whereas up until to the late 60's the struggle for life meant a struggle for self-determination, the decline of radicalism and the rise of the ghetto redefined the struggle for life as the ability to make money, or participate in the capitalist market not as bare labor but as capitalist. This is precisely what is important of Rodriguez work: he brings to bare how being barred from directing the mode of production and making value dehumanizes and fatally endangers Chicana/os, particularly youth. What is most relevant for this project about Rodriguez's early work (i.e. *The Concrete River* (1991) and *Always Running* (1993)) is that his characters are always running either from premature death or towards it. Rodriguez himself binds with death at a young age when he witnessed a friend jump from the rooftop of a school building while trying to run away from a police officer that was chasing them for trespassing. Rodriguez's characters are thus those who fall into the abyss of an era where drugs and intra community violence is common backdrop of Chicana/o experience, particularly survivors like himself. The violent quality of his experience is evident in the manner in which most of the young men and women he knows growing up end up maimed, dead, or in prison. In *Music of the Mill* (2005), Rodriguez demonstrates how racial violence enters *relations of production* (particularly within the confines of a steel-mill in South Central Los Angeles) from the Second World War to the early 1990s. The struggle against social-death is brought into relief starkly by this novel for it demonstrates that despite economic shifts, white racial power seems bent on monopolizing the production of value. It is evident that through his writing, Rodriguez questions how Chicana/o youth can develop a generative, positive subjectivity when they are marginalized from economies of value. The result, Rodriguez's literature

posits, is tragic for it tends to lead to the perpetuation of a living death through imprisonment and a perpetual dependence on drugs and alcohol.

Similar to the writers I just mentioned, Cherríe Moraga's writing emerges as a response to the historical moments that articulated the emergence of Chicano/a consciousness and nationalism. The sudden deaths and "exiles" brought on by the AIDS crisis of the 1980s within the queer community have also spelled out Moraga's proximity and confrontation with actual-death evident in her work. Social-death and symbolic-death become immanent within Moraga's writing because her sensibility perceives the expectation of cultural assimilation by the status quo in the United States as synonymous with cultural genocide. Because Moraga developed intellectually and politically alongside the victories and shortcomings of the Chicano/a Student Movement, her critical attention has been attuned to violence and alienation of queer women of color in particular. Moraga's attention to the gendered and sexual dimension of racialization demonstrates that she has been particularly invested in questioning the manner in which Chicana/os internalize coloniality and reproduce it in their own social relations and institutions. I speak here of the rampant homophobia and the heteronormativity that upholds Machismo and patriarchy within the Chicano community. Most indicative of Moraga's critique of modernity/coloniality is her reading of the way in which in the name of progress, modern society (both its progressive and conservative wings) sacrifices the mother/sister for the sake of maintaining the symbolic order of the nation. In works like *Loving in the War Years* (1983), *The Last Generation* (1993), and *The Hungry Woman* (2001), Moraga questions how women in politics are perceived as the death of the community.

This doctoral thesis is structured in three parts, each paying particular attention to a theme that reveals the coordinates of the coloniality of Being and the path toward decolonization. The overarching themes are, meaning, value, and love, respectively. The first division, "The Lived Experience of "Brownness": Of Oscar Z. Acosta, the Coloniality of Being, and Humanizing Brown Existence," comprised of two chapters, explore the existential meaning of "brown racialization." Chapter 1, "The Failures of Humanizing A Brown Buffalo" moves in two directions. First, it argues for an interpretative approach to Oscar Z. Acosta's work that foregrounds the history and persistent legacies of colonization as paramount to the full understanding of its salient themes. Secondly it posits a reading of *Autobiography* through Gloria Anzaldúa's conception of "Encruzijada subjectivity," a subjectivity caught in the crossroads of Being, couched between the universal and the contingent, that allows me to crystallize a meta-critique of the most written about theme in *The Autobiography of a Brown Buffalo*: the search for identity. Chapter 2 examines the dialectical function of death and violence that is represented in *Autobiography* to demonstrate that social-death, actual-death, and symbolic-death are constitutive to the "brown racialization" process of Chicana/os under modernity/coloniality.

The second division, "The Value of "Brownness": Critique of Racialized Estrangement and *La Vida Loca* in Luis J. Rodriguez's *Music of the Mill*," comprised of three chapters, expounds a critique of the political economy of death that de-values Chicano/as as racialized estranged labor. Chapter 3, "Alienation, Racialized Estrangement, and Chicano/as as Colonial Labor," makes a theoretical distinction between the classical Marxist account of alienated labor and what I call "racialized

estranged labor.” It posits that Chicano/a estrangement from what Marx called “species being” is not solely a result of the mode of production, but is entangled with the emergence of racial perceptions mediated by colonial history. Chapter 4, “Death, Violence, and the Colonial Wounds of the Salcido Family,” executes a close reading of Luis J. Rodriguez’s novel *Music of the Mill* to map the dynamic relation between racialized estranged labor, violence, and death in two generations of the Salcido family. It posits that colonial wounds, what I think of as the trauma and violence that the arrogance of racial perception inflicts, hinder Chicano/as from producing value for the world in which they exist. Chapter 5, “‘It’s their world’ and ‘Figuring a way to exist in it,’” evaluates the existential meaning of existing in a vacuum of value. Following the story of the third generation of the Salcido family, this chapter puts forward the notion that the monopoly on the production of value and the lack of “Care” (in the Heideggerian sense) for racialized youth are the principle factors curtailing entelechy and mediating intra-community youth violence.

The third and final division, “Decolonizing Love / Decolonizing Being: Cherríe Moraga’s Wars of Love,” encompasses two chapters that demonstrate how Chicana writers decolonize the meaning and value of Being by re-articulating hegemonic signification. Chapter 6, “Love’s Wars: *Loving in the War Years* and the Critique of Love as Domination,” examines how Moraga’s text deconstructs the sadism and masochism that mediate the loving relations of colonial racial subjects. It posits that a “hermeneutics of love” is essential to generate a world without a dominating ethos. Chapter 7, “Sacrifice of the Primal Mother/Sister: Decolonial Horizons in the Dialectics of Death of in Cherríe Moraga’s *The Hungry Woman: A Mexican Medea*” argues that the figure of primal mother/sister evoked by Moraga’s Mexican Medea throughout this play is a critique of the betrayal of the primal father and brother in the development of repressive society. This last chapter posits that Moraga’s play dramatizes how it is that Chicanas symbolic and actual death in the realm of politics means the victory of patriarchy and the persistence of the paradigm of war during modernity/coloniality.

PART ONE

THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF 'BROWNNESS':

OF OSCAR ZETA ACOSTA, "COLONIALITY OF BEING,"

AND HUMANIZING BROWN EXISTENCE

The coloniality of power dehumanizes and overdetermines the meaning of racialized existence because it relegates it to what Lewis Gordon (2005) describes as "the zone of nonbeing," an existential horizon characterized by "a consciousness of a frozen 'outside,' of being purely as seen by others, in the face of the lived-experience of an "inside," of a being who is able to see that he or she is seen as being without a point of view, which to not being seen as a human being."¹ Examining Acosta's writing helps diagnose and critique the coloniality of Being precisely because it dramatizes the existential crisis brought upon by the internalization of dehumanizing racial discourse and a horizon determined by white-supremacy. Given that much analysis on Acosta's writing has focused around the themes of canonical representation and identity politics, the arguments raging from the need to situate his work in U.S. American or Latin American literary history (Barrera 1996, Aldama 2004) to assessments of the representational qualities of Chicana/o narrative, history and experience through his work (Alurista 1981, Guajardo 1995, Martínez 1998, Moreno 2004, Nieves 2004, González 2009), my approach will yield a nuanced understanding of often-overlooked critical and historical dimensions within Acosta's writing. The present contribution, while in dialogue with these debates, seeks to amplify the scholarship on Acosta on a critical theoretical level. The task in this section, as in the other sections of this dissertation work, is to go beyond the idea that Chicano/a narrative solely represents experience and moves towards the idea that it also offers a critical lens to dismantle and demystify dominant ideologies by both questioning hegemonic meaning and generating libratory discourse. In short, we focus on the narrative's resistant position and its critique of society.² Acosta,

¹ To be more precise the term describes existential condition of colonized subjectivity, a subjectivity that is enmeshed in "the realm of pure exteriority," which denies racial colonial subjects the possibility of inner life, while it yields the paradoxes of racialized experience (22). The most significant of these paradoxes consists of being a being that cannot signify Being, of living as a contingency rather than universal, thusly "suffering from a failure to bridge the gap between subjective life and the world" (23). See Lewis Gordon, "Through the Zone of Nonbeing": A Reading of *Black Skin/White Masks* in Celebration of Fanon's Eightieth Birthday," *The CRL James Journal: A Review of the CRL James Society* 11.1 (Summer 2005): 1.

² In this regard, the present work contains close affinity to Genaro Padilla's writings on Chicano/a literature, in which the process of social consciousness and subject formation can be mapped. Padilla approach focuses on consciousness, while mine stresses Marxist categories to articulate the state of Chicano existence, but opens up the reading of the literature of Chicano/a literature in a formal decolonial

for better or worse, has been known to be a reactionary activist, but I submit, following Marcial González (2009), that his writing expresses the content of a critical imagination that both questions and engages revolutionary praxis.

Oscar Z. Acosta's formal contribution to Chicano literature came in 1972, six years after having passed the California Bar Exam. Although the events of 1968 are well within the purview of Acosta's texts, it can be said that his books were launched during waning moments of that contentious period of social transformation around the world.³ *The Autobiography of Brown Buffalo* (1972) and *The Revolt Of The Cockroach People* (1973), Acosta's literary masterpieces give expression to the historical and existential meaning of the late sixties for Chicano/as just as he himself was evolving politically and artistically. It can be said that Acosta both documents and imagines the process of becoming a subject while affirming his existence despite coloniality. In the following chapters, I will analyze the lesser-known *The Autobiography of Brown Buffalo* for two reasons. First, it is a book that warrants analysis because it has received considerably less critical attention than *Revolt*. Second, the fact that *The Autobiography* and Acosta's second published manuscript might have been written as one narrative and then divided in half with the intent to publish the two parts separately raises questions as to how much insight we can derive from *Revolt* without fully comprehending the origins the anti-hero we encounter in it.⁴ This position suggests unity between the novels, one that represents the process of assimilation, dis-assimilation, and re-articulation of subjectivity. In this chapter I will link the assimilation/dis-assimilation trope in *The Autobiography* to what Maldonado-Torres calls "de-colonial reduction," a critical method "that provides a diagnosis of the meaning of institutions and the aspirations behind the civilizing, imperial, or –decolonizing projects" (*AW*, 5). My intent with this approach is to map the narrative's attempt to give meaning to racialized existence. It is a venture that is characterized by a plot movement, which begins with the angst of racial alienation and the fear of dying alone, and concludes with decolonial dreams and the wish to live/die for Others.

manner that widens both its historical and theoretical signification. See Genaro Padilla, *The Progression From Individual to Social Consciousness in Two Chicano Novelists: José Antonio Villarreal and Oscar Zeta Acosta* (Diss., UC, Santa Barbara, 1981).

³ The explosion of anti-colonial consciousness Fanon alludes to in the opening pages of *Black Skins/ White Masks* has already happened. By the time Acosta published, Algeria, Cuba, Africa, and Vietnam have been the principle sites of international struggles against colonialism because guerilla forces have been active for years. On the U.S. national front the Black Power and Brown Power movements have been mobilized around civil rights issues to address the problems of the 'internal colony'. This temporal context creates a synergistic dynamic that animates Acosta's narratives because they are anchored on history and the emergence of decolonized historical subjects.

⁴ See Ervin Nieves, *Beyond Darwinism: Chicana/o Literature and Modern Scientific Literary Analysis: Reading Josefina Niggli and Oscar A. Acosta* (Diss. UC, Santa Barbara, 2004).

CHAPTER ONE

THE FAILURES OF HUMANIZING A BROWN BUFFALO

Letter to The Playboy Forum, 15 October 1973

Sir:

Your November issue, "On The Scene" section on Mr. Hunter S. Thompson as the creator of Gonzo Journalism, which you say he both created and named ... Well, sir, I beg to take issue with you. And with anyone else who says that. In point of fact, Doctor Duke and I—the world famous Dr. Gonzo—together we both, hand in hand, sought out the teachings and curative powers of the world famous Savage Henry, the Scag Baron of Las Vegas, and in point of fact the term and methodology of reporting crucial events under fire and drugs, which are of course essential to any good writing in this age of confusion—[...] These matters I point out not as a threat of legalities or etcetera but simply to inform you and to invite serious discussion on the subject.

-- Oscar Z. Acosta¹

His novelistic "gonzo" production calls for an imperative humanizing praxis capable of demystifying the real object of his grotesque narrative: the Yankee militarist empire and "democratic" gymnastics: "Its in the blood now... just like a slave is chained to his master.

-- Alurista²

The tumultuous conflict that gives The Autobiography its form is marked by Brown Buffalo's inability to reconcile his Anglo conditioning with his being 'an innocent, brown eyed-child of the sun... a peach-pickers boy from the West Side Riverbank'. Sick - psychosomatically suffering of bleeding ulcers—Buffalo Brown, Oscar Zeta Acosta, the protagonist departs on a spiritual quest searching for both personal identity and a place within two countries, Mexico and the United States, where he might belong.

-- Norma D. Smith³

¹ From a letter addressed to The *Playboy* Forum, dated October 15th, 1973. Published in Ed. Illan Stavans, *Oscar "Zeta" Acosta: The Uncollected Works* (Houston, TX: Arte Publico Press, 1996).

² The "imperative humanizing praxis" that Alurista calls for is decolonial critique, for it seeks to go beyond the surface of appearance and individualist reductions to make a meta-critique of the whole racial-colonial-capitalist-world-system. The priority however is not economic, but rather concerned with, in Dusselian terms, "sense-beings," particularly the historical-block of the oppressed, in this case Chiana/os. See Alurista, "Acosta's *Revolt of the Cockroach People*: The Case, The Novel, The History," In V.E. Lattin ed., *Contemporary Fiction: A Critical Survey* (Binghamton, NY: Bilingual Press, 1986): 94-104.

³ I would add to Smith's assertion that the form and style are representative of the inner conflict that not only seeks an identity, but also a more systematic and critical search for a humanized past, present, and future as much as it is anxiety towards responsibility and freedom. See Norma D. Smith, "Buffalos and Cockroaches: Acosta's Siege at Aztlán," *Cotemporary Chicano Fiction* (Binghamton, New York: Bilingual Press, 1986): 62-83.

I. Gonzo Style and the Colonial Critic

Although there is on going debate about the kind of style and form that Acosta's work takes, some situating it within a general genealogy of Latin-American anti-colonial literary representation (Padilla 1981, Alurista 1986, Aldama 2003), while others bring it closer to the "American canon" (Barrera 1996, Muñoz 1997, Nieves 2004), I emphasize that the significant aspects of its stylistic innovations have their own expression in their local history even as their concerns go beyond the space/time it explicitly described.⁴ This is the history of the socioeconomic development of the Southwest and the people who have come to be known in Mexico and the United States as Chicano/as. Some understand this history to be longer than others, but Acosta himself understood the unfolding of history as long and slow, although he believed that life itself was too short *not* to want to live it fast. It is evident that what Sub Comandante Marcos characterized as "*La larga noche de los 500 años*" [The long 500 year night] loomed significantly in Acosta's writings about *being* Chicano in both his published and unpublished work. This is evinced in the first of two books he published before disappearing on a sailing trip in 1974, where Acosta reveals his concern for the outcome of a 500 years process that could end in the deliberate extinction of "the Chicano race," as he would put it, by making his protagonist take on a buffalo as alter ego. According to Acosta the buffalo is a figure that signifies Chicano/a existence because it is the animal that despite 'Manifest Destiny's' movement West and Anglo colonists hunting them for meat and hide, its resilience did not allow it to be completely exterminated.

Given that recent readings of Acosta's literature have tended to analyze its cultural meaning and literary through lines of comparison that cast a colonial shadow over his work (I will explain what I mean by this below), it seems necessary to examine the implications of such readings.⁵ We can begin to draw a diagnosis and critique of the coloniality of *Being* by considering the implications of these criticisms. The main thrust of this section purports to apply "de-colonial reduction" to one of these readings in

⁴ I rather invoke a world-systems approach to place Acosta's work in the register of structural time, or as the Braudelian school of social history put it, the *longue durée*. The intent is to read the specific events experienced by Brown Buffalo as products of the "enduring structures (primarily economic and social) that determine over the *longue durée* our collective behavior—our social ecology, our civilizational patterns, our modes of production" (Wallerstein, 138). "Space/time," as theorized by Emmanuel Wallerstein, is a unit of analysis that allows us to understand that phenomena reach their significance in relation to specific geopolitical space and ideological space. In other words, episodes are accompanied by the space they take place in. Enrique Dussel makes the point about the significance of time/space and the "geopolitics of knowledge" when dealing with concepts, totality, and beings, asserting in his *Philosophy of Liberation*, "It is not the same thing to have been born an Indian in Chiapas than to be born in Manhattan"(1). See Emmanuel Wallerstein, *Unthinking the Social Sciences: The Limits of Nineteen-Century Paradigms* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001) and Enrique Dussel, *Philosophy of Liberation* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 1985).

⁵ Paul Guajardo's work (2002) on Acosta writing is emblematic of such readings. They are also represented less severely by critics such as Illan Stavans (1995). The readings implicated here show that their criticism stems from an American Studies approach to Chicano literature. It is an approach that seeks to assess the meaning and value of Chicano/a literature vis-à-vis the American canon. More often than not, the characteristic arguments, in one way or the other, argue for or against its universal value, its worthiness of inclusion, its reliability, and its representational qualities. In other words, these criticisms lock Chicano/a literature in the politics of recognition and identity.

particular, the most egregious I found in my research on Acosta, to demonstrate that the interpretive approaches applied to Acosta's work are often latent with colonial meaning and logic. The main claim here is that the meaning of the genre identified as the Chicano/a novel, and in many respects Chicano/a literature in general, is misunderstood when the modern-colonial context in which it is situated is overlooked. This context can be described as a Manichean totality produced by cataclysmic events that inaugurated the color-lines of Being. Although Chicana/o literature often displays the literary techniques of modern literature, its problems, its dreams, its tensions, its sublimations, it always refers back (directly and indirectly) to the problem of subjugated racialized/gendered existence.

That *The Autobiography* implies realism is an important proposition to consider when much of what has been written about Acosta's acclaimed work has been questioned for its historical accuracy and consistency. Realism, however, should not be read without ambiguity. The critic must keep in mind that every reading generates meaning from its own point of reference. Most writers don't ignore this as they structure their narratives. It is important for the critic, however, to relate these ambiguities to meaning rather than standards of reliability or worth. The critic becomes a "colonial critic" when he/she imposes meaning, standards, and values on the cultural production of the periphery exclusively derived from the center. Doing this *always already* yields the view that the periphery is mediocre, devoid of universal meanings.

In his work *Chicano Controversy* (2002), Paul S. Guajardo makes a few accurate assertions about Chicano subjectivity and Acosta's overall work, but also makes unfortunate and sometimes egregious hermeneutical mistakes in his reading of both *The Autobiography of Brown Buffalo* and the *Revolt of the Cockroach People*. Guajardo is a critic that places value on the autobiographical nature of Acosta's work, paying particular attention to the manner in which Acosta "postures" in the telling of "who he is" and "what he is," which according to this critic, structures both "autobiographical novels" characteristically. Keen to the reflective elements that autobiography brings to the analysis of subjectivity, Guajardo writes, "'Who am I? What am I?' At some point in our lives we begin to wonder about our origins, our relationships to our family, and our place in society. As we age, often there is increased interest in the past and in our ancestors" (23). And he continues: "[a]n autobiography can be a small attempt at immortality—leaving a record of our life for posterity." Guajardo also makes interesting observations about the significance of autobiography as a form of writing for what he considers as "minority writers." These observations, however, become problematic, as we will see, when we submit them to "de-colonial reduction." That is to say, we must question Guajardo's analysis because it displays the tendencies of a colonial critic by omitting and even reifying the coloniality of power in his analysis.

"Minority writers," Guajardo posits, "may record personal history out of a wish to preserve a vanishing culture or a way of life, out of a desire to leave a record for the younger more assimilated generation, or out of a need to come to terms with the self, particularly the ethnic minority self" (24). The reasoning Guajardo employs here, while not necessarily inaccurate, is incomplete. While I welcome Guajardo's appreciation of the experiential aspects of the autobiographical endeavor when he writes quoting Olney's *On Autobiography*, "The strength of autobiography lies in its providing '...privileged access to an experience... that no other variety of writing can offer... autobiography

renders in a peculiarly direct faithful way the experience and the vision of a people” (24), what strikes me as incomplete about this idea is the weight that is placed on the representational aspect of autobiographical writing. It is as if, without him knowing it, Guajardo is locking the “minority” in the realm of experience. Guajardo’s view suggests that the intent and function of “ethnic autobiographies” is solely as a kind representative ethnic food to be consumed by the “American” (read: Anglo American) mainstream to reflect its multicultural and liberal realization of its society. Lewis Gordon warns us against this tendency as we engage the literature of racialized people.⁶ Why? Because the dominance of this view in the academy elides the critical and epistemic aspects of writing from experience.⁷ What I am suggesting is that Acosta did not write for the mere purpose of telling a story --no matter how much his alter egos try to tell us otherwise-- but rather *wrote to make sense of and provide a critical articulation of the factors that contribute to the making of Chicano subjectivity from the 1940s through the 1960s*. In this sense Guajardo’s and Roy Pascal’s insight that autobiographical writing offers “unparalleled insight into the mode of consciousness of other men” is correct.⁸ However, the critic must not only seek to describe the contradictions of consciousness in a given work, but ask “why” and “how” consciousness is shaped to then understand its contradictions.

In describing the paradoxes involved in the attempts at humanization that Acosta’s narrative describes, we must consider that autobiographical writing as a form in the traditional sense is presumed to posit a reliable, coherent, objective, and unproblematic (meaning without contradiction) subject. If we measure Acosta’s work by this standard, it fails miserably. This is not a surprise because the standard of the genre is informed by a colonial logic that projects the Western white men as reliable, coherent, objective, and graceful. A book that claims to take the form of an autobiography written by a man of color will not reflect the universal standard, but rather a particular “deviation.” Take for example the manner in which books are shelved in stores in the United States and Mexico. In the U.S., books written by so-called “minority authors” will almost always be placed in “Ethnic” sections, even when the subject matter transcends or even completely ignore issue of race and ethnicity.⁹ It should not be a

⁶ See Lewis Gordon, *Existential Africana* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

⁷ Lewis Gordon and Paula Moya have respectively pointed out the problems with, on the one hand, relegating people of color into the realm of experience, and thus over seeing the critical contributions that scholars of color offer in their literature, and on the other hand, not recognizing the epistemic value of contingent experience bestowing meaning to the universal. For extended discussion on these two problematic extremes see Lewis Gordon (2004) and Paula Moya *Learning from Experience: Minority Identities, Multicultural Struggles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

⁸ *Design and Truth in Autobiography*, 1.

⁹ I note here an anecdote to further clarify my point. Sometime during the 2004 school year, I attended a reading by the noted writer Robert Rodriguez. Rodriguez is better-known for writing some books that question notions ethno-racial identity: *Hunger of Memory* (1981), *Days of Obligation: An Argument with My Father* (1992), and *Brown: The Last Discovery of America* (2002). During this reading, as he was trying to make a point about how he rejects being identified by ethnic or racial categories, Rodriguez expressed that he much rather be identified through his sexuality than a presumed ethno-racial identity. Rodriguez told the audience that he could not understand how it was that even though he is known for holding such convictions, book stores still shelved his books under Ethnic Studies or Mexican-American Literature. He implored the audience that if they ever noticed such a contradiction in terms, to

surprise that even in the periphery where ethnic or racial difference is not usually consciously expressed, say in a country like Mexico, you can observe the distinction (read here as the colonial difference within the geopolitics of knowledge (Mignolo 2002)) that stands between the Universal and the Contingent and its relation to the coloniality of Being. There, the difference comes into relief in a Manichean manner as it is expressed in the arrangement and categorization of bookshelf sections that read “*Literatura Latino Americana*” and “*Literatura Universal*” in book-stores such as Mexico D.F.’s Libreria Gandhi and Editorial Siglo XX. And if we follow this logic to its end, we will also understand that this universal standard is not only about form alone, but also about the constitution of human subjectivity. Here, I recall the work of Edward Said and Maldonado-Torres, both of which describe how imperial and colonial projections work to dehumanize “the wretched of the earth.” Said (1978) demonstrates how colonial discourse projects negative qualities unto the colonized, while Maldonado-Torres (2008) shows how what he calls “Imperial Man” has projected the grace of god unto himself to dominate over *the damné*.¹⁰ That many critics have labeled Acosta’s autobiographies as unreliable, unliterary, incoherent, subjective and full of internal contradictions is exemplary of how meaning and value of the written work of people of color is compromised when the recognition and understanding of its value and meaning is dependent upon concepts and standards dictated from what Maria Lugones refers to as “the lighter side” of the colonial difference.¹¹

I am not suggesting that concepts, categories and standards are culturally incommensurate, but that there are certain concepts and standards which are latent with racism and colonial telos. Acosta, the writer, falls short of writing a “reliable” autobiography, just as Brown Buffalo, the persona and narrator, falls short of satisfying standards throughout his development as a brown boy coming of age in the Southwest. While Guajardo is correct in agreeing with Pascal’s suggestion that “autobiography does raise ‘...agonizing questions of identity, self definition, self existence, and [self] deception,’” we must be careful as to how we relate these categories to colonized existence, for we end up sometimes de-legitimizing its experience even when trying to give it its own significance (27). Guajardo is guilty of this, for in trying to underscore the aesthetic and fictional side of Acosta’s narratives, he simultaneously dismisses the meaning and value of Acosta’s short lived, yet impressive record as writer and revolutionary political activists. It is as if for Guajardo critics, artists, thinkers, and revolutionaries cannot inhabit the same brown body. The implication of this position is that Acosta, the author and revolutionary, is rendered a liar, opportunist, and uncommitted individual who is mistakenly taken as a source for modeling revolutionary ideas and practices. Acosta’s art, critics like Guajardo suggest, is solely what should be

please do him a favor by either placing his books in “Autobiography” sections or to put them in what he called the “pink section,” referring to gay studies.

¹⁰ See Maldonado-Torres, *Against War*, Part I in particular.

¹¹ Critics that question Acosta’s objectivity, historical reliability, and ideological consistency such as Alurista (1986), Bruce-Novoa (1979), Ilan Stavans (1995), Paul S. Guajardo (2002), and Marcial González (2009). The colonial difference has been theorized by Fanon (1967), Mignolo (1995, 2000, 2002), Dussel (1985), Quijano (2000), and Maldonado-Torres (2008) as the dichotomy established by the imperial/colonial world and its Manichean logic, which separates the light from the dark, reason and unreason, beauty and ugliness, being and non-being.

understood as his contribution to the world, rather than the politics, critical perspective, and decolonial attitude he endowed Chicanos with through his books and legal cases.

Presupposing the primacy of form and the aesthetic in Acosta's works suggests that his books were much more concerned with the representation of an identity to the mainstream, rather than with reading his work as presenting an aesthetic that critiques the mainstream. Oscar Z. Acosta's critical aesthetic animates the paradoxes that dehumanize brown folk in American society, and evinces a philosophy of life that is dead set on building what Maldonado-Torres (2008) calls a "de-colonial attitude" that defies the coerced "respect" that American institutions have historically demanded from people of color. The theme of power is eclipsed by the theme of identity in criticism that is over-concerned with what Acosta depicts rather than with what he is trying to question. I prefer to approach Acostas' work through an analysis that takes what Wynter (2000) has identified as Fanon's *sociogenic principle* seriously to find coherence to Acosta's incoherence, to find reason in his supposed "pathologies," to find a root to the grotesque colonial/modern aesthetic that his autobiographical novel achieves. What this means is that we need to understand that Acosta's supposed search for identity represents more than personal account of a fragmented self fighting through the angst of modernity (Martínez 2003) —or even, using Jameson's terms, "post modernity"—but rather, *Autobiography of a Brown Buffalo* can be read as a case study into sociogenic subject formation of male Chicanos in the space/time of coloniality. This text is about Brown Buffalo's attempted assimilation into the American mainstream, his failure to do so, and the consequent process of not simply dis-assimilation, but rather an emerging complex process of *decolonization* brought upon by a realization that these failures are not only dynamic within the U.S. but also beyond its borders. This approach, while de-personalizing Acosta's narratives, allows me to demonstrate that the instability of Acosta's text and narrator is intimately tied to the systematic, historical dehumanization of Mexicans, Mexican-Americans, and Chicanos in the United States.

Acosta's published narratives become representative of what I would call the modern/colonial novel precisely because they embody the underside of modern literature. That is to say that no matter how much Brown Buffalo dreamed of being the Chicano Faulkner, no matter how far east from the Southwest he traveled to get close to it, he would never gain the critical recognition of his peers in the American canon. In fact, in the history of American letters Acosta seems to only be a footnote in the literary trajectory of Hunter S. Thompson. If the modern novel is about the nation, individuality, and liberal democracy, the colonial/modern novel is about the evisceration of subjectivities, the destruction of civilization and subjectivities, and imposition of colonial power.

II. From Search of Identity to Ruse of Power: (Re)Interpreting the Struggle for Recognition in Oscar “Zeta” Acosta’s *Autobiography of Brown Buffalo*

Man is not merely a possibility of recapture or of negation. If it is true that consciousness is a process of transcendence, we have to see that this transcendence is haunted by the problems of love and understanding. Man is a yes that vibrates to cosmic harmonies. Uprooted, pursued, baffled, doomed to watch the dissolution of the truths that he has worked out for himself one after another, he has to give up projecting onto the world an antimony that coexists with him.

-- Frantz Fanon

*Al otro lado está el río
y no lo puedo cruzar,
al otro lado está el mar
no lo puedo atravesar.*

--Isabel Parra, “*En La Frontera*”¹²

In *Borderlands/ La Frontera*, Gloria Anzaldúa theorizes Chicano/a subjectivity as being caught in crossings. For Anzaldúa, the U.S./ Mexico border serves as a spatial signifier for Chicano/a subjectivity, for she describes it as “a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in constant state of transition” (25). The subjectivity she describes being formed in this kind of space is torn geopolitically, culturally, spiritually, and psychologically. According to Anzaldúa those who reside on the “darker side of the borderlands,” as it were, are *atravesados*, transgressors that “go through the confines of the normal.” I analyze Acosta’s work through Anzaldúa’s conceptualization of Chicana/o subjectivity because they were both interested in making critical assessments of the subjectivity that arise when it is spatially located right on the line that divides two geopolitical territorial bodies. Particularly, they asked where exactly does one stand historically, legally, socially, racially, and culturally in such a space? Using Anzaldúa’s terms, it is this de-territorialized and “*encruzijado*” subject position that Acosta brilliantly articulates in his writing and legal work.

In the experience that Oscar Z. Acosta represents in the page of *The Autobiography*, a liminal racial subjectivity is what makes it so difficult to exist as a Chicano. The salient idea in the search for identity in Acosta’s narrative is the notion that

¹² Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/ La Frontera* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1999), 161. Anzaldúa includes this epigraph to begin section III of *Borderlands/ La Frontera* titled “Crossers/ y otros *atravesado*.” I am inclined to head this section with this epigram because it speaks about the impossibility of a crossing. What I think the river and ocean symbolize are the overwhelming forces that colonized folk encounter hindering their movement towards life. Water, rivers, and oceans symbolize life in the Western Christiano-centric imaginary, but here, I think nature takes in a dual significance, one of life and one of death. The force of water’s currents in rivers and oceans, paradoxically, give life, for they provide the life blood of life that grows from the earth, but they are also uncontrollable forces that not only have the potential to take life, but also move us in directions that one cannot control. More significant to this section, these lines point to the paradox of a desire to cross a dangerous path to reach less dangerous place, and the forces that hinder that movement.

if one does not know who one is in the world, one also does not know what one wants to do in the world. This is expressed with anguish in two ways. The first is in the actual physical manifestations of angst represented by Acosta through reoccurring intestinal maladies. Second, anguish is expressed through reoccurring episodes of –sometimes chemically induced and sometimes not-- neurosis. That Acosta has to *go out to find himself* is what I would like to examine close here because it signifies the main struggle, or in Marxist terms, the main contradiction that initiates the movements of the novel.

More than a search for identity, I think that Acosta is looking for ways to *humanize* himself. In the language of liberation philosophy (Dussel 1985), the narrator of Acosta's narrative is looking to shorten the distance between his colonized self and "Being" to overcome his over-determination as sub-being. However, as Fanon and Maldonado-Torres demonstrate, the rules of the game for this humanizing venture often become a ruse of power that is arranged by colonial relations. I posit that what this search yields for Acosta is a series of failures that inevitably, time after time, lead Brown Buffalo to dead ends when he tries to find himself through the gaze of the Master—in this case the gaze comes from Anglo American culture that paradoxically tells him that he should be both an individual that disavows his cultural particularity to fold into the American Universal, and a brown body that cannot be folded in because it does not signify anything of value that America wants to incorporate. If we think of Acosta's first book in relation to the Hegelian master/slave dialectic, the narrator of *The Autobiography* represents the slave who seeks the recognition of the master through work (in his activities as football player, a musician, a soldier, and an evangelist) only to fail because in U.S. socio-political reality there is not a reciprocal dynamic between master and slave. This means that the master can be arrogant with his gaze because the slave can be replaced as fast as he/she can be terminated from existence without consequence to his own mastery.

Hunter S. Thompson, one of Acosta's better known associates, once pointed out that Acosta always felt himself an outsider wherever he was.¹³ I suggest that what Thompson observed as streaks of anti-sociality were actually symptoms of being preconscious of his colonized existence and the particular liminal racial subjectivity that Chicano/as experience in the United States. Diego Rivera in *My Art, My Life: An Autobiography* alludes to the idea I am forwarding here in a section titled "Pre-Conquest Art" when he remarks about his inner feelings towards his own development in the arts. Rivera recounts,

Meanwhile I painted, and although I now took some pride in my work, I was often depressed by a generalized sense of inferiority. *It was a racial feeling, not unlike that felt by many artists in the United States. And like many of them, it finally brings me to Europe.* But in my (Mexican) case its roots were not specifically the same. (*Emphasis added*, 19).

He continues with a point about the liminal positionality of the Mexican artist vis-à-vis Spain and Mexico's indigenous roots,

Under the tyranny of the Spaniards, *the half breed descendants of these great Indian creators turned away from the native sources that had given Mexican art its power. Feeling inferior to their conquerors and oppressors, they sought to raise themselves to equality by imitating the*

¹³ See "Introduction" in *Revolt of the Cockroach People* (New York: Vintage, 1973).

accepted models of classical European art. It was a response of men reacting to a tradition of defeat—and this tradition was within me, too, buried in my subconscious. (Emphasis added, Ibid.)

Rivera's own observations about the anxiety over not being a European artist are significant because in them one can find the germ of a coloniality that cuts across time and space. Coloniality is a temporality with psychosocial outcomes that causes angst, abjection, terror and most importantly, yet under-studied in the Chicano intellectual community, estrangement.¹⁴ These outcomes of coloniality as historico-political global structure are significant correlative factors not only because a form of consciousness and attitude towards existence are articulated through them, but also because this internally contradictory structure conditions actions and practices in life.

According to Maldonado-Torres (2007), the "Coloniality of Being" points to a process of subject formation in which the subject exists under fire, confronting the constant threat of death through racial violence. Frantz Fanon described most eloquently the failures a black man encounters in his attempt to humanize himself under such conditions in his seminal work, *Black Skins, White Masks* (1967). The failures Fanon encounters in the colonial context of black subjectivity are the failures of language, the failures of reason, the failures of Western logic that inevitably forecloses the possibility of black subjectivity to possess a sense of full humanity. It is meaning, both its content and the possibility to generate it, that forces a crisis upon black subjectivity. I argue that the psychosocial dynamics Fanon analyzes in relation to the black Martiniquean cannot only help us understand black subjectivity in particular, but also the kind of subjectivity produced by coloniality in its particular manifestations. Here I pay special attention to the particular manner in which Chicana/o subjectivity has been forged through five hundred years of colonial power being exerted on "the brown body." This body is couched within the corporeal schema of "brownness" and *mestizaje*. It is couched in the signification it is given by what Walter Dignolo (2000) calls the Western European locus of enunciation.

Acosta's narratives and legal work demonstrates that Chicanas and Chicanos exist within a racial matrix inherent to colonial negation. It is important to note that Acosta, the writer, understood that his racial positionality—both imposed from the exterior and taken up as self-identity—was to a great extent an outcome of a particular history of racial injustice, rape and miscegenation in the conquest of the Americas as a whole and the Southwest in particular. The allusions to conquerors and *Indios* throughout his books made this clear. In his capacities as lawyer, on the judicial level, Acosta sought to undo colonial negation by problematizing the legal racial categories under which Mexicans were interpellated, while he made a polemic about the political attitude through which racist institutions approached the Chicano movement in court battles. This included framing and defending the legal cases that resulted from the Chicano uprisings in Los Angeles. What is most historically significant about Acosta's legal battles is that they caused crisis of signification for the system it self. Indeed, the system had gotten used to

¹⁴ Kelly Oliver's work brings great light on these issues as they relate to the psyche. I especially appreciate the manner in which she brings Fanon to bear to critique some of the established categories of psychoanalysis and puts them in conversation with the phenomena of colonization to construct her theory on oppression. See Kelly Oliver, *The Colonization of Psychic Space: A Psychoanalytic Social Theory of Oppression* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004).

people of color trying to make claims that affirm whiteness in efforts to shore up their legal rights as citizens of the nation, but never had a group argued to be re-defined legally as non-white. Acosta's legal arguments bypassed proving discrimination on the basis of race in a positive sense, that is, proving their actual whiteness scientifically via blood quantum, by demonstrating how it was that Chicanos constitute a racial class because of the differential treatment that they encounter in the hands of police, schools, and employers. He pointed to the existence of negative factors pointing to the fact that Chicano/as consist of a racial class.

In *Autobiography*, crises of signification play themselves out internally, always in relation to violence and death. I will elaborate more on this point in my discussions of the dialectical functions of death in the chapter that follows, but for now I will examine more closely Brown Buffalo's *attempts* (misguided as they may be) at achieving recognition and a "harmonious identity" that can humanize him. I use the adjective "harmonious" to describe the kind of subjectivity that is often sought by Chicano/as, as well as other dehumanized subjects, because the quality of forming a pleasing and consistent whole is often what is *idealized* when the self is torn asunder by the multiplicity of paradoxes that assail its being, which negate its potential. To reach harmony, as it were, would mean not only to find peace (meaningful, consistent, ethical logic) in a "colonial death world,"¹⁵ but also to generate one's own meaning and undermine the powers seeking to subjugate and prematurely end one's life in the real and in the symbolic. This runs counter to Heideggerian notions of authenticity.¹⁶ To be sure, this proposition is no mistake when it concerns colonized subjectivities because neither the anonymity offered by the "They" nor the confrontation with death offers an end to the contradictions that plague colonized existence. On the contrary, *Da-sein* and the promise of death offer nothingness to the colonized subject because these have been systematically used against them to guarantee their subjugation and alienated experience in life. In fact, it has relegated colonized being to the ontological status of non-being. The ruse of power which is signified, as Fanon's and Maldonado-Torres's work demonstrates, by the desire of the slave to become master -- or at the very least to identify with him-- works well enough to have Acosta want to be anything but Mexican throughout his childhood and much of his adult life.¹⁷

¹⁵ The term "colonial death world" refers to logic of coloniality. Maldonado-Torres uses Wyschogrod's term to describe a social logic that curtails meaning and expedites premature death. He notes, "The colonial death world, which includes the imperial project, is the anti-ethical par excellence. It is a world where the allegedly extraordinary event of anticipating one's own death cannot be achieved, not because the individual is lost in an anonymous "mass" but simply because death (the death of the slave, or of the indigenous population for instance) is already part and parcel of ordinary life. [...] The colonial death world becomes the ethical limit of human reality. It is a context in which violence and war are no longer extraordinary, but become instead ordinary features of human existence" (100). See Nelson Maldonado-Torres, *Against War: Views from the Underside of Modernity* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2008).

¹⁶ For the precise discussion about the "authentic" and "inauthentic" attitude towards Being see Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, Trans. J. Stambaugh, (New York: State University of New York, (1953) 1996).

¹⁷ See Frantz Fanon (1967), especially chapters 1 and 2, which articulate how colonial language often is the door for the ruse of humanization and Maldonado-Torres (2008), especially the section titled "Recognition from Bellow: The Meaning of the Cry and the Gift of the Self in the Struggle for

An analysis of Acosta's work that goes beyond individualist reductionism would not only posit that the narrator of *The Autobiography* wears disguises and postures, as Guajardo (2002) suggests, because he wants to elicit pity as a victim of racism, or because he is ashamed of who he really is, nor because he has not come to terms with his true identity, but rather would also venture into asking why this dynamic occurs.¹⁸ If we entertain Fanon's fundamental rhetorical question in *Black Skin, Whites Masks*: "What does the Black man want?" for a moment we can carve out space to enter into the meaning of the question of identity, which many Acosta critics thematize as a journey or quest.¹⁹ For our purposes it would be apt to modify the questions to read: "What does a Brown Buffalo want?" or to arrive at a more socially relevant analysis for Chicanos in the U.S., "What does a Brown Man want?" Notwithstanding the problems that this rhetorical question poses for defining the desire of subjectivity in masculine terms, I will enter into the analysis of the question as it stands in relation to Acosta and the narrator of *The Autobiography*, Brown Buffalo, because we are analyzing a novel of a writer and the voice of a narrator who is aware that masculinity was integral to the identities he was taught, culturally coerced, and the he chose to perform. "Acosta carefully develops," Norma D. Smith comments, "obvious contradictions for his hero" (84). In fact, that Acosta's narrative articulates the manner in which he is gendered, raced and sexed at the various levels of sociality (i.e. the family, school, church, culture, etc.) shows that Acosta knew that identity had both subjective and objective dimensions that generate paradoxes

Recognition," where a suspension of the desire of recognition from the Master is suggested to avoid the ruse. This point also brings me to call into question what Guajardo suggest may be the root of dissimilation impulse in third-generation Chicano/as since the sixties. He writes that theories of dissimilation "are especially important in light of affirmative action which in some ways rewards minority identification"(7). By arguing that Acosta participates in "muting properties," he begins to pathologize the psyche of color as one that has a possessive investment in reconstructing his personal history by omitting, exaggerating, misleading, and posturing to seek the "social rewards" behind racial/ethnic identification. I, on the other hand, posit that the posturing that Brown Buffalo practices has more to do with his pre-conscious angst brought upon by "racial seeing" (Alcoff 2006) and racial negation, which splits his personalities (read: consciousness) and ultimately erupt through the psychosomatic symptoms he is afflicted by through most of the *Autobiography*. As we observe in *The Revolt*, it is when Brown Buffalo suspends his desire for recognition from the American mainstream and plunges into revolutionary political activity that the neurotic symptoms vanish.

¹⁸ Here, I am advancing a constructive criticism of Guajardo's reading of Acosta in the respective sections "Acosta's Disguises" and "Acosta: Still Posturing." I am also asserting that Fanon observations about Mannoni's notion of the "black's dependency complex" were sound. Fanon criticizes Mannoni for misreading racism as something that does not "reflect an economic situation" (*WS, BM*, 85), but he also congratulates him for being "sincere in purpose, for [Mannoni's study] presupposes to prove the impossibility of explaining man outside the limits of his capacity for accepting or denying a given situation. Thus the problem of colonialism includes not only the interrelations of objective historical conditions but also human attitudes towards the condition" (84). What Fanon underscores here, and what I would also like to stress is that racism and the coloniality of being is encompassed by a circular circuit that is not solely about the manner in which any given individual manages racism and coloniality's power objectively to overcome the limitations it imposes, but rather that individuals will encounters his limits and possibilities vis-à-vis the racist/colonial attitudes he/she encounters "out there," in the world. Guajardo's analysis, unfortunately, presupposes the genesis of the individual in a vacuum, for he attributes the contents of Acosta work as a product of individual desires.

¹⁹ These include Paul Guajardo (2002), Norman D. Smith, (1986), Arthur Ramirez (1975) among others.

and contradictions in relation to the meaning and value of categories through which one is interpellated or one chooses to adopt.

It is important to note that desire, freedom, and power must be factors that bear on our analysis in order to address the question of the identity in Acosta's narrative. Freedom and power in particular have dimensions that parallel the Manichean logic of colonization when these concepts are analyzed concretely in the time/space of coloniaity. Maldonado-Torres makes this point clear when he posits that Liberty and Justice do not share a universal meaning and value when they relate to subjectivities the humanity of which has been historically negated through the threat and actualization of death, violence, and the rules of colonization. Pointing to Fanon he writes,

The point here, [Fanon] states, is that in the day-to-day ordinary life of the colonized [Liberty and Justice] are not completely effective as producers of feelings of disrespect. That is why ultimately Fanon finds black subjects wear white masks. To be sure, this does not mean that racialized and colonized do not confront dilemmas for freedom. What it does mean is that these dilemmas cannot be properly thematized in relation to spheres of culture and value that have not emerged or in which certain subjects have not been allowed to participate. (*AW* 128)

What this also suggests is that the search for identity in the socio-political realm arranged through racial differences also implicates a perverted version of a struggle for recognition prompted by a desire simply to exist, to be accepted for who and what one is in flesh and blood. Respect would be too much to ask when it becomes obvious that it is actually a derivative of colonial technologies of subordination and authority because it is commanded by the dominator. As Fanon demonstrates in chapters two and three of *Black Skins, White Masks* this sort of struggle militates against the self because the price of recognition from the hegemonic 'They' is precisely the self. The fact that racial perception persists makes it such that one's own skin marks the most basic impossibility of this recognition ever coming into fruition. The ruse of power becomes evident in this dynamic because while Brown Buffalo searches for a self that will allow him to exist comfortably in his own skin, the meaning and logic under which the American status quo operates (read: "the protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism" (Weber 1958)) always already guarantees his experience as marginalized citizen and dehumanized racial being, alienated by the political economy of death implied in the racial segregation of estranged labor. As Brown Buffalo recalls his immigrant parents, he writes:

The truth of it was they both conspired to make men out of innocent Mexican boys. It seemed the sole purpose of childhood was to train boys how to be men. Not men of the future, but *now*. We had to run home from school, work on weekends, holidays, during vacations, all for the purpose of being men. We were suppose to talk like *un hombre*, walk like a man, act like a man and think like a man. When they called us from the corner lot to play keep away, we couldn't go until we pulling weeds from the garden. And while the gang gathered behind the grocery store to smoke cigarette butts, we had to shine our shoes and read the *Seabees Manual*. In fact, the only time we could read funny books was when my father was in the Navy. Nothing would infuriate him more than to catch us

browsing funny books. Men, he'd tell us, took life seriously. Nothing could be learned from books that were funny. (75)

To be recognized, as it were, colonized being has to turn against itself, it has to disavow the past and the future to be what he thinks the master wants 'Men' be today. In Acosta's case the United States Naval Manual was his father's instruction book not only on how to become American, but also on how to become a "man." As a result, Acosta unconsciously learns to wear white masks, not to be recognized by the master, but rather to get away from the trap of his brown skin, the skin that locks him to a past that spans longer than his own life, which ultimately negates the possibility of him signifying and embodying a universal. Inevitably, contradictions and paradox abound in this kind of tragic situation.

