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Publication Date

2018

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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Los Angeles

Performances of *Mestizaje* in
20th/21st Century Literature of the Americas

A dissertation in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in English

by

Maria de Lourdes Rubio Medrano

2018

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2018

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Performances of *Mestizaje* in
20th/21st Century Literature of the Americas

by

Maria de Lourdes Rubio Medrano

Doctor of Philosophy in English

University of California, Los Angeles, 2018

Professor Rafael Pérez-Torres, Chair

Performances of Mestizaje in 20th/21st Century Literature of the Americas examines the relationship between representation, performance, and colonial discourse by 1) tracing crucial flashpoints in the evolution of a literary, performative, critical *mestizaje* and 2) by tracking iterative, textual performances of what I call *colonial scripts*—iterations of social behaviors or systems of power that reproduce and normalize colonial violence and the logic of racial difference. The project moves through two key moments in history: the crisis of the Mexican Revolution of 1910 and the crisis of neo-liberalism of the late 20th century. Through a case study model, I use Latinx and Indigenous literature of the Americas—María Cristina Mena’s short stories (1913-1931), Sandra Cisneros’ *Caramelo* (2002), Leslie Marmon Silko’s *Almanac of the Dead* (1991), and Mayra Montero’s *The Last Night I Spent with You* (1991/2000)—that offer various regional representations of *mestizaje*. My dissertation uses literature to provide a

comparative study of the ways in which *mestizaje* functions as both a discourse of dominance and resistance in a Mexican, Chicana, Indigenous, and Caribbean context. In considering these different contexts and their similar colonial histories, I argue that *mestizaje* can function as a space of creativity and cultural critique rather than as solely a tool of assimilation.

The dissertation of Maria de Lourdes Rubio Medrano is approved.

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2018

Para nosotras, the Revolutionary Women

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank everyone who helped me on this long journey. I would like to thank the UCLA English Department, Grad Division, and the Inter-University Program in Latino Studies (IUPLR) for their generous funding of my research.

I want to thank all the amazing mentors who helped me make it to the other side. In particular I would like to thank Richard Yarborough, Christopher Mott and my wonderful committee: Rafael Pérez-Torres, Marissa K. Lòpez, Elizabeth DeLoughrey, and Mitchum Huehls. I want to give a special thank you to Marissa, thank you for your unconditional support and for always believing in me even when I couldn't. *No se que seria de mi sin ti.*

I would also like to thank my amazing Revolutionary Women and IUPLR homies who stood by my side and kept me sane during this process! I dedicate this dissertation to us. I want to give a special shout out to Erica Onugha, Anndretta Lyle Wilson, Carolina Beltran, Joyce Warren, Brandy Underwood, Ana Baez, Joy Guey, Wendy Shih, Tatiana Reinoza, and Amber Williams. Thank you for being the incredible people that you are. Your sister-ship has meant the world to me.

I'd also like to thank my incredible family. Thank you for being the absolute best family anyone could ever hope for. Last but not least I'd like to thank my partner, Fabian. Thank you for always inspiring me, every single day, to be the best version of myself. I love you and little E so very much. We are the luckiest. Words will always fail.

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Introduction:

Could language injure us if we were not, in some sense, linguistic beings, beings who require language in order to be? Is our vulnerability to language a consequence of our being constituted within its terms? If we are formed in language, then that formative power precedes and conditions any decision we might make about it, insulting us from the start, as it were, by its prior power.
-Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech*

I know that it is not the English language that hurts me, but what the oppressors do with it, how they shape it to become a territory that limits and defines, how they make it a weapon that can shame, humiliate, colonize.
-bell hooks, *Between Languages and Cultures*

During his June 16, 2015 speech announcing his run for the U.S. presidency, Donald Trump referred to Mexican immigrants as criminals and rapists stating, “When Mexico sends its people, they’re not sending their best...they’re sending people that have lots of problems, and they’re bringing those problems with us. They’re bringing drugs. They’re bringing crime. They’re rapists.” In his speech, Trump frames Mexicans as enemies of the state, placing Mexicans within an us/them binary—“us” meaning the civilized American citizen and “them” meaning the uncivilized Mexican alien—a binary relationship reminiscent of the civilized/uncivilized logic of colonial difference. In this instance, the English language functions, as bell hooks notes, like a weapon that “shame[s], humiliate[s], and colonize[s].” Trump’s language and its injurious effects serve as a reminder “of our vulnerability to language”—a vulnerability that reveals how, to some extent, we are, as Judith Butler suggests, “linguistics beings,” whose identities are constantly being shaped by and uttered into existence through language. But how does language colonize exactly? The answer lies partly in the power of representation, performance, and discourse, specifically colonial discourse—a system of statements that assumes and ascribes a level of inferiority onto people who have been colonized

¹ A term coined by Edward Said. For more on colonial discourse see Said’s *Orientalism* (1978).

by Western forces.² In his speech, Trump draws from colonial discourse to reproduce a colonial script that reenacts colonial violence by framing the dominant group, white Americans, as civilized, and all other groups as uncivilized.

Performances of Mestizaje in 20th/21st Century Literature of the Americas examines this relationship between representation, performance, and colonial discourse by 1) tracing crucial flashpoints in the evolution of a literary, performative, critical *mestizaje* and 2) by tracking iterative, textual performances of what I call *colonial scripts*—iterations of social behaviors or systems of power that reproduce and normalize colonial violence and the logic of racial difference. The project moves through two key moments in history: the crisis of the Mexican Revolution of 1910 and the crisis of neo-liberalism of the late 20th century. Through a case study model, I use Latinx and Indigenous literature of the Americas—María Cristina Mena’s short stories (1913-1931), Sandra Cisneros’ *Caramelo* (2002), Leslie Marmon Silko’s *Almanac of the Dead* (1991), and Mayra Montero’s *The Last Night I Spent with You* (1991/2000)—that offer various regional representations of *mestizaje*. My dissertation uses literature to provide a comparative study of the ways in which *mestizaje* functions as both a discourse of dominance and of resistance in a Mexican, Chicana, Indigenous, and Caribbean context. In considering these different contexts and their similar colonial histories, I argue that *mestizaje* can function as a space of creativity and cultural critique rather than as solely a tool of assimilation.

The project moves from an analysis of *mestizaje* in a Mexican context in Mena’s stories, to a Chicana context in *Caramelo*, and then expands to a critical mix of *latinidad* and *indigeneity* in *Almanac* in order to trace the origins of that which may flower into the kind of emergent trans-

² More specifically, colonial discourse “hinges on notions of race that begin to emerge at the very advent of European imperialism. Through such distinctions [colonial discourse] comes to represent the colonized, whatever the nature of their social structures and cultural histories, as ‘primitive’ and the colonizers as ‘civilized.’ For more see Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, Helen Tiffin’s *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts*, p. 50-52.

Latinx hemispheric latindad posed in *Last Night*. When read in this way, it helps us to see the connections across the hemisphere and makes visible the interconnection of all Latinx races. The texts' narrative formal qualities help unpack the critical edge of the texts, even as they replicate the repressive colonial scripts. Reading the texts through this trajectory also makes visible how the texts "perform" narratologically and formally a kind of *mestizaje*, a transculturation or *nepantla*-like transformation, so that the idea of a critical *mestizaje*, one that undoes the colonial script, hovers flickering on the horizon. In tracing the vast and varied history of *mestizaje* through a Mexican, Chicana, Native American, and Caribbean context this project asks what can Latinx and Indigenous 20th/21st century literature of the Americas tell us about how we understand US literary history and *mestizaje*'s broader place in American cultural production?

Each text in this case study outlines a different vision of *mestizaje* and the role it has played in the cultural production of American literature. Through reinscribing colonial discourse the texts' offers representations of various colonial scripts. At the same time, the texts also create tensions and push against these colonial scripts by performing a utopic vision of *mestizaje* on the level of form. Mena's stories, for example, examine *mestizaje* from a Mexican context in "The Gold Vanity Set," "The Birth of the God of War," and "Son of the Tropics." Mena's short stories use the concept of racial and cultural mixture embedded within *mestizaje* to take race and national categories to task by tracing how the language and logic of these social categories are rooted in the language and logic of colonial difference and are enacted through a colonial script that frames bodies in binary terms as either colonizer/ colonized, civilized/uncivilized, master/slave, or noble/savage. These colonial binaries script bodies into a language system that materializes the overvalue of Euro-American, first world, white, upper-class, male identities; this value system is then enforced by the nation-state act of dividing its citizens into a series of seemingly fixed social categories—such as race, class, and gender—that rank identities and

perpetuate colonial violence. Mena's stories, however, reveal that bodies also push against language and that social identities are not quite as coherent as the nation may seem to suggest. For example, there is a notable level of ambivalence surrounding the term "Indian" in "The Gold Vanity Set" and "Son of the Tropics." Throughout "Gold Vanity," Petra is referred to as a Mexican Indian and although she and Rosario from "Son of the Tropics" share distinctly similar racial features (eyes, skin color, etc.), Rosario is never referred to as a Mexican Indian, suggesting that the "idea of Indian-ness" might have as much to do with performance as it does to a description of a racialized category. A close reading of Mena's mixed race *mestiza/o* characters suggests that while the materiality of language limits and constrains bodies, bodies are also actors that can move between scripted colonial roles. For example, the use of calquing illustrates how bodies can rupture the English language and its system of meaning by literally translating Mexican idiomatic expressions into a series of English words that render no meaning to a culturally Anglo-only English speaking audience. The stories also highlight the ways in which cultural mixture, specifically religious syncreticism, function as a tool of empowerment or resistance for some of the mixed race characters.

Sandra Cisneros' *Caramelo* examines *mestizaje* from a Chicana context. This chapter examines how some of the novel's language and performative narrative strategies—such as calquing, footnotes, meta-narration—relate to the body and how mixed-race bodies function as narrative elements. Many of *Caramelo*'s mixed race characters, including Candelaria, Celaya, and the Awful grandmother illustrate how mixed-race bodies function as narrative elements. Each character enacts an aspect of *mestizaje*'s rich but complicated history, which in turn is mirrored by the equally rich and complicated history of the Reyes family. The way that Celaya comes to discover that Candelaria, the washerwoman's daughter, who is actually her half sister,

is through body language—a familiar squinting of the eyes, the same squint that Celaya and her father make is what leads Celaya to her conclusion of this family secret. Candelaria’s rejection by the Reyes family and embracement by Celaya parallels the tension found in Mexican *mestizaje*’s attempt to erase Mexico’s indigenous past and Chicana/o *mestizaje*’s romanticization of that past. This focus on *mestizaje* and cultural mixture, however, is seen not just on the level of plot and form, through the novel’s use of bilingual strategies, but is also seen on the level of genre as well. The novel mixes the European *bildungsroman* with the Latin American tradition of the telenovela and in doing so enacts as it illustrates the cultural process of *mestizaje*. *Caramelo* enacts *mestizaje* by mixing two culturally different forms: the *bildungsroman*, which follows a European literary tradition, and the telenovela, which stems from a Latin American tradition.

Leslie Marmon Silko’s novel *Almanac of the Dead* examines *mestizaje* from a Native American context. The novel offers an overt critique of *mestizaje* suggesting that *mestizaje* functions as a tool of erasure meant to deny indigeneity. At the same time that the text critiques *mestizaje* as an ideological tool of assimilation, the novel, on the level of form, enacts *mestizaje*’s processes of cultural mixture by mixing an array of Western and non-Western modes of knowledge production and narrative practices—such as the novel, the almanac, myth, and oral history. Together, *Almanac* uses written forms (the novel, an almanac) and oral forms (mythology and oral histories) forms to create a kind of orature. Orature goes beyond “a schematized opposition of literacy and orality as transcendent categories...it acknowledges that these modes of communication have produced one another interactively over time and that their historic operations may be usefully examined under the rubric of performance” (Roach 11). Mixing the different Western and non-Western genres produces a textual performance wherein

the value of archival knowledge and ephemeral knowledge (located within a living body) are treated with equal importance as the novel highlights the dialectical relationship between archival and ephemeral knowledge. The novel further grapples with questions of identitarian practices and the ways in which race, nation, and ethnicity are tied to a colonial legacy and discourse. The novel traces the way identities like “mestizo” and “half-breed” are rooted in colonial scripts that reenact colonial behaviors.

Mayra Montero’s *The Last Night I Spent with You* examines *mestizaje* from a Caribbean context in. In Montero’s work, the mixed race protagonists often become the site of negotiation between the Caribbean’s colonial past, neo-colonial present, and its resistance to colonialism’s repeating pattern of violence and trauma. The text uses the bolero, a musical product born out of cultural mixture and cultural survival, as a way to frame the novel’s plot structure by titling each chapter with the name of a famously well-known bolero; the novel’s structure mirrors the complicated, painfully violent, but yet artfully resistant process of *mestizaje* as it occurred in the Caribbean. The novel also uses the bolero as a way to give insight to the novel’s main characters who sustain their will to live through this musical art form. Aside from its structure and form, the novel offers representations of race as a performance of culture and the idea of the possibility of multiple subjectivities by having the reader rely solely on the characters’ cultural practices for a sense of characterization. The novel for example never discloses the protagonists’ nationality, race, ethnicity, or class, only a sense of their cultural repertoire which ranges from colonial acts to acts of disidentification.

Furthermore, the protagonists move between the colonial binaries and in some cases perform the role of the subject, the civilized, the noble, and at others enact the role of passive uncivilized other. In employing the form of a bolero and its various performative narrative

strategies, the novel reexamines the effects colonial violence and historical trauma has had on the Caribbean. Through a series of performative narrative strategies, the novel restages scenes of colonization and critiques colonial scripts and its colonizing tricks. These series of performative narrative strategies work to reveal the many layers of histories and cultural memories and practices that continue to inform the Caribbean and its problematic portrayal by Western culture as a place to exploit and partake in taboo activities. The in-between space that Fernando and Celia inhabit speak to the effect of displacement and diaspora due to colonization in the Caribbean. Ultimately, bolerismo offers the characters a knowledge, an aesthetic, performative, cultural way of coping, and an identity that exists outside of a national category that does not limit one to a national understanding of one's self as a racialized, gendered, etc. subject existing under a Western system of order, hierarchy, or oppression. In Montero's work *mestizaje* ultimately transcends nationalism and its crippling social categories.

Through language and close reading analysis of these texts I demonstrate how, on the level of plot and content, the mixed-race characters reinscribe colonial scripts or contest those scripts by performing syncretic cultural practices—such as religious syncretism, code-switching, calquing,³ and the bolero—in order to disidentify with hegemonic systems of power, such as Spanish colonialism and American imperialism. On the level of form, I argue that the texts' mixing of literary genres and performative narrative strategies also mirror this process of cultural mixing, thereby offering a vision of *mestizaje* in late 20th century America. Silko's *Almanac of the Dead*, for example, blends forms such as the epic, an almanac, and oral history tradition while Cisneros' *Caramelo* blends the *bildungsroman*, non-fiction, and telenovela genres

³ In her article “Replication, Transfer, and Calquing: Using Variation As a Tool in the Study of Language Contact,” Miriam Meyerhoff defines a calque as: “usually used to refer to the direct translation, morpheme by morpheme, or word for word, of concepts and syntactic structures that originated in one language and can be shown to be...a historical introduction into another” (298).

resulting in more dynamic and performative texts.

Content and **Form** are the two modes in which I examine performance. I argue that the texts represent the performance of colonial scripts through the characters. But the very texts themselves, because of the demands of their hybridized form, perform a new kind of cultural mixing. In doing so, all suggest the possibility of a critical *mestizaje* as a promise that the form of the text offers as a possibility just beyond the horizon. The texts perform via their aesthetic formal qualities of narration or narratological strategies—calquing in the Mena’s stories, orature in the Silko’s *Almanac*, footnotes in the *Caramelo*, and bolerismo in *Last Night*. In each text there is a tension between the text's literary representations of characters performing race, or another kind of colonial script, and the text's actual narratological execution of *mestizaje*—in other words, the text's mixing of genres and their performative narratological strategies. This tension offers insight into the possibilities of *mestizaje* because it allows the texts to gesture towards an idea of a transformative *mestizaje*. Even as the texts reproduce colonial scripts, their aesthetic structure pushes against those same colonial scripts and in doing so envision the hope of a possible critical *mestizaje*.

The narrative strategies found in the texts in this study—such as orature,⁴ code-switching, calquing, and footnotes—should be considered performative in the model of Diana Taylor, Joseph Roach, and Jose Muñoz. By considering the texts performative, the mixed genre forms and narrative strategies can be used to think about a literary American performance that challenges the ways in which we understand US literary history and its broader place in American cultural production; in other words, the ways in which *mestizaje* informs US literary

⁴ In *Cities of the Dead*, Joseph Roach describes orature “compris[ing] a range of forms, which though they may invest themselves variously in gesture, song, dance, processions, storytelling, proverbs, gossip, customs, rites, and rituals, are nevertheless produced alongside or within mediated literacies of various kinds and degrees” (11).

history. There is something unique about the history of coloniality in the Americas, and the production of mixed race peoples, that demands a more nuanced understanding of how language relates to the body and how bodies function as narrative elements. Ultimately, I argue that literature can and should be read as performance in an American context, and further that *mestizaje* should be read as part of US literary history.

Visions of *Mestizaje*

As the product of a colonial legacy, *mestizaje* is fraught with contradictions. It is necessary to introduce the concept of *mestizaje* as a contradictory one in different cultural contexts in order to understand how my texts perform this contradiction productively. One of the many outcomes of the Americas' colonial encounter with Europe was the primarily involuntary mixing of Indigenous and African bodies with European colonizers. Through this, often violent, process of racial and cultural mixing, mixed-race bodies managed to coalesce multiple—African, European, and Indigenous—cultural practices to forge an entirely new performativity in the Americas. In regions that were primarily colonized by the Spanish, this new performativity is formally known as *mestizaje*.

This new performativity, however, came at a great cost. Implicit within *mestizaje* and the process of racial and cultural mixing are the systems of power that defined, contained, owned, disciplined, sold, killed, and bred racialized bodies. Although new cultures were formed through the process of transculturation, an asymmetrical power relation between peoples of European cultures and non-European cultures always remained present. Racial hierarchies, such as the Spanish *casta* system, created and maintain the asymmetry of power between white, indigenous, and black subjects. The continuation and proliferation of racialized categories such as *criollo*, *mestizo*, *mulatto*, etc. kept this asymmetrical structure in place. The *casta* system literally

incorporated mixed race bodies into a legible system of socio-racial categorization.

Mestizaje, as a racial hierarchy and positionality that was codified into governmental policies and national discourses, became quickly stabilized through both the system of *casta* categories and the later development of nationalist discourses that pitted indigenous versus *mestizo* subjectivity. As a cross-cultural practice informed by colonial difference, *mestizaje* has at times functioned as an oppressive and institutionalized ideological tool in the form of nation-state forced assimilation—a form of colonial mimetic performance.⁵ In 1925, influential Mexican scholar, José Vasconcelos wrote “La raza cósmica” which argued for the racial uplift and racial superiority of the *mestizo* race. The Mexican “was to understand himself as a universal man who combined the racial strains and cultures of the entire world in his own person, moving away from an Indian past...into a modern future” (Pérez-Torres 6). Vasconcelos’ purpose was to use the concept of *mestizaje* as a way to forge a unified national identity among Mexico’s various mixed race citizenry. This new national imaginary however erased indigenous and black subjectivity and equated progress with whiteness. Vasconcelos’ notion of racial mixture served “not to mark racial distinction but to affirm the role of the Mexican citizen-subject in the new order of modernization, technologization, and capitalist consumption” (Pérez-Torres 6). This vision of *mestizaje* and its erasure of an indigenous subjectivity is addressed in Mena’s short stories.

Although Mena’s stories (1913-1916) were written and published prior to Vasconcelos’ work, Mena’s stories highlight Mexico’s colonizing attitudes towards its indigenous population

⁵ In order for colonization to succeed, it was necessary for the native culture to adopt the ideas, language, and culture of the colonizer. Ironically, the process of assimilation resulted revealed the instability behind colonial logic. In “Of Mimicry and Man,” Homi Bhabha cites the ambivalence behind colonial discourse. He notes how colonization requires the mimicry and therefore iterability of the colonizer’s culture. He argues that during this process of mimicry a slippage, or “like but not quite” reproduction occurs during its execution. This slippage reveals that the “*menace* of mimicry” lies in “its *double* vision which in disclosing the ambivalence of colonial discourse also disrupts its authority” (*Location of Culture* 126).

and attempt to erase an indigenous presence in the name of modernization. Mena's first two stories, "The Gold Vanity Set" and "John of God, Water-Carrier," in fact feature an *india* and an *indio* protagonist and in doing so suggest that indigenous peoples and their everyday lives were worthy of being written. The stories' quaint representations of its indigenous and more indigenous *mestiza/o* characters, however, reveal a problematic liberal humanism that results in only further reinscribing a similar colonial script present in Vasconcelos' Mexican vision of *mestizaje*. In a Mexican context then, *mestizaje* functions as an ideological oppressive tool that reproduces a colonial script by reinforcing the 'civility' of whiteness and the 'primitive nature' of the Indian.

Mena's stories and their embrace of indigeneity in some ways echo a Chicana vision of *mestizaje* which celebrates its Mesoamerican indigenous roots. Unlike Chicana activists and scholars, however, Mena's stories do not suggest identification with these indigenous roots but rather a distant association (like a distant older relative). A Chicana understanding of *mestizaje* builds her identity from or rather grounds her identity on these indigenous roots. Pérez-Torres succinctly highlights the difference between *mestizaje* in a Mexican context versus a Chicana context: "If, then, *mestizaje* in Mexico represents a flight from the Indian, we might think of Chicana *mestizaje* as a race towards the Indian" (16). This celebration of indigeneity can be seen in the works of Chicana scholars like Gloria Anzaldúa who argues for a more critical understanding of *mestizaje* in her text *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987). According to Anzaldúa, the *mestiza* is "indigenous like corn" and seeks to transcend duality through the power and wisdom of Aztec myths and primarily Aztec goddess (103). To her, the Chicana are "originally and secondarily indigenous to the Southwest. Indians and mestizos from central Mexico intermarried with North American Indians. The continual intermarriage between

Mexican and American Indians and Spaniards formed an ever greater *mestizaje*”: the Chicana people. (Also, it is worth noting that Anzaldúa is writing specifically from a U.S. context.) For Anzaldúa, the Chicana is the new *mestiza* and *mestizaje* offers a “new consciousness” that, for her, functions as a decolonial survival strategy. I build on Anzaldúa’s notion that *mestizaje* has the potential to function as a creative survival strategy on the level of form as illustrated by the texts in this study.

Unlike Vasconcelos who articulates *mestizaje* as a desirable product—the universal man—Anzaldúa reads *mestizaje* as a process that, like performance, is in constant movement, a position “that allows for decentering and deconstructing energies to emerge as a response to modern and post modern conditions of displacement” (Pérez-Torres 22). It is this ability to decenter and deconstruct that transforms *mestizaje* from an ideological tool of oppression into a potential tool of decolonial resistance. This emphasis on movement and fluidity opens the possibility of reading *mestizaje* as a kind of performance, or as something that *can* be enacted. I use representations of *mestizaje* to develop a theory of reading and writing as embodied performance that are reflected in the texts’ aesthetic forms used in this study. I then read representations of *mestizaje* as challenging colonial racial hierarchies and use that ideological challenge as a way to think about textual form as well. My critical intervention lies in highlighting this tension between how the texts perform *mestizaje* on the level of form versus the texts’ various literary representations of *mestizaje* that the mixed-race characters perform such as race and the enactment of various colonial scripts. I argue that the texts serve to represent the performance of colonial scripts through the characters. But the very texts themselves, because of the demands of their hybridized form, suggest the *possibility of a critical mestizaje* as an idea or promise that the form of the text offers as a possibility just beyond the horizon.

This project also examines how the text’s literary representations of mixed-race bodies

function as sites of knowledge. In doing so the project seeks to advance an interdisciplinary conversation between literature and performance studies that argues for the validity of systems of knowledge that do not rely entirely on Western forms, such as written texts or archives. The body is one such mode of knowledge. In particular, I argue that literary representations of mixed-race bodies in the Americas, such as *mestizas/os*, function as valuable sites of knowledge in the following ways: 1) by providing concrete material evidence of a history of conquest of the Americas 2) by acting as vessels that transmit and forge new cultural knowledge 3) by destabilizing and disrupting European notions of racial authenticity and purity. I suggest that the mixed-race body serves as a particularly legible text because it is so clearly inscribed by seemingly visible ideological markings including class, race, gender, and sexuality.

When read through a performance studies lens, literary representations of mixed-race bodies transform into sites of knowledge that reveal the performative aspects of colonialism and the unstable logic of colonial difference. In his germinal work, *Mestizaje: Critical Uses of Race*, Rafael Pérez-Torres writes about how, in a U.S. Chicana context, *mestiza* and *mestizo* bodies “serve to destabilize the unity and coherence integral to racial and gender hierarchies as these hierarchies seek to naturalize unequal relations of power; that is, mixed-race bodies undo identity formations based on purity. They thus undo ideas of simple differentiation” (3). I build on Pérez-Torres’ claim specifically noting the role performance plays in undoing “ideas of simple differentiation.” What the text’s representations of *mestiza* and *mestizo* bodies reveal is that civility and incivility are not innate traits but rather social behaviors that are learned and performed. Whether *mestizaje* functions as a discourse of dominance or resistance in the texts, the text’s representations of *mestizaje* ultimately highlight the performative and therefore deconstructable aspects of colonialism and the possibility of multiple subjectivities as evidenced

by *mestiza* and *mestizo* bodies.

Although pervasive and systemic, colonial violence was not immune to strategies of subversion and resistance. In the texts, *mestizaje* at times offered mixed raced bodies survival strategies or acts of performative resistance such as religious syncretism, code-switching, and calquing. I read these acts of performative resistance, and *mestizaje* more broadly, as an example of what performance studies scholar Jose Muñoz calls disidentification, or a survival strategy that “tactically and simultaneously works on, with, and against a cultural form” and its dominant ideologies” (*Disidentifications* 12). *Mestizaje*, I argue, functions as a survival strategy or performance, that allows mixed race bodies to disidentify—meaning resist, destabilize, and reinscribe—hegemonic systems of power such as colonial difference, nation-states and homogenous understandings of race. Similarly, Alicia Arrizón reads *mestizaje* as a form of transculturation that “helps to imagine the racialized body and the elements of cultural/colonial difference. [Mestizaje] ‘performs’ a link to local and translocal identities through contradictions, cultural negotiations, and resistance” (4). While I find Arrizon’s discussion and framing of *mestizaje* in terms of Fernando Ortiz’s notion of “transculturation,” Mary Louise Pratt’s the “contact zone,” and Homi Bhabha’s “hybridization” insightful, I find Jose Muñoz’s notion of disidentification more adequately captures the complex and varied possibilities and limitations of *mestizaje* as a subversive, performative resistance strategy against colonialism. The texts become a kind of transculturated object that then performs an act of disidentification.

As a practice, disidentification offers minority identities a way to negotiate their identity which has been rendered ‘abject,’ or ‘other’ by dominant racial, gender, heterosexual, etc. ideologies. According to Muñoz, “disidentification is about managing and negotiating historical

trauma and systemic violence” (*Disidentifications* 161). He further goes on to explain how this negotiation occurs:

Disidentification is about recycling and rethinking encoded meaning. The process of disidentification scrambles and reconstructs the encoded message of a cultural text in a fashion that both exposes the encoded message’s universalizing and exclusionary machinations and recircuits its workings to account for, include, and empower minority identities and identifications. Thus, disidentification is a step further than cracking open the code of the majority; it proceeds to use this code as raw material for representing a disempowered politics or positionality that has been rendered unthinkable by the dominant culture. (Muñoz, *Disidentifications* 31)

I see this strategy implemented in the texts examined in this study. The texts take a raw dominant cultural Western form, such as the short story or the novel, and through their unique narratological strategies—such as calquing, footnotes, code-switching—transform the Western form of the novel into a new cultural product that pushes against, rethinks, and makes visible the inner workings and exclusionary nature of the dominant culture. This is how that the texts work with, on, and against dominant cultural form. I argue that this practice of disidentification of working on and against, is also seen in the tension between what the texts themselves offer representations of—versions and different iterations of colonial scripts as performed or reproduced by the characters) versus what the texts are performing narratologically and on the level of form. Thus, even as the texts reproduce colonial scripts, their aesthetic structure pushes against those same colonial scripts and in doing so envision the hope of a possible critical *mestizaje*.

Performance, Performativity, and Colonial Scripts

In a short video titled “Performance Studies: An Introduction – Performativity,” Richard Schechner cites post-structuralist Jacques Derrida’s notion that, “there is nothing outside the text,”⁶ in order to expand the definition of language and the role it plays in the production of knowledge. Schechner revises Derrida’s claim clarifying that Derrida’s phrase does not only refer to written texts but also to “performance text and behavior texts;” in other words he includes embodied behavior like body language such as gestures. From Schechner’s point of view:

language is not first, [he] wants to update the performative, [he] wants to update Derrida, [he] wants to update [J.L.] Austen and say that what is basic is embodied behavior, that language is derivative from embodied behavior, we had bodies before we had language...speech is a specialized kind of embodied behavior, not the other way around, that behavior is a specialized kind of text. That is central to the whole approach of performance studies. Embodied behavior is primary.

(“Performance Studies: An Introduction”)

I extend Schechner’s approach to my literary project along with his idea of performance as “restored” or “twice behaved behavior.”⁷ To his point, literary texts are inanimate objects that neither produce nor read themselves; they *are* however cultural artifacts produced by bodies. Furthermore, literature, reading, writing, etc. are themselves cultural practices in the same way that dance and music are cultural practices that require a body. Schechner’s approach pushes

⁶ This phrase is often mistranslated and should read “there is no outside-text” however the mis-translation does not affect the larger claim that Schechner makes regarding language. For more on Derrida’s notion of deconstruction and language see Derrida’s *Of Grammatology* (1967).

⁷ For more on Richard Schechner’s theory on performance see his *Between Theater and Anthropology* (1985).

back against the Western tradition to privilege archival knowledge (inanimate, documented, static, fixed texts or objects such as literature or artifacts) over the ephemeral knowledge (cultural memory/practices) provided by the animate, finite body. The purpose of this study, however, is not to privilege the body over the archive or to continue a binary discourse of archival versus ephemeral knowledge. Instead, this study will demonstrate how these seemingly oppositional systems of knowledge inform and depend on each other in the process of knowledge production.

The knowledge found in the archive does not transmit or produce meaning on its own; archival knowledge requires a body to enact the process of meaning production and knowledge transfer. Performance studies scholar, Joseph Roach has noted the pivotal role performance and bodies play in this process of both transferring and continuing of knowledge:

Performance genealogies draw on the idea of expressive movements as mnemonic reserves, including patterned movements made and remembered by bodies, residual movements retained implicitly in images or words...and imaginary movements dreamed in minds not prior to language but constitutive of it. (26)

This kind of knowledge is not captured and displayed in a museum, but instead is found in the practices of everyday life. Michael de Certeau writes about the importance of studying these everyday practices, or what he calls “ways of operating” or doing things (xi). This dissertation examines literary representations of everyday colonial practices for the purpose of rendering them visible.

Performance is one vehicle for the literary representations of everyday colonial practices while illustrating their pervasiveness. Performativity, Judith Butler explains, “must be understood not as a singular or deliberate ‘act,’ but, rather, as the reiterative and citational

practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names” (*Bodies that Matter* 2). This is true of colonial discourse and how it produces colonized bodies. Key to Butler’s framing of performativity is the repetition and regulating of citational practices; it is this process of socialization that leads to the policing and normalization of social behaviors and social identities, in Butler’s case specifically gender identities. In other words, performativity produces social scripts, like gender scripts, that program individuals to enact social behaviors that adhere to hegemonic systems of power, such as heteropatriarchy. I extend Butler’s notion of performativity and its production of gender scripts to my idea of *colonial scripts*—repetitions of social behaviors or iterations hegemonic systems of power that reproduce and normalize colonial violence and the logic of racial difference.

Like gender scripts which assign gender identities or roles such as male or female based on essentialist⁸ notions of identity (physiological markers such as genitalia), colonial scripts assign a series of prescribed social binary roles—such as colonizer/colonized, noble/savage—and social behaviors—civilized/uncivilized—that are determined and informed by colonial discourse and its logic of racial difference that normalizes unequal relations of power. Colonial discourse “hinges on notions of race that begin to emerge at the very advent of European imperialism. Through such distinctions [this discourse] comes to represent the colonized, whatever the nature of their social structures and cultural histories, as ‘primitive’ and the colonizers as ‘civilized’” (Ashcroft et al. 50-51). The binary articulation of racial difference

⁸ According to Diana Fuss, Essentialism is “most commonly understood as a belief in the real, true essence of things, the invariable and fixed properties which define the ‘whatness’ of a given entity ... essentialism is typically defined in opposition to difference ... The opposition is a helpful one in that it reminds us that a complex system of cultural, social, psychological, and historical differences, and not a set of pre-existent human essences, position and constitute the subject. Essentialism in and of itself is not an inherently epistemically violent concept, however, “the binary articulation of essentialism and difference can also be restrictive, even obfuscating, in that it allows us to ignore or deny the differences within essentialism.” See *Essentially Speaking* (1989): xi-xii.

(white/non-white) set in place a system of unequal relations of power between white European colonizers and non-white, non-European bodies that categorized European colonizers as noble, superior, civilized and non-European bodies as savage, inferior, and uncivilized, respectively. Within this system of logic, lighter skin and European features functioned as markers of civility. Just as gender roles, such as male and female, follow a gender script that discursively determines what acts male and female subjects do and do not enact in,⁹ colonial roles, such as colonizer and colonized follow a colonial script that determines what acts and gestures civilized and uncivilized subjects do and do not enact, in other words, certain behavioral patterns. Upon noticing the differences in behavioral patterns from their own, the Europeans, those in the position of privilege, began to mark these differences with colonial discourse, which created a colonial script that cast the Europeans as noble, master, and subject while people of the Americas were cast as savage, slave, and “other.”

There is a level of citational performativity of the “reiteration of norms which precede, constrain, and exceed the performer” (*Bodies that Matter* 234) that is working behind these colonial scripts. What Butler’s gender performativity ultimately reveals is that male and female scripts are not naturally occurring, nor are they stable, but rather depend on “that power of discourse to produce effects through reiteration” (*Bodies that Matter* 234). Colonial discourse produces the colonial script which frames bodies as either civilized or uncivilized through reiteration. In the same way that gender performativity reveals that male and female behavior is a social construct, colonial performativity reveals that civility and incivility are also social constructs that cannot be determined by racial or ethnic markers. In fact, the entire concept of civility can only exist because it is defined in relation to non-white bodies, “for colonial discourse constructs the colonizing subject as much as the colonized” (Ashcroft et al. 52).

⁹ See Judith Butler’s *Gender Trouble* (1990).

I am interested in how the discursive practice of performativity relates to colonial discourse and how colonial discourse produces social scripts, roles, and hierarchies like colonizer/ colonized, noble/savage, and civilized/uncivilized as illustrated by the texts in this study. For example, in her article “Caribbean *Tabula Rasa*,” Angeletta KM Gourdine discusses how the modern day act of touring reenacts these colonial scripts noting that, “Touring, a nexus for travel and leisure, encompasses ritualized behavior that follows the colonial script: modern person travels to premodern historically frozen place, hoping to explore both internal and external unknowns.” This script is enacted by Celia and Fernando in Montero’s *Last Night*. I would argue that there are variations of this colonial script and Gourdine’s description is just one scenario: the tourism industry in the Caribbean (which I read as an iteration of the plantation system in the Caribbean that exploits both the Caribbean landscape and bodies). But there are multiple variations of the colonial encounter that follows a basic colonial script: person (actor/performer) travels or encounters foreign lands, peoples, or cultures (audience) and on the basis of white supremacy ascribes inferiority in both subtle and overt acts such as—but not limited to—colonization, genocide, slavery, the plantation system, exoticization, the Indian Reservation system, the industrial prison complex, tourism, etc. In these scripts, actors are always interpellated through colonial discourse’s binary logic of difference as either colonizer/colonized, noble/savage, civil/uncivilized, master/slave. The privileged actor is allowed a variety of dominant roles such as the discoverer, explorer, the conquistador, the white savior, etc. The non-privileged actor undergoes a process of dehumanization, executed by the privileged actor, that determines the non-privileged actor’s subordinate role, such as the native, the subaltern, the slave, the savage, etc.

This colonial script, I argue, can be traced back to the moment of the colonial

“encounter,” which Diana Taylor describes as:

a theatrical scenario structured in a predictable, formulaic, hence repeatable fashion...no matter who restages the colonial encounter from the West’s perspective—the novelist...the discoverer, or the government official—it stars the same white male protagonist-subject and the same brown, found ‘object.’

(Archive and Repertoire 13)

Taylor highlights the performative aspects of the colonial encounter and in doing so reveals its iterative reproduction process. The colonial encounter is predictable, formulaic (in other words performative) and therefore repeatable, and is the means through which colonialism is able to reproduce itself through these various colonial scripts. When read together, Butler’s theory of performativity and Taylor’s insight regarding the theatrical structure of the colonial encounter make visible colonialism’s formulaic and performative nature and in doing so demystifies colonialism’s colonizing tricks and the myth of inherent white supremacy. It is the performative aspects of colonialism, its repeatability and iterability, that both sustains it and renders its power invisible.

