

National Association for Chicana and Chicano Studies

35th Annual Conference Proceedings

Poesía, Baile y Canción:
The Politics, Implications, and
Future of Chicana/os' Cultural Production

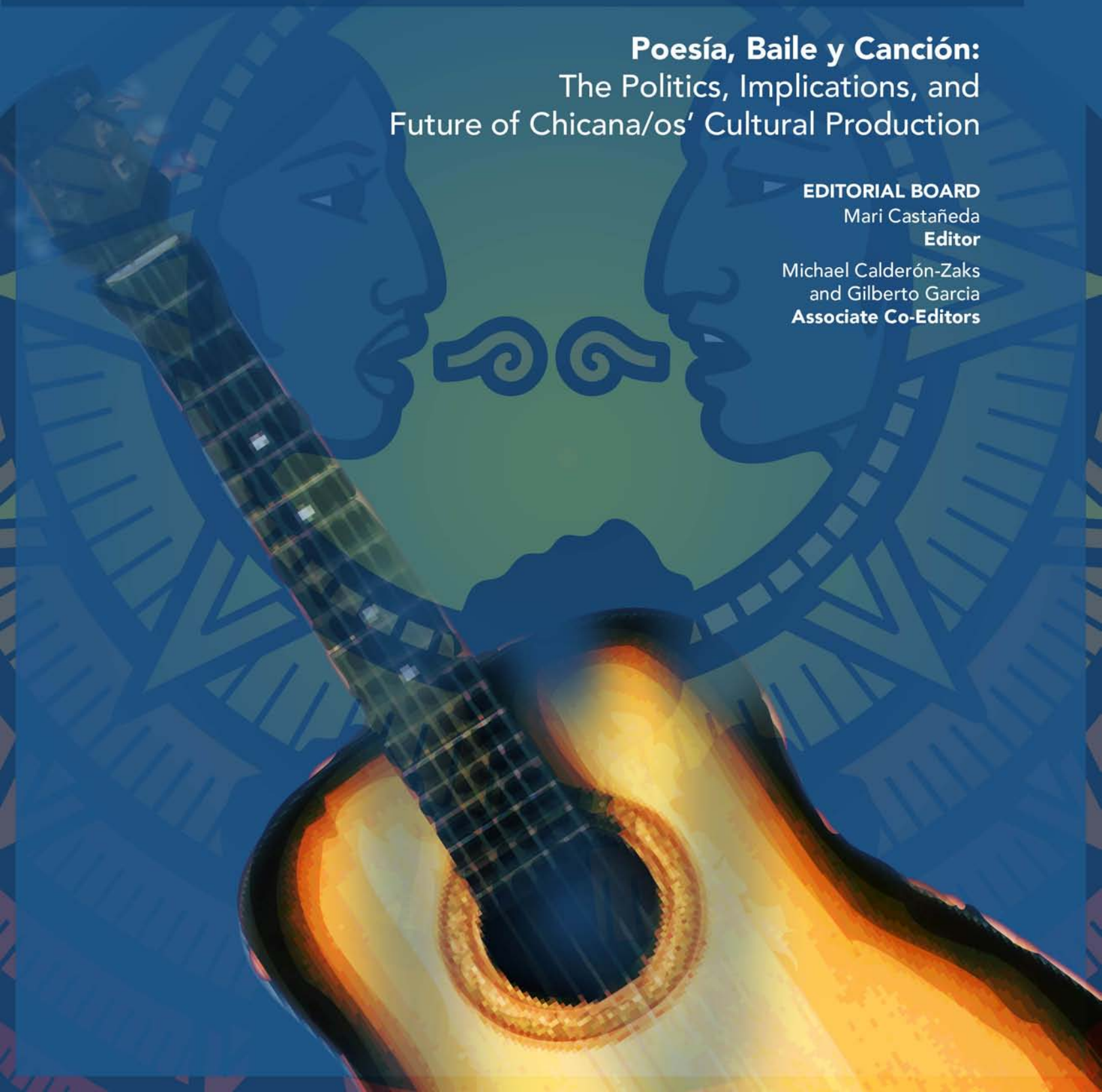
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Poesía, Baile y Canción: The Politics, Implications, and Future of Chicana/os' Cultural Production

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2008 NACCS Conference Proceedings

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Editorial Board for the NACCS 2008 Proceedings

Introduction to the 2008 Conference Proceedings
“Poesía, Baile y Canción: The Politics, Implications, and Future of Chicana/os’ Cultural Production”

Introduction

The online publication of the proceedings for the 2008 conference held Austin, Texas marks the beginning of a new era for the NACCS! Rather than using precious tree resources to print the proceedings, the National Board decided at the mid-year meeting before the Austin conference to publish the proceedings electronically. Not only would this ensure that all future conference proceedings would be available to members from any computer terminal at any time, but new members would be able to review the intellectual and activist trajectory of the association through e-proceedings. In addition, as digital media and information communication technology become critically important for online and offline participation in our communities and academic circles, the National Board believed NACCS needed to be at the forefront of the expanding landscape of electronic engagement. The Editorial Board for the 2008 Proceedings is honored to have been selected to take the lead of the first ever online publication of NACCS proceedings. These peer-reviewed proceedings are very important because they are a selected group of papers that act as a public record and snapshot of the various issues, case studies, and issues that NACCS members were engaging within their conference presentations.

The call for papers reminded emerging and seasoned scholars on the nature of Chicana/o Studies scholarship: this scholarship has challenged, contested and revised both the interpretations of the power of culture as well as its role in the formation of social structures, policies, practices and identity. Just as important, it called for a research, which examined the cultural politics of the Latina/o communities as reflected in “theory and praxis” and its “complex multilayered” engagement. It specifically sought contributions from mujer-produced cultural productions and their role in highlighting diverse issues from gender, sexuality to voicelessness as well as scholarship exploring the transnational turn in the formation of Chicana/o Studies. And finally, the call included not just exploring Chicana/o cultural politics but how ~~to~~ they are important in the movement towards social justice. The following section briefly summarizes each of the papers in the respective order developed by 2008 Editorial Board however we are also aware given the interactive nature of digital media members may develop their own logic to the assemblage of papers presented here. This is actually the exciting element of online proceedings and we encourage members to submit their thoughts to the NACCS blog about other potential ways to organize the papers. Many thanks to Kathy Blackmer-Reyes, Julia Curry Rodriguez, and the National Board for their vision, their invaluable help throughout this process, and their forward-looking acknowledgement of association’s most important resource – the incredibly committed, scholar-activist members that help NACCS thrive.

The Papers

The first four papers of the 2008 proceedings are papers by NACCS members featured in conference plenaries. The first paper is by Juan Mora-Torres, ““La Primavera del Inmigrante”: Media and Voice in the Making of Chicago’s Immigrant Rights’ Movement, 2005-2006,” and his paper was featured in the conference Thematic Plenary. Given the conference theme on the politics and political nature of Chicana/o cultural production, Mora-Torres’ paper not only historicizes the Immigrant Rights Movement that had captivated the U.S. for the last several years, but also the role of media in both organizing and documenting the movement. His paper especially discusses the centrality of Mexican Chicago in the initiation of the movement and the development of a national archive that will capture oral histories of Latinos who have participated in the Immigrant Rights Movement.

The following two papers are by the 2008 Frederick A. Cervantes Student Premio Recipients: graduate winner, Alvaro Huerta and undergraduate winner, Joaquín Castañeda, both of whom had their papers featured on the Student Plenary. Huerta’s paper, Looking Beyond ““Mow, Blow and Go”: A Case Study of Mexican Immigrant Gardeners in Los Angeles,” examines the social organization of Mexican gardeners and their participation in the growing informal economy of Los Angeles. His contribution in this understudied area of research is critical for challenging the notion that informal economies lack social networks and social capital, particularly in the unregulated landscape industry. Castañeda’s paper, “The Oak Park Redevelopment Plan: Housing Policy Implications for a Community Undergoing Early Stage Gentrification,” documents the historical legacy and impact of redevelopment housing policies on a community outside of Sacramento. He argues that such policies not only gentrified the neighborhood, but in the process pushed out the most vulnerable members of the community for a redevelopment plan that was often unrealized and problematic.

The final paper in these 2008 proceedings that was featured in one of plenaries at the conference is by Anne Marie Leimer, “Chicana Photography: The Power of Place,” and her paper was presented at the Chicana Plenary. In keeping with the spirit of this dialogic plenary, we present Leimer’s paper as being in conversation with another member’s paper selected for the proceedings. In the papers written by Leimer and Amanda Maria Morrison, the scholars explore Chicana/os cultural productions in music and photography. In both papers the authors contest and challenge both the interpretation of the power of culture as well as its impact on policies, practices and identity. On the one hand, Leimer’s paper is an examination of the photographic work of three Chicanas: Laura Aguilar, Kathy Vargas, and Delilah Montoya. Through the application of the ideas of space and place originating from the work of Lippard and de Certeau, Leimer’s searches the meanings of the “sites and bodies” in the work of the Chicana photographers. For Leimer, the photography of Aguilar, Vargas, and Montoya, present through the images of bodies and sites simple everyday acts, and transformed the geographic location of space into an intimate place: “something intimately known, something that holds human history, something of great power.” Thus, Leimer concludes the work of the photographers leave traces of the lives lived in those geographic sites transforming the landscape and “reveal the power of place.”

On the other, Amanda Maria Morrison’s “Too Mex for the Masses: Bringing Mexican Regional Music to Market” is a critique of the Latino music industry’s ghettoization of this genre and the promotion of a more hip Latino image capable of crossing into the mainstream of American music taste. According to Morrison, this musical genre represents an identity of Latinidad, which threatens the dominant cultural order, and fails to appeal to the non-Latino consumer’s perception of Latino culture. Applying the notion of “tropicalism”, a concept that presents a view of Latino culture with an “intrinsic eroticism and “hot bloodedness”, influences the marketing and promotional practices, thus, marginalizing Mexican regional music within the domestic entertainment industry. Moreover, the entertainment industry’s interest in reaching out to the non-Hispanic market and the more affluent Latinos reveals a class-based and racialized discourse that further marginalized Mexican regional music. In spite of the marketing success and popularity of Mexican regional music, entertainment industry promoters continue to ignore the power of this genre and remains ghettoized in the United States.

Cultural production was a means of challenging hegemonic, from photography and music to playwriting. Virginia Grise and Irma Mayorga challenge hegemony over women’s bodies by giving agency to the *panza* in a way that departs from traditional scholarly writing formats. As co-authors of *The Panza Monologues*, a paraphrasing of *The Vagina Monologues*, taps into the lived experiences of Chicanas and other women. Using San Antonio as their setting, the authors link the *panza* to beer and bars, respectively representing a beverage that exemplifies comradery and a space where commoners

can discuss community politics, especially the politics of the everyday in Chicana lives. Moreover, "everyone...has a *panza* story."

From the politics of the *panza* to representations on eating, Elizabeth Kessler examines the written discourses on Latinas and food. The discourse on Latinas and food is highly gendered and sexualized. Kessler documents both the scientific and literary discussions, combining Sigmund Freud and Cristina Garcia. And what does a link between food and sex reveal about power relations within the family or the community? Is food therapeutic for multiple difficulties in the everyday Latina life? Kessler explores these questions.

While other papers did not focus on "cultural productions", never the less, the scholarship highlighted the importance to study the increasingly complex formation of identity in the Chicana/o community. From the early focus on a "mestizaje" that centered on an indigenous-European identity, the new scholarship explores the Afro mestizo tradition ignored in previous Chicana/o scholarship. Rebecca Romo's "Blaxican Identity: An Exploratory Study of Black/Chicanas/os in California" examines the nature of Black and Chicano identity as well as the processes influencing their decision of racial self-identification. First, Romo reviews three bodies of literature: Black, Chicano, and dual-minority multiracial identity. Based on face-to-face and telephone interviews, Romo collected data on the experience of Blaxican identity from a sample of 12 individuals (five females and seven males). The questions ranged from the typical demographic variables to questions about family history, issues of identity, relationships and networks and family socialization. Most of the respondents preferred a dual identity or Blaxican racial/ethnic identity, even if their physical features favored one group over the other. The study concluded the family, school, peers, and residential neighborhoods influenced Blaxican identity development and experience.

Another important research subject, that is just as significant and important in the formation of a critical Chicana/o Studies scholarship is the application of theory in the interpretation of the politics of culture today. One critique of the politics of culture is represented in Sandra K Soto's "Transnational Knowledge and Failing Racial Etiquette". The paper raises the question on the impact the transnational experience in the development of Chicana/o scholarship and its centrality in the theoretical problems of "geopolitical power differentials and the study of power". Soto critiques the simplistic formulations of transnational approaches, which simplifies it as scholarship made by just crossing borders and ignoring other major political forces at work. According to Romo, this may lead to a new form of American exceptionalism, where the scholar ignores the nature of "transnational capitalism". Instead, she proposes the development of a perspective grounded in queer theory that moves the scholar and scholarship away from the "intersectionality" approach in Chicana/o Studies.

Speaking of "transnational capitalism," Alejandro Wolbert Pérez examines the anarchist ideals about love by Ricardo Flores Magón in his prison letters to Maria Talamaca. Dreams and love are guiding counter-hegemonic principles for Magón. Wolbert Pérez borrows from Chela Sandoval's theory that "love can guide and analyze "theoretical and political '*movidas*, --revolutionary maneuvers" as a transformational means to decolonizing the self. An examination of these letters reveal the imagined possibilities in that historical moment before the Mexican Revolution. The fact that Flores Magón never married his lover to whom is also the subject, Maria Talavera, due to their anarchist anti-property leanings was an attempt to demonstrate that an alternative to capitalist relations in the everyday life and toward liberation was possible. Not much has been documented of his agency during imprisonment, but his letters reveal that he remained an agent for revolutionary change.

The similar social and political processes between the United States and Mexico did not end at the oncoming of the Mexican Revolution. The similarities continued through World War II and beyond. In documenting an example of poetry as agency, Selfa Chew recovers the history persecuting Mexicans of Japanese ancestry in Mexico during World War II. Memory is recovered through interviews, newspaper articles, and the poetry of Martin Otsuka. While many are familiar with the incarceration of Japanese Americans during World War II, little is known of Japanese Mexicans during that same era. Otsuka's poems illuminate the similar experiences of Japanese Mexicans.

Increasingly, historical literature has been examined as a means of measuring popular and statist sentiments. Daisy Salazar analyzes late nineteenth century *nuevomexicano* pro-statements as a means of countering Anglo attempts to marginalize *hispanos* in "Eusebio Chacón's Statist Narratives of Nuevo Mexico." To counter Anglo degradations of *nuevomexicanos*, Chacón constructs a new narrative that whitens their image vis-à-vis "la gitana," the "outsider." Like much of the older Spanish-Mexican order that was in decline throughout the borderlands region, Chacón defends the older order against the new Anglo one while maintaining the tradition of racializing those on the margins. Such was an exercise in matching the valor of whiteness with the new Anglo power structure and finding common ground with them by racializing "outsiders."

Rounding out the Proceeding is Paula Straile-Costa's "Indigenous Ecology and Chicanada Coalition Building in the dramatic works of Cherrie Moraga: "Living Models" for a Sustainable Future" paper which examines the environmentalist views of one of the most renowned Chicana writers. Straile-Costa analyzes Cherrie Moraga's trilogy, *The Last Generation*, *Heroes and Saints*, and *the Circle in the Dirt* and uncovers an Chicana/o environmental discourse grounded in a materialist interpretation ("Class before race before sex before sexuality."). According to the author, Moraga's dramatic works present what she calls a "re-valorization of pre Columbian and Native American values, beliefs and ways of life.". While the indigenous ecology and Chicanada coalition building sounds problematic, Straile-Costa argues that Moraga resolves the problem by shifting the meaning of land to a more inclusive definition that extends to a planet without frontiers and its resources: the land encompassing the body and the earth in building such a coalition. Straile-Costa concludes that the plays are documents to Chicano history and successful Chicana/o activism applicable in the struggle against global threats. Thus, this essay reflects clearly some of the central ideas of the conference call for papers, such as the examination of the politics of cultural production and a call for social justice around environmental issues. As Straile-Costa sates, "As such, we must read them as urgent calls to action, on behalf of Mother Earth and all of us who depend on her".

To conclude, the Editorial Board for the 2008 Proceedings hopes NACCS members will appreciate the all work and effort that authors have contributed in order to make this inaugural online proceedings a success. Without the authors, there would be no proceedings, and as a collaborative effort, we have deep gratitude for their willingness to share their scholarship.

Submitted con respeto y solidaridad,
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***“La Primavera del Inmigrante”: Media and Voice in the Making of Chicago’s
Immigrant Rights’ Movement, 2005-2006***

Set in motion by opportunist politicians for whom anti-immigrant policies were vote-getters, the House of Representatives passed the *Protection, Anti-Terrorism and Illegal Immigration Act (H.R. 4437)* on December 16, 2005. Better known as the Sensenbrenner Bill, this was going to be the “Children of Men” (film) solution to the so-called “immigration problem.” If it had gone beyond the House of Representatives and Senate, it would have been the harshest immigration legislation piece in the history of this country because it would have criminalized eleven million people living here without legal documents.

The latest chapter in Chicano and Latino history should begin with the Sensenbrenner Bill for the reason that it served as the catalyst that forced Latinos to close ranks and band together for the first time in U.S. history. They understood that this law was not only a racist attack on the undocumented but also on their community, considering that the undocumented constituted an important component of the makeup of the Latino community. Galvanized to defeat Sensenbrenner, thousands of Latinos marched nationwide in the spring of 2006 and, in doing so, moved the immigration battleground from the halls of power to the streets. More than anything, it was the mass mobilization that defeated the Sensenbrenner Bill.

We don’t know exactly how many people participated in the mass mobilizations that took place in March, April, and May of 2006. With activities taking place in 200 locations, millions of people marched in towns, cities, and suburbs during these three months that stunned the country. Around two million people participated in the March 25 and May 1 mobilizations in Los Angeles. Over a million marched in Chicago on March 10 and May 1. With activities taking place in 70 localities on May 1, the Immigrant Civil Rights’ movement used the slogans of “A Day without Immigrants” and “The Great American Boycott” to mobilized three to four million people. These actions redeemed May Day, the international working class day that originated in Chicago but had long been denied its political and historical significance in this country.

In this paper I will discuss the relationship between media and Latino voice (agency) as two ingredients shaping Chicago’s Immigrant Rights movement. Using photographs, videos, and interviews as recorded components of contemporary history, along with press clippings and my own field notes, I will examine the July 1, 2005 and March 10, 2006 mobilizations. For our discussion on the media and voice, I dedicated more time to the July 1, 2005 mobilization for the reasons that, unlike the March 10 event, it has not received much attention, and it provides us with a beginning point for examining change over a period of time.

In our understanding of the national Immigrant Rights’ movement, Chicago is important for two reasons. First, Chicago served as the spark that ignited the mass mobilizations of 2006. Depending on the source, anywhere from a low of 100,000 (mainstream press) to a high of 500,000 people (organizers) participated on the March 10 event. This was the first mass response to the Sensenbrenner Bill and, up to this point, the largest mobilization of Latinos in the history of this country. The event received national media coverage and the visual images emanating from Chicago captured the attention of the entire country, serving as a catalyst that galvanized not only Latino and immigrant communities but also other progressive forces. Soon after this event, the organizers made the call for the May 1 nationwide mobilizations, a strategy that aimed to legitimize the struggles of the immigrant as the continuation of the workers’ struggles of the past.

Second, the March 10 protest began largely as a response from the Mexican community to Sensenbrenner but by May 1 the movement had become inclusive with the incorporation of other communities, ethnic groups, and faiths. For the most part this unity was sustained for another year. Around 350,000 marched on May 1, 2007, a figure that was less than the two mega-marches of 2006 but much larger than any other event in the rest of the country.

July 1, 2005: The Dress Rehearsal for the Immigrants' Spring

The Sensenbrenner Bill was the final product of over a decade of anti-immigrant politics that began in 1994 with Proposition 187 in California. During this time right-wing views on immigration, such as those expressed by media pundits like Bill Dobbs, Pat Buchanan, Michael Savage, and Rush Limbaugh, and intellectuals, such as Samuel Huntington, became mainstream. Meanwhile, hate groups like the Minuteman Project gained "respectability" and politicians won votes by arousing fear of the Mexican immigrant in xenophobic voters (for example, Pete Wilson in California). By the same token, this built-up in anti-immigrant politics, especially after 9/11, generated a growing undercurrent of irritation within the Mexican and Latino community. The feeling in the community was that of "ya basta! ('enough is enough')," that the community had been pushed as far as it could be pushed. Unlike the right-wing proponents of anti-immigrant politics, Immigrant Rights advocates did not have direct access to the mainstream English-language media. Denied of this outlet, their feeling of "ya basta!" was manifested in various forums, from Spanish-language talk radio to music, especially in *norteño* and underground hip hop and *rock-en-español*.

In Chicago this penned up anger of "ya basta!" was channeled into action when 50,000 Latinos, mainly Mexicans, marched on July 1, 2005. Unlike the mass actions of 2006, this mobilization went unnoticed even though it was the largest demonstration of people in Chicago since the 1960s. This event represented a mass response to the post-9/11 intensification in anti-immigrant politics. In the case of Chicago, it was a reaction to a Minuteman Project announcement that they were going to organize chapters in Chicago, beginning in May. Ironically, the main Minuteman spokesperson was a misguided Mexican woman, Rosanna Pulido. Enraged by the publicity that the mainstream media was giving to the Minuteman, Father Marcos Cárdenas of Our Lady of Fatima, a parish in the Brighton Park neighborhood, made calls to Rafael "El Pistolero" Pulido (no relation to Rosanna), a popular radio host for La Q-Buena station, challenging him to use his powers over the radio airwaves to denounce the Minuteman. Emma Lozano, of Centro Sin Fronteras, joined the chorus of those who dared him.

Perhaps because of the radio ratings war between "El Pistolero" and Miguel "El Chokolade" Silva of La Ley station, Pulido opened his morning program to the audience, often broadcasting from different Mexican neighborhoods (Father Marcos and Emma Lozano also made regular appearances). For the month of June "El Pistolero's" program turned into an open forum in which hundreds of people expressed their views on immigration. Sensing a decline in his ratings, "El Chokolade" did the same (he also had Rosanna Pulido on his show). In this competition for ratings, both radio personalities endorsed the July 1 mobilization and actively promoted it in their programs. The July 1 event took place on a Friday and workday. In terms of numbers, it was a success as 50,000 people congregated on Archer and Ashland, a meeting point for Pilsen, McKinley Park and Bridgeport, three neighborhoods that are located in the eastern edge of the growing Mexican metropolis that covers Chicago's Southwest and adjacent western suburbs. They marched to the Mexican barrio of Las Empacadoras (Back of the Yards), the community that Upton Sinclair immortalized in his novel, *The Jungle*.

Upon arrival at the designated site of the march, it became quite obvious that this event lacked the basics of organization, from logistics and crowd security to press releases. To a large degree this had been due to the fact that only a handful of parishes and organizations, such as Centro Sin Fronteras and Casa Aztlan, endorsed the event. The near absence of organization allowed the participants the complete freedom to articulate their own demands that called for family reunification, citizenship for all, better education, and an end to deportations and the war in Iraq. They brought hundreds of hand-written signs and banners in English and Spanish (often misspelled) such as: "Nosotros los niños tenemos los mismos derechos que el presidente Bush"; "I'm a window cleaner. I'll trade my job for anyone who wants it"; "Bush come de nuestra mano barata"; "Somos ciudadanos americanos y apoyamos a los ilegales"; "Legalización: Todos somos hijos de dios"; "Work without borders"; "El gigante no estaba dormido, estaba trabajando." A few brought megaphones and used them to shout slogans such as "No somos uno, no somos cien, pinche gobierno, cuéntenos bien", "Aquí estamos y no nos vamos, y si nos deportan, nos regresamos," "Si se puede," and "La raza unida jamás será vencida."

The near-absence of organization and the spontaneity of the crowd created an atmosphere that resembled a Mexican carnival. Charros on horseback headed a march that included mariachis, drummers, paleteros (ice-cream vendors), and thousands of people wearing white t-shirts, the symbol of protest. The Mexican flag was everywhere and the rally began with the mass singing of "*México lindo y querido*."

Without a doubt, credit for the success in the turnout should be given to the two Spanish-language radio stations, La Q-Buena and La Ley. Their competition for ratings forced "El Pistolero" and

"El Chokolade" to use their programs as a forum on immigration and to promote the mobilization. In the end, "El Pistolero" won the ratings war and over the next months became the most recognizable and visible Latino celebrity in Chicago. Although activists often discussed whether he should be recognized as a Civil Rights leader (he perhaps harbored that illusion), "El Pistolero" came to command a great influence over a growing audience that numbered in the thousands. However, as the signs, banners and slogans indicated, the participants did not come to march in a state of absent-mindedness, following the Pipe Piper, "El Pistolero." In this case, business and politics came together. For "El Pistolero" and La Q-Buena station, it made good business sense to open the airwaves to the audience (the ratings), an undertaking of great significance for it provided "voice" to the voiceless.

Although the mobilization was, in terms of numbers, a success, it failed in making an important political statement (although apparently Senator Edward Kennedy received word of the event and immediately called to congratulate the organizers). With the exception of a few articles that appeared in the alternative Spanish-language and left-wing press, the mainstream media (print, radio, and television) for all practical purposes ignored the July 1 event. The Chicago Tribune did not report on it while the mainstream Spanish-language press covered it as news briefs. In fact, the Chicago Tribune had an article on the Minuteman on the day of the march. Moreover, it did not have any visual impact. It did not receive much in television coverage nor did it disturb the orderly workings of the city since the march took place in a Mexican neighborhood. Ignored by the mainstream media, the demonstration left few historical references for future scholars (only a handful of news briefs and short articles).

Mexican Chicago

In order to understand why Chicago had three mega marches in 2006 and 2007, it is important to examine the make-up of the Mexican/Latino community. Even though Latinos (mainly Mexicans) have been residing in Chicago since World War I, they are, for the most part, a fairly new community. The Latino population grew from 324,000 to 1,607,000 from 1970 to 2004, contributing to 96 percent of the entire demographic growth of the Chicago metropolitan area during these years. Eighty percent of the Latinos are Mexicans (or around 1,300,000), making Chicago the second largest Mexican urban center in the U.S. after Los Angeles.

The "typical" Latino family (overwhelmingly Mexican) in the Chicago metropolitan area is bi-lingual, bi-cultural, and bi-national: English and Spanish are spoken in 76 percent of the homes; 84 percent of the children under 17 were born in the U.S. compared to 35 percent of the adults; and, over two-thirds of all children have at least one foreign-born parent. Given the family make-up, there are few Latinos who do not have a relative, friend, or neighbor that does not have documents. When the implications of Sensenbrenner sunk in, Latinos came out in defense of family and community. In interviews conducted with children and teenagers who participated in the 2006 marches, they reported that they felt a mixture of fear and anger with regards to Sensenbrenner. Anger because they viewed it as a direct attack on Latinos and fear over the possibilities that parents, siblings, relatives, friends and neighbors could be deported. Skribe from Kinto Sol, a local hip hop group, captured this feeling in noting that "as products of two cultures, we have this immense anger (coraje)."

The participants in the mega marches were conscious of their actions and clear on their demands. They came out because they were somehow living with the dilemmas of immigration and all of its dimensions (from everything that illegality implies to sending money back to their countries to sustain their families). Offended by the label of criminals that Sensenbrenner placed on people without documents, they, along with their supporters, marched during work days and they were willing to face the consequences of their actions: from punitive actions, such as employment dismissals, to loss of wages. They came out because they were offended ("coraje") by the criminal label that Sensenbrenner placed on people without documents.

Sensenbrenner, on the other hand, had the effect of forcing those affected by the Bill to search for their own answers on why it should be defeated. A few examples from interviews provide insights on how they dealt with this problem. Adults (regardless of citizenship status and nationality) pointed out that, instead of criminalizing the undocumented, they had earned the right to legalization. That legalization was the compensation for laboring in low-paying work that no "Americano" was willing to do. In a few words an *indocumentado* pointed out the importance of legalization, "we need documents so that we could all be equal." A self-proclaimed Christian from Oaxaca informed me that his congregation held a serious discussion on whether it was right for a Christian to participate in the May 1 mobilization. This congregation was far removed from politics, but for this occasion it found

"answers" in the bible and accordingly "Jesus was an immigrant and Moses went to rescue the Hebrews in Egypt. They were all immigrants." It was this type of awareness-that immigration bonded an entire community- that united, at least for a while, young and old, citizen and non-citizen, worker and small businessmen, Catholics and Protestants, and crossed Latin American national lines. It brought together soccer clubs, churches, home-town associations, unions, community and student organizations on March 10 and May 1.

March 10, 2006: La Primavera del Inmigrante

Once the Sensenbrenner passed, it took a few weeks for Latino community leaders to digest the full implications of this Bill. A handful of activists met in January to discuss ways of responding to Sensenbrenner. Within the next few weeks the meetings involved dozens of activists who met at Casa Michoacán, the headquarters of the emerging anti-Sensenbrenner movement. The activists, representing various community and political organizations, agreed to call for a mobilization on March 10, hoping for a turnout of a few thousand people. No one expected a turnout of 350,000 people.

Once again "El Pistolero" should be recognized as a major force behind the success of this mobilization. He kept the airwaves opened to the audience and actively promoted the event, as did other Spanish-language radio stations. Most of the people I interviewed in this event informed me that "El Pistolero" had been their main source of information. As a messenger, his radio program reached its highest ratings during these months. Moreover, "El Pistolero" reached the peak of his popularity, one that he enjoyed for only a brief time (his popularity went into decline when he withheld, until the last moment, his endorsement of the May 1 mobilization).

Credit for the massive turnout should also be given to the leadership of the anti-Sensenbrenner movement and the organizations that they represented. In addition to veteran Immigrant Rights' activists, such as Emma Lozano and Carlos Arango, a new group of leaders emerged, mainly immigrants from Mexico, such as Artemio Arreola and Jorge Mujica. Although they came from different political backgrounds and experiences, they came together in concluding that the defeat of the Sensenbrenner was the most urgent task facing the Mexican/Latino community. One of the end-results of the anti-Sensenbrenner movement was the creation of the Movimiento 10 de Marzo (M10M), a coalition of dozens of organizations with a collective leadership.

In terms of organization, the March 10 event was the mirror-opposite of the July 1 demonstration. Besides a united leadership, the event was backed by almost all the Latino organizations in Chicago (from home-town and church associations to community agencies). These organizations provided dozens of volunteers who worked in the different committees dealing with outreach, media, publicity, logistics, and security.

One of the unintended effects that a higher form of organization had on "voice" was that it eroded the "*pueblo's*" initiative for self-expression, an impulse that was clearly manifested during the July 1 march. For example, the organizers urged the participants to bring American flags as the symbol of the peoples' loyalty to this country. Aware of the power of the media as a medium of messages and its history in covering past Immigrant Rights' mobilizations (focusing on the Mexican flags), the organizers intentionally hoped to use the media as a tool to change public opinion by projecting the image of the American flag as the flag of immigrants. With that in mind, some organizations distributed American flags. Compared to the July 1 event where the Mexican flag predominated, the American flag was slightly more visible than the Mexican on March 10 (on the May 1 mobilization, the American flag was more predominant).

One also noticed that there were fewer home-made signs on March 10 than on July 1. In fact, most of the signs on March 1 were distributed to the participants by organizations, unions, and left-wing political parties. Thus, instead of the innocence of the lone sign that read "Legalizacion: todos somos hijos de dios," the most common sign was the mass-produced and politically concrete "Todos somos America." Instead of the slogan "Aquí estamos y no nos vamos, y si nos deportan, nos regresamos," the common slogan for the March 10 event was "Hoy marchamos, mañana votamos."

As the first mega march of 2006 and the pioneer of the "Immigrants' Spring", Chicago's March 10 mobilization energized the Latino community and, because of the 350,000 protestors, it attracted world-wide attention. The unexpected mass turnout forced the English and Spanish-language media to cover the event. Consequently, television, video, and photograph images emanating from Chicago had an electrifying effect on all immigrant communities, encouraging them to do what Chicago did on March 10. In a matter of days the Movimiento 10 de Marzo received hundreds of calls and e-mails throughout the country requesting assistance on "how to do" what Chicago had done. Taking

advantage of the moment, the Movimiento 10 de Marzo made the call for the national May 1 demonstrations.

Conclusion

This found solidarity among different peoples and organizations created a new political awareness in which the powerless could gain power only if they acted in unison and only if they forcefully placed their demands on those who had real power. Recognizing the power of numbers, the Immigrant Rights' movements took the offensive and, in doing so, put the great powers on defensive, such as the Republican Party. Big business became aware of the economic might of the immigrants' power as workers and consumers, and the media had to tone down, at least for the moment, its one-side view of the so-called "immigration crisis," a "crisis" that it largely fabricated.

The mass mobilizations of the spring of 2006 captured the attention of the national and international media like no other "Latino" social movement of the past. The mass mobilizations changed the image of the Latino community and of the eleven million immigrants living here without legal authorization. The media had labeled the Latino community as a "sleeping giant," a community of more than 40 million people that was numerically large but weak in political weight. In the spring of 2006 this alleged "sleeping giant" turned into the "awakening giant," a sudden force with the capacities to change the political direction of this country. The undocumented had been perceived as social outcasts who, because of their legal status, lived in constant fear, did not question their social position in life, and consequently did not participate in the civic life of this country. These apparently passive individuals were suddenly seen in a new light: as a pro-active people who demanded legalization so that they could have the same rights and opportunities as any other citizen. Up until the time of the Sensenbrenner Bill, a sign in one of the demonstrations captured the sense of the past, "el gigante no estaba dormido, estaba trabajando."

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Looking Beyond “Mow, Blow and Go”: A Case Study of Mexican Immigrant Gardeners in Los Angeles

The first requisite of a good servant is that he should conspicuously know his place.
Thorstein Veblen, *Conspicuous Consumption* (2006)ⁱ

Introduction

In a front-page *Los Angeles Times* article, “Perils in the Palms,” Sam Quinones reports on the tragic death of a 19-year-old gardener, Gregory Rodriguez, who fell to his death while trimming a palm tree in East Los Angeles. Rodriguez’s death sheds light on the many underreported dangers Mexican immigrants (both documented and undocumented) face while working in this country. Not protected by governmental regulations and labor codes, paid gardeners—similar to day laborers (Valenzuela 1999, 2001, 2003) and domestic workers (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994, 2001; Mattingly 1999, 2001)—mostly operate within America’s informal economy. While much has been written about Mexican immigrant farm workers, garment workers and janitors (Cameron 2000; Milkman 2000; Milkman and Voss 2004), especially given organized labor’s successful efforts to organize these workforces throughout the late 1900s, little research has been conducted on Mexican paid gardeners. To fill this gap, I explore how this industry works, its social organization, and how Mexican gardeners view themselves and their trade in the informal economy. This study also demonstrates how a select group of self-employed, Mexican gardeners utilize their social capital and social networks to benefit from Los Angeles’s unregulated landscape sector.

This single-case study represents an in-depth inquiry on the social and organizational structure of the paid gardening trade, focusing on the experiences and views of self-employed, Mexican gardeners in the informal industry. In addition, this critical case study (Yin 2003) aims to test the theoretical frameworks of social capital, social networks and informality to determine their relevance in explaining how Mexican gardeners successfully navigate this unregulated market.

The paper is organized as follows: The first section is a review that discusses the existing literature on Mexican gardeners and reviews the three theoretical frameworks addressed in the case study: social capital, social networks and informality. The second section provides an outline of the research methodology and issues inherent in this type of ethnographic case study. Lastly, the bulk of the research findings are presented in section three, which describes the workforce characteristics of paid gardeners in Los Angeles. Section four outlines the theoretical framework I found to be most useful in the case study: social networks.

In closing, I conclude with recognizing the positive contributions of Mexican gardeners to individual clients and society in general through their labor by providing us with greener communities, safer yards and cleaner environments. In addition, I pose several questions to policy makers, planning scholars and practitioners, as we attempt to better understand this relatively unknown service sector.

Literature Review

The scholarly literature on Mexican immigrant gardeners in the U.S. is scant (Cameron 2000; Pisani and Yoskowitz 2005, 2006; Steinberg 2006). In the first study of its kind, Pisani and Yoskowitz’s (2005) article on contract gardeners in South Texas sheds light on this relatively unknown Mexican dominated workforce. Based on a survey of 244 individuals (122 gardeners and 122

employers), the authors' study investigates the nature of this occupation, the nature of the relationship between the gardener and employer and the status of gardeners in this industry.

The preliminary findings on contract gardeners in South Texas generally coincide with the known employment characteristics of Mexican gardeners in Los Angeles, as documented by this case study and other sources (Cameron 2000; del Olmo 1997; Huerta 2006a, 2006b; Medina 1998; Pulgar 1995; Quinones 2006). However, due to the socio-economic and demographic differences, including migration patterns, between the small borderland city, Laredo, Texas, and the nation's second-largest municipality, Los Angeles, California,ⁱⁱ more research (both quantitative and qualitative) is required on this informal sector to establish conclusive findings between the two regions.

In their study, Pisani and Yoskowitz (2005, 235-6) found that Laredo gardeners were mostly male, Mexican, Spanish speaking and heads of households. The authors add:

...gardeners tend to be married, Mexican by birth and nationality, work full time as a gardener (though a large portion, 45 percent, work as a gardener part time), middle aged, and possess a middle school education. Three-quarters of gardeners are able to work year around in the trade and have been doing so on average for more than 12 years.

In addition to these traits, the authors also reported on the level of skill needed to enter the trade, and the reasons workers become gardeners:

Gardening is a low-skill occupation that attracts a concomitant employee skill set. This was evident when we asked gardeners why they chose their occupation. Economic necessity, ease of entry, and lack of education or higher-level skills accounted for the bulk (69.5 percent) of the responses.

Apart from the ease of entry into this sector, familial and friendship network ties also play an important role for workers entering this occupation (Tsukashima 1995/1996). Of the fourteen personal in-depth interviews conducted by this author with Los Angeles gardeners, seven of the gardeners attributed their current employment status as gardeners to a family member or friend. For instance, in a personal interview I conducted on March 29, 2006, Guadalupeⁱⁱⁱ — a gardener from Zacatecas, Mexico, with over 30 years of experience in the industry — primarily attributes his employment in this industry to his kinship network ties:

I learned from my family. My father and brother were gardeners. That is how I got started. My father was a gardener and my brother first came to the U.S. to help him. I was twenty-one years old when I started working as a gardener.

In addition, Pisani and Yoskowitz (2005, 237) also investigated gardener wages in the informal sector, finding that gardeners on average fared better than minimum-wage workers in the formal sector:^{iv}

...full-time gardeners are able, for the most part, to work five days a week, averaging about 40 hours per week year around, with weekly earnings of about \$300. This wage rate — about half of the time dictated by the employer [home-owner], a fifth of the time by the gardener, and one-third of the time through negotiation — clearly exceeds the minimum wage in south Texas (\$5.15 at the time of the study) and ranks above the reported formal sector wage in the industry of \$7.55 in Laredo using either the calculated or self-reported hourly wage rates.

However, while gardeners in the informal economy earn more than those in the formal economy, the authors found that informal workers lacked access to most government-sponsored programs and services, such as Social Security, worksite protection and other benefits enjoyed by legal U.S. workers. Since most of the gardeners surveyed in this study worked in the informal economy, their lack of access to basic government services and protections, including workers' compensation and medical insurance, makes them vulnerable workers (Flaming et al. 2005; Hamilton 1999).

Additionally, according to Pisani and Yoskowitz (2005), over 40 percent of the 122 gardeners surveyed lacked proper documentation to work legally in this country. While gardeners without proper

legal status in this country benefit from employment in the informal sector, these workers — like day laborers (Valenzuela 1999, 2001; Valenzuela et al. 2006) and domestic workers (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994, 2001; Mattingly 1999, 2001) — experience the constant threat of deportation and abuse by unscrupulous employers and enforcement authorities.

In the following section, I outline some of the basic theoretical concepts of social capital, social network and informality in order to test their relevance for Mexican gardeners in Los Angeles's unregulated market.

Social Capital Theory

In this section, I draw from the social capital literature to determine its applicability to this case study. The following, however, represents only a few characteristics of social capital.

Focusing on social capital as an *individual good*, Briggs (2004, 152) relates how this resource helps individuals to both solve problems and deal with everyday life by “drawing on norms of trust and reciprocity and other social bonds through which so much of our lives are informally organized.” In general, individuals may benefit from this social resource for a wide variety of daily activities, ranging from borrowing money to borrowing a cup of sugar from a friend to getting a ride to work or school. Like many immigrants in this country (Zolniski 1994), Mexican gardeners draw on their social capital on a daily basis for securing employment and meeting other basic needs. For example, instead of hiring someone off the streets (e.g., a day laborer or placing a classified ad in the local paper), a self-employed gardener typically accesses his social capital resources to meet his business needs, e.g., hiring a relative or close member from country of origin.

In addition, by differentiating between *social support* and *social leverage*, Briggs (2004, 152) demonstrates how the former helps individuals to “get by or cope with particular challenges” without escaping the “regular calamities that drain us,” while the latter assists individuals to “get ahead” in life. In this case study, we can clearly see how individual gardeners in the informal economy can benefit from both aspects of social capital. For example, if a recently arrived immigrant with limited work skills and education wants to “get by,” he can get an entry-level job as a gardener, working long hours with little pay, through a family member or friend. In a different situation, if an ambitious gardener, who has several years of experience in the trade, wants to “get ahead,” he can request support from his current employer (or another established gardener, such as a relative) to help him initiate his own business.

Social Networks

In his classic article on social networks, “The Strength of Weak Ties,” Granovetter (1973, 1378) argues the importance of weak ties (social connections between different groups) “as indispensable to individuals’ opportunities and to their integration into communities.” While not dismissing the importance of strong ties (social connections within cohesive groups), Granovetter (1973, 1360) emphasizes the importance of weak ties:

Most network models deal, implicitly, with strong ties, thus continuing their applicability to small, well defined groups. Emphasis on weak ties lends itself to discussion between groups and to analysis of segments of social structures not easily defined in terms of primary groups.

In short, Granovetter (1973) demonstrates that while strong ties (e.g., kinship, friends and co-ethnics from cohesive groups) can be beneficial to individuals of a particular community, they can also be counterproductive, since these groups tend to isolate themselves and form cliques whereby preventing effective community action outside of their group. Meanwhile, the author argues that weak ties (e.g., employers, elected officials, non-profit organizations and members outside of cohesive groups) provide positive benefits between different groups with vast resources.

In her study of Latina domestic workers (*domesticas*) in the San Francisco Bay area, Hondagneu-Sotelo (1994) draws on Granovetter's (1973) research on social networks to highlight how *domesticas* (both novice and veteran) utilize their strong and weak ties in this informal trade.

As part of her study, the author documents how novice Latina immigrants access their strong ties to secure employment as *domesticas*. However, while this employment opportunity represents a positive aspect of strong ties, the novice *domestica*, who works for a veteran *domestica* with an established client base, may also experience the negative aspects of strong ties by working long hours

for little pay. Thus, the novice *domestica*'s strong ties represent both positive (employment) and negative (low-wages) outcomes.