Acosta's novel provides insight into how the political economy of social negation produces contradictions for the children of immigrants who become conscious of the impositions of Anglo dominant culture. Brown Buffalo's narrative launches itself deep into Chicana/o racialized experience by showing the pre-conscious affective responses to cultural impositions and the internal strife that ensues as the child seeks to counter the oppressive and repressive force of coloniality. "I used to think that only my father was mad," the narrator of *The Autobiography* intimates, "I doubted that the fathers of my friends in the barrio taught them the same things. But one day I learned differently" (76). This was the day that as a boy the young Brown Buffalo spits on a picture of an American flag and is beat up by nine "ten-year old sun-baked Mexican boys" for doing so. He is humiliated for questioning the honor of a flag that to him signified the root of his father's absence during times of war and his madness when he returns home. "I have never, to this day, had any respect for that flag or that country," Brown explains, "You can blame it in on my childhood experiences. Politics has nothing to do with it. I have no ideology, I've been an outlaw of practical necessity ever since. And I have never backed out of a fight." This statement suggests that colonized subjectivity experiences preconscious affective response to its subjugation. By "preconscious" I mean that in the moment in question, as we can observe from his comments above, Acosta has unconscious effective response to things American whose root cause is not repression, but rather actual negation.²⁰ Reason and justice thusly become secondary to the anger and angst that negation produces. The traumatic violence Brown experienced that day would set the tone for the violent character that his interactions with the State would take until he disappears. As Acosta's biographer Ilan Stavans rightly put it, "Indeed, his rebellious spirit and anti-Americanism can be tracked down to [this] very important scene in Zeta's autobiography" (*Bandido* (1995) 25). The fact is that negation penetrates subjectivity's innermost structures to the extent that its choices and actions seem to be based more on survival instincts than calculated endeavors. However, that Acosta's defiance to patriotism is prompted by affect, rather than "reason" makes the products of his actions (in literature and jurisprudence) no less significant. Being *encruzijado*

²⁰ For a discussion on the "Preconscious system" see Sigmund Freud's "Lecture XIX: Resistance and Repression" in *Introductory Lectures to Psycho-Analysis*, Trans. James Strachey (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1966): 354-374. Fanon makes a similar point about the Algerian combatant and the source of their neurosis as not being repressed trauma, but rather actual physical violence at the hands of torturing interrogators. See Franz Fanon's "Colonial War and Mental Disorders" in *The Wretched of the Earth*, Trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 1963): 181-218.

between ideologies and cultures makes it difficult for him to exist within the actual and the ideal. Stavans believes this dynamic engendered a quixotic twist to Acosta's life and narratives. Stavans underscores that the episode described above "would leave a deep scar. Like Cervantes's protagonist Alonso Quijano, he would spend his life fighting gigantic windmills, struggling against invisible ghosts. *Life would be perceived as an ongoing war against astute evil forces always difficult to point out*" (my emphasis, 26).

The dialectical relation between identity and social recognition/non-recognition evident in the childhood experience described above predicates the crisis of actions and affect we encounter in Acosta's narrative. We can gain a degree of understanding of the crisis experienced by Brown Buffalo through some of the categories and concepts elaborated by Hegel, Freud, and Marx, but these yield only a partial and somewhat problem-laden account of colonized beings, problematic to the extent that these theorists of the social and the human never seemed to find a relevant nexus between imperialism and colonialism and the articulation of subjectivity and consciousness. These "colonial theorists and philosophers," as Enrique Dussel (1985) aptly terms the tradition they write from, unfortunately, never intended to theorize a human that is black or brown, much less one whose most profound constitutive factor is the persistence of colonial negation.²¹ For Hegel, the master-slave relation is abstract, an ontological description of how ideas, concepts and history come to be.²² Even in sociality, as his *Philosophy of Right* (1821) demonstrates, subjectivity is constituted only after the State, the political body that ensures the ethical order of society.²³ However, what we observe in both *The Autobiography* and *The Revolt of the Cockroach People*, Acosta's second published book, is that a white racial State and its culture subordinates racialized subjectivity to affirm white status quo's domination and mastery over its racial "Others."²⁴ Racial colonial subjectivity, despite its structural coordinates, manifests itself not only *en lo cotidiano*, through affect and in the actions that this affect coerces in return, but also in the critical articulation of this experience.

The first four chapters of *The Autobiography* are preoccupied with two circumstances that prompt trauma and crisis for Brown Buffalo. One is a pervasive anxiety that manifests itself psychosomatically through ulcers and impotence, and the other is the loss of love, or rather the failure of achieving a degree of recognition through romantic relationships. The latter of these circumstances is particularly important to understand the psycho-political dimensions involved in the struggle for recognition that

²¹ See Enrique Dussel, *Philosophy of Liberation*, (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock), 10.

²² See G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977).

²³ See G.W.F. Hegel, *Philosophy of Right* (Amherst, New York: Prometheus Books, 1996, c.1821). Fanon and Maldonado-Torres properly shows that the ontological approach to understanding the master-slave dynamic is insufficient in relation to the colonial logic the West operates under. Along with the critique of Hegel's conceptualization of the master, who seeks the reciprocal recognition of his slave, Maldonado-Torres also contends that Axel Honeth's attempt to re-write the problem of recognition in the masters-slave dialectic also ignores the specific manner in which negation or misrecognition occurs in the colonial drama.

²⁴ The "State's racial project" is theorized by Omi and Winant in *Racial Formations* (1994). It underscores the structural elements that structure the meaning and practices of race and racism within the national body. As the authors point out, throughout American history racial projects have been articulated structurally, which in turn have cultural repercussions. As Lisa Lowe would put in *Immigrant Acts* (1996), it is when contradictions between capitalism and law become evident that culture erupts.

Acosta finds himself embroiled for a better part of his life. Accounting for the number of times Acosta finds rejection (read: negation) when he pursues the love of a white woman, we must ask ourselves why this desire persists for so long and to what extent this repressed desire is related to Acosta's search for identity and struggle for recognition.

In the opening of *Autobiography*, June MacAdoo symbolizes the "object choice" that gives the narrator of *Autobiography* internal self-worth for apparent superficial reasons. By "object choice" I am referring to the psychoanalytic term that describes the act of opting for a type of person as a love object whose irrevocable and determining character evokes a decisive moment in his/her history.²⁵ Describing how they met, Brown Buffalo recalls:

Jose had introduced me to her the week after I'd taken my first Bar exam in August, 1965. The three of us played pool in the back room. I gave her a ride home and ended up staying at her pad for the next three months. She had skinny legs and an ass that was firm, but not much of a shape. Her tits were small. Her hair was too thin and black, and short, like a pageboy, and she had a little pug nose. But that Rumanian lass from the South Carolina was the cutest chick I'd ever loved and my only serious relationship of the Sixties. (47)

In a Freudian sense, the description reveals that Brown Buffalo's "object choice" is rooted in narcissism. The object of his affection is a manifestation of Brown Buffalo's projected desires. Put simply, he seeks June to satisfy his ego.²⁶ This is supported by the emphasis that is placed both on June's beautifully imperfect physical attributes and her ethnic particularity. These qualities rather than being signifiers of appreciation of inner qualities remain superficial because their value is determined in registers of cultural status and libido (sexual satisfaction). Also interesting to note is that the description reveals contradiction and lapses in logic. For instance, the narrator seems to be disparaging of June's attractiveness by pointing out that June did not have "much of a shape," her hair looks like that of a boy and she has a nose like that of a dog, yet it is clear from both the manner in which the eventual break-up disillusioned Brown—it takes him a year to get to a point where he feels he is just about over it-- and the conviction he expresses in proclaiming his love for her that his sentiment is profound. Notwithstanding June's Eastern European ethnic background, the fact is that under American racial perception norms June is also a white woman. Logical lapse comes into view when we

²⁵ Sigmund Freud introduces the term in *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, Trans. J. Strachey (London: Imago Publishing Company, 1949). See Freud's "On Narcissism: An Introduction" in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XIV (1914-1916): On the History of Psycho-Analytic Movement, Papers on Metaphysics and Other Works* (London: Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1953-1974): 67-102, where Freud further identifies object-choices through two central categories: anaclitic—based on instincts of self preservation—, and narcissistic—based on the desire of the ego ideal—.

²⁶ We must underscore the fact that it is the id, not his ego functioning here. The id, as described by Freudian theory is preoccupied with satiating primary desires of survival. These are self-preservation and reproduction. I believe that the id is dynamic in this desire because his ego, that which protects the id form the contradiction that the primary desires yield in sociality, vanishes in relation to these women. He is putty in their hands, so to speak. They become his sole source of salvation and satisfaction, no matter the extent of negation he experiences through these relationships. This, in fact, may be the source of disavowing the significance of race and racism throughout his childhood.

consider that the relationship only lasted three months –hardly an extended period for substantial binding to occur-- and that the reasons behind it ending were racially motivated.

It is difficult to believe that Brown Buffalo would disavow this fact, but as the narrative unfolds, it is clear that the narrator of *The Autobiography* is almost superfluous to this pattern in his life. Dr. Serbin’s phantom-like psychological presence, tells him that he needs to confront these relationships for what they signify, namely, in terms of race and gender. In fact, I think that Dr. Serbin—who we are told is a Jewish old man--symbolizes a sort of Freudian conscience that wants Brown Buffalo to dig into his past to find a remedy to his intestinal ailments, his impotence, and romantic failures. In the beginning pages of the book, wondering about the source of his chronic indigestion, the voice creeps in with a stubborn suggestion: “Don’t tell me you believe that stuff about Chinese putting the leftovers back in?,” and continues, “Did anything unusual happen yesterday”(13)? Brown Buffalo sheds light on the implications of the questions are made light of by Brown Buffalo through his retort and the following exchange:

Oh don’t start with that shit. I’m *constipated!* Can’t you see? It’s a goddam physical thing!”

“But surely there’s a reason,” he stabs with feigned sobriety.

“You must be holding something back.”

“Ah that’s bullshit!”

“What’s all bullshit?”

“Everything is bullshit! You and your accusations. All of them...

they’re all Jewish fairy tales. (Ibid.)

That Brown disavows the possibility of his physical ailments being rooted in the psyche is important because not being able to face this possibility is in itself a result of the negations Acosta experiences in childhood. In fact, disavowing the impact that racism and amorous rejections have upon his life, I suggest, alters Brown’s reality to the extent that he has to live outside of himself, outside of his own skin to be able to feel himself worthy of the recognition from those he wants to impress in childhood, adolescence, and young adulthood, namely, the Anglo world. As we continue to read Acosta’s narrative, it becomes obvious that June is not the only white woman with whom he fell in love with in the course of his life. It is precisely because June exemplifies a recurring traumatic experience rooted in childhood that his failures in love becomes so significant to our inquiry into the dimensions of Brown Buffalo’s struggle for recognition.

How can we give a satisfactory explanation of Brown’s “narcissistic type object choices” without falling into the individualist Freudian frames of subjective genesis? We must trace his traumas sociogenically, understanding that the racial gulf that stands between Brown Buffalo and the colonial death-world that profoundly marked and shaped his existence have a symbiotic relationship. Fanon puts forth this proposition when he called into question the ontogenic and phylogenic approaches to understanding human development.²⁷ Fanon would suggest, as it were, that Brown’s narcissism is inspired, or

²⁷ Fanon, *BS/WM* 10-11. Addressing the manner in which Freudian analysis is inadequate to understand the psychological complexes that assail the colonized Fanon explains, “Reacting against the constitutionalist tendency of the late nineteenth century, Freud insisted that the individual factor be taken into account through psychoanalysis. He substituted for a phylogenetic theory the ontogenetic perspective. It will be seen that the black man’s alienation is not an individual question. Beside phylogeny and ontogeny

rather determined by the nexus of a structure and culture that is racist, colonizing to the extent that it imposes meaning and norms that paradoxically relegate him to exist in a zone of non-being, thusly, always pursuing the ideal. Indeed, this is the dynamic that spells out “colonial alienation.” I do not separate the particular black experience Fanon writes about from the experience of the brown person living in the U.S. because it is clear to me that the source of Brown Buffalo’s alienation is driven by the forces of racial death and violence that not only impose limits on his potential, but also inhibits his ability to offer something universal to the world and conversely prohibits the world from accepting his universality. Recalling a point I made above and paraphrasing Fanon, I posit that it is evident that the brown man’s alienation and his need to engage in a search for identity—to enter struggles for recognition—is not an individual question, let us say rather that this is a matter of sociodiagnostics.²⁸

That “conquering” white women becomes a symbolic aperture for transcending the limits of subjugated, racialized being to prove that he is worthy of the white gaze is not surprising because repression and negation activates an inevitable processes of displacement and sublimation necessary to continue living. It is in this way that the Freudian “anaclitic” and “narcissistic” object-choice types often converge (collapse) in the lived-experience of racial colonial subjects. Long before meeting June, Brown Buffalo lived through two other significant love affairs with white women that failed, causing much damage to his self-esteem and bringing him to question his cultural specificity. At age nine, Jane Addison was not the first female to make Brown Buffalo feel himself “Othered”—his mother would be the first—, but she was the first female to cause Acosta to engage in deep reflection about his masculine “inadequacies.” *“She was a blonde, shy and had red acne all over her beautiful face. She was the smartest girl in the class and lived no more than the seven blocks from men in the American sector”* (89). It was love from a distance because Jane never demonstrated reciprocity on her part. As Ilan Stavans’s 1995 book on Acosta suggests, Jane and June, are archetypes, “intelligent blonde[s] personifying the whole mainstream environment” (*Bandido* 29). The Jane Addison case fits the “narcissistic object choice” model because it is based on projections of desire for the most part. She does not remind him of his mother, as the anaclitic model suggests, but rather represents an object that could get him closer to what he wants to be, to the image of himself he idealizes. The moments prior to meeting Jane demonstrates that Brown repeatedly displaces erotic desire onto white female figures that he thinks can redeem him from his external shortcomings --having been born a Mexican, brown, fat and ugly—if he could possess them. Brown Buffalo is in the middle of a drawing exercise and all he can think about is his teacher’s, Miss Rollins, skirt and legs. Noticing that Brown is having a difficult time with the drawing exercise, the teacher poses for him. “Now just look at my legs and try to copy them,” the young woman said to me. Miss Rita Hayworth obviously didn’t know that even nine-year old brown buffalos get horny

stands sociogeny. In one sense, confronting to the view of Leconte and Damey, let us say that it is a question of a sociodiagnostic” (Ibid).

²⁸ Fanon, *BS, WM*, 11. Fanon makes it clear that the constitution of subjectivity is not solely an individual phenomenon, despite Freudian thought that says otherwise. “Reacting against the constitutionalist tendencies of the late nineteenth century, Freud insisted that the individual factor be taken into account through psychoanalysis. He substituted for a phylogenetic theory the ontogenetic perspective. It will be seen that the black man’s alienation is not an individual question. Beside phylogeny and ontogeny stands sociogeny. In one sense... let us say that this is a question of sociodiagnostics” (11).

when you see pure flesh. If it hadn't been for the intrusion of Mr. Addison and his daughter, [Jane], who knows what I might have done'"(89). Even in retrospect, Brown seems to think he had a chance at romance with the teacher at nine-years old.

The Jane affair is tragic because the situation elicits pity and fear. Mirroring the colonial situation, it resembles a Greek tragedy because in the drama that encompasses Brown's life, the failures in achieving recognition through love evokes pity and fear for the anti-hero. What else could one feel for a person who devotes himself to the object of his affection, to lose himself in it only to be shunned? As it turns out, Jane lets Brown down twice. The first time is set up by Brown's own naïve overtures. He attempts to tattoo Jane's initials into the back of his hand to impress her. Unimpressed by the gesture, Brown admits, "She squinted, gave me a queer look and just shook her head over and over as she walked away" (90). This experience resembles the moment W.E.B Dubois describes in *Souls of Black Folk* (1903) which brought him to discern the perversion of racial difference. It involved the negation of a gift. The young Dubois, offering a card to a young white female classmate during a class exchange is shunned by her. She refuses to take the card from him because he is black. It is a moment that pronounces the beginning of Dubois' existential concerns. It is the first time that Dubois feels what he calls his "two-ness," as it were, his being split in two by the racial gaze that cannot see beyond the particularity of his skin to find his humanity. In essence, these are moments that spell out non-recognition. Although Brown Buffalo is not offering something material to be accepted, the moment does suggest the offering of a gift. "*Look, I give you my flesh with your name on it!*" the young Brown seems to be saying. But Jane already knew that there is a barrier or difference between them that cannot be crossed or reconciled. This becomes clear when a few months later Jane brings him down again by pointing out to the teacher and the class that Brown stinks, implying that Mexicans expel unpleasant body odors. "The room is filled with laughter," Brown recalls the humiliation, "My ears pound red. I am done for. My heart sags from the overpowering weight of the fatness of my belly. *I am a nigger after all. My mother is right. I am nothing but and Indian with sweating body and faltering tits that at the sight of a young girl's blue eyes*" (my emphasis, 94-95). As a result of this moment, Stavans writes, "He will be forced to go through life existentially injured, his self scarred. Ethnic exclusion will ignite in him dreams of destruction" (*Bandido* 31). Beside the immediate shame that this moment prompts, we need to underscore the fear and the negative course of action that Brown will take from that moment on to the rest of his life. "I shall never be able to undress in front of a woman's stare," Brown bemoans, "I shall refuse to play basketball for fear that some day I might have my jersey ripped from me in front of those pigtailed, blue-eyed girls from America" (95). The dynamic of racial negation is endemic, for it is evident that the more negation Brown Buffalo experiences "out there," the more his psyche will try to repress from him to be able to live through, to survive, the forces of coloniality.

Repression is a psychological function through which the ego protects itself. However, in the case discussed above, the shame is strong enough for it turn against itself in fantasy, yearning for death Brown daydreams:

... dressed up in fine linen, my hands folded over my chest, a rosary in the delicate fingers, I wait my maker in a golden, finely carved casket which shall be my resting place throughout eternity. There they all sit, all of

them: my folks, her folks, Bob, Hector, all of my cousins, my grandmother, Vernon, the Perez', Miss Anderson and, of course *Miss It...* suddenly she gives a tremendous shriek. She jumps up, runs to the front of the church, takes the rosary from my carved-up bleeding hands and bends to kiss the little holes in my hand. Even in death I can feel the warmth of her lovely tears.

“Look Mrs. Acosta! Look at his hands. See? These are my initials.... J-A. Joan Anderson. That’s me. He truly loved me!”(95).

Se quiere borrar. The agony of racism, in this case, makes Brown think that only in death will those around him recognize his worth. It is interesting, however, that within this fantasy there is a discernable impulse to turn against the source of his negation before he turns against himself, for he begins the fantasy throwing blows “into the iron jaws of [Jane’s] father.” How is it that the killing rage prompted by shame and abjection gets re-directed to the self? We will ponder this question in the following chapter more thoroughly. For now, we should underscore that his fantasy is clearly driven by the desire for recognition that turns homicidal when it confronts its limit.

The struggle to achieve recognition for Brown Buffalo entails proving to the white world around him “the richness of [his] thought” and “the equal value of his intellect.”²⁹ Brown’s high-school years are especially significant in this respect. Brown Buffalo would succumb to the power of another girl’s ‘light eyes’ once more during these years. Alice Joy first comes up in a conversation with friends about finding the ‘perfect woman’ during an adolescent drinking binge:

And once again, for the seventeenth time we started going over the list of broads in the entire San Joaquin Valley. We didn’t merely undress them, we measured and weighed every ounce of flesh, we picked their clothes for them, sent them to the beauty shop, brushed their teeth if we thought it necessary, combed, bathed, and even manicured the girls and women of the valley before we sent them school, to work or to someone’s bed. And always there was one objective: to find the perfect woman. *Miss it.* To find the proper object of our affection, the dream of our collective design, the flower for our garden, the pin-up for our wall and the one we could all agree we would marry when the time was ripe. And on that hot summer night after we had dipped into the canal for a quick swim while we worked on a case of Goebel’s, Dragalong told us of Alice, a friend of his sister, a thirteen year-old farmer’s daughter from Riverbank whom he had just met that day and who would be a freshman at Oakdale Joint that fall. “She’s the cats meow. I’m telling you. Cans up to her chin and an ass like a brick shithouse. I’ve never seen a better-looking snatch in my whole life. (112)

Although this kind of talk amongst ‘boys’ seems normal to the extent that young men going through puberty are often preoccupied with sex and satiating their budding desires, the context of the conversation speaks volumes about the structure of Brown’s object choices. I think that we can discern the manner in which the “anaclitic,”—based on instincts of self-preservation—and “narcissistic”—based on projections of the ego ideal—object choice models collapse in this showcase of masculinity by subjecting this

²⁹ Fanon, *BS, WM* 10.

section of Acosta's story to de-colonial reduction. What we have to observe here is the relation that the four young men Brown Buffalo is peaking to have to *Miss It*. We should point out that all of them, except Brown, are white country boys, football players that are a few years older than Brown. Brown Buffalo identifies with them better than he does other Chicanos. In an earlier chapter he intimates that *Pochos* in Riverbank make Brown Buffalo and his brother feel like outsiders from the moment they arrive from El Paso, because "real Mexicans don't come from the east." This chasm has its roots with the fight over the American flag we examined earlier but deepened when Brown Buffalo refused to pair up with Mexican girls for his junior high school graduation march. Brown Buffalo reasons that he refused because he had a sick feeling about being segregated, not because he did not want to march with a Mexican girl. When the Mexican community found out about this, he had no choice but to socialize outside of his own community because his refusal was interpreted as a *Malinchada*, an act of treachery against his own race. The gulf between Brown and his community would only become deeper when during senior high school Brown reads Chicano complaints about Anglos as an irrational case of inferiority. "After I had been elected Jr. Class President, I had forgotten about being a brown buffalo," the narrator reveals. "When I became the solo clarinetist and played the lead in roles like *Captain From Castille* I quit hanging around with Johnny and David and Ben and Alfonso, my grade-school buddies from the West Side, because they constantly talked about the gringos and the Oakies and the Americans and all kinds of things that I could not accept as true because for me all was going kings ass." His lack of empathy to the racial complaints of his Mexican counterpart was complimented by his lack of empathy and attraction to Mexican girls. "I never went out with the few Mexican girls in school," Brown admits, "because they always stuck to themselves and refused to participate in the various activities. Also they were square and homely. Even when my mother asked me one time why I don't go out with Rita or Senaida, I told her that they weren't my type."

From these facts it becomes clear whom Brown Buffalo thought his peers were: not Mexicans. The implications of this are that he constructs the image of the perfect women based on disavowal of the beauty and value of brown folk. In other words, to have a social life, he forsakes the Mexican community around him. Self-preservation is implicated in a social sense in this dynamic. When the narrator signals that the objective was to find the perfect girl, "the dream of our collective design, the flower for our garden, the pin up for our wall and the one we all could agree to marry when the time was ripe," he is referring to the image that Anglo American culture values and recognizes as truly beautiful, what his white 'peers' value (112). The 'we' that is presumed in this passage is not collective at all. It is an imposition that has been in motion in "funny books" and "Dick Tracy" radio episodes he would read. The fact that Brown looks up to Hollywood figures that encapsulate the great American masculinity (like Humphrey Bogart) tells us that Mexican *Macho* masculinity is not the only kind of masculinity by which he is influenced. The instinct for self-preservation is entangled with narcissism in this case because Brown is trying to undermine complete social death by becoming someone else. "[R]ather than escaping his enemies," Stavans writes, "Zeta devoted his energy to understanding their mentality and furthermore, becoming one of them" (*Bandido* 32). Brown thinks he can do this by boasting his physical prowess in the football field, his

artistic talents in the high school band, playing the lead in plays, and his intellect by running strategies for winning school elections.

He got a taste of heaven, as it were, and from that moment on he would long for it and replace it with what ever he could to get the feeling back, or to forget about the “lack” in his life:

I fell in love to the sound of chords and scales from a golden tombstone. I had been down girl-wise ever since Jane Addison told me I stunk. The world simply changed when I looked at those big, innocent hazel eyes. The braces on her teeth made mince-meat of Madeline Harts horse mouth. The little scar above her upper lip I remember to this day. Even though she walked because of polio, still she agreed to dance with me at the school dance in the gymnasium after the basketball game.

The following Friday, I met her in the bleachers after the Oakdale Mustangs beat the Tracy Bulldogs. She told me she'd dumped her boyfriend Carl. We had exchanged pictures the day before. We had them taken from the *Oracle*, the high school yearbook. I had inscribed, “Words can't express the feelings I have for you... Oscar.”

While we danced to Freddy Gardner's “I'm in The Mood For Love,” she said, “Thanks for the picture... I feel the same way.” And that did it. I knew then that she would be forever my *Miss It*. I froze. I literally could not move. I was paralyzed from head to toe. I freaked out so bad we had to go sit in my car. I got down right to it. “Will you marry me? (115)

This lengthy quote allows us to understand that while the relationship with Alice is reciprocal, it also demonstrates aberrations in its constitution. The most obvious of these is Brown Buffalo's leap from getting to know Alice to wanting to marry her after knowing her for less than a week. The moment harkens love at first sight, so to speak, but is it love? Rather, I argue that it is another instance of Brown Buffalo attempting to humanize himself through another object choice. This time, however, the experience is much more profound than Jane was and June would be, because a sort of perverse identification exists between them that relates to their “handicapped bodies.” “The little scar above her upper lip” and the polio induced limp Alice displays are the markers that attract him most. Brown Buffalo does not reveal what exactly attracted him to Alice, but it is arguable that Brown's protective nature towards her vis-à-vis her stepfather's attempted rape made her feel protected. He would be devoted to her to the extent that Brown Buffalo entertains the idea of both changing his family name and religion to appease her parent's objections about the relationship. “It was about my family name,” Brown Buffalo laments, “When she told her mother the name of her boyfriend, the old bag said no dice. Never. Forget it” (116). Of course, his last name is only a way to divert stating her parents' real reasons for opposing the relationship: Brown Buffalo is a Mexican. “It was like this,” the narrator explains, “her real father was a drunk. A rail road man living in Eureka. She loved him. Her mother had married again. The deacon was an American from Arkansas. He tried to rape her when she was twelve. And he hated Mexicans more than life itself. He told her that if she permitted Alice to go out with a Mexican he'd divorce her. Period” (117). Alice and Brown Buffalo continue to see each other until a more stern authority comes between them, Sheriff Lauren.

The “ego conquiro,” which stipulates, “I conquer, therefore I am” is implicated in Brown’s procuring white girls.³⁰ This is because in Brown Buffalo’s early experience the phallus is a symbol not only of masculinity, but also over all subjective constitution. “Zeta is an example of genetic continuity,” Ilan Stavans rightly argues in his second biography on Acosta (*Death and Resurrection* 34). The history of colonization that used violence and rape to subdue indigenous populations in the America’s attests to this. Brown Buffalo’s self-esteem, his potential, and his possibilities are all determined in relation to the culture and structure that came about through two colonial events. The first took place in fifteenth century when Cortez arrived to meso-America and the other when Santa Ana sold out his compatriots for American dollars. *El mestizo*, and more specifically mestizo masculinity is bound to these atrocities through cultural memory, which is renewed systematically through the cultures of colonialism. In this sense *Machismo* and Anglo masculinity are not incompatible. They have similar forbearers and the telos is mastery. “Machismo prevailed in the Hispanic world north of the Rio Grande,” Stavans writes thinking of Acosta’s experience, “It’s idiosyncratic reveries date back to 1523, when Hernan Cortez subdued the Aztec city of Tenochtitlán, known today as Mexico City. Courage and the obsessive art of glorifying the phallus were the norm in the New World, and the *braceros* and wetbacks crossing the border carried along the tradition” (Ibid.). *Machismo*, the practice of overbearing master masculinity, however, becomes the gauge of existence when the phallus’s function becomes entangled with the struggle for recognition. What began as a Spanish venture to plunder a newly discovered land continued as a venture of subduing (read: negating) bodies through violence and rape. In a symbolic sense *el mestizo* is the carnal transubstantiation of this kind of negation. The hierarchy of sexes that stands in the Western matrix of power was engendered in this process, but just as significant to consider is that “[t]he phallus, not gunpowder, was the ultimate weapon used to subdue” (35). This is why failing to “conquistar”³¹ becomes such an existential dilemma for Brown. It is as if Brown’s inability to perform this basic function of masculinity disorients him. After Alice Joy, he has to gather himself and ask once more “Who am I?” and “What should I do to be someone?” Indeed, it is because Brown fails to conquer Alice that he becomes embroiled in the struggle for recognition, which is masked under a search for identity for a better part of his life.

³⁰ See Enrique Dussel (1985), where the “Ego Conquiro” refers to the critique Dussel makes on the Modern European philosophical tradition that Descartes sets in motion. Before the proposition “I think, therefore I am,” or rather, before Reason could take on the central meaning and significance that it does in Modernity, Dussel notes, history shows that the “I conquer, therefore I am” was its precursor. In fact, the condition of possibility of Descartes’ postulation rests on the advent of colonization in the 1500 century. The ontological conditions that made colonial negation possible Dussel writes, “arose from a previous experience of domination over other persons, of cultural oppression over other worlds. Before the ego cogito there is an *ego conquiro*: “I conquer” is the practical foundation of “I think.” The center has imposed itself on the periphery for more than five hundred centuries” (3). The manner in which Dussel concludes this point is of critical importance for he asks, “But for how much longer? Will the geopolitical preponderance of the center come to an end? Can we glimpse a process of liberation growing from peoples of the periphery?” The only sure answer Acosta’s literature offers to these questions is that a de-colonial process is in motion when racial colonial subjectivity is taken to the limits of negation.

³¹ ‘*La conquista*’ in its common usage in Mexico refers not to the historical fact of colonization of territories, but rather amorous exploits. A young Mexican man ‘conquers’, as it were, rather than ‘courts’ the object of his affection.

The Chicano masculinity that Acosta's personas perform are essentially paradoxical and point to being caught *encruzijado* between competing master moralities. Brown, by virtue of his brown body and the time he lived, cannot be Cortez, nor can he be Uncle Sam. For better or worse, desire does not stop where limits begin. Paradox follows for in the desire to go beyond the limits of tradition, Brown Buffalo ends up militating against himself in the process. The dam of emotions that build up in a lifetime, I think spells out the anger and relentless energy that would surface later in his writing and political activism. This is only after, however, facing and overcoming death in the many forms that it manifests itself in the life of the oppressed.

CHAPTER TWO

THE DIALECTICAL FUNCTION OF DEATH IN OSCAR ZETA

ACOSTA'S *THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF BROWN BUFFALO*

The violence that Oscar Zeta Acosta experiences is the catharsis which will bring him into manhood.

--- Norma D. Smith

Colonized existence enters the subjectivization process through colonial subjugation because coloniality is subtended by the use value of racial negation.¹ Colonial violence has been used to assert Anglo dominance in the United States even before it formally became a nation and no matter what point of origin one gives the history of Chicana/o experience—the experience of Mexicans in the U.S. who have shared a particularly traumatic racialization process—it has been forged with colonial imposition and genocidal wars. The flight of spears, the unsheathing of swords, the fire of canons, the spit of rifles, and the swing of the batons are acts of colonial aggression that gave rise to the calling forth of Aztlán. Oscar “Zeta” Acosta’s own formation as subject, and thereby his consciousness, as we observe in *The Autobiography* is the product of the culture of violence engendered through Spanish colonialism and Manifest Destiny’s westward expansion. These contingencies articulate Chicana/o’s dual colonization. Colonialism set in motion the discursive signifiers that give meaning to Brown Buffalo’s internal and external being. He is not just *un indio* in the eyes of Mexican mestizos, but also a ‘*Malinche*’ who has deserted *su patria*. The U.S.-Mexico War --the historical event that ushered the crystallization of Manifest Destiny-- makes Brown a *nigger*, according to the terminology the narrative itself uses. This sort of berated blackness, Fanon and other post-colonial (Said 1978, Spivak 1988) de-colonial theorists (Gordon 2005, Maldonado-Torres 2007) posit, has taken the meaning of the ultimate symbol of non-being.

¹ Heidegger’s (1953) and Foucault’s (1970) work figures here to the extent that colonialism set in motion, recalling Foucault’s own terminology, epistemic fractures, which are not considered in any of their work. Heidegger’s philosophy of existence does not think through the underside of “the They” who grant the anonymity of being. The manner in which racism and racial perception factor into the meaning of being for colonial subjectivity engenders a dynamic in which authenticity is second to self preservation. To evade death is the telos of existence rather than anticipate the promise of its freedom. Coloniality’s temporality is marked by imposition and negation of meaning and life. This dynamic is coercive as it is discursive. We can think of this intervention as expanding on Foucault’s work on the process of becoming a subject through subjection. Chicano experience as we shall demonstrate is constituted through the regulation of the body and mind through language and violence. In this regard, following JanMohamed’s method in his study on Richard Wright (2005), we are not only examining the subjective and objective coordinates that animate racialized subjectivity, but also the cause and effect in between.

The main thrust of this chapter will argue that Acosta's narrative demonstrates that in the relative absence of the ultimate figure of nonbeing, namely, blackness, in the early establishment of the Southwest, Chicanos themselves becomes this figure of nonbeing. There is a profound penetration of life by death in this history. Following Abdul JanoMohamed's work (2005) on the dialectical function of death in the literature of African American writers who excavate the effect of racial negation upon consciousness, the task in this section will be to demonstrate how similar to Richard Wright, Oscar "Zeta" Acosta's writing "embrace[s] a consciousness that looks both ways, [at cause and effect, and between the subjective and objective world], with equally powerful affective and analytic attachment and is willing unflinchingly to abide by pain—a pain produced by the unrelenting containment and penetration of life by death" in order to offer meaning, value, and a critique of the kinds death and violence produced by racial negation (*The Death-Bound-Subject* 46).

A dialectic relation between the actual death, social-death and symbolic-death of Chicano subjectivity animates *The Autobiography of a Brown Buffalo*. We can trace the meaning of this dynamic through colonial history as well as within Acosta's narrative. As Norma D. Smith posits, Brown Buffalo's "survival, his loss, his dignity, and self vilification is a means of survival as mythical son of 'Malintzin,'" Cortez's translator and concubine ("Buffalo and Cockroaches," 84). To be son of *Malinche* posits the notion that one is a bastard child, whose father fails to recognize him or her as his own flesh and blood. The racialized paternal function that JanMohamed describes in *The Death-Bound-Subject* is important to consider in this regard because the "name of the father" takes on a special significance in the racial colonial formation of Chicano masculine subjectivity. The mastery of the Spaniard *en conquista* was meant to proffer his right at once to the body of indigenous women and the killing and emasculation of indigenous men. This, of course, is related to the manner in which colonization imposed hetero-normative systems, the likes of which María Lugones (2007) research identifies as "coloniality of the colonial/modern gender system."² The coloniality of gender operates within Acosta's text because the fear of castration and "the name of the father" are reoccurring themes in *The Autobiography*. Along with the psychoanalytic significance that can be derived from these themes—which will be explored—, there is ethico-praxical meaning to be taken from them. Acosta's homophobia and hyper-masculinity need to be read not only through how Brown Buffalo consciously asserts these qualities but also in the manner in which he actualizes these categories through his body. Indeed, observing the manner in which Brown Buffalo's gender and sex is racialized brings us closer to understanding the

² This seminal essay expands our understanding of the coordinates of coloniality. Quijano's (2000) model revealed two axes under which coloniality stand, namely, coerced labor and racial difference. Lúgones expands this model by positing that colonization prompted the co-constitution of categories of difference based on the body. The social meaning and use value of Race gathers a particular significance with the development of capitalist systems, as Quijano has celebratory research demonstrates, but the meaning gender and sex, Lugones argues, are also conferred with meaning and use value through colonial governance. Heteronormativity along with Eurocentrism, through the subjection of indigenous world-views, structures the legal and cultural meaning of how race and gender is defined and practiced today. See María Lugones, "Heterosexualism and the Colonial/Modern Gender System," *Hypatia* 22.1 (Winter 2007): 186-209.

extent that actual-death, social-death and symbolic-death oscillate dialectically in his subjective constitution.

This last point is supported when we observe that actual-death initiates *Autobiography's* plot movement. Brown Buffalo's secretary at the legal aid office, Pauline, has suddenly passed. This event prompts a crisis of signification that makes Brown want to regenerate his life. Indeed, her death rouses Brown Buffalo from a twelve-month long depression, which has taken shape in feelings of overbearing angst followed by escapes to his coping mechanisms, namely, overindulgence on television, psychiatric analysis, and prescription drugs of various kinds. Ironically, the significance behind Pauline's death has less to do with some transcendental insight it brings forth than with end of her utility to Brown Buffalo as nurturing woman. As I have pointed out, Brown Buffalo's emotional connection to women stem from either libidinal desire or self-preservation impulses. Pauline falls under the later category because as Brown Buffalo admits, Pauline "has coddled me, burped me, protected me and preserved me for the serious work—the heavy research, which I just haven't quite around to doing yet" (22). In a sense Pauline has enabled Brown Buffalo's stasis under a prolonged psychosomatic crisis because she facilitated his own retreat from his responsibilities as lawyer and the world in general. Though we know Brown appreciates Pauline's gentle and understanding nature, he cannot register her death beyond what it means to him personally. "Even now while they bury Pauline," Brown regrets, "I think not of her death but the dimness in my mind. I am not a hypocrite. I know that I didn't really appreciate her [...] I'll be no party to tears for the dead, they have enough problems as it is without having to be concerned the pain in my stomach. And the truth of the matter is that death is mystery to me. I have no opinion on the subjects" (30). I think Brown's ambivalence towards death postured here should be taken at face value. This is because the narrator's lack of explicit opinion about death does not preclude his deep concern for it and the power it has over his life. In this instance Brown Buffalo disavows the significance of death as he decides to ignore the significance of "race" and "racism" in his life. It is as though, for Brown Buffalo, racialization and death are categories that can only be registered through emotions rather than analyzed. The numbness to the death that surrounds the death-bound-subject, JanMohamed posits, is a product of racialized abject status itself.³ It is a nihilistic numbness that presupposes resistance against an overwhelming force such as racial violence and death as futile. Pauline's death signals the end of one form of nihilism and the beginning of another kind of nihilism. On the one hand, it is the end of the protective barrier that allows Brown not to derive political meaning from the social-death that he is charged to fight. On the other hand, this circumstance gives rise to ethical nihilism. It induces the narrator "not to care for bloody noses any more." In essence, Brown is numb to the extent that he wants to forget about the social-death that makes the community he serves bleed.

Although Jim Crow's pervasive threat of death did not take shape to the same extent in the Southwest as it did in the rural Southeast, some historians work show a more subtle, yet just as violent formation taking place West of the Mississippi.⁴ The difference

³ JanMohamed (2005), 50-51.

⁴ Some of these include: Americo Paredes' *With His Pistol in His Hand* (1958), Rodolfo Acuña's *Occupied America* (2000), Mario Barrera's *Race and Class in the Southwest* (1979), Tomás Almaguer's *Racial Fault Lines* (1994), and Stephen Pitti's *The Devil in Silicone Valley* (2003).

is that in the Southwest, law and state agents did the death-work of the lynch mob more often than not. The ubiquitous threat of death that black subjectivity encounters in Jim Crow, as it were, takes the place of a ubiquitous presence of racial violence on discursive, cultural, legal, political, and productive sphere (read: symbolic and actual registers). The infamous relation that the Texas Rangers fostered with Mexican *Tejanos* and the discriminatory “race clauses” which kept Mexican, Chinese, Japanese and migrant Blacks from purchasing property for generations exemplify the kind of exclusion racial negation engendered in the Southwest historically. Just the same, the lynch mob had always reserved the right to assert its white dominance when it perceived a threat from its “darker Others.” The Sleepy Lagoon incident which spurred the “Zoot-Suit riots” came to be a source of racial trauma for the generations of Mexicans that lived through it at the height of World War II. In Los Angeles and other cities across the nation white service men took leave from their army and naval bases to beat and humiliate young Mexicans and other men of color sporting “Zoots.”⁵ In his job at the Legal Aid office, Brown Buffalo faces a formidable racial machine that, as his second published book demonstrates, often requires recklessness and fearless disregard of what the status quo deems as acceptable in order to dismantle. The “target area” he has been assigned to work is as poverty stricken today as it was at the time Acosta wrote during the early sixties. Social-death permeates the Fruitvale community of East Oakland and Brown Buffalo was charged with “fighting it away,” so to speak, despite his insecurities. The fact is that at the time that Brown enters the Legal Aid office he does not have the courage or the ego to do the work of speaking for “the people,” much less defending their rights. The social-death they encounter reminds Brown Buffalo of his-own. Their problems, as it were, “devour [him] each day for the past twelve months” (18). Brown Buffalo’s repeated allusions to the age of Jesus Christ are telling in this regard, not only because they contain several significant dimensions in relation to the dialectics of death throughout this text, but also because in this instance it harkens to the notion of being forsaken or crucified for the sins of others.

For twelve months now, since I first began the practice of law, since I became an attorney, a man who speaks for others, a counselor at law who has the power to address the court, that’s right, a *big* man, a mature person who helps others in distress—for approximately 365 days *time* has been nothing but a never-ending experience that meets me in the morning just like it left me off the night before. No longer am I the clear-headed mathematician of my college years. I used to have the answers; and if I didn’t, I could always turn to the back of the book or ask Professor Blackburn at Wednesday morning’s advanced algebra class. (24)

One can say that Brown Buffalo is overburdened by the daunting task of fighting a racial system and the disparities of its economic apparatus. There are no simple solutions to the social problems that racial colonial subjects encounter. The social problems function without logic, despite the rhetorical nature of law, because the system is subtended by racism and class difference, superficial perception rather than any semblance of Reason.

⁵ See Rodolfo Acuña’s comprehensive *Occupied America* (2000) and Luis Alvarez’s *The Power of Zoot: Youth Culture and Resistance During World War II* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), a relatively recent book which documents the violence in the Los Angeles scenario and the wearing of “Zoot Suits” by African American youth in the East Coast of the United States as cultural resistance.

“Twelve months of divorces, TRO’s, wage attachments, bankruptcies, repossessed cars and furniture, evictions and welfare recipients,” Brown Buffalo bemoans, “How many times have those black faces, those brown legs, those Okie accents sat in front of me and stared at my \$567 IBM typewriter” (28)? Similarly to *Bartleby the Scrivener* in Melville’s tale (1853), Brown sees no end to the paperwork meant to appease these problems. The stagnant feeling of social-death becomes an existential concern for Brown because he understands that the root of these issues is complex, and that they go beyond the bureaucracy that contains them. Even worse, as an attorney he is part of the problem as he helps contain, rather than resolve, social problems. Thus Brown Buffalo ponders:

Doesn’t LBJ know that Watts burned in ’65? That Detroit Rioted in ’66? That the Panthers started carrying guns in ’67? Does anyone seriously believe I can battle Governor Reagan and his Welfare Department even with my fancy \$567 red IBM? Do you think our Xerox machine will save Sammy from the draft? Or that our new set of Witkin law books will really help turn the tide in our battle against poverty, powdered milk and overdrawn checks?

Yes, for twelve months I have seen their frightened eyes, that look of desperation that only hungry people carry with them to their lawyers office. (Ibid.)

The shock of Pauline’s death makes Brown Buffalo abandon an affective register for an analytical one, even when his actions seem to be irrational. He decides to leave. Brown Buffalo figures he needs to get away from pretenses. This, however, as with most of Brown Buffalo’s assertions, should not be taken without ambivalence. For it may be that Dr. Serbin is correct in suggesting that Brown Buffalo feels that “a little brown Mexican boy” should not give false hope to people he knows are condemned to suffer their impoverished condition, or it may be that the narrator is taking a Fanonian stance in leaving his post at the Legal Aid clinic, a stance that wants to go beyond the symptoms of the problems, but rather to the problems themselves.⁶ I read his departure as a turning on the self that is slowly killing him because as such, in his capacities as lawyer, he is only part of the pacifying and maintaining of socially-dead subjects.

The reading I offer above is partial because I do not think Brown’s ambivalence towards death and his decision to leave his position as public defender is primarily motivated by a selfless concern for others, but rather by his own fear of failure and an overwhelming sense of responsibility. These are profoundly existential concerns because they imply a need to know what to do with one’s freedom, however relative this freedom may be for racialized folk. The ego, however, is formed vis-à-vis possibilities and options society makes available to it. Most of *The Autobiography* is about how a brown man’s ego is formed and deformed, bound and unbound through actual and discursive violence in America, and hence, how this violence shapes his options, aspirations, and views of himself and those like him. The salient circumstance in this dynamic is the

⁶ Fanon warn us not to waste time trying to reform decaying society, the task should be rather to replace what is dying from the inside out. Thus he comments, “The function of a social structure is to set up institutions to serve man’s needs. A society that drives its members to desperate solutions is a non-viable society to be replaced”(53). See Frantz Fanon, “Letter to the Resident Minister,” *Towards the African Revolution: Political Essays* (New York: Grove Press, 1967).

protective posture the ego takes to transcend racial negation. Disavowal and flight are means of surviving, or rather coping with social-death. Unfortunately, the ultimate consequences of coping in this manner result in even more repression. The fragmented temporal structure that Acosta's texts present does not make it easy to discern the binding and unbinding of Acosta's subjectivity by successive traumas subtended by colonial racial negation. However, the linear chronological order of events reveals that the source of Brown Buffalo's twelve-month retreat into himself (his depressed mode) was brought upon by two significant failures his ego experiences a year prior, namely, not passing the Bar Exam on his first attempt and getting dumped by June Macadoo for being Mexican. The consistent cycle of binding and unbinding in Brown Buffalo's narrative is important because the process is traumatic and conspicuously violent, but also because this dynamic mirrors the ebb and flow of life and death drives structured by colonized experience. Here I am alluding to the ideas of Sigmund Freud and Herbert Marcuse. Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1961) reveals the complementary functions of life and death on biological matter. Just as there is a tendency towards reproducing and satiating the ego's life, there also a tendency to degenerate and die to keep the dynamic process balanced. Marcuse applies this notion to the social in his *Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud* (1966). Repression is central to this process for it gives way to both life and death. Accordingly, speaking of universal "Man," Marcuse posits:

Culture constrains not only his societal but also his biological existence, not only parts of the human being but his instinctual structure itself. However, such constraint is the very precondition of progress. Left free to pursue their natural objectives, the basic instincts of man would be incompatible with all lasting association and preservation: they could destroy even where they unite. The uncontrolled Eros is just as fatal as his deadly counterpart, the death instinct. Their destructive force derives from the fact that they strive for gratification which culture cannot grant: gratification as such and as an end in itself, at any moment. The instincts must therefore be deflected from their goal, inhibited in their aim. Civilization begins when the primary objective—namely, integral satisfaction of needs—is effectively renounced. (11)

At this juncture, it is appropriate to amplify the analysis on Brown's perverse desire for white women by examining the manner in which these relationships structure the dialectical relations between social-death and symbolic-death in Brown Buffalo's lived-experience. The June MacAdoo case implicates two attempts at recognition, which collapse to induce Brown Buffalo's sinking into symbolic-death. Indeed, to be rejected professionally and amorously has a profound affective impact on Brown Buffalo. Although rejection is nothing new to him, the particular circumstances of these rejections have much to bear on his condition as socially-dead being. According to Orlando Patterson (1982), social-death is articulated through the impossibility of a subject to enter in the polis, the slave is "bare-life" to the extent that she/he is prohibited to participate in the mutual constitution of the social environment she/he inhabits. The spheres of law, political economy, and knowledge are primary conductors of social life in a given nation. To be barred from these spheres, or to be limited to the margins of these spheres not only spells out the particular manner in which social-death was a norm for racialized subjects in the U.S. during the time Acosta wrote, but also the extent to which racialized

communities also constitute internal colonies of *Lumpenproletariat* and estranged labor.⁷ Education, in this kind of reality is presumed to be a humanizing enterprise, one that holds the promise of recognition and anonymity in the mainstream. It is clear that for Brown Buffalo the Bar Exam signifies something more basic than professional security. In fact, he intimates that his venture into law school was guided more by an egotistical desire to prove to those around him that he is was capable of accomplishing something intellectually rigorous.⁸ This desire becomes entangled with Brown Buffalo's amorous relationship with June because she represents the white gaze that can affirm his intellectual and masculine worth. In this sense the Bar Exam for the narrator of *Autobiography* represents much more than a test that will license him to practice law, but a litmus test of his worth in the eyes of mainstream-America, i.e., Anglo-America. Indeed, the Bar Exam and June's gaze play similar functions in Brown Buffalo's struggle for recognition, for he is depending on them for his social survival and humanization. To be rejected by June and to fail the exam are significant factors in Brown Buffalo's racial education because they are symbols of values denoting sociopolitical non-equivalence.

