UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA SAN DIEGO

The Open Graves of Latina/os: Representations of a Latinx Horror in Pinto Poetics, Border Gothic, and Homeless Encampments in Los Angeles

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
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by

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The dissertation of Luis Alberto Cortes is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm and electronically.

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this work to my father and mother, Luis & Mayra Cortes for always believing in me. I would also like to thank my brother and sister, Edwin Giovanni and Cynthia Yareli Cortes, for inspiring me. Lastly, I would like to thank my life partner, Defne Sevil, for listening.

I am immensely grateful to my dissertation committee members and professors who guided me in this process. In particular, I would like to thank Dr. Rosaura Sanchez, Dr. Dennis Childs, and Dr. Sara Johnson for their unwavering support. I would like to thank Dr. Curtis Marez and Dr. Sal Nicolazzo for their mentorship and compassion. Lastly, I would like to thank Dr. Fred Randel, Dr. William O'Brien, and Dr. Michael Davidson, for showing me that our life is poetry.

EPIGRAPH

Rest In Peace,
Andres “Chito” Cortes
May 16th, 1959 - April 14th, 2021

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VITA

Luis Alberto Cortes obtained his PhD in Literature at the University of California San Diego. His dissertation explores the genealogical modern inheritance of colonial mechanisms destroying bodies and epistemologies deemed expungable by dominant hegemonic culture. His honors thesis is on John Milton's *Paradise Lost* and the patriarchal family structure represented within the poem, for which he was awarded Honors with Highest Distinction. In the doctoral program, Luis concentrated in 20th century American Literature, specifically Latinx & Chicanx literature. His educational background in both British and American Literature equips him to effectively engage in the discourse of a wide variety of Spanish, Anglophone, & Transatlantic literature and writing discursive fields. Luis Cortes is the son to formerly undocumented migrants, who themselves underwent the life-threatening US-Mexico desert border crossing, and a first-generation Chicano graduate. Luis has presented his work at The Society for the Study of the Multi-Ethnic Literatures of the United States (MELUS) Conference, and the UMass-Amherst Graduate History Association Conference.

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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Luis Alberto Cortes

Doctor of Philosophy in Literature

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Professor Dennis Childs, Co-Chair
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This work centers on the necropolitical lived reality of Latinx people within the United States. Specifically, this work explores the conditions of death present at the US-Mexico border which migrants encounter, as well as the condition of social death that those undocumented migrants inhabit once within the United States. In this project, we examine the haunting voice that is encapsulated within literary texts emerging from or representative of necropolitical geographies; particularly, the US-Mexico border, the prison, and Los Angeles. Through a close reading of the literary texts, in conjunction with historical data which corresponds to the atrocities documented

within the literature, this project focuses on the haunting present within Latinx texts concerned with the migrant, prisoner, and homeless experience. Ultimately, I argue that the work of Tobar, Salinas, Baca, Lucero, and Limón, demand a new reading practice and a new kind of reader; one attuned to the necropolitical realities experienced by Latinx people. What the new reader must understand, is that these necropolitical encounters are sanctioned and absolved by American imperialism and unfettered racialized & patriarchal capitalism.

Introduction: In the Flesh

"O' Heinous Gods
Who stand for LAW!
to you i shall not bow"
—raulrsalinas, "Declaration of a Free Soul"

"There has to be a reason
for all of this misery"
—Graciela Limón, *The River Flows North*

This work is concerned with the process of reclamation, and to that end you are now my accomplice. Together, we will testify, acknowledge, and explore the lives and deaths of Latinx people caused by the United States foreign and domestic economic policy. *The Open Graves of Latina/os* analyzes the horror produced by the legal sorcery which transfigures people, such as the homeless, the incarcerated, and the undocumented, into positions of death-in-life, social death, and biological annihilation.[1] In particular, this project focuses on Latinx cultural production, such as novels, poems, images, films, and testimonies that represent this systematic process of dehumanization through terror.[2] I trace this Latinx counter-discourse against power, generated both by authors who represent and survivors who testify about the legal creation of American necropolitical mechanisms of disarticulation through the late 20th and early 21st centuries. Stated simply, my work examines the texture of Latinx writing which takes as its focus American institutions which systematically kill our people.

My work centers on a Latinx necropolitical literary undercurrent which resists the dominant hegemonic cultural institutions that transmutate the human into nonhuman in

[1] Here, I am deploying Joan Dayan's formulation of legal sorcery as, "the creation of an artificial person in law, whether the civil body, the legal slave, or the felon rendered dead in law, takes place in a world where the supernatural serves as the infallible mechanism of justice" ("Legal Slaves and Civil Bodies," 3)

[2] I am of course building on Dayan's conception that "It is through law that persons, variously figured, gain or lose definition, become victims of prejudice or inheritors of privilege. And once outside the valuable discrimination of personhood, their claims become inconsequential" (*The Law is a White Dog*, xi)

maintenance of American domestic and foreign economic interests. Throughout this work, I demonstrate how authors represent the modern perpetuation of a Latinx subaltern in the United States and Latin America as sanctioned, absolved, and executed for the sake of capitalist profiteering, or American Imperialism.[3] By American Imperialism, I am referring to the authoritarian regime which controls foreign subjects through capitalist coercion and military force abroad.[4] United States judicial and legislative policy disproportionately target, kill, and disappear Latinx people, and this violence is transcribed in the language of legal text making and unmaking persons, in the speech act and performative utterance which delineates who may live and who must die.[5]

The premise of this dissertation—one we must accept in order to fully appreciate the dialectical relationship between law and Latinx counter-discourse against power—is that we understand the law as codified in language, inscribed in words, and open to interpretation. Of course, I use the term dialectic to reference that which purports itself not to be there, and yet constitutes the margin of existence.[6] That is, after all, the reason why judges exist; their purpose is

[3] The primary authors engaged within this project include Hector Tobar, Raul Salinas, Jimmy Santiago Baca, Judy A. Lucero, & Graciela Limón as each implicates American Imperialism operating within distinct discursive fields, including homeless encampments, prisons, the US-Mexico border, and other Latin American countries such as Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras. The historical purview of this project spans from the 1960s to early 2000s, during the Prisoner's Rights Movement of the sixties and immigrant experience post-9/11 attacks and increased targeting of people of color by the Border Patrol and Customs agency

[4] Here, I am building on what scholar Prabhat Patnaik indicates as "the nature of finance capital to oppose any state intervention, other than that which promotes its own interest. It does not want an activist state when it comes to the promotion of employment, or the provision of welfare, or the protection of small and petty producers; but it wants the state to be active exclusively in its own interest" (*The Changing Face of Imperialism*, 65)

[5] In addition to the legal language of the law which creates the conditions of possibility necessary for much of the necropolitical violence in Latin America which we will analyze in this work, the Freedom of Information Act provides declassified document which detail that the CIA was well aware that "extrajudicial killings of certain categories of persons [were] almost routine" in Guatemala through the early 1990s ("The CIA in Latin America National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book No. 27, Document 6: CIA Cable, From: Chief, Latin America Branch, To : Immediate Director, "Station Investigation of Human Rights Violations in Guatemala," October 15, 1991)

[6] My use of the dialectic invites the definition of haunting proffered by Avery Gordon: "If haunting describes how that which appears to be not there is often a seething presence, acting on and often meddling with taken-for-granted realities, the ghost is just the sign, or the empirical evidence if you like, that tells you a haunting is taking place" (*Ghostly Matters*, 8)

to analyze and clarify the law to the rest of us. The law, in a literary sense, is a text which documents, as Foucault notes in *The Lives of Infamous Men* (1977), the often-violent encounters of individuals with systems of power. The law is a text which reveals the cultural anxieties of the dominant hegemonic group, as it divests people of their rights and humanity. This book examines the Latinx articulation of these necropolitical zones, with emphasis on the incarcerated, the homeless, and the undocumented.

The law generates zones of exception through necropolitical conditions of inhumanity. I argue that from those conditions of inhumanity & zones of exclusion, a modern Latinx counter-discourse to power is formed that exposes the violence, death, and absence engendered by American law and policy. Because this modern Latinx counter-discourse to power represents genocides, massacres, open graves, ruptured families, and living-entombment sanctioned by American legal sorcery, it is a corpus written in the language of violence, death, and horror. Therefore, let us approach this modern Latinx counter-discourse as a form of horror, a modern Latinx horror[7] that takes as its subject American foreign and domestic policy, and represents the law's systematic gothic dehumanization processes.[8]

In the subsequent chapters, I investigate a Latinx horror in the form of a voice which speaks from beyond the grave. Although various stylistic and content points produce the affective quality of horror in these Latinx texts (such as violence, rape, torture, dismemberment, castration, forced

[7] In "Horror, Crisis, and Control," cultural scholar John S. Nelson indicates that "Horror evokes the *sublime*, taking beauty versus ugliness or good versus evil to extremes, then transcending them in glimpses. What's horrifying attracts *and* repels. It paralyzes our limbs, thickens our tongues, and constricts our vocal cords to scream. It raises the hair on our necks. If we neither face nor flee it, we become its abject victims. It consumes and subsumes us—as ghosts and vampires reproduce. By overwhelming categories and defenses, horror spurs utter vulnerability: incomprehensible or even unrecognizable in daylight worlds of fathomable fears" (*Politics of Horror*, 19)

[8] For example, let us consider how scholar Jason De Leon indicates that "Contrary to the Border Patrol's sterile language ('Prevention Through Deterrence'), feigned naivete ('this policy has had the *unintended* consequence of increasing the number of fatalities along the border'), and deflection of blame ('Not a day goes by when we don't find immigrants who say they were abandoned by their smuggler'), it is the federal agency that has created an infrastructural funnel along the US-Mexico border that intentionally directs people toward the desert" (*The Land of Open Graves*, 66)

sterilization, living-entombment, forced isolation, and non-linear temporality), it is the voice which speaks from the grave which posits the counter-discourse of people annihilated by American necropolitical systems, in locales like homeless encampments in Los Angeles, maximum security federal penitentiaries, and the U.S.-Mexico desert border. It is the voice which speaks from the grave which functions as artistic reclamation and rearticulation of that which is lost: while bodies/people die "forever," cultural memory—poems, novels, testimonies—represent a form of living on.[9]

The law divests the individual of rights, alters personhood, and actively seeks to destroy through necroviolence;[10] therefore, the Latinx animation of the dead—the voice that speaks from beyond the grave—functions as a metapoetic cathartic act and as resistive praxis. As the law endeavors to create absence, the presently examined Latinx cultural artifacts defy and resist those attempts to produce erasure.[11] This resistance through cultural production is metapoetic, because the Latinx text invariably recognizes itself as text, as in the iteration of the voice from beyond the grave which recognizes that it speaks though dead. The voice which speaks from beyond the grave and is aware of its own condition of living death or death-in-life, is a resistive act that is also an act of healing, or cathartic act. From a poetic and literary perspective, the text inscribes and preserves the encounters with necropolitical American systems of power, systems which seek to silence and erase Latinx experience.

[9] The importance of testimonies within this work is founded by Luis Martin-Cabrera's claim that "For without testimonies justice is impossible, and yet traumatic experiences can only be documented in their own impossibility" (*Radical Justice*, 28)

[10] Here I am using Jason De Leon's definition of necroviolence as "[...] violence performed and produced through the specific treatment of corpses that is perceived to be offensive, sacrilegious, or inhumane by the perpetrator, the victim (and her or his cultural group), or both" (Leon, 69)

[11] I am deploying Gordon's conception of haunting as "The ghost [which] is not simply a dead or missing person, but a social figure, and investigating it can lead to that dense site where history and subjectivity make social life. The ghost or apparition is one form by which something lost, or barely visible, or seemingly not there to our supposedly well-trained eyes, makes itself known or apparent to us, in its own way, of course" (*Ghostly Matters*, 8)

The voice which speaks from beyond the grave about American-sponsored death in the interest of economic gain, is the unifying factor and linchpin for my present demarcation of the modern Latinx horror. I use the term modern cautiously. I mean modern in the sense that this voice encapsulates a quotidian inheritance of colonial mechanisms of annihilation that operate within present-day homeless encampments, prisons, and the desert border. I emphasize that these judicially sanctioned necropolitical structures which disproportionately target people of color, the poor, and the undocumented, are capitalist ventures. When in spaces like Los Angeles, the horror produced by the state in the lives of Latinx people is domestic warfare cultivated in the name of racist capitalist patriarchies. When in locales like Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Mexico or Latin America, the horror in the form of death, murder, dismemberment, and disappearances is always authorized and absolved by the maintenance of United States foreign economic interests.[12]

Whether in response to the mechanisms of an internal colonialism in ethnic enclaves, or in response to anti-Communist military operations in Latin America, the voice which speaks from beyond the grave offers a decolonization project in the resistive act of not remaining absent and silent, in the act of making visible the otherwise unregistered crimes against humanity perpetrated in the name of the almighty dollar.[13] The unregistered crimes against humanity broached within this dissertation include the lived reality of immigrants buried alive in the desert, as evidenced by Graciela Limón's characters who discover a vehicle filled with people who were buried alive in the desert:

[12] Scholar and researcher Etelle Higonnet notes that American-created Operacion Limpieza "invested awesome power in Arriage Bosque (one of Guatemala's 'most effective and enlightened leaders,' according to the American Embassy), who a few months after [...] these executions would lead Guatemala's first scorched-earth campaign (1966-1967) that killed 8,000 civilians, mostly in the eastern lowland part of the country, in order to uproot a few hundred guerillas" (*Quiet Genocide*, 7)

[13] Etelle Higonnet notes that "In the early 1960s, after the high cost of the Korean War and following the threat of the Cuban Revolution, the United States, through its USAID Public Safety Program, focused on strengthening the domestic security forces of nations like Guatemala it deemed vulnerable to Communism" (Higonnet, 5)

> Menda and Borrego stared in disbelief at what was in the van. Because the vehicle had landed on its side bodies were crammed to one side, piled one on top of the other. The ones on the bottom were wedged into the crack between the side and floor of the cabin. At first it was nearly impossible to tell how many corpses were there because they were tangled, and all that could be made out were legs entwined with arms; heads dangled grotesquely under and over torsos. Those bodies were desiccated, but not yet skeletons. What used to be faces were now skulls covered by blackened, dried-out skin, teeth protruded in a horrified grin. It was obvious that the victims, all of them naked, had ripped off their clothes in an attempt to lower their body heat. A closer look showed that there were several men and some women, one still gripping the body of a child. The inside panels of the van were covered with bloody scratches telling of a desperate, futile attempt to cut through the metal to let in air into that deadly trap (*The River Flows North*, 133).

This passage denotes the macabre existence and death of migrants who travel north through the desert in hopes of attaining gainful employment in the United States; the new reading practice and new reader demanded by a Latinx horror is someone attuned to the desperate and futile attempts to survive expressed in the excerpt.[14] It is through the transposition of the reader into the position of the migrant that we are made to feel the horrific existence of the Latinx exclusion. This passage, and several others which we shall engage together in the subsequent chapters, utilizes horror and the grotesque to render the terror experienced by Latin Americans at the US-Mexico border. In addition to the horror expressed in the aforementioned excerpt, this dissertation explores the horror of massacre and genocide of indigenous populations in the mountains of Latin American countries by United States-sponsored military units, represented within Guatemalan author Hector Tobar's *Tattooed Soldier*. Furthermore, I trace a Latinx horror within the carceral system during the 1960s and 1970s, as expressed by the poetry of raulrsalinas, Jimmy Santiago Baca, and Judy Lucero. My

[14] I argue that a Latinx horror demands a new reader in accordance to Avery Gordon's formulation of haunting as "a constituent element of modern social life. It is neither pre-modern superstition nor individual psychosis; it is a generalized social phenomenon of great import. To study social life one must confront the ghostly aspects of it. This confrontation requires (or produces) a fundamental change in the way we know and make knowledge, in our mode of production" (*Ghostly Matters*, 7)

objective throughout this project is to show how literacy participates in this registration in powerful ways by reviving or recuperating the dead.

As individuals encounter the law, in the form of incarceration, migrant detention, or in any other circumstance, an authoritative text or version of that encounter is produced by the law. It is the official documentation which dictates innocence or guilt, value, or disposability. Latinx horror as counter-discourse to this official narrative of encounter with power, is a resistive literature which iterates a different version of events, posits a different account, and challenges the narrative constructed by the law. Latinx horror testifies to the accounts of the subaltern and is the counter-discourse to the legal sorcery which dehumanizes the Latinx person.

In the sense that legal utterances that dehumanize and the counter-writing to that process of abjection are intertextually discursive, or in conversation with one another, Latinx horror represents an ideological matrix.[15] Through the horror, animation of the dead and their speech, this Latinx ideological matrix expresses a counter-discourse to the institutions of power which produce that horror. The Latinx ideological matrix I am invoking here is a nexus of difference and distinct political affiliations, experiences, and backgrounds which meet at the intersection of Latin American necropolitical disposability within a capitalist and racist framework. We can understand

[15] The legal utterances that I examine in this body of work, include the language around sentencing and divestment of personhood, rights, property, and freedom, as well as the language iterated in legal policy, such as *Operation Guardian* which is purported as a policy to stop illegal trade activity, instead of targeting undocumented migrant Latin Americans: "On July 18, 2007, President Bush issued an executive order establishing an interagency working group on import safety (working group) to address the dangers found in imported apparel, pet food ingredients, toys, seafood, and other consumer products. To address the goals and objectives identified by the working group, ICE developed and implemented *Guardian*, which combines the specific areas of expertise of U.S. Immigrations and Customs Enforcement Homeland Security Investigations (ICE-HIS), U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP), the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), the U.S. Department of Justice Computer Crime and Intellectual Property Section, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), the U.S. Department of agriculture, the U.S. Postal Inspection Service (USPIS), and the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC). *Guardian* is one of several programs overseen by the IPR Center that is aimed at stopping predatory and unfair trade practices that threaten our economic stability, restrict the competitiveness of U.S. industry in world markets and place the public health and safety of the American people at risk […] To combat the importation of substandard tainted, and counterfeit products that pose health and safety risks to consumers" (https://www.ice.gov/factsheets/ipr-guardian)

the iteration of the voice which speaks from beyond the grave as the dialectical negative to the law, in that the law is the official account of an encounter with power, and the voice posits an account that is at once there and not there. In this manner, the Latinx horror is a form of palimpsest.[16] A palimpsest, where the law produces and codifies an "official" narrative through decisions on which bodies may live and which must die, and the reclamation of personhood by those subjected and targeted by the law.

My argument, that there is an element of horror within the Latinx literary production of the late 20th and early 21st centuries that reveals inherited colonialist procedures of violence, is a methodological framework that I adapted from African American literary studies. I follow the lead of scholars like Avery Gordon, Colin Dayan, and Dennis Childs who identify the relationship between gothic horror and chattel slavery, thereby highlighting the violent lived reality of the enslaved as produced by judicially sanctioned American economic policy. I arrived at this model—or rather, this model became necessary—through my initial work on carceral poetics. In order to understand the American prison system, and the poetry produced in captivity, we must comprehend and trace the genealogical inheritance of the carceral system from colonialism and slavery to the modern prison industrial complex. I discovered haunting Latinx voices in the cultural artifacts of the prison, voices that testified of its violent existence, and I began to find these haunting voices in other spaces, such as Los Angeles's skid row, or in the testimonies of undocumented migrants.

My project intervenes in contemporary conversations in the field because I demonstrate the necessity for a new reading practice when engaging these literary artifacts emanating from

[16] For a very literal adherence to the definition of palimpsest, which means text that is written on top of another text, thereby producing a new item, we might consider the writing produced by members of the incarcerated population. Often, with few or no writing supplies, as captive Raul Salinas notes in the chapters to come, prisoners might resort to writing onto other already existing items

necropolitical zones. The new reading practice required by a Latinx horror mandates that we approach the presently amalgamated texts as a new iteration of reader, one attuned to the violent aura and origin of the cultural production. To this end, to focus the new reading practice required by a Latinx horror, I deploy the term "we" throughout this work. The term "we" is used, not as an assumption of a collective readership or subscription to political points of view; rather, I use this term to highlight a characteristic of the horror expressed within these texts. Stated simply, all texts have the power to take on life within the reader, life granted by the reader as the text, its message or circumstances live on within the reader; but Latinx texts which express a lived horror haunt the reader, precisely because it is real. For instance, the new reading practice and sensibility required by a Latinx horror is one capable of appreciating the significance in the speaker of captive pinto poet Jimmy Santiago Baca's iteration, "while this poem is read aloud by someone [/] I am going on" (*What's Happening*, 16). The reader of the Latinx horror must perform the formalist interpretation and understand the text as text, as entity on its own; yet the reader must also comprehend the enormous meaning generated by the imprisonment of the author and removal from the realm of the living and free. When we comprehend the text as object itself and the authorial positionality, it is possible to understand that the reader grants life to the poetic speaker (as is the case with all poetry or writing), but the significance of this act is compounded by the reality of the author's deprivation of freedom. This captivity is enacted by the legal system, and the poem functions as a counter to that divestment of personhood—the poem talks back to the law, and as we give the poem life in our words and mind, we too become accomplices against the procedures of dehumanization.

My work explores a Latinx horror in terms of a border gothic. When I use the term border, it is in reference to a geographical location as well as the limits of being. The border that we

examine is the physical divide between two sovereign entities, such as the border between the United States and Mexico, or the terrain between Mexico and Guatemala, or the space between Guatemala and Honduras—all of which are locations explicitly engaged within the novels examined in this project. I also would like to invite you to expand your understanding of the US-Mexico border beyond the San Ysidro, Mexicali and Tijuana area to also incorporate Los Angeles within that border space. The rationale for this is obvious for people like myself. But let me explain to those of you *who have never needed to know* this information. You see, about seventy-five miles away from the United States-Mexico border, on both major highways leaving the San Diego area (Interstate 5 and Interstate 15), there are California Highway Patrol Weigh Stations (San Onofre on I-5 and Rainbow on I-15). Now, to most people passing through this area, the stations seem inconsequential; and to the local commuter, you have most likely experienced a brief stop at that station as officers routinely check driver identification.

People like my parents, who were undocumented migrants within the United States until 2008, know that these stations, miles inland and away from the border, function as Border Patrol check points, as well as D.U.I. check points and commercial cargo weigh stations. San Onofre and Rainbow are roughly 75 miles north of the Mexican border, but there are similar stations in Valencia and Lebec (north of Los Angeles) as Interstate 5 enters the valley locally referred to as "The Grapevine" in route northward towards San Francisco. Both the Lebec and Valencia California Highway Patrol Weigh Stations are approximately 208 miles away from the Mexican border, and this large span of physical space incorporates Los Angeles County, Imperial County, San Diego County, Riverside County, Orange County and San Bernardino County, the largest in the state by geographical size and population. Therefore, when I mean that these texts produce a border gothic, I am referencing the desert border between Mexico and the United States, but also

the over 200 miles north from the southern border where undocumented migrants continue to be hunted and haunted.

My work on a Latinx horror produced by incarcerated individuals focuses primarily on *pinto* poets. Scholar of *pinto* texts Rafael Perez-Torres notes, a key characteristic of this style of incarcerated poetry that accentuates the horror, is that "like a ghostly remnant, the political configurations of power haunt these interiorized spaces. The poetry still evokes a vision of political inequity and social injustice" (*Movements in Chicano Poetry*, 123). Therefore, I would like to contextualize our present engagement with the horror within *pinto* poetics by indicating that the incarcerated authors within this analysis were captive between the 1960s and 1970s: Raul Salinas was released from prison 1972, Jimmy Santiago Baca was released in 1973, and Judy Lucero died in prison in 1973 at the age of 28. It is important to understand that while these poets were held captive within the prison, fighting for liberation and equality (often through protests and active involvement in the Prisoners' Rights Movement), the Civil Rights Movement was occurring outside of the prison walls. Therefore, while writing from within the prison still exists, the sociopolitical context which created the conditions of possibility for Baca, Lucero, and Salinas is admittedly different today. In other words, there might still be Chicanx and Latinx authors within the prison and jail, but they no longer express the unified political identity that was evident during the sixties and seventies.

In chapter one, I use Hector Tobar's novel *The Tattooed Soldier* (1998) to identify the necropolitical rationale productive of, in scholar Dylan Rodriguez's terms, a world in terror, in which United States foreign and domestic policy justify the death of racialized and gendered bodies in both Latin America and Los Angeles. *Tattooed Soldier* illustrates genocidal murder of entire student movements, indigenous populations, families, and villages as sponsored by the

American military involvement in countries like Guatemala.[17] Through American-endorsed and absolved violence in Latin America and the consequential mass exodus of people seeking to flee violence in their home country, Tobar's novel reveals a Latinx horror produced by United States sovereign power. Through stylistic temporal shifts and oscillation between narrators living in the past and present, *Tattooed Soldier* conveys a voice who narrates from the grave in the character of Elena. Elena's iteration, which encapsulates her socialist political activism in her community through the moment she is murdered by an American-trained Guatemalan government military unit known as *los Jaguares*, is her counter-discourse against the power which determined she must die.

While Elena is an individual literary character that is productive of a haunting voice which speaks though dead in *Tattooed Soldier*, the text incorporates the newspaper publications of *El Gráfico*, a real Guatemalan city newspaper that would daily publish the names of victims of abduction, torture, mutilation, dismemberment, and murder by covert government operations. Elena notes that the newspaper would also publish images of corpses that might be recovered, often in ditches or in shallow graves, thereby compounding the haunting voice produced within the text to the literary (as Elena is a literary product of the author's creation) and the historical (as represented through the actual deaths of human beings chronicled in *El Gráfico*). The basis of the

[17] I will continue to deploy the term genocide, therefore let me define how I mean to use it: "As stated by the International Court of Justice, the Genocide Convention terms reflect fundamental judgements and the conscience of the international community, which have legal force independent of formal ratification. Guatemala ratified the Convention on January 13, 1950. Thus, the Convention was in force during the time of the armed conflict [...] In the present Convention, genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such: (a) Killing members of the group; (b) Causing serious bodily harm or mental harm to members of the group; (c) deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; (d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within that group; (e) Forcibly transferring children of that group to another group" (*Quiet Genocide*, 17)

horror expressed in these texts is founded upon the real lived violent experiences of Latinx people, necropolitical experiences orchestrated by American foreign and domestic policy.[18]

In chapter two, I demonstrate how the necropolitical morphs to incorporate not just the biologically eradicated but also the socially killed by the United States government within the prison system, through the poetry of raulrsalinas's *Un Trip through the Mind Jail y Otras Excursions* (1980) and Jimmy Santiago Baca's *What's Happening* (1982). Chapters two and three examine literary production from inside of the prison and allow us as scholars to enter a realm in which those undergoing a process of ritualized mortification, the living-dead, do in fact testify of their existence, despite their confinement in the United States carceral system. Like the poetic narrator in Lucero's work, the voice which speaks from a position of social-death found in Salinas' and Baca's work resists the necropolitical processes of dehumanization within the prison; unlike Lucero's speaker, the poetic narrator of Baca and Salinas form cross cultural alliances with other ethnic groups within the prison as a means of expressing solidarity in their experience, consolidating political power of the prisoners, and cultural exchange.

In chapter three, through use of Judy Lucero's poetry, I argue an analysis of a Chicana gynocentric (female centered) prisoner aesthetic which engages death in the form of living-entombment, the production of social death, and the physical erasure from the realm of the living enacted by the legal transfiguration power of American patriarchal institutions. Although Lucero only created eight poems by the age of 28, when she died in prison from brain damage as a result of a violent beating she received, her poetry encapsulates a woman's voice which speaks from

[18] Let us consider the testimony of an Ixil woman after the Chisis massacre, "My dad … he died there. When I was in the mountains … the next day the Army arrived [who was American funded and politically endorsed to stop the threat of communism], found the encampment where I was with my husband…. I had my children with me … one of my children died there…. I left again and the soldiers arrived with the patrolmen…. Now, what do we do, I asked myself … but my husband was already dead" (*Quiet Genocide*, 43)

beyond the grave I explore further within her respective chapter. Unlike Elena, the voice which speaks from beyond the grave in chapter one, the poetic speaker of Lucero's work does not deploy temporal shifts in narration to speak from a position of death. Instead, Lucero's poetic *persona* speaks from within the present temporal moment, as the voice delineates the condition of living-death experienced within the American carceral system by some women, namely Chicana women. Through the strategic use of absence (space on the page or line, and use of ellipses marks), Lucero constructs the voice which speaks from beyond the grave as it seeks to make visible that which is actively made absent through the law.

I continuously signal the importance of space and locality to this analysis of the necropolitical as I focus on the prison, the ethnic enclaves of Los Angeles, or the U.S.-Mexico border.[19] The function of physical space within the necropolitical serves to distinguish *where* violent, murderous, or genocidal acts can be committed. Chapter four synthesizes testimonies of survivors who endured the U.S.-Mexico border desert crossing alongside the necropolitical geography represented in *The River Flows North* (2009) by Graciela Limón, to reveal a topography of horror specifically reserved for the undocumented migrant.[20]

Like *Tattooed Soldier, The River* reproduces the voice which speaks from the grave of the necropolitical mechanisms targeting migrants and displaced refugees through temporal shifts and narrator shifts between chapters. In this manner various characters that die by the conclusion of the narration each speak of their own Mexican & American-rooted pain and displacement which causes them to migrate north into the United States to seek better living conditions. Most notably,

[19] Jason De Leon notes that "This space can be policed in ways that would be deemed violent, cruel, or irrational in most other contexts. Just imagine how people would react if the corpses of undocumented Latinos were left to rot on the ninth hole of the local golf course or if their sun-bleached skulls were piled up in the parking lot of the neighborhood McDonald's" (De León, 28)

[20] De Leon applies Giorgio Agamben's formulation of the exception to the border space and indicates that "Border zones become *spaces of exception*—physical and political locations where an individual's rights and protections under the law can be stripped away upon entrance" (De León, 27)

the American-born character of Cerda in *The River* narrates his chapter, which incorporates a past youth prior to the construction of a physical border wall in his particular area of the desert, culminating finally in his own death, murdered by one of his fellow travelers. In this sense, Cerda as a voice that speaks from beyond the grave, narrates through the final moment of life and is speaking from the grave, reflecting on his life as he freely traversed the U.S.-Mexico boundaries, and iterates that his death is directly linked to the forces which brought all of the migrants together in the narrative: American Imperialism and neoliberalism in Latin America.

The legal sorcery which maintains the necropolitical spaces examined in this work is sanctioned, funded, and enacted in the name of American foreign and domestic economic interests. Out of these American necropolitical spaces, a unique Latinx horror is produced. This horror is expressed and experienced through the abeyance of personhood, personification, anthropomorphism, symbolic and real production of absence, and the use of space and nonlinear temporality. Latinx horror betrays the fact that hegemonic power negotiates which bodies and epistemologies are disposable; therefore, these texts function as resistive literature because they testify to the existence of that which the system would destroy.

Like the cultural artifacts which are the subject of my present inquiry, this dissertation is a resistive praxis, as we unearth and exhume that Latinx counter-discourse to power through literary representations and accounts of survivors/victims of those necropolitical processes. My project demonstrates the counter-discourse emergent from the people deemed disposable, writing back against the system actively invested in the destruction of those bodies and epistemologies. The Latinx horror demands a reader who can reconcile the literary representations of violence, absence, and death with the real lived experiences of Latinx people exposed and subjected to American

Imperialist procedures.[21] This work is resistive praxis, like the texts which we examine, because the narratives and lives of the Latinx people subjected to American sanctioned necropolitical violence with the purpose of their erasure, are here inscribed. While American necropolitical mechanisms and institutions annihilate Latinx bodies and epistemologies within the United States and abroad, this project reclaims that which is deemed disposable by the dominant hegemonic power.

Ultimately, this project is about the horror generated by American Imperialism in Latin America; it is a horror which, as Avery Gordon notes in *Ghostly Matters* (1997), produces a 'something to be done'. This something to be done creates an urgency, a demand Latinx horror makes of us, as readers. Throughout this work, when referring to myself, I will often say "we" instead of "I" in adherence to my own double-consciousness or duo positionality as both of Mexican descent and of American birth; it is important to note here that this hyphenated identity is no less, also a product of American Imperialism in Latin America.[22] I also use the term "we" as a way of making you, the reader, an accomplice in this resistive praxis. As a Mexican-American, Latino, and Chicano, whose parents survived the three days and three nights of walking, running, and hiding to cross the United States border to eke out a better living condition for our family, this work is resistive praxis as I will not allow the experience of my parents and countless others like them—some lost forever to the sands and sun—to be forgotten.

[21] Among the imperialist procedures that my work explores, I include settler colonialism, economic and sexual exploitation, as well as scorched earth policies (procedures that dictate the military destruction of communities through setting them on fire). I will specify such policies, such as the various financial and military "aid" provided by various United States presidential administrations in support of American capitalist interests, in the subsequent chapters

[22] I of course mean to indicate the result of U.S. Imperialism in the conquest of Mexican territory. The category of Mexican-American is a political construction created post-Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, at which point former Mexican nationals who remained in the newly stolen Mexican land, became categorized as "Mexican-Americans"

Chapter One: Howling Voices and Haunting Jaguars

"I am interested in a different philosophy of praxis,
one inscribed by the very logic of violence, disappearance,
and death that forms the regime from within which it is
produced, returning an image (shadow? apparition? echo?)
of a world in terror, at war, yet unsettlingly stable"
Dylan Rodriguez, *Forced Passages* (2006)

"They burned houses and left decapitated heads
at the entrances to the villages they destroyed.
The Jaguars had carried out a holocaust
in the mountains"
Hector Tobar, *The Tattooed Soldier* (1998)

In 2003, Achille Mbembe theorized the necropolitical as the sovereign exercise of power over life; that is, the ability of a dominant hegemonic group to terminate or permit the biological existence of a given body or bodies, ostensibly cultural subordinates or subhumans (11). Through the focus of Hector Tobar's *The Tattooed Soldier* (1998), this chapter amalgamates literary representations of necropolitical rationale productive of "a world in terror, at war, yet unsettlingly stable (Rodriguez, 2). This world justifies the death of racialized and gendered bodies—in certain locales—as a product of U.S. Imperialism and economic policy in Guatemala. The text brings into focus police brutality against Latinos and the Rodney King uprisings, therefore permitting an analysis of the necropolitical rational which is part and parcel of quotidian life within the United States. My argument will center on the political economy, or the political and economic power, of the poor, the undocumented, and people of color within the textual framework.[23] Ultimately, who may live and who must die is determined by economic relevancy within the capitalistic framework of the United States. For evidence of this economic necropolitical framework whereby

[23] Throughout this work, I center the labor that is performed by Latinx people in necropolitical spaces, such as the labor production of those incarcerated, the labor performed by the military death-squadrons in Latin America, or the labor of *coyotes* (guides paid to lead undocumented migrants through the US-Mexico desert). Therefore, my treatment of the political economy of the Latinx subaltern is always already in terms of labor in a militaristic society, or as Ruth Wilson Gilmore notes, "The worker-consumer, who has to buy and buy to work, is central to this drama" (*Golden Gulag*, 56)

governmental entities decide who must live and die, we need only examine the nearly 1,000 police shootings per year that occur within the United States, according to the Washington Post, since 2015 ("Fatal Force: Police Shootings Database").

