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Rebordering the Borderlands:
Writing Violence, (Im)migration, and Surveillance

By

Alma Granado

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requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Ethnic Studies

in the

Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

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Abstract

Rebordering the Borderlands: Writing Violence, Surveillance, and Immigration

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Doctor of Philosophy in Ethnic Studies

University of California, Berkeley

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This dissertation is a study on the topics of migration, power, and subjectivity in Chicana/o literature. Much critical cultural studies work which focuses on (im)migration in Chicana/o cultural texts has tended to portray it as an emancipatory project, and thus, has forgone a more complex understanding of this movement. I analyze Tomás Rivera's short stories, Arturo Islas's *The Rain God*, Salvador Plascencia's *The People of Paper*, and Helena Maria Viramontes's *Their Dogs Came With Them* to examine how these narratives depict migration not only in its physical and geographical dimensions, but also as a psychological, gendered, queered, often violent, ideological movement that is shaped by contradicting sources of power and material realities. I argue that these narratives embed the various aspects of this migration in their form, including through a migratory narrative structure, metafiction, skeptical fantasy, and editorial excision. Through the lens of women of color, queer, and political theories, I contend that this literature embodies the tension between transnational and global circuits of power on the one hand and the simultaneous reinforcement of sovereignty, territoriality, and the law on the other to reveal within these narratives moments of resistance *and* complicity in dominant ideologies like patriarchy, cultural nationalism, and limited expressions of citizenship. I contend that this literature *necessarily* reproduces this tension in fractured narrative forms that theorize power and lay bare how Chicana/o writers posit both literary and embodied protests to hegemonic formations of power.

Para mis padres

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract	1
Dedication	i
Acknowledgements	iii
Chapter One: The Borders of Borderland Studies	1
Chapter Two: Recovering a Decolonized Alternative: Land and Subjectivity in the Work of Tomás Rivera	12
Chapter Three: Queer Migration and Abjection in Arturo Islas's <i>The Rain God</i>	30
Chapter Four: Metafiction and the Paradox of Sovereignty in Plascencia's <i>The People of Paper</i>	51
Chapter Five: Skepticism and Possibility in the Fantasy of Helena Maria Viramontes's <i>Their Dogs Came With Them</i>	76
References	88
Bibliography	98

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Chapter One:
The Borders of Borderland Studies

“First of all, community is a place [*un lugar*], a geographical location where they know people, know that the sun will come out behind a particular place, the formation of clouds; the place may be architectural features, a barrio, a nick on a building, color, age, material things, all of which express continuity [*una continuación de las cosas y así del espíritu*].”

Robert Hine, quoted by Tomás Rivera

“Por eso siguió yendo todas las tardes a la labor, hasta que una noche cayó una helada muy fuerte y ya no pudo hacer pozos en la tierra. Estaba ya bien dormida. Luego pensó en el año entrante, en octubre, durante la cosecha cuando podría otra vez hacer lo mismo que don Trine. Era como cuando se moría un querido. Siempre se culpaba por no haberlo querido más antes de la muerte.”

Tomás Rivera, “La cosecha ”

“Border crossing is celebrated in transnational American Studies.”

Trish Loughran

In an essay on Chicano literature, Chicano writer and educator, Tomás Rivera paraphrases a speech by historian Robert Hine, writing, “community is a place.” Rivera’s interjections in Spanish, particularly his “una continuación de las cosas y así del espíritu,”¹ point to his fundamental belief of the connections between community, place, history, and the human spirit. Rivera’s “La cosecha,” a story about the circuits of labor, seasons, migration, and poverty echoes his (and Hine’s) ideas of community. The story highlights the importance of place, and how when one leaves “era como cuando se moría un querido.”² In the story, however, it is the essence of the place that is lost, and its return promises the continuity to which Rivera refers. For Rivera and his characters, peoples are attached to the essence of a place and the disruption of this essence then displaces the spirit. Along with his emphasis of the spiritual strength of migrant farm workers, Rivera’s novel and texts, as well as the other novels analyzed in the dissertation, examine how place is established, re-defined, imagined, embodied, and traversed in the context of constant migration. Like Rivera’s novels and stories, the figure of the migrant and migration itself are the central focus of this dissertation.

This dissertation engages questions surrounding the place of the Mexican and Chicano migrant and migrant worker in U.S. history and society, Chicana/o literature, and a globalized economy. In engaging in discussions of space, I emphasize that Chicana/o literature has attempted to offer different modes of resistance or survival, including decolonized alternatives to identity politics and exclusionary nationalism. *Rebordering the Borderlands* thus centers the trope of (im)migration, and examines specifically Chicana/o literary texts’ articulation of (im)migration as physically, psychologically, and subjectively damaging. My central thesis

¹ “a continuation of things, and with that, of the spirit.” [Translation mine]

² “it was like when a loved one dies.” [Translation mine.]

argues that critical work which focuses on (im)migration in Chicana/o cultural texts has tended to portray it as an emancipatory project, or the “celebration” literary critic Trish Loughran noted at MLA in 2010, and thus, has forgone a more complex understanding of the material, psychological, sexed, and gendered valences of this movement.

Chicana/o writers – and to an extent, U.S.-based Latina/o writers – have featured the thematic representation of migration and immigration in a variety of genres. The historical and material reasons behind these representations and for the migration itself have been topics of study in a number of disciplines. Much of the literary criticism analyzing these works has focused on the historical nature of this literature and intersecting themes of labor exploitation, the emergence of a working class, racialized consciousness, or the formation of an individualized or group identity. While my work attends to these thematic questions, it centers questions of novelistic forms and the means by which the broader concerns of migration, immigration, subjectivity, and Chicanos’, Mexicans’, and Latinos’ relationship to the nation have produced narratives that complicate conventional literary forms while exposing the nature of power.

I begin this chapter by examining the space of the borderlands as a contact zone that is shaped by cultural conflict and negotiation and that, in turn, is mapped onto the bodies of the peoples that inhabit and traverse the space. I shift to discussions of this embodied history, hybridity, and *mestizaje*, and the contentions by some scholars that theories of the borderlands have become so abstracted that they overlook the “actual” material effects of the border and borderlands in favor of a semi-multicultural utopia. I end by returning to the specificity of the border and the discursive and material violence that has historically characterized the surveillance of immigrants and migrants. I center the figure of the Mexican immigrant—and by extension, Chicanas/os and Latinas/os—as a site onto which U.S. sovereignty is mapped.

Just as the American West has served as a site onto which the United States’ expansionist aspirations and nation-forming project was mapped and enacted,³ the landscape of the U.S.-Mexico borderlands have reflected the conflicts that emerge and ebb with shifting U.S. national concerns, imperialist intentions, economic conditions, and politics. The space of the borderlands—pre- and post-1848, the year of the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo that ended the U.S.-Mexico War and largely created the contemporary U.S.-Mexico border we know today—has been articulated and theorized as a site where identity is shaped in the shadows of the national narratives of Mexico and the United States. The overlapping influence of these two countries has created a figurative and literal transnational space in which its residents mediate the convergences and conflicts of power. *Rebordering the Borderlands* examines this space from a U.S.-centric perspective, focusing on short stories and novels by U.S.-based Mexican and Chicano writers, and the transculturation that occurs with the migration of people within and across this space.

The borderlands thus functions as a contact zone, where two nations and many cultures come together on uneven and contested ground. According to cultural critic Mary Louise Pratt, the space is one of “imperial encounters, the space in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict” (Pratt 8). A contact zone does not posit a unidirectional model of cultural transference from the colonizers to the

³ See historian Frederic Jackson Turner’s now infamous essay, “The Significance of the Frontier in American History” (1921).

colonized; rather, it “emphasizes how subjects get constituted in and by their relations to each other,” and the peoples interacting in the contact zone are considered “not in terms of separateness but in terms of co-presence, interaction, interlocking understandings and practices, and often within radically asymmetrical relations of power” (8). Highlighting the asymmetrical nature of power relations in these colonial encounters acknowledges the influence of colonizing epistemologies in the contact zone and thus denies the conceptualization of this space as completely liberatory and easily conducive to social transformation.

The specificity of the U.S.-Mexico border has led scholars like literary critic José David Saldívar to study the “transfrontera contact zone.” He defines it as

the two-thousand mile long border between the United States and Mexico and to other geopolitical zones...this zone is the social space of subaltern encounters, the Janus-faced borderline in which peoples geopolitically forced to separate themselves now negotiate with one another and manufacture new relations, hybrid cultures, and multiple-voiced aesthetics...transfrontera contact zone is an attempt to invoke the heterotopic forms of everyday life whose trajectories cross over and interact. (13-14)

This “transfrontera contact zone” is reminiscent of theorist Gloria Anzaldúa’s borderlands, to which I return later in the chapter, in its references to both “geopolitical zones” and its configuration as a “social space.” National borders remain central, but by studying this contact zone, we come to understand the manufactured nature of borders and that the U.S. nation must be imagined and reinforced continually (19). Instead, Saldívar “challenges this stable, naturalized, and hegemonic status of the national by looking at the assumed equivalence we make between the national and the cultural” (19). Saldívar questions the tendency to imagine the cultural conflict in this space as constituted by the coming together of two distinct national monocultures. The production of “new relations, hybrid cultures, and multiple-voiced aesthetics” attributed to this space are produced not by the conflict between two homogenous national cultures but by the interaction between the multiple cultures that arise out of each national context and transnational context. The assertion that “border culture is always already localized and global” reiterates the political and economic context in which these border cultures are situated; further, it acknowledges that the dominant cultural and historical narrative must continually be inscribed, which relegates border experiences to minority discourse within a nation-centric scope (129). Later in Chapter Four on Salvador Plascencia’s *The People of Paper*, I demonstrate specifically how the nation is conceived as “natural” through ideological and technological reinforcement to demonstrate that the normalizing of national boundaries provides the foundation for territory-based notions of citizenship that contradict the modern capitalist economy, regional economies, and migratory flows.

The space of the borderlands is thus a cultural space, as well as a physical one, that must be navigated and is imprinted onto the bodies that traverse it. In a foundational text on the borderlands, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, Gloria Anzaldúa offers extensive analyses of how this space is forged and mobilized in cultural conflict. Anzaldúa clarifies the space of which she speaks:

The actual physical borderlands that I’m dealing with in this book is the Texas-U.S. Southwest/Mexican border. The psychological borderlands, the sexual borderlands and the spiritual borderlands are not particular to the Southwest. In fact, the Borderlands are physically present wherever two or more cultures edge

each other, where people of different races occupy the same territory, where under, lower, middle and upper classes touch, where the space between two individuals shrinks with intimacy. (19)

This “dividing line” is conceived as an “unnatural boundary” that creates another point of difference by which whites in the region can retain their dominant position in the social structure. Anzaldúa grounds her theory in the body and the visceral/literal space where these borderlands are “felt.” The “physical” borderlands and the “psychological,” “sexual,” and “spiritual” borderlands then cannot be decoupled from each other as they are all embodied within the border subject. The mobility of culture is tied to the mobility of the individual and within the individual, and thus the particularity of the border region could be transplanted and continually inscribed upon the body following this movement. The broadening of the borderlands consequently delinks the concept from the land itself; however, this simultaneously inscribes the history of the land upon the mestizo Chicana/o body that was itself forged in conflict and negotiation.⁴ This historical *mestizaje* inscribes the body as a place represented by its racial mixture of indigenous and Spanish blood. Further, it decenters the nation as a site of difference and identity construction, and instead posits the amorphous borderlands as a complex space of relational cultural identities where nationality functions as an arbitrary demarcation of difference.

As other scholars have noted, this *mestizaje* reflects the Chicano body both as historically situated and constantly in a state of flux. Chicano literary critic Alfred Arteaga claims that “like the border, Indianness is at once a site of origin and of cultural interaction. At each reproduction of the Chicano body, the racial characteristics of European and indigenous American compete for presence” (9). *Mestizaje* pinpoints the importance of race and racialization, and thus the body and the experiential, as political sites of cultural conflict and marginalization rooted in the continual interaction between European and indigenous.⁵ Arteaga’s articulation of “*xicano*” conceives of Chicano subjectivity as not simply a state of being, but as a subjectivity that requires action, agency, and an awareness of the body as a site of politics. It underscores the contingency of identity, of the need to reinforce and continually “work out dialogically unfinalized versions of the self” (155). This process of becoming Chicano “envisions an articulation of self that emerges from the continued acts of hybridization” (26).

These formulations of hybridity and the possibilities enabled with the constant engagement with national, racial, linguistic, and cultural identity have led to critiques of

⁴ Anzaldúa repeatedly refers to the history of Chicanas/os starting with the presence of indigenous peoples in what is now the Southwestern U.S. and their eventual migration to Mexico. Anzaldúa has also been criticized for her misappropriation of Mexican philosopher and politician José Vasconcelos’s “*la raza cósmica*,” and *mestizaje* in general has been critiqued for denying the particularity of the indigenous experience and the influence of the African population in Mexico and Latin America more generally. See Nicole Guidotti-Hernández’s *Unspeakable Violence* (2011).

⁵ However, it is also necessary to recognize the problematic nature of these historical efforts in relation to Native American claims to land. While Chicana/o claims of indigeneity are based in history as well as the ideological and subjective ramifications present in the community, the material and structural differences between displaced Native American groups and Chicanas/os cannot be equated. How then does the concept of *Aztlán* reconcile this Chicano claim to land that was also shared with other indigenous peoples? Conceptualizations of this space fail to sufficiently interrogate the meaning of these overlapping discourses of space and place. Chapter Two engages with this issue of land ownership in favor of a model that privileges dispossession in an effort to circumvent the limitations of a nation-state centered scope of analysis, and ultimately, to bypass the conflict that arises in laying claim to disputed land.

mestizaje and the borderlands as overly abstracting the material reality of living in the shadow of what literary critic Marcial González has called “the most repressive and racist symbol of demarcation and exclusion produced by capitalism, nationalism, and imperialism—namely, the border” (295). Thus, while the notion of a non-stabilized subject avoids an over-simplified understanding of subjectivity,⁶ the possibilities enabled by hybridity must be placed within

⁶ I return here to Gloria Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands/La Frontera*, as it has been criticized by various scholars, including political scientist Cristina Beltrán who critiques this privileging of the mestiza as “almost exclusively as the site of emancipatory alterity,” while all other subjects are simplified into monolithic, stable, and therefore, incapable of achieving the same form of consciousness with the exception of queer subjects (606; 602-605). While Beltrán recognizes that “Anzaldúa seeks to establish a theoretical framework that creates subjects that are fluid, multiple, and contradictory,” she nevertheless argues that Anzaldúa’s privileging of “the *mestiza*, the queer, and the indigenous” results in a “narrative of privileged multiplicity and advanced evolution” (Beltrán 604). This comes to the foreground in Anzaldúa’s concept of *la facultad*, which Anzaldúa theorizes as a level of consciousness border subjects and queers are privy to that allows them to “read” situations, people, and reality as a method of survival (Anzaldúa 60). She points to Anzaldúa’s positioning of the *mestiza/o* and queer on “the evolutionary continuum” (qtd in Beltrán 604) as evidence of Anzaldúa’s “peripheralization” of these groups in her attempt to “construct a dominant narrative of subjectivity in which some subjects represent multiplicity and insight while others signify unenlightened singularity” (604). The crux of Beltrán’s point of contention with Anzaldúa appears to involve the seemingly uncomplicated treatment of experiential knowledge and the positing of an *inherent* advantage of *mestizas* and queers in their capability to participate in Anzaldúa’s revolutionary call for the “breaking down of paradigms” thus situating these groups in opposition to a monolithic “other” (Anzaldúa 102). Beltrán goes on to critique Anzaldúa’s theory of *mestiza* consciousness, what Anzaldúa conceives as the method “to break down the subject-object duality that keeps [the mestiza] prisoner” and to “uproot... dualistic thinking in the individual and collective consciousness” (Anzaldúa 102). She saw the opportunity in Anzaldúa’s *mestiza* consciousness for the “*new mestiza* being a critical site whose historical experience reveals the destabilized, social constructed subjectivity that all human subjects face” (Beltrán 605). Instead, Beltrán holds that Anzaldúa singles out Chicano hybridity as the only complex model of subjectivity because “if the stability of all subjects were called into question, the ‘*new mestiza*’ would lose a critical site of agency; if dominant subjectivities weren’t stable, her privileged role as mediator and ‘bridge maker’ would be lost [emphasis Beltrán]” (Beltrán 605). While Beltrán’s critiques are valid as Anzaldúa does tend to uphold the *mestiza* as the ultimate purveyor of experiential knowledge and as *the* site of revolution, she overlooks Anzaldúa’s stipulation that she sees this “‘alien’ element,” or *mestiza* consciousness, being triggered in *all* inhabitants of the border (Anzaldúa 19). Nevertheless, Beltrán’s assertion that Anzaldúa positions the *mestiza* and queer in opposition to a unitary, uncomplicated subject holds true.

Anzaldúa defines this form of *mestiza* consciousness by its ability to transcend “dualistic thinking” (Anzaldúa 102) and in the ability to operate in different modes of existence (101). Thus consciousness is something to work towards, akin to subjectivity, but with a radical transformative edge. Anzaldúa’s text is meant to lead one through the painful process of coming to consciousness, and as cultural critic Yvonne Yarbro-Bejarano (1994) argues, “the theory of *mestiza* consciousness depends on an *awareness* of subject positions... *Mestiza* consciousness is not a given but must be *produced*, or ‘built’... It is spatialized, racialized, and presented as a new mythology, a new culture, a nondualistic perception and practice [emphasis Yarbro-Bejarano]” (12-13). The entire text is a journey through the process, which cannot begin without an analysis of the hierarchy of power that structures the lives of *mestizas* and queer subjects.

Without the recognition of the hierarchy of power inherited along with the diverse group of possible partners in activism, consciousness becomes something that everyone is expected to achieve.

broader historical, political, social, and economic contexts that recognize the violent means by which Chicanos and Mexicans are racialized and excluded from the U.S. national imaginary.

The critiques of a lack of material grounding of the borderlands have centered on the possibilities generated by the convergences and conflicts of culture in this space and alternatively, by the limitations that arise within these contexts. In proposing his concept of critical *mestizaje*, literary critic Rafael Pérez-Torres seeks to call attention to what he considers an overly utopic notion of *mestizaje* and the borderlands that pose either a space within the Chicana/o body or a broader Chicana/o space as a multicultural prospect for anti-hegemonic resistance and re-articulation. Instead, “the betweenness of *mestizaje* represents not a simple space in which the wish fulfillment of difference can magically or marginally be enacted. *Mestizaje* rather stands as a site of contentious and sometimes violent social transformation [emphasis mine]” (46). This critical *mestizaje* does not seek to detract from the potential of cultural hybridity but emphasizes the need to situate it within the local, regional, and global relations of power that effectively limit the opportunities of Chicanas/os to provoke a “social transformation.” In his critique of the presumptive transformative power of multiculturalism, Pérez-Torres echoes Marcial González’s contention that multiculturalism does not critically question the entrenched and exploitative narratives of race within the U.S. (González 285).

Others have criticized the uncoupling of the borderlands from the land, and the subsequent decentralization of the nation as a unit of analysis and as a significant influence in identity-making. Scholars like literary critic Claire Fox have decried the perceived shift to a “postnational, non-site specific border imagery in contemporary cultural theory” (Fox 1). The amorphous quality attributed to the borderlands has led some to point out the potential for appropriation and commodification in which cultural mixture “might save only those aspects of each culture that prove most useful to transnational capitalism, generating new forms of multicultural mystification and domination” (Arteaga 1997; Hames-Garcia 110). The border subject is increasingly susceptible to targeted commodification for the cultural milieu that are the borderlands and these multicultural mystifications then function as another means by which dominant cultural narratives are codified and circulated.

These critiques of multiculturalism stem from the discursive construction of border crossers, migrants, and borderlands inhabitants as hybrid and liminal in ways that can divorce these ontological arguments from the material reality of the border and immigration. Liminality has been conceived as a space for contestation and active resistance to either nation’s attempt to redefine and fashion these subjects in the image of a dominant culture (Saldívar 1997), and the emphasis on the possibility for resistance has led to the assertions that the cultures of the border should be studied, as cultural critic José Limón has put it, in relation to “the more mundane and instrumental context of political economy, so as to demystify any essentialist and stereotypic reading of culture and thus gauge their range and depth as responses to the crisis of capitalist

Yet, as Norma Alarcón (2003) argues, there is a certain amount of privilege in the circumstances that lead one to come to consciousness. In the practical sense, most are not privy to what she calls, “the logic of identification,” or the time or information to recognize the ways in which they are interpellated (Alarcón 405). As Alarcón notes, the conversation surrounding *mestiza* consciousness and feminist consciousness in general omits the peoples most affected by their positioning on the border. She calls for the recognition of feminist academics to identify their own privilege in the space of academia that perhaps introduced them or pushed them to distinguish the various axes on which their subjectivity hinged (Alarcón 411).

modernity” (Limón 33). Similarly, according to literary critic Ellie Hernández, “it has been convenient for some to think of the border as an endless site of possibility, but such hype only masks the potential for another form of reading socially determining effects” and “one must not be fooled by an apparent liberating quality of the border” (Hernández 91-92). Further, liminality has been understood as needlessly subjecting Mexican immigrants to isolation and overlooking the practical implications of immigrant status, and particularly the undocumented (Martinez 54). However, this critique overlooks arguments that qualify that remaining in this liminal space is not necessarily a choice made by the immigrant or subject within the borderlands; the border subject potentially remains within this liminal space because of the efforts by the state and other outside factors, such as popular discourse and stereotypes (Saldívar 96). That Chicana/o border subjects are willing and able to negotiate different spaces using the tools gained by hybridity and/or liminality assumes that all border subjects are consciously aware of their oppressed status.⁷

In a sharp rebuke of borderlands postmodernism, literary critic Marcial González addresses the tendency by some to trivialize the importance of national borders to identity formation. While González recognizes the anti-hegemonic possibilities of living in the borderlands, he also identifies three major issues with the abstraction of this space. First, he critiques the romanticization of the borderlands that “tends to desensitize the horror of the real conditions of the border and of the immigrants who have no choice but to risk their lives crossing it illegally” (284). This argument parallels that of novelist and literary critic Manuel Luis Martínez, who also points to the lived experience of immigrants to provide a contrast for the notion of a discursive and resistant mobility propagated by some borderland theorists (2002). González also condemns the cultural hybridity lauded by scholars as a form of multiculturalism that he argues only “perpetuates liberal pluralism” and democratic liberalism (285). The concept of the borderlands promotes the project of liberalism thus bypassing the opportunity to challenge this system of capitalist exploitation and racial subjectification. Instead, González claims that the cultural hybridity celebrated by borderland scholars simply adds another dimension of heterogeneous cultural identity to the national U.S. narrative of multiculturalism and thus functions as another complicit trope. His third point of contention involves the “ideological contradictions of theorizing cultural identity nondialectically as a condition of perpetual liminality” (287). This issue of liminality bolsters the critique of Martínez and underscores the failure to take into account the institutional structures that intersect with a subject’s own internal

⁷ Similarly, sociologist Ramón Grosfoguel points out that one’s social position is distinct from their epistemic location, meaning that marginalization may not necessarily produce a subaltern epistemological consciousness (2013). Further, José Limón holds that the conflict between U.S. and Mexican cultures not only gave rise to multiple cultures in Greater Mexico but that this came about in the presence of multiple Anglo cultures as well that did not necessarily exert their dominance at all times. Instead, Limón conjectures that although forces of domination were indeed present, “the theme of superiority and social domination is paradoxically joined to a ritualized and ambivalent rhetoric of desire and self-doubt *within those who dominate* [emphasis Limón]” (103). By looking at instances in which desire and eroticism mediated the shifting parameters of this domination, “we can detect opening and breaks within Anglo-American popular culture that suggest that ‘the Anglo’ is no longer a unitary and all-encompassing category of domination—if indeed, it ever was” (103). Limón has been criticized by Chicana feminists like cultural critic Rosa-Linda Fregoso who point out that he positions both Chicano and white men as central subjects in cultural and colonialist conflicts thus privileging whiteness and masculinity to the detriment of the brown female body (2003).

cultural negotiation. González concludes by stating that “the social contradictions of class exploitation, racism, and sexism cannot be solved by constructing a cultural identity in the image of the most repressive and racist symbol of demarcation and exclusion produced by capitalism, nationalism, and imperialism—namely, the border” (295). *Rebordering the Border* seeks to dispel this romanticization by pointing out how Chicana/o literary texts have identified and critiqued these social contradictions of the border. It places the material effects of the border and migration at the forefront, examining the creation of this cultural production in the shadow of the border.

The U.S.-Mexico border has played a significant role in the theorization of the borderlands, as it serves as a physical reminder that borders become embodied, translated, and transported in Chicanas/os, Mexicans, and Latinos who are continually “transgressing” this border physically, culturally, and economically as racialized peoples. As I make clear in the following, however, crossing the border and traversing the borderlands are not in and of themselves acts of defiance or empowerment. These migrations occur within historical contexts and material sets of conditions, and while the body becomes a primary site of these encounters, it is marked by the violence and surveillance that has historically characterized emigration from Mexico and Latin America and the migration of Chicanos within the U.S. These migrants and immigrants have assumed a prominent role in discussions of who is to be excluded from citizenship and the constitutive relationship between race and citizenship. As the historical equivalence of Mexicans and Latinos with undocumented immigrants that continues today demonstrates, the procurement of “whiteness” that permitted the granting of citizenship to Mexicans living in the Southwest in 1848 has not resulted in this racialized group’s easy incorporation into the image of “the nation.” Questions of citizenship and belonging have historically marked these groups’ physical and figurative entry and settlement in the U.S. Further, as I show throughout the dissertation, this assumption of undocumented immigrant status has been extended to established and subsequent generations of Chicanos as well, who must also contend with discrimination and surveillance.

Contemporary discussions of immigration in the U.S. and their focus on the Latino population further reinforce the marginalized place of Latinos and the role of immigration policy and discourse in the nation-building project. Unlike the shifting definitions of whiteness and differential racialization that allowed southern and eastern European immigrants in the early 19th century to claim the privileges of whiteness following a period of discrimination and negotiation,⁸ Mexicans, Chicanos, and Latinos have largely been excluded from the “imagined community” of the nation, as political scientist Benedict Anderson has called it, and instead been deemed “alien citizens.” Historian Mae Ngai’s term for minority groups who become associated with unassimilable foreigners and thus suffer similar violations of their rights despite their U.S. citizenship speaks to the ways in which immigration policy and discourse have shaped the experiences of these groups in the U.S. As Ngai and anthropologist Nicolas De Genova have demonstrated through their analyses of immigration policy, the “deportability” of Mexicans and the creation of “the illegal alien as a new legal and political subject” have fundamentally shaped the perception of Mexicans as disposable laborers and their presence as requiring scrutiny (De Genova 179; Ngai 4). De Genova states that “this effective equation of ‘illegal immigration’ with

⁸ See Matthew Jacobson’s *Whiteness of a Different Color* (1999), David Roediger’s *Working Towards Whiteness* (2005), and Ian Haney Lopez’s *White By Law* (2006) for extensive discussions on the shifting parameters of whiteness from 1790 to the mid-20th century.

unauthorized border-crossing, furthermore, has served to continuously restage the U.S.-Mexico border in particular as the theatre of an enforcement ‘crisis,’ and thus constantly re-renders ‘Mexican’ as the distinctive national name for migrant ‘illegality’” (171). This reading of the law as both reflective and constitutive of ideology, and specifically racial ideologies, underscores the means by which Mexicans, Chicanos, and Latinos are subject to an everyday illegality that continually excludes these populations from the image of the nation.

Together with the ideological and technological reinforcement of the U.S.-Mexico border, or what has been called the militarization of the border that was heightened in the mid-1990s with Operation Hold-the-Line and Operation Gatekeeper in El Paso and San Diego respectively, the figure of the Mexican immigrant thus serves as a site onto which the preeminence of U.S. sovereignty is mapped. Like the border itself that has become increasingly controlled and regulated, the bodies of Mexican immigrants and Chicano “alien citizens” must be surveilled, deported, and/or detained to reinforce the nation’s control over borders and the perception of control. And visa versa, the regulation of the border—and the sovereignty for and by which it stands—permits the surveillance of these peoples. The effects of the border thus radiate from its specific locale to the spaces through which these immigrants and migrants move. The migrant therefore has become a paradigmatic figure in public discourse that continually inscribes difference and the hierarchies of power that sociologist Anibal Quijano has called the “coloniality of power” (2000).

Although I will examine the multivalent violence involved in the process of migration and how Chicana/o literary texts have depicted this violence, I do not intend to cast all Chicanas/os as victims. Instead, I situate this violence within competing historical narratives of nationalism, cultural or otherwise; race and ethnicity; gender; sexuality; citizenship; and labor. In this way, I echo historian Nicole Guidotti-Hernández’s challenge of “the fixed paradigm of resistance as the only mode of life worthy of study” (23). At its core, the literary analysis of Chicana/o novels in this dissertation centers the physical, psychological, and subjective violence within the borderlands within contexts that allows us to examine how Mexicans and Chicanos live with and mediate that violence. Nevertheless, identifying instances of resistance is not the goal of *Rebordering the Borderlands*; instead, I critique narratives of victimization in terms of how immigration discourse is framed. While I hold that these novels can provide alternatives to identity politics and narrow cultural nationalism, I also identify instances of reification or the limits of coming to consciousness. I do not claim that these alternatives offer easy solutions, but rather that they allow us to lay bare the contradictions that create the conditions for violence while moving within the borderlands.

I analyze Tomás Rivera’s short stories, Arturo Islas’ *The Rain God*, Salvador Plascencia’s *The People of Paper*, and Helena Maria Viramontes’ *Their Dogs Came With Them* to examine how these narratives depict migration not only in its physical and geographical dimensions, but also as a psychological, gendered, queered, often violent, ideological movement that is shaped by contradicting sources of power and material realities. I argue that these narratives embed the various aspects of this migration in their form, including the incomplete and circuitous ontological process of queer subjectivity in the migratory narrative structure in Islas’s novel; the intimate and discursive violence of the paradox of sovereignty and immigrant surveillance in the metafiction and fantasy of Plascencia’s *The People of Paper*; the policing of

residents regardless of legal status embedded in colonialist legacies of destruction in the skeptical fantasy of Viramontes's *Their Dogs Came With Them*, as well as the decolonial and discrepant subjectivity in the editorial excision of Rivera's short stories from ...*y no se lo tragó la tierra*. Through the lens of women of color, queer, and political theories, I argue that this literature embodies the tension between transnational and global circuits of power on the one hand and the simultaneous reinforcement of sovereignty, territoriality, and the law on the other to reveal within these narratives both moments of resistance and complicity in dominant ideologies like heteropatriarchy, cultural nationalism, and limited expressions of citizenship. Ultimately, I contend that these stories and novels *necessarily* reproduce this tension in fractured narrative forms that theorize power and lay bare how Chicana/o writers posit both literary and embodied protests to hegemonic formations of power.

I begin by examining the relationship between Chicana/o migrant subjectivity and form in my first two substantive chapters. In "Recovering a Decolonized Alternative: Land and Subjectivity in the Work of Tomás Rivera," I focus on two of the four short stories that were excised from the final manuscript of Rivera's ...*y no se lo trago la tierra* (1971) – "The Harvest/La cosecha" and "Zoo Island." I situate these stories and Rivera's highly regarded and celebrated novel, which was published at the height of the Chicano Movement, within the Movement's various discourses of cultural nationalism. I examine the representation of the proletarianization of Mexican migrants at the critical historical moment Rivera captures in these stories (1945-55). Drawing on Grace Hong's development of possessive individualism, I contend that this story articulates a discrepant subjectivity based on characters' inability, and *most importantly*, lack of desire to possess the land they toil and migrate, and thus, the story effectively abandons possession and dispossession as primary narrative tropes. These stories lay bare the conflict of operating within a nation-state framework that privileges political representation while attempting to conceive of other possibilities for self-determination that extend beyond the confines of political citizenship and the nation-state.

This broader discussion of land frames the analyses that follow, which begin with the study of the queer Chicano bodies in "Queer Migration and Abjection in Arturo Islas's *The Rain God*." *The Rain God* (1984) features migration, including its physical, geographical, psychological, and ideological dimensions, both thematically and formally, and ultimately ties these movements to the process of subjectivity through its migratory narrative structure. Islas's *The Rain God* depicts subject formation as a continual process marked by various kinds of voluntary migrations and forced expulsion, which becomes manifest in the body and the novel through abjection. This chapter highlights the ethnic novel's enactment of an ethics of entangled intersectionality, or assemblage according to queer theorist Jaspir Puar, through its form that critiques the notion of identity as static, a product of negation, and capable of distillation into distinct categories of identity. By visually and formally mapping the subjective process onto the bodies of the queer racialized characters and the novel itself, *The Rain God* conceives of migration, in all its dimensions, as part of an ontologically incomplete and possibly violent process.