In Acosta's work we encounter the problematic of equivalences coded in what JanMohamed calls the "racial oedipal injunction."⁹ Although JanMohamed describes the injunction in specific relation to the African American racialization process, I posit that the injunction is structured historically through the "coloniality of gender," the colonial process through which racial hierarchies and hetero-normative sexual practices and categorization were established in the America's as a whole. Emma Pérez (1999) notes that although the Oedipal family *is* a fiction imposed upon colonized bodies by colonial discourse, it has real outcomes. Although feminist theorists have rejected the oedipal family as a model to analyze Chicano/as, Pérez also argues that "fantasies of origin are historically structured, but more importantly [...] fantasies of origin "structur[e] the subject's history," and just as important Pérez adds, the myth of the Oedipal family "structure the subjects of history" (102). She affirms that a colonial Oedipus exists in Chicano/a cultural formations despite Deleuz's and Guattari's arguments against the idea as a whole. Perez posits:

[...] I find Oedipus in the Americas in the culture of Chicana/os. I find a mestizo Oedipus after the colonization of the Americas by Spain. By devising a model that I called the Oedipal Conquest Triangle (or Complex) with Hernan Cortés, Malintzin Tenepal (La Malinche), and Octavio Paz as imaginary son of the white colonizer father Cortés and Indian mother Malinche, I [argue] that Oedipus has invaded the Chicano/a

⁷ For a discussion about Chicano's as colonial labor see Mario Barrera, *Race and Class in the South West* (Notre Dame, London: University of Notre Dame, 1979). Following the "internal colony" paradigm, Barrera's work advances the argument of the glass ceiling in the economic sphere of social development of Chicanos in the U.S. Similar to their black counterparts, Barrera argues, Mexican-Americans are an exploited class whose work is appropriated and under-compensated due to its subordinated racial status. For a thorough discussion of Orlando Patterson's conceptualization of "social-death" see Part 1, Section 2, "Authority, Alienation, and Social Death," *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1982).

⁸ This point is expressed by Ilan Stavans in *Bandido: Death and Resurrection of Oscar Acosta* (2003) and the Preamble of Moore's *Love and Riot* (2003), which was written by Diego Vigil, a key associate of Acosta during his time as activist lawyer for the Chicano Movement in Los Angeles.

⁹ See JanMohamed (2005), 233.

consciousness through these imaginary historical metaphors, through this language of conquest. Hence, a colonial imaginary was initiated through the Oedipal Conquest Complex, one that we are forced to contend with and resist. In his writings, Paz disavows his Indian mother, referring to her as “la chingada.” The Oedipal arrangement exposes how the metaphoric (yet for some historically real) mother of Chicano/as is denigrated precisely because Paz and others like him cannot come to terms with the Indian woman who, in their eyes, betrayed the race by embracing the white male colonizer father. Malinche becomes the dreaded phallic mother who will devour him, castrate him, usurp him of his own phallus/power. He must therefore ally with the white colonizer father, but to do so is to ally in ambivalence. This dynamic, I argue, will repeat itself and will be the driving force behind a form of Patriarchal Chicano nationalism that repudiates feminism. Malinche, feared as phallic mother, will be despised over and over again. (106-07)

Perez underscores the “racialized maternal function” of Malinche. That is, the lack of equivalent value she is bestowed vis-à-vis the Oedipal family. What JanMohamed brings to bear to Perez’s analysis and *The Autobiography of a Brown Buffalo* is that the “racial oedipal injunction” structures colonized men’s desire under two other instrumentalities, namely, the “racialized paternal function” and “threat of castration.” The injunction structures sexual taboos not only along the lines of incest, but also dangers of crossing racial borders.

Although Brown’s mother demonstrates resonances with a phallic mother, which helps us analyze his attitudes, thought, and actions towards his fellow Chicanas as an adult once he enters the fray of the Chicano Movement, it is the failure of the paternal function and angst toward castration that also factor significantly in Brown’s struggle for recognition and search for self-identity as child and adolescent. Brown’s racial education requires that he experience the enforcement of racial codes via erotic registers at a young age. This kind of socialization manifests itself through both discursive and physical violence. For instance, Brown points out that his brown body signifies blackness in the absence of absolute black bodies. “Vernon, like all my Okie buddies,” Brown recalls, “called me Jigaboo. I didn’t actually look like Little Black Sambo, but like I’ve said, in Riverbank there were only three races of people, and the closest anyone came to being black was during summer when brown buffalos ran practically naked in the sweltering heat of the San Joaquin Valley” (86). It is characteristic of the young Buffalo of *The Autobiography* to downplay the symbolic violence of such circumstances, for in the same section he reasons that “[t]he name was not meant as an insult. It was simply a means of classification. Everyone in the valley considered skin color to be of ultimate importance. The tone of one’s pigmentation is the fastest and surest way of determining exactly who one is.” The discursive register becomes a negating force with fatal significance because it establishes the meaning and value of Brown’s body. To be called Jigaboo implies more than categorical description. Fanon makes this clear in chapter five of *Black Skins, White Masks* as he phenomenologically deconstructs the black embodiment. The discursive signifier “nigger” implies a present, a past, and a future of a racialized subject trapped in a corporeal schema, doomed to the whims of racial colonial negation. Brown’s mother reinforces the discursive violence that negates Brown Buffalo’s worth

by berating his father and by extension Brown's own indigenous phenotype. She seems to expect the worse of Brown Buffalo because he shares his father's *indio* presence. *El indio* comes to represent a zone of negativity for Brown because at home it connotes drunkenness, laziness, undesirability, uncivilized behavior, and bestiality. It is important that we recognize the extent to which Brown Buffalo internalizes these notions at a young age because they will be congealed into unconscious structures that will make him militate against himself to the extent that he will fantasize his own death as a boy and will try to kill himself at least once when he reaches maturity. The undesirability of *indios* is most significant here because it directly relates to the formation of Brown Buffalo's erotic drives and his fears and experiences with social and actual castration.

Brown Buffalo's first violent racial trauma demonstrates the manner in which the path towards racial colonial 'manhood' is articulated through the ritual of racial castration. Brown is eleven years old, walking a Mexican girl named Senaida home after a Halloween birthday party of a mutual friend when white boys attack them. Evident in what he chooses to disguise himself as, we can discern the extent to which the young Brown Buffalo has internalized racial hierarchies.¹⁰ Brown had attended the party in black face, as a "nigger" according to his own description in the text. It was "[a] regular ambush," Acosta writes, "with whoops and shrieks of blood and rape. Senaida froze. I tried to drag her along but she couldn't move until she finished pissing her pants" (87). The assailants are boys from the 'Oakie' part of town who are five years older than Brown. As the moment unfolds it becomes clear that the attack has racial and sexual motivations. "Hey Junior, look what we have here," one of the attackers lets out as the other one holds Senaida by the neck with one hand and her breast with the other. As Brown is kicked on his testicles the attacker continues, "Lookee here... I got me a fucking nigger" (88). It is clear that the boys have already been initiated into understanding their dominant social position as white males who can affirm themselves by subjecting their counterpart of color through physical violation. For in effect, they intrude upon Senaida's body by fondling her breasts and perpetrate the equivalent of this violation by spitting on Brown's penis.

Both of them beat the shit out of me. They pulled my pants off and ripped my V-8s. I fought back, but they were too much for me. All the while they laughed and thoroughly enjoyed themselves. Ralph shined the flash light on my crotch and said, "Whoeee! Look at that. That nigger ain't even a man."

"Ain't that a fact," Junior Ellis said. "This pussy Jigaboo ain't even got hair on his prick."

With Ralph standing on each of my outstretched hands and me flat on my back, both of them spit on my hairless crotch before they ran screaming into the night with the rest of the savages. (88)

The familiarity with which the kids handle the aftermath of this moment reveals the extent to which such violation cuts through the very meaning of Anglo-American

¹⁰ Acosta often implies the idea that in the absence of black people in a white dominated society, the brown body becomes the takes the place of the black body. Thusly his narrator reasons, "It is no wonder then that Vernon called me Jigaboo? Maybe if the black people, righteous Negroes, had lived in Riverbank they would have been niggers. But as things turned out, I grew a fat, dark Mexican—a Brown Buffalo—and my enemies called me a nigger until that I beat up Junior Ellis" (87).

domination and the common place this kind of subjection takes in rural Texas in the late nineteen-forties. When the authorities are contacted to report the incident, Brown and Senaida decline to identify their assailants saying it was too dark to tell who attacked them. “You mean it might have been anybody?” the Texas Ranger asks rhetorically, “We dutifully nodded our little heads.” The symbolic castration this moment represents introduces Brown Buffalo into a basic reality of racialized masculinity, namely, the presence of a brown phallus disappears with the presence of the white phallus. Ralph and Junior symbolically cut off Brown Buffalo’s penis by pointing out its lack of maturity, as if an eleven year-old boy should have a full-grown member. The white gaze, even at a young age has the power to name what does and does not exist. It has the power to emasculate him with a look. It is clear that Brown Buffalo feels like an intimate secret is discovered that could expose him as incomplete. The angst of this incomplete feeling would continue for decades not because the traumatic memory torments his unconscious, but because he re-lives this moment on different level more than once in reality. The moment also constitutes a brush with both symbolic and actual death. Actual-death is imminent as he is beat, but social-death is that thing looming as he walks away from the incident hoping that no one finds out he has a penis that according to his white attackers looks like a vagina.

Lacanian theory describes the psychoanalytic function of the fear of castration as regulatory one, one that incorporates the individual as a “included exclusion” in the Oedipal family. However, as Abdul JanMohamed (2005) argues, racist hegemonic society warrants that we examine the function and meaning of Lacanian castration with nuance. JanMohamed notes that we cannot presuppose the equivalence of signs that the principle of substantive equivalences presupposes ontologically when we observe racist social reality. Put simply, if the transition from urinary identity to an identity that is negotiated through symbolic registers occurs, we must take into account the unequivalent value of symbols in racist society. As JanMohamed observes, “racialized castration [...] is not really concerned with managing the principle of substantive equivalences on the register of *signification* or the *Symbolic* as such, but, rather on the register of the *sociopolitical* and *control*” (249). This dynamic reproduces racial barriers because coloniality negates the equal value of meaning and value between citizens. This is evident in the manner in which the Ranger brushes off Senaida’s and Brown Buffalo’s attack. However, the dynamic already had bearing in Brown’s life via his mother’s bemoaning of marrying *un indio* and her warning her daughters against following suit. This sheds additional light into Brown’s struggle for recognition because the erotic cathexis that white women represent is a sign of Brown’s desire to have equal worth to white men.

The tensions created by the berating comments against *indios* made by his mother are compounded by Brown’s father’s fanatic desire to assimilate. The tension culminates in a moment where the “paternal function” reluctantly colludes with white hegemonic authority to enact another instance of social castration, which will provoke another episode of symbolic death in the text. We are aware that Brown retains ambivalent feelings about his father’s need to go to war to gain his citizenship in the U.S. He feels both abandoned and burdened because of his father’s intent patriotism. As a boy, Brown struggles to understand his father’s sacrifice as a sailor, but is still impressed by his

father's authority to the extent that he tries to prove his worthiness to his father by humoring his father's law, which is co-opted from *The Seabee's Manual*.

Usually, my old man would wait until we got in bed before he gave us our nightly lectures. Then he'd pull out a blue-covered book they gave him in the Navy called the *The Seabee's Manual*. It was the only book I ever saw him read. He used to say, "If you boys memorize this book, you'll be able to do anything you want. It showed you how to do things like tie fantastic knots, fix boilers on steamships and survive without food and water when lost at sea. Admittedly, it helped me when I took my entrance exam into Boy Scout Troop 42, but it didn't offer any advice on how to get rid of ulcers and or the ants in my stomach. (73-74)

The quote above underscores the extent to which his father's loyalty to the navy life penetrates the family structure. The circumstance that arises due to this kind of fanatic patriotism is that Brown's father runs his home like a naval barge, with extreme frugality and discipline. As a child, Brown feels compelled to follow in his father's footsteps; therefore he becomes part of the American Boy Scouts. However, Brown shows ambivalence towards his father's patriotism and war sacrifices because he senses a problem of substantive equivalences. Acosta writes,

And so to prove my worth I'm always the first one to jump up, stand on the bed and place my hand respectfully over my hear – I'm only a civilian—to show my allegiance to my father's madness for a country that has given him a barge and a badge at Okinawa for an honorable discharge. And made him a citizen of the Unites States of America to boot. (72)

We must underscore that Brown shows allegiance to his "father's madness," not his father's country. This is significant because the U.S. is not his father's country of origin, but the nation that has bestowed him citizenship in exchange for military duty, or rather, in exchange for his life in combat. Brown Buffalo's father abandons them to go to war and Brown would hold animosity towards U.S. institutions because of the burdens his mother and siblings endure during this period. He would hold FDR personally responsible for this. Brown Buffalo is aware of the un-equal rate of exchange his father's death would garner while in combat by emphasizing the things given to his father, a barge and a badge, in exchange for risking his life. Most significant, however, is that Brown Buffalo discerns that his father has been made into something the he once was not by virtue of his *Indio* looks: American. This is his father's madness, and unfortunately Brown would be a product of it. That is why he would point to the limits of *The Seabee's Manual*. That is to say that for all the praise Brown's father gives it as a key to do anything, Brown senses that *The Seabee's Manual* is also a source of cultural imposition that eventually leads him to disavow the repression of racialized experience which will eventually lead him to suffer psychosomatically.

The "racialization of the oedipal injunction" further complicates the paternal function in Brown Buffalo's life. As JanMohamed and many feminists of color have pointed out, the consolidation of racial hegemony is accomplished through the sexualization of race.¹¹ The previous chapter began to unearth the manner in which this dynamic plays out through Brown Buffalo's early "object choices." To the extent that these apparent choices represent Brown Buffalo's desire to humanize himself, to get a

¹¹ See JanMohamed (2005), 241.

sense of self-worth and recognition through erotic cathexis via white girls, the manner in which these “object choices” reject him also spells out how Brown Buffalo’s has been socialized through a “racialized oedipal injunction.” It is clear that Brown’s “object-choices” cannot make him their own because they cannot substitute their white ideal, with a brown one. And when it does happen, racist Anglo society is there not to allow it. Jane and June are too aware of Brown Buffalo’s “Mexicanness” to want to make him a permanent “object-choice,” while Alice cannot gather the courage to defy her own family and community of Anglo Baptists to accept Brown Buffalo’s promises of love. His relationship with Alice is important to discuss because it culminates with an episode of social castration which will cause Brown Buffalo to rethink and question who he is and what he should do as he moves towards adulthood.

The paternal function is implicated in this instance because his father’s authority was used against Brown to reinforce racial borders. In fact, the ‘name of the father,’ that is, his family name, had already struck the death knoll of Alice and Brown’s relationship since her mother had found out that Brown was Catholic. “Catholic” was the euphemism Alice’s mother used to point to the fact that Brown had a Spanish family name, or rather that he is Mexican, a racial Other. “It was my family name,” Acosta writes, “When she told her mother the name of her new boyfriend, the old bag said no dice. Never. Forget it. And she was never to speak about it again” (116). The adolescents’ love story begins to take the shape of ‘fatal love’ when Brown Buffalo, being young and naïve, actually considers changing his last name. His mother is horrified at the idea when he put it before her for consideration. She reacts by warning him about the immorality of such a thought. “You’ll go to hell if you change your family name,” she asserts before invoking ‘the law of the father,’ “And your dad will probably hang you” (117). Brown and Alice continue to see each other secretly until her parents act through hegemonic authority to put a stop to it. On an occasion that is supposed to be a victorious night because it the evening in which Brown Buffalo helped Alice win the Oracle Queen pageant they have decided to finally confront her parents with their relationship. Their plans are preempted when Brown takes Alice home after the dance when they are surprised to be met by Sheriff Lauren and Brown’s parents outside of Alice’s house. “Judgement day was upon me,” Brown recalls, “Be sure your sins will find you out, the nuns were fond of telling us at catechism. And they did that night. They caught us cold. Holding hands in the moonlight while cows slept” (118). As the Sheriff approaches, Brown notices he has brought Brown Buffalo’s parents with him. It is not clear whether they were coerced to come or if they joined the sheriff voluntarily, but it is clear that Brown’s father is ambivalent about being there to enact a racist restraining order against his own son. A mixture of fear and pride is in the air, and Brown Buffalo “detected a horsetrader smirk under the surface of the humble Indian from the mountains of Durango” (119). All along, Brown Buffalo’s emotions are pressing against him and he demands to know why the sheriff has brought his parents into the situation. Sheriff Lauren expresses his distaste for having to “nose into *private* matters,” yet he informs Brown that a formal complaint has been filed and tells him that his relationship with Alice is not a private matter anymore. “[I]f I catch you two together again,” Sheriff Lauren warns, “I’ll just have to take you both into juvenile... it’s already been done... now, I know you for... since you was just a tyke... but under law, if I catch you, I’ll take you in... Savvy.” Brown lashes

out with a Spanish explicative phrase, “*Chinga tu madre, cabron!*”¹² The description of the moment belies the emotions under the surface and the deep psycho-political implications of the moment.

The fact that Brown Buffalo’s parents are involved in this moment of racial negation shows how the “Oedipal family” in a racist hegemonic sociopolitical circumstance is bound to the colonial order of things. The greater authority of the Anglo-American law, the law that supersedes Brown’s own father’s law, in this case the so-called law Sheriff Lauren is enforcing, is an imposition that regulates and maintains racial borders. Like the Lacanian formulation of the Oedipal father, Anglo-American law is a stricture of libidinal functions. Indeed, Sheriff Lauren’s warning is not an injunction based upon statute, they are both minors, yet a crime is implied to the extent that they are both threatened with prison. Although, the threat is directed towards both Alice and Brown, it is clear that Brown is the only one who would be indicted in this case because the color of skin pronounces him guilty of over stepping public moral standards. The sheriff’s ultimatum invokes the threat of social-death not only because prison would effectively take Brown away from social life, but also because in such a violent space it would get him closer to violence and the possibility of a premature actual-death. Most importantly however, this episode constitutes an episode of racial castration that also has fatal implications because it defines racial borders through discursive violence. This kind of context, JanMohamed argues, creates the circumstance in which “a ‘boy’ can become a ‘man’ only by understanding and ‘accepting’ the prevailing structure of sexualized racial difference, which is to say, by accepting his social castration, he will have to face the possibility of literal castration” (249). JanMohamed also continues by pointing out that although social castration is purely a symbolic phenomenon, it is a trope that masks other forms of power relations because “it is subtended by a complex configuration wherein death is used to maim and contain desire.” The end is to discourage the desire for racial equivalence, which is contained alternately through literal and symbolic death and violence. In the context of the episode I describe above, it is clear that the moment will profoundly affect Brown Buffalo’s psyche. Acosta describes the drive home as quiet with the exception of his parent’s comments that Alice is a pretty girl and a fit of uncontrollable laughter with which he is suddenly struck. At first glance, this reaction could be read as a sense of defiant triumph due to the forceful retort he let out at the sheriff after he threatened him with jail. However, I think there is a veiled nervous fear in Brown Buffalo’s reaction. That is, Brown’s laughter is not induced by the pleasure of detached hate he expresses towards the sheriff, but rather, as the deathly reality sinks in he reacts like any *Macho* would (by laughing it off), but as we come to realize, the laughter represents a repressed rage that signals the beginning of the psychosomatic symptom that will afflict Brown Buffalo until he comes to terms with the manner in which the law subjugated his brown body. “I was caught up in uncontrollable laughter,” Acosta writes, but the negation prompts a deeper tension within him, for he continues by saying, “The convulsions down under began that night. The wretched vomit, the gas laden belly formed within my pit when the chief of police asked me if I understood” (120). Neither love or God nor psychoanalysis would help him with this problem for the next fifteen years.

¹² A rough English translation of Brown’s forceful retort: “Go fuck your mother, jerk.”

It is not until Brown Buffalo becomes conscious and begins to analyze the racial bias he encounters in youth, until he enters revolutionary political activity with Chicana/os through the “revolt of the cockroach people” that the ulcers and pains disappear. The time between the episode described above and Brown Buffalo’s coming into consciousness as a politically active adult continues to be a chase for the unattainable, namely, to gain a sense of social recognition, or at minimum Brown desires to get away from the things and places that only remind him of his failures at love and recognition he came to know in Texas and California. Brown’s journey takes him north to Colorado and as far East as St. Luis, Missouri, yet he never found what he was looking for in the almost two years of trekking the United States, until his proverbial return to the mother land, the border region of El Paso, Texas.

Acosta articulates a situation in which Brown Buffalo’s impulse towards death is strong as he continues to live and work in Vail, Colorado. He drinks and weeps nightly, until he tires himself of it and decides, as Acosta puts it, “to got to El Paso, the place of my birth, to see if I could find the object of my quest. I still wanted to find out just who in the hell I was” (184). At this point it is as if the search itself animates his life, every new place brings with it a possibility, not only of finding answer that will give meaning to his life, but also of finding life’s ultimate purpose. Brown is looking for coherence and a calling for himself. That is why he has been fixated on doing things that not only give him purpose, but also knowledge of the world on some deeper level. This is exemplified through the fact that his interests in art through music and writing have been constant throughout his life, but he also has demonstrated high proficiency in science and mathematic during his years in Junior College. Prior to this, his work in the Baptist Church is fascinating because he gives himself completely to it until he finds the contradictions between doctrine and social life too hypocritical to continue to serve as a Shepard to his brothers in faith. Given that the search yields no answers, Acosta’s narrative describes how the dying feeling Brown Buffalo carries inside becomes part of the settings in which he finds himself. Colorado during winter makes for a cold lonely place especially when a desire to encounter reality and life returns. “I was fed up with the pipes and the tough guys who worked the construction gigs,” Brown intimates, “I was sick of the booze and the drugs were completely useless by now. I roamed the mountains, soaking up the snow and cried at the silent, white death” (184). In these lines it becomes apparent that “work” yields no satisfaction within the Hegelian model of dialectical becoming if the slave is muted here by the overwhelming sensation of racial alienation. Brown Buffalo thusly weeps and mourns his own social-death because he knows that affirming his value by recognizing himself in his work does nothing for the distance that “brown racialization” creates between himself and the hegemonic white world.

Reading the concluding chapter of *The Autobiography* closely it becomes clear, in fact, that Brown Buffalo does not find his true identity neither in El Paso, Texas nor across the border in Juarez, Mexico, but rather his return to this region allows him to find clarity about the constituting dimensions of Chicano subjectivity in general. “I am clear,” Brown declares to his brother on a phone call for help, “I’ve checked it all out and have failed to find the answer to the search. One son of a bitch tells me I’m not a Mexican and the other says I am not an American. I got no roots no where” (196). To come to terms with the question of identity, Brown has to let go of unified sense of self first, and

second, he has to come to terms with the fact that he is a product of a kind of colonial de-territorialization as a son of immigrant parents displaced by strangling economies of the U.S./Mexico border. This is why he exists as a fragmented entity. This clarity, however, is arrived at through the experience of negation he encounters on the Mexico/U.S. border, which prompts a definitive symbolic death and a radical shift in Brown Buffalo's consciousness.

Brown Buffalo's arrival to the U.S. Mexico border is misleading because he is optimistic about what he will encounter and hopefully find there. However, the neighborhood of his youth does not provide much comfort to him as he arrives to El Paso. The smells and sounds connect him back to what has been familiar yet it becomes evident that the cycles of capitalist development have profoundly changed his childhood stomping grounds. "Every other store leading up to the border on San Francisco Street was used as a used clothing store," Brown complains about the changes he sees (184). He continues with disbelief, "I was sober, my head was clear when I saw the old neighborhood theater *El Calsetin*, now transformed into a store for dirty, torn shirts and pants, Mexican blouses with broken buttons, and chewed up cowboy hats, all for forty cents a pound. Was nothing sacred? Is this what it all comes down to" (185)? Sad and happy memories flash as he moves through the *barrio*; memories of running to see a movie with his brother at *El Calsetin*, his first "intimate experience" with a girl in a common lavatory, and his childhood tantrums at the house where he and his family once lived. If his journey is about recovering something lost, something that was torn away from him in childhood, returning to that reality foreshadows the emptiness a dead past yields. This however, does not register analytically in the first instance, but rather affectively, for Buffalo ends up weeping once more until he got "tired of crying" before finally crossing into Ciudad Juarez, Mexico.

The sequence of events in this chapter take on discursive significance, particularly because Brown Buffalo moves from the U.S. side of the border to the Mexican side. Once more the sites and sounds of what he encounters on the streets bring about memories. However, there is a dissonance there because the multitude around him speaks Spanish, which makes him realize the extent to which he has lost a language he knew in his younger days. "And they all are speaking in that language of my youth; that language which I had stopped speaking at the age of seven when the captain insisted we wouldn't learn English unless we stopped speaking Spanish..." (186). The melancholia that Moreno has written about in relation to Oscar Acosta's writing comes into relief in this scene in the manner in which Brown Buffalo idealizes the character of the his long lost tongue.¹³ Spanish, Brown thinks to himself, is:

language of soft woven vowels and resilient consonants, always with the fast rolling r's to threaten or cajole; a language for moonlit nights under tropical storms, for starry nights in brown deserts and for making declarations of war on top of snow-capped mountains; a language perfect in every detail for people who are serious about life and preoccupied with death only as it refers to that last day one's sojourn on this particular spot. (Ibid)

¹³ See Rebecca Moreno, "Remembering to Grieve: Chicana/o Identity and Strategic Melancholia in the Novels of Américo Paredes and Oscar Z. Acosta" (Masters Thesis, UC, Berkeley, 2004).

It is interesting that Acosta would link “life and death” to discursive practice in such a romantic description. Read abstractly, the description registers language as a tool for making love or making war, or if we were to take the abstraction to a more fundamental level, making life and making death. The description also discloses an attitude towards death that colonial subjects—although Acosta refers to Mexicans in particular—take when violent imposition and over-determination from without is the order of the day. Life must be taken seriously because the wretchedness of coloniality makes colonial racial subjects acquire stoic semblance towards it, a semblance that paradoxically trivializes death because of its relentless and ubiquitous character wherever racial and colonial violence is prevalent.

The resonance in sound he encounters as he enters Juarez allows Brown Buffalo to analytically register the manner in which language has been used to curtail his potential and suppress part his own cultural understanding. Gloria Anzaldúa calls this dynamic “Linguistic Terrorism”¹⁴ for on the one hand, it spells out a violent dynamic that makes Chicano/as “who grew up speaking Chicano Spanish have internalized a belief that we speak poor Spanish” and on another hand, it describes the violent imposition of language at the hands of Anglo-American hegemony (“*Borderlands*” 80). The power of discursive violence becomes clear as Brown Buffalo realizes the reason why hearing Spanish spoken in public is so dissonant to him. He recalls playing keep-away during grammar school, particularly a day when he scores and the points are not counted because Spanish was used to verbalize that he was open for the through. “You guys are cheating,” Wayne Ellis shouts, “You can’t use secret messages” (186). The Mexican boys challenge this, “What do you mean?,” Brown demands to know. The school principle, which represents Anglo authority, watching the boys all along, affirms that they are breaking rules by speaking Spanish in school premises. “What?,” Brown asks incredulously, “... you say I can’t talk in Spanish *here*” (187)? The message he gets from the principle is clear, “This is an *American* school,” and if they wanted to continue attending it, they must abide by the language Americans speak. Here again, we observe the manner in which Brown’s being is torn in two by competing desires, for although he felt it wrong that he was being forbidden to speak his native tongue to the extent that he wanted to fight the “tall man,” his love for Jane Addisson made him take the abuse rather than risk being thrown out of school.

The climax of *The Autobiography* positions discursive negation and racial perception at center to examine the question of identity as if Acosta wanted us to

¹⁴ In chapter 5 of *Borderlands/ La Frontera*, “How to tame wild tongues,” Anzaldúa examines how language is both used as source of symbolic violence and resistance. “Linguistic Terrorism” specifically articulates how a negative internalization occurs when Chicanos are perceived as speakers of poor Spanish by other Spanish native speakers. For Chicano/as this represents on side of a two-headed coin, so to speak, for the same dynamic plays out when English is spoken through a body that is not supposed to know how to speak it. Even more so, linguistic terrorism occurs when English as second language is imposed in a way meant to erase past cultural knowledge and experience. This negative internalization is like an existential wound that fetters potential, for whenever Spanish or broken English is spoken or heard, dominant culture uses these differences against Chinicano/as. “*Desleguadas*,” Anzaldúa writes, “*Somos los del español deficiente*. We are your linguistic nightmare, your linguistic aberration, your linguistic *mestizaje*, the subject of your *burla*. Because we speak with tongues of fire we are culturally crucified. Racially, culturally and linguistically *somos huerfanos*—we speak an orphan tongue”(80). See Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/ La Frontera: The New Mestiza* 2nd Edition (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1999).

underscore that both 'language' and the others 'look' structure the sense of Self. Anzaldúa makes a similar point when she expresses that language and identity are relational if not derivative, writing in *Borderlands*:

So, if you want to hurt me, talk badly about my language. Ethnic identity is twin skin to linguistic identity—I am my language. Until I can take the pride in my language, I cannot take pride in myself. Until I accept as legitimate Chicano Texas Spanish, Tex-Mex and all other languages I speak, I cannot accept the legitimacy of myself. Until I am free to write bilingually and switch codes without having always to translate, while I still have to speak English or Spanish when I rather speak Spanglish, and as long as I have to accommodate the English speakers rather than having them accommodate me, my tongue will be illegitimate. (81)

The "twin skin" aspect Anzaldúa articulates here is important because it becomes clear that skin and language are the exterior markers of identity that produce social dissonance in the U.S., yet Brown does not become aware of the manner in which this has shaped his relationship to both himself and Spanish as a cultural signifier until he encounters his own forgetfulness in Juarez. Paradoxically, it is the resonance of the linguistic expression of Juarez that allows Brown Buffalo to understand the internal dissonance he has both felt and has not been able to understand. Just as much as the resonance that Brown Buffalo *hears* bring him clarity, the resonance he *'sees'* in people, mestizo and Indians alike, some short and tall, young and old, women and men, "they all walked the streets of colored lights, these vendors of tortas, tacos, tamales, hot dogs on a stick and whatever kind of food one wanted for a buck or a penny," all of which, *at a glance*, represent himself in multitude because they sound and look like Mexicans (188). To inhabit this environment disorients Brown Buffalo to the point of evisceration when he is compelled to have verbal interaction with the people he encounters. This is because in the encounter he is forced to confront a fragmented self, the Duboisian "two-ness" that articulates the distance he senses between himself and the Mexicans around him. Thus he becomes foreign and alien in a place that paradoxically also makes him feel the possibility of finding love.

Brown's shift in consciousness and existential understanding is brought on by two moments of traumatic significance in particular. The first of these disorients Brown Buffalo's sense of racial perception. Not long after arriving in Juarez, Brown finds himself in the red light district, "twisted with the delights of the most beautiful women [he'd] ever seen in my life" (188). He is in awe of the beauty that surrounds him. With erotic desire stirring, Brown intimates that "Whatever Alice Joy or Jane Addison meant to me as a kid, now they were only grade school memories of a time gone by. I was thirty-three when I hit the streets of Juarez and I had never found a *woman* to love in all my travels" (Ibid.). As he settles into a topless bar, a redheaded hostess asks him to buy her a drink. He is indignant because he thinks it pathetic that they get "American girls" that speak better Spanish than he does to work the bar. When he responds to her in English and it is evident that she does not understand, it becomes clear to him that Mexicans are not all brown in skin tone. He takes her sassy response, "*Y este, no me digas que no es Mexicano?*," as a ridiculing gesture, as if he were purposefully hiding his true identity. The dissonance between 'racial seeing' and language identification,

again, force brown into a crisis of signification. “But I always imagined the Mexican as a dark skinned person, a brown buffalo,” Acosta writes and continues,

So when she threw that same accusation in my face, questioning my blood, wondering from what Goddam tribe I must have wandered, I wanted to give her the Samoan bit again as I has done all those years of my search for a reconciliation with my ancestry. But it would not come. I could not joke about it as I had with the *americanos*. The woman had a legitimate question. For God’s sake, she knew I was *mexicano* and yet I could’nt offer her a drink in our language! So instead I took the bull by the horns and did the best I could with grunts and groans and hands flying in the air. (190)

Why was her question serious enough to try to answer, while when *americanos* wonder about Brown’s identity, the question becomes a joke for him? It may be that when the question arises in the U.S., it is asked first because of the racial perception that comes through phenotype and skin color. A racist answer is presupposed in the question, “What are you?” The question seeks to objectify rather than clarify. It is a joke to Brown Buffalo because it is a racial question whose end is objectification rather than identifying a subject. The answer is presupposed by the racial seeing that always already identified the obvious, namely, the Other. His attitude towards the question is important because it has been produced by repetition and the fact that it usually comes from Anglo’s who ask for the sake of recognizing something they don’t want to recognize. On the other hand, the redhead hostess had already recognized Brown’s *indio* phenotype, it was only when Brown did not understand her that she reluctantly questioned his nationality. Recalling Anzaldúa’s analysis that Mexican identity takes on a racial significance rather than a national one in the U.S., it becomes clear that both the hostess and Brown Buffalo are operating under two distinct systems of signification.¹⁵

I posit that this crisis of signification in particular does not evolve into an episode of symbolic death because the women Brown Buffalo meets at the night club allow him to “penetrate” a culture that both his own decisions have distanced him from and Anglo cultural hegemony have forbidden. It is with good reason that many feminists who read *The Autobiography* work draw critical assessments of Acosta’s narrative.¹⁶ This is particularly because woman in the narrative are represented heteronormatively, as the fertile ground of culture but not the makers of it. Access to women, as I suggest above, becomes the door not only of humanization, but also of cultural authenticity as well. Rebecca Moreno observes a similar dynamic in segments of Acosta’s *The Revolt of Cockroach People*. In her account, Moreno submits that Acosta conflates “sexual access and group membership as means of solidifying homosocial bonds and patriarchal order” (36). I agree with this point, and would add that just as women represent the means through which Brown can penetrate culture, men are the ‘gate-keepers of the culture,’ to

¹⁵ Anzaldúa 1999, 84.

¹⁶ This is a purely anecdotal observation I share here because disgust over Acosta’s work is more often than not the initial reaction I have experienced from feminists colleagues when I intimate my research interests on Oscar “Zeta” Acosta. Some have commented that they lost interest in continuing to read *The Autobiography of Brown Buffalo* as soon as they detect the chauvinism in the narrator’s voice. This means that many stop reading the book after the first or second chapter.

the extent that the ‘name of the father’ denotes the limits of what can and cannot be penetrated.

It is important to return to the “oedipal injunction” as we conclude our analysis of *The Autobiography* because it is precisely the efficacy of the racial paternal function that gets recalled at the concluding moments of Acosta’s narrative. It is the manner in which Acosta is ultimately negated by “Mexico,” as it were, that leads me to posit a linguistic dimension to JanMohamed’s observations on the oedipal injunction, suggesting that the racial Oedipal family mediates inclusion and exclusion not only by structuring the meaning and value of racial and sexual differences, but also linguistic difference. In other words, language also constitutes a significant area where a given subjectivity is constituted as an “included exclusion” within a given social space. A turn in this direction, along with a *longue durée* historical perspective, allows us to deconstruct notions that implicate Creole, Spanglish, and *Calo* as bastard languages. The profound alienation that linguistic displacement yields is significant because it has a distinct social nature, unlike the Hegelian, Heideggerian, and Sartrean alienation that presupposes the universality of the human condition. Although language does structure existence, it does so materially, in and around specific social relations of power. In Brown Buffalo’s life, the symbolic meaning that language conveys carries with it the weight of colonial history and violence implicated in the *de-territorialization* of his immigrant family.

While in Juarez Brown Buffalo goes from being coddled by two prostitutes—which he claims taught him “how to be a real Mexican for the first time in [his] life” (190)—*because* he cannot speak Spanish, to being thrown out of the country for not knowing how to speak his “father’s language” by a Mexican judge. Brown is both lost and found and translation (194). He is lost because his short lived affair with the prostitutes gives him the false impression that he has found what he is looking for, that being able to bed a Mexican women will be the “pill,” so to speak, for the pains deep inside his stomach. It is when Brown’s interactions turn to men and the law, however, that he is submitted to discursive negation as well as physical violence. Once more, it arises because Brown Buffalo perceives the uncertainty of two male hotel clerks who cannot make out Brown Buffalo’s remedial Spanish as a challenge to his identity. “Just when I thought I’d become a Mexican in a bed of whores,” Brown Buffalo thinks to himself, “some pimply faced old man with a white brooch under a longed cracked nose questions my identity once again” (191). When the attendants are unsympathetic to his pleas for a heater to heat the cold room he is in, they also convey the message that he can go ‘screw’ himself if he is not satisfied. Brown Buffalo responds with his own expletive, “Well, fuck you too, you sonofabitch!” From this point the scene move to a Mexican jail, where Brown Buffalo is submitted to conform to Mexican authority. He is frisked, strip-searched, and confined to a dark dungeon like cell filled with prisoners and their fluids. Describing the violence behind ‘symbolic castration,’ Acosta writes, “The third time around I told the man I was cold and his two buddies had already searched me. He grabbed my balls and squeezed while his partner laughed and stuck a ten foot long rifle into my kidney” (191). Echoing the physical and discursive violence he encounters with Junior Ellis and Sheriff Lauren, it is this kind of moment that produces Brown Buffalo’s attitudes towards homosexuality and women that manifest themselves more clearly in his second book, for these attitudes articulate his own fears of castration.

The oedipal injunction and the paternal function operate in this scene because Brown Buffalo is unable to mount his own defense to the charges he is brought on because the colonizer's language fails to provide him the means to speak on his own behalf. That is to say that knowing how to speak English fluently and not knowing how to speak Spanish, his father's tongue, does not help his efforts at communication in jail whatsoever because he comes off as a race traitor in the eyes of Mexican men. Embarrassed by this fact and pressured by the muzzle of a rifle, Brown enters his plea: Guilty. "*Si soy culpable*," Brown Buffalo admits, "I am guilty of all those nasty things, vile language, gringo arrogance and *americano* impatience with lazy *mexicanos*. Yes, take me away to the guillotine right now!" (193). This admission of guilt demonstrates that Brown Buffalo is also aware of the colonial attitudes behind the language through which he communicates. The admission also indicts the arrogance of the supposedly racially superior *Americano*. This becomes more clear when the judge reprimands him by saying, "If you're a lawyer, you should act like one. Cut your hair or leave this city. We get enough of your kind around here. You spend your money on prostitutes on *putas* and then don't even have enough money to pay for your fines when you're caught with your pants down" (193-94). This segment of Acosta's narrative reveals that language carries with it, not only communicative expression and cultural value, but also performative attitude. In this particular case, at least in the perception of the *Mexicanos* Brown Buffalo interacts with, what he was trying to communicate verbally in English also implied an arrogant colonial attitude.

The problem of the failure of the paternal function comes into relief at this point once more because the sentence that the judge passes on Brown Buffalo includes a suggestion, "Why don't you go home and learn to speak your father's language?" This suggestion is so cryptic that Brown is left wondering, "My father's language? What does she mean?" More than cryptic, it becomes a source of discursive negation that penetrates Brown Buffalo profoundly. What does it mean to be sent home from a place you traveled hundred of miles to because you thought it *was* home? The simultaneous process of American assimilation and racialization left Brown Buffalo homeless—without a territory to call home—and to a certain extent fatherless in a symbolic sense. Put differently, *la madre patria* expels him, disavowing the Mexican that acts like a *gringo*, but it also tells him to go find his father, a euphemism for the language he should know. "The name of the father," what we can think of as a conveyor of cultural memory passed on through the language, betrays Brown Buffalo once more because it denies him access to a community he so much wants to be a part of. The double-bind Brown Buffalo finds himself in unravels even more when he tries to cross back into the U.S. and is confronted with the misrecognition of an immigration agent that questions Brown Buffalo's nationality because he does not "look like an American" (195). This last instance of misrecognition as he walks back across the border kills him in a symbolic sense, for when Brown Buffalo makes it to a hotel back on the El Paso side of the border he collapses into affective despair. As Acosta explains, "I stand naked before the mirror. I cry in sobs. My massive chest quivers and my broad shoulders sag. I am a brown buffalo lonely and afraid in a world I never made. I enter the womb of the night and I am dead to this world of confusion for thirty-three hours [...]."

The function of symbolic-death in this narrative entails the revitalization of Brown Buffalo as an individual. As JanMohamed posits, "it seems that violent physical

and psychic confrontation is necessary to catalyze the transformation, after which point the old subject-position is discarded for a new one” (66). The narrative alludes to this kind of transformation and possible rebirth. I make this observation considering that after the thirty-three hour collapse into the unconscious, Brown Buffalo comes to reflective clarity thereafter. First, the clarity manifests itself in relation to the question of identity. The coherence he sought, namely that his language, his history, and his skin produce no subjective paradoxes fades into an understanding of the specific history that mediates his own subjectivity. As he communicates to his brother in the call I mentioned above, Brown Buffalo has no roots anywhere; thus, he has the choice of putting them down wherever he wants. Secondly, the search for identity had always been tied to purpose. Brown’s existential statement, “So I’ve got to find out who I am so I can do what I am supposed to do” is turned on its head when Brown Buffalo unconsciously verbalizes what he *desires to do*: write (196). As Brown Buffalo comes to terms with this realization, his brother tells him that if he is looking for a story to write, that he does not need to go to Central America to do it (the next place he considers going), but rather that he should go to Los Angeles to write about the Brown Power revolution that is picking up steam. This option energizes Brown Buffalo and moves him to reflect of the possibilities behind it. All along he thought he needed to know “who he was” to make something happen, to know his purpose, and suddenly he realizes his purpose and chooses an identity. The desire for recognition that drove Brown Buffalo to seek an identity is suspended and exchanged for purpose, a way to become a historical subject rather than an object of history. Thus, Acosta concludes *The Autobiography* with a rehearsed monologue, one he intends to address to those who refuse to recognize him because they cannot see beyond the color of his skin.

I walk in the night rain until the dawn of the new day. I have devised the plan, straightened out the philosophy and set up the organization. When I have the one million Brown Buffalos in my side I will present the demands for a new nation to both the U.S. Government and the United Nations... and then I’ll split and write the book. I have no desire to be a politician. I don’t want to lead anyone. I have no practical ego. I am not ambitious. I merely want to do what is right. Once in every century there comes a man who is chosen to speak for his people. Moses, Mao and Martin are examples. Who is to say I am not such a man? In this day and age the man for all seasons needs many voices. Perhaps that is why the gods have sent me into Riverbank, Panama, San Francisco, Alpine and Juarez. Perhaps that is why I’ve been taught so many trades. Who will deny I am unique?

For months, for years, no all my life I sought to find out who I am. Why do you think I became Baptist? Why did I force myself into Riverbank Swimming Pool? And did I become a lawyer just to prove to the publishers I could do something worthwhile?

Any idiot that sees only the obvious is blind. For God’s sake, I have never seen and felt inferior to any man or beast in my life. My single mistake has been to seek an identity with any one person or nation or with any part of history... what I see now, on this rainy day in January, 1968, what is clear to me after this sojourn is that I am neither Mexican nor an

American. I am neither Catholic nor Protestant. I am Chicano by ancestry and Brown Buffalo by choice. Is that so hard for you to understand? Or is it that you choose not to understand for the fear of that I'll get even with you? Do you fear the herds who were slaughtered, butchered and cut up to make life a bit more pleasant for you? Even though you would have survived without eating our flesh, using our skins to warm your and racking our heads on your living room walls as trophies, still we mean no harm to you. We are not vengeful people. Like my old man used to say, an Indian forgives, but he never forgets... that, ladies and gentleman, is all I meant to say. That unless we band together, we brown buffalos will become extinct. And I do not want to live in a world without brown buffalos. (198-99)

What I want to underscore in these lines as I conclude is the Fanonian undertones that represent a discursive articulation moving from the coloniality of being towards a “de-colonial attitude.” This is a kind of ethics that leads Brown Buffalo to seek the decolonization of others as much as his own.

After loosing himself in “the night of the absolute,” Brown adopts a resistant stance that turns the cumulative effects of racial negation into positive negation.¹⁷ The stance expresses historical and existential meaning generated through memory exercised in writing to make a critique of the white world that robs him of universal value. The moment above constitutes a moment where ‘rupturing meaning’ is articulated, meaning that is itself violent because it affirms Brown Buffalo’s existence by refusing the “objecthood” to which he is reduced by coloniality. It is an indictment of American dominant ideologies that seeks to homogenize identities through negation and eviscerate those who do not want to fold into the status quo. As Fanon suggests, when a racialized dark body makes itself present, even when simply declaring that it exists, it becomes a sign of aggression, and therefore a threat to the white world. Similar to Fanon’s assertion that “The negro is a toy in the white man’s hands: so, in order to shatter the hellish cycle, he explodes,” Brown Buffalo remarks pronounce the explosion of a new subjectivity making itself present against non-existence (*BS,WM* 140). Although Brown Buffalo underscores this by clarifying that he has never felt inferior to anyone. Rather, Brown has not been allowed to be a subject in history, to imagine and produce reality. As Fanon would put it, “A feeling of inferiority? No, a feeling of nonexistence” (*BS,WM* 139). The dialectic revitalization of Brown Buffalo is initiated by critique. However, as JanMohamed argues, the reflective moment must lead to praxis if its worth is truly liberatory. De-colonial action has to follow de-colonial thought in its effort to humanize. Taking place in Los Angeles during the height of 1968 social crisis, Acosta’s next book would bring us closer to the liberatory action, one that sought not only individual

¹⁷ Fanon uses this expression in *BS,WM* to describe the conditions under which consciousness of the self can be attained. Reproaching Sartre for subordinating blackness to contingent, non-universal and class to universal value, he states, “For once, that Hegelian had forgotten that consciousness has to lose itself in the night of the absolute, the only way to attain consciousness of the self. In opposition to rationalism, he summoned up the negative side, but he forgot that this negativity draws its worth from an almost substantive absoluteness. A consciousness committed to experience is ignorant, has to be ignorant, of the essences and determinations of its being”(134).

liberation, but also the liberation of the Chicano community and colonized people of color around the world.

PART TWO

THE VALUE OF BROWNNESS: CRITIQUE OF “RACIALIZED ESTRANGED LABOR” AND *LA VIDA LOCA* IN LUIS J.