Furthermore, as demonstrated in the literary representations within *Tattooed Soldier*, evidenced within the aforementioned epigraph, the necropolitical violence which extinguishes the life of dehumanized people often erases more than their corporeal bodies from the realm of the living, also producing an erasure of their memory and epistemology. Therefore, the text functions as a reclamation of the life, body and knowledge which is lost and devalued in accordance with white supremacist, patriarchal, but most explicitly, capitalist rationale. Tobar's novel broaches both United States sponsored violence within Latin American countries in the late 20th century and the ramifications of those American military and economic policies within Los Angeles. It is the lived reality of U.S. endorsed violence that is evidenced in a haunting voice, or a ghost. Here I am deploying Avery Gordon's formulation of ghost which is "not invisible or some ineffable excess. The whole essence, if you can use that word, of a ghost is that it has a real presence and demands its due, your attention" (*Ghostly Matters,* xvi).

Through two central foil characters within *Tattooed Soldier*—Longoria & Antonio—Tobar genealogically traces the origins of violence in Latin American countries and the consequences of those state-endorsed genocides of indigenous, poor, black and brown people. In effect, through Tobar's characters, who possess an intimate knowledge of the necropolitical negotiation of life in their domestic country, the text posits a locale within the United States—Los Angeles—as an extension and continuation of that very logic of death and violence which decimated communities in Latin America and propelled their migration to ethnic enclaves in Southern California. Within

the novel, Los Angeles is a zone arranged by classist, racist, and xenophobic rationale, which dehumanizes certain human beings like Antonio.[24]

Let us go then, you and I, in exploration of those voices which wailed in the night or in the day, to no avail. We must not turn away from the bones we will find—"small bodies in secret cemeteries, piled on top of each other in pits" or on the side of the road on display—but instead seek to know more about why some may live while others must die (*Tattooed,* 65). As we progress, I will share with you some ideas, let us call them *asides*, for which if I may quote Antonio, "I'm sorry. It's all in my head. My head is full of all this trash, you see" (*Tattooed,* 41).

Conceptually, the necropolitical encapsulates a dialectical relationship, or contradiction, represented within Tobar's novel. When considering this relationship, I recall the once benign lines—*so near grows death to life*—which now infiltrate every facet of my existence and this work. It is this contradiction which Dylan Rodriguez focalizes—*a world in terror, at war, yet unsettlingly stable*—that enables us to enter *Tattooed Soldier* to examine the tension the text produces. At the root of this violence is the United States involvement in Latin America that led to migration and the creation of necropolitical geographies. Such involvement includes, but is not limited to: the CIA's active participation in the toppling of the Guatemalan government in 1954 and sponsorship of the subsequent thirty year-long Civil War, which ravaged the country from 1960 through 1996, as well as military training provided by U.S. special combat forces in the School of Americas (at Fort Benning, Georgia and Fort Bragg, North Carolina), which trained soldiers like sergeant Longoria in *Tattooed Soldier*, a member of the military death squadron *los Jaguares*.[25]

[24] Etelle Higonnet notes that "Racism polarized Guatemalan society, dividing it into big groups: indigenous people and *ladinos*. Racism occupied an influential place in dominant Guatemalan classes' ideas about and treatment of 'the Indians'" (*Quiet Genocide*, 25)

[25] For a specific example of American influence over violence in Guatemala since the 1960s, let us consider Higonnet's claim that "In December 1965, U.S. security advisor John Longan arrived in Guatemala City to create a small 'action unit to mastermind a campaign against terrorists which would have access to all information from law enforcement

The normalization of violence and the irrational rationalism of death which constitutes the necropolitical framework in operation within specific locales, is illustrated at the commencement of *Tattooed Soldier* through what I refer to as *the ice cream scene*. Following his discovery of the bodies of his murdered wife and child in Guatemala—Elena & Carlos—Antonio is urged by neighbors to flee. In the process of eluding the murderers, Antonio discovers that the men who killed his family were soldiers in plain clothing, without identifiable uniforms or vehicle markings. The soldiers—Longoria & *los Jaguares*—had been ordered by politicians and generals not to wear their uniforms, "to say, in effect, that these tasks were so despicable you couldn't wear your uniform when you did them," tasks such as murdering entire families and communities (138). The methodological and systematic murder, which soldiers conducted at the behest of the government—where "the enemies of the government had to disappear in a fashion that would allow the army to say it was not responsible"—are explicit examples of the necropolitical rationale in operation within specific geographies (or so-called "zones of conflict"), such as Guatemala and the rest of Latin America (136). As we proceed in our work in uncovering the economic rationale behind which bodies may live and which must die, let us never forget that these murders are (and continue to be) conducted in the maintenance of United States fiscal and political interests, carried out by American trained murderers.[26]

The ice cream scene is enmeshed in the necropolitical logic of violence and death. During Antonio's escape from the murderers, both Antonio and a neighbor—who witnessed the murder

agencies.' Longan dubbed the campaign 'Operación Limpieza'—Operation Cleansing—and placed Guatemala's brutal military colonel Rafael Arriage Bosque in charge of its operations" (Higonnet, 6)

[26] For historical examples of American endorsed politicians and murderers in Guatemala, let us consider the August 1997 publication of *Cronica*, which details the crimes of assassination, kidnapping, and destroying villages through scorched earth tactics by the Army and URNG (Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca): "According to humanitarian organizations, the URNG had participated in six collective assassinations, which have been documented through testimonies of survivors. The total dead include 265 civilians and 32 insurgents of the Movimento Revolucionario del Pueblo" ("Los Crimenes de la Guerrilla," *Cronica*, 17)[translation mine]

of Elena and Carlos—observe one of the assassins in the village center square, enjoying an ice cream. Mrs. Gomez, Antonio's neighbor who has urged him to escape, states "*Matónes sinverguenzas.* They're not even ashamed to show themselves [...] *Asesinos.* They kill someone and buy ice cream like it's nothing. Nothing!" (*Tattooed*, 18). The statement reflects the disposability of the Latinx subject, the powerlessness "against such overwhelming injustice" of people like Antonio—whose experience is at once intimately personal and universally shared by countless victims and survivors of the necropolitical power of the state to extinguish life without reprimand (*Tattooed*, 46). While this first mode of interpretation is evident within the language of the text—*they kill someone and buy ice cream like it's nothing*—I would now like to center our focus on the final thought within that cited iteration, "Nothing!" as it reproduces a philosophical necropolitical framework (*Tattooed*, 18).

The ice cream scene—through the linguistic equating of the violent and destructive act of murder with the consumption of a dessert afterwards—focuses the concept of *Nothing* as foundational to our understating of the necropolitical rationale governing certain geographical spaces. The line "Nothing!" is thus read at once as a verb, indicative of an act, and a noun or idea: it is both an action and a thing. While the statement iterated within the text is overtly addressing the tension created through the two acts, the murder of people and the enjoyment of sweets enacted by the same body, it equates the performance of both acts as only understandable when considered through the philosophical lens of *Nothing* (18). Here, I am reminded of the words which pollute the whole of existence, *Nothing is more real than nothing.* Stated differently, the lack of shame displayed by Longoria & the Jaguars in the act of murdering a mother and child, then enjoying an ice cream in a public setting, corresponds with imagining existence as the cruel and futile plight against the eventuality of eternal *nothingness.* Verily, Mrs. Gomez's iteration upon viewing the

murderers who "buy an ice cream like it's nothing. Nothing!" propounds the forfeiture of reason and rationality, as she—like Antonio—cannot make sense of the cruelty of murder followed by the unashamed indulgence of ice cream carried out by *los Jaguares* (18).

How can we understand the ice cream scene as proposing a philosophical tract upheld by Longoria and other American-trained murderers of their own people? How can we interpret the acts committed by the Jaguares—the murders and indulgence in sweets within hours of each other—as the forfeiture of reason and rationality? To understand this engagement, I submit the following passage—a passage which we will return to in another segment of this work—in which Longoria is witnessing the racially charged Los Angeles Watts Uprisings following the brutal police beating of Rodney King:

> Memories rushed forward, taking hold of him by the chest. Fire and *laughter*. Violence welling in the eyes of the crowd, the march of police forming battle lines. He could feel it now, this resurfacing of animal instincts. So much like the taste of blood that passed through the Jaguars when they entered a village, when not even the doe-eyed children and farm animals were safe from machetes and machine guns (272)[*emphasis mine*]**.**[27]

The laughter which Longoria repeatedly indicates to accompany him and the Jaguars, the laughter they experienced when committing murder and erasing entire families from the realm of the living, reveals a philosophical dictum posited by survivors of the Jewish Holocaust; "Laughter, whether reconciled or terrible, always accompanies the moment when a fear is ended. It indicates a release, whether from physical danger or from the grip of logic" (Adorno & Horkheimer, 112). Stated differently, we can understand the laughter which accompanies Longoria in atrocities, the "agent of disorder," and the unbothered manner in which he enjoys an ice cream after committing murder,

[27] I would like to contextualize the Watts Uprisings by noting that "The 1965 Watts Rebellion was a conscious enactment of opposition (even if 'spontaneous' in a Leninist sense) to inequality in Los Angeles, where everyday apartheid as forcibly renewed by police under the direction of the unabashedly white supremacist Chief William Parker" (*Golden Gulag*, 39)

as signifying an absence of fear and/or the forfeiture of logic and reason while committing these acts (*Tattooed,* 272). This outlook on life and existence is perhaps necessary to justify the necropolitical acts of erasure and murder carried out by Longoria; but solely attributing these acts to a philosophical perspective would be too simple, too reductive. We must ask—*who or what, has created this world in terror, at war, yet unsettlingly stable?*

I have stated that the tension highlighted by Mrs. Gomez and Antonio in perceiving the murderers of his family publicly enjoying a dessert in *the ice cream scene* reveals a philosophical engagement with *nothingness*—most obviously through the aforementioned iteration directly positing that such an act *is like nothing,* or without meaning when valued with the eventuality of eternal nothingness. However, such an interpretation would locate the individual adherents of this point of view as the exclusive agents and actors of these crimes; we must examine how Longoria, and by extension *los Jaguares,* arrived at this perspective. We must examine the system which created this death squadron and unleashed them on the indigenous, poor, black & brown people of Guatemala. We must ask, *how did Longoria become a blood-thirsty matón? How did he become a Jaguar?*

While the United States imported raw materials from Latin America, it exported military equipment and officers to train local armies to uphold U.S. imperialist political and economic interests. The text reveals the origin of *los Jaguares* and other military death squadrons, like the American trained Atlatacl Battalion in El Salvador, tasked with building new empires as a product of the United States, for "it was the Green Berets who were training all those Latins" (29, 242). Explicitly, Longoria notes that "even his commander looked at him strangely, this small *indio* who had grown stout at Fort Bragg and had returned with an animal on his arm, imitating the habits of the American soldiers every Guatemalan officer feared and respected" (242). Longoria is at once

bi-product and representative of the American training he received to become an efficient murderer and agent during the Guatemalan genocide. Furthermore, Longoria's self-professed ideological beliefs are overtly American, capitalist, and anti-socialist, as he states that:

> This thing they were fighting was a cancer, and sometimes the children were contaminated with it too. You killed the cousins and the uncles to make sure the virus was dead. That's what the officers said, and *you had to believe it*. The parents passed the virus along to their children. It made you want to kill the parents again and again, even after they were dead, because if it wasn't for the fucking parents you wouldn't have to kill the children. Guatemala was like a human body, that was how Lieutenant Colonel Villagran explained it, and if you didn't kill these organisms the body could die (64)[*emphasis mine*].

Stated differently, the purpose of *los Jaguares* was always to neutralize any opposition to U.S. imperialist interest, to suppress and police the poor, to kill anyone who could be part of a socialist resistance movement, and to kill their families. The purpose of the Jaguars was to contain the spread of 'radical' ideology which sought justice, representation, and to pacify the existence of the poor, the indigenous, and black and brown people of Latin America (93). Longoria and the military units trained for this destruction *had to believe* that they were acting for benevolent reasons throughout the duration of the Civil War (1960 – 1996). The Guatemalan military murdered the Mayan people in order to suppress the 'virus' of socialist thought from spreading. The *Jaguares* killed for capitalism because the Americans—who supplied them with Israeli weapons—had trained them to do so, and it was what the Americans were doing (94).[28] We must stop here to inquire, *why must these battalions believe* in the righteousness of the murders they commit against their own people? Are the murderers motivated by economic volitions as they kill in the name of American Imperialism?

[28] By "killed for capitalism," I mean to argue that the murder committed by squadrons like the Jaguars is perpetrated in the preservation of capitalist systems of exploitation of people and land. I also mean to note that such a society has absolved and rationalized the existence of war and violence as necessary for the maintenance of 'peace,' fulfilling the Orwellian pronouncement, "WAR IS PEACE" and "PEACE IS WAR"

Tattooed Soldier illustrates Longoria's conscription into the military when he was still a child and reveals—in several instances—that if "he hadn't killed, he might be dead himself" (170). While in a movie theater watching Steven Spielberg's *E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial,* an alienated figure Longoria would recall at various moments throughout the novel as sharing his plight—both being "like some small creature in a far-off world, making sounds no one understood"—young boy soldiers entered the cinema and took "every boy over fourteen" with no history of military service (34-37). As readers, we witness Longoria's conscription into the military at the age of fourteen, and on the first night in the barracks he wept quietly, as "he knew his mother would be angry with him because he didn't listen to her" and went to the movie theater (37). Longoria, like countless other poor *campesinos,* did not enter the military by choice—in fact, he probably never imagined himself becoming a *matón,* a murderer of families. But he was forced to kill, obligated by the same military forces endorsed by U.S. Imperialism in the maintenance of American economic and political foreign interests. The text relieves that Longoria and others like him *had to believe* in the atrocities they committed, because they were forcefully alienated from their families at a young age and threatened with death themselves. Fundamentally, this is the necropolitical rationale at work: kill for the army or be killed by the army. The necropolitical framework is at once an economic framework, work for the army or cease your labor entirely. Therefore, I would like to stress that in their own particular manner, both Antonio and Longoria are victims of the same necropolitical machine, U.S. imperialism in Latin America. Undoubtedly, this does not excuse Longoria's actions and decision to murder countless families, but we cannot view this issue as simply a matter of right and wrong, black and white: it is a porous issue created and maintained by United States political and economic interests abroad.

The necropolitical tactics deployed by *los Jaguares* and other Anti-Communist Brigades are explicitly learned and cultivated by American training, as indicated by Longoria's character. While recalling the nature of his operations in Guatemala, Longoria states the necessity of a public display of violence, of maintaining necropolitical control; "the thing wasn't just to take the people but to make a show of it. It was street theater, a tug-of-war on the avenues and boulevards, in the parking lots and plazas" (138).[29] In the same breath that Longoria iterates the necessity of murder and violence to control the population, he indicates that he learned it in "his training in psychological operations and knew that the general principle of disorder and violence applied here" (138). Longoria sagaciously and meticulously carried out sanguinary acts in public, where "the point was to allow neighbors, friends, and relatives to see, so that they would tell others" (138). The public display of violence enacted by *los Jaguares* is at once political and the work of death permissible and sanctioned by U.S. imperialism in territories which are established to maintain economic and political interest, much like colonies.[30] On the creation and management of necropolitical locales, like Latin America, Mbembe states "the colonies are the location par excellence where the controls and guarantees of judicial order can be suspended—the zone where violence of the state of exception is deemed to operate in the service of civilization" ("Necropolitics," 24). The dehumanization and evisceration of *campesinos* and socialist students like Elena seeking to pacify the existence of the poor in Guatemala—which began in 1954 when the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency mobilized against the supposed threat of communism in

[29] Higonnet reveals that "Massacres are collective violations of the right to life in which elements of extreme cruelty generally take place. When publicly and repeatedly perpetrated, massacres are acts directed not only against the individuals, but against the community as a whole. In this specific case, directing the massacre exclusively against the Maya population constitutes not only a violent act, but a discriminatory one as well" (*Quiet Genocide*, 36)

[30] As indicated by Higonnet, "In this respect, a [1981] CIA document signals: During the battle it was impossible to differentiate between a member of the guerrilla and an innocent civilian, and according to … the soldiers, they were forced to fire at anything that moved" (*Quiet Genocide*, 32)

Guatemala—is recognizably a necropolitical logic in which murder is enacted in the name of U.S. imperialism, or so-called "civilization."

We must synthesize Longoria's explicit claim, *the thing wasn't just to take the people but to make a show of it,* which is an exclamation of the necessity to publicly display violence, with Mbembe's formulation of the necropolitical as extending beyond the killing of individuals. In "Necropolitics," Mbembe addresses the function of open acts of violence and amputation of body parts, which serve "to keep before the eyes of the victim—*and of the people around him or her*—the morbid spectacle of severing," which is "nothing but the illusory rejection of a death that has already occurred" (35)[*emphasis mine*]. The public display of necropolitical violence—that is, the work of politics and death—enacted by *los Jaguares* is at once directed at individual victims of that carnage, but also those around them, their neighbors and friends who witness the acts. The survivors of these acts—like us as scholars of this crisis—are left with the striking "tension between the petrification of the bones and their strange coolness on one hand, and on the other, their stubborn will to mean, to signify something" (Mbembe, 35). The public displays of necropolitical violence in the maintenance of U.S. capitalist volitions carried out in the text, must be understood through the actual lived reality of the victims and survivors of those acts.[31] As you my accomplice, and I, uncover these corpses in literature, let us always remember that entire families remain buried in unmarked pits or are decomposing in desolate areas and await to be rediscovered, await to have their death mean something to those in the imperial center.

The corporeal death and symbolic *differance* of death in the necropolitical paradigm enacted in Latin America, is exemplified within the text at various moments, not the least of which

[31] Here, I am referencing the evidence recorded of countless massacres and murders. We could turn to Calapte, Uspantan where on the 17th of February in 1982, 42 people were murdered with machetes which is documented in the online journal "Los Crímenes De La Guerrilla" in the newspaper *Cronica* in 1997

when Elena and Antonio witness the disappearance of a fellow demonstrator at a protest; "He would probably never be seen again. They would torture him, disappear him, mutilate his body" (*Tattooed*, 95). In this instance, witnesses to the violent act at once know that the subject of those acts will die, yet because his body may not be found, or only pieces of his body recovered, the certainty of death is differed; the moment and instant of death is perpetually in abeyance until the body is reclaimed. And once recovered, the mutilation of the body serves to project the horrid experience of death and torture onto the viewer. We witness this very function in the disappearance and death of Teodoro, a fellow student activist of Elena, who is later found on the road to Chimaltenango. Upon discovering that Teodoro's hands had been cut off, Elena reminisces and recalls his hands, stating that "Teodoro caressed me, held me in his arms. He wore a silver band on his right ring finger," thereby demonstrating that the necropolitical act of abducting, torturing, mutilating, and murdering people affects and extends beyond the individual victim of those acts (97). The politics of violence live on within the witnesses of the destruction left behind.

Who were the witnesses, who could know? Longoria posits that "If the bones of the children floated to the top, people might know what" *los Jaguares* did, but otherwise "Who could know? Who were the witnesses?" (*Tattooed,* 65). Presently, it is important to understand the ways in which we can bear witness to events. There are different levels of witnessing these necropolitical atrocities funded and sanctioned by U.S. imperialist and economic interests in Latin America. There are the intimate witnesses, who experience the impact of violence personally and directly; like the unnamed old woman who recognizes Longoria's Jaguar tattoo in Los Angeles and confronts the sergeant. While Longoria believes "his violent reactions belonged to a distant, black past," the still-living victims and witnesses of his crimes continue to suffer the consequences of those actions as represented by the old woman's exclamation in horror "What did you do to my

son? Where is he? What did you do to him? Just tell me where his body is. For the love of God, where is Demetrio's body?" (*Tattooed,* 161). Stated differently, while Longoria would like to believe his violence is a buried relic of the past, many witnesses of that necropolitical power over life and death remain, like this unnamed old woman & Antonio. The lady's statement reveals the necropolitical *differance* of death through at once exclaiming the certain death of her missing son, and the languishing pain which remains because of his disappearance. Demetrio is at once dead and unburied, erased from the realm of the living.

Antonio & Elena demonstrate another level of witnessing absence and of experiencing necropolitical erasure caused by U.S. Imperialism in Latin America—that of witnessing through text. After breaking into Longoria's apartment, Antonio discovers a polaroid photo album filled with pictures of corpses the jaguar has collected throughout his military career. Through pictures, Antonio witnesses "corpses with their eyes open. Corpses with their pants pulled down, the seahorses of their genitals exposed. Corpses with their arms folded over their chests. Corpses with hands missing" (175). At once, while the fictitious character of Antonio bears witness to the pictorial evidence to the atrocities of *los Jaguares,* it is important to remember that the U.S. trained and funded *counter-insurgency* military squadrons, like the Atlacatl Battalion in El Salvador and others all over Latin America.[32] Through text, specifically pictures, Antonio is a witness to the necropolitical violence unleashed within Guatemala by *los Jaguares.* But here, we must stop to inquire, *do we believe these horrors because we believe in the validity of the image?* What if the witnessing is presented through the written word in addition to visual imagery?

[32] The Atlacatl Battalion is responsible for the Mozote Massacre where over 800 civilians were murdered on December 11th and 12th in 1981. For extensive analysis and information on this event, which is outside of the purview of this inquiry, please reference Leigh Binford's *El Mozote Massacre* (2016)

I think the genius of this text is propounded by juxtaposing the missing photographs of bodies from the newspaper within Elena's dream—the bodies of her friends and fellow students—with the photographs of corpses Antonio discovers in sergeant Longoria's apartment. Elena bears witness to the necropolitical erasure of people from the realm of the living through a dream which focalizes the written text. Elena dreamt that "she was reading *El Gráfico*, leafing through it in search of the names of her friends and the poets Antonio knew," the same people who the military would disappear and murder, "but she found only blank pages. Someone had stolen all the photographs and articles [...] she was scared and needed to tell someone all the articles were missing" (119).[33] This dream sequence alludes to the newspaper publication of names and images corresponding to bodies discovered daily: it was a morbid list circulated and checked by Elena and Antonio's quotidian community members. We discover that "during the day, soldiers dressed as civilians [would come] to kidnap professors and students; after the sun fell, graffiti artists worked until dawn to cover the university walls with spray-painted names of the dead [...] the walls seemed to have an insatiable appetite for the names of dead students" (87).[34] In a real sense, the memory of the victims is preserved on the graffiti walls, if only briefly until the following night when new names take their place. In this method, Elena dreams that her fellow students and revolutionaries are not only murdered, but their names and memories are erased. In effect, soldiers like *los Jaguares* had managed to extinguish life but also erase the existence of many. Elena as a representative character and victim of those atrocities is in fact telling someone of the

[33] According to Amnesty International, "The Guatemala City newspaper *El Gráfico* (31 December 1971) reported that over 1,000 were *shot dead* in the period [1970-1971], without giving a figure for those who were murdered after detention and abduction" (*Amnesty International Annual Report 1975-1976*, 5)

[34] For example, Higonnet notes that "one witness narrates what happened at the market one day in May of 1981, during the massacre of San Francisco Cotzal: 'The Army arrived dressed in civilian clothes and then lined up the people in the central plaza—women, men, and children—and started asking for identification cards. Before that, they had accused the people of being guerrillas and a man who had his face covered appeared and began to signal. The commander gave the order to shoot anyone who tried to get away. Thirty-five people died in the massacre and the soldiers took away another 35" (*Quiet Genocides*, 38)

necropolitical violence and carnage experienced by people seeking to bring about positive social change. She is telling us, the reader.[35]

For some of us, we will spend a lifetime trying to understand "What were they saying? What was the meaning of the noises and the blood spilling from their throats, the roll and spin of their eyes? They tossed and shook on the ground. What were these signals the body gave off before it finally surrendered to stiff silence? What were the children saying?" (247). This novel speaks, is written, and invites us to inhabit the language of death. We may consider yet another form in which the text allows us, we who are removed by time and space from one another, to witness the atrocities committed in Latin America to uphold U.S. economic interests; the novel grants voice to the dead. Structurally, *Tattooed Soldier* comprises three key segments: the first between Antonio and the Sergeant, followed by Antonio and Elena's segment, and finally Antonio and Guillermo, the latter being Longoria's first name. Let us analyze the second segment, which reproduces Elena's perspective, thereby following Elena through key moments of her life leading to her murder by *los Jaguares.* Through the following engagement of Elena's narration, we may comprehend how literary artifacts function as a symbolic reclamation of the otherwise necropolitical erasure of countless people & their epistemologies. Do you recall the pictures of corpses Antonio found in Longoria's apartment? In the same fashion a picture—which is a text—of mutilated corpses gives testimony to the violent annihilation of life, this novel gives speech to one of those eviscerated bodies, someone "making noises that came from the lungs and stomach, not the mouth and tongue, a secret language of grunts and moans" (247).[36]

[35] I am engaging with Elena as a voice which speaks from the grave in terms of Gordon's formulation of the haunting, as "These specters or ghosts [which] appear when the trouble they represent and symptomize is no longer being contained or repressed or blocked from view" (*Ghostly Matters*, xvi)

[36] Here, it is productive to use Higonnet's formulation that "These three courses of action—'elimination,' 'annihilation' or 'extermination' translated into a set of human rights violations against the Maya Ixil people" (*Quiet Genocide*, 34)

Central to my analysis of Elena's speech within the novel, is the speaker's engagement with knowledge and poetry, which is repeatedly addressed within the text. Through our analysis of what Elena iterates about poetry, though dead, we can posit a reading practice of *Tattooed Soldier* proffered within the text itself, by a character who is speaking from the grave. Through formal interventions such as the use of space, absence, and nonlinear temporality, the voice from the grave testifies the existence of subaltern individuals otherwise rendered disposable by institutions of power, through a politicized haunting. Ultimately, *Tattooed Soldier* illustrates a literary representation of a cultural and personal haunting, in the sense that "haunting, unlike trauma, is distinctive for producing a something-to-be-done," as occurs with Antonio's unyielding desire for revenge against Longoria (*Ghostly Matters*, xvi).

The novel commences with Antonio in Los Angeles who remembers and recounts his perspective when finding his murdered wife and child in Guatemala. In this instance, the novel demonstrates a temporal shift, as we understand the past through Antonio's experience. The second segment of the text is not a temporal shift in which a presently alive character, such as Antonio, recollects the past—but is instead explicitly the narration of Elena, his wife who we discover is murdered in Guatemala from the commencement of the text. This distinction is important, because it at once allows us to understand that we as readers are listening and experiencing life through Elena's, and not Antonio's, perspective.[37] Furthermore, understanding Elena's iteration in this segment of the novel enables us to engage her speech as more than a temporal move to the past where we follow a character into the grave, but rather, allows for that very character to take on life. We give Elena life, as we read her account—we live life with her, and we die with her.

[37] Here, I am building my argument using Avery Gordon's central thesis, that "What's distinctive about haunting is that it is an animated state in which a repressed or unresolved social violence is making itself known, sometimes very directly, sometimes more obliquely […] The whole essence, if you can use that word, of a ghost is that it has a real presence and demands its due, your attention" (*Ghostly Matters*, xvi)

Elena is a vehicle of the affective quality of haunting within *Tattooed Solider*. At the commencement of the novel, Elena is dead; yet, at the commencement of part two of the novel, through a temporal shift, Elena is alive (*Tattooed,* 85). Elena haunts the narrative of the text through her structural recurrence, her dying and undying within the readers experience of the novel. Furthermore, Elena haunts the reader in her final moments, as she defiantly screamed before the barrel of the gun; her scream is entombed within the instant of the flash of light, and "the buzzing in his ear, like the drone of a distant airplane" that Longoria hears after killing her (*Tattooed,* 150-151). In the moments before Elena's death, she has projected herself beyond her own body, to escape the pain of the murder of her son and herself: "This is happening to someone else. She is floating above the room, defying gravity, bouncing like a balloon against the ceiling, watching this happen to a woman in a blue apron" (151). Elena's projection of herself beyond her own body as she is about to die, denotes that she does not accept what is happening to her, "producing a something-to-be-done" (*Ghostly Matters*, xvi).

This ability, to perceive and value speech from the grave may seem rather poetic; yet at several instances within the text, Elena proclaims the central importance of poetry to life and the revolutionary cause.[38] Elena explains that she "discovered literature and art through politics," through reading Otto Rene Castillo, a Guatemalan writer "turned guerrilla fighter who was one of the movement's first martyrs" (89). At once, Elena equates poetry with the revolution, and that any other kind of writing was a luxury people in a similar dejected economic situation could not afford. Throughout a conversation between Antonio and Elena, the former claims that "poetry is like water. We can't live without it," to which Elena retorts that such a view is explicitly privileged

[38] Herbert Marcuse states in the language of value, that "Social theory is concerned with the historical alternatives which haunt the established society as subversive tendencies and forces. The value attached to the alternatives do become facts when they are translated into reality" (*One-Dimensional Man*, xliv)

and out of touch, when the poetry is not about obtaining clean water and improving the lives of the most impoverished in Latin America (88). The fundamental connection between poetry and the revolution, the socialist movement for the equality and equity of existence for black, brown, indigenous and poor in Guatemala, is reiterated as Elena and Antonio contemplate the abduction and certain death of their colleague Gonzalo, "They're going to kill him because they want the names of the poets," verily voicing the necropolitical danger taken on by poets of the revolution who seek to bring attention—not to the ethereal or the sublime—but to the present subjugation of Latin American people to U.S. Imperialism (103). Inversely, Sgt. Longoria comments that socialism and the poetry of the movement was like a plague or contagion, "an infection spread by ideas, a disease carried on the spoken word," which demonstrates the perceived power of the text both by revolutionaries and the military tasked with annihilating writers of the movement (170). In effect, through Elena and other writers of socialist change, we learn a reading practice that urges us to engage *Tattooed Soldier* with a solemn severity, as people are eviscerated because of their poetry. It is noteworthy at this moment to stress that Elena will also be murdered because of a letter she wrote in which she criticizes the contamination of clean drinking water occurring because of industrial dumping of chemicals into the neighboring environment where she lives.

U.S. imperialism, such as the installation of the U.S. Army School of the Americas, creates and maintains necropolitical geographies, locales in which the logic of death and violence are part and parcel of quotidian life, in the preservation of American economic and political interests.[39] The violence of forced disappearances, genocidal massacres, torture, sexual violence, and crimes against humanity endorsed by U.S. imperialism abroad, in countries like Guatemala, propagates

[39] For detailed explanation of the U.S. Army School of the Americas and its history of training death-squadrons in Latin America to preserve US economic interests, please reference Lesley Gill's *The School of the Americas: Military Training and Political Violence in the Americas* (2007)

the forced migration of people from those locales into other regions in search of a better quality of life.[40] The text focalizes Los Angeles as a multicultural tapestry of refugees, victims of unfettered United States military endorsement and installment of dictatorships in Latin America.

In effect, through the textual representations offered in *Tattooed Soldier*, I argue that a similar necropolitical rationale governs and organizes Los Angeles. The necropolitical negotiation of life in the Southern California city is not the exact same as that which operates in locales from which Antonio escapes, but it is an uncanny return of the logic of death which migrants like Antonio seek to escape, and Longoria thought he left behind buried in a distant past. I will now direct our attention to an engagement of Los Angeles as a necropolitical geography which targets and destroys the lives of black, brown, poor, and undocumented people in accordance with the same white supremacist, patriarchal, capitalist rationale which dominates in "conflict zones" abroad.

Tattooed Soldier commences with Antonio's eviction from his apartment and subsequent entry into a homeless encampment, which he states is populated by "Refugees. That was the term for people who lived like this, in makeshift tents, on barren ground" (41). The text immediately introduces the linkage between Antonio's dejected poverty with unrestrained late-capitalism through the symbolism of the camp's location "in shadow" of the Financial District skyscrapers (38). This same idea is propounded through Antonio's reiteration that "It saddened him to find so many of his countrymen transported, as if by some dark magic, to this freeway-covered plain, wandering about Los Angeles in an amnesiac daze, far from even the memory of the soil," a black magic, or legal sorcery, which we know to be those economic and military policies which maintain

[40] Higonnet notes that "The CEH [Comisión para Esclarecimiento Histórico] documented 32 massacres between March 1980 and November 1982. To date, the sum of the cases documented by the CEH and other sources gives a total of 52 documented massacres" (*Quiet Genocide*, 35)

United States interest in Latin American countries (71). The bureaucracy of the United States which dehumanizes people is explicitly addressed by Antonio when he recalls the expiration of his visa and subsequent slippage into the caste of "illegals" (52-53). Furthermore, Antonio notes that "It was a fact of life that when you came to the United States you moved down in social station and professional responsibilities [...] accountants became ditch diggers. Los Angeles made you less than you were back home" (51). Through these various iterations, Antonio conveys that he, like so many others, feels the impact of colonialist United States judiciary policies which target the personhood and livelihood of undocumented migrants, but he has no words to name that seemingly supernatural force, other than a black magic.

In addition to Antonio's declarations of the hostility of Los Angeles as a space to black, brown, and poor people, Longoria is also intimately aware of the intimacies between Guatemala and LA. Longoria witnesses the aftermath of the Rodney King police beating on television, to which he notes the "Deja Vu" feeling that images of riot police and civil unrest produce within him (272). Longoria goes on to note that:

> what was happening on the screen was a battle bigger than anything [he] had ever seen. It was being fought all over the city [...] To see this here in Los Angeles, fire dancing from house to house, singeing everything in its path, was to remember the names of villages turned to ash: San Miguel, Nueva Concepción, Santa Ana (272).[41]

Longoria and his experience as a murderous jaguar are central for our present understanding of Los Angeles as not only a necropolitical geography but more explicitly as an extension of that very locale which the jaguars terrorized. It is through Longoria's recollection of his acts in Guatemala, where he "had turned many things to ash with his lighter, walls and roofs, schools and churches

[41] One example of this massacre which occurred is discussed by Etelle Higonnet, who details that on May 29th, 1984, twenty-five men, women, and children were massacred by the Guatemalan army in Xeuvicalvitz, Nebaj (*Quiet Genocide*, 48)

dissolving into the wind, taking up residence in the clouds," that a direct and explicit connection is proffered by *Tattooed Soldier* which links the necropolitical violence in Latin America caused by U.S. imperialism with the racialized police brutality and subsequent civil unrest witnessed in Los Angeles (135).