The final two chapters shift from reading novelistic forms as abstractions of migrant subjectivities to the abstraction of legal and extralegal discourses used to legitimate the surveillance of Latina/o immigrants and citizens alike. In "Metafiction and the Paradox of Sovereignty in *The People of Paper*," I read Salvador Plascencia's novel as an allegory of the experience of Mexican immigration and settlement. I argue that the melding of fantasy with

metafiction creates an escalating tension in the novel that uncovers and pulls back the façade of what I name the “ideological fantasy of sovereignty” that, in concert with a globalized economy, simultaneously creates and rejects Mexican immigrants, yet deflects sovereign power to the “unquestionable” geographical boundaries of the nation-state. Through the incorporation of the author as a character who struggles to control his characters and the physical territory of the novel, *The People of Paper* (2005) makes visible the discourses of power in novelistic form, and by extension, the occlusion of sovereign power in the discursive creation, monitoring, and punishment of undocumented immigrants. Further, I read the hypersexualization and dehumanization of Merced de Papel, a female character literally made of paper, as demonstrative of the extension of sovereign power into the biopolitical, specifically Latinas’ sexuality and reproductive power. Ultimately, *The People of Paper* offers the possibility of redefining citizenship and civic participation through the characters’ collective critique of the discursive frames to which they are confined as characters and immigrants.

The chapter that follows, “Skepticism and Possibility in the Fantasy of Helena Maria Viramontes’s *Their Dogs Came With Them*,” extends this analysis of state power, surveillance, and violence to Viramontes’s most recent novel. I focus on the spatial elements of the novel and its localized depiction of the effects of urban development in East Los Angeles. I demonstrate that the novel’s imagery loss, destruction, and stunted mobility and its non-linear representation of time reflect the epistemological and cultural destruction of the neighborhood that is rooted in colonialist legacies of domination and that become manifest in the surveillance of the neighborhood. I end with a reading of one fantastical event in the text in particular, in which one of the characters, Tranquilina, possibly flies. The lack of resolution in this final scene underscores the abstraction required in novelistic form to depict fully both the devastation of the community and the enabling possibilities of the imagination. Ultimately, I argue, as I do in the broader project, that this novel highlights how Chicana/o writers have produced realist novels that reproduce the social world through abstractions rather than mimesis in their attempts to depict a multiplicity of social totalities.

Chapter Two

Recovering a Decolonized Alternative: Land and Subjectivity in the Work of Tomás Rivera

Although Tomás Rivera left behind a limited amount of published creative work, he has nonetheless become a prominent figure in Chicano literature. His novel, *...y no se lo tragó la tierra*, or *The Earth Did Not Devour Him*, now stands at the forefront of the Chicano literary canon. Its publication in 1971 by Quinto Sol at the height of the Chicano Movement, and its depiction of the exploitation, desperation, and poverty of farm workers, elevated its status and relevance within the burgeoning field. *Tierra* depicts the harsh realities of migrant farm worker life through a series of interrelated stories and vignettes, which are told from a variety of migrant workers' perspectives. The text features one family—and one boy in particular—and describes the working and living conditions of workers including the prevalence of heat strokes, an “accidental” shooting of a child laborer, a long and uncomfortable trek to “el norte” from Texas on the back of a truck, and a discriminatory education system.

However, the final version of the novel does not include all of the stories in Rivera's initial manuscript.⁹ The reasons behind the exclusion of these stories and their thematic threads are significant because of the context of their writing and because of how they may have altered the broader, popular novel. Although these stories were later published in a collection titled *The Harvest: Short Stories* (1984), they have been largely overlooked despite being dense, complex, and formally interesting. Further, the influence and reach of Quinto Sol and Octavio Romano-V. during the late 1960s and 70s also reflects a concerted effort to represent the emergence of a politicized Chicano subject; I argue that their editing of *...y no se lo tragó la tierra* and the removal of four short stories from the novel demonstrate this effort. I examine this claim in the latter half of the chapter.

I begin by situating Rivera's writings within their historical context by focusing on the issues of citizenship and nationalism. Discourses of cultural nationalism are particularly important given the novel's publication during the Chicano Movement. Quinto Sol Press, which published *Tierra* and was edited by Octavio Romano-V., promoted a particular representation of a collective Chicano community during this politically volatile time. I then offer an alternative reading of Tomás Rivera's story, “The Harvest/La cosecha,” that was part of Rivera's original manuscript but omitted from the novel by press editors. I offer a reading of this omitted story in relation to *Tierra* and as an individual text. Despite the claim that the theme of “The Harvest” would have been contradictory in the novel because it does not portray the land exclusively as a source of oppression, I argue that the claim of thematic incongruity was one based on a cursory assessment. Read as part of the whole of the novel and as a text unto itself, I demonstrate that “The Harvest” clearly portrays land as a possible source of oppression. Marx's species-being is central to showing how the story highlights the oppressive nature of farm workers' relationship to land. Further, I contend that historical materialism as a methodology, in which the study of social relations is intimately tied with that of production, enables understandings of how this story could have functioned within Rivera's novel.

⁹ See literary critic Julián Olivares' “‘La cosecha’ y ‘Zoo Island’ de Tomás Rivera: Apuntes sobre la formación de *...Y no se lo tragó la tierra*” (1991) for an in-depth discussion about the editing decisions made by Octavio Romano-V. and Herminio Ríos that lead to the final version of *Tierra*.

Ultimately, I argue that the story resists the narrative trope of possessive individualism, a concept expounded upon by Grace Hong in her *Ruptures of American Capital*, and which ties subjectivity to the state and the ability to “own” oneself. Rivera’s “La cosecha” identifies the land as a primary site of liberation much like but different from the cultural nationalist discourse of Chicanas and Chicanos during the Movement in that it gestures towards a transnational subject and dispossession, and thus, uncouples land from modes of production. In effect, Rivera’s story captures and resists the dehumanizing perception of Mexican (and Mexican American) migrant farm workers as disposable laborers through their articulation of a decolonized relationship between land and migrant worker. Coupled with its ambiguous treatment of citizenship, the story thus articulates a racialized subjectivity that does not remain confined to the nation-state – a significant contribution not only to the field of Chicana/o literature during this time but to our understanding of the political projects and expectations of the various strands of the Movement.

I end with a reading of another story omitted from Rivera’s *...y no se lo tragó la tierra*, “Zoo Island,” and extend my discussion of the representation of reciprocity here and show how this story exemplifies the ideological conflict inherent in the dissemination of Rivera’s texts during the Chicano Movement. Specifically, this story lays bare the conflict of operating within a nation-state framework that privileges political representation while attempting to conceive of other possibilities for the acceptance of social and cultural citizenship that extends beyond the confines of political citizenship and the nation-state.

Rivera, the Chicano Movement, and Migration

...y no se lo tragó la tierra remains a testament to a way of life that was just beginning to gain national exposure at the time of the Chicano Movement. Through the work of the United Farm Workers (UFW) union in the early to mid-1960s and Edward Murrow’s “Harvest of Shame” CBS documentary that aired on Thanksgiving Day 1960, the plight of the American farm worker was thrust into public view. Just prior to the publication of the novel, the UFW’s organizational efforts sought to reveal the realities of farm worker life with the Delano grape boycott, which resonated internationally. In an interview with literary critic Juan Bruce-Novoa, Rivera credits the Chicano Movement for inspiring him to write the manuscript for *Tierra* (Bruce-Novoa 149). Although he distances himself somewhat from the novelty of the Movement by stating that he came to consciousness ten years before as a politicized academic, Rivera was aware of the various threads of nationalist discourse circulating within this period.

The Movement’s concern with the intersections between racialization and class resulted in the emphasis on the farm worker as one of the paradigmatic figures of the Chicano community. This functioned not simply to bring to light how the “farm worker” is created through the complex structures of globalized agribusiness, racialization, and political disempowerment, but also to underline the contradictions between this political and social disempowerment and the important economic role of the farm worker. As Chicano labor activist and academic Ernesto Galarza, and others, has noted, citizenship was a central issue in the unionization and lives of farm workers decades prior to the height of the Movement.¹⁰ The Bracero Program agreement between the U.S. and Mexico from 1942 to 1964 only further

¹⁰ See Ernesto Galarza’s *Merchants of Labor* (1964) and Juan Gómez-Quiñones’ “The First Steps: Chicano Labor Conflict and Organizing 1900-1920” (1973).

complicated the relationship of both documented and undocumented farm workers to the nation-state.

Rivera chose to write about farm workers at a critical time when union protections were scarce. He makes clear that with the Chicano Movement well underway in 1967-68 when he was writing this story, he saw his “role more as a documenter of that period of [1945-55] when the migrant worker was living without any kind of protection. No había ninguna protección legal, y si no hay protección legal, no hay nada. Yo vi mucho sufrimiento y mucho aislamiento de la gente” (Bruce-Novoa 149).¹¹ However, Rivera sought not simply to document this historical period, “not just paso esto y esto pasó, sino darle una amplitud al espíritu de la gente que exista entonces” (148).¹² His self-appointed role, at the time of his writing in 1967-68, as a documenter of this 1945-55 period when farm workers lacked most labor protections is significant.¹³ Rivera refers to the union protections gained through the work of various labor unions, but most notably by the United Farm Workers, in the mid-1960s. By not depicting the struggle to organize and gain legal protections, which obviously began prior to the efforts by the UFW, the novel creates a genealogy of the lives of these workers. The threads of this genealogy are apparent in the novel, which highlights circularity and repetition, and returning to certain places, like Texas, only to migrate once again to the north in search of work.

This circularity is present not only thematically but also in the structure of the novel itself. Literary critic Brooke Fredericksen deems *Tierra* a “migratory narrative” that itself embodies the movement inherent to the life of farm workers. Drawing on cultural critic Raymond Williams’ discussion of form, she sees this movement as a formal element of the novel, or “the inner shaping force,” where “the nascent stirrings of resistance” is portrayed “through the medium of movement.” Indeed motion is integral to the novel, and as various other scholars have argued, the fragmented narrative and the final two stories signal the beginnings of a cohesive community.¹⁴ While she recognizes that the real-life movement to which she refers engenders workers’ exploitation, her claim regarding the emancipatory nature of this migration

¹¹ “There was no legal protection, and without legal protection, there is nothing. I saw a lot of suffering and much isolation of the people.” [Translation by Bruce-Novoa]

¹² “Not just this and this happened, but to give a spiritual dimension to the people of that time.” [Translation by Bruce-Novoa]

¹³ If these workers were braceros, the labor agreement between the U.S. and Mexico dictated that farmers provide certain protections to their workers that were summarily and intentionally denied.

¹⁴ See Hector Calderón (2004), Ramón Saldívar (1990), and José David Saldívar (1991). Literary critic Hector Calderón in particular considers the meaning in the novel’s structure and the seemingly cacophonous ending in the penultimate story “When We Arrive.” Calderón contends that although the novel’s resolution seems exclusive to the protagonist’s individual identity, the actual structure of the novel hints at a collective utopian alternative in the culmination of this penultimate story. Though he does not dismiss the individualistic note of some of the tales, Calderón holds that the narrative structure in its inclusion of multiple and nameless voices, and thus its refusal to privilege the individual over the collective, steers the reader towards an understanding of the protagonist as a unified narrator-character that ultimately foregoes his individuality “to take the stance like the prenovelistic oral poet” and “surrenders his consciousness and allows the collective voices of his people to speak through him” (83). For Calderón then, the imagining of a community comes forth in the structural elements of the novel and the culmination of the novel’s last two stories are particularly important to his argument. The novel’s structure plays an instrumental role in conveying the main character’s process of identity formation and the role of communal identity and history.

has come under attack by historical materialists.¹⁵ However, Frederickson makes an important contribution here in identifying Rivera's text as representing what Williams described as a "structure of feeling," or the transitory emergent stage of social change in progress. In doing so, Frederickson situates the text within the context of the Chicano Movement during which the novel was written yet with the actual historical context Rivera sought to portray (1945-55) in purview. I take Frederickson's identification of Rivera's text as embodying a structure of feeling as a point of departure; yet, I argue that beyond identifying Rivera's texts as displaying "the nascent stirrings of resistance," one must situate this text within international struggles against colonialism, as it gestures towards this broader context, just as threads of the Movement did. Migration is undoubtedly integral to the novel; however, I assert later in the chapter that a discussion of migration perpetuates a discussion of land ownership that the novel – and by extension Rivera's stories – seeks to undermine. Rivera's stories, and "La cosecha" specifically, highlight the transnational scope of issues central to the Chicano Movement and the particularity of the Chicano migrant farm worker.

Thus, the novel's emphasis on circularity and inevitability provides a much-needed genealogy for the heightened visibility of the farm worker during the Chicano Movement; further, this genealogy and the novel's migratory narrative structure allude to the historical importance of the Mexican population to the agricultural industry. The novel invests in a longer sense of history by alluding to this migratory labor cycle and emphasizes the historical relationship between the labor needs of the U.S. and an "accommodating" Mexico and Chicano community. The novel's ambiguous treatment of citizenship supports literary critic Louis Mendoza's contention that "in portraying the shared humanity between the documented and undocumented, and the conditions of their daily existence under exploitation, inequality, and liminal social status, [*Tierra*] documents the lived experiences of farm workers and documents the relative insignificance of citizenship as a political problem" (Mendoza 173). Indeed, the characters in the novel share the same exploitative conditions thus demonstrating that citizenship does not provide a significant level of labor protections.¹⁶

In centering migration, the land, and the socioeconomic exploitation of farm workers, Rivera's novel and short stories engage with some of the central tenants of the Chicano Movement. This multivalent movement with a heavy emphasis on cultural nationalism re-imagined and narrated alternative possibilities for Chicanos' relationship to the nation. I examine some of the threads of the Chicano Movement and their influence in the production of ...y *no se lo tragó la tierra* in the next section.

Claiming Land and Culture: Nationalism, Third World Struggles, and Quinto Sol

Rivera's work, along with Corky González's "I Am Joaquin," Alurista's "El Plan de Aztlán," Luis Valdez's group El Teatro Campesino, and José Montoya's "El Louie," played

¹⁵ For an in-depth critique of how the concept of migration or movement as resistance has been a central trope of borderland studies and postmodern Chicano cultural studies see literary critic Marcial González's "A Marxist Critique of Borderlands Postmodernism: Adorno's Negative Dialectics and Chicano Cultural Criticism" (2003) and novelist and literary critic Manuel Luis Martínez's "Telling the Difference between the Border and the Borderlands: Materiality and Theoretical Practice" (2002).

¹⁶ However, it is important to note that the novel only includes one depiction of an undocumented character that is quickly exploited by a documented worker and murdered.

pivotal roles in the cultural arm of the Movement in the 1960s and 70s. Although the Chicano poet Alurista first recited “El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán” in 1969 at the First Annual Chicano Youth Conference in Denver, the cultural nationalist threads of this “Plan” had resonated much earlier in the nascent beginnings of the Movement. Much like the Civil Rights Movement, the Chicano Movement has been largely characterized as monolithic and trumpeting a homogeneous message of a masculinist cultural nationalism. Many of these perceptions were furthered by the rhetoric of Alurista’s introduction to the “Plan.” At base, “El Plan” sought to call the Chicano community to political action by explicitly naming nationalism as “the key or common denominator for mass mobilization and organization” because it “transcends all religious, political, class, and economic factions or boundaries” and thus functions as “the common denominator that all members of La Raza can agree upon” (“El Plan”). Alurista’s calls for a “mestizo nation” referred to the economic, political, cultural, and social liberation of a people within the nation of the U.S. However, the nationalism espoused by many in the Movement adhered to “El Plan” in emphasizing “brotherhood,” subsuming the particularities of intersectionality under the issue of racism.

The concept of Aztlán became synonymous with the U.S. Southwest, which was believed to be the mythical homeland of the Aztecs prior to their migration to central Mexico. Thus, Aztlán became a cultural symbol that radical Chicanas/os employed to refer to their rightful place in the U.S. both figuratively and literally. Aztlán not only served as a method to reclaim the Southwest as a Chicano Nation, but it also invoked the pre-Cortesian (and pre-Columbian) history of the indigenous ancestors of Chicanas/os and therefore also sought to undermine the established boundaries of the United States. Together with the cultural nationalism of the Chicano Movement, Aztlán legitimized the place of Chicanas/os in the United States while also referencing a history of subordination, discrimination, and racialization despite their long history in the U.S.

As many Chicana feminists pointed out, this concept of Aztlán, just like the Chicano Movement itself, was fraught with sexist and homophobic undertones, and thus excluded many members of the Chicana/o community.¹⁷ Literary critic Ellie Hernández notes how the notion of Aztlán functioned as a means to subvert the racist foundations of the U.S., while simultaneously putting forth sexist and heteropatriarchy through its “exuberance of national unity [that] takes place at the level of the symbolic and is understood at the level of culture as national pride, patria, and patrimony—that is, as masculinities” (8). The language of the Plan reinforced this interpretation in its initial written form by referring simply to the “Chicano brotherhood” as the foundation for anti-hegemonic resistance. Because of this limitation, many Chicanas attempted to re-conceptualize Aztlán as a space that was inclusive of radical (non-Adelita type) women and queers. Just like other social movements, these critiques and various threads of the Chicana/o Movement are both critiques of a seemingly monolithic “face” of the Movement and are emblematic of the assortment of views, demands, and modes of thinking that preceded this period and gained a larger audience and base during the Movement.

Some Chicana feminist critiques were recorded during the Movement itself in sociologist Alma Garcia’s anthology *Chicana Feminist Thought: The Basic Historical Writings* (1997). Garcia collected texts by Chicanas written during meetings and conferences throughout the

¹⁷ See Alma Garcia’s anthology *Chicana Feminist Thought: The Basic Historical Writings* (1997) and Maylei Blackwell’s *Chicana Power!: Contested Histories of Gender and Feminism in the Chicano Movement* (2011).

length of the Movement and after that highlight the concerns of various Chicana feminists. Although there were some Chicanas who continued to prescribe to a nationalistic ideology and even patriarchy, others definitely linked their multivalent oppression to colonialism, if not some form of coloniality, and they actively sought to convey solidarity with peoples from the Third World:

Commitment to liberation is wherever struggles may be, and struggles must interlock to obtain effective results. The third world has suffered under the yoke of white racism and economic pillage by expansionist powers. We are concerned with the long-range results of our struggles; we have a common oppressor, we hope to achieve a society free from racism, exploitation of human by human, nation by nation, and woman by man. (Vasquez 173)

This articulation of solidarity across a broader international scope and the identification of a “common oppressor” reverberates in Rivera’s story, “La cosecha,” which also, as I argue also sought to expand the critique of exploitation beyond the confines of the nation-state. In addition to pointing out racism and class exploitation, the passage above also centers the discrimination towards “woman by man,” or sexism.

To rectify this resulting discrimination and exclusion in the project of defining Chicanidad and demanding communal recognition for the purpose of social justice, Cherrie Moraga, a prominent queer Chicana feminist theorist, proposed the concept of a Queer Aztlán. She critiques the Chicano Movement’s deployment of Aztlán for not being a “strong enough [nation] to embrace a full range of racial diversities, human sexualities, and expressions of gender” (Moraga 164). Instead, she argues that “in a queer Aztlán, there would be no freaks, no ‘others’ to point one’s finger at,” and the Movement would truly become radicalized and open to the mobilization of all Chicanas/os (164). Moraga clarifies, though, that she calls not just for “inclusion” but rather for a truly reconfigured conception of the Chicana/o nation that validates and welcomes the experiences and ideas of women and queers (164). In particular, Moraga takes issue with the Plan in its references to literal ownership of Aztlán as land. She states

Land remains the common ground for all radical action. But land is more than the rocks and trees, the animals and plant life that make up the territory of Aztlán...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)

Thus, while she recognizes the importance of land as a point of radical departure, she seeks to broaden the concept of Aztlán to include the space of the body as a colonized space unto itself. Further, the references to “the housing project,” “factories,” and possibly dangerous “water our children drink,” underscores the class component to this Aztlán. Moraga’s reference to “las Américas” and the “imperialist” United States expands the critique of the U.S. beyond the scope of nationalist rhetoric. While I contend that Rivera’s stories depict a transnational subjectivity that uncouples land from ownership, and thus modes of production and economic exploitation, I point out that they do so by asserting a masculine subjectivity that by omission excludes women from this decolonial project.

Debates as to level of inclusiveness of the Chicano Movement took place in discussions throughout the community and within academia, where scholars like anthropologist Octavio

Romano played an instrumental role in shaping conversations about Chicano cultural and intellectual production. As founder of Quinto Sol Publications, the publishing house that awarded Tomás Rivera the first Premio Quinto Sol literary prize and published *Tierra* and the *El Grito* journal, Romano served as a prominent member of the Chicano intelligentsia. His contributions to Chicana/o Studies and the Movement came in the form of his publication of excoriating critiques of the depiction of the Mexican and Mexican American communities in anthropological and sociological texts, his articles outlining his positions on the cultural diversity and plurality within the community, and from his helm as editor for Quinto Sol and *El Grito*. Romano's critical review essay "The Anthropology and Sociology of the Mexican-Americans" in *El Grito* paved the way for a growing corpus of scholarship by Chicanas/os that sought to lay bare "North American anthropology's colonial-like practices" that painted peoples of Mexican heritage as lazy, incompetent, fatalistic, inherently criminal, and, in essence, incapable of acting as social agents (Davalos 13; Romano, "Anthropology and Sociology"). Romano's essays on Chicana/o culture and his editorial decisions at Quinto Sol Publications thus provide greater insight into his editorial decisions at Quinto Sol Publications and the representations of Chicanas/os he sought to depict.

In "The Historical and Intellectual Presence" (1969) and "Minorities, History, and the Cultural Mystique" (1967), both published in *El Grito*, Romano engages in a disciplinary and philosophical dialogue on the complexity of Mexican and Mexican American culture and experience. In the first, he identifies and outlines four currents of thought, Indianist Philosophy, Historical Confrontation, Cultural Nationalism, and The Immigrant Experience that he argues arose during the Mexican Revolution and persists with Mexican communities in the United States. Romano begins by differentiating the type of cultural nationalism he observes in Mexican American communities from other ethnic groups in the U.S. that he perceives adopted a xenophobic and ethnocentric strain of cultural nationalism: "Generally, as a group, Mexican Americans have been virtually the only ethnic group in the United States that still systematically proclaims its mestizaje – multiple genetic and cultural origins exhibiting multiplicity rather than seeking purity" ("Historical" 41). For Romano, this mestizaje and "multiplicity" are significant in that they dispel attempts by anthropologists to map the Mexican American community within a cultural determinist model, which limits the possibilities for cultural expression, depicts a static and fatalistic culture, and therefore, results in the distorted representation of Chicanas/os in academic literature. Instead, in identifying these four currents of thought, Romano emphasizes the pluralist and complex nature of beliefs, culture, and philosophies in the community. Thus, for Romano, the Cultural Nationalism current underscores the heterogeneity of thought and culture, and he goes further to argue that "a new rhetoric is needed that will enable us to view history from a perspective that is free from tribal egos and total self-interest. Only in this manner can people transcend the cultural, the ethnic, and the tribal mystique, and truly be free" ("Minorities" 9). However, Romano maintained that despite this heterogeneity and need for the transcendence of an ethnic mystique that replicates the structures of domination in which Mexican Americans reside, there remains a core of folkways, or a "consciousness of collectivity" that connects Mexican Americans to one another. Historian Richard Garcia clarifies that "Romano was emphasizing a sensitivity to the collective – not a collective nationalist sensitivity... He was stressing an ontology (of being) and an epistemology (of knowing) that would allow Mexicans to be 'in American society but not be part of it'" (13). For Romano, the Mexican American

individual and community was constantly in the state of becoming but within the context of a central cultural core.

Romano's anthropological writings are significant because he wielded a tremendous amount of influence when it came to editing decisions at Quinto Sol. Literary critic Julián Olivares' examination of the multiple drafts of Rivera's *Tierra* and accompanying editing notes provide a glimpse into the motives behind some editing choices. He credits a myriad of factors, including thematic incongruity, temporal and structural specifications, and editorial decisions that all lead to the exclusion of four short stories from the final version of Rivera's novel. Olivares ultimately points to thematic incongruity as the reason for the exclusion of "La cosecha" ("Introduction" xxx). However, in another article, Olivares provides more detail as to these motives: "In none of [the stories included in the novel] do we see the love of the land that we might expect from farm workers...this connection with the land [that is depicted in the stories that were removed] is an intentional omission that did not align with the ideology the [novel] sought to propose" ("Apuntes" 59).¹⁸ Olivares goes further and observes that this love of the land was "out of tune with the ideology of resistance and justice as the land is an element of oppression" ("Apuntes" 63).¹⁹ While Olivares admits that love for the land is to be expected, he contends that including this sentiment in the novel would detract from the ideological thrust of the novel. However, Rivera himself was not completely in agreement with some of these editorial decisions.

The importance of the ideological thrust of the novel and the editorial decisions made by Romano with this consideration in mind was not limited to "La cosecha." Rivera wrote of the exclusion of another story "El Pete Fonseca," which focused on a pachuco trickster character:

I still recall "El Pete Fonseca," a story which I had initially included in *...y no se lo tragó la tierra*, being excluded from it. Both Herminio Ríos and Octavio Romano were of the opinion that "Pete Fonseca," a pachuco-type, was presented in [a] derogatory manner and negatively sensitive for Chicano literature at the time (December, 1970). I conceded, but "Pete Fonseca"...[is one of] my favorite characters-types which I have developed. I made and make no pretense at moral judgment and simply wanted to present them as amoral types. ("Critical Approaches" 309)

Rivera's disappointment in the exclusion of "El Pete Fonseca" is obvious, as his main concern is character development and the literary contribution of the pachuco character. However, as with "La cosecha," Romano and Ríos privilege the ideological thrust of the novel. The omission of these stories reflects the desire to publish representations of the Chicana/o community that are not "derogatory" or "negatively sensitive." This decision contradicts Romano's articulation of a Cultural Nationalism that centers on cultural multiplicity and plurality; instead, it subsumes this cultural and philosophical pluralism under the "consciousness of collectivity" that Romano argued formed the core of Mexican American culture. Obviously, the late 1960s and early 70s were a critical period in the Chicano Movement and perhaps "El Pete Fonseca" and "La cosecha" would not present the cohesiveness some desired in the Movement. However, their

¹⁸ "En ninguno de los relatos notamos el amor a la tierra que hemos de esperar de gente campesina...este apego a la tierra es una omisión intencional, puesto que no correspondía a la estrategia ideológica que la obra se proponía." [Translation mine]

¹⁹ "El amor a la tierra – que desentona con la ideología de lucha y justicia, según la cual la tierra es un elemento de opresión." [Translation mine]

omission points to the role of Quinto Sol in disseminating specific representations of the Chicana/o community that aligned with some of the common goals of the Movement. In the next section, I examine “La cosecha” more closely and read it in relation to the *...y no se lo tragó la tierra*, arguing that in centering farm workers’ relationship to land, the story touches upon a central thread of the Movement; however, the story depicts this relationship with nuance and complexity.

Idealism, Labor, and Land: Illusions, Reification, and Alienation in “The Harvest”

In the same controlled and precise language as *Tierra*, “The Harvest/La cosecha” captures the lives of Mexican farm workers in the Midwest. “The Harvest” begins like the novel in that the characters are preoccupied in thought.²⁰ With the season coming to a close and “an aura of peace and death” hanging in the air, the workers have begun thinking about the cyclical concerns of their work – where they will go next and whether they will return the following year (“The Harvest” 173). The bulk of the story involves a comedic series of events in which children stealthily attempt to follow one of the older workers, Don Trine, on his mysterious walks because they come to believe that he is hiding a treasure. One boy continues to follow Don Trine and discovers his strange habit of digging holes in a field and placing his arms in the earth. The boy then replicates this, enjoys the feeling of the earth responding to his touch, and makes a plan to do the same the following year at harvest time.

As I noted above, “La cosecha” does not appear to be consistent with the ideological thrust of Rivera’s *...y no se lo tragó la tierra* because of its positive personification of the land, and indeed, it was removed specifically for this reason; however, I argue that the story provides a more nuanced understanding of land or Nature in relation to labor, reification, and the Marxist notion of alienation. Most readings of the novel propose that the child protagonist comes to a dialectical understanding of his material conditions and the systems of oppression that perpetuate these conditions, which eventually leads to the emergence of a collective consciousness (J. Saldívar 1991; R. Saldívar 1990). These readings stem in part from the child protagonist’s dawning realization that religion has served as one method by which he and his family have been remained entrenched in cyclical and exploitative migrant labor. Therefore, although “La cosecha” appears to contradict this critique of labor exploitation on the surface because of the depiction of a symbiotic relationship between land and farm worker, if read carefully, it does not present this relationship to land as one that is inherently positive. If analyzed in the thematic context of *Tierra* and through the lens of historical materialism, it presents a critique of the creation and entrenchment of the ideological fantasies identified in the novel, particularly of the

²⁰ *Tierra* begins with: “Aquel año se le perdió. A veces trataba de recordar y ya para cuando creía que se estaba aclarando todo un poco se le perdían las palabras. Casi siempre empezaba con un sueño de donde despertaba de pronto y luego se daba cuenta de que realmente estaba dormido. Luego ya no supo si lo que pensaba había pasado o no” (1). [“That year was lost to him. Sometimes he tried to remember, but then things appeared to clarify somewhat his thoughts would elude him. It usually began with a dream in which suddenly he thought he was awake, and then he would realize that he was actually asleep. That was why he could not be sure whether or not what he had recalled was actually what had happened” [Translation: Vigil-Piñón] (63).]

means by which economic exploitation can be arbitrarily divorced from farm workers' relationship to land. In adopting these basic premises, I situate "The Harvest" within this discourse of consciousness and reification while noting how it complicates understandings of workers' relationship to land. Drawing on Marx's explication of "species-being" and his discussion of a human essence in his *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, I contend that the seemingly positive representation of the land in this story fails to undermine the critical bent of *Tierra* and the story itself as an individual text. The inclusion of this story in *Tierra* would have presented the relationship between worker and Nature (or land) as more complex and the workers' alienation from their labor as more insidious.

Olivares states that "La cosecha" would have clashed with the obvious materialist critique of *Tierra* and its depiction of Nature as harsh and unrelenting because of the story's positive personification of land. He argues that "within the realm of the social conflict, the land is a political and economic extension of the dominant society. With the land, Anglo agribusiness literally forces the Chicano migrant worker to his knees" (Olivares, "Introduction" xxx). As Olivares notes that "La cosecha" would have been contradictory in *Tierra* because it depicts the farm worker's "love of the land," he identifies the one-sided portrayal of nature in *Tierra*. Further, in "Remembering, Discovery, and Volition" Rivera credits (wo)man's love for the land and their relationship to the land for asserting and reaffirming the humanity of migrant laborers, and yet, this relationship is not depicted in the novel, as it is in "La cosecha" (301-02). This symbiotic relationship *necessarily* involves the understanding of the land as *both* giving and taking from the laborer and not simply a parasite that serves as a site of farm workers' exploitation (R. Saldívar 84). However, this positive relationship can endow the land with "anthropomorphic projections of human will" and result in "illusions" that aid the continued reification of workers by decoupling notions of the land from capitalist exploitation (R. Saldívar 84).

Whether it contains positive or negative connotations, land in the broader novel plays a large role in the boy child protagonist's coming to consciousness. While also a participant in the novel's action, the protagonist serves as a witness to much of the injustices to which farm workers are privy, including the harsh working conditions they must endure while picking crops that requires them to work long hours under the sun without access to cold water. It is in one of these moments of anger in which the boy's father succumbs to another heat stroke that the boy curses god (*y no se lo tragó* 28, 88). This moment in the novel demonstrates that the boy has come to understand how his family's religious faith has facilitated their exploitation by lessening their potential for individual or collective action and limiting their ability to identify their place in the broader agricultural industry (R. Saldívar 84). Land and nature thus play a significant role in the boy's dawning realization that the earth will not devour him, as the title suggests, but that it *cannot*, and instead,

those anthropomorphic projections of human will onto unfeeling nature are, like the myth of God Himself... Rivera's child protagonist begins to do away with idols when he begins to listen to the symbols by which his world is ordered... the child's full attainment of a political understanding of his place in a system of class oppression, of seeing the world as a product of socially interactive labor, or recognizing the need for collective action... (Saldívar 84)

Like religion then, the "myth" of the earth as capable of exhibiting aggression shifts workers' exploitation from a broader system of capitalist exploitation to "unfeeling nature." Only once the

central character is able to see and understand the “symbols by which his world is ordered” can he begin to make the necessary connections between his own existence, his place in the broader capitalist system, and ultimately, the “need for collective action.” The child protagonist’s dialectical understanding could “foreshadow a mode of thinking that might prefigure an alternative social formation, one that does not tie men, women, and children in bondage to the earth through myths of transcendental peace” (83). I contend that the explicit personification of the earth in “La cosecha” and the positive interactions between the characters and the earth solidify the farm workers’ relationship to the land as a form of “bondage” that serves to perpetuate the workers’ exploitation.