On the other hand, the author also demonstrates how the veteran *domestica* also benefits from her strong ties with the novice *domestica*. Instead of placing an ad in the classifieds or hiring a stranger from a temporary employment agency, for example, the veteran *domestica* accesses her strong ties to hire a trustworthy assistant.

The veteran *domestica*, however, mostly benefits from her weak ties with her employer contacts. By establishing good working relations with her employers — mostly middle-class women — the veteran *domestica* obtains referrals from her weak ties to help expand her client base and business opportunities. "For the Latina women in this study," Hondagneu-Sotelo (1994, 55) documents, "employer referrals were used to develop and maintain a weekly or bi-weekly route of employers."

Strikingly similar to domestic work, from my study of Mexican immigrant gardeners in Los Angeles, I also found social network patterns between novice and veteran gardeners. In addition to the pros and cons of both weak and strong ties between gardeners, I will discuss how veteran gardeners (and also some novice gardeners) benefit from their weak ties with their employers.

Navigating the Informal Economy

Once considered primary features of underdeveloped economies, scholars during the past two decades have documented the existence and vitality of the informal economy in advanced countries (Portes et al. 1989; Portes and Sassen-Koob 1987; Sassen 1994). Debunking the notion that the informal economy will wither away with the rise of advanced capitalism, Sassen (1994, 2289) argues that the informal sector cannot be separated from the formal economies of highly developed countries:

As I shall employ the term, the 'informal economy' refers to those income-generating activities occurring outside the state's regulatory framework that have analogs within that framework. The scope and character of the informal economy are defined by the very regulatory framework it evades. For this reason, it can only be understood in terms of its relationship to the formal economy—that is, regulated income-generating activity.

In an earlier study, Castells and Portes (1989, 12), provide a related definition of the informal economy, emphasizing the unregulated characteristics of this sector:

The informal economy [is] a process of income-generation characterized by one central feature: *it is unregulated by the institutions of society, in a legal and social environment in which similar activities are regulated* [authors' emphasis].

It is primarily in this unregulated context that self-employed Mexican gardeners conduct their business throughout the greater Los Angeles area and beyond (Flaming, Haydamack, and Joassart 2005; Pisani and Yoskowitz 2005, 2006).

In a recently released study, "Hopeful Workers, Marginal Jobs: LA's Off-the-Books Labor Force," Flaming, Haydamack, and Joassart (2005) provide a snapshot of workers in Los Angeles's unregulated economy, including the landscaping service sector. Since the U.S. Census Bureau does not have data specifically on self-employed gardeners, the authors of this study used the U.S. Census Public Use Microdata Samples (PUMS) combined with other sources such as the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) to report on landscaping service workers, including both contract gardeners and workers employed for a licensed landscaping company.

Overall, the authors found a significant number of workers in Los Angeles's informal sector (Flaming, Haydamack, and Joassart 2005, 1):

Our best estimate is that on a typical day in 2004 there were 679,000 informal workers in the county and 303,800 in the city. These workers are estimated to account for 15 percent of the county labor force and 16 percent of the city's labor force. Undocumented workers are estimated to make up 61 percent of the informal labor force for the county and 65 percent for the city.

Given the nature of this sector, the informal sector does not offer the same legal protections that most workers in the formal economy enjoy, such as minimum wage, occupational safety rules and prohibitions against discrimination. Nevertheless, for those who lack legal employment documents or viable employment opportunities in the formal economy this sector provides a means of survival for many workers.

Research Methods

The present study on Mexican gardeners represents one of the few studies conducted on this workforce in this country. Given the scant scholarly literature on this trade, I conducted an exploratory study of this informal, service sector. In addition, as a critical case study this research aims to test theories of social capital, social networks and informality.

Based primarily on qualitative methods, my research consists of an in-depth study of a particular subject: the paid gardening trade in Los Angeles's informal economy. By conducting a holistic study, the research establishes a better understanding of this informal trade. More specifically, I explore the social organization and structure of this trade, focusing on the views of Mexican gardeners and their perspective of this unregulated industry.

Through ethnographic research during 2004 through 2007, I conducted about one hundred informal conversations with Mexican gardener in the Los Angeles area, fourteen open-ended personal interviews, several focus groups and participant observations. In addition, I analyzed current and archival documentation to complement my field research. This included analyzing research on Japanese-American gardeners, who dominated this industry in California from the late 1800s through most of the 1900s (Hirahara 2000, Kobashigawa 1988, Tsuchida 1984, Tsukashima 1991, 1995/1996, 1998).

My interview sample consisted of self-employed, Mexican immigrant gardeners. My informants represent men in their mid-30s to late-60s who have been working as paid gardeners in this country for several years. I initially obtained access to my informants through my organizational contacts, as noted below. Focusing on the social networks of my informants, I also conducted "snowball sampling" techniques to increase my informant sample size. According to Cornelius (1982, 392), "snowball sampling" among undocumented Mexican immigrants plays an important role in securing low refusal rates for this vulnerable subpopulation:

I and other researchers who have used the technique of "snowball sampling" among kinship / friendship networks of Mexican indocumentados [undocumented] have found it to be generally successful in keeping refusal rates low and facilitating the conduct of the interview...

Organizing Gardeners and "Insider / Outsider" Status

Researchers commonly experience tremendous obstacles when studying vulnerable populations, such as marginalized Mexican immigrants and other racial minority groups in this country. In her study of West Indian immigrants and poor African Americans in New York, for example, Harvard sociologist Mary C. Waters (1999) expressed concerns about her status as a white, privileged researcher studying marginalized, minority groups. To deal with some of her field research concerns, she hired African American researchers to help with some of the interviews at an inner-city public school. Discussing her methodology, Waters (1999, 357) writes:

The question of trust and access was a very serious one in this research [i.e., fieldwork in New York, inner-city schools]. Would young black students answer honestly my probing questions about their family life, their racial identity, their behaviors, and their beliefs about touchy issues like race relations and weapons on school? I had hired an African American student from Harvard to do interviews for me because I was worried that my race, gender, and ages would make it difficult for students to trust me.

Unlike Waters, however, I had already established a level of trust and access with my key informants prior to embarking on this research project. From 1996 through 2004, I served as the lead organizer for the Association of Latin American Gardeners of Los Angeles (ALAGLA)—the first group founded to service the interests of Latino gardeners in Los Angeles and beyond.

Through ALAGLA, I had the opportunity to work directly with hundreds of Mexican gardeners (and others from Latin America) on an organizational level against the City of Los Angeles's efforts to ban gasoline-powered leaf blowers—an important tool of their trade—within 500 feet of residential areas (Boyarsky 1997; del Olmo 1997; Huerta 2006a, 2006b; Orlov 1996).^v Not only did I establish a professional relationship based on trust and reciprocity with hundreds of paid gardeners, but I also established long-term friendships with many gardeners that afforded me, as a researcher, access to this informal workforce.

In addition, as a son of poor Mexican immigrants embedded in the culture (rural Mexican) and language (Spanish) similar to many paid gardeners in Los Angeles, I quickly overcame many of the common ethnographic obstacles faced by non-Latino researchers who study Mexican immigrants and their cultural norms, work habits and daily practices in this country.

However, given my own privileged position as a researcher from two prestigious universities (UC Berkeley and UCLA), I am still considered an outsider. As a result, while I feel very confident in my abilities to translate and interpret my data from the perspective of someone within the culture, as someone who is far removed from the hardships and labor-intensive practices of this workforce, I cannot completely negate my outsider status in this research project. To accommodate my limitations as an outsider, therefore, I provided my key informants with interview transcripts and drafts of my research to check for errors in translation and obtain feedback concerning my portrayal and findings of their informal industry. That being said, I believe that my status as an “insider / outsider,” provides me with an advantageous position to carry out this study.

Workforce Characteristics of Paid Gardeners in Los Angeles

On any given morning in Los Angeles, Mexican immigrant gardeners can be seen working the front lawns of middle income to affluent communities. Primarily dominated by men (Flaming, Haydamack, and Joassart 2005; Pisani and Yoskowitz 2005, 2006), the age of a gardener varies from a worker in his early teens—usually the son of a gardener—to a worker in his 60s and, occasionally, and individual past retirement age. In their study of 112 gardeners in South Texas, Pisani and Yoskowitz (2005) found the mean age of gardeners to be about 40. Further research is needed, however, in order to get more representative data on this population.

Labor Dynamics, Structure and Internal Hierarchy

Paid gardeners represent independent contractors who negotiate lawn maintenance agreements with homeowners or renters on an individual basis. Instead of formal, legally binding contracts, the gardener (commonly the owner of the business) and client strike oral agreements based on the size of the lot, type of work requested (e.g., mow lawn, water plants, trim and remove bushes), frequency of visits and estimated time to complete the job. Gardeners typically charge from \$80 to a few hundred dollars per month; however, due to an abundance of cheap labor and fierce competition among gardeners for clients, prices can go as low as \$50 per month for a homeowner (Boxall 1998; *Los Angeles Business Journal* 1999).

Gardeners organize themselves in small crews. The crews usually consist of the owner and several workers, who are often family member, friends, hometown associates, temporary day laborers, and/or hired help from the available immigrant labor pool.

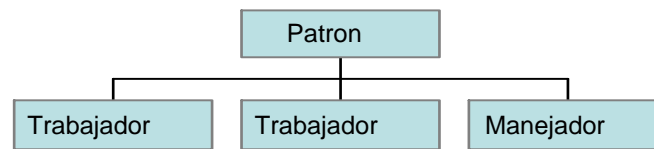
The owner manages all aspects of the crew and business operations. This individual, who will heretofore be referred to as the *patrón* (boss), owns all the tools, truck(s) and equipment (e.g., leaf blower, lawn mover and weed trimmer) and has direct contact with the clients. The *patrón* is also responsible for covering all operational and personnel costs, such as equipment maintenance, auto payments and insurance, gasoline and oil.

The worker, who will heretofore be referred to here as the *trabajador*, is paid for his services like most hired help in any cash-based, micro-enterprise. Contrary to the formal economy, however, most *trabajadores* get paid by the day, from \$50 to \$75 along with a lunch. Since many *trabajadores* may not have a bank account due to their lack legal status in this country, they usually get paid in cash on a daily or weekly basis.

In addition to the *patrón* and *trabajador* position, crews also include *manejadores* (drivers). Apart from performing their driving duties, the *manejador* also takes on similar work responsibilities of a *trabajador*. Given that undocumented workers cannot legally obtain driver licenses in California, the *manejador* has become an important part of the basic crew structure (see Figure 1). As a result, due

to the high demand for workers with driver licenses, *manejadores* command higher wages, ranging from \$75 to \$100 per day, compared to *trabajadores*.

Figure 1. Basic Gardener Crew Structure



Although the *patrón* and the *trabajador* often times work together at the job sites, there is a clear hierarchy between them. The *patrón* dictates everything from work pace to work hours to breaks. There is a mutually beneficial relationship between the *patrón* and the *trabajador*, since it benefits both parties to maintain a harmonious, albeit unequal relationship. On the one hand, it benefits the *patrón* to establish a good working relationship with the *trabajadores* in order to operate an effective and efficient business. Since the *patrón* may have more than one truck operating at the same time, it is very important for him to ensure that his *trabajadores* will be working diligently without his presence.

Apart from the concern that the *trabajadores* are not being productive at the work sites, the *patrón* must also contend with the possibility that the *trabajadores* may steal his clients or equipment. It is very common for an ambitious *trabajador* to offer a client a cheaper monthly rate, luring the clients away from the *patrón*. For example, the *trabajador* may approach the client and ask him or her how much he / she is being charged monthly and subsequently offer a lower price, where the *trabajador* will perform yard duties on his off time.

On the other hand, the *trabajador* stands to benefit from having a good relationship with the *patrón*. Apart from earning a wage and learning the trade from the *patrón*, the *trabajador* may save enough money to eventually establish his own gardening business with the help of the *patrón*, as noted below. In addition, the *trabajador's* employment options may be limited to the informal economy due to lack of legal status in this country.

La Ruta (the route)

The success of these small businesses primarily depends on the number of homes the gardeners' service on a regular basis. Referred to as *la ruta* by paid gardeners, this network of homes represents the paid gardeners' main asset.^{vi} A successful *ruta* usually takes years to develop. Thus, successful paid gardeners tend to be long-term residents compared to recently arrived immigrants.

Also, given that *patrones* typically entered into the workforce as *trabajadores*, this trade potentially provides upward mobility opportunities for ambitious, hard working individuals. Unlike many jobs available to recent immigrants in the formal economy (e.g., dish washers, janitors, car wash workers, farm workers and factory workers), paid gardening allows for some *trabajadores* to eventually acquire their own *rutas*, thereby initiating their own business ventures. For example, prior to establishing his own gardening business, Jaime—a successful gardener from Zacatecas, Mexico, with over 15 years experience in the industry—worked at a warehouse without any prospects of upward mobility given his lack of formal education and limited English skills:

I enjoyed my job at the factory, but it paid too little and I didn't see any chances of becoming a supervisor. In Mexico I attended school up to the 6th grade since I had to work in the fields to support my family. I probably would have still been working at the factory if it weren't for my father-in-law who had his own [gardening] business. I worked for him as a helper. Later he had some extra houses on Saturday's that he gave me. This is how I got started in this business.

If the *trabajador* aspires to have his own *ruta*, for example, he can purchase a *ruta* from the *patrón*. *Rutas*, depending on their size and the amount of revenue they generate on a monthly basis, commonly sell for thousands of dollars. In many circumstances, the *patrón* and the *trabajador* are part of the same extended family network, where the *patrón* provides the *trabajador* (e.g., son, brother, brother in-law or cousin) with a *ruta* either free of cost, as noted above in the case of Jaime, or below

market value. The *patrón* may also gift a *ruta* to a *trabajador* as a token of appreciation for the *trabajador's* many years of hard work and dedication.

As a result, we can clearly see how the *ruta*, has exchange-value. That is, like commodities in the formal economy, *rutas* can be exchanged for cash, traded for other commodities or gifted. According to Marx (1994, 243), exchange-value represents the important characteristic of a commodity:

If commodities could speak, they would say this: our use-value may interest men, but it does not belong to us as objects. What does belong to us as objects, however, is our value. Our intercourse as commodities proves it. We relate to each other merely as exchange-values.

Unlike the formal economy, however, *rutas* are exchanged in the informal market without government regulations, sanctions or issues of taxation. Since paid gardeners mostly operate in a cash economy, neither the seller nor buyer of the *ruta* pays any taxes on this business transaction. Nevertheless, the *ruta* serves as a vital asset for a select group of Mexican immigrant gardeners to succeed in the informal economy.

Working Conditions

While the *patrón* and his *trabajadores* are constantly trying to improve their business ventures and individual opportunities, respectively, the gardeners put in long hours, working up to seven days a week, including holidays (Hanrahan 1996; Pulgar 1995).

Coming mostly from poor rural communities in Mexico, many of these individuals are accustomed to long, arduous hours for little pay. According to many of the paid gardeners I have spoken to over the past 10 years and those interviewed for this research project, they are willing to work long hours and on weekends, without complaining, so that their children have a better future via education in this country. Also, many of them put in long hours in order to send money to relatives in Mexico through monthly remittances.

In addition to the long hours and labor intensive work associated with this industry, paid gardeners in the informal sector, like day laborers (Valenzuela 1999, 2001, 2003; Valenzuela et al. 2006) and *domesticas* (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994, 2001; Mattingly 1999, 2001), do not receive the legal protections and benefits afforded to most workers in the United States, such as minimum wages, workers' compensation coverage, work safety rules and health insurance. On September 13, 1999, for example, a *Los Angeles Times* article labeled contract gardening one of the most hazardous jobs in the country (Hamilton 1999, S4):

The most common gardener complaint is lower back pain due to repetitive bending, lifting and stooping. Gardeners typically visit 15 to 20 homes a day and each time, they haul equipment weighing about 50 pounds in and out of their trucks. ... Falling out of trees and becoming sick from herbicides are also concerns.

In addition to the disadvantages associated with this unregulated service sector, paid gardeners do not qualify for Social Security benefits upon retirement. As a result, many gardeners work beyond retirement-age years without a financial safety net available to most Americans since FDR's New Deal of the early 20th Century.

Moreover, paid gardeners face a host of other work related hazards and problems not experienced by most American workers. Commonly reported problems include the following: not receiving payment by the client for services rendered, being harassed by police and city officials for lack of proper permits and leaf blower violations (only in cities with regulations or bans), and, similar to day laborers, being assaulted and robbed by thieves while working or traveling to and from work (Valenzuela 1999, 2001, 2003; Valenzuela et al. 2006).

Since most gardeners drive to their work sites with their equipment and supplies in the back of their trucks, they are easy targets for thieves. Of the fourteen gardeners interviewed for this research project, all of them claimed to have been robbed at their job sites. In a personal interview that I conducted on April 1, 2006, Guadalupe described the times he has been robbed:

I have been robbed about two to three times. One time I had a weeder stolen. I put it in my truck and I think that I forgot to lock it up and someone passed by the truck

and took it. This other time some guys put a gun to my stomach to steal my things, but they only ended up taking my wallet.

Social Networks: Weak and Strong Ties at the Workplace

Similar to *domesticas* (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994, 2001; Mattingly 1999, 2001), paid gardeners predominantly rely on their social networks to navigate the informal economy. Instead of accessing classified ads to meet his labor needs, the *patrón* typically resorts to strong ties, including his extended family network, friends, neighbors, colleagues, and individuals from the same hometown. This situation not only saves the *patrón* time and money, but it also provides him with a trustworthy and loyal workforce. By hiring his sibling or brother-in-law, for example, the *patrón* does not have to be constantly worried about the *trabajador* stealing his equipment or clients.

While there are problems associated with hiring a family member (e.g., it is more difficult to fire a sibling versus a stranger if he or she is not working out) given that gardeners operate in the informal economy, the benefits of hiring a family member usually outweigh the costs. In his groundbreaking study on social capital, "Social Capital in the Creation of Human Capital," Coleman (1988, 99), for instance, uses the example of a close-knit, Jewish community in New York's diamond market to demonstrate how these entrepreneurs, like Mexican gardeners, benefit from accessing their strong ties to facilitate their trade:

Observation of the wholesale diamond market indicates that these close ties, through family, community, and religious affiliation, provide insurance that is necessary to facilitate the transactions in the market. If any member of this community defected through substituting other stones or through stealing stones in his temporary possession, he would lose family, religious and community ties. The strength of these ties makes possible the transactions in which trustworthiness is taken for granted and trade can occur with ease.

By accessing his strong ties, the *patrón* also benefits from having a hardworking crew to keep up with a busy and arduous daily work schedule. Crews with large *rutas* of 100 clients or more, for instance, service between 10 to 15 homes per day. While the *patrón* may accompany the crew to maintain an effective and efficient work pace at the job sites, the *patrón* relies on a self-motivated, independent crew to remain competitive in this service sector, especially if he has more than one truck operating simultaneously. This situation inherently limits the size of the business operation, since the *patrón* needs to be able to manage both the *trabajadores* and keep his clients satisfied simultaneously. The *patrón* may incur high stress in maintaining a balance between his existing *ruta* and the need to expand it without losing control.

For the *trabajador*, strong ties may represent both positive (employment) and negative (work-related exploitation) outcomes. On the one hand, the *trabajador's* strong ties with the *patrón* allows for the *trabajador* to enter the labor market, especially if he lacks legal documentation to work in this country. On the other hand, these same strong ties may represent constraints on the *trabajador*, who works long hours and weekends for low pay. Cameron (2000, 1090) vividly summarizes the plight of the average *trabajador*:

Tending the front and back yards of the landed gentry in Los Angeles is primarily the work of as many as 65,000 Latina/o immigrants, nearly all of whom are men. By any measure, their work does not pay well. The average crew consists of two to three men, charges \$15 to \$25 per yard and works ten to twenty yards per day. At these piecework rates, the average gardener [*trabajador*] earns \$250 per week, \$1000 per month, and \$12,000 per year. He works eight to twelve hours a day, six days a week, and all without overtime, paid vacation, or health insurance. If he does not work, then he does not get paid.

Apart from benefiting from his strong ties with the *trabajador*, the *patrón* also receives positive outcomes from his weak ties with his clients. The relationship between the *patrón* and the client represents an excellent example of Granovetter's (1973) argument regarding the strength of weak ties. This asymmetrical relationship between two different groups—the *patrón* (e.g., Mexican immigrant petty-entrepreneurs) and client (e.g., White middle-class homeowners)—generates benefits for both parties. For the *patrón*, the established client not only represents a source of monthly income

but also represents an avenue for new referrals. It is very common for a satisfied client to tap into his or her social networks to refer “their gardener” to a family member, friend, co-worker or neighbor. By taking advantage of the client’s social network, the *patrón* is able to expand his *ruta* and business operations to increase his monthly profits.

The client benefits from this unequal relationship by taking advantage of a cheap labor source to service and maintain his or her yard. Given the tremendous competition in this unregulated service sector, the *patrón* must keep his prices low to ward off other *patrones* (or their own *trabajadores*) from stealing his clients.

Middle-class clients in particular benefit from the low-cost services provided by paid gardeners, since they (especially men) can pursue other opportunities in lieu of doing yard work. Traditionally considered the responsibility of “the man of the house” (Jenkins 1994), for example, yard work can now be performed by Mexican immigrant gardeners at a cheap rate while the male homeowner can enjoy leisure time, play with his kids (if he has any) or pursue other economic opportunities.

This situation can also be applied to middle-class households who employ *domesticas*, where the clients (especially women) free themselves of domestic work, such as cleaning their home or caring for their children at a relatively low cost, to pursue other opportunities (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994, 2001; Mattingly 1999, 2001).

Life History: Joaquin Success Story

Like many immigrants from underdeveloped countries, Joaquin Mejia entered the labor market at a very young age in Sinaloa, Mexico. Joaquin, 85,^{vii} learned the hard lessons of manual labor as a temporary farmer worker in the United States during the Bracero Program^{viii} of the mid-1900s, before presently immigrating to the United States in the early 1960s.

During the early 1970s, Joaquin moved to West Los Angeles (WLA) and entered the paid gardening trade with the support of his wife, who worked as a *domestica*. After purchasing a truck and a few tools, Joaquin gradually established his own gardening business. Thanks to referrals from his first clients (weak ties), Joaquin’s business operations expanded. As a result, he hired a few *trabajadores* and had two crews operating simultaneously throughout the WLA area.

Once established as a successful entrepreneur, Joaquin’s monthly cash flow and his wife’s income allowed for the family to enjoy a comfortable life in a rent-controlled part of Santa Monica. Through his successful business, Joaquin frequently took his family on vacations to Mexico. He was also able to help his extended family members both in the U.S. and in Mexico with money and a place to stay. Furthermore, Joaquin and his wife also managed to send their three children to parochial private schools. Eventually, they all attended major universities, including UCLA, Harvard, UCLA Law School and Stanford Law School.

While Joaquin can be credited with establishing a successful business without formal education and limited English skills, his entire family contributed to his business success. Not only did his wife work on weekends so he could purchase his first work truck, she also prepared his meals, washed his clothes and nurtured him when ill. In addition, his oldest son worked as his assistant (*trabajador*) during the weekends and summer breaks. Lastly, in addition to helping their father with his business invoices, all three children served as translators between Joaquin and his clients.

Shortly before retiring, Joaquin took on a full time job as a gardener for an exclusive residential colony in WLA in order to qualify for Social Security and other retirement benefits. While he maintained his *ruta* to supplement his income for several years, Joaquin eventually gifted his *ruta* to a *trabajador* as a gesture of appreciation for many years of hard work and dedication.

Although Joaquin represents only a select group of successful, self-employed gardeners, his story is important since it illustrates how an individual with a lack of formal education and limited English skills can succeed in the U.S. by accessing his social capital and social networks in the informal economy. Like many successful gardeners, Joaquin relied on his family and co-ethnic friends (strong ties) to help build his gardening business. By hiring trustworthy *trabajadores* from his hometown region in Mexico, for example, Joaquin was able to enjoy family vacations to Mexico without the fear of someone stealing his clients. Also, the fact that he established a good rapport with his clients (weak ties) enabled Joaquin to expand his business operations and provide his children with educational opportunities he never enjoyed while working at a very young age in Mexico.

Conclusion

Paid Mexican gardeners represent a vital workforce in Los Angeles's informal economy. While stereotyped on television, Hollywood movies, and mainstream media as ignorant, second-class citizens, Mexican gardeners provide intelligent, productive members of society. They not only provide individual homeowners and other clients with valuable services, but also to the general public by contributing to a greener, cleaner and more beautiful environment.

Moreover, by looking beyond the surface, we can see how these individuals represent sophisticated workers and entrepreneurs who managed to carve a niche for themselves in an unregulated market. By accessing their social capital and networks, successful Mexican gardeners generate opportunities for themselves that are not available in the formal market. Despite lacking formal education and fluent English skills, someone like Joaquin, with the support of his wife and children, can achieve the American Dream.

There are, however, important questions that policy makers, planning scholars and practitioners need to consider when exploring the plight of immigrant workers in this country's informal economy. Are poor Mexican immigrants and other marginalized groups better off in the informal economy versus the formal market given their limited educational background and English language skills? How can planners and others intervene in this trade to protect novice gardeners like Gregory Rodriguez, as noted above and reported in the *Los Angeles Times* (Quinones 2006), who died while trimming a tree without proper protection and training? Should the property owner be held responsible for hiring someone without proper permits and training or should the state provide free training courses to this workforce? By intervening in this informal market, however, will policy makers and planners only create obstacles for Mexican gardeners by implementing strict governmental regulations and restrictions in this service sector that limit the gardeners' employment options and upward mobility opportunities?

These few questions require additional research to better understand this informal service sector in order to deal with the important issues that policy makers, planning scholars and practitioners need to seriously consider. This is especially true in the current environment where honest, hard-working immigrants have been demonized and blamed for America's woes.

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Endnotes

ⁱ See Thorstein Veblen. 2006. *Conspicuous Consumption*. New York: Penguin Books, p. 38.

ⁱⁱ According to U.S. Census data for 2000, Laredo had a total population of 156,576 and a median household income of \$29,108. Latinos represent over 75 percent of the total population. In contrast, Los Angeles had a total population of 3,694,820 and median household income of \$36,687. Unlike Laredo's majority Mexican population, Mexicans represented over 30 percent of Los Angeles' total population. (<http://factfinder.census.gov/>) (accessed April 8, 2007).

ⁱⁱⁱ In order to protect the anonymity of my informants, I will only use pseudo names in this article.

^{iv} Absent a similar study in Los Angeles, it is difficult to determine whether gardeners in Los Angeles' informal sector fair better than minimum-wage workers at \$6.75 per hour in the formal sector. According to some of the gardeners I interviewed for this paper, for example, the daily wages paid to a gardener (worker) ranges from \$65 - \$75 per day. However, since gardeners in this sector may work anywhere from eight to twelve hours per day, it is difficult to compare the wages earned by gardeners in the informal economy versus minimum-wage workers in Los Angeles' formal economy.

^v Proposed penalties by the city for violators of the leaf blower ban passed on December 3, 1996, included a misdemeanor charge, \$1,000 fine and up to six months in jail (Orlov 1996).

^{vi} A *ruta* can include other places, such as businesses, apartment buildings and parks.

^{vii} He retired as a gardener when he turned 80-years-old.

^{viii} In 1942, according to Gomez-Quinones (1994), the United States and the "Mexican government signed an agreement for the importation of fifty thousand Mexican workers" to primarily remedy agricultural labor shortages (p. 157).

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***The Oak Park Redevelopment Plan: Housing Policy Implications for a
Community Undergoing Early Stage Gentrification***

Introduction

Oak Park, the first suburb of Sacramento, California established in 1889, was granted annexation by the city of Sacramento in 1911. The neighborhood was the most prosperous when inhabited by northern Europeans and continued with the influx of southern Europeans during the 1920s, until the turn of the 20th century. This prosperity was highlighted by Oak Park's historic amusement park, Joyland, as well as the trolley system that connected Joyland to the downtown area, and the California State Fair Grounds that were originally located in Oak Park. Though the community experienced significant development until the 1920s, an abrupt decline in the 1930s was initiated by a national economic depression from which Oak Park never recovered.

Oak Park was economically devastated by the Great Depression, which caused many businesses to leave the area, including the city's amusement park, Joyland, in 1927, and the abandonment of the trolley system. The community's inability to recover from the Great Depression, coupled with the growing suburban sprawl of inexpensive post-World War II track housing, created conditions for 'white flight' which gradually diminished the city's tax base and political influence as property values plummeted (Simpson, 2004). Furthermore, the construction of Highway 99 in the 1950s "split [the adjacent communities of Land Park and Oak Park] (see appendixes A) which virtually guaranteed [Oak Park's] urban blight that would follow in the 1960s and 1970s," while with the construction of Highway 50 to the north isolated Oak Park from downtown (Simpson, 2004, p. 7). Oak Park's economic decline escalated in 1968 when the California State Fair Commission decided to move the fair grounds from its original location in Oak Park into northern Sacramento, which further contributed to Oak Park's economic decline due to lost revenue generated by tourism and property taxes.

During the 1950s and through the 1970s, Euro-American middle- and upper-income suburban enclaves emerged outside of Sacramento's urban core, while Oak Park experienced an influx of African Americans into its community. During this time, African Americans made up 40-50 percent of the population (Dingemans, 1979; Decennial Census, 1960 & 1970). The outmigration of affluent, Euro-American residents took with them the tax base, political and social networks, and economic power that historically maintained the neighborhood. Also, during this time, Oak Park and similar neighborhoods were "redlined" by mortgage lenders. *Redlining* is a lending practice that discriminates against minority and low-income neighborhoods and creates a racial disparity of access to homeownership, which limits the ability of these residents to accumulate wealth, in comparison to their Euro-American counterparts (Ross & Tootell, 2002; Wyly & Holloway, 1999). A 1976 study on the redlining and mortgage lending practices in the Sacramento area indicated a distribution disparity of mortgage loans. In addition, it was revealed that "high correlations also indicate strong associations between mortgage lending and ethnicity characteristics...[emphasizing that] the level of lending is low near centers of black concentrations in the southeastern and northern sectors" of Sacramento. (Dingemans, 1979, p. 229-230). The Oak Park neighborhood falls directly into this geographic designation.

The redlined neighborhood and its inability to maintain and attract businesses and homeowners led to a continual decline which coincided with an increase in crime. In response to the increasing crime rates in Oak Park, Sacramento's police department enforced a strong 'law and order' policing strategy that alienated and racially discriminated against Oak Park residents. This strategy resulted in a police raid of Sacramento's Black Panther Party branch located in Oak Park (Simpson, 2004). On June 15, 1969, a six hour gun fight ensued between police and party members that resulted in one police death, 10 wounded and 37 arrested ("Racial Tension Erupts in Sacramento," 1969). This violent and racially motivated incident sent a warning signal to the city of Sacramento

that community leaders and elected officials needed to come together and find solutions for the plight of the Oak Park community ("Sacramento 'Summit Meeting' Proposed," 1969). On August 21, 1969, one month after the racial conflict, the city Council of the city of Sacramento designated the area of Oak Park for redevelopment (see appendix A), obtained federal funds from HUD in 1971, and adopted the Oak Park Redevelopment Plan on January 9, 1973 (SHRA, 1973). The goal and objective of the redevelopment plan is "to revitalize the Oak Park Neighborhood and to create a viable and attractive urban residential community," achieved by "major policy decisions regarding Oak Park" (SHRA, 1973). Though the policy was recast as a redevelopment plan, it is actually an Urban Renewal Plan as defined in the Housing Act of 1949 (SHRA, 1973).

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this research is to: 1) critically examine the Oak Park Redevelopment Plan and its implementation strategies; and 2) to investigate whether this redevelopment policy is a catalyst for gentrification that creates inequities and contributes to the plight of the poor. The Oak Park Redevelopment Plan is designed to "provide a forward looking, imaginative and realistic approach to revitalize an older area of the City and to recreate a viable, attractive urban residential community for the future" (SHRA, 1973 p. 1). In order to better understand how this redevelopment project will impact the social, political, economic, and demographic future of Oak Park it is important to know: 1) For whom is this "viable and attractive community" intended; 2) Is the gentrifying policy a means to a better end.

Literature Review

The following literature review focuses on several issues that provide insight into the gentrifying causes and implications of local governmental redevelopment policy, including: • the Sacramento Housing & Redevelopment Agency's [SHRA] Redevelopment Plan of Oak Park, • the role of private investment and other institutions in urban redevelopment, and • a brief comparative study of a community undergoing gentrification. Although there are a multitude of gentrification-related topics, this review of the literature places a stronger emphasis on policy and market oriented issues and to a lesser degree on social issues, such as social division and community conflict, though these issues are equally important.

The reinvestment in historically disenfranchised urban neighborhoods and the subsequent influx of the middle- and upper-classes into the urban core have changed the urban landscape. Scholars of urban policy refer to this process as *gentrification*. The term, first coined by Ruth Glass (1964, p. xvii), describes the process by which a working-class neighborhood is replaced by the middle- and upper-class. She notes, "Once this process of 'gentrification' starts in a district...working-class occupiers are displaced and the whole social character of the district is changed." According to Wyly and Hammel (2004), gentrification is "the class transformation of urban neighborhoods that were devalORIZED by previous rounds of disinvestment and outmigration," a trend plaguing neighborhoods disproportionately populated with low-income residents. For the purposes of this study, gentrification will be defined the processes in which the in-migration of middle- and upper-classes into disinvested urban areas, by way of public policy and market forces, displaces low-income residents, resulting in a change in character and ecology of the neighborhood (Glass, 1964; Smith, 2002; Atkinson, 2002, 2004; Wyly & Hammel, 2001, 2004). As the definitions indicate, gentrification has a significant impact on neighborhoods. The process supports the turnover of race and class in the urban landscape, thus reconstructing the urban space exclusively for the affluent, largely Euro-American population (Wyly & Hammel, 1999, 2004). While many view gentrification as an urban policy cure, the remedy comes at the expense of the low-income and long time residents who pay a sizeable social cost, their family's ability to stay in Oak Park (Lees, 2000).

Connections Between Public Policy and Gentrification

According to Atkinson (2004), governments do not consider how their redevelopment efforts may initiate and support gentrification in urban, low-income neighborhoods once their redevelopment goals are met. Redevelopment efforts change the ecology of neighborhoods, typically a change that does not embrace low-income residents and threatens their tenure in the community. Though the housing market and the flow of new capital into the neighborhood has been cited as one of the primary causes of displacement, oftentimes referred as "Rent Gap Theory" (Smith, 1979), it is critical

to redirect attention to examining the extent to which the city's redevelopment plan for Oak Park protects low-income residents and who specifically benefits from the redevelopment.

Following is a discussion that expands on the question of why local governments neglect to scrutinize any gentrifying characteristics that may arise from their redevelopment policies. A study conducted by Newman (2004) revealed that local governments have little incentive to assist low-income residents during the redevelopment of their neighborhoods because they are not the targeted consumers of private investment. With the added pressure of the devolution of federal housing programs in an era of a dismantling welfare state, urban policy makers at the local level rely on the deconcentration of poverty, mixed-income housing projects, and the re-introduction of the middle and upper class homeownership as an effective redevelopment strategy (Hammel & Wyly, 1999; et al. 2004). Cameron (2003, p. 2372) describes another form of gentrification that is driven by "neither gentrifiers, nor capital, but public policy," emphasizing the intent of the redevelopment strategy is the displacement of the low-income and economically inactive 'social tenants' with a higher social stratum of owner-occupiers that have comparatively higher incomes and social status. Parallel to these findings, Levine's (2004) study of the relationship between government policy and gentrification suggests that "gentrification is not solely the result of a natural phenomenon and market forces; it is also the result of government policy shaped by strong pro-development interests" (p. 89).

In addition, there is a link between the inequities faced by low-income, urban residents within their neighborhoods and local governmental policies that act as catalysts of gentrification, an outcome that favors deregulation, privatization, and more influential groups over others (Atkinson, 2004; Dávila, 2004). The literature confirms that local governments have turned a blind eye towards the gentrifying implications of their redevelopment policies and would rather address the physical barriers of the neighborhood rather than the social barriers that contribute to the neighborhood's continual decline and neglect.

Market Causes of Gentrification

Some experts explain the cause of gentrification as 'supply constraints and speculative gains' of property owners and real estate investors in urban neighborhoods. In a seminal study, Smith (1979), discusses the concept "Rent Gap Theory," a theory that explains how the disinvestment and re-investment into low-income and urban neighborhoods exacerbates gentrification. Smith (1979; 1987) summarizes that real estate and property owners disinvest out of a neighborhood and create conditions that result in a substantial 'rent gap.' *Rent gap* is defined as "the gap between the actual capitalized ground rent (land value) of the plot of land given its present use and the potential ground rent that might be gleaned a 'higher and better use'" (Smith, 1987 p. 462). Once the rent gap or difference between the actual and potential property value has substantially grown, investment capital begins to flow back into a neighborhood in the form of redevelopment. According to Kennedy and Leonard (2001), this newly viable market serves as a natural phenomenon, and provides a high rate of economic return (Smith, 1996). The intent of Smith's (1979, 1987, 1996) analysis is to demonstrate how governmental redevelopment policies along with strategic investment practices act as catalysts for gentrification that change the housing stock and produces an "economic change in the land and housing market," which are critical indicators of gentrification (p. 463).

Consumption-Cultural Causes of Gentrification

Contrary to Smith, Ley's (1986) classic study of gentrification focuses attention not on housing markets and capital flow, but on the consumption-cultural preferences of the migrating middle-and upper-middle classes into the urban neighborhoods. Ley labels this migration as "*The Embourgeoisement of the Inner City*." This new emerging urban class can be characterized as a community of 'urban pioneers,' rejecting suburban conformity preferring a more cosmopolitan lifestyle of culture and identity. This is important, because '*embourgeoisement*' can only be accomplished with the process of redevelopment of urban and low-income neighborhoods (Ley, 1986). The neighborhood redevelopment attracts the affluent class because of its proximity to downtown amenities, an urban culture, and a new service-economy that caters to the middle-class, such as cafés (Starbucks), art galleries, theater houses, as well as architecturally unique homes, and the premium of a short commute (Meligrana & Skaburskis, 2005; Comey, Levy, & Padilla, 2006; Silver, 2006). As these studies reveal, such redevelopment in low-income urban neighborhoods is done to provide amenities and a physical upgrade of the housing stock for the in-migrating middle- and upper-classes. However, the redevelopment paints a different picture when posed with the following question: Is the

investment in a café such as Starbucks or a new social program likely to address the needs of low-income residents?

Gentrification and Displacement

Displacement of the urban poor is the most contested and controversial of all implications in regards to gentrification. A 1978 national housing report prepared by the Department of Housing and Urban Redevelopment, defined *displacement* as:

“Any household...forced to move from its residence by conditions which affect the dwellings or its immediate surroundings, and which:

1. are beyond the household's reasonable ability to control or prevent;
2. occur despite the household's having met all previously imposed conditions of occupancy;
3. make continued occupancy by that household impossible, hazardous, or unaffordable” (as cited in Braconi & Freeman, 2004).

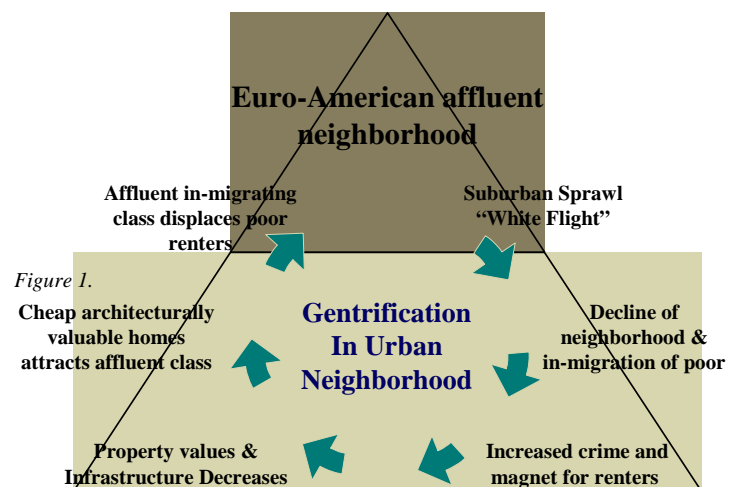
As the report suggests, displacement is an involuntary phenomenon beyond the control of the affected residents, for whom future occupancy proves impossible, hazardous, and most importantly unaffordable (Grier & Grier, 2004).

Interestingly, researchers note that displacement in gentrifying neighborhoods involves the “market removal” of low-income residents (Smith, 2002; Atkinson 2004, Dávila, 2004). This removal is accomplished with rent inflation, increased housing prices, and illegal eviction strategies by landlords who are quick to re-convert rental properties into single family homes or condominiums (et al., 2002; 2004; 2004). As the property values of historic urban neighborhoods decrease, the areas becomes more appealing for migrating middle-class residents and realtors to redevelop (Smith, 1987, 1996; Ley, 1996; Hammel & Wyly, 2006). A major concern here is about the social cost for the redevelopment's success? Who will pay the social cost, and at what price?

Although it is known that such displacement occurs with low-income residents, policy makers need to critically analyze the impact of redevelopment upon these residents. In her study of *El Barrio* in New York City, Dávila (2004) indicates that low-income residents in neighborhoods with high concentrations of public assistance and rent subsidies are extremely vulnerable to displacement. Contrary to these findings, Freeman and Braconi (2004, p. 51) suggest that displacement is “associated with a lower propensity of disadvantaged households to move” out of their gentrifying neighborhoods, based on their study of New York during the 1990s. Though their analysis on gentrification found the displacement of low-income residents inconclusive, the research highlighted that rent regulation was considered a maligned housing policy that has “a certain logic in the context of gentrification,” emphasizing the point of the vulnerability of rental households (Braconi & Freeman, 2004, p. 52). These studies on gentrification point to the vulnerability of low-income residents and their susceptibility to displacement.

Methodology

For this study, the researcher formulated a conceptual framework (CF) diagram to clarify the processes of gentrification and inserted the case study of Oak Park to analyze and discuss in detail the changes that are happening in the neighborhood (Figure 1). The framework is used as a guide to examine the material



conditions and components of the gentrifying neighborhood. Primary sources were utilized to make links with the most current literature relevant to the study of gentrification. In order to offer a brief historical account of Oak Park's decline and neglect, archival research, such as news articles and government documents, was used to examine when and why Oak Park became a disinvested neighborhood. In addition, key informant interviews with representatives from several local government agencies were audio-recorded and transcribed, representatives included as the Southern Area Director and Redevelopment Planner of the SHRA, and the Area Director and Neighborhood Services Coordinator for the Neighborhood Services Department Area 3 for the City of Sacramento. The researcher reviewed policy documents related to the redevelopment project and interviewed key informants in order to gain a better understanding of how the initiative is affecting the community of Oak Park. Lastly, quantitative analysis of the census track-level reports was used to measure the community's vulnerability to further gentrification. Statistical data from the 1960-2000 Decennial Census and the Federal Financial Institutions Examination Council 2007 Census reports for track-level reports 18, 27, and 37 (data from all three track-level reports were averaged together) were utilized to obtain the demographics of the Oak Park redevelopment area.