Through the Jaguars' (Longoria and his companion, Lopez) existence in Los Angeles and their negotiation of that space—the way in which they rationalize poverty and public political outrage at the beating of Rodney King by the LAPD—the text provides a direct link between two locales separated by time and space but united in violence and dehumanization of the poor and black/brown bodies. Upon viewing South-Central Los Angeles askance, Longoria notes that "a few buildings seemed to have been burned out many, many years ago [...] Longoria looked at those buildings and thought that a war must have been fought here, though he had no idea when" (187). Guillermo Longoria, a jaguar and U.S-trained murderer, stares with wonder at the remains of South-Central and posits that some violence, the kind of violence he is accustomed to causing, must have happened here. The Jaguar explicitly equates the two necropolitical locales—though obviously different—as possessing something unmistakably similar; "A conquering army leaves this sort of mark on the landscape, the sooty signature of fire, the hand of random, celebratory destruction. *The scattered ruins along Hoover Street looked familiar*. Longoria wondered why this distant war had been fought" (187)[*emphasis mine*].[42] We must remember that in this present moment in 2021, military police and federal agents without recognizable markings on their uniform are raiding cities like Portland & Los Angeles. Militarized police forces have been ushered

[42] Longoria and other military members would be familiar with "Scorched Earth Policies," as scholar Higonnet notes "The CEH only recorded three massacres in which the locality was not burned. The rest of the villages where there were massacres were physically destroyed either during or after the massacre. Likewise, many villages where there were no massacres because the population fled, were burned to the ground or destroyed. In general, the period of indiscriminate or massive massacres (1981-1982) coincides with the physical destruction of communities" (*Quiet Genocide*, 44)

into the cityscape where primarily poor and people of color individuals reside to violently quell civil unrest in protest to the over 1,001 police murders of unarmed people of color just within this year ("Fatal Force").

The text explicitly links the atrocities committed by the Jaguares with the necropolitical violence within ethnic enclaves in the United States through the iteration of Longoria's companion and former Jaguar, a soldier named Lopez. At this point it is necessary to distinguish between the violence perpetrated in Latin America to uphold United States political and economic interests from the violence that plagues neighborhoods like South Central, Los Angeles, and Watts. The violence carried out by the Jaguars facilitates the maintenance of capitalist policy which disproportionately exploits the poor of countries like Guatemala, for the economic prosperity of the country's elite which align their political interests with that of the United States. We may therefore say that at the root of the necropolitical rationale governing violent terrains within Latin America is rampant capitalism. In contrast, the violence which claims the life of Mauricio, Lopez's son, is gang violence (*Tattooed*, 196-97). However, we can understand that such violence is permitted only within certain locales. For instance, the murder and killing of young people in places like South Central, Watts, Oakland, or Pomona is part and parcel of quotidian life.[43] It is expected and rationalized as a constant expectation within these geographies. Similarly, such violence is not permitted nor expected in communities like Newport Beach, Coronado, or La Jolla. At the root of this distinction and demarcation of which bodies may live and which must die, is wealth. The affluent neighborhoods, which consist primarily of white people, enjoy a level of security and comfort that their less-wealthy counterparts do not have the privilege to ever know.

[43] Some of us know this pain personally. I would like to pause here and remember my childhood friend and classmate Corin Michella Hensley, who was shot and killed in Pomona by a vehicle which opened fire on her auto as she and her husband were on their way to pick up their children from school, on January 13th, 2017

Therefore, although each instance represents some clear differences in necropolitical operations, each locale nonetheless is ultimately governed by racial capitalism, or the valuation of the almighty dollar and maintenance of white supremacy.

When recounting the experience of identifying his murdered son, Lopez explicitly connects the violence that soldiers like the Jaguares are responsible for in Guatemala, with the necropolitical violence which claimed his son. Lopez exclaims that his son, Mauricio's "eyes were still open" and that "I saw him and it was like all these things I'd seen before. I started to remember all these things" (*Tattooed*, 198). Lopez is living through the guilt of his past atrocities, as he witnesses his son reduced to a corpse, the kind of image he himself is responsible for in Latin America. Mauricio is therefore reduced to an image Longoria himself is haunted by, as he expresses that he will "live forever with the voices of boys and girls, their last words, the calling out to their mothers. That was the biggest sacrifice. All of them cried before you silenced them for good, and a lot of them shit and pissed. Even now, the smell reminded him of death" (65). Now, Lopez is in a position to experience the trauma of loss, the very trauma he enacted on families in Guatemala; however, he, like Longoria, struggles to understand how this violence can be happening here in the United States, a place they believed to be better than the country they left behind in ruins.

To comprehend the violence happening in Los Angeles, it is essential to visit the passages of some supporting characters which act as representatives of the residual inheritance of oppression within the United States, the homeless people of color that Antonio befriends. Antonio befriends an African American homeless person by the name of Frank who serves to iterate the long-persistent inequities of the United States. This is important because both Antonio and Longoria are new immigrants to Southern California—in order words, they are unfamiliar with the legacy of oppression and racialized dehumanization for the sake of capitalist profit rampant *within* the

United States. Both Frank and another homeless person named the Mayor, serve to educate Antonio in the ways of the world living as an 'untouchable' or an undocumented migrant reduced to living on the streets. The violence that Longoria and Lopez cannot reconcile as happening in the United States, expressed through the murder of Mauricio and the Rodney King Uprising, we learn through Frank and the Mayor, are common occurrences for people in their precarious situation. Frank clarifies that "Down on the row you can get stabbed in your fucking sleep. People'll knife you for your wallet. The row is a fucking snake pit" (*Tattooed,* 45). At the center of this violence which Frank details, is once again money, *you can be killed for your wallet*, the same process of death and dehumanization that we witness in Guatemala enacted by los Jaguares and politicians. Here it is important to recall that Longoria murdered in the name of American economic and political interests, extinguished the life of his compatriots to sustain the life of capitalism at the behest of Guatemalan politicians. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that Longoria committed these murderers, not out of pure pleasure, but because he was paid to do so, it was his job, he was paid to murder and sustain capitalist ideology within Latin America by the political elite within the US and Guatemala.[44]

Tattooed Soldier explicitly links the necropolitical violence of Latin America as caused by the United States in order to uphold American interests, and Longoria states he has absorbed the knowledge taught to him in the United States "and now he would do it in Guatemala" (*Tattooed,* 241). Most notably, the link between the United States and the necropolitical violence in Latin America is through the very tattoo of the Jaguar with bright red in his mouth on Longoria's

[44] When I argue that Longoria's job as a murderer for the state, it means ultimately that Longoria murders his compatriots for the benefit of the United States and the ruling oligarchy class within Guatemala, I am building on Prabhat Patnaik's formulations of the globalist tendencies and nature of American Imperialism: "The interests of international finance capital, therefore, require a muting of inter-imperialist rivalry. If this process of muting of inter-imperialist rivalry began in the post-war period as an outcome of the overwhelming economic and strategic strength of the United States among capitalist powers, it gets sustained in the current phase by the very nature of international finance capital" (*The Changing Face of Imperialism*, 64)

forearm. We come to discover that Longoria was trained by American special forces to commit covert operations and murders in Guatemala, and a symbol of this American support in the necropolitical acts of destruction is overtly signaled through a silver 9-millimeter pistol that was "a gift from an American instructor at Fort Bragg" (*Tattooed*, 199). Furthermore, the Jaguar tattoo is explicitly "an American tattoo [...] the tattoo was valuable, the prettiest and most expensive thing he'd ever owned [...] Something about this snarling Jaguar hinted at madness, unpredictability, bouts of rage" (*Tattooed*, 242). Longoria's training and his weapons are American, but most importantly, the Jaguar tattoo which comes to represent death—as it did for Elena, as the last image she ever saw—is American.

I would like to leave you with the following thoughts for your consideration on the subject of the necropolitical framework sustained by *los Jaguares* and their American masters: Frank, and the Mayor describe Longoria in terms familiar to them, and they do so by stating "They are like the Nazis. [Longoria] is a Nazi. He is a real-life Nazi, living in our time" (*Tattooed*, 238). I ask you to remember this, because people like Longoria are not aberrations of the past, they are in fact living amongst us. They have committed atrocities in the name of capitalism against those who sought the pacification of existence (to make life more comfortable) for the poor of their respective countries, who sought a better life. Remember that the Americans trained, funded, and endorsed *los Jaguares* who "were synonymous with terror [...] they burned houses and left decapitated heads at the entrances to the villages they destroyed. The Jaguars had carried out a holocaust in the mountains" (164). The lived reality-based horror of this text exemplifies how and why this Latin American cultural production necessitates a new reading practice. Through the use of the voice which speaks from the grave, such as Elena, this text deploys recognizable elements of haunting

that are derived in the lived reality of the relentless and unpunished murder of the poor and communities of color.[45]

[45] Avery Gordon's argument on haunting influences my interpretation of Tobar's text, as Gordon notes that "What's distinctive about haunting is that it is an animated state in which a repressed or unresolved social violence is making itself known, sometimes very directly, sometimes more obliquely" (*Ghostly Matters*, xvi)

Chapter Two: Entombed Voices

"The people are the idea. The respect and dignity of the people, as they move toward their freedom, are the sustaining force which reaches into and out of the prison. The walls, the bars, the guns and the guards can never encircle or hold the idea of the people. And the people must always carry forward the idea which is their dignity and beauty"
—Huey P. Newton (1969)

"Pintos are at the intersection of our colonial reality and our revolutionary potential"
—Raul Salinas (1996)

What would the dead say to us, if they were living, and we were willing to listen? If the *living-dead* could sing, what melodious testimonies would we witness? In this chapter, we will reconcile the necropolitical—the determination of who may live, and who must die—with what several scholars have termed the condition of *social death* or *living-entombment* experienced by captives of the American carceral system.[46] Specifically, this chapter studies two particular Chicanx pinto bards, poets of Latinx ethnic descent writing from within the prison during the mid to late 20th-century, congruent with the exponential growth of the carceral system. I will demonstrate how Mbembe's theorization of the necropolitical morphs to incorporate not just the biologically eradicated but also the socially killed by the United States government. What makes this exploration extraordinary, is the fact that the dead do not usually have a voice of their own, aside from that voice provided by authors removed from the experience of death—as we have examined in the previous chapter. Presently however, we are entering a realm in which the dead, the *living-dead*, do in fact have voice, though mitigated and censored by the carceral apparatus. The socially dead yet biologically alive can write back from their position of living-entombment.

[46] I am deploying the definition of civil death conceptualized by Colin Dayan: "Legal thought relied on a set of fictions that rendered the meaning of persons shifting and tentative: whether in creating slaves as *persons in law* and criminals as *dead in law*, or in the perpetual re-creation of the rightless entity. The medieval fiction of civil death lives on in the present. The felon rendered dead in law is no anachronism, but a continuing effect of dehumanizing practices of punishment" (*The Law is a White Dog*, xii)

Let us listen to their wail as they reach out to us, to pull us in and under, as they attempt to show us their lives in death.

But let us first seek out a tradition. Consider the enchained humans in *Plato's cave* tormented by shadows on a wall, or the captive in Lord Byron's *The Prisoner of Chillon* (1816); both Western canonical texts use the concept of bondage to posit forth a theory of *being* in relation to death and reality.[47] In lyric avian poetics, confinement is often represented by a liberated or caged bird. Typically, the cage symbolizes paternalistic protection from the hostility of the exterior world, as with the dramatic narration of pinto poet Raul Salinas's "Lamento," where "A WEARY BIRD, TORMENTED [/] FROM WITHIN [/] SOUGHT REFUGE IN AN ALIEN WORLD," or the captive's cell (*Un* 29).[48] As with Byron's poetic *personae*, the incarcerated interlocutor of "Lamento" negotiates their own present existence with that of the liberated or caged bird. Notably, our analysis centers the distinction between 'human' and 'object' as the legacy of Enlightenment in the 20th century represented through & contended in language (*Persons and Things*, 3). The poetic 'I' in pinto works—which practice the repossession, reconstitution, and transformation of the speaker's humanity as resistive praxis against necropolitical *social death*—is the antithetical oppositional force to the textually induced and judicially sanctioned 'legal sorcery' which renders a 'person' into a 'thing'.

Historically, anthropomorphism might accentuate the cage in avian poetics as a necessary barrier of defense, while other scholars will go on to characterize the cage as representative of oppressive tyranny and consciousness. For an example, we turn to the terminating lines of

[47] Our conceptual framework is foregrounded by Sylvia Wynter's theorization of "the possibility of a new science of human discourse [...] a sense that in every form that is being inscripted, each of us is also in that form, even though we do not *experience* it. So the human story/history becomes the collective story/history of these multiple forms of self-inscription or self-instituted genres, with each form/genre being adaptive to its situation, ecological, geopolitical" (*On Being Human as Praxis* 3)

[48] Louis Mendoza clarifies that "[...] inspired by e. e. cummings, he began using the lowercased, one-word raulrsalinas, to sign his work" ("The Re-Education of a Xicanindio: Raul Salinas and the Poetics of Pinto Transformation," 8)

raulrsalinas' 'first poem,' "tambien pajarillos presos [/] tienen el derecho de vivir" (*Un,* 28).[49] In the past, the cage as protective enclosure in avian lyric poetry demarcates the *principium individuationis,* or the burden of existence felt by alienated Western *cogito,* as betrayed by the interlocutors of John Keats's "Ode to a Nightingale" (1819) and Shelley's "To A Skylark" (1820). In Keats's and Shelley's respective poems, the narrator bestows the animal with human qualities, while focalizing the creature's blissful ignorance of the human condition—"What thou among the leaves hasn't never known"—as that which produces the "immortal Bird" not born for death ("Nightingale" ℓ.21, ℓ.61). The romantic subject's disposition to contest the regions of being and forfeiture of knowledge are tropes we investigate and juxtapose with the civil death invoked in pinto poetry.[50]

How can contemporary literary scholars understand the imaginary poetic representation of the absent and silenced, or the animation of the dead "En aquel abismo [/] tan profundo y negro, [/] donde han caido nuestras almas," as a mode of resistance (*Un,* 27)?[51] We presently trace the strategic deployment of rhetorical devices—such as anthropomorphism, personification, and prosopopoeia—to interrogate the tenuous border between 'person' and 'thing' as evidence of a *decolonization* project within the pinto poetic aesthetic. This project also engages with the use and function of Spanish within the poetic aesthetic of Baca and Salinas.

If the modern American prison is a residual socio-historical inheritance from imperial 'thingification'[52] processes of colonialism & chattel slavery—which morphed people into objects, and whose very transfiguration is textually absolved through the criminal exception clause of the

[49] This passage translates to: "caged birds also [/] have the right to live"
[50] Here, I am building on the definition of the legal sorcery of the law to create pre-mature death expressed by Dayan: "Civil death triggered a magic that depends on the dubious exchange between natural and supernatural. Instead of dying in the body to be reborn in Christ, the felon dies in the spirit first. The soul is killed before the body dies" (*The Law is a White Dog,* 70)
[51] This passage translates to: "In that abyss [/] so profound and dark, [/] where our souls have fallen"
[52] This is a term I am adopting from Aime Cesaire's *Discourse on Colonialism* (42)

13th Constitutional Amendment (1865)—can the poetic 'I' deployed within the present pinto texts reveal, if I may use carceral scholar H. Bruce Franklin's terms, a 'recent and especially American innovation' in poetics? I would like to take H. Bruce Franklin's framework and depart from it, because of his use of the term 'recent'. For African American people, or Black human beings living in America, mass warehousing, natal alienation, and premature death absolved and sanctioned by the state are not recent occurrences, but rather a residual structure from colonialism and slavery which survives today in the form of mass incarceration. I think Franklin's use of the term 'recent,' is meant to denote the increased and novel rate of incarceration. I, like Franklin, am arguing that the exacerbation, the increased numbers of people who are incarcerated to a quantifiable population never reached in the past, is a noteworthy occurrence which merits our attention. The overactive funneling of people of color, the poor, mentally infirm and nonconformist into the prison, at a rate never witnessed, provides the conditions of possibility of the pinto aesthetic as resistance literature which counters these modern necropolitical mechanisms.

Perhaps it is the destabilizing potential encapsulated in the radical epistemologies[53] of entombed captives, the "Gente de la cual [/] brotaron poemas/ exploding guns [/] from within the WALL; [/] to sing & cry of our [/] EXISTENCE,"[54] which keep some literary scholars possessively invested in staying out of the prison and focused elsewhere (*Un Trip*, 127). [55] Or perhaps it is as prison scholar H. Bruce Franklin notes, that "the artistic achievement of this literature [must be

[53] Dennis Childs notes that "[epistemic breaks] often emerge from spaces of death and abjection rather than from those of liberal bourgeois privilege" *(Slaves of the State*, 47)

[54] This passage translates to: "People from whom [/] poems bursted [/] exploding guns [/] from with the WALL; [/] to sing & cry of our [/] EXISTENCE"

[55] I am using the term possessive investment in accordance with scholar George Lipsitz's formulation: "Because they are ignorant of even the recent history of the possessive investment in whiteness—generated by slavery and segregation, immigrant exclusion and Native American policy, conquest and colonialism, but augmented by liberal and conservative social policies as well—Americans produce largely cultural explanations for structural social problems. The increased possessive investment in whiteness generated by disinvestment in U.S. cities, factories, and schools since the 1970s disguises as *racial* problems the general social problems posed by deindustrialization, economic restructuring, and neoconservative attacks on the welfare state" (*The Possessive Investment in Whiteness* 18)

approached] with an aesthetic radically different from most aesthetics applied in the university and the university-dominated cultural media. In truth, *it may not be going too far to say that the prison and the university provide the contradictory poles defining the field of aesthetics*" (*Prison Literature in America,* 235)[*emphasis added*]. Perchance ivory-tower intellectuals of the traditional Western canon will realize—just as the dying Socrates did when condemned to drink poison in Athens as punishment for a life of tyrannical adherence to utilitarianism—that "what is not intelligible to me is not necessarily unintelligible" (*Basic Writings,* 93).

"As i am not free … [/] though i walk Seattle's streets": Dialectics[56] of the Prison

In the 1999 reprinting of *Un Trip,*[57] raulrsalinas commences the first half of the poetic collection with previously unpublished segments from correspondences while incarcerated which function as a prosaic self-introduction by the author, entitled "Hey World!!!". Within these excerpts from prison letters,[58] the author denotes a poetic theory of survival within confinement, or as pinto scholar Louis Mendoza states, "this epistolary montage can provide a template for readers to understand not only the conditions of Salinas's incarceration, but the multivocalic, multilingual style that characterize his struggle against systemic dehumanization" (*Un Trip,* 5). Central for survival in the prison, the author iterates the importance of human interaction as a

[56] Philosophers Marcuse and Feenberg note that "Dialectical thought thus becomes negative in itself. Its function is to break down the self-assurance and self-contentment of common sense, to undermine the sinister confidence in the power and language of facts, to demonstrate that unfreedom is so much at the core of things that the development of their internal contradictions leads necessarily to qualitative change: the explosion and catastrophe of the established state of affairs" (*Essential Marcuse,* 65-66)

[57] Louis Mendoza indicates that "It was in the inaugural issue of [*Aztlan de Leavenworth*] that Salinas' signature poem, 'Un Trip Through the Mind Jail,' was first published and widely distributed" (*raulrsalinas and the Jail Machine***,** 10)

[58] Mendoza clarifies that "Because receiving and sending correspondence was under intense scrutiny, and often a privilege subject to revocation by prison authorities, and because correspondence with the 'free world' was the most reliable means of establishing and maintaining relationships with non-prisoners, these letters reveal many dimensions of a complex human being undergoing personal and political change" (*raulrsalinas and the Jail Machine,* 20)

means of maintaining one's humanity, as displayed in the following plea for intimacy—even if only through correspondences; "Do keep in touch, you are the only outlets for expression & some of the few breezes of liberation that reach my asphyxiating cave" (26). The desire for human contact or interaction as a means of maintaining one's own humanity operates in opposition to the active physical removal of captives from natal relations as a form of *death*, as is explicitly documented in Salinas' poem "The Pisser" (1964), sub-titled as written in solitary confinement.

Notably, in these correspondences raulrsalinas addresses the dead, or "The spirit of Bro. George Jackson," a prominent prison rights advocate and Black Panther who was murdered by the state in San Quentin on August 21st, 1971, which "seems always close by," to affectively evoke and corporeally solidify a multi-ethnic coalition with "our non-latino comrades" (25). Moreover, raulrsailnas notes the restrictive measures forcibly suppressing artistic expression and production while illustrating the continued struggle against a state-sanctioned process of dehumanization; "Pinches Putos! Me negaron publicar un article sobre 'censorship in prison.' Ya me traen! Daily harassment" (21).[59] Lastly, we focus on the mental condition represented by the author at various points of poetic production. Salinas indicates that "Confined in isolation, a distortion of the senses begins to take place [...] i may catch a dark spot on the floor with the corner of my eye, as i write, and it'll seem to move," thereby inducing within the reader of *Un Trip* an affectively horrific[60] hallucinogenic revelry (*Un Trip*, 24). This hallucinogenic episode is central for the development of any engagement—whether personal or academic—of writing which emerges from captivity within the context of the United States prison. In contrast to artistic hallucinogenic revelries

[59] This passage translates to: "Fucking bastards/bitches! They denied my publication of an article on 'censorship in prison.' They've got me going! Daily harassment"

[60] Dennis Childs notes that "[...] the law's gothic transmutation of living, nominally rights-bearing, human beings into 'slaves of the state' has produced an unaccounted-for excess in the form of a subterranean poetics, politics, and epistemics of the living dead—an unquietly buried assemblage of [racialized and gendered] neoslave sound and theory (and legally disappeared bodies) that constitutes a haunting *unhistorical* counter to the well-entrenched U.S. national fable of slavery's nineteenth-century demise" (*Slaves of the State*, 4)

invoked by poets such as Coleridge, Poe, Keats, Nietzsche, Eliot, Woolf, Kafka, Bukowski, or Ginsberg, the distortion of reality and time that raulrsalinas documents is enacted on the captive through the carceral system. The judiciary manipulation of time and reality for captives is in effect a form of *living death* or *social death*[61] as termed by several scholars including Caleb Smith, Orlando Patterson, Dennis Childs, Avery Gordon, and Colin Dayan, as a mode of ritualized mortification, a transfiguration, or 'making-dead' which the captive poet denotes as existing "in my still mobile cadaver" (*Detention*, 244; *Un Trip*, 83).

Captive from 1957 to 1972, raulrsalinas aptly titled the first segment of poetry in *Un Trip* "The Captive Years," while confined in maximum security prisons Soledad (California) from 1957 to 1959, Huntsville (Texas) from 1960 to 1964, Leavenworth (Kansas) from 1967 to 1971 and Marion prison (Illinois) in 1972.[62] Despite the particular experience of being a captive, racialized and gendered body, the author states in a correspondence, "That you enjoyed the poem, pleases me muchly, because it is your poem...belongs to everyone who can relate to/identify with/ see themselves in it," thereby stating the representational[63] nature—"The universal experience"—of the poetic work despite being exceptionally personal (*Un Trip*, 21).

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[61] Childs states that "Orlando Patterson defines social death as the death-in-life situation of the slave whereby biological death is at once threatened via physical terror and simulated through her forced removal from lines of kinship and communal/cultural sociality—what [Patterson] describes as 'natal alienation'" (*Slaves of the States* 180)

[62] I have chosen never to use the terms criminal or convict throughout this project, because such terms denote a sense of culpability. Likewise, I have also endeavored to omit the reason or causes for which Salinas, Baca and Lucero were incarcerated because I wish to avoid reproducing, even if subliminally, any sense of their culpability or guilt. I have decided to omit the reasons why these people were captured because I know some of my readers might excuse the necropolitical system here described due to a misplaced sense of justice. In other words, I do not wish to share the fact that these poets were incarcerated for minor drug possession charges because I do not want to create a sense of justifiable indifference within my reader who may hold a misplaced sense of superiority due to their lack of exposure to the judicial system

[63] *Pinto* scholars note that "[...] the value of Salinas' literary work lies not only in some traditional notion of 'good writing,' but in its value as a critical voice from within the depths of the penal system, a voice that is not so much exceptional as it is representative. It is representative inasmuch as his pre-prison life and his incarceration are all too typical of the prison population; his experiences of social disenfranchisement, undereducation, participation in the lumpen economy, and migrancy and other forms of displacement are indicators of experience and social location that are shared between him and many other prisoners" (Mendoza 11)

The author notes the restrictive apparatus of the prison dictating how and what one may write; "The reason why most of this letter is in english is because Mr. Hart & Mr. Hendrickson have prohibited me from corresponding in Spanish" (25). Furthermore, raulrsalinas details the punitive process of control over literary texts produced in confinement:

> due to the strange, foreign language imposed within this cage, your (this) letter will be: censored in isolation (for subversive code messages) sent to the mailroom censor (for possible sniffing) before going to my weeks-old caseworker, who is atrociously limited in any language, who will turn it over to a spanish-speaking guard (for final rubber-stamping) before (if ever) it reaches you (*Un Trip,* 26).

The author's description of the relationship between Spanish and English within the prison—and the bilingual guard who functions as translator[64]—challenges what subsequent scholars of bilingualism and translation theory posit. Notably, scholar of translation theory Abdelfattah Kilito argues that in the case of bilingual speakers "there are no oppressive and oppressed languages; when they 'meet on one tongue,' each is simultaneously an aggressor and a victim," which is a paradigm that does not readily characterize what raulrsalinas represents as a captive author, though "their [Spanish and English] relationship is not built on peaceful coexistence, but to the contrary, on tugging, opposition, and quarrel" (*Thou Shalt Not Speak My Language*, 23). Within the prison, the function of the bilingual corrections officer as a translator characterizes the practice of translation "as the extension of military, political, and economic power [as] some languages prey on others, colonize them, plunder and cannibalize their texts," which is the process and experience raulrsalinas documents well before the publication of *Thou Shalt Not Speak My Language* in 2008 (Kilito, xiii).[65]

[64] In his translation theory text, *Thou Shalt Not Speak My Language*, Kilito states that "[Translation/Translator] (*Tarjamah*) carries connotations of alienated speech that has the flavor of falsehood, damnation, and death, but also possibilities of survival, narration, and understanding" (x)

[65] Kilito indicates that "This definition suggests that translation hovers on the boundary between life and death, between love and death…not only as a violent process that alters its object but also as a circular one in which love and death dovetail" (*Thou Shalt Not,* xi)

In a handwritten poem by Raul Salinas in *Un Trip,* the poetic voice recalls the institutional education which—from a tender and malleable age—evidenced the existence of a social hierarchy informed by race, nationality, and linguistic heritage;

> I must not speak Spanish
> in the classroom.
> I must not speak Spanish on
> the schoolgrounds.
> I must not speak Spanish.
> I must not speak.
> I must not (*Un Trip,* 77).

It is essential to place the above quoted excerpt, the textual representation of the Spanish language as punishable in the classroom setting, in historical context with the legislative decision in *Mendez v. Westminster* (1947) which declared the segregation of California public schools on language-based differences as unconstitutional and subsequent *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) which determined racially based segregation to be unconstitutional.[66] The poem commences with a complete syntactical thought, composed by subject ("I"), a negated action ("must not speak"), object (Spanish) and location (classroom which expands to school grounds in the preceding line). The tension in the initial line creates a double or half meaning; this is because of the *caesura* produced at the termination of the line (which ends with the object "Spanish"), and the subsequent meaning that is produced by specifying the location.[67]

The initial line forbids the speaking of Spanish entirely ("I must not speak Spanish"), while the following lines qualify the command and place the poetic scene in a cultural institution, the classroom (which, like the prison, both function through the negation of Salinas's personhood) as

[66] Born in 1934, Salinas would have been thirteen years old when the *Mendez v. Westminster* case concluded, and twenty years old when *Brown v. Board of Education* was decided. Therefore, it is important to place the above cited poem and poet in historical context, as having experienced the racial segregation practices within the classroom both landmark cases (supposedly) ended

[67] In poetic analysis, the "Pull, or tugging, which occurs either when syntax works against and diverges from line, or when other elements of style work against each other" (Kinzie, 471)

an instructive space that upholds culturally dominant ideologies, such as white supremacy. The poetic structure anaphorically repeats the subject of the text (I), while the remaining lines reduce & collapse, thereby audibly and visually representing the poetic subject's own deterioration within the present structure. Stated differently, the repetitive writing of commands as an instructive and disciplinary tool in academic settings, evidenced in the excerpt, reproduces within the classroom setting dominant cultural anxieties. The terminating lines of the poem culminate in the negation of the subject ("I must not") as representing the ideological dehumanization process—if not the judicially imposed & linguistically determined cognitive horizon—targeting historically disenfranchised groups in different cultural institutions.[68] Notably, both English and Spanish are colonial languages which historically undertook the captivity, subjection, and extermination of black, brown, red bodies and culture, through institutions like the church, prison, and school.[69]

Though a subtitle such as "The Captive Years" directly signifies the relinquishment of freedom, the subtitle "Poems of (Partial) Freedom" confronts a reader's conception of the prison as a fixed demarcated physical structure. While the signifier "captive" denotes a forfeiture or deprival of agency and power, the phrase "partial freedom" challenges cultural assumptions of what liberation and captivity actually mean. In effect, the second section of raulrsalinas' *Un Trip* simultaneously confronts the Quakeresque rehabilitating narrative of the prison and residual ideological formations which remain with the prisoner after release. *Poems of partial freedom* invites the reader to ponder just how the prison continues to oppress the captive even beyond physical enclosure and after supposed rehabilitation and reincorporation into society. The poet

[68] This idea is often called linguistic determinism and defined as, in *Language in Mind*, "Under the theme *language as lens*, the question posed is whether the language we acquire influences how we see the world" (9)
[69] Franz Fanon notes that "A man who possesses a language possesses as an indirect consequence the world expressed and implied by this language [...] To speak a language is to appropriate its world and culture" (*Black Skin, White Masks*, 2, 21)

immediately urges this cognitive renegotiation in the first poem of partial freedom titled "Crash Landing":

> "But somewhere beyond
> Majestic Mount Rainier
> in dungeons built by evil men
> are brothers/sisters (prisoners)
> who are still not free
> As i am still not free…
> though i walk Seattle's streets" (98).

In this passage, Salinas invokes the possessive investment[70] of private members of United States society and the state, as noted by Gilmore,[71] in building and maintaining the prisons as capitalist ventures. While noting the social and gubernatorial investment[72] in maintaining prisons, the text confronts the presumption of freedom and legal personhood as obtainable for these captives after release.[73] These ideas are represented through the expressed tension in physically walking Seattle's streets yet remaining ideologically bound in the prison with 'brothers and sisters'. Furthermore, the challenge of regaining—if at all possible—a semblance of a former totalitized self is illustrated through the deployment of the lower-case "i". Therefore, we commence our poetic analysis of Latinx pinto poets with an ideological intervention of what the prison means to various communities and its residual ideological impact on the person. Reconciling the description of labor in constructing the prisons (the "dungeons built by evil men") represented in this poem, with

[70] Scholar Lipsitz notes that "From the start, European settlers in North America established structures encouraging a possessive investment in whiteness. The colonial and early national legal systems authorized attacks on Native Americans and encouraged the appropriation of their lands. They legitimated racialized chattel slavery, limited naturalized citizenship to 'white' immigrants, identified Asian immigrants as expressly unwelcome [...] and provided pretexts for restricting voting, exploiting labor, and seizing property of Asian Americans, Mexican Americans, Native Americans, and African Americans" (*Possessive Investment*, 2)

[71] Ruth Gilmore indicates that "Although the absolute number of private prisons has indeed grown, the fact is that 95 percent of all prisons and jails are publicly owned and operated" (*Golden Gulag*, 21)

[72] Lipsitz posits that "Whites may not be openly racist in their personal decisions or private interactions with others, but they nonetheless benefit systematically from the structural impediments to minority access to quality housing, schools, and jobs" (*Possessive Investment*, 46)

[73] As Michelle Alexander notes, legal forms of invisible punishment "describe the unique set of criminal sanctions that are imposed on individuals after they step outside the prison gates, a form of punishment that operates largely outside of the public view and takes effect outside the traditional sentencing framework" (Rothenburg, 261)

Thompson's observation that "whenever a prison came to a rural white community it certainly created jobs, and given that a corrections officer's salary could be 50 percent higher than that paid to most other unskilled workers, this expansion of the carceral state had the potential to benefit key segments of America's white working class," highlights a vested individual and structural fiscal interest in the continuation of the penitentiary for profit model (724).

As Ava DuVernay's *13th* (2016) reveals, since its conception in 1983 the Corrections Corporation of America (CCA) and the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC) have designed and promoted laws which radically redefine the prison as a cultural structure. As a private company, CCA developed contracts with states, which in turn protected the company's investment by assuring that those private prisons remain populated. Supposed "color-blind" policies, such as President Johnson's declaration of the *War on Crime,* Reagan and Nixon's *War on Drugs,* Clinton's *Mandatory Minimum Sentences* & zero tolerance *Three Strikes* policy,[74] Bush and Obama's *War on Terror,*[75] and most recently Trump's nativist *Muslim Ban*[76] & violent suppression of Black Lives Matter movements, change the political landscape in which historically disenfranchised communities live and the influence of the prison and detention centers on those bodies. The criminalization of impoverished communities, or *War on Poverty,* actively render these spaces necropolitical geographies, maintain a zone of exclusion in which violence is rationalized, or a "domestic war-zone" (Rodriguez, 2). The following excerpt from raulrsalinas'

[74] Mary Bosworth notes that "President Richard M. Nixon declared the initial 'war on drugs' in 1972. In February 1982, President Ronald Reagan also declared a 'war on drugs' [...] The focus changed with the federal enactment of the Anti-Drug Abuse Acts of 1986 and 1988. These acts moved away from targeting major drug dealers and providing treatment for users and toward punishing users and street-level dealers" (*Encyclopedia of Prisons & Correctional Facilities*, 965, 1000, 1028)

[75] Ben Olguin notes that "Indeed, September 11 introduced not only a new enemy—the dark-skinned Muslim male—but a new way of understanding the old racial minority 'menace to society' who, historically, has been figured as a Black male and/or, with increasing frequency, a Latino male. Today, the two villains—the international and the domestic—have become indistinguishable" (*La Pinta*, 1-3)

[76] We note the dialectical relationship between the West and its conception of Islam, proposed by Joseph Massad in *Islam in Liberalism* (2015), in constituting its own tenuous border of existence; "[The Orient] resides inside [the Occidental], defining its identity and its very claims of difference" (1)

"Un Trip through the Mind Jail," encapsulates and testifies the disproportionate sentencing policies in effect, and the subsequent alienation of dehumanized minorities:

> Raton: 20 years for a matchbox of weed. Is that cold?
> No lawyer no jury no trial i'm guilty
> Aren't we all guilty? (*Un* 59).

The voice indicates that "Raton," meaning mouse, received a twenty-year sentence for a non-violent crime, while highlighting the failure of the legal system to adequately protect the human dignity of subordinate groups.[77] Furthermore, the incessant deployment of signifiers of deprivation to modify protections supposedly constitutionally guaranteed—such as the right to an impartial jury of one's own peers as iterated in the Sixth Amendment to the United States Constitution—aligns with the sentiments expressed in points 8 and 9 of chronologically contemporary text, "The Black Panther Platform: What We Want, What We Believe" formulated by Huey Newton and Bobby Seale in 1966.[78] The terminating thought, questions our own culpability—either active or complacent—in maintaining the systems which violently dehumanize historically disenfranchised communities.