Because the characters in “La cosecha” seem to draw some strength or comfort from the earth and the land, this text could appear to contradict the general consensus of critics who argue that the boy protagonist is en route to coming to some form of class consciousness in the broader novel. Indeed, the central characters in the story, Don Trine and Jose, do not seem to recognize how the earth’s seemingly caring and reciprocal touch is a form of illusion that keeps them tied to the land, and instead, their interactions with the earth give the impression of falling more deeply into the grips of these dangerous beliefs. The strengthening of these myths in this story provides another critical site of engagement with the characters’ beliefs that continue to limit their ability to connect their existence as laborers to broader social and economic forces. Taken as part of the whole of *Tierra*, this story simply portrays these characters as undergoing a process of reification in the beginning of the novel where they are far from coming to a class consciousness.

Whether read as part of *Tierra* or as an individual text, this story does not simply represent farm workers’ love of the land; read through the lens of historical materialism, and specifically, Marx’s “species-being,” it depicts reification at a critical juncture – at the creation and entrenchment of the “illusions” central to reification. Here, I draw from literary theorist Georg Lukács’ definition of reification (as paraphrased in Marcial González): “A reified consciousness is thus able to grasp the world only in its apparent forms—as an infinitely fragmented world of discrete objects, disconnected from their social origins and from each other” (*Chicano Novels* 29). Thus, I read the characters in “La Cosecha” as perceiving the land as one of these floating “discrete objects” which is “disconnected” from its ties to capitalism.

“The Harvest” appears to articulate the relationship between the campesino and the land as one of reciprocity, or the mutual exchange of things and practices within a relationship, and mythical proportions. Both Don Trine and one of the boys enjoy “feeling the earth move, feeling the earth grasp [their] fingers and even caressing them” (“The Harvest” 175).²¹ Further, at the end of the story, the boy appears to be looking forward to next year’s harvest and lamenting his previous ignorance of the earth’s abilities to respond to and create human(e) touch (176). The boy seems to recognize that the responsiveness of the earth is directly related to a particular time in the harvest and plans to ritualize the event: “Then he thought of next year, in October at harvest time when once again he could repeat what Don Trine did” (176). For the boy, the ritual will now be part of his migratory cycle involving his movement in search for work, as he plans

²¹ Peruvian sociologist Quijano and sociologist Wallerstein cite reciprocity as one of the means by which indigenous groups were able to continue operating outside systems of domination and capitalism following colonization in the Americas and also evidence of a possible utopia. See Anibal Quijano and Immanuel Wallerstein’s “Americanness as a Concept, or the Americas in the Modern World System” (1992).

to return and “repeat what Don Trine did.” Although the boy links the earth’s ability to “move” and “grasp” to the harvest, the boy fails to draw a parallel between the earth and his labor. He integrates this ritual within his own cycle of work, but for the boy, the earth remains abstracted from the process of production, which does not figure into his imagining of this ritual.

The boy’s perception of reciprocity, thus, could be considered a false one. The earth physically responds to his touch and in turn, the boy imagines he feels closer to the earth; however, in reality, the boy has created an imaginary relationship to the earth that exemplifies his entrenched reification. The “thing-ification of social relationships” that is part and parcel of reification becomes clear in this story (González, *Chicano Novels* 29). One cannot become “dereified” by objectively coming to consciousness about the interconnectedness of these social relationships (29). However, the boy in the story appears to be under the illusions, or “the fraudulent means by which the force of individual will and collective action can be diminished and misdirected” (R. Saldívar 84). Further, the boy creates this ritual with the assumption that his return to that particular field or grove is inevitable, and does not fear the possibility that the earth “devour” him. The illusion he creates of the earth as only a positive entity undoubtedly distances him from the dialectical understanding the protagonist in *Tierra* begins to undergo. The boy’s preoccupation with the responsive earth actually facilitates his oppression, as it introduces a human-like element to his hegemonic and ideological manipulation and causes him to perceive the earth and the social relationships it embodies—producer-commodity, producer-worker, commodity-worker—as disconnected from his labor. Unlike *Tierra*’s protagonist who comes to understand, albeit in a limited way, how religion has functioned to oppress him and calm his desire for change in the present, the boy in “The Harvest” does not resist the dangerous beauty of his illusion.

In his *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, Marx claims that the actual distinct quality, or species-being, that distinguishes human beings from animals is not thought, as traditional philosophers have conjectured, but “free conscious activity.” This “free conscious activity” refers to the performance of labor under one’s own conscious choice. From this perspective, the boy is alienated from his labor (or activity), the products of his labor, and the natural world. Marx shows that these forms of alienation are interconnected and cannot be isolated from each other, and the boy’s alienation from the natural world then comes from the externalization of his labor as an object outside of him, the alienation of the commodity from his labor, and his isolation from other workers. Like the “creative” relationship Marx describes between worker and commodity, the same relationship exists between the worker and nature. Because these forms of alienation are dynamically interrelated, even if the boy’s fascination with the earth indicated that he overcame his estrangement from the earth, the alienation exists in other forms, such as the boy’s alienation from the produce he picks.

Whether it was intended by the author or not, “La cosecha” starkly depicts this entrenchment of reification. While the boy’s fascination with the earth could be the beginning of his understanding of himself within the complicated social, political, and economic structures that govern his existence, Rivera’s story is also a warning of the “illusions” that obstruct the path towards such an understanding, and further, of the limits of such a goal. In short, despite the claim that the theme of “The Harvest” would have been “contradictory” in *Tierra* because it does not portray “the land [as] a political and economic extension of the dominant society,” a reading of this text shows that the claim of thematic incongruity was one based on an incomplete assessment (“Introduction” xxx). Read as part of a whole and as a text unto itself,

“The Harvest” clearly does portray land as a site of socioeconomic exploitation.

Decolonizing the Earth: Possessive Individualism and Totality

While “La cosecha” centers the land as a site of capitalist exploitation, the story simultaneously resists the narrative trope of possessive individualism, a concept that ties the individual to the state and the ability to “own” oneself. Rivera’s “La cosecha” also gestures towards a transnational subject and dispossession, and thus, uncouples land from modes of production. The story captures and resists the dehumanizing perception of Mexican (and Mexican American) migrant farm workers as disposable laborers as Rivera sought to do through the articulation of a decolonized relationship between land and migrant worker.

Literary critic Grace Hong’s discussion of the literary representation of possessive individualism provides a useful point of reference to argue how Rivera’s story attempts to map out a decolonizing alternative to an accepted subjectivity of the citizen-subject. Hong extends political scientist C.B. Macpherson’s concept of possessive individualism to argue that “subjectivity... is defined by the ability to own, and what the subject primarily owns is the self” (Hong 3). She claims “possessive individualism became the narrative through which subjects were imagined and thus sutured to the nation-state,” (5) and that literary representations of this individualism produce “discrepant subjectivities” (10) because the self-possessed (white) subject depends on the “dispossession of racialized subjects” (27) while simultaneously attempting to erase these exploitative structures. I contend that Rivera’s “La cosecha” articulates a discrepant subjectivity based on the characters’ inability, *and most importantly*, lack of desire to possess the land they toil. “La cosecha” does not merely underscore the characters’ dispossession and the exploitative structures of racialization that determine their status as farm workers; I argue that it goes beyond this critique and imagines an alternative and decolonized relationship to land and property. Thus, “La cosecha” as a text strives toward articulating a subjectivity that abandons possession and dispossession as primary narrative tropes.

“La cosecha” does not conceive of property ownership as a possibility, and in fact, the emphasis on cyclical movement via the migratory work cycle points to one of the defining characteristics of these workers. Their status as migrant workers is established at the beginning and end of the story and references are made throughout about returning to Texas and to a particular field in the Midwest the following year (Rivera, “The Harvest” 173, 176). Their “dispossession” from the land is thus abundantly clear; yet, the characters do not necessarily consider this a disadvantage. When a group of young boys first learn of Don Trine’s mysterious walks and ask him about it, they criticize his anger: “It wasn’t anything to make a fuss over. This ain’t his land. We can go wherever we take a liking to” (173). The boys are simultaneously critiquing what they see as Don Trine’s attempt to claim the land and exalting their right to move across the land, and thus, by extension, its imposed boundaries as they see fit. In denying Don Trine, a farm worker like themselves, his ownership of the land, they also deny themselves this ownership, yet still recognize their freedom to move within and around it.

Despite this critical move, the characters still bypass the opportunity to come to a significant understanding of the nature of their work. In attempting to expose Don Trine’s secret, the boys wish to share in his fortune, which they initially see as a monetary one. Once they eventually discover his secret, they realize that their preliminary inclinations—that “with finding out what [Don Trine] did, they would understand everything”—were false (Rivera, “The

Harvest” 175). Instead, they dismiss him as crazy and forget about it altogether without placing their hands in the earth, as Don Trine did. The story seems to be outlining some of the stages of reaching a more critical form of consciousness, and their desire to “understand everything” mirrors the objective of totality, which “requires a consciousness that strives to comprehend the historical connections and interconnections of discrete objects within larger social totalities across time and space” (González, *Chicano Novels* 29). The fact that most of the boys, save one, dismiss Don Trine, signals their relative immaturity and unpreparedness to deal with “everything” and how it is ordered.

One boy, however, does not forget nor dismiss Don Trine as crazy, and his extra effort brings him closer to understanding “everything.” Although the underlying exploitative nature of his relationship to land continues to elude him as a worker within the realm of production, the boy, at minimum, does come to an understanding of his place *outside* of capitalist production. In an increasingly complex way, the text reveals tensions within the capitalist system, which necessarily obfuscates social relationships such that workers are alienated from other workers, their labor, the commodity, and production, all of which facilitates their exploitation.

However, rather than reading this text from a strictly economic perspective, I read the boy’s character, and thus the text, as striving to represent a form of totality that is not ultimately achieved. Despite falling short of this totality because the character’s understanding overlooks economic structures, the text nevertheless does displace narratives of possession, and thus individualism. Hong contends that this narrative of possessive individualism “sutured [the subject] to the nation-state;” therefore, Rivera’s text breaks from this need to establish subjectivity in relation to possession and dispossession, and therefore, the nation-state. The tension within capitalism becomes visible in that what I perceive as the boy’s inability to place himself within broader global structures of capital and production. This leads to his decolonized view of land outside of the realm of production, meaning that in enjoying the warmth and touch of the earth and essentially and its qualities as a living thing, the boy comes to understand that the land exists outside of its relationship to production and his feeling of connectedness to the land comes from the baser existence of the land as always already connected to human existence. The boy’s “lack” then, is in not recognizing its exploitative qualities; however, in his de-centering of capital from the land, the boy comes to an understanding of the baser role of the land, and is able to see this outside of the realm of production.

The text effectively de-centers capital and production from this relationship, and consequently, de-centers the nation-state and global capital in divorcing the land from its now exploitative nature under these structures as the site of production.²² The boy comes to understand that the earth is alive and able to interact with him in a positive way by “grasping his fingers and even caressing them” (Rivera, “The Harvest” 175). This text imagines possible alternatives to an exploitative relationship with the land by de-centering capital and thus alludes to a decolonized relationship. Of course, the boy must also understand the bases for and of this exploitation. However, in articulating what this relationship *could be* and in demonstrating the boy’s surprise, the story points the novelty of this discovery, and thus how the boy was previously unable to identify the “connections and interconnections” between himself and the earth (González, *Chicano Novels* 29).

²² According to Marx’s notion of species-being, it is not necessary to de-center labor because labor in and of itself is not exploitative. In fact, Marx argues that the essence, or species-being, of humans is to labor under one’s own desire.

In terms of possessive individualism, Rivera's text establishes a "discrepant subjectivity" in denying this trope of possessive individualism and therefore not permitting the characters to be "sutured to the nation-state" (5). Thus, rather than constructing a subjectivity that is based on the ability to own, Rivera's text reflects one that both highlights the structures of racialization and exploitation these migrant farm workers must endure, but also one that is not dependent on this possession of land. Ultimately, the boy gains a sense of power from this "dispossession." Coupled with its ambiguous treatment of citizenship, "The Harvest" thus articulates an alternative and racialized subjectivity that does not remain confined to the nation-state at a time when Chicanas/os were attempting to rearticulate their place in the U.S. by drawing from their historical legacies within the broader continent of North America, which obviously precluded and transcended legal U.S. citizenship.

Despite striving for an alternative to an exploitative relationship to land, the story's articulation of the land-worker (or land-human) relationship and subjectivity is not without problems. Though it strives for a decolonized frame for subjectivity, "La cosecha" falls short because of its assertion of masculinity. The lack of women in the story, as well as the novel, highlights the assertion of a masculine subjectivity in Don Trine's and the boy's digging holes and plunging their arms in the earth.

Trapped: "Zoo Island" and the Politics of Representation and Reification

"The Harvest" is not the only story rejected from *Tierra* that invokes questions about space and belonging. "Zoo Island" literally begins with the dream of a boy, Jose, in a farm worker camp in the Midwest. Jose dreams of rain, and these dreams provide him with the time and ability to conduct a census in his farm worker community. Without much of an explanation beyond wanting people to do what he said, but with a burning desire, the boy enlists his friends to count the farm workers living in chicken coops in his community. While some are distrusting of the census process, other workers exalt the possible effect of this count on their community and seem to hope that recording their relatively large numbers will lead to greater access to basic services such as plumbing, education, a place of worship, and a store. With the blessing of Don Simon, a crotchety, but wise older worker, Jose and his friends complete the census. The valued opinion of Don Simon and the general consensus reveal the desire of these workers to be "officially" counted and the "formal" creation of a community seems to please them, and in particular, the boy.

Although "Zoo Island" deals with the creation of community—as Julián Olivares's introduction to *Tomás Rivera: The Complete Works* suggests—and issues of documentation, it also refers to the relationship between the workers, land, and commodities (the produce). The residents learn that their numbers exceed the population of the town where they buy their groceries every week" (Rivera, "Zoo Island" 180). The repeated mention of the grocery store implies that the workers seem to accept unproblematically, and therefore reinforce, this separation between themselves, the land, and the commodities they help to produce by failing to understand the connection between their labor and the food they must travel to buy outside the farm. In terms of the census performed by some of the teenagers in the text, they engage in an activity that theoretically should bring them the social and political inclusion they seek. At base, their enactment of a census implies that they believe a reciprocal relationship exists between

themselves and the land they occupy in that their residence of it can bring them inclusion and equality. Again, my reading of this text illustrates how this story thematically aligns with *Tierra* and, as an individual text, provides a site of critical engagement with the complex structures and ideologies that disallow for the imagining of a class consciousness.

In his introduction to the anthology, Julián Olivares emphasizes the themes of community in this story, and in a similar fashion as much of the criticism on *Tierra*, Olivares argues that this largely communal desire to be counted exposes “José’s transcendence of his ego” (“Introduction” xxxii). Olivares contends that despite the boy’s original intent to rule the town with the completion of this consensus, he “comes to learn that the values of the group prevail over those of the individual” (xxxii). Indeed, many of the farm workers view the census as an opportunity to become “official” and create a township complete with the services they lack and the smaller Anglo community in turn enjoys.

The nearby Anglo community becomes a point of contrast for these farm workers. Anglos drive by their chicken coop community on Sundays “laughing and laughing, and pointing” at the workers (Rivera, “Zoo Island” 177). The boy’s father is especially bothered by the intrusion and he states that the workers are akin to “a bunch of monkeys in that park in San Antonio—Parkerich” (178). The father’s comparison of himself and the other workers to trapped zoo animals kept to perform for visitors is both curious and interesting, as the boy and his fellow census workers decide to name their new town “Zoo Island” (181). The father’s comment clearly captures his anger in becoming a source of amusement and entertainment for these outsiders, and his drawing a parallel between the farm workers and trapped zoo animals indicates that he recognizes his lot in life is unlikely to change due to forces outside of his control that largely dictate his social, economic, and political limitations and stations. However, the function of zoos is also to educate, which reveals the underlying complexity of the father’s assessment. He seems to recognize that these townspeople are in fact ridiculing the same people that literally make their existence possible by facilitating crop production. In identifying the “performance” value of their meager existence, this character, and by extension, the text, is marking the workers as educators, as exposing to the outsiders that the farm workers’ existence and community makes their own comfortable one possible.

The text also subverts the type of racial performance one might expect. In the father’s critique and in the naming, the workers appear to be recognizing the artificiality of their living situation. Just like the monkeys in the zoo, the workers are literally “penned” in within the chicken coops where they sleep – not for the amusement of their bosses or audiences – but for profit, which is what the eventual name of their manufactured community suggests. It should be noted that the “performance” the outsiders enjoy is not the performance of these workers’ labor, but a performance of their daily lives, as the Anglos drive by the chicken shacks that house the farm workers and not the fields in which they work. Unlike the monkeys who are wrenched from their natural habitat, this artificial “town” of workers has become naturalized, and, in effect, the census the boys conduct facilitates this naturalization, or reification, while the name simultaneously subverts this process. The other side of this naturalization, however, is that the naming is based on and perpetuates a relational form of identity.

Here, I return to Olivares, who holds that the name of this newly established community is an affront to the nearby Anglo community. He states:

It is important to note that ‘Zoo Island’ is not a self-deprecatory name; it is a transparent sign through which two societies look at and judge each other. From

their perspective outside this new town, the Anglo onlookers will perceive the sign as marking the town's inhabitants as monkeys: they will fail to note that with the sign, the Chicanos have ironically marked the Anglos. From within the town, the inhabitants see the spectators as inhumane. 'Zoo Island' is a sign both of community and protest. Within the town 'almas' ['souls'] abide. (Olivares xxxii)

For Olivares, in naming themselves, the townspeople name the "others," or the Anglo onlookers as outsiders, as people who revel in the misfortune of others, and therefore as "inhumane." By extension then, according to Olivares, in denying the humanity of the Anglo onlookers, the Zoo Island residents attempt to (re)claim their own. As the workers repeatedly point to these outsiders and their community as a point of contrast, the attempt to establish the community in itself and the placement of the sign, points to the desire of the workers to be recognized and included in an established community and historical memory. In tying their humanity to the negation of these outsiders and in clamoring for social recognition or inclusion via the census, the farm workers deny the onlookers the humanity they themselves seek. While Olivares seems to be claiming that the farm workers aim to subvert their imposed social position, he overlooks that their "naming" of the outsiders as the true animals is the mere inverse of the ideology the Anglos employ. Therefore, this naming also functions as a method to reinforce the binary in which both groups rudimentarily place themselves. While the workers' mark the Anglos in this naming, they inevitably mark themselves and their own identity as always already tied to these outsiders. In "caging" these Anglos within the role they themselves sought to escape, the workers construct themselves as always already in relationship with the "animals," as lacking a fundamental part of themselves without this "other," and thereby reifying their marginalized identity. However, we must note the irony in this naming and the voyeurism that underlines this interaction. Those who are pointing and jeering and acting uncivilized are the outsiders who are wishing to witness who they are not and revel in their difference.

Although the creation of Zoo Island itself is brought about through the seemingly arbitrary whims of a boy, the text points to the real circumstances that create this type of community out of rigidly exclusive criteria. Zoo Island is not simply a community based on geography; it is built, constructed, and contrived by geography, topography, agriculture, capital, politics, history, and social forces. It is a Mexican farm worker community and, thus, a racialized and classed community created out of particular historical and political circumstances and for specific economic reasons. In short, their community was not one created out of circumstances of their own choosing. Their lives, their living situation, and their work are dictated by a globalized industry that actively produces and reproduces their reality. Many scholars, however, including Ernesto Galarza and legal scholar Kitty Calavita, have shown how farmers and politicians have historically emphasized temporality and migration amongst their workers to facilitate the creation of a mobile and cheap labor force and justify the presence of this racialized group.²³ The creation of a community in "Zoo Island," albeit a temporary one, appears to fly in the face of such historical attempts by farmers to discourage residency and permanency.

²³ See Calavita's *Inside the State* (1992) and Galarza's *Merchants of Labor: The Mexican Bracero Story* (1964).

“Zoo Island” definitely appears concerned with documentation and in the historical documentation and narration of the existence, lives, and worth of the farm workers. The story itself gestures towards questions of recognition and legitimation in the final scene:

And every morning Jose would no sooner get up than he would go see the sign. He was part of that number, he was in Zoo Island, in Iowa, and like Don Simone said, in the world. He didn’t know why, but there was a warm feeling that started in his feet and rose through his body until he felt it in his throat and in his senses. Then this same feeling made him open his mouth. At times it even made him shout. The shouting was something the owner never managed to understand. By the time he arrived sleepy-eyed in the morning, the boy would be shouting. Sometimes he thought about asking him why he shouted, but then he’d get busy with other things and forget all about it. (Rivera, “Zoo Island”181)

This passage points to an underlying sense of hope in Jose’s excitement at seeing the sign in the “warm feeling” that travels through his body, and ultimately, in his desire to shout. This last image of Jose shouting into the empty morning air is a powerful one. Jose’s conviction that he *must* shout and that he must make himself heard underscores the possibilities tied to this census and the individual boy’s “awakening.” However, the farmer’s reaction begs the question of whether both of these acts of conducting the census and the boy’s shouting are intelligible to the farmer, and perhaps the reader, whether that intelligibility matters, and what this means for historiography and the documentation of the every day lives of these workers.

Rivera and A Point of Reference

Rivera’s works offer up alternatives to the identity politics and exclusionary nationalism that contributes to gendered, sexual, and cultural divisions among Chicanas/os. His short stories rearticulate the political, economic, and cultural parameters that define the Chicana/o community and subjectivity within broader, global circuits of power. Shifting the frame of analysis from one that focuses on the nation-state to one that encompasses transnational currents results in new ways of understanding Chicana/o cultural production and its transformational possibilities.

Rivera’s stories are emblematic of what rhetoric scholars Kent Ono and John Sloop have called “outlaw discourse,” which refers to the “logics that by definition challenge dominant ways of thinking and acting [that] create the potential for substantive social change” (14). Engaging the perceived disjuncture between these stories and Rivera’s broader novel and showing how it complicates the novel’s themes of exploitation, representation, and consciousness, underscores its importance and the embedded social significance of the work. Had these stories been allowed to remain in the novel, the novel may not have reinforced popular notions of cultural nationalism, or the “dominant ways of thinking,” that prevailed during its publication and the Chicano Movement. However, it could have offered ways of de-centering nationalism and fomented “the potential for substantive social change.” As they stand, “La cosecha” and “Zoo Island” do not offer easy solutions, but they provide a representation of the complications that arise in operating within a paradigm that limits the possibilities for communal and subjective formation, consciousness, and liberation.

Chapter Three:
Queer Migration and Abjection in Arturo Islas's *The Rain God*

The Rain God: A Desert Tale (1984) and *Migrant Souls: A Novel* (1990) are the first two novels of Arturo Islas's planned border trilogy. The novels follow the clannish Angel family in the Del Sapó community, an anagram of El Paso, along the Texas-Mexico border and ranges in time period from the Mexican Revolution to the Vietnam War. Although the narrative is told from the perspective of various characters, one voice emerges as the main character – Miguel Chico. Rejecting the pull of a linear narrative, the novel begins with Miguel Chico in adulthood and jumps forward and backward in time, from his childhood in Del Sapó to his move to the West Coast to pursue his education. Miguel Chico's queerness – and I use this term both in the context of sexuality and in reference to the “strange” – is hinted at in *The Rain God* and is more explicitly revealed in *Migrant Souls*. His Uncle Felix is also a queer character, and thus both Miguel and Felix are the subjects of analysis in this chapter, which seeks to explore the representation of queer migration in *The Rain God*.

The novel features migration, including its physical, geographical, psychological, and ideological dimensions, both thematically and formally. Through *The Rain God's* migratory narrative structure, the novel portrays Miguel's and Felix's ongoing, non-linear processes of subjectivity in which both the novel and the characters' sites of migration indicate a circuitous geographic, ideological, and self-exploratory journey. In queer migration literature, migration has often been understood as an act of transgression away from a “home” that enables the actualization of a more complete self, particularly in regards to the physical and ideological distancing from restricting, conservative spaces that police identity in myriad ways. However, *The Rain God* reveals a critique of migration and the dangers that mark the supposed liberatory process of migration. Death and sickness play prominent roles in this narrative, and the mutilated male bodies of Miguel Chico and Felix point to the borderlands as a space of queer desire, punishment, and subjective alienation. While for both characters the borderlands does not allow them the freedom to realize fully their queer desires, the space is also not depicted as wholly repressive but rather a space to initiate or reconcile their difference through movement. In effect, the novel demonstrates the inextricable relationship between migration and the ongoing process of subjectivity, and yet highlights the incompleteness of ideological and physical migrations away from seemingly repressive spaces, like the U.S.-Mexico borderlands. For both Felix and Miguel Chico, this space is one fraught with religious, sexual, racialized, gendered, ethnic, and class norms that restrict, *and* in some ways, enable their journeys to self-discovery, particularly in terms of their sexuality. In this chapter's examination of subjectivity and form, I continue where my previous chapter on Tomás Rivera's work concluded. While the previous chapter focused on the construction of subjectivity in the historical context of the Chicano Movement and migrant farm labor, this chapter provides a study on how queer migrant subjects are sutured to and expelled from national and cultural narratives of belonging.

Drawing on feminist, women of color, and queer migration theory, my reading of *The Rain God* demonstrates how the ethnic novel enacts an ethics of entangled intersectionality that takes into account racialization, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, religion, and class, and ultimately critiques the notion of identity as static, a product of negation, and capable of distillation into distinct categories of identity. Islas's *The Rain God* depicts subject formation as a continual

process marked by various kinds of voluntary migrations—physical, psychological, geographical, and ideological—and forced expulsion, which become manifest in the body and in narrative form itself. The bodily violence inflicted on the characters reflects an embodied abjection, or the construction of subjectivity through the expelling of particular aspects of the self, through which their difference is excluded and reconciled. Through its structure, the novel demonstrates that migration as a form of ideological escape or a representation of upward mobility occludes the complications of identity that cannot be easily separated and resolved. The novel mirrors this assemblage through its migratory narrative structure and the representation of the narrative itself as a product of abjection and a path towards compromise.

I begin by examining the character of Uncle Felix, the mapping of his sexual exploration onto the novel, and his geographic and transnational migration, as well as his strategic enactment of a culturally acceptable masculinity, that permit his process of self-actualization to begin within the space of the borderlands. I briefly read his death as the moment of expulsion within the process of abjection that signifies the negation of Felix's difference in the shadow of the nation-state. I then shift to a close reading of Miguel Chico, who seeks freedom from the ideologies of his upbringing and the psychological influence of his family through geographical migration. While for Miguel Chico migration signifies his escape from judgment and his movement to a space that permits his sexual exploration, he continues to be haunted by his family's influence. The vestiges of this influence are reconciled through a violent abjection that permanently marks Miguel's body, and they do not permit him to realize fully his sexual desires but instead become manifest in his telling of the narrative itself. I argue that Miguel's embodied abjection demonstrates that his migration, in all its dimensions, is part of an incomplete ontological process rooted in his attempt and failure to disentangle the various aspects of his identity from one another, most notably his sexuality from his ethnicity.

Islas's difficulty with publishing his creative work (Aldama 2003, 2005), the autobiographical nature of the works (Aldama 2005, Saldívar 1991), the importance of the works in broader American literature (Márquez 1994, Saldívar 1991, M. Sánchez 1990), and examinations of the ideological and cultural significance of the texts (Márquez 1994, Rice 2008, R. Sánchez 2008) have largely dominated the discussion on Islas's work. Further, the incorporation of queer characters into the texts has inspired a number of articles focusing on the representation of sexuality in these texts (Bruce-Novoa 1986, Cutler 2008, Gonzales-Berry 2008, Hardin 2008, Minich 2011, Padilla 2009, Vega 1996). While these texts have informed my argument, I depart from their analyses by focusing on the representation of the queer and racialized body and its connection to place and migration.

When discussing sexuality in a queer sense, I define this outside of the binary construction of the term that posits homosexuality and heterosexuality as opposite and immutable categories. From this perspective, queerness can be conceived "as an anti-normative signifier as well as a social category produced through the 'intersectionality' of identities, practices, and institutions" (Manalansan 225). However, queer theorist Jaspir Puar's warning regarding the automatic association of queer with an oppositional and resistant identity informs my reading of Islas's text, and, in particular, the characterization of Miguel Chico (205). Further, I use "queer" to denote a "strangeness" attributed to Uncle Felix and Miguel Chico by their families. The use of queer in reference to the "strange" is not to revert to an understanding of the term in its most offensive iteration, but to hint at the possibilities enabled by the nascent stirrings

of sexual self-exploration within the characters' home of the borderlands, a topic explored further in the following section.

Queer Migration and the "Home"

The trope of migration is central to Islas's novel as mobility becomes a means for both Uncle Felix and Miguel Chico to escape from the confines of their familial and cultural obligations. Uncle Felix migrated north from Mexico and has a history of attempting to seduce U.S. servicemen, paradigmatic extensions of the nation-state and participants in an institution built upon and reliant on homosocial bonding. The main character of the text, Miguel Chico, is a first-generation Mexican American and, as I show, subverts his exclusion from the nation and his family by migrating to the urban gay scene of the San Francisco Bay Area. A critique of the "liberatory" nature of rural-to-urban migration surfaces in the complications that arise from Miguel Chico's own queer migration to the San Francisco Bay Area and by Felix's traversing of the U.S.-Mexico border. Numerous scholars have tied the act of "coming out of the closet" to this queer mobility that serves to enable the exploration of identity and sexuality (Binnie 2004, Cant 1997, Chauncey 1994, Parker 1999, Stychin 2000, Weston 1995). The teleological discussions of mobility, displacement, and home within the context of queer migration are central and also inherent to borderlands theory and Islas's novel.²⁴

The proliferation of queer theory in the 1990s coincided with a growing literature on diaspora and migration. The intersection of these fields produced a wealth of literature on the association of queer sexualities with spatial displacement. A subset of queer migration literature focused on rural-to-urban (im)migration, and as such tended to depict the urban as the ideal queer space and equated mobility with sexual freedom (Binnie 2004, Cant 1997, Chauncey 1994, Parker 1999, Stychin 2000, Weston 1995). However, various scholars have sought to complicate both the association of urban space with sexual freedom and that of migration itself with the initial moment of subjective exploration. Exploring this migration and the idea of "home" has functioned to further the discussion around issues surrounding queerness and the subject.

In the late 1990s, studies of queer mobility shifted from the empirical to the theoretical, thus enabling and encouraging scholars to uncover and complicate the assumptions underlying these studies. These empirical studies tended to overlook the diversity of experience that marks queer migration and somewhat uniformly characterized migration as rural to urban "intimating a once-and-for-all emergence from the rural 'closet', and hence presenting [migration and identity formation] as teleological and ontologically final" (Gorman-Murray, "Rethinking Queer Migration," 106). Some queer migration literature builds upon the assumption that migration is in and of itself "the basis of an ethics of transgression," which implies that the act of migration

²⁴ The connection between nationalism/citizenship and queer identities is also made explicit in the categorization and identification of deviant sexual identities within the "immigration control apparatus," a system of control identified by Eithné Luibhéid in her *Entry Denied: Controlling Sexuality at the Border* (2002). The U.S.'s long-held policies on the exclusion of "sexual deviants" reflects the desire of the state to control entry into the U.S. based on perceived sexuality thereby showing how immigration has served as a means to construct sexual identities, norms, and categories.

signifies a rejection of an essential identity fostered within the “home” (Ahmed 334).²⁵ This creates a simplistic binary in which the home is conceived as a site of stabilized, essential identity and displacement or migration is deemed the initial and necessary moment of self-exploration (Ahmed 1999; Fortier 2001; Gorman-Murray, “Rethinking” 2007). While the understanding that queerness is intimately tied to spatial displacement is a given within this literature, particularly within a diasporic framework, critiques have emerged that attempt to address issues of cosmopolitanism, scale, racial and ethnic diversity, rural-to-urban mobility, and the complicated nature of subjectivity (Gorman-Murray, “Rethinking” 2007; Knopp 2004; Phillips, Watt, and Shuttleton 2000; Puar, Rushbrook, Schein 2003; Sugg 2003). Scholarly interventions examining sites of (dis)location and their ties to comfort, familiarity, and safety provide critical work on the foundations of queer migration and insight into the representations of migration within Islas’s text.