Findings and Discussion

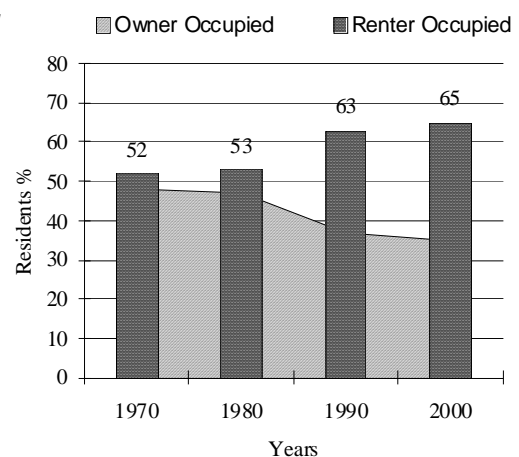
The researcher chose to focus on the redevelopment policy of Oak Park to create a clearer conceptual framework of gentrification processes and, in particular, to examine the case of Oak Park in order to examine the real material conditions and components of this process, which have serious consequences for people in urban neighborhoods. Here the researcher will reintroduce the conceptual framework into the discussion of the gentrification processes of Oak Park discussed in the methodology section. Though the framework components are sequential, many, but not all, happen simultaneously. As depicted in Figure 1, each component is connected to one another. Gentrification has a cyclical pattern and hierarchical structure with several stages. The process begins and ends with a dominate, Euro-American neighborhood.

Early History of Oak Park

Over 150 years ago, Oak Park emerged as the first suburb of Sacramento, California, located approximately 2 ½ miles south of downtown. This new neighborhood was developed with an elaborately distinct architectural style, such as Victorian Queen Ann, craftsman, vernacular, and bungalow homes. This is an early indication that developers envisioned a middle and upper class neighborhood (Simpson, 2004). During the neighborhood's beginning at the turn of the 19th century and into the first half of the 20 century, the area was populated with a stable middle- and upper-middle class of Euro-Americans (SHRA, 2003; Simpson, 2004). But by the 1950s and 1960s, Oak Park entered a transitional period.

Community in Transition

The next stage in the cycle of gentrification is neighborhood change. Beginning in the 1950s, Oak Park experienced the 'white flight' of the affluent class as they sought residence in inexpensive track homes around the greater Sacramento area, created by suburban sprawl (Quintero, T., personal communication, March 16, 2007). This was a result of the construction of Highway 99, which divided the Oak Park neighborhood in two: the more affluent area west of Highway 99 and the ethnic poor to the east of Highway 99, which resulted with community blight, and the in-migration of ethnic minorities (Simpson, 2004; Quintero, T., personal communication, March 16, 2007; see appendix A). These conditions were a result of the exit of the Euro-American population out of Oak Park, which removed the neighborhood's stable tax base, purchasing power, political weight, and overall infrastructure as they out migrated elsewhere (Quintero, T. personal communication, March 16, 2007; Bumgardner, E., April 3, 2007). By the 1970s, Oak Park experienced a high



concentration of ethnic minorities. The African American population was as high as 50% in one track-level report and had a total neighborhood average of 39.3% (Decennial Census, 1970).

Decline of the Community and the Rise of Renters

As the in-migration of ethnic minorities increased, the Oak Park neighborhood began a steady decline which produced a dominate renting class. Oak Park's decennial census statistics from 1970 to 2000 (Figures 2 & 3) demonstrate this trend. The figures show that over the span of thirty years, the number of home owners steadily decreased as the renting population emerged as a large majority. As shown, Oak Park has become a magnet for renters. This renting population of 65% is a critical component with in the gentrification [CF] (see figure 1), since the housing tenure of the renting class becomes volatile as property values increase (Smith 1979, 1987, 1996; Braconi & Freeman, 2004; Dávila, 2004). In addition, the increase of renters and decrease of owners indicates the decline in home equity and in affect, property values.

Following the discussion, the researcher also analyzed the demographics of the renting population to further illustrate the vulnerable renting class, emphasizing the neighborhood's susceptibility to gentrification (see figure 4). The results showed that 34% of the renting class rely on public assistance income, 28% spend 50% or more of their income on rent, and 53.2% occupy pre-1939 homes that have a high architectural value. These statistics are significant for two reasons: 1) It reveals the high poverty rate of renting occupants and 2) Shows how more than half of all renters occupy homes that have historic significance, which are extremely attractive for private investors and homeowners to redevelop and are the first in be on the market and sold (Bumgardner, E., personal communication, April 3, 2007).

Of additional importance is the discussion of renters in Oak Park. The data obtained from the decennial Census from 1970 through 2000, clearly illustrates a problematic trend (see figure 5). The percentage of renters below an income of \$10,000 has been steadily decreasing; however, interestingly the percentage of renters who spend 35% of more of their income on rent has continually increased since 1970 (with a peak during the 1990 recession). Analysis of this information suggests that although the wages of the renting population have been increasing, more of their income is going towards rent. The wages of renters are increasing in wages but they cannot keep up with the rising rent costs. These symptoms are producing conditions for further gentrification.

Redevelopment Policy and In-Migration of the Middle-Class

In 1973, Oak Park was zoned as a redevelopment zone in order to remedy neighborhood

Figure 3. Decennial

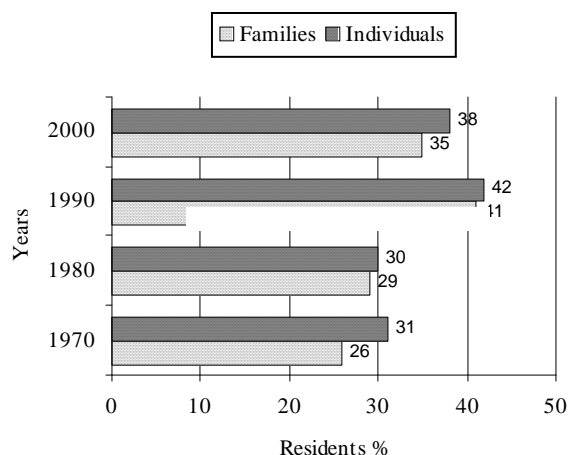


Figure 4. 2000 Decennial Census

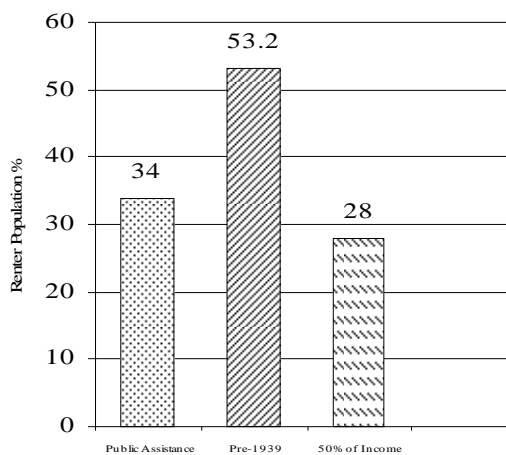
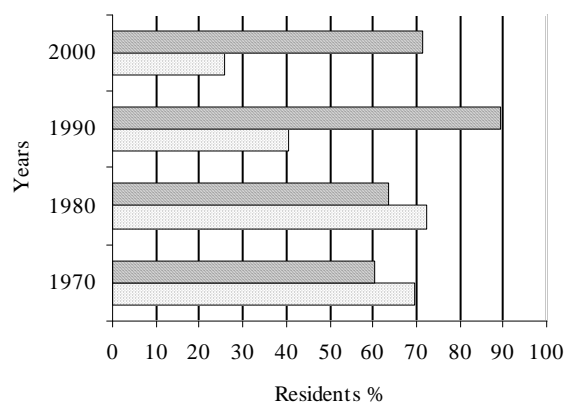


Figure 5. Decennial Census

□ Residents w/ Income Below \$10,000 ■ 35% of Income on Rent



blight by implementing a tax increment fee, in which home owners pay a percentage of their property value when bought. These funds are then allocated and redistributed by the Sacramento Housing & Redevelopment Agency to be reinvested back in the neighborhood with the purpose of "providing a forward looking, imaginative and realistic approach to revitalize an older area of the City and to recreate a viable, attractive urban residential community of the future" (SHRA, 1973). Yet this process begs the questions: For whom is this "viable and attractive community" intended for and who will be included and excluded from the community's future? As an implementation policy, The *Oak Park Renaissance Community Master Plan* was created in 2002 as a strategic revitalizing plan in order to create a 'sustainable' and 'livable' neighborhood (SHRA). These two policies are shaping the material conditions and processes of the gentrification of Oak Park.

Given the prior discussion on the renting class' vulnerability in the future of Oak Park, it's important that policy makers integrate remedies for low-income renter displacement into the redevelopment policy to mediate gentrification. Unfortunately, the research of public policy documents, demonstrates that the priorities of the SHRA's redevelopment policy for Oak Park has a primary focus on home ownership over rental occupants as a revitalizing strategy. As noted in the Renaissance Master Plan, the "primary goal of the Renaissance Program is stabilize the area through the promotion of homeownership," indicating a heavy reliance on owner-occupied residents who are the minority in population comparison to the renting population (SHRA, 2002, p. 56, see figure 2). Interestingly, the Renaissance Plan suggests that "renter families who decide to purchase a home, may move out of the area to purchase a home more suited to their family size," noting that low-income renter households are not suited for permanent residence (SHRA, 2002, p. 55). The analysis of the policy suggests that the redevelopment initiatives are not geared towards the interests of the low-income renter, but for the interest of the middle and upper classes.

SHRA's major redevelopment projects in Oak Park are an attempt to attract a new in-migrating middle and upper class back into the neighborhood, which are the last two components of the gentrification conceptual framework before the neighborhood returns back into a Euro-American affluent neighborhood (see figure 1). In conjunction with the St. HOPE Development Company [SHDC], the SHRA has subsidized projects such as the construction of: The Guild Theatre House, the Brick House art gallery, twelve upscale apartments, a Starbucks, Underground Books, and the 4th Street Lofts Project which will house 7 loft style homes and 3 live/work loft homes (SHRA, 2006). All of these redevelopment projects are strictly aimed in attracting middle and upper classes, while providing sheik amenities. SHRA has also renovated several historic Victorian homes as a means of providing a redevelopment catalyst for private redevelopment. Ultimately, "the goal of the redevelopment of Oak Park area is to create an area that private investment wants to come in" and provide private dollars for revitalization (Bumgardner, E., personal communication, April 3, 2007). With all these gentrifying factors including: Oak Park's designation as a "Buy a Starter Home" neighborhood, the proximity to downtown Sacramento, and "most importantly, its intrinsic qualities of an older, established neighborhood," places Oak Park under material conditions that have exacerbated the neighborhood's gentrification (SHRA, 2002; Comey, Levy, & Padilla, 2006).

Limitations

This study was limited to a six-month time period, yet it raises issues policymakers at the local level need to address when they consider a redevelopment plan in historic, urban, and low-income neighborhoods. With more time, the researcher would have investigated the multiplicity of layered issues arising out of the redevelopment plan, such as the changing political landscape that results when an influx of the affluent class gentrifies a neighborhood, the social divisions between northern and southern Oak Park residents, historic preservation policy as a catalyst for gentrification, and the community's perspective about gentrification. In addition, the researcher would have conducted an investigation of adjacent communities to reveal any diffusion of gentrification, interview the director of the St. HOPE Development Company, local real estate mortgage firms, and members of neighborhood churches. Since gentrification has become a 'dirty word' in Oak Park, all key informants from the SHRA, who are instrumental in the redevelopment of the neighborhood, ignored forms of communication and made it impossible to conduct any follow-up interviews.

Conclusion

This research study examined the gentrifying implications of the redevelopment policy for an urban community by posing critical questions about gentrification at the policy level, specifically the ways in which we see this process taking place at the particular neighborhood of Oak Park, Sacramento, California. As described throughout the research, the SHRA has utilized its redevelopment policies and encouraged strategic investment strategies to act as catalysts for gentrification. The larger themes of gentrification illustrated by the conceptual framework (see figure1), such as out-migration, and in-migration of residents, community decline, as well as the policy initiatives that put a premium on redeveloping for the middle and upper classes rather than protecting the housing tenure of the renting poor, suggests a failure of public policy fostering an inclusive and sustainable neighborhood for all Oak Park residents. With the current redevelopment strategy of promoting homeownership rather than initiating tenant protections such as rent control or affordable rental projects, will compromise the neighborhood's unique ethnic/racial diversity, in addition to its affordability for future generations of residents who will never be able to move into the gentrified community of Oak Park.

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2008 NACCS Conference**

Chicana Photography: The Power of Place

Introduction

Site-specific art, termed earthworks or land art, developed in 1960s and early 1970s in response to concern over the natural environment and as a critique of overtly commercial exhibition practices employed by galleries and museums. The art production of Nancy Holt, Alice Aycock, Robert Smithson, and many other artists interrogated temporality, monumentality, and humanity's connection to nature and its cycles. Holt's *Sun Tunnels* (1973-1976), four massive hollow concrete structures constructed in Utah's Great Basin Desert, channeled light and shadow in relationship to the cardinal directions and the tilt of the earth's axis, while Smithson's *Spiral Jetty* (1970), a fifteen-foot wide path of earth and rock, swirled corkscrew-fashion into Utah's Great Salt Lake for a distance of 1500 feet. The monumental art piece initially lay above the surface of the salt water, but the rise and fall of the lake's water level periodically obscured the work. During this same period, Alice Aycock constructed *Maze* (1972) in rural Pennsylvania, a wooden thirty-two foot labyrinthine form that, much like Richard Serra's later *Band* (2006), invited audience participation. Due to the remote location and ephemerality of many of these environmental installations, documentary photography became an integral element of the artistic process and often created the only record of the artworks.

The concern with space, location, place, and site has continued to engage artists and theorists since the 1960s.¹ For critics and creators engaged with these concepts, the analysis of the interaction between of the processes of spatialization, identity formation, and memory has emerged as an important aspect of critical discourse. Curator and art critic Lucy Lippard considers the notions of space and place in *The Lure of the Local: Senses of Place in a Multicentered Society*. She differentiates the two terms by suggesting that place implies intimacy, a familiarity with a certain geographic location. In contrast, Lippard proposes that space refers to a physical site, often understood as landscape or nature.² Human interaction and, most importantly, the infusion of memory into space or a geographic site produces place. Lippard states, "If space is where culture is lived, then place is the result of their union."³ An individual's values and beliefs, one's spiritual, social and political views and behaviors then mark the space they inhabit.

Like Lippard, French Jesuit scholar and cultural critic Michel de Certeau considers the production of meaning in particular geographic locations. For Certeau, this meaning occurs as a result of everyday behavior, what he terms "the practice of everyday life." He also considers how society uses, or in his words "consumes," its visual and cultural representations and how, in the process of this consumption, people use and produce space. According to de Certeau, through the "practice of everyday life" or daily actions, pedestrians or "walkers" construct a "text" or an unseen "pathway" in their local environment. The repeated movement of the city's "walkers" forms a pattern of motion, not something fixed, like a line on a map, but a present moment experience.⁴ The pedestrian creates the "text" in the moment of moving through space and leaves a trace that creates a complex web of interrelated spaces, which Certeau compares to voices in a choir, each with their own unique but intermingling utterance.⁵ Certeau situates his ideas about the production and consumption of meaning

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¹ Miwon Kwon provides a comprehensive discussion of the development of site-specific and public art, as well as the major theoretical voices that shape the discussion of space, community, and identity. See Miwon Kwon, *One Place after Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity*, First paperback ed. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004).

² Lucy R. Lippard, *The Lure of the Local: Senses of Place in a Multicentered Society* (New York: New Press, 1997), 8-9.

³ Ibid., 10.

⁴ Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 97.

⁵ Ibid., 99, 101.

within the confines of a primarily urban locale and therefore many of his ideas relate narrowly to life experienced in a large city. However, some elements of his argument, especially his notion of how everyday practices create a text as part of the transformation of space into place, create effective tools for exploring the interactions between people and places.

Contemporary Chicana photographers Laura Aguilar, Kathy Vargas, and Delilah Montoya have produced extensive bodies of work during the past four decades that investigate the body, land, memory, and the issues of identity formation⁶ in relationship to location. In this essay, I use the concepts of space and place as defined by Lippard together with a consideration of Certeau's ideas concerning the creation of a text developed in *The Practice of Everyday Life* to analyze selected images from Aguilar's *Stillness* (1999), *Motion* (1999), and *Center* (2001), Vargas' *My Alamo* (1995), and Delilah Montoya's *Sed: The Trail of Thirst* (2004). These theoretical constructs support an excavation of the multiple meanings of the sites and bodies portrayed in these works. I give a brief overview of each artist's development and then demonstrate how the depiction of geographic space in these artists' work becomes an intimate, personal site where the construction of places and identities occur.

Laura Aguilar: *Tierra, Cuerpo, Lugar*

Laura Aguilar was born in 1959 in San Gabriel, California, to a first generation Mexican-American father and a mother of mixed Mexican and Irish descent. Aguilar has a condition known as dysphonetic or auditory dyslexia. This form of dyslexia affects a person's capacity to process aural information and limits their ability to understand how individual sounds construct words. Difficulty in sounding out words phonetically interferes with the development of reading skills as well. Aguilar remained unaware for many years of her learning challenge, due to the inability of the Los Angeles public school system to adequately diagnose it. Her auditory dyslexia made correct spoken pronunciation difficult and many people did not understand her when she spoke. Shy and withdrawn during her youth, she credits her survival to her brother, simply saying, "The best thing in my life is my brother. He saved me."⁷ Her brother encouraged Aguilar's interest in the visual medium of photography, which she first gravitated toward as a teenager. He lent her his camera, taught her how to develop exposed film in the darkroom, and helped her make prints from negatives. Aguilar later studied photography at various colleges and photography workshops throughout the southwest. However, she remains a largely self-taught artist.

Like the Chicana photographers I discuss in this essay, Aguilar has produced a body of work that takes the human figure as its central form of inquiry. Some of the best-known images from her early work include the *Latina Lesbian Series* begun in 1987.⁸ The series consists of a number of black-and-white portraits of women who self-identify as lesbian and Latina. In much of this work, the women look unswervingly at the camera and engage the viewer with a direct gaze. Aguilar poses her subjects in environments that appear of their choosing or ones that indicate the person's vocation, such as her portrait of Yolanda Retter Vargas.⁹ In this telling image, the noted activist and archivist stands in front of a crowded bookcase with a laptop open on a nearby table. In addition, Aguilar pushes the art historical genre of portraiture into a distinct expression by using handwritten text as an integral aspect of the image.¹⁰ The hand of the artist, or perhaps the subject, has distinctively marked

⁶ The concept of Chicana and Chicano identity has been of critical importance in Chicana/o Studies scholarship and its literature is extensive. Two resources that have influenced my thinking include Deena J. González, "Chicana Identity Matters (Vol. 22, No. 2, Fall 1997)," in *The Chicano Studies Reader: An Anthology of Aztlán, 1970-2000*, ed. Chon A. Noriega, et al., *Aztlán Anthology Series* (Los Angeles: UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center Publications, 2001), Aida Hurtado and Patricia Gurin, *Chicana/o Identity in a Changing U.S. Society: ¿Quién Soy? ¿Quiénes Somos?* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2004).

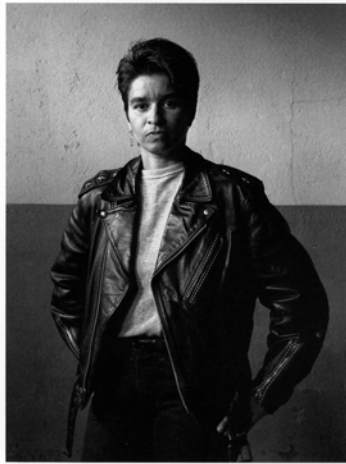
⁷ Telephone conversation with the artist, March 19, 2008.

⁸ Temple University Press published some of the *Latina Lesbian Series* in Diane Neumaier, ed., *Reframings: New American Feminist Photographies* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995).

⁹ Yolanda Retter Vargas was extensively involved in fight for the rights of lesbians and women of color since the 1970s. In addition to activist organizing, Vargas worked as a librarian and researcher, most recently at UCLA's Chicano Studies Resource Center where she shaped a generation of young scholars. She died in 2007 of cancer at age 59.

¹⁰ Photographers have inscribed text on the surface of photographic prints since the early 1960s to ornament the image, to support the visual narrative, or to add graphic interest. In the works described in this essay, Aguilar writes directly on the print's surface, while Kathy Vargas takes the process further. Vargas marks the photograph with text and draws on the print to emphasize particular areas of the image.

the surface of the print. The subjects' thoughts on society's messages about being female or being lesbian are inscribed below each portrait, often accompanied with the woman's signature. Aguilar's portrait of Carla Barboza, Esquire, comprises a prominent example (Fig. 1). The handwriting under Barboza's image states, "My mother encouraged me to be a court reporter...I became a lawyer." The terse text and powerful visual portrayal demonstrate that Carla has pushed beyond society's limits prescribed for women, lesbians, and Latinas.



My mother encouraged me to be a
court reporter...
I became a lawyer
Carla Barboza Esq.

Figure 1. Laura Aguilar, *Carla: Latina Lesbian Series*, 1987-1990, Black and white phototext

A much-discussed image from 1990, *Three Eagles Flying* (Fig. 2), indicates an important future direction in Aguilar's work. In this piece, the artist moves seamlessly into self-portraiture and places her body in the center of the triptych, or three-part work. Mexican and US flags appear on either side of her.¹¹ Aguilar approached the work from a very personal standpoint and used the creation process to examine her relationship with her mother and the variety of phenotypes that existed in her extended family. She did not have her mother's hazel eyes and freckles. As she grew up, many people did not connect Laura with her mother based on their visual appearance. As a result,

¹¹ Yvonne Yarbro-Bejarano has written eloquently on Aguilar's ability in this image to problematize national and cultural identity and to represent both constraint and freedom. See Yvonne Yarbro-Bejarano, "Laying It Bare: The Queer/Colored Body in the Photography of Laura Aguilar," in *Speaking Secrets: Living Chicana Theory*, ed. Carla Mari Trujillo, *Series in Chicana/Latina Studies* (Berkeley: Third Woman Press, 1998), 277-305. Karen Mary Davalos lauds Aguilar's image for its "radical/lesbian Chicana feminist critique" and provides an important reading of the work. See Karen Mary Davalos, *Exhibiting Mestizaje: Mexican (American) Museums in the Diaspora* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2001), 57-59. Amelia Jones has written extensively about Aguilar's work. She discusses *Three Flags Flying* in Amelia Jones, "Bodies and Subjects in the Technologized Self-Portrait: The Work of Laura Aguilar," *Aztlan* 23, no. 2 (Fall 1998): 208-10. In a later publication, Jones investigates how the photographic practice of the self-portrait raises questions of life, death, subjectivity, and meaning-making in the representation of gendered, raced, and sexed subjects. ———, "The 'Eternal Return': Self-Portrait Photography as a Technology of Embodiment," *Signs: Journal of Women and Culture in Society* 27, no. 4 (2002): 947-78.

Aguilar felt a distinct lack of belonging.¹² While this image provides a rich opportunity to think about the interaction between the human body, land, space, place, and nation I am interested in analyzing work the artist has produced within the last ten years.



Figure 2. Laura Aguilar, *Three Eagles Flying*, 1990, Gelatin silver print, Triptych, 24 in. x 60 in. each, Courtesy of Susanne Vielmetter Los Angeles Projects

The lush series *Stillness* (1999), *Motion* (1999), and *Center* (2001), initiated in 1999 and produced over the next two years, exploits the genres of portraiture, still life, and landscape by fusing female bodies into specific geographic sites. Here Aguilar connects landscape and the female form to the point where these elements merge, the human body becoming earth, land, terrain. The face of the individual is noticeably absent, covered purposefully with a graceful flow of hair or turned resolutely away from the camera. The artist denies us the subject's gaze, which encourages an emphasis on form. Female bodies become sculptural shapes that respond to the rhythmic line of motion created by upright trees and their serpentine branches. In *Motion # 46* (Fig. 3) from 1999, Certeau's idea of everyday practices becomes less apparent. Much as we might wish, unclothed cavorting in nature may not be a typical daily endeavor for many of us. So how does Aguilar's intervention of the nude female body into the natural landscape change a space into a place? Lippard extends her definition of place stating,

Place is about connections, what surrounds it, what formed it, what happened there, what will happen there...A lived-in landscape becomes a place, which implies intimacy; a once lived-in landscape can be a place, if explored, or remain a landscape, if simply observed."¹³

I suggest that the artist and her models' interactions with and exploration of the landscape as part of the process of creating these works, however brief, irrevocably altered these spaces and produced place. The women in front of the camera, as well as the one behind the lens, did more than merely observe this landscape. One easily imagines a lengthy photo shoot with a sequence of poses proposed by the talent and the artist. While not a "lived-in" site, the women responded to the shapes present in the terrain, its cavities, outcroppings, and hiding places, its shaded confines and sunlit expanses, to create the positions they took in the photograph. The women's footfalls have not visibly disturbed the graceful arrangement of dry leaves on the ground and yet, Certeau would argue that movement through the forested location has left a trace or text. A pathway may remain invisible and

¹² Telephone conversation with the artist, March 19, 2008.

¹³ Lippard, *The Lure of the Local: Senses of Place in a Multicentered Society*, 7.

unmarked. But this site, now transformed from space into place, links conceptually to other locations depicted in the series and therefore produces a network of interconnection.



Figure 3. Laura Aguilar, *Motion #46*, 1999, Gelatin silver print, 16 in. x 20 in.

Kathy Vargas: *Tierra, Identidad, Antepasados*

Kathy Vargas epitomizes a locally lived life connected to both place and community. Born in 1950 in San Antonio, Texas, Vargas grew up as the only child of loving parents. Vargas reigned as the center of familial attention in the family home on Martin Luther King Drive where she still lives today. Vargas's earliest photographs from the 1970s reflect the nuances of her East San Antonio neighborhood and demonstrate her preference for making art from what surrounds her. A piece from 1979 titled *Front Porch (Woman with Apron)* (Fig. 4) is representative of her initial documentary period, where she recorded her neighbors, local environs, and nearby shrines and cemeteries. Here Vargas celebrates a typical Texas pastime, the social ritual of observing the day's events from the comfort of the front porch.¹⁴ The repetitive motion of the vintage glider, combined with the neighbor's daily walk to and from the porch, epitomizes Certeau's idea of trace, text, and unseen pathway.

¹⁴ Henri Lefebvre's notions of how public interaction produces space are particularly pertinent when considering daily rituals such as those depicted by Vargas. See Henri Lefebvre, "Social Space," in *The Production of Space* (Oxford, UK and Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 1991), 68-168.



Figure 4. Kathy Vargas, *Front Porch (Woman with Apron)*, 1979, Gelatin silver print, 8 ⁵/₈ in. x 12 ⁵/₈ in., Collection of Joe A. Díaz, San Antonio, Texas

A major shift in Vargas' work occurred in the early 1980s. At this time, she abandoned outdoor photography and moved inside the studio. The artist began to stage small scenes from elements of interest, often objects found in her daily excursions. Like Laura Aguilar, she experimented with the placement of text directly on the photographic surface as well as further manipulation of the photographic image through hand coloring. Significantly, much of her photographic production began to reference land, memory, and place as predominant concerns.¹⁵

Given these interests and her life-long residence in San Antonio, one might expect the artist to portray regional histories and locales in her work, in addition to her immediate neighborhood. Consequently in 1995, Vargas produced a photographic series titled *My Alamo*. The Alamo reigns as cultural icon of the fierce Texas spirit of individuality and drive for independence from Mexico, and simultaneously exists as a multi-layered symbol of mission, shrine, war monument, museum, and commercial commodity.¹⁶ It comprises the most visited historic location in Texas, receiving countless foreign tourists as well as endless area school children. In the work, Vargas embeds the racialized, female body within the landscape of this specific regional site.¹⁷ The artist's title announces a personal

¹⁵ For a retrospective of Vargas' art production, see MaLin Wilson-Powell and Lucy R. Lippard, *Kathy Vargas: Photographs, 1971-2000* (San Antonio: Marion Koogler McNay Art Museum, 2000).

¹⁶ For important scholarship on the Alamo, see Richard R. Flores, *Remembering the Alamo: Memory, Modernity, and the Master Symbol* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002), Raúl A. Ramos, *Beyond the Alamo: Forging Mexican Ethnicity in San Antonio, 1821-1861* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008).

¹⁷ In *Border Matters: Remapping American Cultural Studies*, José David Saldívar analyzes the cultural and theoretical constructions of the border between Mexico and the US. His treatment of the Islas' and Lomas Garza's engagement with location and regional environs of Texas and California demonstrates the simultaneity of the global and the local. See José David Saldívar, "The Production of Space by Arturo Islas and

claim to space and territory. She declares that she possesses the site; she marks the location with her presence and claims the local territory as her own. This bears out Lippard's idea that place implies familiarity. The artist's use of the phrase "My Alamo" implies an intimacy, reducing the diverse nature of the site's power from something grand, distant, and monumental to something personal, contained, and closely claimed as an integral part of one's life.

The *My Alamo* series consists of six pairs of hand-colored gelatin silver prints and each of the twelve prints that comprise the work advance a visual narrative of Vargas' relationship to the site. I discuss a single photograph from the twelve images that comprise the work, the first print. In this print, the artist articulates her ancestral connection to the Alamo and marks the site with indigenous and familial presence. Vargas's great-great grandfather Juan Vargas had lived in Northern Mexico in the province of Coahuila y Tejas for six years before rebellious voices urged separation from Mexico. When Mexican President and General Santa Anna approached San Antonio in mid-February of 1836 to quell its revolutionary rumblings, he forcibly conscripted Tejanos into his existing military force. Juan Vargas was one of these suddenly made soldiers. Although Juan was a Mexican citizen forced to perform a major responsibility of citizenship, Santa Anna's officers questioned his loyalty because of his indigenous heritage. Juan participated in the Battle of the Alamo armed with the only weapon the Mexican army thought appropriate, a broom.

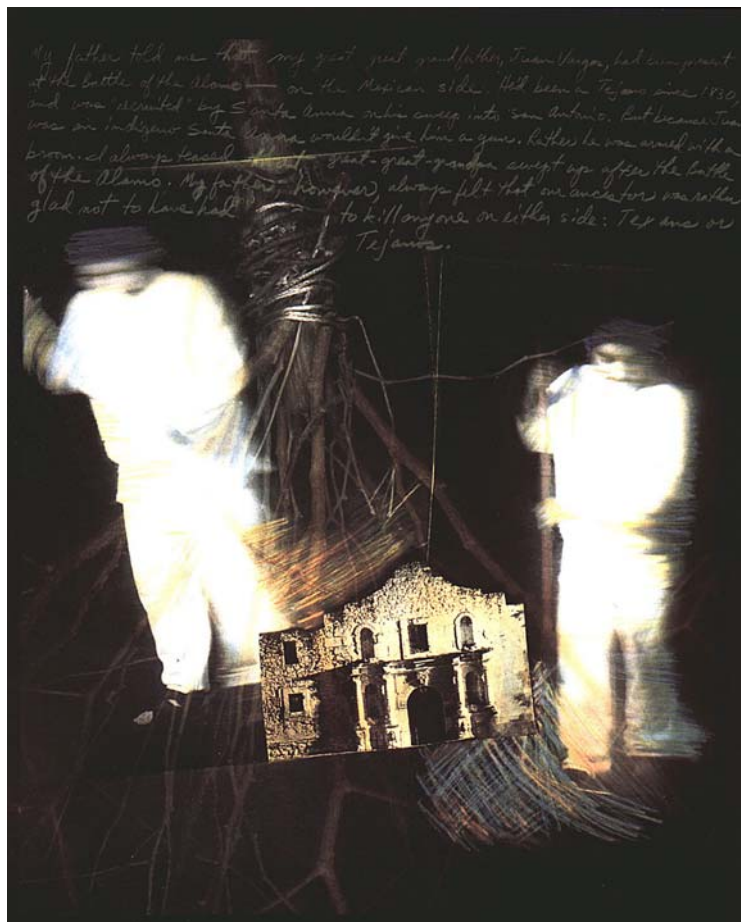


Figure 5. Kathy Vargas, *My Alamo*, 1995, Hand colored gelatin silver print, 20 in. x 16 in.

The artist depicts her ancestor as a non-violent actor at the Alamo, vigorously cleaning up after the battle, relegated to this task by phenotype and ethnicity (Fig. 5). Vargas "writes" or inscribes the absent history of indigenous peoples of the Americas into the site by locating her great-great

Carmen Lomas Garza," in *Border Matters: Remapping American Cultural Studies* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997), 72-94.

grandfather, a Zapotec originally from the Mexican state of Oaxaca, as an active participant in the creation of meaning at the site. By visually imagining and documenting a narrative that contests previous constructions and interpretations of the site's events, notably those that picture Mexican soldiers as barbaric and the Alamo martyrs as heroic, the artist re-appropriates the site of the Alamo. I think that Vargas's work engages de Certeau's notion of text by revealing unacknowledged or silenced pathways created by everyday acts. Although literally swept up in profoundly important historical events, Juan's actions begin to produce a family connection to the site. Through the embodied depiction of the "practice of everyday life" in her photographic series, Vargas reconstitutes these invisible pathways and makes the physical trace of individual action evident to the viewer, an ancestral remnant not apparent to those who visit and consume the site. The artist illustrates layers of information generally invisible or absent in popular representations of the site, including the presence of women of color and indigenous peoples. Her portrayal of the previously unacknowledged presence of these groups serves to contest existing narrations and claims the Alamo as personal, intimate, and familial place.

Delilah Montoya: *Tierra, Sed, Espacio Extenso y Intimo*

Delilah Marie Merriman Montoya was born in Fort Worth, Texas, on December 7, 1955, to Amalia García, a Nueva Mexicana, and John Merriman, a second-generation Polish immigrant. Montoya is one of four female siblings, the mother of daughter Lucy, who recently completed her medical degree, and a grandmother of three. Although born in northern Texas, and named after a bar her parents passed while driving through the vast expanses of West Texas, she grew up in the dirty, impoverished, and noxious smelling stockyard district of Omaha, Nebraska. She spent the first two decades of her life in the Midwest before permanently relocating to Albuquerque, New Mexico, in 1970s. Like Laura Aguilar, Montoya's public education was woefully inadequate, her high school a place of rampant drug trafficking and prostitution. She graduated with deficits in both reading and writing. Only at age nineteen with the birth of her daughter, did her word recognition improve by reading children's books to Lucy at night.

To support herself and her daughter, Montoya earned an Associate of Arts degree in commercial photography and art in the late 1970s. She then worked as a medical photographer at the University of New Mexico for ten years, while pursuing her undergraduate education and two advanced degrees in Studio Art. Her academic career began in 1994 when she was hired to teach photography at the Institute of American Indian Art and California State University, Los Angeles. After teaching on the east coast for a number of years, Montoya joined the faculty at the University of Houston in 2001 and currently serves as a tenured professor of photography and digital media.

In her creative work, Montoya, like Kathy Vargas, first recorded the world and people around her in black-and-white images. Initially influenced by French photographer Henri Cartier-Bresson and American documentary photographer Bruce Davidson, Montoya quickly abandoned "straight" photography and began manipulating the surface of the photographic print with a combination of drawing, painting, and various printmaking processes.¹⁸ Much of her early work drew inspiration not only from the regional landscape, but also from her maternal grandparents' New Mexican heritage and spiritual practices. Montoya's mature body of work investigates the revision of female stereotypes and icons, uses visual and textual narrative or storytelling as an underlying theme, and often documents various Chicana and Chicano communities as a means to addresses broader political concerns.¹⁹

Sed: The Trail of Thirst (2004) combines the Montoya's keen sensitivity to landscape with her documentary acumen. The artist conceived and executed the work in collaboration with Orlando Lara, then one of her students at the University of Houston. In 2003, Montoya and Lara traveled to the Arizona-Mexico border and photographed routes taken by workers passing through the Sonoran

¹⁸ Straight photography developed during the mid-1880s in response to Pictorialism, a movement that closely imitated the aesthetics of painting as a means to validate photography as a fine art. Pictorialist photographers altered negatives, scratched photographic paper, and captured images with cheesecloth placed over the camera's lens in an effort to achieve painterly effects. In contrast, straight photographers believed that photography inherently possessed its own distinct aesthetic and that photographs should be made without any modifications during capture or print processes.

¹⁹ Montoya directly confronted gender stereotypes and limiting societal messages with her recent documentary photography series on women boxers. See Delilah Montoya, María Teresa Márquez, and C. Ondine Chavoya, *Women Boxers: The New Warriors* (Houston: Arte Público Press, 2006).

Desert to the United States.²⁰ The artist captured images of the terrain, the impact of the migrant's journey on the desert landscape, and cast-off objects found along the trail. Montoya debuted the project in Houston, Texas, as part of the city's 2004 Fotofest biennial.²¹ Significantly, the organization declared water as the biennial theme for that year.

Montoya chose to display *Sed* at Talento Bilingüe de Houston, a Latino cultural arts center that has been in operation for thirty years. In its initial showing at Talento Bilingüe, the work consisted of a wall-sized photomural comprised of numerous documentary images, a video that revealed the process of walking the trail at various locations, and an altar comprised of objects left behind during migration.²² Montoya had collected these personal possessions while photographing the border areas and she displayed the discarded belongings such as rosaries, driver's licenses, and backpacks on the installation's altar. One of the most poignant items that graced the altar was a single red and black cowboy boot, the size that would fit a three-year old child. Further, the video, while visually revealing the desert's beautiful and potentially tragic terrain, also encircled viewers with the sounds of migrant footsteps moving across the landscape. Montoya brought to life a complete experiential environment for the spectator.

In 2008, the exhibition opened at Los Angeles' Patricia Correia Gallery simply titled *The Trail of Thirst*. In this most recent version of the show, the artist eliminated the video and the altar and instead, surrounded viewers with colorful large-scale panoramic images of the desert landscape, the trails that crisscross its terrain, and the artifacts that constitute a human life littered in the land along the trail. Previously, Montoya had composed the photomural with numerous small-scale images, visually "stitched" them together using computer software, and printed them out as a single piece displayed on the entire length of Talento Bilingüe's gallery wall. At the Patricia Correia showing, the exhibition design enclosed the viewing public in every direction with images of border landscape. This comprehensive visual embrace combined with the sheer scale of the photographs dramatically heightened their power.



Figure 6. Delilah Montoya, *Migrant Campsite, Ironwood, AZ, 2004*, Digital photographic print, Courtesy of Delilah Montoya

In *The Trail of Thirst*, Certeau's idea of a text writ large in the land by daily human movement comes into powerful play. Montoya's photographs reveal this text in windswept arid vistas in images such as *Migrant Campsite, Ironwood, AZ* (2004) (Fig. 6) and *Hills* (2004) (Fig. 7). In *Migrant Campsite*, the photographer plays with the ideas of presence and absence. Unlike Aguilar and Vargas, Montoya does not openly depict the human figure. The image shows debris, traces of human interaction, that lingers in the desert after workers have moved on. This residue represents the person now absent from the space, and yet physically marks the location with their continuing presence. Similarly, three human shadows appear on the photograph's far right, crisp outlines of their bodies

²⁰ For a study on the treatment of southern Arizona locations by Chicana writers, see Mary Pat Brady, "Razing Arizona," in *Extinct Lands, Temporal Geographies: Chicana Literature and the Urgency of Space* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2002), 13-48.

²¹ Fotofest is a national arts and education organization that produces exhibitions every two years around a single theme and offers various public programs throughout the year.

²² Montoya has used photomurals with altars in previous work. See Victor Alejandro Sorell, "Guadalupe's Emblematic Presence Endures in New Mexico: Investing the Body with the Virgin's Miraculous Image," in *Nuevomexicano Cultural Legacy: Forms, Agencies, and Discourse*, ed. Francisco A. Lomeli, Victor A. Sorell, and Genaro M. Padilla (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2002), 203-45, Victor A. Sorell, "Behold Their Natural Affinities: Revelations About the Confluence of Chicana Photography and Altarmaking," in *Imágenes E Historias/Images and Histories*, ed. Constance Cortéz (Medford: Tufts University Gallery, 1999), 21-28.

formed by the sun. Their presence provokes questions. Who are they? Is this their temporary shelter? Do the items belong to them? Montoya leaves these questions unanswered.

In the powerful composition *Hills*, the artist records an uneven pattern of small mountainous slopes against a desert sky. Perhaps this scene reminded Montoya of the Sandia mountain range that frames Albuquerque. Desert brush and cactus compose the mid-and foreground of the image, while a well-worn path arcs through the left-hand side. Following Certeau, the trace left behind reveals the practice, the daily lived reality of migrating. The trails taken by the migrants traverse the landscape. With each weary step, the travelers etch their lives directly into the earth.



Figure 7. Delilah Montoya, *Hills*, 2004, Digital photographic print, Courtesy of Delilah Montoya

Some of the migrant trails documented by Montoya, like the one pictured in *Water Trail, O'odham Reservation, AZ* (2004) (Fig. 8) run through reservation land near the Ironwood National Forest in Arizona. Individual tribal members placed plastic containers of water along the trail as an act of mercy and in an attempt to reduce deaths along these dangerous corridors. The translucent water jugs glow eerily against the textures of tree, cacti, and rock. Their placement orders the path and indicates the next step in the journey. Montoya's lens records the stark and desolate beauty of the desert landscape now embedded with historical narratives of migrants and those who compassionately assist them. The tragedy and triumph of these important human stories change an isolated and perhaps forbidding space into an unforgettable place.



Figure 8. Delilah Montoya, *Water Trail, O'odham Reservation, AZ*, 2004,
Digital photographic print, Courtesy of Delilah Montoya

Conclusion

I have discussed two theorists, Lucy Lippard and Michel de Certeau, whose work on space and place have inspired my consideration the work of Chicana photographers Laura Aguilar, Kathy Vargas, and Delilah Montoya. A brief overview of their lives and art production contextualized the later discussion of particular images that reveal how simple everyday acts, such as walking, sweeping, or watching a parade, leave both metaphorical and literal traces in the terrain. In their work, each of the artists has transformed space or geographic location into place, something intimately known, something that holds human history, something of great power. Lippard poses the question, "If place is about memory, but no one who remembers is left to bring these memories to the surface, does a place become a no-place, or only a landscape?"²³ I maintain that the work of these Chicana photographers helps us, and those who come after us, to remember the lives lived and the identities contested and fashioned in the geographic sites these artists depict. The traces that we and others leave in the landscape change it forever and reveal the power of place.

²³ Lippard, *The Lure of the Local: Senses of Place in a Multicentered Society*, 23.

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2008 NACCS Conference Presentation

Too Mex for the Masses: Bringing Mexican Regional Music to Market

The notion of a “Latin boom” in the music industry typically conjures the swiveling hips and buoyant salsa-infused rhythms of pop performers like Ricky Martin and Shakira or, more recently, the driving island beats of reggaeton. Few imagine a Stetson-sporting *vaquero* as a representative figure of the contemporary Latin music scene. Yet this is the visual style associated with what is by far the largest-selling Latin genre in the U.S.: Mexican regional music.