Simply stated, the privatization of probation, including the judiciary monetary interest in capitalizing on a system of parole, along with technological advancements for bodily immobilization and control have enabled the prison and dehumanizing legal apparatuses to extend beyond its physical limitations.[79] Through the synthesis of Thompson's claims that "Prison labor

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[77] As Jean Baker Miller notes in "Domination and Subordination" (1986), "We have a great deal of trouble deciding on how many rights 'to allow' to the lesser party. We agonize about how much power the lesser party shall have. How much can the lesser person express or act on her or his perceptions when these definitely differ from those of the superior? Above all, there is great difficulty in maintaining the conception of the lesser person *as a person of as much intrinsic worth as the superior*" (Rothenberg, 92)

[78] Point 8: "We Want Freedom For All Black Men Held In Federal, State, County And City Prisons And Jails," Point 9: "We Want All Black People When Brought To Trial To Be Tried In Court By A Jury Of Their Peer Group Or People From Their Black Communities, As Defined By The Constitution Of The United States" (https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/primary-documents-african-american-history/black-panther-party-ten-point-program-1966/)

[79] Mary Bosworth indicates that "Electronic monitoring exists at all stages of the criminal justice system from pretrial to postrelease supervision. Thus, surveillance may be used as (1) an alternative to pretrial detention, (2) a sanction

was attractive to American employers [and public agencies] for more reasons than lower wages: they also did not have to deal with sick days, unemployment insurance, or workman's compensation claims, and they had few liability worries when it came to toxins or accidents in prison workplaces," and captive poet Jimmy Santiago Baca's representation of those conditions within the prison, we are provided with a dialogue which simultaneously reveals the invested interest in captive forced labor and prisoner resistance through the subversion of that desired labor extraction (Thompson, 722). In Baca's "What's Happening," the poetic voice catalogues the collective will of the captives to resist, as "The entire prison population quits working [/] in fields for three cents an hour, [/] in the factories for a dime an hour, [/] and fire engulfs the tiers, [/] illuminate cell after cell" (Baca, 13).[80] We will address the function of education[81] in Baca, raulrsalinas, and the larger Chicanx and Black captive canon as a means of resistance, which is here invoked through the symbolic and material imagery of "fire" literally spreading out to enlighten and radicalize the captives within their cell, in our subsequent conversation about pinto aesthetics. When we broach the pinto representation of education and knowledge as a mode of resistance, this inquiry will not romanticize the formative potential of incarceration, but rather

meted out at time of sentencing, (3) an alternative to custody that is offered postsentencing, (4) a tool to ensure compliance with a work release program, or (5) a condition of probation or parole" (*Encyclopedia of Prisons & Correctional Facilities,* 283)

[80] Jimmy Santiago Baca was 21 when he was incarcerated for drug possession and sentenced to 6 years in prison, 3 of which he served in isolation

[81] Mendoza notes that "In seizing control of their education, Salinas and his comrades underwent a radical transformation that involved reading works by leading intellectuals of Third World independence movements. This is evidenced by the lists of books and magazines they read; letters requesting specific titles are contained in Salinas' archives. [...] a multiracial cohort of convicts interested in exploring racism, class analysis, and national liberation began crystallizing. [...] Their emergent commitment to prison reform required that they seize control of their education and begin to challenge the denigrating practices of prison culture. Racism, violence, and the exchange of contraband were destructive elements of this culture, and prison guards actively fostered these practices for their individual gain as well as for a means of prisoner control. A divided population whose hostilities were directed at one another rather than at prison authorities was preferable to a united population who recognized its own manipulation and the injustice of the legal system. In banding together in a multiracial alliance that raised questions about social justice, these prisoners became more than just teachers to one another; they sought to forge a safe house within the prison, one that rejected prisoner-on-prisoner violence, the domination of the weak by the powerful, and racism" (*raulrsalinas and the Jail Machine,* 9)

supplement the self-actualization of these captive authors with the conceptualization that "there is no being in the world that knowledge cannot penetrate, but what can be penetrated by knowledge is not being" (*Dialectic*, 19). For now, we focalize the ceasing of prison labor, and the distinct forms that labor takes (agricultural and industrial), as a central mechanism for subverting the commodification process of the body in culturally dehumanizing structures.

In the following passage from the authorial prosaic introduction to *Un Trip,* the pinto poet situates the importance of the Fidel Castro-led attack in 1953, which ignited the people's revolution in Cuba, with the current oppressive conditions of captives and their struggle for liberation or acquisition of human dignity:

> Wed. July 26, 1972, this is the 3rd day of round-the-clock raids, also the anniversary of the Moncada assault in Cuba. There are 78 men confined in H-Block and 72 of us here in I-Block, both isolation units (23).

A critical revelation that this passage encapsulates, "one that some readers may resist: what happens inside the walls inevitably reflects the society outside," situates pinto authors as complimentary—often one and the same—to the exploited racialized proletariat inhabiting the ethnic enclaves, ghettos, criminalized spaces, domestic war-zones and necropolitical geographies (Franklin, xii). The passage denotes the author's ideological alignment with the movement against capitalist imperialist hegemony in the Caribbean.[82]

Can this issue be reduced to financial volitions, is it simply a matter of profiting from a new form of slavery and ensuring that bodies are entrapped in a vicious structural and representational cycle for profit? Here, we consider Gilmore's note that "the generally accepted

[82] While incarcerated in Leavenworth, Raul Salinas "met Ramon Chacon, a convict from South Texas who introduced him to the writings of Ernesto 'Che' Guevara and Frantz Fanon. He also met Standing Deer (alias Robert Wilson) and Rafael Cancel Miranda, a Puerto Rican *independentista* who had been imprisoned for participating in a 1954 armed protest in the chambers of the U.S. Congress in order to draw attention to the colonial status of Puerto Rico. [...] his relationship with Cancel Miranda and Oscar Colazo helped him hone his knowledge of Spanish, learn about the Puerto Rican independence struggle, and begin developing an international perspective that enabled him to better comprehend the historical ravages of colonialism on his own community" (Mendoza, 8-9)

goal for prisons has been *incapacitation:* a do-nothing theory [...] the fact that most prisoners are idle, and that those who work do so for a public agency, undermines the view that today's prison expansion is the story [of 'new slavery']" (21). We move past an argument which situates the prison as a mere extension of the abolished private system of chattel slavery and highlight, as Gilmore does, the public interest in maintaining a mobile surplus labor force created by subordinate people, but also a vested public interest in perpetuating those structures and representations which justify the dehumanization and commodification of historically disenfranchised groups within and outside the prison. Notably, some scholars have argued that it is important not to mistake the fact that most prisoners are not producing products that are sold in the free market, for 'idleness.' Such 'idle' prisoners do all the work on the inside of prisons and jails including cleaning, cooking, clerking, etc. This of course does not include the categories of sex work and/or sex slavery.

The colonial logic informing the prison system is discernible through the *decivilization* of the colonizer; "Between colonizer and colonized there is room only for forced labor, intimidation, *the police* [...] No human contact, but relations of domination and submission which turn the colonizing man into a classroom monitor, an army sergeant, *a prison guard*, a slave driver, and the indigenous man into an *instrument of production*" (Cesaire, 35)[*emphasis added*]. The textual representations of state-sanctioned violence such as "la muerte del compañero/maestro Jackson allá en QUILMAS," which emerge from the prison and the rampant militarization of law enforcement in low-income communities of color, exhibit the systematic colonial logic categorized in *Discourse on Colonialism* (1950), written in Paris shortly before raulrsalinas' captivity and Civil Rights Movement in the states (*Un Trip,* 25). Raulrsalinas vocalizes this process of progressive dehumanization, and the immanent resistive violence it invites, of racialized bodies in the prose of

"Hey World!!!" by indicating that "If forced to continue living like an animal, soon—very soon—i'll be reacting like one" and again with "Ahora comprendo porque los animales de la selva hacen pace back and forth in their cages en el zoo" (*Un Trip* 24).[83]

Notably, Salinas highlights that as a poet in confinement vulnerable to violence both from other captives and guards, one has "no time for poetics" as in the case of the authors' "poet-protege" who "got bopped on the noggin" (*Un Trip*, 24). It is precisely the real material and ideological urgency in the present moment expressed by the aforementioned excerpt that situate a critical need for a new reading practice. Traditional literary reader response practices, such as those proffered by Formalism, invite the reader to disregard all context and information that exists outside of the text. A formalist approach is not only inadequate in this circumstance, because the reader would fail to appreciate the real lived conditions which influence writing from incarceration, but this approach also reproduces a violence in that it treats texts which emerge from a necropolitical space, like the prison, with the same feigned objectivity as texts produced from beyond the prison walls, in the comfort of university offices or recollected in tranquility.

These poets are not just pinto poets, they are American and English language poets. And yet, they are strikingly different from other members of this canon. From T.S. Eliot's conception of the English literary corpus in "Tradition and Individual Talent," or the incessant "Now" of the modern American subject in William Carlos Williams, to Beckett's post-modern disintegrated subject[84]—the additional stress of forced natal alienation and bodily confinement coincide with state sponsored corporeal and epistemic annihilation, which necessitate an examination of

[83] This passage translates to: "Now I understand why the animals of the jungle pace back and forth in their cages in the zoo"

[84] Samuel Beckett's existentialist angst is perhaps best encapsulated in the following: "Where would I go, if I could go, who would I be, if I could be, what would I say, if I had a voice, who says this, saying it's me? Answer simply, someone answer simply. It's the same old stranger as ever, for whom alone accusative I exist, in the pit of my inexistence, of his, of ours, there's a simple answer. It's not with thinking he'll find me, but what is he to do, living and bewildered, yes, living, say what he may" ("Texts for Nothing 4," 114)

ideological, epistemic, and material textual production within the United States prison.[85] The deficiency of Western canonical tradition to incorporate historically underrepresented groups is once more iterated by Raul Salinas in "Epiphany," where the poetic voice states the failure to reconcile imperial and colonial literary tradition with the modern captive's plight, as productive of a new way of thinking, and new reading practice, propounded by the poem's title:

> i heard some black cats blow today
> who spoke of pigs, of being free, of many things.
> No Shakespeare/Keats/ or Shelley, they;
> no bullshit sonnets of nobility & kings (45).

Through anthropomorphism, the poetic narrator presents the current scene in which both captive and oppressors are dehumanized into animals. By indicating that traditional poets of the Western canon are "bullshit," or at least alien to the experience of living-entombment (as denoted by the description of the interlocutors), the author iterates the ideological and temporal dissonance of racialized and gendered captives in the modern American prison and their literary production process.[86] In our present interpretation, the poetic narration encapsulates an artist project to decolonize the captive textual production and epistemologies. While *Un Trip* commences with Salinas attempting to write in the colonizer's formal constraints, there is an epiphany represented within the text denoting his political awakening. This resistive practice to decolonize writing, in this case poetry, is iterated through the negation of Western imperial authors, whose lifespans encompass the Age of Enlightenment, through Wilberforce's campaigns for the abolition of slavery within the British Empire (*Slavery Abolition Act* of 1833). The proposed forfeiture of the self—elsewhere called *thanatos*—by the alienated Western subject, does not readily fit the volition

[85] When writing about enslavement, Paterson states that natal alienation "goes directly to the heart of what is critical in the [captive's] forced alienation, the loss of ties of birth in both ascending and descending generations [...] Natal alienation has one critical corollary that is an important feature of slavery, so important indeed that many scholars have seen it as the distinguishing element of the relation. This is the fact that the relation was perpetual and inheritable" (*Slavery and Social Death*, 9)

[86] For further analysis of gender/sex within the prison, reference *Criminal Intimacy* and *Are Prisons Obsolete?*

of these captives to live, to exist, to be. The tension produced by the captive's vulnerability to state-sanctioned premature death is not compatible with the privileged ruinations in Keat's "Ode to a Nightingale," in which the voice reveals to "have been half in love with easeful Death, [/] Call'd him soft names in many a mused rhyme" (ℓ.52-53). Intellectual writing from captivity must circumvent inadequate, if not actively hostile, material conditions of production—but must also, ideologically reconcile its subjected position (a text which emerges from a legally legitimated position of *living death*), as text within the larger Western tradition of writing.[87]

What can philosophy and cultural scholars learn from a holistic analysis of Nietzsche's declaration "that *God is dead!* [...] God died, and these sinners died with him" and raulrsalinas's testament that "GOD IS DEAD AND BURIED [...] YOU ARE ALREADY DEAD AND BURIED, [/] WITH NO ONE TO MOURN YOU!!!" iterated from a position of cultural legalized "living-death" (Kaufmann, 124; *Un Trip,* 65, 70; Smith, 245)? The immediacy of the current moment repeatedly vocalized in *Un Trip*, as in "For me: only the NOW of THIS journey is REAL!," confronts postmodern Western conceptualizations of the meaninglessness of meaning or existence as simulacra in the age of mutually assured destruction (59). How do we, the quotidian scholars of the ivory tower, reconcile the Nietzschean eternal moment with the state-sanctioned manipulation of time through prisoner solitary confinement, "hidden from the sun," as when "approx. 150 prisoners were placed in isolation following a work stoppage in protest of the senseless beating of a Chicano prisoner" described in *Un Trip* (24, 23). What plurality of meaning is produced through the personification of the prison ("the putrefying bowels") in raulrsalinas's "In Memoriam: Riche," when we consider the transfiguration of 'person' to 'thing' enacted by the

[87] Louis Mendoza indicates that "Unlike the often ideologically inconsistent counter-cultural stance of many of the Beat poets, the context and conditions of Salinas' confinement shaped him into becoming a 'rebel *with* a causa' in an era rife with revolutionary potential" (*raulrsalinas and the Jail Machine*, 11)

legal sorcery of United States law? Does the poetic narrator clarify and explicitly denote—through the iteration "The System [/] (not God!) [/] created you"—the transfigurative power of legal text to create cultural exclusions (*Un Trip*, 50)?[88]

"in dungeons built by evil men": Criminalizing Poverty and Race

The poetic *personae* in raulrsalinas' "Preguntome," questions the emergence, maintenance, and direction of sociohistorically inherited structures such as, but not limited to, the prison:

> where does it all lead to?
> i mean, like where are we going?
> and where did we come from?
> where did it all begin?
> and who started it? (*Un*, 67).

Notably, the poetic voice commences with an interrogation of the future trajectory of the present cultural systems, which are signified through the use of a totalitized "it" and not explicitly catalogued. The aforementioned stanza is structurally separated between two temporal moments—the past origins and future consequences. That the poetic voice initiates with the impending destiny of the cultural structure signified through "it" and those bodies which it targets, and then meander to ruminate its origin, functions to highlight the critical urgency of altering the future and assigning culpability as secondary. Subsequent post-colonial, sociology and literary scholars, such as Lisa Lowe, Michael Omi and Howard Winant,[89] have attempted to genealogically parse out a plausible

[88] Agamben notes that "The exception is a kind of exclusion [...] But the most proper characteristic of the exception is that what is excluded in it is not, on account of being excluded, absolutely without relation to the rule. On the contrary, what is excluded in the exception maintains itself in relation to the rule in the form of the rule's suspension. *The rule applies to the exception in no longer applying, in withdrawing from it*" (*Homo Sacer*, 18)

[89] Professor Omi and Professor Winant assert that "The process of racial formation we encounter today, the racial projects large and small which structure U.S. society in so many ways, are merely the present-day outcomes of a complex historical evolution. The contemporary racial order remains transient. By knowing something of how it evolved, we can perhaps better discern where it is heading" (*Racial Formation*, 61)

answer to the question positioned by captive Chicanx pinto poet raulrsalinas's *personae*; "The social inequalities of our time are a legacy of [the] processes through which 'the human' is 'freed' by liberal forms, while other subjects, practices, and geographies are placed at a distance from 'the human'" (*Intimacies of Four Continents,* 3). The condensing of culturally oppressive structures to an ambiguous yet singular "it," is juxtaposed by the subsequent line, "is the problem social/ [/] cultural/ [/] political/ [/] economical," which deliberates the origin of the presently experienced subjection to be—perhaps in part—fiscally rationalized and judicially administered inheritances from our colonial past (*Un Trip,* 67).

The positivist master narrative of modern liberal humanism represents the Thirteenth Amendment as the legal apparatus which terminates slavery and involuntary servitude; however, a dialectical analysis readily reveals that the law actually permits a state of exception in which slavery might transfigure and survive in the prison.[90] The real and material representation of chattel slavery metamorphosis into a legally sanctioned form of captivity is best illustrated through the Louisiana State Penitentiary at Angola's shift from plantation to prison plantation. Similarly, cultural scholars such as Stephanie Smallwood and Dylan Rodriguez emphasize the revival of the *middle passage* in the modern prison's use of solitary confinement and isolation as punitive practices:

> A genealogy of the contemporary prison regime awakens both the historical memory and the sociopolitical logic of the Middle Passage. The prison has come to form a hauntingly similar spatial and temporal continuum between social and biological notions of life and death, banal liberal civic freedom and totalizing unfreedom, community and alienation, agency and liquidation, the 'human' and the subhuman/ nonhuman. In a resurrection of the Middle Passage's constitutive logic,

[90] Scholar H. Bruce Franklin reminds us that "After the old form of chattel slavery was abolished by the Thirteenth Amendment in 1865, the former slaves had to do one of three things to be legally returned to servitude: (1) 'voluntarily' sign a contract they could not read; (2) become indebted to the people who owned all the land and commodities; or (3) commit a crime as defined by an all-white criminal justice system. The contracts that illiterate ex-slaves signed with their previous owners bound them to servitude and often stipulated that they required the plantation owner's permission to set foot off the plantation. Any person leaving his servitude would be, under the law, a criminal" (*Prison Writing,* 21)

> the reinvented prison regime is articulating and self-valorizing a commitment to efficient and effective bodily immobilization within the mass-based ontological subjection of human beings (Rodriguez, 239).

Pinto poet raulrsalinas represents the intimate connection and inheritance from plantation to prison in "Extensions of an Evergoing Voyage" depicting "Portorican farmworkers kaptive [/] on Atlantic Seacoast [/] slave (plantation) quarters… [/] now called labor kamps" (*Un*, 114). Notably, the poetic *personae* transcribes the linguistic shift from *slave plantation quarters* to *labor camps* as imprisoning a racialized surplus agricultural labor-force. As in the case of Angola, the semantic maneuvering of terminology does not reconcile the reappropriation of geographical spaces—such as former plantations—as the zones in which a re-formed state-sanctioned institute of dehumanization may continue despite its supposed abolishment through the Thirteenth Amendment.

To continue further, we must first reiterate the need to destabilize any cultural ideological assumptions regarding the wholly altruistic and unbiased nature of the law. Instead, my argument engages the law as a cultural product which, like all texts, are infiltrated with authorial intent and open to reader interpretation. Such is the purpose of appointed judges, to interpret the letter of the law; unlike all text, legal writing does transform a 'person' into a 'thing'.

Dialectical analysis reveals both the superficial level of signification, or what the given law purports to accomplish, and that given law's subtextual meaning.[91] For example, as noted by Colin Dayan in *The Story of Cruel and Unusual* (2007), the language of the Eighth Amendment, "Excessive bail shall not be required, nor excessive fines imposed, nor cruel and unusual punishments inflicted," establishes the need for legal precedent as the condition of acceptable

[91] Philosopher Marcuse and Feenberg note that "Dialectical logic is critical logic: it reveals modes and contents of thought which transcend the codified pattern of use and validation. Dialectical thought does not invent these contents; they have accrued to the notions in the long tradition of thought and action. Dialectical analysis merely assembles and reactivates them; it recovers tabooed meanings and thus appears almost as a return, or rather a conscious liberation, of the repressed!" (*Essential Marcuse*, 69)

punitive practices (7). Dialectically, the law establishes the need for punishment to merely be normal or commonplace—to be *usual*—to nullify or discredit interpretations of that punishment as excessively or notably cruel. The present pinto writing testifies the United States prison to be a 'land-based slave ship,' as George Jackson—'a tender warrior'—does in *Soledad Brother*, which genealogically traces a residual structural inheritance of modern carceral models into the chattel slave plantation, the horrors of the Middle Passage, and colonial *necropolitical* geographies (*Un Trip*, 81).[92] Pinto writing announces the violent survival of the logic of power utilized to subjugate racialized bodies sustained through practices of corporeal and cognitive punishment, in spite of the supposed humanistic termination of chattel slavery.

The dialectical relationship between freedom and unfreedom, or human and nonhuman, necessitates the establishment and invested maintenance of an ideological "other;"[93] in this sense, the need of an "other" against which dominant culture defines and establishes itself relegates that marginalized entity or subordinate as a form of cultural sacrifice.[94] The sacrificial relation of racialized bodies essential to the formation of modern liberalism is highlighted by raulrsalinas in the following passage from *Un Trip*:[95]

Que chingados tengo yo que ver

[92] Captive prison intellectual George Jackson indicates that "It was capitalism that armed the ships, free enterprise that launched them, private ownership of property that fed the troops. Imperialism took up where the slave trade left off. It wasn't until after the slave trade ended that Amerika, England, France, and the Netherlands invaded and settled in on Afro-Asian soil in earnest. As the European industrial revolution took hold, new economic attractions replaced the older ones; chattel slavery was replaced by neoslavery. Capitalism, 'free' enterprise, private ownership of public property armed and launched the ships and fed the troops; it should be clear that it was the profit motive that kept them there" (*Soledad Brother*, 133)

[93] Scholar Lisa Lowe notes that "the modern distinction between definitions of the human and those to whom such definitions do not extend is the condition of possibility for Western liberalism, and not its particular exception" (*Intimacies of Four Continents*, 3)

[94] Agamben provides a particularly fruitful engagement of the cultural sacrifice on pages 71, 73, and 79 of *Homo Sacer*

[95] As Cesaire notes, the sacrificial model which we focalize is discoverable in the formulations of European humanists, such as Carl Siger's claim, "the new countries offer a vast field for individual, violent activities which, in the metropolitan countries, would run up against certain prejudices, against a sober and orderly conception of life, and which, in the colonies, have greater freedom to develop and, consequently, to affirm their worth. Thus to a certain extent the colonies can serve as a safety valve for modern society. Even if this were their only value, it would be immense" (*Discourse*, 42)

Con Liberty Bell
When Hell
is
Black ‘n’ Brown Boricua babies
burning/ gagging/ dying
in the stinking squalor
of North Philly arrabal? (114).[96]

In the preceding excerpt, the poetic voice focalizes and interrogates the evident contradiction of modern racialized exploited field workers of the state as expungable. The *personae*, as if in response to a question concerning that individual’s relation to freedom or modern liberalism as symbolized through the representation of “Liberty Bell,” situates their present irreconcilability with humanistic notions of unalienable civil and human rights. The exclusion from Western conceptions of the human is uttered by the poetic voice through Western religious language represented by “Hell;”, the first three lines of the poetic excerpt relegate the exclusion of the poetic voice from the incorporated liberal populous through a deployment of traditionally Judeo-Christian religious iconography. The poetic voice proceeds with the particular equating of hell or damnation as the present black and brown experience in the United States—our ‘hell on earth’—a sentiment iterated by African-American poet Sterling Brown’s “Slim in Hell” published in 1932.[97] Salinas’ formulation of “Black ‘n’ Brown” people as divested/excluded from the United States master narrative of liberty and equality, but incorporated into an ideologically Western space of punishment, suffering, and violence in hell—the “burning/ gagging/ dying”—climaxes with the subject of the narration, the black and brown *babies.*[98] The presumably innocent infants—with the

[96] This excerpt translates to: “What the fuck do I have to do [/] With Liberty Bell [/] When Hell [/] is [/] Black ‘n’ Brown Boricua babies [/] burning/ gagging/ dying [/] in the stinking squalor [/] of North Philly suburb?”
[97] From Sterling Brown’s “Sim in Hell” poem: “Den de devil gave Slim [/] De big Ha-Ha; [/] An’ turned into a cracker, [/] Wid a sheriff’s star” (Nelson, 480)
[98] Professor Childs asserts that “What the spectral voices, testimonies, [textual production] and survival practices of black prisoners make clear is that racialized prison slavery has had little to do with the alleged criminal acts of individual black people and everything to do with the socially constructed crime of being born black (or Indigenous or brown or poor) in apartheid America” (*Slaves of the State*, 3)

exception of the religious concept of *original sin*—as opposed to right's bearing matured people as recipients of violence, reveals the predisposition of these bodies to state-sanctioned annihilation through culturally constructed and maintained links between race[99] and criminality.[100]

Pinto poet raulrsalinas, in "Ciego/Sordo/Mudo," highlights the dissonance between the lived experience of the poetic voice and the narrative of meritocracy, or the "American Dream" which avows that opportunities are unbound in the United States, therefore possibilities for financial wealth or prosperity reside solely in individual will and relentless unyielding (*Un Trip,* 69). This dominant cultural ideology proposes the assignation of wealth with positive values, such as "intelligence" and "hard work," and the interpretation of poverty as ahistorical self-determined consequence for lack of effort at the level of the individual. This ideological framework presumes equal access and opportunity to all citizens, including 'minorities'; according to this narrative, those groups who successfully assimilate into dominant culture are a *model minority.* Those who do not prosper are categorized as a *problem minority*, or "a social bogey or a social burden" as termed by African-American poet Alain Locke in *the New Negro* (1925). The poetic voice in "Ciego/ Sordo/ Mudo" pronounces the ideological promises of the "American Dream" as that of "equal opportunities for all, [/] just go out and [/] LOOK," as a "nightmare/dream sequence" or simply "a righteous nightmare" (*Un Trip*, 69). Furthermore, the poetic voice iterates "i don't wanna be a meskin all my life—" as indicative of two social markers which have positioned the speaker at a low social standing, which we presently explore further.

[99] In her 1951 text, Arendt claims that, "Race is, politically speaking, not the beginning of humanity but its end […] not the natural birth of man but his unnatural death" (*Origins of Totalitarianism,* 157)

[100] In *Racial Propositions* (2010), Daniel HoSang posits that "Race often similarly functions, in Stuart Hall's words, as the 'modality through which class is lived.' Indeed the false dichotomy presented between race- or class-based explanations of political inequality is itself an artifact of racial domination, for it presumes that racial subordination only functions through isolated expressions of animus rather than broader structures of power. Racial meaning can also be expressed and experienced through frameworks of nation, family, sexuality, religion, and other cultural forces" (9)

The poetic voice in "Ciego/ Sordo/ Mudo" simultaneously denotes the speaker's race/ethnicity and implicit socioeconomic origin through the use of colloquial term "meskin," to signify Mexican. Through the socially compelled renunciation of ethnic identity as a method to pacify existence and the use of non-standardized language, the voice affirms the failure to achieve the "American Dream" stems from the social maintenance of both racial and economic differences.[101] Moreover, the poetic narration reveals that those who have been excluded from the "American Dream" are not forgotten; they are allowed "an opportunity to go out [/] boosting [/] dealing dope [/] & robbing banks," to further validate the representation[102] and treatment of these types of communities as "problem minorities" (70).[103] The narration of raulrsalinas' poem, terminates with the sentencing—transfiguration of 'person' to 'thing' through the natal alienation of the captive and the "performative utterance" of the law as act[104]—of the *personae* to a federal penitentiary because they sought the fulfillment of that "American Dream" which they are not invited to possess, to "move away from this [/] stinking barrio into the suburbs" using the only opportunities culturally constructed for survival, which we term *crimes of poverty* (70).

The scholar Joy James characterizes *crimes of poverty* as "when the government fails to be responsible to its citizens and ignores the social dynamics of poverty," which generally force these people "to seek illegitimate means to eke out an existence," while "the real criminals are those

[101] Scholar Lisa Lowe argues that "*Race* as a mark of colonial difference is an enduring remainder of the processes through which the human is universalized and freed by liberal forms, while the peoples who created the conditions of possibility for that freedom are assimilated or forgotten. The genealogy of modern liberalism is thus also a genealogy of modern race; racial differences and distinctions designate the boundaries of the human and endure as remainders attesting to the violence of liberal universality" (*Intimacies,* 7)

[102] Ben Olguin indicates that "[...] violent turf wars by prison based gangs such as the Mexican Mafia, Nuestra Familia, and the Texas Syndicate, as well as spectacular shootouts by drug cartels on both sides of the Texas-Mexican border, frequently are *represented in mainstream media* as 'confirmation' that the nation is under siege from 'Latino terrorists'" (*La Pinta,* 12)[*emphasis added*]

[103] In "Why Mass Incarceration Matters," Thompson indicates that "In stark contrast to white working-class Americans, who increasingly claimed the mantle of crime victim over the course of the twentieth century, poor blacks were increasingly blamed for any crime problem America had" (707)

[104] For more discussion on the performative utterance of the law as speech act, reference page 65 of *How to do things with Words* by J. L. Austin

who create the socioeconomic conditions that perpetuate impoverishment" (*The New Abolitionists*, 33). Returning to pinto poet Jimmy Santiago Baca's "What's Happening," ventriloquizes the impoverished bodies and horrific conditions within the prison which consequently lead to prisoner rebellions like *Attica* in 1971, which sought humane treatment for captives:

> Inside this furnace are the men, human beings, voices crying,
> Screaming and eyes weeping!
> Poor Whites, poor Blacks, poor Chicanos, poor Indians,
> who yell, turn the water on!
> Let us flush our toilets! Let us drink some water!
> They bang against bars, shuddering rows of steel cages! (15, ℓℓ.69-74).

This passage, which highlights the lack of water to drink or for sanitary use, depicts the surmounting collective will of the captives to oppose their dehumanization made literal with the description of bars and steel cages. The theory of praxis which emerges for pinto poets through scenes such as in the excerpt, will be addressed further in the following segments of this work. Presently, the description of captives as racially different—and inclusive of whites—highlights their *poverty* and class position as the shared modality[105] which binds them together as "human beings" in "this furnace," the shared experience of the pandemonium of the late 20th century United States prison.

In "The Individual in the Great Society" (1965), cultural scholar Herbert Marcuse posits that "[The war on poverty] is supposed to be waged by the 'affluent society' against poverty in the 'affluent society'; thus it may turn out to be *a war of this society against itself*" which adheres to the aforementioned conception of *domestic war-zones* by contemporary carceral scholar Dylan Rodriguez [*emphasis added*](Feenberg 6). Through language reminiscent of an Arthurian hunt

[105] As scholar Mendoza notes: "These convicts were brought together by the shared experiences of prisoner abuse, such as inadequate health care, guard brutality, disproportionate sentencing of people of color, unfair parole board review, indeterminate sentences, and the illegal blocking of prisoner access to legal materials (law books and documentation regarding their cases, in particular) that would enable them to challenge their incarceration" (*raulrsalinas and the Jail Machine*, 9)

scene, the poetic voice in raulrsalinas' "El Tecato," illustrates the social system which necessitate crimes of poverty, and the subsequent punishment for these economically coerced choices within a necropolitical landscape;

> Narcotic officers didn't think so,
> Nor do i feel they cared.
> And so one night they stalked their prey:
> a sick, addicted father/ brother/ son,
> who recognized his children's need
> for food and nourishment
> while no one recognized his need
> for drugs or treatment.
> So the predators gunned him down
> In the manner of that social madness
> that runs rampant across the land,
> dressing itself in the finery & raiments of
> JUSTIFIABLE HOMICIDE!!! (*Un*, 54).

The excerpt deploys the culturally recognizable markers of positive paternal behavior or normative family, as the parent selflessly seeks to satisfy the needs of their offspring. The poetic lineation which presents the familial or domestic structure—while denoting the parent as an addict and therefore themselves in need of aid/rehabilitation—are enjambed by the state-sanctioned violence. The *domestic war-zone* represented in the text is equally a physical material space like that in which the parent is extralegally murdered, as well as the ideological space which rationalizes—"that social madness"—and reduces poor people of color as expungable, without condemnation.

In recent cultural memory, we need only recall the public executions of Emmett Till (1941-1955), Eric Garner (1970-2014), Philando Castile (1983-2016), Breonna Taylor (1994-2020) or George Floyd (1973-2020), as evidence of the legally permissible cultural sacrifices of racialized bodies.[106] Furthermore, expanding Thompson's revelation that "human immunodeficiency

[106] We note Wynter's formulation of the dialectical need of a racial exclusion in the formation of the modern subject; "a racial presence is necessary to the expansion, development, and implementation of imperial order and the production of Man-as-human" (*On Being Human as Praxis*, 4)

virus/acquired immune deficiency syndrome (HIV/AIDS) was 'up to five times more prevalent in American prisons than in the general population,' and given that the majority of inmates were eventually released to urban centers, numerous city residents were eventually at a higher risk for contracting the virus," we are able to conceptualize the visible threats of the *domestic war-zone*, as well as those not visible which nonetheless eviscerate these communities (715).[107]

The criminalization of ethnic enclaves created and sustained by ineffective "fair housing" ordinances[108] & unequal administration of the legal benefits promised by the GI Bill[109] for veterans of color, as well as the gentrification or "revitalization" waves of the 1970s through 1980s,[110] are evidenced in Salinas and Baca's literary corpus. For example, the poetic narrator in Baca's "There's Me," emphasizes the capitalist driven commodification (or, to use Cesaire's term, *thingification*) of human life ("We know about factories all right") and common inability of the lumpenproletariat to overcome those conditions (*Discourse*, 42; Baca, 27). The text reveals the division among the lumpenproletariat, impeding the formation of a collective social consciousness in which the valuation of money itself, not merely the disproportionate correlation between productive labor and profit, is critically interrogated ("but not about how everybody up there makes so much money")(27). The poetic voice proceeds to focalize the horrifyingly vast[111] network

[107] For an account of the threat of sexually transmitted diseases within the prison by a former captive, consider "AIDS: The View from a Prison Cell" (1986) by Dannie Martin

[108] As Cheryl Harris explains, "Although the existing state of inequitable distribution is the product of institutionalized white supremacy and economic exploitation, it is seen by whites as part of the natural order of things that cannot legitimately be disturbed" (*Whiteness as Property*, 1778)

[109] In Ira Katznelson's text *When Affirmative Action Was White* (2005), the author notes that "On balance, despite the assistance that black soldiers received, there was no greater instrument for widening an already huge racial gap in postwar America than the GI Bill. As southern black veterans attempted to gain from these new benefits, they encountered many well-established and some new restrictions. This combination of entrenched racism and willful exclusion either refused them entry or shunted them into second-class standing and conditions" (121)

[110] Explored by Kennedy and Leonard of the Brookings Institute in "Dealing with Neighborhood Change: A Primer on Gentrification and Policy Choices" (2001)

[111] Here, it is useful to remember Burke's theory that "Greatness of dimension is a powerful cause of the sublime [...] However, it may not be amiss to add to these remarks upon magnitude, that, as the great extreme of dimension is sublime, so the last extreme of littleness is in some measure sublime likewise" (*Sublime and Beautiful*, 148)

between gendered[112] representatives of the supposedly altruistic legal system, capitalism, and the vulnerability to state-sanctioned terror invited by simple occupation of a public space;

> [...] take a cop wants to arrest somebody, and I'm walking
> down the street, why me? He just wants to arrest somebody.
> Not him, but someone told him to arrest somebody. And that
> someone was told by someone else, who had little numbers in
> a paper that say things ain't going too well.
> [....]
> And how does he know? I think he looks at
> all these charts, you know, and if the line goes down, that
> means the chump is losing. He's paid to win. So he's got
> all these college dudes with degrees, thousands of them,
> in a big ole building, working all day, so he can win.
> They figure up everything (Baca, 27-28).