Discussions of “home” in particular reflect the ways that place is tied to conceptualizations of the self and identity. Movement away from the home under duress is a point of commonality between the study of queer migration and diaspora. Tying “home” to affect can be an effective method to critique the equation of home with an essential identity (Ahmed 1999; Fortier 2001; Gorman-Murray, “Intimate Mobilities” 2009). Gender and sexuality scholar Sara Ahmed, in particular, seeks to dispel the characterization of migration as the initial moment of self-exploration, or the belief that migration is the necessary impetus for this exploration. Instead, she argues: “The association of home with familiarity which allows strangeness to be associated with migration (that is, to be located as beyond the walls of the home) is problematic. There is already strangeness and movement within the home itself” (340). In Ahmed’s identification of the home as a nascent site of self-exploration, we see the possibility for conceiving of migration as the *continuation* of a process begun in home rather than privileging migration as a necessary step towards this self-exploration. By rejecting the notion that the home does not inherently “secure identity by expelling strangers,” Ahmed allows for the possibility that this self-exploration has occurred within the home as well (340).

The reconfiguration of the home as “strange,” or as simply allowing for “strangeness” within the home, calls into question the purpose of queer migration and the foundations of a queer diaspora. In a diasporic framework, queer migration is necessarily conceived as motivated by “the condition of exile and estrangement experienced by queer subjects, which locates them outside the confines of the ‘home’: the heterosexual family, the nation, the homeland” (Fortier 408). However, if “strangeness” can exist within the home, queer migration in itself is not transgressive (Ahmed 340). Therefore, how do we conceive of the “point of origin” and the site to which the queer subject migrates? In tying home to affect, “home” and “away” are not conceived as bounded and distinct cultures and the movement between them as indicative of a linear process of self-exploration with an identifiable end. The depiction of queer subjects moving away from the home and searching for the familiarity and comfort of another still adheres to this linear trajectory (Fortier 410). By desiring and searching for a “home,” rather than thinking of home “as always in the making, endlessly deferred” as it is within a diasporic framework, queer migrant narratives can impose the heteronormative and nationalistic limits associated with static ideas of “home” and “ontological security” (Fortier 409-10). To disrupt

²⁵ This mirrors more recent critiques of queer studies that contest conceptions of queer as always already resistant and alternative. See Jaspir Puar’s *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (2007). This critique will be explored further later in the chapter.

these associations, the relationship between migration and the body can serve as a starting point to re-think how the move towards a queer subjectivity is embodied within the subject itself (Gorman-Murray, “Rethinking” 2007). Centering the body as a unit of analysis can also allay tendencies to create master narratives that assume to encompass the queer migrant experience. Shifting from a linear understanding of this journey of self-exploration to one that includes multiple sites of (dis)location more accurately reflects the ongoing process of “becoming” where each location functions as a physical and ontological site of discovery within the process (114). This shift de-centers the significance of “home,” or the idea of an essential origin, and injects the individual within the process with some agency. Extending this emphasis on multiple sites of (dis)location and continued mobility so that this “placelessness” becomes a desirable and active movement rather than a reflection of displacement and rejection further introduces subject agency (Knopp 2004).²⁶ Tying home to affect (Ahmed 1999) and/or to memory (Fortier 2001) reemphasizes the relational aspect of place and the importance of the body and desire.

While this literature on queer migration and diaspora has provided frameworks from which to theorize, discuss, and imagine the process of queer subjectivity, critiques have emerged that attempt to address issues of cosmopolitanism, scale, racial and ethnic diversity, and the complicated nature of subjectivity (Gorman-Murray, “Rethinking” 2007; Knopp 2004; Luibhéid 2005; Phillips, Watt, and Shuttleton 2000; Puar, Rushbrook, Schein 2003; Sugg 2003). Further, while some have conceived of queerness and queer migration as transgressive, others have shown how these can still operate within restrictive and heteronormative frameworks. Much like borderlands postmodernism, scholars have also warned against the abstraction of migration in the study of queer migration:

To use migration as metaphor, is to migrate from migration, such that it becomes an impossible metaphor that no longer refers to the dislocation from place, but dislocation as such (thought already dislocates). In this sense, the migrant becomes a figure: the act of granting the migrant the status *as* a figure (of speech) erases and conceals the historical determination of experiences of migration, even though those experiences cannot be reduced to a referent [emphasis Ahmed].
(333)

The critique of the “use of migration as metaphor” lies in the contention that to employ migration as a metaphor is to inherently imbue it with meaning and conceal “the historical determination of experiences of migration.” In concealing the conditions for this migration, the migrant becomes “a figure (of speech)” thereby symbolizing an act of transgression rather than an individual operating within a set of conditions. This critique is reminiscent of historical materialist critiques of borderland theory, which claim that the abstraction of the borderlands as a space and theorizing border subjects as liminal overlooks the practical implications of this liminality in the case of Mexican immigrants and subjects them to needless isolation (Martinez 2002). Such reduction also contributes to the romanticization of the borderlands, elides the real conditions of the border, and adds another dimension of heterogeneous cultural identity to the national U.S. narrative of multiculturalism (González 2003). The representations of migration and the borderlands in *The Rain God* reflect the dangers of such romanticization. In the analysis that follows, I highlight the material reality of living within such a space, and reveal the limits of migration even for subjects whose political citizenship is not in question.

²⁶ The obvious critique of this formulation of “placelessness” again lies in the critique of cosmopolitanism and the privilege associated with it.

Ultimately, the body looms as a primary figure of analysis in this chapter because the body remains the initial site of conflict.²⁷ As literary critic Ellie Hernández astutely points out: “In most instances, body figurations, or embodiments, arise as the site of border encounters. This aimless body assumes the metaphor of border culture...the body forms citizen-subject relations through crisis, abjection, and confrontation” (84). Here again, the “aimless body assumes the metaphor of border culture;” however, both Felix and Miguel Chico move with purpose and attempt to situate themselves outside of heteronormative master narratives. Finally, the journeys of self-exploration for these two characters differ though their “body figurations” that are both forged through violent “crisis, abjection, and confrontation.” At base, Felix’s and Miguel Chico’s narratives of queer migration diverge in terms of how they engage with the structures of power that mediate their identities.

Uncle Felix and “Queering the Borderlands”

As the older queer character in Islas’s texts, Felix serves as an important antecedent to Miguel Chico’s own documented journey of sexual exploration. Felix’s story and eventual death provide insight from which to decipher how his and Miguel’s experiences of migration differ and coalesce. Though he is depicted as the proto-typical Mexican patriarch of his nuclear family, Felix also participates in the sexual harassment of his Mexican male workers and is ultimately killed when he propositions a U.S. military servicemen on the ride home from a bar. The perceived success of Miguel Chico in escaping the borderlands, which one could argue enables his ability to express his queer desires, and the relative tragedy of Felix’s brutal death because of the expression of those same desires within the borderlands, can be interpreted as a condemnation of that space. However, contrary to the contention that “the borderlands signifies the homophobia of both sides [of the border],” Felix’s assertion of a non-normative sexuality within and around his home together with his death point to the text’s representation of conflicting narratives of sexuality within the borderlands and the cultural masculine privilege that permits Felix’s sexual exploration (Hardin 221). I examine *The Rain God*’s representation of sexuality and “look beyond white colonial heteronormativity” to read Islas’s depiction of sexuality in the borderlands as a gesture towards a queering of this space (Pérez 124).

Scholars have debated the “queerness” of the borderlands and sought to question the heteronormative assumptions of historiography. Historian Emma Pérez’s theoretical construct of the decolonial imaginary, along with the work of historians Deena González, Antonia Castañeda, and Vicki Ruiz, among others²⁸ have sought to center discussions of gender and sexuality in

²⁷ The emphasis on the body as the initial site of conflict is explored further in the chapter that follows in which I analyze the discursive and literal (physical) creation of Merced de Papel in *The People of Paper*. In differing ways, the bodies of Miguel Chico and Felix in *The Rain God* and that of Merced de Papel reveal the various methods by which citizenship and belonging are mapped onto both documented and undocumented (im)migrants.

²⁸ See Antonia Castañeda’s “Sexual Violence in the Politics and Policies of Conquest: Amerindian Women and the Spanish Conquest of Alta California” (1993) and “Presidarias y Pobladoras: The Journey North and Life in Frontier California” (2000), Deena González’s “La Tules of Image and Reality: Euro-American Attitudes and Legend Formation on a Spanish-Mexican Frontier” (1993), Jaspir Puar’s *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (2007), Vicki Ruiz’s *From Out of the*

Chicana/o historiography and beyond. Their interventions have been crucial in showing how patriarchy and heteronormativity have organized our understanding of historical events and historiography. Pérez (2003) has identified the “queering of the borderlands” as a project of recovery: “The history of sexuality on and in the borderlands looks heteronormative to many historians. . . . To disidentify is to look beyond white colonial heteronormativity to interpret documents differently” (Pérez 124). Similarly, Gloria Anzaldúa’s identification of the borderlands as a queer space, or a “third space,” attempts to challenge the dichotomy of hetero- and homosexuality within her project to break down the subject-object duality of the *mestiza*, and thus to complicate understandings of the subjectivity of border subjects. While her conceptualization of the borderlands as a “queer/third space” has been criticized, it nevertheless provides a foundation on which to analyze Islas’s representation of the borderlands as a critique of this sexual duality. *The Rain God* dramatizes Anzaldúa’s primary critique of the duality of Chicana/o subjectivity and thus of the borderlands as simply “Mexican” and “American” and border subjects as either “homosexual” or “heterosexual.”

Unlike Miguel Chico who does not act on his queer sexual desires until he disassociates from his family and his home, Felix acts upon his desire within his “home” of the borderlands. Felix’s migration within the borderlands is indicative of the critiques of queer migration and the underlying assumption that one must move from undeveloped to modern countries (or from rural to urban areas) to enable self-exploration, particularly as it pertains to sexuality. In Uncle Felix’s case, he migrates within his “home” of the borderlands thus eschewing the contention that the home cannot be a site of self-exploration. While he ultimately suffers the consequences of his sexual exploration, Felix nevertheless views the borderlands as a site of sexual fluidity. It is a conceptualization that is marred at the end by the strict enforcement of heteronormativity on the part of the U.S. military serviceman who kills him. His family seems aware of his queer tendencies and his sexual desires are well known at his place of work, where his nickname is “*Jefe Joto*” or Fag Boss (Islas, *Rain God* 117). However, though this is a cause for concern on the part of his family, and his wife in particular, Felix is “allowed” to explore his desires. His family’s silence functions as a form of complicity in his continuation of the fake medical exams he provides to his male workers and his frequenting of bars on both sides of the border in search of soldiers responsive to his overtures (115-116).

Felix’s expression of his queer desires and his death reveal a confluence of varying narratives of sexuality structured by the cultural geography he navigates. Michael Hardin notes that Felix’s murder is a result of the convergence of homophobia: “In the areas where the cultures are similar, the ‘third space’ [of the borderlands] can amplify the negatives. With Catholicism on one side and Protestantism on the other, the borderland signifies the homophobia of both sides [of the border]” (Hardin 221). Implicit in the critique of Mexican Catholicism within the home is the understanding that cultural patriarchy, or *machismo*, organizes much of gender relations in Mexico and Mexican American families. Hardin later goes on to identify the Catholic Church and the U.S. military as “two distinct sources [of] cultural homophobia” (231). While the presence of homophobia in Islas’s borderlands is undeniable, there remains the underlying assumption that Mexican Catholicism and American Protestantism, as represented by the U.S. military in the novel, are the only cultural institutions that serve to regulate sexuality within the borderlands. It becomes apparent, however, that the patriarchy that structures much of

Shadows: Mexican Women in Twentieth Century America (1998), and Siobhan Somerville’s *Queering the Color Line: Race and the Invention of Homosexuality in American Culture* (2000).

Mexican Catholicism provides Felix with the freedom to explore his sexuality, and therefore, the signification of the borderlands as simply embodying an amplified homophobia elides the layered narratives of sexuality and masculinity that intersect to permit Felix his sexual exploration.

The identification of Mexican Catholicism as a source of homophobia justifiably implicates patriarchy and the “home” as complicit in regulating and promoting heterosexuality; yet, this overlooks how Felix’s home also enables his queerness. Sociologist Anne-Marie Fortier contends that “the condition of exile and estrangement experienced by queer subjects...locates them outside the confines of the ‘home’: the heterosexual family, the nation, the homeland” (408). However, for Felix, his migration across the border to find willing participants in his queer exploits illustrates a figurative “stretching” of the home to encompass the entire border area. Given Felix’s position as a border subject, and as an (im)migrant, his “home” extends into Mexico, which remains his “homeland.”²⁹ For Felix, there is no “association of home with familiarity,” and he explores this “strangeness” within his literal home and his home of the borderlands (Ahmed 340). His lack of an “official declaration” of his queer sexuality through vocal affirmation underscores his process of subjectivity and the complexity of his identity.³⁰ Like geographer Andrew Gorman-Murray’s conceptualization of multiple sites of (dis)location in the context of queer migration, which points to the importance of place (“Rethinking” 114), we learn that even in death, Felix is intimately tied to his home. On Mama Chona’s deathbed, Felix appears to his dying mother and she thinks, “he smelled like the desert after a rainstorm” (Islas, *Rain God* 180). This image and scent is reminiscent of Felix’s childhood “when he would run outside and dance when the storm clouds passed over” (114). Felix’s ties to the desert until the moment of his death *and* after are also emphasized with the title of “his” chapter: “Rain Dancer.” These repeated references reflect Felix’s connection to place, to his home, and ultimately to a home in which there was “already strangeness and movement within” (Ahmed 340). Felix’s dancing emphasizes this “movement” and illustrates his exploration of this “strangeness” within his home (Islas, *Rain God* 114).

The novel also reflects Felix’s sexual confusion and journey of self-exploration in its circuitous migratory narrative structure and spatial language. For example, Felix confesses to himself that “his protective feelings for [his male] child perplexed and disoriented him because they seemed stronger than his desire for his wife” and eventually shifts from sharing a bed with his son and his wife to only his son (Islas, *Rain God* 122). Felix is “perplexed and disoriented” in his “desire” for his son’s male body, and his initial confusion and ultimate exclusion of his wife from his bed indicates this journey, particularly as his *dis-orientation* reflects a spatial element to his confusion. Further, the migratory narrative structure results in the temporal disorientation of

²⁹ It is important to note that the title of the sequel to *The Rain God* is *Migrant Souls: A Novel*, which emphasizes the migration, rather than the immigration, of the Angel family to El Paso.

³⁰ As gender theorist and philosopher Judith Butler argues in her article “Imitation and Gender Subordination,” declaring one’s sexuality immediately provokes the risk of deducing one’s self to a specific signifier (309). Making one’s sexuality supposedly transparent by vocal affirmation results in the concealment or disappearing of the various ways in which one is interpellated. This suggests that this transparency of sexual identity is an impossibility, as the conscious self that vocalizes this declaration fails to know the totality of one’s self (309). Butler goes on to state that though she recognizes the political saliency of organizing under a particular label, she insists that naming one’s self perpetuates the normative standards set forth by various structures (308).

the reader, who must try to determine roughly where each chapter lies along a timeline of the family's history. The literal and spatial organization of the text in its jumping back-and-forth in time adds to the reader's confusion. Together, both Felix's and the reader's disorientation reproduce the ongoing, non-linear process of subjectivity while also emphasizing Felix's physical movement across the borderlands.

Felix's trajectory through this process is centered in and around his home, where existing conceptualizations of masculinity and sex actually allows for his sexual exploration. His continuing connection to Mexico, and thus to existing structures that permit sexual experimentation among men, enable his queerness. As various scholars, most notably sociologist Tomás Almaguer, have shown, in some Mexican communities, sexuality is more complex and tied to various other factors. Men who have sex with other men (MSM) are not necessarily deemed gay. Instead, sexuality is generally defined along the lines of the active/passive role in sex (Almaguer 1993; Gutmann 1996).³¹ Only the man who enacts the "female" position during sex is typically considered gay. Thus, men, usually working-class men, are allowed a "formative period" during which they sexually experiment with other men with no consequence to their masculinity or sexual identity (Gutmann 129). Instead, this sexual experimentation is considered an expression of masculinity, *if* one assumes the active, penetrating role. Sexuality, therefore, appears to be hinged on the type of masculinity MSM employ. If MSM display a particular type of masculinity, such as that associated with machismo, they do not suffer the social embarrassment and persecution that is associated with being a homosexual and assuming the passive role in sex. The feminization of the passive/penetrated male immediately marks the power relations associated with this active/passive dichotomy and ascribes the feminized role as the weaker of the two by its association with the subjugation of women.

This type of sexual system complicates the social positioning of MSM. Those who are "passive" in the sexual act garner the majority of the social disapproval and persecution, while the "active" member "gains status among his peers in precisely the same way that one derives status from seducing many women" (Lancaster as quoted in Almaguer 259). These distinctions are learned from an early age through social discourse. The language used to ridicule gay Mexican men is "generally coded with gendered meaning drawn from the inferior position of women in patriarchal Mexican society" (Almaguer 260).³² The intersection of sexuality and the manifestation of masculinity are inextricably tied, and together, they serve to complicate the construction of the quintessential image of the modern queer Mexican man. MSM, therefore, are not primarily or simply defined as homosexual by whether they display "feminine" qualities or engage in sexual acts with men occasionally. Rather, there are various factors that contribute to this formulation including age, class, masculinity/femininity and sexual role. Of course, this type of formulation of sexual and gender identity assigns a certain privilege to Mexican men. They are socially allowed to have sex with other men, if they assume the active role and can continue

³¹ See Tomás Almaguer's "Chicano Men: A Cartography of Homosexual Identity and Behavior" (1993), anthropologist Matthew Gutmann's *The Meanings of Macho: Being a Man in Mexico City* (1996), and anthropologist Joseph Carrier's *De Los Otros: Intimacy and Homosexuality Among Mexican Men* (1995).

³² Vocabulary exists within the Mexican lexicon that distinguishes the participants in male homosexual sex. Notably, none of the signifiers used for the active participants suggest they are homosexual, while the existing vocabulary for the passive actor clearly denotes him as an effeminate gay man (Carrier 11-12). What is significant about this lexicon is its prevalence, and therefore, the entrenchment of this dichotomous distinction between active and passive.

to do so even after they marry women, so long as they continue to perform a particular kind of masculinity publicly. This masculinity is tied to heteronormative roles in MSM, and the conditions placed upon these roles that enable the active, penetrating male to still claim heterosexuality serves to erase the “queerness” of this activity, thus normalizing it.

As the aggressor in his gay sexual activities, and in assuming a culturally accepted role of head of the household, Felix assumes this masculine role.³³ In popular conceptions, Mexico exports a form of “machismo” along with their immigrants, of which Felix is one. Dominant perceptions of Mexico and Mexican immigrant families imagine that gender relations among these families adhere to a strict patriarchal construction in which women are relegated to the private space of the home and are required to perform tasks typically associated with the caretaker female. By contrast, men (in this imagination) are associated with womanizing, earning the family wage, and overall, make the overwhelming decisions in the home. Rarely does the genealogy of “machismo” undermine this stereotype in the popular imagination and incite questions of the difference (im)migrants are forced to negotiate upon their entry into the United States (or a self-reflection of the form of patriarchy within the United States).³⁴ Critics have suggested that Felix’s sexuality does not subvert or contest existing patriarchal structures because of his patriarchal role in the family and because many of his sexual interactions with men come from exploiting his position as a factory manager or manipulating other power dynamics (Padilla 26; Sánchez 70).

While Felix’s sexuality continues to operate within this system of power that privileges the position of the “masculine” male, it nevertheless points to a less restrictive understanding of male sexuality within Mexico, including border areas, and contradicts the contention that the borderlands is only a space of sexual repression. Felix’s expressions and interpretations of his sexuality and sexual desires are mediated by the various domestic and public spheres he navigates with alternating masculine, feminine, and patriarchal behavior, and thus his character cannot be categorized using typical, binary understandings of sexuality (Padilla 2009). His unwavering authority as a factory manager, father, and husband can be viewed as evidence of his complicity with patriarchy and accepted masculine expectations that actually permit him to deviate from heterosexual practices within those same arenas (26). The character, thus, does not conform to either the sexually liberated or closeted character that is undergirded with representational significance and which calls for celebration or social awareness of the struggles of non-normative sexually identified people. I tend to agree with social welfare scholar Yolanda Padilla that the character’s adherence to hypermasculinity and patriarchy within his family structure in concert with his seemingly contradictory sexual desires reveals a critique of masculinity and power rather than one that focuses on traditional categories of identity. I too examine the network of power dynamics that enables Felix’s non-normative expression of sexuality; however, I contend that the space Felix traverses and habituates and the association of specific spaces with Felix’s ability to explore his sexuality is significant. The setting of the narrative and Felix’s movement across and within the landscape of the novel adds a spatial element to his expression and troubling of his masculinity and sexual desires. Felix shapes and manipulates the environment around him as the place itself presents him with opportunities to act upon his desires while maintaining his authority within it.

³³ Literary critic John Alba Cutler briefly points out the context for Felix’s sexual activities (2008).

³⁴ See novelist and scholar Ana Castillo’s “The Historical Roots of Machismo” (1994) for an alternative viewpoint on the origins of machismo.

Rather than relying on the binary of Mexican Catholicism on one side and American Protestantism on the other as the sole institutions that regulate sexuality, we begin to see how Islas's representation of the borderlands creates the possibility for sexual exploration within this third space. Reading Islas's borderlands and Felix's "queer tendencies" within the context of this system of sexuality undermines the perceived "white colonial heteronormativity of the border" (Pérez 124) and introduces a more complex understanding of the cultural influences that shape "border culture." Although Felix's sexuality continues to operate within a power dynamic that encourages patriarchy and exploitation, it nevertheless points to a non-normative sexuality that highlights the inadequacy of a hetero- and homosexual binary (Cutler 14).

To celebrate this non-normative representation, however, without considering Felix's eventual fate would overlook the warning embedded within the text of the material reality of living within the borderlands. Felix's death at the hands of a U.S. soldier functions to underscore the continued regulation of heteronormativity and patriarchy within the borderlands and ties the "hyper-masculinity, machismo, and homophobia" of the military to "the police, Border Patrol, and even Spanish *conquistadores*" (Hardin 234).³⁵ This long legacy of regulation hints at its colonial roots.³⁶ While the U.S. military is associated with "hyper-masculinity, machismo, and homophobia," it also relies heavily on homosocial bonding to build the camaraderie deemed necessary to produce cohesive military units. The emphasis on commonalities amongst soldiers is not unlike the function of "imagined communities" in the process of nation building in that differences are de-emphasized or deemed threatening to a fictionalized group identity (Anderson 1983). The tolerance of "abnormal" sexualities – despite the military's dependence on homosocial bonding – undermines the enforcement of a cohesive identity and threatens the tenets of the "hyper-masculinity" that undergird military culture.

That Felix's eventual murder comes at the hands of a U.S. military serviceman reflects the penetration of U.S. cultural norms into border areas and the role of the military in enforcing these norms. In this way, the soldier functions as the long arm of the military and a representative figure of the nation-state in his Foucauldian regulation of sexual identity. Felix's murder is an attempt to erase his sexual difference, and thus a means to police the sexual parameters of acceptable citizen-subjects. Further, "homosexuality is not only the opposite of masculinity, it is a corruption of it, an unnatural form that by virtue of its transgression of the binary male/female order poses a threat that must be contained or controlled" (Cantú 120). Felix's assertion of machismo despite his sexuality, and the established context for this "behavior," permits him some leniency on the part of his family. However, the U.S. soldier views Felix's "corruption of [masculinity]" as "unnatural" and "a threat that must be contained or controlled" through violence. Given the reliance on homosocial behavior and hyper-masculinity in the military as a basis for bonding, the parameters of acceptable "masculinity" must be tightly controlled, as the presence of homosexuality would disrupt this basis.³⁷

³⁵ See historian Eithné Luibhéid's *Entry Denied* (2002) for a detailed history of the role of immigration officials in the regulation of permissible sexualities.

³⁶ And yet, Hardin never explicitly names the role of colonialism/coloniality in the reinforcement of heteronormativity and patriarchy.

³⁷ The "corruption" of masculinity and its effect on male homosocial bonding within the military was used extensively in the discussions surrounding the implementation and eventual overturning of Clinton's "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" Policy that permitted the enlistment of gays and lesbians in the military so long

Further, the brutality of Felix's murder is such that he is barely recognizable to his own family and indicates that Felix's "transgression" went beyond his expression of queer tendencies. The detail in the text – that "there was no face," the "tooth...sticking out behind the left ear," the "insectlike" eyes, "mushy" head, "purple, bloated, and caved in at odd places" body, "one of the testicles was missing" – reveals the extent of the mutilation (Islas, *Rain God* 81). This demonstrates a heightened sense of fear and rage on the part of the white Southern soldier who perhaps is also hoping that the brutality of the murder will dispel any hints of sexual impropriety on his part given that he accepted Felix's ride home and weakly objected to Felix's not-to-subtle invitation to "park" (136-37). The soldier's means to not only eradicate Felix's difference, but also to establish his own heterosexuality, mirrors a process of abjection, with the soldier rejecting and expelling Felix from the soldier's possible realm of subjectivity and the nation itself (Kristeva, *Powers* 4). Felix's murder emphasizes the sexual transgression of his body as well as its racialized form (Cutler 13; Hardin 234). There is an important correlation between Felix's missing testicle and systemic "emasculat[i]on [that] was a sign of torture, abuse, and conquest" in African American lynchings of the South and the genocide of indigenous groups across the Americas (Hardin 234). Felix's brutal murder reminds the reader of the material reality of living as a queer man in the borderlands in that it shows how the queer racialized body is subject to physical and ideological violence. We learn later in the novel that the soldier goes without punishment, and the lack of justice for Felix and his family is part and parcel of the differential punishments doled out based on the ethnicity of the accused and his or her victim(s). The case against the soldier is chalked up to self-defense "understandably" by the district attorney, while the soldier is moved to another base (Islas, *Rain God* 87). Reconciling Felix and his sexual difference, as it was with lynchings and the mutilation of indigenous bodies during genocidal campaigns, is ultimately the extension of the desire for the obliteration of these bodies and to transform the "marginalized ethnic and sexual body" into nothingness with "no face" (81).

Felix's murder and furtive lifestyle can be seen as emphasizing the danger of the borderlands, and while the family's Catholicism and heteropatriarchy unarguably organized much of Felix's life, they also endowed Felix with the privilege of the sexual exploration extended to males that was discussed earlier. Though family members, most notably Miguel Grande and Felix's own wife Angie, suspect Felix's queer desires, they do not voice their concerns and judgment to Felix. Attempts to keep the circumstances of Felix's death from the public reinforce their desire to keep "family matters" private. However, it also indicates their acknowledgement that had Felix's sexual desires been made public, they would not be understood within the same context that fostered Felix's "secret" behavior for years. After Felix's death, Miguel Grande directs his anger to the person who killed his brother, but also to his brother: "Felix, you never thought about the rest of us" (Islas, *Rain God* 83). The omniscient narration makes it clear that while Miguel Grande did not necessarily approve of Felix's sexual interactions with men, Miguel Grande would ultimately overlook his behavior so long as it did not implicate "the rest of [them]." Angie, on the other hand, notes the closeness of her husband to their son JoEl and confesses to her priest the lack of intimacy with her husband prior to his death (123). However, she resigns herself to her life, stating "He's a good man...I have my children, my house, enough to eat. What more do I need?" and receives silence in response from the priest (123). In naming her "children," "house," and sustenance, Angie confirms that

as it was not discussed. It has also been deployed in discussions about the incorporation of women into active combat units.

although Felix does not fulfill her sexual needs, his participation in the culturally accepted and, most importantly, public displays of masculinity are enough for her. The priest's silence reinforces his complicity in the couple's sexless arrangement, and thus in Felix's activities outside the marriage, further underscoring the web of cultural institutions that enable and allow for Felix's sexual "experimental" behavior. Further, both the priest and Angie justify the denial of the same sexual needs permitted to Felix at the expense of his wife's, relegating her to the role of the suffering wife and sexless Madonna. The silence surrounding the circumstances of Felix's death is steeped in the same cultural acceptance of his queer activities and the recognition that his sexuality could not be made intelligible to cultural outsiders. Thus, to claim that silence undergirds sexuality in the borderlands denies the diversity of experience and epistemological frames of reference for sexuality on the border (Hardin 234).

Felix's experiences in life and in death reveal his negotiation with masculinity, sexuality, and the cultural pressures that limit and allow his sexual desire. The presence of these conflicting frames and narratives centers Felix and, ultimately, his mutilated body as "the site of border encounters," and his movement within the space of the borderlands mirrors his sexual exploration (Hernández 84). The reader is privy to the confrontation that eventually kills Felix, and which signifies a rejection of him as a citizen-subject, and thus of his queerness as antithetical to national discourses of belonging. Miguel also suffers bodily violence because of his queerness, though he does so due to disease rather than at the hands of another. However, this violence is tied to Miguel's own queer migratory journey.

Miguel Chico, Abjection, and Queer Complicity

Unlike his Uncle Felix who is able to explore and act upon his queer desires within his home, Miguel Chico suppresses his sexuality and moves to the San Francisco Bay Area, a growing site of a largely white queer subculture in the nation at the time. Miguel Chico's migration across the country reflects his navigation of the complicated structures of power within which he moves, with only two being his family and ethnicity. His physical movement not simply away from his family but also from the immediate vicinity of the border and the nebulous space of the borderlands depicts his subjective confusion through spatial displacement. Miguel Chico's migration from Del Sapto to San Francisco is emblematic of his process of self-exploration; yet, a complication arises which is reflected in his physiological problems. The "complication" of his racialization reveals the text's critique of the use of migration as a form of cultural escape. Further, Miguel's choice of the Bay Area, while seemingly appropriate given its queer population, does not become the sanctuary he sought, but rather one of the sites of (dis)location reflecting his ongoing process of subjectivity (Gorman-Murray, "Rethinking" 114).

In contrast to Felix, Miguel Chico's narrative reflects an exceedingly internalized struggle to come to terms with his queer and racialized identity. Reading Miguel Chico's story through the lens of Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection reveals that his physical mutilation is representative of the embodied form of his abjection and his attempts to remedy it through migration. Kristeva's psychoanalytic lens must also be racialized to understand how the character attempts to move from his state of abjection through the trope of migration, which the novel dismisses as a viable means to subjective finality. Jasbir Puar's theory of assemblages allows for such an examination – one that exposes the manner in which Miguel Chico deploys

migration as a form of cultural escape in an effort to express his queer sexual identity. Miguel's role as narrator further underscores how this process of self-discovery, migration, and abjection is enacted through the novel's form.

The Rain God begins with Miguel Chico in adulthood and the story jumps forward and backward in time, from his childhood in Del Sapto to his move to the West Coast to pursue his education. His story and perspective, thus organizes much of the text and the influence of his academic and culturally distant attitude colors the narrative. This is apparent with Miguel Chico's revelation that he views "people, including himself, as books" and "wanted to edit them, correct them, make them behave differently" (Islas, *Rain God* 26). Miguel's editing is based on his desire to view himself as always separate and exteriorized from others and his belief that his embellishments as narrator improve the story. Miguel confesses that he edits people and events so that his stories are "happier than their 'real' counterparts," thus calling into question the reliability of the portions of the story told from his perspective, and the jarring and circuitous appearance of the Miguel Chico character at non-sequential points of his life underscores further how the novel's structure embodies a non-linear process of subjectivity (26). Ultimately, it is Miguel Chico's admission that "he failed to take into account [other people's] separate realities, their differences to himself" that alerts the reader to this character's narcissistic point of view (26). His failure to recognize these "separate realities" and "differences" does not arise from his belief that he shares a connection with these people, but rather that he solely imagines them within his world, context, and reality. Miguel Chico's reconfigured tales and his removal and inclusion of himself in these tales—seemingly at a whim—is based in his desire to view himself as always separate and exteriorized from others.

Miguel Chico reflects on his relationship with his family from afar, both literally and figuratively. Halfway across the country in San Francisco, he recognizes that his connection to his grandmother lives on, despite her racist, classist, and patriarchal issues we learn about throughout the novel (Islas, *Rain God* 28). The imagery Miguel Chico draws upon to speak of his "survival" in the face of his childhood and family provides a material manifestation of his continual connection and separation: "And Mama Chona was still very much a part of him...perhaps he had survived—albeit in an altered form, like a plant onto which has been grafted an altogether different strain of which the smelly rose at his side...was only a symbol—perhaps he had survived to tell others about Mama Chona and people like Maria" (28). The "different strain" grafted to Miguel Chico and the "smelly rose" attached to his waist refer to the permanent stoma, or opening on his abdomen, from a colostomy procedure. This stoma allows feces to leave the body, and Miguel Chico's belief that his stoma and colostomy pouch symbolize his survival in "altered form" shows the difficulty he perceives in maintaining some form of cultural and racial identity similar to that of his family's. Further, it displays his need to transform his abjection aesthetically within his own mind. Indeed, the parallel Miguel Chico draws between his grandmother, Mama Chona, the matriarch of the family, and the stoma functions as a critique of Mama Chona's stereotypical conservative Mexican grandmother as someone who easily dismisses her indigenous blood (despite her dark skin), "lower-class" Mexicans, non-Catholics, queers, non-patriarchal families, and the uneducated. As literary critic Julie Minich states, "by placing the memory of Mama Chona, the person most instrumental in teaching him to reject his body, onto the part of the body toward which he feels the most shame, Islas creates a deep and haunting image of the physical, bodily impact of oppressive discourses" (Minich 702). The "psychic damage" Minich identifies is embedded in Miguel Chico's

relationship to his body, and the struggles with disease and discomfort he feels within his pre- and post-operative body are symbolic of his subjective journey. Moreover, the allusion to the stoma and thus the production and storage of feces illustrates Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection. Further, Miguel Chico's inclusion of Maria, his childhood domestica or nanny, into his cultural schema also serves to both reject and preserve Maria as a representation of the meek, religious, sympathy-inducing maternal figure.