“Regional Mexican” is the catchall phrase the industry uses to categorize a variety of musical traditions. These include the mariachi and ranchera sounds most people identify with Mexican national culture. It also includes musical styles linked to specific states or regions in Greater Mexico, including banda, norteño, duranguense, and tejano. These song forms stem from pre-industrial folk music traditions, and often evoke a pastoral, agrarian past. But today’s performers adapt them to better reflect the struggles of working-class Chicanos and Mexican immigrants living and laboring in U.S. cities. Many artists infuse their music with an urbane sensibility, and sometimes even a hip-hop swagger, as is the case with *narcocorridos* – gritty ballads about gangsta-style drug smuggling antiheroes.

The commercial category known as “regional Mexican” is really as much an American phenomenon as it is Mexican. Many of its most popular artists are, in fact, Mexican American, including Los Tigres del Norte, Jenni and Lupillo Rivera, Intocable, and Grupo Montez de Durango. A reflection of transnational realities, Mexican regional artists today typically have to do well in the States before they hit it big south of the border (Kun 2006).

Here in the U.S., the style sells more than Latin pop, rock, and tropical acts combined. It’s one of few genres that haven’t suffered significantly in the music industry’s recent downturn. Yet despite its massive U.S. appeal, Mexican regional remains ghettoized within the music industry as an “ethnic” niche-market genre whose domestic audience is never expected to reach beyond immigrant communities in the West and Southwest. The music receives little promotional backing from record labels and garners the fewest licensing and sponsorship deals of all Latin genres, despite the fact that it outsells them all. Its standing in the Latin music community is so low that Mexican regional artists boycotted the inaugural Latin Grammys in 2000 to protest their vast under-representation in the show’s award categories.

One of the reasons frequently given for regional Mexican’s marginalization is the perception that it’s either corny or old-fashioned. To unaccustomed ears, the blaring brass, polka beats, and waltzing accordions underlying so many regional styles sound either like circus music or Lawrence Welk showtunes. In sound and image, it’s thought to contrast sharply with the suave *salseros* and Latin-pop divas whose sultry performance of Latin-ness has traditionally been easier for music execs to promote.

I argue that regional Mexican music fails to reach “general” markets, and attract industry support, because it presents a version of Latinidad that’s either incongruous or threatening to the dominant cultural order. Beginning with the mid-century “mambo craze,” record executives have tended to put greater development resources behind Caribbean-based musics because of their connotations of glamour, sensuality, and romance. Underlying this appeal is a tropical imaginary that portrays Latinos as “hot and spicy,” passionate and sexy. Francis Aparicio and Susana Chávez-Silverman define the verb “to tropicalize” as a “means to trope, to imbue a particular space, geography, group, or nation with a set of traits, images, and values” (1997:8) that is “overdetermined for the Caribbean” (1). *Tropicalism*, or the belief that Latinos embody an intrinsic eroticism and “hot bloodedness,” can be understood in similar terms as, or as a corollary to, Edward Said’s analysis of “Orientalist” discourse in regard to Asia and the Middle East – i.e. fantasies of an exoticized, eroticized, non-Western other.

This tropicalist orientation results in the marginalization of Mexican regional music – and of Mexican Americans generally – from marketing and promotional efforts within the domestic entertainment industry, despite the fact that people of Mexican descent comprise nearly 70% of all

U.S. Latinos. The general consensus within the music industry is that the boisterous rhythms, *charro* fashion, and gritty lyrical content associated with Mexican music holds none of the sexiness and exotic allure necessary to attract non-Latino listeners, or even more affluent and “acculturated” Latinos. At work here is a class-based but also heavily racialized discourse that characterizes Mexican working-class culture as coarse, tacky, and lacking in sophistication – what Latino elites consider “*naca*” or “hick” culture.

When regional Mexican groups appear in concert, they’re typically dressed in cowboy hats, ostrich-skin boots, and colorful matching *trajes*. To their legions of fans, the look is sexy and cool, an expression cultural pride; there’s a longstanding tradition in Mexican folklore that elevates the humble rancher or rural *campesino* to the status anti-imperialist hero. But to the majority of entertainment executives, this image plays into xenophobic stereotypes of Mexicans as illegal aliens, impoverished peasants, and dirty day laborers. According to journalist Gustavo Arellano, “The definers of Latin culture have decided that the most popular Latin music genre in the United States isn’t worthy of promotion because it might lead people to believe that Latinos are poor and culturally backward, not slick and ‘with it’” (2002).

Within the music industry, the subordination of Mexican regional music and the privileging of *tropicalismo* are quite literally structured into corporate organization. Most Latin music departments exist outside the domestic operations of major record labels, which have New York or L.A. home offices. Latin divisions are instead based in the Hispanic media hub of Miami and considered a component of the company’s international operations – an arrangement reflective of wider attitudes about Latinos as somehow “foreign” or “un-American” (Negus 1999: 142). In Miami, Mexican regional artists are handled by record executives more attuned to salsa-inflected Latin pop or overtly Caribbean forms of music like son, bachata, cumbia, and reggaeton – styles favored more commonly by East Coast Latinos who are primarily of Puerto Rican, Dominican, Cuban, and Colombian descent.

In her study of Hispanic advertising, *Latinos, Inc.* (2001), Arlene Dávila emphasizes how Latino cultural workers are often just as complicit as Anglo executives in reinforcing preexisting tropicalist stereotypes (42). Although many of these cultural gatekeepers may be Latino, rarely are they Chicanos with insider knowledge of working-class Mexican-American tastes and sensibilities. More often than not, they are either corporate elites recruited from Latin America or Spain or they’re Cuban Americans, the only U.S.-born Latinos to make major inroads into the Latin entertainment and advertising industries (Dávila 2001: 30). In the music field, Cuban ex-pats Gloria and Emilio Estefan are still dominant players, ensuring the industry remains firmly entrenched in Miami.

Much is at stake in the commercial construction of a palatable image of “Latinidad” within the domestic cultural industries. Although Latinos comprise the fastest-growing segment of the U.S. population, and Latino purchasing power nears the staggering sum of \$1 trillion dollars,¹ Latin media producers still have difficulty convincing high-level executives that this demographic deserves any attention at all. A key strategy Latin marketers employ today, which Davila makes plain in her study, is to generate a “unified, uncomplicated, depoliticized, and hence readily marketable definition of Hispanidad” by erasing both regional and national-origin differences as well cultural elements thought to be threatening or distasteful within the Anglo mainstream (2001: 13).

In the music industry, this means developing products aimed at an idealized pan-Latin consumer who’s hip, young, sexy, and relatively affluent. Unfortunately, this is everything Mexican regional music and its fans are thought not to be. Companies founder under the misconception that regional Mexican’s listener base is composed entirely of immigrants who cling to traditional culture and have little to no disposable income. In reality, fans of the genre spend significant hard-earned cash on CDs, concerts, and related merchandise, suggesting that further investment in the music would pay dividends for media companies. As *Billboard* columnist Leila Cobo attests, “[We’re] not suggesting that everyone should turn Mexican or start playing corridos, [but] information gatekeepers certainly do no one any favors by pretending that the market that sells doesn’t exist simply because they don’t like or understand it” (Cobo 2007).

Just as it’s a misconception that the fanbase lacks disposable income, so too is it a fallacy that the Mexican regional audience is dominated by older-generation immigrants who pine for their rural homelands. In reality the format matches hip-hop and reggaeton in terms of popularity among urban Latino youth. Nearly 60 percent of Mexican regional radio listeners are between 18 and 34 years old – the age range considered the most desirable demographic in the corporate realm (Clemens 2005). Regional Mexican radio is second only to hip-hop and R&B in terms of popularity among all 18-to-34 year-old Americans.

¹ Source: 2000 U.S. Census; Selig Center for Economic Growth, the University of Georgia, 2004

Despite glaring evidence to the contrary, the music is thought to inhere none of the youthful and rebellious energy required to appeal to U.S.-born urban Latino youth, or “Generation Ñ,” a consumer base increasingly attractive to media companies because of its growing size and affluence. Mexican regional artists struggle to find corporate sponsorships, which puts them at a distinct disadvantage since, in today’s sluggish music industry, endorsement and synch-licensing deals have become integral to an act’s profitability. While Latin pop, reggaeton, and even rock en Español are increasingly used in television ads, film soundtracks, and cell-phone ringtones, regional Mexican sounds are ignored or outright dismissed. For example, in 2002, when Tecate attempted to re-brand itself from an “ethnic” beer to a hipper product pitched toward young Latinos, it dropped banda music in favor of rock en Español, a genre whose sales are actually negligible in the U.S.

Among the artists most favored today for national advertising campaigns are Shakira and reggaeton star Daddy Yankee because they’re deemed sexy enough to have pan-Latin and even mainstream appeal (Clemens 2005). Shakira represents a marketer’s dream, ostensibly because her hybrid sound and ethnically ambiguous appearance reads as “Latin” without screaming any one national-origin group. Additionally, she taps into several racialized economies of desire, as media scholar Maria Elena Cepeda points out in her essay “Shakira as the Idealized Transnational Citizen” (2003). With her luxuriously blonde hair – dyed famously in 2001 as part of a crossover marketing strategy – Shakira conforms to European standards of beauty, much as *telenovela* starlets and “Sabado Gigante” showgirls are expected to. She also embodies tropicalist tropes with her hip-swiveling dance moves, even though they’re actually based on bellydancing and her Middle Eastern heritage. Nonetheless, her much-touted dancing evokes a neocolonialist, quasi-biological discourse positing Latinos as having “rhythm in the hips” and “fire in their blood,” reinforcing, as Cepeda points out, “the popular belief in an inherent link between Latina corporality and hypersexuality” (221).

What’s being elided in these commercial attempts to market Latinidad is its overwhelmingly Mexican-American composition. Beyond being merely invisible on the mass-marketing radar, cultural elements coded specifically as Mexican are actually thought to “taint” or “degrade” mainstream corporate brands. The inability to view Mexican regional music and the people who listen to it as young, cool, and sexy is a testament to the low level Chicanos and *Mexicanos* occupy on the rungs of Latinidad’s national-origin hierarchy and in American society as a whole. As a result, Mexican regional music is treated, in industry parlance, as if it were a “dog” when it is in reality a “cash cow.”

There are a few signs that the industry-wide chauvinism against Mexican music and Mexican Americans generally has slowly begun to attenuate. Some companies have begun to shift their geographic locus as well as cultural orientation from Miami to Los Angeles, home to the second-largest concentration of *Mexicanos* in the world. Universal Music Latino’s Machete imprint just revamped its entire roster from reggaeton to Mexican regional. Univision Music has always been based in L.A. and is the industry leader, largely thanks to its Mexican regional roster. And when the Latin music- and youth-oriented TV cable channel mun2 (pronounced “*mundos*”) moved its headquarters from Miami to Los Angeles in 2006 and began airing more Chicano-themed programming, it tripled its ratings. Mun2’s Argentinian-born GM Alex Pels relates, “Like it or not, this is the city with the biggest number of Latins in the United States. And the Mexican influence on Latin culture is huge. We don’t want to put a flag on the channel, but we do want to address reality. And not acknowledging that regional music is the biggest-selling Latin genre in this country is a big, big mistake” (Cobo 2006).

Companies attempting to reach Latino youth without Mexican music are floundering. New radio formats like Clear Channel’s “urban” or “Hispanic urban” have yielded disappointing ratings with their reggaeton-heavy set lists. Reggaeton presents an interesting new twist on the decades-old tropicalist dynamics of the Latin music industry. Although the genre stems from Caribbean traditions, it resonates with pan-Latino youth through the common generational language of hip-hop. Certainly, young Chicanos bump it in cars and clubs, but it’s just one component of an eclectic musical mix that includes everything from 2pac to K-Paz de la Sierra. The over-reliance on reggaeton reveals an ongoing refusal to recognize the cultural values of U.S. Latinidad’s Mexican-American majority. Thus, the hottest-selling genre of Latin music remains ghettoized in broadcast barrios and ethnic retail aisles, kept from contaminating market-friendly island fantasies.

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2008 NACCS Conference Presentation

***Power to the Panza: The Politics of Panza Positive Cultural Production,
a Performance***

The initials throughout this essay correspond to the following names:

IM: Irma Mayorga, co-writer, director, dramaturge, and designer of *The Panza Monologues*

VG: Virginia Grise, co-writer, performer of *The Panza Monologues*

IM: We, like you, have been to a number of conferences, and we want to acknowledge factors that often go unmarked. We want to thank everyone for attending this session among the many offerings at this hour. Most of us have traveled great distances: we want to thank you for your time, energy, and money. Because we are in one of what we consider our “home” communities—NACCS, we want to press on this occasion to offer counter-hegemonic practices of resistance. We want to offer a different type of paper presentation, something collaborative, artistic, feminist, alternative, interdisciplinary, and experimental. So we ask you to enjoy our departures.

VG: It all began with *cuentos*, *chisme*, *chistes* and the intimacy of *mujeres* talkin’. It was never meant to be repeated. But it was, and not only was it repeated, it was fashioned, stylized, deconstructed, dramaturged, upended, sent forth, and staged—always staged.

IM: We thought rather than discuss the work in a conference paper monologue, we would contrive a performative conversation of our performance work: *The Panza Monologues*. For many, this paper is an introduction to our work. For others, who may be more familiar, this talk serves as a genealogy to clarify the work’s origin and its driving ideas. In creating this work, we encountered many happy moments

VG: and sad facts

IM: about producing politically conscious, unapologetically Chicana-centered work. Likewise,

VG: because of our journey,

IM: we have some recommendations for the future. Because unapologetically Chicana-centered theatre work is so very rare, we have observations about our journey, art making, Chicana/o cultural production, and the future of Chicano cultural centers and theater artists who identify themselves as Chicanas and *feministas*. As co-writers of *The Panza Monologues*, we split our tasks:

VG: I performed in the piece when it toured as a solo show. It was the first time I had to hold down a stage for such a long period of time and the first time I wasn’t self-directed. Often, our training in theatre is a result of pure Chicana ingenuity—the need to tell a story that hasn’t been told on the stage, an urgency to speak, scream, laugh, heal. However, this show—over an hour long—taught me lessons about the craft of performance that challenged me to work outside of my normal rhythms and habits of speech and locate different characters and voices inside my body.

IM: Vicki and I co-wrote this piece together, and I served as the work’s dramaturg and director, which bears explanation because few in our community understand these important roles in theater. And frankly, we need to produce more Chicana dramaturges and directors. This is a conference where we want to imagine how to better our cultural production—so let us begin with these two theatre positions.

A dramaturg works with writers to develop their plays for performance by bringing a deep, historically centered, and contemporaneously conscious artistic eye to bear on a three dimensional work of theater. So, it takes a bit a training: life experience and otherwise. I also directed the piece.

And to clarify, directing in the theater is formulating the vision of the show, the nature of its actions, the texture of its moods, the style of the acting, the way an actor moves on stage and when, the music between moments, and the overall visual picture. In the best theater pieces, when a director and dramaturg have done their job well, their handprint on the work is remarkable because it becomes imperceptible. In the beginning. . .

VG: cuz every people needs a story that starts that way. . .

IM: In our beginning, there was a time when we had the good fortune to work amongst some astounding and fierce women. We were working for social justice, sisters side by side in the struggle, organizing with people, communities, and using arte to resist the “17 White Men” who control the power in the city of San Antonio just 82 miles south of here [Austin, TX] and a world away.¹

Panza *activista* María Berriozabal, who served for ten years on the San Antonio City Council, coined the exquisite phrase

VG: “17 White Men”

IM: to describe her experiences with power in San Anto.

VG: “17 White Men”

IM: control and manipulate San Antonio’s entire economic and socio-political structures. These good ‘ol boys are rich beyond measure, racist, misogynistic, and homophobic.

VG: They do everything within their means to make sure that they retain the power to shape what happens to and within the city.

IM: Working for social change is hard: it’s gut wrenching, eat-at-your-soul, scar up your psyche work.

VG: And in the midst of this work, we began to tell each other our *cuentos*.

IM: *Tu sabes, cuentos* to ease the day along. And inevitably, those *cuentos* came back to stories about the *panza*—usually at the exact same moments when we were smacking Bill Miller’s² french fry grease off of our fingers and thinking of our ourselves twenty, thirty, forty pounds ago.

[*music rises—Marissa starts music on boom box*]³

Placard: **FROM CHA-CHA TO PANZA**⁴

VG IN PERFORMANCE:

(seductively) I wasn’t always big. I use to be cha-cha thin, tall and skinny like my gringo daddy. I would wear tacones - black with straps that reached across my ankles, boots that stopped short of my knees, diamonds across my feet. Tacones - upper leather, suede, alligator, snake, all leather and in different colors- brown, red, cork, biege, gold, green, black, blue even. Tacones that matched the dresses I wore, dresses that always fit my body, showed shape, whether they were long with slit on the side, in the front, in the back / seperating my piernas, or short, showing my thighs. Me and my tacones.

Vicki pulls her tacones out of a shopping bag.

And they weren’t puta shoes / girl, they were classy. Tacones made me feel taller. Somehow tacones made me feel stronger, more sure of myself. Not submissive or anti-feminist but like the virgen in a yolanda lopez painting, karate kicking out of her blue veil with gold stars, stepping on the head of an angel with her tacones. Pues yo tambien. I throw punches for my raza and I can do it with my tacones on too just like the old school cholas use to do.

Vicki begins to put her tacones on.

And the men, the men were scared of me when I walked into the cantina made up / hair swept, red lipstick and tacones. You see, men like fuckin but they don’t like bein fucked and when I walked in I wuz the one doin the choosin. I didn’t sit back in dark corners waitin for someone to ask me to dance. I asked you. Locked eyes and said “You will dance this polka with me,” sometimes without even sayin nuthin. Other times I’d say, “Fuck all of ya’ll” and take the dance floor at Daddy O’s all by myself

Music erupts into full blown conjunto.

¹ NACCS 2008 convened in Austin, TX.

² A popular and local Texas barbeque restaurant chain.

³ In our presentation at NACCS 2008, our *comadre* Marisa Ramirez helped during our presentation by serving as technical coordinator: running music and placing title cards at times indicated in the paper above.

⁴ Vicki performs a monologue from *The Panza Monologues*.

Vicki rises, dances across the presentation area, swirls, turns.

They all watched / old school vatos, young cholos, graduate students. . . trying to remember their hometown barrios in a bar east of the freeway, forgetting in between too many beers. Hell even the cholas were lookin. Some worried I'd take away their man. Others, shit others just wanted to dance wid me. Be free. Be free like me.

They say a bar is a man's space but I owned that motha fucker. I walked in with my own go-go juice in blue bottle cuz my dad once told me, "Beer makes you fat Virginia," so I drank vodka on the rocks, learned how to play pool "Call your shots. Cuz I'm not fuckin around." And I learned more about community politics/who owns who, who runs what than I could of ever learned workin at a cultural center.

I claimed power through my pussy, and I didn't even have to let any one in. I just had to let em all know I knew I had one and that I controlled my own cho-cha. Ya, I owned that motha / fuckin bar / 'till the city tore it down after li'l Danny got cut.

Vicki sits.

I use to be cha-cha thin. Proud of my calves, well-defined. Calves that did not look like my mother's calves. My mom's calves were more like tree trunks. Her whole body was like one huge bloque. My mother gave us everything, everything but I never remember her having anything. Instead of tacones, she wore chancas. She use to threaten us with her chancla, and it didn't matter if she were big and old, she could still bend over, take off her chancla, grab us by the arm, and meternos un chingaso, real quick like/good ol' fashion chancla discipline. My mother use to say that my father wanted boys. We were three girls. My mother never said what it was she wanted. That was her way I guess. I'm not sure if my mom ever loved my dad but I grew up thinkin that women that fell in love were weak.

I never thought my mom was pretty, even when she was younger and I never wanted to look like her but slowly the image of my mother crept into my own body. Slowly after too many two o'clock after closin time tacos, candy bars and coke for breakfast. They startin callin me dis—short for gordis—instead of la vicki. Cha-cha became panza and not little panzita even. The whole body grew and you know, it's not easy balancin this much woman on an ity, bitty heel. I no longer walked real straight and tall. Hell, I looked more like a weeble, wobble. All my weight on a heel as wide as my pointing finger with my foot arched in the middle. I feel the weight of my panza all the way in the ball of my foot. When your panza gets bigger so do your feet and those thin sexy straps that use to hold your feet well they aint that sexy no more. You've got these little lonjitas hangin off the side of your shoe and it causes your feet to swell. It's like they're chokin, pulsatin, gaspin for air as they struggle to balance all of you on a tacon. And to tell you the truth, I don't really feel so strong, so sure of myself anymore. Shit I'm scared I'll fall when I'm dancin and the people that are lookin at me now are starin because they're scared if I go too low I might not be able to get back up. They're worried I'll hurt someone out there.

There's somethin classy about cha-cha/medias and tacones but when cha-cha becomes panza, and you think you can still pull the same shit you could when you were 21, you just look kinda silly. You lose your tacon super powers, and your magic slippers really are just puta shoes. Your dress clings tightly to lonjas and you can't lock eyes with anyone anymore and talk to them without speaking cuz now they only look at your huge chi-chis, and well chi-chis just aren't as powerful as cho-cha. I don't know why. Who makes these rules?

[Marisa fades music out]

IM: Looking around our small office, this fact was more than evident. At the time, we worked in a cultural center environment of 90% women, and of those women, all of us were Chicana. And, only two of our fellow workers had body weights that could be classified as "healthy." The rest of us ranged in weight dimensions between slightly overweight to full scale *panzonas*. And it didn't matter if we had college degrees or were laid off blue-collar workers—we were all *unhealthy*.

VG: Along the street where we worked in San Anto you could find almost as many fast food joints as in South Central, Los Angeles—not a fresh vegetable in sight that wasn't deep fried. We quickly began drawing the parallels between obesity related illnesses such as heart disease and diabetes to poverty.

IM: From the get go, creating *The Panza Monologues* worked off two basic ideas:

[music rises—Marissa starts music on boom box]

Placard: **"PROLOGUE" FROM THE PANZA MONOLOGUES**

VG IN PERFORMANCE:

There once was this play. This really quite interesting play. It was this play about women. Well, not just anything about women, but about them in a specific way.

IM: *uno* — *cuentos* about our panzas were important: literally, culturally, and metaphorically. Second, everyone, almost without provocation, has a panza story.

VG IN PERFORMANCE:

It described all these women from different places, different groups, different races, different ages, with different boyfriends and girlfriends and lovers who were both boys and girls. And it told stories. Stories about these women that united them through one particular thing.

The play was about (beat) their vaginas.

But vagina is not what I call it. I call it my cho-cha.

Translation. Recoding.

Sometimes translation makes all the difference in the world. Listen:

Vagina. Cho-cha.

Vagina. Cho-Cha.

One has music. One sounds like sandpaper.

But what this woman's play said once again—as so many great women have said over and over—is that we are in a war. A war for our own bodies. And, in the war of our bodies, it became clear to me that for us before you can get to the battle of the cho-cha, we have another score to settle, another place on our beautiful bodies to baptize, actualize,

a place that has been

demonized sterilized starved stuffed covered over.

In fact, we've been encouraged or commanded or scared into actually getting rid of it.

Before I can talk about cho-cha, I need to tell the story of us—Whose us? We are the ones who carry the sun in our skin, brown like almonds or café con leche, color de la tierra.

Tu sabes, the "us" that uses the word cho-cha, panocha!

But you see - the story of us is not just cho-cha it's. . .panza!

Raise your hand if you've thought about your panza today! [People gathered raise their hands in response.] Cuz I know that when I talked to my homegirls, they weren't spilling stories about their cho-cha. ¡No! There we would be with big plates of fideo or pan dulce or menudo or tripas or pasta or Sea Island or Las Manitas, Sol y Luna, or. . .Luby's, and we'd all be telling the stories of our panzas.⁵

And I thought, we gotta hear the stories of the panzas. And so I listened, with my heart in my hands, I listened as women told me about the life of their panzas. Panzas were crying out everywhere: "Tell my story!"

Now someone's panza story is a sacred story and to share it with someone else is to tell them about the condition of your life. Cause the panza, it does have an ego. Every time your panza pooches out from behind that long sweater you put on or when you're walking by a plate of glass and you turn your head and its flashing its big panza "I'm here" lonja roll back at you—that's its ego. Cuz society has told it again and again—"You're bad. Bad Panza. Go away!" The panza it knows, in its own way, it knows, about us, about you. But the panza also knows that it ain't alone there in the middle of us. The panza it knows it needs the legs to walk, the arms to carry it, the mouth to feed it, the heart to excite it.

And when you listen to the panzas of all the mujeres out there, you can hear the world according to women. That's the power of a panza story.

[Marisa fades music out]

IM: The idea of taking true-life incidents and staging testimony has deep roots in U.S. American theater—we nor Eve Ensler, who inspired our work, are not the first to do it nor will we be the last.

Our work has its legacy in documentary theater techniques honed by women like playwright/performer Anna Deavere Smith. Documentary theater forces the writer to partake in the creation of theater as part journalist, part anthropologist, and part crime scene "witness."

VG: For me, the stories of the panza lived inside my body. They were what writer Sharon Bridgforth calls "blood memory," acted out without a stage in an office for an audience of *comadres* and *compañeras*. They were performed before they were written, had to be remembered before they were performed.

IM: One-line riffs secretly documented on my computer later became whole pieces in the show.

⁵ "Sea Island or Las Manitas, Sol y Luna, or. . .Luby's,"—all popular restaurants in the Austin/San Antonio area.

VG: In the winter of 2003, I went to Cuba to attend the Jose Martí Catedra de teatro hosted by El Centro Libre de Experimentación Teatral y Artística (CLETA). Cuba helped me understand the panza as part of a theatrical tradition informed by *carpas* and *teatro callejero*. Cuba was also the place that allowed me to see the specificity of the panza in a U.S. context. It was the first time that I really discovered just how big I was!

IM: It became clear that as Chicanas, we are living in a state of nePANZAla. As late writer Gloria Anzaldúa says, in the inbetween/contradictions where “we can’t ignore the body, because we live in a physical world.” We are living in the wealthiest country in the world where the question of obesity largely affects poor communities of color. Coca-cola, Big Red, kool-aid, free lunch and breakfast programs, processed food force-fed to our children, diabetes, and cancer. We experience the repeated act of colonization in our food, in what we eat.

VG: And when I was in Cuba everyone on the street had a running political commentary about what that meant.

IM: As our performance “Prologue” states, we were certain that for a Latina/Chicana context, “Before you can get to the cho-cha” we had to talk about the panza. For Latinas/Chicanas, sexuality, race, and gender crosscut much differently than what we heard in Eve Ensler’s *Vagina Monologues*. When we gathered stories we asked a wide spectrum of Chicanas to help us. We sent a letter to women and asked:

VG: “How do you feel about your panza? How does your panza feel about you? How does your familia, your partner, your cultura feel about your panza? When do you control your panza? And why? When does your panza control you? Why?”

From your words, and other sources of inspiration, we will be developing our performance piece. We will treat your story with respect and honor if you give it to us, we offer you many thanks in advance.”

IM: The *mujeres* we asked were surprised that they could think about their panza, that a panza could be theatricalized, that it could SPEAK.

The first staging of *The Panza Monologues* was both compelled and interceded by two events that fundamentally changed how Vicki and I thought about our work as artists, activists, and Chicanas. In the midst of making *The Panza Monologues*, Vicki was summarily fired from her position as a collective staff member of the Esperanza Peace and Justice Center. At the time, both of us worked at the Center. The dismissal was abrupt, unparalleled in the organization’s history, and devastating to witness in a space that forwarded itself in grant language and mission ethos as a woman-centered space. Only in retrospect do we know what devastating events such as this can yield.

VG: In the midst of the turmoil, I made a conscious decision to take three months off and dedicate that time completely to writing. I had a regular schedule, waking up at 8am, spending the full day until dinner working. I learned that writing is a commitment. It is a daily practice. As Chicana artists, we often juggle so many things: our commitment to community, family, the job that often pays our bills. Many times what gets sacrificed is our own creative work. That summer taught me that I didn’t want to create art after working 50, 60 + hrs a week. Being an artist is my life practice, and I want to make a life out of doing this work.

I also learned that although I will always have a relationship with institutions both mainstream and alternative, I cannot let my activism or my art be institutionalized. Although I experienced a break from an institution that I hold high regard for—that continues to change the cultural landscape of San Antonio—my community remained intact. I believe as a queer person, we have found all sorts of creative and resourceful ways to make family and community despite the harsh circumstances of reality and that community is rooted in support and how we treat one another as people. So even when I lack institutional support to do my work, as an artist, I always have the support of my community. One of my favorite examples of this is that I literally wrote parts of *The Panza Monologues* on borrowed food stamps and in my “restaurant office” at Café Latino⁶ where the owner—Jessica Cerda, along with David Zamora Casas—fed me on many, many bowls of *fideo*.

IM: While Vicki was eating *fideo*, I was selected to develop a new play at the Eugene O’Neill Theater Center’s Annual Playwright’s Conference (Waterford, CT). My time at this apex of U.S. American Theater afforded me a view that my mentor, Cherrie Moraga articulated in her 2000 essay “Sour Grapes: The Art of Anger in América”: silence continues to be the contribution made by Chicanas and Latinas to theater production in the U.S. Watching theatre-making from this privileged vantage point, watching my play about a working-class Chicana/o family take the stage before New England elites

⁶ Café Latino—A locally owned, small restaurant in San Antonio. Now closed.

showed me how far away our stories are from that reality. As I watched the audience, I realized how intimate our Chicana/o history is—how hidden and in the stead of that, how unvoiced. And a young Chicana protagonist who's trying to articulate the currents of colonization in the Americas? Forget it! And it made me wonder—who am I making theatre for—even in the throes of this accolade?

We strongly believe that the cataclysm of these two life-altering events, in the span of three short months, uniquely imprinted *The Panza Monologues* with its Chicana-centered sense of energy, ideas, and aesthetics.

To date *The Panza Monologues* has toured to three states.⁷ ALLGO (Austin Latino/Latina Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender Organization) invited us to hold our premiere production right here in Austin.

VG: It was picked up by ALLGO after Sharon Bridgforth⁸ heard a reading of a few of the monologues at Resistencia Bookstore, owned by poet and activist Raul Salinas who has recently passed. It's significant that this work was picked up first by a queer space and not a traditional (white or Latina/o) theatre space—again to me it's about how creative and resourceful we are with what we have.

IM: When ALLGO approached us to premiere the show, they asked us a fundamental question: "What do you need?"

VG: This was my first introduction to professional theatre, and it wasn't until I went back to graduate school that I understood that U.S. American Theatre is not run by queer women of color. I didn't know. I thought that was the norm.

IM: The show was written and then first produced and run by women of color.

VG: and I thought that's just the way it's done.

IM: In addition, the play received publication through the vision of itinerant publisher Jackie Cuevas and Jennifer Margulies. . .

VG: . . .again, queer women. . .

IM: and their publishing company Evelyn Street Press. Jackie and Jennifer's support and commitment to our work has been unwavering and magnanimous. Despite these important developmental milestones, the play has never *premiered* in San Antonio. It has played to a number of closed, invitation only events in the city, and it has even received an *homanaje* staged reading by a collectivity of UTSA students last year (2007), but it has never received a fully realized production in San Antonio, the city for which it was written. We did enter into negotiations with the Guadalupe Cultural Arts Center, but those negotiations fell apart when the organization's director felt that the project did not merit monetary allocation. We also suspect the work was too adamantly woman-centered for the organization's leadership at the time. Later, the Guadalupe's executive director was removed from office and served with a sexual harassment lawsuit by a former employee.

VG: Which is why sometimes we gotta take our work into our own hands.

IM: As a result of our experiences with making, performing, and producing *The Panza Monologues*, we have arrived at a list of recommendations that would help encourage what we term "Panza Positive Cultural Production." Our advice enumerates points integral to the task of growing, nurturing, and sustaining the next generation of Chicana cultural producers. We close with:

"Recommendations for Panza Positive Chicana/o Cultural Production"

1. *Cultural Producers and producing non-profits need to begin to think in layers and know that part of the art is process not necessarily product.* We have to move beyond only presenting work. We need to make a commitment to developing work. For theater, a multi-layered strategy among our cultural institutions would subscribe to the following tenets:
 - a. Invite artists to residencies where they only develop work—not teach, not give a show, not lead a workshop, or hold a seminar. Invite to your space/institution solely for the purpose of developing their work.
 - b. Theatre needs an audience in order to move the work forward. Create opportunities for artists to show their work at different stages of development—including workshop readings, staged readings, and full productions. This strategy makes the experience in your community truly supportive of artists accomplishing work.
 - c. Don't occupy creative time with tasks that are not about creating/developing the work. Oftentimes art needs isolation and solitude.
 - d. If you invite an outside artist into your community (someone from a different geographical location), first make sure that you are nurturing local talent. Don't spend

⁷ As of March 2008. Since then, the show has also enjoyed performances in California.

⁸ Nationally acclaimed writer/performer.

- the entirety of your budget to bring in a big name at the expense of your local responsibility. Interrogate why you are searching for non-local artists.
2. *While we invite opportunities for conversations about our art-making process and political/creative visions, don't force artists into sessions where feedback is given—it's not always helpful.*
 - a. At the O'Neill Theatre Center they abide a creative rule where no one could offer feedback to a playwright's work—unless the playwright specifically asks—because often the feedback does more harm than help to what the artist is trying to accomplish in their time of development. We find often there is so much missing from the Chicana/o theater experience and that an audience wants a play to speak in so many ways, the play loses its own voice in its quest to satisfy the majority. This dilutes work.
 3. *As women, we need to stop giving our work away for free.* We need to stop saying that it is "OK" for ourselves and for other artists to donate our creative energy. It is natural that we want to give and give and give to our community. But we should not do so to the point where we no longer validate ourselves or can sustain ourselves as working artists in this country. In the U.S. where women only earn $\frac{3}{4}$ of a dollar that a man does and most non-profit orgs are government funded—we need to stop being the accommodating, passive, "donation" tick mark for non-profit organizations. We need to teach each other that we are used as a commodity on grant reports, grant requests, and other sources of "finance seeking" documents by institutions who receive generous donations because they can list the participation of women artists.
 - a. Likewise, our Chicana/o/Latina/o/people of color Cultural Centers need to stop asking our artists, especially our female artists, to donate their work.
 - b. As well, our Chicana/o/Latina/o/people of color Cultural Centers need to become more conscious of fostering woman-centered work and queer women of color work and stop fearing it as not representative of the totality of the community and therefore unworthy of time or money.
 4. *Change in any non-profit organization that desires to make itself a better home for artists needs to start from the top down.* The culture and ethos of the organization is not derived from its carefully crafted mission statement but always from the attitude and behavior of its leader. Although we admire egalitarian run orgs, we have yet to see a true, democratically run non-profit organization—especially in a Chicana/o context. So, first we need to realize that that idea has been cast aside. Second, too often we require the executive directors of our organizations to be in possession of a host of knowledges that are too far flung. We need money managers *and* artistic managers and this very rarely comes in the same package of one and the same person—our lack of success at producing theater organizations as Chicana/os bears witness to this. And even when it does come in the package of one person they are so overworked and underpaid that the work they produce is done at the expense of their own sense of self and private life.
 5. We must not misinterpret critique as personal attack and learn to be more willing to listen to each other, articulating our needs and desires without tearing each other down.
 6. *In Chicana/o theater, we need to create more dramaturges and directors—and half of them need to be women who are the least likely people to perform these two specific tasks (in Chicana/o or mainstream theatre production).* We need to grow these artists, nurture them, collectively raise them in Cultural Centers that foster and support new work where these types of artists can test their wings before their wings are then clipped and pruned in the laboratories of graduate schools. We need to fund them and their projects. We need to insist that new play production of any kind by any one will benefit from their deep knowledge and participation. In particular, Cultural Centers need to become more responsible about learning what these two positions can mean to theater production.
 7. *One of the most valuable things that you can give theater artists of today is space and time.* A free space, unfettered, a big room without anything in it. Oftentimes, we would have given almost anything for this simple privilege. Instead, we have rehearsed this show of ours in Irma's cramped living room, in empty houses that she's rented, and in all the backyards that she has ever had the occasion to hold a lease to. Theatres should not sit dark when there is so much need for them.
 8. Universities and Chicana/o Studies Centers in universities need to be more creative in opening the resources of their institutions to artists in ways that go beyond presenting work, for

example: create visiting artist positions, produce new work from page to stage, offer big areas as rehearsal space, and offer IT support.

This summer we will be filming *The Panza Monologues* in order to distribute the play on DVD. Thank you for your time and attention.

N.B. As of September 2009, our film project is complete, please visit www.panzamonologues.com to learn how to order a DVD of *The Panza Monologues* filmed before a live audience at Plaza de la Raza in Los Angeles.

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2008 NACCS Conference Presentation

Latinas in the Kitchen: The Rhetoric of Food and Desire

She imagined herself alone and shriveled in her mother's womb, envisioned the first days in her mother's unyielding arms. Her mother's fingers were stiff and splayed as spoons, her milk a tasteless gray. Her mother stared at her with eyes collapsed of expectation. If it's true that babies learn love from their mother's voices, then this is what Lourdes heard: "I will not remember her name."
Christina Garcia, *Dancing in Cuban*

Developing Desire

From infancy we learn immediately to desire certain elements in our environment to make us comfortable. Infants cry moments after birth as they feel a change in temperature. No longer are they wrapped within the warmth of the womb but are typically introduced to the chill of the delivery room or other birthing area where the temperature is below their mother's internal body heat. Once they are cleaned, examined, and wrapped in a blanket, their next need is met: hunger. If the child is born at the appropriate time, its sucking muscles have developed, and it can find sustenance from its mother, or if necessary, from a bottle. Thus, whether the child is male or female, it learns immediately that without warmth and food, it is in discomfort, and its needs must be filled. Sigmund Freud describes this preverbal stage as pre-oedipal and theorizes that unconscious sexual desire develops here. In his essay, "Infantile Sexuality," Freud explains that the first pleasure that an infant experiences comes from "his sucking at his mother's breasts. . . . The child's lips, in our view, behave like an erotogenic zone, and no doubt stimulation by the warm flow of milk is the cause of the pleasurable sensation. The satisfaction of the erotogenic zone is associated, in this first instance, with the satisfaction of the need for nourishment" (47-48). At this point, infants form their first unconsciously sexual attachment to their mother, but it is thwarted by a bigger and stronger person, the father. To become a successful heterosexual individual, the infant must be able to shift the desire for the mother to a desire for the father and, ultimately, to a desire for an appropriate person, another female for the son and another male for the daughter (Chodorow 93-94).

Furthermore, as Freud describes, from birth, this development of sexual desire has been linked to food; therefore, not surprisingly, the desire for food and sex has been frequently marketed in unison.¹ Consequently, the commodification of women juxtaposed to certain erotically suggestive objects or foods objectifies women, making them tantalizing objects of desire. And many young women have not only accepted this as part of their identity, but they have learned how to use it to manipulate men's desires. However, in some cases, food becomes an inappropriate substitute for sex, and, instead of satiating one's physical desire for an unattainable person through sexual gratification,

¹ Heather Brook's article "Feed Your Face," notes that "[t]he reification and styling of food has been explicitly likened to pornography. In analysis of 'food porn,' Ros Coward (and others) analyze examples of marketing which draw explicit associations between sexual pleasure and food (Coward 1984)" (145). She also quotes from Maree Burns: "'Popular cultural representations of women's deviant appetites are not confined to prescriptions about appropriate eating but are infused with sexual themes whereby women's desire for food is often conflated with, and substituted for, desire for sex' (Burns 2004, 279)" (145). Brook continues this section of her article providing sexually suggestive advertisements of women juxtaposed with food as well as a quotation from John Berger's text, *Ways of Seeing*: "Women are there to feed an appetite, not to have any of their own' (Berger 1972, 55)," which she expands by saying that "women are exhorted not just to feed others' appetites but also to hunger *for* hunger—or, perhaps, to hunger to be *hungered for*" (146).

Another article Brook cites that concerns the connection between food and sexuality is Abigail Solomon-Godeau's "The Other Side of Venus: The Visual Economy of Feminine Display" in *The Sex of Things: Gender and Consumption in Historical Perspective*, edited by V. de Grazia and E. Furlough.

a person turns to the physical pleasures found in eating. Again, Freud, in his essay "Infantile Sexuality," explains that even though the two needs—for sexual satisfaction and for "taking nourishment" (48)—separate when teeth appear, a phenomenon known as sublimation occurs: "diversion of sexual instinctual forces from sexual aims and their directions to new ones . . ." (44), such as eating. This article argues that Lourdes Puentes, the major character in Christina Garcia's novel *Dreaming in Cuban*, employs dysfunctional eating habits as sublimation of her sexual desire, and the text reveals rhetoric associated with the desire of both food and sex to disguise Lourdes Puentes's sexual repression and her inability to solve personal problems.

Dreaming in Cuban

I have come to the conclusion that for many, obesity has an important positive function; it is a compensatory mechanism to a frustrating and stressful life.

Hilde Bruch, "Anorexia Nervosa and Its Differential Diagnosis"

Before we can begin a study of what Lourdes Puente desires, we must investigate the definitions of incest, a topic with multiple meanings. From a legal perspective, Judith Herman and Lisa Hirschman² provide the fifty states' incest statutes, and each one includes sexual intercourse or penetration between individuals who are related as "an ancestor or descendent" (222) or between "persons within the prohibited degrees of consanguinity" (224), including "step children and adopted children" (225), or "with brother or sister, whole [or] half blood" (230). In their work, *Father-Daughter Incest*, Herman and Hirschman further define incest as occurring "[w]hen a parent compels a child to fulfill his sexual needs. . . . The actual sexual encounter may be brutal or tender, painful or pleasurable; but it is always, inevitably, destructive to the child" (4). Here we must note that Herman and Hirschman lack specificity about the "sexual needs" being fulfilled. This fulfillment can be done in ways that do not necessarily include sexual intercourse: oral-genital contact, manual manipulation, inappropriate hugging and kissing, voyeurism, or any other activity that arouses sexual feelings and fulfills them. In a study described in Elaine Westerlund's work *Women's Sexuality after Childhood Incest*, Westerlund defines incest as a "major psychological trauma in the lives of women" (29). In the Incest Survivors Questionnaire, Westerlund offered six kinds of sexual acts in addition to sexual intercourse (190-91). In responses, vaginal intercourse was experienced by only 49 percent of the respondents while 95 percent, the highest rate, reported only "kissing and/or fondling" (219). A total of fourteen kinds of sexual activity were reported.