The predisposition of the "Peace Officer" to arrest someone, regardless of culpability for a crime is enabled by the real permissible use of "Officer Discretion," which is the criminological theory which is utilized to ubiquitously permit racial profiling throughout the United States. [113] The third line immediately expands the focal point of the narration beyond the individual officer to highlight the structurally administrative and fiscal interest in the subjection of racialized bodies.[114] Through the iteration of the culturally invested systems of violence in "There's Me," the text ominously divulges that irrational rationalism (the logically arranged and mathematically balanced charts and graphs viewed askance by *personae* and reader)—which a mere 37 years prior to the publication of the poem, reasoned the erasures termed the "Final Solution"—presently organizes quotidian

[112] As Sarah Haley notes, "The maintenance of this racial-gendered order is vital to a nuanced understanding of the southern carceral regime and the history of Jim Crow modernity. The state institutionalized gendered racial terror as a technology of white supremacist control, and often this state violence compounded intraracial intimate abuse that they faced in their homes. State violence alongside gendered forms of labor exploitation made the New South possible, not as a departure from the Old, but as a reworking and extension of previous structures of captivity and abjection through gendered capitalism" (*No Mercy Here*, 3)

[113] From Wilson and Kelling's criminological theory article titled "Broken Windows" (1982), which posits that evidence or signs of crime are productive of an environment which spurs more crime

[114] Heather Thompson specifically engages with these structurally administrative and fiscal interests on pages 724 through 725 in "Why Mass Incarceration Matters"

United States.[115] Our present interpretation of Chicanx pinto captive Jimmy Santiago Baca's 1982 text, reiterates Cesaire's postcolonial pronouncement in 1955, that "At the end of capitalism, which is eager to outlive its day, there is Hitler," or those necropolitical mechanisms of progressive dehumanization once rampant in the colonies, now unbound within the prison.

Similarly, the following excerpt from "Un Trip through the Mind Jail" laments the annihilation of the material or physical space,[116] while the anthropomorphic ascription of human qualities articulates the shared violent colonialist procedures which criminalized space, erased epistemologies, and racialized body:

> Neighborhood of my youth
> demolished, erased forever from
> the universe.
> You live on, captive, in the lonely
> cellblocks of my mind.
> [....]
> Neighborhood of my childhood
> neighborhood that is no more
> YOU ARE TORN PIECES OF MY FLESH!!! (*Un* 55, 59).

The initial line of the poem situates what follows as a multivocalic apostrophe; the *personae* at once addresses an absence ("Neighborhood," specifically La Loma, East Austin), while noting that within their own transfigured existence ("in the lonely [/] cellblocks of my mind") they both go on. The poetic voice addresses the personified space in the commencing line, which terminates in the possessive avowal of past 'youth' (ℓ.1). This affective quality, the future potential signified through 'youth' is only a half-meaning of the line—an illusion—quickly annihilated by the subsequent line testifying the disappearance of the "Neighborhood" from the outer world and

[115] Adorno notes that "The irrational nature of contemporary society inhibits a rational account of it in the realm of theory. The possibility that the steering of economic processes might be transferred to the political powers does indeed follow from the dynamics of the deductive system, but also tends toward an objective irrationality" (*Can One Live After Auschwitz*, 116)

[116] Achilles Mbembe states, "My concern is those figures of sovereignty whose central project is not the struggle for autonomy but *the generalized instrumentalization of human existence and the material destruction of human bodies and populations*" ("Necropolitics," 14)

confined in isolation, a plight shared by pinto poets.[117] The coupling of the personified "Neighborhood" and the culturally sacrificial pinto *personae,* is explicitly iterated in language which illustrates the horror of forcible physical and ideological violence ("demolished," "erased," "captive," & "TORN") enacted on both narrating speaker and symbolic interlocutor, through physical/bodily rupture.

Notably, the visually striking affective quality produced by the uniform capitalization of the final quoted line is augmented by its reappropriation of culturally canonical gendered scenes of Eve's subjection.[118] The gendered relationship between *personae* and the incarnate "Neighborhood," which is strategically deployed through use of the bond obtainable only by female reproductive capabilities ('of my flesh'), momentarily permits an androgynous narrative speaker—whom is silenced elsewhere—to emerge in this instance of raulrsalinas' *magnum opus*. The demarcation of racialized bodies as culturally sacrificial—which is maintained by aforementioned structural mechanisms (such as the prison and academic institution) and confirmed by social representations (the images or narratives produced in any platform)—is implicitly intimated through the utterance of the anaphoric biblical phrase "of my flesh". Through use of biblical language centered around the Messianic transfiguration[119]—Christ's embodiment in the redemptive Eucharist wafer—the speaker of "Un Trip" denotes their own externally imposed ascription as cultural sacrifice through socially constructed valuations of difference.

[117] As Michelle Alexander notes, when considering the disappearance of black males from quotidian society, "They [captives & the personified 'Neighborhood'] did not walk out on their families voluntarily; they were taken away in handcuffs, often due to massive federal program known as the War on Drugs" (Rothenburg, 259)

[118] For depictions of the subjection of Eve, you may reference Genesis 2:23, or Milton's *Paradise Lo*st (IV.440-443, 471-480), or Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* (40)

[119] The biblical passage is as follows and can be located in various books of the bible: "While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, 'Take and eat; this is my flesh'" (Matthew 26:17-30)(Mark 14:12-26)(Luke 22:7-39)(John 13: 21-30)

Through the alignment of the sacrificial *personae* with Christ's language, the pinto text forcefully compels the inheritors of Western society to a *defamiliarizing* or *estranging* proposition. Perhaps the culturally familiar penitential iteration *mea culpa, mea culpa, mea maxima culpa*—rather than grieving the Messianic sacrifice—belies a violent recognition of the possessive investment in Christs' corporeal annihilation. The passage iterates Cesaire's formulation, that the "very distinguished, very humanistic, very Christian bourgeois of the twentieth century" cannot exist without the ritualistic sacrifice of their *homo sacer,*[120] rendered reproducible public spectacle through the staging of the *Passions of Jesus* (*Discourse*, 36). Western philosophical tracts which purport that "the liberty of some must depend on the restraint of others," illustrate the possessive investment in maintaining the aforementioned *de jure* and *de facto* sacrificial mechanisms (disproportionately targeting historically disenfranchised groups) which abstractly rationalize all criminality to be antisocial behavior and grounds for subordination through terror (Berlin, 17). In doing so, the dominant group *differs* culpability of the present social inequities onto the victims of their oppression.[121] The culturally familiar proclamation of guilt vocalized weekly by the countless masses in preparation for the *Sacrament of Penance*—foundational in the Quaker conception of the *penitentiary*—obscures an admonition uttered by the decadent civilization. Does the ritualized pronouncement of cultural culpability for the constitutive sacrifice—'in order for us to possess eternal life,' 'to atone for our sins'—provide a formula to rationalize the present disproportionate

[120] My interpretation at this moment is predicated by Agamben's claim that "*Sacer* designates the person or the thing that one cannot touch without dirtying oneself or without dirtying; hence the double meaning of 'sacred' or 'accursed' (approximately). A guilty person whom one consecrates to the gods of the underworld is sacred" (*Homo*, 79) and the following biblical passages: "Above his head was placed the charge against him; it read: 'This is Jesus, the King of the Jews'" (Matthew 27:37), "Pilate wrote out a notice and had it fixed to the cross; it ran: 'Jesus the Nazarene, King of the Jews'" (John 19:19)

[121] Isaiah Berlin terms this as "I am not being coerced, for I have willed it, whether I know this or not, and am free (or 'truly' free) even while my poor earthly body and foolish mind bitterly reject it, and struggle against those who seek however benevolently to impose it, with the greatest desperation" ("Two Concepts of Liberty," 25)

annihilation of black and brown bodies as regrettable but necessary for the preservation of the status quo?[122]

What can we learn from Salinas' conceptualization of the *mind jail*; how and why does the prison remain with the speaker of "As i am still not free … [/] though i walk Seattle's streets" (*Un Trip*, 98)*?* Is the *mind jail,* as metaphorical "space," a discursive field in which the residual ideological mechanisms of colonialism, chiefly the reproduction of *social* or *living death,* fuse with the uniquely 'American' carceral punitive practice of mass entombment and perpetual solitary confinement? Is the *mind jail* another *domestic war-zone* which "continues to *haunt* the subject's consciousness, remaining on the periphery of awareness," incessantly threatening and maintaining the 'borders of the self' (McAfee, 49)[emphasis mine]? Considering Caleb Smith's formulation, that "Divested of citizenship and subjectivity, the condemned becomes a shadow, *an animate corpse* in the eyes of the law," any treatment of pinto writing requires an active resistance of institutional ritualized mortification, or the process of making-dead through legally sanctioned transfiguration of the 'person' to 'thing,' through solitary confinement and isolation, or the *necropolitical* inheritances of colonialism and slavery (247)[*emphasis added*].[123]

"brothers/ sisters (prisoners)": the Pinto Ideological Matrix and Praxis of Being Human as Resisting Living-Entombment

[122] I am arguing that the model of human disposability sustained within the necropolitical production of civil death is framed within religious institutions, just as Dayan notes that "Rituals of banishment are crucial to cleansing and purifying a place of human holiness, or more precisely to disposing of the stigmatized outside the body politic" (*The Law is a White Dog*, 16)

[123] We recall Cesaire's quotation of Western intellectuals, philosophers, and politicians; "We aspire not to equality but to domination. The country of a foreign race must become once again a country of serfs, of agricultural laborers, or industrial workers. It is not a question of eliminating the inequalities among men but of widening them and making them into a law" (*Discourse*, 37)

In raursalinas' "The Pisser," the only poem in *Un Trip* to be parenthetically subtitled "(solitary confinement)," the poetic narration culminates with the following supplicant invocation of ancestral mythic tradition:

> Cries of succor make flesh quiver up in spasms,
> as gods of sorts are agonizingly invoked
> (Aztec ones, in this case),
> but straining, screaming voices
> have no sound
> and thus
> are never heard (40).

This excerpt encapsulates a self-recognition of the text as resistive praxis (or the constitution of being through *language*)[124] to the corporeal and ideological eviscerating mechanisms of the carceral system which are residual *necropolitical* inheritances of slavery & colonialism.[125] If poetry is the incarnation of aesthetic expression, then the potentially resistive practice to institutional dehumanization obtainable through literary/artistic production, is reified in the very existence of, in the often harmonious and occasionally contemptuous union of, our own voice with the *personae* in "The Pisser".[126] Crucially, the poetic supplication that is left *unheard* or *unperceived* invokes a terrorizing affective quality—a horror—to the muted bodily emanation. In this sense, the Enlightenment Cartesian *cogito*, and subsequent Berkeleyan reformulation ("I am perceived, therefore I am") would negate the existence of the poetic narrator—intimating the

[124] For our analysis, it is helpful to remember that "Kristeva has insisted that the study of language is inseparable from the study of the speaking being" (McAfee, 27)

[125] "Necropolitics" asserts that "[...] in most instances, the selection of races, the prohibition of mixed marriages, forced sterilization, even the extermination of vanquished peoples are to find their first testing grounds in the colonial world. Here we see the first syntheses between massacre and bureaucracy, that incarnation of Western rationality" (Mbembe, 23)

[126] We use scholar Sylvia Wynter's formulation here: "Being human is a praxis of humanness that does not dwell on the static empiricism of the unfittest and the downtrodden and situate the most marginalized within the incarcerated colonial categorization of oppression; being human as praxis is, to borrow from Maturana and Varela, 'the realization of the living'" (*Being Human,* 4)

culturally sanctioned eradication of quivering flesh—whose anguished iteration are cast to oblivion as socially sacrificial.

In the case of Baca's "Steel Doors of Prison," the prison itself is animated and given animal characteristics as "A set of bars, [/] Paint scraped, still as cobras in gray skins, [/] Wrapping around you little by little," until "You hear nothing but the steel jaws close, [/] Slowly swallowing you…" (18). Baca's text at once transmits the alienation of the speaker through their captivity, while developing the poetic action with language of the natural world. In this instance however, rather than resist the process of dehumanization through nature, the hostility of the natural world is personified/incarnated by the prison. The terminating alliterative line ('Slowly swallowing you…') indicates the gradual progression of annihilation systems eviscerating the captive, iterated in natural physiological language, which ultimately produces the speakers absence from *the living world*, made visible by the elliptical omission.

For Baca, the hostility of the natural world is representative and constitutive of the larger human experience, as when the *personae* of "Who Understands Me But Me" introspectively treks through the fields of their existence;

> I followed these signs
> like an old tracker and followed the tracks deep into myself,
> followed the blood-spotted path,
> deeper into dangerous regions, and found so many parts of myself,
> who taught me water is not everything,
> and gave me new eyes to see through walls,
> And then they spoke, sunlight came out of their mouths,
> and I was laughing at me with them,
> we laughed like children and made pacts to always be loyal,
> who understands me when I say this is beautiful? (ℓℓ.30-39, *What's Happening*, 20).

The quoted excerpt propounds a recurring pinto theme that is central in the formation of—if any at all can be surmised—a pinto aesthetic; an introspective journey for self-realization as praxis for resisting the colonialist progressive dehumanization mechanisms of the prison. The poetic voice

signals that at the end of 'the blood-spotted path,' which gestures a violent trauma, the voice finds itself as a child; this would mean that the speaker's own trauma is indispensable in actualizing a higher state. Rather than romanticize the subjection of pinto captives, the poetic narration reveals the cultural, ideological, and physical dispossession of racialized-ungendered bodies within the colonialist prison system as an education in violence.[127] But from this education in violence emerges a possibility beyond the restorative, since the newfound knowledge provides 'eyes which enable the captive to see' through walls, something they could not do before. Within Baca's text, the education in violence as represented by the danger present in the natural world, as newfound knowledge or a new epistemological production made possible through the abject deprivation of the captive by hegemonic society and that *personae* reorientation towards nature. The poetic voice reveals a path for the *living dead* to resist the process of dehumanization within the prison.[128] Furthermore, the future possibility encapsulated by the newly discovered knowledge as held by 'children,' the poetic voice reiterates Raul Salinas' previously cited claim, that "Pintos are at the intersection of our colonial reality and our revolutionary potential" (Olguin, 1).

Central to the acquisition of knowledge ('who taught me') provided by the education in violence and deprivation in the aforementioned passage from "Who Understand Me But Me?," is *laughter* as it is reiterated twice in the revelation provided by the *personae*. Rather than interpreting this laughter as a 'laugh so as not to cry' dictum, we highlight the philosophical nature of that

[127] My conception of an education in violence that people of color like myself receive, is iterated by Cesaire: "[...] I look around and wherever there are colonizers and colonized face to face [one can scarcely imagine a space which produces the possibility of total isolation and bodily control—such as in 23 hours, 7 days a week solitary confinement], I see force, brutality, cruelty, sadism, conflict, and, in a parody of education, the hasty manufacture of a few thousand subordinate functionaries, 'boys,' artisans, office clerks, and interpreters necessary for the smooth operation of business" (*Discourse*, 42)

[128] Notably, in *Inequality in Mankind* (1755), Rousseau formulates that "The first man who, having enclosed a piece of ground, bethought himself of saying *This is mine*, and found people simple enough to believe him, was the real founder of civil society" which denotes the progression of man out of the natural—in conquest of the natural—and into civil society (83-110). Presently, the progression and actualization of the poetic voice occur not in civil society—or the prison—but in the speaker's conceptual negotiation of being alive as a part of nature

bodily emanation scarcely studied.[129] We presently engage laughter as a forfeiture of reason, and therefore resistive of Western Enlightenment thought;[130] "Laughter, whether reconciled or terrible, always accompanies the moment when a fear ends. It indicates a release, whether from physical danger or from the grip of logic" (*Dialectic*, 112). The *personae* and the newly discovered 'parts of myself' posit forth a resistive practice, rooted in the forfeiture of 'civil society' and a turning towards nature. In this sense, Baca's speaker is reproducing Nietzsche's pronouncement in "Truth and Lie," which denotes the futility of Western Enlightenment when weighed against the magnanimity of nature; "In some remote corner of the universe, poured out and glittering in innumerable solar systems, there once was a star on which clever animals invented knowledge [...] After nature had drawn a few breaths, the star cooled and congealed, and the clever beasts had to die [...] how aimless and arbitrary, the human intellect appears in nature. There have been eternities when it did not exist; and when it is done for again, *nothing* will have happened" (Kauffman, 42)[*emphasis mine*].

The poetic voice of Baca's "Who Understands Me But Me?," when engaged with the preceding *nihilist* dictum, reveals a critical difference encapsulated in the forfeiture of civil society by the captive pinto, from Nietzsche's *Ubermensch*. Where the romantic philosopher envisions the Apollonian and Dionysian forfeiture of reason and the corporeal self,[131] the present renouncement of Western rationalism—"to the extent that [all Eurocentric logic and speech] are part of the

[129] I am deploying the philosophical understanding of laughter proffered by Mikhail Bakhtin: "Laughter has a deep philosophical meaning, it is one of the essential forms of the truth concerning the world as a whole, concerning history and man; it is a peculiar point of view relative to the world; the world is seen anew, no less (and perhaps more) profoundly than when seen from the serious standpoint. Therefore, laughter is just as admissible in great literature, posing universal problems, as seriousness. Certain essential aspects of the world are accessible only to laughter" (*Rabelais*, 66)

[130] My interpretation of the argument presented within "The Concept of Enlightenment" is that: if Renaissance Enlightenment rationale led to the collapse of mythic faith, it did so by supplanting itself as absolute truth—becoming unquestionable faith itself (*Dialectic*, 8)

[131] Nietzsche reminds us, concerning the corporeal self, that "[...] body am I entirely, and nothing else" (*Portable*, 146)

mutilated whole" in rationalizing "slavery, the Inquisition, child labor, concentration camps, gas chambers, and nuclear preparedness"—is proffered forth by Baca's speaker as a resistive praxis of those very mechanisms of oppression produced and upheld by Western Enlightenment (*Basic Writings,* 36; Marcuse, 68-9).[132]

The proposed function of *laughter* within the work of Baca—as a forfeiture of those Western tracts which posit the possibility of being or poetic production—is prevalent throughout raulrsalinas' poetry.[133] Such is the case in the previously referenced "Nutmeg Nuances":

> We were (almost) children
> yesterday
> we chose (do you s'pose?)
> our own insanity
> refusing/ rejecting
> forms
> forced & prescribed.
> [...]
> We laughed
> an unrestricted
> (with no shackles!)
> LAUGH!
> at funny-people movies
> human tragicomedies (ℓℓ.1-17, *Un* 79).

The third line ['we chose (do you s'pose?)'] problematizes and questions the captives agency in entering a pathologized state of 'insanity'. Presently, what is noted to be insane or irrational is the poetic narrator's 'refusal/reject[ion]' of that which is imposed through scientific/medicinal language—('prescribed')—externally by force.[134] While the question of the captives agency is

[132] We reiterate—in unison with Wynter—the critical importance of "drawing attention to the ways in which the violence of conquest and colonization are implicit to modernity" (*Being Human as Praxis,* 4)

[133] Philosophers Marcuse and Feenberg note that "In authentic language, the word [...] *is not the expression of a thing, but rather the absence of this thing….The word makes the things disappear and imposes upon us the feeling of a universal want and even of its own want* [...] Poetry is thus the power 'de nier les choses' (*to deny the things*)—the power which Hegel claims, paradoxically, for all authentic thought" (*Essential Marcuse,* 68)

[134] Omi and Winant assert that "Spurred on by the classificatory scheme of living organisms devised by Linnaeus in *Systema Naturae* (1735), many scholars in the 18th and 19th centuries dedicated themselves to the identification and ranking of variations in humankind. Race was conceived as a *biological* concept, a matter of species [...] Attempts to discern the *scientific meaning* of race continue to the present day [historically contemporary with *pinto* writing focalized in this inquiry]. For instance, an essay by Arthur Jensen which argued that hereditary factors shape

negotiated—as in the case in determining individual culpability for crimes which culture has compelled an individual to commit—the fourth line denotes the pinto's possessive ownership of this new cognitive state ('we chose our own insanity') in opposition to the epistemologies which rationalize the racialized and impoverished captives present subjection.[135] This forfeiture of Enlightenment rationalism as praxis for constructing a new *decolonial scientia*[136] of being, ['We laughed [/] an unrestricted [/] (with no shackles!) [/] LAUGH!'], as in Baca's aforementioned text, is coupled by a pre-civilization bodily emanation. *Laughter* operates as a mode of resistive practice for the captive to (if only momentarily) become "for-reals" (80).[137]

The centrality of *the real*—or claiming existence—as resistive praxis for the captives 'self-realization' and subversion of state-sanctioned erasure, permeates throughout pinto writing. The negotiation of *reality* espoused in pinto writing produces a stark contrast to the existential 'burden of consciousness' and corresponding vacuity of meaning as nullifying existence,[138] the alienated subject confronted by *the meaninglessness of meaning*,[139] typical of canonical Occidental and postmodern texts. Consider raulrsalinas' monumental text "Un Trip through the Mind Jail":

> Neighborhood of my childhood
> neighborhood that no longer exists
> some died young—fortunate—some rot in prisons
> the rest drifted away to be conjured up

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intelligence not only revived the 'nature or nurture' controversy, but also raised highly volatile questions about racial equality itself" (*Racial Formation*, 64)

[135] Omi and Winant note that "Racial rule can be understood as a slow and uneven historical process which has moved from dictatorship to democracy, from domination to hegemony. In this transition, hegemonic forms of racial rule—those based on consent—eventually came to supplant those based on coercion" (*Racial Formation*, 67)

[136] For further discussion on "decolonial scientia," visit page 5 of *On Being Human as Praxis*

[137] We propound Raymond Williams' formulation of the centrality of emergent epistemes, "We need, on the one hand, to acknowledge (and welcome) the specificity of these elements—specific feelings, specific rhythms—and yet to find ways of recognizing their specific kinds of sociality, this preventing that extraction from social experience itself has been categorically (and at root historically) reduced [...] The idea of a structure of feeling can be specifically related to the evidence of forms and conventions—semantic figures—which, in art and literature, are often among the very first indications that such a new structure is forming" (*Marxism and Literature*, 133)

[138] For a philosophical iteration of this idea, visit Nietzsche's *Birth of Tragedy* (*Basic Writings*, 42)

[139] My engagement with the meaninglessness of meaning is rooted in Nietzsche's position: "away with the body, this wretched *idee fixe* of the senses, disfigured by all the fallacies of logic, refuted, even impossible, although it is impudent enough to behave as if it were real" ("Twilight of the Idols," 480)

in minds of others like them.
For me: only the NOW of THIS journey is REAL! (59).

The poetic narration, as previously highlighted, personifies the 'Neighborhood,' thereby aligning the dehumanization, natal alienation and isolation of the captive with the criminalization of spaces, or the erasure of ethnic-enclaves through processes of gentrification. The final line denotes the resistive affirmation of *the real* as a practice for combating colonialist processes of dehumanization and erasure of impoverished bodies of color. The final line contains an affirmation of the natural body—the racialized body which an education in violence criminalizes and eviscerates—as it experiences the eternal present moment as a means of defying those same residual inheritances from imperialism and colonial Enlightenment thought. Pinto captives invocation of the *real* urgency of the present moment opposes—and therefore produces tension with—Western intimations of inexistence; "That passed the time, I was time, I devoured the world [...] But what matter whether I was born or not, have lived or not, am dead or merely dying, I shall go on doing as I have always done, not knowing what it is I do, nor who I am, nor if I am" (*Malone Dies*, 229, 256).[140]

Likewise, the synthesizing and coalescing of captive's bodies and epistemologies—"tri-ethnic vibes [/] permeate/create [/] class-consciousness [/] among the poor"—as resistive praxis in the proclamation of their existence, is iterated by the speaker of "Crash Landing," raulrsalinas' first poem from *partial freedom* (*Un*, 97). The intimate union of subordinate groups to form a class-consciousness (or *lumpenproletariat*) produces the connective labor to make visible "the longevity of the colonial divisions of humanity in our contemporary moment, in which the human life of citizens protected by the state is bound to the denigration of populations cast in violation of

[140] From Samuel Beckett's *Malone Dies* (1951): I couple these textual excerpts because of the tension they produce, both emergent from 20th century postmodern subjects. One subject is engaged in affirming their being, the other preoccupied with self-forfeiture

human life, set outside of human society" (Lowe, 6). Notably, the eternal present moment, the 'NOW' accentuated by capitalization, is on-going; stated differently, the author renders the reader an accomplice in the practice of resisting their systemic erasure. The textual affirmation of the existence of the captive as resistive praxis is pronounced in the aforementioned passage noting the revolutionary potential of pinto writers; "Gente de la cual [/] brotaron poemas/ exploding guns [/] from within the WALL; [/] to sing & cry of our [/] EXISTENCE" (*Un*, 127).

While some might argue that the reader lends life to any/all historically removed authors through pronouncement of their words and breathing life into the text, we highlight pinto text as resistive praxis against not just natural corporeal death, but premature judicially sanctioned *death-in-life*. For example, note the terminating words of Baca's speaker in "What's Happening";

> And I am weeping! I am sick!
> I have had enough, and yet every day I go on,
> while this poem is read aloud by someone,
> I am going on, [...] (ℓℓ79-82, 16).

The first two lines of the quoted passage illustrate the progressive dehumanization through residual colonialist mechanisms of domination transcribed in the logic of carceral punishment in the United States. The final two lines of the passage highlight the present moment ('while this poem is read aloud by someone') and the text as resisting the captive's ideological, epistemological and corporeal erasure ('I am going on'). Through developing a metapoetic narrative (through the *personae* claiming personhood in an unknown 'someone'), in which the textual narrating voice denotes its awareness of itself as text, pinto poets (and writers which resist carceral annihilation and *living-death*) simultaneously denote a poetic reading practice for survival while making the current reader an accomplice in that resistive act against carceral erasure.

The ideological matrix of the racialized/gendered captives expressed through pinto writing as tumultuous contradiction, being simultaneously inheritors and excluded from the Western

tradition (and the additional active judicial impositions to material production within the institute of the 'American' prison) urges a different reading practice. Just as W. Benjamin proposed an ideological shift—the emergence of a reader whose sensibilities perceive a different *textual aura* necessitated by the circumstance of 'art in the age of mechanical reproduction'—we argue the present necropolitical and industrialized carceral model which produces racialized/gendered *writing from captivity* as necessitating a discursive intervention. Stated differently, how could—and why would—a reader of texts which emerge from incarceration as defiant testimony of epistemic and corporeal erasure, engage the present resistive proclamations of existence or the proclamation in Salinas's "Epiphany" ("NOW IS THE TIME for all oppressed humans to be set [/] free"), with the same paradigm as one does the self-forfeiting *personae* which pollute the whole corpus of 'Shakespeare, Keats, or Shelley' (45)?

Formalist literary reading practices fail as a method for reading pinto poetry and writing from incarceration. What I propose, rather than a reading practice that only engages with the text itself as object, the new reading practice that pinto poetry demands is an emotionally and psychologically taxing one. As we engage in an analysis of text, material conditions of production, and author—moving beyond the limitations of formalism—the *aura* of texts is a horrifying immense weight. These poems, written in the wake of the Civil Rights Movement and Prisoners' Rights Movement, which testify to the necropolitical negotiation of life and death within and outside of the prison, are the creative reclamation of personhood divested by the law. If the law is the legal sorcery which renders a 'person' into a 'thing,' and these poems are the counter to this process, then the reading practice demanded by pinto poetry renders the reader an active accomplice in the process of resisting living-entombment and practitioner resurrective magic.

Chapter Three: The Voice That Once Was A Woman

"Hidden in Prisons a dismal gloom
Dark and Silent and Cold,
like a tomb

This shell that once was a Woman"
—Judy Lucero (1973)

With the title of this chapter, I mean to focus Judy Lucero the poet and person, as well as denote the systematic process of death she endured. Death, in the form of living-entombment—the production of civil death which I will detail throughout this chapter.[141] Death, in the sense of deterioration of her mental health—a fact repeatedly alluded to in her poetry—caused by the removal of her daughter and other loved ones, a procedure known as natal alienation inherited from the logics of chattel slavery. Death, in the form of her physical death at the age of twenty-eight within the prison because of brain damage incurred during a violent beating while incarcerated. Death, of her potential as a poetic voice, exemplified by "The Right to Live," the final of her eight poems which was never finished before she died in prison. Before we center on Lucero, let us examine the prison as a structure.

The manifestation of writing *about* incarceration and writing *from* captivity is an extensive tradition. Writing *about* incarceration or confinement in the Western canon historically functions as a philosophical inquiry. Is there meaning in a life deprived of "liberty, goods and services, heterosexual relations, autonomy, and lack of personal security," which according to Sykes (1958), are the "five key deprivations that result from institutional regulations" in the mid-20th century United States carceral system (Bosworth, 223)? We presently inquire how—from President Johnson's signing of the *Law Enforcement and Criminal Justice Assistance Act of 1967* into the

[141] I am engaging Colin Dayan's framework of the legal sorcery to make humans into nonhumans: "The ritual of civil death, which came into prominence in the United States as slavery was abolished, resurfaced as a literal and legal *via negativa.* The prisoner condemned to life imprisonment fell outside the boundary of human empathy: no longer recognized as a social, political, or individual entity" (*The Law is a White Dog,* 55)

current moment—the age of mass incarceration has transformed the societal experience of personhood,[142] race, class, gender, and death as represented within texts which originate from, to use ex-captive Jack Henry Abbott's phrasing, within the belly of the beast?[143]

Stated simply, if state-sanctioned annihilation or living-entombment is established through legal terror, physical kidnapping, and the sentence as 'speech act' or performative utterance[144]—which transforms the human subject into 'thing' or 'object,' thereby producing a condition of 'civil death'—how might *pinto* poetics appropriate, for instance, the rhetorical trope of *animating the dead* and bid them sing?

The central cultural objects which this project examines, namely Judy Lucero's poetry in this chapter, emerge from this tumultuous historical time period of post-1970s, during which a segment of the United States population sought civil equality for historically underrepresented groups, while these same disenfranchised bodies were systematically funneled and disappeared into the prison. Notably, if those bodies reappeared, they appear as convict-lease labor utilized to subvert or undermine unionizing efforts for better wages and laboring conditions of the working-class population outside physical captivity. When considered against prison scholar Tom Wicker's statement on the dual function of the prison—meant simultaneously "to keep *us* out as well as *them* in"—the materialization of prison literature or any artistic work outside the physical prison

[142] As scholar Barbara Johnson notes in *Persons and Things* (2010), "In 1871 […] Congress passed the Dictionary Act, a glossary of terms Congress might use in any act, stating that the word 'person' 'may extend and be applied to bodies politic and corporate'" (Johnson, 5)

[143] As carceral studies researcher Ruth Gilmore posits: "How are prisons supposed to produce stability through controlling what counts as crime? Four theories condense two and a quarter centuries of experience into conflicting and generally overlapping explanations for why societies decide they should lock people out by locking them in. [...] The shock of retribution--loss of liberty--supposedly keeps convicted persons from doing again, upon release, what sent them to prison. Retribution's specter, deterrence, allegedly dissuades people who can project themselves into a convicted person's jumpsuit from doing what might result in lost liberty. Rehabilitation proposes that the unfreedom of prisons provides an occasion for the acquisition of sobriety and skills, so that, on release, formerly incarcerated people can live lives away from the criminal dragnet. And, finally, incapacitation, the least ambitious of all these theories, simply calculates that those locked up cannot make trouble outside of prison" (*Golden Gulag*, 14)

[144] For more information on legal text and verdicts as 'speech acts,' or 'performative utterance,' consult J.L. Austin's *How To Do Things With Words* (1962)

is a resistive praxis.[145] Texts produced within confinement must survive the material conditions of prison which include threats of violence[146] from other captives, correctional officers and their informal code, cell inspections, and an array of censorship laws[147]—and those few works which are published defiantly testify to the repressive judicially sanctioned violence of captivity and erasure.[148]

With Judy Lucero's poems, published posthumously in *De Colores* (1973), this research project examines the poetic representations of uniquely American cultural structures disproportionately relocating the poor, the mentally infirm, people of color, and nonconformist advocates of human equality into the prison.[149] Despite the inherent divergences present within the poetics of these captives, and the limited textual material available for Judy Lucero who "died of a brain hemorrhage caused by one of the several beatings she had received in her life," their unifying principle is that they are modes of "resistance literature" known as *Pinto* poems which defy the state-sponsored mechanisms of erasure (*La Pinta,* 211). Pinto scholar Ben Olguin notes that "Through her syncretic gynocritical and materialist poems from prison, Lucero was able to recuperate her status as a daughter, a mother of a daughter, and, ultimately, a historically situated

[145] We join Dylan Rodriguez in stating, that the present focus is "the post- 1970s formation of 'radical prison praxis,' [...] as an active current of political-intellectual work shaped by a condition of direct and unmediated confrontation with technologies of state and state-sanctioned (domestic) warfare" (*Forced Passages*, 2)

[146] As prison reform researcher Mary Bosworth notes "In 1971, for example, correctional officers at Indiana Reformatory wounded and killed 48 African American inmates who had staged a peaceful sit-in protesting brutality, racism, and alliances between white inmates and correctional officers" (*Encyclopedia of Prisons & Correctional Facilities*, 809)

[147] Out of the entire United States, only New Hampshire has never enacted a 'Son of Sam' statute, while Louisiana, Massachusetts, Missouri and South Carolina are the only states to repeal and not replace a 'Son of Sam' statute. All other states currently have a 'Son of Sam' statute in effect (firstamendmentcenter.org)

[148] We use cultural scholar Sylvia Wynter's direction, "to think carefully about the ways in which those currently inhabiting the underside of the category of Man-as-human—under our current epistemological regime, those cast out as impoverished and colonized and undesirable and lacking reason—can, and do, provide a way to think about being human. Being human, in this context, signals not a noun but a verb" (*Being Human*, 3)

[149] Chicano literature scholar and writer, Jose Armas notes that "The first issue of *De Colores: Journal of Emerging Raza Philosophies* was published in 1973 out of our home in the Old Town barrio of Albuquerque, within the context of the emerging Chicano Movement […] We published a broad span of genres and subjects, featuring writings by *pintos* (those in and out of prison); we published oral histories, contemporary thought, history, criticism, essays, *teatro*, short stories, poetry; we also included artwork and photography" (*The Origins of Chicano Studies*, 97-100)

Chicana. Her embodied poetics not only challenge the phallocentric paradigm of prison but the equally masculinist Pinto contestatory discourses" (*La Pinta,* 211). Stated simply, pinto poems display the cultural tension created by *de jure* and *de facto* practices of racial and sexual domination both within/outside prison walls.