I examine how iterations of the colonial encounter are represented and restaged in my literary case studies. I am specifically interested in 20th/21st century literary representations of colonial scripts and how they intersect with *mestizaje*—such as the *encomienda* system and its iteration through the class/servant system in Mexico, the Indian Reservation system in the U.S., the tourism industry in the Caribbean—and textual forms of *mestizaje* as a performance of resistance against the same colonial scripts. I trace how each text invokes colonial and national discourse in order to reproduce colonial scripts in the form of racial, national, and ethnic categories and analyze the ways that the mixed-race characters either reinforce these social

categories or destabilize them.

Colonialism is sustained through discourse and iterability, which while powerful, is not impermeable. Colonial discourse perpetuates a myth of continuity and a stable binary logic of subject/object—a logic that, as suggested by Taylor’s use of “white protagonist” and “brown, found object” is grounded in racial difference. The civilized white protagonist is always cast as the subject while the uncivilized brown ‘other’ will always be relegated to ‘found object.’

Taylor further explains how the colonialist discourse:

that produces the native as negativity or lack itself silences the very voice it purports to make speak...The “primitive” body as object reaffirms the cultural supremacy and authority of the viewing subject...the native is the show; the civilized observer the privileged spectator...The “encounters” with the native create us as audience as much as the violence of definition creates them, the primitives. (*Archive and Repertoire* 64)

Mixed race bodies disrupt colonial discourse by rupturing its binary logic because the mixed race body is always at once colonizer *and* colonized. When they first appeared in the Americas, mixed race bodies destabilized colonial discourse and ruptured its master colonial script by creating new racial and social categories. With the creation of the *casta* system, these bodies began to be incorporated into a legible system of socio-racial categorization.

These new racial and social categories, as illustrated in the sixteenth and seventeenth century Spanish *casta* paintings, highlighted the fact that “violence of definition” and “cultural supremacy” had as much to do with the performativity of the mixed race body as it did with racial markers like blood quantum and skin color. In her close reading of the Spanish *casta* paintings, Taylor notes, “Though ostensibly grounded in notions of blood, these categories [like

mestizo, mulatto, morisco, lobo, and coyote], and the many paintings that depicted them, actually focused more on issues I identify with performance: manner, dress, style, language, religion, and setting” (*Archive and Repertoire* 64). This relationship regarding race, class and performativity is especially examined in the texts in this study. In Mena’s “Gold Vanity Set” for example, the indigenous protagonist, Petra is read as “*india*” when she does “indian things” (braided hair, wears Indian clothes) or behaves in an “indian manner” (is obstinate and stupid) even though her character’s physical description reads as *mestiza*. This suggests that Petra’s characterization as a little *india* has less to do with physiological markers than it does with her cultural repertoire. Performance becomes central to the understanding of a system of power and how that power is maintained.

To be clear, I am not theorizing race, I am using representations of *mestizaje* and mixed-race bodies to develop a theory of reading and writing as embodied performance. This project illustrates how language relates to the body and how bodies function as narrative elements. As bodies still part of a colonial hierarchy, the mixed race *mestiza* and *mestizo* characters in the texts engage in performative acts that both perpetuate and resisted colonial violence. Through language analysis I will demonstrate how mixed-race characters specifically function as embodied cultural texts that both reproduce and resist *mestizaje*’s legacy of colonialism and how the texts produce tension by performing a resistant vision of *mestizaje* on the level of form, one that pushes against the colonial script. In this way the texts offer a possibility that history will not allow.

Form and Content: Representations of *Mestizaje* in 20th/21st Century Literature

This project examines how 20th/21st century Latinx and Indigenous literature of the Americas engages the colonial legacy of *mestizaje* by tracing iterations of textual performances

of colonial scripts. Each text offers a different vision of *mestizaje*: Mena's stories in a nationalist Mexican context, Cisneros' *Caramelo* in an ethnic Chicana context, Silko's *Almanac* in an indigenous hemispheric context, and Montero's *Last Night* in a regional Caribbean context. Together the texts make visible the interconnection of all races across the hemisphere, and rather than offer a national, ethnic, or regional based collective *mestizaje*, gesture towards the emergence of a possible trans-Latinx hemispheric latinidad.

Beginning with the work of María Cristina Mena (1931-1931), this study engages the colonial legacy of *mestizaje* in a Mexican context through her stories' representations of Mexico's *encomienda* system. The *encomienda* system reproduces the master/slave or master/servant dynamic present in colonial relationships and as such functions as an example of a kind of colonial script. Colonial scripts refer to the predetermined roles—such as colonizer/colonized, master/slave, noble/savage—that regulate subject behavior by framing white bodies as civilized and non-white bodies as uncivilized. Mena's stories incorporate a colonial script in the form of the *encomienda* system as a way to highlight the early 20th century agonies of U.S.-Mexico relations, which in many ways parallel a neo-colonial relationship, and Mexico's own colonizing attitude towards its more indigenous population. The stories resist this colonial relationship by employing the technique of calquing, which renders the dominant language of English unintelligible to a U.S. English-only speaking audience and by attempting—but failing—to present Mexico's *indios* in a more favorable, sympathetic light. Unfortunately, Mena's quaint representations of *indios* only serve to further reinscribe a colonial script that frames *indios* as uncivilized colonized subjects. Mena's stories ultimately illustrate how colonial scripts reproduce and restage iterations or variations of colonial violence and colonial relationships (i.e. colonizer/colonized).

Sandra Cisneros' *Caramelo* (2002) similarly employs a colonial script but makes the colonial script more legible in a way that Mena's stories do not. An iteration of the colonial

script found in the *encomienda* system portrayed in Mena's work is later seen in the servant class system, which inherited the values of the *encomienda* system, illustrated in the novel *Caramelo*. *Caramelo*'s representation of the servant class system suggests a level of critical consciousness or awareness that a colonial script is at play that is not present in Mena's stories. *Caramelo* displays a greater awareness of the colonial script by playfully incorporating footnotes that map a counter narrative to U.S. history's problematic representation of U.S.-Mexico relations. This counter narrative reveals and critiques U.S. history's legacy of colonial violence and the consequences of *mestizaje* in a Chicana context. The novel's representation of *mestizaje* from a Chicana context, with its fascination and romanticization of the *mestiza* or *india* body, proves to be just as problematically essentializing and solipsistic as in Mena's short stories, and therefore at times reinscribes rather than disrupts the colonial script. *Caramelo* does however develop the trans-national perspective that Mena's short stories begin to outline.

Leslie Marmon Silko's *Almanac of the Dead* (1991) also uses colonial scripts as a way to address U.S. history's legacy of colonial violence. The novel in particular critiques the U.S.'s Indian Reservation system and Mexico's own racist attitudes and violent treatment towards its indigenous population. The text makes these colonial scripts visible on a hemispheric scale that reveals the ramifications of *mestizaje* in a Native American context. Rather than idealize *mestizaje* and the *mestizo* body, *Almanac* underscores the dangers of *mestizaje* as a tool of assimilation into whiteness and tool of erasure that seeks to erase a Native presence. In the case of *Almanac*, *mestizaje* itself becomes the colonial script that reveals the discourse of national identity (which functions as a present day variation of colonial discourse). The novel underscores how the concept of "mixed-race" can only exist because of colonialism and reinforces rather than undermines whiteness. At the same time, the novel employs a mix of various cultural and aesthetic forms—such as the novel, the epic form, the oral tradition, a Mayan almanac—and in doing so performs or enacts *mestizaje* on the level of form. The novel's

treatment of *mestizaje* on a hemispheric scale transcends national and racial or ethnic boundaries as it continues to develop the notion of a possible trans-Latinx hemispheric latinidad but one that includes and highlights an indigenous presence not outlined in the previous two texts.

Ultimately, *Almanac* argues for a coalition or vision of *mestizaje* based on relational histories of colonial oppression as opposed to racial or ethnic categories, be they mixed or not.

The emergence of a possible trans-Latinx hemispheric latinidad is most clearly seen in Montero's *The Last Night I Spent with You*. The novel removes all national, ethnic, and racial boundaries through the metaphor of the bolero that envisions the possibility of a trans-Latinx hemispheric latinidad. Like the previous texts, *Last Night* also invokes a colonial script as a way to critique a history of colonial violence, however, this text places that history in the broader context of the Americas and decenters the U.S. as the primary object of analysis. The novel engages a critique of tourism in the Caribbean as a present-day version of the colonial script of discovery. The text employs bolerismo as a way to resist national boundaries, another product of colonialism, and envisions the potential of *mestizaje* as a possible tool that could undo the colonial script and transcend national boundaries.

Taken together, these chapters trace crucial flashpoints in the evolution of a literary, performative, critical *mestizaje* and track iterative, textual performances of the colonial script. My reading interprets the texts in a performative light, arguing that the narratology allows the texts in this study to “perform” something that the mimetic dimension of the narrative cannot. I liken the idea of a critical *mestizaje* as akin to José Muñoz's idea of queerness as he states it on the first page of his book *Cruising Utopia*: “Queerness is not yet here. Queerness is an ideality. Put another way, we are not yet queer [...] Often we can glimpse the worlds proposed and promised by queerness in the realm of the aesthetic” (1). We are not yet mestizx – but the aesthetic form of the texts promises something that helps undo the representation of repressive colonial scripts.

CHAPTER 1: Maria Cristina Mena's Short Stories and the Language of Colonial Scripts

Introduction

Although written almost a century prior to Leslie Silko's *Almanac of the Dead* (1991), Sandra Cisneros' *Caramelo* (2002), and Mayra Montero's *The Last Night I Spent with You* (1991, 2000), María Cristina Mena's short stories (1913-1916) had already begun to trace and critique the colonial and imperial underpinnings of U.S. foreign and domestic affairs. Mena's unique Mexican immigrant and upper class status offers insight into her dual critique of both the U.S.'s imperial attitude towards Mexico and Mexico's own colonial treatment towards its most vulnerable class: Mexico's more indigenous *mestizo* population. Unlike most immigrants who fled Mexico in the early 1900s, Mena had the good fortune of belonging to an affluent family. Several scholars, including Margaret Toth, "have speculated that [Mena's] father, an ardent supporter of Mexican president Porfirio Díaz, sent her to the United States because of brewing domestic turmoil that culminated in the Mexican Revolution" of 1910 (331).

The Mexican Revolution prompted an influx of Mexican immigrants to the U.S. and resulted in a radical shift in the U.S. cultural landscape. According to historian Vicki L. Ruiz, by 1930 "over one million Mexicanos (one-eighth to one-tenth of Mexico's population) migrated" (6) to the U.S. This early 1900s shift in demographic led to an anxiety regarding American culture and identity. Aware of the political climate, the prominent American periodical, *The Century Magazine*, took care to "respond to their readership's fear of the foreign in the struggle for a distinctive and 'common' American identity" (Doherty xviii). In an attempt to address the fears regarding the change in cultural landscape, *Century Magazine* hired Mena in 1913, who

was only twenty at the time, to write a series of short stories that would produce an appealing image of everyday Mexican life to an Anglo middle and upper class readership.¹⁰

Although only meant to portray a quaint vision of everyday Mexican life, Mena's stories often attempt to address some of the more negative stereotypes held towards Mexicans as lazy, degenerate, and uncivilized. Her stories "The Education of Popo," "Doña Rita's Rivals," and "The Birth of the God of War," for example, illustrate a relatable and socially dynamic Mexico, rich in history and culture. Mena's stories also indicate an interest in highlighting the social and political struggles faced by Mexico's more indigenous population. In fact, Mena's first two published stories, "The Gold Vanity Set" (1913) and "John of God, the Water-Carrier" (1913), feature two *mestizo* indigenous protagonists, Petra and John.

Mena's desire to write about Mexican Indians, however, was met with some resistance from the editors at *Century* (Doherty xxii). In a March 1913 letter to *Century*'s editors, Mena defends her position asserting that:

I expect to write more stories of Inditos than of any other class in Mexico. They form the majority; the issue of their rights and wrongs, their aspirations and possibilities, is at the root of the present situation in my unhappy country, and will

¹⁰ This change in literary landscape and new found interest in representations of non-Anglo cultures was not just limited to Mexican culture but extended to other ethnic groups. Like Mena, many early 20th century African-American and Mexican-American writers, including Charles W. Chesnutt, Zora Neale Hurston, and Fray Angelico Chavez, were affected by this pressure to speak to both Anglo and non-Anglo audiences. Publishing in these larger American circuits often left these writers with the dilemma of either fulfilling Anglo-American expectations of "ethnic representations" or of offering an astute political consciousness regarding said "ethnic representations." For this reason many of these writers have received harsh criticism for their ostensibly romanticized or quaint representations of Mexicans, Mexican-Americans, and African-Americans. Genaro M. Padilla in his introduction to *The Short Stories of Fray Angelico Chavez* (1987) for instance notes that, "Early black writers like Charles W. Chestnutt...were at times mistakenly dismissed by fellow blacks for, in the case of Chestnutt, playing upon common stereotypes of superstitions and indolent Southern blacks in *The Conjure Woman* (1899)." Mena received a similar critique by early Chicano scholars, like Raymond Paredes, who labeled her work non-confrontational, suggesting that a "braver, more perceptive writer would have confronted the life of her culture more forcefully" (Introduction xix).

become more and more prominent when the immense work of national regeneration shall have fairly begun; and I believe that American readers, with their intense interest in Mexico, are ripe for a true picture of a people so near to them, so intrinsically picturesque, so misrepresented in current fiction, and so well worthy of being known and loved, in all their ignorance.¹¹

In referring to indigenous people as “Inditos” that are “so intrinsically picturesque” and “so well worthy of being known and loved, in all of their ignorance,” Mena not only reveals her class bias, but she also ironically reinscribes the same infantilizing and paternalistic attitude she critiques Mexico of having towards its more indigenous population. In her letter, Mena seems to directly contradict her own efforts of wanting to provide a more nuanced image of Mexico and its indigenous population. Reading the letter more closely, however, reveals a level of irony in Mena’s voice. At face value, the letter seems to want to make the subject of “Mexican Indians” appealing, or at least non-threatening, to an American audience whose “intense interest in Mexico” and ignorance about “a people so near to them” make the American reader “ripe for a true picture.” Mena’s subversive but ironic tone suggests that perhaps Indians are not the only ones who suffer from ignorance. In order to convince the editors that Indians are a worthy subject matter, Mena uses the Spanish word “Inditos,” explaining that the word is meant as a term of endearment, in order to present herself as a native informant who can offer a more authentic and “true” image. Because of Mena’s stories’ more complex representation of Indians and the politics at play and, there is reason to believe that Mena saw indigenous people as more than just simple “intrinsically picturesque” “Inditos” and perhaps uses that language in the letter as a means to an end—that end being the ability to convince the editor’s that Indians are a worthy subject matter.

¹¹ As cited by Amy Doherty. María Cristina Mena. Letter to Robert Sterling Yard. [March 1913].

The use of the words “Indito” and “picturesque” are in fact criticized later in her story “The Gold Vanity Set” (1913). Set in Mexico, the story critiques U.S. tourism and the wealthy Mexican elite that facilitate U.S. cultural imperialism and the continued oppression of Mexico’s indigenous population. In the story, the wealthy Mexican, Don Ramón, becomes “nervous, sensitively anxious” of the American tourist, Miss Young’s, impressions of Mexico due to an Indian girl, Petra’s, taking of Miss Young’s vanity set and offering it to the Virgin Mary in hopes that her husband will stop beating her. In an attempt to explain Petra’s behavior to Miss Young, Don Ramón asserts: “The ways of the Indito are past conjecture, except that he is always governed by emotion... You may observe that we always speak of them as Inditos, never as Indios... We use the diminutive because we love them.” (“Gold Vanity Set” 10). To which Miss Young responds: “‘They certainly are picturesque,’ pronounced Miss Young judicially.” Unlike in Mena’s letter to *Century*’s editors, the words “Inditos” and “picturesque” are employed by two characters the story is highly critical of, the wealthy Mexican businessman and the American tourist. Don Ramon’s explanation for using the term “Inditos” is condescending and frames Indians as a people who lack nuance, civility, or the ability to reason, thus revealing the colonizing attitude of the Mexican elite. Miss Young’s response of “judicially” viewing the Indians as “certainly picturesque” is read as judgmental and self-righteous. Although subversive and indirect, Mena critiques this simple, inaccurate, and condescending portrayal of Mexican Indians by having the wealthy Mexican and the American tourist voice these stereotypical views.

Mena’s work and writing strategy functions on this more subversive and indirect level. Mena’s stories employ a colonial script that reiterates stereotypical portrayals of Mexico and its people—such as little Indians as savage and backwards—in order to critique them, not reinforce them. Characters like Don Ramón and Don Rómulo perform the colonial script through the

encomienda system by patronizing and subjecting the more indigenous characters like Petra and Rosario to a life of servitude. This is how Mena's stories illustrate the colonial legacy of *mestizaje*, by offering representations of the *encomienda* system. At the same time that Mena's stories employ a colonial script, the stories' narratological strategy of calquing performs *mestizaje* on the level of form. This tension between what the stories represent via the colonial script and what the stories perform on the level of form through calquing suggest a move towards a possible more critical and transformative *mestizaje* that could potentially undo the colonial script.

According to Charlotte Rich, the stories' stereotypical notions about Mexicans could suggest "Mena's capitulation to marketplace demands of the early twentieth century in order to publish her fiction, but a careful reading of them does not allow us to take such narratorial asides at face value" (214). Instead, Rich argues that the dramatic irony that Mena "develops throughout each of these texts concerning insensitive, acquisitive Anglo-Americans shows such references to be the discursive technique of double-voicing, unmasking the limitations of those views" (214). This technique of double-voicing:

allows us to see beyond the stories' superficial qualities of charming local-color fiction about Mexican life and their appearance in mainstream periodicals that generally did not publish fiction with highly politicized content. We thus recognize the contrasting functions that Mena's texts performed simultaneously, as they dialogically balanced hegemonic discursive modes with more resistant ones. (Rich 214)

In addition to double-voicing, however, Mena's texts also engage with two other narrative techniques: code-switching and calquing. Unlike double-voicing, these performative literary

strategies require movement between languages or cultural sensibilities—in Mena’s stories’ case between Spanish and English languages or the Mexican or Anglo culture. According to Rafael Pérez-Torres, code-switching “among Spanish, English, and the vernacular is a common means of expression used by multilingual speakers, a verbal strategy for conveying such information as sociopolitical identity and economic position” (*Movements in Chicano Poetry* 17). He further goes on to note how this speech-act of code-switching, “establishes or reinforces social roles, and aids or precludes the construction of bonds and relations. Within the discourse of Chicano aesthetics, it becomes involved in a complex strategy of formal experimentation, political commentary, and empowering representations” (*Movement in Chicano Poetry* 17).

Mena’s stories offer early instances of this Chicano aesthetic as a way to address the colonial legacy of *mestizaje* present in her stories; Mena’s stories for example offer representations of the *encomienda* labor system which functions as an iteration of another colonial script: the Spanish *casta* system. “Gold Vanity Set” and “Son of the Tropics” (1931) illustrate the colonial script of *mestizaje*’s legacy of colonial violence in their representation of the *encomienda* system. For this reason, I argue that the stories’ incorporation of Spanish words and phrases have less to do with identity politics than it does with mapping a different reader experience through this other linguistic world. In “The Birth of the God of War (1914),” for example, the narrator herself offers some meta-commentary on this matter of language and the limits of the English language and expression exclaiming that: “Alas! The sonorous imagery of those well-remembered phrases loses much in my attempt to render them in sober English” (65). Using English often mutes a certain cultural sensibility that the narrator wishes she could express. It appears Mena fought to use Spanish in her stories. According to Amy Doherty, Mena evidently:

had to gain permission from her editors to include Spanish words in her short stories. For example, in a letter to Douglas Zabriskie Doty, [Mena] comments on the editor's suggested changes for "The Son of His Master," a story which was not accepted for publication in *Century*, noting that she "cut out many of the Spanish words— but I must make a special plea for the few that remain, all of them having a definite value of humor, irony, local color, or what not" ([November/December 1914]).

Beyond offering some local color or humor, I would argue that the use of Spanish in Mena's stories engages with a decolonial strategy that Walter D. Mignolo refers to as "linguaging" which he defines as "thinking and writing between languages...moving away from the idea that language is a fact (e.g. a system of syntactic, semantic, and phonetic rules), and moving toward the idea that speech and writing are strategies for orienting and manipulating social domains of interaction" (226). This act of linguaging disrupts hegemonic discursive modes through its interruption of or switch from the English language. Code-switching produces this disruption by creating a moment of pause within the text that can either be read as exclusionary or like an invitation to re-engage with not just language, but a non-hegemonic way of understanding or finding meaning.

This decolonial strategy of "linguaging," of writing and thinking between languages, is similarly enacted through Mena's stories use of calquing, or literal-word-for-word English translations of Mexican cultural idioms. One must have cultural plurality or cultural familiarity with both Anglo and Mexican cultures and the English and Spanish languages in order to intelligibly decode phrases such as "not once did I paste the eyes" ("Son of the Tropics" 139). which is a literal translation of the Mexican idiom "*no pegue ojo en toda la noche*," which when

translated into English vernacular means to not have gotten a wink of sleep. Through narrative strategies like code-switching and calquing, language ceases to be a stable system of rules and facts and instead offers moments of creativity through linguistic cross-cultural interaction and cultural mixture. On the level of form, code-switching and calquing function as a kind of linguistic *mestizaje*—a prominent theme, present in much of Mena’s work. As a cultural practice, *mestizaje* requires movement between multiple subjectivities. Mena’s double-coded literary strategies textually perform and engage a critical *mestizaje*. In this way *mestizaje* functions as a metaphor for identity formation and informs Mena’s anti-colonial critique.

On the level of content, Mena’s stories offer early Chicano literary representations of *mestizaje*, a term commonly used to describe the result of racial and cultural mixing¹² in the Americas. She praises this cultural mixing in her story “Birth of the God of War,” however, makes sure to critique *mestizaje*’s colonial legacy through her representations of the *encomienda* system in “Gold Vanity Set” and “Son of the Tropics.” Mena never actually uses the word *mestizaje* but does make clear that some of the characters are mixed-race. Mena’s representations of mixed-race characters are, at times, problematic when it comes to its representation of Mexico’s indigenous history, peoples, and cultures. On this matter, Marissa López has astutely noted that in fact, “a central contradiction in [Mena’s] work arises...from the tension [Mena] maintains between making natives central to a definition of the Mexican nation while simultaneously distancing Mexico from its native present” (99). Mena’s stories celebrate an indigenous past but seem unsure about where to place or what role indigeneity plays as Mexico is forced into an era of modernization. For example, the protagonist of “Son of the Tropics,” Rosario, upon learning of his mixed racial and class heritage leads him to commit a final act of suicide, suggesting that perhaps, there is no place. The value of *mestizaje* lies in its

¹² Of primarily Spanish, African, and indigenous cultures.

ability to “illuminate the racial, national, sexual tensions” (and I would add cultural tensions) “traced yet often obscured in writings of the Americas. And internalized on the individual level, *mestizaje* can present a multiplicity of possibilities and fluidity of identifications” (Bost 9).

Mena’s mixed-race characters perform the contradictions of liminality and in doing so offer valuable insight on the ways language narrates and frames bodies, specifically the way colonial discourse frames bodies within binaries such as civilized/uncivilized, master/slave, noble/savage. These binaries are rooted in the language and logic of colonial difference that script bodies into a language system that materializes the overvalue of Euro-American, first world, white, upper-class, male, and able-bodied identities. This value system is then enforced by the nation-state’s act of dividing its citizens into a series of seemingly fixed social categories—such as race, class, and gender—that rank identities and perpetuate colonial violence. Mena’s representations of mixed-race *mestiza/o* bodies, however, reveal that these social identities are not quite as coherent as the nation may seem to suggest. For example, there is a notable level of ambivalence surrounding the racial terms “Indian” and “Mexican Indian” in “The Gold Vanity Set” and “Son of the Tropics.” Furthermore, in “Gold Vanity Set,” Petra is at times narrated as a demure, obstinate Indian, while at others she is presented as a cultural critic with the power to reassign meaning to cultural objects. Mena’s stories and their contradictory and more rounded representation of its Mexican characters reveal the complexity and multiplicity implicit in *mestizaje* and identity. According to Tiffany Ana Lopez:

Mena wrote well before the emergence of identity politics and, as a result, her stories embrace a more contradictory and fluid sense of identities...Mena’s constantly shifting point of view – from impoverished to erudite, from confrontation to conformity, from the US to Mexico – underscores the existence

of the borderlands as a terrible and wonderful space where cultures clash and clasp in an ongoing performance of negotiating identities. (77)

Although colonial discourse has the power to narrate and frame marginalized bodies as objects, performance enables these bodies to push against this objectified identity and embody multiple subjectivities simultaneously—like in the case of Petra.

Throughout her stories, Mena struggles with language and representations of class, race, and indigeneity. This struggle between offering representations that challenge “colonially scripted” images¹³ of *mestizos* and Mexican Indians but of also simultaneously reinscribing them is present throughout Mena’s stories “The Gold Vanity Set,” “The Birth of the God of War,” and “Son of the Tropics” (1931). Through close reading analysis, this chapter will examine the ways language can function as a tool of coloniality that frames bodies within a logic of colonial difference, while simultaneously functioning as a tool of decolonial resistance that challenges the stability of such hegemonic colonial discourses. Part of Mena stories’ decolonial strategy lies in the stories’ ability to counter or disrupt hegemonic modes of knowing, such as colonial formations of knowledge and colonial discourse. On of the level of form, Mena’s work accomplishes this disruption of colonial knowledge by employing performative narrative strategies like code-switching and calquing; on the level of content, Mena’s stories offer complex representations of Mexico’s more indigenous *mestizo* population that challenge colonial formations of knowledge by valuing the body, or embodied performances, as a site of knowledge.

Colonial Language and *Mestizaje*

¹³ Meaning colonially informed or colonially produced roles, such as civilized/uncivilized, master/slave, noble/savage; socially scripted roles produced from or through a colonial gaze.

“The Gold Vanity Set,” one of Mena’s earliest publications and only story to feature a Mexican Indian woman protagonist, offers contradictory but insightful representations of *mestizaje*. The story invokes the idea of *mestizaje* through Petra, the story’s protagonist, as it grapples with *mestizaje*’s historical and material reality. The narrator’s lengthy description of Petra, for example, underscores the colonial and racial tensions still very present in twentieth century Mexico. The description also brings into question the matter of indigeneity and the terms by which indigeneity, and race more broadly, are determined and defined. Petra’s physical description as “tall and slender, as strong as wire, with a small head and extremely delicate features” with skin “the color of new leather” (“Gold Vanity Set” 1) are physiological markers more commonly associated with mixed race bodies, such as *mestizas/os*, rather than Indian. The reference to “wire” even implies modernity and the reference to “new leather” suggests a soft beige color (which is produced through the transformation of a raw material mixed with other base products).

It is not until the narrator begins to racialize or frame Petra’s mannerisms, gestures, and behaviors as Indian that Petra begins to read as Indian. Her eyes are described as “wonderful, even in a land of wonderful eyes. They were large and mysterious, heavily shaded with lashes” and her voice “was like a ghost, distant, dying away at the ends of sentences as if in fear, yet with all its tenderness holding a hint of barbaric roughness” (“Gold Vanity Set” 1). Words like “wonderful” and “mysterious” are reminiscent of the kind of language Columbus used in his journals to describe the “New World.”¹⁴ This language frames Mexico as a mythological land and Petra like an exotic creature or object. Her soft-spoken voice is characterized as at once

¹⁴ See Christopher Columbus’ *The Letter of Columbus to Luis De Sant Angel* (1892).

ghost-like and “tender” yet “barbaric.”¹⁵ In short, this language seems to reinscribe a colonial script that frames bodies, specifically Petra, as either civil or uncivilized. In the following sentence however, the narrator subtly shifts from a colonial viewpoint and explains that, “the dissimulation lurking in that low voice and those melting eyes was characteristic of a race among whom the frankness of the Spaniard is criticized as unpolished” (“Gold Vanity Set” 1). The narrator flips the colonial script by suggesting that perhaps it is the Spanish and their frankness that is barbaric and they who are uncivilized. In fact, the story later revisits the politics of “frankness” when the narrator draws a parallel to Miss Young’s frankness as a way to comment on Americans more broadly. Miss Young’s plainly stated connection between the loss of her vanity set and Petra’s taking it causes Don Ramón to tremble “at her frankness...’How original!’ he reflected, epitomizing the thought of all of his people when they meet the people of the North” (“Gold Vanity Set” 8). The implication is that like the “unpolished” Spaniard, so too is the American characterized as unpolished and lacking tact, suggesting that cultural differences and the perception of those differences goes both ways and Mena’s stories refuse to privilege Euro-American cultural values. Although subtle in both instances, the story uses this indirect strategy as a form of anti-colonial critique that would otherwise not be possible in venues such as *Century*, *American* and *Household Magazine*.

The question of race and its meaning, however, still remains unclear. To which “race” is the narrator referring in the passage, or is she referring to Mexicans? Indians? Mexican Indians? And what is the difference? Many of Mena’s stories center on this question of what it means to be Mexican and rather than answer the question directly, the stories will offer varying points of

¹⁵ This is quite a contrast to the young child version of Petra in the pervious paragraph who is described as intelligent, self-assured, and independent in her ability to teach herself to walk, fetch water from the public fountain, and take her father his dinner wherever he might be—which suggests that Petra’s more meek and demure behaviors were learned or imposed by patriarchal and colonial forces as will be encountered later in the story.

view—not for the purposes of reinscribing them, but as a way to open them to critique. For example, the narrator often plays on Americans’ quaint, stereotypical images regarding Mexicans such as the idea of how “Most Mexicans, to be sure, have music in their fingers” (“Gold Vanity Set” 2). This essentialist logic does not hold true even within the story itself as Manuelo is the only character in the story who displays any musical interest or talent. His musical expression, however, does read as culturally Mexican as he sang “in passionate Spanish softened by Indian melancholy” (“Gold Vanity Set” 6). Present in this description is the concept of *mestizaje*. To be Mexican means to be part of this cultural phenomena of *mestizaje* and its history of colonial violence and indigenous survival. Every Mexican character in the story—be it Petra, Manuelo, Manuelo’s father, or even Don Ramón—is to some extent bound to the historical legacy and material consequences of *mestizaje*. One of these historical and material consequences is the colonial script which appears in the form of the *encomienda* system. This class system—which functions as an iteration of a previous colonial script, the Spanish *castas*—defines the relationship between Don Ramón and the rest of the characters. At the same time, there are shared transcultural syncretic practices, another consequence of *mestizaje*, that at times flatten this hierarchy.

This reality is no more apparent in the story than when these characters pay homage to the syncretic figure of La Virgen de Guadalupe. This cultural figure merges the pre-Conquest goddess, Tonanztin, with the Christian figure of the Virgin Mother. Originally a symbol of the Spanish conquerors, the Virgin was transformed into ‘the ‘dark Virgin,’ of the conquered” as the “patron of the newly developing ‘Mexican’ identity (1737)” (Taylor, *Archive and Repertoire* 47) through an act of what performance studies scholar Joseph Roach refers to as “surrogation.”¹⁶ This act of cultural survival enabled indigenous people to continue practicing their cultural

¹⁶ See Joseph Roach’s *Cities of the Dead* (1996).

beliefs through the guise of the Virgin. Using the Virgin as a conduit, Petra is able to transform an object of commercial oppression—Miss Young’s gold vanity set—into a tool of liberation from Manuelo’s beatings. Initially, Petra attempts to mimic the “brilliant cheeks of the American *señorita* of the brave looks,” (“Gold Vanity Set” 5) but this failed act of mimicry leads Petra to a more creative space that concludes that, “her concept of the [vanity set] was not simple, like Miss Young’s. Its practical idea became a mere nucleus in her mind for a fantasy dimly symbolic and religious...truly the gold treasure was blessed and the red paste was a holy as its smell, which reminded her of Church” (“Gold Vanity Set” 5). Rather than develop a sense of inferiority from the failed act of mimicry, Petra uses the white powder and red paste as a disguise that inspires a sequence of events, such as Petra’s leaving the house in search of yellow jonquils and spikenard, that results in an impromptu ritual-like scene where Manuelo vows to the Virgin Goddess that he will never again beat his Petrita.

Petra’s ability to orchestrate the means of her own liberation using two objects, the vanity set and the Virgin, that are traditionally used to keep women in a subordinate position demonstrates quite a contrast to the “dumb, obstinate Indian” who rebels against Miss Young’s camera described earlier in the story. As a consequence of *mestizaje*, Petra’s character embodies multiple subjectivities that at once resist and perpetuate colonial attitudes such as when she refers to Manuelo’s habit of burying things in the ground as “foolish, Indian things” (“Gold Vanity Set” 5). This moment of internalized racism, however, pales in comparison to Don Ramón who struggles to reconcile his own relationship to native-ness and the reality of *mestizaje*. To Don Ramón, the Indians “are our blood. With their passion, their melancholy, their music, and their superstition they have passed without transition...into the world of today which ignores them; but we never forget that it was their valor and love of country which won our independence”

(“Gold Vanity Set” 10). His understanding or articulation of *mestizaje* seems to be informed by a colonial logic of difference. In framing Indians as “they,” Don Ramón reinscribes a “subject/other” binary present in the colonial script. However, his colonial logic falls apart by his very own definition since without the “they,” the Indians, there can be no “us,” Mexicans. Without the Indian, Mexico as a nation-state would not, according to this definition, even exist.

Although Don Ramón does not perceive himself as native, his definition suggests that his identity, or that Mexican identity more generally, contains native influences—a fact that is confirmed when he falls to his knees at the sight of the Virgin Goddess. Besides class, what separates Don Ramón from the Mexican Indian characters? Is it perhaps his willingness to perform the role of the colonizer by participating in the U.S.’s imperialism of Mexico and Mexico’s own colonizing projects by holding patronizing views towards indigeneity? What Don Ramón cites as Indian attributes—passion (which earlier in the story was actually associated with being Spanish), melancholy, music, superstition—have nothing to do with race and are all part of a cultural repertoire that in fact continues to influence Mexican culture to this very day. The idea of Mexican-ness, or race then, has less so to do with a series of physiological markers than “an ongoing performance of negotiating identities”—another consequence of *mestizaje*. For the majority of the story, Don Ramón seems as Mexican as Miss Young—that is of course until he is confronted with one of the most powerful figures representative of *mestizaje*: La Virgin. Upon witnessing the Virgin, Don Ramón, like Petra, falls “on his knees” (“Gold Vanity Set” 11), and along with him his colonial logic of difference. Miss Young, unable to consume this display of cultural expression, literally chokes on the scene as she bows her head “fumbling for her handkerchief” (“Gold Vanity Set” 11). Don Ramón’s genuine participation in this performance

of cultural reverence functions as a marker of his Mexican identity. Ultimately what *mestizaje* reveals is the socially constructed nature of the idea of “race.”

Colonial trauma, Loss, and the Mixed-Race Body

Like Petra, the character of Rosario in “Son of the Tropics” also illustrates how colonial scripts frame bodies through a colonial logic of difference. In this story, Don Rómulo, the estranged *hacienda* master, pays a visit to his troubled plantation. The narrator describes Rosario as having “an easy bearing, and his face, the color of unroasted coffee, was cut in precise lines, strong and yet sensitive, while the inward fire of his will was projected outward through a pair of amber-hued eyes, impetuous and dauntless” (“Son of the Tropics” 146). His face although “cut in precise lines,” which suggests a certain defined rigidness or containment in character, is offset by its dual strong yet sensitive quality. This duality is also signaled by the “pair of amber-hued eyes,” which like his light tan skin, are indicative of racial mixture and the inherent condition of doubleness present in *mestizaje*. Although problematic in some ways, this racial valence, according to Pérez-Torres, “is significant because it works in two contradictory ways: it embeds identity within systems of asymmetrical power relations, and it suggests mutability as *mestiza* and mestizo bodies enact new relational subjectivities arising from a history of racial conflict” (*Mestizaje* 7).

The duality of the mestizo body is also witnessed in Rosario’s contrasting characterization. On the one hand is he characterized as uncivilized and inferior:

An oration in the vulgar dialect, often bombastic —often ludicrous in its betrayal of undigested half-knowledge— such was the harangue of Rosario. But it was also much more. Not only did it swing the hearts of the *peones* round again from

their lawful lord to their unlawful chief, now with tears, now with laughter, now with exultant cries; but also it stirred to their depths, in spite of their prejudices and their fears, two hearers of the superior caste. (“Son of the Tropics” 148)

The language used to describe Rosario’s manner of expression—“vulgar dialect” and “undigested half-knowledge”—frames Rosario as an uncivilized subject who has failed to fully mimic the civilized colonial subject with his half-knowledge. The articulation of Rosario’s oration seems heavily informed by a colonial script that binds him to the colonial logic of difference. Interestingly, however, his performance has an unexpected but equal effect on both the inferior *peones* and the two of the superior caste. Rosario successfully manages to appeal to both audiences suggesting that Rosario embodies more than one identity. Although Rosario’s identity seems tied to a colonial script that narrates him as an uncivilized “unlawful chief” in relation to the civilized “lawful lord,” Rosario’s dual identity, as both the son of a master and the son of a servant slave, collapses this neo-colonial binary and becomes the new mestizo body.