While Westerlund offers specific incestuous acts, Herman and Hirschman added two further dimensions to incest: parental power and secrecy—two qualities of importance in Lourdes Puente's experiences. Herman and Hirschman set aside the psychological element and focused on the power exerted by a parental figure: "What matters is the relationship that exists by virtue of the adult's parental power and the child's dependency" (70). Furthermore, the incest, in whatever form, is usually couched in secrecy, a silence that a woman, especially a Latina, is familiar with. Frequently, the parental authority tells the child that this is "their secret" or that if she shares their secret, it will hurt "mommy" and her siblings. Thus, the child must not only keep the secret, but she has to live with the guilt of what might happen if she discloses the activity and the part she would play in hurting her family. So, for Herman and Hirschman, if a parent feels that his behavior must be kept a secret, then it is probably not only "overly eroticized" but "is probably inappropriate" (205). With these as background definitions and characteristics as well as Freud's explanation, I argue that we should recognize that Lourdes's experiences do not fall into a traditionally, legally accepted category of incest. Instead, she receives a form of paternal love that appears to be culturally acceptable and does not cross a physical boundary, but still inflicts a psychological trauma that transcends cultural boundaries.

Food and Sex

² Judith Lewis Herman is a Professor of Clinical Psychiatry at Harvard University Medical School and Director of Training at the Victims of Violence Program with the Department of Psychiatry at the Cambridge Hospital in Cambridge, Massachusetts. *Father-Daughter Incest* was first published in 1981 and was reissued in 2000 with a new Afterword ("The Case of Trauma"). In 1996 Herman received the Lifetime Achievement Award from the International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies ("ISTSS Awards").

Rather than denying the presence, knowledge, and fear of dysfunctional sexuality that scientific studies clearly reveal among family members in primarily dominant society studies, Latina literature acknowledges the problems within our own culture. From Sandra Cisneros to Denise Chavez, Gloria Anzaldúa³ and Christina Garcia, Latina writers openly discuss unhealthy homes where daughters are exposed to problematic sexual understanding stemming from their experiences or lack of experiences with male family members. Although Tere, from *Loving Pedro Infante*, and Lourdes Puente from *Dreaming in Cuban*, share similar sexual and eating disorders because of their misidentified and unsatisfied desires, Lourdes's problems arise from the abandonment of her mother and a much more complex relationship with food and sex than Tere, as Lourdes's desires stem from multiple levels. As a naturalized U. S. citizen, Lourdes adopts an inordinate love for America and American democracy in contrast to her undisguised hatred of Cuba and Communism. Finally, Lourdes hungers not only for food, but, like Pancha in *Real Women Have Curves*, for a child. This paper, however, will consider only Lourdes's dysfunctional consumption of food and sex to handle the multiple difficulties she faces and the repressed incestuous desires she feels for her father.

Although *Dreaming in Cuban* opens in Santa Teresa del Mar, Cuba, with Celia, the matriarch of the del Pino family helping to guard the north coast of Cuba, readers do not meet Lourdes Puente until the second chapter where the narrator hints at Lourdes's sex and food disorders: "It is 4:00 a.m. [Lourdes] turns to her husband sleeping beside her. . . . She has exhausted poor Rufino again. Lourdes puts on a size 26 white uniform with wide hip pockets and flat, rubber-soled shoes" (17). From her introduction, readers become aware of Lourdes's over-indulgence and hedonistic involvement in sex and food.⁴ That she clearly hungers for some unattainable, metaphorical sustenance is also displayed in her size.

Yet Lourdes is neither a weak nor an unsuccessful woman, and Elspeth Probyn argues "that food and its relation to bodies is fundamentally about power: 'linked to the mode of production of material goods, the analysis of cooking [baking] has to be related to the distribution of power and authority in the economic sphere" (7). In fact, Lourdes owns a bakery and by the end of the novel, she owns two and has dreams of having a chain of bakeries across the country. On the other hand, Marion Woodman suggests:

...that 20th –century women have been living for centuries in a male-oriented culture which has kept them unconscious of their own feminine principle. Now in their attempt to find their own place in a masculine world, they have unknowingly accepted male values—goal-oriented lives, compulsive drivenness, and concrete bread which fails to nourish their feminine mystery. (10)

However, as Lourdes moves away from a job where she was "classifying the records of patients who had died" (18), she appears to find pleasure in feeding others and in making her bread products as

³ In *The House on Mango Street*, one of Esperanza's friends displays behavior that suggests that she suffers sexual abuse from her father. In *Loving Pedro Infante*, Tere grows up in a home without her father, and she is unable to learn appropriate male-female behavior without his presence or the presence of another father figure, which leads to her inappropriate choices in men and her inability to become involved in a positive relationship with a man. In Gloria Anzaldúa's book, *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Anzaldúa explains:

La gorra, el rebozo, la mantilla are symbols of my culture's "protection" of women. Culture (read males) professes to protect women. Actually it keeps women in rigidly defined roles. It keeps the girlchild from other men—don't poach on my preserves, only I can touch my child's body. Our mothers taught us well, "*Los hombres nomás quieren una cosa*"; men aren't to be trusted, they are selfish and are like children. Mothers made sure we didn't walk into a room of brothers or fathers or uncles in nightgowns or shorts. We were never alone with men, not even those of our own family. (39-40)

⁴ Andréa Poyastro Pinheiro et al. report in their article "Sexual Functioning in Women with Eating Disorders" that many women who suffer from anorexia nervosa as well as to those who suffer from bulimia nervosa display characteristics of eating disorders, which, in turn, "influence sexual functioning" (123). Even though there is little research in these areas, the authors cite studies that have found that "women with BN [bulimia nervosa] symptomatology report an earlier age of sexual encounters and have more sex partners and *higher sexual desire and fantasy* [my emphasis] compared with women with restricting AN [anorexia nervosa]" (124). Upon completion of their study, the researchers compared their findings to other existing studies and found that women with bulimia nervosa did not have as high a loss of libido as those with the various forms of anorexia nervosa (128).

attractive as possible to those who come to her shop. In Cuba she had no power, no ability to access or develop her business sense; however, in the U.S., she can become an entrepreneur and move in the direction of the American Dream, admittedly, a male-oriented dream but one that she infuses with a feminine sense. Whereas women's private role has been that of nurturer, one of several "subtle factors that increase the risk of obesity in women" (Maccoby & Jacklin cited in Hall and Havassy 164), for Lourdes, it has spilled into the public arena as the business woman is not only involved in profit but also in the aesthetics of her product and in offering comfort and fulfilling the needs of her customers: "Lourdes lines the display cases with paper doilies and organizes the croissants and coffee rings. . . . [And] she sets the first pot of coffee to brew. . . ." (18, 20). Furthermore, her baked goods provide a sensuous form of comfort food for herself: "She is comforted by the order of the round loaves, the texture of grain and powdered sugar, the sustaining aromas of vanilla and almond" (18) even though the only sweet treats she enjoys eating are the pecan sticky buns, of which she reserves "two to eat later" (19).

The bakery, however, provides the environment that exacerbates her obesity. In a 1971 study, researchers found that "[a] well-studied characteristic of the obese is the tendency to eat in response to external clues rather than in response to internal physiological states. . . . In general, the obese eat more than normally when food is visible, easily accessible, and extremely tasty and abstain more easily in environments devoid of food cues" (Rodin cited in Hall & Havassy 164). Unfortunately, while she is making preparations to begin the day, Lourdes discovers that her father has died, but she is too busy to attend to her dead father's needs. In her text concerning eating disorders, Marion Woodman discusses the Christmas legend *The Owl Was the Baker's Daughter*, a Christmas legend about Christ stopping at a bakery. The baker's daughter fails to meet the Lord's needs and is turned into an owl. Much like the baker's daughter, Lourdes "is so busy preparing the [daily] bread and putting her shop in order that" (8) she misses the importance of "feeding" her run-away daughter, Pilar, and tending to the immediate needs of saying goodbye to her father.

However, at one point, Lourdes's anxiety about her missing daughter drives her to consume "a two-and-a-half-pound stash of pecan sticky buns" (23), representative of the "'dough [that] immediately . . . began to swell, and presently became of a most enormous size' . . . [the] concrete bread" (8, 10), which she began thawing at nine o'clock the evening of Pilar's failure to come home and which she finished eating by midnight. This attempt to control her anxiety about Pilar's absence is sublimation in the form of binge eating and a way to care for herself when Rufino is unable to comfort her. Basically alone, she sublimates her fears, anger, and anxiety about Pilar as well as her sense of loss over the death of her father to anger at Rufino for not being available when she needed him and to the sticky buns. According to Susan Bordo, "the emotional comfort of self-feeding is rarely turned to in a state of pleasure and independence, but in despair, emptiness, loneliness, and desperation" (126). At a time when Lourdes is especially vulnerable and most in need of support and love from Rufino, a time when her daughter has been missing all day and her father has died, the only place where she can find solace is in the pecan sticky buns.

Ironically, Lourdes has been hungering desperately for "something [Rufino] could not give her, [and] she wasn't sure what" it was (20). After her family had lived in Brooklyn for five years, Jorge, Lourdes's father, came to New York for chemotherapy, and "her appetite for sex and baked goods increased dramatically" (20). The longer she cared for her father, taking him to the hospital, the greater her need to sublimate her inappropriate sexual feeling for Jorge, and "the more she reached for the pecan sticky buns, and for Rufino" (20) until "Rufino's body ached from the exertions. His joints swelled like an arthritic's. [And] he begged his wife for a few nights' peace. . . ." (21). During this time, "Lourdes . . . gained 118 pounds" (20). According to Bordo, "[e]ating is not really a metaphor for the sexual act; rather, the sexual act, when initiated and desired by a woman, is imagined as itself an act of eating, of incorporation and destruction of the object of desire. Thus, women's sexual appetites must be curtailed and controlled, because they threaten to deplete and consume the body and soul of the mate" (117). That Rufino begs for her to stop suggests that he sees and "fears being controlled by [her] sexual power" (Sharpe 87), sexual power that is only a patriarchal privilege. Despite what seems to be a voracious appetite for sex, with "[h]er legs looped and rotated like an acrobat's, her neck swiveled with extra ball bearings. And her mouth. Lourdes's mouth and tongue were like the mouths and tongues of a dozen experienced women" (21), she could not be satisfied. Her unappeasable appetite was searching, indeed, for something she could not get from Rufino, for what she desired and did not realize was her father.

From a Freudian perspective, Lourdes's behavior stems from her infantile sexuality and her object choices, which originate in the Oedipal stage. David Richter explains that a "successful Oedipal outcome [for girls occurs when] the girl shifts her sexual desire from the mother to the father (who possesses the penis she wants). And then, when her sexual advances to the father are opposed, begins to identify with the mother in order eventually to possess another man like the father" (1016). Unlike Tere, in *Loving Pedro Infante*, Lourdes did not lose her father and develop a need to go looking for a father figure to satisfy her sexual needs. Instead, Lourdes was abandoned by her mother immediately after her birth—Celia "held her child by one leg, handed her to Jorge, and said, 'I will not remember her name'" (43)—an act of rejection that Lourdes feels but does not remember until her father's ghost tells her the story of her mother and her own birth. That symbolic and metaphorical act results in the reproduction of the Latino patriarchal ideology of paternal ownership of the females—wife and daughters—in the household. Jorge takes ownership of Lourdes as Celia relinquishes her daughter, and Jorge's ghost admits to Lourdes decades later: "'I took you from her while you were still a part of her. I wanted you for myself. And you've always been mine, *hija*'" (196). These acts—Celia's and Jorge's—result in producing "the absent mother. Since the trauma takes place during the very early pre-oedipal stages of development, and is thus pre-verbal, the experience remains for the most part unconscious" (Dillman 1). But rather than deal with attempting to become a meaningful part of Celia's life, Lourdes clings to her father for her needs. Celia's relinquishing of Lourdes to Jorge, however, was, in fact, a positive act at that moment, for unbeknownst to her, Celia was unable emotionally and psychologically to care for her infant. Thus, Jorge becomes the sole provider for Lourdes, and as the years pass, the two grow more attached to each other, to the point of either excluding or indifferently accepting the company of Lourdes's sister Felicia when she wants to join the circle. After recuperating from a debilitating car accident, during which Lourdes slept at Jorge's side nightly, he recovered to the point that he could play again with his older daughter. However, when "Felicia crie[d] and want[ed] to play with them, . . . they ignore[d] her" (54).

Because Jorge was a salesman, he was away from home, and Lourdes either waited for him to return, dressed to please him, or she accompanied him during her summer vacations. According to Celia, "Lourdes is two and a half years old. . . . Jorge calls her every night when he travels. 'When are you coming home, Papi? When are you coming home?' she asks him. On the day he returns, even if he's not expected until midnight, she wears her frilly party dress and waits for him by the front door" (52). Jean Wyatt, author of *Reconstructing Desire*, explains that this activity is one of three—"waiting, flirting, and the oedipal triangle" (27)—in the pattern of the female unconscious where the woman is raised in a patriarchal family.⁵ This homecoming provides excitement in an otherwise mundane day and foreshadows the traditional romantic scenario played out in fairy tales with the young woman waiting for her prince to come and rescue her, an event that has its "active and passive roles first played out by father and daughter" (28). Herman points out that "[c]onscientious parents often wonder where to draw the line between affectionate intimacy and inappropriate sexual conduct with children" (205); however, Jorge consistently fails to see that his behavior, which apparently does not include sexual, physical contact, is indistinguishable in the child's mind from sexual love, and the two—parental and sexual love—become forever entangled, leading to Lourdes's later unperceived sexual desire for her father.

The narrator skips most of Lourdes's adolescent and young adult years, and moves to her engagement to Rufino. At that point, Jorge feels threatened by the interloper, and according to Celia, "Jorge is so jealous that he acts like a stubborn child. He refuses to shake Rufino's hand and then he locks himself in our bedroom, sulking until Rufino leaves. Jorge complains incessantly about him, finding faults where there are none. This is the first time I've ever seen Lourdes cross with her father" (205). She also indicates that "Jorge blames himself for traveling so much during her childhood" (206). Jorge's possessiveness of Lourdes is seen through the belief that he has lost in the "male competition for [his] daughter's affection and attention" (Sharpe 85). Just as Celia relinquished Lourdes to Jorge, he must now relinquish his control and her love to another man. He will not only no longer play the role of protector, but he will lose his control over her virginity, thus displaying not only a jealousy that Celia immediately recognizes, but a "sexual jealousy" over her possession (both literal and figurative) by Rufino (86).

⁵ Wyatt explains the other two activities, flirting and the Oedipal triangle, each of which clearly appears in *Dreaming in Cuban* with Lourdes and her father being the main participants.

Lourdes's marriage and move to New York were positive steps in her unconscious attempt to break away from her romantic relationship with Jorge. She makes the required departure from her father's home to her husband's and ultimately to her family home apart from what is ironically called the "Fatherland" (106), Cuba. In fact, her desire to move as far as possible from the Florida coast that is so close to Cuba reveals her attempt to sever her ties with a land that metaphorically and literally protects rapists. Again, ironically, Lourdes is raped by the authority figure who should have been there to protect her, El Líder's soldier, as well as being metaphorically raped psychologically and emotionally by her own father, the patriarchal figure who should have protected her from himself as well as from others. To Jorge's credit, readers discover that he never had sexual intercourse with Lourdes, who reveals that she has repressed her rape memory and proudly recalls that she "was a virgin when she married" (168). That, however, does not vindicate him from arousing her childhood fantasies, thus allowing her to develop feelings that were unacceptable, and creating psychological trauma in her childhood that lasted into her adult life.

Conclusion

Unfortunately, most Latinos refuse to go to counseling, believing that they will betray the family, especially the patriarchy. The belief that the father/husband is always right is the standard in the Latino family. To betray the men is to be a traitor to the culture. Consequently, to cast aspersions on the head of the household, especially from the arena of sex, or to denigrate one's mother by suggesting that she abandoned her child is to betray the love and the closeness of *la familia*. And the punishment for that is to be cast out from the family; thus, that fear leads to silence. Although Gloria Anzaldúa refers in the following passage to her life as a lesbian, she speaks for all Latinas whose sexuality has strayed from the path of *la Virgen de Guadalupe*:

We're afraid of being abandoned by the mother, the culture, *la Raza*, for being unacceptable, faulty, damaged. Most of us unconsciously believe that if we reveal this unacceptable aspect of the self our mother/culture/race will totally reject us. To avoid rejection, some of us conform to the values of the culture, push the unacceptable parts into the shadows. (42)

And as we have seen, the "unacceptable parts" that are pushed into the shadows for Lourdes are those incestuous aspects of her sexuality that unconsciously draw her to her father and that she can only continue to repress further and further into her psyche until the only way out for these feelings is sublimation and obesity. She experiences the need for silence that most females who have been violated feel. As Judith Herman points out, "[t]he victim who reveals her secret implicitly challenges a traditional and cherished social value, the right of a man to do as he pleases in his own home" (130). That Lourdes might not even know consciously what this secret is is highly probable, and, consequently, she cannot uncover it without psychological help.

From the Latino perspective, only Anglos go to psychiatrists. Rather than looking to a psychologist or other mental health professionals, Latinos choose physicians or *curanderos* to cure them of problems with *los nervios*, depression, and other conditions they suffer from (García-Preto 163). Latinos keep their problems to themselves; they don't even share the burden with others in the family. Thus, authors like Cherríe Moraga and Richard Rodríguez know that their families will probably never read their works, *Loving in the War Years: Lo que nunca paso por sus labios* and *Hunger for Memory: The Autobiography of Richard Rodríguez*, respectively, but if they do read them, their relatives will rebuke them for divulging family secrets. And others, like Denise Chavez and Sandra Cisneros, recognize and refuse to be complicit in hiding the fact that incest does occur in Latino families. And as Herman points out in her Afterword, 2000: "Understanding Incest Twenty Years Later," "[l]eading authors of contemporary fiction" (221), such as Jane Smiley, Alice Walker and Toni Morrison (243) as well as "leading figures of daytime television. . . . [and] well-known celebrities [such as Oprah Winfrey], have disclosed their own experiences" (241).

These revelations, however, are not the case with Lourdes and many other Latina protagonists who sublimate their sexual desire into a strong desire for food. The authors are not only revealing the hidden violations experienced in the families, but they are also examining the consequences that such violations have on the daughters. Regardless of whether Lourdes is in Cuba or in the U.S., her psyche has been damaged, and she suffers the repercussions of repressed incestuous desire for her father.

Even though she has severed her ties with Cuba, thus renouncing her social and patriotic identities, she cannot escape her ethnic identity, which has been part of her life since she was born. Try as she might to assimilate into the American way of life, going so far as to leave her daughter's punk painting of the Statue of Liberty on her bakery wall and rejecting El Líder and his Communist policies, Lourdes continues to hold on to her internalized beliefs and continues to feel love and loyalty for the only person who sincerely cared for her as a child and who loved her when her mother was not there to perform her duty even though he damaged her deeply. Thus, Lourdes will probably live the rest of her life tied to an eating disorder without knowing why she has to binge and why she cannot lose weight.¹

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***Blaxican Identity: An Exploratory Study of Blacks/Chicanas/os
in California***

Introduction

This paper explores the life experiences of *Blaxicans*, or multiracial individuals who are the products of unions that are composed of one biological (or birth) parent who is identified and designated as Mexicana/o or Chicana/o, and one parent who is identified and designated as African American or Black. Most research on racial intermarriage and multiracial offspring in the United States has concentrated on European American unions with African Americans or other people of color and their descendants. Research on “dual-minority unions” and their offspring is scant (Wallace 2001). The examination of how identity formation operates among multiracial offspring whose biological parents are non-white¹ is limited and informs the basis of this investigation of *Blaxican* identity. In this introduction, I discuss the literature related to Blaxican identity, including: Black identity, Chicana/o identity, and dual-minority multiracial identity. The goal of this paper is to investigate how mixed-race Black and Chicana/o individuals racially identify and to examine the processes that influenced their decision of racial self-identification.

Review of Relevant Literature

Black Identity

The current struggle over multiracial identity owes its genesis to the outcomes of previous struggles over racial identity and is in part the product of the institutionalization of the one-drop rule and the contradictions to which it gave rise (DaCosta 2007). The one-drop rule of hypodescent holds that individuals with *any* trace of African ancestry, regardless of the degree and no matter how slight are considered Black (Davis 2006). Stemming from slavery, the one-drop rule was crucial to maintaining Jim Crow segregation in the South. By the beginning of the twentieth century, the one-drop rule became the “commonsense” definition of Blackness throughout the United States and the legal definition in some Southern states (Davis 2002). Utilizing the one-drop rule to define Blackness had the intended purpose of prohibiting African Americans from intermarrying or having sexual contact with whites, which kept them in inferior segregated schools, and excluded them from political participation, employment, housing, and credit opportunities as well as receiving public assistance (Davis 2002). The intended goal of the rule was to define Blacks as outsiders as a means of protecting white supremacy and wealth (Daniel 2002). This racialized legacy maintains an anti-Black rhetoric that condones the subordination of anyone to whom the one-drop rule of hypodescent is applicable. While the one-drop rule once legally defined Blackness and thus excluded African Americans from resources enjoyed by whites, African Americans eventually adopted the rule as a positive source of empowerment, unity, and self-actualization as a coping mechanism for survival in an oppressive society (Wallace 2001). The movement of the 1970’s spurred the affirmation of “Black is Beautiful,” such that the one-drop rule became more socially acceptable in defining Blackness. Thus, Blacks used the one-drop rule, which was initially designed to further marginalize them, as a source of unification for power against an oppressive white system.

As the one-drop rule shapes how Blackness is defined, scholars and lay people continue to argue that mixed-race offspring of African ancestry remain labeled as Black (Davis 2006; Rockquemore, Laszloffy and Noveske 2006). In the popular press for example, Tiger Woods has been

¹ In this study *white* is lowercased because it “refers not to one ethnic group, or to specified ethnic groups but to many” (Hurtado 1996: 161).

portrayed as infiltrating the white world of golf as the best Black athlete to ever grace the sport. Woods, however, refutes that claim stating that he is not Black, but “Cablinasian” a mixture of his Caucasian, Black, Indian and Asian backgrounds (Nordlinger 2001). To some extent, mixed-race individuals of European and African descent in the United States, even if phenotypically white, have internalized the one-drop rule and tend to consider themselves as Black (Daniel 2002; Wallace 2001). Furthermore, Black-white mixed race people are more likely to self-identify exclusively as Black rather than exclusively as white because of the historical legacy of the one-drop rule and the myth of white racial purity (Rockquemore and Laszloffy 2005; Davis 2002).²

Chicana/o Identity

Chicana/o communities are linked to the national histories of Spain, Mexico, the United States, and indigenous and tribal nations or groups (Lipsitz 1998). Chicanas/os have a unique culture within the United States, with its own traditions, history, and language composed of linguistic varieties including Chicana/o English and Chicana/o Spanish and its variants (Mendoza-Denton 1999). The identity of Chicanas/os stems from the Spanish colonization of Mexico in which racial mixing or *mestizaje* occurred between the Spanish, indigenous, and African populations (Menchaca 2001). The process of racial mixing in Mexico was Spain's socio-political colonial project with the goal of “whitening” the race and elevating Mexico in Europe's view (Hunter 2005). The concept of *mejorar la raza* (literally to improve the race) is still used today among Chicanas/os to emphasize the desirability of being light skinned, or marrying someone who is light skinned or white (Cruz-Jansen 2001; Comas-Días 1996).

Typically, when the concept of *mestizaje* is evoked, the African roots of Mexico are ignored (Acuña 2000; Rendón 1971; Gonzales 1967). The social and political structure of Mexico has a legacy of giving preferential advantages to people with lighter skin. Prejudices against Afro-Mexicanas/os and darker skinned indigenous and mestizo populations is part of Mexico's social fabric (Vaughn 2005), hence the omission of African slavery and ancestry in popular discourse about the national history. Consequently, Chicanas/os are considered to be *mestizas/os* of European and Native American descent, regardless of African ancestry or phenotypical traits (Daniel 2002). Racial mixing in Mexico has produced people whose skin colors vary from white to phenotypically Black. However, for most Chicanas/os, dark skin is associated with an indigenous ancestry and identity, while for others it is associated with Blackness and therefore stigmatized (Hunter 2005).

In the United States, around the time of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo (1848), Mexicans were defined as a “white” population in the state of California's attempt to assign Mexicans to already defined legal racial categories (Omi and Winant 1994); however, they were still treated *de facto* as non-whites by European Americans (Haney López 2003). The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo stated that any Mexican who chose to stay in the United States after the Mexican-American War would be granted full citizenship. However, there was a linkage between being a citizen of the United States and whiteness, that is to say, in order to be a citizen one must also be white. Citizenship in the United States meant that Mexican-descent Americans were necessarily designated *de jure* as white. However, the United States government broke the treaty's conditions and consequently the more powerful and dominant white landowners and the larger European American community, backed by the government, increasingly came to view Mexicans as a *de facto* racialized ethnic minority (Hunter 2005). Since the 1930s, members of the Mexican community, including community leaders, argued that Mexicans were white, despite European Americans' rejection of this idea, and they continued to stress an assimilationist ideology promoting a white identity (Haney López 2003). However, the assertion of a white identity did not apply to everyone, particularly those who were from the working class, which was mainly composed of people with dark skin and limited English language proficiency, and who could not pass as white (Haney López 2003). Some argued that the efforts to assimilate Mexicans solely *de-Mexicanized* them but failed to Americanize them in a sense of fully incorporating them as white (García 1997).

With mass deportations of Mexicans during the Great Depression, many of whom were born in the United States, Mexican people's consciousness began to change. The Civil Rights movement of the 1960s changed how Chicanas and Chicanos viewed themselves. They began to reject whiteness

² For examples of mixed race Black and white individuals that exclusively self-identify as Black, see Rockquemore, Kerry Ann and Tracey Laszloffy. 2005. *Raising Biracial Children*. Lanham: AltaMira Press.

and deny claims that they were and should be assimilating given their status as an *internally colonized* group in the United States (Blauner 2000; Mirandé 1985; Barrera 1979), a position held along with African Americans and other historically marginalized groups. Segregated employment, education, and housing solidified a consciousness among Mexican origin people that they were not white. Chicanas/os began to assert themselves as proud members of a brown race (Haney López 2003).³ The term Chicana/o, originally a Spanish derogatory word to define Mexicans was used to embrace a unique cultural heritage (Mirandé 1985). In the face of discrimination, intolerance, and erasure in a white society, the Chicano movement sought to define what it meant to be Chicano (Haney López 2003; Rendón 1971; Gonzales 1967). As men in the Chicano movement solidified an identity for themselves, they did so however without including women and attempted to undermine women's realities. As defined by some of the dominant male voices in the movement, a Chicana's main role was to support Chicanos and maintain the race through bearing and raising Chicana/o children (Blackwell 2003).

Accordingly, Chicana feminists articulated a Chicana identity for themselves that included aspects of race, class, gender, and sexuality (Pérez 1999). For example, Gloria Anzaldúa (1999) calls for a new *mestiza* consciousness that rejects static notions of the self and essentialist categories of what it means to be Chicana including notions of skin color and Spanish proficiency. Anzaldúa defines the *mestiza* as being "cradled in one culture, sandwiched between two cultures, straddling all three cultures and their value systems, *la mestiza* undergoes a struggle of flesh, a struggle of borders an inner war" (Anzaldúa 1999:100). Anzaldúa strategically deconstructs Chicana identity with the goal of creating a post-colonial consciousness using the notion of multiple identities that called for embracing all notions of self, including the European and indigenous backgrounds, to escape the oppressive confines of colonial discourse (Pérez 1999). However, this post-colonial consciousness differs from an anti-colonial consciousness that shaped Chicana/o identity in the 1960's in that an anti-colonial consciousness operated under stringent and essentialist binaries such as the colonized/colonizer.

Despite attempts to anti-essentialize Chicana/o identity, some individuals continue to operate under essentialist notions of Chicanisma/o.⁴ Initially, Chicana/o identity was socially constructed in theory using the concept of *mestizaje* as a radical form of strategic anti-essentialism based on embracing European, Native, and African components.⁵ Over time, for some Chicana/o individuals and scholars on the subject, the idea of *mestizaje* has been overlooked or dismissed. Consequently, Chicana/o identity is increasingly socially constructed as a "mono-race" and exclusive identity and category, leaving little space for differences and multiple identities within the concept of Chicanisma/o. Chicanas/os currently are subject to questions about their racial and ethnic authenticity when they either have lighter skin or cannot speak Spanish (Hunter 2005).

Dual-Minority Multiracial Identity

Following the elimination of anti-miscegenation laws with the *Loving v. Virginia* decision (1967), interracial marriage and multiracial births in the United States have increased (Davis 2006; Daniel and Castañeda-Liles 2006; Root 1996). According to the year 2000 Census, 6.8 million people

³ The *East LA Thirteen* and *Biltmore Six* cases were significant in proving that Mexicans existed as a distinct group and could be discriminated against. This was difficult to prove given that the Mexican community had some success in the past to argue that they were white.

⁴ The term "strategic essentialism" was coined by Indian literary critic and theorist Gayatri Spivak to refer to a tactic that nationalities, ethnic groups, or "minority" groups can utilize to present themselves to achieve certain goals. Strong differences may exist between members of these groups, and amongst themselves as they engage in continuous debates. Yet it is sometimes advantageous for them to "essentialize" themselves and project their group identity in a simplified and reductionist manner that tends to focus on one axis of experience, identity, and ultimately, oppression (Landry and Maclean 1995, 7, 54–71, 159, 204, 295).

⁵ Strategic essentialism" (Lipsitz 2003, 31–5) refers to a tactic that nationalities, ethnic groups, or "minority" groups can employ by emphasizing the strong differences that may exist between members of these groups, and amongst themselves as they engage in continuous debates in order to achieve their goals. While strong similarities may exist between members of these groups, it is considered advantageous for them to "anti-essentialize" themselves and project their group identity in a complex manner in order to address more than one axis of experience, identity, and ultimately oppression, as well as the interlocking and ambiguous nature of these phenomena.

in the United States reported more than one race.⁶ The significance of “mixed-race” has not been adequately examined within the sociological literature on racialization (Parker and Song 2001). Furthermore, research on race/ethnicity⁷ has concentrated on the Black/white color line with lesser attention paid to other racial/ethnic formations. It follows that research on multiraciality has focused primarily on Black-white multiracial offspring (Korgen and O’Brien 2006; Twine 2006; Spickard and Daniel 2004; Davis 2002; Root 1996) and to a lesser extent on Asian-white and Mexican-white multiracial offspring (Williams-León and Nakashima 2001; Liles 2005; Jiménez 2003; Salgado de Snyder, Lopez and Padilla 1982). Less scholarly attention has centered on “dual-minority” multiracial individuals (Wallace 2001). Multiraciality is not generalizable and not all mixes are the same. Each is a product of specific historical influences, racial hierarchies and power relations and these varying histories of power are carried within the mixed race body (Kwan and Speirs 2004). Therefore, it is important to highlight the need for more complex theoretical conceptualizations of the experiences and identity development of dual-minority multiracials.

Dual-minority or “double-minority” multiracials have birth parents that are both identified and designated as non-white and from different racialized ethnic groups. Dual-minority multiracials are distinct within the multiracial population because their parentage does not include a white parent, although either one or both parents may have European ancestry. Dual-minorities’ experiences may differ starkly from majority-minority multiracials, particularly if they belong to two racial and ethnic minority groups that have historically been at odds with one another (Hall and Cooke 2001). For example, Blacks and Latinas/os in the United States tend to compete for the lowest paying employment in the formal labor market (Betancur 2005) and experience racially-driven warfare against one another in prison institutions and on the streets. Identification with one race/ethnicity may cause difficulty for inclusion with another racial group (King and DaCosta 1996). Furthermore, the social experiences of dual-minority multiracials differ depending on particular racial/ethnic cultural backgrounds. In the next section I discuss the methods used in my study.

Methodology

Method

To study the identity formations and life experiences of Blaxicans in California, I conducted face-to-face and telephone interviews with 12 individuals. I began the interviewing stage in July 2006 and ended in January 2007. I used a semi-structured agenda using a grounded theory approach (Glaser and Strauss 1967) to analyze and interpret the data collected. The grounded theory approach focuses on the discovery of theory in data, rather than testing data based on established theory (Emerson, Fretz and Shaw 1995). Given that I began this research as an exploratory study or one without prior expectations (Schutt 2001), I felt that the above approaches to data collection and analysis were the most appropriate methods of getting at the most significant aspects of a Blaxican identity from those that know it most intimately.

⁶ “The Two or More Races Population: 2000.” Census 2000 Brief, issued November 2001. (<http://www.census.gov/prod/2001pubs/c2kbr01-6.pdf>). The year 2000 was the first time in Census history that people were allowed to mark more than one race. Data indicate that 1.6 percent, or 4, 856, 136 individuals of the nation’s population of 301, 621, 157 identify with two or more races. This is a 25 percent increase since the 2000 census when multiracial individuals totaled 4 million. Initially multiracial individuals totaled 7 million on the 2000 census. This figure was modified to 4 million to correct misreporting of respondents who, for example, checked “white” or “Black” but also wrote in “Hispanic” or the equivalent in “Some Other Race.” These individuals identified as “white Hispanics” or “Black Hispanics” not “Two Or More Races.” Mike Stuckley, “Multiracial Americans Surge in Number, Voice: Obama Candidacy Focuses New Attention on Their Quest for Understanding.” MSNBC, 28 May 2008, <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/24542138/>; “Table 6. Resident Population by Sex, Race, and Hispanic-Origin Status,” *Annual Estimates of the Population by Sex, Race, and Hispanic Origin for the United States: April 1, 2000 to July 1, 2007* (NC-EST2007-03), Population Division, U.S. Census Bureau, 1 May 2008.

⁷ Some scholars view ethnicity as a matter of culture and race as (presumptive) biology. (See Kwan and Speirs, 2004.)

Sampling

I used multiple sampling strategies including: snowball, internet postings on a popular classified web site, internet publications in independent newspapers, massive emails through academic list serves, posting leaflets, and by word of mouth. I used this approach because I had a limited sample of people who do not live in close proximity to one another. I had a difficult time identifying a site where I would find Blaxican people all at once. My target sample consisted of people over the age of 18 who resided anywhere in California.

The sampling tactic of snowballing involves one member of the sampling frame introducing the researcher to other members. I also relied on networks that I had established as a long time resident of Sacramento, California. As a Chicana raising a Blaxican son, I maintained a network with other Chicanas with Blaxican children for over five years, who subsequently became my key informants. My role as a semi-insider helped in recruiting possible volunteers because I already had contacts with people who knew Blaxican individuals. To supplement the snowballing strategy, I also posted bulletins for volunteers on Craigslist, a popular online classifieds listing site, in the following places: Bakersfield, Chico, Fresno, Humboldt, Inland Empire, Los Angeles, Merced, Modesto, Monterey Bay, Orange County, Palm Springs, Redding, Sacramento, San Diego, San Francisco, San Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara, and Ventura.

In addition, given the higher rate of participants from the Sacramento region, I posted study information once a month from July 2006 to January 2007 in the online editions of *Sacramento News and Review*, a local independent newspaper. Furthermore, I sent emails through list serves on the California State University, Sacramento campus with the help of the McNair Scholar's Program, and the Early Opportunity Program. After interviewing one woman who belonged to a multicultural sorority, she offered to send out a massive email to her sorority sisters across California. The word of mouth came mainly from people who were "looking out" for me and knew someone who was Blaxican and passed along the study information. In all, six of the respondents I reached were through the various Internet postings, and five were reached through snowballing, while the remaining interviewee was reached by a flyer left on a college campus. Finally, the size of the sample in this study is small, and therefore external validity is low. In other words, the results of this study can only be generalized from a specific setting and small group of people, and cannot be generalized to many situations and many groups of people. In the next section, I will discuss the questions asked of the respondents.

Question Areas

All of the interviewees were asked descriptive questions including: age, place of birth, present city of residence, parents' racial ethnic identification, where their parents were born, number of siblings they had, highest educational level obtained, their class status growing up and presently, and how they identified racially and ethnically. The questions from which I collected the descriptive information were standard across all interviews and asked randomly throughout the conversations when I felt it was the appropriate time to ask. However, in the beginning of each interview, I did inform the interviewees that I hoped we could talk about family history, issues of identity involving school experiences, friendships, romantic relationships and networks, and family socialization. Next, I give an overall demographic description of the participants I interviewed.

Demographic Profiles

Five females and seven males participated in this study. The respondents' age ranged from 21 to 45, and the majority were in their twenties. Only two of the respondents were born outside of California, while the others were born in places in California as far north as Redding and as far south as San Diego. I included the city of residence at the time of the interview; here respondents place of residence ranges from Sacramento to San Diego. The information I posted aimed at recruiting volunteers that are individuals whose biological parents are Mexican or Chicana/o and African American.⁸ Six of the respondents have fathers of Mexican ancestry, and mothers who are African American. Of the six fathers that are of Mexican ancestry, four are Chicano (born in the United

⁸ A few of the respondents' had parents with other known ancestry other than Mexican or African American. Some parents were also mixed with Japanese and Native American, however, they identified as Black.

States), and two are Mexican, born in Mexico. The remaining six respondents have African American fathers and mothers that are Chicana (of Mexican ancestry, and born in the United States), with the exception of one mother who is a Mexican national. Table 1 provides demographic information of the respondents.

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents

Name*	Sex	Age	Father	Mother	Residency
Frances Tompson	F	45	Black/Native	Chicana	Sacramento
Dania Romero	F	40	Black	Chicana	Sacramento
Julius Grace	M	37	Black	Chicana	Long Beach
Roland Sanchez	M	35	Chicano	Black/Native	Bakersfield
Eric Lopez	M	31	Chicano	Black	Fresno
Kiara Barksdale	F	23	Chicano	Black	Salinas
John Coleman	M	23	Black	Chicana	San Diego
LaTrice Johnson	F	23	Black/Japanese	Chicana	Sacramento
Gaby Mayfield	F	23	Chicano	Black	Fresno
Eduardo Flores	M	22	Mexicano**	Black/Native	Sacramento
Antonio Flores	M	22	Mexicano**	Black/Native	Antioch
Desmon Jackson	M	21	Black	Mexicana**	San Diego

*Names are Pseudonyms. **Mexican Nationals

The names of the respondents have been changed to provide anonymity. I changed the names to reflect their actual African American and Spanish origins. The majority of the participants were residents of either Northern or Central California counties. California is among the top ten states with the highest percentage of “two or more races” in the 2000 Census, with over one million residents who identified themselves in this way.⁹ Ultimately, the respondents’ place of residence was consistent with the “multiracial belt” around the Central Valley and greater Sacramento regions where there is a concentration of counties with higher percentages of multiracial people (Park, Meyers and Wei 2001). As far as education was concerned, the majority of the respondents pursued degrees beyond high school. Eight of twelve respondents were from working-class backgrounds, although two felt they had transitioned to the middle-class as they got older, and two were from middle-class backgrounds. To determine class status, I asked the respondents questions that would help determine their social and economic capital.¹⁰ The next section explores how respondents racially self-identify and the processes that influence their decisions.

Negotiating a Multiracial Identity

During the interviews, I was interested in learning about how interviewees racially self-identified, as well as about the process that brought them to their decision to identify as multiracial Black and Mexican. All of the informants in this study self-identify as Black and Mexican and most of the respondents use “Blaxican” as a racial label of choice. That is to say, respondents viewed themselves as a *blending* of Mexican and Black as a mixed identity. Overwhelmingly, respondents chose a combined Black and Mexican, or, Blaxican racial/ethnic identity, rather than a monoracial claim even if their phenotypes and cultural leanings favor one group over the other. A blended identity is one that is similar in nature to Gloria Anzaldúa’s (1999) “border identity” or an identity that spans across the boundaries of existing categories. Therefore, a blended identity also straddles boundaries, yet exists on a continuum and does not imply equal and perfect balance (Daniel 1996; Rockquemore and Laszloffy 2005). A blended identity resists the dichotomization and hierarchical valuation of African American and European American (in this case Chicana/o) cultural and racial differences (Daniel 1996). For example, Eduardo, a twenty-two-year-old student studying in Sacramento identifies as Blaxican. “I usually say I am Blaxican because I don’t want to deny both of

⁹ “The Two or More Races Population: 2000.” Census 2000 Brief, issued November 2001. <http://www.census.gov/prod/2001pubs/c2kbr01-6.pdf>

¹⁰ Bourdieu, Pierre. 1989. “Social Space and Symbolic Power.” *Sociological Theory*. 7: 14-25

them [Black and Mexican backgrounds] so I always say Blaxican. Off top, they already know what I am talking about" (Eduardo, age 22). By telling people that he is Blaxican, Eduardo is acknowledging all of his ancestries, and offers an easy way to articulate that he is both Black and Mexican without having to give a lengthy explanation.

A statement made by Gaby, a twenty-three-year-old woman living in Fresno, summarizes the overall sentiment of what it means to be Blaxican:

When I say it [Blaxican] I am trying to let them know that this is a whole other race of people. There are races, but then there is also another one, there doesn't just need to be one whole race like just Black or just Mexican, or just Chinese. You can mix two people together and create a new race, I do have two legs and a heart and a brain, I am walking around, and I do exist. So I am trying to let people know that this does exist. It is a new type of person. And it is not just the body that is there, it is a whole new culture. (Gaby, age 23).

In the simplest sense, Blaxican means the mixture of African Americans and Chicanas/os physically, ancestrally and culturally. By choosing a Blaxican identity, informants are resisting the one-drop rule that would define them as Black, as well as mono-raciality. The active resistance to mono-raciality, and the one-drop rule is significant because these constructs characterize the United States racial order that have historically been used as a way of maintaining white racial supremacy and power. Next, I describe some of the structural and interactional forces that shaped Blaxican identity and experience.

Influences on Racial Identity

External forces such as family, school, peers, and residential neighborhoods influenced Blaxican identity development and experience. Elementary school and junior high school were two particular life stages when participants experienced incidents that forced them to confront directly the meaning of their racial identities. Instruction about race indeed occur within the school setting not only in explicit curriculum but also in lessons about race in which racial difference and similarities were presented in both obvious and hidden ways by staff, parents, and peers (Lewis 2003). Families also play a pivotal role in an individual's racial identity development, and are places where children receive the most powerful messages about their own identities (Rockquemore and Laszloffy 2005).

LaTrice, a twenty-three-year-old student living in Sacramento remembered that the first time she reflected on her racial identity was while attending a predominantly white elementary school in a working-class neighborhood in Redding, California when a classmate called her a racial epithet:

The first time was when a girl called me the "n" word in elementary school. I don't think I understood, and I went crying to my mom, "What does this mean?" I knew what it meant but I didn't understand the concept. My mom wanted to know who she was. And I said, "Mom calm down!" (LaTrice, age 23).

Although LaTrice expressed that her Chicana single-mother did the best that she could do to instill knowledge and pride about both of her heritages despite the absence of her father, she could not prepare her for the hard blows of racist acts that loomed in her childhood. Being the only child of color in most of her Redding, California public schools, LaTrice knew that her identity was unlike that of the rest of her peers:

My mom always made it clear to talk to me about why I was different from other people. When I was younger it was harder because my dad wasn't really apart of my life. My mom was a single-parent, and it was harder because when I was younger I looked a lot more African American than I think I do now, but then I spoke Spanish. My grandparents helped raise me and they didn't speak English. I had episodes of kids calling me names, calling me the "n" word in elementary school and even junior high. I had my grandpa who told me that I was not Black, but Mexican. So I never really had a place because I grew up in a predominately white high school and city. It was different, because I looked one thing then I identified with more of the Mexican culture because that was the way that I was raised, I spoke Spanish (LaTrice, age 23).