In this chapter, I focus an analysis of Judy Lucero—who signed her poetry as #21918 as a means to highlight the absence of Lucero the person and birth of a state created inmate—to center the necropolitical processes of horror enacted and sanctioned by United States jurisprudence and the captive's resistance to these mechanisms through poetry. An immediate example of this resistive praxis to living-entombment or social death within the carceral system is Lucero's "Comfort," where the poet utilizes the word "mad" three times within the twenty-four line text. The speaker of #21918's poem notes that "At times I'm certain I've gone mad [/] just missing U," thereby actively indicating the mental and cognitive damage caused by the separation from her loved ones, in this case presumably her daughter (ℓℓ.5-6). Moreover, "Comfort" notes the existence of two worlds, "the free world" or "a real world" and in contrast the world in which the #21918 inhabits (ℓℓ.17-20). This model offers us an entry point into the necropolitical ritualized mortification of captives, who once removed from the realm of the living and politically relevant are reduced to a position of civil death.[150]

Poetic works produced in captivity posit an internal interrogation of the Western literary tradition, and theorist Michel Foucault argues that "when the prisoners began to speak, they possessed an individual theory of prisons, the penal system, and justice. It is this form of discourse

[150] Here, I am deploying Dayan's postulation on haunting and horror generated by the law: "Specters are very much a part of the legal domain. Human materials are remade and persons are undone in the sanctity of the courtroom. Whether slaves, dead bodies, criminals, ghosts detainees, or any one of the may spectral entities held in limbo in the no-man's-lands sustained by state power, they all remain subject to the undue influence and occult revelations of law's rituals" (*The Law is a White Dog*, 12)

which ultimately matters, a discourse against power, the counter-discourse of prisoners and those we call delinquents-and not a theory about delinquency" (*Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*, 205-217). As Foucault indicates, texts produced from incarceration radically question what culturally is considered as art or literature. These texts are the discourse which emerges from the most dejected people within our society, people who inhabit the position of the socially dead, or dead-in-law.

Furthermore, works produced in captivity should concern all members of society because central to the development of an "American" identity—focalized around *certain unalienable civil but not human rights*—is the constant threat of incarceration, the threat of the law's transfigurative power. The racialized subject tenuously lives in relation to the total forfeiture of civil and social personhood; therefore, texts which defiantly emerge from incarceration ventriloquize a cultural unconscious.[151] In this sense, the captive and their text is a physical manifestation of the repressed. Culturally abjected from existence, the captive is often literally removed to the margins of society or rural areas;[152] while the threat of incarceration is never fully annihilated, the prison permanently influences our lives whether we are aware of it or not.[153] Moreover, these texts challenge cultural definitions and demarcations of literary merit and reading-practices, because imprisoned authors

[151] Here we are using scholar Noelle McAfee's interpretation of Kristeva's statement that, "persons are subject to all kinds of phenomena: their culture, history, context, relationships, and language […] subjects are not fully aware of all the phenomena that shape them. There is even a dimension of their own being that is inaccessible, a dimension that goes by the name, 'the unconscious'" (*Julia Kristeva*, 2). Kristeva herself indicates that "On the one hand, affects *redistribute the order of language* and give birth to a style. On the other, they *display* the unconscious through characters and actions that represent the most forbidden and transgressive drive motions. Literature, like hysteria, which Freud saw as a 'distorted work of art,' is a *staging* of affects both on the intersubjective level (characters) and on the intralinguistic level (style)" (*Black Sun*, 179)

[152] Scholar Heather Ann Thompson notes that "Just as inner city vitality was sapped when increasing percentages of urbanites were sent to prisons in rural counties—in turn giving those all white areas claims on government aid that had formerly been theirs—so too urban spaces of color lose political power when they, in effect, were forced to give the votes of the incarcerated to those who confined them ("Why Mass Incarceration Matters," 733)

[153] Here I am invoking philosopher Giorgio Agamben's theory that "The exception does not subtract itself from the rule; rather, the rule, suspending itself, gives rise to the exception and, maintaining itself in relation to the exception, first constitutes itself as a rule" (*Homo Sacer*, 18)

are actively hindered by legal apparatuses from writing. As Chicanx captive Raul Salinas details, "No access to personal/legal materials, nothing at our disposal, but each other" (*Un Trip*, 23). Such is the effect produced by the so-called "Son of Sam" law meant to keep prisoners from profiting from publicity of their crime, but typically deployed to impede writing production and classify all non-prisoned approved forms of writing as contraband.[154]

If we adhere with carceral scholar H. Bruce Franklin's proposition, that the mass incarceration model or prison system is an especially recent and unique event in comparison to the thousands of years of human history,[155] literary scholars are invited into the prison as discursive field, and zone of production. What can we learn, from poetic production emergent as testimonial resistive praxis from a 'zone of exception,' about that present Latinx poets' lyric negotiation between 'subject' and 'object'? I argue *pinto* poetics use three techniques. There is the interlocutor's use of *anthropomorphism* ("having a human-like character or form"), *personification* ("A person or thing typing a certain quality or idea: an embodiment or exemplification"), and *prosopopoeia* ("the voice from beyond the grave, speaks *from* the grave"), which subverts the captive's corporeal & ideological necropolitical erasure from the realm of the socially alive (*Persons and Things*, 15, 17, 13). Bearing witness of the captive's existence through textual representation, these texts attempt to invert the 'thingification' of the captive from the realm

[154] The legal language of the Son of Sam statute reads: "Upon the motion of the United States attorney made at any time after conviction of a defendant for an offense under section 794 of this title or for an offense against the United States resulting in physical harm to an individual, and after notice to any interested party, the court shall, if the court determines that the interest of justice or an order of restitution under this title so requires, order such defendant to forfeit all or any parts of proceeds received or to be received by that defendant, or a transferee of that defendant, from a contract relating to a depiction of such crime in a movie, book, newspaper, magazine, radio or television production, or live entertainment of any kind, or an expression of that defendant's thoughts, opinions, or emotions regarding such crime" (18 U.S.C.S. § 3681(Lexis 2000))

[155] Here, I am using the philosophical definition posited by Slavoj Zizek of "an Event—the shattering encounter of an Idea; the emergence of a purely eventual *cogito*, a crack in the great chain of being" (*Event*, 5)

of the living by the jurisprudence of United States law, through poetically transfiguring the entombed & silenced prisoner into a new "living-person."

Notably, prison scholar James B. Jacobs situates the Prison Rights Movement "as part of a larger mosaic of social change [which] is not to deny this movement's own sociopolitical history," though the movement "depended heavily on the involvement and efforts of free citizens" (433). As Jacobs and other scholars of prison writing indicate, we must strive to comprehend the work produced within confinement in relation to that which is produced beyond the prison walls, while avoiding the erasure and collapsing of nuances which adorn each tradition particularly.

The tradition of writing *from* or *about* incarceration extends into antiquity and as we might expect, writing from confinement evolves with the different incarnations of the captive space or prison in a given culture. Building from H. Bruce Franklin's cultural observation in *prison writing in 20th-century america* (1998), which situates "the prison system [as] a recent—and especially American—innovation," this research project and chapter broaches poetic production from incarceration—namely Judy Lucero's poems in *De Colores* (2).[156] While we reference Franklin's conjecture of the relative novelty of the industrialized carceral model for profit in contemporary United States society, this analysis of the material conditions of production within the prison is intimately linked to those necropolitical 'zones,' barrios, ghettos and/or ethnic enclaves from whence the captive originates. Through recognition of the financial institutions which destroy once accessible public space, as cultural scholar Mike Davis argues in *City of Quartz* (1980), as the condition which produces and organizes the American prison itself, we situate our present dialogical treatment of the spaces in which violence is rationalized (226).

[156] Scholar Dylan Rodriguez argues that "Fatal unfreedom, historically articulated through imprisonment and varieties of (undeclared) warfare, and currently proliferating through epochal technologies of human immobilization and bodily disintegration, forms the grammar and materiality of American society" (*Forced Passages,* 1)

The unifying principle within these texts, or the drive for human dignity, is encompassed in the larger Prison Rights Movement of the 1960s through 1980s. James B. Jacobs notes that "what is needed is a holistic understanding of the role of litigation and law reform in creating and sustaining a prisoners' rights movement, which includes prison reform efforts of all sorts, by prisoners and others" because prison writings register a cultural discourse between social repressive structures and those reduced to the lowest hierarchical position (431). As Jacobs suggests, we situate this project around the cultural products or laws which target the historically disenfranchised and the artistic response to these mechanisms. This research inquiry purports the cohesive engagement of literary and legal text as cultural products for a comprehensive analysis of the structures that regulate—and material representations that testify—the push for dignity within and outside the prison.

Scholar of Chicanx poetics Cordelia Candelaria posits that "despite the large corpus of Pinto poetry, its topical unity, and the recurrence of a unique Chicano prisoner patois, 'it is a mistake to consider it a distinct, stylistic school identifiable by a unique poetics,'" but rather must be understood in relation to the larger Chicanx poetic tradition (Olguin, 19). Presently, we do not separate *pinto* poetics from the larger Chicanx tradition (nor the Chicanx tradition from the Latinx corpus), however the captive's material condition of captivity needs special note. Because the law as text transfigures the captive into 'socially dead,' into a 'thing,' the use of *anthropomorphism* in *pinto* texts to testify existence is a critical distinction presently noted.[157] Candelaria includes the "prolific production of prison-based newspapers, literary journals, magazines, and anthologies, as well as a vast corpus of multimedia artwork such as tattoos, embossed leather work, glossed envelopes, *paños* (handkerchiefs), and hand-drawn postcards" within the pinto aesthetic (Olguin

[157] Here I am deploying Dayan's formulation of civil death as "the state of a person who though possessing *natural life* has lost all *civil rights*" (*The Law is a White Dog*, 44)

19). She argues that "*La pinta* is the Chicana/o vernacular Spanish term for prison" which "problematizes the original eighteenth-century Quaker idea that posits the penitentiary as a brutally 'altruistic' institution that facilitates a prisoner's repentance and reformation" (Olguin 24).

Consider the entirety of *pinto* poet Judy Lucero's 14-line lyric poem "Untitled". Structurally, it is in sonnet form (composed in 3 verse stanzas, constituted by 4 lines within each stanza, which are typically coupled in this instance), with a critical symbolic production of *absence* in the closing couplet; [158]

> Heartache's story here is told
> in a face of Hate turned old
> Where bitter idleness took its share
> and laid a young soul bare
>
> Stripping it of health and pride
> as despair's door opened wide, *showing*
> only emptiness and sorrow
> There was no hope for a tomorrow…
>
> Here love is lost to bitterness
> And the mind rots in idleness
> Hidden in Prisons a dismal gloom
> Dark and Silent and Cold,
> like a tomb
>
> This shell that once was a Woman (*De Colores*)[*emphasis mine*].[159]

The 'like endings' (*homoeoteleuton*) in Lucero's text (*a,a, b,b*), situate an expected visual and auditory terminal rhyme pattern by the conclusion of the first stanza. Lines 5 & 6, however,—or the commencing line-pair of the second stanza—subvert the established rhyme pattern. The

[158] For my work, I have found literary critic Fredric Jameson's conceptualization of the symbolic appropriate: "We may suggest that from this perspective, ideology is not something which informs or invests symbolic production; rather the aesthetic act is itself ideological, and the production of aesthetic or narrative form is to be seen as an ideological act in its own right, with the function of inventing imaginary or formal 'solutions' to unresolvable social contradictions" (*Political Unconscious,* 79)

[159] Scholar Ben Olguin notes that "Lucero was a lumpenproletariat Chicana introduced to drugs at the age of eleven; a victim of domestic violence that caused her to miscarry twice; a drug user addicted first to heroine, then to the 'cure,' methadone; a mother forcibly separated from her daughter after her convictions and incarceration; and finally, a woman who died in prison of a brain hemorrhage, the cumulative effect of a lifetime of beatings" (*La Pinta,* 210)

punctuation mark (,) in line 6, which simultaneously signals a pause in thought and narration, grammatically isolates the term 'showing,' or *making visible the previously unperceived.* Our present interpretation of the *personae's* narration in "Untitled," broaches Lucero's textual product as metapoetic cathartic act.[160]

Within "Untitled," whose very title denotes an absence, the poetic narrator spatially locates and meanders through different locales throughout the text's dramatic unfolding within the *personified* 'Prisons'. While line 1 ambiguously locates the scene of action (as 'here'), the complementary rhythmic line 2 specifies the narrative as inscribed ('in a face') and legible from the captive's corporeal body. The commencing line overtly situates the *anthropomorphic* construction of 'Heartache' as the imaginary possessive subject of the poetic narration ventriloquized by Lucero's speaker. While the speaker never claims an 'I' for themselves, the multi-vocalic *palimpsest* function—which at once testifies and makes visible the otherwise absent narration—is a symbolic textual reclamation of the humanity transfigured by legal text, a reclamation of life denied by the necropolitical condition of *social death.*

Central to our subsequent development of the *pinto* ideological matrix and the praxis of being human as resisting living-entombment, is a comprehensive engagement of the tension produced by the grammatical rupture in line 6 of Lucero's "Untitled". Etymologically, the sign 'showing' signifies the active appreciation of what was previously imperceptible; in the successive line, the poetic narrator depicts what we might call a horrific topography of absence ('only emptiness and sorrow'). We note that of the fourteen lines in "Untitled," only lines six and eight denote a potential for multiple interpretations of the line. Although all fourteen lines of the sonnet

[160] Appropriating scholars Patricia Waugh and Mark Currie's characterization of the *metafiction,* we formulate the metapoetic as "writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artifact in order to pose questions about the relationship between [text] and reality," or as "writing which places itself on the border between fiction and criticism, and which takes that border as its subject" (Murfin, 296)

are grammatically linked by the period which terminates the narration in the last line, only line six produces a plurality of meaning—created by the in-line punctuation mark—thereby establishing a full meaning and half meaning through the pause necessitated by the comma. Through use of punctuation marks which command a momentary suspension of narration, line six focalizes the act of making visible the grammatical exclusion of the term 'showing.' Of course, without the act of 'showing' the obscured or absent, the successive narration would not transfigure the reader into the aforementioned necropolitical 'zone of exception,' held captive in the closing couplet.[161]

The affective tension produced within the reader induced by the deprivation of the structurally expected terminating couplet, which "is the earliest and most obvious rhymed form in English," makes visible the previously *absent,* represented through a visually striking 'blank-space' on the page (Kinzie, 262). "Untitled" produces a syntactic clash as the poetic narration within the third stanza terminates and ceases (pauses) on the term 'tomb'. Through the *caesura* produced by the presentation of absence—or the introduction of 'blank-space' between line thirteen & fourteen, Lucero's reader is forced to inhabit the textual representation of the author's social death, in the 'tomb'. In this sense, the deviation from the standard or traditional elitist, patriarchal, and Eurocentric structure of the sonnet, through the strategic incorporation of 'omission' in the terminating couplet, visually reiterates what the content of the poetic narration expresses—dehumanized life (through the legally sanctioned transfiguration of a 'person' into 'object') existing in a state of 'death-in-life,' in a necropolitical zone of exclusion or erasure.

Throughout Lucero's "Untitled," the *abeyance* of personhood is constituted through the overt absences of a lyric subject, as the possessive first person pronoun 'I' is explicitly omitted.

[161] We will subsequently use the concept 'necropolitical geographies,' and 'domestic-war zone' to enrich the present concept, 'zones of exception,' which Lisa Lowe argues "that colonial relations, temporized by both Foucault and Marx as a gap between distant past and more developed present, should be viewed as spatial rather than temporal" (*The Intimacies of Four Continents,* 196)

The poetic structure of "Untitled" propounds the signification produced by the linguistic semiotic signs which enclose the 'blank-space' between line thirteen and fourteen. Yet, Lucero propels us a bit further.

If the reader manages to escape the necropolitical 'zone of exception' on the page (between lines thirteen and fourteen), the terminating line ends with the term 'Woman,' which presents us with another position of social death. The transfiguration of 'person' into 'thing' is simultaneously witnessed in "Untitled" through the dejected condition of the poetic narrator's state-sponsored erasure & through the transfiguration of the reader into the 'tomb' in line thirteen, or the absence in-between the terminating couplet. But, perchance the existential void expressed in the terminating thought, *the last word,* of the cultural artifact denotes a historically upheld condition of social death exclusive for women. Lucero as a model of *pinto* poetics is productive because "Untitled" presents transfiguration as means of resisting necropolitical erasure from the realm of the living and socially relevant. First, the personification of the prison & palimpsest ventriloquizing of absent silences. Then, the transfiguration of the reader into culturally constructed material/discursive fields of exception. Through the immersion of the reader into not just "the grotesque vacuum of this grotto," but more poignantly, into "this shell that once was a Woman," Lucero's gynocentric *pinto* aesthetic contends with the legally sanctioned process of turning a 'person' into an 'object' or the necropolitical mechanisms of social death, as well as the patriarchal institutions the prison and marriage (*Un* 40).[162]

[162] Scholar of *pinto* work, Ben Olguin notes that "Lucero, through Inmate-cum-Convict #21918, lays claim to the authorial space that previously had been occupied by the masculinist gods charged with rehousing and deconstructing her into a profit-producing Inmate. Modeling what Mary Pat Brady (2002) identifies as an insurgent Chicana spatial poetics, the narrative in 'A Little Girl's Prayer' finally dislocates the apocryphal gods foregrounded in 'Face of Fear'—Judeo-Christian deity and the secular god of the lumpenproletariat, the penitentiary—both of whom have usurped a cultural feminist model of 'Woman's space'" (*La Pinta*, 219)

"Untitled" at once recounts an *anthropomorphic* narrative otherwise absent or silenced ('Heartache's story'), and at the termination of the poetic narration entombs the reader in a state of social death. Lucero's reader momentarily inhabits the *pinto*'s cadaverous existence[163]—not as voyeur or spectator, but as active accomplice in the resistance of state-sanctioned living-entombment. Stated differently, Lucero's text transfigures and relocates the reader within the horrific dismal gloom, which briefly abandons the reader, through the cessation of narration produced by the visually impactful manifestation of absence constituted by the 'blank-space' between the terminating lines.[164]

How do the interlocutors in the works of Lucero, Baca, and Salinas—who are themselves actively silenced by punitive censorship laws and entombed in life through the dehumanizing practices of solitary confinement and isolation—negotiate the rhetorical address of an absent, dead, inanimate, or imaginary listener? Presently, just as the textual language of the 13th Amendment illustrates an uncanny process of 'legal sorcery' through which a person may be deprived of civil rights, demarcated a 'slave of the state,' and subsequently entombed—within *pinto* poetry, an antithetical 'magical transformation' is practiced in the transfiguration of the object/subject within the corpus of Baca, Lucero, and Salinas (Johnson 5). Stated simply, just as the carceral model's *modus operandi* is the active deprivation of civil personhood, entombment and erasure of nonconformist bodies and ideas, these *pinto* texts self-consciously navigate the tenuous borders of their own necropolitical violent existence, through the deployment of poetic devices which negotiate the relation between subjects and objects, between life and death.

[163] Cultural scholar Theodor Adorno states that "The terror of death today is largely the terror of seeing how much the living resemble it" (*Can One Live After Auschwitz*, 460)

[164] Adorno posits that "It is as if, in death, they experienced their own reification: that they were corpses from the first" (*Can One Live After Auschwitz*, 460)

This research inquiry utilizes Candelaria's formulation that "*la pinta* is part of a counterhegemonic Chicana/o prisoner linguistic system, culture, and worldview that arises from a uniquely racialized incarceration experience" which "serves as a racially nuanced nodal point in the wave of revisionist histories of U.S. penality that link early U.S. criminology and penology to U.S. colonialism and imperialism" (Olguin, 25). Furthermore, pinto poetry "postulates that the construction of Chicana/o difference and subsequent criminalization and containment of this difference is inalienably linked to U.S. capitalist imperialist hegemony in the Southwest and beyond" (Olguin, 25). This analysis utilizes Candelaria's conception of pinto aesthetics to deem the works of raulrsalinas, Jimmy Santiago Baca and Judy Lucero as that Foucaultian[165] "counter-discourse of the prisoner"[166] against power or "an intervention in the ahistorical and often dehumanizing popular discourse surrounding prisoners and crime that all too often preempts any critical discussion of the faults and limitations of the criminal justice system" (*raulrsalinas and the Jail Machine*, 216; Mendoza, 16).[167]

As noted in the previous chapter, Salinas directly correlates his own experience of incarceration with fellow incarcerated Puerto Ricans, people that are culturally different from Mexicans or Mexican-Americans. Despite this divergence, they are united in their horrific experience within incarceration. This ideological alignment further illustrates the intimate links between geographically and culturally differentiated peoples—in this case, as *pinto* scholars like

[165] This concept is expressed in *Intellectuals and Power* (1972)

[166] Carceral scholar H. Bruce Franklin "has noted that there are two overlapping groups of prison authors: 'the political activist thrust into prison, and the common criminal thrust into political activism. The distinction between these two groups tends to dissolve as the definition of crime, from both sides of the law, becomes increasingly political'" (*raulrsalinas and the Jail Machine*, 15)

[167] *Pinto* scholar Louis G. Mendoza states that "Most prison literature is testimony to the author's struggle to retain dignity and sanity in a context that forces a convict to conform or resist. Much of this literature can be said to have a similar intention as *testimonio* literature, whose goal is to render the 'often invisible' abuses of power visible as it seeks to realize a politics of solidarity [...] Prison literature, especially that which might be labeled 'protest' literature, is by definition speaking from the margins. The issues of location and politics are important for here the function of literature becomes crucial" (*raulrsalinas and the Jail Machine*, 16-17)

Mendoza and Olguin note, the captive Chicanx pintos were politically awakened by Cuban revolutionaries—peoples in their quest for equality and human dignity. Furthermore, the passage previously cited reveals isolation and bodily immobilization as a principle mechanism of violence and control.[168] Notably, in one of Lucero's texts available, the poetic voice reiterates the use of isolation and idleness as weapon of violence expressed in Baca and raulrsalinas' poetry: "Heartache's story here is told [/] in a face of Hate turned old [/] Where bitter *idleness* took its share [/] and laid a young soul bare" (*Untitled,* ℓℓ.1-4) [*emphasis added*]. Centered throughout the corpus of these Latinx poets is the iteration of isolation and idleness as a violent means of corporeal, psychological and spiritual oppression countered by ventriloquized anthropomorphism and making the absent visible—either by those within the prison or outside—against racially buttressed imperial capitalist institutions.

The formulation for the validation of one's own existence as recognizable only in being perceived by another, and the inevitable psychological repercussions which result from punitive solitary confinement practices, are ventriloquized in Lucero's "Christmas Sacrifice":

> In my lonesome cell, alone with
> bitterness and hurt for companions
> the time slowly passes by …
> I sometimes ask myself, 'just who am I?'
>
> It's hard not to know what lies ahead. But for now
> Am I alive or am I dead? (*De Colores*).

Notably, the violence of isolation—iterated twice by the *personae* within the commencing line—is augmented by the "temporal and spatial entrapment" of the colonialist carceral practices of

[168] This passage in question is located at footnote 71. It translates to: "What the fuck do I have to do [/] With Liberty Bell [/] When Hell [/] is [/] Black 'n' Brown Boricua babies [/] burning/ gagging/ dying [/] in the stinking squalor [/] of North Philly suburb?"

domination (Smallwood 125, 135).[169] The fourth line proffers a critical epistemic break that situates a rupture of the totalitized self through disintegrating a singular *I,* into split subjectivity visually represented by the deployment of two subjects. The fourth line negotiates the *I* who thinks, and the *I* which sets itself apart as an observer of the introspecting self. The line extrapolates the existence of the *observer I,* which now validates the existences of the *subject I.* Just as the violence of isolation is highlighted in the initial line by the repetitive invocation of forced solitude, the trauma/contradiction of existing as racialized cultural *exemption* is likewise focalized through the introduction or emergence of the "I" as always already split into two within the fourth line. In this sense, *personae* evokes a racial and gendered *double-consciousness* which at once feels "two warring ideals in one dark body," and views askance how, in Simone de Beauvoir's terms, "One is not born a woman, one becomes one" (*The Souls of Black Folk,* 3). When considering pinto texts a praxis of resistance, far from pathologizing Lucero or diagnosing the author, we are reminded of Kristeva's postulation that "Literary creation offers a way for the melancholic to proceed, to try to turn his or her sadness and sorrow into a symbolic object, to share again in the community of other speaking begins" (McAfee, 73).

Following Lucero's fourth line, in which the existentialist interrogation ("just who am I?") of the self in isolated captivity is posited, the subsequent couplet in "Christmas Sacrifice" iterates the speaker's cultural exclusion ("Am I alive or am I dead?") as *socially-dead,* left to be answered

[169] At this point, some readers might desire to know more about Lucero's biography; however, as I have endeavored to explicitly denote and implicitly suggest, there is not much information known about Lucero prior to her death in the prison. We know about the drug addiction issues which led to her incarceration, we know that her daughter was taken from her by the state, we know that she was the victim of sexual assault and abuse. We also know about the few poems she managed to create while alive. Throughout my research process on Lucero, it was not possible to discover more about what various prisons she was held captive in. The lack of information, or the 'emptiness' I have found when researching Lucero, propounds the weigh of her poetry as resistance to the necropolitical processes of making absences

by another.[170] Similarly, Lucero's "Comfort" espouses the incarcerated pinto poetic narrator's abjection from society—their *absences*[171]—in the language of mortality;

> When I get to see your face
> it reflects an image of the free world
> even now…
> It must be because you're so alive and a part
> of a 'real' world (*ℓℓ.*16-20).

The five line free-verse stanza focalizes an unknown addressee of the poetic narration, who dwells in the 'real' world outside the prison walls, literally beyond the physical reach as "when I see U [/] And we can't touch…" (*ℓ.* 7-8). Notably, the termination of lines 8 and 18, encapsulate an omission and testify an absence through use of ellipses marks. The use of ellipses to characterize absence is a recurring device in Lucero's corpus.[172]

The first line of "Face of Fear" commences with a supplication in the recognizable Judeo-Christian mythic faith, as the *personae* utters "Stay with me … God… The night is dark" (*De Colores*).[173] Regardless if the individual reader stresses or unstresses the initial word—which our scansion reasons to be stressed because it initiates the command—all plausible metrical outlines situate an absent word, and therefore stressing an unstressed sound (replaced by the ellipses marks), in the second and third feet around the figure of divinity in the text. The use of absence—the presence of *nothingness* in the line—betrays the authorial reverence of their God's sublimity,[174]

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[170] Scholar Dennis Childs notes that a prisoner's condition as socially dead is "[...] signaling the felon's forfeiture of all rights, properties, etc., relative to the status of *living* 'citizens'" (*Slaves of the State,* 180)

[171] Philosophers Marcuse and Feenberg postulate that "The common element is the search for an 'authentic language'—the language of negation as the Great Refusal to accept the rules of a game in which the dice are loaded. The absent must be made present because the greater part of truth is in that which is absent" (*Essential Marcuse,* 67)

[172] Ben Olguin notes that "Lucero's gynocritical dismantling of the Foucauldian guard tower [...] necessarily begins with an interrogation of the legal and ontological effacement her incarceration simultaneously represented and reproduced. Like many prisoner writers, Lucero underscored this erasure by signing her poems with her assigned prison identification number '21918' rather than her real name" (*La Pinta,* 212)

[173] Olguin indicates that "As the dramatic dialogue progresses, it devolves from a prayer into an ominous premonition, with 'the haggard Face of Fear' starring her down just a few lines below, heralding Lucero's inevitable and humiliating death in prison as an anonymous number" (*La Pinta,* 213)

[174] According to Edmund Burke, "All *general* privations are great, because they are all terrible; *Vacuity, Darkness, Solitude,* and *Silence*" […] "Whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain and danger, that is to say, whatever

as well as the horror of their own dejected state. Through the use of absence signified on the page with ellipses marks, and/or the perceptible rupture in form created by space between lines, the text not only visually, in the written sign, but audibly—through the cessation and supplantation of narration with erasure—reiterates the abjection of the captive speaker. Stated differently, the spacing and arrangement of poetic structure reveal the strategic use of form to resound the destitution of the captive, represented by omission.[175] Lucero utilizes the *blank-spaces*[176] within the form of the poem to reiterate the content expressed within the narration—isolation, alienation, absence, erasure, and living-death.[177]

Although one facet of pinto texts is to testify the carceral mechanisms of isolation which legally transfigure the person into "*an animated corpse,*" distinct and various praxis of resistance emerge. For instance, a trope in pinto texts is the use of nature or the natural world to assert the captive's humanity (often through anthropomorphism)—effectively *re*locating the poetic narrator within the natural world—which is legally deprived. Baca's narrator in "Ah Rain!" displays the fertile, productive, and revolutionary possibilities ("soft earth I plunge seeds to like sword tips") within the natural realm for pintos and future generations (ℓ.12). Or, in the case of Lucero's speaker in "Comfort" who states, "Just listening to the rain [/] Reminds me so much of U," thereby indicating the use of sensory perception to engage the natural world (and its audible sounds) which engulf the prison as a means of actively resisting their own state-sanctioned alienation. Another

is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the *sublime*; that is, it is productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling" (*Sublime and Beautiful,* 111)

[175] Ben Olguin notes that "Prisoner #21918's prayer, initially offered to a celestial 'God of Strength and Gentleness,' is intercepted by the panoptic penitentiary god through its phallic palisade priest—the all-seeing guard tower—which claims the symbolic power of an erect phallus" (*La Pinta,* 214)

[176] Ben Olguin argues that "Lucero's nuanced gendering of this ambiguously situated geopoetic space enables a matriarchal pantheism that dissolves the imprisoning binary paradigm promulgated by Patriarchy/Prison. She thus recenters the status of women on earth as Convict #21918 previously had done in the heavens" (*La Pinta,* 220)

[177] Olguin interprets "This morbid scenario, foregrounded in the very title of the poem, 'Face of Fear,' is underscored in the final four lines, which propose the consummate subordination of the prisoner who tries to speak from beneath the frightening and disempowering gaze of the tower" (*La Pinta,* 214)

pinto poet, Raulrsalinas' "Nutmeg Nuances" personifies nature and momentarily allows a redemptive possibility through the natural to emerge, as "SunFlower [/] who dared peek [/] over prison walls [/] to welcome the SUN" (*Un Trip,* 79). In the following excerpt from this poem, the redemptive potential of nature is thwarted by representatives of the carceral power;

> Later we learned
> she was sentenced
> by sadistic tower guard
> (for consorting/ conversing
> with two humanoids:
> one black/
> one brown
> or red?)
> to be chopped down at sunset
> aren't they weird?
>
> We communed with nature
> yesterday
> so we know THAT'S wrong,
> (the part about the guard, i mean.)
> yesterday
> we were being children
> (the warden forbid!)
> we were for-reals (ℓℓ.23-40, *Un Trip* 80).

Within the poetic narration, the text reveals the institutional retaliation of the racialized captives—for seeking to enjoy that which the state means to deprive, the companionship of nature personified as feminine—through the elimination of 'SunFlower'. The text terminates by denoting the resistive praxis possible through 'consorting' with nature. The final line reveals the possibility (if only momentarily) to become 'for-reals' through the redemptive potential of nature as a means of defying their *living-death* sentence of alienation from—as Lucero's speaker termed it in "Comfort"—*a 'real' world* (ℓ.20).

In Lucero's "I Speak In An Illusion," the poetic voice explicitly situates their living-entombment while inviting the reader to share in their deprivation;

> Care to spend a day in my House of Death?
> Look at my garden...are U amazed?
> No trees, no flowers, no grass...no gardens… (ℓℓ.7-9, *De Colores*).

The poetic narrator intimately links their forced removal from the natural world as constitutive of their *living-death*. The final two lines—which invite an unknown addressee to perceive, and therefore existentially validate, the very essence of the speaker through the assessment of their labor production focalized in a particular space, or *the garden*—iterate a contradiction which denotes the necropolitical existence of the captive in a state of *living-death*. The command/request to appraise the garden, the subsequent inquiry of the viewer's amazement (belying the *awful* nature of the reveal), which terminates in the negation of the garden's existence, encapsulates the captive's physical presence in the prison while signaling their absence from the outside world and life-cycle. The third and final line of the excerpt negates both the existence of nature and consequently leaves the speaker of the text in a state *death-in-life*.

Continuing with the Berkeleyan formulation, *I am perceived, therefore I am,* the commencement and title of "I Speak In An Illusion," denotes the necropolitical existence of the speaker, or rather the precarious social death position which they inhabit. Line one situates the Berkeleyan dictum and anaphorically modifies each statement to disavow the existence of the speaker. The poem states that "I speak but only in an illusion," thereby negating any validation of existence proffered by the perception of the speaker. In other words, if we adhere to the Berkeleyan model, that we can confirm our existence only through others, through their perception and validation of us, then this statement in #21918's poem offers us volumes. The claim here is that the poetic voice speaks—attempts to be validated—but that existence is only permissible in an illusory manner.

The poem accounts for the present reader, who reads and in fact one may argue validates the existence of the speaker, by placing even that level of perception and validation within a realm of illusion. Stated differently, you and I might perceive the captive and their speech, but the inmate's self emanates from a realm of illusion, beyond the realm of the living. The reader experiences only its shadow, a fact propounded by the death of Lucero within the bowel of the prison system.

The aforementioned world of illusion, which I name the realm of the necropolitical, the living-entombment of the captive, the position of social death, of living and breathing but lacking political relevance, is reiterated by the speaker in the phrase "It's me and it's not," thereby dismantling the Cartesian or Berkeleyan formulations of the establishment of self, *I think, therefore I am* & *I am perceive, therefore I am* (ℓ.1) The speaker thinks, and is even perceived by the world around her, and us who read her decades after her death, yet she questions her existence, interrogates the present rendition of herself ("I live and I don't") as an illusion and unreal because that version of herself—not Lucero, but #21918—is a byproduct of the American prison complex (ℓ.13). Ultimately, while every aspect of her life is questioned and rendered an illusion—her love, her hate, her song—the only assurance the speaker offers is the reality of her captivity, as only "the bonds are real" (ℓℓ.10-13, ℓ.18). The necropolitical existence of the captive, the living-death status conferred upon them by the government, invokes the existential angst that bourgeois existentialism promises to produce but typically does not, because it is not written from of space of living-entombment, of death in life.