At the same time that Rosario's mestizo body signals the “unlawful chief” his body also as resembles a civilized nobleman of the superior caste: “Irresistibly too, the passionate face of Rosario recalled a revered family portrait, that of Beltrán Salgado, Don Rómulo’s great-great-grandfather, a statesman, poet, and soldier, who had played a telling role in the overthrow of the Spanish dominion” (“Son of the Tropics” 148). Besides foreshadowing Rosario’s true lineage, as the son of master Don Rómulo, this passage also highlights the second primary historical conflict of *mestizaje* that informs the forging of new relational subjectivities: class. Like his great-great-great grandfather, Beltrán Salgado, Rosario Salgado, is also a passionate revolutionary who also played a significant role in overthrowing an oppressive governing system. Where Beltrán Salgado is narrated as a passionate statesman, poet, and soldier, Rosario

Salgado is narrated as a vulgar, bombastic unlawful chief. This contrast in framing seems entirely based on the language and logic of colonial difference (since the story makes reference to the fact that Rosario looks like his great-great grandfather). Due to his peon class status, Rosario's actions read as unlawful as opposed to passionate.

This class and racial conflict is further illustrated in the following passage regarding Rosario's mother Remedios. Upon learning of his mixed heritage, Rosario is consumed with shame:

Disarmed and dishonored, his leadership made a mockery, his very blood polluted with tyranny. He thought of his mother in her black shawl. In all the *peón* population of the hacienda she had been the only woman of shawl, and he in his childhood had imagined that she was permitted that distinction as a testimony of her peculiar excellence. Now he understood the true reason. ("Son of the Tropics" 149)

Rather than find empowerment in the idea of possessing multiple subjectivities, Rosario is unraveled and undone by this revelation. Part of Rosario's feelings of disavowal stem from a colonial ideology that basis identity in terms of purity as Rosario feels that "his very blood" has been "polluted with tyranny." For Rosario the two identities master/peon cannot co-exist thus leading him to read his mixed-identity as a form/kind of blood contamination that negates his previous marginalized identity. The danger lies in relying on language or colonial binaries as a means to arrive at a stable singular identity. On the limits of the mixed race body, Rafael Pérez-Torres notes, "the innovative potentiality of new subjectivity is offset by a profound sense of dislocation and absence that forms a dark shadow cast by the hybridity of identity. This shadow implies an absence, a loss in the process of developing one position of identification from

another” (*Mestizaje* 196). Rather than gain a new identity, Rosario sees the merging of identities as an erasure of his marginalized identity. Furthermore, the memory of his mother reveals the unequal, uneasy, if not possibly sexually violent circumstances of his birth, and as such Rosario functions as a larger allegory of the historical narrative of sexual colonial violence that *mestizaje* embodies. Rosario had initially read the shawl as a marker of civility and class distinction but realizes that the “true reason” for the black shawl was to brand his mother as the sexual property of Don Rómulo.

In an attempt to rectify past wrongdoings, Don Rómulo decides to culturally civilize and economically empower his *mestizo* son. Don Rómulo’s attempt fails however and instead only succeeds in perpetuating colonial violence by turning his son into a civilizing project which Don Rómulo believes will grant him personal atonement. His selfish motives are revealed in the following passage:

“All these years, Rosario, I have longed to be blessed with a son,” he cried, his face shining with tears; “and now God has given me thee. All that I have shall be thine, with the name of Salgado fixed on thee by law. And thou shalt have an education to fit thee for thy future as a master; and thy life shall be of ease and elegance. Thus thou wilt help me to atone for many injustices and to make my peace with God.” (“Son of the Tropics” 149)

Don Rómulo seems less concerned with redemption and more concerned with issues of inheritance due to his longing for years to be blessed with a son. Rosario however never longed to have a colonial master for a father and even less to become part of the oppressive system that himself seeks to overthrow. At no time does Don Rómulo offer any solutions that might lead to

any structural changes of the *hacendia* system. Instead his plan to remedy past transgressions is to use Rosario as both his means of atonement and as a tool to perpetuate colonial violence.

In an act of resistance, Rosario commits an act of social and physical suicide. Rosario cannot reconcile his dual positionality or multiple subjectivities, and Rosario's physical body suffers as a result. Ironically, however, Rosario understands his identity as part of a collective of the people: "Rosario has lived of the people, and so he will die. Without favors he made himself something. But now you have made him less than nothing. Master, I give you back your people, in whose faces you have covered me with shame...*Adiós*. This Rosario is well finished." ("Son of the Tropics" 150). At the same time, however, he narrates himself as a self-made man who has been reduced to nothing by his master, yet Rosario can only be understood as a revolutionary when put in relation to his master. In other words, Rosario claims that he is self-made however he has lived his entire life defining himself in relation to the master. He cannot live outside of his scripted role as an oppressed revolutionary subject and the loss of this singular identity proves to be too great for Rosario and in the end destroys Rosario. Rosario's process of identity formation is too bound to a colonial script that frames bodies as either colonizer/colonized or master/slave that Rosario cannot embody the binary's collapse as it would require movement between his two identities and the possible forging of an entirely new identity which racially he already signifies. Rosario's tragic fate underscores how the narrative of *mestizaje* is as much as a narrative of possibility as it is a narrative of loss. Horrified at the thought of having to perform and possibly assimilate into whiteness, Rosario decides to end his own life.

Calquing and Code-switching: Performances of Intelligibility

Not concerned with the project of creating a national literature (U.S. or Mexican), as an

early Latina writer, Mena's work was more concerned with developing literary practices that would reveal the colonial legacies present within the idea of language as a national institution. I argue that the stories' narrative techniques of calquing and code-switching function as examples of a decolonial strategy such as Mignolo's *linguaging*. Code-switching and literal translations through calquing allow the stories to simultaneously inhabit or move between cultures.

According to Mignolo, "It is the very concept of literature, like the philosophical and political conceptualization of language, that should be displaced from the idea of objects (e.g., grammar of the language, literary works...to the idea of linguaging as cultural practice and power struggle" (227). Calquing displaces meaning. Calquing as an illustration of language contact is a specific linguistic example of Mary Louise Pratt's broader notion of "contact zones." Contact zones is a term Pratt uses "to refer to social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out in many parts of the world today" (Pratt).

Mena creates calques by providing direct, word for word, literal translations of Mexican cultural idioms or phrases into English that still maintain the original Spanish language syntactic structure. This linguistic pattern exhibits a phenomenon of Pratt's contact zones known as *transculturation*. A term originally coined by Cuban sociologist Fernando Ortiz in the 1940s, transculturation, unlike acculturation or assimilation, signals or underscores a level of agency on the part of a colonized people. This agency is illustrated by Mena's manipulation of the language of imperialism, English, in such a way that it renders the English translations unintelligible to an Anglo English-only speaking audience. The literal translations transform English words with a different meaning or reassigns the English words to signify differently, an (e)signifying of sorts

that results in a form of double-speak.¹⁷

In the instance of calquing, the text itself is actually performing *mestizaje* on the level of form rather than representing *mestizaje* on the level of content. Calquing playfully double-speaks through irony by signifying in English and drawing in an Anglo American reader audience, yet excludes the Anglo audience by rendering the meaning of the direct translation in English unintelligible to an English-only speaker or a reader familiar with only Anglo-American culture. One of the many things that calquing does is prompt its reader audience, Anglo or non, to engage with Mexican and American culture, the English and Spanish languages, (and with language and its unstable properties of signifying more broadly), in a new way, in an unfamiliar way. Calquing, as an example of languaging, unsettles both language systems. This process of *languaging* works in two ways: by making English strange, it gives perspective not only to the original Spanish but also gives new perspective to the English words that the Mexican expressions are translated into. The literal translations make both languages strange for the purpose of re-familiarizing the reader with both languages while also allowing a critique of both Mexican and American cultures. This is just one of the many politically and culturally informed critical interventions that calquing accomplishes in Mena's stories.

Mena's contradictory aims of satisfying an Anglo readership and publishers and of providing critical and oppositional socio-political insight "require a form of narrative camouflage in which whimsical, romantic, and mystic surface is quietly undermined by social criticism" (Padilla xix). These contradictory aims informed Mena's work to develop a kind of narrative camouflage, or subversive narrative strategies, that embedded double messages that could speak to more than just one reader audience simultaneously, but did not speak to them in the same way.

¹⁷ Much like the double speak found in Henry Louis Gates notion of "signifyin'." See *The Signifying Monkey* (1989).

This aspect of double-speak transforms the process of meaning production into an exercise, or a performance, in intelligibility. This performance highlights the tension between accessibility and inaccessibility, and in doing so asks key questions: Who has access to knowledge and who does not? What kinds of knowledge do certain readers have that others do not?

As the Spanish language and Mexican culture come into contact with the English language and American culture, the language contact and process of literal translation creates a new lexeme in English because even though the English language is being used, the translations ironically, and playfully, exclude an Anglo-American readership. This process of calquing and manipulation by literal translation, then, also carries with it a political element. What then are the socio-political and cultural implications, effects, or advantages of choosing to calque in works such as Mena's short stories? Like calquing, code-switching also creates fractures within the dominant discourse. The stories use of Spanish and English signifies differently in order to cause the Anglo-American reader to pause and consider the instability of the English language. The strategies further suggest that the U.S. or Mexico, as Anglo Americans understand it, may not be such a linguistically or culturally homogenous place. I argue that the calquing and code-switching enact a linguistic remapping of U.S.-Mexico relations and geographical borders.

Performance studies scholar, Diana Taylor, explores maps as a way to narrate what performance studies offers traditional humanities' disciplines and maps out an answer by discussing performance as a genre. Performance as a genre, Taylor explains, "allows for alternative mappings" of history and geopolitical spaces and allows one to "study daily life as a performance by focusing on a series of practices, conventions, presentations of self, and the aesthetics of everyday life" ("Remapping Genre Through Performance" 1417). To ground her argument, Taylor provides a critical reading of a 16th century indigenous and 16th century

European map. Pitting them against each other, she highlights the differences between the fixed divisions of land and “bird eye view” of the European map versus the ground level and implied movement—the animatives—of the indigenous maps. Taylor defines animatives (in relation to Austin’s performatives) “as part movement as in animation, part identity, being, or soul as in anima or life—the term captures the fundamental movement that is life (breathe life into) of embodied practice” (“Remapping Genre Through Performance” 1417). She further notes that, “[like performatives] pertaining to the repertoire, animatives refer to actions taking place ‘on the ground’ as it were, in the messy and often less-structured interactions among individuals” (“Remapping Genre Through Performance” 1417). What is so compelling about Taylor’s notion of animatives is their role in remapping and re-reading of America as a performance where maps function as animatives that cite and produce constant movement, and not fixed borders.

For Taylor, the indigenous map functions as a visual performative with animatives, such as the foot markings, which constantly signal movement in the form of “embodied, lived, contradictory, vexed behaviors, experiences, and relationships” (“Remapping Genre Through Performance” 1419). This citation of movement contests the Euclidian notion of fixed divisions of space between lines and points. Unlike the European maps, the indigenous animative maps move and cite different processes of meaning making, knowledge production, history, and space. Rather than map space as an abstraction, the indigenous map details the movement within space. Mena’s short stories enact a similar kind of alternative mapping by using language as a way to signal space through calquing and code-switching.

No other story addresses the politics of language and performance more directly than “The Birth of the God of War.” In this story the narrator’s grandmother recounts the legend of the Aztec Mother Goddess, Coatlicue, and Aztec War God, Huitzilopochtli. In the midst of the

narrator's recounting of the tale, she asserts: "Alas! The sonorous imagery of those well-remembered phrases loses much in my attempt to render them in sober English" ("Birth of the God of War" 64). In this passage, the narrator directly points to the inability to translate cultural expression in "sober" English. Translation then becomes a political act as the passage ties language and translation to affect. In it, the narrator suggests that it is not a matter of things being lost in translation, but the assessment that the English language is limited in its ability to convey or express other valid forms of feeling or rather, "knowing." Shortly after the narrator critiques the English language for its limited form of expression, the narrator inserts a meta-moment where she connects language to space:

'Ruge, éste por la vez postrera,' as it rolled out in my grandmother's voice, the *éste* signifying that ill-fated cub, for which I always wept. I render the construction literally because it seems to carry more of the perfume that came with those phrases as I heard them by the blue-tiled fountain. ("Birth of the God of War" 65)

The narrator directly ties the Spanish language to a place—to the place "by the blue-tiled fountain" in Mexico, which is where this framed story took place. The setting of the framed narrative is invoked, marked and produced through the Spanish language. The narrator further suggests that in order to honor meaning, the phrase must be kept in its most original form possible, thus as literal as possible. Translation for meaning seems to be less the narrator's concern than highlighting than creating ruptures within the dominant language and suggesting language's ability to invoke space. Further, the decision to translate for the reader (or not in this case) functions as a political act in these short stories that can lead to the inclusion or exclusion of a non-Spanish speaking reader.

In other instances, the narrator acts like a cultural mediator that walks her reader through uncharted territory as a way of working and thinking between languages, or *linguaging*, in order to reorient “and manipul[at]e social domains of interaction”—such as when the narrator offers a phonetic representation of Aztec God and Goddess’ Nahuatl names: “It is not so difficult to pronounce as might be thought. ‘Weetzee-lo-potchtee,’ spoken quickly and clearly with the accent on the ‘potch,’ will come somewhere near it...And the god’s sweet mother Coatlicue may safely be called ‘Kwaht-lee-quay,’ with the accent on the ‘lee’ ” (“Birth of the God of War” 64). The narrator connects the visual phonetic representation of textuality to utterances and sounds. The text’s hybrid textual and performative qualities transform the text from a mute artifact to an interactive source of cultural knowledge. In relaying the story to the reader, with its commentary on language, the story has now become a version or “iteration” of this oral history.

The passing down of this oral history functions as an act of cultural survival—a theme that the grandmother highlights when she addresses the syncretic nature of Mexican Catholicism: ““And on Sunday, when *papacito* carries thee to the cathedral, fix it in thy mind that the porch, foundation, and courtyard of that saintly edifice remain from the great temple built by our warrior ancestors for the worship of the god Huitzilopochtli”” (“Birth of the God of War” 65). The great temple is substituted by the cathedral, however, that space remains the designated site of ritual worship of an ancestral god as evidenced by the “porch, foundation, and courtyard...that remain from the great temple.” The narrator participates in this act of cultural memory by “fix[ing] [the memory of the God of War] in [her] mind.” The imposition of Catholicism onto the Aztecs by the Spaniards does not negate or erase the cultural history or memory of the God of War, instead culture is preserved and remembered through various linguistic strategies and literary practices embedded within the English, Spanish and Nahuatl languages.

Conclusion

Although subtle, “The Gold Vanity Set” and “Son of the Tropics” try to establish an anti-colonial critique and highlights the role language and performance play in reinscribing and resisting a colonial script which reenacts or restages iterations of a colonial logic of difference. “The Birth of the God of War” explores similar themes, however, rather than focus on plot structure and characterization, the story underscores the concept of *mestizaje* through performative narrative strategies such as calquing and code-switching. Although more subtle than literature of the Chicano movement in the 1960s, Mena’s political commentary places her within a larger literary canon of early Chicano literature.

By 1931, Mena was named as “the foremost interpreter of Mexican life”¹⁸ by *Household Magazine*. In her role as cultural translator, Mena also becomes cultural critic, citing the U.S.’s economic and cultural imperial presence in Mexico while simultaneously addressing Mexico’s own colonialist and paternalistic attitudes towards its indigenous and female subjects. Some scholars have criticized and reduced Mena’s acts of translation to nothing more than a cheap imitation of Mexican culture produced for Anglo consumption.¹⁹ Those scholars however fail to historically contextualize Mena’s work. Her critique of U.S. tourism and U.S. involvement in Mexico suggests that while Mena “presents a stereotypical image of Mexican Indians...she also demonstrates the implicit role of U.S. capitalism in Mexico’s modernization,” (Doherty viii) suggesting that the history of Mexico is also the history of the United States and vice versa.

In an article titled “Comparing Modern Literatures Worldwide: The Transamerican View,” Ramon Saldívar urges comparative literary scholars to seek a new paradigm for

¹⁸ See *Household Magazine*, Jan. 1931: 4.

¹⁹ See Raymond A. Paredes’ “The Evolution of Chicano Literature” (1978) and Charles Tatum’s *Chicano Literature*.

theorizing and analyzing global and local cultures and literatures suggesting that we must move beyond “the postmodern/postcolonial formulations of ‘comparative world literatures.’ ” (199). He cites Gayatri Spivak’s notion of “translation”²⁰—a process of “*poiesis* that is not mere imitation of an original but an imaginative creation in another mode, situated in the very differential between copy and original” (201)—as a possible new cultural poetics that could adequately address the task of assessing new world realities. Mena’s, short stories lend themselves to this new kind of cultural poetics. Mena uses translation as a process of *poiesis* not for the purposes of imitation but for the purposes of assessing new world realities that unsettle seemingly stable categories of gender, race, class, and nation. These new world realities include the events leading up to the Mexican Revolution of 1910, U.S. economic involvement in Mexico, and the mass migration of Mexican people to the U.S.

Translation functions as part of Mena’s anti-colonial critique. Rather than perform acts of imitation, through calquing Mena creates or invent a new discourse that not only fractures the purity of language, but also linguistically invokes a hemispheric consciousness while enacting the idea of multiple subjectivities. Although at times Mena reinscribes colonial ideologies within her stories, her attention to language—such as the language embedded within colonial scripts—reveals the racial hierarchy embedded within colonial discourse in order to expose the ways in which imperial and colonial difference manifested in the Americas at the turn of the 20th century.

The following chapter also addresses *mestizaje*’s colonial legacy. Sandra Cisneros’ novel *Caramelo* looks at a later iteration of the same colonial script seen in Mena’s stories: the servant class system in Mexico. This script echoes the same racial logic of difference seen in the *encomienda* system and thus illustrates the performative aspects working behind the master colonial script. The novel also further develops Mena’s transamerican vision and narrative

²⁰ See Gayatri C. Spivak’s “Translating in a World of Languages,” (2010) in *Profession*: 35-43.

strategy by examining *mestizaje* through a Chicana context. The novel's unique narratological strategy of footnotes ultimately produces a counter-narrative that undoes colonial formations of knowledge and exposes its divisive production of space.

CHAPTER 2: Animative Maps, Animative Narratologies: Bodies, Translation, and Footnotes in Sandra Cisneros' *Caramelo*

Introduction

Like Mena's stories (1913-1916), Sandra Cisneros' novel, *Caramelo or Puro Cuento: A Novel* (2002), also offers readers a trans-american vision of the U.S.-Mexico regions that gives insight into the colonial and imperial forces—that almost a century later—are still at work in the Americas. *Carmelo* engages with the colonial legacy of *mestizaje* through the novel's representation of Mexico's servant class labor system—a colonial script that inherited the values of the *encomienda* labor system seen in Mena's stories. The servant class system functions as a later version of the *encomienda* system. Although the textual representations of these colonial scripts are almost a century apart, both colonial systems are informed by the racial hierarchy that was established during the Spanish colonial period through the Spanish *castas* (another colonial script). *Caramelo* offers representations of these scripts and their various iterations—the Spanish *castas*, the *encomienda* system, the class labor system—all products of *mestizaje*'s colonial legacy used as a means to control and regulate Mexico's more indigenous *mestizo* population.

Unlike Mena's stories, however, *Caramelo* makes the colonial script more legible. *Caramelo* develops Mena's trans-American vision and displays a greater awareness of the colonial script through the novel's mixture of European and Latin American literary genres and its playful incorporation of footnotes that map a counter narrative to U.S. and Mexico national history. This counter narrative reveals and critiques U.S. history's legacy of colonial violence and the consequences of *mestizaje* in a Chicana context. The tension between *Caramelo*'s representation of *mestizaje* as part of a colonial legacy through the servant class system and the

novel's performance of *mestizaje* via its mixed aesthetic literary form and narratological strategies—such as footnotes, calquing, code-switching—suggests the idea of a possible critical *mestizaje*, one that could push against and potentially undo the colonial script.

One of the primary ways *Caramelo* pushes against the colonial script is through its performative narrative strategies of footnotes and calquing which remap and rearticulate colonial understandings of space such as the nation-state. The novel operates outside of a nationalist framework and performs what I call “animative narratology” through the footnotes and acts of calquing. The concept of animative narratology draws on Diana Taylor's notion of animatives which she defines “(in relation to Austin's performatives) as part movement as in animation, part identity, being, or soul as in *anima* or life—the term captures the fundamental movement that is life (breathe life into) of embodied practice” (“Remapping Genre through Performance” 1417). I argue that the novel works like a map, and the footnotes function as animative markers that reframe space as a lived practiced place rather than an entity that can be owned or determined by lines on a Euclidean map. The footnotes, calquing, and code-switching instead highlight the role performance, in the form of cultural memory and everyday cultural practices, play in the production of space.

The trans-American vision that the novel presents ultimately reveals that Mexico (and the U.S.), like the Americas, is not something that “is” but rather something that is constantly re-inventing itself through cultural practices, such as language, and the constant movement of bodies throughout the hemisphere. Using a transnational framework, *Caramelo* places U.S. and Mexican history in a broader trans-American context by narrating the novel primarily from the perspective of a trans-national subject, Celaya Reyes. The novel traces four generations of the Reyes family from 1910s Mexico to 1960s Chicago. The main narrative, however, does not

follow a linear plot; it opens in 1950s Chicago with the young, Celaya (Lala), as she narrates her family's annual summer drive to Mexico City to visit her Awful Grandmother and Little Grandfather. Along with narration, many of the novel's performative formal strategies—including the use of calquing, code-switching, footnotes, and meta-narration—help the novel to remap national U.S. borders. The novel uses linguistic strategies like calquing and code-switching as alternative ways to map space.

Cultural practices like code-switching and calquing are a result of cultural mixture—a theme the novel explores in great detail. The novel's Spanglish title itself, *Caramelo, or Puro Cuento: A Novel*, functions as a bi-lingual strategy that alludes to the Americas' history of cultural and racial mixture, especially that of *mestizaje*. Using the Reyes family as an allegory for *mestizaje*, the novel traces the complicated history of violent conquest and cultural and racial mixture in the Americas. In focusing on the history of cultural and mixed-race encounters and in incorporating bi-lingual cultural practices, the novel works to place U.S. and Mexican national history and space within a broader hemispheric American context. This trans-American vision reveals that Mexico (and the U.S.), like the Americas more broadly, is not a fixed space, but rather a place that is constantly re-inventing itself through this process *mestizaje*, the cultural and racial mixture of Afro, Indigenous and European cultural practices.

Using a performance studies lens, this chapter examines *mestizaje* on two levels: on the level of content and the level of form. On the level of content, *Caramelo* offers literary representations of the colonial legacy of *mestizaje* and the way its characters perform race and reproduce the colonial script through the servant class system, reproducing the colonial script. On the level of form, the novel performs *mestizaje* as an aesthetic strategy that offers insight and gestures towards the idea of a possible transformative *mestizaje*. *Caramelo*'s use of performative

narrative strategies reexamines the production of space, offering a way forward in this vein. Even as the text reproduces a colonial script, its aesthetic structure pushes against that same script and in doing so envisions the hope of a possible critical *mestizaje*.

Performing Race and *Mestizaje*: The Servant Class System

The servant class system is illustrated through the Reyes' family poor treatment of Candelaria and her mother the washerwoman Amparo who comes every Monday. Celaya describes her as "a woman like a knot of twisted laundry, hard and dry and squeezed of all water. At first I think Amparo is [Candelaria's] grandmother, not her mama" (*Caramelo* 34). Celaya's description of Amparo emphasizes the role physical labor has on the worn body of the peasant working class. In addition to indigenous features, manual labor functions as a marker of Mexico's peasant class. In this system Amparo exists for the purposes of improving the quality of life of Mexico's upper-class, and is the means by which the upper-class sustains itself both economically and socially.

As a young child and trans-national subject, Celaya does not understand the implications of Mexico's servant class system. Her cousin Antonieta who has been indoctrinated by colonialism's logic of racial difference and internalized the colonial script enforces the script:

—How can you let that Indian play with you? my cousin Antonieta Araceli complains. —If she comes near me, I'm leaving.
—Why?
—Because she's dirty. She doesn't even wear underwear. (*Caramelo* 36)

This image of the "dirty," primitive "Indian" who "doesn't even wear underwear" stems directly from a colonial discourse. Antonieta performs this colonial script through her regurgitation of the system of statements embedded within colonial discourse that establish European racial

superiority. This derogatory image of the Indian existed since the colonial encounter, however, lives on through her reproduction of the colonial script.

The concept of European racial superiority is completely lost on Celaya, who in fact idolizes rather than shuns Candelaria's indigenous features. Until she meets Candelaria, Celaya thinks "beautiful is Aunty Light-Skin...the women on the beauty contests we watch on television. Not this girl with too many teeth like white corn and black hair, black-black like rooster feathers that gleam green in the sun" (*Caramleo* 35). Celaya ascribes a value to Candelaria's caramel skin color that enables a paradigm shift regarding conventional notions of beauty. Although Celaya seems to undergo this paradigm shift and escape a fate of internalized racism, Celaya's description of Candelaria makes the Indian servant girl read like a mythical indigenous character with her "too many teeth like white corn" and "black-black rooster feathers" hair. Celaya's embrace of Candelaria and the romanticization of her indigenous features could be read as a problematic form of *indigenismo*. But we can also say that Celaya is responding to a coloniality of power that dictates the superiority of whiteness.

Antonieta's and Celaya's differing attitudes towards indigeneity are representative of the differing attitudes found within *mestizaje* in a Mexican versus a Chicana context. Rafael Pérez-Torres notes this difference succinctly asserting that "If, then, *mestizaje* in Mexico represents a flight from the Indian, we might think of Chicana *mestizaje* as a race towards the Indian" (16). This race towards the Indian stems from a need to create an identity that speaks to the trans-national Chicana subject's experience. In a Chicana context, *indigenismo* enables "an identity of resistance, one deployed in response to a profound sense of disempowerment and alienation" (*Mestizaje* 16). Pérez-Torres further notes that while this "particular articulation of identity is extremely problematic, it nevertheless exemplifies a type of tactical subjectivity that responds to

discrimination and political exclusion” (16). Although tempting as a counter discourse to the degradation of the Indian, this celebration of indigeneity however becomes problematic if left unexamined. Many scholars like Pérez-Torres have discussed the danger of romanticizing an indigenous past; this however is not the primary concern of this project.

Celaya’s admiration and affection for Candelaria stands in contrast to the Reyes’ rejection of her. This proves ironic and of particular interest on a narrative level given that Candelaria is technically Celaya’s half sister through her father who had an affair with washerwoman Amparo. Candelaria’s rejection by the Reyes family but yet complete embrace and fascination by Celaya parallels the tension found in Mexico’s attempt to utilize *mestizaje* as a tool to erase Mexico’s indigenous past in contrast to Chicana/o *mestizaje*’s romanticization of that past. In this way, the Reyes family itself functions as a microcosm of *mestizaje*’s rich but complicated history. The variety of skin tones that resulted from *mestizaje* is embodied by the literary representation of the variety skin tones present within the Reyes family:

The girl Candelaria has skin bright as a copper *veinte centavos* coin after you’ve sucked it. Not transparent as an ear like Aunty Light-Skin’s. Not shark-belly pale like Father and the Grandmother. Not the red river-clay color of Mother and her family. Not the coffee-with-too-much-milk color like me, nor the fried-*tortilla* color of the washerwoman Amparo, her mother. Not like anybody. Smooth as peanut butter, deep as burnt-milk candy. (*Caramelo* 34)

Although all mixed-race *mestiza* characters, Candelaria, Celaya, and the Awful grandmother all perform a different class station due to their racial proximity to indigenous features and darker skin tone. Unlike Mexican nationalist notions of *mestizaje*, Celaya’s trans-national subjectivity

allows her to celebrate indigeneity and decenter whiteness, pushing against the colonial script's established racial hierarchy.

The novel further attempts to push against a colonial script by suggesting that bodies function as narrative elements or sites of knowledge. Candelaria's undocumented recognition as a member of the institution of the Reyes family does not stop Celaya from discovering that Candelaria is her half sister. Celaya comes to discover the truth about Candelaria through body language—a familiar squinting of the eyes, the same squint that Celaya and her father make — leading Celaya to her discovery of this family secret. Unlike a traditional *bildungsroman*, the novel's key secret and climatic moment revolves not around its major characters but around the marginalized Indian character of Candelaria. The way in which the novel reveals this secret is key to the novel's understanding of knowledge production as something that is both located within and produced by the body. The novel's opening, for example, contains this hint: when describing a photo about a trip to Acapulco the narrator notes, “Here is Father squinting that same squint I always make when I'm photographed” (*Caramelo* 3). This attention to a simple gesture seems meaningless until the following passage some nineteen episodes later: “Candelaria sparkling like a shiny water bird. The sun so bright it makes her even darker. When she turns her head squinting that squint, it's then I know. Without knowing I know” (*Caramelo* 78). Celaya's discovery about Candelaria, or her “knowing without knowing” illustrates how the body functions as a narrative element, or, a site of knowledge. There is no archived evidence that Candelaria is part of the Reyes family. However, the lack of archived evidence does not negate the familial connection between Celaya, her father, and Candelaria. But the larger question remains: why is Candelaria erased from the family tree but kept within the family's presence?

The answer lies in the troubled history of *mestizaje*; although a seemingly marginal character, Candelaria is key.

Caramelo traces this history through the characters of the younger Antonieta Araceli Reyes and the older Reyes' Awful Grandmother. The Reyes²¹ family's attitude towards Candelaria illustrates the dual ideological and historical condition of *mestizaje* which scholar Pérez-Torres eloquently asserts:

On the one hand, racial mixture embodies a flight away from the 'primitive' Indian toward the 'civilized' European. The de-Indianizing body somatically manifests a social transformation that embraces hegemonic notions of progress and advancement.

On the other hand, the mestizo body indexes a physical connection to a repressive colonial history of enslavement, genocide, and exploitation. The mestizo body inherits an untenable dichotomy involving numerous forms of erasure and presence. (7)

Celaya's cousin for example Antonieta Araceli does not want to be associated with Candelaria asking Celaya, "How can you let that Indian play with you...she's dirty...she doesn't even wear underwear....Once I saw her squat down behind the laundry room and pee. Just like a dog" (*Caramelo* 36). The implication is that not wearing underwear is "primitive" and that wearing underwear is "civilized" and this is how Antonieta Araceli distances herself or "de-Indianizes" her body. The performance of progress or the civilized body here is the act of wearing underwear. It is revealed, during a game of "tag and squat," that Candelaria in fact *does* wear something underneath her dress: "Not underpants. Not exactly. Not little flowers and elastic, not

²¹ Might be worth noting the irony that "Reyes" means "Kings" in Spanish.

lace and smooth cotton, but a coarse pleat of cloth between her legs, homemade shorts wrinkled and dim as dish towels” (*Caramelo* 36). However, the fact of the matter remains that even though Candelaria, for all intents and purposes, is wearing a garment of clothing to signify “civility,” what Candelaria is wearing does “not exactly” fall in line with the hegemonic notions of femininity (read civility) as prescribed by the proper underpants with “little flowers and elastic” made of “lace and smooth cotton.” The garment that Candelaria wears still narrates her as primitive because it is “like” underpants, but “is” not underpants. This concept of is “like” but “not exactly” speaks to Homi Bhabha’s notion of mimicry where the colonized subject attempts to perform civility but fails because the inauthentic other will always almost be “the same, but not quite.”²²

Candelaria’s actions represent an “in between” civil and uncivilized body, yet she is framed as a completely uncivil “Indian” even after she has clearly demonstrated an instance of “almost” civil. Once the Reyes cousins discover that Candelaria is not the completely uncivilized animal, or “dog,” that Antonieta Araceli claimed her to be, they lose interest and ignore her. The game of “tag and squat” was only meant as an exploitive measure to witness the “difference” of the primitive otherness of Candelaria and her “not exactly” underpants. Colonization’s repressive history is reproduced through the children’s game and in doing so underscores the pervasiveness of this dichotomy of erasure and presence. This also functions as an instance of liveness, as performance scholar Jose Muñoz describes it –the insistence that the subordinate other perform otherness. According to Muñoz, the “burden of liveness” “affords the minoritarian subject an extremely circumscribed temporality. To be only in ‘the live’ means that one is denied history and futurity. If the minoritarian subject can only exist in the *moment*, she

²² For more on mimicry see Homi K. Bhabha’s “Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse” in *The Location of Culture* (1994).

or he does not have the privilege...of being a historical subject” (189). Candelaria is later erased from Celaya’s presence as a playmate entirely and Candelaria’s presence only remains in the form of exploitative invisible labor “folding sheets” or “hauling a tin basin of wet laundry to the rooftop clothesline” (*Caramelo* 36). Candelaria embodies a literary representation of the ideological dichotomy present in *mestizaje*.

The Awful Grandmother also illustrates *mestizaje*’s complex attitudes towards its indigenous past. On the one hand the grandmother shuns indigeneity by using “Indians” as an insult exclaiming that “No use taking anything of value to that town of Indians” (*Caramelo* 7). The implied truth in the grandmother’s statement is that Indians hold no value. This is explicitly seen in the family’s treatment of Candelaria, which is all the more ironic due to the fact that Candelaria is also technically the Awful Grandmother’s granddaughter. In this way, Candelaria, who signifies indigeneity, functions as a metaphor that ties the Reyes family to its indigenous past which the Reyes family attempts to deny by not acknowledging her legitimacy as a Reyes. This denial or refusal to claim indigeneity in turn functions as a larger metaphor of the complicated legacy of *mestizaje* within Latin America. Candelaria, although clearly present, is a reminder of that which must be erased. By focusing on Candelaria’s plight, the novel reveals the irony of this attempt of erasure, as her existence is what supports or enables the Reyes’ own sense of racial superiority—without a slave or servant there can be no master.

At the same time that indigeneity is shunned, it is also at times revered. For example, when Celaya refuses to eat her *mole*, the grandmother responds by retorting, “What do you mean? You like chocolate, don’t you? It’s practically all chocolate, with just a teeny bit of *chile*, a recipe as old as the Aztecs. Don’t pretend you’re not Mexican!” (*Caramelo* 55). Unlike the previous passage, here the Awful grandmother privileges the indigenous aspect of Mexican

identity. The Awful grandmother now implies that a Mexican identity is tied to an Aztec past in the form of the *mole* recipe. *Mole* functions as a cultural and national marker that is related to Mexico's indigenous past. According to legend,

in the late 17th century, the Dominican sisters of the Convent of Santa Rosa in the city of Puebla heard that the archbishop was to pay a visit. The sisters had to scramble to put a meal together and gathered the ingredients they had—dried chili peppers, chocolate, old bread, nuts and more — to make a sauce for wild turkey.
(Barclay, “Mexican Mole”)

The history of *mole*, as it turns out, is just as rich and ontologically and culturally mixed as the history of *mestizaje*. According to scholar Maricel Presilla, *mole* came from “a long line of parents, such as the pre-Columbian chile-thickened sauces...and chocolate drinks. Look even closer at the nuns' kitchen and you'll start to see the whole clan of ancestors—using nuts as a thickener, for example, which was a keynote of Spanish medieval cooking” (Presilla 15).

The recipe may or may not be as old as the grandmother claims but what is clear is that *mole* functions as a metaphor for *mestizaje* with its various root and routes of influence from the medieval Spanish cooking technic of using nuts as a method of thickening to the use of thickened chocolate often used in Mayan and Aztec rituals. The Awful grandmother's act of using “town of Indians” as an insult but yet praising *mole's* Aztec roots illustrates how *mestizaje* “evokes and erases an indigenous ancestry that is at once a point of pride and source of shame” (*Mestizaje* 8). The times at which indigenous ancestry becomes a source of pride are the moments in which indigeneity is spoken of or referred to in the past tense and erased from the current present. The presence of indigeneity in a modern world is when it becomes a source of shame or a threat to the mixed-race *mestizo/a* body that is attempting to mimic the colonial master, as the Awful

grandmother attempts to do here. The vexed relationship towards indigeneity is a symptom of a (Mexican) national movement where *mestizaje* was used as a tool of erasure and assimilation meant to render the Indian invisible and left in the past.

Performing *Mestizaje* through Genre

The novel's focus on *mestizaje* and cultural mixture, however, is seen not just on the level of content through the characters performance of race and the colonial script but on the level of genre as well. The novel mixes the European *bildungsroman* with the Latin American tradition of the *telenovela* and in doing so enacts as it illustrates the cultural process of *mestizaje*. All novels to some degree mix different discourses together. This is the definition of the novel according to Mikhail Bakhtin. For Bakhtin, "The stylistic uniqueness of the novel as a genre consists precisely in the combination of subordinated, yet still relatively autonomous, unities (even at times comprised of different languages) into the higher unity of the work as a whole" ("Discourse in the Novel" 340). This is not untrue of *Caramelo*; however, I contend that the particular culturally mixed narrative strategies and Latin American traditions that *Caramelo* employs disrupts the European *bildungsroman* form and in doing so produces a trans-cultured object. *Caramelo* stems from a colonially oppressive legacy that Bakhtin does not consider when he writes about the novel and its form. It is within this unique colonial legacy or context that I frame this discussion about the novel.