As a young woman, LaTrice received contradictory messages about her identity. She had to negotiate what it meant to be perceived as African American on the outside, although she felt more connected to Mexican culture. On the one hand, her mother was reinforcing positive images about being Black and Chicana; on the other, her Mexican grandfather rejected her Blackness altogether and tried to convince her she was not Black. LaTrice's peers at school reinforced the fact that they saw her as Black by using racial epithets that marked her as such.

Likewise, Kiara, a twenty-three-year-old participant, remembers that the first time she thought about her race was also after she was called a racial slur:

I remember this one time when I was walking home from school and somebody drove up next to me and called me a nigger, and I told my mom and I said someone called me a nigger what does that mean? Then she was pissed off. I have been called wetback; you know I've been called a lot of names, a lot of them by adults, sadly enough (Kiara, age 23).

At a young age, Kiara learned about the negative characteristics associated with both Blacks and Chicanas/os. She spoke about a racist schoolteacher and recounted an example to me:

I have come across teachers that are very racist, people very ignorant, kids just mean. I remember I was at school and a teacher knew that I was Black and Mexican and she kinda called me out in the middle of class and I was in awe. Every body in that class were all Mexican and she called me out in class and told me that I had to leave, I couldn't be there anymore because I was Black. So immediately right there the students kind of separated me, once she said that, because I had no problems till then. Then when she called me out right there I noticed that a lot of them started saying things to me (Kiara, age 23).

In this Salinas, California public school classroom a white teacher announced to the class that Kiara was Black, and her Chicana/o classmates abruptly alienated her. Kiara's teacher made sure that everyone in the classroom was interpreting her in the "correct" way. Accordingly, she was not being accepted as Chicana but rather, as Black, which therefore meant she did not belong. As an authority figure, the teacher validated the Chicana/o students and sanctioned behaviors that would "other" Kiara not only in relation to whites but Chicanas/os as well.

The racial composition of school contexts and residential living spaces also awakened a consciousness of being Blaxican for Kiara. She noticed the differences in how she was perceived and understood by others when she and her Black single-mother moved from one town to another, in Central California. After living in a predominately Black neighborhood in Fresno, the two moved to a Mexican barrio in Salinas:

Me and my mother, we lived in Fresno with my family for a while, and I grew up in an all Black neighborhood, and we moved from there when I was really young, probably about three or four and we came to Salinas, California. We moved to the east side, which is basically like little Mexico. Every one was Mexican in just that area. When I was a kid I looked Mexican. My skin tone was very very light and my mother was a single parent so she was the only Black woman in that area and so I knew something was up when people would look at us funny, and definitely look at her funny, like what'cha doing with this little Mexican baby? (Kiara, age 23).

Kiara had lighter skin than her mother and the neighbors questioned their relationship as mother and daughter with looks of curiosity, disapproval, and disbelief. As a light skinned baby, Kiara was seen as Chicana, yet her mother was marked as not belonging because she was the only Black woman in the barrio. Phenotype and skin color is a common theme throughout the interviews, and are aspects of Blaxican racial/ethnic identity that informants constantly had to negotiate. The above examples provide a brief glimpse of how family, school, peers and experiences in residential neighborhoods inform and influence Blaxican identity development and consciousness.

Conclusion

This paper briefly highlighted some of processes by which multiracial individuals of African American and Mexican descent came to make choices about their multiracial identities within the context of California. The review of literature on multiracial identity evinced that most studies focus on multiracial identity formations of individuals with white and non-white birth parents, and heavily ignores the experiences of people with two non-white parents. Most often, literature on multiraciality has focused on a Black-white duality, or white and some other group of color. Research on "dual-minority" multiracial identities has not been at the forefront of research, yet adds significant depth and breadth to our understanding multiracial identity formations. This research contributes to the literature on dual-minority multiracial identities and seeks to give powerful insights into the social construction of race. This study focused on the life experiences of 12 Blaxican persons in the state of California. The primary impetus for this paper was the interest in racial identity choices of Blaxican individuals, and most important, the processes' that underscored these choices. Unlike other studies that only seek to know *how* multiracial people self-identify; this study sought to understand *why* individuals identified as Blaxican.

I found that all informants identified as Black and Mexican, or Blaxican and this racial/ethnic identity implies the blending of Chicana/o and Black cultural, ancestral and physical characteristics. This paper also analyzed the process that underpinned how respondents chose to racially identify. Family socialization, social contact with peers, educational experiences and neighborhood environments were described as critical spaces that influenced their identity choices. Furthermore, this research illustrates the complex negotiation of race/ethnicity that occurs among Blaxican individuals. Unlike other studies that focused on multiracials with African ancestry, informants in this study do not identify as Black in accordance to the one-drop rule. Rather, informants in this study actively resist mono-raciality and the one-drop rule by electing an identity that blends Chicana/o and African American ancestries and cultures.

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Transnational Knowledge Projects and Failing Racial Etiquette

What does the current injunction to produce “transnational” scholarship mean for Chicana/o Studies scholars? The transnational turn is upheld by many progressive scholars as the corrective to all sorts of epistemological problems having to do with both geopolitical power differentials and the study of power, from American exceptionalism to an overinvestment in studying “cultural production” (which—according to some social scientists—distracts us from the more pressing and serious study of institutions and political economy). For scholars working in Chicana/o Studies—as for those working in other ethnic studies areas such as African American Studies and American Indian Studies—the transnational imperative is complicated, if not vexed, not least of all because the study of U.S. racial formations has been accused of being parochial.¹ The comments that follow are organized polemically around some overlapping challenges that complicate the ambitious, but important, project of thinking transnationally about Chicanos/as. Although these challenges are ones that are meaningful to me precisely because I have had to negotiate them in my own reading, writing, and teaching, I do not see them as idiosyncratic, and I am going to try to frame them in an accessible and open-ended way in order to encourage collective thinking and dialogue.

I want to start with the most naturalized—presumably because most commonsensical—aspect of the definition of transnational scholarship as it circulates in much of the literature. Precisely because it is so unremarked and taken for granted, this aspect of the transnational deserves interrogation. The quintessential criterion of transnational scholarship seems to be that the scholar physically cross national borders. That is, in much contemporary scholarship that purports to be “transnational,” one can quickly ascertain that the scholar has traveled *outside of the U.S.* in order to carry out some research, whether that means working in the archives of a foreign library or interviewing subjects in another language. But the notion that in order to think, write, and investigate transnationally one simply needs a passport and a hefty travel account seems to me to border on cosmopolitanism. This flatfooted understanding of the transnational takes the term “transnational” far too literally, taking it to mean *only* the crossing of borders (regardless of theoretical commitments, interest in understanding the workings of transnational capitalism, interdisciplinarity, etc.).

But also, that literal conception of transnational scholarship can ironically open onto a newer form of American exceptionalism. If the critique of American exceptionalism—launched largely from critical American Studies—has taught us to frame the U.S. as an imperialist, nationalist and colonial power, then it should also remind us that those of us working on racial formations in the U.S. need to think about how *transnational capitalism* inscribes those formations. That is, when we insist that producing transnational scholarship means *leaving the U.S.*, then does that mean that knowledge projects that focus on U.S. formations should not ask transnational questions about those formations? Why should people, culture, racializations, literatures, produced within the U.S. not be studied within the larger context of transnational capitalism? In response to recent critiques that Chicana/o and Puerto Rican studies “have lost most of their explanatory power” because they are inherently unequipped to step up to the injunction to work *transnationally*, Juan Poblete has persuasively argued that “These perspectives forget a number of key facts, such as the historically colonial and still existing neocolonial relationship of the United States with Mexico and Puerto Rico as well as the extent to which these two national populations combined account for a significant part of the ever-increasing Latin American immigration to the United States” (xxvvi).

If we are too literal in our conception of “transnational”—taking that term to mean merely the crossing of borders—we might also be too optimistic, if not celebratory about what can be found under the rubric of the transnational. That is, the injunction toward transnational inclusiveness could

¹ See my essay “Where in the Transnational World are U.S. Women of Color?” in which I discuss the transnational turn in feminist studies.

transmogrify into the liberal projects of *inclusiveness*, *diversity*, a new form of *multiculturalism*, one keyed toward rendering the global South merely (and problematically) *visible* to a U.S. audience.² We can think here of Jennifer Abod's 2002 film *The Edge of Each Other's Battles: The Vision of Audre Lorde*, which documents the 1990 transnational conference on and tribute to Audre Lorde, held just two years before her death. The name of this conference was, significantly, *I am your Sister* and it drew to Boston from 23 countries 1200 activists including Lorde herself. Abod's brilliant film displays the conference organizers' incredible commitment to *not* using "the master's tools," as they worked tirelessly and innovatively to create a transnational space that would *not* lead to the kind of objectification, tokenization, marginalization, and essentialisms that Lorde devoted her lifework to critiquing. However, the film's footage of the conference and its inclusion of post-conference interviews with organizers and participants also makes clear that the conference threatened to implode precisely around national difference. Asian women, Asian-American Women, Latin-American Women, Arab women—all of these different groups can be seen in the film angrily speaking into a microphone from the floor (not the stage) and demanding recognition as they questioned their relegation to the audience and their absence from the podium. In one of the film's post-conference interviews, the Puerto Rican anthropologist and conference attendee Ana Ortiz explained quite passionately that transnational tensions were especially acute between U.S. Latinas and Latin American women, and that these tensions largely revolved around class differences and presuppositions about language. She described, for instance, how because the Latin American attendees were unaware of the U.S.'s violent history of disciplining subjects for speaking Spanish in workplaces and schools, they could only read non-bilingual Chicanas and Latinas as *pochas*.

That is, while the conference organizers meant for "transnationalism" to feature as immediately and naturally politically enabling and transformative, the conference ended up coming undone precisely around geopolitical seams. This is an insightful example of the difficulty of practicing transnational feminist politics for at least two reasons. First, it reminds us that *visibility* and *inclusion* of difference are never in themselves adequate to the task of, to cite Lorde, using difference as "a fund of necessary polarities between which our creativity can spark like a dialectic" (107). There is nothing inherent in the literal conception of transnational feminism that is in itself transformative or even necessarily enabling. Second, the implosion of the conference, and especially Ortiz's suggestive analysis of it, helps remind us of one of the most crucial points in a strand of transnational feminist scholarship running from Gayatri Spivak through Caren Kaplan and Inderpal Grewal. And that is that especially for those of us who work on gendered and racialized forms of oppression and subjectification, we have to be acutely cognizant of our different institutional locations of knowledge production, and that part and parcel of this awareness is the charge of thinking seriously about our own locations within the international division of labor.

We have to be especially cognizant of the ease with which the transnational turn can slip into a desire for multicultural/multinational difference. When Audre Lorde wrote her groundbreaking piece "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House" in 1979, it made sense for her to say that "we have been taught to either ignore our differences or to view them as causes for separation and suspicion rather than as forces for change" (107). I would now update that assessment in order to account for the multicultural display of difference, especially by moving it across national borders, on the one hand, and the postmodern celebration of difference, on the other.³ Referring to the proliferation of this kind of celebration as "the difference revolution," Rey Chow insightfully captures its insidiousness.

What is significant in this modulation [writes Chow] is that culture itself has taken on an emancipatory function as opposed to various forms of oppression. In terms of topography, then, what is given (that is, what is oppressive) tends to be imagined in

² See George Yúdice's "Rethinking Area and Ethnic Studies" for a critique of multiculturalism as "legitimation discourse."

³ There are a number of excellent critiques of multiculturalism. See especially: Avery F. Gordon and Christopher Newfield, eds. *Mapping Multiculturalism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996); Minoo Moallem and Iain A. Boal, "Multicultural Nationalism and the Poetics of Inauguration," in *Between Woman and Nation: Nationalisms, Transnational Feminisms, and the State* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999), 243-263. See also Lisa Lowe, *Immigrant Acts*, which argues that "'Multiculturalism' supplements abstract political citizenship where the unrealizability of the political claims to equality become apparent: it is the national cultural form that seeks to unify the diversity of the United States through the integration of differences as *cultural* equivalents abstracted from the histories of racial inequality unresolved in the economic and political domains" (30).

terms of the stagnant, immobile, firmly-in-place, and unchanging, whereas the opposite tends to be viewed (by hybridity theorists) as inherently liberating.

The inherently liberating subjectivity within Chow's topography can be easily recognized by the cultural cache of several seductive key terms: heterogeneity, fluidity, hybridity, contradiction, mobility, abjection, and especially *intersectionality*. And if the bodies of racialized subjects are often referenced through these terms, the *minds* of racialized subjects often feature as uniquely primed for revolutionary subjectivity, a new form of standpoint epistemology. A good example of thinking a one to one correspondence between, for instance, quotidian life in the borderlands and transgressive standpoint epistemology can be seen in Donna Haraway's *Cyborg Manifesto*. What the key terms used to mark transnational and borderlands difference as inherently transgressive have in common is their indelible dependence on what can only be a fantasy of a normative center inhabited by homogenous, static, racially pure, stagnant, uninteresting, and simple *sovereign* subjects. And so not only does the celebration of transnational complexity help reify the fantasy of a sovereign subject, it also threatens to transmute *itself* into a form of authenticity only here rendered by the notion of "Pure Impurities," to borrow a term from the independent scholar Dana Maya.

That notion of *pure impurities* also negatively affects the relationship between Chicana/o studies and Latina/o studies. We have to think innovatively and queerly about the (sometimes vexed) relations between specific Latino groups while simultaneously recognizing and respecting specific historical, economic, political, and cultural differences. In addition to the individual histories of Latin American and Caribbean countries of origin, there is also the matter of the specific ways in which different Latino groups characterize their presence in the U.S.—whether this characterization involves frameworks of internal colonialism, exile, diaspora, immigration, or indigenism. While scholars in pan-ethnic Latino Studies note the "shared legacies of colonialism, racism, displacement, and dispersion" (Acosta-Belén and Santiago 29) among Latinos, other scholars remain wary, if not skeptical, about this pan-ethnic approach to a politically fragmented and heterogeneous array of Latino groups. The favored cautionary example cited by skeptics has always been the case of Cuban Americans, a community thought of in terms of "in exile" and viewed as upwardly mobile, politically conservative, and clannish. And yet, the myth of a monolithic Cuban exile community homogenizes all Cuban Americans in a way that overlooks the specific waves of immigration patterns from Cuba and the ideological differences between different generations of Cuban Americans, while simultaneously ignoring the significant presence of Afro-Cubans for whom social mobility is more limited. It also forecloses a consideration of how *émigrés* and Cuban Americans such as Reynaldo Arenas, Achy Obejas, and Carmelita Tropicana have impacted and diversified the exile community's own sexual and gendered traditions. And this leads back to the original question about recognizing and respecting the historical, social, economic, and ideological differences between different U.S. Latino groups. The desire to foreground differences between Latino groups can itself lead to a homogenization of each Latino group as well as an over-reliance on national borders as fundamental markers of identity and ideology.

It seems to me that one way we can negotiate the transnational challenges I have outlined above is to use the best of the tools that queer theory has to offer. My qualification in that sentence (*the best of the tools*) is meant to acknowledge that queer theory itself presents its own set of challenges. For queer theory has been slow to learn from the important work of people like Jose Quiroga, Juana María Rodríguez, Jose Esteban Muñoz, and Yvonne Yarbro-Bejarano—to name a few of the people who have over the past dozen or so years staged imaginative interventions against the heteronormativity of Latina/o studies *and* the racialized blind spots of queer theory. Too often queer theory continues to render race, ethnicity, and nation *niches* within a broader, and un-remarked white erotics. Elsewhere I have called this rendering "the-see-for-instance" footnote. From Eve Sedgwick to Judith Butler, queer theorist's engagement with queers of color, or with racial formation more broadly, is still too often contained in the tiny-fonted endnotes at the backs of books. And usually these footnotes are meant to reference this strange *thing* we call "*intersectionality*." You know what I'm talking about, you'll be reading one of the greatest hits in queer theory—something published in Duke's Series Q, no doubt—and you'll finally come upon some attention to racialization, but it comes in the form of a sentence that sounds something like, "thanks to women of color we now know that we have to address the *intersectionality* of race, class, gender, sexuality, and nation." And that obligatory utterance will take you to an endnote that reads something like, "see, for instance, the groundbreaking works *This Bridge Called My Back*, The Combahee River Collective, and *Borderlands/La Frontera*."

I want to think at once harder and more flexibly about racialized subjectivity than the commonly-used shorthand approach known as “intersectionality” allows. Why this devotion to the rather lethargic and unimaginative trope of “intersectionality” when we know that we are capable of so much more, when we know that queer theory is quite adept and energetic when it comes to marshalling transgressive and imaginative theoretical apparatuses for queering dimensions like space or time, for queering people like Henry James. It seems to me that race, sexuality, and gender—to name the usual categories—are *much* too complex, unsettled, porous, mutually constitutive, unpredictable (and I *do* mean to be wordy here), incommensurable and dynamic, certainly too spatially and temporally contingent, to *ever* (even if only for an *instant*) travel independently of one another as they would *have to do* in order to be conceived of as intersecting, as eventually meeting one another here and there, crossing, colliding, passing, yielding, merging. “Intersectionality” is too spatially rigid and exacting a metaphor to employ when considering the ever dynamic and un-ending processes of subject formation. I don’t want to offer a better metaphor as an answer to this problem. What I want to suggest is that we be *wordy* and contingent, that we not look for a shorthand for naming or understanding or endnoting the confounding manifold ways that our bodies, our work, our desires are relentlessly interpellated by unequivalent social processes.

To point out the racialized limitations of queer theory, however, is not to suggest we abandon it. In fact, queer theory can help us navigate the transnational turn in ways that take us beyond the literalness with which the “transnational” is often understood. Queer theory’s healthy poststructuralist skepticism of empiricism and positivism—together with its commitment to social justice and keen awareness of the power differentials within knowledge production—makes it poised to help us out of the temptation to simply shine a light on the global south.

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***"María y revolución, eso es lo que ocupa mi corazón":
Love and Liberation in the Prison Writings of Ricardo Flores Magón****

A few days after the new year, 1904: Ricardo and Enrique Flores Magón along with Santiago de la Hoz crossed the geopolitical border separating Mexico and the United States; their comrades Librado Rivera, Antonio Villarreal and Rosalío Bustamante joined them in Laredo, Texas shortly thereafter. United under the banner of the Partido Liberal Mexicano (PLM) they were now, effectively, in exile. Journalists and poets; organizers and intellectuals; anarchists and agitators; but perhaps above all, dreamers: These magonistas, as they came to be known, fled persecution for their criticism of the dictator Porfirio Díaz. Now they joined with the masses of other Mexicano emigrants and took up jobs as farm laborers and dishwashers in that mighty empire to the north.¹

In November of that year the magonistas briefly reestablished their base of operations in San Antonio, resumed publication of their leftist paper *Regeneración*, and continued to agitate for democratic representation, land reform, trade unionism, and an end to Díaz' rule. Harassment forced them further north, to St. Louis, but this move was short lived. By this point the magonistas were under constant watch, from U.S.-based law enforcement as well as police and private detectives from the Pinkerton agency employed by Mexican officials. As a consequence Partido members scattered, traveling through industrial areas, rural labor camps, and mining towns in the Southwest United States and Northern Mexican frontier at a time of intense unrest and possibility; with almost a religious fervor, they believed their call for revolution was, increasingly, becoming a reality.

Yet Ricardo Flores Magón would not get to participate in the day-to-day organizing for this revolution. Instead, he spent the majority of his time during the three years leading up to the eve of the Mexican Revolution incarcerated. No stranger to a prison cell, Magón had been jailed several times while in Mexico and would be for the remainder of his life in the United States. Yet he continued to dialogue with other Partido members over political thought, philosophy, and the course of action they should take that would best advance their cause. During this time, significantly, Flores Magón clearly articulated his commitment to anarchism. "Debemos dar las tierras al pueblo en el curso de la revolución," he wrote, "de ese modo no se engañará después a los pobres."² Reforms which maintained the system or revolutions which overturned the status quo but did not address the root causes of inequality still perpetuated oppression; what was needed, Magón believed, was the abolishment of private property coupled with the redistribution of land as an important step in ending capitalism and capitalist exploitation.³ This philosophy formed the basis for the Partido's slogan of "Tierra y libertad," land and liberty, and later adapted as the rallying cry for Mexico's insurgents del sur under the direction of El Gran General Emiliano Zapata.

* "María and revolution: that is what occupies my heart" [My translation]. Ricardo Flores Magón, to María Brousse de Talavera, Los Angeles, CA, n.d., [most likely between November 22 and November 27, 1908]. In Flores Magón, Ricardo. *Correspondencia 1 (1899-1918)*. Jacinto Barrera Bassols, ed. México, D.F.: Consejo Nacional para la cultura y las Artes, Dirección General de Publicaciones, 2000: 495. Please note that "in a consciously political act," following Sonia Saldivar-Hull's explanation, I do not italicize Spanish words this essay, unless they are already italicized in direct quotations (*Feminism on the border: Chicana gender politics and literature*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000: 173). This essay is a version of a paper first presented at the 2008 NACCS annual conference in Austin, Texas.

¹ The manner in which Chicanos were treated had "a deep and lasting impression" on Flores Magón, according to an interview historian Gómez-Quíñones had with Nicolás Bernal, a Partido supporter based in Oakland, California. Gómez-Quíñones, Juan. *Sembradores: Ricardo Flores Magón y El Partido Liberal Mexicano: A Eulogy and Critique*. (Los Angeles: Aztlán Publications, University of California at Los Angeles, 1973: 23).

² "We must give the lands to the people in the course of revolution; only in this manner the poor won't be deceived" [my translation]. Ricardo Flores Magón to Enrique Flores Magón and Práxedes G. Guerrero, 13 de junio de 1908, Cárcel del Condado, Los Ángeles, California. (*Correspondencia 1*: 464).

³ Ricardo Flores Magón to Enrique Flores Magón and Práxedes G. Guerrero, 13 de junio de 1908, Cárcel del Condado, Los Ángeles, California. *Correspondencia I*: 462-470.

There's another aspect of which Flores Magón wrote during this same time period: love. Love, that curious emotion at once universally shared and yet amongst the most intimate of all, unfolded and unfurled through words written on paper folded and furred, hidden and secret, exchanged between Flores Magón and María Brousse de Talavera (henceforth referred to as María Talavera), yet discovered and documented—as virtually every other aspect of Flores Magón's life—by authorities serving those in power in Mexico and the United States.⁴ Flores Magón, incarcerated, and María Talavera, freed—at least from the physical constraint of the prison walls—wrote one another of love and revolution, often in the same sentence, much as they must have spoken of both in the same breath. What was the nature of their love for one another and for the cause to which they dedicated their energies (and, for Flores Magón, his life)? How did this “revolutionary love” sustain them?⁵ And what can we, a century later, learn from their words and actions?

Through an analysis of their correspondence I argue that Flores Magón and Talavera practiced a praxis of love and liberation through the coupling of their desires for revolution, for freedom, and for one another. In introducing questions around intimacy, desire and sexualit(ies), I wish to draw attention to the bodily practices of embodied resistance: the (social and physical) movimiento(s) in process that I identify as embodiments of Aztlán. In *Methodology of the Oppressed* Chela Sandoval writes “it is love that can access and guide our theoretical and political ‘movidas’—revolutionary maneuvers toward decolonized being” (141). She argues for the importance of understanding romantic love as a transformative, liberatory force, expressed and invoked through a “differential consciousness” that allows for the citizen-subject to actualize revolutionary love. As she explains, differential consciousness “is linked to whatever is not expressible through words. It is accessed through poetic modes of expression: gestures, music, images, sounds, words that plummet or rise through signification to find some void—some no-place—to claim their due” (140). Sandoval names this potentially decolonizing imaginary “*amor en Aztlán*” (146, her emphasis). As Laura E. Pérez explains:

To love in Aztlán is perforce to love differently, because Aztlán does not exist. ... Though to love in Aztlán is about queerness with respect to dominant orders, it is nonetheless not about sexual, ideological, cultural, political queerness reinscribing patriarchal and other hierarchies of inequality, under new guise.⁶

Her cautionary note reminds us that revolutionary love does not automatically begat decolonial love. Rather, following the suggestion of Michel Foucault (1983) and Audre Lorde (1984), we must also examine how oppositional actors can move “erotically” through power, for it is through an erotics, or what Lorde might categorize as those feelings that are “unexpress[able]” or “unrecogniz[able]” (53), that one experiences and negotiates power at the level of the body.⁷ By bringing the level of analysis to the level of the body, and of

⁴ Talavera was introduced to the PLM in 1906 by way of her involvement with the Socialist Party in Los Angeles; she began her relationship with Flores Magón a year later. Born in Zacatecas, 1867, her family emigrated to the United States at the end of the 1800s. She remained in the United States until after Flores Magón's death, at which point she emigrated to México. She died in 1947, in Ensenada, Baja California. (Barrera Bassols, Jacinto. *Correspondencia I*: 672.)

⁵ Of revolutionary love, columnist Patrisia Gonzales writes:

I believe our lives are a love story—to love ourselves, to love what we do, and to search for purpose so that we can love how we live. For those of us who have survived injustices and violence, to love is a primal, everyday act against injustice. For all revolutionary love leads back to our souls for the revolution that begins inside of us, so that we can begin to love, and change (“Column of the Americas: Amor Revolucionario (Revolutionary Love),” Universal Press Syndicate, 6 Feb. 2004. 10 May 2006. <<http://www.voznuestra.com/Americas/2004/February/6>>).

⁶ Pérez, Laura E. “Ero-Ideologies and Methodologies of the Oppressed,” unpublished paper presented at “Mapping the Decolonial Turn: Post/Trans-Continental Interventions in Philosophy, Theory, and Critique,” University of California at Berkeley, April 22, 2005.

⁷ When Sandoval recognizes that

any ‘liberation’ or social movement eventually becomes destined to repeat the oppressive authoritarianism from which it is attempting to free itself, and become trapped inside a drive for truth that ends only in producing its own brand of dominations (58)

she calls to mind Foucault's preface to Deleuze and Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus*, where he inquires

interactions or relationships between bodies, sexed and gendered, we can begin to discuss and develop technologies and theories of decolonization at the more intimate, and therefore most directly experienced, levels.

El Partido Liberal Mexicano, Anarchism, and the Mexican Revolution

During the era of the Porfiriato, the nearly-continuous 35 year stretch of Porfirio Díaz's rule that lasted from the tail end of the 19th century through start of the 20th, the Mexican elite and foreign (mostly U.S. based) investors enjoyed a degree of prosperity in pre-Revolutionary Mexico made possible through the expansion of railroads, exhaustion of mining and agricultural resources, superexploitation of its laboring classes, and repression of its dissents, all accomplished under the name of progress.⁸ For these U.S. investors and the government which guarded their interests, Mexico served as what Ramón Grosfoguel (2003) terms a "showcase" country, one which was to demonstrate a conservative model for future Latin American economic and political development.⁹

Flores Magón's letters to María Talavera come at a time when he begins to shift, publicly, and with a sense of optimism, from advocating Mexican Liberalism to Anarchism. During the mid-1800s anarchist thought and philosophy developed in México in response to the industrial revolution and the exploitative conditions which accompanied it. According to Juan Gómez-Quiñones, anarchists:

...believed in abolishment of capital, of the state and of all dominating, exploitive institutions and relations. They envisioned a society of free human beings, working creatively, either individually or collectively, to produce for the common needs in free association, living according to the noblest ethics of love, harmony and peace.¹⁰

At first Flores Magón supported liberal, constitutional reforms. Yet, as he became increasingly radicalized his encouragement of populist revolt, land reform and workers rights converged in a call for total revolution against capital and the state. Whether or not Magón and the Partido Liberal Mexicano could have made their vision a reality is debatable; however, in advocating for a workforce without bosses and a world without borders the magonistas poised a serious enough threat to the both nations as to merit continuous retaliation.

After leaving Texas in 1905 and dispersing around the country the magonistas regrouped in Los Angeles in 1907 and resumed publication of their paper, now aptly named *Revolución*. Almost immediately Flores Magón was arrested, along with several of his companions. Partido supporters (including María Talavera) used the arrest and pending trial as an organizing issue while their lawyers conducted their defense of their clients in conjunction with actions both in and outside the courtroom. While held captive in Los Angeles, Flores Magón and Talavera wrote to one another several times. *Correspondencia I* reprints 19 letters Flores Magón sent to her, and four he received, between September 15, 1908 and February 28, 1909, at which point his correspondence ceased completely as a result of his relocation to Arizona. These letters, of love and revolution, were smuggled out of the prison in secret, hidden in his laundry. However, prison authorities discovered this elaborate system and closely monitored his correspondence, much as they had done and would continue to do when he wasn't behind bars. Once discovered, they photographed, documented, and reported these letters to

How does one keep from being fascist, even (especially) when one believes oneself to be a revolutionary militant? How do we rid our speech and our acts, our hearts and our pleasures, of fascism? How do we ferret out the fascism that is ingrained in our behavior? (1983: xiii).

For more, please see Sandoval, Chela. *Methodology of the Oppressed*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000) and Foucault, Michel. "Preface," *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, (Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1983: xiii). See also Lorde, Audre. *Sister/Outsider: Essays & Speeches*. (Berkeley, CA: The Crossing Press, 1984).

⁸ For a more in-depth analysis of the Porfiriato era please see Ramón Eduardo Ruiz, *Triumphs and Tragedy: A History of the Mexican People*. (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1992). For a more immediate account see also Turner, John Kenneth. *Barbarous Mexico*. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1969 [1911]).

⁹ Grosfoguel lists several examples of modern-day neoliberal showcases, of which Mexico is one. Escobar, as well as Gonzalez & Fernandez, however, make the point that Mexico had previously and strategically been employed as a showcase for the development of Latin America, including during the period leading up to the Mexican Revolution. Please see Grosfoguel, Ramon. *Colonial Subjects: Puerto Ricans in a Global Perspective* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003). See also Gilbert G. Gonzalez and Raul A. Fernandez, *A Century of Chicano History: Empire, Nations and Migration* (New York: Routledge, 2003) for their discussion of the role of empire in relation to development and migration in Mexico during the same period.

¹⁰ Gómez-Quiñones 4.

the U.S. and, most likely, Mexican officials.¹¹ Did Flores Magón know he was being monitored? What sort of informal networks amongst inmates were in place that enabled—and undermined—his secret correspondence? If these letters are a surviving historical record of “things said,” then, perhaps most importantly, what is left unsaid? What and where are the silences from the undocumented letters—that is, letters that escaped detection, as well as conversations had, thoughts held, dreams wished that remained secret? Certainly, Magón’s published and unpublished essays clearly express his political vision and allow us to trace his articulation of anarchist thought, as well as his shift from liberalism and socialism to the anarcho-syndicalism he advocated at the end of his life. In private, however, from his letters it appears that Flores Magón made this transformation much earlier.¹² Ironically, it is because of the state’s surveillance of Flores Magón and the Partido’s activities that we have this added insight into Flores Magón’s personal life, including the most intimate and liberating of emotions contained in his dreams of freedom and feelings of love.¹³

Flores Magón never married María Brousse de Talavera, for under anarchist philosophy marriage would imply ownership, and require official sanction from the regulating institutions of the church and the state. Rather, the two saw themselves as companions, *compañer@s*, whose love and devotion to one another (at least during this time, if we are to believe in the honesty of their letters) transcended prison walls and the oppressive mechanisms of the society that created them. Intense and powerfully poetic, Flores Magón’s correspondence shows the empathetic, sensitive, passionate side of the revolutionary poet-intellectual. This came as no surprise to those who knew him. However, his letters from this period and, especially, from his time in Leavenworth towards the end of his life also document his doubts and uncertainties, misconceptions and misgivings. In that emotional space that is love, in that geographic nowhere that is Aztlán, what possibilities and potentials did Flores Magón imagine?

The Letters

In a letter dated 15 septiembre de 1908 Talavera told Flores Magón of her concern for his well-being and her fear that he may be moved to Arizona by October. Well aware of the insurmountable challenges he faced in the court of law as well as public opinion, she wrote:

Yo no tengo fe en la Suprema [Corte]. Allí están tus enemigos. Va a suceder lo que con los jueces que los han juzgado, ¿qué han hecho?, condenaros a Arizona. ¿Qué haría yo entonces sin poderme ir luego?, me moriría de desesperación. No tengo fe más que en el pueblo. No creo en nadie más ¿quién puede cuidar de ti más que yo? Nadie si te llevan a Arizona. Yo cuidaría que no te plagiaran y como socialista agitaría al pueblo que se levante para salvarte.¹⁴

Talavera followed this letter with another, dated two days later.¹⁵ Concerned, she assured Flores Magón of her willingness to go to Arizona, should he be transferred there, and expressed her interest in organizing a Mexican branch of the Socialist Party through her contacts in both Arizona and El Paso, Texas. In his response, dated 20 septiembre de 1908, Flores Magón informed Talavera that he was very sick. This might not have been entirely unexpected as various illnesses including respiratory

¹¹ See Jacinto Barrera, “Introducción,” *Correspondencia I*: 23-53.

¹² See, for example, Ricardo Flores Magón to Enrique Flores Magón and Práxedes G. Guerrero, 13 de junio 1908 (*Correspondencia I*: 462-470). Gómez-Quíñones (1973) and Ward Albro (*Always a Rebel: Ricardo Flores Magón and the Mexican Revolution*. Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 1992), among others, discuss this letter in greater detail.

¹³ A vociferous writer, with little else to occupy his time but his words, Flores Magón, now nearly blind and frequently ill, continued corresponding with supporters, allies, confidants, counsel, and friends while imprisoned from 1919 to 1922 in the Federal Penitentiary in Leavenworth, Kansas. These letters were collected, translated, and reprinted in *Epistolario Revolucionario e Íntimo, Vol. I-III* (México, D.F.: Grupo Cultural Ricardo Flores Magón, 1925).

¹⁴ “I do not have faith in the Supreme Court. There lies your enemies. What will happen with that which the judges decide? What will they do? Condemn us to Arizona. What then will I do if I am unable to go? I will die of desperation. I do not have more faith than in the people. I do not believe in anyone else. Who can take care of you better than me? Nobody, if they take you to Arizona. I would see to it that nothing ails you and like a socialist I would agitate the people to rise up in order to save you” [my translation]. María Brousse de Talavera a Ricardo Flores Magón, L.A., CA, 15 septiembre 1908. (*Correspondencia I*: 470).

¹⁵ María Brousse de Talavera a Ricardo Flores Magón, L.A., CA, 17 septiembre 1908. (*Correspondencia I*: 471-2).

ailments and blindness would continue to plague him until his death. However, in addition to confronting his worsening health Flores Magón questioned Talavera, perhaps naively, as to why the Socialists don't do more to help free the imprisoned Partido members.

At the close of another letter, from September 25, 1908, Talavera optimistically predicted Flores Magón's release from prison and return to full health: "Siento que vas a salir y quiero que estés seguro. ¿Cómo estás de salud? Pronto te cuidaré para que estés bien. Yo seré tu medicina. Mutuamente nos curaremos los dos de la enfermedad que nos consume. Recibe el amor inmenso de tu María."¹⁶ Was this "amor inmenso," they shared enough to sustain him while incarcerated? On November 29, 1908, Flores Magón penned his response:

Sólo tengo fe en las dos cosas que amo: tú y la Revolución. Sí, María: fuera de ti y de la Revolución, nada hay para mí ni nada quiero. Sólo en ti y en la Revolución pienso; de las dos estoy enamorado. [499] ¿Tendrás celos de la Revolución porque la amo como a ti, dulce amada de mi corazón?¹⁷

Flores Magón's letters reveal him to be a romantic as much as a revolutionary and as such they shift, often with startling abruptness, from declarations of his love for Talavera to discussing issues related to the Partido and the campaign to free him and his companions. The longing that Flores Magón must have certainly felt comes out clearly in his letters, as does the optimism and faith to which he clung. Yet it is evident that at the edges and within the margins his doubts lingered as his correspondence with Talavera showed an increasing concern with his failing health, despite his assurances to the contrary. Did Flores Magón feel betrayed by his friends and supporters? Imprisoned, he could completely devote his thoughts to the cause of revolution, to the struggle which he advanced, and for which he was incarcerated. Outside those prison walls, however, the Partido struggled to stay afloat. The campaign for his release attracted supporters from the Mexican working class and Anglo left, as well as attention from local and national media. Yet despite this outpour of support, Magón grew increasingly indignant with those closest to him, as he made clear in a letter to Talavera, dated October 25, 1908:

Más que los tiranos, son nuestros amigos los que nos tienen en la cárcel, porque su pereza, su indolencia, su falta de iniciativa los tiene atados, nada hacen. Yo creo que nos aman y nos tienen en sus corazones; pero eso no basta para rescatarnos. Se necesita que trabajen de un modo efectivo por nuestra liberación, y eso no lo hacen.¹⁸

Continuing, Magón clarified to Talavera that he was not singling her out as she had undertaken a prominent role in working for his freedom:

[F]íjate bien y verás que son los amigos los que nos tienen presos por su apatía. Recibe mi amor inmenso y mi adoración, tú, la única mujer que hace latir mi corazón. Lo que he dicho no es un reproche para ti, ángel mío. Tú haces todo lo que puedes y con el alma te lo agradezco. Si no vences en esta lucha contra el depotismo, y no rescatas a tu Ricardo que amas y que a ti te adora, no habrá quedado por falta de empeño de tu parte.¹⁹

¹⁶ "I sense that you are going to leave and I want you to be safe. How is your health? Soon I will take care of you so that you will be well. I will be your medicine. Together we will cure one another of the sickness that consumes us. May you receive the immense love of your María" [my translation]. María Brousse de Talavera a Ricardo Flores Magón, L.A., CA, 25 [23?] septiembre 1908. (*Correspondencia I*: 475).

¹⁷ "I only have faith in the two things that I love: you and the revolution. Yes, María: beyond you and the revolution there is nothing for me nor nothing that I want. I think only of you and of the revolution; I am in love with both. Are you jealous of the revolution because I love it like you, sweet love of my heart?" [my translation]. Ricardo Flores Magón a María Brousse de Talavera, L.A., C.A., 29 noviembre 1908. (*Correspondencia I*: 498-9).

¹⁸ More than the tyrants, it is our friends who keep us in the jail, because of their laziness, their indolence, their lack of initiative that keeps them tied up. They do nothing. I believe that they love us and keep us in their hearts; but this is not enough to rescue us. One needs to work in an effective way for our liberation, and they have not done this" [my translation]. Ricardo Flores Magón a María Brousse de Talavera, L.A., C.A., 25 octubre 1908. (*Correspondencia I*: 483).

¹⁹ "Look closely and see that it is our friends who keep us prisoner because of their apathy. Receive my immense love and my adoration, you, the only woman who makes my heart beat. What I tell you is not a reproach for you, my angel. You do everything that you can and with my soul I thank you. If you don't succeed in this struggle

Although physically incarcerated, Flores Magón sought both a metaphorical and real release, as these letters reveal; a metaphorical and real freedom which he linked through his writing. Poetic language aside, Flores Magón remained grounded in his convictions throughout his sentence. Their correspondence shows that he placed his utmost faith in Talavera:

Mis ansias, mis sueños, mis anhelos encuentran en ti su objeto. Tú eres mis ansias, tú mis sueños, tú mis anhelos convertidos en un ser que sienta, que piensa y que ama. ... María, pedirme que no piense en mi libertad es tanto como pedirme que no piense en ti. Ya ves, amor mío, que no puedo dejar de pensar en mi libertad. Puesto que tú eres todo para mí, eres mi libertad, esto es, lo más caro que tiene un hombre de espíritu libre como yo. Privado de ti sufro, sufro cruelmente. Sólo mi pobre corazón sabe como lo tortura el dolor. [490]... Nada me consuela, nada alivia mi dolor. ... ¿Serías capaz de enamorarte de un pedazo de bronce? ¿Podrías cambiar a tu Ricardo tan sensible por un hombre de piedra?²⁰

In this letter from November 15, 1908, Flores Magón found it necessary to separate his feelings of love for Talavera with his quest for freedom. As an anarchist, Flores Magón believed in uncompromising freedom; here, he expresses the totality of his feelings of love for his partner, unfettered and unbound by society's limitations. Yet, in the same letter, he let Talavera know that just as he felt immense love he also felt immense sadness. As she became the embodiment of Flores Magón's revolutionary desires he found himself pushing up against the limitations and constrictions placed upon his person. In his writing for *Regeneración* Flores Magón stressed the humanity of the working class; in his letters he sought to reaffirm his own humanity. He was not an unfeeling man of stone, he wrote; his love for Talavera helped him to maintain his sense of self and his connection to the outside world. While Flores Magón confided his emotional vulnerabilities to Talavera and trusted her with his deepest sentiments, prison authorities were reading his letters and sharing them with his enemies—not his friends, but those in power in Mexico and the United States who saw Flores Magón as a threat to their rule. Needless to say, Flores Magón was unaware that, as he wrote to Talavera, other eyes would read his words and, undoubtedly, use them against him.

On February 28, 1909, Flores Magón wrote Talavera for what would be his last time while incarcerated in Los Angeles. Less than a week later he and the other defendants were relocated to the federal penitentiary in Arizona, where they awaited trial. This move separated Magón from his loved ones; unable to communicate with Partido supporters (outside of, presumably, his legal counsel) Magón was, in effect, silenced until his eventual release in August 1910. In that letter Flores Magón sent Talavera he reassured her of his convictions, and his commitment to both her and the cause for which he was persecuted:

Soy Viejo rebelde; no comencé a luchar ayer. [Porfirio] Díaz puede hacerme millonario en un abrir y cerrar de ojos. Pero no es riqueza lo que quiero, ni poder, ni gloria vana. Quiero que mi conciencia esté tranquila, y sólo puede estar tranquila sirviendo a los que sufren. Y si tengo la aprobación de la mujer que amo, ¿qué otra cosa puedo desear? No necesito más que tu aprobación, no quiero otra cosa sino que mi María no se avergüence de amarme. María, tus deseos son los míos.²¹

against the despot, and you don't rescue your Ricardo who loves you and who adores you, it will not be for the lack of effort on your part" [my translation]. Ricardo Flores Magón a María Brousse de Talavera, LA., C.A., 25 octubre 1908. (*Correspondencia I*: 484).

²⁰ "My yearnings, my dreams, my longings encounter in you their target. You are my yearnings, my dreams, my longings converted in a being that feels, that thinks, and that loves. ... María, to ask me not to think in my freedom is like asking me to not think of you. You see, my love, that I can not stop thinking of my freedom. Saying that you are everything for me, you are my freedom, this is, the most valuable thing that a man with a free spirit like I can have. Deprived of you I suffer, I suffer cruelly. Only my poor heart knows how much the pain hurts. ... Nothing consoles me, nothing alleviates my pain. ... Are you capable of loving a piece of bronze? Could you exchange your Ricardo so sensitive for a man of stone?" [my translation]. Ricardo Flores Magón a María Brousse de Talavera, LA., C.A., 15 noviembre 1908. (*Correspondencia I*: 489-90).