Kristeva discusses abjection as an individual's reaction to the blurred distinction between the subject and object. She controversially refers to the image of the corpse as instrumental to the recognition of the object and the subject's materiality (*Powers* 4). Kristeva argues that individuals must abject, or reject a certain part of themselves, to construct an identity and move from the state of abjection to the "symbolic order," which includes linguistic communication and the acceptance of the rule of law. Thus, Kristeva's theory of abjection ultimately speaks to the construction of subjectivity through the expelling of particular aspects of the self.³⁸

Miguel Chico's abjection, or the recognition of himself as a subject in the face of the externalized other, becomes more apparent after his colostomy. His permanent stoma and pouch complete with his literal excrement serve as continual reminders of his (necessary) violent excretion. In this moment, following his migration from the desert in Del Sapó to San Francisco, the completion of his formal education, and his extrication from his family leads Miguel Chico to reflect on his survival "albeit in an altered form" so that he "could then go on to shape himself, if not completely free of [his family's] influence and distortions, at least with some knowledge of them" (*Islas, Rain God* 28). With his excrement in constant view, Miguel Chico should be reminded of the abject, and in his case, the "otherization" of his family in relation to himself. And, indeed, it does seem that he achieves the distance needed to view himself as separate from his family, and therefore, as an individual subject. His equation of his family with "knowledge" further emphasizes the distance at which he holds his past, his family and by extension, his culture (28). As an academic and a subject, his culture then becomes something to be held at arm's length and studied. Although he recognizes that he may never be "completely free," he believes he can objectively identify "their influence and distortions" and thus use that "knowledge" to adjust his behavior accordingly so as not to incorporate their expectations, and especially his grandmother's biases, into his sense of self.

³⁸ Kristeva specifically states that the individual must abject the maternal to enable this construction or transition. In Miguel Chico's case, Maria functions as a maternal figure he eventually externalizes from himself following her religious transformation, his father's disciplining of her after she proselytizes to Miguel Chico, and Miguel Chico's migration to San Francisco. Although Miguel Chico is able to extricate himself from the figure of Maria, he remains tied to his biological mother, Juanita. In fact, he openly shows his disdain for his father, Miguel Grande, for having an affair with Juanita's best friend while Miguel Chico attempts to counsel his father at his greatest moment of confusion surrounding the affair (*Islas, Rain God* 94). As a doctoral student living in San Francisco, he turns toward his books for an explanation for the resentment he harbors towards Miguel Grande, the deep love he feels for his mother, and Miguel Grande's jealousy over his son's relationship with Juanita: "upon learning of the Oedipus complex, Miguel Chico had savored the intuitive knowledge that his father was no rival for his mother's affections. It was clear to both mother and son that Miguel Grande at his most brutal could not break into their intricately woven web of feeling for each other" (94). Miguel Chico seeks "scholarly" justification for his feelings towards his mother and appears to enjoy his father's exteriority to the "intricately woven web of feeling" between Miguel Chico and his mother, which reflects his lack of desire to expel the maternal in an effort to construct his subjectivity.

However, the violent transformation Miguel Chico undergoes to recognize himself as a subject reminds him of the difficulty of doing so and is literally based in his body. The surgery itself and the process of digestion required in the production of his waste that is constantly at his side underscore the nature of abjection as a process. This is consistent with Kristeva's description of abjection as

an extremely strong feeling which is at once somatic and symbolic, and which is above all a revolt of the person against an external menace from which one has the impression that it is not only an external menace but that it may menace us from the inside. So it is a desire for separation, for becoming autonomous and also the feeling of impossibility of doing so. ("Interview" 135)

The "somatic" points to the embodied nature of this recognition, and, for Miguel Chico, it involves the literal excretion of the "menace...from the inside" in the form of his excrement. The permanent presence of the stoma and the waste at his side further illuminates the circularity of this process, as Miguel Chico cannot disconnect himself from the appliance that ensures his continued existence. He resents the presence of the appliance, saying "he had forgotten what it was like to be able to hold someone, naked, without having the plastic device between them," but he still cleans it with care (Islas, *Rain God* 25). Therefore, while Miguel Chico has a "desire for separation" from this machine, the stoma and his waste are constant reminders of the "impossibility" of completely removing himself from his family and culture despite his efforts to do so through education and his physical migration. Although Miguel Chico's "desire for separation, for becoming autonomous" persists, it cannot be satisfied no matter how far he travels from his hometown, family, and culture, and therefore, he lives in a constant state of flux – as abject. In fact, his immediate reaction following the surgery, even before he opens his eyes, is to realize that "[he] cannot escape from [his] body" (7).³⁹

Miguel emphasizes his self-imposed distance from his family throughout the text and repeatedly deems himself superior. He also admits that he "was the family analyst, interested in the past for psychological...reasons" who was interested in the motives behind peoples' behavior (Islas, *Rain God* 28). And though he distinguishes himself from Mama Chona in that he views people from an "earthly, rather than otherworldly, point of view," he later compares himself to a god when gardening (28). In naming himself the "family analyst" interested in the "psychological" motives behind behavior and identifying his point of view as "earthly," Miguel Chico again underscores his desire for objectivity; yet his comparison of himself to a god reiterates his desire to control his surroundings (28). Further, he repeats throughout the text that he is superior to his family in part because of his belief that he "was finding ways out of [cultural restrictions] through his university education" (91). By asserting his superiority and seeking to control situations, Miguel also reveals his desire to escape criticism of his queerness on the part of his family.

Above, I called attention to Miguel Chico's image of himself as an editor of people, who sees them as characters in his own life and thus re-creates "happier" stories using them as characters. This image does not simply emphasize his narcissism but also his desire for order and his self-perception as an "objective" narrator in the face of his perpetual confusion. His conviction of himself as an individual who is only remotely connected to his family and culture

³⁹ Literary critic Vivian Nun Halloran points out that Miguel Chico's connection to his "plastic device" invokes Donna Haraway's cyborg (98). However, I disagree with the implication that Miguel Chico becomes a kind of ethnic hybrid in this postmodern condition. I take up this argument later in the chapter.

is mediated by this need for order and stability in an environment away from the easy categories of “Mexican” and “white” in Del Sapo. Despite his judgment of Mama Chona’s various “-isms,” including sexism, racism, and classism, that she practiced to create weak distinctions between herself and low-class Mexicans and “Indians,” Miguel Chico also attempts to differentiate himself from his family and the people of Del Sapo as a whole. His need to create and emphasize these differences underscores the artificiality of categories of identification, such as race, ethnicity, and sexuality; yet, the violence he suffers and its permanent mark on his body highlight his inability to escape these categories and the structures of racialization and sexuality that organize his life and subjectivity. He has not yet discovered how to disentangle and reassemble the conflicts between the perceived cultural, gendered, sexual, intellectual, and ethnic requirements that his grandmother seeks to enforce.

Despite the physical pain and trauma Miguel Chico suffers, his status as abject demonstrates the possibilities of the process of abjection itself. This process forces Miguel Chico to face his ties to his family and culture, as menaces – yes – but also as people with valid stories, and not just characters in the story of his own life. His intermittent narration of these stories confirms that Miguel Chico’s (subjective) re-telling functions as another representation of the abject. While Miguel initially aims to control and edit his family’s story, he ultimately seeks to “make peace with his dead” (Islas, *Rain God* 160). With his fear now gone, Miguel vows to “prepare a feast for [his dead]” and “feed them words and make his candied skulls of paper” (160). In drawing from the Mexican *Día de los Muertos*, or Day of the Dead, imagery with his “feast...of candied skulls,” Miguel reveals that he has begun to come to terms with the cultural influences of his upbringing and can now “tell the family secrets” (160). The novel thus positions the subject in relation to history, culture, and society in a constant flux and negotiation that threatens the subject with constant abjection. In this novel, ethnicity and culture do not function as the ultimate factors that determine one’s existence, identity, or subjectivity. Instead, Miguel Chico resists these impositions and suffers both the violent consequences and reaps the benefits of the possibilities of his amorphous state. The products of his abjection include both his excrement *and* the salvation of his family’s history through story.

Miguel Chico’s narrative process is indicative of his journey to self-actualization; however Miguel is not able to distance himself completely from his family and culture, and he comes to realize the impossibility of doing so. Although I agree that Miguel Chico’s “narrative is able to achieve partial reconciliation and healing for the Angel family,” I hold that his mutilated body and his inability to act on his sexual desires prohibit him from being seen as “a transformative figure, a hybrid ethnic whose distance from a pure sense of ethnicity allows him to embrace separate identities simultaneously while prohibiting his ability to inhabit any one ethnic identity altogether” (Rice 164). While I have established that Miguel seeks to distance himself physically from his family, and thus from his culture and ethnicity, he does so in part to express his sexual desires. As was the case with Felix, it is impossible to disentangle Miguel Chico’s queerness from his racialized identity.⁴⁰

Miguel confronts challenges in his attempts to separate the expression of his sexuality from his racial, ethnic, and cultural identities, which is symbolized in his physical, psychological, and ideological migration from his family and Texas. In arguing that Miguel Chico is unable to

⁴⁰ I agree with literary critic David Rice’s basic premise that Miguel Chico struggles to negotiate “his own ethnic difference and separation” and thus, attempts to examine objectively the basis for his ethnic identity (164). However, this assumes that Miguel is able to disentangle his ethnicity from this sexuality.

“embrace separate identities simultaneously” (Rice 164), I draw upon Puar’s conceptualization of assemblages, which she distinguishes from intersectionality because the latter “presumes that components—race, class, gender, sexuality, nation, age, religion—are separable analytics and can thus be disassembled” (Puar 212). By contrast, “an assemblage is more attuned to interwoven forces that merge and dissipate time, space, and body against linearity, coherency, and permanency” (212). Puar’s concept of assemblages is a helpful tool in examining Miguel Chico’s failure to “separate” and “disassemble” his racialized identity from his queerness. An assemblage challenges the perception of “queerness exclusively as dissenting, resistant, and alternative, [and] it underscores contingency and complicity with dominant formations” (205). Miguel Chico attempts to disassociate from his culture and ethnicity by moving to the Bay Area to “come out,” thereby hinging his ability to express his queerness on a rejection of his ethnic background. However, the “complication” of his racialization disallows this and his choice of the Bay Area reflects queerness’s “complicity with dominant formations” and Miguel Chico’s desire to integrate himself within a co-opted subculture. His faith in education and in the power of knowledge reflects his effort to substitute the knowledge he gains through education for that received from his family. Therefore, as with the representation of migration as always already a “transgression,” which is undermined in Miguel Chico’s case in his inability to act upon his sexual desires, Puar’s assemblages acknowledge the “contingency” and “complicity [of queerness] with dominant formations.”

Miguel migrates away from Del Sapó initially to attend college and finds some safety in the distance he puts between himself and Del Sapó; further, his migration from Del Sapó is a precursor to Miguel Chico’s acknowledging his queerness to himself. The figures of his nanny Maria and his grandmother Mama Chona do not simply serve as representatives of the maternal but also as signifiers for culture, religion, and race. His fear, in particular, is directed at Mama Chona, whose mere photo inspires a fear from which he seeks to escape with physical and ideological distance. Miguel Chico considers this migration away from his home as a necessary step in working to “shape himself” in that it provides him with this distance (Islas, *Rain God* 28). His migration away from home and in search for a familiarity and comfort of another adheres to a linear understanding of the subjective process. However, his migration remains part of the process of his “becoming” rather than a final destination that enables him to completely achieve a (fictionalized) stabilized form of identity. His admission that he deems himself “superior” to his family and is like a “god” points to his inability to recognize the influence of his family and culture on his identity and thus indicates that he is still in the process of shaping himself (28, 91). The non-linear narrative confuses the reader in identifying where in the process Miguel stands. The confusion mirrors Miguel’s disorientation and the non-linear process of abjection. Therefore, although Miguel Chico’s migration is intimately tied to his identity, it is not representing a “once-and-for-all emergence from the rural ‘closet,’ and hence presenting [migration and identity formation] as teleological and ontologically final” (Gorman-Murray, “Rethinking” 106). In fact, Miguel Chico does not emerge from the rural closet in either *The Rain God* or *Migrant Souls*, and even in his “sanctuary” of the Bay Area, Miguel Chico continues to live with dis-ease as represented by his intestinal issues and connection with the desert of Del Sapó.

The significance of the Bay Area in the text and to the main character is always in relation to his “home,” which, despite his protests, remains integral to his subjectivity. To claim that “there is no erosion of the (hetero)sexual boundary” in Del Sapó (Hardin 228) and that “the

border/desert is not a space that permits homosexuality” (229) is undermined not only by his Uncle Felix’s culturally sanctioned queerness, but also Miguel Chico’s own complicated relationship to that place. Miguel admits that he requires isolation after visits to Del Sapo, and “to recover, to rid himself of the desert, he walked on the beach or in the fog,” thereby replacing memories of the dryness of the “desert” with the humidity of “the beach” or “fog” (Islas, *Rain God* 90). The dryness of Del Sapo is repeatedly commented upon throughout the text not only by Miguel Chico, but by multiple other characters as well. As such, the desert becomes associated with desolation and death, particularly as the latter befalls so many of the Angel family members throughout both novels. Therefore, Miguel Chico’s references to the fog and the beach serve as a sharp juxtaposition for the dry and stark images of the desert. However, his desire for the desert is also made apparent at the beginning of the novel when Miguel notes that prior to his operation “he grew thirstier every day, he longed to return to the desert of his childhood, not to the family but to the place” (5). Miguel’s longing for the dryness of the desert even “as he grew thirstier every day,” reveals his recognition at some level of his continued connection “to the place” of his birth and childhood. He longs for the desert not in spite of his thirst but *because* of his thirst for something that only that “place” can provide, which hints at Miguel Chico’s circuitous queer migration. Further, although the final line of the text – “he smelled like the desert after a rainstorm” – refers to his Uncle Felix, Miguel Chico’s grandmother mistakes Miguel for Felix, who has already died at this point in the novel (180). On his grandmother’s deathbed, Miguel stands in for Uncle Felix, also associated with water and rain, and smells like a place, or “the desert after a rainstorm.” In this moment, Uncle Felix has achieved something Miguel Chico has sought and has thirsted for in understanding his attachment to place and has the ability to bring a kind of regeneration, growth, and nurturing to the desert in the form of rain. Miguel’s thirst then can be understood as desiring some of the sexual freedom Felix was able to enjoy within the same space Miguel found repressive.

Miguel Chico’s continued attachment to place – an attachment he does not necessarily consider desirable – is indicative of the limits of his migration in that it does not bring him the emancipation from the structures, familial, cultural, and otherwise, that dictate his existence. Though he is able to achieve some distance from his family, the freedom he seeks in the Bay Area continues to elude him and is mediated by his inability to express his queer desires fully. Miguel’s colostomy and the permanent reminders in the form of a stoma and colostomy bag at his side prohibit him from engaging in sexual relations with another man without the colostomy bag physically separating them (Islas, *Rain God* 25). The presence of the “plastic device” and bag interrupts the intimacy Miguel is able to establish with his lovers. However, the plastic device also takes the place of Miguel’s anus, which is rendered useless both physiologically and sexually. Therefore, though Miguel’s migration enables him to explore his queerness, there are limits to his sexual activities. Miguel refers to his stoma, or “tip of gut” as a “symbol” of him surviving his family “albeit in altered form” (28). However, the same surgery that he views as a symbolic means to extricate or separate himself from his family will also dictate his sexual behavior for the rest of his life. His attempts to disassociate from his cultural and ethnic ties have a severe impact on his sexuality, which reflects the inseparable, “interwoven forces” of an assemblage (Puar 212).

Miguel Chico’s migration from Del Sapo to the Bay Area thus does not represent the final moment in Miguel’s subjective journey but rather signifies Miguel’s troubled relationship with his sexuality. It does not reflect the text’s “critique of the Texas border metaphor and posit

an urban, Californian alternative” (Hardin 220). To uplift the “urban” as the “alternative” to Del Sapó only serves to deny the possibilities present in the rural “Texas border,” and depict Miguel’s process as a linear one. However, though Miguel Chico feels as if he constantly lives under the surveillance of his family, he does not suffer the type of violence Felix does at the hands of the U.S. soldier. Miguel evades a violent societal rejection by migrating to California. In migrating to the Bay Area, Miguel bypasses this type of exclusion and instead integrates himself within a queer community that had begun to be readily co-opted into the nation through an emphasis on spectacle and “camp,” particularly in the Castro District (D’Emilio 1989). The establishment of queer bars and clubs and the significant queer population had begun to make San Francisco a destination for queer tourism, and a readily identifiable sub-culture that resisted impositions on sexuality but also simultaneously reinscribed that difference into the image of the nation. The incorporation of this subculture into the folds of the nation-state reaffirms Puar’s conceptualization of queer as not always “dissenting, resistant, and alternative” and “underscores [queerness’s] contingency and complicity with dominant formations” (Puar 205). Miguel’s choice to migrate to the Bay Area thus exemplifies this complicity while simultaneously underscoring his frustration and complicated relationship with his culture, ethnicity, and family.

Conclusion

In my readings, Miguel Chico’s and Felix’s queer migratory narratives and their outcomes diverge and come together at different moments in *The Rain God*. While their fates differ, both are still indelibly marked by the violence their queer and racialized bodies suffer. Their bodies are mutilated in death or altered in life to survive the violence brought upon them by both external and internalized arbiters of identity. Through the representation of this violence within and outside of the borderlands, Islas’s text both reveals a critique of this space and underscores the intimate connections that its residents have to place. The “stretching” of the borderlands, or the place where conflicting national narratives of culture and identity coalesce and collide, for both of these characters highlights Anzaldúa’s contention that this place is also a psychological space, and one that requires people to confront the various – and often contradicting – forces and registers that form individual identities. By tying the fates of Miguel Chico and Felix together and stressing Miguel’s complicity with dominant paradigms of sexual identity, *The Rain God* enacts an ethics of entangled intersectionality through its form that critiques the notion of identity as static, a product of negation, and capable of distillation into distinct categories of identity.

The next two chapters shift from the examination of subjectivity to the means by which novelistic forms reproduce the legal and extralegal discourses used to legitimate the surveillance of Latina/o immigrants and citizens. The previous chapter closes with the argument that the short stories excised from Tomás Rivera’s *...y no se lo trago la tierra* might have offered ways of de-centering the cultural nationalism that prevailed during the novel’s publication and thus fomented “the potential for substantive social change” through its representation of different “logics” (Ono and Sloop 14). In the chapter that follows, I extend this argument to the work of Salvador Plascencia, which also examines the migratory life of farm workers. Rivera and Plascencia’s styles vary greatly; yet, they both portray narratives of (im)migration, farm labor, and the relationship between migratory subjects and the nation. For Plascencia, this latter

relationship is exemplified in the incorporation of the immigrant writer as an authoritarian figure. Further, Plascencia's novel, despite its seemingly capricious overarching love story, utilizes fantasy undergirded with metafictional elements to underscore the complexities and contingencies of the immigrant experience. While Rivera's "The Harvest" also makes use of fantasy, it does not—like Plascencia's novel—combine fantasy with metafiction, a strategy that underscores an important difference between these two works in that *The People of Paper* refuses to offer a utopic alternative and "The Harvest" ultimately gestures towards this ideal. This refusal in Plascencia's work and the intimations and oblique gestures towards alternatives in Viramontes's *Their Dogs Came With Them* of my final chapter signal a skepticism of the mimetic realist novel and its ability to depict the multiplicity of social totalities.

Chapter Four:

Metafiction and the Paradox of Sovereignty in Salvador Plascencia's *The People of Paper*

In its representation of the fantastic, *The People of Paper* (2005) marks a continued engagement with magical realism, the growth and trajectory of which has been well documented in Latin American literature.⁴¹ The novel begins with the origin story of a woman made of paper, Merced de Papel, created by an origami surgeon, who also brought to life internal organs and cats – all from paper. Marching monks seeking to forget the location of their monastery where they once created people of paper; a Mexican town disintegrating into dust; mechanical tortoises, one of which tries to make its way to the U.S. and progressively brings Mexico and the U.S. together with the force of its legs; a saint who is also a luchador, or Mexican wrestler; a mentally disabled baby who contains the secrets of the universe and can see the future; and a Rita Hayworth character who is pelted with lettuce for denying her Mexican heritage—all create a world of fantasy in the novel. Although this world seems to provide the characters with the potential to alter their lives creatively, this potential is circumscribed explicitly by the authority of the author and the limits he places on the narrative.

Through a metafictional emphasis on the machinations of narrative and the fantastical story Plascencia struggles to write, *The People of Paper* allegorizes the experience of Mexican immigration and settlement, which has become a common narrative in Chicana/o literature, by literally materializing the sites of tension and rationale within national sovereignty that permit and extend the creation and surveillance of immigrants. At the diegetic level of narrative, the novel follows the emigration of undocumented Mexican farm workers who are watched from above by a Saturn-god character. Saturn is later revealed to be Plascencia, the author of the novel, who labors to write the characters and their story in the face of the characters' resistance to his direction. Saturn-cum-Plascencia institutes various techniques to create, control, surveil, and ultimately destroy the other characters in the novel that decide to question his capricious and arbitrary power. In this way, *The People of Paper* lays bare the rationale behind sovereignty, or the right to rule and govern a set territory. I demonstrate that Saturn's authority over the other characters and Plascencia's visible ordering of the novel as its author mirrors how the modern state is imbued with power in the name of national sovereignty. This metafictional element, where the making of the narrative is made apparent thus highlighting the artificiality of the novel, makes visible the paradox of sovereignty. The sovereign, or state, is imbued with power via the law and yet is able to suspend the rule of law, thus showing itself to be both structured by the law and capable of placing itself outside of it (Agamben 1998). The coexistence of Saturn attempting to control the characters from within the novel at the diegetic level and Plascencia writing the novel at the extradiegetic level parallels the paradox of sovereignty by highlighting the means by which Saturn is able to obtain authority in the novel due to Plascencia's creation of Saturn as a character in his novel. While normalizing a nation's boundaries can disguise sovereign power, thus limiting the grounds to question the sovereign's authority, power is emphasized and critiqued in *The People of Paper* through the figure of Saturn-cum-Plascencia.

Saturn-cum-Plascencia's sovereign power is mapped onto the novel's structure and typography, or how the text appears on the page, and the other characters' movement against this

⁴¹ See Alejo Carpentier, Amaryll Chanady, Scott Simpkins, etc. in the anthology *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community* (1995).

mapping reveals the limitations of conventional, territory-based citizenship. The emphasis on the U.S.-Mexico border as a site of Saturn's "raw power" in the text reiterates the narrative as territory, as well as Saturn's attempt at territoriality, or the emphasis on controlling the geographic boundaries (or borders) of the nation (and in this case, the novel) as a means to claim authority over its inhabitants. The characters work to subvert the imposition on their movement and character development by refusing to follow the generic conventions of the novel and changing the narrative's structure. By visually mapping the regional labor, economic, and social networks that these characters transnationally traverse, *The People of Paper* points out the fissures in territory-based notions of citizenship. With its multi-genre play and a formalistic tension felt throughout, *The People of Paper* struggles to represent the fractured and conflicting role of the sovereign state in contemporary society and the reinforcement of a territorially based notion of citizenship that the novel's characters consistently undermine and that runs counter to the experience and conditions of migrants in the world of the novel.

While metafiction and fantasy are not new, I shall argue that the undergirding of fantasy with metafictional elements in *The People of Paper* reveals the occlusion of sovereign power, the underlying tensions within the paradox of sovereignty, and the limitations of territorial sovereignty. In the latter half of the chapter, I will demonstrate the role of sovereign power in creating, reinforcing, and policing difference and inflicting physical and discursive violence in the selective surveillance of particular laboring, gendered, sexualized immigrants, such as the one-dimensional character of Merced de Papel. I shall end by reading the characters' call for war against the "commodification of sadness" as a critique not only of their repression and exploitation by Saturn as the author, but also of the commodification of their stories in novelistic form, the public consumption of their lives, and the reduction of their existence to their roles as (im)migrants, thus implicating the public discourse surrounding immigration. In critiquing their status as discursive constructs of the author, the characters highlight the limiting nature of these discursive frames. Therefore, the novel pushes for "logics that by definition challenge dominant ways of thinking and acting [that] create the potential for substantive social change" (Ono and Sloop 14).

In Chapter Two, I closed with the argument that the short stories edited out of Tomás Rivera's *...y no se lo trago la tierra* might have offered ways of de-centering the cultural nationalism that prevailed during its publication and thus fomented "the potential for substantive social change" through its representation of different "logics." In this chapter, I shall extend this argument to the work of Plascencia, which also examines the migratory life of farm workers. Rivera and Plascencia's styles vary greatly; yet, they both portray narratives of (im)migration, farm labor, and the relationship between the subject and the nation. For Plascencia, this latter relationship is exemplified in the incorporation of the immigrant writer as an authoritarian figure. Further, Plascencia's novel, despite its seemingly capricious overarching love story, utilizes fantasy undergirded with metafictional elements, like the inclusion of the author into the narrative via an atypical columnar structure and the characters' rebellion against the author, to underscore the complexities and contingencies of the immigrant experience. Ultimately, the form of the novel in its representation of sovereignty reveals the tension between the fictitiousness and actuality of sovereignty. While Rivera's "The Harvest" also makes use of fantasy, it does not—like Plascencia's novel—combine fantasy with metafiction, a strategy that underscores an

important difference between these two works in that *The People of Paper* refuses to offer a utopic alternative and “The Harvest” ultimately gestures towards this ideal.⁴²

Creating a World of Paper: Metafiction, Realism, and Discourse

The main character of the novel, Federico de la Fe, an undocumented migrant, feels an oppressive force relentlessly watching him in his home in Mexico. He feels mocked by this planet-god, Saturn, in the sky, who watches him as he dreams, as he pees in bed, when his wife leaves him because of his constant bed-wetting, and finally, when he decides to emigrate to the U.S. with his daughter, Little Merced, to work in the sweatshops of Los Angeles. Federico de la Fe grows increasingly angry with Saturn, who Federico surmises is also dictating his fate and who watches his most intimate moments, including his moments of extreme sadness he tries to burn away through self-mutilation. Federico and Little Merced settle in a small town outside of L.A. called El Monte where he organizes a small army out of a gang of flower pickers to wage a war against Saturn by hiding under lead and burning tires to block Saturn’s view of their lives from the sky. While Federico never learns Saturn’s true identity, the readers do when one character named Smiley tears through the southern California sky and finds himself inside the author’s, Salvador Plascencia’s, Pittsburg apartment. In addition to following – literally through the character-god, Saturn, who watches from above – the migration of the main characters, Federico de la Fe and Little Merced, from Mexico to the small town of El Montes at the diegetic level, Saturn, who we find out is Salvador Plascencia, also participates at another level of narration, or extradiegetic level, where he is preoccupied with winning back his ex-girlfriend Liz.

By revealing the artificiality of narrative via metafiction and blurring the lines between the levels of narrative, *The People of Paper* prompts the reader to view the entanglements between the fictional world and the outside discourses that order it, including its articulation of the role of Mexican immigrants in the nation and the place of the novel within the context of Chicana/o literature. This simultaneous engagement with the diegetic level of narrative and its accompanying, bared construction, or what literary critic Linda Hutcheon has called a metafictional paradox, disturbs any pretense of passive consumption (as cited in Harrison 45). Instead, the reader is in position to take a more active role in deciphering meaning from the novel’s thematic and formalistic contexts. Literary critic Ramón Saldívar (2011) states that although *The People of Paper* may be similar to other Chicano novels in that it highlights inequality, racial discrimination, and social justice, these traits are present with a significant difference in its mode of representation which is couched in the split between the narrative and reality (579). He examines the novelistic form of *The People of Paper* and ties it to a broader and emerging tradition he has identified as historical fantasy, or the literary outcome of re-thinking

⁴² As literary critic Kevin Cooney has noted, magical realism “proves ultimately inadequate as a form of resistance” in *The People of Paper* in that, despite the alternatives to reality it provides the characters, they are incapable of fully escaping “the first-world’s economic and technological encroachment” within the world of the novel (192). As I state here and demonstrate throughout this chapter, my focus on metafiction in the novel stems from my argument that Plascencia incorporates metafiction to limit purposely the fantastic possibilities enabled by magical realism, in which “magic” is to be taken as real.

the relationship between race, justice, and society (574).⁴³ For Saldívar, it is through the rupture between the Real and fictional world of the novel that “Plascencia’s novel formally situates fantasy and the fantastic centrally at the core of its formal project to demystify, in all sincerity, ideological fantasy, particularly the ideological fantasy that allows the use of justice as a perfect disguise for racial injustice” (582). While I agree that fantasy is central to the social critique embedded in the text, I argue that the melding of fantasy with metafiction creates an escalating tension that uncovers and pulls back the façade of the ideological fantasy of sovereignty that, in concert with a globalized economy, also represented in the novel, simultaneously creates and rejects Mexican immigrants. *The People of Paper* reveals the contradictions within sovereignty and its dependence and reinforcement of a territorially based notion of citizenship that is deployed at the expense of largely ethnic minorities, and specifically Mexican migrants in the world of the novel. The fractured form of the novel and the novel’s unclear ending point to literary theorist Georg Lukács’ contention that the realist novel conveys a sense of social totality not through mimesis but abstraction, which extends to the discursive construction and rejection of Mexican immigrants (1971).

The People of Paper explicitly reveals the machinations of narrative and holds up its bared construction for scrutiny, upending novelistic conventions and highlighting the contentiousness of experience. The novel includes Plascencia’s “actual” motives for writing it and effectively points to the materiality of the text by commenting on its price, source of financial support, and incorporation of cut outs and black boxes that “censor” the text and characters’ thoughts.⁴⁴ The novel’s self-awareness also underscores its engagement with conventions of the realist novel in particular. For literary critic Patricia Waugh, realism suppresses the conflict embodied within the representation of the Real; by contrast, metafiction reveals the illusion of representation (6). She argues that in realistic fiction, “the conflict of languages and voices is apparently resolved...through their subordination to the dominant ‘voice’ of the omniscient, godlike author” (6, 67). Plascencia incorporates this omniscience and goes so far as to include an actual god-character in the figure of Saturn that serves as a stand in for the author himself. He reveals the *ungodlike* characteristics of Saturn as well as those of the author who, at times, struggles to remember his characters, loses his omniscience, and is challenged by his characters in various ways.⁴⁵ The parody of the male omniscient author through the emblematic Saturn-god emphasizes and subverts the convention to reveal further the limitations of mimetic realism and provides the basis for the study of the tension between

⁴³ While I agree with Saldívar that race persists “as a key element of contemporary American social and cultural politics,” I am hesitant to use the frame of “postrace,” as the term itself can too easily diminish the continued importance of this construct in the contemporary moment and the history in which it is rooted (575).

⁴⁴ The cutouts of the first edition published by McSweeney become rudimentary scratched out text in the following editions.