RODRIGUEZ’S *MUSIC OF THE MILL*

The analysis of coloniality evinces the tragic conditions of our so-called post-colonial temporality. Although David Scott (2004) posits that the tragic character of post-coloniality stems from the fact that our time is “out of joint” because “old languages of moral political past are no longer in sync with what they were meant to describe and criticize,” suggesting that the function of colonial logic and power has dis-articulated itself to the extent that anti-colonial discourses have become bankrupt, I maintain that the tragedy of post-colonial temporality, including the post-modern within it, is revealed in the often mystified continuation of racial and sexual domination (*Conscripts of Modernity 2*). The inescapable character of subjection and subordination (its violent and homicidal tendencies) that racial subjects with colonial histories encounter spells out the tragic condition of existence under coloniality. Luis J. Rodriguez’s poetry, novels, short stories, essays, and children’s books are important because they work toward curtailing what seems to be the inevitability of violence and the homicidal tendencies of many Chicana/o youth who grow up in *barrios*, ghetto-like enclaves created in the midst of Post-war *de jure* segregation. Urban sites like Chicago and Los Angeles are thus the backdrops of much of his literature. Unlike Oscar Z. Acosta, Rodriguez’s literary trajectory is much less polemical and not at all mythologized. Rodriguez first emerged as an important Chicano literary voice in the late nineteen-eighties, with his first published collection titled *Poems Across the Pavement* (1989). My own interests in literature begin with his work when I was a student at Roosevelt High School in East Los Angeles during the mid nineteen-nineties. I remember the profound impact that *The Concrete River* (1991), his second collection of poems, and *Always Running* (1993), a novelistic autobiography, had upon my mind set at sixteen. After reading these books for a class assignment I remember thinking: “This man makes death and the ugliness in the hood beautiful and tender. How can this be?”

Interestingly *Always Running* has gotten most of the critical attention that *all* of Rodriguez’s work deserves. I point this out because his craft is consistently powerful, critical, hopeful, and real across the board. In fact, I am surprised that neither his short stories nor his subsequent fictional narratives have been commented about to a notable extent. This may be because the theme of “youth violence” eclipses the differential themes he attempts to address in his work. This fact makes it such that in order to do this theme theoretical justice within Rodriguez’s work, the critic must always return to *Always Running* to grasp the significance of the making of what most people in *barrios* call *el vato loco*, *el cholo*, or the mainstream knows as the “gang-banger.” Just as interesting is that similar to the critical attention that Acosta’s works gets, the theme of

the search for identity gets underscored by the critics who have seriously engaged Rodriguez's work. The idea that prevails in this approach is that gangs are post-modern phenomena, a symptom of the fragmentation and disintegration of the modern subject and society.¹ The Chicano/a "gang-member" is read as a post-modern subject who is lost in the meaninglessness and fragmentations of advance capitalist formations. The post-modern theoretical frame echoes common problematic sociological assumptions that characterize the figure of the "banger" as individuals who have lost the sense of wholeness and the coherence behind cultural tradition.² Under these explanatory frames both phenomena, "the loss of identity" and "youth-violence," get folded into recent late capitalist logics of accumulation to give meaning to the social dynamics we encounter within Chicano/a *barrios*.

In the second part of my thesis I want to interrupt the post-modern thread of interpretation of *la vida loca* by introducing the problem of colonial logic circulating within the so-called post-modern temporality certain readings presuppose. I will do this by turning to *Music of the Mill* (2005), a novel that has not received the critical attention it deserves. This narrative captures the manner in which colonial logic maintains a dual alienation of racial subjects and critiques the manner in which "racialized estranged labor," a category I intend to define below, functions as a corollary for youth-violence and the negative resistance it signifies. Through the figures of Procopio and Johnny Salcido, Rodriguez details the manner in which racialized estranged labor exists with the ubiquitous threat of death and violence at its side. On a phenomenological level, the narrative challenges the Heideggerian notion that death is that which is "outstanding" from being, that which is left out until "authenticity" is reached through death. This novel also renders a critique of the political economy of death that mediates gang violence in general and "brown on brown" gang violence in particular. Through Rodriguez's representation of the Salcido family, *Music of the Mill* reveals that the proximity to death that *el cholo*, *la chola* (racialized as Mexican and self identified as Chicano/as) and their immigrant parents experience in industrial sites and on the streets of the inner city, respectively, not only originates from "blind capitalist forces" that seek to maintain alienation in the classical Marxist sense, but rather emerges through the estrangement that operates under a colonial logic guided by racial perception that negates both their present ability and future potential to produce meaning and value. This dynamic spells out *the coloniality of Chicano/a youth violence*. In the chapters that follow, I will approach Rodriguez's narrative theoretically and philosophically to understand it on two levels. First, as critique of the political economy of death that permeates racialized estranged labor's work environment, the space in which it becomes

¹ I am thinking particularly of Maria Herrera-Sobek's reading of *Always Running*, which attributes the rise of gang related violence and death to the fragmented nature of post-modern geographies upon the U.S.'s urban landscape. See Maria Herrera-Sobek, "Geographies of Despair: The Mean Streets of L.A. of Luis Rodriguez's *Always Running*" *Latino Studies Journal* (Vol. 8, No. 2 (1997): 56-68.

² There is extensive sociological literature dedicated to explaining the nature and cause of gangs. I find theories of delinquency, symbolic interaction, and culture of poverty particularly problematic because their quantitative and qualitative approaches lack historical contextualization. Their nomothetic methodologies elide the necessary historical and existential factors that contribute to *pachuquismo* and *choloismo* emerging as unique cultural formation in the Chicano/a community. For a study on Chicanas involved in gangs that takes the qualitative sociological approaches see Mary G. Harris, *Cholas: Latino Girls and Gangs* (New York: AMS Press, 1988).

evident that Chicano/as are negated their place amongst “species being.”³ Figures like Procopio and Johnny are alienated beyond the classical Marxist sense because they are subordinated as racialized labor in the mining and steel mill industry. They are bound to what Abdul JanMohamed (2005) has identified as a “death contract,” and arrangement that compromises their dignity and potentiality as much as it binds their subject formation to homicidal violence.⁴ Second, the chapter that follows continue to conceptualize the “coloniality of Being” by arguing that the nihilism and negative resistance that the third generation of Salcido’s “act out” through its affiliation with gangs on the street is mediated not only by the death and violence they encounter on the street, but also by the manner in which *Care*, what Heidegger identifies as the phenomenon through which *Da-sein* interprets and reveals itself through in its expression,⁵—particularly the lack thereof—manifests itself towards racialized youth. I argue that this care lack, or the manner in which Being presents itself as *lack of care*, to a large extent becomes internalized in a self-destructive fashion. The third part of Rodriguez’s narrative makes it clear that the existential abyss that these figures fall into during youth is mediated by a shifting political economy as well as the lack of “Care” and investment in the realization of their potential. Chapters 4 and 5 will support the two part theses I propose above. However, I will begin with a chapter that provides a schematic discussion of racial alienation to give my reading of *Music of the Mill* a proper theoretical and historical grounding.

³ A footnote in a section of Marx’s *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* titled “Estranged Labor” identifies “species being” as *Gattungswesen*, “a term used by Feuerbach, who takes as *Gattung*, mankind as a whole, hence the human species” (241). I find the term useful to problematize the concept of ‘alienated labor’ defined by classical and orthodox Marxists. Marx proposed that “mankind as a whole” becomes estranged from itself because the division of labor, private property and the capitalist mode of production reify humanity, for they make opaque human process by making it appear as objective things. The first division of this chapter will maintain that the classical Marxist definition of alienation is shallow because not all alienation is inevitable and necessary, neither is it always articulated principally by the capitalist mode of production. In fact, capitalist productive activity should be understood as *one* ‘axis’ of alienation that estranges “species being” from itself, not the primary, nor the principal site when it concerns the alienation of what the editors of *Latino/as in the World System* (2005) call “racial colonial subjects.” See Karl Marx, “Estranged Labor,” from the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, in *The Marx-Engels Reader, 2nd Edition* (New York, London: W.W. Norton and Company, 1978): 70-81.

⁴ Although JanMohamed’s elaboration of the “death contract” from the slave’s perspective speaks directly to the coercive condition of slavery and the Jim Crow South, I will apply it in my discussion of Chicano/as to support the notion that they have historically constituted a colonial labor force. Elaborating on JanMohamed’s work, I seek to analyze the “deployment of death as a politico-economic apparatus rather than considering death simply as an ontological or existential fact that attends human life” (13). To that end, I will approach the deployment of death and violence as a political tool to examine its existential implication on Chicano/a labor and its troubled youth. For JanMohamed’s philosophical and theoretical revision of both the Hegelian master-slave relation and Marx’s theory of value see Abdul JanMohamed, *The Death-Bound-Subject* (2005) particularly the chapter “Renegotiating the Death Contract.”

⁵ The phenomenon of ‘care’ is significant as we analyze the coloniality of Being because it is crucial to Heidegger’s Eurocentric interpretation of the meaning of being. As Heidegger asserts, “The analytic of *Da-sein* which penetrates to the phenomenon of care is to prepare the way for the fundamental, ontological problematic, the question of the meaning of being in general” (171). See Division I, Chapter VI: “Care as the Being of *Da-sein*” in Martin Heidegger’s *Being and Time* (Albany: State University of New York, 1953).

CHAPTER THREE

ALIENATION, RACIALIZED ESTRANGEMENT, AND CHICANO/AS AS COLONIAL LABOR

In order to achieve humanization, which presupposes the elimination of dehumanizing oppression, it is absolutely necessary to surmount the limit-situations in which men are reduced to things.

--- Paolo Freire

What happens when racialized subjectivity (and the existence it signifies) ceases to represent value as bare-labor? Extending the question to subjectivities (brown, red, and yellow) under the gaze of white domination and its colonial logic: What does it mean for “colonized Being” to be completely barred from producing both material and symbolic value? Luis J. Rodriguez’s *Music of the Mill* (2005) both asks this question and answers with its own critique of the current conditions of young Chicana/o life and its homicidal tendencies. Similar to Alice Walker’s *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* (1970), Rodriguez constructs a narrative that moves through three generations of a Mexican-American family whose existence is constantly challenged by the capitalist mode of production, the human relations it engenders, the colonial logic of white domination (expressed through *de jure* segregation and its coercive power), and the limits it places on the realization of their potentiality. While the aim of the two following chapters will be to establish a conceptualization of “alienation/estrangement” through Rodriguez’s critique of the racialization of labor within the American steel industry in *Music of the Mill*, this section first draws a schematic outline of the theorization of alienation and estrangement *to theoretically situate* Rodriguez’s narrative as a contribution towards the elaboration of the concept of “racialized estranged labor,” its parameters within U.S. capitalist production and its existential implications. I will do this by first reviewing some Marxist conceptualizations of alienation to demonstrate how they fail to provide a useful account of alienation for racialized subjects, particularly Chicano/s. Following Franz Fanon (1967), Kelly Oliver (2004), and Nelson Maldonado-Torres (2007, 2008) work, rather than solely emphasizing the process of production in the articulation of alienation, I situate Chicano/a alienated labor within the theoretical frame of coloniality to emphasize the Manichean logic it functions through, its psycho-political implications, and the homicidal historical trajectory it is articulated under.

Marx’s piece in *The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1848* titled “Estranged Labor” famously theorized the manner in which the process of production embodies the process of alienation. It is often thought that this section only points to a single problem, namely that in the making of things, the worker becomes a thing herself. However, for Marx the problem of alienation does not simply lie in the fact that subjects become objects. While Althusser’s (1965) assertion that the theory of “reification” made historical-materialists overlook the fact that Marx did not think of alienation itself as

problematic, Marx did differentiate between subjects becoming objects and subjects becoming objects of subjects. “Alienation” in Althusser’s reading of Marx is a natural consequence of production in a simple sense. It is the *necessary* distance and the means through which the worker gains knowledge of herself and the world she objectifies. Althusser’s own agenda to make Marx conform to his own structuralist tendencies naturalizes alienation when Marx’s own theoretical abstractions of labor were seeking to problematize it phenomenologically even if he ultimately did not articulate ways to overcome it.

For Marx the problem of alienation involves estrangement as an integral process of capitalist production, which yields deleterious existential complications that must be overcome. Accordingly, estrangement is first expressed in terms of the object of production and its producer:

This fact expresses merely that the object which labor produces—labor’s product—confronts it as something alien, as a power independent of the producer. The product of labor is labor, which has been embodied in an object, which has become material: it is the objectification of labor. Labor’s realization is its objectification. In the sphere of political economy this realization of labor appears as loss of realization for the worker; objectification as estrangement, as alienation. (108)

Key in this moment of abstraction is the relation of the worker to the object produced as something that exercises power over her. What Marx underscores in this instance is the priority the object takes over its maker. The problem is that the object determines the subject, that “labor” becomes objectified by the object it creates during production.

Marx does not stop there however, he continues by pointing to multiple expressions of estrangement that refract through the same mode of production. Marx elaborates the problem further by positing that alienation also rests on the fact that labor, as a product of the object of production, becomes an alienating activity itself. “Work” *in the form of labor* does not enable or yield the “entelechy” of the worker.⁶ In fact the

⁶ This concept has an Aristotelian etymology to the extent that, according to Joe Sachs (1995), Aristotle coined it through his work on physics to describe the quality of “being-at-work-staying-the-same” to describe moving objects (78). Ernst Bloch, known to rip concepts from their context to better articulate his own brand of radical utopian Marxism, appropriated the term to give it sociophilosophical meaning. For Bloch the term “entelechy” becomes useful to describe the dynamics of human possibility and potentiality. In his book on Bloch (1996), Vincent Geoghegan observes, “Bloch was particularly attracted to ‘process’ philosophers, thinkers who rejected static models of the real in favor of conceptions which stress movement, change and dynamism” (28). Through his studies of what Geoghegan identifies as left-wing Aristotelianism, Bloch becomes drawn to Aristotle’s “notion of the realization or entelechy of matter” (*Ernst Bloch* 28). Along with Aristotle Bloch’s re-articulation of “entelechy” is also profoundly influenced by classic German Idealism (Kant and Hegel) and Marxism (Marx and the materialist that took up that took on the analysis of the historical process and task of critiquing capitalism in early 20th Century; including Lukacs, Weber, Adorno, and Benjamin). As the translator of Bloch’s opus, *The Principle of Hope*, writes, “[t]hus Bloch takes the utopian aspirations and energy of the subjective factor in German Idealism first systematized by Kant and combines it with the objective factor in the materialist philosophy of Marx and Engels” (xxvii). According to Bloch, the realization of matter’s potential, to which Bloch includes the horizon of human consciousness, is a given that only need to be excavated from the historical record to establish as a universal principal. “Expectation, hope, intention towards possibility that has still not become,” Bloch writes (1959), “this is not only a basic feature of human consciousness, but concretely corrected and grasped, a basic determination of objective reality as a whole” (7). I bring the concept to bear on the analysis of the coloniality of Being because something fundamentally deleterious to human

opposite occurs, as Marx posits, “the better formed his product, the more deformed becomes the worker; the more civilized his object, the more barbarous becomes the worker; the more powerful labor becomes; the more powerless becomes the worker” (112). Integrated into the *relations of production*, “alienated labor” traps the worker in the exteriority of existence.⁷ Her human functions becomes alien to the extent that work, that which first brings her into consciousness in the most primitive moments of history, becomes something through which she denies herself. As Marx explains,

[...] estrangement is manifested not only in the result but in the act of production, within the producing activity, itself. [...] If then the product of labor is in alienation, production itself must be active alienation, the alienation of activity, the activity of alienation. In the estrangement of the object of labor is merely summarized the estrangement, the alienation, in the activity of labor itself. (110)

Labor as alienating activity reduces humanity to its animal functions because, according to Marx, eating, drinking, and procreating become the only actions through which the worker feels herself alive. In this sense the worker cannot look beyond its immediate activity, in fact, *it cannot distinguish between itself and the activity*. This second expression of alienation is important because it manifests the inverted relation that the worker has to her activity. Unlike Judith Butler’s post-structuralist interpretation of the master-slave relation (1997), which proposes that the slave finds her way to subjective consciousness through the egregious recognition that her work is being appropriated, Marx points to the entrenching nature of “work” as “labor” in capitalist production itself, especially its natural tendency as inhibitor of consciousness.⁸ Marx emphasizes the

potentiality occurs in regards to “expectation, hope, and intention towards possibility” when the racialized and gendered over-determination is the order of the day under the “coloniality of power.” I will un-pack my appropriation of “entelechy” further below, for now, I simply want to define and contextualize my use of the concept to underscore the underlying idea of unfolding potentiality it denotes. For a detailed discussion of Aristotle’s conceptualization of “entelechia” see Joe Sachs, *Aristotle’s Physics: a guided study*, (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1995). For further discussion about the development of Bloch’s thought see Vincent Geoghegan, *Ernst Bloch*, (New York: Routledge, 1996). For Bloch’s deployment of the concept see Ernst Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1959).

⁷ Following Habermas, I think it useful to distinguish between the “forces of production,” which express themselves in the form of technology that carry it forward and the knowledge that guides it, and “the relations of production,” which point to the manner in which capitalist production integrates labor power to organize it appropriately. As Habermas writes, “the *relations of production* are those institutions and social mechanisms that determine the way in which (at a given time of productive forces) labor power is combined with the available means of production. [...] The relations of production express the distribution of social power; with the distributional pattern of socially recognized opportunities for need satisfaction, they prejudice the *interest structure* of a society” (138-9). Given these considerations, we could propose that “the coloniality of power” *functions significantly through the relations of production* because the distribution of social power is mediated by the racial/gender categories initiated during the conquest. For Habermas’ discussion on the “forces of production” and “relations of production” see particularly the section titled “Toward the Reconstruction of Historical Materialism” in Jürgen Habermas, *Communication and the Evolution of Society* (Toronto: Beacon Press, 1979).

⁸ Butler’s essay “Stubborn Attachment, Bodily Subjection: Rereading Hegel on the Unhappy Consciousness” posits that it is through the recognition of her signature in the object produced that the slave becomes conscious of the power it wields over the master. As maker of the master’s world, she recognizes the dependence of the master to her and her autonomy. “The object of labor thus reflects,” Butler writes, “the autonomy of the bondsman to the extent that the object, too, covers over the

manner in which labor becomes an alienating activity to point to a larger problem: the problems that human relations encounter, which are brought about by the internal contradictions of capitalist production.

In Marx's theorization of estranged labor a third and most profound form of alienation is expressed that is important to consider as we conceptualize colonized being. I refer mainly to the estrangement of "*species being*" *from itself*. The term Marx employs to describe the "universality of man" is important because it underscores the existential relation that human activity has to the internal understanding of itself and the manner in which it relates to the organic world it both "lives in" and "lives through." As Marx explains:

Man is species being, not only because in practice and in theory he adopts the species as his object (his own as well as those of other things), but—and this is only another way of expressing it—also because he treats himself as the actual, living species; because he treats himself as a universal and therefore a free being. (112)

By positing "species being" in this way, Marx stresses that "Man" affirms its universality in practice, by making all of nature its organic body "in as much it is (1) his direct means of life, and (2) the material, the object, and the instrument of activity" (112). The problem that arises, however, is that the appropriation of the "organic body" expresses the estrangement of humanity both from nature and itself. That is to say that because "Man" appropriates nature as a means to reproduce life, and makes it the object of its activity, "Man" estranges itself *from itself and nature*.

The problematic outcome of work as "labor" in the capitalist system, using Marx's own terms, is the *mystification* of the relations of production. The mode of production in this sense makes opaque the fact that an "organic-whole" becomes compartmentalized through the process of reification. *Reification here means the "forgetting," so to speak, of the chain of being that makes manifest Totality, what could be thought of as the organic whole itself.* That estranged labor "changes for [Man] the life of the species into a means of individual life" is crucial for Marx's understanding of alienation (113). Elaborating on the problem that "estranged labor" presents for species being as alienating activity, Marx writes, "First it estranges the life of the species and individual life, and secondly it makes individual life in its abstract form the purpose of life of the species, likewise in its abstract and estranged form." We can read Marx here as pointing out a ruse in the dynamic of capitalist production. The ruse is articulated by the veiled and warped relations that "estranged labor" produce. What appears as essential activity of humanity yields the excess of inhumanity, the surplus that capitalism actually produces for the sake of profit. Marx makes the point clear when he writes,

Indeed, labor, life-activity, productive life itself, appears in the first place merely as a means of satisfying a need—the need to maintain physical existence. Yet the productive life is the life of the species. It is life-engendering life. The whole character of a species –its species

dissimulation which is the activity of the bondsman. In his work, then, the bondsman discovers or reads his own signature..."(37). It is the appropriation of the object and the forfeiture of his signature by the lord that allows the bondsman to recognize himself: "He recognizes himself in the very forfeiture of the signature, in the *threat to* autonomy that such appropriation produces"(39). See Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1997).

character—is contained in the character of its life activity, and free, conscious activity is man’s species character. Life itself appears only as means to life. (113)

In other words, labor, in the context of capitalist production, tricks people, so to speak, into thinking that the meaning of life is totally contained within the process of capitalist production. In this state of affairs, humanity alienates itself from the organic world it appropriates to sustain capitalist production and humanity itself. It relates to itself in an estranged manner, unable to recognize itself in the organic world of appropriated nature, nor the organic world of human relations. “Species being” disappears as human existence to become existence as individual labor in its abstract form as part of the machines that produce and enable capital.

Given these considerations it becomes evident that Marx’s main concern is alienating activity and the manner in which human potentiality is hampered through it in the process of capitalist production. His account falls short of helping us establish a decolonial account of “alienation” that argues against it being an essential element of human existence. In fact, there is an excess of alienation, which Western Reason has fostered through its collusion with colonialism, imperialism, and capitalism. While Aimé Césaire’s contribution to the *Negritude* movement signaled the rise of Caliban against Prospero’s language and logic in his *Discourse on Colonialism* (1972), it was his student, Franz Fanon, who would make an elaborate theoretical critique, not only of Western Reason, but also of the kind of alienation it engenders on the colonized. Fanon’s work, particularly his seminal book *Black Skin, White Mask* (1967), is germane for understanding how people with colonial histories relate to alienation today because he understood that even the most revolutionary thinkers of the modern era failed to make sound theorizations on locating the coordinates of colonial alienation and estrangement; this included Marx and Sartre.

Fanon thought that the materialist dialectic Marxism proposed was flawed for the single simple reason that it presupposed something that was not true in the colonial situation, namely, *reciprocity* between the factory worker and factory owner, between “producing subject” and the “Subject that produces production.” Colonial imposition does not require the mutual recognition of actors to dialectically overcome its antagonistic relations. It thrives, rather, on a one-way flow of coercive and hegemonic power. As Kelly Oliver notes in *The Colonization of Psychic Space* (2004), “In the colonial situation, as in slavery, there is no fiction of contract. The labor of worker is taken by force along with their lands and families” (11). In this sort of relation, alienation expresses itself prior to the act of labor or even work taking place. The colonial situation presents a form of alienation that estranges “species being” *from the very moment of colonial and imperial contact*. According to Sylvia Wynter (1995), the advent of 1492 signaled an epochal shift that both revised the West’s own “subjective understanding,” what she defines as the behavior-orienting supraordinate goals that determine perception, which imposed a new system of symbolic representation on the “discovered” territory.⁹ While the shift in “subjective understanding” facilitated the

⁹ There are two crucial aspects to this shift. The first is that the epochal shift introduced the systematic dehumanization of the colonized world. The second is that, ironically enough, it was, according to Wynter, a foundational humanist project because it established the hegemony of Western Europe in symbolic terms. For further discussion on the significance of 1492 towards the articulation of what came to

justification of the conquest in political and ethical terms, the imposition of the system of symbolic representation established biologized “heresy,” making the newly encountered indigenous Other signify a completely different species. After encountering Africans and Muslims, Wynter writes:

This third population group [...] would come to embody the new symbolic construct of *Race* or of innately determined difference that would enable the Spanish state to legitimate its sovereignty over the *land of the Americas* in the post-religious legal terms of Western Europe’s now-expanding state-system. It would do so by instituting by means of physical referent of the group’s enslaved lives and labor the empirical basis, of, in Cerio’s terms, the ‘moral and philosophical foundations’ on which Spaniards “accepted” the indigenous people ‘into their societies, however rudely.’ (11-12)

I regard this fact to be significant because it points to the degradation of “species being” as *not solely* expressed through the objectification of labor within colonial relations. Alienation is rather expressed in all aspects of life, material and symbolic. “Subjective understanding” and perception is pertinent when thinking about alienation because understanding and perception, our ability to know and become conscious of the world around us, is intimately tied to the human capacity to give order, purpose, and even value and meaning to things and people around us. To perceive the indigenous “Other” as nature, as a disposable commodity, as *tabula rasa*, from the first instance, expresses another dimension of alienation that has deep epistemic implications that should not be eclipsed by the priority Marx and Marxism gives to the structural implications of alienation. The problem is not only a distorted sense of self in labor, but rather a grotesque sense of self found in the colonizers gaze and his imposed interpellations. At stake in this kind of alienation is not solely the means of material production, but also the means to produce knowledge and valuable interpretation of the world. As Oliver’s critique of Marx’s conceptualization of alienation aptly points out, “it is not just that individuals are exchangeable within the market economy, but within the colonial situation, as Fanon describes it, the colonized are no longer individuals at all, exchangeable or otherwise; rather, they are part of a group considered subhuman, barbaric, evil, or merely hopeless and therefore justifiably oppressed” (12).

Fanon’s debate with Sartre’s intervention (1948) on the meaning of “blackness” points to an important issue that equally demonstrates the short-comings of theorizing alienation strictly from a Western European locus of historical experience. Sartre’s analysis in “Black Orpheus” was lamentable to Fanon because Sartre both dismissed and devalued black alienation as contingent, empty of universal meaning. In a general sense, Sartre’s account of alienation (1963) posits the individual being born into the “practico-inert,” the structured determinations that constitute facticity or being in a “situation,” as a “for itself” endowed with the possibility to gain consciousness of itself as such through the gaze of the Other. This is precisely what differentiates consciousness (*pour-soi*) from

be perceived as the “*propter nos*,” the “us” that strictly articulates the humanity that encompasses the “species being” of Western Europe see Sylvia Wynter, “1492: A New World View,” in *Race, Discourse, and the Origins of the Americas*, Ed. V. Lawrence Hyatt and R. Nettleford, (Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995): 5-52.

non-conscious existence (*en-soi*), its ability to apprehend its alienation, being both the affirmation and the negation of the self and “Other” in the gaze that traps the individual. Although they both ascribe to existential phenomenology’s method, Fanon and Sartre disagree on the extent that alienation can be understood as a positive category for the realization of freedom. According to Sartre, being for-itself is *lack* that seeks transcendence towards completeness. It is this dialectical dynamic that spells out the nature of history and praxis. Conscious individuals make history as they seek to surpass the determinations that constitute their “facticity,” their situation in history. Fanon on the other hand was less optimistic about the dialectical nature of the relation between colonizer and colonized. The colonized subject apprehends no affirmation of his own subjectivity in the racist gaze of the white master, but rather pure and utter negation. The practico-inert that Sartre describes, which according to him can be subsumed and surpassed and which we are responsible to make meaning from, is rather permeated by a colonial logic that not only hinders the colonized from surpassing in a truly liberating manner, but also bars the colonized from authentically producing meaning and value itself. Beyond *being thrown* into the practico-inert when we are born, Oliver explains,

What Fanon describes is not simply arriving into a world of meaning that preexists us— That is true of everyone—but arriving too late into a white world in which one is defined as a brute being who does not mean and therefore is not fully human. Responsibility for meaning, and more particularly for the meaning of one’s own body and self have been usurped by the white other. (15)

Understanding alienation ontologically runs into problems when its *universalized meaning* is derived from a particular set of experiences. Fanon made this assertion salient in the fifth chapter of *Black Skin/White Masks* and contemporary decolonial philosophers like Lewis Gordon (1995), Enrique Dussel (1985) and Nelson Maldonado-Torres (2007, 2008) have pointed this out consistently in their work. This critique is significant because it points to the manner in which colonial subjection intersects with knowledge and philosophy. Continental philosophy, Dussel posits in *Philosophy of Liberation*, cannot make true philosophical claims about reality and existence through limited European perspective. Philosophy is not a self-referential science whose concern is the concepts and ideas that constitute reality (like alienation), but rather philosophy ponders life and experience itself, both its center and its margins (what continental philosophy so regretfully omits consistently). Continental philosophy becomes colonial when it becomes the center through which all existence knows and understands itself. Maldonado-Torres (2008) establishes this observation well when he points out that the colonial logic inherent in Western ontology as *filisofia prima* is found in its imposition on the meaning of Being as it seeks to establish universal meaning from a localized experience. Mignolo (2000) argues along these lines when he posits that the primacy of European knowledge was established through the subjugation (in the Foucauldian sense) of subaltern knowledges by globalizing it through colonial impositions. These impositions transcend the formal understanding of colonization (merely territorial and economic), just as they transcend the formal ontological descriptions of alienation; they are structural, epistemic, cultural, spiritual, etc.

Following arguments that suggest that colonization is *not simply* an economic phenomenon or *principally* a matter about the inequities in the production of value, I

maintain that Chicano/a alienation should be understood *ontically*, through the actual entangled relation between the production of value and the production of meaning, or the *real (as opposed to the phenomenal)* nature of the structure and culture of the modern-colonial world. For this reason it is important that we consider the logic of colonization and its Manichean structure when thinking about the alienation of racialized existents because, as Oliver writes in relation to anti-black racism,

The black man's alienation is neither merely ontological nor generated from his own existence. Within racist colonial culture, his existence is always only relative to the white man's. We cannot find the logic of colonial relations by examining the structure of human existence or by examining the word as it appears to us. Rather, we need to examine the structure of human relationships within particular social situations. (17)

Similar to the point Oliver makes here, I maintain that we must think about Chicano/a alienation in the context of coloniality's structure (Capitalism) and culture (Eurocentrism and patriarchy) to reveal the extent to which Chicano/a existence is also relative to the white man's. This fact is precisely what spells out the colonial difference that constitutes the alienation that Chicano/as live and which their forbearers endured through colonization, revolution and war.

The Chicano/a colonial difference does not refer to essentialist notions but a historical understanding of the nature of alienation in the Chicano/a community.¹⁰ The historic development of Mexican-Americans is a complicated proletarianization that is entangled with a system of symbolic representation that *compounds* the alienation of labor. Juan Gomez-Quinones' essay "Development of the Mexican Working Class North of the Rio Bravo: Work and Culture Among Laborers and Artisans 1600-1900" is significant precisely because he underscores the notion that the emergence of a "Mexican working class" be understood as a dynamic, constantly shifting process rather than monolithic and static one. Although it underemphasizes the symbolic aspect of economic and cultural subordination under colonization, I cite Gomez-Quinones' essay because its historical materialist approach makes the colonial period a crucial moment in the process of Mexican-American class formation and the character of work it has performed through the centuries. As he explains, "The roots of the process lie in (a) the mestizo society's expansion to the north, (b) the Hispanicization of Indians, (c) the features of particular work activity, and (d) the economic transition of that area to fully developed capitalism" (1). These four historical manifestations have determined the form and intensity of alienation that to this day informs the subject formation and existential horizon of Chicano/as.

The rise of Mestizaje in colonial-Mexico had ambivalent outcomes in terms of the alienation for Chicano/as. On the one hand, as Gomez-Quinones indicates, mestizaje was a process of cultural and social miscegenation that mitigated ethnic divisions during the colonial period (3). It prompted the proliferation of a mestizo consciousness that would eventually unify *criollos*, *mestizos*, *mulattos*, and *indios* against the Spanish colonial rule in what would become Mexico. On the other hand, after the War of Independence, "mestizaje" as a nationalist hegemonic formation made opaque the Manichean structure

¹⁰ See Walter D. Mignolo's "The Geopolitics of Knowledge and the Colonial Difference," in *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 101.1 (Winter 2002): 57-96.

of the colonial difference in the rhetoric of national unity. Although it was true that they all suffered from the same prejudice under Spanish rule, not all suffered the full negating, homicidal extent of colonization. After the Mexican Revolution, José Vasconcelos's notion of "La Raza Cósmica" (1948) would become a euphemism for mestizaje that was meant to "dis-alienate" mestizos by re-inscribing them back into species being, for it sought to re-value what was once thought of as a "bastard race" or a race of sub-human cross breeds as an ideal race.¹¹ Unfortunately, this attempt at dis-alienation had the cost of alienating the darker peoples of Mexico, those whose indigenous phenotype remained on the surface of their body and the accent in their speech. Mestizaje as national consciousness would silence the indigenous roots of Mexico for it demanded that Mexicans (Indio, Mestizo, or mulatto) wear the white mask of the European standard of humanity even as it disavowed it. North of the Rio Bravo prior to 1848, mestizaje would be used as an emblem of ethnic national unity to make available the labor necessary to continue developing the established national territory. After 1848, the American "one drop rule" reintroduced the initial colonial logic and the importance of racial purity and ethnic chauvinism emerged with similar severity as when it was first introduced in the first decades of Spanish colonial conquest. Mestizos, became mongrels, cross breeds whose worth far from being universal and ideal was determined solely by the labor they produced.¹² Once more they became subject of a common prejudice: Anglo American Manifest Destiny.

The Hispanicization of Indians throughout Mexico illustrates how Spanish colonization mediates the manner in which racial alienation was to be bound to labor and accumulation of wealth post-1848 in the American Southwest. What is important to underscore is that exploitation and racial domination was at the heart of Spanish efforts to assimilate natives in New Spain just as it has been for Mexicans in the U.S. As Gomez Quiñones explains,

Hispanicization of Indians by Spaniards involved forced de-culturalization by the compelled change of language, religion, and family and intragroup ties. Indians were seen as barbaric, to be civilized and for their own salvation and enlightenment and for the profit of the colonizers.

¹¹ See José Vasconcelos, *La Raza Cósmica: Misión de la raza iberoamericana* (Buenos Aires: Espasa- Calpe, 1948).

¹² "Mongrelization" also refers to the character of subjugation that Anglos established. The well known signs reading "No dogs, No Mexicans" that shops and businesses displayed about a decade later in Texas makes clear the subordinated status that was assigned black and brown and black folk in what became the American Southwest. Although Gregory Rodriguez (2007) characterizes American culture with the same term to make the case for an ethnic, rather than a racial framing of identity in the U.S., I want to emphasize its racial etymology. Originally the term was used strictly to refer to dogs of no definable breed, but over time have more and more taken to refer to miscegenation, or cross breeding. Although Rodriguez is correct to say that Mexican-American identity has an ambiguous nature that stands between racial and ethnic lines, the day-to-day existence of Mexican-Americans and Chicano/as is mediated by racial perceptions. As Fanon suggests (1967), race is skin-deep, but racism penetrates the soul. No matter how many Mexican Americans become middle class, the movement is usually accompanied by some degree of "lactification," the process of internalizing and integrating whiteness as a mode of survival. For Rodriguez's often skewed analysis of the future hybrid ethnic culture and how Mexican-American's function in this process see *Mongrels, Bastards, Orphans, and Vagabonds: Mexican Immigration and the Future of Race in America* (New York; Pantheon Books, 2007).

Spanish colonization was motivated and sustained by wealth. Direct pillage was the first recourse, thereafter, other sources of wealth had to be developed—this required labor. Spanish colonization policy had many interrelated aspects, among these were purification and conditioning of an Indian labor force for the extraction of wealth. (8)

The norms and practices of Spanish colonization were similar to the norms and practices to be established in the newly acquired American territories, with the most notable exception that the American's conquest was secular to a great extent. Though American settlement into the South West was not accompanied by the vast Mission system that did much of the ideological work necessary to ensure the hegemony of Spain, it no less appropriated the existing labor pool to amass wealth through coerced exploitation. The alienation that *indios* experienced through the implementation of *reducciones* (forced settlements of Indians around presidios and pueblos) and Slavery was extended to mestizos whose complexion, language and culture were too impure then to integrate into Whiteness. This is the link between the end of the colonial period and the emergence of coloniality north of the Rio Bravo. That is to say that the War of 1848 shifted the current of hegemony to North America, for through its military victory and supposed purchase of vast Mexican territory the U.S. consolidated control of two oceans in two hemispherical directions-- East and West. For Indians and the darker Mexican mestizos in the South West the impositions of Hispanicization were no less demeaning than what came later. Displacement, de-territorialization, resettlement and Americanization projects have been U.S. tactics and strategies that echo the Spanish Crown's and the Mission's agendas. The "Othering" and subordination behind the policies enacted to "settle" the South West harbor the master consciousness of white-Eurocentric "Reason." These policies include draconian segregation measures, anti-miscegenation laws, forced repatriation, English only laws, criminalization of immigrants, to name a few.¹³ Policies of this sort have become the sources of the profound sense of alienation for Mexican Americans residing North of the Rio Bravo for generations. The logic of capitalism is not outside the purview of the American approach. The explicit nexus of racist and capitalist logic, in essence the expression of the coloniality of power according to Quijano (2000), *articulate the crystalization of Chicano/as as "racialized alienated labor."*

The capitalist transformation that the Southwest underwent after the War of 1848 shows the continuity of colonial exploitation and domination. In terms of labor, we only need to observe the sites of production and types of relations engendered in which Mexicans in the U.S have toiled since the second half of the nineteenth-century to understand the extent to which this ethno-racial group has been over-determined by the demands of capitalist production and its often coercive approaches. After the embattled dispossession of many Mexicans in the war's aftermath, their often-forced assimilation and integration into the emerging American economy has been motivated by a capitalist logic that requires cheap exploitable labor to maximize profit. It is thus that Mexicans are integrated into the mining and textile production industries, as well as cattle and sheep raising, and agriculture in the U.S. This has been a violent and homicidal integration on actual and symbolic levels. That is to say that Anglo domination did not

¹³ Although I make the theoretical connection expressed here, the historical writings by Rodolfo Acuña (1972), Juan Gomez-Quifones (1990, 1994), David Montejano (1987), and Stephen Pitti (2004) inform these observations.

consolidate itself without facing resistance, nor did it establish itself through passive hegemony. On the contrary, the ideology of white supremacy, kept in circulation in spite of abolition, legitimized the outright dispossession of Mexicans through legal means as much as it encouraged their subjection and subordination through coercive violence and cultural signifiers for the sake of white domination. It is precisely this point that reveals that the alienation that Mexicans in the U.S. have experienced under Anglo hegemony expresses a continuity of the colonial logic that the Spanish introduced four centuries earlier, for although it utilized a different grammar; Anglo hegemony re-established the Manichean structure of the colonial difference, which shapes Chicano/s subjectivity and existence.

The literary analysis of Rodriguez's novel will help us establish the meaning of the colonial difference that shapes the experience of Chicano/as as "racialized estranged labor" in a specific industrial site about a century after the Anglo American settlement/conquest of the Southwest. *Music of the Mill* does not only represent a section of the Chicano community, but seeks to critique the capitalist structure that divest from the Chicano/a community by exposing the manner in which it reproduces valueless existents that live with death at their side, always running from it (figuratively and literally), for death to the Salcido family is not an "*indefinite and not to be bypassed possibility*."¹⁴ It is rather a definite reality that negates their own-most potential in life. In this sense, alienation for the Salcido family is not only determined by *productive activity* that alienates man from itself in labor, but also by being over-determined by the history and ideology of racism in the U.S. and *the monopoly on productive activity* of Anglo hegemony.

¹⁴ This is part of an existential, ontological definition given to death by Heidegger as he describes the manner in which the certainty of Death 'attunes' itself into everydayness in order for existents to deal with the Angst of being in a state of "dying." The complete definition reads: "The full existential and ontological concept of death can be defined as follows: *As the end of Da-sien, death is the ownmost nonrelational, certain, and as such, indefinites and not to be bypassed possibility of Da-sein*" (239). See the section "Everyday Being-toward-Death and the Complete Existential Concept of Death." *Being and Time*. Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1996.

CHAPTER FOUR

DEATH, VIOLENCE, AND THE COLONIAL WOUNDS OF THE SALCIDO FAMILY IN LUIS J. RODRIGUEZ'S *MUSIC OF THE MILL*

There is a wound in the land, the body politic, and the collective spirit. Healing involves going directly to the wound, not recoiling from it. The wound, the damage, can be the mother of our rebirth, the reconciliation. If revolution isn't about this, it isn't about anything.

--- Luis J. Rodriguez

There is something about poverty that smells of death. Dead dreams dropping off the heart like leaves in dry season and rotting around the feet; impulses smothered too long in the fetid air of underground caves. The soul lives in sickly air. People can be slave ships in shoes.

--- Zora Neale Hurston

The U.S. Mexican border es una herida abierta where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds.¹ And before a scab forms it hemorrhages again, the lifeblood of two worlds merging to form a third country—a border culture.

--- Gloria Anzaldúa

Luis J. Rodriguez's novel, *Music of the Mill* (2005), details the manner in which hunger, violence (literal and symbolic), and debilitating alienation become a noose that slowly eviscerates racial subjects and stifles their potential.² The novel follows three generations of the Salcido family to show, I argue, the manner in which Mexican immigrants become entrenched in alienated labor through successive generations. The story of Johnny and Azucena Salcido in *Music* helps to establish a theoretical link between Chicano/a youth violence, racialized estranged labor, and the coloniality of Being. This is because these figures respectively represent the second and third

¹ English translation: is an open wound.

² Here I am referencing the kind of alienation I identified in the previous chapter, one that Fanon first observed in the colonized existence of the Antillean, and which Oliver aptly terms 'debilitating alienation' for it seeks nothing short of the evisceration of racialized subjectivity. This kind of estrangement goes beyond reification of capitalist mode of production, that is, the reification enabled by the assembly line and compartmentalization of production. Similar to Marx's version, it refers to estrangement of *species being*, however, it underscores the manner in which racial perception and colonial logic alienates *species being* from itself, rather than merely attributing it to the capitalist mode of production.

generation of a Mexican immigrant family living in South Central Los Angeles at a time when the city was transitioning from urban industrial production center to post-industrial “service economy” wasteland. The years between the late nineteen-sixties to the mid nineteen-nineties ushered in the Cold War, Ronald Reagan’s “trickle down” economic philosophy, the rise of inner city housing projects, the “Crack-cocaine epidemic,” and the turn towards a “globalized” economy, which included the George W. Bush administration and both of William Clinton’s terms in office. Although Rodriguez keeps these sort of details in the background of his novel, he is able to demonstrate the extent to which the transition in this production sector of the U.S. capitalist economy has had clear deleterious effects on the existential disposition of Chicana/o youth living in the *barrios* of urban America. I contend that Rodriguez’s narrative exceeds the characterization of mere portrayal of Chicano experience because he makes a clear conscious narrative choice --in his meticulous ability to thread these structural changes through the voice and reactions of his narrators-- to critique the manner in which surplus “racialized estranged labor” contributes to the nihilist tendency of Chicano/a youth involved with gangs. Rodriguez’s literature articulates dimensions of the “coloniality of Being” in that both *Always Running* (1993), his better know literary work, and *Music of the Mill* confirm that we can only make sense of *la vida loca* through a deeper understanding of the nexus between the colonial logic active in the imposition of meaning (as in assimilation agendas) and the monopoly on production (including in terms of meaning and value) by Anglo hegemony as an axis through which *the crazy life*, or as they say on the streets “*la loca vida*,” is reproduced and maintained.

“Estranged labor” is a theme that *Music of the Mill* allows us to examine well because two thirds of its plot is set in the bowels of a steel mill between World War II and the end of the Vietnam War, a time period characterized by the height and decline of production demands for steel in the service of imperial and colonial wars. It will be helpful to analyze the manner in which “alienated labor” manifests itself in the steel mill Rodriguez writes about to establish how the novel give us important insight into the existential dimension of Chicano/a gang violence. The mill itself signifies estranged labor because immersion into the work of the mill typifies Marxist alienation in its classical sense. The steel mill represents estrangement because the objects it produces objectify its labor. Within the steel mill labor is alienated from life, community and its own potentialities through the compartmentalization of the capitalist mode of production and the manner in which its finished product hides the various stages and forms of labor that it actually takes to make. In its pretty package, the finished products that Nazareth Steel puts on the market, i.e., steel beams, rebar, and screws, hide the exploitation incurred by labor. According to Rodriguez’s narrative, during World War II this mill provided the steel used to assemble ships, planes and bombs utilized by the U.S. Armed Forces to reinforce the allies. This period clearly demonstrated the extent to which industrial labor could be integrated into a common ideological purpose: national unity. However, as Rodriguez’s narrative brilliantly illustrates, this moment also highlights the manner in which nationalist sensibilities of the time outweighed the moral call for racial equality within the industrial working-class. Procopio Salcido’s experience --in both a copper mine in Arizona and the Nazareth Steel in Los Angeles—expresses a dual alienation in this regard. In Procopio *becoming labor* for these industrial sites, he became estranged in the manner Marx would have anticipated. However, Procopio is also

alienated in the Fanonian sense, confronted as something alien to the white power structure that subjugates and objectifies him, which negates his potential to produce value beyond bare labor, negates his potential to produce meaning and value for himself and the world he labors and exists in.

Music of the Mill deserves praise for showing how labor is not only the sum value of its production, i.e., the object that both objectify and alienates labor (money and the finished produced *thing*), it is also an existential disposition that is generated by the mode of production it is immersed in. We need not focus only on Procopio's experience inside the Los Angeles steel mill to support this assertion. As the novel begins it becomes evident that the "open veins," to use a phrase in the title of Eduardo Galeano's (1997) seminal book metaphorically, that colonialism left behind have much more to do with Procopio's status as "immigrant" and "colonial labor" than most political scientist and sociologist would admit, or even consider when discussing the situation of Mexican immigrants in the U.S. I point this out because Procopio is a descendent of the Yaqui Indians, an indigenous tribe who according to the novel "were never conquered by the Spanish—and before that, they were a thorn in the side of the Aztecs" (4). As the novel reveals, Procopio leaves the ancestral territory of the Yaqui --the Sonora Desert-- because the life-blood of the land has been dried up both by genocide and modernization. As Rodriguez's narrative indicates, the exposure to colonization and modernization took its toll not only on the Yaqui world-view and way of life, but on the ability to reproduce life itself. That is to say that colonial forms of domination re-shaped their relation to nature and, most importantly, the way the Yaqui perceived the world they exist in. As Rodriguez dramatizes the trajectory of Procopio's lineage it is difficult to overlook the extent to which colonization, the modernization of post-colonial Mexico, and the American drive to actualize Manifest Destiny manufactures a crises between the colonized and Nature. Colonialism displaced and deterritorialized *indigenas* in the northern and southern territories of North America during the first three centuries of European colonization as much as Mexican *mestizos* would be in the Southwest after 1848. Early colonial enterprises in this sense cannot be thought of as historical moments divorced from the forces that were to produce modern capitalist formations later. Early colonialism correlates with the ultimate estrangement of *species being* from Nature in capitalist modes of production because it re-shaped the existential relationship between them:

[The Yoeme] are extremely reserved and distrustful, having lived through years of abuse from strangers with light skin and those who cater to them.

One of the many extermination campaigns occurred between 1905 and 1907, with the removal of thousands of Yaquis; they were forced to work as slave in the Yucatán henequen plantations and sugarcane fields of Oaxaca. Yaquis—along with other tribes such as the Mayos, Opatas, and Akimel O'odham—were rounded up, jailed, and then shipped off to the nearby state of Nayarit. From there, the Indians were herded on foot across Mexico. Many died.

By 1910, Yaquis were driven from their ancient lands to Arizona and other locations in Mexico and the United States, a distance of 3, 500 miles. Still, even with their numbers decimated, the people survived.

Then in 1941 the Mexican government finished construction of the Angostura Dam, which diverted much water of the Río Yaqui. For generations, Yaquis had planted crops to the river's natural flooding cycle. Soon after the dam was completed, their way of life was gone. Thousands of Yaquis found themselves starving in their neglected and impoverished villages. Although the land was rich with flora, fauna, and alluvian soil, capable of supporting intense cultivation, the Indians had no education, no tools, no political power.

Procopio walks and keeps walking. Although he does not know where he is going, he leaves his small stone home where he lived with his elderly father, a younger but exhausted mother, and three small siblings. He does know this much—without water there's no corn. Without corn there is no life. For years there's been little of all three on the village where his family lives.

So he walks.