The systematic expansion of the carceral state and its influence between the 1960s, its legislative inscription in supposed color-blind texts/laws during the Reagan administration, and post-2001 solidification of the anti-citizen or antithetical America as a "male with dark brown

skin," create the condition of possibility for the continued subjection of racialized bodies in and outside the prison (Olguin, 3). Notably, the present analysis of *pinto* texts broaches the mechanisms of *domestic warfare*[178] as inheritances of American colonization practices or the oppression of racially differentiated groups for capitalist gain of a dominant hegemonic power. Colonialist mechanisms, which Dylan Rodriguez and Dennis Childs genealogically trace into the modern carceral model within the United States, are quoted by Cesaire as emanating from—not Hitler, but—Western humanist philosophers. Cesaire invites us to listen in on Ernest Renan, as he declares in *La Reforme intellectuelle et morale*:

> We aspire not to equality but to domination. The country of a foreign race must become once again a country of serfs, of agricultural laborers, or industrial workers. It is not a question of eliminating the inequalities among men but of widening them and making them into a law (*Discourse* 37).

Cesaire's invocation of Occidental bourgeois legal endeavors to write into law racially-driven mechanisms of subjection to be implemented on the colonial other, situates pinto and black captive authors as inheritors of coloniality transfigured into the prison. Alfredo Mirande's *Gringo Justice* (1987) argument, that "Chicanos have been labeled bandits and criminals because they have not passively accepted their economic and political exploitation," accrues significance when the incarcerated Chicano/Black body recognizes itself within an imperialist history that transcends their present lived experience (236). In Lucero's work, the criminality of the speaker is addressed and adheres to Mirande's conjecture, as the poetic voice attests "I knew what we were fighting for. [/] Some peace for the kids. Our brothers' [/] freedom, A kinder world, A cleansing mind," in "Face of Fear" (ℓℓ.6-8). The speaker of Lucero's text denotes the systematic domination and active violence perpetrated by those who threaten the life and liberty of her "brother," her children,

[178] Olguin indicates that "Data by the Sentencing Project, an independent criminal justice policy institute that advocates alternatives to mass incarceration in the United States, confirm that minorities, especially Black males, continue to receive prejudicial treatment from the police, courts, and prison officials" (*La Pinta,* 5)

and herself. I am here to claim that the perpetrators of the violence Lucero highlights, are in fact inheritors of the Western humanistic system detailed by Cesaire in the colonial past. Therefore, throughout these chapters, I argue that the horrors of necropolitical colonial mechanisms of unrestrained murder and control are present within various landscapes or geographies, such as the American prison.

Cesaire and Mirande's claim intimate the informative relation between a racial other, state-sanctioned violence, and the criminalization of resistive practices which aim to confront the system. Furthermore, the synthesis of the legally permissible violence rationalized within the imperial margins, is redeployed in *domestic war-zones*. When coupled together, the "harmonious and viable *economies*" destroyed by colonialist practices are *absences* which are *reanimated* and lamented as "lost Latino younglings [/] Future musicos/ pintores/ y poetas [/] (soldiers all) [/] Who will never be" (*Discourse*, 43; *Un Trip*, 130).[179]

The modern position of captive poets as "slaves of the state" without "social existence outside of his master" or "the status of a person who has been deprived of all civil rights," not only illustrates the importance of human interaction or alliances as a means of resistance, but also focalizes the duress of what scholar Ruth Gilmore Wilson defines as structural racism or "the state-sanctioned or extralegal production and exploitation of group-differentiated vulnerability to premature death" documented in literary representations by Salinas, Baca and Lucero (Patterson, 41; Civil Death Statutes, 968; *Golden Gulag*, 28). As inheritors of the Western tradition, as American poets, and targets of punitive legal apparatuses of forced labor, pinto poets simultaneously alter the whole existing literary order and bourgeois philosophical discourse because these captives inhabit and exist in contradiction, neither alive nor dead. The dialectical

[179] This passage translates as: "lost Latino younglings [/] Future musicians/ painters/ and poets [/] (soldiers all) [/] Who will never be"

function of the captive as the cultural *exception*[180] which negatively defines the rights and privileges possessed by members of that society,[181] positions the writing of racialized captives of the state as the artistic expressions of the uniquely Latin American subaltern.[182]

It is the tension caused by existing as contradiction or *exception*—the same tension palpable in the *aura* of texts which defy state-administered censorship laws—that provide a plane of signification previously imperceptible within the Chicanx literary corpus.[183] Stated differently, prior to the Civil and Prison Rights Movements—whose necessity betray a violent cultural landscape upheld through *de facto* and *de jure* practices of dehumanization—the mass entombment and warehousing of Latinx bodies had historically been relegated to the vanishing 'American' societal periphery. Just as the unconscious or cultural exceptions are banished to the societal margins/periphery of existence, likewise the pinto captive's writing functions as that horrifying and sublime return of that which refuses to be repressed and silenced.

The culmination of the concepts I have hitherto engaged—the necropolitical living-entombment of the captive, the existential angst generated by the condition of social death, the use of ellipses to denote absence, and the destruction of the person that existed before incarceration—are synthesized in Lucero's poem "Jail-Life Walk" from *De Colores.* The sixteen-line free-verse poem situates the monotonous barren existence of the speaker:

Walk in the day . . . Walk in the night

[180] Once more, I am using Agamben's concept of the exception: "The exception does not only confirm the rule; the rule as such lives off the exception alone" (*Homo Sacer*, 16-17)

[181] Marcuse's philosophical dictum "*What are we without the help of that which does not exist?*" influences my dialectical approach to this discursive field (*Essential Marcuse*, 68)

[182] Dennis Childs notes that "[racialized bodies have] historically been viewed as a *biological and metaphysical exception to the rule of (white) humanity*—as the antithesis of order, rationality, morality, and productivity—and as a natural-born enemy or 'Problem' of the state" (*Slaves of the State*, 50)

[183] Walter Benjamin notes that "Every day the urge grows stronger to get hold of an object at very close range by way of its likeness, its reproduction. Unmistakably, reproduction as offered by picture magazines and newsreels differs from the image seen by the unarmed eye. Uniqueness and permanence are as closely linked in the latter as are transitoriness and reproducibility in the former. To pry an object from its shell, to destroy its aura, is the mark of a perception whose 'sense of the universal equality of things' has increased to such a degree that it extracts it even from a unique object by means of reproduction" ("The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," 5)

Count off the time . . . One to Ten
Then you'll be free . . . Free again

Walk without pain . . . Walk without care . . .

Walk til you see . . . See the sign
Look at the sign . . . Walk in Line!

Then walk in hate
Walk without the world
Walk in fear . . .
See the anger
In their eye
just walking by . . .

The only thing free
is your mind
Free to count
As U walk in Line (ℓℓ. 1-16, *De Colores*).

On the surface, this poem details the act of performing the catwalk in prison, or the lining up of inmates—one behind the other—and sounding off, not their names but their new identity, their inmate number. The poem explicitly details the human warehousing and itemizing of people within the prison system through the experience of a captive. The speaker transports the reader into the line, walking and counting off multiple times per day, walking in hate, walking "without the world" (ℓ. 8). The poem oscillates between the idea of captivity and freedom, as the word freedom appears in four different instances of the poem, ultimately culminating in the indication that only one's own mind is free—free to count and numb yourself to the catwalk.[184]

[184] There is a striking tension between the message posited by *pinto* poets here, and Rainer Maria Rilke's *Letters to a Young Poet* (1929), which states "Even if you were in a prison whose walls would shut out from your senses the sounds of the outer world, would you not then still have your childhood, this precious wealth, this treasure house of memories? Direct your attention to that. Attempt to resurrect these sunken sensations of a distant past. You will gain assuredness. Your aloneness will expand and will become your home, greeting you like the quiet dawn. Outer tumult will pass it by from afar" (12)

Lucero's final poem, left unfinished before she was killed in prison, is appropriately titled "The Right To Live" and will help us close our discussion in the chapter on her poetics. The text reads as follows:

> The lost feeling is what I sometimes feel
> And it makes me stop and think
> If all this worthless misery
> Will drive us to (ℓℓ. 1-16, *De Colores*)[unfinished].

The initial line of the poem denotes the affective feeling of loss, of disconnect, and disorientation—an affective strategy I argue is a central feature of Lucero's poetics from the prison. The second line of the poem behests a pause, as the speaker notes a pause ("stop") and initiation of thought ("think"), moving away from the emotion invoked within the first line. The final two lines of the incomplete poem note what the speaker is thinking, a contemplation on the worthless misery experienced—perchance the worthless misery explicitly experienced within the prison, or by the modern human living within a society that rationalizes the prison industrial complex—which leads to a force, a drive. That force, that drive is cut off, terminates without completion. This cutting off of thought obviously denotes her premature death, but also conveys an implicit destructive end arrived at by the worthless misery, a destructive end that is at once the personal end of the speaker but also the collective end of the culture.

This and the preceding chapter explore into the prison as a necropolitical geography, and advance further analysis of the carceral poetics, particularly the pinto poetics of raulrsalinas and Jimmy Santiago Baca. Judy Lucero warrants special attention, because her poetry is explicitly a gynocentric poetry (female centered)—a characteristic absent from Salinas and Baca's work. Furthermore, Lucero as a poet who died within the prison warrants special attention because she lived and died within the experience of incarceration and the necropolitical negotiation of life and death. Some scholars, who will remain nameless due to the tremendous respect I have for them,

might conceive of Lucero's poetry as amateur or undeveloped. To that point, I can neither agree nor disagree but simply state that we can all improve our craft. What I will state explicitly here—let there be no misinterpretation of my position on this matter—the work of poets like Lucero, who write from a condition of social death produce a novel realm within poetry. You and I can produce a poem about inexistence, about lack of faith and powerlessness, and that poem might very well be well received. But someone who is actually in a living position of powerlessness, of social death and total natal alienation, if someone from this position actually writes about the systemic rendition of this reality, that produces a different experience than anything you and I can produce from outside captivity.

Let me state this idea differently, in a way that some of us will understand, and some others just simply will not be able to grasp. A professor of mine whom I admire once told me of her experience reading Toni Morrison's *Beloved*. My professor stated that, when she was in graduate school as she first read *Beloved* she thought she understood it. She thought that reading and re-reading it time and time again helped her come to a complete understanding of the text. However, she went on to tell me, it was only after she had her first child that she really understood the true immense power and weight of that text, utterly understood the complexity of that text (as you know, infanticide occurs within *Beloved*). I end this chapter with this anecdote because many of us, like my professor when in her doctoral program, might feel like we understand the poetry of Lucero—and the pinto poets, the narratives from migrants or homeless I examine in subsequent chapters—but until we live that experience, until we experience the fear of deportation, until we experience homelessness or food/housing insecurity, until we experience incarceration or captivity, we will forever be somehow removed from fully comprehending these necropolitical negotiations of life and death. That does not mean we cannot value, praise, and enjoy these cultural

artifacts, but we should recognize and acknowledge the gulf between us and the speakers who sing of their existence within them.

Chapter Four: Voces del Infierno

> "pasé por Tecate, ahí nos cruzaron, nos dijeron que iban a ser tres o cuatro horas. Entonces nos dieron un garrafón de agua y todo. Cruzamos ahí pero tardamos caminando de tres a cuatro días […] Encontrábamos agua, pero comida pues no […] es muy, muy triste pasar de esa forma porque muchos […] uno ve cómo se quedan, [incluso] un matrimonio […] se quedaron, se dobló un tobillo el señor y se quedaron en el desierto […]"[185]
>
> —Humberto Calderón, entrevista realizada por Martha García, Guerrero, enero 2001

The above cited epigraph is a survivor's testimony of the real horrors that people endure at the US-Mexico border. The testimony and this chapter are concerned with an *exclusive horror* which arranges the US-Mexico border as a real life necropolitical geography represented in Graciela Limón's novel *The River Flows North* (2009). It is horror that is at once as real and tangible as the flesh and bones of the couple that remained in *el desierto* described by Humberto Calderon's testimony; and yet occult and hidden behind "border policies that do not recognize the rights of unauthorized migrants" (De Leon, 28). While Calderon overtly highlights the failure to gauge or comprehend how much time has elapsed, as well as the scarcity of water and the complete absence of food, we can note that this horrific experience detailed by a survivor is permitted, reasoned, orchestrated, and managed by US immigration policies and practices.

What do I mean by *horror* permeating the necropolitical geography of the US-Mexico border? The real lived experience of the Latinx exclusion, their reduction to *bare life* as characterized by the testimony of Calderon in reflection on crossing the border desert zone, is productive of an *exclusive horror* represented in Limón's *River*. Here, it is important to note Greg Prieto's claim that "cultural belonging does not flow automatically from legal membership," which means that the experience of the Latinx exclusion extends beyond those bodies which are legally

[185] This passage translates to: "I passed through Tecate, that's where they crossed us, they told us it would be three or four hours. That's when they gave us a gallon of water and everything. We crossed there but we took three or four days walking [...] We would find water, but food well no [..] It's very, very sad to cross in that manner because many [...] you see how they stay behind, including a married couple [...] they stayed, the husband twisted his ankle and they stayed in the desert" —Humberto Calderón, interview realized by Martha García, Guerrero, January 2001, [translation mine]

undocumented. Prieto notes that like Japanese citizens, black slaves, and Islamic terrorists, the Latinx exclusion serves as that "other" which dialectically constitutes the sociocultural category "America" (61).

Therefore, this *exclusive horror* is one which exists both in a material sense and a literary one, and one that impacts both documented and undocumented bodies. Calderon's statement itself is characterized by what literary scholars might term as conventional tropes of the horror; the demise of a family, the patriarchal tyrannical control over the female as both man and woman stay to die in the desert, though only the man had twisted his ankle. Or, if you would rather, we can interpret the choice to remain in the desert together as a romantic sentimentality. Conventional literary elements of the horror exist within the literary representation of the Latinx exclusion at the border, as I will show through *The River Flows North*'s overt use of the supernatural and mythic, and like 'classic' horrors, the text serves as a satire of the established order, arguing that the monsters and demons which threaten migrants are legislatively produced.

The horrors of the desert passage for migrants represented in the text must always already be considered simultaneously with those testimonies and narratives of survivors or actual loss of life. Consider John Annerino's photojournalistic realization of the normalized horror at the border, expressing "I was new to photographing the skeletal remains of Mexican citizens, and I wasn't sure how I would react—miles from nowhere—at the sight of a black corpse swinging in the wind" (*Dead,* 14). Notably, Annerino indicates the central importance of space in configuring his response to the morbid scene; he notes the remoteness of the location, or the location itself, as determining how someone reacts to scenes of death. We cannot understand the US-Mexico border as a necropolitical space, a zone of bare life operating within Latinx literary production, without witnessing the dead migrants "rubber soles curling off their bony feet, their cracked plastic water

jugs filling with sand, their leather scalps peeling back from their white skulls, the wallet-sized smiles of their loved ones turning brittle in their gnarled black hands" captured by photojournalists like Annerino (14).

How can we think of the US-Mexico border as a necropolitical space? First, we may have to answer who has sovereign control over that zone. To return to Achille Mbembe, in "Necropolitics" (2003), he theorizes that "to exercise sovereignty is to exercise control over mortality and to define life as the deployment and manifestation of power" (12). Those regions in which the negotiation and contestation of life occur constitute zones of erasure: biopolitical territories in which death is rationalized as part and parcel of the quotidian order. The examination of cultural artifacts—namely literary textual production—which focalize the U.S.-Mexico border as a necropolitical geography, exposes a zone of corporeal and ideological erasure. The literary representation of the U.S.-Mexico border as a necropolitical zone of erasure announces the 'place given to life, death, and the human body' of the racialized and gendered exclusion—the undocumented migrant—within the order of United States jurisprudence ("Necropolitics," 12). Annerino highlights how the border functions as a real necropolitical landscape in providing survivor Miguel Soto's testimony where he states "There was a woman, an El Salvadorian woman, I remembered seeing a few weeks before in Mexico [...] She was clutching a five- or six-year-old girl in her arms. A few feet away was another little girl, about the same age. She, too, was dead. Nearby we saw a teenage girl. She, too, was dead. And about fifty feet away was another dead teenage girl [...] Five days later Border Patrol trackers found the fifth victim, another woman, but coyotes had reached her first and eaten her left leg" (19).

Mbembe concentrates both illegitimate and legitimate regimes in the discussion of necropower; the unifying principle the author genealogically links in the early and late-modernist

systems of the Third Reich, apartheid regimes in South Africa, the Jewish occupation of Gaza and the West Bank, and war machines of Africa, is the state's capacity to prescribe who may live and who must die through the creation of the Other.[186] Do the natural desert formations between the two countries or U.S. Customs and Border Protection checkpoints, constitute zones of necropolitical erasure of the other? Can a cultural artifact represent the state's prescription of life and death of those bodies excluded from, what some scholars term, *the American Dream*? How can we as scholars synthesize the literary representations of death in a necropolitical zone, with testimonial accounts of survival of that space, such as survivor Carlos Cobarubia Mesa's declaration that "Seventeen miles from the border, I saw a body face down in the sand, completely dressed in pants and shirt. This body appeared to have been there for ten days, as there were some dry blood spots around it" (*Dead,* 47)? How does one reconcile the violence and abject poverty which permeate the migrants' places of origin and compel them to undertake the brutal trek northward to the United States, with the horror encapsulated at the border?

This inquiry utilizes Joseph Nevin's *Dying to Live*, John Annerino's *Dead in Their Tracks*, and Jeremy Slack's *Deported to Death* to establish the lived reality of the *conditio inhumana* of the undocumented migrant, and the forms of terror they experience attempting to escape the consequences of U.S. global economic policy defining "who matters and who does not, who is disposable and who is not" (Mbembe, 27). The present focused engagement with Graciela Limón's *The River Flows North* (2009) as cultural artifact articulates the necropolitical abjection of the cultural exclusion—or the nonhuman, the other—at the border as a zone of erasure. We can appreciate and recognize the state-sanctioned "instrumentalization [of] human existence and the

[186] Mbembe's formulation of the Other in "Necropolitics" states: "The Perception of the existence of the Other as an attempt on my life, as a mortal threat or absolute danger whose biophysical elimination would strengthen my potential to life and security—this, I suggest, is one of the many imaginaries of sovereignty characteristics of both early and late modernity itself" (18)

material destruction of human bodies" through a logic of violence which produces a uniquely racialized, gendered, and capitalist spurred modern form of horror in the Latinx exclusion (Mbembe, 14).

The U.S-Mexico border is a zone of disarticulation, a zone of abjection and erasure which stands 'outside of life and death,' a necropolitical zone which physically dismantles and ideologically silences bodies deemed as 'other' or nonhuman.[187] Those people annihilated at the border remain in the form of cadavers, "simple relics of an unburied pain, empty, meaningless corporealities, strange deposits plunged into cruel stupor," until those bodies are engulfed by the desert sand; likewise the memory of those lost, *los desaparecidos*, "then the many disappearances on the desert road fade from memory," in 'striking tension between the petrification of the bones and their stubborn will to mean, to signify something' (*River,* 3; Mbembe, 35). Racist patriarchal state-sanctioned mechanisms of erasure produce a form of systemic horror at the border—a form of state sponsored terror against the 'flow' of immigrants who are fleeing economic oppression and violence, or U.S. imperialism in Latin America. Although the presently amalgamated narratives represented in Limón's *River* are fictitious personal accounts, they are nonetheless real common experiences of migrants through necropolitical zones as "the raw material of sovereignty and the violence it carried with it," thereby allowing the characters to stand as representations of particular types of immigrants in search of economic opportunity (Mbembe, 26).

The production of this modern racialized, gendered, and capitalist driven form of horror, is sustained by supposedly altruistic mechanisms of the state or Prevention Through Deterrence strategies 'aimed at permitting the exercise of biopower, that old sovereign right of death'

[187] Jason De Leon asserts that "Border zones become *spaces of exception*—physical and political locations where an individual's rights and protections under the law can be stripped away upon entrance. Having your body consumed by wild animals is but one of many 'exceptional' things that happen in the Sonoran Desert as a result of federal immigration policies" (*Land of Open Graves*, 28)

(Mbembe, 17). It is a quotidian horror, "far from a piece of prodigious insanity or an expression of a rupture between the impulses and interests of the body and those of the mind. Indeed, they, like the death camps, are what constitute the nomos of the political space in which we still live," upheld by openly racist, sexist, and capitalist motivated legislators and their constituents who support U.S. economic interests abroad (Mbembe, 14). But most importantly, the creation of this form of real necropolitical terror is maintained by those liberal moderates who are possessively invested in maintaining—through a logic of violence—"a world in terror, at war, yet unsettlingly stable" which is dependent on the racialized and gendered cultural exclusion to dialectically demarcate the margins of the neoliberalist human (Rodriguez, 2). As we move forward with our investigation into the representation of necropolitical geographies within texts, it is important to take with us the testimony of survivors like Mesa who states "Ten to twelve miles from the second body, I encountered a third body. This body was buried under rocks, and a crucifix, but I could see the skeleton" (*Dead*, 63).

Graciela Limón's *The River Flows North* (2009) is a novel formulated through real world events and life experiences reported by major newspapers, such as the *Los Angeles Times*. Furthermore, Limón attests the influence of other novelists on the present work, such as Hector Tobar and John Annerino's *Dead in Their Tracks* (1999). The following is an analysis of the construction of Limón's *River* and the representation of the horror of erasure experienced daily by undocumented migrants at the United States southern border. The border represents a terror formation at the frontier, or as Limón's character Doña Encarnación proclaims in the initiation of the trek across the desert, "No one knows how many bones are buried under this sand. Which one of us can imagine how many souls linger here, still waiting to reach their dream" (39). Doña Encarnación's utterance at once produces an affective horror which is recurring in Limón's text;

it is a horror predicated on the *unthinkable,* founded on the impossible to know or imagine, on the absent and invisible, on the bodies consumed by the desert at the border where "lifeless bodies are quickly reduced to the status of simple skeletons. Their morphology henceforth inscribes them in the register of undifferentiated generality" (Mbembe, 35).

Most poignantly, the affective horror represented in Limón's text is a real lived experience produced, not by supernatural monsters or demons, but by the unbiased and indifferent forces of nature & *la Migra,* "uniformed men who drive unstoppable vehicles or worse, the others who call themselves vigilantes" (*River,* 2). Limón's text highlights the necropolitical terror encountered by Latin American migrants both in their domestic space and at the border, a horror comprised by the hostility of the physical space, vigilantes and border patrol agents invested in hunting migrants—"Everybody knows that those guys grab you by the neck and throw you out just like you're a starving dog or something worse"—and those people who chose to ignore the humanitarian crisis that is the US-Mexico border (*River*, 16).

The manner in which Limón achieves the production of horror throughout the structure of the text, is through distinct forms of repetition, or cycles, that in reproduction convey a Sartrean nauseating inescapable recurrence of the terror, of the horrific experience of the migrants, "where 'peace' is more likely to take on the face of a 'war without end'" (Mbembe, 23). Through the structure of the novel, Limón is able to reiterate the affective horror conveyed throughout the narration in "the zone where the violence of the state of exception is deemed to operate in the service of 'civilization'"; the terror invoked within the literary text engages the U.S. imperialist economic oppression in the migrants originating country (Mbembe, 24). Furthermore, the affective horror produced within Limón's text expands beyond the conditions of traversing the desert, where "nature thus remains, in all its majesty, an overwhelming reality compared to which [people]

appear to be phantoms, unreal and ghostlike," to the calamitous uncertainty awaiting the migrants who successfully survive the trek (Mbembe, 24). Or as Nicanor states in response to the fear and danger of being abandoned by the *coyote* mid-journey, "That doesn't scare me as much as when I wonder what it's like over there where the desert ends. What if there isn't any work" (16)? Here we need to note Prieto's claim of the immigrant body and "their inclusion through exclusion as economically necessary, but socially undesirable," as part and parcel of the production of horror for the Latinx exclusion (61). We will first account for the ways in which the structure of the text produces horror, in order to account for the affective horror invoked by its content.

The narrative structure oscillates between a third person omniscient and first-person narrator between alternating chapters, commencing and terminating with third person in chapter one & sixteen. The two narrative perspectives, the omniscient third person and first person limited, create two temporal tracks within the novel. The present, narrated by the omniscient narrator, takes place during the crossing of the desert in 2007; the past is narrated by each distinctive character within their own chapters which recount their displacement by U.S. imperialism and the events leading up to their present trek across the desert. The circular narrative structure, with temporal and narrator shifts, systematically reiterates the recurrences evident within the narrative plot.

Recurrence within *The River Flows North* is a distinguishable narrative trope, which simultaneously advances the narrative plot and invokes the affective quality of horror. In the case of Cerda, the *coyote*, his livelihood is sustained because, as he states, "I knew the lay of the land on both sides, and I spoke the right way. When I was on the gabacho side people thought I was a tejano, and a mexicano when I was in Mexico" (124). The coyote states a circular shift in how he is able to portray or pass himself to maneuver the space he inhabits as a field worker. Likewise, Cerda notes that the migratory cycle which he once followed in pursuit of labor across the U.S-

Mexico border began changing, as he claims, “Little by little I saw that things were changing big time and that people couldn't just come and go across the line like before” (124). It is through the representation of repetition, in this case the recurring search for labor across the border Cerda followed, and the disruption of this track by U.S. foreign policy, “a matter of seizing, delimiting, and asserting control over a geographical area—of writing on the ground a new set of social and spatial relations,” which invoke a sense of horror at the change in livelihood through extra-legal means (Mbembe, 25).

The Osuna brothers represent the circular structure endured by all migrants without legal documentation, subjected to the continual prospect of being captured and deported back to outside of the United States (166). The Osuna brothers once briefly viewed the cityscape of San Diego, but were promptly caught and ejected out of the desert, back into Tijuana, where they prostituted themselves to gain the resources necessary to attempt the desert crossing once more (168). Not only the structural recurrence, the repeated cycle of attempting to cross the border once more, is productive of the horror of the migrant experience, but also the necropolitical description represented in the text of these migrants as they are hunted like animals:

> Alli viene la Migra! We flopped on our bellies and hardly breathed. Our ears got stiff and stuck up in the air like dogs that sense the intruders, but we didn’t hear anything, just the bushes that moved in the wind [...] a big light clicked on, pinning all of us to the ground. I felt that the lamp’s blue rays were spikes of steel, and I froze, stretched out flat on my belly, eyes closed. When I opened them, I saw that everybody shook like wet animals, and nobody moved because we were paralyzed with fear. The worst had happened (166).

The overt and explicit equating of the migrants to animals in this passage invokes the dehumanizing processes endured by people attempting to cross the desert in search of economic opportunity, as well as the horror of the recurrence of undergoing the journey again.

Likewise, the termination of the narrative produces a haunting uncertainty both for reader and literary character, as Menda and Borrego are apprehended by unknown English speakers,

which frightens Menda. One of Menda's rescuer's comments on the frequency of the present horrific display before them, repeating the phrase "I've seen worse" three times. This might lead us to ask, who are these people? Why have they seen near death migrants on the side of the desert road frequently? Why do they know how much water to give the survivors and that "too much will kill them" (174)? Are they frequent travelers of this space/road, or do they work in the business of finding bodies like Menda's and Borrego's? I argue that the two survivors are picked up by *la migra*, who will take them to a station-clinic to recover and then deport them back into Mexico, thereby structurally positing physical return from whence they came. Menda and the surviving Osuna brother, just as the Osuna brothers previously encountered, bear witness to markers of the United States, only to be transported back to Mexico.

The recurrence within the narrative plot thematically envelops Dona Encarnación, who seeks to be reunited with the spirits of the desert; effectively, she seeks to join those who perished in the desert crossing, as well as the ancestral spirits who once inhabited that land prior to migrating south into Mexico. From Dona Encarnación, the reader learns of the ancient ancestral migration from the northern desert into the southern jungles of Mexico and Central America. In the present temporal timeline, Dona Encarnación is returning to the commencement and origin of her ancestral culture. It is Dona Encarnación who functions as a *curandera*, a soothsayer or *dreamer* who is able to see the spirits of the desert. It is through Encarnación's character that the narrative manifests a supernatural haunting affective quality that is reiterated through Cerda, the experienced guide through the desert, who "secretly admitted that maybe he did believe that the desert was haunted [...] he had heard strange sounds more than once on his desert crossings," in the isolation of the desert (14).

The phantasmal return of those who have vanished in the desert serves to invoke a particular horrific haunting experienced by migrants. The horror and grotesque affective quality is exemplified by the migrants discovery of a truck filled with corpses in the desert. The re-emergence of the dead simultaneously serves to constitute a haunting known only by the migrants and those who traverse the desert, as well as a return of *the repressed.* Those that disappear in the desert are lost, both to their families and the larger American/Latinx culture; their return in a ghostly or haunting context, indicate the larger culpability of U.S. imperialism in causing the forced migration and death of migrants in the desert. The return or recurrence of the dead is explicitly invoked within the narrative plot through the narration of Cerda; the termination of his chapter references being shot in the head, which causes his death. In Cerda's chapter narration, he is effectively speaking from death or beyond the grave.

In effect, Cerda's narrator recounts the moment of his death, and therefore is productive of an affect of horror as he lives out his own death, becoming aware of his annihilation. Within the narrative, Leonardo Cerda is shot and killed by Armando Guerrero in chapter ten, where Cerda "dropped flat on his face" (108). The following chapter, narrated by Cerda, recounts the *coyote's* life on the ideological and physical boundary of a Mexican and tejano identity. The chapter terminates with Cerda's proclamation that:

> I was a crazy lone wolf, and that was all there was to it. It didn't bother me that the migrants didn't have legal papers, because for me the border was only a big invention anyway. After that, if they got caught, well, they got caught; I took their money anyway. Sometimes I lied to them, and lots of times I walked out on them. After I got to work on the coyote thing, I never stopped until now that a bullet did the job, and all because I decided to lead that bunch of dreamers on a little detour (125).

In his account, Cerda is reflecting on the procedures which produce his premature death—the need for labor, the border, the choice to take a detour in search for the cadaver of a lost migrant—encompassing the moment of his death. Cerda joins the countless spirits who haunt the desert trails,

those lives lost attempting to cross. Through the use of the first-person narrator, Limón locates the reader in the position of Cerda, who dies in the desert, and is to meander and wander that necropolitical zone of erasure for the rest of time. By allowing the reader to inhabit the space of erasure, the zone of corporeal death, Limón situates the reader within an experience that might otherwise go forever absent.

Notably, as uttered by Cerda in the aforementioned excerpt, the *coyote* would often decide to abandon the undocumented migrants along the desert journey; in doing so, Cerda would condemn these migrants to death. It is important to highlight that the necropolitical power which manifests on the border as a space of erasure is not just attributed to the sovereignty of a nation-state, or the jurisprudence of the United States, but also a process underpinned by individual people. In choosing to abandon migrants, or not choosing to abandon them, Cerda exercises the "power and capacity to dictate who may live and who must die" (Mbembe, 11). Cerda simultaneously is a producer of the affective horror experienced by the migrants, while ultimately eviscerated by Guerrero, a character representative of the necropolitical narco drug trade, or an iteration of a war machine.

A fundamental cause of the northward 'flow' of migrants, as represented in Limón's *River,* is U.S imperialism in Latin America. United States economic policy in Latin America both *pushes* & *pulls* people northward. While *River* never explicitly names economic policy, such as the North American Free Trade Agreement of 1994, the text nonetheless invokes neoliberal policy in at least five different instances as the destabilizing force which propels twelve characters of the text to migrate. In Limón's text, Don Julio Escalante's narrative represents the experience of the displaced merchant and industrialist class in Latin America; a class demolished by U.S. imperialism and invasion of domestic markets. To that effect, Don Julio states:

> It happened around 1994, when banks lost money overnight, businesses began to wobble, people lost jobs and the economy went bad. Our life, as we used to know it, seemed to collapse. No one could explain what happened except that maybe the gringos and the deals they made with our government had something to do with it (50).

Don Julio recounts the temporal moment in 1994, in which the economy around his family's business radically shifted. Don Julio espouses the inability of people to comprehend how or why the economic shifts were occurring. The textual excerpt indicates the complicit role carried out by Mexican government officials to centralize economic power, maintain their own positions and support U.S. neoliberal policy in their domestic market.

Don Julio conveys the affective quality induced by the economic shift within his community and the end result; "Whenever I asked, I got vague answers, as if something shameful had happened. It was only after time passed that I realized what was happening: families were uprooting and making their way al norte" (51). The sense of shame experienced by people in Don Julio's narration can be, in part, attributed to the neoliberalist myth of individual merit, whereby a person/household succeeds or fails based solely on their work ethic, while discounting any form of structural or systemic imposition to their economic ascension as wholly fictitious. In other words, people in Don Julio's position may have felt a sense of shame, because of the capitalist ideological narrative that economic success and failure are reflections on a person's intrinsic worth. Furthermore, because race, class, and gender do not operate in isolation, it is accurate to discuss capitalist patriarchies and their representations within this scene. Don Julio, as the patriarchal authority of the household, may have felt *shame* not just because of a sense of economic failure within a meritocratic narrative, but also as a masculine failure—a failure to fulfill the societal expectations of a male to sustain his family in a capitalist society. In this sense, Don Julio and all other male merchant-class household figures he represents, experience a form of transnational economically induced racialized emasculation.

Similar to the sense of emasculation felt by Don Julio as a representative of the business-owner class in Latin America, Celia Vega's account of the experience of her husband represents another form of economically achieved racialized emasculation. Celia details the societal conditions caused by neoliberalist policy in Latin America as "there were too many people and hardly any jobs. Those were bitter times for all of us, confusing most of us, enraging others, especially since few could explain why such a thing was happening" (141). Under these conditions, Celia explains the way in which her husband, Zacarias, attempts to migrate to the United States in order to give their family favorable economic opportunities. During this journey, Zacarias is "mutilated" as "I saw that he had lost his legs above the knees," presumably amputated by a train in attempting to travel northward (143). Celia details her revulsion and sense of "indescribable disgust" when "Zacarias let me know that he desired intimacy with me," as "I don't know why, but I felt afraid when he asked me to submit to him" (143-144).

Zacarias represents the experience of the mutilated bodies in the hospital where Celia recovered him, the "boy missing an arm," or the other "with both feet sheared off. Everywhere I looked there were men missing limbs," but notably, the reluctance to engage sexually by Celia—the abject disgust she describes—indicates a form of emasculation reserved for those racialized and mangled people attempting to travel to *el norte* (142). Notably, the body of Zacarias signifies U.S. imperialist necropolitical power as "physical amputation replaces immediate death, cutting off limbs opens the way to the deployment of techniques of incision, ablation, and excision that also have bones as their targets. The traces of this demiurgic surgery persist for a long time, in the form of human shapes that are alive, to be sure, but whose bodily integrity has been replaced by pieces, fragments, folds, even immense wounds that are difficult to close. Their function is to keep

before the eyes of the victim—and of the people around him or her—the morbid spectacle of severing" (Mbembe, 35).