⁴⁵ Plascencia’s inclusion of a conventional plot diagram, which the novel clearly does not follow, demonstrates further the novel’s “parody of an earlier literary norm or mode [that] unavoidably lays bare the relations of that norm to its original historical context, through its defamiliarizing contextualization within a historical present whose literary and social norms have shifted” (Waugh 66). While Waugh adheres to her poststructuralist reading of metafictional texts, I hold that *The People of Paper* parodies a mimetic realist novel, which does not account for the complexity of realism in all its forms.

representation, truth, and subjectivity.⁴⁶ Although I agree that as a metafictional text *The People of Paper* lays bare the inability of the novel to reproduce the social world mimetically, I contend that it remains a realist novel at the level of abstraction, rather than mimesis. Thus, the novel is simultaneously a metafictional text and a realist novel, and for Plascencia, this is necessarily so, as it is only through the representation of the fictional world of the novel and its accompanying bared construction that the novel is able to depict the conflict and contradictions within the discursive system of sovereignty and the application of sovereign power.⁴⁷

In addition to demonstrating the “artificiality” of the novel as form, *The People of Paper* lays bare the discourses of the world it proposes to represent, and in particular how power is occluded and rendered unquestionable in the novel and in questions about sovereignty. The novel pushes “readers to be suspicious and aware of those established codes, discourses and patterns, exuding power, control and authority” and to question “the pervasiveness of authority by signaling and dismantling the insidious control behind a narrator’s or an author’s authoritarian stance” (Vieira 584). Ultimately, in revealing “discourses and patterns, exuding power, control and authority” tied to its representation of the characters of Saturn-cum-Plascencia, *The People of Paper* reinforces the inherently ideological nature of literature that novelistic forms like mimetic realism can obfuscate. The novel focuses on questions of authority and power, and in particular, lays bare the occlusion of these discourses within novelistic form and in its social critique. Therefore, through metafiction, *The People of Paper* is able to reveal authorial control through the figure of Saturn and the author character and ultimately the means by which sovereign power and citizenship can be deflected to the unquestionable boundaries of the nation-state. The conflict between Saturn-cum-Plascencia and most of the other characters of the novel reflects the gap between the construction of sovereign power and the actual experience of it. I take up how this conflict is mapped onto the novel in the section that follows.

The Paradox of Sovereignty, Typography, and Territoriality

The People of Paper thus extends its deconstruction of authority and power beyond the authoritarian writer and realist fiction to the discourses that shape and structure the experience of the law. Plascencia’s “god of choice” Saturn is the Roman god of agriculture, which is appropriate given the novel’s focus on farm workers; however, Saturn has also been associated with the law, and in particular, its unwavering enforcement. I assert that in the character of

⁴⁶ While not the subject of this essay, in incorporating a Plascencia-like character, the novel explores further the question of “truth” and experience in the autobiography genre. See Silbergleid (2009).

⁴⁷ Literary critic Julie Levinson argues “Whereas the putatively realist work strives to be as mimetic as possible, pretending only to describe and record, and thereby disguising its arbitrariness and incompleteness, metafiction calls attention to these limitations, admitting that it creates and constructs experience as much as it reflects it... We are simultaneously caught up in the narrative experience and exposed to the ruses of that experience and its questionable correspondence to what it intends to signify” (159). *The People of Paper* examines this relationship between experience and representation and exposes “the ruses of... experience.” A cursory reading of the novel reveals immediately that it does not pretend “only to describe and record,” but rather that it exposes the contingency of experience and the discourses that order it.

Saturn, his constant surveillance of the other characters, and also in his fallibility, the novel lays bare the paradox of sovereignty and the rule of law that dictates the experience of sovereignty. For Plascencia, sovereignty is “the object forbidden... shut out by the doors of convention of systems of closure... that concerns [him]” and which he refuses to “represent... as existing within a safe artistic arena of unified, theological (Author as God) and teleological meaning” (Vieira 588). The novel’s representation of Saturn and the author himself, as fallible, un-unified, and as clearly controlling the narrative, reveals the novel not as “a safe artistic arena,” but rather one that allows for the exposure of discourses that order the experiential and reflect the “implied chaos, instability and the unorderedness [sic] of the outside world” (Vieira 586). I argue that the explicit revelation of Saturn as Sal, as in Salvador Plascencia, exposes the methods of author control and emphasizes a parallel between the illusions of a mimetic realist novel and a sovereign power that governs from both inside and outside the law in attempts to obscure the breadth of its power. However, the metafiction in the novel, paired with its fantastical elements, represents the complexity of the discourse of sovereignty as chaotic, and despite Saturn-cum-Plascencia’s power as narrator and author, he is unable to control fully the characters and plot of the novel. His simultaneous struggle with heartbreak further underscores the uneven and messy borders of the discursive system of sovereignty, as his heartbreak bleeds into the novel and his representation of power. As Plascencia’s power wanes in his romantic life in the extradiegetic level of narrative, it does the same when he appears in the diegetic level as Saturn. Therefore, *The People of Paper* unveils sovereignty not simply as existing within its own unified and uncomplicated system, but one that is shaped by context and its accompanying assumptions, just as the novel is not an isolated form.

In layering the character Saturn as a partial representation of the author inside of the narrative and Sal as a character of the author himself ordering the text from the outside, the novel maps the paradox of sovereignty onto the novel itself. Drawing from legal theorist Carl Schmitt, political philosopher Giorgio Agamben notes that the “implicit topology of the paradox of sovereignty... is the mechanism by which the sovereign, possessing the legal means to suspend the juridical order, places himself (legally) outside the law” (as cited in Minca 389; Agamben 1998). This topology allows for the sovereign to claim authority from the law, a structure seemingly outside of the sovereign’s complete control, but which also imbues the sovereign with power, while simultaneously permitting itself to exempt itself legally from the same legal system that creates it (Agamben 1998). In short, the paradox of sovereignty emphasizes the sovereign’s unlimited and inherent capabilities for the extension of its powers beyond its legal bounds.⁴⁸

The People of Paper reflects this topology through its *typography* and mapping of sovereign *authoritarian* power in the novel which reorganizes some of its pages atypically into multiple columns dedicated to multiple characters and literally separates the thoughts of Saturn-as-God and Saturn-as-author into different columnar structures. Saturn, as well as most of the other characters, is typically organized in these multiple columnar pages at the diegetic level, and Saturn-as-author usually occupies the singular columns in the novel. Thus, rather than render the authority of the author as absolute and unquestionable, just as “the sovereign must be obscured

⁴⁸ As Schmitt notes, the extension of sovereign power outside of its technical boundaries is typically deployed to limit the rights of a specific group of people and place them outside the legal protection of the state. However, political scientist Mark Salter (2008) argues that this state of exception, or when the sovereign demonstrates these capabilities, has become a permanent demonstration of the state’s power that is visibly heightened at border crossings.

and hidden from view” to naturalize its power, the novel reveals the explicit and messy creation of the novel where the author can be questioned and made to account for his desire to enforce his will, which readers ultimately find out is based in his capricious desire to win back his ex-girlfriend (Salter 367). The columnar structures remind the reader – and the characters – that the novel is a discursive construction in that it is an extension of Plascencia’s attempt to exert the control over his characters that he does not have over his ex-girlfriend. In relegating Saturn-cum-Plascencia to different columnar structures, the novel demonstrates explicitly its vulnerabilities as a form of representation and the seemingly totalizing assertion of power. By reinserting himself as a character, despite Saturn’s guise of control over the rebelling characters in the primary, or diegetic, level of narrative, Plascencia underscores the extent of author control and thus mirrors the topology of the paradox of sovereignty.

The People of Paper explores the demonstration of power in the context of Mexican immigration and U.S. citizenship, particularly the seemingly totalizing power of the state over the peoples within its borders, despite U.S. claims to liberal democratic ideals. The figure of Saturn-cum-Plascencia recenters sovereign power and reveals its reach thereby emphasizing the contingency of the rights guaranteed to citizens and non-citizens alike. The novel underscores the means by which U.S. history has been constructed as a “public collective” fantasy at the expense, and necessarily so, of minoritized groups (Saldivar 594). In focusing on how sovereign power is levied against undocumented immigrants, *The People of Paper* simultaneously reflects how the topology of sovereignty extends to all peoples subject to sovereign power. I examine the specific effects on individual characters later in the chapter and turn now to the depiction of Saturn.

As a representation of sovereign power, Saturn initially occupies a prominent role in the narrative, as his character physically occupies space on the page. Beginning in Chapter One, Saturn occupies his own column in the story, and depending on the other characters’ abilities to obscure their thoughts and actions following their declaration of war against Saturn, the column changes in size. The reader later learns Saturn is Salvador Plascencia, who is suffering from a broken heart, after one of the EMF members, Smiley, tears a hole in the sky and finds the author in such a heartbroken and pathetic state that he doesn’t remember his own character (Plascencia 103). His preoccupation with his romantic life also affects the size of Saturn’s column and his ability to move the narrative forward. The more distracted he becomes, the smaller his column, until he disappears from the page altogether (143).

Saturn performs his sovereign power and is felt, if not seen, by characters throughout the novel. He appears, first only as a “hovering force” and a “weight [in] the air” (Plascencia 26, 30). The characters in the novel begin to sense they are being watched, and Federico de la Fe who “for years...had sensed something in the sky mocking him,” leads the charge against Saturn (28). Following his emigration from Mexico to the U.S. with his daughter Little Merced, Federico de la Fe gathers the members of the El Monte Flores gang and warns them of Saturn’s power to dictate their fate and deny their right to “dignity through privacy and...to be unseen” (43, 47). This “hovering force” is for Federico de la Fe a source of constant mockery, indignity, and unjust exposure. Although the characters and the reader do not become aware that Saturn is Plascencia until the latter half of the novel, they are nevertheless subject to his presence and his surveillance.

Saturn’s presence is felt more so along the U.S.-Mexico border. Federico de la Fe notes that he “instantly felt a hovering force pressing down on him” once he arrived in the border town of Tijuana (Plascencia 26). The intensification of this “hovering force” which “felt heavier than

ever before” in Tijuana (28) marks the increased state surveillance of immigrants along the border and follows the contention of political scientist Mark Salter, who argues that the border renders the “functioning of raw power and the internal surveillant gaze of the state... more visible” (Salter 369). However, Federico de la Fe’s sense that Saturn had watched him while he was in Mexico “for years... as... he dreamed of dress factories” in Los Angeles demonstrates the transnational economic and migratory connections between the Mexican population and, in this case, the sweatshop manufacturing industry in L.A. (Plascencia 28). Saturn continues to be particularly watchful during Federico de la Fe and Merced’s journey: “[he] was aligned directly over Federico de la Fe, following him wherever he went, budging a half a space centimeter for every five hundred land miles de la Fe and Little Merced traveled” (30). Saturn’s presence as a planetary object underscores the reach of the U.S. as a sovereign power into other countries, as Saturn can be “aligned directly over Federico de la Fe, following him wherever he went” even while in Mexico. Saturn’s exact measurements reveal the precision with which he monitors their movements that seem to have been honed over time. Despite Saturn’s intense surveillance of de la Fe and Little Merced, it does not prevent them from entering the U.S.

Saturn’s “gaze” becomes “heavier” at the site where raw power is manifested on the border and becomes even heavier and actualized when another character crosses the border. Another undocumented Mexican immigrant, Julieta, must navigate “what was once a border marked only with a line of chalk” and which has been reinforced “with watchtowers and steel fences; cement barricades had been buried directly underneath the fences and no one could burrow to the other side. Stadium lights shone on the border all through the night until the early hours of the morning” (Plascencia 48). The extreme shift from “a line of chalk” to the “watchtowers,” “steel fences,” “cement barricades,” and “stadium lights” signifies the actualization of the enforcement of sovereignty, which was once only Saturn’s watchful eyes, into the physical barriers that make sovereign power more visible, and which in turn, reinforces the territoriality of sovereignty both ideologically and practically in how sovereignty is mapped and spatialized. In revealing the manifestation of sovereign power, *The People of Paper* lays bare the discourse that undergirds territorial sovereignty, in which the nation’s boundaries are considered natural and unquestionable (Nevins 10). The focus on territoriality “serves to obfuscate social relations between controller and the controlled by ascribing these relations to territory, and thus away from human agency” (146-47). The modern nation-state then becomes a mere intermediary rather than an identifiable site of power, and thus the law and the nation’s boundaries become normalized and considered impartial. The novel portrays sovereignty as it is often lauded in past and contemporary immigration discussions in its emphasis on control over land and, by extension, the authority to rule over it, determine the rights of its inhabitants and, at base, decide who is able to occupy it. My examination of sovereignty is focused on this territorial sovereignty and citizenship, which frames discussions about immigration in the U.S. and is alternatively portrayed in the novel as totalizing, yet contradictory to the actual experience of immigration.

This focus on territory is emphasized when Saturn reveals his preoccupation with numbers and science that translates into a mapping of land and measurement of movement across territory. Saturn’s precise movements in following Federico de la Fe and “budging a half a space centimeter for every five hundred land miles” demonstrates his profound preoccupation with following Federico and his precision in doing so (Plascencia 30). His exact measurements show that his surveillance is literally a science, particularly as he moves within “his orbit” (30).

Mechanical tortoises in a Tijuana junkyard communicate in a series of ones and zeros, including one who escapes and slowly brings Tijuana closer to the U.S.: “Official measures said San Diego was now half a mile closer to Los Angeles than the week before... every hour bringing El Monte and the border ten inches closer to each other” (156). Saturn then writes Cami, one of his lovers, and mails her a letter without specifying an address and “three weeks later, there was no reply—just an itemized bill from the Postmaster General requesting reimbursements for maps of cities and waterways, for wind-velocity meters” (171). The instances of the use of science and mathematics in the novel are extensive, and Saturn moving in his orbit to follow Federico, the mechanical tortoise “bringing El Monte and the border ten inches closer to each other,” and the Postmaster General poring over maps and wind-velocity meters all describe precise movement over terrain and territory *and* the desire to measure and map the land. The tortoise just below the border in Mexico that moves both countries closer together through the power of its hind legs serves to highlight the arbitrariness and fragility of boundaries that – in the novel, as well as in actuality – do not exist as “normal and unproblematic” (Nevins 10). Saturn-cum-Plascencia’s hand in each of these instances ties him specifically to this desire for scientific and quantifiable knowledge.

The structure of the novel itself echoes this focus on numbers, which indicates the modern nation-state’s role in the process of quantification. A glance at the table of contents contains a series of dots and columns and suggests that the organization of the novel follows some kind of numerical logic dependent on the number of characters and stories included within each chapter. The novel indicates a fixation with numbers and precision and counting the people, or characters, that appear in the chapter. Saturn’s interest in enumeration mimics the government’s use of statistics in the context of immigration, which scholars have argued has, in part, created the problem of illegal immigration through the wide dissemination of statistics (Inda 65; Andreas 2001). The gathering, analysis, and the publication of statistics engenders not only a sense of immediacy, but it also lends legitimacy through numbers to the severity of the issue of illegal immigration, particularly in the context of border detention statistics. *The People of Paper*’s emphasis on numbers differs greatly from Tomás Rivera’s short story, “Zoo Island,” analyzed above in Chapter Two. While both Rivera and Plascencia are concerned with the biopolitical incorporation of the Mexican farmworker into society, they differ in how they represent the possibilities enabled by quantification. “Zoo Island” emphasizes how a growing population can organize and demand the rights afforded to them as an established community, thus underscoring the potential for empowerment in population numbers. Plascencia’s novel, however, highlights the discursive and physical violence inflicted on immigrants through the use of numbers, most notably tied to the mapping of land and the underlying artificiality of boundaries.

The People of Paper’s emphasis on numbers, territory, and the mapping of and migration within territory underscores territorial sovereignty, as well as the limitations of this paradigm. As political theorist Ray Rocco (2004) points out, the association of territorial boundaries with the right to rule stemmed from the seventeenth-century to nineteenth-century European context (14). He underscores the continued influence of the Treaty of Westphalia of 1648, despite the specificity of its origins in seventeenth-century Europe, on modern society that ultimately does not coincide with the complicated movement of capital, people, and goods that a global economy requires. The “right to rule and governance” provides the foundation to justify controlling rights of citizenship. The fissures between these principles of territoriality, sovereignty, autonomy, and

legality and the nature of a global economy has led to “a disjunction between the forms of governance still based exclusively on territorially defined notions of sovereignty and the actual social space created by the organic sets of relationships that define the real boundaries of a particular community” (14, 17). This “actual social space” is paradoxically represented yet not contained within the world of *The People of Paper* and is exemplified in the surveillance of Federico, Little Merced (the father-daughter duo), and Julieta – all of whom are “followed” by the gaze of Saturn from their origins in Mexico and into California. These characters are incited to traverse geographic territory and the territory of the novel in part due to the opportunities enabled by a globalized economy (and Saturn himself), and contradictorily struggle to reach beyond the limitations imposed by Saturn’s sovereign power.

While Saturn claims that his actions are relatively passive, he ultimately justifies his intrusion and surveillance and asserts his authority. Although Federico de la Fe never learns that Saturn is also the author of the novel, Federico nevertheless comes to understand that the “controller” is Saturn and the other characters are being “controlled”: “Right now, as I say this, we are part of Saturn’s story. Saturn owns it. We are being listened to and watched... But if we fight we might be able to gain control, to shield ourselves and live our lives for ourselves” (Plascencia 53). While not all of the characters approve of Federico’s desire to “fight” to “gain control,” most recognize that Saturn is dictating their lives and join Federico’s war. The reader ultimately learns that Federico and the EMF are simply characters and their surveillance should not be unusual as Saturn is the writer, Salvador Plascencia. Saturn also admits his control, but argues that it was

never [his] intention to destroy any of them, if only they had not rebelled and just lived their lives without looking up. If they had not listened to Federico de la Fe and his crazed speeches, his claims of dignity through privacy and their right to be unseen—it was he who prompted the unneeded war. Saturn only wanted to watch, to see their story develop and unfold. (46-47)

Saturn claims that he “only wanted to watch,” and thus shifts the blame for his attempted destruction of them to the EMF’s own rebellion and lack of acquiescence in wanting to “shield [themselves] and live their lives for [themselves].” Therefore, although Saturn essentially presents himself as a passive observer who simply “wanted to... see [the EMF’s] story develop and unfold,” he dictates their lives and shows his power when these subjects who are supposed to be pliant and under control resist his attack on their “dignity through privacy and their right to be unseen.” The novel thus makes visible the “social relations between controller and the controlled by ascribing these relations to... human agency” through the embodiment of the sovereign power in the figure of the fallible Saturn-cum-Plascencia (Nevins 146-47).

Although Saturn feigns a more passive role in the war against the EMF, he eventually overtly admits to manipulating the flower-pickers and objects to their desire for rights. He reads about Napoleon and “about every naval, land, air, epistolary battle in the history of the Americas” (Plascencia 190) and blames his war against the EMF for his girlfriend leaving him as “it was impossible to be loyal to a war commander who was always away, busy examining maps and charts, lost in the strategies he tried to untangle from his brain” (112). Saturn’s intense study of “every... battle in the history of the Americas” as well as “maps and charts... [and] strategies” signal his overt attempts to fight against the EMF’s “unneeded war” (47). Saturn exerts his power over the narrative, which mirrors anti-citizenship technologies, or what anthropologist Jonathon Inda describes as the means by which the sovereign “seeks to shape human conduct

and achieve special ends not through the empowerment of individuals but through their incapacitation and containment” (Inda 127). Saturn “seeks to shape [the EMF’s] conduct,” of which Federico de la Fe is quite aware and draws a “map” for his group:

‘We are here right now. We are being pushed in this direction. Saturn wants to move us into the peaks and then into denouement. And we must stop before our lives are destroyed,’ Federico de la Fe said calmly, but with a seriousness that made Froggy and everybody else from EMF spit blood and rose petals. (43)

Although Federico does not know that Saturn is also the writer, Salvador, he references the literary term of “denouement” and draws a plot diagram that he argues marks the forced trajectory of their lives with its plot “peaks.” The “seriousness” of Federico’s warning and call for “a war against the fate that has been decided for us” as “part of Saturn’s story” (53) speaks to their sense of “incapacitation and containment” within the narrative that de la Fe believes, if it follows the progression Saturn desires, will end in their destruction (Inda 127). The EMF battles against Saturn’s anti-citizenship technologies that include his persistent monitoring of everyone, which Saturn struggles to maintain after the EMF’s declaration of war, and which is based on the Author-as-God convention that parallels the constant surveillance of undocumented immigrants.

The People of Paper’s emphasis on author control and the novel as a discursive system in the context of Mexican immigration lays bare the means by which state power can be occluded, and the complexities of the immigration issue can be shifted to discussions about personal responsibility rather than the inherent power and state structures that discursively create, monitor, and punish undocumented immigrants. Even though he is ultimately always in control, Saturn displaces this responsibility to the EMF, claiming that if “they had not rebelled and just lived their lives without looking up,” the war would not have been necessary (Plascencia 47). According to Saturn, the claims for “dignity through privacy” and the “right to be unseen” were not the EMF’s rights to take or claim as undocumented immigrants within a discourse of sovereignty that denies them as the status of subjects in the eyes of the law *while still being subject to it* and as characters in Saturn-cum-Plascencia’s book (46-47). Saturn implicitly places the characters within the topology of sovereignty in subordinate positions; while most of the EMF protests their containment within this paradigm, their analogous place as characters within a novel accentuates their co-dependent relationship with Saturn-cum-Plascencia.

The Metafictional Paradox: Escaping the Author and the Paradox of Sovereignty

Although Saturn and Federico claim that Saturn watches the EMF for entertainment’s sake, they both initially fail to recognize that they need one another. In depicting the characters as trapped or forced into certain plot progressions on the one hand and Saturn-cum-Plascencia struggling to maintain control of his own novel on the other, *The People of Paper* highlights the inescapable power of the author and sovereign power. It demonstrates that despite the characters’ attempts to escape, their possibilities will be dictated by a higher power that, regardless of its desire for complete power, necessarily requires subordinate subjects to survive and propagate a hierarchical system of control. Again, *The People of Paper* critiques the perception of the novel as a bounded form and brings to the fore its situational context that both creates and needs characters, or non-citizen subjects in the territorial sovereignty context.

In the novel, Saturn reveals how his war against the EMF is tied to his desire to appear powerful and the novel itself is a demonstration of this power. Saturn/Sal admits that he became engrossed in the war with the EMF “just so that [Liz] may look in my direction... To prove that I too am a colonizer, I too am powerful in those ways” (Plascencia 238). In his need to prove that he is “powerful,” Saturn demonstrates his willingness to “wipe out whole cultures, whole towns of imaginary flower people” (238). Although he identifies heartbreak as his primary motive, Saturn revels in his ability to destroy entire peoples and vows to “end the war, tumble all the columns, even if it meant his own destruction... Saturn was a giant, a titan amongst planets, but he was also a little man who stepped on a stool to open the top kitchen cupboards. Who stood on crates and imagined kissing her. But that is all war commanders are: little men with broken hearts” (238). Saturn has little regard for these “imaginary flower people” of the EMF and wants to prove to his ex, Liz, who left him for a white man, that he too can be “a colonizer.” So, while he resents that the war against the EMF takes him away from Liz, Saturn still needs this war and these flower people to affirm his masculinity and dignity in the face of romantic rejection. Saturn’s capricious affirmation of his power in response to his characters’ rebellion is analogous to the desire of sovereign power to maintain a perception of control while denying their absolute power, as Saturn does throughout the text. However, Saturn-cum-Plascencia recognizes that these flower people are in actuality from his own imagination, and thus, created by and shaped by him for the purpose of demonstrating his power. Saturn’s self-reflexivity of his discursive power and the inclusion of the EMF within the paradigm he constructed serve as a critique of the unwillingness to recognize the discursive creation of undocumented peoples.

Saturn’s longing for the *perception* of control closely imitates one of the means by which territorial sovereignty is reinforced. As I argued above, Saturn’s power is particularly visible on the border and becomes even more so when the character Julieta crosses in comparison to the chalk line border Federico de la Fe and Little Merced step over earlier in the novel. The shift to physical barriers along the border make sovereign power more visible, and reinforces the territoriality of sovereignty in signaling that it must be protected and policed. Just as geographer Joseph Nevins deemed the border enforcement project of Operation Gatekeeper in 1994 a form of reinforcement and protection of national sovereignty, Andreas (2001) also conjectures more broadly that such intensified efforts to protect the border are a response to a sense of disorder and thus a perceived affront to sovereignty. He concludes that the U.S.’s enhanced border enforcement strategies are futile in the age of globalization as borders must necessarily be porous to allow for the movement of goods and labor. Instead, policing the border, especially as these efforts are highly visible and monitored by the media, “has ultimately been less about achieving the stated instrumental goal of deterring illegal border crossers and more about politically crafting the image of the border and symbolically reaffirming the state’s territorial authority” (Andreas 85).⁴⁹ The “watchtowers and steel fences” and “cement barricades...buried directly underneath the fences” so that “no one could burrow to the other side” and “stadium lights” that

⁴⁹ Latino Studies scholar David Hernández makes a similar argument in regards to the detention of immigrants, stating that it “assists in creating an illusion of security. In this sense, the noncitizen is an instrument and constitutive factor of our security state, legitimizing its expansion, and drawing support from voters and popular opinion” (49). Indeed, detention and apprehension numbers of undocumented immigrants have been used historically both to support political claims that undocumented immigrant detection methods have been effective and alternatively to show a rise in undocumented immigrant crossings to justify budgetary increases for immigration-related agencies (Nevins 90).

stayed “on the border all through the night until the early hours of the morning” that Julieta must navigate around definitely reinforces the image of the border as a controlled and monitored boundary, particularly as Julieta does not come into contact with an actual person guarding the border (Plascencia 48). However, the watchtowers and stadium lights imply that someone is watching from afar, but Julieta, and thus the reader, does not know for sure whether someone is there. That Julieta is able to cross at this junction indicates that these barriers are a highly visible means to go about “symbolically reaffirming the state’s territorial authority” (Andreas 85). Thus, while Julieta confronts more barriers upon attempting to enter the U.S., she is still able to enter. The perception of control, regardless of the efficacy of border enforcement, is crucial to reinforcing the territorial sovereignty much like Saturn’s desire to prove his power to his ex-girlfriend through the visible display of his power over his characters and the writing of the novel.

While Saturn comes to the realization that he needs his characters, or at least the illusion of control over them, the novel also highlights the inherent contradiction of the characters’ desire to escape Saturn. Because Saturn is the creative manifestation of Salvador Plascencia, if the characters were to find a way to migrate out of the novel, they would technically cease to exist. Most of the characters fail to recognize that their existence in its most base form is tied to the presence of Saturn by way of Plascencia. It is in this intimate relationship between the characters and Saturn as a sovereign power that the novel levies its most obvious critique about the restrictive discourse of immigration: the characters, or immigrants, are created by Saturn, and their existence and reality is always viewed in relation to their subject position outside of legality. Their illegality, or their status as anti-prudential subjects, as Inda calls them, is rooted in their attempt to venture outside their status as subjects always in relation to their citizenship status or the government in general. In this way, the novel underscores a critique of citizenship in the characters’ belief that a life for them does exist outside of their relation to the government. In the final pages of the novel, Little Merced finally manages to obscure herself and her father long enough to escape the gaze of Saturn; they disappear from the text, and the novel ends. This ending comments on the difficulty of the possibility of subjects escaping the constructs of the paradigm of territorial sovereignty, and in effect, their status as non-citizens.

The difficulty arises not only in the ability to escape the author, but also in the conflicts that surface when the nation-state becomes a site of unity. As the EMF is engaged in a war against Saturn, one of its members, Smiley, secretly contests this war and expresses his desire for Saturn to watch over them (Plascencia 87). While Federico de la Fe claims that they must wage this war “if [they] are to be free and sovereign people, free from the tyranny of Saturn,” Smiley wonders “was Saturn really so ominous and threatening? Could he not be protecting us?” (95). Federico’s claims clearly reveal his desire to disaggregate from Saturn and be a “sovereign people,” thus denying Saturn’s attempts to consolidate all of the EMF under his rule and guise. However, Smiley does not understand why the EMF fears Saturn, and instead, questions whether Saturn could not instead be offering them protection. As the EMF hides under lead, Smiley stays outside and exposes himself to Saturn “hopeful that perhaps Saturn would look down and notice that nude wunderkind of botany and mathematics” (Plascencia 152, 169). Another minor character, Subcomandante Sandra says of Smiley: “[he] was one of us...but unlike us he did not want a quiet and private existence. Smiley wanted some form of celebrity, even if it came from simply lying naked in his bed” (185). Sandra equates Smiley’s desire for recognition from Saturn to his aspiration for “celebrity,” because she cannot understand how Smiley could be aware of

Saturn's control over them and yet not desire privacy and freedom from Saturn. His penchant for nudity underscores his desperation for Saturn's acknowledgment.

Furthermore, Federico and Smiley have conflicting ideas about what the outcome of this war will be. Federico imagines that if the EMF wins, they will be free. Smiley, however, wishes to join Saturn and knows "that the defeat of Saturn would bring our own end, that everything would conclude with its crash. But [he] was not worried about the galaxy and the fall of its satellites. [He] thought of [his] own existence, of [his] own place in this novel" (Plascencia 101). Smiley is the only member of the EMF that considers that the destruction of their creator, the writer of their story would, in effect, result in their disappearance from the novel. Although the EMF is aware that Saturn is narrating their story, they do not imagine that they too can be destroyed along with the universe in which they live and which is shaped ultimately by Saturn. Smiley considers this possibility and is concerned with "[his] own existence, of [his] own place in this novel," and thus opts for his self-preservation. And thus, as the EMF hides under lead to evade Saturn and "under the uncovered sky, say nothing, and think only inconsequential things and in a jumbled logic," Smiley seeks out Saturn purposely (95). Smiley tears a hole in the sky, climbs into Saturn's apartment, hopes for Saturn's recognition, and is devastated when Saturn does not remember one of his "minor characters" (103-05). In searching for recognition by Saturn, Smiley mirrors the desire by subjects to find a basis for inclusion and comfort from a paradigm that ultimately controls their life chances.

Smiley continues searching for this recognition and is not the only character to recognize the possible destruction of himself or herself along with Saturn if the EMF is successful in their war. The EMF encounters similar resistance to joining their war when they venture out to recruit more people to their cause. In going door-to-door, they hear the accusation, "'You want to destroy the only thing that is holding us together'" (Plascencia 189). And thus, while Smiley seeks individual recognition from Saturn and ultimately separates himself from the EMF, others in the story identify Saturn as a basis for commonality. Federico de la Fe and the EMF criticize Saturn for his surveillance and methods of control; yet, they do not consider how Saturn shapes their community by confining them within the same boundaries, therefore *creating* a people that share the same source and form of governance, and thus who only exist within the confines of his novel and within the paradox of sovereignty as subjects denied political agency. Merced de Papel seems to be one of the few characters who moves through the novel with little surveillance from Saturn; however, her fate underscores an inherent tension in the novel borne out of the co-dependent relationship between Saturn-cum-Plascencia and his characters and reveals the discursive violence inflicted on undocumented immigrants.

Embodying the Sexualized and Gendered Non-citizen: Merced de Papel

Merced de Papel embodies the gap between territorial sovereignty and "actual social space" that peoples occupy and reflects the extension of sovereign power into the biopolitical. Also an undocumented immigrant from Mexico, Merced de Papel is a woman constructed completely of paper by an origami surgeon, who leaves her maker as he succumbs to exhaustion and paper cuts, crosses into the U.S. from Mexico, keeps a string of ex-lovers who identify one another by their cut tongues from performing cunnilingus, and is ultimately "killed" in a car crash. The character of Merced de Papel is in and of itself incredibly fantastic. Her existence and

her personal upkeep of removing soggy paper and replacing it with fresh newspaper reinforce the near impossibility of her character. Her “death,” however, explicitly represents the limitations of her citizenship and her role within her prescribed fate. Merced de Papel’s death in a car crash is as inconsequential and unceremonious as her “birth”:

The cleaning crew came, sprayed fire retardant over the two vehicles, and then scraped away shreds of wet paper that clung to the shattered windshield and hood, some of the pulp falling to the asphalt and washed into the gutters by rainwater. As with all people made of paper, there was no official record of Merced de Papel’s death, no death certificate or funeral announcement; even the accident report refused to acknowledge her. (197-98)

Merced de Papel, also an undocumented immigrant, is simply “scraped away” and “washed into the gutters.” Her life is of so little value that “the accident report refused to acknowledge her” and just as she has no birth certificate, “there was no official record of [her] death.” Most of Merced de Papel is flushed “into the anonymity of the gutters,” while the rest remains on the hood of her car (203). Merced herself is aware of the impossibility of her life: “Her history was on the lips of her lovers, the scars that parted their mouths. But that was the history of Merced de Papel the lover, the loved one, the history of the pain of touching her. Merced de Papel was cautious of a legacy left in scar tissue, and for this reason she kept her own account, written on the scraps that she shed” (198). Ironically, while she is constructed out of paper, Merced de Papel’s life and death are undocumented and the only record of “her history was on the lips of her lovers.” However, this history only points to her life as a “lover [and] the loved one,” and she recognizes that “a legacy left in scar tissue” only touches upon a particular aspect of her life. Therefore, Merced de Papel decides to keep her own record of her life. Rather than leaving this account behind though, she writes it “on the scraps that she shed” and changes regularly (205). These scraps and Merced herself are flushed “into the anonymity of the gutters” (205). The scars of her lover’s tongues contain the figurative one-dimensional legacy that remains of Merced de Papel.