I argue that *Caramelo*'s hybrid form performs an act of resistance, or disidentification, that suggests the possibility of a critical *mestizaje*. According to Jose Muñoz, "disidentification is about managing and negotiating historical trauma and systemic violence" (161). He further goes on to explain how this negotiation occurs:

Disidentification is about recycling and rethinking encoded meaning. The process of disidentification scrambles and reconstructs the encoded message of a cultural text in a fashion that both exposes the encoded message's universalizing and exclusionary machinations and recircuits its workings to account for, include, and empower minority identities and identifications. Thus, disidentification is a step further than cracking open the code of the majority; it proceeds to use this code as raw material for representing a disempowered politics or positionality that has been rendered unthinkable by the dominant culture. (Muñoz 31)

I see this strategy implemented in *Caramelo*'s mixing of genres and its narratological strategies. *Caramelo* takes a raw dominant cultural Western form, *bildungsroman*, and through performative narratological strategies—such as calquing, footnotes, code-switching—transforms the Western form of the novel into a new cultural product that pushes against, rethinks, and makes visible the inner workings and exclusionary nature of the dominant culture. This is how *Caramelo* works with, on, and against dominant cultural form. I argue that this practice of disidentification of working on and against, is also seen in the tension between *Caramelo*'s representations—versions and different iterations of colonial scripts as performed or reproduced by the characters) versus what the *Caramelo* performs narratologically and on the level of genre form. Thus, even as *Caramelo* reproduces the colonial script, its aesthetic structure pushes against that same colonial script, and in doing so envisions the hope of a possible critical *mestizaje*.

Caramelo enacts *mestizaje* by mixing two culturally different forms: the *bildungsroman*, which follows a European literary tradition, and the *telenovela*, which stems from a Latin American tradition. Like a telenovela, the novel functions as a serialized melodrama with its eighty-six chapter episodes. The audience of the this genre already anticipates a happy ending,

but according to Jorge González, “[audiences] want to know *how* that ending will be produced and delayed—what forms of suspense will delay the resolution of the problem until the very end. That has been the structure of melodrama throughout Latin American cultural history” (69). Mara Salvucci has already noted the parallel plot structure between the telenovela and Cisneros’ novel, noting that, “the whole plot is ironically structured like a gigantic *telenovela* with its crises and sensational conflicts sustained for the longest possible time” (163). At the same time, the novel also functions as a coming of age novel that follows the transformation of a young Celaya from early childhood to young adulthood.

As a genre, the novel, specifically the *bildungsroman*, has traditionally functioned as a tool for nation-building. On the relationship between nation-building and the *bildungsroman*, Jed Esty writes:

romantic nationalism was influential in the German philosophical milieu of the early *bildungsroman*. Goethe, Schiller, Lessing, and Herder worked in an organic culture increasingly identified with the national state...The formalization of *bildung* as a narrative device turned on a specific, doubled notion of becoming: the aesthetic education of the bourgeois subject (Schiller) and the development of the people into the historically meaningful form of the nation (Herder). (“The Colonial Bildungsroman” 411)

Esty further notes in his most recent work that “the reciprocal allegories of nation-building and self-making that underwrite the nineteenth-century *bildungsroman*” led to the idea that “to become an adult was to complete the passage from innocence...into citizenship, or full integration into the national community” (Esty, *Unseasonable Youth* ix). In many ways *Caramelo* takes on a *bildungsroman* form as it follows the transformation of a young Chicana,

Celaya Reyes, from childhood into young adulthood. *Caramelo*, however, is not concerned with nation-building or the “aesthetic education of the bourgeois subject.” Instead of national history, *Caramelo* focuses on placing U.S. and Mexican history in a broader trans-national context from the perspective of a trans-national subject: the Chicana. In doing so the novel addresses the unique history of coloniality in the Americas by tracing the complicated history of *mestizaje* and the production of mixed race peoples, specifically *mestizas/os*, through the multi-generational Reyes family.

Further, *Caramelo*'s interactive narrative strategies disrupt the traditional *bildungsroman* form. The traditional *bildungsroman* form is a master narrative that focuses on a single protagonist, a single narrator, and a linear teleology.²³ In *Caramelo*, the meta-narration between Celaya and her grandmother's ghost, for example, compete for this lead character and narrator position halfway through the novel. There are multiple points in part two of the novel where the grandmother character interjects and accuses her granddaughter Celaya, the main narrator, of giving an inaccurate account of the story.

Having the first person narrator constantly interrupted by the grandmother offers a counterview to the novel's first person narration. For example, the grandmother accuses Celaya of being cruel for not allowing her a love scene with her husband Narciso. The conversation unfolds as follows with Celaya responding by saying:

Just trust me, will you? Let me go on with the story without your comments. Please!
Now, where was I?

You were telling *cochinadas*.

I was not being filthy. And to tell the truth, you're getting in the way of my story.

Your story? I thought you were telling *my* story?

Your story *is* my story. Now please be quiet, Grandmother, or I'll have to ask you to Leave.

Ask me to leave? Really, you make me laugh! And what kind of story will you have

²³ For more on the formal elements of the *bildungsroman* see Marianne Hirsch's "The Novel of Formation as Genre: Between Great Expectations and Lost Illusions," in *Genre* (fall 1979), p. 293-311.

without me? Answer me, eh?

Well, for one thing, a story with an ending.....” (*Caramelo* 172)

A fair amount of the second section of the novel is created through these visually interactive dialogues. The oscillation between the two voices represented by the interactive dialogue underscores the weaving process embedded within the cultural practice that is writing. The grandmother’s tangled life is tied to Celaya’s own identity. Like a *rebozo* and its many strands and interwoven layers, the grandmother’s layers create the pattern that will lead to Celaya’s own story. The grandmother’s story *is* also Celaya’s story. This connection emphasizes a collective identity that is not typical of the traditional *bildungsroman*. The meta-commentary provided by the now two narrators, the grandmother and Celaya, similarly emphasizes the idea of a collective voice that departs from the sense of individualism executed in the traditional *bildungsroman*. The multiple stories of the various Reyes’ family members illustrate and offer insight into the many ways colonialism’s legacy of violence, like *mestizaje*, has and continues to negatively affect marginalized peoples in the Americas.

Caramelo also departs from the traditional *bildungsroman* in that it does not follow a linear plot. Instead, the novel jumps from past to present in order to illustrate how colonial trauma is reproduced or reappears—as illustrated by the grandmother’s ghost. Temporality functions differently in *Caramelo* and does not affirm the linear teleology of the European *bildungsroman*. Rather than be presented as a master narrative, the novel instead is broken up into eighty-six chapters, or *telenovela* episodes, that trace the troubled history of coloniality and *mestizaje* through three generations of the Reyes family. In tracing the story of *mestizaje*, the novel inevitably also traces the story of Europe’s colonial legacy of violence in the Americas. The novel reads *mestizaje* both as a cultural practice and as the material reality of racial and cultural mixing between Europeans and indigenous peoples. The novel itself illustrates this act

of cultural mixing by employing the German *bildungsroman* ‘coming of age’ narrative and imbuing it with a Mexican *telenovela* like structure. This genre “mixture” underscores a fragmented narrative with incomplete characters that are produced through a series of snippet-like episodes with lyrical prose. In this way novel performs or enacts *mestizaje* as a way to blur genres and become a creative tool.

Performing *Mestizaje* through Narratology: Animative Maps, Animative Narratologies

Another way *Caramelo* performs *mestizaje* and pushes against colonial formations of knowledge is through its performative narratological strategies. These strategies—primarily the footnotes—challenge and remap colonial understandings of space production. Although not a footnote, the passage below emphasizes the correlation between embodied performance (in the form of cultural practices) and the production of space. For Celaya, space is constructed and remembered through the body:

The smell of diesel exhaust...the smell of hot corn tortillas along with the pat-pat of the women’s hands making them, the sting of roasting chiles in your throat and in your eyes. Sometimes a smell in the morning, very cool and clean that makes you sad. And a night smell when the stars open white and soft like fresh bolillo bread.

Every year I cross the border, it’s the same—my mind forgets. But my body always remembers. (Caramelo 18)

Every summer, the Reyes family makes a trans-national journey from Chicago to Mexico City to visit the Awful Grandmother. This constant movement between these two national spaces, Mexico and the U.S., shape and mold Celaya’s epistemological horizons. Space and language become topics of interest early on for the young protagonist and are further explored through the novel’s narrative strategies. Bodies, movement, re(memory), lived space, cultural practices, translation all play a key role in *Caramelo*’s philosophical intervention regarding the production

of space. As seen above, for the protagonist-narrator, Celaya, an inherent relationship exists between a lived space and place in the sense that “lived space enacts the emergence of *place* as a kind of space defined by conscious, social engagement,”²⁴ (M. López 4) or cultural repertoire. Lived space, embodied practices, and cultural repertoires work in tandem to produce or invoke a specific place. For Celaya, Mexico is called into being not by the crossing of a borderline on a map but instead is signaled by a particular set of lived, cultural, embodied practices:

Not like on the Triple A atlas from orange to pink, but at a stoplight in a rippled heat and a dizzy gasoline stink, the United States ends all at once...No more billboards announcing the next Stuckey’s candy store, no more truck-stop donuts or roadside picnics with bologna-and-cheese sandwiches and cold bottles of 7-Up. Now we’ll drink fruit-flavored sodas, tamarind, apple, pineapple; Pato Pascual with Donald Duck on the bottle, or Lulú, Betty Boop soda, or the one we hear on the radio, the happy song for Jarritos soda. (*Caramelo* 16-17)

The passage suggests a mapping of Mexico and the United States as a performance of a different set of cultural practices. Using a performance studies lens helps to reveal colonial forces at work behind the dominant culture’s control and separation of space that does not function “like on the Triple A atlas.” The U.S. border is not signaled by a military-state enforced apparatus but rather by the smell of “dizzy gasoline stink.” The U.S. and Mexico are described as a series of different visual markers, activities, and culturally consumable items. It is the interaction between the body and the activities the body engages with that produces, separates, and differentiates a particular space from another.

²⁴ Here Prof. Lopez draws from Henri Lefebvre’s *The Production of Space* (1991) and Edward Soja’s notion of spatial “trialectics” in his work *Thirdspace* (1996).

In her article “Remapping Genre through Performance” Diana Taylor explains how a performance studies lens “allows for alternative mappings” of history and geopolitical spaces by studying “daily life as a performance by focusing on a series of practices, conventions, presentations of self, and the aesthetics of everyday life” (1417). To ground her thesis, Taylor provides a critical reading of a 16th century indigenous and European map. Pitting them against each other, she notes the static, Euclidean narrative of the European map versus the ground, live movement—the animatives—of the indigenous maps. More specifically, Taylor defines animatives “(in relation to Austin’s performatives) as part movement as in animation, part identity, being, or soul as in *anima* or life—the term captures the fundamental movement that is life (breathe life into) of embodied practice” (“Remapping Genre Through Performance” 1417). She further notes that, “[like performatives] pertaining to the repertoire, animatives refer to actions taking place ‘on the ground’ as it were, in the messy and often less-structured interactions among individuals” (“Remapping Genre Through Performance” 1419). For Taylor, the indigenous map functions as a visual performative with animatives, such as the foot markings, which constantly cite movement in the form of “embodied, lived, contradictory, vexed behaviors, experiences, and relationships” (“Remapping Genre Through Performance” 1419). This citation of movement contests the Euclidian notion of fixed divisions of space between lines and points. Unlike the European maps, these animative maps move and cite different processes of meaning making, history, and space. Rather than map space as an abstraction, the indigenous map maps movement within spaces. Sandra Cisneros’ text *Caramelo* enacts this similar kind of live, alternative mapping through its narratological strategies.

My project extends Taylor’s notion of animative mapping to what I call animative narratology, as specifically seen in Cisneros’ text *Caramelo*. In *Caramelo*, Cisneros employs

several interactive narrative strategies that require a live interaction between the reader and the text. Among those strategies are the extensively long footnotes and the peculiar literal Spanish to English translations of Mexican cultural idioms. The constant movement and interaction between these footnotes and translations implicates the reader as active participant in the process of meaning production. I contend that like the footprints on the indigenous maps which signal and chart embodied, lived practiced spaces, *Caramelo*'s footnotes embody this indigenous sensibility by functioning as animatives that chart a different path or process of meaning-making, history, and space.

Caramelo does on some level follow the colonial form of the novel, the *buldingsroman* more specifically, but the structure, *telenovela* form, and content of *Carmelo* moves, pushes, and strains against the notion of a colonial master narrative by disrupting the traditional novel form. Structurally and visually speaking, this counter narrative found in the footnotes is literally written in the margins of the page, outside of its own master narrative. The novel's structure performs its own counter. Secondly, the footnotes mimic the foot markings on an indigenous map; the footnote functions as an animative foot, marking a memory of presence that records what it means to be walking, moving, living in these spaces rather than charting space as fixed points or national borders. Tracing the movements between these footnotes and literal Spanish to English idiomatic translations becomes an exercise or a performance of intelligibility. I read the footnotes and translations here as a performance of intelligibility. In breathing life and movement into her narratological strategies, *Caramelo* offers a literary representation of how embodying an indigenous sense of space can counter the colonial master narrative and uncover the lived experiences and histories that these master narratives, for centuries, have tried so hard but have failed to fully occlude.

Footnotes as Animative Footprints

The footnotes function on multiple levels by excluding and including a particular reader audience. Although they simultaneously hail both cultural insider and outsider readers alike, the footnotes address several topics ranging from but not limited to: the production of space by the imposition of dominant historical accounts, the homogenizing forces of nationhood, and Mexican patriarchy embedded and reiterated in cultural idioms. At the same time, the footnotes challenge Mexican cultural traditions while positing the fluidity of space and emphasizing the lived experience of space on the ground level. The novel itself in its final lines echoes the text's larger socio-political project to illustrate the fluidity of space stating, "And I don't know how it is with anyone else, but for me these things, that song, that time, that place, are all bound together in a country I am homesick for, that doesn't exist anymore. That never existed. A country I invented. Like all emigrants caught between here and there" (*Caramelo* 434). In concluding that Mexico was a country she invented and now no longer exists, the narrator highlights space as process, not product, informed by a series of unstable, unfixed elements such as time, history, landmarks, and cultural repertoire. The text reminds us that the trans-national subject reimagines the sites she lives again and again. This is an epistemological, not ontological, experience.

By claiming that Mexico never existed but yet is longed for, the narrator underscores the labor of both the body and mind that go into producing space. Homesickness causes the affect of melancholia which the body experiences. Place, then, is and is not rooted in the body because space affects the body as much as the body affects space. The narrator locates Mexico not on an Atlas map, but inside her, and only she had the power to conjure it. The final (textual) lines work with and against Western thought to contest Euclidean notions of space and push against the colonialist narrative of the discovery of the Americas. Mexico, like the Americas, was and

continues to be (re)invented. In 1958, Mexican historian, Edmundo O’Gorman, in fact argued this point: that America was invented, not discovered, in his book *La invención de América: El universalismo de la cultura de occidente*. A performance lens reveals how an invented place is directly tied to lived space, or embodied experiences within that space. For the narrator, embodied memory exists in the form of an old popular song about loss and love “Farolito.” The song speaks to her of a time, not necessarily historical, but a reference to young age, a time before she reached puberty and became aware of how she was being gendered, a time that no longer exists, and a particular establishment, Café la Blanca, that also no longer exists. The passage articulates a more complex and fluid relationship between space and place, “emphasizing that people live not within geometric planes but in a rich world of mutable meanings constructed from their daily, spatial engagements” (M. López 5).²⁵

This process of meaning making and history’s role in that process is made visible by the footnotes in the novel. To illustrate, the narrator revisits the story of Pancho Villa as the Invasion of Veracruz in the following footnote:

The invasion at Veracruz, the invasion sent to capture Villa. This was when the Mexicans began to name their dogs after Wilson.*

**In 1914 President Woodrow Wilson authorized the Marines to invade the port city of Tampico after American sailors entered a restricted dock and were arrested. At the time the U.S. was trying to bring about the destruction of General Huerta’s government by encouraging the selling of American arms to northern revolutionaries like Pancho Villa. (This is interesting, since Wilson had supported this same General Huerta when he ousted President Madero from office with a military coup. Madero and his vice president were arrested at the National Palace and under mysterious, or not-so-mysterious, circumstances were shot point-blank while being taken to the penitentiary for ‘safety.’ Newspapers reported he died during an attempt by his supporters to free him, but nobody believed this even then. Thanks to Woodrow Wilson’s and the world’s lack of protests, Huerta became president of Mexico. But I digress.)*

²⁵ A conclusion that Yi Fu Tuan comes to, according to Lopez, after building on Lefebvre’s notion of spatial trialectics.

Although Mexico released the detained U.S. sailors within the hour, on April 21 the U.S. Marines landed in ‘the halls of Moctezuma,’ and what resulted was a bloody battle with hundreds of civilian casualties. This “invasion” created strong anti-U.S. feelings....Riots in Mexico City occurred...and scared the hell out of American tourists.

Of course, later Pancho Villa would counter with an invasion of his own. In March 1916, Villa and his men crossed the U.S. border and attacked Columbus, New Mexico...President Wilson sent General John J. Pershing and six thousand American troops into Mexico to find Villa. But Villa and his men eluded them to the end. Wilson withdrew the forces in January of 1917, \$130 million later. (Caramelo 135-136)

The lengthy footnote, which is even abridged here, enacts the function of the footprints on an indigenous map. The indigenous map, Taylor notes, “unlike the familiar projection genre, is not about locating oneself physically but about performing a history; footprints indicate the movement” (“Remapping Genre through Performance” 1419). Similarly, the footnote here tracks the movements, or events, that led to Pancho Villa’s involvement with U.S. history. The footnote performs history on the ground level and uncovers the more complicated and unfixed historical account of Pancho Villa. Revealing the incriminating historical accounts that not only change the terms of history, meaning the way it has been narrated as U.S. equals hero/victims and Mexico equals villains/perpetrator, the footnote also highlights how intricately tied Mexican history is to U.S. history, and U.S. imperialist forces. Regardless of the superficial creation of national borders, these two histories affect and inform each other. Power, Mary Pat Brady writes, “adheres to those who produce narratives that sustain and naturalize places as opaque, natural, or fixed” (112). The footnotes reveal how “conceptualizing place as process draws attention to ongoing contests over the production of space and the struggle to control its representation” (Brady 112). Who controls a space’s representation depends on the mode of production of that space, which often time tends to be violent. The footnotes visually illustrate this struggle of control on the level of the main narrative it strains against. While an Atlas map

of Mexico and the U.S. suggests they exist as divided entities, the footnote reveals a co-dependent relationship. Space cannot be fractured the way Euclidean mapping techniques suggests that it can; the Euclidean form of mapping separates the body or nullifies the body's role from the production of space. The perspectival vision of European maps, Taylor argues, "places the now supposedly disembodied viewer, at the center, above, in control or possession, the master of vision rather than a subject among subjects. The eye replaces the foot as the defining body part" ("Remapping Genre through Performance" 1419). The footnote's presence challenges this master narrative. Although the footnote might not be read by the reader, its visual presence cannot be ignored, implicating the body in the text's production of meaning. I argue that the novel works like a map and the footnotes function as animative markers like the ones Taylor describes in her article.

Another footnote example that effectively conceptualizes place as process and the relationship between history, power, and space is the footnote that recounts the deaths of hundreds, if not thousands, of Mexican-Americans by Texas Rangers that went unnoticed during World War I. The footnote reads:

**In 1915, more than half of the Mexican-American population emigrated from the Valley of Texas into war-torn Mexico fleeing the Texas Rangers, rural police ordered to suppress an armed rebellion of Mexican-American protesting Anglo-American authority in South Texas. Supported by U.S. cavalry, [the Texas Rangers] bullying led to the death of hundreds, some say thousands, of Mexicans and Mexican-Americans, who were executed without trial. The end result was that Mexican-owned land was cleared, allowing development of Anglo newcomers. So often were Mexicans killed at the hands of the 'Rinches,' that the San Antonio Express-News said it 'has become so commonplace' that 'it created little or no interest.' Little or no interest unless you were Mexican. (Caramelo 142)*

Without Mexican bodies to sustain a cultural repertoire, as they were cleared from the landscape as if they were trees in a process of deforestation, South Texas seemingly had the potential to

become an Anglo-only place; however, the fact that South Texas to this day maintains a majority Mexican-ethnic population suggests otherwise. Why might this be? According to Taylor, “animatives and historical trajectories have been obscured by official histories and archives, but they remain evident in repertoires of embodied practices and behaviors that transmit social memory and identity from one generation or community to another” (“Remapping Genre through Performance,” 1425). Space—whether Mexican, American, or otherwise—cannot be owned. The tradition of territorial naming as possession and land ownership is a myth that European maps have perpetuated for centuries. Like space, history cannot be fractured/divided into a series of coherent linear narratives/lines. Space, Brady writes, “is not a transparent or irrelevant backdrop for history; the production of space is part of the production of history” (112). History and space then are not mutually exclusive, they inform each other. And like space, history cannot be rid of social memory or embodied practices and behaviors. In writing about the deaths, the footnote simultaneously preserves and evokes the living memory, or (re)memory, of the death of the Mexicans killed by the Texas Rangers.

On a lighter note, the footnotes also playfully address how embodied practices undergo mutable meanings, suggesting that these practices too are not static. The following footnote playfully cites Diaz del Castillo’s, one of Cortes’ foot soldiers, chronicles as a source for tracing the Mexican obsession with cleaning:

*Taquitos de *Pine-Sol*

.....*At the moment their food arrives, almost as if on cue, a man appears with the ubiquitous mop and pail[†] and starts to mop with Pine-Sol. The mop is a sweet stinky, as if it hasn’t dried properly, the Pine-Sol so strong it makes you blink. That smell, the sad smell of Saturday mornings, of hallways shared with other tenants, of nursing homes, of pets or people who have had accidents, of the poor who have nothing to clothe themselves with but pride. We may be poor, but you can bet we’re clean, the smell says. We may be poor. It is no disgrace to be pobre, but....it’s very inconvenient.*

^t *Even Bernal Diaz del Castillo, one of Hernan Cortes' foot soldiers, cites in his wonderfully detailed chronicles the Mexican obsession with cleaning. This is true even today. You have only to arrive in the Mexico City airport, step off the plane into the waiting area, and your first encounter with Mexican culture will be to dodge someone furiously mopping. Especially if it's the middle of the day. ¡CUIDADO! WATCH OUT!—warns a plastic yellow sign with a stick figure of a person falling on his back. (Caramelo 298)*

Not providing any further information on how this practice of obsessive cleaning began suggests that the voice in the footnote is less concerned with how it began or how it reads now, and is more concerned with how this embodied practice has survived in the form of Pine-Sol and a mop. There are also several class, and subsequently racial, implications for the smell of Pine-Sol. The American influence is also worth noting since Pine-Sol is an American product that was invented in 1929 by Harry A. Cole. The use of this American based product and the fact that its scent signals poverty, which is associated with being dirty, instead of cleanliness—which is often associated with higher social standing—highlights the disconnection between cleanliness and wealth. The footnotes teases the cultural stereotype of the “dirty Mexican” by referring to it as the “Mexican obsession with cleaning,” a “thick description,”²⁶ to borrow Clifford Geertz’s term, on Bernal Diaz del Castillo’s part. In invoking Diaz del Castillo as an outside observer of the Mejica people in the meta-footnote, the passage shows how culturally imposed readings, or thick descriptions, can transform an act, in this case the act of cleaning, and mutate it rapidly from one culture to another, from one half-century to the next.

The footnotes as a strategy function as theatrical asides that directly address the reader. They bring into focus the importance of performance, or “the everyday.” Mary Pat Brady notes that highlighting the importance of “the everyday” is characteristic of Cisneros’ work. For

²⁶ For more on Clifford Geertz’s “thick description” see “Thick Description: Toward an Interpretative Theory of Culture” in *The Interpretation of Cultures* (1973).

example, when talking about Cisneros' stories in *Woman Hollering Creek*, Brady notes how the stories play "with episodicity and digression to make observations on contemporary Chicana life and to bring "the everyday" into sharp focus" (113). These footnote digressions enact a similar function. Like the stories in *Woman Hollering Creek*, I argue that the footnotes in *Caramelo* "defy narrative postulates by relying on seemingly unsystematic asides and digressions, they also shrewdly exploit complex relationships between reader, narrative, voice, text, and spatial gestures" (Brady 113). This will become more apparent in the following footnotes where the implied author/narrator addresses the reader but for now, it is worth noting the footnote's visual presence and location on the page, outside of the main narrative at the bottom of the page. This spatial differentiation allows the footnotes to act, perform, and function in this animative way. The footnote above functions like a legend on a map, navigating the reader on the ground level, like a foot soldier. These asides or digressions create a more lively, interactive space with different terms between the reader, narrative, and text. *Caramelo* oscillates between making meanings accessible and inaccessible to different cultural readers and thus renders the relationship between the reader and the narrative unpredictable. This relationship between reader and text lends the text to a more dynamic, interactive, and performative reading. The footnotes open the possibility of prompting the reader into a more critical headspace, asking the reader to be more critical about history and the production of space. This is how the unique blending of the narrative strategy of the footnote used in a non-traditional context—in fiction—allows for the kind of interventions made possible by a critical *mestizaje*. By creating a counter-narrative through the footnotes, *Caramelo* pushes against the colonial script and its formations of knowledge regarding space.

Another master narrative that the footnotes contest is that of nationhood and its homogenizing forces. The following footnote traces the multi-cultural/national history of the *rebozo* and uses the *rebozo* as a metaphor for the *mestizo*:

The rebozo was born in Mexico, but like all mestizos, it came from everywhere. It evolved from the clothes Indian women used to carry their babies, borrowed its knotted fringe from Spanish shawls, and was influenced by the silk embroideries from the imperial court of China exported to Manila, the Acapulco, via the Spanish galleons. During the colonial period, mestizo women were prohibited by statutes dictated by the Spanish Crown to dress like Indians, and since they had no means to buy clothing like the Spaniards', they began to weave cloth on the indigenous looms creating a long and narrow shawl that slowly was shaped by foreign influences. The quintessential Mexican rebozo is the rebozo de bolita, whose spotted design imitates a snake-skin, an animal venerated by the Indians in pre-Colombian times. (Caramelo 96)

Tracing the origins of the *rebozo* and using it as metaphor highlights the colonial myth of racial purity. The footnote's animative quality breathes life into the *rebozo* and although the *rebozo*'s birthplace is recognized, the footnote also takes time to articulate the *rebozo*'s rich and complex role as an embodied practice. Writing itself is also a kind of weaving and embodied practice—a practice that is mirrored in the weaving of the *rebozo*. The *rebozo* functions not only as a metaphor for *mestizaje* but for the cultural practice of writing as well.

The footnote also takes great care to emphasize the many cultural influences of the *rebozo* noting that while the *rebozo* “was born in Mexico,” it does not belong to Mexico. Here the footnote privileges collaboration and the circulation of cultural influence over ownership and national identity. The footnote also specifically celebrates the indigenous practice of weaving which reinforces the text's larger project to expose the myths of authenticity and ownership and illustrate the survival of embodied beliefs and practices against these myths. The *rebozo*, although it has undergone several foreign influences, remains intact as a shawl and so do some of the Aztec's embodied practices. The pattern of the *rebozo de bolita* with its spotted design, for

example, embodies the religious belief of the sacredness of snakes. In Aztec mythology, serpents represented and emphasized a cyclical sense of time rather than a linear one (Halpern 15). This back and forth movement against linearity is illustrated in the weaving metaphor, which ultimately also echoes the text's central projects to enact or animate an indigenous sensibility through its narrative strategies.

Implicating the Reader

Prior to mid-20th century literary criticism, the author had been socially constructed, according to Jennifer Summit, to “hold a privileged status in literary studies; more than simply a work’s writer, the author carries an ideological function as the figure around whom ideas about literary tradition, authority, and creativity are organized” (91). The traditional relationship of authority between the author and the reader echoes the binaric dominant/subordinate power dynamic *Caramelo* tries to destabilize via its narrative strategies. Here, I am less concerned with the ontological status of the author than with *Caramelo*'s formal choices of incorporating footnotes and literal translations into its narrative strategies. I reference the modern notions of the single author myth not so much for the purpose of arguing that it is an inaccurate portrayal of the author, as many other literary critics such as Roland Barthes²⁷ and Michel Foucault²⁸ have already argued. Rather, I bring them into the discussion in order to demonstrate how the text utilizes authorship as a political allegory for individual agency. Maria Lugones argues in her book *Pilgrimages/Peregrinajes: Theorizing Coalition Against Multiple Oppressions* (2003), that authorship is a social construction, or a societal consensus. The “bird eye” view of the author or 1st person narration, which *Caramelo* slips in and out of between 1st and 3rd omniscient, speaks to

²⁷ See Roland Barthes' “The Death of the Author” in *Image, Text, Music* (1977).

²⁸ See Michel Foucault. “What Is an Author?” (1987).

the “bird eye” view of the European map. In implicating the reader and directly addressing her, the footnote works against this “bird eye” view and immerses itself on the ground level. This enacts the practice of the indigenous map working from the ground up, producing meaning not in a vacuum but in relation to other elements and subjects. The following footnote illustrates this fundamental process:

**In the times of love and peace, an invasion of illegal aliens descended into Oaxaca, land of the siete moles, and ascended into the clouds of Huautla de Jimenez because of the magic mushrooms Ndjixito, ‘that which makes one become,’ which the locals had used in their religious ceremonies and healing rituals for thousands of years and which took one to trippier trips, it was said, than LSD. Hippies and vagabond anthropologists, artists, students...the Beatles, the Rolling Stones, Bob Dylan...anyone who was somebody and a whole string of nobodies came to see Maria Sabina and gain a shortcut to nirvana...because the confidentiality of the spiritual mushrooms had been betrayed to strangers... Maria’s powers lessened until finally she was acabada, finished, word, done, so that at the end of her remarkable life, Maria Sabina was quoted as saying—Was it all right that I gave away the mushrooms? Tu, what do you say? Tu, reader, she is asking you. (Caramelo 195)*

This direct and informal “Tu,” or you, and its following question mark actively hails all reader audiences into a dialogue with the text. By asking for the reader’s opinion on a subject matter or narrative that the narrator ostensibly has complete knowledge of, the narrator acknowledges the reader’s presence and role in this process of meaning production. It also suggests that no knowledge is absolute or complete but instead is communal, transmittable, and mutable. Colonial formations of knowledge *can* be contested or questioned.

The footnotes also call the reader to question Mexican patriarchal cultural norms. In the following footnote, Cisneros directly addresses the reader’s attention to the misogyny embedded in the Spanish language. As in the Maria Sabina footnote, the text addresses the reader and asks her to ponder the misogynistic attitudes embedded in the Spanish language:

**Worse, the insults aimed at the mother,—Tu mamá.
While something charming and wonderful is--!Qué padre!
What does this say about the Mexican?
I asked you first’ (Caramelo 307, emphasis mine)*

Culture is not static and is mediated by language, which is also not static. Besides gendering, language also keeps gender discrimination in place. Gender, Judith Butler argues in “Critically Queer,” is performative because there is no “I” that comes before the historicity of the uttering force and therefore gender performatives are tied to the normative and signals its failures. Performativity for scholar Jill Dolan, however, reveals the way that social identities are not essential or natural, and yet give marginalized subjects a small gap in which to talk about their condition.²⁹ In order for this to be true however, a discourse or language that does not perpetuate those utterances has to be invented. The invention of this discourse or language is precisely what *Caramelo*’s literal translations aim to do by performing a process of defamiliarization. The novel’s critique of Mexican customs, Bill Gonzales writes, “is ingeniously accomplished by means of the translations into English that Celaya performs of her family’s conversations and everyday speech” (4). These acts of disidentification, be it through calquing or code-switching, defamiliarize both the Spanish and English languages through this code-switching and literal translation process and in doing so offer a critique of the cultural norms, such as gender oppression in the case of the Spanish language, established by the Spanish and English languages. For example, the snippet below reveals what Celaya believes to be the incivility of the English language:

Que strange was English. Rude and to the point. No one preceded a request with a—Will you not be so kind as to do me this favor...as one ought. They just asked! Nor did they add—If God wills it to their plans, as if they were in

²⁹ See Jill Dolan’s *Geographies of Learning* (2001).

audacious control of their own destiny. It was a barbarous language! (*Caramelo* 208)

In this instance, English is used to render American culture as strange or “other” and cast Americans as a barbarous people while illustrating how Celaya animates English to accomplish her own purposes. Intention is part of the process of translation as performance of intelligibility. The animative movement embedded in the literal translations creates gaps that ruptures the ostensibly fixed relationship between signifier and signified.

Translation as a Performance of Intelligibility

Performance scholar Richard Schechner defines “is” performance generally as “recognizably marked behaviors, no matter how varied and different genre to genre, culture to culture” in contrast to “as” performance which “is a way of studying the world,” a methodology (“What Is Performance?”). I employ Schechner’s notion of “as performance” as an effective method for studying translation in *Caramelo*. Translation as a Performance of intelligibility promotes an intentional performance of code recognition for a particular reader. This reader is the non-Spanish speaking reader and the Spanish speaking within a Mexican cultural framework. There exists a certain agreement between the translation and certain requirements between the text and reader, like being in versed in both languages of English and Spanish or having a working knowledge of both cultural nuances. In these instances, the majority (the English-only speaker) becomes the marginalized subject.

The power structure becomes inverted using the colonizer’s language because English is used as an unintelligible code. According to Bill Gonzales, agency lies in a displacement of intention through translation by “animating the word with other purposes [which] remains a

compelling primal scene for the disenfranchised and marginalized, especially because of these twin issues of power and self-empowerment that overdetermine such a writer's relation to a dominant code (10). In this way the novel performs an act of disidentification through the act of literal Spanish to English translations, or calquing. The process of disidentification "scrambles and reconstructs the encoded message of a cultural text in a fashion that both exposes the encoded message's universalizing and exclusionary machinations and recircuits its workings to account for, include, and empower minority identities and identifications" (Muñoz 31).

Caramelo works on and against the dominant language of English and filters it through a minority identity (a Chicana) in order to produce a new alternative code. Disidentification "proceeds to use this code as raw material for representing a disempowered politics or positionality that has been rendered unthinkable by the dominant culture (Muñoz 31).

Although primarily written in English, the text excludes English-only speaking readers who are confronted with cultural nuances from the non-majority culture from the process of meaning making and are denied access to an intelligible meaning. These readers are in a sense, thrust— a combination of the words thrown and frustrated, and made to feel strange in their own linguistic space. The hierarchy in these instances is ruptured because the person who typically understands the English language does not in this moment. The performance itself is the phrase or is that which prompts the exclusion and inclusion. For example, translation as a performance of intelligibility performs that act of inclusion and exclusion in the following footnote:

**Mexican pillows embroidered with Mexican piropos, sugary as any chuchuluco. Siempre Te Amare, I'll Always Love You. Que Bonito Amor, What a Pretty Love. Suspiro Por Ti, I Sigh For You. Mi Vida Eres Tu, My Life Is You." Or the ever popular Mi Vida, My Life." (Caramelo 45)*

In these literal translations, the text invites both her Spanish speaking and her non-Spanish or non-Mexican culturally attuned audiences alike, to examine Mexican traditions and stereotypes from a critical perspective. The text simultaneously plays on these stereotypes. The tone in the phrase “or the ever popular, *Mi Vida, My Life*” teases the hyperbolic love expressions, or *piropos*, commonly employed in Mexican culture, especially on cards or embroidered on objects such as stuffed animals or pillows. The tongue and cheek tone of the comment is directed at two kinds of readers—the native Spanish speaker and the primarily English speaker, or cultural outsider. In addressing the native Spanish speaker, the footnote functions as an inside joke. An inside joke requires excluding someone. Beginning with two Spanish words, which are not translated, *piropos* and *chuchulucos*, the footnote talks past the primary English speaker to appeal to the native Spanish speaker who is familiar with the Mexican custom of using *piropos* and eating *chuchulucos*.

There is a certain shared meaning between the culturally attuned Spanish speaker and the text. The tongue-in-cheek tone in the comment, “or the ever popular, *Mi Vida My Life*” affirms a cultural familiarity with the over-exaggerated idiomatic expressions. Although the expressions are cliché, they would be rendered unintelligible to the target audience. In this way, the text uses translations to exclude/include certain audiences while still hailing all reader audiences.

However, at the same time, in not translating the two Spanish words for the primary English speaking, non-Mexican reader, the footnote only introduces the reader to this particular Mexican custom, allowing only limited access to the footnote’s double function or full meaning. The tone highlights this double function, or contradictory element of this playful footnoting technique, which also has a dual function, creating a contract with the reader body to move back and forth between the main narrative and sub-narrative in the margins.