²¹ "I am an old rebel; I didn't begin to struggle yesterday. Díaz could make me a millionaire in the blink of an eye. But it is not wealth that I want, nor is it power or vain glory. I want a calm conscience and it can only be tranquil serving those who suffer. And if I have the approval of the woman that I love, what else could I desire? I do not need more than your approval, I don't want anything else but that my María isn't ashamed to love me. María, your

Was Flores Magón aware that this would be his ultimate communication with Talavera for the remainder of his sentence? Did he fear that it may be his final missive, should he be extradited to Mexico where he believed he awaited execution? I want to imagine his writing, valiantly, defiantly, to Talavera. This letter, as with the others, shows Flores Magón's expressions of tenderness and political engagement, revolutionary passion and romantic poetry and demonstrates what Laura Pérez terms "eros-ideologies":

[an] affirmation of an erotics of disordering desires, beginning with love of a self, once shorn of self-regard... To love thusly, is thus an act of *ofrenda*, of offering in the face of the other's negation. To love that offending, wounding other, is to dis-other Him, to her him, to me him, to *tu eres mi otro yo* him, you are my other self him²²

In the imaginary space where magonista thought and deed intersect with ero-ideologies lies a potentially decolonizing strategy, a hermeneutics of love.

María Lugones writes, "Coalition is always the horizon that rearranges both our possibilities and the conditions of those possibilities" (2003: ix). By naming his desire, Flores Magón makes it tangible, real; by sharing his desire with his object of desire he makes it collective, an act of coalition created through thought and word rather than touch and deed; by identifying himself as desired and, hence, desirable, he others himself, in an act of solidarity that (re)claims his humanity. In this letter Flores Magón echoes the present-day Zapatista motto "Mandar obedeciendo" ('to command by obeying') in his affirmation that he can only find inner peace by serving those who suffer. It is not Talavera as a passive conduit who metaphorically represents this but Talavera as an active participant in Flores Magón's dialectical desire who carries this forth.

Anarchism, Feminism and Housewives Turned Assassins

At the tail end of a letter Flores Magón wrote to Talavera dated 25 de octubre de 1908, Flores Magón included a short note addressed to Talavera's daughter Lucía Norman, who he addressed as his "adorada y dulce hijita."²³ In this postscript Flores Magón asked for Norman's assistance; because she knows English, he writes, she can encourage the American people to support their cause for, after all, "Cuando habla una mujer, se convencer los hombres, sobre todo, les da vergüenza no ser valientes."²⁴ Seen in this light it is fitting that Emma Pérez calls for women such as María Talavera and Teresa Arteaga (companion to Enrique Flores Magón) to be viewed as activists in their own rights and not just as appendages to their partners or as secondary characters in the telling of magonista history.²⁵ Clearly, the correspondence between Talavera and Flores Magón aptly demonstrate that her commitment to Ricardo, the party, and the revolution went beyond her person. At considerable risk, she smuggled letters and articles written by Flores Magón out of the Los Angeles County Jail and was involved in the planning and organizing work done by the PLM.²⁶

The *Los Angeles Times*, in identifying her as Flores Magón's lover, characterized Talavera as an "expert assassin," who plotted to kill President Theodore Roosevelt and Porfirio Díaz—as well as "a

desires are mine" [my translation]. Ricardo Flores Magón a María Brousse de Talavera, LA., C.A., febrero 28 de 1909 (*Correspondencia*, 513).

²² Pérez, Laura, "Eros-Ideologies and Methodologies of the Oppressed," 2005. Her emphasis.

²³ Although he did not father Norman, as Nicolas T. Bernal points out Flores Magón treated Talavera's daughter as if she was his own.

Ricardo tomó muy serio la relación con Maria y hasta la últimos días de su vida fue su compañero; siempre creyó que Maria era una persona más sensate; pero resultó un perido siempre hablaba y hablaba y no se de tenía a pensar lo que decía... ellos nunca tuvieron hijos, pero Maria, cuando se unió a Ricardo, tenía un hija de nombre Lucia a la que él siempre trató como si fuera suya, y a un hijo de ésta, lo trataba como a un verdadero nieto (Bernal, Nicolas T. *Memorias de Nicolas Bernal*. Mexico: Centro de estudios históricos del movimiento obrero mexicano, 1982: 123).

²⁴ "When a woman speaks men are persuaded, above all, she shames them if they are not valiant" [my translation]. Ricardo Flores Magón a Lucia Norman, LA., C.A., 25 octubre 1908. (*Correspondencia I*: 485). As this passage suggests, the Partido Liberal Mexicano still relied upon conventional notions of masculinity and femininity even as they advocated for greater rights and responsibilities for women in the revolution (Pérez 55-74).

²⁵ Pérez, Emma. *The Decolonial Imaginary: Writing Chicanas into History*. Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1999: 66.

²⁶ Albro 92; Pérez 66.

quiet housewife, intent on cooking *frijoles*.²⁷ For Pérez, the Chicanas and Mexicanas active in the Partido Liberal Mexicano epitomized a “dialectics of doubling” that characterized their activities as a whole and, indeed, that of the hundreds of thousands of other Mexican migrants.²⁸ In her insightful exploration of the third-space practice found via women’s participation in the Partido Liberal Mexicano Pérez argues that Mexican women created a space within the context of the Mexican Revolution to enact, if I may paraphrase, a feminism within (inter)nationalism. However, in spite of the PLM’s radicalism, Pérez rightfully observes that the male leadership:

...did not move entirely beyond their traditional views of women as nurturers. The men’s nationalism seemed to be in sync with that of the Mexican revolutionaries of Mexico; however, the PLM expressed an internationalist nationalism. The women, however, were caught between the imaginary and the real. ...The PLM women intervened interstitially, seemingly broadening the party’s platform to fit their own agenda. They pleased their male party leaders, and they engaged in revolutionary activities as they saw fit.²⁹

Conclusion: Things are Not Always What They Seem

As documented in both Flores Magón’s private correspondence and published essays in Partido papers, magonista ideology, anarchist and internationalist in nature, explicitly critiqued capitalism and the nation-state. Partido members joined thousands of other Mexicanos who emigrated to the United States and, as a part of this group, negotiated the demands and dynamics of their new environment, like their compatriots, at a time when, much like the present, “Whites came to see Mexicans as a threat to the security of the nation.”³⁰ Neither their prominence and their involvement with radical circles nor their varying knowledge of English mitigated this transition or shielded them from discrimination. Flores Magón made note of this last point in a letter addressed to Talavera dated December 6, 1909:

Y nosotros somos pobres mexicanos. Somos revolucionarios y nuestros ideales son avanzadísimos; pero somos mexicanos. Ése es nuestra falta. Nuestra piel no es blanca y no todos son capaces de comprender que también debajo de una piel oscura hay nervios, hay corazón y hay cerebro.³¹

Upset and clearly disappointed in what he felt was a lack of support, Flores Magón lashed out at the racism he felt in private and in public, much as he had done and would continue to do elsewhere.³²

²⁷Los Angeles Times, 19 September 1907, in Pérez 66.

²⁸ Pérez 59.

²⁹ Pérez 71.

³⁰ Escobar, Edward J. *Race, Police, and the Making of a Political Identity: Mexican Americans and the Los Angeles Police Department, 1900-1945*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999: 69). Escobar goes on to identify the period of the Mexican Revolution as “the first time in the twentieth century that a local law-enforcement agency had developed a set of practices for controlling the Mexican American community” (76). Based on Ricardo Romo’s (1983) monograph, Escobar outlines three main elements that comprised what he labels “The Brown Scare”: whites feared revolutionary rhetoric from Mexico would radicalize U.S. Mexicans; whites also feared the violence of the Mexican Revolution would spread, or, that Mexicans in the United States might rise up in rebellion (a la “El Plan de San Diego”); and finally, following World War I, whites feared that Mexico might ally with Germany (e.g. the hysteria over the Zimmerman telegram), and used this as a pretext to call into question the loyalty of U.S. Mexicans. See also Ricardo Romo, *East Los Angeles: History of a Barrio* (Austin, University of Texas Press, 1983). For more on El Plan de San Diego, please see Dirk W. Raat, *Revoltosos: Mexico’s Rebels in the United States, 1903-1923* (College Station, Texas A and M University Press, 1981).

³¹“And we are poor Mexicans. We are revolutionaries and our ideas are advanced; but we are Mexicans. This is our fault. Our skin is not white and not everyone is capable of understanding nerves, heart, and brain are also under dark skin” [my translation]. Ricardo Flores Magón a María Brousse de Talavera, LA., C.A., diciembre 6 de 1908. (*Correspondencia I*: 500).

³²For example, see Ricardo Flores Magón, “La repercussion de un linchamiento,” (*Regeneración*, 12 November 1910) in which, writing of a lynching in Texas, he links capitalism with racism, and points out the poor treatment that Mexicans receive in Texas. This analysis was not limited to Flores Magón, as other Partido members experienced, and were aware of, the racism and discrimination they faced by virtue of being Mexican. See, for example, Práxedes G. Guerrero’s article that appeared a week later on the same subject (“Blancos, Blancos,” *Regeneración*, 19 November 1910).

Louis Mendoza, writing of the PLM's use of nationalism, suggests that "as an ideology, Mexican nationalism need not be Mexico-specific but, rather, a response to a transborder capitalism that simultaneously prompted migration from Mexico and forced people into a new relationship with capital in a land that was both foreign and familiar."³³ In advocating for a nationalist cause, by means of its organizing efforts (in the United States) and ideological perspective (as anarchists, or, following Gómez-Quíñones' analysis, anarcho-sindicalists) Emma Pérez posits that the Partido Liberal Mexicano:

...transcended the nationalist principles of Mexico's revolution and instead ascribed to an international workers' movement. Their rhetoric showed an allegiance to anarcho-sindicalism as a worldwide movement. One can argue that during a historical moment when Mexico was changing its bourgeois leaders, the anarchist group entertained a modernist politics, one that would united the workers of the world. One may even say that this was a harbinger of postcolonial hope for Chicano history. The PLM opened a space for a different kind of nationalism, a transnationalism that moved beyond land, beyond geographic space.³⁴

Despite the sometimes contradictory and muddled messages regarding the role and treatment of women in both the Partido and in the greater cause of revolution Pérez concludes that Chicanas and Mexicanas did actualize a third-space feminist intervention through their involvement with the PLM. This is exemplified by their legacy of radical journalism, labor agitation, and collective action, in addition to the correspondence between Talavera and Flores Magón. Furthermore, the nature of their relationship as committed partners never formally wed yet united by a shared sense of revolutionary love serves as a lived praxis in resistance to the bourgeois, or nuclear, family.³⁵

Amidst rising doubts as to the strength of the prosecution's case against them Flores Magón and the other defendants were moved to Arizona to stand trial on March 4, 1909. The trial resulted in a guilty verdict with the defendants sentenced to an additional 18 months in prison. According to Ward Albro, this effectively solidified Flores Magón's commitment to anarchism, distanced him from his base of support, weakened his influence in the Mexican Revolution, and destroyed his movement.³⁶ Yet Ricardo Flores Magón was just one individual who participated in an organized, collective movement inspired by the philosophy that still bears his name. To focus solely upon his actions, words and deeds, as if they alone directed the course of historical events that Partido members and their supporters followed, only reinscribes a linear narration of historical events that has no other outcome but failure. After all, Flores Magón died in prison, still in exile; physically separated from the land, people, woman and daughter that he loved; his vision of a world without bosses or political despots unrealized. In contrast to this sense of historical determination Robin D. G. Kelley, writing of a different context, argues that:

...the desires, hopes, and intentions of the people who fought for change cannot be easily categorized, contained, or explained. Unfortunately, too often our standards for evaluating social movements pivot around whether or not they 'succeeded' in realizing their visions rather than on the merits or power of the visions themselves. By such a measure, virtually every radical movement failed because the basic power relations they sought to change remained pretty much intact. And yet it is precisely these

³³ Mendoza, Louis Gerard. *Historia: The Literary Making of Chicana & Chicano History*. (College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 2001: 107).

³⁴ Pérez: 60.

³⁵ As a technology of control and domination, patriarchy, male-privilege, and heteronormativity all serve to replicate structures of power embedded within and inexorably linked to race and capitalism. For example, please see Lugones, Maria. "Heterosexualism and the Colonial / Modern Gender System." *Hypatia*. Vol. 22:1, Winter 2007. (186-209.) See also Anzaldúa, 1987; Anzaldúa and Moraga, 1981; Moraga, 1983; Moraga, 1993; García, 1997.

³⁶ "As it turns out," Albro concluded, "much of the work of Ricardo Flores Magón had really been just preparation for Francisco I. Madero" to gain power (98). Elsewhere, while summarizing Flores Magón's influence on the eve of the Mexican revolution, Albro reiterates this point, writing "Mexico listened to the Flores Magón of 1906, not the Flores Magón of 1910" (116); in contrast, Cockcroft (1968) and Abad de Santillán (1925) argue that magonista philosophy formed the underpinnings of the Mexican Revolution. Please see Cockcroft, James D. *Intellectual Precursors of the Mexican Revolution, 1900-1913*. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1968); Abad de Santillán, Diego. *Ricardo Flores Magón: El Apóstol De La Revolución Social Mexicana*. (Mexico: Grupo Cultural Ricardo Flores Magón, 1925).

alternative visions and dreams that inspire new generations to continue to struggle for change.³⁷

If we follow Kelley's suggestions then our understanding of and relationship to Flores Magón changes as well. Rather than judging the Partido by their triumphs and failures can we not draw guidance from the merits of their hopes and aspirations? Over a century later, the ideas and ideals espoused by Flores Magón, Talavera, and other Partido members continue to inspire activists and dreamers in Greater México and beyond, and remind us that another world is possible.

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Re-imagining Collectivities: The Mexican Japanese during World War II

This paper explores the experience of the Mexican Japanese community during World War II through the poetry of Martin Otsuka as well as through my literary intervention in the narrative of the Japanese diaspora. Inspection of the research and creative writing process involved in narrating the Mexican Japanese relocation will throw light on the reconfiguration of identities that diasporic communities forge horizontally. My research and perspective as a Chinese Mexican writer allows me to argue that geographical displacement made possible the creation of new identities and solidarities during World War II that superseded, at times, nationalist affiliations.

The internment of legal residents and citizens of Japanese origin in concentration camps was, until recently, mainly studied from a national security standpoint. In the United States, immediately after the Pearl Harbor attack in December 1941 the entire Japanese community was ordered to submit to the War Relocation Authority. The US Justice Department ordered the belongings of persons of Japanese origin seized, measure that was followed by the creation of various internment camps to detain around 120,000 people of Japanese ancestry.¹ Discrepancies between citizenship and the actual enjoyment of rights conferred through citizenship in the United States made possible the internment of more than 70,000 second or third generation Americans.²

Across the border, an energetic campaign took place to control the Japanese Mexican community, resulting in the deterioration of the conditions of life of those individuals who were arrested and removed from the borderlands. In spite of the impact of the relocation program in this area, the transnational dimension of the relocation project has not been sufficiently studied, its effects on the Latino community on both sides of the borderlands being particularly ignored.

State intervention in the lives of borderlanders was felt long before the Pearl Harbor attack. In their search for spies, inspectors at the Santa Fe Bridge in El Paso, Texas carefully scrutinized individuals entering the United States, an action that involved racial profiling and affected all persons of "Asian appearance".³ Trading with 19 firms and individuals of Cd. Juárez, in its majority local small businesses owned by Japanese Mexicans, was forbidden.⁴ Alicia Gallegos Bueno de Meléndez, then an elementary school student living in Cd. Juárez, Chihuahua remembers that such measure was largely ignored by local Mexican customers of grocery and meat shops or by the loyal patients of Japanese doctors in neighborhoods in need of medical care at a low cost. Alicia had a Japanese Mexican teacher, Eva Takaki, whose parents owned a local grocery store. The Takakis were greatly appreciated in Cd. Juárez and did not see any change in their relation with neighbors or customers.⁵ Eventually, the list was extended to include Japanese in the interior of Mexico.⁶

On its part, the Mexican state demonstrated total cooperation towards the control of the Japanese population during WWII. *La Secretaría de Gobernación* not only ordered the registration of all Japanese in Mexico with municipal authorities but demanded their evacuation from the borderlands and coastal zones in January, 1942.⁷ Furthermore, in March, 1942, the Mexican government allowed the entrance of US soldiers into Cd. Juárez with the purpose of searching several residences of Mexican Japanese families. As a result, 15 Japanese and Mexican Japanese men were interrogated in the Mexican garrison by Mexican and United States army officers.⁸

¹ Roger Daniels, *Prisoners without Trial: Japanese Americans in WWII* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993).

² Gary Y. Okihiro, *Whispered Silences: Japanese Americans and World War* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1996).

³ "Immigration Officers at Bridge Are 'on Their Toes' against Spies," *El Paso Herald Post*, October 18, 1941.

⁴ "Juarez Japs Put on U.S. Blacklist," *El Paso Herald Post*, December 26, 1941.

⁵ Interview with Alicia Gallegos Bueno, December 20, 2006.

⁶ "Juarez Japs Put on U.S. Blacklist."

⁷ "Japs Must Leave Juarez in Five Days," *El Paso Herald Post*, March 27, 1942. See also "Japanese in Mexico Ordered to Register," *El Paso Times*, January 14, 1942.

⁸ "Juarez Japanese Arrested at Secret Meeting," *El Paso Herald Post*, March 19, 1942..

Military and civil measures of population control were directed almost exclusively against Japanese and Mexican Japanese living in the borderlands. While United States newspapers staged a campaign against the Mexican Japanese community, the Mexican Italians or Mexican Germans did not attract the same attention in the newspapers. Because political rights in Mexico were not exclusive in terms of race or economic class in theory, the three groups were equally treated. Naturalized Japanese Mexicans were protected by the same legal frame that covered the rights of Italian and German persons who had become naturalized citizens of Mexico. Nevertheless, racism shaped the relocation program in Mexico and in the United States for which displacement affected mainly persons of Japanese origin residing in the borderlands regardless of their citizenship status.⁹ Journalists carefully worded accusations against the targeted racialized group, declaring Japanese Mexicans as collaborators of the enemy without any due trial.¹⁰ In spite of such public display of enagement against Japanese Mexicans due to reported espionage activities in the Mexican borderland on behalf of the members of the Axis, to this date, there is no documentation of any Mexican Japanese ever tried for espionage or treason in Mexico.

A long history of exclusion in the United States and discrimination of persons of color in Mexico culminated in March, 1942, when the Secretaría de Gobernación ordered all Japanese Mexicans to abandon the US/Mexico borderlands as well as the Pacific and Atlantic Mexican Coasts.¹¹ In the state of Chihuahua, Mexican Japanese men and their families were ordered to travel by railroad to the "prosperous farming community of Santa Rosalia", Chihuahua, where they would "earn a living for the duration of the war". On April 20, 1942 *El Paso Herald Post* announced that a group of 50 Juárez "Japs", including naturalized Mexican citizens, had been sent to a concentration camp near Camargo.¹² Journalist and general population in the United States did not show interest in following the steps of Mexican Japanese beyond their removal from the border cities.

While the United States borderlands newspapers reported the relocation of the Mexican Japanese in racist terms, Mexicans, in several instances, did not share the same view. At the beginning of the Second World War, Japanese immigrants in Mexico had integrated with relative success into the communities they chose to live in. Interracial marriages contributed to a certain stable existence. Diversity among Japanese immigrants was mirrored, in addition to religious, class, and ethnical characteristics, by the different occupations they held in the receiving country: fisher, miner, gardener, carpenter, doctor, barter and dentist were some of the professions they used to perform in Mexico.¹³ The mobilization of these important members of many Mexican communities caused local protests and actions on the behalf of Japanese Mexicans, rarely identified in the United States. I was able to detect such resistance to the relocation program, evidence of a solid integration of Japanese immigrants into various Mexican social universes, throughout my review of the official files in the archives of the *Secretaría de Gobernación* as well as through the interviews I carried out with some Mexican Japanese living in a concentration camp during WWII.

Re-membling, as Esteva and Prakash proposed, is the act of uniting, once again, the pieces of our fragmented community.¹⁴ The borderlands own a subterranean memory that includes the once strong presence of Japanese Mexicans. Although historians have reported male Japanese immigrants in their evaluation of the displacement of this community, Mexican, Mexican Japanese and Japanese women and children were also affected by their removal. Evidence of their role in their communities was acknowledged by both the dominant media and the members of the micro societies that petitioned their return to their towns. *Time* reported in January, 1942 that

⁹ "Turning Back Japs in Large Numbers," *El Paso Herald Post*, December 27, 1906. "Japanese Threaten El Paso Valley Asserts This Man," *El Paso Herald Post*, July 21, 1920.

¹⁰ "Believe Japs reported on U.S. Units". "Believe Japs Reported on U.S. Units," *El Paso Times*, March 22, 1942. According to *El Paso Times* "[...] information about the disposition of American troops in Fort Bliss and the Southwest has been relayed to Japan by short-wave transmitters confiscated by Mexican officers in houses of Japanese residents in Juarez, Mexican and American authorities believed Saturday"

¹¹ "Japs Removed from Border Area," *El Paso Times*, April 1, 1942. "At the Juarez railroad station Monday were 13 Japanese, arrested by troops under General of Brigade J. Jayme Quinones, commander of the Juarez garrison. They will be detained on a reservation in Central Mexico."

¹² "Japs Must Leave Juarez in Five Days," *El Paso Herald Times*, March 27, 1942.

¹³ María Elena Ota-Mishima, *Siete Migraciones Japonesas En México, 1890-1978* (México: El Colegio de México, 1982).

¹⁴ Gustavo Esteva and Madu Suri Prakash, *Grassroots Post-Modernism. Remaking the Soil of Cultures* (London: Zed Books, 1998).

"[...] the 500 male Japs in Baja California (except 55 kept under close surveillance to help the fishermen and keep their canneries running) were evacuated from the peninsula, deposited inland in the State of Jalisco and set to work farming."¹⁵

On a personal level, my friend Rodolfo Nakamura reported the impact the relocation program had on the inhabitants of Palau, Coahuila. Sixty years after his family was disintegrated through the uprooting of his father, he consented to have a conversation in the living room of his home in Mexico City. Don Rodolfo was only 9 years old in 1942 when his only surviving parent was ordered to abandon his family and business along with other persons of Japanese origin.¹⁶ Rodolfo witnessed with pain the massive expulsion from his town that resulted in his separation from his beloved father:

"Just a little after my mom died, they suddenly spread the news. One Friday they started saying that all Japanese were going to be picked up. And that was it. Everybody learned that on Sunday, at ten in the morning, they would have to be at the railroad station because they were going to be concentrated in Mexico City. All of them, without exception. Then people fixed lunch for them. You could hear the painful weeping everywhere. The station was crowded since very early in the morning because there were too many [Japanese Mexicans] leaving. It was very early in the morning when the Japanese started to arrive [in the station]. The train came from Melchor Múzquiz to Barroterán, a mining town. [...] On that occasion, a nonstop train from Coahuila to Mexico City was assigned to them. There was no transference from one train to another one because there were too many, the Japanese who came."¹⁷

The absence of those Mexican Japanese families from their homes in North Mexico speaks of a social disruption that has shaped our perception of race, citizenship and homeland security in the borderlands. The "good war" loses its innocence and its mythic mission to bring freedom to every territory in which United States intervenes if we look at WWII from the perspective of the Japanese Mexican relocation program.¹⁸ The promise of democracy given in 1942 was globally extended by the United States at the expense of the liberty of the Japanese Mexicans, among other groups. Furthermore, a universal ideal that corresponded to European standards in terms of cultural practices and phenotypical characteristics was promoted by altering the racial composition of several communities in both the United States and Mexico, while the rights of American and Mexican citizens were cancelled on the basis of cultural membership and physical attributes.

Marginalized individuals and communities win important spaces through a constant renovation of language and the creation of their own literature affirming their existence and validating their struggles. Quite often alternative narratives to official histories have resisted their erasure and are passed from some individuals of a generation to another selected group of members of the following generation. Language remains a significant political battlefield that determines the interpretation of alternative and mainstream sources.¹⁹ Unfortunately, scholars have procrastinated the research on the relocation program that took place South of the US/Mexico border for which the opportunity to register the voices of the Japanese Mexicans is almost lost with the passing of the generation suffering relocation or internment during World War II. The dominant version of this program reflects the idea that the mobilization of Mexican Japanese to Mexico City was a generous concession granted by the Mexican Government, as a substitute to incarceration or deportation or as a purely defensive tactic in

¹⁵ "Foreign Relations: To Shoe an Achilles Heel," TIME, January 26, 1942.

¹⁶ Notes from conversation with Rodolfo Nakamura during interview on July 25, 2006. My translation

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Harvis Gardiner, *Pawns in a Triangle of Hate* (Seattle: University of Washington, 1981).

¹⁹ When researching the status of Mexican Japanese during WWII, for example, the use of the term "concentration camp" horrified even some social scientists who refused to accept that I use such words to describe the experience of a group of Mexican Japanese who were concentrated in specific locations. They argued that the conditions of Jewish in the European concentration camps were different and far more horrible from those under which the ethnic Japanese were held in the United States and in Mexico. The responsibility and degree of abuse that I seek to address demands that I continue using the term "concentration camp" or "internment camp" to describe those sites in which individuals from a specific racialized group were forced to live, work and, in some instances, die. The particularities, degrees of "horror" and differences between the camps established in the United States and the camps built in Europe are important, for which it is necessary to insist in the application of the term "death camp" to define the experience of Jewish during WWII in Europe and to continue using the term "concentration camps" that even United States newspapers used to report the internment of Japanese Mexicans.

view of the danger represented by the purportedly suspicious Japanese immigrants and their descendents.²⁰

The advanced age of the relocation program survivors makes urgent the task of articulating an alternative narrative that deconstructs the official history. In view of the lack of compensation of any sort for the Mexican Japanese (or Mexican Africans, Mexican Chinese, Indigenous Mexicans and Mexican Arabians), narrating their stories through their own voices contributes to the remembrance of their community and reestablishes a sense of their multiple identities and solidarities with the various ethnic groups they are part of.

One of the voices is present in the poems of Martin Otsuka, a medical doctor who immigrated to Mexico in 1925 from Fukuoka, Japan. I learned about Dr. Otsuka from his daughter, Sidumi Otsuka de Tanaka, who agreed to an interview at her home in Cd. Juárez, Chihuahua. Mrs. Otsuka is very proud of her father who lived in Mexico for several decades. In 1942, he was living in Namiquipa, Chihuahua, with his wife Agrícola Ordoñez and his three children. Sidumi was then a three-year old child. Although Mrs. Otsuka de Tanaka is not able to provide an exact date, she states that in that year a platoon surrounded her family's home, unexpectedly. The soldiers searched every room and arrested Dr. Otsuka, taking him to the capital of the state where he remained for some days joining many of his compatriots in a crowded cell.²¹

In 1968, Dr. Otsuka returned to Japan to live his last years in his country of origin. There, he published his autobiography. The poems in this text are a testimony of a deep relationship with the Mexican landscape and its inhabitants, as well as of his love for a great love for his Mexican wife and his Mexican children. The initial days of the relocation program are narrated with an unedited gaze that marks his identification with the same soldiers that guarded him.

*Los mexicanos son compasivos*²²

Después de haber sido tomado prisionero
En la noche conversábamos amablemente con los soldados
Yo les contaba la historia de los coroneles Hirose y Tachibana
Heroica por sus obras valientes y patrióticas

Dr. Otsuka brings back and addresses the braveness and patriotism of the Japanese soldiers establishing common ground and inviting the Mexican soldiers to look into their past communities.

-Doctor, fume su cigarro!
A pesar de que yo era un prisionero
Ellos fueron muy humanitarios.
-No se preocupe mucho, doctor. ¡Pronto será libre!
Esas palabras fueron sumamente compasivas, conmovedoras.

While the title of this poem registers the compassion that some members of the working class expressed towards the victims of the relocation program, a close examination of the text reveals a delicate literary work that leaves a testimony of resistance within the Mexican community towards the management of Mexican Japanese. Dr. Otsuka remains in his poem, after the initial conversation, a passive subject receiving the encouragement as well as the feelings of the soldiers. The Mexican soldiers are in continuous movement, they talk to Dr. Otsuka, bring him food, and take him out for sunbathing. This passive role allows Dr. Otsuka to place in the foreground the solidarity that infantry soldiers extend spontaneously towards the Japanese Mexicans.

Dejé en la casa a mis hijos de 1 a 3 años
-Fíjese, doctor, en México los huérfanos no se mueren de hambre
Entre ellos bondadosamente me traían el lonche sin cobrar
-Lo preparó mi esposa.

²⁰ David Pérez López, *Historias Cercanas. Relatos Ignorados De La Frontera* (Chihuahua: Ichicult, 2004).

²¹ Notes taken during interview with Sidumi Olivia Otsuka Ordoñez de Tanaka on November 11, 2006.

²² Martín Tameyesu Otsuka, *Poems, Memories of My Home Town, and Chronic of My Travels in Mexico* (Sumiko Otsuka Publisher, 1987), 115.

Dr. Otsuka establishes in his text that Mexican people take care of parentless children; therefore, his own children will be protected by his Mexican community in his absence, as one of the soldiers assures him in order to soothe the Japanese immigrant's pain. The next verses prove that the soldiers' words are not empty: the soldiers' wives prepare food for Dr. Otsuka without expecting any compensation, just as if he were another member of their families.

Su compasión hacía que mis mejillas se humedecieran.
-Fijese, ¡cuánto dolor le causará dormir en el suelo!
Y me hizo una estera con papeles de periódico.

In spite of the harshness of the relocation program, and his knowing that his wife has begun a miscarriage due to the physical strain caused by her running after the arresting platoon, Dr. Otsuka evaluates the gestures of the soldiers as humanitarian and describes with great detail the acts that he considers empathetic.²³ The Japanese poet describes one of the soldiers making a bed out of newspaper in order to reduce the emotional distress and physical discomfort experienced by Dr. Otsuka. Not only the ingenuity of the soldier is shown through his use of the materials available; a strong bond is explained through this image, usually reserved in literature for an assuring parent promising his child that everything will be fine the day after. The author provides a glimpse of tenderness between two men from different ethnic groups and social class. While Dr. Otsuka is positioned in a higher class, as a trained professional, he is in a disadvantageous position due to his ethnicity. Nevertheless, the soldiers do not abuse their position of relative power in the context of WWII but they attempt to create a non-violent space for Dr. Otsuka within their own limits and using their own resources.

This literary moment transcends the temporary identification of military personnel and Dr. Otsuka, it becomes symbolic of the survival of Japanese Mexicans because neither the *Secretaría de Gobernación* nor the *Secretaría de Defensa* provided substantial assistance in terms of food, jobs or housing for relocated Mexican Japanese families who saw their living conditions highly deteriorated during their displacement.²⁴ As Dr. Otsuka confirms in his poem, Japanese Mexicans depended for their support on other members of the community they moved into, including persons with hardly any means themselves, such as the infantry soldiers that help Dr. Otsuka.²⁵ Not grandiose acts of heroic deeds, but minute details acquire significance while in prison:

Cuando se ausentaba el oficial de guardia
Los soldados me llevaban a bañarme bajo el sol.

Dr. Otsuka's last two verses point out to the origin of his lack of liberty. Stemming from the officer, his deplorable situation is then a product of "superior orders" and it is related to the military hierarchy. Here, the poet states that, in the absence of their supervisor, the soldiers are willing to break the rules in order to raise Dr. Otsuka's spirit under the rays of the sun. They, the lowest ranked units in a state ridden institution take Dr. Otsuka from darkness to clarity, from coldness to warmth. The sun acts as a metaphor for hope, but also for the solidarity expressed by the soldiers through their concrete actions, contradicting the official position that demands the control of all Mexican Japanese.

This, and other poems by Dr. Otsuka, describe his integration into the rural community of Chihuahua, and express his position as a part of this social universe. The relationship described in his poems denies the rigidity ascribed to the relationship between stereotyped, racialized communities, in both the United States and Mexico. Those characteristics attributed to the Japanese during WWII are cancelled in Dr. Otsuka's poem imbued with sensitivity and validation of the human essence that he perceives in the Mexican soldiers behavior.

Inspired by Dr. Otsuka's decision to leave a testimony of transnational personal relations transcending transnational state projects, I wrote *Mudas las Garzas*, a narrative account of the relocation program that is not strictly historical but integrates creative writing. Embarking in this project involved a re-examination of my identity. As a Chinese Mexican American I analyzed the Mexican Japanese relocation program within the context of the multiple invasions that Japan carried

²³ Notes taken during interview with Sidumi Olivia Otsuka Ordoñez de Tanaka on November 11, 2006.

²⁴ Both institutions in charge of the relocation.

²⁵ In Mexico City, the *Comité Japonés de Ayuda Mutua* provided temporary housing and meals for some of the relocated families but their means were insufficient and the space extremely limited.

out in China. My reflection on the massacres, rapes, and medical experiments that the Japanese state performed in China forced me to examine the purportedly “historical” antagonism between Japanese and Chinese.²⁶ In addition, the uneasiness that I perceived in some of my Japanese Mexican interviewees at the beginning of our conversations brought to the surface their own reluctance to confide in a Chinese Mexican as a result of stereotypical perceptions constructed in both Mexico and Japan. Once they learned that I had been informally adopted and raised by a Japanese Mexican family, the Nakamura, they accepted to tell me their stories. Later, we developed a deep relationship with a common goal: to denounce the cruelty of the Japanese Mexican relocation program and to demand the inclusion of this episode in the teaching of history in Mexico in order to bring the general public into a state of consciousness about the racial, economic, gender, and sexual oppression that still permeates our society.

The age of my interviewees in 2006, as well as the death of my dear friend Rodolfo Nakamura, prompted the decision to write Mudas las Garzas. Although I started this research in order to complete a PhD degree in History, a dissertation would take years to finish and its publication would also take some other years. I felt urgent to make their stories available to a broad public. Literature was the ideal vehicle to make evident the links among marginalized groups and to provide examples of solidarity as an attempt to erode the antagonisms created by state projects. In that spirit, I assembled a series of poems and short stories with interviews and a novel in order to present several faces of the Mexican Japanese relocation and concentration program and to connect the experiences of internees and displaced Japanese and their descendants to those of other marginalized communities in Mexico, among them the Chinese Mexican. I tried to describe the complexity of my position in a brief text included in Mudas las Garzas. This is an attempt to bring together my memory, as part of the Chinese Mexican community, and that of the Japanese Mexicans:

Doctor Fujimoto, no entiendo por qué entrego ahora un mito, cuando deseo rehacer la historia con el rigor de datos inequívocos que amparen mi verdad. Porque lo que yo tengo de usted son versiones fantásticas, relatos marcados por el amor de sus hijos, y notas oliendo a rabia y prejuicios. A pesar de que poseo todo un legajo de documentos oficiales, usted es la más esquivada entre miles de personas afectadas por la guerra. Podría decir que hasta hoy, usted es solo la suma de sus pasos desde que salió de Japón. Verdad es que hay tramos que la neblina cubre y no me deja ver qué punto del Norte llegó a conquistar con su sonrisa y sus hábiles manos de médico, de artista, de minero. Ciertamente es que me siento una bruja quitando telarañas de una esfera de cristal para ver su pasado y su futuro. O mi pasado y mi futuro, doctor Fujimoto. Porque ya entendí que yo soy usted y usted es todos los que tratamos de caminar sin pisar a los demás, comer sin quitarle el pan a nadie de la boca. Pasado y futuro. Pan y tierra y agua. La vida sigue siendo la misma en todas las historias, doctor. En la de sus compatriotas mineros en Coahuila, la del maderista japonés en Chihuahua, el científico humanista en Chiapas y el fotógrafo de la Ciudad de México. Y en la de todas las mujeres que caminaron los mismos tramos, el mismo destierro. Rabia y prejuicios. Mire que hace sesenta y tres años yo ni había nacido pero ya estaba allí con usted mi destino. Ya estaba contando mi historia de exilio en japonés y en español cortito a los soldados mexicanos que lo encontraron perdido en la Sierra. Pan y tierra y agua. Mi padre nunca habló mal de usted ni de nadie, ni en cantonés ni en español, pero dejó en su librero testimonios. Historias de sangre y fuego. Grabados de demonios amarillos hincando el diente en los cuellos de niñas chinas. Espadas atravesando los cuerpos de ancianos lánguidos. Terrible será tal vez para mi familia el que hoy me encuentre tratando de descifrar otra historia de horror a miles de kilómetros y muchos años de distancia de esas masacres en China. Increíble que hoy busque sanar las heridas de los japoneses mexicanos. Pero es que la vida es igual y es diferente. Y los japoneses en China son harina de otra historia. Y los japoneses en México pertenecen a este costal. Rabia y prejuicios. Como adolescente que

²⁶ Jean Claire Kim's study of Black-Korean conflict during the 1980's in New York City is particularly enlightening in understanding the dynamics of the relationships among racialized groups... In *Bitter Fruit: The politics of Black Korean conflict in New York City*, Kim removes her analysis from the center of the polemic, to place the confrontation within a wider context that includes the power relationships in which the white dominance regulates inter-ethnic negotiations. See Jean Claire Kim, *The Politics of Black Korean Conflict in New York City* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000).

desobedece a sus padres, me siento triste por usted y por mis antepasados y esta tristeza me lleva a ver la similitud y la diferencia entre su historia y la de nosotros. Si he rescatado sus fotos de las celdas de Lecumberri creo que el premio ha sido enamorarme un poco de su mirada digna, recta. De los brazos que sostuvieron mil ahijados indígenas. Pan, tierra y agua. Y amor y vida y medicina compartidos con extraños. Milagros que le atribuyen desde Chihuahua hasta Morelos. No entiendo por qué en medio de los pensamientos más íntimos de otros personajes tejo y entretejo su vida, tal vez porque su historia es mi historia y la de muchos otros. Tal vez porque su esposa también supo lo que era ser mitad y mitad y cuando veo su fotografía recuerdo a mi hermana y su piel suave, clara. Los ojos de una mujer oriental pero también el cuerpo alto, ondulado y fuerte de mi madre mixteca. Verdad es que hay tramos que la neblina cubre pero trataré de contar la fantástica historia del Doctor Manuel Fujimoto y otros honorables Japoneses Mexicanos, a salud de usted, de mi familia china y de mi hermana la que es mitad y mitad y completamente hermosa.²⁷

Re-membering is a process that requires the examination of the different identities that form part of my culture. It is an act of association of experiences that allow me to identify with the suffering of an ethnic group that has transcended geographical boundaries. But this identification has been reciprocal and based on mutual respect. *Mudas las Garzas* was not published until I obtained the approval of the persons who magnanimously accepted to hold long conversations about their histories with me. Our collective task is now demonstrating that race does not determine behavior, that Mexican Japanese act and react according to specific contexts that determine a different outcome in every situation.²⁸ Re-membering is accepting that our mestizo image, the binary European/Indigenous, is no longer an encompassing identity but one that has the possibility to exclude, isolate, important components of the Chicano and Chicana cultures, such as those of Asian origin.

By declining to narrate the losses suffered by the Mexican Japanese during WWII, the Mexican, Japanese and United States societies defer their accountability for the racist projects that affected not only the targeted racialized group, but also the larger communities in which many Mexican Japanese were productive and appreciated denizens. Examining this instance of declared state of emergency will place in a specific context the social frame that makes legal the suspension of human rights and the non democratic mechanisms through which a specific group is controlled. Furthermore, it will empower the various racialized communities through the identification of those instances in which solidarity among transnational communities, particularly within the United States/Mexico borderlands, was constructed in response to oppressive state projects.

²⁷ Selfa Chew, *Mudas Las Garzas* (México, D. F.: Ediciones Eón, 2007).

²⁸ Leland Saito provides in *Race and Politics* an account of instances in which Chinese, Chinese Americans, Japanese, Japanese Americans, Filipinos, Mexicanos, Mexican Americans and Latinos in San Gabriel Valley have reacted to imposed identities by elaborating new ones. Saito's work proves that racial or ethnic identity is not permanent, single or biological but a complex, always in process, definition that is shaped by many factors such as generation, class and gender. Here, Saito, a critical ethnographer, addresses the variety of ways in which every generation at different localities constructs its ethnic identity, according to its own particular experiences. Mexican Japanese during WWII are, under this model, highly differentiated from Japanese soldiers occupying China or Korea; therefore, they deserve to be studied within their specific context. See Leland Saito, *Race and Politics. Asian Americans, Latino, and Whites in a Los Angeles Suburb* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1992).

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Eusebio Chacón's Statist Narratives of Nuevo México

The 1890s in New Mexico were a time of considerable political, cultural, and social upheaval. The question of New Mexican statehood had long been in the minds of many New Mexico Hispanos, especially elite Hispanos who "wanted to gain greater local control over land, resources, and political offices" (Nieto-Phillips, 60). The years leading up to New Mexican statehood, which was formally attained in 1912, were crucial in reaching this long desired goal and resulted in a Spanish- American consciousness that would function to "meet the established criteria (whiteness) for admission into the body politic" (81). Thus, in the years leading up to New Mexican statehood a new social structure had to be re-created in New Mexico one that would transform Nuevomexicanos into Americans (Mitchell, 5). In order for this transformation to take place Nuevomexicanos had to "lay claim to a European heritage," "boast of a 'Spanish' ancestry," and refashion "Spanish genealogy" (Nieto-Phillips, 49). Spanish -language newspapers and the stories they disseminated played a pivotal role in this process (79).

In 1892 Eusebio Chacón's two novellas, *El Hijo de la Tempestad* and *Tras la Tormenta la Calma*, appeared in their entirety in "El Boletín Popular," one of Northern New Mexico's largest Spanish-language newspapers (80). This newspapers' positive stance towards statehood and critical attitude toward those who disparaged Nuevomexicanos, and thus opposed its integration to the Union, offers a political lens through which we might read Chacón's fiction as a proactive instantiation of *nuevomexicano* cultural tradition. Eusebio Chacón was a staunch defender of Nuevomexicanos' "Spanish blood" and was proclaimed to be "an eloquent and fearless defender of the people's honor" due to his position "as a lawyer, author, translator, and acknowledged intellectual" and member of the elite Hispanos in New Mexico (15; 84). In his introduction to the novellas, Chacón denies any Anglo literary influence. This act of eradicating any literary tie to outsiders in turn not only suggests the presence of external social and political forces that are pressing upon the creation of his literature, but more importantly sustains his aimed claim of authenticity to New Mexico (Lomeli, 272). The political and cultural contestation that was occurring within the issue of statehood defined Chacón's societal position in New Mexico, as he fought against the marginality that New Mexico faced within the entire nation (Nieto-Phillips, 49). Considering all of these external forces defining New Mexico in the 1890s, the writing of *El Hijo de la Tempestad* and *Tras la Tormenta la Calma* can be seen as an effort on behalf of Chacón to "sow the seeds" of a Nuevomexicano literary tradition (Chacón, 4). This literary act would prove to the "gabacho" that Nuevomexicanos were capable of "creación genuine," a genuine creation (4). Thus, these two short novels are a type of historical narrative that shows one aspect of an evolving racial and ethnic identity predicated upon the cultural preservation of the Spanish- American heritage.