Merced de Papel’s legacy is intimately tied to that of Federico de la Fe and Little Merced. Although Merced’s life remains obscure beyond her experiences with her lovers, its intersection with the lives of Federico de la Fe and Little Merced, particularly as they travel in a bus north toward the Tijuana border, signals how their circumstances are intertwined as undocumented peoples (Plascencia 25). Merced de Papel does not appear to be emigrating to the U.S. in search of work. Instead, she makes her way to Los Angeles because “she had heard that [it] was the last refuge for those who had lost their civilization” (25). Her perception of L.A. as a “refuge” for people like her coincides with L.A.’s preeminence as migration destination for Mexicans.⁵⁰ Merced de Papel’s and Federico de la Fe and Little Merced’s initial choice to migrate to L.A. emphasizes the real-life trend of Mexican immigration to Los Angeles in the latter part of the twentieth century, and the naming of Merced de Papel by Little Merced, as well as the fact that

⁵⁰ As scholars like sociologist Douglas Massey (2002) and sociologist Saskia Sassen (1992) have shown, capital penetration in Mexico has contributed to migration streams into the U.S., and particularly southern California due to changes like deindustrialization in the automobile, tire, and steel industries; a reliance on subcontracting; the informalization and feminization of labor; and the growth of the service industry in the 1970s and 80s which increasingly accommodated and drew immigrants into low-wage jobs. See sociologist Kristine Zentgraf (2001) and sociologist Manuel Pastor (2001) for an in-depth analysis of these economic changes and the role of immigrants in the L.A. economy in the 1980s and 90s.

they share part of the journey to the U.S., links the fates and circumstances of these three characters.

Merced de Papel's one-dimensional legacy and her three-dimensional body constructed out of one-dimensional paper point to the limitations of her station as an undocumented immigrant, the failings of notions of citizenship based on territoriality and sovereignty, and her connections to Federico and Little Merced confirm their inclusion within the same paradigm. The disappearing of Merced after her death save for scars on her lover's tongues emphasizes how "a one-dimensional conception of citizenship fundamentally obscures its real political nature because it is incapable of capturing contextual figurations that enable its essentially regulative function of controlling and containing societal membership" (Rocco 13). The character of Merced de Papel personifies the inability of "a one-dimensional conception of citizenship" to capture the complexities of the various social, civic, political, and cultural ways peoples participate in the practice of citizenship. Her one-dimensional sex-specific legacy fails to capture the complexity of her life, and the fragility of her construction out of paper emphasizes both the importance and banality of papers, and in particular, the inadequacy of a citizenship based on legality and territorial sovereignty.

The simultaneous inadequacy and importance of paper in the case of Merced de Papel and the other characters in the novel becomes clearer when Ralph and Elisa Landin, fictionalized financial benefactors, comment on their examination of Saturn's war via field reports and maps. They state: "But that was on paper. And if we had learned anything from this story it was to be cautious of paper—to be mindful of its fragile construction and sharp edges, but mostly to be cautious of what is written on it" (Plascencia 219). The Landins cite the inadequacy of only examining the field reports and "the path of Saturn over maps that illustrated the topography of land" and state "but that was on paper" indicating that the study of these various papers are "incapable of capturing" the complexity of Saturn's war (219). There is an underlying implication that they cannot trust the representation of Saturn's war on paper in that it reflects a unilateral representation of this war. In the same way, the "fragile construction [of Merced de Papel] and [her] sharp edges" that cut her lovers' tongues mimics the enforcement of a legally and territorially based conception of citizenship that does not adequately reflect the actual experience of citizenship in its civic, social, and cultural dimensions and how citizenship has changed over time. And yet, the "sharp edges" of citizenship papers connote danger and remind the reader of how this restrictive notion of citizenship manages to exclude certain populations that are simultaneously enticed to participate in the economy.⁵¹ The fragility of Merced de Papel and her flushing away into "anonymity," demonstrates the banality of papers; however, her unceremonious death signals the inherent contradiction of extolling this banality. The Landins' warning "to be cautious of what is written on [paper]" emphasizes further the inadequacy of citizenship papers in defining and describing how peoples operate within their environment.

Merced de Papel's literal and physical construction reinforces the contention that undocumented immigrants are willfully *made* and not simply produced as a consequence of their unlawful crossing of the border.⁵² In various ways, Merced de Papel embodies the ideal subject.

⁵¹ See historian Evelyn Nakano Glenn (2002) for an in-depth discussion of the historically contingent nature of citizenship and the differential policing of peoples of color and women of color.

⁵² See anthropologist Nicholas De Genova (2002, 2004), anthropologist Jonathon Inda (2006), and historian Mae Ngai (2004). De Genova, in particular, focuses on the construction of "the illegal" in the public and legal imagination.

She is easily constructed, detectable, disposable, and incapable of reproduction, although she is still a sexual object. Her disintegration in the rain marks the ease of her disposability. Her death seems inevitable and is indicative of “the protracted subjection of life as an immigrant laborer” (Rosas 404). This disposability symbolizes the manner in which undocumented immigrants are subject to legal and extralegal means of control and surveillance. Her existence is literally less than human, as she is made of paper, and she is worn down daily, partly by her sexual encounters and by her exposure to the hardships of everyday life. Merced de Papel’s life and death capture “the daily evaluations of the cumulative effects of numerous, historically configured, ideological processes that dehumanize a population to the point that state violence, merciless disposability, and other forms of population management appear appropriate or inevitable” (405). Merced’s “policeability,” or the various means by which the state is able to exact control over immigrants and their bodies, is acute (Rosas 404-05). Her constant changing of her paper “never allowed history to accumulate, her skin changing with the news of the world” (Plascencia 164). Although Merced did not allow “history to accumulate,” she is indelibly marked by the layers upon layers of history and news that have at one time made her. Merced’s layering and changing of her paper that is supposed to counteract and repair the daily toll on her body mirrors the “cumulative effects of numerous, historically configured, ideological processes that dehumanize a population” (Rosas 405).

Merced de Papel’s dehumanization is continuous throughout the text and to the time of her death, and it becomes apparent that her construction as a literal person of paper is but one of the ways she is demeaned. One of her lovers makes a parallel between her “fragility” and his Mexican hometown, which is physically “disintegrating” due to a disease, and thus he decides that he must distance himself from her because of “the pestilence of decay that [she] might bring” (Plascencia 76). This equation between Merced de Papel and the disease that is turning Mexico into a land of dust demonstrates not only Merced’s degradation but identifies her origins in Mexico as the reason for Ramon’s dehumanization of her. Her lover fears that she may bring the same plague to which their country is slowly succumbing. Merced de Papel also conjures nostalgia for the past for Ramon: “Merced de Papel was a way to return home without leaving the comforts of central air conditioning and reclining living room chairs” (75). And thus, perhaps as Cooney claims, “Merced de Papel represents the magical realist characteristics of a Mexican culture that is passing away” (Cooney 208). Cooney notes, it is the “indigenous material” like “mesquite, metal...[and] adobe” that is disintegrating in Ramon’s hometown of El Derramadero, and the weaker and toxic plastic replaces natural materials (208). He contends that the destruction of rural El Derramadero, and thus of Merced de Papel, represents the effects of colonization and technological advancement. While I agree with his contention, and contend that Ramon’s nostalgia facilitates his fetishization of Merced, I point out that this disintegration also reflects the inherent contradictions in the “technological advancements” and foreign capital penetration in Mexico that was supposedly intended to improve employment opportunities and the quality of life for Mexicans, and which ultimately created another impetus for emigration. This contradiction lies in the passage of policies that eased the transfer of foreign capital into Mexico alternatively creating the ideal conditions for immigrant employment in southern California, and at the same time, fostered an increasingly more vitriolic and exclusive immigration rhetoric. Therefore, while U.S. capital was moving relatively freely into Mexico and also reaching a certain level of concentration in the Los Angeles area with a particular bolstering

effect on the immigrant population, the international movement of Mexican people was simultaneously drawing calls for further restrictions.

Ramon's fear of this "pestilence" spreading from Mexico reinforces the cultural arguments that abounded during the 1980s and, particularly, 1990s against Mexican immigration. As various scholars have shown, anti-immigration rhetoric has often drawn from discourses of disease, thus describing immigration not unlike a "disease [that] spread from the mountain town of El Derramadero" (Plascencia 75).⁵³ A discourse of disease was deployed to describe the undocumented immigrant "invasion" by some of the public, government officials, and the media, who either described these immigrants as carrying disease or infesting the U.S. with their presence. The plague Ramon fears from Merced de Papel highlights the possible effects of unfettered immigration with one effect being the cultural disintegration of "American values" (76).⁵⁴

Perhaps the most potent fear associated with this potential cultural decay was that which featured undocumented (and documented) Latina women. More specifically, Latina immigrant women's fertility was framed and targeted as a potential impetus for increasing the burden on state social services during the early to mid-1990s. This fear is particularly evident in the discourse surrounding the passage of Proposition 187 in 1994 California, where Mexican women—and Latinas in general, who were collapsed into the category of Mexican—were seen as breeders and as capable of inciting a population boom the recession-mired state of California could not afford (Ono and Sloop 39).⁵⁵ The Merced de Papel character reveals how women's

⁵³ See political scientist Robin Dale Jacobson (2008), historian Natalia Molina (2006), rhetoric scholars Kent Ono and John Sloop (2002), and linguist Otto Santa Ana (2002). Ono and Sloop note that opponents of Proposition 187 used a fear of disease to encourage people to vote against the proposition, arguing that if immigrants did not have access to health care, they would pose a health risk (28-34, 75-77). One opponent went so far as to say that Prop 187 should be called the "Communicable Disease Act of 1994" (118). Although these opponents fought for the defeat of the Proposition, they still framed immigrants as carriers of disease, and therefore as harmful to public health.

⁵⁴ Anthropologist Samuel Huntington led the charge that Latina/o immigrants were damaging core American values in the 1990s into the 2000s, most notably with the publication of his *Who Are We? The Challenges to America's National Identity* in 2004. In the media, figures like Lou Dobbs, Glenn Beck, and Bill O'Reilly centered the topic of immigration on their news commentary television and radio shows and often tied immigration to criminality, disease, and over-population. Although some of these figures, including Dobbs and O'Reilly, often cited the legality of the issue as the basis for their opposition to undocumented immigration, they all collapsed the problematic issues in this community within a cultural deficiency model. Huntington outright identified the growing Latina/o population in the U.S. as a threat to American values and cited their failure to assimilate as the means by which they undermined the white, Anglo, and Protestant foundations of the U.S.: "the single most immediate and most serious challenge to America's traditional identity comes from the immense and continuing immigration from Latin America, especially from Mexico, and the fertility rates of these immigrants compared to black and white American natives" (Huntington, "The Hispanic Challenge" 32).

⁵⁵ While the "immigrant problem" became a national one, it became part of the public discourse in California, which was suffering an economic recession in the early 1990s. Governor Pete Wilson's now infamous open letter to President Clinton asking for the federal subsidization of the state's costs on its immigrant residents bolstered the charge that the effects of the economic recession were compounded by the state's redirection of funds towards the immigrant issue. However, while Proposition 187 was ultimately defeated in the courts after its passage, its effects were felt in lasting ways. The perception that undocumented immigrants took advantage of "welfare" was cemented by the incorporation of the spirit of

bodies function as a critical site of political, social, and cultural discourse. The fate of Merced reveals the violence done to women's bodies in the process. Merced's slow disintegration highlights her dehumanization, as does her inability to reproduce. She is physically incapable of reproducing, and as a Mexican undocumented immigrant, this is ideal. And yet, she is inevitably worn down and feels the violence of living as an immigrant woman in a place that refuses her humanity while simultaneously exploiting her as a sexual object.

Together with the novel's fictionalized benefactors' conclusion to be cautious of what is written on paper (Plascencia 219) and the original dedication to Liz, which reads "To Liz: who taught me that we are all of paper," to focus on the characters are subjects in the novel requires an examination of the circumscribed nature of representation *and* the analogous "incompleteness" of the incorporation of the subject, citizenship notwithstanding, into the biological-territorial body within the topology of sovereignty (Agamben 1998).⁵⁶ The contradictions embodied by Merced de Papel and the violence she experiences demonstrates the limiting nature of a citizenship defined by the discourses of territoriality and legality. Merced the Papel's inability to escape her body literally made of paper marks the circumscribed nature of her existence solely within these paradigms. While Merced de Papel is unable to escape these limitations, the EMF's protests throughout the novel indicate their desire to reframe their relationship to Saturn-cum-Plascencia, the novel, and by extension, the discourses that define them solely as immigrants and characters within a novel. Although the EMF members are not literally made of paper, they also exist only as discursive constructs of the author, and yet, they repeatedly seek to redefine their place within the discourses that shape their lives and the reality to which they are confined.

Waging War Against the Commodification of Sadness and Story

The reduction of Merced de Papel, Federico de la Fe, and Little Merced to characters simply within Saturn's story by way of his surveillance and narration incites Federico's declaration of war against Saturn-cum-the author. Ultimately, this war against the "commodification of sadness" is a critique not only of their repression and exploitation by Saturn as the author, but also the commodification of their and other characters' stories in novelistic form, the public consumption of their lives, and the limitation of their existence solely in relation to Saturn. The EMF wages their "war for volition and against the commodification of sadness" as a means to retain control of their fates and ultimately to challenge how they are circumscribed as subjects within the discourses of sovereignty and citizenship (Plascencia 53). At both levels of narration, the characters implicate the reader and turn their anger towards the reader of the novel,

Prop 187 into the 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act, and the criminalization of immigrants came in the form of the Illegal Immigration Reform and Control Act of the same year.

⁵⁶ While this "incomplete" incorporation of the subject into the biological-territorial body is the basis of Agamben's notion of the state of exception, in that this incomplete incorporation allows for the exception, this issue has become particularly relevant to the immigrant community, as some in Congress have suggested revamping the 14th amendment that extends citizenship to all those born in the U.S. and its territories. Restricting the 14th amendment would outright place these U.S. born, non-citizens in a permanent and legal state of exception.

thus broadening the scope of responsibility for their exploitation beyond the author. In the following, I draw primarily from rhetoric scholars Kent Ono and John Sloop and linguists George Lakoff and Sam Ferguson and their discussions of the rhetorical framing of immigration to examine how the novel engages with this critique of immigrant rights rhetoric, primarily the frames of commodification/labor, legality, and morality. In critiquing these frames, the novel pushes for “logics that by definition challenge dominant ways of thinking and acting [that] create the potential for substantive social change” (Ono and Sloop 14). In the world of the novel, this social change is reflected directly on the structure of the novel, and the characters repeatedly seek to undermine the author’s authority in rejecting the discursive frames that confine them merely to characters within Saturn’s novel.

Beyond critiquing Saturn’s methods of control, the characters begin to implicate the commodification of their stories and the novel itself. As the EMF wages war against Saturn throughout the novel for confining them within the “conventions of story,” another character at the extradiegetic level criticizes Saturn for *selling* his story (Plascencia 217). Sal’s ex-girlfriend Liz denies him the excuse and satisfaction of claiming that the book is all for her, saying

But this is a novel—it is no longer between just you and me. You have involved too many people....So I have moved house and replaced you with a white boy, but that is nothing compared to what you have done, to what you have sold. In a neat pile of paper you have offered up not only your hometown, EMF, and Federico de la Fe, but also me, your grandparents and generations beyond them, your patria, your friends, even Cami. You have sold everything, save yourself. So you remain but you have sold everything else. You have delivered all this into their hands, and for what? For fourteen dollars and the vanity of your name on the book cover. (137-38)

Plascencia promptly ends the book, begins again, and removes the dedication to Liz (141). While the EMF attempts to ease Saturn’s control over their fates, at the extradiegetic level, Liz can directly question Saturn-cum-Plascencia and does so, upending his romantic declarations that he wrote the novel for her. She refuses to accept his supposed romantic gesture and contests that her replacing “[him] with a white boy...is nothing compared to what [he]” did in selling the stories of his town, family, friends, lovers, people, and country in the “neat pile of paper” of a novel, from which he can reap the profits and paint himself as the hero (138).⁵⁷ Liz highlights the novel as a commodity, even pointing out its price, which is adjusted according to edition, and claims that Saturn’s declarations that he wrote the novel for Liz is undergirded by greed and “the vanity of [his] name on the book cover.” In directly questioning Saturn and emphasizing the novel’s value as a commodity, Liz and the novel again undermine the author and his right to tell others’ stories. The emphasis on Saturn’s “selling out” and delivering the novel “into *their* hands (emphasis mine),” meaning the readers, implicates not only Saturn-cum-Plascencia as the writer and the novel as a commodity, but also the reader in participating in the “commodification of sadness” by consuming the story (138, 53). The critique of the novel as a commodity, and thus the stories of the unwilling characters themselves, parallels ongoing discussions within immigrant rights discourse that places immigrants within frames that highlight their value (or lack thereof) as commodities, including as potential taxpayers and workers (Lakoff and Ferguson 4; Ono and Sloop 28-32).

⁵⁷ Cami also questions Saturn’s honesty and sincerity in writing the book and identifies all of his lies (Plascencia 136).

The EMF's commander's daughter, Little Merced, makes the novel's critique of commodification more explicit and points further to the role of the readers in the exploitation of the characters. She poignantly refuses to situate their disempowerment solely in Saturn's realm:

Saturn lacked the decency to look away, the ability to empathize with Federico de la Fe and his daughter and their need to be unseen... She began to feel her own resentment, not only toward Saturn, but also against those who stared down at the page, against those who followed sentences into her father's room and into his bed, watching as he pressed matches to his skin, perhaps even laughing... [Little Merced] wanted to hide [her] father, to protect him from others, so that they would not see him and feel the same pity [she] felt for him. [Her] father was Federico de la Fe, the leader and war commander of EMF. And [she] could not bear Saturn or anybody else looking at him as he sat in his bed, burned, his lap damp with water and puke. (186-87)

While she faults Saturn for not having "the decency to look away" nor "the ability to empathize" with her and her father's desire for privacy, she turns her rage against the readers "who stared down at the page... [and] followed sentences into her father's room and into his bed." Little Merced underscores the intimacy of the moments to which readers are privy: Federico de la Fe burning away the sadness of his wife leaving him, and him sitting "in his bed, burned, his lap damp with water and puke." And while these images elicit sympathy, Little Merced wants to shield him so that the readers do not pity him, as she does, and reminds us in the midst of these moments that Federico is also leading the war effort as the EMF commander. In this moment, she expresses her rage against "the commodification of [their] sadness" and their personal stories for Saturn's gain and readers' entertainment.

Merced implicates the reader in her and her father's exploitation and effectively broadens the scope of responsibility from the central authority of Saturn to those who also participate in the exploitation of peoples like her who are under surveillance. Further, in emphasizing Federico de la Fe's status as a war commander despite the effects of his exploitation, the novel simultaneously critiques the discursive framing of the characters as solely within Saturn's purview, and thus in relation to sovereign power, and seeks to broaden the realm of possibilities for civic participation in such discourse that limits citizenship solely to its legal parameters. Here, through Little Merced, the novel shifts the framing of Merced and her father, who are undocumented immigrants, as existing solely in relation to Saturn, the sovereign power, and thus prompts the reader to consider the characters' existence outside the frame of (il)legality and citizenship. In directing her resentment towards the readers, Little Merced reminds the reader of their privilege and their role in Saturn's war for notoriety and the characters' commodification of sadness. Merced calls upon readers to recognize their complicity in the drawing of the narrow parameters around citizenship and civic life.

As the novel delineates the limitations of a citizenship defined by territoriality in pointing to transnational circuits of capital and labor, it simultaneously critiques the tendency to conceive of the characters, and immigrants, as commodities themselves. It demonstrates that limiting the perception of immigrants to their status as commodities, or workers, and nothing else contributes further to their denigration and continues to frame the issue as one solely dictated by economics and thus through a lens of dominant discourse (Ono and Sloop 32). The characters dispute a surface-level understanding of their status as subjects in the text, just as various scholars have pointed out how viewing the immigration issue through the lens of the "undocumented worker"

frame denies that immigrants build social, cultural, and political aspects to their lives upon immigration (Lakoff and Ferguson 4; Ono and Sloop 31). The characters move away from situating themselves as different kinds of commodities throughout the text and slowly undermine the authority of Saturn in dictating how they, as characters, are framed in the novel and in relation to the author and the readers.

The EMF battles to wrestle control of the narrative away from Saturn, and they show that they not only want to command their own lives but also question the legitimacy of Saturn, and ultimately contest that their base existence is always already framed in relation to Saturn and his story. They question Saturn's power over the narrative calling him tyrannical and a dictator (Plascencia 95, 101, 46, 232) and fight "against a story, against the history that is being written by Saturn" (209). After the EMF is able to minimize the physical size of Saturn in the story, Smiley describes the EMF as being "liberated from Saturn, from the order that for years had kept [them] in line, [their] narrative organized and mindful of the conventions of story" (217). And thus, they battle the limitations of their opportunities inherent to their existence as characters within a story that is necessarily organized by Saturn-cum-Plascencia within the conventional columns of a novel. The characters question Saturn's "inherent authority" as the author, which parallels sovereign power's legal and extralegal means of control over the peoples' within its territory. In centering his own power, Saturn frames the conversation on his characters' "rights" within a hierarchy that privileges his authority in much the same way that the paradox of sovereignty imbues the sovereign with the right to control issues of borders and the state's inhabitants within the law and outside of it. The tyrannical and dictatorial nature of Saturn reveals the underlying contingency of his power.

The characters repeatedly point out the injustices that result because of Saturn's control over the narrative and attempt to redefine Saturn and the basis of his power, thus broadening their status as subjects always already in relation to Saturn. The EMF is convinced that they "were not free people, that [they] were enslaved and serving Saturn" (Plascencia 216). Their perception of not being "free people" and "enslaved," underscores their deep-seeded resentment of their oppression. However, the EMF's language of liberation is rooted not in the discourse of the law but in their base humanity, as they claim that it was "an affront to God's kindness to limit [them], to relegate [them] to strict columns and force [them] to act in one story" (217). The EMF states that while they "may be meek to the God that is in heaven," they "will not be servile to a floating satellite made of dirt and gas," thus recognizing the artificiality of Saturn "made of dirt and gas" and as an extension of the author, and thus the Author-as-God convention (32). Also, their acknowledgement that Saturn relegates them to "strict columns" and "one story" informs their attempts to disrupt the narrative so that it does not conform to novelistic conventions of columns and a clearly defined plot. In these instances, the characters begin to shift how their narrative is framed through their denial of Saturn's inherent authority and by centering their humanity.

While the characters highlight the denial of their basic human rights, they also refuse to cast themselves as victims in Saturn's narrative. To "liberate" themselves, they use their "collective might" of trumpeting their voices and thoughts rather than silencing themselves to squeeze Saturn literally "into the corner" of the page (Plascencia 216). And, as a result, Saturn and the sky begin to flake down on their world (217). The EMF goes from being "enslaved and serving Saturn" to disrupting the order that was now "lost in a melee of voices that for years wanted their freedom" (217). The EMF joins together to fight their war against Saturn and

collectively succeed in “pressing Saturn into a corner” (216). They assert that their “voices...directed the story” (216) and though they initially believed that blocking their thoughts and conversations from Saturn would end Saturn’s narration of their lives, they learned “that the only way to stop Saturn is through [their] own voice,” which finally and structurally changes the novel itself (209). Amongst the EMF’s strategies of disrupting the narrative is to launch offensives continually by first hiding under lead, then burning tires to obscure Saturn’s view from the sky, and finally, by using their collective voice, they do not allow the story to move into denouement, or resolution. The typography, albeit momentarily, is shifted such that the narrative columns are not running parallel to the page in their traditional form, but perpendicular.

In refusing the label of victims, the characters upend the frame of morality upon which supporters of undocumented immigrants often rely upon to argue for undocumented peoples’ rights, and instead choose to demonstrate their collective power. These supporters typically include religious organizations and religious figures, and they construct the undocumented “as weak in comparison to government power” and as “scapegoats” and “vulnerable,” which disallows the undocumented themselves to participate in the discussion about their own fates (Ono and Sloop 92). This morality frame, which emphasizes victimization, is purportedly in good faith; however, it “infantilizes all immigrants by implying that they lack the power to have any effect on their own lives” and further centers the government as the only source of their exploitation (93). Although the EMF is repeatedly defeated by Saturn, they consistently attempt to seize control back from Saturn and assert the power they do have over their own lives. The EMF goes so far as to state that while they “may be meek to the God that is in heaven,” they “will not be servile to a floating satellite made of dirt and gas” (Plascencia 32). They refuse repeatedly to submit to Saturn’s control and again question his authority by comparing him to God and implying that his “dirt and gas” does not endow him with the power over them. In seeking to broaden the discourse in which they are confined and challenging any attempt to view them as weak, the EMF shifts from a strategy emphasizing privacy, including hiding their thoughts and themselves under lead and smoke, to one that focuses on their collective might, even canvassing their community for outside support, and thus assert themselves more forcefully to demand their rights within a group identity. The EMF’s recognition and assertion of their power beyond their prescribed roles as merely characters is reminiscent of undocumented peoples’ participation in the immigrant rights marches of 2006, where the undocumented sought to challenge their dehumanization through *dissensus*, or the assertion of power by those who are fundamentally denied power (Beltrán 604). The group assertion of this power and the mixed citizenship status of the marchers reflected the desire to revise the state’s role in defining citizenship and the possible modes of membership open to the undocumented, much like the EMF’s campaign to undermine Saturn and the discourse that frames their lives and opportunities (Beltrán 610).

Although the characters are able to disrupt the typography and spatial organization of the text, within a few pages, Saturn occupies the entire page and topples the perpendicular narrative columns the EMF constructed to exert their control over the narrative, and ultimately to place themselves outside of Saturn’s sovereign power and the frame of legality. Despite Saturn’s moment of self-reflection with Liz and his confession that he has grown tired of the war, his vulnerability is soon overtaken by his need to overcome his characters once and for all. He notes that “sometimes [commanders] stepped down from their vanity stools and rose above their short stature. They forgot the divisive allegiances of country and race and forgave petty feuds and the

trespasses of others” (Plascencia 240). And despite that he now feels the pain of losing Liz as “a pleasant fever that is a part of him,” he still “moves forward, unconcerned with his own demise, wanting only to save the falling sky and restore the quiet that was there before” (240). Although Saturn indicates a possible shift in his role as a war commander when he “unbuttons his cape and then removes his emperor’s hat,” he still continues with his war plan, more determined than ever to “restore the quiet” the EMF’s protests disrupted (240). While Saturn forgives Liz her “trespasses,” he does not extend the same consideration to his characters. He does not forget “the divisive allegiances of country and race,” nor does he forgive the characters trying to overcome him by shifting the text’s typography. Within a few pages, Saturn occupies the entire page and topples the narrative columns of the other characters that had succeeded finally in overwhelming Saturn by inundating the story with their voices (242). The characters, including the most powerful, Baby Nostradamus, try to resist Saturn’s sudden and overwhelming exercise in power, but they cannot fight him, and Saturn becomes even more powerful. Saturn concentrates, redirects, and extends his power over the novel’s characters where “he would remain... and even gain satellites,” thus showing that he remains “resentful and unforgiving” of the characters’ audacity to demand and claim rights that are not theirs to claim (243). Saturn’s defeat of the EMF demonstrates the difficulty of escaping state-centered and legal discourse and the potential totalizing power of sovereignty.

Only two characters are fully able to escape Saturn’s surveillance. Little Merced and her weakened father walk off the page under her parasol, a technique that she perfected over time to obscure Saturn’s view of her and which is shown as a black dot on the page, and she declares, “there would be no sequel to the sadness” (Plascencia 245). In this final moment, the novel emphasizes the multiple levels of narrative, narrative control, the role of the reader in the “commodification of sadness,” and the consumption of the immigrant novel and experience. The EMF’s group tactic to overwhelm Saturn failed, and Little Merced is able to give her father the privacy that he so desired throughout the novel. However, in abandoning the collective protest, Merced has also relegated herself and her father to the obscurity to which undocumented peoples are often subject for survival. While they were able to remove themselves from Saturn’s surveillance and story, the father-daughter duo was also not able to claim their right to live and participate as they pleased in civic and public society.

Conclusion

Much like the counter-narratives of Sal’s lovers that are sprinkled throughout the book and address his shortcomings, dishonesty, and hypocrisy, the novel itself and the farm worker characters’ efforts to wage war against Saturn offer insight into the ruptures in the fabric of the U.S.’s “public collective fantasies,” and in particular, the limitations of the “rule of law” in providing “inclusiveness, equality, justice, universal rights, [and] freedom” (Saldívar 594). The interjections of Sal’s former lovers within the “Real” level of the novel and those of the characters in the diegetic level highlight the ruptures in a fabric that obscures techniques of power and control within the story and discourses of power generally. Ultimately, the rupture in the novel underscores the ideological fantasy of sovereign power and justice by centering the parody of the conventions of the mimetic realist novel, the representation of the Mexican immigrant experience, and the structures of power that order both the novel and sovereignty.

Fantasy and metafiction have a long tradition in Latin American and Latina/o literature. *The People of Paper* continues in this tradition; however, by pairing fantasy with metafiction, it does not offer a “positive utopia of what social relations might ideally look like” (Saldívar 583). The novel re-centers the totalizing capabilities of institutions and the modern nation-state, despite their unstable foundations, and refutes contentions that the influence of the state has begun to wither. Thus while it features the transnational movement and migration of people dictated by social relationships and economic opportunities and therefore, the fissures in a territorially based sovereignty, it refuses to gesture towards a “positive utopia” in an era of continued immigrant exploitation and surveillance, the political and economic scapegoating of immigrants, and the common and indiscriminate extension of these conditions to documented Latinos and others who “appear” to lack rights guaranteed to them by law. Although the novel does not offer a utopia, it does gesture towards the need for a fundamental rethinking of the discursive framing of immigration, immigrants, and state power. *The People of Paper* makes visible the tensions within sovereignty that create immigrants and simultaneously deny them political agency, and thus, in the characters’ use of their collective voice to critique the discursive frames to which they are confined, the novel offers the possibility of redefining citizenship and civic participation.

By depicting the “incomplete incorporation” of peoples within the sovereignty of power, which is emphasized by their heightened surveillance and denial of rights, *The People of Paper* points to the tenuous place of not only the undocumented in society, but also all peoples. The chapter that follows extends this analysis of state power, surveillance, and violence to Helena Maria Viramontes’s *Their Dogs Came With Them* (2007). Like Plascencia’s novel, *Their Dogs Came With Them* incorporates elements of magical realism, but it does so while depicting the harsh reality of East L.A. in the 1960s. However, while *The People of Paper* is concerned largely with undocumented immigrants, Viramontes’s novel focuses on the experiences of Mexican Americans. While citizenship is largely not an issue in *Their Dogs Came With Them*, it nevertheless demonstrates the extralegal means of control to which even citizen-subjects are privy in the name of sovereignty.

Chapter Five:
Skepticism and Possibility in the Fantasy of Helena Maria Viramontes's
Their Dogs Came With Them

Their Dogs Came With Them depicts the rigid policing of the Chicana/o community in East L.A. during the decade of the 1960s. In a dystopic rendering of this period, Viramontes describes the neighborhood as highly controlled and enclosed within a series of fences and manned checkpoints. The neighborhood is monitored from above by helicopters and its residents are subject to an evening curfew that curtails their movement. The guises for this heightened surveillance is two-fold during the decade Viramontes depicts: the construction of the massive freeway interchange that cuts across East L.A. and a fictionalized rabies outbreak that authorizes the Quarantine Authority to monitor residents and dogs from above with guns. The importance and banality of “papers” and documentation are central to the novel and the characters’ freedom, and the constant presence of the helicopters and police further underscores the depiction of surveillance that is consistent in the last two chapters of my project, albeit in differing ways.

The novel follows the stories of various characters within the enclosed and policed space of East L.A., including a homeless transgendered teen named Turtle, who is dealing with the absence of his brother missing in action in Vietnam; Ermila, a high school student who cuts class with her girl friends to talk-story and shows signs of a burgeoning radical consciousness; Tranquilina, a member of a street ministry that solicits food contributions to feed the area’s homeless; and Ben, an extremely intelligent, yet mentally disabled, former college student who now wanders the streets. While all of these characters coexist within the same neighborhood, and at times occupy the same storyline and spaces, these characters—with the exception of Ben and Tranquilina—do not necessarily connect on any meaningful level. What they do have in common – aside from living in the same neighborhood and traversing the same streets – is that they all have moments in which they imagine a way out of their lives, or confront directly the obstacles that keep them penned in or alienated from others.

I begin this chapter by focusing on *Their Dogs Came With Them*’s futuristic and dystopic rendering of 1960s East L.A. with its imagery of loss, destruction, and stunted mobility. I then demonstrate that this imagery and the novel’s non-linear representation of time reflect the epistemological and cultural destruction of the neighborhood that is rooted in colonialist legacies of domination and that become manifest in the surveillance of the neighborhood. I end with a reading of one fantastical event in the text in particular, in which one of the characters, Tranquilina, possibly flies. I argue that the novel posits this fantastical event not only as necessary to understanding and combating oppression, as moments like these have been read in Latin American magical realist texts, but also as a critique of the limitations of a mimetic realist novel through its emphasis on the narrator’s skepticism in the fantastic. The lack of resolution in this final scene underscores the abstraction required in novelistic form to depict fully both the devastation of the community and the enabling possibilities of the imagination. Ultimately, I argue, as I do in the broader project, that this novel highlights how Chicana/o writers have produced realist novels that reproduce the social world through abstractions rather than mimesis in their attempts to depict a multiplicity of social totalities.