Though it seems as if the text is simply translating from one language to another, its explicit attention to literal translations of Spanish idioms in English reveals its project extends beyond a simple model of translation. The translations defamiliarize the English language by making it strange and rendering it unintelligible unless a reader is aware of both cultural Mexican idioms and has familiarity with the English and Spanish language. These moments in the text, Bill Johnson Gonzales argues, “fracture the language (to use Walter Benjamin’s term), renewing and extending its expressive capacities...[the translations] force monolingual English readers to become aware of the self-differentiation of English as it is rearticulated from new points of view” and in effect, different epistemologies of experience (5). The following footnote, which offers a cultural explanation of a language translation in a meta-footnote, illustrates why translating for intelligibility proves more productive than translating for cultural equivalences. When the character-narrator, Celaya, is born, she recounts her father saying “—*Otra vieja! Ahora, como la voy a cuidar?** Mother had goofed” (*Caramelo* 231). At the end of the chapter the footnote translates,

“**Tr. Another dame! Now how am I going to take care of this one?*^t

^t*Tr. of Tr. How am I going to protect her from men like me?”* (*Caramelo* 232)

Translating for cultural equivalences fails because not all Spanish and English speakers familiar with both Mexican and American culture will agree with the translation or with the translation of the translation. The productive aspect or agency of literal translation lies in that fact that it momentarily destabilizes the relationship of signifier/signified. This is one of the few instances in where the creative potential agency behind the translation fails because it does not seek to create, the example seeks to define for accuracy or reveal the patriarchal status quo. However, the next example acoustically highlights the contrast between the two methods of translation by

unconventionally trying to translate or “thin describe” mundane sounds.

As soon as we cross the bridge everything switches to another language. *Toc*, says the light switch in this country, at home it says *click*. *Honk*, say the cars at home, here they say *tan-tan-tan*. The *scrip-scrrape-scrip* of high heels across *salttillo* floor tiles. (*Caramelo* 17)

By incorporating Spanish words and translating them into literal linguistic equivalences instead of cultural equivalences, the translations perform the function of defamiliarization effectively. Through defamiliarization, the passage addresses the arbitrary differences between the Mexican and American linguistic signifier/signified relationship by translating objects into sound. Like the relationship between performativity and gender—where there is little room for change, according to Butler, since performativity cites what is already naturalized—there is little room to change the language and ideologies that hail subjects. But there is room, and those slippages are revealed through processes like the literal translations by creatively destabilizing the relationship between signifier/signified. Language invokes space as much as it utters gender, race, class, etc, into being. In this way, language marks bodies as much as it produces space since it is those marked bodies that later enact the cultural practices—such a language—that ultimately produce that space.

Conclusion

Like Mena’s stories, Sandra Cisneros’ *Caramelo*, also provides readers with a vision of Mexican life but asks not just “what is Mexico?” but “where is Mexico?” In order to answer these questions, the novel offers a trans-American vision and performative approach to the production of space, language, and history. The *mestizx* characters illustrate how bodies function

as a site of knowledge in the text by underscoring a performative approach to the production of space through those bodies enactment of various cultural practices. *Mestizaje* plays a central role in *Caramelo* both on the level of form and content. The tension between *Caramelo*'s representation of its characters performing race and *mestizaje*'s colonial legacy versus the novel's enactment of *mestizaje* through its mixing of various narratological and literary genres reveals the possible transformative potential of *mestizaje* and its liberating potential that history will not allow.

Although possibly read too much for their possibilities and not their limits, *Caramelo*'s narrative strategies illustrate the fluidity of space and of the signifier/signified relationship. In closing, the text lends itself to a performance reading quite well as the annotated structure of the text enacts the novel's multi-layered meaning and plot structure. The structure of the text, with its footnotes and translations, accomplish several projects within the novel: 1) they act like a marked path that guides the reader in and out of the Mexican world as the text challenges dominant Mexican-American historical narratives and cultural stereotypes of the Mexican and Mexican-American experience; 2) they actively hail the reader to partake in Cisneros's questioning of Mexican patriarchal norms and meaning production; 3) they create a subjective Mexican-American historical counter-narrative that reveal colonialism's legacy of historical violence. Ultimately, *Caramelo* proves to be a productive case study for the intellectual pushing of performance and literary theory. After all, if literature, or the act of reading is a cultural practice and part of a cultural repertoire, does it not make sense to study literature as performance? Reader, I'm asking you.

CHAPTER 3: *Mestizaje* and Performance in Leslie Marmon Silko's *Almanac of the Dead: A Novel*

Introduction

Like Maria Mena's stories and Sandra Cisneros' *Caramelo*, Leslie Marmon Silko's *Almanac of the Dead*³⁰ (1991) also employs a colonial script as a way to address U.S. and European history's legacy of colonial violence. The novel in particular critiques the U.S.'s genocide of Native Americans and the Indian Reservation system that followed. Like the previous two texts in this study, the novel also looks at how a Mexican nationalist vision of *mestizaje* continues to reinforce racist attitudes and the violent treatment of indigenous populations. Rather than idealize *mestizaje* and the *mestiza/o* body, however, *Almanac* underscores the dangers of using *mestizaje* in a national context which functions as a tool of assimilation into whiteness and tool of erasure that seeks to erase a Native presence. In a national context, *mestizaje* itself becomes the colonial script that reveals the discourse of national identity (which functions as a present-day iteration of colonial discourse). The novel underscores how the concept of racial and national categories such as Indian, Mexican, *mestizo*, black and concepts like "mixed-race" can only exist because of colonialism and therefore reinforces rather than undermines whiteness.

In addition, *Almanac* offers an even more critically aware and further developed vision of the trans-american approach presented in *Caramelo* and Mena's stories by making colonial violence visible on a hemispheric scale. This violence appears in the form of a colonialist binary logic which Katherine Sugg notes "opposes European civilization to the savagery and backwardness of conquered peoples. *Almanac* rewrites the hemisphere's colonial script in terms

³⁰ Hereafter, cited parenthetically as *Almanac*.

of Silko's revised, transamerican conceptualization of the Americas" (92). The novel's opening page literally presents the reader with a hand drawn glyphic map of the American hemisphere. The hemispheric map offers a counter-historical narrative that underscores Europe's history of genocide and brutal treatment of indigenous peoples across the Americas. Rather than emphasize borders, the map emphasizes movement and circulation across the American hemisphere. This emphasis on movement and circulation creates what I call a circum-American framework—a term I define as a framework that highlights the many roots and routes by which cultural exchange and cultural practices circulate across and create the heterogeneous social and cultural fabric of the Americas.

This circum-American framework allows *Almanac* to place colonial legacies, like *mestizaje*, on a hemispheric scale that transcends national, racial, and ethnic boundaries. A circum-American framework helps the novel to further develop the notion of a possible trans-Latinx hemispheric latinidad but one that includes and highlights an indigenous presence not outlined in the previous two texts. In this way, the novel's representation of *mestizaje* attempts to go beyond the limits of race and other national categories of identity. Instead, *Almanac* argues for a coalition or more inclusive vision of *mestizaje* based on relational histories of colonial oppression as opposed to racial or ethnic categories, be they mixed race or not. This inclusive vision is made possible through the concept of racial performance which suggests that race is not an accurate cultural determinate.

On the level of textual representation, the characters illustrate this concept of racial performativity through their performance of the colonial script, such as the enactment of *mestizaje*'s legacy of colonial and racial violence through white supremacy (which at times the characters either reinscribe or push against). At the same time that *Almanac* offers

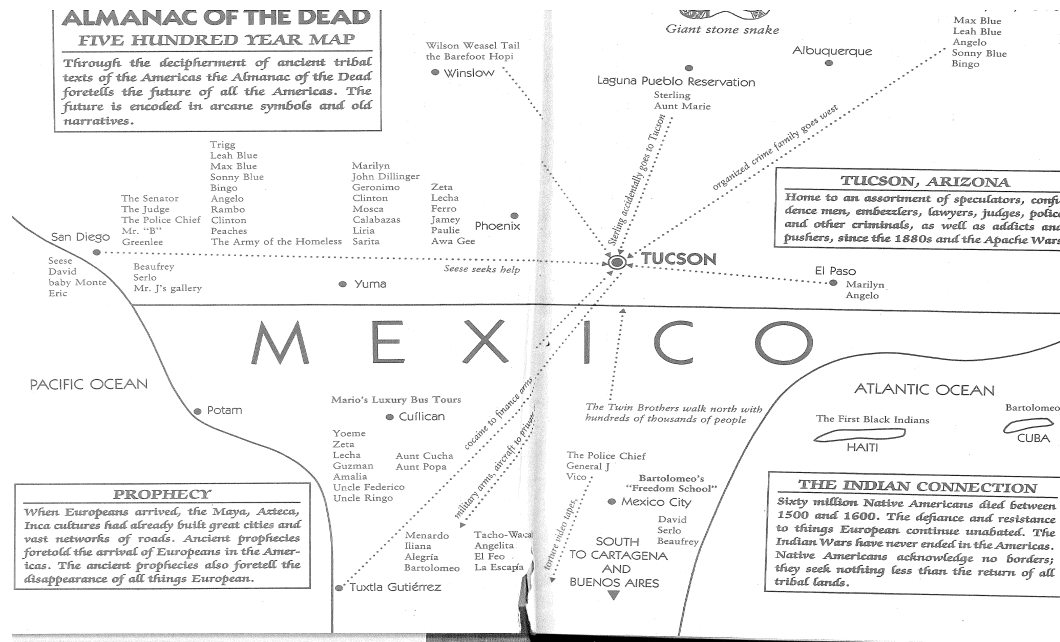
representations of *mestizaje* as a performative colonial script, the novel also performs *mestizaje* on the level of form. The novel employs a mix of various Western and indigenous cultural and aesthetic genres—such as the novel, the epic form, a hand-drawn indigenous inspired map, the oral tradition, a Mayan almanac—and in doing so enacts what could potentially become a critical kind of *mestizaje* on the level of form. Throughout this chapter, I will be moving between these two ways of thinking about performance: of text as representation (in that the text offers representations of the characters performing colonial scripts) and of text as performance (on the level of aesthetic form, such as the map, and structure through the narrative form of orature). Colonial formations of knowledge are challenged through Silko’s novel which not only provides a counter-historical map that traces the history of colonial violence and *mestizaje* in the Americas but also uses the syncretic, performative narrative form of orature, a written form of story-telling, to invoke Mesoamerican and Native American histories and epistemologies. When read in this way, the novel functions as a kind of syncretic literary cultural performance that operates as an act of cultural survival by “transmitting social knowledge, memory, and a sense of identity.”³¹ As a method of cultural and literary analysis, performance studies offers critical insight into how one might read *Almanac of the Dead*. When read through this performance studies lens, *Almanac* also reveals how *mestizaje* might be useful in a Native American context.

Storytelling through Maps: Remapping Genre

One of the ways *Almanac* challenges the traditional genre form of the novel is through its incorporation of a hand drawn indigenous-inspired map. I say indigenous-inspired because the

³¹ Performances, according to Diana Taylor, “operate as vital acts of transfer, transmitting social knowledge, memory, and a sense of identity through reiterated actions,” *Archive and the Repertoire*, p. 25. I read Silko’s act of storytelling as a reiterated act.

map and its markings have less to do with the concept of land ownership and more to do with movement and story-telling:



Prior to the chapter breakdown, or even the acknowledgments page, the novel offers this hand-drawn map of the American Hemisphere with special attention to spaces such as the Southwestern part of post-1848 U.S., Mexico, Haiti and Cuba with arrows pointing south to Cartagena and Buenos Aires. The non-cartographical characteristics of this map, i.e. the boxes with texts, the codices, the list of names, the undefined borders, the trails and arrows, etc. illustrate that the map is less concerned with drawing a document that stresses colonial divisions of space than with mapping a story that traces movement across the Americas. In this way, the map challenges colonial formations of knowledge.

Colonization works and thrives on (racial) difference and according to Mishua Goeman eventually “resulted in a sorting of space based on ideological premises of hierarchies and binaries” (10). This ideological premises of hierarchies and binaries resulted in the colonial, later nation-state, practice of identity categories, such as black, white, brown, Mexican, Indian,

Anglo, man, woman. This idea of identity categories based on racial, national, and ethnic affiliations, is not a value-free concept and the value of any given category, be it nationality, race, or ethnicity, shifts depending on which nation-state hails the subject into being. These binaries and hierarchies can only exist, however, if the subject agrees to their reiteration by performing ritualized acts or behaviors that uphold white supremacy. Similarly, Goeman notes the performative aspect of borders: “Borders are performative acts of language that rely on constative practices such as repetition to secure their dominance” (114). The nation-states’ division of space is therefore arbitrary and can only be maintained or enforced through repressive state apparatuses like military institutions.

The purpose of the map in the opening to *Almanac* is not to divide space; it is to mark the constant movement in the form of human migration and cultural exchange throughout the American Hemisphere and that movement is documented in this map’s circum-American approach. The novel’s constant shifts in not just character plotlines but in setting also underscore this theme of continual movement, cultural exchange, and colonial violence. *Almanac of the Dead*’s strategy of movement calls attention to circulations of cultural exchange that are and have been constant throughout the Americas. The map rearticulates space in such a way that it suggests that space, as Taylor puts it, “is all about ‘practiced place’”³² (“From American to Hemispheric Studies” 1419) and that practice implies/entails movement. The movement of ideas is what incites the cultural revolution to end white materialism and the mass migration north. The prophecy, as stated in the map, to end “all things European,” can only be accomplished through a great migration:

The snakes say this: From out of the south the people are coming, like a great

³² Taylor basis this idea off of Michael Certeau’s notion of ‘practiced place’ in *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984).

river flowing restless with the spirits of the dead who have been reborn again and again all over Africa and the Americas, reborn each generation more fierce and more numerous. Millions will move instinctively; unarmed and unguarded, they begin walking steadily north. (*Almanac* 735)

The news of revolution and the prophecy had to travel somehow and the way in which *Almanac* accomplishes this aesthetically is through its multiple but interwoven plotlines that occur throughout the hemisphere, therefore not just highlighting movement but revealing the limits of the borders of nation-states, especially the U.S. Cultural memory, performance, and substitution sustain and maintain the narratives and cultural movements of Mesoamerican and African practices that helped shaped the invention of the Americas as much as European ones.

A hemispheric and performance studies approach highlights this circum-American framework which works to counter the fixed scenarios of discovery and conquest that produced the colonial script. These scripts created colonial and racial binaries that placed a colonial gaze on non-European subjects—be they white or not since the Spanish created the category of the criollo who is the product of both Spanish parents but born in the Americas as a sub-category to the European born subject. In this case *only* markers of performance (such as attire, language, class, and other aspects of cultural repertoire) would be able to visibly mark the difference between white American and white European, suggesting that the notion of racial hierarchy is as much about racial features as it is about performing a cultural repertoire that aligns with a given racial category. The performance aspect of the scenario is what makes it repeatable and marks it as legitimate. The language of colonial discourses produces the colonial script and its various scenarios, which Taylor explains, “like narrative, grab the body and insert it into a frame. The body in the scenario, however, has space to maneuver because it is not scripted.” Many of the mixed-race characters in the novel act as if they are unscripted and while informed by colonial discourse also push against it. *Almanac of the Dead* takes to task these scenarios, colonial scripts

and contests as much as it re-inscribes elements of these colonial scripts such as national discourses in the form of ambivalent racialized language when referring to mixed-raced *mestizo* bodies.

Performing *Mestizaje* on the Level of Form: Orature and Mayan Almanacs

In a 1993 interview with Laura Coltelli, Leslie Marmon Silko reflects on how for her “*Almanac [of the Dead]* is not just an almanac, but...a sort of Voodoo spell, too” (120). In framing her novel as a “sort of Voodoo spell,” Silko reinterprets her novel as a powerful performative act. More than just a text, Silko claims she wrote *Almanac* as an “act of healing and consolation” (Petrolle 142) hoping it would “energize indigenous peoples to organize and sustain their own revolutionary political campaigns to hold or reclaim land” (Petrolle 133). When read as a performance, Silko’s novel transforms into an act of contestation that rejects the U.S. nation-state’s version of history. The novel literally goes to great [page] lengths to illustrate the role performance, language, and texts play in the production of space, the transfer of cultural memory, and the construction of racial, ethnic, and national identities, such as “Indian,” “Mexican,” “Mexican Indian,” and “*mestiza/o*.” The novel uses language to construct a text-based narrative with mixed-race characters that engage with indigenous histories and syncretic cultural practices in order to demonstrate how the body functions as a site of knowledge by transferring cultural memory.

As a product of cultural mixture itself, *Almanac of the Dead*—with its mixture of Western genres (the novel, the epic) and non-Western form (oral tradition, a Mayan almanac, Mesoamerican/ Pueblo mythology)—functions as a textual performance that mirrors as much as it tells the story of *mestizaje*: the rich but vexed process of racial and cultural mixture in the

Americas. The novel, which takes the form of a Mayan almanac, further lends itself to a performative reading of cultural mixture through its employment of orature, a syncretic textual form of story-telling that emphasizes the interdependent relationship between textuality and orality. Rather than recreate this dichotomy between Western textuality and non-Western orality, the novel incorporates both methods of knowledge production in order to create what I call a performative text. The incorporation of orality on a formal level is what transforms the novel into a performative text. The novel's hybrid form functions as a meta-narrative of *mestizaje*.

The primary plots of *Almanac of the Dead*, for example, draw heavily on Laguna Pueblo oral histories which Silko feels read similarly to the Mayan stories: "Twins play a really big role in the Maya stories just as the twin brothers in the Laguna Pueblo stories...In fact, I did not really spend much time with the *Popul Vuh* because so many stories are almost identical to the Laguna stories" (Coltelli 126). The novel highlights these similarities by following the story of two sets of indigenous twins—Yaqui twins Lecha and Zeta, and Mayan twins Tacho and El Feo—both on an epic journey to reclaim all tribal lands from the European Destroyers. The Mayan twins, Tacho and Feo, are based on the *Popol Vuh*'s Hero Twins Hunahpú and Xbalanqué. In *Almanac*, the Mayan twins are tasked with mobilizing all indigenous and disenfranchised peoples of the Americas into one revolutionary force. The Anglo-Yaqui twins, Lecha and Zeta, are responsible for the survival and transcription of the almanac's ancient notebooks—sacred notebooks that predicted the arrival of the Europeans in the Americas and foretell of the eventual "disappearance of all things European" (*Almanac* map). *Almanac* "confirms the prediction of indigenous resurgence and repossession of the Americas by telling a twofold story: the collapse of white and Hispanic society into sexual perversion and economic

parasitism, and the convergence of a variety of Indian, black, and mestizo revolutionary forces” (Donnelly 247). The mixed-race Yaqui twins must translate, transcribe, and reconstruct the sacred notebooks before the collective memory of the indigenous tribes of the Americas and the prophecy to end all things European is forgotten and lost forever.

The novel’s incorporation of multiple Western and non-Western cultural influences in many ways illustrates the syncretic process of cultural production present in *mestizaje*. The novel’s eclectic combination of genres, including “police drama with revolutionary saga with mythic quest with melodrama with magical realism with historical epic with ancient Mayan almanac” (Petrolle 145), makes placing the novel within traditional literary genre categories a difficult task. In fact, the UCLA library catalog has *Almanac of the Dead* listed under the “ESFFG Enigma, Science Fiction, Fantasy, and Gaming Collection.” This category placement speaks to the novel’s unique form and provides evidence that Silko’s meshing of genres created an experimental literary form—a performative meta-text that structurally rejects a traditional Western, in this case literary, categorization of a realist novel. Sugg further notes how *Almanac*’s “complex plot does not elucidate a story of personal growth or pathos...individual characters are frequently repugnant, and the lack of characters to identify with is one of the elements that makes this novel so difficult for readers accustomed to realist conventions that help propel them” (69). The novel narrates as much as it itself performs an act of cultural resistance.

Although primarily a novel, *Almanac* incorporates items such as a glyphic map and fragments from the novel’s self-referred almanac of the dead. The title, *Almanac of the Dead*, “refers to the pre-Columbian manuscript circulating within the novel...Silko conceived of the almanac /*Almanac* as a fictional companion to the three actual Mayan codices or almanacs that survived the post-Conquest destruction of Mayan written culture” (Donnelly 246-7). Silko

imagines her novel to be a fourth almanac, which “by contrast, has been circulating among native peoples from the 16th century to the present day, preserved and commented upon by many generations of the dead” (Donnelly 247). The novel fuses historical documentation with fiction in order to create an epic meta-narrative that reimages the possible triumphant future of the indigenous peoples of the Americas.

In structure, the text mimics that of the Mayan almanacs in the sense that the novel contains a glyphic map, a record, in the form of fragments, of the history of colonial violence in the Americas, and a prophecy that foretells the end of “all things European.” The novel is divided into six parts titled: “The United States of America,” “Mexico,” “Africa,” “The Americas,” “The Fifth World,” and “One World, Many Tribes.” These six parts are divided into various notebooks such as “Book One,” “Book Two,” and so on. Within these “Books” are a series of narrative fragments or vignettes that make up the novel’s six distinct but intertwined story lines. In total, there are two hundred eleven narrative fragments, each of which consistently shifts in time, storyline, character focalization, or other literary devices that break with Western linear teleology in order to place emphasis on the non-Western spiral, or cyclical, sense of time. The novel spans five hundred years but opens in epic form *media res*-style with Lecha’s prophetic return to Tucson to transcribe the ancient almanac’s notebooks with Zeta.

The survival and passing on of the almanac is what ties the novel’s five hundred year non-linear timeline. During this five hundred year period, the almanac undergoes many changes before it ever even reaches Yoeme or Lecha. Lecha reveals that:

For hundreds of years, guardians of the almanac notebooks had made clumsy attempts to repair torn pages...only fragments of the original pages remained, carefully placed between blank pages; those of ancient paper had yellowed, but

the red and black painted glyphs had still been clear...the pages of ancient paper had been found between the pages of horse-gut parchment carried by the fugitive Indian slaves who had fled north to escape European slavery. (*Almanac* 569)

The surviving text functions as a living document that “bears the mark of an infinite process of rewriting and translating. Like an intertextual web, the almanac is composed of different languages, glyphs, blank pages and ancient stories from different cultures, making it impossible to trace it back to its origins” (Ziarkowska 49). The blank pages protect the original fragments first physically from further damage but also by offering a blank space for Lecha to transcribe the fragment so that its meaning is not lost. The almanac’s survival depends on its adaptability which explains why Yoeme, rather than “break into a fury” at Lecha’s first entry in English, “rocked herself from side to side, sighing with pleasure. Yoeme claimed this was the sign the keepers of the notebooks had always prayed for” (*Almanac* 130). In addition to indigenous glyphs and dialects, broken Spanish, and Latin, the almanac now contains pages in English. The translation of the almanac and its use of various language systems, according to Martha Cutter, illustrates “a focus on language not as ‘pure’ but as a contact zone between peoples and cultures” (112). The multi-lingual aspect of the almanac serves as further evidence against the notion of “pure” subjectivities, racial identities, or cultures, which are ideas that stem from a colonial script.

In a way, the almanac functions as a meta version of *mestizaje* as the syncretic product of both pre-Colombian and post-conquest methods of cultural production. The pages of the original notebooks, for example, were made out of “thin sheets of membrane, perhaps primitive parchment the Europeans taught the native Americans to make” (*Almanac* 246). Parchment making, literacy, and textuality are all European traditions that inform the production of the

almanac. This original version of the almanac, however, no longer exists. In order to survive the journey north, several of the pages were eaten by the almanac's first guardians. But the pages were only eaten on the condition that its contents were memorized and passed on to the others: "Every time a page had been memorized, they could eat it." (*Almanac* 249), the eldest guardian had proclaimed, "I remember what was on the page we ate....Now I am going to tell you three. So if something happens to me, the three of you will know how part of the story goes." (*Almanac* 249) In this instance, we witness the literal (textual) embodiment and passing on of cultural memory by memorizing, ingesting and then reciting the content of the pages. The relationship between text and body is fused and in this way illustrates how the bodies can function as narrative elements. The body becomes the vessel by what the story travels and is preserved through both space and time.

This scene illustrates how the body functions as a performance and site of knowledge through cultural memory and orality. Furthermore, Peter Powers notes that in passing the stories down, "the almanac figures a movement from oral to written to oral again...the almanac has been retranscribed and is being reread and rememorized by the characters Lecha and Zeta...the almanac represents the possibility of hybrid forms being incorporated into ritual memory" (85). Thus, rather than set up textuality and orality as binaries, the novel uses the hybrid, or rather syncretic, form of orature to produce a new kind of performative text that highlights the interdependent relationship between textuality, orality, and the production of cultural memory. Silko uses a "new syncretic tongue in which the oral and the written, the spirit and the flesh cannot be unraveled" (Brewster 234). In this way, the novel's form emphasizes the role of the body and performance in the process of knowledge production.

Other examples of syncretism in the novel include its varying indigenous influences. Several scholars, like Daria Donnelly, have noticed the various Native American and Mesoamerican sources that Silko's almanac draws from including: "the Toltec stories of Quetzalcoatl's return...the Aztec story of Aztlán...Most importantly, Silko's codex draws on the post-Conquest *Books of Chilam Balam*, which are named for the Mayan priest...who became famous for having predicted the Spanish invasion" (247). The novel, in fact, makes a direct reference to the Mayan *Books of Chilam Balam* in an almanac fragment titled "The Ritual of the Four World Quarters" which also happens to be the title to the opening chapter of one of the *Chilam Balam* books. The fragment visually and textually appears in *Almanac* as follows:

Ritual of the Four World Quarters

Jesus, Mary, St. Joseph! Holy Trinity!
 All the saints, and all the souls of the living and the dead!
 The Heart of Heaven who is called Huracan is the long flash of
 lightnings
 The green flash of lightning
 And the deafening crash of lightning.
 Grandmother of the Dawn
 Grandmother of the Day!
 They looked like humans
 They talked like humans
 They populated the earth
 They existed and multiplied
 They had daughters and they had sons.
 These wooden figures had no minds or souls.
 They did not remember their Creator.
 They walked on all fours aimlessly.
 They no longer remembered the Heart of Heaven and so
 They fell from grace.
 They were merely the first attempt at human beings.
 At first they spoke but their faces were blank.
 Their hands and feet had no strength
 They had no blood, no substance no moisture, no flesh.
 Their cheeks were dry, their hands and feet dry and their skin was
 yellow.
 Burning pine-pitch rains from the sky.
 Death Macaw gouges their eyes
 Death Jaguar devours their flesh
 Death Crocodile breaks and mangles their nerves and bones and
 crumbles them to dust. (*Almanac* 479-480)

The *Chilam Balam* books contain an extensive account of indigenous histories including the beginnings of the cosmos, creation stories of the gods and human beings, and the construction of the Mayan calendar. Worth noting, however, is the fact that these texts “reached their present form during a period in which many indigenous elites had recently converted to Christianity” and thus had “obvious Christian references” and “traditions of knowledge from both sides of the Atlantic” (Knowlton 3). The incorporation of Christian influences in the opening lines to *Almanac*’s ancient fragment above, “Jesus, Mary, St. Joseph! Holy Trinity! All the saints, and all the souls of the living and the dead!” similarly mirrors the syncretic process and thus highlights the impact *mestizaje* had on the production of these post-conquest indigenous texts. According to anthropologist Patricia McNany, this ritual of commemoration of naming ancestors, like “The Ritual of the Four-World Quarters” still exists to this day, however, “the ritual is often subsumed within the christianized structure of All Saints’ Day” (30). To some degree, syncretism enables a method of cultural survival. Thus, on the level of form, the concept of cultural and racial mixture, or *mestizaje*, can function as space for creativity and tool for pushing against the colonial script.

Representations of Mixed-Race Bodies as Sites of Knowledge

In the novel, the twins, Lecha and Zeta function as vessels of cultural memory. Their transcription of the almanacs illustrates how it is through the *mestiza* body where Mesoamerican cultural memory resides and is embodied, negotiated, and passed on. In fact, the opening scene to *Almanac* has to do with the transcription of the notebooks, a task passed on from Yoeme to Lecha and Zeta; the completion of this task is one of the novel’s driving plot lines. The opening

scene shows Zeta, in an almost sacrificial-like ritual with its constant mention of blood, preparing a dye to dye her clothes dark brown, the only color she currently wears:

The old woman stands at the stove stirring the simmering brown liquid with great concentration. Occasionally Zeta smiles as she stares into the blue enamel pot...Zeta lifts the edge of a sleeve to test the saturation of the dye. “The color of dried blood. Old blood,” Lecha says... Lecha abandoned Ferro, her son, in Zeta’s kitchen when he was a week old. “The old blood, old dried-up blood,” Ferro says, looking at Lecha, “the old, and the new blood. (*Almanac* 19)

The metaphors in this opening scene introduce some of the novel’s woven themes such as bloodlines, racial mixture, and cultural memory. It’s clear that the brewing metaphor draws attention to the idea of racial mixture, but for what purposes exactly? The alliteration of the “s”—“stove,” “stirring,” “simmering,” “smiles,” “she,” “stares,” “sleeve,” “saturation,” and the rhythmic pattern it creates, also suggests that this is not the first time that Zeta has engaged in this “dyeing” ritual. Cultural memory is enacted or remembered in this ritual as suggested by Lecha’s reference to the brown liquid as “the color of dried blood. Old blood” and by Ferro’s added comment of “the old, and the new blood.” This is the story of old and the new Americas. The mixture of the old and the new blood is the story of the new Americas. Zeta’s brewing and Lecha’s and Ferro’s commentary allude to a story of racial mixture, though it is not made clear which story until the mention of Mexican tiles.

The dark brown dye stains the white grout between the Mexican tiles patterned with blue, parrot-beaked birds trailing serpent tails of yellow flowers. Lecha’s mysterious notebooks have drawings of parrot-beaked snakes and jaguar-headed

men. Leave it to Zeta to have the kitchen counters redone with these Mexican tiles only two weeks before Lecha returned to transcribe the notebooks. (*Almanac* 21)

The significance of using phrases such as “old blood” and “new blood” has to do with the re-mapping and re-telling of the story of the new Americas. In this re-telling, Europe is not the old world and nor are Europeans the new blood. The “blue, parrot-beaked bird trailing serpent tails of yellow flowers” and the “drawings of parrot-beaked snakes and jaguar-headed men” are references to the old Americas and its Mesoamerican culture. These cultural references emphasize that the people of the old world Americas were not a people without a history or culture. What made the Americas new was not the fact that Europeans stumbled upon it. What made the Americas new were the syncretic cultural repertoires and practices that emerged from the racial mixing between old American and European blood to create a new performativity in the Americas.

The dark brown, “color of old-dried up” dye staining the white grout speaks to this larger metaphor of racial mixture while the Mexican tiles, which Zeta installed only two weeks prior to Lecha’s return to transcribe the notebooks, function as a marker of cultural memory. Zeta’s brewing of the dark brown dye, her installation of the Mexican tiles, and Lecha’s engagement in the act of transcribing the notebooks are all acts or enactments of cultural memory. The idea that *mestizaje* is more than just a matter of racial mixture but is as much a matter of cultural repertoire and performativity is established early on in the novel in its opening scene. And the inability for language, specifically racial and colonial discourses, to capture the nuances and complexities of the *mestiza/o* is illustrated throughout the novel’s own slippages regarding the ambivalence surrounding the terms “mestizo,” “Mexican,” and “Indian.” Cultural memory and its performative aspects (cultural rituals, cultural gestures, cultural objects) reveal the faulty and

unstable logic behind the language of colonial scripts and the potential for the mestizos to fashion and perform an identity or role outside of the binaries of colonial discourse.

One of the ways in which performativity of a certain subject position or identity is gauged or marked in the novel is by the mixed race character's ability to enact cultural memory or a character's knowledge of cultural memory in the form of prophecy, oral tradition, rituals, or surrogated objects. For example, referring to the Southwest part of the U.S. as Aztlán is an example or expression of cultural memory as it remembers or evokes the prophecy of the Aztecs return to their homeland of Aztlán. Cultural memory is, in fact, the catalyst for the novel's revolution against U.S. Anglo imperialism and white supremacy, ideas which are grounded in white materialism. The novel's mixed race characters occupy a unique position within the white/“other” binary in that they are both simultaneously “colonizer” and “colonized.”

Performing the Colonial Script: Representations of *Mestizaje*'s Legacy of Colonial Violence

As a discursive cultural practice that is informed by both Indigenous and African cultural knowledge as well as by violent European colonial discourse, *mestizaje* can work as a discourse of either dominance or resistance. This section will examine the ways Silko's novel offers representations of *mestizaje* by evoking, contesting, and reinscribing elements of what I refer to as a “colonial script.”³³ Colonial discourse assumes a core essence or nature to racial and ethnic identities. Reading colonial discourse through a performance studies lens reveals that there is a level of performativity, or process of socialization, that regulates the production of racial and ethnic identities. These unstable identity categories are sustained through iterative and citational

³³ As discussed in the introduction, I extend Judith Butler's notion of “gender performativity” to the idea of colonial scripts as a way to make visible the performative elements present in binaries of whiteness/“other.”

practices.³⁴ White skin and European features, for example, are normalized to be cited or read as markers of civility. Colonial scripts are rooted in a colonial binary discourse that reads white bodies as subjects and non-white as “other.” These roles of white subject and non-white “other” are reinforced through reiterated behaviors or what Richard Schechner refers to as “twice-behaved behavior”³⁵ that assume that white subjects behave in a civilized manner and non-white “others” do not. The novel effectively highlights the ambiguity surrounding social categories, especially when it comes to representations of ethnic, racial, and national categories of “Mexican Indian,” “Indian,” and *mestizo*.

This section will also examine the ambiguity surrounding these social categories and trace the colonial, now nation-state, practice of identitarian categories—such as race, ethnicity, and nationality—to the performativity of colonial scripts. The script’s present-day iteration can be seen in the categories of racial difference that national discourse has produced in the case of the U.S. or in the attempt to assimilate its national subjects into whiteness in the case of Mexican nationalist discourse. The novel traces the “othering” and racial stratification of non-white subjects back to the moment of the colonial encounter. On the origins of racialization, Diana Taylor notes that “From the moment Columbus purported to ‘observe’ and ‘describe’ native bodies, racialized identities sprang from discursive and performance systems of presentation and representation” (*Archive and Repertoire* 93). Taylor reads this moment of colonial encounter as a scenario of conquest where “the frame is basically fixed, and as such, repeatable and transferable...[scenarios] are passed on and remain remarkably coherent paradigms of seemingly unchanging attitudes and values” (*Archive and Repertoire* 31). Scenarios of conquest are reenacted and restaged multiple times throughout the novel’s five hundred year timeline and in

³⁴ Repeatable patterns of behavior.

³⁵ See *Between Theater and Anthropology* (1985).

doing so highlights how the colonial scripts behind the scenario create a fixed formulaic structure that renders it seamless and repeatable.

For example, Yoeme's forced marriage to the "old white man" de Guzman in the early 1900s recalls the tactics used by colonial forces to secure land rights. Although he is described as "old white man," de Guzman is not Anglo, he is Mexican, but his behavioral patterns align with that of a Spanish conquistador. In fact, old white man de Guzman's character is an allusion to the Spanish conquistador, Nuño Beltrán de Guzman, notoriously known for his savage and cruel treatment of Indians in New Spain. The character de Guzman enjoys killing Indians and denying his Indian slaves water which he provides in ample amounts to his mules and cottonwood saplings. Guzman's denial of resources to his Indian slaves creates a hierarchy that places animals and plants above Indians in order to underscore their inferiority. This pattern of rendering Indians as inferior is reiterated across multiple generations throughout the novel.

On a representational level, Silko's novel restages a colonial script when its characters reinscribe the language of colonial discourse which relegates Indians as essentially savage, white bodies as essentially civilized, and *mestizos* as "half-breeds." Even though there are several *mestizo/o* characters in *Almanac of the Dead*, the word itself appears only fifteen times in the novel's seven hundred and sixty-three pages. Due to constant language slippages, the novel itself seems unsure as to what a mestizo is exactly. The word mestizo and its definition are first introduced by the novel's only full-blooded indigenous character, Yoeme, who also happens to be the grandmother of the two main protagonists, Lecha and Zeta. When indirectly accused of killing her white son-in-law with witchcraft, Yoeme's response suggests a resentment stemming from internalized racism: "What did these stupid mestizos—half no-brain white, half worst kind of Indian—what did these last remnants of wiped-out tribes littering the earth, what did they

know?” (121). Yoeme’s distrust of the mestizo and inability to identify mestizo is illustrated through her invocation of racial purity noting that mestizo’s are “half no-brain white, half worst kind of Indian.” Her resentment is directed far past the villagers of Canenea. Her resentment stems from years of colonial violence. This is especially true of the line “these last remnants of wiped-out tribes littering the earth.” Terms like “half-breed” serve as a constant reminder that *mestizaje* is still part of the colonial script that upholds white supremacy.