Hours become days. Days weeks, and Procopio enters villages and vastness of land he's dreamed of but never knew existed. (4)

The historical perspective this lengthy but profoundly meaningful quote provides makes clear that colonized existents do not simply become alienated from Nature as a gradual natural historical progression of dialectical overcoming—as assumed in Marxist thought that posits the progression of economies naturally moving from unorganized to organized, pre-feudal, feudal, pre-capitalist, and crystallize into capitalism; the process assumes a logic presupposing the rational movement from primitive to modern on all categories—.³ Rather, colonized existents are abruptly and violently alienated from it, for they are ripped away from their indigenous relation to Nature through colonial imposition and coercive force. In fact, within the logic established by colonialism the colonized come to sit in for Nature as a raw material in the form of bare labor within the colonizers imaginary. Procopio walks out on his ancestral land because there is not much of life left in northern Mexico to reproduce and maintain life. To be without the resources that nature provides is similar to the extreme that stands opposite to it: as alienated labor in capitalist production Procopio is reduced to bare animal functions. Without land to cultivate, without the means to reproduce life, the animal function humans are reduced to is dying. That is to say that the sum of land displacements,

³ These include the original thinkers and innovators of historical materialism: Marx and Engels, Labriola, Mehring, Kautsky in what Perry Anderson (1976) identifies as the first and second generation of “Classical Tradition.” The common thread of this generation was the desire to establish a scientific historical model through the materialist conception of History. The third generation of devout historical materialist in Europe was more active in geo-politics, yet had no less of a desire to stress the notion of a linear, progressive movement of history. The important Marxist thinkers in this generation are Lenin, Luxemburg, Hilferding, Trotsky, and Bukharin. Although there are important differences among the theories they produced, they all placed a wager on the progress of history (capitalisms eventual demise and the movement into a higher stage led by the proletariat) in their own way. Although throughout the twentieth-century Western Marxism has acquired a more nuanced conception of history that questions the notion of its essential progressive character, many of the most noted thinkers maintain to have tried to rescue the classical view. Lukács (1968), Marcuse (1941), and more recently Habermas (1979) with his notion of “rational reconstruction,” can be grouped here for their faith in the progress of history. For a detailed essay on the historical development of Marxism in Europe, its telos and agendas, see Anderson 1987, c. 1976.

coerced servitude, and rivers drying out was Procopio's reluctant departure from "Yaqui country." This is the wound the Salcido family bears in its genetic memory. What does it mean to be deliberately torn away from the compass of your being? This is a question that one would suspect most immigrant families immersed in the struggle to subsist in America do not speak about.

The land in which Procopio was born was more than a material resource; its meaning and value was ancestral, universal and transcendental to the Yaqui. As Rodriguez describes, prior to Procopio's migration North:

The eighteen-year-old is surrounded by land that speaks in words older than the sky. There, the blood of the earth rises to feed plants, trees, shrubs, animals, and the people he calls family. Nature, to his people, is their best teacher, companion, and challenge. Those who are closest nature's rhythms, its crescendo and lows, its hollers and whispers, have no buffer between themselves and the patterns, laws, languages, and songs of the world. They live simply, but densely. When they think, they think in layers, every thought compacted to where the soul is thinking. (3)

This description of the meaning of Nature, far from a cry for a nostalgic romantic past, rather suggests the loss of a source of knowledge, a loss of a sense of order to Totality. The meaning that Yaqui thought once gave to the universe became forcefully usurped by the succession of colonial (primitive capitalist) and nationalist (capitalist) interests that have administered its marginalization. To lose nature for Procopio meant alienation because its consequence was the loss of life amongst his people, the loss of what he had known as his best teacher, and the loss of that which mediated him a dynamic human being. It also introduced a reified sense of reality because the industrial sites Procopio would toil at once he resided in the U.S. made opaque "the patterns, laws, languages, and songs of the world," essentially creating the buffer between himself and the capitalist Totality he exists in. Procopio's existence was turned upside-down, as it were, when he labored in the Arizona copper mines as bare labor. In the mines, Procopio perceives the world becoming an abyss of darkness as men pick and gut the earth. In Rodriguez's narrative, industrial excavation for minerals, just as with the Angostura Dam, degenerates nature's rhythms rather than generate life. "He thinks of how a copper mine seems to tear the heart of the earth," the third person omniscient narrator recounts, "leaving massive openings that are then abandoned. As Procopio descends into these giant *wounds*, he feels guilty—because of his need to work, the land, his earth, may never heal" (5, my emphasis). Procopio's relation to Nature thus turns from being "one with it" to colluding with its exploitation for the sake of survival.

Nazareth Steel, the company that hires Procopio once he reaches Los Angeles, would not be less forgiving than the Arizona copper mine. Procopio arrived to the city with his new bride, Elaida, whom he had met in the mining town he worked at in Arizona. Knowing she was not happy in her role as a daughter who is subjected to servant like treatment, Procopio asks her to take off with him after he runs into some trouble with Anglo union busters. She would make him wait but would eventually show up to the train station from where he had arranged to depart. "I am turning my life over to you... you damn Indian," she warned as she surprised him with her arrival, "I wont let you abuse me, but if you're good and decent, I'll be there for you" (9). Like many of the

decisions the wretched of the earth are forced to make, Procopio's and Elaida's decisions to marry and seek refuge in Los Angeles was a matter of life or death.

To be sure, Procopio's and Elaida's decision to run away together was guided by hunger and death threats. In Elaida's case, what motivates her is the hunger for a life that goes beyond the impositions of a *Machismo* that stifles her potential. "I was afraid I would miss out on the most important decision of my life," she said, explaining her decision to join Procopio, "I prayed and prayed, but the emotion stayed with me. It was hunger. It was deep in my soul" (Ibid.). The hunger Elaida mentions here is not so much a physical manifestation of deprivation of sustenance (it is clear that her father and brothers will provide for her), but rather the deprivation of her own potential and self-determination. She may be bound to a man with Procopio but it's a choice made under her own terms, not by the birthright claimed by her father and brothers. We can identify the "coloniality of gender" in her relationship with her father and brothers because it is evident that these men are intent to police her sexuality and exploit her capacity to labor in so-called "women's work," i.e., cook, clean, and maintain the household.⁴ On the other hand, Procopio was fleeing death, not from actual hunger as it was with his initial migration, but because he had a price on his head for transgressing racial boundaries. The transgression was made explicit in his political organizing with other *mestizo* and indigenous miners, and the response from the Anglo mine ownership had definite and deliberate racial malice:

Procopio, now nineteen, becomes active in the strike that pits Mexicans, Yaquis, Mayos, Apaches, and Navajos against white miner owners and their goon squads. One late night, Procopio meets with other strike leaders in the dark outside one of the dilapidated worker's-housing units. In the middle of a heated discussion, and out of the shadows, a group of masked men rush in on them with riffles and handguns. The shooting begins. Procopio quickly drops to the ground. His leg is wounded, but he's still alive. Others aren't so lucky. Three of the strike leaders are killed; the rest are wounded or disappear entirely. (6)

The word around town being that "Any vigilante white man can pull in a hundred bucks if they can capture, dead or alive, any of the strike leaders," it is not long before Procopio learns that he has a price on his head. Because he is a Mexican who dares to demand what is fair, Procopio must run to evade a sure death. Guilty of challenging the racial status quo, Procopio thus flees the Arizona mines and eventually finds refuge in a Los Angeles steel-mill.⁵

⁴ As Lugones (2007) points out, the "coloniality of gender" violently imposed a patriarchal distribution of power and normalized sexual dimorphism. This fact bears on Elaida's home life because her father and brother maintain the patriarchal distribution of power and police her labor potential. She is beat and subordinated as a woman that resides on the darker side of the colonial difference. Feminist of color, such as Lugones, who have established the notion of "intersectionality" as constitutive of modern/colonial identity would posit that Elaida's treatment is emblematic of the simultaneity of interlocking oppressions. That she is victim not only of the categories that subordinate her racially in the Anglo world, but she is also victim to the patriarchy that posits gender as an organizing principle that enables her father's and brother's *Machismo*. For a thorough discussion of the relation between heterosexism and the "coloniality of power" and Lugones' amendments to Quijano's (2000) conceptualization of the concept see Lugones (2007).

⁵ It is interesting to note that during the historical period this episode describes (circa early 1940s), Procopio's crossing into the U.S. *ala brava* (forcefully), so to speak, is not an moral or legal issue

The episode I describe above would not be the first or the last moment in which the racial status quo would challenge Procopio's sense of justice and dignity. His struggles against white supremacists at Nazareth Steel would cost him a son's life, but he never shrunk from his sense of responsibility to do what he thought was right and fair. Interestingly enough, more than the alienation imposed by the death-work he is engaged in at the steel-mill, Procopio's sensibilities seem to be much more attuned to the racial estrangement his fellow white steelworkers are intent on perpetuating.⁶ It is as if he senses the colonial difference that meets him with what María Lugones (2003) identifies as "arrogant perception."⁷ This kind of perception follows a colonial logic, which is

because neither immigration laws nor national security laws had yet been set up to manage and curtail unwanted crossing. Unwanted crossing would become a legal, gender and racial issues with the militarization of the border, when the maintenance of the border became a national security issue and one of policing 'pathologies.' For historical documentation on the contentious "construction" of the U.S./Mexico border see Ethien Lubhéib, *Entry Denied: Controlling Sexuality at the Border* (Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), Joseph Nevins, *Operation Gatekeeper: The Rise of the "Illegal Alien" and the Making of the U.S.-Mexico Boundary* (New York, London: Routledge, 2002), and Mae M. Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2004). For a provocative theses that links colonialism and the rise of urban migration see John Rex, *Race, colonialism, and the city* (London Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973).

⁶ The term "death-work" can be theorized of in relation to the term "colonial death-world" Nelson Maldonado-Torres posits in *Against War* (2008). Maldonado-Torres assert that the colonial death-world "represents the point where humanity is made to face inhuman situations as part of ordinary life becomes the ethical limit of human reality. It is a context in which violence and war are no longer extraordinary, but become instead ordinary features of human existence" (100). Death-work, then, is the activity to which the colonial subject is relegated in the death-world. It is a term that can encompass the dangerous menial labor that the wretched of the earth toil in, which historically has taken on the euphemism of "Nigger work," and "Mexican-work." When juxtaposed to the wages and risk of "skilled-labor," disparate wages as well as the proximity to death that "Mexican-work" entails brings into relief the colonial difference between the white worker and the worker of color. Take for instance the maintenance work that Procopio is hired to do at the steel mill. It is not only the demand for that type of labor that lands him the job, but the fact that the mill needs low-wage racialized labor that is not only exploitable, but also malleable to maximize its profit. Not only is it the lowest paid, it is the most dangerous work. As the narrator explains, "For years, the mill has been worked by whites. But the war has pulled many of them away. Although the war is virtually at its end, the mill needs to fill the lowest-paid positions with those who will work like slaves and not complain. Newly arrived Mexicans fit this bill perfectly" (*Music of the Mill* 13). For a more detailed discussion of the term "death-world" and its relation to coloniality see Maldonado-Torres *Against War* (2008), especially pages 100-101.

⁷ "Arrogant perception," according to Lugones, "is to perceive that others are for oneself and to proceed to arrogate their substance to oneself" (Lugones 2003, 78). Through the term, Lugones want to emphasize the link between "arrogant perception" and the failure to identify with the "Other." "A further connection," Lugones writes, "is made between this failure of identification and a failure of love, and thus between loving and identifying with another person. [...] To the extent that we learn to perceive others arrogantly or come to see them only as products of perception and continue to perceive them that way, we fail to identify with them—fail to love them—in this particular way." This term has something in common with certain uses of alienation, for as Raymond Williams (1976) explains, a common meaning it conveyed in the 15th Century was to describe "the action of transferring the ownership of anything to another." That "arrogant perception" appropriates the "Other" *for the sake of the self* through an arrogant gaze implies a similar transfer of ownership of sorts that recalls the colonial logic of domination. For Lugones' proposition of "loving perception," a notion that counters the former term by positing a deep coalition of understanding amongst women of color through what she calls "'world'-traveling" see the section "Playfulness, "World"-Traveling, and Loving Perception," *Pilgrimages/ Peregrinajes: Theorizing*

reflected in the sadist tendencies of white-supremacist ideology. The white-supremacist millwrights in Rodriguez's narrative have in common with the original colonizers of the Americas the belief in the notion that the darker "Other" is an object from which to derive their own pleasure and power. Sartre's phenomenological elaboration of the "look" (1956) is relevant here because the gaze that comes from the white millwrights, the most sought after skilled position in the mill, traps Procopio and makes him feel like an absolute Other. That the first time Procopio feels their white gaze fall upon him was when he noticed it coming from a cooling tower adjacent to the worker housing units most Mexicans rented confirms this observation. As the narrator recounts,

The men just stare at the gathering across the street, not saying or doing anything. He can't make out who they are, but he can see they wear blue hard hats. Millwrights. What must they be thinking? he wonders. Some may have never seen a Mexican before. Many of the craft workers had been brought in from East Texas, Arkansas, Louisiana, and California farmlands. They are young, blond or red haired mostly, arrogant at times, and some are even downright mean. (17)

The "look" encompassed by arrogant perception pierces the racialized body like x-rays and goes beyond the existential self-other realization that Sartre posits is generated by the Other's gaze. Within the confines of the Nazareth Steel, the colonial difference is expressed not just in skin and hair color, but also *in the color of their work hats*. That is to say that their status as "skilled labor" makes Procopio stand outside of himself to conceive *what* it is that Anglo millwrights see, when they look at a brown person. If their gaze incites a sense of guilt within Procopio, it is not because the look of the white millwrights makes him aware of his own subjectivity, as Sartre would posit, but rather because it makes him feel completely alien. Their arrogant demeanor and the meanness they deliver is a clear manifestation of the racial animosity capitalist development has engendered. It is important to stress that categorical differences between white labor and black and brown labor in the U.S. have a colonial trajectory. In the case of black labor, the matter seems transparent to the extent that we can point to chattel slavery as the initiating moment of black labor in what would become the United State of America. Enslavement of Africans gave economic momentum to the early-American colonies for it was the engine that would stimulate the capital-intensive production that replaced the agrarian economy with capitalist industrialization in the U.S. The colonial origins of black labor become opaque because abolition would prevail to the extent that it made economic sense for the Nation-State to promote free-wage labor to help the development of Northern white capital. The colonial history of black labor becomes less transparent during the late-twentieth-century when capital risked the political ramifications of allowing the abatement of racism in order to contain the wages of white skilled labor.

Melvin M. Leiman makes this point clear in "Radical Critique of the Political Economy of Racism." This chapter from *The Political Economy of Racism* (1993) makes the case for understanding capitalism's fluctuating role as inhibitor and facilitator of racist social relations. The idea being that the political and ideological dimensions of racism are entangled with capitalism's developmental movement—from the regimes of monopoly capitalism to that of competition capitalism. Important for

Coalition Against Multiple Oppressions (Lanham, Boulder, New York, Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2003).

Leiman's arguments is the notion that capitalism has a vested interest in manipulating class struggle. Rodriguez narrative supports this idea to a great extent. This suggests that racial stratification is built into the division of labor when racial perceptions have currency in a given economy. Leiman makes this clear when he writes, "As a theoretical construct, capitalism is conceived as without racism. But racism is historically rooted in the combined slave-capitalist system, and its persistence suggests that overcoming racism would requires transcending capitalist society" (5). Although Leiman is clearly concerned with the development of racism within the history of U.S.'s political economy, his logic is echoed by Quijano's (2000) account of the consolidation of the coloniality of power. However, the scope of Quijano's theory makes more sense to understand how Eurocentrism and the racism are significant in forming a division of labor prior to the emergence of national economies, for he argues that the classification race and labor (a fundamental colonial practice) forms the basis for articulation the international division of labor that give momentum to the emergence of Eurocentric capitalist nation-states.

I read capitalism's historical ambivalence towards racial politics (i.e. sometimes affirming the WASP status quo, sometimes putting it in jeopardy) not as sign of its divorce from coloniality, but rather as an illustration of the dialectical dynamic that materializes as territorial logic (governance) and capitalist logic (profit) try to synergize, or become one.⁸ David Harvey (2003) posits that these are competing logics, which seek to strike a balance between national and capitalist interests. My view diverges to the extent that I think that these logics coalesce to become one in what David Theo Goldberg (2002) has posited as the "Racial State."

As I have demonstrated in the previous chapter, the history of Mexican labor in the United States reflects similar ambivalence because it has been entrenched in colonial/imperial dynamics since 1848 according to many Chicano/a historians.⁹ This time-line, however, veils the *colonial continuity* that Anglo manifest destiny represents. As the historian and theorist Emma Perez posits in *The Decolonial Imaginary* (1999), it is not sound to think that what binds all peoples of Mexican ancestry in the U.S. is the common history of immigration that begins in 1848. This is because this short sighted

⁸ To compare critiques of the emergence of racial political economies see Melvin M. Leiman, *The Political Economy of Racism: A History* (London, East Haven, CT: Pluto Press, 1993) and Anibal Quijano, "Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America," *Nepantla: Views from the South* 1.3 (2000): 533-580. Another book to consider that contributes to the historical understanding of racial dimensions of capitalism and the making of the U.S. working class is David Roedigger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (London, New York: Verso, (1991) 1993). For an account that focuses on the impact of the U.S.'s racist political economy on Chicanos see Mario Barrera, *Race and Class in the Southwest: A theory of Racial Inequality* (Notre Dame, London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1979).

⁹ Some Chicano/a historians who have explicitly visited this debate in writing are: Rodolfo Acuña (1972), Juan Gomez-Quinones (1971), Alex Saragoza (1987), and Emma Perez (1999). It is safe to suggest that most historians writing about Mexican in the U.S. maintain is the 1848 as the foundational moment in Chicano history. As Emma Perez has argued (1999), it is important that we re-orient Chicano history in the *longue durée* to decolonize our historical imagination. This means that we it should locate Chicano history in the protracted history of the development of brown labor in the America's. Racial and gender classification of labor did not stop, nor were they completely redefined as the U.S./Mexico border was drawn. Rather than representing discontinuity in the development of class dynamics and development, the annexation of Mexico by the U.S. represented a continuation of the force and logic of colonial domination, which began centuries earlier.

historical frame, using Perez's own terminology, "*silences*" the colonial drama that preceded the U.S.-Mexico War. It means that this short view of Chicana/o history limits our understanding of the entangled relation between 1492 and 1848. This silenced relation is expressed in the continuity of racial stratification—particularly the manner it was regulated and affirmed institutions and culture-- that has crystallized in the Southwestern U.S. since the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. Along with the semi-feudal slavery that *Indios* and dark-skinned *mestizos* were subjected to by Spanish colonial rule, brown labor has toiled as low paid wage labor in mining, agriculture, industrial production and service labor; always in the most difficult back-breaking and significantly dangerous work the Southwestern economy made available. The regulation and affirmation of racial stratification through out-right displacement (lawful and unlawful), murder, violent intimidation, structural and cultural imposition, and even enslavement by their Europeans and Anglo counterparts reveals that colonial logic has been prominent in the formation of what has become the Mexican-America working class in the United States.

Although Rodriguez's narrative does not re-visit every detail of colonial history, we must emphasize that the narrative itself amounts to a reflexive critique of the latent colonial logic contained in the steel-mill's social environment and the alienation it imbues on its racialized labor. The colonial difference implied in Procopio's emotions demonstrates the existential fractures induced by working *under the line of fire*, so to speak, of both the steel mill's dangerous tasks and the racial prejudice of the white millwrights. The narrator makes Procopio's emotions clear:

Procopio feels at home among his neighbors. But in the mill he feels he has entered another universe. At home, he's man and provider, keeper of house and family. But in the mill, he's a thing, a mule, somebody to be humiliated when Denton and his buddies feel like it, to be yelled at whenever his bosses want to yell. His sense of manhood, of being Mexican—of being human—is always on the line when he enters the mill. (19)

It is evident that Procopio's being is pulled in several directions because gender and race become entangled dimension of "interstitial subjectivity," of existing, according to feminists of color, "between and betwixt" categories of difference and, according to Lugones, "universes of meaning" (*Pilgrimages* 59).¹⁰ The quote above also recalls Maldonado-Torres' formulation of sub-alterity, the existential "condition of a subject whose being and meaning have been altered to such an extent that his alterity only works in the function of a system of subordination" (*AW*, Note 24, 282). The fact that Procopio's life is split into two universes—home and mill—that are completely alien to each other reveals that extent to which he lives a fragmented existence. Home is the

¹⁰ Anzaldúa's (1987) term "border subjectivity" echoes this concept for it posits an "in betweenness" that pulls subjectivity in many directions. 'Interstitial subjectivity' underscores liminal existence. The significance of the term is the 'double-consciousness' it prompts upon those who are subjugated by the dominant culture. It is evident in this excerpt that the gaze he feels coming from his white counterpart makes him feel in between his home, his culture and the mill. The term is relevant here because it is obvious that, in the midst of the Nazareth Steel, Procopio "inhabits the limen, the place in between realities, a gap "between and betwixt" universes of sense that construe social life and persons differently, an interstice from where can most clearly stand critically toward different structures" (*Pilgrimages* 59).

universe that understands Procopio, that values Mexican cultural tradition, that nurtures his mind and heart, and more importantly meets him with a familial gaze. The mill, on the other hand, subordinates Procopio to the extent that it perceives him solely as bare labor, for it values, not his life but efficiency, profit and whiteness; it cares for him to the extent that he remains a commodity from which use value can be extracted, and meets him with an arrogant gaze that makes Procopio call into question his own manhood and humanity. The humiliation that Denton, the most senior of all white supremacists at Nazareth Steel, and other white millwrights dish out reveals the coloniality that permeates the steel-mill. The coercion and homicide perpetrated by these supremacist illustrates the manner in which racial power and domination maintain a Manichean order within the steel-mill, for it is by diminishing Procopio's own sense of dignity and self-respect that they prop up their own dominance. Racist Anglos in the mill thus define their dominance through the subjugation of racial and sexual others –black or brown, and women and queer.

The synergistic relation of capitalist exploitation and racial domination are not understated in Rodriguez' novel because the novel makes clear that the mill's productive activities and white-supremacist ideology coalesce to suppress the "entelechy" of black and brown labor.¹¹ Using Fanon's terms, the Manichean logic prevalent in the mill's ownership and management sees to it that Procopio's potential, as well as that of his fellow co-workers of color, and the successive generations of Salcido mill-workers is held in check by the alienating activity of maintenance work and the coercive threats of racist millwrights. The fact is that few Mexicans are promoted within the maintenance crews, and it is even more rare to become, as Rodriguez writes, a "full-fledged millwright" (17). The notion commonly held by racist millwrights that Mexicans who know too much to be dangerous need to be brought down illustrates not only the homicidal implications of Procopio's situation, but also the extent to which his existence is subordinated as a function of both an economic and a racial order. This is evident in the manner in which the ownership and white-supremacist union leadership often make deals to maintain "normal" state of affairs, to look out for the one and the other's interest. Put simply, the mutual interest of capital and white-labor is to keep black and Mexicans in their place: economically and socially below whites. The novel illuminates this fact as it describes how Procopio's and his fellow Mexican compatriots' "ways of seeing and being, of thinking and acting, some of which link back tend of thousands of years before the Spanish conquered" are drowned by capitalist rationalization and Anglo domination (18).¹² The narrator's observations support this analysis,

¹¹ I bring this concept to bear on the analysis of the coloniality of Being because something fundamentally deleterious to human potentiality occurs in regards to "expectation, hope, and intention towards possibility" when racialized and gendered over-determination is the order of the day under the "coloniality of power." That is to say that the "coloniality of Being" points to an arresting quality of human potentiality when one becomes locked in the bodily schema of racist culture. This is why Fanon (1967) makes it a point to express a claim of his full humanity by locating black subjectivity not simply in the past and present, but also in the future. I follow Fanon by making a similar point about Chicana/o existence and subjectivity by pointing out how the possibility to realizes Chicana/o potentiality is curtailed by modern/colonial logic, the modern/colonial ethics of domination, and the coloniality of power, particularly as I am pointing out here, through the racialization of estranged labor.

¹² Here I refer to Max Weber's notion to recall the manner in which capitalism not only represents a set of economic structural dynamics that orient a mode of production, but also a set of

In time, the mill and its bosses clash with many of the ideas and ways brought over from the old country. Industry destroys the village and elder system and replaces it with the boss-worker system that eventually dictates one's life, one's relationships and aspirations, including how one deals with family, one's wife, and even with one's worth.

Whatever the workers may think, the mill becomes primary; family, music, and community become secondary. (18)

We can read Procopio's lament in a classical Marxist sense to underscore the extent to which *species being* is alienated from species life, i.e., the family and community, as a result of industrial labor. However, this reading elides the extent to which racial estrangement is entangled with the manifestations of alienated labor in the steel mill. There is no reason to privilege one form of alienation over the other in the analysis for the effects of subordination in both instances are equally violent and often homicidal. As the narrator observes Procopio is privy to this reality and its violent consequences,

But over time he sees the effects: There are days or nights when men in the cottages yell at the top of their lungs, often drunk, frightening children, beating walls, sometimes having to be restrained from knocking their own wife's teeth out. The mill gets under their skin: The monotony, the long hours, the changing shifts, and the treatment they receive, as if they are less than others. Most handle it as best they can; far too many let it eat them alive. (Ibid.)

The question then becomes how not to let the racism and "alienated labor" *out there* diminish one's being within. For Procopio, the mill would paradoxically become a constant danger and a refuge. I make this observation because although both alienated labor and racial estrangement initially emotionally eviscerate him, Procopio ends up only being able to bind emotionally with his activity and the things it produces rather than the people who love him. This can be attributed to the accidental death of a baby daughter, who brings him close to symbolic-death. The emotional abyss this incident brings about considerably distances Procopio from his family. It is as if the mill becomes a conduit for avoiding the pain of the emptiness and sadness left by his daughter's death. The mill's work abets Procopio's inability to invest emotions, or put in psychoanalytic terms, his inability to cathect. It is a thickening of the skin, so to speak, that is paved by disavowing reality. But this too would have its own costs. Procopio forsakes nurturing his family to avoid confronting the loss within the household by allowing alienated labor to be his comfort. As Rodriguez writes, "The boys grow up without a father. For the older boys it's devastating—they recall a caring and nurturing dad. Neither their father's body, nor his spirit, is around anymore" (22).

cognitive inputs that shape social action and interaction based on efficiency and calculation. I also find this sociological term interesting because in his *Economy and Society* (1978) Weber describes the eventual effects of rationalization as leading to "a polar night of icy darkness," where rationalization traps subjects into a "steel-hard casing" of rational and rule base control. From this, I only think it appropriate that the Zapatistas of the Lacandon Jungle in Southern Mexico describe the colonial situation they have encountered as *La larga noche de 500 años* because it alludes to coloniality: the infernal cage, so to speak, of racial negation and hunger that has led to the silenced darkness of colonial existence. See Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and The Spirit of Capitalism*, Trans. T. Parsons (Mineola, New York: Dover Publications, Inc., (1958) 2003), and *Economy and Society*, Ed. G. Ross and C. Wittich (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1978, c. 1968).

The most significant repercussion of Procopio's complete surrender to the mill comes into relief through Johnny Salcido's, Procopio's youngest son, incarceration. To be sure, this observation is not meant to posit a reduction of the problems Johnny encounters in juvenile courts as a direct consequence of his father's actions and choice (something "the culture of poverty" theory has somewhat accomplished), but it would be disingenuous to posit that they have no relation.¹³ By the same token, we must understand that Procopio's actions and choices are always made in a limited field of options. That is to say that Procopio's and Johnny's experience should always be considered in relation to the marginality and subordination that often makes them feel powerless and withdrawn. As a young man, Johnny's outlook is too narrow to understand this complexity, but he discerns early in his life that the origin of his own problems with the law are not only of his own making or choosing, but rather, they originate from the control that the steel mill (read: estranged labor) has over their life. Explaining Johnny's spiteful attitude towards the steel mill, the narrator discloses,

While the rest of his brothers eventually fell in line, entering the steel mill one after the other, Johnny only sees what the mill has done to his family: pull Procopio away, closing him off, driving a wedge between his mother and father, between father and son, between the danger and excitement of the street life and the sure-thing nature of steel work, with its relentless schedules, long days, and body damaging workloads. (27)

In a Marxist sense we can discern the manner in which species being is alienated from the life of the species in these lines. The wedge that the narrator points out expresses the extent to which the activities of alienated labor distance the individual from the life outside of labor as it curtails the care and nurturing that dignifies life. It is an emotional wedge that impedes the possibility of binding through love and support. The wedge also represents the schism between the value of "life that produces" and "life that does not produce." That the steel mill stands in for the only thing that produces value in the novel

¹³ My criticism of the culture of poverty theory is that it constructs cultural pathologies of many of the problems that racial colonial subjects encounter due to coloniality. For Oscar Lewis (1963) and E.C. Benfield (1970) poverty and its derivatives (crime, violence, segregation, under-education, etc.) are sustained by a culture and individuals that choose to cultivate such conditions. Taking "individualist reductionism" to its limit, these theorists have contributed to the framing of stereotypes and criminalization of racialized folks living in poverty. As the following excerpt from Lewis' 1963 study demonstrates, the mainstream's imaginary has much reason to pity and fear the poor when it elides a historical understanding of such conditions:

The economic traits most characteristic of the culture of poverty include the constant struggle for survival, unemployment and underemployment. Some of the social and psychological characteristics include living in crowded quarters, a lack of privacy, gregariousness, a high incidence of alcoholism, frequent resort to violence in the settlements of quarrels, frequent use of physical violence in the training of children, wife beating, early initiation into sex, free unions or consensual marriages, a relatively high incidence of abandonment of mothers and their children, a trend toward mother-centered families, a strong predisposition to the authoritarianism, and a great emphasis upon family solidarity. (*The Children of Sanchez* xxvi-xxvii)

Even if one could accept this list as sound sociological analysis, none of these so-called traits exist in a historical vacuum. They rather exist through and because of the coloniality of power. For two representative studies of the "culture of poverty" see Oscar Lewis, *The Children of Sanchez: Autobiography of a Mexican Family* (New York: Vintage Books, 1963, c. 1961), and E.C. Benfield, *The Unheavenly City: The Nature and Future of Our Urban Crisis* (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1970).

is important in this regard. It means that anything that falls out of the purview of capitalist production is superfluous. This is important for two reasons. First, because it becomes clear that an individual's value is dependent on his/her ability to be "alienated labor," to produce surplus value for the capitalist mode of production. Secondly, as Rodriguez's narrative unfolds it becomes evident that food and shelter are not all sufficient to nurture a child's potential and its internal sense of value. In fact, as it will become evident in the chapter that follows, sometimes the love and nurturing that comes from the family is not sufficient to fill the emotional abyss that the uncaring racist death-world engenders in Chicano youth. That is to say that as time passes and the steel mill's need for labor diminishes, so does Chicano/a's value as its potential labor force.

To Johnny, the steel mill represents his fate as racialized estranged labor because in his youth Nazareth Steel is looming as the only path he is meant to follow. The fact that his older brothers followed suit successively could not allow him to suppose otherwise. Johnny's eventual incarceration, which can be read as a political death of sorts and a definite social comma, forces him to confront himself existentially. His own existential wedge, the one that pits his being "between the danger and excitement of the street life and the sure-thing nature of steel work, with its relentless schedules, long days, and body damaging workloads," comes to a crisis in jail (27). It is a moment in which he has to consider a profoundly existential question: "What do I want to be?" Johnny cares for his familial bonds, for it is obvious that his existence is grounded by his family's esteem. Johnny does not want to be "a nobody," so to speak, in the eyes of the world, nor does he want to be estranged from his familial roots. The most basic concern behind his consideration of "what to be," however, is whether or not he will survive or perish on a literal level. The streets are a clear danger and a dance with death; they are an abyss of violence, drugs, and crime. On the other hand, Johnny believes that the soberness and structure of working life will give him the possibility to "prevail- not just survive" (32). As the narrator explains, "After surviving drugs, stealing, violence, and jail, his ready-for-anything demeanor is sensed by all those who know him" (31). Over time, however, the "debilitating alienation" Kelly Oliver theorizes in *The Colonization of Psychic Space* (2004), which we first observe in Procopio, overcomes Johnny when he is thrown into the infernally hot, strenuous, Manichean world of Nazareth Steel; the place that paradoxically endows his life with a sense of value and exploits it at the same time.¹⁴

The cyclical nature of the narrative structure supports the notion that class and race issues are trans-generational, and are reproduced systematically across generations. In other words, Rodriguez's narrative reveals how coloniality is reproduced across generations. Procopio's mortal enemies at the steel-mill become Johnny's mortal enemies once he begins to work there. That is to say that Procopio's past struggles for racial justice and equity within Nazareth Steel become Johnny's own struggles. It is important to underscore that what is different between Procopio's and Johnny's

¹⁴ Kelly Oliver theorizes the concept "debilitating alienation," which I introduced in the first section of this chapter, through Fanon, as the underside of originary alienation. Accordingly, "the debilitating alienation of oppression undermines freedom and subjectivity." "If the modern world," Oliver writes, "gives rise to the originary alienation that constitutes modern subjectivity described by contemporary philosophy, what emerges as the underside of this alienation is another treacherous and destructive form of alienation that undermines subjectivity and garners the psychic conditions for colonization, oppression, and social repression on which the modern subject gains its privilege" (*Colonization of Psychic Space* 20).

generation, however, is the sociopolitical context they work under. While Procopio's better days at the mill were the late 1940s and 1950s, Johnny's tenure at the steel-mill begins in May 1970, a time of profound shifts in the meaning and legislation of race and racism in the United States. As Rodriguez makes clear in the vulgar Marxist diatribe of Harley's character, the mill's resident communist, the political economy of the United States during this period is in a precarious condition, not only because of the shifting production demands of a war economy are beyond decline, but also because the nation was undergoing profound changes due to newly established Civil Rights legislation and promising technological innovations in transportation and communication. According to the novel, the racially charged and rapidly shifting state of economic affairs in the U.S. made it such that between 1970 and 1980 a "race war" breaks out in Nazareth Steel; what is at stake is control and dominance over the production of labor and value.

Johnny Salcido's story is important precisely because it demonstrates the extent to which coloniality permeates the steel-mill's environment across generations. This is evident in the way that *the mill's relations of production and white supremacist ideology claim exclusive possession and control on the production of value*. In the midst of the so-called "race war," the colonial difference becomes apparent in the manner in which capital and white supremacy coalesce and come to stand in for Totality. It is as if the making of the world began in the mill's furnaces, for Rodriguez describes the steel mill as one would depict a universe; it has its own materiality, temporality, and harmony. Johnny's first close gaze at the steel mill confirms this observation,

He can see smoke curling away from various towers. Air whistles blast loudly at varying intervals. A resounding roar from the electric furnaces and the boom of the scrap metal being dropped into the back of rail cars rounds out the amazing cacophony of mechanical sounds. From the parking lot, Johnny sniffs the sulfur and limestone smells, the iron and coal dust, and he realizes what a powerfully sensual world the mill is. It has its own music, seemingly senseless but over time coming together in harmonies all its own. It's an otherworldly place, far removed from Florencia neighborhood with its small ma-and-pa stores, liquor stops, and taco stands. (37)

Ironically the steel plant is not far from the *Florencia barrio* at all. In fact, it is part of it. The scale of production, however, dwarfs its neighboring community and those who inhabit it. This excerpt makes it clear that aside from the objects it produces, the steel mill also produces meaning that is "seemingly senseless," but that over time comes to make sense in its own way. "The music of the mill," here, *stands for the meaning that it produces*, the sense (not just in the sensual derivation of the word) that it makes. That is to say that the steel mill not only makes steel or its pure abstraction in value (i.e., profit); it also produces Mexican labor and black labor, it contributes to the creation of the subordinated existence of racialized alienated labor within the mill and outside it. The color-line that is evident in the mill's division of labor is consistent with this notion because the fact that black and brown steel workers are barred from plant promotions forecloses the possibility of moving up in the hierarchy of labor within the mill. The homicidal opposition displayed by the supremacist millwrights to the mobility of racialized labor reveals that extent to which moving from unskilled labor to skilled labor is tantamount to being let into the secrets of Totality, particularly how it is made

hegemonically from the top. The steel mill's hierarchical structure makes the white millwrights feel as though their "god-eye view" of the mill's operations bestows upon them the divine power to give the gift of life or the gift of death. Characters like Denton and his white supremacist cronies suffer of the God complex of "Imperial Man," that Maldonado-Torres theorizes, where "*God becomes the privileged other who alone can provide authentic recognition to the imperial self*" (AW 113). The function being to either annihilate or assimilate difference, because as Maldonado-Torres eloquently asserts "Imperial Man claims right of ownership to everything" (113).

Within the mill's environment attempts at assimilation are out of the question, while attempts at annihilation are rampant. In this sense, Rodriguez novel, similar to Acosta's work, further challenges Heidegger's (1953) proposition that Death is that which is most outstanding for Da-sein. The ontological difference between Heidegger's conceptualization of Da-sein and the racially estranged existential condition of Rodriguez's characters is spelled out by the constant threat of violence and death that is deployed against them. "Ending" cannot "constitute a *being whole* of that being that exist[s]" under the gaze of racial subordination because this ending is not a random, natural occurrence, but rather premature and a curtailing of human potentiality that is sadistically deliberate (Heidegger, 225). In the second part of the novel alone there are at least six instances where Denton's crew of white-supremacist millwrights deploy death for coercive ends to maintain their dominant position over their darker counter parts.

The wounds I allude to in the title of this chapter refer to the scars that the dialectics of death inscribe upon the body, psyche and spirit of all members of the Salcido family (including the younger generations). Johnny's story reveals the links between the wounds of the past generation and the present generation. For instance we learn that prior to Johnny entering the mill his older brother, Severo, was murdered by Denton's crew of Klansman, and that it was known to be a reprisal for Procopio's leadership in bringing about a consent decree that would open more equitable working conditions for workers of color at Nazareth Steel. This is brought to Johnny's attention only when Procopio reveals it to him; only when Procopio fears that his youngest son's political activity could end Johnny's life. The mill's racist millwrights do assault Johnny twice. During the second of these occasions, Johnny is beat close to death, incapacitated for weeks, after his own efforts to organize a more equitable and inclusive labor union seem to gain ground. Beyond the physical wounds these events inflict, they represent profound psychological wounds. On the one hand, Procopio is coerced into a submissive disposition within the mill because he wants to protect the rest of his son's from Severo's fate. He is emasculated, as it were, by the inability to satisfy his own paternal instincts. Procopio's scars are profoundly psychological to the extent that his paternal function as protector and nurturer of the family is compromised by the power that the steel mill (its alienating activity and racial politics) has over him. The fact is that Procopio is rendered powerless by the fear of losing another of his children. Johnny, on the other hand, does not suffers the same sort of symbolic castration, for it becomes clear to the mill's Klansman that not only will he not leave his guard down once more after he's almost beat to death, but also when they realize that Johnny is willing to "negate the negation," using Hegelian terms, by responding to unwarranted racial violence with violence. Johnny's symbolic castration comes when Johnny is reassigned towards the more acute alienation and subtle disempowerment of the wire mill outside of the main plant shortly after

masked men mysteriously attack two of the mill's Klansman in retaliation for setting up an accident that mutilates and almost kills a fellow black worker. In the narrators words,

The wire mill is purgatory. It is a separate tool shanty, separate time-clock area, and separate parking lot. Johnny can no longer interact with the millwrights and mill workers in other sections of the plant. He has to maintain and repair all the machines. He doesn't have helpers, unlike the other plant divisions. Johnny knows why he is there—although he's becoming one of the most competent mechanics in the plant, the company and their union stooges want to keep him from organizing the other employees. (141)

"The assignment is a slow death," according to the novel, because it removes Johnny from the life of the mill, its movements and its music; consigns him to the most alienating and oppressively marginal conditions the mill can assign its labor (142). His time in the wire mill is an exile that seriously diminishes his political status in the steel mill's labor struggles.

It is clear that the struggles in the mill are not only about surviving as a worker, nor simply as an individual, but also about prevailing as dignified human beings, as dignified family and community. This is why the Salcido's wounds have a meaning that is historically entangled with coloniality. The violence that each individual member of the family experiences has a colonial trajectory emblematic of the logic of domination that the mill thrives on and has actual implications that travel beyond the mill to all its members. It is important to underscore this fact because the consequences of racism are rarely considered outside their individual context in American scholarship. "American Exceptionalism" and its counterpart, "American Individualism," tend to permeate the analysis of social scientist and literary critics alike when the problem of race and its consequences are entertained.¹⁵ As if to experience racial prejudice is always unique and an individual matter. The wounds Johnny suffers during the mill's race war and the risks he takes to stand up for dignity, however, are not only borne by him, but also by his family, most of all his wife and children:

¹⁵ This point is important because the scholarly debates about the how the conditions of the oppressed are reproduced still lies between the notions that either affirms that *individuals make the conditions they live* and those who contend that *structures create the conditions they live*. There are problem with taking either of these approaches strictly. The complexity of life and society demands complex analysis. Analysis that displays "American Exceptionalism" and "American Individualism" tends to take individualist reductionism as a rule however. This unit of analysis either presupposes the exceptional status of phenomena under examination or stresses the agency of the individual. When it is applied a priori to racial colonial subjects, the coloniality of power is implicated in this simplistic approach because it veils the historic and structural context under which subjects and their reality are created. Just as important is that it also leads to fallacious analysis that informs policy. Sociologist that think from the darker side of the colonial difference, from Dubois to Ramón Grosfoguel, have commented on this issue, yet the approach not only persists, but remains the norm. For similar arguments that call for a complex analysis in today's social research see Emmanuel Wallerstein *et al.*, *Open the Social Sciences: Report of the Gulbenkian Commission on the Restructuring of the Social Sciences* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1996). For arguments that advocate for how the Humanities and particularly, the Ethnic Studies approach amplifies the possibility for complex analysis in contemporary research see Cathy Davidson and David Theo Goldberg, "A Manifesto for the Humanities in a Technological Age," *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (50:23, 2004), and Johnella E. Butler, "Ethnic Studies as a Matrix for the Humanities, the Social Sciences and the Common Good," *Color-Line to Boderline: The Matrix of American Ethnic Studies* (Seattle, London: University of Washington Press, 2001).

The battle is on. Aracely's part of it, whether she likes it or not. If something bad happens to Johnny, she'll be alone in raising her soon-to-be born baby. But she also believes in him; she believes in the struggles he's taken on. What she learned most from life is that you have to fight for whatever dignity and respect you get in this world. Staying out of trouble because it's "trouble" isn't an option. It will never be an option for Aracely and Johnny. Not when it comes to winning what others take for granted, to getting your just due as an American worker. As a human being. (88)

This excerpt shows the political value that death takes on when we go beyond Heidegger's notion that death is existence's "*ownmost*", "*non-relational*" certainty. As Abdul JanMohamed notes in his work on Richard Wright, political death, the death brought upon by resistance to the threat and use of actual-death as a mode coercion is both interpersonal and intrapersonal (*TDBS* 74). JanMohamed also asserts that the meaning of political death is "determined by the mode of its termination" (73). In Rodriguez's narrative, Johnny's willingness to resist the mill's racial stratification signifies a willingness to "give up" his life for the sake of a dignified existence re-values his life and possible death. If something bad like dying would happen to him, its value would be determined by his act of political defiance for the sake of the community. In this sense the possibility of his political death would have relational meaning that would be shared by his family and the mill's racialized community in general. The intrapersonal dynamic of political death also comes through in this passage because Aracely has to accept the worth of Johnny's possible political death. She accepts it because as his wife and partner, she has to accept it as her own possible fate, as the fate of her family. This is evident in the manner in which she views Johnny's struggles as her struggles, his dignity as her own. In this scenario, Aracely must resist her own maternal desire to protect her children from pain and suffering to support the resistant stance that Johnny takes. JanMohamed explains the existential implications in this kind of situation: "in short, life has to negate itself, or at least its imperatives for its own immediate perpetuation, in order to overcome the devastating effects of the deployment of the threat of death; life has to embrace actual-death in order to free itself from social-death" (74).

It is important to examine the meaning of Johnny's embrace of the possibilities of political death (either by falling victim to Denton's plotting or by acting in retribution to the death and violence that has been plotted against the mill's black and brown labor) because it has two immediate outcomes. The first and most significant in terms of violence is that when two of Denton's goons are found seriously beaten it curbs the racist millwright's malicious attempts to keep blacks and brown labor in its place. Although only temporarily, the mill's white supremacists constrain their attempts to "sabotage" the brown and black laborers that had already maimed and killed many for fear of retaliation. The second outcome is symbolic and has more existential significance in that Johnny's embrace of death signals a re-valuing of himself as more than bare-life. The meaning of this kind of embracing of political death by "subjectifying actual-death," JanMohamed posits, "is that "bare-life" redefines its political status" in doing so (74). Johnny accomplishes this to the extent that Denton and his friends elevate Johnny to the status of "commie," for it is clear to him that Johnny's squad is organized and overtly political (*Music* 152-3). It signals a reorientation of Johnny as "bare life" in Giorgio Agamben's

use of the term in *Homo Sacer* (2005) because he affirms his subjectivity and dignity by establishing his “response-ability” as political agent. Similar to the dynamic JanMohamed observes in certain characters in Richard Wright’s literature that confront racial persecution with their own violence, Johnny and his comrades are “no longer “bare life” to the extent that they are now capable of killing those who have treated them as “bare life” (*TDBS* 74). The re-definition of Johnny’s political status, although symbolic and isolated to the confines of the mill’s environment, is important because it marks a significant moment in resisting social-death and the “coloniality of Being.” Although systemic problems persist for him and his family outside the steel mill, the symbolic re-articulation of his existence and subjectivity affirms his position as producer of value because in this instance he determines the use value of his bare life. That is to say that although Johnny cannot redefine his political status outside the mill, his choice to apply coercion, his own ability to “act on,” so to speak, the master’s “kill or be killed” morality is also a moment constitutive of his subjectivity. It is a moment akin to that which Judith Butler points in *The Psychic life of Power* (1997), where we observe a reversal in the flow of power that demonstrates the ambivalence of power inherent to subject formation. As Butler points out the subject emerges not only when power acts upon it but also when power is “acted on”:

Power is both external to the subject and the very venue of the subject. This apparent contradiction makes sense when we understand that no subject comes into being without power, but that its coming into being involves the dissimulation of power, *a metaleptic reversal in which the subject produced by power becomes heralded as the subject who founds power*. This foundationalism of the subject is an effect of a working of power, an effect achieved by reversal and concealment of that prior working. (15-16, my emphasis)

Although beyond the plant’s walls Johnny would be profoundly limited to give political meaning and value to his own resistant activity, Rodriguez’s literature assumes a hopeful stance for it shows that there is some existential redemption in what Kelly Oliver calls “response-ability,” the ability to “address” or articulate a response to subjection and subordination.¹⁶ In confronting Denton as Douglass once confronted Covey, in staking his life to shrug off those whose boots are constantly at his throat, Johnny becomes a witness of his objectification, subjection, and subordination. Kelly posits this as a liberatory dynamic because,

Through the process of bearing witness to oppression and subordination, those othered can begin to repair damaged subjectivity by taking up a position as speaking subjects. What we learn from beginning with the

¹⁶ Oliver’s use of this concept is important because she attempts to re-think the basis of subjectivity through recognition by positing “witnessing” as an alternative concept to the basis of subjectivity. As she theorizes, “Address-ability and response-ability are what I identify with the process of witnessing. Subjectivity is the result of the process of witnessing. Witnessing is not only the basis for othered subjectivity; witnessing is also the basis for all subjectivity; and oppression and subordination work to destroy the possibility of witnessing and thereby undermine subjectivity. Against theorists who maintain that subordination or trauma undermines the possibility of becoming or maintaining subjectivity by destroying or damaging the possibility of witnessing” (7). For more on Kelly Oliver’s articulation of “response-ability” see pages 5-19 and 135 in *Witnessing: Beyond Recognition* (Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press, 2001).

subject position of those other is that the speaking subject is a subject by virtue of address-ability and responsibility. Address-ability and response-ability are the roots of the subject, which are damaged by the objectifying operations of oppression and subordination. (7)

The question that arises, however, is to what extent this kind of “response-ability” must be conscious and discursive for it to be identified as a “metaleptic reversal.” It seems that the reversal we observe in Johnny is a reaction to the confrontations with death that are forced upon him by the mill’s racists, rather than a clear willing choice to respond. The reversal is actually a break from the stoic and often-passive disposition that Procopio’s generation favored. To not be able to absorb subordination, according to Procopio’s generation, is *not* to be dignified, *not* to be *un aguantador* because to complain about their wretched condition would be “a sign of weakness,” for it amounts to begging for the dignity one is entitled to (149). Here again we encounter the tragic elements of the coloniality of Being, for it becomes clear that the possibility of producing one’s own meaning and value is dependent on one’s ability to stake one’s life or endure subjection, either to supersede the fear that makes the life instinct militate against the self by letting it live in degradation or submit to it passively. The tragedy is in the inescapability of the situation, for even a stoic stand towards the alienation of the mill cannot redeem the historically systemic problems.