Although referenced in Don Julio's narration, the active complicity of the domestic dominant hegemonic culture in Latin America is focused in Doña Encarnacion's and Menda Fuente's respective narratives. Doña Encarnacion indicates that:

> I listened to the cry of my own people who talked openly how, over the years, los patrones first squeezed us off our ancestral lands into the dense forest [...] however, that was not enough for los patrones because they wanted more. They discovered that deep in forest is what they call oro verde, the green gold buried deep in the trunks of the mahogany trees [...] Our needs, however, meant nothing in the face of so much greed, and los patrones continued to push and to seize, year after year (98).

Doña Encarnacion centers the fiscal and financial interest sustained by the economic elite landowners to drive her and her tribe out of their ancestral homeland. In a pursuit of *oro verde*, or green gold, Encarnacion's narration reproduces the first imperialist conquest of indigenous tribes by *conquistadores* in search of gold. However, unlike the Spanish invaders, who practiced "the racial denial of any common bond between the conqueror and the native," the *patrones* are conceivably mestizos or Latinos; therefore, the producers of the necropolitical violence Doña Encarnacion describes are people who have chosen to ignore their ancestral link with the native population of Latin America in the capitalist pursuit of economic gain (Mbembe, 24). Similarly, Menda Fuentes narrates the brutal massacre of dozens of families including her own, not directly carried out by U.S. military forces, but endorsed and upheld by U.S. interests during the Civil War in El Salvador.

Notably, Menda commences her narration by recounting that "My life began when I saw my mama, papa and little sister murdered along with hundreds of other people at el Rio Sumpal as we tried to escape into Honduras. It was 1980," the same year President Carter commenced sending soldiers, military equipment, and $7 billion to uphold U.S. interests during the Salvadoran Civil

War, effectively creating what Mbembe reiterates as a war machine (18). Menda's narration describes the imperialist state-sponsored racialized necropolitical terror endured by Latin Americans in "privileged spaces of war and death" (Mbembe, 33). This horrific experience is enacted implicitly and explicitly by agents of the United States through the formation of a war machine, "implicated in the constitution of highly transnational or regional economies," or those economically invested in maintaining their interests, well before Menda's arrival to the southern border (Mbembe, 34). In other words, the horror reproduced by Limón's text focalizes more than the experience of the perilous journey across the desert, but centers the U.S. endorsed terror productive of the northward migration, into "that wasteland, who would never live to reach the land that had filled their heads with dreams" (157).

Here Mbembe's postulation of the state-sponsored massacre is effective in analyzing Menda's experience, because "if power still depends on tight control over bodies (or on concentrating them in camps), the new technologies of destruction are less concerned with inscribing bodies within disciplinary apparatuses as inscribing them, when the time comes, within the order of the maximal economy now represented by the 'massacre'" (34). Menda Fuentes' account of the war devastating El Salvador "from top to bottom, leaving behind a trail of death, misery and countless broken women left to care for fatherless babies," is an avenue to analyze not just the necropolitical horror produced at the border during the experience of crossing, but also the terror produced by the U.S. military involvement in Latin America which pushes people northward to flee annihilation (18).

The invasion of U.S. industrialized product and the evisceration of domestic Latin American economic markets which propel the 'flow' of migrants northward, is iterated in Nicor's and Borrego Osuna's narration, as "a new product" is introduced into local markets and demolishes

domestic maize production (162). The brothers detail how "a shitty two-kilo paper sack took away our jobs," as it became economically feasible for products mass produced in the United States, such as powdered flour, to compete with and outsell the domestic product within the market (162). While abject poverty compels the Osuna brothers to migrate north in search of labor opportunities, these same conditions can, and often do, lead people to eke out a means of survival in extra-legal business as Armando Guerrero and the Osuna brother's will, in drug-trafficking and sex-tourism.

Armando Guerrero's narration depicts a life in "the poorest family in Tonala," where he "was old enough to see that [he] was born into pure chicken-shit poverty" (70). After the failure of a crumbling scholastic education, Guerrero focuses on developing his career in the drug trafficking trade, as a means of emulating—by his account—the economic and masculine success he witnessed. Guerrero details that by the formative age of thirteen:

> What really nailed me was when I saw for the first time that those narcos packed guns [...] I noticed the women that hung around those men. They were beautiful, with ruby-colored lips, and they were always smiling, showing off big white teeth. They wore their hair long, and they dressed in tight outfits that showed off their butts and boobs [...] The more I looked at those women, and the guys that paid their way, the more I wanted to be part of the whole thing (73).

Simultaneously, Guerrero accounts the inextricable link between his sense of shameful abject poverty, the desire for capitalist wealth, and the patriarchal desire for power and beautiful women, as that catalyst which propelled him into the drug-trade in Jalisco. Ioan Grillo recounts the necropolitical system of killing for hire in *El Narco* (2011), as "Men with connections started looking at who knew how to shoot [...] Then they started paying people to do the big jobs. They started paying people to kill [...] One thousand pesos to carry out a killing. The price of a human life in Juarez is just $85" (165). Likewise, just as the capitalist patriarchal desire for power, wealth, and women drove Guerrero into the drug-trafficking business, it is the same imperatives that propel his migration northward to flee the violence of his trade. Guerrero stole a payment of 'one million

American dollars,' and to escape the imminent violent punishment of the drug-trafficking "war machine," he made his way to the U.S. southern border (Mbembe, 30). The expansive drug trade in Mexico exists because of the United States demand for the product, and a direct link between the implicit American volition permeating Guerrero's narrative is provided by the stolen funds in dollars; although not overtly indicated, the American drug market propels Guerrero's narrative and character arch, terminating in the U.S.-Mexico border.

Just as the drug trade is intimately linked with U.S. imperialist policies, similarly the sex tourism trade in Mexican border cities supply a demand created by the United States. Neoliberalist policies at once create the conditions of abject poverty compelling people into extra-legal means of survival, and create a market demand for those products, as in the case of the drug supply which ultimately 'flows' northward for American consumption, and prostitution in border cities. In an attempt to gather the financial resources necessary to venture a second journey across the desert, the Osuna brothers are left little choice but to enter the sex industry, where they could make "more money in one month than a couple of years bent over rows of plants" (167).

The Osuna brothers as representatives of a larger experience, encapsulated by sociologists Hepburn and Rita's claim, that "experts estimate that each year more than 20,000 Mexican children are victims of sex trafficking [...] Mexico City's human rights commission estimated in 2011 that 10,000 women were victims of human trafficking in the capital city [...] A 2012 Attorney General's Office report on sex trafficking states that at least 47 sex-trafficking rings operate in Mexico and that an estimated 800,000 adults and 20,000 children are trafficked each year" (*Human Trafficking*, 374). The body and sex as a commodity are also represented in Celia Vega's account, as she is to trade sexual favors in exchange for Cerda's guidance through the desert; "he said that he was

willing to take me on one condition: That I agree to pay him somewhere along the crossing. Once would be enough, he said. Although I knew what he meant, I said yes" (148).

The need to generate the funds necessary to attempt the crossing of the desert drives the Osuna brothers into the sex-tourism trade; it is their participation within the sex-trade and the horrific feeling of hopeless desperation while out in the desert, that compels Nicanor Osuna to engage in the act of self-annihilation, or suicide. It is through the representation of Nicanor's suicide that Limón's text invokes the affective quality of the horrific, the grotesquely absent, the erased and unnamable, while engaging within the paradigm of the necropolitical. The narrative plot progression which leads to the discovery of the Osuna brother's body commences with an invocation of the apparitional, as Borrego "saw something in the distance" which at first Menda could not perceive (155). The ghostly apparition in the distance is that of Nicanor "sitting under that little tree," to which Borrego directs an address "with the stress of emotion" (155).

In commencing this scene with the manifestation of an illusion—Nicanor with life, reposing under the shade of a tree—Limón cultivates a stressed affective response from readers, as both audience and narrative characters are in the same position: collectively, the reader, Borrego, and Menda will discover the grotesque horrific truth of Nicanor's demise. Through Menda the reader is alerted of something horrifying and unnamable, as

> she saw that there was something wrong with the man's posture. Something was off with the way his head slumped over his chest, and what was most off was that the man's rump did not touch the surface of the sand. He was hanging, not sitting, even her blurred vision could tell that much. In a moment she understood (156).

At first, Menda is unable to name what is amiss in the scene, but she understands that *something* is wrong. By the termination of the presently quoted excerpt, Menda—and perhaps the reader—comprehend what is wrong, yet this realization remains unnamed, it remains in the realm of the imaginary. As Imelda's desperate supplication for Borrego to stop his advance towards the corpse

of his brother goes unheard, she "gave up and slumped onto her knees while she covered her eyes," which exacerbates the production of affective tension in the anticipation of Borrego's realization of the horrific scene before him (156). As John Annerino notes upon an encounter with a similar grisly death scene, "Suicide has sometimes been the only escape for those suffering from the ravages of death by dehydration in America's killing ground" (9).

Limón subverts the established reader expectation in this moment of horror as Borrego approaches his brother's corpse, as both audience and Menda expect an appropriately horrified reaction, "she waited from the scream, but there was none" (156). Menda's iteration denotes *the scream* as the expected reaction to death, the appropriate response to the extinguishment of the life of family, and the absence of *the scream* invites us to examine the abject horror produced within this passage, analyze the character's responses to the scene, as well as our own as readers. Borrego's denial of the expected scream in horror beckons us to broach death in this instance within the necropolitical realm of the U.S.-Mexico desert in a manner reminiscent of Paul Gilroy's formulation of death as agency in *Black Atlantic* (63).

For both Gilroy and Mbembe, in the framework of the necropolitical, death is "far from being an encounter with a limit, boundary, or barrier, it is experienced as 'release from terror and bondage'" (39). This paradigm, which treats the act of suicide as a means of agency, a mechanism to end the suffering inflicted by external forces—like slave masters or neoliberalist immigration policies—enables us to understand Borrego's reaction to Nicanor's self-immolation. Borrego does not deliver the 'normal' horrified reaction to the death of his brother because the circumstances surrounding Nicanor's death are produced within a necropolitical zone of exception: a space in which death is the constitutive rational irrationality. After a few seconds of anticipation while awaiting *the scream,* Menda "dropped her hands from her eyes to see what happened. She," and

by extension the reader, “saw that Borrego now held his brother in his arms and that he struggled with the belt that bound Nicanor’s neck to a branch of an ironwood tree, so stunted that the only way for anyone to hang himself would be to sit and pull” (156).

The gendered, racialized, and capitalist driven necropolitical experiences, the horrors, endured by the migrants of Limón’s text reiterate a language of terror, death, and erasure from the realm of the living. An instance within Limón’s text in which the necropolitical experience of migrants is focalized in the “ghastly scene” of a truck in the middle of the desert (132). Menda, Nicanor, Borrego, and Celia encounter a truck, the inside panels of which “were covered with bloody scratches telling of a desperate, futile attempt to cut through the metal to let in air into that deadly trap” (133). The four migrants discover the abandoned truck filled with the cadavers of migrants trapped in the vehicle and mummified because of the extreme heat.

In this moment of the text, the living subjects can recognize their own impending death in the “desiccated, but not yet skeletons;” therefore, the migrants are able to live out their own approximating death, become self-aware of their own imminent demise (133). The horror produced by the encounter with the grotesque tomb of undocumented migrants in the desert, is an experience of state-sanctioned necropolitical terror enacted by weapons “deployed in the interest of maximum destruction of persons and the creation of *death-worlds*, new and unique forms of social existence in which vast populations are subjected to conditions of life conferring upon them the status of *living dead*” within the border zone and the regions from which the migrants escaped (Mbembe, 40). To nuance the literary representation of living entombment experienced by some migrants in the process of crossing the border, it is important to remember documented rescues of people in this situation; notably Annerino cites that in August 1998, “113 illegal immigrants were

rescued by Border Patrol agents in Sierra Blanca, Texas who found them suffocating in a tractor trailer rig 90 miles southeast of El Paso" (175).

While engaging with the horrors of Limón's *River,* it is vital to understand that these are the lived experiences of countless people, like 16 year old Alex Torres who crossed the border in the back of a container truck and proclaims:

> "No recuerdo bien, pero al menos dos chicas se desmayaron… no eran mayores, como entre 18 y 30. Cuando se desmayaron, le dijimos al guía: 'trata de comunicarte con las personas que van manejando'. El guía trató de comunicarse, pero nunca, nunca le contestaron. Dos horas después una persona sacó un hacha o un cuchillo, era como algo pequeño. El muchacho abrió un hueco en el cielo del troque y el agujero se abrió y el troque como que se expandió. Hazte cuenta de que se llenó de aire dentro. Pero tuvimos que esperar para que nos abrieran la puerta cuatro horas más. Todo esto pasó en México, aunque nunca nos decían donde andábamos. Pasé demasiado miedo"(*Univision*)(N.p).[188]

Most notably, it is crucial to recognize the fear experienced by actual migrants, real people subjected to terror at the border in their effort to access the United States without documentation. It is this real fear which Alex Torres details and Limón represents in literary form that is productive of an exclusive Latinx horror, one concerned with being buried alive in trucks or clandestine graves in the desert.

[188] This passage translates to: "I do not remember well, but at least two girls fainted… they were not older, around 18 and 30. When they fainted, we told the guide: try to communicate with the people that are driving. The guide tried to communicate, but they never, never replied. Two hours later a person took out a hatchet or a knife, it was like something small. The young man opened a hole in the ceiling of the truck and the hole opened and it was like the truck expanded. It was as if it filled with air inside. But we had to wait for them to open the door four more hours. All of this happened in Mexico, even though they never told us where we were. I was extremely scared"

Conclusion: The Lives of Infamous Latina/os

"Class, in fact, is the node or linchpin upon which
hinge all the other factors that make up one's identity
as Latino or Latina—national origin being just one among them"
—Rosaura Sanchez & Beatrice Pita ("These on the Latino Bloc")

In *The Open Graves of Latina/os*, I have centered the language, words, or voice of the Latin American subaltern—in the form of a speaker from the grave—in various necropolitical spaces, in the latter half of the 20th and early 21st century. I argue that this speaker from the grave is produced by a colonial and imperial inheritance of violence in the form of modern neoliberalism or a global racial capitalism operating within the prison, within homeless encampments, and at the U.S.-Mexico desert border. The production of death, absence, or removal from the realm of the living is enacted by United States economic policy: in other words, it is the legal language which functions as the utterances which divest people of their personhood (their rights, political relevance, and/or economic privileges) thereby enacting a process of transmutation. This process of change to a subject's personhood pivots around the iterations which, transcribed in the legal archive, function as real life magic—the legal sorcery of the law. It is this mythic and violent discourse between the law and the lives of Latinx people that is documented in the form of a voice which speaks from the grave denouncing the financially rationalized and absolved mechanisms of annihilation which have produced unmediated death in Latin American communities, both domestically and abroad.

A primary focus of this investigation into the voice which speaks from beyond the grave in Latinx cultural production of the late 20th and early 21st century has been the negotiation of space and form within each text. I argue that formal interventions such as the use of space, absence, and nonlinear temporality, are productive of a ghostly haunting voice, such as the voices of Cerda, Elena, or prisoner #21918, which narrates from beyond the grave. The actual physical space—be

it beneath the shadow of the freeway, in an isolation prison cell, a desolate desert, or hidden in a distant jungle—impacts the registration and experience of death by the deceased and those around them. For example, recall the corpses discovered and photographed by John Annerino in the U.S.-Mexico desert border I previously referenced in chapter four; note how the remoteness of the physical location impacts the manner in which the bodies of the deceased Latinx migrants are displayed, reclaimed, and handled after death (*Dead*, 19). However, the centrality of space in the examination of the necropolitical and the cultural production which represents those experiences is best academically theorized and encapsulated by scholar Jason De Leon who posits, "Border zones become *spaces of exception*—physical and political locations where an individual's rights and protections under the law can be stripped away upon entrance" (27). I argue that the prison and homeless encampment, like the border, are necropolitical spaces which annihilate people of color, the poor and the undocumented at disproportionate rates. *The Open Graves of Latina/os* attempts to highlight the horror within the Latinx counter-discourse in resistance to United States legal sorcery enacted in the interest of American neoliberalism.

This dissertation is my attempt to engage the Latinx counter-discourse against power through the realm of the horror, by centering the legal sorcery or the ability of the law to transform not only the experience of personhood, but also have a direct impact on life expectancy as well. The law, through a process of inclusive exclusion, generates a Latinx horror within the necropolitical zones of the prison, the desert border, and the homeless encampment. The manner in which the presently amalgamated Latinx cultural artifacts represent the horror within the prison include poetry written from solitary confinement (or 'the pisser' as it is also called), threats to the captive's life and safety, the racist informal code between some inmates and correctional officers,

the captive's removal from nature, from family, and disproportionate sentencing practices which funnel people of color into the prison, such as the Omnibus Crime Control Act of 1990.

The Latinx horror generated by United States law within homeless encampments include laws such as Arizona SB 1070—known as "The Support Our Law Enforcement and Safe Neighborhoods Act" from 2010—or "Stop and Identify" statutes, which grant metropolitan and highway patrol police the ability to function as Immigration and Customs Enforcement officers within the country itself. In this manner, agents of the state may use their discretion to determine if they suspect someone of being an 'illegal alien,' based solely on how that individual might look or behave. Stated differently, these laws allow police to target brown people—regardless of their citizenship status—for stopping and questioning procedures. Lastly, the Latinx horror emerges within texts which represent homelessness through the potential threat and exposure to vagrancy laws, which have a historical link to racial practices and procedures to target people of color and funnel them into the prison.

The horror experienced by the undocumented Latinx migrant is expressed and created through the laws which sustain the U.S.-Mexico border as a necropolitical geography. These laws and policies which target racialized communities have a long historical legacy within this country, we might for instance remember how the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 aimed at this exact proposition. Within the U.S.-Mexico border, the texts which I have amalgamated within this book contend with policies and programs such as "Operation Wetback" (1954), "Operation Gatekeeper" (1994), "Operation Guardian Support" (2018), and "Prevention Through Deterrence" policies enacted by the "Border Patrol Strategic Plan of 1994," all of which have had the effect of increasing the mortality rate of migrants at the southwest desert.

The unifying principle which coalesces within the Latinx texts presently engaged throughout this book is the condition of social death and corporeal death produced by and within necropolitical zones. These necropolitical spaces are locales in which the boundary between life and death is tenuous and porous; stated differently, these necropolitical zones are spaces in which racial and sexual violence is perpetrated or permitted in the preservation and maintenance of American neoliberalist economic policies. Therefore, the analytical vector which allows us to engage this otherwise heterogenous literary corpus is the socioeconomic position which unifies the experiences of Latinx people within necropolitical spaces, as posited by scholar's Rosaura Sanchez and Beatrice Pita in the epigraph to this chapter. I will discuss the issues and necessity behind the methodological decisions undertaken during this research in a few moments, but for now, let us continue exploring the concept of social death as it is reproduced within the desert border, the homeless encampment and penitentiary.

Within *The Open Graves of Latina/os* we have explored the necropolitical rationale which constitutes the social death condition within the homeless encampment, specifically within Los Angeles in the 1980s through 1990s, in order to broach the horror produced and reserved for the poor, people of color, mentally ill or physically diseased and the undocumented migrant. Notably, both protagonist and antagonist within *Tattooed Soldier* observe and remark that "All the people here seem to have the same vacant expression and hunched posture. They looked like walking question marks. *Refugees*. That was the term for people who lived like this, in makeshift tents, on barren ground" (23-24)[*emphasis mine*]. Antonio reflects that, while "Los Angeles makes you less than what you were back home," homelessness is a socioeconomic condition shared by African Americans, Latinx, and white people (23). Therefore, class emerges as the vector upon which inter-racial alliances might be formed, such as Antonio's friendship with the Mayor and Frank, who are

African American homeless that go on to state the necropolitical realities of Skid Row: "Down on the row you can get stabbed in your fucking sleep. People'll knife you for your wallet. The row is a fucking snake pit" (46). Presently, I have attempted to demonstrate the various ways in which homelessness, incarceration, and the experience of the undocumented migrant are regions (or spaces) which intersect with one another to produce the Latinx horror.

While the necropolitical space of homeless settlements reproduces a form of social death—consider people you might have seen ignore the presence of homeless people or actively try to act as if they are not there, or invisible—most poignantly represented in their disenfranchisement from the socioeconomic field, the prison as a necropolitical space produces a different form of living-death. In addition to the inheritance of the American gothic penal architecture from the system of chattel slavery, the prison system produces a form of social death or living-entombment in the form of the captivate that is biologically alive, yet socially irrelevant or dead. For an example of this, let us consider "I Speak In An Illusion" by Judy Lucero or prisoner #21918:

> "Care to spend a day in my House of Death?
> Look at my garden … are U amazed?
> No trees, no flowers, no grass … no gardens …
>
> I love and I don't
> I hate and I don't
> I sing and I don't
> I live and I don't" (*De Colores*).

In the first stanza, note that the poetic voice specifically names the prison as a house of death, not a detention center, not a correctional facility or any of the other inoculated terms by which it might be referenced; the speaker explicitly indicates the prison as a space of death in which the speaker is removed from the natural world, or the realm of the living. This removal from nature and the realm of the living is propounded and enforced in the anaphoric second stanza, constructed through four lines which terminate in negation. The second stanza posits the "illusion" of life that the

speaker is currently living in, most forcefully iterated in the concluding line—"I live and I don't"—thereby specifically indicating a condition of living-death or social death that I broach throughout the work of Lucero, Salinas, and Baca. The future trajectory of this project will be to trace the future of captivity technology and carceral technoscience which expands the "space" of the prison beyond the physical walls of enclosure.

Now, let us consider that while the previously engaged necropolitical locales—the homeless encampment and the prison system—target people of color, the poor, and infirm at disproportionate rates, the U.S.-Mexico border is a necropolitical geography which explicitly kills and destroys Latinx people who seek to carve out a sustainable means of living in the United States. It is important to remember that the conditions of poverty which these migrants are attempting to escape are the consequences of United States economic policies, like the North American Free Trade Agreement, or NAFTA. Most recently in the month of February of 2021, in Bexar county, Texas, a group of 80 migrants were suffocating in the back of an 18-wheeler truck container; they managed to call the police and are quoted as stating "We are dying" according to several news sources, including *The Guardian* and *NY Post*. This of course should remind us of the grotesquely ghastly scene encountered by Menda and her fellow migrants through the desert in *The River Flows North* addressed in Chapter 4, where the migrants discover a truck filled with mummified cadavers of migrants, or dreamers, on their way to 'the land of opportunity'. While we must note that the migrants, which originate from various Latin American countries, are united in their necropolitical experience at the U.S. desert border, they are also united, as Longoria notes in *Tattooed Soldier*, because they originate from "zones of conflict" designated by the United States (26).

When I have discussed the condition of social death or living death experienced by the captive, the homeless person, or the undocumented migrant yielded within the examined

necropolitical spaces, I have often considered the term "zombie" in my analysis; yet you will notice that in *The Open Graves of Latina/os,* I never use that term. I have chosen to do this as a political decision in an attempt to acknowledge, preserve and help reclaim that humanity of the socially dead person. The term "zombie" connotes, in my interpretation, a sense of forfeiture or failure, as it signifies that these bodies of the living dead are gone and irrecoverable or unredeemable in the sense that they are beyond help or (re)integration into the realm of the living or politically relevant. That is why, throughout this work on the cultural production of the Latinx horror I have not utilized the term "zombie;" it is because to some of us, these people are still people, not mindless monsters who roam seeking to infect or consume the life that is around them, as "zombies" are typically represented in texts.

Instead of discussing the "zombification" of the Latinx horror and person caused by neoliberal economic policies, both domestically and abroad, I have chosen to center the mythic in my engagement of these texts. It is through the mythic that we can understand the horror produced by the real lived experiences of absence (such as the natal alienation endured by the captive within the prison system), trauma that is unnamable (such as the migrants who commit suicide in the desert as a choice to escape the horror of the passage), the return of the repressed (such as the uncovered bodies and bones represented within the photojournalism and literary texts we have discussed in subsequent chapters), and nonlinear temporality (such as the oscillating between the past and present which aids in the creation of the voice which speaks from the grave, or the past). The analysis of the mythic represented within the horror found in Latinx texts allows us to understand the law as legal sorcery, or that magic that produces cadavers and erasure within impoverished locales and communities of color. For instance, let us consider the statement proffered by the narrator of *River* as they state that "The dead outnumber those who have lived to

tell what happens on that passage" in reference to the real experience of horror encountered by the Latinx migrant at the southwest border of the United States (2). The enormous amount of death experienced by undocumented migrants—who "haunt the pathway that might have taken them to *la ocho*"—is evoked in the terms of 'haunting' within the text itself (4). Therefore, works like *River* or texts produced by those entombed Latinx captives within the prison, or living underneath the freeway, are inviting us as sensible and attuned readers to engage with them as cultural productions of horror which stem from real lived experiences.

This project on the horror emergent out of the necropolitical realities of Latin American people stems from a larger concern with Latinx multimedia cultural production. For example, my future research trajectory incorporates multimedia examination of the extra-legally sanctioned murder of people of color by police officers, documented in video, live theater, and photography. This is an issue that people from impoverished communities of color—like the city of Pomona, El Monte, and East Los Angeles where I was raised—are all too painfully familiar with. The public execution of people of color by law enforcement officers, killings that often incur no legal repercussion against the uniformed murderers, is a culturally urgent topic that I explore through texts such as "The Many Deaths of Danny Rosales" (1983) by Chicano playwright Carlos Morton and *Muerte En Una Estrella / Shooting Star* (1984) by Sergio Elizondo. In recent cultural memory, we need only recall the public executions of Emmett Till (1941-1955), Eric Garner (1970-2014), Philando Castile (1983-2016), Breonna Taylor (1994-2020) or George Floyd (1973-2020), as evidence of the legally permissible cultural annihilation—under the guise of law and order—of racialized bodies. Therefore, the continuation of police extra-legal murders, their public spectacle and documentation prompts the importance of this work.

In the United States, people live in a post 9/11 era, in a world that does not remember life before the infringements of the PATRIOT ACT & PATRIOT ACT II. As scholar Ben Olguin notes, a consequence of the September 11 attacks has included raised levels of fatal encounters between police officers and males of color, as the national consciousness maintains a narrative of domestic and international black/brown criminality.[189] The future trajectory of this research project synthesizes the real video documentation which exists of police extra-legal murder, like that of Philando Castile, with the police murder represented in literary production such as "The Many Deaths". Both of these texts, the real documentation of the necropolitical police killing of a male of color and the play production which centers around a police killing and subsequent legal trial of the killer, demonstrate an exclusive horror experience reserved for people of color or those deemed disposable by the legal apparatus of the United States. Like the photographs of dead migrants at the Southern border captured by John Annerino, or the names of the dead printed in the real newspaper *El Gráfico* where Elena searches for those disappeared by the American installed military power in Latin America, real violent premature death is captured as testimonies in film or image. A modern and refined reader of the Latinx horror must maintain the necropolitical violence within the narrative or literary production in discourse with the evidence of real death and murder captured within the image.

When we discuss the Latinx horror, we are in discourse with a literary corpus which is based on the lived realities of real people—not unlike the real-life experiences witnessed by slave owner Matthew Lewis, experiences he then represented within his gothic novels such as *The Monk* (1796). However, there is an inherent problem with the demarcation of the Latinx horror, and that is the fact that the Latinx community is a heterogeneous and diverse tapestry of experiences,

[189] The criminality and rise in violent encounters with law enforcement that occurred post-9/11 attacks is explored in detail within Olguin's *La Pinta* (1-3)

political views, nationalities, and cultures. In fact, this tension within the demarcation of the Latinx community as a monolith is iterated by Menda in *River* as she states "I don't know why we're so hated by some mexicanos," in reference to her treatment as a Salvadorian within Mexico (33).[190] We might also examine the hostility directed at newly arrived Latinx people into the United States by other already established Latinx people within the same country, often from the same cultural/national background. Therefore, we might inquire, why engage these texts within the Latinx or Latinidad framework?

In order to understand the use of Latinx within our analysis of the necropolitical geographies represented in the prison, the homeless encampment and the desert border, I would like to center a conversation I was recently a part of with some colleagues at another university. I was asked, "why do you use the term Latinx, and not Chicanx, in your work?" This question was immediately followed up by a second question, "is it because many Chicanx departments across the U.S. are adapting and changing to Latinx frameworks?" I explained to these colleagues that actually, the horror represented within the texts that I engage within this project demand and necessitate the term Latinx over Chicanx, as the migrants in *River* originate from Mexico, El Salvador, and Guatemala. Furthermore, I reminded them that *Tattooed Soldier* is a text which focalizes the massacre, or quiet genocide, which occurred in the mountains of Guatemala and spurred the subsequent migration northward by refugees like Antonio. Lastly, of course I indicated that while captives Salinas or Lucero or Baca might identify as Chicana/o, they nonetheless indicate the multi-ethnic coalition and political engagement actualized within the prison walls, as is iterated by Salinas who notes his own political perspectives fashioned by Cuban and Puerto

[190] We can also consider the reality created by Donald Trump's administration policy which dictated that Latin American migrants seeking asylum as refugees in the U.S. are to "wait in Mexico," a decision which has led to rampant crime and persecution of the Central and South American migrants by Mexican nationals

Rican Revolutionaries he meets within the prison. Therefore, I told my colleague, the choice to use the term Latinx stems from the texts themselves and emerged fluidly within *The Open Graves of Latina/os.* I clarified for them the importance of celebrating and honoring the differences which exist within various Latin American populations and nationalities, while also noting that what unites these texts and experiences within my work is their necropolitical reality produced by United States foreign and domestic economic policy.

Cultural scholar Sylvia Wynters denotes the often-antithetical relationship between the personal and political artistic production. I begin our closing remarks with this quote, "My generation I think, would find it impossible to emphasize the personal at the expense of the political," because it belies a lived reality for millions of people, individuals for whom the personal is always at once political ("The Re-Enchantment of Humanism"). These are the people whom I have focused throughout this investigation into the necropolitical geographies sanctioned and sustained by American foreign and domestic economic interest. Throughout this book, I have maintained that United States legislation creates the macabre conditions of possibility for a uniquely Latinx horror evidenced through a voice which speaks from beyond the grave in order to testify against the mechanism of destruction currently annihilating our communities within American borders and abroad. In this manner the personal, the political, life and death, all intersect within this Latinx ideological matrix.

This work is personal to me; it is a methodical rationalization of why I—and countless people in my circumstance—know what we know and think how we think. The present work focalizes my lived experiences as a Mexican-American who became a Chicano, and the experience of my parents as undocumented migrants who entered into the United States in 1991. Ours was an education in violence, in coercion, in fear, in subjugation and in loss. This work is cathartic, this

work is urgent, and though this work is personal to me, it is nonetheless a record of experiences shared by countless *others.*

In a conversation with my father a few years ago, I mused with amazement at having reached my present age. I said, “I never thought I would make it past 18” years old. Naturally, my father was stunned and horrified at what I said, he could not believe that I had such cynical and morose perspectives. For my part, I was also shocked and confused; I could not understand why he failed to comprehend what I had said. Understandably, no father appreciates hearing that their offspring expects to die young. But how could he not comprehend that I could not envision life into maturity at a young age? There was constant death around us, like the death of my friend Corin Hensley who died in a drive-by shooting by our high school. Or how could he forget the constant struggle to survive and afford a livelihood as all my friends' families lost their homes and some fell into poverty during the 2008 housing market crash caused by the economic greed of major banks and mortgage lenders. I know he was aware of my childhood friends who were victims of gang violence in Pomona and Los Angeles, like Kevin King who was found dead with a gunshot wound to the head at my high school. I know my father knew too well of our family members incarcerated for their involvement in illicit activities, like Hugo Conchas who is my age, serving a twenty-year sentence in Illinois because of his entanglement in the drug trade to earn a better living for himself and his family. I know my father remembers well his own experience crossing the desert border, running for three days and nights with my mother, hiding like animals. How then, did he fail to comprehend me, that I had not imagined living this long? I did not choose the necropolitical as the subject of my research. I think that because of its perpetual presence in my life as a Latino—the way I came to understand the fragility of life as my peers died & the way I

experienced that some bodies had cultural value while others did not—the necropolitical was always already entrenched in my life.

What do I mean by necropolitical? I mean that the present work centers around the ways in which death organizes life, the manner in which death is irrationally rationalized as necessary for the maintenance of the existing American social order, the processes which deploy death or the threat of death as manifestation of power over an *other.* From a nascent and malleable state in life, I came to understand the central importance language plays in our—myself, my family, and countless *others* like us—survival. Our ability to negotiate, comprehend, and dialogue in the English language determined our existence and possibility. The literary production and cultural language that concerns this research project is the language of the law or reading the law as cultural text. Through engagement with the law as speech act, as performative utterance, as the inscription of cultural anxieties, as dominant hegemonic discourse in language, it is possible to gauge texts which speak back, otherwise known as 'resistance literature,' productions which are a counter-discourse to power. It is through the synthesized engagement of dominant and counter-hegemonic discourse in literary production, that a full discursive field can be appraised.

This research inquiry grapples with 'resistance literature' produced within, or representative of, spaces in which death is woven into the fabric of life, or necropolitical zones of erasure. These are regions and locales in which life and death are negotiated as part and parcel of the established order of things. For instance, the prevalent difference in a drive-by shooting occurring here in La Jolla, California, the heart of affluence where the average income per capita is highest in all the United States, and that same horrendous drive by shooting taking place in Compton, La Puente, or Pomona, a city which once ranked 8th in the nation for homicide rates per

year. Same act, in different spaces, carry different meanings. In the former, totally unimaginable, while in the latter, a part of everyday quotidian life.

At this point, I have briefly iterated what this project means by the use of necropolitical and the centrality of zones, geographies or space in this logic of organizing life and death; but what do I mean by erasure, and what does it mean to be erased, to be made absent, and absent for whom? The ideological framework that influences my interpretation and negotiation of erasure and absence is that of the negative dialectical model in the establishment of a subject through an object, the use of what is outside oneself to establish our own tenuous border of existence. The dialectical model of signification allows us to appreciate that which purports not to be there, it provides a formula for which to engage that which is supposedly excluded and demonstrate that within that exclusion—the negative, the repressed, the abject—is actually included at the very center of the conceptual or subject formation. Through the dialectical, we may recover what professes not to be there, like a ghost; thus, with this analytical framework, the absent, the abject, and the erased are perceptible in relation to the establishment of meaning.

Finally, *The Open Graves of Latina/os* is an invitation for those who dare to enter the realm of racial terror and horror through text; through my incorporation of horror represented in literary texts coupled with testimonies from real people who lived or experienced those forms of horror, I hope to illicit some change within you, the reader. Since you have read to this point, now you know about the death worlds created by American economic policies, both domestically and abroad. I would like to end this project with a quote by abolitionist William Wilberforce, that has haunted me for years now, "You may choose to look the other way, but you can never say again that you did not know."

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