In her response, Yoeme evokes the same racial discourse of *sangre limpia*, or racial purity, present in colonial scripts. Originally born out of a colonial discourse, the term “mestizo” has its roots in the colonial practice of fictional taxonomy that included other racial categories such as mulatto, *lobo*, etc. In colonial scripts, racial mixtures are usually labeled in terms of a hybrid animal breed, like *mulatto* (from the word mule) or *lobo* (from the word wolf) as illustrated in the Spanish *casta* paintings. Yoeme’s use of the word “litter” confirms this animal association. Yoeme cannot disidentify like Zeta and Lecha can and eventually dies. The irony of the only, allegedly, full-blooded Indian, in a novel of seventy plus characters, rehearsing parts of a colonial script is not lost on *Almanac*’s readers. Furthermore, the fact remains that her beloved grandchildren, Zeta and Lecha, the only two family members who do not shun Yoeme for her *india* native ways, are themselves mestizas. What then can Yoeme’s racist rendition of mestizos but her love for her two *mestiza* grandchildren really tell us about *mestizaje*? On the surface it suggests that *mestizaje* is complicated, however, it also seems to point to the fact that there is a clear performative element to *mestizaje* that Yoeme fails to understand. It is through her *mestiza* grandchildren in which Yoeme’s indigenous traditions, like the transcription of the almanac’s notebooks, pass on and survive. It is through the *mestiza* body where cultural memory is embodied, negotiated, and passed on.

Zeta and Lecha, however, are in no way cast as heroes or heroines in the novel even though they are the only two from their large and extended family who did not shun their matriarch, Yoeme, for her Yaqui indigenous ways and who have accepted the task of transcribing the almanac's notebooks. Unlike their fellow *mestiza/o* family members, they choose to embrace their indigeneity and reject a narrative of progress, discovery and manifest destiny. As a mixed race body, the *mestiza* has much potential in choosing a set of cultural practices, meaning multiple. The mestizo is not bound to one cultural repertoire and cannot be understood in essentialist or purely social constructivist terms. Lecha, for example, does exploit her indigenous knowledge by playing a mystical psychic on a T.V. talk show host that helps reunite missing family members, yet the future of Yoeme's people and white materialism rests partly in Lecha's own hands. As a Mexican Indian of mixed racial heritage (her father was a white man and her mother was Mexican Indian and mestizo), so really a *mestiza* even though the novel never codes her that way, Lecha's performativity has not been scripted. Regarding the concept of *mestizaje*, Rafael Pérez-Torres notes,

As a descriptive term and a cultural practice, [mestizaje] helps embody the idea of multiple subjectivities. Moreover, mestizaje signals the embodiedness of history.

As such, it opens a world of possibilities in terms of forging new relational identities. At the same time, it signals how the body is tied to a colonial history of racial hierarchy who power relations already constrain and guide the body. (3)

As both a syncretic cultural practice and mixed racial category, *mestizaje* in the novel at times challenges discourses of essentialism, constructivism, and colonial binaries and racial discourse that includes the language of racial purity. The language of racial purity, and the racial hierarchy that it creates, stems from a larger colonial discourse that follows a rehearse-able colonial script.

This colonial script was documented at the scenario of discovery, a scenario that has been staged and restaged multiple times throughout the Americas, although I prefer to refer to it as the scenario of conquest. According to Diana Taylor, the scenario of discovery “leaves out complexity, reduces conflict to its stock elements, and encourages fantasies of participation” (*Archive and Repertoire* 54). Mixed race bodies such as mestizos complicate these scenarios. For a mestizo/o body, it is not clear what role, colonizer or colonized, she/he might play in the restaging of scenarios of conquest—a point that Silko’s novel effectively underscores with its seventy plus characters.

The text’s ambiguous categorization of the twins as either Indian, or Mexican Indian, but never solely as Mexican, reveals a tension between performativity of cultural repertoires and categories of race, nationality, and ethnicity—categories that all stem from colonial scripts. In the following passage, Zeta goes from being Mexican, or Indian, to Mexican Indian: “Zeta was the only Mexican or Indian who would deal with Greenlee...His pale blue eyes had always had the shine of a true believer in the white race...[He] did not take Zeta seriously. She was a woman, a Mexican Indian at that” (*Almanac* 179). What qualifies Zeta as Mexican, Indian, or Mexican Indian, and what is the difference, and perhaps more importantly, what does the racial ambiguity or conflation between the terms reveal? Textually it reveals a slippage in the text but more importantly, the ambiguity surrounding these racial categories speaks to Homi Bhabha’s point that the discourse of colonialism, in this case racial hierarchy and categories, are filled with unstable signifiers and are under constant threat of collapse. In other words, racial identities such as white, Indian, and especially *mestizo*, are not fixed. According to John McLeod, “the economy of representation that colonial discourses seek to install—chiefly that binary distinction between colonial self and civility/colonized’s otherness and barbarism—never entirely happens”

(15). Framing the white Greenlee as something to be dealt with suggests that whiteness exists in oppositional distinction to Mexican, Indian, Mexican Indian.

Sterling's character, a Laguna Pueblo Indian who was banished from his tribal lands and now working for Zeta's drug smuggling business, further examines this question of what it means to be Mexican or Indian:

The short time he had been in Tucson, Sterling had begun to realize that people he had been used to calling "Mexicans" were really remnants of different kinds of Indians. But what had remained of what was Indian was in appearance only—the skin and the hair and the eyes. The cheekbones and nose like eagles and hawks.

They had lost contact with their tribes and their ancestors' worlds. (*Almanac* 88)

In this passage, Sterling draws attention to the ambiguity surrounding the terms "Mexican" and "Indian." As a category, Mexican can function as an ethnic or national category, but it is not a racial category, according to the US census, even though Mexicans embody an always already liminal subject position as a mixed race body known as the mestizo which is a mix of European, usually Spanish, and Indian descent. "Indian," however, denotes a racial category and an ethnicity, but is not a nationality. So to suggest that the terms can be conflated, as in Mexican is just a diluted variation of a kind of Indian causes pause regarding the way in which those two subject positions and identities, Mexican and Indian, are conceptualized. Sterling debunks an essentialist notion regarding identity when he makes the observation that the mere fact that Mexicans "appeared" Indian did not necessarily make Mexicans Indian.

Instead, Sterling highlights the fact that racial category does not dictate cultural repertoire asserting that while Mexicans looked Indian in appearance they did not act in a way that suggested ties to an indigenous cultural repertoire. Sterling's point regarding Mexicans and

Indians, however, is contested by the novel itself with the novel's protagonists, Lecha and Zeta, who were in fact born in Mexico, appear indigenous, practice an indigenous cultural repertoire but instead of trying to hide the fact that they are Indian, they are concerned with concealing their Mexican nationality which cannot be marked by solely visual means. But is that what it means to be Mexican? To have indigenous features such as "cheekbones and nose like eagles and hawks" but have no connection, meaning cultural memory, to their ancestral Indian past? What about a Mexican who does have ancestral ties, is s/he just Indian or do s/he become a Mexican Indian?

Sterling defines Mexicans as "remnants of different kinds of Indians" which also suggests that Mexicans are not full-blooded Indians, or full-blooded anything for that matter, but instead a diluted mixture that results in the visual representation of an Indian but lacks the performativity of an Indian, which in Sterling's mind means having lost "contact with [their Indian] tribes and [their Indian] ancestors' worlds." Interestingly, Sterling seems to place the blame of cultural loss or cultural erasure on Mexicans as if they had any agency or as if they willingly lost contact with their tribes and their ancestors' worlds as opposed to the Europeans destruction of their tribes and their ancestors' worlds. One thing, however, is certain: One cannot simply look Indian, one must act Indian. But what does it mean to look and act Mexican? And how is that different from being mestizo? One difference the novel seems to make when distinguishing between a character who the novel casts as Indian or mestizo is that the mestizo enacts racial shame as indicated in the following passage:

The village of sorcerers had got rich making up and selling various odd sorts of alleged "tribal healing magics" and assorted elixirs, teas, balms, waters, crystals, and capsules to the city people, mostly whites. But more and more mestizos too

had secretly begun to consult the Indians. They all wanted to keep the consultations secret to avoid embarrassment or possible excommunication from the Church. (*Almanac* 478)

Racial shame and internalized racism, which function as erasers of cultural memory, often keep some of the *mestizo* characters, like Menardo, from performing cultural memory and instead try to erase it. While on the other hand, you have Mexican characters like Zeta and Lecha who embrace performing cultural memory. The ambiguity surrounding these terms points to the limits of languages of racial discourse to capture the complexity of an identity that embodies multiple subject positions. The ambiguity of colonial discourse reveals that race is not an accurate cultural or national determinate, the body cannot be reduced to such simple identity categories.

Oftentimes, the text will set up Mexican/*mestizo* and Indian as oppositional categories. When asked to shoot his employer, Menardo, for the purposes of testing his bullet-proof vest, “Tacho had not wanted to fire because he knew white men did not like to see an Indian shoot a mestizo unless *they* had given the order; otherwise Indians might get ideas and move from mestizos to shoot at whites” (*Almanac* 510). Tacho is one of the twin brothers who is meant to portray one of the twins from the *Popol Vuh*. Tacho is a Mexican Indian, like Zeta and Lecha, however they are never described as *mestizo*. In fact, the *only* character out of the seventy plus characters that is formally labeled a *mestizo* is Menardo: “Now Menardo had his mansion of white marble and his pool of water lily blossoms; on the ironed linens of his king-size bed, Menardo, the mestizo, savored the luscious fruit of a skinny white woman” (*Almanac* 472). The white marble mansion is a metaphorical reference as is the “luscious fruit of a skinny white woman” for Menardo’s obsession with and desire for whiteness which stems from a severe case

of internalized racism. Menardo's self-consciousness regarding his flat Indian nose permeates his narrative. His internalized racism ultimately results in his own death. He is plagued with an obsession to erase any signs, physical or cultural, of his Indian heritage believing that "without the family nose, [He] might have passed for one of *sangre limpia*" (*Almanac* 259). Passing for "clean blood," which is what *sangre limpia* translates to, implies that his blood is tarnished due to his racial configuration.

This language and the notion of "pure blood" and blood quantum finds its origin in colonial discourse and is being reinscribed by way of a master colonial script found in the Spanish *casta* paintings. *Sangre limpia* in this context frames *mestizo* mixed-raced bodies as the product of a dirty crime that they must somehow hide by erasing the visual, meaning racial signs of unclean blood. It is this colonial ideology that leads Menardo to believe that erasure of his indigenous past is what will allow him to succeed which to him means having a "gorgeous, shapely blonde at his side" (*Almanac* 260). Whiteness in this instance becomes a commodity with racial privilege that Menardo seeks and ultimately attains. The "skinny white woman" referred to in the passage above becomes Menardo's second wife Alegría Martínez-Soto, who happens to be Venezuelan, but is marked as white. But why causes the narrator to mark Alegría as white exactly? One suggestion could be Alegría's sense of racial superiority towards Menardo but especially towards Menardo's chauffeur, Tacho: "Alegría thought the Indian chauffeur exemplified the worst characteristics possessed by the Indian. He had listened to every word Menardo or Alegría said...He not only made eye contact with his social superiors, this Indian alternately had mocking, then knowing, eyes" (*Almanac* 278). Tacho's ability to read people is read by Alegría as a breach in social decorum. But are these acts or behaviors a breach in social decorum a breach due to racial or class differences? Alegría seems to assume that his

inappropriate behavior of listening in on her and Menardo's conversations and directly making eye contact with them is specifically due to Tacho's Indian-ness. Alegria's use of the word "characteristics" suggests that the Indian inherently or essentially "possesses" these characteristics. Her insistence on Tacho's racial inferiority, however, reveals that it is Tacho's knowledge regarding her and his ways of knowing that she finds threatening but scripts them instead as Indian characteristics as a way to establish hierarchy and difference as the unknowable unconquerable "other." Interestingly, blood quantum is never brought into question for characters such as Tacho, Zeta, Lecha, Calabazas, and El Feo who are categorized as "Indian" or "Mexican Indian," but never as solely Mexican, in the novel.

The issue of *sangre limpia* is not used as a value marker for Tacho the way it is for Menardo. The matter of *sangre limpia* and "passing" for Menardo comes up again and again as even the most minor characters, such as the former Mexican ambassador's wife, exclaims to her husband, "Don't you wonder how all the money goes to that monkey-face who passes himself off as a white man?" (*Almanac* 274). In the African-American literary tradition, "passing" means to racially pass off as a white person with Anglo features. In this context, passing cannot mean racial passing since it is clear that Menardo's "monkey-face" does not racially signify whiteness. What does it mean then for a mestizo body to pass off as a white man? This issue of passing highlights several ideas regarding whiteness and the idea of racial performativity. The passage suggests that passing "off as a white man" is more defined by economic success and social class than racial features; this attention to social standing results in a kind of cultural passing which Menardo believes is possible stating that "he knew what separated social classes were these intricate and confusing rules of etiquette" (*Almanac* 268). In Menardo's mind systemic prejudice comes as a result of difference in social class status and not race, though he

fails to see that there is a direct correlation between race and class since race immediately functions as an index for civility as Alegria points out that the Indian behavioral characteristics that Tacho possesses are a result of his racial identity.

Another character that complicates essentialist arguments regarding identity and highlights racial performativity is Root who works for Calabazas, one of Zeta's friends and fellow drug smuggler accomplice. Through Calabazas' focalized point of view, the narrator notes that "Despite his blue eyes and light hair, Root was a throwback" (*Almanac* 221). Root is characterized as a throwback, but as a throwback to what exactly, an earlier time, and why do racial markers such as blue eyes and light hair have an oppositional relationship to an earlier time? Characterizing Root as a "throwback" despite his Aryan features suggests that Root does not subscribe to a narrative of progress that many of his light-skinned family members subscribe to: Although identified as Mexican, Root, unlike his family members who were "so stunned by having light skin [they] never noticed the odor of their own shit again," (*Almanac* 200) was not obsessed with signifying or performing whiteness. Root's family, especially his mother, is obsessively concerned with claiming *Spanish* not Mexican descent, but Mexican descent is Spanish descent. What Root's family seeks to do by claiming Spanish and not Mexican lineage, like Menardo, is erase any evidence of indigenous heritage. After examining the racial characterizations of several mixed-race *mestizo* characters and their defiance to fulfill their racial stereotypes, the novel implies that race is performative and reveals how the process of racialization and colonial binaries such as colonizer/colonized fail to represent the more complex experience of mixed-raced bodies. The ambiguity surrounding racial categories and blood quantum is made apparent by the novel's mixed race bodies and their racial performativity. There is also the novel's curiousness in classifying certain bodies as *mestizo* and not others.

This is not to say that everything is performative. The characters are still bound to being racialized by the state and experience racial profiling. At the same time, the novel does emphasize the mixed-race characters' agency in either upholding whiteness or embracing their indigenous roots.

If the *mestizo* body enacts Indian cultural practices and beliefs the character is then cast as Mexican Indian and not *mestizo*. This is true of characters Calabazas, Lecha, Zeta, Tacho, El Feo, who like Menardo, are all *mestizo*. The difference between the characters who get cast by the novel as Mexican Indian and Menardo who is cast as *mestizo* is that they do not attempt to hide their Indian heritage but instead incorporate it into their everyday practice. Zeta's "high Indian cheekbones and light brown skin give her an exotic quality that television new desperately needs" (*Almanac* 140). Her high cheekbones and light brown skin, however, are not enough to visually signal Mexican Indian since the narrator later writes, "But this one, this time would be far worse, especially when [the agents] found out [Lecha] was an Indian, born in Mexico" (*Almanac* 165). It is apparently not obvious that Zeta's Indian features do not register her as Mexican Indian since that is something that is revealed only through birth certificates, the ability to speak Spanish perhaps but even then accent would not determine her nationality or her family lineage.

Zeta and Lecha's father was, in fact, a white geologist from the North-east US who Lecha sees as the man "standing apart from the rest, in starched khakis, polished half Wellingtons, reading *The Wall Street Journal*, Far East edition...He did not disdain the poor Indians in the bus depot so much as they simply did not exist for him...as far as he was concerned, [Amalia] had been white" (*Almanac* 120). Amalia, who was Zeta's and Lecha's mother and Yoeme's daughter, is, inexplicably, read as white while Zeta, Lecha, and Yoeme are read as Mexican

Indian. Amalia was certainly never close to her mother Yoeme or her “Indian ways” which Amalia tried to distance herself from, but the question that Zeta, Lecha, Yoeme, and Amalia’s racial categorizations indirectly ask is what is race a function of? Because the act of race labeling and the performativity of race are two completely separate ideas that the text keeps positing with its different mixed raced mestizo characters and their decision to enact or dismiss essentialist racial stereotypes about white or Indian characteristics previously determined by colonial scripts. Through the presence, performance, and subject positions of the different raced characters, who are all racialized and represent either white, mixed-race *mestizo*, or Indian bodies, *Almanac of the Dead* deconstructs, reinscribes, and contests established colonial scripts.

Acts of Disidentification

Almanac offers instances of mixed-race characters that perform both sides of the colonizer/colonized binary. As characters that inhabit multiple subjectivities, the *mestizos* create new relational identities that both work “on and against” colonial ideology. According to performance scholar, Jose E. Muñoz, this strategy of “working on and against” is known as disidentification and neither seeks to “assimilate” within structures of power “nor strictly oppose them” but rather use them in order to try to “transform cultural logic from within” (12). Muñoz further goes on to give the following example of a queer young woman revolutionary from the Antilles who wishing to identify with Frantz Fanon’s anti-colonial strategies is also struck by the hints of homophobic and misogynist tendencies in his writing:

In such a case, a disidentification with Fanon might be one of the only ways in which she is capable of reformatting the powerful theorist for her own project, one that might be as queer and feminist as it is anticolonial. Disidentification

offers a Fanon, for that queer and lesbian reader, who would not be sanitized; instead, his homophobia and misogyny would be interrogated while his anticolonial discourse was engaged as a still valuable yet mediated identification. This maneuver resists an unproductive turn toward good dog/ bad dog criticism and instead leads to an identification that is both mediated and immediate, a disidentification that enables politics. (9)

Disidentification is best illustrated by Angelita's critical engagement with Marxist ideology. Rather than completely reject any Western way of thought, Angelita uses different facets of Marxist ideology to inform her revolutionary strategy. Marx's particular emphasis and attention to history and a people's awareness and understanding of their history gains respect from the Mayan revolutionary, and while at times she finds limits to Marxism, she chooses to disidentify rather than place Marxism within a binary of good/bad. Disidentification becomes a strategy, a way to avoid the stalemate of a binary system of knowledge which becomes limiting and unproductive.

Another example of disidentification in the novel is when a group of *mestizos*, in line with the revolutionary cause, come together to form village "baseball teams" that trick foreign governments and multinational corporations into funding what these institutions believe is a humanitarian cause called "Friends of the Indians." In reality, these structures of power are funding "dynamite and uniforms for a peasant army" that conceals "their need as the outfitting of a baseball team and the clearing of land for a sports field."³⁶ In this instance, mixed-race bodies use a structure of power for their own purpose—to aid in their revolutionary mission to reclaim tribal lands. At the same time, there are some *mestizos*, like Menardo Panson, who despise their indigenous heritage and desire nothing more than to assimilate into dominant structures of power

³⁶Leslie Marmon Silko: *A Literary Companion*, p.165.

in the hope of being granted white subjectivity. Menardo's own internalized racism and self-hatred for his Indian nose reveals the performative and unscripted aspects of mixed race identity that challenge the essentialist ideology working behind colonial scripts. The ability to disidentify with structures of power or assimilate into them illustrates how, as a broader concept, *mestizaje* can function as a form of critical resistance or as a tool of cultural assimilation.

Mixed-race characters that do not identify as *mestizo*, like Lecha, also perform disidentification through the acts of exercising her psychic abilities and of transcribing and decoding of the almanac's notebooks. Although of mixed Anglo-Indian lineage (Lecha is part German, Mexican, and Yaqui), Yoeme, Lecha's Yaqui grandmother, reads Lecha as "Indian" and not "*mestiza*." Further, the novel will often refer to Lecha as specifically "Mexican Indian." According to the Spanish racial caste system, Lecha is, racially speaking, a *mestiza*. The novel, however, identifies Lecha based on the daily indigenous cultural practices she enacts. Lecha's acts of resistance against European and nation-state ideologies define her identity more so than her racial composition. On defining identity in *Almanac*, Malini Schueller has noted that:

Silko insistently defines Native American identity as one of resistance to European domination, emphasizing Native Americans as historical beings rather than essentialized beings of nature, engaged in a continuous struggle against occupation and the emblems of colonial authority (European devised borders).

(147)

The novel bases identity on political engagement and cultural enactment rather than on racial demarcations determined by the colonial nation-state. Katherine Sugg further notes how "Silko's specifically 'Native' epic narrative of the contemporary Americas" and "embrace of the 'tribal' works to undo identitarian categories, even as the text reiterates—or cites—the

ontological status of race (as well as culture and geography)” (68). Mixed race bodies, like Lecha, work to undo identitarian categories by disrupting essentialist notions of racial identity. Beyond simply rupturing essentialist racial ideologies, literary and critical race studies scholar, Rafael Pérez-Torres, notes how mixed race bodies can also function as narrative elements by signaling the “incarnation of colonial histories” (xiv). In other words, *mestizas/os* embody historical materiality by functioning as the material evidence of a history of rape and conquest in the Americas.

The novel creates its own process for determining racial and ethnic identification that stand outside the racial parameters or citational patterns of the colonial nation-state. These representations of *mestizaje* offer a new way of understanding identity that is less bound to binary thinking and instead foregrounds the idea of multiple subjectivities, “(which unlike hybridity) refers to the *both/and* rather than the *neither/not*, the double-coded as opposed to the fragmentary sense of subjectivity” (*Archive and Repertoire* 96). Hybridity, however, at least in the model of Latin American scholar Néstor García Canclini, offers an emphasis on the “intercultural” that terms like *syncretism* and *mestizaje* do not.³⁷ The novel’s mixed race *mestiza/mestizo* characters’ ability to embody multiple “intercultural” subjectivities that disidentify with structures of power, I argue, undoes colonial ideology’s essentialist binary logic.

None of *Almanac*’s mixed-race characters are particularly relatable and neither do they fit within a good/bad character binary; they all in some way or another partake in enacting or perpetuating colonial violence while simultaneously resisting it. For example, Zeta runs a drug and weapon smuggling business and seems to have little interest in morality or being anyone’s savior and Lech exploits her psychic abilities. In writing characters that the reader cannot identify with, “Silko confronts the reader with these desires for identificatory options within the

³⁷ See Néstor García Canclini’s *Hybrid Cultures* (2005).

text and undercuts the teleologies of narrative structures as well as presumptions to particular kinds of selfhood that are embedded in neoliberal fantasies of individuality” (Sugg 80). Instead of neoliberal fantasies of individuality, Silko’s novel uses a failed identitarian logic in order to illustrate how mixed race bodies illustrate the process of disidentification as a means of survival strategy while at the same time function as representations of America’s long history of miscegenation and racial violence. Tracing the vast and varied history of *mestizaje* through this late twentieth century text ultimately reveals the ways in which *mestizaje* has informed U.S. literary cultural production in the context of this Native American novel.

Representations of *Mestizaje* as Cross-Racial Coalition Building

More than just a mere marker of a particular historical colonial condition, the concept of *mestizaje* functions as a large-scale unifying metaphor in *Almanac of the Dead*. Part of what marks *Almanac of the Dead* as a hemispheric novel is the novel’s hemispheric approach and inclusive gesture regarding indigeneity by appealing to shared histories of conquest, colonization, and cultural memory. In an attempt to galvanize an Indigenous movement on this hemispheric scale, Silko’s novel invites *mestizos* and African Americans to forge a coalition with Indigenous peoples in the U.S. and Latin America. On this call for solidarity, Gabriel S. Estrada notes that, “Silko reasons that within every Mestizo and African American is an Indigenous consciousness that could spark to life” (253). This call to action, however, according to Estrada, is “not based upon a universal ideal. Rather, [Silko] writes of the indigenous ancestors who died in slavery and genocide returning to motivate their oppressed descendants to honor their memory through revolt against white materialism” (253). The unifying factor in this revolution is not based on cultural memory.

Rather than base this sense of unity on a universal ideal, Silko uses the various strands and forms of oppression brought on by white supremacy (i.e. capitalism, slavery, genocide, colonialism, etc.) to create a common narrative and consequently a common language that attempts to transcend, primarily, racial and national categories. Although this hemispheric convergence seems desirable and inclusive, Estrada does well to note that the sentiment of inclusion granted to “indigenized Mestizos must be contrasted to the reality that Mestizos are often not considered Indigenous in reservations, the United States, and Latin America” (253). What is an “indigenized Mestizo”? And what place, if any, might Mestizos have in Indigenous politics? Some scholars, on the basis of cultural sovereignty, feel that mestizos have no place in Indigenous affairs where-as others, like Silko, feel that mestizos could be allies in the fight against white materialism. The range of possibilities for mestizos depends on their racialization, by both themselves and others and the cultural repertoire or practices they enact. Thus, race cannot be the only determining factor of the mestizo.

Further, the *Almanac*'s mixture of various Mesoamerican and Native American sources also speaks to the novel's inclusive vision of *mestizaje* and its hemispheric approach regarding indigeneity. The fact that Lecha is Yaqui and must somehow translate and have knowledge of Mayan, Aztec and Toltec stories and codes illustrates this pan-Indian vision. According to the novel's approach, the bonds of solidarity among tribal and marginalized peoples are forged through their shared histories of colonization: “Nothing could be black only or brown only or white only anymore. The ancient prophecies had foretold...this was the last chance the people had against the Destroyers, and they would never prevail if they did not work together as a common force” (*Almanac* 747). On this inclusive vision, Gabriel Estrada contends that

“Silko reasons that within every Mestizo and African American is an Indigenous consciousness that could spark to life...she writes of the indigenous ancestors who died in slavery and genocide returning to motivate their oppressed descendants to honor their memory through a revolt against white materialism.” (253).

The novel rejects a nationalist ideology in favor of a hemispheric framework that works to uncover the indigenous roots and routes of U.S. national and cultural history. Although set primarily in 1980s Southwest U.S., the novel’s multiple story-lines span across the Americas in order to highlight lateral connections between colonial violence and the various oppressed populations in the Americas.

This vision of a unifying *mestizaje*, however, can only be made possible through the medium of fiction, in this case, a syncretic novel that takes into account the multiple and varying histories of indigenous peoples of the Americas. In this way, the text and its syncretic form create a vision of liberating potential that history itself will not allow. This, I argue, is the potential of a critical *mestizaje*. The transformative tension between what *Almanac* performs on the level of form and what the novel represents pushes against the colonial script in order to create this new inclusive vision.

At the same time, *Almanac* is careful to note the vexed history between indigenous peoples and Mexicans and Mexican Indians—specifically referring to those with Aztec heritage:

Aunt Marie had cautioned Sterling and the other children always to be careful around Mexicans and Mexican Indians because when the first Europeans had reached Mexico City they had found the sorcerers in power. Montezuma had been the biggest sorcerer of all. Each of Montezuma’s advisors had been sorcerers too,

descendants of the very sorcerers who had caused the old-time people to flee to Pueblo country in Arizona and New Mexico, thousands of years before. Somehow the offerings and food for the spirits had become too bloody, and yet many people had wanted to continue the sacrifices. They had been excited by the sacrifice victim's feeble struggle; they had lapped up the first rich spurts of hot blood. The Gunadeeyah clan had been born. (*Almanac* 760)

The passage vividly highlights the on-going tension between Mexicans and Native Americans not for the purposes of condemnation but as a way to not romanticize indigenous peoples and their histories. In this way, *Almanac* offers a more complicated and realistic representation of the difficulty behind the task of a hemispheric, inclusive *mestizaje*. The novel emphasizes how these histories must be addressed between *mestizos* and indigenous communities if an inclusive coalition is to ever exist.

Conclusion

In his groundbreaking study, *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic*, performance studies scholar Joseph Roach examines the three-sided relationship between memory, bodies, and performance and the ways in which memories become embodied and expressed through performance and manifest themselves through a series of syncretic cultural practices. Mixed race bodies perform the labor of remembering, transforming and passing on the Americas pre-Columbian cultures and histories. Mixed-race bodies are more legible in that they are literally marked by colonial history as they visibly signify the many roots and routes of the circum-Atlantic³⁸ or what in *Almanac*'s case I would like to call the circum-American—a methodology that highlights the mixed roots and circulation of bodies and cultures between the Caribbean,

³⁸ See Paul Gilroy's, *The Black Atlantic* (1993).

Central America, South America, and North America. Racially, culturally, and historically mixed bodies, such as mestizos, function as sites of knowledge that rupture the imaginary borders of homogenous nations and races and instead reveal the multiple historical roots and routes that led to the creation of the heterogeneous nations, races, and cultures of the Americas. Roach's notion of "genealogies of performance" becomes particularly useful when reading mixed race bodies in this way. According to Joseph Roach, genealogies of performance "attend to the 'counter-memories,' or the disparities between history as it is discursively transmitted and memory as it is publicly enacted by the bodies that bear its consequences" (26). The mixed-race characters in *Almanac* enact these discursively transmitted histories and memories of the Americas—that is the labor of the mixed-race body.

This relationship between performance, cultural memory, and mixed race bodies, particularly *mestizos*, as discursive sites of knowledge and the limits of language in the form of racial and colonial discourse is explored on a hemispheric scale in Silko's *Almanac*. In *Almanac*, mixed-race bodies function as sites of knowledge and cultural memory and in doing so become productive and insightful characters for textual analysis. Many, if not the majority of the all non-white and non-black characters, could arguably be characterized as mixed-race, specifically Indian with White-European (Spanish and Anglo). This is true of characters such as Zeta, Lecha, Tacho, El Feo, Ferro, Angelita, Alegria, Menardo, Mosca, Calabazas, and possibly even Yoeme and Sterling. Interestingly, however, the only character that the novel labels as *mestizo* is Menardo. Through Menardo's character, *Almanac* explores the complicated but rich history of *mestizaje* and eventually asks what role *mestizaje* might play within 21st century indigenous politics. Although characters like Zeta, Lecha, and Calabazas share the same Indian and Spanish racial complexity as Menardo, they are never referred to as *mestizos* by the text and are only ever

identified as Mexican or Indian or at times Mexican Indian suggesting that identity is not bound to race and that the performance of one's cultural repertoire can push against nationalist discourses and its reductive histories and identitarian categories.

Performance studies highlights the ruptures and slippages present in nationalist identitarian practices and its arbitrary and unstable production of space and in doing so places U.S.'s colonial history in a more global context. Although a great deal of the "unspeakable violence instrumental to [the creation of the Americas] may have been officially forgotten, circum-Atlantic memory retains its consequences, one of which is that the unspeakable cannot be rendered forever inexpressible" (Roach 4). The mass genocide, cruelty, and violence towards indigenous populations and bodies of color in the Americas might not be written into the Americas nations' national histories, however, the presence of racially mixed bodies, the creation of syncretic cultures, and the everyday lived practices of institutionalized racism across the Americas render the historically traumatic events behind the Americas' invention present, visible, unforgettable and expressible. These "audible silences" of the archive, as Spivak refers to them, become louder when placed within a circum-American framework.

Silko's *Almanac* illustrates how frameworks that emphasize movement, like circum-Atlantic and circum-American, productively examine sites where memory, performance, and substitution come together to express the unspeakable and transform the unspeakable into a usable past. *Almanac* illustrates how the acts of re-writing and remapping themselves are part of a cultural repertoire. One of the ways in which the Americas' unspeakable violence remains present and is aesthetically expressed is through novels like *Almanac* and other 20th and early 21st century circum-American literature—a literature that constructs its fictional world outside a simple national historical model and instead uses multiple American regions (North America,

South America, and the Caribbean) for its narrative setting in order to treat colonial history in a more hemispheric or global context.

This chapter looked at the novel's mixed form and how it mirrors the process of transculturation in order to create a cultural object that pushes against the colonial script. Although almanacs were traditionally used as a colonial tool—as a method of organizing and conceptualizing other hemispheres from a Euro-centric or Anglo-centric point of view—*Almanac's* hybrid form escapes the problematic, totalizing archival tendencies of the traditional almanac. Silko blends Western white male philosophies such as Marxist ideology and psychoanalytical theory into a novel format influenced by tribal epistemologies to tell the mythical story about an ancient Mayan almanac which has its roots in Mesoamerican culture and creates a syncretic cultural object in *Almanac of the Dead: A Novel*. This chapter also examined how the language of Silko's novel, primarily prose, works to try to represent the performativity and embodiment of certain racialized subject positions, identities, and affiliations such as Indian, mixed-race *mestizo*, and white bodies. The novel's treatment of *mestizaje* on a hemispheric scale transcends national and racial or ethnic boundaries as it continues to develop the notion of a possible trans-Latinx hemispheric latinidad but one that includes and highlights an indigenous presence not outlined in the previous two texts. Ultimately, *Almanac* argues for a coalition or vision of *mestizaje* based on relational histories of colonial oppression as opposed to racial or ethnic categories, be they mixed or not.

The following chapter also examines the limited and failure of nation-state identitarian categories and their ability to adequately address the experience of mixed-race peoples. The emergence of a possible trans-Latinx hemispheric latinidad is most clearly seen in Montero's *The Last Night I Spent with You*. The novel removes all national, ethnic, and racial boundaries through the metaphor of the bolero that envisions the possibility of a trans-Latinx hemispheric latinidad. Like the previous texts, *Last Night* also invokes a colonial script as a way to critique a

history of colonial violence, however, this text places that history in the broader context of the Americas and decenters the U.S. as the primary object of analysis. The novel engages a critique of tourism in the Caribbean as a present-day version of the colonial script of discovery. The text employs *bolero* as a way to resist national boundaries, another product of colonialism, and envisions the potential of *mestizaje* as a possible tool that could undo the colonial script and transcend national boundaries.

CHAPTER 4: Tourism and Bolerismo in Mayra Montero's *The Last Night I Spent with You*

Introduction

Like the previous texts in this study, Mayra Montero's novel *The Last Night I Spent with You*³⁹ (1991/2000),⁴⁰ also offers readers another textual iteration of the colonial script: the exotic paradise narrative in the Caribbean. Unlike the previous chapters, which address the colonial script in relation to *mestizaje*, *Last Night* highlights the tensions that arise when *mestizaje* comes into contact with Caribbean blackness. This tension reveals the limits of a possible trans-Latinx hemispheric latinidad that the bolero, which functions as a metaphor for *mestizaje* in the novel, attempts to trace. This chapter looks at how the colonial script of previous centuries of travelers to exotic paradise is reproduced through tourism discourse in *Last Night*. More specifically, this chapter looks at this paradise discourse in the neoliberal context of two heterosexual middle class Caribbean subjects, Celia and Fernando, and their colonial gaze on and desire for racialized black bodies.

Celia and Fernando reenact the colonial script of the Caribbean as exotic paradise when they embark on a Caribbean cruise and engage in the act of "touristing." This colonial script frames the Caribbean as a space of paradise and escape, a place where travelers can engage in what Angeletta Gourdine refers to as "touristing," or "ritualized behavior that follows the colonial script: modern person travels to premodern historically frozen place, hoping to explore both internal and external unknowns" (81). Touristing can take on many forms but the novel specifically focuses on the protagonist's, Celia and Fernando's, sexualization and exploitation of black bodies and the Caribbean landscape. Ian Strachan traces these acts of tourist exploitation

³⁹ All future references to the novel will appear as *Last Night*.

⁴⁰ The novel was originally written and published in Spanish in 1991 and was later translated into English by Edith Grossman and published in 2000.

back to the plantation system: “the plantation laid the economic, political, cultural, and social groundwork that has enabled tourism to function so effectively in the Caribbean. As an institution of colonization, the plantation established a political and economic dependency on the metropolitan centers that tourism merely extend” (9). In addition, I argue that this scripted, or ritualized behavior of touring is performative and can be traced back to the colonial encounter.

In her book, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (2003), performance studies scholar Diana Taylor notes the performative aspects of Columbus’ scenario of “discovery” which she reads as a theatrical and transferable act. According to Taylor, the scenario of discovery “is theatrical indeed. The self-proclaimed discoverers perform the claim in public by enacting specific movements (planting the flag) and reciting official declarations in a spectacle backed by visible signs of authority (the royal standard and the banners with letters on it)” (56). Taylor argues that it is this performative aspect of the conquest that allows the scenario of ‘discovery’ to become an “act of transfer, as a paradigm that is formulaic, portable, repeatable, and often banal because it leaves out complexity and reduces conflict to its stock elements, and encourages fantasies of participation” (57). The traveler to exotic paradise narrative can be traced back to Columbus’ scenario of discovery and is repeated and reenacted through tourism discourse.

The tourism discourse encourages fantasies of participation, and the Caribbean is one such Edenic paradise to engage with, rather than simply gaze at. Mimi Sheller notes that the Caribbean is where one can see the islands as the “still primitive garden that Columbus first sighted in 1493.”⁴¹ This image of the Caribbean as virgin garden of paradise encourages travelers to place a voyeuristic gaze onto the Caribbean landscape. Depictions of ‘Caribbean

⁴¹ According to Mimi Sheller in her article “Natural hedonism” (2004), this description came from the itinerary of the Noble Caledonian Ltd ‘West Indies: Hidden Treasure’ 14-night cruise on the *Levant*, 8th to 23rd of February, 2002, as advertised in *The Financial Times*.