The third part of Rodriguez’s narrative is powerful because what is repressed by previous generation’s stoicism returns in an acutely homicidal manner in the generation that follows. The third part of Rodriguez’s novel accomplishes the critique of racialized alienated labor by demonstrating that the gang violence that emerged in the wake of post-industrial Los Angeles has a direct link to the life and the death of the steel mill industry in that region; to both what it negated and it affirmed. While “empirical” and sociologically inclined studies on gangs are the most cited by policy makers and police enforcement officials, they never make such historical connections.¹⁷ For instance the *National Youth Gang Survey*, a study first published in 1996 designed to give lawmakers an accurate picture of gangs nationally, tells us that in the year 1986 “gangs became a problem,” but it make no efforts to understand the problem historically (*NYGS*, 12). It is as if the issue arises in barrios and ghettos around the nation in a historical vacuum. We have to do our own extrapolations from the data provided to understand that regions most severely struck by deindustrialization between the nineteen-eighties and nineteen-nineties demonstrate to have the most gang activity nationally. Of particular importance for Chicano/as is that it estimated that in the Western regions of the Unites States 75 percent of police jurisdictions report gangs, a substantial percentage of these being reported from

¹⁷ This is particularly evident in survey oriented government sponsored studies like the report on *Violence By Youth Gangs and Groups As A Crime Problem In Major American Cities* (1975), the *1996 National Youth Gang Survey* (1999), the *1998 National Youth Gang Survey* (2000), which are also significantly cited by academics and provide raw data of the so-called “gang problem” rather than root causes and solutions. Comprehensive empirical studies of the gang phenomenon and Chicano gangs in particular note that gangs in the U.S. are a problem that only dates back to the nineteenth century (Randall G. Sheldon et. all., 2004) and that Chicano gangs in particular rise during the 1920s (Bogardus, 1943), but others note that this rise does have much to do with racial alienation, particularly what was experienced during the 1930s during the Mexican Repatriation Act and WWII’s anti-Zoot-suit sentiment (Moore, 1978, 1991).

California. It is not a surprise that the Midwest and the South follow similar trends.¹⁸ It is less of a surprise that this report confirms a fact that we could have gathered without surveying law enforcement jurisdictions around the nation: that most of the nation's "gang activity," an often used euphemism for "group oriented crime," is perpetrated by "Hispanics and African-Americans."¹⁹ Given the extent to which people of color are disproportionately and systematically affected by this issue, we need only to walk through a prison or a school in an inner city to understand that the nation's so-called "gang problem" brings into evidence the colonial difference.

Beyond quantitative analysis of sociological approaches, Rodriguez's narrative allows us to engage gang violence historically, critically and philosophically to make sense out of a phenomenon that has been difficult to grasp both outside and inside the communities most affected by it. Following his novel, we can discern the theoretical argument Rodriguez is trying to make about the origins of gang violence, namely, that when "racialized estranged labor" is an over-determined horizon for youth of color, it becomes an overbearing imposition that leads to an existential attitude that can be characterized paradoxically as both self-destructive and resistant. The economy of meaning and value is profoundly implicated in this dynamic. Some have described this attitude as "negative resistance" (Smethurst 1996), for it is characterized by a nihilistic bent that surfaces with violent and homicidal force. Rather than becoming a positive political force, negative resistance is a "trap door," so to speak, that lead to the abyss of the "dialectics of death" and the "coloniality of Being." On the one hand, actual-death, social-death, and symbolic-death function dialectically to give expression to the subjectivity and social existence of youth who find them selves affiliated to gangs. The salient issue here is the manner in which a racist political economy, social-death and the ubiquitous presence of violence and actual-death in their social environment, curtail youth of color's possibility of producing value or even, in existential term, *being value*. On the other hand, the disparity of "care" and "understanding" (in the Heideggerian sense of Da-sein's ontology) that these youth experience, vis á vis Anglo dominant society, points to how the colonial difference negates their entelechy and the possibility of producing meaning for themselves. The hegemony of American racist culture imposes upon its own deleterious interpellations to the detriment of Chicano/a youth, for it pathologizes their condition, making gangs and those affiliated with them devious, delinquent, and criminal, rather than lost and abandoned by the colonial death-world in which they exist.

Rodriguez focuses his narrative on Azucena's life in the third part of the novel to bring into view the gender and sexual dynamics involved in youth violence. Although Rodriguez could have essentially written the same story by focusing on her brother Joaquin, I think he wrote about Azucena with detail to undermine the notion that males of color are the most affected by gang violence. In fact, I think that choosing to represent Azucena reveals Rodriguez's desire to insist that the possibility of producing meaning is bound up with one's ability to produce value. I will explore this more when I discuss her rape and Rodriguez's rendering of the possible liberatory significance of Azucena's young pregnancy. For now, I only want to suggest that Azucena's story helps us

¹⁸ NYGS, 9.

¹⁹ The exact figures in 1996 according to the Department of Justice are as follows: "Asian 5%, Caucasian 14%, African American 35%, Hispanic 44%" (NYGS, 24).

understand the “coloniality of gender” particularly and the “coloniality of Being” in general *because what moves this character is not so much a search for identity or even the desire for recognition, but rather a desire for meaning and purpose.* Azucena’s intentionality seeks the means through which she can pursue her potential and *the form to crystalize it through.* This is why singing and praying become so existentially meaningful to her. On a discursive level, these practices help her understand the meaning and process of life, and on an ethical level they allow her to enter the economy of human exchange by allowing Azucena to give a gift in verse or offer something positive to the world through prayer. They also allow her to cathect, in an otherwise eviscerated existence. This is why she compares the steel mill with the sweat lodge that helps her begin to heal the colonial wounds that afflict her and her family. Azucena thinks of the lodge as something akin to the mill because despite the colonial difference it was bent on maintaining the mill’s “heat” had allowed her father to grasp the profound relation between inanimate material and life. Both the mill and the lodge forge things with heat, they shape not only *objects* but also *subjects*. Something akin to what JanMohamed describes as an “isomorphic relation between the labor process and cathexis” is implied in this comparison because it is as if Azucena understands that “the activity of labor [and this does not have to mean blue collar work, but also labor in an abstract and general sense] is a process of intentional and transformative mediation between the subject of work,” and that it “profoundly links and modifies the “original” identities of the tow identities” (*TDBS* 272). Azucena reveals that even Johnny, with his hard-core-Mexican-macho-stoic disposition, could not survive the mill’s punishment without finding a way to *be more than* racialized estranged labor, to live on his own terms, by giving meaningfulness to his activity despite the various interpellations imposed on him from the outside. As Azucena intimates in the concluding paragraphs of the novel,

Johnny may have had his battles in the mill—he may have disagreed with how things were done, how people managed the plant or the way they broke workers down, misusing them, dividing them, scaring them, and lying to them. But he learned to do the work; he learned to love the machines and the way steel’s properties were melted, poured, and hardened. Perhaps he saw a similarity to human beings there. Yes, Nazareth had to die, but the deathless push-pull of humanity and nature, of the mind and matter, of fiery creativity against finite reality, would continue to clash, curl, connect, and grow. This would always be there.

In the end, I think this is what Johnny loved. (308)

That Johnny reaches a point in his knowledge of the mill’s work where he understands it as a microcosm of some larger dialectical forces is significant because it allows him to derive universal meaning from it. This may not have much political bearing, but I posit that existentially, it makes all the difference. I say this because although the steel mill ends up making Johnny suffer the agony of cancer as his body succumbs to it, it is clear that he dies having given meaning to his own existence by owning himself, his spirit, and his causes, by having developed his art as a mill mechanic. By following these tenets and identifying with the raw elements that produce life, Johnny re-inscribed himself back into species-being despite the coloniality that negated him.

CHAPTER FIVE

“IT’S THEIR WORLD” AND “FIGURING A WAY TO EXIST IN IT”: THE SEARCH FOR MEANING IN A VACUUM OF VALUE AND THE DIALECTICS OF DEATH IN LUIS J. RODRIGUEZ’S *MUSIC OF THE MILL*

We cannot be sure of having something to live for unless we are willing to die for it.

--- Ernesto “Ché” Guevara

Many Chicano/as who seek refuge in “gang life” are conscious of the impossibility to live, using Heideggerian terms, “authentically” as racialized existents. These youth exist in a limbo of limited choices; between the certainties of a life as racialized alienated labor and a homicidal street culture that at the very least allows them to die on their own terms. In essence, these youth struggle to cultivate the purpose and meaningfulness that can help them attain *entelechy*, what I think of as the vital principle that actualizes and realizes the development of human potential. Luis J. Rodriguez’s representation of the Salcido family’s third generation in the novel *Music of the Mill* (2005) shows us that Chicana/o youth involved with gangs drop into the abyss of drug-use and criminality because their life is devoid of positive meaning and value. Given these circumstances, the attraction to gangs, as Azucena Salcido’s character reveals, becomes a means for “look[ing] for something with teeth in it, for life to be more than a vacuum cleaner” because the reality of their prospects “[seem] downright deadening” and they do “not look forward to life filled with such limited choice” (209). In this chapter I posit that Rodriguez’s novel critiques the violence and death that these racialized youth encounter and engage in on the streets as outcomes of the waning demand for industrial labor in the inner city and the overall trajectory of underdevelopment of what Chicano scholars of the late 70s and 80s called the “internal colony.” This dynamic is evident in the manner in which the steel mill goes from being *an option* to bypass the danger and lures of the streets for young Chicano/as to come to stand for *the only possibility to become someone that is both endowed with value and bestows value on the world*.

It is clear that the shifting industrial sector’s needs take priority in the racist political economy that emerged in the 1980s, not youth of color’s potentiality.¹ As

¹ This point is greatly emphasized by George Lipsitz in his seminal work, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness* (1998). The 1980s were the moment in which the hegemony of whiteness made itself visible as the gains of Civil Rights legislation dwindled with the emergence of Reaganomics. The crack epidemic, the discussions about the culture of poverty, welfare mother’s, the public housing booms that created segregated enclaves of racialized folk in so called “projects” etc., all of which dominated the

Azucena points out, the school system is more interested in the reproduction of racialized exploitable labor than it is about fostering her potential,

Schools became a waste of time for me. I didn't care. Sometimes I wouldn't even show up. [...] Those schools were nothing but "factories" for factory workers. You didn't learn more than you needed to get a job and work with your hands. Most kids dropped out before they got to high school; most of them ended up working in those factories since they didn't need school for that. Others got into drugs, jail, and street life. (218)

Being intimately familiar with the socio-economic conditions Rodriguez writes about, it is fair to suggest, as the novel does, that when the steel mills closed down and the demand for this kind of labor receded, schools in south-central Los Angeles began to both look and operate more like prisons. Their function, rather than seeking to educate and fully develop the potential of children, seeks to contain their creative energy and limit their options, dreams and hopes by trying to mold them into uncritical consumers who ultimately militate against themselves by embracing either conformism or nihilism. Azucena is representative of the Chicano youth in her generation who find themselves in the double-bind of having to choose the life of alienated labor over *la vida loca*. On the one hand, Azucena could move toward the path of alienated labor, in millwork for example, where her purpose and responsibility will be imposed by the logic of capitalism. She knows, however, that this path simultaneously affirms her subordination as racialized labor as much as it will articulate her subjection as gendered labor. On the other hand, she can move towards the death, violence, and excitement of the streets. This option offers her erotic pleasures, fun, and intoxication, but leads to an abyss where death and violence take on a perverse meaning that stands in for life. As Azucena explains,

Either we are enslaved by old ideas, morals, and responsibilities forced on us in our homes, at school, in the work place, to homogenize and "normalize" us—or we move toward the junk: the drugs, the sex, the uprooted and unconnected "just go for it" mentality that most of us thought was hip and revolutionary. (225)

Although there is a false dichotomy assumed here, standing in the line of fire, so to speak makes it difficult for Azucena to understand this. Unfortunately, the fact that Azucena falls deep into an abyss of violence and death impedes any affective cathexis that could help her see beyond her limited choices to create her own possibilities. The novel illustrates that as she matures Azucena often avoids falling into bad-faith by accounting for her situation socio-historically and not reducing it to single individual choices nor avoiding taking responsibility for the ones she regrets making. "I couldn't blame mom and dad," she admits, "I knew they were shaped by the circumstances of their environment" (261). In articulating this about her parent, she admits the same for her self.

The importance that Martin Heidegger's *Being and Time* (1953) gives to the notion of *Care* in his phenomenological articulation of existence warrants discussion as we try to make sense of what on the surface can be read as kind of *hyper-authenticity towards death* of Chicano youth in *Music of the Mill*. Given that Rodriguez's narrative makes it clear that Azucena's is an abandoned generation rather than simply lost or in

political discourse during this period, were symptoms of the problems this racist political economy engendered.

search of identity, the notion of “care as attunement of existence” comes to bare here. In the section titled “Care as the Being of Da-sein” in *Being and Time*, Heidegger posits,

On the basis of the attunement essentially belonging to it, Da-sein has a mode of being in which it is brought before itself and it is disclosed to itself in its thrownness. But the thrownness is the mode of being of a being which always *is* itself its possibilities in such a way that it understands itself in them and from them (projects itself upon them). Being-in-the-world, to which being together with thing at hand belongs just as primordial as being with others, is always for the sake of itself. But the self is initially and for the most part inauthentic, the they self. Being-in-the-world is always already entangled. (172)

I point to this description of the role of “attunement” and “thrownness” to emphasize the extent to which Heidegger’s phenomenology falls short of establishing his intended ontological universalization of Being. Nelson Maldonado-Torres (2008) has established this in his own work by proposing an ontological difference between “Imperial Man” and colonized being.² The ontic experience of racialized existents makes Maldonado-Torres’ claim sound to the extent that the color-line that differentiates the lighter from the darker Other also colors, so to speak, the attunement and thrownness of being. That is to say that Chicano existents are “thrown” and “attuned” into the “They” distinctively, and that the “They” they are thrown into integrates them to the extent that it bring them before themselves in their “thrownness” as projections of the hegemonic “they,” the Anglo-centric hegemony that attunes them. The “thrownness” that Azucena’s generation of Chicano/as exists under is far from a “mode of being which always *is* itself its possibilities in such a way that it understands itself in them (projects itself upon them)” (Ibid.). Rather, their “thrownness” is a mode of being that robs them of their possibilities and potentialities, which yields a distorted projection of themselves due to the profoundly racist cultural context and the political economy of death they exist in. In this sense it is inaccurate to say that the absorption in the “They” and “*the “world” taken care of*” of racial colonial existents is merely a flight from their authentic potentialities for being (172). Rather than a flight to “They,” what we observe in Rodriguez narrative is that the “They” either wants to integrate them perversely (by Othering them in subordination), sucking them into a system of representation that negates the value of their being as it seeks to annihilate them by foreclosing their possibilities. “What oppresses” is not “the possibility of things at hand in general,” as Heidegger writes, but the lack of possibility,

² In the section “Recognition from Bellow,” Maldonado-Torres posits the need to apply what he calls “decolonial reduction” to excavate the *colonial difference*, “the interpretive transformation that occurs when coloniality is introduced as an axis of reflection in the analysis and evaluation of diverse cultural forms of life, institutions, and critical discourses” (*AW*, 101). On a phenomenological level, the colonial difference posits an “ontological difference” of sorts because the concrete existence of the colonized people is not taken to be universal by Western ontologies. “For Fanon,” Maldonado-Torres notes, “the concrete existence of the master/slave relation transforms the structures of Being and meaning to such an extent that ontology does not make any sense if it does not change the tune and turn to the description of “lived existence”—rather than insisting in portraying and revealing the meaning and destiny of Spirit. Non-existential ontology appears in this light not only inadequate to spell out the specificity of imperial, and civilized contexts, but also extremely conservative, if not even oppressive, as it, in its blindness, tends to mask or hide the significance of the existential tensions and power relations that operate in empire and in contexts of with imperial traces” (105).

particularly that possibilities are foreclosed by the colonial difference (175). In this sense, Azucena and Joaquin's (her older brother) existential angst is prompted by their lack of possibilities in the colonial death-world as such.

On another level, Heidegger's assertion that the ontological structure of care "means being-ahead-of-oneself-already-in (the world) as being-together-with (innerworldly beings encountered)" needs to be questioned because Rodriguez's novel shows that "Being together with" is not a mode of being that automatically determines the taking care of things or Others for that fact (180). If being-ahead-of-oneself means "being towards one's ownmost potentiality-of-being" and this fact conditions "the possibility of *being free for* authentic existentiell possibilities," then the nihilism we encounter in the Chicano youth Rodriguez imagines articulates another significant ontological difference between Heidegger's interpretation of Being as Da-sein and the being of racial colonial subjects (Ibid.). In order to understand this one must consider that Heidegger admits that "being toward the potentiality-for-being is itself determined by freedom" (180). The fact that Azucena and Joaquin feel that their freedom to pursue their potential is foreclosed by their racialization and the socio-economic conditions that surrounds them suggest that "being toward the potentiality-for-being" is also foreclosed. The Chicano/a youth that Rodriguez write about in this novel are beings whose "authentic existentielle possibilities" are curtailed by the demands of the market and, as George Lipsitz (1998) would put it, the Anglo- American possessive investment in whiteness, for even before birth they are assigned to the lot of racialized estranged labor. This is evident in the fact that these youth are convinced that they are fated to become alienated labor. Reflecting on the fate she escaped when the "Big Mill" closed Azucena comments, "I never ended up working there. Neither did Joaquin—although it was supposed to be our lot in life. We were both expected to be steel workers—like dad, like my uncles, like my grandfather. Although I was born a girl, by the time I grew up, women were being hired into the labor and craft crews" (*Music* 206). Just as important is the fact that characters in the novel that are affiliated to gangs or are "bangers" (i.e., Joaquin, Trigger (Azucena's first boyfriend), and Raton (her father's child)) show that their concern for "being-in-the-world-at-hand" and "being-together-with" is profoundly distorted by the normative violence they encounter on the streets as much as it is by their overdetermined situation. Care *for* being in the world is annihilated by their subordination in the American cultural landscape (this includes schools, media, and governmental institutions), the imposition of its values, its negation of the benefit of their authenticity, and most importantly investment in their potentialities. It is as if the "They,"—and here I mean the Anglo-American mainstream-- fears the development of the potentiality and authenticity of Chicano/a youth.

It is important to decipher the meaning of some Chicano youth's lack of concern for being toward their "ownmost potentiality-for-being," their embrace of *la vida loca*, to ascertain the extent in which coloniality and a "political economy of death" contributes to these youth's *hyper-authentic disposition towards death*. I am not pointing here to a simplistic fatalism that many theorists of the "culture of poverty" school have attributed to Chicano culture (Lewis 1963 and Benfield 1961). The attitude towards overdetermination by many Chicano/a youth who are aware of it is often misread as a *submissive*, self-defeating attitude that results from the belief that their conditions are inescapably predetermined and inevitable. Because I agree with Heidegger in the notion

that “existing is always factual” and “[e]xistentiality is essentially determined by facticity,” we must gather the meaning of such attitude in the lived experience of these youth (*Being and Time* 179). The Duboisian question: “What does it mean to *be* a problem?” is important to consider in this discussion because it reveals the manner in which the “facticity” and “existentiality” of Chicano youth is objectified by “the world taken care of.” The fact is that the Manichean “social world” that these youth exist in perceives them as delinquent, anti-social, and dangerous problems that threaten the cohesiveness and safety of society at large, rather than perceiving them as people who act and react according to the conditions they exist under. The logic of colonization is explicit in this dynamic, for it is clear that the racial “Othering” of these youth justifies this perception. On the other hand, the “the political economy of death” that these youth navigate during the years of Reaganomics, the crack epidemic, and de-industrialization reinforces *the lack of value they are always already interpellated as*, the negated surplus potentiality they become. As the novel demonstrates, existing in these conditions makes “dying as sweet as the sun’s breadth” because what these youth desire is a way to forget the social and existential death they live (*Music* 199). “We drank a lot of 40s, cheap wine, jugs of vodka and juice,” Azucena admits, “It was a way to forget, to let the world drain from under you” (223). To further illustrate this point further, I include another excerpt making a similar observation made by the same character that reveals the extent to which Rodriguez thinks “the world taken care of,” the world of the hegemonic “They,” is complicit with many Chicano youth’s lack of concern with realizing their “own-most-potentiality-for-being”:

They were all lost teenagers, using drugs, having sex, tattooing themselves, fighting. Not just at the hotel either. They were in the streets, in the alleys and parks. They were abandoned not only by their parents but by an economy, by a culture, by a convergence of circumstances, where adults away from youth, adults who didn’t want to rock the boat, who themselves had fled wars and hunger, forcing their youth to carry the weight of creation and discovery, a weight they couldn’t possibly bear alone. They sacrificed the children to the gods of conformity. (223)

The Salcido’s relation with the mill is ambivalent because it actualized their subordination, objectification, and alienation as racialized labor while it also allowed them to enter the economy of exchange as Procopio and Johnny found meaning and purpose in the struggles they encountered there. When the mill closed it is as if the whole family, including Azucena’s generation, lost the possibility to attain meaningfulness and purpose. In this sense Abdul JanMohamed’s observations in *The Death-Bound-Subject* (2005) are correct in that the labor process carries with it the power of cathexis, the power of binding affectively with productive activity. Thus, it makes sense that Azucena believes that “[w]hen the mill died, its like a good part of [the family] died as well” (206). “That’s why I’ve always felt like I’m floating in the world,” she declares, “[e]ven no ... I’m trying to find my place somewhere. I have one foot on one side, another foot on the other side, and both feet in no borders” (Ibid).

The shifts in the political economy of the *Florencia barrio* that Rodriguez writes about reflects the way in which technological leaps and ethno-racial politics mediated the steel industry’s significant move away from appropriating the use value of “racialized alienated labor” to create a class of “surplus racialized labor,” whose function in the

market is to be exploited for consumption (i.e., drugs, alcohol, fast food, housing) and the “bare life” the prison industrial complex needs to produce its own profits.³ The meaning of this shift in the political economy is articulated in two ways in the third part of *Music of the Mill*. The first is Aracely’s, Azucena’s mother, discursive articulation of the nature and purpose of capitalism’s vested interest in fostering alcoholism in poor socio-economic communities. Years after the plant closed, wondering why there is such a disproportionate amount of liquor stores in barrios, Acuzena asks her mother why her uncle Junior drinks so much. Araceli responds by linking alcoholism to the rampant unemployment in the neighborhood. The exchange is worth including in its entirety because it becomes a sort of Marxist teaching moment that demonstrates the direction and intentionality of capitalism’s realignment during this period:

“It’s the way that the system kills off those who it can no longer accommodate,” my mother said.

“Say that again?” I asked.

“I’ll try to explain this to you,” she said, sitting in front of the me at the kitchen table, getting all serious, the way she does when ever she gets political. “There are cheap bottles of wine like Muscatel, Night Train, and T-Bird. These have a higher alcohol content than other bottles of wine. They cost a lot less than regular wine— for years, they went for less than a dollar, although now they’re just under two. These cheap bottles are often made by the same companies that make expensive liquor. They’re created to make alcoholics out of people.”

“You mean it’s done on purpose?”

“Yeah, that’s why in Florence and Watts and places like that you have liquor stores on every block. We can’t get any decent grocery stores, but we can get some booze,” she explained. “In other words, some liquor companies purposefully make sure enough cheap bottles in the poorest neighborhoods to keep many of the men—and lots of women—from doing anything but drink their life away.”

Junior was one of those men. (228)

Another way that Rodriguez’s narrative illustrates what the shift away from a productive industrial economy in Los Angeles meant to young Chicano/as of Azucena’s generation is by emphasizing dominant society’s lack of investment in them becoming more than potential labor for the emerging service economy or fodder for the prison industrial complex. While I appreciate the value that Spivak (1987) places on capitalism’s structural “superadequation of the subject,” what she describes as the “subject-predication on labor power,” it is important to show that the *potential emergence of*

³ The last point is corroborated by the intense policing approach that jurisdictions took during the late nineteen-eighties and throughout the nineteen-nineties. The Los Angeles Police Department’s notorious CRASH unit (Community Resource Against Street Hoodlums), whose complete acronym read to mean the opposite of its actual function, is an example of the tactics and philosophy behind the dominant culture’s response to the surge of gang activity during this period. It is well documented that the Rampart Division’s CRASH unit criminalized black and Chicano youth around Los Angeles, sometimes without cause. Los Angeles Times articles exposed the corruption that emerges in policies and practice that emphasize the criminality of youth, as it made known that the unit formed its own criminal subculture. Acting like the biggest gang on the block, as it were, the unit demonstrated patterns of beatings, witness intimidation, illegal shootings, drug dealing, planting of evidence, frame-ups, unjustified arrests, and perjury.

subjectivity can be profoundly curtailed and existentially repressed by capitalism's monopoly on meaning and value (*In Other Words* 165). This is particularly evident in Rodriguez's representation of Azucena and her brother Joaquin, because the trajectory of the life of these characters demonstrate, as JanMohamed has brilliantly theorized in the concluding chapter of *The Death-Bound-Subject*, that the racialized subject's potential to produce value or lack thereof is dependent on his/her ability to expend his/her potential to be labor. JanMohamed makes this point clear when he writes, "Whereas capitalism forces the worker to conceive of his "labor-power" as a potential commodity that he can sell on the market, it is the expenditure of that potential in the "labor-process" that actually produces value" (269). Bringing this assertion to bear on Rodriguez's novel suggests that turning to gangs (Joaquin) and gang activity (Azucena) is an outcome of the impossibility to expend labor potential in a post-industrial context rather than an outcome of the post-modern fragmentation of the inner-city's geography and culture. To support this proposition I recall a couple of comments Father Greg Boyle, founder of "Homeboy Industries," a successful non-profit that seeks to curb gang violence through jobs, made on a radio interview. "These kids," he asserted, "turn to gang life due to a lethal absence of hope. We can help them by valuing them, so they know they are valuable."⁴

Indirectly countering Maria Herrera-Sobek's (1997) proposition that the turn to gangs is a symptom of the loss identity that results from the fragmented geography of despair in post-modern temporality, in the same interview Father Boyle also pointed out that rather than seeking identity or recognition from peers, youth attracted to *la vida loca* are usually *fleeing something*. I posit that this something is the actual, social, and symbolic death that pervades in their reality. Focusing on Azucena's life, it becomes clear the extent to which she is psychologically and existentially affected by the death and violence that accompanies the so-called "crazy life." Death penetrates her being to the extent that she eventually becomes numb to love, unable to cathect because she associates emotional "binding" with death. This dynamic is initiated by the incarceration of Trigger, her first boyfriend, after he is sentenced for shooting someone from a rival gang. As much of a loss this meant to her, the effective trauma it yields paled to the trauma Azucena encounters when her brother's rival gang murders her true first love. This death pushes Azucena close to the edge because she blames her self for letting Ricardo get close to her, for allowing him to get caught in the crossfire of a drive-by shooting during a party. The ironic tragedy of this death was that Ricardo was not a "banger," he had actually fled war torn El Salvador with his family only to die on the street of south-central Los Angeles. From this point on, love becomes synonymous with death to Azucena and the trauma manifest itself physically precisely because its violence penetrates her psyche. "I almost puke at the thought of it," she declares, referring to love. The metaphor she uses to describe it speaks volumes about the disgust it stirs up in her,

Love to me is a drunkard hanging on to a lamppost in the early morning dark. It is chaos and hangovers, sweat and sweet pain, yelling and slammed down phone receivers. That's all I know about love. That telenovela, woe is me, *arrancame el corazon crap doesn't work for me*. (214)

⁴ The interview was done on NPR's "Talk of the Nation," March 10, 2010.

Love's meaning in Azucena's experience is hollowed to signify sex and the release of rage. This characterizes her attraction to the *batos* who live the crazy life. "I'm not sure why I was attracted to these roughnecks and knuckleheads." Azucena admits, "But I was. They seemed in control. Able to do anything. Un-afraid and exciting. I wanted some of this in my life" (216). From early on Azucena sets a pattern of binding with a proximity to violence and death that eventually eviscerates her. Similar to the situation we observe in Acosta's narrative, the collapse of "anaclitic" and "narcissistic" type object-choices are implicated here because they serve a similar function: survival. *Cholos* are subjects that Azucena wants to both be nurtured by and *be*. I point this out even though at some point she denies being a *Chola* herself. This is symptomatic of a disavowal that paradoxically demonstrates both Azucena's self-loathing and her *cholo* fetish. It is for this reason that *choloness* needs to be interrogated for its meaning and function in Chicano/a culture rather than pathologized or essentialized. Doing this allows us to understand the trauma that mediates Chicano/a youth gravitating towards *la vida loca*. In Azucena case, the trauma begins with Trigger's incarceration and Ricardo's murder, and has its culmination some time after she is raped. By the time she meets Raton, the worst she could live had occurred to the extent that her ability to cathect lingers between two polar extremes: Eros and Thanatos. Given this consideration, Azucena's affect is situated between libidinal release and rage. Describing her first sexual encounter with Raton, Azucena intimates:

The first time we actually made love, in that burned-out place of his, it wasn't so bad. I found it hard to come, that's true, but I felt cared for held and alive. Being in a man's arms, living in his eyes and his laugh, did this to me more than anything else. It was a kind of addiction. I started out too young with men and now found that during my loneliest and most trying times, only male fingers and the hot smell of male breadth could satiate my hungers. (237)

The addiction Azucena describes here can also be thought of as a kind of neurosis because it is behavior that "*makes manifest* a defense anxiety and constitutes a compromise" in respect to the emotional internal conflict with which she is struggling (*The Language of Psychoanalysis* 269). Coloniality, social-death, and actual-death coalesce in this period of her life to establish her ego's neurotic character, a state where she is "prevented from establishing either viable relationships with others or a satisfactory internal equilibrium" (Ibid). This is a position that inhibits her ability to cathect as we can gather from her inability to reach orgasm. The inability to transfer emotions productively ultimate surfaces psychosomatically in fits of rage that occur precisely after sexual intimacy. "After we made love [...],"she discloses, "something inside me began to explode. Sometimes it'd happen as we talked. I wanted to break his face. Break the windows. No particular issue sparked my moods" (237-8). Azucena's impulses toward self-destruction surfaces out of her inability to understand her situation and bind affectively as much as the stress that she carries after being raped and being behind in school. It is made worse, however, by not knowing how to deal with these problems productively and not having the means to do so. As Azucena reveals,

That's when Raton began giving me weed, pills, and then blasts form the crack pipe. I guess he tried to medicate me or something, to make me feel better. But it only made things worse—especially that pipe. I

called it “my glass dick.” I took puffs of it, burning my throat and causing me to cough some shitty-ass *flema*. But soon I wanted it all the time. (*Music*, 238)

There is no doubt that Rodriguez wants Azucena’s rape to signify a drop into the abyss of symbolic-death just as he wants her pregnancy to be read as a site for Eros, an opportunity to begin the climb out of the abyss, to commence to produce meaning and value in her life. Azucena’s rape also compounds her guilt and anger over Ricardo’s murder. She is angry at the unjust circumstances of his death and feels guilty for her indirect involvement in it. The violence she goes through during her rape takes her deeper into despair and hopelessness. It is a moment that reveals the viciousness of the internalization of violence that pervades in communities of racial colonial subjects. This is important to consider because it is clear that those who intended to do harm to her could see reflections of themselves in her. They were Chicano youth caught in the double-bind Azucena finds herself in; between the culture that seeks to “normalize” them to integrate them into the political economy and the “junk” on the streets. The violent, near-death moment catalyzes a transformation in Azucena that deepens her already dark mood. Azucena’s own description is chilling and underscores the extent to which she is valued merely as a sexual object:

I don’t know when I actually blacked out. He may have put something in my drink. I was out cold. It was during this time that several guys took off my clothes and raped me. A few of the *jainas* showed up at the hotel the next day and found my naked, dirty, and bleeding body curled up in the corner of the room. I had been punched in the face. Somebody wanted to hurt me. I had a black eye and a fat lip with scrapes on my face neck, bruises everywhere. (226)

María Lugones critique of the coloniality of gender (2007) is relevant here because it helps us analyze the violence men of color do to women of color by “acting out” and keeping alive the colonial logic that not only hyper-sexualizes women of color, but also subordinates their value. In this regard, it is apparent that the sadism of “Imperial morality” (Maldonado-Torres 2008) rather than simply sexual desire motivated Azucena’s rape. That is to say that Azucena’s assailants were led by the desire to wield power over another, the need to dominate those you think you can dominate or annihilate. Unfortunately, the outcome of this incident is negative transformation because it is not accompanied by a discursive articulation that would help Azucena attain the self-consciousness needed to make it a positive transformation. Instead, Azucena descends further into the abyss of the “floating world” that she cannot gather meaning from, into Raton’s arms, into the “forgetting” that the crack-pipe facilitates. Although I agree with the thrust of Lugones critique of the coloniality of gender, I think it reaches its limits when we observe the positive transformative power of the site of maternity in this novel. What I mean is that although we must be critical of the way in which women’s value is relegated to their potential to re-produce life, we must not uncritically condemn this potentiality. We must concede the space to think of the site of maternity as liberatory to the extent that it allows women of color possibly one of the only avenues to produce life without coercion and value without exploitation. I am thinking of life as Richard Wright defines it according to JanMohamed, where it is a “form of cathexis between the subject and a world that has not been fashioned through coercion, that is, through the threat that kills

the very form of free cathexis” (*TDBS* 264). Understood in this way, we can grasp why the pregnancy becomes a positive force that brings meaning and purpose into Azucena life, for it becomes a means through which she will produce value and offer something vital to the world. “I hated to say this, since I don’t recommend anybody doing this,” she explains, “but that baby was what stopped my drug use and helped me from going over the edge” (240). Her pregnancy represents the “metaleptic reversal” I discussed earlier because it forces her to “turn on” the destructiveness of her life and encounter the potential she holds within:

With my pregnancy, I woke up from the inside. This was something I treasured, that I wanted; something I could say is mine and would take care of. It’s the most precious of all things precious. Perhaps this is where good parents like Johnny and Aracely come in, even if we give them hell for trying. Some of their love of life, of nature and children supersedes my own destructive and selfish behavior. (240)

Raton’s murder, shot dead by rivals, must also be included as a profound factor in this “turn”:

The one good thing he did was give me my son. That was all I cared about. To me this was our fate. That was why we came together; why I suffered beatings and drug-use so that this one little guy, this special, incredible *human being*, would be born. This child wouldn’t be this child if I had a baby for any other man. It had to be Raton, as fucked up as he was, although it didn’t mean I owed him tear at his funeral. (242, my emphasis)

On an existential level, the most significant aspect to consider here is the manner in which her pregnant state re-situates her into an economy of “Care” in the world. She has something valuable to live for and to take care of; that lives and will depend on her. Although it is clear that on a psychological level she is still unable to cathect, existentially, this moment illustrates that Azucena is *not* being-towards-death, but rather being towards life, which essentially means existing in pursuit of entelechy by any means necessary.

Before I close this chapter, I would like to return to the manner in which Rodriguez’s writing insists that Chicana/o youth who exist “on-the-line-of-fire,” so to speak, find it difficult to generate meaning *in a world were coloniality deadens their existence*. Rodriguez does this in two ways. The first is by showing Azucena’s desire for meaning through her attachment to the Christian religion and singing as she tries to get clean. “I felt the power, the electricity, the Lord’s grace enter my body,” Azucena confesses during her first church encounter (262). Unfortunately, this would turn out to be a relationship with God that replaces one addiction with another, one form of intoxication for another. It becomes problematic when she grows obsessive about evangelizing and proselytizing those around her, including Johnny and Araceli. When the opportunity to sing professionally arises Azucena realizes that there is a dishonest quality about her fixation on savior and the word of Jesus, which can be thought of as Sartrean “bad-faith” for it points to the self-deceptive character of not coming to terms with one’s situation. It is as if singing becomes the moment of self-conscious articulation that allows her to make a complete “metaleptic reversal”:

I now saw the hollowness of loving Jesus more than valuing myself. In the church I looked away from me—that’s what this church thing does. Jesus is both resurrection and the life. What about me? Where is my resurrection, my life? They taught me to look up, away from the world, but I wanted to find a way in this world, with balance, strength, confidence, and love. I didn’t want to keep isolating myself because I was scared of everything I touched.

I stopped going to church altogether. (262)

Singing becomes a viable means to enter “the economy of meaning” of the world because it allows Azucena to catechize and *express her self to the world*. It allows her to invest emotional energy in a productive way. Rather than deadening her existence with drugs, alcohol or running away from herself by deflecting her interiority to the divine, singing helps her heal by sharing what amounts to a Fanonian “cry” with Others. The significance of this cry, according to Maldonado-Torres, is that it “represent[s] the expression of a subject who has been violated precisely in regards to the possibility of being outside of himself—that is, of loving, giving, and communicating” (*AW* 137). Expressing to others in verse becomes an act of subject formation in that it assumes a position of “responding” with love and anger to a colonial world that systematically denies her a say in the world. As Azucena explains,

But singing—sweet Jesus!— to bear my soul in melody, to make poetry with lyrics and voice, to tell my story with all its fuss and froth, with all its pain and poignancy while honoring the great singers in the world by interpreting their work with my own experience—now that was really healing.” (252)

Singing for Azucena is an existential act of resistance because similar to the cry that Fanon expresses in *White Skins, Black Masks*, it articulates her paradoxical existential stance (*AW* 139). The “froth” and “pain” that Azucena knows up to the point she begins to sing is kept inside because the world never seems to care what she is burdened. Azucena’s early sexualization and racialization, traps her in her body, as it were, hardly allowing her to express her humanity on any level. Maldonado-Torres (2008) makes an important observation on this sort of situation, for he insists that we understand the existence of “the oppressed” with serious consideration of the ontological difference of colonized being. “The problem, to be sure,” Maldonado-Torres writes, “is not about the rescue of authenticity in the face of an alienating totality [as Heidegger theorizes], but about the affirmation of life and about the very possibility of being in love with others while confronting a homicidal System” (140). Azucena’s singing signifies a kind of “witnessing” for the kind of life she has lived that assumes, using Oliver’s terms, “response-ability” for the world she exists in. It is as if in allowing her to sing Rodriguez evokes Billy Holiday’s pain when she famously sang “Strange Fruit.” However, Azucena sings not of the strange fruit that hangs on trees, but of the abandoned generation on the streets of *el barrio* and locked-up in the prison industrial complex.

Another way that Rodriguez insists on the problem of “meaning” and “care” as a key site for the articulation of Chicano youth/gang violence is by making it an explicit issue in the concluding pages of the novel. In what turns out to be Joaquin’s and Azucena’s last encounter, Rodriguez makes an attempt to describe the meaning of the madness of *la vida loca*. “The life” is like a perfect storm because Chicano/a youth

gravitate to it when the worst circumstances coalesce to eviscerate and devalue their being. This occurs when meaning becomes tantamount to making death rather than making life; when life means making money rather than self-determination. The years have passed and Azucena and Joaquin have settled into their circumstances as adults. Azucena visits her brother in the penitentiary after he has been charged with his third felony and given a life sentence. Joaquin is thirty-two, considered a “shot caller” on the outside by then, and has gravitated towards indigenous-consciousness (as Azucena has on the out-side) while in prison. Unfortunately, it is within the utter sensory deprivation of the “super-max prison” that he is prompted to turn to Meso-American indigenous philosophies that have allowed him to come to a certain level of historical self-consciousness and care for himself and others despite his prolonged death sentence. Joaquin’s social-death is compounded by an emotional-death that impedes any affective release. “Joaquin didn’t say anything.” Azucena observes and continues, “He didn’t show any emotion- being in prison forces him to push his feelings down so deep that I’m sure there are times he doesn’t know where to find them” (295). The interesting aspect of this section is that Joaquin is in a position to make sense of his past and surprisingly does not shrink away from taking responsibility for his reckless behavior, from making sense of what on the surface may seem senseless. The origin of his problems he explains, is not in the lack of care he received from his parents, but a more profound lack of care from society in general and the meaning and purpose in his life:

My problems had nothing to do with them. Despite everything they tried. I always felt lost. Nothing had meaning until I got jumped into the barrio. Then, for once, I felt accepted in a way that brought me something to die for as well. I was a soldier with a soldier’s heart. I learned to fight and not give up the fight no matter what. I wanted nothing more than die in a blaze of glory. (296)

Joaquin also resigns himself to the dialectic of actual-death and social-death early in his life because he feels guilty about being alive:

You better believe I was ready to die. I never hid from anyone. We all got shot, all my hommies, but I survived and most of them didn’t. I always felt bad about that. I wanted to be the one they cried for in the cemetery, the one they gave the gun salutes too. (297)

These excerpts need to be analyzed in the context of the Salcido’s past, for we can gather here that the demise of the mill, as I have stated earlier, also killed an outlet for resisting coloniality. The just causes that Johnny would give his life for, particularly, the struggle against the subordination and exploitation of racialized labor, catalyze into the internalized violence the wars on the street yield. Azucena confirms this observation when she makes explicit the link between the mill’s closing and the surge in violence and drug wars during their life by telling Joaquin, “When the big industry died, the gangs got bigger and deadlier. So did the drug trade. That’s when L.A. street organizations got bigger and deadlier. So did the drug trade” (299). In a sense, the race war Johnny fought in the mill, becomes Joaquin’s street-war because segregation, white-flight and the political economy that emerged after the exodus of mills in the area insulated the *barrio* to the extent that it reified the root of their problems. The difference lies in the political value of these conflicts. This is why the term “negative resistance” (V. Perez 2007) adequately articulates the dynamic that Joaquin is trapped in. In his war, Joaquin is his

own enemy rather than the coloniality that curtails his potential and hinders his ability to generate positive meaning and value in his life. However, we must not brush off the significance of this kind of resistance despite its lack of recognizable political value. It is angry, often irrational resistance, yet it is resistance nonetheless, for similar to the escape into drugs that so many people other than so called “gangster” make, *the crazy life* is a way of seeing world outside of the “They’s” gaze that dehumanizes Joaquin by racializing him.

By way of conclusion, I would like to state that for better or worse *la vida loca* is often a way of seeking some form of authenticity, a way to exist on one’s own terms. Azucena makes this observation clear when she rationalizes the disconnect between Chicano youth and dominant society,

Most people can’t understand this, so they fear it. They want to destroy the cholos and graffiti, and our barrio culture. Or put it away behind walls—they don’t understand how much they contribute to creating this life. It’s *their world*; you just figured a way to dwell in it on your terms. (297, my emphasis)

What Rodriguez’s narrative critiques most poignantly at the end is the dehumanization of these youth. “Locking up” the problem, so to speak, is immoral because framing the problem through criminality will continue to annihilate Chicano/a youth. So long as the issue is approached by “Othering” *la vida loca*, by which I mean de-humanizing youth and perceiving them as problems that cannot be integrated into the social fabric rather than people who need help in confronting the social problems, the rebellious, nihilistic resistance to the hegemonic culture that these youth engage in will continue.

PART THREE

DECOLONIZING LOVE/ DECOLONIZING BEING: CHERRIE MORAGA'S WAR OF LOVE

Love is the force that has enabled colonized existents to gather the hope to continue struggling against the logic and structure of domination that reproduces their oppression. Ernesto "Che" Guevara's often cited assertion has reminded us of this fact for decades: "At the risk of sounding ridiculous, let me say that the true revolutionary is guided by feelings of love."¹ Guevara's words evoke a truth that has been alive in the America's since the first acts of colonial aggression were resisted. If we follow Enrique Dussel's work it becomes evident that the resistance that *conquistadores* encountered in the "New World" demonstrates that the empires and tribes of Mesoamerica, though eventually defeated, resisted conquest with the loving fervor that the Cuban revolution would thrive on centuries later.² Along with revolutionaries many thinkers from Latin America have thus entertained the conceptual relation between love and liberation in their own critiques of oppression. One of these revolutionary thinkers was Paolo Freire. Paolo Freire's Marxist pedagogy centered love as the "condition of possibility" to counter oppression. Freire emphasized creation and creativity as principle instruments in the struggle against capitalist rationalization and colonial domination. Loving dialogue being the basis of such creation. "The naming of the world," Friere wrote in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1973), "which is an act of creation and re-creation, is not possible if not infused with love. Love is at the same time the foundation of dialogue and the dialogue itself" (77-78). But just as Freire points to love as the principle condition to generate the creation of a world free of oppression, he warns that domination reveals what he identified as the 'pathology of love', which he defined as "sadism in the dominator and masochism in the dominated" (78).

The struggle against the "pathology of love" becomes central to the critique against the coloniality of Being in Cherríe Moraga's writing. Moraga is particularly interested in critiquing what many feminist of color have identified as "the enemy within," what could be described as the oppression that is reproduced by the internalization of colonial logic, master morality, and discursive violence³ that enable and

¹ See Ernesto "Che" Guevara's "From Algiers, for *Marcha*: The Cuban Revolution Today" (12 March 1965), a letter to Carlos Quijano, editor of *Marcha* a radical weekly published in Montevideo, Uruguay.

² For a detailed account of the manner in which Spanish conquest was perceived by Aztec priests, warriors and nobility see Enrique Dussel, "A Nahuatl Interpretation of the Conquest: From the "Parousia" of the Gods to the "Invasion," in *Latina American Identity and the Construction of Difference*. Ed. Amaryll Chanady, (London, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994): 104-129. Although the resistance was easily subdued with lethal violence and inhumane cruelty, the loving fervor I suggest here is also evident in the battles against Pizarro in Peru. See Jared Diamond's *Guns, Germs and Steel* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2005).

³ By "discursive violence" I mean the system of symbolic representation mediated by connotative and denotative signifiers that trap racialized, gendered, and sexed Others in binary oppositions; that foment the systematic dehumanization of these historically conquered and/or "aberrant" Others; that reproduce the

normalize the subjugation and subordination of women of color and queer subjectivities. Unveiling the perverse contours of coloniality that militate against the gendered-racialized self and that which is supposed to provide that self some measure of security and un-conditional acceptance: its community, Moraga rhetorically counterposes the concepts of Love and War to *inscribe meaning* about “the enemy within” upon Chicana/o discourse. She deconstructs the notion of the “enemy within” by challenging the mythologies that give it expression.