In *El Hijo de la Tempestad*, the tempestuous night, in which the reader is readily engulfed in, becomes symbolic for the chaotic social condition in which its community is enveloped. The social and political conditions of this community are muddled by corruption, which is indicated by the presence of morally questionable outsiders and a visible absence of a presiding structural order in the novelette. El Hijo de la Tempestad becomes the central character in this short novel, because he is defined by his social surroundings. He is called "El Hijo de la Tempestad" merely because he was born "en las tinieblas de una tempestad" (6). The thunderous and stormy conditions in which he was born directly inform and condition his identity. Thus, because El Hijo de la Tempestad was born with the "genio del huracán" he is destined to be "el azote de muchos pueblos y el terror de la humanidad" (12). The fact that he has no identity other than the one he is socially ascribed makes his life representative of his community' social ills, because it directly conditions his identity. These social ills are a product of both internal and external forces that act congruently due to the blurred social and political realms of the community. The gitana as an outsider effectively permeates society and is the key personage, aside from the "politicastros," that makes El Hijo de la Tempestad the coldhearted miscreant he grows up to be (Chacón, 29).

The physical description of characters becomes important because it indicates the social order present in the novelette's community. The only individuals that possess a detailed physical description

in the novel are la gitana and la casta Susana, which designates who is socially inferior and what is socially desired in a community's citizenry. Furthermore, the fact that certain individuals, like the "turba" or mob of rancheros in the novel, are not described in detail allows for the possible recreation of the community's social structure (6). The "rancheros" that are introduced are not given a racial identity and it is only "la gitana" who is characterized by the narrator as "sucia como todos los de su raza" (4). She is the only individual, along with her accompanying "mono," that is associated with a kind of "dirty race" or that is deemed to be an "extranjera" (6). With the exception of la casta Susana, the characterization of the gitana becomes important because all the other characters lack such detailed physical description. The gitana becomes the person that assumes the role of mother to the child whose mother died from giving birth. She is the person who ultimately names El Hijo de la Tempestad (21).

The fact that little detail is provided in describing El Hijo de la Tempestad and that he has a supernatural name separates him from other bandits and makes his nature impressionable. The narrator uses the words "hermoso" and "tierno" in describing El Hijo de la Tempestad before he even was placed in the arms of la gitana (4). If the child had been evil by nature then the narrator would refrain from using positive adjectives like beautiful and tender when initially describing the child. When the gitana prophesizes the destiny of the child amongst the rancheros she associates the evil nature of the child to the fact that his mother died at birth and that he was born in the middle of storm. These two factors do not condition the child, but rather happen to occur due to the overarching influence of environmental forces. When she bears the child in her arms she becomes reminded of "otra extraña [que] la habia alimentado á ella de la misma suerte, y por eso andaba errante por el mundo" (9). The fact that she is reminded of the other stranger that had nurtured her in the same way when she is carrying El Hijo de la Tempestad in her arms not only explains her role as a wanderer, but also functions to foreshadow his future societal position. Ultimately, la gitana transfers her quality of life to the child, which makes him a vagabond, a social outsider, and a bandit. The fact that El Hijo de la Tempestad is a social construction and has no real race is important, because it eliminates the basis for the prejudicial thoughts that the Americans were espousing during the 1890s in associating the bandits of the Southwest to the barbaric tendencies of Mexicans. The supernatural forces and social influences that make El Hijo de la Tempestad "el capítan de bandoleros," one who destroys pueblos and commits human atrocities, is what directs the reader to what truly matters, which is society itself (Chacón, 13).

When the governmental armed forces accidentally come across the hiding place of El Hijo de la Tempestad, while seeking refuge from the tempestuous weather, they are caught in a circumstance that becomes a metaphor for the ironic situation in which their society subsists. The fact that the image of the "tempestad bramabando en el exterior" is contrasted with "el interior [de la cueva] todo era calma" places stress upon the false nature of calmness (27). The tempestuous weather outside is self-evident and metaphorically represents the social chaos that subsists in the community. The governmental armed forces seek shelter in what they believe would be a refuge from the calamity of the outside world and instead find no calmness at all. With this in mind the Capitan's comment in the end becomes much more relevant and disturbing. He nonchalantly declares that the gitana is sweeping the "aposento que deben ocupar ciertos politicastros que traen la patria muy revuelta," which identifies the true source of the social chaos (29). The citizens of "la patria" believe that politicians, like the cueva, would be a refuge from external disorder and yet this calmness turns out to be false (29). The "politicastros," which is a derogatory manner in which to address the politicians, turn out to be aiding the societal chaos that engrosses their community. El Hijo de la Tempestad as a societal creation becomes symbolic for the corruption that hides in the clandestine dark shadows of the governmental body politic.

The only hope for the community is metaphorically possessed in the only figure of morality and virtue in the entire short novel, which is "la casta Susana" (21). Unlike the other "esclavas" who were captured by El Hijo de la Tempestad and his bandoleros when they pillaged a pueblo, "la casta Susana" does not allow herself to be taken advantage of by any of the bandits or by El Hijo de la Tempestad himself (18). Susana and her father are held captive "porque la virtud de la hija y el heroismo del padre habian hecho embotarse los mas feroces impetus del Hijo de la Tempestad" (17). They are held captive because Susana's virtue and her father's heroism act as a ferocious impetus for El Hijo de la Tempestad. Both are "educados en la escuela de la hidalguía" and thus possess all of the generosity and nobility of the Spanish hidalgo. Susana is a virgin who possesses virtue that is made visible in her mere physical presence. She possesses all of those characteristics that a classical "white" beauty would display. Not only is Susana virtuous, but she also is obedient to her father to the utmost extreme. She feeds her elderly father from her "casto seno" or chaste breast and when her father is

near death she obediently accepts to marry El Hijo de la Tempestad in order to preserve her honor and the honor of her father (17). The succeeding allusion to Cordelia and King Lear, places this sacrifice in a literary history that will never be forgotten, as Susana, like Cordelia, is a daughter who remains loyal to her father until the very end (24).¹ Ultimately it is her sacrificial gesture toward her father and honor that sustain patriarchy and social as well as moral order. In the end she does not marry El Hijo de la Tempestad and remains virginal in every sense, which then becomes the only “creciendo luz” that sheds some hope for the continuation of her community’s existence as she becomes the means in which cultural preservation is achieved.

In *Tras la Tormenta la Calma*, the title itself insinuates that after the storm there is complete social tranquility. This sense of social tranquility becomes prevalent in the presence of a more intrusive and prodding narrator and thus a more involved community. The manner, in which there is an absence of structured social space that allows for one to linger over matters of love in the *El Hijo de la Tempestad*, reinforces the social chaos that the community was enveloped in. *Tras la Tormenta la Calma* is a short novel that possesses social space that allows for matters of love to be the central issue in its community. Though the “tormenta” that the title mentions itself could be applied to the amorous love triangle between Luciano, Lola, and Pablo, the fact that there is always a sense of calm lingering behind the storm is ensured by the presence of a remaining stable social structure that is meant to resolve the problems left behind. Susana, who in *El Hijo de la Tempestad* is a symbol of nobility and in a sense the cultural preserver of Spanish heritage, becomes the overarching model of honor in *Tras la Tormenta la Calma* that is imposed upon Lola. The intense amount of Spanish literary allusion becomes a manner in which Spanish- American consciousness becomes more visible and welcomed. These allusions contribute greatly to the awakening of Spanish-American ethnic and political consciousness that successfully establishes a community in which, to quote Francisco Lomelí “honor becomes a relative code of social behavior” (163).

The narrator in *Tras la Tormenta la Calma* is much more colloquial in tone and actively participates in both spectatorship, by letting himself be entertained by “las bromas que los muchachos le dan” through the use of Gustavo Adolfo Becquer’s poetry, and is emotionally attached as he “laments Luciano’s fortune” (Chacón, 32). The manner in which the narrator engages in spectatorship simultaneously forces the reader to intimately engage in the development of the short novel, as we are let in on an inside joke that “los muchachos” from “uno del los barrios de Santa Fe” practice on Luciano (32). The involved temperament of the narrator becomes a mere extension of the engrossed nature of the entire community upon matters of the most personal level. Everyone in the pueblo knows one another and the absence of a foreign presence allows for this kind of intimacy, which is something that stifles the community in *El Hijo de la Tempestad* as la gitana ultimately provokes disorder. The community’s gossip directly reaches Luciano in a way that shows that they are trying to match Lola with whom they consider to be a worthy match (38). Lola, like Susana, symbolically represents cultural preservation of the community. She, whose “hermosura la destinaba á ser de las más ardientes amadoras de que la historia de Santa Fé tiene registro,” is destined like Susana to be one of the most passionate sweethearts of all history (33). She, like Luciano, must serve the community as a form of entertainment and a continuance of the Spanish literary lineage, which is most symbolically represented in Luciano and his crime.

Luciano’s crime ultimately is the misuse of the Spanish literary history, which represents Spanish heritage, and he becomes a redeemable character in the end when he learns his lesson and realizes its correct use. Luciano is presented to the reader as “a joven de gallarda presencia y de gentil linaje” whose only fault was “no saber aprovecharse de la experiencia de otros” (32). His inexperience essentially causes him to be fantastical in his reading of “El Don Juan de Byron, El Estudiante de Salamanca y otras composiciones al estilo” (38). He appreciated these literary works at face value by viewing them “tal cual se pintaban” and thus erroneously wanted to be the next “Don Juan ó Felix de Montemar” (38). Luciano uses golden hypocrisy to seduce Lola, which stresses the valuable nature of the Spanish literary history he alludes to but also the manner in which he is distorting these works into something hypocritical. The manner in which he misuses classical Spanish literature then becomes his Achilles heel, but the way in which Lola succumbs to his advances highlights the power of this rich literary history. Lola becomes powerless under the mesmerizing enchantment of language as she is likened to a helpless “mariposa que se deja facinar por la luz de los faroles” (45). The fact that he has used his knowledge of Spanish literature to deceive someone else

¹ Though Eusebio Chacón’s reference to Shakespeare’s play *King Lear* may appear to undermine his denial of any Anglo literary influence in his novelettes, he refers to Shakespeare along with other famous Spanish writers in order lay claim to a European heritage.

and thus twist the intentions of these classical works marks the commencement of his misguided path toward misfortune. Nevertheless, Luciano in the end is redeemed because of his appreciation of literature, which becomes an obvious outcome when his fate is compared to that of Pablo.

Unlike Luciano, who is a student "en el colegio de San Miguel" and gifted with language, Pablo "tenía las manos callosas" and was "un sér verdaderamente noble" under "sus toscas vestiduras" (33). The manner in which Luciano and Pablo act as foils for one another highlights the crucial flaw that Pablo has, which is his inability to use language. Education becomes a means of degrading and placing Pablo in a class structure. Lola describes Luciano's words as "la quinta esencia de la miel" and Pablo's words as "groseras" (45). The stark contrast between the manner in which Luciano's words ring sweetly into Lola's ears and Pablo's words ring coarsely and cause repulsion, stress the importance that the command of language has and how those who do not possess such an ability are "humilde" and not worthy of love (45). In the end of the short novel, when he is hovering above the dead body of Aunt Mela and defaming Luciano and Lola for their wrongful deeds, his "largo discurso" is cut short (52). The narrator declares that his soliloquy would have been entered into "el Tesoro de la Elocuencia Española de Camapani," along with the best of Spanish literary history, but his pain intervened and "sejó de un tajo el tierno botón antes que fuera rosa" (52). Pablo is incapable of mastering the art of language as his simple nature allows for his emotions to overpower his ability to control speech. He will never be a rose and will forever remain a mere "botón" or seed, for he lacks the potential that would allow for his growth (52). A lack of education becomes his true demise, which reversibly for Luciano becomes a means in which he can redeem his past wrongful actions.

Pablo in the end is a noble character for he preserves the honor of Lola by forcing a marriage between Lola and Luciano even though he still loves her, but he is doomed to a fate of loneliness. Noble actions are a requisite, but the ability to master language and capture the true meaning and importance of a Spanish heritage through literature is essential. Luciano was able to marry Lola under the code of honor that structurally reveals a hidden impartiality. Luciano in the end, who is of noble lineage and of elegant presence, marries the most beautiful woman in the community. Though there is a hint of irony in the resultant fate of Luciano, who marries for passion and not for love, he nonetheless is able to redeem himself and continue his noble lineage. Luciano in the end marries Lola, has a son named Pepe, and has an opportunity to place his mastery of Spanish literary works to good use. In the nights the narrator hears "una playera ó vespertina de que Luciano tiene un variado é inagotable repertorio" on occasion in order to console "his alma triste" (55). Luciano delivers for his family a "vespertina," which is a sermon but also a literary act that is celebrated during the evening in universities, from an "inagotable repertorio" that translates as a book of gathered selected great theatrical works (56). Luciano ultimately learns his lessons and gathers from his knowledge of literature something that goes beyond its face value. The fact that Luciano takes this knowledge and vocalizes it to his family becomes symbolic for the continuance of the Spanish ancestry in which, like Susana, Lola becomes the means from which this culture is preserved.

El Hijo de la Tempestad and *Tras la Tormenta la Calma* present two different themes, one deals with banditry and the other deals with matters of love, however they are both connected by a greater concern for honor and social order. The manner in which the first novelette, *El Hijo de la Tempestad*, deals with issues of social disorder and the second novelette, *Tras la Tormenta la Calma*, deals with the matter of social order through the imposed structure of honor jointly make an argument for statehood. For both these novelettes the interwoven presence of archetypal Spanish literary allusions additionally functions as an interconnecting element that increasingly becomes present in the second novelette. The literary allusions to a Spanish literary history in the "genuina creación" of a New Mexican "literatura recreativa," functions as a way in which to "lay claim to European heritage," "boast of a "Spanish" ancestry," and refashion "Spanish genealogy" (Nieto-Phillips, 49). These two short novels are a type of historical narrative that shows the recreation of a social order predicated upon the cultural preservation of the Spanish-American heritage.

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Indigenous Ecology and Chicanada Coalition Building in the dramatic works of Cherrie Moraga: "Living Models" for a Sustainable Future

Without the sovereignty of Native peoples, including Chicanos, and support for our land-based struggles, the world will be lost to North American greed, and our culturas lost with it. The "last frontier" for Northern capitalists lies buried in coal-and uranium-rich reservation lands and in the remaining rainforests of the Amazon. The inhabitants of these territories – the Dine, the North Cheyenne, the Kayapó, etc. – are the very people who in 1992 offer the world community "living models" of ways to live in balance with nature and safeguard the earth as we know it. (170)

--- *The Last Generation*

For the Chicano Nationalist Movement, *Aztlán* signified its values of Chicano self-determination, unified political action, the right to land and native language and resistance to the cultural imperialism of Euro-America. In *The Last Generation* (1993), Moraga reaffirms the movement's fundamental goals, stating, 'the reacquisition, defense and protection of Native land and its natural resources is the basis for rebuilding the Chicano nation', alongside other American Indian nations (170). How is she able to make such a problematic suggestion that Chicanos, who regardless of their indigenous roots also share the blood and heritage of colonizers and oppressors due to first a Spanish then an Anglo invasion, have a right to land among other First Nations? She is careful to qualify the tenuousness of the Chicano/Indian Nations alliance as well as note the complicity of all North Americans in the global exploitation of land, resources and labor of "Third World" and Native peoples. The critical move Moraga makes in her environmentalist essays is to shift the meaning of land to encompass the body and the earth in the sense of a planet without frontiers and its resources so that the "reacquisition" of a Chicano homeland wouldn't indicate a displacement of Native or other peoples in the Southwest as it once did, but rather the securing of a certain quality of life for all peoples globally:

Land remains the common ground for all radical action. But land is more than the rocks and trees, the animal and plant life that make up the territory of Aztlán or Navajo nation or Maya Mesoamerica. For immigrant and native alike, land is also the factories where we work, the water our children drink, and the housing project where we live. For women, lesbians, and gay men, land is that physical mass called our bodies. Throughout las Américas, all these "lands" remain under occupation by an Anglocentric, patriarchal, imperialist United States. (173)

So in calling Chicanos to join the global indigenous struggle for sovereignty, she means, "the sovereign right to wholly inhabit oneself (*cuero y alma*) and one's territory (*pan y tierra*)" (173-4). This struggle asks that we not only defend remaining Indian lands but also "teach one another that our freedom as a people is mutually dependent and cannot be parceled out – class before race before sex before sexuality" and finally it requires us to "invent new ways of making culture, making tribe, to survive and flourish as members of the world community in the next millennium" (174).¹

Moraga's latest works, especially the dramatic pieces written in the same period as *The Last Generation*, draw from indigenous ecology and the historical archive of Chicano struggle that provide models for a sustainable future she envisions. The author shifts from poetry and essay - the lyrical, reflective mode of self-inquiry and expression for which she is so well known – to a collective dramatic dialogue allowing her to represent the diversity of perspectives that have always existed within and

¹ For an eloquent analysis of Moraga's *The Last Generation* in the context of environmental justice please see Priscilla Solis Ybarra's " 'Lo que quiero es tierra': Longing and Belonging in Cherrie Moraga's Ecological Vision."

around Chicano communities. Through this plurality she is able to give voice to marginalized perspectives and exhibit the ingeniousness and courage behind a long tradition of Chicano coalition building that will be necessary for global alliances of collective resistance. As Chicano activist theater originated with Luis Valdez's *Teatro Campesino* associated with United Farmer Workers Union and later with the Chicano Movement, Moraga's plays are situated within the tradition of Chicano environmental political struggle. *Heroes and Saints*, *Watsonville: Some Place Not Here*, and *Circle in the Dirt: El Pueblo de East Palo Alto*, are infused with the author's interpretation of indigenous ecology that conflates her interlaced political discourses on race, sexuality, gender, community, nationalism, and art with a holistic view of the earth.² Contributing to a tradition of Chicano environmental discourse and the global indigenous struggle for sovereignty, her work brings together and challenges the assumptions of ecocriticism, ecofeminism and American environmental and naturalist writing particularly in terms of race and class by prioritizing the wellbeing of those who dwell in or work the land as opposed to "pristine" open spaces perceived as untouched by human hands.³

The term 'Indigenous ecology' refers to the particularly holistic relationship many indigenous communities have traditionally cultivated with their environments. Naturally, global indigenous cultures represent a great diversity of practices and beliefs, even within a given tribal or regional group many autochthonous communities do not live according to tradition. One thing most have in common, however, is the threat to their wellbeing and customary ways of life. Indeed, John Grim reports that globally, due to multinational interests often backed by nation-state violence, indigenous ecology, "cosmologies, and ritual practices [are] in danger of being extinguished by absorption into mainstream societies and by destruction of indigenous homelands through resource extraction." (Grim) In *The Last Generation*, Moraga uses the more elegant Spanish term, *indigenismo*, to denote the revalorization of pre-Columbian and Native American values, beliefs and ways of life. In her essay from this collection, 'Queer Aztlán: the Re-formation of the Chicano Tribe', written in 1992 – 500 years after the arrival of Columbus and the same year as the Earth Summit in Brazil, the author describes her vision of a Chicano 'tribal model':

A form of community building that can accommodate socialism, feminism, and environmental protection. In an ideal world, tribal members are responsive and responsible to one another and the natural environment. Cooperation is rewarded over competition. Acts of violence against women and children do not occur in secret and perpetrators are held accountable to the rest of the community. "Familia" is not dependent upon male-dominance or heterosexual coupling. Elders are respected and women's leadership is fostered, not feared. (166-67).

2 *The Hungry Woman: A Mexican Medea* and *Heart of the Earth: A Popol Vuh Story* are among these as well but I cannot adequately treat them here. I discussed the first in my presentation at the 2009 NACCS conference entitled, "Myth and Ritual at the Intersections of Social and Environmental Injustice in Cherrie Moraga's *The Hungry Woman*." Indeed, with the complexity of Moraga's interrelated concerns and techniques, even teasing out the environmental threads as I do here is a violation of her art. Yet, it is necessary since they have not been treated elsewhere.

³ A more thorough discussion of these theoretical overlaps is beyond the scope of this paper. However, I am indebted to the scholars who have elaborated the issues and whose knowledge provided a springboard for my analysis. For instance, Devon Peña in *Chicano Culture, Ecology, Politics: Subversive Kin* and Laura Pulido in *Environmentalism and Economic Justice: Two Chicano Struggles in the Southwest*, identify a land ethic and traditional ecological knowledge that are endemic to cultures of Mexican origin that form the basis of contemporary Chicano environmental discourse. In his, *Mexican Americans and the Environment: Tierra y Vida*, Peña elaborates the conflicts between Chicanos in the Environmental Justice movement and the two strands of American environmentalism: the anthropocentric conservationist movement that defined nature as a commodity to be exploited and rarely acknowledged people of color and the wilderness preservation movement that ignored the fact that native cultures often viewed these "open spaces" as their home. (122-3) Gwyn Kirk, in her article, "Ecofeminism and Chicano Environmental Struggles: Bridges Across Gender and Race," indicates the "interconnections, overlappings, disjunctions and gaps between ecofeminism and Chicano environmental struggles" (177) and suggests that while ecofeminists view women's liberation as integral to a "sustainable future," they need to emphasize race and class more often in their analyses. (192) Kirk calls for collaborative activism that contributes to a "broader movement for environmental justice. [...] to create an oppositional politics in the United States that radically challenges white-dominated, patriarchal, global capitalism and includes agendas and strategies for change to bring about sustainable living" (195-6). Moraga's dramatic work embodies just such a politics and represents these sorts of coalitions among groups around social and environmental justice in and beyond the Chicano community.

Moraga reminds us that, due to first a Spanish and then a Euro-American wave of colonization, many Chicanos have been denied knowledge of their tribal affiliations and have thus been only varyingly recognized as such by American Indian tribes. "Regardless of verifiable genealogy," Moraga's drama expresses a "collective longing to return to our culture's traditional Indigenous beliefs and ways of constructing community in order to find concrete solutions for the myriad problems confronting us, from the toxic dump sites in our neighborhoods to rape" (166).

In order to represent the interconnectedness of the world from a mechinano ecological perspective, Moraga employs a network of rich imagery and metaphor that link human beings with their environment and non-human beings. Mary Pat Brady cites Norma Alarcón's term 'tropography' to discuss this aspect of Moraga's work, "The word t(r)opography indicates the interanimating relationship between places (topos) and metaphor (tropology being the study of metaphors, of words used in ways that extend past their literal meanings.) T(r)opography also incorporates geography, admitting through such wordplay the crucial battle over space (for both material control and representation) inherent to the contemporary world" (138). The dramaturge situates this tropography in time (history) as well as local making its valance of meaning even more complex.

The three plays discussed here are set in Californian towns and all based on historical and imagined Chicano environmental, social struggles. *Heroes and Saints* is based on the UFW grape boycott and protest over pesticide use in 1988; *Watsonville, Some Place Not Here* documents the Green Giant factory strike of 85-87; and *Circle in the Dirt: El Pueblo de East Palo Alto* depicts an imaginary protest around urban housing in East Palo Alto in the 90s.⁴ *Heroes and Saints*, takes place in an imaginary town, McLaughlin, (based on the real town of McFarland in the San Joaquin Valley). Moraga's set description reads:

The hundreds of miles of soil that surround the lives of Valley dwellers should not be confused with land. What was once land has become dirt, overworked dirt, overirrigated dirt, injected with deadly doses of chemicals and violated by every manner of ground- and back-breaking machinery. The people that worked the dirt do not call what was once the land their enemy. They remember what land used to be and await its second coming (91).

The second coming of the land to which Moraga alludes here can be read in the context of the play and its sequel, *Watsonville: Some place Not Here*, as a sort of territorial re-appropriation through revolutionary action or through Mexican immigration – "the re-Indianization of the state" (Moraga, 1996, vii). It can also be seen as a representation of the cyclical returns of nature, which many of the workers understand on some level. She also makes clear that the endless vineyards and orchards ought to be constantly present and "press upon the intimate life of the Valle family home" (91). This direction indicates not only the fact that the family has no way of escaping the toxic conditions that plague them, it also implies that la familia Valle cannot be separated from the valley, that by extension no one can be set apart from her environment. There are some who think they can afford to ignore the fact, like the gringo one character imagines driving by on route 99, "...it'd never occur to him that anybody lived there between those big checkerboard plots of tomatoes, strawberries, artichokes, brussels sprouts and [...] hundred of miles of grapes. He'd be headed home to his woman and TV set and sleeping kids tucked into clean sheets and he'd have a wad of bills in his pocket and he'd think he'd live forever" (114).

Though the United Farm Workers Union couldn't prove it definitively at the time, it has been established that pesticides were (and are) causing disease in the valley and the boycott continues today (Huerta 67). The event that motivated the playwright in particular was the brutal beating of Dolores Huerta during a press conference where she protested the use of pesticides. The play opens with an unforgettable spectacle: children in *calavera* masks erect a small cross in a grape field with the body of a dead child hanging silhouetted in the day's first light. Then the sun, moving above the horizon, bathes the child and the play's central character, Cerezita, in its glowing light. Cerezita is an adolescent Chicana born with a head but no body due to the pesticides to which her pregnant mother was exposed while she worked the fields. She is able to move with the help of a motorized "raite," a table-like vehicle she controls with her chin. While her visual image is startling and miraculous, even more so are her humanity and the brilliance of her mind. She is the most intellectual, courageous and

4 Some ideas dealing with the first two play are borrowed from my earlier publication entitled, "Redeeming Acts: Religious Performance and Indigenismo in Cherrie Moraga's Feminist Revision of Chicano Activist Theater." Here performance aspects and character development are discussed at length.

sensitive character in the play, a sort of visionary prophet and a poet. Cere favors indigenous values and knowledge. For instance, she is informed about traditional uses of herbs for healing and cites from memory from Rosario Castellanos' *Balun Canan*, and the Mayan texts on which the novel is based.⁵

Poison is a repeating trope in the play, not only in the ever-present effects of pesticides in the fields and the venomous waste buried under McLaughlin government subsidized housing, but also figured in the toxic relationships of the isolating patriarchal familial structure and the threat of AIDS. For instance, Mario, Cere's gay brother, is victim of both the disease and intense anger caused by his father's cheating and abandonment of his family. Amparo, a character based on Dolores Huerta, leads the protests against the pesticides, saying,

¿Qué significa que the three things in life – el aire, el agua, y la tierra – que we always had enough of, even in our pueblitos en México, ya no tenemos? Sí, parece que tenemos all that we need. In the morning the air is cool y fresco, the ground stretches for miles, and all that the ranchero puts into it grows big and bright and the water pours from our faucets sin término. Pero, todo es mentira. Look into your children's faces. They tell you the truth. They are our future. Pero no tendremos ningún futuro si seguimos siendo víctimas. (111)

The children, who see their friends and siblings dying, become active in the protests, placing the crosses in the fields under Cere's leadership. Moraga associates the McLaughlin children with animal and plant metaphors to demonstrate the connection of human beings and their environment. The images proceed from birth (inside the womb) to death and, rather than essentialize the human - non-human connection, they emphasize their common threat. From her window Cere observes, "The sheep drink the same water we do from troughs outside my window. Today it is an orange-yellow color. The mothers dip their heads into the long rusty buckets and drink and drink while their babies deform inside them. Innocent, they sleep inside the same poison water and are born broken like me, their lamb limbs curling under them." (99) Here we cannot miss the allusion to the girl as a sacrificial lamb. Echoing Amparo, Cere's brother, Mario, says the children are like canaries in mine shafts. Cere refers to herself in this way, more directly foreshadowing her own fate, saying, "...just throw a towel over my cage like the canaries. Martyrs don't survive." (125) Poetically and prophetically, Cere envisions the vineyard as a cemetery,

The trunk of each of the plants is a little gnarled body of Christ writhing in agony. [...] See how the branches look like arms with the bulging veins of suffering. Each arm intertwined with the other little crucified Christs next to it. Thousands of them in neat orderly rows of despair. [...] I see it all. A chain gang of Mexican Christs. Their grey wintered skin, their feet taking root into the trenches the machines have made. (134)

This ecological vision inspires her protest with the child crucifixions. In the final act of the play, she leads the whole community in a revolt, wearing her blue starred mantle, her *raite* decorated like an altar, Cereza invokes the Virgin of Guadalupe and speaks her apocalyptic prophesy,

Put your hand inside my wound. Inside the valley of my wound, there is a people. A miracle people... You are Guatemala, El Salvador. You are the Kuna y Tarahumara. You are the miracle people too, for like them the same blood runs through your veins. The same memory of a time when your deaths were cause for reverence and celebration, not shock and mourning... today... that red memory will spill out from inside you and flood this valley con coraje. And you will be free. Free to name this land *Madre*. Madre Tierra. Madre Sagrada. Madre. . . Libertad. The radiant red mother...rising" (148).

⁵ For a wonderful analysis of Cere's and other characters in the play, see Yvonne Yarbrow-Bejarano's "'The Miracle People': *Heroes and Saints* and Contemporary Chicano Theater" where the scholar explores the profound subversions of Chicana/o subjectivity and sexuality that are weaved in with the play's more conventional representations of community activism and situates the play among works of Moraga's contemporary peers. Yarbrow-Bejarano cites the sources that inspired Cerezita's characters: an image of a limbless child in the 1986 film *The Wrath of Grapes* and the character of Belarmino in Luis Valdez's 1964 play *The Shrunken Head of Pancho Villa*. (73)

Amidst helicopter noise and police gunfire the McFarland people burn the fields in protest. Jorge Huerta describes this final climax as an act of expiation, “cleansing through fire, just as indigenous cultures practice ritual fires to cleanse their lives and signify a new beginning” (167). Moraga’s words, the “red memory” spilling over the land like blood, evoke the ancient notion of human sacrifice as a means of establishing equilibrium between nature, the gods, and humankind. The real message here, though, is a call to revolt – the people’s memory will fill the valley not with blood, but with *coraje*, the rage they will need to fight the growers. Cere’s idea to invoke the Virgin to unite her people is a stroke of genius since Guadalupe appeals to the Catholic believer, the secular activist who will recall her as a banner for the Mexican revolution, and the worshippers of *Tonantzin*, the Aztec fertility goddess. Throughout the play the divisions between key characters makes unified action difficult. In *Heroes and Saints*, Moraga pays homage not only to the victims of environmental racism and martyrs to corporate greed, but also to the faith, skill and courage of the diverse organizers involved in the UFW collective action of this period.

The sequel to *Heroes and Saints*, *Watsonville: Some Place Not Here*, is a fictional drama based on three historical events: the women’s strikes against Green Giant cannery in Watsonville, California of 1985-87; the appearance of the Virgin of Guadalupe on the face of an oak tree in Pinto Lake County Park in 1992; and the 1989 earthquake that registered 7.1 on the Richter scale. Sequentially and thematically these two plays are parts of a whole in that Cerezita’s prophetic vision and martyrdom in *Heroes and Saints* initiates a transformation in other characters that, in *Watsonville...*, sustains them and their continued social and spiritual liberation. We come to know what has happened to individuals after the riot in *Heroes and Saints* and also that the revolt brought no material change for the members of the community. Rather, their transformations are internal, intellectual and spiritual, and in their relationships to one another and to the earth. Based on *Indigenismo* - traditional values applied to contemporary needs, both plays link Catholic beliefs and practices to the Pre-Colombian past. Catholic practices of fasting and pilgrimage are recast as indigenous oppositional political action.⁶ Chicano performance of Indian memory thus becomes a decolonizing ritual, a catalyst for individual and communal social liberation.

Along with a rich topography of arboreal images, the set reflects Moraga’s indigenous ecology by housing all the action of the play within a circle of oaks, which provides a sort of sacred space for transformation to occur:

... private property is the land on which [Mexican immigrants] work, represented by chain-linked and barbed wire fences and corrugated aluminum walls. Still as Mexicans of Indian descent, el pueblo remembers the land as belonging to no one but the earth itself. To that end, the cannery, the kitchen, the union hall, the picket line, the park, the hospital, the warehouse – in short, all the action of the play – is housed within the circle of a grove of aging oaks. The central image of the play is Dolores’ altar, always candle-lit and sainted, which opens through a window to the oldest and tallest oak of the grove. Here, miracles take place. (6)

Watsonville... opens with Dolores, whose children have all either died or left home, working in a cannery with other Chicana women. A strike over working conditions lingers on over months, draining the community’s already limited resources. Outside pressure in the form of a new law threatens to divide the Chicano community into those with legal working papers and those without. The law prohibits undocumented “immigrants and their children from obtaining employment, education, and social services, including non-emergency health care” (*Watsonville...* 84).⁷ Just when it looks as if the strike might fall apart, Dolores has a vision of the Virgin of Guadalupe whose image later appears on an oak tree. The vision is a conflation of recent Chicano and Pre-Hispanic imagery. The Church refuses to sanction the image and calls Dolores’s vision a “personal revelation” that they interpret as a call for her to forgive her husband’s cheating ways. For probably the first time, she does not accept the Church’s version and interprets it instead as a call for her participation in the strike, which she had resisted since the protests depicted in *Heroes and Saints*. Dolores’s vision is a sign of her developing awareness, of the channeling of her religious faith into the cause of social liberation. In *Heroes and Saints*, she is the most religious and alienated from the community. Rather than bringing her closer to her community, her religious faith kept her from fully participating in the

⁶ Please see my article mentioned earlier for a detailed interpretation of these practices.

⁷ This is a reference to California’s proposition 187 that became a law through a vote on a 1994 ballot and was later found to be unconstitutional.

strike or letting her daughter do so. Now, like Juan who has shed his priest's frock, Dolores's faith is transferred from an other-worldly icon on an altar, to one anchored in her reality and to the Chicano revolutionary struggle. The vision inspires her to act; she begins a private hunger strike and enlists other women so they can make it a public protest.

The church officials refuse to authenticate the images of Our Lady of Guadalupe on the sequoia trunk because there are multiple images. (172) This claim, that there should only be one saintly image, echoes the early church's indictment of indigenous religion as pagan, principally due to its multiple gods as opposed to the "civilized" Catholic monotheism. Moraga uses this multiple characteristic, like the thousands of Christs in *Heroes and Saints*, to drive home her vision of a Chicano Movement that is more tolerant of the plurality of its community. We see one aspect of this plurality in the tension between faith and performance played out among the workers. There are many views regarding the apparition; many place prayers, photos, and candles at its base, while others feel it is a distraction to their work. Some suggest that they use the Virgin's appearance to inspire the workers, but the reverent and those non-believers who respect it cannot accept this idea. The strike negotiations create further divisiveness. The company will not stand up against the new law. The strikers argue amongst themselves and cannot seem to resolve their differences, when Dolores suggests the idea of joining with the fieldworkers in a pilgrimage to the tree, affirming their solidarity in protest of the new law. She convinces Father Juan to join by reminding him that the tree is the source, in paper, of all his political books and the Bible he totes. He recalls the Indians called the Bible 'La Piel de Dios' when they first saw it and she claims the tree bled when a woman pulled away a piece of bark from the tree - yet another trope binding human and non-human relationships linked to indigenous tradition.

Susana, a Chicana lesbian helping with the strike, sees the historical continuity the tree represents. Of it she says:

Así que this acorn is the future, a future you and I will never see. In the same way...this old tree is our history. The very acorn that birthed this tree spilled off of some momma oak the Ohlones were worshipping five hundred years ago. Do you have any idea what this place looked like when all it knew was indios? [...] Paradise, [...] true paradise. [...] There were marshes, savannah, redwood forests for days. Elk, antelope, deer, coyotes. And every kind of sea bird imaginable. You put your faith in the workers y bueno, I do, too, pero creo en algo más también. I'm praying to this old oak cuz it's the only thing that seems right to do right now. Call her Tonantzin, Guadalupe, call her whatever you want. This is as close to a God as its gets for me" (89)

Susana voices the desire for lost indigenous tradition and knowledge, ecological knowledge in particular, and a deeper sense of connection with a pre-Columbian past, before California was even Mexico, a time when the land was not over developed. The strikers agree to participate in the pilgrimage, some on their knees, others not, some with Guadalupe in their hearts, some *Tonantzin*, others in a secular revolutionary spirit. The strikers, of almost entirely indigenous descent, are performing the pilgrimage of their Pre-Colombian ancestors. When they reach the tree, Dolores addresses the massive gathering, "Plant yourself here," she says, "... Like that holy tree, *tan fuerte, tan Viejo, tan sagrado, ustedes tienen raíces* that spread all the way to México. [...] Seguimos siendo americanos whether we got papeles or not. This land is the same land as México. *Todo es América[...] una América unida*" (98). Dolores' ecological tropography highlights the artificiality of borders that separate nations and peoples. By likening the community gathered to the tree, amidst such divisive times, she asserts their unity and equality as human beings and their right to a place on earth. The terrific earthquake decimates its epicenter, Watsonville, and devastates much of San Francisco, but the people gathered in the oak grove, some 10,000, are saved. Here the earth appears to respond to their protest. As Father Juan, who had lost God and finds Him in their collective act says: "I lived always in my head, separate. . . apart. But just days ago, I stood in the midst of a moving crowd and I could not be spotted apart from it. I found God, [...] in the dissolution of self. God in the disappearance of me into a we so profound, the earth shook open to embrace us" (101). *Watsonville...* celebrates the courageous self-reflection and sacrifice and the brilliant coalition building exhibited in Chicano non-violent political action that Moraga represents as models for us as we organize to resist the social and environmental threats that plague us today.

Of the three plays, Moraga's *Circle in the Dirt: El Pueblo of East Palo Alto* is the most direct in its environmental justice discourse. East Palo Alto is a struggling community located at the 'borderlands' of Palo Alto's affluent Stanford University community. The author describes it this way:

East Palo Alto consists of two-and-a-half square miles of some of the richest coastal lands in Northern California. It still contains pockets of undeveloped acreage, much of which was once used for raising chickens and small family farming. Predominantly African-American and Mexican-immigrant, with Pacific Islander, Vietnamese, Japanese and Anglo-American residents, EPA is very much the microcosm of the changing face of 21st-century California. With a history that has witnessed everything from the paradise-like conditions of its earliest Ohlone Muwekma inhabitants to the urban trauma of gang violence, EPA is a community committed to political autonomy, economic independence, and peaceful cultural co-existence. All three remain difficult to achieve. (110)

The play opens in a Buddhist temple where community members are celebrating Tet, Vietnamese New Year, a time to honor their ancestors. A Mexican woman, Señora Talamantes, enters and notes its similarity with Día de los muertos. She comments to a Vietnamese woman on the diversity of the faces in the images of the ancestors on the altar, which include a line drawing of an indigenous Muwekma, a 19th-century Californio rancher, a Spanish missionary friar, a Samoan great-grandmother, a Japanese flower-grower, and Irish-American farmer, a 60s style Black radical, a gangster, a Chicano rapper, etc. Mrs. Mai, a Vietnamese woman explains to her that all these people once lived in EPA. An empty frame is also depicted, perhaps so practitioners can contemplate their own death. Mr. Matsamuros, a Japanese flower-grower, greets them. The three of them lament the demolition scheduled for their homes in Cooley Apartments and share their stories of how they arrived in the U. S.. Mrs. Mai came through a sponsor, Talamantes came via coyote, and Matsamuros, in spite of the fact that he was born in the U. S., was placed in an internment camp during WWII.

The next scene finds other Cooley residents conversing: a 40-something, African-American, gay, man, Reginald, talking with the 'Professor', an elderly, African-American, once-Stanford Professor who is Moraga's spokesperson for returning to an indigenous holistic way of life. The two reminisce about the radical days of the civil rights movement and Black Power resistance until Gwendolyn, an elderly, African-American woman arrives and accuses them of romanticizing and "macho nostalgia" about such dangerous times. They also lament the development project. The Professor wishes for holistic development that "takes in the whole of this place...the children, the trees...the breeze in the summertime. One that has a sense of what is being lost, with every growth spurt... Why can't they build a parking lot around [those Orange trees]? Why does development always mean cutting down every living thing and pouring cement over it? [...] Balance, that's all I'm after,..." (134)

The diverse characters are often at odds, hurling their prejudices at one another, yet they muddle through their common situation of imminent displacement together. In this way, EPA can be read as a microcosm of our endangered planet. The Professor provides an ecological discourse that unites people and the earth. True to his character, the Professor runs a community garden and saves seeds. In a key scene he plants some Indian corn in a circle: "Cherokee Red, Black Aztec, Hopi Blue Corn and Navajo rainbow." He explains, "I'm planting this circle here for the American Indians. I guess you'd say because I believe they had things right. Don't abuse anything and do not take more than you are prepared to give back." (141) This gesture symbolically brings together the world's peoples of many colors and places them in the earth. Planted in a circle, no one race is more important than the other. This is a reference to the Quiché Mayan creation story, the *Popol Vuh*, where human beings are created from variously colored corn. The playwright employs agricultural imagery to drive at not only the equality and mutual destiny of diverse peoples, but also what can be learned from indigenous agricultural practices about the vital connection we must cultivate with the earth.

His action magically summons an elderly Native California woman who tells them that she is what is referred to in state legislature as a "Most Likely Descendent" of Native people from the region and thus heir to any indigenous artifacts in the area. She recounts how Stanford anthropologists showed her the hundreds of boxes of unmarked bones of her ancestors that were in a basement on campus. She says, "I been returning our story back to the earth" (161). She walks out in front of a bulldozer to place the bones in the earth and stops the demolition. This agricultural trope figures human regeneration and liberation through the farming of memory, of the ancestral story, discarded in the dusty basement of the American culture of forgetting. Everyone knows the bulldozers will return, but the Professor says, "... today, we re-planted some memory. Maybe we can use it, to try and grow ourselves a future....Nothing is supposed to last forever. One day, we'll all dissolve right back into this basis thing called earth... A circle drawn in the dirt" (164-5). With this Buddhist circle, the professor puts human beings in a more balanced relation to the earth and other living things

alluding to the indigenous and Eastern belief in the eternal return of all of life, its continual change, its seasonal, cyclical nature.

If, as philosopher Lawrence Buell claims, the environmental crisis is one of imagination ameliorated only by "finding better ways of imagining nature and humanity's relation to it," then Moraga's work and that of many Chicana/o writers will serve this cause greatly and ought to be considered integral to a canon of American environmentalist writing. (Cited in Adamson 3) Anchored in specific locals, historical moments and a Mechicano land ethic ripe with ecological knowledge, Moraga's plays refuse to essentialize or mystify indigenous ecology or nature itself as environmentalist or naturalist writings are prone to do. In these works, she highlights successful Chicano activism and indicates how we can use and adapt them to resist today's global threats. The plays are documents to Chicano history and yet they resist documenting the "bitter end" of these stories in favor of more triumphant telling, Moraga explains. The grape boycott continues, the pesticides still poisoning McFarland people through their work and water. East Palo Alto's community landmarks have been almost entirely developed. Watsonville is for the time being protected by agricultural industry's need for farmable land, but that does not guarantee "safe and affordable housing, healthcare, or environmental protection for the industry's [...] workers" (viii). Each of these plays ends in collective, and often bloody, protest. As such, we must read them as urgent calls to action, on behalf of Mother Earth and all of us who depend on her, in particular, the ever-increasing number of Native peoples who fall prey to North American greed around the globe who may hold keys to our survival.

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