Metaphors of Mobility and Images of Dystopia

Their Dogs Came With Them is unique in contrast to the other narratives I analyze in the broader project in that migration is contained largely to a relatively small neighborhood within East L.A. Although Viramontes also illustrates the limitations of migration in her first novel *Under the Feet of Jesus*, she inflects her second novel with a more complex representation of the violent role of the state in creating the conditions for incarceration and enforced segregation in her fictionalized Los Angeles. Movement within this small space is integral in the novel; however, it is the characters' lack of movement, their difficulty in moving freely, and thus their social stasis, physical containment, and urban isolation that reiterate my broader critique of the effects of state-sanctioned violence and surveillance of the Chicana/o community that in this text in particular is indifferent to legal status. The neighborhood is subject to two massive changes that drastically modify both the landscape of the neighborhood and how its residents interact with one another. Chronologically, the first is the construction of a freeway interchange that cuts across the East L.A./Boyle Heights community and that dramatically alters the space, not only by disrupting its geography, but also by uprooting established neighbors and the sense of community.

The novel highlights not only the physical ways the neighborhood has changed but how these physical changes have disrupted the sense of community within the space. After moving back to the neighborhood, Tranquilina and her mother navigate the area searching for food donations for their church, and the mother, who had lived there for decades prior to moving, does not recognize her home:

The two women struggled through the rain in a maze of unfamiliar streets. Whole residential blocks had been gutted since their departure, and they soon discovered that Kern Street abruptly dead-ended, forcing them to retrace their trail. The streets Mama remembered had once connected to other arteries of the city, rolling up and down hills, and in and out of neighborhoods where neighbors of different nationalities intersected with one another... But now the freeways amputated the streets into stumped dead ends, and the lives of the neighbors itched like phantom limbs in Mama's memory: la Señora Ybarra's tobacco smell and deep raspy voice; the Gomez father's garden of tomatoes; Eugenio's pennies taped on envelopes for their ministry; Old Refugia, who had two goats living in her cluttered backyard and who took the goats to feed at the edge of the Chinese cemetery before opening hours... The city of Tranquilina's birth was hardly recognizable. (Viramontes, *Their Dogs* 32-33)

The neighborhood throughout the novel and here specifically is described as a visceral, fluid, animate thing – a body that has been “gutted,” and “amputated” by the freeways, and is now haunted by the “stumps” and “phantom limbs” of the peoples who once touched one another and intersected, like the arteries in the body. Viramontes describes the neighborhood with its Latina/o panaderia or bakery, Jewish deli, and Chinese kitchen that once provided sustenance to the neighborhood in the way of multiethnic human connections and demonstrates that the ties these people had to their neighborhood were rooted in more than geography. Further, the metaphor of the neighborhood as a body underscores the embodied nature of memory and the means by which the knowledge of the place to which one belongs becomes part of a broader epistemology of one's place in the world. The disorientation of Mama and Tranquilina in a maze of

unfamiliarity, where they are forced to retreat and try another avenue after abruptly encountering a dead-end street reflects the sense of movement throughout the novel where characters move about the space with fits and starts and are re-routed around road blocks or checkpoints. Homeless characters, or “almost” homeless characters like Ben, the college student who drops out and wanders the streets, assume the knowledge of moving about the neighborhood as fluidly as its other residents once did.

The memories and histories the space of the neighborhood invokes, as well as the wisps and remnants of this time that spill over a decade into the future, haunt Mama and highlight one of the consistent themes of disappearance and tenuous connections in the novel that undergird the imagery of destruction and dystopia. After lamenting the loss of diversity, communal connections, and fluid nature of their neighborhood with its “rolling up and down hills,” Mama hopes aloud that “wherever the disappeared neighbors were relocated they had lemon trees outside, where long garden hoses on summer afternoons were permissible...where the sun took forever to descend between the telephone poles. She thought of them in a vagueness that unbridled her attention” (35). The image Mama has concocted with its brightness of long summer afternoons, the refreshment of garden hoses, and the crispness of the lemon trees is rather specific despite the “vagueness” she attributes to it. And, her fantasy provides a stark contrast to the imagery in the text that describes the neighborhood in the 1960s.

The sunny image of Mama is one of only a few amongst descriptions of smoke, dust, and smog, which are consistently present throughout the novel, and are typically paired with references to the transient nature of things or loss of some kind. A child, who we later learn grows up to be Ermila, the high school student, examines “smoke coiling from the resting cigarette simply disappeared into thin air like everything else...everything was wrapped in a whirl of dust and floated up somewhere beyond the clouds” (Viramontes, *Their Dogs* 13) and “she didn’t want to ask why everyone disappears because it seemed to happen all the time; she wanted to know, what she wanted to ask, was where...[the] last cigarette and the kitchen table and the photographed faces of her mother and her father and all the other ghosts of all the other houses were ...up in the blurry sky...scattered clouds, to where, the child could only dream” (15). The “coiling” of the smoke, whirling and floating of the dust, and the scattering of the ghosts of the people forced out of their homes to make way for the freeway bathe the novel in a gray and gloomy pallor. All contribute to the ethereal quality of the novel and the transience of the smoke and dust is juxtaposed with the permanence of the ghosts of the neighborhood – the memory of which is recalled by multiple characters throughout the novel.

East L.A. and the Coloniality of Power

This ethereal language of destruction is imbued with an intentionality that is tied to the imagery of the epigraph of *Their Dogs Came With Them*. The bulldozers that aid in the construction of the freeways are described as having “bellies petroleum-readied to bite trenches wider than rivers” (12) with their “machinery teeth” (146). By describing the bulldozers as dogs, the novel underscores the violence and intentionality of the construction itself and invokes the dogs in the novel’s epigraph. Viramontes quotes Mexican anthropologist and historian Miguel Leon-Portilla’s *The Broken Spears: The Aztec Account of the Conquest of Mexico* where he describes the sounds and sight of the conquerors approaching: “Their dogs came with them,

running ahead of the column. They raised their muzzles high; they lifted their muzzles to the wind. They raced on before with saliva dripping from their jaws.” The salivating dogs provide a fitting symbol for the bulldozers that in the novel are all too ready to tear down homes from their initial appearance in the novel.

As the dogs do in the epigraph, the bulldozers reflect their predatory nature and foreshadow the extent of their destruction and what is to come. The reader’s introduction to the bulldozers comes from Ermila’s grandmother, who describes them as “earthmovers,” and their movement into their neighborhood parallels the dogs in the epigraph: “the bulldozers started from very far away and slowly arrived on First Street, their muzzles like sharpened metal teeth making way for the freeway” (Viramontes, *Their Dogs* 6). The slow and deliberate movement of the bulldozers into the neighborhood from a distance indicates the sense of inevitability of their intrusion, as the neighbors cannot stop the freeway construction despite the long process that came before the breaking of ground. Also, the reader is not privy to the operators of the bulldozers or the city or state officials who authorized the building of the freeways; thus, the bulldozers themselves represent the targeting of the specific neighborhood of East L.A. with their “muzzles like sharpened metal teeth.” Just as the dogs do in the epigraph, running ahead of the column of Spanish soldiers, the bulldozers mark the beginning of a massive upheaval. Further, the emphasis of the bulldozers’ literal function as “earthmovers” underscores the extent of the disruption and displacement. Shaped by the epigraph, *Their Dogs Came With Them* thus functions as an allegory for the persistence of the coloniality of power, which grounds the ethereal quality of the smoke and dust that signifies the destruction of the neighborhood, in the long legacy and material outcomes of a racialized hierarchical system of power that mitigates free movement and employment opportunities, while facilitating segregation and environmental racism in the novel.

As Anibal Quijano, the Peruvian historical sociologist, and others have argued, these hierarchies of power organized social relations during colonialism and endure into the present, with the emergence and classification of race as a primary category of difference organized around phenotypic traits. Racial difference served to legitimate and reinforce an exploitative division of labor and other forms of domination that became constitutive elements of the colonization and conquest of the Americas. According to the paradigm of the coloniality of power, Eurocentrism continues to organize social classifications that mark the inferiority of indigenous, black, and mestizo populations and rationalizes various forms of their exploitation. By invoking Spanish colonizers in the epigraph, the novel ties the building of the freeways to a longer legacy of the systemic means by which the population of East L.A. and the Latino characters in this novel become marginalized and their social, economic, and political experiences, as well as epistemologies, are shaped by their racialization.

The material effects of the coloniality of power are made even more visible when a dog appears in Ermila’s room. In a haze between sleep and consciousness that the sounds of cars on the freeway and gunfire from the Quarantine Authority penetrate, Ermila wakes to the sight of a dog in her bedroom (Viramontes, *Their Dogs* 75). Given that her family does not own a dog, Ermila is confused by its presence but rationalizes that her Grandmother, her guardian, had obtained the dog as a kind of guard for Ermila, who is known for disobeying her grandmother’s curfew. The dog attacks and bites Ermila’s hand drawing a significant amount of blood. Now doubting her theory that her grandmother installed the dog in her room, Ermila walks around the house to investigate how the dog could have entered and discovers that all windows and doors

are closed, thus discounting the possibility that a stray dog could have wandered inside. A hundred pages later and the next morning in the novel, Ermila and the reader learn that Ermila's family did not allow the dog inside or have any knowledge of a dog at all (179). And while the dog could be explained by the fact that Ermila is "in and out of dreams" interrupted by the noise of helicopters and floodlights shining through the curtains, it left Ermila with a bleeding wound that impedes the use of her hand and which she has to treat and wrap with bandages (75).⁵⁸

The context for the incident between Ermila and the dog is significant, as the events going on outside of Ermila's home literally come to rest on Ermila's bedroom floor in the figure of the dog. Immediately after being bitten, Ermila watches how the helicopters of the Quarantine Authority "burst out" of the sky, raising roof shingles, and toppling antennas (Viramontes, *Their Dogs* 77). Ermila comments that the destruction was "just like the unrelenting engines of bulldozers" that also shook the community ten years earlier (77). The novel highlights the continuities between the construction of the freeways and the presence of the Quarantine Authority, which is tasked with controlling a supposed rabies outbreak, and which allows them to surveil the neighborhood in helicopters with guns drawn. The Quarantine Authority is the second major event that drastically changes the neighborhood through the aforementioned helicopters, a set curfew, and the installation of checkpoints manned by guards. By jumping forward and backward in time within the decade of the 1960s, the novel points to the consistent and systemic ways this specific community has been targeted such that their movements are always subject to surveillance and control. The novel's non-linear representation of time in these moments effectively ties the presence of the dog in Ermila's room to the freeways and later the Quarantine Authority.

The contradictions between the construction of freeways that are supposed to facilitate movement and the restrictions of the Quarantine Authority are made more apparent with the presence of the dogs in the epigraph and the dog in Ermila's room. In both instances, the dogs can be read as enforcers, corralling those subject to colonization and the coloniality of power respectively and inhibiting their movement. The presence of the dog in Ermila's room demonstrates the lack of mobility afforded to the residents of East L.A. and simultaneously reiterates the broader epistemic violence done to its people. Ermila is not allowed to move freely by the dog, the freeways, and the Quarantine Authority and is penned in inside of her room. However, the bite of the dog reminds Ermila and the readers that just like the neighbors that were forced out of their homes and neighborhood, the violence outside can reach Ermila inside of her home. The incident with the dog motivates Ermila to think that "the world is going crazy" and she's "gotta do something soon" (Viramontes, *Their Dogs* 77). Ermila is confronted with the reality in this specific moment that there is no physical place within her neighborhood in which she is safe and feels welcomed. The helicopters that shake the walls of her house, just like the bulldozers ten years before, wrench Ermila from any sense of comfort she may have had. This manifestation of the coloniality of power in the figure of the dog literally makes visible what the disappearances in Ermila's life and the smoke and dust could not: the two-pronged attack on the

⁵⁸ The appearance of the dog in Ermila's room is paired with the characters' skepticism, as well as the reader's, which is augmented by the fact that we do not learn for a hundred pages that none of Ermila's family members know from where the dog came, leading to the possibility that the dog is a phantom. This scene is indicative of the moments of fantasy that appear in the novel that are tinged with doubt. I return to the fantastical events of the novel later in the chapter.

neighborhood – one for capitalist progress and the other for the supposed health of its residents – is indeed an attack.

Ermila's culminating realization of the limiting nature of the Quarantine Authority and the freeways is mirrored by her grandmother in a scene that occurs ten years earlier and highlights the grandmother's same sense of isolation and indignation. The grandmother's primary concern in the novel revolves around Ermila and her apprehension that her granddaughter's rebellions could parallel her daughter's, and indeed, as I discuss below, it does appear as if Ermila could eventually choose the life of an activist, as her mother once did. The grandmother identifies the linkages between her daughter and granddaughter and is fraught with "nervios," or nerves about the dangers of her neighborhood. As she struggles to deal with her anxiety, the grandmother paces the hallways of her home; however:

the repetitious groan from the loose floorboard reminded her she was entrapped. If she looked out the window, the freeway construction bit endless trenches into the earth that resembled a moat, fortifying their safety from all that furious violence outside. No sooner would her sense of consolation override any panic than she realized the construction of the freeway was ridding the neighborhood of everything that was familiar to her. . . . Grandmother thought of how carnivorous life was, how indifferent machinery teeth could be, and all these murky thoughts swirled the dust and tar and heat into a speeding meteor gathering strength. (Viramontes, *Their Dogs* 146)

While the grandmother initially notes that she feels "entrapped" within her own home, she comes to believe that the freeway construction would create a moat of safety that would keep her and her family separate from the violence that permeated her neighborhood. However, the comfort this brings her is fleeting, as she realizes that the moat of construction she perceived would insulate her from violence is instead isolating her by changing the neighborhood around her. Like Ermila, the grandmother recognizes that the fury of the outside world and "indifferent machinery teeth" have encroached within her world even inside her home. And, by the end of the passage, the grandmother has come to understand that the construction is only one demonstration of indifference on the part of the world outside of the neighborhood that will ultimately culminate in "a speeding meteor gathering strength." Like the dogs that indicate the advancement of colonization in the epigraph, the grandmother believes that the construction simply marks the beginning of a longer process of government-sanctioned violence in the neighborhood.

Literary critic Mary Pat Brady has laid out the rationale that allowed for the rescaling of the Eastside barrio within a hierarchical organization of space for capitalist progress (2013); however, the exclusion of the East L.A. population from the economic progress the freeways were supposed to bring is made apparent when Ermila watches the residents of the neighborhood make their way to bus stop across from her house. The morning after the dog attack, Ermila notes that the "Four freeways crossing and interchanging, looping and stacking in the Eastside, but if you didn't own a car, you were fucked. Many were, and this is something [she] always said in her head. . . ." (Viramontes, *Their Dogs* 176). Ermila recognizes that the movement of the freeways "crossing and interchanging" and "looping" is not necessarily accessible to the people within her neighborhood. The economic progress the freeways were built to facilitate passes right over the neighborhood in which they were constructed. Instead, the neighborhood's people have to travel hours away on buses to jobs as housekeepers, nannies, hotel maids, and nursing room aides (176). The freeways, in effect, have only solidified the place of the neighborhood

people within the service industry that is structured by a racial or ethnically aligned division of labor, as described in the coloniality of power.⁵⁹

The lack of access to these freeways and the stunted and impeded movement of the characters through the space of their neighborhood serve as metaphors for the lack of social mobility available to the Eastside residents. Further, it points to their tenuous place in the regional and national economies the freeways were meant to facilitate. By disrupting the memories and histories of the place, the freeways, and later the Quarantine Authority, have required that residents alter their understandings of how they interact in and with the neighborhood. Their epistemological frames of relating to space have changed and it has required them to rethink where they belong and what is required to demonstrate their membership in a neighborhood that was previously undoubtedly theirs.

Following the imposition of the freeways, the Quarantine Authority shapes further the movement of the neighborhood's residents and their sense of belonging within the space. In one depiction of furtive migration, Ermila is in line at a Quarantine Authority and ruminates as to the "confusion" and "craziness" of the situation, as she waits:

The city officials demanded paper so thin and weightless, it resisted the possibility of upholding legal import to people like herself, her cousin Nacho, her girlfriends and all the other neighbors with or without children who had the misfortune of living within the shaded designated areas. Didn't the QA know that in the Eastside getting a valid ID was more complicated than a twelve-year-old purchasing a six-pack from Going Bananas? A neighbor's idea of validity was totally incongruent with the QA's norms or anyone else's, for that matter. Business was done differently in the Eastside...Need legal status: For those without papers, legal status became a shift in perspective, a matter of dubious demarcation, depending on who the border belonged to...No one in the Eastside believed in paper...But there they lined up...They fisted gas company bills, birth certificates, bogus driver's licenses, anything to get themselves home. The longer the wait, the larger the nervous obsession with the handled paper. Shifting weight of bodies, hushing children, hours passing, backs aching, only to be told certain papers were unacceptable as proof of residency... (Viramontes, *Their Dogs* 62-63)

This passage highlights the banality of papers – how useless papers seem in their thinness and weightlessness, but also how necessary they are for movement; and how arbitrary who is required to have them due to their "misfortune of living within the shaded designated areas" of the QA map. However, this passage and the interaction between the officials and the neighborhoods' residents emphasize the conflict that arises when localized ways of knowing and interacting are transformed into transactions with government officials. Because "no one in the Eastside believed in paper" and legal status is a "dubious demarcation, depending on who the border belonged to," the requirement for papers as proof of residency requires a dramatic shift in understanding who belongs in this space. Valid papers are crucial for residents to cross back into where their homes are located; however, Ermila notes that "Business is done differently in the Eastside," and she goes on to explain that business owners make calculations on paper bags and

⁵⁹ The topic of which has been extensively studied by sociologists and economists, particularly in Los Angeles: Massey (2002), Sassen (1992), Zentgraf and Pastor in *Asian and Latino Immigrants in a Restructuring Economy: The Metamorphosis of Southern California* (2001).

do not provide receipts (63). The emphasis on business, financial transactions, and the comparison of a “twelve-year-old purchasing a six pack” to the difficulty of getting a valid ID, demonstrates that the interactions that occur in the Eastside on the back of paper bags are in marked contrast to the “validity” required by governmental officials and that papers like gas bills cannot provide. In a neighborhood where many non-traditional families reside, families to which many of the characters throughout the novel belong and where documents with valid addresses are thus difficult to attain for everyone in the family, the demands of city officials lead to the neighbors’ anxious fidgeting and nervous handling of paper.

The passage above also undoubtedly evokes border crossings and the interaction that occurs here between the neighborhood’s residents and the government officials is reminiscent of what globalization scholar Wonders has called “border performativity.” The exchange between the citizens and non-citizens of the neighborhood and government officials serves as a means to perform the insidious nature of state sovereignty that is simultaneously reinforced and naturalized in this performance (Wonders 66). In this interaction, what must be explained and is “justifiably” interrogated, as it is at border crossings, is the mobility of the neighborhood’s residents who once moved across the imaginary boundaries of their neighborhood unimpeded (Salter 373). The seemingly arbitrary imposition of boundaries to the neighborhood and the explicit inclusion of peoples with and without legal status demonstrate how these questions of sovereignty and citizenship are continually reinforced within the parameters of the U.S., and not simply at border crossings. Further, this performance highlights how Latino populations become socially and politically marginalized in myriad ways.⁶⁰ As Brady has pointed out in reference to this novel and historian Natalia Molina has demonstrated in a broader context, the rationale that undergirds the presence of health officials like the Quarantine Authority who is supposedly in place to eradicate rabies is rooted in the perceived correlation of the community with disease, and therefore, a superiority/inferiority dynamic that allows outside agents to decide the best course of action for the community itself.⁶¹

As part of this performance of sovereignty, the interactions at the neighborhood checkpoints require submitting to the judgment of these officials and produces anxiety in the characters. The novel notes that the longer the residents waited to reach the start of the line, “the larger the nervous obsession with the handled paper” (Viramontes, *Their Dogs* 63). The nervous handling of paper and uncomfortable “shifting of bodies” after waiting for hours to prove they live in their own neighborhood, illustrates the extent to which the residents are subject to the control of the state via the confessional mode of performance required of them (63). This

⁶⁰ Political scientist Salter argues for the particularity of the border in the performance of sovereignty and the universality of the border inspection that requires all—citizens or otherwise—to submit to the power of the state to define them as subjects in relation to the sovereign. I tend to agree with this assertion by Salter, as it emphasizes the possibility of the universality of the state of exception; however, as this novel shows, the border and sovereignty is performed in spaces within the sovereign’s boundaries. Further, because of the perceived correlation of the Latino population with illegality, peoples like those depicted in *Their Dogs Came With Them* are specifically required to demonstrate their status as legal subjects, and the performance in which they are required to participate within their own community underscores more so the threat of the state of exception.

⁶¹ See Brady’s “Metaphors to Love By” (2013) and historian Natalia Molina’s *Fit to be Citizens?* (2006) for more extensive discussions of the means by which protecting public health justifies the infringement of rights within Latina/o communities.

moment at the Quarantine Authority checkpoint emphasizes the confessional dynamics of this interaction and the residents' subsequent anxiety, as their ability to re-enter their neighborhood is dependent on their ability to provide a believable narrative and appropriate papers for the QA (Salter 374, 376). Salter contends that the "dominant mood of this border examination is anxiety. The border operates...as a confessional machine for producing the categories of insider/outsider, citizen/foreigner" (373). This anxiety is symptomatic of sovereign power and its examination of the subject as a site of objectification (Salter 374; Foucault 1978). While the "foreigner" reinforces the power of the sovereign, it is the examination of the citizen that affirms the limitations of citizenship and the extent of sovereign power (Salter 375).⁶² The performance of sovereignty at the QA checkpoint thus underscores "that the sovereign subject, the citizen, is always available to the potential for exclusion – and it is the representation of this threat that is crucial to the smooth operation of sovereignty" (375). This representation of state surveillance of Chicanos and Mexicans alike in East L.A. is thus reminiscent of the violence enacted on immigrants on the increasingly militarized border zone; however, it captures how this surveillance is extended to include Latino citizens within the boundaries of the U.S. Thus, while I agree with Salter and others who have argued that the possibility of exclusion is extended to all citizens regardless of their legal citizenship, the novel demonstrates that Latinos in the U.S. are especially situated to feel this anxiety.⁶³

Skepticism and Possibility: The Role of Literature and the Imagination

Bubbling under the surface of the devastation, alienation, and surveillance present in the novel, with its metaphors of mobility and imagery of loss, are short and descriptive moments where characters fantasize and hope. Ermila's violent image of people organizing themselves into a python to squeeze the QA officers and Mama's sunny afternoon with lemon trees are two of several instances where characters critique and resist the impositions of the freeways and Quarantine Authority. Turtle, before he becomes a homeless teen kicked out of his mother's house for dressing and acting like a boy, plans to dig a tunnel on Eastern Street to New Mexico with his brother, Luis Lil Lizard. Later, before he is drafted to Vietnam, Luis is welcomed into a gang through a ritual, where he and the other McBride Homeboys seek out "freshly laid cement on the freeway bridges and sidewalks to record their names, solidify their bond, to proclaim eternal allegiance to one another so that in twenty, thirty years from tonight, their dried cemented names would harden like sentimental fossils of a former time" (Viramontes, *Their Dogs* 163-64). However, the novel immediately reminds us that "not even concrete engravings would guarantee immortality" and that the symbols of their bonds will become faded and crack from earthquakes,

⁶² See Chapter Four for a more in-depth examination of the paradox of sovereignty and the means by which the state of exception is permitted and encoded within sovereign power.

⁶³ The emergence and classification of race as a primary category of difference with colonization and the persistence of a racialized hierarchical system of power, along with Latinos history of immigration to the U.S., has also facilitated the perception that all Latinos are not only Mexican and immigrants but also undocumented. Scholars in linguistics (Santa Ana 2002; Lakoff and Ferguson 2006), history (Ngai 2004), anthropology (De Genova 2002, 2004; Inda 2006) have examined how this equation of Mexicans and, by extension, Latinos with undocumented status has been created in part by discourse, historical circumstances, and legislation.

tree roots, the weight of cars, and the passing of time (164). Although none of these moments can be classified as fantasy in a literary sense they provide fleeting images of beauty, comedy, or hope amongst the novel's images of dystopia. Undergirding these moments, like the fading of the McBride Boys' bonds of family, is a skepticism that none of these characters' fantasies *will come or can come* to fruition. This skepticism is also present in actual moments of fantasy in the novel.

I focus on a specific thread of fantasy in the novel, which involves a generational transference of the faith and magic of *voladores*, or flyers, in Tranquilina's family, the ministers that return to East L.A. *Their Dogs Came With Them* describes the Mesoamerican indigenous origin of the ceremony, dance, and ritual of the *voladores*, or men who, like Tranquilina's father, were "balsa-wood light" and wore feathers, waist harnesses, and ropes that allowed them spin and glide and dance "with the grace of a bird" high above the ground and around poles with "the drum of their human hearts to direct their flight" (44). The novel departs from this indigenous ritual when Tomás, Tranquilina's father, flies without harnesses and ropes and rides the wind into the clouds, collects water, and returns to the ground to quench the thirst of his dehydrated-to-the-point-of-death wife with a kiss, as they are fleeing their peonage (47). Mama believes Tomás flew despite her self-confessed delirium; yet, Tranquilina has doubts and struggles to imagine the possibility of her father flying without aid. The novel satisfies some aspects of magical realism in that Papa's flying can only be explained by magic or the supernatural causes doubts in readers, and disrupts traditional notions of time and space, at the same time as the novel incorporates realist depictions of life in the Eastside. However, drawing on literary critic Amaryll Chanady's definition of magical realism in *Magical Realism and the Fantastic*, we could logically conclude that Tranquilina's sustained skepticism as narrator of her family's story differentiates *Their Dogs Came With Them* from magical realism and marks the novel as fantastic. Tranquilina's skepticism and the source of it maintain the split between the magical and the real such that these categories are never joined to create the "magical real" (Bowers 67).⁶⁴

The source of Tranquilina's skepticism complicates some of these distinctions between narrative categories, strategies, and literary traditions. While Tranquilina struggles to imagine her father flying—in the image she recreates in her mind, he is lifted by "every breath of every ancestor...every volador of every century lifted him" (Viramontes, *Their Dogs* 48) and yet he succumbs to the reality of gravity—she laments that she "could no longer make that leap of faith...Tranquilina knew she deserved this upside-down world" (34). Her loss of faith, both her religious Catholic faith and the faith in the possibility of her father's magic, which is what her mother calls it, is indelibly connected to the realist conception of life around her and the lives of people around her, "because everything happened here on these sidewalks or muddy swamps of vacant lots or in deep black alleys, not up in the heavens...lost souls roamed here" (34). She remains skeptical of her father's magic and of miracles, and instead grounds her faith in the "good earth...that was filled with minute worlds of" miracles (93). The repeated mention of the earth centers the fantastic in the very dystopia and realism the novel reproduces. Tranquilina's emphasis on the earth reflects the possibility of re-injecting social relationships into a space that has been restructured by colonial legacies of domination that deny its residents possibilities and fantasies (97). The spatial language invoked in the passages of Papa lifting himself up into the

⁶⁴ Ermila's experience with the dog in her bedroom also meets this criteria with the same exception. Despite the bleeding of her hand, which does ground the magical in the real, Ermila continues to question the presence of the dog, which does not appear again, although Ermila's wound remains.

clouds, and the corresponding gravity that Tranquilina imagines pulling him back down to the ground, mark her struggle to believe in the manifestation of the magical real and the imagination. The conflict within Tranquilina and the novel persists through the final scene.

At the end of the novel, Tranquilina attempts to stop the Quarantine Authority from shooting various teenagers, some of which were involved in a gang conflict. Their sharp shooters continue to shoot from helicopters as Tranquilina places herself between the teenagers and the officials. With “sorrow so wide, it was blinding,” Tranquilina walks towards the lights of the helicopters hovering above, refusing to stop when commanded (Viramontes, *Their Dogs* 325). Instead she rises “two inches, four, six, eight, riding the currents of the wilding wind. Riding it beyond borders, past the cesarean scars of the earth, out to limitless space where everything was possible if she believed” (325). The ambiguity in this final scene, where it is not clear whether Tranquilina does fly, as the novel ends with this final line, again re-centers a damaged earth and re-configures it as borderless and limitless, attempting to re-imagine it before the impositions of the freeways and Quarantine Authorities that disrupted the residents’ embedded attachments to the space.⁶⁵ Along with the possibility and hope this final scene evokes, there remains an underlying skepticism, as Tranquilina notes that “everything was possible *if* she believed,” not *because* she believed. Because possibility continues to hinge on her belief in the magical, her skepticism still lacks resolution. The language here is not conclusive, and yet, Tranquilina’s skeptical hope is felt amongst the dreary gloom and dystopia of the novel and in the final scene—the realism of which cannot be denied, as the scene of anti-gang enforcement in East L.A. has been and continues to be a common reality. The fantasy in this moment lies in a chasm between magical realism and fantasy and reflects the abstraction required in novelistic form to depict the multiplicity of social totalities. In this moment, and as the novel struggles to do throughout in brief moments of hope and potential fantastical moments—like a child’s dream of digging of a tunnel from the Eastside to New Mexico to escape the abuse and chaos of their lives—the novel underscores simultaneously the difficulty of escaping the imposing gaze of the state and the need for imagination amongst its characters and in narrative form. In the intimations of possibility and hope, *Their Dogs Came With Them* alludes to a future resolution we as readers must imagine.

In conclusion, I return now for a moment to the ways the novel centers literature and the imagination as a means to confront the outcomes of the coloniality of power. To emphasize the destructive effects of the freeways on relationships within the community, the novel creates new “imaginaries” that depict how removed the characters are from one another and from the social relationships that were once established within the space of the Eastside.

Despite his mental illness, or perhaps because of it, Ben is able to recognize how the rapid movement of the freeways allows people to move through life with little regard for their surroundings, including other individuals. He notices a homeless woman standing above the freeway on an overpass and imagines: “If one would pass the woman while driving home from the office after a crinkled day of work, one might acknowledge her disorientation with a merciful sigh, but rushing home nonetheless to retrieve the child, make a quick stop for groceries, pick up

⁶⁵ Despite the novel’s invocation of indigeneity in this scene, it troubles nationalist narratives, particularly those during the historical period the novel spans. The novel draws on a non-monolithic indigeneity, thus supplanting critiques various scholars have had about the Chicano Movement (see cultural critic Josie Saldaña-Portillo 2003). Further, the image of Tranquilina as a volador is significant, as women have traditionally been denied this possibility.

a bucket of chicken” (Viramontes, *Their Dogs* 124). Ben’s ambiguous protagonist, or “one,” in his description of the homeless woman on the pedestrian bridge allows for the reader to imagine anyone, including the reader, as the spectator in this scene. Ben acknowledges how the specifics of the everyday are imbued with urgency and importance that only elicits “a merciful sigh” for the woman, while still “rushing home nonetheless” to run errands after a seemingly stressed day of work. In imagining an alternative for this dismissal of the homeless woman, which he fantasizes could be his missing mother throughout the novel, Ben considers that “in order to envision her life, one would have to think of her with greater generosity...it was one thing to assume, another to conjure, and yet another to *feel for her*. *One would need metaphor to love her*” (emphasis in original) (125). Viramontes’s novel, as all of her writing, relies heavily on metaphor and simile, and the emphasis in this passage and throughout the novel, on migration and movement, highlights not the enabling effects and possibilities of this movement in creating connections with others, but rather, the isolation that it can engender.

The freeway system represents the continuation of an earlier migration of peoples – the colonizers Viramontes invokes in her book’s epigraph – that resulted in the alienation of a marginalized group of people and an epistemological threat that has resulted in the removal of the memories, histories, and affect a space embodies. However, in Ben’s one line and in the text’s ambiguous intimations of fantasy and magic, the novel does not simply point to the devastation the construction of the freeways brings, but rather the need for the imagination that literature and art can provide, together with the understanding and compassion that creates human connections that do not necessarily replace the relationships the freeways cover in cement and barricades, but that allow for the rebuilding of a community whose bonds extend beyond geography. Instead, the novel highlights the contingent nature of community and the work, intention, and desire required to instill and cultivate a sense of belonging. Further, it points to the linguistic and figurative devices in literature that create connections between the reader and the subjects of literature and forces us to question: what does it require for us to feel for someone else – both for characters in literature and life outside of art? What points of affinity do we identify with others, that language and literature can facilitate, and what are the insurmountable differences that cannot be overcome by metaphor?

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