The primary thrust of this section proposes that the theme of War that is conspicuous in Moraga’s writing constitutes an important critique of ‘the coloniality of gender’ and ‘the coloniality of Being’ from a queer Chicana perspective. I pursue this proposition in the following chapter by examining *Loving In The War Years* (1983), a text that cuts through literary convention by combining autobiographical, prosaic, and poetic forms, not merely to represent Chicana existence, but to pose a question about the structure of love within Chicana/o communities, to critique and re-articulate the meaning of love, to strip it away from the ethics of domination. Chapter 6 thus argues that Moraga’s *Loving* has immense political and critical value because it deconstructs the meaning some of the myths that enable the subjugation and subordination of Chicana subjectivity. Chapter 7 will follow by focusing on “The Hungry Woman,” a play that re-casts its own de-colonizing myths, while it critiques the meaning of the colonial/modern myths that mediate women of color’s domination and exploitation. My aim is to demonstrate that Moraga’s literary art employs what Chela Sandoval has called a “hermeneutics of love” to deconstruct dominant mythologies and the narratives imposed on Chicanas under modern/coloniality.⁴ Similar to the libratory methodology that Maldonado-Torres has identified as decolonial “transgresstopic hermeneutics and critique,” this approach seeks to decolonize Being by deconstructing hegemonic meaning to puncture reality and penetrate it with its own.⁵ It is an approach that illustrates the manner in which Chicana/o writers suspend the desire for social recognition by engaging in a critical interpretation of the world to affirm the agency and positive value of those who exist

subjugation and subordination of colonized Being by reinforcing the colonial difference to a traumatic extent. Working with Foucault’s description of discourses that order reality, “violent discourse” can take a formal character, which is disciplined, academic, always already constructing a Eurocentric-capitalist - heteronormative reality. However, just as it is with all formal knowledge, discursive violence circulates prevalently in the economy of informal “common sense” language.

⁴ Describing the genealogy of third world writers who employ love as a concept that liberates meaning and subjectivity, Sandoval writes, “These writers who theorize social change understand “love” as a hermeneutic, as a set of practices and procedures that can transit all citizen-subjects, regardless of social class, toward a differential mode of consciousness and its accompanying technologies of method and social movement” (*Methodology of the Oppressed*, 140).

⁵ Transgresstopic hermeneutics and critique firstly involves generating meaning that transgresses the “space of the other and even one’s own” (*AW*, 233). As Maldonado-Torres theorizes, “It involves the notion so well put by Nietzsche of being a traitor even to one’s fatherland. In short, what is at stake here is the “denial of epistemic privileged, ultimately, both to colonizer and colonized.” Secondly, transtopic hermeneutics and critique is an approach that refuses the notion that spaces are anchored epistemological grounds and that because of this self-understanding and self-critique is possible. “Instead of inevitable conflict,” Maldonado-Torres writes, the idea of transtopic critical hermeneutics suggests that there can be generous transactions of gifts through lines of difference” (*Ibid*). For more on the conceptualization and usefulness of this approach see the chapter “Enrique Dussel’s Contribution to the De-Colonial Turn” in Nelson Maldonado-Torres, *Against War: Views from the Underside of Modernity* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2008): 187-236.

under coloniality's oppression. This re-articulation is facilitated by the specific technologies that encompass what Sandoval has identified as "the methodologies of the oppressed." These include but are not limited to the particular technologies already identified by Sandoval: meta-ideologizing, semiology, deconstruction, democratics, and differential consciousness. To this list of methodologies I would include: Freire's (1973) "naming," Oliver's (2001) "witnessing," and Maldonado-Torres' (2008) conception of "suspending desire for recognition." As Gloria Anzaldúa's theorizing suggests (1987), activating these methodologies in writing responds to living in a state of psychic unrest on the Borderlands of subjectivity. Living in this state of unrest, she writes, "is what makes poets write and artists create. It is like a cactus needle embedded in the flesh. [...] When it begins to fester I have to do something to put an end to the aggravation and to figure out why I have it. I get deep down into the place where its rooted in my skin and pluck away at it [...] Then out it comes. No more discomfort, no more ambivalence. Until another needle is pierces the skin. That's what writing is for me, and endless cycle of making it worse, making it better, but always making a meaning out of experience" (Borderlands/La Frontera 95).

CHAPTER SIX

LOVE'S WARS: *LOVING IN THE WAR YEARS* AND THE CRITIQUE OF LOVE AS DOMINATION

If war is an act of force, it belongs necessarily also to feelings. It does not originate in feelings, it reacts, more or less, upon them, and the extent of this reaction depends not on the degree of civilization, but upon the importance and duration of the interest involved.

--- Carl Von Clausewitz

Today I believe in the possibility of love, that is why I endeavor to trace its imperfections, its perversions.

--- Franz Fanon

It is love that can access and guide our theoretical and political "movidas"—revolutionary maneuvers toward decolonized being.

--- Chela Sandoval

Cherrie Moraga's writing centers the notion of "the enemy within" to make a rhetorical critique of what Nelson Maldonado-Torres has identified as the West's "non-ethics of war," *the ethics that result from* the West's moral stand towards privileging and naturalizing conflict to conceive humanity, knowledge and social relations.¹ "The enemy within," as Moraga's writing articulates it, is the 'self' that militates against itself by upholding racism, masculinity and patriarchy; who thinks capitalism and nationalism is a

¹ To be more precise the "non-ethics of war" that Maldonado-Torres theorizes are "a sort of exception to the ethics that regulate normal conduct in Christian countries" which leads to "a more stable and long-standing reality of *damnation*" (*AW*, 217). This *damnation*, Maldonado-Torres continues, "is colonialism: a reality characterized by the naturalization of war by means of the naturalization of slavery, now justified by the very [racial] constitution of people and no longer solely or principally to their faith or belief." Under this view, "It is race, the coloniality of power, and its concomitant Eurocentrism (and not only national socialisms or expressed forms of fascism) that allow the "state of exception" to continue to define ordinary relations in this, our so-called postmodern world" (217-218). In this reality the damned are confronted by death and violence with ordinary fashion. That is to say that death and violence lose their extraordinary character when they become formative aspects of colonized existence. Living life with the weight of social death on their being, hell becomes ordinary life. As Maldonado-Torres writes, "[their] "hell" is not simply "other people," as Sartre would have pit it—[...] but rather racist perceptions that are responsible for the suspension of ethical behavior toward peoples at the bottom of the color line. Through racial perceptions that become central to modern life, modernity and coloniality produced a permanent state of war that racialized and colonized subjects cannot evade or escape." For more on Maldonado-Torres' conception of the West's dominant "paradigm of war" and its accompanying *non-ethics* see the respective chapters "From Liberalism to Hitlerism: Tracing the Origins of Violence and War" and "Enrique Dussel's Contribution to the Decolonial Turn: From the Critique of Modernity to Transmodernity" in Maldonado-Torres' *Against War* (Durham, London: Duke University, 2008).

viable means to live a sustainable life; who abides by the sadomasochism that master morality thrives on. Moraga's writing thus reveals the meaning of living not only "a damaged life," but a *hellish existence condemned to live a life that suffers love*.² It is important to underscore this distinction because beyond a critique of capitalism as the primary source of oppression and alienation in modern history, Moraga's work offers a critique of colonized existence, which according to Maldonado-Torres amounts to "[h]ellish existence in the colonial world [because it] carries with it both the racial and gendered aspects of the naturalization of the non-ethics of war" (*AW*, 220). In this context "killability" and "rapeability," Maldonado-Torres asserts, "are inscribed into the images of colonial bodies and deeply mark ordinary existence." The literal meaning of the title, "loving in the war years," is thus a reference to "rapeability" and "killability" of Chicanas in the midst of "Reaganomics" and the rise of the AIDS epidemic during the nineteen-eighties. The rhetoric of war that Moraga often utilizes is a device that articulates the urgency and fatal outcomes of this hellish existence and what she perceives as the killing of her culture and the negation of her sexuality both at home and in her search for love during that period. In essence, by critiquing love's pathologies through the rhetoric of war, Moraga politicizes social relations that are premised on the dynamics of war and domination.

Home binds familial relations. It can also be a space that produces the most tragic and profound betrayals that cast great gulfs between generations. Although within the dominant Western episteme home stands in for security and the nurturing of entelechy—what I defined in previous chapters as the vital principle that actualizes and realizes the development of human potential—, home can become a conduit for coloniality's perversions according to Moraga's *Loving* because it is the site where the oppressed learn to emulate 'the pathology of love' as truth and norm. Moraga makes this point clear in the opening section of *Loving* titled "What Kind of Lover Have You Made Me Mother." The tension the title foregrounds is 'the how of love' during an epoch that according to

² The key phrases in this sentence mean to evoke some comparative analysis with Adorno's work in *Minima Moralia* (1951). Interestingly this text is subtitled "Reflections From a Damaged Life" and its contents puts in perspective the thought of a person reflecting on "the good life," as Adorno writes, as they run from an impending death during war. *Minima Moralia* was written as Adorno himself was running from the death that the Nazi concentration camps actualized against millions of Jews. Although it is clear that Nazi racism pushed German Jews to exile, Adorno explores this issue in a cursory fashion. I have often wondered why Jewish intellectuals like Adorno have understood these historical events (the Holocaust and WWII) primarily as a symptom of capitalist crisis, solely through the lens of Marxist political economy, even as Nazi rhetoric pointed to another insidious intent in their pursuit of "total war." It is my estimation that the relevance and effectiveness of such critiques suffer from this tendency. This is what differentiates critical theorizing articulated from the darker side of 'the colonial difference' from theorizing done under a Eurocentric modern perspective. That is to say that while Adorno may be correct in understanding WWII as a consequence of private existence being reduced to mere consumption, the atrocities of the Holocaust point to the logic of racism which functions to maintain another kind of profound domination. Although there is something unequivocally true about Adorno's observation that the "sphere of consumption" is ultimately "the mere reflection of production and the caricature of true life: in the consciousness and unconsciousness of individuals," it leaves much to be asked in relation to understanding *racialized gendered existence forced to endure the unpleasant and undesirable colonial order imposed by the West* (*Minima Moralia* 15). To decolonize Being, the virtue of opposing capitalism is only the beginning to "bring about another [order] more worthy of human beings." The deconstruction of colonial knowledge and logic can be a means to constitute an order that humanizes even the condemned while opposing the monopoly of production and value by capital.

Moraga leaves us wondering whether we can be loved unequivocally. This tension indicates that the “war” Moraga is engaged in at home is about *how* to love and be loved. The piece that heads this section, “It is You, My Sister, Who Must Be Protected,” supports this observation because it explores the extent that one’s parents set the tone for *how* we love others and experience love later in life. Structured in three parts, this piece combines essay and verse forms to move from reflections on Moraga’s doubts about her father’s ability to feel and express affect, then to her own assessments of her father’s sexuality in relation to her mother’s own doubt about it, his inability to cathect (express and invest affect upon others), and finally to Moraga’s own lament about the uncertainty of the possibility to be loved for who she is with a measure of certainty. Although in the first instance it appears that Moraga writes this piece to indict her white father’s empty disposition, it seems more apt to posit that she writes to deconstruct her mother’s colonial desire. That it is to say that Moraga’s critique is directed to the manifestation of her mother’s “enemy within.” Put in the language of de-colonial theory, Moraga critiques the coloniality that her mother’s hetero-normative expectations signify and to a certain extent perpetuate.

Moraga’s mother’s problematic expectations of how a man should perform his desire, perform his gender, and express his masculinity indicate that the coloniality of gender figures prominently in her consciousness. Her mother’s hetero-normative expectations and repressed desires are made clear when Moraga reveals the source of her mother’s doubt about her father’s sexuality: “She knows the difference she says, she knows what its like to have a ‘real’ man touch her” (11). Her mother’s assertion implies the essentialist dichotomies upon which modernity/coloniality is built. That is to say that her mother’s notion of what “a real man’s touch” feels like, which is another way of describing his passion and desire, is mediated by master and bondsman ideology expressed through master morality and the sadomasochism it reproduces. Moraga’s mother’s assertion suggests that a “real man’s love” is masculine, forceful and imposing, never mute or reserved. In her mother’s view, Moraga’s father’s masculinity is questionable because it lacks the domineering tendencies that “Macho-men” display. To Moraga, however, her father *is* queer, not because she discerns a lack of manliness or an excess of homosexual desire, but because of his inability to release what she identifies as “the battered child in him.” She writes,

But it is this queer I run from. This man in me. This man settling into the pocket of a woman’s vicious pride and conviction to make a life for herself and her children. [...]

It is this queer I run from. A pain that turns us to quiet surrender. No. Surrender is too active a term. There *was* no fight. Resignation.

I am afraid of ever being that stuck. Stuck back in a story of myself as a six-year old blond-haired boy, very quiet. I guess he was probably very quiet, even then, watching his father leave. (8)

Moraga posits a nuanced meaning to “queer” as a signifier to underscore trauma as a marker of difference here. Her text suggests that besides homosexual desire a profound hidden pain is part and parcel of being queer. It is a pain so intrusive to queer existence that one resigns itself to it, as if no escape from it was possible. Being that her father is white and this whiteness has meant alienation to her, it is interesting that Moraga identifies with her father most on this level. The trauma that her father seems to be

“stuck on,” as she puts it, evokes her own trauma: the anguish that accompanies existing as *Xicana-mujer-lesbiana*. Although her half-white ethnicity presupposes the freedom to choose between white privilege and brown abjection, the choice reveals itself as false because her gender and sexuality bind her to the subjection and subjugation of racism. It is thus that Moraga’s work reveals that “being stuck” on the traumas induced by colonial history, such as racism and sexism, is the most basic feature of the coloniality of Being.

For the queer-conscious-Chicana becoming entrenched in the traumas induced by coloniality comes early because home is often the primary site where coloniality forecloses love by corrupting it. Such is the case Moraga proposes when she discloses the unfulfilled nature of her parent’s relationship and the manner in which colonial desire played part in its failures. Her mother’s “pride and conviction to make a life for herself and her children” reveals that her choice for life-partner had less to do with wanting to be open to the loving support and affection of another person and more with trying to reach an ideal class position that secures and improves the social condition for her and her offspring. There are plenty of examples in the text to support the proposition that according to Moraga many women of color’s choice to be with white men to a certain extent can be determined by a desire to survive on the most basic level rather than the desire to love and be loved. Writing about women who are often unfairly labeled race traitors for not putting their “darker men” first, she writes, “As with so many of our mothers, my mother’s relationship with white men made survival for her and her family possible” (104). According to Moraga, whether women of color resist or succumb to the sexual demands of white men, what is important is that there is actual suffering attached to these relations because bare survival, not love, often determines their basic character. Although I have demonstrated in the first part of this doctoral thesis that on a psychoanalytic level “love” and “survival” collapse in the object choices of Chicano men, power differentials implicated in the male and female body make it necessary to consider this observation further. It is of particular significance that sexual hatred and exploitation that dominant society has displayed against women of color becomes internalized to the extent that women of color themselves (very often, but not always, on an unconscious level) reproduce these dominating practices in various spaces, but most often at home. Moraga expresses this in a lament that indicates how being caught in the middle of her mother’s relationship also meant being caught in a struggle for love and power when she writes,

Daddy, you did not beat me, but every blow I took
from the hand of my mother came from a caress
you could not give her.

The hole burning through her belly had nothing to do
with my lack of loving. I loved her through and through,
alive and in the flesh. (9-10)

These lines make clear that relations of domination always structured the love Moraga *learned and experienced* at home as a child. They illustrate the manner in which violence becomes the means through which the pathology of love that Freire describes unveils itself. Violence prevents the realization of love because negation and imposition are its most basic coordinates. The structure of domination forecloses love because rather than nurturing the Other to enable its *entelechy*, what I theorize as the vital principle that

guides the development and functioning of existents, it curtails its possibilities by imposing subservience and subjugation, preventing the realization of one's full potential. Love in this sense becomes a ruse of power that originates at home, which betrays both the lover and the object of that affection because it deceives both into believing that violence is an act of unequivocal love. This sort of dynamic is so common in Chicano/a culture that "*Amor Indio*" is used as term to describe relationships where violence and domination becomes the condition of possibility for love. It is a reference that harkens back to the paternalism of colonial conquest, for it suggests that natives had to be subdued for their own good; that the love and grace of the Christian God could only be understood by the natives through subjugation and violence. The term is accompanied by the popular refrain: "*Si no me pegas no me quieres,*"³ which further demonstrates the extent to which violence becomes a means for the reproduction of practices of domination.

Moraga's writing critiques the ruse of power I point out above by revealing how it is that home is often the site of the most profound betrayals that deprive women of color the possibility to love one another unequivocally. These betrayals are conditioned and mediated by 'the coloniality of gender,' and usually pit women of color against each other to gain the favor of men. I make reference to the coloniality of gender here because the betrayals that Moraga underscores are fomented not simply through the West's tendency to monopolize women's reproductive power, but also by its ability to reproduce *practices and values* that perpetuate the patriarchy, heterosexualism, and sexism internalized by its colonial subjects. We can highlight two instances in *Loving* where, according to Moraga, betrayals turn Chicanas against each other due to the value that dominant society places on men over women of color in particular. The first instance centers on her white father. As Moraga writes,

...this white man coming up over and over again. There's something about him that feels like such a suck to me. And so I ask myself, is it only that my Chicana mother fed my white father all the days of her life? Is it this model I am struck with/stuck with? The white man getting the attention that should go to the Chicana daughters, that should be shared between women. (103)

This quote makes evident that the priority that Moraga's mother placed on her marital relations wounded Moraga as a child because it deprived her of a mother's loving attention and tenderness. To be neglected by her mother wounds Moraga because it makes her feel less valued, as if she is less deserving of her mother's affection. Moraga's father "feels like such a suck" because he siphons her mother's loving away from her daughters. The question Moraga posits here is significant because it signals a desire to break out of the perverse models that structure the desire of colonized subjectivities. Moraga's reproach that "the attention that should go to the daughter goes to the white man" is significant because it points to the tragic character of colonial desire. That is to say that the priority to survive mediates the desire and, as I have observed earlier, the "object choices" colonized existents make. In this dynamic mother betrays daughter, so to speak, by putting her family's need to survive first even if it means sacrificing the emotional needs of her children. Moraga's mother must be *la mujer agüantadora* that

³ English translation: "If you don't hit me, you don't love me."

Mexican culture has instilled as mode for wife and mother. As such, her mother must put the desires and needs of her husband before her own and her children's. The guiding logic being that if the man is not content and satisfied with the mother, the children will ultimately suffer for it. Unfortunately, these circumstances also set up the perceived eventual betrayal of mother by daughter (it is presumed when she marries), for the dynamic by virtue of it being learned social behavior, is doomed to reproduce itself.

Loving underscores the kind of "betrayals" Chicana daughters endure at home as a consequence of the coloniality of gender by highlighting the priority that was given to the needs and desires of the men in her family, particularly her older brother. Moraga writes,

If somebody would have asked me when I was a teenager what it meant to be Chicana, I would have probably have listed the grievances done to me. When my sister and I were fifteen and fourteen, respectively, and my brother a few years older, we were still waiting on him. I write, "were" as if now, nearly two decades later, it were over. But that would be a lie. To this day in my mother's home, my brother and father are waited on, including by me. I do this now out of respect for my mother and her wishes. In those early years, however, it was mainly in relation to my brother that I resented providing such service. For unlike my father, who sometimes worked, as much as seventy hours a week to feed my face every day, the only thing that earned my brother my servitude was his maleness. (90)

That Moraga and her sister had to *earn* the love of their mother while their brother always seemed to be entitled to that love by mere virtue of being born male animates a profound betrayal that illustrates how Chicano men learn to think themselves better than their female counterparts. Conversely, this kind of circumstance also gives rise to the Chicana's "enemy within" because the priority and value bestowed upon the father/son becomes didactic. As Moraga admits, she contributed to her brother's own sense of superiority by acquiescing to his needs and desires, even if it meant sacrificing her own. It is important that we recognize that it is not a matter of choice, however, but a matter of introjection and coercion. Put in the language of Fanonian decolonial theory more precisely, it is a matter *sociogenesis*, which makes reference to freedom and socialization.

Coercion is clearly stated in Moraga's fear of being ridiculed and chastised for not performing her duty as *buena hija/hermana*. "[T]o refuse [her brother]," she writes, "would have brought [mother] into the house with a scene before these boy's eyes which would have made it impossible for us to show our faces at school that following Monday" (91). Although Moraga's writing is characterized by a reflexivity that examines the usefulness of the ideas and attitudes she has adopted over time, particular cases of introjection are always more difficult to identify. "Coming from such a complex and contradictory history of sexual exploitation by white men and from within our race," she writes, "it is nearly earth shaking to begin to try to examine to what extent we have internalized what in fact is not true" (118). Because what we adopt unconsciously over time becomes most manifest in our desires, fears, and dreams it is clear that Moraga's writing wants to deconstruct what I would call "colonial introjection," the ideas and attitudes unconsciously adopted via colonial knowledge, logic, and practice. Moraga makes this task a prominent part of her writing because she thinks that the betrayals she has suffered at home growing up originate in the latent inception of concepts, notions,

and perceptions that maintain the colonial difference (98). This is evident in her use of dreams and fantasy to question the dominant ideologies that oppress lesbian and heterosexual Chicanas alike. In Moraga's writing dream/fantasy sequences become revelations of "colonial introjection" for they allow her to become conscious of what has slipped into the unconscious and of the myths that have become fact. Elaborating on a fantasy that allowed her to register the manner in which religion has both repressed and manipulated her desires and practices she writes:

I pictured myself lying flat on my back on a kind of surgery table and people—like white doctors—stood around my body, putting dreams in my head. The dreams that made up my life—the people, the sensations, the emotions that gripped my heart. All these things were no more than figure of my imagination, thoughts that formed pictures of bodies that could not actually be touched. Love in this case was impossible. I was crucially and critically powerless. (120)

Moraga's writing demonstrates that the "colonial difference" is integral to the mythologies that mediate Chicana existence. Heterosexism and homophobia, understood here as ideologies reflective of the patriarchal mythology that is foundational to the West, are significant objects of Moraga's critique in *Loving* because they have colluded with the West's "non-ethics of war" to ostracize the queer-conscious-Chicana from her family and community. Moraga's critique of heterosexism thus identifies the manner in which the coloniality of gender imposes heterosexuality on all gendered relations with the end of maintaining strict racial boundaries. Obligated to define the term to challenge its omission in critical Chicano/a discourse Moraga posits, "the heterosexist imposes this model on all individuals through homophobia (fear of homosexuality)," and "[...] supports and/or advocates the continued institutionalization of heterosexuality in all aspects of society—including legal and social discrimination against homosexuals and the denial of homosexual political rights as a political concern" (105). This quote makes it clear that modernity's myths of love are established through heterosexist impositions and negations. I think Moraga's writing maintains that these ideologies must be scrutinized because they affirm the colonial difference and follow a Manichean logic. I make this observation because on the one hand, sexism casts a dualistic contrast between genders (male and female), even though biologically speaking these are only two examples of the biological diversity possible. On the other hand, heterosexuality imposes performative norms based on sex that are always already entangled with racial perceptions. María Lugones (2007) argues that coloniality fomented the chasm between genders and sexes by demonstrating that modern male/female distinctions were normalized historically through colonial conquest. The fact that prior to conquest some indigenous groups were gynocentric egalitarian societies and even recognized, accepted, and valued the plethora of physiological differences in human diversity (gynomorphic, andromorphic and everything in between), according to Lugones, shows the extent that sexism and patriarchy constitute colonial practices. Feminist discourse has often considered how gender differences establish power and value differentials, which maintain practices that perpetuate oppressive cognitive norms. Feminists of color like Moraga, however, have revealed how the internalization of racism and heterosexism (as ideas and practices) are fundamentally entangled with the history of colonial domination. As Moraga explains,

Chicanas' negative perception of ourselves as sexual persons and our consequential betrayal of each other finds roots in a four-hundred year long Mexican history and mythology. It is further entrenched by a system of anglo imperialism which long ago put Mexicanos and Chicanos in a defensive posture against the dominant culture.

The sexual legacy passed down to the Mexican/Chicana is the legacy of betrayal, pivoting around the historical/mythical female figure of Malintzin Tenepal. As translator and strategic advisor and mistress to the Spanish conqueror of Mexico Hernán Cortéz, Malintzin is considered the mother of the mestizo people. But unlike La Virgen De Guadalupe, she is not revered as the Virgin Mother, but rather slandered as *la Chingada*, meaning the "fucked one" or *La Vendidad*, sell out to the white race. (99)

Moraga's observations locate the coordinates of the Chicana's "colonial difference" in the mythologies established through Spanish colonialism and American imperialism. *La Chingada*, one of the mythologies that militate against Chicanas most commonly, betrays Chicanas because it establishes a narrative of un-trustworthiness and innate treachery against women of Mexican ancestry. American imperialism re-establishes the "colonial difference" by putting forward the notion that the nature of mixed race and homosexual people as degenerate. Spanish colonial ideologies/practices and American values and norms have thus coalesced to articulate the "misanthropic skepticism" that generates "sub-ontological colonial difference," using Maldonado-Torres' (2007) terms, that pronounces the "rapeability" and "killability" of Chicanas. Following Maldonado-Torres own formulation of the existential dimensions of blackness, I posit that we can read the figure of *La Chingada* as "an invention and projection of a social body oriented by the death ethics of war" (221). As Maldonado-Torres explains, the projections are meant to be "able to legitimate the same behavior that is descriptive of them. The same ideas that inspire perverted acts in war—particularly slavery, murder, and rape—are legitimized in modernity through the idea of race and gradually come to be seen more or less normal..." (*AW*, 221). Malintzin Tenepal, as a projection that legitimates violence against Chicanas, is the figure whose being articulates the multiple layers of oppression that colonialism initiates and coloniality continues to foster against Chicanas.

Deconstructing heterosexism is crucial to Moraga's critique of the non-ethics of war because she thinks that it is an ideology that functions to foment relations of domination amongst Chicanos and Chicanas by normalizing both racism, homophobia, and the subordination of Chicanas. In the first instance, heterosexism normalizes racism because it has become proof of Chicanas "fidelity to her people" (105). In other words, heterosexism has become a means to draw parameters amongst racial groups. To be sure, this is nothing new for the American historical record. The image of white masculinity protecting white women's "virtues" by lynching and emasculating black men is common to many of us who are familiar with Jim Crow's mores. Moraga, however, draws attention to the way in which heterosexism shares a symbiotic relation with racism, where each becomes conduits for the articulation of the other within Chicano culture. The problem is partially articulated in the manner in which brown masculinity is coddled by Chicano culture for the sake of racial unity, but also in the manner in which queer sexuality is demonized because it "challenges the very foundation of familia" and the way that the "forced 'choice' of the gender of our sexual/love partner seems to precede

the forced ‘choice’ of the form (marriage ad family) that partnership might take” (110). The cost of racial unity by policing Chicana sexuality contributes to the emergence of “the enemy within” because it promulgates the subjugation of Chicanas by Chicanas within the family and foments the alienation of queer Chicanos and Chicanas. Moraga’s definition of heterosexism reveals the colonial logic intrinsic to it for it is an ideology that constructs a norm to subjugate and dominate those who exist outside that norm. “Heterosexism,” Moraga writes, “is the view that heterosexuality is the “norm” for all social/sexual relationships and as such the heterosexist imposes this model on all individuals through homophobia (fear of homosexuality)” (105). According to Moraga, because “the sexism debate” within Chicano discourses has revolved around “getting men right,” a metacritique of heteronormativity has not been entertained by Chicano/a writers. In fact, she chastises Chicana authors who “fall into the too-common trap of coddling the Chicano male ego [...] in the name of cultural unity.” Characteristic of the coloniality of Being, the dynamic Moraga reveals a tragic structure. This assertion is supported by the “rock” and the “hard place,” as it were, that Chicana feminist are relegated to within the scheme of interlocking oppressions. As Moraga writes,

Like the Black Super-woman, the Chicana is forced to take on extra-human proportions. She must keep the cultural home-fries burning while going out and making a living. She must fight racism alongside her man, but challenge sexism single-handedly, all the while retaining her “femininity” so as to not offend or threaten *her man*. This is what being a Chicana feminist means. (Ibid)

Moraga is describing a problematic sacrificial logic that forsakes Chicana integrity for the sake of her male counterpart’s ego. It is a triple challenge in the face of coloniality’s oppression. Not only must the Chicana resist the racism and sexism that assail her being, she must also subjugate herself to demonstrate her loyalty to the community. Moraga’s writing suggest that it is precisely this dynamic that points to the need to rearticulate the function and meaning of love in the Chicano community.

Because modernity’s definition of love vacillates between Hegelian and Freudian conceptions, we can say that *Loving* launches an indirect critique on both models because these models have contributed to love becoming corrupted by the West’s ethics of domination. Hegel’s “Lordship and Bondage” model is directly implicated with the non-ethic of war because it establishes a combative nature to love, particularly for those who exist on the darker side of the colonial difference. Love is linked to the political function of recognition in Hegel because similar to the master/slave dialectic he theorizes, in love two subjectivities must mutually recognize the autonomy and independence of other to crystallize a relationship. As Sjöholm explains in “Love and the Question of Identity,” recognition’s “link to the political may lie in the assumption that a person cannot be emancipated, that is win political freedom, unless he is recognized as an autonomous agent” (75). As such according to the same writer, “[r]ecognition [...] conditions the goal of emancipation.” Given Kelly Oliver’s observations (2001) about the “pathology of recognition,” we can add that for colonized existents recognition also conditions the goal of love. What I mean to say is that if it is correct that “the desire to be seen, to be recognized [...] is the paradoxical desire created by oppression,” then the pathology of love, the masters sadism and the slave masochism, mediates the desire for recognition (*Witnessing* 24).

Recognition and love become modern/colonial pathologies precisely because the social conditions that colonialism established also ushered unequal structures where mutual recognition and mutual loving are virtually impossible between oppressors and oppressed. According to Oliver recognition has become pathology because it has become part of the social malfunctions left behind by colonialism. It is a condition that establishes “the desire to become objectified in order to be recognized by the sovereign subject to whom the oppressed are beholden for his or her self worth” (Ibid.). Similar to Oliver’s line of thought, Fanon (1967) and Maldonado-Torres (2008) have maintained that the desire for recognition has become a ruse of imperial power. The ruse functions through the internalization of colonial negation, as Maldonado-Torres explains, “one of the most distinctive features of [colonial] reality is that dehumanization reaches stages in which feelings of disrespect gradually become either muted or transformed into desires for identification or participation with the dominant culture” (127). This desire to be objectified in exchange for recognition, to participate with dominant culture’s oppressive norms also evokes Freire’s warning about sadism and masochism in the dynamics of oppression because it establishes dependency as primordial. Here we run into Hegel’s ontology again, as Sjöholm writes,

Hegel’s description of the struggle between master and slave develops out of another, earlier description of primordial relations of dependency—relations of love. Even though love is not comparable to the struggle for recognition, *the similarity lies* in the fact that man can think himself only on relation to a ‘soft’ human object. In both cases, object and subject exist for themselves only through the other. (75, my emphasis)

On another level, love and recognition under modern/coloniality remain at the level of the struggle of master and slave because the reciprocity that these dependencies presume are given asymmetrically. Given Fanon’s and Maldonado-Torres’ observations about the impossibility of colonized existents attaining recognition from an imperial master, the implications of this observation are profound because of the lack of reciprocity that exists between master and slave, as Moraga’s writing also suggests through its critique of love’s relation to the non-ethics of war, that the possibility to love and be loved unequivocally during modern/coloniality as colonized existents is virtually impossible. I submit this keeping Hegel’s own definition of love in mind: “True union, or love proper, exists only between living beings who are alike in power and thus in one another’s eyes living beings from every point of view; in no respect either dead for the other” (Sjöholm 31). Coloniality condemns Chicano/as in this regard because the law of substantive equivalence is profoundly compromised by the racist and sexist ideologies that colonial legacy has established. Just as it is impossible to expect that an imperial master will recognize himself in the slave, we cannot expect those who reside on the darker side of the colonial difference; who have internalized and perpetuated the master’s values; those who live social-death, to be able to experience “true union” or “love proper” without pain or struggle. Furthermore, if recognition, as Sjöholm writes, “is a condition for a positive relation to one’s self” because the prospect of basic self-confidence is inherent to the experience of love, then it becomes clear why colonized existents’ self-perceptions and loving relations are embattled (77). If the experience of love is structured by sadism and masochism, as it is for many who reside on the darker side of the colonial difference, then

it follows that this is a result of the perverse recognition that racism and all forms of sexism projects upon colonized Being.

The Freudian conception of love colludes with the non-ethics of war by establishing it as an embattled element of biological life. It does so by conceiving love as a product of a narcissistic instinct aimed at life preservation and ego satisfaction. Moraga's critique of the heteronormative imposition questions the Freudian conception of love because it is implicated in the propagation of the coloniality of gender. It is clear that the normative function of the psychoanalytic conception may be the most expressive of the colonial logic it follows. That is to say that Freudian psychology presupposes a normal and an abnormal axioms based on colonial anthropology. Although the charge of essentialism must be softened according to Juliet Mitchell (1974) because Freud had concluded that "we are all psychologically bisexual" after years of taking "account [of] the biological 'great antithesis' between the sexes," determinism is part and parcel of the Freudian conception of love because it has a biological basis that originates in the theory of libidinal instincts, which Freud derives from an imperial gaze to understand the emergence of civilization (*Feminism and Psychoanalysis* 51). Even more significant to the critique Moraga extends in *Loving* is the fact that the Freudian conception of love, according to Sjöholm, "makes the relationship to the other an ambivalent mixture: he comes to represent both help and threat" (77). The other represents help when it nourishes the ego, when it aids it in its self-preservation. However, since the ego defines itself through differentiation rather than association, in love, the other also stand as a threat because it represents another ego with its own desires. Because in Freudian psychology love is an affair of the ego (whether to impose itself or merely survive) that is expressed through object choices, psychoanalytic love always stands outside of ourselves, and is dependent on the objectification of the other. Like Hegelian recognition it implicates ethical life because "to love" and "to be loved" under this conception we must gain mastery of the object of our choice. Love in this sense is about consumption and defecation as much as it about domination and imposition.

Although Mitchell maintains that Freudian psychology does not establish patriarchy, but rather gives us the tools to study a patriarchal society (xv), Freudian psychology does rationalize a long standing mythology, which posits the 'law of the father' as a normative function that "men *must* believe [...] if they are to live according to the dictates of society" (367). To be precise, the mythology elaborated similarly in both *Totem and Taboo* (1918) and *Moses and Monotheism* (1939) conceives the totem father murdered by a gang of covetous sons who later share the women of the primordial family. Under this view, *the human species* becomes *necessarily* patriarchal for two reasons: firstly to regulate marriage and, secondly, to curb incest. Although it is open for debate as to how much of Freud's tendency to universalize this myth is applicable to all cultures, Moraga's writing makes it clear, just as Emma Pérez (1999) made it clear in relation to the Oedipus complex, that it is a myth that has penetrated Chicano/a culture through the dynamics of colonial oppression. In other words, as the semiotician and historian Walter D. Mignolo (2000) would put it, it comes to stand as a global design; universal in its signifying scope yet stemming from a local history, the history of the Imperial West. I posit that for Chicano/as, rather than expressing a phylogenetic principle, the myth expresses their "sociogenic" development as progeny of the legacy of colonization, for beyond illustrating the organic development of the species, the myth

resonates the socio-historical development of Mexican colonized subjectivity. We can read the myth in the figure of Cortez as primal father to begin, and can think of it culminating later through in the history of Mexican Independence, where the symbolic father of “*Mexico mestizo*,” Spain, is violently overthrown by its children. The paternalism behind the discourses that justified colonialism and imperialism (religious and secular) supports the notion that the myth of the totem father was re-inscribed through the colonial encounter. The primordial myth’s transference to colonized cultures has modified its function. While Freud’s myth functions to rationalize the need to regulate lines of kinship and women’s reproductive potential through patriarchy for the sake of ‘civilization,’ its colonial underside, so to speak, functions to rationalize Mexican nationalism on masculinist and ethno-racial terms. Although Moraga does not go as far as to spell this out, her criticism of the sanctity of ‘la familia’ within Chicano/a culture demonstrates that she thinks that normative conceptions of family and its functions are corrupted. This is evident when she challenges the conventional understanding of family that this myth fomented by writing,

Family is *not* by definition the man in dominant position over women and children. Familia is cross-generational bonding, deep emotional ties between opposite sexes, as within our sex. It is sexuality, which involves, but is not limited to, intercourse or orgasm. It springs forth from touch, constant and daily. The ritual of kissing and the sign of the cross with every coming and going from the home. It is finding familia among friends where blood ties are formed through suffering and celebration shared.

The strength of our families never came from domination. It has only endured in spite of it—like our women. (111)

The re-interpretation of family, Moraga believes, must be established for Chicano/as to move beyond the models of love and kinship modern/coloniality has initiated. In this sense, Moraga’s decolonizing hermeneutics try to re-establish the meaning of family by re-thinking its structure and its relation to models of love that stem and reproduce ideologies of domination.

Moraga’s writing contributes to what Chicana theorist Chela Sandoval has identified as ‘the methodologies of the oppressed’ precisely because it seeks to build the oppositional consciousness necessary to both critique and re-articulate the debilitating paradigms and practices that perpetuate coloniality. Critique and re-articulation here constitute de-colonizing tools for Moraga because they allow her to break out of constraining interpellations, to question hegemonic meaning, and propose alternate conceptions of ethical life. “There is a deeper love between and amongst our people,” she writes, “that lies buried between the lines of the roles we play with each other. It is the earth beneath the floor-boards of our homes. We must split wood, dig bare-fisted into the ground to find out what we really hold in our hands” (Ibid). The conception of love she proposes here is active and ethical for it requires that we “chop through” and “dig out” of the projections and paradigms that make us strangers (and sometimes enemies) to each other and ourselves. The kind of love that cuts through normative roles and dominating tendencies that Moraga alludes to here has been rendered as “decolonial love” by Sandoval because it offers a way thinking of human relations outside the structures of ideology, mastery, and domination. This is a love that according to

Sandoval is rooted in the “‘the no-place’ of the abyss” that helps us move beyond dualisms, where the “the drifting being is able to pass into another kind of erotics” (*Methodologies* 142). As Sandoval explains, “This form of love, is not the narrative of love as encoded by the West: it is another kind of love, a synchronic process that punctures through traditional, older narratives of love, that ruptures everyday being” (Ibid). The political implication of decolonial love is to ‘drift out’ of the very forms and narratives of dominant ideology and to enter a logic beyond the paradigm of war, “logics other than those of the ego, Western law, and narrative order” (145). On a hermeneutic level, as we observe in the pages of *Loving*, decolonial love denotes “a rhetoric of resistance, an apparatus for countering neocolonizing postmodern global formations” (2). I would add that “decolonial love” is also an anti-dote for both the non-ethics of war and the coloniality of Being because this conception of love makes us aware that existence is not an invitation to dominate and master others, but rather makes it clear that existing bestows upon us the responsibility to meet Others on their terrain, to co-exist in the mutual pursuit of the fulfillment of *our* potentiality. Moraga makes this point in a beautifully written poem also titled “Loving In The War Years” when she writes,

Loving in the war years
calls for this kind of risking
without a home to call our own
I’ve got to take you as you come
to me, each time like a stranger
all over again. Not knowing
what deaths you saw today
I’ve got to take you
as you come, battle bruised
refusing our enemy, fear.
We’re all we’ve got. You and I
maintaining
this war time morality
where being queer is as bad
as we can get. (30)

The war-time morality Moraga evokes here is not the master morality that the Western paradigm of war has established. Rather, it is a morality based on the suspension of ego and identity that according to Sandoval fosters relations “carved out of and in spite of difference” (170). It is an ethics where the cry of the condemned, as Maldonado-Torres would put it, elicits responsible action from those who hear it. Beyond mere “witnessing,” this kind of de-colonial ethic requires responsible action to generate human relations that do not follow modernity’s logic of domination.

Moraga’s writing becomes a decolonizing act of love because through it she resists looking away from the oppression Chicanas encounter and generates liberatory meaning whose intent is meant to undo the fear that paralyzes liberatory movement. It is an act of love exercised at the level of critique, for it does the work that according to Maldonado-Torres is meant for philosophy. I make this observation because it is clear that *Loving* calls to question “formations of meaning that create or are complicit with a context marked by the relation between master and slave” (*AW* 244). Through her critical analysis of heterosexism, homophobia, and racism, Moraga’s interrogation of the

meaning of oppression in *Loving* becomes a gesture of profound love for the Other and a measure of her life, for she asserts that she “cannot write what [she] is not willing to live up to” (iv). It is a gesture that affirms that oppression must not be confronted alone because living together and dying together is what makes us human. “I have been translating my experience,” she writes, “out of fear of an aloneness too great to bear.” The aloneness Moraga alludes to speaks of the alienation that capitalism, racism, sexism, and homophobia propagates, which often makes women of color in the U.S. fear they are crazy for discerning modernity’s pathologies. This point come across clearly in the verses of “Fear, A Love Poem” when she writes,

If fear is wishing there were some disease to call it
Saying, I AM GOING CRAZY always for lack
Of a better word always because we have no words
to say we need
attention, early on.
If fear is this, these things
then I am neither alone, nor crazy
but a child, for fear of doom, driven
to look into the darkest
part of the eye-- (34)

In this sense, Moraga’s writing becomes an act of love with political implications because it seeks to subdue the fear that prevents Chicanas from breaking out of the alienation that makes them second guess their sanity and understanding that we often become our worst enemies because we lack the language necessary to deconstruct our oppression.

To conclude, I would like to posit that Moraga’s critique in *Loving* has profound political value precisely because it refuses to normalize alienation and modernity’s war ethic in every day life, especially within loving relations and kinship. More than identifying a problem, Moraga tries to re-construct the soul, so to speak, of Chicano/a loving relations. The reconstruction I evoke here is part of the soul-making James Hillman (1975), Gloria Anzaldúa (1990), and Laura Pérez (2007) have written about, which is “psychology making, shaping concepts and images that express the needs of the soul as they emerge in each of us” (*Re-visioning Psychology* xii). *It is soul-making that invites creativity to coalesce with the analytical to explore the meaning and function of desire, dreams, and affect mediated by the systems of representation and ideologies that produce negative images of racialized subjectivities.* “I have learned analysis,” Moraga writes, “as a mode to communicate what I feel the experience itself already speaks for. The combining of poetry and essay in this book is a compromise I make in the effort to be understood” (*Loving* vi). *Loving’s* form and content as soul-making critique reveals the depth and intensity of the coloniality of Being while it enacts a frontal opposition to paradigms that oppress and depress Chicanas in general and queer Chicanas in particular. Given that writing can be thought of as means to reproduce life and hope in the face of death and doom, as Anzaldúa posits, the political value of Moraga’s writing also lies in the way it confronts the manner in which colonialism’s residue has affected colonized existents ability to process affect.⁴ Writing, Moraga affirms in the introduction, “has

⁴ The section titled “Something to do in the Dark’ in *Borderlands/ La Frontera*, Anzaldúa transfigures the ink of the pen as her own blood. Writing is a process that forces the Chicana queer theorist to confront her worst pain and fear, the worst reflection of herself, to come out once more enlightened

freed me to love [...] from places in myself that had before been mired in unexpressed pain” (v). In this sense Moraga’s *Loving* represents a “de-colonial gift,” that allows us to learn from the pain of colonized existents who live through coloniality’s perpetual war against the *damné*. The task of learning from the gift that takes the form of critique is important because as Maldonado-Torres points out,

The impetus for war and the continuous production of the coloniality of power, being, and knowledge in our contemporary world point to the persistence of the paradigm of war and the need to oppose it frontally. The consistent evasion of the paradigm of violence and war requires a constant learning from the stories, mythical narratives, and intellectual views that emerge in locations whose subjects have experienced the evils of empire. We must be particularly attentive to the points in which the confrontation of evil turns into the horror of evil and the search for goodness. (251)

Loving thus registers as a confrontation with the evils that Western conceptions and myths of love foment against Chicanas. The horror of the evil, though difficult to encounter, allows Moraga to generate her critique and activates the imagination that makes her appeals to love, to liberate love. In the final analysis, as Maldonado-Torres posits, “[a]ppeals to love in the face of colonialism and slavery appear more as consistent responses to systems of dehumanization than as natural expression of gender difference. Love, once again, appears as a response to war” (252).

ready to live and create life. As Anzaldúa explains, “When I write it feels like I’m carving bone. It feels like I’m creating my own face, my own heart—a Nahuatl concept. My soul makes itself through the creative act. It is this learning to live with *la Cuatlicue* that transforms living in the Borderlands from a nightmare into a numinous experience. It is always a path/state to something else”(95). For more on how writing becomes a process a self-reflective, self-affirming decolonization see the chapter ‘Tlilli, Tlapilli/ The Path of the Red and Black Ink’ in Gloria E. Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/ La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Press, (1987), 1999): (87-98).

CHAPTER SEVEN

SACRIFICE OF THE PRIMAL MOTHER/SISTER: DECOLONIAL HORIZONS AND THE DIALECTICS OF DEATH IN CHERRIE MORAGA'S *THE HUNGRY WOMAN: A MEXICAN MEDEA*

Without changing structures of domination, we leave in place the culture of lovelessness.

--- bell hooks

Let us stop importing Greek myths and the Western Cartesian split point of view and root ourselves in the mythological soil and soul of this continent.

--- Gloria Anzaldúa

I write to remember –is there no other way to see it? –because I fear (and hope, in my cowardice) that I will die before any revolution is born blood-red in the horizon. I write to imagine, which is a way of remembering as are dreams, that “we (women) were not always fallen from the mountain.”

Imagine freedom, I tell my self. Write freedom. And I try to do so by painting pictures of prisoners on the page. They are the surviving codices of our loss. When you turn the page, those little five-toed footprints appear again in the spirit of the story. They are leading backwards, pointing towards a future freedom.

--- Cherríe Moraga

The perpetual war that modernity wages against colonial racial subjects has made Cherríe Moraga's own life and personal experience as lesbian mixed-race Chicana become an allegory for living with the trauma of exile. The allegory, as it unfolds in her texts, evinces the meaning of being barred from community when one already exists on the margins of Existence and History. Moraga's writing has consistently insisted on critiquing the longstanding cultural war, which perceives queer subjectivity as a dangerous and deviant aberration that is part and parcel of the racial logic behind coloniality. This observation is especially transparent in her works *Loving In the War Years* (1983), *The Last Generation* (1993), which contains the seminal essay titled “Queer Aztlán: the Re-formation of Chicano Tribe,” and her noted editorial work with her collaborator Gloria E. Anzaldúa in *This Bridge Called My Back* (1981). Reading Moraga's texts as parables that expose the coloniality of Being enables us, as Terry Eagleton's (1981) own observation on Benjamin's treatment of allegory indicate, “to see through the opaqueness of history that demands scrupulous decodement” for life-giving de-colonial discourses to puncture reality (14). Allegory, Eagleton notes, refers back to historicity because “[t]he meaning of that vast, cryptic sign-system which is history must be constantly displaced to be discovered” in literary activity (Ibid). As an allegory of political exile, Moraga's *The Hungry Woman: A Mexican Medea* (2001), one of her most recent and compelling literary productions to date, not only reveals the meaning of

Chicana lesbian existence, but also discloses the gendered and spiritual implications of the violent displacements that indigenous communities, Mexicans, and Mexican Americans living and loving in the U.S. have historically endured owing to the U.S.'s history of slavery, colonialism, and the fundamental inequalities inherent in its subsequent rise as a capitalist empire.