Edenism,' Mimi Sheller argues, "underwrite performances of touristic 'hedonism' by naturalizing the region's landscape and its inhabitants as avatars of primitivism, luxuriant corruption, sensual stimulation, ease and availability" ("Natural Hedonism" 23). Celia and Fernando's colonial gaze of Afro-Caribbean women as "shameless, scheming, and corrupt" bodies "who devoured ardent, insatiable black men" (*Last Night* 80) functions as an example of how travelers perform Sheller's notion of touristic hedonism as a way to fulfill colonial sexual desire. This hyper-sexualization of black bodies has as much to do with desire as it has to do with racialization and the abjection of the black body. Celia and Fernando read black bodies as a form of abjection and use these bodies as both a way to fulfill their own abject desires and as a way to assert their own 'civility' by juxtaposing their 'civility' against the corrupt, abject black body. In her book *Sexing the Caribbean*, Kamala Kempadoo notes this connection asserting that "sexual desire of the colonized was imbued with racial meaning, and sexuality the avenue through which race could be reconfigured and "civilization" obtained" (34). The novel ultimately highlights the irony behind the fact that civility is something that can only be obtained through the abject sexualization and racialization of Afro-Caribbean subjects.

As Caribbean subjects themselves, Celia and Fernando inhabit a complicated position within the colonizer/colonized binary in that they inhabit both positions simultaneously. The couple's many travels suggest a level of class privilege, and thus likely racial privilege,⁴² that sets them apart from the Caribbean bodies and landscape that they encounter. Celia and Fernando's custom of traveling for leisure serves as a contrast to the history of travel in the Caribbean where mobility has mostly been out of necessity due to revolution, exile, and other forms of instability within the region's nation-states. This instability is a direct result of

⁴² Oftentimes, class and racial privilege are tied in that lighter skin possess an inherent value that darker skin does not

colonialism's centuries of genocide, slavery, and general dehumanization of Caribbean peoples. Prior to their arrival to the Caribbean, Fernando and Celia seem unaware of this violent history and in fact perpetuate it when they project a colonial gaze onto the island that romanticizes the region and hyper-sexualizes the black body. The couple's ability to perform or engage in these acts of "touristing" is tied to the fact that they inhabit this privileged position based on their middle class status. In highlighting class status, the novel ultimately offers a biting critique of class-privileged Caribbean subjects on an American ship reifying and racializing/sexualizing Afro-Caribbean subjects.

One of the ways *Last Night* executes this critique is by focusing on the relationship between performance and identity. The novel for example never explicitly discloses Celia's or Fernando's racial, class, ethnic, national origin and instead asks the reader to rely solely on cultural practices—such as language, literature, music—as a means of identification or rather meaning-production. The notions of racial and national identity are challenged in that they are rendered irrelevant and inconsequential to the novel's characterization of its protagonists. Instead, the reader must deduce meaning from the protagonists' cultural repertoire, which includes speaking in Caribbean Spanish,⁴³ subscribing to U.S. magazines (such as *Psychology Today* and *National Geographic*), having the means to travel for leisure, and having quite an affinity for the *bolero* (and other genres of Latin music such as the *corrido* and *rancheras*). The two characters' affinity and cultural familiarity with the *bolero*, *corrido*, *rancheras* and practice of Caribbean Spanish suggest that they could be Cuban, Puerto Rican, Dominican, East Coast Mexican, or perhaps Central American. This deductive reading strategy privileges the notion of performance by emphasizing the idea of the performing (textual) body as a site of knowledge.

⁴³ See Mayra Montero's and translator Edith Grossman's interview in "A prize-winning translator and a distinguished Cuban novelist share ideas on how they work" on Montero's confirmation of her use of Caribbean Spanish.

When read through this lens of performance, Celia and Fernando's characterization can be read as gesturing towards the emergence of a more complex trans-Latinx, hemispheric *latinidad* that pushes back against the racial and national categories of the nation-state by relying on a cultural repertoire as a means of meaning production that privileges regionalism over nationalism.

This push towards regionalism over nationalism is illustrated by the novel's unique incorporation of the *bolero* as an affective mode of meaning-production that critically engages colonial identitarian practices. The *bolero* flattens colonial logic by mixing "ethnicities, rhythms, and feelings with social and symbolic power in such a way that it is not overdetermined by race, gender, class, sexuality or ethnicity...[the bolero] organizes forms of experience beyond the limits of class privilege" (Zavala, "When the Popular Sings the Self," 192). Although Celia and Fernando engage in the neo-colonial practice of "touristing," the bolero reminds them that they are not foreigners to the Caribbean and its rich and varied cultural history. Inscribed within the *bolero* is a history of cultural migration and cohesion that allows the bolero to function as a metaphor for *mestizaje*. The concept of *mestization* appears in the form of the bolero and greatly informs the novel both on the level of theme and allegory.

The novel's plot and characters, namely Celia and Fernando, reenact the colonial script by centering a depiction of tourism. The novel's structure, however, reveals that there is a tension between what is being represented by the novel (tourism) versus what is being performed by the novel (*mestization* in the form the bolero). The novel's aesthetic and thematic structure mimics the cultural form of the bolero through its mixing of various narrative strategies—such as inserts of mysterious love letters, oscillating narrative points of view between the two protagonists, and by titling each chapter after a well-known bolero and weaving the lyrics of those boleros into each chapter. This mixture of forms illustrates Antonio Benítez -Rojo's claim

that the “literature of the Caribbean can be read as a *mestizo* text” (27). This tension between what is represented by the novel and what is performed by the novel highlights the contentious and contradictory conditions of a possible trans-Latinx hemispheric latinidad. Montero’s novel revises the “travelers to exotic island paradise narrative” by highlighting the performative aspects Caribbean touring and reframing nation-state identitarian practices through regional cultural practices such as the bolero. The novel accomplishes this primarily through plot and characterization—the characters’ reenactment of “touristing” and the fact that the novel never marks its protagonist narrators, Celia and Fernando, with an ethnicity, national identity, or racial markers; *Last Night* instead offers a series of cultural practices that collectively gesture towards a trans-Latinx, hemispheric latinidad of desire that echoes, but does not replicate the same colonial scripts previously examined in this study.

Touristing: A Reenactment of the Colonial Script

Celia and Fernando’s acts of touring reinscribe the “sun, sex, sand” narratives that frame the Caribbean as an exotic, consumable tropical playground. This narrative, according to Ian Strachan, can be found in the “tourist brochure” which “promises bacchic release and then some: happiness, eternal youth, sexual adventurism, nonstop sunshine, and partying” (1). Strachan further goes on to note how tourism “makes paradise a product” and likens the hotel industry as a newer version or iteration of the plantation system (3)—a system born out of the colonial script. Mimi Sheller notes the consequences of this narrative stating that, “the West Indies are inscribed as ‘resorts’ beyond civilization, utopian/dystopian places where the normal rules of civility can be suspended” and instead becomes “a carnivalistic site for hedonistic consumption of illicit substances (raunchy dancing, sex with ‘black’ or ‘mulatto’ others, smoking

ganja)” (“Natural Hedonism” 34). The “sun, sex, sand” narrative places the Caribbean outside of the bounds of civilization which is what allows Celia and Fernando to engage in acts of touring and place a colonial gaze that frames the Caribbean as an object space.

Last Night opens with what seems to be a simple premise: a middle-aged heterosexual couple goes on a Caribbean cruise in an attempt to escape the banality of married life. The female protagonist, Celia, immediately alerts the reader to the novel’s inciting incident: “ ‘She hasn’t died. She paused. She’s gotten married—come to think of it, that may be worse’ ” (*Last Night* 1). The couple goes on the cruise as a way to cope with the loss of what Fernando, Celia’s husband, refers to as “the axis of [their] lives,” their daughter Elena. Without this stable axis, Fernando and Celia must confront their sense of loss and longing which they in turn project onto the Caribbean landscape through a series of object sexual encounters.

Loss, desire, and memory become central themes early on in the novel and function both on the level of theme and allegory. The idea of marriage as a form of death reminds Fernando of his own marriage and its complete absence of desire as he recalls how just a few moments earlier they had “made love as it’s made after twenty-five years of marriage, which is to say, as if we were packing suitcases” (*Last Night* 1-2). Marriage, as described above, seems to function as a colonial institution of civility meant to regulate desire. This absence of desire prompts Fernando to seek personal and sexual satisfaction through other means, primarily through the act of “touring” which leads to an erotic extra-marital affair with a woman on the ship by the name of Julieta. Fernando projects his internal desires onto the Caribbean landscape as he uses the body of this woman to explore external pleasurable unknowns. The colonial gaze that the characters place on the Caribbean isles and marginalized (black and female) bodies ultimately speaks to the broader violent colonial history of the Caribbean region and Fernando and Celia’s

need to simultaneously reject and desire the racialized other. Their reenactment of colonial violence allows them to maintain, or rather perform, a false sense of civility as they play the role of the sexually desirous colonizer.

Fernando's act of "touristing" highlights the performative aspects of the colonial script of tourism. Prior to even reaching the Caribbean, Fernando had already meticulously planned out the trip with his friend Bermúdez who "himself was the one who got [Fernando] the maps and suggested sailing dates, since it wasn't a good idea to risk hurricane season. 'From June to November,' he said, 'the Caribbean is a devil' " (*Last Night* 3). The framing of this passage suggests that Fernando is embarking on an expedition rather than a leisurely vacation. This framing of wandering into uncharted territory (and waters) reveals that Fernando's sense of agency stems from a place of fear and a desire to tame or conquer the unknown; and in doing so echoes the colonial discourse embedded within colonial desire—the desire for the other which has now transformed into what Kamala Kempadoo calls "touristic desire."⁴⁴ According to Angelique Nixon, Kempadoo "complicates tourism through intra-Caribbean travel, but she reminds us how powerful the myth-reality of paradise is with regard to touristic desire for different kinds of tourists and in particular foreign-locals" (*Resisting Paradise* 200). As a foreign-local himself, Fernando illustrates Kempadoo's point about the power behind the colonial script of Caribbean as exotic paradise. Even before he sets foot in the Caribbean, he is already performing the role of the colonizer in his reenactment of the Caribbean as paradise narrative. Fernando's lack of knowledge regarding the Caribbean's seasonal patterns also reveals a level of unfamiliarity with the region. This suggests that Fernando is not native to the Caribbean region even though he almost exclusively defines himself in relation to the bolero, which although originated in Cuba, also has heavy Mexican influences and is a popular music

⁴⁴ See Kamala Kempadoo's *Sun, Sex, and Gold: Tourism and Sex Work in the Caribbean* (1999).

form in Mexico. This tension between familiarity and unfamiliarity reveals that while Fernando might identify with, or rather consume, Caribbean culture or popular music, there is a level of colonial difference and desire that informs his imagined relationship to the Caribbean. As a Caribbean foreign-local, Fernando is still part of or marked by the diaspora experience.

The novel's representations of tourism in the Caribbean, however, complicates colonialism's tropes of paradise and escape. Fernando's embrace of a colonial logic allows him to project his repressed sexual fantasies onto the Caribbean. His description of the cruise frames the experience as an imperial adventure, complete with a scenario of discovery and conquest.

Fernando engages in this performance of touristing when he describes the cruise as:

the Caribbean tour we had dreamed about for half a lifetime, with stops at islands nobody else had stopped at. After all, which of our friends, even the best-traveled among them, had ever bathed in the turbulent coves of Marie Galante? Not to mention a brief call at Antigua and the happy conclusion, the culminating moment of the trip, that would take place when we docked at Martinique. (*Last Night 2*)

For Fernando, travel, or the exploration of the unknown, becomes a marker for civility and uses it as a way to establish superiority from even among his fellow "best-traveled" friends.

Fernando's description reads like a scenario of colonial discovery and sexual conquest, complete with an orgasmic "happy conclusion" in Martinique. He as the Western "traveler" is afforded the privilege to impose an exotic gaze onto these Caribbean islands.

Fernando's class privilege allows him to participate in Western rituals of consumerism and behaviors like touristing. His language of conquest frames the Caribbean cruise as a grand sexual encounter as he feminizes the uncharted, "virgin" isles "nobody else had stopped at," exoticizes Marie Galante's "turbulent coves," objectifies Antigua by casting the isle as a call girl

with the description of “brief call,” and sexualizes Martinique by describing it as an orgasm with its happy conclusion and culminating moment; all touring prior to Martinique is just mere foreplay. The cruise allows Fernando to reenact the scenario of discovery. Peter Hulme writes about this European narrative of conquest and discovery extensively in his book *Colonial Encounters* noting that the ‘discovery of America’ marked the beginning of the Americas from a European perspective and was typically framed as the ‘New World’ and later as the ‘Virgin Land’ (1) that Fernando now sees. Sexual violence becomes the primary means by which Fernando exerts his colonial subject position. In this passage, tourism conveys more than just tropes of escape or paradise; tourism becomes a violent heterosexual reenactment of a scripted colonial conquest. Ultimately, the novel plays on Western tropes of Caribbean as a place of exotic paradise and takes them to an extreme using irony and erotic language in order to highlight the colonial and performative nature of touring.

Bermúdez, on the other hand, frames the Caribbean as an active agent. Although Bermúdez’s framing of the Caribbean as “a devil” is problematic, he grants the Caribbean a certain level of agency ---a living breathing entity whose “hot waters” and “smell of decomposing shellfish” causes visitors to have a “dizzying effect” (*Last Night* 3). His attempt to warn Celia and Fernando foreshadows how later on in the novel the Caribbean itself will become a character of its own. The islands strike back and reject Celia and Fernando’s mask of civility by making them fall ill causing them to “lose their inhibitions” (*Last Night* 3) and subject to their most abject and obscene desires. Like the bolero, which flattens social hierarchies, Fernando and Celia are not immune to the Caribbean’s “dizzying” effects. For example, Fernando had originally intended to have a pleasurable “brief call” at Antigua but instead he finds the island to be a “sweltering inferno” where beneath it laid “another world...a venomous marsh that

deceived the eye but not the spirit” (*Last Night* 55). The reference to “another world” lying beneath the surface functions as an allusion to the history of colonial violence that the tourism industry has been literally built on and the “venomous marsh” the blood that was spilled from the bodies tortured through the plantation system and now soaks the marsh. The island refuses to let this history be forgotten and thus make Fernando and Celia come to realize that the Caribbean is not the ahistorical pleasure zone they imagined it to be.

The novel’s representation of Celia’s enactment of “touristing,” stems from a similar colonial desire, however, rather than conquer the other, Celia desires to be the other. This is seen through her constant romanticization and exoticization projected onto the Caribbean landscape and the black bodies she both encounters and the ones she imagines. For example, in the quiet of the early morning, Celia gazes out onto Marie Galante from the ship and imagines herself trading places with a black woman islander. She imagines the black woman islander version of herself to be:

wrapped in a gaudy red-flowered blanket...with my cheek resting in the lap of a black man, discover[ing] that I wouldn’t trade places with [a tourist] or anybody, wouldn’t give up my stained sheets for [a tourist’s] lounge chair, wouldn’t want to be anyone except who I was: a happy, fortunate, satisfied black woman, a black woman aglow with the devastating tumult of so many nights without misery.

(*Last Night* 33-34)

It is clear from the passage that Celia romanticizes the position of what she imagines to be the simple, idyllic, sexual fulfilled life of a Caribbean woman. In romanticizing the life of a Caribbean woman, Celia erases the violent and traumatic history of plantation life—an integral pillar of Caribbean history. This historical fact adds an additional colonial element, which is

directly related to the image of the black body – it is simultaneously the symbol of successful colonial conquest, since black bodies were enslaved and brought to the Caribbean, and the image of the dark body conquered by colonialism which stands in for or rather underscores the absence of the original inhabitants. This historical displacement and mis-reading of black bodies on Celia’s part illustrates her own sense of displacement and longing for an ideal that does not exist. Her use of the word “black” in the passage, which appears three times, illustrates her racialized desire for the unattainable other. For the moment, she romanticizes the “other” in order to escape her own colonial reality of not being a northern white (and although she might not inhabit a black body, as a non-American still experiences a level of “othering” in a neo-liberal context). In order to escape her own reality of being “othered,” she exoticizes and romanticizes the black body and the black Caribbean experience and in doing so participates in the Caribbean’s long history of colonial violence. The novel’s representation of Celia’s desires and Celia’s projection of those desires, and the larger implications that they reveal, function as an allegory of colonialism’s legacy of violence in the Caribbean. Celia’s desire to live outside of a civil code by romanticizing the other reveals the logic of difference that informs her colonial gaze.

The premise of civility, or rather the performance of civility, then it seems is what separates colonialism, in the form of “touristing,” from being a series of savage acts of violence and consumption. The novel however uses the erotic to expose colonialism for what it is, a series of savage acts of violence and consumption masked in the guise of civility. Feeling an intense desire to express her superiority, (read: civility), over Fernando and his lover, Julieta, Cecilia attempts to exert her dominance through a display of what she believes to be an expert knowledge of sushi. The dining experience that Celia subjects them to, which is narrated through Fernando’s perspective, reads more like a cult-like ritual: “I filled my own cup and felt

sorry for Julieta, subjected to this useless ritual, chewing everything with a certain reluctance, with a certain inevitable repugnance. And I dug in too, not so much for the sake of appetite as for the need I felt to join the worship service” (*Last Night* 18). The dinner becomes a methodical way to punish Fernando and Julieta for their lustful, unsanctioned love affair. Fernando highlights the cannibalistic and sexual aspects of the dining ritual: “I began to lick it slowly, sucking at the erect, fleshy protuberance that tasted of woman’s juices...I chewed the mollusk correctly... another throbbing clitoris...and an instant before I came I put the entire sushi in my mouth, bit my teeth into it, and felt it crackle” (*Last Night* 18). Figuratively, Celia transforms Julieta into an abject object that incites both horror and desire⁴⁵ that Fernando must consume as penance for his transgressions against the holy institution of marriage—the symbol for civility. The religious undertones of a “worship service” allude to the Christian cannibalistic practice of consuming the body in the hopes of attaining redemption but instead only leads to Fernando’s ejaculation.

The erotic aspect of the metaphor, however, reveals in plain sight the irony of colonialism’s civilizing project, a project which itself is based on savage, violent, sexual, cannibalistic practices and all things Western culture deems uncivil. What marks the ritual as ostensibly civil is the use of props, such as the table, the cups, the chopsticks/eating utensils, the methodical, orderly presentation of the sushi that Celia orchestrates. The scene highlights the theme of consumption that permeates the novel. According to Sheller, “consuming the Caribbean occurs first through its displacement from the narrative of Western modernity (decontextualisation), followed by its recontextualisation as an ‘Other’ to serve the purposes of Western fantasy” (*Consuming the Caribbean* 144). The colonial script of Caribbean as

⁴⁵ The abject will be explored in more detail later in the chapter in the vein Julia Kristeva’s *Powers of Horrors* (1980).

consumable exotic paradise becomes a repeatable ritual disguised as a civil activity. Rituals and practices are “designed to cleanse or purify the body may serve as metaphors for processes of cultural homogeneity” (Grosz 193). The setting, a US tourist ship, literally sets the scene for Celia’s and Fernando’s Western vision of civility, which as a point of contrast, allows them to in turn frame the Caribbean as an “Other” place meant to satisfy tourist fantasies of colonial desire. Through its use of erotica, the novel demystifies colonization and reveals its colonizing tricks as it unveils the mask of civility.

Textual Performativity: Novel Structure and Textual Touristing

Various elements of the novel foreground the idea of the performative and reinforce the novel’s themes of loss, desire, and memory. The novel is divided into eight chapters, each titled with the name of a popular bolero: “*Burbujas de amor*,” “*Sabor a mí*,” “*Negra consentida*,” “*Amor, qué malo eres*,” “*Nosotros*,” “*Vereda tropical*,” “*Somos*,” “*La última noche que pasé contigo*,”—a mixture of classical and modern, Cuban and Mexican boleros that are lyrical, sensual, but reflexive songs expressing passionate longing, heartbreaking loss, or deep sadness but with a certain nostalgia.⁴⁶ These songs set the erotic, sensual tone of each chapter and mirror the novel’s repeating pattern of love, lust, and violence. In the English translation, the first chapter title, “*Burbujas de Amor**” has an asterisk that footnotes the following message to the reader: “*The bolero plays a significant role in *La última noche que pasé contigo*. Lyrics are quoted throughout the novel, and all chapter titles are, in fact, titles of well-known boleros” (*Last Night* 1). (No such footnote appears in the Spanish version.) Even though the text offers this introductory footnote, the phrase “well-known boleros” still enables the text to assume the centrality of Latin American culture because the reader must have some cultural familiarity to

⁴⁶ In fact, the first bolero was called “*Tristezas*” (“Sadnesses”).

know what would be considered a “well-known” bolero. In marking the bolero as a form of cultural knowledge or cultural currency indispensable to the novel’s paradigm of meaning making, the footnote ultimately underscores *Last Night*’s larger theme of disrupting Western traditions, in this case the novel. In this way, the logic of the bolero deconstructs the sense of the artistic sources of writing.

The novel complicates the traditional novel form by integrating music and in this case the popular musical form of the bolero. The novel’s form is reshaped via the bolero’s theme and cyclical pattern. Rather than follow the traditional teleological plot line of exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, resolution, *Last Night* emphasizes the same focal point—the devastating effects of colonial violence—over and over through various means. This is demonstrated through inter-textual insertions of lyrics from a well-known bolero; the abrupt insertion of love letters from the past; the shifting narrative point of view between Celia and Fernando, and the interwoven plot between Angela (Fernando’s grandmother), Marina/Abel (Angela’s female lover), Agustin Conejo (Celia’s lover), Julieta (Marina’s, then, Agustin’s, then Fernando’s lover). The novel constructs meaning through repetition with a difference⁴⁷ and thus does not seek a resolution or ending but rather reveals how the Caribbean as exotic paradise narrative has muted and transformed into different iterations or forms of colonial violence from genocide, to the plantation economy, to now the tourism industry and its enactment through sexual “touristing.” As a cultural form born out of this legacy of violence, the bolero captures this repeating pattern of loss and inescapability.

The letters embedded within the chapters emphasize this pattern of loss and longing and its iterative quality performs a function similarly to that of a song refrain in the novel. In the original Spanish version, the letters appear visually isolated from the main narrative on

⁴⁷ See Gilles Deleuze’s *Difference and Repetition* (1994).

completely separate pages with a blank page in between the main narrative and the letter. In the English translation, the letters appear to be more embedded within the main narrative and are only separated by a page break and a switch to italic font. Although their visual representation differs, in both versions the letters detail the story of Fernando's grandmother's and her lover's forbidden lesbian desire to escape to a Caribbean island where the writer imagines the couple could live in paradise. The first letter appears after Fernando recounts an unexpected passionate and dominatrix-like sexual encounter with Celia that occurred earlier in their marriage. The letter reads:

Dear Angela,

Close your eyes and make a wish, then open them, look, we're in the Caribbean, you and I and all those birds we can't see but can hear...even if God is unwilling one day we'll take that ship, we'll go to the Caribbean, we'll stay and live on a lazy black island, I won't give you up for a black woman, dark kisses for you, un baiser noir....and for all eternity my love will follow you,

Abel (Last Night 9)

The letters initially seem unrelated to the main narrative except in their equally problematic framing of black bodies and the Caribbean as a trope of paradise and escape. However, upon a closer reading, the letters parallel the main narrative's plot of failed escapism and irresolution and how that lingering desire is projected onto the Caribbean thus repeating the racialization of place.

The letters function as an underlying narrative, or under current, that mirrors Celia and Fernando's own enactment of "touristing" in the hopes of expressing or releasing their most abject desires. The letters retell a story of desire, loss and unfulfillment that, like Celia and

Fernando, the two lesbian lovers had hoped to live out in the Caribbean. Like the main narrative, the letters also incorporate lyrics from popular boleros. The final line from the letter above, “*and for all eternity my love will follow you,*” is in fact a line from the bolero “Palabras de Mujer” (“Words of Women”) by the famous Mexican bolerista Agustín Lara. Since the letter writer is actually a woman (although signed as a man under the pen name Abel), it is fitting that the letter ends with a reference to a song titled “Words of Women,” or things a woman would say, because it is a woman speaking; and the secret that the bolero reveals is that it is woman speaking to another woman. The letter and the bolero function like an embedded hidden code that playfully leaves hints for the reader to find.

The mysterious love letters embedded within Celia’s and Fernando’s plot line echo a similar theme of the colonial gaze. The letters structurally perform a function similar to that of a bolero song refrain. The love letters tell the story of a forbidden love between two women and unbeknownst to the reader, the woman being addressed in the letters, Angela, is in fact Fernando’s grandmother. On one hand the use of letters in the novel disrupts the tourism narrative of the colonial script. On the other, these letters, along with the novel and the bolero, function as intergenerational and intertextual forms of touring that reinforce the narrative’s theme of desire. In the letter, ‘Abel’ narrates black bodies as part of the Caribbean landscape which reproduces a present-day sexscape in where “the Caribbean [becomes] a staging ground for Western colonial fantasies in which tourists from the Global North seek erotic encounters with the ‘authentic’ racialized Other” (Lamen 270). The letter performs an act of historical erasure by imposing a narrative of desire and Caribbean as exotic paradise.

Furthermore, a strange irony⁴⁸ exists between the letter writer's feelings of oppression in being unable to openly express her desire for Angela and the writer's assumption of the Caribbean as the ideal place in where she could (theoretically) openly express this homosexuality. A colonial logic of difference is what leads Abel to read the Caribbean as exotic paradise and thus frame the Caribbean as a place that exists outside the rules and bounds of appropriate sexual rules and norms. The letter writer reproduces a colonial gaze by scripting black bodies as uncivilized objects of desire. The irony lies in the fact that the letter writer's own homosexual desire also places her outside of the boundaries of civility and is therefore abject. This suggests that the letter writer views the Caribbean as an abject space. The letter writer imagines a place that exists outside social codes but in doing so she re-inscribes a narrative of inferiority, escape, and pleasure onto the Caribbean. Her hyper-sexualization of black bodies signifies a colonial desire grounded in a civilizing project that justifies the logic of conquest. Black bodies here are not entitled to subjectivity and therefore function more like an object or prop. In the letters, the Caribbean is imagined as a transgressive space available for continued exploitation beyond the plantation. The letters disrupt the main narrative to make the past present and underscore the inescapable and repeating pattern of Caribbean historical trauma reflected in 'textual touring.'

The inter-textuality of the text--- its layering of songs, letters, and narration--- creates a more interactive and hybridized reading experience. There are secrets embedded within the bolero that set the tone for each chapter and in turn also mirror each chapter's storyline. The chapter "Sabor a mí" ("Taste of me") deals with the very theme of the song's lyrics, an

⁴⁸ Beyond the irony that the lovers represented in the letter are a lesbian couple, it is also worth noting that although they are engaging in Western colonial fantasies, they are not necessarily tourists from the Global North, or in fact tourists at all. This scenario is a figment of her imagination and both her reference to boleros and her Spanish dialect in the Spanish version suggests that she herself may well be from the Spanish-speaking Caribbean.

unforgettable past love that is remembered through the senses. It is through this bolero that Celia is able to recall her extra-marital affair with Agustín Conejo who was always “singing the same old song twenty times over (‘more, much more, than a thousand years will go by,’ smelling of roast chicken and fish soup” (*Last Night* 35). The invocation of the lyrics “more, much more, than a thousand years will go by,” which are taken directly from the bolero “Sabor a mí,” plays in the background as Celia recalls their first sexual encounter: “licking my ears...his heavy, acidic breath...his tongue which he forced between my teeth...I sucked [his sex] lovingly and let it go, caught it again and felt it thrust to the back of my throat...That was how we put songs aside and began to live our own private bolero” (*Last Night* 37). The description speaks to the bolero’s lyrics of leaving the taste of the other still in their mouths. And to the present day, Celia is still living out the lyrics of this particular bolero since it is true that although many years have passed, she still carries Agustín’s taste in her mouth. The layering of songs, letters, and narration creates a circulation of desire that is maintained and repeated through these different forms throughout the text. In this way the boleros and letters function like an allegorical code for the text’s larger narrative and in doing so reinforces the theme of inescapability from a colonial reality and the lack of fulfillment that comes with colonial desire.⁴⁹

Another structural element that performs repetition with a difference and the theme of textual touring is the oscillating, chapter-to-chapter, first-person narration between Fernando and Celia. By alternating points of view, the novel alludes to the repeating pattern of colonial violence reinscribed onto the Caribbean landscape through Celia and Fernando’s colonial gaze. By having Fernando and Celia relay the cruise’s events from their own perspectives, the novel also fractures the singular perspective of the western novel and allows for a more complete and

⁴⁹ Meaning the lack of fulfillment that comes with reproducing a colonial gaze, which Fernando does, or the desire of/for the “other,” which is desire that Celia herself professes.

complex narrative. The alternating narrative strategy frames Celia and Fernando as different sources whose fragmented narration functions as a form of double-speak. They relay the same events but from a different perspective—thus suggesting that history is a series of narratives constantly competing for the dominant position as well as revealing the unreliability of first person narration.

In contrast, the bolero functions as the unifying thread that runs through the chapters and connects the different pieces together in order to arrive at some narrative conclusion. This bolero connection is seen in the first chapter, “*Burbujas de Amor*,” when Celia begins to sing the chapter title’s bolero and Fernando begins to follow her in his mind: “it was one of my boleros, and it seemed providential that she would sing it then: ‘It’s sad to recall what might have beeeeen’—I accompanied her in my mind—“you must seize what will never return” (*Last Night* 20). Celia’s feelings of loss are echoed by Fernando’s own similar feelings of regret or missed opportunity. Rather than state directly “Celia feels loss” or “Fernando feels regret” (which would just be bad writing), Montero uses the bolero as a strategy to convey information⁵⁰ direct but also indirect way. The bolero’s structure lends itself to this kind of task since boleros themselves “are not only double-voiced—a zone of encounter between orality and writing—but they also assimilate the significant verbal relations of emotional memory canonized by ideological systems, reaccentuating them through sonorous rhythmic intonation” (Zavala, “When the Popular Sings the Self” 189). Narration in this text does more than narrate, it establishes a rhythm necessary to the novel’s decolonial meaning-making paradigm. The novel uses the bolero as a way to perform this decolonial strategy.

⁵⁰ However, it must be noted that in order for this to be true, this particular reader would need to have cultural familiarity with boleros and the Spanish language of course.

A final performative element worth noting is the reader's participation in the act of touristic-like voyeurism enabled by the text's prolific but strategic use of erotic language. In this way, the novel itself engages in a form of textual touring as it narrates the erotic and violent encounters of its two protagonists. The novel stages a series of erotic performances that all involve excess, violence, conquest, exoticization of black bodies, or taboo activities (i.e. infidelity, homosexual desire, incest, bestiality, necrophilia, pegging, etc.). The novel's exhibitionist quality implicates the reader who herself partakes in the irony of colonialism's civilizing project—that irony being that the self-proclaimed civilized characters, Celia and Fernando, not only partake in but find absolute pleasure in enacting the taboo behavior that they deem in their own words “savage.”

Abject desires become the norm in the novel and their vivid, graphic representations create a circulation of desire that implicates the reader's own gaze. Celia, who is highly aroused by death and bestiality, for example, enjoys being defiled by lover, Agustín⁵¹ Conejo, who she constantly likens to an animal.⁵² The follow passage describes one of Celia's sexual encounters with Agustín as her father dies in the room next door: “ ‘Get ready, bitch;’ I feel the contact of [Agustín's] hairy torso moving against my back, his gorilla's paw opening the way, Papa chokes, he's choking...the tip of his sex pierces me, Papa turning blue...I'm dying, he's dying...each movement is another wound, an unbearable pain” (*Last Night* 24). Celia by no means functions as a model of civility, and yet she fails to see the irony of her own reading of black bodies as lazy, uncivilized, sex objects: “Black men, no doubt, their arms around slow-moving contented black women delighted by the magnificent tools they offered them” (*Last Night* 33). The irony

⁵¹ Agustín if you recall happens to be the first name of a famous Mexican bolero, Agustín Conejo's name could be read as a bolero of animal passion.

⁵² This is fitting given his last name is “Conejo,” meaning rabbit in Spanish, and his sole purpose in the novel is fornication.

of Celia's own less than civil behavior and the novel's cheeky use of erotic language and absurd description of black male genitalia as "magnificent tools" has a comedic effect that ultimately asks the reader to determine who are the real savages, the tourists or the islanders?

The novel's incorporation of letters and bolero lyrics functions as a form of textual touring and works on three levels: the author, the character, and the reader. This layering of texts and the reader's voyeurism—which all contain a theme of desire—illustrate the power of the colonial script of Caribbean as exotic paradise narrative and the circulation of desire that it creates. Montero uses these other texts as a way to highlight the impossibility of representing the Caribbean outside of these textual touring tropes. Desire travels from the author who creates the narrative which then the reader consumes and the process repeats itself from island to island. In this way, Montero recreates a literary example or textual illustration of Antonio Benítez-Rojo's notion of the repeating island, albeit one that is highly exoticized and sexualized.⁵³

By virtue of being immersed in the erotica, which becomes the norm rather than the taboo, the reader must look beyond the language of Western civility in order to make meaning of the narrative's rampant sexual encounters and interlocking plot lines between the novel's lovers.⁵⁴ Instead, the language of the bolero, which "speaks the language of desire, of its absence and presence, of illusion and disillusionment...of the pursuit of the unattainable other" (Knights 84) is the language that must be sought in order to understand the novel's larger anti-colonial critique. The language of desire embedded within the bolero ultimately illustrates the

⁵³ In fact in an interview with *BOMB* magazine, Montero herself shares that *Last Night* is her most "pan-Caribbean" novel. The notion of the 'island which repeats itself' is very deeply rooted in this novel." See José Manuel Prieto, Mayra Montero and Marina Harss, *BOMB*, No. 70, The Americas 2000 (Winter, 2000), p. 90.

⁵⁴ Although confusing the novel suggests that the lovers are connected in the following way: Fernando has an affair with a woman named Julieta whose partner lover at some point was Agustín Conejo, who at some point was Celia's lover. It is also highly implied that Marina/Abel, Fernando's grandmother's, Angela's, lesbian lover, has an affair with a much younger Julieta.

importance of performance and the ways the body can function as a site of knowledge. The novel pushes against Western culture's heavy reliance on the archive—meaning written texts, stable objects/artifacts, historical documents—as its primary sites of knowledge. The repertoire, on the other hand, relies on the body and performance such as cultural memory, songs, dance, rituals, etc.

Rather than see the archive and the repertoire as two oppositional systems of knowledge, the novel uses both the archive and the repertoire in order to construct the world of the novel. Cultural memory,⁵⁵ in the form of the bolero, and historical trauma/loss, in the form of epistolary notes from the past, becomes an organizing principle for the novel both on the level of plot and on the level of novel's structure. In this hybrid system of meaning production, the body, although ephemeral, becomes a primary site of knowledge that works alongside with the archive. The reader must use both systems of knowledge, the archive, in the form of the letters, and the repertoire, in the form the bolero, in order to make meaning and sense of the novel's multiple intersecting plots and expressions of abject desire. Although a novel that directly implicates the reader's gaze, *Last Night* plays on Western systems of meaning, and destabilizes the idea of nationhood through the bolero, and problematizes tourism's tropes of escape and paradise while highlighting the destructive colonial and dystopian aspects of tourism.

Bolero Philosophy

As ritualized behavior that has roots in the colonial script, “touristing” cannot offer Celia and Fernando the escape, healing, or transcendence that they seek. The bolero, a lyrical-erotic genre of Latin music, however, does offer them an affective method with which to make sense or

⁵⁵ For Diana Taylor, performance is a vehicle that allows subjects to participate in acts of transferring memories and social identity. As a cultural practice, the bolero enables this transferring of cultural memory.

meaning out of their desire or struggle between desiring to be the victims of colonial violence or the perpetrators—meaning between wanting to be the abject “other” or the subject who performs the act of “othering.” Reductive categories of identification, like race and nationality, do not speak to Celia’s and Fernando’s characterization which instead is defined in relation matter of desire so crucial to the novel. This desire is embedded within the bolero. It is the tension between their middle class status and their cultural familiarity with the bolero that reveals why their relationship to the Caribbean is at once familiar and unfamiliar. Interestingly, the only sense of loyalty that the novel’s characters seem to have is to the art form of the bolero, not a nationalist or patriotic moral code. Rather than use a nationalist framework or racial paradigm to organize knowledge or as systems of meaning, the novel relies on cultural framework of cultural practices and places heavy emphasis on music, especially the bolero, as a means of identification and meaning production. I contend that the bolero offers the characters a sense of self or epistemology that the nation and other Western patriarchal, moral, or capitalistic economic codes do not. The bolero transcends national boundaries and transforms into regional expression of hemispheric latindad.

Bolerismo for the characters is a lived performance, a cultural repertoire or sensibility that directly speaks to the issue of diaspora in the Caribbean and the limits of national identity as a stable category of representation. In having the characters privilege this cultural form of the bolero, as a primary marker of identity instead of a national identity, the text decenters nation space as the determinant of agency and instead places agency in the knowledge and performance of a cultural repertoire. The bolero as cultural art form with its cyclical lyrics and themes of irreparable loss and insatiable desire, which speaks to the Caribbean colonial experience, functions as a system of knowing, active subjectivity, and at time agency for the characters in the

novel. As a culturally syncretic form, the bolero blurs boundaries—be they national, sexual, ethnic, racial, or class. Iris Zavala has further noted how “as a social text,” the bolero “reveals the situated utterance and emotional tonality of the mulatto and mestizo population of the Caribbean” (“When the Popular Sings the Self” 191). The bolero’s lyrics and interpretation “recall melodrama, sensuality, romanticism, all dominant discourses of latinidad” (Alvarado 589). Celia and Fernando’s affinity and cultural familiarity with the cultural art form of the *bolero* reveals their connection to *mestizaje* and their embodiment of a trans-Latinx, hemispheric latinidad.