In this final chapter, I read the theme of exile in *The Hungry Woman* through its mythic and fatal implications to situate Mexican Medea, Moraga's tragic heroine in this play, as a political figure whose defiance has profound decolonial political ramifications. As an attempt at "[r]e-mything Aztlán,"¹ I posit that *The Hungry Woman* has profound political significance because it provides a re-articulation of the prevalent narratives that represent Chicana abjection.² The tragic heroin in this play subverts the tendency of frail, silent, maternal, self-sacrificing, helpless representation of Chicana womanhood, and brings to the fore questions about what it means to decolonize a nation from a radical Chicana feminist perspective. Rather than placing the economy of production (Marx) and blood relation (Hegel) at the center of this question, Moraga's play critiques the misogyny and patriarchy upon which nations are built.³ Imagining a Chicano post-colony that liberates itself from an Anglo racial hegemony gone homicidal, *The Hungry Woman* demonstrates that what is most at stake in a decolonial revolution is returning to the gods (I will explain what I mean more fully below) and the possibility of getting away from the political conventions that sacrifice women's interests and values for the sake of binding (read: the process where primary instincts become attached to ideas) and wrapping (read: enclosing boundaries) the nation around the laws of the father, which mediate what Emma Pérez (1993) calls "sociosexual power." I approach Moraga's play asking to what extent can Mexican Medea, Moraga's protagonist in this play, stand in for a radical woman of color politics when Mexican Medea herself struggles fatally with succumbing to nationalism and patriarchal motherhood? The play also compels us to explore to what extent can *The Hungry Woman: A Mexican Medea*, as an "embodied epistemology,"⁴ bring us closer to what can be thought of as a politics that could yield

¹ I am making a reference to Shalini Teresa Fernandez's doctoral dissertation chapter "Remything Aztlán: Forging Community in Cherríe Moraga's *The Hungry Woman*," Diss. University of California, Irvine (2007), where she posits that the plays fundamental function is to re-inscribe Aztlán's meaning in the Chicana/o imagination rather than completely abandon it. Echoing Moraga's position, Fernandez writes, "On the Contrary. We cannot abandon Aztlán, precisely because it serves to name the space of liberation so fondly yearned for. As such, it stands as a site of origin in the struggle to articulate, enact, and make present and absent unity. Aztlán is our start and end point of empowerment (37)" (135).

² A clear counter-figure to Mexican Medea's tragic heroism is Luis Valdez portrayal of Milintzin in *La Conquista de Mexico* (1968). In novels like Rodolfo Anaya's *Bless Me Ultima* (1972), where mother figures are particularly prominent, a similar tendency can be identified.

³ I am specifically referring to their respective observations in Marx's *Das Kapital* and Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*.

⁴ I am making reference to the form's function. That is as a play, once acted out its content becomes knowledge transferred and assimilated through practice. Both the actors and the audience participate in the making performed knowledge. As Micaela Díaz-Sánchez observes as critic and performer in her discussion (2008) on *The Hungry Woman*, "I situate my discussion of "The Hungry Woman: A Mexican Medea" in two specific systems of representation: the play as both mythological and historical text (perhaps as a contemporary material culture), as well as, an embodied episteme given my participation in the recent Stanford production as a performer and collaborator" ("Impossible Patriots," 142). For a discussion on how Moraga's play renders a critique on national struggles that use women as

decolonized horizons. I will address these questions through Chicana decolonial feminist discourses that both contextualize and supplement *The Hungry Woman*'s critique, particularly Norma E. Alarcón (1989), Emma Pérez (1993, 1999), Laura E. Pérez (2007), María Lugones (2007), Marcelle Maese-Cohen (2010). I also place my reading of *The Hungry Woman: A Mexican Medea* in conversation with Lucy Irigaray's (1985) and Judith Butler's (2000) readings of Antigone, a Greek figure, who similar to *Mexican Medea* dares to defy the prevailing patriarchal order.

The Hungry Woman has received a significant amount of critical attention, considering it is a relatively new and not a commonly produced play. In "Mexican Women and Chicanas Enter Futuristic Fiction" (2000), Lisbeth Grant-Britton reflects on what she reads as Moraga's futuristic view of her concern for the contradictions of modernity. Echoing Laura E. Pérez's theorizations about the function of Chicana Art (2007), Grant-Britton emphasizes how Moraga's play represents the spiritual void that being displaced from nature (signified in the play's tension around reclaiming nation through land) yields, and underscores the conflict that arises when working class Chicana/os integrate the technologies "complicit in their oppression and displacement" into their own practices as norms (269). Grant-Britton's sharpest insight about Moraga's play rests on her observation that *The Hungry Woman* most powerful critique projects the dangers behind a community envisioning a future merely to regain a romanticized past. David William Foster's (2002) critical intervention on *The Hungry Woman* underscores its representation of Phoenix, Arizona as interesting juxtaposition of that city's foundational myth. Moraga's representation of Phoenix as a wasteland for exiles, according to Foster, is a dissonant portrait of a city that rose from ashes, a myth foundational to the imaginary of the Anglo-American frontier.⁵ Naomi H. Quiñones's (2002), Shalini T. Fernandez's (2007), and Micaela Díaz-Sánchez's (2008) readings of *The Hungry Woman* are most relevant to the questions I address in this chapter because their approaches to the play hinge on the colonial nature of Chicana lesbian subjection within Moraga's imagined post-colonial reality in the play.

Quiñones, Fernandez, and Díaz-Sánchez respective essays signal the deleterious effects of patriarchy monopolizing the meaning and value of gender and "sexual norms" in a "would be" post-colonial future, as Moraga's play suggests. In "Re(Riting) the Chicana Postcolonial," Quiñones evokes the paradigmatic figures of Chicana feminism that Norma Alarcón identified in her seminal essay "Traduttora, Traditora" (1981) to demonstrate how *The Hungry Woman* problematizes liberation articulated and pursued in male and heteronormative terms. The figures of Malintzin Tenepal and Coyolxauhqui loom in the subtext of the Moraga's play, Quiñones asserts, to remind us that "... the positioning of women within the Chicano imaginary calls to attention the ways in which both myth and cultural belief systems are deployed to establish and maintain the subjugation of women within the movement" (142). Fernandez strikes a similar chord when she writes that "Moraga's fusion of the three mythic figures reveals the overdetermination of the mythic figure of the female betrayer that is used to keep

symbols of liberation rather than integrating them into actual revolution see Micaela Diaz-Sanchez, "Impossible Patriots: The Exiled Queer Citizen in Cherríe Moraga's 'The Hungry Woman: A Mexican Medea,'" (Bruxelles and New York: P.I.E. Peter Lang, 2008).

⁵ Here I am referring to Frederick Jackson Turner's celebrated thesis in "The Significance of the Frontier in American History" (1893).

Chicanas in their position of subordination with Chicano nationalism and culture and which consequently effects their interaction with one another” (“Remything Aztlán” 14). The fact that Chicano nationalism has been in the exclusive control and possession of male discourses that marginalize and disempower Chicanas, particularly queer Chicana womanhood, makes *The Hungry Woman* an important critique, according to Díaz-Sánchez, “of nationalist struggles that champion women as symbols of anti-colonialist revolutions rather than as active integral historical forces in those struggles” (“Impossible Patriots” 142). These observations point to what María Lugones (2007) has identified as “the coloniality of gender” and Emma Pérez (1993) has pointed out as a persistent social problem that stems from the mores established by colonialism and patriarchal civilization: that coloniality rest not only on the racial categorization and coercion of labor of the colonized, but also on the way it has instituted a gender/sex system that is fundamentally patriarchal, homophobic, and heteronormative.

The implications of these critiques makes clear that the modern/colonial world makes men of color sacrifice women of color for the sake of not relenting power. Emma Pérez make this state of affairs explicit when she affirms in “Sexuality and Discourse: Notes from a Chicana Survivor”:

sexuality and our symbolic reading of sexuality is the core of the *problem*. The problem: before the revolution, political, Marxist men refuse to give up their *power*, after the revolution, men refuse to give up their *power*. And what power do we mean? Social, political, economic, and yes, sexual power. (46)

These circumstances, emblematic of modernity/coloniality, take on fatal significance in Moraga’s play because Mexican Medea represents the figure of a Chicana lesbian who will deny herself her own life and the life of her son for the sake of obliterating a symbolic system that exalts patriarchy and masculinity. Caught in the contradictions of coloniality, Mexican Medea’s, whom I situate as a character that represents a primal mother/sister because she signifies the line of ascent of Chicana/o history at the horizon of the maternal function, sacrifice of her son and herself (she commits suicide) enacts anew a foundational myth; one that not only speaks of a Chicano idealized past, but also pronounces what is at stake in the present and future when racial colonial subjects internalize the ethics of domination in their national liberation movements. Rather than a myth that proposes society originating with the murder of the primal father,⁶ *The Hungry Woman* re-imagines an original myth that posits the *killability* and *rapeability* of queer women of color as the starting point of postcolonial society.

Refusing to capitulate to the reifications of colonialism, myth’s primary and most meaningful function in Chicano drama has historically been to counter hegemonic history, particularly its “forgetfulness” as Moraga would put it. As the author of *Chicano Drama* (2000), Jorge Huerta, notes in relation to the role of myth in Chicano plays, “[...] when our playwrights began to resuscitate Mexican legendary figures along with Aztec and Mayan gods and concepts, they challenged both the Mexican and North American hegemonies” (18). Huerta refers to the historical amnesia both in Mexican and U.S.

⁶ I am making reference to Freud’s myth of origins, where he posits that the murder of the primitive father gives way to a paternal symbolic order and an incest taboo in society. See Sigmund Freud, *Totem and Taboo: Resemblances between the psychic lives of savages and neurotics*, Trans. A.A. Brill, (New York: Vintage Books), 1946, c. 1918.

history towards the indigenous roots of North America. In the United States this is best represented by the marginal status indigenous dispossession and displacement has in the historical memory of most Americans, instead privileging the “boot-strap” narrative inherent to Manifest Destiny and Turner’s “Frontier Thesis” (1893). In Mexico there is a similar process of historical *lactification*, to use a Fanonian term, where the indigenous roots of Mexico are whitened over with the history of *mestizaje*.⁷ Mexico’s deep-seeded Eurocentricism and cultural machismo, however, has not simply erased but has also denigrated the vestiges of dualism within Mexico’s Pre-Columbian cosmologies to the extent that figures like Cuatlicue and Coyolxauhqui lose their symbolic power to deities and historical figures that project and affirm a masculine warrior past like Huitzilopochtli and Emiliano Zapata. However, according to Huerta, Chicana/o playwrights participate in the historical re-education of the Chicano community by “substituting Aztec, Maya or Hopi beliefs for the more familiar western European myths” (19). While I would agree that Moraga’s play challenges the hegemonic historical imaginary, I think that more than re-educating Chicanos about their past, *The Hungry Woman* challenges Chicano nationalism’s chauvinist monopoly on the discourse of Aztlán’s liberation. In this sense the work of Moraga’s play is not that of re-education but of what Maldonado-Torres has called decolonial un-learning, the conscious, scrupulous evacuation of colonial knowledge and logic.

Moraga’s approach to myth in this play is interesting precisely because it challenges some notions of the function of myth in Chicano drama. According to Huerta, the function of myth in Chicano theater also serves to explain unexplainable natural or social phenomena and posit origins (Ibid). I submit, however, that *The Hungry Woman* does not seek to explain a divine enigma that is beyond human comprehension, but rather dares to speak the unspeakable in Chicana/o culture; the truth of a possible tragic future. That is to say that Moraga’s play articulates how Mechicano culture coddles men into power and fatally disempowers its women; particularly those who dare to defy heteronormative gender roles. *The Hungry Woman*, rather than positing a re-establishment of a romanticized Aztec warrior past, establishes, on an imaginary plane, the possible origins of a liberated Aztlán caught in the contradiction of its *machista* revolutionary rhetoric. Jumping between past, present, and future, the play’s narrative structure mirrors Moraga’s intended statement about tradition and Chicana/o temporality. That is to say that similar to Fanon’s theoretical conclusions in his phenomenological reduction of “the racist look” in *Black Skin, White Mask* (1967), through her playful use of myth, Moraga refuses to relegate Chicana/o subjectivity and existence to an enchanted past, but rather affirms the temporality of racial colonial subjects in the past, present, and future.

Although it is commonly thought of as a symbolic structure that consolidates and affirms hegemony, myth in *The Hungry Woman* functions to decolonize hegemonic patriarchal signification and challenges the toxic misogyny and homophobia Chicano nationalism has historically espoused to open the possibility of a decolonial future.⁸

⁷ *Lactification* is a term Franz Fanon uses to describe the cultural “whitening” process that racist society forces upon colonial subjects through Eurocentrism. See Chapter 2, “The Woman of Color and the White Man,” in Franz Fanon’s *Black Skins, White Masks*, (New York: Grove Press, 1967).

⁸ For a detailed discussion about the function of myth in Chicana/o drama see Jorge Huerta, *Chicano Drama: Performance, Society, and Myth*,” (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press,

Where as Luis Valdez's use of myth can be thought of as articulating the masculine origins of Chicano history in plays like *La Conquista de México* (1968), *The Hungry Woman: A Mexican Medea* re-casts female indigenous mythical figures in Mexican and Chicana/o culture to challenge both the masculine *ideals* behind the origins of Chicano nationalism and the *future practice* of Chicano politics. Moraga makes this point clear when in the "Preface" to the 2001 published version of *The Hungry Woman*, she writes:

In recent years, I've come to understand myth as a similarly divine(d) gift, an opening into the past, told in character and image, that can provide a kind of road map to our future. I am reminded here of the symbol of journeying employed by Meso-American scribes: little "patitas negras," black-inked human-shaped footprints, marking out the road taken, traversing thousands of miles of desierto and montaña. This preoccupation with the past as a foretelling of the future may be the reason why I have lately begun to write stories placed in an imagined future. Like "a dream waiting to happen," I have written elsewhere. (ix)

This suggests that the mythical figures evoked in *The Hungry Woman*, namely, Coyolxauhqui, Cuatlícue, La Llorona and Malintzin Tenepal (dubbed "La Chingada" by Octavio Paz (1961)), represent not simply a feminized revision of Chicano history, but a way to go about decolonizing the limits of our perceptions as racial colonial subjects, brothers, sisters, sons, daughter, fathers, and mothers of Aztlán. As Fernandez asserts, *The Hungry Woman* serves as a means to "interrogate and deconstruct any representations of the creation of community as effortless or idyllic and reminds us that making alliances, establishing kinship, and forging bonds are not simple processes, but rather endeavors often fraught with pain and the possibility of failure," especially when the bonds of the community come with the cost of discrimination and denigration of women and those who dare to defy patriarchy and heteronormativity ("Remything Aztlán" 15). I contend that while Moraga's play re-claims the legacy of these female figures so denigrated in Mexican and Chicano history through her feminist portrayals in the play, re-casting them as self-determined and resistant of patriarchy according to Fernandez (130), she also re-articulates the meaning and practice of Chicana/o nationalism by positing the death of the "name of the father," what Lacan defined as the symbolic structure that regulate desire and discourse,⁹ within the play.

Given the binary constriction of Mexican women and Chicanas as "virgin/whore" in the Mexican cultural imaginary (Alarcón 1989), one would think that Moraga's critical intent in the *Hungry Woman* is purely discursive, however, I contend that because the symbolic is so intimately tied to *social practices* Moraga's most salient point in *The Hungry Woman* refers back to the constitution of the polis and how modern/colonial gender arrangements produce misogynistic norms that bar women of color from being active agents in its democratic crystallization. Here I am framing my

2000). For a historical account about how the Chicano movement came to represent the cultural assertion of brown masculinity see Ramon A. Gutierrez, "Community, Patriarchy, and Individualism: the Politics of Chicano History and the Dream of Equality," *American Quarterly*, Vol. 45, No. 1, (March 1993): 44-72.

⁹ "It is in the *name of the father*," Lacan writes, "that we must recognize the basis of the symbolic function which, since the dawn of historical time, has identified his person with the figure of the law" ("The Function and Field of Speech and Language" 66). For a thorough discussion of Lacan's theorization of the "name of the father" see *The Psychoses 1955-1956: The Seminars of Jacques Lacan Book III*, (New York: W.W. & Norton, 1993, c.1981).

reading of Mexican Medea as a fused embodiment of Cuatlicue and Malintzin that, as Luce Irigaray has commented in relation to Antigone's legacy on political and ethical thought, "we must abstract [...] from the seductive, reductive discourses and listen to what she has to offer about government and the polis, its orders, its laws" ("Speculum" 70). That is to say that similar to Antigone, who outright defies the law of the father and would rather be dead than disavow her love and personal convictions to be integrated into the nation, Mexican Medea refuses to publicly renounce her lesbian sexuality for the sake of the being recognized by the hegemonic patriarchal order. Mexican Medea represents both a crisis in "the symbolic," the Lacanian formulation which signals the conventions that make intelligibility and culture possible that are neither wholly dependent nor estranged from the social,¹⁰ because she refuses to allow heteronormative patriarchy define what constitutes acceptable sexual norms in a liberated Aztlán, and posits a politics of liberation that breaks away from the non-ethic of colonial domination from which colonial gender arrangements depart.

The Hungry Woman figures a crisis in the system of representation of Mexican and Chicano nationalism because Mexican Medea embodies the limits of the above

¹⁰ Lacan's formulation around "the symbolic" are particularly relevant to the play because Moraga's critique moves against *the word of the father* and how the prevailing symbolic structure governs social alliances by using women as objects of exchange. Explaining the symbolic's relations to language, Lacan writes:

It is the worlds of words that creates the word of things—things which at first run together in the *hic et nunc* of the all in the process of becoming—by giving its concrete being to their essence, and its ubiquity to what has always been [...]

Man thus speaks, but it is because the symbol has made him man. Even if, in fact, overabundant gifts welcome a stranger who has made himself known to a group, the life of natural groups that constitute a community is subject to the rules of matrimonial alliance—determining the direction in which the exchange of women take place—and to the mutual services determined by marriage: as the SiRonga proverbs says, "A relative by marriage is an elephant's hip." Marriage ties are governed by an order of preferences whose law concerning kinship names is, like language, imperative for the group in its forms, but unconscious in its structure. Now, in this structure, whose harmony or conflicts govern the restricted or generalized exchange discerned by ethnologists, the startled theoretician refinds the whole logic of combinations; thus the laws of number that is, of the most highly purified of all symbols—prove to be immanent in the original symbolism. At least, it is the richness of the forms—in which what are known as elementary structures of kinship develop—that makes those laws legible in the original symbolism. And this suggests that it is perhaps our unawareness of their permanence that allows us to believe in freedom of choice in the so-called complex structures of marriage ties under whose law we live. If statistics have already allowed us to glimpse that this freedom is not exercised randomly, it is because a subjective logic seems to orient its effects. [...]

The primordial Law is therefore the Law which, in regulating marriage ties, superimposes the reign of culture over the reign of nature, the latter being subject to the law of mating. The prohibition of incest is merely the subjective pivot of that Law, laid bare by the modern tendency to reduce the objects the subject is forbidden to choose to the mother and sister, full license, moreover, not yet being entirely granted beyond them.

This law, then, reveals itself clearly enough as identical to a language order. For without names for kinship relations, no power can institute the order of preferences and taboos that knot and braid the thread of lineage through generations. (65-66)

mentioned binary construction of Mechicana womanhood, which couches her between the legacies of Malintzin and Guadalupe. She is Moraga's palimpsestic literary construction of what Alarcón has described as "Mexico's own, binary pair, Guadalupe and Malintzin, [who] reenact within this dualistic system of thought the biblical stories of our human creation" ("Traduttora" 111). I propose, however, that Mexican Medea embodies the limits to what both Malintzin and Guadalupe signify because she represents the breaking point of a concession between the vanquished and its oppressors. Whereas, "as a political compromise between conquerors and conquered, Guadalupe is the representative of the Virgin Mary and the native goddess Tonantzin, while Malintzin stands in the periphery of new patriarchal order and sociosymbolic contract," Mexican Medea is representative of a refusal and defiance to collaborate with the powers that subjugate her and those the play refers to as "her kind," alluding to those who transgress colonial gender arrangements (Ibid).

The legacy of "monstrous doubles," to use Alarcón's own terms, demonstrates that Mexican Medea's representative power, as decolonial feminist figure, is not pure and without ambivalence. That is to say that because Moraga infuses Mexican Medea with Malintzin's legacy, the legacy of an Oedipal mother, as scapegoat of colonized masculinity's inadequacies, as "originator of Mexican people's fall from grace and the procreator of "fallen people," the protagonist of *The Hungry Woman* also struggles to subdue and free herself from colonial introjection, which she expresses in her brief, yet meaningful "wifely" capitulation to Jasón, her possessive, and even domineering, attitude towards Luna, her lover, and her self-sacrificial posture towards Chac-Mool, her son (Ibid). Mexican Medea's representability as decolonial feminist political figure becomes ambivalent precisely because she is implicated in maintaining and acting out patriarchal motherhood and benevolent, dominating love. Mexican Medea's principal implication with patriarchal order is legible through her heteronormative union where, similar to the Greek Medea, Mexican Medea helped Jasón obtain "the golden fleece" that liberated Aztlán signifies. Secondly, her attitudes towards Luna and Chac-Mool demonstrate the extent to which she has internalized her own subjugation as *mujer* by identifying with her oppressors through her own behavior. For instance, she treats and speaks to Luna as a chauvinist macho would, for as Luna intimates, "She says she doesn't give a damn if I feel exploited. She says who asked you to be a housewife? 'Quien te manda? I want a lover not a vieja.' I think what she really wants is a man" (35). Additionally, it is as if Mexican Medea hangs her dignity and the measure of her value as "complete women" on her having borne a son:

MEDEA: It was true what Jason claimed that I was unfaithful to him.

True, I was in the midst of an insatiable love affair. No, It did not satiate. Did it begin when my son first put his spoon-sized mouth to my breast? Yes, there our union was consummated, there in the circle of his ruby mouth. A ring of pure animal need taking hold of me. It was a secret Jasón named, stripped to expose us –mother and child–naked and clinging to each other. (31)

Mexican Medea's possessive motherhood is further demonstrated in Mexican Medea's lamentation toward Chac-Mool's growing apart from her "law" and her body:

MEDEA: I never weaned my son. One day, he just stopped wanting it. It

was peer pressure. He was three years old. I call him over to me. “Mijito,” I say, “quieres chichi?” He is on his way out to play. I remember his playmate, that little ruby boy at the doorway. And I show Chac-Mool my breast. His eyes pass over me. Lizard eyes. Cold. “Not now, Mom,” he says. Like a man. I knew that he already wanted to be away from me, to grow up to suck on some other woman’s tit. (Ibid)

Despite this internal struggle, which reveals once more the internally contradictory and paradoxical dimension of the coloniality of Being, the fact that Mexican Medea chooses to live as a banished lesbian in Tamaoacán, the Phoenix wasteland of transgressors of purity and authenticity, is particularly significant to recognize the political critique in *The Hungry Woman* because it is meant to unsettle traditional conservatism by which Chicano nationalism is informed.

The refusal to compromise with her oppressors is Mexican Medea’s decolonial redemption. What sets Mexican Medea apart from the figures of Guadalupe and Malintzin is precisely that her fatal fate is sealed by her refusal to neither “collaborate with” nor “stand aside to witness” the evils of patriarchy and the sociosymbolic order it generates. In fact, Mexican Medea transgresses the sociosymbolic order in two acts: one that is performative and one that is discursive. We can read the performative transgression in Mexican Medea’s *choice* to perform her defiance of heteronormative sexuality by affirming a queer Chicana sexuality. This choice, though not always legible and coherent (even to Medea as the quote below suggests) reflects an instinct that turns into a decolonial conviction to go against normativity:

MEDEA: I’m not cruel, I’m dying to make sense of it. How does it start? How does it vanish? How is it you used to drink from me as if you yourself didn’t taste the same coppered richness when you brought your own bloody fingers to your mouth. As if when you drew a woman’s shape with your sculptors hands, you didn’t find the same diosa curves and valleys when you bathed yourself each day. Eres mujer. But for you falling in love is to think nothing of yourself, your own body. In the beginning all was me. (43)

LUNA: Yes in the beginning.

MEDEA: And now?

LUNA: It’s different now. You get used to each other. It’s... normal.

MEDEA: I loathe normal. At night, I would lay awake and wonder, how is it that she could worship me so and not be banished? But then you were already banished. And now, that’s the road I walk, too. (43)

This exchange between the protagonist of *The Hungry Woman* and her lover makes an indirect remark about a difference between Luna’s and Medea’s sexuality. Whereas Mexican Medea is self-conscious and often “strategically” ambivalent about her desire towards Luna, Luna’s queer identity is rendered as stable because it stands purely on desire and love rather than mediated by perverse transgressions and politics.¹¹

¹¹ I am compelled to qualify this statement because I think Moraga’s intent in depicting Mexican Medea’s ambivalence as linguistic to show how much of a warrior tactician Mexican Medea is. As far as her passion, desire, and commitment to Luna are concerned, there is not much evidence that demonstrates

Considering the number of times that Medea and Mama Sal insist on how Luna is a “born lesbian,” where Medea supposedly is not, it becomes evident that Moraga makes this a significant difference to observe because she wants to posit Mexican Medea’s sexuality not simply as a product of desire, but rather as a matter of transgressions and political convictions:

MEDEA: It doesn’t matter now. I am the last one to make this journey. My tragedy will be an example to all women like me. Vain women who only know how to be loved. Such an example shall be that no woman will dare to transgress those boundaries again. You, you and your kind have no choice. You were born to be a lover of women, to grow hands that could transform a woman like those blocks of faceless stone you turn into diosas. I, my kind, am a dying breed of female. I am the last one to make this crossing, the border has been closed behind me. There will be no more room for transgressions. (45-46)

Mexican Medea is a dying breed because she doubts that future generations would choose to transgress colonial/modern gender arrangements by queering sexuality and being open to queer love given the high price that must be paid for it: a loss of home, a loss of mother-land, a loss of recognition.

To be sure, the question of the desire for recognition comes into play in this discussion of Mexican Medea’s choice to transgress patriarchy and heteronormativity. As the argument I outline in the second chapter proposes, given that recognition in the context of coloniality/modernity becomes a ruse of power that ultimately coerces the slave to make herself in the image of the master to attain this recognition, we must read Mexican Medea’s defiance as a suspension of the desire to be recognized by a colonial master, which in this case is the “law” that Jasón represents. Whether we describe it as an “analeptic turn,” Butler’s (1997) term describing the appropriation of the masters means to attain recognition, or a political compromise, the cost of looking to find the meaning and worth of one’s humanity as colonized subjects through the gaze and discourse of the master *is* the self. Mexican Medea comes to understand that at stake in accepting to negate and disavow what she feels is true and right about her sexuality and vision for Aztlán is what Hegel called “the ethical order,” “the sphere of political participation but also of viable cultural norms,” and the symbolic order, the very universe of meaning and practice itself (Butler (2000) 2). Just as *Hegel’s reading of Antigone casts her defiance of Creon as representing the dissolution of ethical order and cultural intelligibility*, Mexican Medea’s acts renders illegible and suspends the law of the father by defying the sovereign’s minister of culture, Jasón, he who dictates ethical order and the grammar of national culture in “liberated Aztlán” (Ibid). Mexican Medea’s choices to act on her desire, to not perform a disavowal of this desire, and to kill her son thus obliterate Jasón’s power over her by declaring his proposed contingent recognition unacceptable, unintelligible, and illegitimate under a decolonial feminist politics.

she is indecisive. It is clear that Mexican Medea has battled most of her life, her seeming ambivalence towards her attraction to Luna stems from a desire to challenge Luna’s complacency, to be fought for, to be supported in her cause to be allowed to both affirm her lesbian sexuality and be integrate herself as a citizen of Aztlán.

But what are these politics exactly? The politics that *The Hungry Woman* becomes representative of is the politics that understands that feminine and queer sexuality should not be that which must be sacrificed for patriarchal and heteronormative state to be maintained. Luce Irigaray observations about Antigone's insurrectionary power (1974) may be apt to further our analysis of *The Hungry Woman*, for similar to Antigone, Mexican Medea represents the feminine bloodshed, the sacrifice of the primal mother/sister, if you will, on which post-colonial nations are built. Commenting on Irigaray's assessment of Antigone, Butler writes,

The feminine, as it were, becomes this remainder, and "blood" becomes the graphic figure for this echoing trace of kinship, a refiguring of the figure of the blood-line that brings into relief the violent forgetting of primary kin relations in the inauguration of symbolic masculine authority. Antigone thus signifies for Irigaray the transition from the rule of law based on maternity, a rule of law based on kinship, to a rule of law based on paternity. (4)

Butler's interpretation of Irigaray's reading of Antigone underscores the excess, so to speak, that the feminine body represents within the nation. This body is a "specificity and graphicness that fully abstracts principles of political equality not only fail to grasp but most rigorously exclude and even annihilate" (Ibid). Although Butler ultimately finds Irigaray's logic unsatisfactory, noting that it makes Antigone "the eternal irony of the community" because according to her there is no reason to hold that paternal law is absent of kinship relations, I maintain that Irigaray's logic holds for thinking about colonial/modern gender arrangements because *colonial paternal law* has been historically maintained by subjugation, coercion and violence of the native women.¹²

The liberated Aztlán that Moraga imagines does not depart from this historical reality to the extent that citizenship is not simply a matter of the right blood-quantum as the play often suggests. Rather, once liberated with the help of brave women, Aztlán's law became the coercive, domineering paternal law that demands that one not only ally herself to the prevailing symbolic order, but also that one performs it to assure its integration into one's being. As Mama Sal and Savanna observe when they recount the history of Aztlán's so-called liberation:

MAMA SAL: We were contentos for a while—

SAVANNAH: Sort of. Until the revolutionaries told the women put
down your guns and pick up your babies.

MAMA SAL: Fuera de las calles!

SAVANNAH: And into the kitchens! (Beat) Now that's not the official
version.

NURSE: I-18.

¹² The historical record provides ample examples that testify to the systematic rapeability and killability of the native woman during and after colonialism. See the chapter "Sexual Violence as a Tool of Genocide" in Andrea Smith's *Conquest*, (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2005). On another level, the mythic figures that Moraga's play evokes also affirm this proposition. Coyolxauhqui, the legend tells us, was killed by her brother Huitzilopochtli; Cuatlicue, unbeknown to herself becomes pregnant with the god of war without choosing to do so; Malintzin Tenepal is used by all the men for the better art of her life. Her father gives her to a strange white man who puts her to work to fulfill his *Conquista* agenda. Cortéz uses her politically and sexually and then discards her, reportedly giving her to his friend when he was done with her. In one-way or another each of these figures is abused by "the name of the father."

MAMA SAL: Just like the Gringo and Gauchupin before them.
SAVANNAH: And then en masse, all the colored countries—
MAMA SAL: Threw out Jotería.
SAVANNAH: Queers of every shade and definition.
MAMA SAL: Y los homos became peregrinos... como nomads just like
our Aztec ancestors a thousand years ago. (24)

This excerpt makes clear that Aztlán's paternal law, beyond blood-based kinship lines, is bound to how people perform gender, how they either affirm or deny patriarchal order and heteronormative sexuality. The politics of nation under these circumstances become a purely masculine desire. As Mexican Medea's most poignant lines indicate:

MEDEA: Politics. Men think women have no love of country, that the desire for nation is a male prerogative. So like gods, they pick and choose who is to be born and live and die in a land I bled for equal to any man. Aztlán, you betray me! Y acá me encuentro in this wasteland where yerbas grow bitter for lack of water, my face pressed to the glass of my own revolution like some huérfana abandonada.

LUNA: You aren't an orphan, Medea.

MEDEA: I have no motherland. [...] (16)

As the exchange between Luna and Medea above suggests, for Medea a queer-feminist-decolonial politics is not legible to the patriarchal, heteronormative political order of post-colonial Aztlán because the symbolic establishes the right for men to make it their exclusive claim to it.

Given the play's tragic end, it becomes evident that the main contradiction of Moraga's play is not simply whether Mexican Medea will acquiesce to her desire and relent to the edicts that would have her deny her lesbianism and become Jason's ward, but rather if Chac-Mool, Medea's and Jasón's offspring, will affirm the *name of the father* by *enunciating* his masculine claim to nation, by pronouncing his allegiance to a heteronormative, homophobic, patriarchal Aztlán. While Jasón represents the language of sovereign authority and action, the language of patriarchal heteronormative power whose claim to membership in Aztlán are bloodlines, Chac-Mool represents the potential reproduction of masculine sociosexual power. Chac-Mool is thus Jasón's present and future paternal claim to legitimacy in Aztlán because his son figures as the perpetuation of the patriarchal, heteronormative order. When Chac-Mool finally decides to be initiated as a citizen of Aztlán, he is not simply choosing to become a legal-rights bearing member of a nation, but rather claiming the rights and privileges of *conquering manhood*, the right to possess and control what's fertile (land) and fecund (women). While Chac-Mool indicates that his decision is based on the desire to lead a normal life, he is admitting that he is willing to abide with heteronormativity and patriarchy. The implications of "normal" is what registers as problematic for Mexican Medea:

MEDEA: You want to be normal? Then, go with your father. He's perfectly normal. It's normal to send your five-year-old child and his mother to exile and then seven years later come back to collect the kid like a piece of property. It's normal for a nearly sixty-year-old Mexican man to marry a teenager. It's normal to lie about your race, your class, your origins, create a perfectly unoriginal fiction

about yourself and then name your self la patria's poet. But that's normal for a country that robs land from its daughters to give to its sons unless of course they turn out to be jotos. (75)

The fact is that queer Tamoanchán's symbolic order threatens Chac-Mool existentially because as he enters adulthood he reads exile as a form of emasculation. Exile is a symbolic castration for Chac-Mool because in the wasteland of sexual transgressors that Tamoanchán signifies, his manhood is rendered useless if it cannot exert its power in words or action. As the key players of *The Hungry Woman* suggest, to have land, to have Aztlán, is to be virile, is to be a measure power, is to exist. Chac-Mool castration anxiety is evident when he retorts to his mother, "What am I supposed to do. Who am I supposed to be? There's nobody to be. No man to be" (84). To be denied his land becomes tantamount to being denied his phallus, or at least being denied a way to be a man.

Chac-Mool's eventual allegiance to Aztlán, more than a transgression of his mother's wishes, is also an avowal of the prevailing symbolic order. That is to say that rather than blood or bloodshed being the marker of citizenship in Jasón's Aztlán, citizenship is attained by integrating the symbolic order through language:

BORDER GUARD: Where do you want to be?

CHAC-MOOL: Aztlán.

BORDER-GUARD: Right answer. Tú patria.

CHAC-MOOL: Si, mi patria. I am my father's son. I've got a right to be there. [...]

BORDER GUARD: What does he want now?

CHAC-MOOL: Well, now he wants me back! *To make a man of me*, to keep the Indian in him" [...]

CHAC-MOOL: I was always blessed to be a boy. My great grandmother literally traced my forehead with the cross of her thumb and index finger and my brow was tranquil. I didn't then have the violent thoughts of a man. At four, my father drilled his fingers into my chest, held me at the gun-point of his glare. You are blessed, he told me. Open your nostrils and flare like a bull. I want you to smell this land. I remember the wings of my nostrils raising up to suck up his breath. It was a birthing of sorts. He penetrated and I was born of him. His land was my mother and mine and I was beholden only to it. (79)

This exchange, whose significance is underscored by the "officialness" and seriousness it signals since it is an interview with immigration authorities, highlights the kind of performative act, in a kind of "loyalty oath," bent on re-organizing Chac-Mool's imaginary. A re-organization expressed in an *enunciated* loyalty toward the father, and a disavowal of the mother. We can explain Chac-Mool's choice to forsake his mother through Irigaray's observations on why men assume loyalty towards their sex before women in her reading of Antigone. Irigaray writes,

Thus male and female will be split further and further apart.

The wife-mother will henceforward become more and more associated with nourishing and liquefying *lymph*, almost *white*, while she looses her blood in cyclic hemorrhages, *neater and passive* enough in her matter for

various members and organs of society to incorporate her and use her for their own substance. The man (father) will preserve in developing his individualization by *assimilating* the external other into and for the self, thus reinforcing his vitality, irritability, and his activity; a peculiar triumph is experienced when man absorbs the other into himself in his intestines. The Father-King will repeat the rapture of (living) exchange between man and woman by sublating it into his discourse. Blood is burned to cinder in the writing of the text of law whereby man produces (himself) at the same time (as) the double—differently in him, in his son, in his wife—and the color of blood fades as more and more semblances are produced, more atoms of individual egos, all bloodless in different ways. In this process some substance is lost: blood in its constitution of a living, autonomous subject. (221-222)

If it is true that men both consume women to reproduce their own law, their own sociosexual power, their dominance, and their use of discourse to assimilate the symbolic order into social relations, then Mexican Medea will unman, as it were, Jasón by negating him her body as thing to be consumed and killing the son through which Jasón plans to “repeat the rapture” by transferring the language of sovereign authority and action.

A textual problem becomes evident when readings of *The Hungry Woman* ignore that Mexican Medea emerges in her defiance by absorbing “the very language of the state against which she rebels, [making her’s] a politics not of oppositional purity but of the scandalous impure” (Butler 5). Mama Sal’s warning foreshadows the fatal implications of this appropriation, “Don’t make a mother choose between blood and love” (38). This is important to point out because beyond the play’s main contradiction, namely the manner in which one day Chac-Mool’s manhood will be articulated and performed, what I think is most at stake in Moraga’s play is decolonizing the politics of love and gender in Aztlán. This is evident in Mexican Medea’s concern over the kind of love Chac-Mool’s manhood will yield when he returns to Aztlán as she rejects the idea of his return to it:

MEDEA: My son needs no taste of the weakness you call manhood. He is still a boy, not a man and *you will not make him in your likeness!* The man I wish my son to be does not exist, must be invented. He will invent himself if he must, but he will not grow up to learn betrayal from your example. (69)

When Medea is pushed to choose alliances she ultimately chooses to be on the side of what she loves: her son, Luna, and herself. She thus defies Jasón’s word and Aztlán’s law, which decrees that she give up all that she loves for *patria*, for the sake of preserving patriarchal, heteronormative order:

JASON: The courts have already made their decision, Medea.

MEDEA: What courts? The patriarchs who stole my country? I returned to my motherland in the embrace of a woman and the other is taken from me. (71)

Mexican Medea’s discursive defiance forces her to assume the language of the father, what I would characterize as the language of masculine negation, to reclaim her agency and identity, even if she is doomed to be a woman:

MEDEA: Oh Yes, I’ve changed. I married you when I was still a girl, not not a woman, but a girl with girl’s naiveté who still looked for a

father's protection. But that was a long time ago. I am a woman. A Mexican woman and there is no protection and no place for me, not even in the arms of another woman because she is an exile in her own land. Marry your child-bride. A mi no me importa. No, in that lies no traición. Betrayal occurs when a boy grows into a man and sees his mother as a woman for the first time. A woman. A thing to be controlled. (70)

Furthermore, Mexican Medea must embody a measure of the despotism that she is served to regain a sense of dignity in the face of the degradation Jasón has put her through:

MEDEA: No, my son is still innocent. He will love you in spite of me, for his body requires that that animal memory be filled. To that I do not object, nor to the fact that he must one day grow away from me, but he will leave me as a daughter does, with all the necessary wrenching, and his eyes will never see me as "woman." I promise you that. (71)

Mexican Medea, as Butler's reading of Antigone points out, "comes, then, to act in ways that are called manly not only because she acts in defiance of the law but also because she assumes the voice of the law in committing the act against the law" (11). The fact that Chac-Mool does eventually see her with the eyes of a man and—more importantly—speaks to her in masculine terms as he affirms that he is returning to Aztlán "like a man" spells her tragic undoing. The tragic dimension comes into view when Chac-Mool reveals that Mexican Medea's Oedipal mothering, the patriarchal motherhood she internalized, has created the exactly what did not want: "Yeah a man. Just the way you taught me. You fucked him, I didn't. You fucked yourself" (86).

Mexican Medea's discursive transgression challenges the sanctified "name of the father" not by imposing her own law, say by replacing it with a queered symbolic order, but rather by refusing to enter the terms of the discussion all together. Although early in the play Mexican Medea works out a deal with Jasón that would allow her to return to Aztlán with Chac-Mool and Mama Sal, she reneges because she cannot agree to the conditions: return as a ward of Jasón and publicly disavow her sexuality and love for Luna.

MEDEA: I can't go.

CHAC-MOOL: Why not?

MEDEA: Nothing's changed, Chac-Mool. They want a public disavowal.

CHAC-MOOL: What?

MEDEA: I can't deny what I am, hijo. I thought I could but I can't. (74)

To publicly disavow her sexuality would be to accept and legitimate the authority that subjugates her and other queer Chicana/os living in Tamoanchán. Mexican Medea refuses to take grammatical possession of her so-called sexual transgression, not as a way to distance her self from it, but to defy the power that defines her act as an aberration and perversion of the symbolic order. Mexican Medea, thus, re-articulates the gender of sovereignty, not by acting authoritatively, but rather by refusing to cooperate with patriarchal, heteronormative authority.

Mexican Medea departs from oppositional purity, not simply because she ambivalently appropriates the language of negation and refuses to avow Aztlán's authority, but also because her final defiant act—her killing Chac-Mool—offers no

dialectical overcoming. There is no dialectical overcoming because there is no life that Mexican Medea can live with the possibility to love truly. The play's tragic turn reflects this impossibility, for Mexican Medea's heart is split asunder by blood and love. She can neither relinquish her son to her enemies, nor can she give up her lesbian love for Luna. Her fortune is not to have a love to live, to be condemned to a symbolic-death before any possibility to love. In the end, her murder is unintelligible in the eyes of the symbolic order because her act shatters idealized patriarchal motherhood. Rather than sacrificing herself, as the prevailing symbolic order would have it, Mexican Medea sacrifices her son, emerging as she does in text, as the irrational mother who commits an irredeemable transgression. Moraga leaves us with Mexican Medea's apparent *locura*, a psychosis in Lacanian terms, with her lament, and inescapable suffering.¹³ As Chac-Mool's ghost reveals, she ends up living a social and symbolic death in an insane asylum wishing for her own actual-death.

But does this end articulate decolonial feminist politics? I would propose that it does because it evokes the need for ethical anti-patriarchal and anti-heteronormative relations between Chicanas and Chicanos. It calls for a symbolic order where, as Mexican Media suggest at the end of the play, *the dark of each other's eyes would mirror each other* (98). The re-articulation of the symbolic order would allow us to "blend together sexless," rather than as men or women—or even queer women and men—as our subjectivities would emerge without loyalties to our respective genders, only being true to ethical human relations that produce rather than curtail life. *The Hungry Woman's* conclusion offers decolonial horizons precisely because it critiques the colonial/modern gender arrangements and invites us to open to rethink the limits of the prevailing symbolic order.

Given its preoccupation with the mythical construction of queer Mechicanas as the limit of the moral order, *The Hungry Woman* also invites us to challenge the notion that the coloniality of gender has purely material implications. As my overall thesis on the coloniality of Being makes clear, coloniality expresses itself in *the production of meaning* as much as it does in *through labor*. María Lugones seminal essay "Heterosexism and the Colonial/Modern Gender System" (2007) affirms this proposition for it demonstrates that the colonial history of gender arrangements in the Americas does not simply evince the manner in which patriarchy embedded in the coloniality of power has interpellated women as another source of labor and a productive resource. As Lugones proposes, a deeper analysis of colonial/modern gender arrangements also reveals how capitalism, racial classification, and heterosexualism "are impossible to understand apart from each other" (187). This observation is a matter of politics because it addresses the indifference that men of color, as Jasón's macho, Chicano character demonstrates, have towards the manner in which gender and sexuality (its meaning and practice) is determined by Western, capitalist, and colonial logics. That is to say that men of color, and I am referring to Chicanos in particular, who want to theorize and practice truly liberatory politics must question heterosexuality's normative status, and recognize it

¹³ I am referring to Lacan's notion that the problem of psychosis rests in the relation between the signifier and the subject. He notes that psychosis becomes most legible when signifying chain is broken by and competing signifying chain is imposed on the subject. The psychotic, as it were, is caught betwixt and between signifying chains. See Jacques Lacan, "On a Question Prior to Any Possible Treatment of Psychosis," in *Écrits: A Selection*, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1999, c. 1966.

as “consistently perverse when violently exercised across the colonial modern gender system so as to construct a world-wide system of power” (187-88). The challenge for Chicanos in this respect is to understand that “the very meaning of heterosexuality as a tide to a persistently violent domination that marks the flesh multiply by accessing the bodies of the unfree in differential patterns developed to constitute them as the tortured materiality of power” (Ibid).

The politics of decolonial feminisms, as it has been explicitly and indirectly articulated by Chicana thinkers like Marcelle Maese-Cohen (2010) and Laura E. Pérez (2010), gravitate around the conviction that gender oppression is neither simply an individual nor cultural problem, but rather is an epistemic and ethical problematic that is planetary. As Maese-Cohen explains,

The term decolonial feminisms responds to [a] 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 subject communities. [...] Instead, the hallmark of decolonial feminism is the acknowledgement of “materialities, power across scales” and “completely intimate relations of subject formation under the conditions of colonialism.” (19)

The implications of such a definition demonstrate that the political value of *The Hungry Woman* rests on it showing how nation and kinship, materialities whose power is couched between macro and micro scales, must be extricated from their hegemonic degrees of validation. That to say the epistemic function of nation and kinship, rather than amplified as Butler suggests in *Antigone's Claim, needs to be re-articulated to reflect more democratic, anti-violent, human relations* (24-25).

On an ethical level, the politics of decolonial feminism calls for a denaturalization of violence in social relations. The “othering” that colonial violence produces, which racial colonial subjects often internalize, is particularly significant here because it prevents us from existing beyond difference and prevents us from recognizing each other’s humanity. Decolonial feminism, thus seeks an alternative ethical conceptualization where instead of representing negation to each other, we represent affirmation of each other’s humanity. For Laura E. Pérez, the return to indigenous concepts like “In’Laketch,” you are my other self, can help (re)construct an ethical decolonial reality. Commenting on Pérez’s adoption of the concept to articulate a decolonial feminist ethic, Maese-Cohen writes,

In’Laketch enables an understanding of the negatively racialized or sexualized Other as deeply embedded in the self; hence, “their fate is tied to my own,” and what re-appears as external difference reappears as “part of my potential subjectivity that present power relations have rendered other.” Such possibilities can be considered a queer politics that opens up multiple forms of gender in the self by undoing the culturally constructed alignments between “masculinity” and “male” or “femininity” and “female” or “queerness” and “homosexuality.” Most importantly, Pérez concludes that all truly decolonial “solidarity and coalition inevitably entail the de-gendering and deheteronormativizing our social subjectivities.” (21)

The Hungry Woman espouses decolonial queer feminist politics to the extent that it invites us to undo the “othering” that prevents Chicanas and Chicanos from recognizing our common oppression and common humanity. Mexican Medea’s tragic act can be read as a kind of symbolic de-gendering and deheteronomativing of Aztlán in that Chac-Mool represents its future. Once dead, Chac-Mool’s gender and sexuality cannot be reproduced, which can be read as the death of a future patriarchal order that Jasón wants to secure.

To conclude I would return to the mythical dimension of *The Hungry Woman* to bring into relief another significant aspect of Moraga’s decolonial feminism: the spiritual. Given that the first act of colonization was to de-god the newly conquered peoples, it has been important for Chicana feminists to articulate a politics where a reconnection to the spiritual is the first step towards a decolonial reality. As Moraga explains in the preface to play, the reference to hunger in the title of play points the desire for truth and God. It is a hunger for spiritual memory, as it were, that makes her entwine the symbols of Cuatlicue, Coyolxauhqui, La Llorona and Malintzin in this play. Moraga writes, “I worship them in my attempt to portray them in all their locura, because I admire the living expression of their hungers. They like my dreams, insist on truth and as much become allies in a war against forgetfulness” (x). Following Laura E. Pérez’s (2007) theorization of the function of the mythical and spiritual evocations in Chicana visual, performing and literary art, it becomes clear that the return to the mythic and spiritual in *The Hungry Woman* is neither nostalgic nor abstract. As Pérez explains, “For some, the reference to the spiritual function is a metaphor of that which is spectral, neither fully present, nor absent, such as memory, or marginal social being” (20). The return to indigenous myth and spirituality is a conscious identification with what colonialism ripped away and appropriated. In the final analysis, if Mexican Medea cannot represent a “pure” decolonial oppositional politics because she is so entrenched with contradictions that implicate her with heteronormative, patriarchal power, she can at the very least represent what Pérez calls a “politics of the will to remember”: “to maintain in one’s consciousness, to recall, and to (re)integrate a spiritual worldview about the interconnectedness of life, even if it is fragmented, circulating, as its pieces have, through colonial and neo-colonial relations” (23).

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