The bolero for example enables a young Celia to explore her own body and arrive at an understanding about her own desires that extends beyond the physical sexual realm. While listening to a record by the famous Chilean bolerista Lucho Gatica, Celia would begin to touch herself, thinking: “I wasn’t masturbating exactly, nothing as clear-cut, as coarse as that. The exact expression was ‘discovering myself’...I pushed downward as if I were trying to empty it, all in its own time, all in its own natural rhythm that was, naturally, the rhythm of the bolero” (*Last Night* 54). The bolero allows Celia to arrive at a different understanding of her body as a site of self-exploration and female sexuality as natural rather than taboo. Celia also uses the bolero as a way to understand her affair with Agustín Conejo: “That was how we put songs aside and began to live our own private bolero...I barely recognized myself in that submissive, flushed woman who walked behind him, unbuttoning her skirt” (*Last Night* 37). Her affair causes her to become a different version of herself; the bolero functions as the catalyst that allows her to explore this other version of herself.

Bolerismo as an epistemology or way of knowing becomes clearer when Celia explains that for Fernando there existed “a philosophy of the bolero, a way of seeing the world, of

suffering with a certain elegance and renouncing with a kind of dignity” (*Last Night* 54). Fernando’s articulation of bolero philosophy suggests that his existence, or identity, as he understands it is inherently tied to a causation for suffering and reason for renouncing or resistance and that his sense of agency or active subjectivity is derived from his ability to choose how he responds to his perpetual state of suffering and resistance—with “a certain elegance” and “kind of dignity.” These are the markers by which he seems able to redeem or justify his existence. The novel, however, does not make clear exactly what it is Fernando suffers from however he narrates himself as someone who desires to execute agency while under a system of oppression.

In one instance, Fernando contradicts his previous definition of *bolerismo* as “suffering with a certain kind of elegance and renouncing with a kind of dignity” when he asserts “Boleros, yes sir, for doing some dirty dancing...Boleros for cutting our veins and fucking and all those hot savage things boleros are good for” (*Last Night* 47). In their contradiction, the two passages illustrate how Fernando sees himself as inhabiting both the position of the civilized subject, who suffers with elegance and resists with dignity, but as also the uncivilized “other,” who partakes in savage, inelegant, undignified behavior such as fucking and the self-cutting of veins. In this way, the bolero reveals the tension between the civil and the abject that is so key to Montero’s novel. The instability of the colonizer/colonized binary becomes reflected in Fernando’s own unstable definition of Bolero philosophy. Fernando’s contradiction reveals the double-speak of the bolero as a tool that:

decentralizes the verbal ideological sphere, welding together the multiple languages and expressive ideologies that coexist within hegemonies. African musical rhythms present in the bolero both revealed and produced social positions

through the aristocratic idioms of elite modernist literature, at the same time the bolero's expressive use of the body strongly suggests the subversive ideological contents of emotions and feelings. (Zavala, "When the Popular Sings the Self" 189)

As a decolonial strategy, the bolero destabilizes social structure, especially those of class, binaries, and other Western systems of meaning. According to Iris Zavala, the bolero emerged "as a postslavery expression of the new social and cultural cohesion around the master narrative of decolonization" (*Colonialism and Culture* 170). Due to its syncretic nature and multicultural influences (primarily Spanish and African), the bolero, for example, rejects a homogenous imagined national community.⁵⁶ Part of the process of decolonization hinges on rejecting this nationalist framework and pushing more towards a regional framework which the bolero allows us to envision in the form of a trans-Latinx hemispheric latinidad.

Further, the bolero structures reality for the characters in the same way that the bolero structures the novel. Titling each chapter with a line from a famous bolero alludes to the fact that the novel itself is structured like a lyrical bolero full of themes of melodic repetition, irreparable loss, and insatiable desire; therefore the reader should not expect resolution to the plot that the author posits but instead a return to those cyclical themes in the form of the inescapability of colonial trauma. Celia's trajectory mimics the bolero structure and in a moment of self-realization asserts, "At this stage of my life, with a recently married daughter, a frayed marriage that would last forever, and a head totally empty of plans, I should have acknowledged that my entire existence had revolved around the bolero" (*Last Night* 53). Rather than destroy her character, the realization that her life had "revolved around the bolero" seems to help Celia cope with the loss of her daughter and the fact that her marriage will always leave her in a

⁵⁶ See Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* (1991).

constant state of desire or unfulfillment. Her character embodies this inescapable process. She finds value in this pattern of repetition with a difference as a meaning-making process stating that

It seemed coincidental, but it wasn't. I had to go on this cruise...for me to realize that people come into the world destined to be sustained by intangible things, by odors that recur, a color that always comes back, a music, in my case, that appears and disappears at culminating moments, melodies that come and go in our minds to let us know that one phase is over and the next is about to begin. (*Last Night* 54)

This concept of repetition with a difference functions as a law of sustainability in the novel. The passage, and the novel more generally, seem to echo Derrida's's notion of "difference and repetition." Like Deleuze's work, Montero's novel means to challenge the idea of a metaphysical fictions such as truth, knowledge, origins, etc., which according to Sarah Gendron's reading of Deleuze, are fictions that have

managed to persist in Western thought because difference has always been subordinated to identity. Deleuze's strategy is to substitute what he refers to as "nomadic thought" for traditional ways of thinking in an attempt to transcend or "pervert" institutional norms and thus eventually to expose the general failure of Western representation. (11)

Using the bolero as a strategy of "nomadic thought," which makes sense considering the bolero's history of migration from Cuba to Mexico to other Latin American regions, and erotic language and images of the abject. The abject, according to Kristeva, seeks to pervert institutional norms (16) and thus in the context of Montero's novel, exposes the general failure of Western

representation of the Caribbean and black bodies. The bolero's "nomadic life can be understood as a sort of modification of the internal form of the aristocratic erotico-lyrical poetry" (read Western representation), "once the latter comes into contact with processes of social democratization and emancipatory narratives" (Zavala, "When the Popular Sings the Self" 189). Embedded within the bolero are emotional narratives of the "experiences of the displaced gaucho and immigrant, and the narrative of love societies of Cuba and Mexico (areas where there was more African presence)" (Zavala, *Colonialism and Culture*, 170).

The bolero's structural repetition, language of sensuality (odors, colors, melodies), fluid movements, and themes of loss, memory, and desire characterize the characters' system of meaning. The circulation of desire, as expressed through the bolero, is what ties the islands and the characters in the novel together. In fact, desire *is* in the language of the bolero. Vanessa Knights highlights the relationship between desire and the bolero, noting that the bolero "speaks the language of desire, of its absence and presence, of illusion and disillusionment and is therefore not so much about love or pleasure but about a desire that by definition is impossible to realize: the pursuit of the unattainable other" (Knights 84). This desire for the "unattainable other" embedded within the bolero directly speaks to abject encounters the characters engage in as a way to "pervert institutional norms" in order to create a breakdown within Western systems of meaning which include binaries of subject/other and self/other.

Sites of Abjection

Recalling that bolero epistemology destabilizes Western systems of meaning and binaries, such as subject/"other" and human/animal, will be useful for the next portion of this chapter in understanding the bolero's relation to the abject. The abject, according to Julia

Kristeva, refers to “the human reaction (horror, vomit) to a threatened breakdown in meaning caused by the loss of the distinction between subject and object or between self and other” (4). Bolerismo is a cultural method for mourning loss and the abject is the act, or the performance, of “the violence of mourning for an ‘object’ that has always already been lost. The abject shatters the wall of repression and its judgments” (*Last Night* 15). Touristing is a platform by which Fernando performs this abject violence and attempts to reconcile his “abject” existence of feeling neither completely subject nor “other” or completely colonizer or colonized. Touristing examines the relationship between tourism and performance as “the performance of leisure and the Caribbean is the designated site of leisure” and in the process of “touristing ‘the Caribbean’ becomes signifier and tourist desire is signified” (Gourdine 82).

Performance and scripts play a large part in the scenario of conquest. Fernando for instance fantasies about his role of participating in enacting a colonial script when he mentions Admiral Nelson, a highly regarded British naval officer who lead several expeditions in the Caribbean in the late 1700’s. The chapters alternate narrators between Fernando and Celia, thus the following is narrated through Celia’s voice but uttered in indirect discourse by Fernando, “[Fernando] only managed to murmur that Admiral Nelson had good reason for describing [Antigua] as an infernal pit, a well of indolence, a thorn in the flesh, that would drive any man to drink;” stating a couple of pages later “that island is a filthy hole” (*Last Night* 55, 58). Antigua is no longer a brief call girl, but an infernal pit—hell, a filthy hole—a place that incites horror, illness, vomit, in other words, an abject space. This colonial reenactment, this performance of attempting to achieve pleasure through virgin islands “narratively (re)inscribe[s] the Caribbean as an ideal pleasure zone” (Gourdine 81). However, rather than let it become a pleasure zone, Montero’s novel complicates tourism by making the Caribbean an abject zone—a zone of

collision and contact that enables and incites the abject, or the place where boundaries and a Western sense of order breakdown for Fernando and Celia. The Caribbean becomes an abject space where Western systems of meaning collapse and with it its binaries of human/animal, desire/repulsion, and scarcity/excess.

According to Dino Felluga, Juila Kristeva “associates the aesthetic experience of the abject with poetic catharsis” (“Modules on Kristeva”). Bolerismo with its elegant suffering, dignified resistance, cutting of veins, and fucking functions as a similar aesthetic experience of poetic catharsis which is achieved through the execution of the character’s abject encounters. One of the ways in which the characters cope with loss, for example, is through the frame of death, a topic the text immediately opens with:

“‘She hasn’t died,’ [Celia] paused. ‘She’s gotten married—come to think of it, that may be worse.’

Celia burst into laughter, her bare breasts trembled, and in a final maternal gesture she put her hand between my legs...and gave me a circular caress, free now of all desire, a grateful, gentle caress, like the faithful licking of an animal.” (*Last Night 1*).

Death leads to a sexual gesture on Celia’s part which in turn is read by Fernando as a maternal and animal like gesture. According to Felluga, “the corpse especially exemplifies Kristeva’s concept since it literalizes the breakdown of the distinction between subject and object that is crucial for the establishment of identity and for our entrance into the symbolic order,” (“Modules on Kristeva”) which is how as social beings one has been conditioned to derive meaning. Celia, who finds death irresistibly sexually arousing finds affirmation in the instances of people she reads about who have experienced similar arousal in *Psychology Today*. Each

instance she reads about brings her “closer to the key: the proximity of death—someone else’s death, obviously—intensifies sexual desire in certain individuals... I’m not going too far afield when I compare what happens to me with what has occurred to these people” (*Last Night* 21). Death blurs the line between the subject and the other. More so than the ‘idea’ of death itself, what stimulates Celia is the break down of the symbolic order.

Celia’s attraction or desire of/for the abject “other,” which has been demonstrated through her attraction to Agustín Conejo, a lover who she describes as a filthy hairy gorilla, is further established by her arousal by the idea of death. If the distinction between subject and object is crucial for the establishment of a stable identity, Celia’s peculiar and ambiguous relationship between death and sexual desire speaks to the novel’s characterization of Celia and her lack of a fixed racial, ethnic, national, identity—in other words, the lack of an identity that would be premised on a colonial logic of difference.

Equally revealing as Celia’s relationship between death and sexual desire is Fernando’s inability to separate the sexual from the maternal or other categories such as human/animal, as suggested by his likening of Celia’s sexual caress to a maternal gesture, free of all desire, and animalistic--“like the faithful licking of an animal.” Like Celia, Fernando’s association between sexual desire and the abject speaks to the circulation of desire present throughout the novel and the characters’ inappropriate objects of desire. The novel’s uses the abject as a way to break down the notion of civility’s symbolic order and highlight the tension between the appropriate and inappropriate other. According to Kristeva, “by way of abjection, primitive societies have marked out a precise area of their culture in order to remove it from the threatening world of animals or animalism, which were imagined as representatives of sex and murder” (12-13). Fernando’s conflation between the maternal and the sexual, and the human and the animal,

indicates that he has yet to establish his relation to his objects of desire. His “primal repression,” “one that precedes the establishment of the subject's relation to its objects of desire and of representation, before even the establishment of the opposition, conscious/unconscious” (“Modules on Kristeva”), seems unable to distinguish between me and other, and between me and m(other). The abject then has a direct relationship to the discourse of civility. Both Fernando and Celia struggle with distinguishing the human and the animal and separating repulsion from desire. Julieta, a mysterious older woman who becomes Fernando lover on the cruise, is the nexus that connects all these relationships and at the same time functions as a disruption of stability and order in the novel Julieta’s body becomes the site of past and present transgressions.

Upon meeting Julieta, the first thing Fernando notices is a birthmark on Julieta’s inner-thigh. Fernando notes:

“It could have been repulsive—the line between repulsion and desire tends to waver a good deal. But this woman’s birthmark, an island...dazzled me...in a cerebral flash that was immediately reflected...in a partial, inexcusable, almost animal erection.” (*Last Night* 15)

Here again is the problematic sexualizing of the island trope through Fernando’s description of Julieta’s birthmark as an island. However, instead of signifying simple tropes of escape or paradise, the image of the island incites desire and repulsion, a linguistic binary that collapses with Fernando’s conflation of the two terms. Thus not only is his reading of the birthmark troublesome, but his articulation of his reaction is as well. In describing his reaction as a “partial, inexcusable, almost animal erection,” Fernando subjects himself to an abject positionality. Although he is briefly horrified by his reactionary erection, he quickly continues on to his next

sentence, thereby implying a shamelessness in his lack of primal repression, which only reinforces his conflation between desire and repulsion. The novel's writing style is strategically *sin vergüenza*⁵⁷ or shameless in its immersion of the abject.

Like Fernando, Celia experiences a similar sexual impulse when she witnesses three islanders slash a cow's throat, suck the blood from the wound, and engage in an act of animal bestiality. The scene is so excessive that it is almost comical. Upon witnessing the violent interaction, Celia reacts with excitement, thinking, "There they were again, death and animal passion, the two things that excited me most in life. And I was excited, I squeezed my thighs together and had a demonic impulse to join in the group and suck too, let myself be manhandled and massacred" (*Last Night* 56). The sacrificial ritual, if one can call it that, has an aspect of performance that Celia desires to take part in. Present again in this passage is the repetition of this colonial script and desire, or impulse to partake in an abject, violent act of transfer. The novel complicates the colonial script by highlighting *latinidad*'s confrontation with Caribbean blackness and the internal racialization of the Caribbean.

Celia seems to want to inhabit both spaces at once, she desires to be the subject or agent of violence (as the one who sucks) and the object that violence is done onto (as the one who is manhandled and massacred.) Even in her psychosexual breakdown, she cannot seem to decide where she belongs, as an oppressed, or as the oppressor, as colonizer or colonized. In her imagined sphere, Celia exists as both, but no matter which position she exists in, they both involve violence. The implication of this inescapable violence highlights Celia's inescapable neo-liberal reality because although she might be an upper class Caribbean tourist, the novel makes sure to make present the hierarchy between Spanish versus Anglophone Caribbean

⁵⁷ In the Gloria Anzaldúa sense of shamelessness. Shamelessness as a response to oppression. Shamelessness as a form of resistance. See *Borderlands/La Frontera*.

peoples. This is the condition of *mestizaje*'s colonial legacy.

The American cruise ship functions as a symbol of American cultural imperialism which she participates in but does not seem to identify with. As problematic as Fernando and Celia's neo-colonial tourist behavior might be, Celia at least seems to be an avid critic of American culture. We already know that Celia thinks of, at least Anglo American men, as gringos. She describes the cruise ship's lounge chair as a "cold American lounge chair" which she would be more than happy to exchange "for the passionate shelter of an island cot" (*Last Night* 33). Celia's critique of the "cold American lounge chair" suggests her awareness of the rigidity, emptiness, and consumerism of American culture. Yet, as aware as Celia might be of U.S. imperialism, she is complicit with the larger U.S. neo-colonial project as she projects a colonial gaze onto the islands' black bodies.

There is a pivotal scene later in the novel, however, that complicates Celia's character. For a moment, Celia imagines what it might be like to have the colonial gaze placed onto her. As she docks the island of Gosier, Celia wonders if,

Maybe I'd see that other woman on the rocks, a pale, disoriented blonde, we would look at each other, she wanting to be on the other side, wanting to be the woman I was, devouring me with her eyes, and I wanting to be only what I could be: a vision at the edge of the mirage, an apparition within another apparition.

(*Last Night* 80)

This scene offers an inverted mirroring of an earlier passage when Celia imposes this very same gaze onto a black woman islander. In the passage, Celia is placed in front of a blonde white woman and for a moment, Celia imagines herself becoming the white woman's object of colonial desire—the inappropriate other. Celia becomes the inappropriate other and in doing so

she illustrates:

a practice of subjectivity that is still unaware of its own constituted nature, hence, the difficulty to exceed the simplistic pair of subjectivity and objectivity; a practice of subjectivity that is unaware of its continuous role in the production of meaning, as if things can make sense by themselves, so that the interpreter's function consists of only choosing among the many existing readings; unaware of representation as representation. (Minh-ha 419)

Up until this moment, Celia had not been aware of the continuous role she had played in the production of meaning or rather its reproduction in the form of the colonial gaze. She had accepted the existing readings, or representations, of the Caribbean as paradise and black women as sexually contended creatures. Having the colonial gaze placed on Celia causes this to change. At stake then is the problem of representation which functions as the mirage within the mirage in the passage above. The passage flips the colonial script and now it is Celia who plays the inappropriate object whose role is always defined in relation to the appropriate subject, in this case the white woman. This flip in script enables Celia to realize that image of the “happy, fortunate, satisfied” black woman—an image which she never *actually* witnesses—is just a mirage. Celia seems to realize that colonialism is just a trick, “an apparition within another apparition.”

As non-black and non-Anglo Caribbean subject, Celia inhabits a curious and ambiguous insider/outsider status that allows her to identify as both civilized and uncivilized, as colonizer and colonized. Celia is, in Trinh Minh-ha's words an “inappropriated other” which she defines as “as someone whom you cannot appropriate, and as someone who is inappropriate. Not quite other, not quite the same” (418). The mixed race body *is* an (in)appropriate body; the

mixed race body is always becoming, always arriving and therefore cannot be appropriated and cannot be so easily marked as it travels between the appropriate and inappropriate as Celia's character does, between moral, civil, appropriate behavior and immoral, uncivil, and inappropriate behavior with her engagement in abject desires. This process of moving in between, of identifying with and against dominant ideology is called disidentification—a process which Jose Muñoz defines as a “third mode of dealing with dominant ideology, one that neither opts to assimilate within such a structure nor strictly opposes it; rather disidentification is a strategy that works on and against dominant ideology” (Muñoz 11). As a strategy, disidentification is what prompts Celia's character development and is the logic that helps her realize that she is just as vulnerable to the island as it is to her and allows her to become conscious of this dual position that she inhabits. The Caribbean becomes the space that enables her to resist and act on this duality.

Even though the novel never explicitly identifies Fernando or Celia as *mestizos*, it is clear that they constantly struggle between identifying with aspects of Caribbean culture such as the *bolero* but also with colonial representations of the Caribbean as paradise. This tension reveals how the novel is ultimately a critique of the racialization of afro-Caribbean bodies in hispanophone novels of the region. As mixed race bodies, Celia and Fernando possess a very peculiar and versatile insider/outsider positionality. This ambiguous positionality enables mixed race bodies to enact and signal multiple identities at once in the way that Celia and Fernando for example enact and signal Mexican, Cuban, Hispanic Caribbean, etc.—in other words a trans-Latinx, hemispheric latinidad. The novel's attention to Celia's and Fernando's abjection of black bodies functions as a critique of the limits of a hemispheric latinidad. As mixed-race bodies, Celia and Fernando are afforded a level of class privilege, however, they are also subject to the

social structures based on racial purity; they are still bound to that symbolic order. At the end of the day they are 20th century postcolonial subjects on an American ship.

By nature of consisting of multiple subjectivities at once, the mixed race body cannot be authentically represented since it does not function on a premise of authenticity but rather multiplicity. As an improper body tainted with impure blood, the black and mixed race body is an abject body. Kristeva's notion of the abject is useful here since, according to Elizabeth Grosz, Kristeva "asks about the conditions under which the clean and proper...law-abiding, social body emerges ...The abject is...irreducible to the subject/other and inside/outside oppositions...The abject necessarily partakes of both polarized terms but cannot be clearly identified with either" (192). Like the abject, the mixed race body also collapses binaries and breaks down Western systems of meaning.

On National Identitarian Practices and Regionalism

Although the theme of nation-building is characteristic of the 19th century Latin American literary tradition, Montero does not use the idea of romance as a way to create an allegory of the nation. Montero's novel falls more in line with the tradition of early 19th century Latin American resistance literature (which included writers like Jose Martí) and came out as a response to American cultural imperialism. Even though nationalism fails as an adequate framework for Caribbean literature and identity, there is also a danger in wanting to categorize or define the Caribbean in terms of regionalism. Elizabeth DeLoughrey has noted how regionalism "excludes those who choose not to migrate, and often does not question how gender and class contribute to particular migrant practices. As literary figures extolling the virtues of transoceanic migrations, there is also the danger of defining regionalism by the experience of an elite class"

(38). This is true in regards to Montero and Jose Marti, who are both literary figures who choose to migrate from Cuba. This is important since *Last Night* is ultimately a novel about Cuban tourists representing other Caribbean people, particularly the Anglo- and Francophone Caribbean. *Last Night*, however, takes care to note the role class plays in enabling the characters to racialize and sexualize Afro-Caribbean subjects.

At the same time that the novel critiques class-privileged Caribbean subjects, Montero tries to complicate elite formations of regionalism through the bolero which the novel uses as a way to posit the idea of a trans-Latinx hemispheric latinidad. The bolero, according to Iris Zavala, *bolero* flattens social hierarchies by mixing “ethnicities, rhythms, and feelings with social and symbolic power in such a way that it is not overdetermined by race, gender, class, sexuality or ethnicity...[the bolero] organizes forms of experience beyond the limits of class privilege” (“When the Popular Sings the Self” 192). The erotic language of desire embedded within the bolero attempts to transcend categories of social class and the pitfalls of elite regionalism.

Rather than focus on building a sense of national identity, Montero’s uses erotic language in the novel as a rhetorical device to critique neo-liberalism. Regarding the relationship between the Latin American literary tradition and the use of the erotic Doris Sommer further notes:

It is the erotic rhetoric [of Latin American fiction] that organizes patriotic novels. With each obsessive effort to be free of the positivist tradition in which national projects (were) coupled with productive heterosexual desire, a continuing appeal is reinscribed in the resistant Boom. The straight lines of "historical" novels can fairly be reconstructed from the efforts to bend them. (2)

Montero does succeed in breaking free of the positivist tradition as she takes these literary Latin

American fiction traditions and inverts them by displacing productive heterosexual desire with abject desire, for example homoerotic desire in the case of Fernando's grandmother, Angela. The novel uses the letters of homosexual romance as a way of queering "the straight lines" of history which the novel's non-linear progression, with its constant flashbacks, also underscores. Furthermore, productive heterosexual desire typically happens only within the, ostensibly, sacred institution of marriage.

Infidelity in the novel is not contained in one character's point of view, or even in one timeline. The love plots of Fernando's and Celia's extra-marital affairs overlap: Julieta, the woman on the cruise with whom Fernando betrays Celia, happens to be the wife of Agustin, the man with whom Celia, earlier in their marriage, betrays Fernando. Julieta also happens to be the name of the foreigner with whom Abel (Marina) betrays Fernando's grandmother who was also a married woman. All of the characters commit an act of transgression, or betrayal of monogamy, and their interlocking plots reveal the interlocking system of colonial oppression. None of them are innocent or traditional Latin American heroes/heroines; they are in fact anti-heroes/heroines who in their most vulnerable moments illustrate the tension between latinidad and Caribbean blackness through sexual violence and expressions of abject desire.

All of the novel's romances function as failed relationships. Classic examples of Latin American romance during the 19th century, according to Doris Sommer, "are almost inevitably stories of star-crossed lovers who represent particular regions, races, parties, economic interests, and the like. Their passion for conjugal and sexual union spills over to a sentimental readership in a move that hopes to win partisan minds along with hearts" (5). Rather than represent a particular race, region, party or economic interest, *Last Night's* relationships reveal the failure of the institution of marriage. In Montero's novel, Julieta functions as the repeated offense—she is

the lover that comes between both Fernando's grandmother and her lover and between Fernando and Celia. Julieta claims that the death and loss of her husband is the reason she has decided to go on this cruise. Unbeknownst to Celia (and the reader at the time of Julieta's introduction), Julieta was Agustín Conejo's wife. Julieta is the connection between the past and the present, she is the constant variable, the repeating pattern of chaos. This is alluded to through Julieta's butterfly-shaped birthmark: "it was impossible not to notice the birthmark, a dark red stain, the size and shape of a butterfly and covered with hairs....an island rising from the most suggestive part of [Julieta's] body" (*Last Night* 14). Julieta's body becomes the site through which history is repeated and transgressions against lovers are reenacted. These acts of transgression, which stem from the wounds of colonial violence which regulates and policies "appropriate" desires, reappear as acts of "touristing," or other acts of domination on and against the "other," be it women's bodies, black bodies, or the Caribbean landscape.

Besides erotic rhetoric, a second characteristic of Latin American novels is the discourse of *mestizaje*, which is also intimately linked to a nationalist discourse. According to Sommer, "as a rhetorical solution to the crises in [Latin American] novels/nations, miscegenation (an unfortunate translation of *mestizaje*, which is practically a slogan for many projects of national consolidation) is often the figure for pacification of the 'primitive' or 'barbarous' sector" (22). Montero employs a very different representation of *mestizaje* through the bolero. As a "transcultural idiom" the bolero "suggest[s] the heteroglossic and polyphonic cultural identity of the national hegemonies" (Zavala, *Colonialism and Culture* 170). Yet *mestizaje* does not work as a project of national consolidation in Montero's novel. The erotic description of black bodies in fact highlights how when used as a project of nation-building, *mestizaje* excludes the African diaspora. Thus rather than reduce *mestizaje* to a discourse of homogenous racial mixing,

Montero uses the bolero as a form of cultural unity, not national unity, and emphasizes its “transcultural” “heteroglossic and polyphonic” quality that gestures towards a trans-Latinx, hemispheric latinidad.

As much, then, as the novel is about colonial violence through sexual violence and exotic representations of the black Caribbean bodies, it is also about neo-liberal resistance through cultural resistance in the form of the bolero. The bolero refuses a narrative of a homogenized imagined community and functions as a metaphor of an inclusive *mestizaje*. Montero works on and against conventional Latin American literary traditions as a way to critique some of the ways in which these traditions have been complicit in perpetuating colonial violence in the Caribbean and marks an interesting turn to inter-Caribbean tensions and racialization and blackness.

When asked in an interview about what literary tradition her work belongs to, Montero shared that:

... if I were to be in a dialogue with one literary tradition, it would have to be with the one from [Puerto Rico], because this is where I live and this is where, to a great extent, I developed as a writer...I don't share thematic or stylistic characteristics with my Puerto Rican colleagues...I can understand the idea of a "dialogue" as an identification with something. But I don't think that geographic origins define that identification. I could feel for example a strong identification with a novel by Jaime Bayly, who is Peruvian. (Prieto 89)

According to this interview segment, Montero claims to not subscribe to a nationalist identitarian politics or essentialist notions. In the case of *Last Night*, this seems to hold true. Montero's response shies away from an identitarian logic. For her, the matter of identity and identification go beyond essentialist associations of gender, race, and nationality and instead suggests multiple

identifications that can simultaneously co-exist within a collective identity. Montero's narrative strategies do not subscribe to a nationalist framework. Rather than rely on geographic origins to define identity, the novel's strategy, in terms of character introduction and character development, relies on the performance of cultural practices as a way of characterization and identity formation.

For example, the cultural literature Celia and Fernando consume suggests a level of class privilege and suggests that they speak English. Celia, however, makes it a point to let the reader know that *Psychology Today*⁵⁸ is “(una de las tantas revistas gringas que recibe Fernando)/(one of the many gringo magazines that Fernando subscribes to)—the others he subscribes to are *National Geographic* and *Travel and Leisure*” (*Last Night* 21). Wherever it is that she and Fernando reside, that place has access to U.S. Anglo literature like *Psychology Today* and they are a household that subscribes to U.S. magazines. This suggests a clear familiarity with and regular consumption of U.S. culture. Celia's use of the word “gringo” here is very telling. For one, it marks her as non-Anglo. The term “gringo” comes from a specifically Mexican Spanish dialect that illustrates the tension-filled history between Mexicans towards Anglo Americans, especially after the Mexican-American war of 1846-1848. Additionally, Celia and Fernando's rejection and fascination with black bodies suggest that they come from a place where black bodies are either not frequently seen or are not considered to be part of the nation's imagined community. Mexico fits this description. Most of the African descended populations in Mexico were mainly brought for plantation work that was generally along the coasts. The discourse of *mestizaje*, in a Mexican context, all but erases the historical presence of black bodies—a point the novel's seems to critique by its hyperbolic sexualization of black bodies. The characters'

⁵⁸ In the original Spanish version *Psychology Today* appears as *Psichology Today*; I am unsure whether that is a typo or for effect of some kind.

excessive and constant reading of black bodies as taboo objects reveals Celia's and Fernando's race and class privilege. Rather than state this directly, the author creates a sense of irony by bringing the reader into a joke about the absurdity of Celia and Fernando's racist logic.

Besides the old boleros, the other genre of music that Fernando likes are Mexican *corridos* which he claims "is a shameful aberration" and is as if he "were a man who liked to put on his wife's underwear" and further notes that he plays "the records with a feeling of embarrassment" as he listened "to Jorge Negrete" (*Last Night* 11). Given his class privilege, Fernando's feelings of shame for liking *corridos* likely comes from the fact that *corridos* is folk music that was created by Mexico's working poor who live in the countryside. This shame highlights Fernando's struggle between identifying with the marginal class while belonging to the dominant class. This tension also underscores the issue of class privilege and cultural consumption. Fernando's taste in music and his classist feelings towards the genres of the lower class (i.e. *corridos* and *rancheras*) reveal how Fernando uses class as a way to attempt to transcend his postcolonial subjectivity. Class privilege is ultimately what enables Fernando to engage in acts of touring.

Further evidence of this struggle between class privilege, identity, and cultural consumption is indicated by Fernando's love for Mexican *rancheras*. Fernando confesses that: "at the age of twenty-five, a few months before my wedding, I was ready to throw it all away for a *mulatta* who sang *rancheras* and with whom I celebrated my farewell to bachelorhood, and her fifty-second birthday" (*Last Night* 4). *Rancheras* draw from the same rural tradition as the *corrido*, so it is ironic that Fernando would be drawn to *rancheras*. In fact, *rancheras* were born out of an initial rejection of Mexico's aristocratic culture and functioned as a symbol of Mexico's new national consciousness. The bolero was also initially "linked to the aristocratic

class's prestige culture," and later "emerged as a prodigious literary body, tattooed with cultural memories directly related to identify and identification" (Zavala, "When the Popular Sings the Self" 190). Unlike *rancheras*, the bolero never became tied to a national identity. On *rancheras*, Rafael Castro notes that,

In the context of Mexican folk music *la cancion ranchera* is a love song sung by the common folk, the peasants of the rural countryside. After the Mexican Revolution *rancheras* became more agreeable to the upper classes because of the movement toward a Mexican identity and nationalism and a rejection of European cultural values. (197)

Cultural consumption becomes a way for Fernando to express the multiplicity of his fractured identity which cannot be solely defined in relation to his upper-class status. This tension between his class status and his musical preferences reveal his connection to his own colonial condition as the hybridized product of a colonial reality that his class privilege cannot erase or transcend.⁵⁹ When framed in terms of cultural repertoire, meaning cultural practices, the question becomes less a question of being (i.e. what *are* Fernando and Celia) and more a question of performance. The colonial gaze that the two characters project becomes problematic since they themselves, as Latinx subjects, share a similar history of colonial oppression with the Caribbean bodies and spaces that they encounter. However, Celia and Fernando's reaction to and

⁵⁹ Given his class status, it is ironic that Fernando would "throw it all away" for a mulatta given his racist attitude towards black women, and black bodies in general, which he views as: "shameless, scheming, corrupt black woman, a black woman who devoured ardent, insatiable black men" (59). In this passage, however, the black woman is half white, as indicated by the term mulatta, and her act of singing *rancheras* somehow seems to civilize her because she is participating in the national imaginary, which on some level, but not completely grant her access to the nation's imagined community. I say not completely because in the end, although Fernando expresses desire for the mulatta, the desire is fleeting and ultimately not feasible, or not worth "throwing" away his initiation into a nationally enforced institution, marriage, which the mulatta would bring into question.

engagement with black bodies ultimately reveal the limits of a trans-Latinx hemispheric latinidad.

Conclusion

In *The Last Night I Spent With You*, Montero inscribes the effects colonial violence and historical trauma has had on the Caribbean. The novel's narrative strategies work to reveal the many layers of histories and cultural memories and practices that continue to inform the Caribbean and its problematic portrayal of blackness by Western culture and its internalization by other Caribbean cultures as a place to exploit and partake in taboo activities. In privileging the representation of the body and performance, Montero's novel offers a way to look beyond a colonial logic of difference. The novel's emphasis on class privilege is key to Montero's novel as it reveals the mode through which a colonial logic of difference functions: through divisionary identitarian practices such as nation, race, ethnicity, class.

For Celia, bolero philosophy allows one to "reflect on your own body, try to see yourself inside and out, try to determine how others are seeing you" (*Last Night* 54). This dual subject positionality of inside/outside describes a non-nationally determined sensibility that exists outside of the binary of subject/other. The abject then in this novel is useful insofar as it allows one to image a different symbolic order, in order to see one's self from the outside, which is not the same as attempting to occupy the position or subjectivity of "the other." To be clear, I am not in any way implying that the text suggests that bolerismo is a way of "understanding" the other—that is not possible in this novel. However, I do contend that the text offers bolerismo, as a marker of regionalism, firstly as a way of envisioning the world—an ideology or way of being/performing in the world—that exists outside of a nationalist framework and secondly that

it allows one to reflect on the agency present in lived performances, and not nationally, geopolitical determined boundaries or notions of space. What is so compelling about Gourdine's theory of touring is this awareness of performance, "touring either lived or textual, provides insight into the relationship between self-identity and physical location that reaches beyond the common sense notions of national identity and colonizing dispositions" (96). Touring in Montero's novel illustrates how the act of tourism is always already inherently embedded or implicated with acts of transfer, violence, and neo-liberalism.

Ironically, these two characters come to the island wanting to escape a traumatic past and static present. However, rather than offer them a haven of leisure and escape, their tourist encounter with the Caribbean forces them to confront their own personal history of trauma and loss—a history they cannot escape due to their own colonial reality as the (textual) cultural embodiment of *mestizaje*. Fernando and Celia both consume and are consumed by the Caribbean's traumatic colonial history and in doing so create a different relationship to the environment and space of the Caribbean. The Caribbean becomes the stage for human consumption and the text itself becomes the literary stage onto which that narrative of displacement, horror, trauma, and abjection is deployed.

Afterword:

Mestizaje's legacy of colonial violence lives on in the textual representations of the works in this study. The text's representations of colonial scripts and their various iterations serve to represent the performativity of the colonial script through the characters and their performance of race. But the very texts themselves, because of the demands of their hybridized form, suggest the possibility of a critical *mestizaje* as an idea or promise that the form of the text offers just beyond the horizon. This possibility of a critical *mestizaje* offers a liberating potential that history will not allow—a way to potentially undo the colonial script. This project traces crucial flashpoints in the evolution of a literary, performative, critical *mestizaje* in order to illustrate the creative and liberating potential of this kind of *mestizaje*.

One of the questions that these works of fiction leave us with is “where do we go from here?” How do we heal? How do we move forward? After all the trauma, violence, and devastation that colonialism has and continues to reproduce, how do we move forward with our dignity still in tact? The novels in this case study answer that question through their creative narratological strategies. We must forge and reclaim our history and our spaces by every creative means necessary. Literature and our everyday performances allow us to do this. My reading interprets the texts in a performative light, arguing that the narratology allows the texts in this study to “perform” something that the mimetic dimension of the narrative cannot. I liken the idea of a critical *mestizaje* as akin to José Muñoz's idea of queerness as he states it on the first page of his book *Cruising Utopia*: “Queerness is not yet here. Queerness is an ideality. Put another way, we are not yet queer [...] Often we can glimpse the worlds proposed and promised by queerness in the realm of the aesthetic” (1). We are not yet mestizx – but the aesthetic form

of the texts promises something that helps begin to undo the representation of repressive colonial scripts.

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